Integrating Arts-Based Approaches into User Experience Design

Maria Murray
School of Applied Psychology
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland
maria.murray@mtu.ie

ABSTRACT

User experience (UX) design is concerned with working with people to develop products and processes in response to their specific needs, expectations and contexts. This gives rise to the question of participation in design, a concept that designers and design educators themselves are not necessarily always familiar with. It also engages with social justice, as these various needs, expectations and contexts are typically both personal and political. Socially Engaged Art (SEA) has long been preoccupied with questions of participation, specifically transformative participation that turns "spectators" into "actors", promoting more active and agentic citizens. As user experience design engages with social justice issues and looks towards contributing to more sustainable and equitable futures, it could benefit from integrating SEA theory and practice into both configuring meaningful and equitable participation, and creating design processes that marry design principles and practices with arts-based modes of creative exploration and expression.

Authors Keywords

User experience, arts-based methods, social justice, socially engaged art, participation

CSS Concepts

• Human-centered computing ~ Interaction design ~ Interaction design process and methods ~ User centred design

INTRODUCTION

I am a design educator, a researcher and an artist. I teach creative digital media, including UX design, user interface design and instructional design. My research practice is interested in how digital socially engaged art (dSEA) theory and practice can inform HCI work in rapidly developing rural communities. My artistic practice is both personal (painting) and socially engaged (art+activism = "artivism"), with a focus on public participatory art projects working towards some social change. Central to all three of these endeavours is the idea of facilitating meaningful participation that impacts on individuals in such a way as to develop in them a critical creativity. This allows for an examination of the contexts they are operating in, an identifying of issues they (or their communities) may be facing, and an ability to conceptualise ways forward in addressing these issues via design or art-based method.

Taking an dSEA standpoint in configuring participation provides us with theories and practice that look towards developing individual agency, democratic action and stronger social bonds [1,2,3,5,6, 8]. This is said to be achieved through iterative processes of action, reflection and (re)action [4], and through engaging in dialogue to challenge assumptions and make visible marginalised experiences [5,7,8]. These approaches look towards individual transformation in order to effect some social change. While in the domains of dSEA and "artivism", these approaches are cornerstone, they are less considered in the world of design education. I look to integrate these approaches into my classroom wherever possible, looking for ways to create transformative, meaningful participation and approaches that might activate students to become more socially engaged in their design practice as they develop their critical creativity in addressing problems of today.

In the following pages, I present UX design work from students, dSEA work from research participants and images from collaborative and participatory "artivist" work in my local community. These sets of images illustrate the commonalities across these various approaches and serve to provoke further conversation on how arts-based methods might be employed in UX design.

STUDENT WORK

These images indicate the development of work on a user experience design brief to create a campaign for Spotify, entitled "Acceptance in every beat". This was a collaborative project drawing on typical exercises from both art and design, encouraging students to be both personal and political in their response. The images represented here are from student sketchbooks, exploring the concept through written and visual exercises while relating it to both personal experience and wider social context.

we are all
friends
even if we're different

INCLUSION

IDENTITY

→ Physical appearance → Fingerprint, DNA

→ Hobbies

→ Family influences your identity but doesn't define who you are

→ Location influences your identity
E.g Christening are common in Ireland but may not be in other Countries

→ Name → everyone's name has a meaning

The ___

Sunday, August 30, 2006

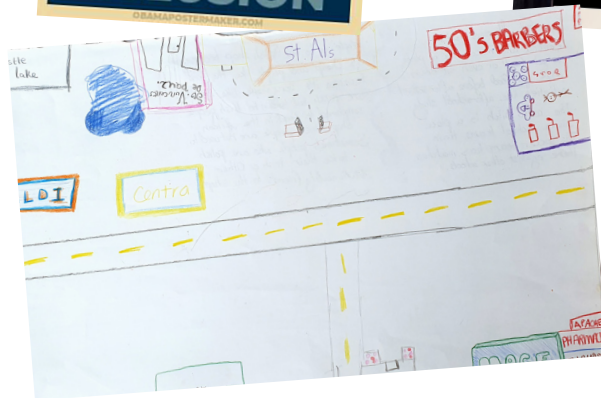## Difference is Good

Everyone is different in their own way and that is what makes us unique. Some people look different for example they may choose to wear the hijab but they are still a human being like us all. No one should be left out because they are different. If we were all the same the world would be a very boring place.


Not being discriminated

Community culture   Exclusion   Part of the community

DSEA WORK

These various images are taken from two of my PhD studies, both with young people in a rapidly developing rural community and both with dSEA outputs, specifically digital stories and digital images. Again, the young people were encouraged to explore both the personal and political sides of issues they identify as important to them, and to create artwork on these topics with the intention of increasing their ability to articulate and share their experiences in the hope of creating some social change.

LIVE
YOUTH CAFE
SVP
BREAKING NEWS
LOCAL TEENS NEED YOUR HELP!
12:22   TEENS IN ___ ARE APPEALING FOR HELP TO MAKE A SPACE JUST FOR THE

50's BARBERS
St Als
Centra

• St. Aloysius - school
centra and mace are a place to get food or even sit down people get food before afterschool activities like afterschool study

• The astro pitch is a place where school teams train
The soccer team has matches there against other schools.

• People go to the Polish shop because it's cheap and people like the food because it's very simple like biscuits are polish but known to Irish people compared to food in the African shop which people are not used to. Sometimes people who are polish take their Irish or other Nationality friends to the shops

"PRODUCTION TITLE"
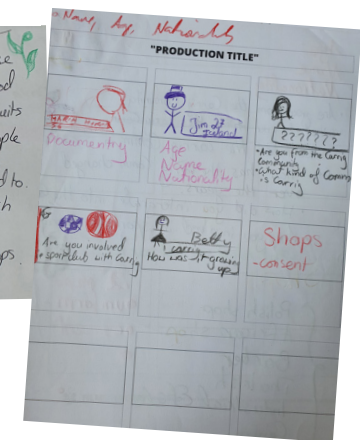
ARTIVISM WORK

These images represent three actions undertaken by HIVE, a SEA collective based in Cork city of which I am a member. Our work is always collaborative, participatory and socially engaged. The various actions here are around the UN Sustainable Development Goals, creative street action during the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and an ongoing public participatory art project aimed at commemorating women who have died by mens violence in Ireland while opening dialogue around how to challenge GBV.

CONCLUSION

The various projects depicted here illustrate the potential cross-overs between UX design and SEA with regard to configuring participation, engaging with social justice issues and developing more active and agentic designers and citizens. The first set of images is explicitly linked to UX design and HCI, the final two arts-based examples demonstrate a process of participation in socially engaged work that could offer a new way to engage stakeholders on UX design, specifically with a view to empowering participants to advocate for themselves and become more active in their own contexts. While the ideation and exploration processes in design and SEA can sometimes look similar, the intentionality in these processes is where the difference lies. The role of the designer is often to solve problems with design, while the role of the socially-engaged artist is often to identify and communicate social problems with the intention of supporting individuals and communities to take action and find their own solutions. I hope to bring these perspectives to CHI 2022 InContext: Futuring User-Experience Design Tools workshop in order to contribute to the development of the UX design tools futures manifesto. I am excited about a future where UX design and arts-based methods meet to activate our future designers and effect positive social change in our world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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