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# Maps, threads and notes. Navigating hybrid modes of encounter and knowledge production with the Deep City Symposium digital platform

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## Abstract of the answer to the call for proposals

How can we conceive of a digital interface that avoids the many ills of our online tendencies for over simplified mono-modal interaction, closure of horizons and effective polarisation and segregation? How to seize the current pandemic situation, which obligates uncertain and unstable hybrid forms of attendance and participation (physical-virtual-remote) as an opportunity for innovation? The Deep City International Latsis Symposium, organized at the EPFL and with Lucía Jalón and Darío Negueruela as scientific coordinators, was originally planned for spring 2020, and had to be rethought in light of travel restrictions and the impossibility to gather physically in a venue. It finally took place in March 2021 in three cities simultaneously through an innovative digital interface or hybrid conferencing designed together with Gordan Savicic at Computedby. In this article we describe and assess the process of conception and design of this digital platform, within a broader analysis of the current context and shortcomings of our digital interfaces for knowledge production, exchange and diffusion. The current pandemic situation has brought about numerous challenges and opportunities for the ways we interact with our peers and broader audience in the context of academic and research activities. For many, this has meant endless months of distant learning/teaching/collaborating through digital communication platforms and software in an unprecedented shift that has also brought screen fatigue and affected personal well-being and the quality of our social interactions. Ultimately this is having an undeniable impact on innovation, learning and knowledge production. Arguably, this is due to the fact that physical presence allows for a variety of modes of encounter and dialogue that include non-verbal corporal communication, odoral and haptic communication, and a crucial sense of presence that affect our affective engagement. It is widely accepted that co-presence plays a key role within physical modes of interaction and collaboration in the context or with the aim of innovation and knowledge production. Softer modes of co-presence that allow for social bridging (Florida) and weak links (Granoveter) are said to facilitate organic modes of solidarity (Durkheim) that are constitutive of urban societies and foster social, economic and cultural innovation (Florida, Negueruela del Castillo). Hegemonic digital interfaces are not equipped for a better and wider scope of modes of encounter and dialogue. Moreover, Smartphones, ICT and the internet have also meant the explosion of spaces for interaction(ref), with many channels existing in simultaneity, with the associated multitasking. In this respect, we are dealing also with the difficulty of articulating digital forms of co-presence with a required *multipresence* and *multimodality*.

Our ambition was to craft an interface for Deep City that could integrate a variety of audiovisual and textual, acknowledge the situatedness of collaborating and dialoguing as meaning-making practices in need of enriched content, and provide a geography of emergent knowledge

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which can be navigable asynchronously with the aid of the interface.

In addition, we intended to build an interface that would enable scholarship as a living and interactive archive, rather than facilitating a mere repository, thus challenging and expanding the horizons of digital publishing 'on the go'.

**Keywords:** Presence, space, interaction, archive, geography of knowledge