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SHOPS

Where production, exchange and consumption meet.

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my villages/ Publicworks

"This is the shop and the shop can be many things."

The title refers to an exhibition in 1994 curated by Bart de Baere at SMAK in Ghent, which was called "This is the show and the show can be many things". The title has since been adapted for many different social, spatial and cultural formats. These notes are towards a shop version.

I am not a shopkeeper, nor am I a keen shopper.

I am an artist.

I am interested in shops as familiar and everyday places for social and cultural exchange and communication, where production meets consumption.

Leila McAlister who runs a small local grocery shop in Shoreditch once said: "I like shops, because they are very straight forward".

Shops are incredible exhibition and communication spaces organised around negotiations and agreements about value.

They are incremental to a capitalist society, where value is measured in money and exchange led by profit, but they are much more than a function.

They are important cultural spaces embedded in our everyday.

A shop can be anything.

Small, big, tiny.

Messy, tidy, organised, chaotic.

On the corner or online.

Glossy, shabby, designed, appropriated.

Exclusive, inclusive, owned, shared, individual, communal.

There are a million reasons to go to a shop.

And there can be a million things in a shop.

For R-urban I'm going to look at the concept of a local shop, one that is stocked through local production and provides for local needs (a "Gemischtwarenladen", a "Corner Shop", a "Genral Store" an "Epicerie") but also its capacity to trade and communicate on a trans-local scale.

The shops and forms of trade that interest me in connection with R-urban are of course those where producers and the outcomes of local production are directly fed into a circle of exchange and trade. Where producers are directly linked to the trade of their goods,

and where the consumption and income feeds into supporting and strengthening other local activities.

Shops as public realm

Shops sit at a key point between production and consumption, and they are based on mutual agreement over values.

Shops can very easily communicate.

Their appearance, style, organisation, stock of goods and chosen currency are all a direct portrait of their ambition.

They are complex socio-cultural spaces, and can be developed as means to make and nurture a particular public realm, one which is inclusive, representative, with numerous access points, multi-functional and for multi-authored, etc.

For the "Park Products" project (by public works) in Kensington Gardens, the shop - or the trading table - was the space for a new public realm within the park, where different users of the park would meet through making and trading local goods made by other users. The shift in roles from user to producer was important in order to question the idea of a public park as provided facility for individual use. It was to interrupt the seemingly clear-cut division between provision and consumption, in order to stress the fact that the park as a public realm is constantly being co-produced by everyone involved.

R-urban is sharing this concept of making communal space through co-production, where everyone takes on different degrees of involvement.

The places - I call them shops for now - where knowledge, goods and services are passed on are very varied within R-urban.

They range from

- the completely informal individual (e.g. the gardening plot where some tips about growing spinach are passed on)
- to informal collective pedagogical (seminars and lessons)
- informal social situations, like cooking together
- more formal lessons in making
- stalls for selling and buying
- organised markets and shops
- trans-local dissemination through conferences, discussions and publications.

They are the spaces where knowledge and goods are being shared, and in order to nurture and grow a "culture of sharing" it is important that all these

"transactions" are seen and understood as part of a particular idea of a local and economy which includes formal and informal forms of exchange of objects and knowledge.

The exchanges might predominantly be seen as social actions but they are also economical actions.

I'm interested in trading spaces which are very directly linked to spaces of production: work - shops.

Where the making and makers are visible and tangible and concrete.
Where marking, trading and using are close together.

Economy is not abstract

The professionalisation of economy suggests that it is something organised and conducted by others/economist for the rest of society.

The language and mechanics of economy have been affiliated with specialists who organise the economy for us, and we are simply characters at the receiving end.

Economy and its language needs to be reclaimed for the everyday and for small scale action.

It needs to become concrete again and tangible, like a piece of land that can be shaped and used.

The same way that R-urban is nurturing a culture of sharing, participating and co-producing it can also promote a particular economic culture, one that acknowledges values beyond the monetary.

It would be good for R-urban to find its own language of economy, based on an ethos of gaining through sharing.

An economy of making sure there is enough. Not profit orientated.

A non gendered economy.

A mixed economy that involves money exchange, gift economies, swaps,...

Economy is not something added on, it is integral to everything, and also needs its own pedagogy.

The same "pedagogy" of having individual gardening plots next to a more professional collective run one (Agrolab) could be applied to the subject of economy (Tradelab): R-urban could set structures for economies, e.g. market plots alongside a permanent shop, spaces for temporary trade given to local businesses, start up bursaries to support local individuals to make their own associated business, etc.

Relationship economy - culture - to set out as a hybrid

Again, this is about economy being integral, not something that is being added on in order to make a project financially viable and sustainable.

The current situation at R-urban has a clear economy, with external EU money and local funding financing the set up of the infrastructure for the whole project.

A forecast for how R-urban will function economically in three years time might be a good exercise.

I can see a danger of the expectations being too high that the project will be able to sustain itself financially in the long term.

I think traditionally there is a rather either-or view of social enterprises. They are either

commercially viable or cultural/educational and therefore subsidised.

I think it would be unfair to a project like R-urban to expect it to be financially viable on top of all the other challenges and ambitions it has set for itself.

It might be healthy to be clear from the start that as a project it should be supported financially into the future in order to be able to achieve its wide range of ambitions.

If its economy turns out to be self-sustaining it is a surplus, but it shouldn't be a condition.

Common goods and collective goods

Commons exist and grow through commoning.

In regards to produce and objects that result from R-urban it would be interesting to speculate on what are or could be common goods.

The land and the facilities are used in common, which is very clearly set up, communicated and facilitated.

Can some outcomes and products from these activities be declared common goods?

I suggest the development of one or a few collectively developed goods.

To bring together a group to develop a new product based on the existing pool of knowledge and in response to Agrocite.

A new product and the way its copyright is issued, and the way it is traded could embody and communicate this ambition to create new commons.

Imagining a shop for Agrocite

Once the building is starting to get used, a huge effort should be made to have a brilliant shop.

This can be for just two weeks, but the shop should give an idea of what is being produced and exchanged within R-urban.

The first shop is an introduction to all possible shops.

The project is so rich and the shop should be impressive.

It should make everyone feel ambitious about what else is possible.

In the same way the garden has done this so far.

What is produced?

From water to energy to knowledge, produce, events etc.

Lists of possible goods from the site are drawn up beforehand.

They range from energy to vegetable and tools, compost sets, DIY kits, manuals, building material, food and ideas.

Other shops and stalls can join in for a market day.

Local businesses can come and visit and trade.

The first shops will have to resolve many questions.

Who is the shopkeeper?

What is the currency?
Does the shop have a name? And a sign?
What is happening with the turnover?
How to reflect on informal trade and gift economy?

Further to explore

Think local processing

To invest in tools for processing beyond the simple manual or technical.
Instruments for more transformative production, e.g. a press (for compressing seed bombs, compost), a steriliser for preserving conserve and juices, a shredder for paper and shrubs, a saw and planer for wood, etc.

Think shops/trading formats for each site

List of case studies (collective shops and local shops/economies)

Sketch transfer and exchange between the 3 R-urban sites and between R-urban and the non-local

Start/continue a product catalogue for Agrocite