

New Challenges for a Collaborative Urban Planning: Digital Platform for Promoting Relationship Between Local Administration and Citizens in the City of Malaga

Francisco José Chamizo Nieto¹, Nuria Nebot Gómez de Salazar², Carlos J. Rosa-Jiménez²

¹PhD student, University of Malaga, Strategic Chair of Emerging Technologies for Citizenship, Malaga, Spain

²PhD, University of Malaga, Faculty of Architecture, Strategic Chair of Emerging Technologies for Citizenship; iHTT Institute Habitat, Tourism and Territory, Malaga, Spain

Abstract

The most conventional systems in the Urban Planning practice leave out needs and real social demands through inefficient management models in many cases. Nowadays there is a social, professional and institutional demand to transform these models into new ways of thinking and planning the city that are closer to its inhabitants. In fact, there is a high social involvement of people that are helping or developing activities in favour of their local communities. However, this social activism is not visible nor recognised as the one made by regulated associations. Undoubtedly, the use of new technologies offers a framework of opportunity in these new ways of "making the city", as well as it becomes a new area of work and research.

In this sense, there are many experiences that incorporate technology as a resource to promote citizen participation in the management of cities. However, only some of them are effective and achieve the goal of becoming a useful tool for citizens. In the city of Malaga, there are already some digital tools at the service of citizenship, although these require a process of revision and updating that allows optimizing existing resources and increasing their impact as a participation tool. As a first step, it is necessary to identify the agents and social initiatives of existing participation in the city.

The objective of this project is to create an interactive digital platform that shows the city of Malaga from a real social perspective, as it makes visible and map the emerging non regulated movements, neighbourhood initiatives and new urban trends with low visibility. Finally, the aim is to create a tool for collectives, associations, administrations and other urban agents to promote synergies and relationships among all of them. The incorporation of all of them is essential for the success of the platform as a participation tool. For this, a methodology of actions is established, and it begins with the identification of possible agents and the way of interaction with each one of them. The digital tool that is used is based on the use of geographic location systems.

This article collects the results of the first phase of the research project that includes a methodological proposal for mapping the real social activist reality in cities and a functional test of the digital platform created for this. Likewise, an evaluation of the experience and possible improvements to be incorporated in the successive phases of the project is advanced.

Keywords

citizen participation; new technologies; digital platform

1. Introduction

The social involvement of citizens and associations is a sign of the social, political and even economic development of societies. Many authors relate the social capital of a territory with its economic development (Fernández, 2009). The World Bank distinguishes between two types of capital existing in countries: the tangible, linked to resources and production of consumer goods, and the intangible, related to human and social capital (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [The World Bank], 2006). According to this report, the greater the wealth of a country is, the greater the importance of its social capital. And therefore, a direct relationship between development and social capital is established. It is necessary to study and analyze measures to promote activism and social participation of citizens.

The research of Fernández Prados on the situation of associationism and social participation in Andalusia is of high interest. It already distinguishes between a formal associationism (associations, entities, foundations, federations, etc.) and a non-conventional social involvement (in order to refer to collective actions, strategies of influence, protests, etc). The last one is characterized by its ephemeral condition, since it is formed by collectives which emerge to pursue a specific goal, and it usually disappears after achieving its objective. One of the main difficulties in the study of this social activism is the complexity and the wide spectrum of existing associations and groups, formal and informal ones. It is very difficult to obtain information from the latter because of its temporary nature as well as the lack of a unitarian register but a high number of sources such as blogs, webs, social networks, etcetera.

The sources of information available on associations in Andalusia, such as the statistical yearbooks and the Andalusian register of associations, offer information on registered associations, and therefore, only formal initiatives. But the associative reality of cities today is much wider than the one that appears in the formal registers. This complex situation shows the difficulty to know about social real activism in cities. However the knowledge of this social reality is very important for local administrations, for other social initiatives and associations, and for the citizens themselves. Only through this knowledge of the associative and activist reality is possible to understand the existing problems, needs and real demands of local communities, as well as promoting reflective, inclusive and innovative solutions for citizenship.

This project aims to explore urban regeneration processes where citizens are involved through participatory social initiatives, either regulated or non-regulated ones in the city of Malaga, as well as approaching to a more reliable knowledge of the activist social reality than the one that formal registers show. According to this objective, collectives, local groups and platforms are made visible (as they are not included in a municipal registry), in the same way as regulated associations, federations and groups.

