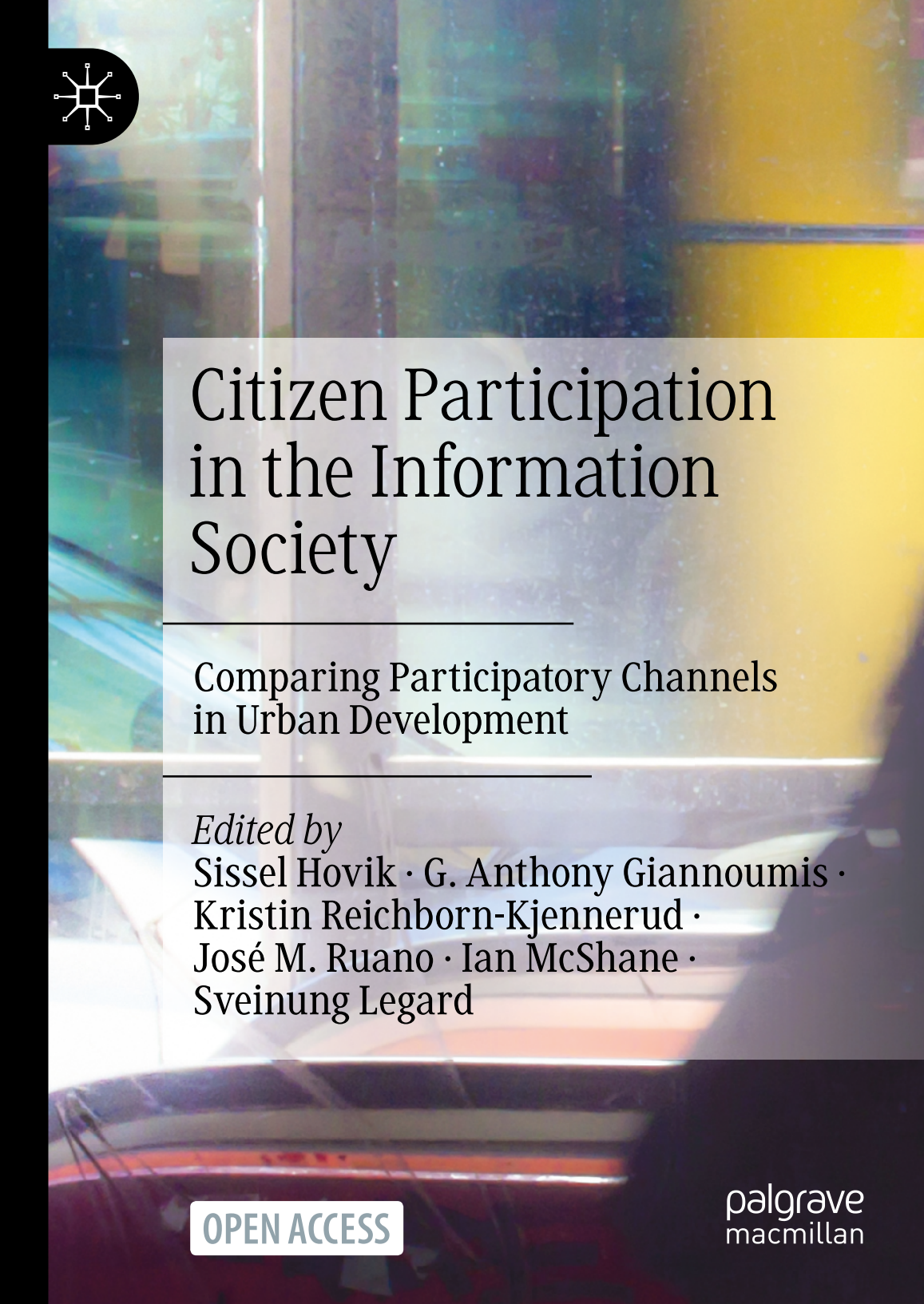

Citizen Participation in the Information Society

Comparing Participatory Channels in Urban Development

Edited by
Sissel Hovik · G. Anthony Giannoumis · Kristin Reichborn-Kjennerud · José M. Ruano · Ian McShane · Sveinung Legard

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CHAPTER 1

Linkages Between Citizen Participation, Digital Technology, and Urban Development

Sissel Hovik and G. Anthony Giannoumis

Introduction

The use of digital tools to promote citizen participation,—i.e., either e-participation or digital participation,—is spreading around the world (Steinbach et al., 2019), and most larger cities promote citizen participation through the use of ICT and new media. Examples of this include social media, virtual networks, content creation, and sharing platforms (Bonsón et al., 2015; Gilman & Peixoto, 2019; Lidén & Larson, 2016; United Nations, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on physical gatherings may also have increased the demand for these tools. Innovations in digital participation promise to facilitate two-way communication between citizens and city governments, and to provide extended opportunities for citizens to take active part in the public decision-making

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processes (Effing et al., 2011; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). The democratizing potential of digital technologies is therefore being heralded by academics, industry leaders, and policymakers (Taylor, 2014; Veak, 2012).

Cities use ICT and new media to different extents and in different ways (Giannoumis et al., 2019; Zheng, 2017). A UN report (2020, p. 250) makes a distinction between 'e-consultation', the engagement of citizens in contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services without involving them in actual decision-making processes, and 'e-decision-making', the involvement of citizens in actual policymaking and co-production of services. E-participation is adopted and implemented in different political-administrative and social contexts. Differences in ultimate form therefore are not surprising.

This book examines the ways in which e-participation innovations have been applied in differing social and cultural contexts. We look into how local governments respond to new opportunities to engage citizens in public discourse and decision-making, enabled by the diffusion of web technologies. We also look into the consequences of such digital innovations for citizen participation and influence. The overarching question we investigate is how different city and system characteristics affect the implementation of digital platforms and the extent and impact of citizen participation in urban development. We also investigate whether and how the digital participation contributes to democratic urban governance.

Urban planning and development are matters of importance for any city government. Recent trends in urban development, furthermore, accentuate the question of citizen participation and democracy (Falleth et al., 2010). Cities around the world are growing rapidly, and city governments are facing the challenge of combining this growth with social welfare and justice for its residents.

Urban development affects the everyday lives of citizens, and citizens therefore have an incentive to become engaged in these processes. Urban development processes often, however, encompass the conflicting interests of different groups. Representativeness and legitimacy therefore become particularly important. The improvement of poor neighbourhoods in central city districts is often followed by gentrification, which makes the area more attractive to the tourist industry and to middle-class residents. However, it also leads to higher rents and cost of living, which pushes away working-class people and immigrant residents (Porter & Shaw, 2009). Gentrification has a significant effect on residents' living conditions. Urban development is a contested arena. This makes the study

of the effect of ICT and new media upon the involvement and influence of different groups of residents in urban development processes highly relevant. It also provides a basis for studying how city governments adapt and implement digital innovations, to promote the involvement of citizens in their policymaking processes.

We, in this book, examine three cities with different system characteristics, Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo. The chapters of this book representing a mix of comparisons of cities and single case studies that explore and examine how different mechanisms operate in different contexts.

E-participation and Citizen Engagement

Citizen participation refers, in this book, to voluntary contributions or involvement of citizens in public decision-making. E-participation refers to the use of digital tools. These tools come in a variety of forms including digital online forums and meetings, interactive web or mobile applications, and electronic polls. The democratizing potential of ICT is widely acknowledged (Fung et al., 2013, p. 37). Digital tools can foster interaction between citizens and enable citizen self-organizations. It can also reduce the costs for city government to crowdsource and consult citizens, can reduce barriers to participation, promote equality and inclusion, and can create direct connections between citizens and politicians and other policymakers. The expectation that digital innovations will mobilize new citizen groups and improve city-citizen dialogue (Effing et al., 2011; Fung et al., 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012) has, however, yet to be achieved. Experience shows that digital participation is often subject to the weaknesses or challenges of conventional participation—i.e., such as the inclusion of politically marginalized groups, the fostering of two-way communication between citizens and policymakers, and allowing citizens to impact policy decisions (Ellison & Hardey, 2014; Kneuer, 2016; Lidén, 2016).

A persistent digital divide has separated groups who can access and use ICT from those who cannot. This phenomenon has been researched across a number of social characteristics including race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and age (Choi et al., 2020; Goggin, 2017; Jackson et al., 2008). Public agencies in the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, and many others, have implemented a range of policy instruments aimed at closing these digital divides. Research has, however,

shown that nearly every marginalized group continues to face unequal access and use of ICT and several groups facing a widening gap. The vision that the web and social media will promote the participation of marginalized groups on an equal basis with others has yet, in practice, to be realized.

Citizen participation and participatory governance is not new. Digital participatory tools are therefore adopted and implemented by cities that have a pre-existing institutionalized practice of citizen participation. Therefore, digital participation can represent a continuation of existing practices and the digitalization of existing participatory opportunities (Touchton et al., 2019). Digital participation can, however, be part of participatory reform and expansion. Previous studies indicate that several institutional factors impact local government uptake of e-participation practices including public administration style (Bonsón et al., 2015; Royo et al., 2014), and the cultural and structural characteristics of the political-administrative system (Carrizales, 2008; Ma, 2014; Zheng et al., 2014). Very little is, however, known about how such macro-level institutional factors conditions or impact micro-level decisions on the adoption and implementation of different e-participation practices (Steinbach et al., 2019, p. 81). Little is also known about how such contextual factors condition citizen decisions on whether and how to participate.

Digital channels are often implemented in situations where traditional channels such as public forums, town halls and neighbourhood council meetings already exist. Digital participation venues therefore often supplement existing venues, rather than replace them (Spada & Allegretti, 2020), often increasing the opportunity for citizens to contribute to public decision-making. The growing body of literature on democratic innovations and e-participation acknowledges this blend of participatory channels. Existing knowledge of the nature of this mix and its impact on citizen engagement and influence is, however, incomplete (Smith, 2019; Spada & Allegretti, 2020). For example, we do not know whether a digital channel meets the needs and preferences of previously inactive resident groups, or just becomes another channel for those already active, which may contribute to the development of a layer of 'super participants' (Spada & Allegretti, 2020, p. 46). Citizens may also prefer to participate through channels they control, rather than through channels initiated and controlled by local government or third parties (Loader et al., 2014).

We, in this book, investigate how the governments in developed representative democratic cities' use of digital participation tools contribute

to the overall democratic quality of the polity. We do not examine the effects of e-participation in non-democratic cities or young democracies. Neither do we investigate the broader democratic potential of citizens use of ICT and new media (Nam, 2012). Research has, furthermore, begun to show the impact of online violence, abuse, and propaganda, which includes hate speech, harassment, fake news, and security breaches (Poland, 2016). We acknowledge that online violence, abuse, and propaganda contribute to the exclusion of marginalized groups (Skjerve et al., 2016), and may affect e-participation. The examination of these issues in detail is, however, beyond the scope of this book. We instead use these broader trends to provide a point of departure for the examination of trust and exclusion in e-participation, a multidimensional experience that affects the decisions of users and government agencies in the adoption or use of new media.

Key Concepts and Relationships

This volume addresses the introduction of ICT and new media, and the effect it has upon citizens' participation in urban development projects. The chapters in this volume, therefore, explore relationships between citizen participation, the adoption and implementation of digital innovations, and city and system characteristics (see Fig. 1.1 for an illustration of these relationships). We recognize the multidirectional relations between the elements in the model. This volume focuses, however, on the impact of these elements on citizen participation and not the other way around. Neither does the volume focus on the impact of citizen participation on city adoption and implementation of innovations, nor city and system characteristics. Instead, we explore and examine the ways in which different mechanisms relate to citizen participation within different city and system contexts and not how specific city and system characteristics influence or cause participation.

The Extent and Impact of Citizen Participation

Participatory and deliberative democracy theories claim that citizen participation can contribute to democratic governance (Smith, 2009). We, inspired by recent developments in democratic theory, apply a problem-based approach to democracy. This approach presupposes that citizen

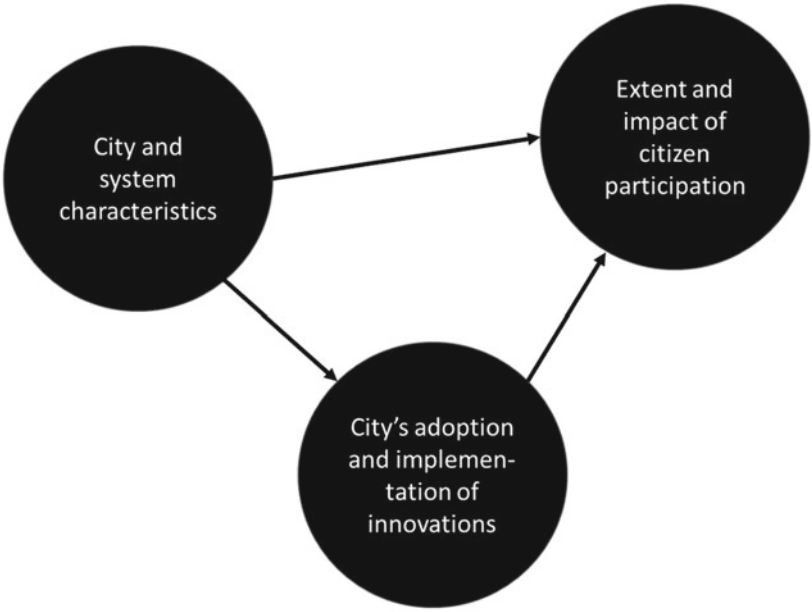

Fig. 1.1 Illustrative model of the key concepts and relationships for citizen participation
Source Own elaboration

participation beyond elections can contribute to solve important problems of democratic governance (Fung, 2006, 2015; Warren, 2017). Most assessments centre around the three functions of inclusiveness, deliberation, and public control, albeit sometimes with other choices of wording (Fung, 2006, 2015; Smith, 2009; Warren, 2017).

We understand citizen participation to be a three-dimensional concept (see Fung, 2006, 2015; Newig et al., 2018, p. 273) consisting of (1) The breadth of the involvement of affected citizen groups—to what extent do different affected groups of citizens participate? (2) The type of information exchange and communication—to what extent is communication a one-way information exchange or two-way dialog? and(3)The impact or influence on urban development—to what extent does the information and articulation that citizens bring to participatory arenas and channels inform the content or the premises of decisions made by city authorities?

Whether or not e-participation will advance inclusiveness, deliberation and popular control, depends on the role that digital tools have on each of these three dimensions.

Inclusiveness requires the involvement of those affected and potentially affected by a collective decision to 'possess the powers of speaking, voting, representing, and dissenting' (Warren, 2017, p. 44). An equal opportunity to participate is therefore fundamental. This volume addresses the introduction of ICT and new media, and the influence of this upon citizen participation in urban development processes in city districts marked by gentrification. Such urban development processes often struggle to involve disadvantaged groups such as young people, refugees, and other immigrants (Fung, 2006, 2015; McKay & Warren, 2018; Michels & de Graaf, 2010)—groups highly affected by gentrification. The effects of introducing digital participatory channels are, however, contested. Some studies indicate that ICT and new media promote political participation and dialog (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2019). Others conclude that it deepens existing participatory divides (Ellis & Goggin, 2013). These participatory divides, also known as digital divides, separate those that have access to and use digital technology from those that do not, relegating the 'not' group to second class digital citizens.

Forms of deliberation such as advocacy, argument, persuasion, negotiation, and bargaining shape the collective agenda and the formation of a collective will (Warren, 2017, p. 44). Observers are, however, concerned that digitalization may foster individualized and 'thin' participation (Urbinati, 2014) or echo-chambers (Sunstine, 2007), instead of dialog and deliberation. They are also concerned that e-decision-making can be dominated by an ignorant majority of participants, unaffected by the issues at hand, and at the expense of a deeply concerned and well-informed (knowledgeable) minority (Spada & Allegretti, 2020, p. 45).

Public control concerns the extent to which participants in these spaces are allowed to influence decisions that are taken by the government, and the importance of these decisions for the citizens' lives. Participation is, however, often limited to providing information to city government, which gives citizens few opportunities to influence urban development (Fung, 2006, 2015; Michels & de Graaf, 2010; Smith, 2019). Digital innovations can bring citizens closer to power and bypass gatekeepers such as political parties, bureaucracies, or traditional media (van Dijk & Hacker, 2018). Some cities have also introduced multi-functional digital platforms to promote the involvement of citizens in 'e-decision-making'

(United Nations, 2020). Still, digital participation is mostly consultative, leaving the final decision to the city government.

ICT and new media can, however, create a juxtaposition between an arena for change and the potential to reproduce existing inequalities. We therefore examine the role of digital technologies in citizen participation as a multidimensional concept. New media and digital participatory channels often supplement and are combined with traditional media and participatory channels. We, however, have little knowledge on how these channels are combined by citizens and by city governments (Smith, 2019; Spada & Allegretti, 2020). Combining digital and conventional channels can, however in theory, impact citizens' participation in urban development in different and opposing ways. It can expand the opportunity for active resident groups to dominate the debate on urban development and provide opportunities to those not previously involved. It can make traditional measures more efficient (digitalizing existing channels) or open up new arenas for city-citizen and citizen-citizen communication. Combining channels can also extend opportunities for consultation or for (co-)decision-making.

Cities Adoption and Implementation of Innovations

The adoption and implementation of innovations by city governments mediates citizen participation and can act as a key driver and mechanism for including or excluding citizen groups. We refer, in this volume, to innovations as new value-driven policies, procedures, technology products and services designed to promote citizen engagement in local governance. The aim of these innovations is to provide opportunities for city governments to connect with citizens. City adoption and implementation of participatory innovations are, however, affected by technological availability and resource constraints. City government choices are also influenced by its citizen participation goals and strategies. Public policy theories show that public goals and strategies are affected by the policy problem and political climate (Åström et al., 2013). Åström et al. conclude that lower levels of trust in public institutions, and the greater the depth of policy problems, the higher the chances for the adoption of what they call 'an elite-challenging' type of e-participation. Public policy theories also point to change agents (or policy entrepreneurs) who may play a decisive role in linking policy problems and (technological) solutions (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). City governments adopt and

implement citizen participation innovations using a range of strategies. The introduction of digitalized channels can in effect layer, replace, or supplement existing channels. For example, a city may choose to layer an online consultation platform on top of an existing non-digital channel for consultation. A city may also choose to replace physical paper petitioning with an online petition website and may supplement paper-based 'suggestion boxes' with online polls or social media channels that are designed to provide citizen input on government systems or services.

There are reasons to believe that the adoption and implementation of participatory innovations have an impact on whether and how citizens use participatory channels. The choices citizens make regarding which city and citizen-initiated channels to use does not follow a consistent or rational approach. We believe that citizens blend the use of participatory channels, and that their selections are highly contingent on a multitude of social, environmental, and behavioural factors. The decision to use one channel over another is therefore dynamic and responsive to the individual beliefs and perceptions held at a specific moment in time.

This multidimensional layering of participatory channels and opportunities changes over time. It also changes as citizens navigate and shift between traditional and digital forms of participation (Yao & Xu, 2021; Zheng, 2017). Mechanisms that contribute to this change include the acquisition of new digital skills, access to new technologies, implementation of new participation channels, and changes in community and government leadership (Choi & Song, 2020; Vicente & Novo, 2014).

ICT design influences how users interact with and experience digital products, systems, or services. The intended and unintended choices of project managers, developers, programmers, and others therefore influence the way in which users access and use e-participation platforms. The UN and national governments have attempted to implement a variety of policy instruments that focus on the universal design of ICT, to influence the design of digital platforms so that the broadest possible population can access and use them.

City and System Characteristics

Context will affect the extent and impact of citizen participation and the adoption and implementation of participatory innovations. This volume therefore investigates, among other things, the characteristics of the political-administrative systems that underlie the citizen–city relationship.

Previous studies have shown the importance of macro-level factors such as city size (Medaglia, 2007; Steinbach et al., 2020), financial resources (Ma, 2013, 2014; Medaglia, 2007), and the socioeconomic characteristics of the citizens (Ma, 2013; Medaglia, 2007). This research has helped explain which cities are forerunners and which laggards in the implementation of digital measures. Our knowledge of the effects of institutional context on city adoption and citizen use of digital participation is limited (Steinbach et al., 2019). The rigidity of public administration is often cited as being a general barrier to digital participatory initiatives. Public administrations often struggle with technological and organizational changes and advancements. Some findings do, however, indicate that the characteristics of the political and administrative system, such as administrative style or organizational culture, have an impact on cities' adoption and implementation of digital innovations (Royo et al., 2014; Steinbach et al., 2019). The explanation for this is that some types of administrative cultures are more open to citizen participation than others and are therefore more open to digital participation.

Social capital and citizen trust in city government are examples of features that are fundamental to understanding citizens' willingness and capacity to take part in participatory governance (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Lowndes et al., 2006, p. 287; Reichborn-Kjennerud et al., 2021). Trust is often seen as being a precondition for citizen participation. Low trust can, however, also be a driver of city government adoption and implementation of participatory innovations. The purpose of city governance strategies being, in this case, the building of trust (Hertting & Klijn, 2018). Low trust in city government might also sustain or even reinforce a culture of citizen activism. We believe trust will have an impact on the extent of citizen involvement, and the participatory venues they prefer.

We investigate, in this volume, how a city's broader cultural norms and institutions may influence how citizens respond, which digital and non-digital participatory channels they use, and for what purpose. Party ideology will arguably impact politicians' views of whether to involve citizens and in what way. Medaglia (2007) and Panagiotopoulos et al. (2012) find that left-leaning municipalities adopt e-participation technologies more frequently than others. Value systems that reflect and sustain political values beyond party conflicts, however, provide the foundation for different models of urban governance. These value systems shape different urban policy choices and outcomes (Pierre, 1999). The

concept of state-civil society regimes (Baiocchi, 2005) describes the creation of specific logics of civic engagement and acceptance of political practices for resolving conflicts between societal actors. Regime logic can therefore have a great impact on a city's adoption and implementation of digital participatory innovations. This is regardless of whether the aim of the decision-makers is to adapt or break with the logic of the established state-civil society regime.

Research Design and Methodological Approach

This book investigates how different city and system characteristics affect the implementation of digital platforms and the extent and impact of citizen participation in urban development. We examine the dynamic fluidity of citizen participation through both digital and non-digital channels. Most of the chapters in this book focus on broader social and political e-participation mechanisms, rather than specific digital tools or exemplary cases of digital participation. This allows us to compare digital and non-digital, and city-initiated and citizen-initiated channels, and to study the added value of digital channels. We also focus on conditions for achieving this 'added value' by looking at the adoption of participatory innovations by the cities, and seeking to understand how this is linked to their political-administrative systems. We consider to what extent the adoption of digital channels by city administrations and citizens represents a form of layering, and in what ways participation channels are blended. Citizen participation is therefore seen from a city administrative point of view as providing opportunities to gain insights from citizens and from a community point of view as extra-governmental ways of promoting mobilization.

The three cities of Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo are in countries with different types of multilevel democracy (Sellers et al., 2020). These differences are deeply rooted in the multilevel institutional infrastructures that 'mediate the practice of democracy at the local scale' (Ibid., p. 47). Our approach was not to follow Sellers et al. and assume that one type is superior or preferable to another, but instead to assume that different types of multilevel governance imply variations in city and system characteristics such as administrative structure and culture, trust in local government, civic activism, and state-civil society regime.

Madrid has a population of 3.3 million and is the capitol of Spain and the country's largest city. The city is part of the local elitist type

of multilevel governance, where organizations with political power are given a privileged position. Neighbourhood associations have been given a privileged position at the city and city-district level. They were, through their institutional position in territorial councils, informed, consulted, and permitted to suggest measures and negotiate with the city government on local issues. Spanish legislation recognizes municipalities' 'general clause of competences', whereby any local government can tackle any social problem. The city council of Madrid therefore assumes broad competences in welfare services, urban development and land use planning, and public works and infrastructure. The city government is led by an elected council that in turn elects a mayor who, once elected, freely appoints the members of their government (named *Junta de Gobierno*) from among the councillors. This forms the executive collegiate body of political and administrative management of the city, which is accountable to the city council.

The city of Madrid is divided into 21 districts. These city districts are chaired by a councillor that is appointed by the mayor. District responsibilities are delegated by the city level government. The districts are spaces for discussing problems that affect the citizens of the district and proposing initiatives for approval by the city council. They can also implement programmes in the district. The percentage of district expenditure is, however, below 15% of the total city budget, which is indicative of a high level of centralization in the city council.

Melbourne, with a population 4.5 million, is the capital of the state of Victoria and Australia's second largest city. The city is a part of a civic localist type of multilevel governance (Sellers et al., 2020). The relations between city government and civil society are individualized. Australia's Westminster administrative tradition is characterized by values of neutrality and anonymity, authority and accountability resting with portfolio ministers and senior officials.

Melbourne, unlike Oslo and Madrid, does not have a metropolitan-scale government, the metropolitan area being governed by 31 local government authorities of varying size and capability. The City of Melbourne, population 180,000, consists of the central business district and some surrounding suburbs. The local government sector in Australia is relatively weak in fiscal power and service functions. For example, the Victorian state government is responsible for the provision of utilities, policing, transport, school education, housing and, of particular relevance to this book, large urban development projects. Municipal councils

are governed by elected officials. The councils are, however, statutory creations of state governments, which have the ultimate power to dismiss them in the event of maladministration or corruption.

Oslo is the capital of Norway and, with its 700,000 inhabitants, the country's largest city. Norway is characterized by Sellers et al. (2020) as a nationalized type of multilevel governance where organized civil society actors are incorporated in decision-making processes. These actors are given some opportunity to influence. The system, however, 'limits the scope for citizen activism via other, more ad hoc, less hierarchical channels' (ibid., p. 115). Municipalities have, furthermore, extensive responsibility for welfare services and urban development. The city of Oslo is, therefore, responsible for land use planning, infrastructure development and area development. The city is also responsible for welfare services such as primary and secondary schools, nursery schools, social welfare, and youth work.

The municipal authority in Oslo is divided between a city-level government and 15 subordinated city district governments. The city government is led by an elected council and executive authority is exercised by a city government composed in accordance with a majority principle and held accountable to the city council. The city level government is responsible for tasks such as land use planning, transport, roads and other infrastructure, the physical environment, and primary and secondary schools. The city districts are led by directly elected district councils, and the district administration is led by a full-time district chief officer. The responsibilities of the city districts are delegated by the city level government. These include nursery schools, health and social work, youth clubs, care for substance abusers and the integration of refugees and immigrants. The district governments of some districts, such as the central district of Gamle Oslo, also run area-based initiatives.

We study citizen participation in urban development in the central districts of these cities. These central districts are all experiencing the transformation of traditional working-class areas. The improvement of poor neighbourhoods is often followed by gentrification. This development process encompasses conflicting interests of different groups of residents, and between resident groups and business interests in areas such as tourism. Our main interest is citizen participation in policy processes that impact the urban development of these areas. We therefore compare the adoption of citizen participation in policy processes that address similar challenges or policy problems in these three cities.

Our aim is not to identify and compare the relative importance of different contextual factors or to propose causal explanations to our observations. We have instead compared these three cities to explore and reveal mechanisms that mediate the three-way connection between (1) culturally bound and contextual characteristics of the city, (2) the political administrative systems and (3) the behaviour and choices of city government and citizens. We then use these comparisons to illustrate and explore how different factors and mechanisms play out in different contexts. Such a causal conclusion, due to the contextual factors being dependent on each other and the impossibility of isolating the effect of each factor through only three cases, could not, however, be drawn (Lijphart, 1971).

The chapters in this volume use different data collection methods, such as survey data (questionnaires), interviews, studies of social media, and document studies. Some chapters mix different methods. Others use single methods. The methods are, however, presented and discussed in the chapters.

Summaries of Arguments and Findings

The chapters in this volume explore different aspects of the relationships between citizen participation, the adoption and implementation of digital innovations, and city and system characteristics. The mix of approaches and methods applied in these studies makes us able to present the details and richness of the cases. Taken together they provide an in-depth study of e-participation that is anchored in unpacking the role of technology and institutional settings as mechanisms associated with political participation and empowerment and, just as often, exclusion and marginalization.

Chapter2 investigates the impact city e-participation strategies have on the participation and influence of local activists in urban development, and how this relation is conditioned by characteristics of the institutional context, and, hence, relations between all three key concepts of this book. Hovik et al. analyse data from a survey of local activists in Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo. The city strategies distinguish themselves along the power and functions the digital platforms afford participants and whether they are introduced to complement or replace pre-existing non-digital channels. The analysis reveals that local activists often combine different participatory channels, formal and informal and digital and analogue channels, regardless of the cities' e-participation strategies. The authors

argue that the institutional context, i.e., state–civil society relations and levels of trust in city government, is more important than e-participation strategies when seeking to understand the differences among the cities regarding the ways activists participate. The data furthermore shows that activists who combine many different participatory channels believe they have greater impact on urban development, than activists using one or few channels. The study therefore reveals that the introduction of multichannel systems of participation tend to create super-participants.

Chapter3 investigates the fear that digital technologies will displace traditional forms of non-digital citizen participation, such as deliberative councils or face-to-face meetings. In this chapter, Sveinung Legard explores the relationship between all three key concepts investigated by this book. By comparing Oslo and Madrid, he develops the hypothesis that the relationship between e-participation and traditional forms of citizen participation is an uneasy one, but that the level of conflict and displacement caused by the introduction of new technologies is dependent on how they are *enacted*. The establishment of the digital platform *Decide Madrid* deprived Madrid's traditional neighbourhood associations of their role. In Oslo, however, the e-participation platforms complement existing forms of non-digital participation. The implication of the hypothesis is therefore that e-participation technologies can be accommodated and adapted to a range of different settings, depending on how they are enacted.

Chapter4 analyses how city and system characteristics impact public managers attitudes, beliefs, and assessments of citizen participation. José M. Ruano and Kristin Reichborn-Kjennerud analyse data from surveys and in-depth interviews with civil servants in Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo. They look at citizen participation in general, irrespective of whether through digital or non-digital channels. This reveals a general positive perception of citizen participation among public managers in all three cities. However, the public managers' views on what is possible to achieve through participatory processes are not as optimistic. The chapter reveals a variety of mechanisms that might contribute to suboptimal participatory outcomes including insufficient resources, weak cross-sectoral and multilevel coordination, and prioritization of powerful social groups over collective interests. The similarities in the beliefs and perceptions of the public managers in the three cities stand out, particularly in the light of the differences in the political-administrative systems of the three cities.

Hence, this chapter points to system characteristics similar in all three cities' bureaucracies as possible barriers to participation.

Chapter5 focuses on the design of participatory platforms as a mediator in citizen participation and urban development. G. Anthony Giannoumis and Nidhi Joneja takes a universal design perspective, which positions technology design as a means for ensuring participation in all aspects of society. A case study of some citizens experiences, and a heuristic analysis of the *Si Din Mening* platform in Oslo, provides a basis for discussion latent barriers and opportunities for participation that the design of digital platforms can pose. The results illustrate that citizen participation is a complex phenomenon with a variety of potential factors that influence whether, how, and to what extent ICT may provide an effective solution for political participation. This chapter emphasizes the need to consider broader social issues, such as to promote awareness of and engagement with platforms, enhance trust and preserve citizens' right to privacy, and consider broader aspects of design, including the city administrative system, policies that aim to promote active participation, the organization of the local government, and the services that are intended to support participation.

Research on governments' presence of social media suggests that it is rarely used to increase public participation. In Chapter6, however, Sveinung Legard investigates politicians' and bureaucrats' use of social media. It suggests a more nuanced image of city governments' use of social media, not only focusing on attempts to control social media space, but sometimes also gaining helpful input in striving to fix things and searching for solutions to practical problems. These interactive aspects are emphasized without necessarily subscribing to the idea that they will democratize politics and government. The chapter elaborates the concepts of *controlled interactivity* and *responsive interactivity*, arguing that responsive interactivity has been overlooked in political communication and e-government studies.

