Journal of Rural Studies 106 (2024) 103239

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Activating rural infrastructures in regional communities: Cultural funding, silo art works and the challenge of local benefit

Emily Potter [a,*], Katya Johanson [b], Molan D'Arcy [a]

[a] Deakin University, Australia
[b] Edith Cowan University, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Cultural funding
Regional cultural policy
Silo art work
Wimmera-mallee regions
Agricultural infrastructure

ABSTRACT

This article examines the issues involved in publicly funded regional arts initiatives, through two contrasting examples of art works that creatively repurpose grain silos in rural Australia: the Silo Art Trail in north-west Victoria, and the silo art practices of the small town of Natimuk in the same region. Via desktop analysis supported by observation and interviews, we consider these initiatives in the context of a turn to arts-led regeneration and creative place-making in rural and regional development approaches and the role of public cultural policy within this. With the majority of public funding for cultural and creative projects in regional communities coming from urban-based governments in Australia (eg federal and state governments), decisions tend to be informed by urban-centric frameworks. Public cultural funding programmes often expect to develop projects that create jobs and generate market demand for creative products that will ensure creative enterprises are economically sustainable. This overlooks broader economic impacts and non-economic values that arts activities bring to rural and regional places, resulting in a misalignment between funding intention and outcomes. A lack of equity inherent in the relationship between urban-generated cultural funding approaches and regional priorities suggests a need for a rethink, to better understand and develop policies for creative practice in the regions that are driven by and responsive to regional priorities and capacities.

1. Introduction

As part of an arts-led revitalisation grounded in creative place-making, repurposing disused agricultural infrastructure in economically challenged rural communities has recently become popular (Anwar-McHenry, 2009; Jazdzewska, 2017; Green 2021). Visually prominent grain silos – tall cylindrical structures within and on the outskirts of rural towns, designed to hold grain before its transportation to markets – are a compelling focus for such creative repurposing. As rural populations have shifted and declined, and agricultural production transformed, many silos have been decommissioned (and newer mobile silos built elsewhere), remaining as highly visible markers of change, and as community assets available for re-imagining and re-use.

The economic and social shifts in rural and regional Australia map against experiences of agricultural communities in the global north (Balfour et al., 2016), impacted by the neoliberalisation of government and industry from the 1970s onwards. This has involved the withdrawal of state interventions in the agricultural economy such as subsidies and other forms of economic and social support, and an increasing emphasis on 'efficiency, competition and self-reliance' for primary producers (Hinkson 2022, 52). Heightened industrialisation and integration with global markets brought with them the capacity and pressure to 'scale up' (Hinkson 2022, 55), and a shift from family farms to agricultural conglomerates, often with transnational investment, resulting in a contraction of rural populations, as well as the concentration of populations in larger regional centres. The introduction of new technologies that reduced the need for human labour meant fewer employment opportunities, with a cascading effect on local economies. Public and corporate services withdrew from smaller towns and local businesses closed as people moved in search of opportunities elsewhere. This corresponded with, as Butler identifies, 'a reduction in the economic and political influence of rural locales' and a rise in inequitable resource allocation between urban and rural communities (2019, 9). Agriculture remains Australia's principal export base, yet its economic benefits often do not flow to the local communities that populate rural and regional places (Fleming and Measham 2015, 210, Duxbury and Campbell 2011; Farrugia, 2019; Cunningham et al., 2021).

In search of new economic drivers, policy makers have looked to

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: e.potter@deakin.edu.au (E. Potter).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103239
Received 12 September 2023; Received in revised form 7 January 2024; Accepted 7 February 2024
Available online 15 February 2024

cultural initiatives to attract tourism, build livability and contribute to population renewal in rural towns (Bell and Jayne 2010; Anwar McHenry 2011). All three levels of government (local, state and federal) have developed funding schemes targeted to regional creative opportunities. Increasingly, these opportunities involve activating agricultural infrastructure as tourism draw cards and as canvases for creative experimentation and local celebration. This article considers two examples of publicly funded creative projects that repurpose local grain silos to explore the affordances and limitations of rural revitalisation that involves urban-based government support: the Silo Art Trail and the Natimuk silo.

Both cases are located in the Wimmera-Southern Mallee region in Victoria's north-west.

The Wimmera-Southern Mallee is a regional governmental designation that is unceded Country of many First Nations groups, including the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk people. These groups were widely dispossessed from the 1850s onwards as land was taken and cleared for agriculture, initially pastoralism, followed by wheat production. The region remains colonised Country, a history unevenly recognised today, as our silo art examples highlight. The population of the Wimmera-Southern Mallee is around 47,500 (Regional Development Victoria, 2022), however over 40 per cent of this population lives in its regional centre, Horsham, while other towns throughout the region are much smaller. The Wimmera-Southern Mallee region is classified as 'relatively disadvantaged' compared to other Australian regions, a measurement marker based on variables such as income, health, employment, education and housing (Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership, 2017). The Silo Art Trail (hereafter referred to as the SAT) began as a roughly 200 km driving trail linking six rural towns ranging in population from 5 to 540 through specially commissioned silo art works. Natimuk is a town of just over 500; its silo has been a dynamic site of creative activations since the town became an attractor for artists in the 1990s. Four hours drive north-west of the Victorian capital city of Melbourne, and four and a half hours drive from the South Australian capital city of Adelaide, Natimuk is officially considered 'remote' (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

We consider these two sets of creative activities, the SAT and the Natimuk silo works, as distinct examples of the publicly funded creative employment of agricultural infrastructure, and the implications of these uses for local economic and creative place-making objectives. We draw attention to the goals and outcomes of these two sets of silo activity, and the different registers through which to consider the potential for impact of creative arts initiatives in rural and regional contexts. The SAT is an example of regional public art tasked with the goal of tourist-led economic development. It attracts tourists and has the potential to generate economic activity in otherwise struggling towns, but in doing so, misses opportunities to contribute to creative placemaking. The Natimuk silo activations are local initiatives by residents of the town and surrounding area, driven by artistic, community-building aims incorporating cultural exploration and celebration. These activations are labour-intensive, but achieve a mix of economic, social and cultural outcomes, albeit with outcomes that are difficult to measure. We explore the way that the inherent goals of each activity shape the activity itself and its integration into the community. Despite the different objectives driving the two activities, this discussion of both sets of activities can inform future regional creative initiatives.

While we acknowledge that, as Hinkson argues (2022), there is no straight forward demarcation between the rural and the urban, either historically or today, we also recognise that this relationality is uneven in terms of representation or power. The article finds that urban frameworks tend to dominate cultural funding approaches to the regions, and that as a result, direct economic imperatives are prioritised over less quantifiable benefits that we argue are crucial to rural and regional flourishing. Following this introduction, Section 2 identifies themes in cultural policy and sociology literature that provide the background and impetus for this discussion. Following a discussion of our methodology in Section 3, Section 4 examines the example of the SAT, an initiative supported by three levels of government and motivated by a cultural policy framework that centralised the economic benefit of public art initiatives. Section 5 examines a different kind of creative intervention in a rural community through various activations of the Natimuk silo. We identify the economic, social and cultural impacts of those activities, as well as their limitations, and consider the capacity of both to harness creative labour in regional communities, and to mobilise the relationship between this labour and community identity and wellbeing. Finally, we discuss how this analysis of two kinds of silo works might inform future rural and regional cultural policy development and scholarship.

2. Cultural policy and regional development

Three themes in cultural policy and sociology literature are explored here. The first is an urban bias in cultural policy making and implementation, the second is a broader shift in cultural policy away from community or cultural outcomes to economic outcomes within the framework of creative place-making, and the third theme is the distinctive impact that arts and cultural production are seen to have in regional communities and economies that distinguish them from metropolitan creative economies. This section ends with a brief account of the common structure in the two sets of activities we discuss: Australia's grain silos as economic assets and community landmarks.

