

Money isn't everything

Devolving the tools of engagement

*Creative participation is the key to cultural vitality and the key to universal creative participation is **access**. I don't mean access to products and services (what could be called passive access) but access to the tools of production and the levers of power (that is, **active** access).*

What are these tools?

For communities to achieve maximum engagement in creative participation, they need widespread and easy access to:

- **Recognition:** public recognition and promotion of the value of their activities and the importance of their status; confidence in their cultural function and the public support for carrying out that function.
- **Time:** there are many options; for example – a shorter working week, mandatory arts elements in educational programs, paid time for cultural activities as a part of workplace agreements, a recognition that time spent in creative activity is socially productive.
- **Networks:** of common interest and experience, of support and sharing – networks that facilitate discovery, exchange, dissemination and promotion; while these networks need to be independent, their development would benefit from, for example, the availability of training opportunities for community activists and the facilitation of co-operative resource sharing.
- **Information:** about examples and models, guidelines to best practice, contact details, exposure to alternatives.
- **Equipment:** the tangible materials and tools with which to make stuff.
- **Sites:** in which to work, to practice, to mingle, to play, to experiment, to make and to show.
- **Public space:** places where widespread face-to-face social interaction can be facilitated. This is a key to civic engagement and to local cultural development.
- **Facilitation:** people who are really good at liberating the creativity of others.
- **Skill development:** decentralised and local ownership of an ongoing skill-base; keeping in mind that the fundamental skill is CONFIDENCE and that development is the opposite of envelopment. The skills I'm thinking of are not just those of specific artmaking techniques but also of group-work and cross-cultural facilitation.
- **Diversity:** opportunities to experience and collaborate with people with different experiences, values and modes of expression.
- **Continuity:** 'access to continuity' may sound strange, but it is meaningful; communities need to be able to experience **ongoing** cultural engagement – stop-start projects can be counter-productive.
- **Gentle hands:** resource and service providers whose behaviour is founded on their understanding that their function is to serve rather than control.
- **Money:** although, if all of the foregoing resources were available to communities at a minimal cost to them, then perhaps money wouldn't be an issue at all.

Most communities could not hope to achieve accessibility like this on their own: interventions are clearly needed.

The challenge for agents of governance is to ensure that the distribution of these resources is achieved in ways that make them accessible, productively used and, as far as possible, locally owned and sustainable.

If the tools of cultural production were to become universally accessible, the results would not simply be the universal and democratic exercise of cultural rights, but also a massive outburst of creativity.