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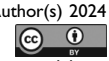

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Invisible innovation: Intellectual labour on regional university campuses in Australia

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Abstract

In Australia, regional university campuses occupy a geographically and institutionally peripheral position in a metrocentric higher education system. We argue that the concentration of research funding and capabilities at metropolitan campuses devalues the intellectual labour of academics working on regional university campuses. The authors use collaborative autoethnography to explore a common theme of 'gap filling', that is, mobilising scarce resources to create unique solutions for local issues, and draw on Southern Theory to theorise the implications for our work in the location-based power relations of the Australian knowledge production economy. In this context, we utilise Eversole's concept of 'invisible innovation' to theorise how the important place-

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based knowledge work associated with 'gap filling' on regional university campuses is rendered invisible by the metrocentric geopolitics of knowledge production within Australia. The research reveals that the place-based knowledge work of regional academics fills gaps in regional services and resources through innovations largely unrecognised within the higher education system.

Keywords
regional university campuses, intellectual labour, knowledge production, Southern Theory, collaborative autoethnography

Introduction and background

Research into the experience of academics in rural and peripheral regions consistently demonstrates that their intellectual labour is qualitatively different to that performed in urban metropolitan locations (Eddy & Hart, 2012; Ellis et al., 2006; Page et al., 2019; Wirihana et al., 2017). In particular, it extends to 'wearing many hats': firstly, in undertaking teaching and research in the absence of adequate on-site facilities and personnel; and secondly, in meeting institutional expectations to foster university–community engagement (Murphy & McGrath, 2018) as resident 'academic citizens' (Macfarlane, 2006) in regions with often significant levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The central aim of this paper is to explore and critically analyse the experiences of academics working at regional university campuses in the Australian context to better understand the distinctive nature of their work.

In the Australian context, the terms 'regional campuses' and 'regional universities' refer to those located outside major metropolitan capital cities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). Geographic areas outside Australia's densely populated metropolitan centres are collectively known as 'regional Australia' (Eversole, 2016, p. 4). Australian regional campuses and regional universities are designed to 'serve geographically and economically peripheral regions' (2022b, p. 911) and contribute to 'social and economic development in regional areas' (Australian Government, 2024, p. 22).

There is a dearth of literature about the nature of intellectual labour on regional university campuses in Australia, but a few studies begin to indicate the nature of this work. Eversole's statement, for example, that 'no one expected a serious academic to be working on a regional campus' (Eversole, 2022b, p. 915) suggests that different expectations apply to the work of knowledge workers on regional university campuses compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Academics working on geographically peripheral regional campuses in other parts of the world have similar experiences of 'not measuring up' (Eddy & Hart, 2012, p. 767; Herman & Hilliam, 2018, p. 173), indicating the importance of understanding the influence of geographic location on academic work in both a national and international context.

Regional university campuses on the periphery

Different national contexts use different language to refer to geographically peripheral campuses, reflecting important assumptions and understandings about the meaning of

place. Examples include 'regional' in contrast to the 'main campus' in the United States (Page et al., 2019), 'satellite campus' in Italy (Rossi & Goglio, 2020, p. 1) and campuses in 'regional centres' (Herman & Hilliam, 2018, p. 176) and 'rural regions' (Salomaa, 2019, p. 233) in the United Kingdom. Whilst 'regional' in contrast to the 'main campus' implies unequal power relations, emphasis on 'regional centres' and 'rural regions' points more to the role regional university campuses can play in regional development, as emphasised in much European research (Atta-Owusu & Fitjar, 2022; Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019; Cinar, 2019). For regions geographically distant from metropolitan centres, and with higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage, both power dynamics and regional development expectations may influence campus trajectories.

In the Australian context, regional campuses serve regions outside the capital cities with limited access to higher education. The Australian higher education system is highly concentrated in a handful of coastal capital cities where at least 75 per cent of the population lives (Cook et al., 2022). People living in regional Australia are classified as a higher education equity group (Baik et al., 2015; Robinson, 2012; RUN, 2013, 2023). In Australia, the idea of equity groups in higher education was introduced in 1988 by the federal government to address underrepresentation in higher education and inequality of opportunity for particular groups (Dawkins, 1988). Although the idea has since been frequently reviewed and evaluated (see, for example, Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024; Bradley et al., 2008; Zacharias & Brett, 2019), the original six equity groups – non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB), disability, women in non-traditional areas, First Nations people, low SES (socio-economic status), and outer metropolitan, regional and remote locations – remain largely unchanged.

