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CIVITAS INSIGHT

Participation 2.0: Informing, consulting and collaborating with citizens

Today, there is no escaping the widespread adoption of social media. Similar to the rise of the personal computer, mobile phones and the Internet, the ascent of social media is historic and transformative in the way people think, behave and communicate. In few other places is this transformation more unique and revolutionary than in the implementation of participation 2.0 into government administration.

We are entering an era of participation 2.0.

The Internet has revolutionised the world. It has changed the way people work, socialize, shop, and travel. It has changed the way companies operate, where they locate and how they manage production. It has changed the way government provides services, how we communicate with government and how we influence public policy.

While most transportation organisations have entered the Internet age, many are barely scratching the surface of the Internet’s potential. Almost all transport organisations use the Internet to disseminate information (for example, public transport schedules), many use the Internet to collect feedback and as part of public involvement programs, but there are very few who use Internet applications effectively to engage the public in a collaborative process designed to improve planning, construction and operation of transport systems.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The involvement and participation of citizens and stakeholders in the field of sustainable urban mobility is necessary to address their actual needs and to obtain public legitimacy. New Information and communication technologies have started to shift citizen participation methods more to online environments. We are entering an era of participation 2.0.

The term derives from the expression ‘Web 2.0’, meaning internet sites that allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a virtual community and to create content rather than passively viewing content.[[2]](#footnote-2) Participation 2.0 methods support participation through social media groups, interactive web-platforms, discussion forums, online polls and mobile applications. They can be used to complement traditional tools and to overcome their shortcomings. Participation 2.0 removes barriers of time and space and allows citizens to participate and interact with other users whenever they have time. It has a potential to reach new target groups, especially the so-called digital natives.

With the right approach, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs can help to raise awareness and participation in many activities on transport and mobility. Today, there is no escaping the widespread adoption of social media. Similar to the rise of the personal computer, mobile phones and the Internet, the ascent of social media is historic and transformative in the way people think, behave and communicate. In few other places is this transformation more unique and revolutionary than in the implementation of social media into government administration.

Social media has opened up exciting new avenues for public engagement and participation, yet cities are often hesitant to embrace these new mechanisms as a legitimate form of public participation. Some, perhaps, see the public’s engagement with these social platforms as a fad; others might be worried that social networks might bring to the floor controversial viewpoints or weaken institutional control. Despite these perceived risks, examples from around the world show that now more than ever is the time for city leaders to recognise the potential impact of social networks, which have the ability to radically change how cities collect data, implement projects, and create innovative solutions for improving quality of life for urban residents.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Public participation through traditional planning commission meetings are often focused on what they do not want to do, rather than formulating a viable plan that moves their community forward. Social media can change this planning process by giving a wider audience a voice, as well as broaden the number of planning issues considered. This allows a greater variety of urban residents to learn and actively participate in the dialogue surrounding the development of their city.

Social media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. On top of actual social media, additional services have been created to facilitate the use of social media. Social network aggregation is the process of collecting content from multiple social network services, such as Twitter or Facebook into one unified presentation. This is often performed by a social network aggregator which easily pulls together information into a single location or helps a user consolidate multiple social networking profiles into only one. Social network aggregation services are able to organise or simplify a user’s social networking experience by consolidating messages, tracking friends, combining bookmarks, searching across multiple social networking sites, reading RSS feeds for multiple social networks, and allowing users to see when their name is mentioned on various sites, or letting them access their profiles from a single interface, providing live-streams, etc. Even if boundaries between the different types of social media have become increasingly blurred, the following different types can be listed:[[4]](#footnote-4)

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| Social media | Usage |
| Social Networks | Allowing the user to connect with other people with similar interests and background (for example Facebook and LinkedIn). |
| Bookmarking Sites | Allowing the user to save, organise and manage links to various websites and resources around the internet (for example Delicious and Stumble Upon). |
| Social News. | Allowing their users to post various items or links to outside articles and then start a contest to vote on the item itself. The items getting more votes are displayed most prominently so the decision is up to the community (for example Digg and Reedit). |
| Media Sharing | Allowing the user to upload and share different media such as pictures and video (for example YouTube and Flickr). |
| Micro-blogging | Focusing on short updates pushed out to anyone signed in to receive the updates (for example Twitter). |
| Blog comments and Forums | Online forums allow members to hold conversations by posting messages. Blog comments are similar except they are part of the blog and discussions are usually focused on the topic of the blog post. |

