Brickstarter

Bryan Boyer
Dan Hill

SITRA

Brickstarter is a prototype for a 21st century social service. It proposes a new model for how we make shared decisions about shared spaces.
It tests the exciting potential of crowd-funding and crowdsourcing against the practical realities of debating, governing, investing in, and ultimately delivering the built environment.

This service doesn't exist yet, though we purposefully talk about it as if it does. We've designed a prototype online service as a way to articulate the larger themes that Brickstarter engages, but it's not our role to build and operate such a service.

This book captures the thinking so far, pulling together essays, interviews, photos and a manual. It is our hope that by sharing this research under a Creative Commons license you might take the ideas and make them your own.

Sitra 2013

Brickstarter recognizes that the built environment entails such cost, lengthy timelines, and potential divisiveness that the ways we make choices about what to build (or not) and where (or where not) are a special class of decisions that require their own specific tools.

Brickstarter involves the use of technology, but not exclusively. It also asks us to reconsider the roles and approaches of the public sector, of communities, and of individuals. Taken as a whole, Brickstarter implies an online platform that unlocks new interactions between all those who have a stake in how the city develops.

Brickstarter takes advantage of social media and mobile apps in order to address the disconnect between individuals, communities, and institutions by describing a more articulate, more responsive, and more representative platform for citizens and institutions to work together.

Brickstarter reverses the polarity from NIMBY to YIMBY ("Yes In My Backyard"), from complain to create, outlining a platform for suggestions, developed and driven by participation of citizens, local business, and government. Brickstarter explores how to make it easier for communities to voice a productive and collective "yes" to their best ideas. Mere 'consultation' leads to largely negative engagements, and in the worst cases, active distrust and NIMBYism ("Not In My Back Yard"). Sometimes such frustrations can result in attempts to side step or halt institutional developments..

Brickstarter sits between bottom-up and top-down, connecting the needs and desires of the community with the resources and representation of institutions. Brickstarter has a user-centred perspective, working with communities and government to help smooth institutional processes and permits, and to prototype participative governance. Citizens are now more eager than ever to play a part in local decision-making. Promising initiatives are popping up around the world, each exploring the potential of crowdsourced or crowdfunded approaches to shared spaces, services and public infrastructure. Yet bottom-up is only half the story.

Brickstarter enables everyday people, using everyday technology and culture, to articulate and progress sustainable ideas for their community.

Bryan Boyer and Dan Hill, January 2013

CONTENTS

Foreword
Joseph Grima

The shape of a city changes more quickly, alas! than the heart of a mortal [1]

In the French novelist Julien Gracq's beautiful book[2] inspired by Baudelaire's words, he records the memoirs of years of walks through the city of Nantes. Throughout Gracq's wanderings, there's a recurring tension between the idea of the city as something permanent – the product of a quasi-geological process of accretion – and something mutable, almost mercurial, continuously reshaped by the trajectories of its inhabitants and the rapidly-shifting cultural perspectives of the times.

The "shape of a city", in other words, is something more nuanced than its mere physical conformation. Today, this shape is changing extraordinarily quickly: over a short period of time technology has dramatically transformed our experience of the city, while leaving its physical form virtually untouched. In just a decade or two, the network has become the dominant cultural logic, and the very idea of the city, the modalities through which we relate to it, have been literally upended. The "digital flaneur" has evolved from exotic fantasy into mundane reality: what we demand from the city has changed, and continues to change, more quickly indeed than the heart of a mortal. Yet the decision-making process that shapes its concrete form has not, leaving it a prisoner of practices that most other domains discarded long ago. It's as though the city operates at two speeds: the hypersonic tempo of its citizens, whose everyday lives are steeped in the tools and the media of network culture, and the glacial speed of municipalities, ministries and institutions shackled to a culture of ineffective, slow-moving, heavy-handed bureaucracy.

Need this be the case? No. Can this remain the case for much longer? No, since these divergent velocities will sooner or later cause the engine

to seize up, triggering institutional collapse. The effects of network culture are tangible realities in almost every branch of human activity: distributed finance, crowd-funding,, 3D-printing, micro-factories, social lending and virtual currencies are already the stuff of everyday life. The social web has helped us effortlessly metabolise the terms of what Adam Arvidson defines as an "ethical economy" – one geared towards the accumulation not of capital but of interpersonal recognition, peer-status, extended networks, "followers", respect, *social capital*.[3]

However, as one of the authors of this volume, Dan Hill, has written, "it's easier to crowd-fund a revolution than a light rail system".[4] The palaces of power, the desks where the things of real substance are decided, are exponentially more difficult to infiltrate than the spaces of popular opinion. So how will we make decisions in a networked society? This question is an urgent one, as we embark on a century of difficult choices. Technology has given us almost total freedom of choice, at least when it comes to city-building: we are largely free to ask ourselves not only what is possible, but what is desirable. But at the same time, the social, environmental and demographic challenges facing us are vastly more complex than the problem of where to find the money needed to build a light rail system. And if even a light rail system can't be crowd-funded, let alone agreed upon, how can we ever hope to usefully leverage the network to tackle something as complex as reshaping the city?

Perhaps the answer is by building tools instead of making rules. Brickstarter's brilliant suggestion is to sidestep the problem of whether crowd-funding a light rail system will ever actually be possible: its endgame is not so much to pass round a digital

hat in lieu of dipping into the public purse (something that would amount to a kind of infrastructural parody of David Cameron's "Big Society"), as to establish a platform for communication between the city's diverse stakeholders – a service which remains inexplicably absent today. It tackles the opaque process of producing urban space head-on by making it legible, while also bringing the pressure of public opinion to bear on the dogmatisms of the planning office and the short-term logic of the market. Yet it also tries to take the idea of the institution, albeit reshaped, with it.

We are living a moment of phase change – of one system being born inside another, and it will continue to expand and morph until it subsumes its host. A peer-driven society, as Michel Bauwens has argued,[5] will not be ushered in by a revolution in the Marxist sense of the word, but will infiltrate the existing frameworks via new tools and new modes of production, and gradually take them over. Brickstarter is just such a tool: it is a Trojan horse that infiltrates the "dark matter" of bureaucracy, enacting change from the inside.

NOTES
1 Charles Baudelaire, 'Flowers of Evil', 1857
2 Julien Gracq, The Shape of a City, Turtle Point Press, 2005.
3 Adam Arvidsson, 'The Crisis of Value and the Ethical Economy', P2P Foundation, 2007,
4 Dan Hill, 'Essay: On the smart city; Or, a 'manifesto' for smart citizens instead', City of Sound Blog, 2013.
5 Michael Bauwens, 'Dialogue between P2P Theory and Marxism: Part One', P2P Society, 2013

Preface: A Finnish Perspective

Paikallinen hyväksyttävyys paranee yhteiskehittelyllä ja hyödynjaolla

Julkisen sektorin päätöksentekomalleissa vakiintuneet osallistumisen käytännöt tarjoavat tyypillisesti kanavan lähinnä uudistusten vastustajille, eivät puolestapuhujille. Hankkeista päätetään monimutkaisella tavalla, mikä aiheuttaa asukkaissa lähinnä ahdistusta, voimattomuutta ja kielteisyyttä. Myönteiselle osallistumiselle ei ole juurikaan olemassa tuttuja toimintatapoja. Päätöksentekoprosessien yksinkertaistaminen säästäisi kustannuksia sekä julkiselta sektorilta että yrityksiltä.

Brickstarter on idea verkkoalustasta, joka on syntynyt yhdeksi ratkaisuehdotukseksi asukkaiden, yrittäjien ja hallinnon edustajien väliseen rakentavaan vuorovaikutukseen. Sen avulla asukkaat voivat tehdä aloitteita helposti. Se tarjoaa mahdollisuuden yhteisen sävelen löytämiseen. Ideaa saa vapaasti kopioida, hyödyntää ja jatkokehitellä.

Sitran hankkeessa YIMBY – Kyllä meidän takapihallemme selvitettiin, miten paikallisyhteisöissä voitaisiin parantaa ekologisesti ja taloudellisesti kestävien investointien sosiaalista hyväksyttävyyttä. Lupaavina ratkaisuina nousivat esiin yhteiskehittely- ja hyödynjakomallit sekä niitä mahdollistavat uudenlaiset verkkopalvelut. Tämä kirja esittelee näistä kertovia esimerkkejä.

MITEN PÄÄSTÄÄN NIMBYSTÄ YIMBYYN – CASE TUULIVOIMA

Suomessa hyvin ajankohtainen päätöksenteon soveltamisalue on tuulivoiman rakentaminen. Tuulipuisto on iso ja näkyvä rakennelma, joka helposti herättää paikallista vastustusta. Näin tapahtuu, vaikka tuulivoima edistääkin yleistä hyvää, alueen omavaraisuutta sekä ilmasto- ja energiaongelmien ratkaisemista.

wwwTutkimusten mukaan kansalaisten omistama tuulivoimala on helpompi hyväksyä kuin yritysten omistama. Omistuksen kautta ihmiset pystyvät vaikuttamaan tuulivoimalaan liittyvään päätöksentekoon ja saavat siitä myös taloudellista hyötyä.

Vaihtoehtoja hyödynjaon toteutukselle löytyy monia, sillä kyse on tyypillisesti hyvin paikallisista tarpeista. Pääasia on, että ihmiset kokevat tuulivoimahankkeet reiluiksi, avoimiksi ja oikeudenmukaisiksi.

Esimerkiksi Skotlannissa Fintryin kylässä on 15 voimalan tuulipuistosta myyty yksi voimala paikallisen yhteisön omistukseen ja käytetty siitä saatuja voittoja kylän talojen lämpöeristämiseen. Saksassa Reußenkögen asukkaat omistavat yhdessä kunnan kanssa useamman tuulivoimalan, joiden voitoilla on rahoitettu 12 km pyöräteitä ja laajakaistayhteydet koko kylälle, ja vieläpä kunnostettu urheiluhalli ja tulvapatoja. Saksan tuulivoimaloista jopa kolmannes on kansalaisten omistuksessa.

Miksi sitten Suomessa yrittäjät eivät tarjoa asukkaille mahdollisuutta hyötyä tuulivoimainvestoinneista taloudellisesti? Muutamaa poikkeusta lukuun ottamatta yrittäjien resurssit kuluvat tuulivoimaloiden lupaprosessien selvittämiseen. Voimavaroja ei liikene lisätyöhön, jota hyödynjakomallien kehittäminen edellyttäisi. Kiinnostusta vie myös nykyinen valitusoikeusjärjestelmä, joka sallii yksittäisen kansalaisen viivästyttää hanketta useilla vuosilla.

YHTEISKEHITTELYLLÄ KOHTI KÄYTTÄJÄLÄHTÖISYYTTÄ

Ihmisten omaa aktiivisuutta ja aloitteellisuutta on tärkeää tukea. Julkisen sektorin tulisikin kehittää päätöksenteko- ja lupaprosessejaan käyttäjälähtöisemmiksi. Jos yhteisö haluaa

rakentaa tuulivoimalan, avata ravintolan tai perustaa skeittipuiston, prosessin pitäisi olla yksinkertainen ja helposti ymmärrettävä. Vaikka päätöksenteossa onkin tärkeää huomioida monimutkaiset luonto-, terveys-, talous-, naapurusto- ym. näkökulmat, ei päätöksentekoprosessin tarvitse olla vaikeaselkoinen ja pitkäkestoinen. Eikä yksinkertaistaminen tarkoita luontoarvojen tai kansalaisoikeuksien painotuksen vähentämistä. Päinvastoin: päätöksenteon yksinkertaistaminen parantaa eri näkökulmien demokraattista ja avointa käsittelyä.

Jotta paikallinen hyväksyttävyys paranisi, tulisi vuorovaikutteisempia päätöksentekomalleja kehittää ja kokeilla rohkeasti. Uusien lähestymistapojen kautta paikallisyhteisöjen aktiivisuus muuntuu uudenlaiseksi paikalliseksi voimavaraksi. Yhteiskehittely rikastaa suunnitteluprosesseja moniääniseksi vuorovaikutukseksi. Parhaimmillaan lopputuloksena on elinympäristö, jonka asukkaat ja yrittäjät kokevat omakseen ja jossa hallinto palvelee yhteisiä päämääriä.

Paikallisen hyväksyttävyyden parantaminen siis edellyttää julkisen sektorin päätöksentekoprosessien yksinkertaistamista ja demokraattisempaa yhteispäätösmallia. Voisiko *Brickstarter* olla tähän sopiva ratkaisu?

Helsingissä huhtikuussa 2013, antoisia lukuhetkiä toivottaen.

Jukka Noponen
Johtaja, ekologinen kestävyys

Karoliina Auvinen
Johtava asiantuntija, ekotehokkuus

Suomen itsenäisyyden juhlarahasto
Sitra

Introduction:
From NIMBY to YIMBY
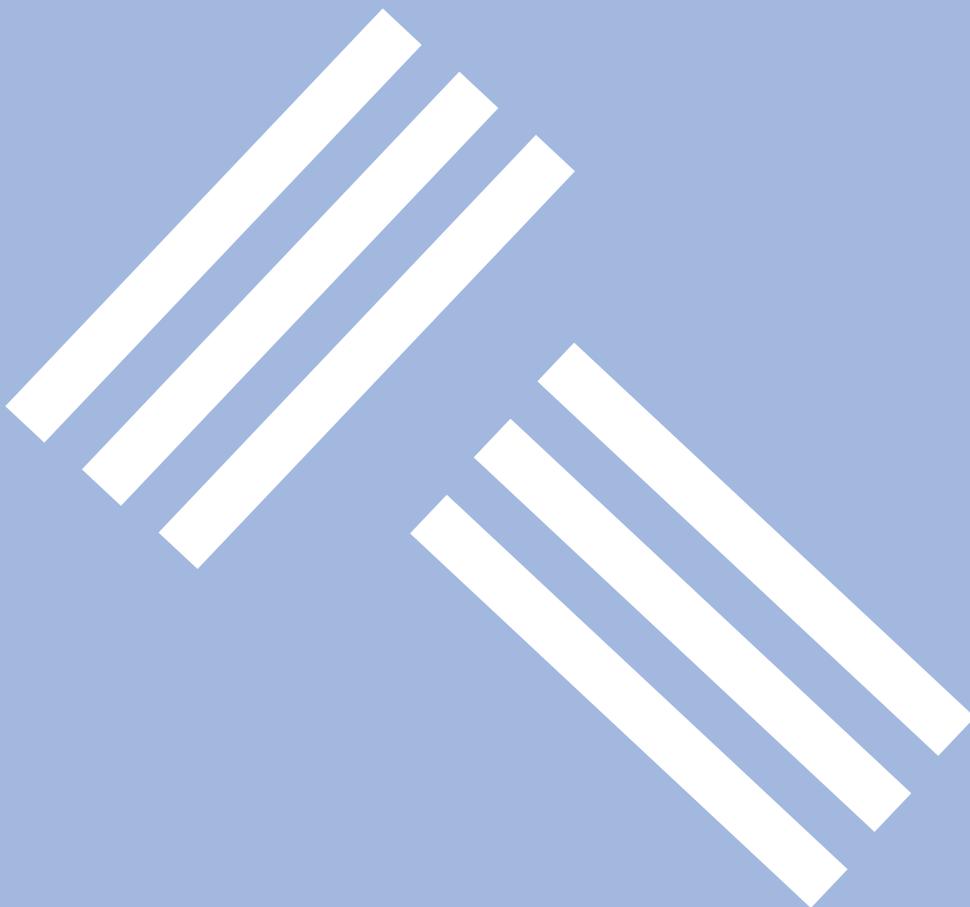
Our means for determining the future of shared spaces are fraught by opaque bureaucracy and occasionally overwhelmed by individual opposition. How might we redesign decision-making to tip the scales in favour of people with good ideas and good intentions?
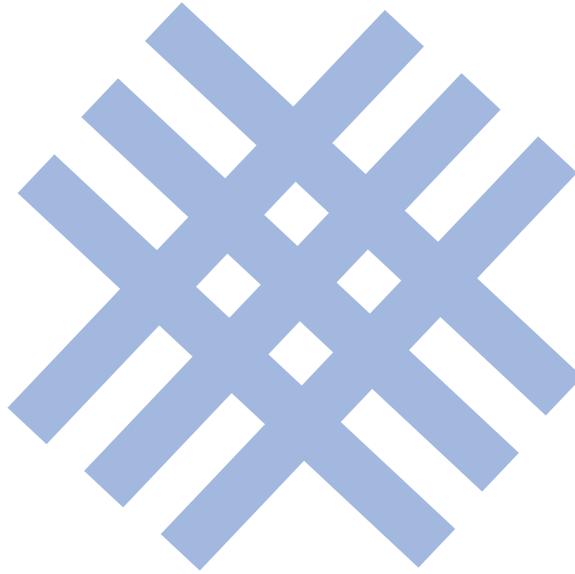
Paradoxically, in an age when we are capable of engineering and constructing just about anything, we find it difficult to agree on what to build and where. Having inhabited cities for thousands of years, one might expect that we would have developed more effective systems for negotiating these spaces. Yet today urban development of any scale seems more contested than ever before. The planning procedures, processes and cultures that were created during the 20th century to ensure equity in spatial decision-making do not always live up to their intentions. Projects go through consultation periods where neighbours can comment, but formal channels are particularly attuned to hear negative responses louder than supportive ones. Quite literally, Not-In-My-Backyard still speaks louder than Yes-In-My-Backyard.

From a planning perspective, what should be a debate about the city instead plays out as a series of parallel, polarized monologues delivered in different venues, through different channels, at different times. Making decisions about the built environment persists as a frustrating, slow, complex, and expensive process.

This may be an inherent aspect of projects that have long-term consequences, like any act of building does. Yet there is an inscrutable opacity to much of current planning activity, which need not necessarily be an outcome of working with the slow and cumbersome characteristics of the built environment. Brickstarter arises out of a desire to make the process of urban development more legible, and in doing so to enable a more diverse public to not only have a voice, but to actively contribute in shaping the city. While this ambition concerns more

Brickstarter arises out of a desire to make the process of urban development more legible, and in doing so to enable a more diverse public to not only have a voice, but to actively contribute in shaping the city.

sophisticated governance, appropriate to today's increasingly diverse urban publics, it might also enable a more diverse set of spatial and infrastructural outcomes for the city, which we urgently need in an urbanised age facing "wicked problems".

