Alison Prendiville, LCC, University of the Arts London, UK

she ji
[ʃə: ʤi:]

Amplifying Relationships through Place and Locality in the Design of Local Government Digital Services

Abstract This paper presents an action research service design project that took place as part of the Public Collaboration Lab (PCL), a one-year, AHRC funded research project between Camden Council and Central Saint Martins (CSM), University of the Arts London. The project focused on the Council's Home Library Service (HLS). With UK central government reducing budgets for local authorities, and increasing pressure from societal challenges including an ageing population, the HLS offered a speculative design space to reconfigure possible co-designed service futures. Visual ethnographic processes, framed within anthropological concepts of locality and place, traced the routes travelled and the interactions that were enacted between the HLS team members and its housebound readers, revealing the hidden nature of the relationships and knowledge that existed across the borough. I conclude that as governments look to reconfigure services – and often do so using abstract policy language – new frames of understanding of locality and place must be explored to deliver digital solutions that amplify the social and cultural dimensions that constitute a community.

1 Editorial note: while the body text conforms to U.S. English, all project titles and institution names adopt British English where appropriate.

2 Adam Thorpe, Alison Prendiville, Sarah Rhodes, and Lara Salinas, "Public Collaboration Lab," abstract, in *PDC '16: Proceedings of the 14th Participatory Design Conference: Short Papers, Interactive Exhibitions, Workshops-Volume 2*, ed. Claus Bossen et al. (New York: ACM, 2016), 80, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/2948076.2948121.

3 Prime Minister Tony Blair and Minister for the Cabinet Office, *Modernising Government* (white paper, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1999), 6, available at https://ntouk.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/modgov.pdf.

4 Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts, "*Design Principles for Essentially Digital Governance*" (paper presented at the 11th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, CA, September 2015), 3, available at http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64125/1/Essentially%20Digital%20Governance.pdf.

5 Victor Pestoff, "Co-production, New Public Governance and Third Sector Social Services in Europe," *Ciências Sociais Unisinos* 47, no. 1 (2011): 15, available at http://www.redalyc.org/html/938/93820778003/.

Introduction

The Public Collaboration Lab (PCL) was a one-year, AHRC funded collaboration between Camden Council and Central Saint Martins (CSM), University of the Arts London,[1] with the aim to investigate the "potential for, and value of, strategic collaboration between design education and local government."[2] Within its research agenda was an open service design brief to review the Home Library Service (HLS), with the proviso that technology be considered in the service solution. In this article, I present research that uncovers and articulates tacit values and knowledge that make the HLS much more than a book delivery service. By using design and visual ethnographic processes, and anthropological notions of locality and place — in the context of a service design framework — the HLS reveals itself as a locus of important relational activities. Once discovered, these hidden values and this knowledge offered an opportunity to co-design and transform the HLS through a digital platform, affording a new, longer-term wellbeing and independent living care service based on the personal interests of the service recipients. More widely, if relational digital services are to address highly complex and entangled social issues such as ageing communities, new conceptual frameworks are required. This article suggests options that help developers of such services better understand the centrality of place so that we may translate and amplify relationships between service provider and recipient in developing online solutions.

I begin by explaining the drivers of change for UK government services, and the government's adoption of design methods and practices to address the multi-layered, interconnected challenges facing many local communities. I draw on the literature from political science, policy, and public management to situate the HLS service design project as an exploration within a lab environment. After a brief description of my methodology, I offer an anthropological framing of the service design process through reference to the key concepts of place and locality, both of which guided the visual ethnographic work I undertook during the discovery and defining stages of my research. After this, I explore opportunities presented by digital technologies to enhance human relational elements; especially what they were able to contribute to the digital common platform that was part of the final service concept. I go on to present and analyze the service design concept itself, which I use to address the abstract language typically used in government to describe new types of transformative digital services. I conclude by formalizing these frames as a means to guide the development of relational digital service designs that address complex community challenges.

The Changing Nature of Government and the HLS

As one of the collaborative projects undertaken by the PCL, the HLS reflects the current interest of western governments and local authorities to explore the application of design in public sector innovation. It also demonstrates broader government agendas that emerged at the end of the twentieth century. In 1999, the "Modernising Government white paper"[3] suggested that public services could be improved by focusing on users rather than organizational structures and realizing opportunities to apply new technologies to make government simpler and more accessible. Concurrently, increasing social and economic pressures facing the welfare state meant that the UK Government shifted from the New Public Management model originating in the 1980s, that, according to Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts, "emphasized disaggregation of large-scale departments, increased competition within the public sector, and the incentivization of public officials along business lines, to a New Public Governance Model."[4] For Pestoff,[5] the New Public Governance paradigm has at its core the co-production of services that utilizes

a mix of public service agents and citizens who contribute to the provision of a public service. Consequently, co-designing public services and policies is becoming increasingly common at public agencies.[6] These collaborative efforts take different forms, "including public involvement in formulating strategies ('planning for real,' 'visioning exercises,' and community appraisals),"[7] and emphasize the importance of involving service users and their communities as part of the service planning and delivery.[8]

