

Thoughts on the Sustainable Design Medium of Urban Communities Within Information and Telecommunication Technologies

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Abstract

The rapid development of informational accessibility, virtual commutability, and their impacts on cities are becoming parts of the very core of concerns of contemporary urban design theories and methodologies. The level of access to the new means of cybermobility is becoming a formative factor for socio-spatial gradients and demographic patterns in urban and suburban settings. While the new hyper drive towards the ubiquitous virtual mobility is becoming the dominant mode of our being, it is exposing disparate consequences to cultural experiences, economic conditions, and socio-spatial networks of communities. The paper is devoted to elaborate the transformational role of cybernomadic experiences on social interaction for a resilient design of urban communities. The ultimate goal is to identify the applicability of new technological opportunities to empowering the urban poor and finding out the challenges facing urban design territories. The paper also reflects on Jane Jacobs' urban vision for the future and its specific lens.

Keywords

Urban planning, placemaking, cybernomadism, virtual mobility, Jane Jacobs

By creating cities, we create ourselves. When we despoil our cities, we despoil ourselves. Our most cherished memories will henceforth generate the poison of regret, of irretrievable loss, even of hatred of what we prized most. We then flee from the world and from ourselves. A beautiful village, a beautiful house, a beautiful city can become a home for all, a universal home. But if we lose this aim we build our own exile here on earth.

—Lèon Krier, Architect, Architectural Theorist and Urban Planner

The world is running out of places where it can start over.

—Rem Koolhaas, Architect, Architectural Theorist and Urbanist

PROLOGUE

Internet and cell-phones are the quintessential backbone and grid of the network society we live in. As Manuel Castells observes, these devices have specific historical position in altering the capacity of the communication system to be organized around interactive, multimodal, ubiquitous, asynchronous, synchronous, local, regional, and global flows—from few-to-many and from many-to-many (Castells 2009).

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This has resulted in the reinvention of the classical meaning of social networks that were mostly grounded in physical places and specific nodes.

The German social thinker, Jürgen Habermas (1984) in *Communicative Action* presented a novel insight of perceiving the new mode of development. By clarifying and redefining the notion of modernity and modernism in relation to communication and its inevitable magnitude for contemporary societies, he argues that modernity and advanced capitalism as developed during the last century is structured around a particular social order based on the principles of “instrumental rationality” in the sense of being capable and effective at delivering the aspirations of “the system” or those in power. To Habermas, instrumental rationality has enormous limitations to apprehend the importance of the existing communication channels and has hence a clear tendency to ignore the social values, cultural wealth, and identity of localities, “the life world” (Habermas 1984: 355). In other words, the exaggerated confidence of modernism in “instrumental rationality” has led to the overall failure to appraise the importance of reciprocal power discourse of communication flows and procedures as the main amplifiers of social opportunities and the key combatants of injustice, discrimination, and inequality among diverse social strata. Habermas suggests the re-evolvement of counter-hegemonic and horizontal discursive actions between “system” and “life world”, espousing a “communicative rationality” that has the practice-based possibilities to create a community life in sync with progressive ideals; an open society more present and alive based on optimal transparency and democratic principles of government (Habermas 1998). Habermas, however, does not deny the fact that vigorous strategic involvements and supports through a long term social policy are needed to eradicate the existing communication inefficiency between haves and have-nots.

There is a growing concern confronting modern communities with profound unexpected effects

specially targeted towards the most vulnerable social groups in terms of imbalanced power-structure, unfair resource allocation, educational inequality, cultural negligence, and lack of access to technological utilities. Can “communicative rationality” act as a reliable abolisher of colonization of “life world”? Can the new technological means be deployed as a major leveler of the existing social gaps and deficiencies through fair distribution of possibilities? Can information and telecommunication be deployed as a central mediator of equality and justice? How is it possible to design and deploy information and telecommunication technology to function as the accelerator of social and spatial equilibriums?

In this paper, the authors elaborate challenges urban design practitioners are facing to reframe the predicaments of the emerging normative, conceptual, and structural value conflicts. The paper advocates a holistic review of the past urban design theories and methods with aim of approaching ideas supporting a resilient and sustainable flexibility in placemaking. The authors’ further objective is the creation of a new condition through design innovations to evolve the destructuring process towards equilibrium of power and distributive justice of new resources.

MEANING AND VALUE CONFLICTS IN PLACEMAKING

Cities are among the most sensitive generative contexts of information and communication flows, where the roles and impacts of technological means of information and telecommunication are very visible and vital in their functions and features. The rapid augmentations of advanced information and telecommunication technology in almost every moment of our urban life provide a range of divergent but family-resembling design problems that are astonishingly being confronted by very limited consideration. Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (1996) in their seminal study, *Telecommunications*

and the City: *Electronic Spaces, Urban Places*, denounced the neglect of telecommunication and its real position in urban settings, urban design, and urban studies. They link information and telecommunication technology to the challenges related by the invisibility, the technical and private character of information and telecommunication infrastructures. They also point out the conceptual difficulties linked to the emergence of cyberspace as a new urban domain. Graham and Marvin argue that the new technology is challenging the old urban design paradigms based on the industrial city concept. The new technology is also altering the common concepts of space and time. It is however unable to contain the new time-space dimensions that arise with the use of cyberspaces for developing urban activities (Graham and Marvin 1996: 33-43).

