EXPLORING COMMON VALUES: DIVING DEEPLY INTO THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

TIREE, OCTOBER 2016

Contents

Foreword

The idea for this project emerged during my first visit to Tiree in October 2015. During my time on Tiree, partly attending the Techwave and partly having the time and space to think about both my research and my role as a researcher it struck me that as PhD students we often don't have the opportunity to go somewhere that isn't fieldwork, a conference or a writing retreat. Upon my return to Lancaster I began having conversations with fellow students in HighWire and Professor Gordon Blair, who all supported the idea of developing a project that enabled a group of students from across the Digital Economy Network Doctoral Training Centres to visit Tiree and experience it for themselves.

During the development of the project the aims of fostering cross-disciplinary research skills and creating a temporary research community emerged. Tiree felt like the ideal place to try and make this happen. We would collectively like to thanks the Digital Economy Board for funding a project that enabled us to have the freedom to explore these aims without the necessity for traditional academic outputs being placed upon us, which was a rare opportunity indeed.

We would also like to thank Felicia, without whom project could not have gone ahead. Felicia was instrumental in the development of the original bid and with the difficult logistics involved in sending ten students to a remote island in the Inner Hebrides. Professor Alan Dix was also instrumental in developing the project and ensuring our time at the Techwave was both enjoyable and productive. His hospitality and enthusiasm for our project gave us confidence to explore the island and engage with some of the people who live there.

As you will see in our reflections, the experience had tremendous impact on us, both personally and as researchers. Our aim is to stay in touch with one another, collaborate on various projects and to hopefully return to the beautiful island of Tiree.

What follows is a brief explanation of the two projects we carried out, personal reflections on our time in Tiree and a brief description of a reflection session we held on the final day. We aim to carry out further reflection after several months in order to try and capture longer term impacts of the project.

Louise Mullagh

Louise Mullagh

I visited Tiree in October 2015 after my supervisors suggested I look at alternative approaches to the phenomenon of the hackathon that don't take place in cities. The Techwave intrigued me, partly as there were no bold claims as to how it might solve issues through technology, partly because it takes place in a remote island in the Inner Hebrides. Tiree is windy, very windy, and bleak, but also beautiful and unique. The visit remained with me, making me think more in depth about the impact place has upon our experiences with technology and for my own research interest, open data.

On my return to Lancaster I began thinking about my next visit and how it would be a great opportunity for other researchers to take some time out and experience this unique place and event.

I must return…

It wasn't so much the being on Tiree that had an impact on me, but my return to Glasgow on my way home. Being surrounded by so many people and having immediate access to the internet felt too much after a week of being on an island inhabited by 650 people with somewhat iffy connections. Like returning to reality after a holiday, the difference in the way people live their lives according to their location stuck with me and had a significant impact upon my research. I knew I wanted to return to Tiree but I wanted to share that experience with other students. Not just the Techwave, but the chance to operate outside of normal PhD life for a week, to take a step back from being so focussed on the digital.

Sharing values does not ensure success

Peter encountering Joe's VR headset outdoors, an

Being part of the Digital Economy Network is a privilege, but the world of technology moves at such a pace that it often feels like trying to shoot a moving target. Over the last four years at HighWire I have shared many conversations with Justin about our relationships with technology, how values affect our relationships with and impact upon technology. We had several conversations with Professor Gordon Blair who encouraged us to apply and with the support of Felicia we put our application in.

Once we had received confirmation that the project had been successful it was time to start thinking about what we might do when we got there. It was important that we gather a group of students who would be interested in taking part in this project, one that would remain simultaneously vague and focussed on particular aims. It felt important that we didn't impose a strict timetable for activities and research, that we would decide upon themes before we went, but once there we would be inspired and motivated by our surroundings and the people we met. This made me nervous as there was potential for drift, that the week would go by and we would have done lots of walking and talking, but nothing to really distinguish between a holiday and a research trip. Also, sharing values didn't ensure success.

Organising complex logistics of getting ten people from different parts of the country was challenging, as was trying to ensure everyone got something of

Personal reflections: Louise Mullagh

Tiree from the air – on the approach from Glasgow

value out of the week. Before we arrived this made me nervous, but it was clear as soon as Justin and I met everyone off the plane and ferry, that somehow this was going to work. The call for participation naturally selected participants who were willing to spend nearly a week in an unusual environment with barely any phone or internet access. The call also meant that everyone was prepared to work out what we would do once we arrived, although the scaffolding was put in place before we got there, with the ideas for a session around open data and the telephone box project.

I was excited but nervous as we all gathered in the cottage on the first evening. Would everyone blame me if it all went wrong? What if someone just wandered off, never to be seen again? My fears were unfounded though and as the week progressed I began to realise how lucky we all were to be sharing this experience with one another.

What did this mean to me?

The project took around a year to arrange and so was on my mind for a long time, so it feels strange to be writing about it in the past-tense. During that time I felt no pressure from DENS to deliver, nor from my fellow researchers and for that I am grateful. The project enabled me to gain valuable experience in organising a research project, albeit a very small one and I feel privileged to have spent a week learning and sharing with such motivated researchers and islanders. During the reflection session two words that kept repeating were "openness" and "trust", both of which for me sum up this project. The outputs in terms of the data walk and the telephone box pieces were valuable, but for me it was the sharing between the group, of methods, experience and kindness that will remain with me. The group trusted me to put this together and that something interesting would emerge and DEN trusted me, and the group, to go away for a week and explore research with one another.

It is acknowledged by many that the PhD journey can often be a lonely one, with large periods of time spent alone. The DEN Doctoral Training Centres do enable students to share their journey with others, which is valuable, but coming together across centres and across disciplines, for me was incredibly valuable. Workshops and conferences are often useful experiences, but they are often intensive in a different way, with short periods of time being given for talks or networking and many distractions. Tiree was intensive, but in that it enabled us to spend time talking with people and sharing ideas and experiences, with few distractions. Perhaps my strongest memory will be standing on the shore at sunset with the group, playing with Joe's VR headset and just being immersed in the experience of that place and appreciating what we had managed to put together.

