



Seeing Jigamy; using an arts-based method to explore the meaning of place for an aboriginal community controlled organisation on the South Coast of NSW

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between health and place is often difficult to articulate. This paper explores the use of community mapping to understand the meaning of place for members of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation on the South Coast of NSW. The paper demonstrates that engagement in this arts-based method allows people to think deeply about place to construct a multilayered visual narrative which encompasses history, current experience, and future hopes and in doing so contributes to a critical understanding of place.

Introduction: place and well-being

The relationship between health, wellbeing and country for Australian Indigenous people¹ has begun to be described in academic literature (Burgess et al., 2005; McDermott et al., 1988; Senior et al., 2018). Burgess et al. (2005) and McDermott et al. (1988) focus on the physical health benefits of living on country, including greater access to traditional hunted and gathered foods, exercise and being away from negative influences such as alcohol, overcrowding and social disruption. It is clear however that Indigenous conceptions of health and wellbeing extend far beyond physical health. The wellbeing aspects of Indigenous people's association with place are difficult to measure but have been described through qualitative research. Senior, et al. for example, describe the health benefits of outstations in remote area contexts and explore the ways in which its Aboriginal residents engage with a sense of place and their embodied experiences of living on an outstation (Senior

et al., 2018). There has, however, been little exploration of the importance of place for Aboriginal people living in regional areas, which are areas outside of the major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane (see for example Howard-Wagner, 2017).

Indigenous connections to place are characterised by complexity, fluidity, and reflect deeply embedded feeling and emotion (Fredericks, 2009, 2013; Kingsley et al., 2018; McKnight, 2013, 2016). The complex layering of the connections between Indigenous people and place gives people strength and resilience, but it can also be threatened by disruption and damage due to natural disaster and human induced crises. The complexity and depth of the relationship between people and place which resonates in history, stories, knowledge, and emotion can be difficult to describe and describing it effectively requires time. This paper describes the use of an arts-based method; community mapping which was used to explore the meaning of place for a particular group of people.

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¹ In this paper we have used the term "Indigenous" to refer to all Indigenous peoples. "Aboriginal" is used to refer to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our project and team

Our project titled ‘a place-based model for Aboriginal community led solutions to complex health and social issues’² specifically looks at the importance of place in place-based services to explore not only the reassurance of Indigenous controlled service but the comfort of being able to access services in a place that is your own. We reconceptualise regional places with an Indigenous lens as stories embedded in places rather than seeing them as groupings of barely connected towns. Our research aims to explore the meaning and value of health and well-being services that are situated on Country for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) are the focus for our study, and we aim to highlight the significant impact ACCOs have in improving the health and wellbeing of First Nations people as they specifically aim to meet the multitude of health, social, economic, emotional, spiritual, needs of the local First Nations communities. ACCOs have designed innovative holistic approaches and service delivery models that cater to the specific health concerns of local communities (Kildea et al., 2018). However, the literature draws attention to the difficulties faced by ACCOs including the undervaluing and underfunding of the ACCO sector (Campbell et al., 2018; Deloitte Access Economics, 2016; Ware, 2013; Wearne et al., 2006) and there is a gap in the research literature about the impact of ACCOs on First Nations peoples’ health and wellbeing (AIHW, 2011; Campbell et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2022). In this project we have investigated how ACCOs operate in southeastern New South Wales, and how their effectiveness is grounded *in place*. Our project aims to highlight the innovative approaches, models and strategies, and to celebrate their resilience and demonstrate the growing need for these types of organisations and to develop a place-based model for service delivery to Indigenous communities that can have application across Australia. The project involved working closely and in collaboration with the managers, staff, and members of ACCOs located with Yuin Country along the southeastern coast of NSW, including the Twofold Bay Aboriginal Corporation, whose members participated in this community mapping study.

