

5. Best Practices References.

The theme of the visualisation of information and the new perspectives of cartography, not only geo-referential and topographical, are expanding rapidly. Here we mention only three case studies selected for originality (Subjective Atlas of Palestine), for closeness to the spirit of this workshop (Stockport Emotion Map) and to be integrated as a consolidated practice in real communities (Parish Map)

5.1. Stockport Emotion Map.

Whilst conventional maps show static architecture and exclude humans, this art project presents a vision of Stockport that represents the emotions, opinions and desires of local people. Over a period of two months in summer 2007, about 200 people took part in six public mapping events. This map collects together and shows the results of the two activities: Drawing Provocations & Emotion Mapping.

Drawing Provocations

People were asked to sketch their responses to a variety of serious and humorous provocations about their daily lives such as what really annoys them about Stockport, where they meet their friends, as well as who are the most important and dangerous people in town. Other provocations were focused on the town and its history, river and landmarks. As a result, people enthusiastically created a huge pile of drawings which were scanned and used to create this map. As far as possible, all the drawings were placed in their geographically correct position or where people mentioned them.

Emotion Mapping

The second activity involved people walking freely through Stockport equipped with a special device invented by the artist, that measured their emotional arousal in relation to their geographical location in the town. On the map, the walks are represented by thin angular lines tracing the paths that people walked. The emotional arousal is represented as a series of pillars at four different heights corresponding to the intensity of emotional arousal. Arousal is not necessarily positive and is best thought about in terms of heightened attention to ones body or surroundings. The textual annotations on the map were written by the participants themselves to describe the huge variety of events and sensory stimuli that caused their emotional reactions during their walks.

Stockport Emotion Map

Everyday we enter into discussions with people for different reasons. Sometimes, we have a particular purpose for communicating, but often we just want to talk to friends and strangers to hear their ideas and to express ourselves. The vast majority of these conversations quickly slip our mind and are never recorded because we think they are trivial. Yet we live in a time when our opinions are valued very highly. Everyone from politicians to market researchers are fascinated by how we feel about particular issues. Curiously though, when we enter into discussions in those contexts, we tend to use a very strange stilted and alienated language, that neatly packages our ideas. In addition, these discussions tend to focus only on a single issue, for example the building of an incinerator rather than asking wider questions about how our society produces and disposes of goods. This map suggests a model for recording the apparently trivial conversations and events of our everyday lives and allows us to see them all simultaneously without being constrained to a narrowly defined topic. When it is possible to see this overview, these apparently disconnected conversations show their true value and form clusters of issues and concerns.

Based on the process of talking to over 200 people in Stockport and analysing their drawings, we identified five overlapping issues of concern. Feel free to go to the project web site and download all the original drawings and Emotion Map data.

Here are the five issues that we identified for Stockport:

1. The marginalised history of Stockport
2. The hidden river Mersey
3. Monolithic shopping
4. Semi-Public Space
5. Isolation of young people

The marginalised history of Stockport

While Stockport prides itself as a historic town and many people drew the looming train viaduct as a landmark, the history of Stockport was not very strongly represented in people's drawings. When asked, most did not think that the past was influencing their everyday life in Stockport. Even amongst those that thought it did affect them, some saw it as standing in the way of new developments. An example of this type of thinking is perhaps visible at the site of the Norman castle, then later cloth mill, which has today been turned into a very brash clothing shop. The nearby covered market which was reverentially named the 'Glass Umbrella', is today neglected and hardly frequented. This space appears to have the potential for a conversion into a cultural centre that could set an example for sensitively combining the past and the present.

The hidden river Mersey

The building of the Merseyway road in 1934 which covered the river seems to be a pivotal point for Stockport. Not only did it unite Stockport into one town, it also meant that all the old factories and mills that lined the banks had to be knocked down. This is the reason why there are very few visible signs of Stockport's industrial heritage in the centre of town. The river which had been the basis for the town's founding, growth and identity was suddenly hidden away. Modern developments such as the cluster of supermarkets that block the river banks and allow only stolen glimpses exacerbate the problem. In fact, we found that the majority of young people that we talked to did not know that there was a river running below their feet. Most adults only had a vague idea about the course of the river and included it as a ghostly trace on their mental maps. We suggest that there is a whole range of cultural and physical interventions that could allow people to re-engage with the river, such as canoeing trips under the Merseyway, marking the course of the river in the street or drilling spy-holes through the road surface to allow people to see and hear the Mersey.

Monolithic shopping

The main thread that ran through people's drawings and texts was the subject of shopping. When asked to draw the most important people in Stockport, whilst some drew their friends and family, a large number drew smiling consumers holding branded shopping bags. There is little doubt that the main factor responsible is the Merseyway shopping area, which dominates the centre of Stockport and defines its identity. As far back as 1978, not long after the shopping centre was built, a local newspaper already referred to Stockport simply as "our shop window town". While many people seemed content with the shopping area, a fair number felt that it was "seventies and outdated" and wanted more of a cafe street culture. Others expressed a worry that smaller, local shops were being forced out. Most of the shops that people drew were global brands and only a few sketched images of local shops or market stalls. Already in 1979 a local newspaper suggested that "...we cannot afford to lose the family-name businesses from Stockport" and that, "what is lacking is something to attract people there apart from the shops. There is no real focal point..."

Semi-Public Space

When talking to people it was surprising how few activities apart from shopping were mentioned. When asked about where they go to meet friends and relax, people drew images of corporate cafe chains and suggested that Stockport revolves around coffee.

