

“EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR CITIZENS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN AREAS”

Table of contents

ABSTRACT

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. CITIZENS PARTICIPATION, ICTs AND HUMAN FACTORS**
- 3. THE EXPERIENCE OF “CALL ROME 060606 SERVICE” IN ROME**
- 4. THE WEB SITE: <http://www.roma6tu.it/>**
- 5. THE WEB SITE: “<http://www.professionecittadino.it/>”**
- 6. CONCLUSIONS**
- 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY**
- 8. ANNEX 1- List of Tables**
- 9. CURRICULUM**
- 10. RECENT PUBLICATIONS**
- 11. CONTACTS**

“EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR CITIZENS’ PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN AREAS”

Giovanna Anselmi, ENEA – Ugo Mocci, roma6tu

ABSTRACT

Different channels are currently employed by citizens and local administrative and operational bodies to communicate each other. In Rome a dedicated call centre (Call Rome 060606 service) has been recently set up to help citizens in gathering information on administrative services, sending suggestions, signalling drawbacks and in general to share information on the main events occurring in the town. Such service is organised in two cascade levels: a I level front end that provides direct access to the information and a II level front end involving the internal offices for a deeper investigation if required. The service makes use of both telephone and web site channels to meet citizen’s information demand; statistics concerning use and acceptance of the service are regularly reported on the web site. Such statistics show that the service is effective to meet demand of general information arriving to the I level front end but do not contain enough details to evaluate the effectiveness of the sessions involving the II level front end and the internal offices. In this regard both the technical quality of the implementation and the receptiveness of the departments to listen and interact with the citizens are important. Suitable information can be derived from the activity of the web sites promoting citizen participation and transparently managing web databases storing both the citizen’s messages and the relevant answers given by the departments. In this regard the web sites <http://www.roma6tu.it/> and <http://www.professionecittadino.it/> (respectively operating in Roma and Bologna) have been addressed. The analysis has shown that technical, organizational and human factor barriers should be still overcome for further improvement of the service.

“EFFECTIVE CHANNELS FOR CITIZENS PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN AREAS”

Giovanna Anselmi, ENEA – Ugo Mocci, ICT roma6tu

1. INTRODUCTION

Web technologies are not yet effectively used to stimulate citizen's participation in management and government of the urban areas. Ongoing efforts of the local administrations are mainly aimed to provide on line access to town information and to allow citizens to perform remotely the most common administrative procedures. Though significative this approach seems limitative and shows that on line technologies are not considered as a suitable channel to develop *e-democracy* or a tool to improve town monitoring and public services provisioning with citizens help. In other words citizens are not considered as a valuable “resource” of knowledge and a reference subject to improve both city environment and social life.

An Italian song says “freedom is not to fly like a bird / freedom is participation”. To be effective and responsible, citizens' participation requires some prerequisites to be met, in particular, to access transparently to the city life information and to contribute freely to the building of the town knowledge databank. To meet the requirements technology can be used, so to really open the management and government of the towns to citizens' participation.

Citizens have physical coverage of the whole town territory and can observe the real status of the town every day. They are naturally interested in what happens in the urban environment and in the places where they go. Thanks to the available on line technologies and to the diffusion of intelligent terminals, citizens constitute an intelligent, motivated, redundant, no-cost monitoring network. Why it is left completely unused? Even if technology is already available, other factors seem to be lacking; in particular the awareness that:

- active and participant citizens are essential to improve the social cohesion of the towns;
- citizens can contribute to monitor and manage effectively the urban environment and the main public services of the towns;
- technical and human barriers limit and discourage the active participation of the citizens.

In the following we analyse such aspects with reference to some experiences carried out independently in the towns of Rome and Bologna. Firstly, we consider the characteristics of different

communication channels as a tool to support citizens' participation. Secondly, we refer to the service for citizens recently activated in Rome ("Call Rome 060606 service"). Subsequently we analyse complementary information available from two web sites created to improve citizens' participation operating respectively in Rome and Bologna. In the last section we summarize the results of the analysis and suggest directions for further initiatives.

2. CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION, ICTs AND HUMAN FACTORS

Citizens' participation is a systemic requirement to achieve cohesion and efficiency in urban areas characterized by quick changes in population and social environment. In this regard and also in the view of an *e-democracy* perspective, the diffusion of ICTs can offer new opportunities to both citizens and local offices.

Quite often participation risks to be just an empty word simply related to the possibility given to the citizens to express their views or complaints. A lot of usable channels are available to this purpose and publicity to citizen's opinion is given on the different media. These opinions are filtered and only temporary reported (at most a news on a TV program or a letter on a newspaper for a day). As a whole such information appear dispersed and difficultly accessible. The true citizens participation requires instead the availability of fully transparent and accessible information infrastructures collecting and storing all citizens' opinions, so creating a city life knowledge databank, usable by social bodies and the public administrations for management, social research and planning. The existence of such databank would constitute an incentive for a good administration of the towns and give the citizens the proof that their opinions are really appreciated and taken into account. Such perspective would improve civic education of the whole social body and stimulate better citizens' behaviours.

From a systemic viewpoint the presence of citizens all over the territory and the diffusion of both mobile and fixed means of communication make it possible to realize costless and effective city monitoring networks having a significant interest for public service provisioning, town maintenance and urban security.

As regard to these objectives the different channels usable by the citizens to communicate have different characteristics and utilization. The telephone channel with its high penetration offers simple, fast and interactive operation and can be used by all kind of people (also unskilled) both to get information and to send messages. However the telephone channel reveals inappropriate to build a citizen's knowledge databank because technologies for storing, classifying and handling vocal messages automatically will be still immature for a long time ahead. Similar considerations apply to

other traditional communication channels, like ordinary post and fax. On the opposite, the internet technologies are able to meet all the technical requirements needed to develop and implement effective systems and tools for citizens participation: network coverage, wide diffusion of connection terminals, easy graphic interfaces, interactive forms, large storage capacities and powerful search engines, all assure a proper and cheap technical framework to develop a channel really usable by citizens. Some features of the Internet technology has been already successfully exploited to implement e-mail, dynamic forms, discussion forum, remote voting. However, other features, like on line data base management and information processing, have not yet found their full application.

Indeed the problem of citizens' participation, is not reducible to a technical problem, because it involves also political willingness and positive attitude of the administrative departments. As far as citizens' participation will be perceived as a trouble or an obstacle, any technical tool offered to the citizens will not encourage them to improve their active participation. There are not extended field experiences on the subject. The authors have tried to analyse the problems encountered in the real world referring to the experiences made by the "Call Rome 060606 service", operated by the City of Rome (web site: <http://www.comune.roma.it/>) and by two other web sites, promoting citizens participation respectively in Rome (web site: <http://www.roma6tu.it/>) and Bologna (web site: <http://www.professionecittadino.it>).

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF "CALL ROME 060606 SERVICE" IN ROME

In June 2002 the City of Rome launched the new "Call Rome 060606 service" to simplify citizens access to the services offered by the municipality (1). "Call Rome 060606 service" offers a 24 h multilingual centralized service that is structured in a two level front end:

- the I° level front end answers questions concerning " Who, Where and When" inside the administrative and operational offices; gives information about activity, opening time and location of the offices; forwards calls to the internal numbers or to public services operating companies or, if requested, transfers calls to a II° level front end:
- the II° level front end acts as an advisor helping citizens to solve their problems, tries to answer more specific questions concerning the administrative procedures and gives access to the municipality databank.

Statistics on utilization of the new service are available on the town web site and an overview is reported in Table 3.1.

From June 2002 to November 2003 "Call Rome 060606 service" cumulatively managed about 1.460.000 calls. In November 2003, 98.2 % of the calls concerned asking of information, 1.1 %

suggestions and 0.8 % complaints. As a whole 31 % were directed to the public service companies, 34 % to the town departments and the remaining 35 % to local municipalities or to extra-departments. 82 % of all calls were managed by the I° level and the 18 % was directed to the II° level front end. More recently "Call Rome 060606 service" has offered the citizen an additional channel by e-mail. Statistics on this channel (1) are reported in Table 3.2 and in Table 3.3.

