

## **Alliance of cultural Tourism and the Arts & Crafts**

**Robert Jadin**

### **ABSTRACT**

Reaching an increasingly diverse and sophisticated tourist population with an effective cultural message, realistically delivered, for those Queensland regions not advantaged by unique natural structures poses a real challenge. Although today cultural references are blurred due to rampant standardisation, globalisation and mass production, there is a growing desire by the tourist public to return to our origins, traditional know how and singularity which are values precisely concentrated in the arts and crafts professions. It is essential for those regions to define and rekindle a cultural uniqueness through their traditional skills thereby creating substantive opportunities for a sustainable future.

This session draws parallels between regional France (2003 Senate Report "Tourism and the Arts and Crafts Professions", a discussion paper) and regional Queensland underlining the rich possibilities existing between cultural tourism and the arts. It also examines those factors likely to accelerate or impede the development of this concept by focussing on the successful contemporary examples of such relationships in regional France which argues that:

1. This recognition influences cultural heritage priorities in different rural communities.
2. The emphasis must be on human activities which encourage, maintain or revive artisanal and technical skills from the local regions.
3. A recognition that cultural tourism allied with the art and craft professions, by emphasising the uniqueness of the cultural object through quality, authenticity and integrity, can offer regional/rural communities not just mere survival but a good quality of life as a cultural and economically sustainable alternative.

## **Alliance of cultural Tourism and the Arts & Crafts**

While France is positioned as one of the premier tourist destinations in the world with approximately 77 million foreign visitors annually and with tourism contributing 15 billion Euros to the French economy annually, it has "not managed to maximise economically its leading tourism position" (French Senate Report, No. 250, 2003). Tourist numbers increased by 1.2% in 2002 over 2001 but tourist spending decreased by 2.4%. Spain, however, achieved a growth in tourism of 2.7%, and saw a 6% increase in tourist spending in this period.

In addition to this worrying trend, tourism was identified as not only a substantial but an essential component to the regional and rural economy in France. However, tourism outcomes differ between regions with those not blessed with remarkable natural or geographic features, significantly disadvantaged. Moreover, many areas of regional France are suffering the loss of traditional agricultural jobs thus requiring special assistance and economic infusions to prevent a social and demographic fracturing and "desertification" of their region.

In 2002 and 2003 colloquiums addressing the state of the French tourism industry were held with the outcomes presented in a report to the French Senate. This provoked agreement at the national and regional level to co-operatively fund, research and develop initiatives to address the problems identified.

A key strategy identified that this paper explores, was the proposal to include, in a more formal and official sense, the arts and crafts within tourism leading ultimately to the unification of the economic, tourism, and arts and crafts spheres. The belief was also endorsed that the fuller development of tourism could reverse the drain from rural areas.

This strategy had as its basis, three key factors. Firstly arts and crafts guilds, co-operatives and artisans exist all over France and importantly in regions where tourism is not a traditional activity. These constitute a valuable network which could be voluntarily redeployed in a balanced strategy of demographic and tourism management.

Secondly the arts and crafts professions are the inheritors of centuries of traditional skills and complex knowledge acquired after long periods of apprenticeship. Although today cultural references are blurred due to the rampant standardisation and mass production of globalisation, there's a growing desire by many for the nostalgia of origin, to comprehend their environment both natural and social, and to reinstate singularity and authenticity, values precisely concentrated in the arts and crafts.

Thirdly, the arts and crafts represent, economically, strong value added activities. Developing and integrating them within a network of tourism offerings can benefit economically the whole collective, creating a new dynamism and providing sustainability for both sectors. This is especially so given they are playing an increasingly significant economic role with the sector exhibiting a 36% increase in employment over the last 20 years well beyond the national employment average. This also highlights the vitality of these professions and the fact that they are being embarked upon by an increasingly younger workforce.

Thus the Senate Report argues the spheres of tourism and the arts and crafts are natural partners capable of creating a synergy which fits well with the new demands of contemporary tourism and promising a mutually profitable partnership for both.

