



CiViTAS
Cleaner and better transport in cities

POLICY NOTE



The use of social media
to involve citizens
in urban mobility projects
and city planning

CiViTAS



The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning



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Preface

Thank you for reading the third policy analysis of the CIVITAS WIKI Policy Analyses series.

The mission of the CIVITAS WIKI project is to provide information on clean urban transport and the CIVITAS Initiative to EU city planners, decision-makers and citizens. With its policy documents WIKI aims to inform people in cities about a number of topics that currently play an important role in urban mobility.

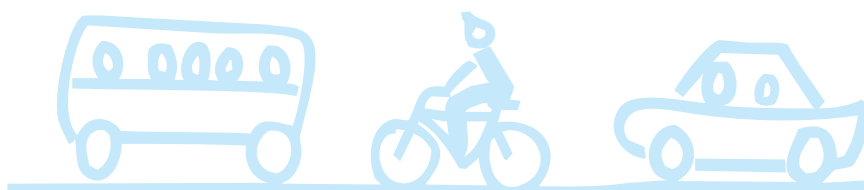
This policy analysis focuses on the use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and planning of cities and regions.

This publication was produced by the CIVITAS WIKI consortium.

The policy note was compiled by Inova+ team. A special acknowledgement goes to Walter Koehn from the WIKI Advisory Board and the dissemination manager of some CIVITAS cities for their collaboration and feedback.

A growing debate on this topic is going on at EU level and has been re-launched within the CIVITAS Public Involvement Thematic Group. Collaborative interaction was set up on the CIVITAS Interactive platform (www.civitas.eu/thematiccooperation) and in the CIVITAS Urban Mobility LinkedIn group to collect further resources, links to other projects, practical city experiences and opinions and comments on the topic.

Within the CIVITAS WIKI project, a total of eight policy analysis will be produced. Cities can suggest topics for research to the CIVITAS WIKI team. This can be done via the CIVITAS secretariat or using the CIVITAS thematic groups. If you have a topic you want to know more about, please let us know!





The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning

1. An introduction to social media

Using social networks to interact with the general public today is becoming more and more frequent even in the public sector. However, there are some concerns and limitations about the use of such technologies, which sometimes may threaten the usability and the reliability of the information gathered. At the same time, the potential of such tools is great, and there are several applications exploiting social cooperation through the web.

When considering the quality of urban mobility decisions, most CIVITAS cities involve a wide range of stakeholders in the measure development process. Through such consultations, local communities are empowered and build a sense of ownership related to the results. At the same time, the level of interaction between decision makers and the target of their decisions is higher, which results in better completion of the measure, granting stakeholders a better understanding of the planned mobility measures and reducing potential negative acceptance associated with them. With this in mind, the use of social media has become essential to minimise the cost and maximise the impact of stakeholder involvement in urban mobility planning, but also to increase direct communication with citizens (i.e. informing about traffic condition and real-time public transport services). To this extent, the current policy note would like to explore in-depth how cities can make the best use of information providing and offering them some guidelines on developing and exploiting a social media strategy.

1.1 Social media: different types, scope of each major social media channel, characteristics and figures.

Improving the participatory aspects of urban mobility plans, including definition and implementation can benefit from the support originated from the use of social media by Public Authorities in planning, dialogue and policy implementation.

According to Wikipedia¹, social media represents computer-mediated tools that allow social interaction among people and to create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Andreas Kaplan and Michael

Haenlein define social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content². Social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals.

1.2 Different types of social media

Social media technologies take on many different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro-blogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking.

On top of actual social media, additional services have been created to facilitate the use of social media. Social network aggregation is the process of collecting content from multiple social network services, such as Twitter or Facebook into one unified presentation. This is often performed by a social network aggregator which easily pulls together information into a single location or helps a user consolidate multiple social networking profiles into only one. Social network aggregation services are able to organise or simplify a user's social networking experience by consolidating messages, tracking friends, combining bookmarks, searching across multiple social networking sites, reading RSS feeds for multiple social networks, and allowing users to see when their name is mentioned on various sites, or letting them access their profiles from a single interface, providing live-streams, etc.

Even if boundaries between the different types of social media have become increasingly blurred, six different types can be listed:

- **Social Networks** – allowing the user to connect with other people with similar interests and background (For example Facebook and LinkedIn).

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

² Kaplan Andreas M., Haenlein Michael (2010). "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media". Business Horizons 53 (1). p. 61.



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- **Bookmarking Sites** – allowing the user to save, organise and manage links to various websites and resources around the internet (For example Delicious and Stumble Upon).
- **Social News** – allowing their users to post various items or links to outside articles and then start a contest to vote on the item itself. The items getting more votes are displayed most prominently so the decision is up to the community (For example Digg and Reedit).
- **Media Sharing** – allowing the user to upload and share different media such as pictures and video (For example YouTube and Flickr).
- **Micro-blogging** – focusing on short updates pushed out to anyone signed in to receive the updates (For example Twitter).
- **Blog Comments and Forums** – Online forums allow members to hold conversations by posting messages. Blog comments are similar except they are part of the blog and discussions are usually focused on the topic of the blog post.

Useful and original content will trigger a viral effect: users will re-share content posted to their social network. Many social media sites provide specific functionality to help users re-share content – for example, Twitter’s re-tweet function, or Tumblr’s re-blog function or Facebook share function. Public administrations, as well as non-profit organisations and activists, may have a particular interest in developing a proper content strategy.

The success of a strategy must be monitored and analysed: the use of social media monitoring tools allows strategists to search, track, and analyse conversation on the web about their brand or about topics of interest. This can be useful in PR management and campaign tracking, allowing the stakeholders using social media to measure return on investment, competitor-auditing, and general public engagement. Tools range from free, basic applications to subscription-based, more in-depth tools.

1.3 The honeycomb framework and major social media sites relevant for urban mobility

The honeycomb framework³ defines how social media services focus on some or all of seven functional building blocks. These building blocks help explain the engagement needs of the social media audience. For instance, LinkedIn users are thought to care mostly about identity, reputation, and relationships, whereas YouTube’s primary features are sharing, conversations, groups, and reputation. Many companies build their own platforms attempting to link the seven functional building blocks around their brands. These are private communities that engage people around a narrower theme, as in around a particular brand, vocation or hobby, rather than social media platforms such as Google+, Facebook, and Twitter.

According to Jan H. Kietzmann⁴, the honeycomb framework of social media is based on the following functional building blocks:

- **Identity:** represents the extent to which users reveal their identities in a social media setting. This can include disclosing information such as name, age, gender, profession, location, and also information that portrays users in certain ways.
- **Conversations:** represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting. Many social media sites are designed primarily to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups. These conversations happen for all sorts of reasons. People tweet, blog, etc. to meet new like-minded people, find true love, build their self-esteem, or be on the cutting edge of new ideas or trending topics. Yet others see social media as a way of making their message heard and positively impacting humanitarian causes, environmental problems, economic issues, or political debates.

3 “Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media”, Jan H. Kietzmann , Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, Bruno S. Silvestre, Business Horizons 54: p. 241–251.

