

Should we explore Open Urbanism through Service Science lenses?

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Abstract ;

The global deployment of a civic tech of visual collective intelligence for open urbanism could have transformative effects on the development of new kinds of services within territories.

The first international case studies seem to show that replacing traditional top-down approaches with open innovation approaches that integrate civil society and stakeholders in the reflections and decisions allows to configure spaces more adapted to the ecological and social transition.

The emerging model is that citizens, users and stakeholders think first of all about the uses and professions that the places to come will have to allow, and so they place the creation of new services, of which they see themselves as designers, actors and users, before urban morphologies.

Should we replace the maxim stated by the father of Modernism Louis Sullivan in 1896, "**Form Always Follows function 1**" by a maxim more adapted to cities and sustainable territories "**Form Follows Sustainable Services**"?

#1 Introduction : Transformation of a process

Intention of the Unlimited Cities action-research (2010)

To invent a disruptive digital tool, accessible to civil society and all stakeholders, capable of taking the sector of territorial transformations into the complex and collaborative 21st century. This sector is currently frozen by top-down political decisions and the confidentiality imposed by land investors (see UN Habitat report ²).

Description of the tool

A collective intelligence platform, collaborative, fun, easy to use; allowing collages on photos of spaces to be transformed, with argued comments. A civitech that can be deployed by public and private actors, NGOs and activists, not online, but in public spaces to meet people, including the most marginalized.

Systemic impact

As soon as it was presented at the international innovation festival « Futur en Seine » in Paris in 2010, political actors and journalists measured the potentially transformative effect of this tool on existing processes, by allowing the real involvement of civil society through a distributed intelligence approach, transparent and producing qualitative data to inform decisions.

Author of the initiative

The architectural firm & non-academic laboratory Host ³, whose transdisciplinary activities were divided between architectural projects, urban planning, research and the design/development of digital tools for collective intelligence to integrate civil society and stakeholders in projects.



Using the Unlimited Cities civitech in Taiwan, Switzerland, USA and France

#2 Project Development : Share resources, provide services

First implementations

A few months after the presentation of the prototype in Paris, the HOST laboratory agency is invited to Japan and then to Brazil for presentations of the tool in the context of the cities of the future and smart cities. Then first orders arrive from France for dynamic regional cities (Rennes 2012, Montpellier 2013) as well as for medium-sized cities in decline (Évreux 2013). Last deployment by HOST in Switzerland in the Canton of Geneva (2021)

International requests

Conferences ⁴, articles by researchers ⁵, online documentation, Wikipedia ⁶ ; the international sharing of the concept, experiments and first results popularize the tool at the same time as the notions of open government and civictechs emerge. Designers and local governments were interested in using the tool in Europe, Asia, America and Africa.

Sharing resources and skills

The Host lab team is realizing that civictech users in different contexts are developing new practices and making the tool evolve. The 7 Billion Urbanists Association was therefore created in 2014 to bring together users, collect the diversity of experiences and facilitate the provision of new knowledge through a information common good.

Implementation of contributory engineering

The move from Paris to Geneva in 2019 following the meeting with the Swiss Free-It Foundation network allows to conceptualize an efficient environment based on Copyleft for contributory software development. It is also the moment when the different services to be created around the collaborative transformation of territories are considered with the 7 Billion Urbanists network. The Open Urbanism Foundation is registered in 2021 to guarantee the initial intention of free software beyond its future collaborative transformations. The foundation starts by creating the Beta version of the principles.



Demo workshops and projects with Unlimited Cities between 2012 and 2021

#3 Achievements: Out-of-the-box responses to the complexity of contemporary challenges

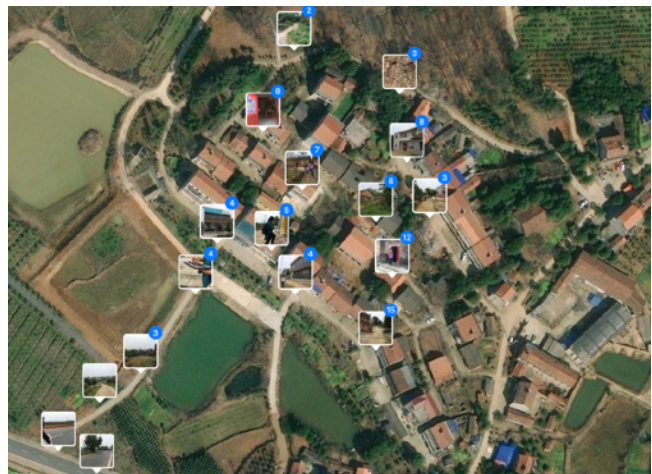
The metropolitan scale Grenoble France, Architects & Planners: Host lab

- Problem posed by the metropolis and the transport operator: a bus line with a high service capacity fails to find its public despite heavy financial investments.
- Briefing given to the pilots of the open urbanism approach: rely on the Unlimited Cities approach with the population to improve the visibility and comfort of the bus stops in order to increase the bus line's frequentation.
- Result of the approach: the bus stops are not seen as the problem by the respondents. The diversity of the inhabitants and users brought to light many criticisms of the public spaces and demands for improvement that cannot be detected by the classical analyses and methods that separate planning and mobility. These demands can be addressed in a comprehensive way by articulating them around the relationship of people and organizations to the outdoor spaces of the metropolis. Improving these outdoor spaces, making them more livable in winter as well as in summer, means allowing people to spend more time there and to enjoy themselves. In a more livable urban landscape, where people can stay, buses can provide a desirable mobility service where the private car loses its role of protection against an inhospitable public space.
- Link to Service Science: residents and users have proposed living spaces animated by many service ideas not filled by public and private organizations.

