Uncontrollable factor?

The role(s) of social media in Finnish urban planning culture

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Participatory Planning 22.3.2021

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Four good reasons to study the use of social media in urban planning context

Social media is having an impact on Finnish urban planning culture as part of the ongoing **digital transformation**

Digital participation is becoming established in urban planning, but the role of social media in urban planning **is vague and conflicting**

Social media is challenging current practices. There is an evident gap between **top-down and bottom-up** participation.

The renewal of land use and building act emphazises digital transformation but is unable to address to the challenges related to selforganizing participation

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The challenges related to the use of social media cannot be explained solely through **planners' attitudes** or **technological challenges**.
Can answers be found in Finnish planning culture?

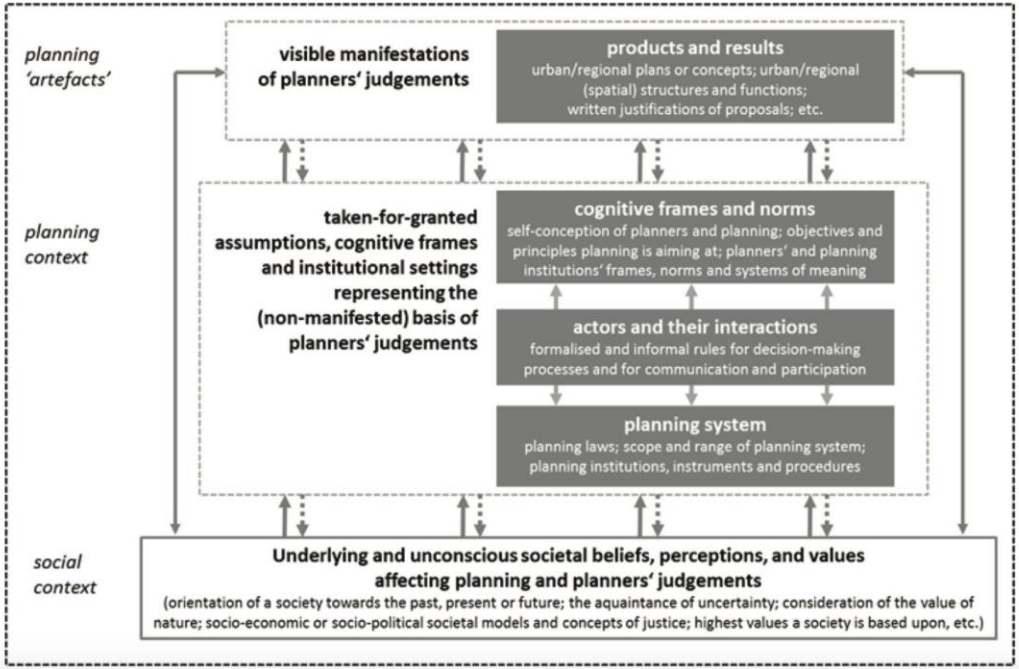
The concept of planning culture

Planning culture:
An entity of prevailing urban **planning practices** and **legal planning system**. The **goals**, **means** and institutional **structures** are defined within that entity.

(The Helsinki term bank for arts and sciences)

The concept of planning culture

Figure 2. A conceptual framework to explain and compare planners' judgements. Source: Author's own illustration (based on Levin-Keitel & Sondermann, 2014; Othengrafen, 2010, 2012)



Some characteristics of Finnish planning culture:

- Comprehensive rationalist paradigm
- Strong emphasis on expert knowledge
- Public participation framed by Land-use and building act
- Attitudes towards digitalization
- Future oriented society
- Trust in public sector

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Source: Othengrafen, Frank. (2014). The Concept of Planning Culture: Analysing How Planners Construct Practical Judgements in a Culturised Context. International Journal of E-Planning Research.3(2), 1-17.

