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A Manifesto for Digital Messiness

Final Report – July 2015

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Summary

This is a report from a short research project funded by the Communities and Culture Network+. The project comprised a series of online articles written by a range of academics and artists with the intention of contributing to the debate about the role that digital media and social networking technologies play in supporting citizens to play a more democratic role in society and live more fulfilled lives. The ‘Manifesto for Digital Messiness’ website (<http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/>) hosts nine articles that were written between April and July 2015. This report brings together the posts. The website remains ‘live’ and the opportunity remains for further postings to be made.

Blog posts are republished below in chronological order. Hyperlinks are also added as footnotes for convenience.

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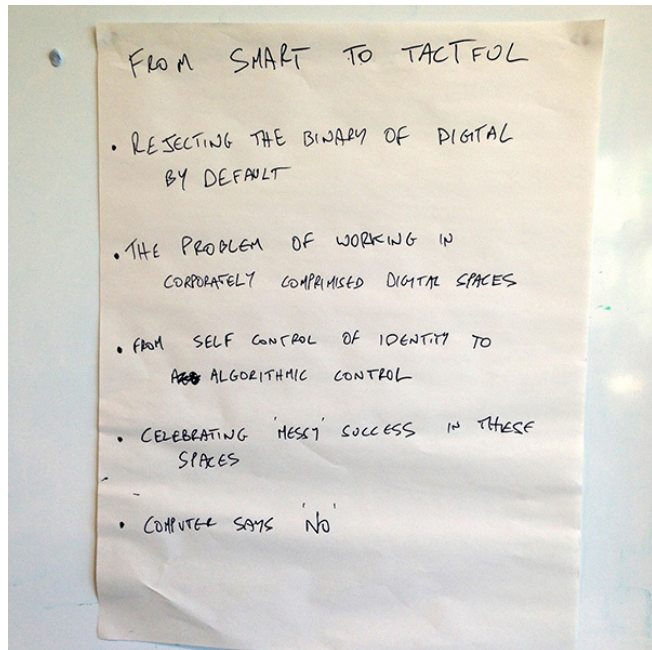
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Why a Manifesto for Digital Messiness?

Published at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/04/23/why-a-manifesto-for-digital-messiness/> on April 23, 2015 by Dave Harte

It seems timely to be writing the introductory post to this *Manifesto for Digital Messiness* at a time when political parties in the UK are launching their own manifestos rich with promises of a better world should you put your vote their way.

Given ~~the messiness of the outcome of that election and~~ [less messy than expected as it turned out] the inevitable compromise to said promises, it would be a mistake for me to likewise offer untold riches and inevitably fail to deliver.



Instead I'll offer up something more modest. This manifesto, like any, is interested in change. But rather than seek a wholesale radical shift we seek a modest left turn; a left turn in our thinking about Digital.

The problem with 'Smart'

In mainstream discourses digital is always 'smart'. Look no further than the notion of the 'smart city', now well established as a moniker for bringing together series of digital projects focused on delivering efficiency and innovation.

For example, Birmingham's Smart City Vision Statement¹ sets out a series of heady promises about digital's transformational impact on the city's economy, and its citizens' health, environment and employability:

We need to make digital inclusion a priority and support our citizens and communities to be digitally skilled so that they can be part of our global digital economy' (Birmingham City Council 2012).

A glance at the current round of political manifestos predictably casts the 'digital' in an equally optimistic light: "securing liberty" (Liberal Democrats²), "reforming our public services" (Labour³), "saving you time, hassle and money" (Conservatives⁴). Yet despite research⁵ showing that less than a third of those with Internet access have accessed government services online, the drive toward 'Digital By Default' or 'Digital First'⁶ continues on its utopian path:

'New technology also means that for the first time individuals, entrepreneurs and businesses can now access and exploit public data in a way that

increases accountability, drives choice and spurs innovation.’ (Government Digital Strategy: December 2013⁷)

Recognising ‘tact’ and celebrating ‘messy’ success.

The collection of articles that will follow this one (eventually forming a kind of loose, inevitably ‘messy’ manifesto) will offer a critique of the discourses inherent in digital agendas.

We’ll try to make the case for recognition from citizen perspectives that use of digital and social networking is caught up in complex issues of identity and privacy. As Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2010) argue, online identity is ‘a continual performance’ (2011 p113⁸) and individuals make ‘tactful’ decisions about interaction and engagement.

Such nuances are rarely taken into account in government digital inclusion agendas. So this project will highlight the complicated nature of online identity management and the need to reject the ‘digital by default’ and ‘smart cities’ agendas as arbitrary measures of success for digital interactions.

It will make the case for a ‘messier’ articulation of digital’s potential, and in doing so celebrate citizen-centred initiatives and activism that sees beyond the uncritical claims made for digital as a force for good.

