

Cutting Edges / BOZAR | José Moura (Oct 2019)

By the end September, I had the opportunity of participating in the event “Cutting Edge” organized by CROSSTALKS and UNICA, at BOZAR, in Brussels. A keynote lecture given by Anna Valtonen (Vice-President of Art and Creative Practices, Aalto University, FI) preceded the session, and tuned the scenario for innovation and interaction between a wide range of disciplines covering science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics.

Next, challenging thematic topics promote the discussion in three round tables: Sustainable water management, Clean air, and **Smart cities & Digital pollution**.

Being assigned to the last topic, I was impressed by the complementarity of interest and backgrounds of the participants around the table.

Smart cities operating in a sustainable way was the first topic discussed, appealing for the progress and well-fair from personal and professional perspectives. The multiple opinions expressed around the table defined novel platforms for the participation of the many actors (researchers, funding, spin-offs and startups, architects, designers, artists, decision makers, etc). It was pointed out that several benefits could be gain by the improvement of more closed human relations and by the introduction of local solutions, using the concept of “doing it yourself”, even in small scale. Fablabs and Makerspaces were pointed as helpful contributors to community empowerment.

The second point was a real challenge, a concept not too much spread, almost unknown and not widely discussed. The obvious questions were: “Have you heard of Digital pollution? Do they have a foot print?”. The manufacture, use and wear of equipments leads to a growing demand for energy and chemicals, and produce wastes that contributes to environmental pollution, and depletion of chemical elements. The use of modern equipments leaves a relevant ecological footprint, on production, purchase and replacement. Data centers operate in a non-stop mode consuming enormous ammounts of electricity, not only for organization, handling and storage of information, but also in Internet connections, generators, ventilation and cooling systems, etc. Moreover, data is stored in multiple copies, amplifying the problem.

The counter point between High-Tec and Local Solutions was an interesting point added to the discussion. The work under development by the different contributors was sound and strong connections were envisaged. The aspects related to the sharing of new ideas might be exploited, in a near-future horizon, for potential consortia.

Smart cities & Digital Pollution round table participants

- Marie Albert (French Tech Culture - FR)
- Pieter Ballon (VUB - BE)
- Ezra Belgrado (Visual Harvester - BE)
- Luc Deleu (Architect/Urbanist - BE)
- Tom De Block (IoT - BE)
- Rita De Graeve Dept. Cultuur, Jeugd en Media - BE)
- Sotiris Diplaris (Mindspcs - GR)
- Joana Moll (Critical Interface Politics - ES/GE)
- José Moura (NOVA - PT)
- Cato Van Den Bosch (student UA - BE)
- Judith Veenkamp (Waag Society - NL)
- Jacques Vermeulen (Nokia - BE)
- Marleen Wynants (VUB Crosstalks - BE)