



Pleasurable Cities

A discussion paper

by Tash Lee

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INTRODUCTION

The Pleasurable Cities project was an exploratory study into how personally owned technology might be used to provide young people with a voice within their local communities, have a say in changes to their local environments, display ownership and use of social spaces and become more 'active citizens' within their localities.

At the core of the Pleasurable Cities project was the link between visual signs (represented by real-world place markers) and virtual conversations (both in location - via text messages, and remotely - via web-based message boards), to provide new channels for young people to express their use of space, and to discuss and comment on their expectations and desires for any development or change of those places.

The project explored the pros and cons of a proposed (and existing) range of technology-enhanced systems that utilise located media and mobile phone technologies. The aim was to create a prototype system that would:

- enable young people to have their say in location and 'in the moment'
- facilitate discussion and debate and the sharing of ideas between peers
- result in a coherent bank of feedback/suggestions for local decision makers to review, comment and act upon.

This document provides a description of Futurelab's background research; the thinking and concept development behind such a system and a brief review of the pertinent literature. It also provides information on a series of co-design/user-informed design workshops and focus groups we ran with young people. This early work highlighted a series of insurmountable issues to the development, integration and wide use of such a system, at least within the framework of a prototype project. As such, we postponed any technical development to take stock of and reflect on our findings to date, and to share our learning and suggestions for a way forward. The project came to Futurelab through our Call for Ideas programme¹.

The research and development work on which this paper is based is small-scale and the account is an exploratory one. From the limited evidence available to us, broad empirically-informed conclusions cannot (and should not) be drawn. However, our investigations to date do provide a good starting point for understanding the challenges and issues that must be overcome in order to fully integrate the use of personally owned technologies in such an active citizenship scenario.

¹ The Call for Ideas (CFI) programme is Futurelab's biannual open call for new ideas for learning technologies or practices on a range of themes. The CFI programme offers support in academic/market research and the development of a technical prototype for concept testing/trialling with learners. Each idea is put through a rigorous process of discovery and elaboration before any technical development is undertaken.

CONTEXT

The concept of the 'Pleasurable City' is derived from a diverse context, which takes into consideration issues of empowerment, community participation and political engagement, learner voice, intergenerational communication and young people in local democracy. It is relevant to the debate on mobile and ubiquitous computing for learning, and on recent research of new technologies, such as open mapping, geo data, semantic web, social software and 'active posters'². It draws on debates about architecture and the built environment in seeing social spaces as learning spaces - as well as having links to citizenship education. This section very briefly explores the theoretical, social, political, educational and technical frameworks within which the project sits and offers references to follow for further investigation.

Participation in politics, citizenship in education and student voice

The past two decades have seen greater attention given to issues surrounding the development and maintenance of effective democratic citizenship within societies by both politicians and educators alike³. In England, the debate about the future of democracy has been driven by two interconnected concerns. The first is the perceived general apathy of citizens towards politics and worries regarding the level of participation and political understanding⁴. The second concern is that of the 'seemingly pervasive erosion of the social, political, economic and moral fabric of society in England, in the face of rapid economic and social change'⁵.

This reduction in people's interest, participation and commitment to 'official politics' is perceived to be more prevalent amongst younger generations⁶ and there have been countless initiatives targeted specifically at young people⁷ that aim to counteract this social and political disaffection and to raise levels of understanding and participation. Perhaps the most explicit of these interventions is within the formal education system, where Democratic Citizenship became a compulsory National Curriculum foundation subject in English secondary schools from 2002⁸. This is complemented at Key Stages 1 and 2 (5 to 11 years old) by non-statutory guidelines for citizenship education alongside personal, social and health education (PSHE).

² For information on active poster technology, see: activeprint.org and semacode.org

³ Biesta, G and Lawy, R (2006). From teaching citizenship to learning democracy: overcoming individualism in research, policy and practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*. Vol 36, No 1, pp63-79

⁴ McLaughlin, TH (2000). Citizenship education in England: the Crick Report and beyond. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 34(4), 541-570

⁵ Kerr, D (2000). Citizenship in the National Curriculum (England): issues and challenges. *The School Field*, 11(3/4), 73-90

⁶ See:

Kimberlee, RH (2002). Why don't British young people vote? *Journal of Youth Studies* 5(1), 85-98

Torney-Purta, J, Lehmann, R, Oswald, H and Schulz, W (2001). *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*. Amsterdam: IEA

White, C, Bruce, S and Ritchie, J (2000). *Young People's Politics: Political Interest and Engagement Amongst 14- to 24-year olds*. York: YPS

⁷ Park, A (1995). Teenagers and their politics. In R Jowell et al (eds), *British Social Attitudes, 12th report*. Aldershot: Dartmouth

⁸ www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship

In theory, the objectives of citizenship education are sound – to educate young people to become informed, active members of society able to participate on many levels⁹ - and as such are organised around three key aims of knowledge, skills and participation:

- knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens
- developing skills of enquiry and communication
- developing skills of participation and responsible action.

Despite best intentions however, these objectives tend to get lost in translation from theory to practice, or worse, citizenship is undervalued in an already overcrowded curriculum so that it is barely included at all. As recently as September 2006 an Ofsted report highlighted that “only a minority of schools worked hard to make citizenship a key part of the curriculum”¹⁰, with 25% of schools inspected in 2005/06 judged by to be ‘inadequate’ for the quality of their lessons in citizenship¹¹. In many of those schools where citizenship does feature on the curriculum much of the focus tends to be on the knowledge and understanding aspects and ends up becoming simply teaching **about** citizenship – “providing students with sufficient knowledge and understanding of national processes and the structures and processes of government and political life”¹², but not the experience and skills required to become effective democratic citizens.

Several commentators have argued against this education **about** citizenship in favour of active citizenship, the learning of democracy through participation in the activities, practices, relationships and communities of everyday life¹³. Biesta et al (2005) make a compelling argument for a shift from “teaching citizenship to learning democracy”, highlighting the vital importance of informal learning and of active participation on the formation of democratic dispositions, both in school and in non-school settings¹⁴.

