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## Beyond connectivity: The impacts of social media in urban development in Puerto Ayora, Ecuador

Laura Pinzón

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Development Planning Unit | The Bartlett | University College London  
34 Tavistock Square - London - WC1H 9EZ

Tel: +44 (0)20 7679 1111 - Fax: +44 (0)20 7679 1112 - [www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu](http://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu)

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# Beyond connectivity: The impacts of social media in urban development in Puerto Ayora, Ecuador

Laura Pinzón

[aupinzon@gmail.com](mailto:aupinzon@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

New communication technologies and digital platforms have evolved quickly and extended considerably during the last 20 years. Beyond the recognised significance of the Internet in connecting people's interests on a global scale, this paper explores the effects of social media at a local level, in terms of the interaction between the people and their transforming cities, and between citizens and planning authorities. In attempting to unpack these interactions, this paper analyses how social media – as a tool for collective organisation, sharing and producing information – affects the power relationships around the building of cities. Factors like the social features of new technologies, the tensions between the global and local implications of digital connectiv-

ity, the different ways social movements support their actions through social media, and the limitations and challenges of new ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) are analysed to increase our understanding of the potential of social media in urban development. In the final chapter, the example of Puerto Ayora – the Galapagos Islands, the paper analyses some situations where the use of social media has supported social initiatives in achieving their goals. This study suggests that a timely analysis of what is happening, in the digital – as distinct from the physical – spaces where people discuss the city is needed to broaden urban theories and ensure more holistic analysis of what is actually happening.



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## List of acronyms

CDF – Charles Darwin Foundation  
CGG – Consejo de Gobierno de Galápagos  
DPNG – Galapagos Natural Park Direction  
ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

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# 1. Now we are connected - What next?

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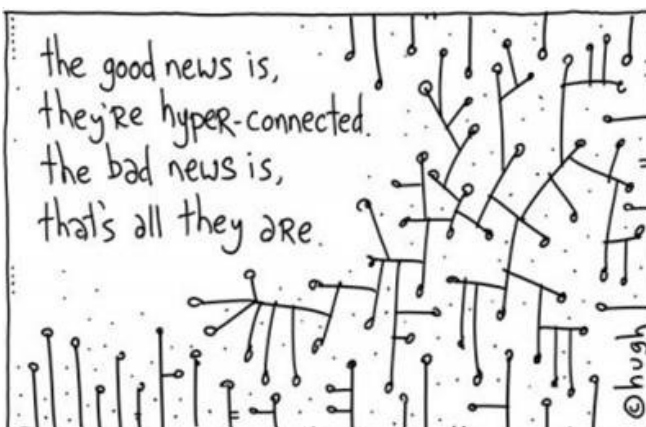
## 1.1. Identification of the problem

*"From computers to data to information to communication to democracy"* Diana Saco (2002:xiii)

The way we communicate is changing rapidly, and according to Thompson (1995), such changes also imply transformations within social organisations and the structures of power in society. New communication technologies and digital platforms have evolved quickly and extended vastly during the last 20 years. Being able to communicate with someone on the other side of the world using different applications on a pocket size device is no longer a novelty. Rather, it is becoming commonplace - and even necessary - for some people (Figure 1.1). However, this paper is motivated by questions that go beyond the amusement of new technology, such as: what profound changes can new communication mechanisms support in urban social and political spheres? What are the different meanings of online connectivity at local scale? What are the motivations behind using the Internet for collective organisation in the city? How can Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) help people to confront and even overcome local social inequalities where resources are scarce and access to communication services are limited?

Beyond the recognised significance of the Internet in connecting people's interests on a global scale, this paper explores the effects of social media at a local level, in terms of

**Figure 1.1** Hyper-connected. Author: Hugh MacLeod [Online] Available at: < <http://gapingvoid.com/2008/05/19/hyper-connected/> > [accessed 30 November 2013]



the interaction between the people and their transforming cities, and between citizens and planning authorities. In attempting to unpack these interactions, this paper analyses how social media – as a tool for collective organisation, sharing and producing information – affects the power relationships around the building of cities. The relevance of studying this media in social movements analysis has been considered in the work of Castells (2007; 2009), Shirky (2009; 2009b; 2010), de Wall (2011), Lim and Kann (2008), Saco (2002), among others. This paper proposes the need for urban development theories to analyse the potential of social media; and considers the possibilities of ICTs in enriching discourses around contemporary cities.

Social media theory is constructed and constantly redefined by the ways in which participants and producers use communication mechanisms. For that reason, this paper encompasses work across a range of different disciplines – from sociology to computer science, anthropology to urban development – on the potential and challenges for social media as a means to facilitate social change. Given the variety of analyses to which social media has been subjected, it is important to frame the theory which, although has been recognised by this paper, will not serve as the main basis of the analysis. That is why theory related with the meanings of the 'disembodied' nature of online interaction (Saco, 2002), and the different behaviours people develop on the Internet (Dourish and Satchell, 2011 Miller, 2011), passes to a second level in a study of this kind. Similarly, some of the concepts used to define the transformation in the 'Digital Age' discussed by Castells (2009), should be considered beyond the scope of this paper since they relate to media regulatory processes, the management of global multimedia business, and the cultural change in the globalised world. That said, and following Shirky (2009), this paper is not concerned with questioning the performance of media platforms per se, but rather with their potential role in facilitating social and urban transformation. As Shirky observes:

*"The choice we face is not asking whether that's the media environment we want to operate; that's the one we have. The question is how we make the best use of this media even though it means changing the way we have always done it."* (Shirky, 2009, min 15:45)

This document is divided into five parts. The first chapter is this introductory section. The second chapter provides a background on new communication trends and

their relevance in socio-spatial studies, highlighting the differences between new and old media and exploring in greater depth the character of more recent social media platforms. The third chapter discusses the meaning of 'networks', and their connotations in both local and global contexts. This chapter also considers asymmetries of power, access and the political meanings of the Internet at local levels. The fourth chapter analyses the ways groups using social media can impact the physical and digital urban landscape. In doing so, it acknowledges the phenomenon of mobilisation, the creation of participatory spaces, and the production of knowledge as the three main social-media representations in urban spaces. In the fifth chapter, the example of Puerto Ayora – the Galapagos Islands, analyses

some situations where the use of social media – alongside traditional media – has supported social initiatives in achieving their goals. In the situations described, the groups' claims have been borne out of social, political or environmental injustices associated with urban development processes in the islands.

My hope is that this study will increase our understanding of the current relationship between communication and informational trends and the social dynamics involved in the production of the city. I believe a timely analysis of what is happening, in the digital – as distinct from the physical – spaces where people discuss the city is needed to broaden urban theories and ensure more holistic analysis of what is actually happening.



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## 2. The social character of communication

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It is important to reiterate here that this study's interest lies in the effects of new communication mechanisms on the social and political structures of the city, not in technological innovations per se, nor in an exploration of the accuracy of messages transmitted via new communication channels. However, some attention to the information shared is important in recognising the advantages people perceived in using new ICT compared to other mechanisms (Figure 2.1). Through an understanding of participatory approaches - from consensus to contestation, it is also important to critically evaluate the democratic potential of social media, and also in recognising the potential power of local knowledge in shaping urban development. As Castells observes:

*"[New communication mechanisms] become the main source of signals leading to the construction of meaning in people's minds. Since meaning largely determines action, communicating becomes the source of social power by framing the human mind."*(Castells 2009:136)

The discussions in this section are mainly framed by theories from Manuel Castells (2007; 2009), Clay Shirky (2009; 2009b; 2010), and Daniel Miller (2011). Castells is hailed for his many contributions to the social study of communication trends, the information society and attendant social movements. Shirky has studied the effects of the Internet on society since the early 90's, and his recent works are mainly oriented towards the production of information in online social networks, and their political potential contained therein. Miller is a pioneer of what he calls "digital anthropology". His recent works study the impact of online communication on social relationships. The positions from these three authors are sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory; this paper seeks to profitably explore, rather than reconcile, these tensions, where they exist.

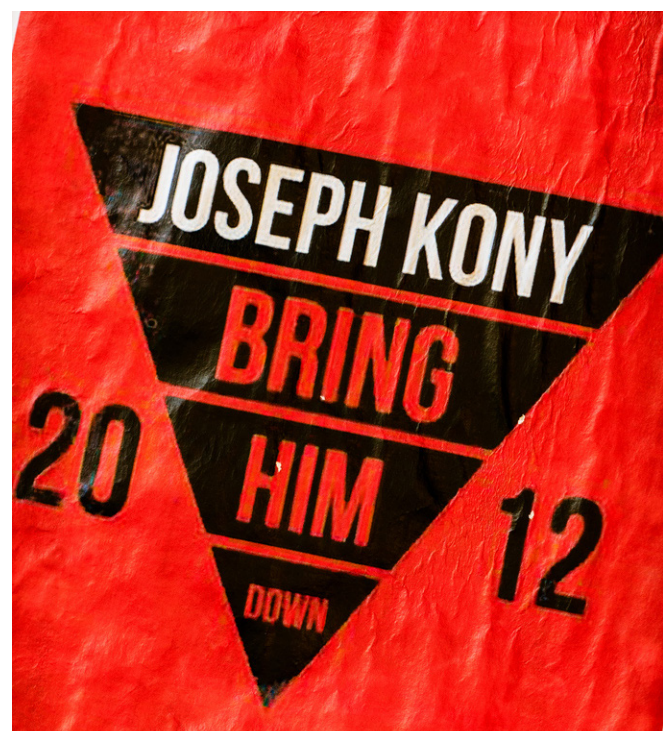
### 2.1 Communication matters!

*"It is through communication that the human mind interacts with its social and natural environment. This process of communication operates according to the structure, culture, organization, and technology of communication in a given society. The communication process decisively*

*mediates the way in which power relationships are constructed and challenged in every domain of social practice, including political practice."*  
(Castells, 2009:4)

The above quote sums up the relevance of understanding communication processes in an analysis of social organization and collective action in society. This paper argues that the study of local communication trends is closely related to developing an understanding of the social and political potential of citizen movements. In this context, it is important to define what we mean by "communication."

**Figure 2.1.** The Kony 2012 case is an example of the importance of the message in communication. Without proper scrutiny of the local political implications, this global campaign went viral influencing many people to share and support it. Joseph Kony Bring Him Down 2012. Author: Shenghung Lin. Artist unknown [online] Available at: < <http://www.flickr.com/photos/shenghunglin/sets/72157629613859236/>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



Communication is described by Castells as “the sharing of meaning through the exchange of information” (Castells, 2009:54). This process is defined by technology, the characteristics of senders and receivers, and the scope of interaction (Ibid.). This analysis uses “technology” to refer to the software, devices and infrastructure required for online communication. Here, the terms “servers and receivers” relate to the people, groups and institutions, involved in discussions about the city. Shirky (2009b) and Castells (2009) demonstrate how communication users are evolving from their passive role as audiences –receivers – to a more active and productive role as senders and producers of information. With the term “scope,” Castells (2009) makes reference to the direction of the communication – one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many – and the scale of it - between local and global. In this paper, emphasis is given to communication addressed to the “many” and communication at local scale.

I concur with Shirky (2009) when he argues that the social character of new media platforms allows for greater innovation when people have easy access to technology. Shirky claims that the transfer of capabilities, to shape and manage the way people communicate, from various professionals to the general public is unprecedented; innovation is now truly in the hands of the users.

