



roomservices presents:

ADVENTURES IN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

innsbruck

*"Here, here, everything is kept inside
So take a chance and step outside
Feel frustration face to face
A point of view creates more waste
So take a chance and step outside*

*Take a chance and step outside
Lose some sleep and say you've tried"*

Joy Division, Autosuggestion



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A project by roomservices (Evren Uzer and Otto von Busch), Innsbruck 2005 | www.roomservices.org



This knowledge production atlas of Innsbruck looks on networks and places and the lines that are connecting them on basis of production type, medium and transparency. As Roomserves we don't claim that it's a finished or objective and correct mapping. On the contrary this atlas is very subjective, the concepts proposed are quite blurry and imprecise, not enough for classic academic research, open for change, re-interpretation, re-naming or re-classification tool more for inspiration than instruction. For most groups we have only focused on one part or aspect of their practice –the low level knowledge production and this might not represent their whole practice or their public outlook.

This work is a second part of an artistic research series on alternative localities which was started in Dale-Norway (NKD, June 2005) in form of an audio tour, which aims to represent cities in alternative ways. As their nature of being artistic research these series open possibilities of cross disciplinary connections and unconventional transgressions in our perception of the city.

When mapping this low- and mid-level knowledge production we focused on the serious hobbyists, spare time specialists and professional amateurs who rigorously practice their interests and live for their generative sideline activities. Pro-Ams, or Professional Amateurs, is a term used by the British everyday democracy think-tank Demos (www.demos.ac.uk) and have been defined as “a new social hybrid who force us to rethink they way we think about work and leisure time” and participate in activities that “blur the traditional definitions of professional and amateur.” (Demos Pro-Am report, Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller 2004). Pro-Ams contribute to economy, research, social life from various ways and forms spanning from amateur astronomy to hobby modeling. As professional technology becomes cheaper and the population more skilled, new networks of user-innovators emerge and get connected globally through internet. In the example of amateur astronomers they today have very good observation material, and internet communities of amateur astronomers discuss and exchange observation and contribute to astronomy in the form of new discoveries. Different sport practitioners improve and invent new equipment for their sport and manage to survive by selling these inventions through their network.

There is an increasing number of people who spend as much time on a hobby or an interest as they spend to their livelihood employment or

even live on what was once their hobby (midnight programmers, clans of professional computer players as well as eBay pickers to name some active on internet). And most of the big computer firms today have been initiated by computer geeks working at their garage for fun. In this "Adventures in Local Knowledge Production" atlas, the main motivation for us is to reveal groups of Pro-Ams that contribute to cultural, economic, social life in different levels but are not directly institutionalized in the system and survives more on self organized and initiated structures than direct economic profit or heavy state support. The main area for these actors is in a low- or mid-level knowledge production, not the white coats or edge competences in the corridor of power that the politicians usually talk about when they say "research and development", but the broader level of educated people meeting in NGOs or different communities. They are usually organized in non-profit or idealistic communities, challenged by their artistic curiosity, idealistic belief, or practical economic need in form of DIY cheap solutions for their own interest.

All this motivation and community activity is something unaccounted in the modernistic and industrial models of society. They are sidelines in our perception of work and leisure, professionalism and amateurship, and thus falls out of what is counted as "productive" activity for society. Community life has usually been seen as connected to a political sphere in society, fostering democracy and recreational energy, but rarely connected to the economical sphere in form of business and employment. But today we can see "cooperative citizenship" where the democratic choices reach into our shopping behavior, from buying "fair trade" products to vegan shoes. But also in collaborations between (political) interest organizations and car manufacturers on using non-allergic chemicals and plastics inside the car's driving environment. Suddenly a knowledge and interest born outside of the company becomes integrated into the firm. An expertise raised in a non-profit and democratic interest blends with capitalistic modes of production. Solutions and inventions from the street level, outside the company's lab becomes the motor for economic change.

Another track of knowledge production is the network of the user innovator. The combined User-Innovator has been around for a long time but through industrialism and specialization the roles



was separated and distinct roles of producers and consumers were born. Some even suggest that the 19th century design of our whole public education system was a strategy for producing replaceable soldiers, factory workers and builders for the society as machine, with discipline, punctuality, order and basic reading skills reading, as the basis functions of the society as machine.