Useful and original content will trigger a viral effect: users will re-share content posted to their social network. Many social media sites provide specific functionality to help users re-share content – for example, Twitter’s re-tweet function, or Tumblr’s re-blog function or Facebook share function. Public administrations, as well as non-profit organisations and activists, may have a particular interest in developing a proper content strategy. The success of a strategy must be monitored and analysed: the use of social media monitoring tools allows strategists to search, track, and analyse conversation on the web about their brand or about topics of interest. This can be useful in PR management and campaign tracking, allowing the stakeholders using social media to measure return on investment, competitor-auditing, and general public engagement. Tools range from free, basic applications to subscription-based, more in-depth tools.

The CIVITAS DYN@MO project found out[[5]](#footnote-5) that such tools play a significant role in establishing a two-way communication between the city authorities and residents, and that it benefits both parties. Citizens feel more involved and are provided with reliable information. City authorities, on the other hand, receive feedback and input from citizens that can be used for improving both the planning processes and the information services. While the tools attract mostly digital natives, they are becoming increasingly popular among broader audience as the technology becomes available to everyone. Different mobility apps and platforms have huge potential and, when applied in the right way, can be valuable tools for making cities’ mobility planning processes and services more effective. CIVITAS DYN@MO presents five benefits of using such 2.0 tools:

1. Possibility to reach wider audience and involve better new target groups in the mobility planning process
2. Enhanced communication between the city administration and citizens helps to create wider acceptance towards a mobility plan and planned measures
3. Possibility to receive feedback and public opinions on the development of mobility measures and services
4. Offer a good way to provide citizens easily accessible mobility information for planning multimodal trips
5. Possibility to create synergies by integrating and linking several tools such as different social media groups together

This shows that participation 2.0 can help to change the planning dialogue, bring data into policy discussions, and to find the best solutions to difficult transport problems. Local governments should not only acknowledge but encourage the use of social networking in governance. These new tools will likely prove vital in engaging the citizens of today to help in building the sustainable cities of tomorrow.

CIVITAS stimulates involvement for improving the quality and acceptance of urban mobility measures

Participation helps citizens to better perceive the process of sustainable urban mobility planning – from vision building to implementation, and offers an opportunity to influence and participate themselves in the planning and developing their own living environment. The involvement of citizens obliges transport and urban planners to explain, often, very complex planning issues in everyday language and use methods that citizens understand. It is also important for the city to get feedback at an early stage and to get to know the topics which may be controversial. Active participation on the part of citizens can help to gain better acceptance of the traffic planning measures. The CIVITAS Initiative’s Thematic Groups on Public Involvement[[6]](#footnote-6) and Mobility Management[[7]](#footnote-7) provide a number of resources, such as training resources, guidance material, policy recommendations, and also learning opportunities such us trainings, study tours or workshops. The group allows also to get in contact with the city officials and experts of the presented best practices.

Since the start of the CIVITAS Initiative in 2002 cities have been experimenting with public involvement and stakeholder consultation. For example, the City of Berlin was involved in CIVITAS I (2002-2006) and worked on a measure that was aimed at promoting future urban transport solutions through direct communication with potential customers and users.[[8]](#footnote-8) Within CIVITAS II (2005-2009) the City of Krakow underlined its strong political commitment to improving public participation in transport planning was by the creation of the city’s Mobility Forum.[[9]](#footnote-9) And finally, within CIVITAS PLUS (2008-2012) the City of Ghent initiated an engagement process with citizens, because the whole area around the main train station is being redeveloped, which will have a massive impact on the area in terms of noise, dust, traffic rerouting and accessibility.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Whereas public involvement and stakeholder consultation has a high priority in CIVITAS, the topic of participation 2.0 has come to the CIVITAS agenda only recently through CIVITAS PLUS II, especially in the CIVITAS DYN@MO cities of Aachen, Gdynia and Palma. Experiences within the CIVITAS DYN@MO project have shown that due to the specific situation in each city, different approaches are needed.

