



CONNECTED MOOD

Interactive Cities

Digital, social media and
user-generated content
improving urban governance



EUROPEAN
PROGRAMME
FOR
SUSTAINABLE
URBAN
DEVELOPMENT



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#State of the art

"There is a lot of power in people to self-organise around a specific issue and if they'd like to use technology to mobilise themselves, they should have the capability and the choice to do that."

Juliana Rotich, founder of Ushahidi, 2011

Context

With today's European cities hosting most of the continent's population, and urban areas being the stage for many contemporary conflicts such as social inequality, environmental threats or economic crisis, collective action must be taken immediately. In the past years, there has been a lot of discussion about the potential role of smart technologies in addressing these problems. While an important part of the discourse on "**smart cities**" focuses on infrastructural investment, recent criticism of it underlines the importance of empowering smart citizens as part of developing smart cities. A smart city should improve the quality of life of its citizens and help them to react to urban challenges. The emergence of social media and various digital technologies are potential tools to empower both citizens and public administrations in creating new frameworks for multi-stakeholder collaboration and enhancing the information flow between different actors of European cities.

Social media today is regularly used by a vast majority of the population, but in most cases this happens outside of a dialogue with the public sphere. As public institutions face a multiplicity of challenges and they are forced to reduce public expenses and augment efficiency, their success increasingly depends on the extent to which they engage and mobilise their residents in meaningful cooperation. Inspired by the higher liveability and sustainability of community-led developments and in contrast with the traditional top-down mechanisms of planning cities and providing services, public administrations are progressively looking into learning from local communities about their specific needs, incorporating bottom-up intelligence: citizens' knowledge and insights are regarded as reliable data sources.

The digital shift has opened new opportunities for cities to create **dialogue** with their citizens, residents and users. However, many cities are hesitant to adapt their communication and participation mechanisms to this shift: they are often too slow and bureaucratic to engage with technologies that were already widely deployed in their communities. The impact of new digital tools extends well beyond the technological sphere: they transform the way cities are governed, urban projects are managed, services are delivered, and participation is orchestrated. Social media has the potential to bridge the gap between public administrations and citizens, municipal agencies and community groups, service providers and users. Adding an inclusive dimension to the smart city paradigm, new communication platforms may foster cooperation and innovation within public administrations and outside: municipal operations may gain more visibility and legibility with the help of online platforms, while citizen feedback and user-generated data may support decision-making with the help of social media.

The use of digital platforms also opens new perspectives for **data management**: on the one hand, the big data created through the citizens' use of social media can give a real time picture of their opinions and perceptions of urban matters, and thus can inform planning and

policy. On the other, transmitting city data through municipal platforms to users makes them able to use the data in applications, thus translating them and making them more accessible for the broader public.

Social media and digital communication also reshape the discussion on de-territorialisation: while many observers warned that global connectivity and online communication might kill places and help global hegemonies replace local economies, social media and digital platforms also create the infrastructure for advanced peer-to-peer communication that enables responsible consumption patterns and local distribution networks. In this sense, digital communication does not only help individuals join the global information system, but also assists the emergence of **locally rooted networks**, as we see in many local social media groups, neighbourhood blogs, local digital platforms and chat rooms.

Keywords: social media, public administrations, digital communication, big data

New trends in Digital Communication

The use of social media, apps and data is contributing to better city governance all around the world and to improving the lives of billions of people. The revolutionary change in the system of relations among people brought by the rising importance of communication technologies, have significant effects also on the way urban residents expect that cities communicate to them. Recently, increasing numbers of American and European cities have used digital communication tools to foster the interaction of residents in many different domains of urban life.

Cities with advanced ICT infrastructures and high internet penetration rates were among those which drove the debate with innovative practices and experiences in Europe and at global level. Amongst these were many small and medium towns and cities which developed original strategies to foster local development and better governance through social media. Some examples are the tourism promotion carried out by the Italian city of Turin with [Twitorino](#) or the [London EU Funds](#) account promoting the international activities of the British capital.

Urban communication was completely reshaped by the use of social media and apps, which are creating also the floor for the development of new professions and skills, as well as the integration of digital enterprises in the local economies, as in Helsinki with the [Helsinki Region Infoshare](#) and the [Forum Virium Helsinki](#).

The development of new tools for different uses and purposes of the urban life, from increasing the efficiency of local transport systems to the delivery of new customised services or packages of information, has contributed to improve the involvement of residents in their local communities. This is the case of [Social Streets](#) Facebook groups, that make the interaction between local governments and residents an essential element for more democratic and integrated local communities. The development of integrated communication strategies including the intensive use of social media and apps was not only a matter of technology but contributed to renew the sense of place and community in many areas of the world, considering how the user-generated information can be easily integrated in flows which see institutional accounts and other local sources of information in a unique flow followed by the users.

Social media and apps play a decisive role in the strengthening of creative clusters and in sharing information among different levels (institutions, communities, etc). The creation of e-government services and the increased interconnection between city leaders and communities are decisive elements in this framework. This was successfully experimented with the [Data Dictionary of Chicago](#) where a metadata repository for more than 500 datasets produced by the City was established and made accessible to developers and citizens.

The development of innovative and interactive technologies is linked also to new forms of local development, collaborative urban planning and the trend towards better use of public spaces by residents. This enabled the development of a new concept of e-Government that emerged in the late 90's with bidirectional flows of information, which allowed more than ever the citizens to take active part in the local political debate. The real time conversations and debates fostered by Twitter and Facebook contributed to integrate the traditional ways of dialogue and debate at local level, making social media a decisive tool for new, integrated forms of e-Government. The analysis of big data and social media flows is becoming a decisive element for the co-creation of participative local public policies. This extensive use of social media increased the role of the citizens as clients to be satisfied but also as stakeholders who do not just receive information but contribute to create them. The increased access to smart technologies, such as tablets and

smartphones, had effects not only on the generation of digital natives but also on who developed a wide range of services for different audiences in local societies.

Flows of information freely available and analysable on social media and accessible data are ending government monopoly on information. The use of these tools not only by experts but also by local inhabitants opens the floor to unimaginable forms of interaction at local level, for example with civic groups which can recognise themselves in communities. Developers' competitions, hackathons and other publicly visible moments are only the most spectacular elements of a movement of ideas and practices which do not see only digital experts as main actors but all the possible users of digital technologies. Visualising on a screen the decisions adopted by the City Council with geo tags on the different areas of the city, as done by the [Open Aijo](#) application developed by the city of Helsinki, or knowing through [Iperbole](#) what service the City of Bologna is sharing with citizens, are ordinary innovations which are changing the way residents perceive public services and, generally, the action of local authorities towards citizens.

The European Commission has recognised the potential of such social media usage within its flagship initiatives for Europe 2020 and has elaborated the [Digital Agenda](#). Social media are hereby seen as valuable tools available for citizens, businesses and administrations to support and reboot Europe's economy. An important role is also played by Open Data, seen as a valuable tool for fostering innovation and competitiveness. The ownership and capitalisation over the data availability are very sensitive issues, especially with Facebook or Google, as evident in the case of Vienna, which has not given full availability of the mobility data to Google Maps. For the same reason many citizen-led initiatives have developed [OpenStreetMap](#), a platform for open source cartography where citizens can freely upload and edit data under the Creative Commons License. With a very active and diverse debate over Data, today the range of possibilities is extremely wide, and public administration must be aware of the data management consequences of their communication strategies.

These changes happened very fast and often in an unexpected way for many local authorities, which often decided to replicate schemes and modules of action without first empowering its local officials. These had to adapt their role and their tasks to the new reality imposed by the use of apps and social media. It contributed also to reshape the role of local officials but the lack of coordination among different parts of the local authority became also more visible through these tools, which have more in general fostered the active participation of residents and the establishment of efficient systems to communicate complaints and find cooperative solutions to urban problems. Local communication ecosystems, which see users, media, NGOs, planning authorities and other urban stakeholders as decisive actors, are fed by flows of information. These need to be organised and customised according to agreed local uses.. The applications of social media might involve residents in promoting the city at internal and external level, using social media to foster resident and business participation in the use of public spaces and developing better internal communication and governance between local authority offices. These are just some examples of what cities around the world are doing through social media, with low investment in ICT infrastructure and high investment in local human capital.

The effectiveness of social media cannot be seen as an isolated issue, solely dependent on the potential of the communication tool itself, but rather on the way such instruments are embedded in organisations, creating information flows and shaping decision-making processes. Hence the governance model relating to the use of social media is an increasingly decisive element in city-wide communication strategies.

