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YUTPA as a design tool for public participation

Maurice Berix

Abstract Engaging the public in decision-making processes is commonly accepted as an effective strategy for a better policy making, a better policy support and for narrowing the gap between government and the public. In today's digitised society, participation via online media is becoming more important. But is this so-called e-participation being used optimally? Or is a better design possible? In my opinion, the answer to these questions is a 'yes'. Despite numerous efforts in engaging the public with policy deliberation, the actual amount of participants remains low. In this article, I have used the YUTPA model (Nevejan 2009) to analyse some existing e-participation projects. Additionally, I derived ten characteristics of 'play' to make proposals for a more designerly e-participation approach.

1 Modern democracy needs public participation

Trust is one of the principal requirements for a stable society (Marková and Gillespie 2008). In our Western society, trust is under pressure. Trust in politics is lower than ever, as is stated in the Dutch National Trust Monitor (Winkle 2009). Governments, scientific institutions, multinationals and banks invest in restoring consumer confidence. Trust cannot be restored easily, however. I claim that if organisations really want to achieve restoration of

M. Berix (✉)
Provincie Zuid-Holland, PO Box 90602, 2509 LP The Hague,
The Netherlands
e-mail: cpm.berix@pzh.nl; maurice.berix@planet.nl

trust, they will have to enter into a relationship with the consumer, the citizen; a relationship that is based on respect, commitment and interest. Trust does not come overnight, but needs time. Receiving trust requires an outstretched hand, which requires trust to be given.

So, building trust is a mutual process. Receiving trust equals granting trust. For a government, this implies providing influence to citizens. In most Western democracies, influence is provided by the mechanism of elections every 4 or 5 years. But is this system of representative democracy in today's society still valid? Since the implementation of the representative democracy in its present form, society has changed. One might argue whether today's individualised, digitised and globalised society needs new democratic mechanisms (e.g. Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur 2010). And how does the conception of trust fit within?.

> **Hitch-hiking is an act of mutual trust**
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> In april 2010, I returned home from a study trip to Zürich, Switzerland. Due to the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano ash cloud the airspace was closed and trains were fully booked. So I hitched , just as I did back in the eighties. As I recall it from that period, I just jumped into cars, and drivers were keen to pick up hitchers. But with my recent hitch-hiking action it was striking, that in nearly every ride the subject 'trust' was a prominent subject of discussion. Can I trust you? Can you trust me? How can trust exist between strangers? Apparently, times have changed. We – or at least I – seem to have lost our innocence or perhaps our naïvety.

Apart from representative democracy, other possibilities for influencing governmental policy exist. A common format is the participation ladder model of Sherry R. Arnstein. He distinguishes influence on the degree of participation: informing, consultation, advising, co-production and delegated decision-making (Arnstein 1969). Formal participation is at the level of 'consultation'. In this case, the government places itself above the public. More radical forms of participation such as co-production and delegated

decision-making require a fundamentally different attitude from the government: an attitude of equality or even a serving, facilitating attitude. Thus, if the government is really interested in citizen confidence, it must grant trust to the public first, and for that, it must (at least partially) give up control.

The insight that today's network society requires a different position of the government is not new. Many examples of citizen participation can be found (e.g. Van Berlo 2009). With the increased potential of the Internet and of social media, citizen participation got a new impetus in so-called e-participation, meaning citizen participation with the use of digital media to improve public services and the functioning of the community (Burgerlink 2010). The TNO E-participation monitor has recognised and analysed 540 e-participation initiatives in 2010 (Slot and Van der Plas 2010).

So, there are plenty of intentions and initiatives, at least within the Netherlands. But do they really work? Does e-participation actually lead to a changed relationship between citizens and government? Towards a greater mutual trust? To better policies and to better supported policy making? It is plausible that citizen participation is about the design of trust. In that case, e-participation may well be about witnessed presence. I used the YUTPA model (Nevejan 2009) to analyse some of the most promising e-participation projects of 2009. In fact, the analysed projects were nominated for the E-Participation Award 2009. Those nominees may be regarded as the pearls of e-participation in the Netherlands (Burgerlink 2010).