In this context about the emergence of new virtual spaces, *PCI Malaga: Citizen Initiaves Platform in Malaga*¹ was born as a platform where citizens can be visible. The present article explores the purpose of the project: to show the city of Malaga from a perspective of emerging movements, neighbourhood initiatives and new urban trends within its neighbourhoods. At the same time, helps to show this social reality with little visibility in the city. Furthermore, this project should help, on the one hand, to create a network of collectives and associations and, on the other hand, to establish potential synergies between them.

2. Literature review

Citizen participation is a concept based on the goal of returning the active role that belongs to the citizenship who wants to be involved in issues about how public space can be used (Jacobs, 2011). However, this concept has been distorted because of urban practice, since its purpose has not really been applied. (Lefebvre, 2013) noticed about

¹Project developed in the *Strategic Chair of Emerging Technologies for Citizenship*, University of Malaga..

this a few decades ago²:

another obsessive issue consists in relating participation with integration. But it is not a simple obsession. In practice, the ideology of participation allows obtain the acquiescence of people interested and involved at the lowest possible cost. After the simulation which drives information and social activity approximately, they return to their quiet passivity and retirement. Is it not clear that real and active participation has a name? This name is self-management which presents other problems. (p. 123)

In the context of urban practice, the traditional production of space is not always accurate because it leads to social and urban problems. These inherited places are understood as alienated spaces by the citizens when they do not respond to the needs of inhabitants, even if they have been designed with the best of intentions. Perhaps, the fact of annulling the main actors from the design of the public space is the central problem of creating spaces with no identity which population does not feel part of, and, at the end, they become "non-places" (Augé, 1993).

Against this malpractice, citizen participation is understood not as a panacea, but as a tool which empowers citizenship. However, the anecdotic use of this type of methodology can lead to superficial exercises of non-binding consultations or information sessions about projects developed. These ways are known as "participationism" (La-Col, 2016) and they just make citizens unhappy, either because nobody is taken into consideration or because the projects end up being very far from what they were meant to be. Even if these two dynamics are well done, the practice of participation would still be poor because it would be reduced by a false approval of the population (Padilla, 2015).

In this context, the binomial citizen participation-public space is presented as a facilitator of "integral urban regeneration" (Declaración de Toledo, 2010)³: "searching about a new 'urban alliance' shared by all the agents involved in the city construction process" (p. 10). This coalition shows the different ways to make new forms of governance where social, physical and virtual networks work together to create synergies and think about the city: a complex system formed by a huge amount of civic demands and needs which are in continuous development making changes in the cities where we live (Mateo, 2015).

This symbiosis between reality and virtuality from the age of digital, requires a reflection on the state of public space in the age of "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2003). This new public space or "sensitive space" (Di Siena, 2009) is hybrid: physical and digital dimensions forms a whole. This is where new technologies takes part as a way to promote the culture of participation in a society who moves from virtual forums to physical public spaces.

Far from understanding this duality of public space as the cause of the emptying of physical public space, virtual environments can be understood as an opportunity to make the leap from individual-solitude to community-solidarity (Bauman, 2013). This leap is motivated not only by the need of sharing a common cause but also by the fact of having a shared goal which a group committed to the cause will enlighten and solve. In this sense, new technologies work as a commons thanks to the community that can build social networks where this new tool involve universal access and freedom of expression (Di Siena, 2009).

The connection between the virtual and the face-to-face lead to new understandings and social meeting points. Due to this, there is a paradigm shift: from the inherited city to the "MediaCity" (Berruti, 2008) or "City of Bits" (Mitchell, 1996). In this parallel reality, a social architecture is defined in order to override hierarchies and place citizens at the same level. According to this, democracy and inclusion are guaranteed (Di Siena, 2009).

²Translation of the original citation from Lefebvre (2013):

otro tema obsesivo es el de la participación vinculada a la integración. Pero no se trata de una simple obsesión. En la práctica, la ideología de la participación permite obtener al menor costo posible la acquiescencia de personas interesadas e implicadas. Después del simulacro que más o menos impulsa la información y la actividad social, aquellas se vuelven a su tranquila pasividad, a su retiro. ¿No está claro ya que la participación real y activa tiene nombre? Este nombre es autogestión. Lo cual plantea otros problemas. (p. 123)

³Translation of the original citation from Declaración de Toledo (2010): "búsqueda de una nueva 'alianza urbana' compartida por todos los agentes que intervienen en el 'proceso de construcción de la ciudad'" (p. 10).

