# Demystifying the arts centre model

## A critical exploration of a *difficult* difficult brand

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I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

# Acknowledgements

# Abstract

Despite their prevalence in both England and Australia, arts centres are often neglected within academic research and policy. Beyond a few surveys and a handful of publications, there is little investigation into the arts centre model internationally and specifically in England and Australia. This thesis aims to demystify the arts centre model, shedding light on arts centres in both England and Australia by asking the question: How suitable is the arts centre model for effective arts and cultural provision? To undertake this task, this thesis incorporates three methodological approaches: an online survey with 201 arts centres, nine external expert interviews, and four arts centre case studies.

The findings highlight the centrality of an arts centre's relationship with its community and provide insight into the role of arts centres, uncovering the unique characteristics of arts centres in terms of management and leadership, programming, marketing and branding, and stakeholder perceptions. The research suggests that these inherent characteristics of the arts centre model could be viewed as providing unique opportunities, yet also constituting a *difficult* difficult brand (Harrison and Hartley, 2007), as it is precisely the characteristics that make arts centres unique that present them with their greatest challenges.

This research reveals that the use of broader literature in the arts centre setting fails to consider the complexities and nuances of the arts centre model. This research is particularly timely given the opportunities presented by arts centres in supporting policy agendas such as the focus on the hyperlocal (Polivtseva, 2020; Sargent, 2021; Walmsley et al., 2022), placemaking and the rise of local and regional policymaking. My research shows that if managed appropriately with community at its heart, arts centres are an untapped resource for communities, worthy of further research and attention.

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| | |
|---|---|
| ACE | Arts Council England |
| ACGB | Arts Council of Great Britain |
| APACA | Australian Performing Arts Centres Association |
| BAC | Bridgwater Arts Centre |
| BAFC | Burnie Arts & Function Centre |
| DECC | Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre |
| DIAP | Disability Inclusion Action Plan |
| DRG | Devonport Regional Gallery |
| EDM | Electronic direct mail marketing |
| FIFO | Fly-in fly-out |
| ITC | Independent Theatre Council |
| LOV | Lincolnshire One Venues |
| NAAC | National Association of Arts Centres |
| NARPACA | Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association |
| PAC | Performing Arts Centre |
| PAC Australia | Performing Arts Connections Australia |
| QDA | Qualitative Data Analysis |
| RAB | Regional Arts Board |
| RAP | Reconciliation Action Plan |
| RAV | Regional Arts Victoria |
| SVN | Small Venues Network |
| TSO | Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra |
| USP | Unique Selling Point |
| V&A | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| VAPAC | Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres |
| WW2 | World War Two |

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

Research into arts centres is more important than ever before. Despite having qualities which seem invaluable for arts and cultural provision and for addressing the pressing circumstances and policy demands of our time, arts centres have been neglected in the academic literature and research in recent years.

The popularity of arts centres grew out of the arts centre movement, which is credited by Lane (1978) as beginning in England post-World War Two (WW2). However, it has been claimed that arts centres did exist prior to 1945. Sherwin (1985) suggests three such centres existed in the UK, and a list of arts centres found in the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) Archive, hosted at the V&A (Victoria and Albert Museum) Archive of Art and Design, mentions an arts centre in Nottingham which was founded in 1943. Additionally, Bluecoat in Liverpool is considered the first arts centre in the UK, established in 1927 by the Bluecoat Arts Society (Bluecoat, no date). Over the years, other institutions are suggested to have played the role of arts centres, including coffee houses (18th century), working men's clubs (19th century), mechanics institutes, and little theatres or people's palaces (Evans, 2001). Despite these mentions of other arts centres and organisations, it was in the post-WW2 period (post-1945) that arts centres gained popularity, and a movement began. Arts centres became an international phenomenon (Lane, 1978): the boom of the establishment of these institutions occurred in most developed countries (Baldry, 1981) and "became a common feature of post-war urban planning in Britain and [the] Commonwealth" (Glow and Johanson, 2019, p.298). In Lane's (1978, xi) preeminent book, *Arts centres: Every town should have one*, he provides the following explanation of their role and relevance:

> On the face of it the arts centres may appear irrelevant to the true needs of our time. They may seem, in fact, utterly peripheral to the business of existence which moment by moment, day by day, consumes the lives of multiples of thousands for whom the arts, let alone the arts centres, may seem as distant as the nearest star. Yet to observe the centres is to see, as in a mirror, the face of our society. To see the freedom and individuality, the new layers of expressive needs – self-discovery and self-fulfilment – which the technology of abundance has brought within

reach of all. To see, too, the reverse side of this golden coin: the shadow of alienation, the destruction of community, the almost total loss of meaning which characterises the modern western world.

I read Lane's (1978) words for the first time in 2013 and was intrigued by his link between arts centres and a world in crisis, where a sense of community and meaning had been lost; a world where the relevance of arts and arts centres was questioned. There I was, 35 years after these words had been written, also questioning the role of arts centres and their place in communities, and baffled by arts centres generally. Through my work experience I had first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by arts centres but was uncertain of their potential as an arts and cultural provider, let alone of how to unlock any potential or opportunities that arts centres may offer. With Lane's words ringing in my ears, accompanied by my own experience and questions, my mission to demystify arts centres was born and the impetus for this thesis emerged.

My interest in arts centres was a result of working in one such centre, Burnie Arts & Function Centre (BAFC)[1] in regional Tasmania (Australia). BAFC was established in 1976 and was the first professional regional theatre in regional Tasmania (Burnie City Council, 2024). When I commenced working at the centre as Performing Arts Coordinator in 2013 it was impressive in size and facilities, especially for a town of 20,148[2] people (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2014). The facilities included a proscenium arch 385-seat theatre; a town hall that seated 794, with both a balcony and adjustable floor seating that allowed flexibility for various events and functions; an art gallery; a range of meeting and function spaces; a commercial kitchen; and over 100 metres of foyer space (Burnie Arts & Function Centre, 2017).

Working at BAFC, I often felt confused about the role of the centre and to whom I was responsible. Daily, I felt the constant pull between competing stakeholders, which manifested in attempting to connect with the community, encouraging hirers to utilise the venue, supporting arts groups and organisations, meeting local authority-devised budgets, and programming for a wide audience. The task

[1] Now developed and rebranded as Burnie Arts.

[2] This figure is for the year 2012, the year before I commenced working at BAFC.

of managing multiple stakeholders was made even more challenging given the lack of a clear mission statement or strategic plan that might have assisted in stakeholder management and decision-making. This is not to say that BAFC did not have a strategic plan; rather, it is to say that this was not necessarily formalised and foremost in the minds of employees, especially for new employees such as myself, at the time. This lack of clarity surrounding the role of BAFC and my priority towards and obligations to stakeholders made me want to further develop an understanding of the role of arts centres.

It was not only the role of the centre which presented challenges for me at BAFC; but also the management structure did too. BAFC was operated by its local authority, a management structure which at the time I understood to be common in the arts centre setting in Australia. However, I faced specific issues with this management structure and questioned the popularity of this arts centre structure. For instance, at times there appeared to be incompatibility between the values and goals of the centre and those of the local council. This is not to say that there were not supporters of BAFC working within the local authority, only that this was not always the case. Additionally, BAFC had to abide by the rules and regulations of the council, which at times felt restrictive and not fitting for an arts centre. I was uncertain as to whether the challenges and issues I faced were truly a result of the management structure, or whether arts centres in other management structures also experienced obstacles in how they were run.

Operational decisions were also a challenge at BAFC, particularly regarding programming and marketing. Programming was at times difficult because of the regionality of the centre and the need to balance quality and financial pressures. In terms of marketing of the centre, the marketing approaches appeared to be partly successful in attracting people to BAFC. This success was reflected in a steadily growing subscription base: the centre was popular with small community groups hiring spaces, local amateur theatre groups had regular bookings, and touring shows often visited (venue hire). However, in many instances, marketing tactics did not seem to be reaching some audiences: for example, it was an ongoing challenge to attract families and children to the centre. When I commenced at BAFC, I was given the brief to ensure the centre appealed to the entire community. I asked myself: how could I simultaneously target audiences, whilst at the same time considering the entire community my audience? The breadth of this task seemed impossible. It also quickly became evident that among the varying stakeholders associated with arts centres, including staff

members, funders, local councils, local artists, local community groups, touring artists, audiences, and the community more broadly, there were a range of opinions and perspectives on the arts centre and the most suitable approach for running one. To tackle these concerns, I desired further information about the operations of arts centres.

Despite the multiple challenges I faced at BAFC, I was determined to help the centre thrive. In my first attempt to conquer these issues, I sought counsel from colleagues based at other Australian regional arts centres. Following numerous conversations, it became apparent that the challenges I was facing at BAFC were not unique to my circumstances but were experienced more broadly, and were perhaps caused by the characteristics of arts centres themselves. This realisation led me to consider whether arts centres were problematic in and of themselves, and to question their suitability to provide effective arts and cultural provision.

In my research prior to commencing this PhD, it became evident that there were critics of arts centres. For example, in a blog post, Bryan (2013) is critical of local authority-run arts centres in Australia, arguing that these centres have become transactional rather than enacting their traditional role as hubs of creativity. Johanson and Glow (2015a, p.1) are also critical of arts centres in Australia, stating that "while the arts centre may have been an appropriate means of community building and fostering interest in the arts in the late twentieth century, in the present century the municipal arts centre is a white elephant". They cite reasons such as the expense of upkeep; lack of flexibility among venues to cater for cross-arts practices; changing audience demographics; and increased mobility of audiences (Johanson and Glow, 2015a). The challenges related to the physical building of an arts centre is also addressed in an essay by Eltham (2012), who asserts that investment in building arts centres seems to come first, and consideration of other costs comes second. However, beyond these perspectives and insight into arts centres, I was still lacking knowledge of arts centres and their role and operations.

To investigate arts centres further I sought arts centre-specific literature. However, it quickly became apparent that there was a dearth of information on arts centres in Australia. One exception to this was the work of Performing Arts

Connections Australia (PAC Australia)[3], the Australia-wide network for arts centres as well as other industry professionals. PAC Australia conducts biennial economic surveys that focus on the operation and economic impact of arts centres in Australia; the network also published *Power PAC: Venue Survey Results* (Australian Performing Arts Centres Association [APACA], 2011), outlining arts centre programming practices in Australia. However, these publications failed to provide the insight I craved into the arts centres. Further exploration revealed that the lack of arts centre literature and research was not unique to Australia, but a problem worldwide. This paucity led me to contemplate the place of more generalist arts management, strategic management, branding and arts marketing research in the context of arts centres. However, given the particular characteristics of arts centres (for example, being commonly local-authority run or the breadth of programming) and issues I had encountered, I decided to conduct research to test the relevance of arts management, strategic management, branding and arts marketing research in the arts centre setting. It was these revelations—the little available knowledge of arts centres, and uncertainty of the applicability of more generalist arts management, strategic management, branding and arts marketing literature to arts centres—that led me to undertake this PhD.

These aforementioned realisations, experiences and questions, accompanied by the literature review, resulted in the following overarching research question, which guides this thesis:

- How suitable is the arts centre model for effective arts and cultural provision?

This research question is supported by the following research sub-questions:

- What is the role of arts centres?
- How do arts centres operate?
- How do key stakeholders perceive arts centres?

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[3] Formerly known as Australian Performing Arts Centres Association (APACA).

These research questions afford the opportunity to provide an original contribution in terms of demystifying arts centres and contributing to the scholarship on arts management, strategic management, branding and arts marketing, as well as enhancing the arts centre-specific literature.

The research design adopted to address these research questions was a mixed methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Johnson et al., 2007; Creswell, 2015; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). The benefit of combining numerical (quantitative) data with nuanced personal voices (qualitative data) is that the findings provided greater richness (Creswell, 2015), and essentially, the two approaches "complement one another" (Veal and Burton, 2014, p.36). This methodological approach also allowed interrogation of arts centres from multiple perspectives, allowing a breadth of understanding and insight into the wider arts centre landscape and arts centres generally (survey and external expert interviews), and the opportunity to delve into the nuances and complexities of arts centres (case studies). Such depth and breadth of approach is considered necessary in order to understand "complex social phenomena" (Mabry, 2008, p.216) such as arts centres. This mixed methods approach comprised three core methods: a survey of arts centres in both countries; interviews with external experts—individuals who do not work within an arts centre but regularly engage with arts centres with specialist knowledge, such as arts consultants; and four case studies (developed via internal stakeholder interviews, community interviews, audience interviews, observations, and document analysis).

These research questions are explored within the context of arts centres in two countries: England and Australia. Both England and Australia have similarities in terms of arts and cultural policy debates, and a history of growth in the popularity of the arts centre movement. These contextual similarities minimised the variables in exploring arts centres in two different countries, allowing the focus of the research to respond to the research questions rather than being clouded by external factors. Additionally, England was selected as it is commonly cited as the birthplace of the arts centre movement (Lane, 1978), which was the driving factor in undertaking my research in England in the first place. Being located in England for the early years of my PhD, empirical research could easily be conducted in person. Australia was selected as I had personal knowledge of and access to arts centres in Australia, given my previous history of employment in an arts centre. This personal connection was not without its issues, which are

described in the Methodology chapter. Exploring arts centres in two countries offered the opportunity to examine a greater diversity of arts centres. However, it should be noted that the aim of this thesis was not to compare and contrast arts centres in each location, but rather to gain a rich, detailed and nuanced understanding of arts centres within the sampling frames of England and Australia.

In reading this thesis, it should be noted that data collection took place in 2017-18, prior to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. It has been well documented that the pandemic had a dramatic impact on the arts and cultural sector in both England and Australia (Sargent, 2021; Pennington and Eltham, 2021; Walmsley et al., 2022; Australia Council for the Arts [Australia Council], 2022; Freeland and Reich, 2022). Far from rendering this research no longer timely or relevant, I argue it has given it new urgency, as government agendas, particularly in the UK, have increased their focus on the local and the hyperlocal (Walmsley et al., 2022; Durrer et al., 2023). It could indeed be argued that arts centres are uniquely positioned to support this focus. Ensuring there are opportunities for arts and cultural provision and participation in regional and rural areas is once again regarded as important.

This thesis is organised into nine chapters, which will now be introduced to provide an overview of the structure of this document.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, provides a theoretical and historical context to this research and is divided into four sections. Firstly, an overview of arts centres is presented, including the definition of arts centres and their history in England and Australia. This is followed by an examination and interrogation of the literature on arts centres organised according to the three research sub-questions. The literature on the operation of arts centres is further divided based on the key operational elements represented in the literature: management and leadership, programming, and marketing and branding. As previously mentioned, apart from a handful of sources, there is a paucity of arts centre-specific literature. Hence in this chapter literature from the academic fields of arts management, strategic management, branding and arts marketing are consulted. By exploring the broader literature and considering and applying it in the arts centre context, greater understanding of arts centres can be ascertained.

Chapter 3, Methodology, describes how I designed, planned and carried out research to answer my research questions. This section begins with an explanation of the research design, which justifies design decisions, demonstrates the link between the research questions and the chosen research approaches, and discusses the sampling approaches and data collection methods. The chapter concludes with details of the data analysis approach. In terms of analysis, the survey required various approaches in order to understand the data depending on the question type, whereas the qualitative element of the research design relied upon transcribing details, open thematic coding, and the assistance of the qualitative data analysis (QDA) software program NVivo.

Chapters 4–8 document the findings from the data. These chapters are structured into sections to align with the research sub-questions (the role, operations, and key stakeholder perceptions of arts centres). The Role section considers the strategy and role/aims of arts centres; the Operations section explores the themes of management, including management structure, leadership, programming, and marketing and branding; and the Stakeholder Perception section considers the opinions of various arts centre stakeholders. Chapter 4 focuses on the survey findings and external expert interviews, and where possible, data is presented using graphs/charts to ease comprehension (recommended by Denscombe, 2007). Chapters 5–8 are dedicated to the individual case studies. The decision was made for each case study to occupy its own chapter in order to fully uncover the complexities and nuances of each centre.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis, bringing together the research findings, highlighting the limitations, outlining the implications, and offering an opportunity for reflection on the research. This chapter focuses on the original contributions of this work to arts centre-specific literature and the academic fields of strategic management, management and leadership, programming, identity and difficult brands. The chapter both builds on the literature and provides practical approaches for arts centre management. Finally, the chapter draws conclusions as to the suitability of arts centres as effective arts and cultural providers (addressing the overarching research question). The thesis will now explore the literature and research on arts centres.

# Chapter 2 – Literature Review

As discussed, this literature review begins with an investigation of the ways in which arts centres are defined in the literature, followed by an exploration of the arts centre movement and history in both England and Australia. Following this, the chapter is organised into sections to align with the research sub-questions: what is the role of arts centres? how do arts centres operate? and how do key stakeholders perceive arts centres? It should be noted that the literature review in fact determined the research questions; however, it was rewritten to align with the research questions for ease of comprehension, and so key areas of interest and gaps in knowledge are revealed which form an important foundation for the later analysis chapters.

Throughout this literature review arts centre-specific literature is examined and where appropriate, the review diverges into broader arts management, strategic management, branding or arts marketing literature. By exploring the literature beyond that of arts centres, a foundation is made to explore the arts centre setting further. Understanding the context and whether the broader literature is relevant in the arts centre setting enables this thesis to make an original contribution. For instance, where there is misalignment between arts centres and the broader literature, there was a need for greater analysis and research of theory in practice, particularly in the arts centre setting. This background is crucial for the analysis chapters, where questions are posed regarding whether arts centres fit within the broader management literature, whether they should, or whether the unique characteristics of arts centres require a different approach.

A key point to note in reading this literature review is the timeline of this thesis. As mentioned previously, the fieldwork was conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impacted the world in significant ways. This lapse between data collection and thesis writing demanded that decisions be made in terms of the literature reviewed. Given that this thesis is interested in arts centres in both the pre- and post-Covid world, the decision was made to include research that was published after the fieldwork and the Covid-19 pandemic. This inclusion of the most up-to-date research ensures the currency and relevance of this thesis, which is important given the contribution it could make in both practical arts centre management and policy settings in both England and Australia.

## Arts centre definition

Despite the popularity of arts centres over the years and their presence in the current arts ecology, the definition of what constitutes an arts centre is considered "amorphous" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.3), with Lane (1978, p.147) arguing that there has been no "satisfactory" definition. Some publications have attempted to provide a definition for arts centres, such as the following, in the introduction to the ACGB's Directory of Arts Centres 2 by editors Sheena Barbour and Kate Manton (1981, p.5):

> Arts Centres are buildings not subsidised as Theatres, which meet the following criteria –
>
> a) There is a programme and policy for more than one art form
>
> b) More than one space is used for the arts activities
>
> c) There is some professional input (artistic or managerial)
>
> d) There is substantial usage which is not part of formal education (or adult education) provision.

Although worded slightly differently, this definition was also utilised in MacKeith's (1996) report *The Art of Flexibility: Arts Centres in the 1990s.* In 1985, the National Association of Arts Centres (NAAC) (1985, p.1) provided a definition that incorporated the articulation of local and participatory events:

> Arts Centres usually offer a variety of arts forms, a programme which is a mixture of professional and participatory events, and also have a local focus. The Association, however, does not wish to propose a definition which would be exclusive. The National Association of Arts Centre [sic] wishes to offer membership to any organisations which themselves identify common aims with the Association.

Despite slight variation in the wording of arts centre definitions, there appears to be consensus in the literature that in the broadest sense arts centres could be considered "a building which provides a regular base for substantial programmes

of activities in more than one art form" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.3; Kawashima, 1999, p.266). This is the definition adopted in this thesis and from here on in this thesis where references are made to the 'arts centre model' it means arts and cultural organisations that meet this definition.

In discussing the definition of arts centres it should be noted that the term 'arts centre' is also used in Australia to describe organisations that "support the work of more than 4500 Indigenous artists" (Kleinert and Neale, 2000, p.524). In the states and territories of Western Australia and Northern Territory there are over 45 First Nations arts centres (Kleinert and Neale, 2000), which serve to provide a "diverse and complex variety of cultural, economic and social roles-as dealers, galleries, wholesalers, intercultural mediators, art schools, and community art spaces" and "are owned and controlled by local Indigenous people" (Kleinert and Neale, 2000, p.524). However, this definition of arts centres is not applicable in this thesis, which is concerned with examining arts centres, rather than First Nations' arts centres.

Upon reflection on the definition of arts centres, perhaps a contributing factor to their amorphous nature is due to being what Lane (1978, p.42) refers to as a "cultural supermarket". The breadth of programmes that typically accompany an arts centre may appeal to a wide range of people, but the questions remain: how can a programme appeal to many different people with differing preferences? and who are arts centres responsible to? (Lane, 1978). Perhaps the lack of a unified arts centre definition resides not so much in its components (theatre, restaurant, studio etc.), but rather in that their purpose and mission as arts centres appear to exhibit diversity in their aims, character and background (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987) as well as their programmes.

This diversity was considered central to the arts centre offering (Lee, 1965; Lane, 1978; English, 1981; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). For example, Hutchison and Forrester's (1987) research on arts centres[4] in the UK demonstrates that there is no singular blueprint or best practice for arts centres, rather, there is variety in building type, programming focus, ambition, events, facilities, target audience, level of participation, staffing, organisational structure, volunteer

[4] 242 arts centres were invited to participate in the study, with 165 arts centres responding.

involvement, funding structure, and history. This recognition of the diversity of arts centres was echoed in Australia, where "community arts centres are organisations of great diversity in their development, their operations, their activities, their budgets" (Australia Council for the Arts [Australia Council], 1980, p.1).

This diversity of arts centres is commonly seen as a benefit, as "it is the hybrid nature of many arts centres that contributes to their complexity as social organisms and their uniqueness as cultural initiatives" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.23). This diversity can allow arts centres to be responsive to their surroundings (Sherwin, 1985), though it can also be seen as muddying an arts centre's brand. For example, Evans (2001, p.102) suggests that small to medium-sized arts centres can struggle as a result of being "in the problematic zone between arts-as-amenity, social arts provision and experimentation/agitprop, and the economic imperatives for arts investment as part of regeneration, gentrification, and visitor-based socio-economic development". Building an understanding of the impact of the diversity component of arts centres is central to demystifying arts centres, and to the questioning of its suitability in this thesis.

Although the research reported in this thesis focuses on arts centres today, the history of arts centres is examined to provide a context and understanding of the arts centre movement. There is a lack of research on the history of the arts centres internationally; however, the work of Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017) on the evolution of arts centres attempts to fill this chasm. Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017) suggests that arts centres have evolved over four generations, each generation with a different focus and role. 'Home' refers to initial arts centres, which could be considered 'showcases' focused on excellence and high arts, providing a home for professional artists and arts companies (1960s and 1970s)[5]. 'Place' refers to the generation of arts centres seen as tools for urban revitalisation and placemaking, with increased professionalisation of managers and increased programming demands, as well as concerns about similarity of arts centres

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[5] It should be noted that the dates listed in this section relate to Wolff's (2015) article for *Encore - Arts Centre Melbourne's Supporter Magazine*. In Wolff's (2017) book chapter there is a lack of clarity surrounding suggested dates, and he suggests that Generation 3 may have commenced at a later date, in the 2000s.

across cities (mid to late 1970s and 1980s). 'Community center' is the generation of arts centres seeking to be unique and distinct to their community, improving access and connection to their communities (1990s). 'Nexus' refers to a generation of arts centres concerned with: creating public value; a learning environment; quality programming; a leader in the community; being an innovator; a risk taker; and providing and supporting participation opportunities. It should be noted that Wolff's research (2011; 2015; 2017), is primarily focused on arts centres in the United States of America, and there is no research to indicate that these generations fit within the English and Australian arts centre context. This work is considered in the upcoming section which explores the history of arts centres in England and Australia to provide a context and understanding of the arts centre model for this thesis.

## History of English arts centres

In 1945, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) claimed there was an increased "interest in the arts and a realisation of the enjoyment they can give" (Arts Council of Great Britain [ACGB], 1945, p.3). In response to this purported demand, the ACGB encouraged the establishment of new multi-purpose organisations: arts centres (ACGB, 1945). To assist those interested in establishing an arts centre and to respond to the "crying dearth of suitable buildings in most of our cities, towns, and villages" (ACGB, 1945, p.4), in 1945 the ACGB published *Plans for an Arts Centre*, a guide for towns and local governments that sought to establish a centre. The guide articulated that arts centres were appropriate for towns with a population of 15,000-30,000, where having separate art form-specific venues (e.g. concert hall and theatre) would not be economically feasible and would require more than a "modest multi-purpose hall as a part of a social centre" (ACGB, 1945, p.4). Hence, a multi-use arts centre could offer access to arts and cultural offerings (ACGB, 1945).

*Plans for an Arts Centre* details what the ACGB considered the necessary physical components: a hall (seating approximately 600 people); an exhibition or lecture room; and a restaurant (seating approximately 200 people). Additionally the guide touched on what the ACGB believed to be key ideals for arts centres. These ideals highlight the importance of: the aesthetics of arts centres, which is deemed necessary because enjoyment of the arts requires "happy and stimulating surroundings" (ACGB, 1945, p.6); "communal enjoyment" as a result

of "communal practice" (ACGB, 1945, p.5); a place for "men and women in every walk of life" (ACGB, 1945, p.3); and of designing arts centres "to accommodate the local amateur as well as the visiting professional" (ACGB, 1945, p.5). *Plans for an Arts Centre* also highlights the value of arts centres for communities claiming that: "an arts centre can and should play a vitally important part in the life of the community it serves" (ACGB, 1945, p.5). It states that they can provide a site "where present and future generations can enjoy in comfort their rightful heritage of music, drama and the visual arts" (ACGB, 1945, p.5).

The commitment to delivering on the recommendations of this publication has been questioned. For example, following receipt of the publication of *Plans for an Arts Centre*, John Maynard Keynes, the inaugural Chair of the ACGB, wrote in a letter "Who on earth foisted this rubbish on us?" (cited in Stark et al., 2013, p.40). Regardless of the ACGB's support or lack of support of arts centres, "by the end of the war, arts centres had become a prominent consideration in planning circles" (Weight, 1998, p.162). Stark (1984, p.126) strongly critiques the impact the ACGB and Arts Council England (ACE) made on arts centres and their popularity, stating "this phenomenal growth is in no sense the result of central, regional or local planning by any one agency, least of all the Arts Council. It is, and has been unplanned". Stark also asserts that this unplanned quality has impacted the nature of arts centres: for example, arts centres are always lacking funding; they have been opportunistic in terms of repurposing other buildings; they are flexible in their role and use; and they are adaptable, "masters of disguise" (Stark, 1984, p.127).

Despite the beginning of the arts centre movement and the growing popularity of the model, in the movement's early years (1940s-1950s) arts centres were commonly associated with a club membership and "were a result of ingenious conversion schemes" (White, 1969, p.6). They also catered for the population who already enjoyed the arts, with high levels of education and job status, and for whom "an introverted cosiness vitiated many of their activities" (Lane, 1978, p.5). Hence many of the early arts centres may not have incorporated the cultural democratic role alluded to in the ACGB's ideals, which is the idea that "the role of a cultural policy is not to interfere with the preferences expressed by citizen-consumers but to support the choices made by individuals or social groups through a regulatory policy applied to the distribution of information or the structures of supply" (Evrard, 1997, p.168). In terms of the early arts centres, the

programming is cited as having been dominated by amateur work, yet professional work was also present (White, 1969).

The 1960s saw a shift in the role of arts centres (Evans, 2001; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; Lane, 1978), with arts centres cited as being responsible for "a revolution in provision for the arts in Britain" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.131). Lane (1978, p.5) asserts that the 1960s saw a shift away from the "introverted cosiness" of previous arts centres and towards a focus on communities, amongst a changing political climate and the Arts Lab movement (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; Lane, 1978). Lane (1978, p.7) describes this period as the "sixties revolt", and there was a belief that "art should no longer be the preserve of a privileged minority but must be made more widely available to the population as a whole". Phillips (2017, p.523) concurs that the arts centres established in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s were "premised, ideologically, on the idea of cultural provision for everyone", and in alignment with the ideology of cultural democracy. Additionally, it was in this decade that Lee's (1965) *A Policy for the Arts - White Paper* was published, which is cited as influential in altering perceptions of the role of arts centres in communities (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987), as well as the first official *acknowledgement* of the change in perception of the role of arts centres, but not the *cause* of it (Lane, 1978).

This objective of 'opening up' the arts was acknowledged by many arts centres at the time, including the Midlands Arts Centre for Young People, which opened in 1964 (Lane, 1978). This centre is considered a contributing factor in the change in perception of arts centres (Lane, 1978; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). Lane (1978, p.6) credits the centre with creating a programme that became "the common property, if not the aim, of every arts centre in this country". However, the potential transferability of the Midlands Arts Centre for Young People to regional areas, where many arts centres are located, is debatable, as this arts centre was located within the city of Birmingham. Unlike many previous centres, it was ambitious in scope (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; Lane, 1978), employing professional staff, and linking the arts with other leisure activities such as sports (Lane, 1978). Lane (1978) describes the new-outlook Midlands Arts Centre for Young People as "an isolated, private effort" (Lane, 1978, p.5), driven by the "magnificent obsession" of the Founder and Director, John English (Lane, 1978, p.6). Despite this support for 'opening up' the arts and cultural democracy, Lane (1978, p.7) criticises John English for still considering arts "established arts – the masterpieces of European musical composition, literature, ballet, painting

and sculpture which had been created for court or bourgeois audiences between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries". It should be noted that an individual being the driving force behind an arts centre was not uncommon, as "before 1975 the opening of arts centres was largely a result of the vision and efforts of individuals and voluntary groups" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.10). Similarly, Baldry (1981, p.135) attests that the "driving force behind the arts centre movement has been local initiative rather than direction above".

In the 1970s, known as the 'seventies explosion' (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; Lane, 1978), there was further growth in arts centres. Fifty percent of the arts centres discussed in Hutchison and Forrester's (1987) study were founded in the 1970s[6]. Evans (2001, p.94) attributes this growth in the 1960s and 1970s to "a combination of local aspirations and strengthening of the power of local administrations, together with growing affluence (leisure time and spending) and artistic freedom and experimentation". Hutchison and Forrester (1987, p.7) labelled the period post-1975 the "local authority involvement" era for arts centres[7]. After this time, instead of arts centres being primarily an outcome of hard work and commitment of local communities and dedicated individuals and voluntary groups, local authorities began to play a greater role in their establishment. In the years 1975-1981, 50% of arts centres were established by local authorities and development groups and in 1985-86, 93% of centres were in receipt of funding from local authorities (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). Not only did this period bring increased growth in the number of arts centres and increased local authority involvement, but there was also evidence of, and desire for, more transformational arts centres. This is evidenced in the NAAC's[8] Beaford declaration – a type of manifesto. The declaration includes the following text:

> This growth [of arts centres] reflects a new generations determination to
> make creative activity as well as the art object available and accessible to

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[6] The study surveys 175 arts centres.

[7] It should be noted that in England the term 'local authority' is commonly used, whereas in Australia 'local council' is the preferred term. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

[8] The NAAC was founded in 1974.

> the vast majority of the population who are currently untouched by art which is provided for their consumption.
>
> (National Association of Arts Centres, 1974, no pagination)

Higney (1987, cited in Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.128) concurs that this period brought a more transformational approach to arts centres, stating that since the late 1970s arts centres began to be concerned with individuals rather than art forms, and that this is reflected in increased programmes for unemployed and minority groups. The literature on the history of arts centres in England in the 1960s and 1970s differs from the story told by Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017), for whom these decades were seen as the 'home' generation whereby arts centres were hubs of excellence for professionals, hence questioning applicability of this work in relation to arts centres worldwide.

Literature on arts centres in England following the 1970s is lacking, thereby making comparisons to Wolff's (2011; 2015; 2017) later generations challenging. However, one exception is Joy MacKeith's report, *The Art of Flexibility: Arts Centres in the 1990s*, commissioned by ACE in 1996 to gain insight into the components of arts centres and the elements vital for success. In this report arts centres are considered a key element of the English arts landscape and vital for arts provision "and are uniquely flexible in filling different roles in different communities at different times" (MacKeith, 1996, i). However, beyond MacKeith's work and despite the prevalence of arts centres in the 1980s and 1990s, arts centre-specific literature was rare (Kawashima, 1999b). This lack of investigation into arts centres and the arts centre model in England has continued in more recent years. This thesis directly responds to this gap in the knowledge and literature. This history provides an important basis for understanding the arts centre model, providing context and themes which are explored further in the analysis.

## History of Australian arts centres

In contrast to the literature on the early days of the arts centre movement in the UK, there is limited literature tracing the history of the establishment or growth of arts centres in Australia. This lack of research makes the applicability of Wolff's (2011; 2015; 2017) work challenging to gauge in the Australian setting. In the

information available, there are contradictions: for example, Johanson and Glow (2015a) state that the majority of arts centres were built between 1945 and 1990, whereas Milne (2004) claims that the first arts centre was not built in Australia until 1965. Regardless of specific dates, an arts centre movement occurred in Australia and arts centres are still a prevalent model for arts and cultural provision in Australia today. Numerous reasons have been cited as the impetus for the growth in establishment and popularity of arts centres in the Australian context: for instance, in his speech at the First National Conference of Performing Arts Centres in 1987, Leonard Amadio (previously Director of the South Australian Department for the Arts) stated:

> Of course there are various reasons for building arts centres, and I guess, in a sense Australians took the lead from the rebuilding of post-war Europe, which saw cultural centres as symbols of civilisation and a "coming-of-age"
>
> (National Conference of Performing Arts Centres, 1987, p.68).

This significant role for arts centres post-WW2 is echoed by Glow and Johanson (2019, p.300), who claim that "the stabilising and professionalising role that the ACGB saw the arts centre as playing after the Second World War also dominated discussions about the role of public cultural infrastructure in Australia's Department of Post-War Reconstruction".

In the 1970s and 1980s, Australia saw the development of a significant period of arts centre building in capital cities, which was echoed in regional areas (commonly a venue with two theatres and often a restaurant) with a growth in regional touring (Milne, 2004). The Australia Council (1980) recognised the significant period of growth in community arts centres in the 1970s, which may have been impacted by the funding opportunities available in Australia at the time. For example, in 1974 the Department of Tourism and Recreation offered funding for "capital expenditure on cultural facilities" (Australia Council, 1980, p.4). However, it should be noted that this funding was short-lived and removed in 1976/77; as a result funding was sought from Australia Arts Council Boards, which resulted in a reduction of funding available for arts centres, from $300,000 per year to $185,496 (Australia Council, 1980, p.4).

After 1975, the establishment of regional arts centres was commonly the responsibility of local authorities (Milne, 2004). Prior to this, the scope of local councils was more limited, as Thorne (1979a, p.8) attests "with the exception of support for brass bands, little was done at local government level for cultural activities until very recently". Recognising the shift in responsibilities in running an arts centre, in 1979 the Community Arts Board (Australia Council for the Arts) commissioned the report *Housing the Arts: Establishing community arts centres and performing arts facilities*, by Ross Thorne. The report forms a kit, which consists of three parts: a summary booklet; a report on specific elements of an arts centre and findings from the research; and a report consisting of in-depth information on the case study arts centres (of which there are 30). This report was designed as a tool for local councils and groups contemplating establishing an arts centre in response to the lack of arts centre information available. It cited the following key steps in establishing an arts centre: considering why to start an arts centre; how to undertake this task; the type of venue; and who will support the arts centre. It also includes details of how to undertake a feasibility study; the building process; and the importance of good administration (Thorne, 1979a; 1979b). However, there is little information about the operations of the arts centre once established. Not long after the publication of Thorne's kit, Australia Council for the Arts' (Australia Council) Community Arts Board published an evaluation report (1980), *Community Arts Centres and Workshops,* which consists of survey information gathered from 25 centre respondents. The publication of *Community Arts Centres and Workshops* sheds light on the components of an arts centre considered crucial in order to gain government financial support:

(i)     To improve the quality of the arts experience

(ii)    To develop emphasis on creativity and self-expression

(iii)   To provide a larger choice of activities and give opportunities for all tastes

(iv)    To bring the artist and community closer together

(v)     To create a social environment suited to attracting new participants to the arts

(Australia Council, 1980, p.32)

The report also asserts that in Australia arts centres are usually created by "groups of non-artists banding together with an interest in learning more about

individual arts or crafts, or providing arts experiences for their children in after-school and holiday programs", which is suggested to impact "the quality of the arts experience" (Australia Council, 1980, p.3). However, this seems contradictory to the strong role attributed to local councils in the establishment of arts centres in Australia (Milne, 2004). The prominence of local councils in running arts centres in still evident in Australian arts centres; for example, the PAC Australia (2022) *2021 Economics Activity Benchmarking Report* revealed that 68% of respondent arts centres are owned by local government and 57% are managed by local government. Interestingly, the involvement of local authorities in the establishment and running of arts centres may have contributed to the gap in arts centre literature because "local authorities [who], despite their importance in cultural policy, vary in terms of commitment to culture […] are relatively difficult to research. It can be argued, therefore, that venues supported by them have received little academic attention" (Kawashima, 1999a, p.265).

Although responsibility for arts centres in Australia post-1975 has commonly been attributed to local councils (Milne, 2004) state governments have also played a role (Eltham, 2012). The reasoning behind this state support for building structures such as arts centres was presented by Anthony Steel in a speech for the National Conference of Performing Arts Centres in 1987:

> State governments prefer building monuments to fostering ephemera like emerging talent; the latter involving taking political risks and in any case the talent may not emerge from its chrysalis until the politicians are out of office. Far better for them to have a concrete monument to their concern for the aesthetic and intellectual well-being of their constituents.
>
> (National Conference of Performing Arts Centres, 1987, p.23)

The literature suggests that this focus on building arts centres has at times been problematic. For instance, English (2012, cited in Eltham, 2012) claims that the building itself is commonly considered an investment and as a result the programming is a secondary consideration. Eltham (2012) concurs, stating that the priority of investment is the construction of arts centre buildings, whilst programming and operational costs are an afterthought. This can be problematic as higher than expected running costs are common across the arts sector in regional Australia (Eltham, 2012). "Skyrocketing operating costs" were also mentioned by Steel (National Conference of Performing Arts Centres, 1987,

p.23). Milne (2004) also recognises these challenges, and in response questions the appropriate balance between granting money to these venues and granting money to arts companies themselves.

In discussing the history of arts centres in England and Australia it should be noted that there are connections between arts centres and cultural policy, and that these have had a complicated history. However, while these discussions are beyond the scope of this thesis and the research questions, it should be recognised that in both countries, the amorphous definition of and diversity in what exactly comprises an arts centre, in a cultural policy setting which exhibits an art form-specific orientation rather than the recognition of organisations of a hybrid nature (Hutchison, 1977; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987), are suggested reasons for this neglect of a greater focus on arts centres in policy. Again, the arts-centre trait of diversity appears to make the classification of arts centres difficult, whether in terms of funding structures or being able to comprehensively understand the role of arts centres in relation to policy agendas. The following section will develop this line of questioning and further explore the concept of role.

## Strategy and role

In this thesis, *role* is the term used to encompass what, essentially, an arts centre does and why, its remit and purpose. This section delves into the concept of an organisation's role, considering the strategic management literature, including strategic planning and mission statements, which is discussed in conjunction with the arts centre literature. Following these theoretical discussions, this section explores the writings and publications of the arts centre networks in England and Australia to further gain insight into the role of arts centres from a more practical perspective. The literature from this section provides the foundation for exploring the first sub-question of this thesis: what is the role of arts centres? This is an important consideration in the overarching question of this thesis investigating the suitability of the arts centre model.

In the academic literature strategic planning has been cited as beneficial to organisations as it can encourage "strategic thinking, acting, and learning" (Bryson, 2004, p.11), improve decision-making, improve company effectiveness, and have positive impacts on stakeholders (Bryson, 2004). Strategic planning is

intrinsically linked to the role of an organisation; for example, a strategic plan is enacted to fulfil the goals and role of an organisation. Throughout the years there have been various debates and approaches to strategic planning. For example, Cummings and Wilson (2003) present the terms 'strategy as orientation' and 'strategy as animation' to clarify approaches to strategic planning. Strategy as orientation aligns with more traditional views of strategic planning, whereby generic approaches to planning are placed within an organisation from the top down in order to obtain competitive advantage (Porter, 1985; Ansoff, 1987). However, strategy as animation is now a commonly accepted approach (Bilton, 2007), and is focused on a more bottom-up approach allowing the "energizing effect of the strategic process on the organization, resulting in a common sense of purpose and visions" (Bilton, 2007, p.91), an approach also advocated by Mintzberg (1994). Despite the applicability of strategic planning in the business world, there have been questions as to the applicability of strategic planning in the arts and cultural sector.

Strategic planning in the arts and cultural sector is debated owing to the unique characteristics and complexity of an arts organisation, such as the element of creativity, the element of risk, uncertainty of funding, labour intensiveness, challenges in measuring outcomes, multiple stakeholders, and in some instances, high production costs (Varbanova, 2013). Building on these points, resistance to a more formal approach to planning may also be influenced by a lack of resources, a view that the work relies on intuition rather than formal processes, lack of skills, a focus on creativity rather than management processes, the need to be able to quickly adapt to changes, and the lack of need for strategy given a 'business as normal' mentality (Varbanova, 2013). MacKeith's (1996, p.58) study comments on the challenges of a strategic outlook in the arts centre setting, arguing that "most arts centres are concentrating on the immediate business of survival, rather than looking forward to what the future might hold".

Reluctance to embrace strategic planning in some instances in an arts centre setting may be an outcome of the desire for flexibility of arts centres. For instance, in the *Here and Now Evaluation Report* (Moore, 2022, p.24) it is suggested that "responding to the moment, rather than feeling restricted by a static plan will ensure their [arts centres'] future projects will meet the needs of their community and arts centres will remain useful, co-ordinated with and connected to their local areas". Williams et al. (2017) support this need to be

responsive to an arts centre's community, suggesting that the primary responsibility of an arts centre to its community is remaining connected. This relationship between an arts centre and its community is fluid and "constantly evolving and transforming, as demographic changes, global trends and influences, economic factors, and technological developments all impact the ever-changing environment within which the PAC operates" (Williams et al., 2017, p.242). With these concerns in mind, upon reviewing the strategic management literature, it is clear that incorporating flexibility into any strategic thinking is essential, which are key points raised in the work of Bryson (2004) and Bilton (2007).

Despite the debates and challenges posed in the literature on strategic planning, in particular in the arts and cultural setting, PAC Australia's best practice guide for local authorities and arts centres, *Performing Spaces* (Heath and Dalziel, 2019), argues that it is this complexity itself that makes the need for planning especially pertinent, and that like any other organisation, arts centres need a strategic plan. Williams et al. (2017, p.244) concurs that a mission statement or strategic vision can assist arts centres to "better define their 'brand'", which may be important given the diversity of the elements within the arts centre model. *Performing Spaces* argues that strategic planning for arts centres should involve a myriad of strategic elements, including a 3-to-5-year plan, alignment with local authority plans, an artistic plan, extensive research, financial projections, performance indicators, goals, missions, timelines, and alignment with organisational functions (Heath and Dalziel, 2019).

As has been touched on previously, in the strategic management literature it is commonly considered best practice for organisations to have a clear role (Bryson, 1988; Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Drucker, 1993; Vogt, 1994; Campbell, 1997; Varbanova, 2013). Upon reviewing the strategic management literature it is evident that various terms are utilised to discuss an organisation's role. For instance, the term *vision* is used to describe the desired impact of an organisation (MacIntosh et al., 2023) and its future goals (Tipurić, 2022); or MacIntosh et al. (2023) talk about *strategic intent* which encapsulates the what, how, why, and when of an organisation; or finally *mission statements*, the "purpose and the results it wants to achieve" (Drucker, 1993, p.9) or an organisation's "reason for being" (Voss and Grabel, 2014, p.81). The concept of mission statements aligns with the concept of an organisation's role being its

remit and purpose. Hence, mission statements will now be discussed in further detail.

In the words of Varbanova (2013, p.33), mission statements should respond to the following questions: "Why do we exist? Why are we undertaking the journey? How are we different from others?" The inclusion of a mission statement is considered important for organisations, as these can be the source from which an organisation's goals, activities, values and plans evolve, and which differentiates an organisation from its competitors (Vogt, 1994). Mission statements are also cited as a tool to inspire stakeholders (Bryson, 1988; Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Campbell, 1997) and to create an emotional reaction (Campbell, 1997). Mission statements may also be of particular value for not-for-profit organisations, which arts centres commonly are, because measuring performance can be challenging; hence mission statements can provide a basis for gauging success via fulfilment of organisational mission (Preece, 2005).

Although, as discussed above, mission statements are commonly cited as important for organisational success, Bartkus and Glassman (2008) state that the authenticity of mission statements need to be scrutinised, as the inclusion of stakeholders in mission statements may be a way to acknowledge stakeholders or may be expected by stakeholders, rather than guiding decision-making. For instance, in their desire to present a positive public image to connect with stakeholders, missions may be ungenuine statements that do not reflect reality (Wright, 2002; O'Gorman and Doran, 1999; Coulson-Thomas, 1992). Wright (2002) conducted a study of 356 organisations, of which 82% had a mission statement, and 90% of those organisations with a mission statement had a customer focus. However, when confronted with operational or budgetary decisions, 50% of organisations with customer-focused missions did not abide by the priorities articulated in their mission statement, and only 40% of the managers surveyed felt that their mission statements were an accurate reflection of reality. Not-for-profit organisations, which arts organisations commonly are, may also struggle with ensuring congruence between mission and actions by experiencing mission-market tension as a result of needing to remain financially secure; thus actions may be undertaken that do not match key values (Voss and Grabel, 2014). In discussing this complexity of mission statements, it should be noted that having a strategic plan and mission statement does not guarantee the success of an organisation. Rather, the manner in which it is enacted is key (Bryson, 2004).

Additionally, involving stakeholders in the strategic planning process can result in the incorporation of the various preferences of stakeholders (Collins and Porras, 2008) and greater stakeholder satisfaction (Baetz and Beamish, 1993). Research suggests that the process in which an accepted mission statement is created is as important as the resultant mission statement (Cochran et al., 2008). For example, where stakeholders are isolated from or ignored in the mission statement process and unable to provide feedback and partake in discussions, stakeholders exhibit dissatisfaction with the mission creation process (Baetz and Bart, 1996), which may result in lack of buy-in. This sentiment of organisations needing more for success than just a mission or strategic plan, or knowledge of strategic planning analysis, is shared by MacIntosh et al. (2023, p.7), who states that "a focus on tools alone is necessary but not sufficient [for strategic planning]. A sculptor can produce intricate three-dimensional surfaces using only a hammer and chisel. The tools may be indispensable, but the craft and inspiration come from the sculptor". Hence a strategic approach to an organisation does not guarantee success; however, it is a first step which then needs to be enacted, supported with a process which incorporates stakeholder feedback. This connection between strategic planning and organisational outcomes is explored in the case studies of this thesis.

In terms of gaining a greater understanding of the role of arts centres via arts centre mission statements, MacKeith's study surveyed 81 arts centres and revealed that 55 articulated a mission statement. It should be noted that although 68% of the respondent arts centres stated they had a mission or programming policy, it is difficult to gauge how widespread a mission statement was for arts centres at this time. This is due to the sampling of arts centres for this survey being limited by a funding criterion which stated that centres included in the study must meet the criteria of centres "funded by RABs[9]/Arts Council or were identified by RABs as being significant in their area" (MacKeith, 1996, p.2). Such funding arrangements often require a formal strategy/strategic outlook; hence it is impossible to gauge the use of mission statements/programming policy beyond those included in the study, who may not have a formal requirement.

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[9] Regional Arts Board.

Despite this unknown element of the breadth of mission statements more generally, MacKeith's (1996) study does provide an indication of the role of arts centres in 1996 in England. This is exhibited in Table 2.1, which outlines the seven themes used in MacKeith's (1996) survey to categorise the mission statements.

**Table 2.1: MacKeith's (1996) mission statement themes**

| Focus | Mission Theme | Description | Number of arts centres |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Community** | Access | Everyone within the community to have access to art | 47 |
| | Participation | Opportunities for the community to participate and engage in the arts | 29 |
| | Development | Provide new experiences, challenges and development opportunities for the community | 28 |
| **Art Form** | Quality | High quality work is of utmost importance | 18 |
| | Innovation & experimentation | A focus on innovation and experimentation | 9 |
| **The Artist** | Support | Support to artists in whatever form that may be, such as sharing resources or guidance | 7 |
| | Presentation | Opportunities for artists to display their work | 6 |

Findings depict that the most commonly recurring themes are community focused: access (85%), participation (53%), and development (51%). The importance of community is reminiscent of the ideals of an arts centre as introduced by the ACGB (1945). This resonates with more contemporary views such as Williams et al. (2017, p.241), who assert that an arts centre "belongs to everyone in the community" and should be "thought of as the 'glue' for a community – a welcoming place for residents and visitors to enjoy the performing arts but also a place to learn, to celebrate, and to assemble".

This inclusion of the community in the mission statements by arts centres correlates with the recommendation of the academic literature, which supports the inclusion of key stakeholders in mission statements (Bartkus and Glassman, 2008). However, as mentioned, the authenticity of this inclusion needs to be scrutinised (Bartkus and Glassman, 2008). This questioning and research bring to light the lack of research on the relationship between the articulation of an arts centre's role and its operations, and the way in which it is perceived by stakeholders. Bridging the gap between these elements was a key impetus in this thesis and an original contribution to the academic field.

Despite these questions of authenticity and genuineness of mission statements, MacKeith's (1996) work does begin to shed light on the role of arts centres as articulated by arts centres themselves. Moving beyond this English focus, more recent examples in the Australian context are the biennial economics surveys conducted by PAC Australia. These surveys are completed by arts centre members with the aims of creating a benchmarking document for members and gathering data for advocacy work by PAC Australia (2022). Findings from PAC Australia's (2022) *2021 Economics Activity Benchmarking Report*[10] indicate that strategic thinking was not universal across the respondents. For example, the report asserts that 56% of respondent arts centres had a programming policy or plan, and that 70% of the respondents' local authorities had a cultural plan. However, only 47% of these plans included information specifically pertaining to the arts centre and its aims and operations (PAC Australia, 2022), suggesting that despite a plan being in place the arts centre is not necessarily considered a vital aspect of a council's strategic approach. This brings into question not only the presence of strategic plans, but also their contents and the way in which they are enacted.

Uppal and Dunphy's (2019) study explores this sentiment further in an examination of the role of cultural development plans, and indicates that although a local authority may have a formal cultural development plan, this is not to say that it is effective, that it is followed, or that it is suited to a particular

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[10] The survey was emailed to 130 PAC Australia members and 30 non-members who managed subsidised performing arts. A total of 56 surveys were returned (35% response rate) (PAC Australia, 2022).

arts centre. Uppal and Dunphy's (2019) study of local authority council plans and cultural development plans in Australia demonstrates various foibles in local authority plans (for those that did have a published plan). Uppal and Dunphy (2019) assessed the plans based on Dunphy and Smithies' (2018) *Framework for Cultural Development Planning,* which identifies six principles of best practice for local government cultural plans: based on values; directed towards goals; focused on outcomes; informed by evidence; underpinned by a theory of change; and respondent to evaluation. Findings indicate that of these six best practices, only one or two were commonly met, and none of the studied local authorities exhibited more than three of the best practice schemas. The observed plans demonstrated a lack of connection between goals and activities, and activities and purpose. There was limited evaluation, and the voices of the local community were lacking, which echoes the results from Dunphy and Yazgin's (2015) assessment of cultural development plans. Although this research only examined a sample of Australian local authorities and cultural development plans (67 councils, 65 with council plans, 22 with current cultural development plans and 11 with out of date or in development plans), it offers a reminder that strategy is more than a plan, and that the quality, commitment and enactment of a strategy is paramount in having a clear role.

Following an exploration of the academic literature, the websites of the arts centre networks in both England and Australia were consulted in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the role of arts centres. In the English setting, the UK network for arts centres, Future Arts Centres, does not explicitly state their understanding of the roles of arts centres. However, on their website the organisation outlines what they consider the "key principles" or their beliefs for arts centres. Given the definition of *role* outlined in this chapter, these principles could also be viewed as the roles of arts centres. These include:

1. provide outstanding artistic experiences [which] maximise social impact and community cohesion through the breadth of their activities and depth of engagement

2. are 'businesses' making significant contributions to the economy

3. drive economic growth by acting as incubators for individual artists and entrepreneurs and through cultural SME's [sic], supporting them with advice and training to establish their own enterprises

4. contribute to regeneration and growth through their local economic impact and by providing cultural place-making

5. provide 'safe houses' for the development of artists and companies, encouraging and supporting artistic experimentation and development

6. drive innovation within the industry, with business models that enable artistic risk-taking

7. provide safe and stimulating environments for the creative development of children and young people

(Future Arts Centres, 2024a)

Despite the articulation of these roles, it should be noted that these concepts are articulated by the arts centre network; there is no documentation or research suggesting that these beliefs are exhibited by arts centres, nor that they are shared and supported by the broader arts centre community or various stakeholders. Given that one of the primary tasks of Future Arts Centres is to advocate for arts centres in the UK, without evidence these key principles need to be considered with care, as they may be aspirational rather than an authentic representation of the role of arts centres. These key principles will be referred to in this research in relation to whether there is alignment or misalignment to these ideals shared by Future Arts Centres.

In the Australian context, PAC Australia does not explicitly state their perception of the role of arts centres. Instead, available for download on the Resources page on their website is Wolff's (2015)[11] work on the evolution of arts centres, suggesting the network aligns with Wolff's concept that arts centres are currently in the generation of 'nexus'. This generation of arts centres is concerned with creating public value, being a learning environment, quality programming, being a leader in the community, being an innovator, being a risk taker, and providing and supporting participation opportunities (Wolff, 2015). As depicted in Wolff's (2011, p.4) work, the various roles of the fourth generation are visually displayed in Figure 2.1.

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[11] Previously, the AMS Planning and Research article was available (Wolff, 2011); at the time of submission of this thesis, the *Encore - Arts Centre Melbourne's Supporter Magazine* (Wolff, 2015) is available.

**Figure 2.1: Wolff's roles of the fourth generation of arts centres**
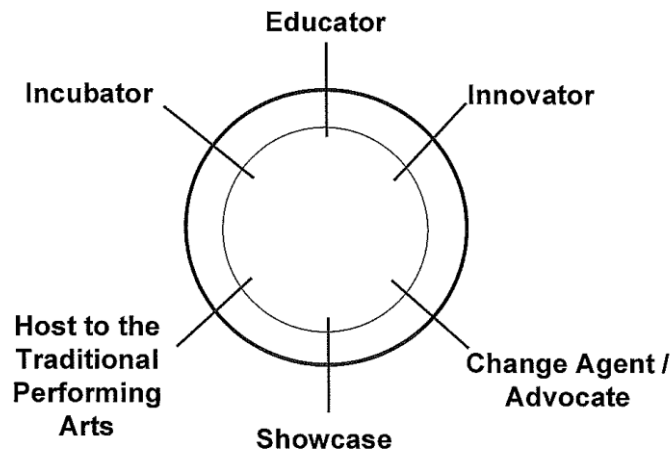


Despite PAC Australia's inclusion of Wolff's work (from both 2011 and 2015) and the inclusion of this theory in a report – *Performing Spaces* (Heath and Dalziel, 2019) – there is no research to indicate that this fourth generation fits within the Australian arts centre context. It is also mentioned in Glow and Johanson's (2019) Australia-focused work, yet research is lacking as to whether arts centres in Australia align with this theory. Indeed, as mentioned previously, the generations did not align with the history of development in the English setting, and there is limited evidence in the Australian setting. Again, this is a call to understand the role of arts centres in these countries, as the applicability of Wolff's international research (2011; 2015; 2017) is unsubstantiated.

This section has provided an overview of strategic management approaches, specifically mission statements, to provide a context to explore the role of arts centres in this thesis. Although the literature on this section touches on the role of arts centres, it is limited and provides little evidence as to their role in recent years. It should be acknowledged that in this thesis there is no expectation that arts centres have one universal role, just as there is no universal role attributed to theatres or museums. However, although there may be no singular role of arts centres owing to the diversity and uniqueness of each organisation, there may be recurring themes; for example, the centrality of community in MacKeith's (1996) work. Understanding the role of arts centres is crucial in attempting to uncover the suitability of the arts centre model. Additionally, understanding the role of an arts centre is vital in terms of practical management of arts centres to guide decision-making. According to the strategic management literature, there is an expectation that the operational elements of an arts centre are enacted in alignment and support of the role of an organisation. To gauge whether the case

studies in this thesis demonstrate this alignment, this chapter will now explore operational management elements which relate to arts centres and provide a context for further analysis.

## Operations

This section explores the second research sub-question examining how arts centres operate. This is an important question in the aim to identify the suitability of the arts centre model because to enact an organisation's mission, it must be supported by its operations. Therefore, this section considers literature on operations generally, as well as the relevant available arts centre literature. The literature search revealed that the available arts centre operations literature can be categorised into these themes: management and leadership, programming, and marketing and branding. This section will now delve into the literature on these operational areas.

## Management and leadership

This section critically reviews the literature pertaining to management structures, management and leadership of arts centres. Supporting the specific arts centre literature is broader literature to provide a context and foundation for the analysis of this thesis. Available arts centre literature touches on the structure and management of arts centres, with the PAC Australia report (2022) indicating structures present in the Australian setting, and MacKeith's (1996) report providing insight into the English context. First, however, this section will review the available literature on arts centre management structures in England and Australia.

In terms of arts centre structures in England, the available literature is outdated, with the most recent documented evidence being MacKeith (1996). At the time of this study, arts centres were primarily independently run (75%)[12] with the remainder operated by local government (MacKeith, 1996). However, 58% were leased or owned by local government (MacKeith, 1996). This is perhaps not

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[12] Of this 75%, 53% are registered charities and 48% limited companies (MacKeith, 1996).

surprising, given the grassroots growth of the arts centre movement in the UK historically (Lane, 1978).

In contrast, in Australia local government dominates the running of arts centres. The PAC Australia (2022) report details that 68% of respondent arts centres are owned by local government, 27% by state government, and 5% by private/non-government organisations. In terms of management, 57% are managed by local government, 21% by statutory authorities, 16% by companies/associations and 5% by educational organisations. This heavy reliance on local government in the arts centre context in Australia presents both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of possible disadvantages, a study conducted by Fishel in 2014 for PAC Australia highlights the following challenges for arts centres that sit within the local authority framework: local authority regulations and processes, restrictions on marketing and branding (Fishel, 2014, cited in Heath and Dalziel, 2019). Potential branding issues are a result of arts centres being seen as an extension of local authorities, which are often considered "negative or outdated" by communities (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.42). The associated local authorities face challenges themselves in relation to the arts and "many struggle to balance the community benefits of the performing arts – which may not always correspond to high sales at the box office – with the affordability of their assets and services overall" (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.8). It was this very uncertainty about how to manage the relationship between local authorities and arts centres that was the impetus behind the creation of PAC Australia's (Heath and Dalziel, 2019) *Performing Spaces* report. However, it should be recognised that there may also be benefits to being associated with local authorities. For example, local authority arts centres may have access to greater resources, improved sustainability, and a larger capacity owing to broader structures in place and financial support (Heath and Dalziel, 2019). Also, arts centres that are connected to local authorities may experience an advantage over state or national government owned/run centres (in Australia) due to the proximity to their community and the potential for greater flexibility in responding to policy and decisions on funding (Johanson et al., 2014). In terms of independent centres Heath and Dalziel (2019, p.46) note the advantages of this management structure in comparison to local government structures:

> An independent model has benefits that relate to programming, brand, marketing and communications and autonomy, while a model within a local government structure, supported by good relationships, may have

benefits in regard to sustainability as well as financial and operational factors.

In considering the pros and cons of different management structures in the arts centre setting, Fishel (2014, cited in Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.42) asserts that the best structures and operations for an arts centre depends on the "type of organisation, its size, its art form, location and other factors". Despite this claim, there is a dearth of literature that investigates the various facets of an arts centre and the fit between the various components; for instance, the relationship between an arts centre's management structure and its role, operations, and stakeholder perspectives. This thesis will respond to this gap.