Does e-participation actually lead to a greater mutual trust between citizens and government?

2 A brief YUTPA analysis of e-participation projects

Most e-participation projects take place within the 'You—not Now—not Here' space. However, the distinction between the spaces is not a distinct border. The level of unity on the personality, time, place and action parameters is highly dependent from the e-participation project it concerns.

The YUTPA model in brief

The YUTPA model is a communication model developed by researcher and designer Dr. Caroline Nevejan (Nevejan, 2009).

YUTPA is the acronym for "being with You in Unity of Time, Place and Action". The specific configuration of four dimensions of time, place, action and relation defines how people interact. In the sphere (figure 1), the white space of You, Here, Now there is 'air' in which people can act. In this space human beings meet, love, play and fight. In the dark space there is no air and it is hard to act, yet we design many systems that deeply influence human's well-being and survival in the black space.

When designing larger communication processes, a trade-off can be designed between presence and trust, by tuning four dimensions. A configuration of maximum You, Here, Now, Action grants maximum possibilities for building trust. When any of the dimensions is geared to 'Not' this effect can be balanced in other dimensions (text quoted from www.being-here.net; image by Max Bruinsma)
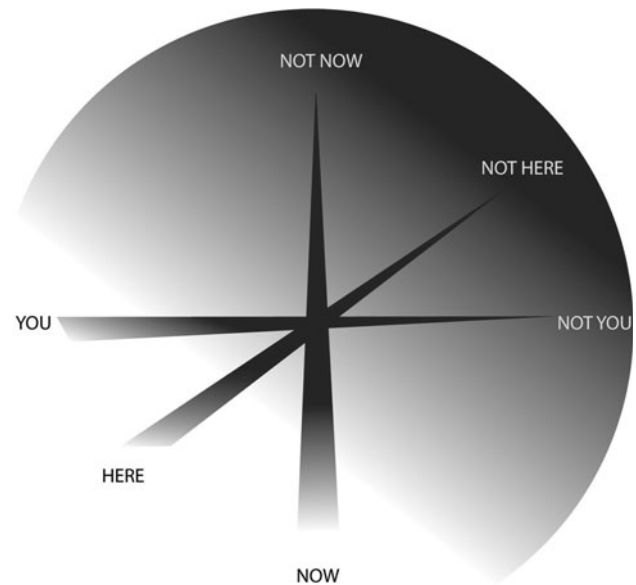

Fig. 1 Schematic representation of the YUTPA model

2.1 Breda-Morgen (www.breda-morgen.nl)

This project is an interactive site from and for the citizens of Breda. The goal is to connect people in order to conduct the city collectively, to collect initiatives of Breda citizens and to improve the quality of the city together. (Burgerlink 2010) Breda-Morgen offers the possibility to submit so-called dreams. With sufficient support, these dreams may promote to 'initiative', after which the municipality offers support in the form of independent expertise. An initiative can gain support as well. With sufficient support, the municipality commits itself to organise a meeting with the initiators (so-called town meetings).

You/Not You: People who start dreams seek support in their environment. More of the support is expected to come from the initiators' personal network. But there is also the possibility for strangers to respond, people with whom no relationship is built (yet). Communication is initially quite apart from the municipality. In a relatively late stage, the municipality gets involved (by organising town meetings). Despite the considerable number of ideas and activity on the site, the number of five town meetings is still very low. Conclusion: Breda-Morgen gets a relatively low score on the dimension You.

