

Digital Participation and GIS in Local Governance: Practical Models for Inclusive Citizen Engagement

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SUMMARY

Citizen participation plays an important role in democracy and local government, but many cities still struggle to involve people effectively. A lack of time, staff, and technical knowledge often limits how much citizens can take part in planning and decision-making. This paper looks at how digital participation platforms with GIS (Geographic Information Systems) can help cities and citizens work together in new ways. Using digital maps and location-based tools, citizens can better understand local projects, share their ideas, and see how their input shapes results.

Municipal participation often lies between high expectations, limited resources, and everyday work demands. While everyone agrees that participation is valuable, the question remains: who should organize it, how should it work, and how can it be managed with limited capacity? To answer these questions, the paper suggests three practical models for using digital participation tools:

Information and Transparency Model – Focuses on sharing clear information and open data through GIS maps and dashboards. It helps citizens follow decisions and builds trust, even when resources are limited.

Co-Creation Model – Encourages citizens, planners, and local groups to work together on ideas for projects. GIS tools make it easier to collect and discuss feedback based on specific locations.

Integrated Governance Model – Connects participation data and GIS tools directly to city planning systems. This model helps cities include citizen input as part of their daily work and decision-making.

These models show how digital participation can move from simple consultation to real

cooperation. GIS-based platforms make complex planning topics easier to understand and more inclusive for everyone. By using modular and flexible digital systems, municipalities can manage participation more efficiently, increase transparency, and reduce frustration among citizens. In the long term, this approach can strengthen local democracy, build trust, and encourage more people to take an active role in shaping their communities.