

PAPER VI

**From design participation to
civic participation**
**Participatory design of a social media
service**

In: International Journal of Social and Humanistic
Computing 2(1/2), pp. 51–67.
Copyright 2013 Inderscience Enterprises Ltd.
Reprinted with permission from the publisher.

From design participation to civic participation – participatory design of a social media service

Asta Bäck*, Pirjo Friedrich, Teemu Ropponen,
Auli Harju and Kari A. Hintikka

VTT, P.O. Box 1000, FI-02044, Finland

E-mail: asta.back@vtt.fi

E-mail: pirjo.friedrich@vtt.fi

E-mail: troppone@gmail.com

E-mail: auli.harju@uta.fi

E-mail: kari.hintikka@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: This paper describes a case study in which a social media service for civic participation was created together with its intended users. The purpose of the service was to support civic participation and integration of immigrants in Finland. Open participatory design approach was used throughout the process. This paper presents critical issues and lessons learnt during the process of working together with a heterogeneous user group and multiple partners. We claim that constant meta-level discussion about the goals and participation practices with the users is vital for the design process. When designing services for civic participation, more focus should be put on designing and testing concrete participation processes. Clear ownership and community management are needed during the design and use of the future service.

Keywords: social media; civic participation; participatory design; immigrant integration; co-design; open processes; produsage.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Bäck, A., Friedrich, P., Ropponen, T., Harju, A. and Hintikka, K.A. (2013) 'From design participation to civic participation – participatory design of a social media service', *Int. J. Social and Humanistic Computing*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1/2, pp.51–67.

Biographical notes: Asta Bäck works as Principal Scientist at VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and leads a research team called personal data ecosystems. She graduated from the Helsinki University of Technology in 1983. Her current research interests include innovation tools and processes and social media, particularly using social media tools and content for creating personalised digital services. She has led several European and national projects.

Pirjo Friedrich works as a Research Scientist at VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland. She graduated from the Helsinki University of Technology in 2006 with Human-Centred Information Systems as major. Her work and studies relate to user-centred design, user experience, social media and user-driven innovation both in business and in public sector. She is a PhD candidate in Aalto University and is currently finalising her thesis on web-based co-design.

Teemu Ropponen holds an MSc (Eng) in Computer Science from Aalto University, with his major in interactive digital media. Previously a Project Researcher at Department of Media Technology at Aalto University, he is currently working at the Ministry of Justice in Finland. His work and studies relate to user-driven service development, e-participation, e-democracy, open government, social media and online collaboration.

Auli Harju is a Researcher at Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication (COMET), University of Tampere. Her recent research focuses on social media, citizen participation, uses of the news media in daily life, data journalism and open data movement in Finland.

Kari A. Hintikka is currently doing his PhD and works as a Research Scientist at the University of Jyväskylä. He graduated from the Media Laboratory of the University of Industrial Arts in Helsinki in 2008 with concept and usability design as his major. His work and research relate to collective intelligence, co-creation, internet collaboration, social networks and ecosystems, open data and open science.

This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled ‘Co-designing a social media service for civic participation: critical issues and challenges’ presented at 14th International Academic MindTrek Conference – Envisioning Future Media Environments, Tampere, Finland, 6–8 October 2010.

1 Introduction

Internet in general and social media in particular has provided new opportunities for citizen participation in society. The typical e-government solutions are top-down services: the municipalities and other public authorities provide citizens with online tools that support the existing political processes, e.g., online forms instead of paper, webcasting of parliament plenary sessions, and electronic voting. However, the opportunities of social media have increased the expectations towards e-democracy and online deliberative democracy that emphasises discussion as a method of guiding and legitimising decision-making (Held, 2006). It goes beyond the formal election and decision-making systems and aims at citizens’ everyday participation in the issues that concern them. Citizens do not only want to be passive receivers of information on the internet, but are willing to participate in discussion, solve problems and take action via self-organising citizen networks (Näkki et al., 2011).

There already are plenty of popular social media services that citizens use for influencing in societal issues, e.g. discussion in blogs, videos in YouTube, and fan groups and organising events in Facebook. Popular services like Twitter and Facebook may be very effective in sharing information and getting attention, but these general services have their limitations. For example, discussions in social media services like Facebook may have limited visibility although publicity would be important in civic participation. The discussions may be visible only to the registered users, or only those who belong to the same group. Also, mixing private, professional and societal communication in one online profile may be unattractive to some users.

There is need for services that are planned especially to support civic participation and that preferably can be connected to the official decision-making structures. Our basic assumption is that social media services for civic participation cannot be given to citizens as ready-made tools. Citizens – the end users of this kind of services – should be involved in planning these services. They users can even be seen as innovators, and the services should be adaptable to different purposes according to the needs of users and different cases (Von Hippel, 2005).

In this paper, we present the case of Monimos, a social media service for civic participation that was designed together with the user community. The aim of this case was to study how the participatory design approach (Schuler and Namioka, 1993) works in connection to creating a social media service aimed at improving the opportunities of immigrants to civic participation in Finland. The specific new aspect of this case is using participatory design methods in an open process with a loosely defined user community. The voluntary immigrant members in the design team participated in defining and designing the service that supports their own various aims related to civic participation.

