



Tuesday, 4 October 2011, 1:30 pm.

Roundtable 4: Invigorating cities

Speakers

Moira Sinclair, Executive Director, Arts Council England

Say Kosal, President, National League of Communes/Sangkats, Cambodia

Marcus Westbury, Founder, Renew Newcastle and Renew Australia

Eduard Miralles, Cultural Relations Advisor, Barcelona Provincial Council, Spain

Moderator

Paul Holton, General Manager, Development, Wellington Shire Council, Australia

Rapporteur

Frank Panucci, Director, Community Partnerships, Australia Council for the Arts

Description of the session

This session focused on the role of art in urban environment and its role in the revitalisation of public spaces, city planning, social inclusion, diversity and the response of local cultural policies to the new situation.

Moira Sinclair explained that the participation rates in London are the highest for the wealthy and those with access to education and the worst for the poor and that this disparity is amongst the worst in England. She said that making major institutions understand their part in opening up to people is important in addressing the gap. As in many cities, rich and poor work and live alongside each other every day so it is important to open up the elite institutions to communities that surround them. She also explained how agencies are coming together to see how they can combine to have a long term vision rather than fund a range of activities. Some of the examples she displayed included targeted and sustained investment in areas where there is low infrastructure and engagement. Through investment in particular projects you can increase the sense of the local in an international city. She also talked about the importance of partnership and what it really means this can be a strength. You foster soft social infrastructure by investing in existing culture.

Say Kosal explained that to sustain diversity of culture what is needed are four things: a) a clear national policy, b) support to local governments as they are the ones working with local communities on the ground and need resources to do it, c) harmonising of the culture and d) love for your own culture but also valuing other cultures and harmonising your efforts.

Marcus Westbury said that empty spaces are lost opportunities for creative people to do something as initiative and experimentation are not just capital. He also talked about the broker model between private owners and the creators and how psychology of the place has changed. At the moment Newcastle is on Lonely Planet's top 10 places to visit. For him, channelling initiative is the real issue and to work with people for what they are not to fit them into a program (meaning software and not hardware is important). He concluded by saying that creativity is a decentralizing issue for setting up a social enterprise.

Eduard Miralles started by saying that health of a city needs integrated development of all its parts. Now cities are in the market place competing with other cities for marketing and branding and this raises risks for the health of cities. New pathologies under globalisation are a risk. He also talked about gentrification and how cities use culture to transform traditional places – changing the social composition leads to a decline in the wellbeing of the traditional inhabitants. He also talked about Barcelona and its tourism industry, and the “damaged host” syndrome. Tourism is good but no one can regulate it. In Barcelona the city wants to move from 9 million tourists to 14 million but the ‘host’ is tired and getting upset. They also play with the idea of a ‘Midas touch’, the idea that all things touched by art turn to gold. But it might have a boomerang effect – the magic Midas stick may come back to you. He also underlined that culture is the 4th pillar of development; not only a resource for development but actually itself a pillar of development. Furthermore, there is the need to rethink the relationship between excellence and proximity, and to develop a notion of excellence that is relevant to the outside world with ideas, etc that have nothing to do with the local culture and community. The accent should be placed on creators and communities and not on the provision of cultural provision.

Creative intersections discussed in the session

- People are at the centre and we need to be careful that we don't lose the traditional and proximity
- How do we unleash the initiative and keep connections with local communities and artists living in the area
- Where does heritage preservation etc fit into this

Examples of good practices

- 33 London boroughs (local government) are involved in a big dance project that has a health agenda as well as providing opportunities for great art to take place with millions of people

- London project for wellbeing – arts organisations have been working with sustainable food agencies, local health boards, sports providers and the YMCA on grassroots led and designed interventions.

Identified problems

- Invisible local government – things happen in a place where there are not just citizens but also local authorities
- Urbanisation pathology
- Balancing the damage that might happen against the potential and opportunities
- Art seen as problem solvers
- What about the arts as arts
- What would government sacrifice to reallocate resources to these investments within the arts and cultural budget and across government generally
- In Australia we need to contribute to the design of policies policy as well as the National Cultural Policy (NCP) and cross reference them

Recommendations for future actions

- Need to focus on people, focus investment in artists and local communities
- Local leadership is important and the relationship with major events – cities are not to be seen solely as theatres or platforms
- Look at the small scale do not just assume that it has to be big or top down mega redevelopment projects
- There is no magic formula – local is the centre of the conversation
- Culture seen as an element of development and not just a resource for development

Other additional comments

- *‘What is a city but its people?’ (Shakespeare)*