Fast Facts

Project: Digitalising and Preserving Oro, A Secret Signage Language of the Nomadic Penans in the Rainforest
Lead Organization: Institute Of Social Informatics And Technological Innovations (ISITI), University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)
Country: Malaysia
Budget: AUD 22,339.40

Situation
Penans are one of the indigenous communities living in Sarawak, Brunei and Kalimantan. Long Lamai is one of the most progressive Penan communities in the upper reaches of Sarawak’s Baram river basin. Oroo’ is a living cultural heritage of the Penan which, from a historical, political, social and scientific perspective, is of extreme value to the society. In initial engagement with the community elders they expressed their concerns of losing enriched Penan cultural heritage. According to them, the youth and especially children are no longer interested in going to the jungle but rather spend their time with ICTs and playing digital games on computer. In this context, providing deep learning opportunities and creating learning environments for transferring cultural and traditional knowledge, is one of the biggest challenges for parents and elders in these indigenous communities. The community elders also showed their interest to explore the potentials of technology and digital games in bridging the socio-cultural and intergenerational knowledge transfer gap.

Solution
The project activities focused on documenting Oroo’ signs and developing ICT tools for contemporary use of Oroo’ signs as communication medium for the youth. The objectives of this projects were:

1) To collect a comprehensive set of Oroo’ and do a pattern and message structural analysis along the dimensions mentioned above.
2) To gain insights into this intricate informal message composition and asynchronous communication approach.
3) To co-design an educational Oro cultural heritage game based on the fundamental principles of the Oro symbolic language.
4) Designing exploring mechanisms to evaluate the preservation, transfer of knowledge -from the old to the young generation.

Outcomes
- High impact publication
- Awards
- Software tools
- Database of Oroo’ signs
- Increase in knowledge about Oroo’ sign
- Enhanced interest of local youth in Oroo’ language

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• Partnership with NUS and University of Auckland.
• The project produced a community of practice that emerged in collaboration within villages as well as between two villages (Long Lamai and Long Kerong, a sister village of Long Lamai).
• The local artisans and community elders were part of the project activities. They were developing handicrafts model based of Oroo’. The model is demonstrated by the local artist in the meeting with experts from the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts UNIMAS and received feedback for improvements.
• In addition to documentation of the contents, the project team promoted a cultural event Oroo’ trail hunt, as a tourism activity that would yield a product of Oroo’.
• Four undergraduate interns were hired under the project. The interns experienced fieldwork under the supervision of experts, attended workshops and seminars conducted in ISITI, UNIMAS, presented their research findings in the community, Institute, Faculty meetings.

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