The physical form of our cities may be slow to change, but contemporary society continues to evolve rapidly. New technology has given rise to new communications norms, and individuals increasingly expect that the things around them can be interacted with, accepting their participation and involvement. The challenges societies face have also expanded in scope and complexity, from climate change to demographic timebombs, all at a time when the ability of governments to act decisively has been weakened by crushing debt and diminished and deteriorating institutional efficacy.[1] We are facing 21st century problems with the inflexible institutional silos of the 19th century.[2] In this context it's often hard to see a connection between one's daily life and to-and-fro of political and governmental decision-making at a national level.
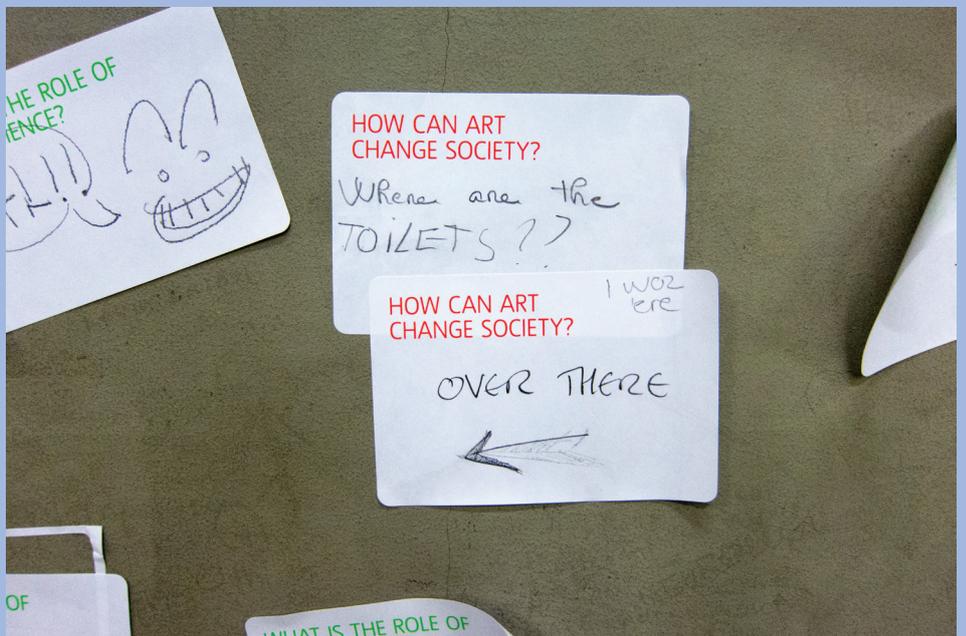
Changes to physical space are slow and burdened by bureaucracy. These images illustrate signs of resistance and attempts at manipulation.

But life in our cities presents a different picture. While the spaces around us are subject to equally invisible regimes of regulation, law, cultural norms, economic logic, and so on, the sheer physicality of sidewalks, lots, buildings, streets, and squares mean that they are also tangibly present in our everyday experience. Despite this complexity, during recent years many cities have witnessed a boom of self-initiated, small-scale urban experimentation. The dynamics of western cities in particular generate vast amounts of unused or forgotten spaces, but now a different culture is emerging that sees these spaces as opportunity rather than blight. People are increasingly doing unexpected things in unexpected places, from converting a dilapidated downtown into storefronts for small businesses and cultural venues,[3] to building a crowdfunded swimming pool,[4] to putting disused rail lines back into service as an edible garden.[5]

Taken as a whole, the urban experimentation we're witnessing now represents a manifesto of new means for living together. These experiments are often happening on the margins, as formal channels can be frustratingly slow to those who want to change the way we approach such spaces and allow new uses to flourish. So while citizens may not have the tools to rapidly recalibrate decision-making processes about their city, they are certainly capable of working outside of them, getting on with doing something in the empty and overlooked spaces of their neighbourhood. These efforts have been variously described as tactical urbanism, unsolicited architecture, civic entrepreneurship, urban activism, or even grassroots culture, and for the purposes of this book there is not a significant difference between them.

The details of these stories, here and in the rest of this book, are mostly told from the perspective of Finland, a country with its own particular governance, climate, culture, and geography. Still, the underlying patterns will ring true in other contexts as well, and we've attempted to describe events in such a way that readers from

afar will still be able to extract lessons from these stories.

We are interested in such acts because they represent one possibility for translating Sitra's vision of sustainable wellbeing[6] into space – into a way of gracefully rebuilding the city to support a sustainable society. This starts from the perspective of the city as public good, over and above just bricks and mortar, and recognises you we use the processes surrounding the latter to articulate and advance the former. Whereas the grassroots activity outlined above is filled with examples of groups coming together to make *tangibly different decisions* at specific moments, the strategic design approach

We've moved from an era of facts, where scientific proof or the limits of engineering helped us decide what's unequivocally Right, to one of factions, where what's right for us right now must be continually negotiated through small-p politics.

of Brickstarter is about *making decisions differently* by developing new interfaces, that are used by new constituencies, leading to new collaborations between communities, businesses, and government.

FROM FACTS TO FACTIONS

When it comes to cities, because of the advances in engineering and construction technology in recent decades, the process of deciding what to build and where is less a question of what's possible and more so an issue of what we collectively want to build. We've moved from an era of facts,

where scientific proof or the limits of engineering helped us decide what's unequivocally Right, to one of factions, where what's right for us right now must be continually negotiated[7] through small-p politics.

Whereas political arguments can end in an agreement to disagree, the built environment is not as flexible. Decisions about the built environment tend to be mutually exclusive and have consequences that endure for years, if not decades. As our economy continues to come to terms with material limitations – of the environment, of room to build, of growth – NIMBY conflicts will be become more commonplace until we find productive ways to collectively engage constraints and make mutually agreeable decisions about them.

This means grappling with the essential difficulty that lay at the heart of the fuller definition of NIMBY: "I like the idea… but not in my back yard." For example, lowering the carbon footprint of society will include rethinking the built environment, mobility and consumer behaviours, and there will be more and more grand plans that sound like a good idea, so long as they're completed in someone else's backyard. The prevalence of factions over facts is already causing tensions that express themselves as examples of NIMBYism, leading to some rather unexpected conflicts.

Finland's thousands of kilometres of coastal areas are popular locations for summer cottages, which have been a central character in the national mythology of "the good life" since at least World War II. Many of these same coastal areas are ideal for wind turbines, which provide a viable and clean energy source throughout other countries around the Baltic Sea. So far relatively few turbines have been built[8] due, in part, to fierce resistance from part-time cottage residents. Finland has one of the lowest densities in Europe and is among its largest territories, so this is not a matter of a direct contest for land use. The Finnish countryside is by no means lacking the raw space for cottages and wind turbines to coexist.

The resistance to wind energy in Finland is the result of priorities which can be held simultaneously in the abstract and yet come into conflict when made specific, tangible, and situated in the world. "I believe in climate change and I think we should create renewable energy" does not necessarily conflict with "I want a rustic summer getaway in the woods where I do not see anything manmade beyond my windows", but in a finite world these parallel desires can clash, and our current decision-making processes are not well equipped to deal with the collisions. Battles like this can be played out using duelling Environmental Impact Assessments and other technical crutches, which take many months and exhaust all but the most committed, but the dispute is ultimately one of differing personal priorities.

For instance, in Finland the Siberian Gliding Squirrel is so endangered that the presence of their droppings, and thus an indication of their habitat, is enough to halt or significantly delay development plans. So effective is the discovery of squirrel droppings at stalling development that one is able to find examples of people asking via online forums where to purchase them, presumably to be re-dropped in the path of a diligent Environmental Impact Assessment team. In this slightly absurd example it's hard to tell whether one should feel more sorry for the well-meaning entrepreneurs whose plans have been halted by dirty tricks, or by the tricksters who literally poo-pooed a project. This example should be read as evidence towards the dire need for new tools to aid debate and decision-making about the built environment of our communities. It's not the individual who is crazy in this instance, but the system that has driven the individual towards a crazy tactic to feel as though they have had a fair say. After all, one does not casually enter into the online purchase of squirrel shit.

Eight thousand kilometres away in California, an effort to build a high speed, low carbon train link between San Francisco and Los Angeles is being disputed by separate environmental efforts, among them an interest in conserving wildlife territories.[9] Once, "environmentalism" was a sufficient label for such efforts, but now one must choose whether they prefer the animals over the climate, the local over the global, or vice versa. In this example if we assume that all parties are acting with the best of intentions we nonetheless encounter a conundrum that is not soluble with mere facts: what is "worth" more to the community, the conservation of wildlife habitats or the conservation of the atmosphere which those animals (and the rest of the planet) rely on?

Before we can make different, more sustainable decisions about our built environment at a large scale, we

We should not be surprised by the pervasiveness of NIMBYism' when "no" is the only kind of feedback our systems can meaning-fully accept.

need to be able to make decisions differently. This means we need new interfaces that enable debate about projects to exist on a spectrum of *how do we do it in a mutually agreeable way* rather than the binary of *can we do it?*

Brickstarter asks, what is the role of contemporary online platforms in making a spectrum of options visible and debatable? How might online platforms help communities manage the variation and refinement of proposals towards mutual agreement?

INSTITUTIONS WITHOUT INBOXES

The interface between citizens and institutions can be slow, awkward and cumbersome. For years, this was just the way things were. Yet the tools

and media that people now use to orchestrate their everyday lives have rapidly outstripped those used by most municipalities, ministries, and other institutions.

There is currently a boom in e-Government and Government 2.0 activity, indicating local municipalities and national governments now recognise that contemporary technology is defining a new normal. As individuals grow accustomed to using world-class online platforms to organize their social and work lives, expectations are set for all digital experiences, regardless of the operator. When it comes to digital services, cities and other governments now find themselves in the unusual position of having competition. When a city builds an online presence, their competition is not other city websites, they are competing against the likes of Facebook, Google, and Amazon who set the standard for pervasive and easy to use web services.[10]

Anyone who has watched a toddler swipe at a magazine with the knowing gesture used to advance pages on a smartphone has witnessed the extent to which our world is now effortlessly interactive by default. This is not simply a matter of the physical things in our lives now being so often alive with code, intangibles such as brands and companies have changed dramatically as well, embracing the internet and various social media channels to engage their customers, creating a new default relationship between customer and company. The way that we make cities is also benefitting from this transformation, but at a slower pace. Many jurisdictions require development projects to go through consultative processes that are intended to give the community a say in how their shared spaces are developed. But fundamentally, our institutions do not have inboxes. With few exceptions, Michael Sorkin is correct when he remarked that "the only ways that citizens can engage planning and other public processes is by their power to say no."[11] We should not be surprised by the pervasiveness of NIMBYism' when "no" is the only kind of feedback our systems can meaning-fully accept.

Those who use their right to say no to development proposals can be derided as selfishly anti-development, and that is surely sometimes the case, but more fundamentally NIMBYism is simply a symptom of an imbalanced system. To make critical comments one need only be a citizen, but to offer constructive proposals through official channels the qualifications are rather more demanding: enter the market as an entrepreneurial developer or become an elected official. By extension, the system is intrinsically designed around these players, these inputs.

Brickstarter asks, how can city governments make room for citizens to not only give constructive feedback (both positive and negative) but also to contribute ideas in the form of project proposals? How can we shift the default mode from reactive to active? How might city governments take advantage of contemporary interactive tools and cultures?

FROM GIVING IDEAS TO GETTING HANDS DIRTY

"Often in the name of doing things for people *traditional, hierarchical organisations end up doing things* to people… *Social services departments were created to help people in need. Yet those on the receiving end of services often complain they feel they are being done to, processed by a bureaucratic machine." - Charles Leadbeater[12] (emphasis added)*

Helsinki, like many cities in the rich world, is presently enjoying a boom in urban interventions. From cycling to recycling, gardening to cooking, there has been an explosion of self-initiated events, services, spaces, and groups who are testing out new ways to live, work, move, shop, and play. These experiments demonstrate a mismatch between the kinds of things that citizens are interested in doing today and the kinds of activities that our institutions were created to enable and protect. This mismatch means our system is misaligned and leaky, with potential value to society leaking out in a number of ways.

Today's interventions often occur on the periphery, physically located at the boundaries of the city or in underutilized urban nooks, sometimes at the ill-defined edges of the legal system, often both. Of course, a certain percentage of these individuals and groups are doing things on the edges because they find the liminality of it exciting. Some do it as a critique of, or protest against, "the system." But others go outside of the mainstream simply because it's the path of least resistance.

You can see a small example of this in the Schöneberg neighbourhood of Berlin where residents have taken it upon themselves to tend small gardens in the traffic medians.[13] It's a

How might such activity happen informally and be "above board", part of the collective agreement to shape the city that the government and its citizens share?

near unquestionably beneficial activity that brings an unmistakable charm to the neighbourhood, both in the form of the additional greenery and in the occasional glimpse of residents actively tending to their street. One might have a fair complaint that the city should be taking care of the medians, which are clearly public property, but how are we to interpret the fact that they're not doing this anymore? On the one hand, it's a failure, an unfortunate outcome of Berlin's tight municipal budget. But noticing a failure alone is not much of a fix. If this maintenance was taken over once again by the city, what more important activity would be de-funded and what new expenses might the municipality incur to spur the cohesion and integration of the neighbourhood's residents who now have one fewer way to spend time together through the mediating experience of gardening? We see in this example that divisions

of labour and responsibility do not cleave so easily anymore. The efforts of the Schönebergers is "off the books" but that doesn't mean it's not valuable. Quite the opposite. We can imagine that somewhere there is a ledger of city duties including "mow the traffic medians in Schöneberg" which is currently marked as derelict because a city employee has not managed to complete the task. But the neighbourhood is far from derelict and that task has been fulfilled by others who are not only willing and able, but quite happy to do the job. New value has been created beyond the perfunctory duty to mow the grass, but it is currently invisible to today's institutions.

Brickstarter asks, how will our society and our governments change to make better account of this kind of contribution – not only to resist stifling it, but to actively enable it, and eventually reward it too? How might such activity happen informally and be "above board", part of the collective agreement to shape the city that the government and its citizens share?

FIRST MOVER DISADVANTAGE

In the spring of 2011 Helsinki's first food truck opened. It was not an easy project to realise for Tio Tikka, the young entrepreneur who dreamt of combining coffee, crêpes, and a vintage Citroën van. As Tikka dutifully asked for permission from various authorities he found himself in a series of absurd conversations: is it a car that serves food? Is it a restaurant that has wheels? Is it a piece of active street furniture? The answer to all of these questions, of course, is "yes". It is a restaurant in a car; it can move when it needs to; and it very much does change the public space around it. It was also a question that the city had never been asked before. What Tikka discovered rather painfully is that no single department wanted to give a definitive "no," but they also couldn't say "yes" because they didn't have any

precedents to compare it against. The 'shape' of the question didn't match the shape of the city's departments, its divisions of responsibility who each look after a different area of content.

The project was stagnant with little progress until Tikka became frustrated enough to create a Facebook page that garnered upwards of 8,000 subscribers, a substantial number for Helsinki. This was picked up in the largest daily newspaper and eventually the Deputy Mayor had to personally call the relevant departments to ensure that Tikka be given the necessary go-ahead. To wit, the crêpes may have been inexpensive, but their cost in political capital was high.

While it is tempting to discount this crêperie as frippery, the underlying dynamics of the story are the important part. In a moment of financial difficulty when cities are struggling to promote new economic activity, and here in Europe suffering high levels of youth unemployment, Tikka represents exactly the kind of activity that cities are grasping for. His specific product also embodied an important point of difference within the street food of Helsinki. By sourcing fresh local ingredients rather than relying on processed foodstuffs, Tikka's product was healthier and had a lower logistical carbon footprint than his competitors. With chanson and the smell of caramelized onions wafting out of the kitchen, the atmosphere of the street corner around it changed too; the infamously raucous nightlife of Helsinki was a touch calmer there than around the city's standard-issue *grilli kioskis* that dish out low quality hotdogs to a clientele of drunken carousers. Although it's unlikely to tick over another point of GDP, the combined economic, social, and ecological value of Tikka's van was real and a real contribution to the city. But so too were the costs he bore to make the project a reality. The months it took to get a definitive answer from the city translates directly to cost for an entrepreneur such as Tikka, and although he made it through the hard slog, his circumstances – a personal decree from the deputy Mayor – are far from replicable.

Unlike in the business world where there's often a first-mover advantage that comes in the form of financial return, there's not usually much compensation for being the first person to work your way through a bureaucratic headache. Those working against the grain of the city's bureaucracy, which can take a long time, hence cost, often prefer to forget about it as quickly as possible and get back to the core of their passion, be it the communal garden, local energy production, or crêpes and coffee. What happens in this situation is that the tacit knowledge of how to navigate a particular idea through the system remains tacit and rarely becomes part of the shared pool of know-how.

If such knowledge and experience could be captured in a useful way, the hassle that precipitated them becomes an investment in the same issue being more easily resolved next time.

If such knowledge and experience could be captured in a useful way, the hassle that precipitated them becomes an investment in the same issue being more easily resolved next time.

Simply put, other people can copy it, and the city learns. From "View Source" showing the seams of a web page through to social media's recorded conversations, the web has enabled such sharing and learning from day one and it provides the necessary tools to enable this kind of urban learning. Yet if the experience evaporates, as it currently tends to, all of the effort to achieve a similar outcome is borne again and again as a recurring cost.

Even from a purely commercial perspective a learning feedback loop has implications for small businesses. The crêpes venture was in operation

for less than a year, closing for winter and never to return (though Tikka did go on to open a larger cafe and bar up the street, presumably drawing on his experience.) Large businesses may be able to engage in market research before they open a new shop or restaurant, modelling the potential revenues to fine tune the location for maximum profit, but small businesses rarely have access to the same expensive kinds of intelligence services. Encouraging a conversation about our collective desires for the city has the added benefit of highlighting potential business opportunities and helping would-be entrepreneurs test their ideas in a lower cost way by matching them against the expressed wishes of the city's population. Nothing replaces the value of an operational prototype in situ, but any way of lowering the risk of new ventures is useful.

Brickstarter asks, how can a useful online platform also indirectly benefit future entrepreneurs by accumulating experience in a public fora? How might Brickstarter help entrepreneurs inexpensively gather market intelligence to inform their hunch about a potential business opportunity? Is it possible to remove or reduce the first mover disadvantage that comes with civic entrepreneurship?

WHAT POPS UP
MUST POP DOWN

For every Tio Tikka who tries to 'do the right thing' there are plenty more who head into the "dark matter"[15] of governance seeking the required permissions, never to be seen again. For this reason, many would-be urban experimenters don't even bother. Instead, they follow the path of least resistance, routing around the blockages, expense, and slowness of formal procedures to sidestep bureaucracy altogether, or at the very least, exploit loopholes and grey areas. Some of the most exciting urbanism these days comes in the form of pop-ups and temporary installations conducted parallel to or outside of the institutions of everyday life. So the pop

Scenes from 'Ravintolapäivä' (Restaurant Day),
a festival held in Helsinki where ordinary citizens
are encouraged to run an ad-hoc 'restaurant' for
a day.

The 'Paviljonki' installed during the summer of 2012
as part of Helsinki Design Capital suggests new possi-
bilities for temporary public buildings and alternate
public spaces

up is a valid tactic, particularly in terms of getting things done.

But what pops up must pop down. Pop-ups, when done well, can be a potent way of visualizing and prototyping what Steven Johnson calls the "adjacent possible."[15] But by virtue of being outside the formal system they generally also don't push it to adapt in positive ways. Here we have a catch 22: the system itself 'encourages' entrepreneurs and activists to skirt around the edges in the interest of maintaining their momentum. Yet the more that happens the less likely it is that the system's inefficiencies and blockages can be discovered, articulated, and repaired in a constructive manner.

Temporary interventions might open the door to the adjacent possible, but they don't allow us to step through. When pop-ups inevitably pop down the city can quickly snap back to the way it was before, waiting for another hero to come along and show us what their version of the future looks like. They're a valid tactic but not a valid strategy. Popups might titillate, but they rarely transform.

The danger is that our satisfaction with temporary interventions blinds us to the reason such interventions were necessary in the first place: the life of the city was not providing what people wanted.