Our contemporary cities are experiencing a ground-breaking situation when opportunity to rapid information exchange and accessibility to telecommunication technology is becoming an inevitable necessity of being. Borrowing Derrida's terminology, the new era of global "structurality of structure" is "decentering" our intellectual cosmos (Derrida 1978: 278-294), turning our perspectives towards unidentified horizons, towards multinodals of power, that can likely be the sources of our future economic revenues, our cultural values, our system of thinking, the way we interact with the everyday life and the medium we choose to look at the world around us and beyond (Schön, Sanyal, and Mitchell 1999: 18-23). The unexpected consequences of this trend raise contested voices on the indispensable principles of urban policies and associated design actions: how to tackle the socio-technical impacts of information and telecommunication in cities; how to frame the impacts of these ingenious changes on cities; and, how to diffuse new information and telecommunication opportunities in urban placemaking while avoiding social and environmental pitfalls.

Castells (1996) in *The Rise of the Network Society* portrayed a world-wide revolutionary condition in information and telecommunication technologies that since the last few decades has welded its presence to the modern urban life. Networking produced informational cities in interaction with economic, social, cultural, and political adaptation. It created the present patterns of socio-spatial segregations and new structural orders called "dual cities". According to Castells, the emerging revolution in information and telecommunication technology has not "caused" the gap between rich and poor in urban communities, but has just "exacerbated" it (Castells 1999). Castells frames his argument mainly in terms of the cities and contiguous suburban spaces as the primary units of his analyses. He regards city and the adjacent hinterlands as the major subject of social, spatial, and technological changes. He implicitly reflects on the future role of urban designers, planners, and local governments as the most influential facilitators of such profound socio-spatial transformations (Castells 1996; 1999). Castells perceives "informational cities" and their neighboring suburban spaces in need of special care (Castells 1989). He places informational cities on the borderline of dual characteristics, evolving towards a universal urban schizophrenia, entailing severe conflicts of values between parallel spaces and among them between two foremost contradicting ones: between "the spaces of places" and "the spaces of flows".

Thus, people do still live in places. But because function and power in our societies are organized in the space of flows, the structural domination of its logic essentially alters the meaning and dynamic of places. Experience, by being related to places, becomes abstracted from power, and meaning is increasingly separated from knowledge. It follows a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society. The dominant tendency is toward a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aiming at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural

codes. Unless cultural *and physical* bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading toward life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into different dimensions of a social hyperspace. (Castells 1996: 428)

It seems that the arising dichotomic conditions and tensional peculiarities between the spaces of places and the spaces of flows are taking over the conventional theory of social class struggles of the industrial era. Castells believes that the new conditions contain contradictory aspects that can be led towards clashes of conflicting values, or adopting the Habermas' expression, and it will lead to "colonization" of spaces of place by spaces of flow. Castells, however, seems hopeful that a supportive policy and an equitable distribution of premises of communication technology as well as innovative design solutions may lead the urban poor, the most disadvantaged citizens to a reorganization of their power structure, their knowledge mobility, and their better awareness of protecting their cultural capital and creativeness. This means that with a discursive vision of sustainable flexibility, with systematic control and rational allocation of resources among citizens, urban designers would gain potentialities to design cities in the framework of a reciprocal, humane, intelligent, and inclusive structure. The new condition brings about numerous imperative design challenges that can revise the ultimate task of urban designers towards the reconciliation of decisive and divergent paths of placemaking values in the future cities. Urban designers have to face, to grasp, and to explore appropriate, unrestrained, and communicative solutions to eliminate the growing structural tensions and struggles between "flows" and "places"; between communities that are poorly equipped/prepared and those privileged social groups with relatively limitless accessibility to the latest super high speed innovations in information transmission and telecommunications; and between place-bond urban localities and non-place-bond de-centered urban realms.

STRUCTURALITY OF THE FUTURE URBAN STRUCTURE

Building cities belong to the polysystem domain of design thinking where the repertoires of heterogeneous cultures, techniques, texts, and contexts correlate with each other and shape complexes of socio-spatial processes and entities. Cities are the largest and most sophisticated structures that have ever been shaped by humankind (Wegener 1990: 12-16). An increasing number of the world population are born, live, and die in cities. Cities that accommodated about 200 million people or less than 10% of the world's population in 1900, abide now more than 3.5 billion people or over 50% of the world's population. It is predicted that by 2050, cities would be the places of 6.4 billion people or over 70% of the world's inhabitants.

Cities are the most sensitive recipients and leading carriers of values and norms of civilizations. They are the vital ideological, cultural, political, economic, social, and technological indicators of societies. Cities take shape through cumulated values and norms; and when values and norms begin to change, the form, meaning, content, identity, and function of cities will be affected as well. Nonetheless, these constantly altering processes should be conceived in a give-and-take manner. Cities are also the vibrant generators of social capitals relentlessly inaugurating new concepts, new meanings, new norms, and new values to human cultures.

Technology in general and communication and information technology in particular have always been among the most influential forces transforming the norms and values of societies. Technology is also among the powerful factors that put their impacts on the design ideals of cities. Due to massive technological innovations and advances on the horizon, the design of cities is foreseen to be highly compound, unique, uncertain, and full of unpredictable value conflicts. Nonetheless, the abilities of cities to adapt to

the prevailing condition and be able to harness the opportunities arising from technological novelties are divergent and their paths are different. The emerging conditions are instigating considerable socio-spatial decompositions and conflicts in the future cities. Simultaneously, new technological outcomes are entailing genuine possibilities unrevealed to conventional urban design theories, methods, and processes of the past Industrial Age.

