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Policy development and engagement: perspectives and insights from key stakeholders involved in the creative industries in north Queensland, Australia

Like many western nations, the Australian government invests significant resources in creative industries at federal, state and local levels. While the majority of investment exists in the southern part of Australia, the current federal government has drawn attention to the need to develop the vast northern area of the country. North Queensland is the most populated area of northern Australia, hence key to this broader vision for the country. This case study therefore presents findings from interviews with key stakeholders involved in the development and/or promotion of cultural policy in north Queensland, including participants working at national, state and local levels. The findings are significant and point to four issues of ongoing relevance: the impact of policy and associated engagement issues, reductions in government funding, the fragmented nature of the creative industries, and the particular challenges facing north Queensland in terms of the northern Australia vision.

Keywords: Northern Australia, North Queensland, Creative industries, Cultural policy, Regional isolation.

Introduction

Despite the ongoing fiscal challenges facing many countries following the aftermath of the global financial crisis, governments around the world continue to invest in the growth of the creative industries sector or creative economy, be this in developed or developing worlds (Cunningham 2009, Lancaster et al. 2010, Richards 2011, Scherer et al. 2012, Chapain et al. 2013, Flew 2014). This focus on creative activity as a potential contributor to economies initially occurred in Australia in 1994 (SGS Economics and Planning 2013), followed by the United Kingdom later that decade where it received focussed policy attention (Flew and Cunningham 2010). Since this time, economic growth via the creative industries has received significant policy attention in many countries, due also to the ongoing shift away from traditional

industries such as manufacturing and agriculture (Flew 2010, Bakhshi and McVittie 2009, Alvarez 2010, De Propris 2013). Creative industries, which seek to exploit intellectual property towards wealth and employment creation opportunities, typically includes "music, performing arts, film, television, radio, advertising, games and interactive content, writing, publishing, architecture, design, and visual arts" (Ministry for the Arts 2014).

While there is recognition of the importance and potential economic value of the creative industries, there remains confusion about the sector in terms of its participants and its disciplines of practice (Drake 2003, Townley et al. 2009, Cooke and De Propris 2011, Chapain and Comunian 2010, Kolenda and Liu 2012, Flew 2014). For example, debates exist in terms of whether to include such areas as cultural tourism, heritage (e.g. museums), architecture and software development (Cunningham 2009, Flew and Cunningham 2010). Further, there is debate within the sector as to what in fact are the creative industries, as distinct from the arts and culture sector, or the cultural industries (Power 2009, Flew and Cunningham 2010, Caust 2014, Hartley 2014). Some countries (e.g. Scandinavian or Nordic countries) have even preferred to use the term 'experience economy' to refer to this area of creative practice and activity (Power 2009), although even this concept attracts criticism in terms of its appropriateness as an encompassing label (Bille 2012). In addition, criticism exists in the discourse in terms of the neoliberal connotations of the creative industries concept (Hesmondhalgh 2008, Hesmondhalgh et al. 2014), the gathering together of disparate disciplines (Garnham 2005, Waitt 2006, Banks and O'Connor 2009), the clashing of opposing pairs e.g. amateurs and experts (Hartley 2014) or the often city-centric or clustering methodologies applied in sector analysis and research (Jayne 2005, Drake 2003). Despite these various criticisms, definitional issues and

uncertainties, creative industries [1] and the creative economy continue to attract attention within policy settings and government investment agendas (Calver et al. 2013, De Propris 2013, Flew 2014).

The creative sector in Australia: current issues and context

In a similar manner to many western nations, the Australian government identifies creativity and creative industries as key to the future economic growth of the country, through its Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council for the Arts[2], the latter operating at arm's length from government in supporting excellence in creative practice (Ministry for the Arts 2014). Similarly to the global scenario, debate exists in the Australian context in terms of the definition and role of creative industries (SGS Economics and Planning 2013). Nevertheless, the current total share of the national workforce is steady at 3.5% and the sector contributes approximately $90 billion to the annual Australian economy (SGS Economics and Planning 2013). In addition to policy recognition and funding investment at national level, the Australian states and territories have their own strategies and funding support for creative practice and creative industries, with Queensland often regarded as one of the early pioneers in promoting the sector (Flew and Cunningham 2010).

