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Designing for Dissensus

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ABSTRACT

For social justice-oriented design, pluralistic participatory practices are recognised as important. This paper explores Socially Engaged Art (SEA) as one such practice, which uses dialogical inquiry to address social justice issues. We describe a case study of SEA-informed digital storytelling workshops in a rurban community in Ireland. The workshops aimed to support diverse adolescent participants in identifying and critiquing place-based social issues with a view to imagining alternative and inclusive futures. SEA was instrumental in uncovering contradictory and hidden experiences of community life. We propose incorporating SEA into design processes to: i) challenge assumptions around identity and belonging; ii) recognise diverse experiences; and iii) breakdown social-engagement barriers. As we ask questions on what design is for, who should design, and why design matters, SEA can centre marginalised experiences, support polyvocal participation and help develop participant agency to work towards more equitable futures in rapidly changing environments.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centred computing**; • **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; • **Empirical studies in HCI**;

KEYWORDS

Rurban communities, socially engaged art, participation, place, inclusion, rural HCI, community-based design, design processes, digital storytelling, social justice, Ireland, race, ethnicity

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a Socially Engaged Art (SEA) approach to participation in rapidly developing rural (rurban) communities. SEA is a participative political art form that interrogates social norms to imagine alternative futures. It facilitates dialogical, creative processes that enable collective learning and democratic moments [86]. SEA is used in activist, collaborative settings working towards social and political change through polyvocal dialogue and developing participant agency [91]. Contrary to many design research approaches, SEA is explicitly activist as it seeks to develop critical thinking and political agency in participants. It also differs from participatory approaches in design in that it centres discomfort and conflict as catalysts for identifying social issues and working towards social change [11]. A rurban community is a rapidly expanding rural community with intersectional rural and urban characteristics [15, 24, 49, 103]. Hallmarks of rurban experience include a diversifying and expanding demographic, changes to traditional ways of life and evolving perceptions of place and community identity [9, 73, 79, 80, 96]. As a result, rurban areas experience challenges around place, identity and inclusion [79, 80, 98]. Rural studies have warned of social rupture due to not attending to these challenges [71, 77, 96], while also highlighting the potential of rurban communities to be fulfilling and progressive living places [15]. Design practices can play a role in realising this potential through approaches to participation that interrogate power dynamics and assumptions around identity and belonging. As the DIS community looks towards applications of transformative design, SEA offers aesthetics of dissent and confrontation (where 'aesthetics' are the central characteristics by which the artform is recognised [8, 44]), supporting a polyvocal and critical participation to access hidden experiences and to imagine and work towards alternative futures. This is done through creative and generative problem-posing to evoke critical thinking [43] and constructive conflict [13] in pursuit of challenging hegemonic power structures [86]. Achieving this, however, has challenges in supporting confrontational dialogue that can challenge and disassemble hegemonic norms and assumptions [6].

Design practices such as agonistic design [14], adversarial design [33], speculative design [55] and design futuring [85], as well feminist [3], Afro-futurist [22] and post-colonial [38] methodological approaches, all speak to the desire to use design to redistribute power and develop agency at grassroots levels to work towards better futures. Participatory design, as a formative discipline in democratic design, has identified the need to revisit activist intentions and incorporate pluralistic approaches to participation [16, 19]. SEA can be one such approach and has been used in design processes to incorporate sustainability [34], reclaim identity [31] and support inclusion [72]. However, SEA is still underused [29], despite arts-based processes being recognised as useful to participation [29, 34, 56, 72, 76]. This research contributes to social justice-oriented design with insights on how SEA can be integrated

to sharpen the political and transformative edge of participatory processes. In the rurban context, SEA is considered useful due to its ability to bring multiple perspectives into dialogue to engage with rurban considerations around identity and inclusion [79, 80].

With that in mind, we present a case study of SEA-informed digital storytelling workshops to understand the nuanced and sometimes hidden experiences of teenagers in an Irish rurban community, and to bring those experiences into dialogue. The workshops did not work towards a technological solution but aimed to uncover hidden experiences and support participants in critiquing these in the context of broader social issues. We contribute insights into how SEA might inform the design of interactive systems to explore complex and difficult human experiences, and to support participants in critical and radical thinking and acting in community life.

2 SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART FOR CREATIVE AND CRITICAL PARTICIPATION

Design has engaged with social struggles through participative processes [22, 29, 36, 55, 68] and the HCI community has demonstrated an interest in cultivating activist intentions in research [5, 70, 93, 100]. These developments evoke questions around power, positionality and equality [42, 76]. On an individual level, participating in work to interrogate personal and social issues can promote self-reflection, identity expression, transformative mutual learning and active citizenship [34, 76, 108]. These are ambitious goals, and the need to constantly revisit any change-making intentions in participation has been well established [2, 16, 54, 56], with calls for pluralistic approaches to participation in community settings [35].

Thinking of participation as an experience with the potential to be transformative, rather than a means to specific ends, opens up questions around how participants make sense of their experiences and what kinds of understandings and perceptions are available [108]. In this capacity, participation becomes political in terms of what and where constraints come into these experiences. The need to examine the systems participation takes place in, who or what participation serves, as well as participant positionality and equity is central in understanding these constraints and facilitating affirming and agentic participatory processes [54, 56, 108]. As interest increases in exploring the role of design in social change [1, 22, 47, 54, 85], and in reinvigorating the change-making potential of Participatory Design (PD) [2, 16, 59, 63], we propose an integration of Socially Engaged Art (SEA) as one such pluralistic approach. SEA is arts-based collaboration that aims to support participants in identifying and articulating their social issues to surface tensions and imagine and enact alternatives [43]. One example is Suzanne Lacy's *Uncertain Futures* [67], which addresses women's experiences of work and aging. The project highlights intersectional inequalities through interview, film, photography, theatre, installation, gatherings and workshops that extend out of the gallery and into the public sphere. As with much of Lacy's work [64–66], confrontational dialogue and public engagement are central aesthetics intended to disrupt public assumptions. SEA has been used in design contexts to access nuanced and hidden experiences, often difficult or painful to verbalise [30, 72]. It has also provided directions for more sustainable HCI and participation [34, 56]. This paper further explores potential for the use of SEA in accessing complex and challenging experiences as the basis for the design of more equitable and sustainable interactive systems.