ICTs have extended towards many different realms of everyday life; sometimes being locally adapted to purposes that the designer could have not foreseen. Technology needs to serve people’s needs, not the other way around (Shirky, 2009b; MacKinnon, 2011). New ICTs, that recognise the importance of local adaptation, are trying to have more flexible applications, so global inventions can have different meanings in local contexts. Communication tools or devices are not important in and of themselves; they can only support meaningful changes in society when responding to social problems and when they allow users to adapt them to their needs (Varnelis and Friedberg, 2008). Thus, despite some distinctions, tools such as “social software”, “social media” and “social computing” are conceived around the same idea:

*“We now have communication tools that are flexible enough to match our social capabilities, and we are witnessing the rise of new ways of coordinating action that take advantage of that change.”* (Shirky, 2009b:ch1)

## 2.2. Social media

Social media is defined by Dourish and Satchell (2011:21) as the “digital systems through which people engage in social relations of many sorts”. Social dynamics are supported by technologies such as social

networking sites (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Bebo), social virtual realities (e.g. Second Life, Friendster), blogging and microblogging (e.g. Twitter), always-on mobile communications (e.g. Smart-phones) and systems for using media and user-generated content (e.g. from SMSs to posts on YouTube or Wikipedia) (Figure 2.2). Castells refers to social media as ‘mass self-communication’ and defines it as:

*“Self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many who communicate with many. This is a new communication realm [...], whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive.”*(Castells, 2009:70)

Conceptual terms such as “social”, “media” and “ubiquity” are key in explaining the features that differentiate social media from its predecessors. In this context, the term “social” refers to the action of connecting people, with a focus not only on individuals but also on linking collectives and organisations. Traditionally the term “media” relates to the “interaction mediated by representational forms” (Dourish and Satchell, 2011:21), but in this case it also refers to the character of “living alongside ‘traditional media’ – print, images, film, TV, Radio, and so on – as a source of information and a site of engagement”(Ibid.). Finally, “ubiquity” refers to the characteristic of new ICT being present in all the aspects of our every-day life; connecting physical spaces and activities in the digital world of communication.

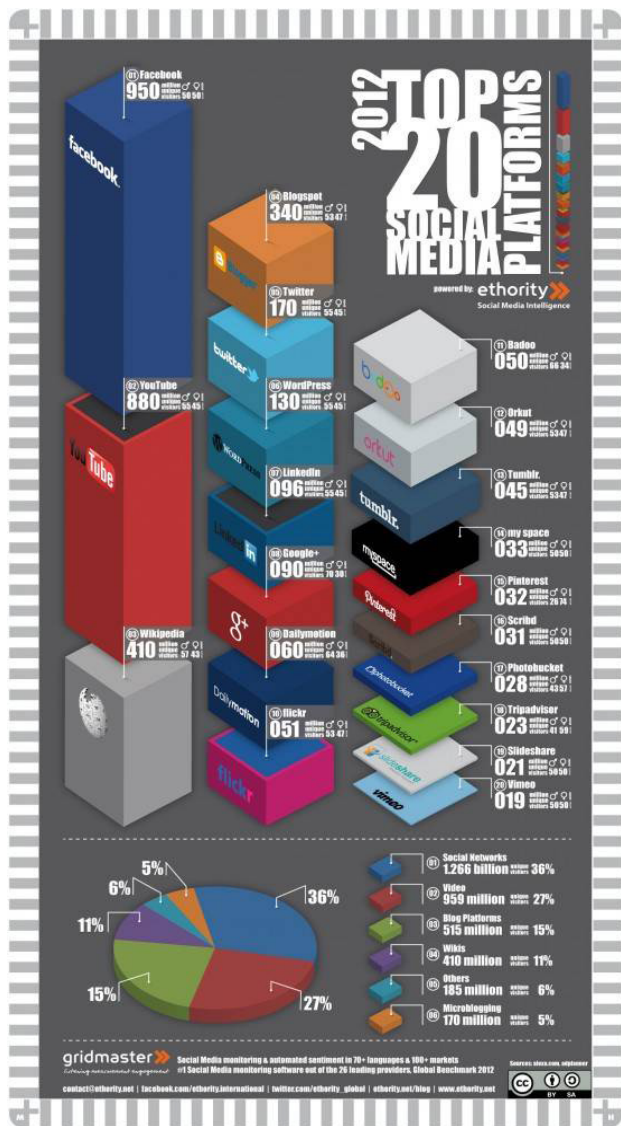
## 2.3 How is ‘social media’ different from other media?

Communication dynamics in the 20th century were defined by features such as the same message being spread to hundreds of individuals; there were few producers, it was an expensive process, and therefore there was minimum competition (Shirky, 2009). This predominantly one-directional form of communication is what Castells (2009) defines as mass communication. He claims that this is still present and coexists with the new form; the mass self-communication. On a more optimistic note, Clay Shirky states:

*“All that is over, we are increasingly in a landscape where media is global, social, ubiquitous and cheap.”* (Shirky, 2009, min 11:14) (figure 2.3)

The popularisation of the Internet and the wireless communications have allowed such changes in today’s communication landscape. The Internet was initially developed in 1969, but its dramatic expansion followed from its commercialisation in the 1990s. Since then, it has evolved at a rapid pace. Worldwide, users grew from

**Figure 2.2.** 2012 top 20 social media platforms. Top 3: Facebook, Youtube, and Wikipedia. Infographic, Author: unknown. Available at: < <http://www.ethority.net/blog/2012/03/> > [accessed 30 November 2013]



**Figure 2.3.** Ubiquitous communication. A man recording a protest with his mobile phone. Author: Eric J. Sarmiento. Available at: < <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jamessarmiento/9605482369/> > [accessed 30 November 2013]



less than 40 million in 1995 to about 1.4 billion in 2008 (Castells, 2009:62). Only after 2000 did the convergence of wireless and Internet systems begin, shifting the meaning of being “connected”; as Castells notes “the key feature of wireless communication is not mobility but perpetual connectivity.” (2009:69)

**Ubiquitous interaction**

In 1991, the computer and communication scientist Mark Weiser, also known as the father of ‘ubiquitous computing’ expressed his vision about how technology should evolve as a more socially integrated part of human life; leaving its shell and complex jargon, technology should be placed closer to people’s everyday needs. Twenty years later, Weiser’s ideas are becoming more and more commonly seen in interactions between people, and in the individual’s engagement with the objects and spaces around them. Nowadays, there are applications that allow us to communicate with objects, with things; from intelligent buildings, to real-time traffic notifications on your mobile phone. It is an entire field that could be explored in the interest of improving the interaction with the city. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I am interested in the concept of “ubiquity” in terms of what it represents for urban collective action. In other words, I am concerned, principally, with technology that is accessible and easy for the majority of people to operate, thereby allowing it to be used for the promotion of social causes.

Transformation can only happen once technology that is available is taken on board by the people, and integrated into daily practices (Weiser 1991; Shirky, 2009). With the inclusion of Web 2.0 , Internet platforms became easier for regular people with minimal computer skills to manipulate. Only then did the Internet begin to be a tool for social interaction. Castells claims that “the availability of proper technology is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the transformation of a social structure” (Castells, 2009:22). Following Castells, Shirky (2009) observes that, more than technical capital, what matters is social capital. More and more often the first images of devastating natural disasters, or of political protests, are published via the mobile phones of someone who happened to be in the right place at the right time, and not by professional journalists arriving later to cover the news (Shirky, 2009b). This is possible, not only because of technological advances around mobile phone technology, but also because of the evolution of that technology as an extension of the human mind and body in terms of its interaction with the physical world (Castells, 2009).

**2.4 The three main differences**

Shirky (2009) claims that there are three main points differentiating the Internet, and social media, from previous media. The first is that former communication mecha-



nisms (print, telephone, photographs, video, radio and TV) migrated to an extent to the Internet, and can be related to each other easier than before- allowing for the convergence of content. The second point is that the Internet is the first medium to support the creation of tools for groups and individual conversations at the same time (Shirky, 2009). The third is the shift in the framing of consumers, from passive receivers (as discussed earlier) to producers of information and tools. These three points are elaborated upon below.

### The convergence of modes

Shirky (2009) explains that when traditional media migrated to the Internet, the correlation among media became easier. Similarly, Castells (2009) argues that there is no point in comparing the Internet with previous media. Instead, he claims that the Internet is the fabric of most of the activities in our lives, from leisure to work, from sport to politics. Castells notes that “the communicational power of internet is being distributed to all realms of social life, just as the electric grid and the electric engine distributed energy in industrial society” (Castells, 2009:65). I would add, that similar to access to the electric grid, the ease of access to Internet services is not the same for everyone, and depends on a multitude of political and socio-economic factors. This point is explored further in Chapter 3.

Social media’s potential to effectively engage a larger public has been also recognised by mainstream media. News companies and TV channels often use platforms like blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to diversify information delivery and thus increase interaction with their audience on multiple levels. (Ibid.)

### Multiple choices, multiple channels

With previous media integration into the Internet, the new form of interaction is characterised by the variety of choices available for the transmission of messages, which may be addressed to one or to many people – via narrow-casting or broadcasting, from many to many, and to local or global networks. Technology users determine the modes and channels that best suit their purposes. (Miller, 2011; Castells, 2009)

As a result of the variety of options, groups around common interests are formed faster and more easily than before. Shirky (2009; 2009b), Miller (2011) and Castells (2009) agree that this is a key social change brought about by the Internet. Talking about Facebook, Miller maintains that this tool “does not invent social networking but it certainly facilitates and expands it” (2011:165). Without considering utilities like Facebook as communities in-themselves, Miller sees social media working as a possible counter-balance to community (Ibid.). For example, allowing a space for shy people to participate in

group discussions without awkward face-to-face interventions. Furthermore, as explored in Chapter 5, online deliberation can sometimes compensate for the lack of participatory spaces in the city, where communities can openly critique local problems.

This does not mean that social media and new ITC have the best democratic potential just because allows many to many communication. Loader and Mercea (2011) acknowledge the ‘mass-collaboration’ innovation that comes with social media for democratic practices, but they also call for a critical and less enthusiastic evaluation on the way new ITC impacts democracy on a larger scale. Factors such as social diversity, state control, cultural practices, inequality, and the quality of local infrastructure affect access to new technology, and online arenas, as sources of influence over the democratic status.

It is recognised by several authors (Saco, 2002; Shirky, 2009b; Castells, 2009; and Miller, 2011) that Internet utilities could also amplify social failings, as well as social skills. Castells (2009) calls this “digital autism” – people publishing more of themselves but avoiding social engagements, including participation in political discussions. However, it is the amplification of group actions that motivates this analysis as well as acknowledging its position in between the conflictive processes of “globalization and identification”, and between “individuality and communalism” – as proposed by Castells (2009:117).

### From consumers to producers

*“The potential for the audience to take charge of its communicative practices has increased substantially with the related development of the culture of autonomy and the rise of mass self-communication. [...] And the more people used the Internet, the more they increased their level of autonomy. So, the common view of the Internet as an instrument of autonomy-building has been empirically tested by our study.”(Castells, 2009:129)*

Through social media, the role of the audience shifted from passive to interactive, creative and – at some extent – autonomous (Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2009b) (Figure 2.4). According to Castells (2009), this autonomy is expressed in two ways. One refers to the increasing possibility for groups to communicate in a more direct way with institutions of authority in the city. The second pertains to the production of information. The content that supports online debates is mainly produced by the same participants. There are many cases where local information (e.g. register of events, social surveys, mapping) is produced and published by people without the need for guidance and support from local governments (a point further explored in Chapter 4).

As discussed previously, traditional media corporations do not fight against social media – instead they utilise the benefits it represent in terms of ubiquitous communication and the production of information. News companies encourage users to upload their blogs and content that, “if compelling enough, will be featured online and in an increasing number of television programs that feature on-line user-generated content (for example, CNN’s iReport and VH1’s Web Junk 2.0)”(Castells, 2009:97)

Social media, then, is supporting the current “increase in expressive capacity” (Shirky, 2009), and as a result, the Internet is more and more a place for coordination and participation and not only a source of information (Ibid.). This is what makes social media an essential tool in the way social movements build their capacity for action in order to achieve their goals. What are the limits, however, of such independence? Can initiatives outside or-

**Figure 2.4.** YouTube is one of the main sites for sharing user-produced content. Author: Karl Jonsson. Artist: Unknown. Available at: < <http://www.flickr.com/photos/karl-jonsson/488412425/>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



ganisations go beyond online deliberation and produce genuine impacts in urban spaces? Is this autonomy also reflected in the ways of transforming urban spaces?