What did I learn?

Many things, but primarily that he Digital Economy Network is full of incredibly enthusiastic researchers who really care about how technology impacts the lives of people and place. Being part of this project made me feel incredibly lucky to be part of this network.

Watching the cloud roll in

Justin Larner

My involvement with the Exploring the Digital Frontier workshop in October 2016 started about a year before, when Louise and I talked about how a location where Internet access couldn't be taken for granted could stimulate reflection on the role connectivity played in people's everyday lives. Her recent experience of participating in the October 2015 Tiree Techwave event inspired the choice of Tiree as the venue. My motivations for participating in the event included that it could be an opportunity to explore the potential for design techniques in uncovering the values held by stakeholders. The potential availability of funding from the Digital Economy Network sharpened our ideas, taking shape as a project to bring 10 students from the EPSRC funded Centres for Doctoral Training to the Tiree Techwave, staying in two cottages on the island. The project aimed to explore what it meant to be on the "digital frontier" and how a physical sense of place could be influenced by its digital representations. Louise led a successful bid to the Digital Economy Network in spring 2016, with funding awarded in April, then organised the trip with Vanessa, Joe and myself contributing.

We had lots of ideas about what might happen during the time on Tiree, including mapping, open data, open hardware, artistic interpretations of digital data and surveillance in a disconnected society, but in the end the work on Tiree was inspired by their situation and how information and communication technology was changing on the island. At the Techwave introductory session, Rhoda Meek talked about how BT were in the process of decommissioning all but one of the island's 12 telephone boxes, while mobile connectivity was still poor across the island. She had led a community initiative to buy the redundant phone boxes and invited Techwave participants to come up with ideas of how the boxes could be re-purposed. This re-purposing became the focus of our work on the island and that of other Techwave participants.

There were two main stages in our work on the island, which could be framed in terms of research *for / through / into* design. The Data Walk on Monday was about gathering participant's thoughts during a walk in small groups from the Rural Centre to Kenovay, which resulted in a wide range of perspectives from the DENs group, other Techwave participants and islanders. These perspectives on what was data and where it could come from and be used were thus research *for* design.


The Phone Box Freefall on Tuesday took what was for me a very interesting approach. Each participant was encouraged to visit a phone box for an hour, bringing with it their ideas, assumptions and reflections to their time with their phone box. Participants were encouraged to take a reflexive and creative approach. These ideas and reflections were all then brought together in a group exercise. The individual engagement followed by a group sharing and reflection section could potentially avoid the groupthink that often is a problem for any such exercise. The discussion revealed a range of responses, from purely technical enhancements that could be made to the phone boxes to more artistic interpretations, including poetry and drawings inspired by their box and its location. This stage corresponds to research *through* design, where the different interpretations and ideas could be brought together to create an overall design for re-purposing phone boxes in an isolated rural location.

Personal reflections: Justin Larner

The last stage, research *into* design, can be through reflection on our overall approach, where each participant brought their ideas, perspectives, knowledge and designs - and their own methodology. The range of ideas that came out of the group session following the individual time with the phone boxes indicates that such a parallel process could be a powerful design method.

Particular memories of the event for me include:

- The deep silence of the island, free from the background hum of everyday life in urban areas.
- Walking along the beaches, not for nothing Tiree is compared to Hawaii.
- Visiting the radar dome, which seemed to grow as we approached it.
- Finding the restaurant in the middle of nowhere.
- The conversations with other participants, particularly Joe and Vanessa, which helped deepen my understanding of emergent methodologies and contributed to the Freefall exercise.
- The walk to the mysterious and spooky Ringing Stone, getting to the stone at sunset and feeling that we were truly experiencing the spirit of Tiree.
- The feeling, as participants gave feedback on their hour with their phone box, that something very powerful was happening. Joe's videos and photos, which gave me a new perspective on the event.
- Louise giving out Tunnock's Caramel Wafers on the plane back to Glasgow, this completed the whole experience nicely.
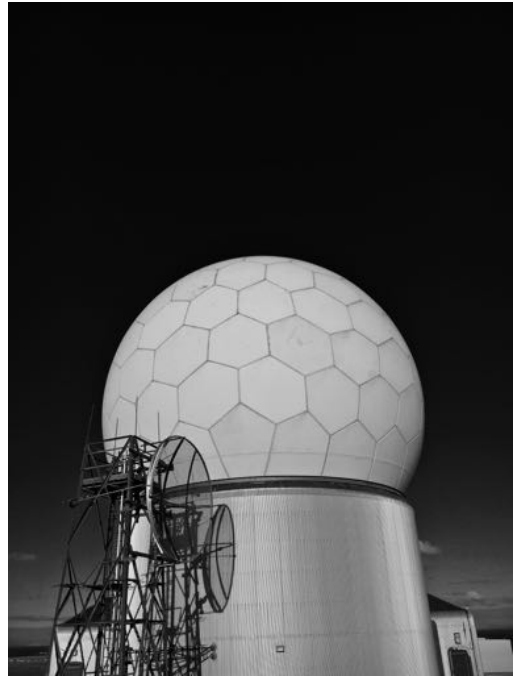
I felt privileged to work with such a bunch of people, where we created a successful research methodology there and then. In particular, we were able to overcome the typical group processes that happen on these sort of events to undertake a powerful joint process of discovery. This discovery can continue, as I'm sure that the bonding and team-work won't be confined to the few days on the island.

My thanks go to my fellow participants and particularity to Louise, who put in much hard work organising the trip so successfully. I'd also like to thank Alan Dix, who worked very hard during the event to ensure that we were made welcome and could engage with local people and other Techwave participants.

Peter Craigon

Tiree techwave with the DEN in October 2016. I'm tempted to say you wouldn't understand, you weren't there, but I'll give it a go. In my world centred on a personal project in the final stages of my PhD, writing and rewriting, staring at a screen, working and reworking why would I bother to take a week out for something seemingly unrelated?

When we landed I met a group of like-minded people who had looked at the opportunity and instead of asking why, had instead asked why not? This will be the overriding memory from Tiree, an ethos of what research should be about; creativity, community, grounded in the real world, collaboratively exploring real world issues with real communities in a real place. Build that and the impact and outputs will come.