Despite the various levels of recognition of creative industries in Australia, there are numerous underlying challenging factors and issues of relevance. At a fiscal level, a recent review of the Australia Council revealed the fact that Australia is "well behind other comparable countries" (Australian Government 2014a, p. 21) in terms of total investment in arts and culture as a percentage of GDP, at 0.084% compared to

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[1] While it is accepted that there are variations in terms of formal definitions of the creative industries, along with ongoing debate about the appropriateness of this term, these issues fall outside the main focus of this paper. However, the version put forward by the current Australian Government (Ministry for the Arts 2014) and cited above is adopted here to provide a contemporary context for this paper.
[2] For the remainder of the paper, the shorter form 'Australia Council' will be used.

Canada at 0.156% and New Zealand at 0.198%. In addition, policy development and funding decisions relevant to the arts in the last 20 years in particular have been fraught with tension and debates, given the regular switching between Labor and conservative governments and their differing political ideologies. For example, Labor governments have been responsible for arguably the two most significant national cultural policies in the country's history, namely Creative Nation in 1994 and Creative Australia in 2013, however conservative governments have been quick to disregard these after winning power shortly after the release of each policy (Connor 2011, Caust 2014). Indeed not only is there concern currently that the recently released Creative Australia policy will have limited life under the new conservative government, with Craik (2013) arguing that it has "virtually sunk without a trace" (p. 49), Caust (2014) in fact argues that the situation is even worse in Australian politics, proposing that "very few politicians on either side of the political agenda take [creative industries] seriously" (2014, p. 7).

In addition to this overarching political landscape, Australia's creative sector is dominated by state capitals on the east coast and in the southern part of the country, with Sydney and Melbourne attracting the majority of infrastructure and funding investment. While the remaining state capitals (Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin) each boast their own distinctive creative sectors, all of these with the exception of Darwin exist in the bottom half of the country. At the same time, with a population of less than 100,000 (City of Darwin 2014) and thus the smallest capital city in Australia by a substantial margin, Darwin is not of sufficient size to attract major arts funding, infrastructure or investment commensurate with support afforded to its southern counterparts. To highlight the significance of current investment in the sector, all 28 of the major arts companies (e.g. orchestras, opera, ballet) funded by the

Australia Council are based in the south (Australia Council for the Arts 2014a). Further, of the total Australia Council expenditure in 2012-13 - be this to major, medium organisations or individual artists - 83% of total investment ($145 million) was in the capital cities in the southern part of the nation (Australian Government 2014b).

Northern Australia: the last or the next frontier?

Northern Australia, an extensive geographical area above the tropic of Capricorn, falls into what Aristotle negatively described as the 'torrid zone' some 2000 years ago (State of the Tropics 2014). This area has particular challenges, including vast distances, limited infrastructure and major climate influences (e.g. rain, drought, cyclonic seasons). Across this area of approximately three million square kilometres is a population of approximately one million, although most are located on the east coast in the area of north Queensland[3], with Townsville the largest provincial city, followed by Cairns and a range of smaller cities or towns (Figure 1). Much of northern Australia is steeped in indigenous culture and heritage, with numerous cultural centres promoting indigenous arts practice and/or operating in the cultural tourism area. In addition, there are a range of artists and creative workers, including those in traditional art-making areas (e.g. visual arts, craft, theatre), through to those seeking to work in a commercial capacity (e.g. design, photography, interactive media).

[Figure 1]

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[3] For the purposes of this research, north Queensland is considered the broad geographic area above Mackay on the east coast and Mount Isa in the west of the state of Queensland, to the northern tip of the country.

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Figure 1. Population density of northern Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2014)

While there is diverse creative practice in northern Australia, the majority of large cultural infrastructure and hence activity exists in the southern part of the country. In addition to the fact that all 28 of the major arts companies are based in the south, in terms of the 178 multi-year funded organisations also supported by the Australia Council, an analysis of this group reveals that only 16 of these are based in the northern part of Australia[4]. Further, in terms of the 17 organisations in this group that exist to represent different art-form or creative sectors (e.g. Writers Guild, National Association of Visual Arts, Music Council of Australia), all of these are located in the southern part of the country. Hence, in terms of physical location, northern Australia contains only nine per cent of organisations funded through this program. While at one level this is significant, given only approximately five per cent of the population exists in the northern Australia area, the fact remains that the majority of cultural infrastructure and ongoing investment to support this exists in the south, and particularly so when considering that all 28 major arts companies are based in this part of the country. Northern Australia is therefore not only severely isolated, in terms of infrastructure, funding and investment, but access to the major arts companies and therefore regular opportunities to participate in and experience the arts is very limited for those based in this geographical area.

