



# PANDEMIC, PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND REINVENTION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

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## A B S T R A K

Bagaimana kita mendefinisikan partisipasi selama pandemi? Apakah kita berada di era yang membutuhkan penemuan kembali ruang fisik kita dan mode partisipasi kita untuk membangun masyarakat baru? Virus corona baru telah mendekonstruksi ruang sosial seperti yang kita kenal, dan secara signifikan mengganggu partisipasi kita di bidangnya. Hari ini kita menyaksikan bentuk ruang baru, mengingat pandemi yang sedang berlangsung dan dampaknya terhadap partisipasi kita, ruang fisik, dan budaya digital. Artikel ini menunjukkan perubahan yang terjadi di ruang fisik dan terhubung yang membentuk "urbanisme virtual baru" kami (Doueihi, 2011). Ini menggambarkan praktik partisipasi di taman alam di Jenewa-Swiss dan Pays de Gex-France, membedakan tiga jenis ruang: ruang pra-pandemi, ruang kurungan dan ruang deconfinement. Ini menunjukkan bagaimana praktik sosial budaya berubah dalam kaitannya dengan konfigurasi ruang dan penggunaan teknologi digital. Apakah kita perlu menemukan kembali ruang kita untuk mendorong partisipasi? Jawabannya mungkin terletak dalam mempertimbangkan pengembangan jejak digital kita dan memanennya dalam proyek yang terorganisir dengan aturan, tujuan, administrasi, manajemen, dan tata kelola. Dalam pengertian ini, partisipasi digital menjadi penuh dan efisien ketika bergantung pada proses membangun memori dan termasuk mereka yang menemukan diri mereka dikucilkan dari dunia baru ini.

## INTRODUCTION

How should we reinvent our spaces and reshape our daily practices currently affected by the Covid-19 pandemic? What kind of culture emerges in a context of social distancing and how to ensure an effective and inclusive remote participation? By targeting the lungs and other vital organs in the human body the Sars-Cov-2 virus has disrupted the social interaction and crippled the rapprochement between the human bodies. As a result, our bodies became isolated, distant, and suspicious whenever and wherever they may be. Physical and social distancing have become the new norm in the fight to limit contagion. To better cope with the imposed

social distancing, individuals increasingly rely on digital technology, to maintain their ties. The "social process" (Mead), which refers to the elementary fact of coexistence, communication and cooperation through which humans organize their environment and live-in society, has been disturbed.

Furthermore, the distancing imposed by the virus has affected social action by blurring the meanings of gestures and expressions. For symbolic interactionists, individuals grow in social interaction. In other words, we interact with one another to create symbolic environments, and in return, the interpretation of those same environments shapes our behaviors

and relationships. Unsurprisingly, the current pandemic forces us today to reexamine the social interaction, which sits at the basis of participation.

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## LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY Covid-19, Culture and Space

How do we define participation during a pandemic? According to the National Center for Textual and Lexical Resources, participating means to:

"Take an active part in something (...) Pay your share, contribute (...) empathize with someone's feelings (...) Be interested (...). Hold on to the nature of something by links of analogy or similarity while keeping one's identity".

Participation as an act inevitably takes place in a given space and time. Participatory culture existed long before the Internet. Digital technology has renewed how we approach the multiple aspects of participation and measure the new opportunities it offers to build a more open society. According to Henry Jenkins, participatory culture encompasses different aspects of building communities, with the desire to share and develop, integrate or hijack commercial and cultural productions.

Hereunder, we question participation as a notion and socio-cultural practices located in a physical space, in a temporality, as well as in the digital environment. The title of this article, "the reinvention of the everyday life" echoes the work of the French scholar Michel de Certeau *the Practice of everyday life*, published in 1980. In his book, de Certeau examines how people individualize mass culture, altering things, from practical objects to street plans to rituals, laws,

and language, to make them their own. According to him, the "ordinary practitioners", who are participants in the life of a city in the context of our reflection, are:

"Walkers, Wandersmänner, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen [...]. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: as for representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93).

Furthermore, De Certeau distinguishes the lived spaces (Espace) from the dead places (Lieu). He defines "space" as the intersection of moving elements, the function "of the vectors of direction, of the quantities of speed and [of] the variable of time". On the other hand, he defines "place" as the order of contiguity, juxtaposition, and exclusion.

"So that excludes the possibility, for two things of being in the same place. [...] A place is [...] an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. In short, space is a practiced place. Thus, the street geometrically defined by town planning is transformed into space by walkers".

Of interest to us are the lived spaces, forced by the pandemic and the lasting effects of digital culture into a real revolution.

