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**TITLE**

**Global Cities, Global Parks: Globalizing of digital Leisure Networks**

In the end to talk about parks is to talk about the city as much as about what landscape architecture is, and what landscape architects can do

Jusuck Koh and Anemone Beck, *Parks, People and City*

Conceptualizing digitization and globalization...creates operational and rhetorical openings for recognizing the ongoing importance of the material world even in the case of some of the most dematerialized activities.

Saskia Sassen, *The Hybrid Space*

Diasporic public spheres, diverse among themselves, are the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movement of refugees, activists, students, and laborers. It may well be that the emergent postnational order proves not to be a system of homogenous units (as with the current system of nation-states) but a system based on relations between heterogenous units (some social movements, some interest groups, some professional bodies, some nongovernmental organizations, some armed constabularies, some judicial bodies).

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*

## Introduction

Where does the park end and where does the city begin? Can we talk about the park without relating it to the city? While the park is centered within the cityscape as its social and leisure public domain, it is also decentered from the dominant functional ethos of urbanity. The architects Jusuck Koh and Anemone Beck alert us to the direction that contemporary parks are taking, becoming more distanced and cosmopolitan, conditioned for peripheral consumption by the passersby. What seem to diminish are the nurturing, local and intimate designs of the urban park that evokes sensuality, belongingness and a sense of community. In making their case for a more vibrant ecology of public leisure space, they suggest a dismantling of conventional boundaries between the park and the city:

As much as possible a park should not be bounded or bordered in a zone defined by city planners or a social sector. It must be open: visually, socially and ecologically. It also needs to be programmatically open to change, open to participation of community, open to aesthetic participation of users by using comprehensible formal languages, and open to momentary or time-share ownership of the users. Desirably, an urban park today could reach out into the city like an octopus. Likewise, it could let the city come in with its urban uses and activities, with restaurants, theaters, museums, or even complementary housing. The result would be a “park in the city” or a “city in the park”, realizing necessary interpenetration and mutual complementarity between nature and culture, and park and city. (2006:16)

While indeed the intermingling of these two spheres can be desirable and effective in shaping a more livable social environment, boundaries continue, underlining the historical persistence of social practice within these realms. When these borders blur, we need to pay attention to points of convergence and divergence that are often strategically constructed to evoke a particular social vision.

We have seen the coming of age of urban parks particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to the fast growing industrialization of the time. During this period, the state, be it in China, the United States or England seemed to share a social vision of the urban park as a spatial strategy to foster modern civility and communal feeling. We have witnessed the omnipresence of park formations

in dialogue with democracy and urbanization, two globally sweeping phenomenon that signaled the rise of the modern society. We have recognized the park as a radical act of the carving of the city into an open space marked for the public, to exercise their range of leisure expressions and social enactments. Urban parks emerged as a symbolic, political and ideological landscape worldwide. One can argue that it is impossible to experience the park without the larger experience of the inhabited city. While distinct cultural practices mark these topographies, the park and the city undoubtedly share certain common architectures and social infrastructures. They are both in constant play with forces that demand control. Both spheres are subject to the practicalities of design for standardization and uniformity to feed our need for efficiency. At the same time, social inhabitation of these spaces compel for plurality and creativity as the needs of a range of people and institutions strive to leave their mark on these landscapes.

Parallels between varied forms of the urban park and social network sites have been explicitly drawn to bring to the fore the privatization, commercialization and politicization of public leisure space. In this paper, we embark on two missions: the first is to situate the urban park as part of the larger cityscape and the second is to underline its global implications. In parallel fashion, to frame social networking sites as part of the larger Internet domain and the second is to underline the globalizing of the digital leisure commons. This is not as ambitious as it seems. Over the decades, the relationship between the digital commons and the material commons has matured, catalyzed by the metaphor. We have learnt to conceptualize the Internet through analogies to grasp its information highways, networks, the underlying logic dictating movement and nodes of concentrated social action. William J. Mitchell's influential book, 'City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn' (1996) laid a solid foundation for comparison of the Internet to the city. His prophetic perspective on the web as 'soft cities' highlights the underlying infrastructures and architectures of digital space, calling for a novel way of framing these new techno-social domains through a historical and urban approach:

In a world of ubiquitous computation and telecommunication, electronic augmented bodies, postinfobahn architecture, and big time bit business, the very idea of the city is challenged and must eventually be reconceived. Computer networks become as fundamental to urban life as street systems. Memory and screen space become valuable, sought after sorts of real-estate. Much of the economic, social, political and cultural

action shifts into cyberspace. As a result, familiar urban design issues are up for radical reformulation. (pp. 107).

Mitchell draws attention to the fact that while digital space appears infinite and freely accessible, it is subject to accessibility constraints and regulatory factors:

If the value of real estate in the traditional urban fabric is determined by location, location, location (as property pundits never tire of repeating), then the value of a network connection is determined by bandwidth, bandwidth, bandwidth. Accessibility is redefined. (p. 17)

Lawrence Lessig (2006) took this comparison further in his book, 'Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace,' provoking us with a spectrum of ramifications on the impact these virtual architectures can have if code, its building blocks, can be controlled and regulated by interests that are not necessarily democratic and oriented for the common good. He warns us that "we must consider the politics of the architecture of the life there" (p. 293). Today, with talk of big data structures attempting to cement our digital experiences into predictive moulds, walled gardens to envelope our leisure experiences, and the politics of algorithms to influence our navigation into specific pathways, this was indeed prescient. By equating the Internet to the city, we have been compelled to extend our imagination by applying our understandings of urban planning and cultural geography to current conversations on the shaping of the digital commons. Another much talked about dimension of these realms is its network potential where dense sociality is organized in a multiplicity of ways. Manuel Castells' book 'Network Society' (1996) is credited to have significantly shaped the global cities scholarship as he mapped these ideas convincingly to understand contemporary space. He argues that cities should be viewed not as places but as processes, where ideas, good and people flow through, contributing to the rich array of relations that attract us to these domains. He introduced the term 'spaces of flows' to break the conventional notion that cities were bounded entities where communication technologies and transportation networks enable these to be more fluid and hybridizing a terrain.

Hence, the persistence of this parallel has matured from the initial utopic notion of the web as a novel frontier of limitless and depoliticized western space (Barlow, 1996) to a more architected

and socio-economic phenomenon of a propertied and contextual digital place. The Internet realm has tremendously benefited from scholarly insights on the material sphere to aid in the architecting and conceptualizing of virtual social practice. Interestingly, the ‘city’ itself, while lending itself as a tool to illustrate the digital sphere, is in fact going through its own metamorphosis. There is no one generic understanding of the city and in fact, within the host of cities to choose from, we recognize persistent hierarchies, networks and clusters that resemble the core-periphery binary. Certain cities have become templates to emulate, termed as ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 2001). These select cities are seen as command centers that serve as a fulcrum for the industrial, the creative, the leisurely, and the privileged as well as the temporal laboring and migrant class. Similarly, not all social networking sites share the same influence and zone of power. Facebook and Twitter for instance are the virtual command centers of the digital age. Much like the global city, they are at once stateless and yet, constrained by diverse national laws, local socio-cultural politics and practices.

Thereby, this paper draws heavily from literature on global cities, using this avenue as a discursive tool that pushes this analytic further. The metaphorical parallel of the city as the Internet is used as a point of departure given that it has been established and elaborated upon over the decade. This allows us to move directly to the framing of global cities to capture the globalization of digital architectures. We build on this rubric to delve into a segment of the Internet that is marked for leisure- that of social networking sites. Taking a cue from global cities, this paper offers a proposition to understand the globalizing of digital leisure networks through the spatial metaphor of *global parks*. In prior literature, there has been an emphasis on how urban parks in their varied forms reflect dimensions of social networking sites, sharing the rhetoric of being democratic, participatory, open and leisure-oriented. While seemingly innocuous, we have seen how urban parks have a contentious history in becoming a public and democratic space across different cultures and nations and how they are fundamentally universal and cross-cultural. Parks share a history of struggle in making and sustaining their spaces as public. Here we see that behind the design of urban leisure spaces are intentions, regulations, and constraints that are often played with by people that inhabit these spaces. By investigating the globalization of the Internet through the lens of the ‘global city,’ we can push our understandings on the commonality amongst parks across contexts. Overall, this effort allows us to constructively borrow from the field of urban studies and extend important debates surrounding

globalization of the material domain to its virtual counterpart- the Internet and its social network sites to better confront the political, socio-cultural and economic dimensions of globalization and its online/offline intermediations.