The structure of an arts centre impacts not only its operations, but also the demands on the centre directors or centre managers[13] in terms of skills and tasks. The literature highlights the range of tasks demanded of the centre director role, including looking after the building, programming, marketing, and financial considerations (Williams et al., 2017). These varied tasks require a broad skillset of the centre directors and personal attributes, including "stamina, flexibility and emotional resilience" (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.53). In the words of Lane (1978, p.63), the role:

> calls for qualities rarely found all in one person: a genius for enthusing people, a sympathetic understanding of the aims of artists, a wide knowledge of the arts and the capacity for maintaining a constant flow of dynamic new ideas (so that nothing becomes stale), must be combined with diplomatic, administrative and fund-raising skills of the highest order. The director must survive a regime of day-to-day pressures and remain as committed and inspiring as on the first day he started work.

These varying tasks imply that the skillset and demands of a centre director requires a "balancing act of exquisite difficulty" (Cohen, 1987, cited in National Conference of Performing Arts Centres, 1987, p.19). The literature notes that accompanying the challenges of the role itself is the degree of responsibility placed on the centre director. For instance, given that many arts centres play a

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[13] From now on to be referred to as the centre director.

central role in arts provision in towns and cities, those running an arts centre have a key responsibility to their communities (Cohen, 1987, cited in National Conference of Performing Arts Centres, 1987, p.19). The responsibility of centre directors to their communities has been cited as so great that they have been described as "a taste-maker and even, in some circumstances, a cultural gate-keeper in the community. They are cultural leaders making decisions that impact on the community's identity and wellbeing" (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.53).

Given the responsibilities, range of tasks and skillsets demanded of centre directors, it is not surprising that previous literature has commented on the importance of management training for them. For instance, MacKeith's (1996) study called for further managerial training for centre directors, especially given that many of the survey respondent centre directors were from an artistic, rather than an operational, background. This recognition of the importance of the experience of centre directors being beyond that of the artistic is documented in Thorne's (1979b, p.62) report, *Housing the Arts: Establishing Community Arts Centres of Performing Arts Facilities - Volume 1,* which states: "frequently a professional artist is not the right person. Such people are sometimes accused of having their outlook limited by their own special interest and occasionally petty jealousies arise". Therefore, to aid in the recruitment of a suitable centre director, the importance of having a clear goal and mission, or role, is raised (Lambert and Williams, 2017), as well the need for clear objectives (Thorne, 1979b).

This literature outlines the challenges that the arts centre model presents in the director's role. Considerations of the way the director approaches these tasks is discussed further in the literature in relation to leadership. Although there is no universal definition of leadership, there is often overlap in practice between the terminology of management and leadership (Price, 2024). The distinction between these elements is described by Finn (cited in Hagoort, 2003, p.194):

> The difference between a business manager and a business leader is that the former knows how to organize work so that it is done efficiently, while the latter knows how to create enthusiasm about work so that it is done with commitment. Managers direct; leaders inspire. Leaders stimulate a collective desire to achieve high levels of performance, to serve the interests of both the company and the community, to provide benefits to others while fulfilling personal ambitions.

In view of this definition, the previous discussion on tasks was management focused, whereas now leadership will be discussed.

Williams et al. (2017, p.242) attest that a 'transformational' leadership style is necessary for arts centres, given that the relationship between arts centres and the community "is constantly evolving and transforming, as demographic changes, global trends and influences, economic factors, and technological developments all impact the environment within which the PAC [performing arts centre] operates". Yet there is little evidence and research to support this statement. The popularity of transformational leadership extends beyond Williams et al.'s (2017) work on arts centres and has been adopted in the cultural sector more broadly (Hewison, 2004).

The term 'transformational leader' was introduced by Burns (1978) and built upon by Bass (1985). Key areas of focus for transformational leaders include common vision; goal setting; process; and communication (Williams et al., 2017). Transformational leadership is not limited to these factors but also requires "charisma, inspiration, creativity and connecting with individuals in the organization at a personal level" (Saintilan and Schreiber, 2017, p.168). Transformational leaders are often referred to as 'heroic' leaders (Hewison, 2004; Hewison and Holden, 2011) who can manage change and lead their followers into new areas, whilst also increasing motivation and goal attainment via a clear vision, "not a fixed target" (Hewison and Holden, 2011, p.30), and allowing for flexibility whilst also exhibiting control (Hewison, 2004). Given the specific and particular characteristics of arts centres (such as funding uncertainty or various stakeholders), it is understandable why Williams et al. (2017) suggest that arts centre directors adopt a transformational approach to leadership, especially to exist in the rapidly changing environment in which arts and cultural organisations find themselves. Seeking a charismatic leader can be especially appealing in the arts and cultural context, where short term goals are commonly sought, and a charismatic leader provides the solution (Price, 2017). However, there are criticisms of the transformational approach in regard to the power, behaviour and charisma of the leader, which should be considered when thinking about the leadership approach in arts centres. For instance, although "charisma in the arts is highly rarefied and depicted as a romanticized social illusion", there may be a darker side where charisma can overrule ethics and logic (Nisbett and

Walmsley, 2016, p.9). Charismatic leaders can also be idolised and as a result inappropriate behaviour may be allowed (Chaleff, 2001, cited in Nisbett and Walmsley, 2016), narcissism may reveal itself (Sankowsky, 1995; Conger and Kanungo, 1998; Maccoby, 2000; Hewison and Holden, 2011), and followers can exhibit group-think (Nisbett and Walmsley, 2016; Caust, 2018) or lose their perspective (Hewison and Holden, 2011) owing to the centrality of the leader. Centrality of the leader may have the opposite effect to that desired, and leave followers "disempowered, not inspired" (Hewison and Holden, 2011, p.32).

Perhaps these drawbacks of the transformational leadership approach have influenced a more recent shift in the popularity of leadership styles in arts and cultural settings (beyond the lens of arts centres) to a more relational approach (Hewison and Holden, 2011), increasingly referred to as 'relational leadership' (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Binns, 2008), as well as meeting demands for a flatter approach to leadership, as exhibited in distributive leadership (Gibb, 1954; Gronn, 2000; Gronn, 2002). It should be noted that there are numerous leadership styles; however, these two are discussed in detail in this thesis as there is increasing literature examining them in relation to arts and cultural organisations. They are explored here in order to supply greater context for Williams et al.'s (2017, p.242) focus on arts centres embracing a transformational approach to leadership.

Relational leadership has been considered suitable for the cultural sector as a result of "the collapse of a hierarchic model of cultural values" (Hewison, 2004, p.164). Relational leadership focuses "on the quality of the relationship between the leader and the led" (Hewison and Holden, 2011, p.32). That relationship is seen in terms of a group of people moving forward together, rather than a group following an individual, as in transformational leadership. Relational leaders "inspire and motivate, but their communication skills make them much more sellers than tellers" (Hewison and Holden, 2011, p.31). In relational leadership, leaders are considered "enablers" and "nurturer[s] of other people's talent" whilst also being a point of stability amidst change (Hewison, 2004, p.163). It has been claimed that this approach "is more conducive to long-term stability, to Continuity and Care" (Hewison, 2006, p.57). Despite this, there are certainly critiques of the relational approach; for example, the organisation as a whole may suffer owing to the focus on relationships, risking delayed decision-making and possible cliques (Hewison and Holden, 2011). However, despite the concerns that arise from this approach, relational leadership remains a popular leadership concept in the arts (Hewison and Holden, 2011).

The aforementioned distributive leadership approach is also lauded as a way to lead in a changing arts and cultural sector (e.g. external factors or financial instability) with greater complexity and the drive to remain "relevant to the changing needs and tastes of contemporary society" (Hoyle et al., 2018, p.5). Distributive leadership moves away from the leader situated at the top of an organisation; instead the leader creates "opportunities for individuals to lead at all levels, be it as employees or freelancers" (Hoyle et al., 2018, p.17). It has been described as a 'heterarchy', where "power and responsibility is widely shared throughout the organisation, in a collective commitment to the principles of Creativity, Continuity and Care" (Hewison, 2006, p.57). Furthermore, power and influence shift as the organisation requires (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Hoyle et al.'s (2018) report, *Changing Cultures: Transforming leadership in the arts, museums and libraries*, which was commissioned by ACE, asserts that distributive leadership is still relatively rare in the arts and cultural sector, despite the fact that the current climate demands flatter organisational structures and a more distributive leadership approach. It should be noted that the concept of distributive leadership has been critiqued as under-developed or simplistic, or lacking a clear understanding of what it pertains (Gronn, 2008; Gosling et al., 2009; Bolden, 2011; Currie and Lockett, 2011) demanding further consideration. Regardless, Hewison and Holden (2011, p.43) attest that "the best kind of leadership is where responsibility and decision-taking is distributed throughout the organization, and the leader is seen as being at the centre of a network, not the top of a hierarchy".

Given this exploration of both the positive and negative attributes of relational and distributive leadership styles, a relational or distributive approach could be considered suitable in the arts centre setting. This is opposed to the view of Williams et al. (2017), who assert that a transformational approach is best suited for arts centres to lead in the context of a continuously changing role within its community. This opinion versus the potential suitability of alternative approaches to leadership provides a starting point from which to explore leadership in the arts centre setting within this thesis. It should also be noted that much of the literature on arts leadership is borrowed from the business world, and the fit of such leadership styles in the arts and cultural context is questioned by Hewison (2004). There are unique and exceptional characteristics of arts and cultural organisations: for instance, rather than a singular focus on the bottom line, arts and cultural organisations must also appease various funding sources, respond

to multiple stakeholders, consider policy expectations, navigate varying governance, law and accounting requirements, manage limited resources, manage unknown financial stability, contain a creativity component, and commonly involve volunteers and board members (Hewison, 2004). Given these distinguishing factors, the applicability of these leadership styles in the arts centre setting is questioned in this thesis. This section will now delve into programming, another operational element of arts centres.

## Programming

Programming is central to the operations of arts and cultural institutions, including arts centres. Programming is considered "the planning and delivering of arts and cultural leisure experiences for individuals and groups" (Carpenter, 2008, p.9). Programming is the way organisations can connect to audiences, with the literature describing the role of programmers as "experience makers" (Carpenter, 2008; Toffler, 2022). Understanding programming in the arts centre context is crucial for this thesis—which is interested in the connection between an arts centre's role, operations and perceptions—because "programming is driven by the mission or purpose of the organization" (Byrnes, 2022, p.25) and the impact on stakeholders is profound. Programming is explored in this section via a consideration of risk, programming responsibility and programming decision-making.

Programming in the arts setting presents unique challenges owing to operating in an environment of risk (Tonks, 2020). This risk is greater than in non-arts organisations due to the fact that "programming art is totally, innately, constantly, gloriously unpredictable. In other words, risky. Programming art can be, financially, totally unpredictable. In other words, very risky" (Tusa, 2007, p.5). The available literature on arts centre programming recognises this risk. For instance, financial risk is acknowledged by Micocci (2017), who presents recommendations in an attempt to mitigate the financial risk associated with arts centre programming. These include having in place a risk reserve fund, building and nurturing relationships with different audiences, being mindful in programming decisions, sharing the cost of artists and programmes with other centres in the area (termed as block booking and co-presenting), and balancing programming decisions between those that may be a loss for the centre with hirers (guaranteed income). Williams et al. (2017) concur with the final recommendation, stating that centre directors (most commonly the programmer)

have to carefully curate a programme that allows for mitigation of predicted losses and offset these with other programming. Although Micocci's (2017) recommendations appear to be practical, there is a lack of research examining these strategies in a real-world setting, which is common across all the arts centre literature: simply, there is a lack of research to uncover the operations, including the programming, of these institutions.

In Australia, the PAC Australia report (2022) provides recent statistics that allude to the appetite for financial risk amongst arts centres in their programming. For example, the report asserts that in terms of performing arts events at the centres, 56% carry no financial risk to the arts centre (hirers), 38% carry full risk (arts centre has purchased the show), and 6% share risk. This focus on external hirers, rather than taking on financial risk for presentations, suggests alignment with the approaches of local authorities in the ownership and management of arts centres in Australia. For instance, there is "an increase in risk aversion by local government, influenced perhaps by increasing budget pressures or difficulty in assessing the offsetting benefits" which could be a key determinant in risk appetite for arts centres (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.61). Interestingly, these statistics from the PAC Australia (2022) report demonstrate an increase in financial risk taken on by respondent arts centres from previous surveys, which exhibited 25.5% full risk and 68.6% no risk in 2019 (Performing Arts Connections Australia [PAC Australia], 2019). The reasoning for this potential increase in willingness to take on financial risk has been suggested to be a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, and increased focus on the hyper local (PAC Australia, 2022), yet could also be a result of fewer hirers. Future reports are needed to ascertain whether there is an increased willingness by arts centres to carry greater financial risk.

The financial pressures placed on arts centres are compounded by their limited budgets. For instance, in 1996, the average budgetary spend on programming of arts centres was 35%, compared to 58%[14] for other arts organisations (MacKeith, 1996). In the Australian context, Australian musician, tourer and producer Lawrence English builds on this by suggesting that "the further away from the capital cities you get, the harder the programming. There's often no

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[14] MacKeith employs the 58% figure from *Report on 1994/95 Performance Indicators: Arts economy and audiences.* London: Arts Council of England.

budget" (English, 2012, cited in Eltham, 2012). This is relevant to arts centres, as they are commonly the primary arts and cultural providers in regional locations.

Budgetary concerns and financial risk appear to have impacted artistic decisions and willingness to take on artistic risk in arts centre programming. For instance, in MacKeith (1996, pp.27–28), "many interviewees lamented that the 'freedom to fail' was gone and with it the ability to implement any other artistic policy than the populist approach of simply responding to current audience tastes". MacKeith (1996, p.28) attests that the programming of more innovative or unique works or performances appears to be a greater challenge beyond the cities, with regions being:

> unable to draw in audiences for cutting edge work as their local populations tended to be more conservative in their tastes. These centres found that they needed to concentrate on more mainstream work or […] focus on local cultural identity.

More recently, in Glow and Johanson (2019, p.306), who investigate the challenges presented by arts centres for cultural policymakers via an exploration of Australian arts centre case studies, the connection between budgetary restrictions and risk is noted by one arts centre manager as follows:

> The difficulty in sustaining audience development for new products is also related to the cost of programming. At the Drum Theatre, the manager identified that without a strong sense of confidence that the theatre could sustain large audiences, many shows were scheduled for only one night. This presents a drawback because the centre would be strengthened by artists being 'part of the fabric of what we're presenting' in a manner that is 'more organic' and long term than programming will allow.

This challenge of only being able to programme a one-off-show, or where there is a gap between offerings, is problematic and a difficulty many smaller arts organisations, including arts centres, face. Preece and Johnson (2011, p.20) attest that this restriction on programming and the propensity for one-off-shows creates a break in "consumption experiences", which may cause increased risk

or uncertainty in the eye of the audience member for the next performance, especially if any negative reaction to a previous show is able to fester and grow.

Future Arts Centres presents a more optimistic perspective on artistic risk, with their website noting that a key principle of arts centres is to "drive innovation within the industry, with business models that enable artistic risk-taking" (Future Arts Centres, 2024a). Although this is a key aim of arts centres, according to Future Arts Centres, whether or not this support for artistic risk-taking, or even the capacity to embrace artistic risk taking, extends to the wider network of arts centres in the UK remains uncertain and unexamined. The appetite for risk taking is examined in this thesis.

According to the literature, it is not only the financial constraints but also the arts centre model itself that creates challenges for arts centre programming owing to the structure of the organisation and with whom the responsibility of programming lies. For example, Kawashima's (1999a) work recognises that in the arts centre model the centre director is commonly responsible for the programming. This additional task, alongside their myriad other tasks, can present challenges for centre directors, who need to be "knowledgeable in many different art forms and genres and to keep up-to-date on their developments" (Kawashima, 1999a, p.269). In order to tackle this challenge and manage this financial and artistic risk in programming, Kawashima's (1999a; 1999b) research on nine case studies unveils strategies that are adopted in programming arts centres, which include use of personal contacts for recommendations and knowledge, routinisation of work (formulas that have worked previously, such as art forms, etc.), return of regular artists to develop an audience and reduce risk, and sharing decision-making beyond the centre itself. However, accompanying these approaches is the need to balance art form, genre, financial expectations, and what is new or familiar to the audiences (Kawashima, 1999a). This breadth of offerings means that arts centres can "maintain predictable patterns of relationships which provide key events in the diary. This then allows them to experiment with new interorganisational/institutional arrangements" (Kawashima, 1999a, p.272). Yet again, beyond the work of Kawashima (1999a; 1999b) there is a lack of exploration of programming and the complexities and considerations in this operational aspect of arts centres. This thesis attempts to address this gap in knowledge.

In terms of uncovering how arts centres make programming decisions, the literature reveals that there are three key areas of programming decisions: specialisations, amateur versus professional works, and producing or commissioning versus presenting. These will now be discussed in turn.

MacKeith (1996, p.24) recognises the challenges of programming for arts centres and recommends that arts centres should not try "to fill all the possible roles", but instead should specialise in two ways. The first is that arts centres should be venues presenting multiple art forms, where it would not be feasible to have multiple specialist arts venues. The second approach suggests that arts centres should specialise their offering to cater to a specific community, or specialise in type of art form, or focus on a specific age group. This recommendation challenges the commonly held belief that diversity is central and vital to the arts centre offering (Lee, 1965; Lane, 1978; English, 1981; Sherwin, 1985; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). This concept, as presented by MacKeith (1996), raises the question of whether the diversity of the arts centre offering is a benefit or in fact a hindrance, as suggested by Lane (1978, p.42): "How can programmes be selected to satisfy so many different people?" This interrogation of the implications of diversity is examined further in this thesis.

The questioning of the balance of professional and amateur work in arts centre programming has been discussed since the inception of the arts centre model, with creating a place for both amateurs and professionals being a key ideal of *Plans for an Arts Centre* (ACGB, 1945). In reality, between 1945 and 1965 English arts centres were primarily amateur focused, yet there was also space for professional work (White, 1969). In England this amateur focus prevailed despite the emergence of arts centres within a cultural climate focused on professional work and the democratisation of culture, "to disseminate major cultural works to an audience that does not have ready access to them" (Evrard, 1997, p.167). Yet in the UK there appears to have been a shift in the programming focus from amateur to professional. Hutchison and Forrester (1987) state that according to their survey, 37% of arts centres considered local amateur work a high priority. However, this percentage decreased to 12% in MacKeith's (1996) survey. Evidence of this possible shift away from the amateur to the professional can also be seen in Hutchison and Forrester (1987), where 67% of arts centres considered visiting professional performances/exhibitions a high priority, which increased to 81% in MacKeith (1996). It is recognised that the survey methods and criteria utilised were not identical in these surveys, but they

nonetheless present a possible trend. This increased professionalism of UK arts centres during this period aligns with Wolff's work on the evolution of arts centres, where Generation Two (late 1970s and 1980s) of arts centres saw increased professionalisation (Wolff, 2011; 2015; 2017). In the English context, there is no relevant research examining the amateur and professional focus of arts centres beyond these now-outdated surveys. Hence further investigation is required to develop an understanding of this balance, which will take place in this thesis.

In the Australian context, the PAC Australia (2022) report provides some insight into the focus on programming of amateur versus professional work. Figures suggest that commercial rates are evident in 60% of contracts in Australian arts centres, whereas 40% are community agreements which relate to school, community, and amateur performances (based on the number of performances, it is 57% at a commercial rate and 42% at a community rate). The previous PAC Australia (2019) *Economic Activity Report 2019* notes that 96% of arts centres cited their primary activity as being "a receiving or presenter venue for professional work" (PAC Australia, 2019, p.37). However, unfortunately for the sake of continuity, this question was not asked in the 2021 survey. Although these statistics begin to tell a story of the possible priorities of arts centres in terms of professional versus amateur programming, there is a lack of deep insight behind the reasoning for such preferences, especially the part this plays in the wider arts centre context; for example in relation to their role, and perceptions of stakeholders.

The available literature also reveals that not only do arts centres make programming decisions in terms of the presentation of professional versus amateur work, but they also need to decide to what extent they produce or commission work versus present the work of other companies. In England, 55% of arts centres in MacKeith's (1996) study had undertaken commissioning of new work, and 49% had taken part in co-productions, with 35% of centres considering themselves both a commissioning and presentation house (MacKeith, 1996, p.13). MacKeith's (1996) survey coincides with the time period in which, according to Kawashima (1999b), there was a shift in terminology amongst arts centres, referring to themselves as 'presenting venues' rather than 'receiving houses'. Reasons attributed to this shift include increased professionalisation and capabilities, necessity owing to lack of suitable product (especially works for children), training and motivation of staff making creation of work possible, a way

to improve organisational profile, and to build partnerships in the process and, in turn, be viewed favourably by funders (Kawashima, 1999b).

More recently, Future Arts Centres claims that arts centre involvement in the creation of work is still prevalent. For example, the Future Arts Centres (2017, no pagination) Annual Report states that "increasingly arts centres are playing an active role in the creation of new work, achieving artistic excellence whilst at the same time reaching a wide range of audiences in their local communities". However, this claim should be considered with care given the report is based on information from the nine founding partner arts centres[15] of Future Arts Centres, which consider themselves 'leading' arts centres (Future Arts Centres, 2024a), as well as eight additional arts centres[16] (the criteria for inclusion in the report is not detailed). Therefore, the relevance of the claimed involvement of arts centres in the creation of work to the broader arts centre community is uncertain and unexamined.

The PAC Australia (2022) report also reveals support for the commissioning/creation of new work in the Australian context. It suggests that 62% of arts centres took part in commissioning new work and 44% had programmed a festival or festivals. This represents a stark increase from what was reported in the PAC Australia (2019) *Economic Activity Report 2019,* which reported that 20% of arts centres commission new professional work (inquiring into the commissioning of amateur work is absent from the survey), and that in terms of producing or co-producing productions, 3% created professional work and 44% non-professional work (PAC Australia, 2019). The results do not provide extensive detail, and there is a lack of understanding of the degree to which the arts centres engage in these activities. It should also be acknowledged that these reports fail to break down the locations of these centres; hence they may be painting an unclear picture, as the regionality of centres may impact the ability to undertake such work. For instance, Eltham (2012) supports this

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[15] These include The Albany, ARC Stockton, artsdepot, Brewery Arts Centre, Cambridge Junction, Lincoln Drill Hall, mac Birmingham, Rich Mix, and Stratford Circus.

[16] These include Calstock Arts, Colchester Arts Centre, CAST in Doncaster, HOME in Manchester, The Core at Corby Cube, The Ropewalk in Barton upon Humber, The Spring Arts & Heritage Centre in Havant, and Z-arts in Manchester.

possibility, stating that commissioning new work is primarily seen in arts centres in the cities or state government-funded venues.

Bryan (2013) also questions the relationship of Australian arts centres to creating works; as previously mentioned, he asserts that arts centres have become transactional when once they were hubs of creativity. The foundations of this claim are debatable, as there is a lack of evidence that Australian arts centres were ever artmakers. But a guide initially published in 2013 and updated in 2018 (PAC Australia, 2018) suggests there is an appetite for increased producing/co-producing or making theatre works, with 70% of arts centres stating this is the case, despite programming budget restrictions being a primary constraint to undertaking such works (APACA, 2011). These sources suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the relationship between arts centres and commissioning and producing works, the degree to which it is exhibited in the programme, as well as the value and importance of commissioning or producing work in the programme offering.

The literature suggests that risk is an evident factor in the arts centre setting, yet there is a lack of comprehensive exploration of how this manifests and is managed. Overall, there is a gap in understanding of the programming of arts centres in both England and Australia. This is explored further in this thesis, especially in the relationship between these programming decisions and considerations and the role and stakeholder perspectives of arts centres.

## Marketing and branding

Marketing plays a key role in any arts and cultural organisation, and it is no different in arts centres. The arts centre literature that pertains to marketing is classified into two categories: audience and branding. These two research themes will be explored in this section alongside literature from the broader academic fields of audience, audience development, arts marketing and branding research. This broader literature provides a greater contextual foundation for building an understanding of arts centre marketing and branding.

### *Audience*

In recent decades the academic literature has demonstrated an increase in research in relation to audiences (Reason et al., 2022), including audience

development (Kemp and Poole, 2016). However, despite this increased interest the research has been considered fragmented and disconnected (Brown, 2020, cited in Brown and McDowell, 2022) and there is a degree of complexity and uncertainty in this area of research. For example, there is no unified definition of audiences, and the term has been referred to as a "monolith" (Conner, 2013, p.7), while at the same time considered contradictory (Pitts, 2015; Hadley, 2021). Reason et al. (2022) delve into the complexities of audiences, ranging from considerations of the place of this research within the literature, questions of passivity and engagement, collectivity and individualism, and both the extraordinary and ordinary elements of audiences. For instance, the concept of an audience is an "an utterly ordinary phenomenon" (Reason et al., 2022, p.3) and being part of an audience occurs on a daily basis; in the words of Conner (2013, p.13), "the audience is us". Yet Reason et al. (2022) argue that in the arts, generally, audience members choose to be part of an audience. Therefore, for clarity in this thesis, the understanding of audiences adopted is gained from the Latin etymology *auditorium*, or "hearing place", and considered to be the "temporary assembly of a group" (Conner, 2013, p.13). In the context of this thesis specifically, the audience is considered to be the people gathered to view, attend, or participate in an event or performance at an arts centre. Considering audiences is important for this research as audiences are a vital component of the arts and cultural experience, as "without an audience there is arguably no performance" (Reason et al., 2022, p.1). Audiences are a key stakeholder of arts and culture, and of arts centres, with centres relying on audiences for income and engagement.

In England, MacKeith's (1996) findings indicate that the primary audience of arts centres was the region or district (67%), followed by the city or town (14%) and a national audience (12%). MacKeith (1996, iii) also asserts that arts centres claimed to conduct less audience development and marketing than is desired[17] and "in many cases it is ad hoc and audience development almost non-existent". Findings also indicate that audience crossover was not seen in arts centre settings, which suggests that centres are recommended to encourage niche audiences, rather than pursuing or relying on crossover of audiences (MacKeith, 1996). Attracting younger audiences was also cited as becoming increasingly challenging (MacKeith, 1996).

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[17] The average marketing spend of the total expenditure is cited as 6.5% (MacKeith, 1996, p.33).

The available research in the Australian setting is focused on audience development. The term 'audience development', like that of 'audiences', has no clear definition and is referred to as "elusive" (Hadley, 2021, p.11) and an "umbrella term" (Kawashima, 2000, p.10). The audience development definitions available are commonly focused on the *how* of audience development, rather than the *why* (Hadley, 2022). Therefore, in this thesis, the definition of an audience development plan as articulated by The Audience Agency[18] (2020) is utilised because it appears to cover the commonly recurring elements of numerous audience development definitions: increased audiences, diversity and engagement or relationship building. The definition states that an audience development plan "is a practical blueprint for growing audiences, increasing reach, building deeper relationships and doing those things to the best of our abilities and resources, through the combined effort of our colleagues and stakeholders" (The Audience Agency, 2020, p.2). Having a clear organisational role is highlighted as central to the audience development process, to ensure there is alignment between both factors (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001; Wiggins, 2004; The Audience Agency, 2020). Yet again, the importance of strategic planning and mission statements appears in the literature surrounding arts and cultural organisations, this time in relation to audiences.

In terms of audience development, this has manifested in numerous frameworks such as those by McCarthy and Jinnett (2001) and Wiggins (2004). McCarthy and Jinnett (2001) argue that there are three audience groups—participating, inclined to participate, and disinclined to participate—and that different approaches are needed to tap into these groups. They also state that there are three approaches to increasing participation: "broadening it" – enticing more people who are currently non-participating, but seem to be "natural" audience members; "deepening it" – increasing audience engagement; and "diversifying it" – seeking new markets (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001, no pagination). Wiggins (2004) builds on McCarthy and Jinnett's (2001) work and applies the MAO model (motivation, ability and opportunity) to audience development, enabling the recognition of numerous barriers to participation and the ability to see the impact

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[18] The Audience Agency is a charity funded by Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland, and various other partners and funders, and aims to "provide knowledge, data and insight enabling cultural organisations to increase their relevance, reach and resilience" (The Audience Agency, 2024).

of strategy on numerous market segments, which was not possible in McCarthy and Jinnett's model (Wiggins, 2004). An audience development project focused on arts centres will now be discussed.

In Australia, the Australian Research Council funded the *Talking Theatre* audience development project (2004–2006) (Scollen, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2009). The project was conducted in 14 arts centres in Queensland and Northern Territory, with 24 non-attendees for each arts centre. Participants attended three live performances, as well as completing five questionnaires and attending three group discussions (Scollen, 2009). The project identified the key barriers to attending the arts centres as prices, family and work commitments, and lack of family and friends who also attend. These barriers differed from those exhibited in Alnasser and Yi's (2023) work on audience development in other types of arts and cultural institutions – museums, libraries, theatres, and music institutions. The barriers revealed in Alnasser and Yi's (2023) work include increased arts and cultural offerings available to people, improved access to other leisure activities, and higher costs of living in comparison to income increases. The importance of recognising and nurturing the social element of performances cited in the *Talking Theatre* project is seen in the literature beyond arts centres. For example, in Gainer's (1995) work, a performing arts organisation demonstrated that 22% of tickets were purchased singly, versus 78% for two or more people, and of those single purchases it appears that many were purchased to sit with people who had already purchased a ticket. This desire for connection as part of the arts attending experience was demonstrated in the success of the post-show conversations in the *Talking Theatre* project, where participants stated that they felt valued and appreciated by sharing their ideas, with some even claiming to prefer the discussions over the performances themselves (Scollen, 2008a). These findings align with a shift away from the idea that audiences are passive to the notion of audiences being engaged and empowered (Reason et al., 2022). As articulated by Baxter (2012, p.21), building a connection with audience members is paramount, not just for building but also for retaining audiences: "shouldn't we be focusing more on creating audience enrichment initiatives that empower the audience to experience arts and culture in the best possible way? And to keep them coming back?" In her book *Audience Engagement and the Role of Arts Talk in the Digital Era,* Conner (2013, p.13) also argues for the important role of audiences:

Our goal should be to empower audiences to engage in constructive and pleasurable dialogue about the arts and to celebrate those audiences who, by virtue of their vital and engaged presence, can turn any arts space into a site of public assembly ripe for intellectual and emotional connection. Our vision should be to provide twenty-first-century audiences with a bill of rights assuring that every member of the audiences has by definition not only the right to interpret but also the right to be heard as a viable interpreter.

Further findings in the *Talking Theatre* project address the relationship between programming and risk. Firstly, *Talking Theatre* suggests that 86.5% of participants thought the programme was "appealing", which indicates that perhaps arts centres need to review their marketing to non-regular attendees, because evidently the programme itself was not creating a barrier to attendance - in fact, it was viewed favourably (Scollen, 2008a). Secondly, the project cites risk as another barrier to attendees of arts centres. Risk factors cited include time and money, the quality of the work, risk of not understanding the performance, and uncertain expectations of the performance and setting (Scollen, 2008a). These findings align with two of the four risk types to audiences articulated by Colbert et al. (2001), which determine the likelihood of reattendance by theatre goers: namely functional risk and economic risk. The two additional risk factors cited by Colbert et al. (2001) were psychological (threat to preferred self-image) and social (how an individual hopes to be perceived). Preece and Johnson's (2011, p.20) investigation into difficult brands also considers risk to audiences in the performing arts and highlights the importance of "accurately representing the performance that is on offer, as opposed to trying to entice audiences through hyped or misleading promotion" to both inform but also reduce risk of unmet expectations and generate "bad will". This literature review will now delve into the concept of branding and difficult brands in the arts centre setting.

*Branding*

It should be noted that there is no unified definition of the concept of a brand (Dall'Olmo Riley, 2016). The American Marketing Assocation (AMA) (2023) claims that a brand is the "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers". However, there has been a call for a broader definition to truly encapsulate the essence of a brand: for example, a brand "is everything which the company or

brand owner does, says or owns" (O'Reilly, 2011, p.49). This call for a broader understanding of the term is reflected in The National Society for the Prevention of cruelty to Children's (NSPCC) citing of brands as being "everything we are, everything we say, everything we do" (NSPCC, no date, cited in Hudson, 2008, p.71). This definition is adopted in this thesis because it allows brands and branding to be considered in their broadest sense, meaning that it can be explored within the context of arts centres without forcing my own preconceived understanding of branding into the analysis, and allowing openness to findings in this thesis.

However, although brands are discussed within this literature review, the applicability to the arts and entertainment sector is questioned (O'Reilly, 2011). This questioning is supported by Walmsley (2019, p.41), whose content analysis of arts marketing journals from the past 30 years indicates "a shift away from a management-based interpretation of strategic marketing concepts such as branding towards a more relational and/or psychological approach based on interdisciplinary enquiry". Raynor (2007) agrees, suggesting brands no longer have the desired effect and that consumers are interested in experiences, focusing on operations over marketing, authenticity, personality, and quality of the product. Baxter (2012, p.21) also highlights the importance of stepping away from traditional branding to creating experiences: "every single experiential touch point a person has with your brand, your building, your staff, and your offer, has the potential to create or undermine value." These comments align with the aforementioned focus on engagement and relationships with audiences, rather than viewing them as passive receivers.

Although there is no literature that directly relates to branding and arts centres, there is one aspect of the branding literature, the concept of a 'difficult brand', that appears to be highly relevant to the arts and cultural sector, in particular arts centres. The concept of difficult brands was introduced by Harrison and Hartley (2007) and is based on the knowledge that not all brands, owing to their specificities, are able to provide regular usage and repetition, which is an assumption for building brand loyalty. These brands are labelled 'difficult brands' and present unique challenges to marketers and organisations owing to the constrained availability and uncertain outcome (risk) of the product or experience (Harrison and Hartley, 2007).

The concept of constrained availability relates to a brand only being available at certain times and commonly impacted by seasonality, often as decided by the organisation (Harrison and Hartley, 2007). This reduced availability limits the formal contact between a brand and the consumer, hence restricting opportunities for customer satisfaction (Preece and Johnson, 2011; Harrison and Hartley, 2007). This may result in increased pressure on those managing difficult brands to "build and maintain connections between the consumer and the brand when the product is unavailable" (Preece and Johnson, 2011, p.19). Preece and Johnson (2011) note that this pressure is especially felt by performing arts organisations because contact with the audience is limited, thereby creating a challenge in building salience. This context of constrained availability demands that organisations with difficult brands "identify other factors, beyond transactional satisfaction, which might contribute to customer loyalty" (Harrison and Hartley, 2007, p.287). These factors could include a sense of belonging, playing on the rarity of experience, or high value of experience (Preece and Johnson, 2011). However, in the case of performing arts organisations these benefits are only apparent as a result of maintained interest of consumers between performances (Preece and Johnson, 2011). Arts centres meet the criteria of constrained availability, as although the building of an arts centre is present year-round, the offerings and facilities are not always accessible or available, resulting in constrained availability of the various art forms and offerings.

The second element of a difficult brand, an uncertain outcome, refers to the presence of risk – a concern explored earlier in this literature review. In regard to difficult brands, it is suggested that organisations can attempt to mitigate risk by providing information to consumers about upcoming events and performances (Preece and Johnson, 2011; 2014). However, Harrison and Hartley (2007) suggest that in some cases the presence of risk might actually increase the desirability and appeal of a brand because consumers seek experiences beyond mere products and an element of risk is worth the uncertainty. This potential openness to risk by certain consumers could also suggest "some psychological or sociological investment in the difficult brand" – an investment beyond the brand solely as a commodity (Harrison and Hartley, 2007, p.286), or they may be considered 'mavericks', according to Brown's (2007) segmentation theory for performing arts ticket buyers. This group of ticket buyers seek risk and alternative arts and cultural offerings and are commonly "younger, fearless, values-driven cultural consumers who reject the status quo and want to be

shaken up" (Brown, 2007, p.22). It should be noted that there are various approaches to audience segmentation, such as behavioural and demographic or service quality, and a comprehensive overview of the literature can be found in Kolhede and Gomez-Arias' work (2017). However, this work by Brown (2007) aligns to that of the risk seekers mentioned by Harrison and Hartley (2007).

In considering difficult brands, Harrison and Hartley (2007) call for a move beyond purely transactional understanding of brands, as the "relationship may not be simply the product, the customer service, or the location. It may be the social interaction, the connection with the values of the offering of organisations, and the desire to be part of something" (Harrison and Hartley, 2007, p.287). The value of social connection was also exhibited in the *Talking Theatre* audience development project, as discussed previously.

In order to combat the challenges presented by difficult brands, Preece and Johnson (2011; 2014) suggest the concepts of persistent presence (McClellan et al., 1999) and small worlds (Gainer, 1995). Although they do not explicitly use the term 'difficult brand', McClellan et al. (1999) examine non-profit arts organisations, which could be classified as difficult brands as they meet the criteria of constrained availability and uncertain outcome (risk). McClellan et al.'s (1999) work considers persistent presence as an approach to maintaining awareness and survival of non-profit arts organisations, despite unique features such as seasons and individual performances (constrained availability). In response to these unique features, McClellan et al. (1999) present five 'ingredients' to maintain a persistent presence in their communities: facilities and signage (physical and visual elements); seasons and performances (regular seasons); validation (brand validations typically from outside the immediate community); artistic product (high quality); and personalities (artistic, administrative, and board). Persistent presence is normally viewed in terms of disposition (positive/negative perception of a brand), cohesion (is an organisation "integrated among all of its activities and into the overall arts sector, or fragmented, with no connections made at all?" (McClellan et al., 1999, p.170)), and duration (is the support for the organisation continuous or irregular) (McClellan et al., 1999). This work presents a mechanism to explore the concept of difficult brands further. Preece and Johnson's (2011; 2014) exploration of difficult brands updates the concept of persistent presence, suggesting that with the increase in web technologies, a digital response to creating persistent

presence is a suitable way to tackle difficult brands by ensuring an ongoing relationship between customers and organisations.

Gainer's (1995) work proposes another method to attempt to combat some of the challenges associated with difficult brands (Preece and Johnson, 2011; 2014). Gainer's (1995, p.258) study of 10 performing arts attendees reveals that "people value the establishment of 'small worlds'". 'Small worlds' are considered to be the joint consumption of the arts that results in the development of social bonds and interaction beyond that of a performance. It is the desire by arts audiences to be part of a small world that can increase the value of an arts event (Gainer, 1995). Preece and Johnson (2011) suggest that the creation, or encouragement, of small world communities can connect people beyond merely a performance (constrained availability), and this created social bond can reduce perceived risk or mitigate feelings of unease as a result of risk (uncertain outcomes). Again, this reinforces the social element of arts centres.

Accompanying Preece and Johnson's (2011; 2014) research on difficult brands, Urrutiaguer (2014, p.31) presents a case study of the Forum theatre in Le Blanc-Mesnil, France, "a non-profit multidisciplinary theatre". This work provides further empirical evidence of the challenges of difficult brands by exploring the theatre's programming strategy and the elements that can impact the value of the programming and subsequent demand. Findings suggest that in order to have greater success in attracting audiences, the Forum must address key challenges of difficult brands, such as by reducing attendees' negative risk perceptions and overcoming "the local elitist image" (Urrutiaguer, 2014, p.41). Communicating the values of the organisation is suggested as a way to rectify any negative brand image issues (Urrutiaguer, 2014), again suggesting the importance of the connection between an organisation's strategic elements, such as role, to operations and perceptions by stakeholders.

Congruence between these elements and brand identity should be a key aim of organisations (Voss and Grabel, 2014). In discussing these elements, it should be recognised that organisational identity and mission statements have commonly been used interchangeably in the arts (Voss and Grabel, 2014); however, this thesis recognises a distinction which it is important to explore. Essentially, mission statements relate to the purpose of an organisation, or as discussed in the earlier section, to an organisation's role, whereas identity is the

beliefs, values and essentially the defining characteristics of an organisation (Albert and Whetten, 1985). The literature attests that it is important for organisations to have a clear identity and brand (Voss and Grabel, 2014; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020), in order to "build brand salience with customers" (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020, p.107) and as a vehicle to assist in mission fulfilment (Voss and Grabel, 2014). However, this task may not be easily achievable nor controllable, as consumers themselves attribute their own understanding of a brand's identity to an organisation (Voss and Grabel, 2014).

Despite the applicability of difficult brands to numerous organisations (Harrison and Hartley, 2007), especially those in the arts and cultural sector, there has been little research exploring and investigating the concept of difficult brands, exceptions being Preece and Johnson (2011; 2014) and Urrutiaguer (2014). This thesis will expand on the concept of difficult brands in the arts centre context and explore the mechanisms, if any, for managing these challenges whilst considering the role and stakeholder perceptions of arts centres. This literature review is yet to explore the stakeholder perceptions of arts centres in the literature; this task is undertaken in the upcoming section.

## Perceptions

Within the context of this thesis, understanding perceptions is an important consideration. This section is divided into two parts: stakeholder perceptions followed by perceptions of the arts centre model more generally. Understanding stakeholder perceptions is crucial for the success of an organisation (Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Campbell and Alexander, 1997), as are perceptions of the model, as this builds a foundation for understanding arts centres and their perceived benefits and downfalls.

*Stakeholder perceptions*

In exploring the relationship of arts centre stakeholders to arts centres themselves, it is first important to understand who stakeholders are. Stakeholders are considered to be "any group or individual who is affected by or who can affect the future of the corporation – customers, employees, suppliers, owners, governments, financial institutions, critics" (Bryson, 1988, p.33).

Satisfied stakeholders are argued to be crucial for organisational success as companies that do not achieve stakeholder loyalty will experience poor performance (Ireland and Hitt, 1992) or "go out of business" (Campbell and Alexander, 1997, p.44). The value placed upon an organisation by a stakeholder can hold great power: as Bryson (1999; 1988) comments, stakeholders measure an organisation's performance based on their personal criteria. Therefore, a mismatch of values can have detrimental effects and leave a stakeholder with "a form of values persecution" and result in stakeholder resistance (Campbell, 1997, p.932).

In terms of stakeholder management, stakeholder analysis is described as a way "to identify the key people who have to be won over" (Carpenter and Sanders, 2007, p.77). Essentially, the process involves an organisation identifying its stakeholders and "their 'stakes' in the organization, along with the stakeholders' criteria for judging the performance of the organization. The organization also explores how well it does against the stakeholders' criteria" (Bryson, 1999, p.5). Freeman (1984) also presents the Values Audit, which is a framework that can aid managers to understand their situation through the eyes of their stakeholders (Freeman, 1984), and to identify any value congruence or incongruence. It comprises four steps: communicate the mission; identify stakeholder concerns or issues; critique organisational strategies for stakeholders; and adjust priorities of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984).

The range of stakeholders in the arts centre setting could include arts centre staff members, volunteers, local artists, local arts companies, local schools, touring artists/companies, funders, local councils, audience members, and communities more broadly. In tapping into the perceptions of arts centre stakeholders, Kawashima's (1999a; 1999b) research incorporates the stakeholder voices of programmers, non-programming staff members, funders, and those in a more strategic position in regard to arts centres and programming. However, it is less focused on the perception of arts centres than on listening to these voices in order to gain insight into the operational function of arts centre programming (the programming approaches are mentioned in the programming section of this literature review).

Johanson and Glow (2015) and Glow and Johanson (2019) interview arts centre directors as part of case studies (three and four directors respectively). Their

work highlights the impact of mobility: everyday mobility, migration and cultural diversity, and global networks. One significant finding of their research is that "what works for one centre, one audience base, or one company will not necessarily work for another and indeed may not work in five years' time" (Glow and Johanson, 2019, p.307). This further adds to the complexity of arts centres. Glow and Johanson (2019, p.307) present the juxtaposition that "the challenge of the arts centre manager is to trace and work with their various streams of mobility, negotiating and mediating the impermanence of their publics with the permanence of the space they manage". It should be noted that Glow and Johanson's (2019) findings on the complexities of managing and working with mobility is based on four case studies, three of which are located within the city of Melbourne, and the fourth in Geelong, a city in its own right. Hence the applicability of these findings to arts centres beyond metropolitan areas is uncertain, especially given that mobility and access is not as readily present in a regional setting.

Both the arts centre networks in England and Australia, Future Arts Centres and PAC Australia, project a favourable perception of arts centres. For example, on the Future Arts Centres website the sub-heading states that arts centres are "the cultural venues of tomorrow" (Future Arts Centres, 2023); and in an article co-written with Connor, Future Arts Centres Co-Chair Barlow states that "arts centres are the unsung heroes of the creative sector, and they might hold the key to the future of UK arts" (Connor and Barlow, 2014, no pagination). The basis for this claim appears to be that arts centres provide various services and opportunities for engagement, provide a space for new work, and play an important role in working with local councils to meet social aims and goals (Connor and Barlow, 2014)[19]. Although Future Arts Centres has a large membership base of over 140 members (Future Arts Centres, 2024b), as mentioned, its annual report focuses on the workings of the primary nine member arts centres, which could be considered to be thriving, and this report may therefore paint an inaccurate picture of arts centres more broadly. PAC Australia also see the potential in arts centres, with the purpose of the network being "to connect and unlock the potential of performing arts presenters and creators, to transform and expand opportunities for artists and audiences across Australia" (PAC Australia, 2023, p.1). As arts centre advocates, Future Arts Centres and

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[19] At the time of publication, the authors were Co-chairs of the National Partnership of Arts Centres, who lead the Future Arts Centres network.

PAC Australia are expected to present a positive outlook for arts centres. However, this favourable view of the arts centre model is not necessarily shared by all. This is discussed in the next section.

*Perceptions*

Beyond immediate stakeholders, the literature presents a range of perceptions of arts centres. In the English context, Phillips (2017, p.525), an academic, asserts that there has been a "shift in ideological determination" of arts centres. For example, Phillips (2017, p.525) states that although most arts centres today offer participation opportunities such as outreach programs and workshops, this:

> ideological shift can be read in the granularity of the 'offer' of participation: no longer a free and flexible approach to joining and committing to people with shared beliefs and values (what I termed earlier 'solidarity hosting'), more a discrete and limited offer where many things are out of bounds— the curatorial staff, the gallery spaces, the CEO, the discussion of how budgets can be spent, the timeframe necessary to inhabit and reshape spaces through ongoing social commitment.

Phillips (2017, p.526) goes as far as to argue that this shift "is a social and political loss to the landscape of not simply the arts but also a social infrastructure founded on acceptance, cooperation and belonging". As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, criticisms of the arts centre model are also expressed in the Australian context. For instance, academics Johanson and Glow's (2015, p.1) aforementioned conference paper is critical of arts centres in Australia, as is the work of Bryan (2013), who was marketing manager of Canberra Theatre Centre at the time of his statements.

The physical building of an arts centre has also been cited as influential to the perception of arts centres. For instance, the designs of new venues can be of concern, with building often "carried out in isolation and with a narrow focus on technical and design aspects, with little thought to the building's context and its wider impacts" (Wang et al., 2018, p.370). The design of new centres themselves has been questioned, as some may appear threatening, unwelcoming, and missing the "humanity which seems to be essential for community arts centres" (Thorne, 1979b, p.61). The importance of a welcoming and practical design is

raised in Glow and Johanson's (2019, p.8) research, in which an arts centre director states that despite the building's design winning numerous architectural awards, it fails to entice the community and is perceived as unwelcoming and inaccessible, with the facade described as "intractable". The centre director goes on to state that if they were able, the preference would be to knock the building down and instead build a centre with a "soft interface" more suited and practical to the community (Glow and Johanson, 2019, p.8). Beyond these comments, there is a lack of insight into the implications of the perceptions of arts centre buildings.

Studies have also mentioned the potentially problematic nature of the term 'arts centre' (MacKeith, 1996; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987), with stereotypes of "largely middle-class attenders—emphasis usually on observing 'excellence' by the 'experts'" (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.10). Even references to the 'performing arts' or 'the arts' can in some cases conjure "ideas of elitism, arcane cultural forms, snobbery and lack of contemporary relevance" (Ellison et al., 2011, p.68). This isn't to say that arts centres cannot change any negative perception, as Ellison et al. (2011, p.94) contend:

> Arts centres can work to overcome negative stigmas by both diversifying programming whilst amplifying and emphasising the positive discourses expressed by participants concerning the transformative, consistently high quality, and rare experiences on offer at the centres.

Given these considerations, this thesis questions not only the perceptions of arts centres but also the implications of the term 'arts centre'. These explorations are closely linked to branding and identity and are explored extensively in the case studies.

The sources discussed in this section provide a small insight into the perceptions of arts centres. In examining the relevant literature, it is apparent that there is a lack of stakeholder voices in existing research. Indeed, while the previously mentioned arts centre surveys provide insight into the operations and characteristics of arts centres (MacKeith, 1996; PAC Australia, 2022), these are from the vantage point of one stakeholder, a staff member from the respondent arts centres. There is little insight as to stakeholder perceptions beyond the

aforementioned *Talking Theatre* audience development project (2004–2006) (Scollen, 2007; 2008a, 2008b; 2009), and the incorporation of arts centre stakeholders into the work of Kawashima (1999a; 1999b), Johanson and Glow (2015a) and Glow and Johanson (2019). The arts centre networks in both countries – Future Arts Centres and PAC Australia – promote an optimistic perspective, but given that this supportive outlook is vital in their advocacy role for arts centres, there is no evidence that their outlook is shared by other stakeholders. Other perceptions of arts centres are demonstrated in the words of critics and academics, which is useful given the paucity of arts centre literature and research, and presents a point of comparison in considering the perceptions of stakeholders in this thesis. Additionally, the building itself and the term 'arts centre' may be problematic in terms of stakeholder perceptions of arts centres. This thesis will respond to the lack of representation of the voices of arts centre stakeholders in research, with a research design that allows an opportunity for the various perspectives to be heard.

## Conclusion

This literature review reveals the paucity of information on arts centres in both England and Australia. Although there was research available that responded to the three aforementioned sub-questions of this thesis, for the most part this was very limited. For example, much of the research was outdated, or location-specific, or findings were from surveys which lack the ability to interrogate findings and gain greater insight. The incorporation of broader arts management, strategic management, arts marketing and branding literature provides context to the arts centre setting and creates a foundation for the analysis of this thesis. By understanding theories and evidence from the broader literature, the analysis in this thesis will test whether arts centres fit within these, or whether the unique characteristics of arts centres demand a different approach. For instance, the broader arts management and strategic management literature highlights the importance of having a clear mission statement and operational structures and approaches which support an organisation's role. However, given the unique characteristics of arts centres and being a difficult brand, the applicability of generalist methods in terms of role and operations may not be applicable in the arts centre setting. The literature review demonstrated key gaps in knowledge acquisition and approaches to understanding arts centres. Lack of voice was revealed in relation to stakeholder perspectives: there was a dearth of stakeholder voices available in understanding arts centres, with research on

perspectives primarily provided by the voices of academics or through surveys, rather than from the variety of arts centre stakeholders. In this thesis the research has been designed to respond to this lack of stakeholder voice, allowing the voices of multiple arts centre stakeholders to be heard in order to create a more complex, detailed and nuanced picture of arts centres. This approach will now be discussed in the methodology chapter.

# Chapter 3 – Methodology

The methodological approach was designed to support the lines of inquiry of this thesis, including the overarching research question: How suitable is the arts centre model for effective arts and cultural provision? as well as the sub-questions what is the role of arts centres? how do arts centres operate? and how do key stakeholders perceive arts centres? This chapter outlines this process and provides a rationale for the decisions made for conducting empirical research on arts centres to answer these questions. The first section of this chapter discusses the research design, sampling and data collection of the approaches, which comprise a survey, external expert interviews, and case studies. The chapter then concludes with an overview of the data analysis approaches.

## Research design, sampling and data collection

This thesis sits within an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm, with the ontological belief that "reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing. What is of importance to know, then, is how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, perception, etc." (Glesne, 2011, p.8). This positionality is most suited to this research given my experience of working in an arts centre. Whilst employed at Burnie Arts & Function Centre (BAFC) I recognised that the varying stakeholders had different perspectives on the centre and its role and operations. These differing opinions were often a result of factors such as their connection to the centre, personal experiences, goals and professions. Hence to gain an in-depth understanding of arts centres the positionality of the research needs to be stated in order to allow these various voices to be acknowledged and included.

To fit within this research paradigm and to respond to the research questions a mixed methods approach was selected, which comprised a survey, external expert interviews, and four arts centre case studies. As mentioned in the introduction, the benefit of combining data that is numerically based (quantitative) while including personal voices (qualitative) is findings that provide greater richness (Creswell, 2015). Another reason for a mixed methods approach, was the capacity to include a "diversity of views" (Bryman, 2006,

p.106) and range of perspectives (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). As mentioned, from my previous experience, I had knowledge of key stakeholder groups associated with arts centres, including arts centre staff members, volunteers, local artists, local arts companies, local schools, touring artists/companies, funders, local councils, audiences, communities, and, more broadly, researchers and consultants. A singular methodological approach may not have had the ability to engage the diverse range of stakeholders that is central to my research; for example, a centre director would have a different level of willingness to participate in the research and different knowledge than an audience member might. Hence different approaches were needed to ensure participation, and an approach that seemed appropriate to the stakeholder's connection to the centre. The methods were selected to highlight and embrace the various perceptions and voices associated with arts centres.

A mixed methods approach also allowed both breadth and depth in knowledge. For instance, the survey and external expert interviews generated data that provided insight into the arts centre landscape in both England and Australia (breadth) and the four arts centre case studies revealed the nuances and complexities within the arts centre model (depth). The perspectives gained from these approaches provide a rich and comprehensive view of arts centres while also fitting with the interpretivist framework which allows an examination of the arts centre model from multiple perspectives and realities. The upcoming section outlines the considerations and justifications that were employed in the selection of the research methods, as well as the sampling decisions, data collection processes, challenges and learnings. Each approach took into consideration the research questions, the aims of breadth and depth and the desire for a detailed understanding of the arts centre model.

## Survey

The literature review revealed that surveys on arts centres had been conducted previously in England (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; MacKeith, 1996); however, the most recent country-wide arts centre survey was nearly 30 years ago. Hence the most recent insight into the various elements of the arts centre model in England is outdated. In the Australian setting, there are the biennial PAC Australia economics surveys and the Power PAC survey (APACA, 2011). However, these surveys are limited in scope. The biennial PAC Australia economics surveys focus on "comparison of the scale of operations, usage, and

financial activity" for arts centres and on providing advocacy material for PAC Australia (PAC Australia, 2022, p.8), and the Power PAC survey was limited to "programming practices, processes and venue management structures" (APACA, 2011, no pagination). Hence the previous arts centre surveys in each country fail to provide insight into the research questions of this thesis and reveal a gap in knowledge of arts centres and a lack of understanding of the role and operations, which encompasses its physical elements (theatre, restaurant, workshop space etc.), priorities, programme, audiences, stakeholders, funding, and management.

Gaining an overview of arts centres was important for this thesis, in order to provide breadth of understanding of the model which would complement the nuanced and in-depth findings from the case studies. By gaining insight into arts centres in both countries via a survey, a foundation was provided in which to compare case study findings as well as to reveal possible themes and characteristics of arts centres more broadly.

A survey was the most suitable approach to gain this insight into arts centres in both England and Australia because online surveys have the capacity to retrieve information from a large number of respondents across various locations, as well as being cost and time effective (Wright, 2005; Sue and Ritter, 2012; Veal and Burton, 2014). However, surveys do present limitations, as the approach relies upon self-reported data from respondents within arts centres. This can be problematic as it is dependent on the respondents' ability to accurately recall information and beholden to their propensity to exaggerate or under-report details (whether conscious or not) (Veal and Burton, 2014), and thus it does not provide the multi-perspectival approach desired in my research design. Yet, more positively, people completing the questionnaire who work within the arts centre have significant knowledge of the centre, which is hugely beneficial to understanding their specific arts centre, and surveys can provide a large enough sample for comparison between centres, which a small number of case studies cannot. It should be noted that the findings from this survey are not definitive in terms of their representation of the entire population, but rather evoke a broader overview of arts centres.

The previous arts centre surveys were consulted in designing the questionnaire. Essentially, questions that would assist in answering the research questions

were incorporated into the questionnaire for this thesis, and questions were added to meet this requirement (Appendix A). Overall, the questionnaire was designed according to Fowler and Cosenza's (2013) four characteristics that they considered essential for reliability and validity: pose understandable questions; pose questions that respondents have the knowledge to answer; pose questions worded suitably for respondents to answer; and pose questions that respondents would be comfortable answering.

In designing the questionnaire, I made the decision to incorporate a range of question types: dichotomous pre-coded, free text boxes, multiple response, matrix, and ranking. The choice of question type was based on the information desired from respondents, with considerations of ease of interpretation, minimal time, and effort. Examples can be seen in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Survey question types**

| Question Type | Benefits and justification for use | Question examples |
|---|---|---|
| Dichotomous pre-coded | <ul><li>Minimised effort and time to complete.</li><li>Only possible where there was no room for interpretation and only two possible responses. Primarily used for contextual questions.</li></ul> | Would you consider your organisation an arts centre? Yes/No |
| Free text box, open-ended | <ul><li>Gain greater understanding and depth from respondents.</li><li>Primarily used to understand participants' opinions, but also used for factual items which could not be predicted in pre-coded options.</li><li>Although time consuming to analyse, the detail provided outweighed this drawback.</li></ul> | How would you describe what an "arts centre" is? |
| Multiple response | <ul><li>Minimised effort and time to complete.</li><li>Only possible where there was a range of possible answers that could be predicted by the researcher.</li><li>Where appropriate an open-ended option was included as part of this type, for example, "Other" for the respondent to include additional factors which may not have been considered by the researcher or may be unique to the respondent's arts centre.</li></ul> | In a regular yearly programme, what other activities occur in your arts centre? Professional season (e.g. theatre season), Children and family specific events/programmes, Local community programme, Festivals, Exhibitions, etc. |
| Matrix, factual (Some required responses as percentages) | <ul><li>Allowed two different questions to be asked which may have the same response options. Combining the questions allows for ease of interpretation by the respondent and makes the survey shorter and clearer to understand.</li><li>Matrices were also used to assess the percentage of different elements of the arts centre. By using a matrix respondents could easily ensure that their answers would add to 100%.</li></ul> | In a regular yearly programme, which of the following art forms do you engage in? Please select all that are applicable and if you consider it to be amateur or professional work. |
| Ranking, opinion | <ul><li>Provided indication of importance and priority of a factor within an arts centre.</li></ul> | In order of importance, please rank the top three stakeholders of your arts centre. |

In designing the survey, I needed to be mindful not to impose my preconceptions of the definition of an arts centre. Therefore, I made the decision to design the questionnaire to allow arts and cultural venues to opt in if they considered themselves an arts centre, hence reducing researcher bias and revealing a greater understanding of the term 'arts centre' and its components. The first question therefore asked: Would you consider your organisation an arts centre? If the respondent stated 'yes', they were directed to the remainder of the questions, and if they responded 'no' they were asked the name of their organisation, their location, and how they would describe their understanding of an arts centre. This allowed respondents to opt in if they considered themselves an arts centre, whilst also gaining knowledge of the understanding of the term 'arts centre' from not only arts centres, but also arts and cultural venues (those that do not identify as an arts centre). The range of questions/themes can be seen in Appendix A.

Given that the questionnaire was designed for the respondent to complete themselves, additional measures needed to be taken to ensure ease of completion (Veal and Burton, 2014). For example, careful consideration was taken in the layout and wording. Before official distribution of the questionnaire, test questionnaires were completed by both those in the arts centre sector, the arts more generally and people with no connection to the arts and arts centres. This step of piloting the questionnaire and survey was considered vital to test the quality and as a result improve the response rate (Fan and Yan, 2010). Feedback from these tests resulted in minor wording changes to improve clarity and hopefully the accuracy of responses. The program Online Surveys (formerly BOS) was used to host the questionnaire owing to its ease of use (both in creation and participation), support from the university (who had a license for the program), and because the program met the ethical and data requirements necessary in this research.

