

DESIGN FOR CARE IN THE PERIPHERIES: ARTS-BASED RESEARCH AS AN EMPOWERING PROCESS WITH COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Arts-based research (ABR), its potential for participation and collaboration, can create insights and understanding of complex societal structures. It can also be used as an approach to find mindful solutions with peripheral communities. The paper argues that ABR, supported by practical collaborative processes, can offer suitable approaches to design for care by including local stakeholders in community-led development processes. This paper presents a Life Story Mandala tool that enables researchers and art and design practitioners to manage complex societal development processes in a globalised world (Bonsiepe 2006). The tool was developed during two global research cycles in South Australia and Finnish Lapland. The goal was to contribute to the development of fair and equal possibilities in everyday life through self-expression. The paper illustrates the practical implementation of a theoretical framework to analyse two case studies

in which ABR was employed as an approach to design for care in the peripheries.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is arguing for the value of ABR and collaboration when working with design for care. These practises contribute to co-creation of mindful solutions in peripheral communities. Mindful solutions are valuable in design for care processes in which designers, as well as participants, are aware of “the sense of social, environmental and economic stewardship as the foundation for a sustainable future, in a time of profound social and environmental change for society at large” (Janes 2010). In many cases design processes aim to achieve immediate outcomes or concrete deliverables, but often communities need care before embarking on collaborative activities. Especially peripheral communities often have to deal with context-specific challenges that come about through their existence in social, economic and environmental peripheries. This emphasises the fact that in community contexts, design is rarely composed of dramatic breakthroughs, but instead comprises many small moves that cumulatively produce new ways of acting in the world (Hara 2007).

Care could be described as the process of providing and/or receiving what a person or thing needs. So when designing for care, social structures in the everyday life of the communities as well as social impact of the collaborative solutions become important. To design with or for social aim is many times explained as a mentality or a way of thinking, rather than a discipline.

Social design is not a solo activity undertaken by an ingenious individual, but a collective effort for a better world and everyday life (Van der Zwaag 2014). Social design draws in the full range of design specialisms and combines these with the deep understanding and analysis that exist in other areas such as health care, social care, or policy and planning (Margolin & Margolin 2002). This way social design opens up innovative ways of doing research and generating new knowledge (Armstrong et al. 2014). Understanding social design and being able to build collaborative processes by using this mentality is crucial component of designing for care.

Margolin and Margolin (2002, p.25) proposed a 'social model' for designers that is based on a widely-used process in social work. With social work being based on the concept of care (Meagher & Parton 2004, p. 11; Parton 2003), the social model for designers can thus also be argued to be based on care. However, discussions around the ethics of care in social work only started to gain momentum as from 2004 (Meagher & Parton 2004). They draw (p.12) on feminist theories, and state that the ethics of care upholds the values 'connection, interdependence and passivity'. And add (p.12), that perspectives such as enthusiasm and emotions have been associated with women's interests, whilst professionalism and bureaucracy answer to masculine ideals.

Parton (2003, p.2) posits that the ethics of care should be deeply embedded in professional practice, which is possible by embedding a plurality of knowledge and voice. However, from the professionals who provide care, including designers, Kittay (2011, p.50) argues for those in need of care who are 'in their power with respect to intimate details of life, aspects of existence often do not share[d] except with those closest to [them, which] is an imposition and intrusion [that] can be oppressive'. This dual perspective on giving and receiving care is a pertinent underpinning of this paper alongside the Ricoeurian perspective on care, which is enabled through narratives, discussed later in this paper.

The ones who design for care must also hear the current calls on designers to decolonise design practices (Tunstall 2013; Tlostanova 2017). Decolonised design deeply embeds the values of feminist and postcolonial theories into design practices. However, Raghuram et al. (2009, p.1) suggest that designers need a 'care-full recognition of postcolonial interaction' by leaving care open to the multiple meanings that it may adopt in various contexts, spaces and places. Thus care has to be taken to refrain from notions based on wanting to care for the fragility of another, thus deciding who needs care, why and how. Worse, actions of care should not be based on altruistic generosity but instead, decolonising practices should approach care with a focus on 'interdependence and coexistence [by making] apparent the potential connections between responsibility, care and power, at a variety of scales' (Raghuram et al. 2009, p.23).