The paper is structured as follows. We first explore the critical issues of civic participation from different perspectives, namely urban planning, social media, and information systems' design. Second, we introduce the Monimos case and explore the critical issues identified in the participatory design process of the social media service. Finally, we conclude with lessons learnt and suggestions for future research in participatory design of social media services for civic participation.

2 Participatory design of a social media service for civic participation

In the case study, participation had many viewpoints. The subject of design was civic participation, the solution for that was participation via social media, and the chosen method for designing the solution was participatory design. General requirements and earlier findings relating to civic participation create the basis also for designing online environments for civic participation. Social media offers tools and processes that can be used to build such a service for civic participation and are themselves examples of user participation. Social media services typically evolve directly based on the needs and ideas of their users, internet citizens or 'netizens'. Netizens accommodate virtual world and use its services to support their daily lives and communication and collaboration needs.

Participatory approach and collaboration of different stakeholders, including users, was used already in the design process. It was a natural choice, since our assumption is that citizens need to be involved in the design process of services for civic participation.

2.1 Civic participation

A key requirement for a civic participation service is publicity: participation is a deliberative process with public discussion and it should be open and accessible to everyone. For example in urban planning, civic participation is regarded as a value in itself: it is important that citizens participate and are involved in the processes that eventually will result in having a big impact on their everyday life and environment. In the public sector, participatory practices have been found to be underdeveloped and sometimes problematic: e.g., the planning and execution processes and decision-making may be slowed down because of civic participation (Bäcklund, 2007).

In cases where the public sector is the initiator of the participatory processes, the participation practices have usually been set beforehand unlike in citizen-oriented, grass-root activism. Participating citizens may have their say in the issue but they are excluded from defining the actual practices and means of their participation. This has sometimes clashed with people's ideas and wishes. Hence, they may disagree with city officials about the facts and values behind the planning process, as well as the goals of the process – and their own role in it.

The research of urban planning has introduced key questions of civic participation (Bäcklund, 2007; Häikiö, 2005; Laine and Peltonen, 2003; Leino, 2006) that are useful also in the participatory design of social media services:

- inclusiveness – who is allowed to participate
- stakeholders and representativeness – what kind of groups are represented in the process and by whom
- expertise – who possesses information and what kind of information is seen relevant and valuable
- knowledge and understanding about the planning process
- interest in or motivation to be involved in the planning process.

2.2 *Social media*

Social media can be understood both as the tools that people use to share content and to interact, and a process that this interaction creates (Erkkola, 2008). Social media has many distinctive features from traditional media process; the roles of the producer and consumer are not separate. The content production model is iterative (Lietsala and Sirkkunen, 2008; Näkki et al., 2011).

Axel Bruns (2008) uses the term *produsage* to illustrate social media-based production. Perhaps the most known example of produsage is the development of Wikipedia where 'users' are continuously both producing and using. Produsage is based on the following four principles (Bruns, 2008) that are similar with the aims of civic participation processes and participatory design:

- open participation and communal evaluation
- fluid hierarchy with ad hoc meritocracy
- unfinished artefacts and continuing progress
- common property but individual rewards

Social media offers versatile platforms to operate with the wisdom of crowds, which refers to the notion that in certain conditions, large groups of people can produce collectively smarter decisions and predictions than a few experts (Surowiecki, 2005). The conditions or prerequisites include diversity, independence and decentralisation of opinions, and a way to aggregate opinions into a single answer.

Another important feature in social media is its networking capability. User communities are the cornerstones of social media and make designing social media

services challenging. The designers cannot create only an information system but they need to design participation opportunities. Since users are active participants in the service, the traditional distinction between users and developers no longer holds (Fischer, 2009). One speciality of designing social media comes from the constant development of services. The services can be in perpetual beta phase and be developed during their use based on user feedback (O'Reilly, 2005).

2.3 Participatory design

When developing information systems, participatory design refers to a software design approach in which various user groups and other stakeholders participate in the design process and decision-making in a mutual and reciprocal relationship with the developers (Muller, 2002). Different methods have been used in involving users into the design process (Massanari, 2010). Users may participate actively as members of the design team and are involved in defining the problem, devising the solution principles (e.g., software features), testing and giving feedback. Participatory design has traditionally been applied to information systems design especially in workplaces where the end-users and their goals and tasks are relatively easy to identify and define.

There are some special aspects in using participatory design for a social media service. Social media services are formed in a collaborative process of content-creation and communication with other people, as soon as the service can be launched, and used by ordinary users. The design should be on providing opportunities for interaction and supporting desired processes. The role of designers is not to design a ready-made system but rather to facilitate and encourage the use of the system and to create conditions for participation: to 'seed' content, community and connections that can continue after the designers leave (Hagen and MacFarlane, 2008).

When developing social media services, users and their needs cannot only be studied at an individual level but also from a community perspective. As social media services are used with and in relation to other people, they must be designed to support collaborative actions and communication. Instead of user-centric, a community-centric design approach is needed (Brandtzæg et al., 2009).