One example of this is evident in Helsinki's relationship to food. *Ravintolapäivä,* or Restaurant Day, is a festival that now happens four times a year where ordinary citizens are encouraged to run a 'restaurant' in their living room, on the sidewalk, or just about anywhere for a single day. When the festival is on, the effect on the city is utterly transformative. Not only does the culinary diversity of the city explode with the addition of 200-300 'restaurants', many of which are serving ethnic cuisine not easily found in Helsinki, but the quality of the street life also changes. Cars slow down because streets are busier with pedestrian activity than normal, people are out and about in neighbourhoods that are typically quite sleepy, and the city's true diversity is made apparent.

It's a genuinely positive experience and is likely to remain so for as long as the community keeps it alive.

The success of Ravintolapäivä also draws attention away from the root cause. The event was first created by a group who were frustrated with the process of establishing a legitimate restaurant in Helsinki. Instead, they followed the path of least resistance, used the tools at hand like Facebook and other social media, and mobilized their network to help them manifest the city they wanted as an event.

Together, these missed opportunities point to the need for a new kind of platform that leverages the advantages of the web to create a space for constructive debate and the involvement of a broader public.

Approximately 1000 pop-up restaurants per year add up to quite a significant amount of time, attention, money, and effort by a wide swath of Finnish society, from home chef lawyers to immigrant mothers and everyone in between.

What would happen if some small percentage of that mass of innovation were instead applied to the question of constructively sorting out the permitting and license process that frustrated the festival's founders in the first place? What if we could build a more explicit pathway from activism towards activity, from the exceptional to the everyday? This is a way of having our cake and eating it too: festivals, pop-ups, temporary installations could continue to play their role as experimental development of culture, but they could also become a testing

ground for ideas that may graduate through successive layers of formality in a governance context designed to expect iterative development.[16] Again, some people pursue pop-ups because they like doing things outside the system, but the many others who do it merely out of convenience are prime candidates for such a strategy.

As cities face increasingly tough financial situations we predict that they will eagerly seek new resources, which includes encouraging particular types of development and activity that reduce direct costs (like involving neighbourhood residents in light maintenance in exchange for more say about how their environment is designed and built) or increase shared value[17] such as enhancing the social capital of a community. Importantly, this should not be interpreted as being about creating savings and outsourcing responsibility. It's about providing the city's administration with a learning engine – and not just on the desires of its citizens (not all of which should necessarily be acted on, of course) but also on the way the city government itself it needs to act. Brickstarter asks how a pathway can be created that helps successful, small, short-term experiments take steps towards formality? What is the attitude, stance and behaviour of a 21st century city administration? How might this learning scale to the larger decisions such as light rail, new neighbourhoods, and energy infrastructure that are well beyond these small examples of tactical urbanism?

CONCLUSION

Each of the various anecdotes above illustrate a failure or missed opportunity for public agencies to encourage a more just, sustainable, equitable, entrepreneurial, or fulfilling use for the city. It so happens that many of the examples here may be considered 'trivial', or 'first-world problems' – from food trucks, microparks – but they nevertheless highlight the difficulty of public decision-making that occurs with projects of all scales, including those

of more consequence such as wind turbines and train lines

Together, these missed opportunities point to the need for a new kind of platform that leverages the advantages of the web to create a space for constructive debate and the involvement of a broader public.

NIMBYism is the symptom of a system rather than a quality exhibited by individuals. Unfortunately, the platforms we have inherited – planning departments, legal statutes, bank financing – are 'low-resolution', and don't easily accommodate a nuanced debate about what is needed and where. Instead, leaving disenfranchised individuals to take extreme measures in an attempt to feel as though they've had a fair say. Whereas most decisions in life play out as a set of trade-offs, our current system often poses decisions about the built environment as an onslaught of binary choices. This rarely makes room for a constructive discussion about *how,* and seldom makes the most of contemporary culture and its technology, which may offer broader channels for debate.

If these current systems give too much of an advantage to those with resources, or those who want to say 'no', it's our hope that Brickstarter can help rebalance the scales in favour of those with an enthusiasm and commitment to what the city could bring.

NOTES

1   Michael Hallsworth, System Stewardship: The Future of Policymaking? (London: Institute for Government), 16-27.
2   Jocelyne Bourgon, A New Synthesis of Public Administration: Serving in the 21st Century (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 91.
3   See conversation with Marcus Westbury regarding Renew Newcastle, (55)
4   See conversation with Archie Lee Coates and Dong-Ping Wong regarding the +Pool, (p.44)
5   In the Pasila neighborhood of Helsinki a group called Dodo has been working to introduce gardens, particularly of edible plants, into former industrial sites. A notable example is their use of a disused turnaround point for the city's tram network. It's now a centre point for urban gardening. For more info, see http://kaantopoyta.fi/
6   Bruno Latour, An Attempt at a "Compositionist Manifesto", accessed January 15 2013, http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/120-NLH-GB.pdf and Bruno Latour, ed., and Peter Weibel, ed., Making Things Public: Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 4-31
7   At the end of 2011, Finland lagged behind its Nordic neighbours with just 197 MW of installed wind power compared to Norway (520MW), Sweden (2,907MW), and Denmark (3,871MW). Source: European Wind Energy Association. Wind In Power: 2011 European Statistics. January 13, http://www.ewea.org/fileadmin/files/library/publications/statistics/Wind_in_power_2011_European_statistics.pdf
8   Seth Nidever, 'Mixed signals: environmentalists split on high-speed rail', Handford Sentinel, March 12 2011. http://www.hanfordsentinel.com/news/local/mixed-signals-environmentalists-split-on-high-speed-rail/article_a92ed0ce-4c5a-11e0-a00c-001cc4c03286.html
9   The work of Government Digital Services in the UK's Cabinet Office has provided an exemplary outlier here. By bringing design and technical development capability in-house, they have consolidated and redesigned the UK's national government websites into a single port of call. Recently it was nominated by the London Design Museum as Digital Design of the Year for 2013.
10 Michael Sorkin, interview on By Design, ABC Radio National, Australia, broadcast November 4, 2009. http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bydesign/new-york-new-york/3098366
11 Charles Leadbeater, The Art of With (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 2009), 1.
12 Hella Hernberg, Helsinki Beyond Dreams (Helsinki: Urban Dream Management).
13 See 'Dark Matter' essay, (p.21).
14 Steven Johnson, Where Good Ideas Come From, Riverhead Trade, 2011
15 In a separate project entitled Open Kitchen, Sitra has begun to prototype a 'middle step' between Restaurant Day pop-up and formal business. Open Kitchen provides individuals training to deal with the practicalities of opening a food business, access to mentors, and a safe environment in which to test their learning by operating a restaurant for a week.
16 Michael Porter and Michael Kramer, 'Creating Shared Value', Harvard Business Review, January 2011. http://hbr.org/2011/01/the-big-idea-creating-shared-value/

Dark Matter

The answer to unlocking a new experience, product or service is sometimes buried deep within organisational culture, regulatory or policy environment. Brickstarter is predicated on explicitly recognising that this 'dark matter' is part of the design challenge.

We draw the term 'dark matter' from Dutch architectural historian and theorist Wouter Vanstiphout's memorable phrase:

"If you really want to change the city, or want a real struggle, a real fight, then it would require re-engaging with things like public planning for example, or re-engaging with government, or re-engaging with large-scale institutionalised developers. I think that's where the real struggles lie, that we re-engage with these structures and these institutions, this horribly complex 'dark matter.' That's where it becomes really interesting."[1]

Wouter's notion of dark matter suggests organisations, culture, and the structural relationships that bind them together as a form of material, almost. The metaphor may not be perfect but it usefully gives a name to something otherwise amorphous, nebulous, yet fundamental.

The concept is drawn from theoretical physics, wherein dark matter is believed to constitute approximately 83% of the matter in the universe, yet is virtually imperceptible. It neither emits nor scatters light, or other electromagnetic radiation. It is believed to be fundamentally important in the cosmos – we simply cannot be without it – and yet there is essentially no direct evidence of its existence, and little understanding of its nature.

The only way that dark matter can be perceived is by implication, through its effect on other things (essentially, its gravitational effects on more easily detectable matter.) With a product, service or artefact, the user is rarely aware of the organisational context that produced it, yet the outcome is directly affected by it. Dark matter is the substrate that produces. Imagine a particular BMW; this vehicle is an outcome of the company's corporate culture, the legislative frameworks it works within, business models it creates, the patent portfolio that protects, the wider cultural habits it senses and shapes, the trade relationships, logistics and supply networks that resource it, the particular design philosophies that underpin its performance and possibilities, the path dependencies in the history of northern Europe, and so on.

This is all dark matter; the car is the matter it produces.

Similarly, the city we experience is, to some extent, a product of a city council's culture and behaviour, legislation and operational modes, its previous history and future strategy, and so on. The ability for a community to make their own decisions is

If we want to shift the way society functions systemically, a facility with dark matter must be part of our toolkit.

supported or inhibited by this wider framework of dark matter, based on the municipality they happen to be situated within as well as the characteristics of the local culture.

Thus, the relationship between dark matter and more easily detectable matter is a useful metaphor for the relationship between communities, organisations and culture and the systems they produce. This "missing mass" of dark matter is the key to unlocking a better solution, a solution that sticks at the initial contact point, and then ripples out to produce systemic change.

It is organisational culture, policy environments, market mechanisms, legislation, financial models and other incentives, governance structures, tradition and habits, local culture and national identity, the habitats, situations and events that decisions are produced within. This may well be the core mass of the architecture of society.

If we want to shift the way society functions systemically, a facility with dark matter must be part of our toolkit.

Dark matter surrounds the various more easily perceptible outcomes that we might produce – the observable physical matter of a neighbourhood block, a street food cart, a mobile phone, a wind turbine. It is what enables these things to become systemic, to become normative. It is the material that absorbs or rejects wider change.

Without addressing dark matter – and without attempting to reshape it – we are simply producing interventions or installations that attempt to skirt around the system. This is a valid tactic, but not much of a strategy. A strategy would focus on delivering the intervention whilst also enabling the positive energy it creates to be easily drawn into the system, to shape it over time.

This is a balancing act, as too much time spent immersed in dark matter can lead to nothing being produced, and we believe that change is enabled through prototyping, through making, through demonstrating.

Parts of this text have been adapted from *'Trojan Horses and Dark Matter: A strategic design vocabulary'*, by Dan Hill, Strelka Press, 2012.

NOTE
1   Rory Hyde, '*Historian of the Present: Interview with Wouter Vanstiphout*', Architecture Review Australia, 2011.

From Kickstarter
to Brickstarter
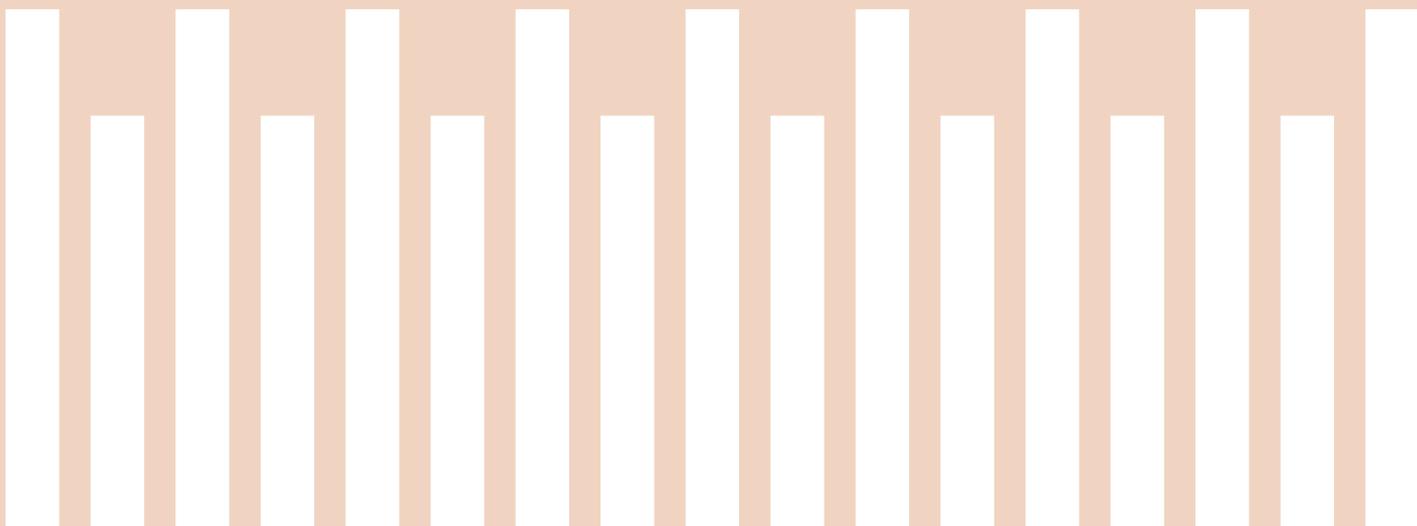
With the profusion of online crowdfunding initiatives sprouting up in the past few years, it's seemingly a small step to apply this logic to the built environment. But the transition from Kickstarter to Brickstarter raises new issues to be reckoned with.

When we speak of crowdfunded urbanism, what is actually being funded and what's the realistic extent of the crowd? The idea of collecting a multitude of relatively small payments to fund larger projects has been around for some time – indeed, that basic formula would aptly describe taxes in any well-functioning society – but the recent change has been the use of online platforms to facilitate easy collection of funds from willing contributors.

Over the past five years we've witnessed an explosion of online crowdfunding, with upwards of 450 platforms serving more than 100,000 projects in 2012.[1] These sites make it dead simple to collect payments and this is what gets the bulk of the attention, but looking at the supporter list of a project on Kickstarter, one of the most popular platforms, the distributed nature of support for projects is also revealed. Crowdfunding platforms do two things: they make collecting money simple, and they flatten geography. This works well for watches, but it's still an open question how well it works for water towers. Considering the implications of a built environment project over its lifecycle add another dimension of complexity. Compared to consumer products and other small goods, we've identified five interrelated issues that complicate crowdfunding for urban initiatives: cost, opportunity cost, catchment, approvals, longevity. Below we step through each issue and its implications for Brickstarter.

1. COST

The sheer cost of urban and infra-structural projects means that they are often in a different order of magnitude from even the highest earning projects on current platforms.

Buildings, bridges, roads, and parks are expensive and the scale of their cost will make crowdfunding a more complex proposition than it is with smaller items. At the time of writing, the single most successful campaign on Kickstarter is the Pebble E-Paper Watch that raised a total of USD $10,266,845[2] from 68,929 backers around the world.[3] This works out to approximately $150 per contributor. For the sake of comparison, Helsinki and its neighbouring cities are currently working on an extension of the Metro system that is expected to cost around €800,000,000.[4] Assuming the same 68,000 people who backed the Pebble watch would choose to fund the Metro extensions, each would be on the hook for a contribution in the range of €12,000. This is before any operational or maintenance costs are incurred. And what happens when the project runs over budget, as many capital projects do (including the Metro extension which is now at double the initial projections)? Are contributors obligated to chip in for overages? An incomplete metro line stuck at 99.999% because of an inability to raise overage funds is still 100% useless.

Crowdfunding the actual project, however, is only one option out of many. For something as significant as a major infrastructural project, direct crowdfunding may be unrealistic. Instead one imagines that a crowdfunding platform for urbanism would offer the possibility of funding proposals, feasibility studies, or limited prototyping. Supporting such early-stage initiatives would enable a broader diversity of voices to contribute to the planning discussions, which are usually driven by the municipality or large developers who have the funds to prepare such proposals. Crowdfunding could enable a broader range of good ideas to be resolved into plausible proposals so that decisions about the built environment could be made between a range of alternatives, rather than as a series of yes/no decisions.

Indeed, as we will see below, groups like the team behind the +Pool in New York City used a crowdfunding campaign to enable them to continue with feasibility studies for their project, and then cleverly used the results from the testing to pursue yet larger funds for the next scale of testing.

For smaller initiatives with costs in the thousands or even tens of thousands, such as painting a new zebra crossing or building a small park, crowdfunding has proven to be possible with successful examples on Kickstarter, Spacehive, and other current crowdfunding platforms.

Hybrid solutions are also promising. Since 1988 Seattle,

Washington has been running something called the Neighbourhood Matching Fund. The setup is simple: communities organize themselves and make proposals to one of three funds differentiated by size of the project. If accepted, the city matches the community's funds up to a maximum of 50% of the project costs. The Community funds required to unlock a contribution from the city do not strictly need to be cash and may also include volunteer labour, donated materials, and professional services.[5] Since it began, the Neighbourhood Matching Fund has awarded more than $49 million to more than 4,000 projects throughout Seattle and attracted an additional $72 million in community contributions.

Brickstarter should be clear about thresholds. E.g. projects up to €10,000 may be wholly crowdfunded, while those over €10,000 can only request funding to support a more robust proposal or feasibility study.

2. OPPORTUNITY COST

An infinite number of novels can be simultaneously funded, but when it comes to proposals that occupy physical space there is an opportunity cost associated with the fact that uses for the same piece of physical ground are often mutually exclusive.

Economist Greg Mankiw explains it succinctly: "To get one thing that we like, we usually have to give up another thing that we like. Making decisions requires trading off one goal against another."[6] When making an individual decision this is comparatively easy, the argument is all within our own heads. But the "we" who decides what "we like" in the context of urban development is always diverse – it's a conversation with your neighbours. While macroeconomics teaches us that opportunity costs exist in all decisions, it is especially present in choices about the city because changing our mind incurs the cost of significant time and money to make changes.

Twenty square meters of park

this minute cannot turn into twenty square meters of swimming pool the next minute because building things takes time. In the physical world the concept of 'undo' is much less graceful than it is in the effortless ether of the digital. When building things, to undo is to redo: to tear down and rebuild. This implies that a platform for urban crowdfunding must help users come to terms with the opportunity cost of their decisions as early and as clearly in the process as possible.

Brickstrater should help its users weigh a variety of proposals for the same space. This entails visualizing those parallel opportunities, as well as helping users discern, as clearly and completely as possible, the various financial and non-financial costs and opportunities.

3. CATCHMENT

Whereas items that can be transmitted or shipped may potentially attract a global group of funders, things situated in one particular place generally cannot. Their 'catchment area' is smaller.

The bulk of the 100,000+ projects crowdfunded in 2011 were products, media, and business ventures.[7] Many were intangible, and most of those that were tangible could be easily transported, like the Pebble E-Paper watch. The reality of a capital project such as a building or bit of infrastructure, on the other hand, is that it's not going to be very mobile, and we might fairly expect that those in the vicinity of the proposed project are the ones most likely to support it because they are ones who most likely stand to benefit. It's simple math: when attempting to raise a set sum, the more funders a project has, the less each needs to contribute. Typically, the wider the geographic area in which funders may be discovered, the more people may be implicated as potential funders, which means the value of the average individual contribution required to reach a target goes down. This implies that cities with larger populations are

better positioned to crowdfund urban initiatives, simply from the point of view of numbers.

Connectivity also matters. By virtue of a high flow of business and tourist traffic, some cities act as global hubs. New York City, home to the proposed +Pool, is probably among a handful of places in the world where local projects could plausibly garner support from residents outside of the immediate area. In that sense, the specific location of the +Pool helps out and sure enough Berlin, Chicago, San Francisco, Amsterdam, and many other cities are represented on the backers list. Because of its connectivity, a place like NYC has a long tail[8] to draw funding from. In a large, well-connected city the crowd is more crowded, as it were.

