

Realigning community, culture and development in dispersed urban settings

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Abstract

As the office moves into the handbag and mass self-communication technologies proliferate, traditional notions of urban space and time are transfigured. Urban places and people are increasingly uploaded, downloaded and connected to the global, and the potential local implications of this are exciting. This article analyses the nexus between dispersed urban spaces, mass self-communication technologies and cultural development policy. In culmination it suggests a new term: culture-led redevelopment. It provides an analysis of key concepts within this cross-section and suggests a need for further emphasis to be placed on investigating and creating space(s) of mass self-communication with the dispersed locality in order to facilitate productive ongoing dialogue between cultural practitioners and policy makers. The local focus for this article will be Australia's Gold Coast, a postmodern city in which we can observe a range of conditions that exemplify the dispersion of contemporary living.

Keywords: cultural development, culture-led redevelopment, community, mass self-communication technologies, cultural development policy, networks

Postmodern urban dispersion emulates a shift in the way we communicate; we no longer think in linear time frames, and we certainly don't commune in conventional ways. Decentralisation is an increasing probability, if not certainty, for emerging cities – particularly coastal cities, where a city centre is substituted by an elongated stretch of beach. Although this dispersion is important to a city's sense of place, it can also hinder cultural production and development. For the dispersed and emerging coastal locality to produce, develop and sustain culture in the twenty-first century, it is crucial that we look now to more current modes of communication and to new points of articulation.

This article focuses on the nexus between cultural development policy, mass self-communication technologies and dispersed urban settings, with Australia's Gold Coast as an example. In a much broader context this article works toward the possibility of the creation of localised online space(s) through which dispersed cultural practitioners and policy makers might communicate, interact and form an ongoing dynamic dialogue with one another. But considering this broader picture, engaging local practitioners is no mean feat; identifying key cultural nodes for the sustainability and instrumentality of such a space is indeed complex, and tailoring online space(s) to the varied, ongoing needs and wants of local practitioners is intricate.

So, contrary to cultural policy frameworks, this article works backwards, and it takes as its point of departure the analysis of the local cultural practitioner. By analysing the local cultural practitioners and identifying their needs, wants and practices, we can begin to understand the challenges faced and the resources needed. Alongside this, this article examines cultural development policy terms in an attempt to expose the dislocation between local cultural practitioners' understandings of these terms and the processes of the policies aimed at them. All data presented in this article about Gold Coast cultural practitioners is preliminary and is informed by my observations as a local cultural practitioner and researcher, although there are some useful case studies which exemplify the relevance of this research.

Community, culture and development on the Gold Coast

On the Gold Coast, 'community' and 'culture' have frequently been taken as terms synonymous with 'desert'. Or so the story goes. A misleading and stereotyped depiction of a culturally devoid Gold Coast, and a Gold Coast with little coherent sense of a 'real' community, has long been entrenched throughout South-East Queensland and wider Australia, obscuring the actual situation and intensifying the hurdles faced by people who are, in fact, producing culture on the Gold Coast. The clichés and catchphrases about 'cultural desert' and lack of community spirit have become so established that visitors and even some locals begin to accept their authenticity. Accordingly, people tend to view the city as little more than a superficial destination and, therefore, do not seek out local cultural events and opportunities for richer engagement.

The Gold Coast's tale is one of struggle against the grain. Flourishing from its early days as a timber and sugar-cane port and turn-of-the-twentieth-century seaside resort to its current status as an emerging city with a growing residential population of over half a million, the Gold Coast now has a significant connection with a range of global activities beyond tourism.¹ Yet to many, the Gold Coast is a beach and a skyline of high-rises: entertaining, relaxing and phony. It is hardly considered a city and it is definitely not considered a cultural space. Not quite regional enough to get access to some federal and state funding targeting regions, but not quite city

enough to be taken seriously in national discourses about what cities have to offer, the Gold Coast is suspended in an inadequate space.