With regards to questions around what kinds of perceptions and experiences are available to participants, SEA draws on the concept of a social consensus that defines what can be conceived of and perceived, and ultimately polices the social order [10, 76]. The antidote to this is seen as dissensus – disordering assumptions around fixed social roles and capacities in terms of what remains unsaid, unheard, unseen, unquestioned and unknowable in public life [90]. Dissensus can develop new visions for community life, as making visible hidden experiences is said to disrupt and reimagine social and political power structures [45]. The disruptive qualities of dissensus are useful to design for social justice, particularly with marginalised groups, precisely because of the focus on platforming marginalised experiences to challenge the status quo and activate agency [17]. A key element of this is the starting assumption of equality in difference, supporting recognition of multiple experiences, ways of being and belonging. Also central to the idea of dissensus is the transformation from 'spectator' to 'actor' [89]. McCarthy and Wright propose that to do this, participation needs to support people in changing the roles they habitually perform [76]. The concept of dissensus is often integrated into SEA through drawing attention to social issues, asserting equality and making visible aspects of experience that are outside of the accepted social structure. For example, Tania Bruguera's iconic *Immigrant Movement International* [23, 32, 60] combined community work and SEA to challenge perceptions about migrants in the US, while suggesting alternative visions based on recognition, solidarity and belonging. This kind of work is highly challenging to facilitate and in response to this challenge, SEA has had long running debates on positionality and participation (e.g. avoiding tokenism or placation and positioning all participants as equal) [6, 7, 12], the transition of spectator to participant (e.g. facilitating a truly transformative and agentic participation) [13, 61] and the aesthetics (e.g. qualities, characteristics and configurations) around what participants can experience and conceive of [17, 75, 76, 89].

This work seeks to understand how SEA (as a collaborative art practice that looks to create political change) and dissensus (as a concept often employed in SEA to access hidden experiences and challenge assumptions) can be of use to design practices looking to create transformative participatory experiences in pursuit of social change. We describe a series of nine SEA-informed digital storytelling workshops in an Irish rurban secondary school with teenage participants. We found SEA was useful in accessing nuanced and often hidden experiences (i.e. uncovering consensus), but that the process didn't move to the next stage of critiquing those experiences (i.e. cultivating dissensus). We contribute perspectives on how to refine the process, as well as describing key potentialities of SEA in design with rurban communities to work towards more sustainable and equitable design of interactive systems.

3 NORTHROCK, A RURBAN COMMUNITY

This research took place in an Irish rurban community, anonymised as 'Northrock'. In the Irish 2016 census, Northrock grew four times more than any other town in Ireland and two thirds of Northrock's

population categorised themselves as white Irish [94]. The population expanded from 1,232 in 1996, to 2,782 in 2006, 5,090 in 2016 and 8,181 in 2022 [25–27] and local groups identified a need to guide the community through further expansion, particularly around community identity and inclusion [94].

Irish rural communities have been examined for a 'rural cosmopolitanism' based on rapid population diversification [107] and complex experiences around identity, inclusion and belonging have been articulated in this context [62, 74, 78, 88]. Northrock has a large percentage of migrants, and the largest age group is 35 to 39 years [94]. Rural communities are typically highly interdependent with social networks often overlapping [52, 92]. This 'everyone knows everyone' belief is something that persists in this community. However, previous work with Northrock revealed challenges around inclusion and identity and highlighted the multiple perceptions of community life, with minority experiences less visible and struggles to recognise other perspectives and needs in many contexts [79, 80]. In response to this previous work, a dissensual SEA approach was deemed relevant in Northrock to bring contradictory experiences into light, to challenge consensus and identify alternatives.

4 DESIGNING THE WORKSHOPS

The study aimed to increase our understanding of how SEA might contribute to design practices by uncovering consensus and evoking dissensus in pursuit of social change. Social justice-oriented design has highlighted the need to develop new strategies [19, 37, 56], move away from solution-oriented design [102], engage with hidden or marginalised experiences [19, 102], understand and prioritise local knowledge [68], position all participants (including researchers) as equal and mutually responsible [41, 54, 68], and challenge distributions of power [1, 41]. SEA provides theoretical and practical examples of how to achieve these various aims in community-based contexts and this work draws on that tradition to design a dialogical, generative and creative participatory experience intended to uncover hidden experiences and challenge hegemonies. Designing the workshops from an SEA standpoint involved seeking to evoke examples of both social consensus, in terms of norms and assumptions, and dissensus, in terms of challenging dominant ideas about community life. The kinds of insights gained specific to the SEA approach revolve around nuanced, somewhat ephemeral and difficult to articulate phenomena around that which is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, knowable and unknowable in participants' lives [10, 76, 90]. The study did not work towards a technological solution, the aim was to access participants' experience and support them in critiquing this experience as a first step in working towards technological supports.

The study comprised of nine digital storytelling workshops with eighteen teenage girls in a local school. Participants engaged in collaborative SEA activities - often art and / or design activities facilitated with the intent to evoke personal and political dialogue and critique around social experiences. The workshops happened once a week and each was eighty minutes long. 'Identity', 'inclusion', 'culture' and 'community' were four focal points for the workshops; they were developed from an earlier focus group study with key Northrock community groups (not reported on here). Ethics approval was granted by the University's Ethics Committee.

4.1 Participants and data collection

The workshops were offered to transition year (TY) students, who are typically around sixteen years old. The workshops were described as an opportunity to develop storytelling and digital skills, and to examine their experiences of life in Northrock. The school was all-female, there was no other secondary school in the community at the time. While there were no specifications in terms of participant racial or ethnic background, and time spent in the community, it was inherent in the study design as it is a characteristic of the school. Table 1 details participant aliases and some background information.

Participants were formed into four groups, each exploring one of the four focal points identified in the previous study. Data collection included pre and post questionnaires, researcher observation notes and reflections, video recordings of group presentations and discussions, audio recordings of groups' conversations during workshops, artefacts created during workshops and the final digital stories.

4.2 Workshop activities

Workshop activities were designed from a SEA standpoint with the intent of creating opportunities for participants to identify social issues, question hegemonies and imagine alternatives. SEA does not have a prescriptive set of activities. SEA workshops use many typical art and / or design activities with the intention of revealing and interrogating consensus to encourage critical thinking and ultimately dissensus [46]. While there are similarities between SEA and other participatory design activities in terms of collaboration and form, the differences are in way these activities are framed, the intentionality behind them, the kinds of questions and prompts used and the intended outcomes. These aspects are developed in both the initial design process, and in the live workshop as the researcher / facilitator adapts the workshop to pursue those moments that might lead to accessing experience, challenging assumptions and bringing viewpoints into dialogue. Often the most desired outcome being an increased criticality and agency in participants [43]. With that in mind, Table 2 gives a breakdown of the workshop plan.

4.3 Workshop environment and researcher positionality

Designing the workshops from an SEA perspective had implications for the environment. The workshops were held in a 'TY space', an area in the school outside of the typical classroom setting, specifically for TY students to work on projects and socialize. Prior to each workshop, the lead researcher organized the desks into four 'islands', supporting a more informal, collaborative atmosphere. The researcher moved between all four desks, promoting a sense of equality and familiarity. The researcher also went by her first name in the workshops, something that the teenagers do not experience with teachers in the school.