This shift in government management also results from the expectation that public services have an increasing role to play in tackling the growing range of complex and interconnected social problems[9] commonly requiring a greater attention to behavior and changes in lifestyle.[10] These complex "wicked"[11] problems are public policy issues that have "multiple, non-linear, and interconnected causes that feed off one another."[12] For example, in the HLS project I describe in the coming sections, many of the issues that emerged related to isolation and loneliness and chronic condition management intertwined with an ageing community. For this reason, applying "standardized approaches used to solve such problems is often seen as being ineffective, as a deep knowledge of personal circumstances, requiring time and individual and neighborhood engagement is needed, with no guarantee that any particular approach will work."[13] Graeme Cooke and Rick Muir[14] present opportunities for the role of the state to revolutionize its service delivery by recognizing the importance of human relationships when dealing with complex social challenges such as dementia. For Geoff Mulgan, shifting from delivery mode to a relational one in government services, "where a government acts with the public to achieve common goals, share knowledge resources and power,"[15] information must become a central component of "effective relational strategies particularly in services for an ageing population."[16] Patrick Dunleavy and Helen Margetts also see opportunities for governments to reorganize themselves and innovate around the digital traces left by citizens who engage with the public sector, but they acknowledge that currently "government and citizens remain strangely separate and distinct."[17] For the purposes of the HLS project, the Council considered the digital dimension important at the start of the project, but saw its introduction merely as a means to deliver efficiency rather than as part of more relational and interconnected solution.

HLS within the PCL Innovation Space

To address increasing societal pressure on resources, and begin to rethink the role of government, Christian Bason identifies the emergence of "design labs as public innovation spaces"[18] to tackle complex public social challenges. To provide better services in difficult times, Bason says there is a need "to break with established routines and traditional structures of government, using design, to allow for greater experimentation and simultaneously reform and change the way government operates."[19] As part of this emergent landscape, PCL was established to explore the potential for and value of design-led collaborative projects and address societal challenges in the context of public service reform, via a strategic research collaboration between Camden Council, the citizens it serves, and a higher education institution: CSM University of the Arts London.

Since 2010, Camden Council has been one of the London borough's hardest hit by central government cuts. The council currently offers six hundred services to two hundred and thirty thousand residents at a cost of £857.9 million. £93 million savings were made between 2010 and 2015, with a further £70 million required by 2018.[20] To deliver these ongoing reductions in expenditure, the council aims to create a further £800,000 in savings by the end of the 2017/18 financial year and is undertaking a range of consultations to find solutions. One of the targeted areas

6 Elke Löffler, "Public Governance in a Network Society," in *Public Management and Governance*, 2nd ed., ed. Tony Bovaird and Elke Löffler (London: Routledge, 2009), 225.

7 Steve Martin, "Engaging with Citizens and Other Stakeholders," in *Public Management and Governance*, 2nd. ed., ed. Tony Bovaird and Elke Löffler (London: Routledge, 2009), 289.

8 Tony Bovaird, "Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services," *Public Administration Review* 67, no. 5 (2007): 846, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00773.x.

9 Rick Muir and Imogen Parker, *Many-to-Many: How the Relational State Will Transform Public Services* (London: IPPR Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014), 1, accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2014/02/Many-to-many_Feb2014_11865.pdf.

10 Martin, "Engaging with Citizens and Other Stakeholders," 280.

11 Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (1992): 5–21, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1511637.

12 Muir and Parker, *Many-to-Many*, 1.

13 Ibid., 11.

14 Graeme Cooke and Rick Muir, eds., *The Relational State: How Recognising the Importance of Human Relationships Could Revolutionize the Role of the State* (London: IPPR Institute for Public Policy Research, 2012), 8, available at https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2012/11/relational-state_Nov2012_9888.pdf?noredirect=1.

15 Geoff Mulgan, "Government with People: The Outlines of a Relational State," in *The Relational State: How Recognising the Importance of Human Relationships Could Revolutionize the Role of the State*, ed. Graeme Cook and Rick Muir (London: IPPR Institute for Public Policy Research, 2012), 20.

16 Ibid., 11.

17 Dunleavy and Margetts, "*Design Principles for Essentially Digital Governance*," 1.

18 Christian Bason, ed., *Design for Policy* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 2014), 34.

19 Ibid., 33.

20 "Further Government Cuts to Council Funding Will Jeopardise Basic Services," *Camden Newsroom* (blog), last modified September 21, 2015, http://news.camden.gov.uk/further-government-cuts-to-council-funding-will-jeopardise-basic-services.

21 Camden Council, "Camden Equality Taskforce Evidence Base," 5, accessed March 20, 2018, https://opendata.camden.gov.uk/download/asq6-n3v3/application/pdf.

22 Joanna Latimer, "Homecare & Frail Older People: Relational Extension & the Art of Dwelling" (paper presented at *Homecare: International Perspectives Workshop*, Victoria, BC, Canada, April 2009), 2, accessed March 20, 2018, http://orca.cf.ac.uk/68223/1/FinalLatimerhome-care-dwelling%20(1).pdf.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 Ibid., 1–24.

25 Karen Windle, "What Role Can Local and National Supportive Services Place in Supporting Independent and Healthy Living in Individuals 65 and Over? Future of an Ageing Population: Evidence Review" (report, Foresight, Government Office for Science, 2015), 1, accessed March 20, 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/460109/gs-15-24-future-ageing-supportive-services-role-er14.pdf.

26 Ibid, 5.

is the HLS. During the time this project was underway (2015-2016), the cost of running the HLS was £170,000, and hence the council saw it as an area for potential savings. As Camden ranks eighth in London for "income deprivation affecting older people,"[21] and since the majority of the HLS users are elderly, any changes to the service were going to impact an already vulnerable group.

