The Digital Story Bank: A Novel Means of Archiving, Organising, and Accessing Oral Histories

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Communities and organisations, whether corporate, community-centred or volunteer-driven, hold rich histories and often keep important collections, yet the recording and archiving of this history and historical ephemera can be overlooked. When archiving is carried out, the stories of communities may be removed from their context and transferred to a central location. This raises ethical considerations about supporting communities' ownership of the stories they have created. This article demonstrates how a new tool – the 'Digital Story Bank' – allows communities and organisations to manage and archive their own stories and historical material. This article subsequently proposes that by making use of the tool, communities' and organisations' ability to manage their own history could open up further potential to allow stories to remain in the places they were made – where they are most meaningful. This paper demonstrates how the Digital Story Bank, created by researchers at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), was designed

and piloted, and explores the potential for the tool to support place-based narratives, particularly in remote communities where issues of place and story are particularly powerful.

INTRODUCTION

Data and information about the history of organisations and communities is often recorded in electronic and paper-based formats that are stored, but not necessarily archived. Over time, the task of archiving this material can become overwhelming and beyond the scope of volunteers or employees without expertise in history or information management. Meanwhile, this material history is accompanied by oral stories that complement and contextualise it – but these oral stories are often not captured or recorded. It may become difficult to access information about a particular time, event, or place in a timely manner, and the stories that illustrate a material archive are lost as people move to other organisations, locations, or retire. These issues are common in organisations (large and small), in communities and local councils, schools and libraries, and in non-profit and volunteer-led organisations such as historical societies or sporting and recreational clubs. Many such organisations and groups secure funding to engage their communities in local, narrative-based arts projects. Keeping track of project material such as photographs, snippets of research and writing, and digital content is challenging but increasingly important as the emphasis on meaningfully measuring and articulating the impact of these types of programs has grown into an acquittal requirement.[1]

A particular challenge facing communities and organisations who seek to preserve their stories is presented when staff or volunteers move on or retire. For example, with twenty years' experience planning, creating and (in recent years) evaluating narrative-based arts projects in local communities, our research team member Helen Klaebe has found that a change in a committee, board or of government funding often means the keepers of the organisation's archives inevitably move on, and

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1   See for example: Claudia Fontes, 'The What and the How: Rethinking Evaluation Practice for the Arts and Development', in Katerina Teaiwa and Polly Stupples (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Art and International Development* (Routledge, 2016), 258–72; Kim Dunphy and Vicki-Ann Ware, 'Evaluation Practices in Participatory Arts in International Development: Findings of a Systematic Literature Review', in Katerina Teaiwa and Polly Stupples (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives*, 221–237.

valuable resources become hard to find or lost. Klaebe regularly receives hopeful requests for assistance in utilising past project materials. Too often, organisations rely on a small number of staff and volunteers who hold considerable institutional knowledge – when they move on, they take stories about places and events with them. Even when historical documents such as minutes, photographs, reports and transcripts *are* archived, this information is rarely in an accessible form from which users can easily extract the human side of historical events or find content that can be repurposed.

This occurs in a context where more and more communities are seeking small grants aiming to increase participation in the arts, to celebrate or commemorate key anniversaries, strengthen a unique sense of place and pride, or build resilient and inclusive communities.[2] While these projects are carried out by organisations embedded in their own communities, they often rely on the expertise of visiting scholars or historians to supply specialised knowledge or tools that build capacity and support the work. With the benefit of this expertise comes an increased risk that stories may leave with the professional team who helped create them, rather than remain in place. Similarly, until recently, many stories created in small communities have been archived in centrally-based institutions and repositories that are not necessarily the most effective or appropriate location for community stories or artefacts (due to the very localised and place-based nature of such material). The theory and practice of creative placemaking, which privileges the specificity of place and the unique stories and experiences of communities in project design and delivery, provides an avenue to better understand this issue.[3] Drawing on this theoretical groundwork, the Digital

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2   Andrew Mason, 'Art in Response to Crisis: Drought, Flood and the Regional Community', in Robert Mason and Janet McDonald (eds), *Creative Communities: Regional Inclusion and the Arts* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2015), 124–134. Also see UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, 'Community Story Telling', which was set up in 2018 to make a significant and wide-reaching impact on civil society and cultural life by taking storytelling out into a range of communities and to increase start-up professional community storytelling companies (UK Arts and Humanities Research Council 'Community Story Telling' available from https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/case-study-archives/community-storytelling/). Accessed 19 May, 2020.

3   While creative placemaking has been defined variously, we refer particularly to the USA cultural policy model of creative placemaking, and the definitions and models exemplified by the National Endowment for the Arts through projects such as Our Town (see National Endowment for the Arts, 'Our Town: Program Description', available from https://www.arts.gov/grants/our-town/program-description). Accessed 19 May 2020.

Story Bank allows stories to remain in place, where they are most meaningful, and the Story Bank's simple, digital nature gives organisations the power to disseminate stories more broadly (since many oral histories are collected because they are interesting and useful beyond their context) while respecting their localness and specificity. A further purpose of the Story Bank is to provide a method for organising primary and first-person material for future remixing and repurposing, rather than offering a 'complete' history or narrative.