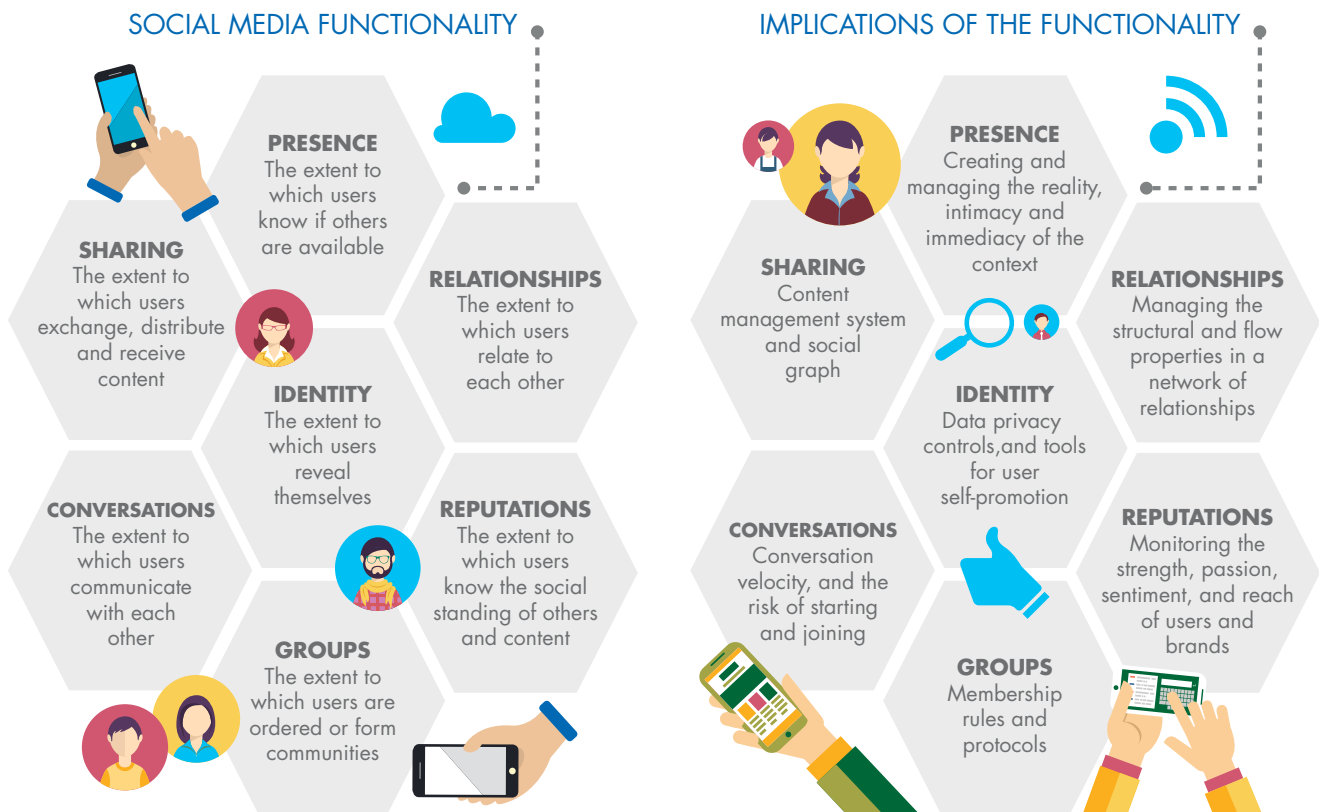
4 Idem



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- **Sharing:** represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content. The term 'social' often implies that exchanges between people are crucial. In many cases, however, sociality is about the objects that mediate these ties between people; the reasons why they meet online and associate with each other.
- **Presence:** represents the extent to which users can know if other users are accessible. It includes knowing where others are, in the virtual world and/or in the real world, and whether they are available.
- **Relationships:** represents the extent to which users can be related to other users. By 'relate,' we mean that two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet up, or simply just list each other as a friend or fan.
- **Reputation:** represents the extent to which users can identify the standing of others in a social media setting. Reputation can have different meanings on social media platforms. In most cases, reputation is a matter of trust, but since information technologies are not yet good at determining such highly qualitative criteria, social media sites rely on 'mechanical Turks': tools that automatically aggregate user-generated information to determine trustworthiness.
- **Groups:** represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub-communities. The more 'social' a network becomes, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts.

Figure 1: The honeycomb framework



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Figure 2: Major social networks facts and features infographic⁵



Figure 2 shows examples, fact and figure of use of social media

- **Pinterest** – Sharing pictures and photos of good practices and realized projects from all over the world (e.g. effective road signs, green areas etc.)
- **Twitter** – Live tweeting about last minute warnings; real-time Q&A sessions with citizens

- **Facebook** – Pages dedicated to particular projects and plans to ask the users for their opinions and comments
- **Instagram** – Live sharing of pictures/videos of places where events occur
- **Google+** – Creation of circles on urban thematic (e.g. sustainable infrastructures builders)
- **LinkedIn** – Connecting professionals and creating discussions on urban mobility issues

⁵ <https://leveragenewagemedia.com/blog/social-media-infographic/>



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1.4 Social media and urban mobility planning

The previous introductory sections have provided an overview of social media. This section will introduce the link between social media and the primary process of city practitioners: urban mobility planning and implementation. This will provide context for the following sections that elaborate on further insights, background and guidance for social media strategies and instruments.

Within context of EC policy development such as the Action Plan on Urban Mobility⁶ and the Urban Mobility Package⁷ the concept of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP) has been introduced and elaborated upon. This has resulted in many practical and useful insights for urban practitioners. It is expected that this concept, which stands for an integrated and a participatory way of working, will be mainstreamed into common practices across Europe in the coming years.

Characteristic for SUMP is its strong emphasis on the participatory approach, especially targeting the involvement of citizens and stakeholders. As described in the SUMP Guidelines (p. 8-9)⁸ "A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan focuses on people and meeting their basic mobility needs. It follows a transparent and participatory approach, which brings citizens and other stakeholders on board from the outset and throughout the plan development and implementation process. Participatory planning is a prerequisite for citizens and stakeholders to take ownership of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan and the policies it promotes.

It makes public acceptance and support more likely and thus minimises risks for decision-makers and facilitates the plan implementation." In a contribution to the CIVITAS organized webinar on "Public Involvement 2.0"⁹ it has been highlighted that public involvement contributes to the generation of better ideas (due to detailed local knowledge and

fresh perspectives), provision of political support (especially important for tough decisions) and creation of commitment.

The SUMP cycle is illustrated in figure 3. The process consists of 11 steps categorized into four main quadrants. For each quadrant a perspective on the usage of social media is presented.

- **Preparing well.** In this stage the process of mobility planning is being prepared and designed. Several practicalities are being identified and agreed upon. Important decisions are being made with regard to citizens and stakeholder involvement. Having insights in possibilities and limitations of social media contribute to the decision making. Involvement of large numbers of citizens and stakeholders is costly and time consuming. Social media could for example provide a solution. As such, decisions at this stage could be taken that lead to broad involvement meeting time and budget constraints.
- **Rational and transparent goal setting.** In this stage effective packages of measures are being identified based on a common vision and respective targets. Involvement of stakeholders and the public is foreseen in the development of the vision. Social media could be enrolled to reach out to the general public and invite them to express their ideas and contributions to the vision development process. During this process draft and/or final version of the vision could be presented to the public using the same channels. Though not explicitly mentioned in the SUMP cycle, social media could also be used in gaining input from public and stakeholders for prioritisation of goals and/or measures.
- **Elaborating the plan.** In this stage the SUMP is being adopted. Therefore, important elements are the plan for monitoring and evaluation as well as the creation of ownership for the plan. Again, social media could play a role here. For instance, with regard to monitoring and evaluation, social media could be used for reaching out to larger numbers collecting feedback and monitoring indicators about citizens' satisfaction. Furthermore, the public can be invited to respond and provide feedback on draft versions of the plan. As such the use of social media contributes to ownership of the plan.

6 European Commission, 2009 (COM(2009) 490 final)

7 Together towards competitive and resource-efficient urban mobility, 2013 (COM(2013) 913 final)

8 Guidelines Developing and implementing a Sustainable urban mobility plan. European Union 2013.

9 Webinar organized on 27 march 2015. Contribution by A. Nash. Slides available at http://www.civitas.eu/sites/default/files/crowdsourcedplanningnash27mar2014-140327034035-phpapp01_0.pdf

