

STATE of SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Trends and Issues 2006 Update

Australian Institute for Social Research
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THE ARTS Jo Caust

Introduction

Premier Rann at his recent investiture of an honorary doctorate at the University of South Australia said,

"I see no reason why Adelaide can't develop a national and international standing in university education that rivals the one we today enjoy in relation to arts and culture" (Rann 2006)

Yet less than a week later the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer is quoted on the front page of the Advertiser saying that,

"...South Australia has started to lose its lustre as the arts capital of Australia...It's not that South Australia has done less, it's that other states have done more...I don't think the present State Government shows a lot of interest." (Dower quoted in Starick 2006)

Aside from the obvious sparring implicit in party politics, who is right? Does South Australia still have an enviable reputation for arts and culture and is this supported by the present state government policies and programs? Or have the other states caught up and is South Australia relying on a reputation from the past, rather than still being regarded as a significant national leader/player in relation to the arts? In this update the position of the arts in South Australia, is discussed in the context of the state government's strategic plan, as well as in relation to significant trends in national and state policy development affecting the arts.

Update of Key trends

While the intent of South Australia's Strategic Plan was to provide achievable targets in specific areas, it was also stated that the Plan was directly connected to the State Government Budget and its priorities. The challenge for a field such as the arts is that the targets are framed in essentially quantitative terms and based around an economic framework. The 'arts' do not necessarily lend themselves to this mode of framing. Yet

according to the State Labour Party's electoral policy document for the arts published for the 2006 election, the 'arts', through the Plan's section on Creativity have been given equal status to the other strategies in the Plan such as 'Growing Prosperity', 'Improving Well-being', 'Attaining Sustainability', 'Building Communities' and 'Expanding Opportunity'. But the term 'creativity' does not necessarily mean the 'arts' and in fact the term 'arts' or 'art' are not mentioned in any of the strategies in the current Plan. There are however 11 targets under the umbrella of 'creativity'. Of these, three could be seen as having a direct relationship to the arts sector. For example target 4: 3 reads

" Film: Significantly grow and expand South Australia's share of the national feature film industry to match our population share"

However in the audit of the plan's progress published by the State Government in June 2006, it is noted that while South Australia's share of national film production increased to 22% in 2004-5 (from 16% in 2003-4), this represents a decline in production from 2002-3 where South Australia had around 30% of the production. These figures are still good nevertheless in relation to the State's national population share of 7.6% and the original target. The audit report's goal of 30% of the share of national production within a ten year time frame may be achievable nevertheless. The State Government's strategy of commissioning films as part of the remit of the International Adelaide Film Festival for instance, is likely to pay dividends in the future. However the film sector nationally is in a trough at present, and is the subject of a national review. This situation already affects the overall levels of production and therefore South Australia's share, and this might therefore have an impact on possible levels of production in the future.

While the film target can be seen as an arts target, the two other targets connected with the arts are less obvious. Target 4: 4 reads:

“Television: Double our share of television production within 10 years.”

There has been an increase in television production share from 4.95% in 2002-3 to 11.4% in 2004-5, however this is mostly due to one drama series that is made in Adelaide, “McLeod’s Daughters”. In addition Australian television drama production, like film, has declined nationally over this period, thereby increasing the relative proportion of South Australia’s share. However this target does not differentiate between drama and other forms of television production so other forms of production that may occur, may not be related to the arts (e.g. sport for instance).

The final target that is seen to have a connection to the arts via its association with the ‘creative industries’ is Target 4:5. This reads:

“Audio visual and digital content: Match the Australian average rate of growth in the audiovisual sector within 10 years.”

This target presented problems for the Strategic Plan in terms of definitions and ways of measurement. So although the Creative Industries Report commissioned by the State government in 2005, predicted high growth rates in this sector, there is an inability to accurately measure this, until agreed definitions have been realised.

South Australia’s Preliminary Community Engagement Report responds to the audit of the Strategic Plan highlighting targets that are not working, missing, or are not seen as relevant or important. Under Objective 4 re Fostering Creativity it suggests that the 3 targets related to the arts sector, T4.3, T4.4. and T4.5 should be consolidated but there should be some reflection of contemporary and emerging art forms.