## 2.5. Can social media make a difference?

Many authors who are concerned with new ICTs recognise the potential, as well as the risks, of the so called ‘communication revolution’ in empowering people towards unprecedented social transformations (Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2009; Hirsch, 2011; Conneally, 2011; Loader and Mercea, 2011; among others). The argument that communication media can facilitate political empowerment and citizen engagement is old; with the work of Habermas (1991, cited in Lim and Kann, 2008) and Anderson (1983) as examples. However, Miller (2011) maintains that sudden and spontaneous political revolutions – similar to recent ones linked with social media usage – had happened in history before such technology appeared. He calls for us to be cautious to assign such political transformative potential to something that – in his view – primarily affect only close social relationships. Mediating the discussion there are authors like Lim and Kann (2008) who suggest that the spheres created through the Internet, generally, could not serve “to advance and deepen democracy, but within these convivial spheres individuals and groups have greater ability to be political.” (Ibid.:101) On a similar note, authors like MacKinnon (2011), and Loader and Mercea (2011) argue that the Internet and new ICTs, as they are constituted today, cannot produce meaningful social changes unless their structure evolves in a citizen-centred manner instead of being centred on government and the private Internet-operator companies.

In conclusion, although this study attempts to show how social media can support social and urban transformations, it is the tension between theories – whether contradictory or complementary – that guides this paper in recognising the challenges and opportunities presented by social media in empowering citizens’ contestations and initiatives.

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## 3. From global to local

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In order to understand the effects of social media on the city, it is important to explore the concept of network, considering its global and local connotations. Such focus leads the final discussions in this chapter to expose some local differences in ICT access, as well as government responses to social media.

### 3.1. From global network society to the local citizens' network

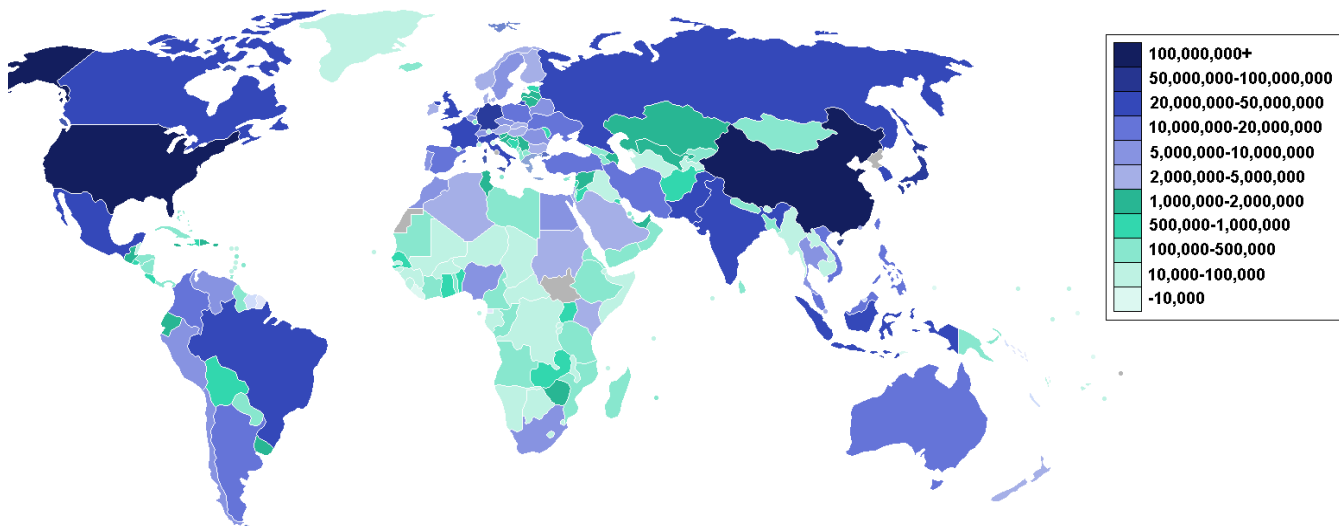
According to Shirky (2009b), group effort is central to human life. Any change in the way groups function generates impact everywhere, from commerce to religion. As mentioned in Chapter 2, new technology allows for new – faster and varied – mechanisms of group-forming (Shirky, 2009b). Groups, individuals, institutions – and even things – connected through technology comprise the communicative structures which Castells and other authors define as networks (Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2009; Saco, 2002; Latour, 2005).

Castells define the network as a formation of interconnected nodes, the relevance of which varies depending

on their individual ability to contribute to reaching common goals. Thus, here the unit is not the node but the network itself (Castells, 2009). There have been social networks since the beginning of human settlements, and the geographical scope of connectivity extended with the appearance of new technologies, for example railways and telegraphs. However, Castells claims that current communication trends differ from those established previously in that technological advances empower networks to become global, culminating in what he names the “global network society” (Ibid.). Miller conversely states that the concept of ‘network’ – as in the ‘actor network’ or ‘global network’- fetishises the relation between individuals and the global scales; as he puts it, “there is no evidence for a global network, and no evidence for isolated individualism” (Miller, 2011:190).

Moving forward from discussing the accuracy in the term networks, this paper proposes that what requires deeper analysis is the ability for groups with a social urban project to achieve their goals, to go beyond isolated or hyper-connected deliberation and produce changes in the city. This is not to deny the importance of networks reaching the global scale. On the contrary,

**Figure 3.1.** Map of the Internet users by country. Available at: < [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Internet\\_users\\_by\\_country\\_world\\_map.PNG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Internet_users_by_country_world_map.PNG) > [accessed 30 November 2013]



it is to recognise the impact international connections can have on local decision-making processes; impact in terms of both support and opposition. The ease with which social media facilitates relations between local and global actors, in the case of cooperation, does not ensure greater compromise than that which preceded online communication, but it certainly facilitates committed actors to better organise themselves, and to accumulate more allies in the process.

Networks in social media form not only to allow communication among nodes, but to “outcommunicate” (Castells, 2009 following Mulgan, 1991). Online groups frequently have a claim, a message to communicate to others. If this is a network’s clear objective – as in the case for example of a group protesting an urban intervention liable to impact negatively on a community – there is a need to find the best arena where the greatest number of people could receive the message; to identify common social-network sites used by the target population. This is how the value of such services increases, as more users are gained this is usually referred as the “network effect” (Gardner and Mars, 2011). However, it is the value of the network that attracts more users, not the service per se. This is known as the “band-wagon effect” (Ibid); the more people join a network, the more valuable the service becomes, which persuades others to join in turn.

What about those disconnected? Is it the network, the service, or the message that influences people’s choice to join or not join a group? To understand networks, it is important to analyse not only how nodes connect but how and why they fail to connect (Strathern, 1996). Applying this question to urban analysis could produce reflections on social, political or economic factors influencing people choices for participating or not participating in discussions about their city.

Just as development studies recognises the importance of studying local identities and social dynamics, so it is time for urban studies to do so in studying local trends of networking and communication. To substantiate this claim, Castells (2009) maintains that communication is essential in struggles for a more social and politically balanced society. Miller (2011), despite his scepticism about the political potential of networks, supports the call to focus analysis on the local meanings of communication trends. He asserts that as social utilities such as Facebook become global, the importance of cultural difference will become more - instead of less - important. Processes of appropriation that serve to make imported products distinctive, at the same time provide a source of increased cultural diversity (Ibid.). Therefore, studying local distinctions is essential in order to understand their potential contributions to improving the relationship between citizens and authorities, and also to discover the different “techno-urban imaginaries”<sup>1</sup>

that can be discerned from people’s claims about how their city ought to be (de Wall, 2011). Without using the same term, Harvey confirms the relevance of identifying such urban imaginaries; “The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.” (Harvey, 2008:23)

### 3.2. Social and informational asymmetries

This section recognises two important imbalances in the access, distribution and possible uses of information and communication (Figure 3.1). One concerns the possibility of governments gaining control over the Internet and the information shared on it. Defending the originally autonomous character of the Internet, Rebecca MacKinnon (2011) claims that people need to regain control over Internet content and shape. The power of what people can or cannot do with their digital lives is actually in hands of a few private companies, who often respond to government control policies by adjusting their products from country to country. MacKinnon proposes a global mobilisation where people demand ICTs to regain the purpose of serving and improving people’s lives, instead of controlling and manipulating the masses to shape government interests (Figure 3.2). The main challenge for this is that, as Castells puts it, “[the Internet] submits, as everything else in the world, to relentless pressure from two essential sources of domination that still loom over our existence: capital and the state.” (2009:116)

The second informational asymmetry, and perhaps the most relevant for this paper, is about the situation in regions with the lowest rates of Internet and ICT penetration. This phenomenon is what Castells (2009) calls the ‘Global digital divide’, also found in other works as the ‘technological divide’. (Figure 3.3)

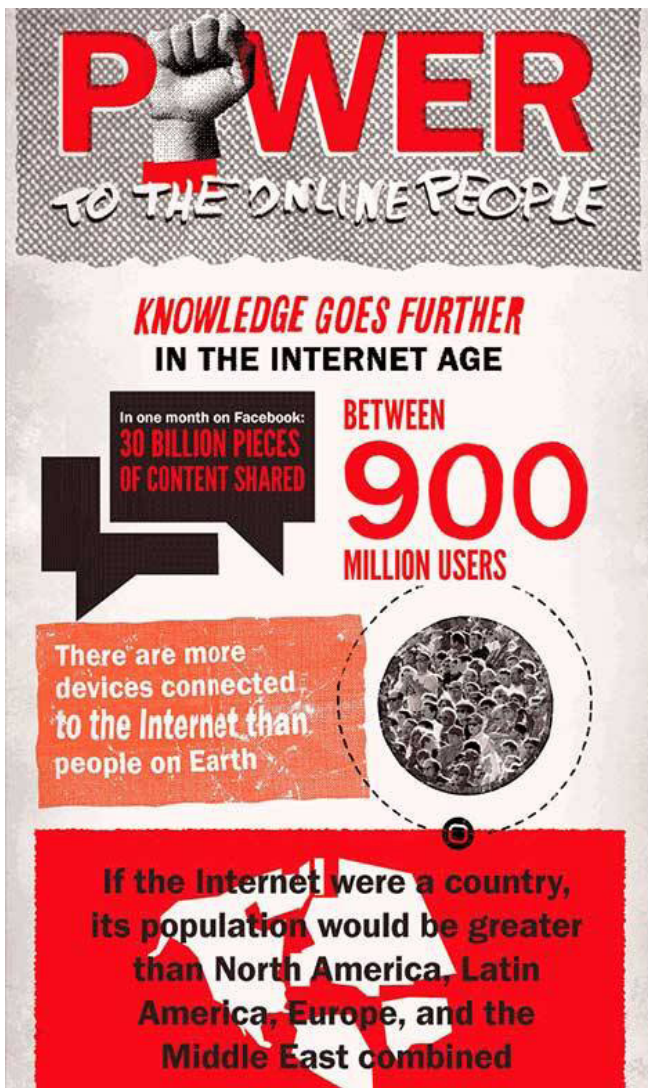
Castells notes that, “since 2000 the digital divide, measured in terms of access, has been shrinking.” (Castells, 2009:62) By June 2012, the global penetration for mobile-phone subscriptions reached 86%, while the number of households with Internet access grew to 70% in developed countries, and 20% in developing countries (ITU, 2012:1). While the global gap of Internet access remains, mobile telephony has become the most common communication tool in developing countries.

Based on locally available technology – usually mobile-phones and a few laptops, some organisations have undertaken innovative projects to improve the



communication in certain regions. In doing so, these projects respond to local concerns such as education, violence, health, and political recognition. Initiatives like Ushahidi (see Appendix 2) or Frugal Digital<sup>2</sup>, and organisations like ICT4D (ICT for Development) are trying to bring the advantages of a connected world to the most “digitally underserved” (Venkatraman, 2012). One of the strategies used by these initiatives, as Castells observes (2009), is to create a mix of new and locally available technologies to produce communication platforms adjusted to local contexts. Results can vary from low-powered radio and TV stations, to low cost video projectors for poor schools in Mumbai (Venkatraman, 2012).

**Figure 3.2.** Power to the online people. (section of poster) Open-site.org. Available at: <<http://www.ocmodshop.com/power-to-the-online-people-infographic/>>[accessed 30 November 2013]



Such initiatives could have a larger impact when local governments recognise the benefits of connectivity in dealing with local problems. Unfortunately this has yet to happen in most of the poorest regions. It is therefore reasonable to ask: why is social media not taken seriously by some governments? And what factors influence government positions in adapting social media as a tool for building a better commonality?

