

# Experiences from a Living Lab trialling a mobile participation platform

Real Corp 2016

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# Status of e-Participation

- Current phenomenon: Low impact (?)
  - Despite many diverse efforts in e-participation, the overall (political) engagement rate has not been increased (yet)
  
- Many possible reasons, among them:
  - Mistrust
  - Perceived low efficacy
  - Digital Divide
  - Ignorance
  - Lack of motivation
  - ...

**“Political participation is not necessarily declining,  
but it is changing.”**

(Karlsson, 2016)



# b-Part

## Building Pervasive Participation

2013 – 2016

Public funded (FFG)

[www.b-part.eu](http://www.b-part.eu)

# Interdisciplinary Consortium



**AIT Austrian Institute of Technology**  
User-Centered Mobile Interaction



**University of Turku**  
Department of Social Research



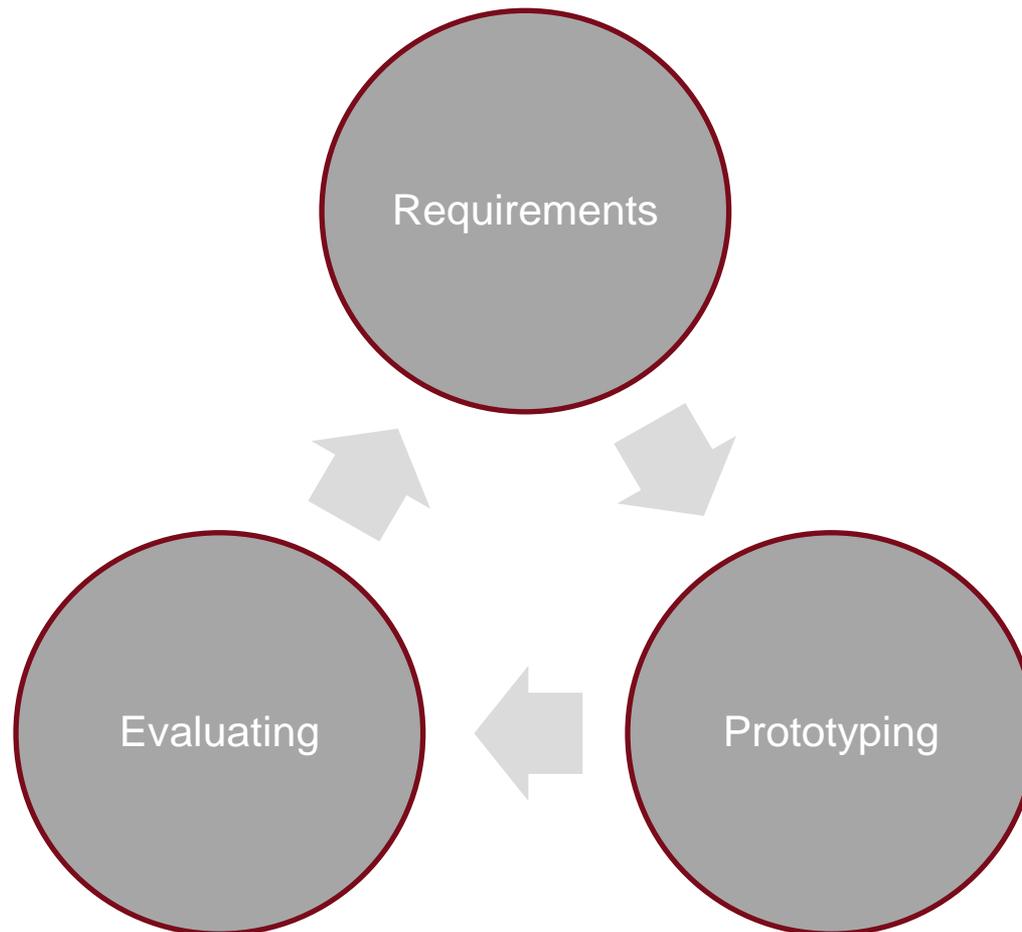
**Örebro University**  
Centre for Urban and Regional Studies