Additional calls made to designers are to find ways to develop communal assemblages that facilitate transitions towards more sustainable and plural ways of being (Botero et al. 2018) and to consider design as a means to freedom (Graduño García 2017). Social design actions stemming from these calls will be related to care as they indicate that designers should care even more about the communities and places they design with, as well as master mindful processes while they do this. Designing for complex societal challenges (Miettinen & Sarantou 2019) has become more strategic, with the result that broad discussions and holistic approaches towards community-centred and community-led work is increasingly motivating the work of designer-researchers (Winschiers-Theophilus et al. 2010).

This paper discusses how a decolonising shift can come about through the role of ABR in processes that utilise design to facilitate care and contribute to the capabilities of especially peripheral communities. ABR is a progressive research approach that addresses the 're-examination of power within the knowledge-building process' (Leavy 2015, p.9). In this paper, peripheral communities are defined by conditions of isolation and migration, which is emphasised by the geography of the case studies in the Arctic and far South. Peripheral communities are defined as those that experience isolation from 'mainstream society' due to linguistic barriers, geographic isolation, history of oppression, racism, discrimination, and poverty (Marshall 1998). ABR and social design can be instruments of change in peripheral communities as they enable change through collaborative decision making. This paper discusses ABR as a practical method and approach to care in the peripheries, next to creating dynamic capabilities to respond to the needs of peripheral communities.

The research questions posed in this paper are: "How can ABR processes contribute to care and empowerment within and for peripheral communities?" and "How collaborative processes can benefit from ABR methods?" In order to answer these questions, the paper uses data that was collected from the artistic and service design research project titled Margin to Margin (2016-2018) that was funded by the Finnish Kone Foundation (Miettinen et al. 2017; Akimenko et al. 2017). Additional data was captured during practical fieldwork related to reconciliation training that was offered by the University of Lapland with communities located in Finnish Lapland. During the fieldwork in July 2018, valuable tools that were developed during the Margin to Margin project were implemented and further elaborated on.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

ABR has multiple plural underpinnings. McNiff (2008) signposted the plurality of art-based research as it can employ all visual and performing arts approaches. This research approach draws on artistic processes in

understanding experiences of both researchers and their participants through systematic research processes that are based on 'the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts' (McNiff 2008, p.29). Leavy (2015, p.5) further emphasises this plurality by proposing ABR as an 'umbrella category', or collective research method, that brings together at least 28 arts-based methods into a 'partial lexocology of terms'. The multiplicity of approaches and knowledge areas that have developed in this research field are brought together under the umbrella term of ABR, including art-based and a/r/tographical research, to name a few (Leavy 2015, p.15).

According to Leavy (2015), the creative arts is used by researchers to understand complex processes of meaning-making, which is central to qualitative research. This research approach cultivates connection, but also empathy and self-reflection through the disruption of dominant narratives by utilising storytelling and visualising (Leavy 2017, p.224). ABR is a powerful approach that can be applied in all the stages of the research process, from the incubation phase, through to problem identification, methods and results as it assists researchers with 'idea percolation' (Leavy 2015, p.18).

The research process in this paper is social and engages people to think about and design their own futures, using their own ingenuity and locally available resources (Burkett 2016). From the participants this kind of collaboration requires the ability to share and accept equal partnership in the creation process (Fleischmann 2013). ABR approaches enable responses to complexities and 'reflection in action' (Schön 2001) that are often needed in community-led activities that aim for creative and empowering outcomes. Arts-based researchers aim to suggest new ways of 'viewing [social] phenomena' (Barone & Eisner 1997, p.96), thus it does not seek out certainty, but instead enhances and brings about different perspectives.

CARE

Narratives are vehicles for giving and expressing care, because narratives 'recount care' (Ricoeur 1994, p.163). It is through stories that communities and individuals have the potential to reach out to one another (Petrilli & Ponzio 2000). Stories not only nurture the connections between individuals, communities and cultures, but they are the tangible connections through which care is transferred across 'natural' and cultural 'boundaries' (Sarantou 2014, p.247). In her opinion, care given and expressed builds resilient communities as it creates and sustains social networks. The power of stories to reduce the negative impact of social and economic practices on societies and the global environment is another dimension of care that can be enabled through stories (Sarantou 2014, p.248).

