

# LIMITED STORIES: SOCIAL DESIGN POTENTIALS WITHIN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

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## ABSTRACT

In social design processes, designers seek to improve challenges by using design to solve problems and answer communities' needs. Aspects of change are central to social design, as transformative change usually forms the goal of the design action. This study will consider narrative practices, such as stories and creativity, to explore how they can—and cannot—reconstruct realities faced by marginalised communities. Social designers frequently encounter such settings to address particular needs using social design tools. The article is based on a focus group discussion conducted during a community arts-based intervention, thus prioritising a qualitative approach to comprehend the fundamental problems in this particular South Australian context. When dealing with sensitive matters and designing with marginalised communities, social designers need to understand narrative practices' power to be changed and transformed. People, processes and artefacts can contribute to the reinterpretation of stories, thereby changing the direction of dominant narratives. Social designers ought to gauge the power of stories with care to create better cohesion and carefully guide disruption.

*Keywords: Social Design, Narratives, Stories, Arts-based Methods, Trust*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Enabling narrative practices in the early stages of the social design process can bring about rich narrations, which can create possibilities for storytelling but also outline its limitations. However, a critical view on the role of narratives should also consider the destructive or adverse consequences of storytelling and narrative practices. Such research contributes to breaking down stereotypes and fostering cross-cultural appreciation in social design.

The unique contribution of this article lies in demonstrating how arts-based storytelling fosters trust and community cohesion. The research provides a new lens for understanding social design in marginalised settings by employing techniques such as collaborative art-making and narrative sharing. This approach highlights the role of emotional and cultural sensitivity, emphasising the importance of context-specific engagement strategies that respect and amplify the voices of marginalised communities [1]. The study facilitates personal and cultural expression by utilising creative practices like felting and storytelling while encouraging the co-creation of narratives that can influence social change. These arts-based practices are essential for eliciting rich qualitative data and engaging participants meaningfully [2].

This study aims to illuminate the limitations of storytelling and embodied action as methodologies within social design contexts. To convey the significance of the intervention, it is vital to understand Ceduna's challenges, including limited resources, cultural disconnection, and intergenerational trauma. This context highlights why creative engagement and storytelling through felting are crucial for cultural preservation and community well-being.

Furthermore, the research reflects on how narrative practices used in social design, specifically storytelling, can be central to understanding complexities within marginalised contexts. The research asks, 'What are the possibilities and limitations to storytelling and embodied action for creating trust and context-specific understanding with vulnerable groups or environments in the early stages of social design processes and throughout?' 'How can stories create awareness to better design social processes and relationships that address challenges within sensitive contexts?'

An intervention will illustrate the use of stories and embodied action in the fuzzy front end of social design research. The fuzzy front end of design is often perceived as the initiating and empathy-building

phase in design processes [3]. This intervention entails an arts-based felting workshop at Arts Ceduna, an Aboriginal art centre in the isolated and remote town of Ceduna on the west coast of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula. The initiative was carried out in collaboration with the Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation (CAC) and the University of Lapland. This study used arts-based research to engage with the artistic community of Ceduna due to their familiarity with arts-based practices. The arts-based methods (ABMs) used were based on textile making, painting and storytelling. During the intervention, a focus group consisting of the three authors discussed the role of creativity within the community and how the arts can elicit more active engagement. They shared their creative experiences, concerns, and beliefs about the purposes of art practice. By doing so, the results delivered insightful understandings that advance knowledge on using narrative practices to guide empathic engagement in early and ongoing social design and research processes within marginalised contexts.

