# Smart Cities Stakeholder Workshop and Responder Technology Showcase

Session 3B: Community Engagement Session

2 May 2018, 13:30-15:00

Track B: Technology Stack

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This session discussed how to characterize and bridge the many gaps between technologies and urban communities. Cities are typically made of communities that are diverse in education, wealth, and access to technology, as well as culture of public participation. Just getting people to public meetings can be a huge challenge in some areas. Team members from Cviker, a company providing architect developers and communities with augmented reality platforms in Slovakia, noted that a certain legacy of non-participation from a “former regime” was difficult to overcome. They cited a case of street reconstruction where many objected but did not weigh in until the project was underway. Another hindrance to feedback included the inaccessibility of a 200-page planning document for the project. One of their answers was increased use of visualization, but this format also faced challenges of authenticity and a sufficient scope of modeling to put a project in proper context of impact on people’s lives. For example, they provided a virtual reality (VR) visualization of a proposed pedestrian bridge to gather popular support to build it. Another case included a community with leadership that felt uncomfortable providing a realistic visualization of the consequences of a dam break. The intention behind the project proposal was to encourage work to increase dam safety and present communities with the “cost of doing nothing” scenario.

Successful engagement includes making the process easier and producing outcomes. A successful outcome could be generating a response from city administrations and consequent changes in plans or behavior. Another element is two-way communication, e.g. cities provide feeds of transit vehicle locations, but usually do not offer an application-programming interface (API) for apps that consume the feeds to provide feedback, such as when a bus does not show up at its scheduled location. Successful engagement can lead to many forms and degrees of interaction, from citizen science to citizen “charrettes” with detailed community participation in planning. There are even benefits to unauthorized forms of public engagement, such as “Tactical urbanism” or grassroots municipal service, e.g. citizens painting in a needed crosswalk to illustrate a need.

Discussion turned from the processes of engagement to some of the benefits and risks of open data for supporting engagements. Open data practices may reveal, for example, previously unknown vulnerability, but may also cause citizens to become disenfranchised or misinformed due to poor or missing data. Open data can require addressing other dilemmas, for example disclosing private information in order to have one’s preferences and opinions taken properly into account. For instance:

* A quid pro quo example. “Tell me your commuting route and we’ll tell you what we’re doing that might impact it.”
* Community policing. Police departments are beginning to use predictive analysis of past behavior or may engage with communities prior to large-scale events. The police need information on what people are doing and intending to do to manage events in an area.

Is it always a choice or should it be a civic responsibility to share oneself to some degree? Data sharing does not always lead to agreement. Smart city technologies may need to support or even engage in conflict management between communities. The discussion concluded by observing that community communication is almost always improved by the exchange of accurate data and trustworthy evidence.

These outcomes were reported out to a plenary workshop session.