This article begins by considering the ways in which stories are meaningfully tethered to place, and the advantages of supporting communities to not only author, but effectively preserve, use, and re-use their stories. We then provide this as a basis for the rationale behind the Story Bank concept and provide a summary of its features with reference to its pilot project at Brisbane's South Bank Corporation. We outline the distinct needs of organisations such as the South Bank Corporation in narrating and archiving their own histories, then turn to explore the Digital Story Bank's potential for wider application in documenting, accessing and repurposing organisational and community histories.

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

The value of stories for not only reflecting place, but for shaping place and community in positive or meaningful ways is reflected in the rich field of practice and growing body of international scholarship on creative placemaking.[4] Creative placemaking positions arts and culture at the heart of community development initiatives and engages community members as participants and collaborators in developing localised solutions to complex problems.[5] This model recognises the specificity of place, and the role of arts and creativity in shaping and reshaping localities, settings, and whole communities.[6] A defining feature

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4   See for example Jill Sonke, Tasha Golden, Samantha Francois, Jamie Hand, Anita Chandra, Lydia Clemmons and Stacey Springs, *Creating Healthy Communities through Cross-Sector Collaboration* [White paper], (The University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine and ArtPlace America: Florida, 2019), available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding-finder/great-place-scheme; Eleonora Redaelli, 'Connecting Arts and Place: Cultural Policy and American Cities', in Cara Courage and Anita McKeown (eds), *Creative Placemaking: Research, Theory and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019).

5   Redaelli, *Connecting Arts and Place*, 156.

6   Sonke et al., *Creating Healthy Communities*, 8.

and success of creative placemaking is that it engages deeply with a community's stories, values and lived experiences in determining the physical and social character of places. As Redaelli finds, such creative, place-based and community-led initiatives not only animate or draw attention to the unique histories of a place but involve communities in processes of authoring themselves and their shared visions for the future.[7] From this perspective, stories are usefully tethered to place and may not have the same significance or meaning for their community if shifted. One of the potential uses and, we hope, benefits of a resource such as the Digital Story Bank, is the provision of a methodology and tool that communities can use to keep their stories 'in place', and reimagine and reuse them in ways they find meaningful and relevant.

The relationship between place and storytelling can be ruptured when stories are removed from their setting. While the State Library of Queensland has managed and acquired Queensland oral history and multimedia collections and has been particularly interested in those from regional communities for several years, the centralised curation of archival material and creative responses to place is increasingly open to question. As Thompson writes, the 'co-operative nature of the oral history approach has led to a radical questioning of the fundamental relationship between history and the community. Historical information need not be taken away from the community for interpretation and presentation by the professional historian. Through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history'.[8] Van Luyn demonstrates that writing that arises from and responds to regional communities is often influenced by a sense of isolation from larger cities.[9] The symbiotic relationship between place and storytelling and the city/regional dichotomy raises questions, therefore, about the appropriateness of removing stories from the communities that forged them to be stored in city repositories.

Supporting regional communities to author their own histories requires not only development of oral history and storytelling skills, but also close consideration of

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7   Sonke et al., *Creating Healthy Communities*, 174.

8   Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2017), 15.

9   Thompson and Bornat, *The Voice of the Past*, 249.

where and how these stories will be kept, which influences how they can be heard and used. Even the South Bank Corporation's own archive, despite its urban location, had been neglected and distributed over time, with many artefacts finding their way to state-based, central locations, where their significance and utility was diminished. The impact on regional communities tends to be more erosive to historical records, with fewer people to maintain archives, and central repositories located very distant from the stories' origins and communities where they have greatest impact.

Many scholars and practitioners involved in the collection of personal or life stories express concerns about preserving, and reframing or recontextualising, the story-teller's account.[10] Discussing listening environments for digital stories, Matthews and Sunderland delineate the complex and overlapping ways in which institutions and platforms frame stories and shape their reception in ways that may support and enhance, or sometimes undermine, storytellers' original intentions. In moving stories from the context in which they were produced, and repositioning them in new listening environments, the forms of oppression and power that facilitated storytelling practices essentially aim to disrupt may in effect be reinforced or repro-duced.[11] Through operating as curators, hosts or caretakers of stories, organisations such as libraries and museums function as meta-orators who contribute a layer of contextual meaning to stories, and hence play roles that are ethically and politi-cally significant.[12]

The shaping role of institutions is not necessarily problematic – rather, large libraries and museums can usefully expand the audience for stories, and in some ways legiti-mise them by contextualising them as part of broader public narratives.[13] However, it is useful to acknowledge that institutions and platforms are not neutral spaces; rather, they are 'contexts shaped by power (political, economic, organisational, and indi-

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10 Nicole Matthews and Naomi Sunderland, *Digital Storytelling in Health and Social Policy: Listening to Mar-ginalised Voices* (Routledge: New York, 2017), 38.