Storytelling and narrative practices are important methods in ABR processes when working with communities. This paper explores the role of narratives

and storytelling in design for care in peripheral contexts. A considerable number of rich and wide ranging 'narratives of care' (Sarantou 2014, p.164) were documented in the two case studies that are discussed in this paper. ABR, paired with a strong storytelling component, offers means to give and express care by building on the use of creativity, self-expression and active listening. The experience of being heard brings along growth and change (Levitt 2002; Toller 1999).

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is 'an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of resources gain greater access to and control over those resources' (Zimmerman 2000, p.43). The process of empowerment may begin by collective empowerment within a community, or through the help of outsiders who may provide new influences, encouragement and new skills development to strengthen self-sufficiency. It enables individuals and groups to access personal or collective power, authority and influence, but it also encourages individuals to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life and their environment, which often leads to the improvement of self and society (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995). And as such, empowerment is also a very social process.

Empowerment is about strengthening the capacity of people to exercise their rights, either as individuals or as members of a community, by engaging their own efforts (Eade 1997, p.4). Parsons (1991) reminds us that many psychological and individual issues are based on experiences of structural factors such as oppression, inequality, power relations, violation, neglect of own language and culture, to name a few. Although these phenomena are structural and society based, they impact on individuals by resulting in issues of low self-esteem, lack of trust, feelings of oppression and lack of encouragement. In these situations caring, of yourself or the ones around you, becomes challenging. Another point of view is that facilitators can be compared to social workers in that their role is to facilitate and guide the capacity for self-help of their clients as self-empowered persons with the ability to fight abuse or oppression (Adams 2008; Parsons 1991).

Empowerment is the key step to gain control of circumstances (Rappaport 1984), which is a reality that peripheral communities and individuals have to live with every day. This control provides possibilities to achieve goals and maximise the quality of lives (Adams 2008). ABR process directed to social goals, supports and enhances empowerment from many different perspectives. In the context of working with communities this is important as it enables paths towards discussing and creating care during collaborative processes, as well as to the designed solutions. To conclude, ABR and storytelling can

facilitate wellbeing, healing and empowering processes (Kangas 2017; Anttonen et al. 2016; Miettinen et al. 2016a; Guetzkow 2002) as it serves as means for empowerment and transformation within the community (Kay 2000).

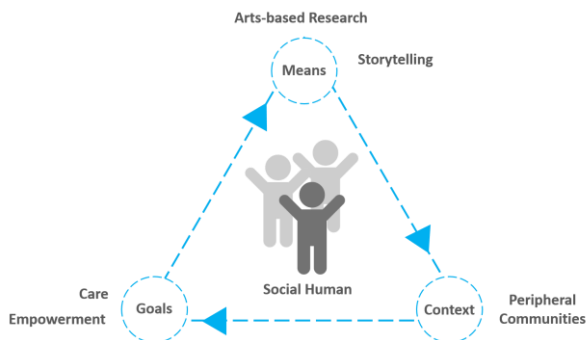


Figure 1: Theoretical framework for empowerment and care through ABR.

A visualisation of the theoretical framework constructed in this paper is proposed in Figure 1. It places social and human development in the centre of the elements ‘contexts’, ‘means’ and ‘goals’, thus illustrating how researchers and designers work to improve social and human situations with peripheral communities. This paper discusses, by drawing on two case studies, how ABR and storytelling was used with peripheral communities to enable design for care and empowerment for these communities. In the next section the Life Story Mandala method will be discussed as a method for ABR, followed by the two case studies.

LIFE STORY MANDALAS: A METHOD FOR ABR

The artist-researchers aimed to engage in collaborative and equal partners with the communities. The Life Story Mandala method was developed to use an arts-based approach that would express the stories that relate to the art making and identity processes of the communities. The assumption was that through art making and stories, they would be able to reflect on and express the challenges they face due to peripheral circumstances. The two research cycles that are presented in this paper are two workshops with local communities by employing the Life Story Mandala method. The first workshop was hosted between a local artist group and the researchers in Australia in 2016, while the other was hosted with artists in Finnish Lapland in 2018. In the first workshop the Life Story Mandala method was explored as a tool for empowerment and connectedness with other peripheral communities, while in the second workshop focussed on reconciliation. This workshop was applied in a new setting in order to further develop the method. The research and development process is ongoing and outcomes are used to develop ABR methodology with the aim to address societal change in peripheral communities. The research data in the two cycles were collected through ethnographic

observations, storytelling, arts-based methods and workshops.