To realise this vision, the Report proposed as an essential primary task the better definition of what constitutes the French touristic offering and how this could be positioned to produce a unique product.

Audits of local and regional potential to identify possible cultural offerings and demand were required as was support for existing and where necessary, re-establishment of arts and crafts activities which embraced the concept of locality, originality and singularity.

The strategy was the creation of arts and crafts pools within existing cultural and heritage trails as well as the development of dedicated arts and crafts trails at the regional level linking sites and their related artisanal activities. It was hoped this would create a kind of label or branding for a region and generate mutually profitable outcomes for both arts and craft practitioners, their associated village/city and greater region. It was noted that such trails have witnessed, over the last 10 years, a continued growth in cities where artistic and artisanal activities have been encouraged. Administrative and financial strategies would also be enacted to encourage the creation of artisan streets and even small villages, that is specific spaces totally dedicated to the arts and crafts professions.

The ultimate objective is the development of trails amalgamating and unifying all the resources available in a region with special focus on the identification, development and inclusion of unique arts and crafts offerings.

Previously discrete activities could be combined creatively encompassing:

- Culture and cultural heritage trails
- Wine and gastronomy
- Festivals and special events
- Arts & craft educational workshops

Such combinations need not compete against each other but rather can produce synergies, cross fertilising and sustaining each other. Such an example would be the gourmand trail organised by Languedoc and Provence jointly. This combines aesthetics and epicure (called 'a table') involving restaurants and other food establishments where all dinner sets tableware, crockery, glasses, linen etc (which may include the work of many artisans) are for sale. Diverse small arts and crafts workshops are also held. This trail takes place every year for an active period of 40 days, (1<sup>st</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> November) and has been a great success from the viewpoint of "wine and food" trail tourism and the arts and crafts professions.

In short the strategy is:

*Looking at going beyond merely visiting heritage sites, churches and museums (although important) it seeks to celebrate every aspect of creation, culture, food, wine, the landscape, activities, the language. It seeks to involve the tourist with locals and make every tourist a cultural explorer and discoverer (Landry cited in Jelincic, 2002).*

Marketing strategies promoting the resulting unique and authentic cultural product and experience were to be developed and aimed at the modern tourist who seeks not merely pleasure but also a desire for knowledge and authenticity.

The overall strategy within an ambitious five year plan requiring full state and regional support, is to create a substantial number of small to medium business enterprises. It was launched in mid 2003 with Arts and Crafts Open Days in 22 regions of France when for three days all arts and crafts workshops, comprising more than 13,000 artisans, opened their doors to the public to showcase their mix of knowledge, skills, techniques and artistic imagination.

This illustrates a key tenet of the strategy with its emphasis on showcasing arts and crafts practitioners engaged in demonstrating their skills and producing, in accessible venues, using traditional methods and materials, their unique, authentic arts and crafts objects. As Etienne Dulin, owner of a highly regarded copper workshop in the village of Villedieu-les-Poeles situated on the newly designated "tin road" between Brittany and Normandy believes, a tourist (or an educated traveller as he prefers to name them) who sees a particular object being fabricated by hand with explanations of the process will look at it with understanding, respect and more to the point, as an object to be acquired. He views his role not only as an authentic artisan/manufacturer but also as a teacher<sup>1</sup> (French Senate Report, No. 250, 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> He has also initiated a gastronomic food/table trail with chefs, cheese makers, chocolate artisans and vigneron working in partnership with ceramicists, glass artisans, woodcarvers and iron artisans.

M. Pierre Chevalier (President of the Société d'encouragement des Métiers d'art) reminded the 2003 French colloquium that the arts and crafts are positioned precisely at the meeting point between the cultural and business spheres, hence the suitability of their assignment to the tourism sector.

The French Senate Report is not alone in recommending that the Arts and Crafts be aligned with tourism and utilised to ensure economic sustainability for disadvantaged regions. The UNESCO report: *Encouraging Arts and Crafts for Sustainable Development* (2003: IV.3.1) also recognises the importance of artisanal activities to tourism, economic growth and social cohesion.