If active citizenship education promotes young people’s participation in decision-making, it is necessary to understand what might be meant by ‘participation’ in practice. Firstly, there are obvious tensions between the view that sees children as autonomous individuals, and the view that is inclined to problematise and marginalise children¹⁵, or see them as innocent and incompetent dependents in need of protection¹⁶. Secondly, it is necessary to accept that offering young people equal participation in decision making can lead to irreconcilable conflicts

⁹ Holden, C (2004). ‘Heaven help the teachers!’ Parents’ perspectives on the introduction of education for citizenship. *Educational Review*, 56:3, 247-258

¹⁰ Times Educational Supplement (28 September 2006). ‘Inadequate’ citizenship classes criticised. www.tes.co.uk/search/story/?story_id=2289043

¹¹ Office for Standards in Education (2006). *Citizenship in Secondary Schools*

¹² Selwyn, N (2002). *Literature Review in Citizenship, Technology and Learning*. Bristol: Futurelab

¹³ See:

Biesta, GJJ (2006). *Beyond Learning. Democratic Education for a Human Future*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers
Biesta, G and Lawy, R (2006). From teaching citizenship to learning democracy: overcoming individualism in research, policy and practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol 36, No 1, pp63–79

¹⁴ Biesta, GJJ, Lawy, RS and Kelly, N (April 2005). Young people learning democracy: A UK perspective. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada

¹⁵ Roche, J (1999). Children: rights, participation and citizenship. *Childhood*, 6:4, 475-493

¹⁶ See:

Stasiulis, D (2002). *The Active Child Citizen: Lessons from Canadian Policy and the Children’s Movement*
Jans, M (2004). Children as citizens: towards a contemporary notion of child participation. *Childhood*, 11:1, 27-44

between existing value systems, ethical standards and beliefs¹⁷. The challenge of educating for participatory citizenship, then, is to provide relevant and authentic methods, tools and ways of participating, that also support the reflection on one's own (and others') actions in a pluralist society; where diverse cultures, subcultures, and their associated values and interests all exist alongside each other.

These debates about young people's participation in democracy share close links with issues of student/learner voice and young people's rights to have a say in their education. Recently, research on student voice in schools and communities has become increasingly prevalent. Generally there is agreement that student voice/pupil participation is important and there is a rapidly growing body of research literature¹⁸. However, whilst student voice is fairly high on the agenda, there is a wide range of differing practices "with quite different intentions and aspirations for the future"¹⁹. It is argued that when people have a voice and an influence on decisions and outcomes they are more likely to participate and also to learn through participation²⁰. However, listening to students and acting on feedback is still a fairly rare occurrence in schools and there are often few suitable means for students to participate at all in school decision making. Arguably, when it does happen it is often tokenistic with consultation reduced to 'tick box activities'²¹, or if there are opportunities for young people to contribute their opinions more openly, there is seldom someone able or willing to listen or act on them²².

Our thinking with the Pleasurable Cities project was to explore aspects of political participation, to try and change attitudes towards young people's participation in decision making, and to provide authentic scenarios for young people to get involved by:

- enabling 'in situ' opportunities to participate in democratic debate
- setting up a system that could potentially deliver a tangible outcome
- providing a means to participate by utilising a device that can be found in many teenagers' pockets - the mobile phone.

Ubiquitous technology

Alongside politicians' and educators' interest in democratic citizenship, the last few decades have also witnessed a marked increase in the use of information and communication technologies which are transforming the ways in which we work, learn and live. Increasingly, particularly amongst younger generations, much social practice is technologically supported.

¹⁷ Berman, S (1997). *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Social Responsibility*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

¹⁸ See:

Fielding, M (2001a). Beyond the rhetoric of student voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of 21st century schooling? *FORUM*, Volume 43, No 2

Rudduck, J and Flutter, J (2000). Pupil participation and pupil perspectives: carving a new order of experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30, pp75-89

¹⁹ Fielding, M (ed) (2001b). Special issue on student voice. *Forum*, Volume 43, Issue 2

²⁰ See for instance: Beetham, D (1992). Liberal democracy and the limits of democratization. In D Held (ed), *Prospects for Democracy: North, South, East, West*. Cambridge: Polity

²¹ See:

MacBeath, J and Mortimore, P (eds) (2001). *Improving School Effectiveness*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Rudduck, J and Flutter, J (2000). Pupil participation and pupil perspectives: carving a new order of experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30, pp75-89

²² Futurelab (2006). *Learner Voice Handbook*. Available online at: www.futurelab.org.uk/research/handbooks.htm

95% of 16-25 year-olds own a mobile phone²³. These phones are becoming ever more sophisticated with multiple functions and a convergence of media - internet access and MP3, video games, camera capabilities etc. The proliferation of technologically-mediated interaction amongst young people has led some researchers to explore the impact these technologies have upon democratic practices²⁴. The thinking behind Pleasurable Cities was, more specifically, to explore the impact of technologically-mediated interaction on 'active citizenship - in action' and to establish effective ways of both widening participation and of supporting communication between diverse groups of people.

The acquisition of democratic knowledge and skills is largely believed to be through exposure to and dialogue across different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. It has been argued that technology can have advantages over face-to-face communication, not only because it enables connections regardless of geographical location, but that it can be more inclusive, bridging gaps between age, gender, class and culture²⁵. In addition, its potential for anonymity offers new channels to those who would be unlikely to participate through more traditional means. While this facilitative function of technology may be helpful to the learning of democratic practices, another important characteristic of technology is its generative nature, its ability to create new environments for social action. This is evidenced in the power of online computer games where virtual worlds provide new opportunities for experience, interaction and learning.

Drawing on the power of technology to provide new forms of communication and support social action alongside its ever-increasing mobility and ubiquity, we wanted to explore the combination of locative, mobile and web technologies to support the development of our 'Pleasurable City'. Our thinking behind this concept is that a town, city or institution might be a more **pleasurable** place to live, work or learn if you've had a chance to shape and develop it to suit your needs.

Towns and cities

In the Government's white paper, 'Our Towns and Cities'²⁶, plans for transforming UK cities over the next 25 years were outlined. Key to this vision is the decentralising of Government power to local councils, to create their own vision for their cities and countryside. This requires a complex range of policy approaches that take into account the diversity of needs in our towns and cities and the plethora of voices, both young and old.

