Everyday self-organising social movements and the role of social media in citizen engagement

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of digital storytelling in the context of small-scale local activities. We introduce the theoretical concept of 'everyday self-organising social movements' (ESSM), which refers to small-scale, citizen-led programs that aim at improving their neighbourhoods and cities. In theorising ESSM, we identify the tension between bottom-up and top-down actions aimed at fortifying the community, and discuss how this tension can be transcended through the concept of self-organisation. Our multidisciplinary research framework combines ideas from the fields of digital communication, media studies, urban planning and collaborative design. From the perspective of digital storytelling, we demonstrate how digital social media plays the role of a catalyst in the organisation of social movements and in the construction of identities. To make our case, we present six examples: three from Helsinki, Finland, and three from Tokyo, Japan. Finally, we discuss the conditions that city and municipality officers, decision-makers and urban planners can mobilise to support the activity of mundane but crucial, community-based social actions.

Key words

Digital storytelling, social media, communication infrastructure, social movements, self-organisation

Movimientos sociales cotidianos auto-organizados y uso de medios sociales en la participación ciudadana

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Resumen

Este artículo examina el papel de las narrativas digitales en el contexto del nacimiento y desarrollo de acciones locales de pequeña escala. Proponemos el concepto teórico de 'movimientos sociales cotidianos auto-organizados (ESSM por sus siglas en inglés) para referirnos a esas acciones ciudadanas de pequeña escala, que operan de una forma auto-organizada y tienen como objetivo inmediato la mejora de la experiencia en la ciudad y el barrio. Al teorizar los ESSM, identificamos una tensión entre las actividades que fomentan cambio social en la ciudad de abajo hacia arriba (desde las comunidades) y las que operan de arriba hacia abajo (desde la administración pública). Discutimos cómo esta tensión puede ser fructíferamente trascendida por el concepto de 'auto-organización'. Nuestro marco de investigación multidisciplinario combina ideas de los campos de la comunicación digital, estudios de medios, planificación urbana y diseño colaborativo. Acercándonos desde la narrativa digital, mostramos cómo el uso de medios sociales digitales es un catalizador tanto de la organización como de la construcción de las identidades de este tipo de movimientos sociales. Para construir nuestro argumento, presentamos seis ejemplos de ESSMs en Helsinki, Finlandia, y Tokio, Japón. Finalmente discutimos algunas de las condiciones favorables que podrían generar las ciudades y municipios, sus oficiales y planificadores urbanos con el fin de apoyar este tipo de actividades mundanas, pero comunal y socialmente cruciales.

Palabras clave

Introduction

Mundane social activities in which citizens engage in local city-making efforts (Brynskov et al. 2014) are commonplace today in cities as diverse as Helsinki and Tokyo (see e.g. Hernberg, 2012, Bialski et al., 2015, Brumann & Schulz, 2012). In the context of our research, these city-making efforts consist of concrete activities that include reviving a local bathing culture, creating collective urban gardens, or organising events to reinterpret the use of local public spaces.

There is a nice concept in Japanese culture called *machizukuri* (which means 'community development', 'neighbourhood-building', or 'town-making') that describes participative urban activities and covers a variety of city planning activities. According to Sorensen et al. (2008), central to such bottom-up activities is the creation of physical and conceptual civic spaces. *Physical spaces* refer to local spaces that enable people to meet each other and interact, such as parks, community centres and galleries. *Conceptual spaces* refer to the ideas the community has about their development, shared values and heritages, and new, shared activities (ibid., p. 33).

Anderson noted that stories are the building blocks of the ability to 'imagine' an area as a community (Anderson, 1991). This means that storytelling is an important vehicle for building identities and a sense of belonging to a community. A conceptual space is needed for negotiation to emerge. On the other hand, Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006) suggested that neighbourhood communities actually are 'storytelling networks'. According to them, these networks consist of three levels: local media (macro), community organisations (meso), and residents (micro), and in the most integrated communities, these levels are well connected. In their communication infrastructure model, Kim and Ball-Rokeach (2006) state that the 'communication action context' is the key for the successful operation of a storytelling network. The context is analogous to the 'social architecture of the living space'; some foster connections, others obstruct. Actors together form the community that is created, maintained, dissolved, and recreated in communication. Thus, city-making is as much about the community's ability to use their imagination and tell stories of themselves in novel ways as the participants of the community as it is about enabling structures.

