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An app that maps your walk and shares your views about the future of places you care about.

**Dr Cristina Garduño Freeman** shares her vision for an innovative mobile tool that is currently being developed as a result of a successful crowdfunding campaign made possible through a joint venture between Deakin University and Pozible.

CmyView is a research project that investigates how mobile technologies can facilitate new ways to share, understand and experience the connections that people have with places. Led by Dr Cristina Garduño Freeman, CmyView focuses on the way in which everyday kinds of participation, such as photography and walking, can capture people’s unique views about the places they visit and inhabit.

The project arose from collaborations with Super Sydney, a volunteer community group now operating under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Architects, whose mission is to invite people to share their ideas about the future of their city and build a metropolitan community spirit through creativity and sharing.

CmyView aims to deliver a tool and methodology. The tool will be a mobile application for smartphones intended to facilitate two kinds of participation. The first experience will allow people to map their own walks and then share them on CmyView. Using spatial mapping technology, the app tracks the route walked and connects this with photographs taken along the way. People will be able to comment on the photographs they take in order to tell others why they are interesting or important aspects of the places they have been. CmyView then packages the route, photos and comments into a shareable walk that others can participate in.

The second experience enables people to engage in one of the contributed walks on CmyView and to share the built environment through someone else’s views. The walk in this mode becomes a visual treasure hunt where the photographs and comments of the contributor act as signposts that guide the experience. By engaging in one of the shared walks on CmyView people will be able to see what is important to others, how they value these aspects of the built environment, and consider how this affects their own experiences.

Mapping and sharing, and engaging in walks on CmyView can be done individually or in groups. CmyView as a tool and platform allows individuals to contribute their ideas, share these with others and connect through an asynchronous informal sharing of social knowledge.

CmyView also delivers a methodology that explains how people’s participation through walking and photographing can be a way to evidence social value. The methodology also seeks to understand how a set of walks, and their component routes, photographs and comments, can be analysed in order to understand the intangible connections that people have with places. By evidencing social value in measurable ways, the methodology seeks to incorporate these important aspects of our relationship with the built environment into the existing decision-making processes of corporate and government institutions.

The methodology also considers how walking and photography can transform the way we assess social value and carry out community consultation. Walking is central to human existence. In her book *Wandrivist*, Rebecca Solnit offers a cultural history of walking where she draws together the ways in which walking is embedded in daily life through examinations of its role in pilgrimage, meditation, evolution and even landscape forms such as the labyrinth.

Walking is a form of transport, a way to increase fitness, or even simply a means to unclutter the mind. Research shows that taking a walk has positive effects on creative thinking. Being physically active through walking can change our mental state.

Similarly, new research in the social sciences makes an interesting case for developing creative and reflective ways to understand people’s sense of their own identity or attributes to specific issues. Rather than the direct ‘questionnaire’ approach, academics such as David Gauntlett are exploring the way in which creative practices, such as making things or, in this case, taking photographs, can offer a reflective process for individuals and thereby give a richer and deeper understanding of the social processes taking place.

While many apps exist that can track your walk, or take photographs and share them online, such as MapMyWalk or Instagram, CmyView is unique. The research is innovative, not only because of its practical and theoretical contributions to the fields of architecture, media and heritage, but also technologically within the field of information and analytics. The CmyView app will simultaneously build user-generated content via a social topic and a physical space, thereby extending the experience of social sharing visually and spatially. This will also enable advanced analytics due to the additional semantics. Furthermore, employing mobile technologies to reconsider processes, such as community consultation, can change them from a unidirectional activity centred on data collection, to bi-directional social activity. This potentially builds community through ubiquitous practices and the informal sharing of knowledge. In short, consultation becomes conversation.

Community consultation to assess people’s views about the built environment is typically carried out through public meetings, interviews and surveys, or by appointing advisory committees. CmyView uses mobile digital technologies to develop a new approach. Instead of holding consultations in community halls or council buildings away from the places being discussed, CmyView uses mobile technologies to move these conversations into the places people value and into their everyday lives. Mobile technologies are not an end in themselves; their potential lies in the way social media platforms can build on familiar everyday activities in which many people participate, such as walking and photography.

**Research funding**

Participation is also at the heart of realising CmyView. The pilot has been made financially feasible through Deakin University’s project ‘Research My World’, which is an innovative collaboration with Pozible, an Australian crowdfunding platform. Recently, universities and academics have begun to explore the opportunities that crowdfunding offers for delivering small modest research projects. CmyView successfully raised 12 per cent of its $6,000 target. While crowdfunding raises questions about governments’ role in funding research, it also has the benefit of creating direct connections between researchers and the broader professional and general community.

CmyView is currently in its pilot stage, which will resolve the app’s methodology and design experience. The aim of this initial phase is to run two small ‘walkshop’ case studies in Sydney and Geelong that will enable a ‘proof of concept’ of the mobile app to be developed. This will allow substantive financial support to be sought for the project’s full development.

CmyView is an app that maps your walk and shares your views about the places you care about. Image: Cristina Garduño Freeman.

CmyView is a project led by Dr Garduño Freeman in conjunction with the Socio-Cultural Ecologies Group at Deakin University. For more information visit: www.pozible.com/project/181101.

**Footnotes**