With the innovations in information and telecommunication technology, a new global convolution of urban design is growing among urban planning and design practitioners, local policymakers, and academia. Many researchers are reconsidering the skills, theories, traditions, and methods of urban placemaking inherited from the industrial era. As urban designers are turning their attentions to quality and sustainability issues of urban life, including the predicament of the holistic texture of cities, they are gaining new knowledge of urban design practice by considering cities as polysystem entities shaped by intensely interwoven networks of processes, products, and organizations (Kazemian 2009).

As a matter of fact, researchers are disclosing the limited role urban designers play and their very tiny control over an exceedingly multifaceted socio-spatial system which they understand only a very small segment of it (Schön 1983: 18-20). As Winograd and Flores convey, designers need to establish a theoretical-ethical basis for looking at what their design outcomes “do”, not just how they “operate” (Winograd and Flores 2004: 4-8; Kazemian 2009).

More than ever before, urban designers are called upon to perform tasks for which they have not been adequately educated and prepared. And even if they get closer with responding to new demands, their professional performance would still be “temporary” and “transitional” just because the design contexts, situations, and practices can be rapidly diverged and contextually inappropriate, that makes an urban design action inherently insecure, uncertain, and unstable

enterprise (Schön 1983: 38-40).

Particularly since the 1990s, information and telecommunication technology has become very powerful agent of contextual changes, deeply ingrained with the functioning of the new type of socio-spatial and politico-economic organizations of cities. Telecommunications and exchange of information in real time have become the main foundation of transformation of cities. Obviously, it is strategically very vital for cities to compete on global scene and fight to survive. Many economic activities are increasingly linked to information processing and transmission or are critically depended upon telecommunication accessibility. The new mode of development is considered to shape the basic infrastructure and core of the current organization of urban economic spaces.

Doubtlessly, over the next decades, the role of urban designers will be redefined in pace with the rapid intervening of technologies and the following reorganization of cities. The significant velocity in the development of the means of telecommunication and information processing in everyday life and in real time as well as in the construction and building design techniques has double-edged influence on the transformation of the established roles, functions, and forms of cities. And without a doubt, the emerging socio-spatial condition, would even add to the obscurity of insufficient task definitions for urban designers. In fact, a brief review of the long path of technological development and its impacts on the transformation of urban settlements, from the ancient to post-industrial ages, gives us a fascinating standpoint to view and envision the future urban changes and their design ideals.

POSTMODERN URBANITY

Preindustrial cities displayed a comparatively moderate level of concentration of human activities and settlements around the central market places.

During the industrial stage of capital accumulation, cities grew so far to form new points of concentration outside their central business districts (CBD) and outward the medieval walls. Their structural settings—land use patterns—continued to be separated by specific functions into several zones: residential, commercial buildings, recreation, transportation, and industrial. They expanded far beyond the conventional city boundaries towards areas called suburbia or urban sprawl.

Since four decades ago, a networking, often polycentric form of absorption of nubs and hubs has gradually appeared. The new trend is considered as a different emerging pattern of urbanity and city form. The phenomenon is differently named by different researchers as: “Post-Industrial City” (Bell 1973), “Informational City” (Castells 1989), “Edge City” (Garreau 1991), “Network City” (Batten 1995), “City of Bits” (Mitchell 1995), “Postmodern City” (Dear 2000), “Splintering City” (Graham and Marvin 2001), “Multinodal City” (Oswald, Baccini, and Michaeli 2003), “Metapolis” (Ascher 2004), and many more. This stage of urban transformation and technological jump began in the early years of the 1970s and as is still going on. A new overall paradigm shift became a matter of serious consideration through the legitimacy crisis of the Project of Modernity that Charles Jencks (Jencks 1987: 9-24) symbolically declared its end when on July 15, 1972 in St. Louis, Missouri several blocks of the Pruitt-Igoe urban scheme, constructed according to the most progressive ideals of CIAM (Congr s Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne/ International Congresses of Modern Architecture), leveled to the ground by dynamite (see Figure 1). Coincidentally, the legitimacy crisis of modernity followed by the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil embargo of 1973 entailed a sudden energy shortage worldwide. At the same time, the decisive invention of microchips in

microelectronic technology in 1973 began to revolutionize the speed and quality of recording, generating, and transmitting information data. It was also in 1973 that Daniel Bell introduced the concept of the “post-industrial society” to define the radical shifting from the industrial mode of production to a higher level, post-modern, and knowledge-based development. It is believed that the years 1972-1973 can be seen as the turning juncture of the industrial organization in the western countries from industrial mode of production to a higher mode of development; to a post-industrial and post-Fordism or flexible mode of capital accumulation (Kazemian 1997). The new information and telecommunication technology and as known, “the heartland technology”, was established in 1969 with the purpose to mobilize research resources from American top universities. As Castells states, Internet was born from an unlikely formula: big science, military research, and libertarian culture (Castells 1996).

