

# BUILDING CITIES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

15 February  
INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP

#SMWcities

During the second half of the Social Media Week 2012 event “Building Cities through Social Media,” put together by UN-Habitat and the MIT Center for Civic Media, the participants engaged in a brainstorming session to come up with ways in which social media tools could be used to improve people’s lives in the city. The room broke up into nine groups each with its own topic, and participants were to come up with three ways that social media (SM) could be used towards their topic.

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## DESIGN GROUP

The design group took the big idea challenge literally and discussed three wide ranging theoretical themes.

Firstly, the group discussed the ways in which SM is a cycle. Information is moved from the physical realm, to being documented and disseminated in a virtual realm, and finally the ideas in generates are manifested once again in the physical.

The group also talked about how the relationship between those who shape the city and those who use the city can be altered via SM. They loosely called this “The Department of Listening” or a 311 for design ideas. They suggested that designers allow the city to talk to them, and gather information on how the city works through data collected through SM. They noted “the way that you navigate the city can change when information is always *real time*”.

Lastly the group discussed a concept they called the “Shape Shifter City.” This idea asks how SM changes our experience in the city. Do we over-experience the city through micro management of our daily lives? Does SM make new experiences?

### Design Notes

Translation: Physical → Digital → Physical.

Shape Shifter City! - How does SM change our experience in the city?  
over-experience, controlling the daily.  
make new experiences.

Department of Listening "311 for design ideas"  
allowing city to "talk to us".  
the way that you navigate the city can change when information is always *real time*.

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## PUBLIC SPACE

The group that discussed public space came up with the guiding theme that SM can enhance the experience of public spaces.

On their notes they asked, shall we assume that everyone will have access to SM? This is an important note to remember whenever discussing these issues that there remains a digital divide in most contexts.

But moving on from that they came up with three ideas on how SM could enhance public spaces. They came up with the idea to build a virtual wall or mural that could serve as a bulletin board for people to contribute/find images, questions, stories, and ideas. Adding on to that idea, they suggested that there could be a public space that's interactive, a device that projects tweets for 5-10min, and invites people to play or interact with it. The group called this idea "momentary art."

The third idea they had was to use SM to allow people to assign unique/intuitive names to every single object in the city; and use that to foster discussion, and find information about a place or thing. The group said that this "Internet of things" is already being developed, and it would give a unique way for people to identify every object in a space and foster conversations about this.

### Public Spaces Notes

Shall we assume that everyone will have access to SM?

Virtual wall/mural, bulletin board for people to contribute/find images, questions, stories, ideas.

Public space that is interactive, projects your tweets for 5-10 min, invites people to play with it/interact... "momentary art".

Give unique/intuitive names to every single object in the city... and use that to foster discussion, find information about a place/thing.

## ECONOMIC VITALITY

The group that focused on economic vitality talked about connecting all the elements of the city: housing, jobs, markets, services, and other problems to provide stimulants to economic vitality. A sort of “open 311” could serve as a communications platform between people to connect them with different solutions. Stressing the openness of this platform, they advocated for the creation of a digital commons for free exchange of information and services.

The group discussed three dimensions of this connecting power. The first one was through services, and connecting people to people. Possibilities for this dimension would include education, direct skills transfer, connecting people to jobs or mates, getting involved with the community board, the ability to encourage reinvestment in certain neighborhoods and the ability to enhance the visibility of local information.

The second dimension that SM and digital commons could effect in the spatial dimension of city life, thinking of new ways to imagine public space, as well as the market place. The group thought that new ways to imagine public space could be an anchor to create economic vitality in a neighborhood, with the Highline Park as a prime example.

The last dimension was the ability of SM to create transparency in the public realm, and have citizens become more involved with their greater community.

They also asked the question where does this interaction happen? The group discussed mobile phones as an important tool to foster more interaction, because of the mobility of information. The group’s representative gave the example of his using Twitter on his phone to crowd source ideas on economic vitality.

All of these dimensions would work towards the goals of creating transparency, interaction, participation, common goals, the fostering of community, which can all enhance the economic vitality of a city.

### **Economic Vitality Notes**

Connecting all the elements of the city: housing, jobs, markets, services, "open 311" problems, micro level services (job sources, matchmaking), openness of platforms, get involved, community board, reinvest, visibility of local info, mobile/sms, skill share.