A possible way to promote change or "the viable unpublished" (Freire, 1973) is mapping: an instrument of territorial analysis that allows to represent and map common interests in a unitary way in space. This practice makes possible to visualize and reflect different things from those registered in any street, political or geophysical map, while at the same time giving space to social concerns. Thus, a social fabric is built to create community⁴: "invisible threads become the connectors which unite the different participatory nodes, links which collide at all times with physical objects within the urban space" (Di Siena, 2009, p. 92).

Technology can re-humanize the public space against positions which invite the isolation of individuals because it explores new forms of socialization promoting new awareness and collective values (Soroa, 2009, cited in Di Siena, 2009). Similarly, the possibilities of the new technologies of the digital age are practically endless: the means of representation of the public space increase exponentially, the range of citizen communication channels is broadened and a greater social awareness is generated where the new digital information or social hardware will complete the physical information (Di Siena, 2009).

The ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) facilitate meeting and exchange places because they accelerate collaborative processes and relational situations. As Alfonso Sánchez Uzábal (2009, quoted in Di Siena, 2009) stated⁵, "the entire open culture movement should serve as inspiration for the creation of a network of open source public spaces, in constant change, flexible, with possibilities of adaptation to the demands of the global city" (p. 101). Platforms such as *CIVICS*⁶ is presented as a digital collaborative mapping tool where you can view all citizen initiatives geolocated according to the theme and scope of action, and register new emerging movements. Virtual mapping proposals such as this aim to make the local and the global hybridize, to create synergies between related initiatives, and to dilute the physical and digital limits promoting the meeting (Lafuente y Horrillo, 2017).

3. Objectives

The main objective of the project is based in the need of making visible those local participatory processes of Malaga city in order to empower citizens in making decisions about their relationship with public space. As Jordi Quiñonero and Gema Jover (2016) stated, the fact of having a global and territorial perspective of citizen movements allows us diagnose our urban and territorial environment in order to be able to make related social movements. For this reason, defining the scene of citizen participation in Malaga city will promote processes of social innovation over the territory in a strategic, open and inclusive manner. Only in this way a city model based on the monopoly of planning made by a few can be broken down (Padilla, 2015).

To achieve this statement, it is aimed to map all those neighbourhood initiatives and social movements which have their scope of action around the coastline from Malaga city. However, this area is understood as a starting field of study that will allow the construction of a network which promotes the culture of participation all over the city. In this way, a direct relationship between "governance networks" (Martí, Blanco, Parés and Subirats, 2013) and "urban governance" (Martí et al., 2013) will be facilitated in order to promote the principles of interdependence, reflection and cooperation among emerging actors such as associations, groups, movements, cooperatives and consortiums where citizenship and citizen participation are involved.

A different way of generating new forms of local governance is to facilitate synergies between different groups which share common issues in order to provide solutions jointly. Thus, it is possible to combine common objectives and goals which are part of different realities of a city-society which is not continuous but fragmented. In this context, technology takes part as a tool which can put together those discontinuous physical spaces because they do not have to share the same continuous space associated with a single neighbourhood (Di Siena, 2011).

⁴Translation of the original citation: "hilos invisibles que se convierten en los conectores que unen a los diferentes nodos participativos, enlaces que colisionan en todo momento con objetos físicos dentro del espacio urbano" (Di Siena, 2009, p. 92).

⁵Translation of the original citation from Alfonso Sánchez Uzábal (2009, quoted in Di Siena, 2009): "todo el movimiento de la cultura abierta debería servir de inspiración para la creación de una red de espacios públicos de código abierto, en cambio constante, flexible, con posibilidades de adaptación a las exigencias de la ciudad global" (p. 101).

⁶Platform *CIVICS*: impulsa tu ciudad. Retrieved from <https://civics.cc/es/#!/iniciativas>

Another goal, derived from the main one, is to promote meeting spaces which offer the possibility of working directly with the administration. This purpose is based on the principle of "network governance" (Martí et al., 2013)⁷: "emerging pattern of government based on network interaction among multiple actors from different spheres (public, private, civil) which they recognize each other interdependently" (p. 29).

4. Methodology

To achieve the preceding objectives, a methodology consisting of three phases (view Figure 1) was proposed: *Search for "participactive" (sub)nodes* (phase 1), *Construction of living networks* (phase 2) and *Postproduction* (phase 3).

