



Communities & Culture Network+

CCN+ Newsletter, January 2015

Research

Reports

The final report from the 'Hyperlocal Government Engagement Online' seed project, led by Peter Cruikshank from Napier University, is now available on the CCN+ website. The project investigated the current and future potential value of digital technologies in the work of hyperlocal government in Scottish Community Councils. Read the report [here](#).

The final report from the 'Digital Technologies of Debt Resilience' pilot project, led by Johnna Montgomerie from Goldsmiths, is also now available on the CCN+ website. The project investigated the intersection between the civil society organizations that advocate or provide services to people in debt and information sharing forums for people in debt. Read the report [here](#).

The final report from the "Teacher Professional Learning Networks and the 'politics of circulation'" seed project, led by Sara Bragg from the University of Brighton, is also now available on the CCN+ website. The project aimed to build on the work of Kennedy et al (2013), Albarran (2013), Beer (2013), Ball (2011), Pykett (2009) and others to understand how to conduct social media analysis in the context of teacher professional learning networks, and to comprehend patterns of influence in education policy and practices. Read the report [here](#).

The final report from the 'Social Media and Austerity: Online Peer Support in Mental Health Communities' seed project, led by Ian Tucker from the University of East London, is also now available on the CCN+ website. The project sought to address the experiences of a vulnerable community in a culture of austerity and explored the capacity of service users to enhance their mental health by engaging with peer-support practices through social media. Read the report [here](#).

Who we are

The Digital Economy 'Communities and Culture' Network+ engages with digital transformations, bringing them together with a wider public through direct engagements, innovative methods and digital resources.

Funding

All funding opportunities from the CCN+ have now closed.

Research

New Pilot Projects

There are three new pilot projects about to begin on the network: 'Storytelling for Development', led by David Frolich from the University of Surrey, explores the role of short digital stories about the heritage, culture and aspirations of a local community, in neighbourhood planning and urban design; 'New Radicals? Digital Political Engagement in Post-Referendum Scotland', led by Peter McLaverty from Robert Gordon University, aims to analyse the transition of social media activism since the Scottish referendum, in order to establish whether the related activism is sustained over a longer timescale, particularly in relation to younger voters; and 'Creating a Virtual Museum', led by Ian Ewart from the University of Reading, will take advantage of a rare opportunity at the University of Reading's 'Museum of English Rural Life' (MERL), which is due to close temporarily to undergo a major redevelopment, to provide unencumbered access to the interior space and key objects in the collection. Using a novel mix of proprietary and emerging digital technologies, they will create a prototype Virtual Museum and explore the possibilities for enhanced interactivity.

New Seed Projects

There are also three new seed projects about to begin as well: 'Paradoxes of Digital dis/engagement', led by Adi Kuntsman from the Manchester Metropolitan University, will develop a new way of looking at the link between digital technologies and culture, citizenship, and society, by using those who refuse to engage with the digital (out of concerns for privacy, political freedom, over-consumerism, damage to personal relations or education) as an innovative and fruitful angle on understanding social relations, wellbeing and digital footprint in our present and future; 'Choreoathons: Hackathons For Dance', led by Gerard Briscoe from Queen Mary University of London, considers how the hackathon model could be applied to the performing arts, including choreography and dance; 'Games for Communication', led by Matthew Barr from the University of Glasgow, will explore the use of commercial video games and associated networks and communities to develop players' communication skills.

From the Network

'Gypsy' Travellers and the Digital Economy Project

To date, little digital economy research has been conducted that engages with 'outsider' groups such as gypsy travellers who are often peripheral to more mainstream currents in society (Sibley, 1981,1995). This project aims to fill this lacuna by researching the ways in which travellers, as individuals or as groups engage with digital technologies on an everyday basis, as well as exploring any barriers to accessibility that they may face. We will explore how traveller groups participate (or do not participate) in the digital economy and how this impacts on their engagement more widely with 'society' as a whole. Given the presumed benefits that the digital economy offers for participation, gypsy travellers, due to their peripheral position, are potentially (self) excluded from these opportunities. Factors such as; low levels of literacy, lack of digital skills, problems of accessibility (to networks, technology and education), gender relations, transitory lifestyles all represent potential reasons for exclusion from the digital economy. This potentially isolates them from opportunities afforded by digital engagement such as those relating to education, employment and skills development (Townsend et al., 2013). There is little research which illuminates the potential areas of benefit for such hard to reach groups, therefore, this research seeks a greater understanding of existing digital practice, its impacts (both positive and negative), barriers to engagement and the potential of increased engagement. Additionally, we are interested in the ways in which engaging online (e.g. through social media) may impact upon identities of place for different types of traveller groups (settled and transitory) and forge better linkages with disparate but relevant other groups. A theoretical framework will be employed which is grounded in Helsper's (2012) social, cultural, economic and personal fields of inclusion. We will investigate the extent to which current approaches taken by travellers groups to digital participation are impacting on these fields. Further, we will explore how barriers to participation (whether external or internal to the group) may influence the fields of inclusion, potentially leading to forms of exclusion.