Spatial Dimension → Public Space + Marketplace.

Transparency, jobs, interaction/participation, common goals, fostering community.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

This group talked about using SM to create a safety pulse of the city for everything from muggings to disasters.

The first two ideas the group came up with were very practical. They suggested to use SM as a disaster warning system which would inform people of potential danger quicker, and make it easier for people to coordinate a response. The group also suggested that SM could be used to inform people with special needs and/or disabilities to potential safety hazards for them in their everyday experience with the city.

Their most ambitious idea was to create a safety index of neighborhoods, in which SM could be used to inform residents and visitors of safety issues where they are. They thought there could be a geo-tagged safety index map. They added a warning that a tool such as this could also be abused and used to isolate and ghettoize an area instead of open it to the rest of the city. This prompted them to ask, can such a tool be used to give a voice to people and not marginalize them more.

After considering this they decided that SM based tools for safety could be more pro-actively focused instead of reactively focused. One such pro-active strategy would be to use SM to create public art, improving the standard of living by fostering community.

### Public Health and Safety Notes

Social (disaster) warning system, add speed, create new connections, geo-tag, coordinate who gets it.

Safety Index (of neighborhoods), feedback to tell people/tourists/visitors.

Safety for people w/ special needs/disabilities.

Controlling Dissemination of Important Public Info: (ex. H1N1 Mexico City Outbreak, Earthquake, Natural Disaster)

Curate Info: Promote Correct, Attack Incorrect.

Target Sources with Large Audience/Spread of Influence.

Improve 311/911 type system (emergency response).

Factors of urgency/panic.

Responsibility of SM companies to interpret volume of public info/safety data collected, and connect it to authorities.

## CULTURE

The group that discussed culture had the idea to create a marketplace for social experience and cultural exchange.

Their first idea was that crowd sourced art such as street art through SM, or music and transit could create a convening of people in public spaces.

They also thought about how many neighborhoods have their own culture. They suggested that SM could be used to create an inter-and intra-city sharing system between similar cultures separated by distance, and between proximate cultures which are different.

The third idea the discussed was the ability for SM tools such as geo-location and public art to generate self-curated personal narratives by people living in certain areas and publish them in a public realm. The potential of this tool could be harnessed to create amongst other things, a map or timeline of a neighborhood so that those who are new to an area could tap in and continue existing cultural legacies, as well as support the creation of new and/or alternative histories in an area of a city. This data could also be collected and analyzed for use in city agencies or governing bodies as well.

Finally as a sort of outlier, and a very practical solution to problems in artistic communities, is the issue of access to resources for freelancers. The group suggested that SM could be used to do everything from the geo-location of desks and other resources, to support networks through knowledge sharing and feedback from others.

### **Culture Notes**

Marketplace for social experience.

Crowd sourcing: open source art, street art, music + transit

Culture: intercity sharing culture, neighborhood connections, intracity neighborhood culture connect, connecting cultures.

Self curation narratives, mapping through time, geolocation + art, new histories.

Freelancers: geolocate desks, knowledge sharing + feedback.

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## GOVERNANCE

The governance group came up with three ideas as well, wrestled with the major question of how to get governing bodies to buy into reforms and possibilities prompted by these new tools. They advocated for an open loop system in which governing bodies solicit information at all levels of governance.

There are several possibilities that would be created by this system. One would be a more transparent and democratic system of governance. With government buy-in, they could have closed door discussions published. Another possibility would be that the government or civil society agencies could also devise a pulse system that would gauge the public's response to events or things published in the media. This would not only allow for a feedback system, but could also measure government response to public opinion.

A final suggestion was that government could use SM to alert the public from everything to an emergency or disaster, to street closures and other infrastructure issues.

### Governance Notes

Open Loop System: Government solicits at all levels.

Transparency + Democracy (closed door discussions published).

Pulse/Response to publication in media.

Alerting public of: emergency, street closure.

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

The climate change and energy group had the guiding principle that SM could be used to have real time energy use measurement as an incentive for behavioral change.