### 3.3. Government ‘status’ in social media

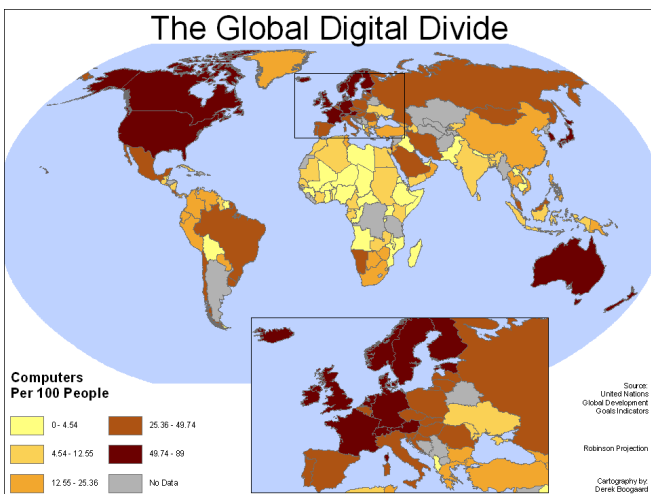
Without going further in the discussion of how the Internet is transforming politics, it is important to note that some governments and political parties are increasingly using online strategies, where the technology to do so is available (Lim and Kann, 2008; Newmark, 2010, Takao, 2004). Although some authors believe that new ICTs have the potential to improve political participation and generate healthier democracies (Foth et al., 2011; Shirky, 2009b), it should be recognised that these digital arenas are also shaped and influenced by power relationships. Thus, what appears a democratic engagement from local authorities may lead to either meaningful transformation, or to the legitimisation of the status quo (Gaventa, 2006).

Understanding the way in which social media is managed by governments is key to understanding their position towards such communication tools; whether ‘off-line’ or ‘on-line and available,’ in other words, whether they recognise the crowd as a source of problems, or as a possible problem solver (Wexler, 2010). The former position is exemplified by the recent cases of Egypt, Syria, and China, where social media platforms were shut off by national governments during political crises; the latter position is exemplified by the 2012 social-media battle between Obama and Romney for the USA presidential elections (Figure 3.4). Each campaign was trying to have the greatest presence in popular social-media sites. Both had hired teams specialised in gathering online supporters, keeping an active two way communication, and showing 24/7 interest in **people’s concerns** (Chron, 2012). There is also a position in between these two extremes: an ‘invisible or away’ status, in which some government participation in social media occurs but is mainly oriented towards publicising their activities, while avoiding discussions in open conversations<sup>3</sup>.

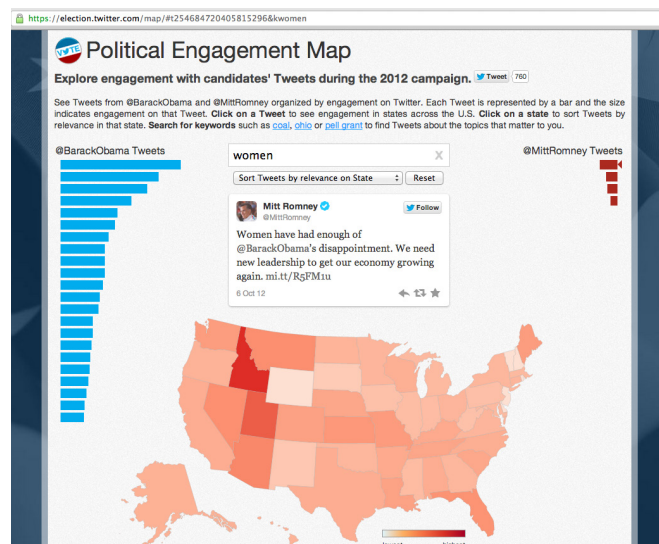
From this section it can be concluded that understanding both local constraints and assets in social, political and economic terms could lead to more appropriate uses of new communications to support local struggles.



**Figure 3.3.** Map representing the global digital divide. (Bottom five countries: Guinea Biseau, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger. Statistics in the map measured access and tariffs for ICT. Available at: < [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Global\\_Digital\\_Divide1.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Global_Digital_Divide1.png)> [accessed 30 November 2013]



**Figure 3.4.** Obama vs. Romney on Twitter. Political engagement map. Available at: <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rosefirerising/8160102106/>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



*NOTES TO CHAPTER 3*

1. “[technourban imaginaries can be] conflictive perspectives on what the city should be and how technology is thought to bring that ideal about” (de Wall, 2011:15)
2. Frugal Digital: “We work on projects to set the framework, create tools and provide inspiration for frugal innovators around the globe” [online] Available at: < <http://ciid.dk/frugaldigital/>>

3. Some examples: the social media policies from the City of Fullerton <[http://www.cityoffullerton.com/about/policy/social\\_media\\_policy.asp](http://www.cityoffullerton.com/about/policy/social_media_policy.asp)> or the City of Seattle <<http://www.seattle.gov/pan/SocialMediaPolicy.htm>>, where it can be concluded that the main concerns are related to responsible posts from employers, and to lead with people's public comments.

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## 4. The social media phenomenon in the city

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This chapter explores the ways in which social media is reconfiguring the relationship between people and places. In an attempt to “explore both, the networking of space and the spatiality of the network” (Varnelis and Friedberg, 2008:15), the first section introduces some features of the relationship between physical and digital spaces. The second section considers three ways – in terms of mobilisation, participation, and the production of knowledge – in which the participatory nature of social media brings new possibilities to city-making processes.

### 4.1. Physical and digital spaces in the city

There are two types of spaces considered in current discussions of the urban environment. Castells (2009) for example, terms the digital arena where information is shared in the network “spaces of flow”, and physical cities “spaces of place”. The relationship between these types of spaces is complementary, not competitive. As Varnelis and Friedberg assert, “place itself does not disappear in favour of the ‘city of bits’. On the contrary, place is as important as ever, playing a key role in the network itself” (2008:15). Digital space can therefore be understood as supporting the discussion and production of physical space.

Certain examples, like SeeClickFix.com and WikiPlanning (Figure 4.1), illustrate the way in which the use of digital spaces serves the clear purpose of informing discussion and conceptualisation of physical spaces. Thanks to the growing use of digital mapping and geo-referenced media, urban spaces connect closely to the digital world. In SeeClickFix.com people can report, and upload in a map, local problems regarding infrastructure and public services that require the attention of local authorities. WikiPlanning follows the model of a design workshop, and allows residents and other interested people to participate online in the design of new local projects. One of the problems in these cases is the lack of autonomy suffered by participants over the website. Participatory spaces online need to be flexible and allow people to shape them to their purposes. As Gaventa (2006) suggests, doing so comprises part of people’s right to participation.

For social movements, space plays an important role; it can serve as both a background and a causal factor. (Castells 1983, cited in Guidry, 2003:192) Space can

bring different groups together around the questioning of citizenship, and space can - and should - be produced as the consolidation of social movements; as the materialisation of their ideas (Lefebvre 1991, cited in Guidry, 2003). Despite the use of digital spaces for the facilitation of deliberation and coordination, the transformation for social movements remains an aim for the urban space.

### 4.2. Mobilisations

The term “smart mobs” is usually applied when mobile technology and the Internet allow groups to spontaneously form while sharing information to contest injustice (Hirsch, 2011). (See Appendix 1 for example). Through social media, it is common today for local struggles to achieve global attention and gain international support, which in some cases translate to aid, practical advice, or even pressure placed on the authorities to provide answers and solutions. However, the main purposes for groups using this media remain the sharing of information and the coordination of action at a local level.

**Figure 4.1.** Wiki Planning for bicycles in Southern California. Available at: <<http://opentransportation.tumblr.com/post/1269159578/wiki-planning-for-bikes-and-pedestrians-in-southern-cal>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



Although Miller (2011) concurs with Shirky's (2009b) claims regarding social media as a tool for organising physical gatherings instead of replacing them with on-line forums, he does not share Shirky's view about social media activating political participation. Miller (Ibid.) claims that the fact that tools like Facebook are clearly used by activists does not mean such tools are creating more activists. It is a fair point to highlight when reflecting on situations of social and political pressures affecting individuals' decisions about getting involved, or not, in online political discussion; particularly on sites where their opinions are visible to friends and family. Yet the Internet amplifies information access, and thus more and more topics need to be codified for individuals to form their opinions. (Castells, 2009) As a result, more people can be made aware of social injustices, and so motivated to more actively support movements or initiatives.

The facility to connect, send and receive information in real time can be used for many different purposes, and not always to positive ends. Mobile phones, for example, played a significant role in the London riots of August 2011 – an event that began with a claim for community justice and culminated in widespread acts of vandalism and theft across the city, carried out primarily by teenagers. The Metropolitan police found that crowds could gather impressively fast while at the same time avoiding police detection and control through the use of the BlackBerry Messenger system- a service used by at least 37% of British teens (Halliday, 2011) at the time, and through which people could connect to larger groups while evading authorities. (Ibid.; Carrick-Davies, 2012)

### 4.3. Participation 'from the side'

Social media as a participatory space faces similar challenges to those that affect physical participatory spaces in the city. Characteristics of recognition, autonomy, openness, accountability and transparency, can still be manipulated on the Internet. Therefore, the presence of authority figures on social-media sites can also disguise attempts to thwart, rather than encourage participation.

Utilising the social character of new media and its potential to facilitate access to information and produce knowledge independently of government apparatuses, a new participatory model proposed by Miessen (2010) could eventually materialise through social media initiatives:

*"Let us bastardize participation into a form of non-democratic practice, an opportunistic model of interventionism, in which interference*

*is possible due to the fact that one is no longer following existing protocols of internalized political struggle. Such a model is what I refer to as a Crossbench Practice."* (Miessen, 2010:490)

This model acts – as Miessen notes – “from the side”: instead of struggling for power from inside-out of the political structures, he proposes that collective actions need to find their place of agitation outside such structures (Miessen, 2010). As a form of contestation, such practices can be enriched by the autonomous character of social media, in terms of gaining external alliances, while gathering local resources in the shape of participation and production of knowledge.

Sometimes citizens' initiatives concur with those from institutions with political leverage over the city's construction. Social media can allow easier ways to connect vertically (Castells, 2009) with such institutions to create alliances and promote accountability across different levels – from the local to the international (Gaventa, 2006). Later we will see examples supporting the argument that institutions should support local urban initiatives, despite their contestation to local authorities. They will also show that local networks need to recognise the best spaces for participation and the power relationships around the production and management of the space.

One point that needs to be considered, independently of the ways in which participation can be integrated into government city-making procedures, is the motivations of authorities, individuals or groups promoting participation. Processes that should be encouraged by practitioners are those which act in the interests of stimulating critical discussions to produce meaningful changes (Miessen, 2010). There may be no cut-and-dry way of identifying the true intentions of actors promoting participation. However, the popularity of social media, and the fact that most conversations are visible to many others, can help to test the motivation and commitment of actors and so help distinguish those using participation as a transformational tool, from those offering only the tokenistic semblance of legitimate participation.

### 4.4. Local production of knowledge

As discussed in Chapter Two, new technologies can facilitate access to information and the production of knowledge. This condition has political implications in terms of the ways in which participation is understood by governments, and how citizens can gain power for negotiation. According to McFarlane (2006), knowledge is produced through interaction, and in response to the demands of particular situations and contexts. Information is then adapted and transformed by the culture and identity of a place. For Souza (2006), 'local knowl-

edge' is the strongest reason for social movements to be included in planning processes. Knowledge of the particularities of the place, the local culture of communication, and local people's needs cannot be underestimated. Souza (Ibid.) maintains that local knowledge together with technical expertise can lead to more effective urban planning practices.

Nowadays almost anyone has the potential to produce and manipulate valuable information, a task that was traditionally associated with experts in particular fields. This is what is known as "crowdsourcing" (Greengard, 2011; Shirky, 2009b). Considering the crowd as a problem-solver and source of innovation (Wexler, 2010) in urban development, crowdsourcing projects can gather the input of local volunteers to be used in a variety of projects, with surveying and mapping as the most common outputs. Challenges for crowdsourcing include developing trusted sources, the costs of establishing – sometimes training, and managing the network responsible of the information (Ibid.). Some governments may find crowdsourcing a "disruptive tool" (Ibid.) as technology becomes a form of political power in hands of a knowledgeable public, who could adapt it to their needs, producing unpredictable results.

