

Mapping Australian Homemade, Amateur & Do-it-Yourself Cultural Economies.

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This contribution to the current consultation on *A New National Cultural Policy*, draws attention to an important space for consideration created by the work of the Australian Research Council Funded Discovery Project *Mapping Australian Homemade, Amateur & Do-it-Yourself Cultural Economies* (DP240102301).

The project is about to commence its final year and is led by Chief Investigators Prof Paul Long (Monash University), Dr Ash Watson (The University of New South Wales), Dr Ali Alizadeh (Monash University), A/Prof Shane Homan (Monash University), Dr Delvin Vargehese (Monash University). Research is supported by Dr. Meherose Borthwick (The University of New South Wales) and Dr. Suzanne Grasso (Monash University). Attached to the project is PhD student Ms. Teesta Chatteraj.

Mapping Australian Homemade, Amateur & Do-it-Yourself Cultural Economies was formulated as a direct response to *Revive's* commitment to recognising the professional status of artists as workers, to supporting audience development and to nurturing the infrastructure which enables the flourishing of a particularly Australian creativity at home and abroad. Recognising the interrelationship of economic value and the expression of Australian *values*, *Revive* commits to the idea that the national identity produced by creative work is a polyvalent site. Key pillars in the policy affirm 'First Nations First' and ensure that there will be 'A Place for Every Story'. Yet there is a curious absence in the purview of *Revive* which makes no mention of the important and durable contribution to such objectives in everyday Australian creative production.

The idea of the cultural and creative industries can be conceptualised in terms of an ecological metaphor (Holden 2015; Gross & Wilson 2020). This describes a continuum between commercial and publicly funded practice, in which an essential if under-appreciated component is that of the *non*-professional sphere of everyday creative production: homemade, amateur and do-it-yourself (HADIY).

While *Revive* reports how 2020 Australia Council for the Arts research claims that 98% of Australians are in some way engaged with the arts and culture, this is framed in terms of participation as consumers. Their activity is confirmation of the value of professional work as their role is relegated to that of readers, viewers, listeners or attendees at events. Absent in *Revive's* citation, the same research tells us that those who creatively participate in the arts as producers has increased by 13% between 2016 and 2020, with 45% of Australians involved in activities from artistic photography to playing a musical instrument or taking a community arts class. The commitment of ordinary people to creative expression has been lauded for their contribution to wellbeing (Fahey et al 2022) or in promoting communal solidarity (Working Class Collective 2022). However, as the oversight of *Revive* confirms, this is a field of activity

that is largely under-represented, respected and scrutinised in terms of the meanings, practices and value – economic and cultural – that ordinary people produce.

Systematic analysis of HADIY addresses the democratic ambition of ‘A Place for Every Story’ and an understanding of the particular, unspoken interdependencies of the cultural economy. Knowledge and assessment of HADIY practice is indispensable for informing, challenging, and ultimately constructing a more inclusive, effective and distinctly Australian cultural policy. By developing new knowledge of the lived experience of creative participation in Australia today, we are making HADIY an object for greater public engagement and policy attention. We integrate the meanings, practices and perspectives of HADIY creatives, organisations and networks in playing a proper part in steering the condition and prospects of Australia's cultural life, identity and creative economy.

To achieve this objective, the project collects qualitative data on HADIY creative practices, places and networks, extending detailed case studies to a participatory mapping of the contexts of such activity, its outputs, community and value. Through our commitment to innovate methodologically in both mapping and dissemination, we fill a gap in the nation's ability to incorporate the evolving HADIY environment into local, state and federal and government initiatives and policies.

In so doing, our research has sought to address these questions

Who are the homemade, amateur and DIY creatives, what do they create and under what conditions is their production enabled?

What is the place of HADIY creativity in the wider cultural economy of markets and formalised processes of support?

How and where is HADIY creativity enabled and conditioned by its organisations, institutions, intermediaries and communities of interest?

What is the value of HADIY creativity for the Australian economy, communities, cultural policy and identity?