A recent argument in Australian higher education debates proposes the need to conceptualise regionality beyond geographic location to consider the social and cultural dimensions of being regional (Shinners, 2022; see also Eversole, 2016). We agree with Shinners that geographic context carries social and cultural dimensions that shape the experiences of academics working on regional campuses. Unlike Shinners (2022), however, we do not abstain from recognising the structural disadvantages inherent in the geographic location of regional communities in Australia.

Regional university campuses in Australia have been shown to play an important role in generating aspirations for higher education among people experiencing intersectional disadvantage (Fray et al., 2020; O'Shea, 2019; Wirihana et al., 2017). Campuses also support regional communities through workforce development (Hays et al., 2021; Playford et al., 2010; Wirihana et al., 2017) and are 'energizers of regional innovation systems and contributors to community development' (Eversole, 2022b, p. 917). At the same time, regional campuses are comparatively costly to run (Daley & Lancy, 2011; Richardson, 2011; Robinson, 2012). Further, their capacity to foster regional development varies depending on the size of the campus and whether it is part of one of the resource-rich, 'research-intensive' (G08) universities, a satellite campus of another metropolitan-based Australian university or a university with regional headquarters (Heffernan, 2017).

Research also highlights that regional university campuses are perceived as less prestigious institutions than metropolitan campuses (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Mills, 2002;

Wirihana et al., 2017). Urban economic and intellectual dominance privileges 'the interests of the (metro) centre, rather than the periphery' (Robinson, 2012, p. 88). Current data demonstrate, for example, that research capabilities are becoming increasingly unequal as 'The pockets of world class research hosted by regional Australia – and undertaken for the benefit of regional Australia – are significantly overshadowed by the research income of a small group of metropolitan universities' (RUN, 2023, p. 36). Such a metro-normative orientation positions regional academics, and those who work and study regionally, as institutionally and politically peripheral (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Ebden, 2010; Ellis et al., 2006; Wirihana et al., 2017). Of interest here is how this positioning marginalises the intellectual labour of academics working on regional university campuses.

Regional academics on the periphery

In the Australian higher education sector, the work of academics characteristically involves a mix of teaching, research and service activities (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019). Regional academics, however, 'have different experiences to their metropolitan counterparts' (Wirihana et al., 2017, p. 317), performing their intellectual labour in contexts in which they both live and work (Eddy & Hart, 2012; Herman & Hilliam, 2018, p. 173; Wirihana et al., 2017, p. 12), and where other academic and institutional resources are thin on the ground. Being embedded in small, local communities can make the labour of academics in regional communities highly visible and produce strong expectations to participate in and contribute to community life. Together with often high levels of local educational disadvantage, limited access to local services, and the demands of regional travel (Wirihana et al., 2017), regional academics also grapple with limited resources on regional campuses, which struggle to attract students in lightly populated regions. These conditions create a work context for regional academics that is very different to that of urban academics. Academic workload models, calculating hours of research, teaching and service (Kenny & Fluck, 2014), are typically developed for urban locations and fail to recognise the impact of these regional conditions and needs on academic workloads.

In regard to teaching, the intellectual sustenance and rewards that academics in regional settings gain through targeting and countering the intersectional inequalities of their students are well understood (Eversole, 2022b; Penman & Ellis, 2009). Yet, undergraduate teaching is typically not a prestigious pursuit in contemporary higher education (Papadopoulos, 2017) and its quality is constantly threatened by increased research workload pressures, especially in regional contexts (Dugas et al., 2020).

In regard to research, Aprile et al. (2021) note that the 'managerial imperatives' of the Australian and international higher education sectors actively work against regional academics in that they prioritise universalised performance metrics over the benefits of research for and with local communities. Such experiences are not confined to Australia. In investigating the role of regional academics working in sciences in the UK, Herman and Hilliam found that 'those at a geographical distance experience a constant sense of not measuring up' (Herman and Hilliam, 2018, p. 173) to conventional

ideals of research-focused academics. Eddy and Hart (2012) note that in the United States the ideal research life models the experience of academics at large-scale metropolitan university campuses. They argue that the scholarship of regional academics 'should be recognized for its own value' rather than compared to a metropolitan research life (Eddy & Hart, 2012, p. 767).