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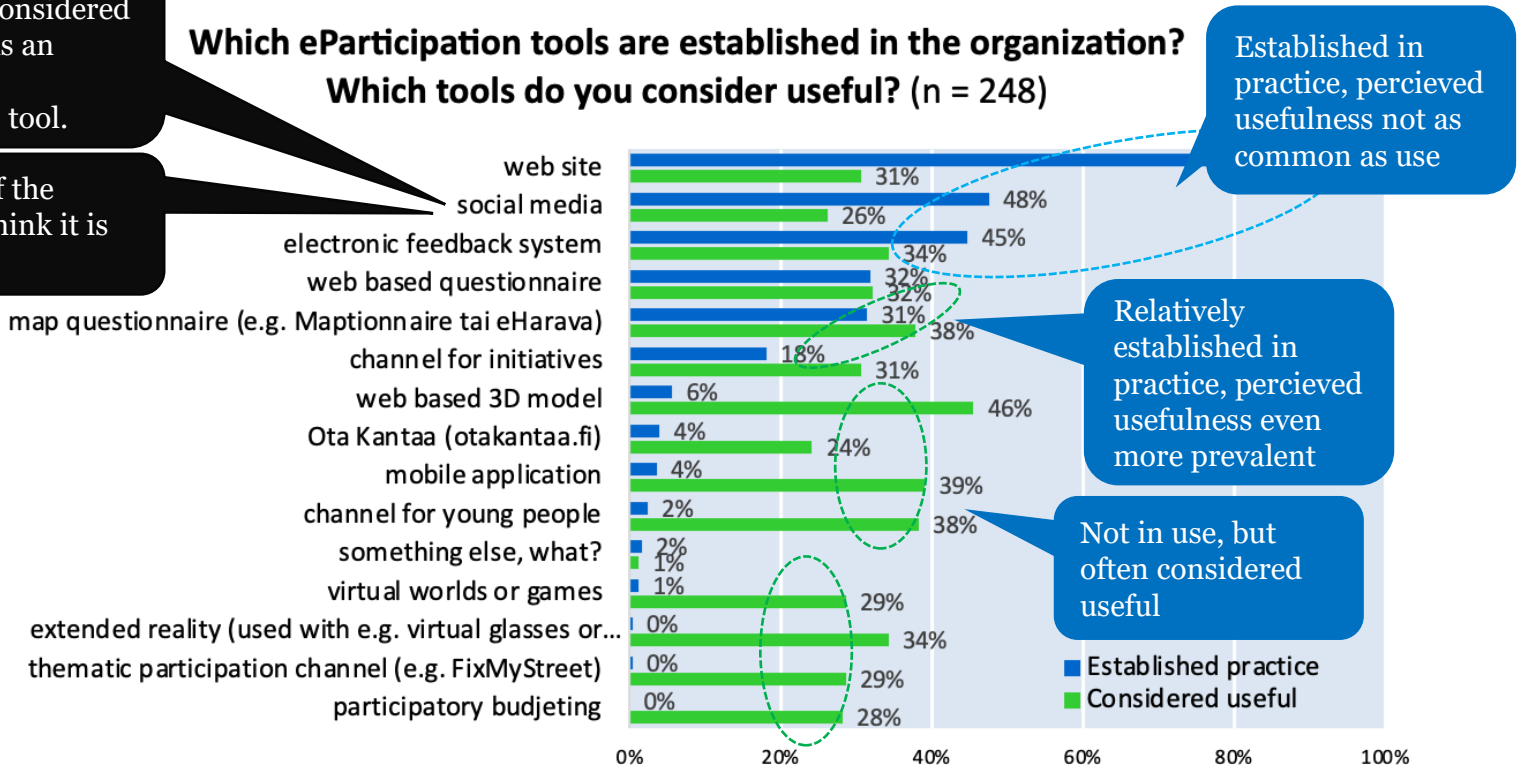
The roles of social media

Almost half of the respondents considered social media as an established eParticipation tool.

One quarter of the respondents think it is useful.



Source: Nummi (2018). Sähköinen osallistuminen alueiden käytön suunnittelussa (eParticipation in urban planning survey), Ministry of the Environment, Finland.

22.3.2021

Urban planners' perceived challenges and expectations in relation to social media

Inadequate resources and capabilities

Conflicting attitudes for and against within planning organizations

Experienced benefits – or uselessness

Lack of rules and support from the management

Planner's dual role (public servant / citizen)

