

Soapbox Feature – The Mercury Newspaper -
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The Creative State.

Recently, by chance I met up with an old friend. Max (not his real name) was a skilled tradesperson who once worked with me on a major construction project in the state's south. This time however our meeting was not a happy occasion. Now in his 40's, broke and unable to find work in the local building industry he was reluctantly moving back to New Zealand, whence he came.

Of the near 200 people who relocated to Tasmania to work on that project in the early 2000's, nearly all have left the state. Some were temporary contractors, some made homes here; I was one of those people and to my knowledge only four of us remain.

So here is the problem we face in Tasmania. With our post GFC economy unravelling,

major industries facing stress and Australia's worst unemployment figures, where can we turn to glean some hope for our future?

The Mining Industry, the Forestry Industry and the Housing Industry may be struggling, but what about *Creative* Industry? You may not know it, but the clothes you wear, the apps on your phone, the shows you enjoy and the art on your wall all stem from this sector. In fact, "Creative Industry" officially includes marketing, architecture, design (graphic, product, fashion, environment), radio, film, television, digital content, music, performing arts, visual arts, photography, publishing, software and writing. According to Professor Terry Flew of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI), Australia's Creative Industries are worth an estimated \$30 Billion per annum and employ about 5% of the national workforce. These industries are high growth, and eminently suited to our culture and way of life in Tasmania.

It is interesting to look at how this sector is being embraced in other countries post the Global Financial Crisis. In the UK Creative Industries are estimated to be worth A\$59 Billion per annum. The UK has a Minister for

Creative Industries who this year visited areas throughout Asia, including the boom regions of South Korea and Taiwan to promote British expertise in the sector. It is clear that the UK takes the export potential of its Creative Industry very seriously.

New Zealand has a long history of Creative Industry engagement and export. Consider the successes of their various musicians, film productions and design-lead brands such as Fisher and Paykel. New Zealand is an island nation with a tiny population of only about 4.4 Million people, yet two of the six highest grossing films of all time (Avatar and Lord of the Rings) were filmed there. In 2006 the New Zealand Creative Industry sector was generating 3.3% of the nation's total GDP, a figure worth NZ\$5.1 Billion.

It is well known that in 2008 the Icelandic economy was reduced to a smoking hole thanks to the outrageous failings of its financial sector. This economy however is now recovering on the back of a Creative Industry renaissance lead by the actions of its Federation of Creative Industries, the Samtök Skapandi Greina (SSG). This organisation lobbied government to investment in Creative Industry development. With their economy in

tatters the Icelanders realised that the most effective way to provide economic stimulation was to promote creative enterprise.

A year after the crisis SSG spokesperson Ása Rikhardsdóttir stated, “Traditionally the [government funding] goes towards stimulating conventional sectors. The creative industries have high demand for labour force, which means that it is a sector that can easily stimulate high employment, as opposed to building aluminium smelters or dams in which there is a high concentration of labour while it’s been built but once it is ready, the need drops considerably. We want to be a negotiating partner in defining the economic future of this country.”

Tasmania needs its own SSG style Creative Federation and last year I joined a volunteer committee dedicated to aligning and promoting the Creative Industries in Tasmania. This group, provisionally named the Tasmanian Creative Industries Council (TCIC) has received a positive reception from all three major political parties, local governments and industry organisations both inside and outside the sector. Most understand that these industries drive innovation, entrepreneurialism and cultural

development and agree that the sector needs a collective voice.

Recently the NSW State Government produced a 10 year Creative Industry Action Plan for the state. This plan was released in June this year and presents a clear interpretation of the current value of the NSW Creative Industries and their future economic impact. The TCIC believes that the Tasmanian Government should perform a similar investigation here. Furthermore, given the potential of these industries, any future Tasmanian Government should consider the inclusion of a Minister for Creative Industry in its cabinet.

Where do we find creativity? We find it in experimentation, in bold thinking and freedom of expression; we find it in art. In Tasmania the arts are often associated with tourism, but actually the benefits of artistic endeavour go much further than that. Disney Pixar, Wingnut Films (Lord of the Rings) and Apple Corporation are all major enterprises built on the creative work of artists. A society that values artistic thinking also nurtures creativity, and a creative society will prosper.

My friend Max needed someone creative to provide him with a job. Creative Industry development is good policy and Tasmanian politicians on all sides of politics would be well advised to address it overtly heading into the upcoming elections.