The new information and communication technology while is shrinking the world and making it very small, it is also changing the function, size, form, concept, and perceived meaning and characteristic of cities worldwide. Many cities are becoming much larger, more crowded, more diversified, more individualized, more sophisticated, and more intelligent communities that are connecting to each other through networks. The emerging cities are changing from industrial cities, metropolises, and megalopolises of today into globally connected multinodal networks of metroplexes and metapolises of tomorrow. The unique dynamic forces behind the ongoing transformations are small networks of individuals empowered by the new information and telecommunications technologies. These individuals are competing and collaborating with each other for new opportunities globally. The United Nations Human Development Report 2001 demonstrated that:



Figure 1. Demolition of the Gold Medal Winning Housing Project: Pruitt-Igoe, Designed by the Architect of the World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki. Photo Courtesy of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

People all over the world have high hopes that new technologies will lead to healthier lives, greater social freedoms, increased knowledge and more productive livelihoods. The 20th century's unprecedented gains in advancing human development and eradicating poverty came largely from technological breakthroughs. In the network age, every country needs the capacity to understand and adapt global technologies for local needs. Policy, not charity, will determine whether new technologies become a tool for human development everywhere. (UNDP 2001: 15)

As Thomas Friedman (2007) reflected, the new process is not only going to be driven by more individuals but also by a much more diverse group of individuals, people with every color of the human rainbow. People with basic education or skill, with sufficient computer literacy, and with an affordable laptop connectable to the net and ideally from a prosperous city, can join the game (Friedman 2007: 14-22). It is no need to emigrate to an advanced western country in order to succeed if ones' freedom is not threatened by backward tyrannical regimes. One may play the game from anywhere in any third places, any hot corners, any I-places. In fact, information and telecommunication technology and its rapid spread can be used as a powerful weapon in the hands of deprived citizens to fight for fairness, against

political corruptions, against the wide-spreading embezzlements and oppressions. Through social media, people can now shake the trembling ground of such states.

Creation of new "social media" and "social networks" is now done online from a home or a specific hot spot, a Wi-Fi place or from an I-Place using the latest digital media and technology. This is where the new sociability emerges—a sort of combination of networked, nomadic-cyber-mobile individualism connected into virtual webs—with weak and strong links amongst individuals and groups. Are urban planners and designers aware of such empowering possibilities? Are we perceptive enough to (re)deploy the enormous capacities the new technology offers? Is not it time to think proactively, to step down on earth and break apart design barriers of the past?

ANOTHER LENS ON JANE JACOBS

Some of the leading ideas and discussions in the Global Age of Cities and rapid urban development have and are still associated with cities and their different futures: the concept of global cities (Sassen

2005), rise of the creative class and the urban crisis (Florida 2003; 2017), the network society (Castells 1996), city of bits (Mitchell 1995), splintering urbanism (Graham and Marvin 2001), planetary urbanization (Brenner 2014), and ultimately the triumph of the city (Glaeser 2011) as well as well-tempered city (Rose 2016) and infinite suburbia (Berger and Kotkin 2017). These discourses see a plethora of structural transformations that Jane Jacobs was not able to neither see nor predict and that go beyond her complexity of cities which is ultimately bounded to specific places. The new trends and emerging patterns are either in place, happening or in the continuous “becoming”; creativity is becoming a more important part of the economy as cities hinge on creative people, i.e. they need to attract creative people’s human capital which generates growth and therefore the cities are engines of growth and economic prosperity when they exemplify this “creativity”.

What we are witnessing now is a major flow of social and economic dynamics of the information age, virtual places as well as physical ones, and interconnection by means of telecommunication links as well as by pedestrian circulation and mechanized transportation systems, patterns beyond any vision Jane Jacobs could have had. The new network society becomes structured around networks instead of individual actors and works through a constant flow of information through technology. This is closely connected to the ongoing miniaturization of electronics, the commodification of bits, and the growing domination of software over materialized form. The emphasis on the formation of cross-border dynamics through which cities begin to form strategic transnational networks is seen in the case of global cities; the dynamics and processes that get territorialized are global. The celebration of the city becomes an impassioned argument; city’s importance and splendor, humanity’s greatest creation, and our best hope for the future are bestowed with the key role

in addressing the important issues in these challenging and crises ridden times. Ultimately, the cities will be those battlegrounds where the environmental, economic, political, and social challenges of the twenty-first century will be addressed and ultimately fought (or lost). Jane Jacobs knew that but within a different scope and perspective than we are faced with today.

Over the years, Jacobs has been called many things: an urban visionary, an anti-planner, an amateur economist, a geographer, a community activist, feminist, architectural critic, and a radical centrist. She was foremost an urbanist that understood the value of the cities at that time. In a 2005 article for *Metropolis* magazine, urban theorist Joel Kotkin introduced the ephemeral city as one that has become “playpens for the idle rich, the restless young, and tourists” (Kotkin 2005). He defined it as a “new kind of urban place, populated largely by nonfamilies and the nomadic rich”. The ephemeral city “feeds off the wealth generated elsewhere while providing a stage where the affluent classes can expend their treasure most fashionably”, a marked contrast to the well-functioning city Jane Jacobs described in her seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in which Boston’s North End was featured as a prominent example of a thriving, livable neighborhood (Jacobs 1961/1992). What is important to note here is that this “ideal” city district, neighborhood unit, humanistic model of dwelling and third place has transformed into something quite different. The transition from Jacobs’ diversity, social mobility, and social capital to Kotkin’s monoculture of transience and wealth was primarily effected by infrastructural change and changes that Graham and Marvin talked about but also changes that go beyond the place-based complexity of Jacobs’s cities. It also has to do with urban demographic shifts, the nature of business establishments, new urban geographies, the decline of middle class families, the changes in patterns of living, racial diversity, erosion of social

capital, technological changes, and other things. The most salient issue today for the neighborhood that Jane Jacobs elaborated is the erosion of the very elements that made up neighborhood vitality: diversity, upward mobility, and social capital.