National Collective Project Announcement

Dr. Kathryn Vincent of the University of Aberdeen has been working with the Artist group National Collective to explore how artists and creative are able to shape the political discourses of a grassroots movement. In a year where the people of Scotland were able to peacefully and democratically choose the future of their constitutional arrangement for the first time, a mass grass-roots movement has developed. National Collective is a primarily volunteer-run organisation, which has been in the forefront of this movement. Non-party aligned, it held a series of events in the years leading up to the referendum, with branches in all parts of Scotland.

In the post-referendum UK, it has become even more important to discuss the impact of arts upon political discourses. Though there was a No vote, many of the grass-roots groups have remained active, including National Collective. A recent gaffe by the Labour party twitter account (boasting about their commitment to cut the arts and cultural budgets by just as much as the Tory party) has thrown into stark relief the need to identify the purpose and impact of artists upon political thought.

The project seeks to show how artists are able to help interpret and promote complex political ideologies through creative acts. It will show how these creative acts impact upon more traditional political activities. This project will answer the following research questions:

1. How did National Collective use their online presence to shape the discourse of the independence referendum?
2. How did individual members of National Collective use these discourses to campaign both online and offline?

SAVING ROSIA MONTANA: Online networks of protest

Cristian Luguzan

Social movements are a type of collective behaviour aimed to bring societal change through collective action. In recent years, with the advent of social media and Computer-mediated communication (CMC), social movements across the world have gained new abilities of mobilization, identity-building, and awareness-raising. Online communications have been instrumental in a series of recent social movements and protests, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the UK student protests, as well as the Euromaidan movement in Kiev. The pilot study investigated the potential of Computer-mediated communication for creating stable networks of protest between heterogeneous groups that have could potentially lead towards coordinated social action.

The pilot study investigated a Romanian social movement that has its roots in Rosia Montana, which is a small mining town in the Apuseni Mountains in West-Central Romania. The mining rights belong to the Toronto-based Gabriel Resources, which planned an extension of the mine by using cyanide exploitation techniques, with objectives to make it the largest open-cast gold mine in Europe. However, critics of the draft project argued that it would involve destroying the nearby mountain tops, and lead to the creation of a cyanide lake that could potentially infiltrate the subterranean water network. Another issue that was raised was that of the necessity of relocating the local population. While the company managed to persuade most of the residents to move into a newly built residential project at the outskirts of the mining site, a few villagers resisted the move and formed an association in 2000 trying to stop the planned cyanide exploitation of the mine. This allowed the residents to set up an online presence, eventually attracting the attention of over 40 NGOs and environmental activists, both from Romania and from abroad. The extended network of NGOs, activists, and the original association gave birth to the Uniti Salvam (United we Save) social movement, which over the next few years grew into the largest collective action in Romania since the 1989 Revolution, culminating in September and October 2013 with global protests in 75 cities worldwide, with 25000 people in Bucharest alone.



By employing thirteen qualitative interviews in Bucharest and Rosia Montana, preliminary findings suggest that there are at least three distinct quasi-independent networks of protest that have formed in opposition to the mining project: in Rosia Montana, in Bucharest, and in Cluj-Napoca. The 2013 protests seem to be a coagulation of heterogeneous movements, activist groups, and ideologies, ranging from historical societies and environmentalists to Moldavo-Romanian nationalists or Occupy Romania. The movement had been shown to have a strong undercurrent of nationalism, which framed the protests as a battle against the Canadian-based company, as well as an empowerment of local communities against a corrupt government. The preliminary findings of the pilot advise for the future inclusion of additional methods, such as media content analysis, as well as further exploration of the nationalist theme.