¹ <http://digitalbirmingham.co.uk/project/the-roadmap-to-a-smarter-birmingham/>

² <http://www.libdems.org.uk/read-the-full-manifesto>

³ http://b.3cdn.net/labouruk/e1d45da42456423b8c_vwm6brbvb.pdf

⁴ <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/manifesto2015/ConservativeManifesto2015.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/communications/increasing-digital-takeup.html>

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00407741.pdf>

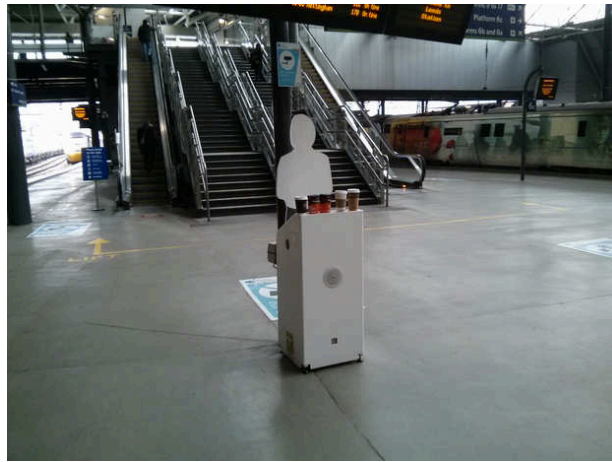
⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-strategy/government-digital-strategy>

⁸ http://www.tiara.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/marwick_boyd_twitter_nms.pdf

Smart as in Smart Bomb, Tactful as in Human

Published at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/05/13/smart-as-in-smart-bomb-tactful-as-in-human/> on May 13, 2015 by Ben Dalton

Companies and governments talk about making our cities smarter through digital connectivity and data processing. Our experience of smartness in a city is often in the form of street architecture or personal devices. These objects become envoys of the smart city vision, and we can start to ask questions of the smart city through them. Smart in what ways? And smart for whom?



We watch a parent with two young children in a buggy try to negotiate up the main highstreet in my neighbourhood in Leeds. The road is busy at rush hour, and the pavement on the corner of the street becomes narrow, making it hard to push the buggy past. The pavement is overly narrow because a large robot is in the way and will not move. The robot is clearly being rude. This robot happens to be a surveillance camera, but I have seen similar pavement hogs working as controllers for telephone-masts or cable TV. The surveillance robot has a large metal base, very sturdy and solid – Secure By Design™. It has a long neck, like a giraffe, to reach up and look down on the bustle and life of the street. The robot can move its tiny head to view the street and the pavement below it, but is otherwise fixed in place. If we think of smart objects in our cities as robots most are still stationary ones, locked in place because they cannot be relied upon yet to move around. However these ‘very slow’ robots suggest the social norms we will expect of them in the future when they do start to move more quickly. Thinking of a smart object as a robot allows us to imagine the intentional agency it might have – the considerations of its own in addition to the rules set out by its employer.

We see another stationary ‘slow robot’ in a car park. A flustered shopper approaches, several bags in each hand. As they near the car park robot, one of the bag handles snaps, scattering shopping to the floor. The shopper stops to pick up their things before continuing to the robot to pay for parking. The shopper is now one minute past the hour for their parking, and must pay for an additional two hours. If this were a human parking attendant, we would expect them to take notice of the spilt shopping, and perhaps be lenient with the interpretation of the rules. The robot refuses to acknowledge compassion or social norms (and its ruthlessness is profitable for the car park company).

The ability to negotiate complex social situations, balancing and struggling with the roles and desires of those involved, is a vital part of civic living. Even the simple act of walking through a busy street is made up of many such negotiations of intention and compromise. Robots are not yet suited to moving through pedestrian areas

partly because they cannot handle the subtlety of social negotiation. Robots have very high data-intelligence – recall of information and logical speed – but have little, if any, capacity for emotional-intelligence.

The smart city infrastructure currently on offer is smart like a smart bomb. It can carry out a task with ruthless focus but with no ability to consider or act on human consequence (as smart bombs have shown us, high-tech smartness often does not guarantee intended outcomes). Such task-driven smartness is an uncomfortable fit with the messiness of actual civic life. Our street robots are data savants, that appear unwilling to engage with even the simplest form of understanding or compromise.

It is useful to think of smart objects in terms of tact. Erving Goffman used tact to describe the social negotiations of situation, including tactics of inattention, withdrawal, and sensitivity to hints of unacceptable behaviour. Currently smart systems use vast resources of interconnectedness and processing to fake context awareness through simple pattern matching. However massive connectivity often leads to context collapse, as offhand or private information resurfaces in inappropriate situations. Perhaps what we need then is a call for Tactful Cities rather than Smart ones. A robotic data savant – bent on the rules it has been given by advertisers or traffic wardens at the cost of all else – is simply not tactful enough to negotiate the real-world situations it will find itself in

Private/public spaces, how we use them, and who they benefit

Published at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/06/02/privatepublic-spaces-how-we-use-them-and-who-they-benefit/> on June 2, 2015 by Jerome Turner

In my ethnographic work looking at hyperlocal media audiences, one thing I come across repeatedly is people using platforms like Facebook pages, which are public, in a private way.



Whilst hyperlocal media is written, edited and curated by (usually) citizen editors, I don't think of them as broadcast/audience platforms;

the people that inhabit and discuss those pages make it feel more like a space, although I'm probably influenced by ways of thinking about 'third places' in society aside from work and home (Oldenburg; Habermas).

