

HYBRID CITY. LEARNING TO MAKE CITIES THROUGH THE DAILY USE OF THE INTERNET

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Abstract

The concept hybrid city here responds to a series of real demands of liveability in cities in an information society as it integrates the physical and the virtual in an "augmented" reality. As it can be seen, the everyday use of ICT and virtual social networks transform our perception of reality so that our physical environment gets enriched with new properties, with new layers of meaning that shape our imagination. In this sense, the social and psychological effects that affect the user of the "Augmented Environment " draw a new map of habitability, still in a training process. The city turned into a place of hybridization overlaps the digital layer in the existing city and in the households inferring symptoms of delocalization to the different modes of inhabiting on the one hand, while on the other, it strengthens emerging local ways to coexist. Therefore, new types of spaces are created outside established and purely disciplinary channels of architecture and urbanism. They have a common denominator. They are processes of an "hybrid" nature between the physical and the digital that are beginning to have an extreme interest among disciplines intervening in urban areas as well as in the regulatory framework that governs it.

This innovation is primarily based on the creation of social life and political culture. New generation spaces, often at the border between the need and the creativity of their "users" are born in the moment when people act together. Most of the time, they are outside cultural policies, and moreover, they act in substitution and because of the lack of them. We are, undoubtedly, facing a social revolution based on interoperability, on projects and strategies based on the user and for the user through internet and different web applications. These tools, that are usually available for free, facilitate information sharing enable the undertaking of initiatives, that would not be possible otherwise, promote participation and collaboration on projects as well as intervention in governmental projects, and generate new communication and relationship's dynamics, able to improve the cohesion of local communities. Digital relationships call face to face ones and the perspective of community and collective action that transform encountered situations and consolidated urban environment is generated in the network.

The communication that we propose for this conference aims to study these new emerging hybridization phenomena that take place in the urban space.

Keywords: Internet, Participation, Proactive Citizenship, Public Space, Hybridization

1. DEMANDS OF LIVEABILITY IN AN AUGMENTED ENVIROMENT

Today we are witnessing a new literacy of the living and relational space based on increased perception and intensified by a technological mediation of everyday use. Thanks to the available media, everyday we receive abundant information that results in the increase of stimuli of our senses and is translated in the acceleration of our daily lives. Our perception of the world is changing radically under the influence of the Augmented Environment by new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that are changing our consciousness. The “connected” human being is learning to use the online media to innovate and customize his way of life, to share experiences with others and participate in typical telematic projects of a participatory nature that are changing him from being a passive element into being an active agent of the society within communities that are organized in specific environments, near or far away. There is no doubt that the media available nowadays are gaining enormous power of social construction and are becoming educational tools for citizens who are discovering in decentralized technologies a fantastic collaborative tool and the struggle for a better world.

Thanks to the ICTs that support social networks we are learning new ways of organizing and living in the world and more horizontal organizations are appearing against the typical hierarchical structures. These social networks are being organized around proposals, options and claims whose epicenter is localized or dislocated urban life. As a result, different ways of experiencing and visualizing the city, new narration and projects are explored in an Augmented Environment, a place where the migration of traditional contents and the mediatic condition of the contemporary individual is being integrated. We can affirm the fact that the contemporary self is a mediatic circumstance, whose space-time dimension unfolds itself into a digital or virtual alternative reality, that overlaps with the traditional space-time concept.

The Augmented Environment (EA) as an outcome of the Digital Revolution is produced by replacing the Mechanicist Paradigm with the Digital one and with the transformation of the Post-Industrial Society into the Information Society. The EA is a function with two variables: 'being digital' and 'being physical', where each variable generates its own reality: digital reality and physical reality, which in turn define their own environment: Digital Environment (DE) and Physical Environment (FE). We live, learn and produce in both environments at the same time. In this hybrid paradigm the social and psychological effects that affect the user of EA become fully effective.