The role of the researcher in this case was also that of facilitator. A dynamic of equality between participants and facilitator is encouraged in SEA, where knowledge is developed and transferred in both directions. It was important to ensure that researcher /

Table 1: Workshop Participants

Participant code and Alias	Background Information
P:1, Michelle	Irish born, Irish family background
P:2, Martha	Nigerian born, Nigerian family background
P:3, Charity	Nigerian born, Nigerian family background
P:4, Jess	Abu Dhabi born, Irish and New Zealand family background
P:5, Diana	Irish born, Nigerian family background
P:6, Deirdre	Irish born, Irish family background
P:7, Florence	Irish born, Nigerian family background
P:8, Becky	Irish born, Irish family background
P:9, Irena	Lithuanian born, Lithuanian / Belarussian family background
P:10, Nikola	Polish born, Polish family background
P:11, Susan	Irish born, Irish family background
P:12	Withdrew – took an alternative class
P:13, Steph	Irish born, Irish family background
P:14, Beth	Irish born, Biafran family background
P:15, Julie	Irish born, Irish family background
P:16, Abeni	Irish born, Nigerian family background
P:17, Hanna	Polish born, Polish family background
P:18, Saoirse	Irish born, Irish family background
P:19, Jane	Irish born, Irish family background

facilitator support did not become directive or prescriptive and that participants maintained a sense of ownership [10, 43, 90].

The primary researcher grew up in Northrock and disclosed this information in the first workshop. Being closely positioned to the community is seen as a strength in much of the literature on participation [105], SEA [29] and rural HCI [52] as it supports trust-centred relationships [104]. This proximity also led to a greater need for reflexivity. Informed by guidelines from thematic analysis [20, 21], SEA-informed HCI [29] and feminist HCI [3] the researcher, with the support of the wider research team, continuously reflected on assumptions, biases, perspectives or values she might have brought to the study design, analysis and writing.

4.4 Equitable participation

Configuring equitable participation is a goal of SEA and central to this research. Drawing on literature that discusses the importance of designing a useful participatory experience for all those involved [4, 22, 54, 76], we donated Mac desktop computers to the TY space prior to the workshops. The lead researcher donated these due to a lab upgrade in her university. We installed opensource media editing software on the machines and allocated workshop time to teaching the teenagers how to use these. Participants were trained in DSLR cameras and video production process. The educational aspect of the workshop was as important as data collection. We agree with Harrington et. al on the need to design longitudinal research engagements with communities that prioritise community needs [54].

4.5 Data analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis allowed for the investigation of multiple co-existing realities in a relatively small number of participants [20, 34]. The lead researcher transcribed recorded data between workshops. This allowed us to adapt each workshop plan in response to the data. It also meant that the process of analysis began during the cycle of workshops. We followed a reflexive approach [22], cyclically going through six stages: familiarization; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing and developing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; and writing up. The dataset included transcripts, artefacts created in class, the digital stories, questionnaires and observation notes (OBS). First level coding generated 92 initial codes. Second level coding involved comparing and contrasting initial codes to amalgamate those with commonality. Six initial groupings of codes were further examined and consolidated into three themes. We then worked through final stages of reviewing, defining and renaming themes through an iterative analysis process that involved ongoing discussion and reflection across the research team.

5 WORKSHOP FINDINGS

The SEA process evoked moments of discomfort and conflict where various contradicting teenage experiences were brought to light and into dialogue with each other. Findings illustrate how an SEA approach to participation can increase visibility and recognition of minority experiences to indicate directions for the design of interactive systems that are more equitable and inclusive. The following section describes these findings and highlights where the workshops succeeded and struggled in accessing and critiquing personal experience and wider community life.

Table 2: Workshop Breakdown

Workshop	Objective	Activities
1	Introduce project, get to know each other, form project groups, set up expectation of "equality in knowledge" – an open and reciprocal facilitation style, discuss focal points. Begin world café exercise query focal points.	1:Icebreaker – giving ourselves nicknames to set an informal tone, 2:Post-it activity on key themes – write down three words you associate with the 4 focal points, 3:World café – use post-it prompts on themes, emphasis on individual experience and understanding.
2	Collectively query world café results with the intention of identifying consensus/drawing out dissensus, re-examine issues that arose for examples of power structures, marginalisation, who is being represented, norms and assumptions.	1:Icebreaker – one question from person after last week, 2:Finalise world café – continue rotating tables, facilitator prompts based on data from previous section - focusing on conflict and hidden experiences, present world café results – 3:Presenting final results, facilitator develops discussion focusing on moments of conflict or surprise.
3	Begin storyboarding and scripting digital stories. Examine these for recurring issues as described above, critique case studies, creatively explore social issues to gain new perspectives through making, revisit and further interrogate previous discussions and activities.	1:Journalistic six ("who, what, when, where, why how") questioning key aspects of identity / inclusion / culture / community as identified through world café and subsequent discussion, 2:Developing critical skills through examining case studies – scaffolding by facilitator drawing out reflection on social and political issues portrayed, 3:Storyboarding and scripting to begin visualising and verbalising ideas.
4	Further refining idea through dialogue around process, opportunity for entire group to discuss all ideas, identify and critique shared experiences and connect these with wider social issues. Address practical components around logistics and technology, developing confidence and agency in terms of completing the work.	1:Empathy / journey map – each group adapts this to their idea so far, either focusing on a character or experience, again facilitated to support querying assumptions and imagining alternatives, 2:Group presentations with a discussion around common experiences, contrasting experiences, connecting these to wider social / political issues , 3:Develop shooting schedule, choose technologies.
5	Support the group in giving critical feedback, interrogating assumptions around place and experience and putting forward alternatives, finalise each digital story idea and plan for execution (increasing a sense of individual and collective agency).	1:Re-cap process so far, highlighting moments of frustration / discontent / conflict, supporting participants in connecting personal experience with wider issues and imagining alternatives. 2:Story share and capture – each group presents their idea using questions provided, wider group takes notes on each idea as it is presented, these notes are grouped in terms of similarities to identify possible themes. 3:Finalise storyboard, shoot schedule and tech choices.
6	Develop agency, skills and confidence as digital storytellers, strengthen confidence and self-belief through sharing ideas with the wider community and develop a sense of their own ability to affect change on some level.	1:Review plans for shoot with each group. 2:Shooting video in the community and the school – participants fully self-direct here, they go into the community or the wider school environment with equipment and plan for shoot.
7	Further develop agency, skills and confidence as digital storytellers, express social issues creatively through making collaborative and critical aesthetic choices around editing and audio, revisit previous thoughts around social issues by further querying the focal points.	1:Why/how ladders – each group goes back to their initial starting point (identity / inclusion / culture / community) and re-interrogates from the perspectives of why these things happen vs how these things happen, 2:Editing video (technical support by facilitator), 3:Shooting extra video if needed.
8	Further develop skills and confidence as digital storytellers, further query idea via brainstorming promotional materials for the final piece.	1:Editing video, editing sound – students are again quite self-directed in this. 2:Those students not editing work on creating a storyboard for a video trailer or a poster advertising their video piece - prompted to revisit assumptions around place, experience and power.
9	Realise final digital story piece. Increase sense of individual and collective agency as they review their final work together. Build confidence in being able to identify and communicate social issues that are important to them through the creation and discussion of exploratory digital media.	1:Finalising video and sound edit, 2:Rendering final digital stories –technical support offered by the facilitator, 3:Sharing these with the class, scaffolded by key prompts and questions aimed to evoke critical thinking and constructive conflicts, 4:Discuss dissemination options in terms of bringing the work into the wider school and Northrock community.