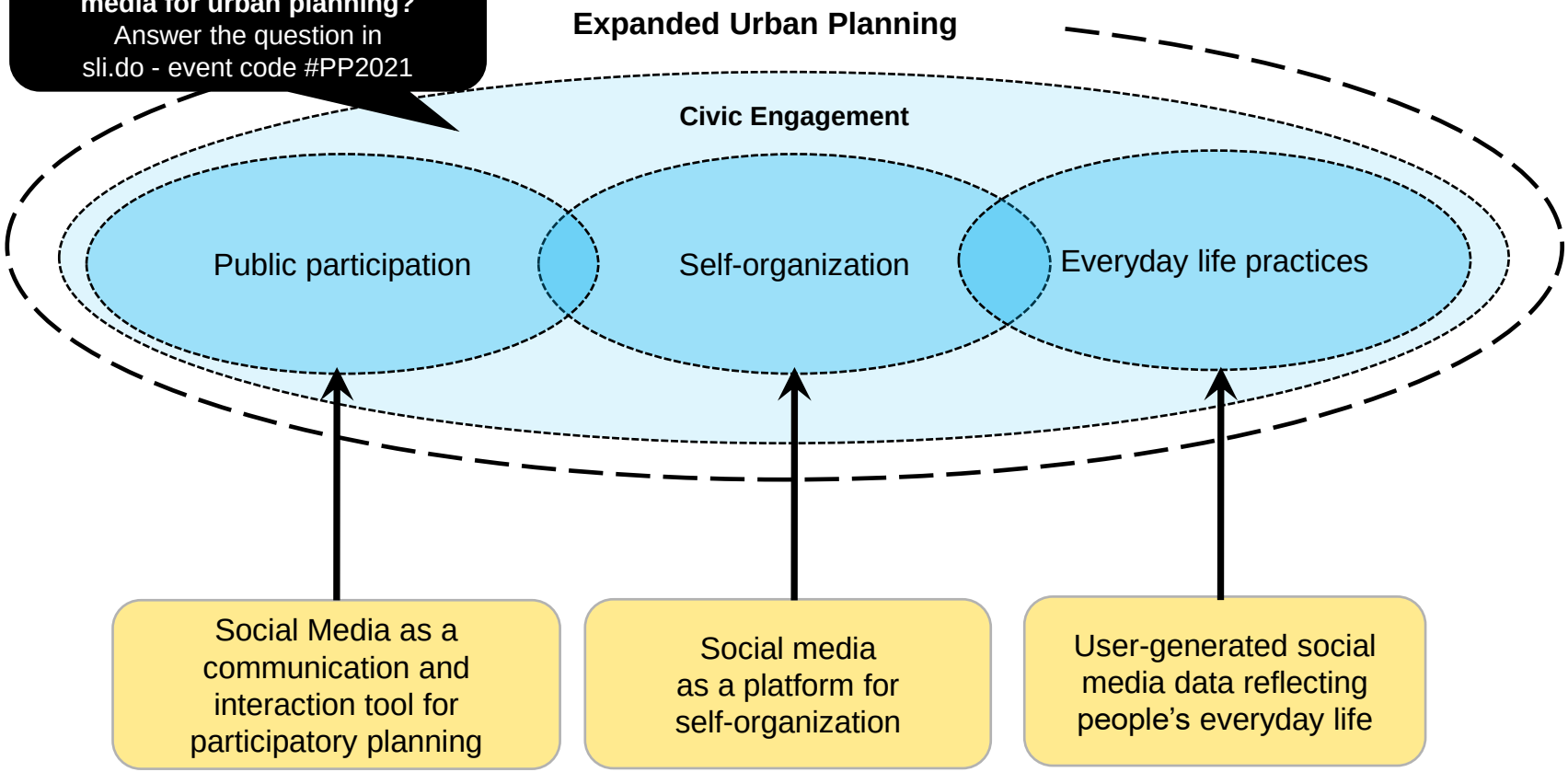
Expectations for a new open, pluralistic and interactive planning culture

Social media is establishing its role as a communication tool for planning

Enables self-organization of the citizen society

Useful knowledge for urban planning can be extracted from user-generated content

How would you rank the relevance of the roles of social media for urban planning?
Answer the question in
sli.do - event code #PP2021