This specialization and strict division between producers and consumers has been supported by many economic theories, both for preaching innovation and growth (producers make new inventions for profit) and of suppression of communal tendencies (birth of consumer culture to absorb and diffuse potential revolutionary energies). By separating these roles the division contributes to the design of closed products, discouraging engagement with consumer goods as well as displacing user-innovation to the distant pages of hobby magazines while firms heavily promote their products in the glossy spotlight of life-style magazines.

But low-level user-innovation is not an obscure practice, but a wide field of knowledge production and design, spanning from programming open source software, developing kite-surfing equipment, inventing astronomical tools and exploring new techniques at radio transmissions. Not to mention all cultural production made at this level in small poetry zines and punk band rehearsals but also the highly trendsetting street fashion scene and innovatively curated street markets. But all these activities are falling outside of the models of industrialism and the basis for the production of the welfare state. Thus they have long been in the shadow from public attention and of questionable economic interest.

The collective practices:

What we have been exploring are the small scale, independent (and often non-profit) initiatives on knowledge production. They all somehow propose changes in social and economic relations and are distinct actors in the local scene and public domain. Through tactics of small change they perform micro-politics and offers new possibilities by facilitating flows and initiatives, sometimes independently but more often in informal networks.

The possibilities in this case are the extended interface for action in society, the bridging of gaps, trespassing of borders by breaking two main patterns of consumer culture; interpassivity and radical



mediocrity. These two patterns are processes of homogenization of markets by promotion of ready-made diversity. Through tools and structures (which are often said to be “interactive”), we, as “consumers” are involved in rituals that are pacifying (canned laughter on TV, photocopying books we never read, etc.) and also some parts of the everyday creative process is consumed by the sophistication of media itself. For example by buying a ready-made sauce for the dinner I have a better sauce made in two minutes, but at the same time my chance of learning how to really make a sauce is taken away from me. In a short rational calculation over time and taste I give away my ability to evolve into becoming a master chef.

These tendencies of interpassivity and radical mediocrity are defied and defended by the collective practices we have explored on this local scale. They form new occupations in the public domain, reclaim the creative sphere for themselves and form new alliances of low-level infrastructure, exploding design space through distributed production and open sharing of knowledge. They blur the borders of professional and amateur and by their sometimes semi-economic models, they collapse old models of political ideology, suggesting unexpected passages to maneuver home made initiatives. They are the street level think tanks reorganizing specific situations and experiment in the tension between radical mobilization of creativity and organizational institutionalization, using street level democratic practices to advance the liquid forms of collaboration and representation. By acting and promoting the commons of practice and information they defy the current trends of copyright defences and closing of product initiatives. These commons are of content, form and expression and acts as a pool for empowered development or interaction, a source of innovation and mutation.

By creating an atlas we have tried to map and better understand the connections and potentials in this low-level production. The borders are blurry and our different concepts and borders are artificial as outcome of our short and very subjective research process. But the aim is to bring something hidden into the light and making a tool for its further exploration by the local community itself. The actors we have found are mostly self-organized communities but we also have included some more institutional and state supported networks since we found their connections



