

Announcement and CFP

Pervasive and Locative Arts Network (PLAN)

A new international and interdisciplinary research network in pervasive media and locative media has been funded as part of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) Culture & Creativity programme. The network will bring together practicing artists, technology developers and ethnographers with the aim of advancing interdisciplinary understanding and building consortia for future collaborative projects. It will be of relevance to people working in the arts, games, education, tourism, heritage, science and engineering.

The network will stage three major gatherings. Each gathering will have a distinct form and focus: an initial workshop to launch the network and assess the state of the art; a technology summer camp for artists and technologists, including hands-on prototyping sessions using the facilities at Nottingham's Mixed reality Laboratory; and a major public conference and participatory exhibition as a central component of the Futuresonic 2006 festival in Manchester; as well as a supporting web site and other resources.

Call for Proposals - PLAN Workshop

Submissions are invited to the first of these events, a two day public workshop with papers, demos and discussion sessions. The aim of the event is to launch the network, review the state of the art, bring key players in the field together, and make initial contacts. The event will also aim to identify a range of specific interests that can lead to the formation of sub-groups within the network. Position papers and a summary report will subsequently be published on the network web site.

The workshop will take place in London over two days in the week beginning 24th January 2005. Venue and final dates announced soon.

Please send submissions to ben@open-plan.org by Monday 8th November.

We request that participants seek support for travel and subsistence from their institutions. For participants without institutional affiliation the network shall support applications to funding councils and foundations, please contact us for further details.

The Network

Pervasive and Locative Arts Network (PLAN) - Enhancing Mobile and Wireless Technologies for Culture and Creativity

This network will draw together computer scientists and engineers who are leading the field in developing pervasive and locative technologies; artists who are using these technologies to create and publicly deploy innovative and provocative experiences; social scientists with a proven track record of studying interactive installations and performances; industrial partners from the creative industries, spanning the arts, television, games, education, heritage, mobile computing and telecommunications sectors; and international partners who are coordinating parallel networks around the world.

Network objectives

The network aims to support the formation of a new interdisciplinary research community to investigate how the convergent fields of pervasive media and locative media need to evolve in order to support future cultural and creative activities. Specific network objectives are:

- To review the scope of the research that is currently being carried out in these fields through a focused workshop, leading to an integrated 'state of the art' survey paper.
- To identify the key research issues that need to be addressed in order to further develop pervasive and locative media to support culture and creativity, leading to a series of discussion 'white papers'.
- To seed future projects by bringing artists, scientists and industry together in a creative environment so that they can generate and practically explore new ideas, and also to provide a forum for publicly demonstrating some of these.
- To produce online and offline resources to support researchers, artists, industry and to promote public understanding of this emerging field, including a public website, an online document repository for members and a newsletter and DVD.

Network activities

The network will organise and support a range of activities aimed at growing a research community and generating new collaborative projects between artists and technologists. These will include staging three major research gatherings, producing online and offline resources for fellow researchers and PhD students, and outreach activities targeted at industry.

Gatherings

We will stage three major gatherings. Each gathering will have a distinct form and focus: an initial workshop to launch the network and assess the state of the art; a technology summer camp for artists and technologists, especially PhD students, including hands-on prototyping sessions using the facilities at Nottingham's Mixed reality Laboratory; and a major public conference and participatory exhibition as a central component of the Futuresonic 2006 festival in Manchester. These major gatherings will be interspersed with more ad-hoc steering and reflection meetings as required by the network participants.

Producing resources

We will produce resources to publicise the network, encourage the exchange of perspectives and discussion, and to provide tutorial support for PhD students, artists and other researchers who wish to break into this area. These will include:

- Online resources: a public website providing access to network information including project deliverables as well as news of forthcoming calls for proposals and conferences, supported by a online document repository where members can upload documents and take part in discussion. The latter will be realised using BSCW or Project Place software.
- Offline resources: a six monthly printed newsletter and a DVD of video material.

Outreach

The network will reach out to other researchers beyond the initial partners and also to the creative industries. This will include distribution of the newsletter and also staging a series of industry seminars, for example as part of the DTI/EPSRC Outreach programme. The network research associate will also carry out a series of site visits to different partners and potential partners in order to learn more about and report on ongoing activities.