I might not go as far as terming it 'online community' given that people take part in ranges of activity and passivity, sometimes dipping in and out. But it does feel like a walled garden with it's own sociality and rules, norms, behaviours.

The more people become comfortable with these spaces, the more likely they are to treat it as part of their everyday lives, and are often seen to be organising their social lives (events to attend), or divulging personal information. This is likely to be because they speak to people who were either friends offline before and ongoing, develop new friendships, or form online bonds due to the local issues / places being discussed.

The technology allows for this familiarity too – is it so surprising for us to see ‘text speak’ in a Facebook post when we are using the same hardware (mobile phone) and user interface (touch screen keyboard) in both text and Facebook interactions? Hardly surprising at all that we see a ‘whatever’ approach to language in such spaces (Baron).

So why could this be a problem? If we want to make these public spaces our private platforms, part of our individual mobilisation, then so be it? My concern is in who might else be looking or reading. Aside of the obvious dangers of telling potential burglars you’re going away for a holiday, or divulging your mobile phone number to strangers, we can apply Habermas’ assertion that third places have the potential to form public opinion and inform organisations and governments.

If that is the intention of the citizens, it can be used to demonstrate a voice or demand, but in other situations, such spaces can be trawled or mined for useful quotes and soundbites without their knowledge. In one of my interviews with a local volunteer who uses a hyperlocal page, he said he has often presented Facebook comments from residents to police to prove a point, but it was unclear whether they gave their consent for this.

In another case, a friend had posted a story to a hyperlocal page which the local mainstream media picked up and turned into a blog post – the problem here was that not only did they fail to contact the originator of the story or the hyperlocal platform to seek permission, but it was passed off in a way that suggested they had interviewed her. Aside of the problems around theft of citizen digital labour and representing it on a money-making platform, this was a citizen’s voice fished out of the pool and re-appropriated without their knowledge.

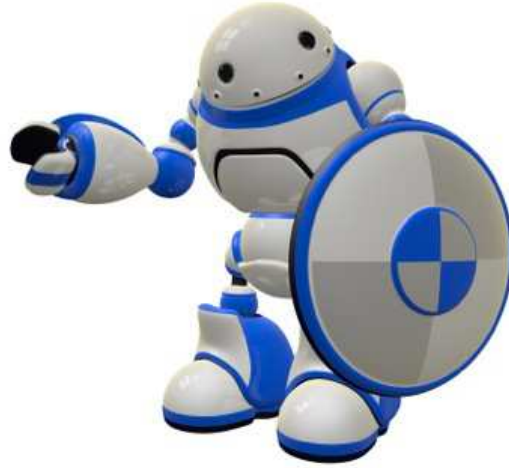
So, is the payoff worth the risk? Do we get more from using such platforms to run, speak about and organise our everyday lives than we lose by the potential for comments to be taken out of context? That’s the question we should maybe be asking ourselves with each interaction.

Digital proxies – your online representatives?

Published at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/06/15/digital-proxies-your-online-representatives/> on June 15, 2015 by Bruce Ryan

What is a digital proxy?

A digital proxy would be someone who undertakes someone else's online affairs because he or she cannot use the internet for some reason. This would include participating in digital democracy and other online interactions with government and other institutions, analogous to being a traditional voting proxy or holding power of attorney, and potentially managing your digital 'estate'.



Where did this idea come from?

It crystallised at [Democratic Sector Day](#)¹ (thanks Oliver and colleagues, Christian and other people at the Digital Participatory Democracy table!) from several sources:

- My sister isn't able to deal with government and bureaucracy. So, with her permission, I do her tax returns, applications for state benefits, and any other tasks requiring digital, numeracy or literacy skills.
- I also complete our father's tax return.
- Our mother won't go near the Internet.
- In many elections, people can nominate proxies to vote for them if they cannot get to their polling stations.
- I am very able to take part in digital democracy – I'm almost never away from at least one internet device. But what about
 - *Those who can't even afford a roof over their heads*, let alone the most basic feature-phone?
 - *People living in not-spots?* (My prime example is friends who farm on the west coast of Arran. They can only get very patchy dial-up connections. It's hard enough for them to do necessary tasks such as filling in DEFRA's online forms. I doubt whether they have the time or patience for anything else online.
 - *Disabled people* who cannot afford screen-readers etc. Being disabled tends to lead to low income, so the people who need extra services and equipment tend to be those who can least afford them.
 - *Any other people who cannot use the Internet to interact with the 'digital-first'/'digital by default' state?* Online voting isn't that far away. In fact it was an option in Edinburgh's 2013 community council elections. Most Universal Benefit² claims will need to be made online³.

So I think we *digirati* need to consider the sort of society we may be foisting on others who potentially cannot benefit from it. That concern isn't new – the digital divide⁴ (wikipedia) has been around for years. But perhaps digital proxies could help mitigate this chasm.

So what is that idea again?

With your permission, and following your instructions, your digital proxy would represent you online, by voting for you online, acting for you in online participatory democracy (e.g. emailing your councillor, commenting on government consultations, taking part in participatory budgeting etc). Your digital proxy could also manage your digital estate: social media accounts, music bought from and stored in the cloud. This is distinct from traditional power of attorney, where an attorney is empowered to act on your behalf to manage your finances and tangible property. It's also distinct from traditional proxy voting, where a proxy is empowered to vote in a specific election, often in a specific way.