Lucky it's got the looks. Boasting extravagant beaches stretched along a fifty-seven-kilometre corridor of glistening sand, the Gold Coast is often portrayed as beautiful, glitzy, shallow and egotistical. Described by Bosman as a 'hyper-neoliberal tourist city'², the iconic beachside high-rise 'strip' tends to be positioned in terms of hyperbole, rather than discussed as an expression of urban postmodernity, let alone an architectural celebration of the increased desire to live closer to the clouds.

Nationally and regionally, sensationalised media reports depicting glitz, glamour, sleaze and crime largely contribute to the aforementioned negative preconceptions of the Gold Coast. Baker, Bennett and Wise note, 'The region's newspapers share a preoccupation with crime reporting, with the regional tabloid, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, using 'big' crime to portray the city as having a dark underbelly on par with big cities like Melbourne'.³ While these popular representations are indeed damaging to local cultural production, the disconnection between residents increases these tensions and encourages the common preconceptions relating to culture and community.

In public discourses the emphasis is on excess – such as having the 'World's Tallest Residential Tower', which (however briefly) doubles as 'Australia's Tallest Building'.⁴ But resorts such as the Q1 in Surfer's Paradise are multivalent. They are actually locally called 'mixed-use developments' because their diversity of apartments represents a broad spectrum of people: long-term unit owners, medium-term tenants, and short-term tourists. These buildings also mould local life as well as tourist life through the elaborate entertainment, leisure and retail spaces created around their bases.

However, often abbreviated to just Surfers, the Gold Coast's fluorescent main drag of meter maids, seductive nightlife and disorderly partygoers is not a part of the urban space that the majority of locals choose to frequent. To most holidaymakers, 'Surfers' is indeed the first word that comes to mind. Ironically, just as many locals do not consume its nightlife, serious surfers rarely surf on its adjacent beaches. Nonetheless, Surfers' chic facade, its neon Pink Poodle signature and its redundantly tall architecture dazzle tourists.

The Gold Coast breathes tourism. Themed shopping malls, amusement parks and hotels are dotted around the city; restaurants tailor their menus to the tastes of their holidaymakers; many businesses market their products to a leisure audience; and hotels offer a rich menu of purely indulgent activities. In these and many other ways, the significance of tourism in Gold Coast economic life and sense of regional identity is obvious to locals as much as to tourists.

What many people don't realise is that the Gold Coast doesn't end at its tourist strip, beaches, theme parks and mega-malls. In fact, the Gold Coast extends far back through its sprawling suburbs, navigating 270 kilometres of waterways, to its semi-rural but increasingly developed hinterland comprising world heritage forest – some 77,250 hectares of natural environment, home to 1300 animal and 1700 plant species.⁵ From the highest parts of this hinterland, the spectacular city can be seen stretching down the coast right to the New South Wales border, and away towards Brisbane in the north.

Another perspective often missed is that there are 500,000-plus residents of the city, undertaking their daily lives, in the diverse kinds of clusters of suburbs, in the hinterland and in the high-rise strip. You may even find artists if you look hard enough.

That being said, the Gold Coast lacks the cohesion of a traditional centred city and fragmentation occurs. Its residents are dispersed across a decentred city, which is, in Soja's terms, an 'exopolis' – missing the traditional 'downtown' or city hub 'perched beyond the vortex of the old agglomerative nodes'⁶ and lacking the concentric, centre-focused formations of more conventional cities, not only in terms of geographical space, but also in terms of transport and services infrastructure.⁷ The Gold Coast forms residential and economic clusters but these are volatile, segmented, and not inclined to pass information through a common centre of communication. As Patricia Wise writes: 'The Gold Coast does not have a "downtown" financial district or hub of government, law, and cultural institutions, which are dispersed outside the dominant skyline of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach'.⁸

This resultant clustering of residents dispersed along a narrow corridor creates fragmentation and, in turn, dislocation. So although there are indeed strong connections between groups of people, there are less superficial ties between groups, resulting in alienation. In a more practical sense, this means that two groups of people – or alternatively, two individuals – can be creating the same type of project with similar objectives on either end of the coast and never know about each other. Although there are several vibrant arts initiatives, an arts centre and a very active city gallery, over 80 other galleries, and cultural practitioners producing art in locations all over the coast, they are disconnected from each other⁹, and almost always invisible to people who tend to view the city as lacking in culture and cultural identity. This is problematic for cultural practitioners, and it indicates that a distinct type of network can be found on the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast's network: a lack of weak ties

The Gold Coast's network is exemplary of modern times, and can usefully be understood using weak tie network theory. In his original study on the strength of weak ties, Mark Granovetter identified two types of ties between people in networks: strong and weak ties.¹⁰ He defined the strength of a tie

as 'a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterise that tie'.¹¹ Granovetter claimed that 'our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than are our close friends (strong ties)'.¹² This worked on the principle of transitivity:

If A is connected to B and A is connected to C, then likely B is connected to C. Furthermore Granovetter noted that if the two ties A-B and A-C were strong, then B had to be tied to C, either strongly or weakly.¹³

In a study that surveyed people finding employment through weak and strong ties, Granovetter discovered that more people found jobs through weak ties than through strong ties. There were many reasons for this and some inconsistencies later discovered, but the general findings were that weak ties were important to a network's flow of resources and knowledge.¹⁴ He theorised that 'strong ties by themselves generate fragmentation, as subgroups in a locality become isolated from each other, and weak ties allow for integration, connecting these subgroups'.¹⁵

The Gold Coast's fragmented formation would seem to imply a network dominated by strong ties and lacking in weak ones, disallowing communication to flow further outward beyond each clique. In a more practical sense, two cultural practitioners operating within different cliques may be aiming to achieve similar goals, but never cross paths with one another. This is, of course, a hindrance in the area of cultural development. Granovetter noted that in order to connect two seemingly disparate networks, and hence the wider community, weak ties need to be *bridged*.¹⁶ Once bridges are formed between networks, communications and processes may flow more seamlessly, autonomously, and in a sustained way, so that the probability of resources flowing to all people in the community – rather than a select few – is increased.

Although the Gold Coast City Council acknowledges these processes of the Gold Coast, it is still grappling with how to enable more comprehensive connection and communication between locals as well as between Council and locality. This can be seen throughout policy.

Gold Coast cultural development policy

To understand Gold Coast cultural development policy and its processes more clearly, it is useful to examine how key terms are deployed in policy discourses. Wise notes that cultural development 'tends to be one of those givens of policy speak and public ideas'.¹⁷ The terms are in themselves rather ambiguous and their significations can slide about quite alarmingly depending on the context in which they are used. This is particularly prevalent on the Gold Coast, where the lack of connectedness between people further dislocates participation in the defining process.

Cultural development

The first term in the policy field that is of concern is *cultural*. Its noun, *culture*, has baffled great thinkers for a considerable period. The 'culture wars' have been going on since the word's conception in the late eighteenth century, and while they have been incredibly insightful, they are happily unresolved. Acclaimed theorist Raymond Williams once said, 'I've wished that I'd never heard the damned word'.¹⁸ Because of the term's ambiguity, it has infiltrated the media to describe a multitude of different processes, systems, practices and products: gay culture, cultural economy, cultural capital, cultural genocide, tissue culture, cultural evolution, popular culture, just to name a few.¹⁹

Toby Miller and George Yudice describe culture as being connected to policy in 'two registers: the aesthetic and the anthropological'.²⁰ They explain: 'in the aesthetic register, artistic output emerges from creative people and is judged by aesthetic criteria, as framed by the interests and practices of cultural criticism and history'.²¹ In contrast, the anthropological register describes 'how we live our lives [and] the senses of place and person that make us human'.²² So, the aesthetic refers to 'differences *within* populations' and the anthropological refers to 'differences *between* populations'.²³ In accordance with this, in my preliminary observations about cultural practitioners on the Gold Coast I've found that these two registers of cultural policy coincide with the two dominant perceptions of what cultural development is: some think it's loosely about art and others think it's about ethnicity or community. Countless times I've mentioned the term 'cultural development' only to be met with vague uncertainty about the assimilation of ethnic groups into the wider Gold Coast 'community'.