Background in science and culture

A new generation of pervasive technologies is enabling people to break away from traditional desktop PCs and games consoles and experience interactive media that are directly embedded into the world around them. And locative media, the combination of mobile devices with locative technologies, supports experiences and social interaction that respond to a participant's physical location and context. Together these convergent fields raise possibilities for new cultural experiences in areas as diverse as performance, installations, games, tourism, heritage, marketing and education.

A community of researchers working in pervasive media, also known as ubiquitous computing, are exploring location awareness as a requirement for the delivery of accurate contextual information. Another community, primarily consisting of informal networks of technical innovators and cultural producers, which identifies its field as Locative Media, is exploring developments in and applications of locative technologies within social and creative contexts. One of the aims of this network is to bring these two communities together, linking academic research initiatives and agendas to key figures and ground breaking developments that are currently taking place outside mainstream academia.

The creative industries are also beginning to take up these opportunities, led by artists who are actively charting out the potentials and boundaries of the new pervasive and locative media. Other cultural sectors have also been exploring the potential of pervasive and locative media including the games industry through commercial examples of locative games played on mobile phones such as Bot Fighters and Battle Machine and also research projects such as ARQuake, Mindwarping, Pirates! and Border Guards. Researchers have also demonstrated applications in heritage and tourism, for example personal tourist guides and outdoors augmented reality displays and as well as in mobile learning experiences and participatory local history mapping projects.

A key characteristic of this research is its interdisciplinary nature, with many of these projects combining practicing artists, technology developers and also ethnographers, whose studies of early experiences that are actually delivered as public artworks have yielded new insights into the ways in which participants experience pervasive media, for example how they (and performers and technical crew) deal with uncertainty of location and connection, and, conversely, new metaphors for engaging in locative media.

However, realising the full potential of pervasive and locative media requires several further developments. First, it is necessary to expand the research community, drawing in new academic partners and also a greater range of partners from the creative industries. Second, it is important to deepen the interdisciplinary relationships between artists, technology developers and social scientists working within and between these two convergent fields. This is not only a matter of reflecting on this relationship, it is also necessary to pursue it in practice, which means forming new collaborations leading to practical projects. Third, we need to clarify and deepen the research agenda for this area, by opening up a variety of research questions, including:

- To what extent does the convergence of pervasive media and locative media signify a commonality of views, definitions and issues in each field?
- What new kinds of cultural applications will become possible through pervasive and locative media? Can we envisage new installations, performances, games and other public experiences?
- Can common design frameworks and tactics help create powerful user experiences? Can we identify and share design guidelines and generate useful abstractions, for example building on recent proposals for deliberately exploiting uncertainty and ambiguity
- What tools are required by creative users, for example that enable them to easily (re)configure an experience to work in different locations or to orchestrate it from behind the scenes. What new research challenges do these embody, for example, how do we visualise the state of the technical infrastructure – networks and sensors – or intervene in participants' experiences?
- What methods do researchers use to design and evaluate their experiences? We already see the use of ethnographic studies, audience discussions and even analysis of system logs; how should these be extended and can we share approaches, tools and even datasets to enhance our understanding of experience and design?

These questions, combined with the need to build a broader interdisciplinary research community, provide the underlying motivations for this network.

Initial network

Project investigators

Steve Benford, Nottingham (Principle Investigator)

Drew Hemment, Salford

Henk Muller, Bristol

Matthew Chalmers, Glasgow

Michael Sharples, Birmingham

Geraldine Fitzpatrick, Sussex

Christian Heath, Kings College

Jon Hindmarsh, Kings College

Network co-ordinator

Ben Russell, Headmap/Locative Media Lab

Initial partners

Marc Tuters, Locative Media Lab

Dennis Del Favero, NSW iCinema

Steve Sayers, NESTA

Toby Barnes, EM Media

Richard Hull, HP Labs

Denny Plowman, City of Nottingham Council

Sara Diamond, Banff Centre

Andrew Caley Chetty, Metapod

Amanda Oldroyd, BT Exact

Matt Adams, Blast Theory

Nick Southgate, Ricochet TV

Annika Waern, iPerG

Giles Lane, Proboscis

Minna Tarkka, m-cult

Carsten Sorensen, LSE

Angharad Thomas, Salford

Chris Byrne, New Media Scotland

Paul Sermon, Salford

Nina Wakeford, INCITE, Surrey