Saskia Sassen @SaskiaSassen Re> TED prize: the city. Here a great project community originated, made, maintained, aims at global network of such http://www.globalcitynetwork.org Cidades pela Retoma

presentation at the 'crisis regimes and emerging social movements' workshop, Athens, 7-10 febr. 2013

HOW CAN CITIES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES DEAL WITH TIMES OF CRISIS AND TRANSITION?







- **1. Cidades pela Retoma** emerged from the recognition that civil society will be able to organize itself at local scales to reflect about its collective future, when confronted with changing paradigms and the emergency of a financial, economic and social crisis with deep impacts on people's lives.
- 2. It also acknowledges that, despite the incipient, fragile and ephemeral nature of many urban civic movements, their resilience and consistency justify greater attention, proximity and engagement from research and policy.
- 3. Finally, it thrives on the potential of our cities to promote new forms of economic, social and spatial development, accepting that this demands the mobilisation and alignment of available energies (civic, productive, knowledge, social and economic actors) as well as the definition of new collective arenas (real and virtual) of encounter, reflection and action.

What are our arguments?

1.

The local scale of interventions and the growing autonomy of urban actors suggest that the common ground of civic action is not always ideological or corporative, but material- the city, neighbourhood or street are often the spatially consistent focus of collective concerns.

2.

The proliferation and differentiation of increasingly individualised points of view and practical actions in urban contexts shows the need to filter, organise and support them technically and culturally.



Cidades pela Retoma

(cities for recovery)

A collective platform dedicated to discuss the role of cities and their communities in times of economic and social transition. Its mission is to observe and disseminate urban practices and knowledge, and to build bridges between active social movements. The group aims to improve participation in cities and reflect about the future of citizenship.

1. LOUDSPEAKER

A tool to facilitate greater exchange and cooperation between social movements

Global City 2.0 Network

www.globalcitynetwork.org

Global map and discussion forum of urban civic groups

Cities Civic Think Tank

citiescivicthinktank.blogs.sapo.pt

Repository of technical and scientific knowledge about cities

Timeline

2. BRIDGE

A platform of observation and dissemination of collective practices and knowledge

low-cost & high value Urban Initiatives

ruadasideias.blogs.sapo.pt

survey of effective and valuable community projects (publication)

Local Agenda for Recovery

agendalocalretoma.blogs.sapo.pt

Mobilisation / discussion of projects with visible effects in local economy

Timeline

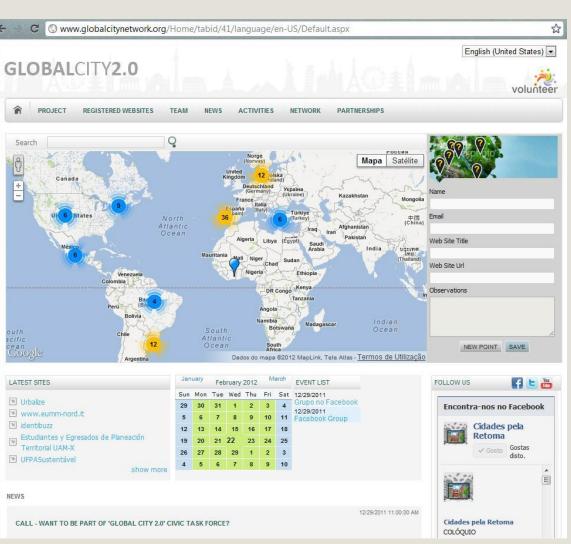
1.

Global City 2.0 is an attempt to map and connect urban civic groups worldwide in order to create a global platform for interaction, learning and exchange. The project website was developed pro-bono by *Ponto C*, from Aveiro, under the European Year for Volunteering 2011 initiative. The Global City 2.0 network is now online and in the process of collecting information and mobilising support from groups and institutions around the world.



