# Methods for the involvement of adolescents in participation processes

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## Introduction

Public space in urban environments is limited and claimed by multiple, often competing demands. Particularly for young people, public space is very important for social interaction outside parental control or school constraints (van Lieshout & Aarts 2008). They use these spaces to meet like-minded people and friends, to just hang out there or use the space as container and platform for signs and symbols of their affiliation. As teenagers experience no formal right to physical spaces of their own and have nowhere else to go than outdoor public and/or semi-public spaces, there is a high potential for conflicts with other groups (Lieberg 1995).

To examine spatial perception and appropriation of public spaces as well as to identify barriers and motifs for avoiding several places, we developed and applied methods to collaborate with adolescents at different stages based on web mapping technologies, mobile devices for recording data and spatial-related artwork (GPS drawing) to express expectations and emotions while experiencing certain spaces in a different way.

## Project Background

The methods presented are developed and applied within two research projects – the already completed project *I AM HERE! - Participative approaches to analyse the space behaviour of adolescents in the city* and the still on-going project *Transforming Spaces: Breaking down social, cultural and planning barriers of Viennese adolescents in urban space utilization*. The spatial context in both projects is the city of Vienna. While *I AM HERE!* aimed at the analysis of spatial activity patterns and spatial demands of adolescents in Vienna, *Transforming Spaces* has the goal to identify areas that have a negative association among young people, often perceived an explicitly named as "No-Go" areas. The goal of both projects is the development of strategies for a city development and open space planning that respect the special needs of adolescents.

As tools for data collection, GPS devices, mobiles, digital photo- and video cameras, audio recording devices, web-mapping and virtual globe technologies are used, combined with qualitative and quantitative interview techniques. Data processing and visualization was implemented via web-mapping and virtual globe technologies.

## Engaging adolescents in participation processes

We apply a set of different methods to work with adolescents mainly in a school class context with the goal to support individual preferences of expressing themselves about space, as most of the

adolescents have difficulties to talk about perceptions of their everyday places (Schauppenlehner et al. 2012). Finding appropriate methods becomes even more important in working with school classes of adolescents, where on-going mechanisms and subliminal behaviour patterns can influence individuals, discussions and collected data.

### *The youth.places Web-Mapping application*

WebGIS applications have progressed over the last years due to technological development and simplified access through mobile devices. In particular young people use these technologies as a matter of course in their everyday life. We developed a web-application together with adolescents named *youth.places*, to draw mental maps and to record spatially distributed data (Schauppenlehner et al. 2012). The application allows tagging places on a map and offers the ability to describe and categorize them using an online form. To obtain acceptance, we focus on a simple and intuitive usability and a design vocabulary familiar to young people. Points on the map can be viewed and rated; graphically processed statistics allows users to quickly identify main characteristics and coherences.


Figure 1: Main map window of the *youth.places* application

The application can also be operated on mobile devices, which facilitates spontaneous on-site interventions using QR-codes, SMS or email invitations. The users can respond directly after receiving the request, wherever they are. A geolocation tools using HTML5 and Javascript can help guide them to identify their current position on the map. Linkages to social networks should provide a platform where they can engage in discussions and use different media to express themselves (e.g. music, pictures, text, videos).

### *GPS drawing*

In addition to the structured quantitative data gathering with the *youth.places* application we develop an art approach to interact with urban spaces and to provide the ability to point out messages, feelings and expectations regarding space (Schauppenlehner et al. 2013). The concept is based on the creation of artwork through walking (Tufnell et al. 2002) that was expanded into GPS drawing by Hugh Pryor and Jeremy Wood (Lauriault & Wood 2009). GPS drawing uses a GPS device as pen and the urban fabric as the corresponding piece of paper to create large-scale artworks within and depending on a specific landscape with the help of new media and technology.

## Conclusions

Both presented methods allow an involvement of adolescents in research processes at different stages. Using web mapping and mobile technologies can point out new scopes for well-known tools that young people use in their everyday life. The wide spread of mobile internet offers new possibilities for research as they allow to reach people on-site or connect them via social networks. Nevertheless, technical issues like platform-depended interfaces and application still causes challenges for data integration and analysis. Social media provide a huge platform to involve more and diverse people in research processes and further give people the possibility to engage in the research process anytime. This widening requires well-designed filtering and clustering methods as participants may not fit into the target group (e.g. age classes, social backgrounds, location, messy data).

The GPS drawing project also uses mobile technologies and allows an intensive and different experience of the urban environment and specific spatial settings. By drawing a certain message or image into the urban fabric, adolescents have the possibility to discover new spots and peculiarities of actually well-known areas which can lead to rethinking processes of the daily used urban environment.

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