

World Wide (urban) Wiki | Bookscapes in Metapolis

Cross-media poet/artist Jan Hatt-Olsen

Abstract.

In my media art I have four basic theses.

- Media intertwined with its content are both visual and written literature - prose, poetry or composite forms and outer physical reality
- Media don't exist in a pure form where it's not fused together with content, fiction, imagination and outer physical reality
- The difference between fiction, imagination and 'real' reality is that the latter have much more restrictions, but all have in common that what determine their way of being, their ontology is restricted imagination (individual, social and physical restrictions)
- (Urban) space is an interface, is a media space, is a genre of literature.

In my ongoing artistic research, I have explored these theses and how they can be used in the exploration and creation of (urban) spaces as bookscapes.

Metapolis with internal contiguity in its fragments, but with lack of contiguity between the fragments, is very much like a genre of poetry.

Currently I'm working on the world wide (urban) wiki project, which is creating a fuse between physical urban space and the internet, in which urban spaces becomes both augmented spaces and augmented interfaces. This has been presented in Mumbai at Techfest (Asia's largest technology festival) arranged by IIT Bombay as part of my urban wiki | wiki light exhibition and at Techkriti arranged by IIT Kanpur.

The wiki is projected directly (re-loaded every 30 seconds) into urban space, using urban space and life as a screen in itself and people can read, write and edit the wiki light with their smartphones and tablets.

The wiki is made using the open source Mediawiki software (known from Wikipedia), which gives a structure quite similar to how public urban space function today. Presence or absence of locals, civil servants, police and politicians. Totalitarian, anarchistic or democratic. Top down, activist, grassroots, local or balanced. It's crucial for augmenting and enhancing urban space in metapolis space to be aware of and discuss how it's governed.

Different (urban) spaces can each have their page in the world wide (urban) wiki. New spaces and people can easily be part of it. Wireless/mobile internet, smartphones, tablets, notebooks and laptops are widely spread and people are used to wiki's on the web. From a technological and planning perspective it would be economically easy. The change of perception will be significant. In the world wide (urban) wiki urban spaces are perceived as both real and fictional spaces, as chôra spaces, always in the making, in flux, permanently in-between zones where everyone can imagine text, colors and pictures and then write and paint in urban space in dialogue with others in metapolis.

Space is possibility and speed of movement. In metapolis it's obvious that the Newtonian model mapping in four dimensions, measuring seconds, meters don't function very well to define, perceive urban space. Possibility and speed of movement is determined by time, effort, cost, availability, and possibility of transport and communication. A through world wide (urban) wiki enhanced metapolis are fiction/poetry, physical and functional properties melted together. It is augmented re-enchanted urban space. Metapolis is better mapped, defined and perceived as poetry books as bookscapes.

Introduction.

I have in my art explored urban bookscapes since 2004, where I made a downtown Værløse in the Greater Copenhagen area into a collection of poetry, where everybody and everything were poems and everyone being in or relating to the area were poets themselves, a work which later took part as an example of street creativity exhibited in 2005 in City Living – Living City | The European Biennial of Town and Town Planners.

This was an urban space of a traditional type defined by physical boundaries. Still urban space and life was highly fragmented, but with the fragments and there interaction, creating a living space, which was an entity, like what is happening in a poetry book.

This way of perceiving urban space and life, don't depend on the fragments being placed in an area defined by boundaries like the metropolis. In a poem and poetry book you can move from Denmark to Germany to India almost instantly.

It is just as appropriate to use this method for an urban entity defined not being inside physical boundaries, but by function and necessity.

I have explored this in my urban wiki projects, which are utilizing the speed and flexibility of communication in new media, both as locative media and for communication over distances, the urban wiki has a background in 'The Cinescape Street Creativity Charter' which I participated in making and presenting at City Living – Living City | The 6'th European Biennial of Towns and Town Planners' and 'Urban Alchemist in the Night' which I made during the Metropolis laboratory (Copenhagen 2007) together with the Icelandic new media artist Ásta Olga Magnúsdóttir

The urban wiki projects are based on a fuse between the internet and physical urban space. The internet is sharing many characteristics with the metapolis. Fragments create entities. In the case of the internet, groups of virtual places are connected to each other by function and communication, not by being close to each other. The time and effort it takes to travel between the spaces being very short and easy.

A fuse between the internet and physical urban space (traditional urban spaces, transport spaces, leisure resorts relevant for decision making etc.) is already going on by urban screens from large one to small ones people carrying laptops, tablet, smartphones etc. in urban space

Still there is a separation between a common physical space and the common virtual space, made physical in the urban screens.

