The role of collaboration in knowledge exchange processes: if people are the creative sector, then citizens can teach to the academics.

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A collaborative approach is often useful, if not essential, to prevent a designer's ideas about the needs of his potential customers being too far away from the real needs of his users. People are experts in their own lives. A designer is not an expert in people's lives: a designer is an expert in design.

It is therefore essential to discover a type of intervention that, in public space, can fill this gap. The importance of the people-centred approach to design, in a collaborative process, is to bridge the gap between the needs of real people and the academic thought about them. In this way the knowledge exchange between the Creative Sector and the Academics can be seen in a completely different light. This rethinking - where the citizens have become the expert creative sector, while the academic experts learn from the people - can change the perspective through which we look at a new kind of collaboration and interaction between these two fields. The proposal aims to capture the value of community-led design, improving the practice and then trying to reconnect, as much as possible, the knowledge of experience to academic expertise, supported through new media.

Keywords: Community-Led Design, Collaborative Process, Creative Citizens

The underlying hypothesis of this paper is to inquire if it is possible to develop new tools to bridge the gap between citizens and experts through the use of media.

Introduction: Designing With Communities

> "Because people are experts in their own life.
> ...you are not an expert in their life. You are an expert in other things."
> [Rama Gheerawo]

Thoughts about the city and new ways of interacting with the metropolitan texture are constantly changing and growing. For urban policies, one of the major areas of intervention in this process is the role that people can play in the design of their own environment.

One of the most common mistakes committed by (urban) design experts is to propose solutions that claim to be made for the citizens. What happens if the experts are not in a position to speak for the citizens? Can a designer, almost completely unaware of the real needs of future users, create a very effective solution? A collaborative approach is often useful, if not essential, to prevent a designer's ideas about the needs of his potential customers being too far away from the real needs of his users. Whilst the "high" knowledge of those professionals who design the city and its possible fruition is certainly essential, it is people who live in these places who are the experts in their everyday lives (Gazzola 2003).

There is a value to urban design methodologies that can help to close this gap. The proposal is to explore the 'creative ideas' in the field of urban design, architecture and local services, where

professionals, local government and citizens get together to develop sustainable solutions to complex problems such as regeneration and social innovation, using the process of co-design.

Community-Led Design And Co-Design Processes

Community-led design's methodology uses a co-design process, where people are directly involved in decision-making throughout the design process, from visioning to implementation. In this approach, the community becomes not only a subject (with a very important opinion on the project), but an equal or lead player in the design process.

CLD methodology is one modern iteration of a bigger movement, which is commonly called "participatory design". The participatory design movement date s back to the 1970s and was developed for the first time in Scandinavia to increase the value of industrial production by engaging workers in the development of new systems for the workplace.
The basic principle of this methodology is to put together the expertise of the system's designers/researchers and the situated expertise of the people whose life was to be impacted by the change. The approach built on people's own experiences and provided them with the resources to be able to act in their current situation (Bødker 1996). This approach is particularly important in the context of new design and planning legislation. The new Localism Act and the national planning policy framework are bringing important reforms in the planning system, a significant objective being that of "taking power away from officials and putting it into the hands of those who know most about their neighbourhood - local people themselves" [Greg Clarke, Minister for Decentralisation, 2010].

According to this principle, it's quite easy to understand the great opportunity that could be given to the citizens; they are given the power to make decisions about their local environment and services, taking on roles that would have previously been played by experts, practitioners and designers. This new direction in urban design relies on early and meaningful engagement and ongoing collaboration with communities in order to succeed. This can be supported by new research and methods, as well as tools for understanding and supporting best practice.

Creative Citizens

The Creative Citizens research project is an AHRC and EPSRC-funded collaboration between Cardiff University, Birmingham City University, University of Birmingham, University of the West of England, Royal College of Art and Open University. The researchers are exploring the value of 'creative citizenship' activities for different communities within the current changing media landscape. The Royal College of Art and Open University are focusing specifically on community-led design projects to study the value citizen involvement can bring to the design of environments and services, and how new media and digital tools can support this activity. In order to evaluate this support, the researchers are developing new digital interventions that have been co-designed with the community-led projects. These interventions aim to support the projects by creatively engaging more people. One aspect of the co-design methodology being applied uses a tool known as 'asset mapping'.

Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping is a practical tool that emerged out of the principle of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD): the premise is that communities will be better equipped to develop if they can identify and mobilise the assets they already have. It is a way of unearthing and visually representing the assets of an individual or community, as well as being an engaging activity that involves citizens in a community development project.

Despite the widespread trend to address the needs and problems within a community - which then looks outside for a solution - asset mapping instead focuses on those skills and expertise a community does have; it's an appreciative approach that recognises the intrinsic worth in people and places (O'Leary, Burkett and Braithwaite, 2011). Assets can include people, their time and skills, buildings and spaces, infrastructure, groups, associations and businesses, local media, events, and facts or stories that are of cultural or historical value.

