

# Digital Storytelling Design Learning from Non-Digital Narratives: Two Case Studies in South Africa

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# Outline of this talk

- Introduction
- Case Study 1:  
The District Six  
Museum
- Case Study 2:  
Lwandile workshop
- What does this tell  
UGC designers



# Introduction

- User generated content (UGC) in Human Computer Interaction (HCI):  
*“... a shift among some media organizations from creating content to creating the facilities and framework for non-media professionals (i.e. 'ordinary people') to publish their own content in prominent places.” (wikipedia)*
- Examples: YouTube, Facebook, Flickr, Wikipedia
- Conversational media vs. Packaged media
- Active, participatory, creative audience

# Introduction

- UGC has been harnessed by the previously marginalised e.g. Grassroots videography on the challenges facing indigenous peoples, traditional knowledge records and skills (e.g. Sacred Land Film Project)
- UGC is widely used in developed countries
- These technologies need to be adapted for people without personal access to computers and whose communication practices that differ from those in the developed world

# Introduction

- Royal Society workshop, June 2008:
  - HCI and information retrieval experts
  - The challenges for providing effective, appropriate technologies to enable community-based for the majority of the world's population
- UGC largely seen as a digital, on-line activity
- We will describe two case studies which organise narratives non-digitally:
  - The District Six Museum's use of ex-resident community and different story media
  - Lwandile workshop on indigenous knowledge in collaboration with the National Archives outreach

# The District Six Museum

- Commemorates the District Six area which was demolished after racially mixed residents were forced to move out during Apartheid
- Housed in a former Methodist Church on the edge of District Six
- Exhibits focus on life in District Six and the history of forced removals



# A community museum

- Ex-residents played a central role in the museum's creation
- The two full-time guides are ex-residents
- Objects on display at the District Six Museum were largely donated by ex-residents



‘it was modelled on people’s stories’

- Peggy Delport, museum founder and curator
  - The museum was not modelled on anything else, it was modelled on people’s stories. It started with empty space to which people brought stories and artefacts
  - The museum is very much about voice and testimony
- The museum developed organically from the contributions of the community



# Ethnographic study

- Conducted over 3 months in 2007 at the District Six Museum, Cape Town
- Observing storytelling by two ex-residents as a means of informing the design of digital storytelling systems
- Observed that many other voices are expressed in the museum through the powerful use of non-digital UGC



# Ex-resident involvement

- The use of ex-residents' stories and donations has resulted in the layering of many voices
- Allows visitors space for personal interpretation as well as the expression of contested spaces and histories
- The voices of ex-residents :
  - in the stories of Joe and Noor
  - in the voice and music recordings playing in the museum
  - attached to the objects and photographs on display

‘flowers just don’t grow anymore’



Sound dome installations playing ‘langarm’ music, poetry readings, stories about the barbershops, childhood and everyday life



# The objects 'contain' stories of ex-residents – explicitly and implicitly



"We would play 'evergreen'... People wanted the bands... If you tried to get too jazz... 'Moenie jazz speel nie m... But the highlight of the e... Then you have the peopl... In the early days there w... but in my day, people mo... and the Commercial."



# Joe & Noor

- Narrative authority and ability to interact directly with audiences
- Museum as a space of memory:  
*“It’s called a museum - I have a problem with that because to me normally a museum is a space where you stare at dead artefacts and they stare back at you. At this stage I’m not a dead artefact yet (some laughter in the audience) ... so I call it a space of memory (chuckles). Memory, my memory and memories of people who lived in District six. And this museum also represents what happened throughout the whole of South Africa.” (Joe)*

# Inscriptive media

- There is a tactile craft aspect e.g. handmade banners, inscriptive surfaces and direct engagement with the space
- The floor map and Bloemhof Flats exhibits which allow ex-residents to indicate where they used to live
- Memory cloths allow ex-residents and visitors to express their perspectives



# 'I used to live here'

- Aerial Map of the former District Six area
- Ex-residents visiting the museum took to writing their names where they used live on the map's covering with Koki's
- Names are transferred onto the map when the covering is changed



‘as if *psychologically* wanting to  
reclaim’

*“when ex District Sixers came to view the museum, they saw the map on the floor. Then they asked for pens, then they started writing their names down. As if psychologically wanting to reclaim that space where they used to live before.”* (Joe)

- In lieu of being able to visit the real streets of District Six, the map acts as a tangible remnant of the former suburb itself.