Now/Not Now: Like most e-participation projects, communication is asynchronous (with the exception of the town meetings, which take place offline). Especially, compared to other e-participation projects, the response time is short—several weeks to several months to move from dream to town meeting. In addition, the website is transparent about the response. The score on the dimension Time is high.
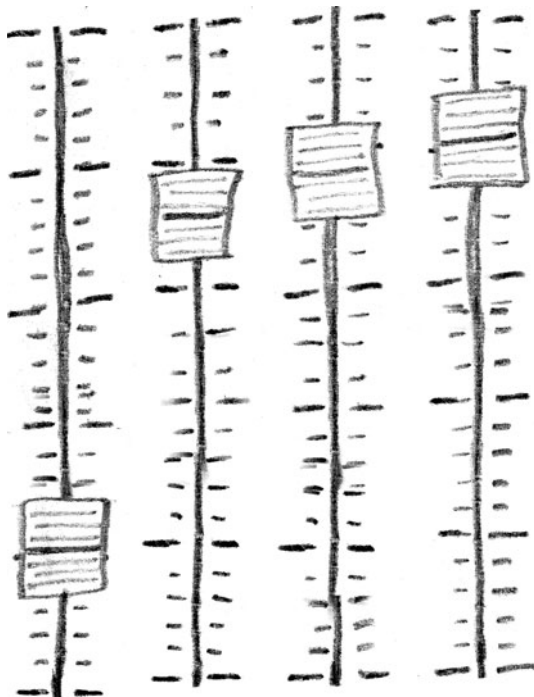
Fig. 2 Breda-morgen: a relatively low score on the dimension 'YOU'; the score on the dimension 'TIME' is high; fairly high score on dimension 'TIME'; a high score on the dimension 'ACTION'

Fig. 3 De Amstel Verandert scores quite high on all dimensions of the YUTPA model. The off-line meetings are largely responsible for this

Here/Not Here: Offline communication, actual meeting is present in the 'initiative' stage and during town meetings. The actual meeting, or the prospect of it, is valuable for building trust. Breda-Morgen scores reasonably well, compared to other participation projects.

Act/Not Act: Acting is paramount to Breda-Morgen. Participation is at the level of co-producing. In terms YUTPA, this means a high score.

Conclusion: With a relatively high score on the dimensions of Time, Place and Action, Breda-Morgen offers a good basis for building trust between public and government according to the YUTPA model (Fig. 2).

2.2 De Amstel Verandert (www.deamstelverandert.nl)

On the De Amstel Verandert website (translation: The Amstel River in change), one can propose his ideas about the future of the Amstel River area. The site offers background information about the area as well as an online library. (Burgerlink 2010). De Amstel Verandert is the winner of the 2009 E-Participation Award.

You/Not You: The online section of the project remains relatively anonymous. Organised meetings offer better prospects for the dimension You. The five meetings that were organised had a turnout of up to 80 people (not of all encounters, the number of participants was recorded o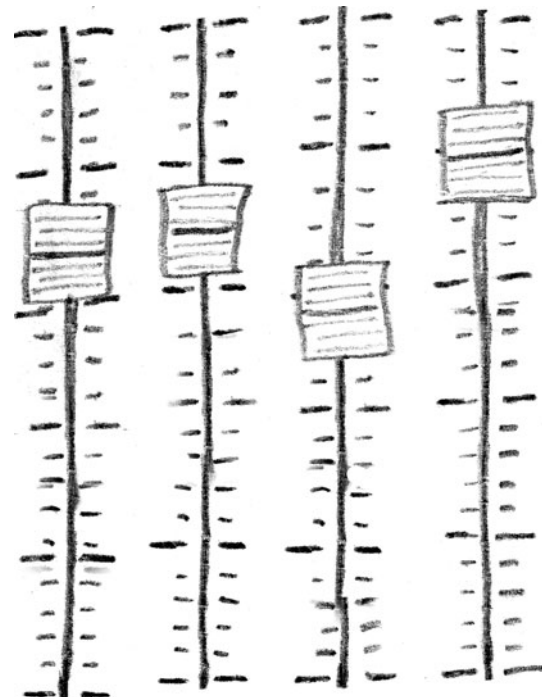n the website). Compared to the amount of people who to whom the Amstel area is relevant, the attendance was very low, but it is also important to note that everyone had the opportunity to participate.

Now/Not Now: Because of the limited time frame within which the project was implemented, and because of the meetings that were organised, the score on the dimension Time is high.

