

BOOK REVIEW

Web 2.0 Technologies and Civic Engagement in Urban Governance

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Kathryn Kloby & Maria J. D'Agostino

Citizen 2.0. Public and Governmental Interaction through Web 2.0 Technologies.

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The book *Citizen 2.0*, edited by Kathryn Kloby and Maria J. D'Agostino, is an important contribution for the interpretation of the current changes in urban governance, in particular regarding the role Web 2.0 technologies can play in that process and how they can be used to transform public administration in all tiers of the political system, in particular in a period

of public finance constraints and increasing citizens' demands for more transparency and accountability. As the editors state in the beginning, the book aims to answer three main research questions: i) what is Web 2.0, and how can government make use of these technologies to engage the public? ii) How are governments using Web 2.0 technologies to engage citizens in the policy process? What should public administrators know about Web 2.0 technologies as they adopt and implement them? iii) In what ways can Web 2.0 technologies transform government as they are used to engage citizens? In addressing these primary research questions, the main focus of the book is on how these new Web 2.0 technologies are used to engage citizens in the public policy process. As some of the chapters in this book show, Web 2.0 technologies have the potential to improve public service delivery, its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as to enhance citizen engagement in the public policy process. The

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book has 15 chapters, written by 28 authors, from different academic backgrounds, and is organized into three main sections.

In the first section – Defining Web 2.0 Technologies and Their Relevance to the Public Sector – four chapters address the role of social media in the public sector, e-rulemaking, issues of privacy in records management associated with social media, and the management of virtual public organizations. Chapters in this section provide a detailed description of different applications and tools available to policy makers, the attributes of Web 2.0 technologies and platforms, and how these Web 2.0 applications can be employed to improve the policy-making process and some of the challenges associated with digital (urban) governance, namely issues of privacy and digital divide.

In the following section – Applying Web 2.0 in the Public Sector – the six chapters address a wide range of key issues and how Web 2.0 technologies are being addressed in the different tiers and sectors of public administration: M-Government, 3-D Digital City Platforms, Municipalities and Web 2.0, Social Networking, E-Democratic Administration, and social media in military affairs. The challenges associated with the digital divide are also addressed as well as the opportunities created by some of these web-based technologies to reduce these gaps and to enhance citizen engagement. Some of these chapters are specially focused on the local or municipal government tier and for that reason provide insights more directly connected to the sub-national tier in which urban and regional e-planning is usually placed in most countries.

This overview of Web 2.0 technologies is followed in the last section – Web 2.0 and the Potential of Transformation – by an in-depth

exploration, in five chapters, of how these new web-based technologies can offer new avenues for engaging citizens in the policy process and through that to facilitate the alignment of public policy decisions and actions with citizen's preferences. The role of Web 2.0 technologies to enhance citizen engagement in public policy decision making processes is examined, from different perspectives, and practical examples are offered, which will most probably help the dissemination of these participation approaches in urban and regional e-planning worldwide. Barriers and drivers of citizen e-participation through Web 2.0 technologies are also identified and discussed, confirming previous findings reported in the literature, including a critical assessment of the role of Web 2.0 in citizen participation, suggesting that the relationship between government and citizens, in all tiers, is being transformed by the widespread use of these new Web 2.0 technologies.

In sum, this is a valuable collection of essays, focused as they are on cutting-edge issues, most of which relevant for urban governance, and for urban planning in particular, well written and easy to read. In other words, it is a well informed overview of Web 2.0 technologies and of its potential to drive change in the way (urban) government interacts with citizens. For all these reasons, this is a book to be commended to researchers, students, planners and administrators working in the broad field of urban and regional (e-)planning and interested to explore some of the key issues and challenges that can be found in the frontier of technology and urban and regional governance.

Carlos Nunes Silva, PhD, is Professor Auxiliar at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests are mainly focused on local government policies, history and theory of urban planning, urban and metropolitan governance, urban planning ethics, urban planning in Africa, research methods, e-government and e-planning. His recent publications include the Handbook of Research on E-Planning: ICT for Urban Development and Monitoring (2010) and Online Research Methods in Urban and Planning Studies: Design and Outcomes (2012). He is the Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR).