Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity

Carolina Neto Henriques

Abstract

This chapter introduces the question 'Can assemblage urbanism contribute to the fight for 'the right to the city?' with a reflection on the role of a hybrid forum and the 'Hybrid City'. It first addresses the ongoing confrontation between assemblage urbanists and 'the right to the city' scholars, the critical urban theorists — focusing on the origin of the debate, arguments and main academics involved. Subsequently, the discussion presented here outlines the main potentials of the assemblage urbanism perspective on 'hybrid forums' as an instrument for the fight for 'the right to the city'. Furthermore, the paper presents a hybrid forum, Institute for (X), as a case illustration of a Hybrid City. Institute for (X) is a cultural platform for young artists and entrepreneurs where culture is produced through an open network of creative experimentations, innovative solutions and constant learning opportunities. The anthropologic investigation of this case study found that the community involved felt strongly about the area and defended its character as positive and good, for them and the city. This chapter questions if an assemblage perspective of (X) enables an understanding of a constant transformation of the area that makes it a sizzling representation of the kind of resilient character cities must learn to adopt, in the face of our fast-changing world.

1. Can 'assemblage urbanism' contribute to the fight for 'the right to the city?'

As David Harvey (2013) says, "Utopias are only possible through constant change". The Actor-Network Theory (ANT) -based urban approach, Assemblage Urbanism, *affords* a conceptualization of the city as a *network* of *actors* where space and time co-exist, shedding a light on *interactions* that are shaping the future of our cities. ANT is mostly known for its take on the way *human and non-human actors* are regarded — at the same analytical level — where the built environment, materials, things, ideas or people are equally capable of change through their *agency*.

This all started with the findings of a master's thesis research, which was carried out during 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Aarhus, Denmark. Institute for (X) is a municipality-promoted temporary urban project that was

established in the old DSB (Danish railways) warehouses, abandoned at the time, in 2009. The initiative took place due to Aarhus Kommunes's (municipality) will, to invest in creativity and art in the city, since it will be 2017's European Capital of Culture. Institute for (X) was set with the purpose of exploring potential ways to start a 'Cultural Production Center' with the targeted-community approval — as this specific kind of initiative is generally not started from top to bottom, but it's mostly decided bottom-up. The project was so successful that nowadays the official cultural production centre, Godsbanen, thrives as a separate entity nearby but serves a separate purpose. The community of people who adopted Institute for (X) is now showing signs of fighting for it to become a permanent area and not just a trial project. Institute for (X) was named after the idea that an 'Institute' is a traditional place for learning; and (X) is the global mathematical symbol for the unknown and the representation of infinite possibilities, depending on your equation (as in, your project, your idea) (Laursen, 2013).

The singular character of this urban experiment — with many cases of small details that were specifically thought to multiply uses; or areas that seemed to have a purpose but have often other hidden purposes, only accessible to those who are truly integrated — communicated that this project wanted to be more than just an arena. It was communicating; it wanted to make a statement: there are alternatives. And I remember thinking "this is only an area, an *assemblage* of things, of buildings and shipping containers. It couldn't want anything". Or could it?

Actor-Network Theory believes it could indeed. ANT started out in the context of Science and Technology Studies (STS) by arguing that knowledge is a "social product rather than something generated by through the operation of a privileged scientific method" (Law, 2003 [1992]: 2). Within this theory, *knowledge, agents, social institutions, machines* or *organizations* are equally seen as a product or an effect of a network of heterogeneous materials. Taking on a material form — either this comes in a paper, a talk, or in the form of skills embodied in scientists and technicians — ANT believes that *knowledge* or *agents* (or all above mentioned) are the end product of a lot of hard work which is made by all the bits and pieces (test tubes, chemicals, organisms, skilled hands, scanning microscopes, monitors, scientists, articles, computers, etc.) that compose a juxtaposed patterned network. It is not only a material matter but a matter of organizing those materials.

To ANT, both humans and non-humans can, democratically, exercise *agency*, as explained further by Farías (Farías, 2011). Sayers explains that, to

Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity ▪ Carolina Neto Henriques

255

Latour, a non-human actor is only so because he is "necessarily seen as adding something to a chain of interaction or an association" (Sayes, 2013: 138). Non-humans, "like anything else that is placed between two actors, are understood as continually modifying relations between actors" and are both changed by their circulation and change the interaction through their circulation (Sayes, 2013: 138). In fact, non-human actors are even seen as gathering points of other times and spaces, which is the very notion of 'actor-network': "the assembling together of a network of actors of variable ontologies, of variable times, and of variable spaces" (Sayes, 2013: 140). Any actor is part of a structured network, which means it always *interacts*.

