Mapping the local and global networks of Universal Design

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Abstract. This short paper describes a collaborative and event-based installation at the Universal Design conference 2014 and issues an invitation to participate. By creatively mapping the ties between people, groups, organisations and nations, the installation will illuminate the local and global networks through which Universal Design is shaped and transported. It forms part of an ongoing research project investigating the role and relevance of Universal Design around the world today.

Keywords. Communities of practice, curating sociology, social network analysis, universal design, visualisations.

An invitation

Who are the people that inform your practice, which professional groups do you belong to, what organisations are you connected with, and where in the world do these links transport you? As part of an ongoing research project[2], we invite you to contribute to a collaborative and event-based installation at the Universal Design conference 2014. By creatively mapping the ties between people, groups, organisations and nations, the installation will illuminate the local and global networks of Universal Design. These ties matter, because they transport the attitudes, information and objects that shape communities of practitioners and mobilise Universal Design around the world today.

The installation will emerge over the duration of the conference, and will include a selection of computer-generated visualisations or network diagrams (see figure 1). As sociologist Nirmal Purwar writes, "While these diagrams have appeared on the pages of academic texts, they are less likely to be exhibited on the walls and floors of public places. This is a largely untapped potential of research for sociologists to institute public conversations" [1]. We suggest that, while these visualisations illustrate a "politics of association" [2] and are useful in so far as they identify links, relations and clusters, they tell us little about the connections and communities through which Universal Design is shaped on a daily basis. By exhibiting them, we aim to use the installation as a form of research through which new knowledge, patterns and connections are generated.

As such, the installation will undergo a series of mutations, as conference delegates engage in a creative knowledge practice and redraw their own networks onto our materials. Specifically, we invite you to contribute your own hand drawn maps, detailing the local and global ties through which your personal Universal Design networks are composed. To this end, you will find a postcard inside your conference pack. On the front, we invite you to draw your network on the world map outlined. On the back, we hope you will tell us something more about the ties that are important to you, and through which your understanding and practice of Universal Design is shaped. Once completed, stop by at the conference to pin your postcard to our live installation.

Figure 1. The network figure to the left was created from the website addresses of six Universal Design institutions in the United States. Issuecrawler explored each website by mapping its receiving and giving links with other websites. The larger nodes in the middle indicate sites that received the most links, whereas the nodes that are clustered together had the most ties between them. The figure on the right visualises these links geographically, revealing that most of the Universal Design sites explored by Issuecrawler are connected to other sites based in the United States.

References

[1] R. Rogers, *Digital Methods*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2013.
[2] N. Puwar and S. Sharma, Curating sociology, *The Sociological* Review **60** (2012), 40-63.