

**Digital Liberties**

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**The innovation**

We hypothesize that the relating, capturing, re-enacting and re-distribution of historical and personal narratives as told by community members can play an important role in fostering a sense of place.

Many community based storytelling projects are happening nowadays. Some develop methods to assist people in producing their own stories with the use of digital media and broadcast their results in different forms such as online journals (Silver stringers <http://stringers.media.mit.edu/>), storytelling websites (bbc capture Wales: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales/> ) or radio or tv programmes (Voices: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/>).

Our work differs from the above mentioned in the production and delivery methods. Positioning and mobile wireless Technology is employed in the delivery of the stories in the location where they happened. We believe that this technique of delivery serves as a catalyst that will enable us to collect memories and location based anecdotes from the community members themselves.

The project contributed to the state of the art of cinematic community-based narrative in the following ways:

- By linking stories and locations we bring the navigable structures paradigm out of the computer into the real world transforming the movement through real space into an editing process.
- By collecting and linking real stories from a community of people sharing the same geographical space we create a new organic non-linear story structure that remains open to the community story input.
- The production method makes use of different techniques from story reenactment with some community members and non professional actors, to digital effects and animations of hand drawn illustrations of the stories.

## **Background**

The work of my master project at Trinity College Dublin was the starting point for this work: Weirdiview, an interactive collection of real stories from a community of people living in a village just outside Dublin.

Further Inspiration comes from the ongoing research at the Interactive Cinema group at the MIT Media Lab in Boston and work Happening at MediaLabEurope focusing on the development of tools to facilitate the creation of multi-threaded narratives, the browsing of large collections of media segments and the construction and delivery of spatially distributed cinema.

## **Related research areas**

Interactive narrative, interactive cinema, distributed stories, open story structures, new media, narrative theory, spatial navigation of content, location based content, expression of atmosphere, history and personality of a place, community memories and social history.

## **Concept**

People like to tell stories and like to empathize with stories. The goal of this interactive media portrait is to offer the contemporary community a view into the history of their neighbourhood and to provide an evolving repository for stories community members wish to add. Each short story is developed as a unit for a particular setting in the community and, can be delivered via mobile technology in the appropriate location. The stories will be arranged in a multi-branching structure. Multiple characters develop their own plot through the narrative fragments and eventually intersect with other characters who appear in different stories and who are connected through the common social network or shared adventures. The stories, in form of downloadable video clips, will be made available to the audience at the geographical locations where the stories happened, and contribute to a community-related story map of the area.



## Research method

The development method includes getting to know the neighbourhood and its people conducting ethnographic interviews concerning the evolution of the community, and entering into a collaboration with Maireen Johnston, a writer whose book "Around the banks of Pimlico" provides the basis for the script that shapes the media segments. Based on the author's memories of growing up in the neighbourhood, the book describes the life, lore and color of the Liberties. Real individuals become characters and the anecdotes about their lives are woven together with historical descriptions of the social condition of the people living in the area in past times.

## Implementation: system and media

The hardware and software for deployment of Media Portrait of the Liberties is being developed as part of the Wireless Ad hoc Network for Dublin (WAND) and Context-AwaRe Multimedia Environment for Narrative (CARMEN) projects, both collaborative efforts between Media Lab Europe (MLE) and the Distributed Systems Group (DSG) in the Department of Computer Science at Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), funded by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA). The WAND collaboration explores ad hoc wireless communication system based on the IEEE 802.11b Standard. In the process of being implemented, the network will cover part of the city centre of Dublin, from Thomas Street, where MLE and the Liberties are located, to TCD. The technology used provides a network infrastructure for handhelds, laptops, PC's and other wireless-enabled devices that are outfitted with the required protocol. The Carmen collaboration focuses on the creation of tools to shape the delivery of context aware multimedia content to people roaming public

space. Carmen's multimedia application development framework is used for the Media Portrait of the Liberties.

The Media Portrait of the Liberties focus is been to realize a set of stories that would allow the audience to discover the place. Firstly short stories/anecdotes were extracted from M.Johnston book, then scripted and storyboarded for multimedia production. In creating visuals for the stories we used a mix of video, animation or photographic media. Audio narration was scripted, recorded and added to the stories. Different methods of production were applied for different types of stories, ranging from blue screen for ghost stories to old pictures and hand drawings for description of architectural changes of the area and portrait of local characters. Harnessing the friendly atmosphere of the neighborhood and the availability and enthusiasm of the MLE staff, film sets were staged in MLE and around the Liberties where locals and colleagues would re-enact some of the stories following as closely as possible the costumes and settings described in Johnston book.



A different kind of story, referencing buildings that do not exist anymore or particular events too complex to re-enact, were produced using some of the material collected during the research such as the old photos and some watercolours painted by myself during the storyboarding process. The varied methodology added in expressivity and freshness to the stories, but mainly pointed out some ideas for on how to develop a framework under which to guide the community members in the feedback collection phase: when they will provide and produce their own stories to add to the collection.





## Time line and future work

We are in the process of testing the technology (GPS and wireless experience of the location based stories). As soon as the testing is completed we will be carrying out a first evaluation of the project. Response from community members in form of stories and story material should be collected during this evaluation process.

## Publications

Nisi, V., Davenport, G., Haahr, M., Demo-Poster, "Interactive portrait of the Liberties" ICHIM 04 "Digital Culture & Heritage", Berlin, August 30-Sept. 2004

Nisi, V., Davenport, G., Haahr, M., full paper "A mediated portrait of the Dublin Liberties" to appear in SPARK! Design and Locality Conference Proceedings, Oslo, May 4-6 2004