What about a project in Pori, Finland with a population of 83,000? It's a lovely place, but doesn't have the connectivity, population or reach that a global hub does. Although the catchment area is a critical factor for crowdfunding it is less relevant for crowdsourcing, the collective gathering and vetting of ideas. Instead of using an online platform to attract funding, smaller cities will likely find more benefit from using platforms to involve citizens in equitably distributing funds and in developing proposals together for how the city may be reshaped.

Brickstarter should recognize the realistic limits of the geographic area it serves. Crowdfunding currently enjoys a significant amount of hype, but the Seattle example is a good reminder that citizen-led urbanism does not necessarily require a sophisticated online platform to flourish. Persistence and openness on the behalf of the municipality and the genuine commitment of funds are prerequisites whether there's an online platform or not.

4. APPROVALS

Just because a project is funded does not mean that it has passed all of the permitting and regulatory hurdles that it may need to clear.

While smaller, less global cities are not as likely to benefit from crowdfunding, there are exceptions to every rule. In the Spring of 2011, as Detroit, Michigan was dotted by empty and derelict houses, a group on Kickstarter proposed that the city would be improved by a massive statue of Robocop, the eponymous character from the 1980s action movie set in Detroit. Perhaps due to the film's cult following, the project beat the odds and attracted global attention and funding, raising more than $67,000 on Kickstarter, exceeding its original goals by more than thirty percent.[9]

But there's one individual who remains unconvinced, and that's Detroit's Mayor Dave Bing.

"There are not any plans to erect a statue to Robocop. Thank you for the suggestion."[10]

Unlike books and digital watches, projects that exist in the shared space of the city will often require some form of public approval. In the saga of Robocop, the Mayor's dissenting voice has precluded the use of public land for the statue, but the organisers were able to find a non-profit who is willing to donate a piece of land over which Robocop can stand sentinel.

There is a similar tentativeness present in the pitch by the +Pool team. They were able to secure the help of global engineering firm Arup before launching a campaign on Kickstarter. With donated efforts over the course of five months, Arup produced a feasibility report for +Pool that ends on a positive note. As Craig Covil, Principal at Arup, notes:

"Is it really going to happen? Yes of course it will happen, but we need to get behind it. We all need to get behind it… Technically [it needs to be engineered], but also from the government side with permits and approvals."[11]

+Pool contributors bought into a contingent thing, an idea that may not materialize in the end exactly as planned, if at all. It should be pointed out that, to their credit, the team are very forthright about this on their Kickstarter pitch video and all supporting documents. It's a habit that Brickstarter should enforce.

Brickstarter should take into account that proposals will not necessarily have passed the required checks and gathered all approvals needed. Indeed for some projects funding will be requested for the explicit purpose of pursuing such qualifications. Therefore, how will Brickstarter systematically expose these aspects to its users as a risk factor that potential funders can assess and weigh for themselves?

5. LONGEVITY

When a project is successful and something is built, who is responsible for it? Who bears responsibility in 60 years? Whereas consumer products can be recycled or discarded, it's not as simple to do the same with pieces of the city.

Crowdfunding has provided a new way to handle transactions, but pieces of the city are not only bought, they're also maintained. At a minimum Brickstarter should encourage proposals to openly account for potential maintenance issues (if not the costs) so that an honest conversation can be had about the scale of the maintenance needs and who will take responsibility for them. Timelines on Brickstarer should be long by default; making the city is not a sport that's played well over the short term.

Cities are experimenting with novel responsibility-sharing schemes that split upkeep duties between the community, who have a vested interest in keeping their own vicinity shipshape but might come and go, and the institution of the city itself that usually has access to a broader range of equipment and skills as well as permanence. The Schöneberg neighbourhood of Berlin is one such example, as is Arnold Circus in London.[12]

Questions of maintenance and repair cannot be separated from the primary issue of to build or not to build, because ultimately they are part of the total cost of an initiative. Consciously engaging the totality of the project opens an opportunity to collectively profit not just from the money that may be scrounged up, but also from the time, effort, and attention individuals contribute. The returns here are not merely financial, but also imply opportunities to foster social cohesion. In this sense we follow on Richard Sennett when he argues that societies which have a culture of repair are more integral cultures.[13]
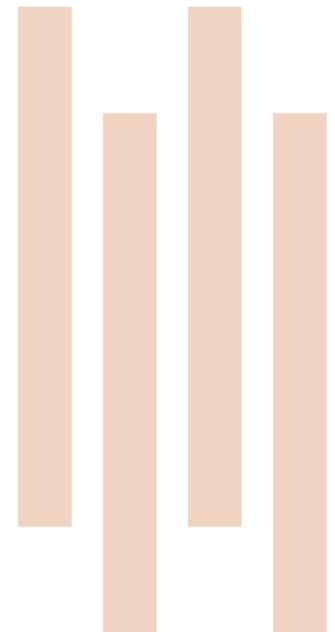
NOTES

1   MasSolution, 'Crowdfunding Industry Report', online resource, 2012. Source: http://www. scribd.com/doc/92933854/ CROWDFUNDING-INDUSTRY-REPORT-ABRIDGED-VERSION-Market-Trends-Composition-and-Crowdfunding-Platforms

2   Kickstarter, 'Most Funded', accessed Nov 2012. Source: http:// www.kickstarter.com/discover/ most-funded

3   A survey of the first 200 backers included individuals from USA, Canada, Lithuania, Switzerland, Australia, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, UK, Finland, Belgium, Spain and Taiwan.

4   Taloussanomat newspaper, 'Western Metro Price is Now €800 Million', September 2008. Source: http://www.taloussanomat. fi/autot/2008/01/16/ lansimetron-hinta-on-nyt-800-miljoonaa/20081467/304

5   Seattle Government Department of Neighborhoods website. Accessed Nov 2012. Source: http:// www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ nmf/communitymatch.htm

6   N. Gregory Mankiw, Principles of Macroeconomics, South Western College, 2011, p.4.

7   MasSolution, 'Crowdfunding Industry Report'.

8   Chris Anderson, The Long Tail, Hyperion, 2008.

9   Imagination Station Detroit, 'Detroit Needs a Statue of Robocop'. Source: http:// www.kickstarter.com/projects/ imaginationstation/detroit-needs-a-statue-of-robocop

10   Mayor's Twitter post on February 7, 2011 (see image)

11   +Pool on Kickstarter

12   Berlin's Schöneberg neighbourhood is discussed in the introduction, (p.15). And see the Conversation with Finn Williams, (p.21) for a discussion of London's Arnold Circus.

13   Richard Sennett, Together, Yale University Press, 2012.

Surveying the Territory

Maija Oksanen

Our analysis of the current crop of crowdfunding platforms suggests most are either citizen-initiated and bottom-up, or government-initiated and top-down, creating an opportunity for forward-thinking organisations to develop participatory services that actively mediate between the two.

We have kept a close eye on services similar to Brickstarter, both to learn from the efforts of others, and to determine where there might be gaps in this space. Although the focus of Brickstarter are projects that have urban ramifications, in this analysis we've looked more generally at crowdfunding and crowdsourcing platforms from Finland and abroad. This selection is barely the tip of the iceberg of a rapidly expanding sector, where there are hundreds of platforms online, and more emerging every day.

TYPE OF PROJECTS SUPPORTED

Of the platforms we looked at, most are directed toward supporting social improvement or not-for-profit projects and activities. While there are fewer private initiatives represented here, elsewhere the use of similar platforms for funding the development of physical products is growing in popularity, representing an alternative source of funding for entrepreneurs, particularly for consumer goods.

CROWDFUNDING OR CROWD-SOURCING

Of our sample, approximately one third are focused on crowdfunding, with the remaining two thirds on crowdsourcing. For our purposes we define the terms as follows. Crowdfunding platforms are those which make it easy for a project initiator to accept (typically small) payments from a wide variety of supporters. Crowdsourcing, on the other hand, refers to platforms which enable groups of people to share ideas and build upon the contributions of others. Our basic assumption is that funding and voting are relatively passive acts, whereas contributing ideas and debating options are examples of more active engagement.

In assessing whether the platforms surveyed here meet these criteria we've looked at how they purposefully enable crowdfunding or crowdsourcing. For instance, Kickstarter has very clear affordances that enable project initiators to collect funds, such as straightforward credit card processing and a third-party transaction system which gives the crowd confidence their funds are safe. Whereas the Finnish platform Joukkoenkeli provides tools for users to vote on potential ideas and construct a shared to-do list to achieve goals, therefore allowing the crowd to collectively source the best path forward.

BOTTOM-UP OR TOP-DOWN

The platforms are generally either citizen-initiated and bottom-up, or government-initiated and top-down. We were not able to find many examples of a third party platform acting as a mediator between communities and government. Neighborland and Neighbor.ly are two notable exceptions, both of which have strong community engagement and are beginning to work more closely with local government in the US.

Of the privately operated platforms we surveyed there are generally more opportunities for active participation, through the contribution of ideas, time or expertise, for example. Where government is involved in these platforms, it is typically in a passive role, used simply as a channel to collect (mostly negative) feedback.

CONCLUSION

While we are witnessing an explosion of activity in this field, the adoption of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing platforms is not without its challenges. In Finland, for example, projects seeking to crowdfund face resistance owing to the ambiguity of current legislation and protective stance of regulators in the wake of abuses of non-profit fundraising and hoaxes. Although it is technically possible, Finnish law doesn't offer an easy way for those seeking to fund projects with these new and unconventional tools. In the face of this dark matter the first mover disadvantage is evident here too. What this sample shows, is that there remains an opportunity for forward-thinking municipalities to develop active participatory platforms. The internet enables unparalleled ease in the sharing of information, collaborative decision-making and the coordination of funds and human resources, but so far it has been easier for privately operated platforms to take advantage of this. With the recent boom in e-Government initiatives we've seen a number of solutions aimed at allowing citizens to issue complaints, questions, and fix-it notifications, including New York City's 311 system and Fix My Street. In contrast, Brickstarter takes the approach of "yes and". It asks users to frame contributions around proactive solutions rather than passive observations.

	crowdfunding	crowdsourcing	bottom-up	top-down	government involved?	
ioby	X	X	X			www.ioby.org
neighbor.ly	X		X		X	www.neighbor.ly
Kickstarter	X		X			www.kickstarter.com
indiegogo	X		X			www.indiegogo.com
voordekunst	X		X		X	www.voordekunst.nl
Spacehive	X		X			www.spacehive.com
Lucky Ant	X		X			www.luckyant.com
Mesenaatti	X		X			www.mesenaatti.me
Smallknot	X		X			www.smallknot.com
Neighborland		X	X			www.neighborland.com
Joukkoenkeli		X	X		X	www.joukkoenkeli.fi
Change by US (NYC)		X	X		X	www.nyc.changeby.us
Give a Minute		X		X	X	www.giveaminute.info
Digitalkoot		X		X		www.digitalkoot.fi
Avoin Ministeriö		X	X			www.avoinministerio.fi
Aloitekanava		X		X	X	www.aloitekanava.fi
Neighbourhood Matching Fund	X	X	X	X		www.seattle.gov/neighbor-hoods/tnmf/default.htm
Otakantaa.fi		X		X	X	www.otakantaa.fi
Mieluisa Tampere		X	X		X	www.mieluisatampere.fi
eDemokratia.fi				X	X	www.edemokratia.fi
Osallistuva budjetointi	X	X		X		www.osallistuvabudjetointi.fi
Webvolunteering.org	X	X	X			www.webvolunteering.org
Talkootarjotin		X	X			www.talkootarjotin.fi
Stadin Aikapankki		X	X			www.stadinaikapankki.wordpress.com
make.helsinki		X	X			www.makehelsinki.fi
Hukatila ry.		X	X			www.hukkatilary.tumblr.com
Hukkatila Oy		X	X			www.hukkatila.fi

○ non-government

⦂ government

● active

  passive

◉ Time banking

◉ Hukkatila

◉ ioby

◉ Joukkoenkeli

⦂ Change by US

○ Kickstarter

Non-Government ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

○ Neighborland

○ Spacehive

○ indiegogo

◉ Avoin Ministeriö

◉ make. helsinki

○ Mesenaatti

○ Smallknot   ○ Neighbor.ly

○ Lucky Ant

○ Talkootarjotin   ○ Mieluisa Tampere

○ Webvolunteering.org

**Project
Management**

                                                    Neighborhood Matching Fund

Government

⭕ Digitalkoot   Osallistuva budjetointi

          Voordekunst

                    Aloitekanava

          ⭕ Municipal consultation process

                    Otakantaa.fi

                    Give a Minute

                    ⭕ Complaints

               ⭕ Voting

                    Demokratia.fi

Promotion

CROWDFUNDING

ioby
neighbor.yl
Kickstarter
indiegogo
voordekunst
Spacehive
Lucky Ant
Mesenaatti
Smallknot

CROWDSOURCING IDEAS

Neighborland
Joukkoenkeli
Cange by US (NYC)
Give a Minute

CROWDSOURCING LABOUR

Digitalkoot

TO GOVERNMENT

Avoin Ministeriö

WITH GOVERNMENT

Aloitekanava
Neigbourhood Matching Fund
Otakantaa.fi
Mieluisa Tampere

INFO ONLY

Demokratia.fi

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Osallistuva budjetointi

TIME BANKING

Webvolunteering.org
Talkootarjotin
Community Exchange

GRASS ROOTS URBANISM

(action, no platform)
make.helsinki
Hukkatila ry.
Hukkatila Oy
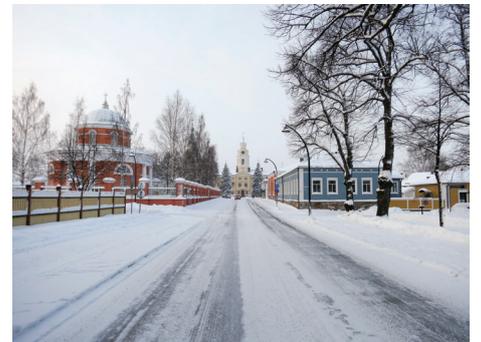
Wind Farms

Wind farms are in many ways archetypal NIMBY projects; considered so 'good' and widely supported, except when they're proposed in your own backyard. The slow and steady sweep of the turbine blades belies the epic struggles that can be required to see them built.

Field Trip: Hamina, Finland
Hamina, Finland is home to a small wind farm of three
turbines that almost never happened. In the planning
phases of this project the owner of a nearby mökki,
or summer cottage, filed an objection claiming that
the presence of a manmade turbine would disturb their
holidays in an otherwise pristine forest. Ultimately,
the dispute rose to the Supreme Court where it was
overturned. In a discursive turn, the team planning to
build the turbines engaged the community in a series
of public meetings leading to some discussion about
the precise locations, which some locals were unhappy
about. The solution? Move the planned location of one
turbine 500 meters. Today the farm is producing more
energy than it was projected to yield.

Field Trip: Högsåra, Finland
180,000 islands punctuate the seas off Finland's western
coast. One of them, Högsåra, is home to a determined
local resident who worked for the better part of a
decade to build a small wind farm. Although there are
objections from cottage owners here too, the local
community of fisherman and other seafaring endeavours
has traditionally made their way based on the wind.
This effort was so new at the time that governance
was almost entirely unknown, and so the ambiguity and
novelty of the situation was its biggest barrier. Could
individuals produce their own electricity? What kinds of
permits are needed for a turbine? Who might finance such
an investment? These questions were answered in Högsåra,
but governing bodies have been slow to learn from them
and the process remains difficult. Today, the forms one
fills out to apply for the permit to operate a turbine
are still the same as those used for a nuclear reactor.
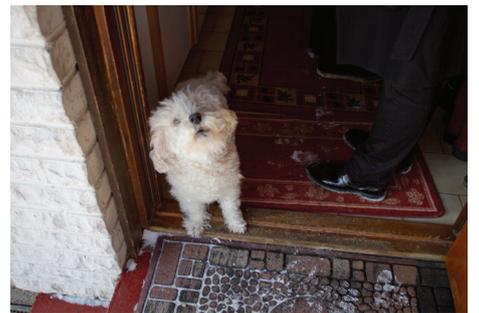
CAMPAIGN

Conversation with Archie Lee Coates IV and Dong-Ping Wong, +Pool

FREE SWIM · SWIM MEET
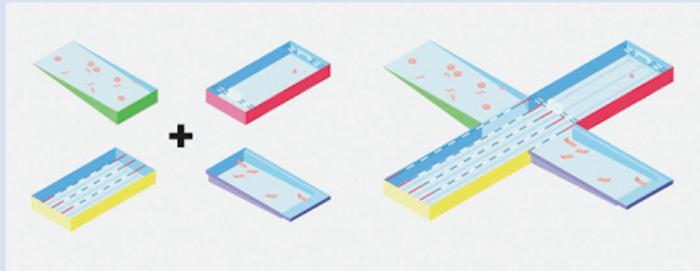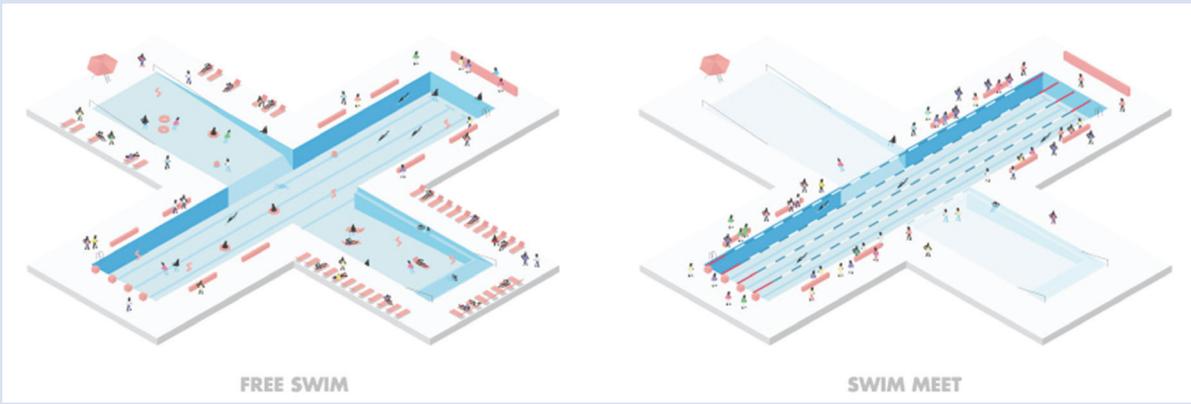
Images courtesy +Pool

The +Pool, a proposal for a swimming pool in the shape of a plus sign, is one of the most compelling examples of what has been termed 'Kickstarter urbanism'. Its creators offer insights into their experience running a crowdfunding campaign for a substantial capital project, what made it such a success, and how it is progressing.

On a sunny Manhattan afternoon we met architects Archie Lee Coates IV of Playlab and Dong-Ping Wong of Family to discuss +*Pool*, their attempt to crowdfund a public pool. Situated literally *in* the East River, the +Pool uses a custom filtration system to clean river water, allowing visitors to once again enjoy a swim in this significant waterway without the effluent. Two years into the project, Coates and Wong are still energized by the work on a daily basis. Coates describes this particular mode of self-initiated project creation, promotion, and development as a kind of "unknown darkness" that they are exploring together. As the team negotiate with public officials, discuss business models, and wade through legal questions, they are learning as they go how to navigate the 'dark matter'.

