

# Impact of Social Art in the People's Smart Sculpture PS2

**Martin Koplín<sup>1</sup>, Igor Nedelkovski<sup>2</sup>, Christian Geiger<sup>3</sup>, Carl Skelton<sup>4</sup>, Aura Neuvonen<sup>5</sup>, Stephan Siegert<sup>6</sup>, Olga Sismanidi<sup>7</sup>, Lorenz Potthast<sup>8</sup>, Elwira Wojtunik-Lang<sup>9</sup>, Popesz Csaba Lang<sup>10</sup>**

M2C Institute of Applied Media Technology and Culture at the City University of Applied Sciences Bremen<sup>1</sup>, Gauss Institute Bitola<sup>2</sup>, University of Applied Sciences Duesseldorf<sup>3</sup>, OCAD University<sup>4</sup>, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences Helsinki<sup>5</sup>, Digital Impact Lab Bremen<sup>6</sup>, European Commission Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency<sup>7</sup>, Xenorama<sup>8</sup>, Elektro Moon Vision<sup>9,10</sup> Bremen, Germany<sup>1</sup>, Bitola, Macedonia<sup>2</sup>, Düsseldorf, Germany<sup>3</sup>, Toronto, Canada<sup>4</sup>, Helsinki, Finland<sup>5</sup>, Bremen, Germany<sup>6</sup>, Brussels, Belgium<sup>7</sup>, Berlin, Germany<sup>8</sup>, Krakow, Poland<sup>9,10</sup>  
 koplín@m2c-bremen.de<sup>1</sup>, igor.nedelkovski@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>, geiger@hs-duesseldorf.de<sup>3</sup>, carl@gotham.green<sup>4</sup>, aura.neuvonen@metropolia.fi<sup>5</sup>, siegert@m2c-bremen.de<sup>6</sup>, olga.sismanidi@ec.europa.eu<sup>7</sup>, lorenzpotthast@gmx.de<sup>8</sup>, elektromoon@gmail.com<sup>9,10</sup>

## Abstract

The People's Smart Sculpture PS2[1] panel of ISEA2018 in Durban reflects the social and political impact of a 4 years media art and science activity in Europe with more than 800 artists and scientists involved. PS2 developed participatory digital art methods for changes in urban living environment. What will be left after 4 years? Which results, artistic methods, digital tools will sustain? What is transferable into different situations? The panel additionally integrates the experiences of the temporary African-European PS2 digital art lab in June, before and during ISEA2018 in Durban.

## Keywords

#Social Art #Social Resonance #Impact of Media Art #Participative Art #Urban Re-Design #Urban Art #Digital Art #Changes in Europe #Impact Lab #Digitalization #Durban Art Lab

## Introduction

Today we witness a large societal shift that is driven by the digitalization, urbanization, new forms of labor, climate change and globalization. Especially the urban sphere of the cities undergo a change in the perspective: What determines the cultural development? Who is responsible for the social infrastructure? Who is eligible for education and integration in a city? What are the new ways of expressing ideas and contributions towards a good and livable urban environment? How are we designing the social through digital art?

The People's Smart Sculpture PS2[2] is a 4-year creative research and art innovation project, co-funded by Creative Europe [3]. PS2 fosters participative art, urban development, and digital culture processes in city spaces. It clusters smart participation activities from all over Europe and designs new art forms, digital strategies, art as methodologies and digital media tools that allows new perspectives and approaches towards urban re-design and the participative cultural evolution of urban spaces. PS2 tries to find

answers over the use of social art to create a better social resonance and participation in urban re-design and society. Did we succeed? Can we adapt our artistic methods to future demands? The project is about cultural construction of future spaces by real people as performative spaces. The PS2 approach works on two levels: The employment of new artistic methodologies and digital tools for participatory urban re-design that is tested on site and in everyday life situations. And the evaluation of those activities in a comparative analysis under the aspect of real transferability to other places.