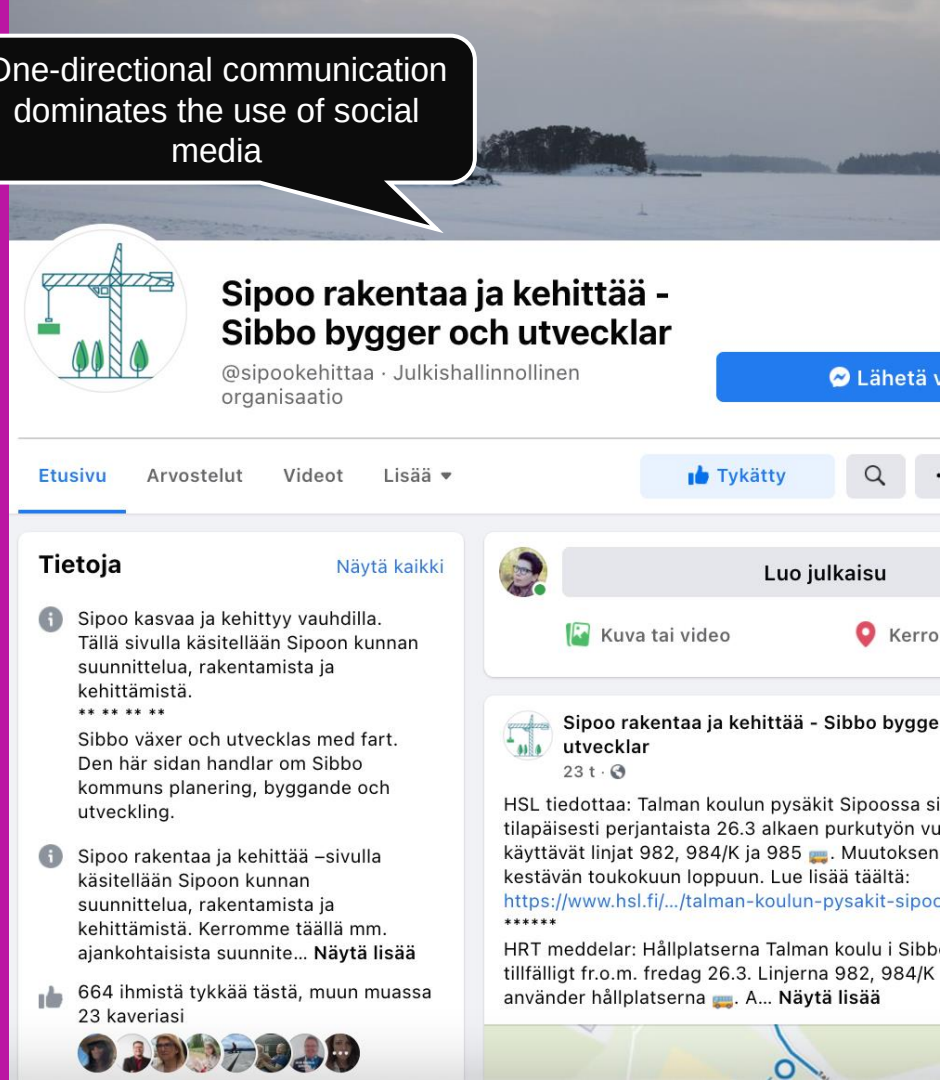
Participation:

A tool for communication and interaction

One-directional communication dominates the use of social media

Goals to reach wider stakeholder groups

Expectations towards increasing amount and quality of participation



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It’s not formal feedback? (Sipoo)

A more sizzling debate is going on in Sibbo-Sibbo local FB group.
I hope that planners would follow and save the discussion as a feedback for the plan.

Matti Hyhkö
Kiivaampi väittely tästä on käynnissä Sibbo-Sipoo ryhmässä. Toivoisin että kaavoitus seuraisi ja tallentaisi myös kyseistä keskustelua palauteena kaavasta.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/19025995072/permalink/10158610611855073/

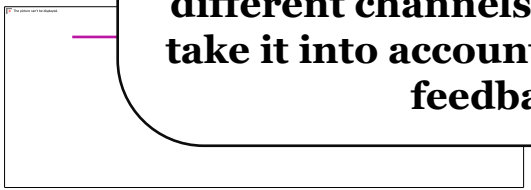
Tykkää · Vastaa · 3 vk · Muokattu

Tekijä
Sipoon kunta - Sibbo kommun
Hei! Hienoa, että aihe herättää keskustelua, mutta kannustamme kuitenkin jättämään palautteet mainittuja virallisia palautteenantokanavia pitkin. Niiden kautta lähetetyt palautteet huomioidaan ja käsitellään. Erilaisia somekeskusteluja ja keskusteluja toreilla ja kylänraiteilla käydään hyvin monissa paikoissa ja kanavissa, eikä niitä ole mahdollista huomioida samalla tavoin kuin virallisia palautteita.

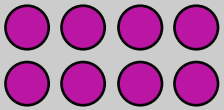
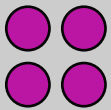
Tykkää · Vastaa · 3 vk

2

”Hi! It’s good that the topic raises discussion. However, we encourage people to use the official feedback channels. Only those comments will be taken into account and processed.
It is not possible to observe all discussions that are going on in different channels and forums and take it into account likewise formal feedback.”



Different ways to participate in local discussions

Follower		Planner follows local social media discussions with own profile, but does not participate in discussion.
Active listener		Planner follows and participates actively in discussions that are related to own planning projects.
Participative planner		Follows and participates in local discussions, and starts discussions about planning-related topics.
Informing organization		The organization informs about current projects in social media. Planners do not participate in discussion with their own profiles.

Platform for self-organization

The same **Social Media** – that is being slandered for **hate speech** and **bubbles** that drain democracy – is creating a **democracy of doing**, in parralel with the representative system.

Mäenpää & Faehnle, 2018

Transformation of the civil society

“The Finnish nation and social system was built by the civil society. Now it is being re-built – through social media.