Cultural development could perhaps be implemented to cater for both the anthropological and aesthetic registers, but the problem is that this is not communicated clearly in cultural development policy nor clearly understood by cultural policy makers and workers. Gold Coast City Council defines cultural development as 'the coordinated and planned utilisation of the arts and other creative activities to improve local quality of life, community wellbeing and community engagement'.²⁴

This description doesn't match local practitioners' understandings of what cultural development means on the Gold Coast. Alongside this, the funding opportunities available through the Gold Coast City Council cultural development unit confuse the terms further. The two grants available are the Regional Arts Development Fund and the Rapid Response Cultural Development Fund. Both arts and culture here actually refer to the same thing (art and culture) except the latter is only awarded for recognised emergencies in retrospectively ongoing projects. But there is no apparent difference in the actual kinds of projects supported by either the arts or cultural grant.

The Gold Coast City Council, in the terms it uses, assumes that culture is understood by all Gold Coast people in the same way as it is defined in policy (and even this is confusing); and by implying that community is necessarily a group of people sharing a common interest and identity, and that this idea of community is desirable, which brings me to the second problematic term: community.

Commune(ity) or locality?

In recent times, the word *community* has had friendly connotations: as Raymond Williams writes, it's been 'the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships'.²⁵ The term has also led to lengthy debates though, such as those between liberalism, individualism and communism.²⁶ From the 1920s, 'urban communities and rural communities became laboratories for sociological examination of the breakdown of the cohesive values that sustained community and formed the basis of social order'.²⁷

From these investigations, models of community development were proposed and implemented as a response to communism.²⁸ Community is now referred to nostalgically, retrospectively, futuristically and presently. But Yúdice suggests that community's 'darker side' might be raising its head. He elaborates:

Much of the chaos which passes for post-socialist transitions (mafia-style capitalism in Russia), the disruption and dislocation of globalisation (the collapse of Argentina), and the proliferating violence and terror in the wake of the Cold War (September 11) presents a set of circumstances in which the darker side of community edges out the positive. While for Manuel Castells the network society is the spawning ground of innovation and urban renewal, largely rooted in the local, terrorist networks are also (re)new(ed) forms of imagined community.²⁹

Now, community has become such an over-used term to describe such a myriad of conditions that its use has become potentially dangerous. As Irving Goh notes, 'it is really the verbal reiteration of "community" – articulated endlessly without submitting it to critical thought, enunciated as if it could ever if not already give us that thing called "community" – that has so far contaminated any future possibility of thinking about community'.³⁰

To delve more deeply into contemporary understandings of community on the Gold Coast, it's important to illustrate the all-too-frequent superficiality of the term in regional cultural development policy. It is crucial to note here that although Gold Coast cultural development workers do not position themselves as community cultural development (CCD) workers, they do incorporate the term 'community' in their definition of cultural development: 'the coordinated and planned utilisation of the arts and other creative activities to improve local quality of life, community wellbeing

and community engagement'.³¹ The objectives are stated as understanding that: 'A well-managed cultural development program offers all members of the community the opportunity for creative expression, enhanced social networks and a sense of inclusion'.³²

Community is thus almost as confusing as *cultural* in this usage. It is deployed firstly in the sense of community wellbeing. This phrase is rather vague and could mean any one of a number of things: health, emotional stability, connectivity, and financial security, just to name a few. The second time it is used is in reference to engagement. But what kinds of engagements are being improved upon, how and why? The final mention of community is in regard to membership and this is also problematic.