In Chapter7, Bhavna Middha and Ian McShane analyse data from the Melbourne case study. They explore the association of gentrification, the increasing use of digital technologies in urban governance, and what they term *e-gentrification*, which is the convergent trajectories of digital technologies and the gentrification of formerly working-class urban locations. They contend that the implementation and use of the digital engagement platforms may be constituent of gentrification processes. This chapter therefore extends the book's discussion of consultative digital platforms as

sites of dialogue between citizens and governments, to situate these initiatives within the wider investment in digital urban infrastructure made by governments and commercial providers and brings critical attention to citizens' digital rights to the city.

The concluding Chapter8 elaborates on how democracy is affected by different approaches to digitalization of citizen participation. Sveinung Legard and Sissel Hovik investigate how different e-participation models of Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo perform on the dimensions of inclusiveness, deliberation, and public control. The digital direct democracy model in Madrid is compared with the digital crowdsourcing model in Melbourne and the e-bricolage model in Oslo. Their analyses show that in the best case, Madrid, digitalization enables the city to mobilize more citizen and involve citizen in the city's decision-making processes. At the same time, it fails short in reducing political inequalities and in facilitating high-quality deliberations. Furthermore, in none of the models, does digitalization replace other forms of engagement, which the authors argue might be beneficial since it enables cities to sustain forms of participation that digital technology so far has not yet facilitated.

Taken together, this book unveils the significance of the fact that digital transformation happens to democratic institutions in concrete places. E-participation technologies are enacted by people who adopt e-participation in different situations and for different reasons. These people, the users of digital tools, including citizens, activists, bureaucrats, or politicians, are embedded in specific cultural and institutional structures. Their use of e-participation tools is, furthermore, conditioned by the institutional context and marked by path dependency. In this way the book contributes to the e-participation literature by studying how contextual characteristics at macro and meso levels affect the practice of digital technologies at micro level (Steinbach et al., 2019), and under what conditions digital technologies can further democracy at local level (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017).

This book, furthermore, accentuates the importance of digital channels being added to non-digital channels for citizen participation, which has recently been addressed in the literature on democratic innovations (Smith, 2019). There has not yet been any digital transformation of the participatory spaces. Instead, the fact that digital channels are being layered upon non-digital participation channels has complicated and multifaceted consequences for democracy. It does enable cities to reach out to more citizens and in different ways. It implies extended

participatory opportunities for citizens and allows for different forms of engagement. Hence it can modify limitations of non-digital participation and at the same time limit the possible negative effects of thin and obligation-free digital participation. As such this layering can make participatory governance more robust. There is, however, a considerable risk for deepening the participatory divide as the more resourceful citizen groups are better equipped to use the new participatory opportunities digitalization represents. And digitalization might even impact the right to the city through e-gentrification, which is the convergent trajectories of digital ICTs and the gentrification of formerly working-class urban locations.

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CHAPTER 2

Participation and Influence in Urban Development: Does City E-Participation Strategy Matter?

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Introduction

Cities increasingly use ICT and new media to inform, consult, and involve citizens (Bonsón et al., 2015; Gilman & Peixoto, 2019; Lidén & Larsson, 2016; United Nations, 2020). Cities, however, adopt and implement e-participatory tools for different reasons (Royo et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2019), and in different ways (Bolívar et al., 2019; Simon et al., 2017; United Nations, 2020). The e-participation strategies of cities therefore

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differ. Some cities introduce e-participation to expand citizen participation opportunities. Others use digital technologies to digitalize existing participatory channels. Some cities invite citizens to participate in digital channels which only provide the opportunity to consult with the government, and others use digital tools to involve citizens in co-producing policies or services. Most cities choose to implement one comprehensive and multifunctional digital platform. Some cities, however, implement issue-specific and monofunctional platforms (United Nations, 2020). Some cities replace existing participatory channels with digital channels, and others use digital tools to complement existing channels.

Digital participation is introduced by cities that already have institutionalized practices of citizen participation and city-citizen communication (Touchton et al., 2019). Digital channels coexist with analogue city participatory channels, such as public forums and town hall meetings, and with informal channels of political participation, such as lobbying and traditional media. The role of digital channels must therefore be understood in terms of their position in this broader 'political ecology' (Smith, 2019, p. 579) or institutional context (Steinbach et al., 2019).

There is a substantial body of research on the reasons why cities adopt and implement e-participation at different paces and in different ways (Steinbach et al., 2019). The effects of digitalization are, however, contested (Gilman & Peixoto, 2019). We, for example, lack knowledge on how city e-participation strategies impact citizen choices of participatory channels, and the effect of different channels on citizen influence.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate city e-participation strategies, the way in which they affect local activist participation in government-induced channels, and the level of influence local activists can achieve in urban development issues through these channels. Activists can be members of community or local interest organizations, official or unofficial representatives of such organizations, or individuals who are particularly involved in the urban development of their neighbourhood. We, inspired by the literature on the political participation of interest groups and civil associations (Uhre & Rommetvedt, 2019), assume that local activists participate in order to impact urban development, and that they make conscious choices on their participation based on which channel they believe yields greatest impact. Activists may shop between channels (or venues) (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991) or combine a number of channels (Gaventa & Barret, 2012). Their behaviour therefore says something about a digital channel's position in the city's broader political ecology.

We furthermore and more specifically ask the following questions: How do local activists participate? How do the most influential activists participate? Are city e-participation strategies and activist behaviour and influence interlinked?

We have compared use and assessment of participatory channels by local activists in the three cities of Madrid, Melbourne, and Oslo. These cities were selected according to a 'diverse cases' strategy (Seawright & Gerring, 2008): the three cities represent different multi-level democracy models (Sellers et al., 2020), differ in terms of citizen trust in local government, and the relationship between civil society and city government. Data obtained from surveys of local activists in these three cities were used in this study.

We, in this chapter, first present arguments for whether and why digital participatory tools impact the participation and influence of activists, and then explain our choice of methods. This is followed by a presentation of our findings, and then a discussion of how our study contributes to the literature on digital participation and democratic innovations.

E-Participation in a Multi-Channel Context

E-participation or digital participation refers to the use, by citizens, of information and communication technology and of new media, to engage with public affairs and democratic processes (Sæbø et al., 2008). The literature on e-participation and other forms of democratic innovations acknowledge that such innovations are introduced into systems, where multiple channels for citizen-city communication and political participation already exist. It also acknowledges that we lack knowledge on how such innovations function in such a multi-channel context (Smith, 2019; Spada & Allegretti, 2020).

Spada and Allegretti (2020) claim that there is a consensus among researchers that a diversity of participation venues is always a good thing, because it provides more people with greater opportunities to impact development. They, however, question this idea, arguing that there is a need for studies of how democratic innovations interact in practice with other participation channels. We distinguish between formal city-induced participatory channels and informal citizen-induced channels. Local activists can move between channels. Their activity in one channel may, however, support or weaken activity in other channels (Bussu, 2019; Spada & Allegretti, 2020). In this chapter we examine the impact city's e-participation strategy has on local activist choices of participatory channel.

City E-Participation Strategies

We focus on three relevant dimensions: First whether the cities have introduced e-consultation or e-decision-making, second whether they have implemented a single multifunctional digital platform or use several issue-specific platforms and tools, and third whether they use digital platforms to replace existing participatory channels or complement existing city channels.

We, in this study, investigate local activist use of participatory channels in the promotion of their views on specific urban development issues. Our assumption is that local activists who want to impact city government decisions on specific issues, prefer channels that allow them to take part in decision-making, and not channels that only allow consultation. Narrow monofunctional platforms exclude cases outside the platform's domain. Multifunctional platforms can, however, give activists greater opportunities to front their case. A digital platform that replaces other participatory channels might also be more frequently used than digital platforms that complement existing participatory opportunities, simply because alternative channel options may, in the replacement strategy, have disappeared.

E-Participation and Participation Divides

Proponents of e-participation argue that there are fewer barriers to digital participation, at least in cities in developed countries, where mobile phones and internet connection are broadly distributed. E-participation costs less time and effort than attending physical meetings (Effing et al., 2011; Fung et al., 2013), and demands fewer network resources and less competence and self-confidence of participating citizens. E-participation is therefore assumed to reach out to more people, and to more effectively reach new groups of people than conventional ways of participation, including formal channels such as town hall meetings and workshops, or informal channels such as direct contact with elected or employed officials, protest actions, and media.

Channel differentiation can allow a larger number of citizens and some 'difficult to reach segments of population' (Spada & Allegretti, 2020, p. 42) to be reached. A diversity of channels can, however, create an 'oligarchy of super participants' (ibid., p. 46) who have the resources required to be simultaneously present in numerous channels and spaces. Groups that have the time, interest, and other resources required, can exploit the diversity of different channels and venues. They can shop between venues, try another venue if they fail in one (Baumgartner &

Jones, 1991), or can blend different channels or venues (Spada & Allegretti, 2020). Blending is particularly important, as being simultaneously present in numerous channels increases the chances of success in multichannel systems of participation (Gaventa & Barret, 2012). Those without the time and other resources required for this are, however, forced to commit to primarily one channel. Differentiation can therefore create participant losers and winners.

We are interested, in this study, in investigating whether the introduction of digital tools contributes to the creation of a layer of 'super participants'. We compare this in cities that implement a complement strategy and a replacement strategy. Digital participation is implemented to complement existing participation channels in a complement strategy, but is implemented to displace the pre-existing model of participation in a replacement strategy.

Why City E-Participation Strategies Might Not Matter

The expectation that city e-participation strategies impact citizen behaviour leads to the hope that digital participation will involve more citizens, and to the fear that it can deepen a participatory divide. The literature on political participation and participative governance points to, however, a number of grounds for expecting that a city's participation strategy will have no effect. One is that activists believe informal or invented spaces are more effective channels of influence than formal city channels. For example, Rättilä and Rinne (2017) argue that local resident activists in Finland found the official participatory opportunities to be formal and staged rather than real and effective, and so do not trust and rarely use them. Local activists can also find invited channels to be unattractive, because government actors do not listen, or because they are invited to have a say on only minor yet tangible issues, or what Fung (2015) calls 'the park bench problem'. It is the privilege of elected politicians in representative democracies to make final decisions (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Therefore, informal channels that link activists to elected politicians can be the most effective, irrespective of whether these are lobbying channels that connect activists directly with elected politicians or channels that impact public opinion, which elected politicians are accountable to.

Local activists can find analogue channels more attractive than digital channels, because digital platforms can wipe out the position of local activists as 'middlemen' and as mediators between citizens and city government. Digitalization promotes 'thin' participation, and therefore

involves the risk that some citizen groups can overturn the participatory processes at the expense of other groups, including groups that may be more knowledgeable and more affected (Spada & Allegretti, 2020, p. 45). Local activists, and other representatives of interest organizations or civil society groups, may therefore prefer venues that open for 'thicker' participation, such as arguing and bargaining. The arguments or knowledge they bring to the process, and the number of members and supporters they can mobilize, enable these groups to influence policy solutions (Rommetvedt, 2017).

Finally, institutional context arguably affects city e-participation strategies and how resident activists participate in and influence city decision-making processes. There is limited knowledge on how institutional context impacts the results of city e-participatory strategies (Steinbach et al., 2019). We, however, point to two institutional factors that may constrain or promote the use of digital tools by local activists and city governments, and briefly describe how this differs between the three cities.

First, citizen trust in government. Studies show that trust in government is a fundamental element in the understanding of the willingness of citizens to participate (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Lowndes et al., 2006, p. 287). Citizens that do not trust city government, and its ability or will to listen to citizen input, have no reasons for engaging with the city through the formal city channels of participation, whether digital or non-digital (Reichborn-Kjennerud et al., 2021). Most Norwegian citizens have high levels of trust in government, including in local government. Citizen trust in Australia is in the middle of the scale (Pew Research Center, 2017), and citizens of Spain have low levels of trust in the Spanish government, especially after the financial crisis of 2008 (Mayne & Nicolini, 2020, p. 3).

Second is the relation between civil society and city government (Sellers et al., 2020). Some systems give individual citizen participation priority, others give priority to organized groups and associations. Systems that give priority to privileged local associations, and systems that give access to the plurality of organizations and groups, can furthermore be distinguished between. Individualistic cultures may facilitate digital participation, as digital tools promote individual participation. Digital participation may be constrained by corporatist cultures.

Local-level citizen participation arrangements in Australia are usually oriented towards individuals or communities, and not towards organized interest groups (Christensen & McQuestin, 2019). Norway and Spain are, however, part of different corporatist-oriented cultures (Sellers et al., 2020). Neighbourhood associations were, in Madrid, given privileged access to city and district government. The city government of Oslo focuses, however, on cooperating with organized interests and resident groups (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Ophaug, 2018), the growing plurality of organizations therefore competing for access to decision-makers (Rommetvedt, 2017).

Methods and Data

We, in this chapter, report the findings from a comparative case study. We selected cities that are a part of different multi-level governance systems (Sellers et al., 2020), to ensure variation in city and system contexts, and to allow us to explore how digital participation plays out in different institutional contexts.

We used different methods of data collection. Data on city strategy was gathered through interviews and archival research, 77 individuals being interviewed, 48 in Oslo, 11 in Melbourne, and 18 in Madrid. The individuals were elected officials, public administrators, activists, and other relevant actors, such as platform providers. We also collected relevant documents such as policy papers, internal reports and evaluations, and minutes from council meetings that relate to the adoption and implementation process of e-participation initiatives in each of the three cities. The interviews were coded and analysed using a thematical approach.

We also conducted an online questionnaire that we replicated across the three cities. The questionnaire was distributed to residents and organized interests in the central city districts of the three cities, in the first half of 2020. We targeted active citizens, to investigate their participation and their perceived influence on the issues they engaged in, within their local community. The respondents often represented organized interests, which are broadly understood to include civil society groups such as neighbourhood associations, business associations, sporting organizations, and management boards of housing cooperatives and social housing blocks. There, therefore, was no predefined population, and we could not apply a uniform strategy to the identification and reaching out to respondents.

The respondents in Oslo were recruited through contacting NGOs, neighbourhood organizations, parents' representatives in schools, posts

on local group and city-district Facebook pages, and contacts made through fieldwork. The questionnaire was distributed online to 322 recipients in the central city districts of Oslo. 188 respondents answered.

The questionnaire was distributed, in Madrid, to the 212 associations included in the official register of neighbourhood and business associations of the city of Madrid. All were asked to disseminate the link to their members. The answers of the 219 respondents who claimed a connection with the central districts of Madrid, which is understood to be districts within the M-30 ring road, are used in this analysis.

We combined a number of recruitment methods in Melbourne: e-mails to publicly available e-mail addresses, snowballing through known contacts, and advertisements in the media and on research centre websites. The snowballing method (initial recipients being encouraged to distribute the questionnaire link to their contacts) was the most effective. The total number of people or organizations reached by snowballing is, however, unknown and a response rate cannot therefore be determined. The target group were residents and organized interests in seven inner city Melbourne councils. 100 respondents completed the survey.

The differences in methodology are in many ways inevitable, given the institutional contexts and registration practices of each city. Whether and how these differences affect our findings are discussed in the concluding sections of the chapter. There are, however, only marginal differences between the cities in whether and how often respondents tried to influence the development of their local community, and in respondent age and gender. Differences in education and trust in local government are as we had expected based on our knowledge of the residents of the three cities.

We present the questions and response alternatives with the findings. The questions map activist use of different participatory channels, and their influence, and were linked to just one specific issue, selected by the respondent. This enabled us to explore whether and how local activists combine different channels and spaces in their endeavours to exert an impact on this specific issue. In Oslo, issues related to housing, services directed to neighbourhoods, and community development dominated. In Melbourne, it was issues related to the protection of green areas, environment and climate, and in Madrid rights of and services to vulnerable communities.

The attentive reader will probably note the absence, in the analysis, of background variables such as gender, age, education, and trust in politicians and civil servants. This is because the low number of respondents, particularly in Melbourne, restricted our ability to control for the effects

of such variables in multivariate analyses. We have, however, run bivariate tests that show these variables to be only weakly and statistically insignificantly correlated with activists use of participatory channels and their perceived influence.

City E-Participatory Strategies

We briefly, in this paragraph, present the three cities' e-participation strategies.

Madrid

The city of Madrid implemented a single digital, *multifunctional platform* (*Decide Madrid*) that opens for *e-decision-making*. It was designed to encompass all major participatory processes at the city-wide level, so allowing citizens to participate in multiple ways: collecting signatures for initiative referendums, engaging in participatory budgeting, voting on policies proposed by the government, and in consultations on government plans and proposed regulations. The city government does not have the legal authority to hold binding referendums but commits voluntarily to implementing the results of participation processes.

Madrid also primarily chose to implement a *replacement strategy*. The previous participation model, which was based on neighbourhood associations, was partly dismantled and replaced by a model based on digital and individual participation. *Decide Madrid* was initiated by a left-wing alliance that won the 2015 municipal election and was, as described in more detail in Chapter 3, introduced to strengthen the role of individual citizens, enhance mass participation and direct democracy, and to limit the influence of local neighbourhood associations.[1] The introduction of the digital platform was accompanied by a reorganization of local forums at the district level, to allow individual residents to participate on an equal footing with association representatives.

[1] The *Decide Madrid* platform changed after the conservative parties won the 2019 election. Our survey was conducted shortly after the change in government (and before any consultations or votes had taken place on the platform). The responses in our survey therefore reflect the experiences of activists during the left-wing period from 2015 to 2019.

Melbourne

All 31 municipalities that make up the metropolitan area of Melbourne have implemented community engagement platforms, or have integrated community engagement functionalities on their websites. One example is the *Participate Melbourne* platform in the City of Melbourne. Another is *My city, my voice* in the City of Maribyrnong. These are *multifunctional consultation* platforms, which citizens can use to express their opinions on plans and projects proposed by the city government, via online surveys and participatory budgeting. Citizens can also use these platforms to contribute to government actions through crowdsourcing tools. Community engagement managers in the municipalities of Melbourne and Maribyrnong, explained that these platforms were established to open new venues of participation that *complement* existing channels of analogue participation. They were not implemented to replace them. The platforms are open to all residents. An important rationale for this introduction of digital technologies was to attract busy, middle-class residents who do not have the time or interest to attend physical participatory processes (see Chapter 7).

Oslo

E-participation initiatives in Oslo are smaller and more *fragmented* than those in Madrid and Melbourne. Oslo has adopted a number of different platforms for more specific purposes. All the platforms are, however, examples of *e-consultation* that digitize existing participation channels, such as for consultation in planning or the right to petition the local government. Digital participation was not implemented in Oslo to challenge existing participation venues, but to *complement* and improve them through enhancing accessibility or increasing the participation of 'silent voices'. These platforms are described in more depth in Chapter 3.

Findings

We start by presenting our findings on the way in which local activists engage; whether they engage with formal city-induced participatory channels or informal participatory channels, and thereafter which formal city channels they use. We then turn to the question of whether and how different channels are combined, and end with an analysis of super participants and perceived influence.

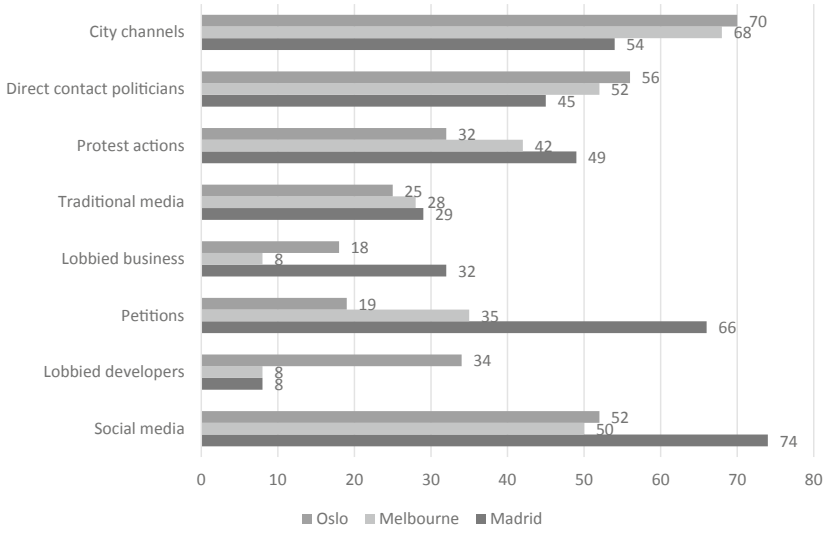

Fig. 2.1 Ways local activists engage[2] (% that to a large or very large extent engage) ($N = 285–323$)
Source Own elaboration

How Local Activists Participate

Most activists in all three cities answered that they used city-induced participation channels (abbreviated here to city channels) to a great or very great extent, to engage in urban development issues. These channels are the most widely used form of participating in both Melbourne and Oslo (see Fig. 2.1). Some informal channels are also widely used, particularly by activists in Madrid. They use social media and petitions more often than they use formal city channels. Contacting elected politicians is the most popular informal channel in both Melbourne and Oslo.

[2] To measure the ways resident activists engage, we asked those who confirmed they were engaged in urban development issues, to identify how they engaged for a specific issue. They were asked to assess to what degree they engaged in the following ways: (1) city participation channels, (2) contact politicians, (3) organize/participate in protest actions, (4) contact traditional media such as TV, radio, and newspapers, (5) lobby local business, (6) initiate/organize petitions, (7) lobby local developers and (8) use social media such as Facebook and Twitter. The response alternatives varied from 1 (to a very small degree) to 5 (to a very large degree) (a five-point Likert scale).

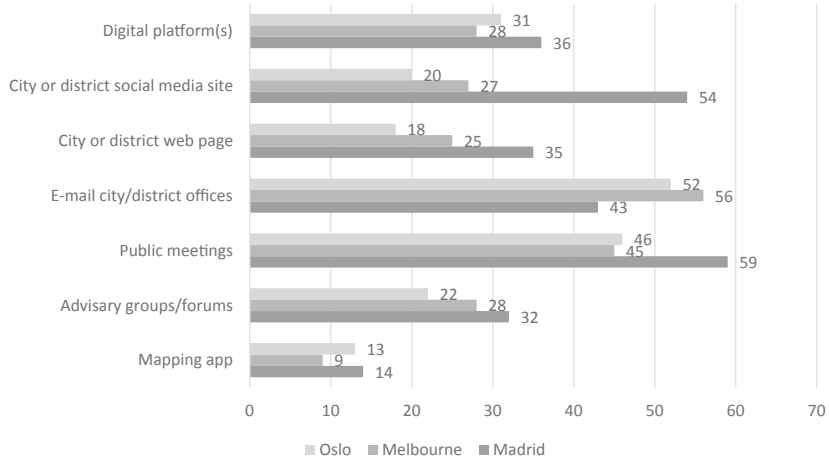

Fig. 2.2 Local activists use of seven different city channels[3] (% that use them to a large or very large extent) ($N = 303–316$)
Source Own elaboration

We also asked resident activists to tell us to what extent they used the seven different city channels listed in Fig. 2.2 when engaging in urban development issues. The activists most frequently e-mailed city offices and attend public meetings, fewer using the city's digital platforms, city's social media site, or city's web pages.

Activists in Madrid (somewhat surprisingly) did not use the *Decide Madrid* platform significantly more frequently than activists in Melbourne and Oslo used their city platforms. This indicates that Madrid's replacement-oriented e-participation strategy did not result in local activists using the digital platform instead of using traditional formal and informal participatory channels.

[3] We asked them to estimate to what extent they used the following city participatory channels: (1) digital platforms ('Decide Madrid' in Madrid, "such as 'Your city, your voice' in Marybyrnong" in Melbourne and 'Si din mening', 'bymelding' or 'min sak' in Oslo), (2) city or city district social media sites, (3) city or city district web site, (4) e-mail to city organizations, (5) public meetings arranged by city or district government, (6) input via research report/advisory groups/participative budget forums, and (7) via a digital application mapping of the use of an area. Response alternatives were on a five-point Likert scale from 'to a very little extent', to 'to a very large extent'.

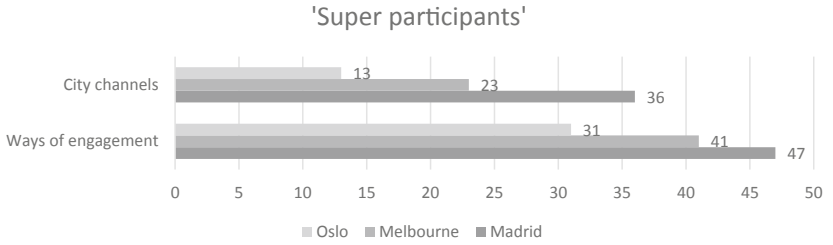

Fig. 2.3 Proportion of 'super-participants' in the three cities. % of respondents using four or more city channels and four or more ways of engagement to a large or very large extent ($N = 331/338$)
Source Own elaboration

Combination of Different Participatory Channels

Activists in Madrid combined a number of informal ways of engagement and formal city channels, more often than activists in Melbourne, and even more than activists in Oslo. Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of 'super participants', those frequently engaging in four or more ways, and those using four or more city channels. The difference between Madrid and Oslo in city channel use is particularly high. There is also a strong correlation between the number of ways of engagement and the number of city channels in all three cities, thus indicating that those who engage in a number of ways also use a number of city channels. (In Madrid $r = 0.57***$, in Melbourne $r = 0.53***$, and in Oslo $r = 0.42***$). The city-internal variation is, however, largest for activists in Melbourne, some respondents using no space or channel to a great extent, others using many.

The results suggest that the replacement strategy of Madrid has not led to a lower proportion of 'super participants' than the other two cities. It also indicates that the complementary strategy of Oslo has not led to a higher proportion of 'super participants' than the other cities. The largest number of 'super participants' was in Madrid, the fewest in Oslo.

Respondents in Madrid did not, however, engage more frequently than respondents in Oslo and Melbourne.[4] There is a strong correlation in Melbourne between frequency of engagement, number of channels, and

[4] We asked: How often did you engage in city/local community development processes? The alternatives and frequencies were 'one or few times a year' (36 pct), 'one or few times every six months' (20 pct), 'approximately once a month' (21 pct), 'approximately once

the ways they are used. This therefore indicates that there are few 'super participants' in Melbourne that engage often and through a number of channels, and that there are quite a few respondents that only engaged infrequently and through few channels.[5] The correlation is weaker in Oslo, indicating that those who engage most frequently tend not to use many more channels than those that engage less frequently. The respondents in Madrid are in a middle position.

There are substantial differences between the three cities, in the contribution of digital platform use to the emergence of 'super participants'. In Melbourne, the digital platform is frequently used by the most active, and to a lesser degree by the least active participants. The digital platform, as expected in a city with a complementary strategy, strongly contributes to the emergence of super participants. Finding a similar tendency in Madrid was also not surprising, as the digital platform in Madrid has not substituted the use of other city channels and participatory spaces. The tendency is weakest in Oslo, activist choice of how to participate being more specialized. The digital platforms in Oslo are important participatory channels, even for respondents that rarely use other channels. The Oslo city strategy of targeting specific city channels at specific groups of citizens can therefore explain why the digital platforms in Oslo contributed least to the creation of 'super participants'.

Local Activists' Influence Over Urban Development

We turn to analysing the relationship between how activists participate and their perceived influence upon urban development. The activists in all three cities on average neither agreed nor disagreed that they could influence urban development in their area. The influence they believe they can gain through city government participatory channels is slightly lower than the influence they believe they have irrespective of the channel they use. There are no significant differences between the three cities.[6] Local activists in all three cities that used the largest number of informal

a week' (12 pct) and 'more or less every day' (12 pct). The frequencies did not vary between the cities.

[5] For Melbourne the pearsons $r = 0.52$, for Oslo $r = 0.16$, and for Madrid $r = 0.26$.

[6] The questions were: 'I have been able to influence the urban/local development in my area', and 'I have been able to influence the urban/local development in my area through the city government's own participatory channels'. The response alternatives

Table 2.1 Resident activist perceived influence by number of engagement ways or channels that are frequently used and how frequently they participate (OLS-regression, standardized regression coefficients)

	Influence in general			*Influence through city channels*		
	Madrid	*Melbourne*	*Oslo*	*Madrid*	*Melbourne*	*Oslo*
Number of engagement ways/number of city channels (respectively)	0.31***	0.30*	0.23***	0.33***	0.23	0.30***
Frequency of engagement	0.12	-0.05	0.32***	0.04	0.10	0.31***
Square *R*	0.15	0.08	0.21	0.12	0.09	0.22
N	114	52	146	113	52	141

(*$p = 0.10$, **$p = 0.05$, ***$p = 0.01$).
Source Own elaboration

and formal participatory channels, perceived themselves to have most influence (see Table 2.1). The number of channels each activist used is therefore important in all three cities. How often they participate is, however, only important in Oslo. The most active in Madrid and Melbourne have most influence because they combine a number of channels. The most active in Oslo are more influential than the least active, irrespective of how many channels they use. Both measures of 'super participation' are, however, of importance in Oslo. Our data therefore indicates a strong relationship between being a super-participant and perceived influence, irrespective of city e-participation strategy.

Finally, an analysis of the relationship between local activist use of different city channels and the perceived influence they gain through the use of these channels, unveils interesting differences between the three cities. There is a relation between use of digital platforms and perceived influence in Oslo and Melbourne, but not in Madrid.[7] The most important factor in Oslo and Melbourne is the use of digital platforms, followed

were: 'strongly disagree' (1), 'somewhat disagree' (2), 'neither agree or disagree' (3), 'somewhat agree' (4) and 'strongly disagree' (5).

[7] For Oslo, the standardized regression coefficient is 0.22, in Melbourne 0.34 and in Madrid 0.04.

by attending public meetings. In Madrid, the most effective approach is to attend public meetings, followed by e-mailing city officials/offices. Use of the digital platform in Madrid is not statistically related to perceived influence. Direct contact with politicians is considered to be the most effective informal channel in all three cities. Elected politicians in all three cities agree with this. They consider direct contact with politicians to be the way in which citizens can have the greatest impact on urban development (unpublished results), civil servants in Melbourne and Oslo also agree with this (see Chapter 4).

Discussion

Our findings indicate that the introduction of digital participation tools has affected local activist participation and influence differently in the three cities. City e-participation strategies can only explain some of these differences. None of the three dimensions (e-decision-making vs e-consultation, multifunctional vs monofunctional platforms, and replacement vs complement) can, furthermore, explain the differences between the cities in how often activists use digital platforms or their perceived influence.

The digital platforms imply added participatory opportunities in all three cities. The replacement strategy of Madrid is not all encompassing, as the *Decide Madrid* platform is combined with physical meetings at local forums and with a number of other city-invited participatory opportunities. The active in both Madrid and Melbourne combine this added digital participation opportunity with other channels. In Oslo, however, digital platforms provide participation opportunity even for actors not active at other channels. Our study therefore informs the question raised by Spada and Allegretti (2020): Adding more participatory channels may enable some cities to reach out to new groups of citizens and may contribute to the creation of super participants in other cities. Our findings indicate that whether this is true may depend on the city's participation strategy. The city government of Oslo targets channels at different groups of citizens, despite participation through most city channels being based on self-selection (Bertelsen, 2020). The digital platforms in Madrid and Melbourne are, however, implemented to promote mass participation.

There is another important difference between Oslo and the other two cities. The *si din mening* platform in Oslo, as described in more detail in Chapter 3, invites both individual citizens and organizations to

participate, and to participate by arguing for their position. The platforms of Madrid and Melbourne, however, invite participation from individual citizens, and often by just indicating their preference on a predefined question. Local activists may prefer 'thick' forms of participation, which allow for arguing and bargaining on behalf of their members and supporters. This might explain why the monofunctional and consultative platforms of Oslo are as frequently used by local activists as the multifunctional platforms of Madrid and Melbourne.

Previous studies have concluded that local activists and organized groups prefer informal ways of participation, and even avoid using formal city channels (Rättilä & Rinne, 2017). It is common for the activists in all three cities who answered our survey, to combine formal and informal channels. A broader spectrum of our data indicates, however, that it is the informal channel of direct contact with politicians that is most effective in gaining influence in urban development matters. Activist use of formal city channels contributes very little to perceived influence in urban development, and none at all in Oslo.