Co-design is a term close to participatory design. It stresses the collaborative nature of design activities across the whole span of the design process from exploration in the fuzzy front end and ideation to concept development and prototyping (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). As distinction to participatory design (Schuler and Namioka, 1993), in co-design special attention is paid to the early phases of the design process in which the idea does not yet exist (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). Co-design can be described as collaborative, transparent in regard to methodology, continuous in regard to participants and open for a multiplicity of viewpoints (Bradwell and Marr, 2008).

When designing social media services, service design is another relevant approach. It shares the ideals of involvement, cooperation and empowerment with participatory design approach. However, participatory design is typically tool-centred, whereas service design looks at multiple value-adding channels. In comparison to participatory design, service design is neutral towards different actors and their goals. All stakeholders are seen equal and cooperation between all actors who share capabilities and resource will bring all authors toward their own and their shared goals (Holmlid, 2009).

3 Monimos case study

Monimos was a joint case study of two research projects, Somus¹ and EPACE², which both examined the possibilities of social media in civic participation and in collaboration with the public sector. The Monimos case study focused on developing social media tools especially for and together with immigrants and multicultural associations in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In Finland, enhancing political participation of immigrants is of growing importance, since this group currently has disappointingly low participation figures (Wilhelmsson, 2010).

The high level goal of the case study was to enable immigrants' participation in the processes of knowledge building and public discussion, and to establish open interfaces and interaction between immigrants, multicultural associations and various government agencies. There were no specific goals regarding the form of the social media service to be developed. The study started with an open exploration of needs and different opportunities together with the end users.

Our research method was participatory action research and we used participatory design methods to plan the actual ways of how immigrant participation in the Finnish society could be improved with the help of social media.

3.1 *Design process*

The case study started with getting more understanding of immigrants' needs and current challenges in civic participation. We made this by interviewing civil servants working with immigration issues and the founder of a Helsinki-based networking and events community for Finnish and international people (Jolly Dragon). As the following step, the challenges that immigrants face as well as possible solutions were discussed and developed in two concept ideation workshops. The first workshop was held with a group of foreign researchers working in one of the participating research organisations, and the second one with people working with immigrant issues in NGOs, media, municipalities and ministries. In the workshops, we came up with 18 ideas of social media services that could be used to enhance immigrants' civic participation. The ideas varied from podcasts to translation services and collaborative language learning.

Another result of the initial workshops was making the connection to the Moniheli Cooperation Network for Multicultural Organisations in the Helsinki Capital Region (later referred to as Moniheli). Moniheli was then in the process of being established and more like a loose network than a formal organisation. Moniheli members shared the same interests with the research projects relating to immigrant involvement in the society, so mutual decisions were made to collaborate. This way, direct connection was established to local immigrant communities.

The more precise definition of the case goals, target results and partly also of the participation practices were left open for negotiation with the participants. To start, we published all 18 initial concept ideas on the web and asked people to vote and comment on them as well as to post new ideas. The actual refinement of the ideas started in an open workshop together with Moniheli members in which the three most popular ideas were evaluated (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 An open workshop organised together with Moniheli members for defining the service concept (see online version for colours)



Based on the group discussions in this open workshop, we decided to combine two of the presented ideas for further development: *a solutions arena* – forum that uses the wisdom of the crowds to solve civic issues – with the idea of a *multicultural event calendar* for associations, public sector and individuals to help in networking and forming ‘crowds’ and interest groups. Moniheli did not yet have an online presence, so there were high expectations of creating a comprehensive solution for various purposes that would serve Moniheli. Expectations presented in the workshop included providing basic organisational information, community management, marketing, creating job opportunities, and even getting funding via the service.

After this first Moniheli workshop, a core design team was established. It originally consisted of ten immigrants, two Moniheli network employees and the research project workers - a web developer, a designer, and six researchers of different fields. One of the Moniheli project workers invited the immigrant members with various backgrounds (nationality, gender, professions) and interest in social media and new service development. During the process, eight additional immigrants joined the team or participated in some of the workshops, due to their role or interest in Moniheli. Some of the original members did not participate throughout the whole process, so that even the core design team was dynamic during the case.

The core design team held eight monthly design workshops that were the most important space for creating the vision for the service, making design decisions and managing practical issues, such as press release for the launch of the website. Some participants attended the workshops remotely by using free applications like Skype, EtherPad and Bambuser. In the first design workshops, the focus was in idea generation, use scenarios and use case descriptions, whereas the later workshops concentrated on evaluating the Monimos website that was being iteratively developed based on the participants’ feedback and decisions.

Between the workshops, the core design team worked online in the Owela co-design space (Näkki and Antikainen, 2008) and via e-mail. Owela was open to anyone interested

and not only to the core team to make suggestions regarding the service concept, prioritise features (Figure 2), discuss the layout and service name, and vote on these. In the final stages before the launch, three chat sessions were carried out for real-time co-testing capturing bugs and making quick decisions about minor issues.

