

Digital Streets

Not just disability but motility for all

A collaborative project to design the requirements for a community tool to improve street accessibility in Elgin.

The built environment creates a number of societal challenges experienced by citizens today, particularly when considering factors such as physical or mental health, age or life-stage (1). Giles-Corte et al (2) recognise the role for city planning in supporting the 'liveability of cities' and the subsequent health and wellbeing of residents, while Leyden (3) states that people 'who are socially engaged with others and actively involved in their communities tend to live longer and be healthier physically and mentally'. This interconnection between the built environment, community engagement and social and physical wellbeing creates a stimulating platform for a design research intervention.

Across Scotland, digital technology such as Neatebox, Toilet Finder or Euan's Guide have been developed in response to these challenges, but are often under utilised both by local authorities, health providers and the communities for which they are created.

In Moray, there was a recognised opportunity to address accessibility and improve public awareness. The proposed project involved developing a series of Experience Labs to explore the potential of a community tool developed with users to support meaningful dialogue with local council.



What we did

The Experience Lab team investigated the street access needs of people with disabilities living in Elgin and those involved in providing accessibility services by encouraging them to share their experiences and knowledge of the town.

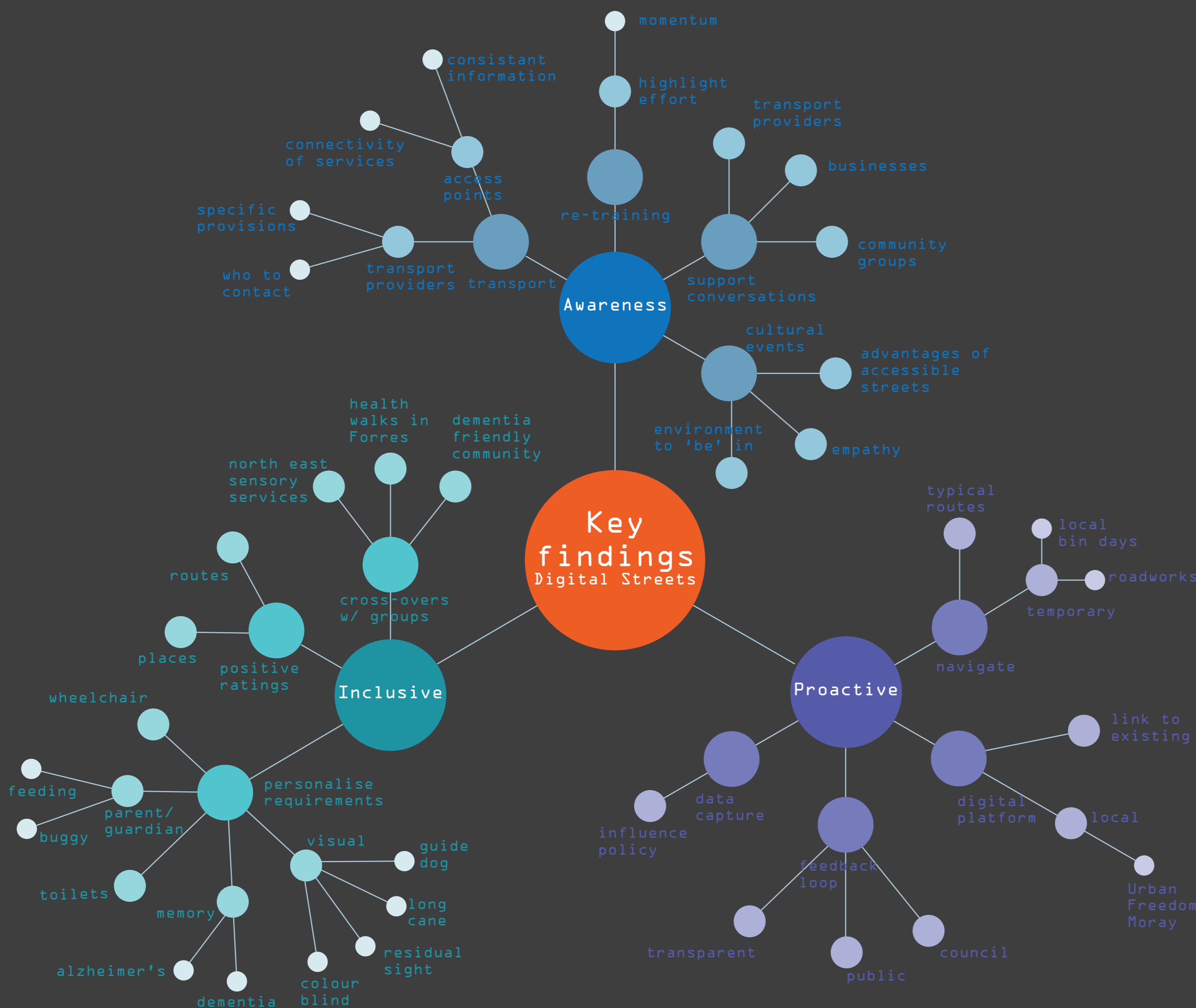
An initial Community Street Audit was led by Living Streets which identified issues that encourage or discourage everyday use of Elgin High Street area.

In Experience Lab 1, maps were produced to capture positive and negative experiences of

the group, including their general perception of the High Street area. The group also considered what Elgin might look like in 50 years time, and the steps required to reach that vision.

In Experience Lab 2 the group were asked to consider and articulate the requirements for a community tool. An innovation generator was used to encourage creative thinking in creating new or repurposing existing technologies, from which user driven requirements were derived.

What we found



Inclusive

A need to be inclusive in relation to variety of needs expressed, sharing opinions and feedback of locations as well as routes, and consideration of crossovers of interest with other groups or businesses was of particular importance as well as the ability to personalise.

Proactive

A proactive approach was seen to be crucial in the development of digital platform which is local and resourceful by linking to existing technology, going beyond other mapping technology to be more responsive to user circumstances and location. Two-way communication was also important, allowing increased transparency between stakeholders. The data collected could also be used to influence policy at a council level.

Awareness

The concept of 'not just disability but mobility for everyone' relates to raising awareness of accessible routes and places not just for wheelchair users but inclusive to all people. Participants noted the importance of engagement with transport providers, businesses and public places to promote this awareness both through training and acknowledging effort as well as through events, which promote empathy towards accessibility.

References:

1. Public Health England. (2015). Reducing social isolation across the lifecourse, (September).
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3. Leyden, K.M. (2003). Social capital and the built environment: the importance of walkable neighborhoods. American journal of public health, 93(9), pp.1546-1551.
4. French, T., Teal, G., & Raman, S. (2016). Experience Labs : co-creating health and care innovations using design tools and artefacts. Proceedings of DRS 2016, Design Research Society 50th Anniversary Conference., 1-15.

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