2.1. Urban bias in policy and its consequences for regional cultures

A persistent critique of cultural policies for regional areas is that policy makers tend to apply a model based on urban styles of creative production to their funding decisions and reporting requirements, in ways that are inconsistent with the circumstances and objectives of non-metropolitan creative production (Micoo and Vinodrai, 2010; Mahon et al., 2018, Edwards 2012, Gallagher 2021). This bias is evident in a tendency to see regional communities as 'the recipients of a prescribed set of cultural or creative activities produced by others' (Symons and Hurley 2018). For this reason, cultural policies targeting regional communities have often been dominated by a model of touring productions (Duxbury and Campbell 2011).

An urban bias is also evident in the expectations of policy outcomes that should flow from public support, without regard to the geography and nature of the communities in which funding is located. An urban-centric policy model assumes, for example, that the cultural economy is competitive and relies on economies of scale, and the clustering of creative activities into a geographically defined area dense with cultural infrastructure and population that sustains large audiences (Escalano-Orcao et al., 2016). This does not apply in most rural contexts where artists are fewer and need to work collaboratively rather than competitively and with leaner resources, and where audience numbers are small (Mahon et al., 2018). Mahon et al. point out that applying urban expectations to 'places with lower population densities or other historic deficiencies and vulnerabilities often means that central state or agency sources of funding are put out of reach, and along with it the process of nurturing the necessary local capacity to attain economic traction via the arts at a scale appropriate to that place' (2018, 214). In a US context, Gallagher (2021) identifies that the regional arts sector has received less funding per capita than its urban equivalent because of the difficulty that rural interests have in articulating their needs in terms set by urban-based funding agencies. Requirements common for public funding applications to be successful include, for example, the need for matching funding from other public, philanthropic or private sources, professional management and governance structures, high targets for box office sales or audience numbers, or the programming of internationally or nationally renowned (i.e. urban-based) artists: all of which are often out of reach for regional projects. Not only are such requirements beyond the capacity of regional communities, they are also

not necessarily required for those communities to produce arts and cultural initiatives that can have significant social, economic and cultural benefits because 'arts initiatives need not be large to produce community benefit, nor do they need to be initiated by local elites to succeed' (Balfour et al., 2016, 231).

Recently, public cultural agencies have made efforts to address their urban bias by establishing geographic quotas or targets. Contentiously (due the scale of its ambition), the Arts Council of England responded to a directive from the Conservative UK Government in 2022 to 'level up' by moving millions of pounds in funding from London-based to regional organisations (Behr 2022). In Australia's state of Victoria, where the current study is located, the Government's Creative State 2025 policy (launched in 2021) promises major regional cultural infrastructure projects and regionally based training hubs for technical skills development in performing arts as a means of directing funding to the regions.

Providing funding for regional cultural infrastructure and projects is potentially the start of a shift away from urban policy bias, but cultural policies and their operations require a more comprehensive review because even when they receive funding, rural arts organisations have often 'encountered conflicts in the demands of distant funding agencies and the needs of their local audiences' (Gallagher 2021, 34), when the requirements of those agencies have not been sensitive or appropriate to local communities. Sunderland et al.'s Australian review of rural development policies critiques the historical 'top-down' approach (e.g. Federal and State government driven, rather than local government or community driven) to rural cultural policy development. Scathingly, they compare this framing to European colonialism: 'In the same way that First Nations' and other peoples of colour have been measured against Eurocentric conceptions of progress, morality, beauty, development, and civilisation for centuries, regional and remote areas are subject to dominant urban – also not coincidentally Eurocentric – imperatives about which forms of living and development are worthwhile and even possible' (Sunderland et al., 2022, 424).

Countering this urban bias through the development of policies sensitive to regional interests and capacities is critical to addressing disadvantage more broadly than simply in the realm of arts and cultural life. Sunderland et al. (2022), Gibson (2010) and Mahon (2018) argue that for rural societies to be measured against urban standards sets them in a deficit paradigm evident in public discourse about Australia's rural towns. Examples include commonly expressed notions that regional areas are 'struggling to survive', with services and outcomes that are 'problematic, inferior and undesirable' and communities that are 'stoic' whilst also being 'inferior and homogenous' (Sunderland et al., 2022, 426). Cultural policy development that is sensitive to regional cultures and communities requires attention to those cultures and communities, such as the significance of place, their creative histories and active modes of local creativity, and 'the ways in which geography shapes resources and sustainability for organisations' who seek to deliver or enable creative place-making (Gallagher 2021: 38). An aim of this article is to increase the understanding of what such attention might look like.

2.2. From community to economic development

The second theme in the literature on regional cultural policy notes a shift from cultural policies that aim to increase community goals, such as social cohesion and community resilience, to economic goals. The association between arts initiatives and economic development is a long-standing policy fallback, having motivated major arts and cultural strategies since the early 1990s (see for example Creative Nation 1994). The normalisation of neo-liberal approaches to funding over time, and the pressures of contemporary economic conditions, have 'sharpened discussions about the use of public funds to support the development and presentation of arts programs and events' (Gattenhof et al., 2023: 24).

However, the targeted focus on culture as a contributor to regional economies is a newer interest, which runs parallel to the increased attention to regional creative production. Duxbury's (2021) survey of literature related to cultural and creative work in rural and remote settings identified this shift in emphasis over the past twenty years, involving a focus on growing the 'rural creative class', as well as (relatedly) growing 'regional creative economies', more broadly, both of which connect to tourism as a drawcard for visitors as well as new creative community members (2021). Bell and Jayne refer to an emergent creative economy in rural areas as the new face of 'the post-productivist countryside', which is economically diversified and no longer solely reliant on agriculture and extraction (2010, 211). Skippington and Davis (2016) applaud the reorientation from an emphasis on rural arts 'aimed solely at social outcomes', towards its potential for economic outcomes (237), while Mackay et al. caution that 'an over-emphasis on economic indicators may ignore or diminish the ways in which arts and cultural engagement is actually experienced and valued by individuals who together make up each unique community' (2021, 395). Increased cultural production in regional areas is seen as offering a means of diversifying local economies and providing alternatives to industries with declining labour needs and thus decreasing benefits for those economies. Yet to the extent that a focus on the creative production may be seen as a new era for regional economies, the need remains to develop appropriate policies that take into account the ways that arts and culture are valued locally (Mackay et al., 2021, 392), and to see rural economic development through a 'more holistic notion of sustainability' (Mahon et al., 2018). Sub-themes of such a perspective are explored in the next section.

2.3. The distinctive role of arts In Non-Metropolitan areas

Resisting a deficit approach, a field of scholarship is pointing to the specific affordances and creative capacities of regional and rural communities (Sweeney et al., 2018; Potter and Magner 2018; Mahon et al., 2018; Gattenhof et al., 2023; Gallagher 2021), including the particular value of place-based approaches to creative activity in locations where 'place is everything' (in Mackay et al., 2021: 2). Arts in regional communities play a role in providing local residents and others with a sense of place, because of their ability to explore community identity, express local stories, and communicate meaning, which in turn encourages pride, cultural resilience and a sense of distinctiveness related to the specific place (Anwar McHenry 2011; Roberts and Townsend 2016).