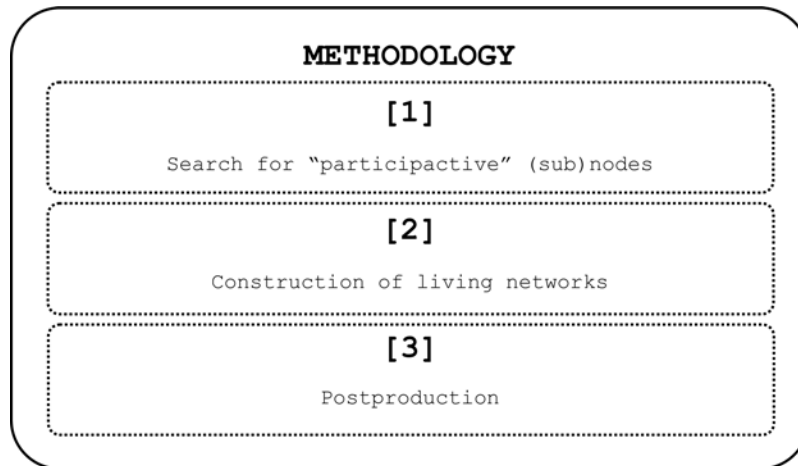


Figure 1. *PCI Malaga* methodology. Source: self made.

4.1. PHASE [1] Search for "participactive" (sub)nodes

The first phase [1] begins with the search for those initiatives that have a remarkable activist role and a strong presence in the media, as well as an outstanding social awareness campaign. Initially, these will be located within a study area which spread along the coastal districts: *Cadiz Road*, *Centre* and *East Malaga*. The choice of them is motivated by the fact that the casuistry of these areas is quite unique and different between them despite of being articulated around the coastline.

The fact of locating this type of group is motivated by the need for starting from their action networks to define their subnodes associated with them. In this way, we start from those informal or regulated initiatives which really move for common citizen issues in the specific case of Malaga city. In this sense, the regulated initiatives are defined as those which are included in the *RMAE*⁸: source where are filed all associations and non-profit entities legally constituted, registered in the corresponding Public Registries and with headquarters or delegation in the municipality of Malaga.

From these subnodes, new nodes are defined in order to establish a network leap. Thus, through several network leaps, this social network can be expanded and completed: a living that grows up and feeds on all those initiatives that work together such as neighbourhood associations, local groups, or radio and television channels. In addition, this network does not stagnate because it is constantly changing and transforming while new groups are formed. On the other side, platforms disappear when they achieve the goals which led to their emergence. Similarly, it does not matter that the network expands beyond the boundaries of the three coastal districts because they have only

⁷Translation of the original citation: "patrón emergente de gobierno basado en la interacción en red entre múltiples actores procedentes de distintos ámbitos (público, privado, civil) y que se reconocen interdependientes entre sí" (Martí et al., 2013, p. 29).

⁸*Registro Municipal de Asociaciones y Entidades* portal of Malaga city. Retrieved from <http://www.malaga.eu/misc/bsocial/asociaciones.jsp>

been defined as the initial scope of study to delimit the field of work at the beginning of the research.

Finally, there is a range of objectives and motivations defined and classified into two group of attributes: *Scope of action* and *Topic*. They have been assigned to each located initiatives like tags. To do this, a file (view *Appendix B: PCI Malaga inquiry: Platform of Citizen Initiative in Malaga*) with a questionnaire was handed to that each association involved in the Project. In addition, it was filled with information provided by the municipal register (under the heading of Statutory purposes), web pages and social networks.

4.2. PHASE [2]- Construction of living networks

The second phase [2] consist of mapping every initiative thanks to GIS (Geographic Information System) in order to make visible the whole network of relationships between associations which really shows the case of Malaga city. Likewise, a selection of initiatives is defined by attribute or group of attributes, assigned in the first phase, with the aim of establishing synergies between equals either by proximity or by objectives in common.

Putting in common all the emerging initiatives defined allows relating the registered and non-regulated initiative overlapping. In this way, it will be able to make a global reading which brings to light the reason of its internal structure. At the same time, it will be easier to link them in order to create synergies which promote the collaborative work.

The fact of mapping every informal initiatives makes visible those platforms or movements which are not archived because of their ephemeral character, since many of the collective dynamics emerge spontaneously by citizenship. This happens because population is aware of the issues which affect in their relationship with the public space. Therefore, the success of the present project is based on the compilation of those non-regulated initiatives for its subsequent dissemination to citizenship.

Mapping and linking every initiative in a specific place or a scope of action where they take part is important because this fact allows making conclusions about the reason for their emergence. However, the concentration or dispersion of collectives can offer answers regarding the motivations or starting conditions which promoted their development.