Here/Not Here: The offline component of the project is responsible for a high score on the Place dimension.

Act/Not Act: Acting is paramount to De Amstel Verandert. Participation is at the level of co-producing. That is, a high score in YUTPA terms.

Conclusion: De Amstel Verandert scores quite high on all dimensions of the YUTPA model. The offline meetings are largely responsible for this (Fig. 3).

What can we learn from the YUTPA model for the design of e-participation projects?

Even within the 'pearls of e-participation', the conditions for building trust between government and public are not always present, judging from a brief YUTPA scan. The reflection provides us with some guidelines for designing interactions through e-participation:

It is very difficult to build trust if interaction retains a high degree of anonymity. Many e-participation projects depend on communication and interaction between strangers. The YUTPA model shows that actual meeting can be a valuable addition to e-participation and is an important factor in building trust.

Some degree of asynchronicity is often inherent to e-participation. Asynchronous communication may not impede the building of trust, if the time-span between sending and receiving a response is acceptable (a few days to several weeks). By dividing the communication process in separate stages, response times for each communication step can be reduced. Transparency in communication, such as applying 'tracking and tracing', provides a better acceptance of asynchronicity in communication.

Unity of Place is principally responsible for the sense of a shared interest. Best, this is realised by organising offline meetings. Mapping can play a supportive role.

The ability to act is essential for successful e-participation. If there is no action perspective, one cannot speak of e-participation. Therefore, it is questionable whether initiatives that exclusively depend on a service like Twitter can be called e-participation. In general, the higher a participation project is on the participation ladder, the higher the YUTPA score on the dimension Act/Not Act will be.

It is very difficult to build trust if interaction retains a high degree of anonymity

3 Lessons learned: the cost-saving pilot project

During the period November 2010–January 2011, the province of South-Holland has carried out an internal pilot project on crowd sourcing & participation. The major goal was to practice with crowd sourcing and thus prove the value of participatory policy making. The chosen subject for this pilot was 'cost saving'. Being the project manager for this pilot, I had the opportunity to design the participation optimally in terms of YUTPA.

The cost-saving project was built on the same engine as the Breda-Morgen project, with some major adjustments made. The project was divided into three phases: ideas, initiatives and interviews. Every participant started with 30 votes that he or she could issue to someone's idea or initiative. Reacting or posting own ideas was rewarded with additional votes to be issued. During the ideas phase, all colleagues were able to post their ideas about cost saving. This phase was anonymous, to eliminate a possible hierarchical effect (e.g. ideas from superiors to be better supported by subordinates). If an idea collected 15 votes, it advanced to the initiative phase. In this phase, people could collaborate to elaborate the initial idea. Colleagues could vote in this phase as well. The most supported initiatives advanced to the discussion phase. In this phase, these initiatives were discussed with a group of (internal) experts. This 'expert group' formulated an advisory report to the board of directors. The project was intensively moderated and accompanied by an online and offline communication

campaign. Also very important: we were completely transparent about the process, and the project approach stayed unaltered throughout the period.

The results were astounding: during the 6 weeks that the project was open for submission, 119 ideas were posted by 466 individuals (on a population of 2000 people with access to the project). One hundred and eighty-seven reactions were posted, and 1,681 votes were issued. The expert group was able to provide a top ten of initiatives with a positive advice. But also less-supported ideas and initiatives provided valuable information. Currently, these are being elaborated as well (Fig. 4).

In terms of YUTPA, all sliders were set to a 'maximum': being an internal project, the YOU dimension was apparent; all participants are part of the same community. Also, the moderators were well known by most participants. There were colleagues just like the contributors. We saw that during the project, more and more participants completed their online profile on the website.