It argues that it has a huge potential to empower deprived populations and indigenous communities, enabling them to invent and shape their future by drawing on arts and crafts professional networks to emphasise "capacity building" for local residents.

A practical example of UNESCO's endorsement of the arts and crafts as a tool of economic sustainability is its Small Business Incubator program for cultural industries launched in the Asia Pacific region (<http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/index-14.html>).

The objective of this initiative is to employ cultural activity as a basic building block for sustainable economic development by promoting the widespread establishment of sustainable small-scale industries utilizing existing but underdeveloped traditional arts and crafts skills.

The program nurtures practitioners through the difficult start-up period and offers training, advice, credit, space and equipment to create necessary entrepreneurial competencies.

The program also has as its objective the validation, preservation, protection and enhancement of indigenous cultural practices thus providing communities with the means to sustain the development gains achieved through the program..

UNESCO has also created a portal to promote quality art, craft and design using new technologies to stimulate creativity and global interactions.

### **THE AUSTRALIAN SITUATION:**

In contrast to the French Senate Report and UNESCO's initiatives, a federal inquiry into the Australian contemporary visual arts and craft sector conducted in 2001 culminated in the production of the Myer Report. This report, while recognising the need to develop sustainability for both individual artists and for the overall arts and crafts sector, suggests this be achieved through increased government funding.

Accordingly the *Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy*, a joint initiative between the federal and Queensland governments, was launched in response to the Myer Report. It provides increased funding of at least \$39 million over four years designed "to support infrastructure and individual artists, expand markets and support indigenous arts and crafts" (*Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts* 2003).

There is no suggestion in either the Myer Report or the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy that the building of strategic alliances between tourism and the arts and crafts sectors could be a means of achieving economic sustainability.

It is the argument of this paper that the ideas put forward in the French Senate Report offer perhaps a more viable means of achieving both a sustainable future for rural and regional Australia and for the arts and craft sector. Moreover, in an environment supportive of increased funding, Australia should seize the opportunity to explore the development of such alliances which ultimately could provide the means for some arts and crafts professionals to move beyond a reliance on government funding.

There are already some Australian examples which parallel the French initiatives. Tasmania has developed numerous tourist trails including:

- Tasmania Wine and Food: Cellar Door & Farm Gate Guide
- Art & Design Trail
- The Huon Trail
- The Heritage Highway
- Great Nature Trail
- Wildlife trails

These all come with route maps marking the various attractions available, however, there is only limited inclusion of the activities of arts and crafts professions and overall the development of arts and crafts trails and offerings are embryonic in comparison with the other trails on offer.

The Queensland government has adopted in its *Creative Queensland* initiative, cultural tourism as a strategy "to enhance regional Queensland's development by showcasing a region's distinct and unique cultural heritage and natural assets" (Creative Queensland Progress Report, 2003:7). It has funded 68 Cultural Tourism Incentive Program projects valued at \$3 million to 2003. Nonetheless, while recognising the vast size of Queensland and the challenges that it presents for the development of regional tourism trails, there remains a major potential for synergies between the tourism and arts and crafts sectors to be encouraged and developed.

Queensland has in existence a network of cultural service organisations, arts and cultural advisory committees (e.g. RADF), cultural venues as well as Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Boards. These represent a basic infrastructure which could be utilised to this end.

Unfortunately there is insufficient time in this paper to analyse the various cultural and tourism policies throughout Australia nor canvass all the examples of arts and crafts tourism offerings Australia wide. Such an audit will be the subject of my future research.

### **ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES:**

The Tourism Forecasting Council predicts international visitor arrivals to Australia will grow at an average annual rate of 6.6% over the next 10 years reaching 9.4 million international visitors by 2010. Tourism, already a significant economic force in Australia, is very much a growth industry, and has a multiplier effect in the local economy.