Arts in regional communities are also valued because they increase civic participation (Gallagher 2021; Anwar McHenry 2011; Edwards 2012). With a smaller pool of professional labour and skills - both arts-based and in associated trades - than their metropolitan counterparts, regional artists often must enlist community members to contribute volunteer labour, playing a range of roles from sharing their ideas and stories at the project's conception and participating in production, to rigging lights or sound equipment, to selling tickets (Edwards 2012, 519). The need for in-kind resources also often sees regional artists and arts organisations developing networks with people and organisations in other regional towns, creating exchanges that are 'not dependent on institutions - particularly where those institutions are not there in the first place' (Anderson and Toohey 2020, 152). Such community participation ensures that arts activities lay the groundwork for ongoing social connections that extend beyond the arts event and into other civic initiatives and decision-making (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016). Balfour et al. (2016) see the arts in contemporary rural communities serving 'the same function as it did in the Greek polis, supporting frequent interaction in public places, along with political debate and ceremonial processions' (237). In this way, arts play a role in strengthening community cohesion, even in the face of challenges that would otherwise be divisive. In colonised countries such as Australia, this role is seen as particularly valuable in bringing together First Nations, settler-colonial, and post-colonisation migrant community cohorts (Sunderland et al., 2022). Arts activities provide regional communities

with opportunities to explore 'points of tension', whereas, in the words of Victorian small theatre company director Jude Anderson, in a metropolitan context: 'I can more easily hide from the weather' (Anderson and Toohey 2020, 150).

Arts activities also provide economic benefits to regional communities that extend beyond the immediate examples such as ticket sales and tourism. Artists and volunteers who contribute to arts initiatives develop new skills and knowledge, which provide them with commercial advantages in the labour market (Edwards 2012). Without the ability to call on the professional resources that are readily available in metropolitan areas (such as marketing), contributors to arts activities are often required to develop wide-ranging entrepreneurial skills. The same skills become intellectual and social capital, as they 'may translate readily into skills for reinvigorating local economies through the launch of a variety of creative ventures - some related to art, and some creative in other ways' (Balfour et al., 2016, 237). Unlike ticket sales and tourism income though, the cause and effect in these economic outcomes are difficult to identify and measure.

2.4. A brief history of Australian grain silos

Cultural policies with economic objectives generally seek to capitalise on perceived local assets or attractions. While concrete silos are feats of engineering rather than architectural aesthetics, they are also a strong visual feature of agricultural Australia, commonly flanking the road entrance to a town and situated alongside a railway siding that was established primarily to transport the grains to market. Private agricultural company GrainCorp built many of the 650 silos built in the 1920s and 1930s, evidencing the investment in rural industries at the time, and an optimism for their future. Many silos fell out of use,[1] becoming emblematic of the changing face of rural Australia and posed a practical infrastructural challenge. Their repurposing through the rise of silo art in Australia has offered new life to these anachronistic structures.

The repurposing of silos has involved different levels of Australian governments, through a variety of public agencies. The SAT was commissioned by the cultural development arm of Victoria's state government, Creative Victoria, during a period in which the state government was driving its departments to prioritise job creation. Informed by Victoria's earlier *Creative State Strategy 2016–2020*, the Landmark Works initiative that co-funded the original stage of the SAT had key goals of increasing tourism around Victoria, 'strengthening the creative industries ecosystem', and 'turbocharg[ing] local creative economies' (Creative Victoria 2019). It also hoped the project would bring skills development opportunities for local artists and deeper connections in the local community (Interview 1). As discussed below, the jobs creation behind the SAT was in secondary industries such as hospitality. This was due, in part, to the hands-on role of local council in the development of the Trail, whose motivations lay in local regeneration through increasing visitor numbers and resulting economic growth. The latter part of this article examines the extent to which these objectives were part of the decision making behind the two sets of activities, and the extent to which they were achieved.

3. Methodology

The current research is based on a narrative inquiry, aiming to investigate the contribution of silo art to regional creative place-making, and to expose aspects of and perspectives on this contribution and its limitations that are not initially obvious and may be contested or otherwise undocumented (White and Cooper 2022). Revealing these aspects is intended to inform future policy and research approaches to regional arts development. The authors identified the region of the Wimmera-Southern Mallee as the geographical focus of the study for three reasons. Firstly, the region exemplifies common economic and social upheavals resulting from the rise and fall of small-scale agriculture over the past fifty years. Secondly, since the late 2010s, examples of silo art emerged and then boomed in the region, providing an opportunity to start to identify silo art as a particular arts activity and to examine the intersection of policy decisions, industrial transformation and arts activities. Finally, one of the researchers (name withheld) is a resident of the Wimmera-Southern Mallee, bringing extensive contextual knowledge to the project, as well as rapport with members of the community.

Data collection involved desktop analysis supported by field research. Desk-based sources included policy documents and media accounts – traditional and social. Field research included narrative interviews and observation of relevant geographical places and landmarks, particularly the arts activities and the ways audiences and/or participants interact with them and with each other in relation to them. The selection of interview participants gave priority to people living and working in the region rather than those based in or visiting from capital cities because the research sought to elicit the extent of and ways that the arts activities are valued locally. Interview participants were selected on the advice of the local resident-researcher and based on their profiles associated with the silo artworks. As is common in narrative inquiry (Creswell and Poth 2018, 168), a small number of these interviews (six) contribute to the current study. Semi-structured, the interviews were approximately an hour long and held face-to-face, with the central topic being the development and experience of the silo artworks and their economic, social and cultural aspects. Together, desk-based and field research were analysed thematically, focusing on the themes of policy and funding, and economic, social and cultural expectations and outcomes (see Fig. 1a and 1b).

4. The silo art trail

The SAT (Fig. 2) is an extensive and still-expanding driving trail in the north-west of Victoria that, at the time of writing this article, links sixteen grain silos whose exteriors are painted with vast images of local people, flora and fauna. Branded as the 'original' Silo Art Trail (although the first linked series of painted silo art in Australia was actually the FORM Public Art Trail in Western Australia), the trail began with a single painted silo in the tiny town of Brim in 2015 (Fig. 3). Located in the Yarriambiack Shire, a rural local government area roughly 355 km from the state's capital city, Melbourne, Brim's small population of 171 people is indicative of this part of the Wimmera-Southern Mallee, where a few larger service towns of several thousand in population support

Fig. 1a. Wimmera southern Mallee llen, Victoria, 2023. Courtesy: https://www.llen.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/LLEN-Area-Map.gif.

[1] The Natimuk silo is still in active use, however.

Fig. 1b. Map of Australia (2023). Courtesy: https://ontheworldmap.com/australia/.

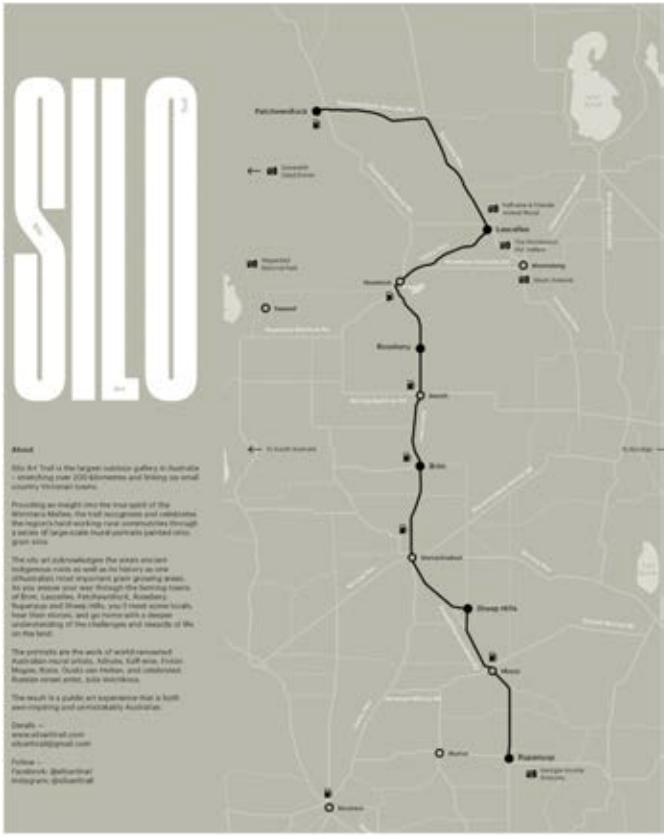

Fig. 2. Map of original Silo Art Trail, 2021. Courtesy: http://siloarttrail.com/home/.

numerous much smaller communities (13 across Yarriambiack). Yarriambiack produces one quarter of Victoria's grain and barley output across its 7158 square kilometres, and more than half its population are involved in agriculture, either directly, or through industries that support the sector (Yarriambiack Shire, 2022). Yet Yarriambiack's entire population was estimated as 6658 in 2022: a decline in the overall shire

Fig. 3. Farmer Quartet, Guido Van Helten, Brim, 2018. Photo: XXX

population of at least 14% since 2008 (Rollason 2018).

