

Week 11 : after class research a contemporary art app or an app of interest to you and perform the walkthrough method, document this on your blog and reflect on the process to share in the seminar next week.

White Spots - Data Visualisation of the internet

White Spots is an iOS/Android app that shows both a map of the zone in the world covered by internet and also the cellular antennas nearest to you in order to raise consciousness about the electromagnetic devices that surround us everyday.

When first opening the app you immediately enter a 360 view of the electromagnetic cloud that surrounds you, thanks to the use of your GPS position and open data of the cellular network.

VISION

The target user base are people with already some degree of consciousness and concern about the high number of electronic devices that now populates our lives. This is confirmed by the app's description on the app store:

"Do you ever desire to escape from the information flows surrounding us?"

The White Spots App visualises the invisible electromagnetic cloud that we live in and offers a way out"

The app wants to give to these users a way out of a system that feels oppressing and overwhelming to them, and it does so using different approaches in a ascending climax. As a first thing it presents a very effective and impressive 360 view of all the cellular antennas near you. Its effectiveness is due to the huge amount of them that would go mostly unnoticed if it wouldn't be for the app, so it raises awareness through overload of information and by showing the invisible.

Then it offers a way out through the use of a map of the "white spots" in the world, locations where there's no internet and no gsm coverage. Each spot contains a little story with a photograph or a video. After the map, there's also a section called "route planner" which behaves as a gps navigation device and highlights the way to the nearest white spot.

The user is supposed to feel the urge to act: whether by just achieving a higher level of knowledge about his situation, planning a visit to the nearest spot or changing his daily routines.

OPERATING MODEL

The app is free with no sort of in-app purchase.

As stated on the website, is the the result of a collaborative effort by many artists and was supported by **vpro, Media Fonds, Creative Industries Fund NL, SIDNfonds.**

In order to better inspect the app revenue sources, I'm attaching quotes from each of the nominated (and still existing) organisations websites.

"Creative Industries Fund NL is the Dutch cultural fund for architecture, design and digital culture, as well as every imaginable crossover. [...]"

The aim of all the grants and programmes is to enrich the creative sector and through cooperation to strive towards a culture- and knowledge-driven creative economy."

"SIDN Fund stands for 'a strong internet for all'. We provide financial support to ideas and projects that aim to make the internet stronger or that use the internet in innovative ways."

The maximum contribution they offer is 10.000€ per project.

The main interest behind the app seems to be the growth of a more aware user base on the issue of overpopulated environment of electronic devices.

The funding received from national organisations and the lack of any kind of in app revenues such as ads or IAPs or links to other apps seems to confirm this idea.

GOVERNANCE

Before opening the screen with the 360 view, the app just shows a text ("There are hundred of digital signals around your right now") and a button ("show me"). Once you press it, it goes to the 360 view. It gives you no freedom to choose how to start and instead guides you through the "best" next step in order to have a stronger impact on you.

Once you're in 360 mode, you can just hold your device upright and then "get out": the app will then show a world map with all the white spots.

The 360 screen also offers a VR mode if used in pair with a VR handset like the Google Cardboard.

From here you now have the freedom to explore the stories or find the nearest white spot.

There's also a smaller hamburger menu icon in the top right side of the screen that once clicked gets you to a menu with 5 different choices: world map, show networks, route planner, about, help.

The help page is a technical screen with a link to the support page.

The about page is written in a fairly neutral style describing the app technologic aspects and the various sections.

From a UI perspective the design is clean and minimal, offering few choices. It uses a serif font in order to communicate a less “techy” environment. It’s elegant in a friendly way. The choice of colours of the map is made to emphasise the contrast and make the map easier to read, while also maintaining the visual metaphor of the “white spots”.

Concerning the UI, no new symbols are created by the aesthetics of the app.

For the wifi icon, it uses the well know 4 arcs symbol.

In the 360 mode, a new visual language is employed consisting of spheres made of triangles that radiate from each of the antennas. Pointing to one of the antennas will result in colouring it of red, almost like if you’re revealing your nearest enemy.

The amount of spheres and the speed of each one rapidly shifting towards you helps to convey a sense of oppression and claustrophobia.

A background noise reminds us of a polluted electromagnetic environment.