

CROWD SOURCED CITY: SOCIAL MEDIA & PLANNING PROCESSES

FINAL PROJECT BRIEF

December 15, 2010

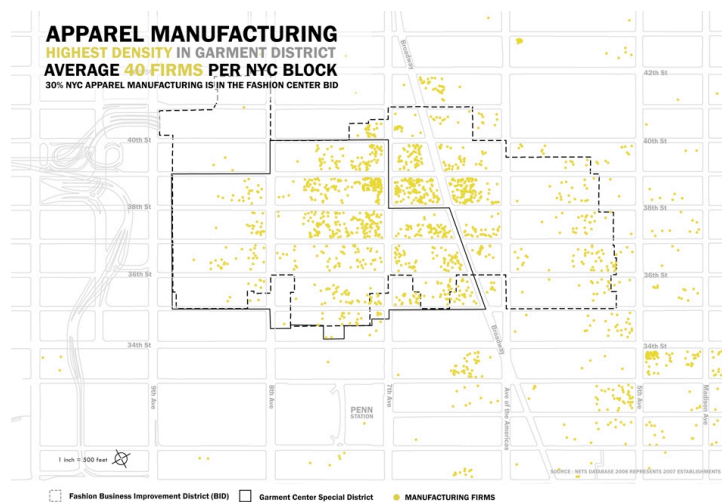
Judy Chang, Lola Feiger, Michael Shyu

ABSTRACT

Client: Council of Fashion Designers of America, The Fashion Center BID

The Garment District, New York City's fashion epicenter, is currently threatened by rezoning. Until now, fashion manufacturing has been protected along the area's side streets, resulting in the clustering of factories and warehouses, and the fashion businesses they serve. The Council of Fashion Designers of America maintains that without this localization of fashion operations, and their protection from encroaching commercial and residential takeover, the fashion industry in New York will cease to exist. The CFDA argues that not only does this nexus of production allow for designers' immediate access to manufacturers, which saves time and money, but suppressed rents help encourage emerging talent to take root. A garment's production from idea to completion requires an interdependent network of highly skilled specialists, all present in the Garment District, and, like any other clustered industry, proximity fosters research and development innovations.

Our study, an extension of The Design Trust for Public Space's 2009 *Made in Midtown* study, addresses directly whether proximity matters to the fashion design process. Using Google Latitude-enabled cell phones, we mapped the daily work activities of a handful of design industry professionals located in the Garment District. Participants also supplemented this basic geographic information with time-stamped, abbreviated descriptions of their activities, text messaged to a centralized modem we configured. After a week of data collection patterns can begin to be seen. However, an extended run-time and sample size would be necessary for any definitive conclusions to be drawn.



Source: Made in Midtown

METHODOLOGY

To test that proximity does in fact matter to the fashion industry, it was important to see how design operations in the Garment District play out geographically. To do this, we decided to collect two different sets of data from our study participants: spatial information (both horizontal and vertical), as well as qualitative information, to find out which fashion tasks are conducted where. Our intent was to synthesize this data to assess just how integrated and localized the Garment District's fashion industry really is.

To qualify this study as crowd-sourced we decided to solicit this locational information from actual users of the space – designers, and production assistants - rather than conduct any sort of shadowing experiment ourselves.

We chose Google Latitude, a program that uses mobile devices to map users' locations in real-time, as a means of tracing study participants during their working hours. To substantiate this basic geographic information, as well as to safeguard against program errors, we devised a text messaging system to allow participants to describe their activities and floor numbers. Participants were instructed to text – with one of our standardized task abbreviations – the number 312-560-2455 every time they changed activity during the day.

We intended initially to conduct this experiment twice, each over the course of five business days, with roughly 20 participants per study pool. Due, however, to a limited amount of time, and poor participant response, we conducted the study once only, processing data for just the four volunteers who participated for the duration of the study period.

Our participants: Our participants were self-selected from a group of design industry professionals located in the Garment District, contacted in early October. Some of these professionals were formerly attached to The Design Trust for Public Space's *Made in Midtown* study, the remainder were otherwise familiar with the project and the issues at stake. From an initial pool of 20 or so respondents, 12 attended our information session at Nanette Lepore's Garment District showroom, and 5 people ultimately submitted data. Because of inconsistencies, only 4 sets of data were actually processed for our analysis. (Employees represent two different firms: 3 were from the more established Nanette Lepore, and the fourth from the more emerging Restore Clothing).