That notwithstanding, ultimately, Jacobs, Florida, Sassen, Glaeser, and others are in many respects complementary urban thinkers though with very different lenses on macro, meso, and micro complexity of cities. "Cities are thoroughly physical things", Jacobs wrote once. Her ability to influence how cities are perceived remains unrivaled. But Glaeser, Mitchell, Florida, and others add a compelling new component to that perception and go beyond the nostalgia and romanticizing about diverse, child-friendly, dense city neighborhoods. Their forceful and systems thinking case for increased complexity of the city beyond the "place centric" obsessions and focus but rather people-technology-infrastructure-global flows redevelopment efforts should provoke serious discussions among academics, practitioners, and policymakers for years to come.

CITY JIGSAW OF URBAN SPACES AND PUZZLED PLACES

"Urbanism is the study of cities—their geographic, economic, political, social and cultural environment, and the imprint of all these forces on the built environment" (this is a perfectly adequate Wikipedia definition of urbanism and finally let us not be afraid of the source!). Urbanism is generally defined (in other dictionaries, books, scientific papers as well as amongst the professionals' theorizing and practicing it) exactly as the "study of cities, but different fields focus on different aspects. In urban planning and architecture (and urban design), urban form and structure are the main focus". This is often forgotten, especially by the critics of urbanism (those wanting the profession to extend to fields above and beyond its

duty and capability). The authors offer this definition of urbanism and it is up to you to take it or leave it: the study of the processes and patterns of urban & social change in cities, towns, and neighborhoods which are the product of architecture, urban design, town planning, and urban development. What the authors also currently have at play is a sort of, as they define it here, four main streams of urbanism at work (reflected as urban design paradigms): quotidian (mass produced, regulated, formal & schematic, market and demand oriented, naturalistic and pragmatic and car-driven), contemporaneous (profit-market and torrent-design oriented, highly avant-garde and retail & consumer driven, utopian and futuristic), neotraditional (historical, place-making, romantically nostalgic, code-based, people centered and market & sustainability driven), and dystopian (everyday, unconventional, ad-hoc, unregulated & wild, splintered and commonplace, ordinary and asylomic). The contemporary one is often branded as re- or post-urbanism. Doug Kelbaugh sees three contemporary urbanism/urban design paradigms: post/re-urbanism, new urbanism, and everyday urbanism (Kelbaugh 2008). Contemporaneous we find is probably the most interesting and is one which seeks to transcend all borders uniting: urbanism + transformation and urbanism + globalization and urbanism + medialization and marketization. As Arjen Mulder observes that "the city is no longer seen as a clearly localizable spatial unit, but has transformed into an urban field, a collection of activities instead of a strict, stable and sound material structure" (Mulder, Brookman, and Brouwer 2002).

This strand of thought & practice sees the cities of today as organisms that are in a state of continuous decomposition, but are also continually reorganizing and rearranging themselves, expanding and shrinking and creating a new language as they go along, as opposed to the traditional view of cities that have stability, coherence, adaptability, reference, history, timeless constancy, and a strict vocabulary. This is

why we have this dichotomy between, as some observers call it (drawing from the world of cinematography) the urbanism of *The Truman Show* and the urbanism of *Blade Runner*. The representations of Los Angeles (as endless suburb; a physical embodiment of postmodern/post-Fordist decentralization) and New York (as high density modernist metropolis) both have utopian and dystopian elements. If we look what is going on globally, especially in China and Dubai for example, we might just arrive to the real *Blade Runner* film setting. Is that what awaits us in the future?

The dark side of this contemporary strand is its “metaphysical” core—the “generic city”—a meta-torrent sprawling metropolis of repetitive buildings centered on a massive anchor or transport link and, as Lebeus Woods pointed out recently on his Blog, “inhabited by a tribe of global nomads with few local loyalties”. For Nicolai Ouroussoff and Edward Willet, the greater evil is: “the growing use of high-end architecture as a tool for self-promotion which reduces cities to theme parks of architectural tchotchkes that mask an underlying homogeneity” (Ouroussoff 2008; Willet 2008). The massive constructions in the rapid-growth global capitals of tomorrow—Dubai, China is testimony to that—are outpaced by the haphazard destruction of tomorrow’s forgotten global hinterlands and the massive urbanization (50% of the planet’s inhabitants live in cities) which creates the horrendous (and unsolvable) byproducts of segregated satellites and forgotten slums. There seems to be a strange desire on the part of post-urbanists to create an urban fabric with some delusion of understanding the “larger context”, not the immediate one, but some metaphysical one. Their building and urban complexes are freed from nearly all stylistic constraints and when deployed in historic and cultural (existing) context, they look ridiculous—some sorts of alien ships from *War of the Worlds* invading mother earth. That notwithstanding, the sad fact is that exactly those “star-architects” and

the contemporary post-urbanism they represent is/are the ones provoking the real debate on the future of our cities and the future of our urban form, as old-traditional-European (new) urbanism, with all the good it’s doing, unfortunately does not hold those answers. Architects and urban designers such as Koolhaas and even Gehry, Piano, Hadid, Holl, Libeskind, and some others, are “one of the few professionals in the field willing to face the crisis of the contemporary city—from its growing superficiality to its deadening sterility—without flinching!” (Ouroussoff 2008).

More than a decade has passed since Rem Koolhaas made his famous claim that “if there is to be a ‘new urbanism’, it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence but [on] the staging of uncertainty”. “To survive”, Koolhaas continued, “urbanism will have to imagine a new newness” (Koolhaas 1995). Even though the concept of “new newness” is a par excellence nonsense, urbanism will indeed have to respond to the call of the wild uncertainty, complexity, and insecurity on all levels. It will have to address the complex and multi-layered fabric of the contemporary city and the system of forces that continuously reconfigure it, and how to intervene through effective and sensitive proposals. But, at the same time, it is crucial (and we see no alternative to this) for (real) urbanism to continue to respect the timeless, well-functioning traditional fabric of the cities and to learn from its character and quality which so well define spaces but more importantly, create places.