Community membership implies inclusivity and a condition of belonging that, in turn, suggests exclusivity. This does not take account of contemporary recognitions of the plurality of communities and leaves little room for imaginative ideas of what makes or can make community. This policy does not describe an understanding of one of its key terms and it is restrictive in its usage. In contrast to this idea of community, Jean-Luc Nancy describes community not as a group of people sharing an identity or who have something in common, nor an essence, or even as a nostalgic term for some sense of a lost communion that must be rebuilt in the form of a project. Nancy describes community as something already inherent in our existence: our *being-with-one-another*. He states:

Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity and sharing this* (narcissistic) '*lack of identity*'. This is what philosophy calls finitude.³³

It is this shared finitude that Nancy believes constitutes community because our finitude, our limit, is our only thing *in* common. He describes community as 'myth-interrupted' and explains that the only thing community has lost is itself as myth. Furthermore, society is not the result of a destroyed community; far from being what society has lost, community is the here and now, the act, the desire, the waiting. This rejection of a necessary shared identity is particularly refreshing and relevant to the aforementioned Gold Coast policy statement, which still appears to be aiming to produce a shared identity.

Taking into account the varied perceptions of what makes or can make community, I have purposefully moved away from using the term 'community' because of its various relations to notions of shared identity, nostalgic yearning for a 'lost' community or one that is based on commonality. I have, instead used the term *locality*, which describes a group of people living adjacently to one another. The final term in cultural development policy I'd like to discuss is development.

(Re)development

For the purposes of this article and in relation to cultural development, I understand *development* to be planning (based on experience and analysis) for a locality. In order to flesh out a potential theoretical framework for working *with* the locality (not to *create* community), it is essential to elucidate the connection between locality and the experience of the individual.

The being-*in*-common outlined in the previous section, would seem to correspond with a notion of *being-experiential*, drawing on the suggestion that people are experiencing each interaction with the world for the first time. Here it would seem appropriate to expand on this notion.

Being-experiential is a term to describe our being, within the moment it occurs. It expresses the *here* or the *now* of each interaction with the world, or the complex, finite and fleeting experience of each moment encountered. Experience, like an experiment, is new each time it occurs; it may feel or seem similar to a previous experience but two experiences are never the same. Raymond Williams noted the two dominant understandings of experience: experience (present); and experience (past).³⁴ He explains:

At one extreme experience (present) is offered as the necessary (immediate and authentic) ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis. At the other extreme, experience (once the present participle not of 'feeling' but of 'trying' or 'testing' something) is seen as the product of social conditions or of systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not as materials for truths but as evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain.³⁵

As far as the human imagination extends, we could claim that we have never been, and possibly will never, *be* in any particular moment again. In this sense, then, all *being* could be seen to be experiential or, as Williams terms, experience (present). Williams notes that

Experience past already includes, at its most serious, those processes of consideration, reflection, analysis which the most extreme use of experience present – an unquestionable authenticity and immediacy – excludes.³⁶

So with this understanding, if every experience we understood to be truth was not absolute, then nothing we learnt through these experiences could be considered fixed; and our *being* could be seen as potentiality. I do not wish to suggest that nothing can be learnt from experience but quite the opposite: there is everything to be learnt from experience. And if experience has taught us anything, it is that *anything* is possible.

Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'liquid modernity' is relevant here.³⁷ Bauman explains how the solid modernity of the past 40 to 50 years, where life choices have had definitive outcomes, has moved to a liquid modernity, where fluidity and change are the constants, rather than the conflict. He explains:

For the first time in our history, we are confronted with change as a permanent condition of human life. So we need to develop the ways of behaviour, the ways of contact which are fit for living in this state of constant change.³⁸

Bauman also makes interesting discussion about the disappearance of the project as mode of development. He explains that a project denotes a fixed beginning and ending, whereas liquid modernity requires constant fluidity. This thinking has implications for models of planning and development for locality.