Global City 2.0 presentation with Saskia Sassen, Lisbon, April 2011





Low-cost & High-value Urban Initiatives is a project that documents efforts by local communities and social and economic actors in the search for creative solutions to develop local economies. The publication intends to identify low-cost and high-value community-led initiatives that address concrete problems and develop local potentials in relevant fields. The actions should be locally based, quick to implement and directed to the public.

what? Project

 People who?

• Story why?

• Timeline when?

where? Maps

The Complete UrbanBuzz - UCL, 2009

The seeds of sustainable change

PROJECT PROFILES ABUNDANCE

Agricultural Networks of Creativity and Endeavour (ABUNDANCE)

Transition Towns Brixton, Guinness Trust Residents Association, volunteers

http:transition.towns.org/Brixton/ABUNDANCE

Project coordinato Robert Biel, UCL

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The Abundance project is rooted in the potential of cities to produce food. A community in Brixton, south London, has created a flourishing demonstration plot and is working through the issues involved to sustain it

Activating **Blighted** Urban Niches for Daring Agricultural **Networks** of Creativity and Endeavour

Project Activating Blighted Urban Niches for Daring input, high output' community garden, and to demonstrate just how productive urban agriculture can be.

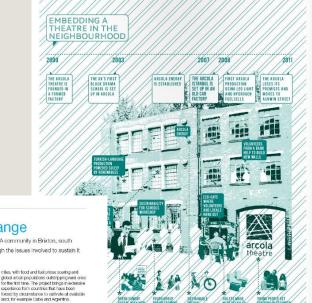
Surveys suggest that a very significant amount, as high as 60 per cent, of food needs could be met within cities if all available space were to be cuttivated, including rooftops, baiconies, alictments and urban green space says project coordinator Robert Biel.

The team and local residents are already enjoying the first crops of fruit and vegetables they've grown in their new demonstration plot at the Guinness Trust allotments in Brixton, south London.

A key other for Abundance is the emerging global food crisis and the drive to reduce food alobal urban populations autstripping rural ones for the first time. The project brings in extensive orience from countries that have been forced by circumstance to cultivate all available

in Argentina, for example, community gardens were created to mitigate the effects of the 2001 economic collapse. As the economy recovered, the popular concept was reworked into government-run urban agriculture programmes providing unemployed worke with food and an income. It would seem that activacsity broads sustainability, as the Bridon plot, along with many of London's parks and gardens, was last cultivated during the food shortages of wartime Britain.





THE STORY

Acting and environmental engineering might seem an odd mix. But for the Arcola Theatre in Dalston, it has proven a successful recipe for upskilling young people, working with migrant groups, creating a resilient community asset and increasing eco-awareness in a highly diverse part of the London Borough of Hackney.

When the Arcola Theatre opened in a former textile factory in 2000, its founders, Turkish migrants Mehmet Ergen and Leyla Nazli, were determined to make it a place that was open for local initiatives. Realising the tremendous diversity of the area - over 100 languages are spoken in the vicinity of the Arcola Theatre - their ethos was to combine a welcoming attitude to community-driven projects with theatrical innovation and experimentation. The theatre was soon hosting a variety of productions set up by local groups, including young people, older residents, refugees and a host of ethnic and religious minority groups. As a consequence, 60% of its audiences are from the local boroughs of Hackney and

Arcola was created on a shoestring - the founders primarily used their own credit cards and personal savings and the theatre has continued to run on minimal funds even as productions have scaled up. Every Tuesday it offers a number of 'pay what you can' tickets, as a way of making theatre more accessible to the local residents. To enable this approach, the Arcola has cultivated a network of volunteers, more than a hundred of whom regularly contribute their time and energy in a wide variety of

In 2005 one of them made a bold suggestion. Ben Todd, an engineer, suggested that the Arcola could add environmental sustainability to its social agenda and become the first carbon-neutral theatre in the UK. In accordance with the organisation's ethos, Nazli and Ergen gave Todd

free rein to use the theatre as testing ground and demor stration platform. The result was Arcola Energy, which drives sustainability within the arts by providing advice and inspiration to other theatres, as well as becoming a commercial provider of sustainable energy solutions. In 2008, the theatre featured its first production powered by hydrogen fuel cells and lit by LED lamps, cutting its standard energy consumption by 60%.