## THE CITY AND THE PARK

The industrial revolution brought about massive urbanization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, promising tremendous economic prosperity and yet, threatening the quality of life. The strapped infrastructures of the city designed for productivity left little breathing room for diverse public expression. Public parks were seen as a solution, a safety valve. No society can sustain itself on purely the pragmatic. People's needs, desires, aspirations and expressions are fundamental to a lived space. Sustainability and regeneration became the underlying premise for the urban park movement (Woudstra & Fieldhouse, 2000). Thus, a symbiotic relationship is born where the city is nurtured by the presence of its parks and the parks cater to the unmet needs that emerge within the city. Since then, expectations of the urban park have risen as scholars have pointed out the linkages of these domains to economic, psychological and social prosperity. It pays to have leisure. It is productive to recreate. The modern society comes with a social vision and strives to embed these values within the aesthetics of park design. For instance, equal access to public goods was a new core value, departing from the past practice of urban parks being accessible for only a select and privileged population. The future of the community as seen during this time was driven by a vision for democracy. Much emphasis was now being placed on bringing a diverse group together in these new green commons to create connections and shared interests, contributing to the makings of a responsible and socially invested citizen of the city.

In the makings of these public greens, the municipality was of course spearheading this process. Soon enough however, in the name of democracy, a range of actors began to play their part in the shaping of these architectures. For instance, The Amsterdamse Bos located in Amsterdam in the Netherlands was designed by the Department of Public Works of Amsterdam, led by the architect Cornelis Van Eesteren in collaboration with the landscape architect Jacopa Mulder. However the design team was multidisciplinary, constituted by teachers, botanists, biologists, engineers, architects, sociologists and town planners (Loures, Santos & Panagopoulos, 2007).

This team involvement was seen as useful in conceptualizing the park to meet the needs of the modern city and serve as a guardian for its sustainability. In analyzing the urban park models of the time such as the Parc André-Citroën in Paris and the City Park of Porto in Portugal, much can be attributed to the novel aspect of citizen involvement in the design of public space. Also, the location of the park, once on the periphery became now central to city design, occupying prime space and defining the character of the city itself. The economic sustainability of the park itself led to the growing influence of corporate magnates during the time who donated resources to this modern project. The industry was quick to catch on that these seemingly innocuous green parks led to a real rise in income and prosperity, impacting the real estate around them and enhancing the value of the city amongst the inhabitants. The appeal of these ideas caught on as we see the urban park movement spread worldwide during this time. The Victoria Park in London and the Central Park in New York served as templates for enlightened park design that melded the interest of the city within them.

It is easy to get swept away in the romance of a globally shared ideation of a public park, and accept their design and architectures as normative and inherently positive for social order. After all, who hates parks in their neighborhood? Who would dispute a public good such as this for their social well-being? Yet, as we should know by now, no domain is completely sacrosanct. Jane Jacobs, an American activist of the sixties was seen as an unlikely candidate to influence urban planning and renewal. And yet, her book, 'The Death and Life of Great American cities' (1961) came to be seen as pioneering work that offered concepts that we today take for granted such as social capital. She watched closely how the planning establishment would mindlessly imitate and transpose models for development onto existing public spheres, without paying heed to the contexts within which they would assert themselves. She enjoyed provoking the intelligentsia on how urban 'renewal' in spite of its futuristic promise, served to create slums. She did not hesitate in questioning that which was faithfully revered at the time –that parks are good and crowding bad. She argued that at times, parks could be dangerous due to their isolation and crowded areas could be the safest spaces to inhabit.

When we shift our attention to the digital domain, we are poised with a similar symbiotic relationship, the internet with that of social networking sites or what O'Reilly terms as its 'participatory architectures.' The internet refers to a global system of interconnected IP

networks, datagram structures that enable the exchange and flow of information across destinations. It serves as a collection of interconnected documents (web pages) and other web resources, linked by hyperlinks and URLs, connecting millions of computing devices. It supports a multitude of services such as email, file transfers, interactive video calls (VoIP), online communities and of course, social networking sites. In other words, the internet is marked for e-commerce, e-governance and a host of social and economic activities, among which are digital leisure practices. Much of the growth and usage of the internet in the recent decade has been attributed to the popularity of social networking sites for entertainment, play and pleasure. In fact, the terms internet and Web 2.0 are often used interchangeably, signaling the dominance of digital social and leisure platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Cyworld and a multitude of media sharing sites, in shaping the perception of the digital commons. The user-generated and participatory culture appears to be seeping outside these boundaries and into most digital spheres. Today, it is also clear that these leisure domains are deeply commercially viable and lucrative, propelling several private sector actors and agencies to adopt such architectures for their public outreach. And as Jane Jacobs reminds us, these public spheres, in spite of their participatory lure, can also be non-conducive to society. Criminal activity and sexual deviance for instance, capitalize on these transnational networks to spread and garner support from a diasporic public sphere. While the transnationalism of digital leisure networks have been addressed in prior papers, what is yet to be discussed are the makings of command centers within this highly competitive landscape, digital and material.

## GLOBALIZATION OF THE URBAN AND THE DIGITAL COMMONS

### *The Global City, command centers and corporate networks*

Cities are not equal. The understanding of hierarchies within these socio-spatial networks and their extent of global reach has been approached in the last few decades through the construct of 'global cities.' This concept's well-known proponents, John Friedmann, Saskia Sassen, and Peter Taylor argue that certain cities due to their economic, political and cultural factors are to an extent disembedded from their national systems as they exert their presence in a plurality of ways across the globe. Contrary to popular notions of globalization as impervious to borders



(Held & McGrew, 2000; Friedman, 2006), Sassen's innovative argument on the 'global' city is built on the emphasis of boundaries where the city's unique centrifugal localization contributes to the denationalizing of these structures. In other words, New York, Tokyo, London or Paris exists in a bubble zone of particular politics due to their unique capacity to attract and sustain a global flow of socio-cultural and economic capital. These cities thereby hardly mirror the larger national culture within which they are situated.

Sassen defined the term 'global cities' in her book *The Global City* (2001) as "strategic sites in the global economy because of their concentration of command functions and high-level producer-service firms oriented to world markets; more generally, cities with high level of internationalization in their economy and in their broader social structure" (p. 154). In reviewing the burgeoning literature on this term, the following main characteristics come to light as Brenner and Keil frame it (2006, p.11), namely:

- basing points for the global operations of transnational corporations
- production sites and markets for producer and financial services
- articulating nodes within a broader hierarchy of cities stratified according to their differential modes of integration into the world economy
- dominant locational centers within large-scale regional economies or urban fields

In conceptualizing the 'global city,' much weight is given to financial markets in the reorganizing of cities' spatial structures and within it a new transnational class system. Sassen (2006) paints the picture of such cities as 'command points' of corporate power that fosters a formation of networks of not just the financial elite but also of the bulk of the low-paid immigrant service workers that sustain these city economies.

William Carroll (2007) reinforces this linkage between global cities and transnational corporate networks in his study but argues for the staying power of nationhood as these entities continue to be constrained by regional legalities, politics and economic underpinnings. It is worth remembering that corporate power is not a consensual and centralized force but comes with its own internal tensions that often are reflective of their specific local/national conditions and affiliations. For instance, we cannot assume that the Shell Corporation in the United Kingdom is

seamlessly operating along the same lines as Shell in the Netherlands. These organizational entities are more segmented in form through their strategic, operational, and allocative features:

Strategic power occurs at the level of structural decision-making and concerns the determination of basic long-term goals and the adoption of initiatives to realize those goals. Operational power involves the actual implementation of corporate strategy within the head office and in sub-ordinate offices, subsidiaries, and plants. Finally, there is the allocative power wielded by financial institutions, whose collective control over the availability of capital ``gives them the power to determine the broad conditions under which other enterprises must decide their corporate strategies (Scott, 1997, p. 139).