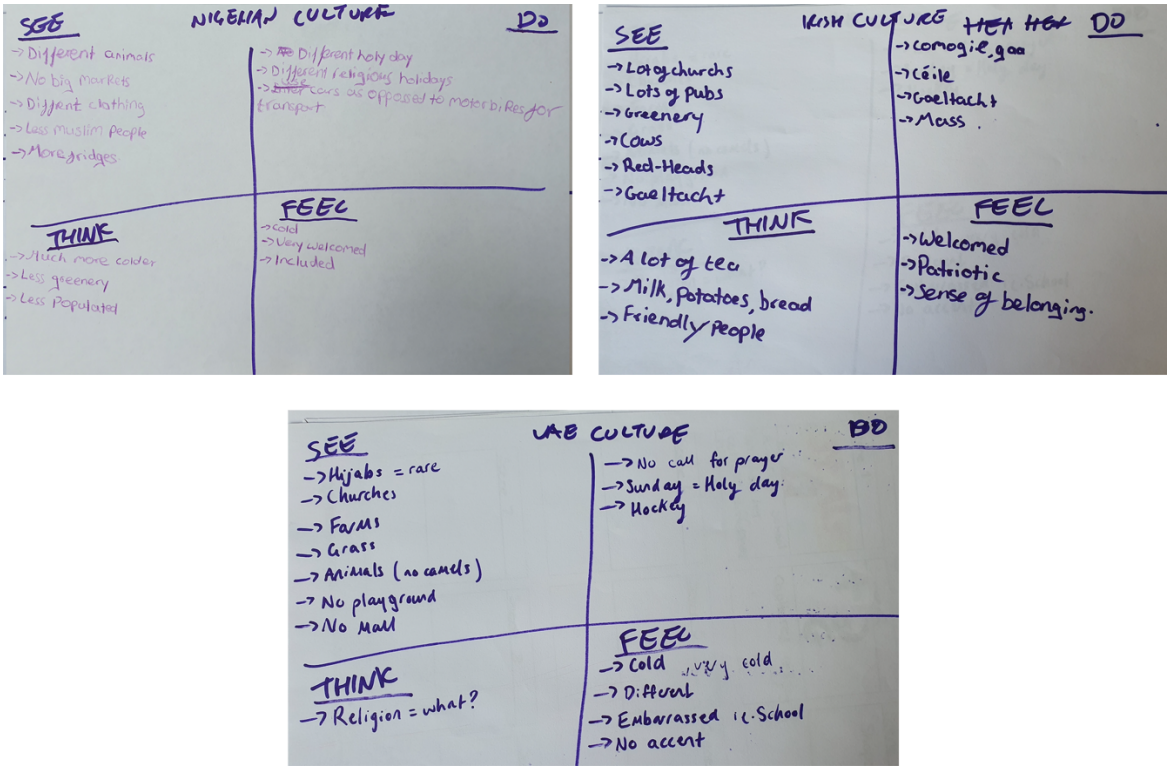


Figure 1: Empathy maps to develop three composite characters.

5.1 Revealing consensus, but not reaching dissensus

While participants focused on Northrock's diversity and made statements about how accepting and inclusive the community is, dialogue around ideating and making the digital stories revealed complex and contradictory assumptions and experiences around recognition and belonging in the community. In this finding, we spotlight moments where participant dialogue evoked by SEA prompts and activities provided significant nuance to our understanding of these assumptions and experiences. However, the participants themselves generally did not move to critique these.

5.1.1 A gate-keeping of Irishness. Many of the prompts and activities spurred a negotiation in terms of who was 'more Irish' and why, suggesting a complex social order that is broadly accepted by participants. This negotiation was often presented in ways that were self-deprecating to the majority (white Irish) group, satirizing what's seen as the typical Irish culture and flattering minority groups. While these exchanges may seem benign, they illustrate how minority Irish groups become marginalised.

The exchange below took place around the storyboarding activity in a group developing an idea based on interviewing as many different nationalities in the community as possible. Michelle is white Irish and from a nearby town. Diana is first generation Black Irish and from Northrock:

> Michelle: I'm very Irish like
>
> Diana: Alright girl [exaggerated local accent], I'm Irish too
>
> Michelle: But like my whole family is Irish
>
> Diana: Yeah, I get you.
>
> Michelle: You're not like, Irish Irish Irish
>
> Diana: I love potatoes [laughs]. Like I actually love potatoes
>
> Michelle: Yeah that doesn't make you Irish, Diana!

While this is a light-hearted exchange, it shows a conflict around understandings of 'Irishness' and reveals different tiers of acceptance that contradict the assumption of an inclusive community life. This illustrates the need to disassemble harmful norms and assumptions around who is 'more Irish' in order to support visibility and recognition of the various Irish experiences and voices in the participant group and the wider community.

This gate-keeping of Irishness is seen again in the following excerpt. These participants created empathy maps under the headings 'see, think, do, feel' to query the experiences of three composite characters for their digital story (figure 1). The three composite characters were from Ireland, Nigeria and the UAE and based on girls' own backgrounds. Conversation around creating these helped participants connect with each other's experiences, assumptions, and expectations.

This excerpt was around the development of the Irish character:

> Deirdre: for the Irish one we can do a girl with a rosary beads and a small bible [...]