interdependent parts: the theatre, the charity that runs community and training programmes, and the energy company - with strong linkages that enable learning and co-development. Diversification into these different funding streams has also increased Arcola's resilience in the long term; although the theatre over time has obtained funding from organisations like the Arts Council, no single source makes up more than 15% of its reve

benefits: the Arcola has for example built strong relation ships with Hackney Council, which has recognised the theatre's role in driving local sustainability initiatives. When, in 2010, the former factory was to be turned into luxury flats, the council took a proactive role in brokering a deal to find the theatre a new home.

In 2011, the new Arcola Theatre opened up in the Colour works Factory, less than half a mile from its original site The move took only a couple of months and was carried out with the help of more than 1,000 volunteers. Having moved to a larger site, the Arcola is now able to grow. offering bigger theatre productions as well as increasing its portfolio of partnerships and projects. It has already set up a sustainable energy incubator that will include elements of R&D as well as genuine small-scale

Compendium for the Civic Economy | Case Study #01 | 19

Compendium for the civic economy: what the Big Society should learn from 25 trailblazers 00:/, NESTA & Design Council CABE, 2011

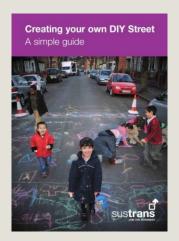
Global City 2.0 | Low-cost & High-value Urban Initiatives

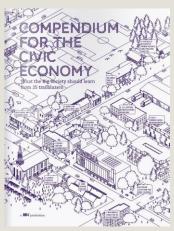
"Develop an alternative medium to support and catalyse global interdependencies and collaborations beyond the bureaucratic and exclusivist pipelines of **markets**, **corporations** or **public authorities**."



COTEC PORTHIGAL

Cidades pela Retoma







Cidades pela Retoma is neither a social movement with direct intervention in particular causes nor a merely academic effort towards generic discussions.

It is a builder of **bridges** between other movements and a **loudspeaker** for other people's practices – its aim is to support and enable both

"... to search within the present for alternative futures. There are two major paths to such an end. We may examine the plethora of oppositional movements to neoliberalism and seek to distil from them the essence of a broad-based oppositional program. Or we can resort to theoretical and practical analysis of our existing condition to define alternatives. [...] The task is to initiate dialogue between those taking both paths and thereby deepen collective understandings of possibilities..." Harvey, 2004

Questions & Constraints

1. Internal Issues

- Structure: from informal platform to established association?
 - Sources of Funding: where, when, what for?
- Daily Life: how to keep an informal group of people spread all over the country with other priorities on their hands working steadily towards a common project?
 - 2. Who are our "neo-liberal" targets, enemies, partners?
 - Mobilisation efforts happen more against burocratic, autistic and ineffective public authorities than truly corporate-style neo-liberal forces

Rather abandon and forbid access to spaces than tolerate self-management and occupation for social purposes





Rather oppose the clear majority of the population and spend available funds on questionable projects to "leave a legacy"





Questions & Constraints

3. Cidades pela Retoma: also a product of neo-liberalism?

Harvey, 2004:

"The neo-liberal state emphasizes the importance of personal and individual freedom, liberty and responsibility [...] It should not be surprising that the primary collective means of action under neo-liberalism are then defined and articulated through non-elected (and in many instances elite-led) advocacy groups for various kinds of rights. NGOs have grown and proliferated under neo-liberalism, giving rise to the illusion that opposition mobilized outside of the state apparatus and within some separate entity called "civil society" is the powerhouse of oppositional politics and social transformation."

[...]

"The NGOs have in many instances stepped into the vacuum in social provision left by the withdrawal of the state from such activities. [...] In some cases, this seems to have helped accelerate further state withdrawal from social provision. NGOs thereby function as 'trojan horses for global neo-liberalism'."