11 Matthews and Sunderland, *Digital Storytelling*, 26, 32–33.

12 Matthews and Sunderland, *Digital Storytelling*, 31.

13 Nancy Thumim, '"Everyone has a Story to Tell": Mediation and Self-representation in Two UK Institu-tions', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 6 (2009): 632–633.

vidual)'.[14] Empowering communities to own their stories and histories necessarily involves building their capacity to host and re-represent, distribute, and remix them on their own terms. As Sheffield finds of grassroots community archiving projects, many communities are determined to remain autonomous from formal heritage or collecting institutions, preferring direct ownership and physical custodianship which keeps collections or artefacts in the community.[15] For under-represented communities and minority cohorts, community archiving practices can be an important act of resistance and collective identity-construction, and an opportunity to tell stories that counter dominant narratives preserved in formal heritage institutions.[16] Retaining control of its own collections may be an important social and political act for a community.

Heritage and collecting institutions such as museums and libraries are increasingly moving beyond their traditional roles as repositories or interpreters and 'gatekeepers' of history and information to involve communities as co-curators of cultural artefacts, thereby facilitating community expression and voice.[17] Co-curation or shared stewardship supports communities to not only engage more deeply with collections but to exercise some control over representations of their lives and stories through becoming co-constructors and co-interpreters of a shared past.[18] Despite democratising objectives and possibilities, however, participation and engagement are inevitably defined and delimited by the inviting institution, its agendas and conventions. A potential use and value of the Digital Story Bank is it may provide a template for how communities might hold onto and usefully repurpose their artefacts in ways more autonomous than is possible with artefacts held in institutional settings.

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14 David Wallace, 'Archives and Social Justice', in Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood (eds), *Currents of Archival Thinking* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited: 2017), 276.

15 Rebeka Sheffield, 'Community Archives', MacNeil and Eastwood, *Currents of Archival Thinking*, 351–376.

16 Sheffield, 'Community Archives', 366.

17 Daniel H Mutibwa, Alison Hess and Tom Jackson, 'Strokes of Serendipity: Community Co-curation and Engagement with Digital Heritage', *Convergence* 26, no. 1 (2020): 157–177.

18 For information on shared stewardship, see Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, *Shared Stewardship of Collections* (2019). Available at https://folklife-media.si.edu/docs/folklife/Shared-Stewardship.pdf. Accessed 19 February 2020; Co-curation is described by Mutibwa et al., 'Strokes of Serendipity', 159.

Digital technologies have vastly expanded the potential for co-curation and mean-ingful and sustainable community access and use of collections. One could argue that collections (in digital format at least) can be housed and accessed in both the community in which it comes from, as well as in a public institution such as the State Library of Queensland – and such is the aim of the Digital Story Bank. Increasingly, in a multi-platform digital environment, organisations are expected to not only keep the records of history, but to re-use collections across different digital platforms such as websites, blogs, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to attract, grow and keep prospective audiences engaged in meaningful, authentic ways. Any organisation (or business for that matter) will know the value of a competent web administrator or content creator is now critical to their business. In 2015 Facebook introduced 'On This Day' curating memories of our Facebook life.[19] The Digital Story Bank is a pilot attempt of thinking more deeply about how organisations and communities can 'regain control of our narratives online'.[20]

Still, not every collection or report needs to be accessioned into and searchable in public depositories – so there is a gap and, we would argue, a need, for simpler ways for smaller organisations to data manage their historical artefacts internally. Symons and Hurley state that 'people need to be equipped with techniques and tools that 'give permission' to be creative'.[21] So how can we support communities and organ-isations to better manage their general data and collect, keep, archive and share (if only internally) material? How might those delivering programs or carrying out evaluations empower communities to better store and access their collection inter-nally? Symons and Hurley also suggest that a 'reconceptualisation of creativity… can encourage people outside the so-called "creative sectors" to consider themselves

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19 Artie Konrad, *Facebook Memories: The Research Behind the Products that Connect you with your Past* (September 6, 2017). Available at https://research.fb.com/blog/2017/09/facebook-memories-the-research-behind-the-products-that-connect-you-with-your-past/. Accessed 15 January 2020.

20 Leigh Alexander, 'What Facebook's On This Day Shows about the Fragility of our Online Lives', *The Guardian,* 25 Jan 2016. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jan/25/facebook-on-this-day-tweets-status-updates. Accessed 11 January 2020.

21 Jessica Symons and Ursula Hurley, 'Strategies for Connecting Low Income Communities to the Creative Economy through Play: Two Case Studies in Northern England', *Creative Industries Journal* 11, no. 2 (2018): 121–136.

as having creative potential' – we hope that concepts like the Digital Story Bank can help inspire inexperienced individuals to more readily explore their historical ephemera, weaving together history, storytelling, and archiving in a readily accessible format.[22] Despite the fact that the pilot was produced in a corporate, and indeed, metropolitan setting, the Story Bank tool has potentially broader application for other organisations wanting to manage their historical data because it has been designed to be accessible, repurposable, and scalable.