Governance of communication processes

Social media and digital platforms do not only serve municipalities to extend their communication outreach but also help them redefine their **governance** models. In many cities, social media has become a crucial factor in the provision of public services and the way public administrations and citizens interact around them. While many local administrations use social media for outward communication, an increasing proportion of them increasingly engage in two-way communication: collecting feedback from citizens and basing planning and policy decisions on these feedbacks might effectively create partnerships that go far beyond simply informing or consulting citizens. Such 'shift from government to governance' (Bellamy, 2010) has brought an increasing complexity within the relationship amongst stakeholders and the decision-making processes. With governance being characterised by the "interdependence between organisations; continuing interactions between network members; game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants" (Rhodes, 1997), the role of the flow of information amongst this increasingly complex network of stakeholders is of essential importance, especially for local administrations who are often the authority in closest contact with citizens. At the same time, municipalities need strategies on how to use citizen feedback. Crowdsourced data and citizen feedback might inform **biased** decisions, as some social groups are digitally more connected and thus prioritised in online communications. The challenge of public administrations here is to engage also digitally underrepresented social groups in online communication and decision-making. Interestingly, as experiences by many of the Interactive Cities' partners, the digital divide concerns administrations less than the issue of finding the right language: many municipal communication teams see their biggest challenge in reaching youth through social media and digital tools.

The way the administration will develop a dialogue with its citizens implies a new approach within the communication strategy of the administration. More traditional institutional communication may not be able to engage people, with whom a more collaborative approach will be necessary. In fact, it will be necessary to open up the communication of the administration to a more flexible approach, able to engage in sharing, accepting input and revising contributions.

If many public administrations have been reluctant to engage with the use of social media, this is partly due to the ambiguous outcomes online communications create. In the first place, social media offers many potential **benefits** for public administrations: increased participation and engagement of citizens and community groups, better access to citizen knowledge and capacities, and an improved transparency of the administration that can also boost efficiency in intra- and interdepartmental communication and management. Furthermore, social media allows public servants to conduct surveys at low cost and tap into public sentiments in real time. Accessing citizen networks also opens the possibility of crowdsourcing solutions for problems inside the administration and its operational and governance mechanisms, thus helping innovation in the public sphere. In the meanwhile, social media can also improve the quality of public services, by fine-tuning and delivering services where they are really needed, and can even help widen the scope of services provided by local authorities and cooperating private and nonprofit partners.

In the same time, social media also carries **risks** for public offices. Destructive behavior on online platforms can harm the support of public policies, even if they are well-thought and were created through a rigorous participation process. Social media can also distort public opinion about certain themes, through the overrepresentation of certain social and demographic groups who have better internet access and are more comfortable with online communication.

In fact, social media has contributed to a change within institutional communication, transforming this from a linear process into a new form that is based on ongoing input from stakeholders, seen as city experts. For Habermas (1981) ideal speech conditions are with the direct engagement of parties, so these can test if the arguments are accurate. Rationality provides criteria for democratic reasoning processes that are based on communicative practices, allowing for the construction of an 'inter-subjective consciousness' through debate. In order to achieve this common understanding, it is also important that decisions are not dominated by people outside the process and that everyone has the same access to information, the same right to speak and to be listened to. This process is what is defined as collaborative rationality by Innes and Boheer (2010), making negotiation theory the fundamental approach, and building upon Diversity, Interdependence and Authentic Dialogue (DIAD):

"Planning and policy are not about finding the best solution -- indeed there is no one best solution, though there may be many better ways of proceeding than the status quo. Collaboratively rational processes are about engaging with other members of a community to jointly learn and work out how to get better together in the face of conflict, complex changing conditions and multiple conflicting sources of information. Such processes are not only about finding new ways to move forward, but they are ultimately about guiding community and governance capacity to be resilient in the face of the inevitable new challenges." (Innes, 2010)

The fact that planning becomes a dialectic process, an expression of governance model that is "the management of the common affairs of political communities" (Healey, 2005), is an enabler towards a more inclusive and democratic decision making process. Arnstein's 'ladder metaphor' identified eight steps of participation level, in which the first two were weak, as they are manipulation and therapy; then come symbolic measures such as information, consultation and placation. The higher levels are stronger, as they are partnership, delegated power and citizens' control. These are the most controversial ones in terms of democratic involvement of citizens as they open a new role for civil servants that have often not received training for dealing with such new challenges.

Even though communication allows for the development of community reasoning, better understanding and builds the self-consciousness of the group, it still may not solve challenges in finding agreement and compromise between those with different perspectives. Although communication plays an essential role in allowing all actors to be aware of the stakes it does not balance out inequalities between them. This is why social media is a powerful instrument to tap into untouched user groups of our cities, enabling wide numbers of exchanges at hardly any cost.

At the same time, online communication platforms bring up the questions of both the quality of content and the reliability of crowdsourced information. Furthermore, communication through social media raises many privacy issues, due to a lack of established standards. Establishing a coherent social media presence also requires significant **effort** from public administrations: besides unblocking social media accounts on the office computers, it also necessitates dedicating staff time in order to promote a municipal initiative and generate increased participation in the initiative. One step further, establishing a fluid, two-way communication channel between citizens and municipal governments requires the hiring or nominating of dedicated social media professionals, but may result in the increase of general

public engagement, constantly available citizen input and a captive audience for new initiatives. This necessitates a continuous presence: leaving questions and comments unanswered might harm the credibility and reputation of the public office.

In **summary**, digital communication and social media can redefine and deepen the concept of citizenship and civic engagement, sparking cohesion, promoting shared values and creating a stronger sense of belonging. At the same time, social media operations can also threaten the efficiency and results of other communication and cooperation channels, if they are not coordinated or maintained, and supported by traditional media channels and part of a broader communications strategy.

Good practices

Local administrations can address a variety of issues through social media and online platforms. Ranging from emergency alerts and transit information to community building or economic development, digital tools can inform, engage and connect. Fostering residents' collaboration, promoting local commerce, tourism and an urban brand, or responding to crisis situations are just some of the possible opportunities to test the power of social media as factors of interaction between local authorities and residents. Making apps and social media a decisive part of municipal collaborative strategy is not only relevant to make its action more efficient but also to create new jobs and opportunities for the local community of innovators.

There are innumerable good digital practices related to the functioning of cities. While some of them come from public administrations, others are born within civil society or the private sector. However, they all share the ambition to contribute to the quality of public services, a better information flow and more inclusive decision-making processes through linking capacities between the public, private and civic spheres. The role of municipalities is not limited to developing its own communication platforms to support its outward messages: local administrations have to work together with all stakeholders to help them find their voice in a digitalising world.

Within the context of the Interactive Cities network, the cities involved have expressed the need to apply communication to a variety of themes, from business promotion to tourism or urban development. Experiences from around Europe applied to the various themes are therefore gathered here below to provide practical insights on what has been done in the last years.

Business promotion and economic development

The viability of local businesses depends largely on their ability to gain visibility and engage customers. Some municipalities and their partners recognized that matchmaking between various stakeholders can create mutual benefits: while traditional tradesmen can expand the scope of their businesses, new entrepreneurs can understand better the demand for their services.



In 2015, the Paris municipality's mixed company Semaest launched the [Costo](#) (Connected Stores) program, to support shopkeepers in developing a digital strategy. Recognising the

economic, social and cultural importance of local retail, and the transformation of consumption patterns, Costo aims at helping tradesmen expand their networks, establish an online presence and create cooperation with new services, like geo-localised recommendation and fidelity systems, or shared storage, online ordering and home delivery. As part of Costo, Semaest created a social network to bring together hundreds of shopkeepers with local startups to experiment together with digital solutions to make local retail more responsive, attractive and competitive, by reconciling it with the digital economy. To reach out to the Parisian digital ecosystem, Semaest, together with Paris & Co and the Chamber of Trades and Crafts of Paris, launched a call for innovative solutions to increase the visibility of local commerce. The program includes regular meetings between startups and voluntary tradesmen, where the latter can test the solutions developed by the earlier.



Matchmaking is also core of the [Cu-Cu application](#) by the London-based Meanwhile Space. Cu-Cu links property owners to social enterprises looking for space and help brokering mutually benefiting rental agreements for formerly vacant buildings. The application offers a solution for the missing link between new entrepreneurs, affordable spaces and property owners: it helps new initiatives find their space and establish their market presence, thus helping small enterprises flourish and reach out to local audiences. The services of Meanwhile Space are used both by private property owners and public authorities that struggle with their unrented buildings and their responsibility in local economic development.

Communication technology helps business promotion and economic development by strengthening and creating local networks which enable peer-to-peer consumption, short chain distribution and service integration. Such tools support a circular economy, where one's waste or side-effect is another's resource.

Tourism

Tourism was one of the fields where social media and online platforms were first deployed by city administrations. While social networks proved to be an important channel to transmit attractive messages about cities, they also allow feedbacks from visitors and inputs from citizens to highlight particular city features off the beaten tracks. Some good practices are using available social media platforms, as in the case of the [Warsaw instagram account](#) or the [Lyon Fête des Lumières](#) twitter account. At the same time we find tourism promotion being developed through new processes that are establishing new engagement with local stakeholders also through the use of social media.



[CREZI FOOD KIT](#) in Palermo, Italy, is a project developed by the Association CLAC and aims at supporting the local traditional artisanship, helping it from disappearing in the transformations of the historical city centre. The project developed a mobile application, UGame, in which 78 historical and new local artisan shops in the city were identified. Through a wide range of audio visual narrations, photographs and interviews, the application explores the value of artisan work today and helps organising urban

games where local inhabitants can discover the artisan world of Palermo, and through searching for artisan products, they can build long lasting relationships. The mobile application is available for locals as well as tourists to discover the hidden heritage of Palermo. The existing local network of artisans allowed the development of an incubator that connects young designers to the food industry, the only sector flourishing during the economic crisis in Palermo.



Mercats de Barcelona is a twitter account aiming at the promotion of local food markets in Barcelona. In recent years, the city has invested much effort in the regeneration of the 40 historical food markets that since 1991 had been managed by the in-house company of the Municipal Institute of Markets. This regeneration aimed at turning markets into places for social cohesion, product valorisation and new management models. Today the markets have a yearly turnover of 950 million euro and give work to 7500 people. They have become tourist attractions with visitors coming to experience local life, purchase traditional food products and enjoy lunch within the markets themselves. Due to the great success of the

regeneration process, markets today attract 62 million visitors a year. This is the result of structural interventions on certain markets, like in the case of Santa Caterina with the Architect Miralles or in the case of Mercat de Sants, that elaborated an innovative management of the flows of goods. This process has been accompanied by an efficient communication strategy that also took place on social media that promoted the locations, broadcasted the experiences of the tourists but especially communicated the stories of the locals, be they vendors or inhabitants.

These experiences show how the tourist promotion of a city cannot be developed without the active involvement of the local stakeholders in building a genuine and credible narrative of the city. The administrations together with local stakeholders have the important duty of supporting and broadcasting such communication through the relevant channels, but the message must come from the city itself.

Planning and participation

Similar to public services, urban planning has also undergone radical transformations: in cities where public administrations took participation seriously, digital communication tools opened new perspectives by establishing channels for community feedback and for crowdsourcing citizen ideas.



Next-Hamburg is a city-wide platform where citizens could contribute, both online and offline, with ideas for the future development of the city, that are then further developed in partnership with the administration departments, local NGOs, research and private sector. The editorial team of Next Hamburg is composed by urban planners, sociologists, political scientists and media professionals who help in moderating and developing the content. The process was established over the years, in 2009 the platform was launched and over 700 ideas and

suggestions from citizens were collected and put on show on an online map of the city. The next step took place in 2011 when these ideas were filtered in 300 selected projects through a mentoring process with the experts, composed the Civil Vision of the City, a participative integration to the official plans of the city, and 30 of which are currently being developed. Next-Hamburg is a non-profit associated since 2009 and was originally founded as a pilot project of the National Urban Development Policy of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development between 2009 and 2012. Today the association runs on private donations, funds from Foundations and other local actors. Even though the platform runs independently, it provides a public service for an inclusive development of the city of Hamburg, which could be easily replicated in other cities, also with a stronger commitment of the administration. What this experience shows is that the combination of online communication combined with offline collaboration in person produces effective and long lasting results, fostered by a variety of digital and analog media.



Since the mid-2000s, community mapping has become an important tool to crowdsource information from communities. Vacancy mapping is among the most consequential deployments of community cartography: organisations in cities with as diverse development contexts as Amsterdam, Paris, Hamburg, Vienna or Budapest initiated the collective mapping of vacant properties. Community mapping projects, by developing new mapping techniques have contributed to a greater visibility of the common land use problem of European cities: participatory mapping campaigns can help shaping policies concerning the reuse of vacant buildings. The German-language [Leerstandmelder](#) platform, highlighting the importance and possibilities of vacant

buildings, is a good example for turning an initially professional engagement into a broad social movement.



Perhaps the most known online citizen feedback system in the field of urban planning and design is [FixMyStreet](#). Founded in 2007 in the UK as Neighbourhood Fix-It, the website allows users to report dysfunctional elements of the urban streetscape that are transmitted further to the responsible municipal bodies who can directly answer them. The app FixMyStreet was born in 2008 and allowed people to make reports on-site, making the communication flow between citizens and the platform more direct and instantaneous. By creating an accessible, user-friendly interface and encouraging a sense of common ownership of public spaces, FixMyStreet streamlined citizen feedback

and encouraged people to actively engage in the protection and positive transformation of their neighbourhoods. In the meanwhile, the process also benefited the municipalities that gained a network of “citizen sensors”, on-the-ground investigators who crowdsource up-to-date informations at a scale way larger than municipal officers could ever provide. Since 2007, over 600.000 reports have been made through the platform in the UK and over 250.000 of them were resolved. The success of FixMyStreet had inspired dozens of similar platforms and applications in many European cities (see, for example, [Járókelő](#) in Hungary).

The use of social media in urban planning has the great advantage of developing new participatory methods, ensuring better feedback both from citizens and civil servants and it can crowdsource ideas and observations by making them available to the public in a comprehensible way. Nevertheless we can see that the key to the success of these initiatives is a tailor-made balance of online and offline engagement of the stakeholders, therefore enriching and innovating the participatory processes with new forms ways of participating.

Social services



In the past years, digital tools did not only prove to be efficient means to collect feedback and ideas from citizens but also helpful devices to aggregate resources and connect citizens to important social and community services. [Synathina](#), an online platform initiated by the Athens municipality, invites citizen initiatives to register themselves and gain a broader visibility for their activities. By mapping these initiatives, the municipality formally recognises the importance of self-organised citizen undertakings in maintaining the quality of life and services in times of economic crisis. The platform allows initiatives to connect with each other, to exchange their experiences and to send signals to the municipality about their

regulatory problems and legal barriers. In response, the municipality looks into the possibilities of removing those barriers thus facilitating the activities of the organisations featured on the platform.



In other European cities, online tools provide ways for citizens to contribute to decision-making processes, including the reallocation of public funds and resources. Ghent established its online platform [Crowdfunding.Gent](#) in 2015, that invites citizen projects to collect funding in an alternative way: by posting a proposal for a street, a neighbourhood or the whole city, projects can raise funds from a few hundred to thousands of euros from other citizens. The platform is not limited to projects that correspond to the official directions of development; the municipality's policy allows even "oppositional" projects – initiatives that confront official development projects – to

appear on the site. However, proposals that correspond to the administrations defined objectives can benefit from additional funding from the municipality, adding up to a yearly 55.000 euros. Crowdfunding.Gent is not limited to funding: the city also helps projects in their communication and social media strategy, increasing the visibility and outreach of the selected initiatives.



In another form of participatory decision-making, the [Tartu participatory budget platform](#) is run by the City of Tartu in collaboration with the NGO eGovernance Academy as a result of an e-Citizen II EU project, with 10 cities around Europe looking into how to develop e-participation capacities in public administrations. The project started in

in 2013 using an overall 1% of the city's investment budget, a total of 140.000 euro, to be spent on specific interventions in the city. There was criticism towards the initiative, regarded upon as "playing democracy" as the budget was so small but this allowed a transparent process to start that could be publicly tracked. The winning projects were selected through the selection criteria of feasibility, budget and running costs. In the first year, 21 experts evaluated 158 submissions, out of which 75 were selected for public voting. This improvement was due to the combination of good media and social media coverage together with seminars where projects received mentoring and could present their ideas publicly. Digital tools applied to social services, sharing initiatives and participatory budgets have become an important instrument to aggregate resources and to connect initiatives. They help to make innovative processes in society transparent and visible to the public, allowing to widen the involvement by finding human resources and engaging volunteers.

Mobility

One of the most common uses in social media applied to mobility issues in cities is certainly the real-time communication of public transport timetables, like in the case of the **infoatac** twitter account in Rome or the **RATP** one in Paris.



At the same time, various application to promote sustainable mobility behaviour in people have been developed, as in the case of the **TrafficO2** application developed by PUSH in Palermo. Citizens are incentivated to have sustainable mobility patterns, going on foot or using their bikes, through a system of points and tokens provided by local enterprises. The application was piloted with students who received free haircuts at the barber's or cocktails at local bars if they could reduce their CO2 emission in moving around the city. The success rate was high and the application will soon be piloted in other Italian cities, too.



To address a related issue, **Wheelmap** is an online map and smartphone app developed by the German NGO Sozialhelden, which enables people to share information about how accessible places are by wheelchair. Users can also leave reviews, on everything from toilets and train stations to pubs and theatres. Launched in 2010, users have mapped the accessibility of 500,000 locations in cities across the world. Another app developed in Helsinki is **Blindsquare** which helps visually impaired people to navigate the city by layering public transport data with information from Foursquare. The app also gives information about museum exhibitions and art galleries

which enables Helsinki's visually impaired residents to lead a culturally rich and active life. Another project is **NavMem** (Navigation support for Travellers with Memory Decline) which was developed within the AAL program and is an Android navigation application for elderly people, using predominantly pictures, instead of texts. Furthermore, the app has a help button which allows users to initiate a call to a carer and automatically send a link to a Google map with the current position of the walker and the way taken within the last hour.