To do this, the living network will be overlay whitth others urban factors such as urban scopes related with districts or neighbourhoods; sites delimited by geographical agents, which do not necessarily have to be administrative limits, such as the coast or rivers; thematic areas such as green zones or school environments... In this way, a diagnostic cartographies work will show the evolution of local citizen movements in Malaga city.

4.3. PHASE [3]-Postproduction

The third phase [3] is a catharsis of the two previous phases so the whole research process will be archived in several open access documents which will be recovered from the following platforms and formats:

- Web page: website where every remarkable participatory initiatives and related information will be saved in order to make citizens able to edit this page with new content about emergent movements in development.
- Virtual map (web page plugin): digital platform where you can consult and edit every layer of information developed, so it would work as a living tool.
- Tiny networks (virtual map plugin): facilitating meeting points between different associations and local entities with affinity, to encourage and promote future projects based on teamwork.

5. Discussion and conclusions

To achieve the objectives exposed before, an initial methodology consisting of three phases (view Figure 2) was proposed: Analysis and mapping of social movements, emergent initiatives and new urban trends in Malaga city (phase 1), Putting in common data and making conclusions (phase 2) and Making final documentation and its promotion (phase 3).

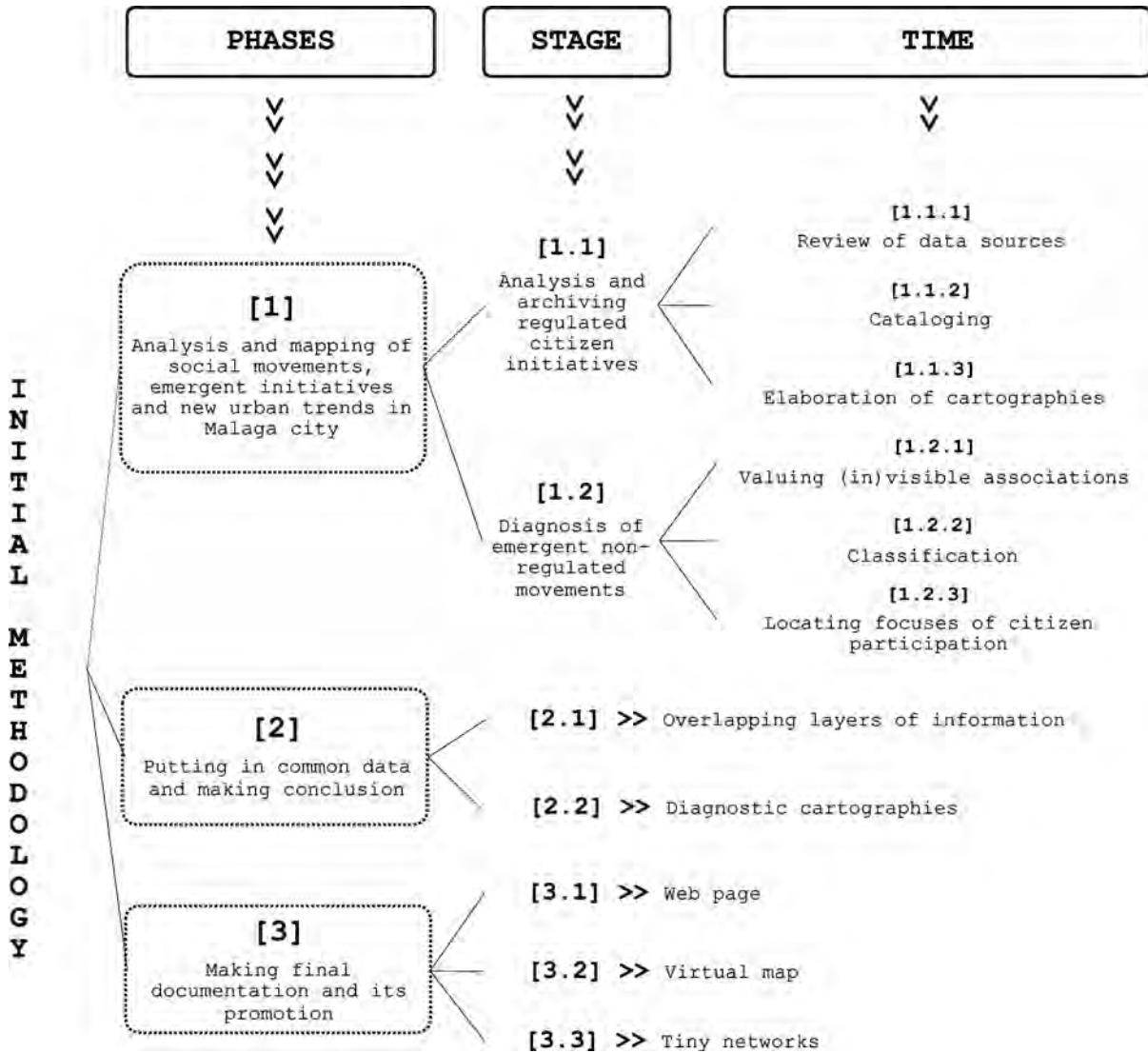


Figure 2. PCI Malaga initial methodology. Source: self made.

However, this way of developing the project during the first phase [1] presented shortcomings so it was necessary to rethink the original method. The following discussion topics motivated the reformulation of the initial methodology towards a new one exposed in the previous section:

- Areas of study

At the time of testing the initial method and focus on the specific case of Malaga city, the study began studying over *Cadiz Road*, *Centre* and *East Malaga* districts which are located among the coastline during the first stage: [1.1] *Analysis and archiving regulated citizen initiatives*. In this way, it was possible to establish limits of action to the research due to the huge number of associations and local entities registered in the municipality of Malaga: 3138 registries on the 23th April, 2018.

