



Briefing Paper

Participatory Planning for Sustainable Urban Governance

Introduction

This briefing paper was developed as part of the Sustainable Urban Governance through Augmented Reality project (SUGAR). It summarises the key issues relating to participatory planning in Cyprus and provides guidelines for authorities to improve participatory practices. The briefing is based on a review of the current state-of-the-art on participatory planning and design, a systematic review of case studies, a critical assessment of provisions for public consultations in Cyprus, and two dialogues held with professionals and users. The definition of 'participatory development' by the World Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development is used as a benchmark to assess participatory practices: "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them". The key factors identified as contributing to successful participatory planning are *creation*, *process* and *community*. A full framework was developed as part of the project aiming at supporting improved urban governance and participation in planning by proposing a strategy for engagement through trust building, a systematic approach to public participation and specific methods for participatory activities.

Key Issues

Trust. On the one hand, the timing and the location of the public hearings, as well as the effective dissemination of this information to citizens are thought to be prohibitive in achieving meaningful participation. On the other hand, authorities feel that a lot of effort has been put in achieving participation in public hearings, but with disappointing results in terms of interested parties attending. Lack of trust is triggered by the authorities' view that such processes are a non-determining routine given low level of participation achieved and involve mainly biased participants who express individual interests. The late stage of the design phase at which the public hearings take place, leads to difficulties in influencing design decisions that the citizens suggest in

the first place.

Transparency. This is regarded as a process that requires the involvement of citizens and systems that are pivotal in facilitating participation and understanding of the planning process. Navigating through the bureaucracy required to respond to public consultations is especially complex; the lack of cross-verified details regarding the information given and the need to dedicate much personal time to develop the know-how to digest the technocratic tone of the information hinder transparency.

Power. There are concerns regarding power relations and land ownership: the government is exempt from planning application processes and the church seems to be treated more leniently than other private landowners. Another key concern is the extent to which authorities are (not) legally bound to follow what is expressed in the public meetings.

Culture and Education. The lack of planning education was mentioned as one of the most significant obstacles to meaningful participation of the public in the planning process. According to the authorities, citizens do not realise the importance of planning and design in the quality of their lives, therefore they focus on unimportant personal issues rather than the bigger picture. The public is said to not be sufficiently educated to decide on serious matters, and this leads to suspicion towards the authorities and the reluctance in listening to the reasoning behind decisions.

Over-democratisation. There is a firm belief among authorities that, in some cases, good design that benefits the wider community is not necessarily an outcome of participatory planning, but of the skills and expertise of planners and designers, and in these cases consultations endangered the quality of design and the timely progress of beneficial developments. The purpose of the public hearing should not be to just "giving people a voice" for the sake of having a

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public opinion, sometimes dogmatism and trust is needed to achieve good results.

Practicalities. The absence of public space to host hearings, the lack of funding, human resources and quality methods of presentation in order to create a productive model of participation are all barriers to sustainable urban governance. The presentation quality and methodology for participation is not efficient, and both the public and the officials need further education and training to communicate with each other effectively.

Proposed Solutions

1. Good communication between the public and the authorities, which can be achieved by simplifying the information given to the public and providing different participatory tools suitable to different groups, including advanced visualisation tools;

2. Technology, currently non-existent, could assist by providing digital maps, drawings and information regarding projects in a manner accessible to laymen, by documenting the progress of the planning process and providing feedback following consultations;

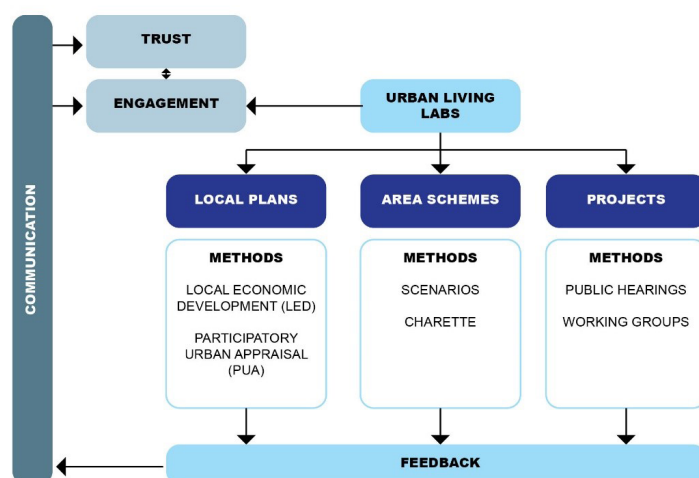
3. Improving interest in public matters and the importance of good planning in education. This could lead to the cultural development of citizens, and therefore to the prevention of errors and conflict during public consultation;

4. More structured and well-designed participatory procedures, that aim to inform citizens ahead of public hearings, with the use of technological innovation and media, could simplify and enhance participation in urban development and its meaning.

