

EUT

QUADRA

Volume 01

Edited by Elena Marchigiani and Giuseppina Scavuzzo

Research Investigation on Territories and the Built Environment

Università degli Studi di Trieste
Università degli Studi di Udine

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The book collects the essays of former doctoral students:

Elisa Maria Vittoria Bertolini (XXXIV cycle); **Elisa Cacciaguerra** (XXXIV cycle); **Sara Carciotti** (XXXIII cycle); **Alberto Cervesato** (XXXIII cycle); **Barbara Chiarelli** (XXXIII cycle); **Gianluca Croce** (XXXIV cycle); **Egidio Cutillo** (XXXIV cycle); **Mariacristina D’Oria** (XXXIV cycle); **Veronica Riavis** (XXXII cycle); **Valentina Rodani** (XXXIV cycle).

They are introduced by essays of their supervisors:

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This first issue of the *Quadra* series collects the results of researches developed in the frame of the Architecture curriculum of the XXXII-XXXIV Cycles of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture, jointly established by the Università di Trieste and Università di Udine since the academic year 2015-16. Being characterised by strong interdisciplinarity, the curriculum encompasses a range of study fields: architectural and urban design, urban and landscape planning and design, architectural representation, technical architecture, and economic evaluation of plans, projects, and policies. Under the umbrella of economic, social, economic and cultural sustainability and of climate change adaptation and resilience, the focus is on the enhancement and transformation of territories and the built environment, through the integration of different theoretical and operational tools and scales of intervention. By bringing together architectural and urban design reflections and devices, technical and technological tools, spatial planning investigations and instruments, the doctoral researches this book presents provide a picture of a large variety of topics and approaches. Their common aim is to explore fields of innovation in the various steps of transformation processes: from their conception to the proposal of approaches to the building of possible solutions. The first section of the book, *Territories of Smartness and Interactions*, collects contributions dealing with material and immaterial, physical and technological aspects and tools, addressed to the investigation, integrated planning, management and communication of the multiple dimensions of territorial assets and transformations. The second section, *New Metabolisms and Subtractions*, presents researches that are primarily related to the fields of architectural and urban design. Each essay is the result of a synthesis and reworking of a doctoral thesis and its key findings, and is introduced by a presentation written by the research supervisor to sketch broader theoretical frameworks. Overall, the book offers an articulate “geography” of topics and hypotheses the PhD course has dealt with: a tentative mapping of research paths, understood as a starting point for new critical reflections, and for stronger interactions among disciplinary fields and approaches.



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Being the first of the *Quadra* series, this book collects the results of some researchers developed in the frame of the Architecture curriculum of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture (cycles XXXII-XXXIV). The course has been jointly organised by the Università di Trieste and the Università di Udine since the academic year 2015-16. The coordinator of the course is Alberto Sdegno, Elena Marchigiani and Giuseppina Scavuzzo are respectively the current vice coordinator and the previous vice coordinator.

The PhD offers multidisciplinary education and training on topics and approaches that today are at the center of resilient and sustainable design. The objective is to develop skills capable of addressing the radical transformations that are happening in contemporary cities and territories. The curriculum dedicated to Architecture includes a number of disciplines such as architectural and urban design, urban and landscape planning and design, technical architecture, project evaluation and appraisal, and drawing. Researches explore design theories and methods, from the scale of buildings to that of territories, also through the use of advanced surveying and representation tools, information and communication technologies, economic assessment, and construction techniques focused on environmental sustainability.

This book would not have been possible without the commitment of doctoral students; through their researches, they make it valuable evidence of the work done so far. A heartfelt thank goes to all the colleagues who participated in the PhD teaching and training activities, and provided their essays. Last but not least, special thanks go to the PhD students Martina Di Prisco, Anna Dordolin, Andrea Peraz, Vittoria Umani, and Camilla Venturini whose efforts have made the creation of this editorial product possible.

PhD in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture

Università degli Studi di Trieste

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E-participation for the Development of Urban Regeneration Projects and Processes. Explorations and Research-Action Practices in Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (Italy)

Barbara Chiarelli

When participation is part of the regeneration processes of public spaces or urban commons, tendencies are, on the one side, the activation of punctual top-down processes by the public actor and, on the other side, the emergence of spontaneous practices by communities, often far from regulation. Both approaches do not always lead to significant results unless there are specific conditions.

