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Local Anchors in Trans-local Knowledge Communities

Sponsorships

Economic Geography Specialty Group

Organizers

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Universität zu Berlin

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Session Abstract

Conceptualizing places and spaces is at the heart of geographic thinking and the relations between the two are continuously challenged, contested, and negotiated. Specific physical places may, for instance, serve as local anchors for social movements (e.g. the maker movement) (Walter-Herrmann, 2013; Toombs and Bardzell, 2014), trans-local scenes (e.g. in music) (Hauge and Hrats, 2010), global knowledge communities (e.g. communities of enthusiasts) (Brinks and Ibert, 2015; Müller and Ibert, 2015) or global processes of value creation (Power and Hauge, 2008; Pike, 2009; Berthoin Antal et al., 2015). In fact, we observe a wide spectrum of local anchors that help to disseminate ideas and knowledge, enable and encourage participation in specific practices (e.g. tinkering, designing, building), serve as (temporary) productions sites (e.g. local workshops for music) and facilitate curation and consumption (e.g. pop-up stores, record stores). Hence, actors utilize these physical spaces to co-/create objects, artifacts and products and to generate and disseminate ideas, brands and values.

As these spaces and processes are dynamic and understudied, this session, co-organized by Brian Hrats (University of Southampton), aims to nuance our understanding of the interplay between ‘the global’ and ‘the local’ as well as ‘physical’ and ‘virtual’ spaces. We aim to explore the role that local anchors play within local neighborhoods and scenes as well as trans-local scenes, communities and virtual networks. More specifically, the session aims to consider the diversity and specificity of local anchors which may comprise open creative labs (Schmidt et al., 2014; Ibert et al., 2015), third spaces including cafes and restaurants (Oldenburg, 1997), craft collectives, performance venues, records stores (Hrats and Jansson 2016) fablabs and coworking / maker/ hacker spaces (Merkel 2015). In doing so, it aims to identify nexuses between the global and local and advance our understanding of how global communities are rooted locally and how localities intertwine with the global.

Presentations

1) The messy socio-spatial trajectories of knowledge - Tracing creative projects in pharma and music across scales and media

Gernot Grabher, HafenCity University Hamburg

Alice Melchior, HafenCity University Hamburg

Benjamin Schiemer, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Elke Schüßler, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Jörg Sydow, Freie Universität Berlin

The local and the global, the physical and the virtual: the increasing engagement with both dualities signifies that economic geography has left behind the preoccupation with the idiosyncracies of place. And yet, these dualities still seem rife with assumptions and omissions that this paper seeks to take issue with.

First, in prevailing perceptions of the local-global tension, spatial scales seem confounded with communicative logics. The local is regarded as the realm of accidental interactions and chance encounters; the global, alternatively, is the domain of strategic interactions. Second, in the engagement with the physical/virtual duality, communication media seem equated with social logics. Only physical sensory-rich interaction nurtures trustful relations, whereas virtual interaction remains a deficient medium. Third, scales and media routinely are treated as dichotomies; shifting and morphing communicative and social logics are hardly systematically conceptualized. Finally, knowledge practices are still perceived from the exclusive angle of co-presence. A systematic appreciation of the role of absence in knowledge practices seems, well, absent so far.

Based on preliminary findings of a major interdisciplinary research project, the proposed paper seeks to cut across these dichotomous assumptions and to move beyond the fixation with co-presence. By systematically comparing the fields of arts (music) and science (pharma), the paper aims at tracing the socio-spatial trajectories of creative projects across scales and through media alternating between various forms of co-presence and absence. From these trajectories, the paper attempts to derive building blocks for a processual understanding that appreciates the increasing hybridization of knowledge practices.

2) Artefacts anchoring on-line communities

Johan Jansson, Uppsala University

Geographers have long been dealing with different types of local anchors in studying the embeddedness of specific processes in different places e.g. countries, regions or cities. Through the concept of trans-local communities, research has shown how similar features, processes and ways of doing things have diffused from one place to another; processes usually embedded in and developed in the vicinity of local anchors. Naturally, as geographers, these locally embedded anchors have first and foremost been of physical nature such as firms, institutions, cities, neighborhoods and the like. However, in this paper, the starting point will be less about local physical anchors as it will focus on other forms of artefacts as points of reference in trans-local communities. More specifically, two sets of empirical material; on-line forums (as well as e.g. YouTube video clips) for enthusiasts with interest in a) a specific type of synthesizers (Yamaha CS80) and b) high-end audio equipment, will be analyzed respectively. Thus, the paper has the ambition to show both similarities and particularities in how and where artefacts are used. In particular the analysis will focus on three dimensions of the empirical material namely: how values (quality, authenticity etc.) are negotiated in on-line contexts, how the use of specific artefacts are ritualized and show specificities and similarities between different users and places, and how artefacts, through ritual usage, are means to transcend time/space limitations (e.g. nostalgia). Theoretically the paper will relate to discussions on trans-local communities and ideas of the complex relationship between users and artefacts.