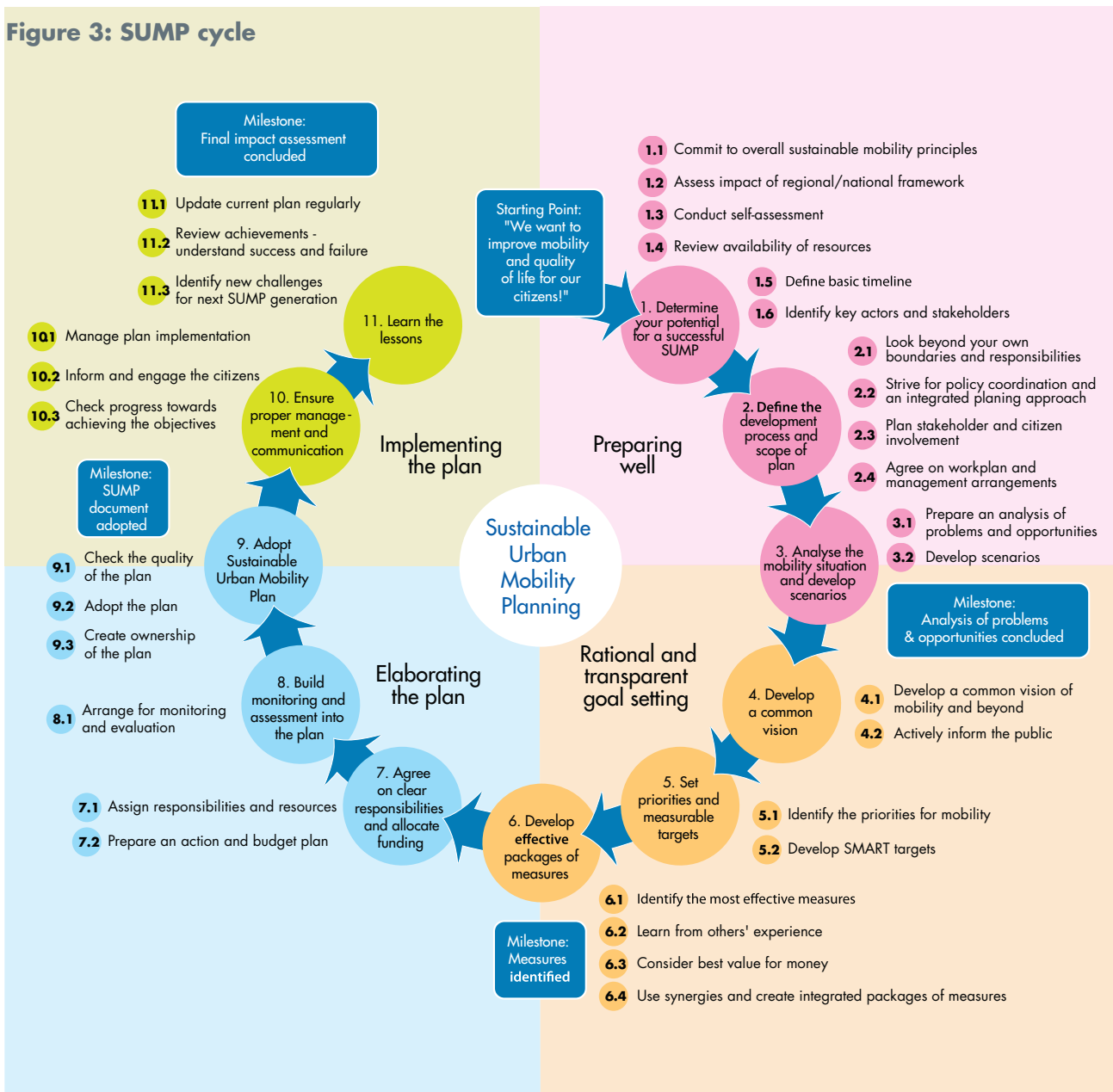


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- Implementing the plan.** In the final stage of the process the plan is implemented and monitored. Communication is foreseen to inform and engage citizens. The final step in the process is learning the lessons. For specific sets of measures communication should be foreseen. Social media can be one of the channels used here.

Furthermore, social media could be used to monitor traffic and the traffic situation. Given increasing penetration rates of smart devices, mobile internet and the use of social media there are increasing possibilities for the utilization of data mining techniques for monitoring situation in a city both in regular situation and during events attracting larger numbers of people.

Figure 3: SUMP cycle





2. The use of social media by local authorities: snapshot of EU reality

With public-sector budgets under increased pressure and scrutiny more than ever, having the ability to fine-tune services and to deliver them where they are needed most is becoming increasingly important. Social media gives city authorities the opportunity to tap into public opinion in real time – albeit only to the portion of the public using social media – collecting ideas that are expressed spontaneously.

Reaching out

Crucially, it is not just a case of passively watching and listening to what citizens are saying. The social web also makes it possible to reach out in new ways to support the management of communication departments and others within the local government.

Opinion polls and surveys

For example, social networks enable local government to carry out surveys – and increase their visibility – at relatively low cost.

Increased communication activities

The use of social media also opens up potential for enhanced cross-departmental collaboration within councils. Local government is a major employer: for example, Merton London Borough Council in the UK employs upwards of 5,000 people, as does Brent Council, while Birmingham City Council is the largest local authority in Europe, employing 60,000 people – the same size as a multinational company.

Public participation and crowdsourcing ideas

Perhaps the most important aspect of social media, though, is its potential to open up public participation. Social media has a decisive role to play in motivating and empowering citizens, as well as in increasing engagement with the third sector, which includes charities, voluntary groups and not-for-profit organisations.

Unlocking the transformative power of social media means finding ways to connect, collaborate, communicate and innovate.

Social media generates huge amounts of data. The challenge lies in finding ways to make sense of it all and to glean insights

from the ongoing conversations. For local governments and city authorities, this means using tools and techniques that have already proven themselves in the commercial sector.

Social media analytics make it possible to measure public sentiment with real-time data mined from Twitter, blogs and other social networks. Text analytics use natural language processing to spot key words and to gauge sentiment. And by combining new data from social networks with existing, structured data, including internal documents, call centre notes and emails, it is possible to obtain even better intelligence, leading to better decision-making.

Smart use of social media has the capacity to enhance collaboration between different agencies and between individual departments within local authorities to leverage synergistic benefits. Different tools can be used by some local authorities to promote collaboration and share information internally, with discussions, opinions and knowledge-sharing covering everything from bus lanes to planning and policy initiatives.

(See also ‘Some examples of social media use by the cities’ section below).

In many cases, the impetus for implementing social networking technology for internal use has come from the workforce itself. The message is clear: if local governments and city authorities do not embrace new ways of communicating, staff will do it for themselves¹⁰.

2.1 Social media use in the urban context

Social media represents a place where people meet, but the initiative to set up a new network can come from either sides: public authorities and citizens. A research¹¹, led by Flouch, H & Harris, on behalf of The London Council, has identified a typology of citizen-led local internet spaces:

¹⁰ http://www.ibm.com/smarterplanet/global/files/uk_uk_en_none_file1_488kb.pdf

¹¹ See Flouch, H & Harris, K (2010) London’s digital neighbourhoods study: typology of local websites, [<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/London%20Councils/LondDigNeighTypology%20%283%29.pdf>]



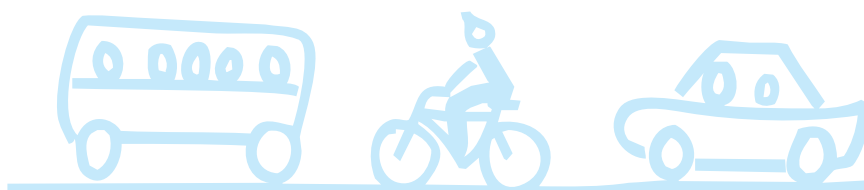
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- Civil society networks: designed to encourage discussion and interaction between people with both a civic and social purpose
- Local discussion sites: similar to the above, but with more focus on making social connections and local knowledge sharing
- Place-blogs: blogs that report on local stories at a very local level
- Local blogazines: similar to place-blogs, but focus more on lighter neighbourhood profiling and human interest stories
- Public social spaces: Profiles set up on Facebook or Twitter for sharing information and often light-hearted conversation about an area
- Local action groups online: online spaces for 'real world' groups
- Local digital news (commercial): hyper local news sites designed to report on local issues
- Multiples & listings (commercial): sites primarily used to generate revenue through listing local businesses, services and events.

How do city authorities use social media?

Social media can play a decisive role in motivating, empowering and engaging citizens, by creating new communication channels and opportunities of sharing ideas and information. In addition, social media has proved its ability to unleash innovation on the ground. By combining data, from text to geographical information and video, it is now possible to create an all-encompassing synthetic view.

This approach could be adopted by local authorities as a way to visualise and better manage the city's communication activities in different areas, for example monitoring and managing traffic situations, major events, disturbances and even natural disasters.