Mobility offers a wide range of possibilities for integrating with various aspects of urban life, from environmental issues to social cohesion or care for people with disabilities. The technological possibilities connected to the routing algorithms allow identification of the most appropriate way for each user, tailoring the experience for personal needs.

Conclusions

From tourism through business promotion, urban planning and social services to mobility, the presented digital platforms and tools represent a broad variety of approaches to urban problems and services. While some focus on singular issues, others link various themes, thus contributing with an interdisciplinary perspective to a more integrated management of resources, information and collaborations. Inspired by these practices and many more, the URBACT Action Planning Network [Interactive Cities](#) builds on local needs and capacities to use social media and to develop new tools for better urban collaborations. The cities involved in the Network look into the opportunities of using social media to improve the governance of urban spaces, resources and services. By launching new platforms, applications or channels to enhance communication between administration and citizens, the project aims to help participating cities develop a local ecosystem of social media-based tools in order to better respond to challenges. Interactive Cities will compare strategies adopted by different European cities in the use of social media for institutional communication, as well as the use of open datasets for the creation of urban apps made by independent developers or by the public authorities themselves. Highlighting the city as a hub for creative exchange of contents and information among people is one of the main objectives of the project which will start from the strategies currently adopted by the Network's partners in order to make them more efficient.

Interactive Cities aims to underline that the role of social media and digital tools in municipal communication is by no means limited to the transmission of messages by administrations. On the contrary, they potentially serve as bi-directional exchange channels, restructuring not only public communication but also the municipal governance models. Many of the platforms or digital tools that transform the way we live, experience, use and create cities are not initiated by local administrations but civic organisations, research institutions or private enterprises: however, they create important links between public, civic, academic and private stakeholders. The role of public administrations in this process is manifold: besides creating, commissioning or triggering, they also need to accommodate innovation and help all their partners in adapting to economic and social changes by redefining their digital strategies. This requires building up eco-systems of digital communication and knowledge exchange: in order to improve public services and create an innovative milieu with the help of incubators, open data platforms, sharing and exchanging tools, hackathons or competitions, administrations need to help urban actors establish their networks.

Online involvement cannot replace offline cooperation though. In order to crowdsource citizen observations or connect initiatives, it is not enough just to establish digital platforms or online tools: engagement includes offline and online involvement, and often necessitates particular incentives to make community members contribute:

"If people congregate around an issue, they will, in fact, create a community around that issue. The most successful deployments are the ones where people are congregating around an issue and have a channel for them to participate. Our insistence on partnership, and in particular on-the-ground partnership has become very important because context is everything. Geocontext helps, but the local understanding of the tech landscape, the political landscape, the cultural landscape is extremely important in the success of a deployment." (Rotich 2011)

#Synthesis

Interactive Cities is a cutting-edge project aimed to explore how digital, social media and user generated content can improve today's urban management in the European cities, no matter their size. And this challenge will be tackled in two ways. Firstly, as opportunity to redefine and deepen the concept of citizenship and civic engagement today, providing a path to spark cohesion, commonalities and shared value as well as increasing sense of place. In other words, making the most of the new channels to revisit the relation between the individual and the local community in the digital era. Secondly, as a way to improve the quality of public services, in terms of efficiency and transparency, and even widen the current service chart provided by the local authorities. The international cross-learning on this issue will be organized into three main sub-themes: i) Communicating a city as an attractive tourist destination strengthening its image both locally and internationally ii) communication of business promotion strengthening the city's conditions through the support of local companies, both the existing ones and the potentially new ones iii) communicating urban development making understandable to a wide audience often very complex technical matters, balancing the involvement of inhabitants in the decision making process and explaining why plans have been approved by the administration.

With today's European cities hosting most of the continent's population, and urban areas being the stage for many contemporary conflicts such as social inequality, environmental threats or economic crisis, collective action must be taken immediately. In the past years, there has been a lot of discussion about the potential role of smart technologies in addressing these problems. While an important part of the discourse on "smart cities" focuses on infrastructural investment, recent criticism of it underlines the importance of empowering smart citizens as part of developing smart cities. A smart city should improve the quality of life of its citizens and help them to react to urban challenges. The emergence of social media and various digital technologies are potential tools to empower both citizens and public administrations in creating new frameworks for multi-stakeholder collaboration and enhancing the information flow between different actors of European cities.

The use of social media, apps and data is contributing to better city governance all around the world and to improving the lives of billions of people. The revolutionary change in the system of relations among people brought by the rising importance of communication technologies, have significant effects also on the way urban residents expect that cities communicate to them. Recently, increasing numbers American and European cities have used digital communication tools to foster the interaction of residents in many different domains of urban life.

The digital shift has opened new opportunities for cities to create dialogue with their citizens, residents and users. However, many cities are hesitant to adapt their communication and participation mechanisms to this shift: they are often too slow and bureaucratic to engage with technologies that were already widely deployed in their communities. The impact of new digital tools extends well beyond the technological sphere: they transform the way cities are governed, urban projects are managed, services are delivered, and participation is orchestrated. Social media has the potential to bridge the gap between public administrations and citizens, municipal agencies and community groups, service providers and users. Adding an inclusive dimension to the smart city paradigm, new communication platforms may foster cooperation and innovation within public administrations and outside: municipal operations may gain more visibility and legibility with the help of online platforms,

while citizen feedback and user-generated data may support decision-making with the help of social media.

The use of digital platforms also opens new perspectives for data management: on the one hand, the big data created through the citizens' use of social media can give a real time picture of their opinions and perceptions of urban matters, and thus can inform planning and policy. On the other, transmitting city data through municipal platforms to users makes them able to use the data in applications, thus translating them and making them more accessible for the broader public.

Social media and digital communication also reshape the discussion on de-territorialization: while many observers warned that global connectivity and online communication might kill places and help global hegemonies replace local economies, social media and digital platforms also create the infrastructure for advanced peer-to-peer communication that enables responsible consumption patterns and local distribution networks. In this sense, digital communication does not only help individuals join the global information system, but also assists the emergence of locally rooted networks, as we see in many local social media groups, neighborhood blogs, local digital platforms and chat rooms.

Interactive Cities aims to underline that the role of social media and digital tools in municipal communication is by no means limited to the transmission of messages by administrations. On the contrary, they potentially serve as bi-directional exchange channels, restructuring not only public communication but also the municipal governance models. Many of the platforms or digital tools that transform the way we live, experience, use and create cities are not initiated by local administrations but civic organisations, research institutions or private enterprises: however, they create important links between public, civic, academic and private stakeholders. The role of public administrations in this process is manifold: besides creating, commissioning or triggering, they also need to accommodate innovation and help all their partners in adapting to economic and social changes by redefining their digital strategies. This requires building up eco-systems of digital communication and knowledge exchange: in order to improve public services and create an innovative milieu with the help of incubators, open data platforms, sharing and exchanging tools, hackathons or competitions, administrations need to help urban actors establish their networks.

Synthesis of the Partner Profiles

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>Genova The city has over the last years moved from industrial production and heavy port activity to an increasing tourism, even though not all inhabitants seem to have realised. The main economic drivers in the City are the industrial and port activities, which are often isolated from the rest of city life. An additional difficulty faced by the city is the ageing population, especially the settled Genovese community, whilst the younger migrant background often don't engage with the city narrative.</p>	<p>The Stakeholders involved from the beginning of the project were the ones that were part of the ULG of the City Logo project, the Social Media Team, therefore there is a clear continuity with the previous experiences as well as an initial familiarity between the people and the project methodology. The communication strategy of the city has over the recent years developed from being a communication of the City Administration to being a communication for the citizens.</p>	<p>The City of Genoa is interested in developing a city narrative of a competitive and attractive city to live and work in, by strengthening the Social Media Team and developing a governance structure that managed communication both within the administration as well as includes other stakeholders in the development of the strategy. The aim is also to work on involving younger and innovative initiatives within the city in building a city narrative attractive also for young people (students and young professionals).</p>
<p>Murcia The new City Council is very committed to developing a new communication strategy for the city. Even though the City has not had much experience previously in engaging with stakeholders at city-wide scale, they have run remarkable projects on urban regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods under the URBAN program.</p>	<p>The identified stakeholders foresee a large number of public or public affiliated departments dealing with public relations and services to the citizens as well as a large number of citizens associations.</p>	<p>The great extension of the City, about 880km², even though many parts are hardly inhabited, makes the provision of services and involvement of citizens very demanding for the administration, which is fragmented in 60 districts with local mayors. The use of social media could be a useful way to reach people.</p>