In addition they propose that there are three more targets included that focus on some acknowledgement of arts events, an increase in live music presentation and an increase in the participation of young South Australians in arts activity. Greg Mackie, Director of Arts SA, said in interview with this writer, that in the revised version of the Strategic Plan,

“I would hope to see a more streamlined approach to the screen-based sector targets and inclusion of at least one target that validates and supports the objective of growing audiences and participation in the arts” (Mackie in conversation August 29th 2006).

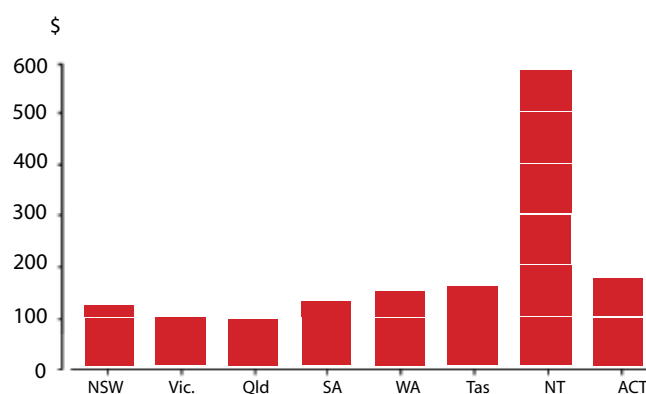
So it is likely that in the next version of the Strategic Plan, there will be a target that focuses on audience development for the arts.

In relation to present government funding there have been additional allocations to the Fringe of \$2 million to enable it to occur annually, to the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust of \$8 million over four years to assist in the refurbishment and upgrading of the venue, and to regional arts of \$2 million dollars committed over 4 years. While the arts budget lost about \$1.5 million in 2004 as part of the across government

savings policy, the State arts budget has seen some small growth in 2005 and 2006. There is also some optimism within Arts SA that future arts budgets will be less affected by continuing government cuts than originally anticipated.

Table 1 shows a national comparison of cultural funding from States and Territories for 2004-05 (ABS August 2006 4183.0). While this cultural funding does not just relate to the arts but includes heritage, South Australia is placed in fifth position nationally in relation to funding by person for culture. If levels of funding reflect both political will and activity, then South Australia is in the bottom half rather than the top half.

Table 1: State And Territory Government Cultural Funding, By \$ Per Person - 2004-05



ABS August 2006 4183.0 - Cultural Funding by Government, Australia, 2004-05.

Update of Key Policy Issues

The other major development in State Government Policy in relation to the arts was the publication in 2005 of the Creative Industries Report. This report was prepared for a cross government committee with representation from Arts SA, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Trade and Economic Development and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology. The focus in the report is again an economic one, where areas of potential growth particularly in relation to the area of new media, are explored. Traditional art forms are given limited attention in the report, although they are also included in the overall definition of ‘creative industries’. The focus is on the areas of screen and digital, similar to the Strategic Plan. The report certainly talks up the economic possibilities of the creative industries but the authors are talking essentially about one particular area of the creative industries.

Policy Directions

Over the past decade the arts both nationally and internationally, have been framed within an economic construct by governments. While there is an increasing critique of the instrumentalisation of the arts by commentators such as John Holden and Clive Gray in the United Kingdom and Charles Dorn in the United States, this trend still prevails. Certainly the

emphasis in South Australia's Strategic Plan on industry aspects of the arts such as film, television and audio digital sectors and their potential as economic generators, reflects this trend as does an emphasis on events such as festivals.

The Arts Industry Council has noted that although there was talk at the State Arts Summit in 2003 about the development of a State Arts Policy, this has not occurred. The Arts Industry Council have also been conducting a campaign for more money for 'art makers' rather than 'art presenters' and requested an extra allocation of \$700,000 from the State Government for this (AIC 2005). They argue that this would encourage artists to stay in South Australia rather than move elsewhere, after their training.

So while there is continuing rhetoric about the importance of the arts to the State, a claim that the State still leads the country in arts development, may be now an overstatement.

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Dorn, Charles (2004) "The Deterritorialization of Art" in the Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society Washington, Vol 34, No 2, Summer 2004

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