Social Tapestries: public authoring and civil society

Giles Lane

DIFFUSION GENERATOR

Social Tapestries - An Overview

Social Tapestries was an artistic research programme building on Proboscis' earlier project *Urban Tapestries* - which investigated the potential for grassroots knowledge mapping and sharing ("public authoring") using a fusion of mobile and wireless technologies with geographic information systems.

Urban Tapestries (UT) created a software platform enabling people to annotate and share words, sounds and pictures about places with other people - weaving their personal threads of

.....

Everyday Archaeology

In June 2006 Proboscis and Loren Chasse collaborated on a second workshop with Jenny Hammond Primary School. Everyday Archaeology introduced students to a process of investigating the local environment using a combination of Feral Robots, Urban Tapestries, Sound Scavenging, an Endless Landscape, StoryCubes and eBooks.

Over the course of a week students in Year 4 learnt about relationships between the environment and pollution, acting as scientists and archaeologists to gather evidence about the world around them and uncover causes of pollution. This was a trigger for them to imagine what they could do to help the environment and think about the kind of world they want to grow up in.

The workshop covered a range of key skills and concepts from map reading, making media, storytelling, drawing and literacy to more abstract concepts, science and maths an intense and broad immersion for the students, teachers and the Proboscis team.

Download the Activity & Impact Report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-archaeology-report

Sound Scavenging

The first collaborative learning project with Loren Chasse and Jenny Hammond Primary School took place over two workshops in June and December 2005.

Sound Scavenging introduced students of Year 4 to think about sound as part of our environment. We designed and distributed kits to the students, including an eNotebook, a digital sound recorder and various objects designed to help the students explore sound as a material and as part of the local ecology. The students used the eNotebooks to keep sound diaries during the workshops, and their recordings were podcast and mapped.

The second workshop focused on 'Listen Your Way to School'. The students logged the sounds they heard on their daily journey to school and mapped them in a bodystorming process. By building up a sound map of their local environment, they learnt how much they could find out about the world around them just through 'listening'.

Download the Project Report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-sound-report

.....

and experiences within geographic communities can enable new forms of neighbourliness to emerge. By stimulating and inspiring habits of participation these informal knowledges can assist in transforming relationships with key stakeholders such as local authorities and public service providers to develop reciprocities of trust.

• *education and learning* - developing knowledge mapping and sharing techniques and tools as new forms of associative learning and teaching methods for schoolchildren, lifelong learners and teachers.

• *people and environment* - staging creative interventions with local areas and communities that engage with regeneration and environmental issues to increase issue ownership and peoples sense of agency and empowerment to act.

To engage with actual communities we worked with a network of intermediary organisations to share our ideas with grassroots groups. Setting up projects where we were invited in by specific communities, not imposed on them, we believe that we avoided some of the pitfalls of short term initiatives 'parachuted' in to communities.

knowledge and experience to co-create the rich tapestry of the city. We ran two public trials (in December 2003 and June-July 2004) to test the platform and begin to understand the social and cultural implications of public authoring. However, despite our efforts to engage with more diverse local residents, the trials attracted participants who were, in the main, already familiar with the concepts and aims of spatial annotation and mobile technologies. In developing and promoting UT as an art project we found that its participants were largely those already engaged in the issues and we were effectively 'preaching to the converted'.

Social Tapestries was designed to enable us to engage with other communities - not convened groups, but actual communities in real world situations. We sought to build relationships in a number of contexts that would allow us to explore the concepts behind public authoring, but where the technologies and tools used would only be those that were appropriate to the situation and context, not pre-determined.

We focused on three areas of enquiry:
• *citizenship, neighbourhoods and public services* - exploring how mapping and sharing knowledge

Credits
Project Leads - Giles Lane & Alice Angus
Project Team - Camilla Brueton, Loren Chasse, Megan Conway (intern), Michael Golembewski, Kevin Harris, Karen Martin, George Papamarkos, Simon Ruffle, Sarah Thelwall & Orlagh Woods.

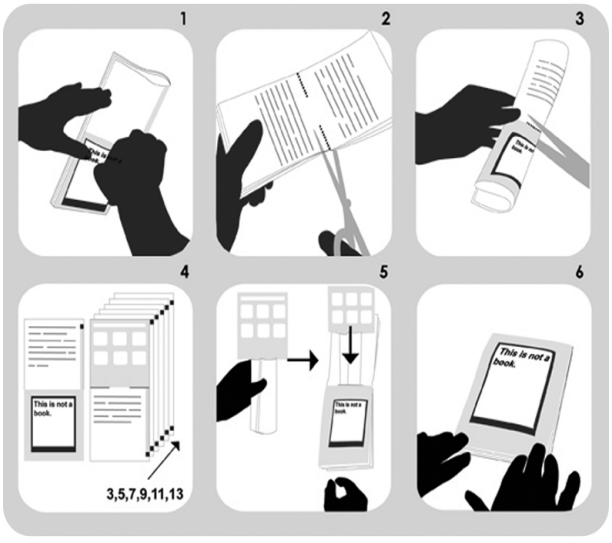
Collaborators - Bev Carter, George Roussos, Natalie Jeremijenko, Dimitrios Airantzis, Dima Diall, Dikaios Papadogkonas, Jenson Taylor, Stephanie Lucas, Sally Labern, John Paul Bichard & Nick West.

