

For my MA thesis in Development Studies, I have conducted field work in Australia. My thesis describes the hybrid economy model, as developed by Altman and the role of customary activities in remote economies on Aboriginal land. In my thesis, I have described the position of the Aboriginal art sector in this model and how the arts are related to the state, the market and the customary sector. During my field work, I have visited three Aboriginal arts and craft centres in Arnhem Land (Bula'bula Arts in Ramingining, Injalak in Oenpelli and Maningrida Arts and Culture in Maningrida) and a special role is dedicated to these art centres. In this submission I have briefly described some of my research findings in relation to the terms of reference of this Inquiry.

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Economic, social and cultural benefits of the arts sector

Economic benefits from the Indigenous art sector are provided in different ways and on various levels. Aboriginal people themselves naturally benefit economically from the arts and craft sector. Not only do the artists derive an income through selling the arts, other community members too benefit from the arts. Especially in remote areas, the concept of sharing is significant. Artists share their cash income with family members, as well as consumer goods they have purchased with their arts income, such as motor vehicles. This way, the money derived from the arts is distributed within the community.

In my thesis, the art centres play a central role, also when it concerns the economic benefits the arts provide. Especially in remote Australia, the art centres connect the production of the arts with the arts market; they act as intermediates between Aboriginal artists and art buyers. In my opinion, one of the strengths of the art centres is their culturally-informed policy and their priority to act on behalf of the artists and their well-being and in their interest. Some art centres for example reward culturally significant art works with a higher price although they may not necessarily be sold for a higher price to the market. This way, they recognise the cultural value of the arts and not only the western aesthetical value. Moreover, art centres not only invest money in the arts, but also in other socio-economic activities and the staff often serve many different social and economic functions in the community. Because their main priority lies with the artists and the community and because of their culturally-informed policy, the economic benefits from the art sector are generated in a way that suits and recognises Aboriginal cultural values.

Besides the economic benefits to Aboriginal people and the community, the arts and craft sector also economically benefits the state. The Northern Territory economy benefits from Aboriginal art and crafts through taxes. Furthermore, Aboriginal art and culture attract tourists especially in the Northern Territory. Statistics from Tourism NT for instance show that for many tourists, experiencing Aboriginal art and culture is a main attraction for a visit to the Territory. The tourism industry is major part of the Northern Territory economy and provides employment and income opportunities in the entire Territory.

Social benefits are related to economic benefits. Economic benefits may increase social well-being and may consequently stimulate a strong and successful art sector. The art centres play a significant role in delivering social services too. They often provide many different socio-

economic services which are not directly related to the arts, such as helping out with funerals, legal issues and medical problems. Providing services like these contributes to the social and physical health of community members, including the artists. These services therefore greatly influence the arts sector and increase community engagement in arts practices and art centre dealings.

The art sector provides cultural benefits too. The production of art and craft works goes together with transferring cultural (ecological) knowledge, stories and other cultural elements. Moreover, the arts and craft sector enables and stimulates Aboriginal people to reside on their traditional lands and to engage in diverse customary activities and cultural practices, as it is one of the few income opportunities in remote communities. Enabling Aboriginal people to reside on country by developing a strong arts sector contributes to maintaining Aboriginal culture and stimulating participation in other customary activities too.

Furthermore, living on country and engagement in customary activities generates the competitive advantage of Aboriginal art and craft works. The land, customary practices and other cultural elements are the foundations of Aboriginal art in many different ways – especially in remote communities. And the fact that the Aboriginal arts and craft sector is often founded on the customary sector and based on the land and its spiritual and cultural value, is what makes Aboriginal art unique and attractive for the market. Hence, cultural aspects increase the competitive advantage of Aboriginal arts and contribute to the commercial opportunities of the arts industry.

As the arts sector further enables and may encourage Aboriginal people to reside on country, this also provides other benefits on a higher level. It is generally accepted that the presence of Indigenous people contributes to biodiversity and in Australia it further leads to decreasing the risk of destructive wildfires due to Aboriginal fire management practices. And as biodiversity issues receive more and more attention on national and global level, the role of Aboriginal people in maintaining and increasing biodiversity should be acknowledged and rewarded.

Financial, cultural and artistic sustainability

During my field work I found that little research has been conducted about the sustainability of the arts sector. In my thesis, little attention has been directed at sustainability issues, although I do recognise that this is an important aspect of the art sector. However, *ecological* sustainability also needs serious consideration and further research. Especially in geographically remote Aboriginal communities, natural materials are used for the production of art and craft works and although research findings indicate that the use of species by Aboriginal people is in general ecologically sustainable, the ecological sustainability needs to be thoroughly assessed as well in order to develop and stimulate an art sector that is available for following generations too.

The current and likely future priority infrastructure needs of the sector

In my thesis, I have concluded that the art centres play an enormous role in the Aboriginal arts and craft sector in remote communities. As I stated above, they provide a wide array of

services on social, cultural and economic level and they seem to genuinely act on behalf of the artists. They mediate between the artists and the market and maintain policy structures which take Aboriginal values and cultural elements into account. Considering and using cultural differences and customary practices that prevail in these communities, is what makes these art centres successful enterprises in areas which often lack other commercial businesses.