CIVITAS PLUS II | Aachen (Germany): Experiences of e-participation in the Aachen SUMP process

Aachen has a recent example illustrating that the success of major development projects is highly dependent on the extent to which the public is involved in the process. A referendum in Aachen, in 2013, put a stop to the planned project of reintroducing a light railway system. This is a good example of how projects “coming from above” may fail to be successful. Instead, a broad agreement, with the help of public participation, has to be reached with regard to the need for major changes to get wider acceptance and public support.

One of the key elements for creating a successful Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) is the development of a common vision that will establish the foundation for all steps later in the process. A mobility vision for the year 2050 in Aachen was formulated by different participants involved in the process such as politicians, city officials and different stakeholder groups in 2012-2013. The vision was divided into eight sub-topics that were compared against the current situation in these fields. The eight sub-topics followed the division to eight thematic commissions that were established to facilitate the discussion between experts and stakeholders on the SUMP.

To make the vision easily understandable, the components of the vision were visualised with 36 attractive posters. The posters, together with a video, explaining the reasons for developing a SUMP, were presented to the public in a citizens’ workshop taking place in a large marquee near a popular pedestrian zone. Citizens had the opportunity to read the vision and make concrete proposals on measures and express their opinions, which were collected on the partition walls. The leaders of the eight commissions were available to discuss with the citizens. About 500 people took the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the SUMP process. The atmosphere was positive and the event can be considered a success. In order to motivate more people to participate in the SUMP process, especially people who were not able to attend the citizen workshop or who usually do not take part in such events, Aachen utilised a participation 2.0 method to complement the traditional participation approach. An online questionnaire, where people could express their opinions and evaluate the visions, was opened for three weeks after the public event. The video served as an invitation to citizens to participate. Furthermore, the 36 posters were also available as online versions.

Proposals for how to change the visions were especially helpful and were discussed in the eight thematic commissions. Some of the changes were implemented. Five months after the completion of the participation process, politicians decided upon the finalised version of the draft resolution prepared. In January 2014, the ‘visions 2050’ were approved unanimously by the Mobility Commission of the City Council.

Based on the experiences, Aachen sees the participation 2.0 methods as an additional and useful possibility to engage citizens in the process of developing a SUMP. However, traditional participation methods also have their place. Both ways are needed to develop and implement citizen-supported plans.[[11]](#footnote-11)

CIVITAS PLUS II | Gdynia (Poland): Mobilna Gdynia platform integrates several tools together

A Mobility 2.0 Internet platform Mobilna Gdynia was set up and officially launched in February 2014 by the City of Gdynia following a concept elaborated by the Gdansk University of Technology. The main aim was to create a tool, which would allow the city to communicate with the public and stakeholders more easily and on a wider scale, and to conduct consultations with the local community, especially during transport planning and the SUMP elaboration process.

The Mobilna Gdynia platform was not the city’s first attempt of using web 2.0 and social media for communication with citizens. Since 2013, Gdynia has actively used its Facebook profile Mobilna Gdynia to raise awareness and inform citizens about sustainable mobility and get public opinion on currently implemented or planned mobility measures. With the Mobilna Gdynia platform, the city decided to take one step forward and designed the website, not only to provide information and raise awareness, but also to encourage citizens to join the discussion on the SUMP. With the platform Gdynia hopes to learn more about the public opinion on planning issues, better understand people’s attitudes and receive concrete proposals for actions to overcome mobility related problems. This is made possible through the use of web 2.0 tools integrated to the platform.

One example of a successful dialogue with citizens was an online survey on closure of one of the Gdynia’s main streets for traffic. The experiment showed that this way of communication with the public has huge potential. The questionnaire was completed by more than 2,700 people and was viewed by over 7,000. Some 73 percent of respondents agreed on to limit car traffic on the street and more than 60 percent out of those also agreed on closing the street for traffic. To reach the less “technology-active” target groups, the survey was supplemented with around 200 traditional interviews.