The Life Story Mandala is an ABR method that utilises a combined narrative and visualising process to reflect on life histories. This method generates data on participants’ world views, their major life events, including trauma, which impacted on their thinking and life experiences. The mandala-making process is based on life span mapping, a tool deriving from life span psychology and based on a model that identifies and discusses triggers, modes, contexts, moderators, functions, and outcomes (Webster et al. 2010).

The benefit of the Life Story Mandala method is its usefulness in holistic and iterative research approaches. During the workshops, the mandala-making enabled the participants to process their life stories in two significant phases. Firstly in conceptualising and representing significant events in their lives through painting or building activities, and secondly through verbal storytelling that offered opportunities for reflection and active listening. Some groups painted or assembled their mandalas while listening to others’ stories, while some participants worked more individually and shared their stories either with each other and the facilitating researcher. The process enabled painting and sharing in peer to peer learning, while individual self-reflective work enabled the processing of personal stories. Video or audio recording of the individual mandala stories is an important tool in rendering audible the voices of individuals (Miettinen et al. 2016b).

In the two case studies that are discussed below, the application of the ABR method is illustrated. In the first research process the method was used to empower a fibre artist group to accomplish their goal to revive connections between existing and new members. The Life Story Mandala exercise, as well as other arts-based approaches, not only enabled new connections within the group, but also with other peripheral artist groups globally (see Sarantou et al. 2018). In the second research cycle the Life Story Mandala method was used for reconciliatory purposes during a workshop in Lapland.

LIFE STORY MANDALA MAKING WITH FIBRESPACE INCORPORATED GROUP IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The first case study discussed in this paper is a workshop that was hosted with the regionally based South Australian Fibrespace Incorporated textile artists. The group was inaugurated in 1998 and consists of both female and male members, ranging from thirty-five to ninety-two years of age (Sarantou 2016). A small minority of the group identify as Indigenous Australian. With face-to-face meetings being the preferred communication method between members, the group meets three times annually, usually in some of the South Australian towns of Ceduna, Port Lincoln, Port

Augusta, Whyalla, Port Pirie and Gladstone. To overcome communication gaps and distribute information, management processes have been extended to include technologically-enabled communication functions and platforms. The fibre artists' works are based on experimental practices, which they are encouraged to document using diaries, notes and photographs. Once a year the group engages in a brainstorming session in which they present themes for the new textile art that will be produced for that year. With great anticipation, the group present their fibre art once annually in a joint session that includes verbal presentations, self-reflections and group criticism (Sarantou 2016).

Fibrespace is a peripheral arts community due to the challenges they have to overcome to sustain the group's existence. These artists are dispersed throughout regional South Australia, thus group meetings require long distance travel from the southern Eyre Peninsula, Far West Coast, Mid North and other (remote) areas in South Australia. Due to a lack of funding for arts in general, especially in regional areas, resources such as arts officers are few amongst the dispersed communities. As a result, the group is self-funded, drawing on personal resources to develop and exhibit their work annually. In 2016 the group consulted with the Margin-to-Margin researchers with the aim to forge new global connections and share experiences through arts-based making. Group consultations, the terms of collaboration and the preparations for interventions were determined by the group.

The group initiated a workshop in collaboration with the Margin to Margin researchers after the first consultation. The themes, concerns, ideas and aims of the group and their needs for international collaboration and professional development as artists were identified during the first consultation meeting through the use of a mind map (see Table 1). The proposed workshop for mandala-making was to a large extent self-funded. Fibrespace was eager to collaborate through art activities and to connect with other peripheral artist communities. The participants were fluent in fibre arts practices. Thus, the participants approached the researchers with exciting propositions and activity suggestions, which ensured a bottom-up approach to research and collaboration as the researched community actively participate in planning and the development of the project.

During the workshop the Life Story Mandala process was introduced and close to 35 painted life story mandalas were produced during a two-day workshop. Artistic practices and storytelling overlapped during the workshop. Stories were told, shared and documented through art making, the artefacts that were produced, photographs and documentary video. At least fifteen interviews of between twenty and forty minutes were captured via audio recording, while over twelve hours of footage was recorded during storytelling.

Table 1: The actions, themes and collaboration examples identified by Fibrespace.

