The UrbanIxD
Manifesto

*Interaction Design in
the Networked City*

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The UrbanIxD Project

UrbanIxD is a 2 year European project that is building a research network around the domain of data-rich urban environments, focusing on human activities, experiences and behaviours.

A transformation is taking place in how our cities work. Cites are being laced with sensors and mobile technologies that are generating a myriad of urban informatics experiences. A digital landscape overlays our physical world and is expanding to offer ever-richer experiences. In the cities of the future, computing isn't just with us; it surrounds us, and it uses the context of our environment to empower us in more natural, yet powerful ways.

By employing a "critical design" methodology, the UrbanIxD project is providing an opportunity to re-think what intelligent connected communities of the future might actually look like. The project questions the concept of the "smart city", and is developing a community of researchers with a shared commitment to the foregrounding of the human experience in the field of urban interaction design.

Introduction

This UrbanIxD manifesto is a statement of beliefs about the field of urban interaction design. It represents a synthesis of the project's work with artists, designers, technologists, social scientists, urbanists, architects and researchers; people who are motivated by a desire to explore how we experience urban living and what that might be like in the near-future.

The manifesto sets out what we think urban interaction design is, what it should explore, and how it can contribute to the making of liveable cities. It is a necessary first step and we acknowledge that it is far from complete. How it develops, and what influence it will have, is down to the emerging community - all of us who are concerned about the issues, and inspired by the potential offered by cities.

Call it a mission statement or a call to arms - this manifesto aims to lay the foundations of the field that is urban interaction design - a field that represents the collective desire to call into question the kind of future we are in the process of making.

The Manifesto

From Life Between Buildings to Life Between Systems

The goal of Urban Interaction Design is to place people at the centre of design for interactive products and services in the urban environment. In particular, how the application of technologies serve human and societal needs. The field of Urban Interaction Design explicitly acknowledges the complexity of cities and seeks to draw inspiration from the socio-economic interplay between the traditional aims of spatial planning and the quality of urban life experience.

We propose that researchers in the field of urban interaction design should exhibit the following key attributes:

1. The ability to adopt a transdisciplinary philosophy.

2. The sensitivity to act as an interpreter in urban space, to be a facilitator that aims to alter interactions in the city.

3. The skills to utilise methods that seek to articulate the connection between the local and global.

4. The insight to view communities as not something that we develop or design for, but as mutual partners that we design with.

5. The sensibility to navigate conflicting viewpoints over the use of urban space.

We propose that the key criteria of an Urban Interaction Design project are:

1. The adoption of a human centred approach to the making of liveable cities.

2. The explicit foregrounding of urban life's experiential qualities as a context for the design and deployment of technology for cities.

3. The skills to reflect social and collective processes through urban technology design.

4. The goal of understanding problems rather than solving problems.

5. The craft to embrace the mess and complexity of cities - to acknowledge that cities are complex socio-economic systems and in the future they will contain a complex mesh of interconnected, heterogeneous technological systems.

6. The vision to focus on how things might be, rather than on how they are now.

7. The insight to listen, learn and speculate.

8. The realisation that there is not a prescriptive way of working – it is an attitude of mind.

9. The recognition that as the world changes, so too must the questions we ask.

It is the position of the UrbanIxD project that the following research topics should be of primary concern to the community:

1. The Quantified Self — in a world where everything is measured and crowd sourced opinion holds sway — how do we trust our own judgement?

2. The Negotiation of Space — how might interactive technology be used to maximise the use of space within urban areas for positive outcomes, to enhance the experience of city living?

3. Experiencing the Other — using data to experience other times or other places through the eyes of others.

Urban interaction design can contribute to the move towards underlying societal change, driven by a changing technological landscape.

The field has the opportunity to impact the aspirations of civic engagement and make it a more profound, direct, effective and diverse experience of engaging in public issues.

We believe that Urban Interaction Design can make a significant contribution to research in the following areas:

1. The changing form of the urban media landscape.

2. The promotion of citizen-participation through the development of open access tools to advocate for, and engage with, self-actualisation and social transformation.

3. The emergence of digitally mediated resource-sharing systems and associated business models.

4. The participation in the building of artefacts, processes, solutions and mediating concepts to bring the differing parties together over discussions about how our cities should evolve.

5. The study of mapping tools as a means of delineating urban space. In short, how representational layers of the city can be reconfigured in order to see possibilities for the city to be both a shared space and a space for sharing.

6. The ownership of data in the networked city, specifically in relation to the production, aggregation and operationalisation of data - the humanisation of data rather than the datafied human.

7. The creation of interfaces that allow citizens to understand and act upon data gathered in cities and the subsequent impact on value and identity.

The field of Urban Interaction Design recognises the need to engage directly with people who live and work in cities through:

1. Using everyday language.

2. Recognising that the field is not solely digital.

3. Talking with people and learning their stories — engage or risk being marginalized.

4. Valuing the contributions of others in the field.

5. Planning for sustainability and scalability.

6. Developing a strategy for the shift of ownership in the post-project phase.

Central tenents of research in the field of urban interaction design are:

1. The explicit acknowledgement of the reciprocal nature of technology and the city.

2. The understanding that urban public space is both shaping, and shaped by, the digital technologies, media and materials that are becoming increasingly important to communities.

Further Reading

All UrbanIxD publications are available at **www.urbanixd.eu**

City Data Future: Interactions in Hybrid Urban Space

The UrbanIxD exhibition catalogue.

From Urban Space to Future Place

A document describing how the 2013 UrbanIxD Summer School applied critical design & design fiction to future urban technologies. Produced in collaboration with the Book Sprints for ICT Research FP7 project.

Summer School Reader

From the UrbanIxD project Summer School that took place in Split, Croatia in August 2013.

UrbanIxD Industry Report

Analysis of the industry landscape around creating digital urban interactions.

Urban Interaction Design: Towards City Making

How do you describe emerging trends within a forming field? In this book, you will find a distilled conversation, filtered through the collective and embodied practices and experiences of eight diverse individuals. We cannot claim that the result is a perfect representation of the current situation. However, because of the experience, commitment and generosity of the contributors, this book does now exist.

UrbanIxD: Designing Human Interactions in the Networked City

www.urbanixd.eu