This is an Indigenous led project, comprised of a team of seven Indigenous and three non-Indigenous researchers, including two Yuin researchers with family connections across the region, and others with established relationships with First Nations communities over many years. Our approach was for the Indigenous members of the team to lead and conduct the research, for example to initiate the community mapping exercise and for non-Indigenous members to provide mentoring and support, particularly in the use of new methods such as the arts-based methods described in this paper.

Arts-based methods & community mapping

There has been a recent burgeoning of interest in the use of arts-based methods (Boydell et al., 2021; Powell, 2010) as researchers become more interested in participatory approaches, which re-orientate conversations to the concerns of research participants. Arts based methods aim to move beyond the limitations of traditional research methods in that they are used to stimulate, refresh, and reframe conversations. Community mapping has been described by Grassini (2012) as auto-ethno-cartography, because ‘place perception and collectively held ‘senses of place’ are inextricably linked to life histories and social scenarios’ (2012: 98). The community map, whether it be a sketch in the sand, or a complex multi-layered digital production, is not intended to be an accurate reconstruction or representation of a particular landscape

(Grassini 2012). Instead, it aims to explore people’s understanding, interpretations of and embodied experience of a particular place. These experiences may be ordinary, they may be distinct to a particular place, and they may represent something distinctive about a place and people’s connection to it (Clifford and King 2006).

The community map is both a process and an outcome. As a process, it explores group decision making and consensus. It involves a discussion of material culture, intangible social heritage, seasonality and sociality (Grassini 2012). The act of map making and thinking deeply about a place encourages people to tell stories about place and to think about their own feelings of connectivity. As a product, the community map is a unique visual representation of a particular space grounded in community history and interpretation. It becomes something to come back to and can help stimulate and re-frame further discussions about the meaning of place. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) argue for the need for critical place enquiry which interrogates how a chosen methodology engages conceptually with place. The creation of community maps reframes discussions of place from representations and boundaries created by non-Indigenous people (a map) to a representation that is created through collective storytelling and memory work of Indigenous people. The production of community maps can be ethically complex, specifically relating to who owns the knowledge that is depicted and who is entitled to view it (Strang 2010). Ethical approval was obtained from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee 1608/19). Individual consent was gained from each participant, including permission to use photographs.

Jigamy farm

Jigamy Farm, is located on the edge of the Pambula Lake, north of Eden, NSW, is owned by the Twofold Aboriginal Corporation. It was established in the late 1960s by the Bega Aboriginal Advancement Association however, Uncle Ossie Cruse was the main leader in fighting to secure land for the Youth Group and Aboriginal community. Uncle Ossie was concerned about the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal youth, he expressed his concern to the Youth Group, and together they decided to work towards building a Youth Camp. Through the Uncle Ossie Strong Network, he connected with Tom Williams, who was the Land Fund Commissioner at La Perouse, and asked him to buy land for the Youth Camp, which, he did. There was some disagreement over the purchase of the land, with Charles Perkins³ claiming the funds were to be used for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory rather than buying land for the Youth Group. To maintain ownership of Jigamy Farm, Uncle Ossie approached the Bega Aboriginal Advancement Association and asked them to take ownership to secure the land for the community.

The location of Jigamy Farm was, and remains, a place of high cultural significance to the local Aboriginal community. Jigamy Farm is a sacred place with rich cultural heritage, history and is now a prominent meeting place for local First Nations people and those that are visitors. The land is home to sacred sites such as 3000-year-old middens (the oldest on the southeastern coast), a carved shield tree and the beginning pathway to the Bundian Way, which is the Songline that connects the coast to the alpine regions (<https://bundianway.com.au/>). Middens are shell accumulations that contain the remains of shellfish gathered and eaten by Aboriginal people. In this region they are predominately formed from oyster and mussel shells (Sullivan 1981). The cultural centre which is called Wanneroo Wilber Agadoo, meaning ‘peoples of the mountain and seas’, is the gateway to the Bundian Way and it is

