Developing the Public Environmental Humanities: Challenges, Opportunities, and Lessons

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Abstract
The environmental humanities are a dynamic and growing field of scholarly inquiry that grapple with many of the key challenges of our time. Over the past decade, in particular, the field has developed a strong emphasis on public-facing scholarship. However, while that public scholarship has grown steadily, scholarly analysis and reflection on this work has not kept pace. This article offers a timely discussion of the 'public environmental humanities' as a field of engaged, experimental, research practice. It explores how, where, and when this area of scholarship began to emerge, the diverse goals, formats, and modes of public-engagement that are developing, and provides an overview of some of the key challenges and opportunities in this space.

Keywords:
Environmental humanities; public scholarship; public humanities; engagement; participatory research; research impact.

Introduction

As a field of scholarship, the environmental humanities have emerged in response to the growing challenges of our time, and the recognition that these challenges are fundamentally biosocial, or naturalcultural, in their origins and their impacts (Rose et al. 2012; Neimanis et al. 2015; Adamson and Davis 2017). Consequently, the field has grounded itself in the understanding that any meaningful long-term response to our present moment will require thoroughly multidisciplinary and engaged, modes of research and action. In this context, many scholars have begun to develop new approaches to some of their core academic practices, (re)prioritising the value and importance of communicating and collaborating with broad publics. This does not necessarily mean the abandonment of peer-reviewed scholarly publications, but rather the recognition that articles and books that reach only specialised audiences within one's own discipline are not the only potential outputs of academic research. What else might we do with and through our research? What other possibilities for more inclusive and creative change-making might the environmental humanities help to foster and explore?

Public scholarship has arguably been a core part of the environmental humanities since its emergence as a distinct scholarly field in the early 2000s, albeit in a more pronounced way in some places and amongst some disciplinary communities than others. In fact, many of the founding scholars in the field were engaged in a variety of public forms of scholarship long before the term 'environmental humanities' was in use,

including everything from delivering public lectures and co-authoring community books, to producing exhibitions, guided walks, and collaborating with Indigenous communities on a variety of projects including land claims. During the past ten years, however, the explicit effort to engage publics in various ways seems to have moved from the periphery to the very centre of the field.

At the broadest level, work in this area has in common a desire to cultivate meaningful connections between environmental humanities (EH) research and larger publics to develop richer understandings of the world and more inclusive and empowering socio-environmental possibilities. This scholarship seeks to engage publics in different ways: from work that is produced to be accessible to public audiences, through to co-designed and collaborative community research projects. Its media forms are also diverse: from public storytelling archives and guided tours, to apps, lecture series, and more. Finally, its goals are also broad ranging: from informing and educating, to amplifying marginalised voices and catalysing democratic and inclusive forms of change (see Part 2).

This article provides an overview of this space which some scholars have referred to as the 'public environmental humanities' (and that is the terminology that we have opted to use in this article, abbreviated to 'PEH'). Related terms are also in circulation, including 'citizen humanities' (Neimanis et al. 2015; Adamson et al. 2018) and the 'participatory environmental humanities.'[i] Importantly, some EH scholars working in this space have opted to utilise entirely different terminology, at least with some audiences. In some cases, the term "humanities" is itself taken to mark a project as being primarily shaped by academic concerns and priorities, and/or to carry too much of the baggage of exclusion from academic spaces that some communities continue to face (see Part 1). As a result, this term is sometimes avoided by EH scholars in public-facing work in favour of other terminology like "community-based environmental research" or "public storytelling."

For the purposes of this article, in an effort to keep the discussion focused and manageable, our approach has been to focus on those projects that are explicitly identified by their creators as environmental humanities projects (or as significantly drawing on this field) and that aim to engage publics in a meaningful way—even if not all of these projects use the term "environmental humanities" prominently or exclusively in their presentation of themselves to all audiences. The article draws on a combination of data sources. As very little has been published on PEH specifically as a field, we have drawn on the broader scholarship on the publicly engaged humanities and social sciences. Insights from this literature have been brought into conversation with our own extensive experience working in this space, conversations with colleagues running similar projects, conference presentations, and a review of over 50 websites for PEH projects conducted between 2019 and 2024. The authorship team have (co)led a broad range of PEH projects, some of which are outlined in brief in the appendix with further links provided (projects listed in the appendix are marked in the main text with an asterisk).[ii] This approach means that our discussion is focused in very large part on projects carried out entirely or at least partly in the English-language.[iii]

The first section of the article sketches the emergence of PEH research: how, where, and when has this space taken shape and how has it been influenced by broader

trends within and beyond the academy? The second section provides an overview of some of the broad contours of the field: how and why are publics being engaged by scholars in this space? The third, and most substantial, section focuses on the practicalities of conducting a PEH project, including key challenges and opportunities. Areas of discussion include securing funding, reaching target audiences, working with partners beyond the academy, archiving, and evaluating projects. This section in particular draws on the experiences of the authorship team, aiming to share some of the insights from our own projects: what worked and what didn't and what did we learn along the way? This approach was largely necessitated by the fact that there is as yet very little published material available that provides a behind the scenes look at, or reflective evaluation of, PEH projects. To accessibly compile this data, we conducted an informal survey of the authorship team, asking them to reply to a series of questions about their own PEH projects.

1. The emergence of the public environmental humanities

The following patchy overview of core influences on PEH is necessarily partial, informed by our own practices and networks. We readily acknowledge that other scholars, working in other disciplinary traditions in other parts of the world, will have taken up their work in this space in other ways. Despite this limitation, we nonetheless felt that it was important to acknowledge these threads of practice and inspiration. First and foremost, doing so matters ethically as part of an acknowledgement of our indebtedness to others. Secondly, it matters pragmatically, as part of understanding what has worked and what hasn't, when and where. In reflecting on our own practices, and inviting others to do likewise, we hope to enrich the conversation and the conceptual and practical resources for this work. This conversation also plays an important role in addressing what Jason Groves has called a kind of "Columbusization" in discussions of the public environmental humanities (Groves 2019). That is, an overstatement of novelty and a failure to adequately acknowledge the work of others, especially those in fields like Indigenous studies with long established practices of community collaboration. We should note in this context, however, that for our part the appeal of work in public EH is not its supposed novelty, but rather the possibilities for inclusion and engagement with diverse publics that this work might offer, at least when done well.

The growing centrality of public facing work within the environmental humanities has taken concrete form through a broad array of research and/or community projects, some of which are described in more detail in later sections of this article. But it has also taken other institutional forms, aimed at critically exploring and sharing possibilities for this kind of public practice. Perhaps three of the earliest formal events in this space were the 2017 intensive school in Public Environmental Humanities run by the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory in Stockholm, and symposia on the "Participatory Environmental Humanities" and "Humanities in the Anthropocene: Rethinking Impact" run by a partnership between UNSW, ASU, and King's College London in 2017 and 2018. Other more recent institutional forms include university courses dedicated to this space, like the "Public Environmental Humanities" course run by the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities, and another at the University of Washington, "Exposed: Public Environmental Humanities."[iv]

Another important foundation for this development was the establishment of *The Seed Box: An Environmental Humanities Collaboratory*. From 2015 to 2022, The Seed Box provided funding to EH researchers around the world, itself funded by the Swedish agencies MISTRA and FORMAS. The Seed Box placed applied "citizen humanities" at the centre of its mandate alongside multidisciplinary research (frequently involving the creative arts) and did a great deal to open up space and resources within the field for this kind of engaged research.[v] Another institutional catalyst for PEH was provided to the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities (PPEH) by the Mellon Foundation, from 2016-2020. PPEH places "public engagement, particularly in and with environmental justice communities and concerns" among its four core commitments.[vi] Mellon funds seeded community-engaged projects developed and led by university faculty as well as the development of over 100 student-design public engagements projects. Similarly, key journals in the field have made dedicated space for this work, including the "Environmental Humanities in Practice" section in *Environmental Humanities* and a "Public Environmental Humanities" section in *Resistance: A Journal of Radical Environmental Humanities*.