Total managed calls (15 months)	1.460.000
Call subject: General information	98.2 %
Suggestions	1.1 %
Complaints	0.8 %
Call address: Public services companies	31 %
Town departments	34 %
Local Municipalities	35 %
Calls managed by I level Front End	82 %
Calls managed by II level Front End	18 %

Source: <http://www.comune.roma.it>

Table 3.1 "Call Roma 060606 Service": citizen's calls overview

With very few appreciable exceptions the behaviour of the departments was not very encouraging: 13 out of 20 proposals remained completely ignored; 4 out of 20 were signed for receipt by the URPs and only 4 out of 20 received a significant answer. No cycling question-answer dialogue between the citizens and town offices started up.

Type of requirement	Percentage
General information	74.3
Suggestions	15.8
Complaints	5.9
Contentions	4.0

Source: <http://www.comune.roma.it>

Table 3.2 "Call Roma 060606 Service": citizen's e-mails content

From June 2003 to November 2003 the service received by the citizens 2700 e-mail totally, 74.3% concerning asking of information, 15.8 % suggestions and 9.9 % complaints and contentions. The monthly profile of the number of calls since the introduction of the e-mail channel in June 2003 is rather instructive: starting with 349 e-mails in June, a maximum level of 1265 e-mail was reached in July; afterwards the number of citizens e-mail continuously decreased from 670 in August to only 101 in November 2003 (Table 3.3).

Though the "Call Rome 060606 Service" has been successful as a whole, no analysis of citizens' satisfaction and no evaluation of the impact due to citizen's suggestions and complaints are available on the City of Rome web site. However, some general remarks can be pointed out anyway:

- even if a significant part of demand concerning general information is met with the direct access to the town web site (no statistics are available on the point), many people seem still to prefer the traditional telephone channel to get general information and communicate.
- compared to the telephone channel the e-mail channel is much less utilized. Moreover its use is decreasing with time.

Month (2003)	# E-mail
June	349
July	1265
August	670
September	138
October	144
November	101

Source: <http://www.comune.roma.it>

Table 3.3 "Call Roma 060606 Service": citizen's e-mails number in time

The last point reveals problems of different kinds that would be important to analyse and hopefully to overcome. Responsible politicians are aware of such difficulties and in February 2004 have launched a public call "Idee in Comune" (1), asking citizens to send proposals to improve the town and the city life. 25 proposals will be chosen for realization in cooperation with the citizens.

4. THE WEB SITE: <http://www.roma6tu.it/>

The web site "roma6tu" (2) was opened in Rome at the beginning of 2002 to experiment new ways of citizens participation. The site was specifically designed to offer the following features:

- to collect citizens complaints and proposals and publish them on the web site;
- to group and send proposals and citizens messages to the administrative departments or to the public service companies of the town;
- to monitor on the web site the answers or the interventions taken by the institutions and by the companies;

- to manage a fully accessible “roma6tu archives”, where both citizens messages and received answers are permanently stored.

In the first months of activity the site received more than 50 e-mails from the citizens. The messages where processed by “roma6tu” and from them 20 proposals on specific problems where generated. The proposals, together the pertinent citizens e-mails, where sent to the administrative departments, asking for intervention and offering to report answers on the web site. “roma6tu” monitored the whole answering process to verify administration efficiency and attitude to the dialogue with the citizens. Whether ignored the messages where sent again with the warning that the behaviour of the departments or the public company would be monitored. In case of answer “rome6tu” offered the opportunity to a further dialogue, sending new messages to analyse more deeply the relevant problems.

Proposal subject	Department	# Attached e-mail	# Delivery	# Answers	
				URP	Department
Quality registers for the companies	Public works		2	-	-
Districts maintenance	Maintenance	3	2	-	-
Public service company web sites	Companies	1	1	-	-
Taxation offices drawbacks	Taxation	3	2	-	-
Collapsed buildings restoration	Public works	2	2	-	-
Restoration after works	Public works	2	1	-	-
Roads maintenance	Maintenance	1	2	-	-
Abandoned cars removal	Mobility	2	1	1	-
Markets maintenance	Maintenance	1	2	-	-
Traffic & pollution	Environment	1	2	-	-
Parking in down town	Mobility	1	1	1	1
Antipollution limitations	Environment	1	1	-	-
Public assistance	Social affairs	1	2	-	-
Cancelling prescribed taxations	Taxation	1	1	-	-
Birds and animals	Environment	2	1	-	1
On line administrative procedures	Taxation	2	1	-	1
Parking limitations areas	Mobility	1	1	1	-
Urban Planning	Maintenance	14	1	-	-
Air conditioners regulations	Environnant	1	1	-	1
Traffic viability	Mobility	1	1	1	1