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>Alba Iulia The City of Alba Iulia is one of the best practices in Romania, if not even in Europe, on how a City can attract large sums of EU structural funding, with which they financed the rehabilitation of the ancient citadel. They are now addressing private investors to bring companies and functions within the citadel, activity which is supported by the collaboration with the World Bank in the realisation of an Urban Strategy. Even though the City Administration is not only working on the citadel, but also at rehabilitation projects of deprived neighbourhoods as well as river waterfront area, the citadel is a unique chance for the city to attract investments, qualified people and improve the economic situation of the city.</p>	<p>The stakeholder meeting was well attended and there were interesting representatives of public offices, like the citizens' information, private companies, like the software development company providing the city web infrastructure, media like the national newspaper, the local city promotion blog and the University. The common agreement was over the need for a stronger involvement of the private sector.</p>	<p>The City aims at developing tourism communication in order to also attract investment. The City wants to therefore focus on the communication strategies necessary to address local stakeholders, strengthening the city brand, and the foreign attraction of tourists as well as investors for establishing functions within the citadel.</p>
<p>Ghent The city Administration of Ghent has had a stable political leadership for the last 20 years and interesting organisational features such as a strategic dept. overarching communication, international relations, city branding and participation flexible time and space internal communication platform (Yammer) and regular colleagues meetings.</p>	<p>The City is running many innovative projects which can feed into the Network, such as the crowd-funding platform, the city narrative or the temporary use actions, which appear to be the result of an ongoing dialogue and collaboration with civil society and private business representatives.</p>	<p>The City will focus on business promotion and investment attraction, for which it has already developed some initial experiments but a more structured communication strategy needs to be developed.</p>

Partners not joining the second phase

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>Lausanne The City of Lausanne is planning on various urban development projects, such as the train station of the Winter Olympics in 2020, but is concerned with the citizens' involvement since an early stage of the project as it has previously happened that citizens voted for a public referendum and blocked projects (Metamorphose or the Tower).</p>	<p>The project has a strong political commitment. A high level of awareness on the topic emerged from the stakeholder discussions, these being the importance of not using social media as a tool for co-opting public opinion, as well as the relevance of creating a positive and emotional narrative of the city also for the future developments.</p>	<p>As the Swiss e-democracy process allows citizens with voting rights to have a strong decision power over project, the administration is interested in establishing an effective dialogue since an early stage. Lausanne will focus its participatory process around the renovation of the train station, using the existing infrastructure, such as the touch panels, which could help the experimentation.</p>
<p>Liverpool The City of Liverpool in the past years has undergone great changes, both physically in terms of urban development as well as in terms of image. With the Capital of Culture in 2008, the City had the possibility to overcome the previously negative reputation and invest on a new image made of culture, innovation and business development. Even though much improvement has been made, such as the well-known Docks and the upcoming creative industry cluster, nationally and internationally the city is still suffering from a bad reputation and mainly associated to the Beatles and football clubs.</p>	<p>Amongst the stakeholders involved is the the Social Media responsible of the Beatles Story, which have been running an interesting initiative on world-wide ambassadors, as well as stakeholders from the culture sector, such as museums, the Docks and other cultural entities. All stakeholders recognised the value of the meetings in order to focus the discussion towards a shared communication strategy to improve the attractiveness of the city.</p>	<p>The City is interested in building a local community for strengthening the image of the city, aiming at including large players, such as the football clubs, and emerging ones, like the creative cluster. The strategy will be developed in collaboration with the existing ecosystem of cultural actors.</p>

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>Varna The city of Varna is undergoing great investments in order to improve the city's infrastructure, which will be also strategic towards tourism, one of the economic pillars of the city together with maritime industry. Tourism is mainly active in the summer season and could be strengthened in order to further support the local economy, keeping the younger generations within the city and attracting new inhabitants.</p>	<p>Stakeholders from the Political level and city Departments, the tourism private sector and the University, would like to improve the communication around tourism and would like to use the project as an opportunity to experiment collaboration.</p>	<p>For tourism the main challenges to deal with are the prolonging of the season by promoting the spa and thermal water resorts available in the area, especially close to the sea. A valuable opportunity arising in the near future is the Youth Capital in 2017, which even though will not offer economic investments will provide additional visibility which could be beneficial to tourism.</p>
<p>Tartu Tartu has greatly invested on the digitalisation of administrative processes and governmental relations through an e-government platform and e-voting, e-participation and e-democracy. The City has not experienced great digital divide but there is a reduced involvement from youngsters both in the elections and the participatory budgeting. Also, many citizens are not fully aware of all the services available online, which could be dealt by the new website.</p>	<p>The City is collaborating with a range of stakeholders, some from the administration and some external, especially from NGOs and Companies. The cooperation between stakeholders is very solid, also thanks to the size of the city that helps for personal relationships to be developed.</p>	<p>All stakeholders, from politicians to civil servants, from companies to local NGOs, recognised that the project Interactive Cities could be useful to improve the communication to citizens of the e-services available and to gather feedback, as well as to improve the civil participation, especially of youth, of the ongoing city processes, from voting to participatory budgeting.</p>

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>Palermo The City of Palermo was appointed as UNESCO World Heritage in 2015 and the centre was pedestrianised. Even though this process was already started many years ago in the rest of Italy, in Palermo it was very hard due to the opposition of the shopkeepers, who in fact demonstrated in the street against this new project, although today it has been seen that the effects have been positive for many of the shops, especially food and fashion related.</p>	<p>In the past years the City of Palermo has activated the first participatory processes around the pedestrianisation of the street, which as a first attempt was well attended and the City is willing to further develop this participatory culture. In particular there are very good relations with the University, who is also very involved in the other CityMobilNet Urbact project (which aims at developing a sustainable mobility plan) and the local start-ups, also related to participation in mobility and urban processes.</p>	<p>The City appears to be willing to develop a participatory process related to the involvement and information of people in the pedestrianisation of the city centre and the new mobility patterns forming. Additionally the project could serve also as the communication strategy for the development of the sustainable mobility plan tackled also within the CityMobilNet, as the Department involved in the Interactive Cities is responsible for Participation as well as Mobility.</p>
Non City Partners		
<p>EDC Debrecen The EDC is an in-house company of the City of Debrecen responsible for urban and economic development. Being the city the second largest in Hungary, it has a competitive advantage in the region thanks to the presence of various innovative start-up and technological companies. The City is in the unexpected situation of having more available jobs, especially for engineers, than are available in the city.</p>	<p>EDC is bringing together different stakeholders, from company clusters to the Technical University and local NGOs, to work on creating a friendlier ecosystem towards innovation, including formal education of the University as well as cultural education of the Agora.</p>	<p>Debrecen is promoting collaboration between companies, research and administration to accommodate and attract new talents. There is a need to communicate better the work possibilities within the city as well as the quality of life.</p>

City Context	Local Stakeholder Commitment	Expectations within the project
<p>SemaEst Paris The Semaest is a company with Mixed Economy, pursuing public missions with a private economic basis. It is responsible for the economic regeneration for neighbourhoods in the east of Paris, working on purchasing shops, rehabilitating them and renting them with the lowest market price possible to innovative new commercial activities, that may reactivate the commercial tissue of the neighbourhood.</p>	<p>The political level as well as the representatives of the local start-up community involved in the CoSto project (a pilot project inviting technology start-ups to develop services for local shops) are very keen on further developing their program within the context of the Interactive Cities project. In further steps of the project, a stronger involvement of shop keepers will be essential and for this an improved communication strategy could be very useful.</p>	<p>The SemaEst, in accordance with the City Council, will be focusing on developing the communication for a participatory process within the CoSto project, focusing on shop keepers as well as local inhabitants to identify needs and potentials.</p>
<p>CLLD Network - Lisbon The CLLD Network was promoted since 2015 by the City of Lisbon and counts currently more that 150 associations throughout the city collaborating with the goal of combating poverty in the city. Over the past years the City has been experimenting with a series of programmes to promote civic engagement especially in socio-economically challenged neighbourhoods. The programme started in 2011 with the BipZip program and has developed today into a Community Led Local Development network that requires appropriate communication strategies both internally and externally, to involve new stakeholders.</p>	<p>The CLLD Network is composed by a series of stakeholders within the administration, civic organisations, research institutions and start-up companies. As the city is committed since years in strengthening civil society and has launched a series of experimental projects such as the H2020 Smart City Lighthouse project, the potential of improving the communication strategies is clearly recognised by all stakeholders.</p>	<p>The CLLD Network will focus on the development of communication platforms that can better explain, involve and improve thanks to citizens' feedback. This will become the main platform for internal communication, participation and inclusion of new stakeholders. Additionally it will accompany the BIP/ZIP program, as this will now make an evaluation of the neighbourhood status after 5 years of running.</p>

Approaches

The Interactive Cities partners have expressed a variety of approaches to the broad theme of digital communication to improve the governance of our cities. These can be synthesised into two main trends: one foreseeing an outward communication, such as marketing and promotion; and an inward communication, such as participation and inclusion. Even though no communication is a one way road, we see that due to the local needs and the specific profiles of the city departments directly involved in the project, there is this main difference. Some cities are interested in developing a communication strategy that will help position the city and their local stakeholders on an international or even city-wide map. For example, when wanting to market the tourism attractions of Varna or when wanting to promote the engineering companies in Debrecen, it will be necessary to develop a branding strategy in collaboration with the local stakeholders in order to really sustain it. On the other hand when wanting to include the citizens of the Lisbon Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) or when wanting to gather feedback from citizens within the public services of Tartu, it will be necessary to enhance the listening capacities of the public administration as well as improve the feedback loop. Even though any communication strategy implies a strong cohesion within the administration and an effective collaboration with local stakeholders, the two approaches described carry within them different tools and organisation systems also according to the thematic implementation.