In this context, the research investigated the opportunities that ICTs have for enhancing various actions, including in terms of open government, trying to measure their effectiveness regarding the target audience widening, communities' consolidation, and the impact of results.

The case-study action-research in Friuli Venezia Giulia region has allowed to investigate in depth the existence of elements that are favourable, but also of resistance, to a new way of planning that also includes ICT.

The results of the research aim to define a set of priorities to enable an adequate development of e-participation.

Keywords: e-participation, urban regeneration, action research.

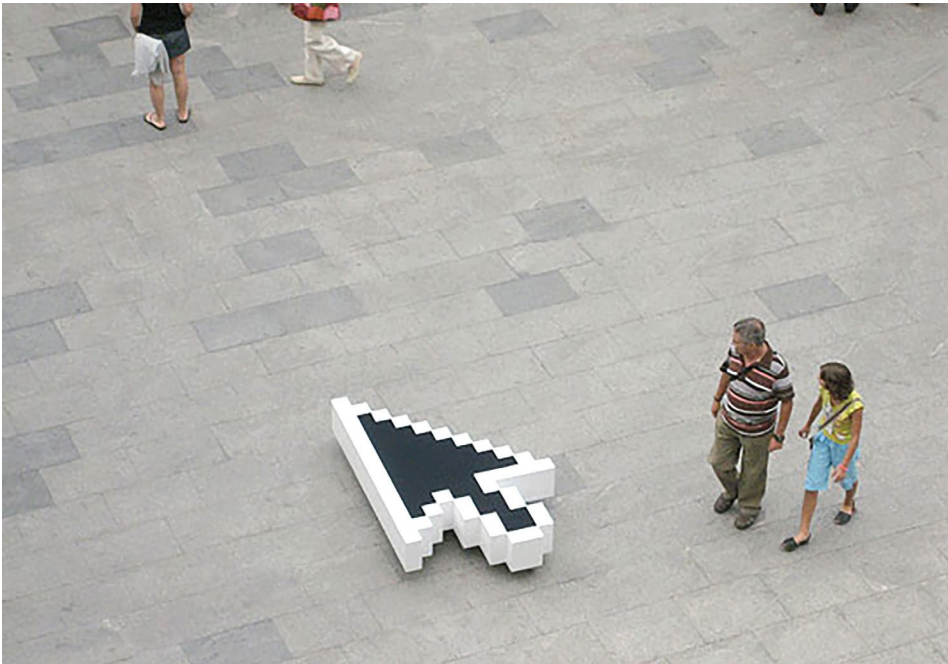


Figure 1
Urban Cursor, designer
Sebastian Campion
(2087.tumblr.com).

1. Introduction

This research stems from the opportunity provided by the FVG, Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region through the resources of the FSE, European Social Fund to investigate the relationship between digital platforms, places and communities, with a focus on the regional context. Public spaces, urban commons and target communities were the object of study. The research investigated the opportunities that ICTs, Information and Communication Technologies have to enhance various actions within urban regeneration processes, seeking to measure their effectiveness in terms of broadening the target audience, consolidating communities and the impact of results (Fig. 1).

2. Public Spaces, Commons and Belongings

Various studies from different disciplines agree that in recent times a number of contradictions concerning the link between public space, urban commons and communities of individuals are emerging. One of the most pressing problems in modern society is the loss of a sense of community, that feeling that members of a community experience by perceiving each other to be important within the group, in the shared confidence that needs and goals will be met and achieved with the commitment of togetherness (Tussi, 2021). This loss progressively leads individuals to alienation, political and social disengagement, the division of community, and the dissipation of intentional forces. Some research finds that one of the reasons for this trend can be found in the weakening and impoverishment of public spaces, which are increasingly