In terms of service, universities' emphasis on individualised performance of service conflicts with community-oriented and collective approaches to working with regional communities (Aprile et al., 2021, p. 1). Further, a 'lack of university institutional flexibility' (Allison & Eversole, 2008, p. 99) has been identified as hindering regional academics in Australia from establishing university connections with communities. Similar challenges are experienced by regional academics in the United States, who report an absence of understanding by centralised university administrators about the circumstances and needs of regional locations (Page et al., 2019).

Intellectual labour on regional campuses is often invisible or unseen beyond the periphery where it is performed. For example, in Australia (Eversole, 2022b) as well as Europe (Cinar, 2019), universities' promotion of innovation as primarily technological renders invisible social innovation in regional settings. Similarly, locally beneficial university community partnerships can become invisible when measured by university metrics of research 'engagement' or 'impact' (Murphy & McGrath, 2018, p. 336). Under such conditions, regional academics report feeling self-doubt, exclusion, isolation and a perception of low standing within the university overall (Aprile et al., 2021; Mills, 2002; Page et al., 2019). This can be further exacerbated by intersecting factors such as gender, geographic isolation, and lack of opportunities for professional development and network building, ultimately working against career stability and academic progression on regional campuses (Thomas et al., 2019; White & Goriss-Hunter, 2021).

To make sense of this confluence of factors and how regional academics navigate them, we draw upon the concept of metronormativity grounded in Southern Theory (Collyer et al., 2019; Connell et al., 2017). Southern Theory argues that the global knowledge economy is centred in and dominated by the metropole of the Global North, shaping knowledge production according to its demands and expectations. This metronormativity marginalises social science made in the global periphery and embeds Southern knowledge workers 'as subordinate players in a Northern-centred knowledge formation' (Connell et al., 2017, p. 26). In their study of scholars in the Southern tier of the global knowledge economy, Connell, Collyer and colleagues (Collyer et al., 2019; Connell et al., 2018) examine how intellectual labour is performed in South Africa, Australia and Brazil. They reframe the post-colonial concept of 'extraversion' (Hountondji, 1997, 2006) to analyse the ways in which the labour of Southern knowledge workers is 'extraverted' or turned outwards to meet the demands of the Global North, and how they respond to this domination, particularly through 'their active involvement in the making of knowledge institutions and new domains of knowledge' (Collyer et al., 2019, p. 146).

Our analysis addresses these geopolitical forces operating *within* the Southern tier. Notwithstanding that Australia as a country overall has an 'ambiguous global North/South status' (Collyer, 2021, p. 43), we recognise that metropoles and peripheries also exist within nations. Our analysis conceptualises academics on Australian regional

campuses as peripheral players in a national knowledge economy dominated by metropolitan centres of knowledge production. We utilise the concept of 'extraversion' to examine how the everyday activities of regional academics contest the metronormativity of the higher education system and contribute important knowledge to universities and communities. We recognise that the entrenched structural advantage of the metropole can render the production and transfer of knowledge created through regional intellectual labour invisible. As Eversole notes,

> the most significant aspects of regional campuses' knowledge work in regions remain unacknowledged and unvalued … the institutional and policy environment frames their work in ways that render it invisible. (Eversole, 2022b, p. 918)

Nevertheless, evidence also suggests that regional academics resist metropolitan dominance of the knowledge production economy, and do not passively submit to 'metropolitan power and authority' (Connell et al., 2018, p. 56). Regional academics articulate a symbiosis between invisibility on the one hand and autonomy on the other (Eddy & Hart, 2012; Goriss-Hunter & White, 2021; Page et al., 2019). They actively contest invisibility and reframe it across all domains of academic practice (Eddy & Hart, 2012, p. 761), reclaiming their agency by prioritising teaching and research with and for local communities.

In this way regional academics are well positioned to pursue engaged intellectual labour, providing leadership within the higher education sector for authentic and innovative work with regional communities (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Eversole, 2022a). While such labour on regional campuses may be largely unseen and undervalued within the metrocentric higher education system (Page et al., 2019: E7), it is visible locally, in the authentic engagement of regional academics with their students, research and communities. Eddy and Hart argue that regional academics 'are confident, productive, academics who are making a difference in the lives of their students and communities' (Eddy and Hart, 2012, p. 767). Christensen and Nilsen argue for 'inclusive autonomy' whereby academics working on regional campuses 'feel a sense of inclusivity with the main campus, yet, be entrusted with a sense of local autonomy' (Christensen and Nilsen, 2021, p. 204). The benefits of collaborations between local academics and their communities are well recognised (Drummond et al., 2011; Waschik et al., 2022), across both peripheral and metropolitan regions. Aprile and colleagues observe that amongst early career academics on Australian regional campuses, there is 'an undercurrent of tenacity that connects these academics to their disciplines and their regions in powerful ways, encouraging the pursuit of research outcomes of real value to end-users' (Aprile et al., 2021, p. 12).