- Selection of neighbourhood associations

After this first reduction, it was proposed to start the research within district number 7: *Cadiz Road*. Before proceeding to the location of the 479 entities located in this scope of action, it was decided to do a second reduction which contemplated only those neighborhood associations with more than 300 members (20 in total). This selection is motivated because of being able to establish contact with them and considering them as informing agents will allow the construction of the network of emerging non-regulated collectives. In addition, working with the neighbourhood associations at the beginning allows to cover in a homogeneous way the whole area of the district.

- Keeping in touch with associations

To establish an approach to these associations, a previous contact was started by email and social networks. However, this way is quite limited because many of the neighbourhood associations do not have an active president as usually they only develop their activities one or two days a week in the afternoon. Nevertheless, meetings with groups such as *Bosque Urbano Malaga*⁹ allowed us to be aware of the fact that several district associations carry out their activities collaboratively. Likewise, we also were aware of other ways of promotion and contact in which associations keep on run such as radio and television channels.

- GIS location

Once the associations to work with were chosen, their location was made by GIS technology. The use of this tool is motivated by the perspective of a future open access platform in which the layers of information will be easily accessible and edited by citizens (view Phase [3]). At the same time, the location of points related with initiatives allowed to be aware of well cover the whole district which associations with more than 300 members. Furthermore, it was ensured that these associations could act as informing agents to define the network of non-regulated movements due to their influences on neighbours (view Figure 3).