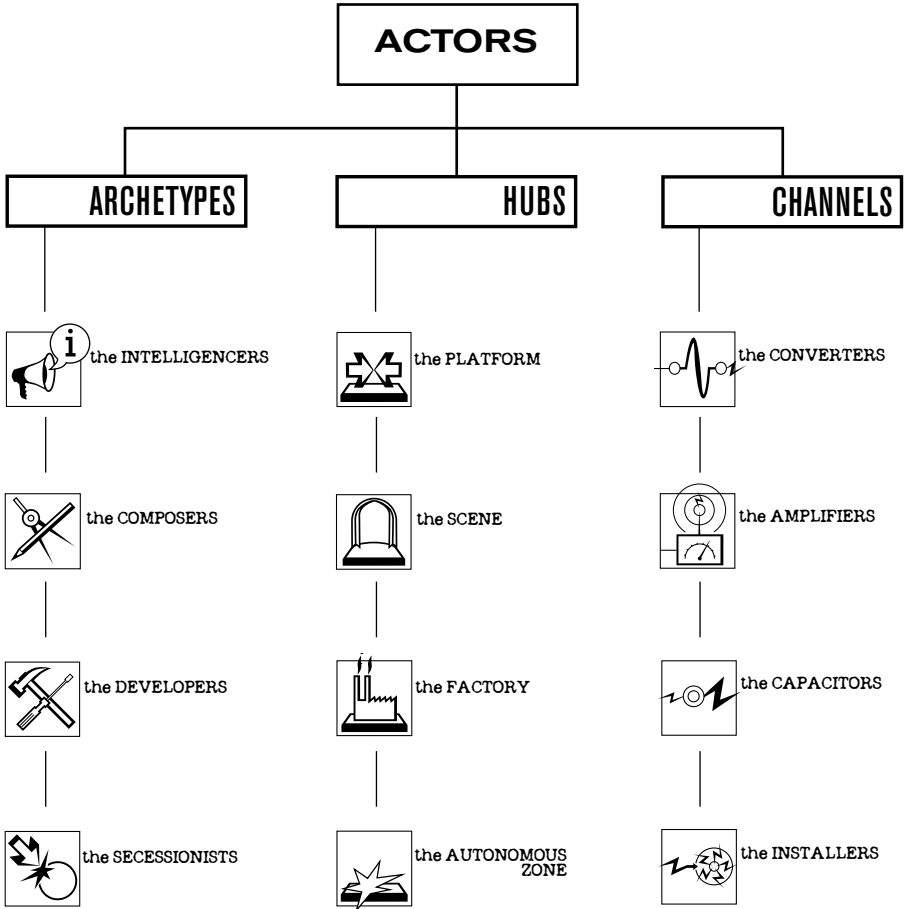
intense and their open minded approach to the other networks we document. All these actors are also productive units in society and arenas for radical democracy, since they encourage an open contest of ideas and transparency in their collaborative work. At this level they are the true “creative industries” as they are the breeders of wider layers of ideas of information and open sharing of their knowledge in support for a wide idea of commons, also the open spaces for socializing and oppositional camps are in this field. By offering a living example they affect the surrounding society and offer a free room for open practice which is the basis for a wider democratic knowledge production.

At this level we found a lot of initiatives, old and new. What we have experienced is not so much a crisis of people that are “bowling alone” but other forms of communities and associations but that are invisible to the statistics, they have rarely official record of members and board of leaders but work totally through informal structures and networks. Some are registered for some state support but most work along the margins of the structures.

We have also consciously included a level of economic exchange since we find that most groups produce large amount of knowledge but lack tools and markets for exchange. Our hope is that by cross-reading the concepts on the cards, new possibilities of exchange and collaborations might occur. Our observations and concepts might also be inaccurate in someone’s eyes and self-image, but hopefully this misreading might also be turned into something fruitful, such as non foreseen common points for future collaborations.

The Actors:

Alternative knowledge production atlas is prepared as a toolbox that reveals the layers of knowledge production in Innsbruck within the form of a booklet and series of cards. Cards are showing the three types/levels of local knowledge production in Innsbruck and their subtypes under each title. Archetypes, Hubs and Channels are the three main categories we have identified in this field of action. Each group and their sub-groups have rooted from 2-3 examples from Innsbruck but they could easily be in Istanbul, Malmo or any other city. The basic idea to prepare it in the form of cards is to enable additions while thinking about different cities and making the toolbox more open to change. Our main aim is to



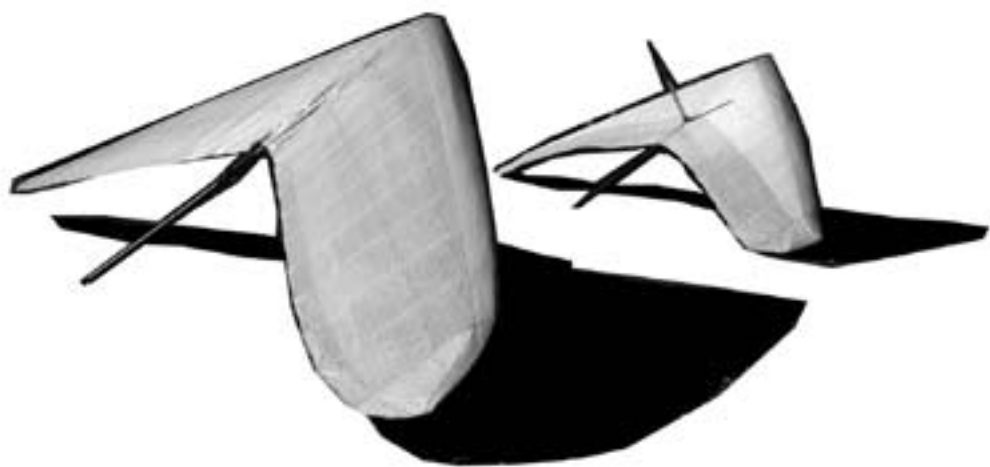
make this work available for any interested group and encourage the discussions and additions on it, thus becoming an engine in furthering the collaborations at this level.

