

**“How are Culture and Economics related?
Discuss in terms of Australia.”**

Culture and economics are two of the major fabrics of society, not only in Australia, but throughout the world. Without culture, there would be no distinctions between the peoples of one country and the peoples of another. Without the study of economics, this culture could not be continued. Hence, culture and economics are integral and inter-related parts of any society.

There are many ways to define culture and economics, just as there are many ways to relate culture and economics to one another. Economics is “the study of how decisions are made, or should be made, by individuals, groups and governments about the use of resources and the distribution of goods and services that are obtained from those resources,” (Bennett, 1993, p.4).

From its origins as a convict settlement, Australia’s economy has grown to be one of the strongest in the world. “With its abundant physical resources, Australia has enjoyed a high standard of living since the nineteenth century. It has made a comparatively large investment in social infrastructure, including education, training, health and transport,” (Australian Government, Department of Affairs and Trade, 2004).

The ‘high standard of living’, including many cultural aspects (such as health, education, employment and tourism) that Australians have enjoyed since the nineteenth century is just one way in which culture and economics are related.

To understand how culture and economics are related, it is first imperative to understand what culture is. Generally speaking, culture is, “...the social production of meaning and understanding, whether in the inter-personal

and practical organisation of daily routines or in broader institutional and ideological structures,” (Cunningham, 1992, p.vii).

To define Australian Culture, however, is a more difficult task, as our culture has changed, and no doubt will continue to change, over time. Cunningham states that “ ‘Cultural Identity’ [involves] some sense of Australianness, of our nationalism as a distinct form of social organisation,” (Cunningham, 1992, p.vii).

Ask citizens of other nations what their image of Australia is, and commonly you will hear words like “kangaroos”, “koalas”, “bushrangers”, “damper”, “lamingtons” and of course Australia’s famous “vegemite”. But what do bushrangers have to do with the economy?

To some, Australian bushranger Ned Kelly is still the essence of what it means to be Australian: determination, mateship and a little larrikinism. To others, he is nothing more than a thief and a liar. But no matter what be the opinion one holds of Ned, it is irrefutable that Ned Kelly and his legacy are part of the culture of Australia.

Ned Kelly’s legend still lives on today in Australia and throughout the world. Each year, thousands of tourists visit the town of Glenrowan in Victoria, famous for the ‘last stand’ of the Kelly Gang. This fragment of our culture is shared with pride by some, and shame by others. However, one thing is indisputable, and that is the economic benefit that this tourist attraction brings to the Victorian Government each year. This example clearly exhibits the link between culture and the economy.

The link between economics and culture can be made in so many ways. One of the most well known ways is through Australia’s annual Australia Day Festival, held on January 26 each year. While this is promoted to be a celebration of Australia’s culture (with the slogan “celebrate what’s great”), the Australian Government also reaps a substantial economic benefit from

the celebrations. Whether it is directly through takings on the day or indirectly through tourists travelling to take part in the celebrations, it is an undeniable fact that Australia's culture and economy are both prominent beneficiaries of the Australia Day Festival.

Tourism in general is a prime example of the link between culture and the economy. Any Australian tourist attraction that highlights Australian culture is redeeming economic benefit from our culture. Whether it is the Glenrowan Inn, the Big Pineapple, the Big Apple, the Big Banana, the Stockman's Hall of Fame, the Sydney Harbour Bridge or the Sydney Opera House, the outcome is the same. Various aspects of Australia's culture are being celebrated through the establishment and continuance of these businesses, with the dual benefit of providing a greater boost to the economy, through proceeds taken and spin-off benefits such as jobs created from these businesses.

"In 2001-02, tourism gross value added was \$26.5b, contributing 4.1% to total industry gross value added," (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). This statistic proves the vital link between tourism (which displays and compliments our culture) and the positive benefit to Australia's economy.

As well as providing a vast economic boost to Australia's economy, tourism also provides a vast boost to Australia's employment statistics. "In 2001-02 tourism directly generated 549,000 jobs," (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

"An estimated 900 000 people undertake some paid work in culture and leisure activities each year with 1.6 million undertaking unpaid work," (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004). Through the creation of jobs, tourism has boosted the economy, and boosted the standard of living for Australians. With more Australians being able to get jobs in more cultural industries, this in turn means a stronger economy,

and further income for those undertaking the work to spend on their own individual cultural activities.

Another part of Australia's culture and national identity is multiculturalism. "Ever since white settlement, the character of Australian society has been shaped and re-shaped by successive waves of immigration," (Graetz, 1994, p.78). Australian culture has been shaped, and will continue to be shaped, by immigrants, choosing, for many different reasons, to come and join the Australian way of life.

Multiculturalism benefits Australia in many ways, not only culturally, but also economically. "In 2004, Australia's population has grown to more than 20 million, it is home to people from more than 200 countries and it has an enviable international reputation for its diversity and tolerance," (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004).

