

Chapter 6

Designing Participant-Generated Context into Guided Tours

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an interdisciplinary framework for designing participant-generated context into guided tours. The framework has been developed in parallel to practice-led research in the design of mobile learning tours with young people based in London. The article draws on art, architecture and urbanism to outline productive concepts, 'seeding' and 'threading', which support mobilised learning in tours of the built environment. In this, context is explored as an active and dynamic idea in developing attributes of the mobilised learner in the design of tours around buildings and the built environment. 150 words or less.

INTRODUCTION

I am concerned to explore how mobile learning may evolve a set of processes that involve learners participating in and producing tours of the urban built environment that challenge notions of perceived authority and inaccessibility. In this, the learner is facilitated to construct new

experiences, understandings and perceptions that reconfigure the role of the guide in tours. I have originated and designed a number of 'learning through touring' projects based in London from 2005-2007 located in everyday Deptford in South East London and institutional buildings such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and the British Library. Findings from these projects, Mudlarking in Deptford, Transitional Spaces at the V&A and Cracking Maps at the British Library

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have contributed towards the production of key concepts of ‘seeding’ and ‘threading’ that aim to stretch ways in which participants may generate context in guided tours.

In this article, I describe and link a range of theoretical ideas that contribute to an interdisciplinary perspective on mobile learning in guided tours that has both informed and been informed by the practice-based projects. Here, the tour is conceived as learning activity in which participants make connections between past and present, one site and another supported by the guide who engages multiple perspectives and voices of a building in bringing about opportunities for weaving context. The article is organised into three main sections. The first, ‘learning-enabled buildings’ makes a case for understanding the built environment as active in the design of mobile learning activities in tours. This section also proposes definitions around ‘site’, ‘situation’ and ‘context’ that are relevant to developing the concept of learning-enabled buildings. The second section focuses on ‘out-of-context’ and ‘recontextualisation’ as creative processes in learning, drawing on the work of theorists and practitioners in art, architecture and archaeology to explore how mobile learning involves using attributes of ‘noticing’, ‘stumbling upon’ and ‘connecting’. The third section concludes the article with a framework for mobilising learning through touring structured on key concepts of ‘seeding’ and ‘threading’ that enable participants in guided tours to produce and weave context in location.

LEARNING-ENABLED BUILDINGS

In 2007, Mike Sharples suggested that the last ten years has witnessed a growth in mobile learning ‘from a minor research interest to a set of significant projects in schools, workplaces, museums, cities and rural areas around the world. (Sharples, 2007a) A mobile learning community has evolved through these projects and it has been argued that

this somewhat organic development, whilst important in allowing multiple perspectives on mobile learning to thrive, has also resulted in a form of pedagogy and practice that is difficult to define. (Winters, 2007, p.5) The term ‘mobile learning’ can be described as one still in the process of defining itself and is interpreted differently by the various individuals and organisations that have an interest in considering relations between mobile technologies and learning. Sharples describes three phases of development in mobile learning over the last ten years. He suggests that the first phase was characterised by a focus on handheld technology for formal education and training in which there was a concern with technology implementation and fixed locations such as classrooms. The second phase saw the development of ‘learning across contexts’ in which the emphasis was on ‘how people learn across locations and transitions’. Sharples suggests that there was a focus on learning outside the classroom during this phase and projects based on field trips and museum visits evidenced this shift in focus from technology to learner. He describes a third phase of mobile learning as ‘learning in a mobile world’. The elements for this vision he suggests are:

- Learning spaces – new types of technology-enabled indoor and outdoor space for learning, communication and knowledge working
- Pervasive technology – display screen on tram seat; interactive map of the city; activity trails; place notes
- Participatory design – technology to enable people to be actively involved in the design of their physical and electronic, environment. (Sharples, 2007b)

These ‘phases’ provide a platform for critically engaging with the development of mobile learning with an awareness that they can be used to pose questions and open up such discussion rather than present a seamless future scenario. Of particular

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