

Patterns as artifacts in user-developer collaborative design

- Field research carried out at GreenFam – NGO that campaigns for human rights
- 18 months participant observation of a new project to develop Lotus Notes information-sharing tools
- 3 years later I returned for 9 months to evaluate Notes tools after a period of use
- So – was able to track development of the project over a fairly long period...
- ... and to observe the learning process of the ITP

Background

In 1996 GreenFam identified a need to –

- Replace their old email (THE COORDINATOR) with a more up-to-date tool
- Improve tools for information sharing and access
- Move to a more collaborative way of working

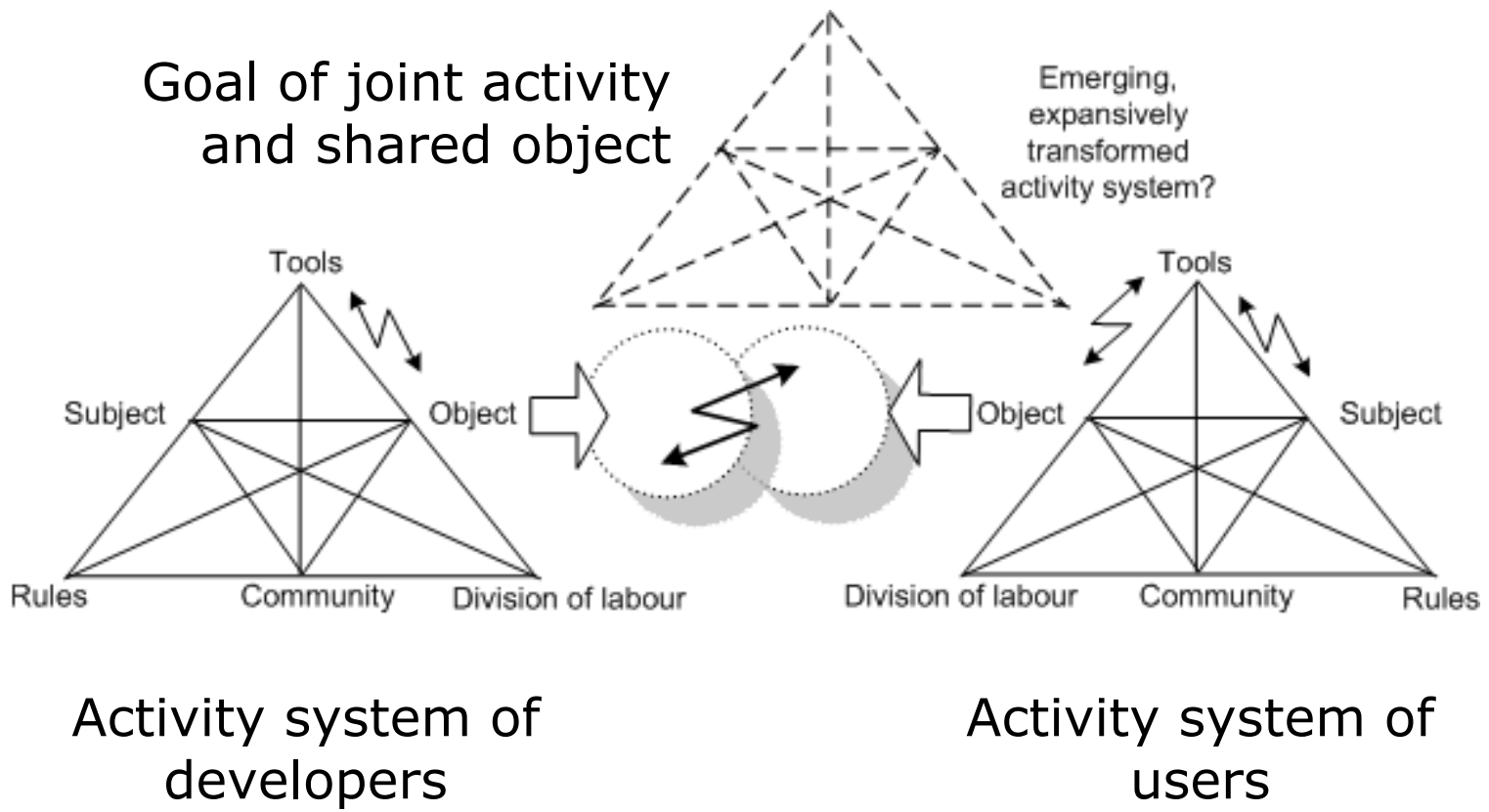
The ITP set out the “Vision” –

- Use groupware to plan and coordinate campaigns
- Discussion forums for exchanging ideas
- Use this information to evaluate campaigns
- Create an “organisational memory” for future campaign coordinators

Project evaluation

- Databases had improved access to information, but had not met the objective of leading to more collaborative ways of working
- The ITP lacked tools and resources that could support realisation of the visionary model of a new way of working...
- ...specifically 'How' and 'Why' models (Wartofsky, Engestrom) to mediate design activity
- Organisational and cultural division of labour between "users" and "developers" was a barrier to understanding work of users ...
- ...and effective co-construction of tools

An attempt to visualize this situation using activity theory



Why look for patterns?

- In the course of the evaluation we developed scenarios of concrete working practices
- The ITP liked scenarios – good fit with their way of working and thinking about design
- Saw how they could develop scenarios of future work with users
- Many of the findings of the evaluation looked like patterns – i.e. recurring practices, design features etc. that HAD worked
- Objective of writing up the research as a pattern language as a tool for co-constructive design at GreenFam

Patterns and activity theory

- Alexander's work used as an inspiration – some obvious differences e.g. philosophical foundation to activity theory
- Shared language between users and developers
- Patterns were intended for “users” of architecture
 - to give them a tool to build homes and environments for themselves
- Anyone can write and understand patterns
- Resonate with activity theory methodological tool of contradictions – patterns are a solution to a problem in context; reconcile “misfits” between form and context (Alexander)

Pattern examples – EMAIL ALERTS; ONE CLICK HYPERLINK; POST MISSION CRITICAL INFORMATION

To:	#ITP
Cc:	
Subject:	For discussion at Monday ITP meeting

Hi everyone,

Here is an important topic for discussion at the Monday ITP meeting:



Addresses the problem of getting people to use a new tool for information sharing, rather than email

Thanks,
Greg

PROBLEMS + QUESTIONS

- Quote from ITP manager - "We're very goal-orientated ... it's a case of 'what are the requirements to get things done?' ... it's a pragmatic approach. The theory of how to do it just washes over me..."
- Is it possible to formulate activity theory as an ISD method given the pragmatic and amethodical approach of practitioners?
- Alternative approach is to develop tools that can be used by ISD that “embody the principles of activity theory”
- What does it mean for a tool to “embody the principles of activity theory”? Is it possible?