ALTERNATIVE GRASSROOTS ARTS AND CULTURE CREATIVE ACTION PLAN

Hākari stages as featured in Dierdre Brown's book *Māori Architecture*

24/7/14
INTRODUCTION
This alternative plan is based on the observation and experience that the six goals for arts and culture outlined in the Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan (ACSAP) are fulfilled continually by countless, and uncounted, grassroots arts and culture groups and individuals across Auckland.
The Alternative Grassroots Arts and Culture Creative Action Plan, hereafter referred to as the Grassroots Creative Action Plan (GCAP) offers the means to highlight, reinforce, resource and celebrate the work of the grassroots in:
1. Accessing and participating in arts and culture;
2. Meeting Auckland’s diverse creative needs;
3. Developing and operating vibrant arts and culture organisations;
4. Celebrating unique cultural identity as it appears in distinctive communities across Auckland;
5. Contributing significantly to placemaking and;
6. to the creative economy.

1. PREFACE TO THE GRASSROOTS ALTERNATIVE CREATIVE ACTION PLAN
1a) The Depot Artspace is a grassroots organisation. As a result its diverse services and activities have grown from having an ear to the ground, the place where people stand – their tūrangawaewae – and from which, if nurtured, things grow and are sustained.

1b) The Depot is an example of the significance and value of grassroots arts and culture, having over nearly two decades developed facilities, services, activities and new initiatives that respond to the needs and interests of the creative community, both local and across the Auckland region and beyond. These include: galleries; recording and rehearsal studios; ArtsLab, the biggest professional development programme for artists nationally; creative internships research and development; Cultural Icons, a filmed interview series (72 interviews so far) with people who have been significant in the cultural landscape; Depot Press, including ‘The Vernacularist’ journal, W’akaputanga, Tūrangawaewae/Sense of Place and LOUD magazine.

1c) The Depot employs 10 staff, 7 full-time and 3 part-time and receives operational funding from Council of $78,000 and has independently raised funds or developed partnerships to deliver its services and programmes. This has been a cost-effective, community-responsive model, referred to as the North Shore Model, a legacy structure dating back to pre-amalgamation days.

1b) The Depot contends that this model, with some resources devolved from a reduced multi-tiered bureaucratic arts and culture structure, is a much more cost-effective means for delivering a vibrant, rich, diverse arts and culture programme across the city that fulfils the aspirations of the ACSAP.
2. WHY AN ALTERNATIVE GRASSROOTS CREATIVE ACTION PLAN?

For the purposes of this plan ‘grassroots’ is defined as ‘community-engaged’; grassroots are the people in and of a community, especially as contrasted with the leadership or elite of a social or government organisation, etc. (Wikipedia) Grassroots movements are resourceful, often innovative in their actions and community driven.

2a) This document is an Alternative Arts and Culture Action Plan, referred to as Grassroots Creative Action Plan (GCAP), written from the grassroots perspective. The current council-driven plan does not encompass the grassroots, nor were grassroots organisations consulted in its preparation, and as a result it does not recognise the extent to which arts and culture flourish in this city outside the aegis of Council and other ‘creative bureaucracies’ who claim the expertise to define and control creativity.

2b) This GCAP contends that Council’s role is not to prescribe or to orchestrate a creative city but rather, to celebrate, support and promote the creative city Auckland is, thanks to the innumerable grassroots creative groups and individuals undertaking exciting, innovative, unique and culturally distinctive activities and services.

2c) For the grassroots, the arts and culture are not primarily about excellence (P.5 Draft Summary), which the ACSAP contends is a priority (and who measures excellence anyway), though this does not mean grassroots does not deliver high quality, high value arts and culture. Grassroots emphasises the joy and vibrancy arts and culture brings to people’s lives and by which the city becomes liveable; not as a tourist destination but as a home where people wish to stay and return to.