Figure 2 Feature voting in the online collaboration platform Owela (see online version for colours)

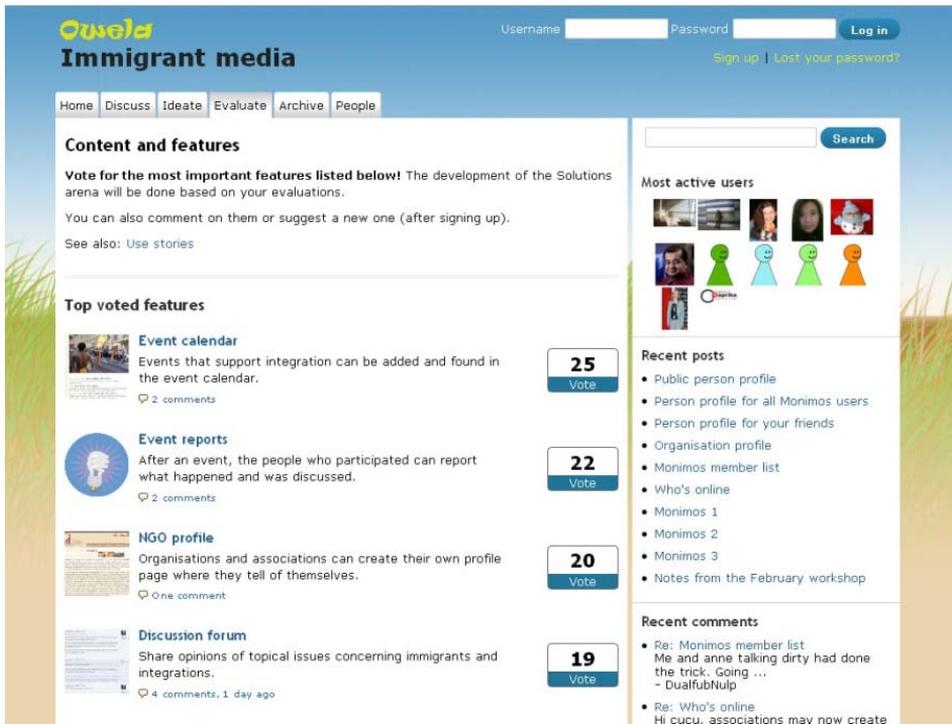


Table 1 Summary of the design methods, participants and outcome in each phase

<i>Method</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>	<i>Participant role</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Interviews	Civil servants, immigrant network (3)	Informants	Needs and challenges
Workshops	Civil servants, NGOs, media, immigrants (24)	Innovators	Service ideas
Online ideation	anyone (immigrants, civil servants, researchers) (14)	Innovators, evaluators	Comments and votes
Immigrant workshop	Moniheli members and employees (15)	Evaluators, informants, innovators	Selection of service concept
8 Core team workshops (PostIt ideation, scenario drawing, use case writing, discussion, evaluation of design sketches)	A selected group of (mostly) Moniheli members, researchers, developer, designer (10–15)	Co-designers, evaluators, decision-makers	Vision, use cases, features, decision-making, marketing
Online co-design (suggestions, feedback, test chat)	Anyone (immigrants, civil servants, researchers) (20)	Evaluators, innovators	Feedback, name suggestions

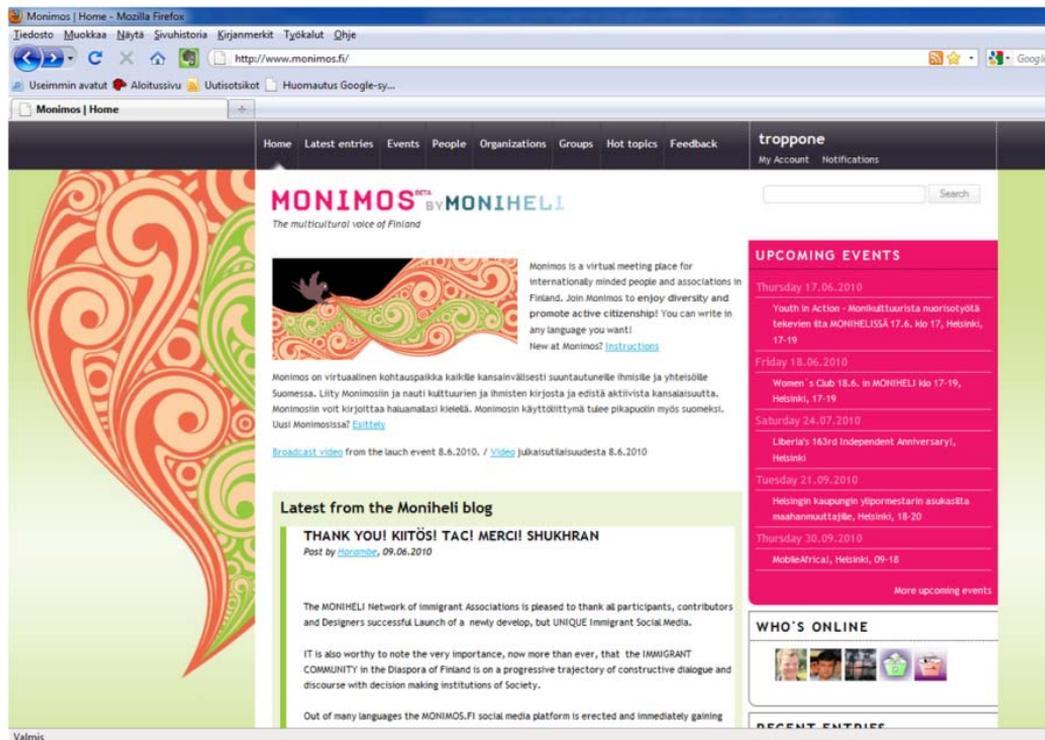
A summary of all design methods, the role of participants in them and the outcome of each stage in the design process are listed in the Table 1.