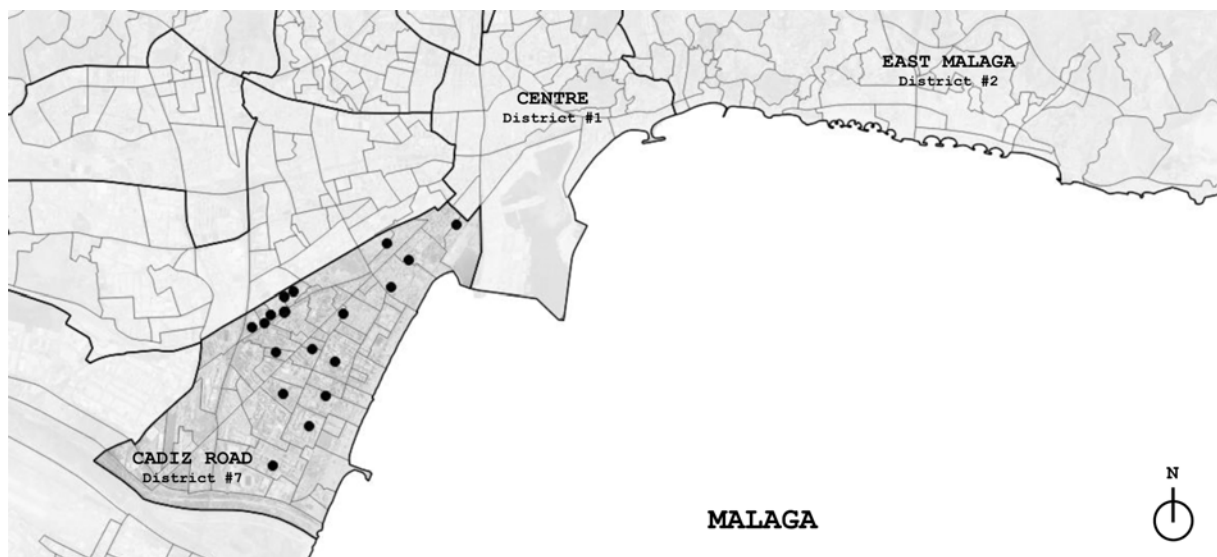


Figure 3. Neighbourhood associations with more than 300 affiliates in district #7: *Cadiz Road*. Source: self made from Plan Nacional de Ortofotografía Aérea [PNOA] (2018).

After this first test of the initial methodology, it was concluded that the future of the project was going to be unproductive for two reasons. The first one consists on focusing on the study on the neighbourhood associations. The other one is to think that the number of members is a key date to measure the social impact of initiatives.

⁹Citizen platform which achieves to turn an urban area over 17700 m² into a forest: a zone which is located between the *Cruz de Humilladero* and *Cadiz Road* districts. Link to platform: <http://bosqueurbanomalaga.org/>

The first reason slowed down the progress of the Project because it presented several problems due to the nature of this type of associations. Firstly, this type of groups directs their program of action within the territorial limits of the neighbourhoods they represent. In this rare, they rarely work far away from the limits of the suburb despite of sharing goals with other initiatives. Secondly, the profile of the president who leads these collectives is usually a adult male who tends to concentrate the neighbourhood project without representing other agents such as children, teenagers or elderly people.

According to the second reason, many of these associations have a high number of members but they focus their activity in a very local way and do not expand it beyond the limits of the neighbourhood where they are settled. In addition, this data is not representative of the activity of the association since it is just which does not a number of an affiliation, so it does not imply an active commitment.

For this reason, starting the research by focusing on neighbourhood associations does not show the real network which actually has a presence in the city. Due to this problem, the initial methodology was reformulated by a new one which place value on those initiatives with an impact on the citizenship (view Figure 4). In this way, it will be possible to build an associative structure which really represent this reality of emergent movements in Malaga city.

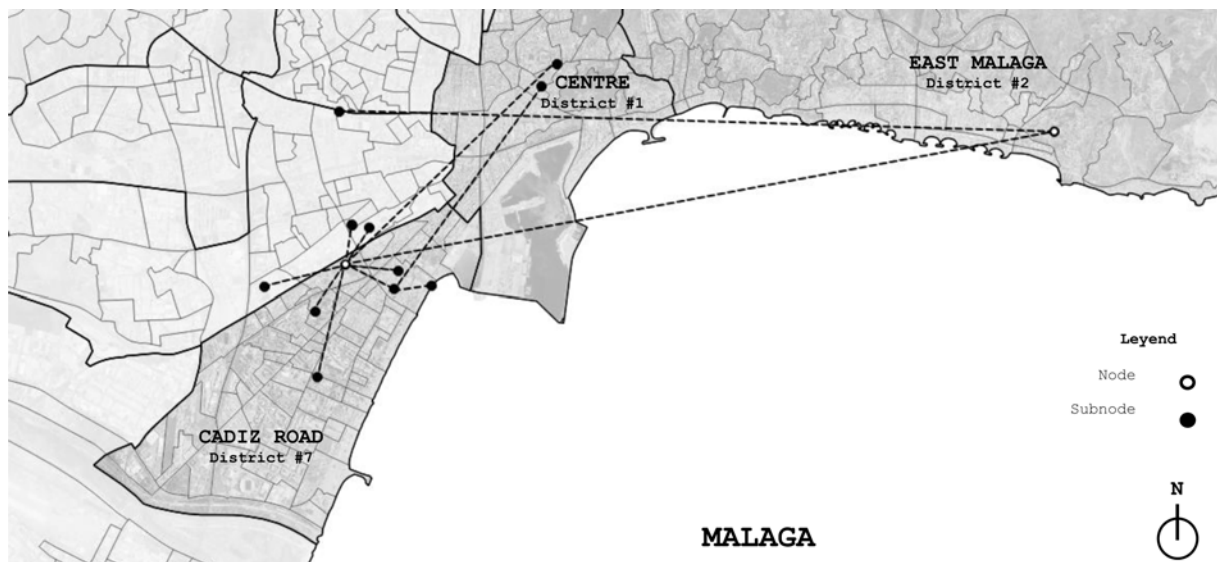


Figure 4. “Participative”(sub)nodes network. Source: self made from PNOA (2018).