The YUTPA score on the dimension TIME was also very high. The project took place within a very short time span. The platform was open for submissions during 6 weeks. Subsequently, the expert group needed 3 weeks to complete their advice. The board of directors decided about this advice within 2 weeks. During the project, we were completely transparent about the time schedule. Moderators were almost permanently present at the
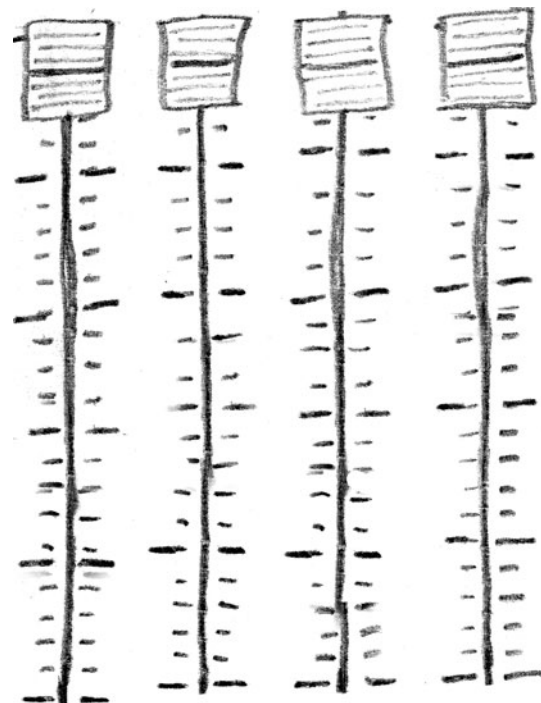

Fig. 4 Cost-saving project: in terms of YUTPA, all sliders were set to a 'maximum'

platform. We actively promoted collaboration and brought initiators together. Participants received reaction within several hours at most.

The vast majority of participants reside at the central office in The Hague. Therefore, the score on the dimension PLACE is high as well.

The ability to ACT, finally, is prominent. People were encouraged to give their ideas on cost saving on any subject, without restrictions. Also, the possibilities to influence given ideas were prominent: not only by voting and reacting but also by adjusting and adding to existing texts via a Wiki tool. Participants were encouraged to co-operate offline too. Because they are all colleagues working in the same office, this was fairly easy to accomplish.

Thanks to the careful execution (being transparent, being sincere, being consistent and being swift in our reactions) the YUTPA-scores were very high

So, to sum up: an internal project like the cost-saving pilot is an optimal starting position in YUTPA terms. Thanks to the careful execution (being transparent, being sincere, being consistent and being swift in our reactions), as the YUTPA scores were very high. Consequently, the response to the project was very high.

4 Participation in an entertainment society

But I wonder: would an optimal e-participation project in YUTPA terms be enough to engage a broader public to policy deliberation? The 'Breda-Morgen' or the 'De Amstel Verandert' projects come close to this optimum. And your starting position is never as advantageous as in the internal cost-saving project.

From a designer's perspective, I claim that many participation projects are inaccessible, little intuitive, text oriented, requiring a lot of knowledge or that they are immensely boring. Today's society is also an entertainment society, where play and playfulness play an important role in human interactions. It is interesting to examine consumer participation in media, art & design and to redesign public participation in policy deliberation in a more playful way. I proposed this approach for the collaborative design of a city park.

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4.1 Rules of the game

In 1938, Johan Huizinga wrote his book Homo Ludens. In this book, he claims that play is an essential part of human culture. Game appears in all cultures at all times. Play is essential for the development of children. Game provides an escape for the pressure of everyday life (Huizinga 1938).

Anno 2010, Huizinga's book is still as relevant as in the 1930s of the last century. Entertainment and amusement are important features of today's Western society. I am convinced that the fundraising for the earthquake victims in Haiti owes its success to the TV show that was built around it. A few years ago, the 'Grote Donorshow' (Big Donor Show) on the Dutch television initiated the debate on the donation of organs. Whether we like it or not: the 21st century citizen is also a critical consumer in a world of abundance. To reach him, he must be tempted, and entertainment is a powerful tool for that.

For that reason, the phenomenon of 'play' deserves a more detailed view. What makes a game fun and attractive, and what types of games can we distinguish? Understanding this gives us clues for the design of a successful participatory process. Being a game-enthusiastic myself, I derived ten characteristics of a game. I claim that the more of these characteristics are present in a project, the more playful it is, whether it concerns a board game, a computer game or a participatory project.

