

Chapter 69

Citizen Involvement in Public Services Design: The SPAC3 Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In the last years new relational systems between citizens and Institutions have been arising. One of the main effects of such transformation is an increasing citizen engagement in designing public services. The motivations, modes, and effects concerning this practice are relevant research topics addressing political, social, and economic issues. In this paper the authors present the SPAC3 project, as it involved the citizens in the design process. The project aims to allow families of the Municipality of Bergamo (Italy) to access services and information dedicated to them in a more effective way. Here, the authors will focus on the analysis carried out in the project, by pointing out the methodology and the main achieved outcomes, and the features of the identified solution. In the end, the SPAC3 project has been a good opportunity to think about the complex relationship between citizens and Institutions in order to strengthen it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, due the more active role of citizens into the decision-making processes, the services offered by the Institution begin to be greatly influenced by the uses and the needs showed by people who are affected by them. This is the effect of an increasing openness and collaboration between citizens and Institutions. This emergent process of change is also sustained by a growing amount of public services, information, and government tools delivered online, through the Internet. It also shows clear opportunities for the future improvement of e-participation services, including crowdsourcing (United Nations, 2014).

Design practice offers many tools to improve the quality of public services and ideate innovative solutions for citizen participation, but some considerations have to be made in order to undertake a proper process of improvement. A greater attention has to be paid to what citizens need, especially as the adoption of e-government services is influenced by several factors and variables (Klier, Pflieger, & Thiel, 2015). Moreover, the state of the online public services delivery has to be evaluated. In fact, Institutions all around the world have different levels of services digitalization and citizen's involvement. In Europe, only 40% of EU citizens now access online government services, but the number might increase thanks to new strategy for creating compelling digital platforms, especially those that emphasize convenience for customers (Kirchherr, Klier, & Stern, 2015).

In this article, the authors illustrate the case study of the SPAC3 project, a digital platform which allows families of the Municipality of Bergamo to access to interactive services and needed information in a more effective way. SPAC3 is a project funded by the Lombardy Region. It has a strong service design component following a Human-Centred Design approach, as this one combines the operative aspects of the design of systems with social challenges, paying specific attention to the future users of the system that will be designed. This approach has a co-evolutional nature based on three different perspectives woven together, i.e. user research, service and interaction design, and technological potential, for the definition of solutions at once visionary, innovative, and capable of stimulating user engagement and participation and co-building knowledge (Blomberg, & Darrah, 2015; Hassenzahl, 2010; Holtzblatt, & Beyer, 2014).

The citizens have been engaged throughout the whole SPAC3 e-service design process. Data and information about the specific target of end users were especially collected through an online survey aiming at gathering a comprehensive picture of how the citizens perceive, approach, access, and enjoy Institution services. The findings of this activity have been analysed to design an innovative public e-service and to analyse some theoretical and more general issues related to the citizen engagement processes in designing public solutions.

In detail, this paper is organized as follows: the second section illustrates the importance of the user-centred approach in the design of public solutions; the third section focuses on the theoretical and empirical purposes of the research, illustrating the SPAC3 project; the fourth focuses on the survey conducted on the user experience, by pointing out the followed methodology and the main achieved outcomes; the fifth section focuses on the concept generation process and on the main features of the SPAC3 web application; the sixth section focuses on a discussion concerning the complex relationship between citizens and Institutions in order to strengthen it through different stages (contact, engagement, negotiation, and agreement); finally in the seventh section conclusions and future works.

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