

## **SUBMISSION BY THE CYNEFIN CENTRE FOR APPLIED COMPLEXITY AND ASSOCIATED RESEARCH PARTNERS**

This submission is supported by University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research, Guy Yeomans Director of Arctic Futures, Desirée Sartori and Marco Cappi of Bangor University, and Thomas Rickard, an independent researcher.

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### **Subject: Views on the purpose, content and structure of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform**

The Cynefin Centre for Applied Complexity and its research partners welcome the opportunity to submit their views on the purpose, content and structure of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIP Platform).

The Cynefin Centre embraces the efforts to establish a platform to engage indigenous and local communities. The Centre's hallmark distributed ethnographic tool and approach to narrative research, SenseMaker®, could be a valuable contribution to the LCIP Platform. In the spirit of collaboration we are open to participate with other applicants and parties.

### **Purpose**

Mitigating and adapting to climate change requires the engagement of local communities with unique contexts, resources, and cultural practices. The platform should seek to empower LCIP in their context-specific approaches by facilitating information sharing between communities, global and local governments, third sector organisations and activist groups. Rather than emphasising top-down implementation of 'best practice' that is identified through large-scale data collection and expert analysis, the platform should be an opportunity for communities to share their experiences, stories and strategies directly with policymakers that are equipped to rapidly deploy support for their activities. Indeed for citizens across the world this may provide the chance to interact *meaningfully* with one another on human environmental concerns.

The collaborating parties are in agreement that, given the well-documented politics of representation of indigenous communities at a global scale, the main purpose of the platform should: (i) enable authentic representation of intersecting knowledge; (ii) be based on a decentralisation of expertise; and (iii) enable the power of interpretation to remain in the hands and hearts of those for whom it matters.

### **Approach**

Our suggested approach is to use a *distributed ethnographic tool* to enable the empowerment of local solutions to local problems. Over recent years, approaches to

development and relationships with indigenous groups have been evolving to include more sophisticated approaches to complex, multifaceted issues. Rather than imposing externally formulated linear plans with pre-defined criteria for success - which can sideline valid knowledge and fail to spot “unintended consequences” - methodologies are available today that can effectively draw together multiple experiences, stories and actions for truly collaborative solution discovery. A recognition that micro-level stories and practice are indeed interconnected to a much bigger whole.

“We are never more than the co-authors of our own narratives.” SenseMaker® is the first fully distributed and scalable ethnographic research method that allows for real-time, continuous capture of data. This methodology represents a quantitative approach to narrative work that does not require technical or expert interpretation of text.

Through storytelling, SenseMaker® enables indigenous communities to communicate their realities in their own language. The tool allows for multimodal data capture for populations: stories can be written or spoken, videos can be recorded and photographs of places, people, drawings and symbols are all possible. This approach helps to transcend any communication barriers between local communities and the United Nations and allows policy-makers to make decisions that are authentic to the voices of the communities they serve.

We envisage that the LCIP Platform could integrate SenseMaker® into a long-term strategy of direct engagement and dialogue with indigenous people in various contexts. But, crucially, and as we enter an age of powerfully coordinated networked social movements, it empowers communities themselves to act meaningfully at a local level whilst allowing for people across the world to learn about the knowledge and practices of disparate populations all living with the future burden of climate change.

As we are aware that within indigenous communities the rights of access can be complex, it is worth noting that this approach allows people to provide varying levels of disclosure, and the ethical process is therefore highly contextual and person-centred. This means that respondents may choose to limit the visibility of their story accordingly, but their statistical data could still be shared with a wider population. Because it is the “metadata” - the patterns of statistical interpretation beyond any personal information - that remains accessible, decision makers at all levels can continue to refer back to patterns and trends. Research ethics, data storage, privacy & access procedures can be designed in conjunction with indigenous groups & communities prior to any project starting.

When stories are shared, there are opportunities for community exhibitions, forums, and representative on- and offline multi-stakeholder engagement.

This approach has already been applied to the context of child abuse within indigenous communities in two different countries. Including other work in Europe, Canada,

Australia, Africa and also in Latin America on peace process, counter-narco community work, cultural issues and generational entrepreneurial behaviour in impoverished areas. We have partnerships with Oxfam GB, The International Federation of the Red Cross, and our distributed ethnographic tool has over twenty-five case studies in place with UNDP exploring multiple ethnic and socio-economic issues.