Contracting populations and reduced job opportunities have hit small towns such as Brim particularly hard. It was in this context that the Brim silo art work 'Farmer Quartet' - by internationally renowned Brisbane street artist Guido Van Helten - was commissioned by the local Brim Active Community Group (BACG), and supported by the Yarriambiack local government, to 'lift community spirit' and 'attract tourists' (Malzard 2018). While the Brim silo was intended as a one off, its quick success as a tourist drawcard meant that Yarriambiack soon began planning a series of painted silo works across the region. Brim's kickstart to the trail also meant that, seemingly inadvertently, it generated a template for most of the other silo works that would follow: large-scale mural works in a realist style painted by well-known street artists from outside the region (commissioned by Melbourne based street art agent, Juddy Roller). These depicted iconic Australian rural imagery - farmers, horses, local sporting culture - and conveyed a sense of generations in place through imagery that incorporates elderly residents and young children (Potter and Johanson 2023). 'Farmer Quartet', for instance, renders the weathered visages of four male farmers of differing ages across an imposing six columned silo.

Based on Brim's success, the local council made submissions to state and federal governments to fund a trail. The SAT was originally conceived as six singular silo works that would extend over 200 km in a north-south direction and would appeal as a leisurely driving trip over several hours. The silos are located in towns of similar or even smaller size to Brim: Patchewollock (population 133), Lascelles (93), Rosebery (5), Sheep Hills (28), and Rupanyup (536).

The Victorian State Government, through its creative industries arm, Creative Victoria, was the primary initial funder of the SAT's development. The Australian Federal Government provided some funding for the SAT through its Drought Resilience Fund, which aims to build social and economic resilience strategies for agricultural communities to cope with the economic and social cost of drought, along with the local government, the Yarriambiak Shire Council. As mentioned, the original funding for the trail brought a range of intentions into play. Creative Victoria's investment grounded the project in a shared set of intentions (around creative place-making and capacity building amongst local artists). Subsequent funding through two other state government agencies – Regional Development Victoria (focused on regional economic development) and community grants initiative Pick My Projects (with a stated funding objective of community development) – brought further policy drivers to the SAT, and contributed funding to expand the trail to a run of 700 km extending beyond Yarriambiack to adjacent shires in the Wimmera-Southern Mallee over the next five years, adding in Nulliwil (population 93), Sea Lake (640), Kaniva (803), Goroke (299),

Arkona (0), Albacutya (0), and Horsham (20,429) – the largest town and services centre in the Wimmera region. Private agricultural company GrainCorp provided most of the silo canvases and covered some additional production costs.

4.1. Silo art trail: expectations and outcomes

The growth of the trail reflects its delivery on the broad economic intentions of 'Australia's largest outdoor gallery' (Silo Art Trail 2023), informed by the idea that creative industries offer a promise of renewal to disadvantaged regional and rural communities (Gallagher 2021). The concrete silos are critical signifiers of this promise, remade from 'sentinels of economic decline' into tourist icons (Gillmore 2018). Research indicates that tourists are 'demanding new experiences and want to visit ordinary places', where everyday people live (Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miro 2021, 8), and the SAT was an opportunity to satisfy this demand while simultaneously creating new revenue streams and revivifying local businesses in areas dominated and depleted by agriculture.

In this objective, the SAT was extraordinarily successful. Yarriambiack Shire reported a 400 per cent increase in visitors to associated towns between the beginning of the Trail's construction in 2016 and 2020 (Interview 2). From the initial state and Federal government investments of $400,000, Yarriambiack and its adjacent councils, including Buloke and Horsham, have successfully leveraged over $2 million from government and private sources to establish the SAT's 13 current sites. The visually arresting painted silos have been a focus for 'insta-tourism', fanned by significant international and local media coverage that included inflight magazines for Qantas and Singapore Airlines, a Mazda car campaign, and a series of Australia Post postage stamps. In early 2023, the #siloart hashtag had over 43,000 posts by individual visitors to the trail, while the unofficial Australian Silo Art Trail Group had more than 123,000 members. Increased visitor numbers have resulted in a definite growth in local economic capacity, and relatedly a campaign to improve and construct new infrastructures to accommodate visitors, further driving economic activity. Towns once off the map are now destinations. As a local councillor noted when we spoke in 2019: 'caravans filled the main street of Sea Lake when we visited a couple of weeks ago … You just couldn't park' (Interview 3).

The revival in small business that has accompanied the trail in proximate towns across the Wimmera-Mallee in some towns includes new tour and accommodation ventures, re-opened pubs, and proliferating cafes and gift shops, prompting celebratory reassessments of the region's future, no longer a 'place in decline', but rather a series of 'potential sites for civic creative practice' (Morgan et al., 2020: 21). A local business owner reported that she had been 'struggling' until the arrival of the SAT turned things around for her tourist-oriented art gallery ('Silo Art Brings', 2017). While no systematic analysis of the SAT's return on investment has been conducted, evidence suggests that at its height between 2016 and 2020, silo art in the Wimmera-Mallee stimulated the local economy to a significant degree (Potter and Johanson 2023). In these ways, the Silo Art Trail has been significantly beneficial to the economy and profile of the Wimmera-Southern Mallee region. 'Victorian tourism supports thousands of workers', the Victorian Minister for Tourism, Sports and Major Events was quoted as saying, in promoting the state government's investment in a package of regional initiatives that included the SAT (Beat 2021). News articles made ambitious claims, such as 'The unique art experience that saved Australia's rural towns', which describes how local drought and crop failure meant that to 'save their towns, residents needed to attract tourists' (Cresswell-Myat 2021).

In contrast to this immediate economic success, the SAT's claims to cultural benefits, including creative place-making, are less evident. While theorists of creative place-making such as Markusen and Gadwa (2010) argue that its affordances lie in the grounded activation of everyday spaces and community encounters, there are limitations to how this is done. These include 'outside' expertise coming into a community and directing activations, without embedding consultation, collaboration and co-production amongst the makers and the community in the process (Courage 2021a, 2021b). Consistent with Symons and Hurley's (2018) point that regional communities are commonly regarded as recipients rather than potential producers of culture and arts, the SAT relied on artists from outside the region, commissioned by a Melbourne-based agent to create the work. The substantial investment in the SAT and the significance of its profile offered a rare opportunity to provide work and skill development for local artists which was not taken. Painting murals at the scale needed for the silos requires specific skills, both practical – such as suspension from heights – and artistic, such as working at heights for ground-level viewer perspective. 'Farmer Quartet' on Brim silo for example is 35 m high and 45 m wide. Whether intentionally or not, missing this opportunity reflects a common misconception that there is little creative capacity in regional Australia, and so reproduces an urban-centric approach that shapes cultural planning in the regions.

The second limitation of the SAT's capacity to generate cultural outcomes results from its character as a driving tour. Audiences for the trail are encouraged, by the fact of the trail and the distances between towns, to move between the painted silos rather than to stop and engage with the communities that house the silos. While some towns benefit from increased demand for hospitality services, the very nature of the trail encourages brief and superficial engagement, as the next silo calls (Interview 5). These interventions, too, reflect a move from the valuing of public art for aesthetic and intrinsic reasons, to instrumental and applied ones.