By recognising their assets, a community can focus on positive development, responding to, building and expanding upon existing capabilities (which often go unrecognised), rather than focusing on

problems or what the community lacks (Mathie and Cunningham 2002, McKnight and Kretzmann 1996). One particular benefit of asset mapping when used as part of a co-design process is that it gives the community an activity during which they can describe why they consider an asset to be of value. This reveals opinions, values and stories about the participants and their community that give the designers important insights into the group and into their aspirations and tensions around their particular project. This helps the designers to get a deeper understanding of the community that is essential in both people-centred design and co-design processes.

In this way the knowledge exchange between the Creative Sector and the Academics can be seen in a completely different light. This rethinking - where the citizens have become the expert creative sector, from who the academic experts learn and rely on - can change the perspective through which we look at a new kind of collaboration and interaction between these two fields.

Asset Mapping and Media

In order to realise the aims of co-designing a media tool with the community project that could support them in engaging more people, the Creative Citizens research adopted asset mapping as part of their methodology. Identifying the community's capacity and opportunities could form a basis for the development of a media intervention that played to their strengths and would be sustained by the community after the research was over.

The team developed their own method that would draw out information about both the community project's assets and relationships, and the relative value of each.
Consisting of a three part group workshop (plus an icebreaker activity by way of introduction), the first part focused on mapping a community project's current assets. These are assets that already contribute to the project. Six categories of assets were used as prompts, each represented by a different prop. These are Spaces, Infrastructure, Media, Groups & Associations, People and 'Other' (incorporates anything that does not fit in the other categories, particularly cultural assets like events). Participants were asked to choose a prop, label it and place it on the map (a large sheet of paper spread on a table) explaining why they think it is an asset to the project. The closer to the centre of the paper they place it the greater the role that it is currently playing in the project. This position is then discussed by the group to decide if it correctly represents the asset's 'value'.

The second activity aims to map potential assets. This can be as simple as moving those assets currently placed on the paper to a more central location if they have latent capacity, or adding new assets to the map that the project doesn't currently use or have connections with.

The last activity aims to understand how each participant relates to the assets placed on the map. One by one participants are invited to construct an A3 version of the map placing themselves at the center and the specific assets that they relate to in the surrounding circles (Greene 2013). This tells the researchers something about the individual motivations and relationships that make up the group, which assets provide common links between people, and draws out some of the social capital present within the project.

Asset mapping has proved a useful activity to begin the co-design process, by identifying capacity and skills that could support, sustain or be harnessed for the development of a digital intervention to engage more people. After mapping a wide range of assets through several workshops, researchers are now beginning to experiment with ways to visualise the maps digitally, so that they can compare the types of assets mapped and connections between them, and continue to engage people in the process outside of a workshop. Digitising the data will also make it easier to share back with the community projects, and could be a powerful tool to continually improve and develop community networks, relations and underused assets, skills or links.

However, the 'storytelling' aspect of asset mapping has been seen to be of as much benefit as the physical mapping activity. In fact, one thing that was noticed through this methodology is the inability to truly understand people's values and motivations without a deeper involvement. So far, the only way to capture this information has been to let them explain their motivations, links, networks and relationships through a face-to-face approach (with interviews, questions, questionnaires, probes, workshops etc...). Whilst these approaches are effective, they are limited by the context in which they are undertaken, and analogue methods are very slow and quite impossible to systematise.

Part of the aims of Creative Citizens research is to understand community-led design as a creative citizenship activity but also to enable communities to connect and to support each other through various forms of media (Alexiou 2013). Developing asset mapping in a digital way is one early example uncovered by the research of how new media could be of great benefit: Web 2.0 technologies and social media offer new opportunities for participatory planning and could transform the way in which people take part in the process and affect the ability to have a real and effective impact, further reducing the need for designers or professional experts in community-led activities, and helping them to become more sustainable. The support of media is expected to be useful - or even essential - in developing social networks and engaging new participants in the community itself.

Conclusions

Two strands of study, apparently far apart, have come to overlap ever more frequently. On one side internet, the Web 2.0, social medias, blogs, open-source programs, free sharing uploading and downloading services etc are giving people more and more possibilities to choose, in first person, what kind of information they want to have, receive, share and forward. Concurrently, the worldwide spread of mobile (and cheap) devices allows us, everyone everywhere anytime, to take pictures, grab videos, comment, write, like, follow and know a massive amount of people, images, films, news. It is unavoidable to note that new technologies have enabled anyone to become the director of his/her own - online - life. What we are witnessing in the technological field is an empowering of individuals that supports bottom-up methodologies, opposed to the traditional top-down one. The direction emerging in urban design field follows this bottom-up approach: community-led design, co-design and creative participatory planning are all methodologies that allow citizens' voices to be heard.

The Creative Citizens project doesn't simply aim to capture the value of community-led design, improving the practice and then trying to reconnect, as much as possible, the knowledge of experience to academic expertise. It is also trying to deeply investigate the impact and role of new media in collaborative processes, whether that's in the asset mapping methodology itself or in the interventions for engagement that it aims to co-design. The purpose is to experiment with new ways to interact, use and take advantage of these media in order to enhance creative engagement in community-led design.

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