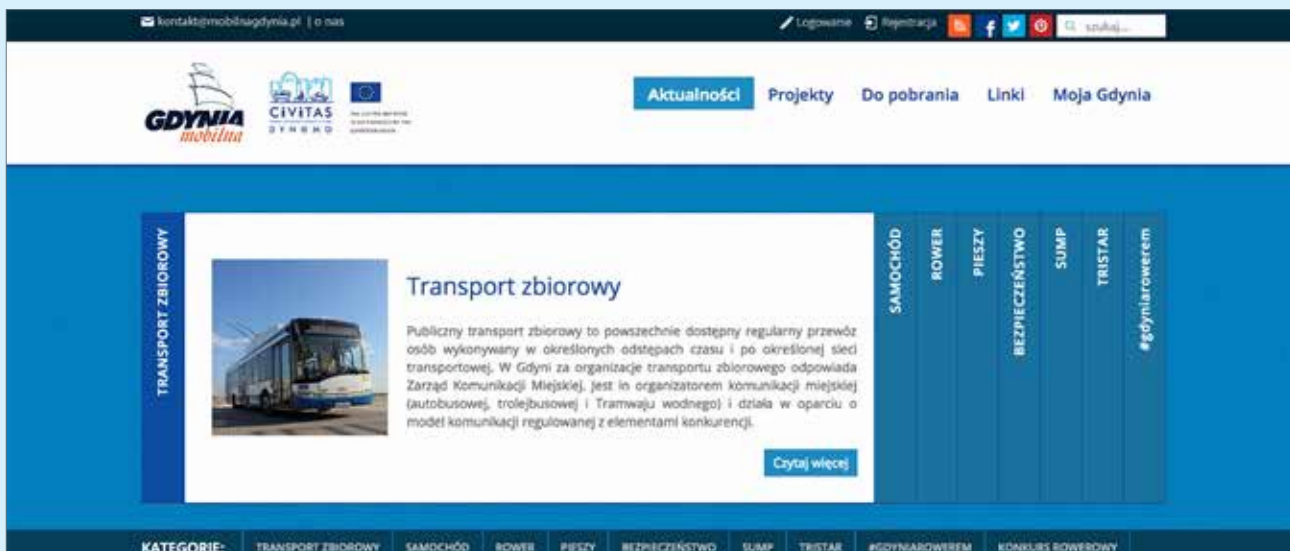
Some examples of social media use by the cities

Following, several examples and case studies, on how digital technology and social media can make a real difference to engagement with residents, and also offer tangible savings.

THE MUNICIPALITY OF GDYNIA IN POLAND is very active in the use of social media. The city has different Facebook accounts all linked to the City of Gdynia (with more than 83,000 likes), and is also using contents for the social media channels. For sustainable mobility, Gdynia has a specific Facebook Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Gdynia has a dedicated press team responsible for managing the account directly connected to the mobility

website, created within the DYN@MO project. For Gdynia the most important achievement of the use of social media involves disseminating events, giving visibility to the mobility campaign and collecting feedback and opinion on the mobility plan of the city.

<https://www.facebook.com/MobilnaGdynia>
www.mobilnagdynia.pl

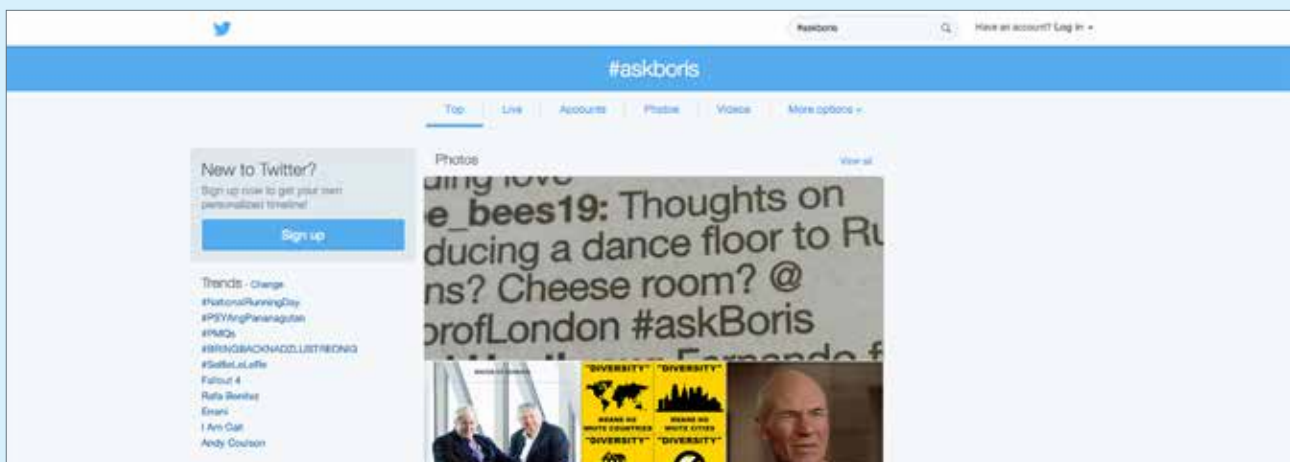




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THE MAYOR OF LONDON, UK, Boris Johnson uses a variety of social media channels, e.g. through a hashtag #askboris he answers questions from residents once a month. In February 2013 these ranged from

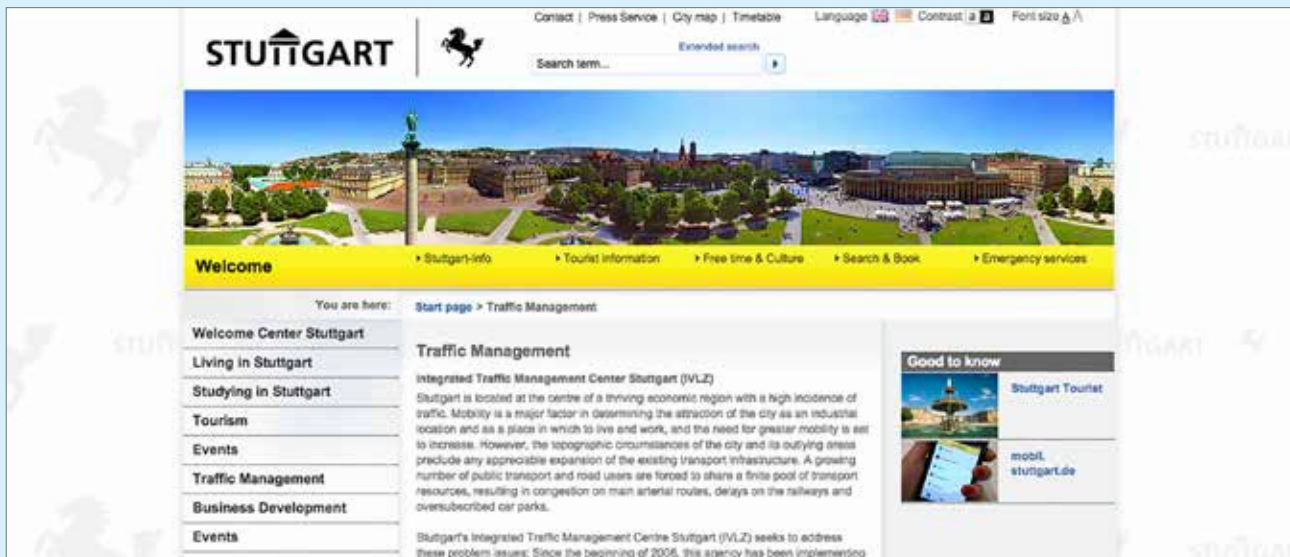
'How to employ young unemployed Londoners?', 'What is your biggest achievement in 2012, to Do you like cheese toasties?' [Answer: Who doesn't?].¹² <https://twitter.com/hashtag/askboris>



¹² http://www.solace.org.uk/about/solace_foundation/quiet_revolution_report_final.pdf

THE CITY OF STUTTGART, GERMANY, is using social media to inform citizens about strategic projects and activities in the field of traffic and urban mobility. This is mainly being done through communications about its updated Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, the promotion of the Jobticket (public

transport ticket), and specific improvements in the mobility for pedestrians and cyclists. Since 2013 citizens have also been able to submit concrete proposals and suggestion on all issues related to the municipality related to mobility and traffic. <http://www.stuttgart.de/en/item/show/279417/1>