## **2 NARRATIVE PRACTICES IN VULNERABLE CONTEXTS**

Denzin [4] illuminates the role of narrative practices, with their benefits and limitations, within vulnerable groups or environments. Such practices can assist in the uncovering of hidden gaps, disconnects, conflicts, congestions, constraints, and power distortions in the early stages of design practice by creating – audibly, visually or performatively – a holistic understanding of the interactions between or within communities. The value of storytelling in exploratory design phases has been acknowledged in sensitive contexts. Stories are frequently used to amplify, divert from, or alter what is experienced, what is current reality, and what is yet to come when nurturing the potential of the possible. Narratives are transportive, illustrating the ‘persuasive potential of stories’ [5, p. 385; 6]. Transportation is understood as a ‘loss of oneself’ or to ‘travel within the text’ [6, p. 385]. Narrative persuasion results from the level of immersion into a story and its ability to influence the beliefs of the listener or reader of the story [5]. The limitations of storytelling amongst participants living in peripheral contexts include the often silenced and interrupted stories [1]. Within social design and cultural contexts, audiences play important roles as the recipients and interpreters of stories. Audiences are stories' protagonists as they ‘progressively construct models of meaning that represent the people, places, and problems of a story’ [7, p. 323]. Therefore, audience as a social construct is relevant to social design. When an audience experiences a story, they must place themselves inside the narrative's mental model and take on the character's viewpoint. However, they must also be conscious of their social position within the group [7]. They need to negotiate the positioning of the players, characters, and roles within a story. Thus, audience participation in stories is essential for revisiting and reinterpreting shared histories. This opens the possibilities for capturing and processing the unfolding of current events and to express ideas, needs and dreams about the future [1]. However, critical views on the power of audiences should not be overlooked, as audiences’ participation in stories can also be unfavourable.

## **3 NARRATIVE FUNCTIONING, ARTS-BASED METHODS AND EMOTIONS**

Narrative goes beyond merely telling stories; it becomes a powerful tool for sparking creative insights and initiating transformative actions. Narrative practices are cognitive, emotional and performative constructs. In addition, they are mental simulations; they can transport people into narrative worlds through vivid imagery that can feel like real experiences that shape attitudes and lead to adopting beliefs [5]. In addition, the narrative function itself can critically reflect on, question and also undo dominant narratives. By embracing narrative, individuals gain the ability to navigate the complexities of creativity with flexible and visionary insight, ultimately leading to the development of fresh and creative ideas [8]. The greatest social impact of the arts is encouraging critical reflection on personal and others' experiences [9]. Arts-based inquiry fosters new dialogues and participation, proving valuable for impactful research and visual dissemination [2]. Arts-based enquiry captures rich qualitative data through diverse strategies, addressing complex issues and offering innovative solutions to societal challenges by revealing underlying narratives [10]. When applied collaboratively and with care, ABMs stimulate engagement and storytelling through multimethod, open, and improvisatory processes. Emotions and feelings elicited through narratives can contribute to the persuasiveness of a story through the transference of information, during which feelings can become vital moderators of social influences [11]. Such influences can emerge from stories [11]. Therefore, how individuals and groups feel about their circumstances influences their well-being and resilience in change processes. Emotions' role in well-being and coping with change is central to stories at both individual and community levels. Stories are essential to ensure the functioning of change mediation in marginal communities [12]. Although

stories can drive emotional and other forms of resilience [13], they can have negative effects on communities when stories break down and voices are silenced. This leads to the exclusion and degradation of coping mechanisms, which impacts emotional well-being and cohesion within society from the individual to the community level [14]. The arts can transport, create new meanings and heighten our attention as they are a medium for evoking new interpretations and aesthetic experiences such as emotional responses [15]. This form of transportation is an immersion into narrative worlds and a form of mental engagement that can affect attitudes and beliefs [7]. Mental models must be ‘constantly updated as the narrative moves forward’ [7, p. 323]. Narratives are frequently used to amplify, divert from, or alter what is experienced, what is current reality, and what is yet to come when nurturing the potential of the possible. The power of narrative practices, or stories, should be used cautiously, as uncontrollable or runaway change [16], which can be detrimental, does not always result in long-term benefits. The abilities of stories within social design and with a specific focus on vulnerable contexts to connect and control are illuminated in this article. Uncovering the impact of narrative practices in marginalised contexts needs cross-checks and balanced views by everyone involved. Social designers should be sensitive to, and critically consider counteractions to ameliorate power dimensions at play in marginalised contexts that come about and are often perpetuated through narrative practices and other expressive processes.