Although the team is made up of artists and architects, in conversation it's easy to mistake them for them for startup entrepreneurs.

The +Pool was the first example of a capital project that we could find evidence of on Kickstarter. As Coates and Wong tell it, the +Pool would have been "almost impossible to imagine" without a platform like Kickstarter. After introducing the concept to the world during the summer of 2010, and the ensuing

media buzz, the team wers able to attract the attention and pro-bono labour of engineering giant Arup. This collaboration allowed them to complete a feasibility study but getting through technical testing, including building mockups of special water filtration systems integral to the proposal, was beyond the limits of their ability to self-fund. The team also needed to offset their operating costs to be able to continue working on the project, and that's where the Kickstarter campaign came in.

The most visible result of the campaign is the $41,000 raised in 30 days, but the goodwill and expression of public support were also important outcomes. Against the projected cost of $15 million, the funds raised sound like a drop in the bucket – but just the right drop. Starting from scratch, they are using each public exercise to gather

Although the team is made up of artists and architects, in conversation it's easy to mistake them for them for startup entrepreneurs.

just enough support to unlock the next scale of funding, of detail, and of seriousness. Their successful Kickstarter campaign tangibly evidenced the public's enthusiasm, leading to a new willingness on behalf of public officials and potential corporate sponsors to discuss the project, as well as replenishing the team's own momentum.

With their Kickstarter money in hand, the team built and successfully tested one layer of three that make up the proposed filtration system.

In parallel with this activity, they also began thinking through funding models more deliberately, leading to the launch of a $e million fundraising campaign that started in October 2012. Rather than go back to Kickstarter for this effort, they approached it as a more traditional fundraiser. Without the umbrella of a larger platform that is set up to attract contributions, the +Pool team are doing more legwork to get attention and convince backers. Still, it was a conscious decision to avoid Kickstarter for this phase because they are sensitive not to overburden the same contributors by continually asking for funds in the course of what is necessarily a long and slow development process.[1]

The goal of the second phase of fundraising is to build a full working

mockup of the three layer filtration system and a waterside pavilion, which may just be the evidence needed to unlock the development of the pool itself. The decision to progress with this intermediary step answers a question that Wong asks rhetorically during our conversation: "how can we involve investors without asking them to bite off the whole thing?" They've sold the process instead of the final product. Raising money in stages punctuated by tangible projects enables the team to invite funders – be they individuals, charities, or corporations – to get to know the project and the team in waves. It's a way of building mutual confidence.

Depending on how the team decide to move forward, the project might begin to look and act more like a traditional non-profit, or for that matter a profitable company. Regardless of the business model that they choose, it's evident that the initial use of self-funding and crowd-funding allowed the team to bootstrap itself to a point of fragile but optimistic accomplishment, giving them access to a category of public and private entities that otherwise could have easily required months or years of contvent and lobbying tactics. Brickstarter will need to address this 'valley' of funding that exists between the initial concept development and investment into the actual capital project. In the meantime, we're happy to be able to learn from others, like the +Pool, who have waded into these waters first.

• Don't start from scratch if you can help it:

By the time the +Pool was posted to Kickstarter they had already launched the concept in public a year earlier and attracted support from media, citizens, and companies that offered pro-bono work to develop the ideas. This made the proposal more believable and enabled the team to be specific about what they needed to do as next steps and how much it would cost.

It's evident that the initial use of self-funding and crowd-funding allowed the team to bootstrap itself to a point of fragile but optimistic accomplishment.

• Video helps the pitch, but great video is better:

To make the most effective pitch possible, the +Pool team invested a bit of their own money into a video describing the project. Unable to afford market rates for the video production, they offered a small percentage of the Kickstarter proceeds to the videographer, effectively giving away a stake in the campaign so that everyone's interests were aligned towards producing the best video possible.

• Timing matters:

To capture the broadest support for the project, the team decided to delay their fundraising drive until summer time when the hot weather would more easily encourage people to be excited about a pool.

• Managing public expectations:

In all of their promotional material the team were very clear that the funds went towards technical mockups rather than the actual pool. There's still a long way to go between proving the idea will work and actually building the thing, so it's important to share this information in an open and clear manner. Doing otherwise would risk damaging the initial goodwill towards the project.

• Communications infrastructure is important:

Beyond the fundraising, Kickstarter is also useful for communicating with the community of funders. The project page does not replace the need for a project website (and the +Pool has a great one) but its updates and mail features are functional and useful for staying in touch with funders. It remains an open question how long the attention span of funders will be.

• Manage team expectations too:

+Pool were in contact with Kickstarter before their campaign and this exchange was useful for the team to learn about what works and what doesn't on the platform. Although this might have been possible only because the site was still young and not flooded with as many projects as it is today, it brings up the fact that there is an important and active role for the administrators of a platform not only for technical issues but also to establish and transmit the desired culture of the community.

• Be in it for the long haul:

A capital project is a big effort. The flurry of excitement afforded by a site like Kickstarter can be energizing, but it's only the beginning of something that will last multiple years.

More information:
www.pluspool.org

NOTES
1   See *'From Kickstarter to Brickstarter'*, p.23

NAVIGATE

Conversation with Nene Tsuboi & Tuomas Toivonen, Kulttuurisauna
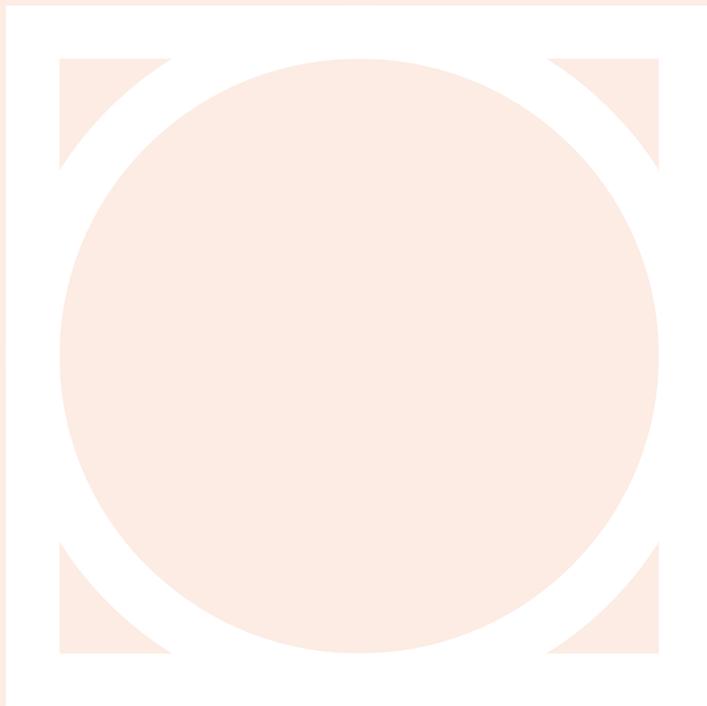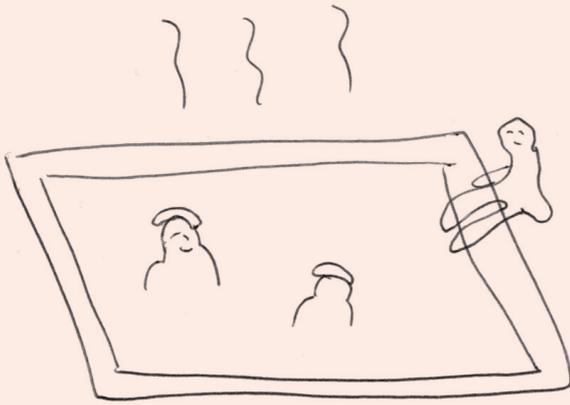
After years of hard slog and investment, an artist and an architect have managed to successfully navigate the 'dark matter' of planning bureaucracy to gain approvals for their ambitious public building on Helsinki's waterfront. Through their deep personal commitment and idiosyncratic approach, they even managed to win over the neighbours in the process.

Although the sauna holds a special place in the heart of Finland, it's not so often these days that a new public sauna is built. They've fallen out of fashion with the rise of private saunas that are now built into most residences.[1]

Tuomas Toivonen, an architect, and Nene Tsuboi, an artist, are a rare exception in that they're building a new public sauna. The *Kulttuurisauna* ('Culture Sauna'), as they call it, will sit on the water's edge in Helsinki's up and coming Kallio neighbourhood.

With the duo having recently broken ground on the building site, we sat down to learn from their experiences navigating the 'dark matter' of Helsinki's bureaucracy and the travails of NIMBYism.

THE EXPERT BIAS

"The possibility of building for yourself only happens when you understand how [the system] works," Toivonen recounts. "When you build up enough courage to walk into [a city] office and say, this is going to sound crazy but…" After some seven years of operating his own practice for paying clients, Toivonen has built up enough knowledge and experience with permits and approvals to have the confidence to walk into the municipality and propose a complex and unusual idea, such as a public sauna. Describing the process, Toivonen and Tsuboi struggle to find peak moments of difficulty. Instead

"there are not really specific bottlenecks, it's more like a general friction."

The fact that every step of the way involves unknown steps or unexpected surprises means that the process of developing the *Kulttuurisauna* has been slower than they expected, even though they knew it would be slow and arduous.

As a self-initiated project that includes an architect as half of the core team, they were able to progress despite this 'friction', but it begs the question of whether others who do not have the same abilities would be able maintain momentum without bankrupting themselves. Friction translates to time, and that means money. Here we find one of the reasons the built environment can seem almost allergic to innovation: it's very expensive.

The effect of this friction is to weight the decision-making process towards larger projects that are likely to have a significant income stream able to recoup the costs incurred. Simply put, bigger projects have a better chance of surviving the battle of attrition in the current decision-making structures and the costs they incur.

By revising decision-making processes to be more transparent we can demystify the process, making it inviting for experts and enthusiastic amateurs alike.

SITE SPECIFIC SURPRISES

The difficulties of sorting out dark matter become apparent in the dense details of the process. The waterfront site features a seawall which is maintained by the parks department, therefore raising a question about long term maintenance and making the parks department extra cautious with ground works. Although it was not clear at the outset, in the end Toivonen and Tsuboi were obligated to build the structure atop expensive pilings driven deep into the ground, instead of a typical foundation.

A preliminary analysis that showed it was possible to safely build the structure without pilings, allowing the economics to work out for Toivonen and Tsuboi favourably, which was a deciding factor early on. But when it came time to build, different departments of the city had different opinions about what was required as a minimum standard. Coming late in the process, the requirement to install pilings forced them to make a decision: abandon years of effort and expense or find a way to scrape together enough money to cover the costs of re-engineering the plans and the capital costs of the pilings themselves. Toivonen and Tsuboi doubled down on their commitment to the *Kulttuurisauna* and now we have a very real visualization of the 'cost' of the darkness of dark matter. The city's decision-making proved to be

as opaque as the *Kulttuurisauna's* pilings are deep.

When a proposal involves specific risks that have not been assessed before, extra time should be taken to make sure that balanced perspectives may be properly synthesized.

NIMBY

In Helsinki, projects like the *Kulttuurisauna* are required to go through a period of "neighbour listening" where people who live near the proposed site are given the opportunity to make comments on the plans. It's possible to do this oneself, but Toivonen and Tsuboi opted to pay the city a standard fee of €180 to have them handle the legwork of this listening period. In practice, this means that the approvals architect in the city planning office made a judgment about how wide the catchment for the project is and then sent invitations to comment to everyone in that area. They had 2 weeks to comment.

The results of this call go into a dossier and then a judgment is made. *Kulttuurisauna* was approved by the city architect at this stage and moved on to the next phase, a month-long period for complaints. A single complaint was lodged, which went to the permit council for consideration, taking another 8 weeks. Eventually, the single complaint was rejected by the city's permit council. On the day of our conversation Toivonen and Tsuboi had just received final, written confirmation from the court of Helsinki that the project had cleared all appeals. This piece of paper represents a resounding YES to *Kulttuurisauna*.

In parallel to this process, Toivonen and Tsuboi were receiving direct and indirect encouragement from members of the local community who enthusiastically supported the proposal. But it's important to note that the bureaucracy is better equipped to accept complaints than it is compliments or suggested improvements.

This experience begs the question, could there be a way to think about the right to appeal in the context of a parallel right to support, in effect limiting appeals that are not backed by a wider base of support or balancing appeals against support?

RITUALS TO MATCH ACTS OF CONSEQUENCE

"You could say that the Civil servants have been really civil during the process."

Toivonen and Tsuboi noticed a positive inclination on behalf of many of the civil servants they interacted with during the project. In their estimation, a self-initiated effort that is clearly a project of passion lends a different tone to the conversations. They recalled with a bit of glee the excitement of the moment they signed the land lease with the city, who owns the majority of land in Helsinki: "we expected a bureaucratic stamp but instead when we arrived they were asking 'so you are the ones doing the sauna' and were very excited to see us."

Bureaucrats are people too. Could rituals in the context of bureaucracy subtly create opportunities to encourage civic entrepreneurship? How might a coherent, articulate, and widely-accessible city strategy empower individual civil servants to calibrate their decisions in support of larger values?

THE POINTY TIP

While developing the project from the very beginning, Tsuboi and Toivonen were interested in a network of possibilities. For them the perfect project was not just a sauna or a special building, per se, but one that would combine those and more. They sought a project that folded architectural merit, public sauna, a waterfront site, and energy efficiency considerations into one effort. This particular mix, one imagines, is what happens when future owners dream up a project that they're willing to tie themselves to for thirty years or more. It's bound to be specific, even quirky, and it will succeed or suffer on its specific composition of these aspects.

Toivonen and Tsuboi describe it slightly differently: they talk about the project having a "pointy tip" which is articulated in a way that appeals to a broad base of interests. It's never just one thing, and therefore is able to be part of multiple narratives in different contexts, retaining the best possible chance to break through blockages or other adversarial moments. Kulttuurisauna can be a place to sauna and swim in the centre of Helsinki; it's an experiment in highly efficient energy use for a small building; it's also a rare example of contemporary architecture in Helsinki. The strength of the proposal is its multiple stories.

Having a good idea is not enough. The narrative of the proposal must also be compelling, and compellingly presented. Telling the story again and again during the course of a project is a good way to hone the message through trial and error.

Having survived a two year process of design and development, they're now in the full swing of construction and hope to have the sauna open in the first half of 2013.

More information:
Kulttuurisauna.posterous.com
www.nowoffice.com

NOTES
1   As of 2010 there were 1.5 million saunas in flats alone here in Finland, which is approximately one sauna for every 3.5 people. See: "Housing Statistics," Statistics Finland, accessed January 14, 2013 http://www.stat.fi/til/asu_en.html

PARTICIPATE

Conversation with Rodrigo Araya, Tironi Asociados
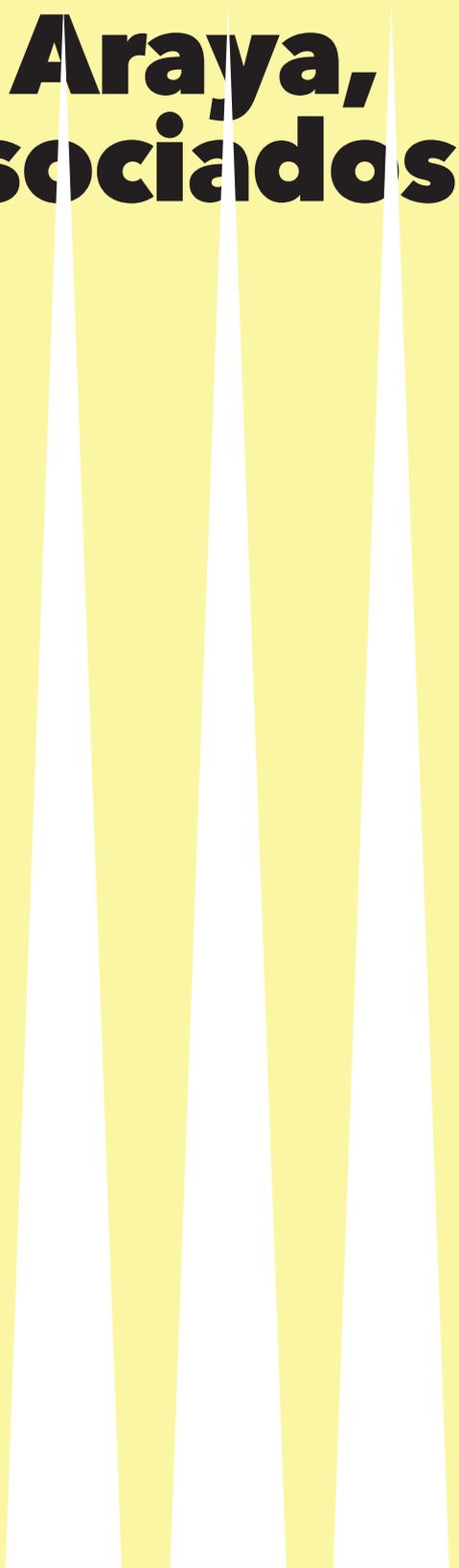
Stills from the film "Mauchos" which documents the
process of recovery following the Alma earthquake.
Directed by Sebastian Moreno and Ricardo Larraín.

Drawing upon the theoretical concept of the "hybrid forum", Rodrigo Araya and his partners in Chile destabilise the position of experts in the masterplanning and design process, illustrating the extraordinary outcomes that can be achieved when public engagement is placed at the top of the pyramid.

Tironi Asociados's work has shifted from strategic communications to coordinating citizen participation strategies over the last decade. Crucially, it now includes actually facilitating participation, hands on, so when Rodrigo Araya happened to be in northern Europe recently we reeled him in to Helsinki for a chat. Our conversation focused on two cases in two cities: the rebuilding of Constitución after the devastating 2010 earthquake and tsunami and a new masterplan for the city of Calama, both in collaboration with architects ELEMENTAL. In both cases urban planning does not involve participation as an add-on, it is participatory full stop.

CONSTITUCIÓN

Tironi's work in this area started with the forestry business Arauco, who became interested in engagement as a result of trying to obtain a sustainable forestry certificate. According to Araya, this certification took the public perception of the business as one of the primary criteria, and meant Arauco started to gear up their strategy accordingly.

Then the tsunami hit, an event Araya is given to marking in conversation with a sharp slash of

his hand through the air. As the significant employer in Constitución, and throughout the affected area, Arauco suddenly became involved in the reconstruction of the largely destroyed city, as did Tironi.

In the aftermath of the disaster, we can see a story involving incredible bravery, resolve, invention and commitment. The partners set themselves the target of a *new masterplan in 90 days,* a task that usually takes up to a decade. This speed is unheard of in itself, but perhaps an understandable ambition given the circumstances.

But then the project team made the unconventional decision to organise the entire planning process around the participation of citizens, local businesses and government officials, with co-design as the organising principle.

The first thing the team did was establish a small building in the centre of the city. This structure housed regular intense public debates while also acting as an office for the design team working furiously to coordinate and interpret input from citizens.

The project included significant funding from Arauco. This is interesting in itself, and in other contexts might cause a raised eyebrow, but here, with a relatively poor city government facing a crisis, it actually lead to an interesting balancing act between industry, citizens and government. Arauco played producer/funder, but not director, according to Araya. Trust is key to such a productive working relationship; which makes one wonder whether the urgency of working to recover from a disaster necessarily forged trust in a way that isn't easily transferable.