Thereby, multiple national actors and processes play a role in making a multinational corporation and exert influence in the formation and the enactments within a global city. While the state continues to exercise its power, this does not negate the fact that in this era of global outsourcing, workers in distant nations can and at times do exercise their voice, even when not situated in West's command centers. So continuing with the example of Shell, the regional branch in Nigeria was hardly impervious to the pressures that emanated from people of the Kula community in the Rivers State that demanded the corporation to keep their promises on sustainable development. Or for instance, the disastrous and deadly collapse of the garment factory in Dhaka touched a nerve with apparel consumers in global cities such as Berlin, Dublin and Helsinki, pushing the multinational garment industry to respond meaningfully to this situation in the periphery. Part of this responsive network has to do with the mobility and circulation of labor, more sophisticated communication technologies that allow for interactivity, engagement and public awareness of local issues.

While this can serve as a sign of optimism against the normative hegemonic structures that have dictated these formations historically, Taylor (2004) points us to the more disturbing potential of these inter-urban configurations, that being the making of a 'new network bourgeoisie' - a global plutocracy. In other words, the main global cities and transnational corporations strategically cooperate to sustain their overarching power, setting an urban fabric that is more impenetrable to lesser cities and agencies. In fact, the global city concept has come under severe criticism due to its bias towards the West, negating the rise and influence of cities in the global South. While cities such as New York, Tokyo, Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin get evoked time and again to

illustrate their commanding roles, cities in emerging markets gain a fraction of attention. This is alarming as the world's substantive population resides along these peripheries and are gaining stride in their influence and reach. While it continues to be argued that unfortunately, power does get concentrated and circulated within the traditional Western clan of global cities, in recent years however, with the rise of emerging markets, there has been some flux in membership. For instance, Mexico City, once deemed a city on the periphery has moved to the core, while certain industrial centers like Detroit have been peripheralized (Sassen, 2002).

These recent trends thereby remind us that global cities per say are not static entities but are evolving and transitioning and transforming. It is fairer to term them as 'globalizing cities' as it better captures the dynamism of this category as different cities compete for this status through their ongoing restructuring and reinvention (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000). Lastly, it is important to consider the ramifications that this term can have on communicating a certain urban convergence and normalization as cities are compelled across the globe to follow this prescribed model, compromising therefore on the range of potential diversity that city formations can display. Robinson (2002) denounces this trend by stating that 'global cities have become the aspiration of many cities around the world' (p. 548) and argues that this can have devastating consequences on particularly less economically prosperous cities that are pressured to imitate these models at the price of equality in citizen participation, access and usage. Interestingly, this has created a new spatial form of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) particularly by BRIC nations wherein certain regions within the state gain significant privilege over others through this new terrain within which the flow of services are relatively free of state regulation and interference, unlike zones outside of this boundary. Hence, global cities can be deliberately architected within emerging markets to appear less nationalistic and more international to allow states to compete in this digital and global marketplace.

And finally, another persistent 'zero-sum' juxtaposition that seems to circulate is that the 'global city' is pitted against the state wherein the strength of the city comes at the price of the weakening of the state. On the contrary, the nation state may well be behind the rise of certain global cities as this strategic maneuvering may help situate the state prominently on the global landscape via these chosen global cities. Territorial domination is enabled by privileging certain cities to the forefront, creating 'glocal' nodes of accumulation and regional competitive

advantage (Brenner, 1998). Thereby, it is naïve to assume that the city and the state are positioned as diametrically opposite. Instead, the possibility that these actors often collude politically and otherwise should be seriously considered.

Not coincidentally, we find parallel discussions regarding the internet and its globalizing potential. Much like a cityscape, the internet is a techno-social infrastructure of nodes and networks. How these structures are connected and mapped on a global scale are of ongoing concern. The birth and proliferation of the internet has closely been linked to the phenomenon of globalization, some believing that these new digital structures largely circumvent the state and create new affiliations that disregard national geography (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Through this lens, communication networks are seen to strengthen social relations, creating a culture that clusters across borders (Rosen, Barnett & Kim, 2011). Others argue that it extends the state reach and gives it greater control in all social spheres to an unprecedented degree, at times in collusion with multinational corporations.

This conversation can be meaningfully enhanced by borrowing from the global cities literature. We need to first identify which are the digital command centers and gauge their sphere of influence. Candidates such as Facebook and Twitter for instance come foremost to mind. These platforms are indeed appropriated by several nations and are constantly being subject to local rules, regulations and policies. If we look at the approach on citizen privacy, the operationalizing of these digital infrastructures differ based on whether they are in Europe or in the United States due to specific regional policies regarding this issue. Also, in light of the umpteen media stories circulated in the last few years on their role in the ‘Arab Spring,’ we recognize their ongoing negotiations with different states that attempt to control these digital spaces. Undoubtedly, given the global outreach of these digital command centers, it is hardly debated that they have tremendous power in dictating the rules of the game. Yet, due to corporate interests, they are compelled to cooperate and even yield to the interests of the state time and again. However, if we look at the case of China and its dominant social media platforms such as SinaWeibo, Renren, Tencent, Douban, and Wechat, they enjoy tremendous support from the state as long as they demonstrate sensitivity to the political needs through self-censorship. Hence, it is a mistake to frame this conversation as a dichotomy of the state versus the digital command centers and instead, to look at the complex interplay of power that circulates between these two entities. As

the global cities literature above explicates, at times the state proactively propels certain global cities to the forefront to achieve international recognition with the goal of being a major player in the transnational domain.

Interestingly, the core-periphery model that has been used to assess the membership of global cities and to gauge whether in fact we are facing a ‘new network bourgeoisie,’ is also found applicable in discerning the globalizing of the internet. A study was recently embarked by Park, Barnett and Chung (2011) to unravel the relationship between globalization and the Internet by looking at changes that have taken place over the years in connectivity by comparing global communication networks of countries in 2003 and in 2009. Using network analysis, the research was carried out on the web-based network that linked the country code of top level domains that represents countries. The results indicate that the 2009 international hyperlink network is completely interconnected. G7 countries and Spain are at the center of the network. At the periphery are the poorer countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This resonates with the global cities clan of primarily command centers situated in the West, propelling us to acknowledge the persistence of the digital and material plutocracy that exists in global network formations. The study strived to determine whether the internet has become more individualized and fragmented or whether this digital space continues to function through the conduit of the nation state. What these researchers found was the reigniting of the classic world system theory as their data fell along lines of the core, periphery and semi-periphery relations and dependencies amongst these states, calling to question the independence of their digital networks. It appears then that a nations’ development can be understood by considering “the systematic ways in which societies are linked to one another within the context of a larger network of material, capital and information exchanges” (Barnett & Park, 2005).

Much like the global cities analysis where disproportionate attention is given to economic aspects while negating the socio-cultural aspects, the analysis of the globalizing of the internet has been accused of a similar bias. Thereby, these researchers pay heed to this critique and go beyond economic aspects of global communication networks to delve further into claims of decentralization, regionalism and cultural pluralism that have been attributed to these platforms. It was found that while indeed there was a global system linking these nation states, there were also regional clusters around language, culture and geography that circumvented these

conventional borders. While it is clear that the world systems theory largely prevails in terms of inequality where wealthy nations are more interconnected than the less prosperous, emerging markets have undoubtedly made a significant rise on the international stage since 2003 and function more stably and centralized as a regional cluster than in the past. Also, it was found that while in 2003 the US was central in this mapping, by 2009, it found itself sharing the stage to a substantive extent with Europe, particularly with Germany. Also, much attention has recently gone into the rise of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), creating tremendous speculation of their role in the shaping of the Internet. It was found that not all emerging markets are equal; Brazil and Russia are more hyperlinked to the global stage than China and India. Part of this can be explained by the fact that China and India have some of the world's largest internal digital economies to cater to. Despite China's formidable role in today's global economy, it is far less central in its international hyperlinked network. This has been attributed to China taking on different language code systems to create a regional cluster of its own, a deliberate effort to shape its walled gardens within the 'Great Firewall of China.'