In our paper, we study what kind of storytellers the local communities are by focusing on the small-scale social movements within them. Mundane local activities are characteristically known to be self-organising, i.e., free of city-driven activities, and thus operate 'on their own' (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011; Horelli et al., 2014). City or municipality-driven initiatives are not always as successful in generating social change as self-organised initiatives, even though city-driven operations have much more financial resources. As a consequence, a key question arises: *what can be learnt from everyday self-organising social movements, especially in terms of supporting and enabling such movements to emerge more widely and frequently?*

One important catalyst in the emergence of self-organising initiatives seems to be the wider availability of communication technology, especially social media (e.g. Horelli et al., 2014). In fact,

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there seems to be a link between the enhanced communication technologies available and storytelling (Brynskov et al. 2014). In essence, besides being an effective platform for coordination and planning, social media also contributes to the construction of an image and identity of communities, thereby influencing the ways in which concrete social practices are performed. However, even though scholars such as Horelli et al. (2014) have discussed the role of social media in self-organising movements operating at a local level, there is a need to know more about the role of digital technology, particularly how digital technology can be used effectively in the context of storytelling, community-building and small-scale social movements. This is identified as the research gap to which our study seeks to respond.

Our aim in this article is to introduce the concept of 'everyday self-organising social movements' (ESSM) that refers to such small-scale, citizen initiated actions that operate in a self-organising manner and aim at improving the experience of the city and the neighbourhood in local physical spaces. It is our claim that such social activities are increasingly enabled by, and also dependent on, the use of communication technology. Today, this technology is both mobile and visual, allows the building of digital archives that represent the community's memory, and enables people to interact and build communities online. In the case of ESSM, communication technology not only helps people find each other, get together and plan around certain issues or interests, but it also provides a 'digital communication infrastructure' that makes it possible to share, disseminate, and archive different stories, images and memories of the events of a community. In turn, digital communication and action turns into a movement. These practices of sharing, disseminating and archiving are the mechanisms that contribute to the construction of the identity and shared image of the movement. They materialise the crucial practices of an issue (Marres, 2012) and enable the learning process by informing community members on how to engage in the movement and defining what types of actions are valued and what types are not.

In this paper, we propose two research questions that we aim to answer by analysing six cases using the framework developed for this study. The research questions are as follows:

1. How can conceptualising a community as a self-organising system help to study the emergence and operation of digital storytelling in small-scale social movements?
2. How can participants in small-scale social movements create, share and make their stories available to others via digital communication technology?

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section 2, we define what we mean by ESSM and how it differs from the concept of 'social movement'. In Section 3, we introduce the concept of 'self-organisation'. In this discussion, we rely on the findings in the field of complex systems sciences. We then elaborate on the key takeaways of this theoretical understanding of self-organisation in the context of social movements. In particular, we make the claim that bottom-up movements

introduce changes to their community structures, and that the key means by which this goal is achieved is the rich interaction enabled by social media. In Section 4, we discuss the role of storytelling in community building. These elements together form our theoretical framework. In Section 5, we demonstrate how this framework applies to six real-life ESSM cases. In Section 6, we present the most important characteristics of these cases in an attempt to answer to the research questions proposed in this paper. Finally, in Section 7, we discuss how community development activities and urban planning can be fostered in practice, as well as discuss our findings in relation to the existing literature.

1. From social movements to everyday social movements

The cases we introduce here are not directly comparable with large-scale social movements, such as the labour movement or the environmental movement. However, our cases do represent, on a certain scale, forms of constructive 'protest' that mobilise social creativity around an issue in a similar way to their larger counterparts, although through more practical, mundane and material engagements (Marres, 2012).

As the case studies will demonstrate, by engaging collectively in making new gardens in a public space or by attracting new participants to a traditional bath house, these efforts abide to a fairly general definition of a social movement: 'interlocking networks of groups, social networks and individuals, and the connections between them, with a shared collective identity who try to prevent or promote societal change by non-institutionalised tactics' (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Social movement theory can thus be fruitful in understanding the variety of ways in which individuals perform collective actions, even in their everyday lives, toward common interests.

