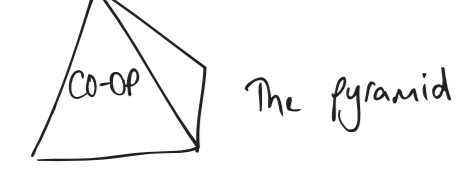


STOCKPORT EMOTION MAP

to Manchester ↑



THE STOCKPORT EMOTION MAP

While conventional maps show static architecture and exclude humans, this art project presents a vision of Stockport that represents the emotions, opinions and desires of local people. Over a period of two months in summer 2007, about 200 people took part in six public mapping events. This map collects together and shows the results of the two activities: Drawing Provocations & Emotion Mapping.

... DRAWING PROVOCATIONS ...

People were asked to sketch their responses to a variety of serious and humorous provocations about their daily lives such as what really annoys them about Stockport, where they meet their friends, as well as who are the most important and dangerous people in town. Other provocations were focused on the town and its history, river and landmarks. As a result, people enthusiastically created a huge pile of drawings which were scanned and used to create this map. As far as possible, all the drawings were placed in their geographically correct position or where people mentioned them.

... EMOTION MAPPING ...

The second activity involved people walking freely through Stockport equipped with a special device invented by the artist, that measured their emotional arousal in relation to their geographical location in the town. On the map, the walls are represented by this angular lines tracing the paths that people walked. The emotional arousal is represented as a series of pillars at four different heights corresponding to the intensity of emotional arousal. Arousal is not necessarily positive and is best thought about in terms of heightened attention to ones body or surroundings. The textual annotations on the map were written by the participants themselves to describe the huge variety of events and sensory stimuli that caused their emotional reactions during their walks.

... HOW TO READ THE MAP ...

It is important to notice that the whole of the map is oriented so that the River Mersey runs across the middle of the page, meaning that the top does not face North like most contemporary maps. This projection is based on historic maps of Stockport that placed the main focus on the river as a resource, source of identity and country boundary. This map follows the definition of older maps according to which the river Mersey does not start in Stockport but rather at the confluence of the river Goyt and Etherow. Curiously, modern North facing maps of Stockport appear to align with the M160 motorway in almost the same way. Looking at the overall pattern of the emotion pillars, it is possible to discern a number of high emotional arousal clusters. There are large clusters around the old market area and throughout the whole of Princess Street with smaller ones in Mersey Square and the Stockport Market area. In contrast, the Great Underbank and St. Petergate areas are very calm. This pattern seems to correspond to the relative density of people and their social interactions in those areas. It is also a reflection of the amount of visual distractions in those places. In addition to these broad patterns there are a number of individual high arousal spots that seem to be caused by particular buildings like the brewery or by very personal contacts like an individual's annoyance at the graffiti on a medieval wall.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EMOTION MAP

Everyday we enter into discussions with people for different reasons. Sometimes, we have a particular purpose for communicating, but often we just want to talk to friends and strangers to hear their ideas and to express ourselves. The vast majority of these conversations quickly slip our mind and are never recorded because we think they are trivial. Yet we live in a time when our opinions are valued very highly. Everyone from politicians to market researchers are fascinated by how we feel about particular issues. Curiously though, when we enter into discussions in those contexts, we tend to use a very strange stilted and alienated language, that mostly packages our ideas. In addition, these discussions tend to focus only on a single issue, for example the building of an incinerator rather than asking wider questions about how our society produces and disposes of goods. This map suggests a model for recording the apparently trivial conversations and events of our everyday lives and allows us to see them all simultaneously without being constrained to a narrowly defined topic. When it is possible to see this overview, these apparently disconnected conversations show their true value and form clusters of issues and concerns.

Based on the process of talking to over 200 people in Stockport and analysing their drawings, we identified five overlapping issues of concern. Feel free to go to the project web site and download all the original drawings and Emotion Map data.

- Here are the five issues that we identified for Stockport:
1. The marginalised history of Stockport
 2. The hidden River Mersey
 3. Monolithic shopping
 4. Semi-Public Space
 5. Isolation of young people

... THE MARGINALISED HISTORY OF STOCKPORT ...