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³ Charles Perkins (1936-2000) was an Aboriginal activist, who championed land rights. His disagreement with Uncle Ossie described in the paper relates to an over-arching scarcity of funds and Perkins’ firsthand knowledge of the acute needs of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory who were also fighting for the rights to their land at this time.

located towards the entrance of the farm (Fig. 1). The Gateway will feature bush tucker, bush medicine, native plants, and trees that are used to make canoes and tools for hunting. Uncle Ossie's goal is to demonstrate his people's lifestyle prior to colonisation and educate people about their complex knowledge of Country. Within Jigamy Farm there is also an entertainment area where arts and cultural events are held, such as the *Giiyong* (Guy-Yoong/Welcoming) Festival (Ryan and Cruse, 2019), an art studio, camping ground and ceremonial ground. Jigamy Farm is a powerful place that is important to the local First Nations people, as it has become a safe place for them to heal, connect, strengthen their cultural identity, and continue their cultural practices as their old people have done since time immemorial.

Mapping jigamy

We were invited to meet with the participants of a group of local Community members who meet regularly at the Art Studio located within Jigamy Farm, to connect and conduct their artistic expressions (Fig. 2). There was a large central table in the room filled with art materials and the participants were seated around the table. It was a cold, rainy day, and the room was warm and vibrant, with laughter, talking, cups of tea and people enjoying working with art materials. Starting with brief introductions and small talk amongst participants and researchers, we then began discussing the idea for the map and what shape and space would be painted on the canvas. In agreement, that Jigamy Farm will be the map, two members of the research team then went outside of the studio to paint an outline of Jigamy Farm, which, is also on the edge of Pambula Lake. We prepared the canvas in the rain while

the participants were having morning tea and the lead researcher discussed the consent forms and the objective of the research project. The outline we prepared was very simple with the farm/land areas painted in green, the lake and the rivers in blue and the beach in yellow on a large canvas (Fig. 3). As seen below, another researcher was also taking drone shots of the beautiful landscape of the area Jigamy is located within Yuin country.

Prior to commencing the session, the researchers explained the community mapping activity with the community participants and held a discussion about who owns the knowledge that would be depicted and who is entitled to view it. Together the group agreed that the map produced through the activity would be formally returned to the community.

After we were done painting an outline of the map, we took it inside, cleared the central table from art materials and placed the canvas, which took, up most of the table's space. Participants were pleased with the accuracy of the map and began organising a range of brushes and acrylic paints and mixing containers. With everything finally set up we handed it over to the participants which was composed of five women and one man, and they began painting the story of how Jigamy came to be.

The most difficult part of a community mapping exercise is explaining the purpose and what is required from the participants. People may be reluctant to be involved because they doubt their artistic skills or are reluctant to make the first move. A good strategy is to encourage people to draw something simple, for example in body mapping, we get people to start with the eyes (Senior et al., 2014). In this case, we began with small white dots to represent middens. After talking further about the purpose of the project, we asked the group if



Fig. 1. Jigamy entrance sign.



Fig. 2. Jigamy Farm.



Fig. 3. preparing the canvas by providing a simple geographical outline.



Fig. 4. The middens (white dots on edge of waterways).

they could start to ‘make the map come alive’ by painting the things that were important to them. Predictably, the start was slow. The group of women were reluctant to take the first step “I’m not an artist” said one and the others nodded in agreement “she is though” pointing to another woman, and she picked up a brush and started to paint a whale in the ocean. Another woman started to paint the ancient middens that line the lake and river (Fig. 4).

It is fitting that these middens formed the first layer of the map. The middens of Pambula Lake are evidence of a 3000-year relationship of Aboriginal people with this coastal region and they are one of the most important and intact complexes of mound middens in NSW (Sullivan 1981: 81). As the white dots (painted with the end of a paintbrush) started to populate the edges of the river, a facilitator asked about their significance:

F1: Have the middens been protected?

P2: Yeah, they are registered but National Parks don’t care about that stuff.

