unexpected and unintended ideas for what something could mean to different people.

Bodystorming was a key technique in Urban Tapestries where we created a mock up of the proposed interaction screens on a PDA for geolocating personal stories, and a large floor map onto which people were asked to map their use of the mocked up system. We asked people to create threads of the knowledge they might like to geolocate in their neighbourhood on the map. This technique was hugely influential on the development of the final software platform, as it revealed many uses that we could not have anticipated.

Mapping

What

– We have found that mapping ideas, associations, knowledge, stories, concepts, hopes and connections in different ways is one of the most useful way to both make connections with people and to capture knowledge in the moment. It might involve using large and small scale local maps, paper covered tables, diagrams, crayons, pens, paper, drawing and making models to visually explore, capture, represent and manifest ideas in a dynamic way.

Why

– Visual and text-based mappings can allow people to see the connections between their experiences, contexts and aspirations and those of other participants. Mapping ideas and concepts enables participants to think outside of their professional and domestic boundaries, and is a catalyst for further conversation and dialogue. Links and associations are revealed and the map becomes a visual record of what are sometimes intangible concepts. It can build trust within a workshop and help people to feel comfortable and inspired.

Who

– Requires imagination to devise and good facilitation skills to deliver but should be relatively easy for most people to utilise.

How

– The following techniques show several ways to use mapping in social engagement settings.

Social Mapping

To facilitate an introduction in which people discover unusual connections between each other we devised a form of Social Mapping. In this activity participants write their name, title and select some connections to the place, issue or each other on a sheet of paper. The aim is to reveal personal connections (more than professional ones) and to deepen the later conversations. Connections are described by drawing lines between each other or between previously noted activities, places, groups or hobbies. People that might not be present but who are relevant can also be included. In an engaging way it visually maps the complicated and wide reaching nature of interpersonal relationships. It introduces people to each other, showing shared points of interest and opens out later discussions through people discovering previously unknown facts about each other. It is important in building trust, setting the tone of a workshop as a place to be comfortable in, inspired and willing to contribute.

Proboscis ran social mapping sessions with key stakeholder groups for the Perception Peterborough regeneration visioning workshops. They were highly successful in helping a group of people quickly establish common shared interests, knowledge and passions as well as professional connections and form links that deepened throughout the workshop.
Introduction

Method Stack draws together some of our principal methods of engagement, exercises and tools to inspire dialogue, connect people and enrich the outcomes for those working together. It details What they are, Why you might use them, Who could use them and How they can be employed. It is part of Agencies of Engagement, a series of four books by Proboscis outlining the methods (Method Stack), approach (Project Account), observations and insights (Drawing Insight) and final recommendation (Catalysing Agency) used in a research project exploring groups and group behaviours within the context of the University of Cambridge and its I.T. systems. The project is a collaboration between Proboscis, the Centre for Applied Research in Education Technologies (CARET) and Crucible.

Proboscis is a social and cultural innovation studio which specialises in nurturing new ideas, talent and practices. We bring the creative processes and insights of artistic and technological fields and learning environments, expanding horizons for our partners, the participants in our projects and ourselves. We create situations and activities which enable people to access and share their own creativity and innovative ideas in novel ways – methods of engagement. Our projects have crossed the worlds of design, regeneration, technological and social research and art; in all of these we have worked with many different people and communities.

These methods are designed to make connections with people; they involve going outside of our own space and environment to talk to people in their own communities – in groups, individually, inside, outside, in pubs, cafes, community centres, libraries, schools, markets, at home and at work. Through informal conversations, workshops, interviews, activities and events it is possible to gather opinions and experiences of real people’s lives in everyday situations, rather than convening focus groups or abstracting people into types and personas. Through prompts and creative activities people are encouraged to articulate their own story rather than respond to a set of predefined questions.

These processes have enabled us to excavate layers of meaning and understanding to tease out the subtleties of people’s experiences and get beneath the surface. The methods allow people to create, communicate and share what is most precious to them in ways that transcend social, cultural or disciplinary boundaries.

Alice Angus, Giles Lane & Hazem Tagiuri
Illustrated by Mandy Tang
In Studio: Recipes for Systemic Change

In Studio, published by the Helsinki Design Lab, introduces their HDL Studio Model which they describe as “a unique way of bringing together the right people, a carefully framed problem, a supportive place, and an open-ended process to craft an integrated vision and sketch the pathway towards strategic improvement”. Helsinki Design Lab is an initiative of Sitra, The Finnish Innovation Fund, to “advance strategic design as a way to re-examine, re-think, and re-design the systems we’ve inherited from the past”.

