

Discussion after Urban Alphabets Workshop in Sao Paulo – Workshop 3 (Wednesday)

(Open discussion with 9 participants; one of them acts as the translator)

Type: group interview

Place: FIESP - Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo, Avenida Paulista, 1313 - Cerqueira César, São Paulo - SP, 01311-923, Brazil

Time: 7:30-9:30

Length: 43mins (recording)

Interviewer: Suse Miessner (Suse)

Interviewees: 9 workshop participants

Abbreviations: P1-P13: one participant (some may be the same again)

T: translator

Formatting: [...] added comments to understand discussion better
text *gestures, expressions from the group*

Suse: I'm also doing research behind the project and the research is about how you perceive space while you are using the application. I have a little questionnaire about that but first of all I would actually like to ask if you enjoyed the workshop and the walking and what you think you have been doing differently or something that comes to your mind that happened to you during the walk outside.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: *[explanation]* for Ma thesis

T: *[translating]*

Suse: What's the first experience that comes to your mind about the walk?

T: *[translating]*

P1: *[Portuguese]*

T: First thing, it was very nice. He liked the experience. Then the first thing that came to his mind was that how you can see letters in 2 different ways: one is the obvious, which are in signs or brands and you can just take a picture and crop and the second way is what he tried most. It was to recognize letters where are no letters. That's very interesting.

Suse: Exactly.

P1: *[Portuguese]*

T: A suggestion to your app is it possible to zoom before taking a picture.

Suse: Yeah. I know. One of those things I know.

T: *[not understandable]*

Suse: ... I know. Because you are used to it, because other apps do it like that. So you want to zoom before. It actually doesn't make a difference from the result or the technical point of view if you zoom before or after taking the photo from technical side. It's just what you are used to do.

T: *[translating]*

P1: *[Portuguese]*

T: *Explaining that image quality doesn't improve.*

Suse: But it's an established pattern of how things work and I know that I should be doing it. What were you about to say?

P2: It's a different way of see and feel the city. You exercise your observation, your creativity, your vision. You see letters where are no letters, you see letters. And it is another time to experience the city. We are used to walk around fast; to run from one point to another point and in between the two points you see basically nothing. You put your earphones and you are alone with your thinking. This is very good.

T: *[starting to translate]*

P2: *[translating himself]*

Some discussion between the participants

types of
letters:
letters as
letters; things
as letters

usability:
zooming

change in per-
ception: ex-
ersize on ob-
servation,
creativity, vi-
sion; things as
letters; speed

Suse: This really goes to one of the project ideas, that you start seeing space differently and you actually start experiencing space again where usually we walk from A to B, very focused, that is where we want to get and we do not allow ourselves in everyday life that kind of time of just experiencing the city or experiencing space. Usually at least if we are outside in the city spending time we at least have a friend with us so we focus on that, but we don't actually focus on our surroundings.

T: *[translating]*

P3: *[Portuguese]*

T: Thank you for the experience. He said the same thing as you just said that he recognized shapes and things not necessarily on brand posters. And he said that also the same with sounds. When we are walking we don't listen.

Suse: Actually not at all similar but I did a project about city sounds earlier.

T: *[translating]*

P3: *[Portuguese]*

T: He said also that if you go somewhere downtown. Sao Paulo downtown is not the same as a downtown in Europe.

Suse: I experienced that...

T: We don't have the same relationship status for our downtown. So many people when they go downtown they do not even pay attention to the buildings. They don't look out to see the stories of the buildings. People go from A to B. As we said we are not even paying attention to eye-level. Not even that.

Suse: So it is just what you have to see in order to get where you want. I mean we find ourselves in that situation I don't know how many times a day, but many times... I think this *[the app]* is just a way to get out of it.

T: *[translating]*

P3-4 some discussion; also with T

T: I think it's great. You cannot be only like this all the time or zoom out all the time. You need to swap. *[Own opinion]*

Suse: I would say everyday life is too complex to see everything around you, so you have the focus on something.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: The problem is that zooming in *[to your phone]* or zooming out of a situation becomes the default mode of operation. I think that is a problem. That is what the app is trying to break.

