

People in Places 2011

Workshop: Film as a Tool for Community Voice

Workshop Rapporteurs:

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Workshop Leaders:

This workshop was led by Sarah Bood (hftzr@stu.ca) and Martha Steigman (martha.stiegman@gmail.com). Sarah is from Dartmouth and explored film while completing a Masters degree at Dalhousie University. Martha Steigman produced two short films while exploring the grounds for solidarity amongst stakeholders in a fishing grounds conflict for her Ph.D.

Workshop Participants:

The session began with introductions:

- Who you are
- What you do
- Do/How you use video in your work
- Expectations

We heard from the following people during introductions:

--> **Lynn from Lakehead University-** Her questions had to do with how film can help develop the movement in community-based forestry management, where potential sources of funding are available, and how to integrate film into academic research.

--> **Melanie from the Natural Resources Institute-** Melanie has looked at Aboriginal communities on the coast of Australia and is interested in the editing process and how to engage in a more participatory editing process.

--> **Susan from St. Thomas University-** Susan is looking at gender issues and rural food policies. She sees the potential for film in her current work and is interested in how the medium is used for visualization.

--> **Bya Wheeler from the Natural Resources Institute-** Bya has worked with film through a food film project.

--> **Shawn from Department of Fishing and Aquaculture-** Shawn works in policy development and has produced experimental videos in Puerto Rico and Mexico to spread messages of conservation.

--> **Ricardo Torres from Mexico-** Ricardo is a professor at a state university in Quintana Roo, but spent four years in Vancouver working on his Ph.D. He used video to document mangrove conservation in Mexico, but this was his only experience and he is interested in learning how to improve his next videos.

--> **Jaclyn from the Bahamas-** Jaclyn commented on how video is a good way to show the ecological importance to communities, and she wants to learn more about how to get funding and the general editing process.

--> **Kathleen from the University of Ottawa-** Kathleen comes from the Audubon Chapter of the Canadian Parks Association and wants to use film to get a good message across regarding endangered species in the parks that they work to manage.

--> **Martin from Grenada-** Martin works in the Grenadines at an NGO and is interested in everything there is to know about film, how to get money for it, how to determine the message, and where to find low-budget equipment.

--> **Ashley from the Ecology Action Center-** Ashley did some film work around Nova Scotia and is curious about how to keep the momentum going after people have seen a particular film.

--> **Sahar from the University of Ottawa-** Sahar thinks film would be a good way to show human impacts and would like to learn more about its potential as a visual stimulant.

--> **Anne from Umeå University in Sweden-** Anne is looking at Lake Victoria and the intersection of different medicinal uses, government conflicts, and different cultures. Traditional users of medicine here have used video and radio, but Anne is interested in using film as a part of her research.

--> **Sana-** Sana works with First Nations in Nova Scotia to write about traditional ecological knowledge. She is working on her Masters thesis and is interested in learning the techniques of film.

--> **Shelia-** works on HIV/AIDS issues and the infant feeding choices of women.

Workshop Notes:

Martha mentioned the organization called ***Witness: Video for Change*** (www.witness.org), which works with other organizations to focus their campaign goals and produce a film that reaches their target audience. The purpose is not only to train organizations with the capacity to make films, but also to create unique messages for each partner organization or community. *Witness: Video for Change* does this by identifying the audience, and Martha calls them “slick in terms of impact”. There are tools on their website to guide questions about message, audience, and impact.

Martha and Sarah then showed ***Sharing the Waters***, a film by Sarah Bood that illustrates the impact of LNG development on the lobster fishing industry in St. John and how the livelihoods of local lobster fishermen will be affected.

- This film took three months to make.
- It was originally thirty minutes long but was then cut down to ten minutes in order to condense the issues.
- Sarah commented that shorter, crisp timing is the best for keeping the audience engaged. Also, so long as you have good audio, poor visuals are forgivable.

- Sarah described how she established trust with fishermen in the film after showing them a short trailer so that they could see how she was portraying the situation and allow them the opportunity to offer input.
- In film, the language that should be used (in the case of narration) should be accessible for the general public (i.e. no jargon!). Sarah mentioned that even in a community story, it is important to consider other sectors (i.e. where is the government and corporate voice?). However, it is still a documentary even if those other voices are not included.
- This particular film has had a positive impact- it has been used as a reflective tool for the fishermen as well as in high schools for education.
- Particular liberties exist when an individual produces films in an NGO context; you have the freedom to be accountable to those in the community. At the same time there are other constraints with the documentary industry, such as funding.

Martha and Sarah then showed ***In the Same Boat: In Defense of Our Treaties*** (<http://inthesameboat.net/about>), two shorts that Martha filmed, edited, and produced as a part of her Ph.D. She described her film and the tensions between First Nations and non-native coastal communities.

- The Marshall Decision went into effect in 1999. The government tried to get First Nations to buy into commercial fisheries by offering them money, but Bear Nation was one of two First Nations to refuse.
- Treaties were negotiated between the government and the Bear Nation people to protect a way of life. Martha hoped that if the two could come together they could join forces to create solidarity.
- In order to honor this parallel ground, she created two parallel shorts: Bear River vs. Digby Island (*In Defense of our Treaties* and *The End of the Line*, respectively).
- In many places this sparked a conflict, one that continues to this day.
- She noted that community empowerment to participate in filmmaking is important.
- Martha brought the films back to these communities and conducted individual and group screenings. People suddenly realized where she was coming from, which led to more real, directional conversations.
- Martha returned for a second month of filming and later used the film as a launching point to have further conversations.
- The filmmaking process in the communities is sometimes more important than the quality of the film. For example, process-oriented films can exist on one end of the spectrum while producing a slick end product so that the outside world gets to hear a polished story can exist on the other end of the spectrum. It's up to the filmmaker to decide which will have the greater impact.