The project accords with a scholarly tradition in which ‘culture is ordinary’ and where everyday creativity is not wholly subsumed to conventional art world practice, a model of creative industries and the prioritisation of wealth creation achieved in the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. This non-professional, non-market oriented production is named across cultural forms variously as: grassroots, off-grid, handmade, pro-am, prosumer, homemade, do-it-yourself, do-it-together, activist, vernacular creativity, process-based and collaborative arts practice (Stebbins, 1992; Kester 2004; Edensor et al. 2009; Gauntlett 2011; Holden 2015; Leontidou 2015; Watson & Bennett 2021).

Public policy for art and culture has often been invested in development objectives, with researchers and intermediaries focused on moments of 'hype' around the economy, investment, branding and placemaking at the expense of attention to everyday, 'mundane' creative expression for its own sake (Brokalaki & Comunian 2021). In the expanding literature on engagement by ordinary people with the provision of arts and the cultural sector and the context, practicalities and results of participation and non-participation (Miles & Sullivan 2012; Bennett et al 2020), under-explored is their role as creative producers, and the specificity of the kinds of work created, its motivations and results for its creators and communities of interest (Reeves 2015). Addressing this absence entails new paradigms of assessment when compared to modes of consuming culture (a drama or dance performance, viewing an exhibition or reading a piece of writing); its production requires a different set of resources, time and investment from individuals (Reeves 2015).

The absence of attention to everyday production is apparent in discussions of cultural value (O'Brien & Oakley 2015) and its power dynamics. The lack of interest in HADIY production has the added impact of diminishing its cultural worth and the insights into Australian cultures it offers, reproducing an idea of the amateur's work as secondary and inferior (Fox 2004; Vodanovic 2013).

The project addresses a gap in knowledge by exploring the practice and meaning of vernacular creativity through in-depth examples. Our research has engaged with visual artists, festival organisers, craft-makers, poets, dancers, creative writers, ukulele orchestras, comic-book makers, photographers, zine makers and many others whose practice, driven by creative zeal, is not confined to any one field. We have interviewed around 100 individuals, made numerous site visits to art groups, festivals, rehearsals, performances, workshops, home studios and so on. Recognising the limits of economic audits (Edensor et al 2009), research examines the role of HADIY production in everyday lives in terms of the values it expresses and contribution to individual and community identity, awareness and esteem, evaluating how findings inform wider approaches to creativity.

While the spatial metaphor of the cultural ecology reserves a place for HADIY production at the interstices of commercial interests and publicly funded work, its relationships, interactions and distance (Vodanovic 2013) from those sectors, practices, policies and paradigms is in need of greater exploration. While improvised pathways to creative work often involve the management of a dream or passion for a future in that occupation, incubating skills in amateur or DIY activities (Kerr & Kelleher 2015; Taylor & Luckman 2020), the meaning of forms of creativity and 'fugitive energies' escaping the dominance of the market (Waitt & Gibson 2013) are in need of conceptualisation. Distinct from the commercial and publicly funded sector, HADIY production and values are not conditioned by the same kinds of time schedules (Bilton

2014; Jones and Warren 2016); competition; the over supply of producers and risks (Menger 2014); or aspects of self-exploitation (Taylor & Luckman 2020).

We are finding that what distinguishes HADIY creativity is that it is pursued out of enthusiasm and for pleasure above and beyond necessity and the durability needed to sustain businesses and careers, allowing the sharing of interests, collective production, friendship, and the production of value and identity (Hoggett & Bishop 1986). Yet, whatever the apparent freedoms of HADIY production, a key issue is the degree to which opportunities for participation, particularly for the socially marginalised, echo, affirm or challenge inequalities in the professional sector exacerbated by its structural conditions (Eikhof & Warhurst 2013; Luckman 2020). This perspective of HADIY on the cultural sector invites considerations of foundational tenets of talent and expertise (Banks 2007; Patel 2020) as well as social and cultural capital that informs dispositions towards self expression and participation.