3.2 Monimos service

Monimos was built on free open-source software, WordPress and BuddyPress. They were tailored according to the needs and requirements identified during the participatory design process. The choice to use this platform was based on several reasons: the projects had limited resources; open source platforms give good opportunities for future development and maintenance, and based on the initial requirements, this software had the necessary key features.

As the result of the design process, the Monimos service³ was defined to be a virtual meeting place for internationally minded people (Figure 3). In practice, it is meant to be a tool for individuals and associations to facilitate and promote networking, information exchange and civic participation.

Figure 3 The monimos.fi service (see online version for colours)



Individuals and associations may have a profile page in Monimos. All content is created by users and most of it can be read without registration. Users may write and comment on blogs, join and create groups, create and answer polls, find and advertise events, network with other users and organisations, and send private messages. Associations can create their own organisation profile to present their activities, events and things they want to promote. Even though the main aim was to create a public open forum, it is also possible for associations to use the service as their own internal tool.

The Monimos service was launched in June, 2010 and a year later, there were 390 registered users, 22 organisations, 25 public groups, ten private and 33 hidden groups. The most active discussion had 87 entries. One hundred users had written at least one blog post, 105 users had commented at least once, and all in all, 241, or 41 %, out of 586 posts had been commented.

In addition to online discussion, the aim has been to organise face-to-face meetings, ‘Monimos Clubs’ that would serve to develop the service and network users, initiate real world action. Three Monimos Clubs have been organised for the Monimos members. At the end of the research project, the service was handed over to Moniheli and it is currently administered and owned by them.

3.3 Data gathering and analysis

The research project produced various kinds of research material including audio recordings from workshops, research diaries, questionnaires, seven semi-structured participant interviews, analysis of the materials produced in the planning process both in workshops and online spaces, researcher observations and reflections of the discussions with the core design team and research groups. For the purposes of this paper, the data was analysed collaboratively by the authors. The research diary was read and analysed by three researchers and the interview transcriptions were read and annotated by two researchers. These notes and the key interview findings were discussed, reflected on and organised collaboratively using EtherPad, a tool for real-time collaborative writing.

4 Challenges in open co-design

During the Monimos development process, we found a number of critical issues to be aware of when designing social media services for civic participation as an open process. With openness we mean the fact that the end result is not fixed in advance, and that the participation in the face-to-face and online co-design sessions is not limited only to the preselected persons. We group the critical factors as follows:

- defining the goal and vision
- inclusion and motivation
- interaction and working methods
- decision-making process.

The following sections present and discuss key findings related to these factors in more detail.

4.1 Defining the goal and vision

Defining and communicating the vision is part of creating a ‘plausible promise’ (Raymond, 1999), which means specifying the value that the service is intended to bring to the participating community. The time and effort spent by the user using a social media service and interacting with other users must be valuable (Shirky, 2008). Communicating the plausible promise, including the design process goals and rationale for participation is

important for managing expectations. This is especially critical in the early phase, when the user base or community is just forming and the value potential may be difficult to see.

The clear aim of the core design team was that both immigrants and Finns should interact and collaborate in the resulting service. The final goal of this interaction would be to promote diversity and effectively lead even to integrating immigrants into the Finnish society. Even after crystallising, developing and eventually launching the service, the vision remained wide. In May 2010, the participants were asked to write down their understanding of the Monimos vision and goals, to gain an understanding of whether there is still a shared understanding among the core design team members. These expectations and understanding were very much in line the initial vision but still expressed at very high level, which is typical in action research projects (Mäkinen, 2009).

The discussions in the workshops showed that immigrants are faced with many kinds of challenges, and once they had an opportunity, there was a lot of pressure to get as many of the pressing issues as possible to be included. However, since each project only has limited resources, it would be beneficial that a more limited target is set, at least for the duration of the project.

4.2 Inclusion and motivation

There had been numerous immigrant related research and development projects in which immigrants had felt like being the objects of research or actions, and not subjects or active participants. As the participants put it, it is completely different to be an active and empowered participant in the process, than just an informant or the object of research. A participatory process aims at empowerment by involving participants as full members of the development team. This hopefully leads to the sense of empowerment also as a fully contributing member of the society. Involving immigrants as early as possible and discussing their role in the project are ways of trying to eliminate the research object point of view.

Very heterogeneous parties were involved: multidisciplinary researchers, Ministry of Justice, multicultural associations, their cooperation network, and people participating as individuals. The majority of participants with non-Finnish background came either from Asia or Africa. We did not aim at finding a representative group of participants in relation to the whole heterogeneous immigrant population in Finland. The collaboration with the Moniheli network meant that we found people who were already active and wanted to contribute to further improving the opportunities of immigrants in the society. They had an important role as the link to the wider immigrant communities and in trying to understand their needs for tools to promote active civic participation. Some core team members also contacted people their personal networks to get more opinions on the planned features. On the other hand, core team members expressed their concern on the small number of people in the team, and thus limited viewpoints.