The duality of the findings from Oslo can be explained by city government inviting citizens to have a say on minor and tangible issues, such as the colour of park-benches (Fung, 2015), and that the decision-maker often listens to citizens voices in these cases. This is not the same as giving citizens the opportunity to gain influence over the urban development of an area. This applies to the experiments in participatory budgeting via digital platforms conducted in Melbourne and Oslo, citizens being invited to allocate only a small sum of money.

The three cities are representative democracies. Decisions on more substantial issues are therefore taken by elected politicians, participatory arrangements complementing and subordinating the representative system (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that many resident activists try to directly influence elected politicians, or indirectly influence politicians through influencing public opinion. Our data sources indicate that direct contact with politicians is the most effective way of participating, which furthermore tells us that elected politicians are to some extent responsive and listen to the arguments of local activists (see Bertelsen, 2020; Hovik & Stigen, 2022). This form of participation requires, however, a knowledge of how the political-administrative system works and network resources.

Contacting politicians is the participation form that makes a difference. We cannot, however, conclude that it is unnecessary to engage in other

ways. It could be presumed that the other ways of participating, when not combined with lobbying politicians, are not effective. Lobbying may, however, also be less effective when not combined with promoting a case through formal channels and supporting it by mobilizing fellow citizens. The findings we present in this chapter support this interpretation, as they indicate that combining channels is effective. The formal city channels, including the digital platforms, therefore contribute to some extent to the creation of a layer of 'super participants' (Spada & Allegretti, 2020), contribution being greatest in Melbourne, and least in Oslo.

A city's institutional context can elucidate why digital tools give different results. Neighbourhood associations in Madrid previously had privileged access to district and city officials through local and sectoral councils. Respondents in Madrid are representatives of local organizations and associations, many preferring public meetings and e-mail contact, which can be interpreted as being path dependent behaviour. Low levels of trust in city government can promote a culture of activism, which can explain their preference for informal channels such as petitions, protest actions, and social media. Using many participatory spaces and city channels can, furthermore, be interpreted as being an indication of uncertainty, created by the previous city government's ambition to transform the city's participatory governance, and to replace existing participatory channels with a digital platform. As representatives of local organizations, they are likely to have the resources and knowledge required to use many participatory spaces and city channels. The digital platform does not, however, stand out as being one of their most preferred alternatives, their preference being to participate through channels that allow for arguing and bargaining. Those who frequently have direct contact with politicians, who frequently attend public meetings and e-mail city officials are those who themselves believe to have the strongest influence on urban development. This indicates that traditional channels have not been replaced by the digital platform. Activists can still access the decision-makers through the traditional channels.

Civil society–city relations are dominated in Melbourne by individualistic and informal linkages. Influential business interests and citizen groups are, however, often incorporated at the local level in such civic localist multi-level governance systems (Sellers et al., 2020, p. 117). Participatory channels and spaces seem to be dominated by activists who have the time, knowledge, and network resources to participate, others being hardly present in any channel or space. These 'super participants'

are active even on the digital platforms, and the use of these platforms being linked to perceived influence. Digital platforms complement an individual-based participatory culture, and seem to reinforce existing participatory divides.

The system of participatory governance in Oslo is founded on cooperation between city government, organized interests, and resident groups. Citizens in Oslo have high levels of trust in city government, and there is a tight net of linkages between citizens and city government, a combination that can explain the low use of protest actions and other activism. Resident activists can gain access to decision-makers through many different channels, which can explain why perseverance (how often they engage) seems to be a source of influence in Oslo. It can also explain why digital platforms can provide the less active resident activists with some influence.

We cannot rule out that digital platforms have a different effect on individual citizen participation than on local activists. The *Decide Madrid* platform has reached out to a larger proportion of Madrid's citizens than Oslo's and Melbourne's digital platforms (see Chapter 8). Digital platforms, despite other channels and spaces being more effective for local activists, may provide greater opportunities to individual citizens to impact decision-making processes.

Conclusion

The digital platforms in all three cities are added to existing participatory opportunities, and local activists often combine these and other city-invited participatory channels, with informal ways of participation. This combination of different participation channels, furthermore, seems to be effective, as those who believe they have influence also tend to be those who use several channels. The introduction of digital platforms therefore seems to reinforce a participatory divide, rather than reduce it.

There are, however, some differences between the three cities, our findings showing how the effects of city e-participation strategy are conditioned by institutional context. In Melbourne, introducing digital platforms complements an individualistic participatory culture, the platforms being primarily used by the most active local activists. This seems to contribute to the reinforcement of an existing participatory divide. In Oslo, digital platforms complement a tight net of participatory channels, and seem to enable the city to reach out to new participants, digital platforms being used by even the least active activists. The e-participatory

strategy in Madrid aimed to transform and replace existing channels. The institutional context, however, constrained its effect, local activists preferring traditional participatory channels such as public meetings.

The level of trust in city government seems to contribute to these effects. Low trust in city government in Madrid, leads local activists to use informal channels and join protest actions. High levels of trust in Oslo can explain activist use of city channels and direct contact with politicians, and their little use of protest actions. Institutional context therefore creates path dependent responses to a city's e-participatory strategy. Activists continue to initiate and join protest actions in cities where trust in government is low, and they prefer meeting decision-makers face to face in all three cities.

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CHAPTER 3

Displacement and Citizen Participation: A Comparison of the Enactment of E-Participation Platforms in Oslo and Madrid

Sveinung Legard

> A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything. (Postman, 1993, p. 18)

Introduction

As time passes, it becomes increasingly evident that most larger cities in democratic, and even in autocratic countries, have begun to use *e-participation* technologies as part of their citizen engagement repertoire. A recent UN survey of one hundred major cities around the world, showed that two thirds had adopted digital tools that allowed residents to share their opinions with the government. Nearly half had web portals

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with deliberation features, around one third conducted land-use planning and participation budgeting online, and 17 per cent opened for electronic voting on policy issues (United Nations, 2020).

Madrid and Oslo, two of the cases in this book, are a part of this trend. Madrid launched an award-winning platform for citizen participation called *Decide Madrid* in 2015, and Oslo inaugurated a consultation website in the urban development area in 2017. A few Oslo districts began, during the COVID pandemic, to also use community engagement platforms. These initiatives were, in both cities, preceded by other initiatives such as the e-petition tool *minsak.no* in Oslo, the ad hoc consultation website *Madrid Participa*, and the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter to engage citizens in political processes.

The growing digitization of citizen participation has not just been welcomed as a beneficial development. There have also been concerns about digitization, including that low-cost 'slacktivism', such as clicking a like or vote button, will replace long-term involvement and commitment to social, environmental, or political issues (Morozov, 2011). Another concern is that such platforms privatize engagement, and erode the mediation required to achieve a functioning public sphere (Urbinati, 2014). Implicit in this is the fear that this instant, individualized, and direct form of participation facilitated by digital platforms, will *displace* the traditional forms of participation that we associate with democracy, such as long-term commitment to a cause, deliberation, and representation.

The deterministic view that technological development automatically erodes previous forms of political engagement is not one that this chapter shares. This chapter instead takes Latour's view (1986, p. 267) that the introduction of technological innovations such as e-participation platforms into a new environment, is in 'the hands of people' who do not simply open the door to anything but 'act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it'. To be more precise, the introduction of e-participation technologies into a new environment is *enacted* by people who are embedded in specific cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional structures, who therefore have a tendency to reproduce them (Fountain, 2001).

I use this perspective in this chapter to inductively develop the following hypothesis: The relationship between e-participation and traditional, analogue forms of citizen participation is uneasy. The level of conflict and displacement caused by the introduction of e-participation

technologies is, however, dependent on how they are enacted. The empirical basis is a comparison of Madrid and Oslo, the establishment of *Decide Madrid* in Madrid depriving the traditional channels of citizen participation (the neighbourhood associations) of their role, the introduction of e-participation platforms in Oslo complementing existing forms of analogue participation. If the implication of this hypothesis is true, then there is nothing necessarily dangerous or radical about e-participation technologies. They can therefore be accommodated and adapted to a range of different settings, depending on how they are enacted.

Theoretical Perspectives

The Danger of Displacement

There is a narrower discussion within the broader debate on how digitization affects democracy of the potential benefits and dangers of introducing new participation channels, especially digital channels, into existing systems of citizen participation.

Most cities now have, according to the literature, 'hybrid' or 'multichannel' systems of participation (Borge et al., 2009; Monnoyer–Smith & Wojcik, 2012; Won et al., 2016). 'Hybrid' channels are *single* participation combinations of offline and online forms of engagement such as, for example, participatory budgeting that uses both physical meetings and online voting. 'Multichannel' systems combine a number of different methods and venues of participation, some purely digital, others hybrid or analogue. Spada and Allegretti's (2020) view is that one benefit of this can be that 'hybrid' or 'multichannel' systems attract more participants than single venues. This is often referred to as the mobilization hypothesis, and is based on the premise that groups such as youth or parents with small children, that do not normally participate in public affairs, will be encouraged to participate by the availability and attractiveness of new technologies (Tai et al., 2020). Such systems can gain efficiency by sharing knowledge and resources across channels, and through participants having more freedom to choose which issues and fields they wish to involve themselves in.

The introduction of new channels can, despite these potential benefits, also backfire. Spada and Allegretti for example are concerned that one or more channels in a system might displace other channels, a central and relevant risk being competition between and within channels. Channels of

engagement may therefore compete for active participants, leading to the demise of some channels. They can also compete for funding, resulting in the cannibalization of resources, which could weaken the functioning of the system. Competition between channels also increases the likelihood that participants choose channels that offer the best return for the least effort. This is a 'form of soft free-riding' that can undermine the system's legitimacy (Legard & Goldfrank, 2021). Adding and combining different participation channels, some of which entail more effort but also provide greater privileges, also 'increases the probability that a selected group of people that has the time and interest will monopolize such channels' (Spada & Allegretti, 2020, p. 46).

This is related to the so-called reinforcement thesis, which suggests that online political participation amplifies the social exclusion of the digital divide (Min, 2010). Research in Brazil has shown that 'people with university-level education participate in online initiatives roughly five times more [often] than those with primary education' (Sampaio et al., 2011, p. 498). This does not have to mean anything other than that different segments of the population choose to use different channels, but does become a problem where online participation outweighs the participatory venues that involve physical presence. There have been examples in Italy of participatory budgeting processes in which lower-class citizens participating offline were ousted by middle-class citizens participating online, and also examples of young online participants overwhelming the results of the votes of senior citizens (Spada & Allegretti, 2020).

Enacting Technology

The extent to which new forms of digital participation displace previous, analogue forms of participation is not only determined by the unintentional consequences of introducing these new participation forms, but also by how they are designed and placed within the environment. Discussions about the impact of new technologies on democratic participation are often dominated by either technological or social determinism, and do not capture the dimension of agency (Chadwick, 2006, p. 18). This dimension is, however, seized in what Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) call 'ensemble views' of technology, and more specifically the 'Technology Enactment Framework' formulated by Jane Fountain (2001).

Fountain distinguishes between 'objective' and 'enacted' technology, objective technology referring to artefacts such as the Internet, software,

and digital devices, and enacted technology referring to the actual use of these within a specific context. Her focus is on enacted technology, because the material capabilities of technology have little practical value if not utilized. How individuals and organizations define and use IT in subjective ways, is therefore of great interest. Municipal organizations in different cities may, for example, use identical objective technologies in dramatically different ways. Both cities in this chapter used rather similar e-participation technologies, but these were, however and as I will show, perceived, designed, and implemented in ways that had different consequences for the existing channels of analogue participation.

The Importance of the Context

Individuals are not, however, completely 'free' to enact technologies in any way they desire. Enaction is embedded in cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional structures, the individuals enacting new technologies tending to reproduce the rules, routines, norms, and power relations that define their context. The routines, scripts, frames, and patterns that constitute the typical set of responses to an environment in an organization, are therefore maintained. This corresponds with other perspectives, and highlights the stability of specific modes of participation in specific places. According to, for example, Baiocchi (2005) modern societies are made up of state-civil society regimes, or of stable patterns of interactions between the state, and the institutions, practices and the networks of voluntary life which we call civil society. The ways in which societal demands are recognized by the state are the defining feature of such regimes. This can follow a number of logics ranging from a more mediated model of interest group representation, such as in neo-corporatism (Schmitter, 1983), to more customer-oriented views of citizens in managerial models of urban governance (Pierre, 1999).

Baiocchi points out that changes in state-civil society regimes are often path-dependent, stating that every new turn in state-society interactions 'reflect[s] the balance of power and legacies of previous turns' (ibid., p. 19). These regimes will naturally limit the realization of some possibilities. Savini (2011, p. 962) similarly argues that new participatory endeavours tend to 'reproduce heuristics of dialogue and interaction that have been historically consolidated between municipal governments, third-sector agencies and voluntary organizations'. The regime and embeddedness perspective stresses stability. It does not, however, preclude

change. Fountain stresses that change may occur through unintended consequences, the technologies inserted to uphold a regime ultimately undermining it, due to unforeseen events. Another type of change is the gradual change that occurs through making numerous subtle modifications to accommodate new technologies. These changes can lead to more dramatic shifts in social structures and social relations. A third and more rapid type of change occurs in a crisis, where there are salient alternatives to the status quo that can replace it.

The Inherent Logic of E-Participation Technology

There is a certain dynamism to the Technology Enactment Framework. One weakness of the framework is, however, that it overlooks the disruptive potential of specific technologies in specific contexts. The framework, instead, views the technologies as objective and therefore neutral, and the people who implement them as biased and subjective. As Langdon Winner (1980) however points out, technologies can be political and therefore also subjective in two different ways. One way is in how they are used for political purposes in a specific environment. The other is in the technology appearing to require compatibility or being compatible with specific types of political relationships. This is also echoed by other scholars, such as Postman (1993, p. 13) who notes that 'embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another'.

So, what kind of political relationships are compatible with e-participation technologies? I propose, inspired by Baiocchi and Ganuza (2017) that e-participation technologies, despite the great variety of such tools, have two coordinating principles in common. The first is *individualized* participation. E-participation technologies are based on individual users being connected to the platform through stationary or mobile devices. They are also typically of a privatized character, individuals voting, ranking, clicking, and adding comments under limited interaction with other users. Second is *direct and unmediated* engagement. The data or input from the citizenry is connected directly to the administrative or political apparatus of the municipality. There are no mediating organizations negotiating the results with the government. E-participation technologies therefore share fundamental characteristics, that may be more compatible with political relations within some contexts than within

others. The main concept in this chapter is therefore that individualized, direct, and unmediated civic engagement opposes the mediated and indirect engagement found in the traditional forms of civic engagement of many representative democracies. I will, in the remainder of the chapter, show how the enactment of e-participation technologies played out in two state-civil society regimes that applied many of the same mediated and indirect forms of engagement, and will discuss why this ended in displacement in Madrid and completion in Oslo.

Data and Methods

The comparison of Madrid and Oslo follows a divergent case approach of maximum variation on the dependent variable (displacement/completion), but a similar independent variable (state-civil society regime) (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). The aim is to identify other potentially explanatory variables that account for the divergence of the dependent variable. I do not test whether specific theories explain the difference in outcome, but proceed inductively to develop a hypothesis that can account for the difference. This resembles what George and Bennett (2005) call a heuristic case study.

The data comes from two sources. One source is documents, reports, and secondary literature that describe the implementation of e-participation technologies in the two cities. These are important to understanding the cases as a whole. The other source is interviews with the public administrators who were responsible for implementing these technologies in the two cities. According to Steinbach et al. (2019), there are few studies of the micro-level processes that shape e-participation practices. They therefore recommend a focus on how managers within public administrations make decisions on the introduction of e-participation technologies, and the factors that influence their decisions. This is particularly pertinent, as we know that public administrators play a crucial role in initiating and developing public sector innovations (Røiseland & Vabo, 2020, p. 3), and can even be considered to be vanguards in democratic innovations (Warren, 2009). It is therefore highly likely that this is transferable to the field of e-participation (Steinbach & Süß, 2018; Wilson, 2020).

The data for Oslo consists of interviews with 10 administrators from city-wide agencies such as the Agency for Urban Planning, the Agency for the Urban Environment, and the central administration of the city

government. The district level has also been seminal in implementing e-participation tools. This chapter therefore also uses data from interviews with 5 administrators from a district that is responsible for an area-based initiative (ABI). The data for Madrid includes interviews with 7 administrators from the Area of Transparency and Citizen Participation, who were responsible for the implementation of the *Decide Madrid* platform. This platform became the main e-participation platform in 2015–2019, when it was developed and adopted. The interviews were transcribed and then coded using the *NVivo* qualitative analysis application.

Findings

Similar State-Civil Society Regimes…

The two cities both have a history of representative and interest-based forms of citizen participation in urban development. Oslo has historically had a strong corporatist model of urban governance. Madrid has what Tomàs (2005) calls a neo-corporatist governance model at the regional level. Urban planning has historically been dominated by neighbourhood associations at the city level, which is the main concern here.

Oslo's urban planning associations and their representatives play a prominent role in participatory processes, albeit not exclusively. National legislation furthermore requires municipalities to consult all 'affected interests' or 'affected parties' before adopting or altering zoning plans. Research on participation processes in the planning of Oslo shows that participants mainly are representatives from civil society organizations or public entities, for example, neighbourhood associations (*velforeninger*), migrant associations, sports associations, parents' groups, schools, religious groups, local business associations, councils of the elderly and youth, district politicians, developers, and various municipal agencies. This does not mean that there are no open processes in which residents can take part based on being an individual citizen living in or nearby the zoning area. Organized interests are, however, also significantly represented in these open processes by attendance (Kommunerevisjonen, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2011).

It is important to note that Oslo also has seen a rise in participation methods that are less based on the representation of formal organizations, and more on the direct involvement of groups that have hitherto been under-represented in the planning process. This includes workshops of

different kinds, digital mapping, design of temporary installations, and wide-ranging dialogs that engage residents directly in their capacity of being individuals affected by proposed plans, and not as representatives of formal associations. Such methods are also recommended by the planning authorities (Oslo kommune, 2019).

Neighbourhood associations have, in the urban governance model of the city of Madrid, a distinct and formalized place in urban governance and planning that dates back to resistance to the Francoist dictatorship, and the transition to electoral government (Pearlman, 1983). Marti (2012) has mapped the ebbs and flows of these associations, and their relation to the government. The movement initially had, after the fall of the dictatorship, a corporatist relationship to the metropolitan government. This took the form of negotiations both with public officials and with professionals such as planners, lawyers, and architects a relationship that was increasingly regularized and formalized throughout the 1980s, and that led in 1992 to local legislation in Madrid on citizen participation. Interest in the neighbourhood associations was renewed during the communitarian turn that took place in the 1990s, which was partly inspired by the Rio de Janeiro conference on sustainable development that introduced Local Agenda 21. This resulted in local community plans in neighbourhoods that either established or reinforced existing associations.

Madrid has a sub-municipal governance structure and a small district government administration, the role of the neighbourhood associations being institutionalized in this structure through territorial councils. The associations were therefore informed, consulted, and permitted to suggest measures and negotiate with the city government on local issues. A certain tension has however, over time, been growing between this representative model and new direct participation mechanisms. This was particularly true in the 2000s with the introduction of measures such as citizens initiatives, and consultations being conducted with other parties than the established organizations. The local legislation on citizen participation, despite this development, does still privilege neighbourhood and sectoral associations (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2004, article 35).

…Yet, Different Enactment of E-Participation Technologies

Oslo and Madrid have, despite these similarities, introduced digital tools for citizen participation very differently. In Oslo they were carefully crafted within the existing logics of participation. They were designed

to improve existing institutions, for interest groups and individuals, or to enhance the representation of 'weaker voices' within corporatist and representative arrangements. The *Decide Madrid* platform was introduced in Madrid as an alternative, and even in opposition to the corporatist-associational model of participation. I will briefly describe what type of e-participation technologies were introduced in the two cities, and then demonstrate these differences by showing how the public administrators perceived, designed, and implemented e-participation technologies, these being the three central aspects of Fountain's technology enactment.

Digitalization of citizen participation in Oslo has mainly followed three pathways. One is in urban development in general, specific digital tools being introduced to achieve the representation of groups that normally do not participate politically. Another is in urban planning, the government developing a website called *Si din mening* ('Give your opinion') to allow citizen input in planning processes. Area-based initiatives and municipal agencies have, at the local level, used digital tools to engage children or the elderly in specific physical upgrading projects or to get their input on the broader community development (Hagen et al., 2016; Vestby et al., 2017, 2020). An online platform from the company CitizenLab was also introduced in two disadvantaged neighbourhoods in 2020 (Lokalstyret Områdeløft, 2020).

The municipality of Madrid launched the platform *Decide Madrid* in 2015, and quickly won recognition for being one of the most active and innovative digital participation platforms in the world at the time.[1] Data shows that it was, in the first months of 2019, visited more than 11 million times, 26,227 proposals being added, which received more than 3 million votes. The 452,823 registered users also created 5630 debates and 193,000 comments (ParticipaLab, 2019, p. 23). A total of around 91,000 people participated in the 2018 participatory budget, 53,891 voting online on a total of 702 final proposals, and 2191 voting offline at voting stations. The platform does, however, have precedents. The municipality distributed an electronic consultation in 2004 to around 130,000 residents in the central district. Only about nine hundred people responded, and it is unclear how the results were used by the city administration (Scytl & Accenture, 2004). The experience was a pilot and was

[1] In 2018 the municipality of Madrid was one of the UN public service award winners (https://publicadministration.un.org/unpsa/database/Winners/2018-winners/Citizen-participation-project, last accessed 06.12.2021).

discontinued. *Decide Madrid* was the project of the left-wing coalition *Ahora Madrid* that governed the city from 2015 to 2019, the conservative government that took over from *Ahora Madrid* continuing to use the platform. The period I discuss in this paper is, however, before the transition in 2019.

Perception

The view of e-participation technology of the public administrators in the two cities differs drastically. The technology is seen in Oslo to be a tool for including the perspectives of hitherto under-represented groups into the administrative and political process, or to increase the accessibility of existing participation instruments. It is seen in Madrid, on the other hand, to be a tool for obtaining mass inclusion of citizens into the policymaking process, and to achieve a type of direct democracy centred around individuals and not representatives.

The approach of public administrators in Oslo to digitalization and inclusion is captured in a quote by a digital communication officer from the Urban Environment Agency, who says that digital mapping is used 'to get the old and young into the game, precisely because they are the weakest groups represented'. The reason behind the adoption of the CitizenLab platform is similarly to 'involve groups that normally do not speak up publicly about their neighbourhood', and to reach more people (Lokalstyret Områdeløft, 2020, p. 2). The main perception, at the city level, is that digitalization increases the transparency and accessibility of existing participatory instruments, the aim of the *Si din mening* website being to 'make it easier for people to not have to remember case numbers and addresses and things like that. And that one can find out what was going on relatively early'.

The public administrators in Madrid, in contrast, perceived digital tools as a way of achieving mass participation. This is framed as being the opposite of analogue participation, which normally only mobilizes a fraction of the population. As the director who oversaw the development of Madrid's platform said in an interview:

> *[If] you don't have a digital platform, the chance of having an inclusive participatory process is basically zero. Without digital platforms it's basically impossible for you to reach the population.*[2]

The administrators in Madrid furthermore greatly value the direct and individualized character of e-participation, and emphasize that it lowers the threshold for public participation, unlike long and tedious public meetings:

> *We work with the direct and individual system, because it has the great benefit that any citizen can participate in public affairs without having to systematically attend meetings that take hours, and that at any moment a citizen can make a proposal on how to improve the city or can vote in the municipality's consultations, comfortably sitting in front of their computer.*[3]

Design

Public administrators in Oslo have not been actively involved in the design of instruments other than *Si din mening*, a website commissioned and developed by the municipality's IT service. The data shows that it was consciously designed to accommodate the engagement of both associations and individuals. The website firstly allows feedback not only from individual users, but also from organizations and voluntary associations. The designers linked the platform with the national population register (of individuals), and also the register of legal entities. This allows feedback from representatives of organizations, and also from individual persons, to be verified.

Second, the developers focussed, during the design process, on making the feedback mechanism not look like a plebiscite but more like prior consultations. There were internal discussions during the site's development of whether to include preformulated questions, as in a survey. This was, however, seen as something that could create a bias of numbers in the feedback process, and therefore skew the Agency's perception of citizen input. It in other words would put individuals and associations on the same footing. They therefore chose *not* to insert survey questions,

[2] Interview with WP1MABP11, Project Director for Citizen Participation, online interview 14.03.2019.

[3] Interview with WP1MABP3, General Director of Citizen Participation, Madrid 07.05.2019.

to avoid 'weight of numbers' trouncing 'quality of arguments'. This was expressed by one of the developers as follows:

> *Some think that we have concrete questions in there, but I am one of those who think that we should not have concrete questions, because that makes it seem more like a vote. And if 450 people say one thing and 130 say another thing, it does not mean that the 130… they may have a better point than the 450.*[4]

Design in Madrid used an open software project approach, hundreds of coders and activists from around the world contributing to the platform. The main decisions on development were, however, taken by public administrators from the municipality of Madrid through the *Consul*-foundation, making this primarily an in-house project. The graphic design of the platform (unlike that of Oslo) however immediately signalled that this was a tool for allowing Madrid inhabitants to decide over policies, which was further conveyed by slogans such as 'In Madrid, you decide'. This is mirrored in platform functions that allow users to vote, rank, formulate their own proposals and gather support, and by this being conducted in full transparency. The implications of these designs are significant. They firstly make it clear that platform users are going to make decisions (vote), and that they can prioritize between different options and not merely signal their preference for a specific option. It was also designed to allow citizens to submit their own proposals and gather support for them, the municipality therefore becoming not the only actor in the process, and opening for initiatives from users. Finally, and importantly, the design only facilitated individual users, collective entities not being given access:

> *The novelty is the participatory system that we work with. It wasn't just a novelty in Madrid to have a participatory system in which individual citizens take public decisions, but also in all of Spain.*[5]

[4] Interview with WP1OSBP2, Head of Unit, Agency for Planning and Building Services, Oslo 24.01.2019.

[5] Interview with WP1MABP3.

Implementation

The e-participation technologies were not only perceived and designed differently in the two cities, but were also implemented differently, which tells a great deal about their differences. The technologies in Oslo were used to strengthen the consultations carried out in the urban development area, and to include previously unrepresented groups in the policy process. Feedback sent by users through *Si din mening* is either sent to the developers or the planning authorities, who then decide whether to take this feedback into account and whether it is important enough to modify plans. The other digital tools are directed at engaging the local population in a particular disadvantaged area, and targeting population segments that are normally not heard in public participation. Digital mapping tools are specifically aimed at children and senior citizens in the drawing up of new plans by the authorities. The CitizenLab platform in Oslo's districts also paid 'ambassadors' to reach hard-to-reach citizens with migrant backgrounds, and through this mobilized twice as many participants as the previous engagement methods (Melbøe, 2021), many speaking little Norwegian. The e-participation tools were therefore not used to replace previous channels of engagement, but to make them more accessible or to mobilize new groups into them.

Decide Madrid was, in contrast, implemented to reach all the city's inhabitants, not just specific segments, and to let them decide on and not just consult them on political issues. Participation numbers were high. Only a minority of citizens, however, used it. Of Madrid's 2.7 million voters, 12% were registered as platform users, 8% voted in referendums, and 3.3% participated in the participatory budget. These participants were however, according to the municipality, representative of the population's age, gender, and residential distribution. These numbers are, when compared with other cities, still conspicuous. So too is the decision-making authority the government delegated to the platform users. Participants in 2015–2019 decided on 346 million euros in investment, two proposals gaining sufficient support to initiate referendums. The government also held votes on other issues, such as citywide votes on the refurbishment of the central square *Plaza de España*, traffic in the shopping street *Gran Vía*, and the remodelling of public spaces in a number of city districts. The government used it to regularly consult the population. It was, however, the direct and unmediated connection with the political process in the city council that stood out. Neighbourhood associations were, through this, bypassed by a mass of individuals,

government officials understanding that this created a conflict, but one which they in many ways saw as desirable:

> *The Local Forums don't like Decide Madrid, because it strengthens direct and individual participation and weakens the control the forums have over citizen participation.*[6]

Discussion and Conclusion

E-participation in Oslo was, as I have shown, perceived, designed, and implemented to complement existing participation channels. It was, however, indirectly and directly enacted in Madrid to displace the pre-existing model of participation. It is difficult to assess the effects of these differences, particularly as Oslo's introduction of e-participation technologies did not really change anything except add new participation tools to the environment. In Madrid, however, the neighbourhood associations and the political opposition reacted negatively to the complete change that the government had attempted to bring about through the introduction of *Decide Madrid*. They protested, in particular, against equal weight being given to proposals from unorganized individuals associations that represent hundreds of residents or more, and that the government attempted to transform the local territorial councils into open forums that put individuals on a par with the neighbourhood associations.[7] The effects are also seen in Chapter 2 of this book, activists and associations reporting that they have some kind of influence in Oslo over policies via digital participation channels. This effect was, however in Madrid, very small and statistically insignificant. This is probably explained by organized interests in Oslo using *Si din mening* as collective entities, organized interests in Madrid being drowned out by the many other users on the e-participation platform.

[6] Interview with WP1MABP2, Deputy Director of Citizen Participation and Volunteering, Madrid 07.05.2019.

[7] This is reported in additional interviews with WP1MARA4, President of La Corrala Neighbourhood Association, Madrid 07.05.2019, WP1MARA5, President of Las Cavas y La Latina Neighbourhood Association, 08.05.2019, WP1MABP7, Councillor from Ciudadanos (Liberals), Madrid 16.05.2019, and WP1MABP10, Councillor from Partido Popular (Conservatives), Madrid 17.05.2019.

This chapter's main concern, however, is not the consequences of the technology enactment, but why it was enacted so differently in the two contexts. The similarities between the state-civil society regimes arose before the advent of e-participation, this suggesting that the technology enactment would produce similar results, given that administrators tend to reproduce rules, routines, norms, and power relations when enacting new technologies. What can, however, explain the divergence? Fountain provides an answer to this at one level. She emphasizes that technologies can change the environment in which they are enacted, if there are salient alternatives to the status quo. This pinpoints what took place in Madrid. The e-participation perceptions of the central public administrators who enacted *Decide Madrid* were shaped by the Spanish *Indignados*-movement, the movement occupying squares and parks in cities and towns all over the country in the wake of the global financial crisis. The *Ahora Madrid*-coalition grew out of this movement, and was elected on a platform of letting 'all citizens' 'intervene in the definition, administration and development of fundamental policies' (Ahora Madrid, 2015). The tech activists and the direct democracy promoters who populated the department responsible for citizen participation, rose out of this movement.

Another advantage of the technology enactment perspective is that it emphasizes the role of *agency*. Technology is not something that simply happens to an environment. It is, as illustrated by the Latour quote in the introduction, enacted by people. The agents that I focus on in this chapter are public administrators, and were seminal in both cities in the enactment of the e-participation initiatives. There are, however, important differences between them. In Oslo, the administrators were essentially low-ranking officials in the planning agency and city districts. They therefore adapted platforms to the broader plans of the municipality, and digitized existing services. Their position did not provide them with any room to enact the technologies in a way that broke with the practices of the context in which they were situated. The administrators in Madrid were, on the other hand, given room by the political mandate to establish a system of citizen participation that would challenge existing political institutions, including those of citizen participation. The administrators developed reciprocal relationships with the politicians, these activists turned bureaucrats proposing designs to the politicians, the politicians ratifying them and pushing for more. The mayor 'was always a

total fan of democracy and she always said "more, more, more" to everything we can do', said a senior official in an interview, and added: 'We were lucky because the political will was one hundred per cent in favour of these kinds of channels'.[8]

The regime perspective of Baiocchi (2005) and Savini (2011) leads us to expect that the individualized, direct, and unmediated character of e-participation platforms would clash with the existing logic of participation in both cities. This was, however, not the case in Oslo, so identifying a problem with the regime perspective. The perspective implicitly assumes that the institutional field of state-civil society relations is a totalizing phenomenon. This is, however, rarely the case. As Hardy and Maguire (2008) point out, such fields are normally riven with inconsistencies and conflicts, which provides opportunities for both perseverance and change. Pierre (1999), in his work on models of urban governance, similarly notes that not all models of governance, and their associated modes of citizen participation, are mutually exclusive, and that one city can contain more than one model at any time. This is because municipal governments are made up of actors that push for different agendas, that solve different problems, and respond to different pressures. E-participation technologies were introduced in Oslo in a similar vein as other New Public Governance instruments were introduced, and alongside other and more representative modes of participation—without one displacing the other. One reason for this difference is that they serve different purposes, e-participation in Madrid invading the associations' turf.