T: *[translating]*

P5: *[Portuguese]*

T: She also enjoyed the app. She is not from Sao Paulo capital; she is from the countryside, a small city. She has recently moved here to study at the university and she said that because she is not from here, she has this extra will to pay attention to things. So she is always moving in the city and the chaos. She goes to the university by bus. She has one view of the town and pays attention to it, but recently she walked instead of using the bus and it was very different. She also likes to pay attention to sounds.

Suse: Yeah, it is already between different modes of transportation that we have that very, very different experience and it's actually quite good to realize also.

T: *[translating]*

P3: *[Portuguese -short]*

P6: *[Portuguese]*

T: He is also walking to here and he's amazed on how many things you can find out. Sao Paulo is a big city. It is a very car driven society, so when people decide to walk they start realizing that you....

P7: *[Portuguese]*

Some discussion between the participants

T: I had the same experience that I used to work very far from here about 10 km and I took the car there for 10 years and then I decided to study right in the other side of this building here and every morning that I go walking the city it was like a liberation, being out of a jail that was my feeling and it's the best thing I did in my life, to see the sun, the rain, the people. It was fantastic.

Suse: It's strange how these little things change our idea of the city.

zoom in + out
as survival
strategy in
complex city
life > zooming
out is default
mode

different city
perceptions in
different modes
of transpor-
tation > if you
have the will
for attention;
UA is in a way
forcing you to
do it

P8: It's totally different.
Suse: And I think I have a very different experience of cities, because in Finland they have an ambitious plan to make public transport so good that you do not need a car. And there could be more busses on the streets than cars.
T: *[translating]*
T: It's very special.
Suse: Yes, it's very special. I always tell one story how we have a public transport planner on-line that shows you your route options, how to get from your where you are to where you want to get but then it also shows you how much air pollution comes from it when you are using a bus or when you are using a car. So it really raises your awareness for environmental pollution and the different choices that you make and you know it's one part in educating the people in how much better it is to actually use public transport.
T: *[translating]*
P?: *[Portuguese]*
T: Besides bus, how is the bicycle environment in Helsinki?
Suse: That's really different to whom you are talking. Because someone in Helsinki, who has always lived there, would say it's horrible and it is horrible in some parts of Helsinki.
T: What means horrible, as in dangerous?
Suse: Lets say the bus drivers especially are not used to bikers on the streets and they do not like them to be there. Especially on the bus lanes, which is where you are officially supposed to bike if there is no bike lane. So in those cases it can be quite dangerous at times but generally it's super-safe and very bike-friendly. Most of the places that you actually want to access will have a ... you know, from your home to your work there will be a very well conditioned bike lane. But then of course we do have about 6 months of winter where you cannot bike. *[Laughing]*
T: *[translating]*
T: People get killed in their bicycles?
Suse: No. People don't get killed in Finland.
T: *Some discussion with participants*
Suse: Sao Paulo also is a much bigger city. The greater metropolitan area of Helsinki has 1.2 million inhabitants. It's a totally different situation.
[Discussion in Portuguese]
P9: it takes a lot of... *(Not understandable)* a lot of photos from graffiti
Suse: I see it as a tool and you do whatever you want. So it's about what you use it for. You could use it for these kinds of street art-projects.
P9: I was late and I took a lot of photos about the letters from graffiti but I didn't recognize the letters in them and then I made again the exercise. For example,... there is the M.
T: *[commenting in Portuguese]*
P9: *[Portuguese]... is the street art guy; maybe I can show... [Portuguese]*
T: *[Portuguese comment]*
P10: *[Portuguese]*
T: He wants to understand how you developed the idea. Why did you arrive to this app? And what's the story behind it?
Suse: The story is I moved to Finland. *[Laughing]*
T: *[translating]*
Suse: So that was in 2010 and that's when I started using my big-ass DSLR camera. I moved to Helsinki from a little town in Germany and I somehow started seeing a graphical identity of Helsinki. I had always been interested in typography but at that point I somehow started seeing something really interesting in letters on the streets and how they actually tell something about the environment. But also how they are somehow site-specific, but not really. *[Laughing]*
T: *[translating]*
Suse: And then I ended up with my big DSLR-camera taking photos of letters and I did it street by street somehow. It was ...I don't know why... it ended up being an alphabet of one street. So you walk for 2h in the afternoon and you just randomly take letters and you come home and then you have to crop all the letters in Photoshop.
T: *[translating]*
P11: It's a lot of work.

