The Value of Humanities Research in Regional Australia

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We are two academics at Flinders University in South Australia who have been involved with the Australasian Consortium of Humanities Researchers and Centres (ACHRC)—as it is now named—for over a decade. Robert, in mid-career as a literary scholar and research leader, launched the network in 2011, while Tully began working for the organisation as an administrator in the years between finishing her PhD and commencing her first full-time lecturer position, balancing the role with postdocs and part-time contracts. Modelled on the international Consortium of Humanities Centres and Institutes (CHCI), the ACHRC met annually at different institutions around Australia and New Zealand. It advocated for better outcomes for humanities research and staff, diffused strategic knowledge for people of all career stages, and networked centre administrators. We concentrated on providing professional development that could be hard to get at one's own institution given the distinctive and sometimes isolated nature of humanities research centres in their own institutions and the lack of knowledge about the Humanities expressed by many in our universities' senior executive roles. We connected with the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australian Research Council, the Council for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS), and the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (DASSH); we also investigated the nuances of the relationship between humanities scholars and the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector. The consortium's main vehicle has been

© *Australian Humanities Review* 73 (February 2025). ISSN: 1325 8338

face-to-face discussion at annual meetings and symposia on topics of practical and strategic relevance to getting humanities research—broadly defined—done in a changing and often hostile environment.

We ran with a broad definition of the humanities, encouraging engagement from researchers in creative arts and social sciences, especially its qualitative wing. The ACHRC's definition of the humanities was and remains a fuzzy one, reverse-engineered from the interests of those who engage in our activities rather than imposed with categorical or conceptual clarity. Thus, there will be some variety in whether we write humanities, HASS (for Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences) or humanities and creative arts in the essay that follows, but all those terms should be considered as part of a continuous field in pragmatic terms. This breadth matches particularly well the relatively unsiloed status of humanities research and teaching in regional institutions, where the classic departmental structures have long given way to schools and colleges where instead a sociologist, a literary scholar, and a visual artist may all be direct colleagues.

At the second ACHRC meeting, held at the University of Western Australia in 2013 we, as the then director and executive officer of the consortium, were approached by Jane Mummery of Federation University, Ballarat with respect to relevance or otherwise of parts of the program to her context. She made the case that the experience of humanities researchers and centres in regional universities was very different to that of those in the Group of Eight universities or even in the non-Group of Eight metropolitan universities. Jane suggested that we do something through the Consortium for researchers in regional universities and in research environments that differed from those enjoyed by more established research centres in the larger universities. It was a very good idea and has born constant fruit since Jane hosted the first 'Humanities in the Regions' symposium at Federation University in Ballarat, in 2014.

Thus was born the most successful of the ACHRC's several member initiatives. We started with a double meeting approach—an ACHRC meeting in a capital city followed by a Humanities in the Regions meeting at a nearby regional city. After that we decoupled the meetings temporally and geographically. We called them meetings, but they were symposia with talks, roundtables, pre-meetings focused on how to get centre-based research in the humanities and creative arts disciplines done. We operated always with a broad definition of centre—from a well-funded ongoing research institute or even Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence like the Centre for the History of Emotions to initiatives developed on zero funding by colleagues who wanted to bring visibility to a concentration in research. Some participants aspired to have centres, by navigating their university's centres and institutes policies which are always written with science-based disciplines and outcomes in mind. Others were less

ambitious or more realistic, aspiring to the status of initiative, cluster, or theme, according to the nomenclature *du jour* at their place. The underlying ambition was to create opportunities for colleagues and postgraduate students to connect to ongoing important research with visibility in some form or other.

The focus of our meetings was always less about big intellectual ideas in the humanities and more about the mortar that connects our disciplinary bricks together—nationally, regionally, and within our institutions. It was about the 'how' of research in our disciplines and in between them rather than the 'what' of research. COVID interrupted the face-to-face element integral to the meetings, and the networks and rhythms are yet to be fully restored. At the same time, there are new centres and institutes facing new and old problems at least some of which can be solved or at least alleviated through sharing of knowledge and strategy, through co-thinking and collaboration. It is on our intensive experience of the decade of engagement with these lively and regular events, and the people and perspectives shared through and between them, that this overview of issues for regional research is based.