The Home Library Service

The aim of the HLS is to ensure that people who are homebound due to ill health, mobility, mental health, and frailty issues can access library services from their own home, free of charge. At the time of this project, the service involved the delivery of items — paper books, audiobooks, CDs, DVDs, jigsaw puzzles, and some electronic devices such as CD players — with visits every four weeks to deliver and collect items. HLS staff might select items for users based on their stated preferences, or users can request their own specific titles. The service users are spread across Camden Borough, which is divided into three areas. HLS makes deliveries to different users every day. Each delivery round — one in the morning and one in the afternoon — can have up to twelve drop-offs. At the time of the design ethnography work, the HLS had three hundred and fifty users, forty-seven percent of whom were elderly and infirm; twenty-four percent elderly and disabled; eighteen percent under the pensionable age but physically disabled. Out of the three hundred and fifty users, ten percent had a mental health disability. Given the HLS user profile, and considering that HLS is a service, it is also important to consider formal care services for the elderly. Latimer[22] says that many see care services for the elderly — including in-home care and housework — as denigrating, and that care service is disparaged for being low paid and frequently part time. In addition, she notes how this kind of work "is constituted as semi-skilled, maintenance work: it and the people being cared for, the frail elderly, are figured as having no future, no prospects ahead of them."[23] Latimer says that when reimagining care services, there should be less emphasis on functional notions of care and more on rethinking home care in terms of locale, materiality, and relationality.[24] The discussion on framing to reveal place and locality in the coming sections provides context for these considerations.

A report by Karen Windle for the UK government asks the question, "What role can local and national supportive services play in supporting independent and healthy living in individuals 65 and over?"[25] Karen Windle identifies a need to reduce social isolation and loneliness and recommends befriending services, social prescribing, group activities, and other similar interventions for this age group. She also acknowledges that there needs to be more long term well being interventions. Windle acknowledges, however, that currently "there is little evidence that identifies the types of package of early interventions that should be provided, when these need to be offered, and to whom."[26]

Research Methodology

When Camden Council presented the HLS to PCL as a service design project, the focus was on home library delivery service. This is part of the Council's library services, which sit within the department of Leisure and Libraries. The Home Library Service project, as one part of the broader PCL research agenda, aimed to explore the reform of the Council's library services through service design, design, and anthropological lenses. As action research, the main purpose of the project was to review, rethink, and reimagine possible HLS futures using established practices, highlighted by Elizabeth Koshy, Valsa Koshy, and Heather Waterman as "participative and collaborative, situation based and context specific." According to them,

action research "develops reflection based on interpretations made by the participants" and creates knowledge "through action and at the point of application."[27]

The project also aimed to fulfill PCL's line of inquiry into services digitization, and foster an asset-orientated approach to public and collaborative services – services co-designed and delivered with and by citizens. Seven MDes Service Design and Innovation students received the HLS design brief. That brief was the starting point for the reform of the Borough's range of library services, including home delivery and walk-in access. It had a six-month timescale. As part of wider PCL research, the HLS project underwent the University's ethical review process, and some of the students from the team registered with the UK Home Office Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Throughout the project, I and other research staff from PCL were involved in supporting the delivery of workshops. We worked closely with the students to support the participatory and co-design activities and monitor the work's progress and its sensitivity to the context.

Although the brief was situated as a local authority service under review, as an action research project within a Lab space the work encouraged the students to look beyond the currently familiar and accepted methods and tools of the discipline – things like customer journeys, touchpoints, storyboarding, and personas[28] – and draw on co-designing as a transformative process that captures multiple entanglements and tacit knowledge.[29] Drawing on visual ethnography practices,[30] and anthropology – in particular the work of Arjun Appadurai,[31] Tim Ingold,[32] and Joanna Latimer,[33] – the students mapped the relationships, routes and daily activities of the service providers, and the social and technological engagement within the homes and lives of HLS users. To understand the types of relationships that existed between the HLS team and its users, the research also extended to recording and mapping conversations between them. This somewhat messy approach pertains to what Jeanette Blomberg and Chuck Darrah see as "services relating to the broader and anthropological view of the human condition,"[34] which "are seldom clearly bounded precisely because they are embedded in institutions and the wider practices of society, and therefore difficult to demarcate."[35]

To contain the tangled, diverse, and iterative ethnographic and co-design techniques used in the design process, we applied the Design Council's Double Diamond divergent and convergent model[36] to guide the different stages of the work and locate points of reflective engagement with Camden Council officers. Throughout the six-month project, there were three workshops with staff from across the Council. At each one, we synthesized the evidence gathered from the visual and design ethnography and co-design sessions with HLS users to create further tools for internal engagement with Council officers on the reconfiguration of the HLS.

Frames to Reveal the HLS

Building on previous work exploring design anthropology's contribution to service design through understanding "place as social interactions within in-door places as well as the daily movements and personal networks,"[37] I directed the students to undertake visual and design ethnographic fieldwork around HLS locales. The following frames provided ways of directing the ethnographic work and understanding the HLS – not as a delivery service, but as something constituting a place and locality in the lives of some of the most vulnerable residents in Camden Borough (see Figure 1).

27 Elizabeth Koshy, Valsa Koshy, and Heather Waterman, *Action Research in Healthcare: For Improving Educational Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 3.

28 Andrew Polaine, Lavrans Løvlie, and Ben Reason, *Service Design: From Insight to Implementation* (New York: Rosenfeld Media, 2013); Marc Stickdorn and Jakob Schneider, *This is Service Design Thinking: Basics, Tools, Cases* (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2011).

29 Yoko Akama and Alison Prendiville, "Embodying, Enacting and Entangling Design: A Phenomenological View to Co-designing Services," *Swedish Design Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (2013): 29–41, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3384/svid.2000-964X.13129.

30 Sarah Pink, "Mobilising Visual Ethnography: Making Routes, Making Place and Making Images," in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 3 (2008): 1–17, DOI: https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-9.3.1166.

