

Designing for local institutions in the hybrid city*

Panayotis Antoniadis
ETH Zürich

Ileana Apostol
NetHood

Within current globalization processes, there are multiple dispersive forces that limit significantly the incentives and capacities of urban communities located in physical proximity, to socialize, share resources and information, and most importantly to identify their values "in common". Shaping a stimulating space for the continuous expression and integration of shared values in everyday life has the potential to restore a sense of being-together, more intimately than the way modern society allows. Some of the immediate effects of such restoration is to diminish the disintegration of society, and to strengthen the role of local action toward improving the quality of life in the cities. By claiming their right to the city (Lefebvre), local communities may become significant players within the phenomenon of planetary urbanization, as laboratories of social learning (Dewey) that can beneficially provide alternative views to the solutions generated in the marketplace.

Generally, sources of resistance depend, however, on the initiatives of highly motivated individuals and take place outside formal institutional frameworks, mostly restricted to progressive neighbourhoods or specific urban subcultures (e.g., complementary currencies, ecovillages and a wide variety of urban action movements). The Internet has played an important role in allowing such dispersed initiatives to build global networks for sharing tools and knowledge. But since this "virtual" activity does not manifest itself in the built environment, and does not pose any physical constraint for participation, it often contributes to the further isolation of those involved from their immediate surroundings.

Taking into consideration the impact on urban space of ICTs, Antoniadis and Apostol (2013) have argued that wireless technology, and free and open source social software, combined with appropriate urban interventions can play a critical role in facilitating the formation of hyper-local communities, as a hybrid realm of urban communities shaped on physical proximity rather than on common interest. This means that the design space has significantly opened up to the virtual space, including a complex interplay between formal and informal institutions.

In this paper we discuss the role of "hybrid space" design in shaping new relationships between global institutions and localities, toward empowering local players to claim their right to the hybrid city and launch their own experiments on building local institutions from a sense of being-together. We aim to build an understanding of the extent to which technology can become a means for connecting people in physical proximity, while limiting its use to promote healthy and convivial communities.

*Submitted to the Inaugural WINIR Conference on Institutions that Change the World, 11-14 September 2014, Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich, London, UK