To better understand and advance research into the nature of intellectual labour on Australian regional university campuses, we asked the question: 'How does regionality shape intellectual labour on regional campuses?' Our interest in answering this question arises not only from the literature but also directly from our personal experiences and our work together as co-investigators studying the experiences of students on regional campuses. Conversations in project meetings began to surface common experiences which led us to articulate this research question.

Collaborative autoethnography

The research reported here utilised collaborative autoethnography (CAE) between the authors, reflecting on their lived experiences as four female academics of immigrant and non-Indigenous heritages working on different regional university campuses in regional Australia. Each of us has more than a decade of experience teaching and researching regionally in the humanities, social sciences and social work. We all have PhDs, lived regionally at the time of the study and continue to be employed in a range of ongoing university positions. We recognise these privileges have insulated us from the precarity endured by academic staff employed regionally in casual and fixed-term contract positions. Further, we acknowledge that in comparison to our own regionally informed Western academic feminist knowledges, other ways of knowing, such as Indigenous knowledges, have historically been more marginalised in the Australian academy (Holt, 2020). Our work together as co-investigators on a research project about regional student experiences across three campuses in three Australian states in 2021 prompted us to reflect critically on our own experiences as academics teaching and researching in regional contexts, and ask how regionality shapes intellectual labour on regional campuses. To this end, we extended our study to include a formal reflective writing process guided by collaborative autoethnography (CAE), defined by Lapadat as:

> autobiographical, autoethnographic, polyphonic approach to writing, telling, interrogating, analyzing, and collaboratively performing and writing up research on personal life challenges and on negotiating personal and professional identities. (Lapadat, 2017, p. 597)

CAE enabled us to consider and combine our individual experiences within a broader social, cultural and political context, in this instance the Australian higher education system. Each of us wrote an individual autoethnographic reflection about our experiences which we shared online within the research team. Collaboratively and systematically, we then interrogated these reflections to critically analyse our experiences as regional academics. Our approach reflects notion of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) whereby experience is positioned within a geographic as well as a social, cultural and political context.

The interpretation and analysis of our reflections were carried out during June and July 2021 through fortnightly discussions online. The research process was iterative and guided by the exploration and discussion of our reflective writings to distil the nature of our own intellectual labour on peripherally located university campuses. This collaborative process brought together our different perspectives and positions, enriching our individual capacity for reflection and understanding and highlighting the convergences and divergences of our experiences (Lapadat, 2017).

Following our collaborative discussions, we conducted a simple thematic analysis of our four reflections, commencing with a process of reading and familiarisation. The 'analytic sensibility' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 201) bought to bear on the data was guided by our CAE discussions and research collaboration investigating regional student

experiences through which discussion about social and political issues and contexts was ongoing.

Through a process of 'complete coding', data points which addressed the research question of how regionality shapes our intellectual labour on regional campuses were identified and coded for each of our reflections (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 202). The codes were reviewed and the linkages between key words were mapped. This generated six themes and provided conceptual descriptors for organising subthemes. These were developed directly from the language in the reflections through grouping into categories that reflected similar ideas. Table 1 sets out the themes and subthemes.

Marginalising and valuing intellectual labour on regional university campuses

Our individual reflection pieces about our work experiences on regional university campuses revealed the dominance of metrocentrism and numerous examples of how being regionally located is often framed as trivial or negative in the Australian higher education system. Responses such as, 'Oh, you *live* in Shepparton?', 'Why are you still *here* [Burnie]?' and, 'Oh, and we forgot to mention the South West campus – enjoy the scenery [Bunbury]' dismiss intellectual labour on regional campuses as easily forgotten, temporary, a stepping-stone to better positions elsewhere and less valued when compared to the metrocentre. It also reveals how metrocentrism contributes to powerful social constructions of views and beliefs which devalue intellectual knowledge production occurring on the periphery.