Some questions (aka *What could possibly go wrong?*)

- *How would DPs be procured?* Not every family has someone with the skills and time to be a DP. In Scotland, the Office of the Public Guardian registers powers of attorney⁵ and monitors guardianships⁶. Could it and its equivalents elsewhere handle DPs – an extra task when government budgets are rapidly shrinking?
- *Would DPs need to be paid?* If so, how would this be arranged? By results (e.g. tax refunds)? By time spent on the tasks?
- *Who would pay DPs?*
- *How should the DP act if you have not instructed them?* For example, what if you've not told them how to vote, or how to respond to a change in benefits legislation? Should your DP act as he/she believes you would act – or not act all without specific instructions?
- *Where should the boundaries be set?* You might be able to take part in some online activities but not others, or might be able to do so intermittently. (Maybe more than 20 minutes in front of a monitor brings on migraines. Should your DP be able to take over after 15 minutes? Is that even practical?)
- *What if your DP and your other representatives disagree?*
- *How would you know to trust a DP?*
- *What happens if your DP doesn't do as you instruct?*

No doubt there are many more potential issues.

It's possible that existing facilities from the analogue age could apply to digital matters. For example, I could give my partner power of attorney, i.e. a specific instrument allowing her to control my finances and property when I no longer have mental capacity to do this. If I lose mental capacity before I grant her power of attorney, she could seek guardianship over me. There's no automatic limit to the channels attorneys and guardians can use, so my partner would be able use my online banking, instead of needing to visit my bank in person. Similarly, I believe it would be facile to extend proxy-voting legislation to cover online voting.

To the best of my knowledge, neither of these specifically cover my other interactions with government and other significant institutions, or automatically covers my digital estate; these are where my digital proxy would step in to represent me and safeguard my digital estate. But, to the best of my knowledge, the legal, technical and governance frameworks around our digital existences and estates are not in place. I think we need to start safeguarding our digital futures now.

(This is an updated version of [this post](#)⁷. Huge thanks to my ever-wonderful partner for suggesting inclusion of digital estates.)

¹ <https://twitter.com/oliverescobar/status/566518307839541248>

² <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

³ http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland/benefits_s/benefits_welfare_benefits_reform_e/benefits_uc_universal_credit_new/benefits_uc_claiming_universal_credit/uc43_uc_how_do_you_claim_it.htm

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_divide

⁵ <http://www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk/power-of-attorney>

⁶ <http://www.publicguardian-scotland.gov.uk/guardianship-orders>

⁷ <http://bruceryan.info/2015/03/13/digital-proxies-a-potential-new-research-area/>

You can't say politics on the internet?

Published on June 17, 2015 by Bruce Ryan

I have been interested in how governments use the Internet to engage with citizens for a few years now. Of course, I'm very late to this party – e-democracy was 'invented' over 20 years ago¹. I didn't start from there – I stumbled into researching how poorly Scotland's most local democracies (Community Councils) use the internet² during a career-changing MSc³. More research⁴ just confirmed this gloomy picture. I currently aim to contribute practically (I'm webmaster and minutes secretary for three Edinburgh Community Councils) and to academic research around (hyper)local democracy. A recent successful workshop about digital engagement for Community Councils⁵ has led to commissions for more⁶ – these will contribute to both practical action and academic research.

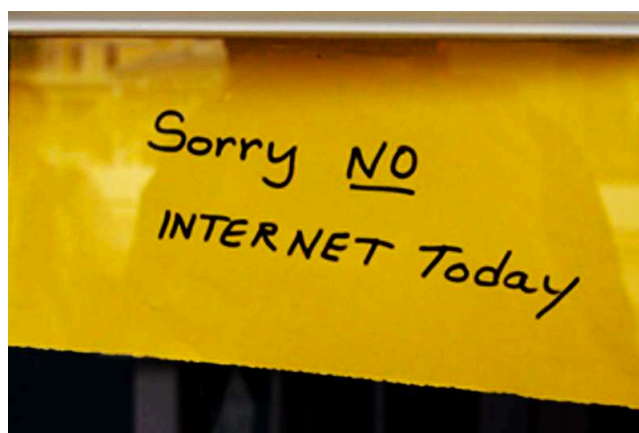


Image: Marcello Gracioli

Of course, as well as finding out what's going on, and working towards improving matters, it's necessary to ask **WHY?** That is:

- **Why** do fewer than 25% of Scotland's Community Councils (CCs) use the internet?

- **Why** are the CC digital channels that actually exist generally so poor? Some don't say who the 'elected' members are, others don't enable contact with the CC – not even a phone number, let alone an email address or contact form.
- **Why**, of the 1100 existing CCs⁷ do only around 150 use Facebook and only around 60 use Twitter⁸, which could host multi-way conversations about local issues.

