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Co-Creation in the “Lockdown City”: Re-Designing Creative Urban Methodologies through Hybrid Interfaces

In this paper, we present the process of re-designing a creative and collaborative methodology for engaging citizens within the production, analysis and use of local data by means of co-creation through hybrid (digital / analogue) urban data interfaces. This approach is being prototyped in a relatively new suburban neighbourhood of Utrecht, Netherlands, through an ongoing collaboration between a group of local artists, an art institute, local residents and researchers.

Aiming to address critiques around civic engagement in the datafied smart city, the methodology has been developed as part of a creative response to the “lockdown city”, experienced during the current pandemic. It centres on a ‘hotglued’ website and seeks local engagement through the lens of everyday life practices and neighbourhood aspects that are especially critical at times of crisis, here revolving around access, production and distribution of food. Using existing technologies ‘at hand’, the website is explored as a digital data interface, mediating online conversations about present practices and potential neighbourhood food futures. Engagement, data collection and dissemination are also mediated offline, through the artists’ depot window (a shop space) explored as an analogue data interface, physically present in the neighbourhood.

Building on this experience, we discuss how re-designing creative urban methodologies might help to co-create new ‘social imaginaries’ around technology, its relationships with the city and its inhabitants. Furthermore, we present opportunities and challenges for re-imagining technology, such as urban data dashboards, as tools for co-creation in the “lockdown city” that foster solidarity and care rather than surveillance and control.