I spent nearly a week with a group of fellow PhD students and yet I could tell you little about their PhDs. We weren't defined by our work in Tiree, we were researchers but not elevator pitches, working together to explore the Techwave problems of data on Tiree and the phone boxes. Disconnected from the Internet but far more connected to each other and the research challenges we faced. The sheer variety and quality of responses a testament to the creativity, talent and investment of everyone involved. The place, atmosphere and structure allowed this to flourish.

To make this happen takes trust, vision and courage from the DEN and particularly Louise and those from Highwire who put everything together. It was a privilege to be involved. When looking back on my PhD, then this is what research will mean to me, not poring over words and papers in a solo academic project, but engaging with people, communities and places. These real world research skills and impacts, hard to quantify, but much more enduring flourished in Tiree. A result of a group and situation that instead of asking why, asked why not?

Vanessa Thomas   20 October 2016

REFLECTIONS FROM TIREE

"Put your words into the fire." *- Patrick Watson*

I've been back on the mainland for just over a week now and I'm still unable to clearly articulate many of my thoughts about Tiree.

Tiree felt like an emotional and interpersonal rollercoaster, the likes of which I haven't willingly subjected myself to since 2014 when my M.Res cohort undertook the HighWire Deep Dive at Brathay. Peter (Craigon) and Joe (Lindley) participated in that, too, and I suspect their presence made the similarities between events feel all the more real…

But perhaps that's not a helpful reflection. As I think back to my time on Tiree, several unforgettable experiences pop into my head:

- The road trip up to Oban, the conveniently overbooked ferry (spontaneously making room for my first distillery tour!), and the ferry ride to Tiree. Constantly checking my phone to see when I was out of mobile signal, feeling some sort of uneasy excitement.

- Alan Dix, shouting out of his car window at Joe and I, just as we were about to embark on what would be a misguided attempt to find our lodgings.

Personal reflections: Vanessa Thomas

- That awkward first night of chats, which suggested that strong personalities and split opinions might make for a difficult week. Then watching—and engaging in specific conversations to make—that awkward tension break down, and seeing bonds form amongst my colleagues.

- Late and latelate night conversations with my interesting and inspiring housemates, who taught me soso much about the world and academia. I couldn't have asked for a more interesting group of people to lodge with. So much gratitude to them.

- The privilege of having the time, space, and freedom to cycle around the island, visiting every phone box, writing a haiku about each phone box, and coming up with an absurd yet playful activity for my peers—an activity they embraced to a degree I hadn't expected and couldn't have asked for! Again, I have so much lingering respect for and gratitude to them all!

Joe, Delvin, Justin and Hanne climbing on the cliffs near the ringing stone. 12 October 16.

- Drinking several pints at Duncan's brewery (I can remember his name, but I cannot remember his brewery or restaurant's name! How telling!), cycling home with Joe and Peter, having a wee lie-down on a road lit by incredibly bright stars, and using the phone in Heylipol to call my parents in Canada (a phone call worth every penny of that £5!).

- Our final presentations, the sheer joy of having a local (Frances) agree to undertake a phone box visit, and then the trek out to the Ringing Stone with Joe, Delvin, Hanne, and Justin.

I'm not sure what else to tell you about, to be honest…

"It's Vanessa! She's drunk-dialing us from an Island in the Atlantic, and she's getting paid to do this."

- MY DAD (ON THE PHONE)

I think I grew a bit as a person while I was on Tiree. I think Tiree's isolating and stunning setting, as well as the openness and honesty of my colleagues, forced me to be more vulnerable and trusting with and to them than I otherwise would have been (I am often a very guarded person, especially in group scenarios). I think I was reminded of where I came from and how fundamentally important that is to me, even though I'm currently thousands of miles from home, in a culture I don't always "get".

Personal reflections: Vanessa Thomas
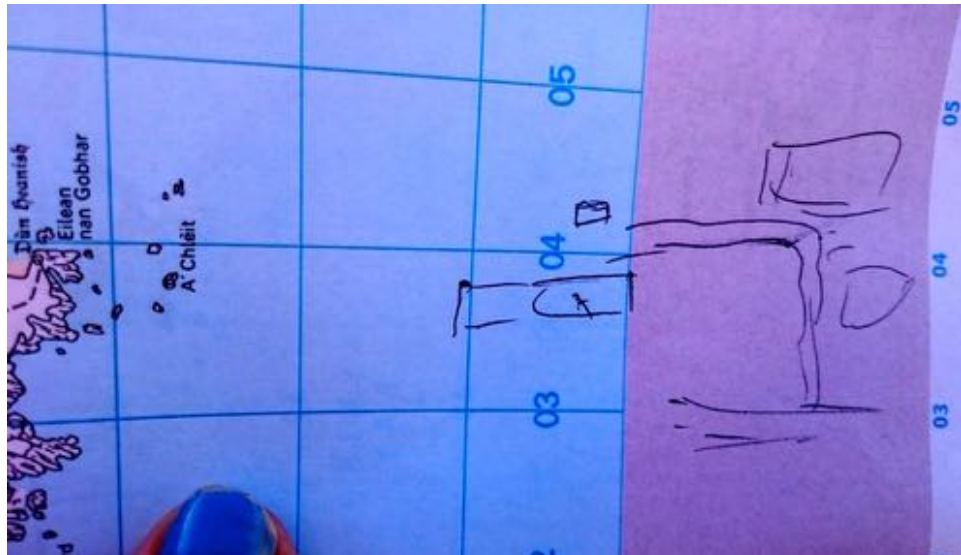
Alan's hand-drawn directions to Rachel's dinner. *Somehow* we got lost, but managed to find our way with a bit of luck (and the help of Amanda's amazing family).

What else can I say, really?

I loved that Tiree's infrastructure forced us to collaborate with and be courteous to locals. By that I mean: single track roads forced me as a cyclist, and my peers as drivers, to not move so quickly and to make space for others. Infrastructural reciprocity. We waved at locals. We spoke with locals, oftentimes quite casually, and sometimes when we were lost.