True civic design has to compose and assemble the city through the public realm: squares & streets, defining the organic growth of civic DNA tissue by architecture that responds to its environment by compatible vocabulary and grammar, not by fragmented, event-flowing shapes out of time, out of place. It will have to balance on the thin line between what is possible and what is not. The fulcrum of the coming events for urbanism will still be global climate

change and rapid increase in population, the exploding middle class consuming tribes. Balanced with that is the need to answer to the possibilities and pitfalls of innovative and contemporary approaches to city making and not to be stuck in stoned present and only traditional approaches. If we are to dwell in a hopeful and sustainable present and have any kind of a fair shot at the future (urban) survival, we need to think (of what we call here) Triple “M”—repairing the “mutilated” urbanism, avoiding the “mutational” one, and working towards devising a “mature” one.

PLACEMAKING FUTURES & BEYOND: URBAN DESIGN AND CITY MARKETING FOR A NEW AGE

Urbanism (urban planning & design) is the study of cities—their economic, political, social, and cultural environments, structures, developments, and processes within. It is also the practice of planning, arranging, designing, and creating human communities. It is therefore a discipline that is here for the long haul. Notions of time as an important dimension are essential. Everything that is accomplished now is done for the future, as yesterday is not here, today is already gone and we only have tomorrow. This moment, here and now, is not the sole factor and urbanism cannot be judged only by its present results.

The key to its success lies in the long run and in the understanding of complexity and realities on the ground, having in mind a realistic vision of the future. Urbanism is a historical, sequential, and extremely complex discipline. Robert Fishman points out that the “urban past is also an integral part of the urban future and that the traditional vocabulary (that new urbanism uses) of urban design that gave identity and permanence to our cities throughout history, is much part of our future as the urban past”. Major challenges that face our cities today are associated with social, economic, and urban inequality, where planning problems become often connected with uneven

development, decay and deterioration of the quality of urban life (social, ethnic, and economic stratification, wasteful consumption of resources, transportation congestion, and environmental degradation). In a number of places, this is linked together with disinvestment in older urban centers and cores, which presents a destructive and unsustainable combination. On the other hand, the current processes of globalization, glocalization, commercialization, and medialization are via the fascinating new forms of the visual and marketing energies transforming and re-urbanizing cities across the globe. The challenges that will shape the outcome of our cities are experienced through the wave of exploding population growth and economic prosperity where consequences on the environment and on long-term social well-being of their inhabitants become primary. The ability of urban centers globally to cope with the impacts of high energy demands and high fuel costs may call for a new urban design approach, a change to the concepts and layout of cities as we know them. One of the main focuses of urban design deals primarily with the design of high quality places, management of public space environment or the public realm domain, and the way these places are experienced and used by people. The urban renewal plans are part of a new strategy that all global metropolises are going through and a bigger inner metamorphosis of the city. This new refurbishment goes hand in hand with strategies for branding the city and preparing it for the “creative era and creative class”.

In an age shaped by globalization and the ascendancy and solidification of network society and new innovative technologies, the creative knowledge economy becomes the most important economic sector. And in Richard Florida’s spectrum, it is the creative, highly educated, and talented workforce—the creative class—that decides the economic destiny of cities with its technology, tolerance, and talent (Florida 2003). This new class is also extremely mobile and savvy about its choice of

city and the choice of meeting places and webs that make up social networks. Urban Design, Architecture and Management & Marketing schemes are helping cities in the West, East, everywhere, for example in Europe cities like Stockholm or Helsinki or Oslo or Hamburg to compete with other international metropolises—London, Barcelona, Berlin—to lure creatives with culturally interesting surroundings and the quality of its urban habitat, especially attractive post urbanist schemes of starchitecture (“flagship buildings”), culture and art, and nodes of highly vibrant public realms.

I-PLACES AND CYBER NOMADIC MOBILITY—NEW DESIGN EXPERIENCES

What Internet has created now globally is a new kind of urban overlay, never experienced before. This rapid change in technology has brought acceleration in adaptive innovation and experimentation where a combination of things has made this possible: new technologies, changing cultural taste, increased consumerism, medialization of society, rise of the middle class, and erosion of traditional values. William Mitchell predicted this some 13 years ago in his *E-topia* where “familiar forms of the home, office, street, neighborhood, downtown, and region were going to co-exist with new virtual spaces and digital network exchanges built with high broad band width wireless and fiber-optic telecommunications systems, all linked by ‘increasingly indispensable software’ interfaces” (Mitchell 1999: 2-10). What emerges as a conundrum is the relationship among the physical sociability, privatization of public space, inter-personal alienation, transformation of third spaces, and increasing human-computer interaction. As Jaron Lanier, one of the virtual reality and Internet pioneers duly notes, “the whole point was to make the Internet and the World Wide Web as a more creative, expressive, empathetic, and interesting world; it was not to escape it” (Lanier 2010: 24-43). This can

certainly be linked to the notion and representation of the “third place” concept. The “third place” was formulated and described by Ray Oldenburg as a social space on neutral ground, a public and democratic agora where people can engage in community interaction (Oldenburg 1999). In urban planning & design movement such as New Urbanism, this is often addressed with a desire to design spaces—from front porches to main streets, from coffee shops and bookstores to public squares and local pubs—that will change public life. Third places have manifested themselves as important nodes for civil society, democracy, civic engagement, and establishing feelings of a sense of place and building social capital. Nowadays, they seem to be replaced, more and more, by, or at least challenged by what we call here “I-Places” (see Figure 2), a pseudo concept of third place built around virtual social webs and online networking, but more grounded in physical presence in proximity of consumption. It turns out that we all want the same thing, a respite in our lives, to connect with our friends and family in a setting that is comfortable, accessible, affordable, and easy to use.