2d) This GCAP places community arts and culture in the forefront, as the driving force through which the goals Council has prioritised are not just ‘to be achieved’, but are being realised daily. The GCAP therefore has established other priorities that relate specifically to grassroots creative groups and to celebrating and supporting the programmes, facilities and services they provide that enrich the lives of Aucklanders.

2e) There is also a fiscal reality to the GCAP. In the straitened economic circumstances such as those Auckland Council is facing today grassroots can be assured of delivering a rich, distinctive, innovative array of programmes, events and services at a fraction of the Council’s delivery costs. Auckland Council has a large, multi-tiered, centralised arts and culture staff which is out of touch with the communities they remotely manage.

2f) Grassroots, on the other hand, is resourceful and innovative, leveraging off base funding to raise additional sums to cover costs, as well as drawing on extensive voluntary networks for support.
3. PRIORITIES FOR THE GRASSROOTS CREATIVE ACTION PLAN

A. CULTURAL MAPPING: UNDERTAKE A CREATIVE AND CULTURAL ASSET INVENTORY ACROSS AUCKLAND

3A1) There is no inventory of arts and cultural assets in Auckland. Nor is there research on the contribution of grassroots arts and cultural activities to the vitality, resilience, vibrancy and economic well-being of their communities. Evidence may be ascertained anecdotally in communities with vibrant informal arts and culture that they visibly foster greater connection and tolerance between residents of different gender, race, class, age and religious affiliation, but there is little quantitative research.

3A2) Creative and cultural asset mapping will engage leaders, community members and organisations and can help motivate participation in the project because it involves gathering and sharing collective knowledge and making it available to all potential stakeholders. As leaders see common interests and organisational links, they may come up with new ways to leverage the assets, or be inspired to strengthen or form new partnerships.

“What a marvellous thing is a map. Marvellous and civilising. Without some kind of map we have only a small idea of where we are, an even smaller one of where we have been and not the slightest chance of working out where best we might go…..Galleries, museums, libraries, art dealers and auctioneers, performance venues, theatres, cinemas, music shops, community halls, marae, film and music resources are all there in a glorious profusion. For the first time, someone has come up with a rational tool for cultural planning. Most critical of all, the map not only reveals an incredible layer of activity, but also shows areas of a chilling deprivation.”

– Hamish Keith NZ Listener, 22 October, 2011

Above: Mapping Devonport’s creative and cultural assets; pins and strings identify location and nature of asset.
3A3) Cultural mapping identifies opportunities to form relationships with potential stakeholders and to leverage existing assets while identifying new opportunities.

3A4) Creative and Cultural Asset mapping assists communities to recognise assets, leverage resources, identify gaps and grasp opportunities.

3A5) Unfortunately this map has never been released and yet it could provide the means to determine the cultural needs across Auckland and within its communities.

B. INVEST IN CREATIVE AUCKLAND BY SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS ARTS INFRASTRUCTURES AND INITIATIVES

3B1) Cultural institutions and artists animate our communities; they bring disparate people together to share common experiences, stimulate our imaginations, challenge everyday thinking and help foster a rich and varied quality of life. They are able to address issues of national or global concern in an inclusive context, providing a place for everyone to have a voice and be involved.

3B2) Research has shown also that entrepreneurs migrate to communities that are progressive and support the arts. A community rich in arts and culture attracts a diverse population that can assist in its sustainability. Richard Florida (‘The Rise of the Creative Classes’), once the guru of Auckland’s high level arts funding and delivery institutions such as Auckland University and CNZ and now conspicuous by his absence in the ACSAP literature review, stated, ‘where the creatives go, the geeks will follow.’