In fact, recent studies have emphasized the heterogeneous nature of the Internet, adopting the term 'Internets,' once a social meme driven by President Bush's gaffe with this term, to now a more serious proposition. Corporate and state politics are slowly but surely encroaching on this digital territory that was originally designed to not be controlled by any one agency, institution or state. A case in point is the rise of internets such as the 'Chinese internet' with its own digital firewall, effectively filtering information flows along the line of the state's interest (Zhong, 2012). Having said that, several examples have been given in the last few papers on how Chinese citizens play with these structures to express and advocate, contributing to a far more dynamic and complex digital space than the popularly touted authoritarian perspective. Lindtner and Szablewicz (2010) argue that China has not one but multiple Internets:

the interface, content and wider social meaning of Internet technologies today are not determined by software developers and designers alone, but rather by a complex web of actors, including, but not limited to, users, corporations, state actors and policy makers. As such, it is important to acknowledge that online practice, including such things as the use of search engines or the creation and modification of digital content, is not divorced from cultural processes, e.g. social discourses and political debates. Rather than

portraying the rapid changes of the IT landscape in China as a single, unified process, we stress the importance of tracing ‘multiple Internets,’ the development of which are contingent upon broader cultural changes such as shifts in socio-economic class, political projects of modernization and economic reforms. (p2)

As corporate, state and other actors with their vested interests contribute to the development of the Internet, it becomes clear that there is no one unified agenda and policy dictating the direction and nature of this digital geography. This is not to say that there are no hierarchical influences amongst these forces. A study examining digital network flows and their overlapping with European urban networks to detect economic connectivity found that centrally located European cities had a higher influence and degree of information flow as compared to peripheral European cities with similar levels of physical connectivity (Derudder et al., 2010). To illustrate, the combined cluster of London, Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam is viewed as the ‘Internet diamond’ as these global cities serve as important nodes of the European urban and digital commons (Tranos & Gillespie, 2011). This power fulcrum is also seen to extend its tentacles well beyond the region, marking the European influence on the global Internet backbone network. These power politics underpinning the internet infrastructure and character of the global network reminds us that select forces shape the internet as a public good. In spite of the affordances of communication technology to foster unprecedented locational freedom and mobility, we continue to witness the forces of agglomeration driving the exponential growth of the cityscape and the infoscape.

In pursuing this urbanization and digitization of space, perhaps it is more effective at this point to adopt a more integrated discursive stance on this subject. This comes at a time where it is evident that global cities are becoming more mediatized and digital networks are more entrenched in their urban geographies than perceived to be. For instance, let’s focus on the shift in core-periphery memberships among cities and the implications on their digital networks. Within the emerging market domain, Mexico City, currently number two, will drop to fifth place, while Mumbai is forecast to move up from third to second position. Also on the way up are urban areas such as Delhi, (up from 6th to 3rd position), Dhaka (up from 10th to 4th) and Lagos (up from 14th to 7th). While this indeed displays certain dynamism in the periphery categories, what is also observed is the simultaneous shift in scale and speed of Internet infrastructures and network

concentrations of these geographical nodes. In other words, recent studies have demonstrated the persistent and staying power of interconnectedness between the virtual and the material domain of social life. The Internet and city infrastructures seem to synchronize to create a complex and rich understanding of globalization of social networks and structures.

This perspective comes to fruition through state efforts to create a digital presence of its cities as ‘smart cities.’ This momentum rides on the convergence of online and offline structures through spatial mediatization via new technologies (Komninos, Pallot & Schaffers, 2012).

The digital space of cities is also described as a system composed of four concentric rings. At the center are the broadband networks, wired and wireless infrastructure, and the access devices enabling communication, data collection and exchange. Then, web technologies enabling data storage, processing, and visualization constitute a second ring. The third ring is composed of digital applications in many different domains of a city for e-government, utilities management, and sustainable development. The outer ring is constituted of e-services, a few selected applications that achieve developing viable business models and offered on a regular basis as services.

The intense localization of these digital cities utilizes ‘mirror’ logic in a sense that there are web-based representations and reproductions of different zones of the real city. This is designed to amplify city functions as well as transform urban configurations of the physical city to sync better with its online counterpart. Some interesting examples underway of such an initiative are the AOL digital cities that collect tourist and shopping information of the corresponding city coupled with local advertising for vertical markets. Other examples include the Digital City Amsterdam that is a platform for various community networks and social interaction among citizens, the Virtual Helsinki representing a 3D reconstruction of the entire city, and the Digital City Kyoto, also representing a 3D virtual space enriched with avatars and offering information related to city traffic, weather, parking, shopping, and sightseeing (Ishida, 2000). Also, it is not just the core cities that take on a web presence. Sometimes, periphery cities embrace this representation so as to gain entry into the core group through the backchannels of the web. There is an expectation and hope that its digitization will eventually enhance its real city status. The



case of Manchester is a good example wherein it has created a smart city rubric with the intent to become more inclusive, creative and sustainable a city through the imaginative use of digital applications and services. This illustrates an example of an urban commons' commitment to open innovation through the co-production of new digital services for citizens and tourists alike to engage with their city. This comes at a time where the leisure and tourism industry is growing exponentially with the rise of the middle class around the world. These systems of urban/digital navigation allow a simulation of inhabitation that compels one to engage in both spheres, often with positive economic and socio-cultural repercussions.

At this point, there is sufficient evidence to argue the relationship between the construct of global cities and the globalization of the Internet, where we see how global cities are gaining a virtual presence and digital embodiment while Internet architectures are impacting how we experience and architect our lived environments. This blurring of online and offline social life creates for a more integrated understanding of these infrastructures and their political and socio-economic dimensions. As a metaphor, the global city serves to understand contemporary shifts in the globalizing of the Internet. For starters, we detect a significant shift from a more generic model and rubric of the city/Internet to a more heterogeneous and decentralized model of global cities / Internets. Recent empirical studies have revealed that there is much in common between these two constructs as we witness hierarchies and strategic networks of these command centers. Be it the physical structure of cities or the coded arena of the Internet, they both cannot be viewed in isolation but rather, as part of a cluster of domains that are positioned by economic and socio-political advantages. There is more mobility and dynamism than assumed as these conventional power structures are being slowly challenged with the rise of emerging markets, creating a diversification in network cultures both materially and digitally. The role of the nation state is far from disembedded within these structures as they implicitly and explicitly and in cooperation with private-sector entities create walled gardens based on unique arrangements and negotiations. In fact, as we have seen, the state need not be diametrically opposed to the global city but may be the primary propeller in the creation of these city entities as part of the statehood agenda to compete on the international playing field.

*Transnational public spheres, the global-rural and the cultural metropolis*

There was mention earlier on of the creation of digital clusters that circumvent national borders, based on cultural commonalities such as language, political alignment and media interests. Numerous studies have explored the makings of a transnational public sphere in the age of new communication technologies that emerge in response to contemporary events and flows. For instance, the ‘Islamic public sphere’ addresses the global alignments in the religious arena while the ‘diasporic public sphere’ situates the migration of people and their sense of identity on a global stage (Fraser & Nash, 2013). Crucial to this space is a sense of inclusivity and democracy in participation that is not defined primarily by the state but on other rules of the game that are more specific to the culture of these spaces. As one would expect, these spheres do not come without critique. In some sense, popular framing of the transnational public sphere have fallen into similar trappings of Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere theory. This classic Habermas perspective was accused to be mainly informed by a Westphalian political imaginary while espousing egalitarianism. Feminists and multiculturalists and antiracists had a field day picking these notions apart as much evidence substantiates the fact that participation is rarely equal and constitutive powers in place influence these domains to favor certain select groups and people. We have seen this in the past papers in the makings of the public park as well as numerous examples on gender, race, and ethnicity bias on a range of social media platforms.