Decades of research around these phenomena have demonstrated the many ways in which social movements have been a central source of change in contemporary societies (Goodwin & Jasper, 2003). Being mindful of the limits of social movement as a concept, we will tentatively refer to them in the mundane (but critical) spirit of their everyday instantiation. In theorising ESSM in the rest of the paper, we identify the tension between bottom-up and top-down actions aimed at fostering communities and discuss how this tension can be transcended with the concept of self-organisation. In the next section, we will next discuss what we mean by 'self-organisation'.

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2. Self-organising communities

The concept of self-organisation describes the collective behaviors of a system's agents free from imposed structures or top-down leadership. The concept itself is derived from complex systems sciences (Holland, 1995), which studies systems that function between complete order and complete disorder. In general, complex systems have multiple interacting agents that exhibit coherent collective behaviours—they can be as different as flocks of birds, financial markets, or organisations (see e.g. Cilliers, 1998). In a state between complete order and complete disorder, complex systems are said to be capable of self-organising; this means they are able to create their own organisation, independent of top-down control, by following a set of simple rules that enable collaboration (Mitchell, 2009). Technically, this process of building novel structures happens through internal information flows among the system's subsystems (i.e. the 'actors' of the system), while they aim at stabilising the system by shaping the system's own structures (Gregson & Guastello, 2011). For example, in cultural systems, explicit and implicit cultural norms are the 'structures' that evolve and facilitate certain actions while inhibiting others (ibid., p. 6). Thus, in self-organising human systems, interactions among individuals can give rise to novel collaborative behaviours with consistent norms, behavioural patterns, relationships, values, criteria, and ways of working (ibid., p. 7).

Taking this metaphor further, we may say that in the context of communities, these systems consist of people (the actors), their interactions and flows of symbolic communication, their surrounding environment, and other embedded elements, such as technologies, tools, and artefacts. The community is an interactive system that requires some means of communication in order to form a living, evolving system. The elements of the system interact together, and their patterned interactions represent the structures of the community and are manifested in the practices of the community. In addition, communities are not empty of existing cultural values, but rather they tend to hold a rich culture and history that influence the potential course of future actions. Communication technologies, then, help community members to interact and exchange information, and thereby contribute to cultural norms of behaviours.

From the perspective of self-organising systems, a community develops novel structures in an attempt to stabilise its internal cultural structures, manifested in the new recurring patterns of interactions and communication. While we have referred to ESSMs as community actors, we have not yet clearly defined their role in relation to the whole system, i.e., the community. These movements represent a form of a constructive 'protest' that mobilises social creativity for practical reasons, such as making new gardens or attracting new participants to the traditional bathhouse; this shows that their role is to introduce changes into community structures. From the perspective of self-organisation theory, these movements are emerging patterns of behaviours that stem from bottom-up activities ignited by unhappy and/or eager citizens who seek to develop the community

and introduce changes to its structures. While the function of a municipality is to take care of the well-being of the residents, it is often impossible to satisfy the locale-specific needs of communities. Thus, the movements that are built around certain needs—such as building a sense of belonging among community members—utilise the resources of the community and its surroundings. This introduces changes into communities that consider their specific needs, which then generate novel behavioural patterns. Indeed, such movements serve as change agents of the community in the longer term, establishing new normative behaviours that may become a part of the established cultural order of the community. In this sense, bottom-up activities do not necessarily act in opposition to top-down activities—at least not in the long run—but they do serve the community from a different perspective.

3. Digital storytelling

Communities are based on their resources for storytelling about the community (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006), i.e. they are built and maintained through communication. According to Kim & Ball-Rokeach (2006), communities are built on shared discourses about the identities, desires, and shared lived experiences of the members. If communication and interaction are the key drivers of self-organisation (cf. Gregson & Guastello, 2011), and if storytelling is a central building block of the community (e.g. Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Anderson, 1991), then we need to understand how storytelling activities, understood as a form of communication, can foster community building as a driver of self-organisation.

Couldry (2008) defined digital storytelling as 'mediation' that can be approached from three distinct perspectives: 1) as a context and process of production with certain practices and styles of interpretation; 2) as a circulation of the outputs of these practices; and 3) as long-term consequences for particular communities and for wider social and cultural formations (ibid., p. 383). This definition thus highlights three different aspects of digital storytelling as a practice: processes, flows of information, and socio-cultural impact.