But to say that non-human actors have agency is not to just say that there are interactions. Latour's standing point is that *intention* — as this being the characteristic that could be bluntly said non-human actors are missing — is only here conceived as a type of action and that there are many others, like "authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on". Through this perspective, we open more doors to all the possible interactions that *can transform* (Sayes, 2013: 141).

For Ruming (2008) *agency* becomes the "collective capacity of heterogeneous networks, in which the activities of the non-human count for as much, or more, than the activities of humans" opening a new window for interpretations of a *hybrid network* or *multiple agencies of hybridity* applied to society or city studies: a new way to look at networks made up of not only one *agency* but multiple, originating several layers or dimensions of interactions in a *hybrid network*; hence allowing the claim that present cities shape future cities by choosing a certain 'path' or 'rethinking process' — then, the 'Hybrid City' has to be one of an endless ability to change, physically and socially. According to *Urban assemblages: how actor-network theory changes Urban Studies* (Farías & Bender, 2010), the conceptualization of *agency* plays a central role and I argue that assemblage urbanism can in fact bring a new agenda for western cities.

Central to assemblage urbanism is the ontology which regards the city as a '*composite entity*'. Such idea suggests a visualization of the city in terms of its composition (assemblages), in which the city is seen as '*an active assemblage of assemblages*' (Farías & Bender, 2010: 312), as mirrored in the work of other scholars, such as in Jacobs' view of the city as a constant *dance* (Jacobs, 2003) and still be: "an open arrangement of human actors, infrastructural networks, architectural networks, security networks (...) not confined by a circumferential boundary" (Farías & Bender, 2010: 316).

2. Assemblage urbanism *versus* critical urban theory

Central to assemblage urbanism *versus* critical urban theorists' disagreement is a discussion about this same ontology. Critical Urban Theorists is the somewhat opposite perspective on the city, that doesn't see 'simple' assemblages of things: it sees the city as an arena of numerous power struggles where the fights aren't being fairly or equally fought. As capitalism grows and some urban stakeholders grow their power, inequality and lack of social protection weakens the less powerful, which are no less entitled to the same arenas, the same city (Brenner, *et al.*, 2011: 225). The fight the 'Right to the City' cannot be fought by viewing the two sides as equal players. I agree. What I argue that if can, if we take 'the fight' into consideration into every single one of these exchanges, connections, interactions, actions or mediations — whatever happens, can happen with a purpose, if we are aware of this. This could potentially break the fight into smaller, multiple, hidden dimensions and networks and, I dare even say, turn the tables around.

Within this discussion, (McFarlane, 2011) offers his perspective on what assemblage thinking might offer critical urbanism by raising three sets of contributions for thinking the city politically and normatively. First he emphasizes that assemblage thinking entails a descriptive orientation to the city as produced through relations of the actual and the possible; second, assemblage as a concept disrupts how we conceive *agency*; and third, assemblage thinking, as a collage, composition and gathering provides an imaginary of the cosmopolitan city. The first and third points are particularly important if connected with Utopian Studies. The second, of assemblage conceptualization of *agency* discusses the point most relevant to this research — that in the materialized world we came to, these *things* (*whether they are policy documents, housing and infrastructure, new and old technologies, credit instruments, money or the material conditions of urban poverty and inequalities*) (McFarlane, 2011: 215) play an increasing role in our XXI century urbanity and offer unique perspectives to find contemporary resources or restraints to the political city.

McFarlane's perspective, though, distances itself from that of ANT in its purest in the sense that it's more focused on the potentials of these interactions

in relation to its human and non-human actors. Assemblage is, to this author, increasingly being used as a descriptor of urban production and change, but there has been little attempt to consider what this might specifically offer as a conception of *the city*.

But critical urban theorists critique such a view, as exposed in Brenner's work (Brenner *et al.*, 2011), with the claim that there is no 'assemblage urbanism' and that McFarlane's view offers a 'naïve objectivism' as it deprives itself of a key explanatory tool for understanding the sociospatial 'context of contexts' in which urban spaces and locally embedded social forces are positioned (Brenner *et al.*, 2011: 225).

