



**A SUBMISSION TO THE
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**

Sustainability Policy Unit
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FROM

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY CULTURE

Recommendation

That Community Arts Network WA, CAN WA, be included as a partner in the development of the State of Western Australia's sustainability strategy.

The above recommendation is based on CAN WA's track record and its way of working including principles, products and services as follows:

CAN WA's mission

To grow partnerships with, and provide training for communities, artists, government and community service organisations and business to contribute to sustainable community, environment, social, cultural and economic development.

Background

Community Arts celebrates communities coming together. The mission of Community Arts Network WA (CAN WA) is to go beyond the rhetoric of partnerships into the "doing" and "being". This includes working together with communities to overcome, or change perceived mainstream mindsets, to take the extra step into what is often unknown territory and, as a team, work with communities, searching out ways through arts and culture, in which we can go forward and improve the quality of communities and therefore our own lives.

CAN WA is the peak industry body for training and development in Community Culture, Community Arts and Cultural Planning in Western Australia and the only peak body arts agency in WA to have sustainability as an integral part of its core business. CAN WA uses community culture development (CCD) processes. CCD is defined as a participative process, which draws out a community's inherent knowledge through creative means to acknowledge, preserve or enhance that community's culture. CAN WA became an

incorporated association in 1985 to advocate for cultural democracy and has played a vital role as a catalyst in revitalising communities across the state.

Traditionally CCD has grown as a voice among communities in search of, and as an expression of, identity and spirituality in a changing world. CAN WA believes that a participative, involved community has a better chance of being vital, holistic and sustainable.

Community culture practitioners work with social justice and diversity as the heart of a healthy community. A community culture practitioner is a person who inspires and encourages creativity, innovation and reflection in communities.

Achievements

CAN WA's achievements include:

- Partnering a specialised Cultural Planning Program with local governments and their communities since 1996.
- Working as a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation since 1999.
- Cultural Planning with Aboriginal communities in Ieramagadu (Roebourne).
- Developing a Popular Culture Centre concept (an arts and enterprise village) with, by and for young people.
- Establishing the first accredited training in cultural planning in WA ('A Short Course in Cultural Planning').
- Mentoring community organisations and community culture workers.
- Undertaking research into community culture in partnership with Community and Environmental Psychology, Edith Cowan University.
- Creating multinational links with communities throughout the Indian Ocean region and planning for an expo of its cultures
- Managing community arts and cultural investment programs – Catalyst and Community Culture – on behalf of the State of Western Australia through ArtsWA.

CANWA Principles and Strategies for sustainability

2002 Creating cultural opportunities;

1992 Facilitating community ownership and participation in long term cultural planning ,
implementation , review and evaluation;

1993 Researching, developing and documenting cultural identity with and for
communities;

1994 Integrating oral tradition (community spirit) and urban infrastructure (corporate
systems);

- Encouraging the unfolding of self through community, imagination and creativity;
- The valuing of all different experiences redefined to include a sense of expanded identity.

The WA State government definition of sustainability puts forward a definition based on the notion of the triple-bottom line. Although the definition includes the concept of social, the definition used for conceptualising sustainability is inadequate as it excludes the concept of culture. Such an exclusion portrays the Australian ‘landscape’ as an homogenous group of people (society) living according to one system of belief and law. As it stands, Western Australia is not a state with one system of law or belief (e.g Mabo and Wik, and established ‘alternative schools). The recognition that Western Australia is a part of a neo-colonial nation and a ‘multicultural’ society must be made in all conceptualizations of sustainability including the one put forward by the WA State Government. An inclusion of the concept of culture not only recognizes the cultural dimension of sustainability, but also provides a space/place in which different groups (indigenous, women, youth, ethnic minorities) needs and aspirations can be *valued*.

The triple bottom line is underpinned by infrastructure. These are mostly third person processes. The triple bottom line does not consider people's thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Third person structures provide the "roads" for community and society. It does not provide for, or interpret vitality. "People are invisible" until their story is told. Culture begins with identity. Identity is about our story. Each story adds to the spirit and the vitality of community.

Every culture has its tests of ability, protocol, discipline, dignity and boundaries. Each has created a suitable way to survive and has decorated it with music, dance ornamentation and ritual. This is common to all cultures.

Variations to the above are that some choose to live with the land and maintain simplicity. Others harness the land for constant development. These major variations manifest themselves in social, environmental and economic structures and outcomes but the underpinning of all three bottom lines is in fact CULTURE. Culture is not an outcome it is a way of life. It is identity, protocols and how we dress our imaginings.