## Confinement/ Deconfinement: How to Participate in the Lived Spaces?

The appearance of the novel coronavirus has deconstructed social space as we know it, and significantly disrupted our participation in its spheres. The physical and social distancing, in addition to the closing of state borders, are barely the tip of the iceberg. The widespread panic that ensued disrupted face-to-face communication and the physical rapprochement, and on the other, the interaction between local and foreign entities. Confinement was to be the best response to contain the virus.

Interestingly today – we are witnessing yet another representation of space, in the light of

the ongoing pandemic and its impact on our digital culture.

These exemplifications are:

- 1) The pre-pandemic space,
- 2) the confinement space, and
- 3) the deconfinement space.

Their respective representations vary according to the geographical, cultural, and political context of each country. The pandemic has significantly altered the face-to-face participation in each of the space models.

Let us take the example of natural parks in a Geneva – Switzerland and the Pays de Gex, across the borders in France.

In the pre-pandemic, parks were open to the public with sets of rules aimed at ensuring the comfort and safety of visitors: thus, the opening hours posted on entrances and the parks' websites; safety rules advertised on entries and throughout those spaces; and signs were quickly visible and helped guide and inform visitors. The structures were arranged in the best ways, with clear and specified roles (cafeteria or restaurant for eating and drinking, toilets, souvenir/toy shops, lawn or benches for the picnic, local garbage cans etc.).

During the confinement/containment phase of the pandemic in France, authorities closed all public spaces to prevent gatherings and instructed the public to stay home. Park gates, for instance, were sealed with padlocks or duct tapes, and posters invaded the place with constant reminders to respect the new sanitary measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus. In that sense, parks transformed into "unpracticed places", and nature regained its foothold. Now abandoned for weeks and months, these same spaces changed, as did their uses and utilities. In neighboring Geneva (Switzerland), where the situation was qualified as "extraordinary", parks remained open to the public. Gatherings were however limited to a maximum of five people, and then 30 people as of 27.05.2020.

During the deconfinement in France (the same period now qualified as "ordinary" in Switzerland), parks reopened to visitors, with however the introduction of new protective measures, thus changing the spaces to accommodate a limited number of visitors while respecting social and physical distancing and hygiene rules. In Switzerland, the Federal Council instructed in a press release issued on

19.06.2020 that "all places accessible to the public must impose protection plans".

Passing through these spaces, traced on the maps of towns and villages as trajectories that connect precise geographical points, hides the operations of participation of walkers. The pandemic has severely affected face-to-face participation in the space mentioned above models.

During pre-pandemic, authorities (city and village town halls) invested in digital technology to develop architectonics that increases and enriches the physical space (websites, mobile applications, photo galleries). At that time, we could visit the parks virtually, without the need to know their opening and closing hours. Institutional websites provided information on these places: description, accessibility, regulations, events, and maps.

Many individual and associative digital projects flourished thanks to their interest in the intersection of spaces, their histories, and socio-cultural practices. These initiatives traced physical space and expanded it by including any activity practiced in its spheres. Some individuals treated natural parks as meeting places (for leisure, discussion, sport, etc.), others as regarded them as places inhabited by biodiversity, offering educational walks to meet trees or botanical walks. Some offer descriptive and informative (non-interactive) content on the places and others allow mobile interaction with a geographical map enriched by photos and information on services, dog walking, cycling routes and events at inside each park.

At the height of the pandemic and during the confinement throughout France, every time an individual left their home, they had to carry a special travel certificate, and proof of professional requirement to travel. To visit parks required searching for information online. On-site, the visitor, could inquire or verify the authenticity and conformity of what he read on the Internet. The closure of parks or specific areas such as picnic or barbecue and children's playgrounds was posted on websites and on-site. The new measures prevented any participatory activity. Even those parks that remained open (in Geneva- Switzerland, for example) closed their shops, cafeterias and restaurants and imposed strict distancing measures that ended up impacting the number of visitors negatively.

Later, during deconfinement, the notion of participation is shy in resuming its old habits due to the altered context. In that sense, despite the reopening of parks, their cafeterias, restaurants, and shops remained closed to restrict social interaction, and today these new practices seem to take hold. Physical distancing and hygiene rules are the two major principles to apply. Other standards have emerged such as self-service in certain eateries inside parks, respecting safety measures in place such as greeting without handshaking or hugging, contact tracing in restaurants or festivities, and wearing a mask when taking public transportation.