Google Latitude: Participants were instructed to run the program for the length of each work day and to convert their recorded history into a .kml file, which they would then send to us. Each participant was responsible for sending five separate .kml files to us over the course of a week.

Text Messaging: The set of codes used during the study were revised multiple times. We assumed initially that project participants would prefer simplicity over complexity, but we learned during our meeting with participants and over several emails, that in fact the more specific the better.

The final set of activity abbreviations used:

PROJECT CODES – Text 312-560-2455 with:	
A	admin
FD	design work
MD	media
R	retail
SE	social events
SH	showing/showroom
SM	sample making***
P	production***
SEW	sewing****
W	warehousing (delivery, shipping, order preparation, inventory)
O	other*
***will be asked to elaborate with, C (cutting), PM (pattern making), MG (marking/grading), or O (other, this includes trim)	
****will be asked to elaborate with QC (quality control), SCH (scheduling), PFS (production fit sample), or O (other, including trim)	
*will be asked to elaborate	

Additional tools used to conduct study: centralized email address (garmentdistrict.gsapp@gmail.com) to aggregate all project communications between us and participants.

Project Timeline:

- 11.22 Information Session with potential participants
- 11.29 – 12.3 MAPPING DATES
- 11.29 In-house phone set-up and additional troubleshooting
- 11.30 Thank you communication with participants and final survey

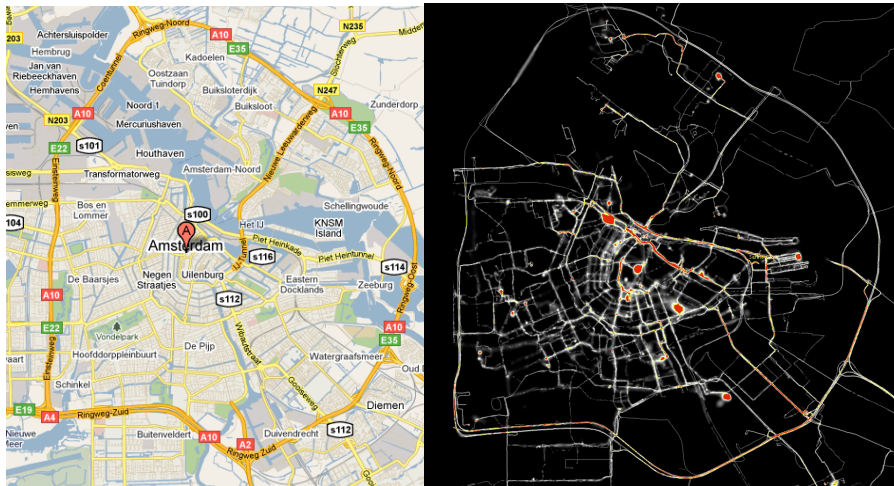
At the completion of the project, we sent participants a brief survey email to solicit their feedback.

PROJECT PRECEDENTS & INSPIRATIONS

Thematically, our project was inspired directly by The Design Trust for Public Space’s *Made in Midtown* study, which in 2009 gave critical and quantifiable insight into the inner workings of the Garment District’s fashion industry, and its integral role in the city’s economy and culture.

Our project, therefore, was conceived as a pilot for study for another phase of the Design Trust’s efforts.

Although we made the decision to track fashion industry professionals before learning of other projects like it, we were nevertheless inspired by the results of two prior artistic endeavors exploiting GPS technology and participant tracing. The first, Waag Society’s *Amsterdam RealTime* from 2002, constructed a composite map of Amsterdam from participant’s movements within the city (participants were equipped with GPS-enabled “tracer-units.”) Their piece, and a comparison map of Amsterdam with streets shown, can be seen below:



Google Maps

<http://www.archadia.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/amsterdam-realtime-image.jpg>