Themes

The cities involved in the project are also focusing on the communication of different themes, from tourism to business promotion and urban development.

Communicating a city as an attractive **tourist destination** aims at strengthening its image both locally and internationally. Tourism involves a variety of stakeholders, such as hotels and restaurants, tourist operators, airports and ports authorities, culture institutions and many other. How to ensure that territorial marketing is substantiated by real quality services in the city? How to make the different stakeholders understand that the improvement of the city has a direct effect on their business? How to coordinate within the Administration when so many Departments are involved (Culture, Economic Development, Urbanism...)? All these challenges are shared by **Genova, Varna, Alba Iulia and Liverpool**.

The communication of **business promotion** aims at strengthening the city's conditions through the support of local companies, both the existing ones and the potentially new ones. Local businesses have the possibility of animating the local urban tissue and making the city attractive to new-comers and with a variety of instruments already existing, such as Business Improvement Districts or the Vital'Quartier program, the real challenge is how to communicate it to the shop keepers and the wide audience? How to make business, especially small ones, understand the value of teaming up to develop a communication and a cooperation even with their competitors? How to make them understand that the improvement of the city is a direct benefit for them? These are the challenges that will be dealt by **Semaest in Paris, EDB in Debrecen and Ghent**.

Urban development aims at making understandable to a wide audience often very complex technical matters, balancing the involvement of inhabitants in the decision making process and explaining why plans have been approved by the administration. How to communicate complex processes without flatterring the content? How to ensure that all people are involved in the decision making process? As urban planning is a lengthy process, how to pursue the

involvement on the long term? As citizens often have many valuable suggestions, how to ensure that input is addressed within the Administration in an effective manner? Such challenges will be dealt by **Lisbon, Murcia, Palermo and Tartu**.

For this reason the cities will have the possibility of working in sub-groups on the communication of the specific theme they are tackling locally, allowing for the development of the network's common methodology applied to the different themes.

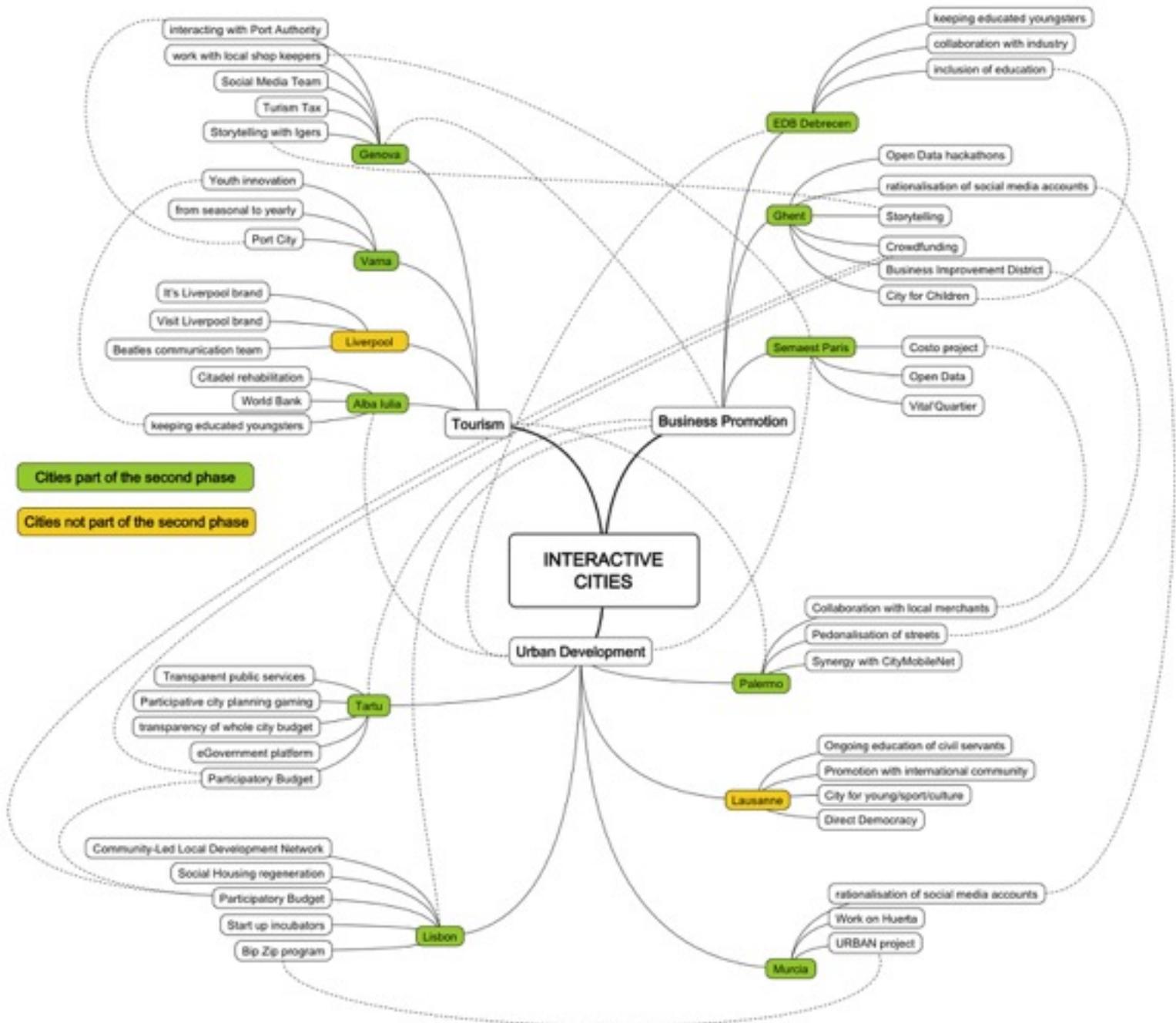


Diagram illustrating the partners topics of interest and relations

Common methodology

Because of the variety of approaches and themes each city will be confronted with, a common methodology for the learning process will be developed. The network will develop local communication strategies through four main steps that will be shared by all cities. The common methodology of the 12 cities involved in the Interactive Cities foresees a learning process made of four steps in which more experienced cities on the specific matter will share their insights.

Audience: Who are we speaking to?

The identification of the audience is an essential step in the development of an effective communication strategy, from here comes the choice of tools, partners and timing of actions.

Governance: How to convey the messages within our organisation?

A great challenge within organisations is to manage the communication flow within the organisation itself, effectively managing to retrieve the necessary information in due time.

Process: How to engage the stakeholders in the communication process?

When wanting to deliver messages about new activities in order to reach new stakeholders it is necessary to think of innovative processes that enable such goals.

Evaluation: How to assess the effectiveness of the process developed?

When testing and piloting new strategies, it is important to have the means and the methodology to verify whether the process is effective and whether some adjustments are necessary.

Implementation strategy: What steps to take with the new communication plan?

At this point each city will have carried out some testing and developed a draft communication plan, the focus will therefore be on how to ensure a durable development of the plan.

