

## Pictures in Motion - Using moving images to approach urban tasks

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*Abstract.* Pictures in Motion is an elective course offered at the University of Karlsruhe (TH), department of Urbanism and Design. The aim is to give students a chance to get involved with digital processing of data and various programs like picture editing and movie production in order to work in a very early stage of the design process with digital media as a way of a design approach.

*Keywords.* Moving images, urban design, conceptual multimedia technologies, visualization, education

### Background

"The world is complex, dynamic, multidimensional; the paper is static, flat. How are we to represent the rich visual world of experience and measurement on mere flatland?" Tufte poses a question which is also very interesting to us and which brings us to the question of how to implement digital media in the urban design process. Our approach is based on the available resources (multimedia pool since 1999) and the search for efficient implementation of digital media in the design process.

We work now mainly on three levels with digital media: in the process of the analysis, visualizing concepts & ideas and the documentation of the actual design project (see figure 01). For each phase we use specific digital media: e.g. among others: Gis and video for the analysis, moving images are used for the visualization of concepts & ideas and for the digital project documentation, we use authoring tools like flash or director. Cad can be part of all three sections.

Each phase described above, is covered with a seminar or a design project in order to implement digital media in the urban design process.

### Motivation

In the last 10 years we find more and more services offering commercial visualizations of projects and at some universities (mostly American) we find possibilities to get a master in Architecture and the moving image.

In this paper I would like to describe out of the seminars mentioned above "Pictures in Motion", belonging to the part "visualization of concepts & ideas". For us the more interesting part in comparison to the documentation of a design project, because we were curious to see if the approach, to use moving images from the very start of the projects, would give us a different outlook on urban tasks.

Sieverts said „Pictures seem especially well suited, to ban indeterminations and to give an idea for designing in the uncertainty. Images take the place of the non-existent concrete reasoning and the still unresolved functional determination...from designing activating images, it is only a small step to designing a „movie“ a story of imagined, political, economical and cultural sequences from which city structures and design elements emerge.”

We wanted to give students a chance to use these “telling” images to discover a specific urban site and its problems and then to describe their ideas through them. We believe that designing a storyboard is very similar to designing a project. Therefore it is possible to compare the design to the work with computers. On top of it, it delivers a result which is very well suited to communicate the ideas not only to planners, but also to other people involved in the planning process. We believe that moving images are ideal to tell a story of a place or urban tendencies as moving images are a common language to all of us.

### Seminar Pictures in Motion

Pictures in Motion is an elective semester course divided into two parts: selective areas of urban planning and computer applications 2. The focus of this seminar lies on teaching multimedia techniques and its application via an urban design project. In the first month the students have three exercises in order to learn the techniques of the tools they are going to use: 1) Picture Editing 2) QuickTime VR 3) Video. Due to the programs installed in the multimedia pool, they work primarily with Photoshop, QuickTime VR and Premiere.

The students analyze the area via their first exercises and get to know the place out of a different perspective through the look of a camera (see figure 02). Then they focus on translating their strategies, ideas or visions into moving images, this can be video or multimedia application like authoring tools (see figure 05).

In the last seminar, the task was to describe a vision for the “Westbahnhof” in Karlsruhe, Germany. As an industrial area planned, we find this place with an extra-ordinary infrastructure. A prominent, public space, which does not exist in the mind of the public and which, offers no quality space to the public. Even though many people live there or go there to shop or work. Varied

questions were supposed to be answered: What could happen to this place within 30 years? Which changes could take place? Boomtown zone like a sleeping beauty or no man’s land without any urban qualities? Does the look through a camera change our approach on urbanism? Can we bring this topic to the public via moving images?

### Conclusion

It is legitimate to ask students to experiment and use only digital media from the very first start of their design project? Does this change the design process?

Using the camera to discover the site and then to use it to describe the ideas and concepts, we believe that yes, it is a different, but legitimate approach. In the 1980s Whyte already used the camera to study urban sites and the people dynamic, or we can think of the situationists who in the 1950s tried to discover the city out of a new perspective. But in comparison to them or other “moving images” projects (Giro, Schwenk 01, Baumann 02) the students covered in this project a whole city quarter and they had to tell also their design project in a story of moving images. Asking the students, they were motivated to take this elective because of its bandwidth, the interesting site, to get to know multimedia tools, and to design with the help of moving images in comparison to a black and white plan.

As the students got to know the site, not only by plans, but also as a focused and personal experience (see also Giro), they all developed a very personal and sensitive approach to the area. Each student found a phenomenon, which he/she had a special interest in. We could say it was a chance to discover the site from a different point of view, they discovered details which are not found on 2D plans. As a consequence, they merely focused on designing buildings, but more on strategic and conceptual development of the

site. In comparison to plans, what moving images show is not quite interpretable and so the narrative part of the project became very important. We also found that students managed a very big area as a design project because the use of digital media gave them the possibility to “capture” and analyze more space.

The results showed a very broad interpretation of urban design, some focused on very specific tasks like theming a bridge, and others tried to look in the future and developed a very political project. The seminar “pictures in motion” in this specific form took place for the second time. We found that techniques like video are extremely helpful in visualizing certain existing things, but it is quite difficult to show a vision in real images because it does not exist and so we always have to use plans or virtual models instead, in order to translate the visions and strategies for this place. This showed in the student’s work: only two projects used film as medium, and the others mixed film, panoramic views, 3D models and plans in order to communicate their ideas. As a conclusion of this and former seminars, we want to modify the concept slightly and we will concentrate on the visualization of urbanistic topics, instead of visualizing a specific topic and then also try to transport certain ideas or visions. That means we are going to use the narrative part of the media to describe an urban tendency to make these things visible and to sensitize for urban tasks, and we would leave the project part out. The title of a movie could then possibly be “In search of suburbia”

The feedback from the students showed another solution: they suggested to split the seminar in two semesters, first the technical part: consisting of the exercises analyzing the site via different media in order to learn to cope with the tools and to have also more time on specific movie tasks like. Then in the next semester we could focus only on the “digital” urban design

approach.

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