

## Chapter XXXII

# The Role of Public Participation GIS in Local Service Delivery

**Jenni Viitanen**

*The University of Manchester, UK*

**Richard Kingston**

*The University of Manchester, UK*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter will discuss the implications of the network society paradigm for e-government and the role of ICTs in the regeneration of urban neighbourhoods. The authors argue that the overriding catalyst for local e-government developments appears to have been the adoption of ICTs for competitive advantage and increased efficiency. The authors make the case for a more engaging approach using the example of online interactive mapping with a specific focus on how citizens can participate in the delivery and management of everyday services in their neighbourhood. Particular emphasis will be placed on how PPGIS can be used to facilitate the regeneration of inner city neighbourhoods through more integrated approaches to spatial data management. The chapter will demonstrate how improvements in local communities could be delivered through the integration of GIS with a range of public services.*

### INTRODUCTION

Apart from the momentum for e-enabling transactions and information provision, the digital age brings to the fore wider questions about how our cities function, what is the role of the local authority and that of the citizen in the governance of the city and its space. Increasingly, decision-makers in Europe accept that digital technologies are an

intrinsic part of the fabric of modern society and are thus assuming an active role in the 'digital development' of their cities.

This chapter is positioned within current debates centred around the wide-ranging debate on e-citizenship and e-governance in relation to the management of public sector service delivery and in discussions on the potential resurgence in citizen engagement and the creation of 'sustain-

able communities'. Central to this debate is the role of ICT in regeneration which is a relatively new concept in both policy and research terms. The UK government appears to have adopted the view that the deployment of information technology will deliver wider social, economic and even environmental benefits to the city and its communities:

*Technology is one of the most important tools for transformation. It can improve the life chances of socially excluded people by increasing opportunities to intervene and tackle emerging problems...* (DCLG 2006, p. 139)

Academics however are divided on the issue of whether these benefits will materialize, especially in deprived urban neighbourhoods (see for example Southern 2002, Graham 2002; van den Meer and van Winden 2002). The role of ICT is not contested only in terms regeneration outcomes; many commentators suggest that there is a "gap between vision and delivery" in e-government generally (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley, 2007, p. 68). Recent research shows that the so-called transformation has been slower and more difficult than anticipated and that citizen empowerment has not made the transition from rhetoric to reality (e.g. Eynon and Dutton, 2007; King and Cotterill, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the wider role of ICT in creating sustainable communities and the deployment of PPGIS in particular for local e-government. The authors will approach the topic from the perspective of the 'network society', considering its implications for the local government-to-citizen relationship.

Empirical evidence in this emergent field of research was generated in an EU-funded collaborative research project entitled IntelCities, conducted as part of the Intelligent Cities Project (2004-2006), aiming to help achieve the European knowledge society policy goal. The project focus was the use of ICT to increase public involvement

in the regeneration process. The authors' ongoing research on the PPGIS tool developed as part of the East Manchester study will be discussed later in this chapter. Other current research by the authors into local e-government draws upon secondary data analysis of a national take-up study of local e-services (CLG/esd-toolkit 2007) as well as an extensive review of a decade of e-government policy in the UK (1997-2007).

The ensuing section two begins with a review of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda to demonstrate the how and why public participation in local governance has gained momentum in the past 10 years. Section three focuses on local e-government in the UK and the forces which influence it: the policy framework, the modus operandi, digital divides and the demand/supply paradox. Section four discusses the role of the citizen-consumer and that of ICT in democratic renewal. A case will be made for the use of ICT at the local level for both increasing efficiency and democratic participation in the network society. A practical solution to the tensions described in sections 1-4 is introduced in section five, presenting empirical findings from the research on PPGIS in East Manchester. The conclusive section summarises the promise and problems associated with e-government with a view to creating sustainable communities, as well as identifying areas for future research.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **The Local Government Modernisation Agenda**

Public participation has become increasingly important in UK policy expressed through the Local Government Modernisation Agenda (LGMA) of the Labour Government since they came into power in 1997. In connection with this, academics have observed a shift from *government* to *governance* in the public sector. The shift is linked

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