The silo works also represent only a subsection of the communities they might have tapped into, perhaps reflecting the influence of non-local artists. The style of the SAT - large murals depicting agricultural figures, faces, and farming or native animals - results from this lack of diverse community inputs in the design stage, as much as it does from its emphasis on recruiting high profile artists from outside the region. It is a particular vision of rural life - one that is externally recognisable - that is perpetuated in the silo works.

This is evident in the limited depiction and inclusion (either representationally or through consultative practices) of First Nations people in the initial six silos of SAT. While one of these works – in Sheep Hills (Fig. 4) – showcases the faces of Wergaia and Wotjobaluk Traditional Owners, this was the only example of the original six works that featured imagery outside what Tony Birch has called 'settler nostalgia' (Birch 2005, 190), and was undertaken by a non-indigenous artist. Overwhelmingly the SAT murals manifest a white-centric imagery of agricultural enterprise, situating these in a long tradition of settler-colonial

Fig. 4. Sheep Hills Silo, Adnate, 2018. Photo: xxx

'public-history making' (Birch 2005, 187) in Australia. Agricultural environments in Australia are problematic sites of colonial violence and dispossession – pastoral landscapes were often frontier zones of conflict and brutality, and agriculturalism not only participated in the denial of Traditional Owner sovereignty, it also enacted environmental colonisation, doing irreversible damage to native ecosystems. The perpetuation of idyllic rural imagery in the SAT, including the depiction of First Nations people in ways that do not acknowledge any of this history, reproduces colonial paradigms. It also misses the opportunity to tell the complex 'interconnected stories located in the "contact zone" of a shared existence' in the making of Australia (Birch 199). Instead, these works provide a narrow, largely monocultural narrative of rural Australian history and community, reflecting a lack of robust consultation processes (Interview 1).

The economic outcomes of the SAT too, hide lost opportunities. Firstly, for small towns the static artworks are expensive to fund: according to Green (2021, p. 240), they average between $50,000 – $100,000 per silo, and up to $150,000 if there are multiple artists involved. Silos are exposed to the weather (hot summers and frosty winters) in agricultural areas that are largely openly cropped and cleared, exacerbating harsh conditions. A painted mural will decay over 5–10 years and require costly rehabilitation work to remain vibrant, and cannot be easily adapted if community sentiment changes. Secondly, an unchanging image is less likely to inspire return visits - and this flows into the third reason: the 'business case'. The trail is marketed (and often experienced by the public), as a fly-by selfie opportunity, rather than places where tourists might stay and spend money over multiple days.

This problematic is exacerbated by the rapid uptake of silo art by governments in response to the SAT's success; seen as a solution to rural economic and social malaise, the roll out of silo art elsewhere has generally involved a template approach, where the style and kinds of imagery of the SAT are largely reproduced. As a representative from Regional Development Victoria expressed, silo art is 'a bit of a runaway train - they just keep painting silos' (Interview 4). In the rush to reproduce the original SAT's perceived success, there is little scope for reflection on the art form itself and its politics of representation.

The street art style favoured in the SAT and its offshoots speaks, too, to the question of imported frameworks not necessarily attentive to the local. As we have discussed elsewhere (Potter and Johanson, 2023), street art emerged as an urban art form in post-industrial cities in the 1970s and 80s and has since been embraced in creative cities tourism, ironically mainstreaming a counter-cultural practice as a tool of regenerative placemaking (Forte and De Paola 2019, 1). While the post-industrial context of rural places maps against the sites of street arts' emergence and international growth, there is translation work to be done to re-situate this form so associated with the political expression of marginalised and disenfranchised urban communities in this geography. In its current iteration, static silo art does not undertake this work, nor prompt conversations about geographically located social conditions, challenges, and needs. The absence of this work speaks to the single purpose of attracting tourists who are provided with safe, appealing, and recognisable place-stories, which offers little to locals by way of opportunities for open and complex discussions about place, history and identity.

5. 5 Natimuk silo art

The small town of Natimuk, on Wotjobaluk Country in the Wimmera region, presents a contrasting creative use of silos. Natimuk lies 8 km from Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles, a cliff in the Tooan State Park significant for its Indigenous heritage and, since the 1970s, as a popular destination for rock-climbers. From the 1990s, rock-climbers have influenced, and been influenced by, the existing arts and broader community in Natimuk. This has resulted in the cultivation of collective and participatory arts practices that are specific to Natimuk's geographic location, skills, and social concerns. The combination of rock climbers, artists, an established settler farming community, a somewhat transient and mobile population, and tourism, has meant that Natimuk is demographically and professionally atypical compared to many other small and more culturally homogeneous Wimmera towns.

This diversity is key to the local profusion of ephemeral and performance-based art which has evolved over several years. Companies that have been established in Natimuk by local artists, including aerial performance company Y Space and bamboo structure engineering company Bambuco (no longer active), and arts and cultural organisation ACT Natimuk (Arapiles Community Theatre Natimuk), have used projection, performance, aerial and shadow work to transform its built and natural environments, including in particular Natimuk's grain silo in the middle of town. Local and non-local artists and other professionals co-produce and perform ephemeral and poetic placemaking interventions with the community in ways that refuse fixed understandings and singular grand narratives.

The examples of creative work on the Natimuk silos presented here have occurred both within the Nati Frinj Biennale (NFB) festival, and in standalone events outside of a festival context. The NFB has been variously funded since it began in the year 2000, and is an event that is part of the wider programming activity of the arts organisation ACT Natimuk (Arapiles Community Theatre Natimuk). In the early, smaller iterations of the NFB, modest funding was supplied by Horsham's Art is … Festival ($100), and then later VicHealth (up to $10,000), but there have also been funding arrangements with a range of other public funding agencies.[2] Some of this funding was purely project or event based (exclusively for the NFB as a whole, or a specific project that was presented). However, since 2016, ACT Natimuk has applied for and received multi-year funding through Creative Victoria which allows it to have three part-time paid positions: a General Manager, Nati Frinj Biennale Director, and a Made in Natimuk producer. From 2022 to 2025, ACT Natimuk is a recipient of the Creative Enterprises Program[3] (CEP) funding ($100,000 per year) from Creative Victoria because of the state-wide significance of the arts and cultural work produced and presented for the NFB as well as the work done by the organisation outside of the festival context in the Wimmera region and beyond.

If tourism is the significant outcome of the SAT, a comparable achievement of Natimuk's artworks is their reputational reach well beyond the Wimmera region. In 2002 the *Colony* development project by Y Space was developed on the Natimuk silo before touring to perform in the Next Wave Festival on the Arts Centre Melbourne spire in the state's capital city. *Colony* involved a group of performers living and dancing on built infrastructure (a $250,000 commission). It was shortly followed by *Space and Place* in 2003: a large-scale community arts project also produced and performed on the Natimuk silo which was:

> … developed by a team of Natimuk based artists, all working in different mediums … Directed by Jillian Pearce, the aerial performance of Y Space, animation of Dave Jones from Transience, shadow puppetry of Mary French, shadow sculpture of Greg Pritchard and the music and choir of Santha Press all came together with 150 local people in Australia's first interactive animation/aerial/shadow performance event. (Made In Natimuk 2021).

Government agency Regional Arts Australia recommissioned *Space and Place* in 2004 (Fig. 5) when the large regional service town Horsham hosted a national arts forum (a $110,000 project).

In 2006, *Space and Place* featured as part of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne (a $200,000 commission) and in 2007 opened the Elements Shopping Centre in Kowloon, Hong Kong (a $150,000 contract). Other large projects include a $250,000 State government

[2] Eg Arts Victoria, Community Partnerships, Festivals Australia, Regional Arts Victoria, and Creative Victoria https://natifrinj.com/location/.