As Farías points out, the two approaches concern different objects of study. Firstly, while critical urban theory focuses on a theoretical critique,

> (…) it runs the risk of silencing the heterogeneity of human and non-human actors involved in the objects of critique, and of remaining innocuous. This is not the kind of engagement with the world that ANT and other assemblage perspectives stand for. They promote a more open and explorative form of engagement with the world; in a word, inquiry, not critique (Farías, 2011: 366).

Secondly, the object of the inquiry, *the city*, has a fundamental discrepancy in the two approaches: while Farias suggests that for critical urban theory, the focus on cities and space is only contingent — the ultimate discussion is the organization of contemporary capitalism — whereas the new work in Urban Studies, revolving around assemblage perspectives is not primarily about capitalism. The question Farías poses is not what is critical about critical urbanism, but how committed to studying urbanism it really is, since the city is one important site, but not the only one:

> The central question we need to pose is whether we study cities as an instance of something else, of capitalism in this case, or we engage in an inquiry into the city and urbanization as a positive, actual and self-entitled process (Farías, 2011: 368).

Thirdly, the introduction of the concept of *assemblage* in Urban Studies, for Farías, is that it allows an idea of a city as a multiplicity, from the study of 'the' urban environment to the study of the multiple assemblages. Assemblages make sense of processes of construction by which cities and urban life are constituted (Farías, 2011: 369). This idea is also based on the general assumption that the world is constantly in the making and that there is no finished or completed version of it. In conclusion, "assemblages are self-contained

processes of heterogeneous associations calling for a positive description of their becoming, not external explanations" (Farías, 2011: 369).

Lastly, Farías claims that the political project of assemblages intends to bring a step further to the known democratization processes, with a redefinition of democracy towards participatory practices that might eventually recognize and represent humans and non-humans as political actors. Quite in accordance to Lefebvre, even, assemblage urbanism understands that the 'right to the city' should be primarily seen as the 'right of access to participation' or a 'right to citizenship for all, the right to shape and influence' (Farías, 2011: 371).

I argue that this is the most important focus: who gets to shape and influence. Despite human or non-human, as urban critical theorists reason, experimentation is reserved for the *intellectually and socially alienated* (Marcuse, 2009). These *alienated* (discontent from any economic class, youth, artists, a significant part of the intelligentsia, in resistance to the dominant system as preventing adequate satisfaction of their needs) represent the advocates to the *cry* to the 'Right to the City', whereas the *materially deprived* will mostly *demand* their right.

When fighting for Lefebvre's *Right to the City*, one may be seeking for *the agents for change*, those who *act* in 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2013) for different possibilities and which Harvey believes to be some sort of 'cultural producers'. Perhaps to be either experimenting with the *alienated* or demanding with the *deprived* can be a matter of where in the world the fight is being fought. Together, these *agents for change producing culture* make the *networks that create change* and can be said to be also 'implementing a vision' (Riot-Sarcey *et al.*, 2008; Taleb, 2012; Jacobs, 2003).

3. Assembling 'hybrid forums': the case of Institute for (X)

Accordingly, what is Institute for (X) in an assemblage urbanism perspective? Newer forms of collective experimentation and learning, in which multiple forms of knowledge are brought together in novel ways, is often represented in the case of 'hybrid forums' (Farías, 2011: 372). These 'hybrid forums' allow the true purity of knowledge, (Farías, 2011: 372), to be achieved not by 'finding things out' but by 'knowing' them. When things are 'known' it means they are shared, socially accessible, discussible and open — a symmetrisation of knowledge positions between experts and laypersons. There were two main ways in which

Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity ▪ Carolina Neto Henriques

259

this phenomenon was observable: in the relationship between Institute for (X) and the city; and in the promotion of the production of resilience mechanisms within the community, either fed from the previous relationship with the city or from the daily interactions at (X).

Hybrid forums could be hereby understood as physical or virtual places of knowledge, information and practice sharing for the community. In the study undertaken, the methodology followed — a mixed fieldwork of participant and non-participant observation and online ethnography — lead to[1] a chronological table (or calendar) with all significant inputs (events, workshops, festivals and others along with their online references, comments, Facebook events, pictures and debates). This table showed very important to understand the interactions between the physical evolution and constant transformation of the area and the community involvement and evolution, growth and network expansion with other organizations, the municipality and other cities similar projects.