Archetypes show the groups/networks that are main actors in alternative knowledge production in Innsbruck. They span from self-initiated hobbyists that are dealing with their model planes on the spare time left from their 'official' job, to more established, self-initiated communities that work on building networks such as local Linux user groups. The second type, hubs are the places that act as medium and energizers for people and/or groups that produce knowledge in different levels and types. They vary from state-supported 'umbrella' organizations to squats that embody the alternative discussion they provoke. Third and last type is channels that are the transmitters of this knowledge production circle. Channels vary from flea market or eBay sales to social production places and empowering rehabs. Some groups, individuals, or networks are re-appearing at different levels in these categories because of their multi-layered structure. They are interpreted accordingly to their complex nature and they have been placed as a primary example at one category and maybe a secondary or tertiary example at another.

The work condensates information on local knowledge production but also opens possibilities for forming practical Prosumer or barter networks, exchange through Complementary Currencies as well as semi-entrepreneurial occupations of Pro-Am sharing, low-level DIY interventions and micro-politics.

When I am working on a problem I never think about beauty. I only think about how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

Buckminster Fuller



A possible way to use this roomservices toolbox as workshop equipment

Duration:

2, 5 hours of workshop, lifetime effects.

Necessary props:

Roomservices toolbox of alternative local knowledge production.

Comfy chairs and pencils/pens for the participants.

Naivety, sense of humor, fresh eyes and dirty hands.

Motto:

"Dare to be naïve", Buckminster Fuller,

Intended effect:

Widened view on everyday structures, inspiration for creative imagination.

The workshop is aimed at improving an understanding of this field and level of production in a local context but also as a tool for further these understandings into new proposals for organization and collaborations.

This workshop proposal requires around 12-25 participants and a moderator/organizer, but it might also be played more as a brainstorming tool in smaller groups.

1. Distribute the actor-cards to the workshop groups. Let them read through, discuss and alter the cards to better represent their local situation. Let them use the examples as inspiration, but also add or change if they need to tune their actors to better fit their situation. Improve tools for the different groups to improve playful interaction – maybe a voice amplification device for the “amplifiers” (giving them a short newscast every 30min), wooden coins for the “converters” etc. Each actor-group should prepare a short presentation of their actors function and their local situation to the other groups.
2. Every turn is 30 minutes of negotiations and brainstorming, all actors trying to come up with collaborations and improvised exchanges. Let all actors propose collaborations and ideas for common events.

Try to think low- or zero-budget alternatives, but reject no ideas. Try to involve many actors in your ideas, think about design, production, distribution and feedback.

3. After a first turn, make a small summary of the actions and proposals that came up. Boost the actors to develop ideas further by involving more actors, making more rigorous and detailed plans. The moderator should try to help lone actors to connect into more dynamic groups to see how they might contribute.

4. After a few rounds some events might have become wide as festivals or sharp edged as institutions. 5-6 rounds might be enough. Make sure every group makes notes and keep “almost real”, exploring dynamics and possibilities, not necessarily defying natural laws.

5. End the game with summarizing the outcome. Propose new actors or re-modeling of the cards. Write down many of the ideas and see how you might work further on them, eventually book another meeting for furthering and promoting these ideas to the concerned local actors.

And let us know about your experience and your re-modeled cards by sending an e-mail to roomservices@gmail.com



Industrialism and modernism, as we have known them, appear to move to China and thus media has told us our future welfare is based on hyped mantras of "knowledge society", "research and development" and "creative industries". But what are the movements traced on street level, the new forms of occupation in the public domain? What happens if we try to map these mostly unseen connections of micro-politics and knowledge production, trying to identify their archetypes, hubs and channels? Roomservices has produced a small atlas that might work as a tool for seeing these aspects of the city, a naïve intervention to reveal hidden networks and communities that form the dynamics of a city.