Storytelling can have several important effects on the community. In the context of organisations as storytelling networks, Chen (2013) has pointed out several advantages of storytelling activities. For instance, storytelling can be used for the recounting individual investments towards a common goal, fostering a bond among members, identifying problems, and enabling organisational learning. In another account, Chen (2012) describes how storytelling can help combat disenchantment by promoting the consideration of agency ('who does?') and meaning-making ('what does?'), and serving as a way to 'charismatise' routine, i.e., to derive meaning from mundane tasks and inspire people to imagine creative ways to perform the same tasks.

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In this regard, the digital storytelling movement has been a game-changer. In practice, the 'digital' aspect of digital storytelling refers to digital tools of production, such as computers, digital cameras, and editing software, as well as to the digital media used for content distribution (Vivienne & Burgess, 2013), for which social media has become increasingly important. Often, digital storytelling is about cross-media or transmedia storytelling, in that the stories are told across multiple digital media platforms (Noguera et al., 2013). In addition, some researchers (e.g. Jung et al., 2013) consider digital storytelling as a research methodology that invites communities to participate in the use of digital media and technology. The practice of telling stories digitally about the existence and activities of a community thus provides an important medium for each community member who is capable of using those media to engage in the identity construction and maintenance of the local community.

An important part of the life and continuity of ESSMs is the use of communication technologies. Social and mobile media enable the storytelling of the movements' activities, thereby constructing and maintaining the image, identity and practices of the movements. Importantly, the idea of a storytelling networks and the enabling infrastructure in the digital sphere has not been in focus when discussing how digital social media is used for the purposes of physical community building and social movements. When considering these citizen-driven activities, it is important to ask, what communication-related infrastructures (both digital and physical) make these actions possible? How are they sustained (or not) in time? How do people develop and document their practices? Do the practices scale up horizontally? How can city or municipality workers and urban planners benefit from learning from such movements, for example, by creating enabling conditions for such initiatives to arise more often?

In the previous sections, we presented an approach to community-building and the operations of small-scale social movements, which focuses on the communication and interaction between community members, as well as the bottom-up processes that yield collective-level behaviour and collaboration. This approach challenges top-down community building approaches and highlights the spontaneous activities of some of the members of the community. We have argued that one of the most important aspects of such self-organisation is communication and storytelling in the community—with all their varying practices. In the next section, we provide illustrative, real-life case examples of these types of social movements that operate within a local community—being a part of it and simultaneously building it—that aim at reinvigorating the community, or posing a social change agenda through new stories or counter-narratives that explore new ways of doing familiar things. This process of making a change *from within* the community can be seen as a key mechanism of a self-organising system.

Our argument and key observation is that this internal renewal process takes place through communication and storytelling and is often supported—and perhaps also catalysed—by the use

of information technology. The central aspects of this theoretical framework are collected in the list below. In the next section, the case examples will further illustrate these theoretical arguments.

1. Elements of a community are people, interaction and communication, physical and conceptual infrastructure, and practices.

2. Communities have a history, and they build on their history. This matters for future courses of actions.

3. Everyday social movements introduce changes from within a local community. Their actions are targeted at satisfying local needs by using the resources of the community. In the longer term, local actions might become part of other established cultural systems.

4. Communication and storytelling are key mechanisms in communities that play several important roles, such as sharing and building identity, prevailing and negotiating cultural norms and values, identifying emerging problems, and serving as a means by which community members (through ESSM) can imagine alternative futures.

5. Communication technology plays a crucial role in creating connections and speeding up interactive processes. Digital storytelling consists of the use of various tools of digital production and social media in storytelling.

4. Introducing six real-life ESSMs

Our aim in this section is to illustrate the concept of ESSM in the light of real-life cases. These cases are part of the fieldwork of the authors (cases 1–3: Botero and Marttila; cases 4–6: Botero, Marttila and Poutanen). Each of these case examples illustrate small-scale, citizen-initiated actions that operate in a self-organising manner and aim at improving the experience of the community's local areas, and by extension, their neighbourhood and city. Next, we will present the six case examples, and thereafter examine them in the context of our framework in order to answer the research questions.