The book is a useful compendium of the theory behind the model, a “how-to” section as well as practical examples of how it has been applied to specific projects. It has many useful observations and practices for managing innovation as well as design practices, and excellent models for initiating and managing collaborative practices. The book is available as a free PDF download.

helsinkidesignlab.org/instudio

Relaxed informal conversations in groups allows people to involve each other in the conversation which sparks deeper discussion. In our research we conduct conversations which sparks deeper discussion. In our research we conduct conversations in order to gain a deeper picture or understanding of a place, situation or thing.
Arup Drivers Of Change

The Foresight group of ARUP, a design and engineering firm with a multi-disciplinary approach, created this set of reference cards to provide insights and instigate positive change. Divided into five categories – Social, Technology, Environment, Economic and Political – each card provides facts and statistics, and asks questions that explore important issues from each realm, encouraging a diverse range of people to work together to create a better future.

2006.driversofchange.com

Storyboards

Working with a group of people to create the storyboard for a film or story can be very revealing as it necessarily involves people in discussing what they want to communicate, the story they want to tell, the settings, the objects or characters, the action and the core motivations behind characters. If the film’s theme connects tangentially to the subject of research it opens doors to explore the issues freely.

For Sutton Grapevine Proboscis ran a playful short animation workshop with a youth group that, through the creative planning, storyboarding, ongoing conversation and execution, revealed important insights into the challenges and benefits of growing up in a rural village.

Collaborative Storytelling

Rory’s Story Cubes

Rory’s Story Cubes are dice-like cube sets printed with evocative images for randomly generating stories. They have been used in workshops as ‘warm-up’ exercises to help get participants into a creative and collaborative frame of mind. The images are commonly used symbols with multiple interpretations, and the 9 cubes in each set allow for millions of permutations. The cubes can be used in different ways, not just for telling stories.

For instance, a common feature of problem solving is being able to look at the problem from a different perspective – the cubes can be rolled randomly or chosen consciously to construct visualisations of the issues at hand. By working with symbols to interpret the problem in an abstract way it becomes possible to generate new perspectives or insights based on different interpretations. Discussion can then flow around re-orderings of the cubes’ relationships to each other, opening up the potential for solutions to be imagined.

www.storycubes.com

Listening to the stories that emerged from a workshop about pollution during the Feral Robots project (where robotic cars responded to air pollution in a public park) and in the Snout project (which combined carnival costumes with environmental sensors and a website to track pollution) led Proboscis to an understanding of how people might use and combine technologies as part of everyday activities to understand and act upon the impact of pollution in their neighbourhood. It also helped the computer scientists on the project further their research into the social application of sensor technologies.

Recorded Interviews

Conducting interviews with groups and individuals in familiar places (where they meet, play, study or work; the market, youth club, park, cafe, community halls and centres) has enabled us to tailor conversations to the particular individual or group. Where relevant we use photographs, postcards, props and maps to start conversations or to trigger more information about a certain area or issue. Recording the interview lets us listen later and focus on the moment, the flow of conversation and engaging with people in a lively way.

Recording interviews for research and visioning project With Our Ears to the Ground allowed Proboscis to talk to people face to face – outside, inside and during their activities – without taking notes and therefore participate more in a group’s activities and the attendant conversation at existing events. This allowed us to join people in many different everyday situations. We were able to go back later and transcribe the conversations, finding nuances and details of memories that might otherwise have been forgotten, and draw conclusions across the many recordings which have been fed into Hertfordshire County Council’s long term planning.
During our projects we often set out to join existing groups of people who meet as part of their lives and community activities, rather than convene a focus group, in order to explore issues in an everyday setting. The storytelling starts when a memory or experience stimulates another and they build into a stream of experiences. This flows best in groups who already know each other. We often take along props, objects, maps and archival material. It might begin as randomly as asking how people used to do their laundry forty years ago, if they make their own clothes, or where young people go to meet. Allowing for meanders into the unexpected, it is possible to reveal a lot about peoples’ lives and to discover stories that might not emerge in a one to one interview where the participant might not think they were relevant.

Our research in developing the software platform Urban Tapestries took us into discussion with a group of elders who meet regularly at our local community centre. What was originally intended as a test of scenarios quickly became a collaborative storytelling event. What we learned was vital to the project as it fundamentally shifted the emphasis away from technology towards how technology could support sharing intergenerational community knowledge. It also shifted our research practice away from using convened test groups to working with actual communities because of the richness and complexity of the unforeseen elements they bring into the mix.
In the Perception Peterborough visioning project wanderings allowed Proboscis to discover a wider group of people than we were initially asked to engage with, which in turn brought valuable voices into the research. This underlined for the partners the importance to community participation and voices. The research subsequently led the project funders to instigate a much larger, two year project (Citizen Power) focused on the voices of people and communities.