Open Data and skilled volunteers support crowdsourcing projects. Open Data is a rising global trend with legal support in countries like the UK, USA, Japan, Chile, and Ecuador, where many public documents are released to the public, and made available via the Internet (Rittenbruch et al 2012). This, where available, helps grassroots initiatives with legal support for their claims and proposals. Skilled volunteers and external organisations can also help to adapt technology to particular conditions, and improve the technical skills of local participants in gathering and

making the best use of the information available. Shirky (2010) argues that technological advances, plus the human motivation to collaborate in something with civic value, are the two elements that make possible all current collective initiatives producing relevant socio-political knowledge. He refers to this as "cognitive surplus". Some examples resulting from such collaborative process are MapKibera and Ushahidi (See Appendix 2). In the case of MapKibera (Figure 4.2), slum dwellers in Kibera (Nairobi) managed to make themselves and their living conditions visible to the world by logging many details of their territory in a Google map. (Figure 4.3)

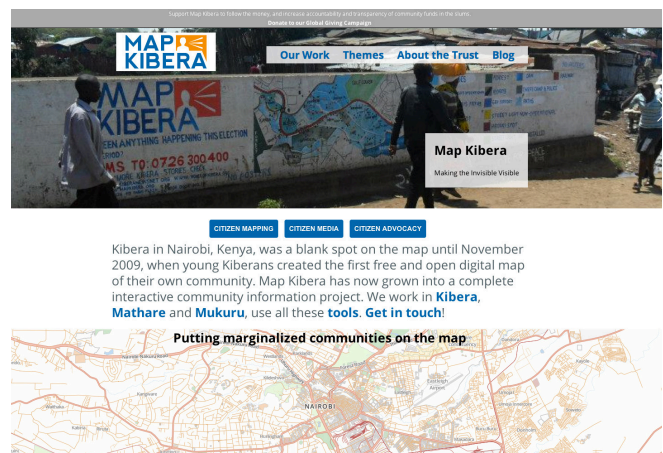
Before, the area appeared to be a generic, indistinguishable green park in the digital map of Nairobi. Mapping was the beginning of different processes of social recognition and local improvement for the area, which also brought the attention of individuals and institutions able to collaborate with their causes (MapKibera, 2012).

As explained in this chapter, there are several ways in which groups use both the digital and the physical space to complement each other in their aim to participate in their city's transformation. Although mobilisations often use social media to coordinate their actions on their territory, the social character of new media also allows social movements to gather information and strategic allies putting them in a better position to negotiate with the authorities, to participate "from the side" in decision making processes about the city. The local production of knowledge, which has been strengthened by social media and new ICT, is still an important asset that mainly remains unacknowledged by planning authorities, and has the risk of getting lost, in the daily amount of new information shared online, unless some political strategy is developed alongside to gain negotiation power.

**Figure 4.2.** MapKibera team in action. Available at: <<http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/Nairobi>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



**Figure 4.3** MapKibera website. Available at: <<http://mapkibera.org/>> [accessed 30 November 2013].





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## 5. The example of Puerto Ayora – The Galapagos Islands - Ecuador

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The examples provided in this chapter will help to analyse the trends of communication and information discussed in previous chapters, taking these to the context of Puerto Ayora. The objective here is to understand how different actors and communication mechanisms are playing decisive roles in the transformation of the city, recognising the local meanings, potential, and limitations in the use of social media for collective initiatives.

There is an evident lack of academic literature about the communication dynamics and the current social movements in the Galapagos. Therefore, I also based my research on news articles, blogs and other social-network sites. Taking advantage of some contacts I made during my work experience in Puerto Ayora in 2010 – 2011 (see Appendix 3), four interviews were conducted via email as part of the analysis<sup>1</sup>. (See Appendix Interviews)

This chapter is intended as an early exploration in a hitherto under-explored context, and it will leave many questions unanswered. My analysis is formed on some examples that, although they marked important moments in the urban discussion of the city, might not be sufficiently representative of the complex and heterogeneous, local dynamics around place making, networking and communication in the island. However, I hope that it suffices as a sound basis for further exploration.

### 5.1. Space and communication in Puerto Ayora – the Galapagos Islands – Ecuador

The Galapagos Islands belong to Ecuador but are located more than 1,000 km away from the country's coast (Figure 5.1). The archipelago was declared a "world heritage" site by the UNESCO in 1978 (D'Orso, 2003) because of its unique ecosystems and the conservation state of their endemic species. Santa Cruz, with a population of over 11,000 (LG, 2009), is the second largest island in the Galapagos archipelago, and hosts 58% of the total population (Marambio, 2009). The main urban area in Santa Cruz is Puerto Ayora with a population over 9,400. Since 1959, the population of the Galapagos has grown from about 2,000 to around 30,000, with tourism-related jobs being the main attraction to new residents. As a result, urban space in Puerto Ayora is highly contested. Environmental restrictions imposed on urban development, and the sudden growth in popu-

lation during the last few decades are the main facts challenging the production and management of physical space in the city.

Due to the worldwide interest in the islands as natural reservoirs, there are various institutions working on conservation projects and research. These institutions have leverage over local policies and practices in order to protect local ecosystems. Therefore, organisations like the Galapagos Natural Park Direction (DPNG) and the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF) are commonly perceived as part of the group of local authorities<sup>2</sup>, joining the Consejo de gobierno de Galápagos (CGG – regional government) and the Santa Cruz municipality, where the mayor has his office.

In 2006, the national government stated that the Galapagos was soon going to be the first region of Ecuador with free Wi-Fi access in all the urban areas; the programme was called RedGal. Six years later, the programme has not

**Figure 5.1.** The Galapagos Islands in relation to the Ecuador's mainland. Available at: < [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Galapagos\\_Islands\\_-\\_Overview.PNG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Galapagos_Islands_-_Overview.PNG) > [accessed 30 November 2013]



achieved its goal and advances at a very slow pace. The director of communications in social-media of the regional government (Interview with Sotomayor 2012) explains that despite RedGal's drawbacks due to technical and bureaucratic limitations, it is reassuring that the national government recognises the importance of digital connection of the islands with the mainland.

Similar to the physical space, the digital space is also challenged in the sense that it is proving an important tool in improving the communication between the people and some institutions – although the low quality of the Internet service can limit this aim. Apart from connecting the islands to the world, the Internet in the Galapagos is re-connecting internal networks. Barwell and Bowles (1997) claim that the distance that internet somehow is reducing is not only geographical but social. I believe that in this case, it is also political. Although Lorenz and Proaño (Interviewed in 2012) state that the culture of participation in the Galapagos is based on face-to-face meetings, they also agree that the role of social media, particularly Facebook, is becoming essential for a better communication between residents, and between residents and the archipelago's authorities. Daniel Proaño states: "Facebook and social media has become the best exercise of democracy in the Galapagos. There you can openly give your opinion, without being sponsored by someone, without physical confrontations with others, and without a space or event as intermediary. This allows citizens to regain the feeling that their perceptions are valued. [...] The traditional media is directly identified with political processes, or at least they are not impartial." (Interview with Proaño, 2012)

The ubiquity of new media that was explored in previous chapters is not so integrated into everyday life for the

majority of people in the Galapagos. However, despite problems associated with poor infrastructure resulting in slow internet connections, social applications and internet access through mobile phones make it possible for more and more people to include online communication as a means to connect locally with others. This can explain why some of the most common applications used by people in Puerto Ayora are Facebook, Twitter, Messenger, and SMS since they can be easily operated on a mobile phone. For the sharing of documents and uploading information to pages on Facebook or Twitter, people often use computers with internet access.

It seems like most of the local and regional public institutions in the Galapagos have a Facebook account (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Most of them were opened over the last three years. Although this expresses an interest from these institutions to be part of the most popular media in the Galapagos, its use seems to be mainly oriented to inform and carry out their activities with a broader public, and not to engage in critical discussions (interview with Sotomayor, 2012). Although local authorities have official websites, and some have internal forums, their use is minimum compared to the one on their Facebook pages.

## 5.2. The examples

The following examples of local movements in Puerto Ayora will help to build a general picture – as well as to identify particularities – of the relationships between citizens' initiatives, the space, and local authorities in Puerto Ayora. They will also show the different communication mechanisms that civic groups have used.

**Figure 5.2.** Santa Cruz municipality's Facebook account. Available at: < <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Consejo-de-Gobierno-de-Gal%C3%A1pagos/179849562048326> > [accessed 28 August 2012]



**Figure 5.3.** Galapagos regional government's Facebook account. Available at: < <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Consejo-de-Gobierno-de-Gal%C3%A1pagos/179849562048326> > [accessed 28 August 2012]



### It is just a big house!

Since late 2010, people from the neighbourhood Punta Estrada in Puerto Ayora have been making enquiries about the construction of a suspiciously big building claiming to be for residential use, but that actually looked more like a hotel. Punta Estrada is a low-density residential area surrounded by an environment-sensitive mangrove forest. All construction projects in the city need construction permits from the municipality, and an environmental impact assessment approved by the DPNG. On the 23th of March 2011 the DPNG, following the residents' allegations, released a letter asking the construction to be stopped immediately since it did not comply with current regulations. The document made clear that the building permit was given for residential use, while the developers were working on a feasibility study for a 26-room hotel in the same location. Although the developers and the municipality denied it, there were news articles, images and plans of the Hotel project being shared among protesters.

On the 28th of March 2011, some Punta Estrada residents formed the group in Facebook "Quiero que en Galapagos se respete la ley!" (I want the law to be respected in Galapagos!) (Figure 5.4). On it, they denounced the apparent case of corruption around the hotel and asked for it to be stopped. However, the claim was wider than that; they alleged it was not the first time that the local authorities were allowing profit-oriented constructions in the Island without the right requirements by law. Despite the notice of closure from the DPNG and the police, the works continued and it was documented through the Facebook group. On the 4th of May 2011, some protesters showed up unexpectedly at the construction site while a judge was doing an inspection of it. This manifestation was co-

ordinated by mobile SMS instead of doing it through Facebook, as that way it could not be visible to everybody. The developers' lawyer and the architect from the Local Planning Office were also there and had to confront people's allegations, while defending their original position about the building; "it was just a big house!" By the 12th of May 2011, the situation had drawn the attention of many more residents in the city and a peaceful demonstration was held in the city centre while people called for a more just Galapagos. The construction has been stopped for now while the developers get the environmental study approved and the right permits for the hotel project.

Sources: (QGRL Facebook, n.d.; El Comercio, n.d.; Alvear, 2011; Galapagos.org, 2011)

### Un cambio por la vida! (A change for life!)

On the 9th of May 2009, there was a road accident in Puerto Ayora where a 16 year-old boy was killed by a car while riding his bicycle. The reckless driving that caused the accident transpired to be the starting point for a social movement in the Galapagos. It was not the first of such road accidents in the town, but this particular case triggered a collective feeling of rejection and frustration against the growing car-dominance on Santa Cruz's roads. According to Daniel Proaño (see Appendix 4), from 1980 to 2006 the number of cars on the island grew from only 28 to 1,276 without much control from local authorities. Led by the boy's family, a march took place on the 2nd of June 2009 to ask the local authorities for better regulations and infrastructure to protect the life of people on the streets of Puerto Ayora. A public manifesto was delivered at the end of the protest with the title "Un cambio por la vida" (UCPV - A change for life), which would later be the name of the foundation, that continues working to this day, promoting a better city for the Galapagos' residents. Initially, the sad news was covered by all traditional and new media. However, the use of social media helped people to organise the march, signatures to support the manifesto were collected through a website for public petitions<sup>3</sup>, and the foundation's vision was published on websites, blogs and people's Facebook accounts.