4.1 Revitalizing food culture in Helsinki

Restaurant Day (RD) is perhaps the most visible citizen-driven, one-day event initiated in Helsinki, Finland. This day is devoted to encouraging food enthusiasts to set up their own pop-up restaurants and sell food on the streets or in their own yards or kitchens for a day, defying legal regulations. It began when a group of friends wanted to raise attention to the need of revitalising the food scene, which is seen as a central element of urban culture and which was stagnating in Helsinki due to over-regulation. The format of a 'day', as in Earth Day or Parking Day, was already making the rounds globally as a way to raise awareness on contemporary issues. So, it made sense to the citizen initiators to build on that idea to create a celebration around food that could

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prove that things in Helsinki could be 'otherwise', at least for one day. The event was first conceived in 2011 as a constructive form of disobedience ('let's put a bunch of semi-legal street restaurants out there') and to point out to the citizens the negative aspects of the lengthy bureaucratic procedures required to set up a restaurant in the city (see Kukkapuro, 2012, for an early account of the origins of this movement).
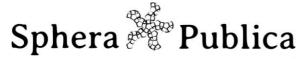
The organisation process for RD was aided by a map mashup website that was made available to announce the locations of the temporary restaurants and to allow possible clients to find them. Communication took place mostly through social networks like Facebook and Twitter, extending also to word-of-mouth communication. The self-organised group of citizens also made considerable efforts to recruit photography enthusiasts to capture images the restaurants and the attendees of the event, and to create strategies to share these images on platforms like Flickr, thus creating an archive of high-quality images. This made it easy to share with the community a new set of stories about enjoying food together in the streets and homes of Helsinki. These images have been circulating profusely across social media and the press. The first RD was declared a success, and since then it has spread globally to more than 60 cities.

The volunteer organisation was consolidated in a local association, and an informal network of ambassadors, who coordinate their advocacy mainly through Facebook, is in charge of spreading the ideas to new cities. In Helsinki, the event has been gaining more recognition by the city authorities, who first mostly just tolerated the pop-up restaurants, and later actually helped to develop city policies to better enable such new food-related experiments. RD has also been used to market Helsinki as an attractive city. The deputy mayor has been quoted to say that events like RD 'have certainly had an indirect influence on the preparation of the new City Master Plan' (Hattam, 2015), whose draft in development prioritises a more walkable and cyclable urban environment, which is also potentially more street food-friendly.

4.2 Celebrating recycling and up-cycling in Helsinki

Cleaning Day (CD) is another citizen-led initiative born in Helsinki that creates the conditions for turning cities into large-scale, distributed, pop-up flea markets for a day. On this day, everyone is encouraged to responsibly use the streets and other public spaces to sell, swap and donate stuff they have at home and no longer use. CD was partly encouraged by the success of the first RD. The idea began with an informal conversation among friends in Helsinki on the possibilities of doing something to reduce the clutter in their homes. At the same time, they also wanted to encourage recycling and up-cycling practices as part of a 'new urban culture' that could also renew local community building (see e.g. Seppälä, 2012, for a first-hand account of the early stages of this 'tiny' movement).

After some initial enthusiasm around a Facebook status update, a working group of active people got together to make the day a reality by creating an infrastructure that other citizens could

use to turn Helsinki into a giant flea market for a day. The CD infrastructure includes several Facebook groups for coordination, communication and marketing, a website with resources like images, reusable permit letters, tips and a code of conduct to keep the day a 'clean' day. It also includes a map mashup that documents the locations of the flea markets in the city and several self-managed recycling spots produced in cooperation with local actors (NGOs and companies). This is augmented by the self-documentation of visitors and flea market sellers that share and market their own events in their networks via social media. Later, more efforts were put into strengthening non-online mediums as well, so as to be more inclusive, especially of older generations, and to counteract Facebook's recent changes in algorithms that no longer provide visibility to page updates without payment.

This initiative then spread to other cities, including cities in Japan. This self-organising group, in a similar fashion as RD, applied social media and savvy use of distributed design skills to build momentum for the event and to mobilise the community. Besides changing in the fabric of the city, CD has also induced other changes, for example, in terms of co-governance. After the first CD took place, the department in charge of granting permits for the temporary use of space in Helsinki approached the core organising group to discuss possibilities for cooperation. One of the outcomes was an agreement to use the CD online platform as a way to officialise the permit for each flea market land use for the day. This is an example of an arrangement that emerged 'through the doings' of citizens that self-organise, both to produce the day and to perform it (Horelli et al., 2014).