31 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

32 Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays of Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

33 Latimer, "Homecare & Frail Older People," 1–24.

34 Jeanette Blomberg and Chuck Darrah, "Towards an Anthropology of Services," *The Design Journal* 18, no. 2 (2015): 173, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2752/175630615X14212498964196.

35 Ibid., 173.

36 "The Design Process: What is the Double Diamond?," Design Council, accessed march 20, 2018, https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/design-process-what-double-diamond.

37 Alison Prendiville, "A Design Anthropology of Place in Service Design: A Methodological Reflection," *The Design Journal* 18, no. 2 (2015): 198, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2752/175630615X14212498964231.

Figure 1 Frames of locality and place directed the visual ethnographic work to reveal the nature of the HLS. Copyright © 2017 Alison Prendiville.
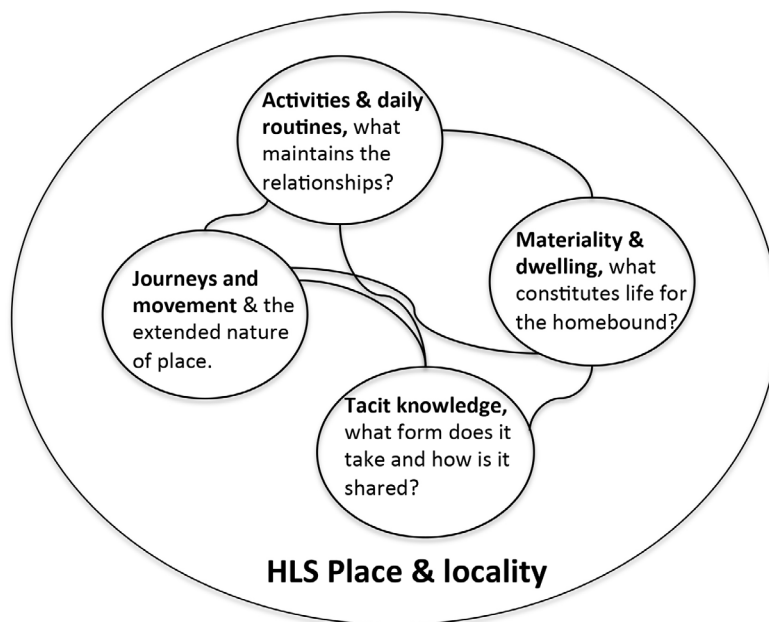
38 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 180.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ingold, *Being Alive*.

43 Ibid., 149.

Activity as Locality

The notion of locality is problematic for HLS, as the service is based within a single office (at Swiss Cottage Library) where four team members prepared the selection, delivery, and discharge of the books, audiobooks, and related material, while HLS team members provide item drop-offs and pickups to homebound service recipients in locations that are spread across the Borough. To understand the HLS as a place, I asked the students to look at the ongoing activity involved the daily practices of the HLS team framed from the perspective of Appadurai and his exploration on the production of locality.[38] For Appadurai, "space and time are … socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation and action."[39] He identifies the connection between the production of local subjects through ethnographic case studies and the processes by which locality is materially produced.[40] He further explains that the humdrum daily actions recorded by anthropologists — such as "the building of houses, the organizations of paths, … the mapping and 'negotiation' of transhuman spaces" — are "all techniques for spatial production of locality."[41] Thus in the ethnographic work for the HLS, daily activities including packing and delivering books for the four weekly cycle, filing and sharing notes about the readers' interests in the user folder, and the social interactions that arose from these all created a locality that was both spatial and social. Such practices were localized within the library office and the routes travelled, and in each of the homes visited.

Journeys and Movements that Produce Locality

Relating further to the HLS and the understanding of locality is the work of Tim Ingold[42] who, like Appadurai, also considers that place is not contained in a single locality but extends through interconnected journeys, stories, and experiences of the kind evident in HLS ethnographic research. Ingold's work focuses on movement and the extended nature of place.

> "Places, then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring. A house is an example where the lines of residents are tightly knotted together. But the lines are no more contained within the house than are threads contained within a knot. Rather they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other, places, as are threads in other knots."[43]
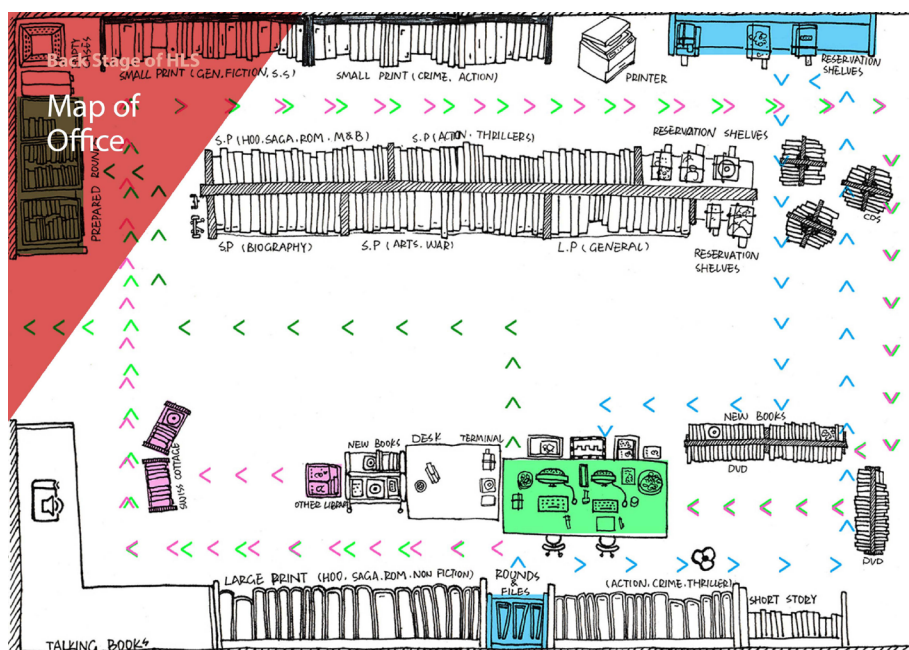
For Ingold, it is these movements and experiences that create place.