The urban wiki project is aiming, through media art to make this separation porous, soft and fuzzy. To augment both the virtual spaces and the physical spaces. To create a new kind of mixed reality space.

To make urban space an life an interface, by using urban spaces in itself as a screen by projecting wiki pages directly into urban space and life and use that smartphones, tablets, laptops are now so widespread in urban space that through theme people can access the wiki and co-write and co edit urban spaces through the wiki projections. This I have made in the Greater Copenhagen area (Denmark) Odense (Denmark) and at Techfest at IIT Bombay in Mumbai (India) and it participated in Techkriti at IIT Kanpur in Kanpur (India) the last place I was not personal present but it was set up following my guidelines.

The system I have used is quite easy to set up, and network of urban wiki pages, could easily grow to a world wide (urban) wiki in principle, technically and economically it would be easy, socially, politically it is a different matter. Who should control the system, how should people navigate in this new kind spaces should anything be allowed or should there be restriction, should it be policed and by who and how should it be done. A wiki like the online lexicon Wikipedia is already heavily policed, should that be the way to do it? How would a media artwork like world wide (urban) wiki change perception, social interaction and ontology of urban space and life in metapolis?

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The rest of this paper will go into details with three of my media artworks Urban Artscape - Furesø (Greater Copenhagen area, Denmark) , Artscape Vollsmose (Odense, Denmark) , Urban Wiki | Wiki Light at Techfest at IIT Bombay, (Mumbai, India), and explore what can be learned from them with regard to possibilities and limitations in creating a fuse between urban wiki and metapolis, which makes a bookscape in metapolis, in which everyone relating to it are co-writing, co-editing it. Finally I will explore the possibility of the existence of a world wide (urban) wiki, in which different augmented metapolis can take part and communicate both internally and between them.

Urban Artscape – Furesø (Greater Copenhagen Area, Denmark)

Furesø Municipality was a new municipality created out of the two old municipalities Værløse and Farum. Each of the old municipalities had a main town surrounded by smaller urban areas.

This structure couldn't be upheld in the new municipality. The politicians in the new municipality wanted to create a metapolis (in a very small scale of course) and an identity of the citizens to be citizens in it.

Some politicians and part of the administration were fascinated by the idea I had developed of the urban wiki, and saw it as a catalyst and facilitator in that process.

They were also fascinated by the idea of making a new kind of urban space, which augmented it, making borderlines soft, fuzzy and porous between places, imagination, social, private, virtual and outer physical reality.



Fig. 1, Fig. 2 Kulturtorvet in Værløse

Two squares and two towns Værløse and Farum in Furesø municipality in the Greater Copenhagen Area were connected and augmented by an urban wiki from November 2007 to November 2008.

The purpose of the relative long period was to have it as a part of daily life rather than an event, so a culture for using the augmented spaces could have time to develop.

This also made the media art work a political and cultural battleground, it challenged established patterns in many ways. The possibilities for how these central squares placed in downtown areas could be used and by whom. It challenged the idea of what a public urban square was, what art and an artist was and of who should be given the possibility to write and paint urban space.

In Farum the most active participation was from a ghetto area Farum midtpunkt, were people normally wouldn't take part in cultural activities in the square Kulturpladsen placed beside the culture house. Stories and photos from the ghetto area were projected into the square, while the art society connected to the culture house in Farum mostly opposed the urban wiki.

In Værløse it also had the consequence that people outside the local art environment would participate in writing and painting urban space, but here the local culture/art scene were split some participated, some were opposed. The graffiti and skater scene in downtown Værløse respected the work and didn't made graffiti in the projection areas. Normally they had the habit of destroying public art exhibitions.

In Farum there was no graffiti scene in the central square in the downtown area they stayed in Farum midtpunkt. That the ghetto area suddenly was present with writing and painting with light in the central square was something fundamentally new.

In the urban wiki I'm using the open source software MediaWiki also used in Wikipedia, because it has a structure very similar to how public urban space is functioning and governed there will be group of locals connected to a space, by passers, visitors, people not physically being in the space but still relating to it. There will also be layers of authorities surveying how the space is used and with possibilities for intervention if someone break the frame of behavior they accept, the space will be policed too, but it's important to stress that like in daily life public urban space there is now pre-censorship.