UNESCO defines culture in the following way:

It is culture what connects people with one another and makes the development of the individual possible...It is culture that defines how people relate to nature and their physical environment, to earth and the cosmos, and through which we express our attitudes to and beliefs in other forms of life, both animal and plant. It is in this sense that all forms of development including human development, ultimately are determined by cultural factors...It is meaningless to talk about the relation between culture and development as if they were two separate concepts, since development and the economy are part of, or an aspect of, a people's culture. (UNESCO, 1995).

Culture is not a fourth bottom line. Culture cannot be separate. It is core. It is integral to the three bottom lines, not a fourth and separate category.

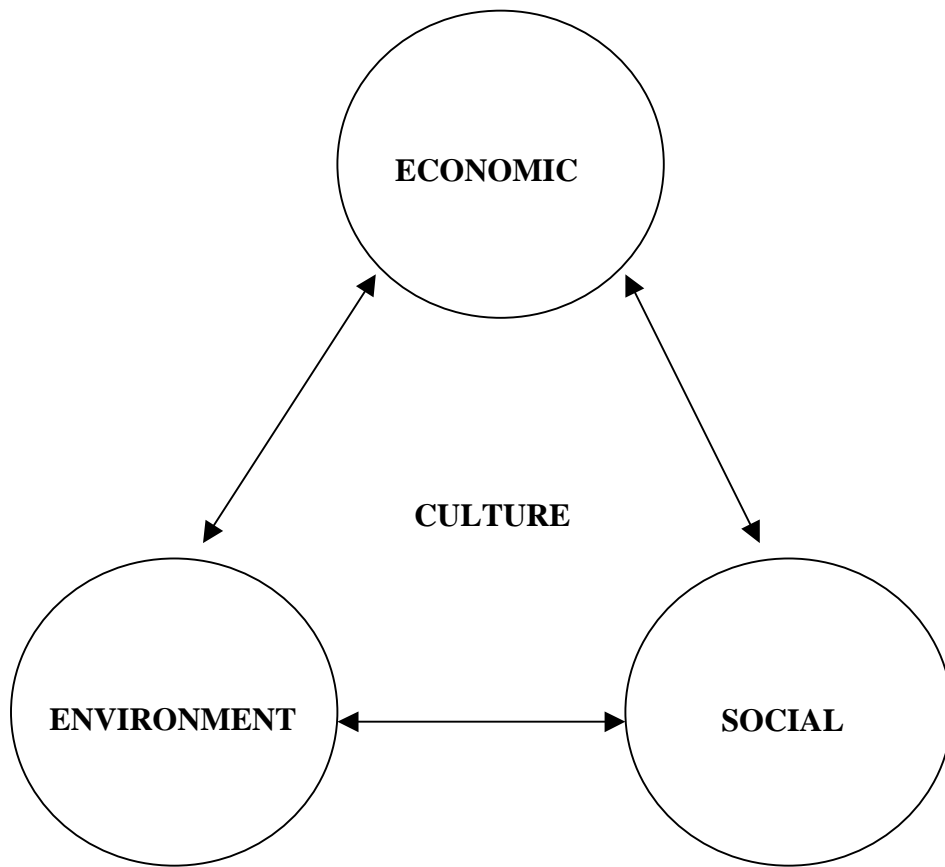


Figure 1: Sustainability Model encompassing culture

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Culture be included in the State Sustainability Strategic

Plan sustainability definition as represented above and not as an add-on to the triple-bottom line.

CAN WA's Programs for building sustainable communities are:

2003Cultural Planning: is a catalyst for social, environmental and economic development. It is about building vital, safe and prosperous communities.

Cultural Planning is a strategic planning process, a tool. It creates partnerships between community, local government and industry. It transforms dreams, ideas and initiatives into real outcomes.

Cultural Planning employs creative and stimulating techniques to ensure a high degree of community participation. These techniques are an empowering process, which grow community capacity and spirit. CAN WA's Cultural Planning methods are delivered across Australia.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Cultural planning become a core strategy and process for sustainability across all sectors

- **Education**: CAN WA's Learning programs are experiential and bridge oral tradition (community spirit) and urban infrastructure (mechanical, technical and corporate systems). These programs employ simple and holistic cycles of being, reflecting, creating, networking, planning, mentoring, delivering, documenting, assessing and celebrating.

CAN WA is a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO). CAN WA delivers community culture training to artists, communities, government, community services organisations and businesses. Community culture training is holistic and context-

driven. It links the development of community spirit and well being with professional and enterprise growth.

CAN WA's education program includes research and development in partnership with universities.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

That more research be conducted on the impact of CAN WA's educational models towards sustainable community culture

- **Advocacy on community cultural development and cultural planning:** To encourage community-driven initiatives in partnerships with artists, communities, government, community service organisations and businesses.
- **Popular Culture:** Everyday our contemporary culture is shaped by recreation, design, music, visual arts, stories, food, environment, social structures and communication. In healthy communities, young people influence and inspire and are involved in all aspects of cultural life.