What are the lessons we can learn from comparing Oslo with Madrid? This comparison adds one contextual factor to the list of factors in the e-participation literature that affect the uptake of e-participation technologies in cities. Previous studies have identified factors such as the degree of democracy and political freedoms at the national level (Jho & Song, 2015), characteristics of the political culture (Aichholzer & Allhutter, 2009; Williams et al., 2013), value systems (Khan et al., 2014; Zhao, 2013), public administration styles (Royo et al., 2014), the design of political institutions (Zheng et al., 2014), attitudes of political and administrative leaders (Aikins & Krane, 2010; Carrizales, 2008; Feeney & Welch, 2012; Hofmann, 2014), and power structures (Chadwick, 2011). Pre-existing forms of citizen participation are, however, rarely discussed

[8] Interview with WP1MABP11.

as a factor that affects the adoption and implementation of e-participation practices. This dimension is added by this study.

It also contributes the following argument to the displacement discussion: The relationship between digital forms of participation and its individualized and unmediated logic, and *some* traditional forms of analogue participation of mediated and indirect engagement, is uneasy. The potential displacement they can cause not only, however, depends on their unintended side-effects, but also on how they are enacted. Postman (1993) claimed that the introduction of new technologies always entails a war with old practices. One thing that this chapter, however, clearly shows is that the technology needs soldiers to wage such a war. E-participation technology in Madrid had soldiers who were prepared to actively assault the old institutions. Oslo, however, only had doctors that used the technology to improve or remedy problems with the old bodies. E-participation technologies can, depending on agency, be enacted in ways that add something to the environment, and in ways that attempt to change everything.

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CHAPTER 4

Inside the Black Box: Perspectives and Attitudes of Civil Servants on Citizen Participation

José M. Ruano and Kristin Reichborn-Kjennerud

Introduction

One essential feature of Weberian bureaucratic administration is the distance from the 'administered' as a guarantee of neutrality and objectivity in the functioning of a public administration. This distance from the public and its protection from political power ensures that the organization is protected from the struggle of interests inherent in society and in the political. This image of an administration, and as one that is blind and distant from social interests, has however given way to the emergence of a new paradigm: that of an administration that is close to citizens, open to

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the public, that operates through relations with citizens and that secures a sufficient level of transparency of the process.

This new image of public administration, which is open and accessible to the demands of society, is expected to use new forms of communication, consultation, and decision-making techniques (Vigoda, 2002). The passage from the mysterious black box to the glass box furthermore involves the emergence of citizen participation as a value in itself, and on which the legitimacy of the administrative apparatus ultimately depends. Citizen participation can take different forms (right to information, consultation, or decision-making procedures), can use different channels (face-to-face or digital) and can ultimately pursue multiple purposes. Some assume that citizen participation improves the quality of public decisions (King et al., 1998; Schachter, 1995; Thomas, 1995). Others are of the opinion that participation strengthens trust in public institutions, improves cohesion, and promotes social capital (Nabatchi, 2010; Roberts, 1997). In sum, citizen participation is expected to have benefits for democracy as a whole, and for the institutional performance of public institutions specifically. More recent studies have, however, focused on the analysis of costs of participation, the methodology used, the stakeholders and its potential dysfunctional effects (Berner et al., 2011; Burton, 2009; Velasco & Ruano, 2021).

The literature recognizes the importance of the role of public managers, this being due to their central position in the public administration between the political actors who ultimately act as promoters of participation strategies, and civil society which seeks to influence the decision-making process. It was therefore traditionally assumed that public managers limited themselves to implementing political decisions, while maintaining an attitude of exquisite neutrality. Some of the literature considers the final configuration of participatory systems to be largely determined by the attitudes of public managers towards citizen participation, attitudes which depend on personal as well as organizational or contextual factors (Ianniello et al., 2019; Liao & Schachter, 2018; Migchelbrink & Van de Walle, 2021; Yang & Callahan, 2007)

The objective of this chapter is to, based on these considerations, carry out a comparative analysis of the attitudes of civil servants involved in the processes of participation in the cities of Madrid, Oslo and Melbourne, three cities which have implemented institutionalized systems of face-to-face and digital citizen participation in different administrative contexts. The general position of the specialized literature on the role of public

managers in participation will then be presented. This is followed by a justification of the selection of the three units of analysis and the methodology employed and a presentation of the data analysis, concluded by highlighting the main findings of the research.

Factors Conditioning Civil Servants' Attitudes

The literature on civil servants' attitudes towards citizen participation processes has identified a number of variables that condition their attitudes and behaviour. Some of these variables are of a personal nature. Others relate to the characteristics of the participatory processes, the elements of the administrative culture or the socio-political context. This demonstrates that public managers do not passively accept policy guidelines solely on the basis of the values of the neutrality and legality expected of them, their perspective on public policies being also determined by a number of other factors, some ultimately promoting or hindering the implementation of participatory systems.

Elected officials are often promoters of citizen participation initiatives, the implementation stage of these initiatives being determined by factors such as the wide variety of designs and trust in elected officials (Liao, 2018). Social actors such as neighbourhood associations, business representatives, social movements, political parties, or individuals may try to influence the content of participatory policies, by exerting pressure on public managers to promote their specific interests or ideology (Yang & Callahan, 2007, pp. 251–252). It is, however, common for bureaucrats to invoke lobbyists' or individual citizens' lack of technical knowledge, their lack of expertise, their ignorance of the administrative procedure, or the false expectations created by participatory processes, as weaknesses of social actors (Ianniello et al., 2019, pp. 26–27). The political and institutional dynamics of a city and the resilience of public managers to external pressures can determine citizen input in participatory decisions. There is, nevertheless, no doubt that the groups that are better organized or better able to exert influence may end up setting the agenda of participatory politics (Campbell, 2010). The number and type of participants, their level of presence in the deliberative or decision-making arenas, and the representativeness of these groups or individuals of the wider community may therefore condition the input legitimacy of the participatory process (Koppenjan, 2008). The paradox of participatory processes is therefore, even where most processes are based on direct democracy techniques,

the perceived quality of the process may be affected by the low social representativeness of participants or the persistence of 'ever-present' or dominant groups, and therefore ultimately condition its development.

Contextual variables mentioned in the literature that may favour or hinder participatory policies (beside factors related to external actors) include the size of cities, their demographic structure, the political colour of the government, the political-administrative structure, the educational and income level of the population, trust in elected officials (Hong, 2015; Liao & Schachter, 2018) or even the type of civic or moralistic culture prevailing (Neshkova & Guo, 2018).

Process design is, due to internal factors shaping participatory processes and to design having a decisive influence on the perceptions and attitudes of public managers, a key element. The inclusion in design of the instruments of dialogue and the dynamics of involvement also makes design a key element. The design of face-to-face or online mechanisms can, in this sense, facilitate or hinder the participation of certain social actors, the type of language or terminology used restricting communication to groups that are more familiar with the complexity of administrative procedures, therefore alienating marginal social groups, minorities or individuals (Halvorsen, 2003). Resources such as personnel, technology, time, budget, or political support may also be perceived as being key elements in the implementation stage (Kim & Schachter, 2013). Citizen participation may be felt like an additional workload upon systems that coordinate with other areas of government, with districts or between administrations, an aspect which should also be noted.

More intangible factors such as management culture also play an important role in shaping the perceptions of public managers. Red tape or bureaucratic structures characterized by hierarchical authority can be factors that negatively affect the momentum and development of participatory initiatives (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Top-down structures can generate distance between citizens and administrators, and the prevalence of a 'conservative' administrative culture based on centralized command and control systems can prevent the generation of a climate of trust with social actors and the creation, in participatory decision-making models, of important arenas for debate and discussion. An open administrative culture or an adaptive or relational leadership style can, however, favour the rapprochement between public institutions and civil society. The institutionalization of flexible forms of communication between them

can also, indirectly, promote a positive attitude in officials towards the participatory tools (Bussu & Bartels, 2014).

The impact of personal factors in shaping public managers' attitudes should also be considered. Some research points out the importance of satisfaction with work performed, the trust of citizens, their ability to interact with heterogeneous social groups, their educational level, gender, age, seniority, their level of fear of losing power or control (Feeney & Welch, 2012; Liao & Schachter, 2018), whether they hold a technocratic conception that is insensitive to political or social values other than bureaucratic expertise (Galbraith, 1975), or have a personal assessment of the cost–benefit ratio of previous participatory processes (Bohmelt et al., 2016).

Rational of Case Selection and Research Methods

Madrid, Oslo, and Melbourne have developed digital citizen participation systems that have been added to the traditional spaces for face-to-face participation. The three cities have different political and administrative traditions. All three have, however, used participatory instruments to handle certain institutional weaknesses. For example, the low public opinion of Melbourne's local governance was the basis for implementing alternative forms of communication and consultation between civil society and policy-makers. Melbourne belongs to Australia's Westminster administrative tradition, which is characterized by values of neutrality, anonymity, and authority and by accountability resting with elected officials. The participation policy drive is therefore essentially political.

The institutional trust indices in Oslo are relatively positive compared with other European political systems. The prolonged decline in local election participation has, however, been seen to be a sign of a latent crisis in local democracy. Strategies have therefore been pursued to revitalize local democracy, through an administrative culture that seeks cooperation, openness, democratic dialogue, and social participation. The implementation of citizen participation initiatives in Oslo furthermore benefits from the legal requirement to carry out consultations in different policy areas, and from an administrative culture that favours the autonomy of administrative departments in their interaction with civil society.

An attempt has been made in Madrid, to overcome the widespread distrust of the political class and of institutional performance. This has

been promoted through the use of a flexible institutional model that allows the deployment of participatory instruments, brings consultative and decision-making processes closer to the citizens, and gives a voice to the most active and interested social actors and citizens in municipal governance. Madrid therefore combines the tradition of a professionalized and neutral civil service with a broad autonomy of the political authorities, to promote participatory schemes. The main promoters are the elected officials.

Most of the information collected in this research was derived from a questionnaire that was sent to public managers in the three cities. These managers were involved in citizen participation processes and were based in urban development departments in the central organization or in the districts from May to June 2020. The questionnaires used in each were similar in structure, but were adapted to the political-institutional reality of each city. The questionnaire used in Melbourne was therefore distributed in seven inner-city council areas, distribution being extended to public employees in the State of Victoria, which is responsible for larger urban development projects. Preparing a public list of potential recipients of the questionnaire was difficult in Melbourne. This was, however, overcome by using a recruitment system that consisted of a mix of direct emails, LinkedIn messages, and snowballing. Distribution in Oslo took into account the active role of municipal agencies in the design and implementation of projects, and in Madrid the questionnaire was sent to officials of the central planning services and to those assigned to the city's districts, these being the territorial arenas for neighbourhood debate.

The questionnaire consisted of a set of multiple-choice questions on perceptions of participation systems, their limitations or drawbacks, the adequacy of existing technical systems, the communication channels used, the frequency of contact with different sectors of organized civil society, and the degree of influence of these groups on urban development decisions. The survey included open-ended questions that encouraged participants to express their views freely, which served to deepen, illustrate, or nuance the answers provided.

The total number of responses received was 369, from Madrid 201, from Oslo 95, and from Melbourne 73. The profile of participants showed that university-educated professionals and women predominated in the survey (58% in Madrid, 60% in Oslo and 62% in Melbourne).

The analysis strategy consisted of, first, ordering and systematizing the questionnaire questions to design 5 key study variables, each being

subdivided into operational variables or sub-variables that account for the content of the main variable. This is shown in Table 4.1.

The quantitative data provided by the survey was supplemented by in-depth interviews with key managers, who are directly involved in the design or implementation of urban development projects (see Appendix of interviews and their coding).

Thirty-seven interviews were conducted with key managers between May 2019 and July 2021, 23 of the interviewees being City of Oslo managers. The in-depth interviews served a dual purpose. Those conducted before the questionnaire provided insight into the context of each city and the details of each participation system. Those conducted after the questionnaire were used to interpret the quantitative data obtained from the survey.

Data Analysis

Citizen Participation and Its Problems

One of the clearest results of the study is the positive perception of public managers of participation in general. More than 80% of all respondents in the three cities said that participation contributes to good evidence-based decision-making (Mad = 82.9; Osl = 89.4; Mel = 87.5). There is also a strong opinion, in the three cities, that citizen participation initiatives improve democratic transparency, and promote the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups. They, therefore, believe it increases the likelihood that people will support or accept change (Mad = 76.5; Osl = 63.1; Mel = 77.5), that it provides information on residents' experiences and increases our understanding of how people contribute (Mad = 84.6; Osl = 93.6; Mel = 90.2), that it allows input from silent voices that do not participate in the life of the organization (Mad = 60.5; Osl = 66.3; Mel = 73.1), and allows a diversity of stakeholders to have a voice in changes that affect them (Mad = 77.6; Osl = 70.2; Mel = 80).

This optimistic perspective on the possibilities provided by citizen participation is supported by the responses obtained from the open-ended questions, and by some of the interviews:

> *75% of the time consultation has turned out to be a powerful tool. We don't want to be in a position where the community thinks we have not consulted*

Table 4.1 Variables analysed and their operationalization

Variables	*Sub-variables*
1. Perception on participation	1.1. It contributes to good evidence-based decision-making 1.2. It increases the possibility that people endorse or accept change 1.3. It gives information about residents' experiences and an increased understanding of how they contribute 1.4. It allows inputs from silent voices that do not participate in organisational life 1.5. It allows a diversity of stakeholders a voice in changes that affect them
2. Problems of participation	2.1. Good participatory processes take time 2.2. People may lose motivation if they invest much time without seeing acceptable results 2.3. Civil servants and elected officials are hesitant to let residents influence decisions 2.4. Stronger groups use the system more effectively 2.5. People do not discriminate between the right to give suggestions and the right to certain results 2.6. Participation is becoming professionalized
3. Participatory infrastructure	3.1. We have procedures for participation embedded in our development plans 3.2. We have assigned officers responsible for coordinating urban development processes 3.3. We have procedures for involving councils and other organizations in developing urban policy 3.4. Collaboration between different departments in our organization works well 3.5. Collaboration between the municipality and the state works well
4. Communication channels and their administrative use	4.1. City webpages 4.2. City digital platforms and participatory apps 4.3. Social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) 4.4. Webpages/social media pages started by residents or organizations

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Variables	*Sub-variables*
5. Contacts with stakeholders and their influence	5.1. NGOs 5.2. Sports associations 5.3. Religious associations 5.4. Educational institutions 5.5. Cultural/Ethnic associations 5.6. Business organizations 5.7. Neighbourhood associations 5.8. Developers/Property owners 5.9. Individual residents

Source Own elaboration

properly, and then we start the work and objections start coming in (…) I think it is useful, and the council benefits from it" .(Interview Mel 6)

We have to accept that the 'less qualified' opinion of the citizen is sometimes difficult, although generally enriching. (Mad)

The potential improvements provided by citizen participation are the result of a process of political change, thus providing an 'opportunity window' which public managers can take advantage of:

The work commenced after a change in government, it was partly driven by a change in approach for managing our digital products and relates to the philosophy within our team (…) within the policy of the government we could see that there was a space. So, we could see that there would be a focus on community engagement (…) We really saw an opportunity. (Interview Mel 3)

Participation requires a process of continuous improvement. The goal is to professionalise participation internally and avoid its politicisation. We want to avoid political bias, to broaden participation, so that the same people do not always participate. (Interview Mad 2)

Well, what I think is important in terms of the development of the city, is the political interference of the councils, and what is the culture around community engagement. So if the council trusts the planners, and our Maribyrnong council has a political environment where the council has trust in the staff to do proper community engagement and if the political messages are the same

in the organisation, you get more stuff done. Political environment is very important in the development of the city. (Interview Mel 2)

An analysis of the practical problems associated with implementation soon, however, shatters this optimistic perspective on participation. One clear practical problem is the lack of time, which is an essential resource. This is recognized by the majority of public managers in the three cities (Mad = 70.2; Osl = 50.5; Mel = 62.1) and confirmed by the open-ended questions. Embedded in the lack of time is also the risk that participants lose interest in participating if they do not see acceptable results within a reasonable period of time (Mad = 89.5; Osl = 90.5; Mel = 91.9):

Bureaucracy makes it difficult (impossible) to respond in a timely manner to enquiries. A comment will be handled by four different people before it gets to the subject matter expert, who can't engage directly but must go back through all the channels. (Mel)

(There is) a danger of symbolic participation, that the process takes too long with no results, and explanations are not given. (Osl)

Another main problem reported by public managers is citizens' lack of technical knowledge of administrative procedures or the competencies of the different administrations:

"(We should know) on which issues citizens should be listened to and the more objective aspects (technical, legal...) that should take precedence and that citizens sometimes do not know about. (Mad)

Many suggestions are made on issues that the district does not control, they therefore have to be forwarded and are not so useful to the district. (Osl)

Stakeholders often lack the full level of detail or technical information regarding an issue and so often views are unable to be accommodated due to other precluding information which has either not been considered by the stakeholder or is required to be confidential to stakeholders. (Mel)

False expectations of the results of participation can arise from citizens' lack of technical knowledge. That is why almost two of three respondents think people do not discriminate between the right to make suggestions and the right to certain results (Mad = 73.8; Osl = 75.8; Mel = 64.8):

We need to be more didactic, to avoid false expectations. (Interview Mad 4)

Frustration must be avoided, because there are things that can't be done or do not fall within the municipality's area of competence. The previous model collapsed due to numerous projects being complicated or having long implementation periods. We need to extend the time for the technical evaluation and implementation of projects. Madrid's was a pioneering experience, but mistakes were made. (Interview Mad 2)

They think participation means decision-making. (Osl)

The pessimism towards participatory processes of certain sections of the citizenry is based on the assertions of some public managers that participatory initiatives lack sincerity:

Most of the time you simply follow the procedure and don't listen. (Mad)

Most things are decided in advance. (Osl)

The government just needs things that makes their jobs easier, in a lot of cases, they are not thinking what do the citizens need. (Interview Mel 4)

The Participatory Arrangements

One of the key elements of citizen participation is policy implementation. Adequate implementation requires material and human resources, and also coordination procedures between institutional actors. Most public managers say that their administrations have integrated participatory procedures into development plans (Mad = 62.1; Osl = 60.2; Mel = 85.4) and assign officials to the coordination of urban planning processes. This statement is, however, more doubtful in Oslo (Mad = 66.3; Osl = 41.3; Mel = 85.3). Public managers in all three cities, despite these resources, highlight the weakness of coordination mechanisms, less than half saying that these coordination instruments work well between organization departments (Mad = 38; Osl = 29.3; Mel = n.d) or between layers of government (Mad = 27.3; Osl = 9.8; Mel = 42.5). Coordination difficulties are compounded by the perception that there is a lack of the technical resources required to process the information and use it appropriately:

It is difficult to coordinate competences between government areas and districts. (Mad)

(There is) no digital system for processing the input. Must be done manually. (Osl)

There need to be across agency positions created to facilitate place based inter-agency approaches. This would enable better integrated engagement to occur. (Mel)

A key element of the successful implementation of the citizen participation policy is, on the other hand, its integration and coordination with the procedures and programs of other areas of government. This adaption effort is perceived as being an unwieldy burden, as the interviews conducted in Madrid show:

Unlike consultations, public policies have to be implemented, procurement has to be organized... The most complicated aspects of this are carried out behind closed doors. At the start, civil servants are reluctant to implement projects suggested by citizens, proposals have to fit into strategic plans, and new government teams need time to learn how to implement them. One challenge is to change the internal culture. (Interview Mad 8)

The projects are an additional burden to the administrative work, this causing tensions between the Directorate General for Citizen Participation and the government areas. (Interview Mad 1)

Citizen proposals have to be adapted to the human and economic resources we have available and to execution times. (Mad)

Communication Channels and Their Administrative Use

All three cities have developed digital citizen participation systems that complement the traditional face-to-face debate arenas, the use of these web pages, social media pages and digital platforms seeming (based on the survey information) to be relatively widespread. This is especially true in Madrid, which is the only city of the three whose webpage serves as a platform for citizen-driven project and investment budget decision-making (Mad = 83.4; Osl = 52.6; Mel = 54.3). According to the interviews, the

digital platform provides obvious advantages of an instrumental nature and even helps build community trust:

> *So in terms of accessibility, this is a really useful tool because a lot of face-to-face events – you know, such as workshops or focus groups – there are a lot of people that feel uncomfortable, or don't feel that they can contribute, because they may be intimidated by that face to face environment. While online discussion forums, people that have different needs from different socio-economic backgrounds, different educational levels, are still welcome to interact.* (Interview Mel 2)

> *So, we can use that, and if we find that we are short in one area, we will target that group, whatever they may be, especially old people, or multicultural groups, so you can always supplement from other tools. We aim to get a representative sample.* (Interview Mel 5)

> *The other element of the platform is the ability to build your community trust and build your relationship with the community.* (Mel)

Two problems arising from the use of digital platforms were, however, noted: on the one hand (as for the lack of use of participation systems noted above), few public managers, especially in Oslo, believe that they have adequate systems for input systematization (Mad = 78.1; Osl = 29.8; Mel = 47) and ongoing assessment (Mad = 68.4; Osl = 28.2; Mel = 42.9).

The development of digital participation systems, while considered inevitable in the digital society, immediately raises the problem of the digital inclusion of different social sectors:

> *Young people do not participate. Older people are interested, but do not participate digitally.* (Interview Mad 1)

> *I think the digital divide is a reality, OECD countries have embraced technology and the digital is the medium through which we interact. There is no doubt about that. I am not saying it's the best thing, but it is just the reality.* (Interview Mel 4)

> *"So, in a low socio-economic community, you might need to go out face-to-face with an iPad and interact with them at a relevant time and in a meaningful way. Those gaps in the data allow the organization to understand*

> *that it's not the same people that always provide feedback, and decisions are made based on a representative – as representative as possible. It's not a representative sample. (…) It allows the organization to really understand the types of people that participate.* (Interview Mel 2)

Not all digital channels are, however, suitable for citizen involvement, particularly some social media channels. It is therefore necessary to combine them with face-to-face channels, so that the majority of the population is reached and to guarantee their representativeness in participatory processes. This is, at least, expressed in the interviews conducted in Melbourne:

> *Facebook doesn't help for sure. It is a terrible tool for engagement. Look I will say that, because even if you look at, it promotes our keyboard warriors too much, so I don't think Facebook is a powerful tool for community engagement. It's good to get the message out there for people to look at. We tried that in planning, and it failed. So, we put in links to surveys, but not for comments.* (Interview Mel 6)

> *Face to face is targeted at migrants, or resident organisations, non-English speaking backgrounds, or disabled people, so they are targeted at them. And often those people haven't heard of Participate Melbourne, so that is an indication for me that the online people are different.* (Interview Mel 2)

> *Most people have internet and the online access is easy, but face to face is also required. There is a temptation in some people to just do digital and not go and face people, but I don't think that's right. You need to cover the variety of cultures and cohorts.* (Interview Mel 5)

Contacts with Stakeholders and Their Influence

One of the most frequent tasks of public managers in citizen participation processes is the development and maintenance of relationships with a wide range of social groups. The groups that public managers maintain regular contact with differences between the cities. The public managers in Madrid acknowledge monthly or weekly contact with business organizations (33%), individual residents (29.9%) and parents' associations (23.7%), the main stakeholders of reference in Oslo being individual residents (55.3%), developers or owners (35.7%) and NGOs (30.7%), and

in Melbourne sports associations (59.6%), religious associations (51.1%), NGOs and developers or owners (44.2%).

One problem perceived by public managers in relating to the social groups was the lack of a strategic vision for the city as a whole and, conversely, the prevalence of specific interests that were limited to the social group's sector of the city:

> *Sometimes I believe that it is necessary to teach citizens beforehand, so that they are in context, not so much to guide their proposals but to get them to see that changes can be made on a larger scale than their own street or neighbourhood.* (Mad)

> *Many do not see the situation in a larger perspective, in terms of what's best for the area and the community as a whole. Their input is focussed on changes not being made near their property.* (Osl)

> *The council generally looks at community engagement in an issues-based way. So, we look at homelessness, waste recovery, while our branch is place based more than place making, so in terms of homelessness, or waste recovery. Citizens are more interested in their own area, and not so much in all of the city of Melbourne.* (Interview Mel 1)

An additional problem is the difficulty of reconciling different and even conflicting interests in plural societies:

> *It is difficult to reconcile the conflicting interests of residents and users of public space (shopkeepers, hotels, etc.) – due to the noise and environmental problems generated by them.* (Mad)

> *Conflicting suggestions from people with widely diverging interests makes it difficult to make a decision that makes everyone happy.* (Osl)

> *Part of the work is balance the interest of developers, businesses, government agencies and community benefit to ensure mutually benefiting outcomes.* (Mel)

> *(There are) very divided personal interests. People can be very 50:50 in what they want and it makes the decision making process more complicated. The sheer size of the Victorian population and how you reach 5 million people and/or hundreds of thousands of businesses. How to prioritise the input that*

> *comes back? Whose input is most important and who determines that? As eluded, you need to hear a diverse range of opinions and to have input from the quiet voices as well as the loud.* (Mel)

This plurality of stakeholders and interests generates problems of legitimacy in the participatory processes. Older people, individuals with greater personal resources or groups familiar with the dynamics of participatory processes are well represented, other groups however lack social representation:

> *We need to complement individual participation with collective participation. We must extend participation to young people and vulnerable groups and innovate. We cannot forget the importance of neighbourhood associations and the collegiate bodies of the City Council. It is not acceptable for the same people to always be there. We must diversify and reduce direct subsidies.* (Interview Mad 2)

> *Individuals say they represent a larger group, when they don't.* (Osl)

> *It is hard to mobilize some groups. Resourceful people, older people and more men engage in open meetings etc. This can cause a less than nuanced impression of needs and wishes in the area.* (Osl)

> *Most of the time, it's the same people that engage with the council. Council has established an active transport committee (…) and there are people that are active in those communities.* (Interview Mel 6)

The survey results show, however, that regularity of contact between public managers and stakeholders does not correlate with the degree of influence stakeholders exert. In other words, it is not always the actors who maintain the most frequent contact that exerts the most significant influence on urban development policies.

The most influential stakeholders in Madrid are business organizations (81.7%) and neighbourhood associations (60%). These were not the stakeholders who were most strongly linked to public managers. The most influential stakeholders in Oslo were developers or property owners (68.9%) and neighbourhood associations (54.5%), these stakeholders displacing individual residents. The actors that public managers in Melbourne perceive to be most powerful are business organizations

(54.5%) and developers or property owners (48.5%). NGOs take second place. These results are confirmed by the qualitative data:

> *Business organisations, through their pressure and support, influence the way in which urban planning is carried out and municipal by-laws are drafted, their goal being the economic growth of the city.* (Mad)

> *Developers and real estate owners have a lot of power in Oslo.* (Osl)

> *Developers set the agenda because they suggest and drive the city's development. They therefore have a strong influence. Developers know how politics works. They go directly to politicians when they want to exert pressure and to influence decisions – not to the administration.* (Osl)

> *Businesses can engage by lobbying for direct benefits or to remove perceived barriers to profit. They have a strong voice and influence on decision makers including public servants. Other groups have substantially less influence under strong efforts are made so they are heard.* (Mel)

Citizen participation processes are, however, essentially political initiatives. This means that the balance of power among stakeholders is always in flux and depends on changes in government and alliances between political parties and interest groups. This is especially evident in Madrid, where changes in government led to changes in the participatory model, to one that was more favourable to other stakeholders:

> *It depends on which political group is in power. Which interest groups are being listened to varies from one political group to another.* (Mad)

> *For many years, neighbourhood associations and NGOs have had a significant influence on decisions. This is also due to the political support they provide, which is reflected in the subsidies they receive.* (Mad)

> *(There are) close ties between some local politicians and stakeholders.* (Osl)

A large majority of public managers in the three cities agree that the stronger groups use the participatory system more effectively (Mad = 75.5; Osl = 84.2; Mel = 60.5) and the 'silent voices' are hard to reach (Mad = 83.3; Osl = 90.5; Mel = 62.1). This data is illustrated by the survey's open-ended questions:

> *Input varies a lot and mirrors that there are more conflicts of interest than common interest in the community. The strongest and most resourceful citizens push their demands in all channels and act as pressure groups, often at the expense of weaker groups' interests.* (Osl)

> *(There is the) eternal difficulty of reaching the silent voices. The vested interests are so loud and powerful it can be tempting for organizations to just respond to them without testing broader community sentiment.* (Mel)

> *There is definitely more scope to bring silent voices and individuals along in the journey.* (Mel)

> *(We put) too much focus on minor issues important to a few persistent noisy voices.* (Mel)

The logical consequence of the domination of participatory processes by some stakeholders is that group-specific interests predominate over collective interests:

> *Activists or minority interest groups, such as those focused on mobility, sustainability, etc., have in recent years also had a strong influence on political decisions and on the definition of participatory models. The danger has been that a minority can greatly influence a participatory process.* (Mad)

> *Organizations further the interests of their own small group of people, and do not work to promote the general interests of the whole area - so it's more a form of lobbying.* (Osl)

> *Stakeholder input often relates to individual interest rather than broader community interests or non-human interests and so doesn't reflect the system of needs that urban development seeks to address.* (Mel)

This capacity of influence is not distributed homogeneously throughout the territory. The capacity of action of certain resourceful groups is linked to the characteristics of the city sectors and the dynamics of gentrification:

> *In the central city areas, organizations that represent shops and businesses have more influence than other organizations and residents. Developers have a strong influence irrespective of area.* (Osl)

The citizens of the west (rich) part of the city know the jargon and can contact politicians more effectively. (Osl)

So lots of suburbs in Melbourne have become gentrified. So, I think that when a suburb becomes gentrified, the expectations rise. The new residents coming in want clean streets etc. So we have to allocate more budget to making the city look good. Their concerns are very different from new ones. The previous residents are happy to have a roof over their heads, and their bread and butter. Today's society is different to them. It becomes hard for council to do stuff, as the expectations go bigger and bigger. (Interview Mel 6)

It is always a challenge, particularly due to the multiculturalism, and also because of the change from industrial to residential, and also because our area has become trendier or hipster. There is one small area here that now has the highest number of educated people, Yarraville. We try to put parking fees, and they ran a campaign with their educational and financial resources to refute our strategy. (Interview Mel 5)

Conclusions

Some of the limitations of this study should first be recognized. This research is, on the one hand, based on public managers' perceptions. Perception is the filter through which reality is shown to us, and in this sense is indispensable in explaining decision-making. Future research should, therefore, to verify our results, employ objective techniques in the analysis of the behaviour of public servants.

A further limitation of the study relates to the sample used. The sample is not statistically representative. The study's aim is not to achieve quantitative results that can be extrapolated to the entire community of public managers, but to understand the public employees and to deepen the qualitative value of the survey through in-depth interviews, which can help explain the results expressed. It would, however, be very useful to use statistical techniques of external validity that apply to administrative sectors or to specific territorial contexts.

The research reflects the general optimistic opinion of public managers, of the potential beneficial effects of citizen participation upon democracy and city performance. This optimistic view of participation becomes, however, much more pessimistic when public managers speak about the lack of the human, material and technological resources required to implement the processes, and to the precariousness of cross-sectoral and multilevel coordination tools. These shortcomings are exacerbated by the citizens' lack of technical knowledge and, on occasions, by the

lack of a sincere willingness among the political authorities to share decision-making with the sectors affected by the policies, all this leading to frustration and the generation of false expectations.

