Margin to Margin: Art-Based Research for Digital Outreach to Marginalised Communities*

Extended Abstract†

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ABSTRACT

Margin to Margin: Women living on the edges of the world is an art and research project that took place in 2016-2017 between four geographical margins: outback South Australia, Finnish Lapland, Russian Kola Peninsula and Namibia. The project is an art and research collaboration between artist communities with the goal to explore the relationship between art-making and empowerment of artefact makers living and working ‘on the edges’. The aims of the project include the understanding of realities marginalised communities face whilst giving voice to these communities by exhibiting their art in various formats, stimulating digital participation and utilising technology for digital inclusion.

CCS CONCEPTS

• Social and professional topics → User characteristics; Cultural characteristics

KEYWORDS

Art-based research, marginal, participation, mediation, iDoc

1 INTRODUCTION

The Margin to Margin project aims to give voice to peripheral artists and their communities through documentary video, blogs and social media platforms. The research views the concept of marginality predominantly from the position of geographical isolation, thus this unique cross-continental collaboration explores and presents art and research processes of artists and makers facing challenges of isolation and remoteness. Thus, the project recognises and responds to sensitivities such as postcoloniality, indigeneity and gender issues.

The project was realised through a series of art and story-sharing workshops. The mutual empathetic response of the workshops’ participants, who stem from a wide range of demographics, facilitated the creation of a safe environment for the ones who made art, shared their stories and for those who listened. The members of the research group created, discussed, exhibited and shared art with and by communities in Fowlers Bay and Port Augusta in South Australia, Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland, Murmansk in Northern Russia and Windhoek in Namibia.

Some of the main findings, that are all based on the projects’ case studies in these peripheral communities, include: (a) art-based activities permit artists and makers to negotiate and sustain their identities, while storytelling and personal narratives offer them ways to work through particular life challenges and make sense of difficult circumstances [1]; (b) art making, as well as physical and digital artefacts, serve as connective and empowering tools amongst global communities who face various challenges [2]; (c) improvisatory processes and art-making stimulate empowerment and community participation despite limitations of resources, thus art-based methods, that are underpinned by improvisation, are key components in social design [3][4]; (d) the key facilitative role of mediation in art-based activities for building empathy between peripheral groups and researchers [5]; (e) the role of intimate bodily spheres, such as laps, in facilitating multiple and complex social and cultural activities, including art and craft making, storytelling and social media participation [6]; and (f) facilitation of participant engagement via a focus on local meanings and utilising narrative identities [7].

2 WORK IN PROGRESS

Whilst the first phase of the project is coming to an end, the researchers are left with a large amount of rich, partially unanalysed audio-visual, textual, physical and photographic data. The researchers now consider opting for an interactive online documentary (iDoc) format to suit their objectives, because textual forms such as stories, artefacts and documentaries “streamline the messy contradictions of real life into relatively accessible, legible forms”[8]. This format implies accommodation of various types of artefacts and media, including web-based responsive maps that

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would emphasise the geographic remoteness the project and the communities deal with. The multimedia iDoc format allows for various ways of temporal, spatial and representational storytelling of various identities, spaces and locations the researchers work in and with. This project seeks to understand shared challenges and opportunities with similar communities of research and through participation, uncover strategies to contribute to a more inclusive research agenda around the nexus of communities and technologies. The aim is to develop a framework that can be used for art based digital outreach in marginalised communities. This framework will include vital ethical considerations for the development of an iDoc platform.

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