cogitatio

Urban Planning (ISSN: 2183–7635)
2023, Volume 8, Issue 2, Pages 44–56
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i2.6607

Article

Smart Engagement in Small Cities: Exploring Minority Participation in Planning

Shakil Bin Kashem * and Dora Gallo

Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning, Kansas State University, USA

* Corresponding author (shakilkashem@ksu.edu)

Submitted: 13 December 2022 | Accepted: 3 April 2023 | Published: 27 April 2023

Abstract
Smart engagement approaches are now widely applied in community planning processes. However, there continues to be a lack of representation from marginalized groups such as racial/ethnic minorities in planning processes. In this study, we explore what smart community engagement methods are being applied by small cities in the U.S., and how minority communities are participating in the planning process with those engagement methods. We analyzed planning documents and public engagement data from five small cities located in different regions of the U.S. with varying levels of minority populations. We evaluated the planning processes of the study cities, specifically comprehensive planning, and what smart community engagement tools they have applied. Our study shows that smart engagements are performed primarily through community surveys and online outreach initiatives. Despite adopting these approaches, most cities received lower participation from minority populations compared to non-Hispanic Whites. Cities with higher participation rates provided more engagement opportunities and conducted targeted community events and surveys to reach out to minority and low-income communities. From this study, we conclude that cities should apply varied methods for community engagement and should not rely solely on smart approaches to engage with minority communities. For cities to increase their overall civic participation, including those underrepresented, smart engagement approaches should be supported by targeted public events and outreach activities.

Keywords
community engagement; small cities; smart city; urban planning

Issue
This article is part of the issue “Smart Engagement With Citizens: Integrating “the Smart” Into Inclusive Public Participation and Community Planning” edited by Jin-Kyu Jung (University of Washington) and Jung Eun Kang (Pusan National University).

1. Introduction

Community engagement is an integral component of any planning process that allows planners to know people’s vision for their community and learn from the perspectives of the citizens. Since the 1960s’ turn in planning by the advocacy planners (Clavel, 1994), public participation is now widely applied in the planning process. Participatory planning targets to create a process that is inclusive, allows consensus building, learning from local knowledge, and helps mobilize community action (Afzalan & Muller, 2018; Quick & Feldman, 2011). But traditional participatory planning process based on community meetings faces the problems of unequal participation from different population groups and entails a high cost of time and resources (Bamberg, 2013; Hoang, 2021). Considering the limitations of public meetings that cannot effectively inform citizens about complex urban issues, planners are increasingly adopting new web-based smart techniques to better engage citizens in planning (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010). Smart engagement approaches can provide greater knowledge, commitment, and satisfaction level compared to traditional public meetings (Conroy & Gordon, 2004). Social media and internet technology also exert a positive influence on political participation (Bañales et al., 2020;

Weber et al., 2003). However, in some cases, they may fail to receive an adequate response from the community (W. Williamson & Ruming, 2020), and may lead to "token participation" by merely educating citizens to accept decisions that have already been made (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010).

Lower participation from ethnic/racial minority communities is always a concern for planners (Hoang, 2021). Cultural differences, distrust in the government, lack of incentives, poor advertisement, inconvenient location and time of public meetings are some of the reasons for lower engagement from minority communities (Kapoor, 2001; Martinez-Cosio, 2006; Michelson, 2001; Quick & Feldman, 2011). While the use of web-based smart engagement approaches can help to overcome some of these barriers (Afzalan & Muller, 2018), there are concerns about "digital divide" or unequal access to digital services and knowledge of information technology among disadvantaged groups (Deng et al., 2015; Kashem et al., 2021; Praharaj et al., 2017). The level of access and usage to social media and digital services may also vary by race/ethnicity, income, or age (Bañales et al., 2020; Larsson & Grönlund, 2016). Despite these concerns about smart engagement approaches, cities worldwide are using them at different levels for their planning process. There is yet to be a comprehensive study that looks at whether smart engagement approaches have any positive influence on minority engagement compared to traditional participatory planning processes. We explored this question through case studies of five small cities across the U.S. By analyzing their methods of public participation and how successful they were in reaching out to minority communities, we evaluated the efficacy of smart engagement and identified methods of participation that may encourage more minority participation.