The immigrant members participated on voluntary basis and individual motives for participation varied. The participants were selected both based on their links to the Moniheli associations and by individuals' personal interest and willingness. Those who participated throughout the process were motivated and believed in what we were doing – the service concept as well as the higher goals that were the long-term target. For some, participating in this kind of an activity and getting an entry of it into their CVs was the motivating factor.

4.3 Interaction and working methods

Participation in the co-design workshops was high-spirited and intense. However, the used co-design methods, such as writing PostIt notes, creating stories with pictures, and writing user stories were sometimes difficult to adopt quickly in this kind of a heterogeneous group. For example, when asked by the workshop facilitators to write notes individually, many participants spontaneously turned to others to discuss and work in groups of two to three people. This example shows, how everyday knowledge of participants and their cultures plays an important role when working with a user group that has no or little earlier experience in service design methods. Choosing the working method can be seen as one form of using power, and it can be argued that the development and working methods and principles should be co-designed as well. In practice, participants could choose methods from among preselected alternatives that emphasise different modes of working.

In addition to the different preferences in the working methods, interpretations of terminology, concepts and conventions varied greatly among participants. This needs carefully attention. For example, feature voting during software development was aimed to be an *indicative* measurement of priorities. During this project, voting on items like the name or feature priorities was taken extremely seriously by some participants, even with similar concerns as in political democratic processes. Based on a feedback questionnaire, the participants had mixed feelings about the perceived democracy of the participatory design process.

In contrast to the active workshops, participation in between the workshops was surprisingly low – especially in the more abstract and open tasks. The involvement was highest in very concrete tasks, like naming the service or commenting on features. It was also difficult to motivate members to try to use the service on their own while it was being built and had limited features.

Critical moments emerged in our development process, when new people joined it and were not familiar with the ways of working. A new concept designer joined the project three months after the development had started, and she questioned some previous design choices of the Monimos concept. Also, the implicit question of expertise caused some dissonance in the role of the expert designer and the participating users in making design decisions. This can be described as an authority conflict. These kinds of conflicts are also familiar from urban planning processes where city planners hold the legitimate, professional knowledge. This expertise includes conventions such as a specific terminology and discourse, in which every day experiences and local knowledge of citizens translates poorly.

Furthermore, many design choices and vision were questioned also when new, very active user representatives joined the workshops at a later stage of the case, and even the whole design process was criticised. In fact, much effort was needed in meetings and e-mail discussions to cope with these questions and criticism to explain what has been done and why. Especially the decision rationale and things that had been *excluded* had not been documented, and they emerged from time to time.

There appeared to be a threshold to the activity and questioning by a new participant that could be handled easily. When that threshold was exceeded, the new person caused arguments and frustration, as earlier members may have felt that the value of their work was being questioned and underestimated. These incidents also caused delays in work, as time was spent explaining earlier decisions.

4.4 *Decision-making*

With the heterogeneous group and the resulting wide range of varying interests, decision-making was difficult. The roles of each person, organisation and stakeholder were fluid - meaning that individual persons could represent various stakeholders or roles, such as individual or citizen; employee or business owner; association head or chairman - and it was not always clear which of these roles dominated in each particular situation. Some of this may be attributed to the fact that Moniheli was still in the formation phase during the case, which meant that it was not an established association with a ready-made vision, working practices or a specific role in the society.

Any digital social media service needs the acceptance of its user community, which can truly be tested only after the service has been launched, but design decisions need to be made during the design process. The decision making in our project was hindered by the unclarity of the ownership of the future service. The design process was initially launched and led by the project researchers but they were not the intended future owners and main users of the service. The Moniheli network was still in the process of being founded, and many questions remained open. As there was no clear business owner, decision-making was decentralised, and it was hard to empathise with the goals or the service owner.

When the ownership is unclear or distributed to the participants, decision-making is slow or impossible. Existing, commercial but people-centric services like Facebook make their own decisions. They listen to the voice of the users afterwards, and adjust their decisions if there is extreme pressure to do that. Whether the users should register with their own names or use pseudonyms is an example of an issue that was hard to decide and that has kept on surfacing after the decision was made. Another such decision was showing the presence of the logged-in user at the website. It is easy to see that all alternatives in these issues have pros and cons, and all users will never be of the same opinion on them. The only option is to decide based on the overall aim of the service.

With a small development team, uncovering all user needs at practical level is difficult. Getting people to use the service as early as possible is one way of getting more information to the developers and to help decision making. Another way to address this issue could be to define user personas, which is a popular approach in service design (Pruitt and Grudin, 2003). With the help of personas, empathising with and understanding intended users could become easier.

We did not state design drivers or other guiding principles explicitly enough, which may have been one reason for hindering making solid and consistent decisions. With an evolving vision, prioritising and scoping out things was difficult and issues that had already been decided once, had a tendency to resurface into the discussions and agenda. This was partly caused by new people joining the development team. This was frustrating, but at best it led to discovering inconsistencies. With this kind of an open process with new members joining the project and with the intention to offer wide online participation, documenting the decisions and their motivation is extremely important. The nature of social media services is however such that the innovation really starts when the application is taken into use by enough many users, so there needs to be flexibility and ability to change things later on.