## **What does this mean?**

In a globalised world, how do we gain nuanced, localised understanding? How do we respond to the unheard (and often unarticulated) needs of those who feel excluded from power? How do we allow the space and means for real dialogue? We:

**Engage:** Allow members of a community to discover what is happening, what is amiss and what is working in their own communities.

**Empower:** The power to interpret the story is placed with the storyteller, rather than being subject to researcher or policy-maker bias. Communities can develop their own solutions and share solutions and ideas across communities all over the world by “presenting their own story”.

**Enact:** Acting on the stories makes the narrative meaningful. For research purposes, this network employs a quantitative (objective) technique in what is a traditionally qualitative area. For communities, it enables highly contextual local action allowing local solutions for local issues.

This approach could enable the LCIP to embody a means of facilitating spontaneous interaction between governments, communities, third sector organisations, and activist groups over time. This multi-layered approach to authenticity, voice, communication, and action will lead to locally-informed solutions that are not only more likely accepted and enacted, but also created and adapted by the people who are affected the most.

## **Content**

With the understanding that sharing of knowledge is as much about embodied practice and action as it is about networked knowledge flow, we propose a number of content ideas that show the value and adaptability of our distributed ethnographic approach:

- Building on an existing project with the Welsh Government Future Generations, we aim to use the distributed ethnographic tool to collect and share intergenerational stories by asking children to become self-ethnographers in their own communities and interviewing their parents and grandparents about the meaning they give to place, to objects and to practice. Enabling peer-to-peer knowledge flow and sharing of these stories across the platform across the world.

- A platform engaging communities, charities and corporations as mutually-responsible for expressing and denouncing abuses and rights violations which threaten humans and environment - generating a visible culture of awareness, shared values and accountability.
- The sharing of audio and video-stories of climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, inspiring others to act but also to learn from mistakes allowing “unintended consequences” to shine through. These resources can be further picked up, translated and adapted for local application across the world.
- At a context-specific level, we would like to engage the various indigenous Arctic groups in a project to explore their narratives around climate change and its current impacts. Of importance will be individual and collective perceptions of prospective future changes to their lives from their own perspectives. One of the ongoing issues in Arctic discourse is the recognition, validation and privileging of different kinds of knowledge, with indigenous knowledge, in certain cases, perceived as being of secondary importance or as being of lower relevance to formal scientific data.

## **Structure**

We expect that the structure of the platform will be accessible, performative and open, whilst protecting users data and interests; that the structure will allow for unmediated peer-to-peer sharing and learning, and; that - unlike some social media - the platform will provide exposure to both similarity and difference in a constructive manner.

In meeting these needs, and in conjunction with other contributions, approaches, and facilities in the platform, we believe that the SenseMaker® distributed ethnography tool and methodologies can form a significant aspect of the platform<sup>1</sup>.

As mentioned above, this approach is easily accessible in a variety of ways and allows for people to become story gatherers from their own communities. Here, the narrative becomes exemplar and supportive of the broader statistical patterns. Because the same classification system applies (through polymorphic signifiers), all of these modes of story can contribute to the same large scale statistical representations that continue to contain the original material.

The data is directly accessible without risk to personal privacy or post submission manipulation, navigable in a range of ways by any user, and useful for representative decision making.

In relating people through connected experiences, rather than just location, group, status, or other means of separation, it provides a means for empathetic understanding across boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the method and case study examples please see Appendices below.

## **Collaboration & Collaborators**

In submitting this proposal for the inclusion of SenseMaker® tools and methodologies into the LCIP Platform, we hope to begin a long term relationship of mutually beneficial collaboration. In engaging with the various partners, it is hoped that a useful tool is provided for a shared approach to Climate Change and Indigenous Communities. But also, that through this collaboration, the research partners can further enhance their contributions to broader conversations around indigenous knowledges, multi stakeholder engagement, and global and local politics.

Our sincerest thanks for the opportunity to take part.

## **Appendices**

### **1.1 Method: Distributed Ethnographic Tool (SenseMaker®)**

Traditional methods allow respondents to self-report on their experiences by using a Likert or linear-based scale. Alternatively, SenseMaker® requires individuals to tell very specific stories about their experiences which then form a discrete item. The power of interpretation always remains at the subject level; it is the individual who provides the data that decides what it means. A process called self-signification. Here, the data collected is in the form of observational not evaluative narrative. Signification of meaning (indexing) effectively adds deeper layers of meaning to original narrative overcoming many of the problems with longitudinal research.

