Transscript

Feminist Hackspace. Interview with Patricia Reis and Stephanie Wuschitz

http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/?p=640

PR:	00:15	Mz Baltazar started in a more male oriented hackerspace named MetaLab.
SW:	00:30	Yeah, we had in a very old hackerspace called MetaLab, regular workshops. But there was always some ear dropping and some kind of interruptions, interventions from people outside who were not used to so many feminists in the hackerspace (laughs). So we decided that we need a room of ones own, of our own. And we moved out and made our own feminist hackerspace.
PR:	00:53	And we also realized that we are all artists so we didn't have so many people from the tech side. And from that moment on we found a new location and a space, we managed to get a little bit more budget to finance ourselves and we started also an exhibition program. So our program, it's mainly on one hand workshops we give for free, we offer for free for women, trans, queer an non-binary people. And on the other hand we also have an exhibition program, which I believe is quite strong.
SW:	01:29	Basically we try to establish feminist hacking as an artistic methodology.
PR:	01:35	Like hacking politics, sort of like questioning things, instead of just accepting, but more demystifying technology mainly, but also gender and art.
	01:46	**"gender and technolgoy"** (intertitle)
SW:	01:52	So I mean for me it was a big insight, why technology is still so biased when it comes to gender: that making technology is a way to perform gender too, to show you're masculine. If you go to a normal traditional hackerspace and you sit there and do your soldering, people will think you try to be masculine or you try to be one of the guys and it's not observed as something, yeah, you're just a person having fun with technology, exploring technology, but it's always framed within the

gender normativity regime. When you are born you are not born with a sex or gender. Actually it's constructed and it's constructed through certain behavior or certain ways of acting and talking and that's something you do all the time. Judith Butler calls it gender performativity, performing gender. And once you are aware of that you do it nonstop, you can also change it. If you are in the normal, normative, hetero normative society, you will just mirror the norms all the time and amplified the norms. But if you make a conscious, intentional community, where you really try to support each other to do things that are not expected and that are not along the norms, you can get quite far. So I think that is the reason why we always make an emphasis on this gender issue, because we really believe we can build another culture about technology.

PR: 03:28   If we look to the more quantitative approach and if we look to statistics, of course we realize that most of the people behind the production, design of technology, it's for sure white normative, male people.

SW: 03:45   And even in hardware where people try to fight it and say, okay, let's do hardware that is feminine, like for example Lily Pad, where part is pink and has flowers on it, it still reproduces the same stereotypes. Especially open source projects often think that if they're just accessible, just open, like Wikipedia, then – it's their own choice of they don't participate, you know, therefore, yeah, so they could, why don't they, you know. But we really believe that since there's such a strong normative structure already keeping people, sanctioning people from breaking with norms, of course they cannot just go and be like: I will become Wikipedia editor, I become a pilot.

PR: 04:30   So we want to change that, of course. We want to a little bit contribute to this reverting the roles, in thinking about technology and inventing technology.

       04:42   **"community"** (intertitle)

PR: 04:47   So our hackerspace in itself, it's open to the community that wants to engage with us. So it's very important in order to be part of the community that they come to us, they visit us in one of the events.

SW: 05:02   I mean a lot of people approach us and tell us, they would like to give a workshop. And then they usually can do it, but we have to always plan with the year program in advance in order to finance it. But then additional to the workshops that are paid, people can also just say, I

want to have a reading group or I want to do this and this, I want to do a Linux group, and then they can just use the space, of course. So for example, we had a motherboard group, which is artists who have kids who come together and teach each other stuff while the kids are playing. Uh,

PR: 05:35   the phyton group

SW: 05:37   the phyton group, the arduino group

PR: 05:39   the arduion group also

SW: 05:39   and we had for a long time a really great reading group, but now all the people are somewhere else. I mean, I have to say Vienna is quite small, so a lot of people come internationally and they come over to us because a lot of things are in english, which is rather rare in Vienna, but they also leave Vienna quickly, so we have quite a flow of incoming participants and outgoing participants.