Final considerations

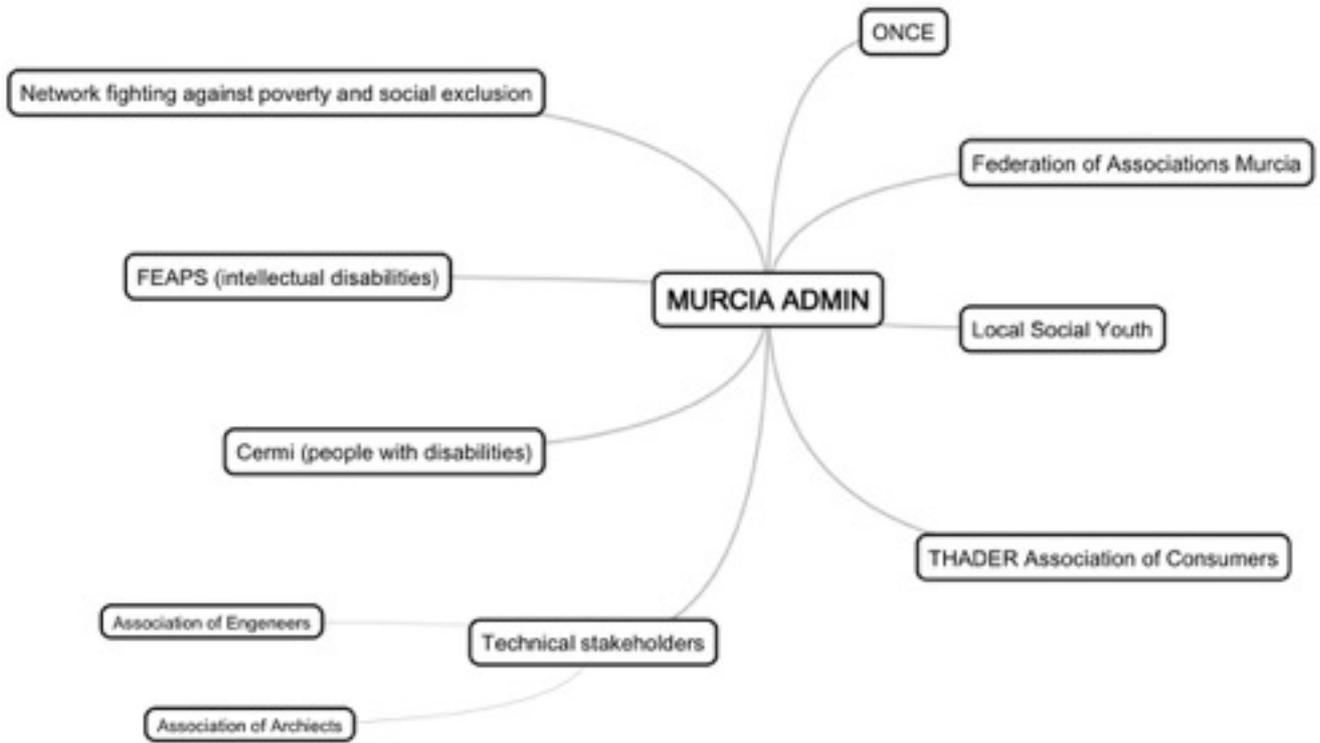
The aim is that through the shared methodology the partners would be able to achieve the common goal of the development of an integrated social media communication plan for the City. Through the process of developing the communication strategy for the specific set of challenges tackled within the project, each city will have acquired the necessary know-how for nourishing, scaling and expanding the strategy throughout the city. This will also help to overcome challenges such as the fact that communication not always the core expertise of the dept involved, which sometimes may imply that communication is not well radicated into governance structure or that there are different different cultures amongst partners of communication between city and citizens. The project will be able to develop a wide perspective over the communication strategies to be implemented in cities on a variety of topics, this being one of the first operational researches on such topic in Europe.