## **4 METHODS**

Researchers are advised to employ qualitative methods such as participatory research, autoethnographic research, narrative and biographical research, or traditional qualitative research based on interviews with representatives of marginalised groups that involve community members in the decision-making process, ensuring their voices and perspectives are integral to the research design and implementation [17, p. 8–11). In collaborative approaches to research, more democratic approaches to data collection and interpretation are promoted. In marginal contexts, often situated at the fringes of societies, specific care is needed in the delicate initial phases of the work and research. ABMs, specifically felt-making and painting, were used to engage with the Indigenous arts community at Arts Ceduna for these purposes. A focus group discussion was conducted while implementing the arts-based activities.

The choice of implementing a felting intervention is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural significance of textile arts within Indigenous practices [18]. Felting art is believed to have originated from nomadic peoples, such as the heritage of Turkic nations [19]. This art form provides a creative outlet and a communal space for storytelling, which is essential for reinforcing cultural ties and facilitating healing. This approach acknowledges the rich traditions and heritage of Indigenous communities, requiring researchers to be sensitive and respectful of cultural protocols and the non-linear and experiential nature of storytelling to ensure community members feel honoured and heard.

### **4.1 The research setting, participants and focus group**

During the intervention in Ceduna, South Australia, in 2023, arts-based activities were implemented at the Aboriginal Cultural Centre and the Women’s Centre of CAC. Ceduna has a small population of less than three thousand residents, including several Indigenous language groups such as Kokatha, Mirning, Wirangu and Pitjantjara. The management board of CAC authorised the intervention and invited the academic research team from the University of Lapland in Finland to collaborate with the Indigenous community. Two team members, who engaged in the arts-based activities and the focus group, were researchers from the University. Both were also practising artists. One of the researchers—the first author—had a long-term working relationship with Arts Ceduna through previous project work conducted in 2016-2017 and again in 2022-2023. During the latter period, she coordinated a felting project with the artists from Ceduna. She had twenty years of felting experience and used her knowledge to coordinate a two-month felting project with the artists of Ceduna, transferring two and three-dimensional felting skills to the artists. The third author, an Indigenous Aboriginal practising artist, also coordinated the CAC Women’s Centre during the intervention. She initiated the focus group and is herself a felting artist.

The arts-based activities included felting with Australian lambswool, as shown in Figure 1. The eight participating Aboriginal artists coordinated and orchestrated their works. Two large, felted textiles of about 1.2 x 1.6 meters were laid out on long wooden tables in the Arts Ceduna studio. The artists grouped themselves into two groups, each creating their own textile design using their personal stories. One group created a textile design that reflected their individual stories and experiences about the sea and

coastline of Ceduna. In contrast, the second group used personal stories about the land around Ceduna to create their textile. The groups discussed and developed the narratives they wanted to embed into the textiles.



*Figure 1. Arts-based activities by the artists at Arts Ceduna. Photography, Amna Qureshi, 2023.*

During the focus group, the artists were not asked any specific questions; instead, the author-researchers engaged in the process by participating alongside them, allowing the artists to take the lead. The researchers listened to the artists' stories, observed their choice of colours, and noted how they carefully placed the felt on the table. The artists brought their verbally discussed themes to life without preliminary sketches, as if the designs were already fully formed. They added pieces of wool, constructing design elements that beautifully illustrated their stories. This silent observation and active engagement method allowed the researchers to capture authentic expressions and understand the creative decision-making process in real-time, providing valuable insights into how art can be a pathway for cultural expression and heritage preservation. Observing the narratives begin to take shape within the first couple of hours was fascinating. There were unplanned breaks along the way, during which the artists engaged in light-hearted conversations, often adding and tweaking elements in their work. However, the author-researchers did not ask specific questions during the focus group; their involvement and observations served the purpose of the research. The researchers sought to understand how engaging in creative processes could facilitate a deeper exploration of cultural themes and community stories.



