Visual Storyboarding tools for public engagement and social justice

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This practice-based research investigation demonstrates how visualisation tools, used in urban regeneration, can give shape to the opinions and expectations of local people. Firstly, it explores how photography, illustration and collage can be combined to visualise the views and aspirations of local residents. Secondly, it investigates how the resulting images can be communicated to powerful commercial and government stakeholders so that they take residents' voices into consideration in their decision making.

It is the hypothesis of this research that if visualisation methods and techniques in art and design are able to analyse, amplify and represent people's opinions and if these opinions are conveyed effectively to the decision makers, then there would be an improvement in the urban regeneration process. Urban redevelopment would be more inclusive, fairer and more sustainable. This shows how design and designers can play an active role in bringing about a more democratic decision-making process and a greater realisation of social justice.

This research asserts the potential of visualisations to support and engage local communities, in order to mitigate the effects of perpetual cycles of commercialisation that, in their concern with maximising financial profit, overlook the voices of residents.

In this investigation, creative visual design methods are used to find ways to democratise the process of regeneration. The thesis demonstrates the important role for the socially responsible designer in acting as a community enabler who can inspire local people to recognise their challenges and opportunities, and express these in a confident, resonant way. This method envisions an approach to visualisation in which people in local communities can identify shared concerns, common goals, collective interests and, on this basis, become actively involved in urban redevelopments, rather than one in which they are 'observed' by empathetic outsiders and eventually 'presented' with a solution.

The redevelopment of King's Cross in central London is the locus of this investigation. The King's Cross area is in the midst of being transformed into a new neighbourhood by developers Argent. Outline planning permission was granted in 2006. New landmarks have appeared in the 67-acre redevelopment site, for example, Granary Square and the new concourse at King's Cross station, as well as public space at the south entrance to the station on Euston Road.

Currently, the area is undergoing massive change: the skyline and built-landmarks are shifting on an almost daily basis. It was decided that this site was appropriate for the research because it represents accelerated physical change in the urban environment and the bewildering effect this has on both long-term residents and newcomers. Between 2001 and 2005 – prior to the start of the development work – Argent conducted community consultation with Continental Railways (LCR) and Exel and created A framework for regeneration in 2001 with the support of Fluid Design. The combined team conducted workshops to discuss their ideas, visited local schools with printed development plans with comment sheets. Based on the community consultation, PUBLICA and Argent created a report public realm strategy in 2004, comprising a series of strategy reports to identify and analyse the spatial, social and cultural characteristics of the neighbourhoods surrounding King's Cross. Consequently, Islington Council published Neighbourhood Framework Document in 2005, as well as Cally Plan - Supplementary Planning Document January 2014 (SPD) to share the future vision of the area with the local residents. The Caledonian Road area is included Islington’s Core Strategy Policies (Policy CS6) that identifies the development of King’s Cross as a major opportunity for regeneration, bringing new jobs and housing not only on the main railway lands site but also along York Way and Pentonville Road. However, there has been little investigation into how the changing area is perceived by local residents, little engagement with local residents in the progression of the plan for the area, and their consultation strategy did not include visualisation tools as proposed in this investigation.

The research develops visual storyboarding tools and workshop techniques that are able to reveal and express perceptions of urban space over time and the relationship between space and individual and community identity. Consequently, it aims to enable local inhabitants to visualise possible built futures related to their own histories and, finally, to develop the role of the designer as mediator in the social fabric of the city.

The first objective of the overall PhD is to produce a conceptual framework that grounds the research in the theory of actantiality.