The reading of this chronological evolution led to the following observations:

    i. Online advertised events progressively increased up until the end of my fieldwork, in a direct correlation with the number of new members joining the community;

    ii. The number of media articles written (0 in 2009 and 2010; 2 in 2011; 1 in 2012; 13 in 2013 and 18 in 2014, only until May) about this urban experience was generally positive, contributing to a positive image of the project to the public opinion; and

    iii. The chronological evolution reading allowed understanding the consistent increasing of events (both online and media articles), partnerships, with music and sustainability festivals, artistic residencies programs and academic projects (experimentation inside Institute for (X) in the form of workshops or exported to the city as exhibitions or art installations). This could be understood as successful in the sense that they help to *recognize the relevance of 'networking' and empowerment of the actor-network for the healthy development and maintenance of such territories* (Freitas & Estevens, 2012).

In terms of identifying *who* benefits from this bubbly new public life, the same data was crossed with a 'scheme for assessing urban interventions benefits' (Killing Architects, 2014) by relating every data point to one of the

---

[1] Henriques, C. N., 2014. Towards a Hybrid City: Rethinking Aarhus through an Institute for (X), Lisboa: ISCTE-IUL.

categories. This way it becomes visually clear who has *benefited* from this urban experiment.

Table 1: The impacts

For cultural producers involved	For land owners	For municipalities/ governmental bodies	For local people
It offers a platform for designers and artists to show case their work, propose ideas and receive feedback;	Temporary projects can raise the profile of an area, or of a particular site to help attract further investment;	Events can draw attention to areas of a city which are undergoing change and raise awareness of issues related to architecture and urbanism there;	Institute for (X) adds to the existing provision of public spaces and community facilities in an area with low-rent work and art spaces;
It provides networking opportunities the ground to establish new professional relationships;	Temporary uses can help to change people's perspective of a place, helping them imagine how it might be different;	They can help to educate people about planning and about how to get more involved with it;	Where building projects have been put on hold and sites remain unused and closed off by hoardings, projects as such can help by giving the public access to land, opening up a greater number of routes through an area and improve its permeability;
If offers the chance to prototype and experiment with the way that different parts of the city are designed and get feedback and ideas from the local people;	Where empty property is taxed, using the space for a temporary project until a permanent tenant can be found, may give exemption from this tax;	Events can help with effective community consultations. They can help reach a wide audience and attract attention for the launch of a consultation, so that it is possible to start a discussion about design proposals;	The strong community at (X) had an effect on the way that people view their local area, helping them to imagine that they are able to change things in the public space of the city, beyond their own homes;
It puts temporary projects at the heart of political decision-making, by involving contacts, partnerships and the local community and understanding the potential of the idea before it becomes permanent;			Temporary projects can help people imagine what an area will be like if a proposed project were to go ahead;

Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity ▪ Carolina Neto Henriques

261

Table 1: The impacts (cont.)

For cultural producers involved	For land owners	For municipalities/ governmental bodies	For local people
As an example of a project placed in very expensive land, in the city centre, a temporary project like (X) can provide 'incubator spaces' for young creatives;			Experimentation and prototyping in public space can help expand people's design and urbanism vocabulary, so that they become aware of a greater range of things that it is possible to do to improve public spaces — to go beyond requests for more cleaning and better street lighting (although these may be relevant as well);
It provides a 'quick win' in the long-run — whereas an urban redevelopment can take years, a temporary project can be finished within months and have a smoother integration, as it is more flexible and open for change.			

The analysis of this table shows that not only a temporary urbanism-project like Institute for (X) benefits private and public/ governmental stakeholders equally, but also that the local community benefits almost as much as the people who are involved in the project, making this a truly *for-people-not-for-profit* project, and thus very aligned with the 'Right to the City' scholars' ideals.

The importance of understanding how this area is *changing* Aarhus' public life encompasses with understanding if this *change* promotes the learning of resilience mechanisms, which could be sustained, and thus said to have long-term impact, and in which ways.

