

Claiming Space Through Language: Conceptualizing a Location Based Cultural Space Experience

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Abstract. In a hyperconnected world, language heavily impacts the human experience and sense of community by how relationships are built and how knowledge is shared through space. LBS methods allow the visualization of the intersections between language, specific spaces and social phenomena. A mapping of such interactions could impact and deepen the cultural lives of citizens and most importantly nurture a space to become a conduit of dialogue by making visible the invisible through meaningful connections. This paper describes the work plan for conceptualizing a cultural space experience, within museums, art galleries, historic houses, and other cultural institutions where interrelations of differences and similarities come together.

Keywords. experimentation, digital humanities, spaces

1 Introduction

Over the past years, language has been adopted as an essential model to conceptualize the embedded power of spaces. The tight and ever growing relationship between language, information and space has caught the interest of areas involved in policy-making and academic studies such as the digital humanities. This enhanced sensitivity regarding language as the object of politics has broadened the conceptions of spatiality, especially the relevance of the *“entanglement-focused, territoriality-, (de)attachment-*



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and connectivity-” conceptualizations in the environment (Jani Vuolteenaho, 2012). Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of linguistics and space enables new collaborative networks for knowledge transfer, for example, by the utilization of Location Based Services for meaningful connections together with cultural continuity.

The increase in personal and spatial information constructs new digital geographies that are more personal and can empower or overpower people, places and institutions. Recent studies described representations of spaces, specifically in the urban realm, as information landscapes (Matthew Zook, 2000). Physical and virtual interactions with language shape people's experience in places. As more people are living closer and are more connected than ever before, the inequalities of information trace imaginary geographies through space and impact our understanding of a place (Seth M. Low, 2011). In a hyperconnected world, language heavily impacts the human experience and sense of community by how relationships are built and how knowledge is shared through space.

This paper describes the process for conceptualizing a cultural space experience as part of museums, art galleries, historic houses, and other cultural institutions within the framework of Exploration Space, (reference: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/about/core-units/core-unit-4/>) a space for innovation and experimentation at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities. Here we aim to explore the relationships between demographic characteristics, language and spaces.

We ask several questions:

1. How does linking language to LBS could help us understand better space and place?
2. How LBS shape our perception of the urban environment?

The goal is to exploit methods of LBS in a co-design process and develop an interactive tool to make our data accessible in places where they are related to. Thus, we aim to visualize how the “agency of spaces” and the moments of social inclusion and exclusion. The mapping of such interactions impact and deepen the cultural lives of citizens and most importantly nurture a space to be a conduit of dialogue by making visible the invisible through meaningful connections.

2 Background

2.1 Exploration space

Embedded into the Core Group “Methods and Innovation” it acts as an open space for the networked humanities, “with the aim of stimulating, designing, enabling and scientifically analyzing new forms of knowledge production at the interface of science, technology and society.”

The actors explore methods and practices of the Open Innovation paradigm on a global scale. Exploration space is a best practice example for Open Innovation by the Austrian government (link: <http://openinnovation.gv.at/portfolio/oeaw-exploration-space/>).

2.2 LBS and the concept of language constituting space

Language is a negotiation between identity and environment, where identities are seen as a process circumscribed by the continuous struggle between the individual need for self-fulfillment and the demands of social structure and collective consciousness. Identities are subjected to constant negotiations that are here assessed through central role of a range of sociocultural and demographic factors that intervene in the relationship between humans, languages, and the physical environments in which communities live. However, language dominance offers the opportunity to choose layers of societal engagement, as well as the pace for understanding through its rhythm dynamics (Will Kymlicka, 2010). An important component of the platform that brings new to how language is systematically hidden within the workings of spaces is the visualization of data.

LBS functions as a layer that bridges the qualitative narratives with behavioral patterns happening in mobility platforms and languages spoken in social platforms. A new understanding on relationships that have been previously hidden in data is potentialized, such as the intertwining of historical patterns, psychology and political systems that perpetuate inequalities, silences and disadvantages.

3 Theoretical Framework: From the margins to the center through intersectionality

The theoretical framework chosen for this project departs from the lens of feminist studies, intersectionality and mixed methods as a research method. We applied Bell Hooks’ notions of space, language and power as a main compass to set the foundations for the work plan. Hooks recognizes the primacy of voices that are often silenced and the importance of presenting a

space as a space of learning (Bell Hooks, 1994). Thus through group-centered research we aim to bring in the experiences of marginalized groups who have generally been absent and ‘give voice’ while highlighting their unique experiences.

4 Methods: Exploratory sequential mixed methods, ‘thinking with care’ is a vital for collective thinking

Our research is a collaborative journey driven by collective processes and design research. In an iterative co-design process, as the conceptualization moves forward, so does the level of engagement of participants by examining the practices, evaluating the methods used in the design experiment process and most importantly in shifting the powers (Cameron, 2019).

The main objective is to develop a set of research tools and materials through collective experiences center on people’s stories. The project seeks to empower participants by giving them the chance to take charge of their own narrative and engage and bring it to the center along with other participants as the process moves forward. Therefore, all activities part of the methodology aims to bring the narratives to the center and remove intermediaries from the spotlight.

An exploratory sequential mixed methods research (MMR) design will be implemented in order to broadly explore and understand, behaviors, and preferences from participants. In an exploratory design, qualitative data is first collected and analyzed, thus, this method is the most fitting for this project, since the qualitative methods and the narratives will later determine our scope for a quantitative instrument to further explore the research.

4.1 Qualitative methods: narratives from the margin to the center

4.1.1 In-depth interviews: From one-sided conversations to back to back connections

An approach will be made to at least six persons and through these qualitative interviews we will examine how race and gender influenced spaces and places experiences. The interviews focus on the complexity of relationships among social groups within and across spaces and places in the city of Vienna and how their experience with has been impacted through language.

4.1.2 Workshops: Journey mapping, ecosystem mapping and scenario building

We aim to conduct four workshops in total over the course of two months with different people from the same group within the community. In an iterative process, we seek to develop strategies and tools for each workshop based on the people's feedback and responses and develop based on our learnings a meaningful framework.

We hope to get an insight to the stories of these people and function as a platform for sharing experiences. We want to create engaging and safe spaces and activities so that diverse non-native german speaking people from different career and life stages could discuss their experiences in Vienna from different perspectives. These workshops function as an exchange of conversations where time, space and emotions are discussed. As conversations get interlaced so does the interactions. This gives away power to the participants to take charge of the conversation and lead the narratives. By learning about the relationship with physical space, these exercises can be a tool to reflect on people's lives. It might highlight power relationships, as well as the rhetorics and stories that people use to interpret and process their experience in a specific context.

4.2 Quantitative methods: location data and time-of-day constraints

Self-reported positioning from people within the city of Vienna will help us to locate locations and time of the day check-ins as well as the language regarding these places. LBS then holds a role as a facilitating layer that feeds on the narratives gathered from the qualitative research phases, complimenting in complexity and in details the story we are trying to map.

5 Consequences, expected challenges and results

We aim to reach a piloting step during the project runtime (01.07.2019-31.03.2020) and develop based on our learnings a meaningful follow up project proposal. After developing this work plan, through the driven results an interactive installation is expected to launch in the city of Vienna in locations where key narratives from our research developed, thus, intertwining the different realities that exist through space and places.

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