Citizen participation processes are, at least in Madrid and Melbourne, essentially political. This relates both to the political nature of their promoters, and to the development and conditioning factors. Consultative tools are more internalized in Oslo's administrative procedures and are less politically dependent. The idea of a homogeneous society that makes decisions on issues that relate to the common good, based on informed debate, fade in all three cities in the face of the reality of conflicting interests that are difficult to reconcile, and the close contact between social, political and bureaucratic stakeholders. This implies that conflict is no stranger to the processes of citizen participation. The results of the research show, however, that contact frequency is not a good measure of the real level of influence of social groups upon urban development decision-making.

The different channels of participation (face-to-face and digital) are necessary and must be complementary, if the level of representativeness required to provide process input legitimacy is to be achieved. The implementation agents in the three cities shared, however, ideas that define the dynamics of the participatory processes. These include the prevalence of particular interests over common ones, narrow approaches versus the strategic vision of the city as a whole, and the predominance of resourceful social groups over individuals and the most disadvantaged sectors of the city.

It should be finally noted that, despite what we expected before conducting the study, the different administrative cultures and traditions of three cities do not have a decisive influence on the views of their public managers. Differences can be observed in the level of involvement of social stakeholders, depending on the urban context or the robustness of multilevel or multisectoral coordination instruments. Quite the opposite can therefore be concluded. Participatory policies do have their dynamics and raise the same issues and hindrances beyond structural factors and the political-institutional context.

Appendix

See Table 4.2

Table 4.2 Interviewees-A

City	*Position*	*Interviewee*
Madrid	Director General of Citizen Participation (term 2015–2019)	Mad 1
	Director General of Citizen Participation (term 2019–2023)	Mad 2
	Director of the Institutional Outreach Service	Mad 3
	Head of Service, Direction General of Citizen Participation	Mad 4
	Head of Service for Information Access	Mad 5
	Member of the Open-Government Team	Mad 6
	Special advisor for Citizen Participation	Mad 7
	Subdirector General of Citizen Participation and Non-Profit Organizations	Mad 8
Oslo	Chairman of the Board Local Tours for the Area Promises Change leader in the Old Oslo District	Osl 1
	Communications advisor, Agency for Urban Environment	Osl 2
	Department director Bydel Gamle Oslo	Osl 3
	Department Director Urban Development and Area Plan, Urban Environment Agency	Osl 4
	District director of Old Oslo	Osl 5
	Employee Area lift for Tøyen and Grønland	Osl 6
	Head of Communications, Old Oslo	Osl 7
	Head of Unit, Agency for Planning and Building Services	Osl 8
	ICT advisor, Agency for Planning and Building Services	Osl 9
	Leader of Områdeløftet Tøyen and Grønland	Osl 10
	Manager, Oslo City Government's Communication section	Osl 11
	Participation Coordinator, Agency for Planning and Building Services	Osl 12
	Project leader Electronic Services, Agency for Planning and Building Services	Osl 13
	Project executive 'Smart Oslo', Oslo City Government	Osl 14
	Project manager Kolstadgata, Urban Environment Agency	Osl 15
	Project coordinator and project manager, Area Lift for Greenland and Tøyen	Osl 16
	Section leader Outdoor Space, Urban Environment Agency	Osl 17
	Special advisor 'Origo Folk' (Oslo municipality digitalization unit)	Osl 18
	Special Councillor, Oslo City Government's Communication Section	Osl 19
	Special advisor, E-Transparency and Internal Communications, Oslo City Government	Osl 20
	Special advisor, Section for planning and strategy, Department of Finance, Oslo City Government	Osl 21
	Special advisor, Section for planning and strategy, Department of Finance, Oslo City Government	Osl 22
		Osl 23

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

City	*Position*	*Interviewee*
Melbourne	Community Engagement Coordinator	Mel 1
	Community Engagement Manager	Mel 2
	Executive Director of Digital Design and Innovation	Mel 3
	Manager of Urban Design and Planning	Mel 4
	Manager of Public Affairs and Communication	Mel 5
	Manager of 'City Places'	Mel 6

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CHAPTER 5

Citizen Participation and ICT for Urban Development in Oslo

G. Anthony Giannoumis and Nidhi Joneja

Introduction

According to the UN, information and communications technology (ICT) design provides a catalyst for realising human rights and for successfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mansell & Wehn, 1998; Sachs et al., 2016; Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Tjoa & Tjoa, 2016). Implicit biases that influence design decisions can, where the diversity of the human experience is not taken into consideration, reinforce systemic forms of social disadvantage (Friedman & Nissenbaum, 1996; Kirkpatrick, 2020; Treviranus, 2017). This is considered to be indirect discrimination, from a human rights perspective (CRPD Committee, 2018; Lawson, 2008). Design decisions can therefore unintentionally create barriers that prevent or limit an individual's or group's ability to

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access or use ICT. These barriers have contributed to broader, social scale digital divides that segregate those who can easily access and use ICT from those who cannot (Datta et al., 2019; Goggin, 2016; Jackson et al., 2008; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013, 2017). The UN has argued that universal design, which is a novel approach to creating ICT anchored in human rights, can help close these digital divides (UN, 2019; United Nations, 2006).

This chapter explores the role of ICT design, development and implementation as a mediator in citizen participation and urban development. The case study described in this chapter of citizen experiences in Oslo provides, however, a basis for examining the latent barriers and opportunities that ICT design for citizen participation can yield. Local authorities have adopted social media and other digital means to engage more citizens in the participatory process. There is, however, a lack of empirical research on this topic. This chapter, therefore, sheds light on the ways in which local municipalities can facilitate and manage the participatory process, and the role citizen ICT use can play in influencing policymaking in urban development.

A thematic analysis of in-depth qualitative data on the use of a new media channel for citizen participation in urban planning in Oslo is presented in this chapter. A heuristic analysis of one of the platforms is applied to further support the analysis and to provide insights into potential contradictory or complementary patterns. The chapter is therefore a response to the following research question: In what ways do citizens in Oslo experience barriers and opportunities using ICT to participate in urban planning?

Universal Design and Accessibility as Catalysts for Citizen Participation

The development and proliferation of ICT generally, and in web technologies specifically, has had the unintended effect of producing new and of exacerbating existing inequalities (Halford & Savage, 2010; Hickel, 2017; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). Digital divides, therefore, have emerged across almost every social identity and form of social disadvantage, including age, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, and race. In this context, digital divide represents a form of social inequality in which privileged groups have access to and use ICT, while other socially disadvantaged groups do not. Developing new ICT,

therefore, provides the opportunity to mitigate or exacerbate this digital divide.

Universal design provides a means for informing design decisions, such that the experiences of marginalized groups are placed at the centre of the design process. Universal design calls for, according to the UN, "design of [ICT] to be usable by all people …" (United Nations, 2006). Researchers and practitioners, when the principle was conceptualized in the 1990s, primarily applied universal design principles to architecture and learning environments (Mace, 1998; Mueller, 1998; Story, 1998, 2011). Recent research has, however, posed a theoretical framework for universal design that rearticulates the principles of universal design in the information society (Giannoumis, 2016; Giannoumis & Stein, 2019). This framework helps resolve the sometimes-conflicting principles of universal design, such that the integral role that ICT plays in realising human rights, including the right to participate in political processes, is accounted for.

Giannoumis and Stein (2019) argue that universal design consists of four overarching principles. These are social equality and non-discrimination, diversity and social disadvantage, ICT usability and accessibility, and participatory processes. This chapter uses these principles to examine the barriers and opportunities that citizens experience when accessing and using participatory platforms.

Universal design relates to user-centred design, the principal difference between the two being that the user is positioned, in user-centred design, at the centre of the design process, user needs and preferences therefore being prioritised (Ritter et al., 2014). Decisions are made, in user-centred design, based on the profiles of different user groups. These often do not, however, take fully into consideration the different forms of power, oppression and marginalisation that exist in society. User-centred design focusses on the active involvement of more general categories of users in design and testing processes. Research has shown that user-centred design is, despite these limitations, more effective at improving overall usability than traditional systems-centred approaches to product design and development (Mao et al., 2005). Usability, according to ISO, relates to whether a user can effectively, efficiently and satisfyingly use ICT (ISO, 2002, 2010).

Accessibility is a narrower articulation of universal design and focusses on the barriers and opportunities that persons with disabilities experience when attempting to access and use ICT. The UN refers to accessibility

as "the degree to which [ICT] is available to as many people as possible", and goes on to state that "accessibility is often used to focus on [persons with disabilities]" (ITU, 2007). Accessibility, in other words, often focusses on the extent to which ICT is usable by persons with disabilities and by everyone. Accessibility is also often approached as a participatory process, with persons with disabilities being actively involved in decision-making during ICT design and development (Balcazar et al., 1998; Giannoumis & Stein, 2019; Simonsen & Robertson, 2012).

The design and development of ICT are, in this chapter, considered to play a key role in whether and to what extent marginalized communities can participate in urban development processes. Efforts to promote citizen participation through ICT therefore hinge on the adoption and implementation, by local authorities, of universal design principles and practices. Collaboration and co-production can provide effective mechanisms for promoting the inclusion of marginalized groups and are fundamental to the goals of citizen participation and the principles of universal design (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012; Giannoumis & Stein, 2019). Public agencies must, therefore, if the benefits of citizen participation are to be leveraged, actively involve stakeholders in the co-creation of new media platforms (Ellin, 2012).

Methodology

A multimethod design that combines semi-structured interviews with heuristic analysis was, in this study, applied to the investigation and exploration of the salient themes around using ICT to promote citizen participation in urban development in Norway. A total of seven semi-structured interviews provided the basis for exploring citizen experiences. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, translated into English, and open coded to classify and identify the themes emerging from the data. Each theme was then analysed in detail to interpret the meaningful view and the opinions provided by the results.

The contact information of the participants was extracted from local municipality websites. Participants were contacted via email, and personal interviews were arranged with three women and four men. The participants were aged between 35 and 55 and were asked a set of 12 open-ended questions. This included questions on their participation and feedback on their use of the *Si din mening* citizen participation website used by the city of Oslo. All participants provided their consent prior to

being interviewed. All of the participants used the *Si din mening* website. Only one respondent had, at the time of interview, used the platform recently. The remainder have used the platform in the last few years. Selection bias was observed, and the participants have been active users of the platform.

Due to the limitations of the interview data, the analysis must be interpreted with caution. There is a risk of over-interpreting the findings and every effort has been made not to overemphasize the meaning of the participants' statements. The data is weak due not only to the limited number of participants but the depth of the interview data. It did not provide a sufficient basis for reaching a point of saturation and the participants' statements often referred to hypothetical scenarios, beliefs or understandings about others' experiences rather than their own. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as an initial basis for reflecting on the variety of potential mechanisms that may influence citizen participation.

A heuristic analysis of the *Si din mening* website was also conducted, to evaluate usability. Expert evaluators used a pre-defined set of criteria or principles to evaluate the quality of the user interface. The criteria focussed on a specific group of users in a given context of use (Casare et al., 2016; Orozco et al., 2016). The criteria for heuristic analysis were drawn from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG), a long-accepted industry standard for web accessibility for persons with disabilities. This is considered to be the gold standard for evaluating website accessibility.

Two independent expert evaluators assessed the extent to which the *Si din mening* pages adhered to the WCAG criteria, and therefore the experiences of persons with disabilities when accessing and using key page functionalities. This includes when contributing new proposals and accessing existing proposals. Criteria that were assessed differently by the two evaluators were re-evaluated and a consensus was reached.

The evaluation focussed on three websites that are part of the *Si din mening* domain.[1] The expert assessors used guidelines 1.1.1, 1.3.3, 1.4, 2.1 and 2.3–4.1. All other guidelines were either not applicable, due to the types of content on the pages, or were considered indeterminate since the expert evaluators could not agree on a rating. Assessors graded the

[1] Source: *Si din mening*, platform: https://innsyn.pbe.oslo.kommune.no/sidinmening/main.asp (last accessed 15.07.2019).

websites as pass, partial pass or fail. Of the criteria assessed, one page[2] failed four criteria including 1.4.8 Visual Presentation, 2.1.1 Keyboard, 2.1.3 Keyboard (No Exception) and 2.4.8 Location. This means that while the website was largely accessible to persons with disabilities, some accessibility barriers remain such as being able to access the site using only a keyboard. Two of the three websites additionally failed criteria 3.1.1 Language of Page.[3] This means that for these websites, the language of the page was not listed, which creates barriers for persons using screen reader software. Finally, all three pages failed 3.3.5 Help, which means that context-sensitive help was not available to the users. These criteria helped users avoid making mistakes. The heuristic analysis suggested that while the pages were largely accessible, some accessibility barriers remained.

Barriers and Opportunities for Promoting Citizen Participation in Urban Development

The results of the interviews revealed four key themes that contribute to citizen participation in urban development. First, the overall usage of technology and social media among participants was high, owing to the overall development of Norway and high levels of Internet access. Second, while the results revealed that the overall accessibility of usability of the *Si din mening* platform was high, barriers remain that may limit some groups from participating. Third, the levels of awareness, engagement and participation on the platform are key mediating factors that impact whether and the extent that citizens access and use the platform. Fourth, trust, privacy and government responsiveness may act as external barriers that further limit and prevent some groups from accessing and using the platform.

[2] Source: *Si din mening*, platform: https://innsyn.pbe.oslo.kommune.no/sidinmening/abb.asp (last accessed 15.07.2019).

[3] Source: *Si din mening*, platform: https://innsyn.pbe.oslo.kommune.no/sidinmening/main.asp?kid=oppstart (last accessed 15.07.2019).

Technology (ICT) and Social Media Usage

The interview results suggested that respondents are active users of the internet and social media. One participant mentioned that they did not like the internet and were not very active on social media. Participant 7 responded that "I use the internet, but only when I can't sleep". Participant 2 said that they used the internet a number of hours each day, "[I am a] 360 degree internet user and probably use the internet more than a number of hours each day". All participants were quite active internet users, using the internet every day for job-related and personal use. One participant expressed, however, a more conscientious approach to their use of the internet.

> *I try to have a conscious relationship with [it] I try to not use it too much because it [impacts my concentration] and makes me feel a little lost … so I try to use common sense and use the internet for [things that] benefit me … I like to use it for … what I think is important and useful.*

All the participants agreed that it's easy to participate in government initiatives using digital media, as this does not require their physical presence at meetings, debates and discussions. Digital media allows them to express their concerns on neighbourhood issues from their home, the participants believing that technology makes participation easier. Participant 1 said "You can participate in issues from your home". Participants were also of the opinion that information is easily accessible on the internet. Participant 4 stated that they were able to inform themselves about the work of their local welfare association through the internet, saying "[I learned about] what types of organizations exist, I go through [their] projects and get to know the strategy … all the time". Participant 1 emphasised that ICT allowed easy access to information, saying "…you get the combination of … easy access to information but you also receive feedback [digitally]". Participant 7 said that they stayed informed about politics and planning issues through the internet, saying "I … have discovered both how incredible and easy it is to find information on … political issues in the city council and … on the centre of my district".

The majority of respondents were positive to information being made accessible to everyone. Social media was a useful means of reminding people about digital urban development surveys, participant 1 emphasising that "easy access and … feedback can be important". Participant

2 stated the need for "everyone to have access". Three participants said that they consider social media to be informative, but that it also contains a lot of fake news. Participant 3 said that "It does help, but at the same time … fake news makes it more confusing as it is difficult to know what is important …". Participant 4 also commented that fake news can cause the eruption of disagreements between citizens.

The majority of respondents were of the opinion that digital platforms provide urban development with many opportunities and options. Citizens must, however, show an active interest in these platforms for these benefits to be realised. Participant 7 stated that "Through digital technology, there are very many opportunities … to improve your opportunities to participate more actively in the community".

This section argues that citizens who are active on social media use it to receive information on upcoming development projects. However, citizens often receive information on upcoming projects through physical meetings as well and use social media, after the meetings, to obtain more information and detailed plans.

Overall Accessibility and Usability of Participatory Platforms

All participants found the *Si din mening* platform easy to use. Participant 3 stated that it was. "Very easy to use". Other participants confirmed, saying they found the website quick to use and that it was not difficult to access and operate. Participant 7 described their experience in detail. They said that the tool does not have many features, an aspect that makes submitting suggestions quick and the tool easy to use.

All respondents believed their parents and grandparents would find the platform very easy to access and use. Participant 7 said that their grandparents "…can use it without any problem". Participant 1 further stated that although their grandparent was not digitally active, they could use the platform without any problem.

> *My grandmother is 92 years old. she is not digital. but my parents, who are in their mid-60s, had used it.*

Participants 3 and 4 reflected that the tool was easy to use and that their parents would have no difficulty using the tool. This suggests that the city administration may have considered different age groups in the design of the platform. This is further supported by the relatively high

levels of conformance with the WCAG standards, as illustrated in the heuristic analysis. It suggests that government and planning authorities intended the platform to be used by a wide range of citizens. Two respondents reflected on the role of age in accessing the platform. Participant 7 suggested that young people and children play an important role in urban development.

> *The perspectives of children and young people on the neighbourhood may be a stronger driving force, and be more focussed on wanting to do something that matters.*

Participant 6 also shared the opinion that younger people can have a totally different view on urban development. One of the participants mentioned that older persons may avoid using the platform. Participant 6 stated that there are many citizens/older people who think they will make mistakes if they try to use such digital tools, and are afraid of using them stating "They [older persons] are often very afraid of making mistakes".

One of the participants noted that there was not much space for text and that this means that participation did not take much time. Participant 7 said that because there was no space for many words, giving feedback was quick. Participant 5 confirmed saying that there were not many functions and that the platform was therefore easy to use. "Easy to use. Just write the text and send. Did not have many functions". Participant 2 said the same, that it did not take much time or many words to submit your opinion. "Little text and does not take much time to express your opinion".

Two of the participants believed that participation can be affected by language barriers. Participant 7 commented that the language of the platform may lead to some people being reluctant to participate.

> *The most important barriers … are linguistic and technical. It is quite easy to use. But the language [of the platform] that was more of a challenge.*

This section argues that the participants generally considered the design of the platform to be user-friendly and can be used by participants of a range of ages. This is supported by the relatively high levels of accessibility illustrated by the heuristic analysis. It also suggests that Oslo city government has focussed attempts on encouraging a range of citizens to participate in development projects. However, the results additionally suggest that

potential barriers and opportunities may exist that can limit or enable citizen access to or use of participatory platforms. These go beyond compliance with international standards such as WCAG. The results suggest that the language used on the platform, which was supported by the heuristic analysis, fear of making mistakes or the need for high levels of digital skills can limit or prevent a citizen from accessing and using the platform. Conversely, platforms that include only a limited and select set of essential functions can enhance and promote access and use.

Awareness, Engagement and Participation

Some participants found the platform was not easy to find and that they were not interested in searching for it. Other participants supported this view, saying that many people are unaware that such portals exist. The participants further suggested that awareness of these portals is essential and that special initiatives should be implemented to increase citizen awareness. Participant 1 suggested that citizen awareness of such digital tools is low.

> *Many don't know that such platforms exist, and should be made aware of them. This could also increase the number of politically active citizens. People don't know about such platforms.*

Others stated that some people may believe the platform is difficult to use, which can keep them from adopting the platform in the first place. Participant 2 believed that there are many citizens who feel that such digital tools are technically complicated and that they won't be interested in using them.

The participants noted that participation on the platform was low and that government and local authorities should devise measures to increase participation. Two participants who knew and had experience with the planning process were aware that only a small group of people participated. They argued that more people should be encouraged to participate through digital platforms and that advertisements on social media could be used as a means to promote awareness. Participant 4 pointed out that "Only a very small group of people express their opinion" and that there is a need for increasing citizen enthusiasm. Participant 6 suggested that the government should take action to improve awareness. "You

need to improve opportunities to participate more actively in the local community".

The results also suggested the need for new measures to stimulate citizen interest in participating in urban development. Participant 2 mentioned that the internet can be easily accessed by most citizens, and therefore social media should be used to increase interest and engagement. Participant 3 said that citizens will submit suggestions or ideas to development plans if they are interested in what is going on around them. "Interest grows when you start getting involved".

However, one participant argued that many people feel that understanding the details of a project requires a lot of time and energy. Participant 1 said that this could be improved by providing succinct summaries and bulleted lists that citizens can quickly read through and give their feedback. "Better at giving a small amount of information and bullet points, instead of this mass of paperwork".

Participant 3 was very satisfied after participation and was glad they took part in the surveys. "It's good to say what you feel. I could express my opinion on the development". Participant 2 was motivated and said that they would submit suggestions and opinions on other close neighbourhood issues.

> *The feeling of sharing your thoughts is very important to me, particularly on your neighbourhood.*

Participant 1 also stated that they were motivated to continue to stay informed, participate and make suggestions on immediate neighbourhood issues.

> *It is important that we, as inhabitants, have the opportunity to participate and help shape the city. This is, however, also about local democracy. That is why I continue to use it, as I think that it can help lead Norway.*

Participant 7 also experienced a positive effect of participation. They were more enthusiastic and more motivated to participate in the future. "It has had quite a few positive effects for me, and I have become more politically engaged". Four respondents were excited and eager to participate more. Participant 4 wanted to participate in the development of their own city/country.

> *It is important that we, as inhabitants, have the opportunity to participate and help shape the city. This is, however, also about local democracy. That is why I continue to use it, as I think that it can help lead Norway.*

Participant 5 also believed that such digital tools should be used more often and participation must therefore be encouraged. Participant 2 also stated that citizens must access such platforms and participate more often. Participant 7 suggested that they will be using such a tool not only for development plans but also for other issues such as politics.

> *I could have been more active, more engaged in planning and development issues, political issues. I think I will use this more often, and will also engage in other issues.*

Two of the participants believed that participation is about local democracy and that everyone should therefore share what they feel about an issue and raise questions if they have them. Participant 7 said that participation, more generally, led to knowing the neighbourhood and neighbours better. "I became better acquainted with my neighbourhood and with many people in my neighbourhood". Participant 2 was also positive about digital tools, as they kept them informed about what's going on across the city. "That is the next stage, to help us know what is going on". Participant 4 was quite positive after reading the suggestions of citizens and believed that suggestions can help the better development of the city.

> *We have urban developer groups on Facebook … So other people's opinions are there right in front of you. It's interesting and positive to read them.*

Participant 4 also thought that communication with the public is very important and that citizens should be encouraged to participate in development programmes.

This section suggests that external factors, including awareness and engagement, can affect the overall levels of access and use as well as the opportunities for participation. The results largely illustrated that increasing awareness about the platform and the ways in which it can be used to participate in urban development projects can help empower citizens and promote democracy. The results also suggested that efforts to

promote engagement and cultivate interest in political participation can improve access and use, and as a result, contribute to improving urban development initiatives.

Trust, Privacy and Responsiveness

All the participants considered trust and confidence in the government as a key driver of using the platform. One participant mentioned that many people are sceptical about the authenticity of participatory platforms, which makes it hard to trust and invest time into using them. Participant 4 said that people sometimes think that such platforms, when advertised on social media, look like scams. "Sometimes I think if the platform was real, would it really be advertised on Facebook".

Some participants reflected on the issues related to privacy and security. Participant 2 recalled that the security code generator, which was required to login, may be a barrier for some users.

> *You need to login and authenticate. Use netbank to login. [Some] people may not be able to use it very easily.*

Another participant expressed concerns about anonymity. They argued that exposing an individual's political opinions would be ethically wrong. Participant 7 agreed, pointing out that survey submissions that include personal information can represent a privacy concern. "If personal information is saved and you are singled out for what you say, then it's wrong" Local authorities must therefore ensure that surveys are anonymous and that they inform participants of their privacy rights.

Three of the participants expected some form of feedback after submitting their opinion—e.g., an email saying that their suggestion is important and will be considered. Participant 5 also pointed out that not getting feedback can result in lower citizen satisfaction with such tools. According to the participant, they were left with the impression that their suggestion or idea is not important, and so considered not participating further. Participant 6 suggested that providing feedback can improve citizen satisfaction and encourage more participation and interaction.

> *Not just feedback that says 'we take note and thank you for the input'. But real dialogue on the issue.*

One respondent mentioned that one barrier to participation may be that administrators do not have the power to respond to their opinions on urban development issues. Participant 6 pointed out that "They [public administrators] hardly ever have the capability to answer the questions you ask".

Participant 6 mentioned that such platforms encourage two-way communication, and make it easier for citizens to connect with political parties and planning departments. All participants were very satisfied with the platform after having shared their thoughts on a development in their neighbourhood. Four participants mentioned that their voice had been heard by the local municipality and that they believe this had a positive effect on their surroundings. Participant 5 stated that they were satisfied after their opinion had been heard.

> *My opinion was taken into consideration. Oslo Municipality receives the information they need to make decisions that are based on what the population thinks.*

This section suggests that citizen perspectives on trust, privacy and the responsiveness of the public administration mediate whether they are willing to access or use participatory platforms and to what extent. Trust in government was specifically cited as a key consideration when using the platform. It may also extend to broader issues around ownership of personal data. Privacy was cited as a consideration in relation to political opinion, as well as barriers that may result from the design of secure authentication methods. Finally, citizens' perspectives on the responsiveness of the city administration and the extent the platform provides automated feedback that acknowledges the value of citizens' contributions, showcases another key consideration in understanding the barriers and opportunities to access and use of ICT.

Discussion

This chapter provides some initial evidence that citizens in Oslo experience a variety of barriers and opportunities to use ICT for participating in urban planning. Citizens in Oslo benefit from relatively widespread adoption of the internet and ICT in general. Public administrators involved in designing the *Si din mening* platform appear to have considered a broad

range of stakeholders and have ensured a relatively high level of accessibility and usability of the platform as indicated by the heuristic analysis. However, as the heuristic analysis further supports, some barriers and limitations remain. It revealed limitations in terms of the user's ability to navigate, adjust the visual presentation of the website and receive context-sensitive help. Further, the interviews suggested that issues such as language—which was also supported by the heuristic analysis—, digital skills and fear of technical complexity limit the extent of citizen access and use of the platform. External considerations, including awareness and engagement, have also acted to limit participation and conversely may be key opportunities to improve participation and enhance democracy. Finally, mediating factors including trust, privacy and the responsiveness of city administrators may further affect citizens' experiences of accessing and using the platform. These considerations may contravene attempts by city administrators to promote participation and provide an opportunity to consider the relationship between participation and broader social issues.

The results of this chapter have largely confirmed research that shows that ICT provides a mechanism for replicating existing participation structures in urban development projects (Nam, 2012). High levels of internet access and ICT use in Norway have contributed to opportunities to access and use the *Si din mening* platform. However, the results also extend this research by illustrating the value of digital channels for participation. This chapter argues that hybrid approaches to participation that utilise non-digital channels—e.g., physical meetings—in conjunction with digital channels—e.g., social media—may provide an effective means for citizens to exchange knowledge and coordinate participation efforts.

This chapter has also extended research on universal design and accessibility, by showcasing factors that influence whether and to what extent users can access or use the platform, and which go beyond user interface design (Giannoumis & Stein, 2019). The results revealed that the platform was broadly accessible by a wide range of users and usable by everyone. However, the platform's content, and specifically the language that is used, may impact the usability of the platform. This has, to a certain extent, been shown in previous research (Boldyreff et al., 2001), and may in part contribute to general fears and concerns about the technical complexity of the platform, and relate to users' digital skills and self-efficacy. These barriers may overcome where platform designers focus on a limited set of essential functions. Essentially by focussing on the

minimum set of functions and features necessary for effectively using the platform. This enables users to more efficiently use the platform and, according to the results of the chapter, suggests that users may also have a more satisfying experience.

Further, this chapter has illustrated the external considerations, beyond the design of the platform, such as awareness and engagement, that can affect participation. The literature on universal design and ICT accessibility focusses on access and use. It has, however, yet to fully consider the external factors that may contribute to specific access and use outcomes. This chapter argues that though these issues may not be core to the universal and accessibility, they may nonetheless provide useful catalysts for increasing ICT adoption. These factors can, in the case of participatory platforms for urban development, help empower citizens and promote democracy when leveraged effectively to promote engagement and cultivate interest.

Finally, trust, privacy and responsiveness are some of the most compelling considerations in universal design and ICT accessibility research. This chapter argues that these factors can mediate access and use and that a lack of trust in the platform owner, operator or parties who may have access to the user's personal data may lead to self-exclusion, and constitute a social barrier that prevents access to the platform. Trust also relates to information privacy and security. Research in ICT accessibility has considered security and privacy features and functions to be potential access and use barriers. This chapter confirms that these are relevant considerations (Lazar et al., 2017; Nissenbaum, 2011). However, research in universal design and ICT accessibility has principally focussed on user interface design. This chapter extends previous research and argues that design barriers extend beyond the user interface, and argues that the responsiveness of city administrators is a service design consideration. Furthermore, by considering design to be a broader approach to creating not only user interfaces but also aspects of systems, policy, organisation, product and service design extends research.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the experiences of citizens in Oslo when using ICT to participate in urban development projects. The results illustrate that citizen participation is a complex phenomenon with a variety of potential factors that influence whether, how, and to what extent ICT

may provide an effective solution for political participation. City administrators could usefully consider the broader social issues that have been suggested as affecting participation. First, they could promote awareness of and engagement with platforms. Second, they could consider ways to promote the platforms that enhance trust and preserve citizens' right to privacy. Third, they could consider broader aspects of design, including the city administrative system, policies that aim to promote active participation, the organisation of the local government and the services that are intended to support participation.

Caution, however, should be exercised in over-interpreting the findings as the limitations of the data are notable. The data is weak due to the limited number of participants, and the depth of the interview data did not provide a sufficient basis for reaching a point of saturation. Many of the participants' statements referred to their hypothetical beliefs or understanding about others' experiences rather than their own experiences. Therefore, the findings may only act as a basis for considering more fully the mechanisms that influence citizen participation.

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CHAPTER 6

Controlled and Responsive Interactivity: What Politicians and Bureaucrats in Oslo Say About Their Social Media Use, and What This Might Mean for Democracy

Sveinung Legard

Introduction

Discussions around social media's impact on democracy are multifaceted, scholarly attention having turned in recent years to the dark sides of social media, including misinformation, automated propaganda, echo chambers, political polarization, and hate speech (Persily & Tucker, 2020). Academics just a decade ago used terms such as 'liberation technology' (Diamond, 2010) and pointed out that social media could connect citizens directly to policy processes, give ordinary citizens a voice in discussions on urban development, and enable governments to crowdsource and co-produce services and solutions with its constituencies. This today seems a very long time ago (Bertot et al., 2012; Mergel, 2016).

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A central aspect of the discussion is whether social media makes governments more responsive to citizens' needs and preferences, the notion that digital development promotes responsiveness being popular in the e-government literature (Lee & Kwak, 2012; Moon, 2002; Siau & Long, 2005). Empirical investigations have, however, found that governments and policy makers rarely use social media to increase public participation (Bellström et al., 2016; Jukic & Svete, 2018; Reddick et al., 2017), Koc-Michalska et al. (2020, p. 1) saying that 'there is broad consensus that digital technologies have had minimal effects on the nature of political communication'. Studies of public administrations have also shown social media to be mostly used for self-promotion or to unilaterally provide news and official information, but not to engage the public in the workings of government.

This chapter investigates how local politicians, communication officers, and other administrators in the urban development policy area in Oslo describe their social media activities, and asks what kinds of responsiveness, or absence of responsiveness, are reflected in these descriptions. The findings of this study challenge the dismal conclusion drawn above, and indicate that the use of social media by government officials is probably more interactive and responsive than we believe. I furthermore discuss, in the final section, what this alternate picture might mean for democracy.