SOUTH BANK AND THE DIGITAL STORY BANK

In 2017, a team of QUT researchers led by Klaebe partnered with South Bank Corporation, which manages Brisbane's most significant urban open space, to design a solution to these problems.[23] The result was the curation of ephemera we called the 'Digital Story Bank': a new tool that serves as an accessible archive of the organisation's history, woven together with stories, and facts about people, places, and events.

Working with the South Bank Corporation to celebrate its 25th anniversary, QUT researchers embarked on a project to collect the organisation's history and enhance these with oral history accounts for use in anniversary celebrations. The material was organised in a Story Bank, providing story chapters based on oral history accounts, facts, and a summary index that preserves the history of the South Bank Corporation so it can be virtually accessible 'at your fingertips' on a corporate e-bookshelf. This pilot program demonstrates how, through its accessible format, the Story Bank has the potential to address issues faced by smaller organisations in urban, regional and remote communities, whose oral histories and other outputs of creative projects might be difficult to access in the future or, at worst, lost with the passage of time.

The archival material used to create the pilot Digital Story Bank dated from 1992 to 2017 (based on the South Bank Corporation's timeline) and included a significant number of documents and ephemera, including annual reports, old decommissioned websites, minutes, images, video, and correspondence in storage, and our researchers

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22 Symons and Hurley, 'Strategies for Connecting Low Income Communities', 121–136.

23 South Bank Corporation homepage available at southbankcorporation.com.au. Accessed 19 September 2019.

found the Queensland State Archives and the State Library of Queensland's John Oxley Library also contained many documents, images and film that were rarely accessed or shared with the organisation or the public. Background research focused on providing information about key milestones, people and places, and these formed the basis of the Story Bank's structure. The Story Bank is not designed for the public to access, but for communities to use internally so that staff and volunteers can quickly and easily access information, and add to as the history of the organisation continues. The Story Bank aligns with the principles of community-based archiving in that its aims are to empower members of a community (however 'community' is perceived) to be actively involved in the self-documenting of their community.[24]

RESPONDING TO ORGANISATIONAL AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

Oral history in the corporate organisational setting tends to be poorly and inconsistently collected, if at all. Perks argues that this is usually due to a lack of interest and resources on behalf of the corporations themselves.[25] He also notes that it may be because oral historians tend to focus on stories that are either individual or more openly public than organisational history allows.[26] Oral history by its very nature is a democratic undertaking, and corporations tend to sit awkwardly within the general ethos of oral history. Corporate history, however, deserves the attention of oral historians because, as Matthew Bailey and Robert Crawford put it, oral history 'holds potential to fill significant gaps in our understanding of the past, and indeed, open new lines of enquiry'.[27] Further, the democratic and therapeutic principles of oral history are likely as relevant in organisational and 'elite' settings as they are in community settings as oral history offers an opportunity to give voice to

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24 Ruohua Han, 'Building Companionship between Community and Personal Archiving: Strengthening Personal Digital Archiving Support in Community-based Mobile Digitization Projects', *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture* 48, no. 1 (2019): 6–16.

25 Robert Perks, 'Corporations are People Too! Business and Corporate Oral History in Britain', *Oral History* 38, no. 1 (2010): 36–54.

26 Perks, 'Corporations are People Too', 36–54.

27 Matthew Bailey and Robert Crawford, 'Shop Talk: Revisiting Business History and Oral History', *Oral History Australia Journal* 38 (2016): 29–35.

underrepresented employees, and may reveal discordant or alternative understand-ings and experiences.[28]

Julian Meyrick, Tully Barnett, Heather Robinson and Matt Russell assert that:

> All organisations generate a narrative that shapes understanding of their activities, managing the message of success or failure, depending on its capacity to weave together stated expectations and demonstrable proof. In time, such narrative accounts supply the primary content for official or anni-versary organisational histories.[29]

Organisations' archival needs are generally different from those of public institu-tions such as libraries, and so call for accessible approaches and the use of simpler technological platforms. When applied in community settings run by volunteers for example, a historical organisation usually requires archives that can be accessed by individuals without any specific training or digital know-how, and who may only devote a small percentage of their time or workload to managing historical material. As Sheffield notes of digital community archiving models, 'digital repos-itories require infrastructure to ensure that platforms are developed and supported over time, which can have implications for communities that cannot support these endeavours on their own and wish to remain autonomous'.[30] Similarly, the archiving system needs to present resources that can be repurposed for a range of applications, from marketing, to signage, to speech-making, to reports, to grant applications and acquittals.

With this important factor forming the foundation of the tool's design, the finished tool provides an index of primary material, accompanied by developed story summa-ries derived from oral history accounts, and is presented via interactive PDF with

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28 Sjoerd Keulen and Ronald Kroeze, 'Back to Business: A Next Step in the Field of Oral History - The Usefulness of Oral History for Leadership and Organizational Research', *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 1 (2012), 15–36; Perks, 'Interviewing in Business and Corporate Environments', 283.

29 Julian Meyrick, Tully Barnett, Heather Robinson and Matt Russell, 'What's the Story? "Credible" Narrative in the Evaluation of Arts and Culture', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 49, no.6 (2019): 375–388.