[3] https://creative.vic.gov.au/funding-opportunities/find-a-funding-opportunity/creative-enterprises/previous-recipients.

Fig. 5. Space and Place, 2004. Photo: ACT Natimuk.

commission in 2018 for the Bendigo National Arts Conference called 'Poppet', and 'Galaxias', a commission for the Geelong After Dark festival in 2019. Natimuk artists also generate collaborations with urban-based arts organisations. In 2019, the local festival, the Nati Frinj Biennale, used the silos as a projection surface to work with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for a major composition by Rae Howell titled 'Bee-Sharp Honeybee' (Fig. 6). *Bee-Sharp Honeybee* was a finalist for the Art Music Awards in 2020 under the 'Excellence in a Regional Area' category.

Fig. 6. Bee-sharp Honeybee, Rae Howell, 2019. Photo: Michelle McFarlane photography.

The Natimuk silos have also been used to develop and rehearse aerial, projection, performance, shadow, theatre, and puppetry skills for various other Y Space/Transience performances including *Cirque de Silo* in 2005, *Highly Strung* in 2011 (which toured to Murtoa's Stick Shed in 2019), and *Dusk* in 2017.

A practical benefit of ephemeral art is its potential for infinite applications - the silo becomes a palimpsest that enables continuously changing representations. Projection on the Natimuk silo is particularly effective because the light colour and surface of the silo are naturally a well-suited canvas for light projections.

The use of ephemeral rather than fixed art also prevents the capture and reification of a single version of Natimuk's history and culture, allowing for continuous reflection and consideration. A recent example of this reconsideration of Natimuk's history and culture is the 'Painted with light' projection program. 'Painted with light' is an ACT Natimuk projection residency program (2021) that was supported by development funding from Creative Victoria (through the Strategic Investment Fund Stage 2).[4] The program is embedded with creative, cultural, and economic goals (particularly to increase tourism and local business trade), and is aligned with, but distinctive from, the SAT.

'Painted with light' differentiates Natimuk in the Wimmera-Mallee silo art trail as a night-time destination, as opposed to daytime visitation of painted murals, and builds on the creative skills of the local artists and community with visual storytelling and multidisciplinary experiments. First Nations artists took up the opportunity to lead the first creative development phase of the 'Painted with light' projection program, so there was an Indigenous development process with the commissioned artists Gail Harradine[5] (Wotjobaluk, Djubagalk, Jadawadjali), Tanisha Lovett (Gunditjmara, Wotjobaluk), producer Savanna Kruger (Wotjobaluk, South Sea Islander), and family Elders. Following this, an open call was made for a community workshop in the Natimuk

[4] The residency idea did not come to fruition as hoped because of unsuccessful attempts at securing further funding. However, other projection activations at the hall and other local buildings have subsequently happened in Natimuk through ACT Natimuk's Reconciliation Week event (in partnership with Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network) and the Creative Lab program ($5000 grants).

[5] Harradine was also part of the ACT Natimuk Projection Residency planning and selection committee, which included regional members and local residents, including: Hannah French, Alison Eggleton, Verity Higgins, Sue Pavlovich, Mary French, and Tracey Skinner.

hall to create and gather visual images to project.

With approximately 50 people attending (equivalent to 10% of Natimuk's population), attendees were Natimuk locals, and from neighbouring towns including Horsham and Dimboola. Local media outlets were enthusiastic, reporting with ' … a live feed and short video clip from ABC Wimmera, an article in the Horsham Times and interest from the Wimmera Mail Times, and Weekly Advertiser today' (ACT Natimuk General Manager report, 2021).

A focus of the 'Painted with light' test night at the Natimuk silo on 1 May 2021 celebrated local First Nations artists including Harradine (born in Dimboola) (Fig. 7) and Lovett (based in Horsham) (Fig. 8). These artists' contributions included mixed forms (painting, drawing, photography, animation), and were characterised by warm portrayals of matriarchal knowledge transfer, and wide-ranging representations of Country. Around 70% of the combined work projected on the night was Harradine and Lovett's. This work 'contributed images reflecting a strong connection to place and family, with linkages between the story of Tchingal the Giant Emu linking Djurrite to Gariwerd [a significant nearby natural landmark] and the wider region' (ACT Natimuk 2021). This use of the Natimuk silo as a site to illuminate an ongoing First Nations-led dialogue with family, ancestors, experimentation, and the non-Indigenous community, aligns with Konishi's (2019, 304) call for ' … continuing modes of Indigenous resurgence which respond to colonial discourses'. The 'Painted with light' test night presents 'extra-colonial Indigenous histories which coincide with shared histories of colonisation' through bursts of First Nations painted light, Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaboration, engagement, and relationship building. Harradine (2022, personal correspondence) notes that 'Painted with light' has 'been a wonderful means for me to connect with other Koorie artists and the broader community'. This event acknowledges and explicitly demonstrates enduring and dynamic First Nations cultural and family ties, and resistance to exclusive and triumphant pioneer myths of Wimmera settlement via the cultural subversion of the grain silo. This is a form of intercultural exchange that displays a distinct relationality, and importantly, is done following appropriate consultation and protocols.

Fig. 8. On Wimmera land by Tanisha Lovett at 'Painted with light' in Natimuk, May 2021. Photo: Mary French.

5.1. *Natimuk ephemeral art: expectations and outcomes*

The outcomes of Natimuk's ephemeral art are both cultural and economic. Reliance on projection and other models of ephemeral art on and around Natimuk's silos allows for infinite narrative possibilities and approaches that reflect cultural changes and views. Projection has the potential to resist a grand narrative, enabling multiple histories/narratives the opportunity to coexist. Although at a scale too small to warrant measure by metropolitan government agencies, being a night-time destination is beneficial to the town's local businesses, including the Natimuk National Hotel and café (although restricted by limited accommodation capacity).

Natimuk's arts, with the working silo at centre, provide economic and tourism opportunities through events like the Nati Frinj Biennale (often with silo activations) and GoatFest, which have revitalised the town. The Nati Frinj is a multi-disciplinary community arts festival that presents and supports local, national, and international arts and cultural

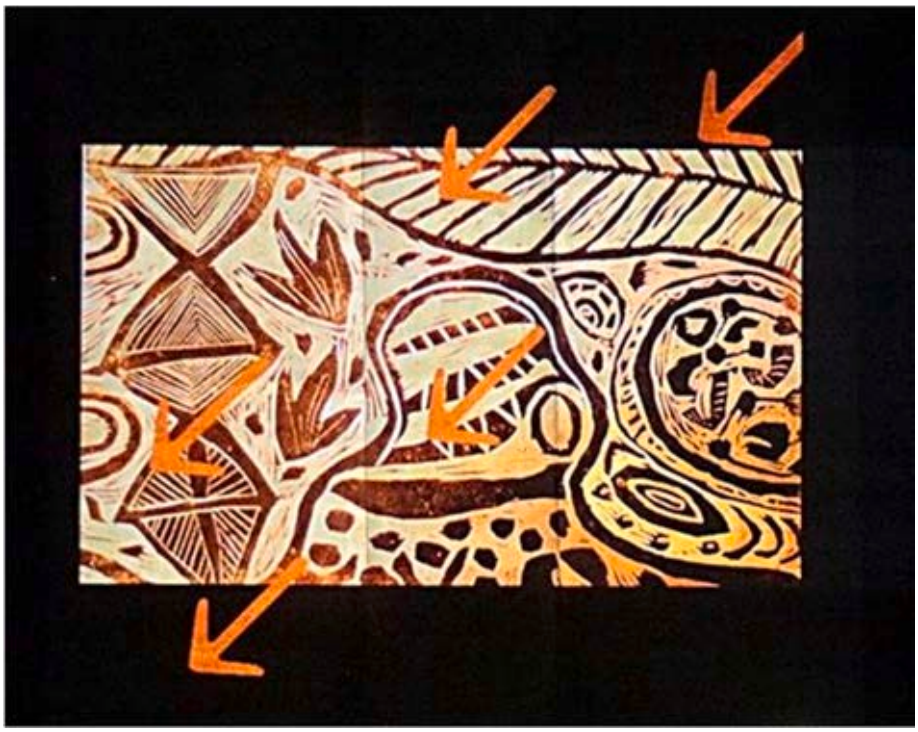

Fig. 7. Emus Feet by Gail Harradine at 'Painted with light' in Natimuk, May 2021. Photo: Hannah French.