As far as the participatory culture is concerned, it has intensified in pandemic periods of containment and deconfinement thanks to its anchorage in the digital world. On social networks, blogs, websites and peer-to-peer services, online communities continued to emerge and develop by focusing on the pandemic and related issues. In addition to discussing the parks as places of practice, netizens of these communities debated the measures imposed by the authorities, while drawing on media, individual and collective experiences. Photos circulating of crowded Parisian parks during confinement shocked the public opinion and led to the closure of several parks in Île de France in March 2020. Throughout the pandemic, and as part of their participatory culture, netizens averted gossip. Instead, they looked for precise and accurate reports, arguments and explicit references in a world drowned in fake-news and characterized by uncertainty.

How is the Covid-19 pandemic changing the reconfiguration of our public and private spaces? What architectural structures do we need to invent and adapt in the post-pandemic world, strongly marred by risks, mistrust and social distancing? How do we take part in an activity, contribute to a community, and participate in social interaction? How should we rethink our digital culture and modulate it to mirror our models of living together (working, studying, socializing, travelling, etc.)?

## **RESULTS & ANALYSIS**

### **A new digital urbanism**

Sars-Cov-2 has disrupted our society and lives, abruptly and brutally. It dictated a new way for everything, including a "new normal", and we are still struggling to understand how, and why. Our physical world evolves around digital traceability. The latter is not a dysfunction, but rather "the irrevocable condition of an economic model and a form of sociability" (Arnaud, Merzeau, 2009, p. 10). The slightest activity produces digital traces which makes it possible to observe and analyse in real-time the interactions and movements of users and to derive predictive analysis of their needs and behaviours for commercial, strategic, malicious, or public purposes.

The ability to collect, store, combine and exploit data is now at the heart of innovation. It is the engine of economic growth and power, and at the heart of multiple ethical, democratic, governance and legitimacy issues (Douzet, 2020, p. 4).

The "new virtual urbanism" (Doueïhi, 2011) has become our refuge and the space for our real activities. If it is true that man is a "spatial being", we would be experiencing the emergence of new virtual urbanism, with its architecture, aesthetics, values, and literature. It is hybrid urbanism inhabited by traces, documents, fragments, but also animated by the voice and the body, by a different temporality, in short by a new culture (Doueïhi, 2011, p. 6).

The distinction between what is real and virtual no longer holds. Digital urbanism, developed to reflect the architecture of our homes, parks and our cities, is present everywhere and englobes us. Its technologies offer immense possibilities for interaction, action and visibility, much like a function that resembles architecture in the physical world.

Digital technologies are much more than tools used to accomplish specific tasks: they are also and increasingly, the environments in which we act and interact (Wiltse, Stolterman, 2010, p. 821).

An architectural perspective considers the built infrastructure, the flow, and the business models it supports and shapes. It further takes into account the effects of digital technology on our physical space and the way it is experienced in our daily lives.

Physical space allows and restricts social freedom, and it is essential for architecture to

consider the design of the physical environment to the social activity it is meant to support (Wiberg, 2017, p. 62).

While digital technologies can be designed to serve as concrete tools to support the practice of architecture, they can also be organized differently, whereby architecture serves as a metaphor for structuring digital technologies (Wiberg, 2017). The Minecraft platform, for example, allows the design of architectures within a virtual world in the computer. Heather Wiltse and Erik Stolterman show how communication tools like instant messaging benefit from a design that references architectural principles for managing availability and presence.

For an instant messaging user, an "available" state is not just a functional indicator of whether or not the user can be reached via the service at a given time. Since the status appears thanks to a connected user, it can also signal, for example, that the person has arrived at the office (Wiltse and Stolterman, 2010, p. 823).

This definition equally applies to many interactive systems like websites, blogs, social networks, peer-to-peer services, and others. Digital businesses lease these "places" to users who pay cash or data for their domains, accounts, profiles, access, and more. Users do not own these "places", but rather occupy them as tenants. When building website, user composes his/her home page as if he/she is making the exterior facade of his/her house. He/she conceives the number and location of his/her site as he/she would do for his/her residence. Moreover, they craft the pages just as they would decorate the different rooms in their houses or apartments. In a nutshell: users produce and select multimedia content for their digital environment as if they were choosing curtains, plants, furniture and selecting paint colours in their actual physical space. According to Milad Doueihi, in this "virtual urbanism" platforms are essential "not because they manage access and storage but also because they combine access to information and knowledge with access to social".

These platforms have always managed new practices in line with architecture and its principles of flow, directions, design of interactive systems, availability, navigation, separation of activities, encapsulation,

sustainability, utility, beauty, and other influences.

How do the inhabitants of this digital urbanism produce with what they "absorb"? How are their practices changing the architecture of their space, and how are digital architectonics changing their patterns?

