



Green Gown Awards
Australasia

Benefitting Society

2020 Case Study



RMIT

TIMeR: Walking with Indigenous stories of land, river and sky

Inspired by pervasive games like Pokémon GO, this initiative pushes the possibilities of 'play' to make users aware of Indigenous understandings of place.

The project draws attention to alternate and pre-settlement understandings of place to bring new questions on perspective and locality into play through location-based, games and audio-visual technologies.

The project is produced by Design and Creative Practice post-doctoral researcher Hugh Davies in collaboration with Associate Professor Olivia Guntarik, VC Research Fellow Dr Troy Innocent, and Boonwurrung elder N'arweet Carolyn Briggs. Auntie Carolyn's voice grounds this initiative through the stories she shares on the mobile app about her oral history, the story of Bunjil the creator and the political activism of her great grandmother Louisa Briggs, among other stories. As a custodial authority on Boonwurrung places, Auntie Carolyn invites participants to engage with Indigenous stories of land, river and sky. Boonwurrung refers to the communities of the Port Phillip region of coastal Victoria, Australia, people who for thousands of years have walked land that is now the greater city of Melbourne (including the wider bay and peninsula) or Naarm.

Listeners are invited to reflect on stories about the deeper meanings of places. They are offered choices to follow different paths as a way to explore these meanings. The initiative also includes audio stories told by non-Indigenous storytellers.

This approach to sharing stories engages participants through cross-cultural learning and reconciliation action.

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Environmental & Social Benefits

Operational outcomes

Students and staff across RMIT University have participated in the project through coursework and as part of the University's Reconciliation Action Plan. This has allowed the University to promote its organisational values of inclusion, diversity and belonging.

Environmental outcomes

The focus on 'place' offers ways to support environmental and sustainability education initiatives. Participants are encouraged to reflect on how places have changed over time and their own role as carers of Country. The first site that participants visit is an Indigenous garden with native plants and information about the Kulin seasonal calendar, changing weather patterns and impact on ecologies and ecosystems.

Social outcomes

The project supports cross-cultural learning during the walk itself through guided tours with the designers of the app. We also conduct pre- and post- presentations to ensure participants understand how to use the app, what to expect from the walking tour and are able to de-brief about the experience after the walk. This approach translates to immediate social outcomes including increased participation in Indigenous education and reconciliation action, improved health and wellbeing (through the focus on outdoor learning), and building strong community partnerships.

Sector benefits

We have invited industry organisations and communities beyond the university to participate in the walk. The project has attracted participation from organisations in technology and social justice, the not-for-profit sector (YMCA) and other universities and Aboriginal communities seeking to develop similar projects involving cultural walks. The benefits to these sectors include enhancing community cohesion, the promotion of cultural diversity, and changing attitudes to environmental care.





Leadership & Engagement

Reconciliation action and a focus on Caring for Country principles are key distinctive features of the project. Pervasive games are digitally enabled and immersive experiences embedded in physical locations. Through 'play' and exploration, these experiences shape impressions of place and allow players to reflect on their environment. Few pervasive, locative and hybrid reality games in Australia have drawn attention to traditional or Indigenous knowledge. Fewer still have focused on environmental issues or invite participation in ways that support reconciliation action. Storytelling and place-based learning provides a distinctive way to engage people in Indigenous Caring for Country principles as a form of reconciliation action. Participants listen to stories about how nature connects us. The story of Bunjil, the eagle creator and custodian of the land, is about what happens if we neglect to care for country. Listening to these stories allows participants to reimagine familiar spaces with greater attention to Indigenous ways of knowing place.

Wider Societal Impact

Pervasive games enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing in urban environments by providing a new way for people to engage with their surroundings and fellow city-dwellers through play – and provide an incentive for light exercise. The increased community engagement and participation in public spaces is considered a win for local governments. This can enhance social cohesion and an appreciation of cultural diversity.

The co-creation process in making games closely connected to place offer an opportunity for diverse groups to reach shared understandings of place. This sharing is evidenced by public events connected to the project involving industry, local government, academics, art and design students and First Peoples.

Most importantly, the project embeds Indigenous knowledge, culture and history in a direct experience of place and relationally to the living world. This situating of knowledge increases awareness, appreciation, care and respect for the environment.

Top 3 Learnings

Developing innovative ways to present First Nations knowledge and understandings to wider audiences both within the university sector (staff and students) and beyond to industry

Enabling participants to negotiate, reflect on and engage with their own 'sense of place' within the unceded territory of Kulin Country for reconciliation action

Engaging collaborative learning environments of inclusion, diversity and belonging between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through cross-cultural storytelling, sharing and community partnerships