The authors' other relevant source of expertise is the work we have done (with Professor Julian Meyrick, now of Griffith University) on the problems of communicating value in arts and culture, including longitudinal value (Meyrick et al.; Phiddian et al.). Though the issues confronting HASS-based research are not identical to those of the arts and cultural sector, there is much overlap, as we shall elaborate below. Longitudinal value works through institutions and sustained commitment to programs and people. It is important, but not easily made visible in the metrics that presently dominate the KPI culture of Australian universities. Currently, the short-term corporate focus on agility and change compounds this blindness, and timelines of value too often shrink to the current budget cycle. The primary purpose of universities is, almost universally, to be permanent institutions in their city or region. While this cannot mean that nothing should ever change, it does mean that decisions about long-term structures and resourcing should take the deeper issues of purpose into account, and not be governed unduly by the interests of the moment. Crises should be addressed with this purpose in mind, not—as some managers seem to assume, as an opportunity to make changes and maximise 'disruption'. Indeed, it is our contention that this balance between longitudinal value and what might be called 'dashboard' value is not being well struck in Australian universities, or in corporate life more widely, as our attention, below, to some heterodox economic perspectives will argue. The fate of humanities research in regional universities is an especially clear illustration ('a canary in the coal-mine') for these wider problems.

Regional Humanities Research—Achievements and Headwinds

In an assessment of longitudinal value in higher education research, it is necessary to take the shaping power institutional histories into account. Some of the most major contributions to scholarship and public understanding of Australian cultural life and memory have been fostered at universities outside the state and territory capitals. An incomplete list includes Russel Ward's work on *The Australian Legend* (1958), done at the University of New England in Armidale NSW; Eddie Koiki Mabo, Henry Reynolds, and Noel Loos' work on Aboriginal land rights and ownership, done at James Cook University in Townsville; the research Centre for Colonialism and its Aftermath at the University of Tasmania has played an important role in the transformation of the understanding of coloniality in Tasmania and around the world; and Lyndall Ryan and a team at the University of Newcastle NSW, who have given us the Massacre Map that fundamentally contests the passive metaphor of 'white settlement'. Would this work have been done by humanities researchers based in capital city universities? Perhaps. But the fact remains that these projects did occur beyond the city limits and were imbedded in the locations from which they emerged. They bespeak new and complex understandings of country that have affected the nation in ways that have enduring cultural value.

As is generally the case with the HASS disciplines, this is not simple value adding, as regionally based research on crop yields might be. Cultural value is a complicated equation, as it includes more than the dollars generated by festivals, exhibitions, and publications in the creative industries. Those are important, but so are the searching questions and revisions of a nation's narratives that these long-considered regional contributions to the national discussion have provided. The ideas, perspectives, and debates that these regionally based researchers have launched into the national conversation have value and impact, in a way that cannot be entirely reduced to a metric. We would be a diminished country without them, but by how much is a matter of judgment rather than mensuration.

Now that the tide in university research policy has been running hard for two or three decades in the direction of internationalisation and metrics that reward the scale of Group of Eight universities much more than regional ones, there are two hard questions to be answered: Is there still a value to having university-based research occurring outside the major population centres? If so, is attention to the humanities an essential or optional part of that mix?

Universities have existed in Australia since 1850 (University of Sydney), then took some decades to complete the set of state capitals with the University of Western

Australia established in 1911.[1] For about a century (with the exception of the University of New England, est. 1938) they drew students from all over their states to inner-city campuses. The numbers were small as the perceived need for university education was small. They were ivory towers to which pilgrim scholars came from all over their states, to be inducted into a small tertiary-educated elite. The humanities formed a central pillar of these institutions and the educations they provided in this era, as it was in universities throughout the Eurocentric world. 'Scholarly practices of a type today labeled "humanities" have been an essential part of the process of knowledge making ever since human inquisitiveness sought to enhance our understanding of the world and ourselves' write Rens Bod, Julia Kursell, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn in their introduction to the inaugural issue of *History of Humanities*, while Stefan Collini is one chronicler of how this image of the university has been put under stress in the face recent managerial or neoliberal fashions (Collini, *What Are Universities For?*; Collini, *Speaking of Universities*).