# 'i'm going to show you my house'

Noor: "Ok, now my house-"

Child: "Over there? (*points to the map*)"

Noor: "No. I'm going to show you now, wait (*goes down on his haunches and points on the map*). My house was on the corner of Caledon Street and Rosberg Lane, you see Rosberg Lane?"

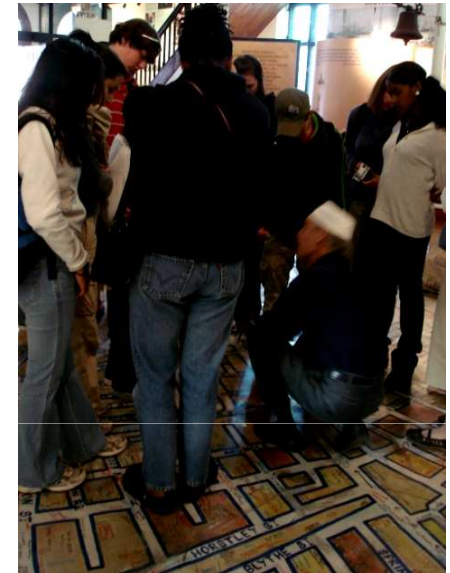
Child: "Yes."

Another Child: "(*reads*) Rosberg Lane."

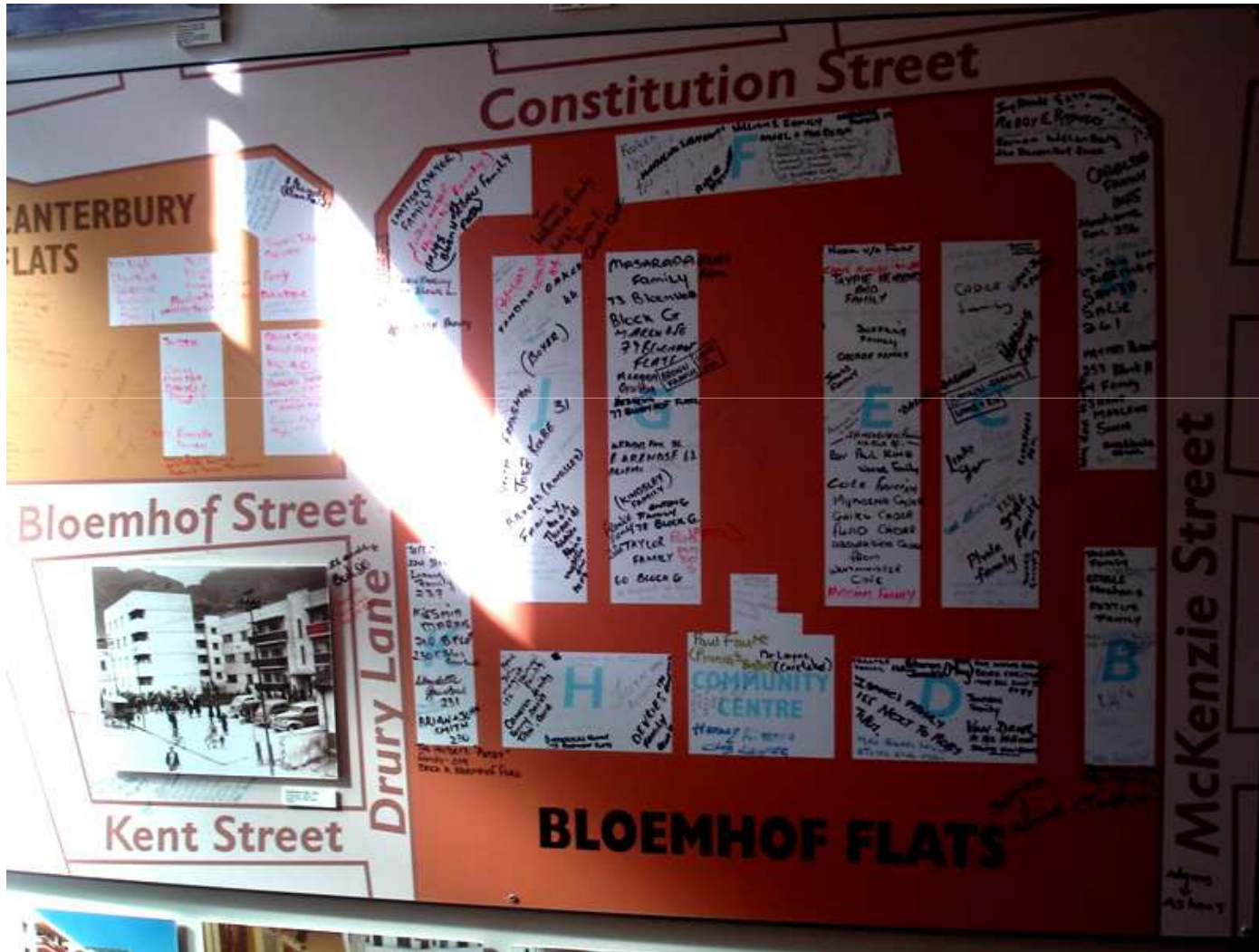
Noor: "Ok, (*pause*) you see in red there? (*points to his name written on the map*)"

