

Book Review

Geomedia: Networked Cities and the Future of Public Space

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Geomedia: Networked Cities and the Future of Public Space.

Scott McQuire

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The book *Geomedia - Networked Cities and the Future of Public Space* - deals with what Scott McQuire rightly considers to be one of the key features that distinguishes our contemporary urban experience - the extension of networked digital media all through urban space. The author starts by highlighting the changes cities and city life have experienced in the last decades, changes that have impacted in the city life but also in the way it is, or should be, governed and planned. This change or transformation of media into geomedia, a name for the heterogeneous group of technologies that make up the contemporary mediascape, is recreating the city as a media space, contributing also for the gradual shift from conventional urban planning into the new mode of urban e-planning. With the expansion of networked digital media, ubiquity made digital media an important part of city routines. It carries with it an important transformation of social practices, as contents and connections tend now to be available anywhere and anytime. In addition, location-aware devices created new social practices and commercial logics that tend to impact the urban space, which together will continue to challenge conventional models of urban planning and the way we govern cities.

The book has five chapters, besides the Introduction, each addressing, through a specific issue, different facets of the shift from media to geomedia. The book has an extensive section of endnotes and a long and updated list of bibliographical references that will certainly prove helpful for all those interested in the impact of geomedia in the practice of urban e-planning. Chapter 1 ('Transforming Media and Public Space', pp. 17-64) describes these changes responsible for the rise of the contemporary networked public space, discussing how the right to a networked city might be addressed and how formal urban planning can overcome its apparent inability to deal with these new characteristics of our contemporary cities. The second chapter ('Googling the City', pp. 65-90) explores and discusses the consequences of proprietary urban data platforms (Google street view), in a period when imaging is increasingly central for mapping and for the digital economy. And as Scott McQuire shows, while there is a need to discuss issues of control over data and proprietary platforms it is also imperative to be more than just reactive and to start imagining and exploring different agendas for urban communication infrastructure, which will also have to consider new modes of urban (e-)planning.

The following chapter ('Participatory Public Space', pp. 91-122) shows how Street View offers insights on how networked public space might be configured by commercial platforms, although, as

the author argues, this is not the only possible orientation of geomedia. Based on this perspective, the chapter explores how people can start to reverse this, discussing the notion of participation and the new models of public encounter in this new technological context. Through multiple examples, it is shown how geomedia has the potential to create more open urban arenas, what the author calls participatory public space, capable of supporting experimental forms of being with others in public. The fourth chapter ('Urban Screens and Urban Media Events', pp. 123-156) explores social encounter in contemporary public space, based in the fieldwork conducted by the author into the use of large video screens situated in public space. His findings suggest the need to rethink the relation between public sphere and public space, a process that could lead to the development of new models of citizen-engagement and communication. And if some of the conditions set by Aristoteles are no longer possible in the current multicultural megacities, as the author argues in the last chapter ('Recomposing Public Space', pp. 157-168), some others continue to be valid and call for new discussions, for which this book is certainly a useful contribution.

In sum, the book main concern is clearly the exploration of the new conditions facing urban public space, seen as a contact zone, a place in which the new digital means available are reinventing the relations between citizens in the city and beyond its physical limits. For Scott Mcquire, a better public culture, able to facilitate interactions between strangers in our increasingly multicultural cities, depends on our capacity to imagine and explore new experiences of being with others in public, taking advantage of the new media technologies available, a process in which urban e-planning can certainly play an important role. These innovative insights offered by the author will be valuable for readers of the IJEPR and for all those working in the field of urban e-planning.

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