2. Smart Engagement Approaches to Planning

With the broader availability of internet technology, most cities worldwide are now thriving to become a "smart city" that promises to bring techno-centered digital solutions to urban problems (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019; Hollands, 2008). Besides bringing embedded systems and sensor technology that may provide a safer and energy-efficient environment (Angelidou & Psaltoglou, 2017; O'Grady & O'Hare, 2012), smart cities also have the potential to transform urban governance that is a more participatory bottom-up process (Coe et al., 2001; Hollands, 2008). Smart technologies can blend the advantages of a face-to-face discussion with the scale and convenience of modern communication technology (Carpini et al., 2004), which may allow creating a citizen-centered approach to city governance. However, there are also critiques that smart cities can enable overly technocratic top-down governance that serve the interests of states and corporations more than the citizens (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019; Kitchin, 2016). Instead of producing a more progressive and inclusive process for decision-making, smart cities can become a high-tech variation of "entrepreneurial cities" (Harvey, 1989; Hollands, 2008).

Despite the critiques of smart city initiatives, smart approaches for community engagement in the planning process are now widely applied. Smart approaches can include any method of public participation that relies on web technology and allows active or passive interaction of a large number of people with the planning process (Angelidou et al., 2017; Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010; Horgan & Dimitrijević, 2019). Brabham (2009, p. 243) argues that this smart approach of community engagement "enables us to harness collective intellect among a population in ways face-to-face planning meetings cannot." Such digital communication networks can help us crowdsource the public participation process to mobilize citizens and produce plans through a democratic process (Brabham, 2009). Besides making the planning documents and processes publicly available and getting direct input from the community, the use of social media is another aspect of smart engagements. W. Williamson and Ruming (2020) investigated the use of social media during the preparation of district plans in Sydney, Australia. Although they found a low per capita response rate, other studies have shown that social media has reached the lives of young adults from many racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Social media is shown to provide new opportunities for minority young adults to read and share news and voice their political perspectives (Bañales et al., 2020).

Smart engagement usually goes beyond giving access to data or using social media to interact with the community. Smart city discourse also focuses on creating a "citizen-centric" city that is more responsive to community needs. However, Cardullo and Kitchin (2019, p. 1), through their study on smart city initiatives in Dublin, Ireland, argue that such "citizen-centric" initiatives "prioritize market-led solutions to urban issues, rather than being grounded in civil, social and political rights and the common good." They suggested that city administrations should be seeking to shift as many of their initiatives as possible up the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) towards citizen engagement and citizen power to create a truly "citizen-centric" smart city. As Bañales et al. (2020) highlighted, such engagement and empowerment of the citizen are even more crucial for minority communities. However, there is yet to have any comprehensive study that investigates minority engagement in the planning process, particularly when cities are adopting different smart engagement approaches.

3. Community Engagement in Planning

Community engagement is considered as an integral component of any planning process. It requires involving community members in all stages, from initial visioning to final plan development, typically through consultation

and collaboration (Arnstein, 1969). This emphasis on community engagement came through a transition within planning practice and theory, from the early conception of planning as a highly technocratic practice to one where planning is meant to be responsive to the needs of citizens (Healey, 1996). The benefits of community engagement or public participation in planning processes are now widely documented (Brabham, 2009; Innes & Booher, 2018; W. Williamson & Ruming, 2020).

Community engagement allows adding expert knowledge and local knowledge to the plan and makes the planning process more informed about public narratives. It can be considered a logical extension of the democratic process in more local, direct, and deliberative ways (Michel Pimbert, 2001). Involving the local community in the planning process also ensures that the plan will be widely accepted by its future users (Burby, 2003; Fiskaa, 2005; Miraftab, 2003). Dialogue with the local citizens and learning about their lived experiences allow planners to gather enough details and facts about local issues (Watson, 2003). It is a process of creation and diffusion of new knowledge about the community that can affect planning process at all stages (Hanna, 2000). In some cases, it was found that the inclusion of non-expert knowledge collected through community participation helped planners discover creative solutions for specific local contexts (Van Herzele, 2004).

Community engagement may not provide the expected outcomes all the time. It can turn out to be a costly and ineffective if not properly designed considering the local context (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Nance & Ortolano, 2007). High-level participation can also increase conflict among disputing parties and slow down the decision-making process (Brody, 2003). Simple participation in the planning process may also not ensure inclusion in the decision-making. Quick and Feldman (2011) particularly highlighted this distinction between participation and inclusion. They argued that while participatory practices enrich the input received, "enhancing inclusive practices builds the capacity of the community to implement the decisions and tackle related issues" (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 274). Efforts should be taken to make the planning process more inclusive for the target community, that would empower them to engage in an ongoing stream of issues. It is particularly challenging for minority communities who are already having a lower level of participation in the planning process. The following section elaborates on the challenges of reaching out to minority populations.