5 Conclusions and future research paths

Our findings deal particularly with how the participatory design processes work when a loosely defined and heterogeneous user group participate in the design and decision making process. Combining our experiences and findings from participatory practices in urban planning and information system design, we have highlighted the critical factors to take into account when applying participatory design of social media services and designing social media for civic participation.

5.1 Participatory design of social media

Involving real users in the development team and process was a natural approach and brought necessary insights of the needs and expectations of immigrants in Finland. The co-design process of Monimos was not, however, an easy one. Some challenges derived from the participatory process itself. The elements of the produsage (Bruns, 2008), such as fluid roles of participants, continuous process with unfinished artefacts, and open participation, could be seen throughout the co-design process. This is typical for social media services and has to be considered when planning the future roadmaps for development and participation.

Participants are in the very core of the outcome. An obvious model, as we have done, is to create a core team that can learn to work efficiently together, and involve wider audiences to question the decisions and to bring additional viewpoints via online participation. The model of combining face-to-face and online interaction worked, but considerable effort should be put into facilitating online participation. Few issues are of such interest that people participate in large numbers without some marketing and incentive. Developers need to present the process and current issues in an easily understandable way so that meaningful contributions can be made.

Our experiences highlight the importance of knowledge and understanding of the design process by all members. Giving the user-co-developers enough understanding of the whole process and letting them participate in method selection contribute to the success of the design process. Keeping a good record of design goals and decisions with their reasoning as well as stating what is explicitly excluded supports efficient progress and helps integrate new members into the team. The design process and the end result were enriched by the insights, viewpoints and experiences of the users.

Table 2 Recommendations for participatory design of social media

Goals	Speak out the (hidden) goals and (fluid) roles of each participant and stakeholder Create a shared vision early and remind of it continuously
Participants	Pay attention to the differences in previous experiences Limit the group of participants for decision-making
Interaction	Document the process and decisions for the members who join the process later Co-decide the participation methods with all participants
Management	Find a responsible owner for the whole service, even if it is bottom-up civic service Involve lots of users in content creation and networking

The summary of the lessons learnt is presented in Table 1. Recommendations for participatory design of social media services in the civic participation context are given related to goals, participants, interaction methods and management. The list is not comprehensive but stresses especially the lessons of the open process with multiple partners.

5.2 Social media for civic participation

The aim of our project was to create bottom up participation with social media tools. With the participatory goals and values adapted in the project, the researchers chose not to define the outcome but let the participants make decisions during the course of the design process based on their needs and hopes. This open-ended way of working inspired the participants and gave them the sense of doing something valuable, not just for themselves but for the immigrants and society in general.

This type of societal goal was possible in this project because the partners involved were researchers, governmental actors and civil society representatives such as NGOs. It was possible to focus on ‘common good’ without pressure of generating revenue or profit. However, that was true only on short term, because some funding will be needed in the long run to maintain and develop the service further. Also, the project might have benefitted from the pressure of needing to have a business model in defining its plausible promise, which in the case of the Monimos service remained broad.

Some challenges of social media services were left unanswered. First, how to invite people to the new public service and get them to adopt it for their own use. The website would have needed more publicity, especially in traditional media, in order to become widely known among people. Second, in today’s social media environment, it is difficult to successfully introduce a new service, especially with such small resources of time, people, and funding, as the Monimos case had. Good examples and knowledge of creating a success story from a small start would have been helpful.

Most importantly, since the aim of the participants was focused at the influencing the society, the project should have proceeded at two fronts instead just in social media. The participants would have benefitted had they been given the opportunity to access actual physical places where societal plans are being discussed and decisions influenced and made. More interaction would have taken place, if the design process had involved real world citizen participation including collaboration with local officers, activists and politicians aside with developing the website.

5.3 Future research

Processes initiated by researchers or government agencies may not become truly owned by the participants as stated by Mäkinen (2009). Research into the continuity of the service use and development is needed. For example, which factors hinder or promote the take-up of a service and the fulfilment of its goals and vision. Further research should evaluate and analyse potential shifts in the behaviour and interactions – for example, how Monimos has changed the way organisations interact. Some interest has been expressed towards the Monimos service by governmental and municipal organisations, so it will be seen later whether Monimos has created or increased engagement between these organisations and the NGOs.

Further research is also needed related to bridging the tools, activities and concepts of bottom-up citizen communities, on one hand, and governments' top-down participation practices and technologies on the other, in terms of interoperability and integration.

Acknowledgements

The case study was a part of the Somus project that has been funded by the Academy of Finland. The authors would like to thank Moniheli, all the participants in the Monimos case study and the researchers in the EPACE project who participated in the case study as our co-researchers.