engagement in participatory and community-based modes, while GoatFest is an annual rock climbing short film festival held over the Easter weekend. The Manager of Arts, Culture & Recreation at Horsham Rural City Council (Interview 6), elaborates on the challenges of the region: 'If we just looked at the statistics: Natimuk, on paper, is in a heavily disadvantaged area, with high levels of unemployment or social security dependency, high-age population, a whole raft of problematic indicators'. She (2020) explains that beyond the numbers, the rock climbing and arts communities have helped to create a unique and vibrant community (Interview 6). In a diverse community, the arts have stabilised and revitalised Natimuk in tangible ways:

> This 'creative' town generates interest: attracting people, maintaining population, maintaining a relative[ly] lower age demographic compared to other Wimmera towns, maintaining house prices (Interview 6).

This revitalisation has partly been achieved by enhanced participation and creativity in public decision-making, and building community capacity by telling stories in (and of) the area that strengthens identity and a sense of place.

However, in comparison to the static paintings of the Silo Art Trail, the ephemeral nature of the arts practised in Natimuk is labour- and time-intensive. This is partly because the ephemeral model requires new artwork to be created regularly. In addition, its community arts approach requires interpersonal communication skills, diplomacy, artistic skills and vision, and has the potential to be taxing to the host community and artists in a context of low or no pay, and the vagaries of project-based arts funding. In Natimuk, these skills, experiments, and experiences have built from small-to large-scale events over time. It also requires a level of capacity in the arts network to prevent artist burnout, and skills in community consultation. Therefore, it is perhaps not a method that is instantly transferrable to other contexts, although Nati artists (often through ACT Natimuk's production arm Made in Natimuk) have facilitated and assisted large and small projects for other communities. However, the potential for communities to co-create and negotiate placemaking means it has the potential for powerful and accurate narrative representations of place which are dynamic and adaptable.

6. Concluding discussion

The two initiatives examined here belong to the same geographic region and both centre on and creatively repurpose grain silos. Their analysis in this article exposes different creative purposes, with very different outcomes. The rapid growth of the Silo Art Trail beyond its initial six silos reflects enthusiasm for painted agricultural infrastructure as a drawcard for regional tourism. As a grand-scale visual spectacle, such artwork represents a significant innovation in creative production. The SAT's overriding success is its contribution to economic stimulus and growth by attracting tourism to places that would otherwise not be on the tourist map. Cultural and regional development policies (by Creative Victoria and the Drought Resilience Fund respectively) adopted a tourism objective to inform their funding of the trail's establishment. This meant that the trail achieved a significant tourism increase, but with less evidence of success in reflecting the diversity of its local culture, and with missed opportunities to maximise a more extensive range of economic benefits.

In contrast, Natimuk's home-grown ephemeral art activities have used the unique aerial and projection expertise inherent in the town and plumbed the many diverse cultures and experiences of its small surrounding population to build a specialisation and originality that make it successful in achieving large scale commissions. In doing so, it preserves the canvas of its silo for future use, and leaves open the opportunity for new stories to be told. Instead of contributing to economic growth in a way that urban policy interests might aim for, Crawshaw and Gkartzios argue that the non-urban arts practices have 'diagnostic' benefits for community development: inducing processes of reflexivity, revealing community relationships and even – in their own study – 'nature-human relationships' (2016: 142). With a slight modification to 'nature-human-built structure relationships', their observation may be used to describe the Natimuk experience. This role is valuable because it assists the 'realisation of the constant transformation of rural communities, ultimately pointing to the need for the constant transformation of rural governance' (Crawshaw and Gkartzios 2016: 142). While their impact on tourism has not been measured and may be more modest than that of the SAT (in part because it is limited by existing tourist infrastructures), the Natimuk activities have generated economic growth as well as provided an opportunity for local artistic development, community involvement and cohesion. Flexible and ephemeral, the 'Nati' silo works allow for new versions of local stories to be developed and told. The development of local expertise increases sustainability in that it has regard for local artists' livelihoods, 'acknowledging and sustaining their professional identities and enabling them to achieve a certain quality of life in the rural as part of its development discourses and strategies' (Mahon et al., 2018: 272).

We utilise the SAT and the Natimuk silo as contrasting examples that demonstrate the limits we are flagging, as well as the creative placemaking that is possible when arts initiatives are generated within regional communities. Recognising silo art as an example of the policy interest in repurposing agricultural infrastructure, we comment on the politics and practicalities of permanent and ephemeral forms of art in placemaking. In addition to this, there is an overarching critique which speaks to all of these points, and that is the quantity and quality of the local consultation undertaken to plan and implement these projects.

These differing examples indicate that while economic benefits can be significant, the potential capacities of cultural funding are diminished if a narrow view of economic impact becomes the lead driver of creative planning in the regions. Rather, we suggest that both the economic and social benefits are greater when economic objectives are embedded in the understanding of social, cultural and community value. This includes local capacity building in terms of skills and training, culturally sensitive and inclusive consultation and participation, and generating a sense of local investment, collaboration and care. These aspects can support economic flourishing and tourist appeal; they contribute to the resilience of regional and rural places, despite their ongoing challenges, and enable inclusive storytelling that keeps place stories and histories alive and open. Local capacity building in all these areas is a key asset for regional and rural Australia that cultural funding can support.

Interviews

Interview 1, 2018, Melbourne. 27 September.
Interview 2, 2019, Warracknabeal. 28 November.
Interview 3, 2019, Charlton. 10 December.
Interview 4, 2019, Melbourne. 15 April.
Interview 5, 2019, Horsham. 27 November.
Interview 6, 2020, Natimuk. 24 February.

CrediT authors statement

Emily Potter: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Katya Johanson:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Molan D'Arcy:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

References

ACT Natimuk General Manager 2021, Report 2021, 7 July.

ACT Natimuk 2021, 'Painted with light', retrieved 3 February 2022 <http://actnatimuk.com/actnatimuk/current-projects/painted-in-light-natimuk-projection-residency/>.

Anderson, J., Toohey, J., 2020. The anchor, the centre, the shelter, the dwelling: a conversation about contemporary theatre practice in regional Victoria. Australas. Drama Stud. 77, 145–170.

Anwar McHenry, J., 2011. Rural empowerment through the arts: the role of the arts in civic and social participation in the Mid West region of Western Australia. J. Rural Stud. 27 (3), 245–253.

Anwar-McHenry, J., 2009. A place for the arts in rural revitalisation and the social wellbeing of Australian rural communities. J. Rural Stud. 19 (1), 60–70.

Balfour, B., Fortunato, M.W.-P., Alter, T., 2016. The creative fire: an interactional framework for rural arts-based development. J. Rural Stud. 63, 229–239.

Beat, 2021. Victorian Government Announces $149 Million in Funding for Ten Regional Tourist Destinations. https://beat.com.au/the-best-day-hikes-near-melbourne-that-arent-the-1000-steps/. (Accessed 2 September 2023).

Behr, A., 2022. 'Arts Council Cuts: the Problems with 'levelling up' through Culture', the Conversation, 10 November. https://theconversation.com/arts-council-cuts-the-problems-with-levelling-up-through-culture-194213. (Accessed 1 April 2023).