One of the first considerations in distributing the surveys was to whom to send the questionnaire. It quickly became apparent that there was no comprehensive list of arts centres in either England or Australia, making it necessary to create a suitable distribution list. In this process, I drew on multiple sources. In England I

contacted the following organisations: The Theatre Trust; Future Arts Centres[20]; Arts Council England; UK Theatre; and Independent Theatre Council (ITC). Of these organisations, Theatres Trust, UK Theatre and ITC provided membership lists, which formed the basis of the distribution list in England. Membership lists were publicly available (online) and added to the overall distribution list from the following venue networks in England: House (southeast theatre network), Small Venues Network (SVN), The Donut Group, Venues North, and Lincolnshire One Venues (LOV). I combined these lists in an Excel spreadsheet and removed duplications to ensure that venues did not receive multiple emails. The data was then cleaned to remove individuals such as artists or producers, venues not based in England, and venues that had closed.

In Australia, the following organisations were contacted: PAC Australia, the performing arts networks in each state[21], the Regional Arts Australia member organisation[22], State Government arts departments (which were not a member of Regional Arts Australia), and the Australia Council[23]. Lists of potential arts centres were provided by the following organisations: Australia Council, PAC Australia, Arts Tasmania, and Creative Victoria. These lists were combined with other lists of arts and cultural venues publicly available on the internet, which included Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centre (VAPAC), South Australian Presenters Association, Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA), CircuitWest, Country Arts SA, Theatre Network Australia, Arts NT, and the National Touring Selector. As was the case for the English venue lists, these lists were examined for duplications and unsuitable items removed.

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[20] It should be noted that at the time of this research and compilation of the distribution list, Future Arts Centres did not have a publicly available list of centres. This is not the case at the time of submission of this thesis, with all members listed on their website: https://futureartscentres.org.uk/our-members/

[21] Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC), South Australian Presenters Association, Northern Australian Regional Performing Arts Centres Association (NARPACA), Circuit West and INAPAC.

[22] Regional Arts NSW, Arts NT, Arts Queensland, Country Arts SA, Arts Tasmania, Regional Arts Victoria, and Country Arts WA.

[23] The Australia Council for the Arts was rebranded as Creative Australia in 2023.

The questionnaire link was sent via email to 493 English venues, with nine bounce backs, and 375 venues in Australia, with two bounce backs. Maximising the response rate was a key consideration in the survey design and process, especially as low response rates are a key drawback of online surveys and commonly a result of survey fatigue or being considered junk mail (Veal and Burton, 2014). Recommendations by Best and Harrison (2013) to improve buy-in were followed, including communicating to potential respondents the aims, process, researcher's details, and how and why they are being contacted. Another approach to increasing response rates was asking for help in this project, as recommended by Mowen and Cialdini (1980) and Groves et al. (1992). Despite the fact that Porter (2004) questions the link between requests for help and responses, the introductory email and home page of the online survey included a statement requesting help with the aim of increasing response rates.

Given that the questionnaire was sent to arts venues, it would be expected that there would be a level of interest in the topic, hopefully encouraging increased response rates. Authority was another factor considered to improve response rates. For example, Porter (2004, p.8) and Groves et al. (1992, p.483) assert that respondents are more likely to participate if the survey is from an authority that they consider to be "legitimate". The connection to the University of Leeds, which was clearly outlined in the questionnaire design and approach, may have aided in the project being considered legitimate and independent, as Fan and Yan (2010) note that academic institutions have a higher response rate than commercial researchers. However, the impact of this perceived legitimacy is difficult to ascertain.

Another strategy to improve response rates, and cited as crucial for successful online surveys, is follow-ups (Burton, 2000a). The initial email containing the questionnaire link was sent to potential respondents in November 2017 and was followed-up by another email in December 2017, with a final email in early 2018. In total, 261 responses were received, a response rate of 30%. Sixty respondents did not identify as an arts centre and 201 responses identified as arts centres. The breakdown of respondents (201) was 100 in England and 101 in Australia.

Based on their research on college student surveys, Fosnacht et al. (2017) assert that a 20-25% response rate is needed for a sample of less than 500; artsQueensland suggest in a research factsheet that a 30% response rate is considered average for online surveys, whereas 40% is good (artsQueensland, 2020). However, in social sciences it is more commonly recognised that there is no firm rule on what constitutes a suitable response rate (Denscombe, 2007). It should be further noted that the use of a high response rate as an indication of the success of a survey should be considered carefully, given that some of the literature suggests that non-response bias is similar in studies with samples with high response rates and those with lower response rates, and that there are other elements which can impact bias, including research design (Hendra and Hill, 2019). Fosnacht et al. (2017) go further in suggesting respondent counts may be a more suitable metric to consider than response rates. However, despite the questioning of the suitability of using response rates as a measure of success, response rates are still a commonly accepted method of measurement and indication of quality (Fosnacht et al., 2017), so the challenge remains as to whether the response rate in this thesis is acceptable.

Hence, in order to assess the success of the response rate, I examined the list of non-respondents, as suggested by Denscombe (2007), and there did not appear to be any glaring omissions to the sample of arts centres that had responded to the research. For example, there were respondents from both countries, with a range of management structures and varying understandings of arts centre roles. I concluded that the respondents did present an acceptable cross-section of arts centres, as they aided in providing information to respond to the research questions. Having said this, it should be noted that this thesis is interested in understanding the role of arts centres, and within that framework, their complexity and diversity. Therefore, this research does not claim to provide an overview of every single type of arts centre, but rather provides an indication of arts centres and their roles and characteristics.

## External expert interviews

To complement the survey, interviews were conducted with external experts. Classifying who could be considered 'an expert' is commonly debated in the literature (Bogner et al., 2009; Littig and Pöchhacker, 2014; Bogner et al., 2018; Döringer, 2021). This thesis holds the understanding that experts possess specialist knowledge, understanding of the workings of organisations, and ability

to understand nuances in the field (Littig and Pöchhacker, 2014). The term *external expert* is utilised in this thesis, as the research is concerned with experts who do not physically work within an arts centre, because these interviews aim to gain an understanding of arts centres and the landscape more broadly and the arts centre employees' perspectives are included in the case studies. These external expert interviews were a way to explore the arts centre model and landscape more generally, as well as to gain a perspective on the model beyond the lens of arts centre employees (as provided by the survey).

There has been a shift away from the value placed on expert interviews (Turner, 2001; Bogner et al., 2018), especially given that people have become "experts in challenging expertise" (Bogner et al., 2018, p.655). In keeping with this concept, although an individual may be classified as an expert in this thesis, the analysis does not weigh their opinions as more valid than individuals who may be interviewed as part of the case studies. Instead, in this thesis, interviews with external experts represent just one valid and acknowledged way to contribute to the rich tapestry of voices sought to gain a comprehensive insight into the arts centre model. The approach was not only a useful tool to provide a wider perspective, but also a way to address the paucity of arts centre literature, as the approach is considered a way to gain insight into an area lacking in research or in which there is a lack of understanding (Littig and Pöchhacker, 2014).

In terms of the interview type, I made the decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with the external experts. Semi-structured interviews involve a set list of questions, but they are open ended, allowing greater flexibility in the interviewing process and giving the interviewee the opportunity to elaborate on topics and issues (Denscombe, 2007) which may not have been considered by the interviewer. Semi-structured interviews are the most common interview type for expert interviews (Bogner et al., 2018), perhaps because they allow interviewees to express what they see as important (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Brinkmann, 2020); enable interviewees to use their own words (Esterberg, 2002); grant flexibility to shift questioning and follow up depending on interviewee responses and what they see as important (Brinkmann, 2020), and allow the key themes to be covered by the interviewer.

The semi-structured interviews were steered via the use of an interview guide which covered the themes detailed in Table 3.2. The complete interview guide can be accessed in Appendix B.

**Table 3.2: External expert interview guide themes**

| Theme | Data sought from each theme |
|---|---|
| Interviewee background | Gain understanding of the expertise of the interviewee and put interviewee at ease. |
| Arts centre model – Definition, components, operations and roles | Gain understanding of experts' opinions on what an arts centre is (definition, components, operations) and the role of arts centres. |
| Arts centre operations and perceptions | Gain understanding of experts' views on the arts centre brand and how they are perceived (including the impact of diversity). |
| The future of arts centres | Gain insight into the experts' vision of arts centres: what could, or should arts centres be in the future? And are they a suitable model to present arts and culture? |

In selecting the experts for this component of the research, snowball sampling was utilised, where "the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (Noy, 2008, p.330). Hence experts were identified via referrals and recommendations received while conducting the research. The selected interviewees, listed in Table 3.3, met the criteria of specialist knowledge, having worked professionally with arts centres, yet not working in an arts centre. Potential expert interviewees were invited to participate in the research via email. The initial email contained detailed information about the research project and specific information about what their participation would involve. Fortunately, all the experts approached agreed to take part in the research.

**Table 3.3: External expert interview selection based on criteria**

| Individual position | Organisation | Organisation Type | Specialist arts centre knowledge | Country |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Co-Chair[24] | Future Arts Centres | Network/ Membership | Arts centre network management | England |
| Coordinator | SVN | Network/ Membership – promote small theatres/arts centres to touring companies and audiences in Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire | Arts centre network management | England |
| Administrator | Arts Development UK | Network/ Membership – arts development in local communities | Network management – working directly with arts centres | England |
| Consultant | Self employed | Self-employed consultant, previous arts centre Director and previous NAAC Chair | Consultant and Researcher – working directly with arts centres. Previous work experience | England |
| Executive Director | PAC Australia | Network/ Membership | Arts centre network management | Australia |

[24] Although the person in this position also manages an arts centre, they were interviewed based on their role as a network director.

| CEO | Regional Arts Victoria | Membership – Peak body regional arts in Victoria | Network management – working directly with arts centres | Australia |
| Executive Director | Regional Arts Australia | Peak body – National voice for arts in regional Australia | Advocate for regional arts – working directly with arts centres | Australia |
| Executive Director | VAPAC | Network/ Membership | Arts centre network management | Australia |
| Consultant | Self employed | Self-employed consultant, previous arts centre Director and previous VAPAC Chair | Consultant and Researcher – working directly with arts centres. Previous work experience | Australia |

In undertaking this method, the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee is noted. Plesner (2011) refers to this as "studying up", where the interviewee (the expert) is aware of their knowledge and position, and in some cases may take over the conversation or be patronising to the interviewer (Bogner et al., 2018). In this thesis, in all but one expert interview, the power imbalance was not an issue, perhaps because as an interviewer, I came to the interview with a degree of knowledge, both through research but also work experience. This knowledge may have positioned me as a "quasi expert" (Pfadenhauer, 2009), which Pfadenhauer (2009) and Trinczek (2009) consider essential for expert interview success and useful for interviews aiming to elicit "useful information" and "facts" (Bogner and Menz, 2009, p.59). Not only may my experience of working in arts centres have addressed the power imbalance, but also my knowledge base may have enabled experts to speak more freely and in more detail about the complexities (Walter, 1994, cited in Christmann, 2009).

However, one external expert interview did prove challenging. Despite the interview questions being designed to elicit the experts' individual understandings of definitions and concepts, one expert saw this approach as

being underprepared with naïve questions. In some cases it has been argued that a degree of naivety can result in the "most interesting and productive answers" (Bogner et al., 2018, p.661) and can challenge the interviewee to respond to questions that are unexpected and may draw out points of view (Walter, 1994, cited in Christmann, 2009). But this was not the case in this instance, as the interviewee also demonstrated what Abels and Behrens (2009, p.144) would describe as the iceberg effect, a "disinterest and inert willingness to give out information". Literature suggests this behaviour may occur where a younger researcher is not viewed as an equal (Trinczek, 2009), or perhaps being a woman interviewing an older expert man (Abels and Behrens, 2009). Regardless of the motives behind the comments and behaviour, the experience taught me important lessons in my interviewer learning and development, encouraging me to build my resilience and to be prepared for similar behaviour or questioning in future interviews. From that interview on, in my introductory briefing to interviewees I emphasised that I was interested in the interviewee's perspective and understandings personally, rather than a dictionary definition.

In terms of conducting the interview, ideally the interviews would have taken place face-to-face, the preferred method for interviews (Bogner et al., 2018). However, given the various locations of interviewees, and time and budgetary constraints, this was an impossibility. Instead, interviews were conducted via Skype, using the video function. In instances where the internet connection was interrupted, only audio was used. Audio interviews created additional challenges with a lack of verbal cues and eye contact; thus a degree of engagement was lost between interviewer and interviewee (Bogner et al., 2018). Upon reflection, the iceberg effect external expert interview previously discussed had to be conducted via audio only, which may have been a contributing factor to the challenges of the interview.

## Case studies

In deciding upon a case study approach, the work of Tight (2017) was consulted. Tight (2017) explores a range of definitions in the academic literature and identifies the consistent case study characteristics: investigation into a specific or number of cases; the case is complex, holistic, and bounded; and the study is conducted in the case's natural context.

These characteristics provide the opportunity for in-depth insight into a phenomenon, allowing description (Dixon et al., 1987), "rich detail" (Burton, 2000, p.225), multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009), and the flexibility to incorporate a range of research techniques (Gummesson, 1991; Yin, 2003; de Vaus, 2005; Gerring, 2007; Simons, 2009). These benefits strongly align with the aforementioned aims and requirements of this research design. The work of Yin (2018) supports the inclusion of case studies in this research. Yin (2018) contends that cases studies are suited for research questions focused on 'how' or 'why', in a contemporary setting whereby the researcher has no or little control, all of which align with this research. It should be recognised that case studies are commonly critiqued in terms of their generalisability beyond the specific case (Burton, 2000b). However, given that this thesis is interested in the diversity, nuances and complexities within the arts centre model rather than comparison and generalisability, this potential drawback of the case study approach is not a concern.

The in-depth understanding was achieved by four case studies - two in England and two in Australia. It should be noted that case studies were conducted in two countries not to compare and contrast arts centres in each country *per se*, but rather to allow a richer and broader understanding of the arts centre model than if the research was limited to one country. As touched on in the introduction, England and Australia were selected because they have similarities in terms of arts and cultural policy debates and history of the arts centre movement. These contextual similarities minimised the variables in exploring arts centres in two different countries, allowing the research to respond to the research questions. Also, case studies in England and Australia also seemed a good fit as literature exists, albeit somewhat limited, providing a foundation to expand knowledge and update the understanding of the arts centre model. Additionally, given that England is often cited as the birthplace of the arts centre movement, it seemed fitting to explore the arts centre model in this historical context. Finally, being based in England to undertake my PhD meant easier access and allowed the possibility of a physical presence at the centres. I also had personal knowledge of and access to arts centres in Australia, as a result of my previous history of employment in an arts centre.

The decision to conduct four case studies was in accordance with Yin's (2018) suggestion of at least two case studies to increase analytic outcomes and avoid the issues associated with a single-case study (for example, impact of results

when relying on a singular case, the importance of case selection, and problems if research does not go to plan). Four case studies also addressed the manageability concern of case study research (Yin, 2018), was do-able in terms of research resources (such as time and finances), and was a suitable number to shed light on the arts centre model.

Unlike the survey and external expert interviews, which focused on arts centres in their wider context, the case studies provided an in-depth and nuanced understanding of arts centres. In order to gain this detailed insight, the data sources needed to be identified. Given that this thesis sits within an interpretivist paradigm and the belief that different people have varying realities and perceptions, the case study methods needed to incorporate the various voices associated with arts centres. Drawing upon my experience of working in an arts centre I was able to create a list of possible people to include in this research: internal stakeholders (board members, staff, volunteers, local artists, local arts companies, local schools, touring artists/companies, funders, local council); community members; and audience members. This list was discussed with colleagues from the arts world, and I was open to other suggestions from the case study arts centre directors or other research participants. The inclusion of various stakeholder voices not only fit with my experience and interpretivist paradigm, but it is also something that has been neglected in previous research. For example, in Hutchison and Forrester's (1987) case study, interviews were conducted with staff and committee members only; beyond the survey component, MacKeith (1996) only spoke with the arts centre director, local arts board member, and in a couple of cases another staff member. These previous case studies lack the holistic, complex, multi-perspectival and contemporary understanding of the arts centre model sought in this thesis.

Once the range of voices was identified, the most suitable methods to elicit information from each stakeholder group (such as audience member or staff member) needed to be determined. The method that appeared to be the best fit was interviews, as the approach elicits both factual and personal information (Yin, 2018) whilst also allowing "people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences" (Denscombe, 2014, p.175) and "participants' relativist perspectives" (Yin, 2018, p.118) to emerge. The interview approaches varied depending on stakeholder group.

In addition to the interviews with stakeholders, two further methods were utilised as part of the case studies: observation and document analysis. Observation is an important inclusion, as this research recognises that individuals have varying perspectives; hence by personally observing the arts centres I could gain additional insight into the centre and gain valuable context for interviewee comments and perceptions. Document analysis was also crucial in terms of the provision of context, with websites and publicly available data being reviewed prior to the interviews and observations to gain important background and historical knowledge. The combination of approaches presents a more holistic perspective of the arts centre case studies.

The case studies themselves were selected based on specific criteria and characteristics that are summarised in Table 3.4. It was important for the case studies to meet two key predetermined criteria: being regionally/rurally located, and being the sole or primary arts and cultural provider in the town/region (reminiscent of the ACGB's (1945) ideal for arts centres – a venue for a town which cannot sustain multiple arts and cultural offerings, such as a theatre or opera house etc.). Meeting these criteria allowed the research to focus on the impact and role of the arts centre irrespective of any other formal arts and cultural providers located nearby, hence creating a greater opportunity to identify relationships and impact. Regionality was gauged via the use of the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023) and the Rural Urban Classification in the English setting (HM Government, 2021). The case study selection not only relied upon commonality of these two criteria, but also considered key characteristics and actively sought diversity in these additional characteristics.

The characteristics or differences that were sought in the case studies were presence or lack of a formal mission statement, various management structures, various years of centre establishment, and various building histories (see Table 3.4). These characteristics were selected because they aligned with the research questions. For example, the presence or lack of presence of a mission statement taps into questions surrounding the role of the arts centre; the management structure relates to the operations of the centre; the history and building recognises the importance of context in case study research (Mabry, 2008; Cleland et al., 2021) and that it is this context that provides "dynamism and complexity" (Mabry, 2008, p.217) as well as potentially impacting perceptions of the centre. Differences were sought in these characteristics to reflect the

diversity within the arts centre model. The online survey was instrumental in identifying these characteristics, and the selected case studies were Bridgwater Arts Centre, Junction, Stratford Courthouse, and Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre.

**Table 3.4: Case study selection criteria and characteristics**

| Case Study | Sole/ Primary provider in city/ town* | Region-ality* | Formal Mission statement | Manage-ment | Estab-lished | Building history |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bridgwater Arts Centre (England) | Yes | Regional | Yes | Company limited by guarantee | 1946 | Previous Georgian House (Built 1723) |
| Junction (England) | Yes | Regional | Yes | Local authority | 2009 | Purpose built |
| Stratford Courthouse (Australia) | Yes | Rural | No | Private owner | 2009 | Previous Courthouse (Built 1885) |
| Devonport Entertain-ment and Convention Centre (Australia) | Yes | Regional | Yes | Local authority | 2001 | Previous Townhall, new building opened Sept 2018 |

*Selection criteria for the case study arts centres

Beyond these criteria and characteristics, an initial phone call was conducted with the centre directors of potential case study arts centres. This was not only to gain the directors' interest, but also to facilitate understanding of the centres more specifically. The conversations revealed diversity in the potential case studies, particularly regarding the arts centres' lifecycle and current challenges and focuses. These conversations revealed the following:

- Bridgwater Arts Centre appeared to be ***challenged by its past***, being the first arts centre established with the ACGB's support in 1946. The arts centre's history and legacy appeared to bring significant challenges and implications in terms of the management, operations and programming of the centre.

- Junction and Stratford Courthouse were both experiencing ***new beginnings***. Although established eight years ago, at the time of the interviews Junction was establishing itself in a purpose-built complex following the closure of a theatre located elsewhere in town, which had operated for 15 years. Stratford was being run by a family who was new to town and revamping the centre, following the venue being a theatre between 1993-2007. Both provided arts and cultural events after a legacy of arts provision in a different format/context.

- Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre was at a point of ***transition***. The centre was being combined with other services – library, tourist information, council offices, government services and gallery – as part of an economic development project, which included a major rebrand and new infrastructure that proved contentious within the town.

**Internal stakeholder interviews**

The internal stakeholders were identified as those who professionally engage with the arts centres. Hence they are not only individuals who are employed by the arts centre, but also those who have a professional working relationship with the centre; for example board members, staff, volunteers, local artists, local arts companies, local schools, touring artists/companies, funders, and local council. It is important to clarify this terminology as the case studies also include community and audience interviews, who, while considered stakeholders, do not professionally engage with the centres. As was the case for the external expert interviews, semi-structured interviews were selected as the method for engaging internal stakeholders to provide depth through their open-ended nature.

The interview guides were designed based on themes informed by the literature review (the complete interview guides can be found at Appendix C). However, the guides were adapted to each stakeholder group, allowing interviewees to speak to what they knew rather than responding to broad questions that may not be relevant to their expertise or experience (see Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5: Internal stakeholder interview guide themes**

| | | Stakeholders | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Centre Director | Staff | Board Member | Funder | Volunteer | Local Charity/ Organisation | Touring Artists/ Groups | Artist |
| **Themes** | Interviewee background | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Interviewee personal connection or value of arts centre | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Arts centre model (not case study-specific) | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Arts centre background | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | Relationship with arts centre | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Arts centre role | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Arts centre operations – Programming, audiences, marketing | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| | Arts centre operations – Difficult brand | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Summary – Final wrap-up question | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Although in the interviews I managed to ask all the questions I planned, it became clear while carrying out the research that there was an overlap, as interviewee responses often answered multiple questions. Although this wasn't necessarily a problem, as semi-structured interviews allow adaptability, it did demand that I, as the interviewer, be more alert to the need to change the sequence of questions whilst also ensuring all the topics from the interview guide were covered, and at the same time providing space for unexpected themes to arise.

In terms of sampling for the internal stakeholder interviews, it was acknowledged that it was impossible to interview all stakeholders of the case study arts centres, given time and budgetary restrictions. Therefore, instead it was important to

ensure that key internal stakeholder groups were represented. As a starting point arts centre directors were asked to provide a list of all staff members and recommended stakeholders to be interviewed for this thesis. This gatekeeper role had potential limitations, such as interviewees feeling obliged/forced to participate and hence influencing responses (Byrne, 2004), and the possible resentment of interviewees (Wanat, 2008). In response to this challenge it was made clear, in both in the introductory email and in person, that they were under no obligation to participate, and the centre director would not be informed of their decision not to participate.

Selection bias, where a sample is not representative of the population being studied (Hill, 1971), was another concern when positioning the centre directors as gatekeepers, as I was guided by their recommendations for interviewees. To combat this potential influence of the centre directors, whether conscious or not, document analysis was used (which is discussed shortly) to ensure no key stakeholder groups were omitted from the lists. Also, in the interviews with stakeholders, I asked the interviewees about any other stakeholders that may have been missed. This resulted in three additional stakeholders being interviewed who had not been suggested by the centre directors. The number of interviewees for each stakeholder group in each case study is depicted in Table 3.6. It should be noted that although interviewees are classified into specific stakeholder groups, the individual often drifted between classifications: for instance, an interviewee ran an arts organisation but was also an artist and volunteer. For ease of interpretation, stakeholders were classified in the primary role they undertook in relation to the arts centre.

**Table 3.6: Internal stakeholders per case study**

| | | Internal stakeholders | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Board Member | Staff | Volunteer | Local Artist | Local Arts Company | Local Organisation | Commissioned Artist | Touring Artist/ Company | Funder |
| **Case Studies** | Bridgwater Arts Centre | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | | | | 2 | 1 |
| | Stratford Courthouse | | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | | | 2 | |
| | Devonport Entertain-ment and Convention Centre | | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | | | 2 | 3 |
| | Junction | | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

In these interviews, I adopted the advice of Wanat (2008) to find commonality with interviewees to encourage cooperation. This was achieved by revealing my previous work experience of working in an arts centre. This admission appeared to automatically create a bond with interviewees, as it showed I had knowledge of arts centres and could readily relate to their responses. Although my background may have put interviewees at ease, as the researcher I constantly felt the pull "between the need to maintain a friendly, conversational atmosphere and the desire not to influence the interviewee's responses" (Veal and Burton, 2014, p.224). In an attempt to manage this tension, I embraced silence, allowing interviewees to speak rather than being tempted to ask leading questions and influence responses. Initially this was an approach that felt uncomfortable, but as the interviews progressed and my confidence in interviewing increased this became more natural.

Conducting most of these interviews in person was another way in which I gained interviewee "trust, confidentiality, and contextual richness" (Brinkmann,

2020, p.444). Being physically present for one week at each location signalled to participants that I was truly interested in understanding their arts centre and communities, which was positively received (as communicated via verbal feedback) and enabled me to build trust and relationships with the gatekeepers, arts centres, and communities. However, attempting to conduct all the case study interviews in one week was challenging: as Yin (2018) states, fieldwork can be both emotionally and mentally taxing. Wherever possible, I attempted to spread out the interviews to avoid becoming overtired and losing the ability to actively listen. Despite the fatigue at the end of each day, I believe that the research benefited from the interviews being conducted in close succession because my mind was completely absorbed and immersed in the research, and my questions and probes reflected my connection to the research.

The interviews themselves were conducted at the arts centres in a private space allowing confidentiality, with the exception of Devonport[25]. However, interviewees were given the option to have the interview elsewhere (e.g. a café) if there were concerns about being able to speak freely, given they were at the venue where they had a relationship. Some interviews were conducted online given differences in location or challenges with availability, especially for touring artists, and primarily these interviews took place on Skype, using the video function. As mentioned previously, when the internet connection was interrupted, only audio was used.

## Community interviews

The community interviews demanded an alternative approach from semi-structured interviews because community members may have less or no knowledge of, interest in, or connection to the case study arts centre, and as non-professionals they may be less willing to give their unpaid time. Therefore, intercept interviews, also commonly referred to as street surveys, mall surveys or mall intercept interviews, were utilised (Bush and Hair, 1985; Hornik and Ellis, 1988). These interviews aim to question customers in natural surroundings (Shani et al., 2009), allow information to be elicited in a less obtrusive way, and are a "straightforward and direct method for gathering data on public perceptions or other locally relevant information" (Flint et al., 2016, p.106). This approach is

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[25] Owing to construction, interviews were held at the Devonport City Council offices where the arts centre staff were working.

common in consumer behaviour research and visitor surveys (Roose, 2007), as well as arts event audience analysis (Cohen et al., 2003; Everitt, 2009).

For the community intercept interviews I stood in a public place and approached people, asking them to answer four questions about the case study arts centre. Following consent, which was an essential step in all the interviews and survey in this thesis, the four questions were asked:

1. Do you ever go to the arts centre? Why/Why not?

2. How important is this arts centre to you?

3. What role does this arts centre play within the broader community? How important is it to [INSERT TOWN]?

4. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence, what would you say?

The focus of the interview questions was on understanding the interviewees' connection to the arts centre and their perception of its role. These voices add to the tapestry of understanding of the arts centre model in this thesis. Although this method appeared to be the most suitable for eliciting information from community members, the approach itself was the most challenging method within this thesis. The challenges included issues regarding location, sampling and avoidance, which will now be discussed.

Initially I made the decision to conduct community interviews outside the arts centre, as it seemed appropriate to ask people about the venue they were passing. However, this was problematic. For example, in Bridgwater (England), the arts centre is in a residential street with little foot traffic, meaning the ideal condition of conducting interviews in a "high traffic" location to ensure access to many people in a limited time (Ayala and Elder, 2011, p.S73) was not possible. Similarly, with Stratford (Australia) being a small town, there was little foot traffic; and in Devonport (Australia) the venue was under construction, hampering the option to be positioned outside the venue itself. Therefore, to navigate these challenges, with the exception of Junction (Goole, England), case study community interviews took place beyond the arts centre's immediate vicinity. New locations were based on where there was mass foot traffic. In Bridgwater,

surveys occurred on the high street (a few minutes from the arts centre); in Stratford people were interviewed in the local shops as well as at another community event (Stratford Historical Society and Museum); and in Devonport people were interviewed in the local shops and along a popular walking track. Using different approaches to suit the location and receptiveness of the community was deemed necessary to obtain responses. However, the potential impact this may have had on the sample is recognised. For example, not all members of the community, or its representatives, may frequent the high street or a popular walking track, thus limiting the reach and representation of this method.

In an attempt to mitigate some of these sampling issues, I visited the community interview locations on different days at differing times, to try to increase the diversity of the sample. Quota sampling, as suggested by Veal and Burton, (2014), was considered as an attempt to counteract the potential of limited samples in intercept surveys, yet the limited number of willing respondents (which will shortly be discussed) made this type of sampling difficult. It should be noted that these sampling challenges are not unique to this research, but are inherent in the method itself.

The key factor that made sampling challenging was respondent avoidance, which was evidenced particularly in the Bridgwater Arts Centre case study by the low numbers of community interviews (see Table 3.7). In this location in particular, passers-by were reluctant to take part in the research and quickly avoided eye contact upon being approached. This avoidance was not unexpected, as taking part in such surveys can be time consuming and may involve topics which may not be comfortable for the interviewee to discuss (Hornik and Ellis, 1988). As the researcher, I made various attempts to increase participation and reduce avoidance for the intercept interviews. For example, I decided to stop carrying a clipboard to record participant responses as I felt that this may deter people from speaking to me. Instead, notes were taken on my phone after each interview. This decision was also reached in view of the importance of a "friendly and approachable" interviewer (Kolb, 2008, p.147), and the visibility of a clipboard signals 'survey', rather than 'friendly and approachable', in the first instance. It is uncertain as to whether this decision made an impact, especially given that the "appearance and approach of the surveyor will not modify the "avoidance" behavior [sic], "avoiders" will decline to respond under any circumstances" (Keillor and Sutton 1993, p.54).

**Table 3.7: Community interviews per case study**

| Case Study | Community Interviews |
|---|---|
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | 2 |
| Stratford Courthouse | 9 |
| Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre | 11 |
| Junction | 10 |

Despite the challenges of this method, it did contribute to providing a range of voices to understand the arts centre model (see Table 3.7). It was important to hear from people who may not be directly involved in the arts centre, which reduced a favourable bias (which counteracts the commonly favourable viewpoint of audience members, as discussed shortly) and helped in understanding the perception of the role of the arts centre in the community. If this research was to be undertaken again, and if resources allowed, I would dedicate additional time to conducting community interviews to improve the numbers.

## Audience interviews

Interviews with audience members were conducted in the same way as the community interviews: using intercept interviews. However, potential audience interviewees were approached in the foyer of the arts centre either before, after, or at the intermission of an event or performance, or in some instances in the event space itself (e.g. gallery space).[26]

Given that audience members were generally more engaged with the arts centre than those participating in the community interviews, there was an opportunity to gain more insight into the working and operations of the arts centre. Therefore,

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[26] One exception was the Devonport audience interviews, which were conducted at a theatre in Ulverstone (a town 20km from Devonport), as the Devonport arts centre was using this space whilst the new premises was under construction.

the audience interview guide incorporated the community interview questions, as well as three additional questions:

1. What do you think the arts centre is trying to do for, and provide to, the community?

2. Are they succeeding?

3. Do you feel the arts centre gives the community what it wants? Follow up with: Do you think this is all they should do?

These questions seemed to provide the appropriate springboard for audience members to share their perceptions of the arts centre.

In terms of the audience interviews, deciding which events to attend was often dictated by what was on at the arts centre in the week that I was visiting the case study towns to conduct research. The events attended to conduct the audience interviews can be found in Table 3.8.

**Table 3.8: Events attended to conduct audience interviews**

| Arts Centre | Event 1 | Event 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | Theatre performance | Knitting group |
| Stratford Courthouse | String Quartet | Time in café |
| Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre | Music tribute band | - |
| Junction | Art exhibition | Cinema |

Where possible, different types of events were visited in each location to ensure a range of responses, as recommended by Fage-Butler (2020). Unfortunately, during the weeks of data collection in both Stratford and Devonport, only one event was presented. This restriction of data collection was carefully considered as a necessary compromise as these weeks were confirmed by the gatekeepers of the arts centres (the arts centre directors), and I felt that the availability of internal stakeholders for the semi-structured interviews took priority over an

additional event that would allow more audience surveys. In the case of Stratford, I spent a couple of sessions sitting in the café associated with the centre to conduct further interviews, and while not formally attending an event, the respondents still frequented the building. Unfortunately, this was impossible in Devonport, as the centre was in a state of construction and no café space or public meeting space was available. The total number of audience interviews can be seen in Table 3.9. If this research had greater resources, conducting more audience interviews at various events would have been preferable in order to gain a greater insight into the perspectives of audience members.

**Table 3.9: Audience interviews per case study**

| Case Study | Audience Interviews |
|---|---|
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | 8 |
| Stratford Courthouse | 4 |
| Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre | 6 |
| Junction | 13 |

The interviews with audience members were met with far less resistance than the community interviews. However, this willingness to be involved carried a higher risk of bias. This bias is often seen in the fact that audience evaluations yield primarily positive results (Johanson and Glow, 2015b) and that those who willingly undertake audience surveys are "the most supportive members of the audience and those keen to make their views known, sometimes complainants" (Tomlinson, 2017, no pagination). Despite the possibility of bias, this approach was still deemed useful for this thesis. As was the case for the community interviews, the goal of the audience interviews was to gather the voices of key stakeholders with a unique perspective to explore arts centres and provide a more holistic understanding of the arts centre case studies, rather than to be representative of a particular stakeholder group.

**Observation**

Observation was used for three purposes in this thesis: to gain insight into the research questions; to compare to findings from other methods (for example, interviews with stakeholders etc); and to provide context or "local colour" (Veal and Burton, 2014, p.204). The observation approach adopted in this thesis was

*participation in the normal setting* (Denscombe, 2007). This approach allowed me to be known to the arts centre staff (which was essential due to their gatekeeper role); however, I was not known to the general public. It was important not to be known by users of the arts centre (besides staff) to avoid influencing behaviour and to allow me the opportunity to observe the behaviour, interactions and use of the arts centre by the general public.

Not only did I conduct observation as a participant in the normal setting, but also in the form of *participation as observer*. In the participation as observer approach the researcher's role is known by all and the researcher may be considered a 'shadow' sitting in on events or occurrences (Denscombe, 2007). These events included attending a choir rehearsal and theatre group meeting. The core benefit of observing in this manner was that I was allowed access to settings normally closed to outsiders, providing an additional level of insight into the operations and role of the arts centre.

The observation sessions were conducted at the case study locations between formal interviews, meaning they took place at different times and days of the week. This variety may have assisted in gaining a broader sample of people at the arts centres, although it should be noted that this method is concerned with providing another layer of understanding to the arts centre model as a whole, rather than generalising. Attending the observation sites between interviews also meant that information ascertained from other research methods could be considered, providing additional focus to the observation sessions. For example, in one arts centre various internal stakeholder interviewees mentioned the confusion surrounding the use of the building. Hence, I ensured I was positioned to hear all the visitor questions in order to gain insight into the confusion surrounding the role of the venue.

Seeing how the public used and behaved in the arts centre provided insight into the research questions by enabling me to witness firsthand the role the centre may play for audiences and communities, as well as being able to observe how each arts centre operated. I spent typically between 1-3 hours at a time in each observation site within the arts centre buildings themselves. The range of observational sites I spent time in can be seen in Table 3.10. The exception was in Devonport owing to construction, and if this research were to be undertaken again and time allowed, conducting the interviews at Devonport Entertainment

and Convention Centre once the build was completed would have been preferred. I also conducted observations at the events/performances that I attended, as documented in Table 3.8.

**Table 3.10: Observation sites**

| Case Study | Observation Sites |
| --- | --- |
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | Exhibition space, the foyer, choir rehearsal |
| Stratford Courthouse | The café, attended theatre group meeting |
| Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre | N/A |
| Junction | Exhibition space, the café |

In terms of how I conducted the observation sessions, initially upon my first observation session, I felt overwhelmed in terms of where to focus my attention. Therefore, following this session I created an observation schedule, as is often done for systematic observation (Denscombe, 2007), which can be seen in Table 3.11. These items were not rigid, allowing flexibility for each arts centre, and served as a prompt, creating consistency in approach across the arts centres.

**Table 3.11: Observation schedule**

| Observation Prompt | Considerations of Each Prompt | Link to Research Questions |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Description of the physical site | Building, size, age, aesthetics, condition, lighting, colours, materials, music | Context<br><br>How do arts centres operate? |
| Information to general public | Posters, displays, monitors (consider info type, wording, colours, design) | How do arts centres operate?<br><br>What is the role of arts centres? |
| People in the sites | Numbers, staff, demographics | How do arts centres operate?<br><br>What is the role of arts centres? |
| Interactions | Between staff, between visitors, between staff and visitors | How do arts centres operate? |
| Use of sites | Activities and behaviours of people in the site | How do arts centres operate?<br><br>What is the role of arts centres? |
| Overall feeling | Atmosphere, vibe | Context |

In responding to these prompts and additional occurrences in each observation session, I used an observation protocol where for each session I took a notebook with pages divided into two sections: one section for descriptions and the other for reflections, as suggested by Creswell (2003). It was useful to separate the observations in this way, so that in the first instance I could attempt to be objective in terms of what I saw, and then reflect further thinking about the feelings, impressions, and ideas. Despite making these notes, the significant time between the observations and writing the thesis made recall a challenge. However, photographs were also taken at the time of the observations, which assisted with recall and making sense of the notes.

Undertaking observation required a high degree of reflection, including consideration of the potential impact of my "personal experiences, personal beliefs and social values" (Denscombe, 2007, p.69) on my research and analysis. Being the research instrument (Esterberg, 2002), I had to be mindful of not projecting my knowledge and assumptions onto the case studies. To do this, I constantly interrogated my reflections of each observation session to try to minimise researcher influence. Despite these attempts at self-reflection, the method is acknowledged as being intertwined and reliant on the researcher's interpretation and 'self', making pure objectivity or removing oneself from the equation an impossibility. Despite the challenges of this method, observations were still used within this thesis to provide context and greater detail. Again, findings are not claimed to be definitive, representative or generalisable, but rather another dimension to provide further insight into the arts centre model.

## Document analysis

Document analysis is the "systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p.27). Document analysis is particularly valuable in the case study setting (Bowen, 2009) and was used in this thesis as a method to provide context and insight into the research questions, a useful tool to cross-check or complement information received from other methods (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018; Morgan, 2021), and to provide additional research data (Bowen, 2009). Obtaining data via this method was beneficial in terms of time efficiency (Bowen, 2009; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), as well as documents commonly being readily available, stability of the data, and minimal cost (Bowen 2009). However, document analysis requires careful consideration as to the author, purpose and audience of documents, as these factors may indicate a bias and influence findings.

In this thesis, document analysis was utilised at different stages of the research process. Three key document types were used: arts centre websites, arts centre publications, and media and online information. Documents were selected based on providing data that would contribute to answering the research questions or the provision of context. Examples of the range of documents utilised, including their link to the research questions, can be found in Appendix D. Further details about the specific source types and the data analysis process used are now discussed.

Collecting data from the case study arts centre websites was crucial for this research and was vital preparation for fieldwork (Yin, 2018). Not only were the websites used to build an understanding of the arts centre and provide context, but they were also crucial at various points throughout the research project to check eligibility of the case study, cross-check information, access official documents, and prepare for the fieldwork. The case study websites were again consulted following the interviewee suggestions by the arts centre directors to ensure that centre directors had not neglected to include staff members or potentially important stakeholders. In all instances, the directors included all staff members, and I felt that the potential interviewee lists provided a good cross-section of stakeholders.

Official documents were also sought for the case studies, including business plans or artistic policies. Although it is recommended to be discerning when analysing official organisational publications (Yin, 2018), they played an important role in the case studies. Official publications (via websites or asking centre directors) offered useful insight into the messaging of the arts centres, what they want their role to be and how they operate. What makes these sources invaluable is that they provide a productive point of comparison to the interviews, highlighting whether there is alignment or a dissonance between the aims of the centres and reality.

Media and online articles were also examined, to provide context for the arts centres. For example, numerous articles mentioned the arts centre in Devonport owing to its connection to the Living City Project (economic development plan). Again, it should be noted that it is impossible for these sources to be bias-free; however, they do provide context, current information (Denscombe, 2007), and an example of a possible 'mood' surrounding the arts centre which could be explored further in the interviews.

The process of undertaking document analysis required me to first find potential sources, and then it was essential to make a judgement call as to the relevance of these. Initially, the work of Scott (1990) was considered as it is commonly referenced in regard to assessing the suitability of document sources (Denscombe, 2007; Rapley and Rees, 2018). Scott (1990) asserts that it is important to verify the validity of the documents by analysing the authenticity,

credibility, representativeness and meaning. This framework seemed fitting; however, given that this thesis embraces various perspectives, the representative criterion may not be as crucial to this research (see Table 3.12). Therefore, the criteria of authenticity, credibility and meaning were considered. Additional to these criteria, documents were selected that provided context to the case study arts centres or responded to the research questions. Once selected as potentially useful for this thesis, sources were saved for reference at a later date. In the case of the websites, screenshots were taken at the time of data collection to ensure that they could be referred to at a later date, despite possible updates online.

Table 3.12: Document analysis assessment based on Scott (1990)

| Scott's criteria | Description of criteria | Suitability of criterion for this thesis | Justification of the suitability of criteria for this thesis |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Authenticity** | Legitimacy of the source | Yes | Documents were sourced from official outlets (arts centre websites or media outlets) meaning authenticity could be gauged easily. |
| **Credibility** | Trustworthiness of the source | Yes | As discussed, bias can be inherent in document analysis, making this a challenging criterion to manage. However, understanding whose perspective the source is from is important for an understanding of the perspective of arts centres. |
| **Representat-iveness** | Representative-ness of the broader sources available and typicality of source | No | This thesis is focused on the nuances and detail rather than making generalisations and being representative. Therefore this may not be a suitable criterion. |
| **Meaning** | Relevance of the content (meaning both at surface and deeper levels) | Yes | The document searches were focused on the content. This was crucial for this thesis, to ensure relevance and the ability of the source to support other case study research methods. |

(Scott, 1990; Denscombe, 2007; Rapley and Rees, 2018)

# Data analysis

The data analysis process varied according to the different methods utilised in this thesis. The survey required varying approaches owing to the variation in survey questions, whereas the external expert interviews and case studies were best suited to thematic analysis. These approaches and decisions are discussed further in the upcoming section.

# Survey

Following the closing date of the survey, the next step was analysis. The survey data was exported from the survey hosting program, Online Surveys, to Excel to form the data matrix (Seale, 2004), which is considered an appropriate way to manage small datasets (Veal and Burton, 2014). From this format, significant analysis needed to be conducted to understand the raw data. The first element to this was cleaning the data (Seale, 2004; Sue and Ritter, 2012), which involved ensuring the spreadsheet was as accessible as possible. This was followed by coding and transforming the raw data into quantitative numbers (Denscombe, 2007). These approaches are now discussed based on the question type: contextual, pre-coded, free text, percentage, and ranking.

*Contextual information*

The contextual questions that provided background information, for example asking the participant to include the name of their organisation, did not require analysis. These questions were useful as raw data as they allowed respondents to be tracked, which was important to ensure follow-up emails were not sent to those who had already completed the survey. Although the survey data was analysed prior to the case studies and external expert interviews, in some instances findings from these other methods required further analysis of the survey data. For example, many external stakeholder interviewees commented on the term 'arts centre' and the connotations and brand characteristics associated with this term. This led me to return to the raw data of a contextual question (name of arts centre) and code the frequency of terms used in the organisational names of respondent arts centres.

*Pre-coded questions*

The most straightforward and time-efficient way in which to analyse pre-coded questions in this survey was via frequency distributions – the number or percentage of survey participants who provided a specific response (Sue and Ritter, 2012). For example, the question 'Does your arts centre have a formal mission statement?' had the pre-coded responses 'Yes/No' in the survey. Therefore, frequency distribution involved counting the number of participants who answered 'Yes' and the number who answered 'No'. Frequency distribution can only occur when there are clear responses. Greater complexity occurred in the free-text questions in the survey.

*Free-text questions*

In some instances, analysing the data from free-text questions was straightforward, as responses were common across the returned surveys. For example, when asked what the respondent's position was within the arts centre, there was a limited range of responses, which could then easily be counted. However, the process of making sense of the responses to some of the open ended free-text questions involved examining the data, grouping the data via themes, and coding each response to provide quantitative results. This process was time consuming; however, as this thesis is interested in the diversity and nuances within the arts centre model, it was appropriate to include this question type to allow the diversity to be exhibited. The questions that required greater steps in analysis included:

- How would you describe what an 'arts centre' is?

- If you selected Yes [to having a formal mission statement], please specify (e.g. please cut and paste your mission statement here):

- If you answered No [to having a formal mission statement], in one sentence how would you describe your mission/agenda?

In uncovering the participants' understanding of an arts centre (description), the responses were coded in two ways. Firstly, an initial reading of the responses indicated that the responses commented on the functionality of arts centres, whereas others were more aspirational. For example:

- "A building with multiple spaces" (functional)

- "An inclusive space where the community can engage, experiment & educate themselves & others" (aspirational)

The second manner in which the descriptions were coded was based on emergent codes that highlighted the focus of each description, including the multi-programme aspect of arts centres, the funding structure, the role of arts centres, and their physical elements. These themes are further interrogated in Chapter 4.

In analysing the mission statement responses in the survey, the themes employed by MacKeith (1996) were utilised (see Table 3.13). This was beneficial in two ways: it provided a starting point for the overwhelming analysis, as well as providing the potential to compare findings between this thesis and MacKeith's (1996) study. In the process of coding responses, it became clear that MacKeith's (1996) codes did not provide the diversity of themes required; hence additional codes were created based on the emergent themes in the data. These are highlighted in Table 3.13 via an asterisk (*).

**Table 3.13: Themes to classify arts centre mission statements**

| Mission Theme | Description | Example from Data |
|---|---|---|
| Access (community focus) | Everyone within the community to have access to art | "Provide an easily accessible venue at a reasonable cost" |
| Development and transformation (community focus) | Provide new experiences, challenges, and development opportunities for the community | "To surprise, challenge and include people in thought provoking creative experiences. Why? Because communities thrive when imaginations fly." |
| Participation (community focus) | Opportunities for the community to participate and engage in the arts | "Widening opportunities to experience and participate in the arts" |
| Presentation (artist focus) | Opportunities for artists to display their work | "Showcases talent across visual art, music, dance, live art and literature" |

| Support (artist focus) | Support artists in whatever form that may be, such as sharing resources or guidance | "Development of local performing artists by providing a venue, resources and support to create and produce their work" |
| Quality (art form focus) | High-quality work is of utmost importance | "Great art for the public. We want our reputation to be for good-quality art" |
| Innovation & experimentation (art form focus) | A focus on innovation and experimentation | "To promote innovative, creative arts activities" |
| Heritage* | Respect and care of the building in which the arts centre is housed | "Preserve our amazing heritage venue" |
| Sustainability* | Priority of sustainability, both environmentally and of the arts centre itself | "We recognise our responsibility to pursue ethical and sustainable business practices in human resources, organisational planning and environment as part of a global community" |
| Target Audience* | Mention of focus on a specific audience | "Working with vulnerable adults to transform lives" |
| Tourism/Town Development* | Aim to use the arts centre to increase tourism/town development | "Our vibrant cultural events and activities help make [town name] and the surrounding region a better place to live" |
| Transformation* | The potential of the arts centre to transform or change people's lives | "To change people's lives through art" |
| Variety* | Focus on the mix of art/events on offer | "Balanced and diverse programme of artistic and educational activity across all art forms" |

Partially sourced from MacKeith, 1996, pp.19-20

Once these codes were utilised on the mission statement data, it became clear that there were still gaps in the analysis and understanding of the data. For instance, the code 'Community Development' appeared to be vague and encompassed many of the mission statements. Therefore, further analysis was

conducted on the arts centre missions that I had previously classified as having a community development element. The list of codes to examine the missions with a community development focus can be seen in Appendix E. These codes were emergent from the data. Further investigation was also undertaken into the use of the term 'community'. This term was evident in much of the data, but not examined in the codes already utilised. Hence coding was conducted on the mission statements which utilised this term in order to understand it further. The findings from this are discussed in the upcoming chapter.

*Percentage Questions*

Percentage questions—for example 'Please estimate what percentage of your staff are paid versus volunteers?'—had the benefit of already being in numerical form, so there was no need for thematic analysis or coding. Instead, the mean was calculated to provide the average response. The mode was also considered, as this perspective provided further insight into the most commonly occurring response (percentage in this instance).

*Ranking Questions*

The questionnaire asked respondents to rank the top three stakeholders of their arts centre. This question faced the challenge of being both free text and ranking. Fortunately, the stakeholders listed were common across responses; therefore the initial step was transferring all responses to the same terminology and gauging the frequency of each stakeholder for each ranking (1st, 2nd and 3rd). Following this, calculations were undertaken in terms of frequency of stakeholder group in the top three rankings as well as weighted calculations, for example allocating 3 points to 1st position, 2 to 2nd, and 1 to 3rd.

*Overall Analysis*

The data was not only considered in isolation. Once data was coded and organised, as recommended by Denscombe (2007, p.265), it was examined for "connections". This was achieved via VLOOKUPS – for example, looking at the possible connections between country and various arts centre factors. To assist in the analysis process, data was transferred into more accessible forms such as tables and pie-charts in order to make "sense of the data" (Denscombe, 2007, p.271).

## Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79), as was touched on in the previous section, was utilised for the external expert interviews and the case studies. Themes were identified via the use of codes, the process of which will now be discussed.

The process of analysis for the expert interviews and the internal stakeholder interviews was the same, hence this is discussed as one in this section. Both the external expert interviews and the internal stakeholder interviews were audio recorded, as recommended by Esterberg (2002), allowing me to be more present in the interview, to assist in analysis, and to ensure no small details were missed. Although audio recording fails to record visual cues, it was selected over video recording because it seems less intrusive (Denscombe, 2014). Recording each interview (after having been given permission from the interviewee) enabled in-depth analysis, as the interviews could be listened to again to ensure that key details were not missed, or memory relied upon.

Once interviews were completed, given the large volume of interviews and time constraints, they were transcribed by professional transcribers. I made this decision with the knowledge that it is "preferable for the interviewer herself to transcribe the conversations" (Brinkmann, 2020, p.442), to allow the researcher to remain close to the data and to develop as an interviewer (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Therefore, in an attempt to counteract any negative impact of outsourcing transcriptions, upon receiving each transcription I listened to the recording whilst reading the transcribed document to ensure both accuracy and to connect with the material, allowing myself to reflect on my interviewing style and develop and grow as an interviewer. Brief notes were taken at this stage to begin thinking about the overall themes, ideas and concepts being discussed. The next step was coding.

The qualitative coding of these interviews was focused on finding "potential meanings" (Esterberg, 2002, p.158). The interviews provided a method to elicit richer details about the arts centre model, meaning that an approach to analysis needed to allow the detail and perspectives to be revealed. In order to do this, I conducted open coding where transcriptions were closely analysed for themes and concepts, allowing codes to emerge as the process evolved. This approach

was preferred over utilising pre-conceived codes or deductive codes, because my arts centre experience may have resulted in deductive codes that reflected my personal views and understanding of arts centres rather than being open to the data and what the interviewee was sharing. After looking at four external expert interviews, recurring themes emerged. At this stage, focused coding commenced, whereby the remainder of the transcripts were coded according to the codes discovered in the open coding process. The codes that developed from the external expert interviews can be seen in Appendix F. Additional themes emerged from the internal stakeholder interviews and the responding codes can be viewed in Appendix G. The process of coding the interviews was laborious; however, it was felt that this was the most appropriate way to engage in the data and truly uncover detailed insights into the arts centre model.

To aid in the coding process and analysis, the qualitative data analysis (QDA) software program NVivo was utilised. Given the large amount of data, NVivo supported efficient data management and provided an organised approach to the data (Willis, 2013), as well as increased time efficiency (Fielding and Lee, 1998). The use of NVivo also provided greater flexibility to interrogate the data rather than being stuck in a more laborious manual process. Critics have argued that QDA software can create a chasm between the data and researcher and will result in lost contextual framework (distance) (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013), and that researchers can be bogged down by data and coding, consequently losing sight of the bigger picture (closeness) (Gilbert, 2002). When considering these potential restrictions of NVivo, it should be noted that this software is a tool to aid analysis and the analysis process rests with the researcher (Crang, 1997; Fielding and Lee, 1998; Willis, 2013). Hence it was my job as the researcher to ensure that I kept reminding myself of the big picture and to continuously have breaks whilst undertaking the analysis process to ensure that I was not getting stuck in the process. Following the coding of the transcripts, as recommended by Esterberg (2002), patterns were sought and interviews and opinions compared.

These codes were also utilised in the coding of the community and audience interviews, observations and document analysis. In the instance of the community and audience interviews, as the interviews were not audio recorded in order to be less intrusive, instead interview notes were taken and uploaded to NVivo. This was also the case for the observations and document analysis, whereby the relevant documents and notes were uploaded to NVivo and analysed utilising the codes identified following the external interviews and

internal stakeholder interviews (codes can be found in Appendix F and Appendix G). In drawing the codes together, commonalities and themes were sought and, where possible, codes were combined to create an overarching theme, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) (listed as headings in Appendix F and Appendix G). Themes were then considered within the framework of the research questions, which formed the basis for the analysis chapters.


## Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the approaches utilised in this thesis. The methods selected were focused on uncovering both breadth and depth in understanding of the arts centre model, as well as providing a nuanced and detailed examination of arts centres whilst responding to the research questions. It is important to keep in mind that this research was not seeking to reveal a best practice arts centre, or necessarily produce findings that can be generalisable. Instead the diversity of arts centres is recognised and explored. With these aims in mind, the upcoming chapters now dive into the findings from the research. First is an exploration of the survey results viewed in conjunction with the external expert interviews, providing context and points of commonality or dissonance. Secondly, the case studies will be explored in turn, with a chapter dedicated to each case study; and thirdly, the findings will be compared and synthesised in the Analysis and Conclusion chapter.

# Chapter 4 – Survey and external expert interview findings

This chapter combines the findings from the two methodological approaches, the online survey and the external expert interviews, as both methods provide complementary insights into the greater context of arts centres more generally in England and Australia and set the scene for the upcoming case studies. The list of experts incorporated into this research was discussed in the methodology chapter and can be found in Table 3.3.

The survey results will be examined alongside previous surveys on arts centres, including the work of MacKeith (1996), the most recent survey on English arts centres, and the PAC Australia 2017 Economics Activity Report (CultureCounts, 2017). The PAC Australia 2017 Economics Activity Report is utilised as a comparator as this report was the most current at the time of data collection and assisted in the design of the survey for this thesis. The more recent PAC Australia Economic Reports (2019 and 2021) are also mentioned throughout to provide insight into whether there may have been a shift in the trends identified as part of this research. In each section the findings from the external expert interviews will be examined in relation to the survey findings. This chapter will now explore the aforementioned data within the structure of the research questions.

## What is the role of arts centres?

As discussed in the methodology, the role of arts centres was explored in the survey via a thematic analysis of the arts centres' mission statements. Of the respondent arts centres (201), 58% stated they had a formal mission statement. These mission statements were coded using the themes utilised by MacKeith (1996), as well as additional codes outlined in Table 3.13. The popularity of these themes can be seen in Figure 4.1. The theme of 'community development' was present in 67% of the arts centres with mission statements, followed by the theme of 'variety/diversity in offerings' (programming) (32%), and 'quality of programming', which was central in 29% of mission statements.

**Figure 4.1: Arts centre mission statement themes**
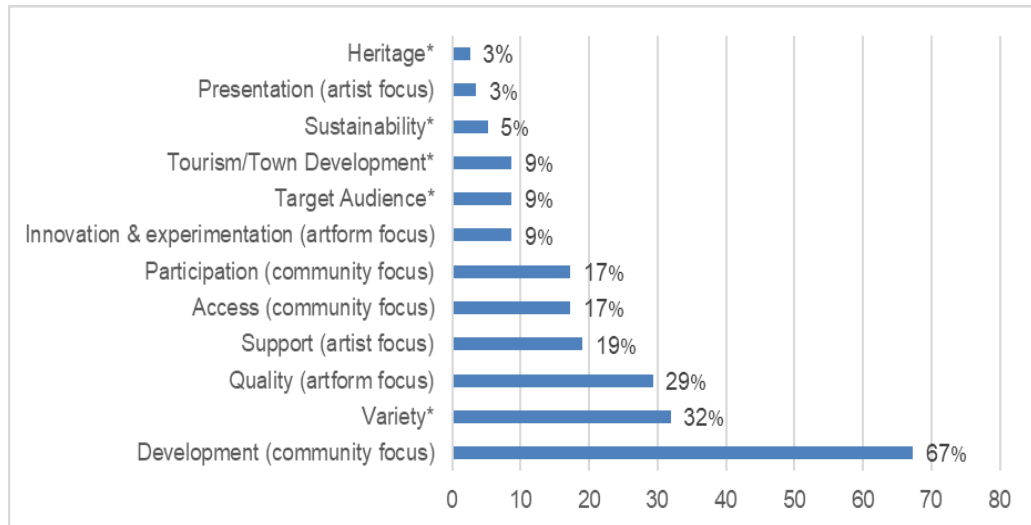


*Themes with an asterisk (*) are the themes additional to those used by MacKeith (1996)*

To delve deeper into understanding this focus of community development, these mission statements were analysed further, utilising the codes which can be seen in Appendix E. The top five areas of focus for arts centres that claimed their role was community development is seen in Figure 4.2. The findings reveal that education is paramount, featuring strongly in the community development-focused mission statements. For example, one arts centre's mission statement was "to present educational and professional work to appeal to a wide community", and another's was "to provide a place for community arts and educational arts".

**Figure 4.2: Community development focus of arts centres**
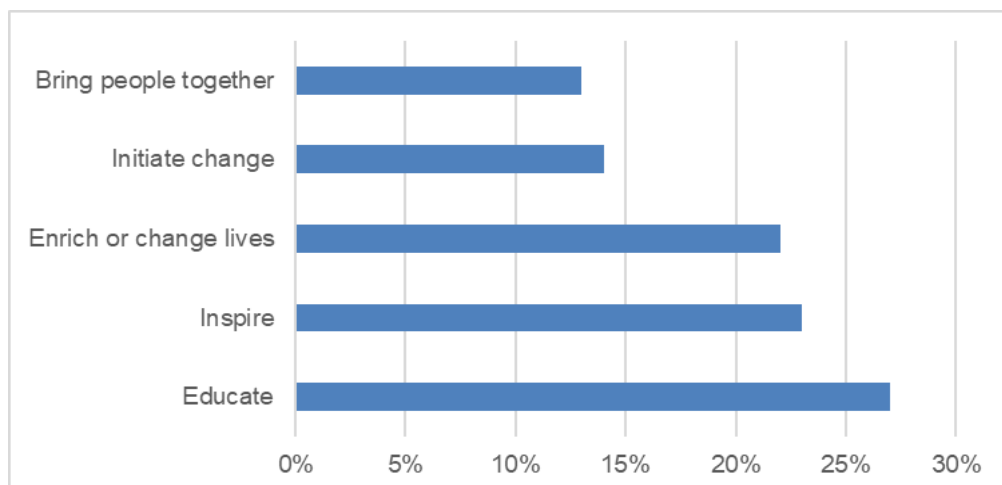
With such a substantial focus on 'community' in these mission statements, an attempt was made to uncover whom these arts centres actually regarded as their community. Analysing the survey data demonstrated that 12% of the arts centres which focused on community development articulated a target audience or a specific community. However, beyond this, the arts centres' definition of community is unclear. The case studies in Chapters 5–8 further explore this notion of community.

The external expert interviews also confirmed the importance of community in the role of arts centres. For instance, one expert stated that arts centres "have a clear kind of civic and community role"; and an English arts consultant and previous arts centre manager stated that arts centres are an invaluable resource to "support local community life." This support of community life was evidenced in the interviews, with claims that arts centres are a hub or meeting place to bring the community together, playing a community development role as well as that of arts and culture provision. As one expert stated, "they should be citadels for arts and culture", or as another put it, the "cultural lifeblood of a place". According to the experts, the role of arts centres aligns with the survey findings of being community focused. This connection between arts centres and communities is further explored in the case studies.