Hence, this discursive formation of communities around aspects other than nationalism is certainly not new. Arjun Appadurai addressed this subject about two decades ago in his book, ‘Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization’ (1996). In this work, he provides a much needed framing that continues to be used today to tackle the nebulous notion of globalization. He offers spatial metaphors such as ethnoscaples, mediascaples, ideoscaples, financescaples, and technoscaples to critically construct networks of culture that are at once local and global. Particularly of relevance here is his emphasis on the history and geography of a context to enable for a more grounded discourse surrounding its cultural traffic. After all, there is no ‘new’ inhabited territory that is independent of its old layers of people, cultures and things. The old and new intermingle and often reinvigorate one another. In his recent book, ‘The Future as Cultural Fact’ (2013) he pushes us further in this journey of ideas by enveloping us with a complexity of networks that make a global phenomenon. For instance, the diamond trade, he elaborates, is not just situated in the global cities of London, Antwerp and New York but is

deeply connected with extreme violence in places of the periphery such as Sierra Leone, Congo and Angola as well as the marketing middlemen in India. Thereby, the ‘production of locality’ of say a global city like Antwerp, is deeply affected by these global cultural flows. In this age of digital and material networks, he reminds us that we need to be more critical of our understandings of ‘flows’ that these networks generate. He suggests that we “distinguish the problem of circulation from the problem of connectivity” (65) when examining their levels of influence. This is illustrated with an example of Turkish guest workers circulating to a high degree between Turkey and Germany and yet, there is far less connectivity between these two cultures.

Keeping this in mind, how do we make sense of the numerous emerging digital platforms and applications that promise to transcend locality? Today mobile technology Apps are being designed with a global diaspora in mind. Digital audiences promise to be fragmented, fractured and at time fictionalized as local, while in reality they are everywhere and everyone. Several of these participatory sites such as Wikipedia (the global encyclopedia), Kickstarter (one of the world’s largest crowdfunding sites for creative projects) and Groupon (an international discount and marketing site) appear to be digital command centers in their own right. Much like global cities, these entities feed on transnational alliances and appear to be bounded, not by the state but by their unique cultural sphere that keeps their audiences faithful to these virtual localities. In fact, if we are to illustrate this further with the example of Groupon, we find that their sphere of influence is wide-ranging and global, spreading across Europe, Asia, South America and North America with 35 million registered users worldwide. While founded in Chicago, this is hardly a Chicago platform any longer. Yet, if we are to examine its production of locality, its practices are deeply embedded in the historical practice of coupons, discounted gift certificates to be used at the local supermarket or restaurant. For this digital platform to thrive and scale in diverse locations, there is much effort that goes into creating alliances with specific local companies, municipalities, and service industries of each city they enter. Their offers reflect the local cultural needs and demands and desires and not some abstract consumption of global products and space. In fact, these are fundamentally local in nature while subscribing to a global template of digital discounting. Taking a cue from Appadurai’s framework, the connectivity may be high in a sense that audiences on the Groupon site can participate and engage at a global level if they so desire.

However, as it plays out, their circulation of consumption practices is deeply localized to the nearby restaurants and their favorite food market.

Interestingly, a new trend is emerging that recognizes the power of locality and seeks to directly cater to this traditional village-like aspiration. As urbanization becomes the signature of our time, we may find ourselves lost in the crowd. Some platforms leverage on this fundamental concern where we ask ourselves -how is it that we do not know our neighbor but we are well acquainted with an online stranger? If we have the time to fight for a global cause, why not invest in local politics too? Should we not act locally if we are to globally engage? This ethos has given birth to several web spaces such as SeeClickFix, a platform in the area of city governance that enable users to report non-emergency issues for improving the neighborhood and the city, and Localocracy that gathers citizens, government officials and journalists to discuss and learn about local politics and priorities. The rise of the social networking site Nextdoor, builds on the mission to get to know your neighbors. Their digital manifesto reads as such:

### **We are for neighbors**

For neighborhood barbecues. For multi-family garage sales. For trick-or-treating

We're for slowing down, children at play.

We're for sharing a common hedge and an awesome babysitter.

We're for neighborhood watch. Emergency response. And for just keeping an eye out for a lost cat.

We believe waving hello to the new neighbor says, 'Welcome' better than any doormat.

We believe technology is a powerful tool for making neighborhoods stronger, safer places to call home.

We're all about online chats that lead to more clothesline chats.

We believe fences are sometimes necessary, but online privacy is always necessary.

We believe strong neighborhoods not only improve our property value, they improve each one of our lives.

We believe that amazing things can happen by just talking with the people next door.

**We are Nextdoor. We are simply you and your neighbors, together.**

The burgeoning of these particular transnational public spheres is seen as part of the ‘slow movement,’ a social response to the pressures of society to accelerate, catch up and embrace the speed. With new communication technologies, there is deep concern among a growing number of people that human relations are being rushed. If we want to have meaningful connectivity, we need to deliberately slowdown in our engagements and reflections of the day to day. This movement currently claims 83,000 members in 50 countries, which are organized into 800 Convivia or local papers. The World Institute of Slowness has been set up to teach the way of slowness and how it can be instilled in all walks of life. This has spawned an entire genre of slowness including that of Slowart, Slowcity, Slowcoffee, Slowdesign and Slowtravel. This is not a Luddite approach. Instead, there is an effort to make new media spaces work to serve ones desired culture rather than have the speed culture thrust upon you.

Further, when we talk about global cities, it is worth remembering that the idea of the city emerges from the larger dichotomy of the urban-rural divide. So when we attribute the globalizing of its spaces, are we to assume that the rural landscape is the much assumed staid, catatonic arena impervious to this discussion and thereby situated on the outside, excluded and disassociated? On the contrary, Lise and Peter Nelson argue that the ‘global rural’ needs to be incorporated in this discussion as new trends of gated communities and new city constructions targeted for an international and elite diaspora, particularly in emerging markets challenge our conventional perception of boundaries of a global city. These socio-spatial fragmentations are characterized as ‘new spaces of exclusion’ (Broudehoux, 2007, p.387) heading towards the ‘ghettoization by choice of the rich’ (Nelson & Nelson, 2011, p. 543). Furthermore, a larger trend can be observed, not just in economically prosperous regions but also in lesser states wherein spaces of leisure are permeating these productive-oriented cityscapes to an unprecedented degree. A fast growing consumerist culture is gaining ground within these scapes and with this, a unique form of spatial organization, consumer expectation and need (Dupont, 2011).

These global rural spaces of exclusion have a significant impact on the distribution of access of the digital sphere. We have come across numerous examples in the *Corporate Parks and Walled Gardens* papers that illustrate how the formation of material gated structures align with the deep

digital divide that pervades our time. From China, India to the Middle East, the rise of special digital and economic zones is seen as endemic to urban and digital policy-making. Take for instance the Dubai Internet City (DIC), an information technology park created by the government of Dubai. This is structured as a free economic zone to attract multinational companies to station themselves within this arena. It is seen as a crucial strategy for this region to become a key player in this competitive digital and material sphere and has led many global information technology firms, such as Microsoft, IBM, Oracle Corporation, Sun Microsystems, Cisco, HP, Nokia, Cognizant and Siemens, as well as UAE based companies such as i-mate, Acette, to move their regional base to the DIC. It is further strengthened by the neighboring industrial clusters such as Dubai Media City and Dubai Knowledge Village. However, this has consequences on how the government distributes access to quality digital infrastructures among its people, privileging certain zones over others.