P3: Its three thousand years old.

Once the sides of the lake were dotted with white shell middens, the map started to take more shape and it had been firmly grounded in an ancient history. The women decided to draw the buildings that made up Jigamy Farm, working together to consider the spatial relationships between the buildings:

P 1: That’s the Keeping Place, The LALC, the Land Council and then we’re here. That’s the house, these are the sheds. That’s where we are right now.

By this point, four out of the five women were actively painting the range of structures and adding trees and animals to the map. The grounds were covered with tufts of Jigamy grass from which the place

got its name: “it grows everywhere here- it is basket grass”. The oyster farms, which remain a commercial enterprise, were painted onto the lake.

Two ceremonial stories emerged at this point, and the women consulted the Elders in the room whether they could include them on the map. Two large fires were painted on the beach, to mark the place where men would call the whales in to ask them for help in the hunt (Figs. 5 and 6). The Killer whales would round up a Baleen whale and beach it on the sand for the men, and the meat would be shared between whale and

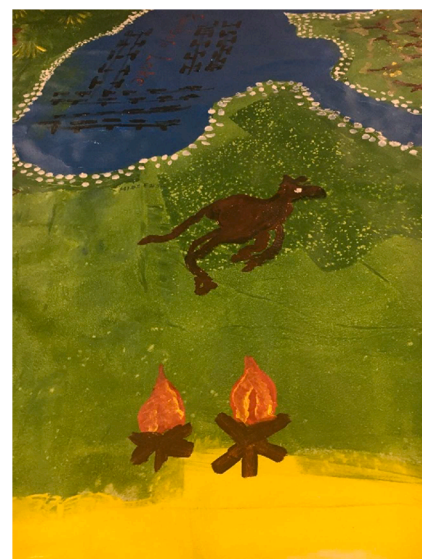


Fig. 5. The fire ceremony.



Fig. 6. The killer whale.

people :

“the story is that Aboriginal men used to go down to the beach and light two fires, they would have an opening between them two fires. And they would call the whales, killer whales in. And the killer whales would come in and he’d act out that he’s hungry or he needs food, and the killer whales then would leave him and go take all the other white killers and they would beach a whale in front of him. And then the ceremony was that all the different tribes that were gathered in ceremonies. They’d be after the blubber and the oil.”

The fire ceremony and the Killer whale The Bundian Way is the second ceremonial story that was described and depicted on the map. This is a 365 km link between the coastal and alpine communities (<https://bundianway.com.au/>) (Stewart, 2020). These linkages centre around the Bogan Moth and Whale ceremonies. Recent archaeological evidence dates Bogon moth remains at Cloggs cave in eastern Victoria back to 2000 years (Stephenson et al., 2020). However, this does not represent how the age of the Bundian Way is understood by Aboriginal People; for instance, BJ Cruse, Uncle Ozzie Cruse’s son and Chairperson of Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, has explained that the “old people have always talked about pathways”, as walking tracks are connected to stories of the Dreaming (BJ Cruse, cited in Stephenson et al., 2020, p. 117)

Two people, both older continued to watch, but not participate in the visual aspects of the map making process. Both were founders of Jigamy farm. It appeared that they were waiting to ensure that the map had legitimacy and that it conveyed meaning for them, which was demonstrated in P2’s interrogation of both the painters and questioning of the positioning of the features on the map:

P2: Are you able to explain to me what them dots are?

P1: Uncle, they are the middens.

It was not until he was satisfied with the map and how various features were portrayed that he started to provide information that he

thought should be included on the map. This new layering of storying was specific to Jigamy Farm and deeply embedded in his life history. The story he talked about was the establishment of a ceremonial place, a Bunarn Ring on Jigamy. The heart-shaped walk around a central sand filled dancing place provides a cultural overview in areas described as camps (Fig. 7):

P2: That’s why it’s called lifestyle, that’s the first camp and when you go around to the next camp um, over here that’s all the amphibians are. People use bark, dugout canoes, bark canoes, all those are feature in the next camp the Canoe Camp. And as you come around here, over here, this is the meeting place where we have gatherings, there’s a fire pit there, cook ya food, a yarn up, a yarn up area.