"For the things of this world are their stories, identified not by fixed attributes … but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations. Each is the focus of ongoing activity."[44]

This notion of movement that constitutes place through routes travelled and knots of intersections allows us to conceptualize the dispersed nature of the HLS as a place. Similarly, Sarah Pink[45] also sees place as constituted through the representation of routes and mobilities and thus students recorded, sketched, mapped, and storyboarded the movements and paths within the HLS office and its daily delivery activities so as to visualize the HLS as a place (Figure 2).

Tacit Knowledge as Locality

Appadurai proposes that "local knowledge is required to reproduce locality and this may only come about if local subjects produce local neighborhoods."[46] By shadowing and observing the HLS team dropping off and collecting material, the research revealed extensive tacit knowledge about HLS users: life-stories, preferences, and daily routines. More importantly, frequently the HLS team member had a distinct personal relationship with the user that had formed over time (Figure 3). This generated special encounters in which stories were shared around daily events and, more specifically, about health and wellbeing. One of the students described the service as "a soft entry into the lives of the most isolated and vulnerable people." The HLS team understood their users' lifestyles, accommodation arrangements, and personal support networks. For example, one member of staff was familiar with a user's ongoing hospital appointments, and would therefore deliver her books at a time when he knew the user would be at home. In another example, the HLS team member would ring the doorbell and wait for keys to be dropped from a window—two floors up—to gain access to the building and the flat. This unrecorded personal knowledge between users and HLS team members was central to building relationships characterized by values of trust and understanding. Over time, the HLS team developed a familiarity with the Home Library users—most were not only well acquainted with the readers, but also with the physical spaces of their homes. They would mark the next date of the delivery on a user's calendar, place books on

Figure 3　Shadowing the HLS team members revealed the tacit knowledge in supporting and caring for their readers. Copyright © 2015 Jung Eun Park.

a specific table, and remember where to collect items to be returned. The HLS providers built up trust and understanding over time, through these regular, familiar practices. If we reflect on Edward Casey's work in relation to the HLS, place is not "one definite sort of thing, for example, physical, cultural, or social"; instead it "takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only are, they happen."[47]

Because the readers were homebound, the HLS team would go beyond the act of delivering books. They undertook tasks that involved passing on information to other social care service providers, persuading the Home Library user to continue with a health plan, responding to extra requests, and performing tasks for Home Library users that extended beyond the home. More strikingly, the HLS team witnessed the changing states of users' health through their requests for books with larger typefaces or the switch to audiobooks as a person's eyesight deteriorated. Thus, across these highly relational encounters, the students began to consider the extensive personal knowledge and sharing of interests and stories that the HLS encompassed as place.

HLS as Materiality and Dwelling

Beyond local knowledge and locality as a frame the HLS, the ethnography also showed that place was configured through the upkeep of the tangible, material elements of the paper based library card system, which was situated in the back office of the Swiss Cottage library. A folder system—updated by the HLS team with handwritten notes—contained information about different users: book preferences,
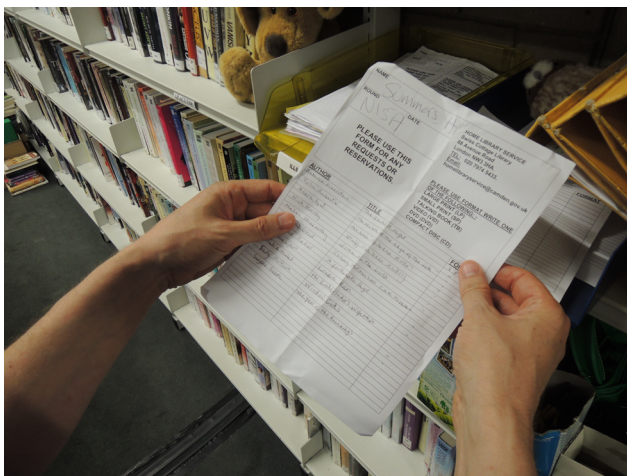

Figure 4　Reader request sheets acted as points of exchange and notes between different HLS team members as they built up a picture of the interests and activities of the service users. Copyright © 2015 Che-sheng Huang.

interests, and requests for information. Each reader profile was much more than a physical touchpoint in a book delivery service. In essence, slips of paper and notes were the means through which the HLS team understood different readers, giving them identity around their interests (Figure 4). Through this deep understanding of reader preferences and interests, the library staff frequently made personal recommendations for books and audio material that would match a particular user's interests.