To describe daily practices, De Certeau makes a conceptual distinction between "strategy" and "tactic" opposing one to the other: We call "strategy" the calculation (or manipulation) of the balance of power which becomes possible from the moment when a subject of will and power (a company, an army, a city, a scientific institution) is isolable. It postulates a place likely to be circumscribed as its own and to be the base from which to manage relations with exteriority of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the countryside around the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) (1990, p. 59).

I call "tactic" the calculated action that determines the absence of a proper. [. . .] The tactic has only the of the other. It must therefore play with the terrain imposed on it as organized by the law of a foreign force. [...] It does it step by step. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them [...]. It must use ... the loopholes that circumstances open in the surveillance of proprietary power. It poaches there. It creates surprises. [. . .] It is cunning. (1990, p. 60-61)

In today's world, governments have developed strategies to deal with the pandemic. Some announced a curfew (Senegal), a "state of health emergency" (Switzerland), others have administered strict confinements (France and Italy) or an "amplification of the disease" (Sweden). For their part, various populations have applied tactics to live with these strategies and to oppose them or to hijack them and seize profit opportunities. We understand participation practices as "tactics" that participants use to adapt to situations, create new ones and invent their daily lives.

### **Editorialize, participate, and memorize**

To de Certeau, the act of walking is "a process of appropriation of the topographic system by the pedestrian; a spatial realization of the place". Spatial action involves relationships and interaction. It is in social interaction that the Self develops, which, according to George

Herbert Mead, is in conversation with itself (and with other-Selves since it is both a subject and an object). Digital culture has long called us to rethink this interaction and redefine it in the context of digital traceability. In the digital environment, all activity produces traces which, for the most part, escape users. These traces are of the nature of the digital ecosystem, which is dynamic and ever-changing. They are not tracing like those we experienced in the pre-digital era.

The publication of traces is not drifted or a malfunction, but what characterizes the hypersphere as a medium (Merzeau, 2007).

Unlike other messages, digital traces resist interpretations by semiology because they are part of another logic: a computational logic. They are matters of treatment. It is their number and their calculation that make sense.

Information traceability cannot be reduced to the subject's expression or projection. The traces are recorded automatically, without having been elaborated as an image or a message (Merzeau, 2009, p. 82).

Thus, the digital space (physical and connected), built up imprints of our paths and our activities as well as our digital traces, becomes the space in which we live. It differs from the digital environment, the web or other connected environments. It is the result of the hybridization of different digital environments with our world. In our hybrid space (physical and digital), we use a set of devices to achieve our participation that allows the structuring and circulation of knowledge. This process produces a vision of our space and our world.

The fact that we live in an increasingly digital space suggests that all these practices also take place there – which means that any approach aimed at understanding, organizing, or interpreting the world, is an act of editorialization (Vitali-Rosati, 2016).

Sharing a comment on a park or a photo of its space in digital environments is one way of making it exist. Physical space then depends on digital activity. Depending on the movement, production, circulation of traces from one platform to another, depending on their sharing by a growing number of users, their accumulation in databases, processing by algorithms, the park will obtain or not status on Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor, etc. Its rate will be affected by participation practices, the number

of geolocated visitors, the work in these areas, its cleanliness but also by its visibility on search engines, by its evaluation scores and by the feedback that he received on online platforms. Consequently, editorialization contributes to the development of space, of the park in this example, and to its life (enrichment, modification, increase, growth, death, etc.). It is involved in user participation and the existence of space. Editorialization refers to all the dynamics that produce and structure the digital space. These dynamics are the interactions of individual and collective actions with a particular digital environment (Vitali-Rosati, 2016).

Computers and digital technology have changed our access to information. They have affected lifestyles and modified space. Digital technology shows hybridization of connected and unconnected objects and spaces. In the age of mass media, the news model was characterized by the top-down approach. The information was produced by the mainstream media and disseminated through their channels to the general public. Everyone received the same story.

The Internet has, however, personalized communication. Today everyone has information tied to their digital traces (profiles, navigation, geolocation, interests, and practices). This revolution in access has transformed the physical space (accessing data with the family, in a group or alone) where the user is located, but equally affected the (digital) information environment (private, semi-private). The flowing movement has become bottom-up, where users are the primary producers and disseminators of information on various platforms. As far as we are concerned, the question today is: does participation become exploitation when it takes place on commercial media or when others derive financial benefit from the contributions of others?

"Can participation make sense when it sits under the control of companies and when our ability to create and share content gives no role in the governance of the platforms that allow its circulation?" (Jenkins, 2015).