Despite this challenging context, northern Australia is once again seen as critical to the Australian economic future and no longer the 'last' but the 'next' frontier (Liberal Party of Australia 2013). While on the one hand this is a significant step forward, it is somewhat alarming that arts and culture and/or creative industries

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4 This figure extends to 17 if including one organization based in Alice Springs and which is 30 kilometres south of the northern Australia zone.

are not mentioned as key focus areas or strategies of this new 2030 vision and plan, with only occasional references to cultural assets presented in the vision. In addition, a recent summit held on the future of northern Australia and attended by a range of senior government, industry and education bureaucrats in Townsville in north Queensland did not contain any major focus on arts, culture or creative industries as potential drivers of economic or cultural growth (ADC Forum 2014). Further complicating the current growth picture for northern Australia is the recent federal government budget, which included wide-ranging cuts to public spending right across the country, including creative industries and in particular to small-medium enterprises rather than to the major arts organisations in the south of the country (ABC 2014, Caust 2014). While the federal government has publically stated that regional arts activities will be protected (Taylor 2014), for those based in Queensland this has largely been compounded by recent wide-ranging cuts to the arts made by the current Newman government, and which have included "the axing of grant programs and the obliteration of arts education initiatives" (Crean 2012). Further, the majority of state funding for arts and culture remains directed at the south-east corner of Queensland, where the majority of large cultural infrastructure is located (Lancaster et al. 2010). Therefore, in terms of growing the creative industries in the north of the country within this context, sector leadership and bespoke policy development will be critical.

Northern Australia: arts, culture and policy research

In terms of specific research and discourse relevant to arts, culture and creative industries, northern Australia has received little focussed attention in terms of how policy is developed and engaged with at the practitioner or grass roots levels. While related studies exist, such as the in-depth analysis of the challenges and

opportunities relevant to the creative industries sector in Darwin in the northern territory (Luckman et al. 2009), research focussed on cultural policy in Australia has tended to focus on broader national issues and often in relation to the Australia Council, the major federal organisation charged with funding and supporting arts and culture. For example, Johanson and Rentschler (2002) traced the development and change in leadership in the Australia Council from the 1970s to the early 21st century, arguing that it led to an increasing focus on culture as an industry. In another study, Johanson (2008) documented the development and relationship between cultural and industry policy in Australia, arguing that it is a longer and closer relationship than that which has been generally understood and agreed. More recently, a detailed history of cultural policy development and the Australia Council has been completed by Seares (2011).

In addition to broad issues, extant research is often art-form rather than area or region based, such as the paper by Craik et al. (2003) which set out to contextualise the Australian performing arts scene in the light of globalisation trends and influences on arts and cultural policy, describing a key ongoing tension for government as being "the goals of excellence versus access, and between government roles as facilitator versus architect" (p. 29). They also identify the fact that government intervention through policy is key but a single unified (national) voice is unlikely nor ultimately necessary given the diversity and complexity of the national scene (Craik et al. 2003). Lancaster et al. (2010) recently completed a major investigation of the changing nature of the notion of place and space in terms of the performing arts scene in Queensland, uncovering an ongoing shift away from traditional cultural infrastructure venues towards alternative locations, thereby highlighting the relevance of this shift to policy makers. Homan (2013) recently traced the development of cultural policy as

applied to popular music, arguing that "the historical discourse of 'excellence' as the primary focus of support is becoming harder to sustain" in light of recent creative industries discourse (p. 394).

While research to date traces the development and role of cultural policy and related government investment in Australia, there has recently been quite strong criticism of the status quo. For example, Connor (2011) argues that government funding of the arts has "introduced the wholesale politicization of artistic creativity, and introduced a culture of grovel in dependent artists. As always, government is not the solution, it is the problem" (Connor 2011, p. 59). Craik (2013) also recently presented a strong assessment of the relevance of the 2013 national policy 'Creative Australia', evidencing how the major influence on the development of this policy – the 2020 summit held in 2010 under the previous Labor government – has simply led to the reinforcing of the role and funding of the Australia Council and the protection of the elite major performing arts organisations in the south of the country. Instead, Craik (2013) argues that "the greatest innovation and value-for-money can be found in small to medium – often grassroots – organisations who prove to be more nimble and responsive to local cultures, communities and cultural priorities" (p. 51).

It is in relation to these various factors defined above that drive the author's current phase of research, which is focused on creativity, the creative economy and creative industries in north Queensland and which represents a key geographic area relevant to the future of the northern Australia vision and plan. That is, while there is an ongoing body of research and evidence-based literature citing economic returns through creative industries, as well as ongoing and significant investment in arts and culture at various levels of government in Australia, key issues specific to this geographical area remain heavily under-researched. Therefore, this paper represents a

second phase study that builds on earlier research that investigated the level of engagement that artists and creative industries workers in north Queensland have with cultural and/or economic development policy (Author 2013). This former research, involving surveys with 162 practitioners in the cities of Cairns and Townsville, followed by 44 in-depth interviews with participants from each location, revealed the following key findings:

- There is limited knowledge of key cultural or economic development policy, be this at local, state or national levels and regardless of whether it is arts-based or economic development policy;

- There is a strong sense of disengagement with such policies, with the majority of practitioners struggling to see the relevance and impact at the local level, arguing they are largely southern centric and for those working in capital cities;

- The majority of practitioners associate policy with funding support for creative practice; and

- The theme of isolation features strongly in the minds of artists and creative workers in north Queensland, not only in geographic and policy terms but in relation to access to support and funding through government and other not-for-profit organisations.

One of the key implications from this earlier research was the need to explore what types of inclusion opportunities are in fact presented at the various levels of policy creation in order to engage artists and creative workers in north Queensland, from the perspective of those working in policy delivery or development. This paper therefore seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge through in-depth interviews with a

range of key cultural policy stakeholders and/or sector leaders at local, state and federal levels. The key aims of this phase include an investigation of the participation opportunities and procedures relevant to policy making and delivery, perceptions as to the level of disengagement from those working in the field, as well as broader views on how to grow the creative industries sector in north Queensland.

Methodology

Key representatives at local, state and national levels were sought to give their views on relevant issues; given depth was sought, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the key data gathering mechanism. Questions and discussion points were developed around policy development and participation processes and strategies, engagement with policy development in north Queensland, regional factors and funding issues, sector growth and participation. In terms of recruitment, organisations in Table 1 were approached in order to seek voluntary participation from key personnel involved in policy development, arts advocacy or economic development that is inclusive of the creative industries.

(Table 1)

Of the organisations tabled, all agreed to participate except the Australia Council. In total, 11 participants[5] representing all other groups took part, with the majority female (7 of 11) and all having extensive experience in government, arts sector support or economic development roles. Given the interviewees had agreed to participate on the basis that they or their organisation would not be identified in any way through any responses presented in the paper, for the purposes of analysis here, data is de-identified and issues kept broad in order to ensure the anonymity of participants. In

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5 Two individuals from each of two respective organisations took part – for all others it was one key person involved.

order to add validity to the interview process, each participant was sent a copy of the transcript of the discussion prior to analysis, with the opportunity to make amendments or update the content. Some participants proceeded to do so, making minor to moderate changes to wording and intent. Once all had been received as finalised versions, the transcripts were read and re-read to develop an overall sense of the key themes and issues to emerge. While the focus of the questions was about north Queensland specifically, some individuals also talked in broader terms about issues relevant to the state or the nation, hence this wider context was deemed relevant and included where appropriate. The subsequent analysis and ensuing broad themes or areas of focus relevant to north Queensland were around policy development and participation, funding and resource support, sector fragmentation and separation, and sector growth and development, each of which is dealt with in the following sections.

Policy development and participation

While not all of the participants nor their respective organisations were directly involved in the development of policy or strategy, each interviewee provided insights into the nature of involving artists or creative workers in such processes. In general, and whether at the local, state or national level, opportunities to participate in policy development were described as readily available and often extensive, be this through email submissions, social media, focus groups, community forums, workshops and round tables, or by policy makers going directly to various stakeholder groups and representative arts organisations to engage with them. For example, specific comments by interviewees in relation to their experiences of participation in policy development included the following: "so widespread … it surprised me", "a lot

of discussion through critical debates", "very active community participation" and "very comprehensive engagement with people who are very active in that area".

At the same time, most participants also referred to the fact that only a small percentage of the sector actually participates in such procedures, hence the view by one interviewee that there is "a lot of work to do", while another described the lack of engagement as a general issue "across all sectors of the economy". Some considered this lack of engagement as being due to the nature of policy language, with its "motherhood statements", "boring government-planning", or "arcane language or jargon that means only something to the people that write the stuff". Another felt that the general lack of engagement is "because [policy advocates] have such vast areas to cover" in not only north Queensland but the entire state, a view echoed by an additional interviewee who described how ongoing geographic isolation meant "the north lacks immediate contact [and] really sophisticated discussions face-to-face".