There are many potential reasons: for example, CCs are under-funded⁹ so they cannot afford professional services; CC membership is unpaid, so members tend to be retired and to not have time to do more than meet¹⁰. Such people are also more likely to be trapped behind the digital divide. But reading Scotland's Digital Future: A Strategy for Scotland¹¹ (2011) led me to suspect another possibility – the *Scottish Government does not support digital **political** engagement!* *Scotland's Digital Future* describes many very valid, positive digital aims. But it's all about 'provision of public services', 'growing a digital economy', 'building digital connectivity' and 'governance'. The chapter on 'digital participation' does not mention political participation via the internet at all. Instead participation here means simply accessing the internet, or learning via digital channels such as Glow¹². That is, there is no mention that we can influence our political representatives and systems via digital channels, or take part in online political discussions.

This felt somewhat paradoxical – after all, Scotland's own 'cyberNats' may have helped deliver the 2007 and 2011 SNP victories¹³. Similarly, the battle for Scottish independence was fought online¹⁴, even though it may¹⁵ (or may not¹⁶) have been lost on printed media. So, was *Scotland's Digital Future* simply an ignorable anomaly?

Possibly not. The same things were said by the Scottish Government in 2013¹⁷. The Scottish Government's current Digital Scotland web page¹⁸, dated 31 March 2015, centres on 'connectivity', 'digital public services', 'digital economy' and 'digital participation'. The 'digital participation' page¹⁹ links to

- an archived web-page about the Digital Participation Charter²⁰, so presumably this Charter has expired. The Charter page again does not show that people can participate in politics via digital channels.
- Digital Scotland – let's get on²¹ (April 2014). This document, while embracing the unarguably laudable vision that 'a world class Digital Scotland is a Scotland for everyone', again is silent on digital political participation.
- Information about a National Movement spearheaded by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations²², but this is again about helping up to a 'million people in Scotland [who] are missing the basic digital skills to get things done online'. While the digital projects this programme supports²³ all seem worthwhile and necessary, again calls to be politically digitally engaged are conspicuously absent.

So is the Scottish Government (and, by implication, other governments) entirely ignoring e-participation (Wikipedia definition)²⁴? Fortunately not. To start with, I know that the Scottish Government has a digital engagement unit²⁵. Albeit a small unit, the people I know there are highly capable, intelligent and dedicated – they live and breath digital engagement in all its forms. This unit has contributed to the Scottish Government’s very recent Participation Week²⁶, which aimed to discuss the full spectrum of what participation could be, ‘from **citizen engagement and decision making in policy making** and democratic renewal to **digital participation** and inclusion to internal communication and collaboration but all with a focus on making the business of government more efficient, more transparent, more inclusive and creating policies and services that are useful and usable.’ I’d like to add **via** between the two phrases I’ve emphasised in the quotation, but I can’t quite be sure this meme wasn’t ignored.

Further, the digital engagement unit is actively seeking ideas on how to use open data²⁷. There’s lots that can be done to visualise and hence understand what’s going on – here’s my small proof-of-concept contribution²⁸ to this field.

And of course I am very grateful to the Scottish Government for funding the forthcoming workshops on Digital Engagement for Community Councils. I know from conversations with SG officials that the Scottish Government, from the First Minister downwards want, and will support, practical ways of advancing digital engagement, including digital *political* engagement.

So is that it? Is everything at least in the starting blocks for the race towards digitally connected government? Not quite, as I see it. For a start, there will always be those who cannot directly participate digitally – and so a need to include them in other ways²⁹. But for now, I think the Scottish Government needs to unmix its messages – it needs to abandon the documents that are silent on digital political participation and properly publicise its existing, very positive commitment to doing politics online.

This piece is necessarily limited to Scotland – my practical experience of political engagement and hyperlocal government is there, and my research so far has been Scotland-centric. Further, other European governments have radically different models of hyperlocal and local governments³⁰. However, reading about English parish councils³¹ suggests that similar issues affect engagement and hyperlocal government in the rest of the UK.

(Thanks to Stiff Little Fingers (NSFW)³² for inspiring the title of this piece)

¹ <http://stevenclyft.com/>

² <http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/publications/publicationid/13373555>
http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/imperia/md/content/department/gpa/zeg/bilder/cedem/cedem14/cedem14_proceedings_1st_edition.pdf

³ <https://brucemartinryan.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/bm-ryan-40070877-msc-dissertation.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/publications/publicationid/13373555>
<http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/scot.2014.0045>