This place at Jigamy is not set, static; it is changing, evolving, and improving. The map, importantly, includes what is already there and what is imagined for the future. For instance, as P2 goes on to explain:

P2: Dugout canoes and bark canoes. I imagine there will be a little shelter over there. Cause I made a dugout canoe, years ago and ... I went to stand in it and my foot went straight through it.

Laughter

P2: So, it taught me a lesson. You must make bark shelters for your dugout canoes and bark canoes; those canoes need protection.

P1, was looking over P2’s shoulder as he painted the Bunarn Ring and talked about how important it was for the local language group as they used Country to reconnect with language:

P1: And then putting the words to it as we go around. It just sort of makes it easier to understand you know? Yeah, so you’re looking at it, recognising it. You’re touching it and you’re using language.

The completed map provided an opportunity for reflection on the achievement of obtaining the land, originally for a youth camp. This process was protracted and politically complex, but ultimately P2’s quest for ‘100 acres near a river’ was successful, with the help of the Bega Aboriginal Advancement Association. The land it-self was heavily vegetated and full of snakes, and it took many years to clear by hand and then begin the construction of the buildings. Clearing by hand was challenging work because this required clearing the Jigamy grass, and this was done together:

P2: All the work we do, we done it as community, and it will always be like that

P2 closed his story with a sense of vulnerability. While he was interstate in 2019, the bushfires surrounded Jigamy Farm. So far away from home, all he could do was pray. The wind changed and the fires stopped at the boundary fence. The encroaching flames and the power of prayer, symbolised by the cross, are marked on the map.

The final mark on the map, symbolising both ownership and approval was the handprint of the other Elder who had been involved in Jigamy from the beginning (Figs. 8 and 9):

P1: Actually, Aunty, you know how your family did a lot of the clearing and everything like that. Maybe you can put your handprint on here. Because your hands did all that hard work.



Fig. 7. Uncle Ossie Sketches in Bunarn Ring before painting it on the canvas.



Fig. 8. An Elder of Jigamy Farm places her hand-print on the completed map.



Fig. 9. The completed map of Jigamy Farm.

Discussion

The community map of Jigamy Farm is a multilayered narrative. It is deeply embedded in history, in the depiction of the ancient middens and the stories celebrating the whales and bogong moth hunters. But it is also forward projected, as hopes and dreams for the future are also depicted. Once the physical aspects of Jigamy were painted, it was possible to layer stories over the landscape. These included stories of the beginnings of Jigamy Farm itself, the struggles to clear the land and build the structures by hand over many years. It also included stories of vulnerability; with the bush fires that reached the very edge of the property in the summer of 2019.

The map gave people the opportunity to talk about the stories which were fundamental to the sense of identity of the community participants, such as their symbiotic relationship with the killer whales and the process of calling the whales in between two fires on the beach. The map also celebrated the importance of ceremonial linkages to other groups, most tangibly through the inclusion of the gateway to the Bundian Way, which connects coastal communities with the alpine communities. The construction of the maps was collective, but authority and depth of knowledge was deferred to and respected. In this way the body mapping process reflects sociality and people's relationships with each other (Grassini 2012). The final stamp of approval was sealed in the handprint of one of the founding members of Jigamy to represent her hard work.

The map was a powerful way of talking about place and thinking about place, and collectively remembering and storying place. The relationship between health and well-being, becomes clear. Jigamy Farm is about history, identity, self-determination, the creation of safe places and places to learn. It's a place where people can re-connect to traditional languages and culture by learning on Country. The stories participants told, as they completed the map, articulated the health and wellbeing benefits of working together to achieve a long-held dream. These were stories of individual and cultural resilience, and expressions of collective pride in their achievements. These contribute to self-determination and a sense of control of one's own destiny, both important determinants of health. These stories also provide an important focus on preservation of Aboriginal culture for the benefit of future generations. In this, the Jigamy Farm map becomes an important learning resource for the young people in the community. The methods

employed in this study provide a useful tool for other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to capture and explain deep and complex histories and associations between community and place.

