

The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning

SUMMARY

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Published by Common Ground P/L, Melbourne, 2001; ISBN 1 86335 049

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'The Fourth Pillar' provides a clear definition of culture, analyses its function within the emerging new planning paradigms and proposes practical measures for the integration of a cultural perspective into the public sphere. Its key conclusion is that a whole-of-government cultural framework, operating in parallel with social, environmental and economic frameworks, is essential for the achievement of a sustainable and healthy society.

The monograph argues that '[a] society's values are the basis upon which all else is built. These values and the ways they are expressed are a society's culture. The way a society governs itself cannot be fully democratic without there being clear avenues for the expression of community values, and unless these expressions directly affect the directions society takes. These processes are culture at work.'

When culture is understood to denote the social production and transmission of values, meaning and purpose and it is recognised that the expression of social goals and aspirations is at the heart of the public planning process, the connection between culture and planning becomes clear. So also does the potential for the use of culture as a core element in the mechanisms that facilitate effective public planning.

'The Fourth Pillar' demonstrates that the 'concept of culture is an invaluable tool that has been largely ignored in the attempts to reconfigure the ways that governments plan the future and evaluate the past.'

Cultural vitality is as essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability. In order for public planning to be more effective, its methodology should include an integrated framework of cultural evaluation along similar lines to those being developed for social, environmental and economic impact assessment.

Part One, *'The Meaning of Culture'* puts forward a comprehensive definition of culture that focuses on its use as a concept to describe the community creation of values, meaning and purpose in life. It then contrasts this with the alternate view of culture as simply arts and heritage and argues that this duality of usage has created significant problems and confusions.

It notes that the function of values creation is increasingly recognised as a critical aspect of social and human development but that, as yet, the public sphere has devised no way of recognising this process within its systems. The tacit acceptance of the arts and heritage version of culture 'has marginalised the concept of culture and denied theorists and practitioners an extremely effective tool.'

Part Two, *'The Application of Culture'* examines the ways that culture is both integral to and unacknowledged by the new paradigms of public planning, in particular those that emphasise sustainability and well-being as key goals. It concludes that 'without a foundation that expressly includes culture, the new frameworks are bereft of the means of comprehending, let alone implementing, the changes they promote. Culture has to be a separate and "distinct" reference point.'

Part Three, *'The Results of Culture'* outlines a range of practical initiatives that would improve public planning. It proposes that, rather than continuing to focus on the development of a discrete 'Cultural Policy', a completely new approach be taken.

Hawkes argues for the development of a 'Cultural Framework' to stand alongside similar social, environmental and economic instruments that can be used to evaluate ALL public

policy. He argues that the emerging focus on issues such as sustainability, well-being, community building and civic engagement needs a clear cultural perspective as a basis for successful implementation. He suggests that such a framework would address three basic questions:

What has been the quality of community input into the development of the actual and proposed activities under review?

To what extent are these activities reflective of the values and ways of life of the communities upon which they (will) impact?

Do these activities improve the capacity of communities to act and interact?

He also argues that no policy can be effective unless it is grounded in systems and institutions able to facilitate its implementation. He suggests that the structure of government departments be redesigned to ensure that the primary areas of cultural generation are integrated and co-ordinated in recognition of their key role in expressing the meaning, identity and purpose of our society and its citizens.

The main conclusion of the paper is that the new governance paradigms and views of what constitutes a healthy and sustainable society would be more effective if cultural vitality were to be included as one of the basic requirements, main conceptual tenets and overriding evaluation streams.