While Stockport prides itself as a historic town and many people drew the looming train viaduct as a landmark, the history of Stockport was not very strongly represented in people's drawings. When asked, most did not think that the vast majority of their conversations quickly slip our mind and are never recorded because we think they are trivial. Yet we live in a time when our opinions are valued very highly. Everyone from politicians to market researchers are fascinated by how we feel about particular issues. Curiously though, when we enter into discussions in those contexts, we tend to use a very strange stilted and alienated language, that mostly packages our ideas. In addition, these discussions tend to focus only on a single issue, for example the building of an incinerator rather than asking wider questions about how our society produces and disposes of goods. This map suggests a model for recording the apparently trivial conversations and events of our everyday lives and allows us to see them all simultaneously without being constrained to a narrowly defined topic. When it is possible to see this overview, these apparently disconnected conversations show their true value and form clusters of issues and concerns.

... THE HIDDEN RIVER MERSEY ...

The building of the Merseyway road in 1914 which covered the river seems to be a pivotal point for Stockport. Not only did it unite Stockport into one town, it also meant that all the old factories and mills that lined the banks had to be knocked down. This is the reason why there are very few visible signs of Stockport's industrial heritage in the centre of town. The river which had been the basis for the town's founding, growth and identity was suddenly hidden away. Modern developments such as the cluster of supermarkets that block the river banks and allow only stolen glimpses exacerbate the problem. In fact, we found that the majority of young people that we talked to did not know that there was a river running below their feet. Most adults only had a vague idea about the course of the river and included it as a ghostly trace on their mental maps. We suggest that there

... SEMI-PUBLIC SPACE ...

When talking to people it was surprising how few activities apart from shopping were mentioned. When asked about where they go to meet friends and relax, people drew images of corporate cafe-chains and suggested that Stockport revolves around office. Walking around the town, we noticed there is very little of what would be classically termed 'Public Space', i.e. places where there is no exclusion based on economic or social conditions. Most of the public life in Stockport seems to take place in semi-public spaces such as the shopping centre or cafes that require people to purchase or at least follow some behavioural rules to be allowed access. There are very few green spaces in the centre of Stockport and those that are available are often small and poorly maintained. One example of a missed opportunity is the Bear Pit on Mersey Square which is shaped like an amphitheatre and was meant to be for public use. When one looks at the featureless concrete design and the fact that one has to cross a busy road, it is not surprising that no one uses it. This is perhaps even sadder considering that Mersey Square is the site of the original Village Green where in the past, large social festivals took place and circuses pulled in. It is illustrative to look at an artist's impression from the 1970s for the redevelopment of Mersey Square, picturing an idyllic green area full of trees and benches contrasting strongly with the desolate traffic heavy area that it now is. We feel that this area has a lot of potential and it would be worthwhile resisting older visions of this space and bringing them back to life.

... MONOLITHIC SHOPPING ...

The main thread that runs through people's drawings and texts was the subject of shopping. When asked to draw the most important place in Stockport, what some drew their friends and family, a large number drew smiling consumers holding branded shopping bags. There is little doubt that the main factor responsible is the Merseyway shopping area, which dominates the centre of Stockport and defines its identity. As far back as 1978, not long after the shopping centre was built, a local newspaper already referred to Stockport simply as 'our shop window town'. While many people seemed content with the shopping area, a fair number felt that it was 'seventies and outdated' and wanted more of a cafe street culture. Others expressed a worry that smaller, local shops were being forced out. Most of the shops that people drew were global brands and only a few sketched images of local shops or market stalls. Already in 1979 a local newspaper suggested that '...we cannot afford to lose the family-owned businesses from Stockport' and that, 'what is lacking is something to attract people there apart from the shops. There is no real focal point...'