Bell, D., Jayne, M., 2010. The creative countryside: policy and practice in the UK rural cultural economy. J. Rural Stud. 26 (3), 209–218.

Birch, T., 2005. In: Lydon, J., Ireland, T. (Eds.), Death Is Forgotten in Victory: Colonial Landscapes and Narratives of Emptiness. *Object Lessons: Archaeology and Heritage in Australia*. Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, pp. 186–200.

Butler, R., 2019. Young people's rural multicultures: researching social relationships among youth in rural contexts. J. Youth Stud. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1657564, 2019.

Courage, C., 2021a. Introduction - what really matters: moving placemaking into a new epoch. In: Courage et al. (Ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking, pp. 1–8.

Courage, C., 2021b. Preface – the radical potential of placemaking. In: Courage et al. (Ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Placemaking, pp. 219–223.

Crawshaw, J., Gkartzios, M., 2016. Getting to know the island: artistic experiments in rural community development. J. Rural Stud. 43, 134–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.12.007.

Creative Victoria 2016, Creative State Strategy 2016–2020, State Government of Victoria: Melbourne.

Creative Victoria 2025, Creative State: Our Strategy, State Government of Victoria: Melbourne. https://creative.vic.gov.au/about/our-strategy.

Crespi-Vallbona, M., Mascarilla-Miró, O., 2021. 'Street art as a sustainable tool in mature tourist destinations: a case study of Barcelona. Int. J. Cult. Pol. 27 (4), 422–436. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2020.1792890.

Cresswell-Myat, N., 2021. 'The Unique Art Experience that Saved Australia's Rural Towns', 13 August. Travel Awaits. https://www.travelawaits.com/2688627/silo-art-trails-australia/.

Creswell, JW, Poth, CN, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, Sage.

Cunningham, S., McCutcheon, M., Hearn, G., Ryan, M.D., 2021. '"Demand"' for culture and "allied" industries: policy insights from multi-site creative economy research. Int. J. Cult. Pol. 27 (6), 768–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2020.1849168.

Duxbury, N., 2021. Cultural Sustainability, Tourism and Development: (Re)articulations in Tourism Contexts. Routledge, London and New York.

Duxbury, N., Campbell, H., 2011. Developing and revitalizing rural communities through arts and culture. Small Cities Imprint 3 (1), 111–122.

Edwards, R., 2012. Gympie's Country music muster: creating a cultural economy from a local tradition. J. Rural Stud. 28, 517–527.

Escalano-Orcao, A.I., Escalano-Utrilla, S., Sáez-Pérez, L.A., Sánchez-Valverde García, B., 2016. The location of creative clusters in non-metropolitan areas: a methodological problem. J. Rural Stud. 45, 112–122.

Farrugia, D., 2019. The local politics of rural land use: place, extraction industries and narratives of contemporary rurality. J. Sociol. 55 (2), 306–322.

Fleming, D., Measham, T., 2015. Local economic impacts of an unconventional energy boom: the coal seam gas industry in Australia. Aust. J. Agric. Resour. Econ. 59, 78–94.

Forte, F., De Paola, P., 2019. 'How can street art have economic value? Sustainability 11 (580), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030580.

Gallagher, B.K., 2021. Death and life: the promise and problems of arts in rural communities. Int. J. Arts Manag. 23 (2), 30–42.

Gattenhof, S., Hancox, D., Kaebe, H., Mackay, S., 2023. The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: a Social Impact Model. Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Australian Research Council Linkage Report.

Gibson, C., 2010. Guest editorial: creative geographies: tales from the margin. Aust. Geogr. 41 (1), 1–10.

Gillmore, L., 2018. Australia's Largest Outdoor Gallery: the Silo Art Trail, Victoria. Guardian, 13 March. https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2018/mar/13/silo-art-trail-victoria-australia-largest-outdoor-gallery.

Green, A., 2021. Australian silo art: creative placemaking in regional communities. J. Place Manag. Dev. 14 (2), 239–255. https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/1753-8335. (Accessed 25 August 2021).

Harradine, G., 2022. Personal Correspondence.

Hinkson, M., 2022. Contesting rural Australia in a time of climate change. J. Rural Stud. 95, 50–57.

Jazdzewska, I., 2017. 'Murals as a tourist attraction in a post-industrial city: a case study of Lodz (Poland). Tourism 27 (2), 45–56.

Konishi, S., 2019. First Nations scholars, settler colonial studies, and Indigenous history. Aust. Hist. Stud. 50 (3), 285–304.

Mackay, S., Klaebe, H., Hancox, D., Gattenhof, S., 2021. Understanding the value of the creative arts: place-based perspectives from regional Australia. Cult. Trends 30 (5), 391–408.

Made In Natimuk 2021, Space and place, retrieved 10 October 2021, <https://madeinnatimuk.com/space-and-place/>.

Mahon, M., McGrath, B., Laoire, O., Liam, L., 2018. 'The transformative potential of the arts and culture in sustaining rural futures. J. Rural Stud. 63, 214–216.

Malzard, B., 2018. Silo murals lift community spirit and attract tourists. Australian Financial Review, 1 June. https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/silo-murals-lift-community-spirits-to-the-sky-and-attract-tourists-20180425-h0z8di. (Accessed 16 August 2021).

Markusen, A., Gadwa, A., 2010. Arts and culture in urban or regional planning: a review and research agenda. J. Plann. Educ. Res. 29 (3), 379–391.

Morgan, T., Edwards, C., Crow, J., 2020. After Warracknabeal. Architect Victoria (Autumn), 18–21.

Potter, E., Johanson, K., 2023. From Streets to silos: urban art forms in local rural government and the challenge of regional development. In: Jancovich, L., Durrer, V., Houndsmill (Eds.), Cultural Policy Is Local: Understanding Cultural Policy as Situated Practice. Palgrave, Baskingstoke.

Potter, E., Magner, B., 2018. Murray-Mallee Imaginaries: towards a literary history of a region. Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature 1 (18), 1–18.

Regional Development Victoria, 2022. Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy. https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/resources/regional-economic-development-strategies. (Accessed 2 September 2023).

Roberts, E., Townsend, L., 2016. The contribution of the creative economy to the resilience of rural communities. Sociol. Rural. 56 (2), 133–328.

Rollason, B., 2018. The Frustrated Victorian Towns where Population Is Going Backwards. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 17 October. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-17/melbourne-is-booming-but-why-are-people-leaving-western-victoria/10376858.

Silo Art Trail, http://siloarttrail.com/home/, accessed 11 July 2021.

Silo Art Brings Colour to Country Towns in Western Victoria, 2017. YouTube, 26 September. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXrX62ZSd2A.

Skippington, P.A., Davis, D.F., 2016. 'Arts-based community development: rural remote realities and challenges. Rural Soc. 25 (3), 222–239.

Sunderland, N., Woodland, S., O'Sullivan, S., Bartleet, B.-L., 2022. The role of Australian First Nations' knowledges and the arts in "inclusive" regional and remote development: a narrative review. J. Rural Stud. 89, 423–436.

Sweeney, J.K., Mee, P., McGuirk, Ruming, K., 2018. Assembling placemaking: making and remaking place in a regenerating city. Cult. Geogr. 25 (4), 1–17.

Symons, J., Hurley, U., 2018. Strategies for connecting low income communities to the creative economy through play: two case studies in Northern England. Creativ. Ind J. 11 (2), 121–136.

White, R.E., Cooper, K., 2022. Qualitative Research in the Post-Modern Era: Critical Approaches and Selected Methodologies. Springer, Cham, Switzerland.

Yarriambiack Shire, Performance Statement, https://www.yarriambiack.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/documents/your-council/council-agendas/2022/28-september/14.3-performance-statement-v1.pdf, accessed 2 September 2023, 1-14.