# From public participation GIS to participative planning support system – Exploring the Helsinki 2050 master planning process

Maarit Kahila-Tani

## Abstract

Current public participation methods are often laborious to use, reach only few participants and are ineffective at gathering usable information for plan making. This situation leads often to mistrust in the process and dissatisfaction in the outcome. Data, information, and knowledge are big themes in planning through discussions concerning big data and smart cities; still these knowledge-based approaches are largely overlooked in the public participation field. These observations suggest that merely providing opportunities for public participation is the endgame that fulfills participation requirements. Focusing solely on the realization of participation process neglects the quality of the end results and the effectiveness of participation. This paper identifies the gathered experiences of the development work of the SoftGIS tools in the field of urban planning. The aim is to bring together the discussions around PPGIS (Public Participation GIS), VGI (Volunteered Geographic Information) and PSS (Planning Support System) that have emerged from the linkage of GIS, ICT and public participation. Paper highlights the use of SoftGIS tool in the master plan process of Helsinki. The results indicated that residents favored infill development and their suggestions aligned with the plan proposal. Planners found the collected data and the developed tools valuable. Evidently successfully used PPGIS can guide the mainstream planning practices towards a more transparent, inclusive and context-sensitive direction. Additionally few other studies are presented to explain how the SoftGIS tools have supported participative planning practices throughout the planning process cycle in different cases. The aim is to consider the advantages and effectiveness of the experience–based information for the urban planning practices and to lay out a new participative planning process model. Based on these findings, the critical conditions will be defined that allow PPGIS to act as a PSS in planning processes and contribute to the change of the mainstream planning practices.

---

M. Kahila-Tani (Corresponding author)
Department of Surveying and Planning, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland
Email: maarit.kahila@aalto.fi