Theory and Existing Research

A central claim made about social media, is that social media can act as a direct intermediary between citizens and public officials, so bypassing public communication gatekeepers such as traditional media, parties, and organizations (van Dijk & Hacker, 2018, p. 62). It is also claimed that social media may increase a government's *responsiveness* to ordinary citizens. Responsiveness is broadly defined as the congruence between the attitudes and preferences of the public, and the policies and actions of elected representatives and public administrations.[1] *Outcome* responsiveness refers to the degree to which government officials alter policies and spending so that they come into line with public opinion, *process* responsiveness referring to the manner in which government officials consider the needs, wishes, and claims of citizens (Eom et al., 2018).

[1] I slightly adapt the definition of responsiveness from Hobolt and Klemmemsen (2005) to encompass public administrations as well as politicians.

Governments can be responsive to citizens in two ways, in this latter sense: through elected officials and their party organizations, or through public employees and their administrative organizations. Politicians may use social media as a listening post to keep track of the opinions of citizens (Rustad & Sæbø, 2013), or to engage with them in an active dialogue on policies and actions (Grant et al., 2010). Parties can track citizens' talk about specific topics on social media in a more organized way, or analyse their interactions and feedback during and between elections (Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2021). Public administrations can also be responsive through responding to and acting on complaints or suggestions from residents (Sjoberg et al., 2017), and through asking for input, polling citizens, inviting into a dialogue on social media (Mergel, 2016; Sobaci, 2016), or analysing content to understand what users think of policies and actions (Reddick et al., 2017).

Let me from the outset disclose that I do not think that modern governments approximate the ideals of 'continuing responsivity' based on the equality often associated with democracy. When they are responsive, then they are normally responsive to elite segments of the population and upper-class interests.[2] There are, however, a number of reasons for assuming that elected officials will be responsive to certain groups of more 'ordinary' citizens as well. Incumbent politicians and parties may, from an elitist perspective, feel pressured to conform with opinions expressed on social media, to keep their supporters happy and strengthen their chances of being re-elected (Silva et al., 2019). Politicians and parties in opposition may alternatively actively engage with voters on social media, to improve their standing and to gain future electoral benefits (Ceron, 2017, p. 13). Politicians and parties are, from a less cynical viewpoint, split between providing leadership and being responsive to the public (Kane & Patapan, 2012). Responsiveness is, in such a perspective, a strong norm of political conduct, particularly in local government where officials are expected to act as 'custodians,' 'stewards' or 'ombudsmen' on behalf of their constituencies (Kleven et al., 2000; Lewis & Neiman, 2009).

Bureaucrats are, according to a Weberian administrative ideal, not to be responsive to anything other than the tasks and orders they receive from elected political organs. Public administrations have, however, changed and moved towards more responsive practices under the influence of

[2] This is the case both in countries where this is most-likely (the US) and least-likely occur (The Netherlands) (Gilens & Page, 2014; Schakel, 2021).

ideologies such as New Public Management and New Public Governance (see Chapter 4 in this book), and the deeper transformation of 'governments' to 'governance' in which administrators need to interact with outside agents, including citizens, to achieve its goals (Torfing et al., 2012). Administrators need, from a consumer-oriented perspective, to understand public needs if they are to develop and distribute effective public services, and to continuously assess the public's satisfaction with these services (Vigoda, 2002). Administrators are expected, in more collaborative arrangements, to be involved in reciprocal interactions, which implies a mutual responsiveness characterized by open discussion, communication in partnership, and by co-decision making, for these to work (Bryer, 2009).

One-Way vs. Two-Way Communication

There is very little research that shows that government actors would be responsive on social media, despite the many assumptions that they are. Koc-Michalska et al. (2020) found, in an investigation of 279 parties' Facebook pages during the European parliament elections of 2014, that these parties were more likely to avoid than to engage in interaction. Johansson (2019, p. 157) claims, based on research on Facebook profiles of ministers in Finland, Poland, and Sweden, that 'most politicians use monologic (one-way) forms of communication and avoid dialogic forms of interactivity'. Enli's (2015) study of Norwegian party leaders also shows that the primary ambition of politicians using social media is to control and build their image as politicians, and not to engage in a dialogue with citizens.

Studies of public administrations also indicate that they hardly ever interact with citizens on social media, a comprehensive literature review from 2017 concluding that content produced by government actors is consistently unidirectional, and the tone formal and neutral. Very few studies find active citizen responses to government posts (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017, p. 501), more recent research also finding similar results. Bonsón et al. (2019), in a study from Spain, found that municipalities mostly use Twitter for self-promotion, and that user engagement was mostly in the form of retweets and not replies. A study from Greece similarly shows that cities primarily use Facebook to create a favourable image of themselves, and do not encourage public engagement (Lappas et al., 2021).

One-way communication is the main plot of the story of political communication and bureaucracy's use of social media. It is, however, not the only one, a number of studies showing that politicians and bureaucrats also engage in two-way communication. Larsson and Skogerbø (2018) point out that very few studies examine how social media is used by politicians in periods between elections, or how it is used by local or regional elected officials. This therefore does not pick up on the way in which local politicians play an interactive role. Politicians use social media to stage themselves and gain media attention. They, however, also use social media to talk and discuss with voters. This matches a pattern found in Norway, in which local politicians engage in a comprehensive two-way exchange with civil society actors through various communication channels, including digital channels (Hanssen, 2007; Lo & Vabo, 2020).

Studies of local governments' social media accounts similarly tends to show that at least some of their tweets and posts consist of responses to users (Faber et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2019), or invitations to take part in online dialogue and seek input from the public (DePaula et al., 2018; Wukich, 2021). Mergel (2016) emphasizes that these practices vary between administrative units, some U.S. federal agencies for example focussing on pulling content and ideas from the public, others having moved from mainly providing information to mostly responding to users. A study of Canadian and US public transportation agencies found that they frequently try to engage with stakeholders, and often reply to users on their social media (Manetti et al., 2017).

Controlled vs. Responsive Interactivity

It is worth noting that interaction is not the same as responsiveness. Political actors and administrators can, however, only appear to be responsive, or interact in ways that do not qualify as responsive on social media. Stromer-Galley (2014) coined the term 'controlled interactivity' for this type of behaviour, and argued that politicians are not really interested in a genuine dialogue with voters, but in creating a 'spectacle of interactivity' to gain votes. Campaigns, according to Freelon (2017), tend to embrace the interactive nature of social media. They, however, only embrace this to ensure users 'stay on message', i.e. that there is a close correspondence between the political issues and terms that the candidates mention and those mentioned by supporters who share or respond to their messages.

Controlled interactivity is amply described in the political communication literature, but not mentioned or thematized in e-government or public administration studies. One exception is Gintova's (2019) research on Canadian immigration authorities' use of Twitter. She finds that these agencies do reply and react to users' feedback, but that they do so in a very restrictive manner. They do not, for example, engage in conversations about policies in general or issues that they know to be controversial, and they avoid replying to tweets that are critical of their delivery of services.

I use the term *responsive interactivity* in this chapter to describe the opposite of controlled interactivity. 'Responsive interactivity' or 'responsive interaction' are sometimes used in social media studies, but never defined or described to any real extent. The terms intuitively suggest an activity in which social media users respond to, consider, and even act on posts, tweets, questions, comments, and other type of feedback from other users. I, however, take Esaiasson et al.'s (2013) definition of communicative responsiveness as a point of departure for a more precise definition. Communicative responsiveness requires three types of actions by politicians or administrators: *Listening* or the endeavour of informing oneself of the preferences of citizens, *explaining* or providing reasons for their actions, and *adaption* through making decisions or taking actions that are in line with the opinions expressed by citizens. Translated to social media activity, and broadened to include both politicians and bureaucrats, responsive interactivity involves (1) acquiring information on citizens' opinions and grievances through social media, (2) responding to and explaining one's stance and actions to users, and (3) adapting policies, programmes, projects, or services to their input. Action one and two in this definition are a part of process responsiveness, action three being a part of outcome responsiveness. All three actions must be performed to be truly responsive. Process responsiveness is, however, a prerequisite for outcome responsiveness, and is the only type of responsiveness I can deal with in this chapter given the nature of the data.

Some studies indicate that responsive interactivity is already a feature of government actors' social media use in Norway, local politicians for example claiming in a report published by Kommunesektorens organisasjon (2017), that they use social media as a listening post. Through direct inquiries or by observing open discussions, they gain an overview of the issues that engage residents. The government actors also say that they bring social media feedback all the way to their own party organization, the municipal council, or the municipal administration.

Data from Statistics Norway shows that the majority of Norwegian municipalities report that they use social media for interactive purposes, such as obtaining citizen reviews of and inputs on their services, and to respond to questions. A third of municipalities also say that they use social media feedback to improve their services.[3]

Data and Methods

Sampling and Interviewees

The data in this study is from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 5 politicians and 9 bureaucrats from the municipality of Oslo (see Table 6.1). Two of the politicians and five of the bureaucrats operate at the municipality city level, the remainder operating in the inner-city district of *Gamle Oslo*, one of the city's 15 administrative districts. The interviewees were asked to participate in the study because they either were politicians involved in urban development in Oslo, or because they worked with communication for or the administration of urban development projects in the city and district administrations. Both levels were included because the city district often acts, in urban development, as a mouthpiece for community demands. The district also runs an area-based initiative that seeks to improve living standards and life quality in two of its neighbourhoods. Area-based initiatives include urban development programmes that are particularly participation oriented (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2018), in which higher levels of digital and analogue government-citizen interactions can probably be found.

Case Selection

Oslo, being a particularly wealthy city in a rich country, is in many ways a probable case. Social media, computers, and smart phones have been around for a while. The government and population of Norway are therefore, based on this, likely to be at the forefront in the use of these for a variety of purposes. Norway, furthermore, has a popular democratic tradition, a well-functioning civil service, high levels of trust in government, and few instances of corruption. If responsive interactivity does

[3] Source: Statistics Norway (2019), https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/12034/tableViewLayout1/ (last accessed 26.08.2021).

Table 6.1 Interviewees

Interviewee	*Position*	*Interview date*
Politician 1	Mayor (Socialist Left Party)	25.06.2019
Politician 2	City Councillor, urban development committee (The Conservative Party)	24.05.2019
Politician 3	Chair of the district's urban development committee (Socialist Left Party)	15.03.2019
Politician 4	Chair of the district council (Workers' Party)	26.05.2019
Politician 5	Vice-chair of the district council (Workers' Party)	04.03.2020
Bureaucrat 1	Communication officer in Oslo's City Government	11.04.2019
Bureaucrat 2	Chief Communication Officer in Oslo's City Government	11.04.2019
Bureaucrat 3	Communication officer in the Agency for Urban Environment	10.04.2019
Bureaucrat 4	Chief Communication Officer in the district administration	20.08.2021
Bureaucrat 5	Manager in the Agency for Urban Environment	04.06.2019
Bureaucrat 6	Chief Programme Officer in the district's area-based initiative	01.02.2019 and 13.04.2021
Bureaucrat 7	Head of Department in the district administration	15.01.2019
Bureaucrat 8	Chief District Officer	03.06.2019
Bureaucrat 9	Programme Officer in the district's area-based initiative	21.11.2018

Source Own elaboration

exist as a phenomenon in government actors' use of social media, then it should be found in Oslo. Norway is, on the other hand, not an extraordinary case. The political activity level of citizens on social media is, as in most other developed countries, not particularly high (Holst & Moe, 2021; van Dijk & Hacker, 2018; Chapter 4), the level of activity found in Oslo therefore probably also found in other countries where social media is widespread, and where trust in government institutions and levels of 'good governance' are quite high, as is typical in Nordic countries and The Netherlands.

Inductive and Constructivist Approach to Expert-Interviews

This study follows what Ragin (1994, p. 94) calls analytic induction, the prime concern of this being the extent to which an analytical image is refined, sharpened, and elaborated by the evidence. The main images in this chapter are controlled and responsive interactivity, the research ambition being not only to determine whether the descriptions of interviewees fit within these categories, but also to improve on the concept of using these descriptions. Understanding how the government actors approach social media interaction in urban development required the interviewing of persons who are responsible for municipal communication channels or otherwise have privileged access to the policy process. They constitute expert-interviews (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019), and share some characteristics with elite interviews, the most important here being that interviewees may exaggerate their roles (Berry, 2002). This is a challenge, but not a necessarily a problem, when interpreting data. I do not purport to treat the interviewees statements as being true (or false) claims about what they really do, but rather as *displays* of experiences that are affected by dominant discourses and values (Silverman, 2001, p. 112).

Findings

Internet connection rates in Norway are high, and social media is omnipresent, 73 per cent of the adult population reporting that they use social media daily.[4] This estimate is probably higher for Oslo, with income and education levels being higher here than in the rest of the country. It is therefore no surprise that most of the city's politicians and municipal agencies can be found on social media. The majority of the city council's elected officials also have public profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and most politicians in *Gamle Oslo* have an active Facebook-account.[5] The municipality has official profiles on most of these networking services for most of its agencies, and all agencies involved in

[4] Statistics Norway: https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/11437/tableViewLayout1/ (last accessed 07.09.2021).

[5] Of the 58 regular representatives in the city council, 55 have a public profile on Facebook, 44 on Twitter and 35 on Instagram. Of the 51 elected officials in the *Gamle Oslo* city district's councils, 43 are on Facebook, 25 on Twitter, and 17 on Instagram.

urban development.[6] The district administration uses a variety of communication channels. However, 'Facebook is the main channel' (Bureaucrat 8). A number of the district's projects, programmes, and services also have their own accounts, the area-based initiative mainly using Facebook.

Two-Way Communication

There is a difference between how politicians and bureaucrats describe their social media presence. Politicians mainly say that they use social media interactively. Some bureaucrats, however, focus mostly on the unilateral provision of information, others on dialogue.

For example, Politician 2 has two profiles on Facebook, one public and one private, using both randomly to stay in touch with local associations and action groups. She follows their Facebook-groups to stay updated on their concerns, and is contacted either by being tagged in a commentary field or being sent a direct message. Politician 1 says that 'one cannot be a politician today without being contacted on multiple platforms', Politician 5 stating that she is frequently contacted by residents via social media. Politicians 3 and 4 also describe how they use social media to obtain information on the opinions and grievances of inhabitants. It is important to note that the material also contains descriptions of self-promotion and information spreading by the politicians.

Bureaucrats at the district level primarily emphasize information sharing, Bureaucrat 7 for example saying that 'the district administration's page is perhaps mainly information'. Bureaucrat 9 from the area-based initiative confirms that they use social media 'to inform about events, important processes, and to share good stories'. The district administration also claims that they try to stimulate public engagement. This is, however, always by directing citizens to other venues than the social media. Bureaucrats 4 and 6 explain that they regularly publish posts that encourage citizens to provide feedback on policy proposals or development plans. They, however, do this by redirecting them to other online platforms that do not have social networking functionalities, or to offline participation processes.

[6] 17 of 24 agencies are on Facebook, 12 on Twitter and 10 on Instagram. Many municipal agencies do not communicate with the public, which means that nearly all agencies involved in public communication can be found on at least one social network service.

Communication officers at the city level, in contrast, stress that the main reason for using social media is to enter into a dialogue with citizens. Bureaucrat 1 states that the municipality's goal is to have 'as much citizen dialogue as possible'. He explains:

> *The public expects an answer. If you have a Facebook-page and don't answer, people will be disappointed. You may ask what's the point of having a Facebook-page if the public cannot enter a dialogue.*

Bureaucrat 3 claims that 'we never provide information, that's the whole point of being on Facebook'. Behind this statement is the municipality's policy to respond to all comments and messages, but not to push information. The district communication officer also shares this goal, her team having established a week day nights and weekend shift system to rapidly respond to feedback.

Descriptions of Controlled Interactions

Interaction is, as emphasized above, not the same as running a responsive social media operation. The remainder of this section therefore elaborates on the dimensions of controlled and responsive interactivity found in the interviews.

Avoiding Discussions, Correcting Misinformation, and Censoring Harassment

An example of controlled interaction is provided by Politician 2, who says that she rarely comments on discussions taking place on the Facebook-groups of local action groups, 'because you can easily end up in discussions that lead nowhere'. She instead prefers to have the conversation by e-mail or meet in person, to promote a constructive dialogue. She is not trying to avoid discussion per se, just discussion that become uncontrollable in public. She therefore wants to conduct discussions in a space that she is familiar with, and that is beyond the public's gaze.

Nearly all the bureaucrats said that they try to avoid discussions completely. When asked whether the district administration enters into Facebook-discussions, Bureaucrat 7 said:

> *What Do You Think They Should Discuss? We Are a Politically Neutral Organization and Are not Supposed to Have Opinions of Our Own. We Value that Quite Highly.*

The administration's role is to execute the policies passed by politicians, and cannot therefore become involved in discussions that appear political. As a result, administrators will either censor themselves on social media based on a Weberian administrative ideal, or they will try to manage the commentary field to prevent such discussions from emerging. This, regardless of the reason why, will appear to other users to be an unwillingness to respond to issues of political importance.

Another way of controlling interactivity is to correct or remove feedback, for example posts that bureaucrats feel contain misinformation or harassment. This is practised in most accounts, articulated here by Bureaucrat 4:

> *We don't intervene and discuss anything. We don't. What we sometimes can do […] is clarify things - correct things if it is important for us to display something. […] In cases of smears and insults, we simply contact the perpetrator and say that 'either you delete your comment, because we don't allow it, or we'll hide it'.*

Setting Up Positive Feedback

A subtler variant of controlled interactivity takes the form of pre-setting the tone of the interaction, which is achieved through the type of content published. This is close to what Freelon calls 'staying on message'. The Agency for Urban Environment owns and moderates some of the most active Facebook-pages in the municipality. The agency's central communication team, however, tightly controls which projects are allowed to establish a social media account. Bureaucrat 5, an agency manager who leads a number of urban development projects, said that she has never been allowed to establish a Facebook page for any of her projects. She believes that this is because the communication team only want projects that are non-controversial to have social media accounts. A project such as the pedestrian precinct in the city-centre will probably cause a lot of trolling once on social media, which then becomes unmanageable for the communication officers who are expected to respond to every comment. Bureaucrat 5 also has the impression that the communication team wants social media to be an arena for positive and pleasant agency responses:

[They have a person] there who writes a lot of replies like 'How nice!', 'Thanks for your feedback!', 'I will check this up for you', 'So, that's what you think? Well, thanks for your feedback!'. There is a lot of pleasantness.

Descriptions of Responsive Interactions

'Listening in', and Asking for Opinions

The politicians in this sample said that they use social media actively to listen to opinions circulating on social media, and to ask for citizens' opinions on specific issues. This falls within online process responsiveness, politicians acquiring information on citizens opinions and grievances through social media channels. Politician 3 states that he uses Facebook 'to find out what is buzzing [among citizens] and to pick up things'. Politician 4 makes an almost identical statement when explaining that she is a member of a number of Facebook-groups to gain insights into residents' opinions. Her aim is 'to pick up on what's going on - to get an overview of peoples' opinions'.

Politicians 3 and 4 said that they also actively obtained feedback through social media. Politician 3, for example, said that he may ask for feedback on issues that he is currently working on:

I have, in the last couple of years, posted perhaps eight to ten posts on the Facebook groups of residents' associations. These posts have been on specific issues which I wanted feedback on, and I therefore asked for comments.

Politician 4 uses the Facebook page of her local party chapter to do the same:

It is also Used to Ask People What They Think About Different Issues. We Ask for Peoples' Opinions, and We Get Quite a Bit of Feedback.

Responding to Questions and Complaints, Channelling Requests

The bureaucrats do not describe the use of this 'listening' to social media or asking for opinions. Their responsiveness is instead in the form of responding to questions, or channelling complaints and requests to the responsible departments. The most typical response is answering informational questions, normally through direct messages. Bureaucrat 4, for example, estimates that 60–70 per cent of user feedback is from informational questions, which can be immediately answered by the moderators.

Inquiries that they cannot answer are forwarded to other relevant bodies in the district, or elsewhere in the municipality. They may also take an active role and push for a response if these units do not respond:

> *We may also forward them to another agency [when it is not an area] we are responsible for. […] If you are asking about something related to urban development, it may not be within our competence. […] In these cases we must find out who the responsible agency is and who they can talk to there. We pass the contact information on to them, or we say that we can add a comment on the agency's Facebook-site, or that they must ask the question in an email to their official e-mail address. […] If they come back to us and say: 'You know what? We never got an answer'. Then we say: 'Okay, let us try'. […] We then often call the agency and ask. Sometimes we get clear answers that we can communicate back, or we are told that 'this has to be sent to the official address to be included in the agency's records'.*

Receiving and forwarding social media inquiries is, according to the other bureaucrats, also common in their organizations. These sometimes, particularly when they are complaints about services, lead to concrete government action:

> *[…] When playground equipment is broken, we communicate [on Facebook] that we will come and fix it asap […], and then we can add a post that we have been there, seen it, and fixed it. Or when there is no water in a water fountain. Those sorts of things. (Bureaucrat 7)*

Such reports of defects or failures are often reported directly by the social media moderators to *Bymelding*, a website and app on which citizens can report a local problem. These reports are automatically channelled to the service provider that is responsible for fixing it. Bureaucrat 3 calls this responsiveness 'citizen service' and claims that it is a precondition for a dialogue with the citizenry:

> *It is important that citizen service is in place, because without citizen service there is no citizen dialogue. No citizen will involve themselves in urban development if they don't see that we are present and take them seriously when they report about potholes or uncleared snow.*

Discussion

This study contradicts the picture drawn by political communication and e-government research, which mainly depicts social media use as being a one-way affair. The interviewees in this study firstly describe their social media use as mainly being interactive. The exception is the area-based initiative, who report that they lack the resources and skills to be as interactive as they would like to be, which is a common finding of studies of government use of social media (Falco & Kleinhans, 2018). Secondly it suggests that interaction involves elements of control *and* responsiveness. Controlled interactivity is, as a concept, well-established in the political communication literature, and is also identified as a phenomenon in studies of public administrations. Controlled interactivity is mainly described by the bureaucrats in this chapter as being the avoidance of discussions, the censoring of misinformation and harassment, and the setting up of the medium for positive feedback. Responsive interactivity is, in contrast, applied here to conceptualize politicians' activities when (for example) elaborating on how they 'listen to' and ask for the opinions of residents on social media, and to bureaucrats responding and explaining to users through direct messages, and acting on their grievances where this is related to the services they provide.

Why this discrepancy? Political communication and e-government researchers often study the official social media accounts of politicians, parties, and government agencies (Koc-Michalska et al., 2020), which is of course important. These studies can, however, overlook the social media interaction between citizens and politicians and bureaucrats that takes place elsewhere, such as in the commentary fields on the pages or groups of resident associations, or through direct messages. We therefore need to apply methods other than the conventional approach to the study of this phenomenon, such as interviews or even the observation of such areas of communication.

Another reason why responsive interactivity largely has fallen outside the purview of e-government, and particularly of political communication studies, is that the data is normally drawn from politicians, parties, and campaigns at the national level, and not from municipalities or even city districts as I have done here. As Larsson and Skogerbø (2018) point out, politicians probably have a more interactive presence at the local level than at the national level, the politics and the struggle for power and position being much more pronounced at the national level. Political competition

is, of course, an element of urban politics. However, as (Barber, 2013) argues, urban politics is more pragmatically oriented towards fixing things and finding solutions than ideological battles. The relationship between a municipal councillor and citizens is also much closer at this level, which makes it more susceptible to the kind of 'strong' democracy associated with responsive interactivity, rather than national politics.

An alternative explanation could, however, be that my study is unreliable and gives the wrong impression. It is, after all, based on a small sample and there is a risk it could be biased. Additional evidence from Oslo suggests, however, that the interview sample is not biased, but instead reflects a practice that is quite widespread among politicians and administrative units. The survey described in Chapter 4 of this book shows that around one third of the surveyed politicians in Oslo answer that they engage in dialogue with citizens through social media on urban development issues. Around one third also report that their political priorities on these issues are influenced by their contact with citizens on social media. Around 60 per cent of the bureaucrats who work in the areas of citizen participation and public communication also claim that their organization has a dialogue with citizens on social media.[7]

Another possibility is that interviewees overestimate their responsiveness and level of interactivity on social media. This, in one way, is almost certainly the case. Elected officials are, according to generally accepted political norms, expected to be responsive to new information on public opinion and citizen needs that arise between elections. Bureaucrats, despite mainly being expected to be responsive to politicians, are also expected to be responsive to users and residents in issues that relate to planning and service delivery. Their statements are therefore in line with dominant discourses and values. It is, however, important to add that interactivity and a certain type of responsiveness also makes *theoretical* sense. Politicians will, given that responsiveness is a dominant political norm (Kane & Patapan, 2012), benefit from both appearing and actually being responsive to 'ordinary' citizens, especially at the local level where the 'custodian' role is prominent. New agendas emphasizing bureaucratic responsiveness have, at the administrative level, not only led to changes in discourses, but also in how administrators relate to the general public

[7] The results from the survey of the politicians are still unpublished. Thanks to Kristin Reichborn-Kjennerud for providing the raw data.

(Vigoda, 2002). It is therefore logical to assume that this has also affected their approach to communication.

Do politicians and bureaucrats, through being responsive to citizens on social media, improve democracy? Not necessarily. This study suggests that responsive interactivity does not preclude controlled interactivity, but may not necessarily provide a representative picture of what goes on in Oslo. Controlled interactivity, or even the absence of interactivity, could still therefore be most prevalent. The responsiveness portrayed in these descriptions is also a very limited form of responsiveness, the issues in this chapter which politicians ask for citizen participation being very local and of minimal importance to citizens' lives. Further, this form of process responsiveness does not necessarily translate into outcome responsiveness, as politicians have the authority to disregard such input at will. This administrative responsiveness is therefore mainly transactional,[8] and consists of improving services in a way that resembles how private businesses relate to customer feedback. It is not, for example, related to the preparation of policy documents.

One can also turn the question on its head and ask whether social media responsiveness is, from a democratic point of view, desirable. Research concludes that the most politically active social media users are in a relatively privileged segment of the population (i.e. people with better income and education, and better access to political power) (Min, 2010), as Chapters 2 and 5 of this book also demonstrate. Policymakers being responsive mostly to these groups may therefore, in fact, lead to less and not more democracy.

Conclusion

The main contribution of this chapter is to distinguish responsive from controlled interactivity, and to define the former as an activity in which politicians and bureaucrats acquire information on citizens opinions and grievances through social media, respond to and explain their stance and their actions to the users, and adapt policies, programmes, projects, or services to citizens' input. There are important limits to this study. Other data and theoretical expectations also, however, suggest that responsive

[8] Thanks to Ian McShane for pointing this out.

interactivity may in fact be a notable aspect of the government officials' social media use in Oslo. These findings are probably also valid for cities in other but similar contexts, such as the Nordic countries and The Netherlands.

One key lesson that the political communication and e-government literature can draw from this is, that one has to look beyond the official social media accounts of politicians, parties, and administrative units when looking for interactivity. The descriptions in this chapter of politicians and bureaucrats imply that their communication with citizens is more interactive and responsive than first meets the eye, but that this normally occurs through direct messages, and through social media accounts established to deal with specific issues, or on other users' social media.

The other lesson is that we should be less cynical about social media. Not all politicians, or all bureaucratic organizations, try to control the social media space all the time. Having said that, this type of responsiveness is limited and probably has a modest effect on democracy, if it has any beneficial effect at all. The local politicians who take 'regular' citizens' views on social media into consideration when voting in the council, most likely only do this for issues of minor importance, and the bureaucratic responsiveness described in this chapter is mostly transactional. This chapter therefore contributes to a more nuanced image of governments' use of social media, one which emphasizes the interactive aspects without necessarily subscribing to the idea that these will, alone, democratize politics and government.

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CHAPTER 7

E-gentrification: Digital Community Engagement, Urban Change and Digital Rights to the City

Bhavna Middha and Ian McShane

Introduction

Gentrification is a persistent characteristic of urban change. It once was identified with inner-urban working-class locations, but is today observed globally in diverse urban and rural settings, gentrification being 'triggered by the variegated dynamics of capitalist reinvestment in the built environment worldwide' (Mermet, 2017, p. 418).

A forceful criticism of gentrification engages the 'rights' framework initially proposed by urban theorist Henri Lefebvre (1996 for example see Balzarini & Shlay, 2016; Mazer & Rankin, 2011), the digitalization of public space and the growth of e-government indicating that the contest over the 'rights to the city' today is conducted in physical and digital spaces (Shaw & Graham, 2017a). The location of urban governments' widespread use of digital platforms for urban development dialogue

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within this analytical frame therefore leads to digital platforms being seen to be not just sites of consultation, dialogue, or even participation and co-design, but also sites of struggle.

We explore two assemblages in this chapter in which digital ICTs contribute to gentrification processes and trajectories, and argue that using digital community engagement may, in Lefebvrean terms, 'produce' digital and physical spaces that reinforce ongoing gentrification processes. Assemblages are a way of thinking about relationships and are, as detailed below, messy, complex, diverse in their material and social configurations, open-ended and contingent (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 175). We therefore draw on the qualitative data obtained in the DEMUDIG project to investigate how these assemblages work, reasoning from this that digital community engagement may be complicit in gentrification processes in areas in which gentrification is a pervasive characteristic of urban development. We also demonstrate that the assumptions and practices of local authorities in this domain may perpetuate the association between gentrification and inequality, this running counter to the city and state government objectives of using digital ICTs to widen community engagement and participation.

We propose the portmanteau term *e-gentrification* to describe the association between digital community engagement and gentrification, a coining that can be compared to the minting of the term *e-government* some years ago for a new assemblage of technology, governance and power. E-gentrification is, however, not exclusively focussed on technology and does not have defined parameters or constituents. It instead seeks to illustrate how digital ICTs are associated with the practices and social imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015) that are constitutive of gentrification. We, therefore, in this chapter, analyse e-gentrification through two socio-technical assemblages (Müller, 2015; Müller & Schurr, 2016) and through theorising a co-constitutive relationship of digital technologies, urban development and community engagement practices.

Imaginaries are political resources that mobilise investment and social action (Bory, 2018). They 'draw a meaningful boundary around a loose-knit 'bundle' or more tightly woven 'complex' of practices, to generate forecasts regarding practices that are intimately connected or co-dependent' (Strengers et al., 2019, p. 111). The imaginaries that we draw from the literature on digital ICTs and cities, envisage a democratic future for digital participation. These imaginaries are technologically progressive and imagine: (1) citizens as rational actors who

require only knowledge and/or digital access to participate, (2) continued investment in digital community engagement infrastructure and (3) ideal mediated/engagement spaces that accommodate alternative views and politics.

The chapter explores the concept of e-gentrification and is structured as follows: we, after a literature review that discusses key concepts used in the chapter, provide some historical and demographic context for two inner-urban municipalities, Melbourne and Maribyrnong, that are the empirical focus of the chapter. A discussion that draws on the interview and survey data gathered in the DEMUDIG project then follows. Drawing on Cardullo (2017), we argue that patterns of e-gentrification exhibit specificity and contingency, their trajectories across the two municipalities displaying distinctive and shared elements. Two assemblages that connect processes of gentrification with digital community engagement are identified in this section. They are: (1) creativity and innovation, digitalisation being a part of a creative/innovative/smart city assemblage, and (2) decision-making and participation, digitalisation influencing patterns of engagement and influence. We argue that these assemblages encode gentrifying practices, and that introducing and implementing digital technologies in these scenarios is an indicator of gentrification. The rationale may also, however, be conveyed through a discourse of progressive and cosmopolitan urbanism. Analysis of the data also indicates that this is not a monolithic story, and that digital technologies may, as online and offline boundaries blur, offer new ways of asserting the 'right to the city', particularly where customised and inclusive digital participation is built into the design and implementation of community engagement processes.