Child: "Hmm"

Noor: "That's my name there. Ok, and this is what people do when they come in, they will write their names where they used to live. That's all the writing on the map."

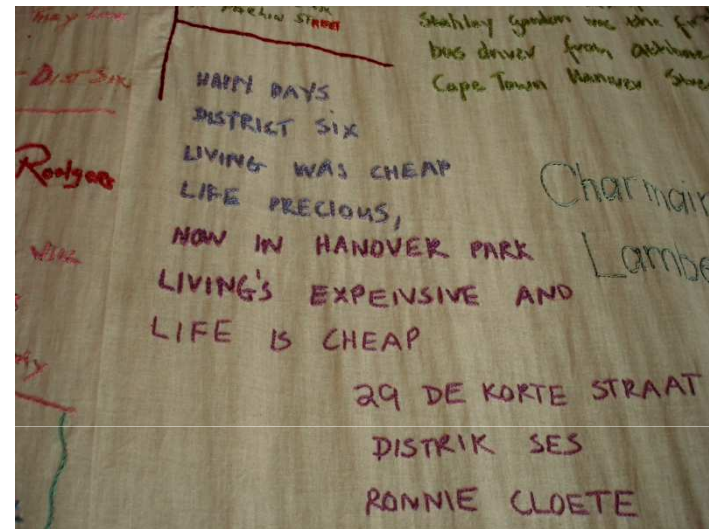


Bloemhof Flats was a large apartment complex which many people lived including Joe



# 'Happy Days' 'we the Titus family...'

- Memory cloths on which messages, names and reflections are written in koki and later embroidered
- A cloth for ex-residents, their family and visitors
- Memory cloths are being embroidered daily in the museum



# Lwandile workshop

- Formal infrastructures to support accessing and protecting cultural records are only just reaching rural people in the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape
- The Lwandile workshop: a collaboration between Khonjwayo people and the National Archives Outreach Program in co-generating a workshop on ‘the importance of preserving our land resources and heritage’

# The Khonjwayo of Lwandile

- Lwandile:
  - the coastal zone of Mankosi, Mamolweni, Hluleka and neighbouring communities, population 50,000
  - home of the Headman of Lower Ndungunyeni (Hlathinkhulu Sithelo), senior of 12 Headman across the area
- The Khonjwayo in Ndungunyeni and neighbouring administrative areas share many kin but their ancestry includes indigenous Khoi-Khoi and San, shipwrecked Europeans and exiles of the Apartheid era.

