From Social Butterfly to Engaged Citizen: Urban Informatics, Social Media, Ubiquitous Computing and Mobile Technology to Support Citizen Engagement

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In 2009, two workshops exploring urban informatics were held: one at Pennsylvania State University, University Park, and the other at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Research and inquiry into the changing landscape of technology-enabled engagement with communities, cities and spaces was presented at both of these events. From these gatherings of international scholarship and research, the book, *From social butterfly to engaged citizen: Urban informatics, social media, ubiquitous computing and mobile technology to support citizen engagement*, was compiled. Within these agglomerations, through the lens of the emerging field of urban informatics, both the citizen and citizenship are under scrutiny. There is a clear sense of positioning urban informatics to play a role in the development of the public sphere and community. The editors are acutely aware of the challenge confronting them in their explorations of relations between the social, technology and space, noting a need to apply new hybridities, concepts, theories and methods for understanding such relationships.

The book addresses five themes: theories of engagement; civic engagement; creative engagement; technologies of engagement; and design engagement. Obviously, engagement is a core organising thematic and, as both idea and ideal are explored in its breadth, not all engagement is the same. The critical question, as the editors describe, is to understand how various technologies can be harnessed for engagement to pursue diverse ends, including better engagement. However, in itself engagement is not tantamount to citizenship: it is one of many citizenship practices. As Iveson writes, it is not sufficient to facilitate citizen participation, but rather to ask 'What is the vision of the good citizen and the good city they seek to enact?' While technologies do not create the citizen, strategies of citizenship are enacted with and through them. The participation of citizens is not the only hallmark of progressive or empowering urban governance. Consequently, many of the projects in the book address engagement in terms of a communicative, conversational or informational process, for example 'Climate on the Wall'

and 'CO2nfession/C02mmitment'. Others, like 'Smart Garden Watering', establish a more obvious informational feedback loop intended to modify the behaviours of suburban gardeners in water conservation. Exercising the responsible consumption of natural resources is a different position and practice to exercising citizenship. Such a difference is highlighted in De Cindio and Peraboni's project which develops online citizen dialogue and deliberation. They note the need for higher level modes of online participation which can evolve through 'hives' for civic participation in decision-making. Current civic initiatives, such as FixMyStreet, tend to have little impact on public discourse and decision-making. There is a changing awareness of civic agency: a more mature public space, supported by government, can reinforce public dialogue and foster citizen involvement.

One of the recurring images – or visions – in the book is that of the ubiquitous city (u-city), where technologies not only shape our experience of the city and its urban culture, but are also shaped by our ideas of the city. Our imaginaries, as de Waal argues, exert influence in the design of urban technologies. Ubiquity can sometimes translate as invisibility, even a set of hidden permissions or protocols that shape the everyday. In her study of South Korean U-Cities, Halegoua claims that the examination of media practice and consumption at the level of urban street and everyday life is an under-explored opportunity. Yet, despite that promise, there is no sense of citizen participation in decision-making about urban space in some Korean cities. Informationalisation or information processing pervades the urban environment and results in the interpenetration of architectural surfaces, bodies, signals and waves. Fuller and Harley claim this creates new kinds of social engagement and 'forces of relationality'. Considering a protocological surround, they pose a question for the citizen who is 'modulated back into the space of flows', asking 'what kind of engaged citizen we might imagine if citizenry isn't even really aware of its engagement anymore?' There is a sense of being connected but not necessarily switched on. However, this unspoken participation can be regarded as implicit participation where engagement is grounded in everyday actions (as in people voting with their feet), rather than words.

At the very least, these questions present challenges for empowerment and for practice. Dourish and Satchell suggest that moral economy and forms of social participation are evident in the use of social media. Less concerned with a focus on tools, they draw attention to social acts and media ecology to highlight the formation of publics rather than audiences. One of the striking examples of active social participation is found in the citizen science community. Paulos, Kim and Kuznetsov found that new technologies enable citizen scientists in measuring and monitoring their environments. This tactical use of sensors in the urban environment captures data that can be used in advocacy and activist efforts. User-generated data – as in the movements

of people in the city – can also facilitate understanding of the experience of the city. Pereira et al. say this kind of 'implicit engagement' can result in the development of urban indicators to evaluate urban strategies. The city is sensory and sentient – we now know more about our environment and our own occupation of it than ever before as the distinction between infrastructure and inhabitant blurs.

As these brief notes about the content of the book demonstrate, *From social butterfly to engaged citizen* offers insight into the breadth of intellectual inquiry into the interplay of technology, the city, community and space. As predominantly academic projects, the chapters offer examples of enmeshed and emerging methodologies. For example, Forlano has designed several methods that support open innovative networks where citizens are engaged in collaborative knowledge creation and the making of an open source city. In her engagement with mobile work, Forlano's experimental approaches included using Twitter for ethnographic notes taken in public spaces appropriated for co-working. Another example is 'flash mob ethnography' as a form of fieldwork. This book evinces that theoretical and research agendas are attentive to and anticipating of the needs of cities and communities where the urban and technological are intrinsically entangled. The book outlines numerous learnings about enhancing human–computer–urban experience in ways that canvas opportunities for citizen engagement, social relations and urban governance with an eye to the future.