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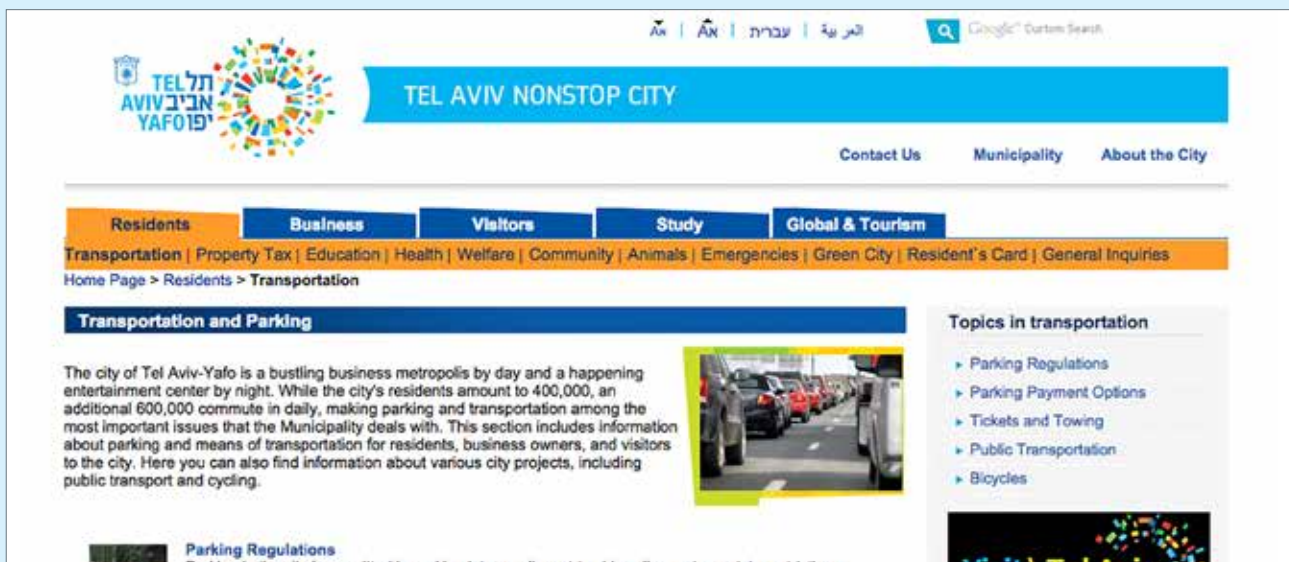
The Facebook page of **THE MUNICIPALITY OF RIMINI, ITALY**, is a growing trend that gives its operators satisfaction, because in addition to having many fans, it responds to many requests and continues to make social networking a public utility, according to Mauro Ferri, webmaster of the web editorial staff of the City of Rimini.

The service is available since November 2009, cultivating this virtual marketplace and its relations with citizens. Today its operators are proud to have built a legitimate channel which is as widely recognised as it is useful.
<https://www.facebook.com/comunedirimini>



THE CITY OF TEL-AVIV YAFO, ISRAEL, uses a Facebook pages in Hebrew to inform, share information, and involve residents in the decision-making process – but also for awareness raising campaigns, conducting surveys/opinion

polls and informing citizens about planned events, traffic conditions, accidents or street works, planned events, etc.
<http://www.tel-aviv.gov.il/eng/residents/transportation/Pages/transportationLobby.aspx?tm=1&sm=27>





The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning

IRISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF KERRY COUNTY

use Social media primarily for one-way notifications to citizens in relation to weather, roads and water services bulletins. There was limited two-way communication in

most cases and not many positive messages to promote the activities of the council.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kerry-County-Council/60472939953>



A Facebook page called Ny Karolinelund (New Karolinelund), which is part of a citizen participation-process in **THE CITY OF AALBORG, DENMARK** was launched to involve citizens in developing a new public city park.

The page provided citizens the opportunity to post their ideas for the development of the new park.

<https://www.facebook.com/nykarolinelund>



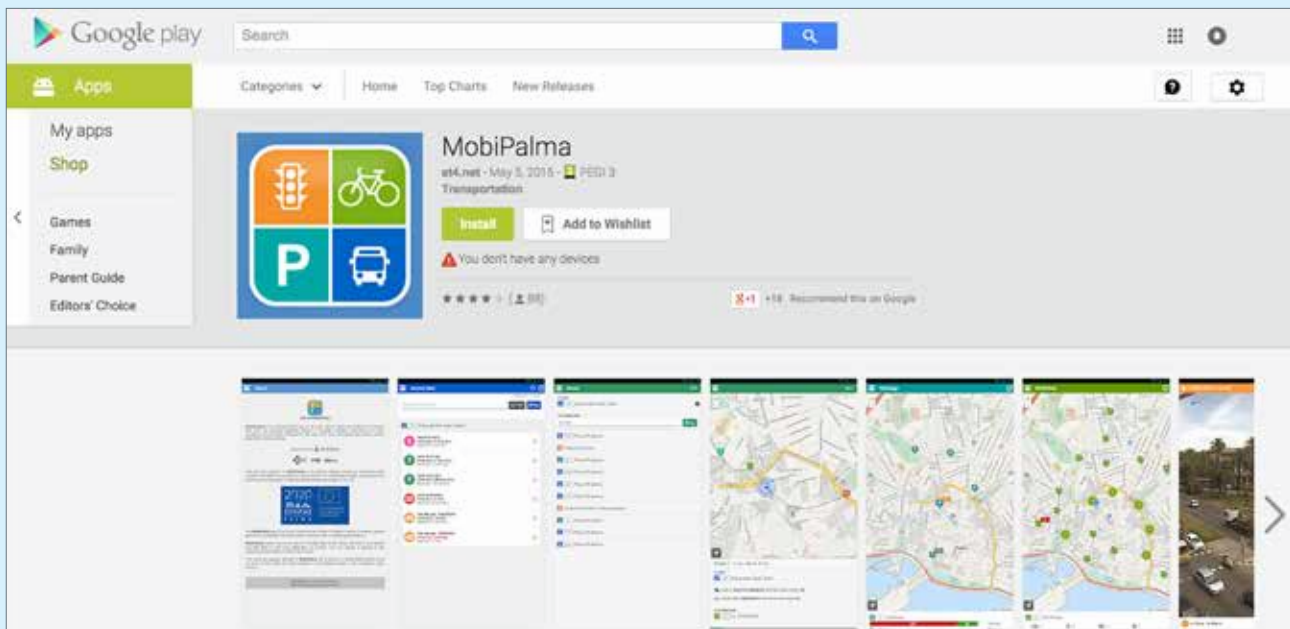


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THE CITY OF PALMA, SPAIN, uses Facebook and Twitter mainly for the public bus company EMT. Recently a new platform for mobility purpose was launched in the form of a mobile App and in web versions. The platform mainly provides information about traffic condition (with the use of cameras), public bike system, availability of parking spaces,

and real-time information about public transport system. The platform has also links to the Palma social media channels for better involving citizen in the urban mobility projects of the city.

<http://mobipalma.mobi/Android>
https://twitter.com/emt_palma





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In **FRANCE, THE CITY OF TOULOUSE's** public transport operator Tisséo has been using Twitter and Facebook since 2011. Tisséo's social media use is directly linked to travel information on its network and to the public transport offer. Since their launch, its Facebook and Twitter

pages have been set up as an information channel strictly dedicated to travel information and traffic conditions, ensuring consistency and continuity in providing relevant information.

<https://twitter.com/infotisseo>



ATAC, THE MOBILITY AGENCY IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF ROME, ITALY, created a Twitter account to inform citizens about urban mobility in the city.

@infoatac's tweets mainly offer information about how the whole service is running across the city. Sometimes they cover urban route changes due to major events or give real-time information about rush hours alerting people on the main problems occurred. They receive numerous answers from their followers, making an immediate check of

critical situations possible. @infoatac is an example of open government good practice. ATAC gives citizens a friendly system to get real time information about traffic and mobility in their city but also the opportunity to be part of the project by using the same tool to point out a problem that can then be solved quickly. This information exchange is undoubtedly useful for both sides.

<https://twitter.com/infoatac>





The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning

THE CITY OF EDMONTON IN ALBERTA, CANADA, found more innovative ways to use its available data and technology, including social media. The local authority determined that by integrating, analysing and transmitting relevant data, decision-making across the city could be improved. Edmonton also collaborated with IBM to find more innovative ways to use social media as part of a package of measures to enhance the quality of transport in the city. Traffic and road safety initiatives in particular were quick to benefit from the provision of timely transport information via more channels to more people.

The strategy provided a channel for disseminating real-time travel information as well as acting as a critical feedback mechanism, with citizens able to report on road closures and accidents. The Edmonton initiative promotes smoother, safer journeys and reinforces civic engagement by encouraging citizens to become the eyes and ears of the city.

<https://twitter.com/CityofEdmonton>

<https://www.facebook.com/cityofedmonton>





The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning

IN THE UK, two local authorities – **KIRKLEES COUNCIL AND ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL** – used Twitter to provide live updates on the state of the roads during heavy snowfall, indicating which roads were being

treated and thereby taking pressure off the system while keeping the roads safe.