Literature Review—The Social Imaginaries of Digital Community Engagement and Gentrification

Digital community engagement and participatory governance is, as detailed in Chapter 1, the subject of a significant and expanding literature, a field that is furthermore dynamic and contested. Kubicek (2010), for example, is sceptical about claims of the democratic and deliberative qualities of digital engagement platforms in urban planning. Schäfer (2015) argues that digital public spaces have widened participation and deliberation, but have fostered a less civil discourse than is found in face-to-face

settings. The trajectory of practice is underpinned by the view that digital platforms enhance democratic and inclusive participation, the trajectory therefore being firmly set towards their increased use. We, in the two subsections below, explore three imaginaries that convey the trajectories of digital community engagement, these focussing on spatial organisation, democratic and inclusive participation and the rational citizen.

Digitalisation and Gentrification

Scholarship has, through focussing on new forms of spatial and social organisation and on new modes of governance-produced technological innovation, evolved significantly. Castells (1996) described the emergence of new forms of social and spatial governance from digital technological innovation as 'networked urbanism'. Later scholarship has questioned whether networked technologies have enabled new forms of urbanism, or reinforced existing social, economic and spatial patterns such as gentrification.

UK urban sociologist Glass (1964) coined the term 'gentrification' to describe the replacement of working-class communities by higher-income households that move into inner-city areas, distort housing markets and change neighbourhood characters. Later scholars argue that gentrification is a more complex and contingent process than that conceived by Glass's stage model. The discussion of gentrification must, however, be set within an analysis of the structural features of advanced capitalism. Gentrification, furthermore, takes different forms at different times and in different places (Shaw, 2008; Swanstrom & Plöger, 2020).

Gentrification may, therefore, not involve replacement or relocation, Shaw and Hagemans (2015, p. 323) observing in a study of two Melbourne suburbs that,

> *Transformations in shops and meeting places, and in the nature of local social structure and government interventions, cause a sense of loss of place even without physical displacement.*

This evolving conception of gentrification provides a context for our specific focus on the association between digital ICTs and urban change, as viewed through a gentrification lens. A common theme in the literature, which further assists our conceptual framing of e-gentrification, is

the impact of digital ICTs on the production of space. Our use of Lefebvrean theory goes beyond the discussion of the interpenetration of the digital and physical which is prominent in the urban design and social behaviour in urban space literature (Jachna, 2021), to engage with the way in which space is shaped and occupied. Lefebvre developed his influential concept around the idea that urban space is a 'work of art' of the space's users that is appropriated by the everyday practices of the people who inhabit it (Lefebvre, 1996 [1967]). He believed that the right to the city suggested something more than the right to be physically present in the city space, for example, the possibility of this space being shaped to its inhabitants' needs and desires (see also Harvey, 2003, p. 939).

Shaw and Graham (2017b) extend this analysis by exploring the reproduction of power through code, content and control of urban information and the production of abstract space by informational monopolies. They conclude that Lefebvre's original separation of the right to the city and the right to information is complicated by virtual urban spaces being dependent on the flow of digital information (Ardichvili et al., 2003; McShane & Middha, 2021). Bringing these constructs together leads beyond the simple right to access the information or the outcomes produced by these systems. It leads to the requirement of transparency around the algorithms themselves and, with the increasing use of machine learning, around the kind of information used to train these new technologies. This implies that citizens should be in charge of the conceptualisation and the decision-making processes associated with these technologies (Anastasiu, 2019).

Technocratic forms of governance enacted through control centres, apps and dashboards increasingly mediate everyday life and shape urban futures. Examples of this include the introduction of placemaking practices, including those that sort, classify and police (Kitchin, 2017; Özkul, 2021). Such smart cities represent, to Hollands (2020), a technology-led stage in the process of city neo-liberalisation and gentrification and a 'high-tech variation of urban entrepreneurialism' (p. 305) that seeks to attract a creative class and to evade engagement with notions of social justice. Shelton et al. (2015) demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the ways in which the smart city idea is implemented in particular places: 'smart city interventions are always the outcomes of existing social and spatial constellations of urban governance and the built environment' (p. 14). Florida (2003), contrasting these critical views of technology as a gentrification factor, sees technology as a vital ingredient (along with

talent and tolerance) in attracting a new creative class to cities, gentrification reworked through the construct of the creative economy, being an implicit feature of Florida's work. This is furthermore observed in his silence on the displacement of an underclass required to service the creatives (Peck, 2005).

Swanstrom and Plöger (2020) argue that the existence of knowledge-based industries is now an essential ingredient of gentrification, the knowledge exchange and innovation of these industries relying on a new combination of digital and face-to-face networks. The advent of mobile connectivity has enabled the spatial convergence of these networks in places such as cafes and co-working spaces, which are described by Forlano (2009) as 'codescapes'. The spatial geographies of the codescape are reflected in the uneven distribution of broadband infrastructure, which is famously conceptualised by Graham and Marvin (2002) as 'splintering urbanism'. Digital ICTs are seen by some analysts as being constitutive of advanced capitalism, and interwoven with gentrification. Other analysts, however, contend that digital communication networks can support community and working-class solidarity, and press wider claims for spatial justice (Cardullo, 2017; Shaw & Graham, 2017b). More pessimistically, Easterling (2016) traces the retreat of the modernist, state-led infrastructure project of service and spatial justice promotion through public provision, in the face of neoliberal ideologies of public choice, privatisation and personalisation. She argues that this trajectory is supported by digital ICTs. As Plantin et al. (2018, p. 299) suggest '[p]latforms rise when infrastructures splinter'. The 'platforms' of greatest concern for our purposes are the digital engagement sites that many governments, particularly local authorities, have instituted in recent years.

Neoliberal Urban Governance and Citizen Participation

The development of digital platforms for citizen participation in urban governance is, despite being influenced by commitments to open government and placemaking, also emblematic of the 'smart city' (Cocchia, 2014), The European Commission (2014), for example, describes smart city making and digital community engagement as 'co-creative', 'inclusive' and 'participatory'. Garau et al. (2020), however, perceive techno-determinist underpinnings as undercutting participatory governance claims and as relying on the implementation of this form of rationality by civil servants and community engagement personnel. The onus is

therefore on the individual citizen to navigate and negotiate the services and opportunities available, their choices being guided by their "commonsensical' constraints' (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2018). This neoliberal urban citizenship model, which views people as beneficiaries or choice-hungry consumers, is rejected by scholars who favour a rights-based framework (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2018; Cornwall, 2002), a rights-based approach paying equal attention to invited spaces (those initiated by government agencies) and spaces that are invented or citizen-initiated (Cornwall, 2002).

Digital participation has been seen as overcoming a democratic deficit, statutory rights being given to some citizens in institutionalised deliberation, such as in Brazil (Cornwall, 2002). There is also, however, a recognition that digital participation may not necessarily enhance participation in the ways envisaged, prompting some governments to use offline methods (Cortés-Cediel et al., 2021). Many Australian cities are, even so, forging ahead with the implementation of digital participation in diverse ways, the main advantages of this agenda being seen to be the enhancement of participation and knowledge sharing (Fredericks & Foth, 2013). Following Cornwall, we situate participation as a practice, and therefore open up space to discuss the bundling of digital community engagement and gentrification as an assemblage.

Theorising E-gentrification: Assemblage Thinking and the Relationships of Digital ICTs, Community Engagement and Gentrification

Assemblage theory (AT), which is the theoretical underpinning of this chapter, illustrates how digital community engagement can be used to produce digital and physical spaces that can shape and reinforce ongoing gentrification processes. AT has influenced scholars across disciplines who engage with urban development and digital ICTs. We analyse e-gentrification in this chapter as a contextual, plural socio-technical assemblage (Müller, 2015; Müller & Schurr, 2016) that co-constitutes dynamic relationships of digital technologies, urban planning and development and community engagement practices. We use assemblages as a way of thinking about these relationships, which Anderson et al. (2012, p. 175) describe as follows:

> *an ethos of engagement that attends to the messiness and complexity of phenomena…committed to process-based ontologies that challenge conventional explanations by focusing on materially diverse configurations; emphasiz[ing] the open-ended, unfinished nature of social formations.*

To reiterate, an assemblage approach rests on three main contentions: (1) assemblages are constantly being made and unmade, (2) assemblages constitute spatialities—not just physical spaces but also topological spaces and (3) causality operates as a non-linear process: it is not located in a pre-given sovereign agent, but in the interactive processes of assembly (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 180). These topologic spatialities are not defined by physical boundaries or linearity, but by relational proximities (Müller, 2015). AT furthermore questions clear cut distinctions, for example, between infrastructures, technologies, sites, data, producers and consumers, Dahlin (2020, para. 28) arguing from a media studies perspective that a plural approach to studying media as an ongoing sociotechnical assemblage is useful, as '*such an approach can successfully reveal who, where, and what works and how it is held together*'.

Critics of AT question its resistance to acknowledging power, and its equal ascription of agency to human and non-human actors. AT, however, rejects presupposed or external notions of power, and concepts such as the social order or other exogenous structural features. It instead looks at situations through which power, if found, is built or assembled (Dahlin, 2020; Mc Guirk et al., 2016).

AT sees the relationship between human and non-human actors as being within fluid and locally situated networks (Müller & Schurr, 2016), alternative ways of ordering being opened by questioning how certain assemblages came to be. This means that new and sometimes existing features, events, technologies or phenomena that were never considered to be a part of that assemblage, are noticed and analysed. We therefore pose the following questions to highlight new connections and relationships.

1. How is the digitalisation of community engagement connected to 'smart city' or 'digital first' strategies?
2. How is digitalisation implemented to promote more democratic and inclusive participation?
3. How is digitalisation dependent on the concept of the rational citizen?

A focus on the local does not, however, restrict our analysis to a geographical space. Conceptualising assemblages as spatial involves the study of their topology, their bordering and unbordering, and the exchange of practices, knowledge and materials across different kinds of spaces. Digitalisation enables this exchange, so creating new and dissolving other previously rigid boundaries. Assemblage is an ongoing process rather than a static phenomenon, the Deleuzean term 'agencement' perhaps best expressing the dynamism and contingency in the way relationships are formed and continued (Anderson et al., 2012).

This discussion summarises the broad approach we apply here. The next section briefly explains the historical gentrification and digitalisation processes of the two municipalities, the section after analysing the survey and interview data gathered in the two cities.

Melbourne and Maribyrnong: Setting the Scene

Melbourne and Maribyrnong are two of 31 municipalities or local government authorities (LGAs) that make up metropolitan Melbourne (Fig. 7.1), the capital of the state of Victoria, Australia. Unlike Madrid and Oslo, Melbourne does not have a single metropolitan scale government. The Victorian local government sector also has comparatively weak fiscal and statutory powers, and limited formal opportunities for participatory governance. The Victorian state government is notably responsible for large urban development processes in metropolitan Melbourne, urban development being increasingly developer-led or organised through public–private partnerships, which is consistent with Victoria's early and aggressive adoption of neo-liberalism (Costar & Economou, 1999). These features lead to planning conflicts between jurisdictions, and may transfer the political risks of poor development to local government.

Urban development is a sensitive political issue in Melbourne. The Victorian government has recently mandated local authorities to enhance their community engagement processes, including those conducted through digital ICTs. Metropolitan Melbourne has been one of the global north's fastest growing cities in the last 2 decades, largely driven by high rates of immigration. Policy and business figures voiced concerns in the late twentieth century that the Melbourne LGA, the metropolitan centre, had become a 'doughnut city', largely empty outside of business hours and at risk of experiencing the social and economic problems of

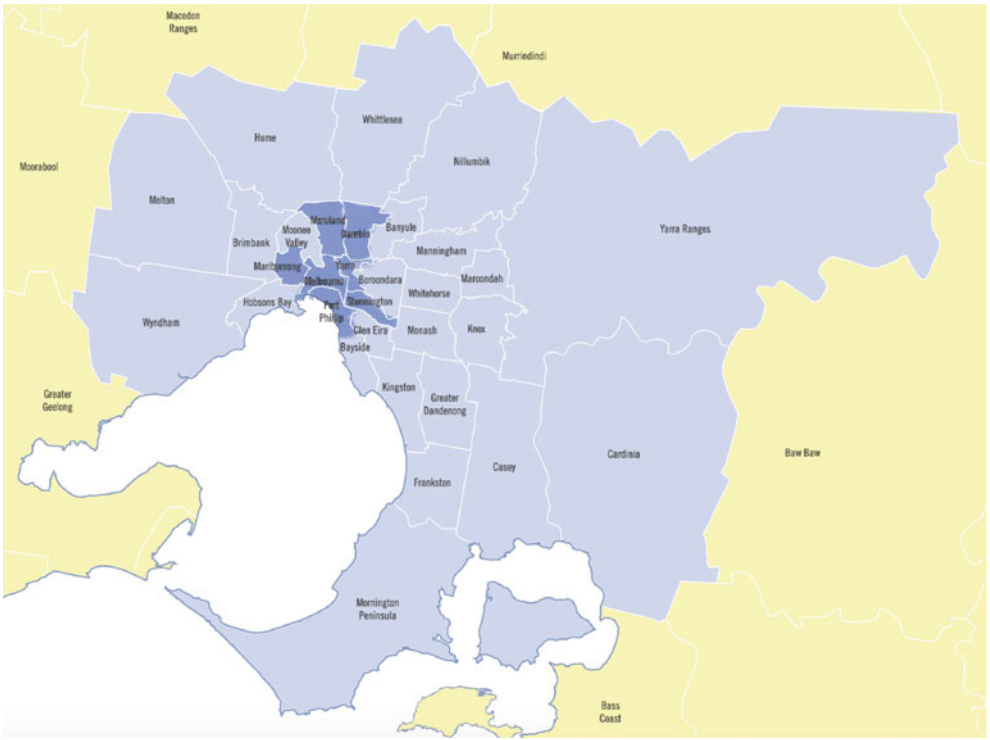

Fig. 7.1 Map of metropolitan Melbourne (surveyed municipalities in darker shade)

similar cities elsewhere in the world (Collie & Gleeson, 2018; Department of Infrastructure, 1998). Action by the Melbourne city council and by an influential residents and business group to promote the concept of 'liveable Melbourne' saw a repopulation of the urban core, and the development of significant creative, night-time and student economies (Collie & Gleeson, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2021), Melbourne's population growing rapidly from around 35,000 in 1990 to around 180,000 today.

Maribyrnong, with a population of 97,000, shares a western boundary (the Maribyrnong River) with Melbourne. The municipality traditionally contained a mixture of residential and industrial precincts, and typified the culturally diverse, working-class character of metropolitan Melbourne's western suburbs. It has a more recent experience of gentrification, characterised by the replacement of inner-urban industrial sites with high-rise apartment towers, working-class residents increasingly being replaced by professional class homeowners. In 2014 the Victorian state planning minister forecast a boom in apartment construction in Footscray, Maribyrnong's commercial centre, predicting a 'new South Yarra of the west', a fanciful reference to one of metropolitan Melbourne's most prestigious suburbs (A.B.C. Radio Melbourne, 2014). Footscray's proximity to the city has made it an attractive site for medium and high-density housing, the area being primed for a regeneration-style intervention by concerns over social problems, the declining quality of public infrastructure and the welfare of its residents. The neighbourhood is changing rapidly, the current population mix consisting of professionals, established migrant groups, recently arrived communities (notably from Horn of Africa countries), and an older population base predominantly of Anglo-Celtic ancestry.

Both cities are afflicted with spiralling housing costs, Melbourne scoring poorly on international housing affordability scales. Gentrification has therefore taken both classic (working class displacement) and novel (a creative city imaginary) forms across the neighbouring cities.

This chapter is based on the analysis of the data obtained from the Melbourne component of DEMUDIG's semi-structured interviews and qualitative data. This data was generated by open-ended survey questions, an approach which is consistent with AT's methodological stance that sense-making proceeds from empirical detail (Mc Guirk et al., 2016; McFarlane & Anderson, 2011). Data from interviews includes conversations with civil servants (including council planners and community engagement experts), politicians (including local government councillors), digital engagement providers and resident activists.

The Production of E-gentrification

Our data analysis identified two assemblages in which the digital, community engagement and urban development come together, and shape and are shaped by each other to produce conditions and spaces of e-gentrification. The topological characteristics of assemblages instanced above (contingency, fluid boundaries, and the exchange of knowledge, practices and materials across sites) are evident in the two assemblages explored below. Also evident is the departure of these assemblages from the imaginaries envisaged for digital community engagement: the unwavering trajectory of digitalisation, the inclusive and participatory enhancement credited to these platforms, and the rational citizen.

Creativity and Innovation

Interview data clearly show Melbourne's self-conscious image as a city of creativity and innovation, expressed through an assemblage of digital, social, physical and institutional settings. Digital community engagement is situated within this imaginary (Dowling et al., 2019, p. 439), this image being described at length by a digital engagement consultant to the City of Melbourne:

> *It is certainly a city that prides itself on innovation…yeah innovation and more a culture of place. There is a lot of emphasis on food and drinks, cultural aspects and sporting and…kind of being an urban lifestyle… places like Collingwood have this kind of urban environment...when somebody starts to do something, and other people watch that, they want to do the same but different. So, I think it builds on itself, the environment where innovation can happen. Because the bar is being raised… principally because there are companies that are driving this, and not just tech companies but community engagement as a practice.*

Mentioning Collingwood is significant. This is an inner-urban working-class suburb, once a centre of manufacturing and now Melbourne's high-tech and design precinct, and one in which factory workers were long-ago priced out of the local housing market. Community engagement consultants such as the narrator in this informant's narrative, help craft this vision and 'raise the bar' of innovation.

Melbourne's creative city imaginary is enacted through international cultural and local business networks, illustrating its flexible topology.

Melbourne was an early participant in UNESCO's Creative City Network (formed in 2004) through membership of the City of Literature program, and through the city's enthusiastic promotion of the Creative Spaces program in which artists were offered short-term rentals of space for studios in under-utilised buildings (Creative Spaces, 2021). This acknowledges the consequences of property financialisation and gentrification, while simultaneously positioning artists as a resource for Melbourne's creative city imaginary. Digital ICT plays a key role, the scheme operating through a web-based artists and space 'matching market'.

Melbourne joins such initiatives seamlessly to a range of 'smart city' projects such as City Lab, open data sets and Smart DNA (an interactive city map), the Participate Melbourne portal and other 'smart' initiatives being indicative in Melbourne of 'how a smart city should operate…useful innovation that folds seamlessly into how we live our lives and improve our day-to-day experiences' (City of Melbourne, 2021).

Claims of innovation are downplayed by Dowling et al. (2019, p. 439), who characterise web-based community engagement as 'entry level digital citizenship'. However, the international circulation of digital engagement practices that are indicative of the globalised and non-boundaried nature of smart city discourse, challenges local government officials to make judgements about technology choices. As Melbourne's digital engagement consultant comments:

> *The internet, man, it's all out there. Look, there is a whole bunch of stuff, in social media, pop up applications. So, you would think why does the government not use that? But the government has particular requirements, they can't just pluck a tool off the internet. They have to worry about where is the data, who is hosting the data, what information are you collecting, is it accessible, like we talked about Universal Design. So, we have to take those tools and shape them to the single ecosystem that supports that stuff.*

> *Yeah, I think they like…the possibility of doing it, but in most ways the technology is leading, the tech is here, their skills are way behind, and what they can do with technology.*

Several scholars argue that these global practices are a form of gentrification, practices in which cosmopolitan forces prevail over local choices (Cornwall, 2002). Most pointedly, municipal government deficits in

digital engagement resources and skills may impact participation, attenuating some citizen voices and inflating others.

Dowling et al.'s (2019) caricature of council web portals as entry level digital citizenship is underscored by the strong preference of the two councils to engage with citizens through this type of platform. The web-based platforms correspond to Barber's construct of 'invited spaces', and as sites of citizen participation that are established by governments to counter political apathy or cynicism (Kersting, 2013). Interviews with officials indicated, however, that control and skill-related rationales also contribute to this preference. Data on community views on development projects, and proposals circulating on social media, are seen as too messy or unreliable, the councils also admitting to lacking the skills and resources needed to manage this data and mode of engagement.

When asked if the council has assigned someone to specifically handle the platform, the official answered,

> *No, they [the community engagement team] do everything. [The] team are IAP2 trained, they do and design the community engagement, they design surveys, they design the online content.*

Similarly, a civil servant commented in the survey on resource issues,

> *In my experience, there is not a lot of support and resource for digital engagement teams. Nor is there understanding that it's a unique role that combines not only understanding in community engagement methodologies but experience in digital interactions and experience design.*

Kersting's (2013) construct of *invented spaces*, in contrast, usefully describes the practice in which groups of residents build support in development issues through social media sites. The issue of who gets to participate and how they participate is discussed in detail in the production of the next assemblage.

Decision Making and Participation

This assemblage relates to decision-making and participation, we argue here that the distinctive social and economic contexts of urban development in Melbourne and Maribyrnong produce variegated patterns of digitalisation and of its acceptance as an engagement strategy. State

government mandates and local authority intentions promote the broadening of the span of consultation, by including traditional 'hard-to-reach' groups through digital platforms. The Maribyrnong officials interviewed in the research, despite this, do not echo Melbourne's enthusiasm for such initiatives, one official referring to community engagement as '*…the flavour of the day*' and to digitalisation as further evidence of local authorities being compelled to '*… move with the fashions of these things*'.

Neither Melbourne nor Maribyrnong officials, however, view the local population they govern as a single community. Class, ethnicity and location are instead seen as determinants of digital engagement, resulting in hierarchies of participation. Interview data suggests that local officials have a range of views on the implications, despite evidence of a persistent digital divide in Australia, one report estimating 11% of Australians as being highly excluded (Thomas et al., 2021). A community engagement professional commented in response to an interview question about digital inclusion:

> *I think it [the digital divide] is a legitimate point, but it loses its efficacy as an argument every day that goes by. Particularly in Australia ten years ago that was more of a legitimate discussion to be having. Yes, it's true you need at a minimum a mobile phone, internet connection. But 95 % of people have mobile phones. And there will always be people that don't have mobile tech and don't know how to use it. And it's not for them.*

The above assertion assumes that digital access equates with digital literacy, and that information sent out digitally will be addressed rationally, and in the way intended by the professionals or the government. Furthermore if 'it' (digital engagement) is 'not for them', who are 'they' and what do 'they' want? As a City of Melbourne communications officer commented:

> *Certainly, face to face is targeted at migrants, or resident organisations, non-English speaking backgrounds, or disabled people, so they are targeted at them. And often those people haven't heard of Participate Melbourne, so that is an indication for me that the online people are different.*

Another community engagement consultant listed how they came to know which groups preferred the digital process or were left out of it.

> *We did do a big piece of research about how people in the city of Melbourne wanted to be engaged across ages and industries (residents, businesses, large businesses, small businesses)…so we knew that if we wanted to target large business or the business community then Participate Melbourne wasn't the most effective tool, but it was a very effective tool for other groups… Ironically, the business community, the most preferred method of engagement for those communities was letter.*

This interviewee disagreed when asked whether online and offline participants were similar, explaining how they engaged different population cohorts:

> *For example, there were quite a few groups in the city of Melbourne…some very large high-rise communities, a high percentage of African residents, Vietnamese residents, we were not capturing any of those online. So, we deliberately had face-to-face techniques for those groups. Similarly, with the elder Chinese community, who often required interpreters as well, for translation. And in the indigenous community, every engagement we did had a process for engaging indigenous communities. That was kind of a standard approach, so we did not rely on them to come through online, we did not rely on seniors to come through online and…homeless communities for example. So, we knew that we needed to reach out to those in a different way.*

The ethnic and class assumptions informing these comments were reinforced by a Maribyrnong planner's reference to the '*squeaky wheels*', the most active users of digital tools. The confluence of social class, digital resources and political engagement is noted by a Maribyrnong community engagement officer:

> *There is one small area here that now has the highest number of educated people... Their average income is higher. They bought the property when it was cheaper, and now they are sitting on more than a million-dollar homes. They are barristers, masters, PhDs. They are very vocal in what they want, we tried to put parking fees, and they ran a campaign with their educational and financial resources to refute our strategy.*

Distinctions were also made in terms of location and length of time spent in the area, which contrasts the socio-economic status of new residents. As a Maribyrnong planner commented:

> *Lots of suburbs in Melbourne have become gentrified. So, I think that when a suburb becomes gentrified, the expectations rise. The new residents coming in want clean streets etc. So, we have to allocate more budget to making the city look good. Their concerns are very different from new ones. The previous residents are happy to have a roof over their heads, and their bread and butter. Today's society is different to them. It becomes hard for council to do stuff, as the expectations go bigger and bigger.*

The interview data indicates stereotyping and segmentation of local populations, and a perception of *difference* which runs counter to the aims of inclusion underpinning engagement strategies. The different methods used and weights given to certain data may, at the same time, create an imbalance in which feedback is considered. Some local councils realise this and have made efforts to collect data in one location through combinations of digital and physical methods (Harvest Digital Planning, 2021). As a community engagement officer from Maribyrnong put it, it may be fruitful to run face-to-face engagement events in non-gentrified areas

> *In contrast there is Braybrook, which is the poorest suburb. But property evaluations are saying that property is going up there too, so that area will go through that process [gentrification] too. You do have the older, different ethnicities and what I want to do is working with language ambassadors. I want to train community members in IAP2, have them as qualified facilitators, and call on them to run engagements in their language rather than rely on our interpreters. I just think to get people, not only language, but also bringing in the trust.*

Web and social media spaces are powerfully utilised by some cohorts for the community organisation of the ownership, control or management of urban spaces, assets or resources. One long-term resident activist termed the focus of these cohorts as being on *'very much local things'* rather than '*big picture urban planning*':

> *They're very vocal, coming from a completely different demographic again… so they don't necessarily get involved with the local RAG [resident action] groups but they set up their own, which means that they follow their own particular interests.*

This cohort, according to the resident activist, is unwilling to join established resident action groups, but has:

> *more people who know their rights …Maybe not so submissive to authority. They expect a bit more and it all goes hand in hand with higher property values and higher rates. They are more willing to get up and complain about it…Certainly social media like Facebook has made it more possible for them to do that. Then you just take the next step and become more formalized, and then they become a movement.*

Recognition that digital engagement may not be as inclusive as forecast, indicates an awareness of the limitations of this form of engagement. The interview data suggests that the class dynamics of gentrification (Slater, 2006) do operate in the digital environment. We suggest that digital engagement is associated with gentrification, and that non-gentrified, culturally diverse neighbourhoods therefore require more focussed, inclusive and trusted ways of engagement.

Discussion: E-gentrification and the Right to the Making of the City

The two assemblages discussed above illustrate how the digital becomes associated with gentrification in diverse ways. The 'right to the city' proposed by Lefebvre, reworked by scholars looking at digitalisation processes (Marcuse, 2009; Shaw & Graham, 2017b), presupposes universality in access to the city, and that participation in decision-making determines what the city becomes. The two assemblages discussed above illustrate that these rights cannot be taken for granted. The arguments presented in this paper are not against digitalisation per se, or digitalisation of community engagement, our contention instead being that how these processes are initiated, to what purposes, and what impacts they have on people's lives, require scrutiny.

The first assemblage, through its focus on spatio-temporal context, illustrates that both the rhetoric of 'creative' and 'smart' and their association with digital ICTs may push councils along digitalisation pathways, without councils necessarily having the will, skills or resources to implement digital community engagement. It also illustrates that the rhetoric of creativity and innovation too easily plays into imagining digitalisation as visionary, so neglecting functionality and weakening the prospects of inclusiveness. The second assemblage focusses on assumptions of technology-based engagement and how inclusive it can be, not only physically but in terms of use by rational responsible citizens. The question

that this analysis raises is therefore who is targeted, who is expected to and actually uses digital technologies, and whether these are social media or bespoke digital platforms? As Cardullo (2017, p. 410) comments "[t]echnologies we take for granted in our everyday practices demand in fact induction, participation and care". Digital engagement cannot be assumed. Technologies need to be fostered and supported by connecting to everyday practices.

Digital community engagement is part of wider governance processes which determine the right to have a say in how a city or a place develops. Some may see the local activism of a new gentrified population, or an increase in property values as positive aspects of gentrification. These outcomes may, however, significantly shape how rights, decisions and actions are understood and exercised (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). As Shaw and Hagemans remind us, gentrification has inequitable effects, e-gentrification recognising that some residents have financial, cultural, human and digital capital which support a greater capacity to exercise influence through online platforms. The benefits of such engagement may not be equally distributed, even if the earlier association of gentrification and displacement are not seen. As Shaw and Hagemans (2015) conclude from an analysis of two gentrifying Melbourne suburbs:

> *The nature of local social structures and governance are also important to sense of community. Changes in one's position in the neighbourhood structure— one's 'place identity'—and in government interventions, initiated by different groups with different interests, can contribute to a sense of loss of stability and control, and similarly constitute a type of displacement.*

Our concept of e-gentrification, as illustrated by the assemblages, describes how digital community engagement becomes part of the practices and arrangements that transform an existing trajectory of gentrification processes. A positive feedback loop may also operate here, digital community engagement favouring the gentrified or the well off and they favouring it, so shaping urban development or urban policy processes.

Assemblage theory questions the naturalisation and hegemony of relational and socio-material dynamics, suggesting points of political intervention and possibilities for reassembly (Müller, 2015). We argue that if an inclusive and democratic participation process is the shared urban imaginary, then the relationships and associated issues illustrated

in this chapter may introduce sites for intervention that make digital community engagement more inclusive and democratic. Some of these are

1. The political allure of innovation and creative peer pressure that shapes the implementation of digitalisation may overlook contingencies and capabilities embedded in everyday community engagement practices. Intervention may involve rethinking different potentials of digitalization and its uses.
2. Resisting a normative view that e-participation by only some groups is acceptable, COVID-19 and lockdowns having shown the importance of including all groups in participatory processes. A hybrid approach may be needed in response to the non-participation of some groups (in the digital phase of disasters), and localised solutions such as smaller and focussed community oriented/community leaders' groups within digital platforms may be required.
3. Public spaces, whether offline or online, may need to cater to different modes of participation and non-participation. Inclusion may require better design and implementation of participatory processes themselves, but also the better balancing of expert and lay knowledge.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that the digitalization of public space and the increased use of digital ICTs in governance processes foregrounds the contest over the rights to the city. This is due to the right to have a say in making the city being inseparable from the right to the city. We asserted that who takes part in decision-making and how decisions are made are crucial to who gets the right to live and be in the city, and to whether cities are inclusive and democratic. We have argued that digital community engagement is part of an assemblage of digital ICTs, of urban development and gentrification, this assemblage viewed through two socio-technical assemblages: creativity and innovation and decision-making and participation. Relationships between various elements, groups, organisations, communities, materials and infrastructures are analysed through this assemblage approach, to

show how digital practices and infrastructures become a part of gentrification processes at the study sites. These assemblages furthermore, and in contrast to the socio-technical imaginaries, demonstrate how idealising digitally connected citizens does not deliver successful digital engagement. Contingencies in the platforms and national and global politics and processes defy clean and planned out technologically determined trajectories. We furthermore question the view that digital engagement may reinforce participation and can, of itself, include pluralistic views and ideas about a shared urban future.

A major contribution made by this chapter is to show how and why digital community engagement should be seen as vital to conversations about gentrification. This paper takes a normative view that gentrification may hinder imaginaries of a just, inclusive and democratic city. It is important to recognise, when thinking about issues of gentrification, that the methods and tools of digital community engagement also play a part in the progressive policy responses.

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CHAPTER 8

The Impact of Digital Participation on Democratic Urban Governance

Sveinung Legard and Sissel Hovik

Introduction

This volume investigates the effect of different city and system characteristics on the implementation of digital citizen participation tools in cities. The way in which characteristics such as pre-existing modes of citizen participation, bureaucratic structures and gentrification processes shape the enactment of these technologies is therefore examined in this book, and how social media or online participation platforms effect the democratic dimension of city governance is discussed. We, in this concluding chapter, elaborate on this discussion using a democratic innovation framework developed in the literature, and ask the question 'How do different approaches to digitalization of citizen participation influence

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how well cities perform on the dimensions of inclusiveness, deliberation and popular control in their urban governance?'.

