

Repairing objects as a way to repair the broken bonds within a/the community

One of the main problems in big, complex contemporary societies (a.k.a. cities) is the lack of direct interaction between citizens. People might even share small spaces and live adjacent to each other, but the notion of community seems to have been lost, especially in the average first world metropolis.

In this framework, repairing the city would imply, first, to expose the intricate web that potentially connects each of its inhabitants, a network that currently wouldn't be taken advantage of as it should: the social links between citizens seem to have been broken by an extreme notion/need for privacy, probably fueled by pervading capitalism, for which the idea of public can become a threat as the public space/public sphere (where citizens interact "in the open", so to speak) could mean a potential loss of space/land for the private business.

Past civilizations not only exchanged goods in an economic system that did not require to manage its equivalent as monetary value in order to work (Whipps, 2008) since, as in the Inca Empire for example, where there was no currency, and the notion of reciprocity permeated all levels of society (turning to be both the motor and the scaffolding supporting that society) a complex civilization developed and reigned the most extensive area of its time under these two elemental principles.

One part of the problem related pollution in the cities is electronic waste, due to its many non-degrading components. The 1st of January of the present year, the electronics recycle law took effect in New York (The Boston Globe, 2014) making it illegal to trash electronics in the city.

In cities like Stockholm, where the waste sorting is taken seriously by citizens, there is still no certainty upon where does electronic waste end up (Christiansen, 2011). There's material that is categorized as "dangerous waste" and that is managed in a way so not to harm the environment (Stockholm vatten, 2015). But, even if this type of garbage is sorted in the right way, one cannot deny that many parts of this waste can be still potentially useful if properly fixed.

The interviews

All our interview subjects had a positive view of the neighborhood. They all shared awareness of the benefits of living in a place with many different people and cultures where citizens potentially could socialize with other. One of the respondents thought that the reason for this is because of how long people have been living there:

“There’s a lot of people living here and they have been living here for a long time. So when you walk around, people say ‘hi’ and so on”.

A younger respondent in the age of 14 supported that statement saying that he actually have lived in the neighborhood since he was born. Another interviewed person had recently moved and even though he experienced the neighborhood in a good way, he actually didn’t see that much contact between people:

“I’ve only lived here for two weeks. It’s really nice here. Lovely people, diversity of cultures, food from different countries of the world... It’s relaxing. It’s nice. I’ve recently moved so I haven’t got so much contact with other people yet, besides from the ones I knew from before. [But I think] People go their own ways, someone maybe gives a coin to a beggar but that’s it.”

The same respondent compared the situation to when was living in Australia. He described how people interacted with each other at public spaces and how the integration was better. He thought of that as something positive since he believed that people could learn a lot from each other while just meeting someone with a different background.

We turned to a secondhand store at Södermalm that recycled used goods to explore the electronic wasting and how that could come into use. The store worked with the slogan “Don’t throw anything”. They explained that someone always sees some value in those things that people throw. According to them, the electronic waste was a little bit more complicated to deal with, since it needed some process of reparation. But they sell cd-players, radios and sometimes computers as well. “Young people in the neighborhood have the knowledge to make something out of a working hard drive”, they explained. The owners also pointed the importance of the environment in this question; “Four tree chairs that we get in are equal to two trees, ten or fifteen metres high. And we allow those to keep on standing”.

Others respondent were divided when they answered about what they did with the broken

electronics they had. Maybe as a coincidence, the respondents that were been living here for a longer period, answered that they don't throw their electronics but instead try to fix them:

"I don't just throw it out. Maybe one have some friend who could help and fix it. That's very usual here. People here don't get sad because things get broken; they just call a friend and get help from them. There are people here that do that kind of work".

It's important to emphasize how people relate this trend within the neighborhood, or how are they aware of the cultural aspect of the area they live at. The previous respondent who hadn't lived at Södermalm for too long had actually never thought of repairing broken electronics:

"I've never thought of that. I only think that if it's broken I have to throw it. It's the same thing with my phone. If I drop it and the glass gets broken, then I go and throw it to recycle it".

Conclusion

Our experience during the meeting with the respondents was very positive, as a whole. This experience supported the answers and testimonies describing Södermalm as an open space with social and open people. Indeed, it seems to be some sort of difference between people that recently arrived to the neighborhood and the ones who have lived there their whole lives, regarding their worldview or how they "feel" the area (particularly, in regards of sociabilization). The contact between people, or at least how they experienced it, seems related to the time they have lived in the area.

It is also possible to find a relation with what many of the interview subjects have mentioned and deduce that there's a "Repairing Culture" in this neighborhood. People that have lived there longer apparently are used to repair their broken electronics (by doing it by themselves or by getting help from a friend).

Interview secondhand store “Återvinnarna” (“The recyclers”)



How do you experience the neighborhood and the people here around in Södermalm?

There's a lot of customers here. We make most of our money on furnitures but people come mostly here to buy bric-a-brac, artistry, porcelain and that kind of things.

That's also what people come here to sell?

We get our stuff from many different places. Vi accept almost everything, but our criteria is that it has to be clean, intact and saleable. All money goes to organizations that help people that for some reason got into the wrong path in life. As we said, we earn the most from furnitures because they have most value, but we sell mostly bric-a-brac since theres a lot of students, old people, and collectors that like that kind of stuff.