The ability for everybody to paint and write with light in urban space with no pre-censorship and to do it in a social net media fused with physical urban space, created a split in the administration, where I had worked as artistic planning consultant prior to the media art public artwork Urban Artscape –Furesø, in contrast to the majority of local politicians who backed the project through the whole process.

The part of the administration who were against were concerned about what people would do with their enhanced possibilities for expression and interaction in public urban space

This conflict between supporters and opponent of the project, during the long planning process before the project, developed into a stalemate, which were broken by a compromise suggestion from my side, that in the first half of Urban Artscape – Furesø only invited artist, urban planners,

architects, administrator, politicians could participate, to create an example of how the space could be used, before everybody was given free possibilities I also had to accept a constant surveillance of the urban wiki so any bad behavior immediately could be removed.

In the phase were only invited professionals and local people from the established local art/culture could participate, there were support from art/culture societies in Værløse but not from the culture house in Farum and the connected art/culture societies there, who opposed not to be in control of the process and disliked the new form of art, especially the distortion of projection when they fused with urban space and life, that the screen was not neutral but the screen was urban space and life creating the writing and painting together with projections.



Fig. 3 Kulturpladsen in Farum

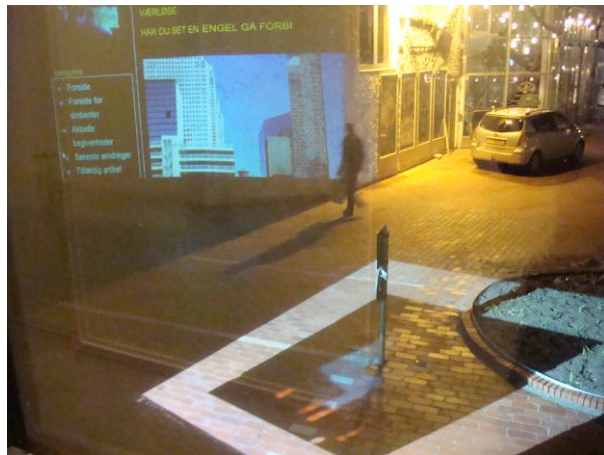


Fig. 4 Kulturtorvet in Værløse

People in general used it as an augmented daily life space, sometimes they would just pass, sometimes they would look at the urban wiki projections, sometimes they would interact, and people would also interact from places outside the two squares.

There were projected poetry, paintings, photos into the squares and people interacted with the projections both with their bodies, shadows and with their imagination through new material uploaded and projected into the squares. The squares were also making an echo in each other, by being video filmed and projected real time into each other in a blurred manner (this was a demand from the authorities that these projections shouldn't be clear people should not be able to see exactly what was going on the other square) on the internet however people were allowed to see clear pictures.

In many ways the urban space became the interface I had hoped for, an interface not on small private screens but for shared encounters even for spontaneous urban parties, but the local art/culture societies and institutions increasingly opposed the project, which resulted in a heated debate in the local press.

Artscape Vollsmose. (Odense, Denmark)

Shortly after Urban Artscape – Furesø I made a new urban wiki in connection with opening of a new media center and library in Vollsmose, a ghetto area in one of Denmark's larger cities Odense. This media art work was curated by the media light gallery Illumenarts.

The urban wiki period here was two weeks and the opening of the urban wiki was a part of the opening event of media center.

There was no conflict of any kind connected to this project and people were using the augmented space to communicate with each other, through the urban wiki projection in the common entrance area for the media center the library and commercial center in Vollsmose, some would use it as chat room projected down in urban space, some would place photos, animations, paintings, written text in urban space, some would dance with the animations.



Fig. 5, Fig. 6. The main entrance to the media center, library and commercial Center in Vollsmose

Urban Wiki | Wiki Light, Techfest 2012 at IIT Bombay (Mumbai, India), Techkrti 2012 at IIT Kunpar (Kunpar, India)

Techfest arranged by IIT Bombay is Asia largest technology festival.

To these two festivals I was invited to present the urban wiki as a part the festivals art/technology programs.