Of course, one obvious and important antecedent for this public environmental humanities work is the broader field of the 'public humanities.' While publicly engaged work in the humanities has a long and varied history in different places and disciplines, in the Anglophone world it is generally argued that a real consolidation of approaches, and significant growth in their uptake, took place in the 1990s. Writing about the field in the USA, Robyn Schroeder (Schroeder 2020, 16) has argued that in university settings, public humanities really "caught fire" in the 1990s, when it "intersected with changing perceptions of the job market for humanities doctorates… influenced by neo-liberalization of university hiring practices, rapid growth in the museum and broader cultural sectors and a generational shift in career orientation which emphasized social outcomes over private gain."

Importantly, these developments in the 1990s themselves drew on a variety of earlier spaces of public discourse, experimentation, and collaboration, many of which were primarily anchored outside of universities and other formal cultural institutions. This point is powerfully made by Farah Jasmine Griffin:

> The Philadelphia of my childhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s was strongly influenced by the vibrancy and urgency of the black arts movement. The gatherings, meetings, readings, plays, discussions, and lectures were not only places where I heard poetry and music but also places of analysis, argument, information, where you learned to think critically, to understand, to debate. In these spaces of intellectual activity and intensity, speakers and audience members alike were invested, and the stakes seemed high because they involved the future not only of our people but also of the planet. Here was one practice of public humanities in a community for whom all times are vulnerable, a site that recognized the historic roots of that vulnerability but also called attention to people's resilience, beauty, and ability to resist. Public humanities in this context was actually about movement building, about informing a people, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a tradition, and feeding and nourishing their intellects and their spirits so that they might be moved to act. (Griffin 2014)

The more formal practice of public humanities can therefore be understood, at least in part, as continuing a tradition that was born in local communities that were largely excluded from the academy by oppressive and racist systems of power – and in local community struggles against racial, gender and broader social inequality. Roopika Risam has explored these themes in detail and outlined the possibilities for a kind of "academic insurgency," that involves:

> a subversive style of engagement in humanities knowledge production marked by fluid and flexible leaps between genres of writing; between public audiences, academic audiences, and community partners; between modes of scholarly communication; and between academic disciplines and temporalities. Academic insurgency weaves together the past, present, and future of public humanities knowledge production, connecting contemporary developments in public humanities within African diaspora, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American studies to a longer trajectory of interventions made by these thinkers within and beyond the academy. (Risam 2019)[vii]

Foregrounding these historical roots, as well as the many vibrant contemporary spaces of public humanities work that have their foundations outside of the academy, is an important part of pushing back against narrow, elitist, notions of both the public humanities and the humanities more generally.[viii] More concretely, this means that when university researchers are involved in developing these kinds of public projects, it is imperative that they do so in a way that empowers, rather than marginalises, these community-based conversations and initiatives. As Mary L. Mullen has argued, this means that public humanities projects need to consider their "own complicity in securing a narrow definition of cultural authority," and work to cultivate relationships with communities that "instead of simply exporting the cultural authority of the university to community groups," might "be a way of questioning how the university defines and achieves its authority" (Mullen 2016, 197).

From within a broad notion of the humanities, all kinds of activities potentially become forms of public humanities work. Along these lines, Christopher Schaberg (Schaberg 2021, 53) has argued that "at its most basic and best" the humanities are "about reminding people what matters—*and* serving as a discursive zone where "what matters" can be debated and reconsidered, assessed and imagined anew." This framing of the humanities has the virtue of being broad and inclusive, while also gesturing towards the fundamental epistemological, methodological, and ethical commitments of this kind of inquiry. However, the humanities cannot be understood so broadly as to include any and all ideas and discussions about human life. In our view it is important—especially in a period in which the humanities are under sustained attack—to also hold onto a sense of the particular contributions, expertise, knowledges, and commitments fostered by humanities approaches (even if these are continually being revised and remade). This includes critical research and reflection, as well as holding open space for informed, imaginative, inclusive, debate.[ix]

When it comes to the environmentally focussed humanities, there is perhaps a natural affinity with public facing scholarship. Schaberg (Schaberg 2021, 50) has gone so

far as to argue that the environmental humanities and the public humanities may be "two sides of the same coin." In a related vein, Imre Szeman (Szeman 2022) argues that the environmental and energy humanities might be considered examples of a "crisis discipline," grounded in the need for simultaneous study and the conduct of urgent political work in the world. This situation has perhaps predisposed EH scholars to more publicly engaged modes of writing and researching than most (but by no means all) other branches of humanities scholarship. There is undoubtedly something to this argument. Many scholars are drawn to the environmental humanities by a sense of the urgent need for change and a desire for their scholarship to contribute in some way to that process. These scholars tend to be in dialogue with environmental activists, community groups, and natural scientists who are working towards similar goals. Many PEH initiatives seem to emerge organically out of these conversations and shared commitments. At the same time, there are also growing efforts among EH scholars to foster these sites of collaborative engagement. One recent concrete example of this is the Danish led EHJUSTICE Network which "seeks to strengthen the environmental humanities in Denmark and its links to civil society, while also developing tools and concepts for a new public environmental humanities."[x] Likewise, the recently launched UNESCO-MOST BRIDGES Sustainability Coalition, which was co-founded by the decade-old Humanities for the Environment Global Network, aims to "better integrate humanities, social science, and local and traditional knowledge perspectives into research, education and action for global sustainability."[xi]

Importantly, however, the public humanities (even when broadly defined) are very far from being the only source of inspiration for scholars working on publicly focused environmental humanities projects. In fact, it seems that just as often work in this space is informed and inspired by other approaches to public engagement, including long traditions in the social sciences (from ethnography to participatory research of various kinds[xii]) and public arts programs. Of particular note in this regard is work in participatory action research (Kindon et al. 2007; Freire 1970; Wiggin at al. 2025), and community-based participatory research in areas including public health and environmental justice (Davis and Ramírez-Andreotta 2021). In addition, work in PEH has drawn on and engaged with the growing field of citizen science in the natural sciences, as well as critical engagements with that work that have pushed beyond enrolling citizens as data collectors to enable genuine collaboration, or to explore a more insurgent set of possibilities in which citizen groups mobilise their own science (either by translating their claims into science, or challenging what counts as evidence) (Kimura and Kinchy 2019; Ottinger 2009; Davies and Mah 2020; Gianquitto and LaFauci 2022).