I didn't miss the Internet. I became anxious when I knew I'd have access to it again. I became aware of that anxiousness somewhere around the two-hour mark of our return-ferry to Oban. It sucked.

I felt really, genuinely welcome on Tiree. I grew to *adore* every one of my DEN colleagues. I wish I could see them regularly, but alas…

At the very least, I hope that I can work with some of them again. I hope I can call them friends. I hope I get to return to Tiree. And I hope I get to continue to have the incredible privilege of being able to play around with ideas, experiences, and things, in ways that challenge me, my assumptions, and my peers.
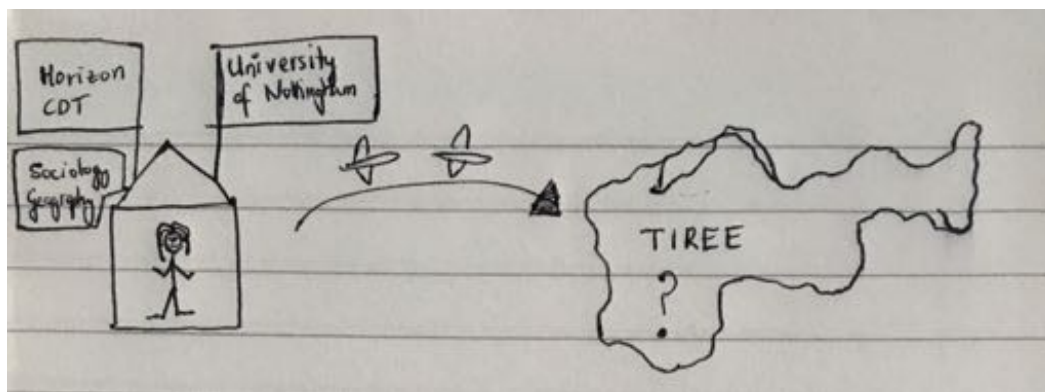
…

Most of all, though, I hope that Tiree was the beginning of something.

Of what, I'm not sure. But I'm looking forward to finding out.

Thanks *so much* to everyone involved. Love,

Judit Varga
Prologue

At first I wasn't sure what to expect of the Tiree trip and the Tech Wave. Sitting in my office at the Sociology department of the University of Nottingham, my imagination was inspired by previous Horizon and Digital Economy Network (DEN) events that I had attended (e.g. the DEN summer school). But the plans for Tiree felt different. In my mind is was an unknown, distant place, a setting for potential adventures, but adventures little defined, stories that had yet to be told.

Episodes

I travelled to Tiree with Horizon colleagues and we met the Others on the island. As we arrived, I quickly got *a* sense of the place, its history, the landscapes and the strong ties between the residents. I also quickly understood that our activities were planned with the intent to facilitate creative discussions and collaboration to emerge *during* the trip. But little had I known at that moment just how much of a treasure this structure holds.
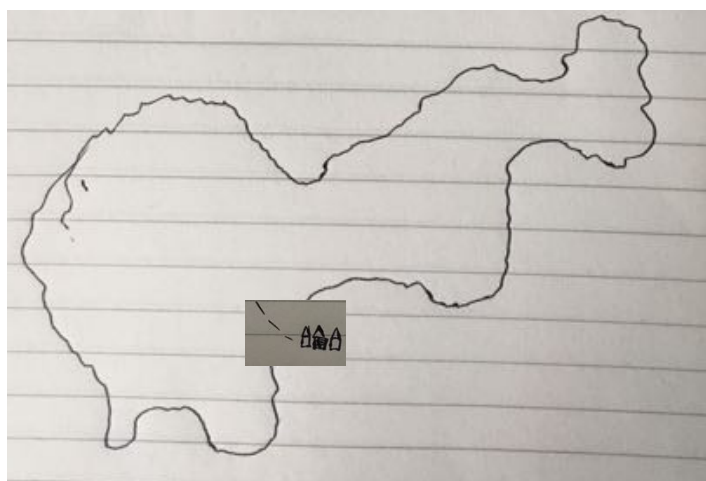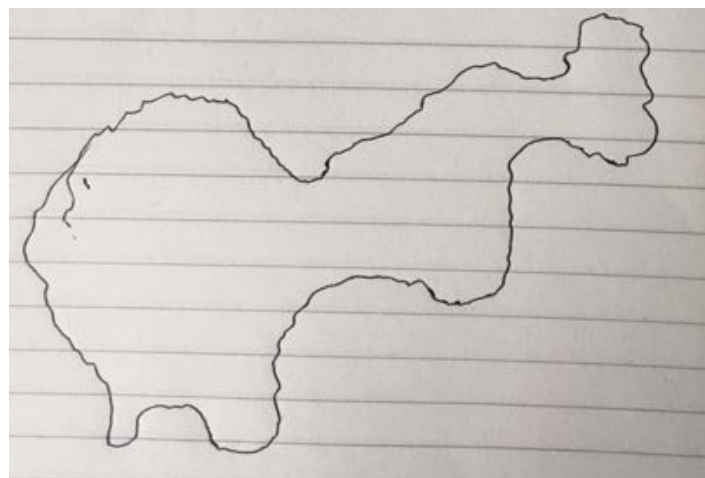
From the start it was essential for us to keep an open mind, to turn to one another and to tune our senses to Tiree. At other events, activities usually are fairly pre-defined and structured. As a result, the places that host the events are primarily defined in functional terms (e.g. the building where we get breakfast, the seminar room, and the place where we socialize afterwards). A significant aspect of agency at such events constitutes of enacting and enabling the pre-defined structure. On Tiree there was little pre-defined order. We had to negotiate visions, interests, preferences and habits so that we could explore the island and create meaning. It came down to every one of us to produce a creative environment for ourselves and for the team,

and to ensure that our activities had the potential to contribute to Tiree life. *In my opinion, creating meaning in a little known, non-standardized and open minded situation requires and fosters engagement, collaboration and reflection. The lack of fixed expectations allowed us to create projects that made justice to our diverse perspectives, impressions of Tiree and experiences with Locals. The opportunity to contribute to and shape the* <u>*meaning*</u> *and structure of the event felt hugely empowering, and it is a stance that I have brought back to Nottingham with me.*