In addition, some interviewees referred to limited policy visibility as part of the reason for the general lack of engagement by those in the creative industries. One interviewee reflected on the fact that people "forget that these [policies] are there to support them", while another argued that policy advocates need stronger "public relations to keep [them] in the forefront of people's minds". This was further explained by one interviewee as being due to "a lack of trust with the general population towards government in general … because we're not out there advocating in the way that we should be". Finally, the frequent changing of governments and hence policies was raised as another impediment, one interviewee describing how the recently elected government "doesn't want to be connected with the policies of the previous [group]", hence slowing the momentum that had been achieved to that point.

Funding and resource support

There was across the board recognition by interviewees of the impact of recent cuts in government funding for arts and culture, with one acknowledging that "there's no sugar coating it" and another arguing "the small to medium cultural sector in Queensland is really under threat at the moment". Some participating organisations had recently experienced such severe budget cuts that one federally funded group was "almost on the brink of extinction - and fighting to survive", resulting in "the loss of employment for dozens and dozens of artists and arts workers" in the regions. Another organisation representative described how they had recently lost the majority of their state funding and were attempting to operate with "a few thousand dollars [left] in the bank". A number of quite negative views were presented in relation to funding in general, with one participant with over forty years experience in the sector describing it as "definitely the toughest I have ever seen", while another felt that in the arts community there was "a very negative perception of funding and funding bodies at the moment" given ongoing reductions across all levels of government. This same participant attempted to explain this situation and argued that the severity of the funding cuts was due to the fact that "there are other issues that are sexier and can achieve greater traction with the electorate than funding regional arts activity or cultural activities". There were also several references to the perception amongst many artists and arts groups that government – both indirectly through policy and directly through grants - exists to provide ongoing funding and for the long term. In a somewhat cynical view, one interviewee felt that the government's unemployment welfare system "is probably the biggest supporter of the arts", while on the other hand another felt "governments have made [artists] helpless by providing money all the time".

Several interviewees also described how Queensland is also the least resourced and funded state in terms of regional arts development officers, with only one currently based in the capital city of Brisbane and therefore at least 1500 kilometres south of north Queensland. One interviewee lamented "how incredibly isolated [the regions in Queensland] are and I know what a big difference it would make if there was a network of professional officers". To further complicate the picture, another felt that "support has been reducing for regional communities" and thus it was a gloomy future ahead given the significant likelihood of even further reductions in government funding in general. Indeed, one interviewee referred to regional arts activities as "constantly hand to mouth" given the few funding sources available for those at the grassroots level.

Sector fragmentation and separation

One of the additional key themes in relation to creative industries in general, as well as in north Queensland in particular, is the level of fragmentation within the sector. For example, one interviewee described their difficulties in attempting over many years to coordinate a broad arts festival in this geographical area, which became far too complicated and fraught as a consequence of "the really fragmented nature of things". Another interviewee described how attempts to bring the creative industries sector together as part of developing a new cultural policy was "really very difficult". Fragmentation within the sector is also perceived in terms of a perceived lack of coordination between the different levels of government and policy organisations, with one interviewee describing how "we were hoping that with the development of the Australian National Cultural Policy that this may have been a key framework for us to build an advocacy tool around … but that's not going to happen no matter how much we try. We work in silos. It's the nature of bureaucracy." Another interviewee

based in the region described a very positive relationship with the state arts body, but then described the working relationship and level of engagement with the national arts body as "absolutely very poor".

In addition to being fragmented within the sector, it emerged in interviews with those focussed explicitly on economic development that the creative industries sector lacks a unified voice or governing organisation and is hence further removed from key discussions and strategic decision making. One referred to "little representation of the cultural industry" in their membership, also arguing that "until they start collaborating, it makes it challenging" to support and promote the sector and divert resources towards it. Another argued that the creative industries sector "suffers more so than anywhere else in terms of its funding and I think that part of that is because it is not able to tell a good enough story about the economic benefit - it's always about the cultural benefit". Hence, this individual also referred to the need for sector-wide representation in order that the creative industries can "get out there and tell its message".