That balance was partly enabled by placing citizens first, displacing the traditional asymmetry of power which usually sees politicians, corporate interest and experts in control. It was sustained through constant, intensive engagement with the debates in the centre of the city acting as a forum for all to be held accountable to each other.

Araya places particular emphasis on the issue of destabilising the position of experts, drawing particularly from the theoretical works of Bruno Latour and

Michel Callon[1] and then that slash of the air again. "Then, the earthquake."

Suddenly they had a reason to put that theory into practice, in particular drawing upon the "hybrid forum" idea from Callon *et al's* essay:

"The authors of 'Acting in an Uncertain World' argue that political institutions must be expanded and improved to manage these controversies, to transform them into productive conversations, and to bring about "technical democracy." They show how "hybrid forums" – in which experts, non-experts, ordinary citizens, and politicians come together – reveal the limits of traditional delegative democracies, in which decisions are made by quasi-professional politicians and techno-scientific information is the domain of specialists in laboratories. The division between professionals and laypeople, the authors claim, is simply outmoded."[2]

The results have been extraordinary, with most of the city[3] of Constitución engaged in an intense, constructive public debate, effectively shaping the plan in real-time. Araya's 'social team' led the process, with experts and others shaping and reshaping their proposals in response to the debates.

CALAMA

The story of Calama is very different, in that it is not forged in the same conditions of crisis, but nonetheless it is a test of the same principles, the same model. Here, the urgency is drawn from economic conditions and a desire for improvement, rather than natural disaster, as well as a series of previously promised and never-delivered masterplans. A new wave of enthusiasm has brought genuine motivation to transform what Araya describes as a highly functional, mining-oriented rough sort of town. The "hybrid forum" methodology is being deployed here too.

Calama shares something with Finland and other developed nations in that focus must be created without a crisis. Faced with slow, creeping crises

– climate change, ageing population, social integration issues – how do we create the sense of urgency? We will have to create and deploy meaningful constraints to 'box in' the problem, and so the participation. Much of the debate has been about choosing the right focus for the project. What are the core issues that can be addressed by a new masterplan and what are symptoms?

BUILD THE RIGHT THING

Participation is an often slow process; yet this is partly because of the stop-start method with which it is implemented. In a more traditional planning process, projects limp painfully through phases of *diagnose, design, propose, consult, re-diagnose, re-design, re-propose, re-consult, appeal, court case, re-propose, lose financing* and so on, leaking information, focus and commitment each time the project pauses.

Constitución and Calama indicate that pulling participation into the process as a unifying thread not only gets more buy-in, and so less likelihood of complaints and blockages but also enables a potentially far quicker process. In both examples, the time spent up front was an investment into clarifying, in an equitable way, what the community wants for itself. This helps ensure that they are "building the right thing" in the first place. The conditions that drove Constitución to this position are not ideally replicable, but the findings might be.

Across both Constitución and Calama we see some patterns in their approach to participation.

• Build a physical focal point

In Constitución, a simple, light wooden structure was rapidly built in what had been the centre of town, acting as the focal point for the participation. This was where the project happened; this was where people could gather, discuss, and see the plans. Subtly, the design of

the structure pointed at a new kind of building for the town too, using timber.

• Use every form of communication to draw people in.

They used social media to get the word out in both cities, although the levels of internet connection in Chile means that it's not a viable strategy for mass communication. Hence they also used decidedly low-tech means as well, including a loudspeaker strapped to the top of a car driven around town as well as radio. With the local infrastructure destroyed, the teams had to rely on basic, more accessible forms of communication

• Focus through compression

The team tried to increase the level of participation by ramping up the intensity of the process, working with the tight timeline, rather than against it. Although it's a stretch, one of the things we appreciate about Kickstarter is the smart use of time limits, building a kind of auction-like sense of focus. Public projects are different, but time constraints can clearly be used beneficially, on this evidence.

• The "hybrid forum"

Balancing the interests, attitudes and different modes of experts, politicians, business big and small, and citizens takes highly skilful facilitation. But for this approach to work, the hybrid forum was key to deliberately unsettling the role of expert, or of destabilising accepted, unquestioned hierarchies in a 'safe', collaborative environment.

• Build a rhythm

Araya noted that the hybrid forum meetings became almost like a "weekly liturgy" for the community. It helped

keep the pace up, and provided a clear framework of engagement for people, both citizens and experts alike.

• Place social in control.

Putting participation at the 'top of the pyramid' was a clear statement of priorities. It directly addressed the default asymmetry of power, with usually preferences experts and policymakers. It also provides a clear framework for public-private partnerships in which private finance and public responsibility can be aligned. There are significant implications here for the traditional positioning of representative democracy, of course. Not necessarily fatal ones, but they do suggest a serious recalibration of the roles, skills and responsibilities of policy-makers, politicians, designers and engineers, and others involved.

• Start with a proposal.

Get to 'the sketch' as quickly as possible and "avoid the eternal diagnosis", as Araya put it. This then enables the 'experts' to be in the role of listening and re-shaping a proposal from the start in response to citizens, rather than defending. "Push back, but do not block."

• Confront things

Hybrid forums involve moments of strong – often emotional confrontation. It is vital, in terms of the community learning and engaging together, that issues are dealt with head on and in public so that the constraints within which the solution is being designed are witnessed, and eventually are shared, by all.

More information
Tironi Asociados:
http://web.tironi.cl/
Constitución:
www.presconstitucion.cl/

NOTES
1   Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes and Yannick Barthe, Acting in an Uncertain World, MIT Press, 2009.
2   http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/acting-uncertain-world
3   Being so devastated by the Tsunami, there was little for Constitucíon's 46,000 inhabitants to do other than to participate in the hybrid forums. This combined with the importance of the task at hand made it "the place to be," in the words of Araya.

ENABLE

Conversation with Marcus Westbury, Renew Newcastle
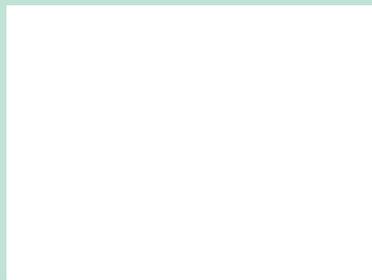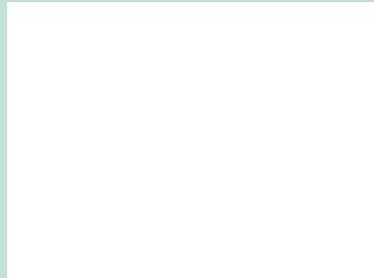
With a lightweight, strategic, affordable and people-focused approach, the Renew project has succeeded in breathing new life into neglected urban spaces where other top-down municipal efforts have failed.
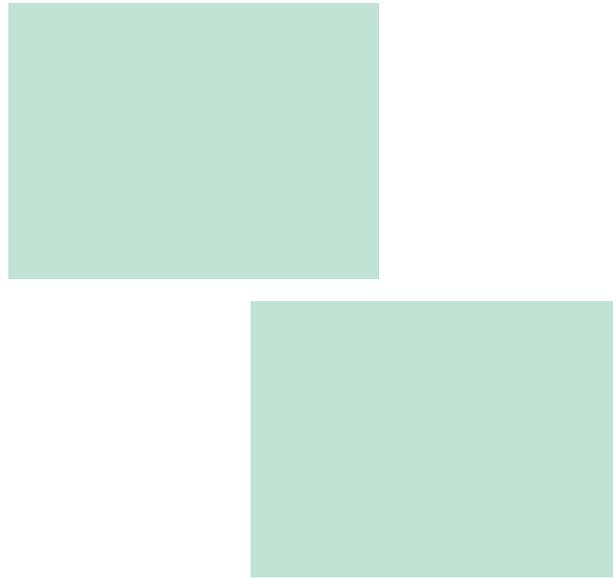
Marcus Westbury is the creator of Renew Newcastle, a not-for-profit organisation which smartly enables the regeneration of urban space by bringing new economic and cultural activity into disused spaces. It started in the downtrodden city centre of Newcastle, Australia, where Westbury and his team employed manipulations of the 'dark matter' – rather than expensive and time-consuming capital projects – to bring new life into the area.

Renew operates as an intermediary between the owners of unoccupied retail tenancies and local artists, designers and craftspeople eager to take on a commercial space in the centre of town. Through an innovative new tenancy agreement, structured as a month-by-month rolling license, the barrier for entry is lowered to allow creative ventures to occupy these tenancies for a small fee until a full-paying tenant comes along, or the endeavour can prove itself to be commercially viable. Renew works as a broker of trust, collecting together previously disparate proposals and provides a sole contact point for land- and building-owners. As a replicable model, it has spread to other cities in Australia, and has now spawned the Renew Australia organisation.

Westbury uses the metaphor of "operating systems" for buildings and spaces, referring to a space's hardware (its built fabric), and the applications that can run on it (what you can do with it). In Renew's case, an example is switching from an uninstalled department_store.app to installed photographers_studio.app, for example, on the same 'hardware'.

Over coffee in Brunswick, Melbourne, where Renew Australia is based, Westbury shared with us some of the insights from his projects:

HOLD OFF THE "YES/NO" DECISION

About a project and a space for as long as possible. Leave it open, to enable it to be shaped. This is also a way of avoiding the easy polarisation of the argument; enabling it to be refined, rather than rejected. Sometimes a project proposal isn't right for one space, but a different one; or at a different time. Renew does reject projects but mostly on a practical basis. As much as possible, Renew tries to remain open-ended about what's possible. Opportunities evolve as spaces come and go.

WORK AT THE SMALLEST SCALE

Try to avoid the complexity involved in either a) scale, or b) permanence.[1]

DO THINGS THAT CAN BE UNDONE

The easier to undo the better, as this lowers the opportunity cost. Something permanent is going to be difficult to endorse because it's not easy to undo. It is considerably trickier at larger scales,

Signs of 'renewal': the cumulative effect of various
small scale interventions has led to a distinct
transformation in Newcastle. Images courtesy Renew
Newcastle

or more permanence – a wind turbine for instance – though not impossible to frame those things in this light.

AVOID THE 'DARK MATTER'

He noted that they've generated 80 or so projects but only managed one Development Application (planning permit). On this point Westbury's approach contrasts with our argument in the introduction[2]. Our reservations that "what pops up must pop down" are addressed in part by Renew's role as infrastructure for a steady stream of short-term usages. By virtue of Renew's stability it is able to assist a 'portfolio' of pop-ups, creating opportunities for the feedback loops we often see lacking in approaches that eschew formality. Westbury's own succinct description for this is, "the hack versus the rewrite."

WORK AS 'PROCESS SHEPHERDS'

Renew often work with project proponents such as legal or business advisors to help them understand what processes they might be bumping up against. The individuals can then choose to adjust and avoid them, or engage with the processes directly. In the latter case, Renew helps the team phrase things appropriately. This is particularly valuable, given how opaque and un-user-centred institutional processes tend to be. By describing 'what you need to know' Renew look to "template and standardise" core processes. Pro bono lawyers, engineers and other consultants are brought in to help with this.

### RECOGNISE THE PARTICULAR 'ORGANIC DYNAMICS' OF PROJECTS

Whereas being a process shepherd is about translating the formal processes to more 'organic', self-organized upstarts, the point works both ways.

For institutions (including large property owners), Renew translate the seemingly messy world of the arts and creative industries into something that can be engaged with more comfortably.

RENEW LOOKS FOR THINGS THEY DON'T HAVE TO ASK PERMISSION FOR

This means peering into the dark matter and looking for gaps. Not loopholes as such; just the spaces left by institutions or between them. In this respect, the 'shape' of Renew is the inverse of the institutional space. It is both an informal interface onto institutional processes and a form of shadow space working around it.

REDUCE THE CITY TO A SCALE YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT.

In working with low cost and low complexity, Renew identifies and then operates within an optimum scale for getting things done relatively quickly. In Australia, the small scale is more capable of being transformed. Planning is seen to be about 'big things' and 'big' is about a form/scale of capital that shifts it beyond a community, in most cases. Other communities will have their own institutional structures and therefore their own optimum scale.

More information:
Renew Newcastle
www.renewnewcastle.org
Renew Australia
www.renewaustralia.org

NOTES
1   See 'From Kickstarter to Brickstarter', p.23
2   See 'From NIMBY to YIMBY', p.9

ENGAGE

Conversation with Finn Williams, Sub-Plan, Friends of Arnold Circus, Croydon Council
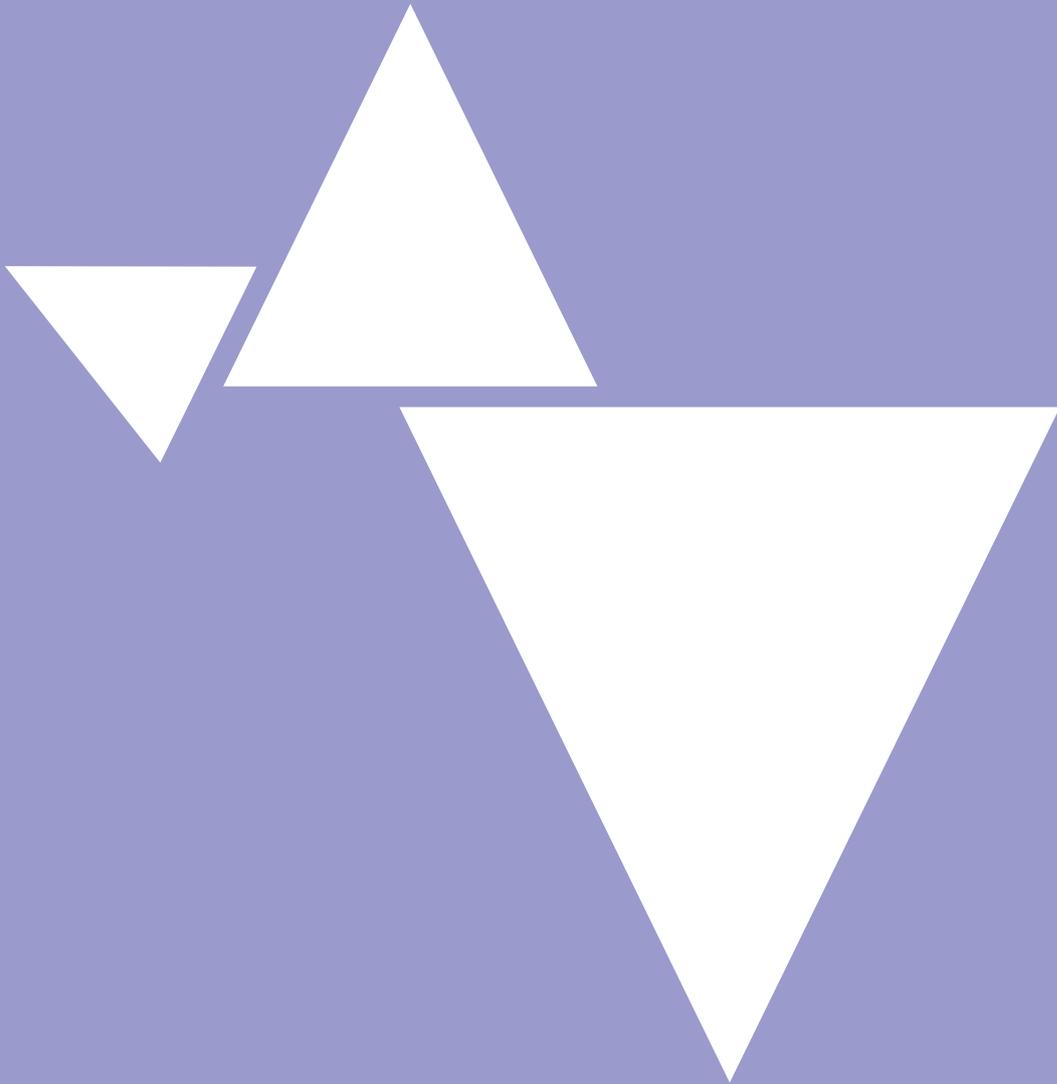
Operating as a public servant, a private practitioner and an engaged citizen, Finn Williams offers an intimate perspective on the workings of urban bureaucracy, planning legislation, and civic participation.
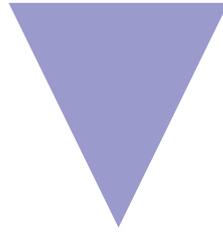
Finn Williams is part of the urban design team at Croydon Council in the UK (one of the largest London boroughs) as well as running his own practice, Common Office. We spent an afternoon in Helsinki's Ullanlinna neighbourhood with Finn discussing Brickstarter, NIMBY to YIMBY, planning policy and law.

In addition to Wiliams' role as urban designer he is also part of Friends of Arnold Circus (FoAC)[1], a community group based in London's Boundary Estate public housing (known as "council housing" in the UK). The Boundary Estate was the first publicly-funded social housing estates in England, and replaced the notorious Old Nichol slum in 1897. When it opened, the centrepiece of Boundary Estate was Arnold Circus, originally a delightful small garden and bandstand whose glory days faded quickly, and fell into a state of murky, dangerous disrepair.

After extensive negotiation with the local council the FoAC agreed to provide basic regular maintenance and programming for Arnold Circus from within the community – essentially the lighter, daily/weekly work that they can do, as well as organising events to keep the space activated. In return, the municipality does the more heavy-duty long-term maintenance on the space. FoAC's website says "we garden, work with schoolchildren and volunteers and run events."

That this simple arrangement took months indicates the basic "social-contractual" problems extant in a place that was also a centrepoint of the London riots in 2011. Static institutional structures block proactive engagement from communities whilst locking civic spaces in stasis to deteriorate. Yet the success of FoAC is redolent of our observations of the communal gardening of medians in Schöneberg, Berlin, discussed in the introduction. There are some things that are better done through productive collaboration and agreement between citizens, civics and institutions.

As both a local resident and trustee of FoAC, Williams tells the story well. Maintenance is almost always the key issue around such ideas. Planting, building, opening – these are the easy bits. The real cost comes after a ribbon has been cut, and the lack of creativity in handling these costs stops many potential developments. FoAC took it on directly.

FoAC is a strong example of 'Yes In My Backyard', even if it is the revival of an existing yet defunct bit of civic infrastructure rather than a new development. It is a clear example of a community speaking loudly and clearly about their desires for their own backyard – and committing to doing something about it. In this way, the example reinforces the role of democratic governance through a more proactive and responsive social contract, rather than trying to sidestep institutions; can we make public decision-making more holistic, and so sustainable, by working with increased diversity, and so also more resilience?

Who has time to read 1000 pages?

UK planning law had just undergone radical surgery, with the national planning guidelines slashed from 1000 pages to 52. Despite a very close call involving the Treasury, the guidelines are generally thought to be better.[2] Reduction is likely useful, but it also begs the question of whether the documents and the processes and rules they describe can be redesigned from a user-centred perspective.