## Central research question



*What are the requirements, opportunities, and impacts of implementing pervasive citizen participation concepts in urban governance?*

# Methodology

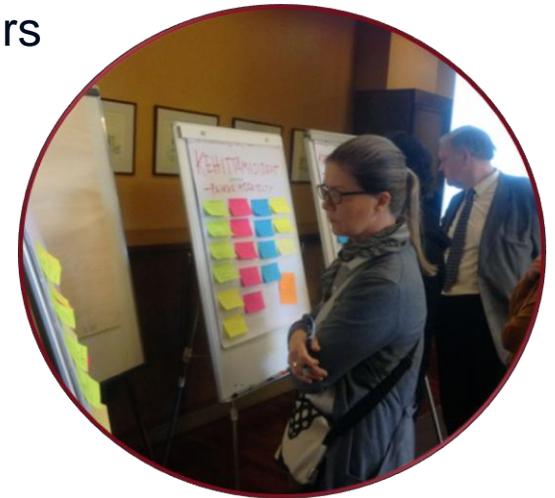


# Requirements

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## User-centered design process

- How to gather requirements?
  - Regular meetings with representatives
  - Workshops with city officials and urban planners
  - Interviews with authorities
  - Walkshop with citizens and authorities



# User-centered design process

## Testing & Evaluating

- Investigating novel interaction/participation techniques with public screens
  - Lab study
  - Field study
  
- Testing app concept and technical setup
  - Field study
  
- Evaluating the game aspects and their impact
  - Two field trials
  - With & without gamification
  
- 1-month field study in Vienna



# Prototyping

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# Mobile participation platform

## App concept

A **location-based mobile app** to motivate **citizens to actively participate and discuss urban topics.**



- post contributions - **geo-referenced** pieces of **content**
- choose: **idea, issue, opinion** or **poll**
- add a photo, your mood and a point of interest.



- contributions are public
  - can be **voted** and **discussed** among players
  - **city officials** will read contributions and can reply if relevant



- contributions have **areas** and a **lifetime**
- irrelevant contributions die
- activity and discussion let's them **grow, stay longer** and **form communities**



- officials can create **missions**
- help shape the city by posting ideas and providing feedback
- associating contributions with missions gives **more credit**

→ Strolling through the city, citizens are encouraged to **create contributions** on-site, **participate in discussions**, **gain area** and **cause impact.**

# Screenshots

**Missions** ⓘ 0 participants

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Miten kehittää Turun keskustaa lasten ja lapsiperheiden näkökulmasta?  
 by Turkukaupunki 2 months ago  
 ⓘ 3 participants

---

**3 missions**

**Läpiajokielto.**  
 by ErkkiK 2 months ago  
 ⓘ 0 participants

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**Kansalaistehtävä**  
 by kallekansalainen 2 months ago  
 ⓘ 1 participant

