Min Kultur Nu! A strategy to elicit information for the building of a new culture house

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ABSTRACT

Min Kultur Nu! is a strategy designed to help Lundby district in Gothenburg involve people in the process of designing the content to be published in the Backaplan Culture House, as well as to serve as a tool for promotion. The project aims to make the Culture House more easily accepted in the community once it has been built and to increase the awareness of culture in the area of Lundby. For this purpose, three intertwined elements were created: a simple webform for eliciting knowledge about people's perception of culture, a physical installation to engage people in a fun way to express their ideas about culture and a gallery to show all the gathered expressions.

1. BACKGROUND

Culture House Backaplan is a wide scope initiative from Lundby District aiming at promoting culture in the area and fulfilling the citizen's needs for cultural activities. A cultural center is set to be built in Backaplan within the next 10 years and, in the meantime, representatives from the district council have expressed their interest in encouraging as much citizen involvement as possible in its planning and realization. The need for user involvement has been a key point for our team since the beginning of this project, when Lundby District sought out an Interaction Design perspective to implement the idea of a virtual culture house that would precede the physical one.

Until this point, Lundby district had made efforts to involve the community through social media and other methods. However, they hadn't been able to successfully document and analyze the feedback they had received. In light of this, the need to develop a tool to engage people in new ways became apparent. One of the main goals was to facilitate inquiry regarding citizen's thoughts about culture and what they expect from a new cultural center. In essence, the strategy described here is a medium for the authorities involved to support decision making and for the citizens to participate and affect those decisions.

2. CONCEPT

Min Kultur Nu! (My Culture Now!) is a strategy to create a bridge between the Culture House and the people living in Hisingen, primarily, and Gothenburg in general. The intention is to use several tools to collect information about people's preferences, motivations and, ultimately, what they want and need from the future culture house. If consciously considered in the design process, the information extracted from this project can contribute to building a successful cultural center, adapted to the residents' interests.

In addition to involving people from the Lundby area in the design process of the Culture House Backaplan, the objective is to promote the Culture House initiative, letting people know that something is going on in the area and highlighting the importance of culture in everyday life.

It is important to note that this project is not meant to stand on its own. The concept developed here is meaningless without the context of the Culture House because it grows from the need to engage the stakeholders and motivate communication. This aligns with the concept of "design as facilitation", which proposes that users can be paired with technology in order to encourage communication, expression and exploration [2].
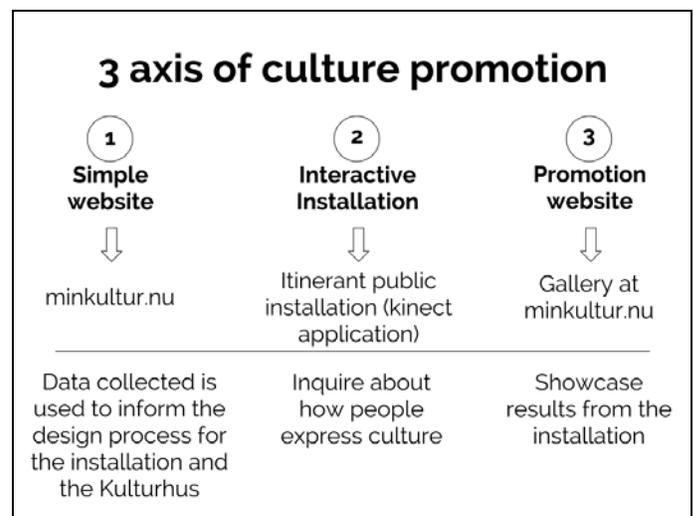

Figure 1. Three elements of the strategy.

In order to achieve the objectives described above, three interconnected elements have been created, tied to the identity of Min Kultur Nu! (See Figure 1). These three elements are:

1. A simple web interface to inquire about how people perceive culture. It consists of a single question survey in which people must answer: "What is culture for you?"
2. An interactive physical installation to engage people in a compelling way to express their thoughts about culture. This will provide people with tools they can use to express how they experience culture in their lives.
3. A web interface to show the input gathered by the physical installation and to allow people to rate the contributions. This will act as a gallery where people can enter and explore other people's contributions as well as their own.