Key Word : Narrative art and design, Visual sociology, Actantiality

概要：この研究では都市開発においてその場所に暮らす人々とその場所を開発する側の立場の人々 - ゼネコンや行政、自治体などの関か問題を促す為のヴィジュアルコミュニケーションツールの開発を目的として、さらには、デザイナーやアーティストの社会での新しい役割 - まちづくりや文化の形成に反映させる為のメディエイターとしての役割を創造することを目的としている。ヴィジュアルアート/デザインの手法をを分析/分解し、さらには社会人類学や民俗学、構造主義や記号論を取り入れ、社会を俯瞰し未来をイメージする力を市民と共有し視覚化することで、従来のサービスを提供する側と享受する側という社会システムに疑問を問うクリティカルアプローチである。
emphasising people’s agency but also the constraints upon social action (Parsons 2015, http://compendium.kosawese.net/term/actantial-model-greimas/). This is an approach derived from the writings of A.J. Greimas and Bruno Latour, which are used to conceptualise the inhabitants as, knowingly or unknowingly, embedded in a field of potential alliances and conflicts, in this case, in relation the redevelopment of their neighbourhoods. The conceptual framework incorporates theory from visual sociology, providing principles for engagement with local residents. The conceptual framework will also link these theories to relevant examples of urbanism, community engagement, public participation in art and design, and visual storyboarding as narrative media.

The second objective is to use the conceptual framework to develop the methodological scaffolding for the visualisation workshops. Based on principles of participation, the scaffolding ties together methods for approaching communities, planning and running workshops, and communicating the outcomes of the workshops. Following these participatory principles, the workshops will explore how to draw out and materialise different voices and patterns of alliances and conflicts within local communities. A creative approach is incorporated by using design fiction to inspire and motivate participants. Design fiction is defined by Grand and Wiedmer (2010), as ‘the invention, creation and construction of possible futures’. The design fictions are visualised at the workshops through photo-elicitation, a method derived from visual sociology. In summary, the workshops visualise design fictions bringing into play people’s memories of places exploring which built landmarks are most significant to them both psychologically and spatially. This will help them to build their own visual storyboards communicating their visions of urban spaces of the future.

The third objective is to enact, test and iterate the methodology being developed for the workshops and the methods for communicating the outcomes of the workshops to the developers and the council. The workshop outcomes will be presented in public exhibition where dialogues will be facilitated among all parties. In order to convey the discussions from these workshops and exhibition a blog will also be developed to inform local inhabitants and to encourage ongoing participation.

This investigation is structured as follows. It begins with a contextual review of the relevant theory and practices. It surveys the following bodies of literature: urbanism related to this research, which describes how, since the 1960s, urbanists have been trying to extract and analyse urban dwellers’ perceptions to improve the urban design processes; relevant theory in visual sociology and visual ethnography showing how some researchers in these fields use photographs as a trigger for open-ended dialogue in interviews, rather than fixed data in structured questionnaires; and the development of public engagement movements and methods that have been used to establish trust and equal relationships between researchers and targeted community groups. The thesis discusses how public participation in art and design has developed and in some cases been integrated with public engagement.

Following this, a critical analysis of case study precedents of creative practitioners working with academics and local communities is conducted. Examples include CABE, Kumamoto Art Polis, Soundings, Proboscis and Broken City Lab. The analysis reveals that some practitioners focus on the built environment, others focus more on the social dimensions of the built environment but overall they rarely develop long-term relationships with communities and they rarely find ways to articulate local voices and agendas beyond their own disciplinary territory or their clients’ requirements. In order to address this deficit, to develop the field and to engage local residents in long-term co-creation that leads to dialogue among all those with an interest in the neighbourhood, the research turns to techniques of visual narrative arts that integrate ethnological research, participatory approaches and co-creation.

Then the research follows firstly describes the methodological steps used throughout the whole research investigation and provides an overview of the entire investigation in diagrammatic form. It then goes on to describe the practical investigations to date and analyses the preliminary outcomes.

In terms of the practical investigations the section initially describes two preliminary experiments that were conducted to prepare for the King’s Cross workshops. The preliminary experiments took the form of workshops at a Japanese boarding high school in 2013 and later at Central Saint Martins (CSM) with MA students from the University of the Arts London. Secondly, the workshops with local residents at King’s Cross are described, presenting an analysis of the initial results, focusing on the visualisation sessions. Thirdly, it is explained how, after the workshops, the King’s Cross participants will be invited to the physical exhibition and virtual online blog to encounter and share their opinions with other stakeholders. Fourthly, the initial principles of the storyboarding toolkit are outlined, and finally how these principles can be applied to different contexts is explored, reporting on the workshops held in Tokyo in August 2015, involving 25 PhD researchers from University of California Santa Barbara and Tokyo Institute of Technology.