
How can cities become a better human habitat?

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If humanism were defined by quantity over quality, modern cities would be the ultimate humanistic terrain because of overpopulation. Instead, we live with this incongruity of human masses while suffering from an absence of humanistic interactions. It's a daily constant to deal with packed public transports, living in sky-scraping edifices and stand at long lasting supermarket lines (where we wait to be assisted by an operational machine). Avoiding eye contact with others or ignoring homeless peoples conditions are arguably becoming common responses and thus automatic actions in a high-tech, automatized and immediate era of the now.

We see humans - dozens, thousands, millions of humans... - but we almost need to seek for humanity. Or most of the times we don't look; we don't need to look because we are convinced by secondary entities that people are united by diverse causes, principles, choices and culture.

While our social network pages are filled with good intentions and ethical positions, we are most likely to find ourselves sinking in a virtual reality. The dangers of this virtual reality are simple: virtuality gives a sense of realness and escape of our daily-life. Such a play where the stage fits in our pocket and dramaturg is in our typing.

To look at a common passenger at the bus stop and comprehend that his/her space in that moment is virtual, remains a concentration of the viewers perception rather than the people around.

This virtual space comes to replace public space and its interactions: talking, flirting, expressing, observing. We take pictures as proof of the beauty we witnessed on a certain place. Often in a night out the connecting 'pick up' line is asking for your whatsapp instead of seeking

an extended real time chat and even the individual is perceived as a new virtual-self - empowered by likes, comments and followers.

Is it that public space has become an empty transient environment to reach other spaces? So, what is the role of cities of the now? A space that accommodates our physical bodies and its needs. A space that facilitates the organisation of private spaces. Will public space become solely a transitional space? No. We are social beings and we need human interaction to keep us sane, fulfilled. We cannot live in isolation since space, time and its conditions (or consequences) impact our ability to function as social beings. We tend to relate with matters that are close to our ideologies and refusing or showing lack of interest by oppositional arguments. Divisions of social groups appear to give stronger connections and serve our personal interests while they shut down for the issues of others. In stark contrast, corporate entities can appear to stand for a 'common wellbeing' and while the reality of corporations is linked to private spaces and the increase of divisions, they are linked to efficiency and the delivery of city services.

Cities dispose countless services and opportunities to organize and isolate different lifestyles: from low cost pub bars to expensive barista coffeeshops, female hairdressers and/or barber shops, public parks to nature reserves, private clinics versus the Chinese medicine treatment of a potential next-door neighbor. As a city grows in size, so too does the range of choice for its inhabitants.

A panoply of services is at our disposition and consumerism is an intrinsic part of our daily-lives that

masks our loss of connection with each other. We are defined by what we wear, what we drink, how (much) we contribute to the economy and, ironically, how unique we can be, in a mass production era. Demanding changes that are mainly for self-protection of our lifestyles and to our dearest ones more than a globally social well-being.

Pointing fingers and immersing into companies' creative innovations to problems of this century are a 'convenient' approach for those who hold the capitalistic desire of success. Solving problems and making money is the magic formula of where we stand as an occidental society.

Though the need of expression and being in contact with nature and each other is so evident and prevailing we can see aspirations in the youngest ones; children playing adults role while depending on their guidance later than it ever was before.

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old activist who recently organised the 'Friday4future' movement after her speech on climate awareness and the urge for political attention is moving students to manifest about environmental rights. These ongoing strikes demand public and political attention not only for climate change but for the voice of an underrated generation.

A few months before, a 12-year-old girl called Genesis Butler also started the non-profit campaign Million Dollar Vegan, motivating a vegan diet during Lent with a special invitation for Pope Francis - if the Pope publicly accepts to compromise with the campaign, 1 million dollars has been pledged to a charity of his choice.

The awareness of these two young women and the

crucially important messages attached to environmental education as well human relations with others has helped raise public awareness and recognition that they stand for a cause and the most humanistic principle - compassion.

So, why are we so strongly attached with political parties, cultural standards and religious conventions, if as social beings we depend on each other? We need to develop intercross thinking, acting and imagining. In order to establish substantial ties with others, we need to challenge and embrace our differences. A space for chaos instead of repressing and attacking what we do not comprehend.

Thomas Crow posits that physical contradictions are the source of articulateness, due to their brief duration: "if the piece could persist indefinitely, the contradiction is illusory (Crow, T. p.136). The city's public spaces are the breaches for contradictions and the relations in-between.

While third spaces - referring to virtual spaces - are more predominant than ever, public spaces need to be re-activated. We must re-think and re-establish new connections with these spaces that are supposed to be available to everyone without limitations or impositions.

The author's intent is to question the context of private spaces and how there is a limiting of interdisciplinary interactions: is there a need to convey an art piece in an artistic establishment to achieve the recognition that it owns? Is the value of speech more critical when presented in a Parliament instead of a public park? Is religious devotion more sacred when practiced in spaces, such as churches, monasteries and chapels?

The use of private spaces seems to enhance our social behavior while public space becomes absent in intimacy due to its exposure. Users of these spaces actions are being reduced to passing-by with occasionally spontaneous demonstrations of performing artists and marketing companies.

While there is coherence in private spaces addressing specific actions and services in the name of privacy and interest development, it is important to question: where does interdisciplinarity activities happen?

As privileged citizens, we are in position of choosing our interests and manifesting our opinion but we are not challenged enough by contradictory realities. It is time to challenge our pre-achieved conceptions and to observe through alternative lenses, people, space and time. Public space is our communal home, our blank canvas ready for chaotic art. Private spaces will always be inherent to it, but right now, we lack a communal ground - public space invigoration.

What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put on? - Henry David Thoreau

Sources

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