NAME OF THE PRACTICE
URBANAGE IOT DEVICES

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Short summary of the practice: Developed and piloted by the URBANAGE project by Forum Virium Helsinki and the University of Helsinki, this method facilitates easy digital data collection from older residents. They are given specifically designed simple IoT devices to record positive or negative experiences in various locales during their daily routines. The responses are submitted instantaneously to a backend server, which in turn feeds relevant information into the city administration's feedback system.

While this approach hasn't been implemented widely, multiple workshops introducing the devices were held in neighborhood centers and senior citizen associations during spring 2023. Following these sessions, curious residents were allowed to borrow the devices for weeks.

Goal of the practice: The method and devices are tailored for easy digital data collection from older residents who may not be accustomed to using smartphones. The gathered data offers insights into their perceptions of everyday surroundings.

Target group: Older residents who may not be accustomed to using smartphones.

Number of participants: Depends on the amount of available mapping devices. The Helsinki pilot project produced 10 devices.

Age of participants: Elderly people

Materials:

Physical IoT mapping devices

Method Settings: Pilot in Helsinki, Finland, however, the method can be used anywhere.

Preparation: The development of the method and devices was a separate innovation project. The mapping participants do not need much preparation for using the devices.

Step-by-step guide: Given the availability of the mapping devices, community mapping project leaders need to take a few essential steps. First, they should introduce residents to the project and the IoT device. Next, they distribute the devices for residents to use and subsequently collect them. Lastly, leaders should analyze the feedback gathered from the online map.

Expected output: The mapping results in point data with one of six binary attributes assigned (which button was pressed). While the device is designed with flexibility in mind, the Helsinki pilot's current categories are 'slipperiness', 'lack of (feeling of) safety', 'littering', 'insufficient street lighting', 'pleasant place', and 'green place'. These categories were defined in a series of co-creation workshops with residents and city officials, in which older residents were asked what kind of feedback they would like to give to the city.

DOs, DONTs and ethical considerations of the method: A lesson from the Helsinki pilot for subsequent IoT device mapping projects is to craft the resident recruitment strategy in a way that attracts not only the already active residents but also involves others.

Change the method brings to the communities: The URBANAGE makes it easier for city planners, decision makers, and elderly citizens to better collaborate and build cities that are more welcoming, healthier, and more fun, and where individuals can keep their independence longer.

Adaptation/Application of the method: At the very least, it makes older people feel listened to by the city administration. It should also help to transform negatively perceived places and highlight positively perceived places.

Case studies demonstrated the use of the tool to plan services for older people with reduced mobility, such as pharmacies. Another possibility is to assess the city's green spaces to make them more comfortable for older citizens.

Credit, References, and Resources:

Link to the app - https://urbanage.fvh.io/

More about the project. The project website - https://www.urbanage.eu/

A few case studies - https://www.imec-int.com/en/urbanage ; https://www.urbanage.eu/flanders