3) Interscalar intermediation: the case of ZK/U in Berlin as a local cultural anchor

Alison Bain, York University, Toronto

Friederike Landau, Technical University of Berlin

Through a case study of the interdisciplinary cultural centre Zentrum für Kunst und Urbanistik (ZK/U) in Berlin, this paper critically examines ZK/U as a local anchor with an urban and a global reach. An examination of ZK/U's anchoring capacities in an ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged neighbourhood on the city's margins reveals how this physical place with its virtual networks permits artists to negotiate the interplay between a locality's infrastructure of ideas, values, and support and global engagement of cultural stakeholders in policy and practice. In so doing, this paper argues that anchorage is not only a socio-spatial act of (dis)embedding at different scales, but also a political act of intermediation which serves to construct and maintain cultural scenes, create and occupy new places, build and augment community relationships, and animate urban space through arts-led programming. By unpacking the opportunities, challenges, and tensions encountered at ZK/U, we reveal the space's importance in the process of *Verstetigung* by Berlin-based artists and social movements – a repeated claim to create and solidify on-going, reliable relationships between urban and cultural policymakers and cultural producers. Such a process of socio-spatial anchorage is investigated with respect to its potential to influence the dynamics of urban and cultural governance in Berlin. A site-specific, empirical analysis of how artists deploy intermediation as a mode of embedding themselves in processes of urban socio-spatial transformation showcases how a neighbourhood arts space functions as a local cultural anchor that supports the interscalar generation of events and networks.

4) Going out of style? The cancellation of Toronto Fashion Week and the evolution of trans-local anchors in the digital age

Taylor Brydges, Uppsala University

Brian J. Hrats, University of Southampton

In the fashion world, fashion weeks have traditionally served as key anchors and field-configuring events which create and communicate value(s), structure the industry and reinforce its global hierarchy. Indeed, along with events in emerging fashion centers, the bi-annual 'big four' fashion weeks in New York, London, Milan and Paris showcase top designers for the press, buyers and bloggers. Recently, however, the economic and symbolic supremacy of these local anchors has been challenged. In the age of Instagram and 'see now, buy now' fashion marketing and consumption, the relevance of fixed-calendar events, 'seasons' and production cycles is being tested. To contribute to this session's focus on the role of physical anchors in trans-local knowledge communities, this presentation will consider the evolution of fashion weeks as physical yet temporary anchors. It will trace the rise and recent cancellation of Toronto Fashion Week (TFW) to demonstrate that a combination of local and global factors can create failed anchors. It will also highlight the implications of this failure for designers, Toronto's position within the global fashion system and the Canadian fashion industry more broadly. In doing so, this presentation seeks to nuance our understanding of the evolution of anchors, trans-local dynamics and the interplay between 'the global' and 'the local' as well as 'physical,' 'virtual' and 'temporary' spaces.

5) Places for Resilience. Anchoring multiple forms of resilience in Open Creative Labs

Suntje Schmidt, Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space / Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Oliver Ibert, Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space / Freie Universität Berlin

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We observe the establishing of Open Creative Labs worldwide, especially in functionally diverse and central localities in urban agglomerations. These places offer both, social and working contexts, for hackers, coworkers, makers, tinkerers, but also startup entrepreneurs, SMEs, mobile employees or for temporary organizations.

In this paper we would like to explore if we can understand the global spread of these places as a signifier for the socio-economic transformation of regions and economies. More precisely, we will argue that Open Creative Labs offer new forms of resilience in increasingly volatile and thus uncertain economic environments. On the urban neighborhood level, for instance, Open Creative Labs are often crystallization points for sustainable community development or are established in form of interim use for unoccupied buildings in districts under transformation. Furthermore, we can observe a renaissance of urban centers especially in creativity and knowledge driven economies. Creative and knowledge driven occupations, however, are often volatile, project-based and of temporary nature. Thus, an increasing share of the workforce seeks new places to work from that are away from home. In other words, there is a demand for flexible work places that in themselves created new sources of income for those who run such places. From the lab user perspective, Open Creative Labs offer new forms of resilience as well. Obviously, individuals find a place to work, to test ideas, to tinker, to gain access to equipment and machinery that are otherwise inaccessible. However, by using these spaces, individuals might become startups or entrepreneurs by accident, because they suddenly are aware of potential markets. Additionally, these places function as local community builders by collectively establishing shared values (including excepting long hours, low pay and uncertainty labeled as 'individual and creative freedom').

Thus, this paper will explore how Open Creative Labs anchor different spatial levels of resilience locally enriched by empirical examples from Berlin and Detroit.