This approach aimed to reveal insights that might not surface through conventional interviews, emphasising the potential of ABMs to elicit rich, narrative-driven data.

Amidst creative felting practices, this unique exchange fostered a rich blend of perspectives, merging cultural insights with a collaborative exploration beyond conventional interview structures [17]. It created a space for genuine connection and a shared understanding of the role of creative practices in a community setting. This collaboration's significance lies in its role in preserving cultural heritage and empowering the artists by valuing their stories and skills [20]. By positioning the community members as leaders in the process, the research underscores the importance of working with, rather than on, marginalised communities. Additionally, this collaboration facilitated storytelling and emphasised the significance of art as a means for cultural preservation and intergenerational dialogue. By engaging in these shared activities, the artists could bridge generational gaps, passing down traditions and knowledge while simultaneously creating new cultural expressions that reflect the evolving identity of their community.

#### 4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The focus group was conducted amid creative art-making activities and was digitally recorded. It was a collaborative dialogue that moved beyond the conventional interview structure: a friendly and personal exchange without research questions or prompts. This approach enabled abducting [21] to ensure spontaneity and for new issues to emerge from the dialogue. The focus group was based on a friendly conversation between the three authors. The unstructured discussion focused on the creative practices of the specific intervention and within the community. The recording time of the focus group was 59 minutes and 7 seconds after the sensitive data had been deleted from the recordings. The transcribed data was collaboratively decoded remotely in a shared document, using an unstructured approach to enable the essence of the interview to emerge. The interview data was deidentified and lightly edited for readability purposes. The discussants are presented as ‘Speaker 1, 2 and 3’. The coded themes were analysed using an interpretative approach.

Four narrative representations, or interview excerpts, were selected first quantitatively according to the frequency of keywords, determined by word count using Microsoft Word’s find function in the transcribed data set. The authors intersubjectively eliminated sections in the transcribed data according to the word count density in certain sections [22]. The transcribed data was organised by ‘identifying similar themes or concepts from the data’ [22, p. 498] and extracting parts representing a dense cluster of the keywords and related themes, as shown in Table 1. The data is represented as narrative fragments, which means that the integrity of the narratives was kept intact by illustrating the conversational flow between the discussants. Although unnecessary wording was eliminated, the flow of the interview and how themes followed one another remained unchanged.

*Table 1. Keyword clusters and themes emerging from the interview data.*

<b>Keywords cluster</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Connections, Trust, Listening	Building connections between individuals from varied backgrounds; Role of trust in interpersonal encounters
Creative Practices, Challenges, Community Connections	Role of creative practices in overcoming challenges and creating better connections within communities
Diversity	Extending connections between individuals through interactions with people from diverse cultural, social, and geographic contexts

#### 4.3 Ethical Considerations

The ethics committee of the University of Lapland approved the research, which followed the ethical outlines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Given the personal nature of the focus group, the interview data has been de-identified. Informed consent, using a consent form in English, was sought from all participants in the research, not only the three authors. This entailed a community meeting at the Indigenous art centre in Ceduna, where participants were informed in English about the intention of the study, as this is the language all participants use in their daily practices. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and all researchers engaged in answering these questions. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. The researchers were careful not to coerce, elicit, record or otherwise learn about or capture any sensitive narrative information from the Indigenous artists. The artists were very aware, and

themselves took care not to reveal sensitive narrative information that may not be shared with outsiders. In storytelling practices, sensitive stories may be present not only verbally transferred but also visually created. Significant care is needed to counteract the harm that may come to Indigenous peoples when their Indigenous knowledge and stories are appropriated and undervalued. The counteraction is possible through narrative functioning that can raise awareness of the protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), which encompasses all elements of the traditional knowledge and cultural expressions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## **5 FINDINGS**