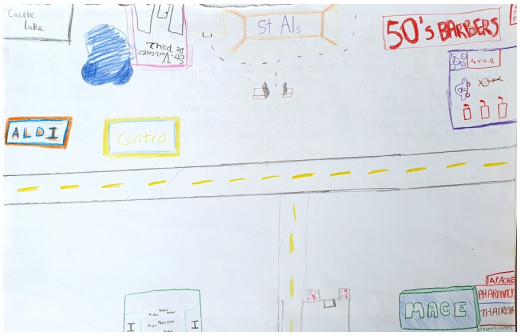


Figure 2: Drawn map of Northrock

> Jane: You see churches in every parish, the tiniest place, it won't have a shop it'll have a church [. . .]
>
> Jess: Pubs [. . .]
>
> Deirdre: Loads of cows, farms! [. . .] This is not to be mocking right but there is a couple of red heads [. . .] There's lots of underage alcohol [. . .] sports, camogie, [. . .]

This again shows the self-deprecating and jovial nature of putting forward 'Irishness'. However, these exchanges, intended to be good-natured, narrowly define Irishness in ways that don't do justice to the diversity of the participant group or wider community and render many Irish experiences invisible. Ideally, participants would move to critique these preconceptions and develop strategies to make more experiences and voices knowable and audible in community life. These insights around how the participants understand and negotiate Irishness are rich in potential for the design of interactive systems that might widen perceptions of national identity and support more critical thinking around current tropes. We return to this in the discussion.

5.1.2 Struggling to name difference. How participants discussed cultural differences was at times quite fluent, but more often it seemed awkward and stilted. For example, throughout the workshops, participants were often uncomfortable asking questions around religion and race. The following excerpt taken from observation notes on the World Café illustrates this discomfort:

> Some girls also mentioned how people are afraid to ask questions about other cultures - particularly in terms of race and religion. Participants discussed difficulties around negative portrayals in the media of different cultures, specifically Muslims and Black people. (OBS)

Another example was seen in the map making activity undertaken by one group when asked to discuss what the word 'community' meant to them (figure 2).

The exchange below took place when drawing hair salons on the map. Even though these participants have been very familiar with each other throughout the workshops, Michelle is uncomfortable asking directly if the hair salons are African businesses:

> Michelle: There's two barbers is there?
>
> Diana: Two barbers, well the one down the road does barbering as well so three. There's two hair salons for hair
>
> Michelle: For. . .. am. . . Caucasian. . .? (trailing off awkwardly)
>
> Diana: For hair, just hair (brusquely)

Both Michelle and Diana show a reluctance to name the salon as specializing in Black hair. While Michelle seems to want to be specific about this, she falters and is indirect in her question. Diana then firmly rejects this attempt at labelling. It's unclear why Diana avoids naming this, but the discomfort around the question is apparent and indicates a broader discomfort in discussing racial experience.

This discomfort is again seen in the following discussion around the idea involving interviews with composite characters from three different cultures (relating to the empathy map in figure 1). The group hesitates when deciding where these characters will be from. Group participants have lived in Nigeria (Charity), Ireland (Susan and Deirdre) and the UAE (Jess). While Jess is happy to put herself forward as a representative of other cultures due to her having lived abroad, Charity is reluctant to volunteer herself and the other participants are reluctant to prompt her:

> Deirdre: Who do we have from a different culture?!
>
> Jess: Don't look at me like!
>
> Susan: What are you looking at me for?!
>
> Deirdre: I don't know what kind of culture you're in!
>
> [Researcher joins table]
>
> Jess: I could talk about places I've lived in you know, and that would be easy enough
>
> Deirdre: I can talk about the basic Irish life, I don't know what other culture we could do? [somewhat awkward silence. . .]
>
> Researcher: Charity, where are your family from?
>
> Charity: From Nigeria

Once the researcher prompted the inclusion of a Nigerian character, the group were enthusiastic about representing this. When these participants presented their digital story idea to the wider group, the mention of the Nigerian character raised a subtle cheer from other participants. The SEA activity, facilitation and scaffolded presentation brought forward insights again around the difficulties in recognising difference, and around how Nigerian culture is not always so visible, despite a large number of the group having close Nigerian connections. Again, participants did not reflect on or critique this.

Across the workshops, participants struggled with naming and discussing difference outside of jovial exchanges based on stereotypes. This is not surprising given the age of the participants and the complexity of the subject. This indicates a role for interactive systems to support such discussion and to help young people in reflecting on the discomfort involved, the possible causes of it and how it might be alleviated to gain a fuller understanding of each other's experiences. Such a system could support dissensus in terms of providing opportunities and strategies to challenge harmful social norms around discussing race.

5.1.3 'Othering' minority groups. Findings illustrate how the teenagers' negotiation of the rapid diversification and expansion of their community involves not only developing a consensus around 'Irishness' and struggling to name differences, but also conceptualizing who is seen as 'other', as outside the dominant paradigm. Here we relay examples of when minority groups were essentially 'othered'.

This conversation took place around the storyboarding activity, where participants reflected on cultural experience from the point of view of Irish, Nigerian and Emirati fictional characters:

> Susan: Yeah it was the same in my primary school, there were people from Nigeria
>
> Deirdre: There was hardly any in mine [. . .]
>
> Jess: [name] was in my primary school and I think she was one of the only Black people there
>
> Susan: There was very little in my year but in the other years there was loads, like we had one in juniors his name was [name].
>
> Charity: I probably know him [. . .] Most of the Nigerians know each other
>
> Susan: I think it's so cool when people are from other countries, I wish I was interesting.

While participants widely discuss how diverse the community is, conversations like these indicate that minority groups are still very much something to be commented on. There are opportunities for the co-design of interactive systems to cultivate an awareness of this and a safe-guarding to mitigate any possible harm. While the exchange is based on commenting on the presence of Nigerian students, which might make Charity feel like she is somewhat under a spotlight, Susan works towards flattering Charity through saying she thinks it's cool to be from somewhere else, and mentioning how she feels boring due to her being from Ireland. It was not possible for the researcher to ascertain how Charity felt about this, if it felt complimentary, or othering, or perhaps both.

The most extreme example of othering is from the excerpt below between Irena (Lithuanian born), Hanna (Polish born) and Abeni (Irish born to Nigerian parents). The conversation developed from a positive discussion around language into aggressive questioning about participants' 'real' names. This was the most problematic of all the conversations across the workshops and lacks any sign of sensitivity towards Abeni:

> Irena: What's your full name?
>
> Hanna: I was saying it. . . (pronounces her full name in a strong Polish accent)
>
> Irena: Mine's (pronounces her full name in a strong Lithuanian accent). What's yours, Abeni?
>
> Hanna: Princess eh?
>
> Abeni: No!
>
> Hanna: Queen!
>
> Abeni: No! (in an annoyed voice, says her full name) [. . .]
>
> Hanna: That [name] is a princess, back in Africa (in a teasing voice)
>
> Abeni: (sounding annoyed and tired) Nigeria.