LiveworX is a concept in development to bring back a greater participative role for young people in planning the future of our society. It was previously known as the Popular Culture Centre. LiveworkX is designed to provide long term innovative programs which uniquely blend arts, enterprise and environment.

- **Indian Ocean Community Culture Expo:** This event is an initiative of CAN WA and will bring together communities of the Indian Ocean, Aid agencies working in the Indian Ocean (and returned volunteers), and business communities who trade in the Indian Ocean.

The above programs are described in more detail in the attached document titled: *What We Do and Where We Are Going* (1992).

Responses to some of questions outlined in *Focus on the Future* are included within the body of this submission. Included below is additional comment with regards to each specific question.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Q1 *Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?*

Sustainability is a worthwhile pursuit if it is not shrouded in rhetoric. Sustainability is no longer an option. It is not an option. It is a MUST. However, how sustainability is interpreted will have an outcome on policies and programs. For this reason alone serious consideration must go into the definition and conceptualization of sustainability. As written above, the State's definition of sustainability is inadequate because it excludes the concept of culture (refer to page 3 to 5).

Sustainability, as conceptualized including the concept of culture, is a worthwhile pursuit because it recognizes that nature/ environment might be perceived as something which exists in itself, but that it is something which is constructed and perceived through one's own cultural lenses. The realization of one's own 'cultural lenses' has implications for the writing of policies and programs for sustainability, and provides a way for governments, businesses, and community groups to understand their relationship to one another and to 'nature'.

Q2 *What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?*

Such benefits might include:

- Valuing of local knowledge, local strategies and local identity (through the inclusion of concept of culture) might thereby empower local communities to take a more active role in their local 'environment' and local sustainability groups.
- Improved physical and mental health.

- Healthier communities.
- Civic consciousness.

Q3 *In your experience, what opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?*

CAN WA's programs as identified in this document and in the attached document titled *What we do and Where we are going*, identifies opportunities to pursue sustainable community culture.

Q4 *What is the role of government, business and community in facilitating change to be more sustainable?*

Government ought to provide a leadership role and develop/promote models and examples of sustainability through collaboration and participation of local communities. This point was taken up in Agenda 21 and was further re-integrated in Local Agenda 21. Combined with the above point is the need for governments to value local knowledge, local strategies and local identity in their cultural contexts through programs and policies aimed at empowering local communities to take an active role in local community sustainability issues. Governments also need to recognise that community consultation and participation is a process that requires community involvement in *all* stages of the process including the development of models, programs and policies. CAN WA's cultural planning program works to this end.

Time allocated for consultation is a crucial issue and 3 months for public consultation is not an adequate time frame to include the views of all groups in Western Australia into the State's Sustainability Strategic Plan. This may be considered as the first phase and recommend that continuing strategies be put in place.

The role of business (and government) in sustainability is to recognise that communities must play an active role in any developments planned for within their local community.

Communities need to take a more active role in voicing local strategies, local knowledge and local identity needs to be part of innovative solutions. Communities can probably more ready to take on the challenge than some business sectors, and communities in their consumer roles can encourage business to have a dialogue.

Q5 *What best practice example exists, if any, to demonstrate how sustainability is being progressed?*

Refer to pages 4 and 5 of this submission.

Q6 *What research and development is needed to ensure sustainability outcomes can be achieved?*

- Research on how people understand sustainability
- Research on partnership between community, business and other sectors.
- Effectiveness of information distribution and dissemination
- Correlation between community participation and sustainability
- The role of arts and culture in working towards sustainable community cultures.

Q7 *In a more general sense, what else should Western Australia be doing to contribute nationally, regionally and globally to progress sustainability?*

- An education systems that recognizes cultural differences and requires people to combine theory with praxis in science-based learning.
- Provision for citizens to engage with the subject in a variety of ways and sectors.

2004 Australians need to first spend time in identifying who they are and where they live expressed through their own eyes. To start with the transformation of self to grow communities of spirit to change the heart of society.

BOX 2

Artists and creative associations

What is the role of creativity and culture in making the transition to sustainability?

1995 To engage with the subject matter. Culture is the dressing of our imaginings. If we cannot “see” or “create” in our minds a sustainable world we will not be able to strive for it.

1996 To engage communities in a participatory hands on experience with the subject and in so doing shift the paradigm from distant concepts to the here and now.

1997 To facilitate dialogue and inspire visions for the future that begins now.

1998 To provide spaces and places of innovation and creativity where solutions can be formulated.

1999 To AID THE MINDSET SHIFT – This is a creative process and the arts can make it happen.

Appendix:

What We Do and Where We Are Going. Community Arts Network WA. 2002

Cultural Planning Special Edition. Community Arts Network WA March 2002

The 1998 Ieramagadu Cultural Mapping Story Community Arts Network WA 1999