



INCLUDE

Voting platform for civic engagement

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1 Good practice information

1.1 General Information

- Title of the Good Practice: Voting platform for civic engagement (Market Square, Letterkenny)
- Region / City / Municipality: Letterkenny, County Donegal
- Country: Ireland
- Contact Organisation: Donegal County Council
- Contact Person & Role: Daragh McDonough – Donegal County Council (IT Section)
- Email / Website: dmcdonough@donegalcoco.ie / <https://www.donegalcoco.ie/>
- Date of Implementation: March 2020 – April 2021 (voting concluded 30 April 2021)

1.2 Summary of the Good Practice

The Market Square Voting Platform is a digital civic engagement initiative developed by Donegal County Council to support public participation in the redesign of Market Square in Letterkenny. The challenge was to significantly increase citizen engagement in an urban regeneration project, where traditional in-person consultations had previously attracted very low participation. To address this, the Council designed an online platform enabling residents to review shortlisted design concepts and cast a vote for their preferred option at their convenience.

Using existing ESRI GIS infrastructure, the solution combined a hub website showcasing six finalist design proposals with an online voting application (Survey123) that ensured secure, anonymous, and single-vote participation. The platform was promoted through social media, local press, QR codes, and a physical shopfront display in the town centre.

Contrary to initial low expectations, the initiative generated exceptionally high engagement, with 3,295 votes cast from a town of approximately 25,000 residents. This far exceeded participation levels seen in previous physical consultations and demonstrated the strong potential of digital tools to broaden and deepen civic participation. The platform successfully identified a winning design concept while ensuring balanced participation across options, providing decision-makers with a credible reflection of public preferences. The practice illustrates how reusing existing digital infrastructure can deliver impactful, scalable, and cost-effective solutions for community engagement.

1.3 Context and Challenges Addressed

- What territorial challenge or opportunity did the region face?

The problem was: How to generate public interest in a public voting process? How could we get the public to cast a vote at their convenience whilst presenting all the information required to them to make an informed decision about their vote. It would be difficult to present all the options in a physical place and also have a voting booth open for the duration of the process.

- Why was digital innovation relevant in this context?

Digital tools enabled 24/7 access, wider reach, and clearer presentation of complex design proposals.

Whilst a shop vacant shop front was secured to show the concepts in the window (large printouts), an ICT solution was the preferred solution. The Platform allowed us to present all the required documentation in one place, overcoming the limitations of physical space. Viewers could open and view at their leisure, wherever they were. Social media promotion of a single small URL put all the details into the hands of those who wanted to engage by clicking through the link onto the platform.

- What specific community or stakeholder needs were identified?

Community needs included easy access to information, transparent decision-making, and a simple method to influence local development outcomes.

1.4 Objectives

List the core objectives the practice aimed to achieve (e.g., participatory planning, improved public service co design, youth empowerment, minority inclusion, data driven territorial management...).

- Increase citizen participation in urban planning decisions.
- Provide a transparent and accessible public voting process.
- Capture public preferences to inform regeneration decisions.

1.5 Description of the Practice

1.5.1 Activities Implemented

- Shortlisting of design concepts by expert committee
- Development of a digital hub site to display proposals
- Creation of an online voting tool with vote-limiting safeguards
- Communication campaign via social media, press, QR codes, and physical displays

1.5.2 Stakeholders Involved

- Local/regional authorities
- Civil society organisations
- Youth organisations
- Businesses / SMEs
- Universities / research centres
- Digital innovation hubs
- Other (please, name)

1.5.3 Resources Used

- Human resources

In-house IT and planning staff

- Technical resources

ESRI GIS platform, Survey123, existing web infrastructure

- Funding sources (EU, national, regional, private sector)

Local authority resources (moderate cost, no external funding required)

1.6 Thematic Categorisation

A. Digital Technologies

- Digital platforms for participation
- Open data solutions
- Digital twins / GIS / mapping tools
- AI supported
- Immersive tech (VR/AR) for community engagement
- Gamification
- Other (please, name)

B. Co Creation Methodologies

- Digital platforms for participation
- Participatory design
- Living labs
- Citizen assemblies
- Hackathons
- Digital consultation tools
- Collaborative prototyping
- Other (please, name)

C. Youth / Minority Groups Engagement

- Digi Tailored outreach to youth tal platforms for participation
- Inclusion of minority or marginalized communities
- Capacity-building for underrepresented groups
- Mentorship or ambassador programmes
- Co creation activities specifically targeting these groups
- Other (please, name)

1.7 Results and Impact

1.7.1 Quantitative Results

- Number of participants: 3,295 votes cast
- Number/percentage of youth or minority participants: Not available
- Digital tools deployed: 1
- Data/outputs generated: 6 shortlisted design concepts

1.7.2 Qualitative Results

Describe how the initiative improved territorial governance, participation, empowerment, or inclusiveness.

The initiative significantly improved civic participation, demonstrated trust in digital processes, and strengthened transparency in territorial governance. It shifted engagement from low-attendance physical events to inclusive, accessible online participation.

1.8 Innovation and Added Value

- What is innovative about the approach or technology?

The practice innovatively reused an existing GIS platform for non-mapping civic engagement, offering a cost-effective alternative to bespoke systems. It removed time and location barriers inherent in traditional consultations, enabling higher and more diverse participation.