For Latimer, the distinction between care and dwelling is critical when considering homecare for the elderly and frail. In particular, she sees the importance of "focusing on how the conduct of care is not something outside of life, provided in order for people to have a life, but something that involves people, and things, in interaction in ways that are constitutive of a life."[48] Latimer says that photographs, for example, do more than display identity and relationship; they are a means through which people create relationships with others "as they pick up and look at and talk about" them.[49] The students observed that Home Library book deliveries were precious moments for the readers as they provided personal occasions for them to
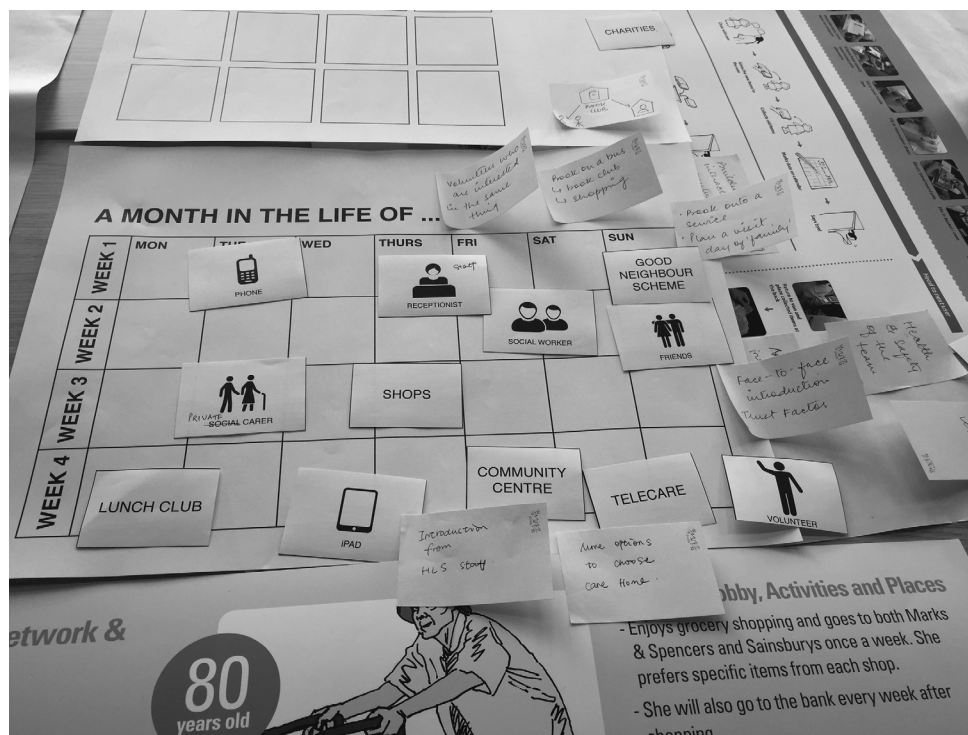
share their interests on gardening, books they had read and enjoyed, or films they had watched.

At the outset, the Council had presented the HLS project to PCL as a service design review. But what emerged at the end of the discovery phase, guided by broad anthropological concepts on place, were actions and values that would be central to informing the development of a digital platform and offering a service solution that would be transformative. At the end of the discovery phase, we hosted a presentation and panel discussion for officers from across the Council—including adult social care, library services, social workers, strategy and change, and public health officers—as a point of collaborative reflection and iteration to inform the next phase of the project. The ethnographic work we then further synthesized into tools for a workshop with staff from different departments that we used to direct concept development (Figure 5).

Digital Opportunities: Magnifying the Social in Placemaking

To understand the opportunities that digital interventions can deliver to local government services, it is important to question commonly held views on digital culture. At the start of the project, the students learned about previous attempts by HLS at digitizing the service—and how these had failed. The students had also identified that, for the majority of HLS users, homes were not Wi-Fi enabled and many of the users had limited knowledge of the Internet. The students used all these factors to shape the development of the final concept.

Those who study digital technologies tend to discuss their morphology, as "a network of flows that create a space of flows, the material arrangements that allow for simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity."[50] Consequently, digital culture is frequently assumed to exhibit place-less-ness, especially with "on-the-go digital technologies creating a homogeneity that defies location."[51] Similarly, the paper based HLS service at first appeared to be a network of flows, books, paper, and routes—albeit an analogue one—when in fact it constituted the social attributes of place and locality that afford an opportunity for replication through the digital.

47 Edward Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith Basso (Santa Fe: School American Research Press, 1997), 27.

48 Latimer, "Homecare & Frail Older People," 9.

49 Ibid., 11.

50 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd ed. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell Publishing 2010), 442.

51 Lane DeNicola, "Geomedia: The Reassertion of Space within Digital Culture," in *Digital Anthropology*, ed. Heather Horst and Daniel Miller (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 83.

52 Tony Boellstorf, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

53 Ibid., 238.

54 Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

55 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

56 Ibid., 18.

Tony Boellstorf [52] considers online communities to be as authentic and meaningful in virtual worlds as they can be in actual worlds and also presents the virtual as offering opportunities to become real places. Thus, when thinking about the introduction of technology for a service such as the HLS — which had not immediately demonstrated its practices of community and place — the focus was to amplify the knowledge and relationships revealed through the design and visual ethnography in ways that could inform the digital solution.

When developing digital solutions for highly relational and social services such as the HLS, it is common to find resistance to the introduction of information technologies. Many feel that service delivery via information technology will replace invaluable moments of human contact. This is not surprising when one looks at local government digital services that are typically delivered via websites or mobile applications. These conventional practices conform to the commonly held view that the digital is homogenizing, and that it strips the human and local dimensions in the interest of cost efficiency. However, from a digital anthropological perspective, Boellstorff notes, "A virtual world can act as 'another platform for the human operating systems.'"[53]

Although many digital solutions remove relational qualities, it also offers people the opportunity to build and magnify social and cultural values,[54] as today's social media practices demonstrate. Equally, Alfred Gell's work offers a way of understanding how the agency enabling non-digital book delivery service provides a frame for extending those relationships through a digital platform.[55] He sees social agency not as exclusive between persons but broadens the concept to look at how social agency can be imbued in things, or can spread from things.[56] When we were exploring opportunities for the digital in our service concepts, we gave special attention to how a design intervention would give agency to people who were homebound and enhance their relationships rather than reduce them. Such insights further informed the role to be played by a potential digital platform.

