Subspaces of Subculture Environment

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In this paper, we first shortly describe the importance of spaces in environmental anthropology. Then with an emphasis on spaces of subculture environment, we extend our discussion to phenomenons of small subspaces of subculture environment e.g. star trek collection room of trekkies. We propose that instead of treating culture as a malleable contingent to the environment, the subspaces of subculture were designed to strongly influence behaviour of people within the culture and become an innegligible part of environment. We propose formation of signifier of culture on different scales should be investigated independently.

subculture | space | environmental anthropology

Classic anthropology emphasises on the human-centric perspective of human society, however environmental anthropology emphasizes on environmental influences. Two initial branches, namely cultural materialism, proposed by Marvin Harri(Harris, 2001), and ecological anthropology, proposed by Steward JH, (Steward, 1963), wanted to abandon human-centric view and establish a view based more impactful environmental influences. Contemporary literature reviews like (Kopnina & Shoreman-Ouimet, 2011) and case studies like (Stasch, 2013) continuously hold similar ideas but with more emphasis on human cultures themselves.

Although the influences of environment is inneglectable, we still need to find an a way to balance the impact of environment to human society and the impact of human society to environment. On large scale, environmental influences shaped politics and culture of human society (Robbins, 2011) but on middle-sized scale, spaces of subculture can be a signifier for this culture (Sheridan, 2007). We follow the same logic to analysis the basic phenomenons of subspaces of subcultures and we claim that unlike large and middle-sized culture, spaces in small scale are strong signifiers of this particular culture.

In following sections, we would like to first introduce classic view of environmental anthropology followed by a brief introduction of two case studiess about "Poetic village formation of Papua" (Stasch, 2013) and "The space of subculture in the Berlin" (Sheridan, 2007) to break down observations from large scale to middle scale. Then we continuously analyze subspaces of a subculture called "Hacker" with proposed identification by Vaden and Richard Stallman in 2002 (Vadén, 2002).

In 2013, Rupert Stasch argued that spatial forms can hold special historical power because of the multiplicity of relational connections they mediate. Korowai formed together partially because of external pressure. Along with governmental projects, Korowai people embraced the concept of villages with a "poetic feeling". In the development Korowai, villages attracted Korowai people who want to buy different goods and joined with visual openness and Christian army. The formation of the space of the villages contain so much things in the process including feelings, religions and ideologies. Rupert named this process "poetic" in order to describe the transformations of heterogeneous components in the formation of new society. On one hand, the environment formed a space distribution based on external aspects like governmental projects and outsiders' activities, on anther hand, the spaces subconsciously influences culture understanding of people in this area.

Another example worth mentioning is about space of subculture in Berlin. In his paper, (Sheridan, 2007), Sheridan describes the spaces of apparently abandoned structures in Berlin include buildings. His study reveals their consequential and symbiotic relationship to the rest of the city. Unlike the Stasch's study of a distinct culture, this study focuses on the symbolic meaning of the spaces of subcultures. As a consequence, a smaller scale of culture phenomenons were considered. This scale difference makes significance of spaces more influential and symbolic to a certain group. In fact Sheridan concluded "The occupants in abandoned buildings manipulate the fabric to suit their varied and changing needs." and " concluded in this paper "In fact, in some cases the building is incorporated into a groups identity."

Environment, on larger scale, is dominant on influencing human culture and society whist on middle scale, environment and culture mutually influence each other. This tendency is more obvious on small scale. in following section, we will discuss a subculture caller "Hacker" and its corresponding subspaces.

"Hacker" is a subculture group identified academically by Vaden and Richard Stallman. People belong to this culture like intellectual challenges. In fact, as Vaden describes in his paper, what does all hackers in common was mainly love of excellence and programming. Soon after it emerged from MIT, many groups in research universities adopted the concepts and feelings as they also like similar activities. Students who study computer science are more or less influenced by this subculture even until now.

University of Helsinki is one of leading universities in Europe. Its department of computer science is influenced deeply by "Hacker" culture. Actually, one of students Linus Torvalds, who graduated from this department, is considered as one of great hackers(Himanen, 2010). In the following sections, we are going to introduce the environment of department of computer science.

Department of Computer Science (CS) is one of the departments in building Exectum. Exectum has four floors in total. First floor and second floor jointly belong to department of computer science and mathematics. One part of third floor belongs to students of mathematics and another part belongs to Helsinki Institute of Information Technology (HIIT), which is a research organization jointly owned by University of Helsinki and Aalto university.

Reserved for Publication Footnotes

Normally CS students take courses on first and second floors and self-study in basement, which they call it Gurulla. Since Gurulla was assigned to students, it has became a symbol of hacker culture. A closer observation actually reveals that many students share a lot of common personalities. In fact, they have arrange this place to a special space independent of university and a signifier of this their own culture. They built a small automatic payment system and a game machine. They also decorated a blackboard to correspond environment.

Automatic payment system is made with a personal computer. Former students programmed a small software to let people to register, charge money and buy things from Gurula as people self-study till very late. Game machine is a impressive project made with old computer and abandoned hardware. This machine contains a lot of old-style Nintendo and Atari games. Blackboard is an intriguing object as people sometime draw things with sexual implication and write formula on it.

These three things form a strong aura of geekiness. People built these things to show activities of "Hacker" culture exist in Gurula. During the conversations I had with interviewees, many referred Gurula as game room.

On a large scale, geological and biological environment are constant. Inhabitants of this area need to find suitable places to form their society. For example, necessary resources like water and food need to be considered in decision. As a result, they integrate their ideology, feelings about nature and religion into location of their living. On this scale, environment is a major aspect.

On a middle scale, inhabitants shape subspaces to meet their needs. Normally subspaces are occupied by different group of people to fit their understanding of the world while respecting city as a whole. This indicates spaces in a relatively middle scale environment face influences not only from larger environment but also from culture inside it.

On a small scale, environment is homogeneous and easily alterable by occupants. As a consequence, spaces themselves do not influence a lot on formation of culture but, on the contrary, culture habits decide locations and appearances of spaces.

As influences of environment are already very different on these three different scales, we propose a detailed investigation using scale of environment as a factor.

Summary of Future Research

Influences of environment are very different on three different scales. A detailed investigation using scale as a factor is needed. Intuitively it can be researched from a computational perspective. Models like network models (model interaction), Gaussian process (model culture influences) and machine-learning based-classification algorithms can be used. The difficulties include data collection and subspaces classification.

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