Threaded through the six themes of *place, identity, challenges, knowledge, rewards* and *intersectionality* are a number of key ideas, including the importance of centre and periphery, valuing and devaluing resources and reconfiguring resources. The theme *place* focuses on geography with the subthemes of *distance* and *relationships* both *with place* and *in place*. Place is characterised as *country*, *borderland, frontier, wild* and *farming*. The final subtheme of *no road map* is indicative of the experience that academics in regional contexts have in creating their roles in situ. The theme of *identity* exemplifies awareness of regionality as distinctive and positive. The theme of *challenges* includes the subthemes of *isolation* indicating geographic location and *un-prestigious* indicating the organisational and political challenges of regional employment. The normative metrocentricity of the higher education system is articulated as *issues of bush not translated to the city* and *designed for someplace else*.

Comments related to the themes of *knowledge* and *rewards* include 'close relationships', 'relationships and connection' and 'co-construction of knowledge'. These highlight rich opportunities for innovative and constructive collaborations with colleagues and students as well as community and industry. The following quotes from our autoethnographic reflections are indicative of the theme of *rewards* from working in regional contexts and depict the benefits of working in situ in regional contexts where intellectual labour is characterised by authentic engagement and collaboration. It is evident in the following reflection about the experience of one of us in meeting regional students for the first time:

> Many of these students were already working professionally … I realised then that my job was different to what my own university lecturers had done. It wasn't merely to teach social research.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes about intellectual labour on small regional campuses.

Themes	Place	Identity	Challenges	Knowledge	Rewards	Intersectionality
Subthemes	Relationships with place Distance The country No road map	Different from town Regionality Limitations	Isolation Low prestige Dependence on goodwill Different	Metronormativity Co-construction of local knowledge	Community of practice Reliance on self and others	Far fewer opportunities Ethical imperative of structural change

> It was to make social research relevant, to make it useful for the busy, practical people watching me from behind steaming cups of tea.

This illustrates how teaching on a regional university campus involves working with non-traditional students who are often mature aged, employed, and with a practical orientation to dealing with the hardships of their complex lives.

Another narrative account from the CAE reflects on becoming familiar with undergraduate teaching in this environment:

> Getting to know students and their stories, not only meant great opportunities for constructing inclusive and innovative learning environments; it also led to the realisation that many students have multiple responsibilities and face different forms of disadvantage … I found that a pedagogy of co-construction of knowledge and social constructionism helped me support these students through their studies.

The final CAE theme of *intersectionality* speaks to the demographic disadvantages of the regional context and elicited a corresponding desire to work for system change, as indicated by the subtheme *ethical obligations for structural change*.

Equally we noted that students who participated in the 'Studying Regionally' project indicated that they highly value the intellectual labour of regional academics, in contrast to predominant narratives about metrocentric deficit. Participants described the importance of on-campus learning and face-to-face support for the success of their engagement with higher education. For example, one student attributed the high level of support and care unique to regional campuses as the reason she had successfully progressed through her university education:

> I think in the first two weeks, I was about actually freaked out and went to drop out. So I went, 'No, I can't do this. I've never written an essay. I've got no idea.' And I went and had a chat to one of the lecturers. They sat down with me, had a one on one chat for about an hour and pretty much turned everything around. I then had another freakout, probably the next week. So, I got someone who helped me to draw up a timetable. They sat down with me for half an hour, worked out a study plan and showed me how to organize all my assignments. And I never had that before.

The student's story connects with other narratives from our CAE. For example, one of us recalled how in the third week of the semester she was contacted by a student who had not yet attended any classes. The student explained that she had turned up at her campus every week, but had not been able to muster the courage to walk through its main doors, go through the campus and find her classroom. The author offered to meet the student at the main entrance and walk with her, resolving the situation.

These two examples reveal how support provided by regional academics to students helps develop their confidence, knowledge and cultural capital. In this way, our CAE found an unexpected commonality between the ways regional academics and regional students demonstrate resilience and devise local solutions in under-resourced environments.

These narratives add weight to the argument that regional campuses and their staff play a key role in 'making a difference in the lives of their students and communities' (Eddy & Hart, 2012, p. 767). In the next section, we present two case studies that illustrate the interplay of the six themes revealed by our analysis. The case studies highlight how regional academics challenge the inequities of a metrocentric higher education system and mobilise resources creatively to develop unique solutions to local issues.

Case study one: The Cradle Coast Academic Community of Practice

Our first case study is about the Cradle Coast Campus Academic Community of Practice (CCACoP) established in 2016 by academic staff, including the first author, at the University of Tasmania's Cradle Coast Campus. This campus offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses predominantly in the arts, social work, education, health, medicine and business and is located in the small town of Burnie, 300 kilometres from the state's capital, Hobart. It services the Cradle Coast region, a region classified as low socio-economic whose main industries area agriculture, mining and forestry, with an estimated population of 120,000 people and many small, isolated communities (State Growth Tasmania, 2022).

