Urban Informatics beyond Data: Media Architecture, Placemaking, and Citizen Action

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ABSTRACT
Since 2006, we have been conducting urban informatics research that we define as “the study, design, and practice of urban experiences across different urban contexts that are created by new opportunities of real-time, ubiquitous technology and the augmentation that mediates the physical and digital layers of people networks and urban infrastructures” [1]. Various new research initiatives under the label “urban informatics” have been started since then by universities (e.g., NYU’s Center for Urban Science and Progress) and industry (e.g., Arup, McKinsey) worldwide. Yet, many of these new initiatives are limited to what Townsend calls, “data-driven approaches to urban improvement” [2]. One of the key challenges is that any quantity of aggregated data does not easily translate directly into quality insights to better understand cities. In this talk, I will raise questions about the purpose of urban informatics research beyond data, and show examples of media architecture, participatory city making, and citizen activism. I argue for (1) broadening the disciplinary foundations that urban science approaches draw on; (2) maintaining a hybrid perspective that considers both the bird’s eye view as well as the citizen’s view, and; (3) employing design research to not be limited to just understanding, but to bring about actionable knowledge that will drive change for good.

Categories and Subject Descriptors: H. [Information Systems]: H.m MISCELLANEOUS
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1. BIO
Professor Marcus Foth is founder and director of the Urban Informatics Research Lab, Research Leader of the School of Design, and Professor in Interactive & Visual Design, Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology. His research focuses on the relationships between people, place and technology. He leads a cross-disciplinary team that develops practical approaches to complex urban problems. He adopts human-computer interaction and design methodologies to build engagement around emerging issues facing our cities. Professor Foth’s recent work has examined: (i) Urban planning – new approaches to community participation and engagement; (ii) Environmental sustainability – new strategies for energy monitoring in domestic settings; (iii) Food futures – new ideas to re-think eating, cooking and growing food in the city; and (iv) Collaboration and co-working spaces – new aspirations for libraries in the 21st century.

Professor Foth has received over $4 million in national competitive grants and industry funding. He received a Queensland Young Tall Poppy Science Award 2013, and was inducted by the planning, design and development site Plan- etizen to the world’s top 25 leading thinkers and innovators in the field of urban planning and technology.

Professor Foth has authored and co-authored over 130 publications in journals, edited books, and conference proceedings. He is the editor of the Handbook of Research on Urban Informatics (IGI 2009), co-author of Action Research and New Media (Hampton Press 2009), co-editor of From Social Butterfly to Engaged Citizen (MIT Press 2011), Eat, Cook, Grow: Mixing Human-Computer Interactions with Human-Food Interactions (MIT Press 2014), and Citizen’s Right to the Digital City (Springer, 2016). He was the co-chair of the Oxford Internet Institute’s Summer Doctoral Programme 2009, chair of OZCHI 2009, the 5th International Conference on Communities and Technologies (C&T) 2011, and co-chair of FoodCHI 2014. He will chair Designing Interactive Systems (DIS) 2016.

2. REFERENCES