Partners - Birkbeck College, Space Media Arts, Jenny Hammond Primary School, HIRO, Kingswood High School, Getmapping.com, Ordnance Survey, St Marks Coop, London School of Economics Media & Communications Dept, Community Development Foundation, Local Level, City University, Stride Design, inIVA.

Funders - Arts Council England, Ministry of Justice, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, EPSRC, Creative Partnerships Hull, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Social Tapestries: public authoring and civil socie
Giles Lane
created on: Fri Aug 29 22:54:28 2008

www.diffusion.org.uk
DIFFUSION eBooks are designed to be freely available to download, print out and share.



Mobility Field Experiment

A proposal to run a field trial demonstrating user-generated spatial annotation of physical access issues by people with disabilities. The project aimed to build up a grassroots map of access problems by the people they affect the most. The aim was to begin to understand the everyday practical issues faced by people with mobility difficulties in the urban environment providing key information to surveyors and mapping agencies about what additional features needs to be mapped (such as kerb height), as well as a public way of mapping and sharing locally specific information crucial to a variety of communities.

Sensory Threads

A research proposal, developed with George Roussos at Birkbeck College's School of Computer and Information Science, exploring the social, cultural and ethical issues associated with real-time data capture from bio-sensors worn by people as part of 'healthy-living self-care' regimes.

Scavenging: guerilla public authoring

Proboscis began trialling a new Urban Tapestries public authoring platform in 2006 as part of several Social Tapestries projects. However we found the system to be difficult to use in many of the social and cultural settings in which it was being implemented. Maintaining the system required significant resources beyond our ability to support it, and we decided to develop a new approach that could take advantage of the many new online services that had appeared in the years since we began the original Urban Tapestries project. From mid 2006 Proboscis began developing a 'scavenging' approach, using the concepts and processes of public authoring to stitch together services that are simple and free to use (such as photo-sharing sites, blogging tools, online spreadsheets, video sharing platforms and online mapping applications).

The results of this approach include the development of our concept of 'hybrid digital/material' *Shareables* (such as the Diffusion eBooks and StoryCubes) and our process/ methodology of '*Anarchaeology*' - a non-linear and lateral 'excavation' and 'incavation' of places and spaces.

Studies & Experiments

Kingswood High School

Proboscis was invited by Creative Partnerships Hull to design a year-long project for Year 7 students aimed at engaging them in new forms of learning that built associations to their lived experiences.

Neighbourhood Games

A research project by John Paul Bichard exploring gaming as a social tool. The project looked at ways in which social multiplayer games can be developed and sustained in a local neighbourhood environment. The aim was to develop a games methodology that has the potential to allow a broad demographic to play in the everyday environment across race, age and gender.

RoadMarker

A research project by Nick West to research and demonstrate ways to make and hear spatial annotations while driving. As an extension to the Urban Tapestries system of marking and examining space, the annotations would be created on the fly while driving or riding; they would also be constructed or edited while on the web.

Mass Observation for the 21st Century

Urban Tapestries investigated how, by combining mobile and internet technologies with geographic information systems, people could 'author' the environment around them; a kind of Mass Observation for the 21st Century. Like the founders of Mass Observation in the 1930s, we were interested in creating opportunities for an "anthropology of ourselves" adopting and adapting new and emerging technologies for creating and sharing everyday knowledge and experience; building up organic, collective memories that trace and embellish different kinds of relationships across places, time and communities.

The Urban Tapestries software platform enabled people to build relationships between places and to associate stories, information, pictures, sounds and videos with them. It provided the basis for a series of engagements with actual communities (in social housing, schools and with users of public spaces) to play with the emerging possibilities of public authoring in real world settings.

Urban Tapestries Platform Development

As part of the ST research programme Proboscis continued the development of the UT system taking it from a prototype to a platform.

Proboscis collaborated with the Pervasive Computing Lab at Birkbeck College's School of Computer Science and Information Systems to re-engineer and enhance the initial prototype. Between late 2004 and summer 2006, both the back end system and client interfaces were developed to enable different kinds of interactions and possibilities for public authoring. In addition to web browsers, flash and mobile phone applications, clients such as the Feral Robots were developed to map and share not just stories, video, audio and photos, but also data streams from sensors.