The CCACoP was established for the purpose of addressing the lack of opportunities for formal and informal peer learning, academic mentoring, collaboration and professional development amongst regional academic staff in the area (Krabbe et al., 2023). For the 37 CCACoP members who share an interest in working together across disciplinary boundaries, this initial purpose has expanded to include creating sustainable and distinctive innovation in teaching, learning and research in a regional context. As such, the aims of the CCACoP are consistent with the definition of community of practice by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1). A unique feature of the CCACoP is that many members are part-time or casual employees with limited access to professional development opportunities. The organisation provides a space for these regional academics to work across disciplinary boundaries, ranks and positions to contribute to place-based initiatives (Krabbe et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2024). Its purpose speaks clearly to our key themes, as *place*, regional *identity*, *intersectionality* and addressing *challenges* related to geographic isolation and creating change are central to the its mission to work across disciplinary boundaries and create innovative place-based teaching and research initiatives. Further, our subtheme of *regionality* is distinctive, positive and apparent in the CCACoP's establishment as a response to the challenges of geographical isolation and the metronormativity of the higher education system.

CCACoP members' shared sense of being positioned peripherally within a larger metrocentric system, combined with their interactions across disciplines and positions, have given rise to an informal and non-hierarchical organisational structure. This has encouraged authentic conversations about the need for innovative strategies and solutions and resulted in ongoing interdisciplinary and collective activities and achievements. In

turn, these ongoing dialogues and shared practices have grown a distinctive repertoire of 'words, tools, ways of doing things, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts' (Wenger, 1998, p. 83, cited in Krabbe et al., 2023) that has come to characterise the CCACoP. For example, the organisation facilitates learning and career development opportunities, workshops, teaching, learning and research seminars and guest speakers for staff on campus and the community more broadly aimed at increasing staff opportunities for professional, career and leadership development (Krabbe et al., 2023). These self-managed events have resulted in interdisciplinary research collaborations (for the most recent, see Richey et al., 2022), cross-disciplinary and specialised publications (e.g. Schmidt, 2017; Schmidt et al., 2024; Smith & Krabbe, 2019), monthly academic seminars (e.g. Hargreaves, 2022; Van Dam, 2022) and two national conferences held in the local area in 2022 and 2023 respectively. These collaborations and achievements are examples of important place-based initiatives that reflect our key CAE themes as they are deeply embedded in *place*, shaped by regional *identity* and developed through *intersectionality* and *knowledge* to address particular *challenges* at a regional campus.

The CCACoP's focus on information sharing and peer learning to strengthen networks and research collaborations across disciplines and the region is well illustrated in its academic seminars. A variety of stakeholders, including academic and professional staff, HDR students, industry and community members, are invited to these seminars to share information about existing and emerging projects. On one occasion, the Cradle Coast Authority (CCA), a joint collaboration between nine local councils in North West Tasmania, presented their project, *Sustainable Living*, investigating how to incorporate sustainable development, sustainable living and sustainable construction into the community. Following the presentation, the CCACoP accepted an invitation from the CCA to participate in the *Sustainable Living* project and contribute interdisciplinary knowledge to inform the project's further development.

Commitment to information sharing, peer learning, collaboration and strengthening networks between people and places is at the heart of the CCACoP. This has enabled teaching and research staff at the Cradle Coast Campus to support student learning outcomes more efficiently, while also continuing to build distinctive research and outputs in North West Tasmania. Connecting with our core themes, the CCACoP illustrates the ways in which academics working in regional contexts respond nimbly to the local context, contribute to understanding and addressing of local issues through their intellectual labour and knowledge production.

Case study two: Suicide Bereavement Forum in Bunbury, Western Australia

The second case study demonstrates the connection between the intellectual labour of regional academics and the regional context. Edith Cowan University is based in Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. Its South West regional campus offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in nursing, education, social work, health sciences, arts and business and is located 173 km away from Perth. The region spans 24,000 sq km with a population of around 190,000; economically it relies on mining, agriculture

and tourism. Socio-economic status varies widely and includes areas of advantage and pockets of disadvantage. The third author worked with local service providers to organise a Suicide Bereavement Community Forum (hereafter referred to as the Forum) held on the campus during National Mental Health Week 2021. A catalyst for the Forum being hosted by ECU was the campus's focus on supporting regional academics in sharing published research within the local community (Carlon, 2022). This included research about the impacts of stigma towards people bereaved by suicide in accessing formal and informal supports (Evans & Abrahamson, 2020).