The experiences have shown that people are willing to take part in surveys and express their opinions when registration is not needed. The Mobilna Gdynia has the potential to become a real one-stop-shop for mobility information in Gdynia.[[12]](#footnote-12)

CIVITAS PLUS II | Palma (Spain): Mobility 2.0 services

For the City of Palma, the main challenge is to combine available mobility information and on-going ICT development processes from different departments and operators into an integrated mobility platform. The aim of the platform is to offer users the possibility to plan intermodal trips in real time and choose the most appropriate transport mode for them. The information should make the use of public transport services, walking and cycling easier and more comfortable and, thus, discourage the unnecessary use of private vehicles. A beta version of the platform – an integrated Mobility App, was launched in 2013.

The wide interest of users in real time mobility apps was discovered in spring 2013, when the first App for real time bus departure information covering the network of Palma Municipal Public Transport Company (EMT) was launched. By May 2014, more than 50,000 downloads have been registered just on the Android platform.

While enjoying the massive acceptance of this App, different parties in the city started to work on other services as well. A private developer included data from the Palma public bike sharing system in a generic App on public bikes. The operator handling the on-street paid parking introduced an App for mobile phone payments in April 2014. However, to achieve the desired intermodality, a more coordinated approach is required to integrate the different isolated projects and to overcome technical and administrative barriers. Therefore, Palma decided to build the integrated Mobility App - one of the measures implemented within the CIVITAS DYN@MO. The main technical challenge is to reach a proper concentration of all the scattered data to feed the main core of the App.

On the administrative side, the different departments and public companies have to agree on cooperation. In the first phase of the project, the Palma Smart Office supported with the standardisation of data formats and offered open data platforms for private developers. After this first phase, local partners came to a conclusion that it was necessary to contract an external company that can take care of the overall integration and design of the user-interface of the Mobility App. With the Mobility App, Palma hopes to offer its citizens an easy way to plan their trips and receive mobility information.[[13]](#footnote-13)

One step further: Collaboration with the citizens

Using social networks to interact with the general public today is becoming more and more frequent even in the public sector. However, there are some concerns and limitations about the use of such technologies, which sometimes may threaten the usability and the reliability of the information gathered. At the same time, the potential of such tools is great, and there are several applications exploiting social cooperation through the web.

Apart from the above mentioned CIVITAS implementations, there are a plenty of further examples on participation 2.0 in European cities. In this context, three case studies from Europe, Tallinn and Tartu (Estonia), as well as Tampere (Finland) offer insights in this particular field.

* The City of Tallinn gained a lot of useful information while taking part in the European Cycling Challenge (ECC)[[14]](#footnote-14). The city won the challenge twice with 500 participants tracking their everyday bike trips with the Endomondo sports app.[[15]](#footnote-15) ECC data have provided the city and local transport NGOs with an overview of bike use in the city and have allowed to identify the main corridors for cyclists to be taken into account during reconstruction of streets. The app has produced a lot of feedback on where the cyling infrastructure and facilities can be improved. It also facilitated communication between cyclists. New users got precise advice on routing from experienced users, as well as hints for shortcuts and safe parking places. The Estonian Road Administration in their turn developed an online mapping programme for schools. Children can mark their routes from home to school, their traffic modes, and various traffic situations and problems on their way to school. The information is added to a GIS-database, which allows analysis of the data by traffic modes, density or other information required for both the school mobility plan and local transport planning.[[16]](#footnote-16)
* The City of Tartu is working on the general planning of the city centre, with the aim to devise the principles for the spatial development of the city centre - where to build and where not to build. The first stage of general planning is the drafting of city centre development strategy, including the assessment of the previous developments and offering possible solutions for improving the city centre. The case explores the public discussion about this process in the media. The discussion was initiated by the local daily newspaper Tartu Postimees. At first, the city architect published his vision of how the river banks could be developed in the city centre in the future. There were drawings and videos attached. This started a major discussion in the media. Most of the articles published in the media were ordered by the Tartu Postimees (according to them). Dozens of articles were published in different media, most of them in Tartu Postimees. The topic was also covered on TV and on the radio. The main goal is to make the citizens think about the city development matters. The discussion is mainly aimed at the citizens, architects, city planners, city officials etc. The discussion affects all the above mentioned groups- it makes them think along and feel being engaged in the process.[[17]](#footnote-17)
* The Valma preparation forum complements the practice of representative democracy in Tampere. The aim is to give people a better chance to more directly participate in decision- making. The Valma forum allows Tampere residents to express opinions about issues in preparation. Residents can have a say in matters early and throughout the preparatory process. This makes public participation an integral part of the city’s preparatory process. When opinions are submitted, they are e-mailed to officials in charge of the preparation and the decision- makers. The decision-makers can then follow the opinions while forming their own views on the issues. Valma can be seen as an e-participation tool or forum for preparatory work. The information is published alongside official data which means that the processing phase of the subject matter, electronic documents and decisions can be viewed in the same electronic environment simultaneously. There is a connection to the GIS-service so that Valma-users can scope issues of interest. People can register to Valma and subscribe to bulletins on interesting topics and areas. Public consultation and residents’ feedback is an integral part of high-quality preparatory work. Valma offers a complete and user-friendly approach to collecting feedback in very different cases.[[18]](#footnote-18)