Multiculturalism and diversity have, over time, become part of Australia's culture.

"Australia is a tolerant and inclusive society, a nation built by people from many different backgrounds. Cultural diversity has become a touchstone of its national identity," (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004). It is this tolerance that has led to the growth of a nation, built on the backs of European settlers. Through the acceptance of a number of different cultures, Australia's culture has also changed, expanding to take into account the diversity of other nations.

"There is much evidence to suggest that ethnicity is still an important source of social, cultural and national identity today," (Graetz, 1994, p.79).

Multiculturalism has brought about a significant boost to Australia's economy, gaining more revenue from a greater population, creating more jobs, boosting the housing market, and seeing larger numbers of children attending schools and adults paying for a profession through tertiary

institutions. Through these and many other ways, multiculturalism binds economy and culture together.

Interest rates and inflation are an integral part of the Australian economy. Interest rates affect our savings and they also affect our loans. If interest rates go up, so do our savings, which leads to a better quality of life. A better quality of life allows us to indulge ourselves in more Australian culture, in terms of music, art, fashion and the like. However, a rise in interest rates will significantly affect those who are chasing the “Australian Dream” to own their own home. In 2003 the average loan in Australia taken out for a home was equal to \$187 542 (Real Estate Institute of Australia, 2003). A rise in interest rates would see a rise in payments that need to be met and therefore, a decrease in quality of life. Therefore, once more, economy and culture are related, as Australia’s cultural dream is to own your own home, however, the economic situation in the country at the time has a vast impact on one’s ability to achieve that dream.

The rate of imports and exports in Australia affects both Australia’s economy and its culture. Many don’t realise that the goods that they buy each day have a vast impact on the state of the Australian economy. Much of the goods provided in Australia are a result of trade agreements with other countries, and are actually products imported from overseas. Take Australia’s vehicle market for example. How many vehicles can one name that are manufactured in Australia, from Australian parts? If one is to be pedantic about it, there really aren’t any. However, Ford and Holden have taken the title of the Australian vehicles.

Cars are a part of the Australian way of life. With the vast distances between point A and point B, and the differing types of terrain that need to be traveled across, vehicles (cars, 4WD’s, utilities) have become instilled in Australia’s culture. Therefore, having a car in Australia is considered an essential, whereas in countries such as China and Vietnam, bikes are considered the common mode of transportation. Bearing this in mind, it is

the next logical step to assume that everybody must buy a certain type of vehicle from somewhere. There are many makes of vehicle to choose from – Mitsubishi, Toyota, Nissan, Kia, Hyundai, Daewoo, Mercedes, BMW, Peugeot, Ford and Holden. Out of all these, as stated earlier, Ford and Holden are the only two that can be considered remotely Australian.

The rest of the cars on the market are imports, vehicles transported from other countries for sale on the Australian market. “Australia's exports of cultural goods and services have grown steadily in recent years, to total \$751 million in 2000 - 01, of which \$273 million was for cultural services, and \$478 million for cultural goods,” (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004). As these imports have a significant effect on the Australian economy, it can be stated that there is a clear link between culture (Australia’s use of cars for transportation) and the economy (the effect of imports on Australia’s economy).

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a prime example of how culture and economy are inter-related. “It [the Mardi Gras] is now the biggest event on the Australian calendar drawing a larger crowd than any other event,” (Nicoll, 2001, p.191). The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a month long festival, held each year in Sydney. The Mardi Gras is a celebration unlike any other, incorporating vast elements of culture; including song, dance, art, and fashion, just to name a few. “Mardi Gras is unique among Australian festivals and special events in using celebration and the arts to promote community, political and social objectives...It is a purely Australian concept,” (Nicoll, 2001, p.191).

The Mardi Gras celebrates Australia’s culture of diversity, as well as providing economic benefit to the country. “Because it generates in excess of \$15 million dollars nationwide, Mardi Gras has successfully attracted the support of both corporate and government sponsors” (Nicoll, 2001, p.190).

Australia also benefits in other ways (economically) from the Mardi Gras. Firstly, there are the thousands of tourists who come to take part, or just to watch, the spectacular. Then there are the corporate sponsors (mentioned above) that all provide funds to make the event even more spectacular. Then there is the revenue from the event when it is televised, nation-wide.

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a perfect example of how culture and economics are related, showcasing culture, cultural diversity and bringing tourism and economic benefits to Australia as well.

As has been stated in the information above, it has been clearly proven that Australian culture is strongly linked to the state of the Australian economy. Without Australian culture, the Australian economy would struggle, creating vast pressure on other areas of the economy to make up for the loss. Without the Australian economy to support the Australian way of life, Australia's cultural system as it is known today would cease to be. Therefore, it is clear, that the Australian economy and Australia's culture are dependent on each other in a myriad of ways, only some of which were mentioned in the above essay.