This broad foundation for PEH work makes a lot of sense if we consider the fact that many of the disciplines at the core of the environmental humanities—including anthropology, human geography, science and technology studies, and Indigenous studies—are not traditional humanities disciplines. Each of these disciplines also has its own approaches to public engagement that have been readily drawn upon by some EH scholars. Furthermore, the environmental humanities are fundamentally a multidisciplinary and crisis/problem-oriented field, a situation which has given rise to a stronger tradition of collaborative, team-based, research than in many other parts of the humanities. As a result of these two factors, EH has rarely been bogged down in defining or defending any particular notion of the humanities and has instead erred on the side of

an expansive, generous, notion of its scope that draws readily on approaches, literatures, and/or collaborators within not only the social sciences, but the creative arts and the natural sciences, as well as diverse groups beyond the academy. Examples here might include the critical and imaginative uptake of work on 'public participation' in EH work on "more-than human participatory research" (Bastian et al. 2016) and the deployment and development of soil pollution testing technologies in the *Nuestros Suelos/Our Soils* project.*

2. An overview of the field

Alongside rapid growth in the number of public environmental humanities projects, in recent years we have also seen a proliferation of different kinds of projects emerging, in terms of empirical focus, modes of engagement, goals, format, approach, and more. Clearly, there are a great many projects focused on environmental topics that seek to speak to public audiences: projects run by NGOs, government agencies, arts groups, and many others. As noted above, for the purposes of this article our approach to defining the scope of the field has been to include only public-facing scholarly projects that are explicitly identified by their creators as being grounded in or drawing significantly on the environmental humanities.

At the outset of this discussion, the nature of the 'public' in public environmental humanities bears critical attention. Publics are multiple, diverse, and shifting (Fishel 2017; Young 2000). Publics (and counterpublics) may be bound through shared geographies or shared interests, they may be enduring or catalysed by particular events or interventions, or galvanised through resistance (Bhandari 2006). It is increasingly common to pluralise 'public'; to build into the framing recognition that there is no one 'public' existing fully formed. Rather, *publics* are forming and reforming, and can coalesce around emergent issues or conjunctures (Osborne and Alizadeh 2020; Bhandari 2006; Chilvers and Kearnes 2016).

For those in PEH, the public may be imagined as an audience or end user, as an already constituted entity. It may be known from the inside by the researcher through pre-existing relationships, belonging, and entanglements, or from the outside, as an audience-in-waiting for the work. The 'public' may also be produced, re/configured, assembled, or constituted, through engagement in or with the work and the various methods and tools of the public environmental humanities; the work becomes a site through which new or revitalised publics may be catalysed. This catalysed public may be ephemeral, lasting for the duration of the project and not beyond, or it may create more enduring relations, particularly where the knowledge reflected or co-created by the project continues to be storied and held in common.

The species composition of the public in public environmental humanities also bears consideration. Is it imagined as a mostly-human public (always already more-than-human, acknowledged or not), or do PEH scholars imagine that their public includes the non-human world: animals, plants, fungi, landscapes, waterscapes, places, Country (as conceptualised by First Nations scholars and communities, for examples (Todd 2017; Larsen and Johnson 2017; Watson 2009))? In developing an understanding of the state of the field of public environmental humanities, key questions are: who are the 'publics' in 'public environmental humanities'? What publics do PEH projects configure, imagine, re/produce? And who is excluded from these imaginings? Which publics never arrive (see

(Butler 2016)) in the public environmental humanities? Holding these crucial questions in mind, the remainder of this section offers an overview of some of the diverse ways in which publics are interacting with and emerging through PEH projects.

In terms of empirical focus, existing projects explore everything from the ecology-culture-spirituality connection, and species extinction, to histories of local waterways and toxic post-industrial sites – and much more. There are some clear patterns to the kinds of issues explored in this work. For example, some topics—most notably climate change—are very highly represented. Some sense of the diversity of these empirical foci is apparent through the many project examples discussed in this article, but an overview or analysis of the kinds of topics covered in these projects is beyond the scope of this article.

Another kind of diversity within these projects lies in the ways in which they seek to engage publics. Daniel Fisher (Fisher 2023a) has offered a typology of the different kinds of engagement found in the public humanities more broadly that we have found instructive in understanding PEH. According to him: "to date five distinct—but very often overlapping—types of [public] engagement have emerged": 1) Outreach: scholarly programming and media for a general audience; 2) Engaged public programming: public programming in which the primary objective is not to transfer knowledge but to cultivate an exchange between facilitators and participants concerning matters of shared interest; 3) Engaged research: research initiatives in which higher education faculty and students partner with community members in the creation of knowledge; 4) Engaged teaching: higher education instruction involving engaged research, teaching, and public programming; and 5) The infrastructure of engagement: research and institutional structures that support engaged scholarship.

These different types of public engagement, Fisher (Fisher 2023a) says, "can articulate the range of ways in which the humanities are addressing society's pressing concerns, broadening perceptions of what humanities work can involve and impact." But they also each have different underlying commitments, agendas, and views on who the actual publics in question are – and how individual projects might produce these publics. Consider, for instance, projects that fall under the "outreach" category compared to those that fall under the "engaged research" category. While the former has a largely passive public that participates as an audience and a commitment to the sharing of knowledge, the latter has a much more active public that participates as a collaborator and coproducer of knowledge, and a commitment to decentralising the way knowledge is created. This does not make one better or worse than the other, but paying attention to these differences matters if we are to avoid oversimplifying what is a very complex field.

Our preliminary survey of the public environmental humanities yielded examples of projects that fit into each of the categories which comprise Fisher's typology. Some projects centre on public 'outreach,' such as the *Sydney Environmental Humanities Public Lecture Series* that offered a series of public talks at the Australian Museum.[xiii] Others, like *Toxicbios** – a guerrilla narrative project that invites marginalised groups and individuals who have encountered some form of contamination to contribute stories about their experience – involve 'engaged research'. Yet others, like *Futures Beyond Refining** allowed university students to partner with communities to explore the challenges of living next door to an oil refinery, and so created opportunities for 'engaged teaching'.

Significantly many projects do not fit neatly into Fisher's typology. This is something that Fisher has himself explicitly noted, referring to them as 'overlapping

types.' Among these projects were those that were initiated and facilitated by a grassroots public, highlighting how the typology, to a certain extent, assumes a central role for academics and institutions – and downplays more organic community forms of public project emergence and leadership. One such project is the *The Lurujarri Heritage Trail** – a nine-day walk following a Dreaming track along the beach north from Broome, Western Australia, established in 1987 by Nyikina elder Paddy Roe, with the help of Frans Hoogland.

Alongside diverse ways of engaging publics, these projects have also sought to achieve a variety of different goals. Here too, Fisher has offered a helpful discussion in his identification of five separate goals which public humanities projects work toward, regardless of how they engage publics. These goals are: 1) informing contemporary debates; 2) amplifying community voices and histories; 3) helping individuals and communities navigate difficult experiences; 4) expanding educational access; and 5) preserving culture in times of crisis and change (Fisher 2023b). The public environmental humanities projects we surveyed featured these same goals, but they also had additional ones. Importantly, reflecting the 'crisis discipline' nature of the field, quite a few of these projects aimed to contribute to ongoing struggles for just forms of socio-environmental transformation. Other important goals included creating a space for generative play – and, more simply, for listening. In opening up this broad space of engagement, it seems to us that PEH projects are often doing something more expansive, inclusive, and democratic, than much of the work that environmental NGOs are doing, work that often focuses on trying to communicate the crisis and encourage people to change their behaviour or vote in a particular way.