Also, EA has precipitated the introduction of the complexity and diversity in the analysis of reality where considerations of building the hyperreal quality of the living space take place. That quality results in a digital layer that brings new meaning to the space built by material elements. The contemporary human being, on the one hand, creates, captures, analyzes, displays and stores an inordinate amount of contents related to himself thanks to the new digital technologies. On the other hand, the interaction between the user and the machine records behaviors of an extraordinary adaptability to the changing circumstances of the environment whose building elements are implemented with other data, that is to say, with information that is produced on a multiple scale order which adheres as a digital layer to the physical environment. Fixed and portable devices are access channels to the Augmented Environment. The communication channels that internet facilitates enable social-networks, email, video-conferences, geo-referenced information systems, apps and other technologies that allow to adhere the digital layer to the architectural materiality.

The cities where we live today are characterized by a high degree of fragmentation and spatial discontinuity nevertheless connected through transportation networks and telematic communications. It is, in fact, an undetermined space where we need to continually move between

points either in public or private transport in order to manage our personal and working relationships and the speed with which we are forced to constantly move does not allow us any relationship with that environment. But the use of the telephone and Internet lets us receive information of this environment in real-time. The additional information (which mutates with movement) transforms this indifferent space into something closer and more human in our imagination. We then realize that in order to transform these kinds of cities it is essential to intervene also in everyday aspects that apparently maintain no relationship whatsoever to the design of urban spaces. Because of that we need to take into account the two dimensions in which our life unfolds: in situ and virtually. We are now in the position to intervene in the "virtual" or "digital" dimension. As Manuel Castells (2002) says everything we do, from the moment when the day begins to the moment when it ends we do it using internet. We are the ones who establish the connection between in-situ (which is not real because reality is virtual and on-site at the same time) and virtual. These are not two different societies but two types of social activities that we connect ourselves to. We have to look for the best way to organize and adapt them.

In addition, local networks allow the development of virtual communities where streets and squares of the neighborhoods are no longer the main meeting areas (*Innerarity*, 2004). Internet seems to offer an alternative "space" for social relations compared to "traditional" spaces. While this may be seen as a problem that leads to empty public spaces, however, it can also be considered as an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen social relations by creating the necessary budgets to improve the vitality of these areas.

The use of technological devices that generate and sustain the virtual space are also making it a habitable place, that can be imagined, narrated, talked about, remembered and rewritten resulting, therefore, in a 'live space'. The experience of the city extends through experiences in the Virtual Environment that enrich and make the cognitive environment more complex. The multimedia recordings that the citizens continually make, -images (videos and photos), sounds and all kinds of emotions and perceptions that they describe, transmit and share on the network-, increase our sensitivity to the environment and sharpen our senses. Locative media also allows us to read and write while we move and share emotions, observations and information. The use of georeferencing tools extends to all kinds of cultural and social practices. The creation and dissemination of digital contents certainly enriches the perception we have of each place as the memory of it emerges with unknown data that are hidden to our vision. The creative manipulation of information implies a constructive and transformative participation within the environment in question, which, in turn, makes everyone an author or a co-author of new narratives. As De Certeau (1999,128) says, without stories cities are deserted. Narratives are the keys to the city that give access to what it is, a mythical vision. This new awareness of the living space that is being created with the technological media, emerges as the shared space in the people's imagination where we find connected subjectivities (Negri, 2010), active and committed individuals (Florida, 2010) and synergy. The narrative of the rationalistic, mechanistic and functionalist space is being substituted by a new narrative that gives place to a space that is 'lived' and 'sensed' as a convivial space.

2. NEW LEARNING TO MAKE CITY: CREATIVITY AND INTEROPERABILITY

The new paradigms of transformation of the urban space that we observe today are imaginative, open and implemented by technological processes; they start on the network and are verified in situ. The development of these projects implies the participation of different entities that act from below, from the baselines of citizenship, instead of being directed from above, from the public administrations and the professionals. These are projects that are usually tackled from different

disciplines and not only from the point of view of urbanism and architecture, and that use new technologies as a catalyst. The new trends in the design of the urban environment that are not exclusively architectural, point towards new learning based on sensitive perception, with the induction and the imagination of citizens who act as interpreters and managers of information, generated and shared with tools and telematic means that they choose or design themselves.