At the time there was only one human services professional, a social worker, in the South West region dedicated specifically to suicide postvention, service delivery and support for people impacted by suicide loss (Andriessen & Krysinska, 2012). This was of concern given that worldwide 'roughly 60 people' (Levi-Belz & Gilo, 2020, p. 1) are bereaved for each death by suicide, while large community-based studies indicate over 50 per cent of a population may experience some form of suicide loss (Maple et al., 2019, p. 380). Such statistics are especially acute in peripheral regions where the proportion of deaths by suicide is consistently higher than national rates (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2022) and where the burden of suicide loss is exacerbated by small populations and the inaccessibility of health and social services (AIHW, 2023). Owing to this resource deficit, the regional social worker championed an approach to strengthen the capacity of the community to better support people bereaved by suicide. This resulted in a working group, consisting of project partners from St John of God Social Outreach, headspace Bunbury and Edith Cowan University, coming together to raise awareness about the impacts of suicide loss and to build community capacity for effectively supporting people bereaved by suicide through the Forum.

The project partners developed this event informed by their own lived experience of suicide loss, current research knowledge and practice wisdom. The purpose of the Forum was to activate the capacity of people bereaved by suicide to understand their own experience as well as the capacity of local people and communities to provide effective support. It was unique in bringing together people bereaved by suicide with those seeking to provide support. The event emphasised the intersection of grief, trauma, structural stigma and taboo in the experience of suicide loss. This established understandings and language that enabled both the bereaved and their supporters to recognise and counter stigma from suicide in their social interactions. The Forum demonstrates an interplay between the themes of *place* and *knowledge* such that lived experiences of the participants and their communities of suicide loss were specific to the South West region, thereby signifying local knowledge embedded in place. Equally the *challenges* of suicide bereavement in the regional context were emphasised and supported by the *rewards* of combining local *knowledge* and research findings to strengthen community capacity.

Twenty-two community members, including people bereaved by suicide, informal supporters and service providers, participated in the Forum. Afterwards their evaluative reflections indicated a strong interest in understanding the experience of being bereaved by suicide. Further they affirmed the need in the local community for knowledge and strategies informed by research to support people bereaved in this way. Forum

participants felt encouraged to share understandings within their families and social networks. Local service providers then sought to adapt the approach. For example, the South West Aboriginal Medical Service invited the project partners to share the event's content with their staff and anticipate developing the material for use within their service. Connecting with our core themes, the regional intellectual labour in this instance was supported directly by the regional campus and local community partnerships. The regional academic involved (third author) harnessed both university and community support and enthusiasm within the regional location to build a community response to suicide loss.

In summary, whilst our two case studies have very different foci, both demonstrate how we, as regional academics, find ourselves deeply embedded in our communities, performing intellectual labour differently to those academics working on urban metropolitan centres. Our research tends to be highly engaged and problem-focused, our teaching holistic and student-centred, and our community engagement intense in regional environments of institutional and resource scarcity and often considerable need. This reveals a paradox of being deeply embedded in local communities and valued as a scarce source of 'cultural and intellectual capital' (RUN, 2023, p. 32), yet unrecognised by the wider knowledge economy centred in the metropole. Therefore, while the autonomy of regional contexts helps us integrate local and academic knowledge in ways which benefit our students, research and communities, the critical importance of this labour in addressing complex and pressing regional problems and inequities continues to be devalued in the university system.

Reconfiguring knowledge work on the periphery: Discussion and conclusion

Our shared stories uncover a wide range of strength-based approaches which inform our intellectual labour. They especially highlight experiences of creatively configuring resources in response to scarcity. By utilising the lens of Southern Theory, which highlights how the global knowledge production economy is centred in the metropolitan North (Collyer et al., 2019), we argue that the intellectual knowledge economy in Australia has its own differentiated location-based power relations. Our stories show that intellectual labour performed on small regional university campuses challenges location-based inequities. In particular, our two case studies of the Cradle Coast Academic Community of Practice (CCACoP) in Burnie, Tasmania and the Suicide Bereavement Forum in Bunbury, Western Australia demonstrate how our everyday actions address needs and harness the energies of local contexts. These illustrate how regional academics work to contest extraversion and create value through our intellectual labour.