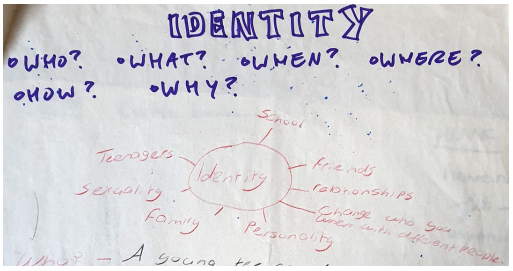


Figure 3: Mind-map created in response to Journalistic Six activity on 'Identity'.

While previous excerpts had self-deprecating and flattering qualities, this exchange is more hostile. As discussed previously, rendering difference invisible can have the effect of silencing and excluding people. However, excerpts such as these show the bullying potential of insensitive and unempathetic dialogue and the sharp necessity to develop systems that can support a more critical and respectful dialogue around difference.

Alternative design research methods are needed to support conversations around difference [22], and to consider intersectional identity markers such as race, class and gender in technology design [53]. Findings presented here illustrate how an SEA approach that focuses on surfacing tensions through moments of discomfort and conflict around creative expression can provide insights into the interplay of various identity markers and reveal harmful consensuses as a starting point for dissensus.

5.2 Diverse ideas, homogenous outputs

The dialogue described above took place around the ideation and realisation of creative expression of participant viewpoints in the form of digital stories. This finding examines the works in terms of what they set out to do, and what they actually achieved, highlighting moments of idea development and resolution.

5.2.1 Idea development on 'Identity'. The 'identity' group (Beth, Martha, Steph, Julie) worked on a narrative following a fictional character who explores and adapts her identity in various ways to find her place. They discussed communicating their character's thoughts and experiences through careful use of graphics, acting and sound. This group had rich dialogue triggered by the drawing of a mind-map on the theme (figure 3):

> They have interesting ideas about identity being fluid, that it changes depending on the situation. They were looking at this through the lenses of sexuality, family, personality, relationships, friends, school with innovative ideas around including drawn thought bubbles (OBS).

However, while their initial exploration was quite provocative, their resolution was basic;

> When it came to the resolution, they jumped to very one-dimensional outcomes such as 'they find themselves through sport'. (OBS)

This might indicate an issue with facilitation and workshop design where the participants felt the need to have a resolution. If

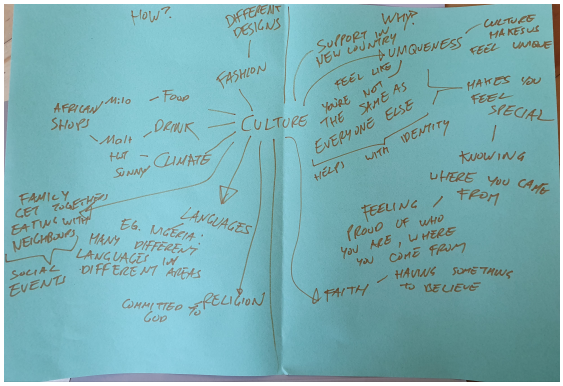


Figure 4: Why / How ladder exploring the theme of 'Culture'

there was more of an emphasis on asking questions without trying to resolve experiences in some neat way, they might have stayed focused on exploring their initial complex thoughts.

5.2.2 Idea development on 'Community'. The 'community' group (Michelle, Diana, Florence, Nikola) wanted to platform the large number of languages spoken. They openly asked each other about languages they spoke and broke into various languages. The final idea involved interviewing a diverse participant group, each saying 'Hi' in their native language and something they like about Northrock. They planned on working with various community groups to achieve this. The participants were initially very enthusiastic about this idea, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

> Diana: Oh my god! We could get the community of Northrock and all the nationalities from age groups, d'ya know what I mean and video them, what do you love about Northrock! That idea is the best! I don't care! [group cheers]

However, the group only filmed in one participant's home and in the school. This significantly watered down their initial idea, which included going into the various spaces in the village (explored via the map they drew – figure 2) and connecting with different demographics to represent a wide cross-section of the community.

5.2.3 Idea development on 'Culture'. The 'culture' group (Charity, Jess, Deirdre, Susan, Jane) developed a 'mocumentary' idea, detailing the lives of three composite characters representative of three cultures– Emirati, Nigerian and Irish. Empathy mapping (figure 1) worked particularly well here, in terms of brainstorming aspects of culture and in giving the research team an insight into difficulties in naming difference and perceptions of 'Irishness'. The why/how ladder also worked well for this group, when facilitated by the lead researcher (figure 4), supporting a nuanced exploration of the theme.

This group showed some reflection and self-awareness, discussing the need to be sensitive to other cultures, e.g. 'I don't want to accidentally make a mockery of something' (Deirdre), and reflecting on the ideation process as having been beneficial in building empathy:

> The same group did say that they felt they have more of an appreciation for the various cultures in the community and that they felt they had more empathy. (OBS)

However, when it came to filming, the work done developing their composite characters seemed to be forgotten and their final video involved three interviews in prominent community places: St Vincent de Paul, the Family Resource Centre and the local butcher.

5.2.4 Idea development on 'Inclusion'. Finally, the 'inclusion' group (Abeni, Hanna, Saoirse, Becky, Irena) developed an idea based on a VoxPop on St. Patricks day. St. Patricks day is used as an occasion to highlight diversity in Northrock, and participants planned to capitalize on this by interviewing spectators and participants at the parade, asking people what brought them to Northrock and why they stay there. However, in the event, they said they were too shy to carry out this idea. They then brainstormed new ideas, one around a new student coming to the school and one on sport being central to inclusion. Introducing the DSLR cameras seemed to be a turning point in motivating them to go back into the community and conduct interviews in local businesses:

> The participants were enthusiastic about the cameras and requested to film outside the school, in the community. The professional equipment seems to have excited them and they are much more enthusiastic about filming on these rather than on their phone. Perhaps some of the embarrassment they spoke about with regard to previous filming was tied to the fact that they were using phones, so it felt too informal? (OBS)

In our next sections, we describe the final videos and we outline where opportunities to develop the critical perspective of the work may have been lost.

5.2.5 Homogeneity of final digital stories. Initial ideas were rich and varied. However, the final videos were less ambitious and noticeably homogenous. Final digital stories didn't reflect the richness of dialogue and a reluctance to engage in critique had repercussions for final work.

The 'culture' and 'inclusion' groups both filmed in prominent public places in the community. They included shots of the playground, the farmers market and Irish flag. While participants emphasized the diversity of the community throughout the process, there were no people of colour interviewed outside of the school setting and the only nationalities represented were Irish and Polish. Participants asked questions such as 'Do you think Northrock embraces different cultural backgrounds?' but didn't query interviewee answers.