The new technological tools for everyday use come with great spontaneity and ease which enables the development of expressive and communicative skills not only by those with expertise in the architectural design of the environment but also by all citizens. In such a way, a new generation of public space projects is emerging thanks to the connectivity in the virtual environment that stimulates the creativity of citizens. So instead of remaining passive in front of the world, they are no longer content to adapt themselves, in one way or the other, to the external circumstances. The new active inhabitants of the city can imagine, that they are creating and recreating the conditions of their environment and their own lives.

We refer, therefore, to the citizen's ability to take initiatives and undertake unconventional projects, sometimes in conjunction with professionals that act outside the usual regulations; or react to urban planning in order to rectify mistakes that the public administration is unable to solve or where architects and planners are making a mistake, demanding changes and introducing reforms. Thanks to the resources available for communication and citizen interaction as a common denominator, the emerging trends in the design of the public spaces affect not only the external transformation of places but in the humans that inhabit there. As Juan Freire (2010) says, we are witnessing a process of "hybridization" that is modifying both, our individual identities as much as the community and territorial ones. The distinction between physical space and virtual communities is being updated. Internet, which has contributed to the development of global networks, is now beginning to have a significant influence at local levels. Digital technologies are radically changing the way in which we organize and interact with our environment. The telematic means of communication and interaction increase the citizen's options for participation, constituting an open and dynamic tool that is constantly being updated.

The binomial technology and creativity is being demonstrated in both the academic world and in different sectors of production. The activities carried out thanks to the new tools allow response to different problems through technology and also learn about culture and human beings in general now that all kinds of knowledge are more accessible. We are, undoubtedly, facing a social revolution based on interoperability, projects and strategies focused on the user and by users through internet and different web applications. These tools that are generally available for free, facilitate the development of skills and creative abilities and point towards more realistic guidelines, as well being more imaginative and innovative in the design of the Environment. These are susceptible of regenerating the architecture and building sector in crisis from a more anthropological than aesthetic perspective. The traditional architect educated in the responsibility of designing and constructing his work, can nowadays, assume much broader and diverse tasks recovering a more humanistic and global view of the architectural space as an experiential space.

The classical paradigms of modernity in Architecture that are fuelled by the crisis are reviewed from a wider viewing angle. In fact, we are seeing a shift "towards the strategic" against the interest in the pure expression of the architectural project that implies a convergence of different disciplines, social groups, public administrations, investors, companies and that requires new procedures and tools both theoretical and practical, more adequate to our time. The new "learning" from "city building" goes beyond the tools we had used until now and we are at the crossroads of a poietic that breaks

with the conventions in order to establish new educational and cultural habits and explore new proposals that claim verbal reflection and lifetime commitments.

3. HYBRD SPACES

Models of collective management of the convivial space are taking place nowadays on the internet, from where they are extending in situ. New communication and relationship dynamics, able to improve the cohesion of communities are developed on the internet. They are presented as an alternative "place" for social relationships, differing from the "traditional" ones. Digital relationships call face to face relationships and on the net the perspective of community as a "place" is generated. We can then speak of a hybrid identity of spaces which are digital and at the same time produce face to face relationship. We can speak of "territorial activation from the digital culture". A new kind of "hybrid spaces" emerges from the integration of digital technologies in the physical space. They are configured as places where the free exchange of information is guaranteed and where management transparency is encouraged. With the design of these public spaces, a key role to restore the vitality of these places is given to society by returning to these places the vitality that they seem to have lost (Di Siena, 2011).