The urban wiki were easily installed the urban wiki kit being as simple as for each projection area, a laptop, a video projector and a wiki page on the net. The urban wiki is made interactive in (urban) space by using a browser which automatically reloads the wiki pages. I used and opera browser, which could be set to reloadø with a time interval from 5 seconds – 72 hours

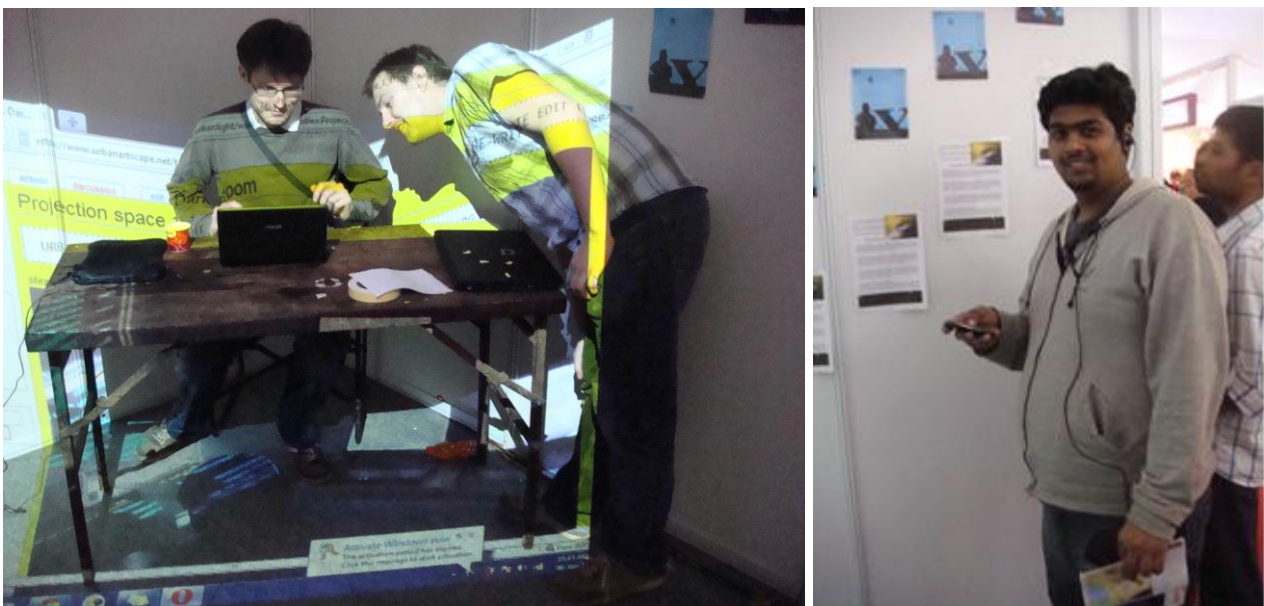


Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Techfest at IIT Bombay

During Techfest there were not so good possibilities for people to interact with the urban wiki. The idea was that people should pass by the different exhibitions (most robotics) look at them and have the possibility to ask questions, which many did. People were most fascinated by the idea of using (urban) space in itself as an interface, where urban space and life were the screen the wiki was projected into and people in urban space could use their smartphones to co-edit, co-write urban spaces and they were also interested in the possibilities of connecting areas A girl connected to a project in Mumbai's Fort area were interested in the possibilities of using the urban wiki in that project. People were surprised over the use of a (urban) space and life as a screen, which made the

wiki projection a source of light and of light art filled with information and expression in a dialogue between what was projected and what was projected upon (with the possibility of always seeing exactly what was projected by going into the wiki on net) instead of using a neutral screen placed in urban space

Conclusion.

The different urban wiki projects show that its technically, economically easy by using urban wiki to make augmented urban spaces and life, by creating a fuse between the internet and urban space, in which urban space are both a physical space for shared encounters and an interface, for communication and expression in an augmented space in flux, which is connected to other urban spaces with soft, fuzzy and porous borderlines between spaces, imagination, private, social, virtual and outer physical reality. In principle it's quite easy to make an urban wiki's, which is connecting and augmenting fragments in metapolis, like pages in a poetry book, to create bookscapes in metapolis. The urban wiki project show also that as art projects with a short timeframe, people are fascinated by it, but as more permanent new kind of urban spaces it challenges a lot of the structures for how public urban spaces are governed and established idea of public urban space, of art and of who can be artists and editors, co-writing and co-editing public urban space. To create an urban wiki on a permanent large scale is politically, socially a very difficult task, to create a world wide (urban) wiki would demand a change in mindset in many powerful structures. And a long process of growth possible different urban wiki's could emerge and over time be connected to each other.

Illustrations in text.

All photos in urban space are taken by Jan Hatt-Olsen. Peoples participation with digital material, which were projected down in urban space are recorded www.urbanwiki.net (used in Urban Artscape – Furesø) www.wikivollsmose.net (used in Artscape Vollsemose), www.urbanwiki.org (used in Techfest 2012, IIT Bombay)

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