Traditionally, the needs and desires of the 14-19 age groups are ignored in the official decision-making processes of local and national government²⁷. Consultation is rare on the development of their economic, social *and* environmental futures²⁸, yet use of public space by this age group is high and varied. However, at the present time, the visibility of many young

²³ OfCom (2006). Consumer Panel Report. Available online at: www.ofcom.org.uk

²⁴ Barber, BR (May 2002). The ambiguous effects of digital technology on democracy in a globalizing world. Paper presented at the Conference Gut zu Wissen, Organised by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Berlin, Germany

²⁵ See:

Wegerif, R (1998). The social dimension of asynchronous learning networks. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 2(1), 34-49

Preece, J (2002). Supporting community and building social capital. *Communications of the ACM*, 45(4), 37-39

McConnell, D (2000). *Implementing Computer Supported Cooperative Learning* (2nd ed). London: Kogan Page

²⁶ The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2000). *Our Towns and Cities: The Future* (full report)

²⁷ Institute for Conflict Research (2005). *Youth Participation in the Democratic Process*. www.conflictresearch.org.uk

²⁸ Matthews, H, Limb, M and Taylor, M (1999). Young people's participation and representation in society. *Geoforum* 30 (1999) 135-144. www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

people 'hanging around' in public spaces is perceived as threatening, and complaints, as well as curfew orders, are common²⁹.

Despite this stereotype, few resources or opportunities are provided for young people to allow them to contribute to the development of public space. Young people know their local environments and the individual locations within them and arguably use these urban spaces more (creatively) than other social and cultural groups. There will be places or objects within our familiar landscapes that go unnoticed by others, but which form the backdrop of many young people's lives. These spaces and places are deeply social as well as public, and yet no official map or urban plan can reveal what occurs and what is seen (in and on them) by the young people who inhabit them on a day-to-day basis. In his seminal book 'The Child and the City', Colin Ward suggests we need to 'reclaim the streets' as a means of education. For this 'education' to be effective, the streets, squares and parks where young people live out their daily lives need to be both recognised and understood. As Ward so aptly puts it, "no city is governable if it does not grow citizens who feel it is theirs"³⁰. One of the biggest aims of the Pleasurable Cities project was to provide young people with tools that allow them to reclaim their cities, and to make steps towards empowering young people to become active citizens whose voices are taken into account.

The potential for new technologies to be used to strengthen the link between young people and citizenship is currently being asserted by researchers³¹, think tanks³² and also politicians — notably, the former Home Secretary David Blunkett claimed that "digital technology has important implications for the relationship between citizen and state"³³. Some commentators even suggest that new media and new technology define society so completely that they should be at the core of the content for citizenship education³⁴.

There have been a multitude of arts/locative media projects that use different combinations of technologies – SMS/MMS, GPS, Bluetooth, visual markers, websites - to provide tools for people to tell their personal stories, create maps of their social spaces, make connections with other people or trade tips and recommendations about certain locations. For instance, the Yellow Arrow project³⁵ enables people to place stickers on physical objects to which they attach digital annotations – accessible by others via text messages; Traces of Fire³⁶ follows the movements of a lighter from pub to pub across the city; SocialLight³⁷ enables people to share

²⁹ See for instance: Newcastle City Council (2004). Green Spaces... Safer Spaces: Anti-Social Behaviour in Green Spaces

³⁰ Ward, C (1977). The Child in the City. The Architectural Press Ltd (p177)

³¹ See:

Selwyn, N (2002). Literature Review in Citizenship, Technology and Learning. Bristol: Futurelab
Livingstone, S, Bober, M and Helsper, E (October 2004). Active participation or just more information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet. A research report from the UK Children Go Online project

³² Howland, L and Bethell, M (2002). Logged Off? How ICT Can Connect Young People and Politics. London: Demos

³³ IPPR (2004). Manifesto for a Digital Britain (overview). ippr.typepad.com/digitalmanifesto

³⁴ See:

Miller, D (2000). Citizenship: what does it mean and why is it important? In N Pearce and J Hallgarten (eds) Tomorrow's Citizens: Critical Debates in Citizenship and Education. London: Institute for Public Policy Research
Turnbull, J and Muir, E (2001). The practice of citizenship: embracing diversity in learning and teaching with implications for in-service training and professional development. Journal of In-Service Education, 27:3, 429-446

³⁵ www.yellowarrow.net

³⁶ www.traces-of-fire.org

³⁷ socialight.com

location-based notes, pictures and sounds via their mobiles; Tagzania³⁸ lets people tag their own web-based maps with pictures and keywords and DenCity³⁹ uses QR-codes (2D barcodes) to physically 'tag' buildings and urban sites, which can then be scanned by mobile camera phones to receive localised information of the specific place. For a more comprehensive list, see 'locative projects' table below.

The original vision for the Pleasurable Cities project was to build on the lessons learned from these projects to pilot a city-wide project that 'reclaimed the streets' for learning, participation and democratic citizenship.

A selection of locative media/arts projects, and mobile social networking products and services

buddyPing	www.buddyping.com	buddyPing provides a mobile location platform for users to find their friends when they are out and about, as well as a location-based events calendar.
CellSpotting	www.cellspotting.com/webpages/cellspotting.html	A global location-based information service for mobile (GSM and UMTS) users. The service enables users to find just in time information for the place they are in currently and reciprocate by leaving information for others.
DenCity	infosthetics.com/archives/2005/08/dencitynet.html	QR-codes (2D barcodes) are used to physically 'tag' buildings and urban sites, which can be scanned by normal mobile camera phones to receive localised information of the specific place. A virtual online map visualises the database content, the emergent interconnections and the resulting urban densities. The maps can be explored interactively by adapting various data mapping settings.
loopcity	www.iamas.ac.jp/~didi	A project that involves the mapping of a city in terms of its social architecture - the spatial/temporal organisation of everyday life. 'Describing the city based on repeated everyday actions'.
MobiTip	www.sics.se/humle/projects/mobitip/about.php	MobiTip runs on Sony Ericsson P900 mobile phone and allows its users to enter comments, recommendations and tips about anything that they want to express an opinion on within a limited spatial scope - such as a shopping mall.
Precision Location	www.intel.com/research/precision_location.htm	A research project to investigate ways of bringing information from the internet into the physical world by associating that information with time and space.
Rabble	www.rabble.com	Part blogging, part location-based personal networking, Rabble connects users with the world in a unique and intuitive way by turning 'users' into 'producers' and creating a