30 R. Sheffield, 'Community Archives', in MacNeil and Eastwood, *Currents of Archival Thinking*, 356.

an accompanying index in Excel. Unlike a chronological book, each component of the Story Bank can easily be read and interpreted in isolation, while also connected to other story chapters and ephemeral data, all correlated in the Excel index. While programs such as Excel have less functionality than Digital Asset Management systems (DAMS) typically used in large-scale archival operations, they have the advantage of being accessible and require little training or IT skills to use. With the flexibility afforded by the Story Bank, organisations for whom collecting and archiving stories might be a secondary function – for example, a sporting or cultural body – have access to a simple means with which to collect and store historical material.

In many ways, the difficulties experienced by small organisations mirror the difficulties we encounter when working on rural and remote community projects in Australia. Although most resources (Queensland's State Library and State Archives, for example) were geographically located close to the researchers, the organisation itself had little capacity to manage or repurpose its historical material or capture its oral history. Furthermore, a proportion of its historical multimedia had been distributed to centrally-based libraries and archives – as often tends to be the case in community projects in the regions. And like smaller or regional organisations and community groups, South Bank Corporation required a tool that could be easily used in-house, but that also supported the dissemination of stories to the wider public or other communities as desired. Given these parallels, we are particularly interested in the potential usefulness of the Story Bank for regional organisations and communities because it responds to the need to hold stories in place, while offering the possibility for them to be shared more broadly should communities wish.

ABOUT SOUTH BANK

The suburb South Bank was originally a meeting place of the Turrbal and Yuggera people, the traditional owners of the land. South Bank occupies land on the Brisbane River opposite the central business district, but in the early years after colonisation, South Bank was the CBD of Brisbane. After the floods of 1893, when much of the area was destroyed, businesses moved to the northern side of the river where the CBD stands today and South Bank became derelict, housing vaudeville theatres,

brothels and boarding houses. Malcolm Snow, CEO of South Bank Corporation from 2005 to 2012, said that he remembered:

> someone a lot older than me saying that as a proportion there were more pubs, police stations and brothels in that part of Brisbane than anywhere else. He was probably right but it was a good sort of encapsulation of just how rough it was – Expo changed all of that.[31]

The major event Expo '88 revived the area – and following a public campaign the land was reopened as public parklands in 1992. It is now one of Brisbane's best-known attractions for tourists and locals, and it is estimated that 11,000,000 people visit each year (pre-COVID-19 estimate).[32] The Digital Story Bank was used to trace this journey.

South Bank was a working-class industrial area until it was revived in the late 1980s for Expo '88. South Brisbane waterfront, 1950 (now South Bank Parklands), City Archives, Brisbane City Council, BCC-B54-712.

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31 Malcom Snow, interviewed by Grace Kirk, 25 June 2017. Transcript held by Queensland University of Technology.

32 Visit Brisbane 'About South Bank', https://www.visitbrisbane.com.au/south-bank/about?sc_lang=en-au. Accessed 20 September 2019.

South Bank itself is an important example of how corporate oral history can be powerfully entwined with a broader history of a city, a state, and even a nation. The evolution of South Bank begins with Expo '88 and ends with a city that embraced its riparian lifestyle, and the 42-hectare site has evolved at the crossroads of major residential, recreational, educational, cultural, retail, medical, and commercial developments. South Bank's history traces a key period in the evolution of Brisbane when, as one of the project's interviewees, Michael Kerry (Board Member, South Bank Corporation 1992–2004), put it, Queensland's capital 'grew up', evolving 'from big country town to city':

> I think Brisbane grew up throughout the nineties where [sic] a lot of things happened. Where [sic] a lot of things we take for granted now actually happened during that time. The outdoor dining, the ferries on the river, the busways, lots of new high-rise buildings. Expo was a catalyst for change and then of course that change kept happening.[33]

With South Bank Corporation approaching its 25th anniversary celebrations, the organisation wished to compile historical data that could be accessed and repurposed for its anniversary, and well into the future, whether creating narrative driven content for newsletters, marketing material, visitor information, blogs or other social media platforms, or simply for internal purposes.

CREATING THE DIGITAL STORY BANK

The research team drew on experience working on regional and small-scale arts projects to design the layout featuring a spine of milestones, with each chapter (people, places, events) connecting a creative story, keywords and summary, that was index-linked to documents, oral histories, and externally held ephemera. A graphic designer was then engaged to make the templates in Adobe InDesign, a widely-used desktop publishing program. The result was drawn together with an indexed summary map held in one e-document, that could also be printed and accessed as