The simple website *(see Figure 2)* was live and gathering information at www.minkultur.nu for several weeks and collected over a 100 responses. It was created with two main objectives in mind. First, to generate expectations around the whole campaign and make people think about culture and define it in their unique way. Second, to try the effectiveness of this method to collect information as opposed to using disjointed postings in different mediums. One of the main advantages identified when using this, is that people can be redirected to the website from any social networking site, through mailing list, regular mail and email, posters, etc. It is easy to promote and it gathers information in a systematic way that can be tabulated and turned into useful conclusions.
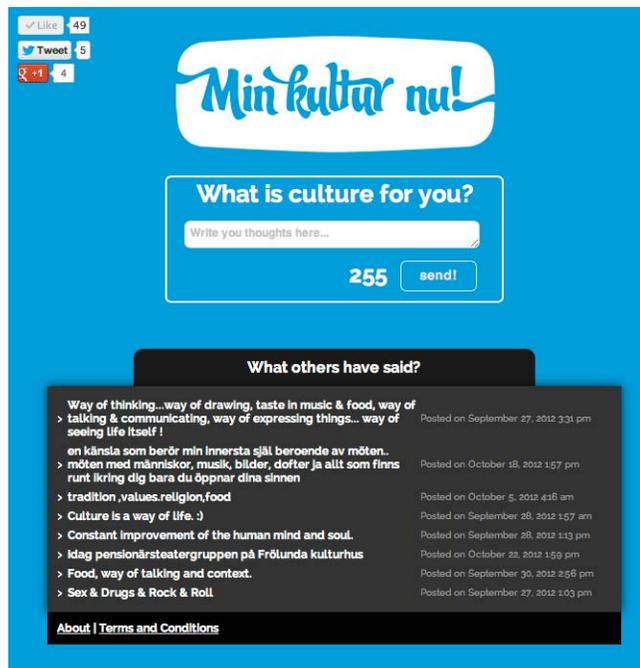

**Figure 2. Interface for the simple website
(http:// form.minkultur.nu)**

The interactive installation is the main element around this strategy. It is intended to be situated simultaneously at different locations within the city area. Ideally, these locations should have a high affluence of people in order to guarantee a good participation rate and useful results. It is important that the installation is placed in public (e.g. bus stops) or semi-public (e.g. public libraries) spaces rather than in privately owned venues, like shopping centers, to ensure that everyone has access and that the initiative is associated with the community's interests and not with private interest.

The installation is composed by a big projection screen, a computer and a Kinect device. Users interact with an interface projected on the screen using body gestures. With this, we want to experiment with the idea that this kind of interaction is more engaging than traditional human-computer interaction systems. Moreover, since its use doesn't demand too much effort from the participants, the expectation is that it will attract a greater number of users than if we were using an interface based on mouse and keyboard input.

When going near the installation, the user will be prompted with a question: "How do you express Culture?" which can be answered using different tools we provide (see Figure 3). This question could be changed according to the needs of the design team for the Culture House. For the first prototype, only the tools for drawing and taking picture have been implemented. This selection would be expanded in future versions. The idea behind the tool design is to give users the possibility of expressing themselves in any way they prefer, feel more comfortable with or simply enjoy more.

**Figure 3. List of tools in the interface of the installation
(http://i.minkultur.nu)**

Providing a wide variety of tools can serve as a motivator and attract people to the installation. Müller et al. [3] argue that choice is effective as a motivating factor noting that "with an increase in the number of possible choices, the likelihood increases that a feeling suited to the individual can be found." This contributes to the sense of autonomy and control in the user, making the interaction feel more personal. These attributes applied to the installation can also be transfer to the perception of the culture house, meaning that the community could develop a positive sense of control and belonging.

Finally, the contributions gathered from the installation will be compiled in an online gallery that everyone can access (see Figure 4). In this gallery, people can rate other's work to create a selection that can later be displayed in the physical culture house. This rating also facilitates the analysis of the information. In addition, it would be possible for people to submit their contributions directly in the website if they don't have access to the installation.

Aside from creating a collection of pieces for the gallery, people's contributions gathered from the installation are meant to enrich the view that authorities have of what can be the role and purpose of the Culture House in the community.

3. DESIGN PROCESS AND TOOLS

The initial premise was to create an installation that people could use to express what culture means to them. After that, the purpose was to generate a concept that had meaningful results for the future Culture House and that was attainable for the time we had.