The Common Platform

After the design ethnography and its synthesis, the students explored the development of a digital platform that would amplify the highly relational and invisible values of the HLS (Figure 6). In parallel, they studied the needs of Camden Council during two co-design workshops, held six weeks apart, hosting a diverse range of officers from adult social care, strategy and change, library services, human resources, and the legal department. The act of including staff from across the council in workshop activities reflected the reach and potential change that was unfolding through the work of the HLS. Using the findings they had generated from the fieldwork, the students generated personas, and highlighted the hidden values of the service on a service journey map. From the first workshop, the Council identified three key areas that the service solution would need to address: 1) new technology that could support and develop the current paper-based the service; 2) increasing the number of volunteers; and 3) amplifying existing relational practices and re-configuring the home library service into a form of adult social care service based on users' interests. Subsequently, three additional elements were also identified as desirable for any future service: 1) upping service capacity by reducing back office workloads and increasing more forward facing social interactions; 2) developing an early intervention measure to reduce social isolation; and 3) incorporating digital inclusion by creating a system to record and share knowledge between users about their interests, which would amplify the social nature of the paper based system.

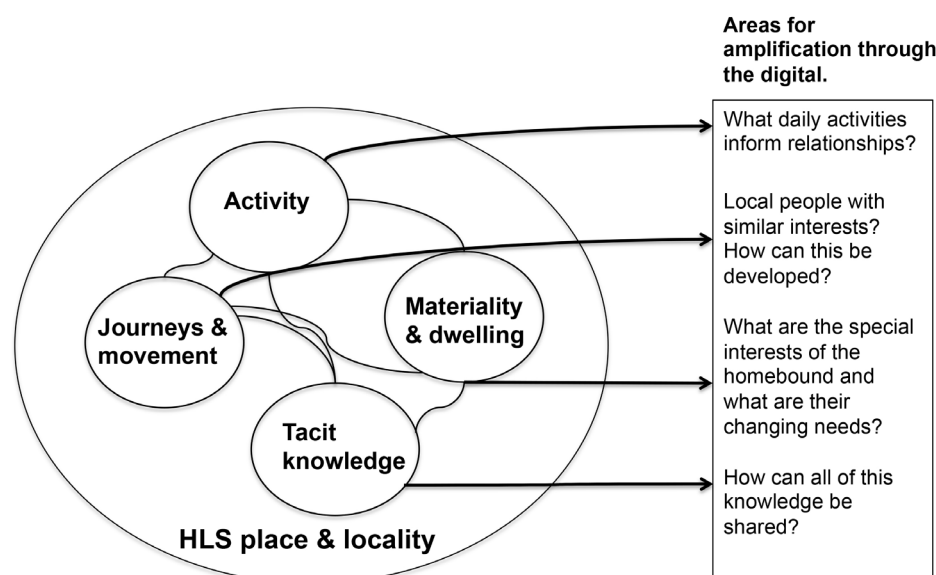For the duration of the user research, the seven students collaborated as a

Areas for amplification through the digital.

What daily activities inform relationships?

Local people with similar interests? How can this be developed?

What are the special interests of the homebound and what are their changing needs?

How can all of this knowledge be shared?

team. In the latter stage they worked individually on their service solutions, with each student addressing one of the Council's areas of need. Early on it emerged that in order to fulfill the Council's requirements to increase its number of volunteers and develop a new model of adult social care, the students would need to prototype a digital Common Platform in the form of an application for iPads and other tablets. The development of the platform involved co-design sessions with existing Home Library users and team members to explore the types of information to be gathered, shared, and accessed by different stakeholders (Figure 7).

In the second workshop with Council officers, early iterations of the Common Platform were used to open up discussion with a wide range of staff from across the organization. The aims of this workshop were 1) to present a prototype of the Common Platform and posit possible service scenarios in the form of three service journeys, including a new model of adult social care, an ambassador service to increase the involvement of volunteers, and a model to engage readers in local activities that maybe in close proximity to their homes; 2) to identify barriers to the adoption of the Common Platform and determine how they may be overcome; and 3) to present and discuss the types of information current HLS users had identified as permissible for sharing.

From this workshop, students developed further iterations of the Common Platform with different user groups to a final proof of concept that also renamed the HLS to the Home Community and Library (HC&L), which more accurately reflected the role of the HLS in the community.

