SUGAR
Newsletter

Sustainable Urban Governance through Augmented Reality (SUGAR)

November 2019

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Limassol 2040: Part 1

LIMASSOL 2040

The SUGAR team, in collaboration with NGO Oxygono and the Youth Council of Cyprus, have organised a two-part discussion panel series under the theme of "Limassol 2040", which aim to discuss how a long-term plan for a city can come to fruition through the participation of citizens, the community and the authorities.

The first discussion took place on the 21st of November 2019 at the Cyprus University of Technology in Limassol. The discussants included Prof. Spiro Pollalis from Harvard University, Dr. Vyronas Ioannou, Urban Planner representing the Technical Chamber of Cyprus, Eraklis Achniotis the Regional Officer of the Town Planning Department of Limassol and Kyriakos Xidias, Mayor of Yermasogia. In what can be described as a very successful event supported by a large attendance of around 150 interested members of the public and key stakeholders and a particularly insightful discussion between the panel of experts, the discussion was centred around five main themes:

1. The main reasons why cities need strategic planning and a clear vision for the future

2. The modern challenges faced by cities

3. The pillars of sustainable urban design

4. The environmental, social and financial issues faced by the city of Limassol due to the rapid expansion of high-rise developments along the coastal front

5. The role of citizens in sustainable urban design

Following the discussion, the audience was given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the topics debated. The people gathered there strongly expressed their concern against the impacts associated with gentrification that is evident in the historic centre of Limassol, the ongoing development of high-rise developments in their city's coastal front as well as the lack of car-park spaces.

To shed a positive light into the future of Limassol, the Mayor of Yermasogia, Kyriakos Xidias, has revealed the intention of Limassol's six municipalities to collaborate on creating an effective strategic plan for their city. It was also recommended by experts from the panel that the city's governing authorities should collaborate with the Cyprus University of Technology in exploring opportunities to educate the community in sustainable urban design. In this way, citizens would feel less distant from the planning process and could be encouraged to participate in public consultations in an effective manner.

The second discussion will take place on the 5th of December 2019 at the Cyprus University of Technology in Limassol. The discussants invited include Nicos Nicolaides (Mayor of Limassol) and Pantelis Eutixiou Georgiou (Mayor of Ypsonas).
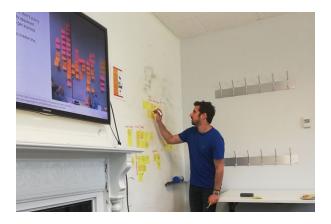
Harvard University visit (20th – 23rd July 2019)

On the 20th of July, the SUGAR team from Cyprus met with the partners from Harvard University (Graduate School of Design) to run a Design Thinking workshop in an adapted format of Google's Design Sprint. The Design Sprint took place at Harvard University as a 3-day structured activity that focused on a collective process of decision making, prototyping and validating, by understanding the problem and the contextual elements of participation in Cyprus. The objective was to deliver a storyboard and prototype an application that uses Augmented Reality (AR) as a tool to engage participation in the planning process of a real-life project in Cyprus.

Different steps organized the app's storyboard

Affinity mapping was used to group ideas into categories

The Design Sprint was informed by a literature review on Sustainable Urban Governance and Participatory Planning, as well as the use of IT and AR in participatory initiatives. The fundamental idea was to have the prototype tested on the selected case study in Cyprus in order to assess the viability and effectiveness of embedding innovative technology in participatory practices to improve urban governance. By the end of the 3-day workshop, the storyboard was completed and a collective review of the key moments brought the participants together to discuss the usability and the effectiveness of the application, in order to conclude the Design Sprint. The prototype app includes a user-friendly environment that generates a 3d model of the project, and provides a series of specified elements to create their own proposal and view or comment on other proposals. The app can be used as an educational tool for the citizens in order to be motivated and participate in public matters.

University of Cyprus
meeting (18th June 2019)

On the 18th of June, SUGAR has held its consortium meeting with literature review presentations from (i) the Cyprus University of Technology on the use of Augmented Reality for Public Participation and Urban Governance and (ii) from the University of Cyprus on Public Participation practice through creating a systematic taxonomy of methods and approaches. This comprehensive overview of the literature was key in taking the project forward and proposing a Sustainable Urban Governance through Augmented Reality framework to be implemented in Cyprus.

On the same day, SUGAR has held its first Advisory Committee meeting. The Advisory Committee consists of key stakeholders, with in-depth knowledge of the Cypriot planning system and its bureaucratic processes. A lively discussion between the stakeholders revolved around the capabilities and dangers of public participation as it should be viewed positively but also critically. Examples brought to the table by stakeholders and their insights complemented the information we have received from the public and have offered a different point of view to the consortium that will reconcile the multiple complex parameters that formulate the planning system in Cyprus. The case studies that were proposed by municipal authorities in order to facilitate the implementation of the project were presented and through the discussion that ensued, while many possible projects had merits, a specific opportunity seemed stronger as it was in a manageable scale given the limited time and resources of SUGAR. The selected case study was also primarily chosen due to its capability of actually instigating change and influencing the decision-making process.

A message from the coordinator, Prof. Panayiotis Zaphiris

The SUGAR project is progressing well and gradually meeting its milestones as set out from the project's initiation. Over the past few months, we have completed an extensive desk research which analysed materials and approaches, reports and statistics, best-practice case studies as well as instructional practices, focusing on activities and methods for involving the public in the decision making process through Augmented Reality.

Following our visit in Boston, Massachusetts, where we met with our SUGAR partners from Harvard, we successfully organised a 3-day Design Spring workshop, which focused on developing a prototype app that can be used as an educational tool for the citizens in order to be motivated and participate in public matters. The case study selected for our app platform concerns the creation of a two-lane road to cross the road of Athalassa through its forest Athalassa (adjacent to ATI) towards Platy (RIK area) and end at the roundabout that connects Akadimias Avenue with Aglantzia Avenue. Our SUGAR partners at Harvard University are currently in the process of converting the 3D site models and the associated 3D components to AR content to populate the activities of the app. Our framework will be tested in a workshop format that is scheduled to take place in February 2020.

The large attendance at the first part of the 'Limassol 2040' discussion panel series is a testament to our project's successful presence in the social media. We have gained an overwhelming amount of support, particularly from citizens that seek to participate in public consultations but wish to do so using more engaging methods of participation. We remain committed to our project objectives aiming to implement our project in our real case study hoping that the outcomes of the project influence the decision-making process and the project reveals opportunities for the evolution of the planning system in new participatory processes.

Prof. Panayiotis Zaphiris