The 'community' group incorporated footage shot at Diana's home and shot the rest in school. They adapted their interview process based on test footage, showing the value of creating early in the process. This group's piece was more diverse than others in terms of people represented, but still participant replies to questions were not further queried.

The 'identity' group, who started with possibly the most nuanced idea, fell apart due to attendance issues and interpersonal dynamics. A level of tension in the group compromised discussion, where

one voice seemed to dominate others. This recalls critical literature on the need to design and facilitate collaborative spaces where all voices are heard [50, 57]. When it came to filming, the group dissolved, and the remaining participants joined other groups.
Possibly the biggest barriers to realising initial ideas were around participant ability to engage in critique, in terms of reflecting on personal and collective experiences to challenge norms and assumptions about community life and imagining alternatives. There was enthusiasm around filming and editing, with participants enjoying adding sound and visual effects to their work:

> As the participants moved to the editing phase on the work, they became quite experimental with transitions and titles and spend some time looking for appropriate music and sound effects. [...] if there had been more edits and more videos made, more participants would have engaged in editing and so further developed their skills and modes of expression. In addition to this, an earlier engagement with making video might have transitioned into more critical discourse, refining and developing the work each time. (OBS)

In post-questionnaires, participants said that they would have liked to start filming at an earlier stage, that they found the ideation process too lengthy. This also indicates the benefit of participants producing media earlier. Spending time building confidence in interviewing would also be useful, as participants felt they lacked this.

At the core of the SEA process is adapting facilitation and activities (including presentation, discussion and critique) to work towards surfacing tensions through social interactions, homing in on moments of discomfort and conflict to do this. The concepts of consensus and dissensus are useful in this, in terms of identifying and challenging norms and assumptions to imagine new possibilities. In this way, SEA informed design practice is always political and seeks to not only provide insights for innovative technology design, but also to develop participant critical awareness and agency. While this process shed light on consensus, a first step in moving towards dissensus, there needs to be more exploration and critique of experiences and assumptions seen in finding 5.1. There are practical adjustments to workshop design (such as introducing making earlier or moving outside of the school environment) and facilitation (such as having a smaller group or a second facilitator) that may support a greater level of dissensus in future work with this demographic. We will expand on ideas on how to refine the process in the discussion, as well as how designers might use SEA to work towards designing interactive systems that support dissensus to tackle these particular issues.

6 ADAPTING THE PROCESS

This work describes how SEA can be of use to DIS in facilitating deep explorations of complex and difficult human experiences. While we did not set out to specifically understand experiences around race and ethnicity, much of our findings related to how the teenagers navigated these experiences. This indicates the value of SEA to designers looking to understand minority experiences and to support those demographics in imagining technologies to meet their needs [40, 53, 55, 85, 95]. While there is growing literature on the intersections of race and design and their implications in working towards more equitable futures [19, 22, 28, 84, 102], this is overwhelmingly in a USA context. In addition to contributing insights into how to use SEA to design for dissensus, this research also contributes knowledge on the experiences of race and ethnicity in an Irish context, which has its own configurations around racial experience due to a history of colonialism and emigration, and recent rapid immigration [62]. This knowledge can be used to work towards designing systems to support the ongoing diversification of Irish society. For example, the insights here are particularly relevant to schools, where development of digital curricula involving social and other interactive media to support the recognition of diverse identities is of importance.

SEA-informed facilitation and activities typically result in highly situated and nuanced knowledge. In our case, the study provoked rich dialogue around the teenagers' experiences of difference, belonging, diversity and placemaking, revealing various consensuses on Northrock community life. However, the process fell short of the participants moving into dissensus through actively querying their assumptions, either through dialogue around creating the work, or the final digital stories themselves. Our analysis identifies access points for exploring these assumptions, indicating the kinds of language, discussion and activities that could be incorporated to support dissensus, such as (for example) acknowledging the many ways of being of Irish and the evolving nature of Irish identity. As DIS looks to challenge dominant paradigms and develop systems to support inclusion of minorities and minority experiences [82, 97], insights such as these could serve as focal points in developing such systems in similar contexts. It is central to create opportunities for minority demographics in rurban communities to put their experiences forward in ways that will be recognised and appreciated. Digital media and systems (such as social media, wikis, video platforms, social games) can play a role in this through providing ways to create and share stories and experiences. Dissensual design is important here, as attention is needed to bring forward minority experiences.

In this discussion, we contextualise our findings in the current Irish landscape, and in relevant design practices. We propose the potential for dissensual design to be evoked through a three-step process. The first step being to identify and challenge norms and assumptions (6.1), the second to make visible contradictory experiences (6.2), and the third, to work towards breaking down social barriers that arise as a result of disconnection (6.3). This process can be used in the design of interactive systems to challenge dominant paradigms, platform marginalised voices and ultimately work towards more inclusive, equitable and sustainable technologies.

6.1 Challenging norms and assumptions

Findings shed light on a collective and specific social order experienced by these rurban teenagers. Design practices to challenge social hegemonies for more equitable technology design [39, 48, 55, 82] can utilize SEA to uncover and engage with the assumptions and norms that underpin such consensus on public life. For example, those looking to develop digital tools to promote the heritage of minority groups [48, 82] and to actively demarginalize

participants [39, 55] might draw on SEA approaches to specifically surface tensions and conflict, either verbally or through creative making exercises, that can feed into technology and digital media design to challenge dominant narratives.

In our Irish rurban context, stereotypical representations of 'Irishness' were in line with literature that found that Irish adolescents tend to display their nationality as uninteresting and banal [99], and connects with research that points to marginalisation that happens in computing as a result of stereotyping masked as humour [18]. This kind of stereotyping, while appearing self-deprecating to the majority and flattering to the minority, undermines participants' claim to Irish identity by so narrow and rigidly defining it through well-known cultural tropes. The centring of whiteness in Irish identity has been recognised [87] and this is cohesive with our findings. The decentring of whiteness and widening of perceptions of Irish national identity could be a focal point for interactive systems to support recognition and inclusion of minority groups. Shared public social events around St. Patricks day are said to extend the boundaries of 'Irishness' [83], such design interventions around the festival could be useful to amplify this effect. However, intercultural initiatives that are perceived as tokenistic can reinforce othering of minority groups [88]. Drawing on SEA theory around equitable participation and positionality [6, 13, 43, 76] would be useful in the development of such interventions.

