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Contribution to Katarsis Athens
City Mine(d)

When it comes to contributing to social change, City Mine(d) is not so much involved in the “needs” of urban citizens, in “what is wrong”, but rather through creativity and the creation of events and artefacts it functions as a lever and a way towards emancipation for a diversity of participants.

Eg. A festival we are organising in London explores alternative modes of production, consumption and exchange through showing activities and products realised in an alternative way. A voluntary organisation made up of mainly disabled volunteers has proposed to do voluntary work during the festival. For the volunteers it is an opportunity to contribute to forms of emancipation that lies outside the field of their disability, yet still emancipates them as disabled citizens as well.

City Mine(d) continuously explores the interfaces between research and action/the field/the terrain/ practitioners. We see the relation between the two not as a single border crossing, but consisting of several possible bridges. On the basis of the presentations in Athens, we have identified 3 possible bridges: a pragmatic one, a conceptual one and a theoretical one.

Pragmatic bridge

It is becoming difficult to remain an autonomous grassroots agent in the European field of civil society that becomes increasingly populated by big players. Academia could play a role in this by helping to convince supporters, and to negotiate the structures both inside the organisation and outside with the powers that be. Furthermore, Academia and grassroots organisations together could mobilise for aims like the ones expressed in the aims of Katarsis.

An example of this pragmatic link is the way the work of Johan Moyersoer in Syngocom helped City Mine(d) to clarify its concept of what constitutes development and Isaiah Berlin’s notion of positive freedom, and through that convince supporters and public of the potential value of its work.

Conceptual bridge

The conceptual link is related to the conceptualisation of questions related to the transformations of our living environment. We can see two possible ways in which this expresses itself. On the one hand researchers can offer a perspective on how social relations have changed and the way grassroots organisations can react to it. An example of this is the way introduction of concepts of politics of scale by Erik Swyngedouw in City Mine(d) at a time the organisation was expanding from a local Brussels organisation to a “glocal” organisation. On the other hand, researchers can provide the organisation with a sense of purpose, by

clarifying the potential significance of the work. The research quoted above done in the framework of Syngocom is another case in point.

Theoretical bridge

The third bridge is about testing the veracity of the claims made by researchers, and exploring how these are received on the ground, how they are "lived". In the already quoted research in Syngocom, an interesting back and forth interaction emerged between the development of a bottom-up growth coalition on the ground and the study of the potential of this new form of development.

This last bridge, along with remarks made in the different papers about action research in Syngocom, places an interesting question mark next to the co-production of knowledge, and more importantly who legitimizes knowledge. How knowledge is sanctioned and reproduced. An example related to City Mine(d)'s current interest in questions of economic equality makes this very stark; namely, the one that says that poverty is still a larger contribution to the reduction of life expectancy than smoking, yet it is smoking that is singled out as the evil to be rooted out. It raises the question of who can change this priority. Who can change the discourse; is it the activist who just has to bang harder on the nail of poverty; is it the structural-realist who has to pinpoint more precisely the places where the power lie and which have to be targeted if we want to constitute change; or is it in the market and do we have to mobilise enough financial support to make our case?

We conclude with a quotation Hannah Arendt refers to, and which links to a discussion about having and doing, related to asset based community development. Arendt quotes Aristotle from the *Ethica Nicomachea* as having said that "happiness is a form of activity, something that develops, and not something one has as a possession". This leads us to the question the polish poet Zbigniew Herbert asks in the *Elegy of Fortinbras* "What can we do, Prince, What can we do?"

City Mine(d)
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