---

**Mitä uusia toimintoja Suurtorille?**  
 by Sampo 3 months ago  
 ⓘ 0 participants

**Kartta**

**New contribution** < Back Submit

Idea   
 Issue   
 Poll

Tap to enter a title

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Tap to enter a description

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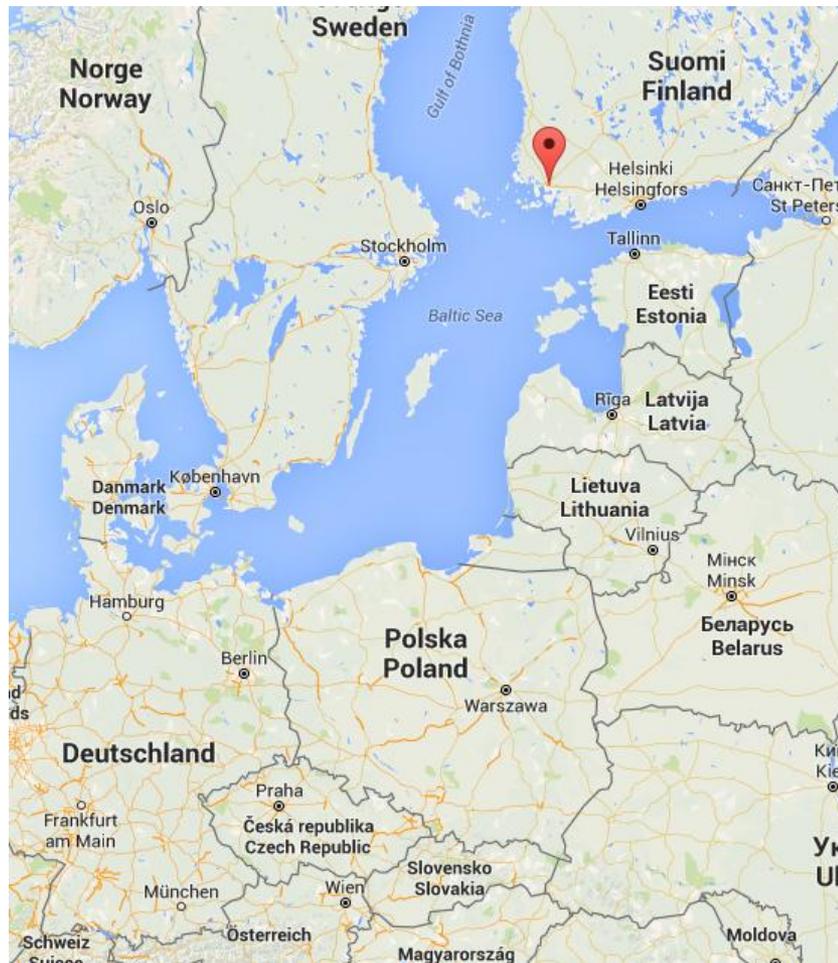
**Additional information**

Choose tag ... >

# Evaluating

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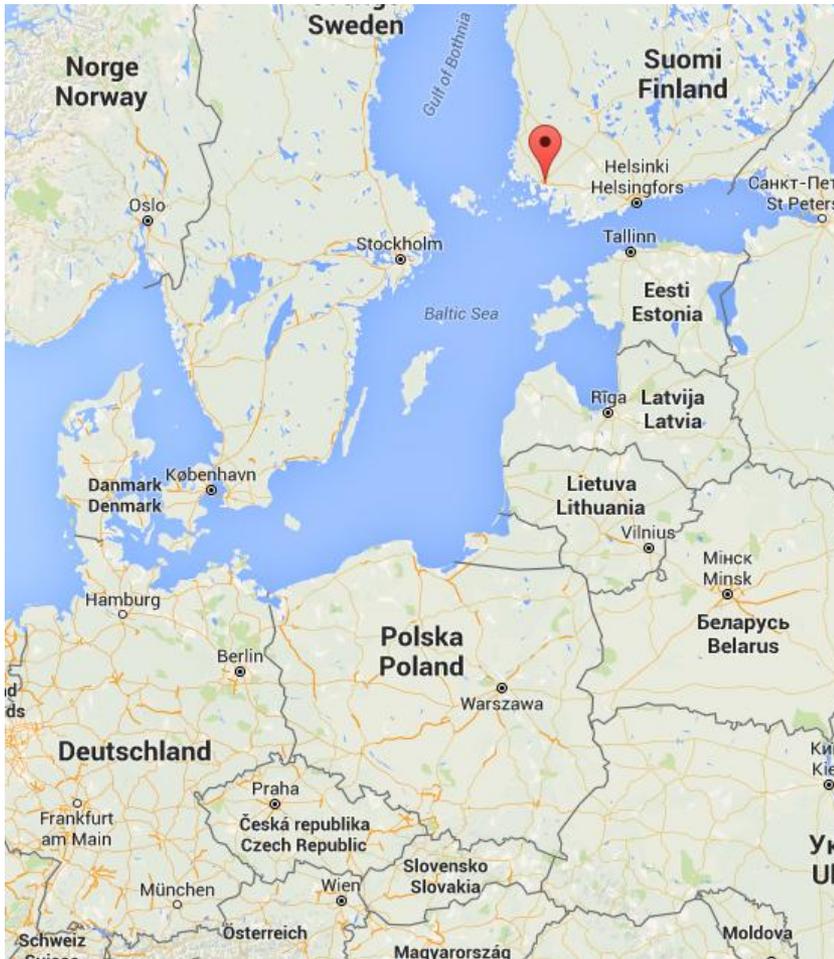
# Living Lab - facts