Walking around the town we noticed there is very little of what would be classically termed 'Public Space', i.e. places where there is no exclusion based on economic or social conditions. Most of the public life in Stockport seem to take place in semi-public spaces such as the shopping centre or cafes that require people to purchase or at least follow some behavioural rules to be allowed access. There are very few green spaces in the centre of Stockport that people can access without money and use as they like. On the whole there was a consensus that people wanted a less rigidly 'programmed' town centre. Current theorists of public space agree and argue for areas that allow multiple interpretations and uses. One example of a missed opportunity is the Bear Pit on Mersey Square which is shaped like an amphitheatre and was meant to be for public use. When one looks at the featureless concrete design and the fact that one has to cross a busy road, it is not surprising that no one uses it. This is perhaps even sadder considering that Mersey Square is the site of the original Village Green where in the past, large social festivals took place and circuses pulled in. It is illustrative to look at an artist's impression from the 1970's for the redevelopment of Mersey Square, picturing an idyllic green area full of trees and benches contrasting strongly with the desolate traffic heavy area that it is now. We feel that this area has a lot of potential and that it would be worthwhile revisiting older visions of this space and bringing them back to life.

Isolation of young people

Young people seem to be a particularly marginalised group in Stockport with very little provision for them. When asked, they mentioned the only thing set-up for them is a skate-park which they have to pay to enter. The council's youth provision also seems to be limited and focused on teenage pregnancy information. This lack of youth activities appears to increase the class division amongst the young people. Middle class teenagers seem to be invisible, while groups of working class teenagers are perceived to be the cause of anti-social behaviour including alcohol consumption, stealing and knife crime. We emphasise the importance of providing youth activities and services to bring the young people together and allow them to be included within the public life of Stockport.

We hope that this map and text will stimulate personal reflections for people and then lead to a larger communal discussion that refines the issues of concern. Some of the topics we identified could be tackled by single individuals such as running youth workshops, while others require a group of people and collaborations with institutions.

It is heartening that 'friendly' was the most frequently used adjective for describing Stockport and we feel that this sense of community can nurture a new vision for the town.

5.2. Parish Maps.

The idea of Parish Maps came about in Britain in the 1980s thanks to the insight of Common Ground, an association that, before any others, decided to dedicate its energy to understanding and enhancement of the local heritage through the active involvement of the local communities.

This experience was developed in particular by the West Sussex Millennium Parish map project edited by Kim Leslie.

Parish maps are quite different from traditional or geometrical ones. They represent, through citizens' participation and the use of different techniques and media, the peculiar features that constitute the local distinctiveness of a place and the roots of the sense of belonging.

Parish maps are not only a set of graphic signs and colours on paper but documents that become custodians of the most valuable of assets, the memory of human stories linked to the places.

The organisers comment that: "If, on the one hand, sophisticated thematic maps today gather and document research on every corner of the plant, on the other we find a loss of

detailed knowledge about places, the expression of deep-rooted wisdom and reached with the contribution of generations and generations". A place is, in fact, much more than an aseptic geographical surface, a list of facts, natural and built elements: a place includes memories, often collective ones, actions and relations, values and numerous and complex facts that are often closer to people than to geography, to feelings rather than to the land surface.

Community maps are therefore instruments through which people who live in a place can talk to others, or remind themselves of the fundamental points of their own history, the crucial nodes in its own web of meanings and signifiers. In this case, the map is not an end in itself, but represents a personal and collective journey that entails involvement, research and commitment. It is a creative means to bond and reconstruct in contemporary terms the essential link between people and places.

Common Ground's choice of the adjective "Parish" to accompany Map, clearly underlines how the main goal is not to focus on a place defined by rigid administrative boundaries – whether these are municipal borders or old church parishes – but priority is rather given to what is defined as "the smallest arena in which life is lived". The only place worthy of this definition is one that deserves special attention for us, that has a particular meaning for us, of which we have personal knowledge, towards which we feel loyal, protective and attentive, that we know inside out and that in some way exercises a capacity to mould us.

5.3. Subjective Atlas of Palestine.

Sublime landscapes, tranquil urban scenes, frolicking children; who would associate these images with Palestine? All too often the Western media show the country's gloomy side, and Palestinians as aggressors. It is this that makes identifying with them virtually impossible. If we are to relate to the Palestinians other images are needed, images seen from a cultural and more human vantage point.

The Subjective Atlas of Palestine was initiated during a workshop in which four Dutch artists worked together with Palestinian designers, artists, photographers, architects and students. It shows a variety of drawings, photographs and maps that reveal individual and subjective life experiences giving a different angle on a nation in occupied territory. Palestine needs more maps. People need to see more maps of Palestine. And it should be actively encouraged that they see more maps like the ones contained in the Subjective Atlas of Palestine. This brilliantly random collection of Palestinian thoughts of home, rendered in maps, flags, charts and other artistic creations, charts personal reflections on the land that for the past 60 years has been deprived of official status in any atlas – and constantly altered by walls and colonial settlements.

In April 2007 graphic designer Annelys de Vet, three Dutch designers and an advisor of ICCO have gone to Ramallah to do a workshop with Palestinian artists, students and (graphic) designers. They were invited to map their country in their own way; political, critical, personal, romantic, negative or positive. Personal involvement was the starting point, with the aim to produce new, unconventional and honest images of Palestine. The Dutch designers were assisting the local artists. All maps, illustrations, texts, photo's and charts are edited, worked out and printed as the 'Subjective atlas of Palestine'. The concept of making a subjective atlas with design students has been organised twice before by Annelys de Vet. The first time as the *Subjective atlas of the EU, from an Estonian point of view* (2003), in collaboration with Estonian graphic design students. The booklet was printed and spread in Estonia and generally supported by the Dutch Embassy. The second publication was the *Subjective atlas of the Netherlands* (BIS Publishers, 2005) made with students from the Design Academy Eindhoven.