One abiding Australian quirk has always been the unusually strong focus on degrees that provided credentials for the professions; here university education was always a bit more instrumentalist and attached to training than was the perceived mothership of the British system, and this has only intensified in the neoliberal era. Nor has it ever had the US tradition of a generalist liberal arts first degree before entry into postgraduate professional streams. Even in the 'good old days', Arts faculties in Australia have nearly always been more marginal elements of the university than they are in the systems we most often compare ourselves to (the most plausible exception being the Australian National University).

The University of New England is unique in having been set up outside a major city before World War II, and consequently it long retained some of the forms and attitudes of the oldest institutions, including the only program in Latin and Greek Classics outside a capital city. It was, however, the major wave of university-building from 1960 that pushed universities into the suburbs of the major cities (like Flinders) and into major regional centres like Townsville, Wollongong, and Newcastle.[2] These were designed as new and comprehensive universities (though they often started without the high-prestige professional degrees like medicine and law), and large Bachelor of Arts programs were integral to their missions. Indeed, the universities of this era were posited on the assumption that the largest numbers of students throughout the Australian system would take either a BA or

[1] ANU (1929/1946/1961) is always anomalous, and the last capital city to get a university was Darwin, with Charles Darwin University, in 2003, effectively part of the third wave of regional universities.

[2] Deakin University was initially based in Geelong, but amalgamations with Melbourne institutions in the 1990s and the spread of the Greater Melbourne area to largely include Geelong means that it does not act consistently as a regional university, but more like a metropolitan university with a strong regional arm.

a BSc. With the advent of many new professional degrees (for example, Education, Business Studies, and Nursing), and in a smaller way developments in Creative Arts, those days are long gone.

The third wave of new universities creation in the 1990s and since saw universities of technology in the major cities and an array of regional universities: Charles Sturt University, University of Southern Queensland, Central Queensland University, Federation University, Southern Cross University, University of the Sunshine Coast, and Charles Darwin University.[3] Metropolitan universities also developed or merged with regional campuses, like La Trobe through central Victoria and Griffith on the Gold Coast. The most consistent element of this wave is that the new universities were created by the amalgamation of existing institutions: Colleges of Advanced Education, technical and teachers' colleges, and so on. The ideas of a broad liberal arts education and of curiosity-based research in social and cultural issues were perhaps not perceived as important to these institutions as was the aim to meet qualification standards across the increased range of professions needed for the twenty-first-century economy. The ancestor institutions had all been focused on training and practical qualifications. This new wave of universities carried much of this pragmatic ethos into the teaching programs and the research their new status required but which they were seldom adequately funded to undertake.

It is important to recognise that most regional universities in Australia (particularly those of the third wave) have lacked a deep commitment to research in the culture of their regions as core business. This is not to deny that fine efforts have been made. It is, however, to assert that there has never been the same gravitational pull to cultural research as has exists in the Group of Eight universities. This is important because, now the tide is running against HASS in the Australian system generally, the anchors in regional institutions may be the shallowest.

The current corporate drivers in the Australian system are not auspicious, particularly in relation to locally-flavoured research. This is a problem for Australian cultural topics generally, not just rural and regional ones. Unlike the history and culture in the United States and Europe, Australia does not count as 'international', and research focused on it has trouble getting into the prestigious 'international' journals and publishing houses for categorical rather than quality reasons. It is these publishers which feed the research rankings that universities live by for the prestige that allows them to attract international students. Consequently, researchers are obliged to seek out Q1 journals in Scimago, despite

[3] The regional university model does not really exist in West and South Australia where, because of sparse rural population, only a handful of small campuses connected to metropolitan universities exist beyond the state capitals.

the fact that it values citation habits from the sciences that do not make sense in the humanities. This isn't a malicious plot, but it is a wicked problem.