To connect the community is the future of a modern planning for sustainable urban mobility

Social media platforms and applications are evolving rapidly. Cities believe that the importance of observing and analysing social media conversations will continue to intensify in local governments as more and more people share information online.[[19]](#footnote-19) Recent news regarding the war in Syria and the terrorism of the IS are just two examples of the public turning to their online networks first to receive up-to-date information.

The two main trends include the following topics:[[20]](#footnote-20)

* Mobile usage in social media will only continue to increase: With a growing adoption of mobile smart-phones comes a change in the way constituents interact with web-based information and social media platforms. More and more people access the Internet via smart-phone devices. As such, city websites and social media offerings will need to be increasingly mobile-friendly.
* The integration of social media into core government services is on the rise: Social media can be seen as a service, and as social media adoption continues to increase, the integration of social media tools into core government operations will become even more prevalent in the years to come.

An overarching goal that can guide the assessment of current activities and development of future efforts is the creation of a ‘connected community’.[[21]](#footnote-21) There are three kinds of connection: citizens to each other, citizens to the local government, and the local government to citizens.

Large numbers of persons seek out associations based on shared interests and activities, but they do not necessarily use these linkages to address civic concerns or to contribute to the governance of the jurisdiction where they live. Local governments have a special interest in fostering these broader connections. Governments are likely to be the ‘keepers’ of community as a jurisdiction above the level of the primary associations that individuals form on their own. To be sure, governmental boundaries in fragmented urban regions can be arbitrary, but unless there is a connection between a government and the persons who live in its boundaries, community governance cannot be achieved. The characteristics of the connected community can be defined more precisely to include the following:

* Citizen engagement activities are connected to what citizens perceive to be important.
* Citizens are connected to each other and to local government through engagement activities.
* Citizens are connected by electronic and traditional linkages that permit generation of information, consideration of alternatives, and joint action.
* Participants in various citizen engagement activities are connected to each other to expand civic capacity, activities are linked and support each other, and new ventures build on previous ones.
* Organizations in the community are connected to citizens and the local government as partners in engagement.

The extent of citizen involvement cannot be based simply on the preferences of officials if a commitment to citizen engagement is going to be met. Officials do not give up control of how issues are considered, but if citizens are going to have a limited say in the outcome of a decision, that limitation should be clear from the beginning rather than imposed at the end of the process. It may be ‘smart’ for officials to retain control and limit involvement, and doing so may reflect their view of the public interest. Still, being ‘smart’ does not mean using citizen engagement only when it is ‘convenient’ or limiting it to situations when it is safe.

Local government officials can take many initiatives to advance citizen engagement. It is a mistake, however, for officials to feel that they can control the process or that they are the only originators of action. Increasingly, citizen-initiated engagement activities will arise. Citizens will ask government to partner with them.

The end result of these connections is to change the perception residents have of how they relate to each other. And participation 2.0 can be an excellent tool to foster this approach.

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