To understand the gaps outlined above, the role of networks, value chains, institutions or associations, of organisations and the effort that enables them is crucial. The organisation and institutions associated with HADIY have received uneven attention in terms of the contributions of personnel, paid roles, administration of membership groups, their sustainability and the durability of production (Stebbins 2019). While HADIY creativity might be highly individualised, personal and sometimes marginalised and isolated from creative tradition and the professional sector, it exists in a relation to necessary resources (musical instruments, art materials, digital platforms), structures of governance, legitimacy and informal judgment such as the school, the workplace, cultural community of interest or state (Vodanovic, 2013). Thus, understanding the social aspects of HADIY creativity as in any 'Art World' (Becker 2008/1982) has involved investigating many mundane or 'humdrum inputs' (Caves 2000) and 'non-creative' activities that underwrite primary activity and give it definition, including the presence of peers, audiences, readers, and so on. These activities include provision of domestic spaces for meetings, booking and maintaining a community venue for a music performance, exhibition or poetry reading, or managing the finances of a non-profit group. A feature of the formal creative sector is the role of the intermediary (Bourdieu 1984; Jones et al 2019); the project examines how intermediary work involves endorsing an approach of 'art for art's sake' (Caves 2000), building networks and community, sharing resources and offering cultural leadership.

Research has engaged with a wealth of organisations that attest to a rich strand of community activity and cultural enterprise focussed on nurturing creativity for its own sake. Some organisations are relatively new and improvised, a significant number have maintained decades of activity, establishing physical premises, financial resources and indeed, rich archives of creative work. HADIY organisations rely on a great deal of goodwill, contributions of time and expertise to maintain and sustain them in a changing bureaucratic environment. Likewise, sustainability relates to changing attitudes to community, with some organisations facing existential challenges thanks

to ageing memberships and a declining availability of volunteers. While many organisations worked hard to survive the Covid pandemic, the closure of a number of well established organisations, festivals and so on underlines the precarity of the sector. Above all, the HADIY sector has a lot to say about Australian community values, self-help and sharing that deserves recognition.

What we are discovering about HADIY production poses questions for its recognition in future articulations of policy and animation of its purposes. As *Revive* suggests, surveys of the cultural economy pay scant regard to the participatory role of non-professionals beyond their function as audiences or individual consumers (see also: *Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts* 2021). Certainly, aspects of policy have sought to connect individuals to potential careers in the creative economy in tandem with galvanizing less instrumental and underexplored modes of expression in a form of ‘state-sponsored amateurism’ (Jones et al 2019). Culture has been enlisted through a series of ‘policy attachments’ (Gray, 2004), whether by Federal or state government agencies, to perform a range of duties, including social inclusion, supporting wellbeing and building confidence and skills (Jones et al 2019), to the degree that engagement in some form has become a marker of one kind of normality (O’Brien & Oakley 2015) and cultural citizenship (Stevenson 2000). This project suggest that a detailed understanding of HADIY production and expression can and should inform policy, especially how cultural value is articulated within the revived interest of the Australian Government to support the creative sector. Page 11 of

Responding to *Revive*’s pillar to ensure ‘A Place for Every Story’, the project innovates conceptually by building a theory of a ‘cultural commons’ (Kay & Wood 2020) to frame HADIY creativity, networks, intermediaries and connectivity to the creative economy. We explore how that concept offers a means of comprehending the value of the sector for initiatives beyond the cultural sector recognised in conventional policy statements. The idea of the cultural commons is one means of thinking past the limits of the creative industries discourse and the prioritisation of the economic potential of cultural assets, goods, experiences and services at the expense of meaning and cultural values.

The approach offers space for innovative thought by taking its cue from studies of informal economies (Lobato & Thomas 2015), of providing viable alternatives to market reasoning and governance (Waitt & Gibson 2013; Leontidou 2015). The conceptual imaginary of the commons can be allied with the materiality of the contemporary sharing economy. This describes a broad socio-economic development beyond the commercial opportunities of a ‘transactional sharing’ economy or sharing ‘for-profit’ and a myriad of alternative and activist practices that often rely upon nonmarket exchange, reciprocity, ‘postcapitalist entrepreneurship’ (Cohen 2017) and indeed production of ideas of the ‘commons’ (Sharp 2020). Connected too are arguments for the value of culture (O’Brien & Oakley 2015), of wellbeing, of emerging

debates about human flourishing, sustainability and the creative sector (Oakley & Banks 2020) for Australia.

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