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- <http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/downloads/downloadid/13381970>
- ⁵ <http://bruceryan.info/2015/02/04/digital-engagement-workshop-for-community-councillors-30-january-2015>
- ⁶ <http://www.iidi.napier.ac.uk/c/news/newsid/133828>
- ⁷ The fact that around 25% of CCs are missing is beyond this post – and beyond my ken.
- ⁸ <https://twitter.com/spartakan/lists/community-councils>
- ⁹ <http://reidfoundation.org/portfolio/the-silent-crisis-failure-and-revival-in-local-democracy-in-scotland>
- ¹⁰ To be fair, this is not the full story: there are many CC members who spend long, unpaid and unthanked hours on local matters. But in my experience, these are in the minority.
- ¹¹ <http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/981/0114237.pdf>
- ¹² <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/approaches/ictineducation/glow/index.asp>
- ¹³ <http://www.betternation.org/2012/01/prediction-2012-death-of-the-cybernat>
- ¹⁴ It continues to be fought online. See, for example, <http://wingsoverscotland.com>.
- ¹⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2758565/Tories-warn-Cameron-bloodbath-extra-cash-Scotland-Pledge-maintain-controversial-public-spending-formula-branded-minute-bribe.html>
- ¹⁶ <http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/scottish-politics/the-vow-did-not-sway-the-referendum-result-new-research-shows.121704244>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.scotlandsdigitalfuture.org>
- ¹⁸ <http://www.scotlandsdigitalfuture.org/digital-scotland-performs>
- ¹⁹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Economy/digital>
- ²⁰ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Economy/digital/Digital-Participation>
- ²¹ <http://wayback.archive-it.org/3011/20130201201833/http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/11/07133415>
- ²² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00448804.pdf>
- ²³ <http://www.scvo.org.uk/news-campaigns-policy/campaigns/digital-participation>
- ²⁴ <http://digital.scvo.org.uk/projects>
- ²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-participation>
- ²⁶ <http://blogs.scotland.gov.uk/digitalengagement>
- ²⁷ <http://blogs.scotland.gov.uk/digitalengagement/2015/06/09/social-reporting-training-at-participation-week/>
- ²⁸ <http://ideas.scotland.gov.uk/Open Data>
- ²⁹ <http://socprojects.napier.ac.uk/edincc>
- ³⁰ <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/06/15/digital-proxies-your-online-representatives/>
- ³¹ See, for example, <http://gemeindebund.at>
- ³² <http://www.cpalc.org.uk/>
- ³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IsOYSNPJTY>

A ‘Smart Countryside’? How the ‘Smart Cities’ agenda is widening the urban-rural digital divide

Published on July 2, 2015 at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/07/02/a-smart-countryside-how-the-smart-cities-agenda-is-widening-the-urban-rural-digital-divide/> by Leanne Townsend

As a rural scholar with an interest in digital media, my research has explored the ways in which rural communities and individuals interact with technologies, and how this enables them to connect with networks, activities and opportunities in urban areas. In pursuing such research, it’s impossible to ignore a related area of enquiry – how a lack of access to/engagement with technology can impact on the sustainability and development of rural communities.



The 'urban-rural digital divide' conglomerates two different but related phenomena: the 'digital divide', which broadly encompasses issues of class, gender, age and ethnicity, alongside other variables such as geographical remoteness; and the 'urban-rural divide' which is incidentally characterised by some of the same demographic variables, as well as reflecting inequalities based on accessibilities to services such as healthcare, places of work and education as well as digital infrastructures. It's no surprise then that, given that rural areas worldwide are characterised by low levels of education, income and ageing populations, that these areas are also typified by lower levels of digital participation.

These issues are exacerbated by poor access to the infrastructure required for digital connectivity. Much of my early research at the dot.rural Digital Economy Hub¹ (University of Aberdeen) from 2011 was focused on the availability of broadband connectivity in rural and remote rural places. Over the last four years, in accordance with Government's commitment to roll out better infrastructure across the whole of the UK, major improvements have been seen. Yet in their latest report, Ofcom accept that rural broadband speeds are still significantly lower than those found in urban areas and the availability of superfast broadband in rural areas is much lower than in cities².

UK Government, via Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) made a commitment to narrow the urban-rural digital divide by rolling out improvements in broadband infrastructure across the whole of the UK. But, as I have argued previously³, this commitment contradicted another of their key aims – to develop the fastest superfast nation in Europe, in order to drive economic growth and innovation. This emphasis on superfast networks has naturally centred around cities, given the large populations (more economically viable in terms of service uptake) and the ease of installing fibreoptic cable, in comparison with remote rural topographies. These advances have gone hand in hand with a growing emphasis on the 'smart city' – a city where technology is embraced to improve every aspect of urban life in a seemingly uncomplicated relationship between increased technology and quality of life.

Other bloggers have done a great job of highlighting some of the dangers around these kinds of assumptions, particularly in relation to issues of power, privacy and trust. But here, I would like to ask a question – does this Smart Cities narrative widen the urban-rural divide further? For one thing, an emphasis on digital advances in urban areas has led to less resources being directed to rural areas. So, even though better broadband might have arrived in some rural communities, this is not usually on a par with the advances being seen in cities, so that despite the improvements in some areas, the divide widens (at least in terms of broadband speeds). This, I would argue, leaves rural businesses, households and organisations at an increased disadvantage, given that they are even less able to keep up with their urban counterparts and engage fully in all aspects of [digital] society.

The changing nature of rural communities (urban outmigration, gentrification, expanding industries including the creative, tourism and IT sectors) necessitates

strong connections with their urban neighbours. Increasingly, this connectivity is required on screen, at the touch of a button, rendering distances irrelevant and making rural locales more viable places to operate from (even to relocate to), and contributing to their long-term sustainability. In my research in remote rural parts of Scotland, I have worked with individuals who have in the end had no choice but to relocate their businesses (and families) to better connected, usually urban places.

The smart cities agenda neglects the needs of our rural neighbours, arguably implying that rural regions are not worthy of investment and development. I would instead argue for a more holistic agenda that moves towards ‘smart communities’ whether these be urban, suburban, or rural. A ‘smart countryside’ is one that, at the very least, is able to function in, and engage with an increasingly digital society. It will provide its citizens with opportunities to sustain, develop, even innovate their strengths and attract new investors and citizens, and to tackle growing problems such as depopulation and ageing communities.