3B3) With minimal empirical research undertaken locally into the place of grassroots arts in community and economic development and identity-forming we have turned to overseas studies, which have confirmed our experience and observations:

3B4) Researchers found that for population growth over a five-year span, low-income neighbourhoods with higher levels of arts activities lost fewer residents than neighbourhoods with lower levels of arts activities. They also found over the five-year span, low-income neighbourhoods with higher levels of arts participation had greater achievement in elementary school test scores than neighbourhoods with low levels of art activities. Informal Arts and Culture, Spring 2010, A Portland State University Senior Capstone Study - In partnership with the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition

3B5) Researchers also unearthed more arts and culture groups and activities than initially recognised in the communities studied, for example, bookshops that held book making workshops, book launches and authors talks. Voluntary Sector Network Blog. The Importance of Grassroots Arts in Big Society. The Guardian 2014

3B6) Grassroots arts fulfil the goals represented in the ACSAP on small budgets that are not entirely dependent on Council. Grassroots is resourceful in leveraging off grants received.

3B7) An increase in resources to community-led and run arts centres and initiatives would strengthen their facilities, operations and programmes and allow greater opportunity to leverage further resources to further enhance services.
C. A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF ARTS AND CULTURE INITIATIVES

3C1) In fiscally straitened circumstances it is essential to analyse how ratepayers’ $$$ are best utilised in the often contentious area of art and culture. Cost-benefit analysis must take into account a variety of components, including social, physical, spiritual and economic wellbeing.

3C2) Although scant empirical research exists on the value of arts and culture to citizens, observation, experience and anecdotal information can assure us that grassroots arts involve and engage their communities, create a sense of identity and of place, and in doing so contribute to the wellbeing of their residents. They also contribute to the distinctive identity of the city as a sum of varied and colourful communities.

3C3) Grassroots arts and culture initiatives generally take place at nominal financial cost with assistance of local volunteers compared to cost of programmes delivered by Auckland Council, many of which are installed or managed by centralised staff.

3C4) Devolution of funding from council to grassroots is likely to result in a much wider range of programmes which are relatively better resourced than previously. While grassroots are adept at running significant programmes on a shoestring, the luxury of increased (but still comparatively modest) funding would enhance presentation and delivery.
D. DECENTRALISING ARTS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

3D1) The ACSAP appears to concentrate its attention and resources on the inner city, with festivals, performances and exhibitions accorded high profiles and large funding. Even when events are branded as Auckland events they take place within the bounds of the CBD and inner city suburbs. So far the Auckland Arts Festival is focused within in these bounds, and Artweek Auckland struggles to reach beyond the inner city with limited resources. Under these circumstances Auckland is a Supercity in name only and does not embrace its significant geographical size.

3D2) Auckland Council Arts and Culture team are also largely centralised with projects organised and run remotely; Franklin and Mangere Art Centres, for example, are programmed and curated from the CBD, with superficial reference to the communities the programmes take place in.

3D3) This militates against each of the stated goals of the ASCAP.

3D4) The GCAP submits that facilities and programming should be returned to the communities in which they are domiciled.
4. TIKANGA MAORI AND THE GRASSROOTS CREATIVE ACTION PLAN

This GCAP is guided by Māori concepts such as Kāwanatanga and Tino Rangatiratanga in accordance with the articles of the Māori version of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The acknowledgement of these principles should entail significantly more visible presence of Māori in Auckland, especially on sites that attract visitors and are highly populated.

For example, in 2012 iconic potter, conservationist, engineer and writer, and former resident of Devonport Barry Brickell* presented to Auckland Arts and Culture forum, following up with a letter at their request, that a hākari whata/stage** should be built on Auckland's waterfront in recognition of, and respect for, the place of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and as a symbol of welcome. If we wish to ‘celebrate Auckland's unique identity’ as in the ACSAP, the hākari whata, more than a state house, will do this in grand and most culturally appropriate style.

* For Barry Brickell’s submission see Appendix attached.

**Hākari (feasts) were a way to demonstrate hospitality and mana. Hākari were held to mark events and rituals, including: the tohi ceremony, when a child was dedicated to a god; marriage; ngahuru, the time of the kūmara harvest in March; the appearance of Matariki (the Pleiades) or Puanga (Rigel) in the sky – the Māori New Year; the sealing of a peace agreement. Hākari became huge in the 19th century. Some featured thousands of guests, with many tonnes of food. Food was displayed in huge stacks or on whata (stages), up to 30 metres high.

