

Exploring Digital Storytelling as a Method for Participatory Design

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INTRODUCTION

The core of Participatory Design builds on collaborative processes of users, designers and other stakeholders. [2] In order to realize this ambition a range of methods and techniques have been developed and used. Initially it was the ethnographic methods that were regarded as the most valuable ones, especially when investigating the users' everyday practices.[3] During the last years the methods repertoire has been expanded to also include methods inspired by narrative and visualization methods (games, story boards, digital scenarios etc.) [1, 7]

Joan Greenbaum distinguishes between pragmatic, political and theoretical dimensions of Participatory Design [5]. The method of Digital Storytelling (DS) is related to at least two of these dimensions. First of all, it is related to the political dimension in the sense that DS is a way to present the direct and immediate voice of users presenting something which is of importance for them, using their own power of self-expression. This relates to empowerment which is highly important in raising awareness for decision-making processes and personal responsibility. In a pragmatic sense could DS be used as a resource in a design process, i.e. in the task of drawing a "rich picture" of a situation, setting or interaction and thereby also help inform requirement specifications.

There is also the aspect that PD no longer only takes place in well-framed, in time and place-bound design projects, since more and more design projects are distributed both between sites (such as the civic society), people and also are stretched in time due to aspects such as design-in-use. The process of participation in itself is complex. Therefore is it not always supported properly in well-structured and defined design projects.

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DS has its roots at the Centre of Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, USA. [4]. DS has emerged as a way to support individual empowerment and local community-building. The goal of the activities at the centre is to "[...] assist people of all ages in using the tools of digital media to craft, record, share, and value the stories of individuals and communities, in ways that improve all our lives." [4]

Participation contains elements of unpredictability which is not possible to plan in advance, if taken seriously. Another crucial dimension of participation is real, authentic engagement in the process, not just "taking-part" as expected or requested. DS can contribute to creative thinking and in creating a foundation for engaged participation instead of dutiful or instructed participation.

The workshop is meant to serve a firsthand experience of creating a digital story following the method developed at the Centre of Digital Storytelling. The workshop aims also to provide an arena for discussion how to merge ideas of participatory design and digital storytelling. Can DS be implemented as a PD-instrument to understand and get a more many-folded and rich access to users' own experiences and knowledge? And/or can DS foster the very idea of participation?

HANDS-ON

The goal of this full-day workshop is to tell participants' own stories and to visualise these. The workshop involves story work as well as hands-on digital work. The work on the narrative is putting emphasis on identifying and articulating a story, from the participants own experiences. The workshop is about facilitating a process of getting to the heart of your story. We will also provide support on how to structure the story in a way that brings insight to the listener. We use the Seven Elements both as a narrative structure, as described by Joe Lambert, who is the founder of Digital Storytelling Centre.

The following questions provide a fruitful starting point: What do I want to tell about? What should my story be about? Perhaps you want to tell about something you have experienced? An occasion or a situation you have been involved in? The first limitation is that your story should be a short one. As a written text it should not exceed 1 A4-page and when you read it loud your story should last max. 3-4 minutes. Secondly, your story should be a personal one; it should tell about something you have been part of! Think through the key parts of the story. The following elements will show the way: *Point (of View)*, *Dramatic Question*, *Emotional Content*, and *the Gift of Your Voice, the Power of the Soundtrack, Economy* and Pacing. [6]

The participants should also think about the visual part of the story. Which pictures would work together with the story? Digital photos are preferred, but paper photos, drawings, artifacts or pieces of fabrics that would work together with the story can also be used (there will be possibilities to scan material during the workshop). The participants should bring the digital visual photos. The participants should bring the digital visual material with them to the workshop, either on a CD-ROM or an USB-memory stick. The material available on the internet is accessible, but the participants should keep in mind that stories including this kind of material cannot be shown in public environments. The stories can also include music and sound effects. There are some open and free archives on the internet, but we encourage the participants to bring the music in digital form with them. We are going to work with standard software to put together the digital stories, with the voice, illustrations (and non-obligatory components of music and sound effects: Photo Story and Windows Movie Maker. No previous knowledge and experience of these programs is required. We recommend that the participants should have a look at these programs before the workshop. Maximum of participants: 12. Deadline for submission of a short description of the chosen visual story, and a few words about the intended strategies for visualization: August of 8th (one A4-sheet via e-mail). Notification for participants: August 25th 2008.

WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

Annelie Ekelin received her Ph. D degree at Blekinge Institute of Technology in 2007. Her thesis "The Work to Make eParticipation Work", focuses the development of ICT-supported participation in eGovernment and eGovernance. She has a previous background as a journalist and has being part of several local, regional and international ICT-projects.

ICT-development projects Pirjo Elovaara Ph.D., is senior lecturer in Technoscience Studies at Blekinge Institute of Technology. Her research field is design and use of ICT. She focuses especially on the concepts of practices of participation and agency. She has also been involved in a number of local and regional ICT- development projects in the south-east of Sweden.

Christina Mörtberg, Ph.D., is associate professor in the Department of Informatics, University of Oslo/University of Umeå. Her research interests focus on systems design, participation and use, gender and IT. She works with interdisciplinary research and combine systems design approaches, feminist technoscience and ANT.

Pirjo Elovaara and Annelie Ekelin are involved in regional development within the frames of www.deltagarden.se, by running courses and training of small groups of i.e. immigrant women and students in interaction design. Further, Pirjo Elovaara and Christina Mörtberg have also used DS as a method to tell about day-to-day practices in a research project.

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