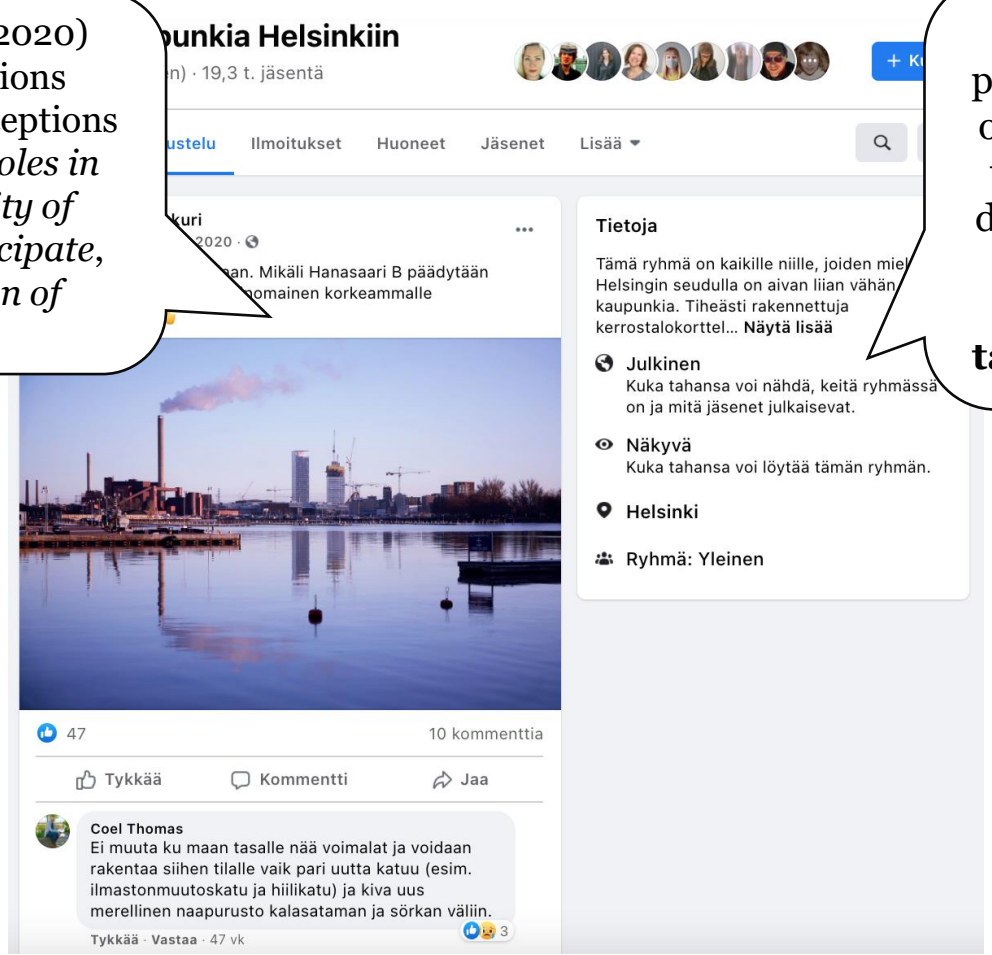
Large part of civil activity is moved to or born in social media. The administration had better to come to social media as well – until it is a must.”

The citizens aim to influence on sparate issues that interest them instead of political parties.

Active citizens want their voices to be heard and demand more rights to participate and influence on planning.

Pasi Mäenpää & Maija Faehnle, 2018, Some ja itseorganisoituva kaupunki
https://urbanacademy.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MaenpaaFaehnle_15012018.pdf

Sjöblom & Niitamo (2020) have identified tensions between planners' perceptions of *active vs. passive roles in social media, equality of opportunities to participate*, and in the *allocation of resources*.



No one forces urban planning to participate on social media, but if the cities themselves don't discuss planning in social media, **someone else will take over the space**.

Sjöblom, J. & Niitamo, A. (2020) The Intermediating Role of Municipal Urban Planners in Online Discussions with Citizens, Planning Theory & Practice, 21:5, 710-726, DOI: 10.1080/14649357.2020.1844282