This focus on community is not new to arts centres. For instance, in MacKeith's (1996) work, as mentioned, the most commonly recurring mission statement themes were community focused: access (85%), participation (53%), and development (51%). Community was central, which was reminiscent of the ideals introduced by the ACGB (ACGB, 1945). It also resonates with more contemporary views such as Williams et al. (2017, p.241), who assert that an arts centre "belongs to everyone in the community" and should be "thought of as the 'glue' for a community – a welcoming place for residents and visitors to enjoy the performing arts but also a place to learn, to celebrate, and to assemble".

Previous Australian arts centre surveys provided little insight into the role of arts centres. For instance, there is no mention of guiding policies or missions in the PAC Australia 2017 Economic Activity Report. However, this does not mean that they were not present: findings from the Power PAC survey demonstrated that 42% of arts centres had a programming policy and 46% an audience development plan (APACA, 2011). Investigating the presence of these policies

was seen in later PAC Australia Economics Reports, such as the 2019 report, which stated that 37% of arts centres had a programming policy or plan, 29% had an audience development plan, and 61% stated that their local government had a cultural plan (PAC Australia, 2019). An increase in formal plans was reported in the 2021 report, with 56% of arts centres having a programming plan, 35% having an audience development plan, and 70% of the arts centres' local councils or authorities having a cultural plan (PAC Australia, 2022). The role of formal planning and policies in arts centres is examined in greater depth in the upcoming case studies.

## How do arts centres operate?

### Management and leadership

To gain an insight into the management and leadership of arts centres in England and Australia, the survey asked arts centres to outline who operated their specific centre. An illustration of the findings can be seen in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3: Operators of arts centres**
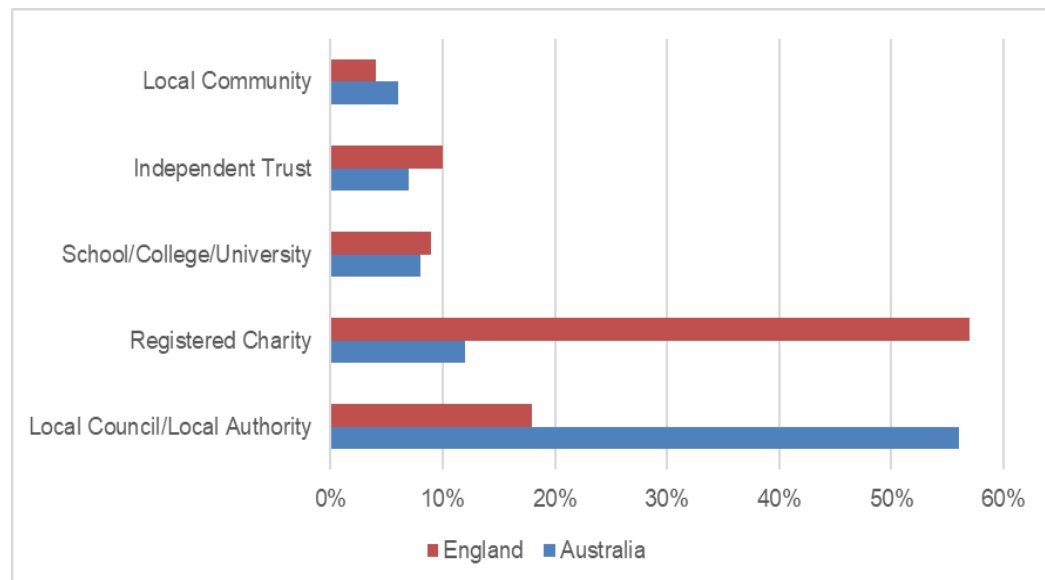


This prominence of the management structure of local council/local authority-run arts centres in Australia was also exhibited in the PAC Australia Economics reports (CultureCounts, 2017; PAC Australia, 2019; 2022) and the Power PAC survey (APACA, 2011). In terms of the English arts centres, the findings confirm MacKeith's (1996) work, which demonstrated that arts centres were primarily

independently run (75%)[27] with the remainder operated by local government (MacKeith, 1996). However, 58% are leased or owned by local government (MacKeith, 1996). This more independent management structure in the English setting is perhaps not surprising given the grassroots growth of the arts centre movement in England (Lane, 1978), as discussed in the literature review.

The external expert interviews raised key concerns regarding the local authority management structure of arts centres. For instance, numerous experts noted that arts centre managers are often placed under extreme pressure and their roles extend beyond the centre to other council-run services; additionally they are commonly from another department of the council rather than having an arts background, and are often stretched in terms of capacity and lack the necessary skills. The VAPAC Executive Director commented that arts centres within this structure can face restrictions: for example, the centre may not be able to have its own website or social media presence. Multiple experts noted that this structure can also impact risk-taking in programming, as local governments are typically risk-averse and focused on the bottom line, or in the words of an English arts consultant, "local authorities famously are completely philistine, have no grasp of issues of artistic achievement or quality […] just are all about the numbers and the brownie points". It was also noted that local authorities can lack understanding of the benefits of arts centres and their offerings. As the VAPAC Executive Director commented:

> The majority of the local governments don't have a real understanding of what, maybe, the venue brings to their community. And to have a facility that generates income but costs a significant amount of investment by the local government, sitting within their model, is a challenge for them. Because principally they expect that you're going to be able to cover your costs, which you're never going to be able to.

Despite these challenges, the Executive Director of PAC Australia did mention that arts centres can benefit from being within a local council structure; for instance, they can gain support in terms of maintenance, finance and marketing, which may be beyond the reach of non-local authority run centres. The impact of

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[27] Of this 75%, 53% are registered charities and 48% limited companies (MacKeith, 1996).

the governance and management structure on arts centres is explored further in the case studies.

The survey also interrogated the composition of arts centre staff, in particular the proportion of employees and volunteers. The findings showed that in Australia, on average 82% of staff members are paid and 18% are volunteers, whereas in England on average 65% of staff members are paid and 35% are volunteers. In terms of the number of respondent arts centres who used volunteers, 68% of the Australian arts centres used volunteers, whereas 79% of the English arts centres did so. This reliance on volunteers in the English setting reflects the findings from MacKeith (1996), whereby 69% of respondent arts centres used volunteers. Again, this focus on the use of volunteers may be the outcome of the grassroots growth of arts centres in England[28] (Lane, 1978). The use of volunteers and the implications of this approach are explored in the upcoming case studies.

The survey aimed to gain insight into the importance of different stakeholder groups to the arts centres by asking respondents to rank their top three stakeholders. Findings demonstrate the centrality of the audience and local community to arts centres, as can be seen in Figure 4.4.

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[28] It should be noted that the use of volunteers was not explored in the PAC Economic surveys (CultureCounts, 2017; PAC Australia, 2019; 2022).

**Figure 4.4: Top three stakeholders of arts centres**
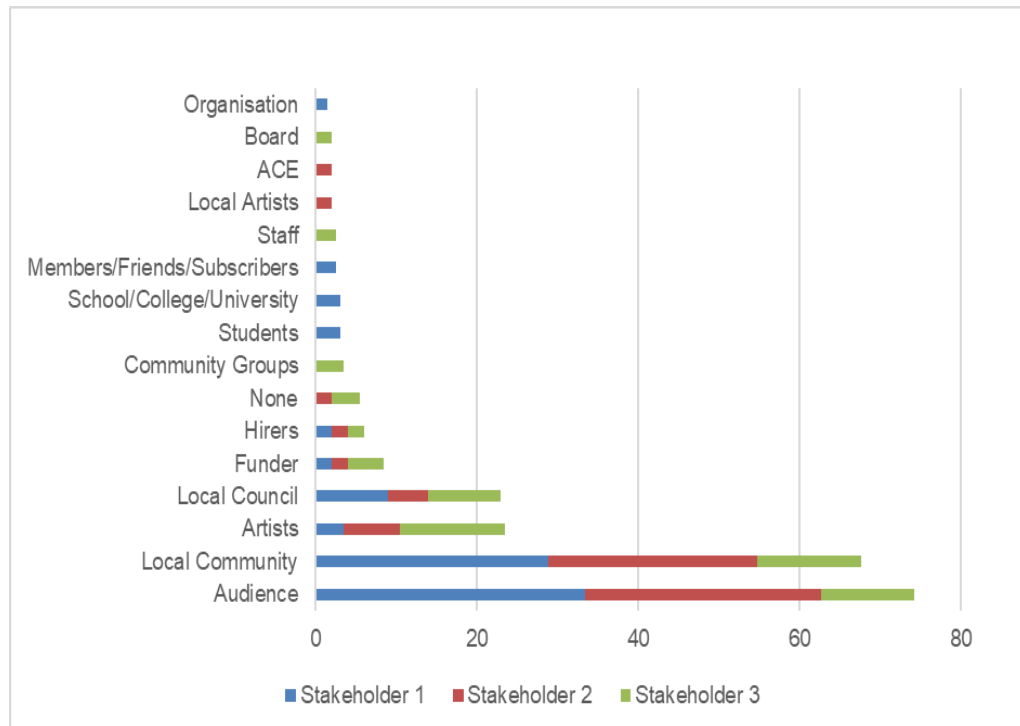


Gaining an understanding of the importance of stakeholder groups to arts centres has been a neglected area of research in previous studies in England and Australia. This thesis responds to this gap not only via the survey but also in the case studies. The case studies explore alignments between the survey and specific arts centres, and offer insight into implications for stakeholder preferences: for example, does decision-making in arts centres align to stakeholder preferences, or is there a dissonance?

## Programming

The programming offered by the respondent arts centres demonstrated a wide range of art forms and activities, aligning with the definition of arts centres utilised in this thesis. The expert interviews also confirmed the multi-art form approach of arts centres, with the majority of the experts identifying the multi-art form structure as a key component of the arts centre definition. Being multi-art form was also considered a way to tap into different segments of the community. As the Executive Director of VAPAC stated: "from my experience, the most successful venues are those that have the greatest number of access points for

their community to engage with their venue", which may come in the form of programming or the venue facilities itself.

The programme offering of arts centres may be considered a way to encourage crossover of audiences: for example, once a music lover attends an arts centre to see a musical act, they would see another show in a different art form advertised and would then attend that show. However, the experts suggested that this was not the case. For instance, an English consultant claimed this crossover assumption was "simply not true", and the Executive Director of PAC Australia stated that "it doesn't happen that way. It'd be a really interesting thing to track, actually, what the crossover is, but - yeah, I think it's dangerous to make generalisations about an audience and their attachment or loyalty to a centre." Findings from MacKeith (1996) also suggested that the multi-art offering was not successful in developing audiences in terms of crossover. This consideration of audience crossover is explored further in the case studies.

Beyond the art forms and activities themselves, the survey elucidated the breakdown of professional and amateur activities. The survey findings indicated a preference for professional work, as illustrated in Figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5: Percentage of professional versus amateur activities/presentations at arts centres**
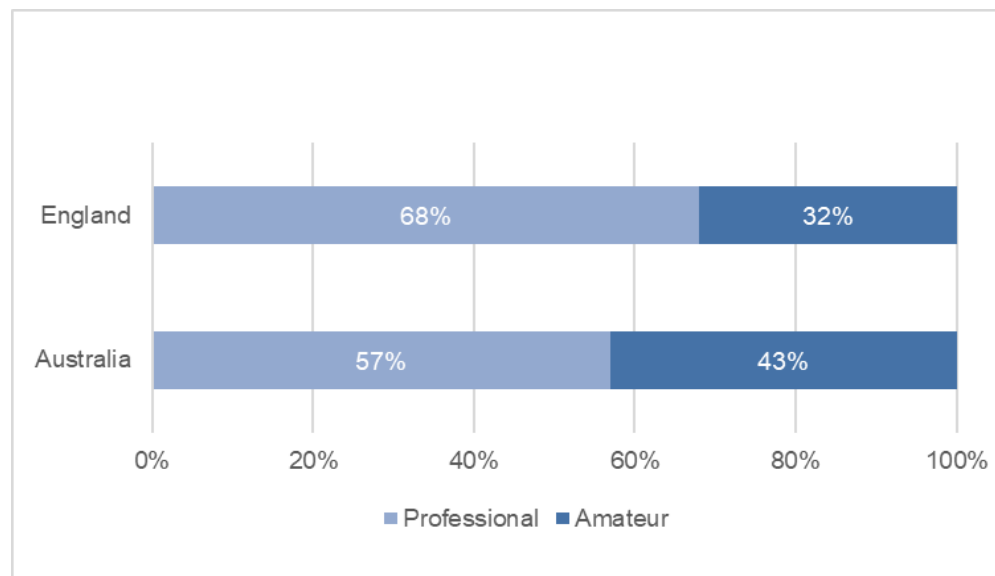


MacKeith's (1996) survey did not provide a breakdown of the amateur and professional balance, although this was discussed in the Australian surveys.

Interestingly, the breakdown between amateur and professional programming differs from the findings of this survey and those of the PAC Australia 2017 Activity Report (CultureCounts, 2017), which attest that in Australia the breakdown was more greatly skewed towards amateur work (61%) than professional (39%). However, the PAC Australia 2017 Activity Report (CultureCounts, 2017) reported great variation in this breakdown dependent on the state. For instance, in Victoria 49% of works were considered professional, compared with 38% in Tasmania and 66% in Western Australia. Differences between the findings from the report and the survey from this thesis may indicate different approaches to the research. For example, the data obtained from the PAC Australia 2017 Activity Report considered the number of performances rather than the number of productions, and the 2017 report had a smaller sample number, which may have impacted findings. However, the findings from the PAC Australia 2019 and 2021 Economics Activity Report are more in line with the findings of this survey. In the 2019 report, 52% of performances were professional versus 48% community or amateur (PAC Australia, 2019) and in 2021, 60% were considered professional and 40% community. Notably, when based on the number of performances, the findings were the same as this survey, with 57% professional and 43% amateur. This similarity suggests that the findings from this survey may hold more recent applicability than those of 2017/2018, when the survey was conducted. The 2021 report suggests that Covid-19 may have impacted the source of the professional work, but not so much the professional and amateur balance. For example, owing to the difficulties faced with touring during the pandemic, there was a reduction in the number of international and national acts, creating a greater reliance on professionals based in closer proximity to arts centres (PAC Australia, 2022). The case studies further tap into the balance between professional and amateur offerings in arts centres and any implications for the balance of offerings.

The external expert interviews provided additional commentary on the amateur versus professional balance in arts centre programming. For instance, one expert suggested that there appeared to be a blurring between amateur and professional work because of the inclusion of the local community in professional works. Two experts commented on the impact of amateur work on arts centres in terms of relationships and audiences as well as perceptions. For instance, one expert noted that supporting amateur works can be beneficial for arts centres, creating strong relationships with the community. However, she also noted the potential downside of amateur groups taking over the theatre for periods with no

resultant outcomes in terms of audience building, as the audiences for community works do not necessarily support other works on offer in an arts centre. Despite supporting the inclusion of amateur works in arts centres, an arts consultant highlighted the importance of clear communication to potential audiences around amateur works. He commented that because there is no guarantee of the quality of amateur works there is the potential for reputational damage and the possibility of a negative perception of the quality of the arts centre's offering overall. The role and implications of amateur versus professional work are explored in the following chapters.

The survey also incorporated a question to ascertain the priority for arts centres in terms of programming. Findings can be seen in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Primary activity of arts centres**

| Primary activity | Australia | England | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| A receiving/presenter venue for professional work | 67 | 69 | 136 |
| A receiving/presenter venue for amateur work | 18 | 11 | 29 |
| Producing or co-producing professional productions | 8 | 11 | 19 |
| Commissioning new professional work | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Producing or co-producing amateur productions | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Commissioning new amateur work | | 2 | 2 |
| **Grand Total** | **101** | **100** | **201** |

Again, the professional element was central to the arts centre offering in both England and Australia, with 68% of the arts centres in the survey claiming that their primary activity was being "a receiving/presenter venue for professional work".

The importance of professional hirers was also demonstrated in the PAC Australia Economics Activity Report (CultureCounts, 2017) where external hirers provided 66% of the offerings at arts centres. This was consistent with the figure of 68.6% of no-risk hirers as part of a season in the PAC Australia 2019 Economic Activity Report (PAC Australia, 2019). Interestingly, the findings from this survey reflect those of the PAC Australia 2021 Economic Activity, where 68% of arts centres saw their primary activity as presenting professional

productions. The similarity between these findings again highlights the ongoing relevance of this survey. The focus on receiving/presenting professional work was also demonstrated in MacKeith's (1996) survey, where 81% of the arts centres claimed that visiting professional performances and exhibitions were a high priority.

The external experts raised concerns over arts centres' approach to programming professional work from beyond the local area. For instance, a representative from the Australia Council mentioned that the fly-in fly-out (FIFO) arrangement, whereby artists visit the centre for a show commonly only for one night, was problematic:

> What's the legacy in terms of what's the long-term commitment? It's no good just zipping into a community for two days or two weeks or whatever and then zipping out. What's the long-term capacity building that you're offering by going into that community and the relationships that you're wanting to develop? The consultation before your entry to make sure what you're doing is relevant, appropriate, and adds value and legacy.

This concept was explored further, with interviewees confirming a growing desire from regional communities for work that included the community: for example "nothing about us without us" (Australia Council representative) and "we want you to do it with us not to us" (PAC Australia Executive Director). This concept was also raised by another expert who noted the increase in co-creation of work between arts centres, artists and communities. This expert also spoke greatly about the capacity for arts centres to commission and create works. However, questions surrounding this capacity are explored in the case studies.

The survey also asked the arts centres whether their programming was guided by a particular focus. The results revealed that 37% of the respondent arts centres had a special focus when making programming decisions. Of those, 41% reported a social, ethical or educational focus such as programming specifically for education, or the support and development of artists; 36% claimed a specialisation in a particular art form, such as circus or dance; and 23% cited a specific audience, such as children and families, or students. Interestingly, only seven arts centres saw their special focus as diversity, which is often considered

an inherent component of the arts centre model more broadly. The focus and approach of arts centre programming is a central element examined in the case studies.

## Marketing and branding

To gain deeper understanding of who was connecting with and utilising arts centres, the survey asked whom the arts centres considered their audiences. Findings are illustrated in Figure 4.6.

**Figure 4.6: Arts centre audiences**
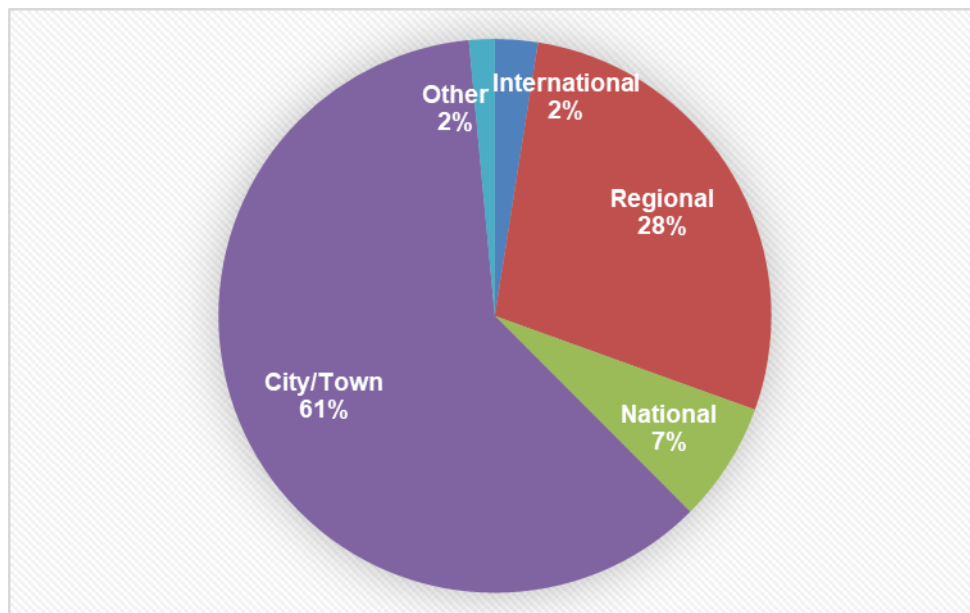


MacKeith's (1996) English survey revealed that the primary audience for arts centres was the region or district (67%) followed by the city or town (14%) and then a national audience (12%). The findings from the survey in this thesis highlight a greater focus on the local community for arts centres.

In discussing audiences, two experts mentioned that they believed that regional arts centres reaped benefits over city-dwelling arts centres, as they have the ability to be more closely connected to their immediate community and more informed about their audiences. As one expert suggested: "I think the ability to really communicate directly with the community is much greater [for regional arts centres], and to create a sense of profile around an event". Another expert mentioned that arts centres they considered successful were those whose ticket-buyer demographics represented the local community. The case studies explore

in depth whether regional arts centres can readily connect and communicate with their local community and also whether audiences are truly representative of their communities.

In terms of branding, one expert noted the following challenge faced by arts centres:

> I always think the strength of an arts centre is that it does so many things in different ways, it relates to different people in different ways. But that's, in terms of communication and branding, of course, that can be a real weakness. Because it's very hard to kind of define what you do in very simple terms or very clearly. So, I think we all struggle a little bit with defining ourselves […] and communicating with different groups, 'cause in a sense it's a collection of so many things coming together. Which obviously is great, but actually that can be hard to communicate.

This comment highlights a key challenge of the arts centre model. As mentioned, diversity is considered central and vital to the arts centre offering (Lee, 1965; Lane, 1978; English, 1981; Sherwin, 1985; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987) and may be considered a strength, but it can also pose challenges in terms of branding and communication of the centre. These concerns align with the concept of a difficult brand, which was discussed in the literature review.

There were mixed responses from the external experts regarding whether they considered arts centres a difficult brand. Some experts attested that arts centres are not a difficult brand given that they should not meet the difficult brand characteristic of 'constrained availability' (Harrison and Hartley, 2007) and be readily available and accessible to communities through other offerings at the centre, such as cafés. However, the representative from the Australia Council suggested that arts centres were a difficult brand as they should take risks in their programming and approach. The case studies will further explore the concept of a difficult brand and its applicability to the arts centre model.

## How do key stakeholders perceive arts centres?

Regarding the perception of the term 'arts centre', an analysis of the organisational names of the surveyed arts centres revealed that only 28% of arts centres (29 in Australia and 27 in England) included the term 'arts centre' in the name of their organisation. Alternative wording included 'theatre' (20%) and 'centre' (11%), although the latter was not associated with 'arts centre' but rather 'centre' on its own or 'entertainment centre' or 'civic centre', or naming the centre after the previous use for the building (8%), such as Substation or the Drill Hall. The analysis also revealed a range of names that were not arts-specific, such as Junction.

Additionally, 38% of the arts centres included the word 'arts' or 'art' in the organisation's name. The expert interviews acknowledged that some community members may face barriers to the centre because of the word 'arts', as the arts may seem unknown or challenging. Despite this viewpoint, two experts advocated that this perception did not justify ignoring this element of the offering. For instance, an English arts consultant asserted that: "I don't think you should avoid using the word 'art' when you're doing art. I feel that's a betrayal, and you have to have the courage of your convictions". Another expert extended these sentiments further, stating that the inclusion of 'arts' in an organisation's name could have the power to change the way in which the term 'arts' is perceived, and in effect create a positive relationship with it.

The interviews also provided some insight, albeit some mixed responses, to the use of the term 'arts centre'. For instance, one expert commented that arts centres have been seen as "slightly a thing of the past" or a "slightly dirty word", a sentiment that was echoed by the representative from the Small Venues Network, who asserted that the term may be a bit dated and has connotations of being corporate or council-run, rather than community-led. This association with being corporate contrasts with the role of arts centres which, according to the experts and survey results, was highly community-based and -focused. An English arts consultant claimed that the term 'arts centre' provides flexibility, which reflects arts centres as a "kind of catch-all". Other experts noted that it is not the terminology that should be a focus in branding considerations—whether or not it is called an arts centre—but rather the association of the centre with the brand and offering itself. These questions of the perception of the term 'arts

centre' are interrogated further in the case studies from the viewpoint of different stakeholders.

## Conclusion

The survey results provide contemporary insight into characteristics and elements of arts centres in both England and Australia. These findings, combined with comments from the external expert interviews, lay the foundation and context in which to explore the case studies. Although it is impossible to draw direct comparisons between the survey results and previous arts centre surveys, given the differing samples and questionnaire wording, this research has provided a comparative and historical context to the evolution of the arts centre model. Numerous Australian findings from this survey align with findings from PAC Australia's (2021) most recent survey, suggesting that despite the survey being conducted in 2017/18, it is still relevant, regardless of the potential impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

When considering the survey findings, it is important to remember that in both this survey and previous surveys reviewed in this thesis, the questionnaire was completed by the arts centres themselves; hence there is a lack of confirmation regarding the degree to which goals and aims are perceived by external stakeholders. For example, it is impossible to ascertain whether the community focus articulated by many of the arts centres is actualised and considered true for the community. This highlights the lack of inclusion of multiple voices in previous arts centre research and the importance of the case studies in this thesis to demystify the arts centre model, not just from the perspective and voice of the arts centres, but by stakeholders and the community more generally. The next chapter in this thesis will delve into the case studies, providing more in-depth insight into the arts centre model.

# Chapter 5 – Bridgwater Arts Centre case study

**Figure 5.1: Facade of Bridgwater Arts Centre (BAC)**



## Introduction

Established in 1946, Bridgwater Arts Centre (BAC) plays an important role in the history of arts centres in England. Located in the market town of Bridgwater in Somerset, with a population of approximately 44,095[29] (Office for National Statistics, cited in The Geographist, 2022), BAC was established as the first arts centre funded by the ACGB, an example of the ACGB's democratisation of the arts agenda, to exhibit the ideals of an arts centre as articulated in *Plans for an Arts Centre* (ACGB, 1945). The ACGB leased a Georgian house on Castle Street, Bridgwater, for the site of the centre, and employees reported directly to the ACGB (Miller and Miller, 1975). Although the ACGB was involved in the running of the centre in the early days, the goal was for the centre to be "independent and self-supporting" (Miller and Miller, 1975, no pagination) and to be an example for other arts centres that they could be "economically and efficiently run" (Miller and Miller, 1975, no pagination). BAC was a particularly

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[29] This figure is based on 2017 estimates.

unique arts centre given the grassroots growth of the arts centre movement at the time (Lane, 1978).

Expectations of the centre were high, with hopes that BAC would "become not only a focus of artistic activity in Bridgwater but also a powerhouse for the neighbouring rural district" (Miller and Miller, 1975, no pagination). Lane (1978, p.4) goes as far as stating that the centre "raised expectations of a national policy for cultural decentralization two decades before their general acceptance". Despite support by the Bridgwater and District Arts Club, which had 300 members in 1946 (Miller and Miller, 1975, no pagination), the centre faced trouble as early as 1950, when the ACGB threatened closure unless another source of local funding could be secured (ACGB, 1950). Patronage of BAC by ACGB was withdrawn as a consequence of the closure of Arts Council regional offices in 1952 (Lane, 1978), and Lane (1978, p.4) asserts that this closure of the regional offices set back "the development of the arts-centre concept for nearly ten years". However, despite these challenges, BAC survived. Ownership of the building has changed hands over the years, being purchased by the Bridgwater Borough Council in 1966 and then owned by Sedgemoor District Council in 1974 (Bridgwater Arts Centre, 2024). In 1982 the adjoining house was purchased, allowing an extension of the centre (Theatres Trust, 2017) under the condition that arts centre members bore the responsibility for any work that needed to be undertaken on the new house (Bridgwater Arts Centre, 2024).

The year 2011 was significant in the history of the centre as Sedgemoor District Council leased the building for the use of BAC for 125 years, with the first 25 years secured on a peppercorn rent (Theatres Trust, 2017). Funding for the centre dramatically changed: until 2011, Sedgemoor District Council had supported BAC with up to £100,000 a year, but following cuts in public sector funding priorities this support was removed, and all staff were made redundant (Bridgwater Arts Centre, 2018). For the centre to survive, volunteers stepped in, allowing it to continue to operate. Over the years, funding improved thanks to financial support from the town council, ACE and various other grants. Despite the turnaround from 2011, the 2011 funding cut was instrumental in shaping the organisation and culture of BAC.

This case study provides an analysis of BAC at the time the fieldwork was conducted in 2017. Internal stakeholder interviews were conducted with the

Chair and Vice Chair of the board, the Artistic Director, Centre Manager, Programming and Marketing Manager, two local artists, representatives from two touring groups, a representative from the town council, a volunteer, two community members via community interviews, and eight audience interviews. The following sections will explore the findings obtained from the case study analysis within the framework of the sub-research questions for this thesis.

## What is the role of Bridgwater Arts Centre?

As outlined in the literature review, an examination of an organisation's mission statement provides insight into its role. Hence, in order to gain an understanding of the role of BAC, the centre's mission statement was consulted. The mission statement was articulated on BAC's website and was as follows: "Enjoy, Create, Participate" (Bridgwater Arts Centre, 2018). However, according to the academic literature, it might be questioned whether this strapline meets the definition of a mission statement. As discussed in the literature review, the aims of mission statements vary from inspiring stakeholders (Bryson, 1988; Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Campbell, 1997) to eliciting emotional reactions (Campbell, 1997) to being a tool to gauge success (Preece, 2005). At its core, a mission is an organisation's reason for being or its core purpose, and indicates the objectives it wishes to achieve (Drucker, 1993; Voss and Grabel, 2014). With these definitions in mind, it could be argued that the three words that comprise BAC's mission statement fail to provide the depth or clarity of strategic vision needed to demonstrate the centre's purpose. Given the brevity of the statement, it could also be questioned whether the statement could sufficiently guide decision-making at the centre, another key aim of a mission statement (Vogt, 1994).

A BAC board member also questioned the suitability of the statement, likening it to a tag line rather than providing strategic direction, and suggested an alternative statement: "to care about the wellbeing of the organisation, the community and the arts". This statement contributes wellbeing, community and the arts to the role of BAC, providing greater depth of understanding of the centre's goals. The Chair of the Board also acknowledged "Enjoy, Create, Participate" as the centre's mission statement and even suggested that BAC was primarily successful in achieving these goals. However, given that the three words provide little scaffolding to measure success (and considering that at the time of the interviews the centre did not have a strategic plan in place), the ability

of BAC to gauge its success in meeting these 'goals' is questionable. Despite the Chair of the Board's support of the mission statement, when questioned about the role of BAC, she went beyond these three words and attested that the centre was "a little bit like a community centre, only it's arts-oriented". It is notable that although both board members acknowledged the formal mission statement, whereas the other staff members did not, they commented on the centrality of 'community' in the role of BAC, suggesting that by neglecting this component, the existing statement may not fulfil the desired role of a mission statement according to the board.

The board members were not the only stakeholders who viewed the role of the centre as community-focused. This sentiment was shared by two local artists and the leader of the town council, who considered the centre a social hub offering opportunities for local artists and provision of participation. Three audience interviewees praised the ability of the centre to be a meeting place to "bring people together". The Centre Manager also voiced an alternative mission, which highlighted the centrality of the community: "[to] provide a really good high-quality performing and visual arts programme, both in terms of performances, but also in terms of participation and education work. And also to be a valued member of the community […] so it's relevant to that community". The Centre Manager suggested that she viewed the community as key to the arts centre's offering, and that the role of arts centres more generally was to "meet a need in its community". However, in the specific example of BAC, she highlighted the challenges in meeting these community requirements:

> We went through this period where it was just survive or die, and now, when you don't have any capacity, it's very hard to reach out into the community, beyond doing what you're doing and saying 'right, we're just going to protect ourselves, and when we're able, when we're a stronger organisation, then we can go out to the community further.' But I would say that it's because of the diversity of the community that we reach that we've been able to even be at this standstill point, really. We could do a lot more, I think, but we don't have the capacity.

Concern regarding the limited capacity of the centre was shared by the board members and all staff members: it was evident that they felt they did not have the time, finances, or resources to achieve all that they hoped. The impact of limited

capacity and decisions based on financial stability recurs throughout this case study – so much so that a local artist considered the role of the centre to be "survival". This sentiment was acknowledged by the Artistic Director, who stated that "the previous five years, it's just been survival"; and the Vice Chair of the Board also commented that there was an ethos of survival at the centre. It is interesting that despite the drive for survival, and contrary to the recommendations in the literature (Bryson, 2004; Heath and Dalziel, 2019), a strategic plan was not put in place. Instead, the Artistic Director stated that "the business plan was survival, kind of month-by-month". This meant the centre developed organically without a clear plan (according to a board member), or, as the Artistic Director stated, in a "headless chicken" fashion at times. The suitability of strategic planning in the arts setting is questioned in the literature due to the unique and challenging characteristics of arts organisations (Varbanova, 2013), however, failure to adopt a strategic plan at BAC appears to be detrimental. Indeed the limited capacity at the centre and the sole focus on survival appeared to have hampered the development of a strategic plan. This is reminiscent of MacKeith's (1996) findings that most arts centres are focused on the short-term goal of survival rather than future planning considerations.

The Artistic Director commented that upon starting in her role, she created a strategic plan or intent, but this received significant pushback from volunteers, including board members. The Artistic Director believed that the lack of stakeholder support was a result of her neglect to incorporate stakeholders in the creation of the plan; this supports the research of Baetz and Beamish (1993) and Collins and Porras (2008), who highlight the importance of stakeholder involvement in the strategic planning process. This lack of collaboration and resultant lack of buy-in appeared to make a strategic outlook a low priority for the centre and heighten the survival focus. This is unfortunate, as a strategic outlook may have assisted in responding to the drive for survival.

This section has raised important considerations regarding the role of BAC. Based on the literature, BAC's formal mission statement fails to provide the benefits of a mission statement, comprising just three words: "Enjoy, Create, Participate". The degree to which this provides insight into the purpose, offers a tool to gauge results, guides decision-making or inspires stakeholders, is highly questionable. Additionally, only the two board members referred to this statement, demonstrating a lack of knowledge of the statement among other stakeholders. This lack of acknowledgement is particularly problematic for staff

members: as Bryson (2004) states, having a mission statement is not enough for success, and the way it is enacted is central. Hence if staff do not know of the statement, how is it to be enacted? This begs the question of why the statement is not known by staff members; for example, whether the statement was not communicated to them, or whether its brevity and lack of ability to impact their roles at the centre make it irrelevant.

Regardless, the community appears to be considered a central element of the role of BAC, according to numerous stakeholders. Indeed, "Enjoy, Create, Participate" could be considered to provide opportunities for the community which enable them to enjoy, create and participate. However, the statement neglects to highlight this community role, which was paramount in the interviews. This focus on community echoes the survey findings about the importance of community and community development for arts centres more generally. The disconnect between the mission statement and the stakeholders' perception of the role of BAC in the community questions the suitability of the mission statement. Either the centre wished to incorporate the community into the mission statement, which is in keeping with the recommendation to include key stakeholders in mission statements (Bartkus and Glassman, 2008), or it needed to assess the role of the centre considering the various stakeholder perspectives.

At the time of these interviews, a new business plan for the centre had just been completed, but was yet to be enacted. The business plan articulated an updated mission, which was: "we want to entertain you, inspire you, include you and offer you opportunities" (Goodale, 2018, p.5). This was to be achieved by focusing on three streams of value: "the wellbeing of the community; the wellbeing of the arts; and the wellbeing of the organisation" (Goodale, 2018, p.5). Evaluating the degree to which this was achieved is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this section has introduced important themes which are further explored in the upcoming sections. These include the impact of the survival ethos on the centre, the relationship the centre has with the community, and the varying stakeholder perceptions of the centre. These will now be discussed through an exploration of the operations at BAC.

# How does Bridgwater Arts Centre operate?

## Management and leadership

The internal stakeholder interviews revealed a range of perceptions of the management and leadership approaches exhibited at BAC. Primarily the case study raised questions about the organisational structure and leadership approach of the Artistic Director, as well as the role of volunteers at the centre. These elements will now be discussed.

When asked about the organisational structure of BAC, the Artistic Director commented that BAC embraces "some kind of operational chaos. There's some kind of chaos but that works, and I think it's fluid. It's very fluid, the people are fluid […] There's been a fluidity to my role as well, and all the other staff members' roles". The Artistic Director viewed this fluidity favourably, attesting that it allowed staff members to grow and develop whilst also allowing roles to form around staff members and their skillsets. The benefits to this approach were also recognised by a board member, who felt the fluidity encouraged "a transparent, democratic way of working, a flat structure". This fluid and flatter approach to organisational structure has been cited as beneficial by some in the literature: for example, by creating a network approach allowing greater creativity (Foster, 2023), or creating greater opportunities for staff members to share ideas and make decisions contributing to the creativity of an organisation (Adams, 2007), or higher job satisfaction for employees (Sartain and Finney, 2003). Yet despite these potential benefits, the Centre Manager commented that the structure was not always beneficial: "I am personally beginning to feel that I can no longer give as much time as I have, over the past 18 months. I feel like I've been overused". This comment referred to her individual capacity but also the structure of the organisation. The Centre Manager noted that because the structure had developed in an organic way it no longer fulfilled the needs of the organisation. For instance, the staff member who ran events was part time and was scheduled to work on a day the centre was closed, hence other staff members would often have to step in to run events. The fluidity of roles may have been beneficial in some circumstances, but in this instance it also led to staff members doing work that was beyond their remit and capacity.

Reservations about the structure were not limited to the Centre Manager, with a board member commenting that:

> Not having a hierarchical structure made for friendly working
> relationships, but not always very efficient working relationships […]
> individuals not quite knowing who their boss was […]. We're all
> committed to transparency and democracy and non-hierarchal structures
> in theory, but honestly, I don't see how an organisation can work unless
> they've got somebody who's really running with the ball at the top who
> people look up to and trust and have got a vision, and yeah, have got an
> external profile.

This questioning of the structure and the implications for leadership was shared by the Chair of the Board, who stated: "I think, certainly in terms of vision and direction, it's needed [a figurehead]". However, the Chair of the Board did qualify this statement, commenting that the Artistic Director not fulfilling what she considered to be a figurehead role was not the fault of the Artistic Director, but rather a result of the organisational structure and the various tasks and requirements of the position, making this additional leadership role a challenge.

Criticisms of the lack of a figurehead at BAC were not limited to the board perspective. For instance, a local artist contended that "there's nobody […] who's had that sort of enthusiasm for it [BAC]" and "there's no fire there". Another local artist agreed, stating: "it doesn't feel like there is a figurehead". These comments align with the opinion that leaders must also be the figurehead for, or public face of, an organisation, which is often the case in arts organisations (Cray and Inglis, 2011), and demonstrates a preference for a charismatic leader, which is often romanticised in the arts world (Nisbett and Walmsley, 2016). Hence the Artistic Director is criticised for not fulfilling this leadership role, and as a result their approach is questioned and criticised.

It is challenging to ascertain whether the organisational structure is problematic in this case study, as there were different opinions regarding the effectiveness of the approach. However, it is evident that there are differing stakeholder opinions that needed to be addressed, as diverse expectations may be problematic for the centre going forward. Regarding the implications for leadership and the approach adopted by the Artistic Director, it was difficult to gauge whether the Artistic Director was lacking in leadership skills and instead fulfilling more of a management role, or whether her form of leadership was not recognised by the

stakeholder interviewees, given the apparent preference for the traditional perception of leadership in the style of a heroic and charismatic leader.

In addition to the differing perspectives on leadership, the case study also revealed challenges related to volunteers. The use of volunteers is common in English arts centres: as the survey from this thesis revealed, 35% of arts centre staff were volunteers and 79% of the English arts centres deployed volunteers. Volunteers were instrumental at BAC following the 2011 funding cuts: as the paid staff were made redundant it was dependent on volunteers to continue the running of the centre. The role of volunteers and difficulties relating to the volunteer structure at BAC were raised by the staff and board members. The concerns centred around the impact on the culture of the centre and the relationship between the board and the staff, which will now be explored.

The challenges relating to the use of volunteers at BAC were evidenced in the Centre Manager's interview, where she noted difficulties in inducting new volunteers to the centre and the new volunteers' reaction to current volunteers:

> You get this sort of clash of cultures in that setting, and that has to be managed really well for them to accept it, I think. And then the people who have been brought in are thinking, 'I've got to deal with these people'. It's like, they go 'Woah!' So that kind of thing has to be managed very carefully.

The Artistic Director also commented on the culture of the centre, stating that there was an "inward-facing culture here, because I guess when volunteers lead a place, it can become by the volunteers, for the volunteers, to a certain degree". This culture clash raises important questions about inclusivity. It was difficult to gauge the impact of this culture on the community more broadly given the reluctance of participants in the community interviews. However, the staff and board member interviews suggested that the impact of this culture was detrimental to the centre and perceptions of inclusivity. For instance, the Vice-Chair of the Board noted that there was a sense of exclusivity surrounding the centre that "felt a bit exclusive to an outsider". He suggested that this 'closed club' phenomenon may be a result of the bonding of the volunteers and staff following the funding cut of 2011.

Interestingly, the case study revealed that this negative culture was not felt by the volunteers and those heavily involved in the centre. One volunteer noted that the centre was their "second home", and terms such as 'warm', 'welcoming' and 'friendly' were common across the volunteer and audience interviews. The high reliance on volunteers, according to some interviewees, created a culture of exclusivity and a closed club, but once an individual was within the club, the experience was positive and embracing according to the volunteer experiences, suggesting a more inward-facing than external-facing culture and focus.

According to the Artistic Director and Centre Manager, the volunteer culture at the centre also resulted in challenges related to customer service as a result of volunteers' lack of training and resistance to change. The Artistic Director also noted that the composition of volunteers at the board level was problematic, stating that during her time at the centre, the board felt like a "dysfunctional family" at times. This was again attributed to the 2011 funding cuts at the centre:

> A lot of really well-meaning, passionate volunteers stood up to the plate and said 'well, we don't want it shut, we need X number of board members, so we will become board members'. So, passion became the currency on the board level, not necessarily arts industry experience.

The role of passion on boards is not necessarily a negative characteristic and can be crucial in attracting individuals to join an arts board (Rentschler, 2015), although it is not necessarily the only driver (Tonks, 2020). The Artistic Director indicated that the lack of arts-specific experience may have presented challenges; however, the literature questions the need for sector-specific experience, suggesting that specialist skills may be more important, whether from within or beyond the arts sector (Tonks, 2020). Whatever the specific challenges of the board's experience may have been, the need to carefully consider the composition of board members, rather than allowing their appointment based purely on willingness to be involved, was evident.

The interviews also indicated challenges with the board regarding their involvement in the daily operations of the centre, a challenge which is documented in the literature (Fishel, 2003; Cray and Inglis, 2011). For example,

the Artistic Director commented that "the board used to make up a third of the volunteers doing box office and things like that", which meant that board meetings were focused on operational concerns rather than strategic thinking. In an attempt to make the board and their meetings more efficient, at the time of the interviews a range of committees had recently been formed to remove some of the operational considerations from the board meetings. These committees included resources, strategy and development, operations, and marketing and programming (according to a board member). Although these committees were viewed favourably by the board members and the Artistic Director, it could be questioned whether the committees removed the board members from the operational considerations of the centre, or simply moved them to another format. Further research would be required to ascertain whether this approach had sufficiently removed board members from operational matters, which traditionally sit with staff members, allowing greater time in board meetings to generate a more strategic approach.

In discussing the role of volunteers at BAC, it should be considered whether the volunteers were the source of the difficulties or whether the history, power imbalance, and the management of the volunteers was to blame. For instance, the case study revealed an overwhelming sense that the centre was indebted to the volunteers for continuing to run it after the 2011 funding cuts. This sense appeared to have manifested in increased power of the volunteers in the BAC setting, which supports the theory that reliance on certain stakeholders manifests in stakeholder power (Mitchell et al., 1997), and the greater the organisation's reliance on the stakeholder, the greater power they hold (Frooman, 1999). This power was revealed in the words of the Artistic Director: "Sometimes I think, hand on heart, sometimes we can sway into imbalance where the volunteers become too much of a – not too much of a priority, because they are the backbone, but sometimes decisions are made because of the opinion of volunteers". It should be noted that this power of the volunteers may not be so problematic if there was alignment and agreement in approaches to the centre, another example of a possible benefit of a shared and acknowledged mission statement and strategic approach.

Despite the supposed power of the volunteers at BAC, there was also discontent amongst the volunteers regarding their management. For instance, one volunteer commented that communication was lacking from management, and "sometimes organisation is a little bit, shall we say, sloppy". Whilst at the centre I

personally witnessed this discontent, overhearing the frustrations of some volunteers regarding changes or decisions made at the centre. The Artistic Director was aware of this dissatisfaction, noting that it was "the most tiring [and] frustrating part of the work". Communication was cited as the solution by the Artistic Director and Vice-Chair. Additionally, the Centre Manager and board members considered training and upskilling as approaches to managing volunteers for positive outcomes at the centre. Further research is needed on the impact of these approaches (newly adopted at the time of the interviews) in terms of the culture of the centre, volunteer attitudes, and perceptions of exclusivity and the culture more generally at BAC.

## Programming

Risk aversion, both artistic and financial, was paramount in the programming at BAC. Interviews with staff and board members highlighted that programming decisions were focused on financial security. In the words of the Artistic Director: "we are open to anything that will make us money really, to a certain degree". With this mindset, programming was focused on tribute bands and less artistically challenging works.

According to a board member, tribute bands were "the most lucrative arts events" at the centre, attracting large audiences which resulted in higher income. Tribute bands were considered financially crucial and a way to appeal to multiple demographics (Marketing and Programming Manager), and were cited as tapping into the demographics of the town of Bridgwater more broadly (Centre Manager). Despite the financial benefits of this approach, not all stakeholders viewed the reliance on tribute bands favourably. For instance, one board member stated: "they're not very inspiring" and another staff member suggested "it's dull, it's so dull". It should be noted that although these staff members may have viewed the use of tribute bands as bland, it was obviously appealing to audiences, as they were popular and provided an important income source for the centre. This juxtaposition between the negative association of tribute bands by some staff members and the popularity in the community comes down to preferences and taste, as well as different and competing understandings of the artistic role of the centre.

Another perspective on tribute bands was presented by the representative for the town council. While recognising the importance of tribute bands from a financial

perspective, he was adamant that the arts centre should not be presenting them. He attested that the centre should be supporting local bands, and that encouraging local talent is crucial because by supporting tribute bands from outside of Bridgwater the centre was signalling that "local bands are rubbish". He also linked the need to support local artists over external bands, such as tribute bands, as necessary, because:

> one of the big things about Bridgwater is the self-esteem of the place. And there's a tendency for people to think, you know, 'boring Bridgwater, you're never going to do anything here, you've got to leave town to be successful'. And we've always had the opposite view of that, and the people that sort of, you know, my way of thinking would say that's quite important, to bring that element of self-worth to people, and creativity.

Herein lies an inner conflict of the centre: what is the role of BAC regarding professional or amateur works, or democratisation of culture? This questioning also came to light when discussing the visual arts programme at the centre. One staff member was highly critical of the visual arts programme, which was curated and organised by volunteers, stating that the programme needed to raise its standards and professionalism. It is interesting that structurally the centre appeared to lend itself to supporting the inclusion of the amateur perspective with its flatter and more democratic way of working, as well as the use of volunteers, yet there was uncertainty about the role of amateur and professional works in the programme.

The confusion about the role of programming at BAC was not limited to questions about the amateur perspective, but also emerged in the context of artistic risk and the presentation of more artistically challenging works. On the whole, the interviewed audience members and volunteers were content with the centre's programming, but the Board and staff were more critical of the offering, as articulated by one staff member: "I just feel it's gone very stale, we're used to the same way of doing things". These various perspectives question the core role of the arts centre: should the centre present work such as tribute bands that appeals to large, popular audiences, or should it present more artistically challenging work?

The Artistic Director argued that there was no audience for experimental, live art, or even theatre at the centre. However, the argument could be made that there was no opportunity for these audiences to develop. Although tribute bands were considered a safe artistic and financial programming option, this does not mean that other approaches may not have been suitable, and perhaps other approaches had been overlooked at BAC. As highlighted in the literature review, risk is not always negative in the programming setting: for example, it can increase desirability and appeal (Harrison and Hartley, 2007) to the audience segment of mavericks who seek risk and alternative arts offerings (Brown, 2007). The neglect to consider alternative options to tribute bands and familiarity, a common programming approach in arts centres (Kawashima, 1999a), raises questions of aspirations in programming as well as uncertainty about the role of programming at the centre.

However, in the interviews there was evidence of a desire for more creativity. These aspirations were articulated by a board member:

> We need to progressively make the programme more stimulating, and—
> it's a bit sort of stuck in the mud a bit at the moment. There's a kind of
> predictability and safeness about the programme. We need to be a bit
> more adventurous and take a few risks, and to accept that there are
> going to be a few things that aren't going to run to start with, but hopefully
> over a period of time it will build up.

The Artistic Director and the Marketing and Programming Manager shared these aspirations and spoke of their desire to present more diverse and challenging work. The approach of balancing the work presented at the centre between that which is expected to generate income with that which may be considered riskier is in keeping with Micocci (2017) and Williams et al.'s (2017) recommendations. However, although Micocci (2017) and Williams et al. (2017) support this approach, the strategy of presenting works that may make a loss may not always be possible. For instance, arts centres need to be in a financial situation to absorb such a loss, which was certainly not the case for BAC directly following the 2011 funding cuts.

Finally, there were conflicting opinions regarding the quality of the programme at the centre. In the first instance, the Marketing and Programming Manager claimed that quality was at the forefront of her mind: even when it came to tribute bands, the quality was important. However, there was a range of perspectives on the quality of the programming. Some interviewees praised the quality of the programme: for instance, the Chair of the Board stated that the programme is "mostly very professional […] the quality's there", and a local artist stated: "there's the odd one or two things that aren't quite as good as you'd hoped, but on the whole the acts we get that I've been to in recent years I've really enjoyed, and have been very good and quite professional". However, this is juxtaposed with criticisms such as "there's been some pretty grim stuff" (local artist), and suggestions that the quality of the programme overall needs to be considered (board member). It was difficult to gauge whether these differing opinions were a result of genuinely low quality, or whether there was an assumption that work which may be more entertainment focused, or less artistically challenging, was lower in quality. This was a reminder that quality is subjective, and again, a greater understanding of the role of the centre and the centre's understanding of quality may be beneficial to address and reduce disputes in programming decisions and perceptions.

BAC is an arts centre that is risk averse both artistically and financially, which represents a stark contrast to the viewpoint of Future Arts Centres. As previously mentioned, according to Future Arts Centres (2024a), a key principle of arts centres is to encourage innovation through business models that facilitate taking artistic risks. Although some arts centres in the UK may have the capacity to be innovators and risk-takers, whether arts centres have the resources, capacity and financial security to undertake this approach in reality is debateable. Certainly, in this case study the opportunity for innovation and risk-taking was hampered by the risk-averse mentality at the centre, as well as financial challenges and questions about the centre's propensity for artistic risk. It is challenging to determine whether this mentality existed prior to the 2011 funding cuts, but it was certainly evident in the years following, where an ethos of survival was paramount.

This section also highlighted debates about the role of the programming in terms of amateur versus professional approaches and work, as well as the role of the presentation of more artistically challenging work. It is interesting that although the interviews revealed a safety and security in the presentation of tribute bands,

this was not necessarily the only approach to programming, raising questions about the perception of risk propensity of audiences as well as the artistic aspirations of the centre. The conflicting views on programming decisions and approaches again appear to highlight the need for a more in-depth strategic approach at the centre to incorporate the role of programming and reflect BAC's artistic vision. Within discussions of BAC's programming, there was notable interest regarding the implications of the programming for the identity of the centre more broadly, which will be discussed in the next section.

## Marketing and branding

BAC's brand identity was raised multiple times in the internal stakeholder interviews. The concepts of brand identity and mission statement have been used interchangeably in the arts (Voss and Grabel, 2014). However, interviewees' descriptions and understandings of identity in this case study aligns with Albert and Whetten's (1985) view that identity encompasses the beliefs, values and essentially the defining characteristics of an organisation. Therefore this definition of identity is utilised in this case study.

According to the branding literature outlined in the literature review, having a clear brand, which is linked to identity, is important, as it provides a way to "build brand salience with customers" (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020, p.107) and a vehicle to assist in mission fulfilment (Voss and Grabel, 2014). As discussed in the previous section, mission fulfilment is a point of contention at BAC, as is the presence of a clear identity. In the words of the Vice-Chair: "we are struggling with our identity". The Artistic Director provided additional insight into the impact of the 2011 funding cut on the brand of the arts centre, and when asked if BAC had a strong identity, the response was:

> No, that's the problem, there isn't. And it's about working on that, really. Because if I'm honest, I've been more interested in making sure we don't shut than thinking of 'oh, what would be a good brand for this place?'. It's just, I haven't been able—it's just not something—and it is difficult, and I guess sometimes when we're having these meetings at board level, when people say 'oh, the identity's been lost', and I understand what they're saying, but then money is always the final thing. And if we need to sell lots of tribute acts and comedy shows, then that's how – you know, it

doesn't matter what the branding is, we just need to do that, right now. But that's not a strategic way to see it.

This quote presents branding as an afterthought rather than a tool that could assist the centre in its desire for survival following the funding cuts. This contrasts with the traditional strategic approach to branding (Walmsley, 2019), and by solely focusing on the programming elements it fails to embrace the benefits of a strong brand that could be achieved via a more relational and experiential approach to audience engagement (Raynor, 2007; Baxter, 2012).

This quote also highlighted a tension between programming and branding or identity. This sentiment was also articulated by the Vice-Chair, who was highly critical of the programming and suggested that the quality and events programmed had damaged the identity of the centre. This resentment of the purported impact of programming on the identity of the centre is revealing. For instance, the Vice-Chair and the Artistic Director alluded to the concept of 'mission-market tension', which refers to the fact that "the need to remain financially sustainable can often force decisions that are at odds with those that would further mission fulfilment" (Voss and Grabel, 2014, p.82). However, given the lack of a clearly articulated mission or strategic approach at the centre, it is challenging to gauge whether the identity of the centre aligns with the desired identity or brand, or whether the programming has played a part in these perceptions. It should be noted that BAC presenting comedy and tributes might also have contributed to an identity, even if not necessarily the desired identity of certain stakeholders.

In considering the Vice-Chair and the Artistic Director's perceptions of the lack of identity, it should be noted that consumers attribute their own understanding to a brand's identity (Voss and Grabel, 2014), hence there were differing views of the centre's identity within the case study. To gain insight into the perceived identity of the centre, interviewees were asked their opinion of the personality of BAC, and unsurprisingly there were mixed responses. For instance, many of the staff and audience members articulated that the centre was welcoming, warm and inclusive. Other stakeholders commented on the heritage of the centre, with one staff member stating it was: "old […] I think we do need to up our image to be much more contemporary"; and another staff member commenting that "the walls

just speak". The Artistic Director went as far as remarking that heritage was the centre's unique selling point (USP).

The term 'quirky' was also used in a few interviews, although the Artistic Director recognised that the use of that term in branding may deter people. The range of understandings of the personality of the centre runs contrary to the goals of branding evident in the literature, where the aim is to align the organisational identity of the centre with the views of internal and external stakeholders

The lack of external awareness of the centre was also a recurring theme raised by staff and board members, as well as three of the audience members and a local artist. One community interviewee, who stated that they had lived in Bridgwater their whole life and had never heard of the centre. The interviews suggested that this lack of awareness was partly a result of the threat of the centre's closure after the 2011 funding cut. However, there were suggestions that the centre was still unknown to many in the community both before and after the 2011 funding cut.

In chatting with audience members, there was a strong belief that the centre was unknown to many within the community. In the words of one audience member: "it is a lively little place really if only people knew it was here"; another suggested "lots of people don't know it exists. It has a low profile. Something should be done". Upon further questioning these audience members attributed the lack of awareness to the lack of marketing. A workshop facilitator agreed, stating that the centre is "not always good at marketing". Even the Marketing and Programming Manager conceded that: "I'm probably not concentrating that much on the marketing". This lack of focus on marketing was no doubt impacted by the breadth of the role undertaken by the Programming and Marketing Manager, which included marketing and programming, managing hirers, creating and negotiating contracts and deals – all whilst employed on a part-time basis. This is not to say that no marketing was undertaken by the centre, as there was a monthly newsletter and communications with those on their mailing list; however, there did not seem to be the capacity to target far beyond those already engaged in the centre. Having said this, the centre made attempts to raise awareness of its presence, for example through working on their public relations, outreach, and delivering presentations at community centres.

Building relationships with audiences was further complicated by member records being lost at the time of the 2011 funding cut. As a staff member stated:

> I think we've lost a big chunk of our supporters by the fact that we lost public funding, all the staff went, everything went poof. And in that period, about three or four years, we've lost a whole knowledge of who those people are. It's really sad […]. And if people feel ignored or left off, they're going to – why would they bother with us? So, I feel we're not giving them enough, to feel, to gain their loyalty.

According to this staff member, the loss of these records was detrimental to maintaining relationships with the community. These broken relationships were particularly detrimental in the BAC context given the focus on community in the role of the centre.

The location of the centre was also blamed for limiting awareness. For instance, the Artistic Director stated that "with the arts centre, we're quite hidden away, you know, even though we are in the town centre we're not on a walkway". Another staff member agreed— "we're not visible"—and advocated strategies for greater visibility, such as signage and a photo of the centre on the town noticeboard. This suggestion aligns with the research of McClellan et al. (1999), who support methods to increase contact with consumers when there may be constrained availability of an offering, which is a key component of a difficult brand (Harrison and Hartley, 2007).

In considering whether BAC could be considered a difficult brand the Programming and Marketing Manager believed that the centre would meet the two key characteristics of constrained availability and uncertain outcome (risk) (Harrison and Hartley, 2007). The Programming and Marketing Manager considered that constrained availability was being managed at BAC by the programming of a range of events, meaning there was more availability of genres to suit diverse audiences. In terms of risk, the Programming and Marketing Manager recognised the risk to audiences due to the unknown outcomes of attending arts events. To manage this risk, the tactic of programming according to familiarity, such as a popular performer or a tribute or a familiar story, was adopted.

This section revealed the challenges of brand identity at BAC resulting from programming decisions. Yet a question must be asked about whether there was a lack of identity, as suggested, or rather an identity that may not have been in alignment with the desired identity according to specific stakeholders. Awareness and marketing approaches were also questioned, revealing again the impact of limited capacity and a negative outcome of the organic organisational structure, where the Programming and Marketing Manager was stretched beyond capacity. The identity of the centre will now be explored further via an examination of the stakeholder perceptions of the centre more broadly.

## How do key stakeholders perceive Bridgwater Arts Centre?

The interviews revealed varying perceptions of BAC. In collecting data on the various perspectives of the centre, it should be noted that it was challenging to gain insight into the perception of BAC from stakeholders who were external to the centre, given the reluctance of individuals to undertake the community interviews. Hence this section gains insight into community perceptions of the centre from internal interviewees who willingly shared their understandings of these. Although this source may not be as accurate as gaining data from external community members directly, internal stakeholders' comments were based on feedback from community members. The perspectives on the centre were wide-ranging, from elitist and exclusive to warm and welcoming. This section will now delve into these differing perceptions, firstly examining the elitist and exclusive viewpoint.

The interviews revealed the sense that many community members who were not involved with the centre viewed BAC as elitist and exclusive. For instance, an audience member stated that "elements of town wouldn't come here because they think it is elitist; if they came, they would realise that's not the case. It's an opportunity to meet friends". The Artistic Director also shared her thoughts on the perception of the centre in the community: "Bridgwater is a proper working town, it's not like Salisbury. It's not an arts centre in Salisbury. So, there's the reputation that the arts centre is elitist and stuck-up people come here". The Artistic Director linked the centre's history as a members' club (Miller and Miller, 1975) to this exclusive perspective, as there were still members of the community who believed the centre was a members' club.

This perception of elitism and exclusivity at BAC was not helped by the fact that in the past, programming was focused on "really high art, and classical music" (Artistic Director). Another staff member agreed:

> I think the high, elitist, the kind of—the chamber music, the kind of more high-end drama, that was what lost audiences. I don't know why; I wasn't ever here for that. But that's why we hang onto the tributes, which are far more a mix of the demographic of the town and relate to what the town wants.