The answer lies perhaps in considering the development of our digital traces and harvesting them in organized projects with rules, purpose, administration, management, and governance. The sharing of memories supposes

[...] the will of a group to gather or exchange memory resources according to rules and for a purpose that it determines. [...] Sharing a memory, therefore, consists less of recording, storing, or preserving traces than in enshrining these traces in a common framework – whether it be a place, a rite, a device, or story (Merzeau, 2017).

In this sense, digital participation becomes full and efficient when it relies on the process of building a memory. It echoes the understanding of "participatory culture" that Henry Jenkins (2015) defends by contrasting it with interactivity – as in the case of the Facebook "Like" button – to cover many activities about "building communities, the desire to share and the desire to develop, integrate or divert commercial, cultural productions". Memory sharing is resistance against the "machinic" memory of the digital, where an uncountable number of traces accumulate every moment on servers scattered around the world, store themselves and make their way for computational processing. This "default memory" (*mémoire par défaut*) (Merzeau, 2011) is automatic and algorithmic, operates at each stage of the information process, hence the difficulty of controlling it. It becomes the major challenge to fight oblivion.

### **Post-pandemic: Built-in community vs isolated geography?**

How can we frame participatory culture and shape it in the pandemic era? Henry Jenkins and his colleagues borrowed a definition firmly focused on his educational potential:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at least they care what other people think about they have created).

At the height of the pandemic, we observe digital communities flourish around issues related to the disease and its effects on all walks of life: work, study, social ties, health, mental health, leisure, etc. These communities thrive on software such

as Zoom, Teams, Skype, Youtube, and on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and others, thus allowing exchanges and sharing of resources on matters of interest. Their netizens share standard professional profiles (such as teachers in a school or university; civil servants in a company or residents of a building or a neighbourhood), collective interests, sometimes suffering and fear (Covid-19 patients and their families; vulnerable population, others). Teleworking and distancing measures have encouraged these forms of connected communities to ensure different levels of participation. It is significant to see that the pandemic has awakened the issue of the digital divide and digital illiteracy, excluding people and groups from digital environments and online communities. Participation is pinned to the participants' space. The discussion of space returns in this context.

The architecture that we built in the digital world, much like our urban architecture, leads us to rethink our physical space during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. We created design structures in the digital world the same way that we build our cities: the home page as the external facade of the house; web pages as rooms in an apartment or house; browsing the web as driving in the street; opening and closing web pages or applications like doors. Nevertheless, the architectonics has changed over time because of user practices and computational logics specific to indexing, searching, and processing in platforms by algorithms. For example, the publication of a tweet or a photo does not only deliver a statement: it embeds in its metadata whole readability, which makes it possible to reconstruct the history of their journey or their manufacture.

User experience – a significant factor to consider in the design of websites, platforms, and digital applications – becomes essential to our participation in the physical space. Individual and collective experiences of involvement in social, professional and leisure areas encourage readjustment of space in a way that allows each activity to find its zone. It is as if we need to reproduce our physical space in the image of new structures that characterize digital: timelines, mobile applications, traces, links, metadata,

databases, and many other forms, which, by connecting, allow us to rebuild our daily lives. Reinventing everyday life: from the web to urban architecture

For Certeau, ordinary humans invent the everyday life thanks to the arts of doing, to subtle tricks and resistance tactics through which they divert object and codes and reappropriate space. Are we in an era that requires reinventing our physical space and our modes of participation to build a new society?

In the post-pandemic, the world expects changes in participation, especially consumption, transportation, habitat, and work pattern. We will need to reinvent our space to encourage participation. These changes are for instance: equipping homes with work desks; adapting spaces for teleworking; organizing day-long activities in areas that allow social distancing; choose spaces at home for online sociability and others for professional exchanges; employ "database logic" in house or residence cleaning (tasks organized and documented in private or common areas to be easily accessible, administered and updated).

The acceleration in the use of digital technology requires digital literacy (trans-literacy) and accessibility to include those who find themselves excluded from this new world. Participants should be aware of what they are getting themselves into. They need to know how much the production and circulation of their media content would contribute to their everyday well-being.

## SUMMARY

The pandemic continues to teach us lessons. It reminds us of our animality and our fragile biology. We are social animals before we are digital subjects. It emerges as an intrusion that can return to it in different forms requiring an adjustment of our space and our way of life to allow the continuity of life.

The pandemic has shown us an urban exodus of individuals who have already chosen to move to the countryside, leaving behind the big cities and their attractions, but also companies and institutions that are considering moving their headquarters. It has also thought us that information is the essence of our civilization, and that the presence of the latter requires

cooperation at the local and international levels to achieve a participatory culture that helps us reinvent our new "normal".

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