Framework

The framework developed as part of the project sets out the vision for sustainable urban governance in Cyprus by proposing a structure for participation on three levels: setting the ground for engagement, a methodological strategy for participation, and specific methods for participatory activities. The ambition of the framework is to provide guidelines to establish a planning environment where information is easily accessible, transparent, and in a format that makes it simple for the public and other stakeholders to understand the nature, content and context of policy and proposals. The framework suggests creating means of communication to build trust among citizens and stakeholders, which will lead to greater engagement and more relevant debates on key development issues. Practical engagement activities should take place through the strategy of Urban Living Labs (ULLs), which would apply to all policy levels and projects. All outcomes of the activities should be feedbacked to the par-

ticipants and the wider public in order to sustain trust and engagement through communication. The basic features of the framework are summarised in figure below.



Guidelines

1. Setting the ground: developing trust for meaningful engagement

The first step to secure engagement is to build trust. This can be achieved through increasing public awareness about planning issues on the one hand and providing accessible information on the other. The process of mutual learning between authorities and the public should be viewed as the basis as well as an outcome of participation. Transparent communication is vital to build trust; for this purpose, a user-friendly online planning platform and system can be developed for stakeholders to access information, be informed about activities, submit contributions and gain feedback on the outcomes of participatory activities. It must be underlined that the platform itself and access to information does not necessarily ensure the building of trust. From the point of view of the participants, feedback will be the key factor in trust development, especially the specificity of information as to how their input was embedded in policy or design, as well as clear reasoning in case this was not. From the point of view of the planners, meaningful, informed and constructive input will be vital in trust development; for this to happen the evidence and information on key planning issues must be clear and convincing for the users, while the format for input should enable users to be constructive.

2. A methodological strategy for participation: Urban Living Labs

Urban Living Labs (ULLs) are effective instruments in bringing different actors together and developing solutions to specific issues (Puerari et al., 2018). The production of local knowledge is one of the most significant outcomes of ULLs, which are flexible formats for participation and can comprise several methods and tools. Since ULLs were shown to be

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successful when set up for a specific purpose, case or scale, this briefing suggests that rather than using a single format for all policy and design levels, ULLs should be designed and comprise specific tools for different levels of policy making and for specific projects.

Continuity of engagement is a key element of sustainable urban governance and ULLs can be set up as a continuous process, at least for certain levels of policy making. This framework suggests that for the level of *Local Plans*, ULLs are run continuously once every six months regardless of the implementation stage of the plan. The content of these ULLs should be adapted according to whether the plan is undergoing the study phase, the drafting or being implemented. The same recurrent model of participation should be used for *Area Schemes* whenever these are in place, new ULLs should be set up prior to the study phase of a scheme for areas which did not have an existing one. In this case, however, if a specific area scheme is to remain 'dormant' for a substantial amount of time with no deadline set for its renewal, then consideration should be given to interrupting the relevant ULL. When it comes to individual projects, authorities should initiate a ULL prior to a call for a competition or any discussion with potential developers, so that the outcomes of participatory activities can be embedded in the call and plan requirements, or as soon as it becomes clear that a proposal will be submitted to the authorities. In these cases, the ULLs should take place more intensively, according to the timeframe of the project, possibly ranging from once a month to once every three months.

3. Specific methods for participatory activities

The methods proposed for use in *Local Plans* ULLs are Local Economic Development (LED) (Majale, 2008; Bonilla, 2009) and Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA), adapted from the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) method for use in urban environments (Halkatti, Purushothaman and Brook, 2003; Sharmin et al., 2013). LED aims at developing private-public partnerships, social networks and mobilisation of local resources. As such, it is more geared towards engaging businesses, from large companies to SMEs, NGOs, civic groups, knowledge and innovation industries. The aim of LED is to achieve consensus and build a common vision for the future of the city. PUA aims at developing shared learning to assess resources, identify issues and propose solutions, as well as evaluating plans and interventions. Its benefit is that it requires no technical knowledge to collect data, as such it is particularly suitable to work with the general public.

The methods proposed for use in *Area Schemes* ULLs are Scenarios (Celino and Concilio, 2010; Chakraborty, 2011) and Charrette (Lundström, Savolainen and Kostianen, 2016). Rather than using methods to build a broad vision, at the level of area schemes, it should be possible to be more specific and gain participants' input into developing relatively

detailed scenarios for an area. Furthermore, ULLs at this level should facilitate embedding user perspectives into planning and design policies. The use of scenarios would enable the development of long-term plans, which can evolve as do the socio-economic characteristics of the area and can help finding an agreed solution through the selection of a preferred scenario.

The briefing proposes that with regards to individual projects, the current system of public consultation should remain in place until a re-evaluation of the legislative procedure. However, it is proposed that this should work in parallel with the method of the Working Group (Al-Nammari, 2013) to enable democratisation of planning practices in specific contexts. The benefit of a working group is that it develops a set of highly engaged and committed individuals, who are afforded the ability to gain information, analyse issues, consider a variety of views and propose solutions and alternatives outside of the limited time and framework provided through public hearings. This enables committed participants to develop understanding and ideas collaboratively, to question proposals aside of the pressures of public hearings, and to converge to possible solutions prior to public meetings.

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