During the days we spent on Tiree, 'my Tiree' became populated with impressions of the landscape (contrary to popular belief, we even found a few trees! ☺), island life, research projects, research methods, group discussions, telephone boxes, windsurfers, kite surfers and perspectives on the Digital Economy. Everywhere I looked I saw picturesque views and colleagues with thought provoking and inspiring stories, including personal and professional experiences about technology and society. It felt like being in an immersive virtual reality game, with nothing else around, in one of the least technology-heavy environments I have seen in the UK. I also soon began to feel the trust that participants had towards each other, towards the Island, and that residents have towards each other and visitors. On Tiree, there is no need to lock doors and cars. Between ourselves, we trusted our ability to collaborate, engage and listen to each other and to co-create meaning.

The shared immersion in Tiree provided an instant common ground for our temporary research community. Our daily activities mainly consisted of taking walks around the island, having discussions at our cottages and on the road during the day and at night, going to the Rural Centre and taking part in research activities. Every day we discovered new parts of the island. Thanks to the deeply experiential, open ended and dynamic nature of the walks and drives, my memories are situated in the embodied narrative of the trip. Among others, I learned about open data, diverse perspectives on hackathons and smart cities, sustainable HCI (and business innovation), design fiction, HCI and international volunteering, politics and video games, critical cartography,

refugees and social media, product design and even the PhD process. We also discussed the relationship between computing and social science, the ethics of design and sustainable community development.

The intersection between characteristics of Tiree (rural, remote), ongoing local projects and our academic interests (i.e. the relationship between technology and locals' lives) gave rise to two research workshops. First, in groups of 5 (that included Local Residents and ourselves), we went for a walk on the Island, and reflected on the potential of 'data' (defined in the broadest possible sense) to enrich Tiree life. This project aimed to engage the currently fashionable 'smart city' notion and reflect on the potential tensions between the 'smart city' discourse and rural, island life. After the walk, we discussed ideas and reflections at the Rural Centre. The walk brought forth various experiences of Island life, including remoteness, the crucial role of weather, intermittent power outings, but also the enjoyment of landscape and relaxation uninterrupted by (digital) technologies. Second, we engaged with an ongoing Tiree project that aims to re-design and re-imagine the Island's 12 red telephone boxes. The Tiree City Council has recently purchased the telephone boxes, and Islanders are looking for ways to engage the boxes with Tiree life. In order to understand the existing plans, we chatted to the Lead of the local phone box project. She came to the Rural Centre every day, which allowed us to chat to her as a group as well as on an individual basis. Given that this activity was enacted by us (and not locals), this ensured that our activities were both in sync with local efforts and our academic interests. On the fourth day of the trip (by this time, we had a sense of Tiree Life), each of us spent an hour with a phone box. This gave us the opportunity to engage with people as well as animate and inanimate agents in ways that suited us. The ideas and reflections that we created will form part of a report that we will give to the Islanders. It is our hope that the report will act as an agent in local discussions about the future of the Tiree red telephone boxes.

Epilogue

I think that it takes a special sensitivity and insight to create scaffolding that enables meaning to be created but does not impose normativity. Louise did an amazing job in her role as the main organizer with creating such a space. Likewise, Louise & Johanna and Vanessa did an excellent job in coordinating our two research workshops, and Jo in 'driving discovery'. Finally, Alan's Tiree Tech Wave does an outstanding job in welcoming contribution without imposing meaning.

The Tiree trip was a personal and professional journey that highly rewarded reflection, engagement and participation. The more thought you put in, the more return there was, because we had to imagine, create and populate 'our Tiree'

Hanne Wagner

My experience of the DEN project on Tiree could be best described as a big 'breath of fresh air'; and that is not solely due to the genuine good air on the island, especially when coming to it from a city with recorded air quality problems such as Nottingham.

When doing a PhD it is easy to get lost in one's own work. Having thus the chance to spent a couple of days away from my usual working environment while collaborating on a Digital Economy related project was a much welcomed change.

The project call and its eventual realisation were both open enough for every member of the research project to contribute with their own background and methods. While maybe not sounding like an extraordinary achievement for an outsider, it is in my book when considering just how different everyone's approaches were. There were those of us who are used to a more structured approach with focus on quantitative methods on one side, whereas others preferred more qualitative

Hanne by the Golf Ball (radar)

and/or critical work that may at times prefer emerging practice over prescribed approaches.

In other circumstances this kind of set up might have ended up in both sides choosing to either 'not get' or ignore the other's approach, leading to deadlock or split up groups at worst as is apparent even in many bigger research groups. Fortunately, our group decided that, instead of being divided by our differences, we would embrace diversity and respect and incorporate a variety of approaches in the work we did. Moreover, we did not stop at respecting each other methods, but went a step further and agreed to take part in the other's practice. It was this exchange of perspectives, concurrent with fruitful discussions of ideas and knowledge, that made my experience of Tiree so special. It was as much a 'working project' as it was a vehicle for (professional) growth and intellectual simulation in a way that a regular academic work environment rarely allows for due to everyone's other (work) obligations and the restrictions of everyday life.

In addition, being at a fairly remote location probably also played a role in this. Not just working, but also living (and cooking) together in equal measures as well. It gave us more time and space then we would normally have to get to know each other as well as provide many chances to reflect on life on the 'mainland'. Doing a PhD can be quite an isolating experience at times, thus having an in-depth opportunity to network and socialise with other research students was a much welcomed chance to realise that many of us, although our projects and CDT's focuses may be quite different, are in a similar situation after all. Knowing that I am not entirely alone with my PhD related struggles was greatly comforting for me.

Finally, and this is probably especially interesting and important from a research management and funding point of view, I felt like the project enabled us to have direct impact on Tiree's island community. While some of it might have only been on a grassroots level and will need a lot more time and resources to properly take off, it nevertheless felt significant to me. Working with members of the community also provided a good reminder that research should not just be done for research's sake, but ideally should also help to better people's life.