Importantly, how public environmental humanities projects seek to achieve these goals differs dramatically. Of particular note is the fact that a large number of these projects seek to do so via inviting community stories – either in written, visual, or oral form – which are often archived and made available online in a digital format. Illustrative examples include *The Living Archive of Extinction Stories from Oceania** that collects community stories of loss and care from around this region, *The Urban Field Naturalist Project** that includes stories or engagements with urban nature, and the "Story Bank" compiled by the *My Climate Story** project, a growing collection of stories of the changes being made by global heating and tagged for searchability with locational and emotional metadata.[xiv]

These examples – and the many others like them – speak to the high value of community archives: "the grassroots activities of documenting, recording and exploring community heritage in which community participation, control and ownership of the project is essential" (Flinn 2007, 153). Distinct from the mainstream or formal archive sector that is sometimes criticised for "not contain[ing] and represent[ing] the voices of the non-elites, the grassroots, the marginalised" (Flinn 2007, 152), community archives have a long history (even though they have only recently been officially recognised) of collecting and preserving alternative voices. In some PEH work, this kind of collecting has been framed as a work of "guerilla narrative" or "insurgent archiving" that explicitly aims to push back against dominant, often toxic, narrative infrastructures ((Cayuela and Armiero 2021; Armiero et al. 2019), also see Part 3.3). There are boundless examples of community archives created by people who are marginalised on the basis of their race, sex, gender, age or sexual orientation. And it's no wonder, given that research by the

Community Archive Development Group has found such archives have diverse benefits, including supporting greater mutual understanding and respect; creating a greater sense of empowerment, belonging and cohesion among under-voiced communities; stimulating community activities and participation; providing opportunities for lifelong learning; and contributing to the creation of more liveable communities.[xv]

Beyond community-based archiving, other PEH projects create public-facing exhibitions/artworks, produce resources (e.g. teaching modules, field guides, activities) for independent discovery, run tours of public locations, initiate public campaigns for environmental justice, produce alternative media like podcasts and documentaries that are publicly broadcast, or host public workshops and seminars. Many projects, it should be noted, also include multiple kinds of outputs.

Reflecting on these diverse projects, we noted a fascinating and important tension at work within the underlying push towards public-facing forms of environmental humanities scholarship. At one end of the spectrum, we have a socially committed scholarship that aligns with marginalized communities and fosters a liberatory and progressive agenda. At the other end, there is a more inward-looking agenda centred on the idea that PEH—as with other forms of publicly engaged scholarship—might help to justify the existence of the humanities in an increasingly hostile political landscape. From this perspective, it is sometimes hoped that PEH might play a role in making the humanities 'useful' and 'productive'. Of course, projects do not simply sit somewhere on this spectrum in an uncomplicated way. They move around, presenting themselves in different ways to different audiences, from colleagues and communities to funding bodies and university executives. While this flexibility has important strategic benefits, we think that it is important that PEH practitioners also push back against demands that we demonstrate the usefulness of the humanities to, at the very least, question what 'useful' means, for whom, to what ends, and for which political projects. Perhaps, as one of us has argued elsewhere, claiming the right to do 'useless' things within a capitalist order is itself revolutionary (Armiero 2019).

3. Practical considerations: challenges and opportunities of PEH work

This section of the paper outlines some key areas for consideration that offer important challenges and opportunities for those developing PEH projects. This section focuses almost exclusively on a group of projects co-led by members of our authorship team, taking advantage of our more intimate familiarity with the inner workings of these projects. This focus was necessitated in large part by the fact that there are, as yet, very few published articles reflecting on PEH practices and approaches and providing anything like a "behind the scenes" look at the process and an assessment of its outcomes.[xvi]

3.1 Funding

Funding is often a significant challenge in the development of a PEH project. The projects that we surveyed were overwhelmingly carried out as a component of a larger research project funded primarily through more traditional research grants. As such, they often functioned as "add ons", rather than the primary activity. There are two key takeaway points from this situation: 1.) most projects had extremely modest and short-term funding, often creatively cobbling together resources and relying on volunteer and private

contributions, and 2.) at present it seems to be difficult to secure "stand alone" funding for public-facing EH work. As noted above, one important past exception to this rule was the funding provided by *The Seed Box: An Environmental Humanities Collaboratory* from 2015 to 2022.

One of the consequences of this insecure funding is a reliance on the goodwill and dedication of team members, as well as friends and colleagues, to provide free or discounted labour. In many of the projects that we surveyed this impacted in particular on creative service providers such as designers and audio technicians. Academics who partner with commercial studios can find themselves negotiating distinctly different orientations to the creative process and its timelines. In the making of *Feral Atlas** for example, the iterative labour of conceiving, designing, drafting, editing and post-peer-review revision put unanticipated pressures on the capacities of the two fledgling design studios who committed to the project for a fixed and heavily discounted fee long before the actual scope of the project became clear. In addition, the technical demands involved in implementing 'a simple change' were sometimes not well appreciated by the academic team members, leading to frustration on both sides. The extended and multi-stage timelines of creative academic production also put stress on researchers who need to find time for 'invisible' labour in their already busy schedules. Ideally, this situation would be resolved through factoring these costs into funding applications. In the absence of available funds, the projects that we looked at took some creative approaches. Some included academic team members with relevant creative skills, for example the IT and design expertise for the *Urban Field Naturalist Project** and *Feral Atlas** were in some part provided by team members. Others have drawn on student labour, which can be a mutually beneficial option if carefully designed so that it is either built into coursework or results in valuable professional experience. Another novel approach, adopted by the *Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm**, is for a project to include a commercial endeavour that generates income to cover some costs.

In addition to the difficulty in securing standalone funding for PEH projects, the funding that was received was often short-term. This had a variety of negative consequences for projects. In the case of *Nuestros Suelos/Our Soils**, funding was mostly available for the first phase of the project–the development of a soil testing tool–meaning that the community-focused elements of the project were limited to a couple of exploratory workshops. Limited funding also often makes ongoing evaluation of the success and impact of projects very difficult (discussed further below), as well as the archiving and/or accessible storage of project outputs (also discussed below).

3.2 Working with partners

Almost without exception, PEH projects are collaborative. This collaboration can take many different forms, from enlisting a web designer or an audio engineer to carry out a specific task, to working with community, government, and industry partners to co-design and execute every facet of a project. Whatever form it takes, these collaborators become partners in a given project. However, who counts as a 'research partner' is not always immediately obvious, with the lines between partners, funders, participants, and even audience members sometimes being blurry. Our focus in this section, lies mostly on those individuals or groups who enter into a formal or semi-formal agreement with researchers to work together on at least some elements of the design and execution of a project. This

focus is not intended to downplay the significance of other forms of public engagement and participation in a project (like being an audience member or contributing a story to a public archive), but rather to make room to discuss the elements of these collaborative partnerships.

A broad range of non-university partners are being engaged in PEH projects, including museums, galleries, broadcasters, publishers, NGOs, artists and designers, government agencies, and diverse community groups, including First Nations organisations like Tribal Councils and Aboriginal Land Councils. Commercial industry partners beyond the cultural and creative sector were mostly absent in the projects we surveyed and seem to be relatively uncommon partners in the PEH space at this stage. Of course, many projects also involve a range of different partners taking on varied roles, including providing technical expertise, access to space, facilities, audiences, or promotion/distribution networks.

One overwhelming takeaway from the projects we surveyed was the need for ongoing, detailed, discussion with partners about their contributions, their goals, and their needs. At the most fundamental level, this requires all parties to be clear on how the project will be designed and led. In this regard, PEH projects differ widely. Some are community-led and so can involve researchers taking a more facilitative role (e.g. *From Syndemic to Symbiosis**). Other projects are very much researcher-led, with one or more partners called on to provide specific inputs (e.g. *Toxicbios**). Others occupy a more complex middle ground, with one or two major partners who contribute significantly to the design and execution of the project, perhaps even co-designing/leading (e.g. *Living on the Edge** and *Animal Allegories**). Irrespective of the nature and extent of the partnership relationship, an ongoing dialogue is important to reduce the likelihood that some partners end up feeling overlooked, misled or exploited. This is particularly important where some members of a team are volunteering their time (see Part 3.1). In this context, it can be extremely important to explore possibilities for paying partners for their contributions. For example, the *Toxicbios** project found paid partners to be more effective than volunteers in identifying and generating content for their story portal.

