

## SimPā Update

### Victoria Weatherall

The SimPā project aims to convey and strengthen Māori culture, tikaka and knowledge by initiating a process of participatory Māori digital media design using 3D game technology. We have a research team consisting of Otago Polytechnic ICT experts, Mana Whenua, a skilled Film and production graduate, a project manager as well as relevant consultants. We work alongside the respective Rūnaka to produce GamePā tailored to their desired specifications.

One of the exciting things about the SimPā project is that because we are working using community development and participatory action research principles we, (Otago Polytechnic Research Team) are only facilitators working with various Kai Tahu Rūnaka to help them retell their stories in different media, primarily in a 3D game environment. We have been working with the Ōtākou Rūnaka preparing youtube clips and GamePā for their project. The participants and project peoples are learning new skills and knowledge which is beneficial and exciting. The Rūnaka of Puke te Raki, Moeraki, and Hokonui are making plans to participate and produce their own GamePā and resources too.

SimPā is a partnership between Otago Polytechnic and Kati Huirapa ki Puketeraki, Te Runanga o Moeraki, Te Runanga o Otakou, and Hokonui Rūnaka. This project is developed as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding between Otago Polytechnic and these Rūnaka. This MOU is instantiated in the position of Kaitohutohu and the Komiti Kawanataka. Te Matauranga Putaiao Trust is also a partner, as is Wairua Consulting. The support and assistance from Ngai Tahu head office is much as appreciated. SimPā is partially funded by the New Zealand Digital Strategy through the Department of Internal Affairs.

Our DIA funding has allowed as the opportunity to purchase a travelling studio, consisting of laptops, handycams, digital cameras and so on. We use this equipment to gather information and help each Rūnaka produce their GamePā. Rūnaka participants are given the opportunity to learn about and use the equipment in the aim of producing further GamePā upon the completion of the project.

We have no preconceptions about the stories or the forms they might take. As such, the resulting “GamePā” could take any form - the driver is to reconnect communities with stories and landscapes and the only rule is that ownership of the work and its products remain with the Rūnaka.

For example at Ōtākou on the Otago Peninsula, Tahu Potiki is working to retell the history of Ōtākou through stories and landscapes - the aim is to make a series of 5 minute videos mixing real and virtual. The virtual giving glimpses of landscapes both historic and imagined. The videos contain SimPā based imagery, but also the stories form part of SimPā - invoking notions of object-based

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storytelling. We're there, helping the best we can, initially behind the cameras and modelling, but as the project progresses, stepping more and more into the background, and eventually, having an empowered community with new ways of exploring their connections.

Presentations have been made nationally at Hui a Tau and internationally at an International Conference and at the Centre for New Zealand Studies, University of London. Informal promotion and networking occurred at the Otago Schools Polynesian Festival.



Russell, K. & Mann, S. (2007) Worlds Colliding: participatory storytelling and indigenous culture in building interactive games. ICHM Conference, Toronto, Canada. [www.archimuse.com/ichim07/papers/mann/mann.html](http://www.archimuse.com/ichim07/papers/mann/mann.html)