¹ <http://www.dotrural.ac.uk>

² http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/infrastructure/2014/IR_3.pdf

³ http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/documents/Townsend_Sthiaseelan_et_al_2013.pdf

Project profile: A People’s Manifesto

Published on July 6, 2015 at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/07/06/project-profile-a-peoples-manifesto/> by Joseph Young AKA Giuseppe Marinetti

This article looks at the ‘People’s Manifesto’ project – a radical sound installation and performance that aimed to express the democratic hopes and fears of a nation during the 2015 UK General Election.

A People’s Manifesto started life at InTRANSIT festival 2014 as part of a commission called Revolution #10. Revolution #10 was inspired by a track on The Beatles’ White Album, Revolution #9 – a radical collage of sounds released at the height of the social and political upheavals of 1968. John Lennon would later refer to this track as ‘the sound of protest’...



I was concerned that in the wake of the both the parliamentary expenses scandal and a general lack of trust in our elected politicians that our democracy was under threat through complacency, borne out of a general perception that all politicians are the same and that voting doesn’t change anything.

So I set out to challenge that notion by asking the public 3 Questions.

- Question #1: If you were elected as Prime Minister in May 2015, what would be the first thing you would say to the nation?
- Question #2: Does democracy matter?
- Question #3: We need a revolution because... (finish this sentence)

The answers to these questions were recorded on a campaign stall set up in various public spaces and also through a dedicated project website at www.revolution10.uk, as part of a commission for Brighton Digital Festival 2014.

The space for dialogue that was opened up during my 3-4 minute encounters with members of the public allowed them to openly express their views without fear of criticism or challenge (with the caveat that I would not allow any overt discrimination or hate speech). This in many ways turned out to be the most valuable part of the project...

The emotional impact of a typical performance of A People's Manifesto, elicited responses such as "I'd vote for you..." even though I had made it clear that it was not my intention to stand for office.

The utopian vision at the heart of the manifesto also led to comments along the lines of "I couldn't listen to it... it's too painful" – expressing the gulf between the world of realpolitik and what many people want and believe in.

The manifesto also accurately reflects the everyday poeticism of people's political beliefs, even from those who at the start of an interview would insist they knew nothing about politics.

Common themes centred on social justice, the environment and the need for tolerance, cheek by jowl with support for immigration controls and concern about benefit fraud.

These contradictions play themselves out in the structure of the piece, to highlight the contrary popular opinions of liberal democracy, which are often socially progressive and, at the same time, economically conservative.

The work was presented to an invited audience at the House of Commons on March 11th, hosted by my local MP Caroline Lucas and again at a symposium on Utopias – An Other World – at the V&A in June.

A People's Manifesto is available at:

http://issuu.com/josephyoung1/docs/a_people_s_manifesto.docx?e=6673610/11886248

smART Cities

Published on July 9, 2015 at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/07/09/smart-cities/> by Peta Murphy-Burke

Artists are a vital part of a functioning vibrant and diverse city space. With the emergence of the 'Smart' city, arts and cultural organisations have begun to explore and reinterpret the experience of being in a city using digital technologies.



The city is not just a physical location but also one where digital connections reach beyond

geographic boundaries. The 'smart' city is enacted in many different ways: social media is cultivated by the commercial sector to yield useful data, live transport information is used to keep the city traffic flowing, open data stores are being run by local authorities to make services more personal, more permeable and flexible.

The collective ambition is to connect the city as a system with an interoperability of responsive services that make it a high functioning, living work and leisure space. Networked citizens participate and consume city life on and offline, city-specific marketing reaches out digitally to attract new visitors and new business and an integral part of this offer is a vibrant cultural scene.

But artists have also been using the urban canvas to create new digitally driven physical experiences. The Playable City Award¹ run by i-shed in Bristol seeks a playful response to city living. The first year's winner, PAN design and research studio², assigned codes to street furniture: 'Hello Lamp Post'³ enabled people to text an object and begin a conversation, ask it a question, converse about the rain or share a secret.

Projects like this opened out a new interaction between the public and the urban environment. 'Folded Path'⁴ by Circumstance⁵ shown at Supersonic Festival in Birmingham, is described as a 'social composition'. It uses individual GPS locative speakers carried by audience members to create a moving orchestra. The soundtrack is changed by the movement of people, echoes under railway bridges, and interactions with the public space.

GPS located data is used in multiple ways by artists and heritage organisations who have used the technology to embed site specific oral histories, maps, poetry and social history to be accessed with smartphone's or tablets.

International art collective MANIFEST.AR⁶, staged an unauthorised augmented reality (AR) exhibition at MoMA New York in 2010, and showed work in 30 AR

buildings as guerrilla activity at the 2011 Venice Biennale, taking art work literally beyond the gallery walls and into an outdoor virtual space.

Mexico city lab Laboratorio para la Ciudad⁷ has been set up to explore civic innovation, multidisciplinary groups working with data sets to look at the city systems mapped against human behaviour to innovate for new systems, by cultivating and prototyping in a research environment grassroots activity and entrepreneurship.