Obviously, I can only really speak for myself, these are my reflections after all. But I doubt that my experiences were very much different from those of many of the other project members. Tiree is a special place allowing for unique experiences, which made this probably the best DEN funded activity I have taken part in so far.

Delvin Varghese

What attracted me to Tiree?

I responded to the DEN call for two reasons:

- a real-world technology application for my PhD interest (which was at the time focussing at low-cost technologies for resource-constrained settings in developing world contexts). So the Tiree trip was very much aligned with my research interests, especially seeing what resource-constrained settings would look like in the context of a rural Scottish island.
- the uniqueness of Tiree was also a factor, as id not been to the Hebrides before. The chance to explore this with other DEN network students was too good an opportunity to miss.

The application process was also straightforward, and the availability of a funding was a huge reason for considering the Tiree trip.

Research colleagues

Once I arrived in Tiree and got a chance to meet the others, I knew it was about to be a good trip! The others on the trip were a nice, friendly group of researchers and I enjoyed getting to know them. As a first year PhD student, I learnt a lot from those further along in their PhD journey.

I also enjoyed sharing accommodation with them, which gave us all a better chance to find out more about each others' lives. Intriguingly, we spent very little time talking about our individual PhD's but rather, talking more about our institutions, our interests, and just sharing our life in general. This was a great opportunity to meet other like-minded people, and share hopes/worries that we perhaps

don't usually get an opportunity to voice with others in our respective institutions.

It was good to get to know the working cultures of other CDT places like Lancaster, Nottingham etc. from the individuals who came from there, as that provided a comparative lens through which I could analyse my own experiences at Newcastle. Again this was very illuminating and reassuring at the same time. I would say that this part of the trip was even more valuable than the research aspect of the trip.

I am particularly grateful to Louise, who was a fantastic organiser. She held the right balance between meticulous planning and 'creativity gone wild'! The trip didn't have a well-laid out itinerary (unlike what we are used to in our day-to-day research events). Despite this, all of us rallied around what we felt was the best approach to undertake each day and we executed it satisfactorily. It was fun to be part of a team like this. It also enabled us to enjoy the Island a bit more, and ensure we had plenty of rest. I particularly saw my visit to Tiree as a more-relaxed research trip (again, away from the hectic schedules of everyday life), and Louise's general relaxed approach very much helped me in enjoying the trip! Thank you again, Louise!

Tiree, Tech-wave and Alan

We were all blown away by Tiree. It is such a beautiful island and

Personal reflections: Delvin Varghese

its remoteness adds to that beauty. It was great to meet the enigmatic Alan Dix as well, and we had many fascinating conversations. The Techwave, which I previously thought was a big tech event/hackathon, was a loosely-structure, emergent workshop, and that was refreshing to see! We had a lot of fun being creative with our workshop ideation and even reflecting   on what counts as a 'workshop outcome'.

We had a chance to engage with the Islanders at the Tech-wave too, and it was good to see locals so engaged with the process, and their general positivity and curiosity for technology.

Last impressions & what I will take away..

Perhaps, my biggest take-away from the trip is just how good the trip went. I had a great time taking in the beauty of the island on our walks, enjoying each other's company, learning from the more-experienced researchers, meeting Alan and the friendly islanders etc. In hindsight, everything went according to plan, and there is not a single thing i would change about it.

A big thanks to Felicia for doing the hard work behind the scenes, and thanks to my colleagues who made it a fun trip. I hope to see you all again in the   future!

Matt Voigts

I'm going to be boring and write my reflections in regular-old, paragraph prose, written while I'm snacking on chocolate from our trip.

As an ethnographer by training, I've believe in the value of spending time getting to know a place, without an extensively-booked schedule of things to do, places to be, and studies to run. The Tiree trip wasn't ethnographic-length, but it was a good length of time for us students in a place with fresh air and room to figuratively and literally breathe. Other DEN events – like the summer school – are good at being what they are, but here gave us time to get to know each other on a more relaxed schedule, think, and chat about the PhD life in ways that in other contexts might be divided between seminars and pub banter.

As for what we *did* produce, it was infectious to see the enthusiasm that people brought when allowed moderately-structured freedom to try something new. Our collaborations continue. It was likewise refreshing to to take some downtime – or time to do PhD work – as needed. The 'Techwave' order – part vacation, part conference, part workshop, part casual chat – was not what island life *was* or *is* intrinsically (lest we parrot the 'golly life's so simple out here in the fields away from a mobile signal!' cliché), but the place did lend itself to us pleasantly using it for what we wanted it to be for a few days. And, of course, we met the locals. On a small island, people seem to stand out a bit more. Coming from a rural place myself, I could relate to the people we met who came out for the Techwave – some who came to Tiree for the life it offered, one who is the awesome Alan Dix, some who came back, and others looking to leave when they can. I've got a painting on my work desk from Tiree. Having to go to the next town (or island) over for certain amenities British urbanites get at the next tram stop isn't odd for a lot of the world. There's a danger of trying to chase a mythic cutting edge in the 'Digital Economy' and the general academic quest for research novelty, when the reality of lived practice everywhere is a mesh of old, new, common and unique. Tiree was a good reminder of how all that could be configured, applicable as its back to the PhD workdays.

Johanna Walker

1.   Raised my awareness of the DEN through the broad, inclusive nature of the CFP

Prior to receiving the Call for Proposal I had found few of the DEN activities related to my work. I often found them very specific in their content and exclusionary to my work. However, the open, unbounded nature of this call enabled me to engage with it and find my own route to participation.

2.   Raised awareness of the individual DENs

While researching the Call for Proposal I visited the DEN website for the first time and read extensively about the work and focus of the other CDTs and the larger mission of the DEN.

3.   Increased likelihood to engage with the DEN in future

I now review the DEN event offer more frequently and plan to attend the Data Publics event in Lancaster in March.

4.   Increased ability and likelihood to recommend DEN activities to other members of the Web Science DTC

I will recommend activities such as this research retreat to other members of the Web Science CDT, especially for the networking, research, writing and opportunities to experiment with methods and ideas in a productive space.