It is interesting that the Marketing and Programming Manager credited the programming of tribute shows with broadening the audience demographic when, as discussed, this approach was also accused of damaging the brand. The connection between BAC's history and more recent perceptions supports branding theories such as Wiedmann et al.'s (2011) assertion that brand heritage strongly impacts brand perceptions as well as the behaviour of consumers. This perception was supported by a staff member asserting that the centre was "still quite exclusive". This perception, and the elements of exclusivity and elitism, were regarded as problematic by staff and board members. However, this sentiment was not shared by all the interviewees. For instance, a local musician stated that he valued the elitism and exclusivity of the centre, commenting that BAC was "still in a way a little bit select" and "I'm not a populist, and I think if it did change and become more egalitarian or wide-ranging then I think it would lose something which I value about an arts centre like this, so. You win a few, you lose a lot, don't you?" This again raises questions about the role of the centre. The viewpoint of staff and board members suggest that the centre wished to appeal to a wide range of the community and embrace a cultural democracy perspective. However, staff and board members appeared to prioritise professional work, and many were critical of the democratic, flat structure. Considering these various contradictions, it appears that clarification of the role of the centre would be beneficial.

The inclusion of the term 'arts centre' in the name of Bridgwater Arts Centre was also cited as perpetuating this concept of elitism and exclusivity. Although the internal stakeholder interviewees were familiar with the term 'arts centre' and what this may entail, there was recognition that for those external to the centre

there may be a lack of understanding of the term. For example, one local artist stated that the term "does turn some people off, 'the Arts' with a kind of capital A, and a little bit frightened of the concept". This was reinforced by a touring artist, who suggested that people were still put off by arts centres as they consider them 'high art'. The Chair asserted that she believed the term 'arts centre' was "a bit outmoded", which isn't helped by the fact that brands with a long history, such as BAC, may run the risk of appearing "old-fashioned and not contemporary and up-date" (Keller and Swaminathan, 2020, p.83). The Chair also commented that "there is a problem that the general public's definition of arts is, they tend to think of visual arts, and unfortunately, they don't think of all the arts". The fact that what constitutes an arts centre is so diverse (Lane, 1978) was prevalent in the interviews. One board member commented on the mysteriousness of arts centres: "maybe it's a bit mystical to a lot of people. What goes on in arts centres? I don't really know".

It should be questioned why, if the term 'arts centre' is creating such a barrier to new audiences and support of the arts centre, this term is used? The Board had considered this very question in the context of re-branding the centre shortly before the interviews took place. However, the heritage of the centre prevailed, with a reluctance, particularly from the volunteers, to change its name. Although linking brands to their heritage has been cited as beneficial, for instance in creating a point of difference to other brands (Aaker, 2004; Frizzo et al., 2018; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020), in the case of Bridgwater, upholding and publicising this heritage may indeed have perpetuated perceptions of elitism and exclusivity, creating a particular barrier to potential new audiences.

Although BAC was perceived by some as exclusive and elitist, contrasting opinions were voiced by many of the internal stakeholders and audience members. For instance, one board member suggested that the centre had:

> a very nice ethos, very inclusive ethos, welcomes people. You know, it's very supportive of individuals as well; people that may have social problems or psychological problems find a lot of support from their friends and colleagues here. It works well.

This sense of inclusion was shared by other interviewees: for example, a touring artist noted the warmth and homeliness of the centre, and an audience member described BAC as a "second home where I can even be grumpy". A volunteer articulated that:

> My cat died. I live on my own and need something to do in the evenings. Giving back. I don't want it to go [the arts centre]. There are lots of lonely people. People who are a bit different, transitioning, and no one cares […] Everyone can be who they are, an eclectic group of weirdos.

A local artist and workshop facilitator concurs with this sense of inclusivity, stating that the centre is:

> quirky […] It seems to attract interesting personalities […] Some of the people that come along to the regular events in the bar like the acoustic night, there's some interesting characters there. Yeah, and it's kind of accepting of those different people and their personalities I suppose.

From a personal perspective, when visiting the centre, this warmth and friendliness was palpable. Upon arrival I was offered a cup of tea, as were the performers who arrived for the bump-in of a performance the week I was at the centre. Throughout my time at the centre, I was made to feel welcome, at home, and was checked on throughout the day. These feelings and positive opinions of the centre greatly contrasted with the aforementioned sentiments of exclusivity and elitism and the apparently excessive cultural influence of the volunteers. Upon reflection, it was evident that stakeholders who regularly visited the centre had a favourable perception characterised by a sense of inclusivity and warmth. This is perhaps not surprising, because if individuals did not experience these positive feelings, they would be unlikely to continue to visit and engage with the centre. A board member articulated the varying perspectives of the centre: "if you're involved in it [the Bridgwater Arts Centre], it has got a very distinct personality […] it's a very supportive community. But nobody would […] know that from the outside".

In some interviews, the physical building of the arts centre was listed as a barrier to attending. For instance, a board member stated:

> People in Bridgwater, perhaps, are very comfortable about going to a
> community hall or a church hall or one of the facilities they're familiar with
> in their locality. Close locality. They don't find any problem with going out
> to these sorts of places. But the arts centre, maybe because it's in the
> poshest street in Bridgwater, and it's got these steps that go up.

The impact of the building itself correlates with the concept of threshold fear or
anxiety. This term, originally from the psychology field, was applied to the cultural
context (museums) by Elaine Heumann Gurian (Gurian, 2005a; 2005b; 2006).
Tull (2017) simplifies this anxiety to the 'unknown', which is evidenced in the
previous quote. However, on a deeper level the concept relates to "the
constraints that people feel that prevent them from participating in activities
meant for them" (Gurian, 2006, p.115) and "the anxiety felt by potential visitors
which can become a barrier that prevents them from enjoying, or even entering
the space" (Dickinson, 2020). Barriers and anxiety could be caused not only by
physical challenges (such as disability access), but also the architecture of the
building (being historic and grand, for instance), and the meaning that may be
attached to that space (Dickinson, 2020). This appears relevant to BAC, which is
located in a historic building with the associated perceptions of elitism and
exclusivity.

This section revealed differing perspectives on BAC according to different
stakeholder groups. In considering these perspectives, it should be reiterated
that the opinions of community members external to the regular working of the
centre are based on the internal stakeholders and feedback they had received.
Therefore, in order to gain greater insight, additional research should explore
these segments of the community. The range of perceptions again underlined
the potential benefits of the centre articulating its role to provide clarity of
strategic priorities and to shape its future direction.

## Conclusion

This case study has provided important insights into the arts centre model and
related management issues. Key findings highlighted the advantages for arts
centres of a clear and distinctive mission statement, a strong brand identity and

strategic leadership. Although BAC had a formal mission statement, it was argued that the statement failed to meet the theoretical definition of a mission statement. Instead, the brevity of 'Enjoy, Create, Participate' meant the statement lacked the ability to guide the centre in decision-making and gaining stakeholder support. In keeping with recommendations from the literature (e.g. Bryson, 2004; Heath and Dalziel, 2019), findings from the case study suggested that the centre might have benefited from a more robust statement and a more strategic approach. The lack of clarity about the role of the centre appeared to be responsible for numerous conflicting opinions within the centre: for example, the various perspectives of the organisational structure; the amateur versus professional offerings and opportunities at the centre; the role of the centre in terms of presentation of more artistically challenging works; understandings of quality; the role of volunteers; and the desired brand identity. Had a more in-depth role been articulated at BAC, perhaps there would have been greater alignment in approaches and decision-making at the centre.

Although a more strategic approach at BAC may have aided understandings of the brand, this case study also questions the fit between the arts centre model and the branding literature. The literature asserts that brands should strive for a clear identity whilst at the same time acknowledging that consumers attribute their own understanding of a brand's identity (Voss and Grabel, 2014). It was evident in the case study that there was no singular identity for BAC and that there were a range of views on the centre's brand identity. This is perhaps not surprising given the diversity within the arts centre model and as raised in the literature, how can a singular organisation appeal to many different people with differing preferences (Lane, 1978). These questions of identity in the arts centre setting are further explored in the upcoming case studies.

In this case study, the leadership style of the Artistic Director was questioned. Stakeholders raised concerns about whether the Artistic Director's approach veered towards a management role rather than that of a leader. The Artistic Director's more democratic approach, which was criticised by multiple stakeholders, was accompanied by claims that BAC lacked a figurehead. These comments demonstrated a preference amongst stakeholders for a leader with a more transformational leadership style, the preferred leadership style in the arts centre setting according to Williams et al. (2017). It is challenging to ascertain the suitability of the Artistic Director's democratic approach at BAC, given the stakeholder preference for a traditional heroic leader. It is just as challenging to

ascertain the suitability of a transformational approach. However, what is clear is the expectation of a charismatic figurehead at the centre, rather than recognition of other potential leadership styles. It should also be noted that the leadership approach in an organisation should align with and support the strategic goals: however, without these in place it is difficult to make a judgement on the leadership approach at BAC. This case study does not debunk the claims of Williams et al. (2017), nor support their comments. Leadership styles are explored further in the upcoming case studies.

BAC is an example of an arts centre that has been greatly impacted by its history, including the 2011 funding cut. In the interviews, the funding cut was cited as contributing to the power of volunteers at the centre, the reliance on tribute bands, lack of brand focus, and an ethos of survival. Although these claims have been critically explored in this case study, it is evident that the centre has faced significant challenges over the years. BAC's story offers a dramatic contrast to Future Arts Centres' key principles of an arts centre. As listed on pages 29-30, Future Arts Centres (2024a) claims that the role of arts centres includes, but is not limited to: contributing to the economy, allowing space and support for artists, entrepreneurs, artistic risk taking and development. These principles demonstrate a chasm between the beliefs of Future Arts Centres and the realities faced by BAC. This gap demonstrates the importance of the research in this thesis to narrate the story and lived experiences of arts centres, rather than reproduce a theoretical and aspirational understanding of the arts centre model. This exploration will now be continued in the second case study: Stratford Courthouse.

# Chapter 6 – Stratford Courthouse case study

**Figure 6.1: Facade of Stratford Courthouse**



## Introduction

Stratford Courthouse can be found in the town of Stratford, approximately 230km from Melbourne, the nearest major city. At the time of the interviews it had a population of 2,617 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016b) and was categorised as inner regional by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+), indicating that the "geographic distance imposes some restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The town had a strong cultural presence, notable for its annual Shakespeare on the River Festival, which has run since 1991 (Stratford Shakespeare Festival, no date), as well as an arts trail, numerous theatre groups, and Stratford Courthouse.

According to the Stratford Courthouse website (Stratford Courthouse Theatre, no date), the building where Stratford Courthouse resides was built in 1885 and was originally the court chambers and municipal offices for the shire of Avon. The courts closed in 1976, after which the space was utilised by the historical society and library. However, with the building in need of significant restoration, these entities moved, and in 1993 the Eye to Eye Theatre took over the venue. Eye to

Eye was greatly supported by the community and was a prolific presenter of work, putting on over 1,000 shows in 14 years (Stratford Courthouse Theatre, no date). In 2008, the building was up for sale and a husband-and-wife team purchased the building. The space was opened in September 2009, with the unusual governance structure of being a privately-run arts centre.

According to the owners of Stratford Courthouse, the aim was for the space to be a gallery with a theatre space available to hirers. However, the gallery did not meet the expectations of its owners. In particular, one of the owners did not enjoy being behind a counter and although the gallery was not overly busy, it was not quiet enough for them to pursue their own artwork whilst there. According to the owners, at this time there was demand from the community to use the theatre space as a community theatre rather than a space for hire. Hence the gallery space was transformed into Segue Community Hub & Arts Café (Segue), to be run by the community, and the owners began programming an arts centre after refurbishments, including retractable seating for 100 people.

As with all four case studies, the structure of this chapter is based on the research sub-questions. The interviewees were the two owners, who will be referred to as Owner 1 and Owner 2; a Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist; a local artist/drama teacher; another local artist; the Artistic Director of a Melbourne-based theatre company; the CEO of a Melbourne-based theatre company; the president of a local theatre company; the founder of a regional theatre group; four audience members; nine community members; and three Segue volunteers. The case study will commence with an investigation of the first research sub-question, exploring the role of Stratford Courthouse.

## What is the role of Stratford Courthouse?

In the interviews, the owners revealed that there had been a significant shift in the role of Stratford Courthouse since its inception. Initially, the approach adopted in managing the organisation was guided by business thinking. In the words of Owner 2:

> When we set it up, it was a little bit by default, I must admit. So we weren't very scientific about setting goals […]. I think we had more of a

business mentality – that the more shows we put on, the more people we'd get here, and we'd make some money.

This business approach was recognised more widely, with the president of a local theatre company stating: "I wonder if, when they first started, it might have been a crime of passion, if you like. But they probably started it as a business venture". It is notable that although both owners considered their approach to be business-like, it did not incorporate a formal mission statement or strategic goals, which defies best practice outlined in the strategic management literature (e.g. Vogt, 1994; Bryson, 2004), as well as the arts centre-specific literature (e.g. Heath and Dalziel, 2019; Williams et al., 2017). Although a formalised mission statement may have aided Stratford Courthouse by providing a reason for existence, goals and points of differentiation (Drucker, 1993; Varbanova, 2013; Voss and Grabel, 2014), the owners suggested that their true challenge in running Stratford Courthouse in its early days was that its focus was unsuitable for both the organisation and the community. Owner 2 admitted that when they started in Stratford, they did not have local connections and did not know the community arts groups. The owners assumed that locals would primarily want to see touring productions, but with their lack of arts knowledge, they struggled to know "whether a show was good or not" (Owner 2).

In the eyes of the owners, the importance of the community became paramount for the success of Stratford Courthouse. In the words of Owner 2:

> We quickly realised that there was only a certain amount of people that would ever be our audience and that we were working way too hard for something that just wasn't working either. We were better off to put on fewer shows of good quality and encourage and support the local community theatre groups.

Owner 1 concurred and noted their growing awareness of the importance of the local community to the success of Stratford Courthouse, stating:

> We realised pretty quickly that if we didn't let the community take control, that the community wouldn't support—they'd support it for a period of time, but they envisage it as you not needing the support because you

appear to be independent and doing it yourself. Which is, you know, sort of an oxymoron really, it's bizarre.

This community focus was so great that the owners saw a shift in their role from a business perspective to "providing a community service" (Owner 2). Accompanying this community service outlook was an embracing of the creativity of the community itself, which demonstrated movement away from the assumption of the community's preference for touring shows, which the owners had upon purchasing the venue, towards embracing more of a cultural democracy perspective. This was manifested in the owners' perspective that Stratford Courthouse was "for everybody" (Owner 1), including both amateurs and professionals. This reflects the aims of arts centres outlined in the literature review (Williams et al., 2017; ACGB, 1945). Owner 1 cited a culture of non-judgementalism as critical in creating this atmosphere and space for the community:

I think the beautiful thing about this space as an arts centre is it's non-judgemental. And I think for ages, we would go: "Oh, who's put that tacky thing in the little gallery space?", "Who's let that exhibition in?", or whatever. But part of that whole thing of calling it an arts space is that whole growth.

This sentiment was shared in the interviews, and in the words of the president of a local theatre company, "you come along to an audition, and you don't have to be brilliant. You turned up. You've got a role". However, this openness to both amateurs and professionals at times proved problematic for the owners in terms of quality and related brand implications. Hence Stratford Courthouse took on provision of professional development to raise the quality of local arts groups. This role was recognised by stakeholders external to the organisation, with one local artist stating that "the thing about the Courthouse and… [Owner 1's] ethos with this place is that any time there's an opportunity to further our skills, he seizes that, or makes it happen, really".

The owners were also involved in establishing a new theatre company at Stratford Courthouse called 'Caught in the Act', which aligned with the upskilling aims of the owners. According to Owner 2, the group was designed to encourage

"local theatre makers to write their own material and perform it. So, that's our main focus. Original material. And enabling that to be performed". However, although the owners saw the company as a platform to fulfil their role of professional development, this sentiment was not necessarily shared by all the committee members of Caught in the Act. Of the ten internal stakeholders interviewed for this case study, five were also members of the Caught in the Act committee, and all were asked about the aims of Caught in the Act. Four of the five members recognised the upskilling and development element; however, a more recent member believed the company's aim was to "put shows on and make use of the space". This perspective was not necessarily surprising, as the company had received funding to present shows at Stratford Courthouse (touring shows) to add to Stratford Courthouse's programme, potentially blurring the aims and role of the theatre company. One committee member recognised this division in the opinion of the aims of the group, stating that there was a:

> 50/50 split between those of us who think we should just do stuff like that [development] and not be grandiose. Just explore and grow and make it really cheap and accessible to locals to come and watch us. Not with a polished piece, just to be able to offer comment – just like a reading of a play really. And others who want to do things that are more substantial.

Analysing this quote through the lens of the literature, it could be argued that the Caught in the Act committee needed to clarify its mission in order to ensure they were all working towards a shared goal and to facilitate ease in terms of decision-making and effectiveness (Bryson, 2004). This was arguably a necessity if the owners wished to ensure that the company continued to develop and upskill the community. In the interviews, not only was there evidence of the divide in aims and goals of the company, but also scepticism by one committee member, who questioned the impetus of the owners in establishing the group:

> Part of me thought that maybe, and I don't want to paint them in a bad light or anything […] I thought maybe they want to be involved because they want to dictate the types of plays we do so they can get bodies through the door, and it wasn't that at all. They're really open to doing different, obscure, new works. And I think that's really cool. Because we've done shows where we've had fifteen, twenty people there. And they don't care.

This comment recognises the owners' genuine commitment to community artists and their development. According to the interviews, this commitment was also a reflection of their personal values and goals. For example, a local artist, who was also the drama teacher at Stratford Courthouse, relayed that the owners were "involved in lots of community events: if there's anything on in the town they're always there. They put their hand up to volunteer for not just theatre stuff, other stuff as well. Really community-minded people". This alignment between the owners' personal values and their work at Stratford Courthouse was also recognised by an artistic director of a Melbourne-based theatre company, who stated that the owners' use of Stratford Courthouse was a "vehicle for connection", adding:

> I think they [the owners] see it as like a community hub, and it's their way of contributing. But also, having meaning in their lives and having impact in a community. And having relationships, and meeting people. They love meeting people. They're just up for having, you know, a good time. They just want a good time and have the resources and capacity to welcome that into their life.

The genuine commitment to the values of Stratford Courthouse by the owners supports the leadership literature, which highlights how authentic leaders are true to their own values (Avolio et al., 2004) and "act based on values, personal preferences, and needs" (Spitzmuller and Ilies, 2010, p.310). However, as highlighted in the above quote, these values can also be enacted with the support of substantial resources, which is rarely present in the arts centre setting.

This questions the applicability of the literature to the case study of Stratford Courthouse. As discussed in the literature review, a formal strategic plan and vision for arts centres is deemed crucial for success (Heath and Dalziel, 2019; Williams et al., 2017). Yet the interviewees beyond the owners recognised the community focus as the goal of Stratford Courthouse, as well as the values of quality and community development. This begged the question: if the owners, who managed Stratford Courthouse, lived and embodied the values, was there a need for a formal strategic plan and mission, especially given that the owners were the key staff members, and there were no other staff members to whom to distribute a strategic plan? As noted by Bryson (2004), having a strategic outlook

does not guarantee the success of an organisation: rather, it is the way in which such a plan is enacted. Therefore in this case study the need for a formally documented strategic approach, or clearly articulated role as cited as best practice in the literature, is challenged, as the owners are in sync in their values and embody the centre's goals. However, this approach may prove to be problematic in terms of succession and if new staff members join Stratford Courthouse. Additionally, the lack of a formal mission statement or strategic approach can make determining the success of a not-for-profit particularly challenging (Preece, 2005).

Despite the absence of a formal strategic approach, both owners articulated their perceptions of the success of Stratford Courthouse. For instance, Owner 1 declared that "the success of it is that people feel free to be creative. People feel like they're not being judged to be creative"; and Owner 2 commented that the centre is "successful in the sense that it provides a creative space for so many people". Other interviewees supported the perception of the centre creating a community space; for example, a local artist attested that it is a "fabulous community asset that's accessible to everybody" and an audience member stated that Stratford Courthouse "provides an opportunity". Even those approached in the community interviews noted its importance in the community, including those who did not regularly frequent it, with one interviewee affirming that it was "very important to the community", and another stating that they had not attended but planned to go in the future. These comments demonstrate aspects of non-use value, including existence value and option value. Existence value is where people value a cultural institution regardless of their intention to partake, and option value is where people may not currently interact with the organisation but value the possibility to engage in the future (Holden, 2004). A question could be asked about the impact of the remoteness of the centre on the value placed upon it, being the sole physical provider of arts and cultural offerings in the town: for instance, does the lack of alternative arts and cultural providers increase the value associated with Stratford Courthouse?

In the interviews there were regular comments about Stratford Courthouse not gaining the support of what was considered the "hunting, fishing, footy crowd" (Owner 1); indeed, the town demonstrated a divide in terms of community members affiliated with sports recreation and those attracted to the creative and artistic opportunities in Stratford (Owner 2). Although Stratford Courthouse attempted to tap into this segment of the community through fundraisers (Owner

2), there were challenges in gaining their buy-in. Hence, although Stratford Courthouse aimed to create a space for the community, it was not necessarily appealing to all members of the community. This brings into question criticisms of the arts centre model, as articulated by Lane (1978), regarding whether or not it is reasonable for arts centre programmes to attempt to appeal to such a wide range of people. The sample from the community interviews did not connect with this segment of the community; hence it was challenging to obtain data reflecting these viewpoints, which indicates a fruitful avenue for further research.

Although Stratford Courthouse did not state a formal mission or strategic plan, it focused on the community by providing a "community service" (Owner 2) that embraced professional development and quality. This focus on community aligns with the centrality of community to arts centres seen in the survey of this thesis and articulated in the external expert interviews. This case study challenges the necessity of a formalised approach to strategic management in arts centres, as recommended in the literature (Heath and Dalziel, 2019; Williams et al., 2017). The case study depicted owners who embodied and lived the values and ethos of Stratford Courthouse, which could be argued to be more important than a formalised strategic approach because it is the enactment of strategic thinking which is paramount rather than formalised strategic plans (Bryson, 2004). This is not to say that Stratford Courthouse would not benefit from a formalised strategic approach. However, given that there were only two key staff members (the owners) and the occasional volunteer, perhaps a strategic plan would not provide the benefits that a formalised strategic approach could offer a larger organisation with multiple staff members. Additionally, the substantial work and effort required in creating a formalised strategic approach may not be worthwhile, given that the owners were content and considered the centre successful, and perhaps their energies could be spent better elsewhere. This case study suggests that there may be additional considerations regarding the usefulness of a formalised strategic approach in the arts centre setting.

## How does Stratford Courthouse operate?

### Management and leadership

The stakeholder interviews provided insight into the management and leadership of Stratford Courthouse. Interviewees suggested that the owners made a "great team" (local artist). Although one interviewee asserted that both owners were

considered the face of Stratford Courthouse, the majority of the other stakeholders (local artist, touring artist and volunteer) suggested that one owner (Owner 1), who undertook the larger portion of the work there, was commonly considered the figurehead or face of Stratford Courthouse and undertook the role of the leader. This interconnectedness of the leader role and being considered the face of the organisation is commonly the case in arts organisations (Cray and Inglis, 2011). This section explores the leadership style of this particular owner, and for ease of understanding, they will be referred to as the 'Leader' throughout this section.

A common theme across the interviews was perceptions of the personality of the Leader. For example, the Artistic Director of Melbourne-based theatre company asserted that the Leader's "personality has a lot to do with it", a personality that was heralded as being welcoming, warm and inclusive (president of local theatre company, local artist/drama teacher, volunteer/local artist) with one interviewee claiming that the two owners "are the most generous, wonderful people I've ever met". In the words of the president of a local theatre company and hirer of the space, Owner 1 "has that character about him and is so welcoming […]. I've worked with other people in theatre who run theatres and whatnot and he's unique. We're very fortunate to have him and this venue". This warmth and traits of the Leader's personality appeared to make relationships central to his leadership style and approach. As the president of a local theatre group stated:

> I think it's [the Leader's] relationship with the people: he fosters that relationship. The other venues, they'll make you at home but really, you're just hiring a space and it's kind of a business deal. Whereas here [the Leader] has a vested interest in theatre and the people that he has here […] I mean, it is transactional by its nature, but it's so much more than that.

The Artistic Director of a Melbourne-based organisation also noted how the Leader made them "feel comfortable and safe". These comments reflect theories of a relational leadership style (Hewison, 2004; Hewison, 2006; Hewison and Holden, 2011). In this relational approach there also appeared to be authenticity. For instance, the Leader demonstrated genuine commitment to the community in their actions, both personally and professionally. The genuine nature of the commitment to the community aligns with the principle of authentic leadership,

which includes authentic behaviour and authentic relational orientation (Goldman and Kernis, 2002).

This focus on authenticity and quality relationships with artists visiting Stratford was evidenced in the artists' experience. For instance, touring artists were provided accommodation at the home of the owners, where they had a self-contained unit. This hospitality had the benefit of building strong and lasting relationships between artists and the owners, and in particular the Leader. The aforementioned Artistic Director raved about this aspect of working with Stratford Courthouse and noted that it was "sort of soul nourishing, I guess, on a big tour. I love to have that sort of experience".

A key element of relational leadership is the quality of being an enabler and nurturer of others' talents (Hewison, 2004). This was demonstrated by the Leader's focus on community development and their supportive approach, as well as upskilling the local community and providing professional development opportunities. Another way in which the Leader enabled talent was articulated by a local artist, a drama teacher at Stratford Courthouse, who noted that the owners had "really helped me out" in allowing her the opportunity to focus on her job, removing all the administration and other requirements beyond teaching. This support was also voiced by the Artistic Director of a Melbourne-based theatre company, who asserted that the Leader provided the environment to support their work and activities, and it was "your real genuine supportive, not in that token way but actively, feel around supportive […] he's very artist focused, which is nice. And then obviously now that we know him, he's also very community focused".

Trust appeared to be central to the relationship between the Leader and the community. The President of a local theatre company also felt this trust and commented: "I've known [the Stratford Courthouse Leader] quite well for some time now and it's more of he just tosses me the key and says, 'knock yourself out', you know? […] it's a relationship that we both value on either side of the fence."

According to the interviews, the trusting relationship between the Leader and stakeholders had the power to encourage audiences. For example, the CEO of a

Melbourne-based theatre company stated that the relationship the Leader has with the community was sacred, as the Leader was considered the "human champion on the ground". According to this CEO, this role as champion could encourage support and attendances at performances:

> I don't expect anyone to come and see anything for me […] but they do for [the Leader] because they've built that sense of rapport with him, and so they trust him, or they're up for supporting him, because they think he's bringing something good to the community. And he's trusting me, and you know a chain, but without him it falls apart, because no one trusts me.

Owner 2 concurred that Stratford Courthouse was able to attract audiences based on recommendations the owners provided to supporters as a result of the trust that had been developed. This connection to the community also resulted in making shows happen. For example, the Stratford Courthouse volunteer, who used to be a touring artist to Stratford Courthouse prior to moving to Stratford, explained that the Leader was "so willing to help and he'll use his contacts […] to help, and that makes a show. Because there is nothing harder for a producer to have to do, and especially in an area where they don't know, is to go and find that sort of sponsorship". This connection and relationship to the community appeared to be vital for the success and operations of Stratford Courthouse.

Central to Stratford Courthouse was not only the Leader's personality and strength in relationship-building, but also his background. The questioning of the background of arts managers is raised in the literature. For example, MacKeith (1996) claimed that arts centre directors with an artistic background may lack the operational skills required, and Thorne (1979) suggested that this background may bias and restrict the outlook of centre directors. These potential issues were not relevant in this case study, as the Leader was not from a performing arts background. Instead, this lack of knowledge appeared to be a benefit to the relationship of the Leader with community members. For instance, in the words of the CEO of the Melbourne-based theatre company:

> I think the fact that they're not theatre people is very relevant, because I think people see us as a little breed of our own, us theatre mob. And

we're a bit closed, and we're a bit either weird, or high-brow, or intellectual or, you know […] they're normal people.

However, although this distance from the performing arts may have been appealing to some members of the community, the apparent lack of knowledge did create challenges. For example, the owners had little knowledge of how to programme and operate an arts centre. An additional challenge faced by the Leader was the sense of obligation and discomfort felt when community members were not supporting Stratford Courthouse. A local artist relayed one such example:

When [the owners] use that language, 'thanks for coming', I hate it. I hate it. Because it means it's personal and I don't want it to be personal. Because, for personal, I would want to support you all the time because you're my friends and […] I can't afford to. So therefore, when you thank me for coming, I feel guilty that I haven't come ten times.

These sentiments were shared by the Leader, who asserted that:

It's hard, and it's hard not to take offence when people don't turn up. I find that, in a small community, it's taken me ages – because people feel bad […]. They should be able to make any decision they want, and so that's taken me ages […] and probably taken the community a while to feel like they could come or not come, and we'd still pat them on the back and say 'g'day' and not care and move on.

In such a small community it is perhaps not surprising that there was a blurring of lines between the personal and professional in the Stratford Courthouse setting.

Although this case study tells only one story of leadership in an arts centre, the findings clearly have implications for research and help to build an understanding of leadership in the arts centre model more generally. For instance, although Williams et al. (2017) recommend a transformational leadership approach in the arts centre setting, Stratford Courthouse provided an example where a relational approach was primary. Overwhelmingly, this leadership approach was viewed

positively by stakeholders, and there was a genuine affection and respect for the Leader and the relationships he held with the community. This demonstrated that a transformational approach may not always be the best approach to leadership in arts centres, and that the circumstances and geography of the arts centre should also be considered in terms of suitable leadership styles. For instance, Stratford is a rural, small and close community, hence a leadership approach that may not have honoured the community, for example the centrality of a transformational leader, may not have been a good fit.

This case study has discussed the importance of community involvement and support for Stratford Courthouse to flourish, and relational leadership is an approach that allows and facilitates participation and community involvement. Additionally, it should be noted that the audiences in Stratford were limited by the small population, hence a relational approach that nurtured and grew audiences was important. This does not mean that it is as simple as a leader deciding on a suitable leadership style and putting it into action. A relational approach needs to be paired with the traits of an authentic leader and reflect the Leader's personality, which it does in this case.

Finally, this section also shed light on the experience of arts centre leaders. The literature recognises the range of skills and tasks undertaken by an arts centre director (Lane, 1978; Heath and Dalziel, 2019), and notes the benefits of arts centre directors having experience beyond an artistic background. This case study demonstrated some incontrovertible benefits of this approach not documented in the literature: that having a background from outside the arts created a point of connection to the community, supporting local artists, breaking down barriers to arts through relationship-building and making arts and culture more accessible.

## Programming

The previous section demonstrated that the leadership styles exhibited by the leader at Stratford Courthouse upheld the community focus, which was outlined as central to the role of Stratford Courthouse. This section will now explore whether this value, as well as the focus on quality and community development, permeated the programming decisions and approach.

Stratford Courthouse embraced the work of both amateurs and professionals, which created challenges for the owners. Challenges presented themselves in the form of amateur performances that were at times "undercooked" (Owner 1). This lack of development of shows was damaging the brand of Stratford Courthouse, and according to Owner 2, it became clear that:

> it doesn't matter how you advertise a show, whether you say: 'This is produced by one of the theatre companies', people still think of, 'I went to that show at the Stratford Courthouse, and it was terrible.' And so, they tell everyone, 'it was terrible'.

Owner 2 detailed one approach to trying to manage these negative perceptions of lower-quality works:

> We did trial trying to cut back on community shows for that reason because there was just a spate of shows that weren't overly good for a while. But then we noticed we didn't really have the backing of the community.

Thus the owners of Stratford Courthouse faced a conundrum: attempt to control the brand of Stratford Courthouse and reduce the amateur element of the programme, at the risk of losing community support; or embrace the works of amateurs and take on the consequences and the potential negative impact to the brand of Stratford Courthouse, raising questions of quality. The decision was made to continue to support and embrace the community. However, professional development then became a key feature of the programming, to raise the quality of the community works (Owner 1). This was manifested through the establishment of Caught in the Act theatre company, which was discussed in the Role section, as well as workshops and other professional development opportunities. This focus on creating and producing work aligns with the Power PAC project's claim that there was an appetite for increased producing/co-creating and creation of work amongst arts centres (APACA, 2011), and supports the findings of the PAC Australia (2022) report that arts centres are increasingly taking on greater creativity. This challenge of attempting to protect the quality and reputation of an arts centre when there are programming elements beyond

the centre's control is an issue beyond Stratford Courthouse, as was also seen in the BAC case study.

Perhaps as a result of these strategies employed by the owners, perceptions of programme quality were overwhelmingly positive. For instance, an audience member viewed the programme as presenting "world-wide acts", and a volunteer/local artist noted that Stratford Courthouse was:

> very professional, it's all well-presented, of a high quality, the shows are great, people really enjoy them. It's a high quality delivered whether it be professional or amateur. I know people don't like that word 'amateur' but, you're not getting paid for it you're an amateur, so [...] But yeah, it's a very high standard.

The Manager of Segue Community Hub & Arts Café agreed, and asserted that "quality is in the earnestness of [the owner's] programming really". Quality is one of many considerations in making programming decisions at Stratford Courthouse. Owner 1 articulated that their programming aimed to cater to classical music audiences, as there appeared to be a gap in this offering in the region, and to focus on professional development. Accompanying these specific audiences, it was claimed that that Stratford Courthouse attempted to provide a balance of art forms (Owner 1), which fits with the original goals for an arts centre (ACGB, 1945) as well as the recommendations by MacKeith (1996) that arts centres should present a range of art forms in areas where there is not the capacity to have multiple specialised arts venues.

Stakeholders involved in Stratford Courthouse seemed satisfied with the mix of art forms on offer and that "it caters for everyone" (local artist/drama teacher). However, this sentiment was not shared by all the interviewees. For example, a community member stated that the programme "isn't necessarily my cup of tea" as they do not like the swearing by comedians and they are not a fan of Shakespeare. The challenge in presenting comedy was acknowledged by one owner, who stated that the older audiences have failed to connect with younger comedy groups or comedians. It should also be noted that Stratford Courthouse does not appear to embrace dance, as communicated by a Stratford Courthouse volunteer, but perhaps this was a result of the restriction of the size of the

performance space rather than an obvious exclusion. Further investigation would be needed to examine this gap in programming.

The interviews also revealed that the owners weren't afraid to programme edgier shows to challenge and provide some of the "best theatre" (Owner 1). In presenting these more innovative works, the owners appeared to have adopted strategies to mitigate the artistic risk, and the consequential financial risk. Firstly, Owner 1 contended that in selecting works that may be edgier or more innovative, a key value was sought, and that was honesty. For example, one Melbourne-based theatre company that regularly visited Stratford Courthouse often created work that Owner 1 considered "a bit random". However, Stratford Courthouse was willing to incorporate it into the programme, given "they always give it 100%, it's always real, honest". There was a sense that if the presentations weren't honest and people weren't giving "100% of their craft", then the "community's going to pick up on that really quickly" (Owner 1). The owners showed respect for the community and their intelligence as audience members.

In this case study, artistic risk was mitigated by the trust that was developed between the community and the owners. For example, Owner 2 detailed that:

> some of our really good supporters will come to a show because we've told them that it's good. And it's probably outside of what they would normally go to. But I think they've probably started to enjoy the fact that they can be challenged a little bit.

The importance of trust in presenting edgier and more innovative work was not restricted to the trust between the owners and potential audiences. For instance, trust was developed through the community building a relationship with arts companies regularly included in the programme, which is a key strategy recommended by Kawashima (1999a, 1999b) to both reduce risk and develop an audience. In this instance, attendance at these edgier productions was partially a result of familiarity and a relationship with the artists.

The relationship between the community and visiting artists was facilitated by the owners, who were adamant that, where possible, artists visiting Stratford

Courthouse embedded themselves within the community. This goal addressed a key challenge faced by arts centres and acknowledged in the expert interviews, specifically that it is often necessary to present one-off-shows owing to the challenges of guaranteeing an audience and budget restrictions, limiting opportunities for artists being embedded within the community (Glow and Johanson, 2019). At Stratford Courthouse, the aim of embedding artists was achieved by the artists being asked to provide professional development opportunities and workshops and touring artists often utilising the self-contained unit at the owner's property for their accommodation whilst in Stratford. Owner 1 stated that the artists are "instantly […] enveloped by the community by accident, by osmosis" and "they come back to our place and all of a sudden four people turn up, and they go, 'oh […] we're jamming out the back'". This approach created not only powerful relationships but also unique audience experiences. As one audience member stated, being able to meet musicians and performers provided an opportunity that was relished by the audience. This opportunity was not lost on the owners, who also noted the special experience this provided: "it's a real treat for us to meet these really artistic people and it's quite nourishing, I suppose, to keep you enthusiastic about the arts". Creating these unique experiences for audience members aligned with the ideals presented by Baxter (2012) and Conner (2013) of enriching the experience of audiences as well as embracing and empowering audiences.

This empowering of audience members was also demonstrated by the owners embracing the feedback of community members in conducting programming decisions. For instance, the owners regularly emailed programming options to their 500-member mailing list and commonly received 50–100 replies detailing their opinions and programming preferences (Owner 1). The benefit of this approach was two-fold: it was an attempt to make programming decisions that would hopefully gain an audience, but also build a community, "they feel like it's community as well, so they feel like they're helping if they give feedback" (Owner 1).

This exploration of the programming approach at Stratford Courthouse demonstrated that the values of community, quality, community development and co-production were paramount and guided decision-making. Upholding these values went hand-in-hand with embedding artists within the community, strengthening relationships and mitigating risk.

Key findings here could extend beyond the Stratford Courthouse setting to arts centres more generally. For instance, this section revealed the conundrum faced by arts centres in attempting to maintain the perception of quality when there are programming elements beyond the centre's control. Professional development and support for amateur groups was critical to addressing this challenge. Another key finding at Stratford Courthouse was the ability and willingness to programme more challenging and innovative works, contrary to the risk-averse approach seen in the BAC case study. These works were supported by audiences as an outcome of honesty and trust: honesty in the programming and the productions themselves, and trust in the owners and familiar visiting artists, which represent an outcome of the relational approach and the high quality of relationships.

This example demonstrated the potential for arts centres, at their best, to build audiences and exposure to different art forms and ideas if the circumstances are right, and to foster honesty and trust in relationships. Finally, this section outlined the richness of experiences offered by Stratford Courthouse. This richness was felt by visiting artists, the community and the owners themselves. Artists were embedded within the community, creating a connection with the place and the community itself, which had positive knock-on effects such as greater trust, goodwill, the creation of unique experiences and a sense of community. Stratford Courthouse depicted an arts centre where the programming and ethos went beyond the simple presentation of arts to building and enriching the community. This discussion also highlighted the impact of quality on the branding and perception of Stratford Courthouse, which will now be developed further.

## Marketing and branding

Following the discussion of the programming of Stratford Courthouse, the manner in which Stratford Courthouse undertook the presentation of the programme provided a unique perspective on its branding and associations. The owner of Stratford Courthouse who undertakes the programming role recounted an experience he had had with a mentor from Regional Arts Victoria (RAV).[30] Stratford Courthouse took part in a mentorship programme and a RAV staff

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[30] RAV is a membership-based not-for-profit organisation which supports Victorian artists and communities "to make, participate in, and experience creative work" in regional Victoria (Regional Arts Victoria, 2023).

member spent time with Stratford Courthouse, considering its finances and assisting with the programme. This exercise revealed some key considerations in programming in a regional centre. Firstly, regarding the programme content, the owner noted that RAV "went out of their way to try and subsidise some good shows for me, but even though the shows were 1,000 bucks, they weren't the shows that our community necessarily wanted or supported". Despite the shows being financially appealing, they did not appeal to local audiences, and there was a lack of connection. Secondly, by presenting so many shows that were sponsored, the physical programme was:

> plastered with RAV logos, Creative Victoria logos. We looked like the entertainment centre. [...] if my programme looks like I'm a millionaire, no one is going to come and support this venue […] that's how I've got to look to our community, we've got to look like we're doing it ourselves, and part of it's professional and a part of it's community.

In this statement the owner highlighted a curious finding in terms of the branding of Stratford Courthouse. At Stratford Courthouse a balance was sought in the presentation of the programme: it must look professional, but still community based:

> We've got to look like community, we've got to look like we need support, but we're sustainable enough that we're not going to collapse. Because as soon as it looks like you're not professional, they think 'oh, they're going broke', and then no one turns up. So, you've still got to look professional, without looking funded.

This desire to 'not look funded' aligned with the goals of appearing rooted in the community and needing community support. Interestingly, Owner 1 stated that the year Stratford Courthouse received RAV support was the only year that Stratford Courthouse ran in the red. According to Owner 1, this was attributed to the fact that the programme looked funded, programme choices may not have been the first preference of both the owners and community, and the artists from the touring shows were provided with a set salary rather than profit share, hence there was no impetus for the artists to assist in marketing and to connect and embed themselves within the community. Owner 1 actually imposed the same

principle on himself, stating that if he received regular funding, or a weekly salary, he would not work as hard as he does:

> Giving us funding wouldn't work, because – I don't believe anyone's motivated by the money […] I think the funding needs to be filtered […] just giving funding to operate a venue, I don't think would work.

Although these opinions present an unusual perspective, it should be noted that it is only one viewpoint. Owner 1 may well be correct in his assumptions, but there could be multiple other reasons for the loss in the year RAV provided funding. Additionally, the Owner's belief that precarity creates drive and ambition is a problematic and contentious assumption and, in this setting, would require further research.

The interviews also raised questions about the identity of Stratford Courthouse. There appeared to be confusion around the identity of the centre, with the source of this confusion attributed to Stratford Courthouse's relationship with Segue. As previously discussed, Stratford Courthouse is located within the same building as Segue, the town's neighbourhood hub, arts café and tourist information provider. As mentioned, prior to undertaking this role, Segue was initially a gallery space run by the owners of Stratford Courthouse, but the decision was made to provide the space to the community to become more of a social enterprise, run by volunteers.

The interviews unveiled the various opinions of the perception of the two organisations, in particular whether Stratford Courthouse had a clear and unique identity separate from Segue or whether the two organisations encompass a shared identity. For instance, the Segue manager, and local artist/drama teacher suggested that the community sees Stratford Courthouse and Segue as a single organisation, and a volunteer indicated that this is often the case for people who remember when the owners of Stratford Courthouse also ran the space where Segue is located, hence the association had remained. Another local artist felt that the community recognised the two organisations and stated: "they've done a pretty good job at differentiating". The owners themselves had different perceptions of the identity of the two organisations. For example, one owner suspected that the community thinks that Segue is still run by the owners as part

of a larger precinct, whereas the other owner believed that those new to the area may assume this is the case, but suggested that people recognise they have separate identities and are run by different people. Three reasons were noted for the confusion regarding Stratford Courthouse's identity in relation to Segue: the history of the space, having previously been managed by the owners of Stratford Courthouse; both Segue and Stratford Courthouse being located under one roof; and the camaraderie between the organisations – for example, the owners of Stratford Courthouse volunteered at Segue and Segue provided meals when there were performances at Stratford Courthouse.

Although the literature confirms the importance of having a clear identity and brand (Voss and Grabel, 2014; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020), as with the BAC case study, the case study of Stratford Courthouse again questions this assertion. Although there appeared to be a lack of consensus around the identity of Stratford Courthouse and the connection with Segue, in the eyes of Stratford Courthouse owners, the Segue Manager, and multiple stakeholders, this did not seem to be a concern, as both organisations appeared to be working successfully. This begs the question of whether a unique identity is important to Stratford Courthouse if the values and drive of both Segue and Stratford Courthouse align. For instance, the organisations had different products and services, but their values appeared to reflect each other; or, in the words of a local artist, the organisations had "the same kind of spirit" and both embraced and prioritised the local community. The Segue Manager also highlighted other values of Segue, such as:

> being open and being consistent […] Consistency of quality of product, consistency of hours of opening, which we open from 9:30 to 2:30 so that it gives the best option for, say for instance people who have family responsibilities around school pick-ups and that sort of stuff. So that was a deliberate decision. Yeah, people remember this as an enjoyable and outstanding experience, coming in here.

This excerpt highlights consistency, quality, honesty and experience, all of which were articulated in the interviews in respect to the values exuded by Stratford Courthouse. The Segue Manager mentioned their desire to "try and level the power, in here, and give people opportunity", again echoing the 'room for

everyone' ethos exhibited at Stratford Courthouse. The Segue Manager also recognised the similar objectives of the two organisations:

> Keeping the place [Segue] dynamic and successful is hard work, but I'm willing to put in that work, I suppose […] [Stratford Courthouse owners] certainly are too. They've, we've never, I guess, shared each other's strategic plan, but you know, […] I guess that we're on the same path.

Not only does the potential confusion surrounding the connection between Stratford Courthouse and Segue challenge the literature in terms of the need for a distinct identity, but the relationship between the two organisations actually had clear benefits for Stratford Courthouse. For instance, Segue provided meals for shows and helped to establish a persistent presence for Stratford Courthouse. As discussed in the literature review, creating persistent presence (McClellan et al., 1999) is an approach to managing the constrained availability of difficult brands (Preece and Johnson, 2011; 2014). As Stratford Courthouse was not open every day, nor was there a performance or event on every day, by being associated with and physically linked to Stratford Courthouse, community members or visitors to Segue were provided with access to and information about Stratford Courthouse. As the Artistic Director of a Melbourne-based theatre company stated, "part of the fact is the café at the side there, the door is right there to Stratford Courthouse and it's always open, unless they need the darkness for the tech run. People could just pop their head in and see what it looked like". Moreover, the volunteers of Segue took an active role in promoting the centre: "we always […] really diligent about this, to show them into the theatre and show" (Segue Manager).

Whilst spending time in the café during this research, I witnessed on numerous occasions the volunteers showing Stratford Courthouse to visitors and explaining what was on offer and shows that were coming up. This provided positive word-of-mouth, which was crucial for the Stratford Courthouse; and, as described by a local artist, word-of-mouth is "probably the greatest driver for people's awareness of what theatre is". This perception supported Foster's (2023, p.168) view that "in many cases, direct contact through word of mouth and meeting with community organizations may be the most effective tools for communicating with the public about your organization".

In terms of the awareness of Stratford Courthouse, the interviewees provided mixed responses. Those who were involved in Stratford Courthouse were inclined to suggest that there was awareness of Stratford Courthouse amongst the community. One of the owners did note that this was not necessarily the case: for instance, "some people involved in the garden [an element of Segue] wouldn't even know there's a theatre. They definitely wouldn't even know there's shows on, or children doing acting classes." There was also evidence of this lack of knowledge in the community interviews. Of the nine interviews with community members, all were aware of Stratford Courthouse, yet two had only recently heard of it through friends. Although these two people live in Sale, approximately 16 km away, they did work in Stratford, where there were very few shops on the main street where Stratford Courthouse was located. Hence it was surprising that they did not know of Stratford Courthouse, especially, as noted by a Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist, given that it was hard to avoid Stratford Courthouse as the programme was in every shop window. Upon visiting Stratford there were physical indicators of Stratford Courthouse. For instance, at Stratford Courthouse there was signage on the wall and above the entrance. Segue, next door, had even greater visibility, with flags and various colours to attract the eye. Yet even with this physical representations of Stratford Courthouse, and physical evidence of its presence, there was still a lack of awareness of Stratford Courthouse among some members of the community.

It should be noted that awareness does not necessarily correlate with patronage. For instance, community members noted obstacles to attendance, such as being time-poor, and some stakeholders felt the programme was not appealing. Connecting with "the hunting, fishing, footy crowd" segment of the community appeared to be a broader cultural issue: "in the country, people think that if you're into sport, you can't be into arts. You can't like both" (Owner 2). The owner of Stratford Courthouse who undertook the primary role of programming and marketing stated that: "it's a hard line between people finding it and feeling like they've found something really unique, which they have, and then it just being in people's face". This comment suggested that part of the brand is focused on nurturing the unique nature of Stratford Courthouse and not necessarily being overt in raising awareness and appealing to the community, which appeared to be a contradiction in Stratford Courthouse's community-focused ethos. However, it could be argued that the Stratford Courthouse offering itself is the unique and special component, and encouraging greater awareness of this offering would not necessarily detract from this fact.

Alongside awareness, the name of Stratford Courthouse emerged as a challenge for the owners. Although the owners agreed that the activities of Stratford Courthouse aligned with the definition of an arts centre presented in this thesis, they were reluctant to actually call the organisation an arts centre. Both owners associated arts centres with being council-run and fully funded, meaning "there's not the need to make a profit – they can bring down shows that no one wants to see" (Owner 2), which was not the case for Stratford Courthouse. Other stakeholders shared this association between arts centres and local authorities. For example, the CEO of a Melbourne-based theatre company who toured to Stratford Courthouse went so far as stating that this association is so negative that the term 'arts centre' conjures up an association with an "empty experience" and "it doesn't speak to people's hearts, it speaks to policy".

The term 'arts centre' also elicited perceptions of elitism, with epithets such as "unreachable, unachievable" and "unobtainable" being used to describe them. The Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist asserted that "the words 'la-di-da' spring to mind. It would be almost snobbish, you know. I think people would be put off. ['Arts centre'] would scare people away". When questioned as to why 'theatre' is a more appropriate term, honesty was regularly mentioned: "theatre is much more active and much more honest" (Segue Manager). The interview data demonstrated that the term 'theatre' was considered more accessible: "people think, 'Okay, I could go to the theatre', you know…" (Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist), and that "it's less intimidating, probably because it's a, it can be a passive, you know it's a [...] yeah you don't have to do anything" (Segue Manager).

This mention of passivity is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, the Segue Manager suggested that audience members wish to be passive, yet in the literature there is a shift away from the opinion that audiences are passive (Reason et al., 2022). Secondly, this notion of passivity contradicts claims in the literature that audiences should be empowered (Baxter, 2012; Conner, 2013), and indeed contradicts the reality of Stratford Courthouse, which appeared to empower and provide enrichment opportunities for audience members. For instance, as noted in the programming section, the community was often called upon in programming decisions and there were opportunities to meet and build

relationships with the artists, as well as having a personalised experience. As noted by a volunteer, the owners:

> will greet every single person by name, they know every single person that comes in the door. And that adds that personal touch onto it as well, and adds that, you know, the love of coming to the theatre. Because what's better than somebody who owns a theatre knowing your name as you walk in the door. All of a sudden, your chest is pumped out and you're feeling great, 'Oh, people know who I am.'

Therefore the claim by the Segue Manager that audiences seek passivity requires further investigation, as this is not the offering at Stratford Courthouse, and it appeared to challenge current theories of audience engagement.

Although the full name of Stratford Courthouse includes the term 'theatre' – Stratford Courthouse Theatre - one of the owners stated that 'theatre' was often dropped from the title. When questioned about the reasoning behind this, the response was:

> It's ended up being that, so that we don't just sort of box it. Because it's not just theatre really, it's kids acting, which is theatre, but people don't like to think of it as theatre; it's a bit of cinema; and it's a bit of, you know […] We do book launches; we have all sorts of stuff. So, we try – it's a bit of an events centre, but – people who know, know what it is. I don't know what we would call it if we did it again.

This quote suggested that there was recognition that the term 'theatre' was not necessarily the most suitable for the organisation either and that they would want something "a bit more nondescript" (Owner 1). Again, the question of a suitable way to articulate the workings of an arts centre comes into question.

This section has raised important questions regarding branding theory and the importance of having a distinct identity. The case study demonstrated a contradiction to this theory, suggesting that singularity of identity may not be crucial and perhaps an alternative perception would be more appropriate in

some instances. For example, Stratford Courthouse's association with Segue created multiple benefits, including positive word-of-mouth and persistent presence. These benefits were actualised by both organisations sharing similar values and goals. This section also exposed a possible tension between awareness and maintaining a sense of uniqueness and something special about Stratford Courthouse, whilst also questioning the associations and desirability of the term 'arts centre'. The term 'arts centre' was itself questioned, and it emerged that there were significant negative connotations associated with the term, although the term 'theatre' did not appear to be fitting in the arts centre setting either. This demonstrates the difficulty of encapsulating the diversity within the arts centre model in a singular name or brand. Analysis of the operations of Stratford Courthouse, the management and leadership, programming, and marketing revealed alignment with the ethos and values of the centre. This community ethos continues to be explored in the next section as stakeholders' perceptions of Stratford Courthouse are examined.

## How do key stakeholders perceive Stratford Courthouse?

Although the owners did not articulate a clear mission statement or strategic approach to the operations of Stratford Courthouse, it was noted that Stratford Courthouse aimed to be a community service, as well as creating a space for the whole community, focusing on quality and encouraging professional development. Although the previous sections in this case study have summarised and analysed stakeholders' perceptions of quality and professional development, this section will consider the stakeholder perceptions of Stratford Courthouse more generally. These responses will be considered alongside the community-focused ethos of Stratford Courthouse to examine either the alignment or misalignment of goals and perceptions. When stakeholders were asked to describe Stratford Courthouse three key responses emerged: a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and specifics of the space. These themes will now be discussed in turn.

A sense of belonging and inclusivity related to Stratford Courthouse was paramount in the stakeholder interviews. Belonging was often spoken about in association with feelings of home. For instance, the Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist asserted that "I feel at home, I feel part – I've only been here nine months, and I feel part of the community, and it's just such an awesome

place". The President of a local theatre company stated that this sense of belonging was commonly felt by audience members:

> Most of the audience feel very at home and they're treated in a way that […] they're respected, and they're valued, and they appreciate that. And so, I think they do feel part of that experience. And, you know, this is a very small town – there's not many people who don't know somebody on stage on the night. And there's not many people in the cast that don't know half the audience.

This sense of belonging was paired with numerous comments that highlighted the inclusivity of Stratford Courthouse. A local artist contended that Stratford Courthouse "is a fabulous community asset that's accessible to everybody" and that the "whole space embraces the community and is probably encouraging, celebratory". Multiple stakeholders' comments reflected the sentiment that Stratford Courthouse embraced the community; for example, an audience member noted that "all sorts of people go", the local artist/drama teacher stated that it is "a place where people can belong", and the Segue Manager suggested that it is a "connecting space".

Many of the interviewees attributed the sense of belonging and inclusivity to the values of the owners themselves. As the Stratford Courthouse volunteer/local artist stated: "a lot of its personality is because of [the owners] and their personalities and their warmth". The Melbourne-based Artistic Director attested that Stratford Courthouse had "definitely got his [the owner's] personality imprinted on it. It's not an extension of him, but it's certainly got his mark on it". The local artist/drama teacher stated that the warmth, inclusivity and belonging of Stratford Courthouse was so great that despite her belief that Stratford Courthouse was haunted, it still had a warmth about it. The personal attributes attributed to Stratford Courthouse were being friendly (local artist/drama teacher), personable (local artist), and professional (Artistic Director of Melbourne-based theatre company, President of a local theatre company, Local Artist/Drama Teacher, Local artist, Stratford Courthouse Volunteer/Local Artist and community member). Given this feedback, it appeared that the owners of Stratford Courthouse were achieving their goal of needing to be professional whilst also needing community support, or as Owner 2 articulated: "we try to run it professionally, but this very much has a community feel to it".

The interviews also revealed the view that Stratford Courthouse was essential for the community. Two of the four audience members interviewed, and six of the nine community interviewees noted that Stratford Courthouse was crucial for the community, saying "it's very important for the community. Especially younger people and theatre groups", and that Stratford Courthouse is "very important. If they promoted better, I would have gone there already". Another community member, who admitted to not being attracted to the programming of Stratford Courthouse, still acknowledged the important role it played in providing a "unique arts space and creative space". These comments demonstrated a strong and common perception of the social value of Stratford Courthouse, even by those who may not regularly use or engage with it directly. As mentioned, this aligns with the concepts of non-use value, including both existence value and option value (Holden, 2004).

Accompanying these perceptions of value, Stratford Courthouse was considered to be embedded within the community. One community member noted that it goes beyond being important just for individual community members – it is important to the community itself, as in order for a small community to survive, it needs ideas and attractive elements. This draw to the town was revealed in this case study, with two interviewees commenting that Stratford Courthouse was a "drawcard" influencing their move to the town: for example, a local artist noted that "we moved here five years ago and one of the reasons we moved to Stratford was because it had the Courthouse and had theatre".

Beyond these emotional perceptions, the physical space itself was regularly mentioned when interviewees were asked to describe Stratford Courthouse. The local artist/drama teacher mentioned that it was an intimate space and a "really beautiful space to perform, and you feel really close to the action, in a play or any performance". The volunteer/local artist went so far as stating that she "would have to rate it as one of the best theatres I've ever worked in, because of it, its layout, its acoustic settings, would definitely say it's one of the best theatres". Three of the four audience members interviewed concurred and praised the layout of Stratford Courthouse with comments such as "lovely little theatre, intimate" and "excellent acoustics, great visuals and I like the small space".

Although Stratford Courthouse had no formal mission statement or formalised strategic direction, as is recommended in the literature, from the stakeholders' perspectives there appeared to be alignment with the ethos and values of Stratford Courthouse. For instance, belonging and inclusivity tie into the ethos and values of Stratford Courthouse. This connection between goals and roles, operations and perceptions will be explored further in the conclusion of this case study.

## Conclusion

The data from this case study unveiled numerous discoveries which challenge the literature as well as build knowledge of the arts centre model. These key findings will now be summarised and the implications for the literature and future research drawn out.

Despite recommendations in the strategic management literature and arts centre-specific literature for a formalised mission statement and strategic plan (Vogt, 1994; Bryson, 2004; Heath and Dalziel, 2019), this approach was not embraced at Stratford Courthouse. Rather than utilising a formalised strategic approach, the community ethos and values of Stratford Courthouse were embodied by the owners. The ethos and values exuded by the owners were also seen in the actions of Stratford Courthouse, with operational factors aligning and embracing the community, and incorporating quality and professional development. As noted in the literature review, a strategic plan does not guarantee the success of an organisation; rather, it is the way in which it is enacted (Bryson, 2004). This is the case in this case study, as the formalised strategic outlook is bypassed, yet actions reflected the ethos of Stratford Courthouse because there was a clear understanding of the role and value of the organisation by the owners. These findings question the suitability of the strategic management literature for all arts centre settings, and suggest that perhaps certain circumstances influence the importance of a more formalised approach. For instance, in contrast to the previous case study, at Stratford Courthouse, beyond the owners, there were no staff members apart from the occasional volunteer, hence there was a clear and specific vision and ethos shared by the owners, without the need to guide, or gain buy-in from, multiple staff members.

This case study also demonstrated the value of a relational leadership approach in an arts centre context. Given that this leadership approach appeared to align with the needs of stakeholders and the community, it raises the question of whether the recommendation of a singular leadership style for arts centres (Williams et al., 2017) is suitable, and indicates that perhaps an approach that is authentic to the values of the leader and the needs of the community should take precedence over the concept of a best practice approach. Again, the context appeared to be instrumental to the leadership at Stratford Courthouse. Stratford Courthouse needed to embrace and support the community in order to thrive, and a central approach to achieving this is via relationships. Additionally, the limited size of the Stratford community meant that relationships between the centre and the community needed to be nurtured to ensure an audience, so again, a relational approach was suitable. Perhaps considerations of the role and context and the personal attributes of the leaders are a better basis for leadership approaches in arts centres than a best practice assumption.

Stratford Courthouse not having a clear and separate identity from Segue Community Hub & Arts Café did not appear to be problematic, which is contrary to the recommendations of the academic literature (Voss and Grabel, 2014; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). Although there may have been confusion regarding whether the two organisations were one and the same, or run separately, this did not appear to be an issue, with both organisations perceiving their entities as succeeding, perhaps as a result of their values and direction being aligned. Again, this was not an alignment via any formalised approach (although Segue did have a strategic plan) or discussions between the two organisations, but rather a shared ethos, vision, understanding and commitment to the community. The relationship with Segue provided the benefits of positive word-of-mouth and persistent presence. These findings suggest that arts centres may benefit from a relationship and association with other neighbouring organisations with shared values and goals.

