Productive Margins: Regulating *for* Engagement

Linked Studentship – Harnessing Digital Space

This studentship is located in the Education pathway of the South West Doctoral Training Centre, and will be supervised by Professor Rosamund Sutherland (ros.sutherland@bris.ac.uk). It will also be embedded in the wider academic context through membership of the Productive Communities Research Forum, and the Centre for Learning, Knowing and Interactive Technologies in the Graduate School of Education.

Context

This studentship will be linked to the work of Knowle West Media Centre (KWMC), which is based in an area that is high in deprivation, particularly in housing, health and unemployment and educational attainment. KWMC performs a wide social, cultural and educational role in the community (www.kwmc.org.uk), and is committed to the development of a broad range of projects that engage young people, those less advantaged and the community as a whole. This vision is delivered through practical participation, mentoring and engagement. It has developed a role and positive reputation within the community of Knowle West and is recognised by local residents as a part of that community.

One of the projects KWMC is currently involved in is 3Ehouses, a European project (UK partners, Toshiba Labs and Bristol City Council) that has recruited 100 households in Bristol to participate in a smart metering project. Each household is being given a Toshiba tablet with Electric Footprint, an animated interface that visualises their energy usage, enabling them to understand their energy consumption. Combined with this, new tools and visualisations for the tablet from a range of data, information and issues that are relevant and interesting to the community are being developed (e.g. local football league, crime stats, locally grown food).

Background

This studentship is predicated on the view that governance and regulation is increasingly data-driven, and there is a need to democratise this process by enabling people to design, gather and reflect on data themselves. In this respect the focus will be on visualizing data and will be concerned with developing appropriate visualisation and navigation strategies to enable users to make informed use of data. Visualising data is linked to the statistical idea of exploratory data analysis an approach to analyzing data by summarising their main characteristics in readily understandable forms, often with visual graphs (Tufte, 2002). Although, statistics and data handling have been a part of the school curriculum for many years many young people leave school lacking the confidence and competence to make sense of data and in particular to make informed sense of data that relates to their own lives (Connor et al, 2006)

The research will build on the KWMC 3Ehouses project and will involve working with intergenerational members of households in order to develop ways of supporting people to visualize and make sense of data that is relevant to their lives. They will also be supported to become critically aware of the data that is routinely being collected about themselves, from bioscanning and environmental devices, from interaction with digital environments (e.g. searching and social media), from interaction with consumer devices and from participation in private and public institutions.

The project is independent from the main proposal as it explores the ways in which new approaches to visualising digital data can be developed for and together with participants, but it is complementary to and extends the research sub- aim "how can grass-roots or marginalised communities appropriate online spaces for empowerment, reciprocal knowledge learning and exchange and widening the range of representations?"