Part of this drive, especially among emerging markets is to be recognized as a serious player in this global arena. As these states gain a new sense of self-confidence, it becomes important for them to exercise their new found power. It becomes a matter of pride that they are equal consumers and can compete within this transnational public sphere. So it's not a coincidence that they are adopting the Silicon Valley template and with that, often comes the embracing of 'foreign' and 'Western' emblems of status. For instance, Delhi is seen as a city that is currently vying for the position of 'global city' as it breeds a new host of shopping multiplexes with primarily foreign retail chains offering brand name goods and services, devoted to an exclusive and cosmopolitan clientele. These spaces symbolize an aspiration for a global culture that is implicitly 'foreign' and 'Western.' Basically, the global city comes with an expansive ideology that privileges certain consumption patterns over others and this preference is architected through institutional and regulatory measures such as formulating laws on what constitutes as appropriate spaces and activities of consumption, differing from state to state. However, it is not necessarily a process of imitation:

Although the middle classes' cultural aspirations have played a critical part in the global drive observed in India's big cities, the new consumption patterns backing physical transformations may be part of a global modernity without necessarily being reducible to

an imitation process of mere Westernization ... In Delhi, this is best illustrated by the recently built 'hi-tech religious and nationalist theme park' devoted to a reconstructed Vedic civilization and Hindu identity, the Akshardham Temple complex, on the banks of the Yamuna river, whose conception draws on many ideas from Disneyland and Hollywood studios...Akshardham is analysed as the embodiment of a process of 'moral consumption' characterizing a fraction of the middle classes that 'can take part in the process of [foreign] modernity, but also 'pull back' and return to 'tradition' to preserve its 'true' Indianness...The anxieties engendered by the destabilizing contradictions between globalization and national identity may thus produce a 'hybridized form of globality' ...(Dupont, 2011, pp. 548)

This ropes us into the much discussed McDonaldization of the cultural landscape where concerns surface on the extent of standardization, Westernization and uniformity that globalization brings to the table. These discussions are balanced by the localization and appropriation scholars that emphasize how even a city's 'global' cache is in actuality its local environment and culture instead of some generic international lifestyle. For instance, Yen-Fen Tseng (2011) in his study of Shanghai, captured the perceptions of skilled Taiwanese immigrants who placed significant value to the unique and distinctive charms of the local environment; "skilled migrants are not as hypermobile as imagined. They value the cultural attractions and lifestyles associated with particular destinations, and are inclined to put down roots once they have settled in a new place they call home" (p. 766). It is important to acknowledge here that this creative class that is mobile and has exposure to other global cities shares a demand that is common to other skilled labor across the globe in what constitutes as a quality of place. Richard Florida states this elusive quality emanates from an assemblage of 'thick' labor markets, lifestyles, social interaction, and diversity of a cityscape (2002: 32). Hence, the 'global' in a city can be very much indigenous in nature and the staying power of the global and supposedly hypermobile migrants are often tied to the value they place in the culture of the place.

Another study that sought to move away from such disambiguation of migrants focused on automotive designers to determine how characteristics of places influenced the designers' migration and settlement patterns (Molotch, 2002). What was found was that beyond simple job-market considerations, certain types of designers tended to prefer specific cities, due to the

lifestyles, subcultures and leisure activities that characterize each place. This brings to our attention the role that leisure and culture play in the shaping of meaning of such spatial constructs. While the discourse has been dominated by economic and financial concerns, scholars such as Soja (2000) have emphasized the cultural dimension, framing the global city as a ‘cultural metropolis.’ After all, these spatial configurations are lived architectures where motivations are not merely driven by the pragmatic but also the affective. People seek for meaning and value in a place of inhabitation and sometimes its social memory can have a powerful impact on such choices. A good example can be drawn from Tseng’s analysis (2011) of how the Taiwanese feel towards Shanghai where their “affection can be traced back to collective memories formed by representations in literature and films, such as images of old Shanghai represented in many films based on the work of famous writer and Shanghai native Eileen Chang” (p. 776).

In fact, hypermobility and digital migration are topics also discussed when concerning movements within the Web 2.0 sphere as the barriers of entry are low and mobility of users are high. Whether we want to enter the portals of Amazon or Couchsurfing, all it takes is setting up an account. We have witnessed the mass digital exodus of audiences from MySpace to Facebook as well how Google+ in spite of their draconian strategies to get people to socialize in their space, is so far failing to do so. We are supposed to be an attention deficit and detached populace that moves with the digital herd. Particularly, the digital natives are supposed to be digital migrants at heart as they flirt with multiple platforms and Apps. Yet, for the most part, this is not so. Instead, we have a vast number of examples that illustrate that people invest their time and energy into the making of their profiles and networks on specific digital sites and make it their ‘home.’ They take ownership of their space and nurture their profile to build a more credible position in these online communities. Some audiences align their identities deeply with certain platforms, seeing themselves as Reddit people or ‘Couchsurfers’ and these come with hierarchies within the membership clan based on how often you post, your tone online, your mediation skills and how you play by the rules of the game. New research into audience participation on social media platforms in poverty entrenched areas of the global South elude to the deep aspirations that youngers have as they go about befriending strangers from exotic and Western countries to enhance their social capital on platforms such as Orkut and Facebook (Rangaswamy & Cutrell,



2012). Thereby, we need to recognize the nuanced differences among inhabitants of these spaces, moving away from holistic groupings.

To conclude, the transnational public sphere serves as a unifying meta-narrative driven by a compelling idea and propelled by the rise of new digital connectivity and circulations of people, products and ideas. Whether or not this concept had initial empirical evidence seems now less relevant as they have been reified through the concentration of resources, intellectual, financial and social, acting as a magnet for skilled labor (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). Sometimes, these have dark ramifications as we have explored earlier on where certain ‘global cities’ dictate the new economic order while lesser cities starve for capital. There is a challenge of subscribing to a normative ideal as these global structures become more sophisticated, reflecting complex needs and demands of pluralistic audiences. It is seen that these supposed hypermobile migrants desire more rootedness than posited, and the intense localization of their inhabited space plays a large role in their loyalty to the domain, be it digital or material. Clusters form along lines of language, taste, and political affiliation that need not collide with nationalism. It is worth considering the application of ‘globalizing cities’ as more appropriate a metaphor for the globalizing of the internet as dynamism is the inherent quality that is valued in both domains. While markets play an important role in the position of these select spheres, culture continues to matter and can supersede the pragmatic. While the classic core-periphery dichotomy has been applied to the understanding of networks, these are not essentializing categories but have more mobility than is portrayed. It is popularly assumed that the state is losing relevancy but as revealed here, it is not a simple zero-sum game of the state versus the global city. They can be in fact key propellers of certain domains to reach a global stage, be it a digital platform or a material sphere. And while the template that circulates in the architecting of these spaces can be rather uniform in nature, they hybridize as they gain usage. Lastly, the digital migrants are less uprooted as it may seem, as they yearn for stability and community, needs that have shaped the simplest of social groups from time immemorial.

## GLOBALIZATION OF DIGITAL LEISURE NETWORKS

So far, effort is made to tie the discourse of the global city to the globalizing of the internet by borrowing from discussions within urban planning and cultural geographies. The intent is to create a channel of transference through the vibrant metaphor of the 'global cities' to facilitate discussions on the globalizing of the internet. This section takes this further, focusing on the arena of the internet that is demarcated for primarily social and leisure purposes- its social networking sites. These digital leisure networks have managed to carve a substantive niche and facilitate a cultural shift within the internet sphere. Marked by social relations and leisure generated activity, Web 2.0 spaces have been attributed to create novel digital markets and online business models that come with significant economic and social value. Yochai Benkler's 'Wealth of Networks' (2006) and Henry Jenkins' 'Convergence Culture' (2006) laid the foundation of tying cultural production and consumption to economic processes, with a special focus on labor-based practices. To investigate the globalizing of digital leisure spaces and the issues that pervade, it is important to situate them within the larger internet infrastructure. As suggested at the start of this paper, given that the 'city' has served as a useful metaphor to understand the internet, then why not extend these benefits by using the 'global city' as a metaphor for the globalizing of the internet and 'global parks' within the cityscape to address digital leisure networks.