In some cases, it can be helpful for partnerships to be formalised in a written agreement and/or through a human research ethics informed consent process. At present, a variety of approaches seem to be being taken to formalising these relationships in PEH projects, reflecting the diverse nature of the projects and partnerships as well as differing approaches to research ethics around the world. In this context, our best advice is to seek guidance on what is appropriate from a university research office and/or professional associations. Irrespective of whether or how these relationships are formalised, however, the key issue is ensuring that partners all understand one another's needs and expectations from the project, that no one is being exploited or treated unethically, and that there are processes in place to manage and revise roles and relationships as the project develops.

This ongoing dialogue with partners can also help to draw out other possible values of a collaboration. For example, in the *Futures Beyond Refining** project, researchers were cognisant that for their small community organisation partner, to receive recognition as a credible and desirable partner for university-based researchers was itself an important part of the collaboration. This academic "stamp of approval" unlocked organisational and funding opportunities for the community partner.

In many cases partnerships significantly enrich and even transform projects in unexpected ways. In order for this to happen, however, all parties need to remain open and flexible in the collaboration. For example, the *Feral Atlas,** which was originally conceived as a public facing website, later entered into a partnership with Stanford Digital Projects that provided an institutional home with a scholarly commitment not only to peer review, but to the infrastructural labour of maintaining and archiving the site. Likewise, several of the projects that we surveyed that included humanities researchers in partnerships with designers noted that the collaborative, design, and curatorial process significantly developed and refined the theoretical and analytic insights of the project (e.g. *Urban Field Naturalist Project*,* *Feral Atlas*,* and *A Curious Trail of Animal Tales**).

Of course, there are also often significant challenges to working with research partners. One of the more intractable challenges can be navigating the micro-politics of community organisations or other institutions, as well as the diverse and conflicting opinions of partners. This can be especially challenging in multi-partner projects. In one of the projects we surveyed, for example, some partners refused to have the government funding body's logo displayed at events or on outputs. Ultimately, in some cases these kinds of issues might lead to the dissolution of partnerships. In most cases, however, challenges related to differing goals and agendas can be resolved through discussion and compromise. For example, the *Living on the Edge** project was initially conceived as a series of evening events including talks and performance works and aimed at adult audiences. Ongoing conversations with National Museum of Australia led to a very different program of events, which included a much greater emphasis on children (both at community events at the Museum and through the creation of associated classroom resources). This ultimately expanded the reach of the project in some ways, but the core researchers worried that it diminished the depth and focus of the planned conversations and so ultimately developed alternative events and outputs to address these goals. Another relevant example is the *Animal Allegories** project, which emerged as an off shoot of another project (*Survival Stories*), providing a platform to share creative work that was perceived as too experimental/fictional for the science museum partnered on the initial project.

This process of compromise can extend to being open to revising core elements of a project in line with the changing needs and expectations of partners, perhaps especially community groups. While these changes can be difficult to plan and budget for, they can also yield valuable—even if unpredictable—results. One fascinating example of this situation arose out of a 'River Country' community day held as part of the *Living on the Edge** project. For this event, a large artwork wetland was installed in the atrium of the National Museum of Australia. Cardboard cut-outs of various plants and animals were sent to artists and school groups in various regional areas around the Murray Darling Basin (the focal region for the event) and then posted back in time to be included in the installation. This process created a connection between these communities and this project, leading to many requests for the team to bring the installation and the broader project to these regional communities. At the time of writing, plans are in development and additional funds are being sought to enable this process. The key takeaway for the project team has been that it is essential to honour and make time for the afterlives of projects, respecting their open-endedness and responding to the needs of community partners.

3.3 Archiving and documentation

The fact that a large number of PEH projects adopt a similar approach of collecting and archiving stories (discussed above), obliges us to ask a critical question: what does it mean to *archive well?* As a first step, it is important to pay attention to and reflect on how stories are gathered, which stories are gathered, and with what consequences. Inevitably projects include only a limited number of stories and perspectives. Some, such as *Toxicbios*,* explicitly aim to do something like 'narrative justice' work in seeking out and foregrounding marginalised voices and perspectives; others aim for a more general kind of inclusivity and ultimately attract those people most likely to find them and who possess the time and skills to contribute. In either case, albeit in different ways, projects tend to produce 'skewed' collections of stories that capture the views of a limited number of publics among the many that exist. We think there is important work for PEH projects to do in figuring out how best to acknowledge and actively incorporate this reality into projects. This might involve a simple statement about whose stories are present and absent, or an active effort to influence the specific publics reached (see Part 3.4). Doing so is a vital part of an ethically accountable, situated, public storytelling that takes responsibility for and engages accountably with its own partiality (Haraway 1991).

Preservation must surely also be part of what it means to archive well. Most PEH projects, as has been previously discussed, have a short life span and are not ongoing due to resource limitations. But arguably this does not mean that they should simply be forgotten about or allowed to disappear without a trace after they have been completed. Indeed, the privilege of collecting stories which often describe painful experiences or are from marginalised communities comes with a responsibility to preserve them in such a way that they remain publicly available in the future – especially for project participants.

Most projects that were surveyed have sought to preserve their archive digitally, via a website. Some have done so successfully with the support of an institution. As noted above, *Feral Atlas** had the backing of the publishing house of a major university which not only helped build the playful and innovative website but also handled the archiving of the content found on it. At Penn, the environmental humanities program has partnered with the university library to ensure preservation of two of its digital archiving projects, *Data Refuge* and the *Schuylkill River Research Corps* archive. Others have done so successfully without institutional assistance but with clever thinking to keep costs down by either paying for website hosting in multiple-year blocks (dependent on the availability of funding), parking separate project websites under a single web hosting with separate domain names, and archiving old projects on personal websites or with public institutions such as national libraries. Of course, how successful each of these approaches will turn out to be over the long-term is something that remains to be seen.

Concerningly, however, it appears that many PEH projects aren't being properly preserved, due to a variety of factors including inadequate long-term planning and lack of resources. We conducted an initial survey of online PEH projects for this article in 2019. When we returned to it in late 2023, we encountered numerous broken URL links and projects that had disappeared without a trace. Other projects, such as *Toxicbios*,* are currently facing the predicament that their existing website is no longer working properly and they have no ongoing funding to properly fix it. They are now seeking to either migrate the project to another website that is less complicated to use and maintain or create a shareable repository which contains all of the interviews conducted as part of the

project. Once again, however, a lack of resources is complicating these paths forward. *The Living Archive,** facing a similar issue, decided to convert all stories to simple PDFs and archive the project on the personal website of the lead researcher.[xvii]

This situation highlights the importance of longer-term planning and resourcing for archiving from the outset of a project, as well as for more open dialogue with participants to ensure they understand how – if at all – their work and their stories are going to be preserved after the project is complete.

3.4 Engaging publics

By definition, PEH projects aim to engage publics. Sometimes, as discussed above, these 'publics' become partners on the project, often through community organisations of one sort or another. In many other cases, however, members of the public become engaged with a project individually, perhaps as an audience member or a contributor. This section explores some of the many approaches taken to engaging publics, the obstacles that can be faced, and some of the lessons learned by PEH researchers. As with many of the other challenges discussed in this section, our experience indicates that the most important element of engaging publics effectively is to devise and implement a plan from the outset. In this respect, it is not enough to simply aim to reach 'the public'. Instead, projects should aim to be as specific as possible about who they are trying to engage, in what ways, for how long, and to what ends. And then, create a plan with relevant partners to achieve these outcomes.