Traditionally in planning and development, we attempt to delimit our experiences by building on acquired knowledge gained from previous experiences. Williams notes that 'we project our old images into the future, and take hold of ourselves and others to force energy towards that substantiation'.³⁹ In *Planning Australia*, Thompson notes that 'all planners predict the outcomes of particular actions, as well as generalising from previous experience, and this pragmatic approach is necessarily contextualised by planning theory'.⁴⁰ Birch further notes that 'one of the greatest challenges [in planning] is defining the 'public interest' or common well-being'.⁴¹ But, as in the case of communism (or even Australian colonial history), trying to establish an 'essence' of community has dangerously led backward and, potentially, prevented new positive experiences outside our current imaginative capacity. In relation to the local context of cultural policy, Gibson and Kong suggest that 'the normative policy script of the cultural economy ... has the effect of closing off potential connections and dialogues that could occur, because it erases a lot of the messiness of culture'.⁴²

I agree, and suggest further that if development (of culture) is truly an imaginative activity, then strict planning based on previous experience might be futile. However, if policy makers together with locality could acknowledge the *in* of being-in-common or of their being-experiential, then they might also be able to comprehend that their experience with the world cannot and will not be delimited. From this perspective then, we restrict or even close down potentialities when we plan for certain or fixed outcomes rather than plotting careful points and letting some chance into the field. Here I turn to Deleuze and Guattari for further explanation.

According to its literal meaning, and as Deleuze and Guattari describe it, the rhizome is a bulbous plant stem with a decentralised, horizontal type of root system, not opposing but differing from the classic tree-root system. Rather than growing upward in a predictable, vertical manner originating from one point, the rhizome spreads its roots horizontally, and stems sporadically sprout from any point. Therefore the rhizome is not a tree. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as a 'multiplicity'.⁴³ Margaret Hagood states that 'Rhizoanalysis functions as an analytic tool for examinations of multiplicities, of ideas and concepts that move as emulations of rhizomes via subterranean flows of horizontal shoots'.⁴⁴

The principles of cartography and decalcomania suggest that the rhizome is 'a map and not a tracing'.⁴⁵ Hagood's use of the term 'Rhizomatic Cartography', which uses rhizoanalysis to map the workings of a rhizome, is relevant here.

As Margaret Hagood explains:

Two key components of rhizomatic cartography include maps and tracings, which Deleuze and Guattari liken to the surface tubers of rhizomes and the deep root structures of trees. A tracing serves as structure akin to a rooted, grounded, vertical, hierarchical arboreal history. A map, on the other hand, operates altogether differently. Maps are like rhizomes, not trees. They have no inherent deep structure. They are the middles that spread horizontally, and these middles connect in often unforeseen ways.⁴⁶

By this, Deleuze and Guattari understand the idea of structure to be 'an infinitely reproducible principle of *tracing*'.⁴⁷ They observe that a tracing only ever reproduces itself and that our tracings 'should always be put back on the map'.⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari note:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real ... It fosters connections between fields ... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification ... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'.⁴⁹

But both the map and the tracing are necessarily important: they are not binaries. Hagood explains:

Both are necessary in order to examine the multiplicities: the stabilities and shifts of ideas. Tracings are important because they show deep structures that ground ideas and that are always at work, while maps point to fissures, illustrating the instability, flow, and movement of ideas in different directions. Tracings on a map exhibit both deep and surface structures, what Deleuze and Guattari (1980, 1987) describe as 'lines of flight'. Rhizomatic cartography offers a means of studying a rhizome that morphs haphazardly underground.⁵⁰

Rhizomatic cartography is useful when trying to understand cultural policy, the cultural practitioner and development. To account for unaccountability, the rhizome necessitates that points are plotted and then folded back onto the map, to inform new points in a continual process of redevelopment. Rather than imposing pre-existing structures (tracings) in a calculated project-and-outcome-based process of development, it is important to gain an initial idea of what connections exist, put this back on the map, and then adapt the emergent map to make new connections.