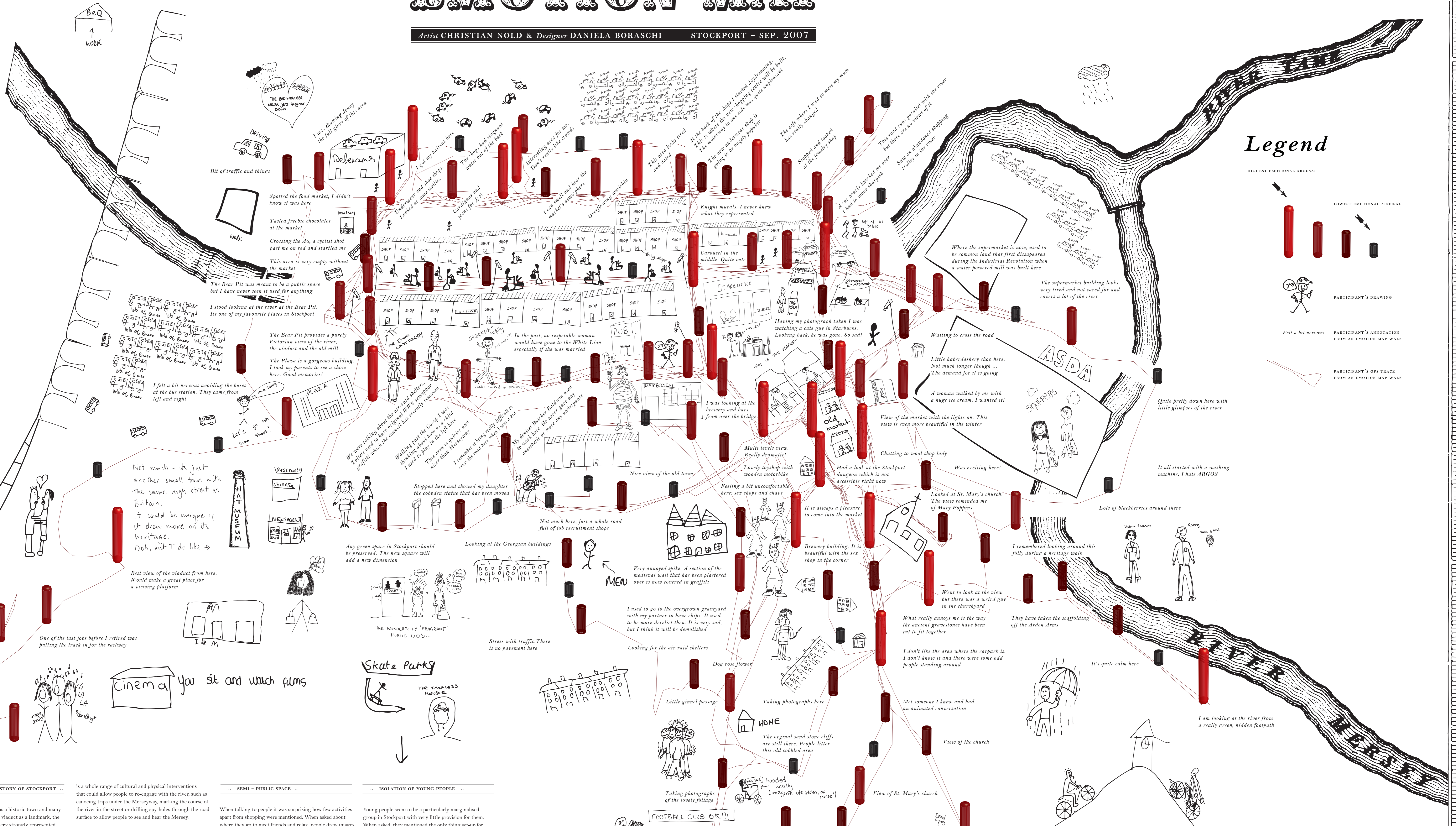
... ISOLATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE ...

Young people seem to be a particularly marginalised group in Stockport with very little provision for them. When asked, they mentioned the only thing set-up for them is a skate-park which they have to pay to enter. The council's youth provision also seems to be limited and focused on teenage pregnancy information. This lack of youth activities appears to increase the class division among the young people. Middle class teenagers seem to be invariable, while groups of working class teenagers are perceived to be the cause of anti-social behaviour including alcohol consumption, stealing and knife crime. We emphasise the importance of providing youth activities and services to bring the young people together and allow them to be included within the public life of Stockport.

... SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE ? ...

We hope that this map and text will stimulate personal reflections for people and then lead to a larger communal discussion that reflects the issues of concern. Some of the topics we identified could be tackled by single individuals such as running youth workshops, while others require a group of people and collaborations with institutions. It is heartening that 'friendly' was the most frequently used adjective for describing Stockport and we feel that this sense of community can nurture a new vision for the town.

Artist CHRISTIAN NOLD & Designer DANIELA BORASCHI STOCKPORT - SEP. 2007



Legend

- HIGHEST EMOTIONAL AROUSAL
- LOWEST EMOTIONAL AROUSAL
- PARTICIPANT'S DRAWING
- PARTICIPANT'S ANNOTATION FROM AN EMOTION MAP WALK
- PARTICIPANT'S GPS TRACE FROM AN EMOTION MAP WALK