5.   Discovered potential for collaboration

A specific desired outcome of the research trip was stated as:
"By staying together in two nearby cottages we aim to create a temporary research community that acts as a starting point for collaboration and research outputs, but also to enable students to have time to think, write and explore the island."

As a result of this I was able to collaborate during the trip on running a 'walkshop' we described as a 'Datawalk', responding to an emergent methodology for community engagement with data. As well as working with many DEN students on this I collaborated in writing up a paper based on this work, and am aware of other collaboratively-written papers that are planned between other students based on this walkshop.
In the future I hope to collaborate with another attendee on a paper engaging critically with the practice of hackathons, one of the three cornerstones of EU open data policy.

6.   Increased awareness of inter/cross/post-disciplinary possibilities and challenges

Although I have written a number of collaborative papers in the past these have been within my own discipline or specific area of study. The open nature of the work schedule invited

intense cross-disciplinary discussion in order to emerge a research agenda that met both specific and more open goals. Although the terms inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and post-disciplinary are used regarding DEN CDT work what this actually means for research is still evolving. The resulting tensions and commonalities between the focii were informative and something that can be reflected on in both my current and future academic activities.

Engaging in a group reflection activity attempting to elicit shared values (both 'positive' and 'negative') based on our time in Tiree was a valuable way to consider and problematize the role of the researcher. Although this is often considered at the beginning of a research programme this was a useful and timely space in which to reflect on this aspect mid-PhD.

7.   Gained a valuable space for experimentation with a new methodology

The co-location of the retreat with the Tiree Techwave provided a valuable opportunity to explore the utility of the Datawalk methodology. Attendees engaged with the idea that the concept was in development and around 25 people from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds attended the walkshop. The facilitated the participation in and organisation of the Datawalk. Developing the academic and practical support for the Datawalk was facilitated by the input of other CDT members.

8.   Engaged with island life

A specific desired outcome of the research trip was stated as:
 "We have chosen Tiree as it will offer us the opportunity to engage with island life and explore how people work together around shared values in a unique situation to make things of value with and for that community."
We were able to utilise the Datawalk methodology to engage with the day to day concerns of island life. Several Tiree islanders participated in the Datawalk. This not only enabled them to answer some questions posed by researchers and non-island participants but also provoked some of their own around what data might facilitate desirable or undesirable information on the island.

## 9.   Experienced the methodologies of others

I participated in research activities designed by other CDT members that used ethnographic methodologies, which developed my knowledge in this area around both process and product and also provided space for reflection on my own research practice.
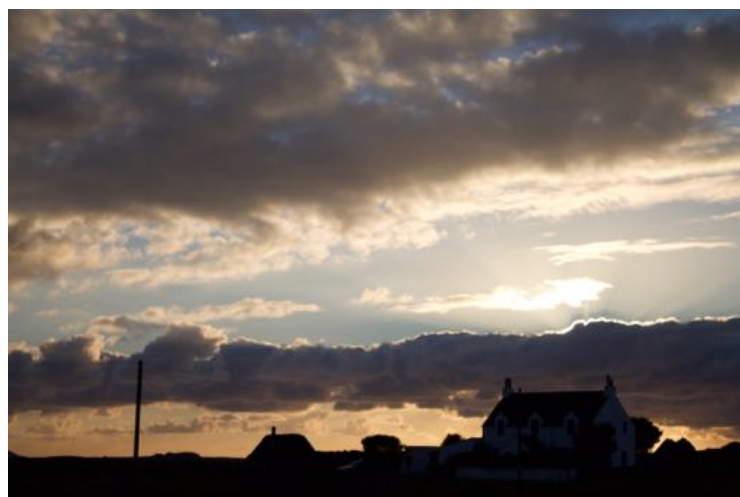
Motivations for a data walk

This activity arose from conversations regarding open data, its collection practices between myself and Johanna. We were keen to try out some suggestions made by Johanna that furthered her research into user focussed data in the form of a workshop on the island. However, when we began discussing the format we developed the idea of a data walk, a method similar to one I have been working on and also currently being developed by an academic at LSE. We developed some research questions to inform the activity (above) and asked participants to form groups of four, who were then set off at intervals.
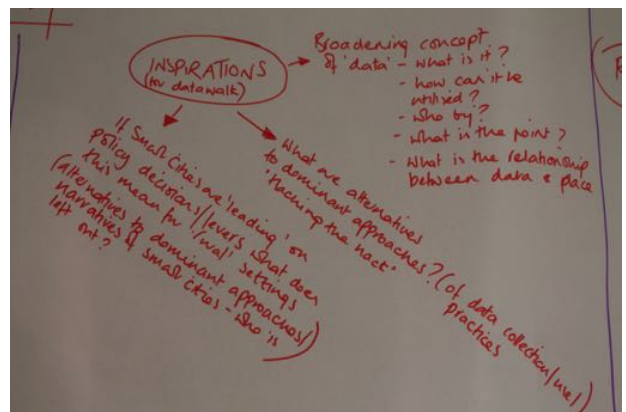
Groups headed in the direction of the beach and were asked to consider the following:

• What is data in this environment?
• What data might they find useful as a visitor or resident?
• Where they might find that data
• Is this data always digital or might we think about analogue forms of data in this environment.

We then re-convened at the Rural Centre for a feedback session, which proved to be a very insightful activity. The output of this project will be a paper for AltChi.

The telephone box freefall

Prior to travelling to Tiree we had been in conversation with Professor Alan Dix regarding potential projects we might carry out while on Tiree. A week before we arrived news came in that the islanders had purchased eleven out of the twelve BT telephone boxes on the island with a view to re-purposing them. This seemed like an ideal project for us, and also for the product design students taking part in the Techwave from Cardiff Metropolitan University. We decided to wait until we arrived to formulate a project plan and to see what emerged. We were lucky to have the input from Rhoda Meek, the co-ordinator of the telephone box group attend and give us the background behind the project and outline some ideas of how they might be used.