Focusing on Folke's (Folke, 2006: 259) categories of *social-ecological resilience*, the analysis was organized in the following way: (1) resilience through learning (interplay disturbance and reorganization, sustaining and developing (adaptive capacity, transformability, learning, innovation); (2) resilience through

self-organizing and feedback skills; and (3) resilience through the conception of a creative environment (integrated system feedback, cross-scale dynamic interactions). The added value of the resilience conceptualization provided by Folke (2006) is that this framework incorporates several sources of knowledge and collective agency, relating resilience with the capacity for transformative solutions of 'adaptive' governance, through the mobilization of different actors and institutions, memories and social networks built throughout time, in different scales and different spaces (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 7). This perspective justifies the capacity of people in a social-ecological system to build resilience through collective agency, understanding social processes like social learning, scenario building and adaptive capacity to "*achieve transformations towards more sustainable development pathways*" (Folke, 2006).

3.1. Resilience through learning

The kind of resilience through learning are mainly related to learning and literacy — either from workshops to learn a skill, from participation in groups, from the re-use of left-over materials and upcycling, or from the inherent skills one learns by establishing their own project, like building skills, mainly — are all possible due to Institute for (X) form of physical (and online) platform for sharing and knowledge exchange. The possibility to bring citizens to an area, or to projects related to this area, is therefore important for the 'rethinking' process for a transition towards a resilience future. By affording a higher level of informed participation in an experimental, creative area in the city, the learning processes provided here are a key to a population who knows-how-to adapt their places to their needs — also, by learning how to do-it-together (and not just 'yourself') the community feeling is enhanced, allowing better cooperation in future projects.

3.2. Resilience through Self-organizing and Feedback skills

Successful cross-scale interactions such as the relationship between the managing group and the municipality are also important mechanisms because it provides this place with a 'legal blessing' to continue what they are doing, freely; Self-organizing is an adaptive capacity afforded by an integrated system-feedback. By understanding self-regulatory procedures and how to take care of shared facilities and resources together, an important step is taken towards resolving the *tragedy of the commons* (Hardin, 2010 [1968]) problem, in the

sense that by learning through a community, community mechanisms are also learned.

Self-regulation here is achieved through a healthy relationship with the municipality, the city, and even international collaborations, shown by the identified outputs like projects, research or innovative transformations of public use of facilities.

The relationship with the municipality is "very tricky and should keep being loose", according to Mads Peter Laursen, an informal 'manager-in-chief' of Institute for (X) and the 'compass' for future ideas, as described in his own words. When it comes to dealing with the municipality, there are rules but sometimes they are 'bent' for the sake of creativity and the artist community tries to show that a lot of cultural projects can be done without the need of corporate sponsors. The non-for-profit is strong about its position to not wanting to make money off the valorisation of the surrounding land, as the project is more concerned on studying alternatives for the development of human and urban life, without thinking about whether the idea will be profitable or not.

> By being in these warehouses, we are showing that leftover industrial space can be a functional space where many creative projects can be made. Through this new approach the city can be improved allowing the public to use it more frequently. (Laursen, 2013: 25).

The learning of self-organizational skills is a key resilient mechanism for a constant process of 'rethinking' a city that requires a consistent power relation between citizens and policy-makers — bonded with the appropriate literacy, the more autonomy stakeholders have in making their own projects, the less bureaucracy and supervision needed, leading to a self-developed, self-thought, almost self-made possible rethinking pathway.

3.3. Resilience through the conception of a Creative Environment

> It is through artistic creativity that the search for other possible futures is made, presenting itself here as leverage for the triggering of a bigger learning process and collective interaction — and it is this collective interaction that thus produces transformative resilience mechanisms, or, the possibility of change. (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 13).

Being an inclusive space, for all minorities, all ages and all types of projects, Institute for (X) escapes de usual bureaucratic steps, giving all an opportunity to bloom according to their own time and effort investment. By allowing new trials,

it also promotes critical and rational thinking, providing its actors with a common creative but pragmatic approach.

The knowledge and experiences shared through dinner time or common breaks also provide a heterogenic feedback on the projects being developed, allowing the participants to shape them in real time, while still under development. The capability of changing in real-time, if faced with a challenge a peer has pointed out, gives these participants a much better 'school' in problem-solving. Also, the physical platform allows a tool-sharing that wouldn't be possible if these projects were scattered around the city.

The environment created through this creative feedback and pragmatic sharing of ideas, skills and tools provides these participants with another important asset, which is that of being able to bring innovative transformations in a rethinking process, which are at the same time doable, upcycled and pragmatic in the use of resources.