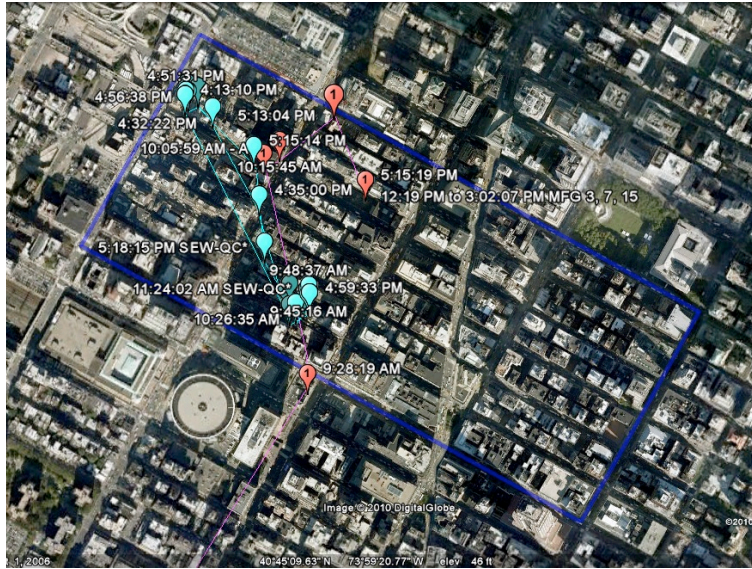
The second tracing project we learned of, MIT and A1/Mobilkom Austria’s *Mobile Landscapes* in Graz, Austria, created similarly a set of maps, this time however, culled from both passive and voluntary crowdsourced tracing data via mobile phones. Three types of maps were generated from the data and exhibited: cellphone traffic intensity, traffic migration (handovers), and traces of registered users as they moved through the city. The aim of the project was to depict layers of movement, activity and communication within a city that typically escape static mapping.

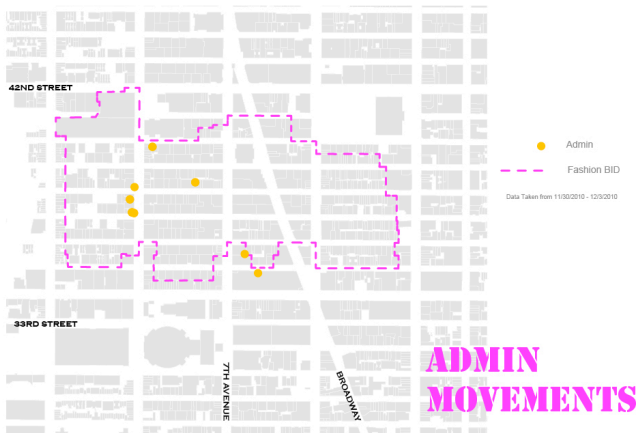
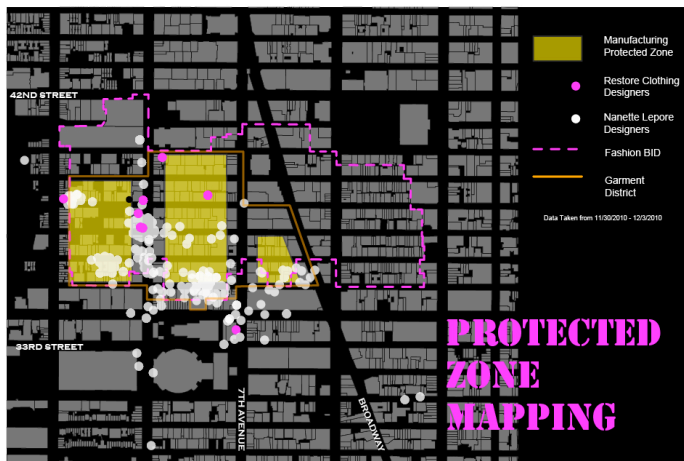
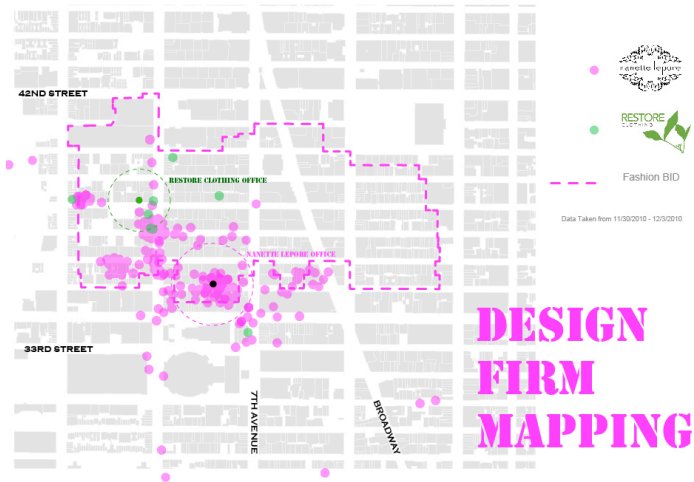
Our deployment of cellphone tracing differs from these projects in that we used the technology to tackle a specific urban planning question – does proximity in the fashion design industry matter?

