

Hybrid Spaces. Interview with Panayotis Antoniadis

<http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/hybrid-spaces-interview-with-panayotis-antoniadis/>

"NetHood" (subtitle).

"NetHood is a non-profit organization working on (digital) tools and infrastructures for a community-driven organization of living - in and with communities" (subtitle)

PA: 00:32 So yes, NetHood is a, I could say the outcome of a love story of the digital age. It was when I was in Paris and my partner and co-founder of NetHood Ileana Apostol was in Los Angeles and we liked the same photo on Flickr, and this made us peaking the list of people that liked the photo, and this is how we met. And for one or two years we were communicating just through commenting on our photos. And actually this was the first moto of NetHood: bridging the virtual with the physical. So, we became partners and we started trying to work together. I was a digital, let's say, expert that was working on networking wireless technology and she was on public space. So then, the next step of this bridging goes to bridge our disciplines. So we started talking about interdisciplinarity, urban studies, technology and ICTs et cetera. Some time there the named NedHood appeared. Our joke is that I was the net and she was the hood, and we were starting developing ideas, mostly theoretical work on this hybrid space, how it can be more democratic both on the technology side? So, this broad discussion about community networks, network infrastructure owned by communities, et cetera, but also democratic on the urban side where Ileana brought ideas from participatory planning, urban design and all these things.

PA: 02:16 **"hybrid space"** (subtitle)

PA: 02:16 And we have both this common idea in parallel about the understanding hybrid space. I mean how digital technology influences the physical relationships and the life in the city. What is important with the hybrid space is the, this type of technologies, is on the technological side, bring technology to the people. So, from a technological side it could be seen as an emancipation and sovereignty tool. On the urban side, exactly because of the abundance of internet connectivity and all these

platforms, we experience some sort of isolation in the cities, people becoming more and more immersed into the digital and to not looking around them, not meeting in person. I think that for sure we have lost the immediate link with our immediate environment, I mean with the neighborhood. And again, this technology that by design brings people together that are very close, it has the potential of animating interesting relationships and processes between them. And the working on this idea of hybrid space, one or one of the key, let's say, values of NetHood, that the proposition is that we should focus on locality and we should redefine somehow what means neighborhood in the digital age and in these megalopolis and all this new situations that we are found in. And this brought us to also other local fields of action, like the money I mentioned, but also cooperative housing that in Zurich was very much advanced, and the food initiatives and the, we started thinking of also these types of bridging, bridging together also different fields of actions. So NetHood I would say is some sort of a bridging institution.

04:37 **"do it yourself networking"** (subtitle)

PA: 04:37 One of the first, let's say, projects or processes that we work with Ileana as NetHood was to bring people from our own disciplines around the concept that at that time we called do-it-yourself-networking. I mean, there was a term used do it yourself networks, do it yourself internet, community networks, we call it do it yourself networking because it resonated with my research community, which was a networking community. And we organized a very successful conference, workshops in Dachstuhl. And there we realized how interesting this concept of a local network independent of the internet can be for bridging people from all these different disciplines, as later we named, at that time we were doing it but we couldn't describe it, that this is a boundary object. Yes, the boundary object is a scientific term that I don't, have not studied in much depth, but I have a very clear idea of what it's for me. And we use it when we bring together people from different disciplines. The example I give is that if you bring people from engineering and social sciences is like bringing Chinese with Arabs to start talking in their own language and they don't understand. And the one way to communicate is like kids that have toys and even they don't talk the same language or even if they don't talk at all, they can communicate through manipulating together a toy. So for me, a boundary object has this property of being well understood by entities that don't speak the same language, so it can be manipulated by both of them. And through this interaction, people can also understand their perspectives, their intentions, and work together on a common project somehow.

06:40 **"Mazi toolkit"** (subtitle)

PA: 06:40 And Mazi actually incorporated all these process and ideas that we had until then. Actually I was calling it NetHood toolkit before, but when we got the project and we got the name, we named it the Mazi toolkit. And then this group that started working before informally, now actually finishes their, this project that was designed to develop four different pilots in collaboration of various sets, partners, with an activist partner, trying out to understand how these local networks will be useful and in what ways, and all this coordinated by an engineering partner that was responsible for developing the code for this. So here's the Mazi toolkit, it's actually software and hardware, tools that allow somebody to take a small computer, we use a Raspberry Pi that is cheap and well known and people, some, many people already have one, and transform it to a router together with a web server, what this practical means is that somebody can have access to a website in a local space, that is completely independent from what we call the internet. It's accessible only to people that are in this place because this computer is accessible only through wifi. And this is some sort of an interesting design space.