**Figure 5.4.** Quiero que en Galapagos se respete la ley. Facebook page image. Available at: <<http://www.facebook.com/pages/QUIERO-QUE-EN-GALAPAGOS-SE-RESPETE-LA-LEY>> [accessed 30 November 2013]



From then on, social media, particularly Facebook, have supported the foundation with the discussion of proposals, development of projects and identification of important allies, both as individuals and institutions, inside and outside the island. The foundation soon started to cooperate with community leaders with initiatives on different areas – not just on safe transport – including local culture, environment and politics. The perseverance and proactivity of the movement have managed to influence the political and physical sphere of the city. The changes include the modification of speeding regulations, better road signposting, clear markings for cycling paths, new



cycle-parking areas, and the political support from local, regional, and national government on the promotion of the bicycle as the most appropriate transport means for the Galapagos. (Figure 5.5)

The fact that both UCPV founders have been employed at some point by local authorities could have been decisive in making their claims to be heard and integrating them in local policies. This year, UCPV started a project to explore the potential of mobile telephony as a crowd-sourcing tool in the Galapagos. Their initial project is to understand the landscape of political perception and democratic participation – using mobile-phone surveys – among the inhabitants of Santa Cruz. Sources: (Las Galapagos, 2011; Galapagos Blog, 2011; Interview with Proaño, 2009; and UCPV Manifiesto Appendix 4)

### No! To the party in Tortuga Bay

In February 2010, a group was created on Facebook to allow others to ask the municipality to stop a polemic annual celebration in Santa Cruz Island. Apparently the party was originally held to celebrate the official declaration of the Galapagos as an Ecuadorian province. People in the Facebook group claimed that the celebration had transformed, within recent years, into a huge party with negative effects for the environment. The noise, the displacement of animals from their habitats and the contamination produced by the participants were some of the reasons why people wanted the mayor to stop promoting these events, or to move them somewhere else. Along with the Facebook group, other actions were taken, both in the digital as in the physical context, such as an on-line petition, people calling directly to the mayor office, and others taking the message to the local radio and TV stations. Just a few days after the group started, it had

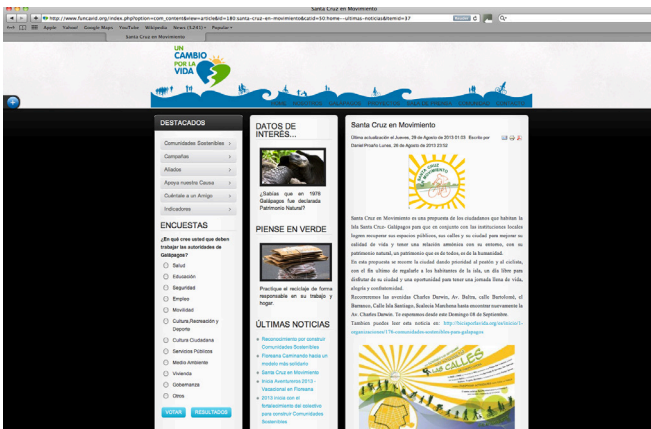
more than 1,300 people, and more than 60 posts. In less than a week, the movement managed to call the attention of other institutions, and even though the party was not cancelled, several restrictions were applied. These were promoted by the DPNG, the police, and lately, by the municipality. The restrictions were about the sale of food and alcohol, and the division of areas where people could not walk to avoid disturbing the tortoises that were nesting a few meters from the party. According to the DPNP Facebook page, the celebration in February 2012 changed from being a noisy party to a recreational event for kids and families. It included activities like a surf championship, snorkelling and kayaking for all ages to promote healthier and more sustainable uses of the beach.

Sources: (Interview with Lorenz, 2012; En la Mira Online, n.d.; no a la fiesta en Tortuga bay Facebook, n.d.; DPNP Facebook page; the Petition Site, 2011)

### 5.3. Can social media make a difference in the Galapagos?

Going back to the question in Chapter 2 ‘can social media make a difference?’ and after analysing the previous examples, I believe that digital communication cannot make a difference by itself; but in the case of Puerto Ayora, it is certainly proving to be an empowering tool for collective action, claiming and proposing a better city. According to D’Orso (2003) and the examples above, people seem to be more comfortable using social media to openly criticise and participate in local debates. The increasing use of tools like Facebook is being recognised by local institutions. Although their commitment to people’s participation does not seem to have increased in online spaces, groups keep using social media actively to share their visions about local issues, to gain support from influencing bodies, and to incite others to pressurise authorities for a response.

Figure 5.5. Un cambio por la vida, website. Available at: < <http://www.funcaavid.org/> > [accessed 30 November 2013]



The transformative potential of social media is attached also, according to the examples, to the particularities of the local context – in terms of social and technological capital, and the place new media occupies in comparison with other media. Social media is still used by only a part of the Galapagos population, leaving older generations, and those lacking internet access out of important discussions (interview with Sotomayor, 2012). That is why the social media strategies in the Galapagos need to be supported by other communication mechanisms to include people that are disconnected from digital networks. To do so, the local relevance of mobile telephony, radio and loudspeaker-cars, for example, cannot be underestimated. In the Galapagos, radio is considered the medium that can reach the majority of the population (Ibid.), and social movements – even if they originate in digital arenas – recognise radio’s benefits in their communication strategies.



This is a case, as Dourish and Satchell (2011) explained, where social media works alongside other media.

Following the situations – exposed in Chapter 4 – about social-media phenomenon in the city, the next sections present particular analysis of the Puerto Ayora's examples in those three topics: Smart mobilisations, participating 'from the side', and local production of knowledge.

### Smart mobilisations

According to D'Orso (2003), mobilisations in the Galapagos have had big impacts on the local government, even before the social-media boom<sup>4</sup>. However, what the examples above show is that social media allows for faster group-forming and coordination of actions (Castells, 2009; Shirky, 2009, 2009b; and Miller, 2011). Puerto Ayora authorities are aware of the potential of people getting together in opposition, and may find it convenient to be part of local discussions people are having on internet. But in this case, where people have lost trust in government participatory processes (interview with Proaño, 2011), it is important for smart mobs to keep their online spaces independent from government apparatus.

According to Guidry, "Movements [...] make spaces into citizenship contests and citizenship contests into the production of new spaces" (2003:190). Meanings for concepts like space and citizenship in Puerto Ayora seem to be challenged by the particularities of the context. As mentioned before, the space is contested by natural conservation restrictions. Similarly, the short history of the city and multicultural migration represent an obstacle to understanding what citizenship might mean in Puerto Ayora. What can be "that space where the promise of citizenship is fulfilled"? (Guidry, 2003) For some residents the ideal city is closer to the one they left to move to the islands. (D'Orso, 2003) In that scenario, what can bring people together to feel like "Galapagueños" and defend their rights as citizens? Sennett (2006) asks how to create a sense of relatedness among strangers in the city. From the examples, it could be concluded that justice over the use of space – whether part of the built or natural environment and the preservation of a good quality of life can be issues making groups in Puerto Ayora more cohesive and feel like citizens.

Through social media, the mobilisations from the examples resulted in support from local and external actors, who influenced in different ways the prompt responses from local authorities. This result might be also affected by the size of the network in the case of Puerto Ayora, where some mobilisations' participants can have personal connections with influencing institutions, or the local and regional government. This

is not to diminish the importance of the network; it actually highlights the importance of the vertical connectivity described by Castells (2009) as an important feature of online networks.

### "From the side" participation

In Ecuador, there is a national Law for Civic Participation (Ley de Participación Ciudadana). But according to Patricio Proaño (interviewed, 2011), participation in the Galapagos is still a tool used for populist politicians and governmental bodies to promote their people-oriented brand, rather than to facilitate authentic and productive political debate. This Law encourages civic groups to participate actively in the political discussions, and proposals about the city. Simultaneously, it requires public institutions to open participative spaces and be accountable to the Asambleas Ciudadanas de Participación (Civic Committees for Participation). Although, in practice, it does not work as is intended, social media serves as a common place for different actors interested in the participative production of the city to explore starting points for collaboration.

A common feature of the examples here is that, soon enough after they initiated their protests, the groups were no longer in a position of struggling from the bottom, but from "the side" (Miessen, 2010). Social media allowed these movements to utilise the connection with important alliances, and the capacity to share information, as empowering elements, putting them in a better position to negotiate with the government. With the term "from the side" Miessen (Ibid.) also means that social movements can, in this model, avoid the constraints of bureaucracy to produce change in the city. In the case of the Galapagos, external and international support has made some projects possible without the need for government backing. However, for initiatives related to urban development, the approval from the local government is always needed.

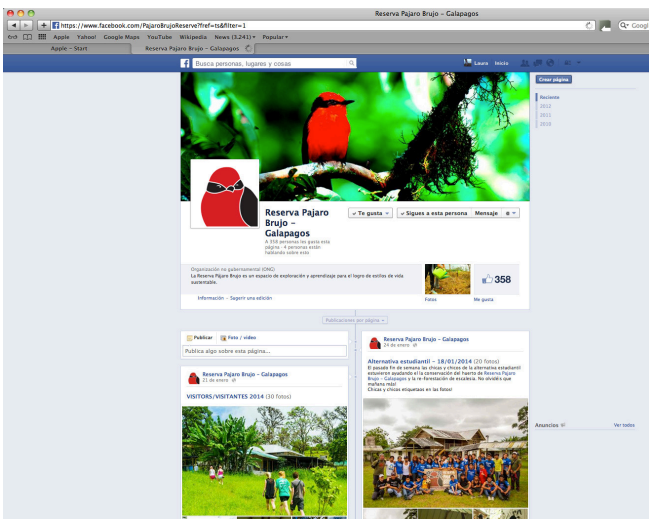
UCPV is an example of how momentary protests can be transformed into more lasting and sustainable negotiation processes; from working 'despite the government' to 'work with it' (Souza, 2006). According to UCPV founders – Daniel and Patricio Proaño (see Appendix Interviews) – social media has been essential during that process; having the support from local authorities has been as important for UCPV as keeping their autonomy, which is mainly done through social media.

### Production of knowledge

Although the groups participating in social media discussions about the Galapagos might not represent the majority of the population, there is an important potential in the heterogeneous and multidisciplinary character of such networks. From teenagers to retired

biologists, from Ecuadorians to foreigners living in the Galapagos, from tour-guides to public workers, the exploration of multiple points of view about the local problematics – depicting the “technourban imaginaries” in the city (de Wall, 2011) – can result in complementary contributions to collective initiatives. This potential has not been explored yet. From the exam-

**Figure 5.6.** NGO Pajaro Brujo. Facebook page image. Local community and educational projects for a more sustainable life style in Galapagos. Available at: < <https://www.facebook.com/PajaroBrujoReserve?fref=ts> > [accessed 28 January 2014]



ples, it seems that the role of social-media users as producers of information is being concentrated only on collecting and sharing information to support their claims. From the experience of international projects like MapKibera, Ushahidi or WikiPlanning (in Chapter 4), groups in Puerto Ayora could import global ideas for collaborative production of knowledge, adapting these to their own local conditions. In this way, the social resource of participation could start affecting the spaces of the city in different ways. One constraint in Galapagos is the limitation on capacity and accessibility to the Internet, but hopefully international ideas for the best use of mobile telephony and light Internet connections could also be adapted locally.

Collective initiatives like UCPV seem to have recognised the power relationships in Puerto Ayora and have been able to work alongside government institutions to produce political and physical changes. Knowing the social and political structures of the city - the room for manoeuvre for urban transformational initiatives - can make UCPV strategies more feasible and successful in gathering the needed support from local authorities. This type of knowledge cannot be underestimated. It could be utilised to lead, or advise organisations with similar purposes to those from UCPV (Figure 5.6). Several projects, looking for a more sustainable and affordable way to improve Puerto Ayora, have not being delivered because of the complex political environment in the Galapagos. It is here where the type of knowledge from collectives like UCPV becomes valuable and, I would argue, needed for a socially balanced development of the islands.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. People interviewed for this paper authorised me explicitly to use the content of such interviews for this analysis.
2. This judgment is made on my own experience working with local communities alongside some of these institutions.