Even though one type of traditional social networking is giving way to a new “connected” way of communication, this is not going to happen without serious consequences. Oldenburg’s original view of the “third place” was centered on association and sociability. The new way is the same but via screens and through global networks where physical proximity and notion of place grounding, sense of place and image of the place, the place identity, the locality have no real role to play. In fact, the original role of the third place, as Oldenburg defined it, was to facilitate social discourse, to balance power structure, and to ease conversations with friends and other individuals who may not be easy to meet outside of the third place contexts. This is not happening so much in the new I-places of wireless social networking, and if it is, it has a completely different meaning, context, and purpose.



Figure 2. I-Places: Typical Starbucks American Environment Typical in Western Society Countries but Spreading Worldwide. Coffee and Free Wi-Fi + Very Little Social Place Contact and Face2face Interaction; Courtesy of Urban Photos 2009.

Oldenburg points out that segregation, isolation, compartmentalization, and sterilization, seem to be the guiding principles of urban growth and urban renewal these days. All of this also goes back to the issues of city and corporate branding, marketing, and middle class consumption. People using their smart devices such as cell-phones, I-Phones, personal digital assistants, I-Pads, and laptop computers want to be connected to Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and other Internet portals. So coffee-shops and other nomadic points of access give them high-speed, wireless connection to the Internet and possibility to consume and enjoy fast food and other products at the same time. All of this allows customers/nomads to access the network from anywhere within such a I-place store. The danger lies in the fact that a I-place, which provides Internet access may create a hollow effect in that the customers are physically present but do not make any social contact with each other, being absorbed by their remote wireless connections and online face-to-face meetings and chats. Some café owners in the US are trying to ameliorate this effect

by staging performance art such as live jazz, R&B, or new age and turning off the Wi-Fi to encourage audience engagement. One thing is clear: for all good and bad reasons and consequences, ubiquitous computing and ambient intelligence are already part of our urban city environments and we have devices that communicate with other intelligent devices, operating in a coordinated way. All of this has consequences on urban form and on our ways of fundamentally rethinking urban personal mobility (Mitchell 2010). In this context, what also seems to set itself as one of the significant aspects today is the complex interaction among infrastructure networks, new information technologies, and emerging new architectural and urban patterns and forms (Haas 2009). One of the key features of many contemporary technologies (and not just those of new media we are experiencing today) is, indeed, their drive towards increasing standardization and commoditization—“globalization” can be seen as naming one, albeit complex, manifestation of this contemporary tendency (Malpas 2008). This also reflects back to architecture, planning, and urban



Figure 3. Post Urbanism: Seattle Public Library by Rem Koolhaas and OMA. Photo by Surrealize, March 19, 2009.

design where we see new forms and even paradigms following these trends, such as post urbanism that has become a global phenomenon.

Post Urbanism is too often an avant-garde, generic urbanism of medialization, of architects' building works of trophy art, buildings in a public realm that are atrophied with little regard to the context around them. The Post-Urbanist city is no longer seen as a clearly localizable spatial unit, but more as a transformative organism, metamorphosing into an urban field; a collection of activities instead of a material structure (Kelbaugh 2008: 41-47); the results are urbanism plus transformation and urbanism plus globalization—or as Arjen Mulder calls it—"Transurbanism" (Mulder et al. 2002). It is a design strategy that allows cities to organize themselves as complex systems, where small local structures incorporate global flows and Internet-media networks (see Figure 3). The influence of the digital media, Internet, and global point of access can be seen in micro as well as macro urban forms, in architecture, city branding, and urbanism.

On the other side of the pendulum, a different paradigm has emerged, Ecological and Landscape

Urbanism. In contrast to post urbanism, architecture and urban design are not the main foci. The view of Ecological Urbanism is that the "fragility of the planet and its resources are an opportunity for speculative design innovations rather than a form of technical legitimation for promoting conventional solutions. It also imagines an urbanism that has the capacity to incorporate and accommodate the inherent conflictual conditions between ecology and urbanism" (Mostafavi and Doherty 2010: 17); so, instead of relying solely on and using only buildings as the medium of design, Landscape Urbanism uses landscapes. That means infrastructure, public space, open space, an approach that is much more comfortable with open-endedness (Waldheim 2006).

All of these paradigms will and are already having consequences for the design of public places and condition of underprivileged people in our cities. All new possibilities that are expected by defenders of New Urbanism, the hybrid securers of Post Urbanism, and the promising ideas of Landscape Urbanism or Ecological Urbanism are offering thoughtful and conscientious design experiences. They may give us a kind of avant-garde or unpredictable sense of freedom

and mobility in form, context, and content. They may also express a post-structural medialized disorder or they may function as indicators of the decentering process of our intellectual universe and power relations (Derrida 1978). They, however so far, could not show any sustainable flexibility with their design remedies to cog the widening socio-spatial gaps which are becoming significant burdens for the disadvantaged communities based on physical place and proximity. The hegemonic power relation of space of flow and the constant struggle for different values and norms among social groups are deforming these good ideas and exposing one social group as being superfluously luxurious, repressive, and arrogant and the other group as conservative, outmoded, out of touch, and no longer relevant in light of modern technology and networking.