Source : <http://www.roma6tu.it/>

Table 4.1 Citizens and town departments: a difficult dialogue

The subjects of the proposals, the involved departments, the repetition of messages delivery, the answers given by the URP (Public Relationship Unit) or by the departments and their attitude to the dialogue with the citizens are summarized in Table 4.1:

With very few appreciable exceptions the behaviour of the departments was not very encouraging. 13 out of 20 proposals remained completely ignored; 4 out of 20 where signed for receipt by the URPs and only 4 out of 20 received a significant answer. No cycling question-answer dialogue between the citizens and town offices started up.

The preliminary experience of "roma6tu" shows that the culture of citizens' participation is not popular within the civic administrative departments and its lack represents the main barrier to more extensive citizens participation.

5. THE WEB SITE: "<http://www.professionecittadino.it/>"

The web site "professionecittadino" (3) was opened in Bologna at the beginning of 2001 with the objective to collect citizens' opinions and stimulate the discussion about the town problems. During a period of 12 months a total of 90 messages where received and published on the site (the messages are still in the archive). The subject covered by these messages was rather wide and is summarized in Table 5.1.

Citizen e-mail subject	Percentage
Social affairs	23.5
Roads and traffic	18.2
Public services	14.6
Pollution	10.1
Education & Culture	7.8
Health	7.8
Public works	4.5
Others	13.5

Source: <http://www.professionecittadino.it/>

Table 5.1 Citizens' e-mails subjects

Only a part of the messages (about 60 % of the total) really expected an answer from the administrative departments or from other responsible public bodies. About 55 % of those messages were answered. About 25 % of the citizens messages stimulated also comments from other citizens, as shown in Table 5.2.

Citizens e-mail statistics	#
Total number	90
Messages generating comments by other citizens	23
Messages requiring an answer from the offices	55
Answered messages	25

Source: <http://www.professionecittadino.it/>.

Table 5.2 Citizens' e-mails statistics

These figures indicate a more favourable and mature situation in Bologna as to both citizens' participation and the interest of the public offices to communicate and dialogue with the citizens. The existence of a link to "professionecittadino" within the city site confirms this empirical evidence. However, though "professionecittadino" has continued his activity with other initiatives, the attempt to create a citizens messages databank has not been further supported.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The information on the use of the e-mail channel to send messages on the town problems and the attitude of the public offices to answer and dialogue with the citizens are rather limited, indicating a lack of initiatives in the field.

The previous preliminary analysis available from web sites <http://www.comune.roma.it>, <http://www.roma6tu.it>, <http://www.professionecittadino.it>, allows to fix some points useful for further discussion:

- the utilization of internet technology to support citizens participation is still limited and the relevant experiences are at an initial stage (4,5);
- the main technical drawbacks of the current situation are twofold: firstly, citizens messages are *dispersed* in many different locations (newspapers and other media web sites, citizens associations, etc.); secondly, such information are not *collected together and properly processed* to extract meaningful overviews of the town problems;

- town operational managers and politics are not completely aware of the importance to provide tools necessary to build up transparent citizens databanks, fully accessible by citizens, associations and social analysers;
- the potential benefits of citizens participation in terms of better knowledge of the town problems, efficiency of public services and stronger social cohesion have not yet properly debated and evaluated;
- the lack of tools suitably supporting citizens' participation makes the interest of the citizens to participate more and more marginal and even decreasing.