car-driven
society

Suse: And it just takes too much time. So I ended up at 2 alphabets. I had materials for more but I just didn't have the patience to sit down at home because it's not fun. It takes way too much time.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: Then almost a year later I actually had this course in my university, I study New Media and we had a course on programming for the iPhone and we needed to do a final project for the course and that's how the first version of the app actually was developed.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: From the first presentation in that course everyone was like "Oh, this is a great idea. You can actually develop it." and that's how I just developed it further and I got some funding and then I got into the Connecting Cities Network and now I'm here.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: Connecting Cities is this media art network that has different partner institutions in different cities, mostly in Europe and then in Sao Paulo and somewhere in Canada also. Then this network just selects a pool of projects every year and then the curators from the actual institutions can for their festivals choose which projects to show. So they all have one open call and that's how I travelled so much this year. That's why there are so many alphabets...

T: *[translating]*

Suse: It's a great opportunity for an artist, really. I was the artist who travelled most this year but still it's great. It's also great because you are always "the artist", because I'm really not. *[Laughing]* But yeah it's a really awesome opportunity. You get some money for it but you mostly get to actually travel and show your stuff all over the place.

T: *[translating]*

Suse: So yeah. Basically the input that was accumulated today is shown on the facade starting Friday and then for the next month. Then there are 2 LED screens and you can also use new letters, so if you are still uploading letters at that time that would be great because it will also change the Sao Paulo alphabet over time. That's also something that I'm very interested in as you also saw in the video and you have been asking. So I'm interested in how this representation of the city actually changes over time it is not something that you can actually make up ones and it's going to be like this forever.

T: *[translating]*

Some discussion between participants

T: I'm just explaining about the contrast. *[Portuguese]*

Suse: So are there any other questions?

P12: *[Portuguese]*

T: He said that the whole experience for him was very related with the zoom in and zoom out. And he remembered a very old movie he watched in the cinema. It was about the whole war and everything and he arrived late in the cinema. The scene was a room and a guy walking from one side to the other. He used this example because ones you are in the movie you see the scene, you pay attention to the scene but then you forget what's going on around and you focus on the character and the dialog, for example. But in this movie because he arrived late and the guy was walking from one side to the other he paid attention to the picture behind him changed, but no one else paid attention. He asked many people, but no one paid attention to that, because they were already in the character and what he was doing but he noticed that the frame was the same but the picture inside was different.

P12: *[Portuguese]*

T: He said because of this experience and exercise even if he's not with the phone he's taking in this experience of paying attention to letters maybe for sometime even after today.

Suse: This is a very good point because this is actually what the survey that I just gave you are about. The last question in that is also if I can send you a follow-up-survey, like an online-survey in 2-3 weeks and it will exactly ask you that question. So if you still perceive space around you in a different way or not. And it's a very interesting question whether you have the phone with you or not. At least for me, I can totally tell what my experience is: I always have to see letters everywhere. Even if I haven't worked on the project for a month it's still like I have to look at letters: My life is just about letters.

zooming in and out example: movie

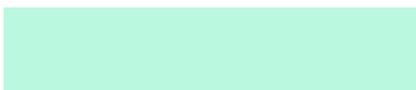
long-term change of perception (increased letter-attention)

T: *[translating]*

Suse: So yeah the survey is in English but if you have questions you can ask.

T: *[translating - starts to translate the survey]*

Legend:

changes in space: perception, action,...	
future development possibilities	
usability	
user types	
urban postcards	
other important	
specificity of a city?	
reference	
types of letters	

change in perception: exercise on observation, creativity, vision; things as letters; speed

zoom in + out as survival strategy in complex city life > zooming out is default mode

types of letters:
letters as letters; things as letters

usability:
zooming

different city perceptions in different modes of transportation > if you have the will for attention; UA is in a way forcing you to do it

zooming in and out example: movie

long-term change of perception (increased letter-attention)

car-driven society