Vanessa then co-ordinated the 'freefall', where we all took one box each and spent an hour at it, focussing on that particular area. Every participant developed a unique insight into their particular box and the area it was situated in, thinking about future uses and developing creative outputs or suggestions as to their future use. These are currently being collated by Vanessa who will be sending them on to Rhoda and the group on Tiree in order to potentially inform what happens next. The report will be circulated once it has been completed.

Project reflection session

Insights into the success of the project

On the final morning we gathered together to try and make sense of what we had experienced over the last five days, what we would take from the experience and whether we had achieved any of the aims set out in the original funding bid. Five questions were asked in order to kick-start our thinking, that might try and capture some of the more tangible experiences as researchers and personally:

- Three things that made you come to Tiree
- Three things you will take from Tiree
- Values you think have been shared by i) us ii) the Techwave
- Three words to describe the experience.

The table on the next page details all of the responses to the questions but it is possible to identify key themes that have emerged that might enable the DEN to develop future projects and activities that build upon this initial project. Key insights emerging from the reflections are that we valued the opportunity to take time out from the challenging task

Reflection session on Wednesday morning

of completing a PhD, having the opportunity to talk to other students experiencing similar challenges within the process and having time to explore a different type of location. It enabled us not just to think about our own research but to place it in context of a real place and to challenge ourselves in terms of methods and the impact of our work.
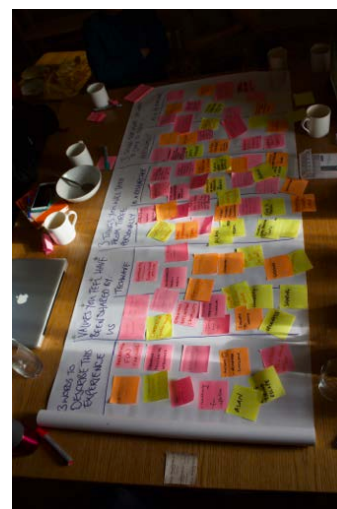
Did we manage to achieve our aims?

The aims of the call were to:

- *Develop a greater understanding into the impact remote locations have upon people, technology and what matters to them.*
- *To develop a temporary research community that will act as a starting point for collaboration and research outputs, but also enables students to have time to think, write and explore the island*

Reflection session

It is clear from our reflections that the project succeeded in meeting these aims. Through engaging in the data walk and phone-box reflections we experienced the island and talked to people living there. We acknowledged that our time there was not enough to complete in depth research, but our experiences during the time on Tiree made significant impacts both personally and as researchers. We reflected on the research subjects (technology, place, people) and the methods we used in this environment, challenging ourselves to experience research methods we had not previously experienced. Tensions between research styles emerged but these were discussed openly, made possible through the honesty and openness demonstrated by all participants, which was highly valued by all of the group.

The temporary research community we established enabled the value trust to emerge as a vital part of the project. Through trusting one another we developed an openness to new research methods, partly due to the project not having imposed strict outputs such as quantities of research papers or artefacts. Thinking time was also highly valued, as we were able to come and go as we wished, due to the flexible nature of the Techwave itself.

Project reflection session

Reflections from the session on Wednesday

What made you come to Tiree?	
Personally	Solitude, curiosity, to see the island, see somewhere new, experience a different rural setting, fresh air, chance for a break, visit Tiree to meet locals, make friends with sheep, Alan, space, wander, chance to visit a remote place in UK, new place, new people, new and memorable experience, a chance to 'get out', personal reflection time, ability to see a part of Scotland I always wanted to see, free!, meet fellow DEN students for exchange of ideas (similar interests), the Hebrides, add-on to my research budget (funded), retreat away from quotidien activities.
As a researcher	Think about data & place (research interests), hear about other CDTs & research skills, am exploring islands & digital connectedness as part of my PhD research, DEN bonding, explore methodologies, experiencing resource constrained settings, retreat from PhD, re-connect with research as people, connections, ideas, techwave, rural data, open nature of call, explore, share ideas, share experience, my thoughts usually get expanded when I go away, 'ad-hoc' research community, meeting other DEN students, co-designing technology with islanders

3 things you will take from Tiree	
Personally	(renewed) enthusiasm, energy, reassurance, a sense of zen, photos, memories, fun memories, photos of sheep, memories of further interest in Tiree and Scotland, 40GB, Vanessa, basic knowledge of Tiree, the peace of the island, Alan, 'a PhD is like a driver's licence – just get it done & enjoy the freedom afterwards, exploring ideas further, spending time talking to people, time to think, Amanda's business card, maintaining habits during 'down time' has great benefits, the phine calls (to my box), energy, memories, friends & connections, "The body bad of feedback"
As a researcher	Thoughts about challenges of method, <1GB, that time we went to Tiree, perspectives on research of & data & places we shared, thinking about island life & phone-boxes(technology), what is a techwave? A new perspective on my research & academic 'life' in general, appreciation of other's approaches to research, finally wrote something (not PhD), reminder that research is people, inspiration, value of both individual & group activities to a mess process, working with other researchers is great, greater appreciation of emerging group approaches, wider network collaborator(s), datawalk!, time and space away is important, Alan Dix is one cool guy, phone-box contemplations, empathy amongst PhD students, rural comparative point for digital studies, a higher awareness of the meaning of 'data', working with maps, chance to create new work & approaches, to get away from daily 'routine'.

Values you feel have been shared by	
Us	Working together, the beauty in chaos, cynicism?, openness to ideas, participation, reflection, creativity, trust, potential, ambition, colonialism, methods and epistemologies, aspects of Christian values, openness to novelty, curiosity, sharing, openness (x3)
The Techwave	Community, enviro-punk attitude, sustainability, openness (x2), honesty, 'maker' culture, interest in Tiree, friendliness, wires, trust, Alan Dix (he cool), welcome, optimism

3 words to describe this experience
Relaxing (x2), flexible, sunny, fun, familiar, community, isolation, beautiful, creative (x2), frustrating, unbounded, open, experience, exchange, interesting, reflective (x2), reassuring, fun, Alan (x3), awesome, memorable, energising, relief, tiring, escape, windswept with a slice of content.