

Abstract

This thesis explores how locally-constructed agency, based on what we really care about, can be developed within and thence beyond localities. At issue is the need for new forms of connectedness and belonging in the globally-based network society.

Globally-based communications and media technologies create new networks and mobilities that stretch and fragment existing socio-economic, administrative and ecological systems and with this, older, local and national forms of sociality. Such social upheavals are apt to drive people into defensive and divisive “us” against “them” forms of belonging. Local communities are then called on almost daily to fix these problems, but scarcely exist as connected effective agents on their own account.

The thesis examines how official institutions (policy and academic) can help undo one-way global-local flows, by supporting new forms of local-local and local-through-to-global agency. A transdisciplinary methodology, developed in this thesis, performatively demonstrates productive, new local-academic-policy connections.

Research included a fully participatory process that blends theoretical concepts (social, aesthetic, literary and film), with film and interactive technologies. A microcosm or simulation of locality was created through DVD film and an interactive research website.

Through the shared use of screen interfaces, over one hundred co-detectives or co-researchers from hugely diverse backgrounds collaborated to search for, help reveal, and test out ways that local inhabitants could more effectively connect and co-create a filmed narrative of the kind of place that all would like to inhabit.

A “network locality” development narrative is here piloted as a counterpoint to the global network society. Based on inclusive co-construction of locally grounded technology – and aesthetic-based communities – new possibilities of belonging around engagement in locally grounded civic-cosmopolitan projects are demonstrated.