# Developing the workshop

- Nic Bidwell:
  - Residing in Hlathikhulu's umzi
  - Ethnography/ participatory action research on ways for local people to interact with technology
- Thulani Sithelo, Hlathikhulu's eldest son :
  - Address issue of Chieftainship taken wrongfully from his family
  - Mobilise local activists from Community Trust

# Developing the workshop

- To address the issue of Chieftainship:
  - Explored records on the Internet and at National Archives
  - Led to collaborating with Matome Mohlalowa and the Outreach program
- To mobilise local activists:
  - Development of The Federation of Rural Coastal Communities (FRCC) with Xolile, Bongile and Mfundiso
  - FRCC responsible for arranging the workshop together with National Archives Outreach Programme

# The Workshop

- “Land Restitution, Our History, Our Heritage”
- 3.5 days in July 2008
- 7 presentations about preserving, conserving the natural resources, heritage as our history
- Multi-lingual and prolonged debate





- Francis from National Archives and Records, Outreach Team:
  - The importance of having records as land legislation changes
  - How keeping and preserving records can protect their interests

- Speaker from Environmental Affairs:  
*“you are very rich, the problem is you don’t know where are those documents that proves and says you are rich”*

## The Workshop



# The Workshop

A speaker:

*“I am very happy to be able to have work with people who want to know more, people who are very, very eager to learn more, very eager to do it with whatever they have”*

A community member:

*“We thank you about the Workshop we are learning a lot. We see the good will. We say thank you to the speechmakers. .... So we have to pull up our socks now”.*



# What does this tell Designers?

- The intention of UGC is to make media conversational and to encourage active, participatory, creative audiences
- Our case studies show that is not tied to technology or the Internet but emerges in non-digital storytelling and knowledge sharing settings
- Technology practitioners can learn from this...

# What does this tell Designers: accessible 'technologies'

- A key aspect of the District Six museum is the involvement of a community of ex-residents
- Facilitated through the use of highly accessible, tangible 'technologies'
  - Oral storytelling and voice recording
  - Donating objects and photographs
  - Koki on inscriptive surfaces
- These all allow the community to use natural modes of conveying material such as talking and, for the literate, writing and require no technical expertise

# What does this tell Designers: accessible 'technologies'

- The memory cloth metaphor:
  - Messages are written on the cloths in koki
  - The process of permanently preserving these through embroidery does not rest on the writers and doesn't limit them.
- This is something that a technological system can learn from – allow content contribution to be as simple and natural as possible while performing any complex processes required post-hoc

## What does this tell Designers: accessible 'technologies'

- To respond to issues of preservation raised in the Lwandile Workshop...
- ...we need to find ways to allow people to interact with materials in the same way as they would ordinary documents (from newspaper clippings to photographs) so the original document can be preserved safely

# What does this tell UGC Designers: supporting alternative views

- The inscriptive surfaces at the District Six Museum are intended to provide a framework of interpretation
  - by layering many different voices
  - and allowing one to record one's interpretation
- This suggests how UGC designers can avoid hegemonic standpoints
- The availability of many standpoints renders more accurate representations of contested histories and places



# What does this tell UGC Designers: supporting alternative views

- However, some filtering will take place when dealing with many voices
  - Careful attention must be paid to doing this in a representative way
- The issue of space for storing many contributions must be anticipated and managed so that existing and ongoing contributions can be sustained.

# What does this tell UGC Designers: supporting alternative views

- Community decision making in Lwandile:
  - Enacted by Headman through consensus and prolonged, transparent debate across multiple perspectives
  - Aim for decisions to emerge ‘spontaneously’ not through coercion
- A striking communication protocol:
  - Traditionally leaders deferred to the general opinion of a court of councillors and today this dictum means mobilizing the experience and expertise of others

# What does this tell UGC Designers: supporting alternative views

- Lwandile workshop: speakers had different perspectives, some not those held by the FRCC
- The FRCC ensured complete transparency and many villagers afterwards noted how important this was
  - The conflicting story of the Chieftainship. The emissary of Chief Gwadiso had over 2 hours to speak. The villagers listened carefully and politely asked questions.



# What does this tell UGC Designers: supporting alternative views

- The workshop has a holistic integration and served various interests: Thulani's, Xolile's, teachers, creating a sense of community and linking culture to natural heritage
- Narrow Western 'information management' tends to perpetuate certain interpretations and inadvertently gag the potential for alternative interpretations
- Traditional communication forms and prolonged discussions around themes that might seem diverse to an outsider is a means to empower people

# Your thoughts and questions