Themes	Execution
1. Starting a conversation with artists in marginalised circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make an artefact that can be posted to Lapland ○ Keep it small for postage purposes ○ A4 envelope size ○ Remain mindful of customs regulations
2. Extenuating circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our world, about us ○ Keep a journal of the process (simple language and good images) ○ Art helps us to make sense of our lives ○ Story and introduction of yourself
3. What and how to communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Funding and finance will determine how the project will proceed ○ Organise an artist retreat ○ Possible artist exchange ○ Possible exhibition
4. Possible Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discovering new ways of working and thinking ○ Conversations between artists ○ Renewed confidence in selves as artists ○ Improved skills and professional development

After the mandala-making and storytelling sessions the textile mandalas were connected with hand sewing and installed at the Platform Gallery where the workshop was hosted (Figure 2). This process contributed to a sense of accomplishment as a group as the large spiral-shaped installation was complex to build and install. The artist group selected this exhibition space as it is a community-managed gallery. The resources produced by the community were not extracted, but first used and displayed for the community in their gallery. The edited documentary videos were also shared with the communities for their use.

The workshop established a trusting relationship between the researchers and Fibrespace members that resulted in ongoing activities, exhibitions and exchanges of artefacts and stories. Such activities included exhibitions in Finland at the Helinä Rautavaara Museum in Helsinki and Hämärä Gallery in Rovaniemi. In South Australia the work was exhibited at the Supper Room of Streaky Bay in 2018. The context of the Fibrespace group, especially before this series of interventions, can be described as a peripheral community that were not sufficiently fluent in utilising global networks and technologies to overcome their challenges. Most of the group members were hesitant to engage in social media platforms with only a few using email to share information. Being so widely dispersed over regional South Australia offered opportunities for using

technology to better connect with members and partner institutions, especially galleries, in sustainable ways.



Figure 2: Fibrespace members and the researchers installing the Life Story Mandalas at the Platform Gallery in Port Augusta (Image by Daria Akimenko, 2016).

The results of the intervention was that the group adopted a wider use of technology such as social media, group message and data storage platforms to better manage the distance and connections between them. The group started to use technology to share fibre art working and development processes, ideas, advice and support. The group's activity management processes became more fluent due to the sharing of information via digital platforms. Self-realisation and empowerment came about by reaching out to like-minded global communities in Finland and Russia through technology, as well as the sharing of artefacts, documentary video and virtual messages. The digital participation of Fibrespace was one of the exciting outcomes of the research collaboration (see Sarantou et al. 2018).

Lessons learned from the application of the mandala-making ABR method is that researchers have to be aware that storytelling may lead to intimate recounts, some that are perhaps traumatic and painful life experiences. In the research encounter with Fibrespace, such stories were shared with the researchers. Empathy and compassion is needed in these circumstances, besides the ethical knowledge of how to manage data that participants may want to withdraw from the research, which was the case in this particular workshop. Although researchers have to take up a responsibility towards ethical research, it is not the responsibility of the researcher to control or intervene in storytelling activities, but to acknowledge the coexistence and interdependence of care and responsibility (Raphuram et al. 2009). The community members supported one another throughout the storytelling processes. The researchers had to balance the potential connections between responsibility, care and power (Raphuram et al. 2009, p.23), understanding and carefully reading the situation not to take control over situations that the community are capable of managing themselves. The ethics of care were adhered to by following a bottom-up approach in which the Fibrespace community determined their terms for

participation and collaboration with the researchers, planning the interventions and selecting the exhibition spaces and avenues for their collaborative art.

In collaboration with the communities, the researchers identified that this ABR method would be transferable to different contexts and environments, thus offering new opportunities for experimentation with art-making materials and methods. The forthcoming rich storytelling experiences motivated the development of the method, whilst the researchers were care-full and mindful of the lessons learned in the first cycle of the research. The flexibility of the method also prompted further exploration in different settings, which resulted in the next research cycle.

USING LIFE STORY MANDALAS FOR RECONCILIATION AND CARE IN LAPLAND

The second case study reflects on a workshop that was an outcome of a reconciliation study course that was hosted in partnership by the University of Lapland, Giellagas Institute at Oulu University and Saamelaisalueen koulutuskeskus (Sámi Education Center). This course in reconciliation was hosted for capacity building purposes for individuals who seek to work as inside mediators and peacebuilders in Sámiland. The communities located in the far north in Sámiland could be described as peripheral because of lack of services available in the areas of health care, education and recreation. Many of these community members need to travel towards the south to gain access to services. These experiences are often tied to frustrations that result from interactions with different service systems that may feel foreign, unfriendly, impersonal, and insensitive.