Design practices that look to challenge dominant paradigms can draw on SEA to design participatory processes that welcome dynamics of discomfort, frustration and conflict to reveal and challenge norms and assumptions that contribute to marginalisation. SEA differs from many social justice-oriented design approaches as it is a political endeavour, seeking to develop critical thinking and agency in participants to do the essentially activist work of querying social structures. This is crucial as the design community recognises the need to work with peripheral communities and experiences in pursuit of more equitable technologies [40, 55, 85]. There are many examples of SEA that facilitate an empathetic and dissensual dialogue with a view to challenging assumptions, such as the mobile artwork of Krzysztof Wodiczko in Lumiere Derry-Londonderry 2013, which projected testimonies of local people across political divides onto buildings in a city that has historically known much bitter division [106, 109]. Such interactive projections in public places are a powerful way to challenge dominant narratives due to their visibility. Designers can combine a dissensual participatory process to create digital media and systems that include a consideration of supporting confrontation in similar ways.

6.2 Recognising diversity and equality of rurban experience

Having identified harmful norms and assumptions, the next focus for designers working with rurban communities is to uncover the multiplicity of experiences and identities that contradict these assumptions. While this is true of all communities, this has its own specific nuances in the rurban community due to rapid diversification [71, 79], and assumptions of homogeneity, interdependence and social hierarchies based on the recent rural past [9, 80, 92]. Drawing on the canon of SEA is useful as it relates to positioning of participants and researcher(s) / facilitator(s). While this is navigated in each individual setting, SEA theory and practice gives some pointers on how this might be achieved [10, 76]. When designing more representative interactive systems, both context and people specific, engaging with multiple contrasting and often hidden experiences is necessary. The SEA process described here was designed with a focus on uncovering these various hidden experiences, we argue that more social justice-oriented design needs to hold this specific focus and design for this outcome.

Tendency to homogenise Irish life is well documented and said to connect to our colonial past [69]. However, Irish demographics have diversified at an unprecedented rate in the last 20 years [88] and recently, the recognition and celebration of cultural differences was recognised as crucial for integration in Irish schools [81, 87, 88]. Our analysis with this community gives some indications of opportunities for where and how this diversity can be recognised. Teenagers were, for example, comfortable discussing difference in terms of language, food and fashion. These could provide focal points for design with these teenagers to develop technologies that might help them ask questions around accessible topics before voicing discomfort to surface tensions and disrupt perceptions of homogeneity, thus supporting young people in social justice-oriented design to recognise and engage with multiple experiences.

Future design interventions with this community, and ones like them, can leverage insights from SEA to make visible different and contradicting perspectives and bring them into dialogue with each other. Examples such as Isabel Lima's work in *Gresham's Wooden Horse* [110] can be drawn on for creative and generative ways to represent various experiences of the same community. *Gresham's Wooden Horse* initiated an informal forum for old and new Gresham residents to exchange experiences and establish a sense of shared ownership of their neighbourhood while recognising diverse needs. Such examples provide fresh ideas for unexpected approaches to participation to support diverse communities in understanding the various experiences present, working towards design of technologies and systems to support both this diversity and sustainable community development. Recognising diversity and equality of experience can be a central design focal point in the design of such systems.

Engaging diverse and contrasting perspectives is critical to design for more inclusive technologies and futures [28]. Design for social change in community-based contexts can be augmented by taking a specifically open and generative SEA approach that looks at increasing visibility of experiences outside of the dominant paradigms through creative digital processes that actively seek to draw out those experiences and to support participants in critical thinking and acting in community life.

6.3 Disassembling social barriers

This point gives suggestions on how designers might work with participants to break down the various social barriers indicative in both social hegemonies and marginalisation via activist-leaning design approaches Our findings show that our teenage participants are aware on some level of various invisible barriers between sectors of the community. This burgeoning awareness supplies a further

justification and focus for dissensus-based processes in design interventions with this demographic to disassemble these barriers through naming and exploring them. Focusing on social barriers, again through attention to discomfort, tensions and conflict, is useful to design that seeks to support collaborative processes to develop technologies for more equitable communities [39, 51].

While various social barriers are referenced, none of these are critiqued or disassembled, either during the workshops or in the final video pieces themselves. Of course, disassembling these ideas is a big ask for a group of young people, but to further interrogate these ideas could lead to some transformative moments. This underlines the need for design methods to articulate these barriers [85] and again points to the use of further SEA-informed design interventions to fully surface these tensions. Disassembling social barriers is essentially activist work and not typical of design research. SEA, as a discipline rooted in social and political change brings much theory, practice and debate to inform these intentions in design [6, 8, 11, 101]. As it is, there is an underlying sense of disempowerment in the way contentious sentiments around barriers between sectors of the community are casually expressed and not critiqued. SEA can provide a framework and examples of politically engaged participation working towards dissensus to challenge hegemonies of power and configure equitable and agentic participatory experiences. Design interested in supporting this community in breaking down barriers might look towards the SEA aim of turning spectator into actor [12], or in the words of McCarthy and Wright, enabling people to change roles [76] through providing multiple tools and modes of expression. Such work could draw on SEA examples such as the *Who Are We?* 2017 event, which created and exchanged knowledge around the multiple crises of identity and belonging in Europe and the UK at that time [111]. Across a six-day cross-platform event, the initiative looked at bringing together people and communities often kept apart to name and work towards dismantling barriers they experience. Design practices looking to address these challenges through the creation of interactive systems might draw on the complexity and richness of such projects to connect with participants on deeply emotional levels with a view towards richer engagement and more meaningful outcomes.
Belonging and marginalisation are examples of two complex experiences the teenagers are navigating which are seen throughout Ireland today [62, 74, 87]. The importance of centring joy and playfulness in design to interrogate oppressive topics is recognised [19, 102]. This is seen as attainable through creative collaboration [58, 102] and restorative participation [19] that supports young people in describing their lived experiences [74]. The act of making brings its own inherent joy [58] and this can be leveraged using non-prescriptive and pluralistic SEA processes that are political and critical in their intention to name and disassemble these social barriers. As the DIS community and HCI more broadly looks to develop progressive and transformative participatory processes to interrogate and redistribute power, develop agency and capacity and work towards social change, SEA is one approach to designing such processes.

7 CONCLUSION

As the design community asks questions around how to support communities in addressing social justice issues to work towards more equitable futures, new approaches are necessary to bring diverse populations together and explore marginalised experiences. In this work, we consider how SEA might evoke dissensual participation to challenge hegemonies and design for more inclusive technologies and futures. The study revealed consensus and provided directions to design for dissensus in future work with this community. We put forward three steps to consider in such design: i) revealing and challenging norms and assumptions; ii) recognising the diversity and equality of rurban experience; and iii) breaking down social barriers. While the work is situated in one rurban community, it is significant to pressurised communities more broadly, and to participatory HCI that seeks to become more political and transformative in engaging with situated knowledge to work towards social change, Design researchers and practitioners engaging with deeply personal and political, often intangible and somewhat hidden phenomena, can benefit from taking a SEA approach to work with emotive, nuanced experiences and translate them into something communicable and actionable to support citizens enacting change in their lives and communities.

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