**Data Capture**

Environmental sensors or device applications that enable data capture such as GPS mapping, altitude, air quality, sound frequencies, infra-red light and other imperceptible phenomena can be playful yet powerful tools to use during exploratory walks in community areas and urban settings. They have been especially useful in working with

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**Issue Cards**

**What** – Postcard or Record cards with information, issues, questions, quotes or photographs printed on them. The cards might describe situations, technologies or scenarios of everyday life. They might make a series of propositions for people to respond to. Each card might pose a different question or contain a prompt, or all ask the same question.

**Why** – To build a snapshot, collect memories or experiences and to engage larger numbers of people, and those who do not want to stop and talk or who are just passing by.

**How** – The cards can be used in different ways: participants might be given a set to work with in a workshop; people might be asked to fill one in at a public site and place in a box; they might be designed to be sent back or pinned on a map or wall in a public space where a collection builds up over time for everyone to see and respond to. It is often helpful to ‘place’ a few completed cards to encourage other people to participate.

**Who** – A common sense tool that can be as simple or complex as the designer wishes. Combinations of images and text, with good graphic design are most effective.
Exploration Packs

**What**

Paper or card cubes, they can be pre-printed or left blank to write on or add stickers, to use as a thinking and storytelling tool. StoryCubes are a tactile three dimensional tool that can be used for exploring relationships and narratives. Each face of the cube is illustrated or annotated to convey an idea, a thing or an action. StoryCubes are a dynamic yet simple way of gathering and sharing ideas by engaging a group of people in creating text and images about a shared issue.

**Why**

Blank cubes can be used for people to write or draw on immediately, to capture and explore ideas. By placing cubes together it is possible to build up multiple narratives in three dimensions and explore the relationships between them. The cubes can be folded in two different ways, giving each cube twelve possible faces – two different ways of telling a story to reveal different perspectives and make new connections and associations.

**How**

Use bookleteer.com to design, print and make StoryCubes on a personal printer, or use the short run printing service to print on demand. You can also order blank collage packs, camera, audio recorder, matchbox) over a given period of time. There are contents by using the items (i.e. booklet of questions, StoryCube, set of photos, felt board, notebook or diary; a set of images to draw or write on with prompts or questions to respond to; a map to mark their location, connections, memories, activities; a camera to photograph; an audio recorder to record thoughts, feelings, sounds, and a matchbox to capture the sense of a place.)

**StoryCubes**

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**Encounters**

It is often the unexpected encounters – stopping to chat to people whilst investigating a place, or talking to people we encounter on a journey – that have brought a rich area of knowledge into our research projects. Encounters have connected us with individuals and communities who we have returned to interview in more depth, and they have revealed places, practices, issues and situations we would otherwise have missed.

The encounters Project had us On With our Eyes to the ground revealed some new communities to speak to outside of those which had been initially suggested. This in turn opened up important avenues for the research to reach diverse sections of the community that we would not have connected with through the established channels. The conversations revealed some key insights into the impact of transport infrastructure on community cohesion that Hornsby Shire Council was able to use in rethinking how its internal teams communicated in policy development.
comfortable to model something simple and add it. The mapping process should be short (30-40 minutes) and followed with a conversation where each participant is recorded presenting what they created.

Proboscis devised a 3D map making session as part of workshops for the Perception Peterborough regeneration visioning project. Stakeholders and advisors in the project were invited to construct their ideas for an environmental city upon a large scale map, allowing them to visualise the impacts and relationships which these had with the existing infrastructure and sparking many conversations amongst the group.

Mapping Stories

Set up a large map of an area and ask people to write on Post-It notes or stickers to show where they live. Ask them questions about the community – where they live, work and play, what it’s like and what they like to do – gradually teasing out the details and motives behind activities they participate in, as well as the difficulties and challenges that people face. Use photographs and postcards to trigger stories.

For Social Tapestries we run story mapping workshops with two housing groups, schools and users of a London park. The process of mapping stories in a group encouraged more people to pitch in as they reminded each other of key issues or memories. Capturing contributions in this informal and open-ended way enabled us to get a deeper understanding of the issues which face the various groups. It also allowed us to explore the potential for emerging mobile media to enable change through the mapping and sharing of knowledge and experience in everyday settings.