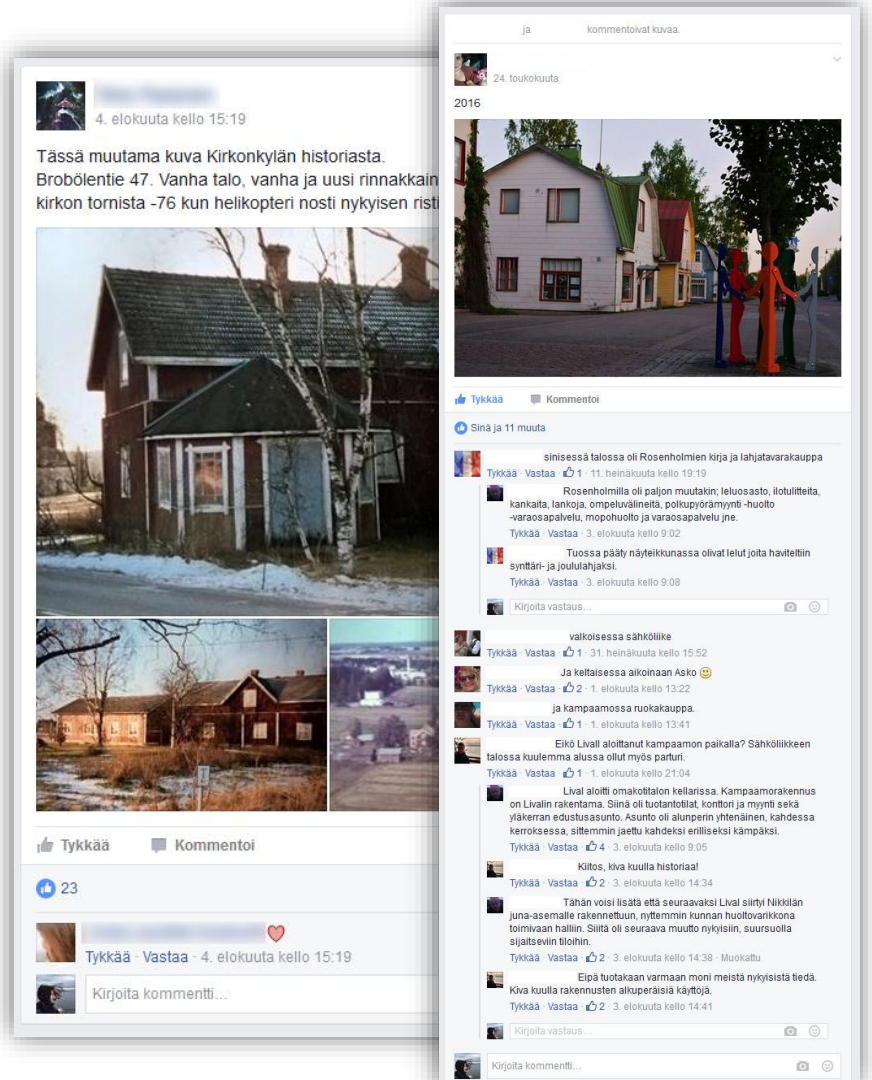
Niitamo, A., & Sjöblom, J. (2018). Verkkokeskustelut kommunikatiivista suunnittelua edistämässä: Lisää kaupunkia Helsinkiin -Facebook-ryhmä kaupunkisuunnittelun kumppanina? *Yhdyskuntasuunnittelu, 56*(2).

Example:
”Nikkilä Memories”

Self-organizing social media can contribute to planning-related knowledge building.

In Nikkilä, collective memories related to old buildings are being built in local Facebook groups:

- *Sharing old images (or images of old buildings) provoke discussion*
- *People share their memories, and provide information about the intangible aspects of cultural heritage.*



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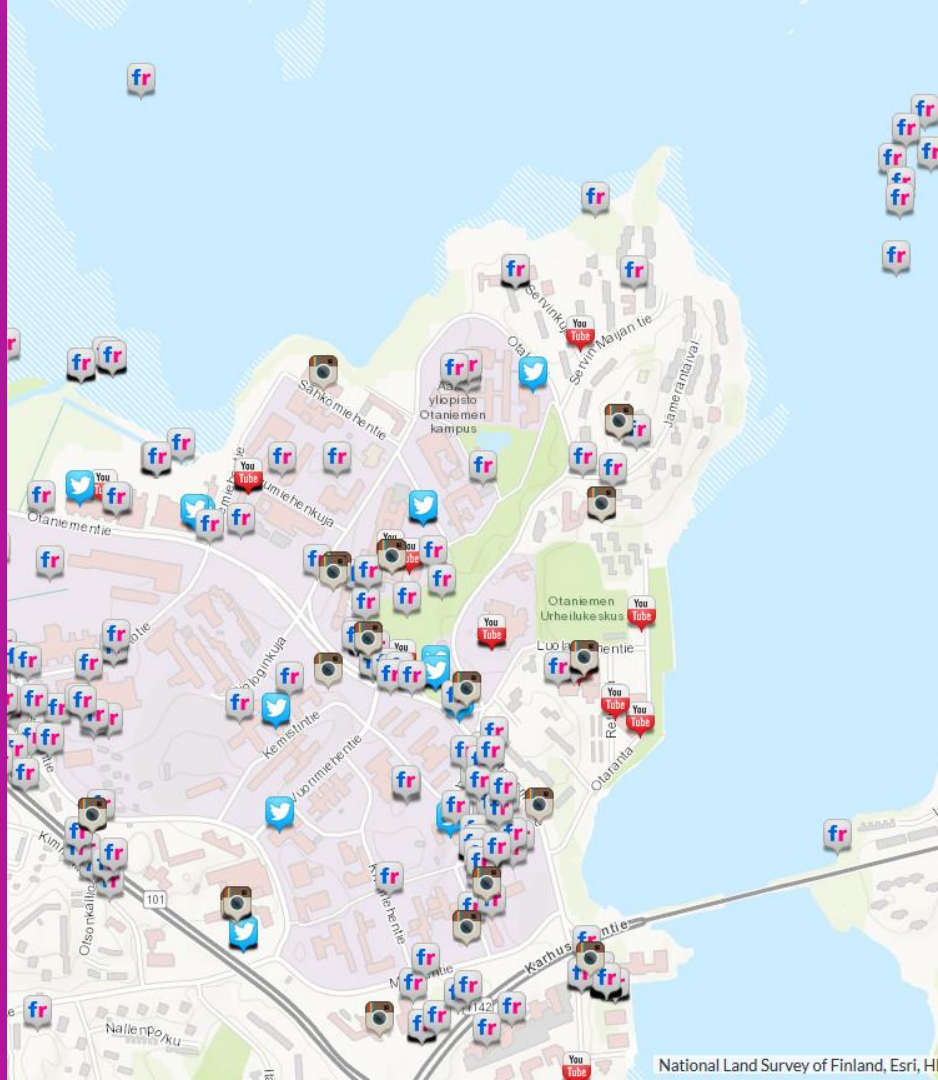
User-generated social media data reflecting people's everyday life