This panel discusses the failures and achievements of PS2, its artistic activities, labs and tools as well as the sustainable results in their interdependency with local dimensions and agoras but also aspects of real transferability into different realms and the social and political impact. Can our digital art support the emancipation of human beings?

## The Spectre of a Smart Art City

A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of a Smart City. It has passed more than half a century after Charles Percy Snow (The two Cultures, 1956) wrote his thesis to the two opposing cultures. Meanwhile, with the digital media R&D in ICT and actual cultural development of the last decades, a not inconsiderable part of the computer science contributes to re-connecting the existing scheme of the scientific-technical areas on the one hand and of the social-artistic-cultural on the other. This applied in particular to an almost infinite number of digital media, digital art, and digital culture projects. While the footprint of algorithms can be found at the latest since the information technology penetration of all work areas of future city development, the spectre of a diremption or disintegration between a technological economy for smart cities and people's free will to design smart cities and live in these environments appear. A new critique is needed towards a technical economy whose algorithms can support people in their daily lives but also create a non-official, not well recognized back-

ground policy – very potent and effective but not democratically adopted. But: digitalization is nothing new for those who work in their expert field of urban development as urban planners, designers, architects, district associations, network companies, energy providers or scientists. They all use digital expert tools and citizens use at least social media and other digital tools in their communication and self-expression. But A) these are all sectoral systems and B) there is no new agora that connects the experts and the citizens for to create a new overview and a new forming of the political will.

A sustainable smart city development through digital art should include participation, green sustainability, should contribute to social balance, job creation, a better life and the happiness of people. A simple but strong idea was given by Caragliu et al. (2009): “We believe a city to be smart when investments in human and social capital and traditional (transport) and modern (ICT) communication infrastructure fuel sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life, with a wise management of natural resources, through participatory governance.” [4] But how to support such an integrative smart city – smart humans approach in this phase of digitalization? No citizen is against busses that arrive in time, or against a more efficient heating or energy management system, but what if an algorithm, so to say “decides”, about the spectrum of your choices or about the medium people are allowed to use for to express themselves in context of participating in the urban development? What if also the political class don't know what the algorithms cause? What if political power is transferred to a technique instead of to enable people to bring themselves in, into the sphere of smart city development? How can we create a higher level of democratization while we realize smart cities instead of possibly decreasing it?

### **Synaesthetic Social-Technical Utopia**

It is required to access the full potential of the new capabilities of communication networks, the broad availability of microcomputers, new design and especially young people's e-skills to enable people to participate in a smart city context. To increase the engagement of citizens in their urban surrounding, to foster identification with the cities they live in, can lead to social development, innovation development, democratization and in the end also to more employment and social balance. Participation has to become part of every city initiative today. This cannot be done just by creating new technologies. But it can be done better by using methods of art that help to involve also groups of citizens that are mostly left out of today's urban decision making.

The panel discussion tries to verify that the integration of digital art tools in urban decision making processes can help to realize a new smart participation as a possibly necessary cultural technique in Europe's city spaces and how it creates a new social inclusion. In this part of the panel we will present perspectives on emerging technologies like

VR/AR, AI and how they can be used to create artistic expression. We will argue that digital technology is not good or bad per se but needs to be considered in a proper contextual setting for not to support the unsocial aspects in life. Adapting emerging technologies for artistic expressions might bridge the gap between artist and audience and help to better convey the artistic message thus providing new ways of participative development. But what happens when artists, technical specialists and cultural experts apply disruptive technologies to change the public space and fail in supporting democratic participative actions but become a “social weapon”?