4.3 Growing food in a public park in Kallio

Kallio Urban Gardeners (KUG) is a young spin-off initiative of one of the most famous informal resident networks of Helsinki, called the 'Kallio movement'. The Kallio movement was a key player involved in changing the face of the traditional, working-class Kallio neighbourhood by organising block parties, collective cooking evenings, and other action-oriented projects that were out of the realm of the more traditional neighbourhood associations. The initiators of the urban gardening activities were interested in connecting with the larger movement of urban agriculture and community gardening that exists worldwide; they see gardening in public spaces as a perfect occasion to build community in the neighbourhood and, in the process, to grow some food. The opportunity came in 2014, when the city authorities made an official inventory and a map of public spaces suitable for urban farming (outside traditional community allotment gardens), and sponsored the publication of a manual for urban gardeners adapted to the local conditions produced by Dodo, an environmental citizens association, which, after years of advocacy and experimentation, managed to influence certain city policies.

The Kallio gardeners were the first group of local citizens to navigate through the bureaucracy of the new practice and to ensure land permits and logistics to start growing food in

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two public parks in their neighbourhood. The KUG members come mostly from the tight social networks of active Kallio movements, who typically communicate only through a Facebook page and group; therefore, communication for this gardening movement spin-off was largely built on the same premise: coordination and communication takes place online. The group has gained some diversity through a more general Facebook announcement and some serendipitous encounters. On some occasions, we found that older people who were eager to participate in urban gardening activities were not able to do so because of not being on Facebook or not being connected on Facebook to people connected to KUG, so that the relevant status updates would be visible to them. However, this situation might change because the gardening activities are now visible in the physical place, and photographs taken by the gardeners and their neighbours have started to circulate. As a result, new stories about what public spaces are for have begun to appear.

4.4 Bringing generations together in Arakawa-ku

'Sento Social Design' (SSD) is an initiative from the Arakawa-ku suburb of Tokyo, Japan. By mobilising the Japanese public bath tradition of *sento* and creating new forms of collective music-making, SSD aims at bringing generations together in the local community. The idea is simple: traditional neighbourhood public baths are used for staging music-making workshops with bands and collectives supporting each other. The organisers intend for the events to serve as potential seeds for new intergenerational encounters in the community. The elder generations—which are now the more regular, even if as visitors to the *sento*—come for their 'ritual' bath. The younger generations come to make music and participate in the workshop. In the process, both groups (re)encounter the practices of each other.

The design of the event offers a low threshold opportunity to participate anew in practices that are both deeply shared but also lost; the elder bathers enjoy music and the young musicians enjoy a bath. The SSD events are planned and advertised primarily on social media for the younger generations, in the sento itself, and in key community gathering places in the neighbourhood. There is also an audio-visual documentation made, which includes short video clips, pictures and sound recordings of the performances, uploaded from the mobile phones to services like YouTube, and then shared on LINE (a prominent instant messaging mobile application in Japan) and Facebook. These activities aim at collecting and giving examples of the general spirit of the event and what happens in the communal area where people enjoy music before or after taking a bath.

4.5 Creating shared spaces in Yanaka

The Yanaka Network (YN) comprises several informal local community groups and associations that have been active since the 1980s; they strive to respond to the increasing pressures of

development and redevelopment around their particular district of Tokyo, known for its eclectic mix of shrines, cemeteries and picturesque residential areas, reminiscent of the Edo period in the 17th, 18th and mid-19th centuries. Active residents wanted to generate conversations about the value of the place (one that is not original enough to be considered patrimony, but, nonetheless, quite peculiar) and its fragility.

Members of the network began reviving the stories of the local inhabitants and their skills through the compilation and production of a print publication that recently made its transition into an online magazine. They also mobilised the community to document and create shared inventories of the place's assets using maps, which have helped to form walking tours around the area. In addition, the members also produced a variety of art festivals to redefine the history and future of the neighbourhood. These activities of the last few decades have successfully repositioned the role of streets and other shared spaces as being worth preserving and requiring an effective conservation strategy that could avoid certain threads of gentrification and uncontrolled development. (Sorenson et al., 2008). Even though all these activities have contributed to the circulation of new stories about the possible uses and meanings of the shared spaces of Yanaka, some challenges have surfaced. In particular, there is a need to renew the membership of the activist network by engaging the younger generations.