at risk of becoming non-places (Salzano, 2010). Public space, the privileged place of relationships, from social to economic and productive ones, from physical mobility to communication (Mattogno, 2020), is becoming increasingly fragile. While this has led to a progressive distrust of public action, it has also seen the emergence of new design strategies to rethink public space as a relational place, a site of social experience within the urban scene (Calderoni, 2017). This is the case of citizens' political initiatives to appropriate a space, which from a public good becomes a common good (Harvey, 2012). This particular form of social practice is referred to as "commoning": at the heart of this practice is the principle that the relationship between that social group and that aspect of the environment that is considered a common good should be both collective and non-commodified, that is, completely unrelated to the logic of the market and its values (Harvey, 2012). Urban spaces and commons are then maintained and cared for by the people of the community living around them (Belingardi, 2012). The concept of "common good" transcends the public/private dichotomy to delineate a good that is collective and necessary to all (Arena, 2015). Common goods are therefore neither private (of individuals) nor public (of the state), but of all as individuals. The relationship between community and good feeds sense of belonging to the community and territory (Marella, 2012).

3. Regenerating through Participation (Top-down, Bottom-up, Hybrid)

This chapter calls up the principles of the participatory approach. When adopted in urban regeneration processes regarding public spaces or commons, it can bring significant benefits, such as greater sharing of choices, greater trust between the governors and the governed, better understanding of problems and needs manifested by citizens, building broader consensus etc. The disadvantages that can be noted, such as the excessive cost of processes, the extension of time to arrive at decisions, or the limited availability of resources for later stages of implementation of policies and plans (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Peattie, 1969; Russel & Vidler, 2000) are, however, elements that often deter administrations from putting participatory processes into practice. In Italy, despite the fact that people have been talking about participation since the 1970s, participatory experiences have struggled to take root structurally and uniformly throughout the country. One of the main reasons is explained in a real attitude of "rejection of participation", which can be substantial (those who express it are convinced that social stability should rest on a well-defined and non-negotiable power bloc); procedural (the concern is about the efficiency of the process, which would slow down and complicate decisions); technocratic (it is believed that only experts and competent people should have a say) (Ciaffi & Mela, 2013). What is noted is not a lack of participatory experiences, but rather a lack of systematization and a methodological rigor that would allow for an orderly rereading of processes and objectivity of results. In addition, participatory decision-making requires a cultural change that must involve

citizens in general, and not all participatory processes automatically generate successful projects.

Where they occur, the initiation of participatory policies, strategies and programs by institutions (top-down activation) is still not enough to generate concrete projects without the activism of the communities benefiting from such actions. What decrees the success of a project is its ability, over time, to qualitatively affect the space by making it more liveable and responsive to the real needs of its users, who the more they recognise themselves in that place, the more committed they will be to its care. Participation can also be activated in other ways, such as in cases of urban regeneration and re-appropriation by small or large communities, or informal groups of individuals who become active in spontaneous ways and times, often without defined structuring, united by a desire to be heard (bottom-up activation). Finally, there are hybrid initiatives that originate as bottom-up and are then supported by institutions, or that conversely originate top-down and result in solid and effective partnerships with non-institutional actors; or the emergence of structured or unstructured citizens' committees motivated by the need to oppose projects dropped from above by administrations (bottom-up oppositional versus top-down exclusionary initiatives).

Proper management of timing and resources; ability to cope with unforeseen events; commitment to keeping a high focus on the project, so as not to dissipate efforts and to emphasise achievements. These are just a number of elements necessary for a successful public space project that contemplates public-private collaboration, or the grafting of new management approaches to common goods. The key word is synergy among all the actors involved. How digital intervenes, in this, is the subject of the next chapter.

4. Participation Between Online and Offline

Participation consists mainly of structured in-person events designed for participants to interact at all levels. However, the potential of ICTs resulting in the forms of e-participation is becoming clear. Experts agree that the use of online tools, if there is an understandable and well-identified objective at the basis, is undoubtedly a strategic element, capable of supporting participatory in-person processes in several aspects (Buiten, 2021). In particular, there are at least three potentially improvable elements: scale, legitimacy and learning (Franceschini, 2016). In any case, activities conducted "at a distance" cannot be a substitute for methods of direct participation, which, however, do not hide a number of critical issues, including the low and general attitude of presence. Citing the 2009 OECD, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report on Citizens and Participation Processes, two main categories of stakeholders who habitually do not participate can be distinguished: the interested but not able-bodied, who lack a number of skills of a linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, etc. nature; and the able-bodied but not interested, who do not participate due to lack of trust, time or interest (OECD, 2009).