= large-scale user study in a real-world setting

- General objectives
  - Make projects more sustainable by follow-up concepts
  - Better design of solutions by integrating multiple stakeholders
  - Increase validity by evaluating under real-world conditions

# Living Lab - facts



- Deployment of a mobile participation prototype
- Close cooperation with the municipality of Turku
- When?
  - June – October 2015 (5 months)
- Where?
  - Turku, Finland (183.811 inhabitants)

# Findings – Quantitative

 Registered users: 780

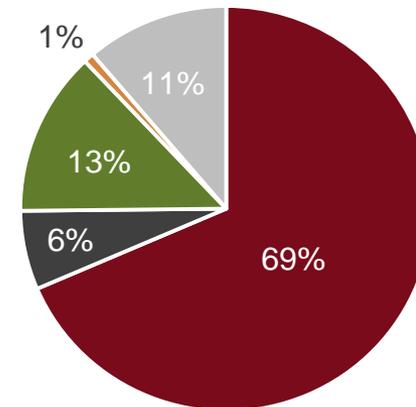
Posted ...

 Contributions: 193

 Comments: 256

 Votes: 622

## Usage behavior of non-staff users



- Users, who have not done anything
- Users who only contributed
- Users who only voted
- Users who only commented
- Users who did more than one activity

## Detailed Findings from living lab

- Citizen perspective
- Authorities perspective

## Experiences: Citizens perspective

- In general
  - Limited to no personal contact to citizens during the trial
  - Feedback through participating in public events (e.g. meetings for start ups, info booth in shopping center, ...)
  
- Findings overview
  1. High expectations
  2. Acceptance of mobile participation
  3. Locations of participation
  4. „Who participated“

## Experiences: Citizens perspective

### 1. High expectations

- Citizens viewed our prototype similar to any other app downloaded from the App store
- Quite unforgiving for technical hick-ups

### 2. Acceptance of mobile participation

- Mobile apps as a way to engage with representatives and address urban issues an accepted method (especially among the young)
- Mobile participation rated as „promising“ and „worth developing“
- Participating on-site was considered very valuable
- Yet, citizens wished for an additional web-based way to engage

## Experiences: Citizens perspective

### 3. Locations of participation

- High interest in topics around their place of residency but also in other parts of the city they frequent
- Equal level of interest in developments and general matters concerning the city center as in their own residential districts
- Most discussed: traffic planning and public spaces

### 4. „Who participated“

- The usual suspects: interested and partially already active citizens
- Highly educated, above average interest in urban planning

## Experiences: Authorities perspective

- In general
  - Very enthusiastic towards testing a novel approach to public participation
  - proud to be among the first to pilot mobile participation
  
- Findings
  1. Supportive in providing participation prompts
  2. Only willing to put „quick-fixes“ up for debate
  3. Authorities viewed mobile participation as superfluous
  4. Theoretical enthusiasm follows faltering feedback

## Experiences: Authorities perspective

1. Supportive in providing participation prompts
  - High levels of engagement in our pre-trial workshops
  - Several relevant suggestions for topics to be discussed in our app

*However...*

2. Only „quick-fixes“ proposed
  - Quick fix: concerns a topic that requires little to no effort to solve the matter
  - Concern of having to deal with controversial topics as that would further increase visibility and fuel heated debates
  - Few topics that would spark discussions or were citizens would be involved in decision-processes