To sum up, from all these initial discussion topics the following conclusions were reached:

- The future of citizen participation

The interest of this research project is based not only on documenting the future of citizen movements which take part in Malaga city, but also in the need to show those remarkable and emergent citizen initiatives which have their development on site. During the project, the location of associations and local entities has been decisive, specially when looking for non-regulated initiatives.

- Emergent citizen actions

The existence of synergies and action networks enhances the need for groups to work together and share common goals. This fact invites us to continue working on creating spaces where they can converge and diverge. To do this, technology is presented as a facilitator to create unions between different associations which do not necessarily have to be close in space.

– The duality of physical-digital public space

Making a global approach about the location and scope of citizen initiatives in Malaga goes towards the construction of possible collaborations not only between the regulated and informal initiatives but even among the first ones. At the same time, proposing an open access platform allows associations to know themselves and society. It makes easier to organize citizenship, as the issues and common causes which would hardly ever have development by a single association, will now be developed by this network of linked associations. Technology takes part one more time as a bond between the physical and the digital through a future virtual platform which will be the synthesis of the research project: *PCI Malaga*.

6. Acknowledgements

PCI Malaga is part of the research theme *Citizen Participation and Public Space* within the *Strategic Chair of Emerging Technologies for Citizenship*: a collaboration between the University of Malaga and the Town Hall of Malaga.

It is appreciated the collaboration to:

Sabina Andrea Habegger Lardoezt. Technique in the Casabermeja's Town Hall (Malaga), PhD from the University of Malaga and more than ten years to the development of experiences in citizen participation, local development and educational inclusion. Collaboration in the methodological review of the *PCI Malaga* project.

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Appendix A: *Platform of Citizen Initiative in Malaga* inquiry

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Name Association / Entity / Collective

HEADQUARTERS

Scope of action (chose between local, regional and national):

Fiscal Identification Code: No. register:

Date of registration: No. members:

Telephone: Mobil phone:

Fax: Email:

REGISTERED OFFICE

Address:

Postal Code: Neighbourhood: District:

NOTIFICATION ADDRESS

Filling in case of not coinciding with the data of REGISTERED OFFICE.

Address:

Postal Code: Neighbourhood: District:

REGULATION

Goals / Purposes / Objectives:

.....

.....

SCOPE OF ACTION

CULTURAL SPACES: Cultural center, libraries, museums, university...

CITIZEN HEADQUARTERS: Associations, coworking (collaborative work spaces), workshops...

PUBLIC SPACE: Squares, parks, streets, urban voids...

VIRTUAL SPACES: Social networks, platforms, blogs...

Figure 5. *PCI Malaga* inquiry 1/2. Source: self made.

TOPIC

- ACCESSIBILITY: Elimination of architectural barriers, universal design...
- ARCHITECTURE: Industrial heritage, Property of Cultural Interest...
- CARE: Health, nutrition, quality of life, social assistance...
- CULT: Religion, beliefs, rite...
- CULTURE: free education, collaborative learning, free access culture (Open Access)...
- EDUCATION: Project-based learning, learning communities, association of mothers and fathers...
- ENVIRONMENT: Ecology, permaculture, urban gardens, urban agriculture...
- EQUALITY: Gender perspective, feminism...
- DIVERSITY: Support for integration, attention to diversity...
- HEALTH: Well-being, healthy life...
- INMATERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE: Traditions, customs, trades...
- INTEGRATION: Interculturality, cultural immersion, attention to groups at risk of social exclusion, attention to diversity ...
- MATERIAL HERITAGE: Archeology, pre-existences, vestiges...
- MEDIATION: Intermediation, facilitation...
- URBAN ART: Artistic Education, graffiti, intervention in the urban space...
- URBAN PLANNING: Urban regeneration, urban acupuncture, urban strategies, empty solar, public space, urban drifts, urban routes, mapping (diagnostic cartography)...
- SELF-MANAGEMENT: Urban governance, urban participation, collaborative work in the network...
- SOCIAL POLICY: Bank of time, crowdfunding (collaborative economy), neighborhood cooperatives...
- SOCIAL RIGHTS: Human rights, equal rights and duties, attention to immigrant population, reception of refugees...
- SPORT: Physical playful activity, gamification...
- SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY: Public transport, bicycle, quiet and healthy spaces
- OTHERS_Specify:

Figure 6. *PCI Malaga* inquiry 2/2. Source: self made.