4.6 Learning together in Shibuya

Shibuya University (SU) is a peer-to-peer learning network, operating in the city area of Shibuya in Tokyo. Founded in 2006, the network comprises a core small staff that coordinates and maintains the basic infrastructure and a large network of volunteers. The staff are all connected to the Shibuya ward, either due to residency, work or some other temporal commitment. The network aims at providing learning and knowledge exchange activities that would be relevant to the people of Shibuya. In this process they prototype alternative new ways of organising city life that take advantage of all the available resources, be it people, knowledge or the environment. Lessons are conducted across a wide range of public spaces, including parks, temples and libraries, but also in private spaces like restaurants or company meeting rooms that are equipped with the required facilities. Teachers also come from all walks of life, sharing their knowledge on bizarre and mundane topics and working mostly on a voluntary basis or for a token salary. The activities are coordinated through its website, which handles the course proposals (open to anyone who is interested in proposing a topic), the marketing and registration of participants, and also serves as an archive of completed courses. The network produces brochures, leaflets and other physical and digital media in order to keep their members informed of the learning opportunities. Actual learning experiences are also documented and shared online by the participants themselves.

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5. Characteristics of ESSMs

In this section, we address our research questions. First, we asked how conceptualising a community as a self-organising system can help to study the emergence and operation of digital storytelling in small-scale social movements. Our presentation and analysis of the six cases in Finland and Japan highlights several important characteristics. First, the movements introduce a change from within their local communities. Second, their use of digital storytelling not only makes change possible, but it also speeds up the process. Through such movements, citizens are able to introduce real changes that, in some cases, became established parts of the official community structure, and even legislation. In this way, bottom-up activities encounter top-down activities in their shared attempt at building and maintaining the local community. It is our experience that our framework helps in the understanding and analyses of such movements, their characteristics, dynamics and digital storytelling activities. We believe that our approach is useful for community researchers and organisers alike.

Our second research question focused on how participants in small-scale social movements can create, share and make their stories available to others using digital communication technology. All of the presented six cases illustrate how crucial a role social media plays in the operation of everyday self-organising social movements. In these cases, social media is not only used as an arena for sharing stories, but it also enables the organisation of events, as well as the continuous negotiation of the principles, goals and values upon which the actions are built. Technology, here, is an enabling tool in terms of communication, but it also enhances the process of organising. All of the cases mentioned in this paper represent a change from within, in that they aim at improving the living conditions of the local communities and introducing novel ways to participate and spend time in local areas. However, even if the motivation for change was internally initiated, the inspiration for change may come from outside of the local community, for example, from other cities and countries that have undergone similar challenges and imposed their own strategies to address them. These inspiring examples are usually communicated and spread via social media.

In the Finnish cases, it can be highlighted how the authorities eventually learnt from the movements and introduced their novel practices as a part of the established system. On these occasions, the different sides, bottom-up and top-down, encountered and created a novel shared understanding of the community. In the Japanese cases, the questions of age gap and community history emerged. Concerning the Japanese community movements, the process of maintaining the community as an evolving system can perhaps be seen more as gradual and internally-evoked, whereas in the cases from Finland a more radical change process and the catalysing role of external examples was prominent. This is an interesting observation in the sense that it allows us to identify different types of ESSMs. However, the distinctions should not be read as a

representation of a cultural difference of any kind; examples of both countries comprise a variety of different types of movements, both radical and continuity-seeking.

Based on our analyses of the cases, we propose that everyday self-organising social movements (ESSM) have, at the very least, the following characteristics:

1. They represent a change from within the local community, by either introducing radical alternatives to the prevailing norms and routines, or by building up continuity in terms of history and/or filling and creating gaps between isolated groups, such as different generations, in a community.

2. They introduce tensions between different ways of organising collective action, in particular, top-down (city-driven) versus bottom-up (citizen driven) initiatives.

3. They open up spaces for collective conversation about city-making.

4. They can make (modest) contributions to urban culture (e.g. in terms of imaginaries and regulations on the usage of public spaces).

5. They rely heavily on social media, although the logic of social media also poses challenges to their operations (e.g. algorithms do not always cooperate, reliance on particular platforms might turn problematic).

6. Discussion

In this section, we briefly discuss the enabling conditions that city and municipality officers, decision-makers, and urban planners can mobilise in order to support the activity of mundane but crucial, community-based social actions. Thereafter, we discuss our findings in relation to the existing literature, focusing on digital storytelling research.