## Experiences: Authorities perspective

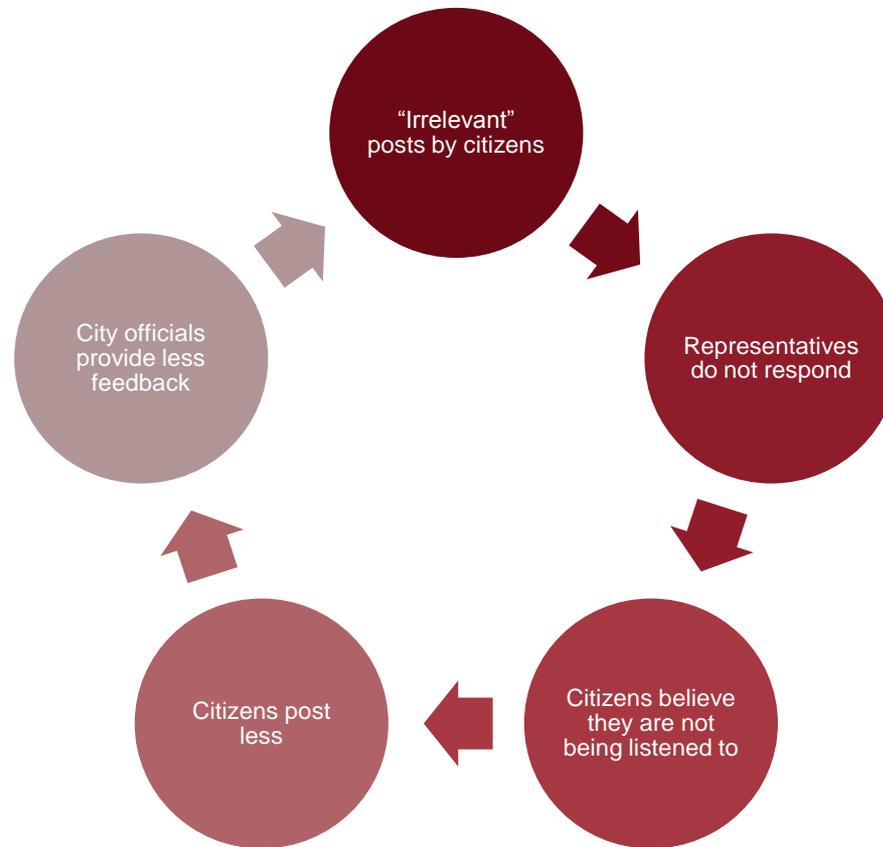
3. M-participation as superfluous
  - Usual suspects / small user group
  - No new insights for representatives
  - → authorities believed that impact is rather weak
  
4. Theoretical enthusiasm at the beginning follows faltering feedback during evaluation phase
  - During the first months very responsive to a variety of topics
  - Stagnating feedback and status updates over the second half
  
- ❖ Many city officials and urban planners used the app as a citizen and proposed own ideas or voiced concerns

# Why did participation & feedback stagnate?

## Some thoughts/ reasons

- Citizens posted about topics uninteresting for city administration
  - City officials did not reply to those topics
  
- City authorities are not responsible for certain topics
  - „issue“ handling outsourced (not the involved authorities)
  - No updates for these topics - so citizen is unsure: „Has it been fixed?“
  
- Mismatch between citizens and local administration's priorities
  
- Is it all just pseudo-participation?
  - ... because representatives do not want citizens to get directly involved in hot topics (?)

# Why did participation & feedback stagnate?



## Conclusion

- Expectation management is crucial!
  - Important to ...
    - communicate goals and purpose
    - get somewhat binding commitments from representatives
  - Citizens expect ...
    - a product not a prototype
    - feedback & status updates to all topics
  - City administration should ...
    - Assign/ be aware of responsibilities
    - Allocate sufficient resources

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your ingenious partner

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