        06:01   **"space"** (intertitle)

SW: 06:05   People are so different and there is so much openness that what grounds us is the space. Otherwise we would have given it up because most of our funding goes into keeping the space and paying the rent. But I think it's so crucial because it's the thing that makes people feel like a group because we have the space. If we wouldn't have a space, people would more look at who is in the group, am I similar to this person? But I think because we have the space, we can offer it to those maybe, yeah, transgender person who just wants to do programming, but also like a fine arts person who really just wants to have a solo show, and they don't feel that they have to adapt to the group because they all use the space. So the space is something that keeps us together. I think most of the people who come are white middle class academics. So it's a little bit difficult to reach out to people who have a different background. Although we, uh, we really tried to be in an area that's not so gentrified yet. Um, and for the exhibitions, a lot of people come in who really have no, have no contact with art, usually on media. And we really like that.

PR: 07:21   It's so important to be at the street with the doors open. And, uh, yeah, of course we also have a little bit of conflict, in that sense. So we call it the little trouble, because some of our exhibitions are, with the artists we approached, they have, for instance, a very strong feminist and activist

perspective in their work, which might somehow create a confrontation with the outside public.

SW: 07:48 Yeah, I really feel the difference if you're in the space, like a safer space or if you're outside, because for example, we had an exhibition about female sexuality, female pleasure, and when people came in, they were talking really openly and it was people that obviously never talk about these things usually. But when I was outside with people talking about the exhibition, it was very, very hard and very confusing for people, and very embarrassing for people. But in this space it was a totally different atmosphere.

PR: 08:18 That's why we like to call it a safer space. Of course, there's no safe spaces, but we want to, to have a safer space, where this kind of conversations can actually exist without any discrimination or harassment.

08:32 **"care and trust"** (intertitle)

PR: 08:37 Taking care of the space, it's the most important thing, and the one of the most difficult things. Who is gonna pay the bills? Who's gonna clean the space? What should we do after an event? And so on. And we, and I'm approaching this topic because I guess it's something that interests us in this project in specific. How we take care of the commons. And uh, in this sense, at the beginning, we tried to somehow reproduce some of the rules that normity of hackerspaces had. For instance MetaLab, they are a community of 200 people, and they have even like all sorts of gadgets, to remember members that they have to clean the space. So every, the first five minutes of every hour there's an alarm and they have to stop and clean whatever. So this is a strategy of course. And we, uh, we also at the beginning decided we had several rules and then we realized that it just don't work because first we have to make the space a safer space, where people and members like to exist, like to participate, like to perform there, themselves

SW: 09:59 It's not a coworking space, like other hackerpaces.

PR: 10:01 It's not a coworking space.

PR: 10:03 But this constant negotiating and discussing, it is something that I personally am very proud that we don't have a rule. We don't have someone saying you did wrong or pointing the finger. But instead we try

to find solutions and to find trust in each other, even in the new members, very new members.

	10:27	**"the commons"** (intertitle)
PR:	10:32	So we don't use the word commons.
SW:	10:34	I think we use instead open source.
PR:	10:37	Yeah.
SW:	10:39	We mention that a lot on our website and it's more like a cultural open source terminology, I think, than just technology.
PR:	10:49	But definitely, the cultural space we share it's a common. It's the same commons and it's the same word I would use to describe for sure. And, uh, we identify with this idea that, uh, we believe that it's possible to maintain this common space by sort of empowering solidarity and trust within the community. And we also, I believe personally, that it's very easy when the community is small and it gets a little bit more complex when it grows. And that's why it's so important to devote time and, to be almost 100% dedicated to this space where we can bring other people to the same philosophy and the same way of thinking and questioning things.
SW:	11:47	I think the word commons actually applies 100% to us. We don't use it that much because we are also in this intersection of private and public. I think everyone can use our network, but no one really owns it. Um, people come in, can use it for everything and instrumental as it, but you can also go again without any strings attached. So it's this kind of right to use and care and foster, but without someone really (gesture of gripping), yeah (laughs).
PR:	12:20	All the rest is about solidarity and about trusting and ultimately love.