

App allows global community to explore Indigenous culture

December 28 2022, by Lauren J. Mapp, The San Diego Union-Tribune



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In many cultures, the community's traditions, oral storytelling and art styles represent knowledge passed down from one generation of relatives to the next, but a new app is aiming to share some of that education

virtually.

Through OurWorlds, users can explore culturally significant locations around the world, listen to Native American languages, hear creation stories and use augmented reality as a way to experience Indigenous [culture](#).

In one experience, users can point their phone at the ocean to see Kumeyaay people paddling tule boats amid the waves as Kumeyaay Community College director and professor Stan Rodriguez speaks of the tribe's maritime culture, first in Kumeyaay then in English.

Through another one, artist Johnny Bear Contreras from the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians talks about the significance of La Jolla Shores to the Kumeyaay as short clips of him working on sculptures fade on and off the screen.

Founder Kilma Lattin, a member of the Pala Band of Mission Indians, said that in developing OurWorlds, he wanted to create a platform for Indigenous communities to claim technological sovereignty and create a digital space sharing their cultural histories.

"I thought it would be a really great idea to merge the oldest civilization in America with the newest technologies," Lattin said.

The new app launched in November as the continuation of an idea he started with its predecessor Peon Bones, a mobile version of a traditional game played with bones, sticks and blankets by Southern Californian tribes.

Although the Peon Bones app was not widely used, Lattin said its use among community members was significant as community members were able to "see their culture brought to life digitally." Since Peon is

primarily played during traditional gatherings, there hadn't been many opportunities for youth to practice it on their own.

"Especially for the younger generation, it was important because they were able to play one of their traditional tribal games whenever they wanted—with a lot of repetition—so they could get better and better at the game," Lattin said.

The 44-year-old says OurWorlds is a way to share cultural knowledge with Indigenous [community members](#) and students or others looking for an [educational experience](#).

For Lattin, an important piece of building the app is working with tribal elders, artists and [community leaders](#) such as Rodriguez and Contreras to create the experiences users interact with.

Rodriguez—who teaches Kumeyaay culture, history and language at Kumeyaay Community College and Cuyamaca College—feels using a digital education platform as a storytelling tool is a way for more people to understand that Indigenous people are a part of the present, not just the past.

"What this app shows is that our culture is still as vibrant today," he said. "The things that we have made in the past, we still make today and we will continue to make in the future."

Eventually, Lattin would like to see more and more augmented reality experiences added to the app, with communities around the world developing cultural experiences of their own to add into OurWorlds. Someday, users may be able to experience a luau by virtually traveling to Hawaii or watch someone cook traditional Irish foods in Dublin.

"We've created this technology highway to digitize culture in any form,"

Lattin said. "This is really a manifestation of that idea of putting communities first and building the technology around people instead of making people build themselves around the technology."

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Citation: App allows global community to explore Indigenous culture (2022, December 28)
retrieved 1 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-12-app-global-community-explore-indigenous.html>

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