Regarding the comparison between offline and online modes, it is not possible to argue that online participation is of comparable quality-lesser or better-than in-presence participation, nor to unequivocally define the effects of using these tools on processes (Borge et al., 2009; Oser et al., 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). What is hoped is that participatory processes will increasingly be organised and conducted through the complementary and integrated use of different tools, both in-person and online, so that the more established and traditional forms can take advantage of a technological infrastructure and tools that were previously unthinkable.

4.1 Platforms and Social Media for E-participation

Literature counts civic networks, platforms for online communication between citizens and administrations, open access software, applications for smart city use as urban commons: the public space of digital networks is recognised as a category in its own right on a par with public space of encounter and public space of flows (Spada & Viganò, 2014). There are researches engaged in testing tools designed explicitly for citizen involvement in spatial planning (Steiniger et al., 2016). The results show that a progressive improvement in citizen participation in planning occurs when specific elements are made available: a) content – information is readily available; b) debate – discussions are allowed; c) voting and ranking – there is the possibility to rank, rate, and vote on content. However, it should be emphasised that the use of ICTs does not automatically constitute an extension of citizen participation and involvement within planning processes. In order to achieve genuine participation, the inclusion of stakeholders must take place at all stages of the planning process, stimulating the so-called ordinary knowledge possessed by ordinary citizens (Lindblom, 1965).

In addition to institutional platforms, social networking spaces also represent a great opportunity, not only to inform and communicate but also to build trusting relationships, to listen and to monitor citizens' satisfaction levels. Several authors argue that social networks have the potential to increase people's engagement in planning processes through moments of public participation (Donders, Hartmann & Kokx, 2014; Evans-Cowley, 2010; Mandarano, Meenar, & Steins, 2011). This potential also occurs in cases of spontaneous participation: an example is the phenomenon of neighborhood Facebook groups, online communities often coinciding with "social streets" (Fig. 2), virtual places where people living in the same area find each other, talk, and interact. The most common problems of the neighborhood emerge from the discussions, and solutions often emerge as well: social streets are an outlet and at the same time a gauge of the desires of the city, whose needs, moods, and inclinations they express across the board. In 2018 Fondazione Feltrinelli's Social Street Report (Pasqualini, 2018) delved into the reasons for participation: «Sharing ideas, opinions and thoughts» is the top reason for participation, immediately followed by «Taking care of my neighborhood» tied with «Seeking help or offering help». What emerges is a very interesting need and desire for interaction, especially in big cities, where the social



Figure 2
Schematization of how Social Streets act
(socialstreet.co.uk).

conditions are rapidly changing. The unfolding scenario is that of a new world of social relations, in which socialisation is no longer relegated to exclusive communities denoted by a physical place, but is connected to infinite liquid, inclusive, intersecting and above all blended communities: online and offline.

4.2 The Digital Divide Question

When we talk about the digital divide we refer to that part of civil society excluded from “digital knowledge”: some studies identify the elderly, people with low levels of education and manual workers as those individuals who, having lower access to the web, are more likely to be unrepresented (Manzetti, 2018). Other research considers women who are not employed or in particular conditions (“gender digital divide”), immigrants (“linguistic-cultural digital divide”), people in prison, and, in general, those who are unable to use IT tools (Alù & Longo, 2020). Analysing the phenomenon of the digital divide, a distinction must be made between the cognitive dimension, which assumes an individual’s lack of minimal IT knowledge, and the infrastructural dimension, which focuses on deficiencies in the availability of the technologies and tools necessary to enable effective browsing. Although these are two clearly distinguishable areas, skills and infrastructure should be considered complementary and inextricable. In both cases, the sensitive issue of digital equality emerges: an issue of considerable relevance in today’s society, since as established by the UN, United Nations Human Rights Council, access to the Internet is one of the most important tools of this century for increasing transparency, access to information and facilitating the active participation of citizens in building democratic societies (United Nations General Assembly, 2011).

Italy ranks 18th out of 27 EU Member States in the 2022 edition of the DESI, Digital Economy and Society Index. Looking at this year’s indicators, Italy is

Figure 3

Italy in the DESI 2022 ranking: in human capital, Italy ranks 25th of 27 EU countries

(<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-italy>).



narrowing the gap with the EU, however still more than half of Italian people do not have at least basic digital skills (Fig. 3).