Our survey of PEH projects, however, revealed that high-level planning in this area is generally conducted in a more piecemeal manner, if at all. The majority of projects have not been designed in ways that are overly explicit or strategic about which publics they aim to reach, how, or why. This should perhaps be unsurprising. For the most part, humanities scholars are still trained to think of their primary audience as the other members of their own discipline, and their skills focus on engaging that 'public'. As such, this is an area in which collaborators from other disciplines with stronger traditions of varied public engagement, as well as partners with established skills in this area, can often be extremely beneficial.

Many PEH projects seek to engage publics through standard modes of recruitment, including utilising social media and where possible conventional media, such as radio and television interviews about the project or coverage in newspapers and magazines. This approach is highly successful for some projects, but less so for others. *The Urban Field Naturalist Project** utilised social media and semi-regular interviews on local and national radio to invite members of the public to share stories of urban wildlife encounters. This was a successful approach for this project with over 150 stories submitted in 3 years. The very short format of stories and the topical subject matter were perhaps part of this success. *My Climate Story** uses another technique to support the creation of short personal stories, with most of its contributions generated through participation in workshops offered for free in schools and universities and in partnership with a range of advocacy organizations. In contrast, two other public storytelling archives—*The Living Archive** and *Toxicbios**—found it more difficult to collect story submissions or generate media interest. Both of these projects focused on difficult subject matter and generally published significantly longer stories. As a result, both projects independently adopted a "mediated" approach, seeking out and inviting relevant individuals to

contribute. In a similar vein, researchers in the *Nuestros Suelos/Our Soils** project found that public participation in their project was much more readily secured when people were only being asked to make a small, low-commitment, contribution (i.e. attending a workshop). Getting people to follow through afterwards, with on-the-ground actions in their communities was far more challenging (especially given the previously noted limitations to funding).

Engaging publics is, as previously noted, an area in which partners can play an important role. In particular, several PEH projects we surveyed emphasised the value of working with partners that have "built in publics". For example, this might involve working with a radio station or an established podcast with a relevant audience to produce an audio documentary, rather than producing it in-house. In addition to a variety of other relevant expertise that these partners might provide, they also have an established audience. Obvious partners that fit this description are publishers, broadcasters, and cultural institutions. For example, the *Living on the Edge** project partnered with a well-established radio show on the national broadcaster to share key events (ABC Radio National's *Big Ideas*).

In a related vein, some PEH projects benefit significantly from an established relationship of trust between a community and a project collaborator or partner. For example, the *From Syndemic to Symbiosis** project was in many ways enabled by the co-PI Melissa Nelson's (Annishinabe) reputation and relationships with the Indigenous American Southwest and Maori communities it aimed to engage. Nelson's involvement as both an ASU professor and community leader, fast-tracked the project's ability to reach beyond the usual publics because of her decades of work in Indigenous-led food systems projects, and especially her leadership at the Cultural Conservancy.[xviii]

However, there can also be important disadvantages to drawing too heavily on "built in publics". In particular, these publics are not always the ones (or the only ones) the project is aiming to reach—or the ones that might have the most to learn or gain from a given PEH intervention. For example, in the above mentioned case of the *Living on the Edge** partnership with ABC Radio National, it should be noted that this station's listeners are, on average, much more likely to be sympathetic to the ideas being presented in this work than are many other Australians who get their news and current affairs from commercial providers (who are, in turn, much less likely to be interested in partnering on this kind of project). More broadly, the other main partner for this project, the National Museum of Australia, itself tends to primarily reach particular publics, especially retirees and school children in the nation's capital (one of the most educated parts of the country). The *My Climate Story** project has encountered some of the same problems with their media partnership with WHYY, the Philadelphia regional National Public Radio syndicate. As a result, of these kinds of dynamics, each project constructs its own unique 'public'—one that inevitably misses many of the key demographics that it might ideally reach. In both cases, however, other outputs were built into these projects in an effort to expand their public reach, including classroom resources and workshops, published essays, and online and in-person exhibitions, but each of them also has its own limitations.

This situation brings us to one of the key challenges of engaging publics. Namely, getting beyond "the usual publics". This can mean different things for different projects, but in general it refers to reaching a broad cross section of the community, beyond those who usually engage with (and are more likely to be sympathetic to) the kinds of ideas

being explored in a given project. If PEH projects aim to genuinely empower and/or educate as a means to creating inclusive and just socio-environmental change, then the specific publics we are able to engage matter vitally.

For those projects that aim to share community stories and voices with a wider audience, *who* is able to contribute to these projects is similarly significant. This is a function not only of knowing about a project, but of having the time, skills, confidence, inclination, and resources to do so. One approach to this challenge is to work to make projects accessible and the task valuable for diverse communities. For example, *The Urban Field Naturalist Project** ultimately arranged for key materials to be translated into Arabic and Vietnamese and then ran storytelling workshops with migrant and refugee women's groups in Sydney which involved training some participants to be future workshop leaders. This enabled women to learn more about their new home (and potentially worrying wildlife), while meeting one another, and gaining more familiarity with the English language. While these stories were not ultimately published on the public-facing website, these workshops allowed the project to reach members of the public it wouldn't normally have, and hopefully to create other positive outcomes for participants.

As is clear from the descriptions offered in this section, one useful approach to reaching publics is for projects to have diverse partners and diverse outputs, allowing them to draw on a range of expertise and networks to create content that travels and appeals broadly. Of course, doing so adds to the complexity and costs associated with these projects.

3.5 Evaluation

Evaluation should be an essential component of any project. When done well, it can advance knowledge of what works and why, and can not only prevent mistakes, however big or small, from being repeated but also transform them into valuable learning opportunities. To date, however, it appears that very little attention is being given in PEH projects to evaluating whether, why, and for whom a project succeeded. In large part this issue is fuelled by the fact that there is a lack of funding for projects themselves, let alone for meaningful evaluation or longer-term monitoring of outcomes.

In addition, however, most of the projects we surveyed don't have a very clearly specified idea about how they define success. There are, of course, serious problems associated with relying on the narrow metrics of success found within neoliberal logics, such as the number of academic citations, visitors to a public exhibition or website, or number of contributors to a story archive. Such metrics, even though they might be requested by funding sources, are highly reductive; they provide no meaningful insight into whether a project has changed community values and attitudes, empowered marginalised communities, or achieved other key goals.

Striving for a more qualitative understanding of impact by, for example, conducting simple surveys with people before and after they engage in a project—perhaps visiting an exhibition, submitting a story, or participating in a walking tour—comes with a different set of problems: audiences often don't know how they have been impacted straight away, and a project might continue to work on them for a long time afterwards. It is also problematic to assume that unless the project "fixes" the issue it's focused on, then it has somehow failed; it *may*, of course, influence people with power

and create structural, societal-level change, but this is an enormous ask and a project's impact shouldn't be limited to whether or not it achieves this singular goal.

Instead, some responses to our survey offered more creative – and generous – ideas about what counts as 'success' – and, by extension, as 'failure' – and were open to multiple forms of impact and possible benefits. In their self-evaluation, the *Futures Beyond Refining** project highlighted the way in which they had inspired more campus-community partnerships for community-based environmental justice work, and the forging of lasting friendships between project participants and a durable shared sense of purpose across differences. Some of the story archive projects, such as *The Living Archive*,* also pointed to the possible psychological and social benefits of their work, such as allowing people to tell their stories and be heard, as well as the justice impacts of creating space for more diverse voices to come into a conversation and for publics to become more sensitive to diverse understandings of an issue.