The narrative excerpts reveal respect, trust, building connections and relationships, and sharing with others through listening and giving time. Two clusters of key themes emerged from the qualitative content analysis. Firstly, the theme of generating trust, the role of narrative practices and learning that can emerge through creative and community engagement emerged. Secondly, the theme of art making, creative practices, and the narrative qualities of the arts for expression, storytelling, and dealing with aspects of change within a community setting emerged. The analysis following the four narrative fragments exemplifies how social designers can approach narratives in sensitive contexts during the fuzzy front end of the design process and for empathy building throughout a social design process.

In narrative fragment 1, the discussants' dialogue reveals themes of building connections between individuals from different cultural, social, and geographic contexts and the role of trust in such encounters. In narrative fragment 2, the discussants extended the role of connections between individuals and learning opportunities through meeting people from different contexts. The role of trust and creative practices in dealing with challenges shaping better connections within communities are themes that emerge in narrative fragments 3 and 4.

### **Narrative Fragment 1**

*Speaker 1: We tried to build a connection before physically meeting. Did it help to build any trust or connection?*

*Speaker 2: It's about respect, I think. But it's hard to say if you don't know a person. And that's why you try to build a relationship. You could go around it and find ways to trust.*

*Speaker 1: So, it's a lot of the sensing, what happens between people.*

*Speaker 3: I wanted to build trust, somehow, you know, kind of an affirmation; here I am, and I'm going to come and see you, meet you, talk to you, listen to your story and do something about it. When I came and met the community the first day, I felt enthusiasm in the entire group. Some artists grabbed my hand and told us: 'Sit and listen to my story'. One artist was attached to her storyline, which she painted. She kept on telling different parts of it.*

### **Narrative Fragment 2**

*Speaker 2: It's learning because learning something different and what other people have to offer. And it's about being different, but we still have the same ideas in cultural things. But then when somebody else comes from a different place, we have to show them courtesy, respect and trust.*

*Speaker 1: Do you think that's important before you start the work, to have that time to meet each other and discuss expectations?*

*Speaker 2: Because you have to build that connection. Because if you don't build that connection, what do you have?*

*Speaker 1: But also, is it a question of what is left behind after they left?*

*Speaker 2: Well, for instance, when you came to this community you showed us a lot of things that we've learned, like felting. And building a connection with us, and for me that is returning to trust again—a better understanding of the outcomes of art projects and what they can do for this community. Art is a way of living. It's about being creative. What people get out of all these things is knowledge.*

### **Narrative Fragment 3**

*Speaker 1: I want to know how to better work with communities. When you have an intervention in a community, it's a new activity. So, it's kind of intruding on your regular program. But interventions, I guess, also have benefits and how we hope to achieve what is best for the community.*

*Speaker 2: It was a good thing to bring women together showing them a different conception of how to get better from a lack of well-being, just being together and sharing each other's ideas. It's a time to be*

*here together, laughing and sharing ideas and how things can be better for our community and the next generation, because that's where everything starts, at home.*

*Speaker 3: To get out of that, you know, home-related, tough routine.*

*Speaker 2: I want to do things with plants or learn how to pot or do sewing, felting, painting, and just being still. Meditation. Some people have got a big wall up, and they don't want to talk, and they're screaming, and they're shouting and all kinds of stuff like being upset, grief, anger, all sorts of things. Whatever stays here in this place or, being said here, stays here. It's about having trust. They need that trust. If they don't have trust, they've got nowhere to go.*

#### **Narrative Fragment 4**

*Speaker 1: We hope to work better in the community. You know, how to draw people in, how to engage people better. Do you have an opinion about how to engage people better?*

*Speaker 2: But some of the artists are not up for change. They are so used to one direction, and sometimes you need to go there and stir it up and turn it in another direction. Some people just put up that wall and say, 'No, I'm not doing it.' Then, all of a sudden, they see the other artists doing it and then ask, 'Oh, okay, how come I'm not doing it?'*

