



Large screens as creative clusters



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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by situating the large screen in Melbourne as part of the industrial cluster development of the Southbank cultural precinct. It examines urban regeneration and cultural policies to map the politics of its spatial geography of agglomeration. It further explores the role of networked screen in the formation of a transnational creative cluster. Using a telematic large screen event staged across Melbourne and Seoul, the paper evaluates the responses of audiences to examine the politics of cultural and civic engagement. While scholarships on creative clusters predominantly focus on the new value chain of industrial and commercial production that arises as a result of agglomeration, this paper argues that the large screen possesses the capacity not only to invigorate public participation, but as a transnational creative cluster, the networked large screen also possesses the potential to enhance the quality of intercultural communication between Asia and Australia.

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Introduction

In the last 10 years, Melbourne, Australia, has grown from a garden state to a city of culture. Key to this is the urban regeneration and expansion of the downtown Southbank cultural precinct. At the heart of this creative cluster is the country's first large public screen and the city's revamped civic centre housed in Federation Square. This paper shows the development of this cluster through creative city policy and planning implementations, and examines the role of the large screen in fostering cultural citizenship, social engagement and civic participation. We demonstrate this capacity through a telematic large screen event staged at Federation Square conducted as part of our five-year Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project.¹

The first section critically introduces the creative cluster of the Southbank precinct by examining urban regeneration

and cultural policies, and mapping its politics of spatial agglomeration and civic engagement. The second section examines the role of large screens in their shift from a broadcast to public communication model, and considers the networked screen as an example of a transnational creative cluster. The third section introduces a large screen event staged by our project and evaluates the responses of audiences to examine the quality of local and cross-cultural engagement.

Extending scholarship on creative clusters that predominantly focus on the new value chain of industrial and commercial production that arises as a result of agglomeration (e.g., Porter, 1990; Pratt, 2004), and engaging cluster theory and urban regeneration critiques on the expediency of culture (Yudice, 2003), this paper argues that the large screen possesses the capacity not only to invigorate public participation, but as a transnational creative cluster, the networked large screen also possesses the potential to enhance intercultural communication. Connecting across Australia and Asia, this transnational cluster adds to an emergent regional culture distinct from normative studies of media ecologies, such as the North–South West Coast film concentration between Los Angeles and Vancouver (Evans & Foord, 2005), or the East–West media capital between China and Hollywood (Curtin, 2007).

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From creative nation to creative Australia: The development of Melbourne's Southbank Cluster

Since Porter's (1990) seminal study on how the spatial agglomeration of business clusters can achieve economic efficiency, cluster studies have developed to highlight the specificity of various forms and objectives, as well as intervene in the critique of business, culture, people and resource. The creative cluster in the cultural sector is perhaps, by far, the fastest spatial form that has arisen in recent decades as a result of the embrace of the creative city economic agenda that had catalysed culture-led urban regeneration.

Defined as "a linked grouping of creative industries, firms or cultural activities which has a spatial concentration and significant growth potential" (Evans & Foord, 2005: 26), creative clusters have emerged as part of city revitalization projects connecting cultural facilities to new forms of geographies, entrepreneurship, social inclusion and civic engagement. Spatial proximity is important for some clusters, especially small or micro businesses, such as craft or digital work, and those organized around short-term projects or flexible modes of labour. As Scott (2000) suggests, creative clusters have three benefits: they reduce costs, increase the circulation of capital and information, and enhance sociality. These benefits extend Porter's business cluster model, which has been criticized for ignoring non-economic factors, such as the spatial and local contexts of social networks, governance and regulation which shape industries (Pratt, 2004).

The arts have been credited as a key factor in regenerating the life of cities, introducing new uses to the ideas of the public, including public art and street life as well as cultivating public participation. Highlighting how built environments and cultural repositories have become the loci for a new city economy, Montgomery coins the concept of 'city dynamics' to refer to these interrelations thus: "a set of interlocking processes of economic and cultural development, the evolution and design of the built form, city governance and the impact of technology on all these" (Montgomery, 2007: xxii). Clusters sit at the core of this set of interrelations, as the "creative-cultural platform of the creative city" (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2007: 4. *Italics in original*). The following examines the large screen at Federation Square as part of the creative cluster of Southbank's cultural precinct by critically considering its types of creativity, scale and relations of proximity, and political-economic setting.

Federation Square sits at the intersection between Flinders and Swanston Streets, two of the major arterials in the southern grid of the city. It was built over disused rail yards and abandoned concrete towers formerly occupied by the Gas and Fuel Corporation and Victorian Employees Federation. Located opposite the city's central railway station and a historic church, the architecture's postmodern fractal façade of sandstone, zinc and glass was controversial. While some lamented its anachronistic design, others lauded the potential of its new urbanism to engage the user in a new experience of critical spatiality (MacCarthy, Crist, Hartoonian, & Stanhope, 2003; Rice, 2005; Rundle, 2002). The complex's meandering walkways followed the style of the city's iconic laneways but functioned as an antidote

to the square grid of the major streets. The 38.5 square meters screen, the first of its kind in Australia, sits in the southern front of the complex overlooking the Yarra River and the iconic Princess Bridge. In the complex are other mixed-sized LED and LCD screens, in the foyers and along its corridors and escalators.

When the Square was conceived, Australia was in the throes of cultural revitalization. In 1994, Australia released its first cultural policy statement, *Creative Nation* (Department of Communication, 1994). Amongst its innovations is the stress on multiculturalism and indigeneity as central to the nation's cultural heritage, as well as the focus on new managerial entrepreneurship and a shift of policy from supply to demand (Radbourne, 1997). Key to these is the emphasis on the creativity of new media technologies. Melbourne followed in this agenda with large-scale building projects, such as the interactive Melbourne Museum and an urban renewal of the riverside precinct. Amongst these developments is the installation of the large screen at Federation Square. Its state policy, *Arts 21*, captured by slogan, Victoria "On the Move," matched the zeitgeist that celebrated the new mobile experiences of the global city. Its strategic aims were to provide world-class facilities with a diversity of programming that would lead the state into the information age and deliver Australia to the world through customer-focused marketing (Stevenson, 2000). In 2003, these aims were further harnessed in an updated state policy, *Creative Capacity +*, that aimed to build creative communities out of these amenities (Arts Victoria, 2003). These aims are maintained with the release of Australia's second cultural policy, *Creative Australia*, in April 2013. Like *Creative Nation*, *Creative Australia* (2013) conceives of the arts and culture through economic and social dividends.

In the last five years, Federation Square's downtown precinct has expanded with the revitalization of the Southbank cultural precinct. Southbank stretches along and behind the southern bank of the Yarra River, and begins after the Princess Bridge crossing. It was once an industrial area, but now houses the theatres of the Melbourne Arts Centre, with its iconic spire, which includes the newly renovated AU\$135.5m Hamer Hall (opened in 2012), National Gallery of Victoria, The Australian Ballet, The Australian Ballet School, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne Recital Centre, Melbourne Theatre Company, Chunky Move, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and The Malthouse Theatre. These buildings house multiple theatres, concert halls and galleries covering extensive international art collections, contemporary theatre, dance, chamber and small ensemble music-making, and the country's leading visual and performing arts training center. On the weekends, the Arts Centre stages a Sunday market with more than 150 stalls selling Australian-made arts and craft, and further south the road, St John's Lutheran Church also conducts a diverse program of arts and music. Abutting these buildings is also the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the country's main public broadcaster, and Channel 7, a commercial free-to-air television station. Across the main road is Sidney Myer Music Bowl, a large outdoor performance venue famed for its summertime concerts (See Fig. 1 below).

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