The case study also added to the extant literature by demonstrating approaches other regional arts centres could consider to manage the challenges caused by commonly only being able to programme a show or event for one night (Preece and Johnson, 2011; Glow and Johanson, 2019). These included embedding touring artists within the community by regular programming of specific theatre companies, artists mingling with the audience, artists' accommodation with the owners (although not always possible or suitable), as well as professional

development opportunities. Not only do these approaches embed touring artists within the community, but they can also minimise risk due to the (lack of) familiarity of the artists, as well as attempt to combat the constrained availability component of difficult brands. As articulated by Harrison and Hartley (2007), owing to the constrained availability of difficult brands, organisations need to seek alternative approaches to creating loyalty with customers. Preece and Johnson (2011) contend that creating a unique and valued experience, or a sense of belonging and small worlds, is a manner in which to create loyalty despite constrained availability, which seems to be the case at Stratford Courthouse. Stratford Courthouse also exhibited four of McClellan et al.'s (1999) ingredients to maintain persistent presence: signage, regular programming, high quality product (and an attempt to uplift community products), and personalities (of the owners). An additional way to encourage persistent presence, not acknowledged in the literature, was word-of-mouth or information provided through another entity: for instance, the relationship and physical connection with Segue.

This case study provided instances where the current literature was not only questioned but built upon. The findings demonstrated a complexity to the arts centre model, whereby the available arts management literature did not always neatly fit the arts centre model. The success of the centre appeared to be the way in which it lived by its role and values and used these elements to guide its operational factors. The centre's rurality and being the sole provider of arts and culture in the town appeared to influence numerous factors, including the importance of relationships and a relational approach, and the importance of opportunities for amateurs. These findings suggest that greater understanding of the context in which arts centres find themselves could provide greater insight into suitable approaches for management.

Stratford Courthouse presented an arts centre that was aware of its role, ethos and values, was community focused, embraced risk and uplifted the community and arts. It demonstrated the potential of arts centres to build exposure to the arts and experiences and provide rich opportunities for the community.

# Chapter 7 – Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre case study

**Figure 7.1: Facade of Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre (DECC)**



**Figure 7.2: DECC and paranaple development**

## Introduction

Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre (DECC) is the primary arts and cultural provider for the city of Devonport, Tasmania (Australia). At the time the interviews for this thesis took place, the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+) considered Devonport to be inner regional categorisation[31], and the local government area of Devonport had a population of 24,696 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a).

The arts centre itself included facilities such as a proscenium arch theatre, previously the Devonport Town Hall, which was built in 1899 (Devonport City Council, 2024b), as well as three function spaces. The core staff members at the time of the interviews included the DECC Manager, the Box Office and Marketing Administrator, three casual box office staff, and a technical manager. Devonport City Council owned and operated DECC and was also the sole funder of the centre.

The interviews for this thesis were conducted at a time of transition for DECC as the Devonport City Council was undertaking a significant economic development project, the Living City Project. Devonport City Council (2017, p.1) described this project as:

> an economic development strategy to stimulate development in the Devonport region. LIVING CITY is the largest urban re-development plan ever undertaken in regional Tasmania and will transform Devonport through the creation of new retail, business/service and waterfront precincts focused on highlighting our tourism, arts, food and services.

The project included creating opportunities for new retail, creating a waterfront precinct and a civic precinct, connecting the city to the river and creating growth in terms of economic and employment opportunities (Devonport City Council,

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[31] Since the interviews took place, the area of Devonport was reclassified (in 2021) to outer regional, an "[area] where geographic distance imposes a moderate restriction upon accessibility to the widest range of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

2014). As part of this, DECC was planned to come under the branding of the paranaple arts centre, a new entity which would also include the Devonport Regional Gallery and the Devonport Visitor Information Centre (Tourism Tasmania, 2024). Overseeing the arts centre element of the Living City Project was the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, who was interviewed for this case study. The new centre was to be located in a precinct which also incorporated the library, local government services and a large convention centre.

The interviews for this case study were conducted with staff members including the Deputy Mayor and the Deputy General Manager of Devonport City Council, the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, DECC Manager, and Box Office and Marketing Administrator. Representatives from local arts groups, namely Devonport Eisteddfod Society and Devonport Choral Society, were also consulted, as well as two local artists. Representatives from two Tasmanian arts organisations who had toured to DECC were interviewed, plus the CEO of a Tasmania-wide arts and cultural festival, a representative from another Tasmanian arts company, and two individuals who were connected to the Devonport Regional Gallery. Eleven community members were interviewed via community interviews and six audience members were interviewed at a DECC event. As with the previous two case studies, these interviews will now be summarised and analysed within the framework of the research questions.

## What is the role of Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre?

To build an understanding of the role of DECC, one staff member shared the mission statement of the organisation, which was "to contribute to the social requirements of the Devonport community by providing performances and events". A more detailed version of this statement was provided in the results from the survey that formed part of this thesis. The elongated version of the mission statement included the addition that DECC aspired to be a quality venue, and was articulated as "to contribute to the cultural and social requirements of the City of Devonport by providing and maintaining a quality venue for the provision of entertainment, cultural events and function services for the local community". In contrast to the previous case studies, this mission statement meets the criteria of a mission statement and was formalised. This mission statement will now be explored to gauge whether there appeared to be

alignment or misalignment of this role compared to the experience and opinions of the stakeholders.

Firstly, in terms of the role of providing a quality venue, although the interviews revealed praise for the quality of staff members working at the centre, there were critiques of the quality of the design aspect of DECC. For instance, a representative of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO) noted that the centre had a "dreadful acoustic, well, has no acoustic really". This perspective was not limited to an orchestral perspective, which the TSO interviewee noted constituted very specific requirements, but was also held by a local artist, who stated the venue design was "shocking! It was never designed by—clearly— anybody who knew what a theatre needed". There were hopes from the Devonport City Council that the new paranaple arts centre building and facilities would alter these negative perceptions. However, the TSO interviewee noted that the additional conference space, in which it was hoped that the orchestra could be accommodated, would still be unsuitable, and the Devonport City Council was criticised for the lack of consultation. This once again brings into question a key challenge faced by arts centres, not only in terms of the physical facilities, but also the arts centre model philosophy more generally: that by trying to cater to everyone, they may not successfully cater to anyone, a concept raised by Lane (1978).

With regard to the role of DECC providing performances and events, it appeared that DECC was fulfilling its aim given that upon reviewing the centre's programme there was a range of performances and events on offer to the community. This was supported by the fact that the role of the provision of entertainment was recognised in the interviews: for instance, when audience members were questioned about their perception of the role of the centre, four unanimously commented that the provision of entertainment was the role of DECC, and they believed that the centre was successful in achieving this goal. In terms of programming quality, the responses suggested that the quality of offerings at DECC was of a high standard (life member of the Devonport Choral Society, Box Office and Marketing Administrator at DECC, and two community members).

Regarding DECC playing an important role in the provision of social requirements, one staff member noted that this role required DECC to be viewed

as a community place and a social place that was appealing to all within the community. The audience interviewees were not directly asked about this social role, nor did their responses indicate this social function. However, although this may not have been articulated, it does not mean that this social value did not exist, rather that perhaps it was not recognised or acknowledged. Given that all audience interviewees were attending the centre with a friend or family, it may be that DECC does play a role in the social element of their lives.

The community interviews also provided insight into whether DECC was seen as fulfilling the role of meeting a social requirement, being a community and social place as well as having appeal to the community. The community interviews presented mixed responses to the role of the centre. For instance, of the 11 community members who took part in community interviews, five highly valued the centre and perceived it as having an important role, and two even stated that it played a key role in their social lives, aligning with the desired role of the centre. However, this sentiment was not shared by another interviewee, who stated they only attended the centre as a child, and another four interviewees claimed they never attended the centre and felt no connection to DECC. A final community interviewee did not even know where DECC was located. These responses question the public awareness of the centre and suggest that although it may provide a social function for certain individuals, it may not necessarily play an important role for the broader community.

From the Devonport City Council perspective, there was a sense that DECC was fulfilling its goals. In the words of the Deputy General Manager of the council, the centre:

> has done the role that it was established to do. Yeah, it meets a need in the community. But I think […] this redevelopment will allow it to go to the next level. It's certainly got – there's scope there for further use and engagement by the community.

This sense that there was greater capacity for the centre was acknowledged by one DECC staff member and shared by the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, who asserted that DECC has "a very strong business objective to be a hall for hire, but I think there is a greater capacity there for how we can use that

space better for our community". This increased focus on "community capacity-building" (Convention and Arts Centre Manager) once DECC became part of the paranaple arts centre, begged the question of whether the mission statement would change in order to reflect this new priority. It became apparent that amongst the DECC staff members and Devonport City Council that there were varied expectations in terms of the mission and strategic approach to the new centre.

In the first instance, one DECC staff member assumed that it would be important to create a new mission, given the changes in the offering of the centre:

> There's a bigger vision now, I think with the arts centre, I think it's about making it more inclusive and within reach of everybody. Even though it was before, I think it's got to be—you know, it's bigger, it should be more welcoming. It's going to be the place where the community want to meet, basically. Because there are things to look at, and to buy, and to, you know, involve yourself in. So, I think that mission statement will have to change.

However, the Convention and Arts Centre Manager appeared to feel this was unnecessary and that the new paranaple arts centre could use the strategic plan that was, at the time of the interviews, being used for the Devonport Regional Gallery (DRG). The Convention and Arts Centre Manager stated that:

> The art gallery has a strategic plan, with a mission statement and three key objectives in it. So essentially, we'll probably borrow from that, there's nothing strategically wrong with that, that strategic plan was only devised last year.

According to the strategic management literature, this approach may be problematic, as strategic plans are recommended to be unique to each organisation (Varbanova, 2013). Upon inspection of the DRG strategic plan (Devonport Regional Gallery, 2017), it could be understood how the values and principles of the plan may be considered suitable in another organisational setting given the broad values of: accessibility, sustainability, strengths based approach, excellence and innovation. Also, given that these values had been

attributed to DRG, a council-operated organisation, it would not be a leap to suggest that they could also be embraced in another council-operated organisation. However, beyond these values, the issues with the lack of personalisation in the arts centre setting become apparent, and problems appear in terms of the vision and the strategic priority areas. The vision— "to be the leading regional gallery of contemporary Tasmanian art" (Devonport Regional Gallery, 2017, p.5)—was only relevant to the gallery setting. Additionally, the strategic priorities could be questioned in terms of suitability. These priorities included: audience engagement; partnerships, investment and performance; and art collection. Indeed, the first two factors could be transferred to an arts centre setting, but the ways in which these priorities would need to be enacted would differ greatly, requiring significant thought and adjustment. The third factor was specifically gallery-focused and inappropriate for an arts centre.

The mission statement in the DRG strategic plan also raised questions of the new centre's goals. The mission statement asserts that the mission was "inspiring creativity and ideas through the arts" (Devonport Regional Gallery, 2017, p.5). This seemed misaligned with the articulated goals of the new centre, according to the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, who contended that key roles included community development, providing access to the arts for younger people, and "uplifting and providing access to our community-based artists". There was further misalignment between the DRG mission statement regarding the perception of the role of the new centre according to one DECC staff member, who viewed the new mission as creating a social place for the community.

Another focus of the role of the new centre was articulated by the Deputy General Manager of the council and Lead of the Living City Project: although they noted the importance of providing arts for communities, the role of the centre was seen as heavily focused on economic development, which was unsurprising given that the Living City Project was an economic development plan. These conversations revealed differing understandings of the role of the new arts centre, which may be problematic as a mission should provide a guide for an organisation (Vogt, 1994) – differing interpretations may cause conflict in decision-making and operational approaches.

In the DRG strategic plan, the acknowledgements section details a range of stakeholders associated with the gallery, who appear to have contributed to the plan. These comprise council members, members of the Friends of the DRG, gallery staff members, members of the gallery's special interest group, and the president of a regional arts group. This incorporation of stakeholders reflected best practice in the strategic management literature, which supports the inclusion of stakeholders in strategic planning and mission statement creation (Baetz and Beamish, 1993; Baetz and Bart, 1996; Collins and Porras, 2008; Cochran et al., 2008; Fegert et al., 2021). According to the literature, this incorporation of stakeholder voices in strategic planning can create greater satisfaction within the organisation with both the mission statement and the process of its creation (Baetz and Bart, 1996). Therefore, based on the theory, adopting the strategic plan of DRG meant that the voices associated with DECC were neglected. This approach is surprising given the evidence in the case study of the already strained relationship between the council and local users of the space, who complained of the lack of consultation. It is surprising that again, in this decision to adopt the gallery's plan, these stakeholders were ignored. The outcome of this decision was beyond the scope of this thesis, but it does create an avenue for further investigation into the potential need for consultation with community members in the strategic approach of new arts centres.

This section has explored the role of DECC within the context of the centre's mission statement. The interviews revealed different levels of fulfilment of the aims of the centre, according to different stakeholders, as well as varying perceptions of its role. These differing perceptions were highly evident in the interviews with DECC staff members and Devonport City Council. However, despite the variation, there was unanimous desire for greater aspiration for the centre once it became part of the paranaple arts centre. Regardless, the way in which the council planned to approach the strategic direction of the new centre was questionable, as the adoption of the DRG strategic plan failed to capture the aims and role of the new paranaple centre and neglected the voices of DECC stakeholders.

This case study will now analyse the operations of the centre, to assess whether there was alignment or misalignment between the attributed roles of DECC and the centre's operations.

# How does Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre operate?

## Management and leadership

The management of DECC was typical of Australian arts centres as it was owned and operated by the local authority, Devonport City Council. As reported in the PAC Australia Economic Activity Report, 66% of the respondent arts centres were managed by local authorities, and 74% of the venues were owned by local authorities (CultureCounts, 2017). According to PAC Australia's most recent economics report, locally run arts centres were still the most common management structure (PAC Australia, 2022); this was also seen in the survey for this thesis, with 56% of Australian arts centres being managed by local councils. Contrary to the two previous case studies, which primarily focused on the leadership of arts centre directors, this section focuses on the management and management structure of DECC. This focus was a result of the data obtained in the interviews, which primarily addressed the implications of being run by a local authority and the impact of this structure on stakeholder relationships.

To set the scene for discussing the tensions faced at DECC regarding their affiliation with the local authorities, a representative from a Tasmanian arts company and the CEO from a Tasmanian festival, commented on the challenges of council-managed arts centres more broadly. In the words of the CEO from a Tasmanian festival:

> There is a bit of a tension between the way in which councils operate and the way in which venues operate, and they're not always the most compatible because of the culture of the places, I suppose you would say. And also, the value the council places on those venues can – you know, in some instances you find councillors just looking for operational efficiencies and cost minimisation, not necessarily appreciating the role those venues play in community engagement, community development, community value. The bigger set of responsibilities the council has towards its rate payers and residents.

A representative from a Tasmanian arts company agreed with these tensions in operational approaches, but also noted that councils' relationship with risk can be problematic in terms of the arts:

> I think the risk-averse nature of local government across Australia is a major issue. There are some places where a show can't be booked unless the mayor says okay. So, it's almost censorship, you know? And that thing that they'll say, if you have two shows that make a profit, the council wants the profit, and if you have a loss then you've got to wear it. So, they don't understand giving a manager an entrepreneurial fund and a little bit of risk money, so they can win on one and lose on two and, over the course of a two- or three-year period, even it out. So yeah, local government understanding risk and entrepreneurship, which is not their nature, their nature is bills and straight lines and confines, so art isn't always an easy fit.

These comments align with findings described in PAC Australia's *Performing Spaces* (2019) report, a guide of best practice for local authority-run arts centres, which asserts that local councils face a challenge finding balance between "the community benefits of the performing arts—which may not always correspond to high sales at the box office—with the affordability of their assets and services overall" (Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.8). These tensions were prevalent in the stakeholder interviews: in particular, stakeholders from community arts organisations who hired the centre appeared to feel these tensions most strongly. One local artist acknowledged the potentially differing values between local authorities and the arts. He contended that arts centres were "being run by accountants, effectively, probably managed in a bureaucratic sense, managerial sense, and less creative and artistic" and that even if a manager were more creative, they would still be restricted by bureaucracy and a cost-sensitive environment.

There were also questions about the authenticity of the commitment to DECC by council members: "the arts are extensively supported by the people. I'm not sure they're extensively supported by the decision makers. I almost feel like it's not only 'ad-hoc-ery' goes on but tokenism by decision makers" (local Musical Theatre Director). Another local artist and life member of the Devonport Choral

Society agreed, and questioned the value that the Devonport City Council placed on the centre:

> I actually don't feel that the councillors value it. I don't believe that the members of council value the opportunities that the DECC could provide for the community. I don't believe they value the Choral Society or the Devonport Repertory Society and what they can offer. I mean, one or two only individually might but, as a body, they seem very 'oh well, if you don't come that doesn't matter, we don't care' kind of thing.

Interestingly, this perception was confirmed by the Deputy Mayor, who stated that: "there are a couple of our aldermen[32] who think we should just sell all the art and be done with that". This view of a select few aldermen was not necessarily shared by all: both the Deputy General Manager of the council and the Deputy Mayor acknowledged that the centre will never break even and there was an understanding that it would run at a loss. However, they still noted the importance of the offering that DECC provided. For example, the Deputy Mayor contended that the centre was just like any other service in the region and plays a vital part in creating a vibrant city:

> There are some things that some sections of the community use, and some things that everybody uses, the roads and the footpaths, and the public toilets probably, and Victoria Parade, those open spaces, most people use. But then there are some sections like Devonport Oval, most people are never going to play footy. They might go to the footy, but - and all the sports grounds and so on. There are people who are never, like, I never go to, I never go to the basketball stadium, why do I pay for that, but you do. It's just what happens. So, either you do that, or you shut everything down, and then you don't have a city.

This belief that the arts, and in this instance DECC, provided an important service to the community also seems fitting with the redevelopment of the centre and its incorporation into the paranaple arts centre. However, from a critical

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32 At Devonport City Council, councillors were commonly referred to as aldermen.

perspective, given that the Living City Project, of which the development of the new cultural precinct was a part, was an economic development strategy, the focus on the arts could be seen as a way to support this urban development, rather than a genuine uplifting of the arts. According to the literature, a greater focus on infrastructure without also considering the artistic elements can be problematic, as the building itself will not regenerate the area (Sacco and Blessi, 2009; Eltham, 2012). Regardless of the driving force for the new arts centre, and the possibly varied motives of the Devonport City Council and the aldermen, the new paranaple arts centre was seen as an important piece in the development of the city of Devonport.

The importance the centre placed on local artists and community arts groups (a stakeholder group ignored in the official mission statement of the centre) was questioned in this case study. Concerns were raised in the interviews about the increased corporatisation and costs of using DECC by members of the Devonport Choral Society, Devonport Eisteddfod Society, Devonport Repertory Theatre Society, and local artists and performers who had performed with local arts groups at DECC. These concerns about increased corporatisation and costs put in place by the management of DECC will now be discussed.

Firstly, local artists who utilised DECC as part of local community arts groups critiqued the increased corporatisation of the centre. For instance, two interviewees who were involved in the Devonport Choral Society lamented that previously DECC provided keys to community groups to come and go as they pleased whilst they were hiring the centre. However, at the time of the interviews greater restrictions had been put in place, making this freedom an impossibility. This reduced flexibility created challenges for community groups: as the President of the Devonport Choral Society stated, society members were volunteers, the majority of whom work full time, hence they were unable to be at DECC during the day, and only able to be at the venue after hours. However, this created a disconnect as the head technician needed to be on site when the society was using the space and the technician had restrictions placed upon their hours and roster. These restrictions meant that the technician was not always available to work at times that were needed by the volunteers of community groups. These changes in policy were highlighted by a local musical theatre director, who contended that DECC was much "more bureaucratically rigid […] in terms of its governance and requirements and restrictions" compared to other venues. Although the interviewees were critical of the increased bureaucracy, it

was important to consider whether this was a result of the council's approach, which was alluded to in some of the interviews, or whether it was a result of health and safety compliance more broadly, noted by the President of the Devonport Choral Society, who said "the OH&S stuff has become far more stringent".

The cost associated with using DECC was also criticised by local community arts groups. A local artist, who had worked with multiple groups at DECC, noted that the centre had become "money-making and the rules became much stricter about what we could and couldn't do and the price of everything kind of had gone from being very affordable to very expensive". It was recognised that although the community groups did receive a community rate, this discount was only on venue hire and there were significant additional costs, such as staff, electricity and cleaning (local artist). The President of the Devonport Choral Society noted that the venue hire portion of DECC was in fact the smallest element of the bill. The President went on to comment that so great was the concern regarding the cost of using DECC that the Society had considered options to minimise costs, including reducing the number of shows presented, and had even considered alternate venues: "we're the Devonport Choral Society, so we want to do our shows in Devonport. So that makes it really hard, when we're limited in venues that can provide what we need, and the only venue that we have is starting to become beyond our means". It appears that DECC had the luxury of being the only venue of its sort in Devonport, giving it a powerful position with local artists needing the centre.

The importance of community groups having access to DECC was recognised by DECC staff and the council. For instance, the DECC Box Office and Marketing Administrator noted that the centre needs:

> to be within reach for everyone. So, I think those community groups are really important. And I like to, whenever the fees are discussed and stuff, I always like to put my two cents worth in, whether anyone listens or not. I think that if it's built by the community, it should be able to be used by the community.

The Deputy Mayor of the Devonport City Council also noted the challenges with accessibility to the centre, stating that "there's always going to be a balance with the charges and all of those things. I think there's always room to continue to evolve and change and continue to be aware of community expectations". In the interviews, the Convention and Arts Centre Manager noted the importance of local artists being able to access the new paranaple arts centre. Although there appeared to be an ethos of inclusion of amateur groups using the centre, the outcome of this was uncertain because according to local artists there was a lack of support from the council. The costs may become of even greater concern given the new paranaple arts centre had reduced seating compared to the theatre at DECC, as a result of seating being removed to improve accessibility and to bring the theatre up to standards.

According to local artists, the relationship management between the council and the community groups had been problematic. For instance, in the design and planning for the paranaple arts centre, Devonport City Council claimed that there was significant consultation with the public. However, this was questioned in the interviews; for example, when asked about the consultation process, the representative from the Devonport Eisteddfod Society commented: "I suppose there has been [consultation]. But all we were told was what it was going to be". The representative from the Devonport Choral Society noted: "Council, I think, has just given very little regard to the users of the space, or the staff of the space, or the function of the space". This was echoed by a member of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, who attested that it "is a big disappointment that they would invest all that money and not really ask us if it would work or not". According to the literature, this lack of consultation and buy-in could damage the success of the Living City Project, as urban regeneration plans require community support in order to be successful (Sacco and Blessi, 2009; Richards and Duif, 2019).

This lack of consultation with community artists and groups appeared to have been further agitated by the lack of communication regarding the new arts centre. Interviewees articulated that they had been left in the dark about the final design and timeline of the project, impacting the planning of the individual groups. One DECC staff member recognised this frustration from the artists and stated that it was:

because we don't know, they don't know, and they think we're holding
back, and it's just a vicious circle. Once it all comes into fruition and we
can actually see, we know what the space is going to look like, we know
what prices are, we know what we're going to use the spaces for, and all
of that, then, yeah. But at this point in time it's really awkward. Because
nobody really knows.

Communication is central in stakeholder management: as articulated by Al-
Khafaji et al. (2010, p.159) "the survival of any organization depends on its ability
to develop and maintain effective and continuing relationships with its
stakeholders. In business, communication in its various forms is the primary tool
used for building long-lasting relationships and partnerships". The importance of
communication was recognised by the representative from the Devonport Choral
Society, who stated that:

Even if you don't know, you can say: 'well this is what we're expecting,
and this is when we're expecting it to happen', you know, 'between here
and here is our predicted finish time', or whatever. At the moment, we
have very little communication and it's not the staff's fault. It's about
management and just their lack of understanding of the information that
people need.

This quote acknowledged the need for communication and did not assign blame
to the staff of DECC, which was a recurring theme throughout the stakeholder
interviews. The DECC staff were viewed favourably, but seen as restricted in
their capacity as a result of the regulations and policies enforced via the council
(CEO of a Tasmanian festival, local musical theatre director, local artist who was
a lifetime member of Devonport Choral Society). This restriction, related to
DECC being part of a local authority, was acknowledged by Fishel (2014, cited in
Heath and Dalziel, 2019, p.42), who stated that having to work within council
"protocol and processes" was a top weakness of a local authority-run arts centre
structure. This viewpoint also highlighted that the DECC Manager was seen less
as a figurehead or leader for DECC, and more as a manager implementing
council protocols. It was interesting how this perception was paramount in the
interviews: although the DECC Manager had to report to the council and stick to
a budget, they still had control of the arts centre's programming and operations.

The centrality of the importance and presence of a figurehead that was witnessed in the previous two case studies was not seen in this setting.

This section has highlighted the negative perceptions and associations of the management of the council, raising questions about whether the council's motives, operational approaches and values are fundamentally at odds with those of arts centres. However, it should be noted that being run by a local council was not necessarily purely negative. As stated by Heath and Dalziel (2019), local authority-run arts centres can reap the benefit of having access to greater resources and capacity. This was evidenced in the interviews with both the council and DECC staff members, who stated that there was a sense of stability in terms of funding, which other arts centres may not have the benefit of feeling, and it was this funding which allowed DECC to fulfil its central role of "providing performances and events" (DECC staff member). Despite meeting this element of the mission, Devonport City Council appeared to have failed in adequately connecting with stakeholders, which, according to the stakeholder management literature, is problematic, as "the efficiency of cultural organisations depends on their ability to meet stakeholders' interests and aims" (Dziurski, 2017, p.66). Despite this disconnect, DECC had the benefit of being the only venue of its size and capacity in Devonport, meaning that community groups, if financially able, would continue to use the space, even in its future iteration as paranaple arts centre. The neglect of stakeholder management in terms of community arts groups may indicate a preference for professional work, which will now be explored in the next section: programming.

## Programming

DECC programmed a range of art forms as part of a season to cater to the wider community as well as being a venue for hire. The range of offerings was recognised positively by stakeholders: for instance, the life member of the Devonport Choral Society noted that "they do run a varied programme" and a community member from the community interviews commented on the diversity of the offering. Although there was diversity in art forms, the professional and amateur balance was not as prevalent. For instance, the season programmed by the DECC Manager included professional work, primarily from mainland Australia, but also from Tasmania. This was a noteworthy finding, as the *PAC Australia 2017 Economics Activity Report* states that overall 61% of performances in Australian arts centres are community works, whereas 39% are

professional (CultureCounts, 2017). The report does note that there is great variation in this ratio dependent on which state a centre is located in. However, looking specifically at the Tasmanian centres, the split is similar, with 38% granted at professional, which does not seem to reflect the findings from Devonport. In the survey conducted as part of this thesis, the responses regarding DECC noted that the split between amateur and professional work was equal. This could relate to the number of performances, rather than the number of productions; for example, some community groups use the space for up to three weeks for events such as the eisteddfods.

As discussed in the previous section, the amateur local arts groups could hire the space, which meant that overall the offering of DECC included an amateur element even though it was not actively included in the programming initiated by the centre. Although interviews with both the Convention and Arts Centre Manager and the Box Office and Marketing Administrator noted the importance of supporting local groups, the degree to which DECC actively embraced this role was questioned by interviewees.

The interview data also questioned the balance of the centre's programming. For instance, DECC was described as primarily being a "hall for hire" (local musical theatre director). This sentiment was echoed by the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, who stated that "the Devonport Entertainment Centre has always been a very strong hall for hire, as opposed to running its own entrepreneurial season". This was surprising, given that the Convention and Arts Centre Manager went on to acknowledge that DECC:

> has run its own entrepreneurial season in a number of guises over the past five years, originally calling it a membership scheme, then lately referring to it as an entrepreneurial season. But that's only been a small part of their operations, or their business model, and up until that point it really has been a hall for hire, with really only one regular community client, that being the Devonport Choral Society. And the eisteddfods, I should mention too, being those annual regular community users.

Indeed the balance of programming was weighed more heavily towards hirers, reflecting the findings of the *PAC Australia 2017 Economics Activity Report*,

which notes that 65% of performances at Australian arts centres are external hirers that limit financial risk (CultureCounts, 2017). This reliance on external hirers and low financial risk was important for DECC (as well also seen in the BAC case study), as despite being characterised as having "a very strong business objective to be a hall for hire" (Convention and Arts Centre Manager), it was widely acknowledged that the centre did not make a profit. The Deputy General Manager for the council confirmed that the centre ran at a loss of approximately $800,000 per year. It would be expected that this loss would be even greater if the hirer-to-season ratio was altered, which may have been beyond the budget provided to DECC from Devonport City Council.

The offerings of hirers could primarily be considered commercial works, which apparently suited the audience, as one DECC staff member remarked that the audience was commercially focused. This notion of being commercially focused led to discussions about entertainment versus art, and one DECC staff member stated that these more commercial offerings sat within the entertainment realm rather than that of art:

> Some of our patrons might think the comedy festival is art. To me that's entertainment. So, I would think that we were more for entertainment than actually art. And that probably won't change [with the paranaple arts centre]. We'll probably still be focusing on making people happy and bringing things that they want to see. But it also gives us a little more of a push to do something a little more confronting or a little bit outside their comfort zone.

This entertainment focus reflected the mission statement of the centre to provide performances and events as well as the key role of entertainment, as discussed at the start of this case study. However, the lack of greater focus on more artistic work made one DECC staff member question whether the centre could even be considered an arts centre, as it was primarily focused on entertainment. This viewpoint that entertainment and arts are mutually exclusive reflects the modernist perceptions of these two concepts (Hamilton, 2023), where the aims in regard to the audience differ. For instance, entertainment "aims to give pleasure or delight by amusing, exciting or otherwise diverting the audience, in a way that calls on them to make little concentrated effort" (Hamilton, 2023, p.43), whereas art "has a conscious aesthetic end, that richly rewards aesthetic attention"

(Hamilton, 2023, p.43). However, the value of art or entertainment sits with the individual and classifying works into either art or entertainment is challenging. This classification is dependent not only on the individual but also the geographic location, the market and political forces at play, and the passage of time (Andersson and Andersson, 2006).

In contrast, the postmodernist view suggests that these two concepts are "indistinguishable" (Hamilton, 2023, p.41). Regardless of the debate surrounding these two terms, it was interesting that this DECC staff member associated the traditional ideals of 'high art' with being a necessary component of an arts centre, and as seen in the previous case study, other arts centres appear to be trying to remove this association. It was especially surprising given the word 'entertainment' was in the name of the centre – Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre – and included in the centre's mission. Again, questions regarding the mission and values of an arts centre arise here. Beyond the art versus entertainment debate, the programme offering at DECC was also interrogated in the interviews by the Convention and Arts Centre Manager and by a DRG volunteer, who longed for greater participation and interactivity in the offering. These demands reflected the aspirations of the new paranaple arts centre, as articulated by the Convention and Arts Centre Manager.

Despite these questions about DECC's programming, many interviewees (four audience members, local artist and four community interviewees) were satisfied with the programming. However, the programme did not appear to appeal to the entire community, as DECC struggled to entice audiences to specific art forms. In particular, these included audiences to children's/family shows, work that may be considered edgier or more contemporary, and drama (DECC staff members). Suggested reasons for the lack of audiences at these events were lack of income and time commitments (DECC staff members).

In an attempt to gain audiences, in particular for these challenging art forms, DECC adopted specific approaches in making programming decisions. For example, DECC considered familiarity as a point of connection to entice audiences, which was a formula that appears to have worked previously, and a strategy identified by Kawashima (1999a) in programming arts centres. In this example, a DECC staff member contended that in programming a drama it was essential "to have a name or an actor that they [the audience] could resonate

with". A representative from a Tasmanian arts company also acknowledged audiences' desire for familiarity, commenting that "the number of pulls or asks on families' disposable income is getting greater and greater. If they're going to something that's unknown to them, then it's more difficult to justify that spend". This was seen as a challenge for this arts company as they only presented original work with performers that may be unknown to local audiences. They approached this difficulty by focusing on ensuring excellent and unique experiences with audiences, and consequently they rely on their strong organisational reputation to build trust and entice audiences.

Despite the challenges of attracting audiences to certain shows, there was a sense that the DECC Manager knew the community and the programme that would appeal to it. In the words of the Deputy Mayor:

> I think our staff certainly have done a good job of knowing their audience. We've had a fairly wide range of offerings, certainly […] [the DECC Manager has] always been good at—she knows the community and has been able to offer a fairly wide range of things.

This knowledge could be a result of both experience and feedback. For example, the Box Office and Marketing Administrator commented: "We try to engage with the audience as they leave the show, people will soon tell you if they don't like something". This seeking of feedback is acknowledged to be an important element in an audience development plan (Varbanova, 2013).

This section has again raised important questions about the arts centre model and its role in respect to programming. DECC has revealed debates about the balance of professional versus amateur work, the balance of hirers to a curated season, and the role of entertainment versus art in arts centres. Accompanying these debates is the question of quality: quality was generally considered high at the centre, and the Box Office and Marketing Administrator noted that they could be confident of the quality of regular hirers and users of the space. However, audiences were often unable to determine whether a show or event was part of the DECC curated season or a hirer of the space; hence a poorer-quality presentation could have a knock-on effect of damaging the brand of the centre,

as was also witnessed in the Stratford Courthouse case study. The brand and identity of DECC will be explored in the upcoming Marketing section.

## Marketing and branding

The interviews revealed a range of perspectives on the identity and brand of DECC. In the first instance, there were those who felt the centre had a strong identity, such as the Box Office and Marketing Administrator and the President of the Devonport Choral Society. This strong identity was justified by the Box Office and Marketing Administrator as follows: "I think people recognise the DECC, it's been around for a long time […] I think the theatre is ingrained in people". This claim was based on the history of the venue and the connections the community has had with the centre over the years. For instance, many community members had visited the venue as children as part of the eisteddfods. The President of the Devonport Choral Society also suggested that DECC had "a strong identity". However, this statement was prefaced with the fact that she had personally had a close relationship with the centre over the years. However, upon analysis of these responses, when these individuals spoke about identity, their wording seemed to equate identity with recognition rather than the definition previously discussed in this thesis, that identity encapsulates the beliefs, values and essentially the defining characteristics of an organisation (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Therefore these statements appear to be more concerned with awareness of the centre in the community rather than that of brand identity. Although these two interviewees attested to the recognition of the centre, this sense of awareness of DECC was not evident in the community interviews, where one individual stated they did not know where it was, another apparently knew nothing about the centre, and another never knew what was on.

This evidence of a lack of awareness among some in the community may have been a result of the budgetary and resource restrictions for marketing and promotion at DECC. Staff members at DECC commented that the budget restricted marketing capacity and limited their approach to electronic direct mail marketing (EDM), hard copy newsletters, posterboards and social media. The Box Office and Marketing Administrator also noted the lack of capacity to reflect on marketing and promotional approaches and commented that "you might get a show book in now for July, you've only between now [February] and then to sell it, and then it's gone. So, you don't have time to then – you move on. You don't have time to analyse, 'well, what did we do, and what worked for that?'". This

comment raised interesting questions about the arts centre model. With the continuous performances and events at the centre, dealing with various hirers, chasing marketing materials from artists, and the performances or events most commonly being for one night, the marketing workload was significant. The ability to conduct a significant marketing campaign with limited resources was nearly impossible.

Questioning the awareness of the centre may not be limited to marketing and promotion, but potentially also the identity of the centre itself. For instance, some of the interviewees claimed that DECC lacked a clear identity. The Deputy General Manager of the Devonport City Council noted: "we're not sure the DECC was a real strong brand name anyway, so we think the paranaple will hopefully become what it's recognised as". A local artist, who regularly performed with groups at DECC, commented: "I really just see DECC as a branch of council and council employees, you know? I don't see that as a separate kind of identity of their own". This perception of a council-run arts centre being seen as an extension of the local authority was not unique to DECC and was a phenomenon discovered in Fishel's (2014) study, which was reported in *Performing Spaces* (Fishel, 2014 cited in Heath and Dalziel, 2019).

The branding of DECC came into question further with interviewees admitting they often did not refer to the arts centre as DECC. For example, a local artist who had regularly worked with local community groups at the centre referred to DECC as the Town Hall, as did the Box Office and Marketing Administrator. This was shared by the President of the Devonport Choral Society, who questioned the connection to the DECC name, commenting that "when you talk about the Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre, I would still say Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre, Town Hall Theatre. Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre, Centenary Court". Others were critical of the name, stating that it was too long, and it was bland and confusing, given that there was a restaurant in Devonport called the Deck. These responses demonstrate a lack of clear identity, which is considered problematic in the academic literature. However, not necessarily problematic in the previous case study between Stratford Courthouse and Segue, however in this instance there appeared to be confusion.

There were also criticisms of the visual representation of DECC, the DECC logo (see Figure 7.3). For instance, one DECC staff member was very negative about the logo: "when I started, I hated the logo, and I still hate the logo. And I don't think, if someone just saw the logo without our name underneath, I don't think most people would know what it is". The President of the Devonport Choral Society disagreed, claiming that "the logo for me is instantly recognisable". However, again, this interviewee had a close relationship with DECC, hence the connection and recognition were built over time. The debate surrounding the logo for DECC was particularly pertinent in the interviews given the new paranaple arts centre that would combine both DECC and the DRG.

**Figure 7.3: DECC logo**



The Deputy General Manager of the Devonport City Council acknowledged that there were mixed views of the new logo (see Figure 7.4): "some people like it, some people don't. It's a logo; there's always kind of [laughter]—there's always going to be different views". The members of the council who were interviewed spoke favourably of the new paranaple arts centre logo. A DECC staff member's response was not as warm, but still favourable: "I like it, I don't dislike it". This was followed by: "anything has to be better than our old one, I hated it!" However, there was a sense more broadly that the logo did not truly encapsulate DECC, and instead the logo was criticised for being "too business-y" (DRG volunteer). The President of the Devonport Choral Society felt that the logo

lacked a storytelling element, stating: "I think logos should not have to be explained […] when you see a logo, you want it to be instantly recognisable as that thing and tell a story about that thing. And maybe it will be, down the track. But it will be quite a while".

**Figure 7.4: paranaple arts centre logo**



Source: Devonport City Council (2024a)

A volunteer for DRG noted that she took part in the consultation for the branding of the new centre, and a key focus of the session was ensuring that the brand of Devonport was encapsulated in the design. However, the volunteer lamented that this had been lost in the final design. Given the diversity within the arts centre model and the broad offerings and audiences it aims to attract, the act of creating a logo that tells the story of DECC and appealed to the community seemed to be a challenging task. This challenge was compounded by the fact that this initiative was council-driven as part of an economic development plan, so the corporate perspective was paramount. This more corporate logo, as described by a DRG volunteer, may also inadvertently create a further divide between the community and the centre, as the centre would be visually aligned to the brand of the Devonport City Council. This connection may be detrimental given the strained relationship between not only the centre stakeholders and the council, but also between the council and the community more generally. This was evidenced in the community interviews, where there was significant frustration with the Devonport City Council and the Living City Project.

The name of the paranaple arts centre was also criticised by the interviewees. Firstly, this related to the word 'paranaple', which is the "local Indigenous word for the mouth of the Mersey River" where the arts centre is located (Convention and Arts Centre Manager). Some interviewees viewed this name negatively: "a

lot of people are not going to relate to that word at all […] it doesn't say Devonport. People are going to go, 'what? That sounds like pineapple'" (DRG volunteer). Although the local community may be confused by the name, it did recognise an important element of the community. Some interviewees applauded the inclusion of an Indigenous name (President of Devonport Choral Society, Friend of the DRG), especially given "it brings in some very important issues which have been really neglected […] which is, of course, the Aboriginal community that's lived here and still does, you know" (Friend of DRG). Perhaps this title was a recognition of a segment of the community who was often overlooked.

This section has provided insight into the marketing and branding of the DECC. There were different opinions of the strength of the identity and branding of the centre, as well as various opinions on the naming and logos of the new paranaple brand. It was perhaps not surprising that there were different perceptions of the brand of DECC, given that the identity and value of a brand can be seen as a co-creation between the consumer and the organisation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Merz et al., 2009; Boorsma and Chiaravalloti, 2010; Voss and Grabel, 2014; Black and Veloutsou, 2016; Burt and Sparks, 2016; Borel and Christodoulides, 2016). This theme of varying perspectives will continue to be explored in the next section, which will examine the various stakeholder perspectives of DECC.

## How do key stakeholders perceive Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre?

Despite criticisms by the local community groups earlier in this case study, overall these stakeholders had a favourable perception of DECC. For instance, the President of the Devonport Choral Society noted: "I love doing shows at the DECC, it's kind of like my second home, and I love the staff there"; and the local musical director commented that his associations with DECC provided "good memories for me. I've spent hours and hours of my life in there. So, what do I think of the DECC? A creative challenge […] An enjoyable creative challenge". The Event Coordinator of the Devonport Eisteddfod Society was also positive: "it's brilliant there. Because we know everybody, which for a start is a good thing. And we know everybody, and everybody knows us". Even the local artist, who has been involved in many local productions over the years and who was quite

critical of DECC in the interviews, admitted: "I certainly value it, even though I've got plenty of criticisms of it. It would be worse if it wasn't there". It was interesting that these perceptions were based on their personal experiences from their active involvement through local community arts groups; hence these positive perceptions may be more an outcome of the event or performance they were involved in rather than directly a result of their relationship with DECC, as DECC just happened to be the venue in which these memories were created. This may not be the case for all, as a positive perception of the staff was mentioned, but it is worth considering the specific impact of DECC in these favourable perceptions.

This positive perception of the staff was shared by another local artist, who agreed that the staff were "really good", which reaffirms the hopes of the Box Office and Marketing Manager that DECC was considered "friendly, I think it's welcoming. I don't think it intimidates people. I think some arts centres can, people feel out of their depth […] I think it's a friendly, trustworthy—I think that that's been built up". These positive sentiments were shared by four community members in the community interviews, who considered the centre to be very important for the community and their lives. However, accompanying these statements was the aforementioned lack of awareness and appeal of the centre, evidenced in another four community interviews and by a DRG volunteer.

Interviewees shared concern about the impact the new paranaple arts centre building and complex would have on the perceptions of DECC. This concern was captured by the Events Coordinator of the Devonport Eisteddfod Society, who noted that "the building itself doesn't fit in" and believed people will "be put off by it, I think so. They're very old-style here". This sentiment aligns with Thorne's findings (1979b, p.61) that newly designed centres may appear threatening and unwelcoming, missing the "humanity which seems to be essential for community arts centres". This challenge of overcoming threshold anxiety (Gurian, 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Tull, 2017; Dickinson, 2020) to the new arts centre building was recognised by the Convention and Arts Centre Manager:

> Trying to encourage that same community to now go into a new glass and steel building in a much more busy precinct could be quite difficult. And likewise with the arts, because again it's going to be a bright new shiny building. It may seem quite elitist; it may seem quite highbrow.

However, attempts were being made to try and make the centre more appealing. For instance, one section of the internal design was cited as creating a "community lounge room", as well as having a coffee shop, couches, natural light, and an inviting space including interactive elements (Deputy General Manager of the Devonport City Council). The Convention and Arts Centre Manager noted that all was being done to try and make the space as enticing and welcoming as possible:

> How to encourage people to take that first step in the building, and then once they're in the building, how do we make them feel welcomed and engaged? And this comes right back down to, and this is going to sound stupid, but I'll use it as an example, whether our customer service team are wearing t-shirts or shirts. It comes down to the fact that how can we do everything we possibly can to make people feel welcome when they come into the space? And if that means our staff are wearing t-shirts or polo tops, as opposed to being dressed more corporately, then that's what we'll do. Because we just really need to break down that inhibition to walk into a building like that and enjoy that building.

The Box Office and Marketing Administrator also raised a way in which to create a sense of familiarity in the new building:

> If the staff all changed and you suddenly took all the people they were familiar with out of the equation, that could have a detrimental effect. Because people would be like, 'oh it's all changed, everything's changed'. Whereas if the same people are there, then it's not about the building […] if you did take everyone out and you just suddenly put all new people in there, that would be a shock.

Trying to gain buy-in and a positive perception from the community for the new centre may be part of a larger problem: the perception of the Living City Project. Sacco and Blessi (2009, p.1131) attest that "the developmental power of culture cannot be unleashed if the initial top–down impulse is not balanced by a substantial bottom–up social dynamics of participation", and Richards and Duif (2019, p.15) claim "the city as a whole needs to be involved, otherwise it is

unlikely that the dream will take root". This community buy-in to the project was questionable, as although the interviews with members of the council suggested that in general there was strong support from the community for the Living City Project, the community interviews told a different story. One of the community interviewees perceived the Living City Project as a good idea, whereas other interviewees were very vocal in their reservations. For example, two people thought the project was a waste of money, as did two audience members; another community interviewee was sceptical and believed that the council should listen more to the wants and needs of the community; and another community interviewee hoped for the best but was very sceptical of the project and the proposed outcomes.

It was notable that when questioned about the perception of the term 'arts centre', rather than being viewed negatively, which was evident in the previous case studies, the interviewees in this case displayed high aspirations for arts centres and their expectations of this model of arts and cultural provision. The central theme in these discussions was the importance of the relationship between arts centres and the community. The interviewees considered arts centres a tool to develop the community and "improve or build on our capacity within the community" (Convention and Arts Centre Manager), as well as a space for the community, a meeting place where community members "don't need to go for anything, you need to go because you know there will be something" (TSO representative). Accompanying this sentiment was the necessity for the centre to be "open a lot" (TSO representative); this would potentially be facilitated by DECC being incorporated into the larger paranaple centre, which would include the gallery as well as other council services, such as tourist information and the library. Engagement and providing an interactive experience for the community was also seen as a crucial ingredient for arts centres (Convention and Arts Centre Manager, Friend of the DRG, DRG Volunteer); examples of this could include workshops (Friend of the DRG) and education programmes (Convention and Arts Centre Manager).

These expectations of arts centres suggested that a central role of arts centres is to embrace and create opportunities for engagement and participation. This expectation was missing from the DECC mission statement, which instead focused on providing a service to the community. However, the Convention and Arts Centre Manager explained that this would be amended with the new paranaple arts centre. Although there was the promise of greater community

engagement and opportunities, it contrasted with the perception, at the time of the interviews, of many of the community uses of DECC, who stated they did not feel valued by DECC and the council. Evaluating the success of creating a greater connection and sense of community with the arts centre was beyond the scope of this thesis; however, this relationship appeared to be part of a larger problem, with a local artist stating that "there's a disconnect in Devonport at the moment between council and community and that's really sad".

Building on the perceptions of the arts centres more broadly, the local musical director provided a unique perspective of an arts centre, stating that arts centres should only be a small element of a community - rather:

> Your whole community should be an arts centre. I reckon that would be the most exciting, creative place. That the whole place is, you know, an arts centre. And that would be great if your arts centre is the type of […] not just the focus of where you […] or just the geographical point of performance, but if it's the generator of arts.

This 'generator of arts' concept reflects ideas from the Power PAC project (Australian Performing Arts Centres Association [APACA], 2013; PAC Australia, 2018) and Bryan's (2013) belief that arts centres should be hubs of creativity. This idea was not witnessed at DECC, which did not generate its own work.

The CEO of a Tasmania-wide arts festival suggested that perhaps too much thought was put into the naming of arts and cultural organisations, as it was the essence of an arts centre which truly gives an arts centre its identity:

> I think, inside the arts sector, we make a lot of distinctions that are not made by our patrons and audiences. So, when it comes to the notion of an arts centre, what does it mean, I think it's irrelevant. You know, whether—if it actually encourages people to come, if they associate it with a place that they—if they think of it as a centre, if they associate it with a place where they get value for money and have a damned good night out, whatever that means to them, whether it's laughing their heads off at a comedy, or actually getting moved by a tragedy, or being provoked into thinking about things by a piece of really good theatre; I

> think it's irrelevant […] The distinction is ours, not theirs. […] So, I think
> it's really quite distinctively different for each place. And it depends on
> what goes in there and how the community connects to it as to whether
> it's important if it's called a this or a that?

This viewpoint provided an important consideration when reflecting upon the arts centre model and its role and place in the arts and cultural landscape. The literature review revealed that although there was a generally accepted definition, there was great variation in the approaches of arts centres, for example in their roles and operations. This diversity has encouraged various perceptions of arts centres, bringing into question the terminology and use of the term 'arts centre', as evidenced so far in these case studies. However, this quote suggests that perhaps the focus should be on the programming and connections to the community rather than concerns with semantics.

The perceptions discussed in this section suggest that primarily, the community that engages with the centre views DECC and the opportunities it provides, be it entertainment or a venue for hire, favourably. However, the interviews also demonstrated that this sentiment was not shared by all the community, as there was a lack of awareness of the centre, as well as a negative perception by some of the centre specifically and the Living City project more broadly. This section concluded with discussions of the perceptions of the term 'arts centre' according to the DECC stakeholders, and the suggestion that rather than focusing on terminology, perhaps focusing on the arts centre itself would be more beneficial.

## Conclusion

DECC has provided a case study of an arts centre at a point of transition. At the time the interviews took place, the new paranaple arts centre was being built, of which the DECC would be a part. This case study has provided useful and original insights into the arts centre model within a council setting and its role as an arts and cultural provider in regional Australia.

Firstly, in terms of the role of the centre: the central focus of the mission statement of DECC, the provision of performances and events, appeared to be met by the programme, with a range of performances and events covering a

range of art forms. However, there was a sense of dissatisfaction with the centre. This dissatisfaction was due in part to key programming decisions, which fed into the purported role of the centre. For instance, the interviewees brought to light debates surrounding the appropriate balance between professional and amateur works presented at the arts centre, the balance of hirers versus a curated programme, and questions of artistic development (entertainment versus art). However, the interviews revealed a lack of satisfaction with the current arrangements, as well as contradictions. For instance, local artists argued there was a lack of commitment from the centre in supporting amateur works and the Convention and Arts Centre Manager himself noted that the centre was too focused on hirers, yet the amateur arts group faced significant barriers in accessing the venue.

The role of the centre clearly articulated the provision of entertainment as central to the DECC offering. However, in fulfilling this goal, a DECC staff member was critical of the centre, claiming that in order to be an arts centre, it must incorporate evidence of works of greater artistic challenge. These contradictions reveal a central challenge of arts centres: although the model allows diversity and flexibility in programming and offerings, this was only beneficial if there was a shared understanding of the roles and aims of the centre. For example, where does DECC stand in terms of genuinely supporting amateur arts groups? Or what was its focus or balance of hirers versus a curated programme expected to be? This gap between the actions and expectations of DECC suggested that the mission statement and goals of the centre should be revisited, and its role better understood and acknowledged by stakeholders.

With DECC moving to be part of the paranaple arts centre, this would have appeared to be the perfect time to have these discussions with stakeholders and ensure buy-in and alignment of the goals and role of the centre. However, according to the Convention and Arts Centre Manager, the mission and strategic plan was to be borrowed from DRG, which questions the commitment to truly tailoring a mission statement to encapsulate the aspirations of the new centre. This re-use of the gallery's plan was surprising, given that the council interviewees reiterated the importance of creating a community space that was embedded within the community. Yet the voices of the community and stakeholders were being ignored, challenging the authenticity of creating an arts centre that was truly embedded, embraced by and accessible to the community, including community artists.

Secondly, being run and operated by a local authority, DECC faced specific challenges, which questioned the suitability of a council-run and -operated arts centre. Indeed, there were benefits for DECC, such as funding, which appeared to be secure; however, stakeholders external to DECC spoke to the negative implications of this structure. At DECC, the arts centre was seen as an extension of the council rather than a separate entity. This may not have been detrimental to the perception of the arts centre if the community's perception of the council had been more positive. However, this was not necessarily the case; as the interviews revealed, there was controversy in Devonport surrounding the Living City Project, which had faced significant criticism within the community. This negative perception appeared to have extended from the local council to the running of the arts centre. Accompanying this negative perception, there appeared to be a breakdown between the local arts groups who hired the space and the centre. The root of this clash appeared to be based on increased restrictions imposed by the council, as well as the high costs of venue hire. It should be noted that the degree to which these increased regulations were within the control of the council, or a result of health and safety regulations was uncertain. However, the costs of the use of DECC raised questions about the motives and value the council placed on the arts centre, and the local community groups' comments suggested that DECC did not truly value the amateur element. Although DECC staff members assisted local hirers as much as possible within the council framework, and amateur performances did occur at the centre, this was only in a hiring capacity. When considering this dissatisfaction, it should be noted that the role of the centre did not articulate support for amateur work, although the Convention and Arts Centre Manager did mention ensuring access for local artists to the paranaple arts centre. This lack of inclusion in the mission statement of the centre did not mean that it was necessarily an incorrect way to run a community arts centre, but it did highlight a potential mismatch of expectations, and consequently a challenging relationship with key stakeholders.

The perspectives of local community groups also challenged the motives of the council. These comments questioned whether the values of an arts centre and the local council can ever truly align. For instance, aspirations for the new paranaple arts centre included a greater focus on community development and capacity building, which does not easily align with the instrumental outcomes approach of Devonport City Council. Whether or not there was a misalignment in

the running of an arts centre by a local council may well be dependent on the individuals involved. For instance, the Convention and Arts Centre Manager comes from an arts background, and demonstrated his aspirations and strong belief in the importance of arts and culture in the interviews. However, the Deputy Mayor openly acknowledged that some aldermen viewed arts and culture as holding no value for the community. Again, this may come down to a questioning of values and motives: for instance, would the new paranaple arts centre have gained council support if it had not been part of a larger economic development plan? Interviewees suggest that the arts centre being seen as a mechanism to drive economic growth was the motive behind the support of the new centre, rather than a true valuing of the offerings of the arts centre.

This case study has raised questions regarding the programming preferences of arts centres and the role and expectations of stakeholders. It has also challenged the suitability of an arts centre run by a local authority, and which has opposing values and drivers for support. This local authority structure will be explored further in the final case study: Junction in Goole, UK.

# Chapter 8 – Junction case study

**Figure 8.1: Facade of Junction**



Source: Junction Goole (2024)

## Introduction

The focus of the final case study is Junction, an arts centre located in Goole, UK. Goole is a market town and inland port situated in East Yorkshire, with a population of approximately 20,500 people (Office for National Statistics - Census 2021, 2021).

The centre opened on 7 November 2009, and was built to replace the previous theatre, The Gate, which had been in operation since the mid-1990s (Junction Goole, 2024). Junction was the result of over 10 years of development and was financially supported by Arts Council England (ACE), East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Goole Town Council, and Yorkshire Forward.[33] The £2.475[34] million

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[33] Yorkshire Forward, abolished in 2012, was the regional development agency for the regions of Yorkshire and Humber (HM Government, 2012).

[34] Various sources quoted different final budgets for the build, ranging from £2.3 million (BBC Humberside, 2010) to £2.5 million (AJ Buildings Library, 2024). The figure included here is what was articulated by the architect.

redevelopment (Henley Halebrown, no date) saw the centre being built in an old market hall.

The arts centre shares the building with the Goole Town Council and, according to Junction's website (Junction Goole, 2024):

> Junction combines three purposes – the administrative and civic base for Goole Town Council, a community centre and a busy mixed-use arts facility, hosting a wide range of live events, cinema and satellite screenings, a workshop programme and activities that reach out into our community.

In addition to this, a privately owned café bar is situated within the building. The arts centre-specific facilities include an auditorium (flexible space with theatre seating capacity for 165 people, with the option of an extra 40 seats), a workshop room, and a community room.

The interviews for this case study were conducted with the core staff members: the Arts & Leisure Manager, Marketing Officer, Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator, and Senior Administrative Assistant. Two volunteers were also interviewed, as well as the previous Relationship Manager from ACE and the Deputy Mayor from the Goole Town Council, who represented funding sources for the centre. Two local school teachers who had worked with the centre were consulted, as were three local artists, a workshop facilitator at the centre, two touring arts companies, two artists with whom Junction had commissioned work, and the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub. In addition, 13 audience members were interviewed, and 10 community interviews were conducted. As with the previous three case studies, these interviews will now be discussed within the framework of the research questions.

## What is the role of Junction?

To gain an understanding of the role of Junction, the online survey that forms part of this thesis was consulted. According to the Marketing Officer, who

undertook the survey, the formal mission that outlines the role of Junction was articulated as follows:

> The purpose of Junction is to provide the widest possible access to the best possible arts activities and to develop our audiences using partnerships wherever possible. Through this, the building, its facilities and its programme aim to achieve sustainable increases in the cultural and economic offer of Goole and in the [sic] way, to contribute to the artistic, social, educational and recreational development of the town and surrounding region.

Although this formal mission statement was not recalled in its entirety by the case study interviewees, including by the Marketing Officer who provided this statement, key elements and themes were recognised and acknowledged. These include the roles and values of the provision of social opportunities, accessibility, superior customer service, engagement and participation, and opportunities for artists.

Firstly, the social role was articulated by various stakeholders. For instance, the Arts & Leisure Manager for Goole Town Council, who for ease will now be referred to as the Director, articulated the role of Junction was to support the "social and educational transformation of Goole". This social aspect of the role of the centre was shared by the Deputy Mayor of Goole Town Council, who stated that the role of Junction was to be a "meeting place", a sentiment also acknowledged by a volunteer who considered the centre a "friendly place for all the community". Not only did the social element of the mission resonate with some of the stakeholder perceptions of Junction's role, but there was also strong recognition of accessibility as being central to the offering and role of the centre.

The importance of accessibility for Junction was evident since its early days; for example, it was raised in the feedback and consultation sessions that were held with stakeholders in the early design stages for the centre. This was perhaps not surprising given the accessibility restrictions that existed at The Gate as the theatre was in an old Methodist church, and not fit for purpose (Director). As a result, accessibility became central to Junction's offering (Director). This

accessibility focus was recognised by the previous relationship manager from ACE, who asserted that Junction had:

> developed a specialism in working with people with learning difficulties. And the way in which they embrace the idea of having resident companies and diversity, despite – it would have been easy for them to say that our, Arts Council England's, diversity agenda was too difficult for them, but in fact they've gone the other way, I think [the Director] and the team there have really embraced that and really tried to make it work in a way that was meaningful not just for ticking our boxes, but in a way that was meaningful for Goole, for groups that they work with, for the place that they're in.

This focus and commitment to accessibility was echoed in all the Junction staff member interviews, with all staff members noting the importance of accessibility in the role of Junction. For example, the Senior Administrative Assistant considered the role of Junction to be "making art accessible for everybody". The Junction Marketing Officer provided a marketing angle and explained that being an accessible venue had become "kind of our linchpin, almost. Because that's something that is across the board and it doesn't change. That we are always accessible". The Marketing Officer elaborated further, stating that Junction cannot claim to be "the theatre venue" or "the cinema venue" whereas they can always be considered accessible. This is in keeping with the literature, which highlights the importance of having a clear identity (Voss and Grabel, 2014; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020).

Despite the centrality of accessibility to the role of Junction, being an accessible venue was not overt in Junction's marketing. Instead, the Marketing Officer attested that this value and role informed Junction's actions. This value and role of accessibility, although not blatantly advertised, was recognised in the interviews with stakeholders from outside the centre; for instance, three audience members commented on the accessibility of the centre, and a local teacher mentioned that Junction had "gone out of their way to make it accessible to people with learning difficulties". Interviewees also mentioned the value of accessibility through the affordability of attending the centre: a local musician, an artistic director of a touring theatre company, and the Deputy Mayor of the Town

Council all commented on the reasonable and accessible prices of the centre, with one local artist stating that:

> I come because I like the price. I don't see myself ever going to York again, or Theatre Royal or anything. I mean, the prices are silly money. You've got to be in a certain wage bracket to go to some places. Most places, now, they're calling themselves arts venues. Or it's a very occasional endeavour, you know. But with Junction, you always feel that whatever it is, the price is achievable.

Beyond accessibility, the interviews also uncovered an element of Junction's approach not mentioned in the formal mission statement – customer experience. The importance of customer experience was highlighted by the Marketing Officer:

> We want them to have a good experience. That's kind of probably more important than whether they like the show, actually. Because the show is going to be subjective but whether they enjoy the experiences, that is something that we can control.

This focus on creating a positive experience was echoed by other Junction staff members: the Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator noted that Junction aimed to "offer everyone and anyone the best possible experiences and the best possible access to those experiences that we can offer", and the Senior Administrative Assistant commented that "sometimes people come in and they are pretty miffed with something that's gone on, but we'll go that extra mile to make sure that we can keep hold of them, retain them and give them a better experience". According to Junction staff members, superior customer service was seen as a way to not only retain audiences, but also build a relationship with artists and users of the space (Senior Administrative Assistant). This retention perspective could be considered to be tying into the audience development element of the formal mission statement. As articulated by the Marketing Officer:

> Obviously, we want bums on seats but it's not just getting them through the door – it's having that relationship with them. It's all well and good getting someone through the door for a show but then, if they never come

back, it hasn't really achieved anything. Whereas you want them to come and have such a good time that they come back with a friend. That's what we're aiming for. Obviously, the more people we can get in, the better. And the better it looks on me. But I think it's as much about the numbers as the experience. We want people to come and want to come back again. We want them to go, 'Oh, they went above and beyond, and they gave us that personal service.' I think that we do go above and beyond. You know, it's sort of giving people that. And I think it's even just how you interact with people.