References

- Bäcklund, P. (2007) 'Tietämisen politiikka', *Kokemuksellinen tieto kunnan hallinnassa*. Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus: Helsinki.
- Bradwell, P. and Marr, S. (2008) *Making the Most of Collaboration: An International Survey of Public Service Co-Design*, Demos, London:
- Brandtzæg, P.B., Følstad, A., Obrist, M., Geerts, D. and Berg, R. (2009) 'Innovation in online communities – towards community-centric design', in Daras, P. and Mayora, O. (Eds.): *UCMedia 2009*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp.50–57, LNICST.
- Bruns, A. (2008) *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Prodsusage*, Peter Lang Publishing: New York.
- Erkkola, J. (2008) *Sosiaalisen median käsitteestä*, Helsinki University of Arts and Design, Medialab, Helsinki.
- Fischer, G. (2009) 'End-user development and meta-design: foundations for cultures of participation', in Pipek, V. et al. (Eds.): *IS-EUD 2009*, LNCS 5435, pp.3–14, Springer-Verlag, Berlin.
- Hagen, P. and MacFarlane, J. (2008) 'Reflections on the role of seeding in social design', *Proceedings of OZCHI 2008*, pp.279–282, ACM Press.
- Häikiö, L. (2005) *Osallistumisen rajat. Valta-analyysi kestävän kehityksen suunnittelusta Tampereella*, University Press, Tampere.
- Held, D. (2006) *Deliberative Democracy in Models of Democracy*, 3rd ed., Polity Press and Stanford University Press, Cambridge and Stanford.
- Holmlid, S. (2009) 'Participative, co-operative, emancipatory. From participatory design to service design', *First Nordic Conference on Service Design and Service Innovation*, Oslo, Norway.
- Laine, M. and Peltonen, L. (2003) Ympäristökysymys ja aseveliakseli, *Ympäristöpolitisoituminen Tampereella vuosina 1959–1995*, (Environmental issues and the 'Brothers-in-arms Axis', Politicisation of the Environment in Tampere from 1959 to 1995) Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Leino, H. (2006) *Kansalaisosallistuminen ja kaupunkisuunnittelun dynamiikka*, Tutkimus Tampereen Vuoreksesta, ActaUniversitasTampereensis 1134, Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Lietsala, K. and Sirkkunen, E. (2008) *Social Media. Introduction to the tools and processes of Participatory Economy*, Tampereen yliopiston laitosten julkaisut, 2008 (Hypermedialaboration verkkojulkaisuja 2008:17) [online] tampub.uta.fi/tup/978-951-44-7320-3.pdf (accessed 8 February 2009).
- Mäkinen, M. (2009) *Digitaalinen voimistaminen paikallisten yhteisöjen kehittämisessä*, Academic dissertation, Tampere University Press, Media Studies, [Digital empowerment in community development], Tampere.

- Massanari, A. (2010) ‘Designing for imaginary friends: information architectures, personas and the politics of user-centered design’, *New Media & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.401–416.
- Muller, M.J. (2002) ‘Participatory design: the third space in HCI’, in Jacko, J. and Sears, A. (Eds.): *Handbook of HCI*, Erlbaum, Mahway NJ USA.
- Näkki, P. and Antikainen, M. (2008) ‘Online tools for co-design: user involvement through the innovation process’, in Karahasanovic, A. and Følstad, A. (Eds.): *The NordiCHI 2008 Workshops: New Approaches to Requirements Elicitation & How Can HCI Improve Social Media Development?*, pp.92–97, Tapir akademiskforlag, Trondheim.
- Näkki, P., Bäck, A., Ropponen, T., Kronqvist, J., Hintikka, K., Harju, A., Pöyhkäri, R. and Kola, P. (2011) *Social Media for Citizen Participation*, p.755, Report on the Somus project, VTT Publications.
- O’Reilly, T. (2005) ‘What is Web 2.0 – design patterns and business models for the next generation of software’, *O’Reilly blog post*, 30 September [online] <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed 15 December 2010).
- Pruitt, J. and Grudin, J. (2003) ‘Personas: practice and theory’, *Proceedings of the 2003 Conference on Designing for User Experiences*, pp.1–15, ACM Press, San Francisco, CA.
- Raymond, E.S. (1999) *The Cathedral & the Bazaar*, O’Reilly, ISBN 1-56592-724-9 [online] <http://www.catb.org/~esr/writings/cathedral-bazaar/cathedral-bazaar/> (accessed 16 June 2011).
- Sanders, E.B-N. and Stappers, P.J. (2008) ‘Co-creation and the new landscapes of design’, *CoDesign*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp.5–18.
- Schuler, D. and Namioka, A. (Eds.) (1993) *Participatory Design: Principles and Practices*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, New Jersey.
- Shirky, C. (2008) *Here Comes Everybody*, Penguin Press HC, London, ISBN 978-1-59420-153-0.
- Surowiecki, J. (2004) *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few*, 320p, Acabus, London, ISBN-10: 0349116059.
- Von Hippel, E. (2005) *Democratizing Innovation*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Wilhelmsson, N. (2010) ‘Political participation of migrants in Finland – reflections from the participation project’, in Ahokas, L., Tykkyläinen, S. and Wilhelmsson, N. (Eds.): *Practicing Participation. Proceeding of the EPACE, Good Citizen Participation Practices Conference*.

Notes

- 1 “Social media for citizens and public sector collaboration”.
- 2 “Exchanging good practices for the promotion of an active citizenship in the European Union”.
- 3 <http://www.monimos.fi>.