During this case one of the researchers of the Margin to Margin project participated in the training and consequently developed the Life Story Mandala method that in this case was applied in a practical workshop during the course. The other researchers from the group contributed to analysing the results of the second workshop. In this process the role of care is strongly connected with the concept of healing from trauma caused by colonial practises. Healing is relevant both to those who harmed as well and to those who have been harmed. Reconciliation can be defined as "a change in attitude and behaviours toward the other group, mutual acceptance of each other by members of groups, and the processes and structures that lead to or maintain that acceptance" (Staub & Pearlman 2001, p.301). Healing and reconciliation are interdependent. It is essential both to improve the quality of life of wounded people and to make new violence less likely (Staub & Pearlman 2006).

In the Life Story Mandala method especially the role of storytelling as means for reconciliation is relevant. Storytelling in the processes of the truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) in Canada is discussed by Corntassel, Chaw-win-is and T'lakwadzi (2009). This process was an important means to re-story

the resettlement history and create counter narratives for the Canadian First Nation communities. Young (2004) argues in relation to the South African TRC for the healing role of narrative practises through testimonials and anecdotes that aim at rendering audible the storyteller. Empathy and rehumanisation are enabled through storytelling in TRC processes with communities (see Gobodo-Madikizela 2002; Halpern & Weinstein 2004).

The Life Story Mandala method was applied here in a reconciliation context. The method was further developed with workshop co-facilitator Hanna Guttorm, a senior researcher at the HELSUS institute at the University of Helsinki in Finland. The fifteen workshop participants were all students of the course. The participants were familiar with one another as they worked together during previous workshops that were part of the course. The idea of art as a method for empowerment and wellbeing was central to the workshop. Jaatinen (2015) presented a framework that enables the production of new knowledge about art for empowerment and art for wellbeing. Her framework is based on clarifying and defining concepts that are central for the production of empowering art experiences, which were used in this workshop, such as facilitation, participation in artistic production, art activity, artistic process and the artwork.

The contextual setting was challenging. The workshop was located in Sámiland to physically connect participants to the realities of the initiation of a truth and reconciliation process that is currently under discussion between the government of Finland and Sami communities. The questions related to the existing conflicts and the reconciliation are complex as the process is in its initiation phase. The conflicted questions include issues of the ownership and use of natural resources, mining rights and the construction of a planned cross-Lapland railway by the Finnish Government that will impact on the Sámi's traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding and traditional ways of fishing.

Additional complexities include identity issues related to how Indigenous Sámi are defined as well as the abuse suffered by Sámi children who were forced to live in government regulated dormitories during mandatory primary education (Heinämäki et al. 2017). Complexities in this northern location are caused by extreme remoteness. Communities in northern Lapland lack regular or accessible public and private services (Heikkilä et al. 2013). This reality undermines the legal rights of Finnish citizens who all are entitled to access to basic public services, such education and health care. For this reason the communities remain peripheral compared to more central and populated locations.

As storytelling and narrative practise is an integral part of care and reconciliation processes, the Life Story Mandala method seemed very potential for the purpose of creating trust and sharing insights within the group.

This method enables the capturing of life stories through visualising important periods in the workshop participants lives. Instead of using different colours, symbols, drawings and text on cotton textile circles, in this case the participants used natural materials that were found in surrounding nature. Garden scissors, metal wire and yarn were available to assist mandala-making processes. The facilitators guided the participants to use natural materials to represent the years or important periods of their lives. Within more or less twenty minutes the mandalas were produced by layering materials that were circularly shaped and connected to create a circle. Thereafter the life stories that were visualised with natural materials were shared in two groups. The storytelling and sharing was limited to three minutes to keep within the time frame of the workshop, which was in total one and a half hours. The storytelling and sharing created an intimate atmosphere as the participants learned about each other's life experiences and values through storytelling.



Figure 3: Participant creating an individual life story mandala from natural materials.