Many art centres, for example, buy art and craft works from any community member who brings a piece of art into the art centre. They do not only deal with high profile artists. Consequently, they also purchase art works which are less easy to sell to the market, but in this way they keep community participation strong. Without the participation of community members – by only involving high profile artists for instance – the art centres would not be able to sustain.

Because the art centres maintain policy structures like the above and because of the many social, economic and cultural services they deliver, they do not act as regular commercial enterprises. Many art centres do not aim for financial self-sufficiency: if they did, they would have to abandon many of their culturally-informed policy rules and their socio-economic functions. This would have a negative impact on the art centre and the art sector: the art centre would lose artists and community participation and would not act on behalf of the artists. Consequently, art centres need ongoing government support in order to sustain and to operate in the interest of the artists and the community. They have to fulfil their socio-cultural obligations towards the community and can therefore not allow to maintain conventional commercial business structures in order to make a profit.

Opportunities for strategies and mechanisms that the sector could adopt to improve its practices, capacity and sustainability, including to deal with unscrupulous or unethical conduct;

One way to handle unethical and unfavourable dealings in the art sector could be an art centre accreditation system. In the first place, criteria have to be established for assessing whether the art centres operate in a social, cultural and ethical responsible way. Art centres that meet these requirements can be granted an accreditation especially developed for the art centres.

Subsequently, the art works that are obtained from the accredited art centres should be clearly recognisable when they are displayed in for example an art gallery. Some art centres already sell their art works with a swing tag describing the art centre, the region, the artist and the product. However, in many art galleries that claim to sell art works purchased from art centres, these swing tags are absent. Alternatively, some art galleries provide a self-made description of the art work or “authenticity document”, but these papers cannot always account for ethical dealings with the artists. Therefore, accrediting the art centres and subsequently clearly marking the art works in a gallery that have been acquired through an accredited art centre, will guarantee that the art work is produced and dealt with in a culturally, socially and ethically responsible way.

There are of course several limitations. In the first place, it will be difficult to establish the criteria an art centre has to meet. Besides, it will be even more difficult to apply these criteria to an art centre in order to measure whether it meets the standard. Many art centres deliver social and cultural services and contribute greatly to daily life in different ways. As I will

explain below, measuring the qualitative output will be very complex and measuring socially, culturally and ethically appropriate conduct will be very difficult. It is therefore important that art centre managers and staff are involved in the establishment of the criteria as well as art centre representative bodies like ANKAAA; they know reality in a community best and they can identify problems that may arise when defining criteria and measuring.

Moreover, it should be noted that the art centre staff should not be burdened with performing more tasks. In many art centres, the staff is always busy and can sometimes hardly keep up with the workload. An accreditation indicator measuring the ecological sustainability of the use of wildlife for the arts for example is unattainable, as the art centre staff simply lacks the time and the resources to control this.

Another very important factor is market awareness. In the first place, art customers should be made aware about the sometimes unscrupulous and unethical ways art works are purchased or obtained. They should also be informed about the negative impact of these unfavourable purchasing methods on Aboriginal artists and communities. Secondly, they should be informed about the way the art centres operate and what the accreditation implies and stands for. The government can play an important role here.

Creating market awareness about certified art works from accredited art centres is very important. There is a great variety of cheap art works available everywhere which lack information about how they have been obtained. The art centre in Maningrida, Maningrida Arts and Culture (MAC), has opened a shop in Darwin through which the arts are sold, besides their art centre in central Arnhem Land. Apparently, many art customers, mostly tourists, do not know what Maningrida is and what an art centre is. They do not know that the money MAC in Darwin makes, is invested in the community. Therefore, they prefer buying a cheaper art work at one of the many tourist outlets in Darwin without considering whether the artist has received a fair price or whether the art work is even made in Australia.

Also, there are art works that are indeed obtained by an art gallery in a socially, culturally and ethically responsible way, but not through an art centre. Individual artists selling art works themselves or through a personal manager for example should not be harmed through the accreditation of art centre art works. The market should be informed that an accredited art centre swing tag does not necessarily mean that other art works are unethically obtained. However, customers who want the guarantee that their art work is ethically purchased, can always trust an art centre swing tag.

Opportunities for existing government support programs for Indigenous visual arts and crafts to be more effectively targeted to improve the sector's capacity and future sustainability;

The Indigenous Art Centers Strategy and Action Plan of the NACIS programme already emphasises the importance of “stable and profitable Aboriginal art centres” in order to build a strong Indigenous art sector. In my opinion, the art centres are indeed a significant and successful instrument and because they cannot merely act as self-sufficient commercial enterprises due to their responsibilities towards the artists and the community, they need on-going government support. Therefore, I do want to stress here that the term profitable should not only imply financial profits, but – often intangible – social, cultural and non-monetary economic results as well. Many positive results of the art centres are non-monetary and

qualitative rather than quantitative. These results are therefore difficult to measure and developing indicators that do measure these outcomes are difficult to develop. Nevertheless, they should not be overlooked and especially in the funding criteria art centres have to meet, their non-financial and immaterial results on socio-economic and cultural levels have to be considered, recognised and rewarded as well.