Technological Initiatives for Social Empowerment

Design experiments in technology-supported youth participation and local civic engagement

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contents

motivation

research approach

the Young Activists Network initiative

the What’s Up Lawrence initiative

conclusions and next steps
In order to foster democratic and participatory societies, it is important to create innovative learning initiatives in which, from a very young age people are motivated to investigate their communities and do something about matters that affect their lives.

(Hart 1997- Children’s Participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care - pg. 9)
research questions

• What are the main attributes of the learning initiatives that foster youth participation and local civic engagement?

• How can digital technologies support the implementation of those learning initiatives in youth technology centers?

• What attributes should digital technologies have in order to become more suitable for that task?

• What other factors have to be in place, besides the technology, for those initiatives to succeed?
design-based research approach

- Analysis of practical problems
- Theoretical framework
- Design experiments in real settings
- Design principles

Refinements of problems, solutions and methods

(based on http://projects.coe.uga.edu/dbr/FAQ.html)
design experiments developed during this thesis

The Young Activists Network (YAN) initiative

\[ \text{YAN}_1 \rightarrow \text{YAN}_2 \rightarrow \text{YAN}_3 \]

2003 2004

The What’s Up Lawrence initiative

\[ \text{WUL}_0 \rightarrow \text{(software development)} \rightarrow \text{WUL}_1 \rightarrow \text{WUL}_2 \]

2005 2006
variables analyzed by proposed framework

- educational approach
- + resources

setting

- engagement, participation, technology usage
- empowerment
empowerment

“have control over the decisions that affect one’s own life”

- proactive, good services, open government
- empowering & empowered
- positive self-esteem, knowledge, skills, active engagement
the Young Activists Network (YAN)
Bangalore, 2003
Trash Olympics  (Charlestown 2004)
Piece of Peace - Interviewing people
5/21/2003
action-research life cycle

- Start
- Problem identification
- Analysis
- Planning
- Evaluation and reflection
- Action
- Successful end of project
- Further planning or new problem identification
the YAN box
| personal empowerment                  | • YAN fostered critical understanding of the neighborhood  
|                                     | • YAN provided many opportunities for personal expression and participation  
|                                     | • YAN helped youth implement personally meaningful projects in the community |
| technology usage                   | • existing technology is not appropriate |
| sustainability and scalability     | • youth participation requires a lot of adult support |
Building Blocks
2005 summer program
Helping young people organize personally meaningful community events may overcome some of the barriers present in other more traditional approaches to youth participation and local civic engagement.

A telephone-based community system can bring great value to the above mentioned initiative.
why telephones?

• easily accessible
• easy to use
• low-cost
• can be integrated with computers and the Internet (VoIP)
system architecture

The What’s Up system

Phone component
- Festival
- What’s Up scripts
- Asterisk

Web component
- Drupal
  - What’s Up modules
- MySQL Server
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>by youth</th>
<th>by the youth organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• uploading of original songs, poetry</td>
<td>• creation of groups for different departments to facilitate communication among staff and members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• access by non-cellphone, non-email users</td>
<td>• promotion of community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• voicemail and system usage at odd times</td>
<td>• announcements and voicemail broadcasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• integration with MySpace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### analysis of the experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>empowerment</th>
<th>technology usage</th>
<th>sustainability and scalability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What’s Up facilitated personal expression</td>
<td>• audio is very attractive</td>
<td>• proper use of the system requires a central team to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What’s Up facilitated community awareness</td>
<td>• telephone interface is very abstract, unusual</td>
<td>oversee the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What’s Up facilitated outreach to/from organization</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
## Comparing the initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>YAN</th>
<th>What’s Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accessibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual empowerment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scalability</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spread</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
attributes of the new organization

support youth empowerment by providing youth organizations with the appropriate technologies, materials, and support required for the implementation of youth-led community initiatives.

- education
- outreach
- technology
- funding
thesis contributions (1 of 2)

• framework for the design and analysis of technological initiatives for social empowerment

• detailed description and critical analysis of 2 initiatives that focus on youth participation and local civic engagement

• a new model of community-technology initiative that is more inclusive and empowering
thesis contributions (2 of 2)

- the What’s Up system as a tool that can potentially expand the outreach of community organizations and facilitate networking among youth, youth organizations and supportive adults

- generic platform for the implementation of telephone-enhanced community systems

- guidelines for the design of technologies for social empowerment

- proposal of new type of community organization to support the development of technological initiatives for social empowerment
future directions

• release What’s Up system as open-source modules
• enhance tool based on findings
• test framework with different settings, audiences
• disseminate findings and promote discussion
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