There are good reasons for addressing this question. There is plenty of research on how the digital revolution affects democracy in *general*, but there is little knowledge on whether and how *different uses* of digital technologies effect democratic urban governance quality (Medaglia & Zheng, 2017; Smith, 2019, p. 578). This chapter shows that such differences can be quite significant. Furthermore, early technology-optimists had great hopes for digital technologies and the contribution they could make to democracy, particularly in cities, the digital technology vision being that it would allow cities to connect with their citizens in more intimate ways, involve them in problem-solving and in the co-creation of services, and even bring them into their decision-making processes (Effing et al., 2011; Shirky, 2008; Townsend, 2013). Investigating to what extent these expectations have come true is a worthwhile endeavour.

This chapter only deals with a specific aspect of the digitalization of urban governance, namely citizen opportunities to participate in urban policymaking between elections. This aspect has, furthermore, been more specifically narrowed in this chapter onto the channels that cities establish to engage with government, often called 'invited spaces' in the literature on citizen participation (Cornwall, 2004). 'Invited spaces' should be differentiated from 'invented spaces', used for the participatory institutions created outside the state (Miraftab & Wills, 2005). Another term used for digitalized invited spaces is 'e-participation' (Macintosh, 2004), which we use throughout the chapter. It can be argued that this term does not encompass the full breadth of the impact of the digital revolution. Citizen participation has, however, become a ubiquitous feature of nearly all forms of urban governance across the globe (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). Between-election participation also lies at the core of nearly all contemporary theories of democracy. These therefore underline the importance of this study.

To be clear, our normative stance is that we do not believe democratic urban governance hinges solely on direct citizen participation. We believe that it requires multiple forms of representation, and that citizens play a greater role than just electing representatives. They should actively participate in collective decision-making. The underlying institutional logic or dynamic of representative institutions is, furthermore, to remove power from ordinary citizens and concentrate it at the apex of government. Representative institutions not controlled and mandated by participatory

institutions (in which citizens can directly discuss and decide policies) therefore inevitably lead to the democratic aspects of urban governance being weakened or undermined over time.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we present our approach to democracy and elaborate on how digitalization can affect the three dimensions of inclusiveness, deliberation and popular control. Then we present the three cases in our study, Oslo, Melbourne and Madrid, and explain how they have implemented digital technologies differently. Finally, we compare these three cases and discuss how these different models of e-participation affect democratic governance, and the implications this has for ongoing discussions about the impact of digitalization on democracy.

E-Participation and Democracy

Assessments of 'invited spaces' for citizen participation frequently centre on the three dimensions of inclusiveness, deliberation and popular control—other words sometimes being used (Fung, 2006, 2015; Newig et al., 2018; Smith, 2009; Warren, 2017). The first dimension, *inclusiveness,* concerns who is given a voice in politics through invited spaces, whether all citizens are eligible to participate, and whether such spaces can mobilize and accommodate the preferences and opinions of previously disenfranchised groups of citizens. The second dimension, *deliberation,* concerns how participants discuss and decide among themselves in these spaces, whether they are able to form their own will or judgement, or whether they merely are invited to express their preferences on issues predefined by government authorities. The third dimension, *popular control,* concerns the extent to which participants in these spaces are allowed to influence decisions taken by government, and the importance of these decisions to citizens' lives.

The digitalization of invited spaces can affect the dimension of inclusiveness in a number of ways. E-participation technologies can mobilize citizens who previously were disengaged between elections, for example youth or parents with small children (Tai et al., 2020), and the use of these technologies by governments to reach large numbers of citizens is, furthermore, less expensive and requires less time than conventional channels such as mass media or public meetings. E-participation is also less 'expensive' for citizens in the sense that it requires less time than attending physical town hall meetings or workshops (Gilman & Peixoto, 2019). It, furthermore and perhaps more importantly, requires

less network resources, competence, and self-confidence. There are few material barriers to digital participation, at least for citizens in developed countries where mobile phones and internet connection are widely distributed (Jho & Song, 2015).

Most research, however, shows that digital participation processes are populated by their own 'usual suspects', mostly white, middle-class men, but often a lot younger in digital than in analogue processes (Touchton et al., 2019). This, in developed countries, is not so much a reflection of unequal access to computers or the internet, but the unequal distribution of the digital skills that make people interested or comfortable with engaging in online processes (Ebbers et al., 2016). A paradoxical effect of e-participation technologies is that they can mobilize more citizens, but at the same time can reinforce existing political inequalities (Tai et al., 2020). A possible solution to this problem could be combining digital and analogue participation channels, which sometimes illustrates the benefit of mobilizing both disadvantaged and disengaged groups in participatory processes (Legard & Goldfrank, 2021). This approach may, however, lead to the risk of the creation of layers of super-participants, a set of participants with the knowledge and resources needed to juggle both sets of channels (Spada & Allegretti, 2020). This is addressed in Chapter 2 of this book.

Urban governments conduct innovative experiments with mini-publics or citizen juries, to promote deliberation among citizens (Beauvais & Warren, 2019), town hall meetings and participatory workshops also often being adopted to promote this (Agger, 2021). Only a fraction of a city's population is, however, normally involved in these initiatives. The belief that this is inevitable is widespread in democratic theory, the assumption being that it is impossible to involve a very large number of people in in-depth deliberations (Cohen & Fung, 2004). The opposite view is that digital technology has brought the previous time and space constraints on communication to an end (Barber, 1984, p. 246) and that the internet provides, for the first time, a virtual space enabling mass deliberation (Dahlberg, 2001). High-quality deliberation through digital technologies has, however, so far been difficult to achieve (Gilman & Peixoto, 2019, p. 111; Landemore, 2020, p. 65). This is despite much work being invested in developing digital deliberation tools as an alternative to social media (Bravo et al., 2019; Shin & Rask, 2021). E-participation tools can, despite these limitations, contribute to collective will formation in other ways than moderating deliberations.

Landemore (2020, p. 182) for example argues that digital technologies are particularly valuable in the crowdsourcing phase of deliberations. It allows the input from thousands or even millions of individuals to be ordered and analysed using digital technologies, and in ways that are comprehensible for those involved in public debate. Discussions on online platforms can play a role in connecting deliberations among citizens to political institutions, despite not satisfying all the criteria set by deliberative democracy theory, so increasing the number of voices and perspectives being heard in the political process (Gastil, 2021).

This brings us to our third topic of whether digital 'invited spaces' are equipped to ensure the dimension of popular control in the decision-making processes. Two aspects of e-participation technologies can make these more impactful than analogue methods. The first is that they can bypass traditional gatekeepers in politics (van Dijk & Hacker, 2018), for example the civil servants who normally compile, filter and then present the results of participation processes to policymakers. The other is that digital tools can mobilize masses of residents. This makes it more difficult for policymakers to disregard the outcomes of online participatory processes (particularly when compared with the outcomes of smaller public meetings or face-to-face workshops). Citizen participation is often limited to providing input to urban governments on citizen preferences—the opportunity to influence urban development being restricted by the triviality of what Fung (2015, p. 521) calls 'the park bench problem'. Governments, furthermore, tend to 'cherry-pick' citizen proposals, implementing those that are cheap or do not challenge existing policy (Font et al., 2018).

Data and Methods

We, in the next section, identify three distinct models of e-participation in urban governance. This is based on the depth and breadth of Oslo's, Melbourne's and Madrid's use of digital technologies, the meaning they attribute to digital engagement, and how these digital tools are connected to the policy process. Our method is based on what Skocpol and Somers (1980) call the *contrast of contexts* approach, which focuses on showing how putatively general propositions are invalidated or affected by particular features of different cases. In our study, this means that the impact of e-participation on urban democratic governance depends on how these technologies are enacted.

Our research questions, however, touch upon so many case aspects, that answering would be impossible without multiple data sources. We therefore apply a multi-method research approach to allow the cases to be analysed holistically, and combine both qualitative and quantitative data (Hunter & Brewer, 2015). Our main data sources are field work in the cities, interviews with key stakeholders connected to the digital spaces, and a survey of local activists in the cities. The field work is most comprehensive and the number of interviews is highest in Oslo, where both authors of this chapter live. We interviewed 48 politicians, bureaucrats, activists and other stakeholders in Oslo, attended a number of meetings, used the digital tools ourselves and followed public discussions on this topic. In Melbourne we interviewed 11 stakeholders and conducted a field visit in April 2019. In Madrid we interviewed 18 and carried out a field visit in May 2019. The survey of local activists in all three cities is described in detail in Chapter 2.[1]

Answering our research question would, however, have been impossible without a heavy reliance on secondary sources. We have most notably used the 'Survey of living conditions and satisfaction with municipal services', a biannual survey of a representative sample of Madrid's population.[2] We also use sources such as external and internal evaluations of the e-participation processes, official documents and legal regulations in our analysis in all three cases.

[1] Thanks to Kristin Reichborn-Kjennerud and Inger Miriam Bertelsen (Oslo Metropolitan University), José M. Ruano (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), and Ian McShane and Bhavna Middha (RMIT University Melbourne) for conducting the survey and providing us with the raw data. Any elaborations are our own.

[2] In, 2012 the municipality surveyed 2520 residents, and then 3003 and 8578 in 2017 and 2019, providing a confidence rate of somewhere between ± 1–2 per cent depending on the size of the sample. All data are available on the Madrid's open data portal and was last downloaded 16.01.2022: https://www.madrid.es/portales/munimadrid/es/Inicio/El-Ayuntamiento/Calidad-y-Evaluacion/Percepcion-ciudadana/Encuesta-de-Calidad-de-Vida-y-Satisfaccion-con-los-Servicios-Publicos-de-la-Ciudad-de-Madrid/?vgnextfmt=default&vgnextoid=87fcc6ba1d244410VgnVCM2000000c205a0aRCRD&vgnextchannel=5134261f46839710VgnVCM1000001d4a900aRCRD.

Three Models of Urban E-Participation

Oslo: E-Bricolage

The first model we identify is the bricolage model, and is represented in our study by Oslo. This is probably the most common urban e-participation model in developed countries. The model is, as the term 'bricolage' suggests, first and foremost characterized by a cautious and eclectic use of e-participation tools, and a focus on the digitalization of services rather than the creation of e-participation channels (Muñoz & Bolívar, 2019; United Nations, 2020). Oslo has a very ambitious digitalization policy which states that 'all citizen services that can be digitalized, should be digitalized' (Byrådet i Oslo, 2015, p. 14). But digitalization only includes citizen participation to a limited degree, the implementation of the digitization of citizen participation therefore being incoherent, piecemeal and often ad hoc. The lack of an overarching strategy results in the use of an eclectic variety of tools and technologies which contain elements of social monitoring of municipal service delivery, dialogue between authorities and the public on social media, crowdsourcing technologies such as participatory mapping, typical e-democracy initiatives such as e-petitions, and even more novel practices such as online participatory budgeting. Some of these are institutionalized, such as the right to petition the city council or to be consulted on urban planning issues. Others have become permanent features of the city's digital infrastructure such as *Bymelding*, which is equivalent to platforms such as *Fix my street* in other countries. The remainder are applied when the unit in question thinks that it befits its purposes. The model is influenced by agendas as varied as 'Open Government', 'Smart City' and 'Place-making'. They all, however, are administrative agendas that are largely disconnected from politics. Nearly all digital tools applied in Oslo are therefore primarily adopted to allow citizen involvement in different stages of the preparation or implementation of policies, but not in the deciding of political questions.

Melbourne: Digital Crowdsourcing

The crowdsourcing model is more ambitious in the digitization of citizen participation, the goal being that all participatory processes have a digital dimension. This is to ensure that citizens who are not able or willing to attend physically, can still contribute to the process. This approach

is represented in this study by Melbourne. All the 31 local councils that make up the city, and the Victorian state government, provide options for online community engagement through their websites or separate participation platforms. The main justification for applying these methods is to 'enlist the eyes and ears of citizens' to spot public problems (Fung et al., 2013, p. 42). The governments write that they use online engagement to obtain deeper insights into how they can improve services (Victoria State Government, 2016), and find better solutions to local and city-wide challenges (Melbourne City Council, 2017). This is often referred to as *crowdsourcing*. The perceived benefits of this are tied to better and more sustainable problem-solving, and more resilient and healthier local communities (Maribyrnong City Council, 2017). The tools the governments use have strikingly similar functions, including map-based feedback, collecting ideas and experiences, user voting, participatory budgeting, discussion forums, polls and surveys. The participation processes combine methods of physical and online participation, as this is believed to enable a more robust and inclusive participatory process. The crowdsourcing model only has weak ties to the political level of government. It is primarily applied by administrative units to the preparation or implementation of policies. The administration plays a strong role in running the municipalities of Melbourne, citizen input from digital platforms potentially giving a greater citizen say in Melbourne than in Oslo. The prime influence behind the model is 'New Public Governance' (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017), which sees participation as beneficial to the human qualities of urban development and sees citizens as co-creators of their city environment.

Madrid: Online Direct Democracy

Madrid's model is closest to the online direct democracy envisioned by many techno-optimists in the early stages of the internet (Chadwick, 2006). It is, however, perhaps the rarest in the world of digital participation in urban governance (Steinbach et al., 2019, p. 61). The goal of the direct democracy model is, unlike the bricolage and crowdsourcing models, 'digital first' in public engagement. The city government of Madrid established the *Decide Madrid* platform in 2015. The purpose of this platform was to encompass all major participatory processes at the city-wide level, including citizen proposals, participatory budgeting, voting on policies proposed by the government, citizen-initiated political

discussions, and more open consultations on plans and proposed legislations. The platform was to create a democratic city in which 'all citizens can intervene in the definition, administration and development of fundamental policies', beyond just voting in elections (Ahora Madrid, 2015, p. 7). The relationship between citizens and politicians should, however, be turned upside down. Elected officials 'should serve the citizens' and bureaucrats should learn to 'work together with the people' instead of within their offices (ibid.). The government therefore saw digital technologies as being indispensable in including the population. Participating citizens are directly connected, in this model, to the political process and can both propose and decide policies. Influences in Madrid are from the social movements that first developed many of these tools, primarily the Spanish *Indignados* movement that arose in 2011 in reaction to the austerity measures following the global financial crisis. The *Indignados* were recognized as innovators of 'civic tech', activists in these movements becoming central actors in the government, in platform development.[3]

Comparing the Models

Inclusiveness

What does a comparison of inclusiveness in these models show? We unfortunately do not have reliable data from Oslo or Melbourne on the number or type of participants. We have indicators, however, from Madrid that allow us to give good answers to this question. The 'digital first' of Madrid's direct democracy model seems, in terms of absolute mobilization numbers, to have paid off. The platform in early 2019 had more than 450,000 users, and was visited over 11 million times (ParticipaLab, 2019, p. 23). This is reaffirmed by the data that as many as 20 per cent of the *Madrileños* in 2019 had recently participated in a consultation held by the municipality. This figure rose from 6.4 per cent in 2012, three years before the introduction of the direct democracy model, which indicates a quite stunning level of mobilization. We show this to be a strength of this model in Table 8.1, on the inclusiveness dimension. The table summarizes

[3] It is worth noting that the conservative-liberal government that took over in 2019 continued to use the platform, but that it lost its radical, direct democracy character. This means that Madrid no longer can be said to belong to a direct democracy model, but something closer to the crowdsourcing one.

Table 8.1 Strengths and weaknesses of e-participation models relative to democratic dimensions of citizen participation

E-participation models		*Dimensions of citizen participation*		
		Inclusiveness	*Deliberation*	*Popular control*
E-bricolage (Oslo)	Strengths	Targets disadvantaged groups using digital tools	Avoids problems associated with online deliberation	Citizens are consulted on both minor and major issues, their views sometimes being taken into consideration
	Weaknesses	Only able to include disadvantaged groups in isolated cases	Only facilitates deliberations with select groups of citizens	Consultations on major issues often require expertise and significant resources. Developers, bureaucrats and politicians can discard input from citizens at will
Digital crowdsourcing (Melbourne)	Strengths	Targets different groups using different methods of participation	Uses innovative and inclusive methods for crowdsourcing and deliberation, also creates ties between these two processes	Citizens are consulted on both minor and major issues, the results being openly available to the public. Their views are sometimes taken into consideration

E-participation models		*Dimensions of citizen participation*		
		Inclusiveness	*Deliberation*	*Popular control*
	Weaknesses	Vulnerable to the privileging of online users and reproducing pre-existing inequalities in political participation	Citizens have a very low chance of being selected for deliberative spaces. Crowdsourcing is normally predefined by government	Consultations and crowdsourcing processes are predefined by administrators. Bureaucrats and politicians can discard input from citizens at will
Online direct democracy (Madrid)	Strengths	Mobilizes a large number of previously disengaged citizens	Creates transparent space for discussions and proposals controlled by the users themselves	Citizens are given decision-making authority by the municipality. Consultations are connected directly to the city government
	Weaknesses	Vulnerable to inequalities in political participation	Suffers from technical and practical problems that limit the ability to achieve online deliberation	Citizens essentially are invited to only decide small-scale projects

the strengths and weaknesses of all three models relative to the democratic dimension of citizen participation.[4] The age, gender and place of residence of participants in 2019 were representative of the general population. Participants, however, had higher incomes and education levels than the average citizen. Citizens with immigrant backgrounds were underrepresented. Does this mean, as the most pessimistic theories predict, that the online direct democracy model amplifies inequalities in political participation? No. The model seems to just copy the inequalities that existed prior to its implementation. The profile of the participants remained the same, despite *Decide Madrid* surely animating more citizens and bringing new groups of citizens to participate between elections. The model is therefore *vulnerable* to pre-existing inequalities in political participation.

Do the *bricolage* and the *crowdsourcing* models fare better in this respect?[5] One of the main advantages of these models is that they are not married to the idea of digital participation being the main channel for reaching the general population. Planners in Oslo often use digital tools to target what they call 'weak voices' such as children, youth, the elderly or people with migrant backgrounds. The ad hoc nature of Oslo's model furthermore gives the flexibility to target, which is its main strength on this dimension. A particularly interesting example is a district that used paid 'ambassadors' to encourage hard-to-reach citizens with migrant backgrounds to participate on its online platform. This mobilized twice as many participants as analogue engagement methods (Melbøe, 2021). Our survey, however, indicates that there still is a tendency in Oslo for those that engage in digital channels to be from the same privileged layers as those who mainly engage in analogue channels. The weakness of the

[4] In 2017 the consultation rate was 22.6 per cent and in 2019 it was 19.4 per cent. A weakness of this survey is that it does not ask whether people have been consulted digitally or through analogue channels. But since most consultations were done digitally in the period from 2015 to 2019, we assume that the answers mostly reflect digital consultations. The exception here is the survey results from 2017 that asked about a period where the city held a large citizen vote on a number of city-wide and local issues, where as many as 214,076 persons participated. They did so, however, mostly by analogue means (either postal voting or ballot boxes). The 2019 survey, therefore, probably gives a better picture of digital participation, which is why we compare types of participation from this year with 2012.

[5] Since we lack representative or platform data from Oslo and Melbourne, we must rely on qualitative data such as internal self-evaluations, interviews with key officials, secondary quantitative data and our own survey with activists from the central districts to assess this question. We also do so for the rest of this chapter.

'weak voices' targeting strategy is that it does not seem to work for the city as a whole, but only in isolated cases.

The crowdsourcing model in Melbourne is based on a similar belief that engaging different types of citizens requires different methods of participation. This means that it shares similar strengths and weaknesses. Officials at both the state and local level are aware that 'digital will only ever get to a certain group'[6] and that a comprehensive community engagement strategy that combines the digital with face-to-face processes is required to 'cover the variety of cultures and cohorts'.[7] Melbourne's digital and analogue participants have, however, higher levels of education and a more non-migrant background than the average population, as in the other two study cities. This is despite extensive efforts to use a combination of digital and analogue methods of engagement to reach broad segments of the population. The model is therefore vulnerable, as pointed out in Chapter 3 to privileging online users and to reproducing existing inequalities.

Deliberation

How do the different models perform on the deliberative dimension of citizen participation? Oslo's bricolage and Melbourne's crowdsourcing models both avoid using digital channels for deliberative tasks. They instead assign these tasks to face-to-face forums that involve small groups of citizens. A lack of faith in the use of e-participation tools for deliberation stems, in Oslo, from negative experiences of dialog on social media and in large public meetings. Both tend to be dominated by white middle-aged and middle-class males, and to be highly biased and polarized discussions. The similar domination of e-participation processes is therefore a fear. The city's planners therefore use small face-to-face workshops or more creative methods to facilitate deliberation among 'weak voices', such as in the co-designing and co-construction of public spaces. The strength of this approach is that it avoids some of the problems of

[6] Interview with WP1MEBP3, Corporate Manager for 'Engage Victoria', Victoria State Government, Melbourne, 03.04.2019.

[7] Interview with WP1MEBP5, Manager of Public Affairs and Community Relations, City of Maribyrnong, Melbourne, 05.04.2019.

online deliberations. The weakness is that the spaces in which deliberation occurs are fragmented and inaccessible to the general public, but accessible and coherent to a few selected participants.

Public administrators in Melbourne are highly influenced by Australia's strong standing in the field of deliberative democracy. They are also firm believers in using mini-publics as opposed to online deliberation. This is emphasized in the crowdsourcing aspect of their model, crowds normally being seen as a *source* of experiences and opinions, but not as the deliberating entities (Howe, 2006). Digital and analogue crowdsourcing is therefore often used to provide input to citizen deliberations that make up the mini-public. Digital tools were, for example, used in the City of Melbourne to receive proposals for a citizens assembly called 'Future Melbourne', and which were deliberated on when formulating a 10-year local government plan (Katsonis, 2019). Similar assemblies of randomly selected citizens have also been introduced by other councils. The strength of this approach is that any citizen has the chance of being picked for the citizen assembly. This, when combined with open crowdsourcing processes, furthermore allows all citizens to provide input to these deliberations. The weakness is that such citizens assemblies are used so rarely that very few inhabitants have a chance of being involved in them. Different forms of crowdsourcing are therefore still the dominant method of engagement. These, however, are mostly in the form of a predefined survey, the government therefore sets the agenda and citizen input. The room for citizen collective will formation in these spaces is therefore severely restricted.

Madrid's direct democracy model took the opposite route and promoted online deliberations on its platform as an alternative to discussions in social or traditional media. This is reflected in the first two features on the platform being debates and proposals through which citizens could discuss among themselves and launch, defend and gather support for their own policy initiatives. The level of activity was impressive. Users had, by early 2019, left more than 25,000 proposals that received more than three million votes of support, and 5630 debate threads that generated around 193,000 comments (ParticipaLab, 2019, p. 23). The platform did not, however, deliver as well as the government hoped. In a critical self-evaluation, *Medialab Prado* concluded that most platform users were only involved in 'thin participation', simple interactions such as voting and clicking and not extensive deliberations. Most users came to the platform only to read, vote or support a proposal.

Those who posted content usually did so only once. The majority of debates and proposals were created by the thousands of superusers, who were the most frequent visitors to the platform and generated most of the content (ibid., p. 40). Another challenge was information overload. This resulted in likeminded citizens not finding out about each other's proposals, so disabling them from gathering enough support for proposals that were very similar. The government therefore decided to establish a randomly selected citizen panel, the *Observatorio de la Ciudad*, to deliberate over the most popular online initiatives and to see whether they could be passed on to the city council. The reliance on insufficient technical solutions to achieve online deliberations highlights the weakness of this model. The model's strength is, however, that it establishes a transparent space in which citizens can access relevant discussions and bottom-up initiatives not predefined and controlled by the government.

Popular Control

There are notable differences between the opportunities for citizen participation in the urban decision-making process provided by the different models. Oslo's and Melbourne's models primarily use digital channels to inform and consult citizens. The direct democracy model, however, centres on involving citizens directly in decision-making. In Oslo, input from both digital and analogue consultations may or may not be taken into consideration by the elected politicians, who have the final say in deciding the city's policies. The description provided on the city's main participation portal for planning issues, *Si din mening* ('Give your opinion'), is telling. It emphasizes that opinions voiced through the portal are sent to those who propose plans (private entrepreneurs or public entities) or the planning authorities, and that it is their privilege to 'decide whether they will take the opinions into account or not' (Plan- og bygningsetaten, 2020).

The crowdsourcing model, of which the City of Melbourne is a good example, is similar. The rhetoric on the city's engagement platform, written by the municipality, states that citizens can 'join the conversation to *influence* the plans' and that resident opinions and ideas 'help *shape* Council's decisions'. However, it furthermore explains that comments, ideas and suggestions are collected and used to '*inform* Council decision making processes' (City of Melbourne, 2020, our emphasizes), officials said that it is up to the administrators to decide whether and in what

way the input from online engagement is used. It is therefore ultimately the city council that makes the decisions on most projects put up for consultation. This was put well by a former chief community engagement manager, who said 'if you are looking at a [citizen participation] spectrum it sorts of [fits] very well into the consult area'.[8] This is also true for e-participation at the state level and the other councils we studied.

The weakness of both the Oslo and Melbourne models is therefore that developers, bureaucrats and politicians can discard the input received at will. A strength they have in common, on the other hand, is that citizens are often consulted on quite significant developments and issues (of much greater significance than the 'park benches' they are allowed to decide directly over). For example, citizens in Melbourne could, using state-level e-participation tools, vote and decide directly on minor issues such as the content of a gift package given to new-born babies or relatively small community funds. They are, however, also consulted on much bigger issues such as redevelopments of social housing estates, hospital plans or large infrastructure projects. Citizens in Oslo have also been invited to take part in participatory budgeting to decide very small community funds. The municipality is, however, obliged to consult citizens on all plans proposed by both government and private developers, which explains why our survey still shows a positive relation in both Oslo and Melbourne between the use of digital platforms and the influence community activists perceive they have. One notable difference between Oslo and Melbourne is, however, that the open feedback solution chosen by Oslo (of using the website *Si din mening* instead of sending an e-mail) requires citizen expertise in understanding the cases they are to provide feedback on, and skills in formulating meaningful feedback to the planning authorities. Melbourne uses much more accessible tools such as polls and surveys, which makes it *potentially possible* for ordinary citizens without such resources to exert a degree of influence. We again, however, emphasize that this influence is within the predefined parameters set by the government.

The direct democracy model represented by Madrid marks a deviation from the broader pattern of e-participation being limited to information and consultation. The strength of the model was that participating citizens in Madrid were directly connected to the political process. For

[8] Online interview with WP1MEBI3, former community engagement manager City of Melbourne, 09.02.2020.

example, between 2015 and 2019 more than 346 million euros of investment was reserved by the city council for allocation by citizens through the digital platform. Two citizen initiatives gathered enough support, through the platform, to initiate a binding referendum, and the city government initiated binding votes on other issues, including refurbishment of parks and squares and traffic ordnances. The connection to the political process was upheld by the government, which did not have the legal authority to hold binding votes or referendums, but voluntarily committed to implementing the results of the processes. This e-decision-making seems to be endorsed by public opinion. In 2012, before the introduction of the model, 26 per cent of the general population and 47 per cent of those that had been consulted believed that the municipality facilitated citizen participation in its decision-making processes. These proportions had, however, increased in 2019 to 57 and 81 per cent, respectively. A weakness of the model is, despite this, the government only allows citizens to decide on minor projects, compared to the size of the budget and the major developments taking place in the city. The investment projects were small, and the decisions made by platform users related to renovation of parks and squares, and the public transport ticket system. This is admittedly more due to the city's limited authority over urban development processes and public services. It does, however, illustrate that it is perhaps easier to give citizens decision-making authority in minor projects than for large budgets or strategically important urban planning.

Concluding Discussion

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. The first is that it is not just democracy at large, but also specific democratic practices at specific places that is digitalized. A second conclusion is that the impact of digitalization depends on the way in which e-participation technologies are enacted. Each of these enactments has their strengths and weaknesses, as the differences between Oslo's, Melbourne's and Madrid's models show. The most notable differences in this study are between the direct democracy model and the other two. Madrid's e-participation approach was, for example, able to mobilize a much larger number of citizens into the political process than the other two cities. This was not just due to the technology used, but factors such as the general level of civil society mobilization and the way in which citizens were allowed to affect

policy outcomes. It is, however, unlikely that this level of participation could have been achieved without a digital platform.

The sad overall fact is, however, that despite this exception none of the models have been able to counteract the reality that citizens have different levels of ability and willingness to participate through 'invited spaces', whether digital or not (Gaxie, 2014, p. 23). Madrid's high participation numbers seem, in fact, to verify the paradox that digital participation (even in the best case scenario) can mobilize more citizens, but simultaneously reproduces existing political inequalities. The importance of digital channels in reaching new groups should not, however, be underestimated, even if the most frequent users of these digital channels are the 'usual suspects'. E-participation tools can also give vulnerable groups a channel for voicing their concerns, but only where their voices are not drowned out by others, and where the city government listens to every voice rather than those who shout loudest. A combination of the broad participation found in Madrid, with the specially designed tools and processes found in Oslo or Melbourne, is probably the best solution for promoting inclusiveness.

Madrid's attempt to create a digital deliberative space on its platform also deserves attention. This space opened up the process to relatively autonomous deliberations on topics that potentially could affect policy-making directly. The failure of this initiative unfortunately the claim that not even the most promising digital platforms have so far been able to design solutions that allow for mass online deliberation. E-participation can, even so, be valuable in collective will formation through crowdsourcing. This can allow more experiences and views to be considered in public deliberations than otherwise would be the case. Melbourne's and Madrid's attempts to design processes in which crowdsourcing takes place first online, followed by a phase of deliberation by randomly selected citizens, represent innovative and promising solutions. This has also been recently attempted in the constitutional process of Iceland and in the citizen panel on climate change in France (Landemore, 2020). Realizing technical, political and social solutions that can allow greater numbers of citizens to take active part in this will formation process, without it being dominated by the 'usual suspects' still, however, seems to be a challenge. Finally, Madrid contributed more to the popular control dimension than the other two models. This was more due to the way in which it was connected to the political institutions, than to its digital dimension. The scope of many of the issues that users of *Decide Madrid* were allowed to

decide was limited. This, however, shows how e-participation tools can be used to involve citizens in collective decision-making, even in a modern metropolis.

It should be noted that participation through digital technologies had a limited impact on power relations in all three cities. We believe the explanation of this is twofold. The first is that e-participation takes place within political, administrative and economic structures that are not easily changed by the introduction of digital technologies, the specialized and fragmented bureaucratic structure of modern city government being acknowledged by civil servants (in all three cases) to be a strong barrier to implementing the outcomes of the participatory processes (see Chapter 4 of this book). The multilevel structure also sets limits on what issues the cities invite citizens to influence. The responsibilities of local councils in Melbourne, and the municipality in Madrid, are very limited, all major urban development issues for example being decided by state or regional levels of government. This is one reason why citizens, in at least these cities, are predominantly invited to give their opinions or vote on minor or trivial issues such as parks and park benches. Another reason is that urban democratic governance takes place in settings dominated by private capital and developers. All three digital models exist within largely neoliberal regimes of urban governance, governments in this being expected to act as entrepreneurs, make the city business-friendly and provide the backdrop for large-scale investments. Planning has therefore largely been transferred to outside market-actors, the civil servants of the three cities believing that developers or business organizations are the most powerful stakeholders (Chapter 4).

The findings presented in this chapter further our knowledge on whether and in what way digital technologies affect the quality of democratic governance. Digital technologies can enable cities to reach out to more people and strengthen the citizens' role in politics. Our study, however, uncovered limitations of digital participation, confirming previous findings that these technologies often reinforce existing inequalities, and that high-quality deliberation is difficult to achieve in digital spaces. The impact of digital participatory processes is, furthermore, ultimately dependent on the willingness of politicians and civil servants to share power, and on the scope of authority they can share. Finally, we wish to emphasize that these models were not arbitrarily chosen by city bureaucrats or politicians. They are, instead, the outcome of path-dependent processes, or processes contingent upon specific events. For example, the

economic crisis in Spain created a rebellious and internet-savvy movement that later took office in Madrid. We, nevertheless, believe that our assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of these models can be useful to practitioners in other cities, as they set out to design systems of citizen participation and consider which e-participation tools and practices to implement.

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