Designing Conviviality with HCI: A Case Study of Snoösphere

Kristina Mah
The University of Sydney
Design Lab
School of Architecture, Design and Planning
Kristina.Mah@sydney.edu.au

Luke Hespanhol
The University of Sydney
Design Lab
School of Architecture, Design and Planning
Luke.Hespanhol@sydney.edu.au

Lian Loke
The University of Sydney
Design Lab
School of Architecture, Design and Planning
Lian.Loke@sydney.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Creative research and practices in art and design have sparked interest and conversation in their offering within the context of addressing mental health, largely due to their holistic concern of adopting conviviality in their approach. In this paper, we discuss the work of Illich [4] who defined ‘convivial tools’ as those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her own vision’. Adding to this, we leverage Sanders’ observation [5] that people need to feel creative in how they interact, inhabit their world and that this should be reflected in design spaces balancing the use of industrial and convivial tools.

In our discussion, we investigate the role of conviviality in the design of technological systems and spaces through the aspects of curiosity and playfulness. We address conviviality and claim that it has a pivotal role in art and design that responds to societal issues such as mental health. We argue that ‘convivial systems’ increase the cognitive accessibility and general interest of such societal issues to reach a broader audience.

To support our claim, we present a case study of Snoösphere, an interactive installation by Lull Studios. Snoösphere is a good example of such a ‘convivial system’, as it provides a rich vocabulary for documenting mental states and human subjectivity, emotion or distress and is also able to connect with people in ways that aren’t verbal [2]. Snoösphere was informed by previous work [7] related to the ‘snoozezen’2, the Dutch therapeutic spaces for mental health and the concept of the ‘noosphere’, a term that was invented in the 1930’s to describe the transitioning impact of humans upon nature [5]. Snoösphere is an immersive environment that responds to mental health and mental diversity, offering a gentle multi-sensory stimulation to its visitors [2]. The creative approach taken by Lull Studios ‘normalises the condition of anxiety and attempts to re-contextualise, de-stigmatising and de-pathologise it’ [1].

We present HCI design methods motivated with creating convivial response to an issue within society; in this case, mental health and mental diversity. Through our case-study of Snoösphere, we aim to discuss how creative research and practices like those used in the development of Snoösphere can reframe and rethink approaches to those issues through digital technologies, particularly by mediating feelings and actions of conviviality through curiosity and playfulness. We present our findings from observations and interviews conducted with visitors to Snoösphere and lab studies informed by these findings to refine initial insights. In doing so, we further develop Loke’s argument [1] that cultural practice offers critical spaces outside of traditional [sites] to explore, examine and transform one’s sense of self and identity, going beyond restrictions imposed by society towards curiosity, play and creativity. We finally conclude by articulating the contribution of conviviality through curiosity and play in reframing and rethinking societal issues.

CCS CONCEPTS
• User-centred design → Interaction design

KEYWORDS
Conviviality, creativity; human-centred; participation; HCI

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
Snoösphere was developed by Lull Studios and exhibited as part of the Big Anxiety Festival in Sydney, Australia.

REFERENCES