For starters, it is important to understand that social networking sites share much of their underlying architectural qualities with that of the internet - they draw upon virtual and overlay networks, cloud-computing architecture, network management and traffic engineering, addressing and routing architectures, IP network architectures and protocols, monitoring and traffic analysis, resilient networks (fault tolerance, network recovery, self-healing), cross-layer design and optimization, mobility (user, device, service, network), content-centric networks, broadband access technologies, resource allocation, switching and routing, and network virtualization (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011). Among these leisure sites, peer-to-peer networks and user-generated content prevail as an overarching and international template, allowing them to fit well under the larger 'global parks' construct. However, there are also distinct lexical structural differences among sites such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, Orkut, and Renren that make these sites intensely localized in terms of their cultural space and yet globalized in terms of their legal and economic status. For instance, social activity was tracked on such sites and it was found that across different platforms, few actors personalized their

platform by modifying their default settings such as for privacy (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Yet, behaviors developed within such architectural confines that were indeed diverse, based on the nature of communication, relations and membership of such networks. While these sites enjoy a certain global status through their shared design rubric, certain arenas such as privacy make these platforms uniquely political and tied to the eccentricities of the specific nation state within which usage happens.

Similarly, we have witnessed how the urban park as an innovative public sphere was adopted across nations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with that, expectations of nurturing urban civility, controlling social unrest and signaling modernity on the world stage. Yet, each park comes with its own narratives and historic dramas. There is a genre of parks marked by politics such as the People's Park in Berkeley, and another genre of parks marked for walled leisure consumption by the elite class such as the Gramercy Park in New York. In fact, this book has revealed a spectrum and typology of urban parks based on the overarching gendered, political, commercial, corporate and ethnic cultures and social practice. Each of these genre of urban parks subscribe to a certain transnational public sphere that is not dominantly characterized by their state and yet, to understand the quotidian relations that unravel in these spaces, the locality of politics and eccentricity of embedded social practice comes to the fore.

Sometimes, there is an overt state commitment to not be part of the transnational public sphere, as it is viewed as coming at the price of nationhood. Warlaumont (2010) points out that some nations such as France are more protectionist in nature and this outlook shapes the very culture pervading architectures of their digital platforms. Numerous state media policies apply pressure to take on a more 'French' cultural form.

For instance, after being allowed to maintain tariffs and quotas to protect its cultural market from other cultural products, especially American films and television, in 2003 France consumed only 60 per cent of American film products as opposed to 85 per cent in other European film markets (Riding, 2003, p. 9B). In an effort to preserve the French language the French government enacted the Toubon Law (penned in 1994 by French Cultural Minister, Jacques Toubon), mandating the use of the French language in all official and commercial publications, and imposing fines on the French media for using Americanisms or English where French equivalents exist. A few years later, another law

mandated quotas requiring the majority of songs on the radio be in French (Wikipedia). Hence, these efforts were a way for the French government to put a cog in the wheel of the perceived ‘steamrolling’ of the English language.

While new media technologies foster new digital network spaces, they still have to often comply with traditional national and cultural policies that have been dictating older communication platforms. To be exempt from these policies would mean to make a case that these architectures are novel and radically divergent from existing communication platforms, a case that is tremendously difficult in this deeply interconnected and mediated era, not just online and offline but between different old and new social networks. What is daunting however, in the case of France for instance is that as cultural boundaries get tightened, command centers such as Facebook gain membership across borders. France’s Facebook membership alone increased a phenomenal 518 per cent over the course of 2008. Google’s YouTube, was the top ranked video site in France, with 25 million people watching 2.3 billion videos online in May 2008. This was in spite of concerns by French government officials who claim these particular sites have the strongest potential for American dominance and imperialism (Instant Messaging, 2009).

Also, we cannot escape the fact that labor circulation, however global it appears to be, is one of the most guarded territories of the nation state. In light of users on digital leisure platforms laboring to produce content, these seemingly free and voluntary activities are hardly impervious to complex labor relations framed by legal systems that are nationally based. Adam Fish (2011) expounds on the nature of labor within these transnational leisure networks and the challenges in governance of such practices. He argues that to address this critically, we need to go beyond the staid binary of viewing these digitally distributed labor practices as either celebratory of the democratic and willful contributions of people or that which is deeply exploitative. Instead, he suggests

for an inductive model of analysis that considers these two perspectives within the context of practices within the sites or systems themselves. This is all the more important when one analyzes emerging social enterprises, which attempt to fulfill a primary social, non-capitalist outcome while still maintaining a competitive position within the market (p. 468).

This is framed as part of a system of 'creative capitalism' that "merges leisure, freedom, even fantasy with the realities of serving a competitive capitalist firm." Fish does underline a significant and growing challenge on intellectual property rights in the digital global network given that these digital laborers are being viewed more as 'outsourced workers' as this phenomenon becomes less marginal. Take the recent case of the Nyan Cat and the lawsuit against Warner Brothers. The Nyan Cat is a feline-themed internet meme. This video entails an online character with a cat's face and a body resembling a horizontal breakfast bar with pink frosting, flying across the screen leaving a bright rainbow trail behind. Much like several YouTube phenomena that moves in mysterious ways, this particular video became a sensation and went viral. Later on, Warner Brothers' game Scribblenauts used the Nyan Cat in their video game without the creator's permission and is now facing a federal lawsuit for infringement of copyrights and trademarks. We can expect more of these incidents in the near future as these boundaries of labor and leisure and what is private and what is a public good has been deeply blurred in this digital sphere.

While Fish takes on a position of hybridity, scholars such as Terranova (2009) point to the underlying ideology dictating these architectures, that which is more corporatized and capitalistic in nature. These spaces are seen as being far from the celebrated liberalized digital global market that promises a fair playing field for the digital laborer. She argues that these platforms are "less a space for employment opportunity and more a domain of precarity, job insecurity, free labor, and general exploitation" (p.). We should not forget that these social network sites, in spite of their dominant leisure and social properties are also markets that follow economic and legal policies. While labor activity can simultaneously be play, entertainment and leisure and contribute to the 'global intellectual economy,' it is still up for contention whether one can demand an economic value to this effort. Banks and Humphreys (2008) argue that we need to look at all fronts and power relations between all actors involved including the "non-monetary, social economies, and their central and increasingly constitutive role in monetary or financial economies." In other words, to determine whether labor infringements are made, we have to determine if this is a consensual and collaborative relationship and recognize any form of compensation that is jointly agreed upon before we make it a matter of dispute. After all,

the power derived from the social economies is not necessarily consonant with that derived from financial economies. When there are abrasive encounters as we have described, it is not always clear who is in control and who the winners and losers are, but it is clear that it is not as straightforward as corporate winners and user losers. Here we need a better understanding of the agents and agencies emerging through social network markets.

Last but not least, it is impossible to not address the underground global economy that digital leisure platforms stimulate such as the porn industry and the impact this has on globalization flows across these spaces. Matthew Zook (2003) has examined datasets on the location of content production, websites and hosting of the online adult industry to gauge to what extent these electronic spaces interact with the geographic realm, paying heed to the local histories, cultures and politics of these occupied terrains:

The roles of these actors, however, are not simply determined by a spaceless logic of cyber interaction but by histories and economies of the physical places they inhabit. In short, the 'space of flows' cannot be understood without reference to the 'space of places' to which it connects. This geography also provides a valuable counterpoint to mainstream electronic commerce and highlights the ability of socially marginal and underground interests to use the Internet to form and connect in global networks.

Also, much in line with the global city literature, certain cities are more permissive than others in their allowances of pornography, creating diverse spaces of regulation based on specific states and cities. For instance, Los Angeles and Amsterdam are more permissive and less litigious towards the adult industry and this unique localization and policy affects its digital leisure space in the nature of services offered and means of distribution and production of adult content. Hence, we need to keep in mind that there are three geographically relevant measures to understand the impact of globalization and physical location on these digital leisure networks, namely: (1) the production of content for the industry, (2) the creation and maintenance of websites to distribute content, and (3) the hosting of websites (Zook, 2003). Also, much like the trajectory of clusters and the core-periphery approach to the global city literature, there is a slow but growing shift from the Western command centers to periphery cities in the digital adult space. It is revealed that seventy percent of the adult content distributors are based in the United

States and countries with the highest user rates are Canada and Australia. However, the United Kingdom contrary to expectations has a relatively low level of Internet adult content distributors. Further, while West Europe is a large market, East European actors are central to the making of this industry, revealing linkages within this global flow of space. Further, countries such as Thailand and Hungary have recently become new centers for the creation of pornographic materials. There also seems to be a focus on specialization in adult sites with the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Australia taking the lead.

