Chapter 4
Improving Urban Planning Information, Transparency and Participation in Public Administrations

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the involvement of citizens in all public affairs that is also extended to urban planning. Spanish Public Administrations have made important changes and progress trying to get urban and spatial planning closer to the citizen. Firstly, a significant effort has been made to generate knowledge services providing citizen access to urban planning information. Secondly, administrations try to involve citizens in urban planning through participation programmes by using the new channels that information and communication technology offers. This paper analyses different instruments and web-based participation systems implemented in Spain in order to check the result of these developments concluding that there is still a long considerable way to go since information and communications technologies offers a lot of options and tools to improve these processes.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies provide access to information and knowledge from anywhere, at any time. Through them, Public Administrations make its relevant information related to issues of public interest available for citizens. ICT implementation in public administration has enabled not only greater access to information and transparency (Rodriguez, Alcaide & Lopez, 2010), but also an improvement in the provision of public services and a higher interaction and citizen's participation in public management (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2006).

Increased transparency should also enable the citizen to take an active part in the relationship with public administrations, in other words being involved in the decision-making process. From the perspective

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of democracy, the transparency and dissemination of information is critical for different social groups to participate in the decision-making process (Bellver & Kaufmann, 2005). In that way, Governance refers to new processes, methods, or ways of governing society (Jolly, 2002).

Spanish Public Administrations have made important changes and progress, trying to get urban and spatial planning closer to the citizen, using the new channels that information and communication technology offers. With the main objectives of enhancing transparency and improving participation they have increasingly incorporated in their regulation and started to develop different instruments to facilitate information, transparency and participatory processes. The question is: are there initiatives that use the Internet and ICT tools to urban planning decision-making?

The main objectives of the study are: i) examining the use of ICT tools in urban planning; ii) identifying the channels used to foster participation; iii) checking whether the participation process use the potential of ICT and enable citizens take part in decision-making. To do this the study has been divided in two different parts.

Part I of this paper explains the services developed at national and regional level to provide better urban information. It focuses on the System of Urban Information, a project created for the collection and processing of statistical data regarding urbanism and land. Part II refers to instruments and processes implemented to enhance participation. Outstanding initiatives at regional, municipal and local level have been selected with a focus on the use of web-based participation systems, in order to check that ICT are used to improve the access and dissemination of urban planning information but not for making decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a growing body of literature about citizen participation. Authors explore its outcomes (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004), new requirements and roles for Administrations (Lyn & Martin, 1991; King, Feltey & O'Neil, 1998), techniques to improve it (Crosby, Kelly & Schaefer, 1986; Thomas, 1995), particularities about the planning process (Day, 1997) and distinct styles of approach (Benwell, 1980). Papers focus on the need to reframe this issue (Booher & Innes, 2002; Booher & Innes, 2004) concluding that participation must be collaborative and effective methods should involve collaboration, dialogue and interaction among citizens and other stakeholders.

Web-based participation complements the traditional technique (Stern, Gudes & Svoray, 2009). Many authors explore the possibilities of ICT tools to promote participation in the planning process (Padgett, 1993; Conroy & Evans-Cowley, 2006; Hanzl, 2007), analysing the adequacy of visualization tools for the different phases of the process (Al-Kodmany, 1999), including GIS (Peng Z-R, 2001; Sieber, 2006), social media (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010), digital games (Gordon, Schirra & Hollander, 2011) and mobile applications (Ertiö, 2015) whose impact has been modest but is expected to increase.

On the other hand, throughout Europe, urban information and communication technology policies are becoming more significant (Van der Meer & Van Winder, 2003) and planners now need tools for visualization of urban activities and phenomena (Laurini, 2001). Authors also investigate the concept of urban visualization in order to provide an actionable understanding of urban issues to citizens (Vande Moere & Hill, 2012) and interaction models to define development areas and assure sustainable cities (Weber, 2003; Stevens, Dragicevic & Rothley, 2007)

In the particular case of Spain, the issues of urban information access, urban planning transparency and participation have been examined in depth (Arranz, 2011; Llorens, 2013; Bermejo, 2013) concluding