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

- Requirements
- Evaluating
- Prototyping
Requirements
b-Part
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
b-Part
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

Miten kehitet Turun keskustaa lasten ja lapsiperheiden näkökulmasta?
by Turkukaupunki 2 months ago
 tritur 3 participants

3 missions

Läpijokieltu
by ErkkI 2 months ago
 tritur 0 participants

Kansalaistehtävä
by kallekansalainen 2 months ago
 tritur 1 participant

Mitä uusia toimintoja Suurtorille?
by Sampo 3 months ago
 tritur 0 participants
Evaluating
b-Part
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
Contributions: 193
Comments: 256
Votes: 622

Usage behavior of non-staff users

- Users, who have not done anything: 69%
- Users who only contributed: 13%
- Users who only voted: 11%
- Users who only commented: 6%
- Users who did more than one activity: 1%
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
   - \( \rightarrow \) 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?

City officials provide less feedback

“Irrelevant” posts by citizens

Representatives do not respond

Citizens believe they are not being listened to

Citizens post less
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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