Our findings add to the research literature about regional campuses and regional academics (Allison & Eversole, 2008; Eversole, 2022b, p. 911; Mills, 2002; Wirihana et al., 2017) by demonstrating how academics on regional campuses labour to fill the gaps created by place-based power relations in innovative and creative ways. The concept of gap filling (Eversole & Scholfield, 2006) in our intellectual labour is evident in our

analysis. Eversole and Scholfield describe how local organisations in a rural town create new governance spaces to 'fill the gaps' left by metrocentric services in the Australian context. Similarly, Abrams et al. (2015) explain how a community-based organisation in the western United States became a 'fluid, gap-filling "hybrid" actor' (Abrams et al., 2015, p. 677) strategically filling institutional gaps in a highly constrained rural institutional environment. These accounts of gap filling resonate with our analysis of our collective experiences. These illustrate how academics on regional campuses intentionally undertake intellectual labour in order to meet real needs in their regions.

Abrams and colleagues equate gap filling with institutional entrepreneurship – the creative and purposeful action of individuals and organisations to maintain or alter institutions (Abrams et al., 2015, p. 677). Eversole and Scholfield (2006) describe how local organisations in a rural town creatively configured resources to fill gaps in local services by working across organisational boundaries. Our collaborative autoethnographic narratives illustrate how academics fill gaps in local services and regionally relevant knowledge. This includes providing in-depth support to students and filling gaps in knowledge, confidence and cultural capital to encourage and enable a generation of non-traditional knowledge makers to embrace university. Both our case studies demonstrate multiple forms of gap filling on regional campuses and in regional communities to counter conditions of scarcity.

'Gaps' are practical, concrete manifestation of so-called institutional voids, situations where institutional arrangements are absent or weak (Mair & Marti, 2009, p. 419). Institutional voids are characterised by conflict and contradiction (Mair et al., 2012, p. 820) which may result in concrete gaps in services and resources. Regional university campuses arguably inhabit an institutional void in Australia's higher education system. They function in contradiction to a system in which the university sector (and indeed knowledge itself) is seen to reside in metropolitan cities; they present a counter-narrative that posits the need for equitable access to universities and their knowledge resources regardless of location. Regional campuses straddle not only institutional tensions between 'university' and 'region' (Allison & Eversole, 2008), but also contradictions between being a university and being in a region. The gap-filling work of regional academics does not align with the types of intellectual activities that are valued and visible within the performance metrics of the university system; yet such activities are vital for universities to function in regional contexts. These contradictions mean that regional campuses inhabit an institutional void, in which they exist, but are systematically undermined. This void manifests in significant resourcing gaps for regional campuses, regional academics, regional students and regional communities.

The process of gap filling, then, can be conceptualised as entrepreneurial activity in which regional knowledge work constitutes a form of innovation on the margins. While by necessity the work of regional academics often focuses on filling practical gaps in services and resources, it also fills knowledge gaps and generates innovative forms of 'cross boundary' knowledge that link theory and practice (Eversole, 2022a). The CCACoP in Burnie, Tasmania, for example, organises and conducts monthly seminars which bring together a wide range of attendees, such as academic and professional staff, community organisations and industry, to facilitate knowledge sharing and generate 'cross boundary' knowledge.

The examples of the CCACoP and the Suicide Bereavement Forum illustrate the innovative ways in which academics on regional campuses work to counter extraversion and fill gaps created by place-based power relations. However, this form of knowledge work remains largely invisible from metropolitan centres. Hence, we have utilised Eversole's concept of 'invisible innovation' (Eversole, 2022b, p. 909) to illuminate this invisibility, and we have drawn upon Southern Theory to explain its geopolitical marginalisation. Our analysis leads us to conclude that the gap-filling innovations of regional academics seem likely to remain undervalued and unseen in Australian higher education until closer institutional recognition and attention is paid to the conditions, purpose, value and contribution of intellectual labour performed on regional campuses. Currently, a highly metrocentric university system in Australia creates narratives, metrics and resourcing arrangements that privilege mainstream research and teaching in metropolitan contexts, while marginalising and diminishing regional intellectual labour. Construed as unimportant, it is rendered largely invisible. In contrast, our shared stories reveal the breadth and depth of knowledge development on small regional campuses and challenge the dominant view that serious intellectual knowledge production in Australia remains the preserve of urban metropolitan campuses. To this end, we call for more research into how intellectual labour is performed on regional campuses to further advance understanding of how regional academics address institutional voids, respond to and resist metropolitan dominance, and find ways to make their intellectual labour visible.

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