One method of self-signification is to place their stories within a triad. Each placement gives three items of quantitative data which, in disintermediation, can be graphically represented as a 'fitness landscape'. These landscapes can store thousands of stories and are used to help identify patterns of meaning over time. The originating narrative supports the statistical data and is always available as a description for data patterns or as a method for intervention design.

The vector theory of change employed by SenseMaker® asks the question "how do we create more stories like this, less stories like that?" Incremental changes, dictated by local context, and tracked with SenseMaker® ensure that best practice is also contextual practice.

## **1.2 Case Studies Using Distributed Ethnographic Tool: SenseMaker®**

Based on over 15 years of research, the SenseMaker® approach has been put to use in a variety of indigenous and policy contexts, with the interactive nature of the tool empowering and exciting people to take part.

Most notable examples for the purposes of this platform are:

- ***UNDP Bratislava Regional Centre***: Multiple narrative research projects across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. SenseMaker® projects included: exploring ethnic separation between Roma and non-Roma populations in Eastern Europe; and exploring prejudice and attitudes to minority populations in Belarus and Georgia.
- ***UNDP Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery***: This project was conducted in 3 post-conflict zones and used SenseMaker® to monitor: the implementation of a formal justice system, and access and attitudes in Pakistan; post-conflict reconstruction in mining communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo; Peace and conflict management in Sudan.
- ***“Footprints in Time”***: Australia’s Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, Footprints in Time, was a four-year project designed to provide policymakers with an unprecedented evidence base to improve the design and delivery of program and policy interventions for Indigenous children in their early years. This landmark project tracked the development of 2,200 children from locations representing Australia diverse urban, regional and remote outback conditions. Footprints in Time had two main streams of inquiry: a comprehensive survey to be administered on an annual basis, and a narrative stream aimed at understanding how indigenous children and their families experienced the early years of development and how these experiences changed over time. For case study please see: <http://cognitive-edge.com/case-studies/footprints-in-time/>
- ***“Resilience building in communities that are being weakened by consecutive disruptions from droughts and flood”, IFRC, May-October 2014***: While many communities benefit from social protections schemes run by their governments and have received periodic assistance from aid agencies for decades, developments in their well-being have remained fragile and prone to quick deterioration. Needs assessments identify similar needs to previous years so similar solutions are usually prescribed. This project explored issues related to local ownership of solutions in order to deflect prescriptive aid assistance that is often too rushed and forced into artificial timelines. It aimed to uncover the experiences, perspective and priorities from beneficiary communities that might determine how and in what ways initiatives could flourish. Collection and analysis of 1,000 responses from diverse communities in southern Africa was the starting point for the IFRCs journey into sense-making and complexity-informed

approaches to aid delivery.

- “GirlHub”, Rwanda: Sponsored by Nike Foundation and in conjunction with the Rwandan Ministry of Health: Using SenseMaker® to take a snapshot of national attitudes to gender and girls. Field research was carried out by partners across rural and urban demographics covering the entire country to capture multiple perspectives. Results have been used to redesign interventions and programmes in field, aimed at enhancing and improving girls’ social, economic and health assets. The SenseMaker® methodology and software was also used to also gather the experiences and perspectives girls who had been involved in the GirlHub 12+ mentoring program, and those who have not received aid from the program. By the end of 2015, over 8,000 mentors were gathering monitoring data on a weekly basis into the SenseMaker® to monitor effects, enhance programmes and improve their own mentoring abilities. For report please see: <http://old.cognitive-edge.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/GH-SenseMaker-brief.pdf>
- “PRIME Ethiopia”: Assessment and enhancement of effect of radio communications strategy for rural communities, 2014-2016. In Ethiopia, two approaches were introduced to look at the effect of campaigns around changing nutritional behaviour across the country. The first was collecting narratives from people about the effective resonance of soap opera storylines to allow decisions for effective communication. The second extended this campaign out to multiple forms of communication including theatre, radio, education sessions, circus and print media. SenseMaker® narrative research was being conducted across the country, looking at underlying attitudes and dispositions of target populations. Within these, early signals are being detected of positive shifts in behaviours and dispositions.
- “Fragments of Impact”: Research and intervention design for security and stabilisation, Multiple organisations including UNDP Yemen and UNDP Afghanistan 2015-2016. Stability-focused element of Fragments of Impact - working with multiple clients to design common analysis and intervention methods and tools. Skilling up local teams and organisational structures to be able to conduct research and interventions themselves.

