

ARTS IN ACTION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

By Linda Blincko, Creative Director, Depot Artspace



A nation can be very rich in every material sense, but if it fails to provide for and nurture creative expression, it is impoverished in immeasurable ways. Helen Clark, cited in Artwork 2004

I have wanted to meet Jason Smith from 2011, the time I encountered his work as Senior Policy Adviser for the Ministry of Culture and Heritage where he produced a cultural map of Auckland which was initially displayed on the Auckland Council website. His comment on the map, following, is no doubt the reason the map was quickly removed by Council, never to be seen again despite repeated requests of MCH.

The map was both informative and incriminating in that it showed where cultural resources such as libraries, museums, galleries, schools and bookshops were, and at the same time where they were NOT and thus raised issues of inequity of access and social problems.

'As the cultural map gets more populated, I am seeing that the highest deprivation areas/worst unemployment areas align with the GAPS in this cultural mapping. The tipping point in this is the addition of booksellers. Looking at the cause and effect of books/literacy, one must speculate about chickens and eggs with regard to the stats ... do better life/social stats make for better cultural infrastructure, or does better infrastructure (more bookshops?) mean better social stats? Fascinating policy implications...'



Dr. Jason Smith | Senior Policy Adviser (Auckland) Manatu Taonga - Ministry for Culture and Heritage

Previously, in 2010 Dr. Smith had completed his PhD thesis *The Creative Country: Policy, Practice and Place in New Zealand's Creative Economy 1999-2008*, one of the first pieces of extensive New Zealand research in this field which addressed the economic value of the creative and cultural sector.

It was predicated upon the following statement by the OECD and referenced the halcyon days of the arts and culture under the direction of Helen Clark as Minister of Arts and Culture:



‘Creativity and culture are important and powerful levers for both personal and societal development. They are a driving force for economic growth, are at the core of “glocal” (sic) competitiveness in the knowledge society, and shape territories and local economies in a way which is innovative and creative.’ *OECD, 2005, p. 3*

We were therefore surprised and super-delighted, after 7 years, by a fortuitous encounter with Dr. Jason Smith, outside the Empire Café and Gallery in Paparoa, south of Dargaville. Not only is Jason a strong and outspoken advocate for the creative economy, but a fifth generation farmer and now, newly elected Mayor of the Kaipara District. It was exciting to meet and talk about a mutual passion for the arts and their role in enriching the cultural and economic life of Aotearoa. We look forward to further conversations and opportunities to build regional networks of support.



So far the Labour-led Government, with Jacinda Ardern in the Arts and Culture driving seat, are biding their time in acting upon their impressive arts policy. The policy has valuable components, some we are particularly keen to see enacted, having spent time developing them, such as PACE (Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment) and the establishment of creative apprenticeships.



We know we cannot rely solely on a single source to deliver the message and enact policy for the creative sector; we need informed, educated, experienced and respected advocates who are themselves beacons for an enlivened, innovative, sustainable future for the creative sector.

Jason Smith, Mayor of Kaipara, successful farmer, creative sector commentator, analyst, advocate and activist is one such person the Government should be talking to; and of course the Depot Artspace who has been flying the flag for creative sector sustainability (with the only surviving PACE programme) through the thick and thin of successive governments and political sympathies.

More information about Dr. Jason Smith can be found here:

<https://www.kaiparalifestyler.co.nz/news/5064-mayorelect-plans-collaborative-approach.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAXfXwTP9lw>