Supporting the amalgamation of the tourism and the arts and craft spheres is the *Cultural Tourism in Australia* (1999) Report which notes:

*There is a substantial market for Australian art and craft products among international visitors. Forty-one per cent of all international visitors who had some shopping expenditure bought art or craft items during their trip, adding substantially to the export side of Australia's balance of payments (Buchanan,1997:18).*

Internationally tourism now provides 10% of world employment, 12% of GDP and is predicted to provide up to 100 million new jobs by 2010. Embracing the arts and crafts sphere will validate rural artists and craft practitioners as partners with cultural and heritage tourism throughout Australia. Moreover, arts and crafts practitioners could be funded in regional and rural areas with a view to establishing 'artist and artisan colonies' (as exemplified by the village of St. Paul de Vence in Provence). Such policies would also provide opportunities to increase and preserve the quality, quantity and diversity of local cultures thus creating 'brand recognition' artefacts.

The extension of the tourist season and the geographical base beyond the beach to rural and remote regions through the arts and crafts could create sustainable economies through year-round tourist options. It could provide insurance against tourism downturns due to terrorism, pilot strikes, etc., and support existing agricultural enterprises through farm stays and B & B's. It could also provide employment opportunities for women, youth and post-retirees. This could in turn assist social cohesion and encourage more social interaction for local people enabling regional towns to formulate and take control of their future.

Arts and crafts Cultural Tourism needs to attract and foster entrepreneurial partnerships and the development of niche and micro business markets. Job creation, diversity and retention would then contribute to the growth of other economic activities in rural areas (i.e. the multiplier effect) as well as increasing tax and export revenues.

Thus, Arts and Crafts Trails could be an appropriate tool to revitalise declining rural areas ensuring a sustainable future.

Other regions throughout the world have recognised these benefits with the Appalachian Regional Commission[2001], for example, arguing that

*Tourism and craft present the best direction for the future. No other industries offer such flexibility for growth in all levels of employment, from entry level to professional to part-time, post retirement. Tourism and craft rely on unique, indigenous resources and people to sustain local economies. They are not subject to industrial moves across borders or oceans.*

To create a successful marriage of arts and crafts with tourism will require collective harmony between the region, the community and the visitor. Fixed in the reality of the environment, such trails must be a reflection of the market demand.

Success will require:

- Preliminary design and marketing research;
- Awareness of the correct treatment of distinctive cultural resources;

- Access to expert advice in heritage resource management, tourism planning and development;
- The development of new skills;
- Genuine consultation with the local community to allow for the participation of a range of interest groups; and
- The creation of Quality fulfilling jobs for local residents.

In order to avoid or at least minimise the unfavourable effects on physical, economic, social and cultural resources and negative impacts on the host communities, unrealistic expectation and inappropriate development need to be guarded against.

In this regard, consideration should be given to the formation of a body such as a 'trails consortium' for its development and promotion.

In Europe while tourism is increasingly seen as a possible partner for trail development and sustainable tourism, there still is a tendency, France's attempts notwithstanding, to devise and develop distinct, discrete trails rather than drawing upon all the resources of a region.

## **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, there are many parallels between the French and the Australian situation. As with France our rural and regional areas have experienced the loss of traditional agricultural jobs and key infrastructure. They have experienced social and demographic fracturing and many of these regions attract minimal tourists given their geographical situation far away from key tourist routes and destinations. Australia also faces the challenge of reaching an increasingly diverse and sophisticated tourist population.

Ultimately this paper is not simply about producing touristic arts and crafts trails but about encompassing inspired combinations of previously discrete tourism spheres within non-competitive, mutually supportive synergies. Fundamentally it is about rural and regional economic, cultural, social and ecological sustainability and revitalisation. This it has been suggested can be achieved through drawing upon the opportunities provided in harnessing the singularity, uniqueness and authenticity offered by arts and crafts object/product especially in non urban, non traditional tourist, and disadvantaged (tourist) areas. Ultimately such events and initiatives need to be part of a defined overall strategy linking trails and regions and amalgamating the tourism, arts and crafts, heritage and cultural spheres.

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