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33 Michael Kerry, (Board Member, South Bank Corporation 1992–2004), interviewed by Grace Kirk, 25 June 2017. Transcript held by Queensland University of Technology.
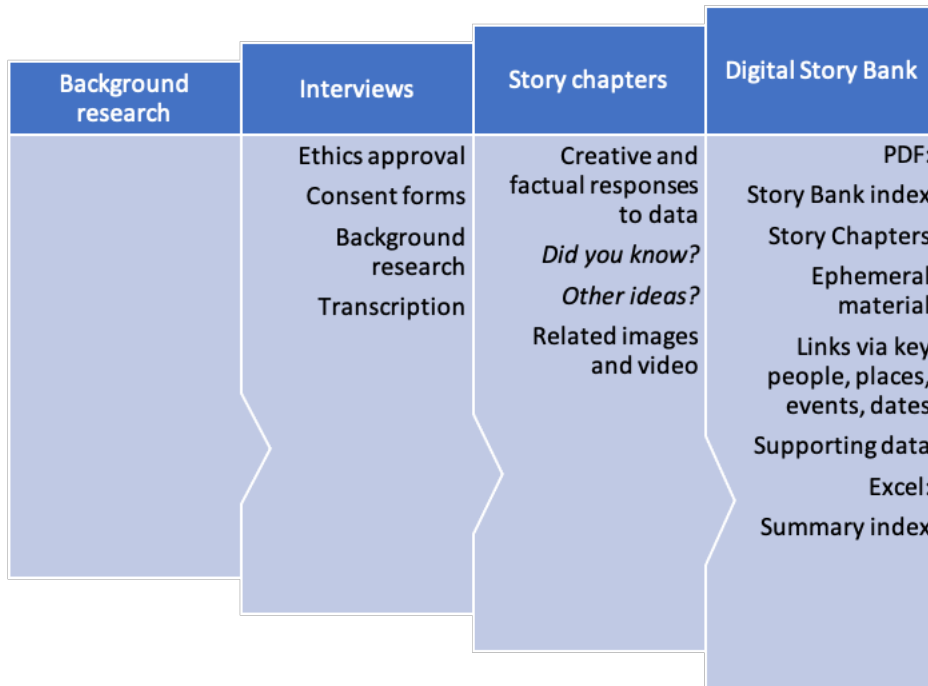
easily as a book. Over several months the QUT research team undertook to develop the pilot Story Bank, and key people, places, and events formed nodes of intersection in the Story Bank content around which it is organised. Background research informed interviews with the key people identified from boards, community, and industry in order to collect personal oral accounts of the history of South Bank. Fifteen audio interviews were recorded in situ at South Bank.

South Bank bore the brunt of Brisbane's 2011 floods and restoring the area became symbolic of the city's recovery. South Bank precinct in South Brisbane flooded, 2011. Photograph courtesy Allan Henderson, CC BY 2.0

Material was organised based on archival research and the stories arising from interviews. Researcher Grace Kirk wrote all creative story pieces, historical overviews, and profiles for the identified people, places, and events that together form twenty-eight 'Story Chapters'. [34] The Story Chapters are accompanied by relevant multimedia such as images and video and are headlined with significant dates, keywords, a summary, and accompanied by useful tools such as 'Did you know?' and 'Other ideas' segments constructed alongside the Story Chapters. This packaging of information in digestible
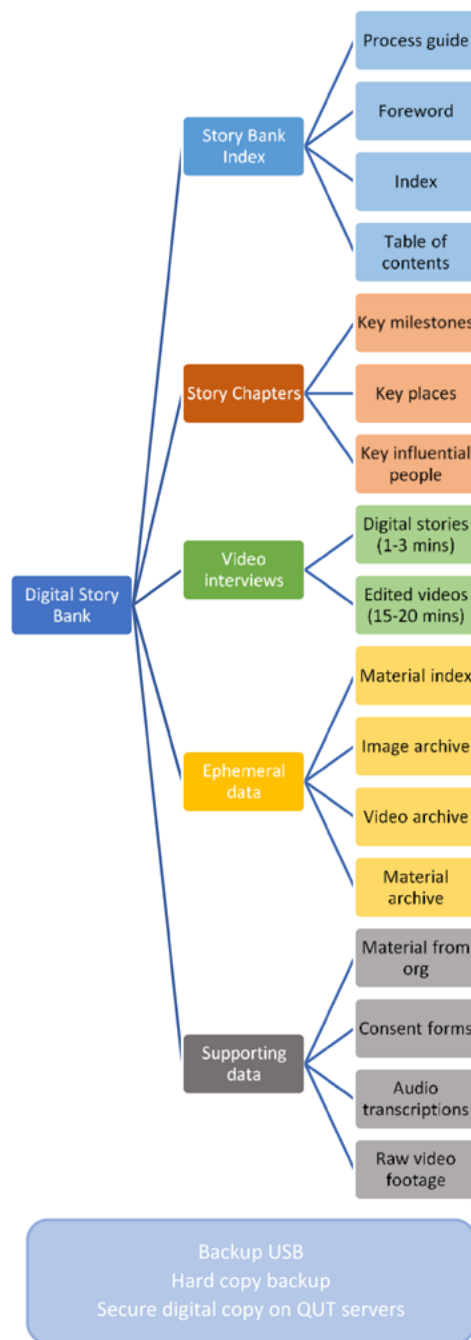
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34 Grace Kirk was the primary research assistant on The Digital Story Bank Project. She recorded the oral histories and wrote much of the creative content for the project. The authors also acknowledge the work of Lena Volkova, who was a research assistant on The Digital Story Bank project.