Ten characteristics of play
1. Attractive: looking good
2. Intuitive: ease of use
3. Interactive: can you perform action?
4. Rewarding: what's the prize?
5. Challenging: the bigger the challenge, the more tangible is the reward
6. Unpredictable: does it surprise you?
7. Not for real: the imaginary world, whether you play "World of Warcraft" or play with dolls
8. With humour: a good laugh adds to the fun!
9. Immersive: a really good game absorbs you completely
10. Social: playing together doubles the fun

4.2 Sources of inspiration

A rich variety of online interactive projects can be found outside the governmental world. These come from the world of art, media, design and commerce. It is distinct that these projects extensively use playful elements. It might be interesting to relate those inspirational projects to the aforementioned characteristics. I mention two of my inspirations: the BBC White Spectrum project and One Frame of Fame.
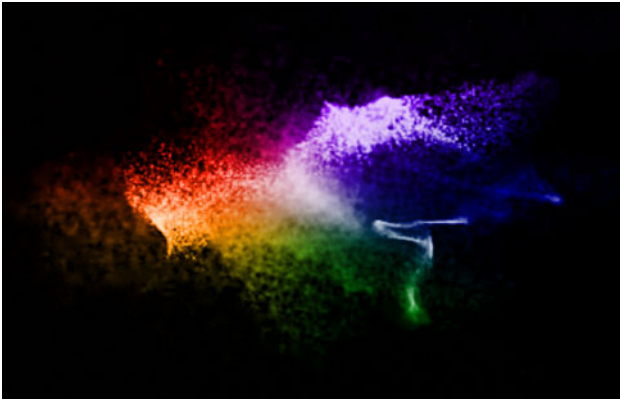
Fig. 5 Screenshot of the White Spectrum website

4.2.1 http://www.bbc.co.uk/white/spectrum.shtml

The BBC White Spectrum is a visual way to present the BBC news (Have Your Say) debate on the indigenous working class in England. This is done by random moving circles on the screen. The website visitor is able to cluster and to filter separate contributions on emotion, geographical origin and similarity.

The chosen format is *attractive,* because of the dynamic visual approach. The contrast with normal textual presentation of contributions is high, and with this approach, the accessibility of the discussion is significantly increased. Because of the visual and interactive approach, the website is quite *intuitive*. The chosen dynamics appeal for trial and error behaviour. *Reward* comes as an accessible presentation of discussion results. The website has a high degree of *unpredictability*; behind each circle is a distinct contribution to the debate. Moreover, each time the site is loaded, another (random) set of debate contributions is loaded. A playful example indeed! (Fig. 5).

4.2.2 www.oneframeoffame.com

With the project One Frame of Fame, the pop band C-Mon & Kypski is producing a video for their new single with the help of the public. All frames of the clip are gradually replaced by photographs made by the public. When you join, you are sent a random frame from the clip, and you are asked to mimic the pose in front of your webcam. The picture taken can be submitted to the website. Currently (February 2011), approximately 29,400 frames have been replaced.

The project is *attractive* because of its visual and dynamic approach. It is also very *intuitive*—joining is made very simple. One Frame of Fame is *interactive* and *rewarding*: joining provides literally one Frame of Fame; you're part of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. The project also has a significant degree of *unpredictability*: the transmitted frames are randomly selected, and the final result is not a foregone conclusion. Playfulness is also helped by the *not for real* characteristic. In addition, the project calls for *humorous* contributions (Fig. 6).

