

Digital Cities 9 workshop - Hackable Cities: From Subversive City Making to Systemic Change

Michiel de Lange

Utrecht University
Muntstraat 2A
NL-3512 EV Utrecht, Netherlands
+31302538244
M.L.deLange@uu.nl

Nanna Verhoeff

Utrecht University
Muntstraat 2A
NL-3512 EV Utrecht, Netherlands
+31302538244
N.Verhoeff@uu.nl

Martijn de Waal

University of Amsterdam
Turfdraagsterpad 9
1012 XT Amsterdam, Netherlands
+31205252980
b.g.m.dewaal@uva.nl

Marcus Foth

Queensland University of Technology
GPO Box 2434
Brisbane QLD 4001, Australia
+61 7 3138 8772
m.foth@qut.edu.au

Martin Brynskov

Aarhus University
Helsingforsgade 14
8200 Aarhus, Denmark
+45 87161962
brynskov@cavi.au.dk

ABSTRACT

The DC9 workshop takes place on June 27, 2015 in Limerick, Ireland and is titled “Hackable Cities: From Subversive City Making to Systemic Change”. The notion of “hacking” originates from the world of media technologies but is increasingly often being used for creative ideals and practices of city making. “City hacking” evokes more participatory, inclusive, decentralized, playful and subversive alternatives to often top-down ICT implementations in smart city making. However, these discourses about “hacking the city” are used ambiguously and are loaded with various ideological presumptions, which makes the term also problematic. For some “urban hacking” is about empowering citizens to organize around communal issues and perform aesthetic urban interventions. For others it raises questions about governance: what kind of “city hacks” should be encouraged or not, and who decides? Can city hacking be curated? For yet others, trendy participatory buzzwords like these are masquerades for deeply libertarian neoliberal values. Furthermore, a question is how “city hacking” may mature from the tactical level of smart and often playful interventions to the strategic level of enduring impact. The Digital Cities 9 workshop welcomes papers that explore the idea of “hackable city making” in constructive and critical ways.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.4.m [Miscellaneous]:

General Terms

Management, Design, Human Factors, Theory.

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Keywords

hackability, smart city, city making, urban curation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Digital Cities workshop series started in 1999, and is the longest running academic workshop series that has followed the intertwined development of cities and digital technologies. Earlier years have seen papers presented at Digital Cities to appear as the basis of key anthologies within the field of urban informatics, smart & social cities and civic media.

This year again we are part of the C&T event to further discuss these relevant themes, gain new insights and work collaboratively towards a new publication, and explore opportunities for cooperation in research programs for instance in the H2020-framework.

2. LIST OF ORGANISERS

Michiel de Lange – Lecturer New Media Studies at Utrecht University and co-founder of The Mobile City.

Nanna Verhoeff - Associate Professor Media and Performance Studies at the Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University, and Senior Researcher at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON).

Martijn de Waal – Assistant professor at University of Amsterdam, researcher Citizen Empowerment at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, co-founder of The Mobile City.

Marcus Foth - Founder and director of the Urban Informatics Research Lab, and Professor in Interactive and Visual Design in the School of Design, Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology.

Martin Brynskov - Associate professor in interaction technologies at the Department of Aesthetics and Communication at Aarhus University in Denmark. He is also research fellow at Participatory IT Centre (PIT) and Center for Advanced Visualization and Interaction (CAVI), director of the Digital Design Lab, co-founder of Smart Aarhus.

3. CALL FOR PAPERS

The Digital Cities workshop invites papers that explore the relation between digital media technologies and everyday urban life, planning and governance. We especially welcome papers within this year's theme: "Hackable Cities: From Subversive City Making to Systemic Change."

"Hacking" has long been part and parcel of the world of media technologies. From HAM radio amateurs to US west-coast computer culture, users have been figured as active creators, shapers, and benders of media technologies and the relationships mediated through them. [2,4,5,7] In general what the term refers to is the process of clever or playful appropriation of existing technologies or infrastructures, or bending the logic of a particular system beyond its intended purposes or restrictions to serve one's personal or communal goals.

Whereas the term was mainly used to refer to practices in the sphere of computer hardware and software, more recently "hacking" has been used to refer to creative practices and ideals of city making: spanning across spatial, social, cultural, and institutional domains, various practices of "city hacking" can be seen in urban planning, city management, and tactical urban interventions. Worldwide, we have seen various artistic and political movements making use of digital media to appropriate urban places as the locus for theatrical interventions, often politically charged. A prominent book on the future of "smart cities" makes an appeal for "civic hackers". [6] Urban governments around the world have embraced "hackathons" as a new way for the development of urban services. Numerous events with titles like "Hack Your City" (e.g. Sheffield) or similar, have been organized. Municipalities have opened up datasets and created urban APIs or SDKs that allow clever hackers to build apps and services.

What these examples have in common is that the term "hacking" is used to evoke a participatory alternative to top-down ICT implementations in cities. The term "hacking" suggests a novel logic to organize urban society through social media platforms. It suggests a move away from centralized urban planning towards more inclusive process of "city making", creating new types of public spaces. [1,3] This logic of "hacking" is touted as slightly subversive, innovative, and is associated with collaboration, openness and participation. As such it is applied to various domains of urban life. The term can be used to highlight critical or contrarian tactics, to point to new collaborative practices amongst citizens mediated through social media, or to describe a changing vision on the relation between governments and their citizens.