<https://twitter.com/kirkleescouncil>

https://twitter.com/essex_cc



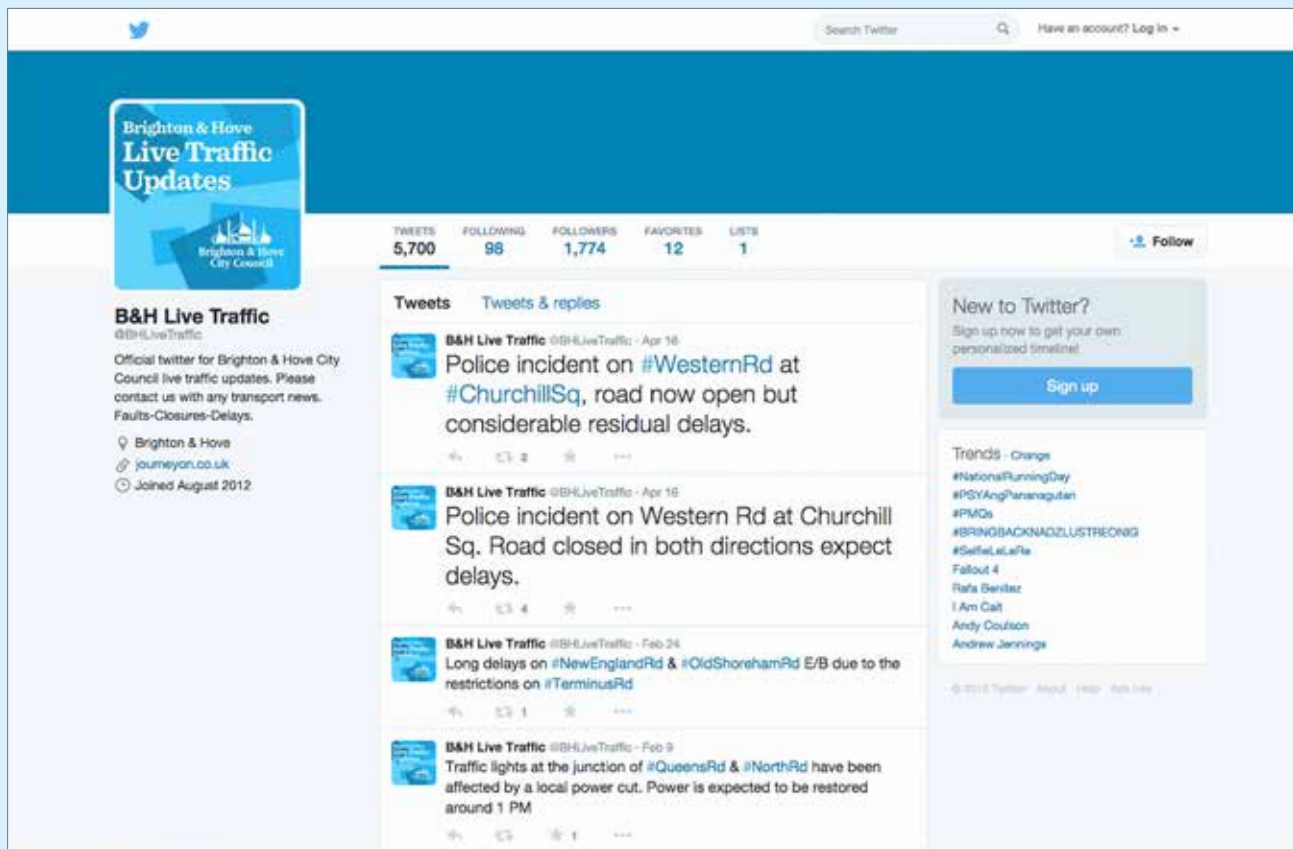
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THE CITY OF BRIGHTON & HOVE IN THE UK

uses social media across many of its services, not just for mobility. In terms of transport and mobility, Brighton & Hove uses Twitter to let individuals and radio stations know about unusual traffic events happening in real time (@BHLiveTraffic). It also encourages citizens to inform authorities what is happening so that the municipality can retweet to a wider

audience. In addition, Brighton & Hove uses Twitter (@BHTransport) to connect and inform citizens about transport issues, letting people know about new initiatives and responding to questions across the full range of transport project and plans.

<https://twitter.com/bhlivetrffic>



As illustrated above, the use of social media by local authorities can take place in different ways and with different objectives: using social media to understand citizens' opinions, responding to residents' requests or comments, informing citizens about traffic conditions, collecting citizens' proposals and offering suggestions related to public issues, etc. But the implications for councils could be much broader than this, affecting different services, departments and other public agencies.



The use of social media to involve citizens in urban mobility projects and city planning

3. How to manage the presence of a city/region on social media

How can local authorities participate?

Local authorities are advised to actively participate in online conversations. In most cases this does not mean spending money on new websites or platforms to create new online communities; it means creating or participating in existing communities on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter.

Such participation will, however, require staff time, with someone taking overall responsibility for the organisation's social media involvement. If the local council chooses to develop its own community, it can account for the development time, and dedicate at least one staff member to manage, attract, engage the members of community and nurture participation.

Local councils will need to demonstrate that they are able to add value to online conversations. Users will make these judgments based on online behaviour of councils; do they respond constructively and provide timely feedback? Are they actually listening or just reacting? Questions such as these will lead to judgements – made very publicly.

The following paragraphs illustrate in detail how to improve the use of social media by local authorities, with examples on how they can be used in practice to improve participation and mutual satisfaction.

The relationship between local governments and social media has to be first and foremost transparent and secondly participative.

In this context, cities and regions should approach the use of social media with one or more key objectives such as:

- providing citizens with information about mobility solutions (new public lines, car sharing services, sustainable alternatives, etc...);
- solving problems by giving quick answers to any question (social customer care services);
- creating civic engagement on problematic mobility choices;
- improving public services with innovative mechanisms for service delivery (sharing real time information);
- generating inputs for improvements from the public.

Social media actions should in fact bring the public sector agenda and activities closer to citizens: news and information will be provided on the platform they prefer (be it Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc.). This way, citizens no longer need to go to the public entity website in order to get the same information.

However, social platforms are also virtual communities and their use should not be limited to publishing information. The platforms can represent opportunities for people to learn together and share their experiences, while local governments can use them in a three-step strategy to inform - listen - engage.

Social media can thus help local authorities engage proactively with residents and help them to find solutions to everyday mobility problems, giving them sufficient information so they can safely live in urban spaces and comfortably navigate through administrative procedures: more informed citizens are better able to help themselves





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and less likely to rely on council services. In addition, advice that is spread on social media can quickly reach a lot of people – many more than through traditional media channels or through traditional customer care relationships.

3.1 How to create a social media strategy plan

To develop a proper social media strategy it is essential to set a social media plan in order to determine goals and resources. An effective plan should start from the analysis of pre-existing accounts, both official and unofficial (unauthorised).

Without having previously set objectives and goals, it would be very difficult to measure success and establish ROI (return on investment).

Here is a 12-step list to create a grounded social media plan:

1. **“Listen” the conversations/comments about you:** have a first, exploratory search of conversations/comments relevant to your city/urban area on all the social platforms, in order to understand who is talking and what are the main topics or concerns.
2. **Check your web reputation:** people is talking about you even if you are not officially online. Is someone talking about you, your projects or services? Are there unauthorised or obsolete profiles using your name?
3. **Select your target:** are users already talking about you or about topics you are interested in? On which social platform?
4. **Profile your target:** Are they citizens, commuters, tourists? How can you segment them? Profile them with information about age and gender, geolocation, but also online habits, tastes, preferences and opinions.
5. **Analyse the scenario** and document best practices: what are other cities doing?
6. **Write down your social media goals.** They should be very focused, measurable and time-related in order to be analysed in a further step.

7. **Set your key performance indicators (KPI):** avoid vanity metrics like Retweets or Likes. Your success will be better measured by leads generated, sentiment of comments and posts or website traffic referred.
8. **Choose your channels** and assign a mission to every profile you decide to keep. How does this mission contribute to the overall communication goals?
9. **Find voice and tone:** it is very important, especially when there is a whole team working behind the same institutional brand, to maintain a unique and very recognisable style.
10. **Create an editorial plan:** choose the right contents, formats and timing of publishing.
11. **Interact with the audience.** Use social media in a peer-to-peer perspective, not only to broadcast contents. Social media is meant for a two-way communication. Citizens use Google or read online news to get information while they visit social media sites to interact with other people and share their own experience.
12. **Analyse (again)** to evaluate your strategy and to test different solutions: did you achieve the goals you have set in a given time? Was your strategy successful? What could you change to achieve more?