Most university leaders can be persuaded to realise that having an Australian university without attention to Australian society and culture is silly, when the issue rises to their attention. But keeping it there when the wider strategic decisions are made is very difficult. Once things ascend to the level of higher metrics, where the dashboards and KPIs dwell, an anchoring consciousness that no-one will concern themselves with Australia if we don't, loses visibility. It disappears behind numbers whose norms are set by the physical sciences and 'measured' by the international ratings agencies. 'Hard' scientific disciplines dominate there and they validly are more international, less anchored in local context. A new discovery in chemistry, physics, or biology has potential for resonance everywhere. In astronomy, only people with access to strong enough telescopes can play in the big league; it matters but a little where their telescope is. Where local context impinges, it tends to be viewed as applied science, and the university will expect it to be funded by a business or government likely to benefit. This tends to hold true in agricultural sciences, for example, where regionally based universities do have a natural advantage.

For better more than for worse, humanities researchers often build rich relationships but seldom attract much applied research funding. We tend to question social and economic powers, rather than align smoothly with their interests, and we have our natural partners among public good and volunteer institutions who do not have significant research budgets to apply. Philanthropic efforts can alleviate some of this in the big cities, but the further you get from metropolitan CBDs, the more vestigial or non-existent these funding sources become. One illustration: The National Cartoon Gallery in Coffs Harbour has, at 23,000, the largest collection of cartoon originals in the country (larger than the National Library of Australia's). It has never had the resources to build a publicly available online catalogue so, pleasant though a trip to Coffs is bound to be, that it is the only way of finding out about this trove is a cultural loss. Indeed, the whole project nearly fell over in early 2024, and the collection might have been dispersed (Scully et al.). Were the cartoon gallery in Sydney, its fortunes might well be different.

There are many unrealised opportunities for research and collaboration in the regions, but they are hard to keep on the agenda of regional universities in a sustained way, because of the funding ecology of the new millennium. For example, cities like Cairns, Townsville, and Darwin all dominate large, remote regions and are growing to a scale where the cultural infrastructure of country towns is no longer adequate. A linkage-style project that assesses their present needs and capacities as a group would have an impact across their regions and all

levels of government, but the academic networks within the universities need to be strong enough to sustain it. It is easier for a Deputy Vice-Chancellor—Research (DVC-R) to remember that the national or local culture matters, in a better-funded institution, especially one with a more regular flow of high-profile ARC grants in cultural areas. For various structural reasons, particularly to do with the scale and disciplinary depth favoured in competitive processes, these grants are much rarer in regional universities. Even a very productive two- or three-person history or creative writing program is going to have trouble maintaining consistent grant success, especially if they have wide-ranging teaching and administration responsibilities as well. Regional universities exist close to the bone financially, in both educational programs and in necessarily selective research efforts. When you add this fact to the patchy historic commitment to cultural teaching and research in the third-wave regional universities, you have very thin ice indeed for the reflective humanities, social sciences, and creative arts to skate on.

Why Does This Matter?

A major lesson of the humanities in the century since European cultural domination started to crack is that there is no universal set of norms for being human. Context and difference matter, and they condition just about every complex situation there is, in the sciences as well as the arts. You bracket these things out at your peril, as many science and engineering projects have discovered. With a series of signal failures, most notably in the failure to galvanise action on climate change after they have 'put the science on the table', scientists have increasingly learned to invite social scientists to the party, and they have a common language of quantification and intellectual detachment. This is all well and good, but quantification is no more than half the story when a policy, a genetically modified crop or a wind farm meet opposition. Local histories and contexts matter, and the narratives of achievement or belonging are experienced subjectively, in ways that the humanities and creative arts have the best tools to address.

There is a particular interdisciplinary opportunity for humanities and creative arts researchers based outside the larger universities. Indeed, it would be valuable to do a thorough survey of what actually is happening in this space. As other essays in this collection demonstrate, there is much interesting work being undertaken and it is strongly marked by range and difference in interdisciplinarity, local or regional focus, as well as connection to scholarship of teaching and learning. Moreover, this project has some bearing on the culture wars that strain social and cultural cohesion everywhere. Whatever the motives of protagonists, the effect is to divide regional and metropolitan Australians into two the noisy digital and political cultures that increasingly map the radical divisions of the United States. These divisions would only be further stoked if all the world for Australian cultural

research were reduced to Parkville (University of Melbourne) and Newtown (University of Sydney), with outposts in other capitals. One of the perverse consequences of the conservative culture war against 'tenured radicals' in this part of the world is that the more they beat us, the fewer and more monoglot we become. When the commanding heights of particular disciplines retreat to three or four departments, it is easier for orthodoxies to dominate. In Australia, those orthodoxies tend to be liberal, cosmopolitan, and internationalist more than they are anchored in senses of nation and place. We advocate not for one or the other, but rather for the need for a healthy dialogue between both.