Sector growth and development

A range of ideas and opinions were presented when interviewees were asked to consider how to grow the creative industries sector in north Queensland. The leadership role of government was one of the main points of discussion, with the continuation of public investment considered important: one interviewee argued the need for government to "support emerging industries like the creative industries [and to] diversify our regional economies", another felt similarly given government "represents the people" but also argued greater investment in the arts is required, while a third also proposed "a more realistic funding commitment and a greater understanding from government of the work that is being achieved". Government

support and funding of capacity was also considered critical by one interviewee, "in terms of development officers and infrastructure (networks)", while another described the need for a carefully coordinated and managed strategy across government; "collaboration and involvement at all levels will be key".

While most references were in relation to future needs or ideal scenarios, one organisation commented on the fact that they were "taking a lead in relation to regional engagement" by working with local councils to build the sector and to identify and foster cultural strengths and assets. This theme of a greater emphasis on the regions was argued by other interviewees, in terms of how to grow the sector in north Queensland:

- *hand the power and the decision making over to the local community. Let us have the debate over what's worth funding and not worth funding for ourselves.*

- *have public resources reside in a non-government not-for-profit organization that has a focus on regional arts advocacy support and development*

- *have a regional picture ... if you're going to attract tourists ... attract them to the whole region so they can see everything [including creative industries].*

Finally, the issue of how to address decreasing government funding while still building the sector was also raised. At a practical level, one interviewee described the need to "better use the limited resources that we do already have", while another described the future of government funding as "a very different ballgame". One participant placed significant emphasis on the need for new business models, given that industry and government are increasingly focussed on return on investment,

hence "if the returns don't involve some significant public impact or profit, or at least a break even, then it doesn't look like a good investment". This scenario of reducing government funding led several other interviewees to refer to growing expectations on the sector to source new levels of support, be this through philanthropy or via business/industry partnerships for example. One interviewee felt this was having traction, describing how "people are starting to think beyond just funding which is … encouraging for us who get very tired of getting beaten up about [it]". Nevertheless, a regionally based interviewee an felt that it was extremely hard for regional artists or groups to attract new sources of funding, describing how, for example, the "people who get philanthropic funding are already very well funded" and usually based in capital cities.

Discussion

The insights obtained via the series of interviews conducted as part of this study provide a more comprehensive picture of key aspects of the creative industries sector and its participants in north Queensland, while also raising wider implications for both the state of Queensland and in terms of the vision for the north of the country in general. There are four key areas that represent ongoing challenges for those involved as either participants or as key stakeholders responsible for the leadership and development of the sector: the engagement, relevance and impact of policy, significant changes in government funding, the fragmented nature of the creative industries, and the isolation of north Queensland from major cultural infrastructure and investment. These issues when viewed together are complex, indeed a 'wicked' problem for those involved in leadership and sector development, particularly if substantial growth is to be achieved as compared to a continuation of the status quo.

Indeed, the findings of this study also reinforce the significance of the challenge for the entire state of Queensland, with its sheer size and geographical spread representing a major ongoing policy, funding and equity issue (Lancaster et al. 2010).

In terms of policy itself, the interviewees confirm that creative industries participants in north Queensland are provided with ample opportunity to participate directly and indirectly in policy or strategy development, be this at local, state or national levels. While some engage, many others also choose not to partake in such processes, thereby reflecting the vexed and complicated nature of the relationship between artists and policy and which has previously been identified in the literature (Rueschemeyer 1997, Mulcahy 2006). In addition, the key stakeholders in this study describe how the general lack of engagement with policy is influenced by a) the isolation of the north Queensland area from major policy making centres, b) the perception that policy language is largely bureaucratic, and c) the limited long-term relevance and/or presence of policy within the sector and particularly when there are changes of government (Craik 2013, Caust 2014).

The findings also reinforce the ongoing impact that government funding and investment in the arts has in terms of sector activity and potential growth. At the time of this study, there was a largely pessimistic stance in relation to current and future funding from government at all levels in Australia, given significant recent cuts and messages from key ministers. For example, the federal treasurer recently declared that the "days of borrow and spend must come to an end" (Hockey 2014), while his Queensland counterpart argued similarly that the "unprecedented scale of the State's debt … demands an unprecedented response" (Nicholls 2014). Ultimately, the various signals about ongoing funding issues and fiscal challenges that the Australian economy faces will arguably mean that the future contribution of the creative

industries sector to the north Queensland economy will likely be significantly challenged, despite the fact that this sector has been recognised as important to the broader economy and also regional economies specifically (Scherer et al. 2012).