Institute for (X) is, therefore, contributing to the rethinking of Aarhus through the production of resilience mechanisms from learning new skills, working in a creative environment or adapting processes in real time, due to a self-organizing community that provides cross-scale feedback. It is only through such resilience mechanisms and objectives only that a 'rethinking' process can bring a city and its citizens closer to having the ability to constantly transform, improve, or be agents of their own future.

4. Future 'Hybrid Cities'

This chapter addressed the reflexions around the role of Assemblage Urbanism perspective in Urban Studies (Brenner *et al.*, 2011; Farías & Bender, 2010; McFarlane, 2011) as a tool for understanding the networks and interactions behind the construction of resilience mechanisms (Folke, 2006). During an empirical fieldwork research at a cultural platform in Aarhus, Denmark — Institute for (X) — this research sketched the possibility of a new model for future cities: the Hybrid City (Henriques, 2014). I suggest that the scenario of 'The Hybrid City' is thus potentially conceptualized from Institute for (X)'s physical shape and social dynamics and the hybrid city idea was a product of an experiment by mixing emerging theoretical approaches with real-life observations of practice. The hybrid city's core idea is that a space that promotes constant transformation (Harvey, 2013; Wenger, 2009) — through creativity,

innovation and learning processes of resilience mechanism — in different network layers, will be better positioned for rethinking itself in the face of need for change and adaptation. This 'idea of city' was based on the recent notions of 'hybridity' (Blok & Jensen, 2011; Latour, 2010; Law, 2003 [1992]; rEvolutions, 2013) through non-human agents affording the democratization of interactions at an urban level. It is left for further debate if such an idea can exist in reality, at a micro-scale, where the intercourse of imagination, art and creativity empowered by access to resources and practical *know-how*, can afford new forms of exercising a right to the city (Marcuse, 2009) with new utopian visions (Friedmann, 2000).

5. Temporary urbanism and ephemerality – creativity, innovation and constant transformation

The outcome of the study undertaken in Institute for X (?) points positively towards a constant physical transformation and temporary uses of different spaces, with a particular acceptance and celebration for diversity and experimentation, creating what Latour would call a 'hybrid network' (Blok & Jensen, 2011). The Hybrid City is becoming a term increasingly used within urban studies, though not with the exact same epistemology. This concept was recently defined in the Hybrid City Conference 2013 Subtle rEvolutions: "Hybrid City is dedicated to exploring the emergent character of the city and the potential transformative shift of the urban condition (…)" (rEvolutions, 2013).

In addition to this conceptualization, this proposal of 'Hybrid City' grounds itself on an assemblage urbanism perspective aiming at bringing more rights to the every-day actors in the city and not profit-owners — being a complex multi-agent system, which gathers the conditions for its actor-network to continuously explore the emergent character of the city and the potential transformative shift of the urban condition — by enabling and *affording* constant new interactions and learning (Greeno, 1994) and thus being continuously socially innovative' (Wenger, 2009). And just as Farías suggests, "the focus [shall] rather be on the multiple ways of dwelling in the city, in the understanding that these involve multiple ways of constructing the city" (Farías, 2011: 369).

In short, being the creatively co-imagined and co-built hybrid forum focused on its urban actors enjoying their full 'right to the city'.

> Probably (X) itself, just the idea that you can have this place exist in the middle
> of the city is quite amazing. Various communities can coexist with each other
> in the same place. The parties and events here are quite interesting, probably
> the most organic form of co-civilization I have ever seen. There were no lights
> back in the day; so you had to be careful when you walked around late at
> night. It was like a post-apocalyptic space, full of potential. (Laursen, 2013: 27).

This constant rethinking (and consequently, transformation) process is perhaps one that is bringing the idea of the Hybrid City closer. If *the hybrid city can eventually be mirrored in temporary urban projects* and the idea of Hybrid City is one of constant transformation, blurred limits, with a central focus on the levels of interaction and always searching for better solutions; then Institute for (X), with its creative environment promoting the learning of self-organization skills, D.I.Y. and D.I.T. skills, community feedback and support skills, knowledge and skills sharing and networking — or, empowering mechanisms for a better future resilience — can perhaps be said to mirror the Hybrid City.