Once the storytelling was concluded facilitators introduced the making of “laavu”, a site-specific installation in which all participants contributed the artefacts they produced in the previous activity. They proposed the making of a collaborative installation based on the traditional wooden shelter “laavu” that is used for staying overnight or cooking in Finland when individuals or groups want to spend time in the

wilderness. The “laavu” was constructed by using metal wire that was installed by utilising the trees within the location. Then everyone’s individual pieces were attached to the structure and the participants once more had the opportunity to explain their reasons for participation through storytelling, and sharing of their artefacts. The “laavu” also reflects towards the indigenous research model that places the indigenous values in the centre of the process. Collaborative activities should respect and locate indigenous language, art and culture in the centre of the process (Kuokkanen 2011). Decolonising practices should be adopted by removing dominant narratives and harmful power structures from processes (Keskitalo et al. 2013).

The reconciliation course leaders welcomed the workshop that engaged in ABR. The development of the workshop concept was an iterative process between the course leaders and facilitators of the workshop. The initial description for the workshop was based on the use of natural materials for the mandala-making and a larger textile installation that required the use of textiles, paints and sewing to create a collaborative installation. However, the workshop agenda developed to consider the site specific elements of the workshop location, an island within Lake Inari. The time span was limited to a few hours, leaving the facilitators to carry out only the first planned activity, which focused on the use of natural materials to create a site specific artwork in the natural surroundings of the workshop.

In this case the ABR process benefited from the natural setting of the workshop. The forest and lakeside, which are important to both Indigenous culture and Finnish tradition, facilitated exploration, problem solving, dialogue and joint discussion. The nature-based context and the participants’ individual connection to it eliminated distractions so that participants and facilitators were able to focus on learning from one another, which is crucial in the care processes. The context of nature created respect to traditional elements and practices as an effort to develop storytelling methods that would include decolonising approaches and respect for local contexts. Care in this case was constructed through the sharing of and listening to stories that brought forth personal experiences, histories and memories and included a project setting that created respect for local indigenous culture.

CONCLUSION

The rationale for the chosen activities was that collaborative installation making involves physical and embodied experiences of problem solving that promote sharing between individuals as everyone’s contribution is valued and an important part of the joint outcome. It exemplifies the capacity of art to enable the coping with and reflection on life experiences, while sharing them within a community (Miettinen et al. 2016a).

Designers are able to co-facilitate processes that support participants’ creative thinking and solution orientation

in care processes. ABR can provide new frameworks and practical means in contexts of care. Used in social design processes, ABR can support artistic creativity, discussion and the generation of insights that may lead to defining, understanding and contributing to the empowerment of communities. The two case studies, or two research cycles, illustrate how the theoretical framework (Figure 1) can be applied in practical empowerment and care situations despite the differences in contexts. Overall, in every collaborative workshop and process, there is need for agreeing on ‘what we do, why and what we may produce’ as outcomes. The different foci and outcomes of the case studies also illustrated the adaptability of this ABR method in a variety of contexts.

The Life Story Mandala method is a good example how ABR can support the use of creativity and collaboration to find new ways of promoting care with (peripheral) communities. This method is a combination of individual processing and collaborative effort. The interactions between them enable reflective sharing as well as developing decolonising approaches (Kuokkanen 2011; Keskitalo et al. 2013) through respect and mindfulness to local social and cultural contexts, especially in the case of reconciliation. Using artistic practice for site specific artwork and collaborative installations in nature requires few resources, but it enables a connection to natural surroundings and contexts that is especially important to indigenous communities. The ephemeral nature of the installation in a natural setting well addressed the issues of care for the environment and one another (Sarantou 2014).

The value of the Life Story Mandala method and collaborative installation lies in creating trust and the rehumanisation of participants as part of a team despite conflicting life experiences, values and views. Conflicted situations need methods that enable listening to and understanding one another, while problem solving and agreeing on (social) aims of collaboration can create feelings of joint achievement and caring within a group. Design for care can enable healing that is fundamental to any reconciliation process.

The two research cycles discussed in this paper illustrate how social design can draw on ABR to mediate processes of self-empowerment with communities. Processes of self-determination and the understanding of local contexts by outsiders support care which can be seen in practice when processes become more inclusive and open. In the Fibrespace case study, the co-facilitation of new connections with global communities and opportunities for self-expression and digital participation were key outcomes. The group was empowered through new global connections and dialogues, professional development, self-fulfilment and the expression of their identities.

In the context of the Arctic case study, a peripheral community seeks to journey through care processes to

find new possibilities for transformed futures. ABR in this context was not only a holistic and collaborative means of achieving transformed futures, but ABR enabled, in both research cycles, processes of care and empowerment.

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