The system was also designed to support future possibilities, such as print on demand outputs: (books, eBooks, posters and postcards); streaming audio/video to local broadcasters; digital TV interfaces; external APIs and embedded device networks.

http://urbantapestries.net

The Projects

Citizenship, neighbourhoods and public services
- Conversations and Connections
- St Marks Housing Coop

Education and learning
- Experiencing Democracy
- Everyday Archaeology
- Sound Scavenging

People and environment
- Robotic Feral Public Authoring
- Snout

In addition several small studies and collaborations were developed alongside the main projects:
- Kingswood High School
- STAMPS
- Eyes on the Street
- Neighbourhood Games
- RoadMarker
- Mobility Field Experiment
- Sensory Threads

http://socialtapestries.net/projects

Conversations and Connections

Proboscis collaborated with community development expert Kevin Harris of Local Level and Bev Carter of Partners in Change to work with residents of the Havelock estate in Southall, Ealing. Working directly with HIRO (Havelock Independent Residents Organisation) we spent 18 months looking at how residents could use online mapping and sharing technologies to gather local knowledge about the conditions on the estate. The estate had a history of delayed regeneration and failure of public agencies to deliver statutory services. Our project (funded by the Ministry of Justice) aimed to explore how far local residents could use online and mobile technologies to build up their own knowledge database in a bid to leverage better service delivery from public providers.

The project explored many different means of inspiring local residents to participate, learn new methods and tools for capturing and sharing knowledge and in doing so exposed many of the barriers and weaknesses in looking to technologies to solve what are essentially social problems. Download the evaluation report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-havelock-report

Snout

A collaboration between inIVA, Proboscis and Birkbeck College exploring relationships between the body, community and the environment, Snout proposes 'participatory sensing' as a lively addition to the popular artform of carnival costume design, engaging the community in an investigation of its own environment. Carnival is a time of suspension of the normal activities of everyday life a time when the fool becomes king for a day, when social hierarchies are inverted, a time when everyone is equal.

For Snout, we designed and created two costumes instrumented with wearable sensors and displays - Mr Punch, the lord of misrule, and the Plague Doctor, a puffed up character insulated from the outside world by his 17th Century HazMat suit. Scavenging free online mapping and sharing technologies as a form of 'guerilla public authoring', the project demonstrated simple ways to gather and visualise evidence about local environmental conditions to participate in or initiate local action.

Download the Project Documentation:
http://tinyurl.com/st-snout-report

Experiencing Democracy

Proboscis and Loren Chasse collaborated on a third workshop with Jenny Hammond Primary School in Waltham Forest, North London in July 2007. The workshop, co-designed with class teacher, Stephanie Lucas, explored ways of integrating democratic values and processes into a classroom environment by experiencing them not just talking about them.

Group work was at the project's core, directly addressing the gap between formal democratic structures and students' everyday experience of participation in decision-making processes. It promoted active citizenship, enabling students to explore and learn the skills of negotiation and listening, leadership skills, how to work within a group, collaborate and build confidence to engage in the decision-making process.

Using Proboscis innovative tools and techniques the students looked at the relationships between the individual and the group, and explored the roles within those groups and reflect on what it means to be part of a democratic process.

Download the Activity & Impact Report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-democracy-report

Robotic Feral Public Authoring

- What environmental factors such as air quality, noise and light pollution affect our neighbourhoods?
- How can we measure pollution in our own localities and make this data visible?
- How can we make sense of this in the context of what we already know about the places we live, work and play in?

Robotic Feral Public Authoring links together two branches of research for community fun and action. Hobbyist robotics and public authoring both enable people to use emerging technologies in dynamic and exciting new ways. Brought together they open up possibilities for exploring our local environments with electronic sensors to detect all kinds of phenomena and map them using online tools.

Collaborating with Birkbeck College, Natalie Jeremijenko, Space Media Arts and local people from London Fields in Hackney, we built and tested two new robots for mapping levels of air pollution with local knowledge of the area.

Download the Project Report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-robots-report

St Marks Housing Coop

Proboscis collaborated with members of St Marks Housing Coop to assist them recover and record the coop's 25 year history of managing property on behalf of social landlords and provide low cost housing to its members.

The nature of short life accommodation is transient - properties are let to the coop by social housing landlords for short periods (typically 6 months to 2 years); members also come and go as they move on to permanent housing or find alternatives when housing is handed back.

Proboscis introduced coop members to online mapping technologies and knowledge sharing tools to help them track places and memories. We also created a document recording 25 years of knowledge shared by the coop's members.

Download the project report:
http://tinyurl.com/st-stmarks-report