A very short and accurate description of Institute for (X) and how it can be beneficial as an urban ideal is given by Pernille Madsen, interviewed during this study:

> I concluded that there is sort of parameters that partly give citizens another
> space where they can just visit and its unplanned and everything is shifting...
> and also this space gives room to minorities or smaller groups that have a
> specific need, both unions or sort of sports, different types of sports (...) also
> small entrepreneurs, that sort of thing (...) and it gives another perspective on
> how to make cities in general (...) and the last thing is that people behind it
> are really a powerful resource for the city so they should start collaborating
> much more with these people in order to find alternative solutions... because
> they are really good for the city (...) because the temporality gives other
> possibilities of other rules and restrictions than you would have in normal
> architecture because it's all temporary. So you are allowed to experiment much
> more, which results in much more interesting structures (Madsen, 2014).

The characterization of the space given by Pernille puts creativity and freedom of experimentation at a high ground. For Freitas and Estevens (2012) the focus on change and transformation of the action-system within the development of communities is anchored in the need to achieve a *collective agency[2]* in order to foresee *real utopias*. In the authors' perspective, the desired real utopia happens through processes of transformative resilience and social

---

[2] Collective Agency is a concept used by the authors which is used here as the potential of agency derived by the network of actors, as ANT conceptualizes.

Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity ▪ Carolina Neto Henriques

267

innovation (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 10). In order to achieve it, a creative environment that promotes this transformation must (1) break with the traditional governance models; (2) adopt a trans-disciplinary approach in recognizing and respecting the different types of actions to incorporate; (3) appeal to an on-going joint learning process; and (4) postulate a generative co-production of its own necessary conditions to exist (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 11) — hereby discussed as the relationship between temporary spaces and the production of resilience mechanisms.

As a collective practice, creativity — in this perspective — affords the improvement of a population quality of life, encouraging and promoting the construction of a participative and transformative city. Artistic creativity is, then, a critical sight over the questioned reality and affords the creation of new collective places assuming multi-dimensional shapes (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 11). It is through artistic creativity that the search for other possible futures is made, presenting itself here as leverage for the triggering of a bigger learning process and collective interaction — and it is this collective interaction that thus produces transformative resilience mechanisms, or, the possibility of change (Freitas & Estevens, 2012: 13) — this transformative process is the goal that can be triggered by projects such as *(X)*.

Translated into an urban scenario, this would signify that the *hybrid city* would never be fully complete, never fully finished, always ready to answer its internal and external demands — not only human, but also non-human, in short, a city that is constantly *rethinking* itself.

6. Final considerations

According to the city architect, Stephen David Wallacy in an interview to Scraper magazine (Wallacy, 2013), Institute for (X) is an example of how a city can still develop even during a recession (Wallacy, 2013: 12). "Development projects, specifically cultural ones have a big impact in the local economy of the city. (…) creative businesses (…) also promote life in their own neighborhoods". After this fieldwork investigation, I found that Institute for (X)'s agency has contributed to a shift in mind-sets, in Aarhus city planning, that being also a product of the rethinking process behind it, contributes to a new way to think cities. Mads Peter statement helps us understand this contribution, when he says this 'agency' is experienced even in the small interactions that happen daily:

> Yes, it has this agency, it makes things happen. Makes me saying hi to everyone possible — waves to people around — this wouldn't be possible, because he is here and I am here, and makes this happen. There is this connection between humans. They happen. And that's (X). And that wouldn't happen if all the projects were scattered around. They would exist but the interaction between the projects wouldn't. And that's very important (Laursen, 2014).

In conclusion, I hereby trust that an assemblage urbanism approach can be helpful in the fight for our collective 'right to the city' in the following ways:

- A creatively co-imagined and co-built hybrid forum focuses on its urban actors enjoying their full benefits and 'rights to the city';

- The Hybrid City wouldn't be possible without the constant transformation that a network-oriented organization affords and it does enable a faster reaction in the face of new needs and change;

- This approach emphasizes the role of art, experimentation and creativity as well as that of resources and the value of *know-how* as an empowering tool;

- Assemblage urbanism contributes to highlight the importance of resilience mechanisms produced by learning new skills, working in creative environments, self-organization capabilities and cross-scale feedback as tools to act upon one's future;

- Temporary urban projects embody the spirit of the assemblage urbanism fight for the right to the city by benefiting the community involved in the project, as previously demonstrated, making these a true example of a *for-people-not-for-profit* projects, by caring about details and alternative connections that might not exist if there were 'mainstream' options;

- An assemblage urbanism approach brings to light the agents of change who act in spaces of hope — cultural producers — who are responsible for the networks that create change and implement a vision.