ANNEX 1: ULG stakeholder maps

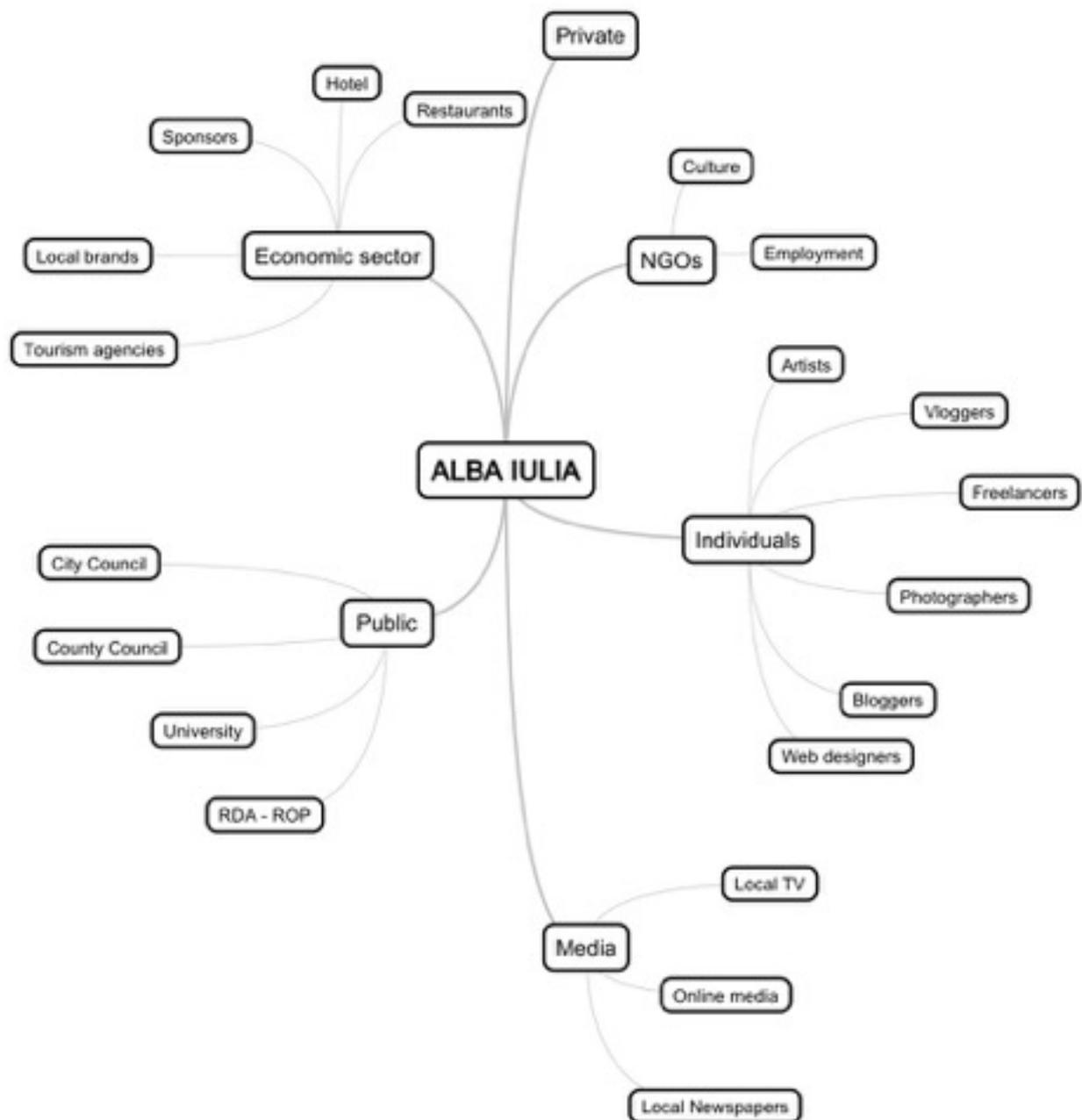
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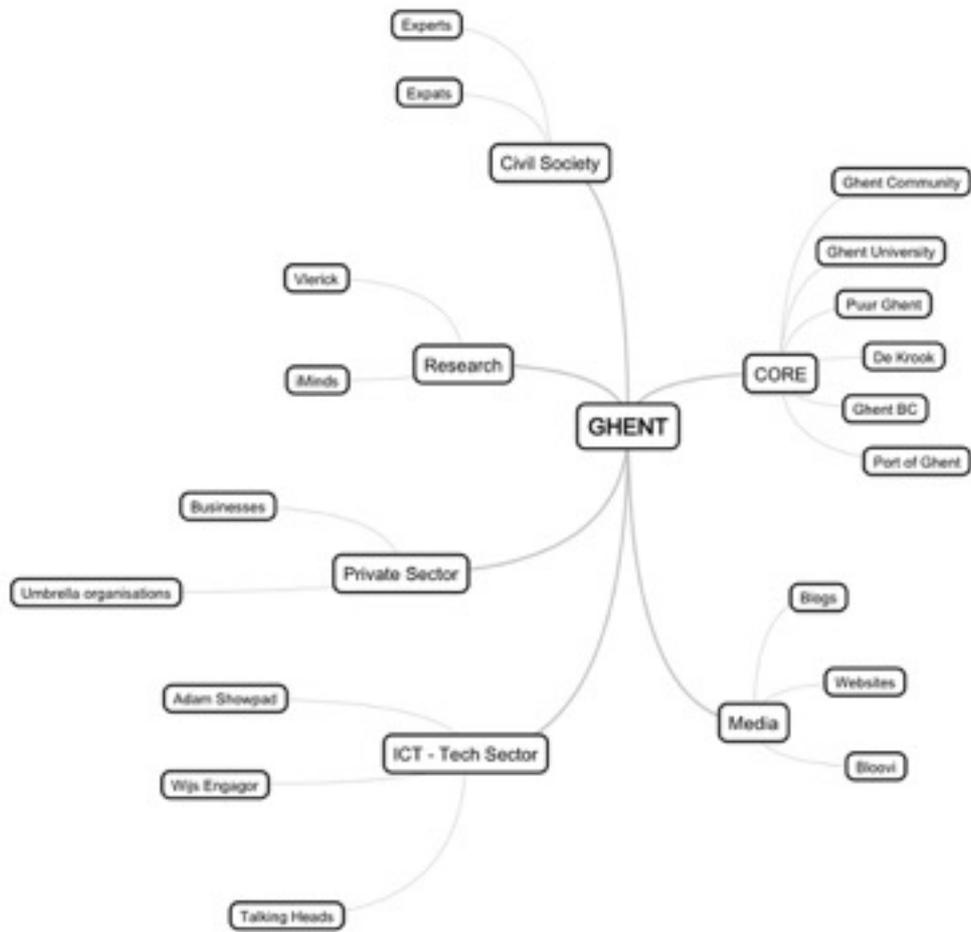
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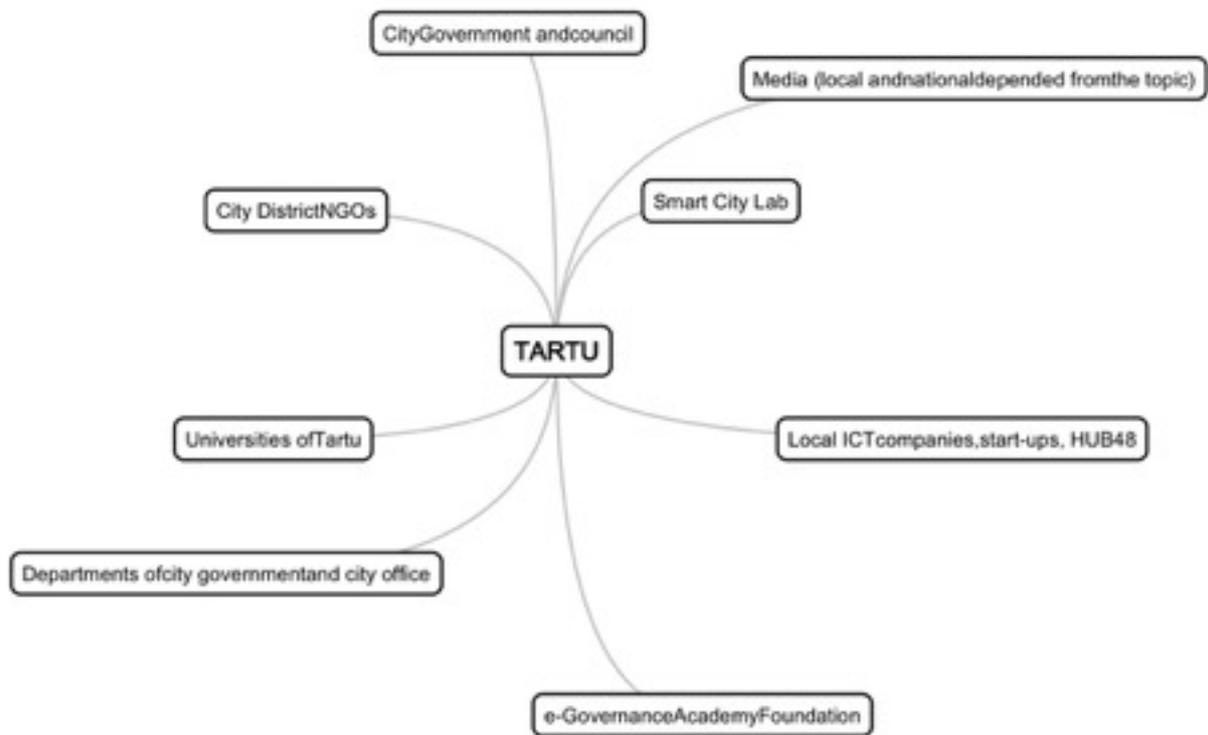
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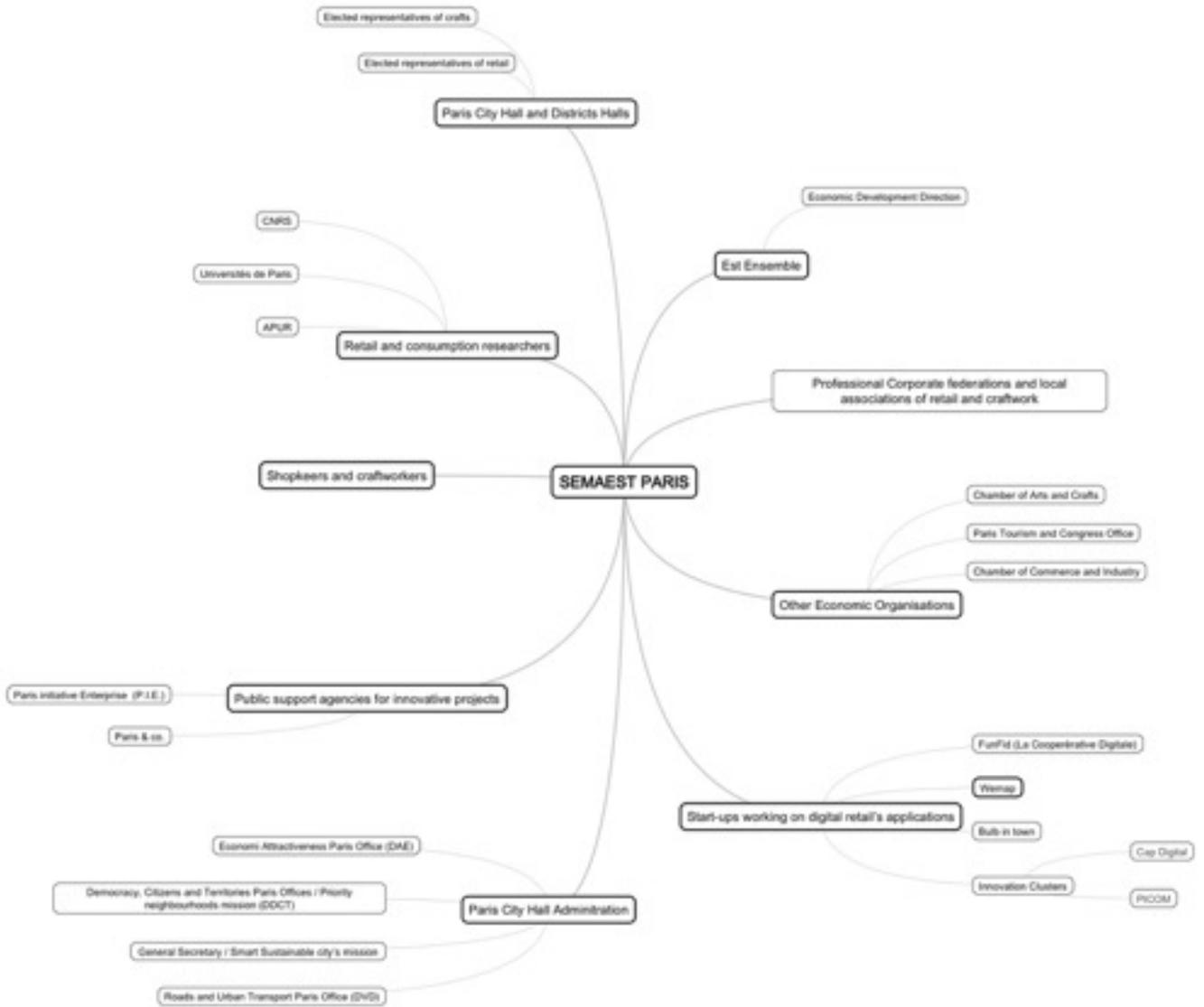
Ghent



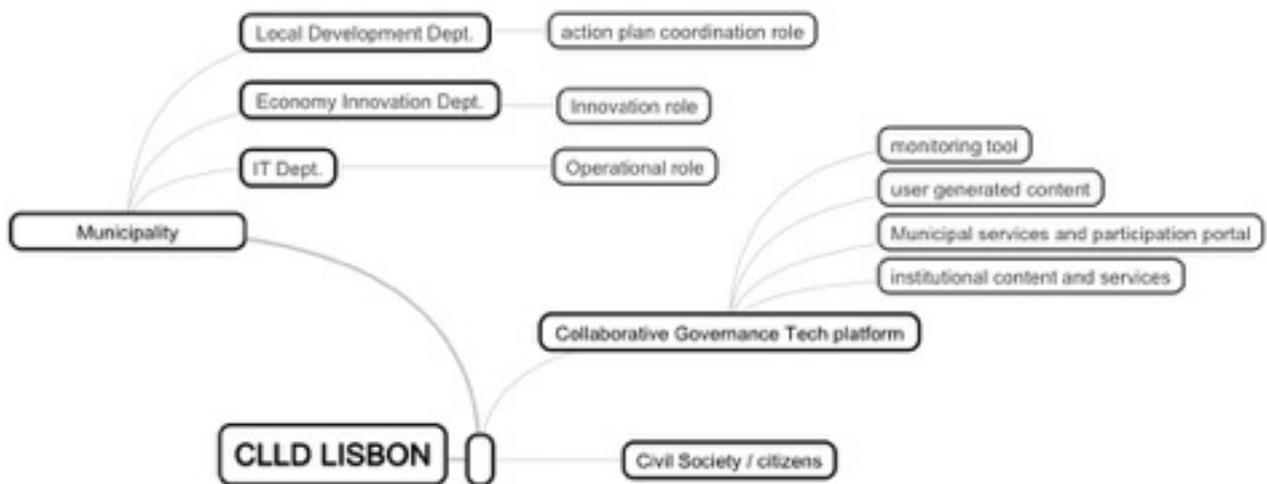
Tartu



Paris - Semaest



CLLD - Lisbon



EDC Debrecen



Liverpool