Creating the Digital Story Bank for South Bank Corporation

formats is simple and easy for staff to access and repurpose at any time for promotion information or public interest. The Story Bank is easily browsable, with all material readily searchable via an Excel spreadsheet 'Archive Index' for ready reference.

The Story Bank is presented in a PDF of 150 pages available in both digital and printed formats. Each component can easily be read and interpreted separately and asynchronously, while linking to other story chapters and ephemeral data. For example, a story chapter on the 2011 Brisbane floods links the reader with key people and places that also played roles in this event. Story Chapters have not been written with a specific audience in mind, but are designed to be 'lifted', edited and repurposed to suit different applications and audiences across various platforms and publications as required. Place settings, summaries, fast facts and suggestions for interesting ways to use the information also feature to help prompt engagement. In this way, the Story Bank works more as a web than an index, both referencing and cross-referencing relevant related stories, places, and media from across the archive to create the building blocks of different stories. The multimedia information referred to within the Story Bank (including archived physical records) is correlated on a master Excel database for quick reference. The ownership of stories and data stays with the organisation.

South Bank's Digital Story Bank structure

Like many research projects, we learnt a great deal from what did not go to plan as well as what did during the project. The initial proposal from QUT researchers to

South Bank Corporation included a second phase for the development of digital stories and transcripts to accompany the audio oral histories, and a collection of new images. However, in 2018 key people who had instigated the project, including the Chair of the Board, the CEO and General Manager of Marketing and Communications, left the organisation and this significant component of the project wasn't pursued after the original Story Bank was created. In 2019, when the organisation was again future-focused, Klaebe was contacted by South Bank staff asking for information about the project. Current staff were unable to locate a copy of their Digital Story Bank, and staff who had previously been involved in the project were no longer working for the organisation. Fortunately, the research team were able to provide a hard and digital copy. While not an ideal situation, one positive outcome has been to raise the research team's awareness of a shortcoming in the Story Bank's processes, as well as the renewed opportunity for more material to be added in future and for ongoing collaboration with South Bank Corporation.

This loss of the pilot Story Bank raised a question about whether the Story Bank was fulfilling its intended purpose of helping organisations manage their history *despite* staff or volunteer turnover. Considering this event, QUT researchers returned to the Story Bank's model and revised some key components. Given that the pilot hardcopy Story Bank was misplaced by South Bank Corporation when personnel left the organisation, in future iterations, QUT will seek ethics approval to securely store the data associated with the finished Story Bank on university servers so that a backup is available (the Story Bank intellectual property (IP) will remain with the commissioning organisation). Researchers were also working on the mistaken assumption that because the software used to manage the Story Bank (such as Microsoft Excel and Adobe PDF programs) is commonplace, no further support would be necessary to safeguard the files. Instead, future Story Banks will be accompanied by a simple but robust process guide for editing and saving the archive, and a password protected USB backup to ensure that this important historical archive can be recovered if original versions are lost. Another important component of safeguarding organisational history within the Story Bank will be to furnish organisations with a simple process guide for editing and saving the Story Bank, relying on its use of accessible software like Microsoft Excel and Adobe PDF programs.

FURTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE DIGITAL STORY BANK: KEEPING STORIES IN PLACE

As researchers and writers with long histories of community-engaged local history and regional storytelling work, we are also interested in the potential for the Story Bank to address the needs for small communities to keep their stories 'in place'. Community-centred or volunteer-led organisations and groups have myriad reasons for wanting to participate in or facilitate local storytelling projects which collect first-person information. Motivations include a desire to preserve community histories, and to retain local knowledge and memories of people and places. In many communities, oral history and related processes of remembering and documenting lived experiences and personal stories have formed an important part of community development work.[35] Community oral history projects are more than archival activities; rather, they are deeply social practices, tools for community engagement, for supporting social cohesion and community resilience.[36] In such projects, aims around empowerment and other social outcomes may emphasise the value of the processes of remembering, documenting and story-sharing as much as the historical resource or product.[37] Despite the varied objectives underpinning oral history projects in community and corporate settings, the long-term management of historical and narrative material collected and produced during a project is a challenge shared across contexts.

A related issue is that of storing artefacts and qualitative narrative data for the purposes of funding acquittal and the evaluation of creative, community-based

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35 See for example Helen Klaebe and Ariella Van Luyn, 'In the Wake of Cyclone Yasi: Facilitation and Evaluation in Community Narrative-Driven Projects', in Isabelle Bartkowiak-Théron and Kathryn Anderson (eds), *Knowledge in Action: University-Community Engagement in Australia* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014): 132–150; Wendy Madsen, 'Using the Past to Strengthen the Present: Intersections between Oral History and Community Resilience', *Oral History Australia Journal* 37 (2015): 56–62; Margaret Ridley, 'Community Development and Community Memory – Remembering Racism?', *Oral History Australia Journal* 40 (2018): 9–13.