³⁸ www.tagzania.com

³⁹ infosthetics.com/archives/2005/08/dencitynet.html

		marketplace for mobile user-generated content.
Social Tapestries	socialtapestries.net	Social Tapestries is a research programme exploring the potential benefits and costs of local knowledge mapping and sharing what has been termed the 'public authoring of social knowledge'.
SocialLight	sociallight.com	Sociallight is a community that enables people to create, share, and discover virtual post-it notes (Stickies) placed anywhere in the real world. Sociallight notifies you on your mobile phone when you're near a Sticky. It will display the Sticky and offer some background on the person who set it. You can instantly respond, leave your own Sticky, or just move on. The goal of Sociallight is to let people share their experiences and ideas from the real world.
Tagzania	www.tagzania.com	Tagzania enables people to add places and points to maps to create and overlay locations with personally relevant information.
Traces of Fire	www.traces-of-fire.org	Arts and technology project in which ten lighters are 'lost' in pubs across the city of Dublin. Each lighter is equipped with its own transmitter and transmission ID. Over two weeks the lighters are tracked, every moved is logged and displayed visually on a map.
Yellow Arrow	www.yellowarrow.net	Art and technology project in which participants purchase stickers - each with a unique code - with which they tag whatever physical object they wish. To this they attach a digital notation by via SMS - a personal story or a restaurant recommendation. Visitors that discover a yellow arrow can satisfy their curiosity and ascertain its meaning by texting the number and receiving a return text. On the supporting website there is further discussion, images of each arrow in location, and an ever growing map of the whereabouts of yellow stickers.

THE VISION – A TRUE 'PLEASURABLE CITY'

In its original iteration, Pleasurable Cities was to use the intriguing and engaging nature and interconnected communication channels of projects such as Yellow Arrow to facilitate political action rather than simply as vehicles for storytelling and sharing information.

In order to provide relevant, authentic situations and tools to support participation, and enable reflection on one's own and others' actions, one of the unique characteristics was that the system would enable an individual to leave a comment but also facilitate a dialogue between people in location – then and there, in the moment. Comments would be marked in the physical environment by a sticker and explored via SMS on a mobile phone. Many of the projects that we were using as references (see 'locative projects' table) enable participants to leave or pick up a comment via SMS while they are in a location, but any richer conversation or consideration of others' actions is followed up later, out of context, with web-based discussions. It was felt that it was crucial to first enable young people to comment on their urban spaces while they were in them, rather than having to remember how they felt at a certain point in time and articulating it later. Equally important was to enable opportunities for

young people to reflect on other people's thoughts and opinions simultaneously, in case another viewpoint may change or influence their opinion – again at the time and in the location in which they first felt compelled to get involved in the debate.

To ensure that the project didn't fail over the long term with young people viewing their participation as tokenistic and their opinions still largely ignored, another key objective of the project, was to ensure that there were systems in place to:

- automate the collection and organisation of comments, debate and discussion
- provide a web-based community to further debate, refine feedback and result in a coherent collective expression – ready for lobbying councillors and urban planners
- communicate feedback, as a coherent set of arguments/suggestions to councillors, urban planners and key decision makers
- ensure a response (or preferably action) by the council in direct response to participants' feedback.

The physical presence of stickers would serve as an immediate visual indication of the issues that were pertinent to the greatest number of people. The infrastructure would allow the young people involved to contribute to a growing map that documented the social uses of public space and to become more active urban citizens. Although confined to the city of Bristol initially, the concept of the pleasurable city was one that could be scaled up and/or transferred to other cities, towns or locations.

During early conversations with Bristol City Council we came up against the first barriers to the project. Although there was some initial interest, to proceed further we needed to obtain agreement from three separate council departments, between which there was a severe lack of communication. We would have persevered to get the council on board but the first of the three departments completely refused the use of physical markers or stickers, due to concerns over littering and the council's fly-posting legislation. As the physical marker aspect was felt an integral and vital part of the project we abandoned our initial broad aims of developing a 'Pleasurable City' and focused instead on a smaller 'Pleasurable Place'.

A 'PLEASURABLE PLACE', CONFINED AND CONTAINED

In spite of the council's lack of cooperation we were determined to find a community or institution where we could test out the concept on a small scale. We established a relationship with The Park, a Local Opportunities Centre (LOC) in Knowle West, Bristol⁴⁰ where we would be working with a group of fourteen 14-16 year-olds who had recently become representatives on the institution's very first student council. Due to the reduced community to which the project would now be relevant, the scale of the project had been pared down and its aims refined.

As we began workshops the aims of the project were as follows:

- to utilise digital tools to enable young people to engage with and comment on their local environment (imperative that this was 'personally-owned technology' in order to widen participation)
- to utilise digital tools to enable young people to make visible their proposals and suggestions for change to decision makers (at the LOC these were the Management Team) with a view that there would be subsequent positive action
- to enable on-the-spot comments and responses to urban environments by individuals (in location - not only on supporting website)

⁴⁰ www.theparkcentre.com

- to create a collective set of responses to the urban environment from a community (crucial that there was an ability to converse with others, in location and on the web)
- to develop an innovative mechanism for public consultation, with the aim of exploring if and how this widens participation.

Widening participation, making differences

Prior to the first workshop, we'd agreed as a project team that the most important objective of the project was to enable a wide participation – therefore the system we designed would need to be based on text/picture messaging that young people would have access to via their own mobile phones.

We had a rough idea of how a system might be constructed, made up of the following components:

1. Visual signs in location that are either encrypted (eg active poster/QR code), or display human readable text (eg traditional poster), with a question, provocation or call for response.
2. Individuals respond to visual signs through SMS/MMS, and receive an SMS summary of others' comments.
3. All comments automatically uploaded to supporting website where additional conversation can continue.