We got an advertising ticket that described the store's core and purpose. On the ticket, it could be read "Don't throw anything"

So, why shouldn't we throw anything?

The environment, the air. Four tree chairs that we get in are two fir trees, 10-15m high. And we make those first keep standing.



I think about electronics. If I came here with a broken computer, could you do something with it?

Yes, we've done that. But it also depends on the kind of people that are working here at that moment, if there's someone who can repair electronics. But we've done that and sold it cheap to someone like a student or someone that doesn't have too much, and they get

a good computer, with screen. Often, the students are so clever nowadays that it's almost enough with a working hard drive and they fix the rest by they own. But we handle and accept everything from analog cd-players to radios.

So, it's really "Don't throw anything"...

Yeah, theres a basis that Kjelle (The founder) thought of when he started the bussiness. He discovered how much that was being thrown that he thought was fine. If he thinks it looks fine and useful, then someone else has to think it too. And then he put some prices on it. Then we have the recycle thing. You could say that we recycle stuff and people as well since people that work here, are people that have had addiction problems or other kind of struggle to get into a working life.

Is there other stores around of the same type? Some stores you compete with?

There's not such competition since Stockholm is full of trash. If you called this furnitures trash. But we work for different things. Our mainly concept is to get these people into the working life while other organizations that also collect used stuff work more globaly with other different things.

Do you get any help from anyone for this organization?

No, this organization is autonomous, independent from any religion, politics or economy . The money we get, we earn it here. But we would like to get help with the local, start a bike workshop, woodwork, somewhere where you could fix furnitures. Right now we only accept things that are clean, intact, that we can put out for sale directly.

Interview – Anders



Hi Anders! You live here?

Yes, I live here.

How is the neighborhood like?

I've recently moved here. I've only lived here for two weeks. But it's really nice here. Lovely people, diversity of cultures, food from different countries of the world, relaxing. It's nice.

How is the contact between people?

I've recently moved so I haven't got so much contact with other people yet, besides from the ones I knew from before. People go their own ways, someone maybe gives a coin to a beggar but that's it.

Are you from Stockholm?

No, I'm from Karlstad.

Is it different there?

No, I wouldn't say that. It's about the same. You go your own way.

Would you want it to be different?

Absolutely! I've lived in Australia for half a year and there it's completely different. People from all different parts of the world interact with each other, people talk to each other at the bus. The integration is simply better.

You think that's something positive?

For sure! You learn a lot from others who come from other parts of the world. You learn a lot by meeting people from other places and with different backgrounds.

Then there is this thing about recycling. I can just ask you straight out. What do you do with electronics that are broken?

I go to the recycling station where you throw the electronic trash.

Do you think that some of those things can come to use? That a broken computer could get repaired?

I've never thought of that. I only think that if it's broken I have to throw it. It's the same thing with my phone. If I drop it and the glass gets broken, then I go and throw it to recycle it.

What would you say if someone offered to repair your broken phone?

Sure. Just give it to someone, do what you want with it. I think that someone could use it.

Interview - Viktor



Hi Viktor, how old are you?

Im 14 almost 15.

Have you lived here a long time?

Yes, my whole life.

How do you like the neighborhood?

It's good. It's stockholm.

But what about Södermalm, do you like it here?

Yes, I do.

What's the best thing about Södermalm?

It's close to many things. From the subway you can get fast anywhere.

What about the people?

They are kind.

Is there many people?

It's the capital.



I was going to ask you. What do you do with electronics that are broken? Let's say a computer that's having some troubles.

I fix it. I do it by myself. Not everything, I don't need to do everything by myself. Sometimes I get help from the internet, friends.

A broken phone, what do you do with it?

Oh, like this one? *he shows his own phone with broken screen*

Then I save to buy a new one. It's an iPhone4 so it's kind of old. But if it were a newer phone, then I would repair it.

So you are more for repairing than buying?

Yes.

What do you think is the reason to that?

I don't get too much money to buy.

Interview Bosse



Hi, what's your name?

Bosse Sörling.

Hi, it's everything fine?

Yes, I think so (laughs).

Do you live here?

Yes, a bit down there.

How is the neighborhood like?

It's really good.

Have you lived here a long time?

Yes, a very long time.

Then you can give me a picture. How would you describe the area?

There's a lot of people living here. And they have lived here very long.

Then you know each other well?

Yes, of course.

Oh, so it's like you come close to each other?

Yeah, not everywhere but around here you could walk around and say hi and so.

Is it because they lived here long?

Yeah, in part. But nowadays there are people that want to move here from other parts of the city and even from the country.

But, Bosse, about electronics. What do you do with the broken electronics at your home?

I don't just throw it out. Maybe one have some friend who could help and fix it. That's very usual here. People here don't get sad because things get broken, they call a friend and get help from them. There are people that do that kind of work.

Those friends do it for free?

Yes.

What would you say if someone said to you "I can fix your broken phone if you help me with my essay"? That kind of exchange.

That depends on the kind of people.

Strangers?

Yeah, that's a fine thing. There's a lot of people that like it the way it's here, that think it's fine here and that wants to join.

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