

# MapLocal: use of smartphones for crowdsourced planning

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Urban planning policy in England has been reshaped around a discourse of localism, with communities nominally given the power to set planning priorities for their neighbourhoods (Painter et al. 2011). This approach is problematic as little or no support is being given to communities to overcome the familiar problems of translating local aspiration into a highly technical and legalistic planning framework. In this pilot project, a smartphone app ('MapLocal') was developed to provide a tool undertake a simple baseline survey of a neighbourhood that could inform a plan making process. Individuals were loaned a smartphone and asked to walk around their neighbourhood recording audio clips, taking photographs and adding comments, all of which were geo-referenced using GPS and uploaded automatically to a central community map.

The smartphone app was designed to be a useful tool within a wider planning process, particularly for community members with lower levels of spatial literacy, younger people who would be less willing to engage in traditional town-hall style participatory planning exercises, and those less comfortable expressing their own views within a group setting. The intention was not only to facilitate communication between communities and local government, but also communication within communities to build resilience. The paper discusses the tensions between using crowdsourcing as an intelligence gathering exercise (cf. Goodchild 2007) and the need for more meaningful collaboration between communities and local government within processes of land use planning.

## References

- Goodchild M (2007) Citizens as sensors: the world of volunteered geography *GeoJournal* 69;4, 211-221
- Painter, J., Orton, A., MacLeod, D.G., Dominelli, L. & Pande, R. (2011) *Connecting localism and community empowerment: research review and critical synthesis for the AHRC Connected Community Programme*. <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/9244/1/9244.pdf> accessed 4/1/12