

Connecting Cities – an Urban Media Platform for Co-Creating our Cities

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ABSTRACT: The Connecting Cities Network reflects on the increasing worldwide presence of large-format digital media façades in the public space and examines their function as cultural and their unique communicative elements. In contrast to the commercial use of these urban media façades, we establish them as platforms on which citizens can engage in participatory city-making processes and also exchange – within the city as much as between cities.

1. INTRODUCTION

From a media artistic and an architectural perspective media façades represent an interesting medium and provide a range of possibilities for artistic experimentation as well as social and cultural exchange.

The EU funded project Connecting Cities (CC), launched in 2012, could build on fertile ground laid out by Public Art Lab Berlin through initiating the Media Façades Festival in 2008 and 2010. The media façades were transformed into local stages and thus opened a global window for cultural and societal processes to create a dialogue and connect the local public virtually with the other places throughout Europe.

As a world-wide initiative the Connecting Cities Network brings together a diversified group of cities and institutions with different urban media environments: some of them develop artistic content for permanent large media architectures like the Ars Electronica Center, Medialab-Prado in Madrid, the Digital Gallery at the SESI Building in Sao Paolo, others work temporarily with an already existing infrastructure of mainly commercially used screens or with projection walls like m-cult in Helsinki, FACT Liverpool and Public Art Lab in Berlin. There are also Connecting Cities partners like Quartier de Spectacle in Montreal and the Federation Square in Melbourne who represent an excellent permanent showcase of how to use these urban media environments for participatory city-making.

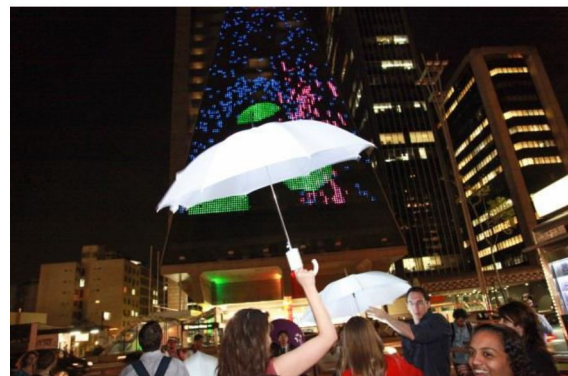


Figure 1: 'Dancing in the Rain' by The Constitute & Pfadfinderei, during Germany+Brasil 2013 in Sao Paolo, Digital Gallery@SESI Building

THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF URBAN MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS

In the framework of a 4-years artistic research programme, the CC partners linked their research and diverse artistic activities to investigate the creative potential of urban screens and media façades.

They worked on questions like:

What are the communicative and socio-cultural potentials of these often only commercially used urban media infrastructures? How to provoke social and political action through artistic intervention using urban screens and media façades?

How to give the public space back to citizens and enable interaction, communication, critical reflection of information, and set actions? How to use these media within public space to connect individuals, institutions, groups and even cities?

Connecting Cities investigates these research questions from different perspectives:

The **'Networked City'** (2013) focuses on interlinking the urban media infrastructures by opening them as real-time windows between the cities and connecting local neighborhoods beyond national borders.

The **'Participatory City'** (2014) investigates community building through participatory involvement by engaging the citizens in the collaborative creation of their urban environment and encouraging them to use urban media. The digital infrastructures are extended to the neighbourhoods by providing a digital stage to directly communicate and debate in the public space.

In 2015 the **'In/Visible City'** explores the visualization of invisible data streams and open data generated through sensor and data networks on urban media environments. As a result, invisibly generated data becomes visible through artistic scenarios and creates an awareness of the digitalization of our society.



Figure 2: 'Master/Slave Invigilator System' by Jeremy Bailey, CCN / Networked City 2013

CONNECTING CITIES – A NETWORK FOR DIGITAL PLACE-MAKING

One of the main focuses of Connecting Cities is the exchange and circulation of artistic and socially relevant contents. This mainly happens during the Connecting Cities Events where a broad public audience can interact with the commissioned artworks.

This city-to-city interventions connect the CCN infrastructure of media façades, urban screens and projections in real-time and each selected artwork will be shown during at least

one Connecting Cities Event and will be embedded in local framework programmes, like the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz.

The selected artists respond to this framework by reconfiguring layers of digital and physical space, and by emphasizing the role of the city as platform for social and cultural interaction. The rhetoric of flow and dematerialisation associated with the Internet in the Nineties is now being turned into a call for hybrid place-making and meaningful reappropriation of the public sphere. A rediscovery of the condition of citizenship in front of a shrunken globe, a planet that we can grasp simultaneously, all at one glance in an ever-changing configuration of networked tangible and intangible spots. Some of the artworks adopt distribution across space as creative methodology and emphasize the prolongation of the space for encounter beyond the physical or digital dimensions.

These urban media environments demand new forms of curating and artistic productions. Starting from the site-specific context, the challenge is how to create access for human interaction and trigger new forms of participation, engagement and bottom-to-top activism. Which interfaces and devices can enable a direct exchange between local scenes and translocal communities? How to develop socially relevant scenarios in a playful and at the same time critical way?

The Connecting Cities Network supports the idea of the public space as a space for creativity, visibility and exchange of culture. In the context of the debate about smart cities, the potentials of media façades and urban screens are redefined and opened as platforms for the co-creation of our cities through bottom-up strategies.

Internationally Connecting Cities is recognized as an important initiative and attracts new partners. Currently the following cities are part of the constantly growing network:

Aarhus | Berlin | Bogotá | Brussels | Dessau | Dortmund | Frankfurt | Guangzhou | Helsinki | Hong Kong | Istanbul | Jena | Linz | Liverpool | London | Madrid | Marseille | Melbourne | Montreal | Moscow | New York | Pula | Riga | Ruhr | Saarbrücken | Sao Paulo | Sapporo | Sydney | Utrecht | Vienna | Wuhan | York | Zagreb | Zaragoza.

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in cooperation with Ars Electronica Futurelab Linz – Medialab-Prado Madrid – FACT Liverpool – Videospread Marseille – iMAL Brussels – Riga 2014 – BIS (Body Process Arts Association) Istanbul – m-cult Helsinki – Media Architecture Institute Vienna – Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb – University of Aarhus – MUTEK & Quartier des Spectacle / Montreal.



Figure 3: Quartier de Spetacle, Montreal during mutek 2013

CV – SUSANA POP

Susana Pop is an urban media curator and producer based in Berlin. In 2003 she founded Public Art Lab (PAL) as a network of experts

from the fields of urban planning, new media arts and IT. Susana Pop is interested in creative city-making through urban media art projects that catalyse communication processes in the public space. From 2004-2007 she initiated a lot of nomadic art projects like Mobile Museums (2004), Mobile Studios (2006). Together with the urbanist Mirjam Struppek she investigated the cultural potential of urban screens and media facades through the Media Facade Festivals Berlin 2008 and Europe 2010. The Innovation Forum Urban Screens 2011 together with the German Ministry for Science and Education and the Connecting Cities Network 2012-16 are artistic research projects which investigate the topic in the context of the social smart cities. She also speaks worldwide at conferences and workshops and is a lecturer at several universities like Bauhaus University Weimar, University of Potsdam and Leuphana University / Institute of Urban and Cultural Area Research. In 2012 Susana Pop co-edited and published the book 'Urban Media Cultures'.

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