5. Action-research to Analyse the Friuli Venezia Giulia Readiness to E-participation

The action-research experience activated in the regional context aimed to investigate the opportunities introduced by new media in the sphere of people's participation in two different urban-scale planning processes. In FVG there is no constant openness of institutions towards citizens to involve them in decisions that affect the territory, neither through offline processes nor through online platforms. Local authorities use to activate "spot" consultations, so residents are therefore not used to participating, neither in-person or through the use of ICTs. In this context, the research sought to measure the effectiveness of ICT use in terms of broadening the target audience, consolidating the target community, and the quality of the results.

In view of the complexity of both processes, which are extensively described in the dedicated chapter of the doctoral thesis, two salient aspects have been chosen to be highlighted, one for each case study, which are useful in making overall reasoning with respect to the issues presented. In the first case, it is described how the use of hybrid participatory strategies turned out to be a supportive element of the entire ongoing project process, despite the low readiness for community participation and given the particularly stringent boundary conditions. The second case describes how the use of an institutional platform, since it was unrelated to other linked and parallel actions such as a constant presence, openness and transparency on socialmedia or well structured in-person activities, did not benefit the entire initiative.



Figure 4
Screenshot introducing the Instameet organised in Palmanova (igersfvg account on Instagram).

5.1 Instagram for Setting up Scenarios for the Reuse of Dismissed Military Sites in Palmanova

The start of the action-research coincided with the entrance of the author into the Temporary Group of Professionals as a young architect in charge of integrating e-participation methods and tools within the planned participatory process, phase management and general monitoring. The feasibility study for setting up scenarios for the reuse of dismissed military sites in Palmanova, is part of a memorandum of understanding between several public institutions¹. Palmanova is a historic fortress-city. Almost half of the area is occupied by mostly disused military sites. Citizen participation was activated due to the fact that the entire initiative is part of the PUVaT, Unitary Program of Territorial Valorization, a concertation tool conceived by Italian legislation to promote a unique process of valorization of public properties.

The methods and tools used were chosen based on the timing and deadlines imposed: the phase during which the participation activity was to take place, had a rather tight timeframe (120 days during the summer season, a complex period to be able to involve the citizenry), with no guarantee that the PUVaT table would continue the process of listening to the territory.

Technological aids undoubtedly helped to overcome a whole series of logistical impediments: in-person activities were complemented by online activities aimed at gathering ideas and proposals from the citizenry, which although not present had the opportunity to contribute. The activity that received the most interest among all was of a hybrid nature (in-person and online participation) was the Instameet (Fig. 4), a sort of social evolution of the neighborhood walk. This formula was chosen with the main purpose of spreading awareness of spaces that had been foreclosed to the public for years through one of the

¹ Agenzia del Demanio Direzione Regionale FVG, Comune di Palmanova, Regione Autonoma FVG, MiBACT.

Figure 5

Screenshot from the website of the local newspaper *Il Piccolo* showing one of the renderings of the project (<https://www.facebook.com/piccoloditrieste/>).



most widely used social media (Instagram), helping to make people imagine their future reuse. The group of participants², coming from different areas of the region, spent an entire day discovering some of the places that were exceptionally opened for the occasion, with the guidance of experts who enriched the visit with stories and anecdotes regarding the historical and logistical profile of Palmanova. The Igers were invited to post the shots taken by geolocating them, using specific hashtags³ and writing meaningful captions. The great strength of the operation, a characteristic linked in general to the mechanisms proper to Web 2.0, is the permanence, accessibility and gratuitousness of the content, in this case on the Instagram platform. Contents of great quality, as they are generated by professional or passionate photographers, therefore continue to “run”, potentially attracting new followers, generating new ideas and hypothetical replications of the initiative. The opening of the Instameet to segments other than residents has helped to broaden the field of thinking. As the regional territory is a constellation of scattered points of former military sites, as well described in the research *Un Paese di primule e caserme* (Corde Architeti, 2016), more than one person expressed a desire to repeat similar practices in other places.