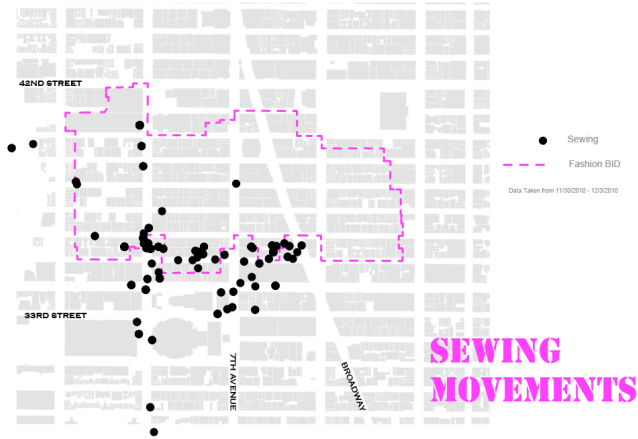
RESULTS

Two participants' basic .kml maps exported to Google Earth:

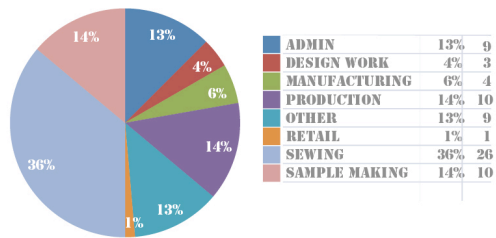
The Garment District boundaries are highlighted in blue



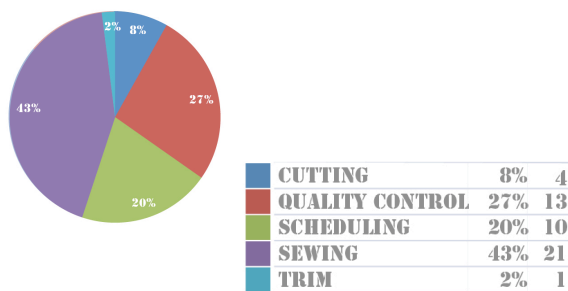




Texting Breakdown:



Sewing Breakdown:



Because of our limited sample size, and the truncated nature of our study's length, no sweeping inferences can be made from the data. Although most day-to-day operations appear to take place within the borders of the Garment District, most activities are plotted in fact outside of the areas protected along the side streets.

A summary of participant feedback:

- Wanted more codes
- Wanted longer study duration
- Believed Google Latitude was not tracking properly
- Wanted more users
- Agreed proximity mapping was the best way to generate data
- Claimed technology was easy to use after the setup

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

That we were unable to answer the question “Does proximity matter to the fashion design process?” has to do largely with three categories of challenges we encountered in implementation.

Communication Errors: We have concluded that our instructions to participants lacked the full clarity needed to explain the technology and process. In addition, our own rudimentary knowledge of the technology was a stumbling block in conveying the necessary information to others.

Project Scope Limitations: We lost a considerable amount of time before our project launched due to barriers between us and our eventual contact pool of participants. We were therefore left with insufficient time to run a long enough study, and were not able to secure a large enough sample size or diversity of sample population.

Technical Limitations: Although open-source and the most legible of the mapping programs, Google Latitude often presented erroneous data points and imprecise elevations. In addition, some participants forgot close the program at the end of their workday, or to turn it on at its start. The text messaging system crossed the line, we believe, between simplicity of use and specificity of data, so that the number and complexity of the codes used proved a stumbling block to participants. In addition, without any constant reminder from us to text throughout the day, we found often that participants would go for several hours without texting anything, forcing us to make our own assumptions.

Were another phase of this project planned, we would recommend streamlining the various technological elements into one easy-to-use cell phone application. We would also recommend a more rigorous set of incentives to secure a larger group of participants.

FURTHER CONCLUSIONS

- Our project is in one way crowd, as it is fashion industry employees within the Garment District providing us with data rather than us surveying it ourselves.
- That the participants' were so adamant about multifarious texting codes is testimony in itself to just how many different fashion industry operations are located within the horizontal and vertical space of the Garment District.
- Ultimately, our inability to quantify our spatial data in any economic terms is a barrier to truly assessing whether proximity really "matters" in design.
-

APPENDIX: Documents provided to participants at 11.22 Information Session

- Condition of Anonymity Form
- Phone Waiver
- Google Latitude Instructions