These artistic responses explore new ways of using the existing city infrastructure, repurposing redundant buildings, creating a different experience in a public space, and give an insight into the future of cities and how they will be used for multi layered activities.

¹ <http://www.watershed.co.uk/playablecity>

² <http://panstudio.co.uk/>

³ <http://www.hellolamppost.co.uk/>

⁴ http://manyandvaried.org.uk/a_folded_path_-_exclusive_performance/

⁵ <http://wearecircumstance.com/>

⁶ <http://www.manifestar.info/>

⁷ <http://labplc.mx/labforthecity/>

Splacist Manifesto v2.0

Published on July 9, 2015 at <http://digitalbydefaultmanifesto.com/2015/07/09/splacist-manifesto-v2-0/> by Nikki Pugh

The Splacist (splā sīst) Manifesto represents a vision of the city as a space for playfulness, a space beyond the limits of planners' visions and one where the digital is 'tool and material' and not just veneer. Splacism is a contemporary mode of practice proposed by Paul Conneally¹. A new set of ideologies defined by Hannah Nicklin² and Nikki Pugh³.



WE ARE THE SPLACISTS

We will own this city.

We will take it back.

We will link and shift; across time, space, people, places and processes.

We will weave throughout the fabric of people's lives.

We will unpick it.

We will expose and re-see.
We recognise our observation affects the outcome unavoidably.
We will affect and be affected.
We will glory in the moment, the collage, the marking and then passing on.

We reject your beginning, middle and end.
We will work on and across edges. We will push them. We will blur them.
We will trace and leave traces.
We will work with you, not for you.

We reject your shopping centre, your pavement, your cultural quarter;
We will under mine pre-defined spaces. We reject them.

We will fail spectacularly, vitally, elegantly.
Our practice will be open, although it may not always be out in the open.

We will make exchanges.
We will make adventures.
We will reveal beautiful moments.
We will reveal the ugly.
We will hold your hand.
We will whisper in your ear 'let go'.

We will reclaim the city, not for you, but with you.
We are you.

WE ARE ALSO THE TECHNOSPACISTS

We will not be technospacist when being spacist will suffice.
We will never underestimate the power of cardboard and masking tape.
We will not be afraid to get our hands dirty.
We will not be afraid to do without digital at all.

We will use 'digital' as tool and material, not as veneer.
We recognise 'digital' is not necessarily something 'other'.

We will make and share our own tools as appropriate.
We will collaborate.
We will be generous.
We will be porous.

We will re-reveal technology as used by private interests.
We will hold them accountable.
We will put it to our own uses.

We will cut, and we will paste.
We will undo.

We will be artful. We will be skilful. We will fail usefully.

We will find our own energy sources.

We will pervade.

(Cross posted from: npugh.co.uk/blog/splacist_manifesto_v2/)

¹ <http://littleion.posterous.com/>

² <http://www.hannahnicklin.com/>

³ <http://npugh.co.uk/>

About the authors

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Dave has recently worked as a co-investigator on a large AHRC Connected Communities project on Creative Citizenship and has a background in working on policy and development initiatives for the creative industries.

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Ben's research focuses on design for networked publics and digital identity, and specifically the role of contemporary pseudonymity in digital public space. He has worked as an inter-disciplinary researcher in the MIT Media Lab and as co-investigator on EPSRC and AHRC projects about digital spaces, and in more traditional disciplinary contexts in arts and sciences including animatronics, nanotechnology and particle accelerator labs.

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Jerome has worked most recently as a researcher on the Connected Communities project: 'Media, Community and the Creative Citizen'.

Bruce Ryan

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Bruce's research and personal interests coalesce around hyperlocal democracy in Scotland. He is currently researching factors behind the uptake of digital communication by Scottish Community Councils. He has also worked with the Improvement Service on systems to encourage closer links between citizens and their Community Council by making information on local democratic processes more readily available online.

Leanne Townsend

Research Fellow, dot.rural Digital Economy Hub, University of Aberdeen.

Leanne's research explores the role of digital technologies and media in enabling entrepreneurs and micro-businesses, with a focus on the rural creative industries. I also explore digital forms of creative practice as a route to community development.

Joseph Young a.k.a Giuseppe Marinetti

Artist

Joseph is an artist working in sound, performance and installation whose work has been presented and performed at Tate Modern and Tate Britain, as well as internationally in New York and Berlin. His web site artofnoises.com showcases a diverse portfolio of work and he is the founder and Artistic Director of [Neo Futurist Collective](http://neofuturist.org/) and the CEO of the fictional [Skinny Vintage Investment Corporation](http://skinnyvintage.com/).

Peta Murphy-Burke

Relationship Manager, Digital & Creative Economy at Arts Council England

Peta Murphy-Burke is a Fine Artist, Artistic Director, Pyro-technician, Performer, Cultural Manager as well as Arts Council Relationship Manager (Digital & Creative Economy).

Nikki Pugh

Artist

From Nikki's website: "My main area of enquiry is centred around interactions between people and place: often using tools and strategies from areas such as pervasive games and physical computing to set up frameworks for exploration" (<http://npugh.co.uk/>)