3. Public petitions' website: [www.firmemos.es](http://www.firmemos.es)
4. D'Orso writes about the case of a corrupt judge in Puerto Ayora being expelled out of the islands by an angry crowd after a protest, which took only one day. (2003:14)

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## 6. Conclusion

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This paper has studied the impacts of social media in the interaction between citizens and governments around the production of the city. Factors like the social features of new technologies, the tensions between global and local implications of digital connectivity, the different ways social movements support their actions through social media, and the limitations and challenges of new ICTs have been analysed to increase the understanding of social-media potential in urban development.

Ubiquitous connectivity through the Internet and mobile telephony is no longer a novelty. Moreover, the culture of connectivity is part of the world as it is today (Shirky, 2009). "Although subtle, this shift in society is real and radical. [...] The network has become the dominant cultural logic. Our economy, public sphere, culture and even our subjectivity are mutating rapidly and show little evidence of slowing down the pace of their evolution" (Varnelis, 2008). The relevance of new connectivity in society has been covered at length by several authors, but the debate now needs to shift towards recognising the potentials for ICT in improving our lives (Shirky, 2009), which include the promise of making a better city.

To make the most of what new technology has to offer, it is essential to analyse features and meanings of social media in local contexts. As seen in the examples in the Galapagos, ubiquity of new media understood locally could explain why some technology and applications are being more used than others, and how they start gaining the attention of local authorities. Following Miller's conclusion about Facebook, "[social media] work best when used to compensate for the deficiencies or stresses of other forms of communication." (2011:184) Consequently, I have argued that some questions should be addressed by those interested in a more participative process of making the city; some of these questions are: what is the most popular communication mechanism used for discussing local problems? What are the motivations behind this? What is the approach of authorities to social media? Can the technology in place and service coverage reach the majority of the population? Are online participants a reflection of local heterogeneity – in terms of age, gender, occupation, economic status? Who are those disconnected and why? Have online social initiatives moved from deliberation to developing urban proposals?

Understanding social media, not in rivalry of physical space but, as an expansion of it, facilitates the recognition of merging points between the two spatial categories. As shown through the examples in Chapter 5, for social mobilisations, social media represents is often the best place for gathering information and coordinating their actions. But also for governments, social media signifies an important part of the public sphere where they also want to be present (Habermas, 1996 cited in Varnelis and Friedberg, 2008); whether driven by the purpose of political legitimisation or, on the contrary, by the productivity of critical participation (Miessen, 2010). In a sense, the autonomous character of the Internet can provide a safeguard against the silencing and manipulation of people's opinions by authorities. However, this is presuming that people have equal publication control, which is not exactly the case in China and in other censored contexts (see Appendix 1).

As explored in the Galapagos' examples, collective initiatives can gain leverage thanks to the vertical connectivity of social media (Castells, 2009). If claims or proposals are not accepted by local governments, people can find support in other institutions with influencing power over city-making processes. This is not to say that only through the Internet can such collaborative processes take place. However, the many-to-many model of communication, typical of social media, facilitates and amplifies the possibilities of connecting around common interests.

The production and sharing of information through social media, also empowers groups to contest "from the side" (Miessen, 2010). As shown in Example 1 in Chapter 5, important documents can be found and shared through social media to support people's claim in cases of injustice. Digital communication tools have augmented users' innovative capacity - a shift that is being utilised for some institutions as a resource for development projects (see section 4.4, and Appendix 2). Crowdsourcing, however, needs to be understood as a mechanism where individuals are not only sources of data for surveys, but the producers of knowledge that can be used locally (McFarlane, 2006). Social movements and authorities should ensure the local adaptation of ICT to re-connect with the less digitally served areas. Probably, such groups could find the use of social-media convenient in reconfiguring their relationship with the government and the city.

For planning authorities, the use of social media can help in understanding the different techno-urban imaginaries of a place: "Projects whose main focus can be reduced to a single framing of what a city is are often problematic. [...] Only by bringing these often-implicit urban ideals can we engage in the discussion of how these urban media can best serve society." (de Waal, 2011:16) In that sense, social media can be a valuable resource for city planning.

Finally, politicians, academics and urban designers who believe that public participation could be the force behind making a better city, should also ad-

vocate for the next two purposes, in their own fields and capacities. First, following MacKinnon (2011), the autonomous character of the Internet needs to be defended against the control from the government and big ICT developers. And second, the analysis of social media potential cannot only be a consideration for communication sciences. As a platform that is participatory in nature and that is proving to strength the leverage of groups acting in the city; social media analysis – at the local level - needs to be included in both theoretical and practical discourses about the contemporary city.

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## Appendices

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### A1. Sichuan schools

During and after the earthquake in Sichuan - China, in 2008, social media played two important roles. First, it was used to report, from thousands of mobile devices, the situation in the affected areas. The first report about the event came to the BBC through a Chinese Twitter account. People were showing what the China official media was not broadcasting. The Beijing Olympics were coming and the government wanted to show themselves to the world as an open government, so initially did not stop the social media hype. The second role of social media was when people realised the most affected buildings that caused the death of thousands of children were schools built by the government. Protesters got together, alleging a case of corruption, and demanded the government for a response, while reporting it to the world through social media. The Chinese government could not filter or stop the messages as they were produced, so their last resource was to close the service of Twitter in the country. (Shirky, 2009; Watts, 2008)

### A2. Mapping the invisible

Ushahidi is a website that was created by a Kenyan lawyer and two international programmers to map the violence reports, sent by hundreds of people, during the political crisis in early 2008 in Kenya. Ushahidi means 'testimony' in Swahili. Since then it has been applied in many different countries, and contexts, supporting movements through mapping reports from citizens. The crisis map of Haiti after the earthquake, the report of public elections in India, the map of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, are some of the applications that people all over the world are giving to the platform. It has also inspired software designers to do similar open source mapping platforms. One interesting case is the MapKibera.org. Through this, slum dwellers of one of the largest slums in Africa managed to make themselves visible to the world. To do so, they located the slum – its streets, churches, schools, water taps, and toilets among other facilities – in a Google map to be easily accessed on the Internet. Before that, the area appeared in the map like a green park at the south of central Nairobi. The map was the beginning of different processes to give a voice to the slum dwellers and bring the attention of individuals and institutions able to collaborate with their causes.

Sources: (Shirky, 2010; <http://mapkibera.org/>, <http://www.slideshare.net/nitin.gaopande/winter-project-how-ushahidi-is-and-will-change-the-face-of-crowdsourcing>, <http://ushahidi.com/>)

### A3. My experience in Puerto Ayora

I worked for the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment in the production of three design workshops in Puerto Ayora: November 2010, Architecture Code- workshop; June 2011, Urban Code – workshop; July 2011, First Demonstrational workshop, The Plot.

The goal of these workshops was the discussion and production of Architectural and Urban Codes, which illustrated the best practices for the project El Mirador in terms of sustainability and co-existence with the unique environment of the island. The codes are not legal guidelines, but it is expected that the municipality includes part of the codes in the existing building regulation for the project. My role was flexible enough to pass from architect assistant to translator and facilitator in several occasions, which gave me the opportunity to explore the relations between the different actors participating in the process.

### A4. UCPV Manifesto

[taken from <http://www.firmemos.es/manifiestoporlavida-galapagosec>, original text in Spanish, translated by Juliana Jaramillo]

#### "A CHANGE FOR LIFE"

On the 2nd May 2009, a date that will never be forgotten, Santa Cruz mourned a friend and son, Patricio Bravo Proaño, a teenager who tragically passed away in a traffic accident. The campaign "A Change for Life" was born in memory of Patricio Proaño Bravo and other victims of road accidents in the Galapagos, in order to generate a movement of citizen action to bring about change in the transport system for the protection of life.

Patito (little duck) Proaño at his young age was embedded in the hearts of his people, a people who grieved



his death, and who accompanied him on his funeral and wanted to remember him with this crusade, with "A Change for Life".

In 1980, the number of vehicles in Santa Cruz was 28, but just 26 years later (2006) this number had increased to 1,276 without any local, provincial or national authority assuming responsibility for vehicular regulation, signaling and control in our country. What does the number of cars need to be before controlling this abrupt increase?

In Ecuador, the leading cause of death for children 5-14 years is traffic accidents, impunity for these acts is raised to 60%; the losses by these accidents amount to US\$200 million each year and take 150 lives per month and leave over 1,000 injured. Of these accidents, 70% are caused by inexperience or recklessness as happened with Patito (little duck) Proaño and Fernando Gil.

## A5. Interviews

Note: the people interviewed for this paper authorised me explicitly to use the content of such interviews for this analysis.

**1. Personal interview with:** Patricio Proaño, 21 December 2011. Director of 'Un Cambio Para la Vida' (UCPV), via Facebook [<http://www.facebook.com/patricio.proanom>] (Original text in Spanish – translation Manuela Belle).

**1.1. In your opinion, which is the best example showing the importance of community participation in Santa Cruz projects.**

Proaño, P.: Civil participation started to be significant in Galapagos in 1997 during the development of the Galapagos Marine Reserve management plan, with the 'Grupo Núcleo'. Following that Civil Participation was also important for the development of the 'special law' ('Ley Especial'), a request for participation with a model of co-management and co-administration which has been, in a variety of occasions, an example of how to manage protected areas.

With the constitution of the 'Civil Participation Law' ('Ley de Participación Ciudadana') a new model of participation was established in Ecuador and it was possible to have a 'Civil participation system' ('Sistema de Participación Ciudadana') at all Government levels, pushing citizens to be dynamic and proactive to be able to plug in all those different systems - since they all have similar mechanisms and tools. At the moment, we are going through a period of understanding and it is not easy for the authorities to start handing over their power.

In the group 'a change for life's (colectivo 'Un Cambio para la Vida') experience, we have learnt that you achieve power/governance by understanding and communicating with authorities, companies and citizens. We believe we can add more value to obtain the development of sustainable, equitable and fair cities.

**1.2. In your opinion, which is the biggest barrier to the inclusion of civil participation as a necessary/ fundamental process for the development projects in the region?**

Proaño, P.: Not only in the Galapagos, people do not yet understand the importance of participation. We can change the current situation - citizen utilisation in the conventional way; that has become part of the lifestyle/ routine in the villages - only with a strong process of citizen education.

We need to make sure we understand correctly the form and concepts of democracy and of the different levels of participation. Those are substantial topics that should be clear to everybody in order to be able to understand each other.

**2. Personal interview with:** Daniel Proaño, 09 April 2012. Founder of 'Un Cambio Para la Vida' (UCPV), interview via email [[danielproanob@gmail.com](mailto:danielproanob@gmail.com)] (Original text in Spanish – translation Juliana Jaramillo).

**2.1. What kind of organisations, similar to "a change for life" do you know exist in Galapagos? I mean, an organisation which had arisen from citizens with a vision of a better city, where somehow the way local authorities plan the city are criticised, or which promotes citizen participation, or where alternatives to improve city are proposed?**

Proaño, D.: "A Change for life" is as far as I know the only civil society organisation that is born from these features and that has lasted for longer than two years, I mean, in the Galapagos there is a culture of promoting social organisation to find common grounds on the aspirations of improving social conflicts. However, this kind of pro - organisation culture is ephemeral, and with a great tendency to generate a document - a letter - public manifesto, a demonstration and its delivery to local authorities, for example, there have been issues about basic public services (water supply, sewerage, health quality improvement, improved streets), corruption issues (lawsuits that end in impunity and corruption of judges), civil works (playgrounds, hospital, police neighbourhood), among others.

Because this culture pro-organisation is momentary, the citizens have not learnt how to track what they once signed, supported, demonstrated in the streets and denounced, and this leads to a constant disappointment if successes are not reported or local changes have not been achieved. "A change for life" is therefore the only [organisation] that has chosen to go beyond that and not

only proposes the improvement of mobilisation actions (as it has been done on its manifesto, march and initial complaint) but also allows the connection among other subjects that are considered appropriate from the inhabitants point of view (perception).

Thus, rather than organizations there are people and local initiatives that propose an improvement of their city – there are leaders in social, cultural, environmental and political issues, and they are the ones that generate actions that may or may not become processes or organisations. In this step from an initiative, a demonstration and a manifesto to a citizen process beyond the limits of ephemeral community participation, it has to clearly face two major challenges: first the ability to maintain a cause in people's minds (and this requires funding and an impact strategy) and on the other, find out a priori (in advance) if all that has (or not) political interests or has factional aspirations, the latter is the most crucial because it allows an effective participation that transcends time or an ephemeral participation that is not faithful to the cause (in the case of being political).