The Plaza de la Cebada Project in Madrid, for example, is a neighborhood initiative to temporarily reactivate the urban space that occupies the site (the previous plot of the demolished La Latina sports center) in the Central District of Madrid. The project consists of the generation of dynamic neighborhood meetings with collective interests for the development of participatory, recreational, cultural, educational, non-consumptive activities, necessary for the community. The Plaza de la Cebada is a space, historically unique in the center of the city that is restored so that people can play, skate, cycle, run, meet... This initiative has neighbors who come from different professional, sociological and ideological backgrounds. It is planned as a temporary alternative to revitalise a closed and abandoned site, only during the time that the works planned for reuse are not carried out, and it is expected to be years before that happens. It is a space where priority is given to the human relationships rather than the projects themselves. The project is open to all constructive proposals and initiatives in line with the demands and the parish's needs that are key to the design process, where the neighbours maintain a constant dialogue with the relevant institutions.

The result is a strange structure that is a mixture of architecture, self-construction, self-management and where something is inaugurated every day. The content is constantly changing as it is not just a physical construction but the construction of an environment where the neighbor's provide their services for free. The place becomes, therefore, an educational and cultural field, an area of social construction and a space to perform all kinds of projects with the active participation of the people. It already has multiple facilities and all kinds of events and festivals are organized. 'Edumeet', for example, consists of informal meetings every 15 days, in which there are debates on education, learning and culture and a horizontal structure is maintained. Communicating and sharing is more important than authorship. The fact that these meetings take place in the Campo de la Cebada prevents the space from determining their identity and authorship. The announcements, dissemination, communication and interaction obviously happens through the net. Certainly such spaces are initially established as a digital entity (<http://elcampodecebada.org/>).

The above mentioned is a paradigm of how new types of spaces are born outside the purely disciplinary established channels of architecture and urbanism that have a common denominator: these are processes of a "hybrid" nature between the physical and the digital that are beginning to have an extreme interest amongst the intervening disciplines in urban areas as well as the regulatory framework that governs them. There are many other cases where professionals that work in the

architectural field, usually the youngest and the most intelligent, are exploring other more natural proposals introducing ethical and aesthetic principles that include low cost and citizen participation in projects. The new generation spaces are almost always created on the border between the need and the creativity of their "users". This is a type of innovation that gives priority to the creation of social life and political culture rather than the physical construction of space. Most of the time, the creation of these spaces is alien to the cultural policies, moreover, it acts in substitution of them and because they do not exist.

The Urban Ecosystem group provides another example of how to carry out projects of a hybrid nature. 'Dreamhamar' is a project among others that have been conducted in a workshop format where they have promoted the process of citizen participation through the network to redesign Stortorget Square in Hamar, Norway. The Hamar commune has chosen a pioneering approach for the construction of the new square. Instead of giving the citizens of Hamar a finished space, they have chosen to participate in a process of collective reflection that will determine the new configuration of Stortorget. The architects created a design process in the network -Think Tank- in order to share with the Hamar citizens the way they saw their city and the way in which they imagined their square. All the residents in Hedmark were invited to participate in on-site workshops so that they could say how they wanted this main space to be (<http://ecosistemaurbano.org/>).

Thus, against the typical transformations of squares and open spaces in urban centers and historic districts by the local administration, where there is, generally, total disconnection between citizens, future users, architects and administrative developers, we can see today several initiatives that are starting to develop. Nowadays, opportunities for direct action, formulas to act autonomously, that are independent from political programs and where professionals can get out of usual commissions and become involved in more daring ones are produced continuously. Moreover, when the economic crisis has shortened the public works, the young professionals have the ability to see new project opportunities, to detect new needs, to look for different promoters and to seek solutions to urban problems. Thus, interdisciplinary professional groups have been created displacing the personal ego in order to carry out different activities where the focus is no longer on stellar works that become an emblem for institutions and capitalism. They are professionals who identify with the final users and meet up with them using the new technology and innovative marketing tools.

Specifically in Spain we can find several collectives. They are about 50 in total from which, among others, recetasurbanas.net, straddle3.net, caldodecultivo.com, estonoesunsolar.com, etc. stand out. These groups have been brought forth from the legal vacuum, vacant lots, temporary buildings, civic participation, employment plans ... a series of actions that change the rules of the game through a new logic for undertaking projects.

