



# Democratic Urban Development in the Digital Age

## Briefing Note

### About the project

Democratic Urban Development in the Digital Age (DEMUDIG) is an international research project examining citizens' use of the Internet and social media to participate in urban development processes, and city governments' efforts to engage and respond to citizens through these channels.

Cities face complex challenges managing social, economic and environmental change, especially in settings characterised by resource constraints and decreasing citizen trust in government. These challenges are often acute in urban development processes, such as projects to improve specific city districts, or new infrastructure or construction projects. Urban development affects the everyday life of citizens. Development processes often involve conflicting interests, challenging city governments to balance representative and participatory arrangements with accountable decision-making and governance.

City governments and citizens increasingly use digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) to participate in urban development processes. However, research has yet to fully examine how these technologies influence participation, decision-making, and policy in the field of urban development and urban governance. In particular, we know little about how city governments interact with citizens through social media, how they demonstrate responsiveness in practice, and how they channel citizen contributions into policy-making.

DEMUDIG will investigate citizen participation in urban development in Oslo, Madrid and Melbourne, cities with different institutional characteristics and approaches to citizen engagement. Drawing on a range of academic disciplines and data sources, DEMUDIG will systematically focus on the relationship between citizen participation (through various channels, digital and non-digital), decision-making and urban policy outcomes.

The research will produce new knowledge and practical insights for city governments and citizens, as well as practitioners within the ICT/technical sphere.

## How will the research be undertaken?

The research will involve qualitative and quantitative analysis including:

- In-depth interviews with city officials, city planners, representatives of business, non-government and civic organisations, and citizen activists
- A large survey in the three cities designed to gather comparative data on the relationship between participation, knowledge and power, and decision-making.
- Analysis of the design of each city's ICT platform and how it influences citizen engagement, knowledge production, and decision-making processes.

## What is involved for participants?

We seek in-kind support of participating city government through the availability of officials for interview, access to relevant policy and strategy documents, and access to quantitative data regarding citizen engagement and participation. We may also seek access to contractors involved in the technical development of digital ICT platforms.

The project will conform to research ethics protocols operating in the European Union and Australia, ensuring participant privacy and data security.

## What are the benefits of participating

Research and policy-making in the area of citizen engagement in the digital domain are falling behind technological development and social practice. The project will produce new, policy relevant knowledge on engagement strategies and technology choices, patterns of citizen participation (whose voice is heard, through what channels?), and the relationship between citizen engagement, decision-making, and urban policy outcomes.

The international scope of the research will also produce new insights through its comparative analysis of how different civic, political and urban settings influence urban development.

## Contact



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## Project partners



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