*Speaker 3: Becoming too comfortable with the one thing that they have achieved, they just feel comfortable doing that. Trying to get people engaged in the programs, because this community needs to understand what art can do for the community.*

*Speaker 2: Being a little bird out in the community and saying, you need to get in here and prepare for the exhibition. Well, you need to go out there and get your story out there. You are an artist. So, listening to what other artists are doing in the community.*

## **6 DISCUSSION**

The themes of trust, community and creative engagement, well-being, dealing with change, and creative practice, emerged as central to the intervention's impact. The narrative practices used, including felting and storytelling, are embedded in the cultural fabric of the Ceduna community, addressing the pressing need for reconnection and emotional expression in a safe and supportive environment. However, understanding these practices requires acknowledging the historical and cultural sensitivities that shape community interactions. By situating these activities within a broader context of marginalisation, this study clarified the significance of ABMs and their role in fostering meaningful connections and cultural preservation.

ABMs were used to engage in creative practice and research with the community through an abductive approach that enabled important themes to emerge from the community itself. The vital role of creative practices illustrated in the narrative fragments, such as gardening, felting, sewing and painting as forms of narrative practices, generated feelings of togetherness. However, the lack of personal and community connections can also be connected to the lack of creative engagement due to 'having a big wall up'. These important themes emerged throughout the narrative texts. The four narrative fragments reveal different notions of trust. Trust often forms the foundation of empathic relationships; cultural differences influence and challenge collective trust [23].

Trust comes about through confidence in people, their integrity, and their abilities, while distrust means suspicion about people's abilities [24]. Based on beliefs and feelings, trust requires feeling safe in someone's presence [25]. A calm and tranquil atmosphere led to trust and connection between community members, outsiders and visitors. Trust can be developed when individuals feel heard, understood, seen, and valued, for example, through their creative expressions and stories, which can render them visible and increase their perceived value. In community engagement, attention is essential, as paying attention to someone or something is fundamental to building trust [26]. When attention is given to a matter, stories' positive or negative impact affects care. Attention can be created positively and negatively, and narrative practices play central roles in ameliorating negative impact.

Another notion of trust forthcoming from these fragments is that it can be expected to grow through creating opportunities for acquiring knowledge as learning is perceived as a gain for the community. Knowledge sharing requires a community to continue organising opportunities for knowledge transfer. Such opportunities can open up valuable co-creation and cooperation initiatives within a community or broader society to enable better processes and experiences through knowledge transfer.

Therefore, how narrative practices and stories manifest trust within and amongst groups and individuals and how stories contribute to the organisation of communities are necessary factors in tackling the

functioning of narrative practices. From a design perspective, understanding how trust develops through narrative practices can inform the creation of social design strategies that prioritise meaningful engagement and co-creation. By emphasising the relational dynamics of trust, social designers can craft more impactful interventions that align with the community's needs and aspirations, thereby enhancing the relevance of social design practices.

Trust is earned; discretion is granted in handling whatever has been entrusted to an individual or group, to be left primarily unattended and unmonitored, and to require only minimal follow-up in executing duties [27]. Social designers must also acknowledge that while trust can facilitate positive outcomes, it is fragile and can be disrupted by poorly implemented interventions. Recognising the limitations and challenges, such as maintaining cultural sensitivity and managing the impact of design work in marginalised contexts, is crucial. This awareness ensures that design practices remain ethical and considerate of the community's well-being. Nevertheless, narratives in various forms, including embodied stories, can be challenging; they can breach trust and affect beliefs and expectations [28]. It is essential to retain a balanced view of stories and their power. When developing into dominant narratives, stories can influence processes either positively or negatively [29], and specifically in marginalised contexts, more sensitive approaches are required. The limitations of stories and sensitivity for acknowledging negative impacts on processes for building trust and empathy can offer critical perspectives. The fragments also illustrate that creative practices do not necessarily reach beyond 'a big wall up'. The challenges illustrated here are the dysfunction and inability of stories to drive change. In addition, the discontinuities and breaking down of stories to form reconnections, for example, to comfort trauma, such as grief, anger or loss, is illustrated.