3.2 How to execute a social media strategy

Citizens must be the actors at the centre of the social media strategy, whose primary and most important aim is to help them get what they want (obtain information, report a situation, resolve a problem) at the first point of contact. The list below will reveal how to put a social media strategy in practice and how it can be successfully adapted by public administrations working in urban mobility:

- **Be exhaustive.** Complete all your profiles with a proper description, profile photo, cover image, and correct links.



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- **Choose the team** that will have access to the profiles carefully, share the passwords only with them and assign duties: who runs or controls each profile? Who writes contents? Who manages the community?
- **Be constant:** once you opened your profiles, do not neglect them. Respect your schedule for posting on a regular basis.
- **Organize an editorial calendar** to have a clear vision of what and when you are going to publish on the official blog, Facebook, Twitter or other social networks you decided to include in your plan. Creating a content calendar can help to organise and schedule postings and ensure that you will not forget to post content about special events in the city, temporary mobility variations, new public transport lines or the promotion of touristic activities.
- **Find ways to interact** with your audience; you should welcome new members, ask for feedback, respond to comments, follow up a posting with a question about the content, invite your followers/citizens into Q&A sessions, start live chats and keep members informed with up-to-date content. Engaging with your members will make them feel part of the community and will make them more inclined to give you feedback on various initiatives.
- **Use hashtags** to start conversations around the topics that are relevant to you. Some of the most used in this area of interest are #roadsafety #traffic #(yourcity)traffic #mobility, #mobility(yourcity) #Subway #Transportation #PublicTransport #Metro #cycling #biketouring, etc.
- **Try to be useful.** Do not just use social network as an advertising space. Give information and solve problems, but also offer everyday tips, weather forecasts, real-time traffic updates.

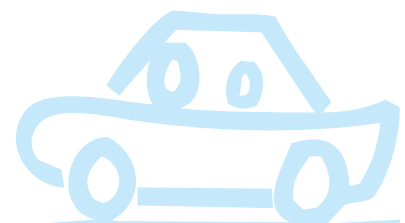
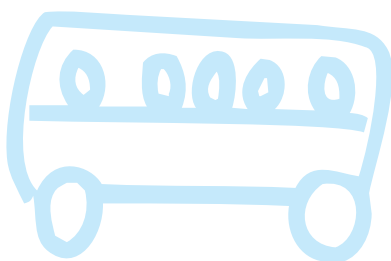
Figure 4: An example of a content calendar

CONTENT CALENDAR							
DAY/MONTH/ WEEK	TOPIC	CONTENT DETAILS/ RELATED PROJECT	TARGET AUDIENCE	BLOG POSTS	FACEBOOK POSTS	TWITTER POSTS	AUTHOR
MONDAY	Insert here the topic you want to focus on			Create a column for every platform you're using			Assign duties and deadlines
TUESDAY							
WEDNESDAY							
THURSDAY							
FRIDAY							
SATURDAY							
SUNDAY							



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- **Choose the right platform** to engage with your target. Do not automate the publication of the same content on every platform:
 - Use Facebook to consolidate the community and to involve citizens, asking them to propose ideas to develop new projects for public infrastructure and participate in political decision-making.
 - Use Twitter for a real-time two-way communication with residents. Choose the micro-blogging platform for improved customer service, offering real-time traffic and public transport information in order to address people on the road with questions or doubts.
 - Use visual platforms such as Instagram or Pinterest to collect images and stories from the territory.
 - Use Google Maps or other location-based platforms to geo-tag places and create personalised routes.
- **Answer promptly but think twice before posting.** Remember that even a local post has potential for global impact. Understand that anything you post, any answer or consideration, could be seen by other users outside your community.
- Public transport disruptions or unpopular measures will be occasions for complaints and political attacks. **Be honest and transparent.** Do not remove or delete community members' posts unless they are abusive, but kindly reply, explaining the situation or your point of view.
- **Verify Information.** It is important to be wary of the accuracy of the information shared; local governments should encourage community-based information programmes such as crowd sourced traffic alerts. However, at the same time they must pay attention to the reliability of messages posted.
- **Plan a crisis exit strategy.** To manage unexpected situations, act promptly in a crisis and prevent embarrassing mistakes that could spread worldwide. Prepare a social media response plan and distribute an approved response strategy to all departments.
- **In the event of a local crisis,** accident, unexpected event, local ceremonies, organised protests or natural catastrophes, turn off scheduled posts and keep a close eye on the situation posting and answering in real time.
- **Involve influencers.** Local bloggers and opinion-leaders such as journalists, mobility activists, associations, possibly local politicians reporting on topics relevant to urban mobility, are key to managing the reputation of local authorities and as 'local ambassadors' can endorse local community initiatives, participating actively and writing positive or constructive comments. In addition, it is advisable to include their blogs into the local council's media monitoring activities in order to stay tuned with citizen's concerns and trending local topics.





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4. The importance of tracking conversations and monitoring social media engagement outcome: how to practice social listening to collect citizens' opinions and behaviours (as input for policy measures)

The vast amount of data shared on social media by public and private actors is a unique opportunity to improve the planning and delivery of transport services and facilities to citizens.

Social media monitoring can help councils to better understand their residents. By setting up keyword searches relevant to local authority priorities and through active listening, authorities can better gauge what issues citizens have, what they are talking about and to respond accordingly.

Information gathered can be used to better understand the needs of the citizens and to interact with them more efficiently. Social media aggregated data can provide details on citizens' thoughts and feelings about places and experiences. This information can then be crosschecked with anonymous data on how and when people are moving around the city, collected through mobile phones, parking sensors, congestion charging zones and smart card ticketing.

The use of online monitoring tools combined with analytics skills can help local governments understand the detailed use characteristics of city facilities and services, and to create places that are tailored to the people who use them. Utilising this data in further planning, administrations can create a more humane and functional urban environment.

Proper real-time monitoring action can help administrations to understand citizens' needs in order to test their appreciation towards new solutions or to register complaints and issues. But social listening can also offer crucial support in critical situations. In case of accidents, delays, last minute road closures from reputable sources, people on the road can be faster than official channels in reporting emergency situations.

4.1 How to create a social media monitoring plan

Here is a path to a **social media monitoring plan** that should be continuously compared with information collected and decisions taken during the strategy planning phase. To properly start listening to relevant conversations there are a few preliminary steps to follow:

- To have access to a first flow of message and **start a "listening" session**, use some general keywords (name of the city/region, of the service, etc.). Do not forget to search names with @ or # or without them.
- **Segment the audience and define the main user/citizen groups you would like to follow** (e.g. tourists, cyclists, elderly, etc.)
- **Select relevant topics and refine your keyword list** to extend your listening reach beyond profile mentions. Use keywords to create specific listening sessions dedicated to topics like *car sharing services*, *pedestrian areas* or *cycling routes* to test their popularity or to monitor critical issues.
- **Define key social media metrics according to your strategy plan**, i.e., percentage increase of citizen's enquiries resolved through social media, number of users involved in conversations, amount of messages related to determined topics, sentiment of the messages.
- **Research channels** where the audience is active. Go beyond Facebook and Twitter and monitor the entire social web. The major social networks aren't the only places on the web that citizens are communicating through: Instagram, Google+, blogs and review sites are also sources worth considering.
- **Select analytics tools based on your strategy:** some of these tools will allow you to understand your reputation through statistics and data analysis. Others will display content of conversations, while a few more will support your social customer care activities or help monitor and manage social media crises.
- **Train the team** to acquire the right data and understand the framework to analyse urban mobility related conversations.
- **Draft reports** to help shape future transport choices.
- **Automate when possible**, but do not remove the human element. Figure out what can and cannot be automated, and allocate human resources where it makes sense.



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As showed by the last four points, an essential step is to **choose the right tool** to collect data. A good social media monitoring tool or service will allow administrations to understand how people are talking about them or their services, about a local happening, about problems and issues of the city / territory.

Social media monitoring tools can be classified in two main categories: tools that analyse the performance of a single account at a time, and tools that collect messages from different platforms or from the entire social web to trace whole conversations and trends. In the first category we can find **proprietary analytics tools** such as *Twitter Analytics*, *Pinterest Web Analytics* and *Facebook Insights*, directly linked or internal to the accounts, or **dedicated suites**, such as *Iconosquare* for Instagram or *Mention* and *Hootsuite*, maybe the most popular management and analytics online platforms. They all allow knowing if an account is performing well, how many users are interacting with the messages, which kind of audience has been reached, on which topics, in a given period of time.