The map also provided an opportunity to think about how Jigamy Farm could be developed in the future, as some aspects (particularly the Bunarn Ring) were incomplete. It was also a place of trial and error (for example the lesson about the need to store wooden artefacts out of the weather). Creating the map involved sharing stories about learning and activities for the young people, including the youth camp and learning about language and culture. This reflected another aspect of well-being (Anderson, 2006) in that Jigamy Farm was a place where people felt they were able to articulate their hopes and dreams for the future. It is also a place where people are free to experiment and try new things another important component of well-being (Zournazi 2003). All these factors are important social determinants of health, contributing to both individual and collective wellbeing. A critique of the social determinants approach is that it is often too linear and deterministic and that it fails to capture fluidity and interconnections of the determinants through place and time and that social determinants may be better understood as an assemblage which is attuned to the historical, social, political and environmental processes on people's lives (Chenhall and Senior 2018). The Jigamy map is an example of an assemblage, which acknowledges complex and layered interconnections and which accommodates change and unpredictability (such as the effects of the bushfires).

Importantly, the map is also tinged with vulnerability; its creators have experienced the tragedy of the recent bush fires, which form the edge of their map and are aware of their continuing vulnerability in the context of an increasingly catastrophic climate. The communities will to go on and plan for the future epitomises the 'gritty, keeping going kind of hope' that Head (2016, 11) argues is characteristic of resilience in increasingly uncertain times.

Uncle Ossie had watched the creation of the map and had asked questions throughout but had not participated until the end. He reflected that the map making process was "good because it gave us the opportunity and the time to really think about the things that are important".

The creation of the Jigamy community map provided the opportunity for people to think about and articulate the relationship between health, wellbeing, and place. The tangible reference point that the emerging map provided prompted people's memories and allowed

people to work together to piece together stories. The process of producing the map was self-affirming for well-being, as we could see relationships of trust, respect and support as the mapping and the conversations progressed. Importantly, the finished map will be delivered, framed, back to Jigamy and will become part of Jigamy and future learning.

Conclusion

The importance of place for health and well-being is well known, but sometimes difficult to articulate. The process of community mapping assembles the complex relationships between people, place, history, and culture and gives them tangible meaning. The map of Jigamy farm is intensely local, but also deeply enmeshed and interconnected with other places and depicted through history. The map powerfully encapsulates and demonstrates the linkages between the social determinants of health; including connection to country and culture, connection with ancestors, social cohesion, the ability to make decisions about the future and the ability to nurture families. Importantly, the map provides a picture of these which is not static, but which acknowledges that all these determinants are affected by historical forces and that they are subject to change. The map itself, framed and presented back to Jigamy becomes a visual reference to be used in teaching and advocacy. It demonstrates that methods such as community mapping, have significant potential to capture the stories of Indigenous people, that are often difficult to articulate, but which are vital to understanding the complex relationship between health and place. Through the map, and the process of making the map, we were privileged to “see Jigamy” and document the story of “how Jigamy came to be” (Uncle Ossie Cruse).

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee 1608/19). Individual consent was gained from each participant, including permission to use photographs.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Kathleen Clapham: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Kate Senior:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Marlene Longbottom:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Valerie Harwood:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Bronwyn Fredericks:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Dawn Bessarab:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Peter Kelly:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Supervision. **Bronte Haynes:** Formal analysis, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Methodology. **Fiona Sheppard:** Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft. **Kaitlen Wellington:** Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Kathleen Clapham reports financial support was provided by Australian Research Council. If there are other authors, they declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that

could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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