- How does it differ from traditional community engagement?

Compared with traditional community engagement approaches—such as public meetings, drop-in consultation events, or paper-based surveys—this practice fundamentally changes how, when, and who can participate.

Traditional methods are typically limited by fixed locations, restricted opening hours, and reliance on physical presence, which often results in low attendance and the repeated participation of the same groups. In contrast, the Market Square Voting Platform enabled citizens to engage remotely, at any time, and using their own devices, significantly lowering barriers to participation.

The digital approach allowed complex design information to be presented in a structured, visual, and easily comparable format, helping participants make informed decisions without the pressure or constraints of a live meeting. The integrated online voting mechanism also ensured transparency, fairness, and consistency, supported by technical safeguards that prevented multiple voting and reduced the risk of disproportionate influence by organised groups.

Unlike traditional consultations, where feedback is often qualitative and anecdotal, the platform generated quantifiable, traceable data that provided decision-makers with a robust evidence base reflecting community preferences. Overall, the approach shifted community engagement from a time- and place-bound process to a more inclusive, scalable, and citizen-centred model that complements—and in some cases outperforms—conventional consultation methods.

- What elements could inspire replication by other EU regions?

Several elements of this good practice make it particularly transferable and attractive for replication across other EU regions.

First, the initiative demonstrates how existing digital infrastructure—in this case a GIS platform already owned and managed by the local authority—can be repurposed for civic engagement without the need for expensive, bespoke systems. This significantly lowers financial and technical barriers for smaller municipalities and regions with limited resources.

Second, the approach combines simplicity of design with procedural robustness. The platform is easy for citizens to use, while behind the scenes it incorporates safeguards such as vote-limiting and anonymisation, ensuring fairness and trust in the process. This balance between accessibility and integrity is highly relevant for other regions facing concerns about digital participation credibility.

Third, the practice shows the importance of linking digital tools to locally relevant topics. Engagement levels were driven not just by technology, but by addressing an issue that had direct, visible impact on daily life. This insight can be applied in other regions by adapting the model to locally meaningful policy areas, such as public space design, mobility, or community services.

Finally, the integration of the platform into a broader communication strategy—using social media, QR codes, press, and physical displays—demonstrates how digital participation tools can complement, rather than replace, traditional outreach methods. This hybrid approach is easily adaptable and scalable across diverse territorial, cultural, and administrative contexts within the EU.

1.9 Lessons Learned

- What worked well?
 - Relevant local topics generate high public engagement
 - Visual clarity and simplicity are critical to participation
 - Continuous communication and promotion are essential

1.10 Transferability and Scalability

- Which aspects can be replicated elsewhere?

The approach is highly transferable to other municipalities and regions, particularly where existing digital infrastructure exists.

- What conditions (resources, policy environment, partnerships) are needed for transfer?

Key conditions include local relevance, institutional buy-in, and a coordinated communication strategy.

1.11 Links and Supporting Materials

- Website: <https://letterkennymarketsquare-donegal.hub.arcgis.com>
- Video
- Tools/datasets
- Reports, publications
- Photos/images

Six design concepts have been shortlisted and are now presented for public consultation. Get involved at <https://letterkennymarketsquare-donegal.hub.arcgis.com/> or by scanning the QR code below to take you to the online VOTING system. Vote for your favourite before midnight on Friday 30th April 2021. Your vote will help the evaluation panel to decide the winner.



SCAN ME



Scroll Down to Vote | Vótáil thíos

Six design concepts have been shortlisted and are now presented for public consultation. Get involved by VOTING for your favourite before 30th April 2021. Your vote will help the evaluation panel to decide the winner.

Roghnaíodh sé cinn de chonraitheacha deiríne agus tá siad á fáil anois le haighiúid choilíníochán poiblí. Bí páirteach trí VÓTA a chaitheamh d'ús chomair le fearr leat féin roimh an 30ú Aibreán 2021. Cuidseadh do vóta le tréall ábharthaíocht mionánachta cinníochá a dhéanamh.

Joseph McCallion	Joan Kerr & Oliver Chapman	Susan McBain Ffoua - Architecture Ltd
The Faul Hogarth Company	Greg McKinney of Opsis Design	Gary Hamilton & Ailbhe Beatty

The winning design concept will then be further developed, either in full or in adapted form, toward securing planning consent and delivery. This process of securing planning consent will provide the community a further opportunity for public consultation on a detailed design for the Market Square.

An caitheap deiríne a aghairú, déanfar an a fhorbairt níos mó, beidh an nua seánáine nó i bhform leasaithe, chun cruid pleanáil a fháil agus é a chur i bhfeidhm. Sa phróiseas chun cruid pleanáil a fháil beidh deis eile ag an phobal a bhíth páirteach i gcomhairíochán poiblí maidir le deiríne mionánachta de Chomráid an Mheágaráid.

Letterkenny Market Square | Cearnóg an Mhargaidh Leitir Cean...

Please select your preferred choice | Roghnaigh do rogha is fearr

Susan McBain Figura Architecture

Joseph McCallion

Joan Kerr and Oliver Chapman

Gary Hamilton and Ailbhe Beatty

The Paul Hogarth Company

Greg McKinney of Opsis Design

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