User-centred redesign of policy, regulations and procedure necessitates the ability of non-experts and experts alike to engage in the documentation. Along these lines, a touchstone for Brickstarter is 'legibility' which entails empathic communication in plain language to explain decisions as well as the reasoning behind them. Precedents here include Candy Chang's work for the Centre for Urban Pedagogy, such as Vendor Power![3]

Williams has explored a related topic in a summer school he taught at London's Architectural Association. Together with David Knight and graphic designers
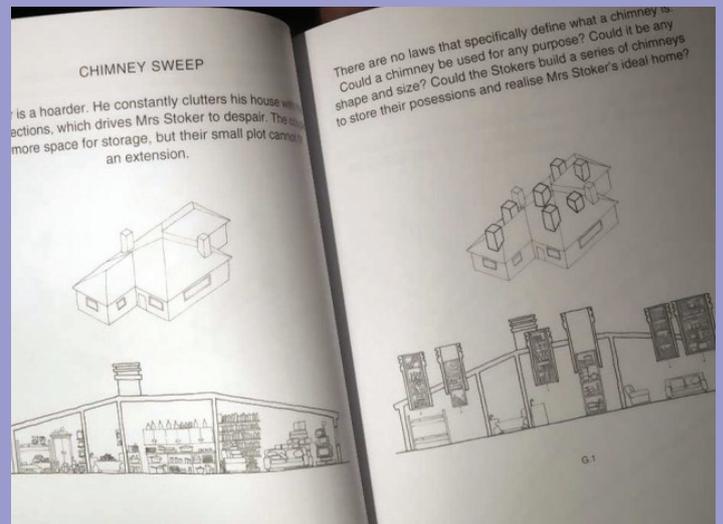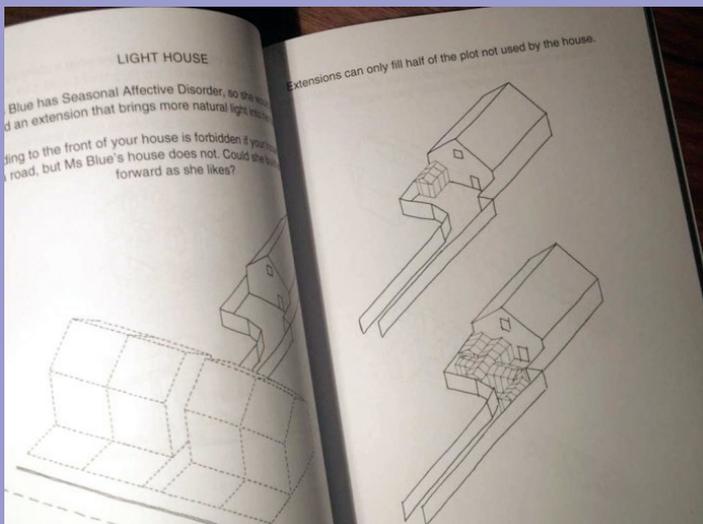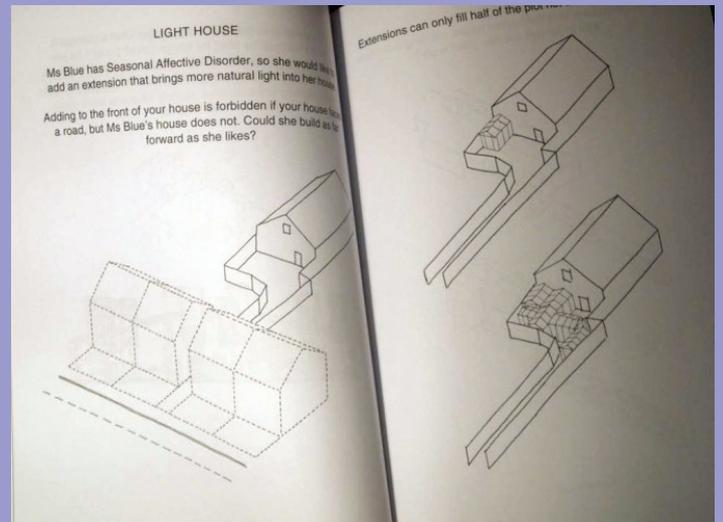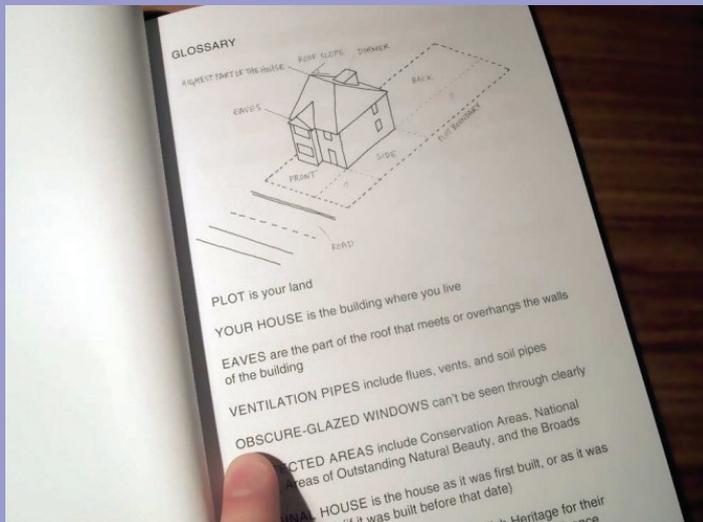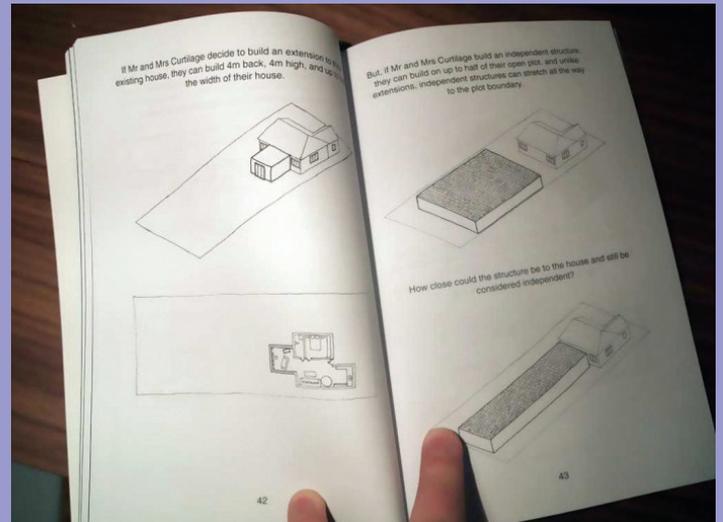
Grabs from Finn Williams' book 'Sub-Plan' which explores ways of subverting the ambiguities of planning law.

Europa, Williams created a booklet called Sub-Plan: A Guide to Permitted Development. Here's an excerpt:

"Sub-Plan is an exploration of this legal no-man's-land; a guide that reveals ambiguous grey areas as openings for opportunist architecture. The study looks for semantic loop-holes and legislative cracks to develop examples of Permitted Development: architecture that limbo dances under the radar of regulations. Sub-Plan highlights building possibilities hidden within a labyrinth of legal jargon and ambiguity. The guide inspires the householder to make the most of their new freedoms. How far can these new rules be exploited? And what might the urban environment look like if householders work collectively? Sub-Plan investigates the moment when architecture appears to slip into insignificance – when it doesn't even need a planning application. Are the implications of minor development more significant than planners imagine?"[4]

Depicted as a series of poetic proposals for renovations and additions, Sub-Plan describes all manner of potential development that might transform a municipality like Croydon (where the research was based) by pushing possibilities to their logical extremes. It does this using entirely new tactics derived directly from existing legislation that seem near-impossible under conventional reading. Included in the collection of fictitious home renovations are the Stokers, a family who exploits the ambiguous definition of a chimney to build a series of chimneys as storage units that legally expands the envelope of the original home.

This is not quite in the tradition of the semi-legendary "Non-Plan" manifesto[5], despite the name. Non-Plan advocated for effectively no planning controls at all, an essentially libertarian position that would have been exploited by power interests and have left no strategic capability to address issues that stretch beyond individual self-interest.

Sub-Plan, however, smartly addresses the gaps in existing legislation, and works creatively within them.[6] It doesn't remove planning regulations; rather, it looks to exploit the fact that they are highly interpretative, and finds ways to create a denser, more diverse urban form within them, yet often taking orthogonal, almost absurdist positions. It's a wonderful demonstration of working with dark matter as a material. It even proposes such an approach could scale to major buildings, well beyond the backyard alterations, and in keeping with central Croydon's relatively unusual condition.

Some core points from our discussion:

MAINTENANCE:

To move beyond the pop-up, the installation, and towards the systemic, the ongoing, means focusing on maintenance, lifecycle and end-of-life issues directly. These are largely absent from current crowdfunding and crowdsourcing platforms.

• Persistence:

FoAC indicates the perseverance required when faced with opaque, outdated or oversized regulation or institutional culture. City-making is perhaps the slowest pursuit humanity has invented,

• You can innovate within existing legislation

But effectively this means the cost of innovation is borne by those who are inspired enough to go for it. How might we more systemically encourage innovation in the built environment by de-risking it?

• Make it legible:

Both the format and content of Sub-Plan suggest that there might be a different way of framing planning for citizens. One that is more inclusive and inviting of a broad range of perspectives and contributions.

NOTES
1   See: http://foac.org.uk
2   Simon Jenkins, 'Tories' long and winding road to sensible planning', The Guardian, 27th March 2012. Source: www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/27/planning-permission-urban-rural
3   'Vendor Power!' is an illustrated guide to the rules of New York City street vendors, which decodes the complex written laws, and enables vendors to contest fines. Designed by Candy Chang as part of the Centre for Urban Pedgagy's 'Making Policy Public' project. See: www.makingpolicypublic.net/
4   Finn Williams and David Knight, Sub Plan, self-published, 2012. See: www.lulu.com/shop/sub-plan/sub-plan/paperback/product-5623621.html
5   Reyner Banham, Cedric Price, Paul Barker and Peter Hall, Non Plan, New Society, 1969. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Barker_(writer)#Non-Plan:_An_Experiment_in_Freedom
6   See 'Conversation with Marcus Westbury', p.55

Baana Skate Park

A project built, torn up, and repaired again, all in the span of 3 months and all by the same unlikely owner lends us an allegory of the difficulty of learning to make shared decisions in shared spaces.

Photo: Sami Pennanen

Photo: Sami Pennanen

In June 2012 a sculptural seating area comprised of the word "Helsinki" extruded out of the ground was unveiled as part of a redevelopment of the new public path known as 'Baana'. The flowing lines of this work, designed by artist Janne Siltanen and commissioned by the City of Helsinki, were intended to be perfectly suited for skateboarders to grind on. Which is what they did.

However, due to an unspecified number of complaints from the neighbours, skating here was outlawed. A public works crew returned immediately to dig a 'moat' around the offending sculpture, which succeeded in preventing skateboarders from grinding, but also effectively vandalised their own initiative.

A high point of city efficiency, to be sure, but not everyone was pleased. The entire Baana project had gone through years of consultation with numerous opportunities for comments or complaints. So why were a few voices able to determine the fate of this city amenity and have their opinions translated into action so quickly, so unilaterally?

Then something doubly surprising happened: the city reacted quickly again, changing tack a second time, and re-paved their moat just five days after they dug it. This restored Baana to its original, skateable condition, albeit surrounded by a stripe of new asphalt as a monument to the non-debate.

On one hand this is a positive story about an agile city who was able to respond quickly, but on the other hand it's an allegory for the problems to come if we do not have more considered tools to help us negotiate questions about shared spaces.

Prototype

testing
testing
testing
testing

What follows may look like a prototype for a crowdfunding website, but it is really just a prop, a sketch of a possible service, designed to generate discussion, to ask the right questions, and force a confron- tation with decisions.

It is what we term a *design probe,* a means to quickly test how a platform for navigating between the malleable urban fabric and the decision-making cultures of communities and municipalities may be constructed.

And while this particular design will be thrown away at some point, each of these elements – each of these pixels – have design choices behind them. We don't mean visual or interaction design choices, though those are here too, but conceptual and strategic choices. This prototype exists only to suggest and clarify questions; to make the issues tangible and specific. Without 'objects' like this, questions as to '21st century governance' are just too abstract. By skipping sketchy wireframes and instead working at a high resolution from the start, the design probe helps us ferret out where the critical issues are by generating realistic responses. It's detailed enough that using these images as a conversational prop elicits excitement – perhaps even fear – but it rarely goes without comment.

For this probe to be effective, it has to look and feel like a contemporary web service, suggesting the kind of platform for citizen participation in decision-making we've been exploring here. Contemporary cities find themselves in the awkward position of no longer holding a monopoly on 'running the city'. Social media and other forms of networked communication are showing us that a city's websites have some unexpected competition. Facebook, Google, and other familiar and highly-tuned services have promoted digital literacy, creating a high standard that municipalities are not exempt from. Ignore this reality, and be ignored.

This is not to say that Brickstarter is necessarily a municipally-managed affair. We've poised this sketch halfway between a decision point, in that it could be interpreted as a public service run by a city, a public partnership in collaboration with a city, or as a social enterprise pending the development of a viable business model.

And to be clear, we'd love something like this to really exist. We might help make that happen; one of our partners might; one of the existing adjacent services might take on some of the aspects sketched here; or it might inspire someone else to do so. The field is growing so rapidly that we can only assume this eventual reality is inevitable.

1. OVERVIEW OF HOMEPAGE

As should be evident throughout, these
mockups take the visual style of the
contemporary web as a starting point.
A screen such as this, the welcome page,
is designed to be natural, effortless.
The page is divided into two main
sections. The first is a call to
action inviting visitors to "make good
things happen in your neighbourhood"
and providing four specific avenues to
do so. The remainder of the page are
opportunities to dive into existing
proposals, either by project description,
by location, or by checking out what
people are supporting. It's worth
stressing that while you don't know
what you get with an open platform, you
can set a direction and filtering the
projects shown on pages like this. It's
an important opportunity to broadcast the
interests of the platform.

2. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT PAGE

A fictional project in progress, aiming to convert a bit of underused/disused infrastructure in central Helsinki into a co-working space. Yes, all the examples here are the usual clichéd set of co-working spaces, community gardens and so on, and each of the spaces and buildings mentioned here are real. In designing these mockups we used plausible details wherever possible so that the outcomes would be plausible.

3. LANGUAGE

The language drop-down offers Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian as basics, and perhaps more. One of the things we're interested in is how rapidly Finland, and Helsinki in particular, is diversifying. That means tools for Finnish communities need to handle a wider selection of languages. Of course, cultural diversity is beyond language, but here's a start, and this little drop-down is a hint to generate debate about that.

70

4A. TARGET

This proposal has a financial target, and a countdown of time remaining for the project to fulfil this target. The money requested in this hypothetical project is for making this into a convincing proposal: to pay for professional services, permits, some marketing, facilitation, and so on, rather than the full project budget. And as we'll see further on, money isn't the only way to offer support.

4B. TIMER

In terms of timers, we've somewhat randomly given 60 days per project, as it seems more complex than a Kickstarter project (where they advise that 30 days or less is best, though they too can last for up to 60.) Those dynamics are interesting, and will need testing for urban projects to establish a rule of thumb for an ideal fundraising timeline.
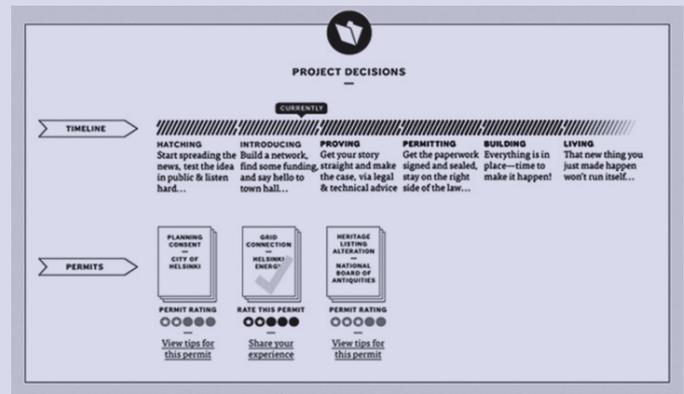
5. DETAILS

5A. SCALE

The details bar gives some sense of what work the funding might be for, and the scope of this work based on how large it is. 'Packages' of work are determined to be either S, M, L, or XL, and consist of necessary permits, advice, contacts, guides and so on.

5C. LEADERS

Here you can see who's leading the project, recognising it always takes one or two committed individuals to drive such endeavours.

5B. PARTNERS

The partnership crests here communicate the kind of partnership required for the success of this project, whether it is intended to be managed by the municipality, by a private entity, or a combination of both. At the very least, all projects require a certain degree of community support.

6. BADGES

Badges – a concept borrowed from the popular website Foursquare – are used here as a way to celebrate the projects which most clearly embody the values of sustainable wellbeing. It's amusing to draft the lists of badges and we've gotten a bit lost in it: *Pramistan… the project is designed to be convenient for parents and child carers*. If you want to use Brickstarter to propose a drive through fast food restaurant you're welcome to do so, but through basic game mechanics we expect that such suggestions will be downplayed on the site. Brickstarter cannot magically ordain anything into existence, but we aspire to help boost up the proposals that are best and most balanced across economic, environmental, and social aspects.

7. PITCH

We're interested in video as a 'higher bandwidth' way of conveying ideas; higher than the standard text field implies, anyway. This may be seem too demanding, but then so is the process of urban development. Just about anyone can produce a video now, thanks to the prevalence of cameras in smart phones, and by virtue of focusing on urban projects it's always possible to simply stand in front of a place and talk about what it could be.
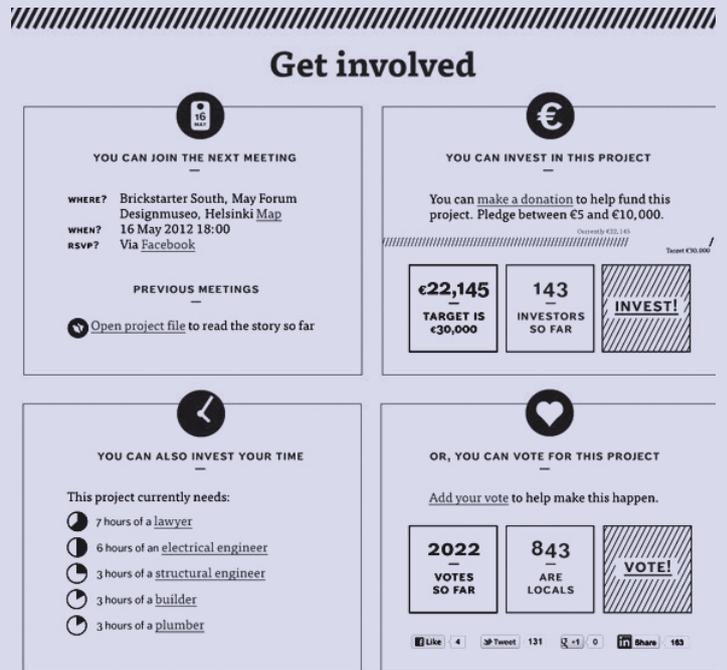
8. GET INVOLVED

We've sketched four different ways of getting involved. Perhaps too many in reality, but it's nevertheless a means to flush out the right questions. For most users this is the crux of the service – given they won't be running projects, but simply observing, enabling or discussing them.

8A. MEETINGS

We're suggesting it's mandatory to hold real, physical meetings. We feel the permanence of Brickstarter decisions, unlike those of crowdfunding sites that focus on products and consumer goods, might necessitate looking your neighbour in the eye. Note 'Brickstarter South' implies an event (or even physical space), like a monthly gathering of prospective civic start-ups, which might enable peer discussion as well as debates and votes.