## **2.0 List of Collaborators**

### **Cynefin Centre Making of Meaning Programme**

The Making of Meaning is a collaborative research initiative developed by the Cynefin Centre for Applied Complexity at Bangor University, which aims to explore human meaning-making as it weaves, flows and emerges throughout different facets of our lives. By using a novel distributed ethnographic approach, the project aims to explore

connections to people and to place, to go beyond surface appearances and explore what it *means* to live a meaningful life in the modern world. The aim is to create a tomorrow where every unique voice is heard and represented; a decentralised platform providing the space for reflection and transformation.

The programme is part of a wider research initiative on citizen engagement which seeks to allow researchers, policy makers, participants alike to make new discoveries, to understand different perspectives and to allow for unexpected connections. Within the context of this proposed collaboration this approach will enable greater understanding of the dynamic interplay of environmental knowledge and practice intersecting various communities, sectors and domains of experience.

Professor Dave Snowden, Director of The Cynefin Centre and Chief Scientific Officer of Cognitive Edge

Eleanor Snowden, Independent Researcher  
BA, MA Anthropology of Development and Social Transformation specialising in cultural understandings of health and healing

Emma Jones, Independent Researcher  
BSc Psychology, MSc Psychological Research specialising in Cognitive Neuroscience

### **University of Kansas, Centre for Public Partnerships and Research**

Through more than 50 grant-funded projects, the Kansas University Center for Public Partnerships and Research is working to optimize the well-being of children, youth, and families. Our partners are diverse and so are the kinds of social problems we tackle—including reducing infant mortality rates, ensuring 3rd graders are reading at grade level, helping middle schoolers learn essential Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) skills, and guiding families on food assistance toward greater opportunities for fulfilling careers that provide a living wage. We can be found most often behind the scenes securing funding, gathering key folks at the table, orchestrating large-scale data efforts, and providing research, cost analysis, and evaluation expertise.

Director: Jackie Counts  
Assistant Director: Keil Eggers  
<https://cppr.ku.edu>

### **arcticfutures**

arcticfutures is a futures & strategic foresight consultancy helping organisations, communities and businesses anticipate and engage with emergent Arctic conditions and future change. It works on a collaborative basis with previous strategic partners including co-developed projects and engagements with The Arctic Circle Assembly conference (Iceland), The POLaR Partnership (US), The University Centre of the Westfjords (Iceland), The Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction, University College



London (UCL / UK), the Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies (CPPFS / US), the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies (HRCFS / US) and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI / UK).

Founding Partner: Guy Yeomans  
[www.arcticfutures.com](http://www.arcticfutures.com) | @arcticfutures

### **Thomas Rickard, Independent Researcher**

Building on years of work in care and support work settings, and engaging with people with needs including homelessness, drug and alcohol use, learning disabilities, mental health, autism and physical disabilities, Thomas Rickard earned his bachelor's in Human Sciences from Sussex University in 2011. From here he continued to engage with his dissertation topics of Narrative, and Community Forestry, living, working, and telling stories at Schumacher College, Devon, UK, an international centre for Sustainability. He is currently undertaking research into family agriculture in Minas Gerais, Brazil, attitudes to environment and responses to the Samarco Mining Disaster, and the dynamic and potential for large scale, complex political representation.

### **Desirée Sartori, University of Bangor**

Desirée Sartori received her MA in Cognitive Neuroscience and Clinical Neuropsychology at the University of Padua (Italy). She's now a visiting researcher at the Mindful Brain Lab at Bangor University. She's interested in the study of Contemplative Sciences in Indigenous Communities as a tool to develop strategies to foster the reconnection between humans and Nature.

### **Marco Cappi, University of Bangor**

Marco Cappi is a master student in Cognitive Neuroscience and Clinical Neuropsychology from the University of Padua (Italy). At the moment he's a visiting researcher at the Bangor University (Mindful Brain Lab). His interests regard the study of the deep relationship between Nature and humans in the Indigenous Communities as a potential resource to reverse the dramatic situation of our world and to promote a sustainable way of living.