The final Common Platform concept was designed to capture and magnify the hidden values that had been uncovered in the ethnographic fieldwork. To do this, the Common Platform required each user to create a reader profile on a mobile tablet with a HC&L team member detailing their interests, books read and reviewed, and additional information around activities and day-to-day support needs (Figure 8). This digital dimension was not intended to replace home visits but rather to increase support for the service, to enable volunteers to be more suitably matched to users in the local area, and for other service providers to better understand the users and their interests. In addition, the platform offered the option for registered users to share their information with other Council and health care service providers and their library habits with family members, and to link with other HC&L homebound users across Camden Borough; different registered users
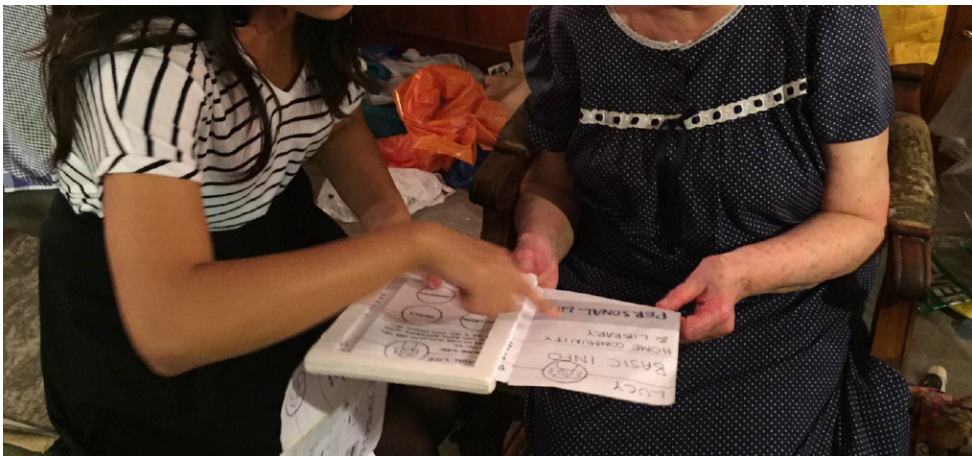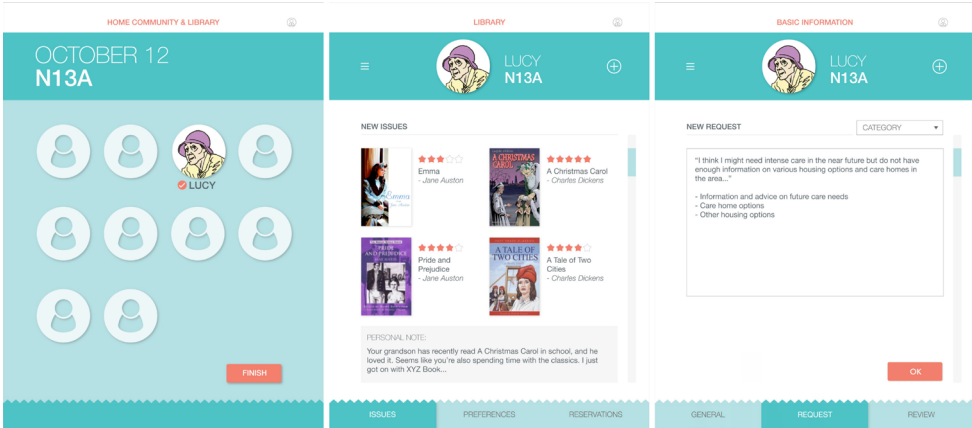
57 Mind and Age UK are two UK charities that are involved with people with mental health issues and the elderly.

would have varying levels of access to the data. In addition, the Common Platform was conceived so that the users could request information and be signposted to third sector organizations and other local support services. Through this Common Platform, a new model of adult social care was proposed that aimed to mirror and magnify the social interactions that constituted the community of the existing HLS, and work as a new preventative service against isolation and loneliness. Thus, the Common Platform allowed a more holistic approach to offering adult social care services to homebound users that was based on their interests and activities rather than just their perceived needs.

The creation of the digital platform was key to the development of other service elements that aimed to increase volunteer involvement by matching their interests and locality with those of HC&L users. This service, too, had been co-designed with local voluntary groups using the Common Platform prototype. The resulting service proposal enabled capacity to be increased by creating a service dimension that could recruit volunteers called "HC&L Ambassadors" from community centers and libraries across Camden to promote the service to neighbors, members, and other third sector organizations[57] who may be socially isolated. These local ambassadors would be signed up for training and vetting with existing Home Library staff and matched with HC&L users based on interests and activities in users' neighborhoods.

The design ethnography had identified an invisible community and invisible places that were made up of readers unaware of each other even though they were linked by the HLS service that mediated the flow of knowledge of their interests and daily practices. The new HC&L service aimed to amplify the interests and activities of the individual users to create an online community and place. The service made these social interactions and practices visible, recordable, and sharable.

Discussion

Given Windle's observation[58] regarding the need to reduce social isolation and loneliness in individuals over 65 years of age, and in order to address the complex social challenge associated with producing more relational services for the ageing community (Mulgan 2012), more long term well being interventions that can be supported by information systems are called for. This paper offers a way of rethinking the design of local government services, through the digital, so they can be configured to reflect the relational values and tacit knowledge that reside in communities and place. To maintain independent living and address the knotty issues surrounding ageing and ageing communities, the often invisible and informal daily practices that support and create community and place need to be understood. The HC&L service concept I describe offered a solution that would build on the social fabric of the existing HLS and amplify and extend it through the Common Platform. This solution conforms with to Ezio Manzini's belief that the more extensive and networked a system, "the larger and more connected is its interface with society, and the more the social side of innovation has to be considered."[59]

Conclusion

In this article, I presented how the HLS service design action research project, as part of the AHRC funded PCL, applied anthropological frames of locality and place to direct visual and design ethnography that revealed an invisible community and place that played out in the daily routines of the home library service, and the value this added to vulnerable people's lives. As with every action research project undertaken through the PCL, the aim was to undertake collaborative participatory practices that would enable speculation on new service futures. Although the project has not been implemented, the emerging outcomes were fed back across the Council and included in policy discussions and documents.

If local government is to rethink and improve its social care services delivery, all concerned must consider how digital solutions can amplify the very human activities that make up communities-in-place through the quotidian. As this HC&L project demonstrates, such communities and places are not always immediately visible – they need to be uncovered through designerly activities and ethnographic work. The alternatives are digital solutions that deliver reductive and transactional services that fail those that are most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledgments

58 Windle, "What Role Can Local and National Supportive Services Place," 1–48.

59 Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 17.