Rob Pope further explains: 'Deleuze and Guattari see all this as a powerful image of genuinely creative thinking: resourceful, flexible and unexpected ("springing suddenly from anywhere, everywhere"), and developing by sudden transverse networks in unseen subterranean ways'.⁵¹ So this suggests that we might plan for certain nodes, intensities and directions for redevelopment but also remain aware that other unimagined, unforeseen, productive connections will be made.

This thinking could form the basis of a critical approach to culture-led redevelopment, one that would recognise community as inherent in our exposition, and one that would accommodate this, by explicitly acknowledging the being-*in-common* of community in its framework. By recognising these premises, (community) cultural development might become less a project (or work of art) in *community building* and more consciously a strategy of creating conditions for the *articulation* of the locality. One way of articulating the locality, in a way that enunciates the dispersion of the Gold Coast, is to create spaces of mass self-communication between local cultural practitioners and policy makers. It is important to elaborate on mass self-communication technologies but first I would like to demystify the term 'culture-led redevelopment'.

Culture-led redevelopment

I understand culture-led redevelopment to be the individual empowering and nurturing of all forms of expression and communication potentially for all individuals in a locality. I have purposefully used the term culture-led redevelopment to describe this process for three reasons. Firstly, it indicates a shift in thinking about planning from a hierarchical perspective, and not from an understanding of development as spawned from its poorer cousin, underdeveloped.⁵² Secondly, it recognises development as a process, not based on a quantifiable fixed set of predicted outcomes. And finally, it implies a more internal nurturing and adaptation of culture, as a natural – in the sense of ordinarily expected – and necessary part of human life. I would suggest that one possible way of enabling culture-led redevelopment – that is, of connecting and enabling the communication of locality – could be to provide access to relevant mass self-communication technologies and online space(s) through which community could be articulated.

Mass self-communication

The dramatic proliferation of communication technologies in contemporary times has led to a vast array of applications, the most recent of which can be described as *mass self-communication technologies*.⁵³ New technologies based on web 2.0 and the forthcoming 3.0, such as blogging and social network sites like Facebook and MySpace and other social media such as Twitter can be described as mass self-communication technologies 'because the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of the specific messages or

content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected'.⁵⁴ In a more practical sense Castells further explains that:

It is mass communication because it can potentially reach a global audience, as in the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive email list. At the same time, it is self communication.⁵⁵

Mass self-communication technologies have provided people with the tools and potential to make meaningful connections with a diverse range of others, and participate in a wider yet more concentrated dialogue than imagined in previous eras. They have also had a profound impact on urban formations.

In one sense, we might note that to a greater or lesser extent depending on settings, traditional spaces are becoming decentralised, as the workplace shifts from city centre to jeans pocket. On the other hand, considering current trends, it is likely that we will continue to physically live in geographical spaces together. Digital change has not necessarily produced the kinds of comprehensive dispersal of workers and workspaces that were envisaged in the internet's infancy. In relation to contexts of cultural production, Gibson et al note:

Factors that contribute to the tendency to agglomerate are linked to the rapid, ever-changing circulation of information, which ensures that there is a constant tendency to destabilization of prevailing norms and practices, and a certain propensity for new insights and new ways of seeking accumulation. To stay in touch with trends, producers must be 'close to action', in precincts where cultural consumption is concentrated.⁵⁶

That is, within the context of intense global change, people create and benefit from opportunities for co-located experience, even as they become increasingly more involved in larger, more dispersed networks. Or, as Castells puts it, 'the social structure is global, but most of human experience is local'.⁵⁷ Castells argues that mass self-communication technologies have appeared to strengthen urban relationships.⁵⁸ He asserts that rather than becoming a homogenous global culture, it is more plausible following people's tendency to agglomerate, that clustered localities will prevail, as well as continue to be strengthened on a local level.⁵⁹ He argues in relation to the blurred boundaries between online and offline practices:

With the prospect of expanding infrastructure and declining prices of communication, it is not a prediction but an observation to say that online communities are fast developing not as a virtual world, but as a real virtual reality integrated with other forms of interaction in an increasingly hybridised everyday life.⁶⁰

In developed economies, not only are mass self-communication technologies connecting the global, but they are also empowering the local by

demystifying connections between locals in a more *tangible* way than ever before. To exemplify the truth in this statement, I would like to turn to two brief case studies of Gold Coast online spaces of mass self-communication: GCBands and RADF (a Facebook group).

GCBands

Gcbands.com is a social networking site created by local musicians, for local musicians. Built from a basic Ning custom social network platform less than two years ago, GCBands has become the first successful localised music-focused social networking site on the Gold Coast to recruit and maintain an escalating membership of 800-plus artists (as of April 2010). Its main function is to provide a stage for local musicians: 'GCBands is about the discovery and promotion of new music and art from the Gold Coast'.⁶¹ But the site certainly doesn't stop there.

In fact, GCBands does almost everything Facebook does, minus the apps. It has a chat function; it enables members to share their music, videos and photos; it allows members to tailor individual profile pages; it promotes interaction between profiles by allowing wall posts and messages; it enables musicians to update the democratic gig guide; it provides space for a forum; and it features musicians on its home page. GCBands also sends out regular emailed newsletters and Facebook posts. For local musicians, this site is both informative and instrumental. Not only does it assist in cross-collaboration and music networking, but it also allows any music lover to access a comprehensive calendar of music events on the Gold Coast. And this is an important function, given the geographical dispersion. Thus, this site has been widely adopted by local musicians and is now considered simply a part of daily life for many Gold Coast music lovers.

RADF Facebook group

As well as this example, Facebook has many local groups created to benefit specific localities. One such group, RADF, is a group I created in November 2009 for the Regional Arts Development Fund on the Gold Coast, as part of my role as a committee member. The group attempts to promote RADF and to make funding more transparent for cultural practitioners. It includes links to application guidelines and updates members with important submission dates. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the round after this was established the committee received the highest number of RADF applications since July 2005, despite it being the typically quieter quarter. And not only were there more applications, but the standard had dramatically risen across the board.

So, both of these case studies are excellent examples of how cultural practitioners can be connected through a space of mass self-communication on a local scale to participate in meaningful, productive dialogue. They not only demonstrate an already identified need amongst Gold Coast cultural practitioners on a ground level for more connectivity and dialogue, but they

serve as solid examples of how local spaces of mass self-communication are *already* facilitating some productive outcomes. And we can learn from these.

Conclusion

While Gold Coast cultural development policy acknowledges the fragmented geography and social processes of the Gold Coast, its inability to solve the challenge of enabling communication between the locality probably stems from the fact that its aim is seemingly to amalgamate systems and produce a coherent community rather than to celebrate diversity and a lack of shared identity. As demonstrated in this article, mass self-communication technologies are instrumental tools for enabling the potential bridging of weak ties and connecting locality in a non-confrontational way, celebrating diversity and a lack of shared identity (as opposed to systems of amalgamation), and creating meaningful ongoing dialogue about culture-led redevelopment.

It is evident from this discussion that a greater focus must be placed on providing conditions for mass self-communication technologies to articulate the Gold Coast locality. Furthermore, through these mass self-communication technologies, it would appear that we need to collectively continue to analyse everyday terms in order to stimulate rich culture-led redevelopment. This process should be transparent and inclusive, and could be seen as a step toward the articulation of locality. By providing the necessary conditions for ongoing dialogue to ensue between locality and cultural policy makers, we may well see sophisticated cultural advances for dispersed and fragmented urban areas such as the Gold Coast.

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Endnotes

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