

Preface

Australia is revered in her folklore for being a land of wide open spaces, a ‘wilful, lavish land’.¹ However, in the change climate of the twenty-first century, those wide open spaces are the most vulnerable; they must measure up to the challenges of change or face virtual extinction. Our most rural and remote communities are shrinking in population and their traditional agricultural bases are ever eroding. While technological changes (e.g. the National Broadband Network (NBN)) are integral to the nation’s egalitarian strategy, the harsh reality remains that these communities face idiosyncratic challenges, ones that will never be confronted by their urban counterparts. Sadly, given its almost exclusive focus on urban contexts, the now vast community development literature has very little to offer those in rural and remote communities in terms of strategic direction. There is an urgent need to redress the balance and to provide relevant options for people living in and committed to these communities and their further development.

The research described in this book derives from the principles of the creative economy; it questions whether a focus on such principles might create potential affordances for such communities. Specifically, this book examines the links between the arts and robust, sustainable, and inventive communities capable of meeting the challenges of an increasingly globalised society. The potential of the arts to contribute to social, cultural, and economic development in rural and remote communities has not yet been fully explored, let alone realised, since the arts are not commonly integrated with community life. Indeed, traditionally, community artists and arts workers have not been fully

1 According to Dorothea Mackellar’s iconic poem, *My Country*.

apprised of or engaged with community-wide issues and problems, the natural consequence of which has been that there have been few opportunities for cross-disciplinary projects or initiatives.

In this volume, the literature pertaining to conventional community development theories and practices is scoped, backgrounding an environmental scan of documented lighthouse projects in the area. Arguing from the concept that the creative economy impacts on multiple aspects of community life and growth, and is proving to be broader, deeper, and more all-encompassing than current conventional approaches to community development, the study explores the potential links between the skills and processes inherent in the artistic crucible of creativity, and those skills and attitudes required to build robust, sustainable, and inventive communities capable of meeting the challenges of an ever more globalised society. Underpinning methodologies include environmental scanning (surveys, interviews, and site visits) in regional, rural, and remote communities to sample the current role of arts in the social, cultural, and economic development of communities, followed by case studies.

The resultant picture of a significant disconnect between the arts and their communities leads to the proposal of a new model for community development that identifies the arts as a community asset to be considered and utilised in conjunction with other community assets. The model encourages communities to develop a focus on creativity and innovation across all sectors of the community, and to embrace the development of community partnerships in anticipation of new synergies, leading to more divergent and innovative solutions to community problems. The relevance of the model is demonstrated through application to a range of recognisably intransigent problems that confront such communities in order to demonstrate how it might stimulate and guide integrated community development. The challenges to the arts and artists to become less insular and more connected with community issues across the spectrum, thus relinquishing a monocular focus on artistic products towards a new focus on creative inputs to other disciplines and community sectors, will doubtless require a disciplined harnessing of the Bohemian — therein lies a significant, albeit intriguing challenge.

This text is taken from *Harnessing the Bohemian: Artists as innovation partners in rural and remote communities*, by Peter Skippington, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.