Municipality officers and urban planners can be said to work for the good of the local community, but these actors are often seen as representing the established order and holding on to regulations and rules through administrative processes and practices. However, over-regulation can become a problem and harm the community's ability to change and evolve. Occasionally, some community members begin to ask themselves if things could be different, and then they try it out. The trigger to start considering the local community differently can, for example, be the examples of other reminiscent communities, distributed via digital storytelling. However, community members may also wonder why they are not allowed to do certain things, for instance, due to strict regulations. Similarly, if citizens are concerned about issues faced by their local communities—for example, the well-being of certain minorities, a lack of connections, or the destruction of important places—they may take action through their everyday life practices. Everyday social movements are born in this way.

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From the city planning perspective, it is important to consider how these movements are not necessarily directly aimed at challenging the municipality, but are rather attempts at initiating change based on certain needs and built around certain active community members. Indeed, as was evident in the presented cases, many of the ideas turned out to be valuable innovations that could be used as a basis for regulatory renewal, as well as for the purposes of image building and marketing efforts of the city. However, at the same time, city planners need to be cautious in working as participants in these projects, and not try to take over people-driven activities. There are at least two risks involved here: first, there is the risk of conflict between the city officials and the members of the movements if the activists feel that they are 'taken over'; second, there is the risk that if the ideas suggested by the movement are routinised and assimilated into the administrative processes too early, something essential that has kept the volunteers in motion will be missing and the whole movement may collapse. Therefore, actions to combine the bottom-up and top-down processes need to be carefully conducted.

Clearly, the process of storytelling may eventually have a real impact on the communities' well-being. For example, personal photographs taken from a community event can serve as a resource for digital storytelling when shared with other community members by using a digital platform. The process of displaying, curating, commenting and interacting with such material online can provide an on-going narrative for the community to work with and reflect their own activities and identity (cf. Vivienne & Burgess, 2013). In addition, narratives might be informative for the community members and foster the organisation of community events. In the end, they may have a very tangible impact on the well-being of a community in the form of emerging practices, events and happenings.

Even though digital storytelling has received much attention in the literature, no significant relationship has been found between the access to the Internet and neighbourhood storytelling networks, meaning that the existence of technology per se is not sufficient to cement digital storytelling in a community (Jung et al., 2013). According to the literature, there seems to be a gap particularly between the older and the younger residents, of which the older ones are more likely to engage in non-digital neighbourhood storytelling networks, while the younger ones are more likely to be online (ibid., p. 651). The lack of involvement of the younger people in community storytelling has been an issue for a long time, but now the use of the Internet opens up novel possibilities for them to connect with their community. Jung et al. (2013, p. 652) suggest that if 'the Internet can be incorporated into neighbourhood storytelling networks, the window for young people to be involved in community matters is likely to widen'.

However, despite this, there still remains a gap between the younger and the older generations, as was evident in the cases presented in this paper. For example, online channels are effective in distributing information on community events, and if older people cannot benefit from them, they may miss opportunities to engage. Similarly, the younger generations may miss a

lot of the stories and practices related to the functioning of a community that are shared by the older generation, thus often reinventing the wheel and wasting resources. One solution would be to incorporate local traditional media more intensively into the communication activities of the movements, thus also reaching the older generations and allowing the communication infrastructure to flow more freely.

Finally, there remains the question of the connection between the digital and physical realms of storytelling. Do they represent separate 'islands' with unique communication landscapes, or is there a mechanism to combine those networks? It is our belief that when it comes to the age gap in relation to the use of technology, it may indeed be hard to combine these realities. The only way may be to have all the community members use digital technology. Considering the link between the physical and the digital spaces, in the context of a community building, one of the key mechanisms seems to be the notion of 'place'. Stories about places, with their visual, spatial, and narrative elements, serve as connecting points between the digital and the physical. These 'place stories' are effectively enabled by the practice of location-based information technologies. For example, in the study conducted by Humphreys and Liao (2011) 'place-based storytelling' was found as an important theme in the storytelling of a community. In such occasions, stories could be seen as a 'spatial practice' in combining the 'perceived, conceived, and lived space' (ibid., p. 417).

The notion of place was also very concretely present in the cases analysed in this study, for example, when map-based applications were used in the communities. In a sense, many of the stories told by the community members are examples of 'place spanning', i.e., people aiming at demonstrating how the surroundings can be reinterpreted and imagined differently, enabling a broader array of actions and events. Therefore, the notion of place seems to be a central element when telling stories of the community. Moving forward, the various forms and notions of place in digital storytelling can open up interesting research avenues for community and urban planning research, and also for media and communication studies.

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