There are also many paradigms of alternative urban actions in European cities as well as in other continents (Martín Castillejos, 2014). The diverse interventions are carried out by new kinds of professionals; architects, teachers, students and artists who are facing the new social and economic situation (lack of commissions) with new techniques and ideas. The peculiar mode of action by the Basurama group, whose office is a website, has spread across the four continents with a different approach towards the waste that surrounds us and recycling in general through workshops and urban initiatives. Worth noting is the work of L'Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA) that is developing urban community gardens in Paris with the support of local authorities; the so called "open source" communities develop online collaborative design methods that attempt to cut costs and experiment with recyclable or biodegradable materials and components, formulas of self-build, etc.. Other projects try to recover the artistry of the urban voids, focusing on the urban dynamics through architecture, urbanism and art, taking into account the perspective of citizen participation,

collective intelligence, urban revitalization and public space. This is precisely what groups like PKMN, Studio Bijari, Bruit du Frigo, Esterni, Supersudaca, Raumlabor ..., etc. do. These are groups that develop urban activities as a way of instantly intervening in the cities and workshops as a direct experience and who seek political provocation through their critical interventions. All these groups and many others investigate new ways to build civic spaces with reduced, ecological and sustainable resources using the new technology as a leitmotif (Trachana, 2014, p.218)

These actions attempt to influence people more than in the classical configuration of the spaces. Hybrid spaces have, as a main characteristic, the ability to integrate people within its formation, through their opinions and their particular use of Information Technology and also in situ. The Madrid urban action group called "estoesunaplaza" ("this is a square") has developed a methodological manual of urban action that indicates the basic issues to consider before starting an intervention strategy on an urban site. The group recommends the setting up of a good multidisciplinary team to develop a strategy for action in order to convince, attract and get the different elements required to carry out the action, and above all, to get the necessary support and public sponsorship. For them, a workshop, an exhibition or a party have components that are highly social, either artistic or cultural (without seeming merely commercial-promotional) that leave their mark in the freed space, and can mobilize expectations and get institutional or financial support. The creative process finally takes place when all the elements are gathered together as it requires people, action and dissemination, policy and administration. The participation in the process of the people for whom the space is intended, is absolutely essential, so that they can feel their involvement in the creation of the space, calling it their own and giving it a continuity in time. Without people, neighbors or groups involved, an urban action would not make sense (Moradiellos, 2009).

The intervention carried out on the municipal site in Doctor Fourquet Street in Madrid was the fruit of two years intense collective work by the Milanese Esterni Group and the Madrid institutions: La Casa Encendida, COAM (Madrid Official College of Architects) and the Central District Council. They were able to make a square for the neighborhood residents, with its trees, its garden, its vegetable garden, its square for exchanging goods, its stage for performances, its football field and its silent disco. Today there is a complete and complex project of joint management of the space with the 300 residents who signed the petition with the Council in order to be able to keep on using this space during the time that it is available. The authors of this intervention have been encouraging citizen creativity to initiate more interventions on potential urban sites or to present proposals and program ideas for the 'urbanaccion2' competition, which has been launched together with the Competition Office of the COAM. The group thinks that the more ideas put on the table the better the cities in which we live will become.

Today the ineffectiveness of the reconfiguration processes or the restoration of public spaces, always conceived from the point of view of the interests of economic and political elites, is more than clearly demonstrated. More positive forms of intervention necessarily involve interdisciplinary processes that imply the participation of local intelligence and dialogue with professionals who coordinate them. More than ever we can say that today what is needed is not so much new initiatives, but rather, to add value to what already exists, by transforming, enhancing their own characteristics and inventing new possibilities of appropriation. In this sense, we have an increasing number of examples of good professional interventions in given situations designed to be effectively functional, sustainable, natural and popular.

