

La Piazza: Intergenerational Learning in Public Spaces

La Piazza is about intergenerational learning in public places that are enhanced by technology. This could be a museum or gallery, a jazz summer school or a computer club - or it could be a piazza. How can people from all generations learn from each other and how can space and technology help?



Outline

It is generally agreed that the current model of technology-enhanced, collaborative public spaces, as used in community centres and museums, needs to be enriched if it is to truly engage users. La Piazza is an initiative of the European research network Kaleidoscope, whose participants have come together to exchange ideas and to explore the issue of intergenerational learning in public spaces using technology.

Existing technologically-enhanced public spaces do not normally cater for adults playing an active role as mentors. The main idea behind the La Piazza project is for community centres and the like to promote learning between generations. Both adults and young people are producers of knowledge and culture, and so a process of mutual learning would be beneficial to all.

The growing importance of intergenerational learning could be attributed to the demographic trend towards an ageing population, with an increasing number of policies to support lifelong learning both in formal and informal settings. However, while there has been much research to explore the benefits derived by adults and young people involved in intergenerational learning, the role that technology-enhanced public spaces can play in maximising those benefits remains largely unexplored.

La Piazza aims to research and develop:

- 1 Intergenerational learning scenarios supported by technology in public social spaces, where learning takes place across ages through meaningful social interactions.
- 2 Integration of technology interfaces and tools into the physical architecture of those public spaces, to support meaningful and playful intergenerational learning activities.

Another dimension of the project is to consider the role of space in learning. Learning activities mediated by technology do not happen in a spatial void. The design of physical space has an enormous effect on the way we, as human beings, behave and on the activities that we undertake. Our perception of space is subjective and can influence the way we think and construct knowledge. It is important to design spaces that are sensually rich and stimulating (using light, colours, smell and touch), as these qualities affect the learning process.

Beyond being a convivial space, a place where people come together, a piazza is a transitional zone, a place between home and work where people of all ages come and go. And so its identity is forever changing, reflecting the varying personalities of its members. Inspired by the nature of piazzas, the La Piazza project contends that a learning space should also be evolving, reflecting the needs of its changing audiences.



Partners

Joint Information Services Committee (JISC)
 Kaleidoscope
 Camporosso
 University of Barcelona, Spain
 University of Sienna, Italy
 University of Liege, Belgium
 LEGO Denmark

Research Objectives

Through the exploration of public spaces and the development of learning activities for adults and young people, using case studies and participatory design sessions, La Piazza aims to:

- explore the issue of intergenerational learning mediated by technologies in social spaces
- define a model for intergenerational learning in public spaces, enriched by technology, to support a range of cognitive and societal competences as well as differing ways of self-expression
- explore architecturally interesting social spaces, in which technologies are ecologically integrated, where adults and young people can participate in a mutual, socially-rewarding learning experience.



Research Outcomes

The overall aim of this project is to establish a comprehensive research roadmap on how, under what conditions and with what social benefits, technology-enhanced public spaces can effectively and meaningfully support intergenerational learning. More specifically the project will produce:

- a literature review, providing an exploration of the research undertaken in this area; this publication will offer a clear vision of where gaps in our understanding lie, where our knowledge base is weakest and future directions we need to follow to make best use of technology for intergenerational learning
- a set of case studies
- suggestions for future research based on workshops to explore new methodologies in the design of technology-enhanced learning spaces.

Further Information

Further information on this project will be added to the website as it becomes available:

www.futurelab.org.uk/showcase/la_piazza

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