What we are proposing today in “A change for life” is no longer to create isolated citizen processes, but rather encourage and support (sponsor?) local causes that generate sustainable and meaningful action at the local level, of course, provided they build better cities, better communities, beyond political interests.

**2.2. Please correct me if I am wrong in this assessment: In my opinion websites like Facebook, Twitter or blogs play an important role in communication processes in Galapagos citizen's organisations, particularly when it comes to any criticism of the local government. (I have only one example: anonymous Facebook profiles where some local processes are criticized and where people seem to actively discuss). What do you think about it? How do you read the use of social media compared to newspapers, radio or television in the islands?**

Proaño, D.: Facebook and [other] social networks become, for the particular case of Galapagos, in the best exercise of democracy, because you can speak your mind openly, without being sponsored, physical confrontation to anyone or a space or event involved, allowing citizens to think they can assert their perception or point of view again, or at least the satisfaction of sharing their insight with other actors or people you know or will never know. I'm not so sure it's so necessary today being anonymous, as you can already see people that openly express their opinions on the social networks.

Now, the reason why social networks have become a great tool is because in such a small place with so few local media, to have a mass media is a major investment and if you want to use it as a means of making a complaint this will generate an economic or political cost. Traditional

media are directly identified with alliances with political processes or at least are not impartial, because in order to survive they must sell their advertisement and services to major institutions such as municipalities, governing council, national park or government entities (ministries and local government), that's why there are media with or without ethical or economical opening according to the complaint. Today, social networks allow “A change for Life” to identify working strategies, get people involved, consult and influence (both people and government).

**2.3. What other kind of means are the most effective for citizen initiatives?**

Proaño, D.: A highly effective means to generate public debate and encourage word of mouth spread, I mean, we are a society that likes to keep informed and tell other what happens (we somehow like to gossip), that's why it's evident that there is a mechanism sometimes used in a destructive instead of constructive way for social processes, I'll give you an example to explain that: If during this week the municipal government, the governing council or any other entity or authority must take a decision, there will begin a positive or negative rumour about that decision and it would end in interviews, complaints and comments about the subject, this mechanism doesn't require mass media once the word of mouth spread begins. Finally, mobile phone texting (Short Message Service –SMS-) is the most widely used tool for personal communication and this has not been used so far in spite of being an effective and affordable method for massive communication. This year “A change for Life” will begin a project that will boost the concept of portable citizenship, I mean, to use a mobile phone in favour of democracy, to spread public perception (after the systematisation of a perception poll exercise) and encourage mobile surveys or consultations on specific topics.

**3. Personal interview with:** Swen Lorenz, 12 August 2012. Director of the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF), interview via email [swen.lorenz@innomega.de]

**3.1 From your experience, which are the main means people prefer to use to participate in or to give their opinion about local or regional public issues in Puerto Ayora? (Internet, radio, letters, meetings, others?) What could be the reason behind preferring one choice from another?**

Lorenz, S.: The most often used way are meetings. Galapagos is a place where a meeting is arranged for just about anything. Phones work badly and video calls are unthinkable given the bandwidth limitation. There is a culture of writing articles for or letters to the local newspaper, at least for a part of the population. There is a notable and growing use of social media, primarily Facebook, to make one's opinion heard and to rally for causes of local interest. Almost everyone has a Facebook account.

### 3.2 Is the Charles Darwin Foundation currently using Internet utilities, such as Facebook or Twitter to communicate with Galapagos citizens? If so, how is it working?

Lorenz, S.: We started using a Facebook site about 6 weeks ago. It was started from scratch and now has 280 users. The first tests indicate that it is working really well:

- We get the message out both to staff as well as to an external audience (incl. key partners).
- Constantly growing user numbers and postings on other websites.
- However, the majority of users are foreigners right now as we mainly post in English. With our growing communication department (we hired a fulltime communications person just 2 weeks ago, and previously had none) this is likely to change.
- We are not using Twitter yet, simply because we want to test and develop Facebook first and then add Twitter.

### 3.3 Do you think the use of social media, and the deliberation about local issues can develop more engaged citizens, who may be more interested and participate more actively in discussions about local policies and projects in the islands?

Lorenz, S.: Yes, absolutely it can. A great example was the (controversial) No a la Fiesta en Tortugay Bay Facebook website, which gathered 3,000 friends and became a political issue (and lead to changes being made to the fiesta in Tortuga Bay).

### 3.4 Do you think Internet tools such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc., have the potential to improve the relationship between citizens and local authorities at the local and regional scale in the Galapagos?

Lorenz, S.: Yes, because they make dissemination of information easier and faster, and also enable two way communication. Check the websites of the PNG and the CGG.

### 3.5 Do you think that people's participation through the Internet could at some point replace face-to-face participative events dealing with local or regional development in the Galapagos?

Lorenz, S.: No, because the culture is geared towards meetings and because the bandwidth issue is so frustrating and limiting (e.g. you cannot disseminate videos).

### 3.6 In your opinion, which do you consider the major obstacle for civic participation in Puerto Ayora and Galapagos?

Lorenz, S.: There is a general sense of frustration and "we can't do anything anyway" among many. There is a lack of information and transparency, although this has been improving a lot.

## 4. Personal interview with: Jorge Sotomayor, 14 August 2012. Director of Communications in Social Networks of the Governing Council of Galapagos. CGG (Consejo de Gobierno de Galapagos), interview via Facebook [<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Consejo-de-Gobierno-de-Gal%C3%A1pagos/179849562048326>]

### 4.1 Do you know what happened to the REDGAL project regarding free wireless networks for Galapagos proposed in 2006?

Sotomayor, J.: Let me tell that REDGAL is still working for the community but there are indeed some drawbacks due to the slowness of the system, some drawbacks were internal in nature because we had to stick to the bureaucracy of the public sector and other drawbacks were due to the technology that had to be adapted to the environmental conditions and the ambitious goals of the project. I know the internet connection arrived to Floreana, the most isolated island in the archipelago and there were good reviews of it despite the slow service, so I think we cover the whole province.

### 4.2 Why do you think the national government supports Galapagos having better free internet coverage compared to the other regions of Ecuador?

Sotomayor, J.: One problem that Galapagos has always had is the difficulty of maintaining communication with Ecuador's mainland. As an anecdote, when I was young I thought our president was the former Peruvian President, Fujimori. That was because it was easier to get information from the Peruvian signal rather than the Ecuadorian one.

### 4.3 Do you think media internet discussion as Facebook, blogs, Twitter, etc., Can improve the relationship between citizens and authorities at local and regional level?

Sotomayor, J.: Social networks have had a strong impact on young people in particular, I see young people in social networks organising social events and discussing problems and trying to propose alternatives and solutions, although there is still reluctance on the part of this social group to join the power groups or political movements. The latter two are closely linked... It could help improve relations between society and the authorities but we need commitments on both sides and this requires direct dialogue between the parties and that society learns to get organised and authorities learn to fulfil their promises.

### 4.4 What are the ways that people prefer to use to give their opinions or to participate in governance issues, (internet, radio, letters, meetings, meetings?) What do you think is the reason behind this preference? What is the most noticeable difference in terms of public participation when people use online tools?

Sotomayor, J.: Young people in Galapagos like to have their say in social networks. The adult population participates in the radio mainly but they also participate in discussion forums and socialization of projects as long as there are these public open spaces, them being not very common. I would say these take place only a couple of times a year.

4.5 In addition to this page of the Governing Council, do you know if there is any public or private institution that is currently using any social network or mobile internet for discussions, citizen participation, invitations to events, etc.?

Sotomayor, J.: The truth is that public institutions do not use social networks or the Internet for open discussion or to open up social spaces. Their presence is rather to inform or publicise their activities (excel or advertise). This includes the Governing Council page but we are trying to change this. Let me tell you, it is not so easy.

But you can check:

The House of Culture of Galapagos Galapagos Education Provincial Directorate, municipality of San Cristobal, Galapagos National Park (also has website and twitter), the Governing Council has two Facebook pages (Governing Council of Galapagos, International CGGalapagos) Twitter (@ CGGalapagos) and blog (<http://swin-swam-swum.blogspot.com/>), Provincial Government of Galapagos

There are pages on Facebook that are on track but they are not from public or private institutions, but rather independent organisations or individuals:

Citizens' Assembly-Sta Cruz Galapagos, Galapagos Cinema, Citizen Galapagos Galapagos Isabela bare, Come to the Galapagos Marathon, Galapagos flycatcher Reserve

4.6 What was the motivation for the Governing Council to decide to make use of tools like Facebook as a means of communication with citizens?

Sotomayor, J.: The growing success of social networks allowed us to open a space to publicise the activities of our institution and gain prestige and awareness, of course at the beginning there was the fear of the disadvantages generated opening communication and receiving reports and complaints and more than a benefit for the institution it could prove to be harmful, but apparently the fears were unfounded. Now we hope it will be a means to solve problems both in our institution and problems created by other public institutions or to correct and guide social actions. Another reason is that we had to cut our budget and we needed cheaper mass media and social networking is amazing because it costs us nothing. Another reason is the limitations of our corporate website, which is in charge of the communication areas (it belongs to the IT department) and that's a big hurdle for us.

4.7 Do you think that at some point online participation can replace face to face meetings to discuss issues of local or regional policy?

Sotomayor, J.: I think not and it shouldn't be so. It is true that the internet and social networks help keep us informed and aware of the versions on both sides of the story and that is a good thing to start a discussion and raise agreements but it is very important to get together, sit at one table and discuss widely and formally local and regional political issues.

4.8 Do you think social media discussions about the city, new laws, complaints, etc., help create more engaged citizens with what is happening in the city in terms of policy and urban planning?

Sotomayor, J.: Yes, and in fact the social networks have helped young peoples in the Galapagos coordinate activities and reach more people in defence of their causes in less time than the traditional media and acquire feedback much faster.

4.9 What is the biggest obstacle in terms of citizen participation in Puerto Ayora and Puerto Baquerizo?

Sotomayor, J.: The spaces or alternatives where the citizen's voice is heard and has relevance are scarce; most of the decisions are already taken by the authorities or are used in acts of citizen's participation to meet certain pre-established requirements by public institutions. The social networks have helped in expanding these opportunities for citizen's opinions and we are seeing results.

4.10 Is it common for people to use mobile phones to connect to the Internet?

Sotomayor, J.: Recently mobile telephony has improved significantly and more people are opting for these options where they have access to a fast Internet service at low cost.

4.11 What is the quickest and most effective way to send a message that reaches the most amount of people living in the Galapagos: TV., radio, SMS, Facebook or Twitter, in the case of an emergency or natural disaster, for example?

Sotomayor, J.: I have heard about a radio station that has provincial-level coverage called "Radio Encantada". The other traditional media do not have enough range to reach all the islands, and the downside of social media is that it only comes to a segmented group mainly young people, mobile messaging (SMS) is excellent in case of emergencies however the case there is of getting the word from person to person, creating a network that is too widespread and sometimes carries a lot of distortion in the information.





## DPU WORKING PAPER NO. 160

The Development Planning Unit, University College London (UCL), is an international centre specialising in academic teaching, research, training and consultancy in the field of urban and regional development, with a focus on policy, planning, management and design. It is concerned with understanding the multi-faceted and uneven process of contemporary urbanisation, and strengthening more socially just and innovative approaches to policy, planning, management and design, especially in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as well as countries in transition.

The central purpose of the DPU is to strengthen the professional and institutional capacity of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deal with the wide range of development issues that are emerging at local, national and global levels. In London, the DPU runs postgraduate programmes of study, including a research degree (MPhil/PhD) programme, six one-year Masters Degree courses and specialist short courses in a range of fields addressing urban and rural development policy, planning, management and design.

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The academic staff of the DPU are a multi-disciplinary and multi-national group with extensive and on-going research and professional experience in various fields of urban and international development throughout the world. DPU Associates are a body of professionals who work closely with the Unit both in London and overseas. Every year the student body embraces more than 45 different nationalities.

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