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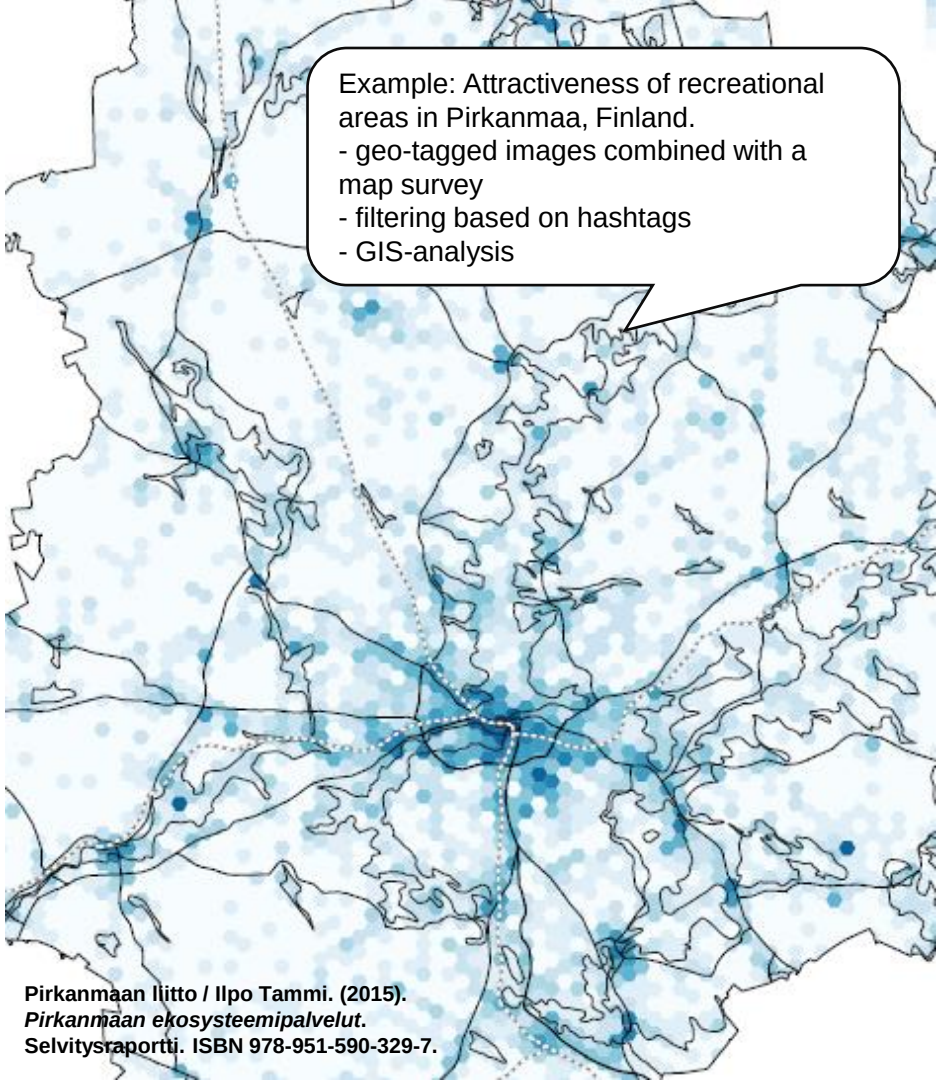
Social media as an information source