To get a new perspective, incisive initiatives should be carried out by local administrations in the following directions:

- to launch coordinated field experiments investigating the better ways to support a true citizens' participation;
- to start suitable cooperation initiatives among media, citizens associations and town administration to gather citizens messages in a centralised system;
- to develop, deploy and manage technological tools for building up fully accessible town knowledge databank centred on citizens participation;
- to improve the attitude of the public administrative and operational structures of the town to dialogue openly and constructively with the citizens.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- (1) Web site <http://www.comune.roma.it>
- (2) Web site <http://www.roma6tu.it/>
- (3) Web site <http://www.professionecittadino.it/>
- (4) G. Anselmi, ENEA – U. Mocci “ Applying ICTs to Public Participation in Enhancing the Urban Environment.” IPTS REPORT N° 69/02
- (5) G. Anselmi, ENEA – U. Mocci “Citizens role in participating monitoring of urban areas.” The 2003 Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences. The Second Annual Conference. June 12 - 15, 2003. Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

8. ANNEX 1 – LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 “Call Roma 060606 Service”: citizen's calls overview

Table 3.2 “Call Roma 060606 Service”: citizen's e-mails content

Table 3.3 "Call Roma 060606 Service": e-mail number in time

Table 4.1 Citizens and town departments dialogue

Table 5.1 Citizens' e-mails subjects

Table 5.2 Citizens' e-mails statistics

9. CURRICULUM

Dr. Giovanna Anselmi graduated in Political and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Milan in 1970. Until 1983 she conducted research into Economic Planning and Social Politics at ISPE (Italian Economic Planning Studies Agency). Since 1983 she has been a senior Researcher at UDA/Advisor Unit at ENEA (Italian Agency for Energy, Environment and New Technologies), where she has been responsible for several research activities and evaluation in national and international projects. Her professional interests concern the Impacts and Changes in Economic, Social and Cultural Scenarios of IC Technologies, Technology Assessment and Sustainable Growth Studies.

Dr. Ugo Mocci graduated in electronic engineering at the Rome University La Sapienza in 1966, where until 1969 he conducted research on system identification and automatic control. In 1970 he joined Fondazione Bordonni where he led and managed research groups on design and planning of telecommunication networks, network management and performance analysis, high speed Internet networks with quality control, wide-band networks for interactive services. He has participated in many European projects promoted by ESA, RACE and COST organizations and until 1999 was secretary for many years of the annual European Network Planning Workshop. He has presented about one hundred contributions in international congresses and was co-editor of the volume Broadband Network Teletraffic, Lecture Notes in Computer Science N. 1155, 1996, Springer- Verlag. His present interest concerns the applications of IC technologies to promoting citizens' participation in the local government of urban areas. In this framework he has recently realised the web site <http://www.roma6tu.it/>.

10. RECENT PUBLICATIONS

G. Anselmi, ENEA – U. Mocci "Citizens role in participating monitoring of urban areas." The 2003 Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences. The Second Annual Conference. June 12 - 15, 2003. Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

*"Urban Impacts of the Information society: Facts, Fiction and Policies Telecities and MUTEIS conference
March 17th - 19th 2004, The Hague. Holland*

WEB: <http://www.roma6tu.it/>.

G. Anselmi, ENEA – U. Mocci “ Applying ICTs to Public Participation in Enhancing the Urban Environment.” IPTS REPORT N° 69/02

WEB: <http://www.roma6tu.it/>.

G. Anselmi, ENEA “E - Government for Universal Access: National IT Strategies and Policies in European Union.” The 6th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of International Telecommunications Society: Information Infrastructure and Sustainable Development: Challenges to Government Policy and Corporate Strategies - Hong Kong, 5-7 July 2001

G. Anselmi, ENEA "Access to Publicly-Funded RTD programmes: EU Government Measures” IPTS REPORT N° 44/00

G. Anselmi, ENEA – U. Mocci "Telematics and New Services: Impact of Communication Technologies in the Urban Areas.” Cities in the Global Information Society: an International Perspective. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 22 - 24 November 1999

11. CONTACTS

Ugo Mocci, ICT expert

Phone: +39670475016;

E-mail: umocci@inwind.it

Giovanna Anselmi,

Organization: ENEA (Italian Agency for New Technology, Energy and Environment)

UDA/Advisor - Lgt. G.A. Tahon de Revel 76 – 00197 Rome, Italy.

Phone: +39 06 36272801

E-mail: <ganselmi@sede.enea.it> <c.mocci@libero.it>