Village scale

China Hubei Village x0009 between Wuhan and Xianning, Architects: Mu Wei Advanced Architecture Lab

- Problem posed by the central government in Beijing: the urban exodus in the big cities leads to the decline of life and activity in the countryside, despite the investments to develop tourism.
- The brief given to the developer of the open urban planning approach: to rely on the Unlimited Cities approach to find new solutions to attract tourists.
- Result of the approach: the attraction of the cities of Wuhan 8.5 million inhabitants and Xianning 2.5 million inhabitants on the young generations means that there is no entrepreneurial dynamic or animation possible to develop tourism in the villages. However, the loneliness in the big cities is very difficult for the poor workers coming from the villages. The situation is also very difficult for the elderly who have stayed in the village. The reflections opened with the inhabitants, the local political authorities and the academics were oriented towards the search for economic activities that could be created in the villages, so as to reunite families and bring back the laughter of children in the villages. They have emerged tracks around health, where large hospitals and clinics of the metropolises, a sector in expansion, could offer convalescence in villages where the quiet and very inexpensive buildings to renovate could offer ideal conditions in connection with nature, springs and sacred landscapes, and thus promote the return of useful and rewarding activities.
- Link to the Science of Service: the inhabitants and users proposed to revitalize the villages by new links to the metropolis through spaces adapted to health, allowing the invention of new services around culture, leisure for the convalescents, their families and the medical staff who have a much higher purchasing power than the locals.



Unlimited Cities approach in Hubei village May 2016

#4 Conclusion : The value of collaboration

Inertia (the world before)

In 2011, co-imagining territorial transformations with civil society upstream of decisions, as allowed by the civitech Unlimited Cities, was perceived by political actors and professionals as an approach destined to remain experimental, as it was too far from conventional practices to be applied to current projects. Even if these actors wanted to challenge top-down processes and business silos.

Global context update

From 2011 to 2022, the global context has been transformed by the concrete manifestations of the pandemic and climate disruption. In this context, for a majority of organizations and people, extreme competition between actors no longer appears to be a desirable horizon. On the contrary, exchanges and the empowerment of all actors around cooperative processes seem necessary to think differently, innovate and respond to global challenges.

A pivot by services?

What if services transformed the state of the art of urban planning and architecture? The various experiments in open urbanism show that the establishment of conditions that encourage the expression of imagination and the creation of trust develops the capacity to act well beyond territorial transformations. In particular, it is by referring to new proposals of activities in a multiplicity of fields that a part of the population and stakeholders think and propose territorial transformations.

Contributory services and contributory entrepreneurship are the matrix of a new open urbanism. Open urbanism, as a producer of citizen emancipation, is the matrix of new services.



Labeling module for automatic analysis (Switzerland)

Diversity of users and contexts (World)

#4 References

¹ Sullivan, Louis H. (1896). The tall office building artistically considered. Getty Research Institute.

² « As a decision-making tool, urban planning must better defend the 'public' against the menace of ever-expanding 'private' interests and its consequences: shrinking public spaces and reduced provision of public goods, which affect more collective, intangible dimensions like quality of life, social interaction, cultural identity and social values. (...) A reinvigorated notion of urban planning would give any city tighter public control over the use of land, change the form and function of cities based on sustainable development principles, as well as expand the provision of, and access to, public goods. » in State of the World's Cities 2012-2013- Prosperity of Cities ONU Habitat <https://unhabitat.org/prosperity-of-cities-state-of-the-worlds-cities-20122013>

³ The activities of the Host lab can also be cited as UFO (Urban Fabric Organisation), which was the spin-off of the Host lab created to respond to the European research UrbanD between 2010 and 2017.

⁴ Conference Metropolis Hyderabad India <https://www.hyderabad2014.metropolis.org>

⁵ « As an interactive device addressing both the developments of the city and digital abilities, Unlimited Cities questions the boundaries of technical services, embodied as groups of public servants, their competencies and ways of making. » Ottaviano Nancy, "Collaborative urbanism, experience and context. An ethnographic look at a digital citizen participation. » <https://www.participation-et-democratie.fr/l-urbanisme-collaboratif-experience-et-contexte-un-regard-ethnographique-sur-une-participation>

⁶ « Unlimited Cities (in French Villes sans limites) are methods and apps to facilitate the civil society involvement in urban transformations. Unlimited Cities DIY is an Open Source upgrade of the application linked with the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations "Habitat III" Conference. » https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unlimited_Cities