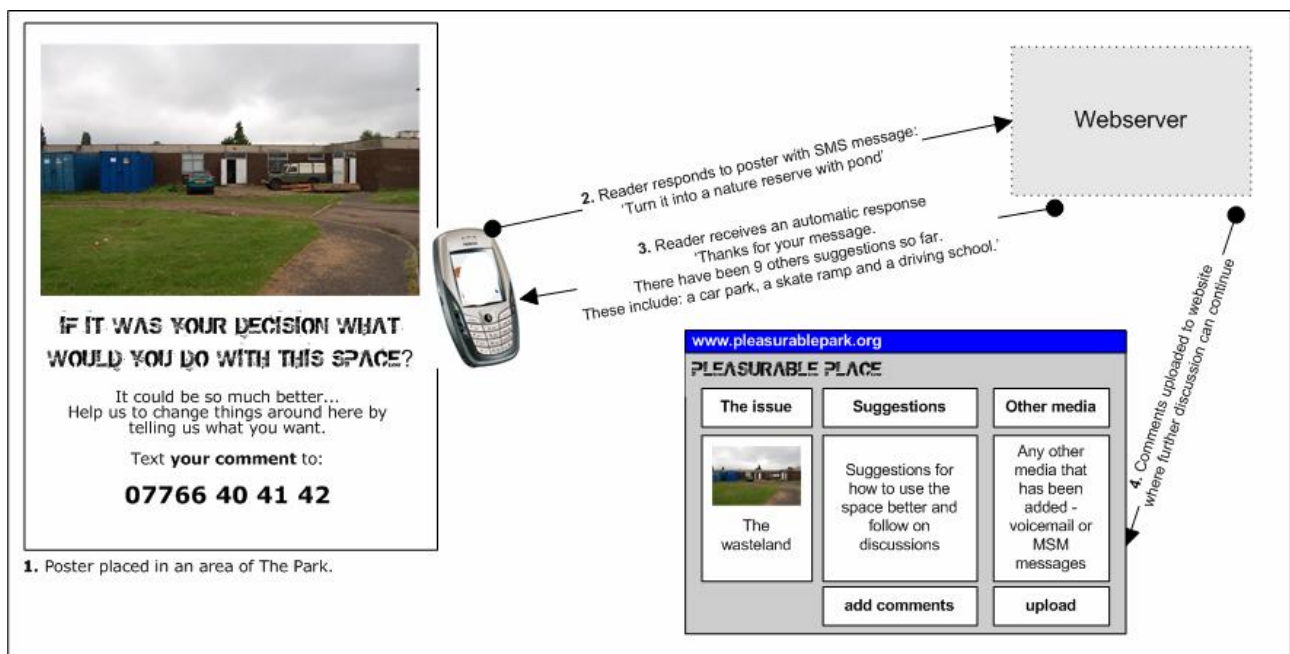


Diagram to illustrate our notion of how the system might be structured

Our intention was to use this loose structure as a starting point to aid discussions with the student councillors. We did not know whether such a system would be a suitable tool for the themes or issues that were important to them and their peers, nor did we know how we might fully facilitate dialogue in location. We were open to feedback and ideas and to be directed by the young people with whom we were working.

The Park serves the general local community in Knowle West, but predominately offers vocational courses to young people who have been excluded from school, or who have chosen

to supplement school with vocational training and spend half the week at a traditional secondary school and the other half at The Park. On the student council there were two representatives from each vocational area – construction, dance, beauty, child-care, food technology, sport and music. Although they had commonality as a group through being representatives on the student council, they hadn't worked together before and they agreed that it would be a good project for them to get 'stuck into' together and to get to know each other better. For us, it was an opportunity to work with a student council staffed by young people of different backgrounds and abilities and with a group that were 'learning the ropes' and discovering new ways of working effectively as a team. As they were so newly formed it enabled us to work with them to create approaches and structures from scratch that we could then take potentially take forward to work with other student councils.

Knowle West is one of the more deprived districts within Bristol but is currently part of a series of regeneration projects including the 'Bristol Objective 2 Neighbourhood Action Plan'. Although The Park is a really positive asset to the area, offering the local community a variety of services, the physical site itself is ripe for development. Perhaps most key though, was that the Management Team was ready to listen to students, had a budget for works and was keen to make reasonable changes to the classrooms, buildings and external environment based on suggestions made by the users of The Park.

WORKSHOPS AND FINDINGS

In testing out the concept, we ran five workshops with the student council over five consecutive weeks in May and June 2006. The workshops utilised a variety of activities to introduce the concept of Pleasurable Cities, to explore the usefulness of different approaches and technologies, to identify issues, themes and locations at The Park that were ripe for development, and to discuss the design and functionality of the system – whether technologically enhanced or not.

The development work included:

- round table discussions
- use of video and digital cameras for students to visually represent problem areas, highlight themes, and to discover positive or negative aspects of an environment they see every day, but perhaps are not consciously aware of
- paper prototyping of technologies – conversations in situ
- design activities – for visual signs/posters
- participation prototyping – we created posters, with a question and a text number to reply to and distributed them around the site
- SMS 'conversations' - to try and create the feeling of an online discussion board in location.

By the end of the second session, the group were already starting to hint that they could not see a system of this kind working for themselves or their peers, for the purposes which we were intending. At the beginning of the third session we delved deeper and captured what the students deemed to be the main barriers. These are detailed in the table below:

Barrier	Reasons given
Cost issues – "Got no credit"	Students claimed that they rarely have any credit on their phones and that if they did they would rather "use it to text mates".
Lack of	Although students had clear opinions about certain areas at The Park and suggestions for how to improve them, they didn't care

motivation/conviction	enough to spend their own money on having their say. There were suggestions to offer a prize draw to encourage people to get involved.
Low tech/no access to technology	Despite surveys that claim technology is totally ubiquitous in almost all teenagers' lives ⁴¹ , a third of our group didn't have their own mobiles. Few of the group had computers at home and worried about when they would be able to get on the website as internet access at The Park was restricted.
Posters unappealing to age group	Initial posters that were designed and distributed around The Park as part of our prototyping process to see if people were prepared to participate did not yield any response. The student councillors speculated that this was because the posters did not appeal to people their age and that the design needed to be tailored to a much younger audience.
A need to know there will be action	The group had been made promises before that were unfulfilled. What was different this time? They were clear that for them to even consider spending any credit on getting their voices heard in this way that they would have to be 100% convinced that there would be some positive action/result based on their input.
Preference for low/no tech solutions	The group showed a preference for more traditional forms of consultation that required little or no technology at all. As a student council, they saw the benefits of providing their peers with new mechanisms to feed back and to make comments, but they didn't see any benefit of utilising technology for this.

The most prohibitive and insurmountable barrier was that of cost or 'no credit'. Without exception, the participants would not be prepared to spend or 'waste' 10p of their credit to make visible their opinions about the place in which they spend most weekdays. When probed further and asked whether a chance to make a real difference and affect change would encourage them to send a text, the answer was still negative, across the whole group. This was despite the fact that at least three (out of ten) of the group had texted to vote someone in or out of Big Brother/X-Factor with a charge of between 50p-£1.50⁴².