In regional contexts the endemic lack of scale in their humanities disciplines can create space for collaboration with other researchers on locally perceived issues. This is not always a straightforward process though, especially for scholars in the humanities and creative arts whose research is not always understood or respected by other disciplines, and who are academics often stretched across more teaching and administrative responsibilities than would ever be the case in metropolitan institutions. Some of this work is happening, such as the heritage and tourism work driven by historians at the Future Regions Research Centre at Federation University Australia. If Federation had also been able to more adequately and consistently resource the Cultural Enquiry Research Group (CERG) that Jane Mummery led, it would have had a remarkable and nation-leading cross-disciplinary team attuned to regional interests. With a few thousand dollars of seed funding in 2013, it combined researchers across philosophy, literary studies, media, creative writing, and education in a dynamic and promising way. They started building co-ordinated networks both within their research interests and out into the Victorian communities around their campuses in Ballarat and the LaTrobe Valley. Then there were financial strictures that dried up the funding and, perhaps more importantly, a wholesale restructure of the BA and majors that took a lot of time and energy. Getting people to seminars became harder, there was not enough patience in the system to wait for a plausible joint grant record to develop, and some central people left the institution. CERG's last Facebook announcement is on 17 February 2020, when thereafter it lapsed under the added weight of COVID. It is no crime for research groups to have life cycles, but CERG's experience is depressingly typical of the particularly precarious ways these research groups operate in regional institutions, where human resources are always stretched. The fragility of teaching programs and cultural research in the smaller regionals mean that many opportunities are being missed, particularly for the sort of community-engaged research that would speak strongly to experience in regional and remote Australia in a way fly-in fly-out city-based research programs cannot. As a consequence of short-term responses and the lack of relatively small sums of money and time, the institution, region, and nation miss out on long-term cultural value.

Many aspects can validly be measured (as other papers in this collection recount) but the value of arts, culture, and creativity is never *only* a number. The problem is that numbers are convenient expressions for accounting, reporting, comparing, and constraining, and because of the negative effects of fifty years of neoliberalism, these are the expressions of value that stick. This is not because of any inherent superiority of numerical data to express value but rather of many societies' historically recent construction of value in this way. Such conventions and methods of expressing value have not served the majority of world's populations well nor the interests of the planet upon which we hope to continue to survive and leave to future generations. Unduly instrumentalist notions of value are, indeed, a sticking point as we attempt to move away from practices that have caused many of the world's most wicked problems (Walmsley).

While this is a larger canvas than we need for our current argument, the core necessary recognition is that some elements of value can be expressed quantitatively, whether through dollars as in the case of economic impact or through numbers of people engaging, but that can never tell the whole story. In research connected to the arts and culture sector, there has been a concerted effort over decades to better reflect the value that arts and culture have and bring to communities. As the creative industries model rose in cultural policy and then in universities particularly in the UK and Australia, economic impact became the defining, dominant and then in some instances sole measure of value (O'Connor). The cultural sector and policy researchers sought to develop complementary understandings of value that sit beside economic impact, similar to the triple bottom line approach for business which places people and planet firmly in the framework of value as well as profit. In the arts and culture sector, work has been framed around forms of value including social impact, health and wellbeing benefits, the contribution arts and culture makes to social cohesion. But in the early 2000s the term 'cultural value' arose as a potential way of talking about the diverse forms of benefit of arts and culture bring that does not fit neatly into those economic or social categories (Belfiore, 'Is it Really?'; Meyrick et al.; Walmsley and Meyrick).