- **There is a rising interest to use social media data in urban planning**
- **A topical issue also in research**
- **Several methods have been developed to reveal for example:**
  - Opinions and experiences
  - People's behavior, activity patterns, mobility
  - Use of the environment
- **Challenges:**
  - difficult access to data
  - privacy issues
  - bias (spatial and demograpic)
  - lack of easy-to-use tools
  - difficulties in extracting useful information

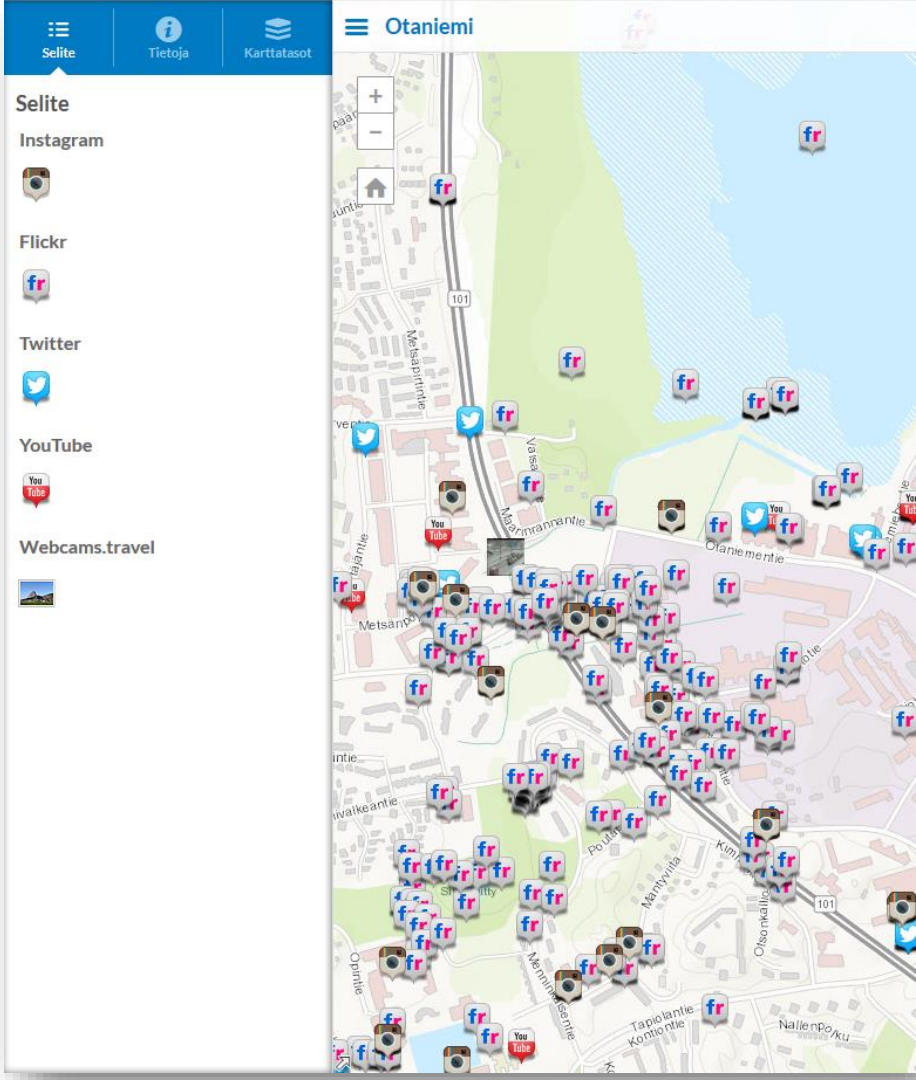


Pirkanmaan liitto / Ilpo Tammi. (2015). *Pirkanmaan ekosysteemipalvelut*. Selvitysraportti. ISBN 978-951-590-329-7.

Social media map with ArcGIS Online

You can make your own social media map with ArcGIS Online (an example of Public Information Map)

- Geo-tagged social media data on map (Twitter, Flickr, YouTube)
- Requires log in to Twitter
- Show only publicly available data
- Different data sources shows different timeframes (Flickr – all publications, Twitter – two weeks, etc.)



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From uncontrollable factor to an asset for urban planning

The different roles of social media should be taken into account both in the **development of local planning practices**, and in the **digitalization of land use planning** in general.

This could help to **promote democratization** of urban planning and to **strengthen human-centered thinking** in the digitalization of urban planning.

Thank you!

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