Sarantou et al. [20] illustrated how Indigenous Aboriginal stories need sensitivity and care when sharing online, as the implications can be dire for mishandling sensitive stories that were orally passed down for generations. With the rise of digital platforms, designers need to be particularly mindful of how cultural narratives are represented and shared. The design of digital and social media tools should consider the potential for misuse or misinterpretation, and proactive measures should be taken to protect culturally sensitive information. This calls for a careful balance between accessibility and the preservation of cultural integrity. This research revealed how younger Indigenous Aboriginal generations are aware that certain narrative practices and stories should not be shared in an open domain, as inappropriate use of stories within sensitive contexts can result in negative runaway change. Complexities are increasing with the power of the internet and social media. As a result, care is needed to prevent runaway change and the negative impact caused by sharing culturally sensitive stories. Unsurprisingly, the younger Indigenous Aboriginal generations of Ceduna know that certain content should not be shared in an open domain. Tensions exist, for example, in Indigenous Aboriginal communities in clarifying the intentions behind stories, yet guarding against misinformation and misuse of meaning needs attention.

## **7 CONCLUSIONS**

This article discussed how stories can create awareness by proposing narrative transportation and arts-based approaches to support the constructive roles of stories within social design in marginalised contexts. It would be beneficial to link the findings to established social design frameworks to enhance the relevance of this contribution to the design community. Articulating how ABMs and narrative practices can inform design processes can advance knowledge in the field and offer practical insights for social designers working with vulnerable communities. For example, integrating narrative-driven design principles can lead to more empathetic and practical design solutions that resonate with community needs.

The limitations of stories and sensitivity for acknowledging negative impacts on processes for building trust and empathy can offer critical perspectives in social design throughout the social design process. When paying attention to the needs of communities, participating researchers aim to build trust [29] and contextual understanding when engaging in specific contexts. In marginal contexts, specific care is needed in the delicate initial phases of the work and research. According to Moree [17], establishing trust involves recognising and respecting the unique cultural, social, and economic dynamics present within the community. Researchers should engage in active listening and demonstrate a genuine commitment to the community's well-being, which helps in mitigating any existing distrust or scepticism towards external entities.

The broader implications of nurturing close dialogues with Indigenous peoples may foster more careful collaborative approaches and social design guided by a critical view of narrative functioning when



working with communities living in marginalised contexts. Exploring the significance and connective power of stories can touch upon improved practices for cultural exchange, preventing the breakdown or loss of trust integral to identity processes within a community, such as the sensitive stories that one of the authors did not wish to reveal. Social design practitioners are encouraged to adopt an iterative and reflective approach, continuously assessing the impact of their work on the community. Incorporating feedback loops where community members can voice concerns or suggest improvements can ensure that design interventions align with cultural values and community well-being. Additionally, training programs for designers on cultural sensitivity and ethical storytelling can be beneficial in avoiding unintended negative consequences.

These aspects ask for better listening skills from social design researchers and practitioners to create trust in context-specific settings when working with vulnerable groups or environments in the early stages of social design processes. For social designers, an acute awareness of narrative practices' positive and negative implications, especially in sensitive settings and working with vulnerable communities, is paramount to creating and maintaining empathy.

Regarding avenues for further research, the connective power of stories also creates a space for authentic communication that can produce emerging data and analysis to contribute to the substantive theorisation of social and transformative design. Building on the insights gained, we recommend future research that expands the multifaceted dimensions of storytelling practices in social design. By connecting storytelling to broader theories of social and transformative design, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of how narrative-driven design can drive social change. This can pave the way for more resilient and adaptable design frameworks that can address the evolving needs of diverse and marginalised communities.

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