Tools belonging to the second category, which, as already said, can be free or, most frequently, subscription-based, are focused on the analysis of data flow originated from different sources. In a very rapidly changing scenario, *Brandwatch*, *SproutSocial*, *Talkwalker*, *Topsy*, *Radian6*, are at the moment among the most popular ones. Although with differences and peculiar approaches, they all allow to track conversations, to understand trends and most important to profile users and analyse the sentiment of messages, expressing their evaluations on **data** with common **metrics**.

Here are the **most popular social media metrics** that are essential to monitor constantly:

- **Mentions:** are a first obvious metric to monitor, to constantly listen to who is directly addressing message to the user, to measure the visibility through the amount of messages received.
- **Reach:** is the amount of users potentially reached by every single message.
- **Recurring keywords:** to have a first overview of words and concepts most frequently related to names, places and services.

- **Trending hashtags:** to understand what topics mostly concern and engage the audience.
- **Topic correlations:** to know what topics and issues are at the center of conversations related to the account.
- **Most amplified messages:** the messages that engage most users that reach the wider audience and are possibly able to shift opinions and beliefs.
- **Most popular editorial contents:** social platform are mostly used to share blogs, magazines, newspapers content and information. A simple analysis of what people tend to share can be an important insight on most diffused opinions and facts.
- **Sentiment:** the analysis of the sentiment of messages and conversations is an essential metric to understand situations and keep opinions under control.
- **Most influential users:** who is leading the conversation? Which users are able to spread their opinion quickly and to engage other users on their contents?
- **Geolocation:** To understand where users are writing from or to know how many people are using social media in a specific place and what are saying.

4.2 How to use an urban storytelling strategy to create participation

According to the American economist and writer Daniel Pink, storytelling is the ability to place facts in context and to deliver them with emotional impact. Storytelling is a powerful tool because you can share experiences through stories, entertain your audience and generate interaction. When hearing or reading a story, listeners become immersed in the world of the story that is shared.

A proper storytelling strategy is the common thread that interconnects messages and contents coherently shared across all media channels. For example: real-time useful traffic information in one media (Twitter), stories from citizens using public transport elsewhere, and tourists' stories in



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another channel, in a collaborative process that creates constant dialogue between communities and authorities.

In this context, social networks do not serve purely as a broadcast channel. Information collected in the social listening phase can be used by administrations to increase awareness about how the city operates and reflect transparency through its communication. From another perspective, letting citizens (both residents and city employees) become a part of the story – actors and narrators at the same time – will create an audience that is more and more engaged and supportive of the city's efforts. Storytelling during events, for instance, makes people feel more connected with what is happening and personally involved, thus more likely to accept or help solving unforeseen difficulties.

For local governments and communities storytelling is a powerful tool to engage citizens and identify common values. Narrating what happens in the everyday life of the city, in this context, must be a collaborative process where authorities interact with all stakeholders to create a sense of community and to encourage them to be responsible, active citizens.

4.3 How cities and citizens can use social media to mutually inform and be informed on the traffic situation and on mobility issues.

When it comes to urban mobility issues, the main aim is to use social connections to improve citizens' experience and to create information flow in both directions.

Real-Time Information

On one hand, organisations can for example provide reliable real-time information on bus arrivals, expected deviations, available parking, public events, works in progress, and weather alerts.

On the other, messages from travellers could warn of emergencies such as accidents. Travellers must remember to geotag their messages or indicate their actual position for the messages to be useful, while the authorities should double-check the information before disseminating it and take the relevant actions. Authorities should also keep in mind that ranks are in fact a likely situation: people on a bus or waiting at the station could post false information about services.

Social Customer Care

Social media can in these cases substitute traditional call-centre services, allowing authorities to reach a broader range of people through proper social customer care activities more rapidly. Social customer care performed on Twitter or Facebook are the right activities to build citizen-centric environments, where the problems of single travellers are solved. But at the same time information can be proactively crowd-sourced from citizens to deliver consistent contact points across the entire experience, with the ultimate goal of building civic loyalty.

Social Media as a Think Tank

Social Media can be a part of the citizen participation process in many ways: in the city of Aalborg in Denmark, a Facebook page can be used to collect ideas and choose the destination of funds and resources. On Twitter, it is good practice to collect ideas and feedback by launching dedicated hashtags, crowdsource suggestions and build an online community. On both platforms (and on Google Plus) it is good practice to launch surveys or run real-time question-and-answer sessions with city representatives to gather citizens' opinions and suggestions.

Social Media for Political and Institutional Image-Building

Social Media can also be used by local governments to help build up a positive image-building effects. Constant use of social accounts by mayors and governors is useful to update citizens on official activities and explain the reasons behind decisions and strategies. Local government delegates can listen to citizens' complaints while organising actions and rapidly solving critical situations to benefit from the subsequent widespread positive press coverage.



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A good illustration of this was recently given by the mayor of London who saved the day of numerous London bus passengers complaining on Twitter about overheated public buses in the summer. The response of the mayor was swift and read: *'to those of you who tweeted about bus heaters being on. You guys are right. it is hot enough! Have spoken to TfL [Transport for London]. They have sorted out the problem'*.

Crowd-sourced Promotion

In conclusion, cities can make creative use of the social media trend by using geolocation and geocaching, and organising crowdsourced touristic routes or digital treasure hunts to motivate locals and tourists to get to know their city.

Applying game mechanics to non-game situations, such as levelling up, competing with others, or gaining points, awards or badges, is not just silly play but a great way for any city to convey its own unique and competitive identity.

Gamification processes through tools such as geotagging or augmented reality can be of great interest to local governments who can use it to recount a particular story about their city. Citizens can use these tools to become more engaged by leaving clues and creating their own tours and sights. In this way offline actions can be complemented by online presence, taking advantage of social media in planning interactive and personal experiences.





5. Conclusion

The panorama of the use of social media exploited by local authorities is very complex and varies from one city or country to another: while some cities have been using social media in structured way for many years, other cities have just started. There are also cases where the use of social media is completely absent.¹³ Overall, many cities are making some use of the social media (mainly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), but only few are doing it with a proper and well-defined strategy. For this reason, the current policy note aims at providing a set of guidelines to the cities that would like to start building their own social media communication strategy, but could also be very useful for cities that already have a social media strategy in place and would like to improve it.

In general, much needs to be done to improve the understanding of the social media revolution in public administration and this policy note would like to contribute to this. At the same time, there is a growing interest among local authorities who use social media not only to rapidly increase their visibility to a wider audience using limited resources, but also to create an additional communication channel and a useful, direct information exchange with citizens.

The main challenges for cities already using social media include **how to reach people** who are not interested in sustainable mobility, thus reaching a wider audience and increasing as much as possible the level of interaction with end users.

The biggest revolution of our days is without any doubt the possibility to access to the internet via **mobile phones**. Most city dwellers live in an *always-on* condition, using their mobiles to have a continuous access to their networks.

The answer to this trend must be **promptness**. Local authorities and administrations should be ready to offer **real-time communication**, and to answer to requests in the fastest way, to let citizens feel they are listened and supported in their everyday-life actions. Cities can use new channels to distribute valuable content, information and news that could have a positive impact on the sustainability of mobility. At the same time they must be ready to offer **customer care** for their services, giving constant assistance and fast individual answers.

From this perspective, social media are not only a powerful system to keep citizens updated on mobility or safeness issues that affect their daily habits, but can be the perfect channel to plan leisure activities, that will **increase affection and good attitude**, both through infotainment online initiatives, such as online games and contests, and through touristic information programmes that could be shared and crowdsourced to offer a better experience of the territory: another kind of activity that could please both citizens and tourist and improve the positive image of a public administration.

Moreover, citizens, as social media users, are nowadays used to a two-way communication; they are used to express their point of view and, in most cases, to be listened by other users, by brands or by companies offering a service. In the same way they now want to **participate to the public debate** about issues affecting their lives and the life of their community.

In this way, creating opportunities for participation, collecting ideas and feedback within online communities or planning crowdsourced fundraising projects, not only during the election campaigns period, administrations can make citizens feel part of the decision-making process.

Social media are not only a question of visibility anymore. They have great potential in increasing a new two-sided communication based on **listening and engaging people** in a transparent and up-to-date way to ultimately build a loyal community that will be supportive to the overall efforts and plans of local governments.

¹³ http://www.solace.org.uk/about/solace_foundation/quiet_revolution_report_final.pdf

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