Public institutions, that are increasingly becoming more involved in alternative projects of this type, are seconded by corporate institutions. The municipality of Zaragoza, for example, has promoted the

occupation of twenty sites in less than two years. They have been intervened by the "Esonoesunsolar" ("That is not a site") group becoming parks, orchards, social spaces with sports fields, playgrounds and places for other activities. They have become in such a way, a municipal employment plan. The Madrid College of Architects has promoted the creation of 'Madrid Think Tank', a platform-open-lab for new ideas, in which the participation of companies, administrations, institutions and individuals is sought with the aim of building a collective urban project for Madrid thereby improving the city and quality of life of its inhabitants. Through public calls for ideas they intend to propel innovative initiatives that foster citizens' participation.

It is true that local institutions are exploiting the potential of technology and that they are beginning to promote initiatives in order to increase the citizens's participation in the artistic and social life of their city. These actions are bordering the limits of a cultural sector that has been mainly of a professional nature hitherto, towards an amateurism that is becoming an alternative and a complementary process. The 'White Nights' in Madrid or the 'Euphoric Nights' in the French city of Tournefeuille, for instance, are projects that reconcile cultural policies and citizens's participation in an ephemeral transformation of the urban space. During these evenings, people gather around a citizens' event in the city in which they become actors and spectators at the same time, in an environment that combines public facilities with advanced technologies and artistic means. These projects aim to promote artistic creation and urban cultural development through "intersections" of technology and public space.

Digital technology, on the other hand, is being adopted to encourage feedback between citizens and institutions, even though these platforms still work in a precarious way bilaterally. Nevertheless, they have information and provide services electronically, saving time and energy for citizens. There are, in fact, a wide range of public and private, local, national and European level initiatives (for more information see Trachana, 2013, pp. 45-46). But nevertheless, there still exists much work to do in order to develop the potential of ICT in the transformation of cities. Today we speak of the "open source city", an expression that makes reference to the free access to urban information which public administrations provide for the citizens, and we also speak of smart cities that through digital technologies offer a diversity of advanced services related to street lighting, traffic, pollution, waste, etc. But the truth is that the transformation of the urban reality is more in the hands of citizens than that of the technology itself as a product, a mere consumable and business object. It depends on the citizens' creativity as it continues to find new solutions to new and old problems in the city, those that are feasible due to the infinite possibilities of choice. We understand creativity as the ability that citizens have as individuals to capture and transform reality, by generating and expressing new ideas. According to Florida (2009), inasmuch as the citizens acquire the ability to make this become their way of life, one can envisage that new possibilities to create and recreate their living environment will emerge, improving people's living conditions and coexistence.

4. CONCLUSIONS

According to Freire, during the last two decades, information and communication technologies are responsible for a radical change that is not limited to technological innovation but accompanied by profound socio-economic and cultural transformations and the emergence of a new paradigm that we could identify as "digital culture" (2010, p.23). Furthermore, according to the same author, the contemporary city can no longer be understood without the technology and practices of the digital culture it generates. The models of urban management cannot remain on the sidelines of these social changes (Freire, 2010, p.71).

Therefore, we can see how a new concept of the city starts being clearly described on the horizon. In contrast to the stable city, a new urban condition emerges because of the citizens' knowledge and actions in order to organize singular collectives for the self-building of their spaces for living. In such a way, public spaces are being returned to the citizens, sensitized and motivated into action by seeking pleasure in working together.

We could speak of a hybrid city that is technologically "connected" and potentially "open" for all to participate. This model city stimulates citizens' creativity and the ability of professionals to undertake initiatives and lead unconventional projects that emerge from "below". These are initiatives outside predetermined plans that not only lead public institutions but citizens advised by professionals who use the new tools in the development of interactive processes. These tools constitute the citizens' educational tools that allow them to undertake a new learning process instead of doing the same as before. In such a way, the citizens start to act differently, to generate new ideas and undertake new adventures for pleasure. This is how creative processes are initiated, by means of decisive actions that transform the environment around us.

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