We spent some time discussing the apparent lack of motivation to want to contribute to a dialogue or discussion via something like the Pleasurable Cities project and how that differed from text voting for a 'character' on a reality TV programme. It was clear to the students that if they were to text a comment, for example, about the state of the toilets at The Park that their message would be heard, especially as they were now on the student council. If there was then a positive response to their feedback that resulted in improvement of the toilets then that would be great "as they definitely need sorting out". However, somewhere in this scenario there was a missing link, there was a lack of motivation. For some reason it seemed that students didn't care enough about their surroundings to instigate change or pay to have their say on changes to their environments. The motivating factors that compel a person to vote to keep someone in the Big Brother house – the emotions and the empathy that someone might feel for a contestant and the knowledge that your vote can make a difference – were not

⁴¹ Guardian Unlimited (2006). Wired-up students: Ubiquitous communications technology promises to provide a highly creative learning environment. Martin Raymond, January 18 2006

⁴² Results of a straw poll in a Futurelab workshop at The Park – 10 students were questioned

factors that we'd managed to foster in our concept development work about creating a 'pleasurable place' with the student council group.

It was clear through our discussions though, that this reticence to use up precious phone credit is not completely independent of the other barriers that the group raised. Like a significant proportion of young people⁴³, many of our group had had bad experiences of 'school' where they had been shunted around, not listened to and in many cases formally excluded. Even at The Park, which is much more like an FE college and free from many of the traditional structures of school, the students' reasons for joining the student council were "so that I can have a voice" and because they still feel they have relatively little control over their lives and learning. Therefore, what we were suggesting was fairly removed from their previous experiences, it was a change in culture, and there was reluctance from the students to believe that things would actually change depending on what they and their peers had to say.

Another barrier highlighted was the poster design. Although our original plans were to use encrypted visual markers (similar to yellow arrows) which require a participant to interact to find out what the marker stands for, for the purposes of prototyping we created simple readable posters, which were much more explicit. These posters showed a photograph of a location, asked a question, eg 'what would you do to improve this space?' and invited the reader to text in their response. They were placed around The Park and displayed for three weeks, but did not elicit any SMS responses nor did they generate any general discussion that we are aware of. The student council thought that the design was unappealing to their age group, but that improving it would not necessarily be enough to overcome the issues of using up phone credit on an 'unworthy cause'. There were suggestions of a prize draw as a motivator to get involved, with each text message representing one competition entry, and a top of the range mobile phone as the prize.

There are countless reports⁴⁴ and books that tell us that young people are 'digital natives'⁴⁵, completely surrounded by technology, permanently logged on, simultaneously communicating with people across the world, "that the average teen now carries £500 worth of technology, which allows him or her to go online by some means or other for up to seven hours a day"⁴⁶. These reports create a generalised acceptance that technology is totally ubiquitous in young people's lives, which belies reality in some circumstances and potentially serves to further strengthen a digital divide. Although we were working with a small sample, it was still perhaps surprising that amongst the group there was a lack both of ownership and of use of new technologies. A third of the group didn't have their own mobiles ("I've got my mum's I can use"), and of those that did, they were basic models with a camera and ability to send MMS, but no 3G features⁴⁷ or Bluetooth connectivity/internet access⁴⁸. Few of the group had computers at home and only limited access at The Park and school.

There was also anecdotal evidence to show that students felt that the kind of consultation we were trying to foster would be better facilitated by more traditional, non-technical means such as meetings and questionnaires. As a student council, our group saw the benefits of providing their peers with new mechanisms to feed back and to make comments, but they didn't see any benefit of utilising technology for this, rather they suggested 'in-location postcards' with tick

⁴³ Erickson, F (1987). Transformation and school success: the politics and culture of educational achievement. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol 18, No 4, (Dec 1987), pp335-356

⁴⁴ See for example Pew Internet and American Life project: www.pewinternet.org/report_display.asp?r=162

⁴⁵ Prensky, M (2001). *Digital Game-Based Learning*. McGraw-Hill

⁴⁶ Guardian Unlimited (2006). *Wired-up students: ubiquitous communications technology promises to provide a highly creative learning environment*. Martin Raymond, January 18 2006

⁴⁷ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3G

⁴⁸ www.bluetooth.com/bluetooth

boxes which could be filled in and posted into a box, then and there. More simply they agreed that they would have a meeting where they collected people's concerns face to face.

"Well, what I'd do is get everyone, all together in one place, in a massive meeting, in the drama studio or something. Then do a PowerPoint, show 'em all the things that should change and then get 'em to have their say, you know, vote on it."
Matthew, 14, construction student

At the end of the fifth session the group were still having concerns that the project wasn't going to work for them. As a project team we agreed to take a step back, to explore some of the issues further and reflect on the barriers that had been highlighted. To ensure that these barriers weren't symptomatic of our student council group, we ran two further focus group sessions with the following:

- University of Bath: seven psychology undergraduate students (aged 21-23)
- Secondary school in Bristol: four Year 11 students (aged 15-16)

The issues identified as barriers to participation at The Park were also borne out in these sessions, although a few variations and additional issues were raised.

The undergraduates were initially excited by the physical marker element of the project and could see applications for it – for telling your story or making a statement about a place. However, they struggled to see it working as a tool for political consultation and democratic decision making without it first establishing itself as a system that people felt comfortable with and with which there was some sense of ownership.

The group agreed that in a setting such as a university, there were already many mechanisms for sharing information, for having your say and for getting involved in debate. It was felt that a Pleasurable Cities-style system would be an unnecessary addition within a contained community/location with distinct boundaries and that it would likely be hijacked as a vehicle for advertising or by political activists. Another strong feeling was that face-to-face communication is often as, or more, effective and the students suggested using mobile technologies to bring people physically together in a location, in the form of a Flash Mob⁴⁹ rather than trying to recreate remote authentic discussion and debate using text messaging.

They also raised concerns that SMS is potentially a cumbersome medium for a dialogue between more than two people, which was borne out in some of technical prototyping (see 'Technology Issues' below), and had concerns about costs, especially for a younger audience.

At the secondary school, the reaction was on the whole more positive. The students had been in their brand new building for only six weeks and there were countless teething problems. Here they could immediately see an application for collecting students' and teachers' niggles about the new building. However it was soon apparent that the 'consultation' would be based on such finite and focused issues (eg "who thinks there aren't enough lockers?") that there would be little 'dialogue' and merely the collection of comments. Although we too saw an application here it was felt the use of technology was not unique and in this instance we would be simply layering technology over a standard tick-box consultation exercise – rather than achieving a deeper engagement with learners. In ensuring that a system runs full circle and results in change, in this instance it would have been impossible. It was 'too little too late', the building had been completed to a cost of approx £30 million and there were no opportunities to make any significant changes at this stage.