Anecdotal evidence demonstrated the effort staff members made to provide superior customer service. For example, one staff member recalled a patron misjudging the time of the end of a film, and therefore their taxi was expected to arrive 15 minutes after the film had finished. In response to this situation, the Junction staff member on duty kept the venue open so the patron could stay in the warmth and wait until the taxi arrived. The Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator recalled a situation where a new participant for a youth drama group was so nervous about joining the group she was unable to enter the building. Upon learning this, the Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator met the teenager and provided a tour of the building to make them feel comfortable, and invited another group member to come and meet them to build a relationship before joining the group. Another staff member spoke of a visually impaired patron who was ecstatic when Junction started using a new audio description system. However, the system was frustrating for the individual as it lacked the ambient noise of the soundtrack, meaning the patron had to have one earpiece of the headphones off to hear this element of the film, which was highly uncomfortable and led to the patron stopping attending the cinema. Following this, Junction sourced a solution, a mixing desk which allowed both audio description and soundtrack to be audible through the headphones. Thus Junction went out of their way to provide an enjoyable cinema experience for this particular patron.

These anecdotes suggest an authentic commitment to exemplary customer service beyond purely the desire to retain customers. When retelling these stories, the staff members appeared to demonstrate a sense of pride in their and their colleagues' actions. This finding is supported by a quote from the Director, who, following relation of the incident of the individual and the audio description service, attested that the outcome personally "means a lot to me". There seemed to be an alignment between the values of the staff members and providing

superior customer service and relationship building, which is discussed further in the management and leadership section of this case study.

Also attributed to Junction in the interviews was the provision of engagement and participation opportunities for the community of Goole, another element of the role which was not included in the formal mission statement. This perspective was provided by two volunteers at the centre, as well as a local musician, who suggested that the "key goal is to engage the community in the arts". This is reminiscent of the cultural democracy ideology and supports the initial ACGB ideals of arts centres being a place for active engagement (ACGB, 1945). Interestingly, those who commented on engagement and participation were individuals who are involved in Junction in this way. For instance, the two volunteers had chosen to actively participate in the workings of Junction and the local musician was very participation focused, regularly coordinating workshops at various locations. Perhaps engagement and participation were recognised as a key role of the centre by these particular individuals, as this was how they were drawn to Junction and reflected how they interacted with the centre.

The interviews also revealed another role of Junction, representing a role of arts centres more generally. According to various stakeholders, Junction plays an important role in developing artists. The previous ACE Relationship Manager articulated that arts centres plays "a key role, to provide that kind of early years' experience" and is:

> vital for the small-scale touring theatre, they're vital for small bands that haven't yet broken through; there needs to be – between the back room of pubs and the big concert halls there needs to be other spaces, and I would say the arts centres are vital in that.

An artistic director from a touring company agreed, stating that it is vital for developing artists to have "professional mentoring and support, a place to showcase new ideas, and also because of the building of that Small Venues Network [35] partners. This offers a chance to not only be involved in working with

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35 The Small Venues Network was a network of arts venues in Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire who worked together to facilitate tours as well as provide support to each other.

one venue, but then an opportunity to take that around to other venues". This is an important consideration in evaluating the arts centre model, as according to these interviewees it fills a gap in providing opportunities for artists in the earlier stages of their career as well as providing opportunities to test new works. These comments suggested that arts centres play an important part in the arts and cultural ecosystem.

In terms of gauging whether Junction is successful in fulfilling its mission, according to the consensus from the stakeholder interviews, the centre was considered successful. However, given the challenges of measuring intangible and qualitative outcomes (Cavaluzzo and Ittner, 2004; Holden, 2006) and the differing understandings of the role of the centre, perhaps it is unsurprising that success was interpreted and articulated in different ways. Interviewees appeared to align their understanding of the success of the centre with their understanding of the role of the centre; for example, interviewees who recognised the importance of accessibility suggested that they believed Junction was successful because of the programme, such as dementia-friendly cinema screenings, or the physical building, which provided wheelchair accessibility, or participatory activities, which were evidenced as successful given the range of groups and workshop opportunities, particularly for youth. These findings reflect Preece (2005), who contends that mission statements can be a way to gauge the success of an organisation. In these examples, the centre was considered successful in the eyes of the stakeholders based on the mission or role that the individual stakeholder attributed to the centre. An exception to this alignment between attributed role and perceived success of the centre came from the Director and the Senior Administrative Assistant, who, in the interviews, equated the busyness of the centre with success. It is interesting that this was articulated as a primary measure of success because the Director considered the core role of Junction to be social and educational development, and the Senior Administrative Assistant suggested its key role was accessibility, rather than the number of patrons. Although this misalignment regarding measures of success and the mission or role of an organisation is contradictory to the literature, perhaps this increased patronage could be considered an indication of the increased accessibility of the venue, as more people are able to attend, and greater attendance could lead to greater social and educational development.

It should be noted that in these discussions of successful mission fulfilment, this sense of success was not shared by seven of the ten community interviewees,

who demonstrated a lack of awareness of or apathy towards the centre. This suggests that the centre may not be successfully connecting with the community more broadly, which will be discussed in subsequent sections in this case study.

This section has revealed the various roles attributed to Junction, from playing a social role to accessibility, which are both included in the formal mission statement, to the additional roles of engagement and participation opportunities and provision of opportunities for artists, and the value of superior customer service. The responses demonstrated the various perspectives of the role of the centre, which, according to the literature, would be problematic, as Voss and Grabel (2014) attest that organisations should aim for congruence between the organisation's mission and values and those perceived by stakeholders. However, these various roles do not seem to be a concern for Junction, as the roles raised in the interviews which were not part of the formal mission statement could be seen as ways to support the formal mission statement through attracting and retaining audiences. Hence, although there may not be direct alignment between the formal mission statement and the roles perceived by the various stakeholders, in a sense there was support for the formal mission statement indirectly. This section also touched on the perceived success of the centre's mission and role fulfilment, which will be interrogated further through an exploration of Junction's operations. By examining the leadership and management, programming and marketing of Junction, insight is gained as to whether there was alignment or misalignment between roles and the actions of the centre, and whether the centre was successful in achieving its goals.

## How does Junction operate?

### Management and leadership

Junction is owned and operated by Goole Town Council. This structure comprised four key staff members: the Arts & Leisure Manager (Director), Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator, Senior Administrative Assistant, and Marketing Officer. Although the work of these roles was primarily focused on Junction, they also undertook tasks for the Town Council more generally; for example, the Marketing Officer may have needed to undertake advertising for another council initiative and the Director also organised the Bonfire Night event. In addition to these staff members, there was a technical manager, box office staff, duty managers, and volunteers who undertook tasks such as being ushers for events.

In exploring the operations of Junction regarding management and leadership, the key themes that emerged from the interviews were the relationship between Junction and the Town Council; the leader of the centre; the staff members; and volunteers. These areas of interest will now be discussed in turn.

The relationship between Goole Town Council and Junction staff members was discussed substantially in the interviews. Staff members commented on the challenges they faced at times regarding Junction's reliance on the councillors in decision-making and funding; the Marketing Officer noted, for instance, that "having to report to Council, sometimes, can be quite constraining". For example, the Marketing Officer and Senior Administrative Assistant spoke of a recent upgrade they undertook of the box office system. The Marketing Officer shared that the previous system had limited capacity; for example, it did not have the function to sell tickets online, so a third party needed to be used, and then a Junction staff member needed to manually enter purchases into the box office system. In addition, customers could not pick their seats, there was limited reporting capability, and those who signed up to the mailing list needed to be manually added to another platform (Marketing Officer). In an attempt to gain additional funding from the Town Council for a new system, Junction staff members put together a case to present to the councillors, and although successful, the Council needed significant convincing. As explained by the Marketing Officer:

> Trying to argue to Council that 'the thing that we've got at the moment is free and it doesn't cost us any money and I want to go to something that is going to cost us five grand a year' to Council, who are just looking at the figures, it's like, 'Well, that's ridiculous, why do you need that?'

The interviews provided two reasons for the challenges experienced at times in gaining councillor buy-in. The first was the lack of specialist knowledge amongst some of the councillors; for example, the Deputy Mayor admitted that in the case of the request for an upgraded box office system, he believed "because it was technology I think a lot of them [other councillors] struggled to understand what the box office was even for". This "lack of specialist knowledge", according to a staff member, was accompanied by the second reason given for creating challenges in the relationship: a lack of interest in the arts centre among the councillors. This was recognised by the Deputy Mayor, who noted that "some

aren't as engaged", and the Senior Administrative Assistant commented that "there's 17 of them, who all have their own agenda". Despite these two challenges for Junction in gaining support from the councillors, the Marketing Officer admitted that "it's very rare that they refuse things", and they have a rather hands-off approach. The Deputy Mayor suggested that the reason for this lack of intervention was a result of the trust they have in the Junction team. Accompanying this trust was recognition that if the councillors became involved in matters such as programming, the outcome would be a programme that "the councillors want to see, not what Goole wants to see and what works well" (Deputy Mayor), as essentially they lacked the required knowledge and insight. Perhaps this hands-off approach by councillors towards the operations of the centre contributed to the perspective shared by a local artist:

> The one thing about Junction that I think is quite impressive is the fact it is run from the council perspective. You often get lots of arts centres that aren't run from the council perspective, and when you consider how community based they are and how flexible and how they can get things to work and make things work and happen, it is quite impressive considering that they are from the council side. They're definitely not stuck in the mud, you know.

This statement provided a contrast to comments by Heath and Dalziel (2019), who suggest that council-run arts centres can often fall prey to the negative or old-fashioned views of the local council, as they are commonly considered an extension of local authorities, as was the case in the previous case study. The hands-off council approach to Junction may have contributed to the perception of separation between the two entities. This is a stark contrast to the DECC case study, which was commonly considered an extension of council and as a result suffered from the negative perception of the council more generally. Additionally it should be noted that interviewees from both Junction and DECC spoke poorly of their respective councils, yet, given the separation from and hands-off approach to Junction, these perceptions did not appear to tarnish the views of the centre, unlike in the DECC case study. Beyond discussions of the role of the Town Council, interviewees also commented on the centre leadership and staff, which will now be discussed.

Multiple interviewees highlighted the importance of the Director in the establishment of Junction. One local artist suggested that Junction is an outcome of the "sheer grit and determination and hanging on it and being determined". Another local artist concurred, stating that the Director was "quietly but determinedly driving it [the development of Junction], which is his style, and after a lot of hurdles were negotiated, Junction came about". According to the previous ACE Relationship Manager, accompanying this determination was a clear vision as well as passion. The interviews revealed that this passion and drive was not unique to the Director, but was also exhibited by Junction staff members; for instance, a local primary school teacher who had been involved in Junction noted that the Marketing Officer and Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator "are very passionate about […] Junction, and about their purpose and serving the community", and the Senior Administrative Assistant also contended that "we're all passionate". However, as revealed in the previous section, this passion may be aligned to varying outcomes amongst staff members, given the differing and multiple interpretations of the role of the centre. These varying passions hold the potential for different outcomes, with individuals chasing varying goals. However, given that the roles attributed to Junction by staff members were interwoven and supported each other, as well as underpinned by key values such as accessibility and creating exemplary experiences, this did not appear to be a significant issue.

On the contrary, interviewees praised the staff members and commented on their unity. For instance, a local artist who regularly hired the venue noted that "you get a real sense of teamwork, the fact that people care about the job"; another local artist stated "you do feel like there's a team at work". This sense of teamwork and alignment in the passion for Junction was supported by comments that all staff members "muck in" (local artist), including the Director who, for example, "will be one minute dealing with the Arts Council, next minute cleaning a toilet" (Senior Administrative Assistant). Despite the formal hierarchy of the centre, this sense of "mucking in" aligns with the perspective of distributive leadership (Gibb, 1954; Gronn, 2000; 2002), in which the Director's behaviour is closely aligned to that of working within a team and network rather than sitting at the top of a hierarchy (Hewison and Holden, 2011).

This alignment and strength of the team was also evidenced in the shared approaches adopted by the Director and the respective staff members, in particular the values of a) building strong relationships and b) ownership of the

centre by stakeholders and the community more broadly. As revealed in the wording on the website, the Director appeared to prioritise relationships with stakeholders, using the term "partners" rather than "customers": for example, "we are looking to build partnerships, not just attract customers" (Junction Goole, 2018). When questioned about this terminology, which was also used in the formal mission statement, the Director noted that this was a push away from transactional experiences towards a deeper connection between the community and the centre, emphasising the relationship between stakeholders. A touring artist acknowledged this strong relationship with the Director, as did an artistic director of a theatre company, who commented that the Director had been "incredibly supportive of me over the last twenty years, and we met fairly recently talking about another development project". This focus on relationships aligns with the priorities of relational leaders (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Binns, 2008), in which relationships with stakeholders are paramount.

This focus on relationships with stakeholders and the community more broadly was also reflected in the interviews in relation to other staff members; for instance, an audience member articulated the strong relationships they had built with the "lovely" Junction staff members. Another example was an artistic director for a theatre company who had used the space at Junction: "you really are brought into the family". Another artist contended that "you build up relations with people, you know. Because I've been with, like, these guys forever, they're really just close friends really now". Although this quote suggests a strong relationship, it also raises concerns about nepotism and a lack of diversity. However, there appeared to be an openness at the centre, suggesting that such issues could be managed. This focus on building strong relationships could be argued to go hand-in-hand with the goal of providing exemplary experiences, a key value discussed in the previous section. This positive relationship-building and creation of positive experiences were evidenced in the interviews, with the staff members regularly referred to as welcoming, warm and supportive (local primary school teacher; local artist; Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub; specialist school teacher), and Junction considered a place where "everyone sort of gets behind you" and goes "above the call of duty to make sure that we're getting what we want" (local artist who annually hires the theatre). Although this relationship-building offered a way to provide a superior experience, there appeared to be a genuineness to the approach, an authenticity, as staff members were passionate about their roles and Junction, rather than solely trying to retain stakeholders.

The relationship Junction had with stakeholders was also reflected in the importance, cited by the Director, of including stakeholders in the process of the design and build of Junction. The Senior Administrative Assistant described the Director's approach as follows, commenting that he:

> involved all of us. As daft as it is, from the cleaner up to the professional company that was coming in, everybody was involved. Because obviously we all had different roles there, and it was just seeing how things were going to work. And even the staff at the council at the time, who were involved with the Gate, were asked what they wanted out of it as well, so nobody was left out at all.

This consultation was extended beyond staff to broader stakeholders and the community, an approach supported by the work of Sacco and Blessi (2009). Not only did this approach have benefits in terms of gaining stakeholder input and building a more desirable arts centre, but it also aligned with the participation role mentioned in the first section of this case study; and, according to the Director, a key outcome has been increased ownership of the centre by stakeholders. This is a strong contrast to the DECC case study, where consultation about the new paranaple arts centre was lacking, which consequently impacted the community's sense of ownership and their relationship with the centre.

Another example of how ownership was encouraged was an Easter egg hunt held on the building site while Junction was under construction. This event was described by the Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator:

> We did an Easter egg hunt here. So, we hid things in different places around. We had a fantastic building company. Like most building companies would be like, 'not a chance', but we wanted to give children the memories of this place being built and that this was a place for them at this point but ongoing. I just had this vision of kids coming back with their grandkids and saying, 'When this place was being built, I found an Easter egg where that wall is.' You know?

The Director was not the only staff member fostering community ownership of the centre. The Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator also attempted to build a

sense of ownership in the youth arts groups at the centre. One example of this was when the leader of the youth theatre group resigned and the Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator organised group members (teenagers) to be on the interview panel, as she felt that they deserved to play a role in selecting whom they wished to be the leader of the group.

The structure of the centre, which included the use of volunteers, was also described as encouraging community ownership of the centre. For instance, an artistic director from a touring theatre company and an artist who had a long relationship with the centre suggested that the use of volunteers was an effective method for getting the community involved and creating a sense of ownership. A volunteer suggested that this ownership of Junction was felt by the community, a perspective confirmed by the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub. This embracing of the concept of ownership by the staff at Junction provided evidence of the values guiding the workings of the centre, which were not necessarily reflected in its formal mission statement.

This section has discussed the management structure of Junction in relation to the centre's relationship with Goole Town Council. Although there are challenges in this structure in terms of dealing with councillors who may lack arts-specific knowledge or interest, in general the structure works effectively, as the Council had built trust in the staff members and acknowledged that the staff members were the experts in the operations of an arts centre. The second section revealed that Junction staff members had shared values which included the importance of relationships and providing ownership opportunities. Relationships were seen not only as a way to retain audiences through creating positive experiences, but also as a by-product of the passion and drive of staff members. Ownership was considered a way to bring the community into the centre, embedding the centre in the community of Goole and its surroundings, which aligned with the formal mission statement. The next section will continue this enquiry into the operations of the centre, in particular programming, and the alignment or misalignment with the centre's roles.

## Programming

At Junction, the task of programming was the responsibility of the Director, which is a common arrangement for arts centres (Kawashima, 1999a). In undertaking this task, the Director was guided by his philosophy on funding and

programming, which was that the financial sustainability and the "long-term financial viability" of Junction should be achieved via box office and hirers rather than grant income, which may be precarious and not necessarily guaranteed. To support this philosophy, careful programming decision-making was needed. Junction was successful in this regard, as the Director commented that Junction's income from hires, cinema and live shows were above their targets, making the "arts programme at Junction pretty much self-financing".

Given this strategy of ensuring the financial sustainability of the centre via box office and hirers, one might assume that encouraging greater audience numbers and encouraging hirers would be the primary focus in programming decisions undertaken at the centre. However, the interviews revealed that this was not necessarily the case: for instance, the Marketing Officer commented that "we're thinking about the business model and getting as many people through the doors as possible. But we're also thinking about the individual experience of those people". The Director commented on the power of arts and culture and the individual experience by stating that, for him personally:

> [It] gives me particular pleasure when the building is used for something that is significant in someone's life. So, when we started doing autism-friendly screenings, I remember one of the people coming and saying—she was an adult—saying that she had never been to the cinema before. An audience member at a dementia-friendly screening saying to me, I never thought I'd see a film like this again, ever. Just deeply human little moments that reinforce how important good arts provision can be. Genuinely life-changing.

This comment highlights the importance of creating an impactful experience for individual audience members and the potentially transformational power of Junction, which the Director articulated as Junction's role, indicating alignment with the goals and values of the Director. This focus on the individual experience was also discussed by the Marketing Officer, who recalled when an opera was programmed at the centre and attracted an audience of 16 people. Although this number may have been disheartening, the Marketing Officer noted that:

> Every single one of them left fantastic reviews and said it was the best thing they'd ever seen and that they would go and see more opera. And so, you think, actually, it hasn't reached a big audience but the people it has reached, it's really reached […] We'll take a low audience because it's getting it out there and, even if only one of those people then goes on to visit Opera North or something, that's what it's all about, really.

This recognition of the positive individual experience aligned with Junction's mission statement's role of artistic development, as Junction created an opportunity for the community to experience opera, an art form not regularly showcased at the centre or in the region.

These examples of the value placed on individual experiences and exposure to arts and culture, and the philosophy of financial sustainability through box office and hirers, created a programming conundrum for the centre. In the interviews, staff commonly equated these meaningful audience experiences with arts and culture that were considered to be high in artistic challenge (rather than entertainment focused). However, often these arts events were not necessarily considered to be popular or commercial, potentially drawing limited attendance and, consequently, limited income. However, the importance of exposure to these art forms and productions could be considered even greater given the limited alternative arts and cultural providers in the town. Herein lies a balancing act for the centre, as articulated by the Marketing Officer:

> We're kind of caught between a rock and a hard place, in a way, because we're Arts Council-funded so we have to tick the 'art' box. We've got to have the 'art' to get the funding from them. But we also have to be commercially viable. So, I think, if we just went down the pure art route, we would fold. It's not popular enough. But it's kind of balancing the commercially successful stuff with the not-commercially successful.

As noted by Micocci (2017) and Williams et al. (2017), this is a common challenge arts centres face, as they need to balance their programme between items that will provide guaranteed income and those that may make a loss. This was discussed further by the Director, who commented that

I don't want to take the safe route, I don't want to put on tribute bands, strippers, or clairvoyants. There's got to be some artistic integrity in the shows that I book in. And it's about the million shades of grey you've got between a contemporary dance company who roll on the floor covered in green paint and somebody who produces a Joni Mitchell—not tribute, but—there's another word for it, I can't remember […] homage. And each programme that I put together has got something tending towards the rolling around in the green paint, and other things that are going to be more solid, more safe.

This quote demonstrates the modernist perception of entertainment and art (Hamilton, 2023), in which these approaches to programming are mutually exclusive, as well as demonstrating that artistic challenge is a priority at the centre and programming something that may be considered a hard sell to appeal to the audiences of Goole is considered to be "absolutely part of our job" (Director). However, it was interesting that the cinema programme was cited as an important source of income for the centre to assist in funding the arts programme. Although cinema at the centre was considered popularist according to the previous ACE Relationship Manager, the Director still considered the film choices to be exhibiting artistic challenge.

Although the programming may have faced challenges in embracing high artistic elements, Junction exhibited what MacKeith (1996, p.28) described as "freedom to fail". This freedom to present works that may not attract a large audience was provided by the ACE funding. In the words of the previous ACE Relationship Manager, Junction "can programme authoritatively and innovatively without knowing that they're going to go bust. That's a part of our function really, and it means that they can reduce the costs to the audience". The Director himself noted that this funding made risk-taking for the presentation of more experimental or less popularist work a possibility as there was less pressure for larger audiences, a position that not every arts centre finds themselves in. In terms of risk-taking, the Marketing Officer believed that the centre could go further and take more risks, stating: "I do think that sometimes we play it a bit safe. We get the same people back because we know that it worked". Programming using knowledge of what has previously been successful aligns with the concept of the routinisation of work (Kawashima, 1999a), in which using this knowledge can assist in managing the complexity of programming in an arts centre, particularly considering the financial and artistic risk. In discussing the

risk-taking in programming, a balancing act emerged between presenting challenging work and meeting targets such as artistic development and income. One artist who had presented their work at Junction commented that the Director was successfully striking the balance and "really interested in pushing the envelope a bit, without losing his audience too much".

Regarding the response to elements of the programme that may be more experimental, the Deputy Mayor believed that given the relationship between the community and the centre, "a lot of people just take the risk". This opinion was shared by the Marketing Officer and the Senior Administrative Assistant, who contended that "they will give us a try because they know our history, if you like, but they've also got that familiarisation of a venue that they come to quite regularly". This opinion was supported by the words of a local artist and regular audience member, who asserted that:

> As far as I can judge, it's always been of a standard. In other words, I trust Junction. And I kind of have a double trust, I suppose now, with knowing [the Director and Marketing Officer] I mean they might take a punt now and then on something that doesn't work out, but then you would expect them to do that.

This comment suggests that risk-taking by audiences was not only a result of trust but also an outcome of the quality of Junction's programming.

Quality appeared to be central to the programme at Junction and all staff members referred to the quality of the offering; for example, the Marketing Officer commented that "we try and put stuff on that we think is of a certain quality", and that the centre rarely received complaints pertaining to poor quality of its offering. The importance of quality in programming was also recognised by the interviewees external to the arts centre; for instance, the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub commented that Junction had "a very positive reputation, of delivering really high-quality activity".

It was noteworthy that although quality was a value articulated in the formal mission statement of the centre—"best possible arts activities"—this value was not articulated by interviewees when questioned about the role of the centre. Yet,

despite neglecting to see the value of quality as part of the role of the centre in the interviews, it was clearly a value which permeated the programming, thinking, and reputation of the centre.

This focus and priority of quality aligned with values expressed by ACE; for instance, the previous ACE Relationship Manager declared that ACE's expectation of the programming at Junction was to be:

> the best of what's available in Britain, England particularly. Or bringing the best international work that they can to Goole audiences. So yes, that would be a diverse spread. So, we wouldn't be interested in supporting an arts centre whose programme mainly consisted of amateur dramatics and tribute bands. Because where's the art there, where's – and also, a lot of those things don't need our money.

This perspective presented by the ACE representative brings into question the entertainment versus art debate and questions the value of amateurs in the arts centre setting, alluding to a democratisation of culture perspective. However, this perspective was not shared by the Director of the centre, who saw Junction as playing a key part in both the professional and amateur worlds, stating that the centre is for:

> professional work to be showcased, yes, but it's also here for local groups to use. It's their resource, not mine. And in that, I can see there's a kind of game-raising aspect to it, that they're in a fairly nicely appointed, well-equipped space, the equipment is good, and what we can do for shows really lifts them […] I welcome those hires – yes it needs to be balanced, if I had too much pressure from local amateurs, I'd probably start to resist it, because I've got the professional programme to get in as well, but so far there's been no clash, and it's actually worked quite well.

Despite this support for the amateur approach by the Director, this balance was highly skewed towards the professional, with the survey in this thesis revealing that the percentage breakdown between amateur versus professional presentations at Junction was 10% to 90%. This percentage may not be a decided-upon target but rather the outcome of demand: as the Director claimed,

"I'm not fending off the overdemand from the amateur sector". However, in saying this, a local artist questioned the accessibility of the centre to amateur groups. For instance, although the centre offered a reduced hire charge of £50.00 (inclusive of VAT) per hour for use of the auditorium for Goole-based groups, versus a regular charge of £100.00 (inclusive of VAT) (Junction, 2017), the artist commented that significant fundraising was often necessary to cover this cost. It should be noted that this was not necessarily an indication of the lack of support for amateur works, but perhaps rather a reflection of the costs of running and utilising an arts centre.

In understanding the decision-making behind the professional aspect, the Director commented that it was in Junction's "business plan that we will promote creators over imitators". This perspective aligned with the artistic development aspect of the formal mission statement and was evidenced in Junction's partnerships with various artists over the years. For instance, the centre commissioned a theatre company to create a workshop-style performance at the centre, and commissioned a puppeteer to produce three works over three years at the centre. Not only did these commissions produce work unique to the centre, but the interviews also revealed the benefits to the artists themselves; for example, one commissioned artist claimed that the commission was "really important because it gives us the opportunity to do it" and to create a better product than it would have been had it been unfunded. The puppeteer was equally positive about the opportunity and experience, attesting that:

> It just gave me the space, and obviously the budget as well, to develop what I was doing, to think about what I was doing, to work with really great musicians and other creative people as well, designers and various other creatives, to make new work. And the technique has come a long, long way, and that wouldn't have happened without Junction at all.

Again, this case study depicts the pivotal role that arts centres can play in the arts and cultural landscape by providing opportunities and experiences for artists. This approach also aligns with the belief of Future Arts Centres that arts centres can play an active role in arts creation (Future Arts Centres, 2017). However, the puppeteer did note that this commissioning arrangement was unusual for him and not the norm.

Artistically focused rather than entertainment-focused works, quality, amateur versus professional and commissioning works were not the sole considerations in programming at Junction. Another key value that came to light in the interviews was the provision of a programme that appealed to everyone, reminiscent of the ACGB's ideals for an arts centre (ACGB, 1945). The Director asserted that the programming was a broad mix that had "cross-age appeal". The Marketing Officer attested that "I know it's a bit of a cliché when people go 'There's something for everybody', but that's what we try to be". This sentiment was shared by many of the stakeholders: for instance, a volunteer contended that there was "something for everyone"; the Deputy Mayor considered that the programme was tailored for everyone; and a local artist claimed that the programme "can appeal to a wide range of customers". Similar comments were made by two other local artists and a touring artistic director to the centre. Eight of the 13 interviewed audience members viewed the aim of the centre as to provide variety.

However, despite this strong sense that Junction was aiming to cater to the entire community, some stakeholders offered alternative opinions as to the target audience of the centre, beyond that of attempting to appeal to the community more generally. For instance, the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub believed that the centre's programming was primarily aimed at younger audiences:

> I think the Junction, my understanding and my perception of it is it's more, it's a place for younger people. That's not to say older people – obviously older people go there; parents go there to experience the young people's work and see the showcases that are put on […] So, I think the Junction's a different thing altogether in many ways, because it's aimed purely at young people.

Perhaps this perception was a result of this interviewee's experience with Junction in association with younger people. However, a regular volunteer commented that Junction's programming was primarily aimed towards families. This is an interesting remark given that this participant volunteered at various event types and art forms at the centre. Upon inspection of the programme brochure, it was evident that there was a range of offerings, not solely family- or young people-focused. Perhaps the volunteer's perception was swayed by the

fact that the centre does "well with family audiences" (Director) and that families were a key audience of interest for the centre (Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator). The interest in children and families was demonstrated in the TakeOver Festival, an annual festival in which each year a different Goole primary school essentially takes over the venue, organising the programming, budgeting and marketing. This festival was initially seen as a way to build a relationship with schools, children and their families (Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator). The programme appeared to be a great success, with the two interviewed teachers commenting that they had witnessed an increase in confidence in their students and the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub claiming that there had been a higher uptake of the Music Hub's services, which he suggested was a result of the TakeOver programme. This focus on children and families was considered by the Senior Administrative Assistant to be "about building up a young audience and keeping hold of them as they get older. A lot of the children's programme that's done I do think is based on like, capturing them and then keeping hold of them".

However, creating this relationship with younger audiences in an attempt to continue patronage of the centre was challenged in the interviews, as the programming appeared to be neglecting one audience segment. The Director and the Marketing Officer noted that Junction appeared to connect with younger audiences and older, but "miss out a chunk in the middle" (Director). The Marketing Officer went into further details of the challenges of this, stating that:

> We get them up to their mid-teens and then we don't get them back until they're 35. It's like a catch 22. We have very few 15 to 25s so we don't programme for them because they aren't there but, because we don't programme for them, they don't come. It's self-perpetuating. But then when we do programme for them, nobody comes.

The Director agreed, stating that: "I don't feel justified in putting on a piece that's dedicated to older teenagers if I'm going to put on that piece and I get six people, which is likely what's going to happen". It is interesting that the Director was willing to programme shows that may not be well attended but exhibit high artistic elements rather than purely entertainment, yet there appeared to be a reluctance to take this risk with this particular audience.

Although it should be noted that this audience demographic of teens in particular may not be overly catered to in the film and theatre programming, they are in the workshop programme. Junction provided weekly workshops for young people: School of Rock group (young musicians covering the gamut of music-related skills, such as performing and songwriting), and Electric Youth Theatre (three classes ranging from 5 to 18 in age, focused on creating theatre). These workshop opportunities were also evidence of the engagement and participation values that were raised in the role section of this case study.

This section has uncovered alignment between the formal mission statement and the programming in terms of focusing the programme on quality and artistic development. The values of engagement and participation were also acknowledged in the programme offering, reinforcing this perceived role of the centre. The case study also presented the entertainment versus art debate and its role in this arts centre. Unusually, according to one artist, Junction has taken an active role in arts creation, via commissioning work. Following this exploration of Junction's programming, its marketing will now be examined.

## Marketing and branding

One of the key themes regarding marketing at Junction that emerged in the interviews was the challenges the centre faced in terms of its identity. This will now be discussed, followed by an examination of awareness of the centre and the way the centre has been promoted.

Findings revealed that Junction faced a challenge in creating a clear identity for itself as a consequence of being housed in the same building as Goole Town Council. This issue was raised by the Director, who commented that:

> There's an identity issue around having the town council's offices here and it being an arts centre as well. For example, the town council runs the cemetery. And if we're selling tickets for a show or a film, and if you've got an enquiry about a grave plot, you don't really want to be mingling with people whose minds are on much happier things.

To tackle this challenge, the naming and branding of the centre was carefully considered. As part of the process, a consultant was appointed and community feedback sought through school consultation sessions and a public vote, an approach that aligns with the stakeholder literature, which encourages communication and buy-in from stakeholders (Al-Khafaji et al., 2010). Despite this consultation, the resulting name of Junction was met with mixed responses in the interviews.

For instance, there were those who did not strongly support the name, including a volunteer who commented that the name lacked a clear connection to Goole itself: "for Goole to be such a partisan place where everybody knows everybody and very community minded, it's quite unusual that it's not got a strong connotation with Goole". This is a valid perception, especially given that the formal mission statement of Junction was strongly embedded within the community. Some interviewees lacked an understanding of the rationale for the name; for example, the Deputy Mayor attested that he "never understood why it's called Junction". However, this lack of comprehension seemed to be in the minority, with other stakeholders praising the imagery the name conjured up. A local artist stated: "I like the significance of it, the junction, the coming together, the crossing over to different ways, junction joining point, meeting place, you know, all of that kind of thing, that's nice". A similar sentiment was shared by another local artist. Despite the mixed responses to the name, the Marketing Officer noted that the name did leave itself open to ambiguity, which she attested can "muddy the identity a bit". However, the Deputy Mayor pointed out that this can also result in the centre being "whatever you want it to be that night", an ambiguity which can be beneficial by allowing the centre to connect to individuals in different ways and through different art forms.

This ambiguity and diversity in the name 'Junction' is reminiscent of arguments about the "amorphous" nature of arts centres more generally (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987, p.3) and the diversity inherent in this model (Lee, 1965; Lane, 1978; English, 1981; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). As suggested by the Marketing Officer, the term 'arts centre' is a "catch-all for everything"; and, as suggested by an artist who ran a youth workshop at the centre, the term can allow "more free range". It appeared that both the name 'Junction' and the term 'arts centre' can be challenging for marketing but can also open up possibilities.

Despite the fact that the term 'arts centre' had the potential to both present a degree of ambiguity and allow diversity of offering and in a sense contribute to the personalisation of the experience, the Director was adamant that the term 'arts centre' would not be incorporated into the naming of the centre: "we don't use [arts centre], and it was a deliberate choice, we chose to avoid 'arts centre' in the name of the building". However, it was notable in the interviews that in general, stakeholders appeared to perceive arts centres as being community focused and playing an important role in engaging the community, which seems to align with the goals and values of Junction. However, some key drawbacks appeared to outweigh these aligned values, which made the term 'arts centre', according to interviewees, unsuitable for Junction. For example, the term was perceived by two interviewees as outdated, with an artistic director of a theatre company who had toured to Junction stating: "it does feel a bit old as a term to me. I don't know why that is, it just seems a little bit dated […] that branding has become a little bit uncool over the years". This sentiment was shared by the Senior Administrative Assistant, who agreed that the term did not sound modern and in fact she thought it was "quite cold".

The word 'arts' was also argued to create a barrier. As articulated by the Director:

> It's about barriers, barriers in the name, about perception of – still fairly widely-held, I think, that the arts don't necessarily have anything to offer, perhaps especially in a town like Goole which is quite deprived, educationally unambitious, what are the arts going to do for me? Well actually a huge amount, but if you're going to balk at coming across the threshold because it's called an arts centre, then I'm quite happy to call it Junction, or something else.

The Marketing Officer also suggested that the inclusion of the word 'arts' may be problematic, commenting: "if you're not up on the lingo, 'arts centre' might sound a bit off-putting. That's the 'arts' – we're not into the 'arts'". Again, it appears that traditional perceptions of high art permeate associations with the arts centre model. Despite these varying perceptions of the terminology, the interviews provided insight into the perceived identity of the centre.

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders commented on the positive atmosphere of the centre. For instance, multiple interviewees (the artistic director of a touring theatre company, two volunteers, an artist who undertook a commission at the centre, a local teacher, a local artist; and the Deputy Mayor) identified Junction as being a welcoming centre. Friendliness was also identified as a key feature of the centre (volunteer; artist who undertook a commission at the centre; Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub; local teacher; and local musician), and in the words of a local school teacher, Junction is a "very positive place, a very friendly place". These identity values were suggested to be a result of the staff members and volunteers at the centre; for example, a local artist suggested "the space is endorsed by the people in it really", and stated that at Junction "you've got your friendly, approachable staff, who'd do anything".

This opinion of the centre as welcoming and friendly aligned with the superior experience value discussed earlier in this case study. However, it appeared to go beyond a superficial attempt to achieve the goals of the centre, and represented a genuine aim to connect with stakeholders. As the Artistic Director of the annual pantomime noted: "it really is that personal relationship, I keep harking on about it […]. It really is strong here, stronger than anywhere else".

Despite the positive experiences and relationships outlined in the interviews, there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the centre and its offerings. For instance, the staff members recalled stories of the lack of awareness of the centre by some members of the community (Director, Marketing Officer, and Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator). For example, the Director commented that:

> You will still find people, I know, who haven't got a clue what goes on in here. People who walk past the building every day—I heard a story recently about someone who thought it was a homeless shelter, despite the posters outside, the big film posters. And I suppose that's about the people who don't feel engaged with art, don't know about it, don't feel ready to come across the threshold.

This lack of awareness was evidenced in the community interviews, where three individuals claimed they had never heard of the centre and an additional four

stated that they never go. The Marketing Officer was critical of this lack of awareness, stating: "I also think, for a really small town, there's no drive to learn about things, I guess?" However, as discussed in previous case studies, threshold anxiety may play a role in awareness of the operations of the centre (Gurian, 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Tull, 2017; Dickinson, 2020), as an arts centre may seem a challenging model to engage with for some members of the community.

When this lack of awareness by some in the community was probed further, the issue of the presence of the centre was raised. A community interviewee and two audience members suggested that there was a lack of advertising and publicity of the centre, and the Deputy Mayor suggested that this was a result of the limited budget, to which the Marketing Officer replied that there is no budget. However, others had a sense that the centre is "well-publicised: everything they do is well-publicised" (local teacher), a sentiment shared by an audience member.

Although the housing of Goole Town Council in the same building as the arts centre may have presented challenges in terms of identity, it was also suggested to be beneficial in terms of creating awareness of the arts centre. As was the café bar which was considered a drawcard for visitors to the building, as were the toilets, as articulated by the Director:

> I think having the café helps that, that brings people into the building. Probably the best used feature of Junction is its toilets. There's a constant stream of people coming in to use the – they think they're public toilets, they're not. It probably costs us a fortune in cleaning toilets and paper.

Upon visiting the centre, I saw attempts to promote the arts centre, with posters in the walkway to the toilets and the stall doors. As the Deputy Mayor stated: "while they're at the toilet they might see a theatre show they might want to come and see".

Despite the use of the building and more traditional approaches to marketing the centre's offerings, such as social media and mailouts, the use of individuals as

ambassadors or spokespeople for the centre was of particular note. One volunteer and local artist clearly articulated the role of a personal connection and word-of-mouth to gain interest and support of the centre, a sentiment that was also shared by the Senior Administrative Assistant. Key people appeared to play a role in this word-of-mouth element; for instance, the volunteers were considered to have an important promotional role. As the Senior Administrative Assistant stated: "I've found with all of them, they're constantly promoting us. Whether it's sharing posts on Facebook, or actually like, if they're here and they're not working, and they hear somebody talking, they'll go get them a brochure and pass them a brochure and things". This promotional role was also seen in the box office staff, as claimed by the Marketing Officer: "I think the box office staff, they care about it as well and they know about what's on and so they'll say to someone like, 'I know you really like this actor and we've got this film coming up' or 'You support Leeds United, well we've got a show about them coming'".

The promotional ambassador role was not limited to that of centre staff members and volunteers, but also included the owner of the café bar. The Senior Administrative Assistant asserted that the owner of the café "is an absolutely amazing promoter for us", a belief shared by the Marketing Officer, who stated that the café owner was:

> really good at talking to her customers and, if they're new, they've never been before, she'll kind of go, 'Oh - let me get you a brochure for the theatre' and it works quite well across the board. It isn't just me banging on going, 'Customers, customers, customers!' Everybody buys into it in the same way.

The owner of the café bar appeared to share the ethos of the centre (Senior Administrative Assistant), as she was "so personable and nothing's too much trouble and you just get this sense of warmth" (local artist). Indeed, the shared ethos between the café owner and the centre staff was so strong that a local artist believed that the café bar was Junction's own café bar, rather than privately operated. This is a similar situation to the relationship between Stratford Courthouse and Segue.

Despite attempts to raise awareness of the centre and its offering, the arts centre model was blamed for creating challenges in marketing, owing to shows and events commonly only being at the centre for one night, a challenge that was recognised in Glow and Johanson's (2019) work and seen in the previous case studies. The Marketing Officer lamented this challenge:

> We generally only have things for one day. So, a lot of the marketing that we miss out on, we can't really go, 'Here's some vox pops from the audience and what they thought of the show. Come tonight.' Yeah, we can take those, but we're marketing it for someone else then. It's gone. It is that quite quick turnaround so it's hard to kind of be like [...] You can't dress the venue and be like, 'For the next 3 weeks, we've got the Snow Queen in. Because, actually, the Snow Queen will be in for an afternoon and then it's gone and there's no point in decorating the lobby for that show because it's gone.

Not only does presenting works for one night limit marketing options, but it could also result in limited access, as suggested by the Youth & Community Arts Co-ordinator:

> I think people maybe see things and go, 'Oh no that was last week, I've missed that', or 'that's coming up and I must remember to go and see that', and then they forget. So, I think people are aware we're here but maybe aren't aware of what's on. Or can't keep up with it in their busy lives or what have you.

These limited opportunities for specific offerings suggest constrained availability, which, as we have seen in the previous case studies, is acknowledged to be a key element in a difficult brand (Harrison and Hartley, 2007). However, when questioned about this, the Director stated that although offerings were commonly only presented for one night, there was persistent presence (McClellan, Rebello-Rao and Wyszomirski, 1999) as the centre was open all year, with "something like 1.3 opportunities to engage every day of the year, on average. So, there's always something happening" (Director).

This section has provided insight into the marketing challenges faced by Junction, with a focus on the identity of the centre and public awareness of it. Although the perceived identity of being friendly and welcoming thanks to the staff members aligns with the goals and role of the centre of creating superior experiences, the lack of public awareness in the community suggests more work may need to be done for Junction to be truly embedded within the community, a key aim of the centre. Additionally, the relationship with the café bar located at the centre was beneficial for the arts centre, as was also seen in the Stratford Courthouse case study.

## How do key stakeholders perceive Junction?

The interviews raised questions about the genuine connection between the centre and community. Indeed, as discussed, there was significant evidence in the interviews that the Director and staff at Junction were attempting to instil a sense of ownership of the centre: for example, the involvement of the community in the consultation process for the development of the centre, the Easter egg hunt, the TakeOver Festival, including teenagers in the hiring of the new leader for their groups, and use of volunteers. The Director claimed that these attempts were successful in realising this goal and that "within a few years of Junction opening, that if for any reason it closed, there would be outcry. And I think, eight years on, that would be even stronger now". Some interviewees agreed, such as the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub, who contended that "there's very definitely that sort of feeling that it's their place, their building", and a local musician and volunteer, stated she personally felt a sense of ownership.

However, beyond these closely associated stakeholders a different picture was presented. Some stakeholders felt that the centre was not genuinely connecting with the entirety of the Goole community and that "the community in general hasn't picked it up and run with it" (local artist). For example, although one local artist did say that Junction made strong attempts to engage with its community compared to other arts centres, he questioned:

> to what extent – this is a genuine question, there's no value judgement in this – to what extent Junction and the working-class population of Goole have met, is I think an interesting subject for conversation. But then, that's true of any arts establishment, that people – well, it's not for us, you

know. I'd rather go down to the club or to the pub or whatever. I can see better stuff on telly, or—I'm one of them sometimes, so, you know. So that's a hard one for anyone to crack, and it's not just Junction. So that is a comment that needs to be made, otherwise you come away thinking all's rosy, don't you? And to the extent that they can make it rosy, I think they do. But that's the big one to crack.

This challenge of engaging the entire community was also recognised by the previous ACE Relationship Manager, who stated that although he considered the programme, the inclusion of diversity, and audience development to be successful elements of Junction, there was a challenge in gaining greater support from the community. A local artist who regularly hires the space noted that they believed Junction was doing a fantastic job, but that "there's still a long way to go" to truly become a hub of the community, suggesting the lack of amateur works in the programme was evidence of a lack of ownership. However, it should be noted that this may not be an accurate measure of ownership, as being included in a programme does not always equate to ownership. The community interviews also suggested that Junction may not have engaged the community in its entirety, as seven individuals had never visited the centre and three of these had never heard of Junction.

A London-based artist who undertook a three-year project with Junction also criticised the centre's lack of connection to the community, commenting that:

> One of the interesting things for me is that the staff in the office upstairs, none of them live in Goole. They live in other places, as far afield as Leeds [...] And I think if there was more local contact and local community involvement, it might make a difference.

However, one might argue that the staff do not have to live in Goole to understand or connect with the community. If this lack of local representation was a concern, it should be noted, as one volunteer pointed out, that the volunteers are primarily local, which created that sense of connection to the community. Although one might question the degree of Junction's success in being paramount to the community of Goole and its surrounding region, it was

evident in the interviews that the centre was successful in making art and culture available to the community and attempting to encourage a sense of ownership.

Beyond considerations of the ownership of Junction, two community interviewees and five of the 13 audience interviewees commented on the importance of the centre as the only significant provider of arts and culture in the region. Hence, Junction was seen as crucial in providing opportunities to access events, performances and films. In the words of one interviewee, "we don't know where we would see things otherwise". This perception aligns with the formal mission statement of the centre, which comments on increasing the "cultural and economic offer of Goole".

In terms of staff members' perceptions of the centre, their responses were aligned to its identity, roles and values, with references to "great quality experiences" (Marketing Officer), quality offerings, and accessibility. However, beyond the four core staff members, stakeholders actively involved in the centre were much more effusive in their praise of Junction. For instance, a perception of vibrancy was raised by two local artists, and a volunteer described the centre as "curious, creative". A local teacher noted the excitement surrounding the centre, likening it to "a magician's box. You're not sure what's going to pop out next but it's always exciting". The transformative power of the centre was acknowledged by the Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub and an artistic director of a theatre company, who considered the centre ambitious and inspirational, with one artist who runs a youth workshop commenting that Junction was "a force for good". This transformational perception aligns directly with the centre's formal mission.

Regarding the building itself, the interviews had mixed perceptions of the centre. For instance, some were particularly favourable towards the centre, including three artists who had performed at Junction and praised the flexibility of the space and the facilities. Merrick's (2010, no pagination) article in *The Independent* also praised the design, suggesting that it was "viscerally anti-bling" and "a small triumph of lo-fi design". However, these opinions were juxtaposed with interviewees who suggested that the building looked unfinished (audience member, local artist and Deputy Mayor), being "a little stand-offish" (commissioned artist), and not overly attractive or appealing (local artist and Acting Head of the East Riding Music Hub). One local artist commented that the

new building may have presented a barrier to the community and new audiences to the centre:

> I'm being openly honest, I think originally the old school people in Goole, my dad would be one of them included […] thought the building, the look of this building was appalling. The design of it looked like it hadn't been finished. So, the consensus of opinion in Goole was, 'what the hell is that that's gone up in the middle of town?' There's still the facade, if you look at it, it is quite modern, but it actually looks like just MDF [medium-density fibreboard] on the front. And I think that that made it quite prohibitive in a way, stopped people, deterred people from coming and enjoying it and seeing what it was about. Cause I think they thought, 'oh my god all that […] money's gone into that and look at the state of it, that ain't going to last two minutes!'

This risk of creating a barrier aligns with the literature, which notes the role that architecture can play in threshold anxiety (Dickinson, 2020), while Thorne (1979b, p.61) attests that new builds may lose the "humanity" of an arts centre, a concern also witnessed in the DECC case study. An audience member suggested that the venue was intimidating, a concern also raised in Glow and Johanson (2019). However, although the centre being housed within the same building as the Goole Town Council and a popular café bar may have created challenges in terms of identity, it may also be breaking down barriers and altering perceptions of other people using the building (Director).

In this section, the interviews presented a range of perceptions of Junction. Stakeholders who used the space clearly felt a sense of ownership. However, this was not necessarily shared by community members who were not closely involved in the centre. Staff members' perceptions of the centre demonstrated alignment with the centre's roles and values. This sentiment was shared by stakeholders who were closely involved in the centre, whose praise for the centre was effusive and overwhelmingly positive. The perception of the centre among the broader community was ambivalent, with suggestions that the centre is yet to be embedded within Goole. However, again, there were differing opinions here. Finally, there were mixed perceptions of the building itself, bringing into question the notion of threshold anxiety and raising the benefits of being located within the same building as the café bar.

## Conclusion

This case study has once again provided a number of original insights into the arts centre model. For example, in contrast to Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre, Junction has provided an example of a council-run arts centre that was not tarnished by its association with the council, and which demonstrated the important role arts centres can play in supporting emerging artists and providing a testing ground for new work. However, beyond the numerous findings already presented in this case study, one element deserves further discussion: the importance of the role of an arts centre.

According to the interview data, in general Junction appeared to be fulfilling the roles outlined in its formal mission statement. The formal mission statement components of accessibility, quality, partnerships, and contributions to the artistic, social, educational and recreational development of Goole and its surroundings were all evidenced. These roles and values permeated operational decisions and were recognised by stakeholders in their observations of and experiences with Junction.

It became clear in the exploration of the role of Junction that there were differing opinions regarding the role of the centre depending on the stakeholder's positionality. For instance, volunteers saw the centre having the primary role of participation and engagement—the way in which they themselves engage with the centre—and the Senior Administrative Assistant highlighted the role of accessibility, which is central to her position managing the box office and volunteers. It appeared that commonly, stakeholders considered the role of the centre in relation to the way/s in which they engage with it, the role or value that resonates with their connection.

Despite this personal element in the perception of the role of Junction, the data suggested that Junction was fulfilling the key components of its formal mission statement. For example, many of the roles attributed to the centre by stakeholders were components of the formal mission statement, suggesting that there was evidence of these goals and aims. However, perhaps stakeholders connect with the role or value which most resonates with their connection to the

centre. There were two exceptions to this: the provision of superior experiences, and engagement and participation opportunities. Neither of these were included in the formal mission statement, yet they were viewed as critical to the centre and embodied by staff members. As mentioned, these offerings could be viewed as supporting the formal mission statement; the focus on experience, in particular, was also considered a focus among the centre staff members.

This fourth case study provides further evidence that there does not necessarily have to be alignment between the entirety of an arts centre's formal mission statement and its perceived role according to stakeholders, as recommended by Voss and Grabel (2014). In fact, stakeholders can connect with certain elements of a mission statement—or the culture of a centre that embraces the elements of a mission statement, which is the case for Junction, as interviewees did not appear to know the formal mission statement in its entirety—or with other values which underpin this statement and still appear to positively connect with the centre.

As the mission statement included numerous roles, these roles created varying points of connection for stakeholders, allowing opportunities for stakeholders to connect with a specific role that aligns to them personally. These points of connection may be particularly important for an organisation such as an arts centre which aims to connect with a broad range of people across the community, all of whom have different expectations from, and desires for, an arts centre. For instance, given the diversity of offerings, stakeholders, audiences and community members, in order to truly connect with the diversity of stakeholders the idea of one singular role seems deeply incompatible with the arts centre model.

# Chapter 9 – Analysis and conclusion

Arts centres have long been a neglected area of research in the academic literature. In the English context there are a handful of historical studies on arts centres (Lane, 1978; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; MacKeith, 1996; Kawashima, 1999a; 1999b), yet there has been very little research conducted on English arts centres in more recent years. In Australia, there is more recent research (e.g. APACA, 2013; PAC Australia, 2018; Heath and Dalziel, 2019), including PAC Australia's biennial economics surveys. However, the remit of this research is relatively narrow and relies on self-reporting by arts centre staff members. Additionally, in the Australian context, the *Talking Theatre* audience development project was conducted in arts centres (Scollen, 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2009), and Johanson and Glow (2015a) and Glow and Johanson (2019) have contributed to the arts centre discussion. However, overall there is a lack of significant exploration and interrogation of arts centres which begs the question of their suitability for effective arts and cultural provision. Are arts centres an untapped resource, or are they resources which have miraculously survived despite being unsuited to current communities and policies? These questions lie at the core of this research and have been explored via the research sub-questions: What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? How do key stakeholders perceive arts centres?

This research adopted an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm. From my personal experience of working in an arts centre, I recognised the range of arts centre stakeholders who all held differing opinions and perceptions of arts centres based on their relationship with arts centres and their experiences, goals and professions. An interpretivist/constructivist approach and the mixed methods research design allowed these various voices to be heard. The research design comprised a survey, external expert interviews, and four arts centre case studies. The key findings from these methods will be explored in this chapter through an examination of the contribution of findings to the overarching research question and the academic literature, recommendations for future research and implications for practice. These insights will be followed by reflections on the research process and conclude with a final summation of the research.

## Contribution to the research question

As this thesis concludes, it is important to reflect upon the findings in relation to the overarching research question: How suitable is the arts centre model for effective arts and cultural provision? This will now be discussed in relation to its effectiveness according to Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017), in the post-pandemic world and in terms of cultural policy in both England and Australia.

This thesis did not aim to critique the effectiveness of individual arts centres, but rather the potential of the arts centre model to deliver effective arts and cultural provision. The case studies demonstrated that the arts centre model can effectively provide arts and cultural activities that speaks to the community and aligns with cultural policy strategies, particularly where the centre is connected to and embedded within its local community. However, despite the assumed commonality of arts centres wishing to provide effective arts and cultural provision and being community focused, the manner to achieve this effectiveness is not universal across arts centres but instead relies upon unique approaches to a myriad of considerations in running an arts centre. For example, to be truly community focused, an arts centre must embrace the diversity inherent in the arts centre model and tailor the role, operations and perceptions to respond to and encompass their specific community. It is this need for a more nuanced and bespoke approach to running arts centres that makes a best practice model to understanding arts centres redundant and brings into question the usefulness of works such as Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017) and his fourth generation of arts centres, also referred to as his Nexus model (Wolff, 2011; 2017).

As previously discussed, Wolff (2011; 2015; 2017) presents the Nexus generation of arts centres as being the current evolution of arts centres. Wolff (2011) advocates that in this Nexus generation for arts centres to be successful, or effective, they must play multiple roles including: educator, innovator, incubator, showcase, change agent/advocate, and host to the traditional performing arts. Although this model highlights many of the multiple roles of arts centres, which was evidenced in the case studies, Wolff's representation suggests a homogeneity in approach for the success of arts centres, which is not evidenced in this thesis. By suggesting this blueprint approach for success, Wolff's model strips arts centres of one of their greatest strengths: diversity. Although diversity in the arts centre model can present challenges, it also allows

flexibility, making it a unique arts and cultural provider with the ability to cater to its community. This relationship and connection with the community is what makes arts centres effective arts and cultural providers and it is this alignment that leads to success rather than following a prescriptive model, a factor ignored in Wolff's model. For example, even if an arts centre had the capacity to undertake the multiple roles presented by Wolff, it would not necessarily be successful as it may not be suited to its community.

Therefore, I would suggest that Wolff's work be seen as possible roles, rather than a representation of the definitive or prerequisite roles necessary for successful arts centres, as this thesis shows this is not the case. Instead, for success, arts centres should focus on embedding themselves within their community and building authentic and meaningful relationships which are supported by decisions in the areas discussed in this thesis, including, but not limited to: role (whether formal or purely embedded); values; management and leadership; community and volunteer ownership; programming; marketing and branding; the building itself; the centre's history, and perceptions.

This thesis has also revealed that despite arts centres being left relatively unexplored over the years, they appear to have the potential to effectively respond to the needs of our post-pandemic world. For example, arts and culture are considered of the utmost importance at "times of crisis", given their capability to connect communities, reduce a sense of isolation, and generate a sense of positivity (A New Approach, 2020, p.2), suggesting that arts centres could play an important role in pandemic recovery. Additionally, research has noted a greater emphasis on the hyper-local following the pandemic (Polivtseva, 2020; Sargent, 2021; Walmsley et al., 2022). This increased importance of the local and the provisions of one's immediate community could place greater value on arts centres owing to their capability for connection to their communities, their flexibility, and their prevalence throughout both England and Australia. Research has also demonstrated the significant value of the arts for both individuals and communities in terms of health, wellbeing, and positive societal outcomes such as social cohesion (e.g. Fielding et al., 2019; Bone and Fancourt, 2022; Gattenhof et al., 2022; Fancourt et al., 2023; Deakin et al., 2023). Hence, arts centres could be considered a perfect vehicle to effectively support these positive outcomes and related policies, again owing to their prevalence and their proven potential for community connection.

Additionally, in reviewing cultural strategies and policies in both England and Australia, it would appear that arts centres could effectively play a central role in realising the aims and goals of the policies. For instance, in the English setting, Arts Council England's (ACE) most recent strategy, *Let's Create*, articulates three outcomes in its strategic plan: Creative people – "everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life"; Cultural Communities – "villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture"; and a Creative Cultural and Country – "England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international" (Arts Council England, 2020, p.28). Arts centres could be uniquely positioned to support these outcomes because they commonly support amateur works and the community, and many are regionally located. In Australia, arts centres could also be seen as a tool to support the goals of The Australian Government's cultural policy, *Revive. Revive,* which incorporates five pillars: "First Nations First"; "A Place for Every Story"; "Centrality of the Artist"; "Strong Cultural Infrastructure"; and "Engaging the Audience" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p.18). Again, each pillar could potentially be supported by arts centres: for example, arts centres can provide a space and access for every person to tell their story and be engaged in the arts (Pillar Two), or they could support the provision of career development and pathways for artists (Pillar Three). Arts centres specifically, over other arts and cultural providers such as theatres, are uniquely placed to embrace these policy goals in both countries because the arts centre model commonly embraces both amateurs and professionals, providing access to the community; is multi-artform, meaning a range of artists can be supported and engaged; and has the capability to be linked and embedded within local communities. Despite all these synergies, arts centres remain relatively unexplored and rarely considered in terms of contributing to these positive societal outcomes and cultural policy agendas. Recommended approaches to bridge this gap include: greater advocacy and understanding of arts centres including arts centre specific research and evaluation, increased funding, and support for arts centre managers in terms of education and mentoring to assist in navigating the complexities of the arts centre model.

Findings from this thesis suggest that arts centres are effective arts and cultural providers where the centre has a strong relationship with its community. The recipe for being successful and effective is unique to each centre and is dependent on the community in which it is located, and on whether the diverse

elements inherent within the arts centre model and decisions are made with its community in mind. The arts centre model is an effective provider for arts and culture within the post-pandemic setting, and aligns closely with the cultural policy agendas in both England and Australia. The role that arts centres can play in the wider arts and cultural landscape is an area for further exploration. The following section will explore the findings from this thesis and highlight their contributions to the academic literature.

## Contributions to academic literature

### Strategic management

The importance of an organisation having a clear role and values as part of a strategic plan is considered best practice in the strategic management literature (Bryson, 1988; Ireland and Hitt, 1992; Drucker, 1993; Vogt, 1994; Campbell, 1997; Varbanova, 2013) and the arts centre-specific literature (Heath and Dalziel, 2019; Williams et al., 2017). However, the presence of a strategic approach does not guarantee success: it must also be embraced and enacted by staff members (Bryson, 2004). Findings from the case studies indicated that having a clear role and values was beneficial for arts centres, but also raised questions about the formality of the strategic approach required.

For example, in the Stratford Courthouse case study, a formal mission statement and strategic plan were not in place; and while Junction had a formal mission statement it was not known in its entirety by staff members. Yet both arts centres appeared to be flourishing. Although neither centre had a formal mission statement that was also recognised by staff members, it was evident in both case studies that the role and values of the arts centres were exhibited and embodied by staff members. By living the arts centre's role and values, these goals seeped into the centres' culture, negating the necessity of a formal strategic plan. This thesis is not claiming that a mission statement and a formal strategic approach are irrelevant to arts centres, but rather that a formalised mission statement and approach may not always be crucial in the arts centre setting. These findings suggest that best practice as outlined in the strategic management literature may not necessarily be the most effective approach for the arts centre model.