References

Blok, A., & Jensen, T. E. (2011). *Bruno Latour: Hybrid thoughts in a hybrid world.* Abingdon/New York: Routledge.

Brenner, N., Madden, D., & Wachsmuth, D. (2011). Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban theory. *City,* 15(2), pp. 225–240.

Assembling the hybrid city: A critical reflection on the role of an Institute for (X) for a new urbanity ▪ Carolina Neto Henriques

269

Farías, I., & Bender, T. (2010). *Urban assemblages: How actor-network theory changes urban studies*. London: Routledge.

Farías, I. (2011). The politics of urban assemblages. *City*, 15(3–4), pp. 365–374.

Folke, C. (2006). Resilience: The emergence of a perspective for social-ecological systems analyses. *Global Environmental Change,* 16(3), pp. 253–267.

Freitas, M. J., & Estevens, A. (2012). Territórios resilientes, criativos e socialmente inovadores: Desafios e paradoxos à transformação e mudança face a disrupções e processos com expressões difusas e diluídas no tempo. In *VII Congresso Português de Sociologia: Sociedade, crise e reconfigurações* [online] (pp. 1–14). Retrieved from http://www.aps.pt/vii_congresso/papers/finais/PAP1014_ed.pdf

Friedmann, J. (2000). The good city: In defense of utopian thinking. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24(2), pp. 460–472.

Greeno, J. (1994). Gibson's affordances. *Psychological Review,* 101(2), pp. 336–342.

Hardin, G. (2010 [1968]). The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, 162(3859), pp. 1243–1248.

Harvey, D. (2013). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. New York: Verso.

Henriques, C. N. (2014). Towards a hybrid city: Rethinking Aarhus through an Institute for (X) (Unpublished Master thesis). ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisboa.

Jacobs, J. (2003). *Morte e a vida nas grandes cidades*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Killing Architects (2014). *Urban tactics: Temporary interventions for long-term planning.* Rotterdam: The Neatherlands Architecture Fund.

Latour, B. (2010). *Networks, societies, spheres: Reflections of an actor-network theorist.* Keynote speech presented at the International Seminar on Network Theory: Network Multidimensionality in the Digital Age, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Los Angeles.

Laursen, M. P. (2013). *Scraper Magazine* [Interview] (July 2013).

Laursen, M. P. (2014). *Mads Peter Laursen Interview* [Interview] (1 March 2014).

Law, J. (2003 [1992]). Notes on the theory of the actor-network: Ordering, strategy and heterogeneity. *Center for Science Studies, Lancaster University,* 5(4), pp. 1–11.

Lefebvre, H. (2012 [1968]). *O direito à cidade*. 1ª ed. Paris: Estúdio e Livraria Letra Livre.

Madsen, P. (2014). *Pernille Madsen interview* [Interview] (February 2014).

Marcuse, P. (2009). From critical urban theory to the right to the city. *City,* 13(2–3), pp. 185–196.

McFarlane, C. (2011). Assemblage and critical urban praxis: Part one. *City,* 15(2), pp. 204–224.

rEvolutions, H. C. C. 2. S. (2013). *Hybrid city: Subtle revolutions.* [Online] Retrieved from http://uranus.media.uoa.gr/hc2/

Riot-Sarcey, M., Bouchet, T., & Picon, A. (2008). *Dicionário das utopias*. Paris: Edições Texto&Grafia.

Rumming, K. (2008). *Non-human agency in residential development and planning: Two examples from fringe Sidney*. Sydney, Australia: City Futures Research Centre.

Sayes, E. (2013). Actor-network theory and methodology: Just what does it mean to say that non-humans have agency?. *Social Studies of Science*, 30, pp. 134–149.

Taleb, N. (2012). *Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder*. s.l.: D. Quixote.

Wallacy, S. D. (2013). *Scraper Magazine* [Interview] (July 2013).

Wenger, E. (2009). *Social learning capability: Four essays on innovation and learning in social systems*. Lisbon: MTSS/GEP & EQUAL Portugal.