In addition, while recent changes to the strategic plan for the Australia Council includes reference to the importance of community arts participation in regional areas as well as easier access to grant funding (Australia Council for the Arts 2014b), the impact of these changes as well as those recently implemented by the Queensland government (Crean 2012) will arguably not yet be fully understood nor realised for several years. The issue of funding is further complicated by that fact that the majority of public investment in creative industries occurs in the south of the country, this leading to a strong perception that north Queensland is not only isolated geographically but also in relation to direct investment. While the north of the country in general has a much lower population base, hence to some extent the balance of investment in the south is logical, the longer-term issue of how to build this geographic area must ultimately include a consideration of the level of investment in arts, culture and creative industries.

One of the key additional challenges for those working in creative industries in north Queensland will be the impending need to examine new business models or other ways of replacing diminishing federal and also state government funding (Lancaster et al. 2010). While it seems clear that many traditional areas of the sector will be forced to transition more quickly from a predominantly subsidized scenario to one where there are multiple sources of funding, or towards what have been described in the literature as self-sustaining creative industries (Felton and Collis 2012), the need for new policy settings and support strategies to achieve such goals will be critical. This poses additional and long-term challenges, given issues of low

population or critical mass, limited infrastructure and the ongoing influence of geographic isolation and separation from the major population centres and support systems in the sector.

Further, this impending transition and shift away from ongoing reliance on government funding will mean that those responsible for the higher education of artists and creative workers will need to consider the extent to which curriculum will need to address behaviours and skills increasingly referred to in the literature as enterprising or entrepreneurial (e.g. Beckman 2011, Bridgstock 2011). That is, if the sector will be increasingly expected to demonstrate return on government and private investment, the participants will need to have the skills and attributes to do so and that evidences the economic and not just cultural or social benefit of this investment. The findings of this study therefore propose that in addition to current funding challenges, the future education and training of the creative industries workforce is an important element of the broader goal to build northern Australia.

Finally, a key complication emerges around the fragmented nature of the creative industries not only in north Queensland but in general, as well as the lack of representation of this sector in economic development planning and strategic development, two issues which came through strongly in the interviews. These findings highlight again the discourse in the literature about the disparate grouping of a range of areas of practice under the banner of creative industries as well as the ongoing debates about who in fact are the actual participants and relevant disciplines (e.g. Chapain and Comunian 2010, Kolenda and Liu 2012, Flew 2014). While most individual creative disciplines (e.g. Architecture, Design, Photography, Music) have a range of state or national representative bodies in Australia, there is no umbrella organisation providing leadership and advocacy for the broader creative industries as

a sector, be this at national, state or local levels. While Queensland has arguably played a lead role in the promotion of creative industries (Flew and Cunningham 2010), it is clear that a major impediment to the growth and development of the sector in the broader economy relates to the lack of coherent representation. Whether this is likely to change in the near future remains a significant unknown but also a particular challenge for key leaders in government and industry.

Conclusions and directions

This case study has raised as many issues as it has offered insights and findings that will benefit the ongoing discourse and debate relevant to arts and cultural policy and the creative industries sector in north Queensland in particular, as well as to northern Australia in general. While on the one hand it is likely that policy and government support for arts and culture and the creative industries will continue for the foreseeable future, if there is in fact a true commitment on the part of the federal government to build northern Australia there will need to be serious and coordinated leadership at all levels, and including creative industries given the sector has been identified as a significant potential contributor to employment and economic growth. For example, the current balance of investment in the south of the country, albeit where the majority of the population resides, will ultimately need to be reconsidered if there is a goal to both attract and retain new populations in the north.

This paper also establishes a demonstrated need for a significant body of further research, to explore such issues as the potential for sector-wide representation and a unified voice, the ways in which creative industries might be included in the broader vision for northern Australia, as well as the ways in which new business models or replacement funding streams can be developed and achieved in an area

such as regional and isolated north Queensland amidst declining public investment in arts and culture. It is clear that northern Australia has particular complexities that are very different to those that may be relevant in the south of the country, indeed it is likely that other parts of northern Australia have their own particular challenges that are worthy of further research and investigation. While these various factors and needs represent a significant and long-term challenge, it also proposes that there are many opportunities that might be considered and pursued if policy makers and key stakeholders are to see the successful long-term development of the next frontier that is northern Australia.

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