Much of the thinking about value in the arts and culture sector is transferrable to the humanities and creative arts in higher education as Belfiore outlined in 2016, as both generate intangible as well as more easily measurable value. The considerable overlap can be seen in the large body of literature that has emerged in recent years on this topic (Small; Collini *What Are Universities For?*; Collini, *Speaking of Universities*). Belfiore and Upchurch argued that what was needed was a reframing of the debate. It is historically true that the arts and humanities have played an integral role to the modern (post-1800) university and changing this idea without deliberation may well be dangerous. Much of the scholarly debate has focused on the deteriorating environment of the humanities and creative arts

in the UK, where they started from a much higher base and are presently in a rapid decline that may possibly be ameliorated by a change of government. The longer, more gradual slide in Australia saw its nadir in the Liberal-National Party Coalition Jobs Ready Graduates Package (2020). Other papers in this collection address the direct impact of this thinly utilitarian reduction of the purpose of tertiary education to jobs training on regional enrolments in HASS degrees, and the knock-on effect in research is also becoming clear. A change of government to the notionally more supportive Labor Party in 2022 has yet to generate any change to the fee structures and the (bizarrely mixed) signals they send to university decision-makers. Even if the 'price-signals' are corrected immediately, anti-HASS prejudices among university managers are not being confronted. The humanities and creative arts disciplines truly provide transferable skills that are the foundation for success in a rapidly changing world (see, for example, the Macquarie University-commissioned report by Deloitte published in 2018). Perhaps this fact has so often been stated that it no longer registers.

This matters because the first gatekeepers that advocates for the humanities need to persuade are always in our own institutions. Much of the difficulty is in the middle rather than towards the top of our layer-cake bureaucracies. The hardest ones to reach, in our experience, are the thin utilitarians, often in Marketing and Recruitment, who tell no-one about the BA, who lead with the 'step straight into a job' type qualifications, who assume that the research you want to do is a waste. In darker moments we wonder whether the generalist degrees will ever recover, but even though many of the 'professional' degrees are overwhelmingly not used in those professions (especially Law). Careers officers in schools really can give country kids enrolling in a BA or BCA more security about their future prospects. They are not just recklessly 'following their passion', because even the most technical issues we face as a nation involve humans trying to live together in peace, respect, and prosperity.

Lessons From Cultural and Economic Policy

This is all happening within a slow moving but no less dangerous climate catastrophe, widening inequalities, extremist politics. We have made the case elsewhere that a factor in many of these catastrophes is connected to the problem of value (Meyrick et al.). And the response to those crises will require community solutions. Cultural policy scholarship has much to offer about the role the arts play in connecting communities, the importance of cultural infrastructure such as galleries and libraries. This cultural infrastructure is particularly significant in the regions and its value and impact cannot be measured by the straightforward inputs and outputs of the classic econometric approach. It is nonetheless very real, and econometrics needs a dialogue with cultural value, not just the dictation test of economic impact statements that make everything speak in simplistic dollar

terms. Healthy and relatively complex evaluative environments that acknowledge the longitudinal benefits of cultural infrastructure, that can account for the effect on a life course of a child's access to books and programs at a local library, are essential. An important recognition is that some sorts of cultural and research activities like festivals and research centres have natural life cycles, and might flourish and end over a decade. By contrast, cultural and educational infrastructure, like libraries and history programs, need to 'be there' for as close to forever as possible, as parts of the social and cultural fabric of a city, town, or region.

This proposition makes little sense in classical economics or neoliberal policy, but a better way of grasping it comes from the heterodox economics thinking that has arisen, initially with the aim of ameliorating climate disaster without causing abject poverty to vulnerable communities. The current authors are, indeed, adding to the work underway by considering the contribution such thinking can make to cultural policy and in particular to the work of value and evaluation. Increasingly we deploy the work of heterodox economics to benefit the way we consider in theory and in practice the value and impact of arts and culture (Barnett et al.). Clearly this can and should extend to the humanities and creative arts work in the regions as well. For example, an unintended consequence of a decision like James Cook University's disestablishment of teaching and research in creative and performing arts in 2023 is long-term damage to theatre and the fine arts in North Queensland. The fact of this loss is hard to count and, arguably, not relevant to JCU's decision processes, but in a huge region with growing population, the loss of local capacity and the attendant brain-drain to Southeast Queensland, Melbourne, or beyond has serious consequences.