4.3 The Plan-o-Mat

Being inspired by co-creation and community projects, I propose the Plan-o-Mat. This might be an online tool to
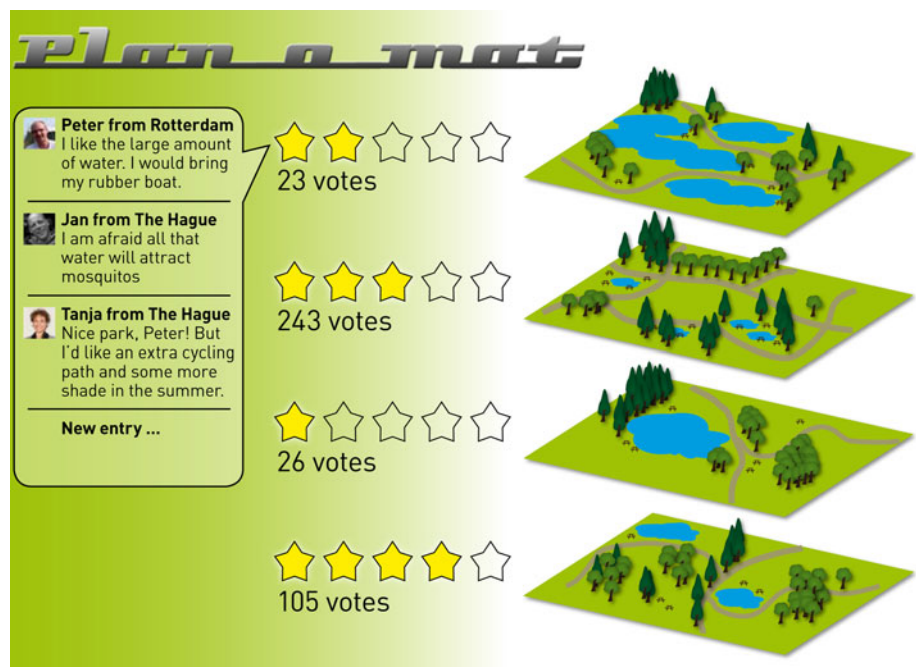

Fig. 6 Compilation of images from the One Frame of Fame website

Fig. 7 Sketch of the Plan-o-Mat: design your own city park by manipulating the sliders

Fig. 8 Idea of the Plan-o-Mat website: discuss and rate uploaded designs

make a plan by yourself using simple means, in this example, elaborated for a city park. The tool consists of a number of sliders, which the user can operate to add elements to the park, such as water, trees, paths, etc. Each action costs money and having a limited budget requires choices to be made—simply putting all controls at a maximum is not possible. The program organises the park elements automatically according to the park style set, for instance modern, natural, classical, etc. The result is displayed on the screen and can be uploaded on a website.

Obviously, a tool like this does not replace the landscape architect at all, regardless of the number of settings possible. But it does offer the opportunity to discover the preferences of future park users in a very playful way. How do they want to recreate? Do they want a large water surface or not? An open landscape or covered with trees? In addition, the Plan-o-Mat provides citizens insight into the costs of building the park. The playful approach is intended to increase the response. The Plan-o-Mat is an opportunity to involve people in the planning process and in the discussion.

Care in the use of such a planning tool is essential. It must be made very clear that the images that are uploaded cannot be a final drawing for a park, but are in fact the starting point for the actual planning process: present the plans that are uploaded on a website and invite people to rate or discuss them online. Organise meetings with residents and a landscape architect—using the uploaded proposals—and develop promising plans further. And finally: inform anyone who has made a contribution to the discussion about how their input is being used.

The Plan-o-Mat comprises several game characteristics. Its design can be attractive, and the use is intuitive (notice Figs. 7, 8). The design asks for interaction, and the reward is the self-designed city park, which can be uploaded. The challenge is in uploading a design that will become popular perhaps even executed. Not for real, obviously. And the possibility to upload and discuss online gives the Plan-o-Mat a social dimension.

4.4 Conclusion

Is civic participation needed? In my opinion, yes indeed, as a complement to the range of democratic means of today. Is e-participation the solution? Partly, I think: apply online Web 2.0 applications, but do not forget offline meeting. Can e-participation be better? Yes. E-participation can at least be made more accessible by applying game elements.

Trust is the basis of a good relationship. Trust between government and society is under pressure. That is an obstacle to a stable, healthy society. Participation is a powerful instrument for strengthening mutual confidence. My research offers new clues for a successful participatory process. Now, let's act!

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