### **Enable Yourself**

The PS2 approach blends different levels of access: public participation, collaborative creativity, exploratory- and game-based learning about to change your neighbourhood. It integrates digital art, design thinking, science, smart technologies and user culture and motivates a broad dissemination of new skills, design expertise, informal learning and social knowledge. These fields are referred as key to improve broad educational effects, while picking up widely spread social dynamics and meet, as McLoughlin and Lee (2008) have lined out, “the needs of a generation of learners who seek greater autonomy and connectivity as well as opportunities for socio-experimental learning” [5]. This also contains the idea of the urban environment as communication space between all: citizens, government and other stakeholders. This means in the context of the need of a highly sustainable cultural development strategy to integrate opinion sharing, digital cross-cultural social inclusion, distinct communication of ideas, performative communication acts, new cultural expressions and explorative and informal learning capacities. The skills, which will be implicitly developed by people while utilizing in the participative art activities can be leveraged as skills for creative expression and social empowerment of participants and their own communities expressing local issues and desires like it several PS2 labs. This might be the base for a new deal between artists, experts, citizens, learners, creators and the government. It is a performative integrated art to combine social and cultural sustainability in the city. On the educational level it can help to improve a large set of important future skills and techniques in handling media and ICT, like 3D-modelling and programming, AR, VR. Skills developed through things like online games and social media use during leisure time as entertainment can be leveraged as skills for creative expression and social empowerment embedded in and serving local issues and desires. Social skills are mostly gained “along the way” by learning and applying new strategies of collaboration and participation, and by using non-professional expertise. A good example for that can be found in the PS2 urban redesign contest in summer 2016, where stakeholders from all society levels, ages and professional backgrounds came together to debate about urban development and to share their technical and social knowledge about the topic. Additionally theorizing about and experimenting with urban

development provides strategical knowledge about transformational processes and societal changes. Being aware of future topics like smart cities, use of new smart technologies and strategies for urban development is of great importance, considering that according to the UN World Urbanization Prospects of 2014 „by 2050, 66 per cent of the world’s population is projected to be urban“[6].

### PS2 Labs in Europe

PS2 labs [7] for peoples participation: gamelabs, social impact labs, virtual urban art labs, digital performance labs – some of them were realized as temporary labs and some as durable ones. This part of the panel will discuss the design, offers, uses and impact of the different PS2 labs. Three labs will be presented in detail here: The 4D lab, a temporary lab in an overseas container and the digital urban impact lab in Bremen. The Bremen lab is a digitally supported creative, participatory, thinking and action space, which is used as a source for integrative and social urban district development in the less developed West of Bremen and sees itself as a service provider for the district, its people and institutions.

The concept of the lab – art as service – relies on digitization as an enhancer of social participation and aims to explore the connection between digital culture (eg, through the transformation of digital tacit knowledge) and experimental action (digital production, digitally-based self-organization, mapping, digital urban art, digital urban development) to transform competences that allow improved access to society, labor and education and develop the district in the process. In doing so, the lab responds to well-known deficits in Bremen's West, such as reduced participation in social life, neighborhood development, the digital gap and divide or increased youth unemployment.

How to increase equality of opportunity in the district via media art? By equipping the action spaces of people from disadvantaged groups such as refugees, early school leavers, young mothers, migrants, or the low-skilled in the sense of an enabling digital art didactics with important skills for the future - by the digital culture – the lab directly contribute to improving the social and economic equality of opportunity in the district and developing new societal and social resonance spaces. But how sustainable are the effects of the lab? Does it create effects on the political level as well?

### PS2 Durban Lab

Imagine the inner city of Durban as a special place to love, live, and work, the temporary PS2 lab in Durban, run by South African and European artists and scientists analyzes existing district culture, picks it up and act as an attractor for the growing artists, maker, commoning and digital scene by highlighting local strengths, advantages and disadvantages by creative and young artists and cultural innovators. The meeting of local citizens with these innovators in the lab in public space can contribute to freeing up new energies for cultural projects.

The lab implements an inter-institutional cooperation of a high diversity of local actors, by complementing the existing options with digital art methods and tools and offering new expression possibilities. The lab can build a bridge between existing initiatives, African and European artists. Workshops about tool-building, artistic methods, participation and art project fundraising will be implemented as well as daily participative art activities. The panel will discuss effects, opinions and results of the work with and in this temporary digital art lab.

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