Something like Kate Raworth's 'Doughnut Economics'[4] is needed to grapple with complexities like this. Raworth uses the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to outline the dimensions of an economic plan that neither surpasses planetary boundaries—the limits of growth beyond which the planet can no longer sustain life, nor neglects social foundations (what people need to not be in the worst forms of poverty and deprivation). While there is no Sustainable Development Goal for culture—and this is a problem—there have been attempts to situate arts and culture within the Doughnut when it is applied to particular cities or regions. For example, it is very prominent in the Melbourne Doughnut that was developed through a participatory process with Regen Melbourne

[4] Doughnut Economics is a visual framework or model emerging from heterodox (or alternative) economics that seeks to chart a safe and just place for all to live within planetary boundaries, and is thus shaped like a doughnut with an outer ring (planetary boundaries) and an inner ring (social foundations). It seeks to reduce both inequalities and climate disaster. The Doughnut model lists the basics for human safety net including water, food, health, education, income and work, peace and justice, political voice, social equity, gender equality, housing, networks, and energy. These are based on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

(O'Connor et al.). While this work is being done presently in a large city like Melbourne, similar projects appropriately inflected for regional cities would be very valuable, and attach strongly to the wider missions of regional universities. The Doughnut Economics Action Lab have developed a city portrait approach to take the components of the doughnut (clean water, gender equality, access to education, housing, human rights and so on) city portraits and apply them to a city, town or region as a means of bringing local specificity together with global connection to make a plan for action. City portraits can work to bring together diverse groups of people to collaboratively decide what, in detail, the doughnut should look like for their locale. Along the east coast of Australia there are several cities that are growing past 100,000 towards 200,000 in population and, while Ballarat and Cairns are always going to retain significant differences, they also have a lot to learn together. A city portrait needs to add specificity and local knowledge to concepts that are also to some extent internationally commensurable and oriented towards global collaboration towards meeting the targets for climate action without worsening social inequalities. In its original intention the Doughnut approach uses the Sustainable Development Goals to develop an understanding of what should be the qualities upon which good living can occur without surpassing the planetary boundaries to sustain life. In our research, we ask what that thinking would mean for arts and culture both in terms of how they can find expression inside a doughnut model and in the city portraits developed from it, but also how they can contribute to implementing doughnut goals (O'Connor et al.). This is research out of humanities and the creative arts that needs local nuance and can be integral to sustainable human development. By extension, doughnut economics and the city portrait methodology can provide a pathway to rethinking the methodologies for assessing the value of humanities and creative arts to cities and towns, to regions, and nations and to international collaboration.

What would a collaborative, participatory process say about the role of university-based humanities and creative arts programs in regional cities that are home to universities? They host events, provide educational pathways for young people and mature-age students. They are sources of transformational experiences of self-knowledge and international awareness for individuals and research-based understanding of the cultural dynamics of the regions they are in. It is worth devoting some time to these questions to ensure the humanities and creative arts researchers, disciplines and their peak bodies are able to navigate future value frameworks. The more holistic, sustainable, and regenerative the notions of value and the processes that are developed from them, the deeper the contribution to local and global development. Humanities research capacity embedded in place is needed for creating, assessing, and communicating that value to diverse stakeholders and audiences. The old economic ways of jobs and growth are not fit

for purpose for the twenty-first century, and especially not for regional towns and cities where that kind of focus is incompatible with building good places to live.

Where to From Here?

A research agenda for humanities in regional and remote Australia should come from the places it is about. All 'Big Country Town' jokes aside, it is not for us as Adelaideans to define it, but we can attempt to project some of its elements. This is our reading of the political drivers, both within the sector and in the wider culture, and some pragmatic suggestions about ways forward. We need proper, evidence-based arguments that will work when governments change and with local members of conservative as well as progressive leanings.