Figure 4. View of the gallery site (http://minkultur.nu/)

For the definition of the concept, the methods used were brainstorming and storyboarding, in an unstructured way. One of our main conclusions was that we were designing a strategy to elicit information, rather than a stand-alone installation, which is why we eventually decided to use one "brand" (Min Kultur Nu!) to encompass all the elements. As the idea developed, it was pivotal to keep in mind how each element should influence the other.

Gestures, which can be sensed using Kinect, were chosen as the input method for the installation (see Figure 5). This kind of input allows for fun and engaging interaction. Furthermore, the novelty factor can be used to our advantage by calling the attention of

people. The purpose was to create an installation that allows for a richer expression than text and encouraged people's creativity.

Figure 5. Interaction with the installation

For the prototype, two working tools were implemented as a proof of concept, as well as both websites. Along with Kinect, Html5, CSS3, Javascript, C#, PHP and MySQL were used for the construction of the web tools. The final goal is to implement a wide selection of tools that people can use to give meaningful representations of what culture means for them.

As was stated before, user involvement was a key element in the design process as well as in the outcome of the project. Users participate actively in the project, and the intention is to make them feel they are part of the culture house, since the content collected from them will shape and be part of the final Culture House.

4. FUTURE WORK

The next immediate step to scale up this campaign is to promote the simple website to gather more information. It would be ideal to contact people from the community directly and point them to the website to get their views. As a support to this, promotion through posters with QR codes and social networks is essential to ensure a high amount of responses.

Implementing the rest of the tools in the interactive installation is also important in order to test its actual effectiveness in engaging people. The aim is to propose tools that increase the richness of the message people want to convey and provide with a variety of ways to express it. Moreover, to fulfill the aim of the installation it should be made available in different locations where people with different backgrounds meet. We strongly suggest that it is featured during other cultural events organized by the city, where it can encourage feedback from people that is already involved in the cultural scene of the area.

Dalsgaard et al. [1] propose four elements of engaging experiences when designing public installations: cultural practices, physical conditions, content and social practices. Of these four elements, cultural and social practices are should be taken in consideration when thinking about the future implementation of the interactive installation. Especially when considering new tools that might put the users in a vulnerable position. For example, consider the implementation of a tool that

records the person dancing to a chosen song. Different people will have different attitudes towards performing in public. It is very important to consider how to encourage people to participate regardless of possible social distress. In addition, how people act will be closely related to the physical location of the installation. This means that the attitude towards the "dance tool" might not be the same if the installation is located in an area full of outgoing teenagers or in a place where people silently commute to work every day.

To extend the scope of the project, it would be interesting to add functionalities to the gallery site and make it possible for people to add their contributions there, either by uploading their own content or accessing a web-only version of the installation interface. This would be useful for populating the gallery and attracting traffic to the page. Additionally, it would be interesting to use the website as an open forum for people to propose activities for the culture house.

Another possibility is merging the gallery and the simple website in one site where people could contribute in different ways. At the moment, they are working as independent sites with related but different objectives. Merging them could be a solution to unify the concepts of defining culture and expressing culture; however, it needs further consideration.

Part of our vision was to enable people to create something that could be displayed in the physical culture house when it was built. As we said earlier, by using the rating system people can choose their favorite contributions that would later be featured in a physical gallery that they can visit.

In the future, this tool could be used to receive continuous feedback as well. A refined version of the installation could be placed on the culture house and act as a medium that people could use to make suggestions and act as a medium that people could use to make suggestions and communicate with the authorities. In this way, Min Kultur Nu! can be an intermediary between the citizens and the city authorities to come to an understanding about what culture means for them and how they can support it.

In terms of implementation, some technical details need to be addressed when dealing with the interaction with the installation.

In addition to what we have proposed here, we would recommend involving active community members through interviews to understand how they can contribute to the Culture House and what they could potentially get from the activities and infrastructure in the Culture House.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lundby District is in need of tools and a strategy to involve people in the creation of the future Culture House as well as to record the gathered information in a way that they can use. Min Kultur Nu! is a strategy containing three complementing ways to elicit and present the needs of the community to integrate the Culture House in their lives. These three elements are a simple web form, a physical installation and a gallery for presentation purposes. As of now we have developed a prototype of the installation for exhibition purposes. However, we have identified several possible locations in the Backaplan area that we considered during our design process.

6. REFERENCES

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