08:16 **"developing community networks"** (subtitle)

PA: 08:21 I mean, the Mazi project at least was designed exactly to experiment in real life. And this is why we brought the people that were already somehow converted to these basic ideas like cooperative housing projects in Zurich, Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin, networking activist in Milan and some people that already were doing it. So we wanted to experiment with people that are already on the ground and really live such processes and try to explore in what they could use that piece of technology. So yes, we tried, for example, one of the pilots was the cooperative housing scene in Zurich and we ran a pilot in Kraftwerk 1, which was one of the first of what it's called young cooperatives, cooperative housing projects that are very sensitive on the democratic participation and ecology, sustainability, more alternative projects. And we had in mind, that proposing such a cool technology that it's, you know, about running your own network would be very welcome and very something that people would embrace – and it was not like this. I mean, people are busy, they are suspicious, it's an European project, what do we need from them, and things like that. And what we decided to do, is to start the, they have a community space and we use this local network as a digital enhancement of exhibitions. So, our first idea was because this is a historical project, to take, we found photos from the first years, it's called the sofa university, we printed the black and white slides of

very interesting moments that some of this people have lived themselves and they had not even seen because the slides were not public. And we offered all of the material in digital form. So somebody that could see the exhibition could download it, write comments, a hybrid exhibition. And as a first step it was well received by some, but not by everybody. I mean, it was a very, in fact, it in a very interesting way as a boundary object as we were calling it, because it was revealing issues that we didn't know before. We have worked on this idea of knowledge transfer and in addition to the technological part, we also tried to understand how cooperative housing works. I mean as a general conclusion we didn't see what we were expecting as success, we didn't see people using it, asking us, it was just a few people that were interested, they understood what it is and then it was some sort of abandoned. But then somehow we were happy because some of the ideas were taken on by them. For example proposing an exhibition without informing us, or putting photos of the football tournament in another place. So, this was a sign for us that actually it's not easy to orchestrate such things as an outsider and especially as being foreigners. And this really needs to be taken by, you know, it should be a technology pull as we say and not push. So having been cast in a European project, we were pushing a little. And this case study in Kraftwerk was our main pilot, and it was, as I said, more or less successful. But actually what happened, we started having other people that were not a part of the original project that got interested, places like the Parkplatz, which is a self-organized garden here in Zurich that resembles the Prinzessinnengarten, the Wunderkammer, it's another public space, art in space now. So, it's also interesting that these things cannot be somehow designed top down. So we had successes of this type in places that we didn't anticipate and it happened really naturally without us being forced from our contract to do. And this is also a good lesson to learn that, you know, things develop organically.

12:59 **"the commons"** (subtitle)

PA: 13:05 As for the commons, personally, I didn't use this term since long time. I mostly use, started using it because it became somehow popular, this idea of commons, the commons networking, commons works, it's called the European commons assembly. And it has many dimensions. I mean, for me, I'm a little bit, how can I say, bored with this idea of the common pool resources and this story with Ostrom and the tragedy of the commons. I don't know, I don't resonate too much with all this discussion. For me, the commons is some sort of points of contact that have to be managed by the people involved. For me, this is the key aspect of the commons that what they verities and what they've conflicts should

be resolved, resources, say the co-creation processes, contributions, have to be managed by those concerned somehow. This is for me the key dimension. And in Mazi for example, that commons is the toolkit. It's some sort of collected knowledge and organized knowledge out of different experiences that can facilitate similar projects. Some of these projects using this toolkit could be commons projects, Prinzessinnengarten or a cooperative housing are commoning projects. But then this depends on the, I mean, it's in the second layer, we study also these as separate processes, but the project itself, theoretical is not concerned with them. It's an empowering tool that you can use also for non-commoning activities. And this is also the big challenge because all these things can be appropriated. And then the Mazi box could be become the Apple box or the Face box, and, uh, you know.

PA: 15:20

I think it's really important if we really want to have a change, being also in urgent times, and also having to fight huge infrastructure, we really need to think of viral processes and establish this idea of success as being appropriated, but making it in a way that it's compatible with the values, I mean, not misappropriated, but really copied into the right direction. I don't have a very concrete answer.