Above: Banner-carrying protesters at the hikoi over Supercity plans. AMELIA JACOBSEN/East & Bays Courier 25/05/2009
CONCLUSION

Peter McKinlay of McKinlay Douglas Ltd in his paper to the Community Government Forum in Christchurch in 1999 said:

“Governments both central and local need to see themselves as instruments on behalf of the community and to recognise that they are one of several mechanisms which a community may wish or need to utilise to achieve its collective purposes.”

In most instances the grassroots know best how to meet the distinctive needs of their own communities, continually fulfilling the goals the ASCAP has outlined to ensure that arts and culture are integrated into our everyday lives.

Much of what grassroots groups and individuals do flies under the radar and a comprehensive cultural mapping process would expose the richness and diversity of our communities as represented through arts and cultural activities.

Once our arts and cultural assets are made more visible, Auckland Council may decide, in partnership with grassroots, how to best reallocate its resources.
Above: The Devonport map is used again, this time for Depot Sound and the musicians who have worked here, including Gin Wigmore, The Checks, Kimbra, Lorde, Naked and Famous and The Veils.

---

Hakari

P.O. Box 87,
Coromandel 3543.
Ph. 07 866 8703.

Letter to the Editor,
NZ Herald,
PO Box 32,
Auckland.

Queens Wharf and Heritage.

What more fitting a concept could the City have as its maritime gateway than a grand Hakari, built of modern engineering materials. The traditional Maori Hakari was a ceremonial prestige structure associated with food, consisting of a series of horizontal stages supported by tall masts tied together to form a stable structure often of great height. Most were built for inter-tribal hui and were evidently great works of primitive architecture. A fine illustration of one can be found on page 22-23 of Deidre Brown's book "Maori Architecture" (Penguin Books, 2009). Such an edifice would carry many strands of meaning associated with the City’s origins and development. It could be designed to straddle a utilitarian building suitable as an entry for cruise liner and other visitors.

Barry Brickell,
Coromandel.

Barry Brickell

This letter was not published.
Also no response from Ngati Whatua.
Above/left: Two of many letters written by Barry Brickell petitioning for the construction of a Hākari on Queens Wharf. He first developed this concept in 2009, after reading Dierdre Brown's Māori Architecture.

I.B. Brickell,
PO Box 87,
Coromandel 3543.

Letters to the Editor,
NZ Herald,
PO Box 32,
Auckland.

Queens Wharf Culture.

Now a public place, Queens Wharf has become a kind of 'front door' to Auckland City. With a cruise ship terminal, countless ferries passing and its proximity to Britomart, it deserves to be more than a show place for a privately sponsored piece of folk art. While we respect Michael Parekowhai and his great contribution to contemporary international sculpture, this gateway precinct needs to be much more than a plinth to support an artwork.

For some years now, I have tried to gain support for a major 'erecure' (not a sculpture) on Queens Wharf, one that salutes both Maori and Pakeha cultures as well as having welcoming reference and a maritime rapport. This would be a modernly engineered 'Hakari', a line of masts extending along the wharf with several stories of platforms and yardarms, based on the traditional Maori structures upon which food was placed as a friendly, welcoming gesture. A fine example may be seen illustrated on p.22-23 of Deirdre Brown's book "Māori Architecture" (Penguin Books, 2009). What a wonderful statement it could make from the harbour against a background of city high-rise blocks! On anniversary Day, it could be fitted with sails. It should be designed so that agile people could climb up it to admire the view. But, so far - no response.

Barry Brickell,
Coromandel.

20 April 2014
d/d 07 8667279.

PS This letter is in response to the article "Fate of St. James a gift sculpture on agenda", NZ Herald, 3/4/14.

A10.