Their three ideas fit under this heading. First, they imagined that a house or an individual can track their energy usage and get real time data feedback. By being able to track individual or community energy usage, it could also encourage competition. Individuals and communities can then receive incentives from energy saving behavior.

The second idea the climate change and energy group had was to use SM to coordinate resources such as car-pooling, or shared taxis.

And finally they came up with the suggestion to work with existing modes of green living like public transportation systems, which could incentivize the usage of their system and provide free rides as a reward of energy saving behaviors. They could track people's usage of their system through a social media tool.

### Climate Change and Energy Notes

Real Time Energy Use Measurement as Incentive for Change.

Real time read outs.

Bragging rights.

Public display of energy usage.

Incentives offered by cities.

Individual vs. Communal Action.

Cloud (Twitter, Facebook).

Measurement.

Educate PSA's.

Tools / Equipment.

Transport.

Collective Shares.

On Subways.

Competitions between Towns.

Macro + Micro Scales.

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## TRANSPORTATION

The transportation group had three strong wide reaching ideas and a host of brainstormed ideas listed below.

Their first idea was to use SM to tailor equitable transportation to specific and unique communities. An example was given that information sharing could help provide better access to arrival information in certain areas, as well as create a more social transportation system encouraging ride shares and other collective transport methods. This could be applicable in both the global north and global south.

More relevant only to the global north, unlike in the global south where many planners can start from scratch, much of the transportation infrastructure has already been developed for many years. The group thought that SM could help retrofit existing transport systems to make them more flexible and adaptable to real-time needs.

Their final big suggestion was that SM could be used to reduce the need for transportation in general.

One highlight from their brainstorming session of individual ideas was to use SM to help coordinate a public transportation system of pods instead of long trains. The New York subway system is already set-up for such a system which would both be faster and more efficient.

### Transportation Notes

Use SM to tailor equitable transportation to specific + unique communities (Global North/Global South).

Retrofit existing systems which is flexible + adaptable to real-time needs (Global North).

Using social media to reduce need for transportation.

## CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBORHOODS

The citizen engagement and neighborhoods group suggested that SM is a realm for information exchange for cultural and civic organizations, as well as facilitating more personalized interactions in commercial spaces.

First, SM could be used to streamline community engagement for people who are unable to always actively engage in the physical realm. People could attend town meetings virtually, and people could voice their opinions about issues in the virtual realm. This relationship between the virtual and physical is a mutually reinforcing one. SM could also facilitate a participatory budget process for cities and neighborhoods.

For the purposes of gathering information on the user end, the group noted that people are able to personalize the news that comes to them. This has important ramifications for local issues, or issues that are meaningful to individuals.

The group finally noted how SM allows for tailoring of the commercial experience. SM could help create personal contact, which would especially support small businesses. The group's speaker said that through SM, she could enter a store and the person working there may know much more information about her to make better suggestions for her. This also suggests the ability to strengthen local and small business competition in the face of large corporate businesses.

### **Citizen Engagement and Neighborhoods Notes**

Mutually Reinforcing:

Community Platform-Virtual + Physical.

Participatory Budget: personalized news, news that is meaningful to the individual.

Sales/Customer information base for local businesses: information exchange, cultural + civic organizations.

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## For More information:

Check the video online to get more information and hear more discussion:

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2012/02/building-cities-through-social-media-interactive-workshop.html>

Check out the South-South News Video:

<http://www.southsouthnews.com/pages/SSN.aspx?nc=1&t=s&s=1&h=false&lo=false&v=2012/02/20120218161357105&vid=396a35d2-a043-4135-926a-0e9401b4f7fc&cid=9dafa96c-8d11-4e07-aef8-dd6063f31d76&r=5463>

## Twitter accounts of participants who singed on the board:

@rumplefraggle  
@zeb  
@angenyc\_  
@van\_alen  
@ifud  
@rosasuri  
@alishalevin  
@bmwgugglab  
@miliespinoza  
@elementalnyc  
@moroni  
@tagbrown  
@arieldesign  
@philsalesses  
@levental  
@designother90  
@davidatkindling  
@johannanewyork  
@danlatorre  
@lyndabauer  
@nrader55  
@evanscowley  
@jakabkrupka  
@organelle  
@arieldesign  
@tagbrum  
@hallm13  
@shpears