We recommend a national, and particularly a regional, effort to generate a culturally plural academic humanities, one that reflects continuity and change, city and country, male and female, poor and rich. In our view, nobody wins if cultural research retreats entirely to the inevitably partial ethics and aesthetics of Group of Eight inner metropolitan universities, as is the effect (whether intended or not) of the Job Ready Graduates package. The conservative culture warriors can achieve a culturally narrow humanities and creative arts by attacking it until it reverts to a handful of bastions. They will not like what they get, however, and will certainly fail in the mission of establishing the culturally narrow panegyric to Judeo-Christian civilisation figures like Tony Abbott (when he was barracking for the controversial Ramsay Centre) want. That narrow panegyric is unavailable because of a deep ethical romanticism in the humanities as a cultural project. Sure, this was not always so when the pursuit of civilisation was used as marketing for European colonisation in the nineteenth century and *Pax Americana* during the Cold War of the twentieth century. In the current century, however, a constitutional inclination in the HASS disciplines to barrack for poetic justice and the underdogs of life rather than aligning with the wealth-making 'winners' has become dominant. To express the idea in a caricature, it is only a tiny minority who read Shakespeare for tips on how to lead corporate teams or invade Afghanistan. Even the more conservative-minded among the rest of us are given pause with Hamlet by what 'what dreams may come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil', or riddle the justice of Caliban when he tells his master 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse'.

Even in the most canonical spaces, research in the humanities tends to explore a wide range of human experiences, and utopian visions of a better world. This is something that is easy to square with liberal or progressive commitments to equity and diversity. It is also pragmatically attractive to a temperate conservatism if it moves, culturally and spatially, beyond the concerns of the metropolitan cultural elites. To put it bluntly, supporting a distinctive humanities

in regional institutions will ensure rural and regional concerns—which tend to be more conservative—are seriously included in the cultural conversation. This will broaden the sense of what Australian culture can and should be, and take some of the heat out of the increasing separation between city and country evident in many things, including voting patterns in elections.

Such high-level ideology will not matter if the HASS sector ignores institutional politics. Humanities scholars need to think who the potential allies are in our universities, across the sector, and in our wider communities. This may involve some rethinking of the individualistic, indeed lonesome way we tend to go about research, something especially hard to break out of if you are the only philosopher or theatre scholar, for example, in your university; but perhaps increasingly necessary for such scholars, in forming unique collaborations with other disciplines.

We are yet to see a project in public health or public acceptance of land-use change that would not have benefited from serious input from locally engaged humanists. Where there is an intellectual or emotional interface between knowledge and people, we can have something to contribute. Universities and Research Councils talk a big game in interdisciplinary research. Peak bodies like the Australasian Consortium of Humanities Researchers and Centres, as it is now called, but also its peers such as DASSH, CHASS, and the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA), must continue to not only support humanities and creative arts research and researchers in regional universities but to cede space, funding, and decision making, all the while acknowledging that in every aspect being a scholar in regional universities but in particular in the humanities and creative arts brings with it material and resourcing constraints that fundamentally alter the capacity to engage on what is already an uneven playing field. Regional universities have the advantage of relatively small scale and closeness to communities to make these things real. Why shouldn't the two recently announced Roderick Centres at JCU, for Australian Literature and Creative Writing and for Mental Health work together in Northern Queensland? The personal and institutional distances are not as great as they might be in one of the big universities. The local need is clearer.

All of this involves practical and local work, but the big picture is wonderfully expressed by a voice from Cape York, Noel Pearson, in his first Boyer Lecture of 2022: 'Mutual recognition will enable us to acknowledge three stories: the *Ancient Indigenous Heritage* which is Australia's foundation, the *British Institutions* built upon it, and the adorning *Gift of Multicultural Migration*' (Pearson). In the modern managerial university, atomisation tends to reign—institutions tend to their rankings and accountabilities, while individual academics with no real security from restructures attend to their own career goals. Pearson generously challenges

Australians to see that how we remember and develop culturally as a nation needs balance and good will. The challenge remains, is even intensified, after the failure of the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice referendum. From our experience, flying a little lower over the national humanities scene in the ACHRC, we add that the nation needs detailed and various work on who we have been and can hope to be. Scale of research effort is important, so that the work can be deep, but spread of sources and topics is also crucial. Stories from the bush to the cities, from the tropics to the temperate zones—all these require curation and analysis if the national research project is to reflect on us in our full diversity as nation.

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