5.2 Online Debates for the Redevelopment of Sant'Antonio Square in Trieste

The start of the action-research in Trieste coincided with the intersection of three different participatory initiatives inherent to the intention of the Municipality of Trieste to redesign the central Sant'Antonio Square (Fig. 5), pursued through the direct assignment of the project to a local architect who developed several proposals.

² 14 people.

³ An hashtag is a label that organises one or more contents of a specific topic or content on social networks, App or any other web service. In this specific case, #ladifesadelfuturo and #casermeaperte are among the hashtags chosen for the collection of images taken during the Instameet. By typing them into Instagram's search bar, it is possible to find all the images taken during the Instameet.

More specifically, the following have been analysed:

- a heated debate that took place on the Facebook page of the local newspaper⁴, regarding the publishing of one of the renderings produced by the architect, which triggered numerous critics and perplexities among the most active citizens on Facebook, who were convinced that the image coincided with the redevelopment project, while it was just one of the many hypotheses elaborated;
- outcomes from an online participatory platform adopted by the Municipality⁵ to allow citizens to express their views on the project proposals, an initiative activated in response to the social debate;
- a thematic workshop to reflect on the accessibility requirements of the square, in collaboration with the DIA, Department of Engineering and Architecture and a youth local association, whose objectives were to determine in a shared way among all participants which of the design hypotheses would best meet a set of basic accessibility requirements.

From the comparison of the data from the three situations, the following quantitative and qualitative considerations can be raised:

- The number of citizens who posted comments on the platform was quite low: 97 comments were recorded compared to 1216 comments on the Facebook post, more than 12 and a half times. The number of participants in the workshop was limited and by invitation due to procedural issues.
- Implementing a semantic analysis of the comments, the language used during the workshop and detected on the platform is more formal, calm, and respectful than that used on Facebook, even in the advancement of critiques that turn out to be constructive in any case. On social media, a general disdain and disbelief emerges with respect to the content, registering a very low 1.5 percent of positive comments, with a clear majority of ironic and offensive derogatory comments (47.5 percent and 27.5 percent, respectively). Next, in significantly smaller numbers, 10 percent of the comments concerned general complaints, 8.5 percent pertinent remarks, and a scant 5 percent a clear call for participation.
- Only the suggestions collected on the platform prompted the municipality's technical staff to request a new version of the project: neither the comments recorded on Facebook nor the outcomes of the design workshop were considered. An interesting fact obtained by cross-referencing the results of the three experiences: none of the users "vented" on the social post and none of the workshop participants then contributed to the platform, an element that could hopefully have been verified and would certainly have enriched the final results both quantitatively and qualitatively.

4 Post available on <https://www.facebook.com/piccoloditrieste/posts/10161221883520381>.

5 Link to the platform: <http://piattaforma-partecipativa.online.trieste.it/>

6. Findings and Final Considerations

The adoption of the action-research approach allowed for an in-depth study of the boundary conditions, an ongoing dialogue with all the actors involved and the possibility of introducing innovative elements within the processes.

The study of the literature, the two action-research experiences, and other data analysed and reported in the thesis (including the problem of the lack of networking of best practices) led to the identification of a number of useful elements to chart a possible way forward to enable the adequate development of e-participation even in contexts such as FVG:

- There is a need for a permanent collection of data, information, perceptions, desires, opinions, ideas, within a container platform where citizens and PA, Public Administration can synergically contribute to the construction of shared governance.

- A major investment is needed in terms of increasing digitisation, across every sphere of society.

- The role of public institutions is central: they can provide the most appropriate tools to enable the networking of knowledge and best practices.

The most appropriate tool for promoting, activating, managing and monitoring these actions over time comes through the approval of a regional law that can enable the structuring of commitments and actions aimed at promoting participation; initiatives that can be activated by leveraging community funding as well.

A further note is necessary. Nearly three years after the start of action-research activities, both situations are still at a standstill: final versions of the projects have not been submitted, the timeline for starting work is unknown, and no official communications from the authorities have followed over the months. Elements, these, that do not help to keep up the confidence of citizens, who, in the face of their commitment to participation, have not only yet seen nothing accomplished, but have not even heard any more about it. A final thought emerges: in the face of a request for participation on specific issues, it is important to ensure updates over time.

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