



Exploring ways of creating an in situ experience of a contextualised archive

ABSTRACT

Online local archives are commonplace, often cared for by community interest groups. Though the resources might be theoretically more accessible, what is the impact on the connection between the archive, the place and people?

A co-creation methodology is used to empower the local community in Cambridgeshire villages, Histon and Impington, to participate in a dialogue about what makes their locale unique. Situated, immersive, storytelling experiences, using archive are prototyped, as a way of enhancing place identity/place attachment.

This research explores how ubiquitous hand-held devices, such as mobile phones, can be used in innovative ways to layer places with poly-vocal stories, providing unique, rare, meaningful experiences of a contextualised archive.



An extrapolation of the Interpretation Triangle (left) and other approaches to place and knowledge, including Tim Ingold's (2011) meshwork (right).

BACKGROUND

Histon and Impington Village Society holds a varied and extensive collection of archive materials. They highlight a need for a publicly accessible repository but note that finances are inhibiting. How else could we conceptualise this repository?

The collection is largely held in the village, is of the village and resonates with the physical fabric of the village in many instances. Embedding archive in situ capitalises on a productive relationship between story, people and landscape. As Tuan writes place can be an 'object in which one can dwell' (1977, p.12).

Phenomenological approaches to embodiment, place and time, including Tuan's theory of place as a pause (1977) and Ingold's principles of wayfaring and meshwork (2011), are used as a theoretical framework to explore alternative ways to locate and enhance access to the archive, exploiting the performative potential of a place and its heritage.

Tuan, Y., 1977. *Space and place: the perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Ingold, T., 2011. *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*. Odon: Routledge.

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PEOPLE | PLACE | ARCHIVE

Exploring the value of immersive storytelling with archive:
re-inhabiting local landscapes with fragile heritage.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What impact does experiencing collective histories through different configurations of interface have on our emotional connection to a place?
Can the immersive experience of archive become a catalyst for the collection of memories, encouraging communities to tell their own stories, rooted in place?



See video exploration

Explore the surrounding landscape



Methodology

METHODOLOGY

The project focuses on a small part of the village. There are five parts to the methodology, which feed into each other using a design-thinking approach.

1. Online questionnaires and semi structured interviews: Working with local interest groups and communities to understand attitudes to heritage and place.
2. Catalysing micro exhibitions as a research tool: Establishing a collaborative space. Exhibitions will be co-curated with community interest groups, to begin to collect stories.
3. Collecting a database of stories: Using careful collection management methodologies a set of archive material is formed.
4. Creative prototypes: Working with the communities' input, a series of multi-modal experiences of a remediated archive are produced.
5. Evaluation and testing: Prototypes are tested with the local community and impact on sense of place assessed.



A portable micro exhibition to be experienced at home

CHALLENGES

The pandemic has meant restricted movement and unease about exploring places together. My research focuses on an alternative to the online database, recontextualising archive in place and was contingent on conversations with communities in situ.

Imposed restrictions are now used as an opportunity to explore creative ways of fostering participation. Interactive paper versions of the venue for the micro exhibitions will be used to encourage community engagement with the project from homes.

The outcomes will be pertinent as we have more access to the outdoors. Is there an impact on how we value our local landscapes? In a time where community and belonging are arguably more important than ever, can access to shared stories in the public realm contribute to our connection with others while physically distanced?

REFERENCES

- Images:
1. Histon Station in 1958. 1959. [image online] <<http://www.dissolved-stations.org.uk/>>
 2. Chivers Train, 1911. [image online] <<https://www.bbc.com/photos/1721232/g05542717600c7>>
 3. Histon Station early in the 20th Century. 1911. [image online] <<http://www.dissolved-stations.org.uk/>>
 4. Railway Magazine, 1890. Midland Railway train at Histon (GGR) [image online] <<https://www.bbc.com/photos/21602076/g05521125480130>>
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