⁴⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flash_mob; <http://www.flashmob.co.uk/>; http://www.sirc.org/articles/flash_mob.shtml

Conclusions from workshops

Cost was raised as an issue in each of the three groups, as was the feeling that much of the consultation and dialogue could be done just as well using traditional and non-technical methods, such as meeting face-to-face. This is possibly symptomatic of working within the confines of an institution or an established community where it would be relatively easy to gather everyone together or communicate with a large number of people at once. As soon as you extend the reach of a consultation system to include all the residents of a city then technically-facilitated remote communication begins to make much more sense.

One of the most interesting findings, which again was evidenced in all three groups, was that in order to get involved in something like Pleasurable Cities, almost all of the participants wanted to know what the project was about, where their information was going to go and who was going to read it. There was also concern over security and safety issues and who may be able to gain access to mobile phone numbers. This was surprising when you consider the prevalent use of social networking sites such as Myspace, Bebo and YouTube by this age group⁵⁰ where more than text messages are shared. The difference is perhaps that these sites have permeated young people's everyday culture, they're concrete and tangible and 'owned', therefore, no longer frightening. To overcome these fears of the unknown there was significant discussion about how the project would be marketed and communicated - flyers, in assembly, on the radio, through sponsorship by local businesses.

All of this feedback obviously had a negative impact on the concept of utilising the intrigue of abstract stickers or encoded markers (like the yellow arrows) to tap into people's natural curiosity which we thought would be a significant driver for the project. It also highlighted that to be successful, a project like Pleasurable Cities would need a long lead time, either to develop the system from the ground up, with stakeholders, and to evolve a community around it or to spend a significant amount of time and effort 'selling' the idea and the system until the community you want to use it feels like they own it themselves.

TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

QR codes, active posters, semacode

In its original incarnation the Pleasurable Cities project was to make use of QR codes/active posters (see boxed text) for people to place their comments in appropriate locations and for others to discover them by decoding them via their mobile phones. Early investigations revealed that there were very few phones able to read the codes and all of them were high-end models retailing at a minimum of £100. As an alternative we investigated the use of semacode, which is able to be read by more phones, but this requires mobile access to the internet which is also limited to mobiles at the higher-end of the scale and incurs an additional cost.

⁵⁰ Futurelab (2006). Social Software and Learning : An Opening Education report.
www.futurelab.org.uk/research/opening_education.htm



QR codes activeprint.org

The Active Print project is exploring how printed materials and digital displays can be linked to online content, services and applications in all kinds of urban/suburban/rural situations via mobile phones. Current camera phones are able to read special 2D 'barcodes'.

These visual codes encode information such as URLs, phone numbers and text-based information. When read and decoded by a camera phone, they can display text and link the user to content and services.

Compatible phones:

Nokia: 3650 | 3660 | 6600 | 6630
| 6670 | 6680 | 7610 | 7650 | N70
| N90
Siemens: SX1



semacode www.semacode.org

Semacode uses similar 2D barcodes to the active print project, but Semacode's software provides the tools necessary to build applications that combine aspects of the virtual world into the real world. It works by combining existing standardised elements — camera phones, optical barcodes, URLs — into an integrated system.

All the specifications and design information needed to develop a semacode-style system are available freely to the public.

For a comprehensive list of compatible phones, please see: semacode.org/about/hardware

The use of these visual barcodes would mean that a participant could read all of the comments made in a specific location by converting each code into scrolling text via their mobile. However, our decision to focus on 'personally owned' technology automatically ruled out the use of QR and semacode and our challenge was in finding ways to foster a remote dialogue and delivering multiple comments made by other people to a mobile using only SMS.

Simulating a dialogue with SMS

In addition to our consultation work with users we also ran a series of tests using SMS aiming to create something that resembled a conversation – 'a dialogue in location' - and struggled due to the limited capabilities of text, to create anything that resembled the rich, multilayered conversations found on online discussion boards, wikis and blogs. SMS is designed to handle short basic, asynchronous messages - it is not sophisticated enough to handle the complexities of a discussion involving more than two people.

Firstly, there are issues with the volume of the information that is returned to users' mobile phones. For example, an automated return text message containing the comments of 50 other participants would be at best cumbersome and at worst, completely impossible to read. There are also limits to the number of characters most phones can handle in a single SMS. It is vital then that there is some kind of either human or automated intervention in which the content is edited, and reformatted to avoid it being nonsensical and so that it is within the character limits. Here there are considerations to make. If the system is automated, what rule sets are employed to ensure that the content fed back to the user is a fair representation of the comments that have gone before? If the content is to be sorted manually, then what is the resource overhead to do this? Who decides what information is shared amongst the community and what implications does that have on subsequent thinking of the participants?

Secondly, there is the issue of what sort of information people are happy to receive, whether this is via their phone or even at all. In testing our SMS conversations with the student council group at The Park, the response was really quite negative. Instead of showing any interest in what other people had surmised on the issue, the group only wanted validation of their own comment. This could have been linked to the young age of the students and may have been rectified by changing the semantics of the text message to first acknowledge the sender's message and then introduce them to the ideas of others, but is definitely an issue worthy of further consideration and exploration.

Question (on poster): What would you do to improve the student council office?

Answer (via SMS): Paint the walls & get a computer

Automated response (via SMS back to phone): Thanks for msg. 2 other people have texted. They say:
Paint the room
Sort out the dirty floor
Any thing to add or change?

Example of text conversation

CONSIDERATIONS: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Summary of the project aims and barriers

Summing up, the key drivers of the Pleasurable Cities project were:

- to enable the use of personally owned digital tools to enable young people to engage with their local environment
- to make visible other people's opinions about the same location and create a 'dialogue' or 'conversation in location' to support the reflection on one's own and others' actions in a pluralist society
- to make visible to local policy makers people's concerns and interests and to ensure that there was some positive action in response
- to create a hybrid system of physical real-world markers and digital annotations
- to explore different approaches and emerging technologies to create a system that would achieve the above objectives.

Our decision to focus on widening participation and thus on 'personally owned' technology automatically ruled out the use of QR codes as the visual element of the project as there are so few mobiles that were able to read them. However, some of the other barriers were so fundamental that it was felt that the novelty of utilising these kinds of codes would possibly hinder involvement even further.