The strategic management literature has considered the relationship between mission statements and stakeholders extensively (Bryson, 1988; Ireland and Hitt,

1992; Campbell, 1997; Bartkus and Glassman, 2008). Campbell (1997) noted that congruence between stakeholders and organisational values was crucial for organisational success. However, in the arts centre setting, creating this alignment between stakeholders and centres was demonstrated to be challenging. For instance, the centrality of diversity within the arts centre model, in terms of both programming and stakeholders, makes creating alignment between arts centres and stakeholders difficult. As Lane (1978) asks: how can a programme appeal to many different people with differing preferences? The mission statement adopted by Junction responded to this challenge. The centre's mission statement consisted of multiple elements that created points of connection between the arts centre and stakeholders. These elements, or points of connection, allowed stakeholders to connect to the element/s of the arts centre's mission that aligned with them personally. Essentially, the provision of multiple roles implied multiple opportunities for stakeholders to align with different aspects of the centre's mission. Creating multiple "access points" was considered crucial for an arts centre's survival, according to an expert interviewee. This case study presents the perspective of considering mission statements, whether formalised or embodied, which have the capability to engage and connect with multiple stakeholders in multiple ways, which is particularly important given the diversity of the offering of arts centres and the various stakeholders at play. This finding calls for a different lens from the traditional theory presented in the strategic management literature through which to view the mission statements of arts centres.

Finally, the research demonstrated the importance of the relationship between an arts centre's role or mission, and the community. The centrality of community was evidenced in the survey findings, but, as Bryson (2004) indicates, it is not enough to have a community-focused mission statement; there also needs to be authenticity in this community focus. In the case studies, this was actualised at Junction and Stratford Courthouse, where the internal stakeholder, audience and community interviews showed that the centres were viewed most favourably by their communities when community was at the heart of the centre's role (whether formalised or embodied). However, the community focus was not central to the roles and values articulated in the BAC and DECC case studies, and nor was this focus felt by the community. This demonstrates the flow-on effect of the relationship with an arts centre's community when community is not at the centre's heart such as a breakdown of trust and of the relationship itself.

## Management and leadership

The research in this thesis scrutinised the complexity of a popular management structure for arts centres: council-run arts centres. According to the survey, this management structure was particularly popular in the Australian setting, where 56% of arts centres were council-run. The available literature presents both positive and negative attributes to this structure (Johanson et al., 2014; Heath and Dalziel, 2019). However, findings from the case studies and external expert interviews depicted a consensus that council-run arts centres were problematic given the possible opposing agendas, such as financial versus artistic goals. Yet, further investigation into the council-run case studies, Junction and DECC, suggested that the negative perceptions of this structure may represent a simplistic viewpoint. Further findings revealed other contributing factors to the success of this management structure, such as the working relationship between the council and the arts centre (hands-off or hands-on approach); the perception of the local council by the community (negative or positive associations, yet negative perceptions are not always detrimental to a council-run centre if other contextual factors are in place, as was the case for Junction); the perception of the relationship between the arts centre and the local council (DECC was seen as part of the council, whereas Junction was seen as a separate entity); and the relationship the arts centre has with the community (open communication and consultation, exemplified in the different approaches to the building of Junction and DECC, and relationship management). These findings suggest that it is not so much that this management structure is flawed, but rather the way in which it is enacted which can impact the success of this structure.

As discussed throughout this thesis, transformational leadership was claimed by some authors to be the best-practice approach to leadership in the arts centre setting (Williams et al., 2017). However, beyond this work, there is a paucity of studies of leadership in the arts centre setting. This research interrogated Williams et al.'s (2017) claim, with findings indicating that although transformational leadership may be suitable for some arts centres, it may not be the only effective approach. The case studies demonstrated multiple approaches to leadership in arts centres, which reflected their diversity of offerings, diversity of tasks and diversity of stakeholders. Thus the diversity inherent in the arts centre model may demand varied approaches to leadership rather than a sole best-practice approach.

The mosaic of leadership approaches exhibited in the case studies indicated that leadership in the arts centre setting should consider greater complexity than a best-practice approach. This is not to say that a transformational approach is not suited to the arts centre model, but rather that there are alternative styles that may be suitable dependent on the context and the individual leader. Finally, the findings bring into question the perception that leaders embody a singular leadership style. As witnessed in the case studies, leaders commonly displayed characteristics belonging to different styles. This challenges the singularity of a leader's leadership style, not only in the arts centre setting but also in cultural organisations more broadly. In other words, leadership emerges as contextual, rather than formulaic.

## Programming

The survey, external expert interviews and case studies presented the key programming themes of the balance between entertainment and works with more artistic qualities; the balance of the presentation of amateur versus professional works; concerns of quality; challenges raised by the fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) arrangement; and trust and risk. These themes will now be discussed in turn.

This research adds data and nuance to the debate about the presentation of entertainment versus more artistically challenging works in the arts centre setting. In the expert interviews, the Executive Director for PAC Australia claimed that the inclusion of works of higher artistic challenge was crucial to the arts centre model, commenting that if an arts centre is:

> a publicly funded organisation, then your responsibility is around cultural development. And if you're just putting on entertainment then you're not developing the people in your community. The whole idea about art is to communicate ideas and if you're not doing that then you're not doing your job.

Given that regional arts centres are commonly the primary or sole arts and cultural provider in the region, the importance of artistic development may be crucial. Yet a focus on more artistically ambitious works was not evidenced in all the case studies: for instance, at BAC and DECC, their programming focus was on entertainment, with limited artistic offerings. Yet both case studies desired

more artistic product, with financial barriers a strong determinant of the ability to move away from purely entertainment offerings. For instance, both Junction and Stratford had the financial backing to curate a programme that allowed for mitigation of predicted losses that could be offset with other programming, as recommended by Micocci (2017) and Williams et al. (2017). These case study findings support the PAC Australia Executive Director's comment in the external expert interviews that there is a misconception that arts centre directors do not want to programme more artistically ambitious work, whereas actually there may be constraints limiting this possibility. This is not to say that all arts centres aspire to programme what may be considered more artistic work, although that did appear to be true of these case studies. However, it does suggest that an arts centre's focus on entertainment does not necessarily indicate a lack of aspiration for artistic development. Regardless, there need to be financial structures in place to support this artistic ambition.

The issue of amateur versus professional works in arts centres has been a point of discussion since the inception of the model (ACGB, 1945). The literature suggests a preference for professional work (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987; MacKeith, 1996; PAC Australia, 2022), which was supported in the survey results, with professional activities and presentations comprising 68% of the English arts centres' offering and 57% of the Australian offering. Despite this preference, the research demonstrated a universal belief that amateur work should be included in the arts centre offering. However, the inclusion of the amateur component raised concerns about the quality of programming; for instance, if amateur works were lower in quality to the standard generally presented at the arts centre, there was the potential for negative perceptions of the identity and programme of the arts centre. In response to this potentially negative impact, Stratford Courthouse presented professional development opportunities for amateur arts groups to elevate the quality of their work. This was beneficial not only in terms of quality outcomes, but also provided a way to support local communities and build and maintain relationships between the arts centre and the community. This approach provides practical advice not only for arts centre directors; it could also be a tactic for arts and cultural providers in other cultural venues that incorporate an amateur component.

Concerns about quality were not limited to amateur presentations, but also applied to professional hirers. Arts centres rely heavily on hirers, with the survey results revealing that 68% of arts centres considered their primary activity as

being a receiver/presenter of professional work, which, as the case studies indicated, are commonly hirers. This arrangement can present challenges in terms of ensuring the level of quality on offer at an arts centre, as the quality of hires permeated perceptions of the quality of the arts centre more generally, despite the work of hirers not always being formally programmed by the arts centre. It appeared to be challenging for audiences to differentiate between offerings that were external to the arts centre and those that were curated by the arts centre. Although being selective in terms of the hirers using the space may be an option (Junction), there are financial implications to such an approach, rendering it not always possible in the arts centre setting.

Beyond the work of Glow and Johanson (2019), there is little recognition in the literature of the challenges presented by the fly-in fly-out (FIFO) arrangement in the arts centre setting. However, the FIFO arrangement clearly presented various challenges to the arts centres studied in this thesis: limited opportunities for positive word-of-mouth; limited marketing capacity, with resources stretched over multiple shows; a lack of connection between the touring artists and the community; potential lack of buy-in from the artists; and a reduction in rich experiences for both the community and the artists. The external expert interviews understood the challenges of FIFO artists and revealed a strong desire from communities to break down the barriers created by artists only visiting the centre for one show, demanding the inclusion of communities in works. The case studies highlighted effective approaches to addressing the FIFO arrangement in arts centres, including extending the stay of artists at the arts centre town, whether via workshops or add-ons to the performance or a multi-year commission, building relationships and buy-in by artists. Stratford Courthouse's owners embedded travelling artists into the community by providing accommodation at their own house. Although this approach requires specific facilities, it appeared to be an effective way to build relationships and trust with both audiences and the artists moving forward, as well as positively impacting and creating a sense of community.

Trust and a strong relationship with the community was also seen as effective for encouraging audiences to attend edgier or more innovative work. When the community trusted the arts centre, there appeared to be a higher willingness to take a risk on shows that may be beyond their comfort zone. Minimising risk was also a recurring theme in programming in the case study arts centres; these findings aligned with the work of Kawashima (1999a; 1999b), in which

introducing opportunities for familiarity in programming through the choice of artist, the topic of the work or familiar performers helped to reduce audiences' perceptions of risk.

## Identity

The literature on arts centres commonly mentions the diversity of arts centres' programming (Lee, 1965; Lane, 1978; English, 1981; Sherwin, 1985; Hutchison and Forrester, 1987). Unlike other arts and cultural providers, arts centres incorporate a wide range of art forms, including both amateur and professional works, participatory opportunities, and a wide range of activities such as workshops and meetings. This diversity of offering was seen as beneficial in creating a programme with the capability to tap into a wide community. However, this diversity can create challenges, in particular regarding communication and branding (as highlighted in the expert interviews) because the branding literature places substantial importance on organisations having a clear identity and brand (Voss and Grabel, 2014; Keller and Swaminathan, 2020). Junction attempted to create a strong identity, despite the diversity within the arts centre model, by attaching Junction's identity to values that could remain constant regardless of the diversity of the centre and programming, such as accessibility and experience. This identity was embodied by the staff members and felt by stakeholders external to the centre. This approach could be easily adopted by other arts centres struggling with the formation of a clear and stable identity. However, this is not to say that other identities were not attached to the centre.

The case studies also exhibited that the lack of a singular identity was not always to the detriment of the arts centre. Indeed, there were concerns about the unclear identity at BAC and the negative identity association of DECC with Devonport City Council. However, Stratford Courthouse and Junction provided examples in which a singular identity did not appear to be vital for success; for example, both Stratford Courthouse and Junction's identities were perceived by some stakeholders to be intertwined with that of the café within the same building. This confusion in identity did not appear to be problematic, because of the shared values and ethos between the two entities. Such an arrangement may not only have benefits for arts centres, but also other arts and cultural providers. However, they are particularly useful for arts centres given the concerns regarding the difficult brand characteristic of constrained availability (Harrison and Hartley, 2007), with some arts centres having limited opening

hours. By having an ambassador at a partnering organisation (although not necessarily a formal partnership), the arts centre is able to create a persistent presence (McClellan et al., 1999; Preece and Johnson, 2011) as there is an advocate for the centre when the centre may be closed, increasing positive word-of-mouth and awareness.

These findings suggest that a singular approach to identity may not be the only, or even the best, way to market an arts centre, given the diversity inherent in the arts centre model. As was the case for the role or mission statement, by having multiple identities, greater points of connection are created to appeal to a wide range of stakeholders and members of the community. Again, this research is not advocating that arts centres should not have a clear and distinct identity, but rather that there may be more complexity and flexibility inherent in the identity of arts centres than the current literature may suggest. Again, these findings question the applicability of the branding literature in the arts centre setting.

## Difficult brands

The findings from this research have revealed the challenges of the arts centre model, highlighting that it could be considered a difficult brand, not only in terms of being a challenging brand, but also in the academic sense of the concept introduced by Harrison and Hartley (2007). A difficult brand, which includes the two components of uncertain outcomes (risk) and constrained availability (brand only available at specific times) (Harrison and Hartley, 2007), is an under-explored concept, not only in relation to arts centres but more generally in the academic literature, exceptions being Harrison and Hartley (2007), Preece and Johnson (2011; 2014) and Urrutiaguer (2014). The lack of research in this area is surprising given the applicability of the concept not only to arts centres but to the arts and cultural sector more broadly. The two characteristics of a difficult brand are inherent to the provision of arts and culture. This thesis has built on the understanding of the concept of a difficult brand by presenting an exemplary case of a difficult brand: arts centres. Applying the concept of a difficult brand to arts centres has demonstrated how the particular characteristics of the arts centre model in fact amplify the elements of constrained availability and uncertain outcomes, making arts centres a particularly challenging difficult brand, or what I have termed a *difficult* difficult brand.

For instance, the diversity of programming at an arts centre complicates matters in comparison to, say, a regional theatre, as in a regional theatre the art form may be more stable or predictable; however, the diversity of art forms portrayed in arts centres may create greater unfamiliarity and uncertainty for audiences. In terms of programming, arts centres have to juggle a multitude of uncertainties: uncertainty and risk in the quality, appeal, and brand implications as a result of the inclusion of hirers or touring companies and amateur productions. This risk is not isolated to arts centres and programming, but also extends to audiences. For example, risk-taking is involved in the attendance of an unfamiliar touring company and hirer, and in the quality and appeal of an offering. It could be argued that risk for audiences is present in all providers of arts and culture. However, in the arts centre setting it may be amplified given that the centre is often unable to guarantee quality and the product as the programme is not necessarily purely curated by the centre.

The arts centre model also amplifies the characteristic of constrained availability. For example, arts centres in regional areas commonly require programming for one night only, which limits opportunities for audiences to attend the performance or event and limits the potential benefits of positive word-of-mouth that multiple performances may encourage. This loss of positive word-of-mouth may be particularly pronounced in the arts centre setting given the increased uncertainty, the diversity of offering, and the unknown, not only of the arts and cultural offering but also of elements of the arts centre model more generally. Additionally, the findings revealed that many arts centres are not open for extensive hours beyond those of the performances and events, which creates further constrained availability. These unique characteristics contribute to arts centres being a *difficult* difficult brand and reinforce the need for specific arts centre research, as the unique elements require further understanding and do not fit neatly within the broader academic literature.

## Arts centre perceptions

This research also contributed to the understanding of the perception of arts centres by stakeholders, regarding the terminology 'arts centre' and threshold anxiety.

The term 'arts centre' provoked significant discussion in this thesis. The literature suggests that the term is potentially problematic (Hutchison and Forrester, 1987;

MacKeith, 1996; Ellison et al., 2011). The survey results suggested that this may be the case, given that only 28% of the arts centres surveyed included 'arts centre' in their name, despite identifying as an arts centre. However, findings from the expert interviews and case studies showed mixed responses to the term; for example, the experts suggested that people may consider an arts centre to be affiliated with the high arts or the arts more generally, which can create a barrier to many people; and the case studies revealed mixed opinions, ranging from 'arts' being considered outdated or elitist to being community focused and open to interpretation.

In considering the applicability of the term and possible repercussions owing to the related associations, one must question the relevance of these semantics. As highlighted in the findings, people attribute their own meanings to terms based on their personal experiences and knowledge. For instance, although stakeholders and community members in Bridgwater may equate the term 'arts centre' with elitism and exclusivity, perhaps these responses were influenced by their perceptions of the arts centre itself rather than the term *per se*. Indeed, it may be difficult to differentiate the term from perceptions of the centre: as previously mentioned, the Georgian building was seen as exclusive and elitist. In essence, in this example it is impossible to determine whether the perceptions of the term 'arts centre' are a reflection of perceptions of the centre itself; a reflection of the perception of the building; whether it is the term itself that is influencing these other perceptions; or whether it is purely a result of the individual's experience of arts centres in general.

Given the varying perceptions and the impact of individual perceptions, two interviewees suggested that rather than getting caught up in the terminology, a greater focus should be placed on the workings of arts centres, on what they actually do rather than what they call themselves. As one expert noted, if an arts centre achieves a genuine connection to its community, it has the potential to alter any negative perceptions of the term 'arts centre'. Findings indeed suggest that a centre's name may be largely irrelevant compared to more important aspects of an arts centre.

As discussed in this thesis, threshold anxiety was seen in the BAC context, where the historic Georgian building was associated with perceptions of high art, elitism and exclusivity, creating a barrier to some members of the community. In

contrast, threshold anxiety was also noted in the design of new arts centres, such as the paranaple arts centre and Junction, where there were concerns that the design may be intimidating, unappealing or unwelcoming, aligning with the literature on the design of new arts centres (Thorne, 1979, p.61; Glow and Johanson, 2019). Junction presented approaches that attempted to overcome the potential challenges faced by building a new arts centre and aimed to gain community ownership. These approaches included community involvement in the design process and building of the new arts centre facilities, and resulted in positive buy-in and ownership of Junction and outcomes of this process. Although consultation was conducted with DECC stakeholders on the development of the paranaple arts centre, the genuineness of this process and the degree to which the community was considered was questioned in the interviews by stakeholders who took part in the consultation sessions. These differing degrees of authenticity and involvement in the DECC and Junction settings may account for the varying levels of connection stakeholders and the community felt to these venues, with strong community ownership seen in Goole, but lacking in Devonport.

## Further research

This thesis has revealed avenues for further research in the areas of strategic management, management structure, leadership, programming and difficult brands.

In terms of strategic management, findings indicated that the field would benefit from further research specific to the strategic approaches in arts centres and the potential succession implications, not only as a guide for arts centre practitioners but also because the benefits of and preference for embodiment of an organisation's role and values over a more formal approach may suit other organisations. Additionally, the strategic possibilities of a multi-faceted approach to mission statements could significantly benefit arts centre directors and are worth further investigation. The questioning of the singularity of identity of arts centres was also raised in this thesis and is worthy of further investigation because there appears to be a misalignment between the broader academic literature and arts centres, and the arts centre model is starting to appear much more nuanced.

Further exploration and research are recommended on the contextual elements in a local council arts centre structure to continue to build an understanding of the implications and success of a council-run arts centre. Not only does the structure of arts centres elicit further investigation but also the fluidity between leadership styles which was exhibited in the case studies, especially because such knowledge could contribute to leadership theory more broadly.

Insights from the programming themes provide important practical approaches for arts centre directors. However, they could also have relevance to other arts and cultural providers; for instance, small regional theatres commonly face the challenges of the FIFO arrangement, issues in managing hirers, and the presentation of amateur works. Tactics utilised in the presentation of more artistically ambitious work could equally work in organisations other than arts centres. Hence this thesis provides a starting point for further research, as the arts sector more broadly may benefit from these findings as tactics may be equally appropriate in settings beyond arts centres.

Although this research has contributed significantly to the limited knowledge of difficult brands, future research should explore this concept in the arts and cultural sector more broadly, as greater understanding could be beneficial for understanding branding in the sector from a new perspective.

## Implications for practice

Not only were there contributions to the academic literature, but also practical findings for those in the arts centre sector as well as those running venues where there may be similar challenges.

In terms of the strategic approach to running an arts centre, the findings highlighted the importance of the embodiment of the values and role of an arts centre, as well as the strategic possibilities of a multi-faceted approach to mission statements which could significantly benefit arts centre directors. Embracing the diversity in arts centres and its multiple roles was also evidenced in the identity of arts centres, whereby embracing multiple identity characteristics can also be beneficial. Arts centre managers can consider multiple identities to tap into a range of audiences, as well as partner with like-minded organisations to build awareness and positive word-of-mouth. Alternatively, where arts centres

may want greater clarity and singularity of identity, an identity can be selected which negates the challenges presented by the diversity of the arts centre model. For instance, an identity that can be maintained despite the variety in art forms, activities and events at an arts centre. Throughout all of the discussions of the strategic approach of arts centres, the cruciality of having community at the heart of an arts centre was paramount. This focus on the community was important in fostering trust, strong relationships and ultimately dictated the success of the centre.

The thesis provided practical advice in terms of programming of an arts centre. For example, the management of amateur works though professional development has the potential to not only increase the quality of the works but also support local communities and build and maintain trust and relationships. Arts centre managers may also benefit from considering familiarity in programming to encourage trust and minimise risk perceptions.

The research provided practical approaches to minimise possible negative outcomes of the FIFO arrangement. The approaches involved encouraging and building a relationship between the artist and the community through: extending the stay of visiting artists with commissions and over longer periods; accommodation within the community; providing opportunities for relationship building and artist buy-in and trust.

The case studies also presented practical approaches for arts centre directors to assist in the management of difficult brand characteristics; for example, utilising familiarity and trust in programming for riskier works and creating persistent presence (McClellan, Rebello-Rao and Wyszomirski, 1999) through partnership with another organisation with shared values.

Finally, the findings provide guidance for arts centre managers who may be undertaking arts centre development. For example, encouraging buy-in from the community, facilitating community ownership, and authentic consultation nurturing relationships.

## Reflections

As recommended by Byrne (2004), being reflexive was central to my approach as a researcher, hence I continuously questioned and considered my decision-making. Therefore, it is fitting now, at the end of this journey, to reflect upon the process to share insights, both academic and personal, that may assist in future research on arts centres. There were significant challenges and learnings from the methodological approaches which were discussed in the Methodology Chapter and will not be repeated here. Instead, the key points of reflection will focus on the themes of ethics, the research areas, the fieldwork, and my personal journey.

Regarding the ethical considerations for this research (Appendix I), a key concern was anonymity. Given the case study approach and the size of the sector, individuals could easily be identified. Fortunately, this was not a great concern, with only a handful of interviewees requesting that their quotes not be directly attributed to themselves. However, the lack of anonymity created a personal tension. In writing the case studies, at times I felt torn between my academic analysis and my relationships with interviewees. In some cases, I had built a rapport with arts centre staff and felt conflicted when my analysis could have been considered a criticism. For the integrity of the research, it was necessary to put these concerns aside. However, I was careful to treat the interviewees with respect and honour the trust they had placed in me.

In terms of the findings, it is interesting to reflect upon the direction the research took and how that varied from my expectations at the beginning of my thesis. Initially, I had expected to focus more directly on the arts marketing element of arts centres and the concept of a difficult brand. However, once I began the data collection it became clear that my findings would be broader than I had initially anticipated. At times the unexpected findings and themes were frustrating, requiring significant additional research to explore these sufficiently. However, ultimately, I am grateful that I approached the research with openness, as I believe the diversity of academic fields addressed in the thesis has enhanced the richness of my findings.

At times the scale of the fieldwork felt insurmountable. This sense of struggle was compounded by challenging interviews and the challenges of recruiting participants for the community interviews. Now, towards the end of this PhD, I

am glad that I included multiple facets and methods in the data collection, as I believe this has provided a unique insight into the arts centre model, depicting multiple stakeholder perspectives which have been neglected in the extant research. Future research would benefit from including multiple stakeholder perspectives, as the inclusion of diverse voices provided a richness of insight that may have been missed had another approach been undertaken, such as a quantitative study.

Personally, my PhD journey has certainly been disjointed, with two periods of parental leave as well as leave during the Covid-19 pandemic owing to lack of childcare support. These breaks in continuity have been both challenging and beneficial for my research journey: challenging in terms of elongating the process with a stop-and-start approach, in which I often felt like I was starting all over again each time I returned from leave, needing to refamiliarize myself with my project and switch into the mindset of researcher. However, there were benefits to this approach, as I was able to distance myself from the research and data, allowing me not to get stuck in the detail. After each break, I was able to approach the task at hand with a new perspective, having given myself the time and space for the project to shift and change and morph into new concepts and ideas.

Since I commenced my PhD, my life has changed dramatically, from living in Leeds to being back in Melbourne as a mother of two. This change was truly welcome, and I would not have it any other way. However, finding the balance between my two selves of researcher and mother was no easy task. There have been significant sacrifices, both emotional and physical, but they are hopefully worth it. This process has taught me determination and resilience to a level I did not know I was capable of, two characteristics that I hope I will carry through the rest of my life and attributes I hope my children will inherit through watching this journey.

## Conclusion

In summarising the contributions of this research, I will highlight the key points that have emerged. Firstly, this research has contributed to the limited arts centre literature, providing greater insight into the model and its suitability for arts and cultural provision, suggesting the model has the capacity to be a highly effective provider of arts and culture. The importance of this research is paramount owing

to the possibilities of arts centres supporting positive policy outcomes and meeting the urgent and rapidly evolving needs of our time. Secondly, the findings from arts centres deserve greater attention, as tactics and findings certainly have applicability beyond the arts centre setting, contributing to the arts and cultural management literature and professional practice more generally. Finally, findings indicate that use of more generalist literature, for example from strategic management, arts marketing and branding in the arts centre setting, fails to encapsulate the complexities and nuances within the arts centre model. Thus I have demonstrated why these unique characteristics of the arts centre model demand specialist research.

These complexities and challenges are of course what make the arts centre model unique, qualifying arts centres as a *difficult* difficult brand. One of the key challenges is the concept of diversity, which is central to the arts centre model. The diversity of arts centres presents challenges such as creating a mission statement or role that incorporates this diversity, the various stakeholders and community; difficulty in brand identity; programming and building audiences; and the diversity of offerings such as hires and amateurs, which can have implications for the quality, risk and brand perceptions of an arts centre. However, it also provides opportunities. This diversity, and consequent flexibility, was noted by MacKeith (1996, i) who argued that arts centres are "uniquely flexible in filling different roles in different communities at different times". This ability of arts centres to appeal to and connect with their local community is paramount: if managed appropriately, it is an arts and cultural provider that has the capacity and capability to be deeply rooted within its community. As demonstrated in the case studies, the relationship between an arts centre and its community is a key determinant of the perception of the centre and ultimately its success and effectiveness. The arts centre literature has voiced concerns about the capacity for arts centres to be everything to everyone (Lane, 1978): as MacKeith (1996, p.57) commented, arts centres may "spread their energies too thinly by trying to be all things to all people". However, perhaps this is the wrong way to think about arts centres. Certainly, arts centres cannot be everything to everyone, but if the role, operations and perspectives align and are embedded within the community, maybe they can be *something* to everyone.

Despite the significant challenges inherent in the arts centre model, the case studies revealed that many of the common issues arts centres face can be overcome: in fact, arts centres can thrive if they are managed in a relational way

in alignment with the local community. In many instances, addressing these drawbacks may be beneficial, as the capabilities and opportunities presented by arts centres can be significant. In the words of an expert interviewed for this research, arts centres have the capability to:

> contribute to the community, to wellbeing, they can be fun, they can entertain, they give people an opportunity to have a viewpoint of the world that they may not have seen, they get exposed to different ways of thinking. They give employment benefits, they can actually have the socio-economic, you know, you've got cafés and so forth that might benefit, but really, it's good for the soul, we need to actually have it. People need to have somewhere that they can go and perform, and parents need a place that they can go and see their children participate in a professional environment, where they've got some good lighting, a professional one, because then people feel good about themselves, there's a sense of pride. So, it's quality of life.

Given the huge and often untapped potential for arts centres to offer high-quality local arts and cultural provision, the timeliness of this research post-pandemic, the policy focus on place and locality, and the potential synergies with the Australian Government's cultural policy *Revive* and Arts Council England's *Let's Create,* this thesis calls for both policy and research to embrace the possibilities of the arts centre model. Further investigation should build on the findings from this thesis and extend understandings of strategic management, arts management, arts marketing and branding and the applicability of the literature to the arts centre context, as well as unveil practical approaches beneficial to arts centre directors. Furthermore, perhaps through this greater exploration and demystification of the arts centre model, arts centres can be encouraged to fulfil their potential of being the "putty of the arts world – they mould and shape to fill the cracks" (MacKeith, 1996, p.25). By advocating for, supporting and researching arts centres, communities will reap the benefits with the provision of arts and culture which truly speaks to them. Surely now is the time to shake off any misconceptions of arts centres and truly embrace and recognise their potential.

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# Appendix A: Comparison of themes and questions from key surveys

| Topic | Hutchison and Forester (1987) | MacKeith (1996) | Australian Performing Arts Centres Association (2011)* | Performing Arts Connections Australia (2019) | This thesis (2017-2018) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Arts Centre Details** | | | | | |
| Name of arts centre/organisation | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | ✔ |
| Do you consider your organisation an arts centre | | | | | ✔ |
| Sole/primary provider of arts in town/city | | | | | ✔ |
| Contact details | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | |
| Name of respondent | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | |
| Job of respondent | ✔ | ✔ | | | ✔ |
| Respondent paid or volunteer | | | | | ✔ |
| Location of arts centre | | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Regionality | | | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |
| Distance to nearest capital city | | | | ✔ | |
| Permissions for sharing data | | | | ✔ | |
| **Arts Centre Model** | | | | | |
| Description of arts centre | | | | | ✔ |
| **Stakeholders** | | | | | |
| Top three stakeholders | | | | | ✔ |
| **Funding** | | | | | |
| Government funding | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | |
| Income | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | |
| Operating expenditure | ✔ | ✔ | | ✔ | |
| Surplus management | | | | ✔ | |
| Process for future capital works/upgrades | | | | ✔ | |
| Contribution from primary funding source (inc. in kind) | ✔ | | | ✔ | |
| Charge commission on exhibition sales | ✔ | | | | |
| Highest and lowest salary of staff | | | | | |
| Able to budget net loss for programming | | | | ✔ | |
| Contribution to Playing Australia funds | | | | ✔ | |
| **Strategy** | | | | | |
| Mission | | ✔ | | ✔ | ✔ |
| Audience development plan or strategy | | | ✔ | ✔ | |
| Programming policy or vision statement | | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ | ✔ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local authority cultural plan | | | | ✓ | |
| **Audience** | | | | | |
| Primary audience | | ✓ | | | |
| Number of people in catchment area | | | | ✓ | |
| Audience breakdown (international, national, regional, city etc.) | | | | | ✓ |
| **Origin and premises** | | | | | |
| Age of centre | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Age of building | ✓ | | | | |
| Purpose built or not (if not what was it?) | | ✓ | | | |
| Who founded the centre | ✓ | | | | |
| Years since capital upgrade | | | | ✓ | |
| Source of funding for capital projects in last 12 months | | | | ✓ | |
| Plans for renovation/conversion | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Applied or intend to apply for Lottery funding (England specific) | | ✓ | | | |
| Tenure arrangements | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Spaces for specific events | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Capital value of centre | | | | ✓ | |
| Total seat capacity | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| **Management and staffing** | | | | | |
| Managing body | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Interests of management committee | ✓ | | | | |
| Staff on other payrolls | ✓ | | | | |
| Paid staff (Breakdown of full time, part time, casual) | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Voluntary workers (yes/no and hours) | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Type of work by volunteers | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Student placements (department/areas and numbers) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and if Community Programme (CP) or Youth Training Scheme (YTS) | ✓ | | | | |

| Business activities | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business functions (bar, café, bookshop etc) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Total number using centre | | ✓ | | | |
| Number of staff contracted out or franchised business activities | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Rent space to artists/craftspeople | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Rent space to other organisations or business ventures | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Number of days available for hire but not used | | | | ✓ | |
| **Programming** | | | | | |
| Priority of activities type (workshop, education, visiting and local professionals or non-professionals, outreach, local arts groups) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Receive professional work | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Performance and event type (theatre, music, literary events, exhibitions, cinema, inter-disciplinary works etc.) (Broken down into professional and non-professional) | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Activities including (outreach, functions, workshops, festivals, membership programs) | | | | | ✓ |
| Broad overview of event types | | | ✓ | | |
| Is there a focus on arts activities | ✓ | | | | |
| Number of paid attendances for event type | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Total number of activities (arts and other) | | | | ✓ | |
| Number of attendees for all performances and events | | | | ✓ | |
| Number of free events | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Create exhibitions and productions | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Create exhibitions and productions that toured | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Commission new work | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Co-produce | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Venue for hire | | | ✓ | | |
| Regular local groups | ✓ | | | | |
| Collaborations with other organisations | | ✓ | | | |
| Description of arts centre: receiving presenting; commissioning organisation or presenting and commissioning | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ (add in prof and amate ur) |
| If presenting, number that were ACE or Regional Board funded (England specific) | | ✓ | | | |
| Of those produced how many Playing Australia funding or state funding (Australia specific) | | | | ✓ | |
| Member of ACE regional marketing agency (England specific) | | ✓ | | | |
| Program with themes across artforms | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Organise festivals | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Venue for other festivals | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Programming sources (state touring coordinators etc.) | | | ✓ | | |
| Constraints on making, commissions, co-producing and co-presenting | | | ✓ | | |
| Interest in producing/co-producing theatre | | | ✓ | | |
| Community hirers and commercial | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Percent professional versus non professional | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Community engagement activities | | | | ✓ | |
| **Resident companies and artists** | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professional companies based in centre | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Any professional companies financed through the centre | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Any artists in residence | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Artist in residence financed by centre | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Number artists engaged (inc. where from) | | | | ✓ | |
| First Nations involvement (Australia specific) | | | | ✓ | |
| **Educational** | | | | | |
| Educational/participatory courses (numbers, type and funding source) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Programme for schools | | ✓ | | | |
| Holiday programmes for young people | ✓ | | | | |
| Workshops for specific groups (young, retired, women, people with disabilities etc.) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Day performances for schools/colleges | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Special visits from schools/colleges (number) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Other daytime use of centre by students | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| **Outside the centre** | | | | | |
| Activities outside the centre | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Facilities/training services (film, photography, screen printing) | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

# Appendix B: External expert interview guide

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself? (General background)
2. Could you please give me an overview of your research [THIS WILL BE EDITED ACCORDINGLY] on arts centres?

**Arts Centre Model – Definitions, Components, operations and roles**
3. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?
4. Are there any components that you think an arts centre should have, to be considered an arts centre? (e.g. theatre, café, etc.)
5. Are there any specific art forms that you think must be present for a venue to be considered an arts centre?
6. Do you think that arts centres are focused on amateur or professional work?
7. From your understanding and definition of arts centres, do you think they create their own work or are they purely presenters of other artists' work?
8. Would you expect arts centres to be run by paid staff or volunteers (or a combination of the two)?
9. From your understanding of arts centres, are they typically located in specific locations? (e.g. regional areas, smaller communities, urban areas etc.)
10. What role do you think they have in their local communities?
11. What do you think the challenges and benefits are of being a regional arts centre versus one that is located in the city?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
12. How do you think arts centres are perceived?
13. There is a term used in marketing literature called a *difficult brand*. A Difficult brand is a brand that is considered to have constrained availability, such as it is not available all year around, and uncertain outcomes or Risk for consumers. Given this, would you consider arts centres a difficult brand? Why/Why not?
14. It could be argued that, regional arts centres could be considered to have increased *constrained availability* compared to many other arts and cultural institutions because they are often subject to negotiating and compromising on touring company schedules, and typically they present fewer shows with shorter seasons than those in larger cities. The element of *uncertain outcomes* is also heightened in many cases because of: the diversity of product type; the diversity resulting from different touring companies; the lack of consistent artistic vision; and the unclear and variety of roles of arts centres in the 21$^{st}$ century.
    a. What would your thoughts be on this?
15. Would this be a positive or a negative?
16. Would you consider the diversity of arts centres in terms of definition, offerings and facilities a positive or negative?

**Summary – The future of arts centres**
17. These last few questions have been about what you define as an arts centre. But now, what do you think they *could* or *should* be? Could they be better?
18. Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?
19. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model?

# Appendix C: Internal stakeholder interview guides

**FUNDERS**

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself? (General background)
2. Could you please give me an overview of your research [THIS WILL BE EDITED ACCORDINGLY] on arts centres?

**Arts Centre Model – Definitions, Components, operations and roles**
3. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?
4. Are there any components that you think an arts centre should have, to be considered an arts centre? (e.g. theatre, café, etc.)
5. Are there any specific art forms that you think must be present for a venue to be considered an arts centre?
6. Do you think that arts centres are focused on amateur or professional work?
7. From your understanding and definition of arts centres, do you think they create their own work or are they purely presenters of other artists' work?
8. Would you expect arts centres to be run by paid staff or volunteers (or a combination of the two)?
9. From your understanding of arts centres, are they typically located in specific locations? (e.g. regional areas, smaller communities, urban areas etc.)
10. What role do you think they have in their local communities?
11. What do you think the challenges and benefits are of being a regional arts centre versus one that is located in the city?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
12. How do you think arts centres are perceived?
13. There is a term used in marketing literature called a *difficult brand*. A Difficult brand is a brand that is considered to have constrained availability, such as it is not available all year around, and uncertain outcomes or Risk for consumers. Given this, would you consider arts centres a difficult brand? Why/Why not?
14. It could be argued that, regional arts centres could be considered to have increased *constrained availability* compared to many other arts and cultural institutions because they are often subject to negotiating and compromising on touring company schedules, and typically they present fewer shows with shorter seasons than those in larger cities. The element of *uncertain outcomes* is also heightened in many cases because of: the diversity of product type; the diversity resulting from different touring companies; the lack of consistent artistic vision; and the unclear and variety of roles of arts centres in the 21st century.
    a. What would your thoughts be on this?
15. Would this be a positive or a negative?
16. Would you consider the diversity of arts centres in terms of definition, offerings and facilities a positive or negative?

**Summary – The future of arts centres**
17. These last few questions have been about what you define as an arts centre. But now, what do you think they *could* or *should* be? Could they be better?
18. Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?
19. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model?

**CENTRE DIRECTORS**
**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself, your background and how you came to be involved in the arts centre? What appealed to you?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
2. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?
3. Do you think the diversity of arts centres in terms of definition, offerings, facilities, is positive or negative?

**Arts Centre Background**
4. What can you tell me about the background of this art centre its structure of the arts centre? Stakeholders, funding, programming, volunteers, facilities, artistic vision etc. Target market?

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
5. What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre? (What is this based on? Experience? Official mission statement? If official what was the process behind this?)
6. Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
7. How do you think the arts centre is perceived? Does it match these values?
8. In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc). (What is this based on, official decisions?). Why is this the case?
9. Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
10. How do you balance the needs and wants of the different stakeholders?
11. What role does this arts centre play within the broader community? How important is it to _____ (Why is this? Only arts provider? Because arts centre? Would this make a difference if not an arts centre?)

**Arts Centre Operations – Programming, Audiences, Marketing**
12. Do you have a clear artistic vision and if so, is quality of work a major concern?
13. How do you connect with the audience and community beyond the shows and events?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
14. Do you think the arts centre has a clear brand/identity?
15. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence what would you say?
16. Do you think that creating a clear and strong brand for arts centres is more difficult than say for a traditional theatre?
17. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (Role in community?)
18. There is this term used in marketing literature called a *difficult brand*. A Difficult brand is a brand that is considered to have constrained availability, such as it is not available all year around, and uncertain outcomes or Risk for consumers. Given this, would you consider arts centres a difficult brand? Why/Why not?
19. If so, is there anything that the arts centre does to try to reduce the risk to consumers? (Information, consistent product, regular touring companies)?
20. Arts centres commonly present a diverse range of things, with different shows, events, facilities, and producers, what impact might have on the perceived risk of audiences? If Any. (Not a big deal, b/c trust there? People like it?). Is this diversity a good thing?
21. What benefits and challenges do you think the centre faces as a result of being regionally located?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
22. Given all of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or working in a regional area?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) If you had the opportunity to change anything at the arts centre, what would you do?
b) Would you describe the arts centre as successful? How do you define success?
c) Would you describe the arts centre model as a suitable way to provide arts and culture in regional areas? Why?
d) Would you say that the arts centre has a personality?
e) Would you consider yourself the public face of the organisation?

**BOARD MEMBERS**

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself, your background and how you came to be involved in the arts centre? What appealed to you?
2. What made you want to be involved in this arts centre?

**Interviewee Personal Connection or value of Arts Centre**
3. How important is this arts centre to you? Why?

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
4. What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre? (What is this based on? Experience? Official mission statement?)
5. Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
6. How do you think the arts centre is perceived? Does it match these values?
7. Do your personal values align/not align with those of the arts centre?
8. In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc). (What is this based on, official decisions?). Why is this the case?
9. Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
10. How do you balance the needs and wants of the different stakeholders?
11. What role does this arts centre play within the broader community? How important is it to _____[insert town]? (Why is this? Only arts provider? Because arts centre? Would this make a difference if not an arts centre?)
12. Do you think this arts centre is successful? How do you measure success of the arts centre?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
13. Do you think the arts centre has a clear brand/identity?
14. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence what would you say?
15. Do you think that creating a clear and strong brand for arts centres is more difficult than say a traditional theatre?
16. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (Role in community?)
17. What benefits and challenges do you think the centre faces as a result of being regionally located?
18. Do you think the diversity of arts centres in terms of definition, offerings, facilities, is positive or negative?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
19. Given all of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or working in a regional area?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?
b) If you had the opportunity to change anything at the arts centre, what would you do?
c) Would you describe the arts centre as successful? How do you define success?
d) Would you describe the arts centre model as a suitable way to provide arts and culture in regional areas? Why?
e) Would you say that the arts centre has a personality?
f) Would you consider anyone the public face of the organisation?

## STAFF

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself and how you came to be involved in the arts centre?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
2. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
3. What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre? (What is this based on? Experience? Official mission statement?)
4. Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
5. How do you think the arts centre is perceived? Does it match these values?
6. In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc). (What is this based on, official decisions?) Why is this the case?
7. Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
8. How do you think the needs and wants of the different stakeholders are managed?
9. What role does this arts centre play within the broader community? How important is it to _____[insert place]? (Why is this? Only arts provider? Because arts centre? Would this make a difference if not an arts centre?)

**Arts Centre Operations – Programming, Audiences, Marketing**
10. Do you have a clear artistic vision? Is quality of work a major concern?
11. How do you connect with the audience and community beyond the shows and events?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
12. Do you think the arts centre has a clear brand/identity?
13. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence, what would you say?
14. Do you think that creating a clear and strong brand for arts centres is more difficult than say a traditional theatre?
15. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (role in community?)
16. There is this term used in marketing literature called a *difficult brand*. A Difficult brand is a brand that is considered to have constrained availability, such as it is not available all year around, and uncertain outcomes or Risk for consumers. Given this, would you consider arts centres a difficult brand? Why/Why not?
17. If so, is there anything that the arts centre does to try to reduce the risk to consumers? (Information, consistent product, regular touring companies)?
18. Arts centres commonly present a diverse range of things, with different shows, events, facilities and producers, what impact might have on the perceived risk of audiences? If Any. (Not a big deal, b/c trust there? People like it?). Is this diversity a good thing?
19. What benefits and challenges do you think the centre faces as a result of being regionally located?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
20. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or the impacts of being regionally based?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) If you had the opportunity to change anything at the arts centre, what would you do?
b) Would you describe the arts centre as successful? How do you define success?
c) Would you describe the arts centre model as a suitable way to provide arts and culture in regional areas? Why?
d) Would you say that the arts centre has a personality?
e) How important is this arts centre to you? Why?

## VOLUNTEERS

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself and how you came to be involved in the arts centre?
2. What made you want to volunteer at this arts centre?

**Interviewee Personal Connection or value of Arts Centre**
3. How important is this arts centre to you? Why?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
4. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?
5. Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?

**Relationship with Arts Centre**
6. Do you feel that there is regular communication from the centre as a volunteer and an audience member?
7. Does the arts centre always meet your expectations?

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
8. What role does this arts centre play within the broader community? How important is it to _____? (Why is this? Only arts provider? Because arts centre? Would this make a difference if not an arts centre?)
9. How do you think the needs and wants of different people are managed by the arts centre?
10. Do you think this arts centre is successful? How do you measure success of the arts centre?
11. What challenges do you think the arts centre faces?

**Arts Centre Operations – Programming, Audiences, Marketing**
12. Who do you think the arts centre is catering for in its programming?
13. Do you think another group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
14. What do you think about the quality of the programming of the arts centre? (Is it consistent?) (Even with different touring shows etc.)
15. Do you always know what you are getting when you attend the arts centre as an audience member? (Yes, no, surprised, good/bad etc.)

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
16. Do you think the arts centre has a clear identity?
17. Do you think that the arts centre has a personality?
18. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence what would you say?
19. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (role in community?) (Range of facilities? Range of events, diversity of performers etc)
20. What are the key factors that persuade you to attend a performance here?
21. Are there any factors that might dissuade you from attending an event or visiting the arts centre?
22. Would you be more inclined to attend an event at a more tradition venue, such as a theatre rather than at an arts centre? (Less risk, know the venue so trust?)
23. What benefits and challenges do you think the centre faces as a result of being regionally located?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
24. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or the impacts of being regionally located?

## TOURING ARTISTS/GROUPS

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself and how you came to be involved in the arts centre?

**Interviewee Personal Connection or value of Arts Centre**
2. How important is this arts centre to you/your organisation? What does this arts centre provide that other venues may not?
3. If this arts centre didn't exist what would it mean for you/your organisation?
4. What role does this arts centre play for artists? Also, do you have an indication of how important is it to _____[insert town]?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
5. The definition of arts centres is unclear, and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?

**Relationship with Arts Centre**
6. Why did you decide to present your work at this arts centre?
7. How many times have you presented at this arts centres?
8. Has your experience/have your experiences been positive or negative in dealing with the arts centre?
9. Has the arts centre met your expectations?
10. What makes visiting/touring to an arts centre a good experience? What do you expect? (Arts centre specific? Or touring in general?)
11. What has been your experience in promoting your show(s)/workshops at this arts centre? (Positive, negative, hard to get community support, relationship with community?)

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
12. Arts centres often seem to have a close connection to their communities. Has this seemed to be the case here? Is this helpful when touring?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
13. Are there any differences working at an arts centre compared to a solo [gallery, theatre etc.]?
14. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (role in community?)
15. Do you notice any differences in touring/visiting a venue in a city rather than a regional area?
16. Do you think this centre has a personality?
17. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence, what would you say?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
18. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or the impacts of being regionally located?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre? (What is this based on? Experience? Official mission statement?)
b) Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
c) Does your organisation/individual values align/not align with those of the arts centre?
d) In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc).
e) Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
f) Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?

## LOCAL CHARITIES/ORGANISATIONS

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself and how you came to be involved in the arts centre?

**Interviewee Personal Connection or value of Arts Centre**
2. How important is this arts centre to your organisation? What does this arts centre provide that other venues may not? What does it provide that others do?
3. If this arts centre didn't exist, what would it mean for your organisation?
4. What role does this arts centre play for other charities of organisations like yourself? Also, do you have an indication of how important is it to the community?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
5. The definition of arts centres is unclear and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?

**Relationship with Arts Centre**
6. Why did you decide to present your work at this arts centre/use the facilities at the arts centre?
7. How many times have you presented at this arts centres/used facilities at the arts centre?
8. Has your experiences/have your experiences been positive or negative in dealing with the arts centre?
9. Has the arts centre met your expectations?
10. What makes visiting/touring/using an arts centre a good experience? What do you expect? (Arts centre specific, or venue)

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
11. If appropriate, are there any differences working at an arts centre compared to a solo [gallery, theatre etc.]?
12. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (role in community?)
13. Do you notice any differences in touring/visiting a venue in a city rather than a regional area?
14. Do you think this centre has a personality?
15. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence, what would you say?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
16. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or the impacts of being regionally located?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre?
b) Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
c) Does your organisation/individual values align/not align with those of the arts centre?
d) In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc).
e) Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
f) Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?

**ARTIST**

**Interviewee Background**
1. Could you please tell me about yourself and how you came to be involved in the arts centre?

**Interviewee Personal Connection or value of Arts Centre**
2. How important is this arts centre to you? What does this arts centre provide that other venues may not?
3. If this arts centre didn't exist, what would it mean for you?
4. What role does this arts centre play for artists? Also, do you have an indication of how important is it to _____[insert town]?

**Arts Centre Model (not case study specific)**
5. The definition of arts centres is unclear and seems to mean different things to different people. How would you describe an arts centre?

**Relationship with Arts Centre**
6. Why did you decide to be involved in work at this arts centre?
7. Has your experience/have your experiences been positive or negative in dealing with the arts centre?
8. Has the arts centre always met your expectations?
9. What makes working at an arts centre a good experience? What do you expect? (Arts centre specific? Or touring in general?)
10. What has been your experience in promoting your events at this arts centre? (Positive, negative, hard to get community support, relationship with community?)

**Arts Centre Role – Strategy and Structure**
11. Arts centres often seem to have a close connection to their communities. Has this seemed to be the case here?

**Arts Centre Operations – Programming, Audiences, Marketing**
12. In regard to being an audience member, do you think the programming is consistent? The quality? Do you know what you are getting?

**Arts Centre Operations – Difficult Brand**
13. From your experience, are there any differences working at an arts centre compared to a solo [gallery, theatre etc.]?
14. What do you think is unique about the arts centre model compared with other venues? (role in community?)
15. You may or may not be able to help me with this one, but from your experience, have you noticed any differences in touring/visiting a venue in a city rather than a regional area?
16. Do you think this centre has a personality?
17. If you had to describe this arts centre in one sentence, what would you say?
18. Do you think the arts centre faces any challenges or experiences any benefits from being regionally located?

**Summary – Final wrap up question**
19. Given any of this, is there anything else you would like to tell me about [insert], or the arts centre model, or the impacts of being regionally located?

**Additional Questions if Time**
a) What do you think the goals and values are of the arts centre? (What is this based on? Experience? Official mission statement?)
b) Do you think the arts centre is achieving these goals?
c) Does your organisation/individual values align/not align with those of the arts centre?
d) In your opinion, who are the most important stakeholders (person or group connected to the arts centre) of this arts centre? (e.g. artists, audience, community, etc).
e) Do you think another stakeholder group should receive greater attention from the arts centre? Why?
f) Do you consider arts centres to be a suitable way to present art in regional areas? Yes/no, why?

# Appendix D: Document analysis source examples

| Arts Centre | Document/Source | Document type | Sourced from | Link to research questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bridgwater Arts Centre | Bridgwater Arts Centre website | Website | Arts centre website https://www.bridgwaterartscentre.co.uk/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Business Plan 2018-2020 | Strategic Plan | Arts Centre Director | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Season Brochure | Programme brochure | Arts centre website https://www.bridgwaterartscentre.co.uk/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Report of the Trustees and Unaudited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 for Bridgewater Arts Company Limited | Financial Report | Charity Commission for England and Wales website https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1018468 | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Unaudited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 201 for Bridgewater Arts Company Limited | Financial Report | Charity Commission for England and Wales website https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1018468 | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | "Bridgwater Arts Centre Heading for the big 7.0" By Ward Councillors 2/05/2016 | Online article | Bridgwater Westover Web https://www.westoverward.co.uk/bridgwater-arts-centre-heading-big-7-0/ | Context |
| | Bridgwater Arts Centre Listing | Historic listing | Historic England https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1197363 | Context |
| | Somerset Community Foundation: Bridgwater Arts Centre – Scaling Up Impact | Grant information | Somerset Community Foundation website | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | Bridgwater Arts Centre – Project revamp | Crowdfunder appeal page | Crowdfunder https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/bridgwater-arts-centre-project-revamp? | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| Stratford Courthouse Theatre | Stratford Theatre Courthouse website | Website | Stratford Theatre Courthouse website https://www.stratfordcourthouse.com.au/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Programme Brochure Jan-June 2018 | Programme brochure | Staff member | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | "Segue a segway to the Stratford's arts community" By Rachael Lucas 8/02/2013 | Online article | Unknown – online and no longer available | Context |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Junction, Goole | Junction website | Website | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Takeover Festival Brochure 2018 | Programme brochure | Junction staff member (Published by Junction) | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Takeover Festival Brochure 2014 | Programme brochure | Junction staff member (Published by Junction) | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Summer Exhibition Programme 2017 | Programme brochure | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Junction Family Film Week Brochure | Programme brochure | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Junction Theatre Technical Specifications Summer 2017 | Junction specifications | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | Junction Hire Charges 2017/2018 | Junction costs | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | "Goole teems with excitement as historic 2.3 million Junction arts centre prepares to open" by Culture24 Staff 6/11/2009 | Online article | Culture24 website https://www.culture24.org.uk/ | Context |
| | Junction Volunteer Application form | Volunteer application form | Junction website https://www.junctiongoole.co.uk/ | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | Goole Renaissance Review 2016 | Report | East Riding of Yorkshire Council https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/ | Context |
| | Council staff list | Staff information | Goole Town Council website https://goole-tc.gov.uk/ | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | Goole Case study - Evie Barrand 2016/2017 | Case Study | Junction staff member (Published by Junction) | Context How do arts centres operate? |
| | "Collaborative network broadens arts offer in Yorkshire" by Christy Romer 22/03/2017 | Online article | Arts Professional https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/news/collaborative-network-broadens-arts-offer-yorkshire | Context |
| | Green light for new arts facility 6/11/2009 | Online article | BBC Humberside http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/humberside/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_8346000/8346286.stm | Context |
| | "Up the Junction: Twenty-first century architecture has come to Yorkshire" by Jay Merrick 5/04/2012 | Article | Independent https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture/up-the-junction-twentyfirst-century-architecture-has-come-to-yorkshire-1935800.html | Context |
| | "The Junction Arts & Civic Centre" by Houlton | Building information | Houlton https://houlton.co.uk/projects/45/the-junction-arts-civic-centre | Context |
| | "Super Shed: Buschow Henley's Junction Arts and Civic Centre" By Geoff Shearcroft 4/02/2010 | Journal article | Architect's Journal https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/archive/super-shed-buschow-henleys-junction-arts-and-civic-centre | Context |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Devonport Entertainment and Convention Centre** | DECC website | Website | DECC website (Website no longer active, been replaced by https://www.paranapleartscentre.com.au/town-hall-theatre/ | Context What is the role of arts centres? How do arts centres operate? |
| | Devonport Regional Gallery Strategic Plan 2017-2021 | Strategic Plan | Devonport City Council staff member | Context What is the role of arts centres? |
| | Living City - An Assessment of its Regional Benefits and Opportunities | Factsheet | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | Devonport Living City Master Plan | Strategic Plan | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | Living City Project Update | Factsheet | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | "Branding unveiled for multi-purpose building and arts centre" 18/12/2017 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | LIVING CITY Convention Centre Operator Update 15/12/2015 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | First class Conference Centre, LINC & one-stop shop planned 1/07/2015 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | Council in negotiations with City First for Conference Centre 30/05/2015 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | LIVING CITY Convention Centre Update 13/05/2015 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |
| | Feasibility Study into new home for the Devonport Regional Gallery 4/02/2016 | Online article | Living City website https://www.livingcitydevonport.com.au (no longer exists) | Context |

# Appendix E: Community development codes

Aims of the arts centre in relation to the community

- Add culture to the town
- Art to initiate change
- Bring people together
- Celebrate with
- Change and enrich lives
- Challenge
- Community Work
- Create sense of belonging
- Develop Culture/Art
- Development of specific community group
- Economy of the community
- Educate
- Empower and ownership
- Engage
- Enrich the lives of
- Entertain
- Fun with
- Inspire
- Leader
- Local partnerships
- Make art part of lives
- Participate
- Pride
- Provide opportunities for
- Strengthen community
- Welcoming of
- Wellbeing

# Appendix F: External expert codes

**Art Centre Elements**
- Goal/Vision/Values
- Regional arts centre networks
- Impact of history
- Programme
- Stakeholders
- Structure

**Arts Centre Model**
- Definition
- Arts centre term
- Diversity
- Exclusivity
- High vs Low art
- Governance
- Policy
- Suitability of model
- Future of arts centres
- Role in community

**Arts Centre Perception**
- Personality
- Difficult Brand

# Appendix G: Case study codes

Audience
- Demographic
- Target audience

Arts Centre Perceptions
- Arts centre model
- The term "arts centre"

Background
- History
- Recent history

Branding
- Difficult brand – Yes
- Difficult brand – No
- Perception
- Personality
- Unique

Community
- Culture
- Part of lives
- Role in community
- Social role

Issues
- Capacity
- Location
- Risk

Marketing
- Competition

Organisational Strategy
- Business plan
- Goals
- Mission statement
- Participation
- Partnerships
- Stakeholders
- Support mechanisms
- Performance (financial and stability)

Organisational Structure
- Funding
- Roles/Positions
- The board
- Volunteers

Programming
- Artistic Vision
- Contracts
- Cross over
- Live theatre

Regionality
- Impact of regional

Values
- Participation
- Quality
- Relationships
- Trust

# Appendix H: Data tables

Data tables that graphs are based on in Chapter 4.

## Arts centre mission statement themes

| Mission Theme from arts centres with a formal mission statement (116) | Number of arts centres who mentioned theme | Percentage of arts centres who mentioned theme |
|---|---|---|
| Development (community focus) | 78 | 67 |
| Variety* | 37 | 32 |
| Quality (artform focus) | 34 | 29 |
| Support (artist focus) | 22 | 19 |
| Access (community focus) | 20 | 17 |
| Participation (community focus) | 20 | 17 |
| Innovation & experimentation (artform focus) | 10 | 9 |
| Target Audience* | 10 | 9 |
| Tourism/Town Development* | 10 | 9 |
| Sustainability* | 6 | 5 |
| Presentation (artist focus) | 4 | 3 |
| Heritage* | 3 | 3 |

**Operators of arts centres**

| Operators of arts centres | Australia | England | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local Council/Local Authority | 57 | 18 | 75 | 37.31 |
| Registered Charity | 12 | 57 | 69 | 34.33 |
| School/College/University | 8 | 9 | 17 | 8.46 |
| Independent Trust | 7 | 10 | 17 | 8.46 |
| Local Community | 6 | 4 | 10 | 4.98 |
| Artists | 1 | 4 | 5 | 2.49 |
| Private Owner/Entertainment Company | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2.49 |
| Company Limited by Guarantee | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1.99 |
| Board of Management/Trustees | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1.99 |
| Cooperative | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1.00 |
| Not for Profit | 2 | | 2 | 1.00 |
| State Government | 2 | | 2 | 1.00 |
| Committee of Non-Profit Association | 1 | | 1 | 0.50 |
| Incorporated Association with Board of Directors | 1 | | 1 | 0.50 |
| Limited Company by Shares | | 1 | 1 | 0.50 |
| Management contract from local council | | 1 | 1 | 0.50 |
| Not for Profit Company - Limited by guarantee | | 1 | 1 | 0.50 |
| Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) | 1 | | 1 | 0.50 |
| Arts Council England | | 1 | 1 | 0.50 |

**Top three stakeholders of arts centres**

| Stakeholder Group | Ranked Stakeholder 1 | Ranked Stakeholder 2 | Ranked Stakeholder 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Audience | 33 | 29 | 11 |
| Local Community | 29 | 26 | 13 |
| Artists | 3 | 7 | 13 |
| Local Council | 9 | 5 | 9 |
| Funder | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Hirers | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| None | | 2 | 3 |
| Community Groups | | | 3 |
| Students | 3 | | |
| School/College/University | 3 | | |
| Members/Friends/Subscribers | 2 | | |
| Staff | | | 2 |
| Local Artists | | 2 | |
| ACE | | 2 | |
| Board | | | 2 |
| Organisation | 1 | | |

# Appendix I: Ethics approval

The Secretariat
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT
Tel: 0113 343 4873
Email: ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk

**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

Sarah Reynolds
School of Performance and Cultural Industries
University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT

**Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee**
**University of Leeds**

4 October 2017

Dear Sarah

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title of study** | **How is value articulated to and by stakeholders of regional arts centres? A critical exploration of a difficult brand** |
| **Ethics reference** | **PVAR 17-005** |

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

| Document | Version | Date |
|---|---|---|
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Response_to_Comments-2017-09-29.pdf | 1 | 02/10/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Application_Form-2017-09-29.pdf | 1 | 02/10/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Email_Managers-2017-09-29.pdf | 1 | 02/10/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Email_Stakeh-2017-09-29.pdf | 1 | 02/10/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Info_Sheet-2017-09-29.pdf | 1 | 02/10/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Application_Form-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Email_Stakeh-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Email_Managers-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Info_Sheet-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Consent_Form- | 1 | 24/08/17 |

| 2017-08-24.pdf | | |
|---|---|---|
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Verbal_Consent-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |
| PVAR 17-005 Reynolds-Ethics-Sample_Risk_Assessment-2017-08-24.pdf | 1 | 24/08/17 |

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie
Senior Research Ethics Administrator, the Secretariat
On behalf of Prof Robert Jones, Chair, AHC FREC

CC: Student's supervisor(s)