36 Wendy Madsen, Sarah McNicol and Cathy O'Mullan, 'Engaging with the Past: Reflecting on Resilience from Community Oral History Projects', in Wendy Madsen, Lynette Costigan and Sarah McNicol (eds) *Community Resilience, Universities and Engaged Research for Today's World* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), 56–62.

37 R. Perks & A. Thomson, 'Introduction to the Third Edition', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge: New York, 2016), xiv.

activities such as storytelling and oral history projects. Over the past few years, researchers at QUT have developed methodologies for this purpose which incorporate digital storytelling, fieldwork, interviews and the analysis of multimedia assets. The resulting frameworks allow communities to apply evidence-based research on arts engagement to develop future investments, enhance jobs growth and liveability factors. The application of these frameworks is demonstrated in reports such as 'The impact of libraries as creative spaces',[38] 'Evaluation of Artslink Queensland's Animating Spaces'[39] and the evaluation of community narrative-driven projects delivered in the wake of Cyclone Yasi.[40] As these projects demonstrate, the aim has been to align with a larger goal of supporting the strategic development of the arts, particularly in regional areas. QUT researchers have recently begun work on a three-year Australia Research Council Linkage Project called 'The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: A Social Impact Model', which will address the long-standing problem facing regional and remote communities in Australia of how to strategically communicate and effectively evaluate the social impact of the creative arts in their communities.[41]

With these programs and the challenge of evaluation comes the challenge of how and where to archive, store and access the artefacts that are created as these programs are delivered. A key issue within this question is the relationship between what is created, the place in which this is created and where these artefacts are kept. In our experience, 'place is everything for regional communities', and those communities need solutions that acknowledge the geographical and social contexts of their experiences, histories, and self-representations.[42] As Van Luyn and Klaebe suggest,

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38 Ben Light, Kirralie Houghton, Jean Elizabeth Burgess, Helen Klaebe, Roger Osborne, Stuart Cunningham, and Greg Hearn, *The Impact of Libraries as Creative Spaces* (Brisbane: QUT Digital Media Research Centre, 2016).

39 Helen Klaebe, Elizabeth Ellison, Cate Gilpin, Grace Kirk and Kathleen Webster, *Evaluation of Artslink Queensland's Animating Spaces 2013-2015: Final Report 2016* (Brisbane: Artslink Queensland, 2016).

40 Helen Klaebe and Ariella Van Luyn, 'In the Wake of Cyclone Yasi', in Isabelle Bartkowiak-Theron and Kathryn Anderson (eds) *Knowledge in Action : University-Community Engagement in Australia* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 132–150.

41 The Role of the Creative Arts in Regional Australia: A Social Impact Model (LP180100477 Gattenhof; Hancox; Klaebe), research.qut.edu.au/raasi/.

42 Gabrielle Chan, *Rusted Off: Why Country Australia is Fed Up* (Penguin: Sydney, Australia, 2018).

storytelling projects in regional areas should empower local communities by freeing them to 'narrate their own place stories in a manner that encourages the development of a shared community worldview'.[43] Supporting communities to retain and manage their stories and histories of place is part of this process. Creative engagement not only helps draw communities together, it also draws attention to the relationship between creativity, memory and place. Van Luyn refers to work conducted by Fuller to propose that this shared community worldview can constitute a 'regional textual community', describing the reading, writing, and publishing community generated in the act of creating and sharing stories grounded in place.[44]

CONCLUSION

Organisational records can serve to illuminate histories of people, places, and events, but organisations often find their archived material too cumbersome, expensive and time-consuming to manage or repurpose. A Digital Story Bank can offer a simple framework or index using a timeline as its spine to support the organisation and accessibility of primary and secondary sources such as journals, reports, minutes, oral histories (audio and transcripts), images and video. The Digital Story Bank is a method of gathering the human stories that enrich the official record to create a comprehensive summary of an organisation's history. This can then be readily accessible internally to leaders, administrators and volunteers helping organisations better manage the large scope and scale of their organisational history.

QUT researchers engaged in 'The Role of the Creative Arts' project intend to offer the Digital Story Bank template to its regional community partners, so that stories and creative outputs created during the project can be curated, stored, and accessed in place (if they wish) along with any evaluation reports produced. The value of such a tool for communities is that it may ameliorate some of the ethical complexities and access issues associated with material being housed by larger, external institutions. It

43 Ariella Van Luyn and Helen Klaebe, 'Making Stories Matter: Using Participatory New Media Storytelling and Evaluation to Serve Marginalized and Regional Communities', *Creative Communities: Regional Inclusion and the Arts* (2015), 159.

44 Ariella Van Luyn, 'Sharing Place-based Stories using Digital Tools', *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives* (2016), 239.

may also address practical complexities of managing community artefacts, and the often fragmentary, experiential and narrative data that is created through community storytelling projects. Such artefacts are significant to communities as a means through which they author themselves, record their histories, and shape shared futures. We hope the Digital Story Bank concept offers a step toward addressing this data management quandary that many organisations and communities face in relation to their own histories, and the archival of creative projects.