Some of these possible impacts can be readily measured, including by conducting substantive interviews at different points in time (provided there are resources available). But others are much harder to and will likely remain more uncertain. This situation should not lead us to narrow our definition of success to only those measurable elements, but rather to become more creative about how we give accounts of impacts and success, as well as to become comfortable with the fact that we won't ever have the kind of 'hard evidence' that some people would like for all of the impacts that matter to us.

3.6 Recognition by the academy of this work as 'research'

The importance of recognising PEH projects as scholarly research varies significantly for different projects and in different countries and disciplinary contexts. For academic team members of different career stages, this issue can also have a very different significance, with more junior colleagues often needing to ensure that their time is spent on 'reportable' outputs that enhance their track record.

Of course, there is also considerable variability as to whether it will matter to external partners that a PEH project counts as "research." For some, it is crucial, as discussed in relation to the *Futures Beyond Refining** project above (Part 3.2). For others, it is much less important. This is often the case in situations where the PEH component of a project is a way of sharing research that has been published elsewhere. In other cases, a project might simply be a playful experiment, such as the *Urban Field Naturalist Project** which provides a platform for people to share stories and wasn't designed to be research in any fuller sense. That said, some projects may start without a clearly planned research output but develop one over the course of the project. In the case of the *Urban Field Naturalist Project*,* the team co-authored a commercially published book which was reportable as a Non-Traditional Research Output (The Urban Field Naturalist Project 2022).

Our survey of PEH projects revealed several important considerations that might be kept in mind in this general area. The *Feral Atlas** team found that design/structural decisions can have unforeseen consequences for whether/how some things are counted as research, including decisions such as including an ISBN on a publication so it can be catalogued, and whether to credit researchers as editors or authors (as the former role does not count for much in the hierarchy of academic outputs in many countries). Members of the *Nuestros Suelos/Our Soils** team were required to navigate a difficult

tension in which they felt that the effort to squeeze research data from the project could potentially undermine its capacity to achieve its community goals by demanding a relevant share of their limited time and resources.

One of the key ways in which research impacts on project design is via formal ethics approval processes. In order to collect data that could be reportable in scholarly publications, researchers are required to follow ethical protocols before conducting any activities such as observing or interviewing stakeholders and participants to evaluate engagement and impact. This can be very challenging for public-facing projects because creating genuinely collaborative research requires a degree of uncertainty/openness that can make ethics committees uncomfortable. Indeed, the difficulty of navigating this process was a significant factor for some of the projects we surveyed in deciding not to frame the work as "research" and to instead emphasise its outreach potential. In addition, many community partners, or public engagement institutions such as galleries, museums and libraries, have less rigorous protocols around collecting such data. This can cause a conflict when an ethics approval process slows down the delivery of a public program, or where asking participants to sign consent forms or include questions that anticipate 'reportable outcomes' can appear to prioritise data collection over allowing a project to generate societal impact or community-led engagement.

As with many other elements of PEH projects, the key takeaway lesson in this area is the importance of a broad and ongoing dialogue with all partners about the process and outputs. This will allow team members to agree about what research metrics mean for each of them from the outset and recognise that there may be different outputs for different collaborators. One way forward might be clearly acknowledging some aspects of a project are 'research' and others are public engagement, with both being considered legitimate forms of academic work. It is also worth documenting and sharing examples in which projects begin not quite knowing what they'll be, but end up developing 'reportable outcomes' over time.

Conclusion

The public environmental humanities are a growing area of creative, experimental, engaged, practice. Given the escalating significance of many of our most pressing environmental challenges, and the ongoing interest in the environmental humanities as a field, there is every reason to suspect that this public facing work will become increasingly important in the years to come. But while researchers continue to develop a broad array of projects in this area, critical and reflective scholarship on how best to carry out this work is only just beginning to be developed. One of the overarching lessons that we have taken from our own projects in this area, as well as from the research that grounds this article, is that PEH projects work best when informed by ongoing dialogue and reflection. In particular, we hope that this article will contribute to the development of a nuanced discussion of the practicalities of doing this work. Importantly, these discussions need to frankly and honestly report on both what works and what doesn't, while also interrogating the criteria for what will count as 'success.' This article offers a first step towards fostering and developing that conversation within our field.

Appendix: Short summaries of indicative PEH projects

A Curious Trail of Animal Tales
This interactive storytelling project is being produced by environmental and digital humanities scholars. It creates an audio trail of animal stories through a museum, asking visitors to reconsider what they know about animals and human/animal relationships. The project also includes an immersive audio experience and a series of 'side trails' that prompt visitors to take up these stories in further activities. The team aim to integrate the trail with coursework in undergraduate units.
www.animaltales.com.au

Animal Allegories
This multimedia storytelling project explores the critical role imagination can play in helping adults to think and feel anew about the world, as we adapt to frightening new ecological realities. The project remixes archival material from museums and libraries into creative nonfiction narratives, that are shared through a range of print and online publishing platforms.
https://animalallegories.com.au/

Feral Atlas
Feral Atlas is a digital project that invites users to explore the ecological worlds created when nonhuman entities become tangled up with human infrastructure projects. Seventy-nine field reports from scientists, humanists, and artists show you how to recognize "feral" ecologies, that is, ecologies that have been encouraged by human-built infrastructures, but which have developed and spread beyond human control. These infrastructural effects, Feral Atlas argues, are the Anthropocene. The custom-designed digital architecture enables users to navigate the site via three key analytic vectors. Video, sound, illustrations, animation, and poetry amplify the analysis at different aesthetic registers. A "reading room" offers a number of framing texts by the co-editors, "luminary" essays, artist statements and more.
https://feralatlas.org/

From Syndemic to Symbiosis
This Humanities for the Environment, North America, project (2019-2023) explored humanities-inclusive intersectional methodologies and community-led diversity and inclusion frameworks addressing three interlinked "epidemics": food insecurities, social inequities and climate injustices. Activities began with online reading groups that brought together environmental humanities scholars and economists, indigenous scholars, chefs and food system knowledge keepers pioneering wellbeing economies that recuperate and build on traditional food systems knowledges. Three Dine-, Maori-, and Apache-led workshops (2021-2023) and a food-tasting event focused on the ways indigenous chefs are innovating community foodways for economic resilience. Participants explored how these communities could secure funding to build capacity and scale up as models not just for indigenous communities, but for world rethinking food systems in the face of food insecurities and climate change. The project included four university food-focused courses, co-taught by project leaders and co-PIs at ASU's interdisciplinary undergraduate Humanities Lab.

https://hfe-observatories.org/project/north-american-observatory-food-sovereignty-and-syndemic-project/

Futures Beyond Refining
This collaborative experiment explored the historical relationship between the South Philadelphia oil refinery (last operated by Philadelphia Energy Solutions, or PES) and its surrounding neighbourhoods, to disseminate data on impacts of over 150 years of refining in this location, to amplify community voices in policy-making arenas, and to engage Philadelphians in imagining alternative uses for the site—literally a "future beyond refining." This experiment included teaching partnerships, fenceline neighbourhood tours, school workshops, a collection of oral histories, digital exhibits, a documentary short, and a temporary memorial to lives lost to refining. Resources for this rapid-repsonse project designed in the immediate aftermath of a catastrophic refinery explosion were cobbled together from a variety of existing funding sources.
https://ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/experiments/futures-beyond-refining