Discourses about "hacking the city" are not unproblematic. While the term suggests cities have embraced a new "hacker ethic" of decentralized organization, reputation-based meritocracy and playfulness, at the very same time many "smart city" policies reinstate modernist ideals of centralized overview and pervasive control. As the notion is ported from the field of software development to civic life and organization, it is used ambiguously, loaded with various ideological presumptions. For some, "urban hacking" is about empowering citizens to organize themselves around communal issues and empowering them to perform aesthetic urban interventions. For others it raises questions about governance: what kind of "city hacks" should be encouraged and which ones are unwelcome, and who decides about that? Can city hacking be curated? For yet another group it

is a masquerade for neoliberal politics in which libertarian values appear in the discursive sheep's clothing of participatory buzzwords like "Web 2.0", "collective intelligence", "crowdsourcing", "open source ethics", or "sharing economy". Furthermore, a key question that remains largely unanswered is how "city hacking" may mature from the tactical level of smart and often playful interventions to the strategic level of enduring impact.

The Digital Cities Workshop explores welcomes papers that explore the notion of hackable city making both in a constructive as in a critical way. We also welcome the discussion of related concepts that address the relationship between bottom-up city making and issues of governance and urban management.

We prioritize papers that address this overall theme, but works connecting to adjacent themes may also come into consideration. Contact the DC9 chair if you want to discuss before submitting.

Relevant topics include but are not limited to:

- What are interesting examples of aesthetic and/or political event-based appropriations of public space making use of digital media technologies?
- What kind of tools or processes are empowering citizens in the processes of city making?
- What can we learn about this from empirical case studies or research by design projects?
- How can digital media open up existing urban infrastructures for appropriation by citizens?
- What are innovative examples of citizens taking ownership in and management of public interest issues?
- How have or could governments make room for 'hackable city making'? What are the societal risks of such an approach?
- In what way can (and should) bottom-up city-making be curated?

The call is also open to other relevant submissions outside the theme of hacking, but relevant to citizens making the digital city, such as studies on civic media, smart citizens, urban informatics, open data, etc.,

4. SUBMISSIONS

Please submit your 300-500 word proposal through the EasyChair system: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dc9>.

We have room for 20-25 people. A selection of applications is made by the workshop organizers based on the proposal's quality, thematic relevance, and overall complementarity.

description	dates
Deadline abstract submission	2015-05-01
Notification of selected papers	2015-05-12
Full papers due	2015-06-12
Workshop	2015-06-27

Table 1. Important dates

5. PUBLICATION

The works presented at the Digital Cities workshop series have been formative to a diverse set of emerging fields, e.g. urban informatics, smart cities, pervasive computing, internet of things, media architecture and urban interaction design.

Apart from the workshops' inviting nature towards interdisciplinary discussions, the fact that the resulting publications have helped articulate and position issues within this heterogeneous domain is an important reason for the longevity of the Digital Cities biannual gathering.

This year, a publication of a peer reviewed edited volume by an established academic publisher is again one of the options we are pursuing at the moment to continue this rich tradition.

Past Digital Cities workshops have produced high quality publications containing selected workshop papers and other invited contributions:

Digital Cities 7 & 8 (C&T 2011, Brisbane/ C&T 2013 Munich)

Foth, M., Brynskov, M., & Ojala, T. (Eds.) (2016, forthcoming). Citizen's Right to the Digital City: Interaction Design for Participatory Urbanism and Open Innovation. Singapore: Springer. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/78107/>

Digital Cities 6 (C&T 2009, PennState)

Foth, M., Forlano, L., Satchell, C., & Gibbs, M. (Eds.) (2011). From Social Butterfly to Engaged Citizen: Urban Informatics, Social Media, Ubiquitous Computing, and Mobile Technology to Support Citizen Engagement. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Digital Cities 5 (C&T 2007, Michigan)

Foth, M. (Ed.) (2009). Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics: The Practice and Promise of the Real-Time City. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, IGI Global.

Digital Cities 4 (C&T 2005, Milan)

Aurigi, A., & De Cindio, F. (Eds.) (2008). Augmented Urban Spaces: Articulating the Physical and Electronic City. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Digital Cities 3 (C&T 2003, Amsterdam)

Van den Besselaar, P., & Koizumi, S. (Eds.) (2005). Digital Cities 3: Information Technologies for Social Capital (Lecture Notes in Computer Science No. 3081). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.

Digital Cities 2 (Kyoto 2001)

Tanabe, M., van den Besselaar, P., & Ishida, T. (Eds.) (2002). Digital Cities 2: Computational and Sociological Approaches (Lecture Notes in Computer Science No. 2362). Heidelberg, Germany, Springer.

Digital Cities 1 (Kyoto 1999)

Ishida, T., & Isbister, K. (Eds.) (2000). Digital Cities: Technologies, Experiences, and Future Perspectives (Lecture Notes in Computer Science No. 1765). Heidelberg, Germany, Springer.

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- [2] Himanen, P. *The hacker ethic, and the spirit of the information age*. 1st ed. Random House, New York, 2001.
- [3] de Lange, M., and M. de Waal. "Owning the city: new media and citizen engagement in urban design." *First Monday*, special issue "Media & the city" no. 18 (11).
- [4] Levy, S. *Hackers: heroes of the computer revolution*. O'Reilly, Beijing; Farnham, 2010.
- [5] Roszak, T. *The cult of information: the folklore of computers and the true art of thinking*. Pantheon, New York, 1986.
- [6] Townsend, A. M. *Smart cities: big data, civic hackers, and the quest for a new utopia*. Norton, New York, 2013.
- [7] Von Hippel, E. *Democratizing innovation*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2005.