Hence, while much on globalization of the Internet has celebrated the connectivity of people across national borders, few have paid attention to the underground interests that also leverage these platforms to create a global network. Democratic participation here take on a new meaning as the digital product in focus that flows between these borders is that which is marked as illegal depending on the nation state. Whether it is the fostering of terror networks, drug or human trafficking, these traditional forms of social and mass deviance have managed to capitalize on the affordances of digital leisure networks to enhance efficacy in their circulations, connections and communications. Thus, Zook remarks, “the geographical manifestation of these networks shares a similar structural logic with the global financial system, albeit with drastically different priorities, goals, and relevant places.” In fact, Castells (1998) recognized early on that there is a space of flows that takes on a “position of irrelevance” (p. 162) and is treated as invisible, however dominant its presence is based on what is deemed as productive and constructive spaces for society, be it at a material or virtual context. These deliberately excluded criminal realms however are very much part of the global flow and contribute to the geography of social network sites. In essence, these deviant spheres benefit deeply on the decentralized and fragmented nature of the transnational digital topography, protecting these realms and its participatory members against any one dominant nation state. In some sense, globalizing of digital space creates invisibility.

As new ways of engineering information emerge and get appropriated, they also transform where the boundaries fall between SNS and the internet as we know it. In recent news (New Yorker, 2013), Facebook announced its new Graph Search which gives users the ability to search their social networks for things like photos and restaurant recommendations:

For a long time, search has been one of the weaknesses of the site; now it might actually be useful. You can search for all the photos that you have “liked,” or all the restaurants in San Francisco that have been liked by your friends who like Lady Gaga. It pores over individualized information that no other search engine has; more interestingly, it represents a different way of thinking about searching, stressing the integration of information across your posts (and those of your friends), rather than just returning a particular page that seems to fit your criteria.

Through this lens, it would give the impression that the cityscape is becoming more a playscape. However, one must not be swept away by novelty as much innovation for remodeling the underlying infrastructures has failed to take root, giving further credence to traditional architectures of command centers. But inevitably, new models will come by and threaten the relative stability of these structures, as they are still subject to varied digital and material movements of political, economic and social in nature.

Lastly, much has been written on the issue of privacy in the *Walled Gardens* paper. We get the impression that this has become a transnational concern that pervades across cultures, pushing for stringent policy measures by the state. We see divergent schools of thought emerging including that of the United States and Europe in this matter. For the most part, United States align with a more self-voluntary and less state-regulatory approach believing that the digital sphere is still in its nascent stage and its future potential would be impeded by privacy regulations by the state. This would freeze the architectures to a high degree and have an adverse impact on innovation. From the European point of view, while innovation and economic prosperity is essential, freedom of a public sphere has to have the consumer’s interest at the heart of it. After all, they are the public and these architectures should be steered in the direction that is less violating of individual rights. Also, over the decades, consumers in these regions have demonstrated deeper concern about their privacy online and have contributed to this current momentum in policy debates. Yet, if we are to shift our attention to the emerging markets, another transnational public sphere emerges, one that is less concerned about privacy. It a recent study, it was found that Saudi Internet users were the top in the list when it came to sharing their



personal lives online (Arab News, June 2013). According to this US report on computing trends, Saudi's expressed little concern in the sharing of most matters of their day to day lives through status updates, photos, videos and other links. India occupies second place in this category. According to the statistics, about 60 percent of Saudis surveyed said they share "everything" or "most things" online compared to 15 percent in the United States and 10 percent in France. The most dominant platforms used in Saudi Arabia are Snapchat, followed by Facebook and Instagram. Hence, we need to recognize that while indeed issues such as privacy has become a dominant contention within the digital leisure networks of Europe and the United States, these cannot be uncritically transferred to other transnational spheres, particularly in the so called periphery domains. While these regions continue to exercise disproportionate power onto the global landscape, there are multiple arenas in the emerging market realm where they are barely visible in their influence. Adopting the template of the digital global city does not necessitate the automatic transference of its concerns and issues.

## CONCLUSION

While SNS differentiate themselves from the internet based on their dominant characterization of user-generated content and emphasis on the social and leisurely aspects, it is important to keep in mind that SNS continues to be embedded within the larger internet domain and shares much of the underlying technological architectures that allow these spaces to sustain themselves. In fact, one can argue that to some extent the SNS culture is pervading and influencing the shape of the internet as the coined term 'Web 2.0' implies, alerting us to a new era of a participatory and network culture. To reconstitute this in metaphorical terms, the urban park distinguishes itself from the tedium of the cityscape as it enjoys the status of leisure and sociality amongst the masses. Yet, it is still part of the fabric of the city, and subscribes to the larger operations of social norms and legalities. These are more soft boundaries between the city and the park, and as urban parks take on a plurality of forms reflecting contemporary leisure practices and public spatial consumption such as shopping arcades and malls, and squares within the city confines, we are alerted to the fact that the public leisure sphere is becoming more commercialized and in need of closer scrutiny on regulations for protection of privacy in public domains. This is much

like the evolution of SNS as corporate interests have seeped into seemingly innocent leisure and open spaces and in fact, capitalize on the disarming nature of leisure to influence human behavior for commercial interests.

Further, in the above reviews of globalizing of the internet and SNS, we see the persistence of the core-periphery nodes and hierarchies that are dictated by a host of factors that are political, corporate as well as affective and culturally based. While certain command centers persist such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, we also see the rise of a host of digital leisure networks that are becoming more issue, interest, group affiliation and location based such as that of Nextdoor, black planet, beautiful people and the like. We also witness the hybridization and indigenization of dominant global leisure networks such as Facebook wherein its usage allows for a diverse representation of spatial forms that may have little resemblance to the original Facebook ethos. In a sense, the more global these command centers get, the more nebulous its ideology becomes as it's impossible to impose its unique socio-cultural norms onto its substantive transnational and transcultural digital inhabitants.

Additionally, it can be argued that these SNS are far from disembedded from the nation state; they seem to nurture a complex relationship with this entity where they become web representations of the nation's culture. Several new digital leisure platforms have been designed for specific regions and audiences such as South Korean's Cyworld, Latin America's Migente, and Germany's Studivz, as well as Google's Orkut (initially aimed for the United States audience to compete with MySpace and Facebook but eventually taken hold in Brazil). That said, the literature points us to an important factor of viewing these command centers not as individual nodes of power but rather as part of strategic clusters of circulating networks and capital. In the age of the hyperlink and hypermobile community, we need to pay more attention to the flows between these sites and not solely that of its individual structures as the former allows for more dynamism and change.

We need to consider how digital leisure cannot be boxed in within the online world as participants mediate between the physical and the virtual, transforming offline moments into digital memories to be consumed and played with; how it regurgitates the past as an infinite and

affective present. As projects for making cities ‘smart’ and ‘fluid’ city are underway, so are its leisure counterpart; hence we see virtual museums and malls spring up as extensions of its tangible and concrete presence. As ways of engineering information emerge and get appropriated, they also transform where the boundaries fall between SNS and the internet as we know it. However, one must not be swept away by novelty as much innovation for remodeling the underlying infrastructures have failed to take root, giving further credence to dominant command centers of the leisure network. That said, it is a reminder that while dominant models remain relatively stable, they are still products of a host of practices and subject to challenge by shifts in the technological, the social and the cultural.

While new information and communication technologies make possible the impressive blurring of lines between reality and fantasy, the real and the virtual, we should not forget that much of the world’s inhabitants reside in a pre-digital world and are the invisible publics that have somehow slipped past the database that appears omnipresent. Poverty, rurality, criminality, and the perverse gain little attention within this larger discourse on the globalizing of the internet and its leisure counterpart. Going back to the analogy, it’s much like examining a city without taking heed of their vast slums, often where half their inhabitants live, work and play. Hence, let’s use this opportunity to simultaneously enrich the conceptualizing of the city and the park, leisure and labor, and the virtual and the material by being more encompassing of the marginal and the diverse.

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