Intersecting Energy Cultures
This is an international working group of ten teams composed of academic and community-based partners in historic energy landscapes now in transition. With funding for community partners and for the production of short video documentaries, teams committed to workshop various arts-driven participatory research methods—all designed to amplify community voices in policy-making settings. Academic partners committed to designing and producing the local workshops in collaboration with community partners, to presenting workshop findings to the working group, to writing locally-relevant policy briefs, and to contributing one chapter to a planned special journal issue. When additional funding was secured for the creation of the documentary shorts, not all teams could participate since this funding included no remuneration for community partners.
https://intersectingenergycultures.org/

Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm
An eco-farming collective consisting of women, trans, and non-binary people who provide mutual support to each other in rural Yilan County, Taiwan. As of 2024, two full-time queer farmers are responsible for fruit production, cultivating 1.38 hectares of citrus orchards. Rice production is undertaken by two part-time women rice farmers who collectively manage 0.8 hectares of rice paddies. By bringing gender awareness into agriculture, "Land Dyke" hopes to create a space where female and queer farmers can flourish outside of conventional family structures.
https://landdykecsa.blogspot.com/ (in Chinese)

Living on the Edge: Caring for Australia's Threatened Places
A collaboration between EH researchers and a museum, this project explores the relationships of Australian communities with threatened ecological communities and landscapes. It brings together cultural researchers, writers, curators, traditional custodians and artists, as well as policymakers, scientists and community conservationists, to share knowledge and explore ideas. Ultimately, it aims to open up a broad public dialogue on

these topics through a series of public events, broadcasts, publications, exhibitions, and the development of classroom learning resources.
https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/living-on-the-edge

The Lurujarri Heritage Trail
The Goolarabooloo people in North-West Australia started this trail over thirty years ago to make their knowledge of Country publicly available. This is a kind of pedagogy, but it is experiential rather than text-based. Participants on the trail walk for eight days north from Broome, learning about the traditional stories and the environment from the Goolarabooloo family. At a walking pace, they gain feelings for Country, as well as knowledge that helps care for Country, learning with the Goolarabooloo children who represent the continuity of ancient traditions.
https://www.goolarabooloo.org.au/lurujarri.html

My Climate Story
A public research project that encourages participants to consider global climate change on a personal scale, initiated and supported by faculty and students at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. University participants have written climate storytelling curriculum (a short textbook) for use in classroom settings, produced documentary films, and offered more than 50 workshops in formal and informal educational settings for participants from middle school to retirees. With storytelling prompts available in 15 languages, the workshops have generated hundreds of short climate stories searchable in the MCS "Story Bank." The project has been supported by the University of Pennsylvania to create a network of nine Philadelphia high-school climate classrooms and twelve Campus Correspondents working at colleges and universities across North American. Organizers plan to develop a wider network of college classrooms and to publish a catalogue of multimedia stories from the climate Story Bank.
https://my-climate-story.org/about/

Nuestros Suelos/Our Soils
A collaboration between researchers in Chile and the U.S., this project aimed at designing, testing, and disseminating a handbook for participative soil degradation assessment based on a citizen science sensibility and low-cost technologies. Looking to extract soil pollution from its current public oblivion, the handbook included a series of activities and devices, ranging from the production of multiple kinds of data about local soil pollution through the usage of low-cost measuring devices to speculative exercises aiming at sketching possible future soils for the areas under analysis.
https://oursoil.wp.rpi.edu/

Occupy Climate Change
OCC! aims to spotlight the practices and experiments of grassroots organizations addressing climate change. The primary output of the project is a digital atlas featuring entries on grassroots and municipal initiatives tackling climate change. The goal is to illustrate that climate change initiatives are not limited to global or individual efforts. The atlas has also provided a platform for individuals to nurture their imagination and share their creative visions of what an urban future could look like.

https://occupyclimatechange.net/

The Living Archive: Extinction Stories from Oceania
This project created a storytelling portal for people to share their own stories about what extinction means and how it matters in their lives and landscapes.
https://www.extinctionstories.org/

The Urban Field Naturalist Project
A collaboration between biologists and environmental and digital humanities scholars, this project helped people to get to know the plants and animals in their neighbourhood. It included resources for studying/observing and learning to tell and share stories about human/wildlife interactions. It produced a website with a community story archive, a popular book, an exhibition, and a series of storytelling workshops.
https://www.urbanfieldnaturalist.org/

Toxicbios
This project aims to co-produce knowledge about the experience of contamination in sacrifice zones. The central concept is that individuals experience toxicity and environmental injustices through their bodies, within their daily lives and surroundings. Following the environmental justice movement's slogan, 'we speak for ourselves', Toxicbios amplifies the voices of people in subaltern communities by gathering their 'toxic autobiographies' through guerrilla narrative techniques.
https://toxicbios.org/

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Endnotes

[i] https://sites.google.com/view/peh
[ii] The authorship team for this article emerged organically out of the existing collaborative networks of the lead authors, drawing on their own projects as well as a larger group of scholars that they have been in conversation with or inspired by on this topic.
[iii] This situation is at least partly a result of the complex ways in which the term "environmental humanities" is translated and taken up in other languages and parts of the world. This situation is discussed in more detail in O'Gorman et al. 2019.
[iv] The syllabus for Wiggin's PEH class at Penn, a hybrid seminar and lab/studio, is available online: https://bethanywiggin.org/teaching/
[v] For further information on the The Seedbox, see: https://theseedbox.mistraprograms.org/
[vi] https://ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/about/mission
[vii] Alongside these kinds of community led initiatives, others have argued that literature, films, plays, and other cultural works aimed at public audiences, might also be described as part of the 'public humanities.' Genuine questions exist here about how this term should be defined. It is far from clear that all of these groups and individuals would see their own efforts as part of the sphere of 'public humanities', and we should be wary of co-opting their efforts. We would like to err on the side of inclusiveness while also recognising that, as described more fully below, there is something particular about what the humanities bring to these kinds of public conversations.
[viii] For a database of over 2,000 public humanities projects in the USA, see the National Humanities Alliance's *Humanities for All* website: https://humanitiesforall.org/.
[ix] On this topic see https://bethanywiggin.org/2024/02/07/this-is-my-pinned-post/
[x] See https://arts.au.dk/en/ehjustice/about-the-network
[xi] See https://hfe-observatories.org/ and https://bridges.earth/
[xii] See (Chilvers and Kearnes 2016)
[xiii] See https://australian.museum/learn/news/podcasts/#HumanNature-Lectures
[xiv] See https://my-climate-story.org/climate-stories/browse/
[xv] Even those who work to create more open digital archives also sometimes warn that online archives risk repeating and even reinforcing the exclusionary structures they seek to overcome, especially when they contain materials by and for communities riven by the "digital divide." Efforts such as the Eastwick Living History project have thus not only created a modest collection of online oral histories but have presented those histories in person, in the Eastwick neighborhood of Philadelphia, where the project's participants live and work, playing them on an oral history jukebox installed at the local nature center. See: https://ppeh.sas.upenn.edu/index.php/field-notes/eastwick-oral-history-kiosk-jukebox-installation-john-heinz-national-wildlife-refuge. Cited in (Flinn 2007, 165).
[xvi] An important exception is (Armiero et al. 2019).
[xvii] http://www.extinctionstories.org/
[xviii] For more information on the Cultural Conservancy, see: https://www.nativeland.org/