Our work to date has indicated that mobile phone technology is not sophisticated enough to facilitate a real dialogue between people in location although it sufficient enough to leave location-specific comments via text message which could then be followed up by discussions on a website. There were more fundamental barriers to this project than the limitations of SMS though. The first and the most significant was that participants did not perceive the benefits of their involvement and of having their say enough to justify paying (even small amounts of) money to partake. In terms of abolishing the cost aspect, this could be resolved through sponsorship from a mobile phone service provider or potentially from government funding. At the current time there is no mobile equivalent of freephone 0800 numbers, and this is another direction that could be explored.

Intrinsically related to the cost issue we found a lack of desire or drive to want to affect change. The young people we worked with were happy to point out problems, but didn't appear to care enough to make a personal effort towards making change happen. Hundreds and thousands of pounds are spent on reality TV programmes, a vast majority of it by young people⁵¹ voting to keep someone in the Big Brother house, or to get a 'celebrity' out of the jungle. We need to foster this natural desire 'to get involved' and 'have your say' for means other than reality TV. To do this we need to prove to young people that their input is valued, and to do this it is crucial that there is consistent action directly as a result.

The combination of cost and time obstacles was deemed too significant for us to continue our developmental work within the current framework of a Futurelab Prototype Development project. Although the cost of text messaging was an insurmountable issue at this time, this could have been overcome in order for us to run a small scale technology trial - it was the need to instigate a cultural shift that resulted in us stopping work to reflect on future directions of the project. The ultimate barrier was the significant amount of time that would be required to develop a system from the 'ground up' - which would be essential to ensure emotional attachment and ownership amongst a community of users and deemed necessary for Pleasurable Cities type tools to work effectively.

The following section offers suggestions and considerations for future directions of the project.

NEXT STEPS

Further work is required in both the exploration and development of mobile social software/ location-based services and ways in which they could provide young people with a voice within their local communities and widen participation in institutional, community and national politics.

The following is a discussion of considerations, areas for further research and issues to overcome in any further development work in the area of location-dependent digital technologies for community participation and 'learning democracy'.

<p>Technology</p>	<p>The key driver in the project was to widen participation, which led us to the decision to use people's own technology as a key part of the system. The most common technology was the mobile phone. The majority of the young people we worked with had basic PAYG models with limited functionality. To ensure that most people who used the institution would have the ability to get involved we were restricted to SMS/MMS as the main communication mechanism.</p> <p>However, there are many emerging technologies and existing technologies that are becoming increasingly popular, that should be considered in thinking about future ways of enabling opportunities for participation. These include but are not limited to: iPods and MP3 players, digital cameras, ubiquitous and speckled computing, geospatial web, mobile social software and location-based services.</p> <p>Links: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubiquitous_computing www.specknet.org</p>
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⁵¹ Russell, A (2004). The truth about youth? Media portrayals of young people and politics in Britain. Journal of Public Affairs. 4:4, pp347-354

	www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/network/2005/05/10/geospatialweb.html www.apple.com/education/solutions/podcasting www.elasticspace.com/2004/06/mobile-social-software
Costs	<p>Can we design systems that employ mobile technologies, but are free for people to participate? On the flipside, how do you ensure that the desire to be involved overrides the cost issues?</p> <p>There needs to be further investigation into potential sponsorship or subsidy from mobile phone service providers or from Government funding. At the current time there is no mobile equivalent of freephone 0800 numbers, and this is another direction that could be explored.</p>
Explicitness vs. intrigue	<p>A natural and longitudinal evolution of a system may not require any marketing/information imparting activities to promote it, but it needs further exploration as to whether the intrigue of projects such as yellow arrow can have any relevance in a system that is to support social and political agency.</p>
Visual markers in public places	<p>Further work is needed to find out the implications of using visual stickers and then inviting people to place them in public spaces. What are the laws, regulations and restrictions? Does this differ from county to county in England? The Yellow Arrow project puts the responsibility on to the participant, saying: "Don't vandalise public or private property. It's simple. Ask permission".</p>
Moderation and maintenance	<p>Who is responsible for shaping the direction of conversations and the collective comments? How much work is involved? How do you overcome value judgments and bias of the moderators? How do you ensure learner empowerment and ownership?</p>
Creating a dialogue	<p>Young people learn how to be citizens through their first-hand experiences of other ideas, cultures and beliefs. How can we use digital technologies to foster location-based dialogue between people that would not necessarily come into contact with one another in every day life?</p> <p>More specifically, how can we create apparatus to enable a dialogue between people and a consideration of others' opinions, rather than generating individual and potentially contradictory requests?</p>
Cyclic system	<p>It was clear from our work and from research into young people's participation in politics, urban regeneration projects and their education/learning⁵² that for any participation to engender real empowerment it is crucial that there is following change and that there are resources in place to react to people's input.</p> <p>Any system to support learner voice would not be sustainable if there is no commitment and action from decision makers in direct response to the collective comments of the contributors. What is the best way of ensuring this kind of commitment before we ask young people to get involved?</p>

⁵² See for example: Futurelab (2006). Learner Voice Handbook. Available online at: www.futurelab.org.uk/research/handbooks.htm

As an organisation Futurelab is committed to changing practice, empowering learners, and exploring whether new technologies might be able to widen participation or support new ways of doing things. In the particular case of Pleasurable Cities, with the decisions that had been made through the evolution of the project, we felt that the technology was not making enough of a difference. However, it is an area in which we will continue to work.

For further information on citizenship and new technologies, see:

www.futurelab.org.uk/research/lit_reviews.htm#lr03

On 14-19 year-olds' use of technology for learning, see:

www.futurelab.org.uk/research/lit_reviews.htm#lr13

And for advice and recommendations on learner voice, see:

www.futurelab.org.uk/research/handbooks/04_01.htm

If you are interested in discussing the Pleasurable Cities work to date, any other similar projects, or if you have any answers to the questions set out above, we would like to hear from you.

Thanks:

We would like to thank all of the members of the student council at The Park for their thoughts, ideas and participation in the project - with a special thank you to Sandra Hanson (Youth Support Officer) for her time, support and coordination. Thanks also to Pete Ferne for technical consultancy and to students at Bath University and Fairfield High School for their participation in focus group sessions.

Contact:

Tash Lee, Learning Researcher: 0117 9158214, tash.lee@futurelab.org.uk