8B. INVEST

This is where you can invest your hard-earned dosh in the project. This seems a no-brainer – and yet this area is fraught with complexity – and politics, for that matter. By representing funding as only one out of a variety of ways to support a project, the aim is to reduce the dominance of financial commitments as the sole means of success for a project.

8C. VOTE

Here you can show your support for a project without committing any money. It's sort of a counterbalance, as if these two boxes – Invest and Vote – are in tension. In this case, a vote might sit somewhere between a vote in a local election and a Facebook 'Like' button. Where the latter is infinite, ad-hoc, and because of that almost meaningless, and the former is finite, infrequent and outsources responsibility for a few years. We want to find something in the middle. Note also we might be able to infer a difference between locals and others, but again we draw something simple which has very complex implications. What constitutes as the local constituency of a bench on the sidewalk? What about a geothermal powerplant? And do all projects have the same definition of "local" or does it change based on the nature of the proposal? Should the voice of those potentially affected by it carry more weight than others?

8D. VOLUNTEER

We're also interested in a Brickstarter service that can act as a kind of broker for people to find professionals who are interested in contributing to such projects, on a *pro bono* basis via time-banking. We feel this is particularly important as it both reinforces the idea that amateurs need professionals and vice versa (these are not mutually exclusive), but also that one of the major hurdles for community-led projects is simply *being convincing*. Understanding who you might need, and then finding them and convincing them to help with the project, is key to whether projects get a hearing from institutions – or not.
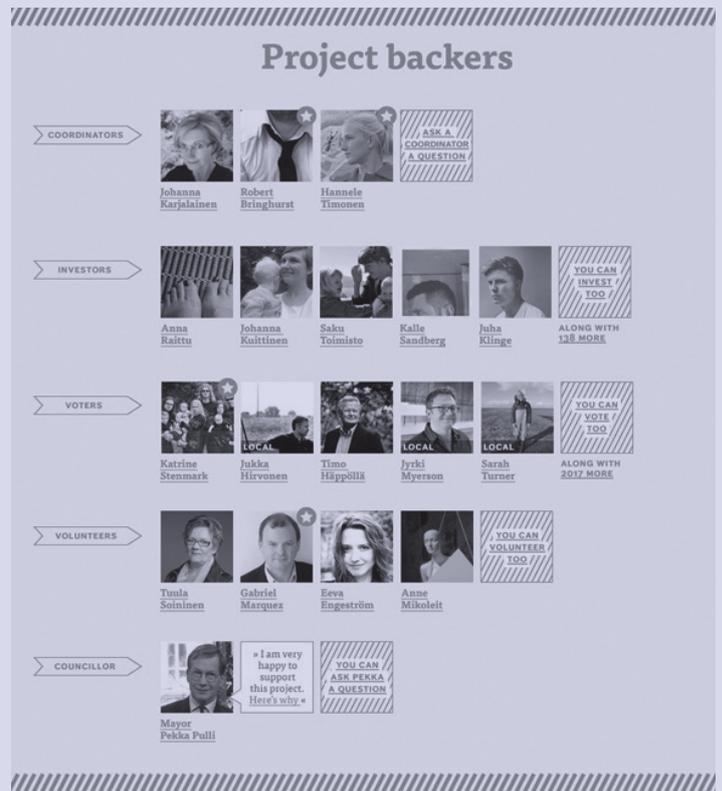
Project backers

9. CONTRIBUTORS AND BACKERS

Project Backers is where the different forms of support are collected and given a face. From coordinators, investors, voters, volunteers, and even the relevant councillors. Note that although councillors hold a special role, they also look like any other user, save a special space to make their views on the project explicit. You also have a one-click way of getting in touch, with the councillor, or organisers. All of these little details have implications, especially for the inboxes of the people pictured here.

PROJECT DECISIONS
—

CURRENTLY

ELINE

HATCHING
Start spreading the
news, test the idea
in public & listen
hard...

INTRODUCING
Build a network,
find some funding,
and say hello to
town hall...

PROVING
Get your story
straight and make
the case, via legal
& technical advice

PERMITTING
Get the paperwork
signed and sealed,
stay on the right
side of the law...

PROJECT LOCATION
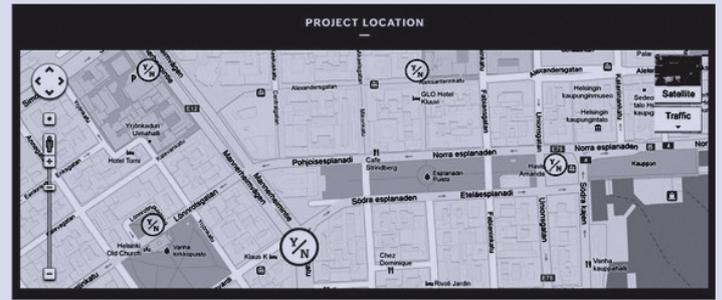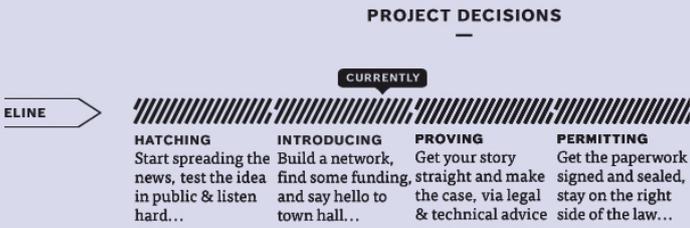
10. PROJECT DECISIONS

Decisions is about denoting where this
project is in the overall process of
realisation, from hatching to living.
For many projects this series of stages
and required permissions may be unknown
at the outset, therefore this feature
could serve as a public 'memory' of the
bureaucratic hurdles, acting as a guide
for future projects of this kind. And
just as Kickstarter and other successful
crowdfunding platforms review and accept
or rejects projects, Brickstarter may
also need some kind of evaluation stage
here. This quickly becomes complex – as
with any open platform about spaces,
places or services that might be public,
the decision to accept or reject a
proposal also needs to be made in
public, lest it risk disenfranchising
the public.

12. LOCATION

All projects on Brickstarter will
exist in a specific place, which is
represented here as a point on a map.
It's conceivable some projects might
have multiple locations, or a wider
radius than a map marker would indicate.
Can we draw that? How to convey the
remit or scale of impact of a project?
Equally, how might we convey other
projects proposed for the same space?
How to understand the opportunity
cost from a spatial perspective—that
if a location is used for one purpose
it's generally not able to be used for
another without destroying the first?
Or how might users suggest a more
productive place for a project, so long
as they can explain why it's so?

PERMITS

PLANNING
CONSENT
—
CITY OF
HELSINKI

GRID
CONNECTION
—
HELSINKI
ENERGY

HERITAGE
LISTING
ALTERATION
—
NATIONAL
BOARD OF
ANTIQUITIES

PERMIT RATING

RATE THIS PERMIT

PERMIT RATING

View tips for
this permit

Share your
experience

View tips for
this permit
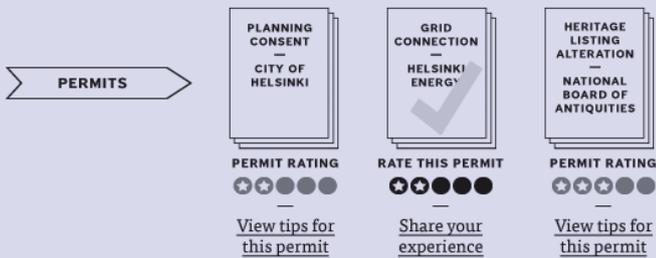
11. PERMITS

If a proposal will require permits,
they're listed here along with a
notation of those which have been
obtained. Displaying the permits here
is an attempt to reveal in a subtle way
the complexity of promoting a project
such as this, and to create a possible
feedback loop for those who design the
permit applications, and those required
to fill them out. It's one small part
of enabling a user-centred re-design of
governance.

Behind all these innocuous looking buttons, there are perhaps hundreds of unanswered questions. This is the point. A high resolution design probe elicits specific questions, and those get us closer to understanding how to make Brickstarter a reality. If we look at that simple <u>INVEST</u> button alone, questions immediately begin to bubble up. This is the design probe in action:

• What actually happens when someone clicks 'invest'? Is it legally possible to invest in a project such as this, or perhaps it must be a donation? If so, how do we potential donors feel secure that their monies will be put to use properly?

• Should it be a direct citizen donation, as per Kickstarter? Or, given the 'tradition' of paying for effective, quality public services in a welfare state like Finland, should some small proportion of a citizen's existing tax payment be made available to place on projects as

they like? Should it be akin to being able to direct charity donations, as in some countries? What's the right way to do this, given many of the projects might be public in scope, remit and value generated?

• How do we ensure that crowdfunding doesn't begin to unhelpfully "destabilise" local taxation that pays for the often-excellent public services?

• How do we validate transactions? When is the money actually transferred? And to what form of legal entity? Do the current

laws allow organisations to accept this kind of funding? How open are the accounts of community projects?

• Should there be some kind of city-led neighbourhood matched funding scheme, like Seattle[1] and other cities, to top-up crowdfunded projects?

• If we say "invest", what does that mean? That your return-on-investment (ROI) is a form of non-financial "shared value" reward of a new service or space existing? Or should it actually be a projected financial ROI? And if so, how does that work in terms

of legal and financial practice? Should we even make the idea of a shared value return an explicit, rather than implicit, part of the project?

• What happens when a community group reaches 99% funding but doesn't make 100% before the 60 day limit? Should some public body step in to make up the shortfall? (It would be almost heartless to build a system that lets a community group raise €29k and then take that all away because they missed their €30k total by two hours. And yet deadlines must be observed in order to have the focus-compressing effect.)

• How do we ensure due democratic process, such that money doesn't speak too loudly? It would be possible to make particular projects more likely happen by dropping large donations on them – but with the opportunity cost involved in public spaces, and with public value generated, this wouldn't be very democratic. How to balance this button with the one beneath, 'voting'?

• How does the City council appear and participate in this open platform, in terms of its funding? Can it create projects in the system, and drop its own funding on them, to open up public financing around public projects? What happens when the citizens decide to reject a municipal initiative (for the sake of argument)?

• Should those donating be made visible within the community? We assume so,

as per web idioms – but is this different from seeing what your neighbour is voting for, or donating to? How do we balance a healthy and rich public discourse alongside these simple mechanisms and transactions?

• Should such a service accept donations for local projects from citizens in other countries? Who makes the decision about their neighbourhood seems a simple question, but what if a neighbourhood could take advantage of the internet to receive funding from anywhere, as per Kickstarter?[2]
You'll be able to come up lots more. And that's just one button!

The questions don't all need to be answered by Brickstarter, of course. We also need to understand the potential connections as part of an 'ecosystem' of services. This implies some kind of 'civic API'[3] which enables us

to share elements across multiple services. So, the crowdfunding mechanisms of one might be able to deploy the financial transaction-handling module of another; the voter registration or citizen identity records of one service might plug into another.

We might, for instance, draw in data from Foursquare, so we can easily aggregate "surrounding attractions or services" for a project site. Should we use OpenStreetMap rather than the proprietary Google Maps in order to reinforce mapping refinement into open platforms? In the prototype we use a comments module from Facebook (available via the Facebook social plugin) to purposefully be both pragmatic and contentious. If a city government were to run a service, it probably couldn't require its citizens to use Facebook to comment, in terms of open access.

The practice of actually making some-thing forces a rigor that comes with making decisions, in a way that most strategy and vision work simply does not.

But does the city government have the resources and means to build a system that would rival the ease and power of Facebook's social networking infrastructure? Is there a technical compromise that does not also compromise equity? From a design practice point-of-view, we value prototypes as a means to flush out questions as well as answers, and in strategic design we use such prototypes to aide decision-making. When you're designing something, you have to make decisions. The stairs have to go here or here, not in both places (usually). This courtyard can be a community garden or a parking lot, but not both at the same time (usually). The button on this website has to be labelled "INVEST" or "DONATE" or "FUND" or "BACK THIS" or "CONTRIBUTE", but not all of them. It can only be one, and it must be consistent, and each choice has a subtly different inflection, and implication.

The practice of actually making something forces a rigor that comes with making decisions, in a way that most strategy and vision work simply does not. This is even before we get to the genuine public value of actually iterating prototypes into services – something that is just not usually done. But that is a whole other conversation[4]. With public service design, each technical choice is also a political choice.

NOTES

1 Seattle's 'Department of Neighborhoods' has matched funding for community-driven projects since 1998. See http://www.seattle.gov/ neighborhoods/nmf/

2 See 'Kickstarter to Brickstarter' (p.23)

3 "API" stands for Application Programming Interface and is a tert for behind the scenes technology that allows a website to also work as infrastructure for others, lending their functionality to sites across the web..

4 One notable exception to this statement is the work of Government Digital Services in the UK's Cabinet Office. They have been publically developing a new single port of call for the entire web presence of the British government, from alpha to beta to a live service. http:// digital.cabinetoffice. gov.uk

CONCLUSION

What Happens Next?

What Happens Next?

Since we first launched the idea of Brickstarter on our blog, brickstarter. org, the response has been incredible. We knew as soon as we started writing (and receiving anxious inquiries about our launch date) that we had struck a nerve. The momentum behind crowdfunding / crowdsourcing in contemporary culture and the equally great frustration with the opacity of the way our cities evolve proved to be two ideas that really resonated.

As mentioned in the preface, we are making a prototype but we are not building Brickstarter, and certainly not as a globally available service. Flowing from Sitra's role in Finland, we are attempting to build just enough to prove the viability of the idea, and then let others take over. Brickstarter is a provocation. This book is our way of spreading this provocation.

We talk about Brickstarter as if it already exists because we are sure that it will in a few years time through the efforts of Neighborland, IOBY, Joukkoenkeli, Kickstarter, and others who are nibbling on this problem from different angles. We've used the existing work on crowdfunding and crowdsourcing to highlight some of the real challenges that will have to be addressed as these approaches are applied to the built environment. And we hope this book is useful to anyone who is building a platform to support shared decisions about shared spaces and/or anyone who considers themselves a civic entrepreneur.

We knew when we got into this that it was going to be a long play. Since we started Brickstarter.org site we've had countless meetings with three cities in Finland, searching for a partner to take the ideas forward into action. Sitra has a specific proposal for how to prototype a new culture of decision-making, and we even have money to facilitate the experiment, but our unique value-add is the ability to work with government, so unless we're able to realize that promise it doesn't make sense for Sitra to risk stepping on the toes of market players already beginning to thrive in the crowdfunding/crowdsourcing space. We don't want to build a platform to support just bottom-up developments anymore than we want to build one that works only top-down. Rather, Brickstarter has traced out the

We talk about Brickstarter as if it already exists because we are sure it will in a few years time

opportunity for an intermediary that sits between these two perspectives, and accomplishing that vision requires having a strong relationship with both sides.

At the time of writing, our discussions continue at the slow pace of municipal negotiations. This is the reality of working with cities today (again, we speak to the situation in Finland but your experiences may vary), and it is one of the reasons that we found so few platforms engaging directly with decision-making. Partly it's a question of business model. The small offices working at the bleeding edge of technology are rarely able to dedicate enough time an attention to landing a municipal client. Meanwhile, cities are in many cases still struggling to find their footing when it comes to procurement of websites and services, often receiving suboptimal results from large (and expensive) consultancies.

IT consultancies are still providing the bulk of services here because, one imagines the logic going, websites involve information technology. While true, what we've see in the past decade is the nature of the web shift from being something additional to being core – from a nice to have to need to have. As we've observed Helsinki and others attempt to use the web to source input from its citizens, we've seen the city struggle to get good results from its procurement process.

During the first half of 2013 Sitra will be working with the city of Kotka in eastern Finland to prototype some of the ideas that have come out of Brickstarter. What we build is going to look very different to the prototype sketched out in the Manual. In that sense, the work we've done is part of an iterative approach. The ideas have evolved, will continue to evolve, and so too will the expression of those ideas. The experiment in Kotka will involve technology, but it will also be a very human effort. Brickstarter has always been about decision-making, and that means spending time with decision-makers to help them make sense of the changes in society and technology. We will be helping Kotka's leaders find ways to proactively create room for grassroots activity – for YIMBY. Stay tuned to brickstarter.org for updates on our continued prototyping there.

Meanwhile, we hope the ideas and research presented here can inspire or contribute to a parallel effort in another part of the world.

Biographies

Bryan Boyer is strategic design lead for Sitra and project manager of Helsinki Design Lab. Previously he has worked in Silicon Valley as a technology entrepreneur, as well as in the US and Europe as a freelance architect.
bryanboyer.com

Dan Hill is managing director of Fabrica, the Benetton Group's communication research centre in Treviso, Italy. Formerly a strategic design lead at Sitra. An interaction designer by trade, he has previously been a design leader at Arup, Monocle, BBC, Domus and others.
cityofsound.com

Maijia Oksanen is a graduate student at the MSc Business & Design, University of Gothenburg, and an intern with Sitra's Helsinki Design Lab.

Rory Hyde is a Melbourne-based architect and researcher. He received his PhD from RMIT University, and is author of Future Practice: Conversations from the Edge of Architecture (Routledge 2012).
roryhyde.com

Rodrigo Araya is a consultant with the firm Tironi Asociados, based in Santiago, Chile. Specializing in the management of identities, positioning, branding, communication, organisational change and controversy. Araya holds a PhD in Anthropology from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and an MA in Political Science from the University of Chile.
web.tironi.cl

Archie Lee Coates IV is a partner of the collaborative art and design practice PlayLab, and one of the creators of the +Pool. Coates studied graphic design at Virginia Tech, and is co-founder and designer of the quarterly architecture journal CLOG.
playlab.org

Tuomas Toivonen and Nene Tsuboi, an architect and an artist respectively, are founders of the Helsinki-based practice NOW for Architecture and Urbanism. They are currently building a new public sauna in Helsinki, called the Kulttuurisauna ('culture sauna').
nowoffice.org

Marcus Westbury is a writer, broadcaster, television presenter, festival director and founder of Renew Newcastle, a not for profit urban renewal scheme that brokers access to empty buildings for creative enterprises, artists and cultural projects in his hometown of Newcastle, Australia.
renewnewcastle.org

Finn Williams is a planner based in London. He studied architecture at the Mackintosh in Glasgow, FAUP in Porto, and the Royal College of Art. He is deputy leader of Croydon Council's Placemaking Team, Policy Chair of the Friends of Arnold Circus, and founder of Common Office.
commonoffice.co.uk

Dong-Ping Wong is director of the New York-based architecture office Family, and one of the creators of the +Pool. His work is focused on determining more optimistic and productive typologies of ecological building.
familynewyork.com

Joseph Grima is the Editor in Chief of Domus, former director of the Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York, and curator of Adhocracy, 'an exhibition about people who make things'.
domusweb.it/

Colophon

www.brickstarter.org
www.helsinkidesignlab.org
www.sitra.fi

Brickstarter is a prototype for a 21st century social service. It proposes a new model for how we make shared decisions about shared spaces.

It tests the exciting potential of crowd-funding and crowdsourcing against the practical realities of debating, governing, investing in, and ultimately delivering the built environment.

Sitra.fi