Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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Abstract Submission Form

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Citizen-Generated Contexts - Complex-social practices as extra-institutional structuring

2. Format: Written paper

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6. Abstract (300 words):

Based on other work on Ambient Learning City and Policy 2.0, as part of the Learner-Generated Contexts Research Group, we developed the idea that for a city to become participatory there also needs to be a process whereby citizens can generate their own contexts; and for them to be active within existing local political processes.

Based on our work with MediaCitizens in helping learners generating their own contexts for learning, and with People's Voice Media in creating Digital Cabinets of Curiosities in Ambient Learning City we developed a process whereby citizen-generated contexts, using social media and other Web 2.0 tools, could become a mediating process (or platform) between neighbourhoods and local governments. Given both the alienation from, and lack of understanding of, local political processes by (now smart-phone wielding) citizens there seems to be a real opportunity to capture local stories through social media, and use them to drive local politics. However a structured process, or platform, to capture this does not exist, and we think a citizen-generated contexts model might supply one.

Smart phones usually end up being used as "fantastic technology" (Koolhaas) for amusement and diversion rather than also being structured elements of a participatory

political process. It is curious that the collection of tools that O'Reilly named Web 2.0 in 2002, which allowed for new "architectures of participation" to be built, have mostly resulted in increasingly "frictionless" consumption behaviours. Many recent local initiatives, both facilitated by new technology, such as meetups, flash mobs and Occupy, and deeper concerns such as Transition Towns, ignore & bypass traditional political processes, which continue unchanged.

This paper argues that citizen-generated contexts can be produced through a combination of local media organisations, activist smart citizens and a degree of political awareness which can transform neighbourhood politics in newly mediated cities.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Fred Garnett

Fred, as Head of Community Projects, was part of the Citzens Connect team examining how new technology could help create active citizens in Lewisham where he helped found both the TaLENT Community Grid for Learning and Creekside Environmental Centre. As Head of Community Programmes at Becta he advised various government departments on e-learning and e-government (DfES, DCLG, Home Office, NOF). For DCMS he was also a Culture Online Visioneer and co-chair of the Participatory Media Literacy Working Group at OFCOM, and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts for "creative & innovative work in community learning" in 2004. As part of the LGC group he worked on the Ambient Learning City project (MOSI-ALONG) looking at making Manchester an interactive learning city. He is working on a "development framework" for the participatory Smart City (forthcoming book chapter on CityZens) building on work done on the EU Origin of Spaces project with Bordeaux, Pula, Lisbon, Bilbao and London.

He is currently part of the Cybersalon Digital Think Tank, is an approved consultant for JISC and NIACE, and has recently worked for the British Council, on Vocational e-learning, and the BBC, on open learning.

Nigel Ecclesfield

Nigel Ecclesfield is currently working as a freelance researcher and consultant. He was Head of Change Implementation Support Programmes – FE and Skills at Jisc, supporting project work to repurpose existing resources and develop innovative uses of technology through FE provider projects throughout the UK. His work included consultancy and advisory work with providers and UK Governments on policy, practice and system issues.

From 1978 to 2003 he worked in Further Education colleges in a range of practitioner and manager roles in Cambridge, London, Liverpool and Devon and as an inspector from 200-2010. From 2003 he worked in national roles for Becta, managing national surveys and research projects in the further education sector and at LSIS, working on a range of technology projects. From 2012 he worked with Jisc Advance as a Programme Manager managing a national project for all four UK Governments, before working with Jisc. Nigel has been engaged in educational research and project activity since 1985 working for national agencies, European projects and higher education institutions and national bodies in the UK, Europe and internationally. He has published papers, book chapters and online materials with educational, policy and technology themes.

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