Urban designers need to develop new theoretical and methodological tools to grasp the multiple facets of the impacts and potential of new technology in relation to the arising conflicts of values on confronting segments of societies. Understanding the new power relations may support ideas not just as a discursive theoretical stand but being seriously considered as a very method to spot the ties and knots of the complicated networks of social power relations that are decentering from focal institutions to undefined multinodal spaces of flow; were making decisions that are being concentrated and decisive.

CONCLUSIONS

The question of connectivity to information and communication devices is shaping the important essences of our relationships that are communications and exchange of information between people. The convergence of information and communication technology and its diffusion from high-tech and work environments to home, I-places, and mobile locations are visibly transforming the city. The exact nature and extents of ongoing transformations are still obscure

and unpredictable, but there are vibrant indicators telling us about the imminent changes that are historical in proportion, global in dimension, organized through electronic networks mainly in eventful cities.

Cities which are designed on the most premises of modernism of the twentieth century with distinct socio-spatial segregations and concentric space price gradients are reclaiming positions as the major generators and carriers of the emerging changes. Our cities need to be treated with great care and have to be prevented from the design oversights of the 1960s and 1970s. Urban planners and designers who are prime responsible of shaping the future cities need to grasp the consequences of the ongoing huge changes with diagnostic outlooks. They have to ascertain an egalitarian perspective in their daily activities, narratives, dialogues, and projects. They should predict, inspire, support, promote, criticize, and strive to decipher the emerging multifaceted urban design issues with reference to secure and sustainable socio-spatial transformations. They have to evolve and sustain new norms and values and weld these ideals with the most successful design assets and accomplishments of the past. It requires a painstaking imagination, a broad democratic stance, and a far-reaching foresight to reconcile the conflicting values in sync with rapidly changing perceptions, meanings, and events in design processes and outcomes. Designing a desirable, appropriate, and democratic community and generating theories and methods to this end would expect to possess wisdom, knowledge, and capability to grasp and translate the future needs and tendencies as meticulous as possible. A contextually flexible, theoretically rigorous, and methodologically holistic design thinking and practice is needed.

Urban designers are already overwhelmed and embroiled by different conflicts of values, goals, and reasons to augment “sustainable efficiency” with design quality. Urban planners and designers have to

(re)frame the new problems of urban design; they have to solve and maintain solutions in the continuous changing conditions.

The urban design remedies of the past century in form of functional zoning, gentrification, urban renewal, neighborhood unit, mass housing, and urban sprawl have not reduced the socio-spatial problems as were promised but many of them surfaced the ground for new social disparities, cultural neglects, segregations, traffic congestions, resource-wasting, and ecological damages. In spite of the most promising theoretically well-defined solutions that were worked out and advocated by urban designers, they were usually ineffective in reality and were based on instrumental rationality which created new problems (Schön 1983: 10-19). The prevailing optimism towards technology-will-fix solutions overlooked the social, cultural, and environmental significances in urban development agenda. "Urban development" as a mystified and misinterpreted concept was aimed at "urban growth" with inflexible infrastructure for place-bonded lifestyle without particular concern in the hidden risks of such a confusing and ambiguous policy. The consequences of the past technological rationality are striking us now in a boomerang effect, in constant social and ecological turmoil, in form of urban-based social uprisings, juvenile delinquency, terrorism, green house effects, global warming, etc. (Beck 1992: 23-31).

Imaginations and visions on the future cities without technology are not more than utopias in vacuum. We are on the cusp of an incredible era of creativity and innovation from all corners of the world. The new innovations are powerful enough to connect all cultures and knowledge pools together. Colors of skin, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or place of birth will have less to do with individual competence and partaking ability in the global game. It is of utmost importance to find out new communicative channels and networks to stimulate a sustainable flexibility, a

humanistic perspective, a balanced communicative power, and a non-discriminatory urban design approach of the future cities.

Urban design educators have to develop curricula on ethical aspects of design and have to initiate projects with social responsibility as a prior urban planning and design ingredient and requirement. Design practitioners should be trained to develop their intellectual aptitude to look at their own profession with critical eyes and remain inventive and open to new ideas, concepts, models, processes, and technologies. They should gain experience to foresee the impediments of instrumental rationality and the future consequences of their profession in societies. It is a challenging task for urban designers and planners to reconcile different logics, to discover how new technological opportunities can best be diffused, success be achieved, and pitfalls be avoided at the very early stage. Farsightedness in urban design theories and methods with ethical and cultural responsibility are among the very decisive means of building a better future.

Information and telecommunication technology is much more than an agent for the globalization of economy. It can serve as a powerful tool for intellectual and social progress, for sustainable urban development, and for environmentally and user friendly cities. The technology can be used to provide basic services and new impulse for education, health-care, business, and commerce in a relatively economical and flexible way. New technological applications can be used to the advantage of those places or social groups with low or limited access to services by promoting a more sustainable and balanced development. In addition, the diffusion of information and telecommunication technology involves a great potential for social empowerment and developments. This implies empowering individuals and groups from the bottom-up, establishing a true dialogue among people, allowing ordinary citizens to become active participants rather than passive

recipients of information. As Thomas Friedman (2007) wrote, we need to act, learn, and perform together and in advance. Instead of waiting for a future to come, we have to contemplate the new risks and possibilities, to envisage the beasts and beauties of the new technology when designing the future cities.

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