4. Minority Participation in the Planning Process

Minority populations, particularly Black and Hispanic people, have a contentious relationship with the U.S. political system due to systematic racial/ethnic marginalization (Bañales et al., 2020). Racist immigration policies and voting practices (Durst, 2018; Misra et al., 2021) have contributed to this distrust in the political system and thereby assumed to have contributed to racial disparities in public meeting participation at the local level (Hoang, 2021). Although there is yet to have systematic research analyzing minority participation throughout the planning process, studies have explored public meeting attendance of minorities to gauge their participation in urban decision-making (Hoang, 2021; A. R. Williamson & Scicchitano, 2014). A recent study by Hoang (2021) utilizing nationally representative data did not find racial/ethnic group differences in public meeting participation but found differences among the economically vulnerable. Several other studies found that public meeting participants usually tend to be older, male, and possessing higher levels of education and income than the general public (Carr & Halvorsen, 2001; McComas, 2001). However, public meetings are only one method of community engagement through which minorities can participate in the planning process. More empirical research needs to be done, and this current study is an attempt at it.

Efforts to increase community involvement among minorities have not been successful due to various reasons. Hispanic communities with a large share of undocumented immigrants can have limited community engagement (Munier et al., 2015) as concerns of legal status may raise fear and trust issues towards city officials. Even community members that are born in the U.S. limit their interactions with the local government due to a lack of trust and racial profiling (Michelson, 2001). Minimal English skills and a lack of knowledge about governing processes may also prevent them from engaging in planning events (Martinez-Cosio, 2006). Through interviewing planning practitioners, Sen (2008) identified several reasons that may keep members from low-income and minority communities from participating in a public process: lack of perceived relevancy, use of technical jargon in meetings, inaccessible meeting places, inconvenient meeting time, busy work schedule, lack of child-care access, absence of translation in the native language, etc. Targeted events for selected groups and ensuring appropriate representation are also important to encourage minority participation (Fung, 2006).

Prior studies have underscored the links between community engagement and the political efficacy of a population group (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Hoang, 2021). Bañales et al. (2020, p. 176) explored it further by applying critical consciousness (CC) theory, "a framework that explains marginalized groups' pathways to civic/political engagement." CC framework argues that a person's civic engagement is influenced by their perceptions of societal inequities (critical reflection) and their political efficacy (i.e., beliefs about one's ability to initiate social change; Diemer et al., 2017). Bañales et al. (2020) examined the ways CC processes are related to sociopolitical action and social media engagement of Hispanic and Black American young adults. From this study, they concluded that stimulating critical reflection on societal inequality has the potential to increase the civic

engagement of Hispanic and Black young adults. They argued for teach-ins, intergroup dialogues, and social media campaigns to stimulate critical reflection among these young adults.

It is projected that in the U.S., racial and ethnic minority groups will outnumber non-Hispanic Whites in 2045 (Frey, 2018). Considering this expected demographic shift, planners should be more diligent now in encouraging minority participation in the planning process (Kashem et al., 2016). While smart engagement approaches may make it easier to quickly reach out to the whole community (as discussed in Section 2), planners need to be aware whether minority populations are effectively participating through these approaches.

5. Study Method

For this study, we selected five small cities from different regions in the U.S. We considered cities with 50,000 to 100,000 residents as "small cities" since it is between the 2010 Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) definition followed by the U.S. Census (areas with an urbanized area of minimum 50,000 population; Office of Management and Budget, 2010) and the 2020 updated standard for MSA (minimum 100,000 population; Office of Management and Budget, 2021). The reason for selecting smaller cities is that smaller cities usually have a limited planning workforce and may have limited capacity to deploy any smart public engagement method for plan preparation. Besides the size of the city, we considered demographic composition and availability of planning documents with race/ethnicity information of public engagement. To select cities from different regions, we explored the U.S. ethnicity map created by Frey (2019) and shortlisted cities with different levels of race/ethnicity distribution. Demographic data of the cities were collected from the 2020 decennial census available through Census QuickFacts (U.S. Census, 2020).

After shortlisting cities from different regions, we searched for cities that had adopted a comprehensive plan between 2010 and 2020 and provided detailed race/ethnicity data of their public engagement activities. The planning documents were found by searching the city's planning department websites. Once the final plan documents were found, the next step was to look through the documents to find any information on public participation and documentation of race/ethnicity breakdown of participants. This process eliminated many cities for different reasons—they either did not have a comprehensive plan between 2010 to 2020, did not have any documentation of public participation, and/or did not document racial/ethnicity data of public engagement events. The locations of the selected study cities are shown in Figure 1.

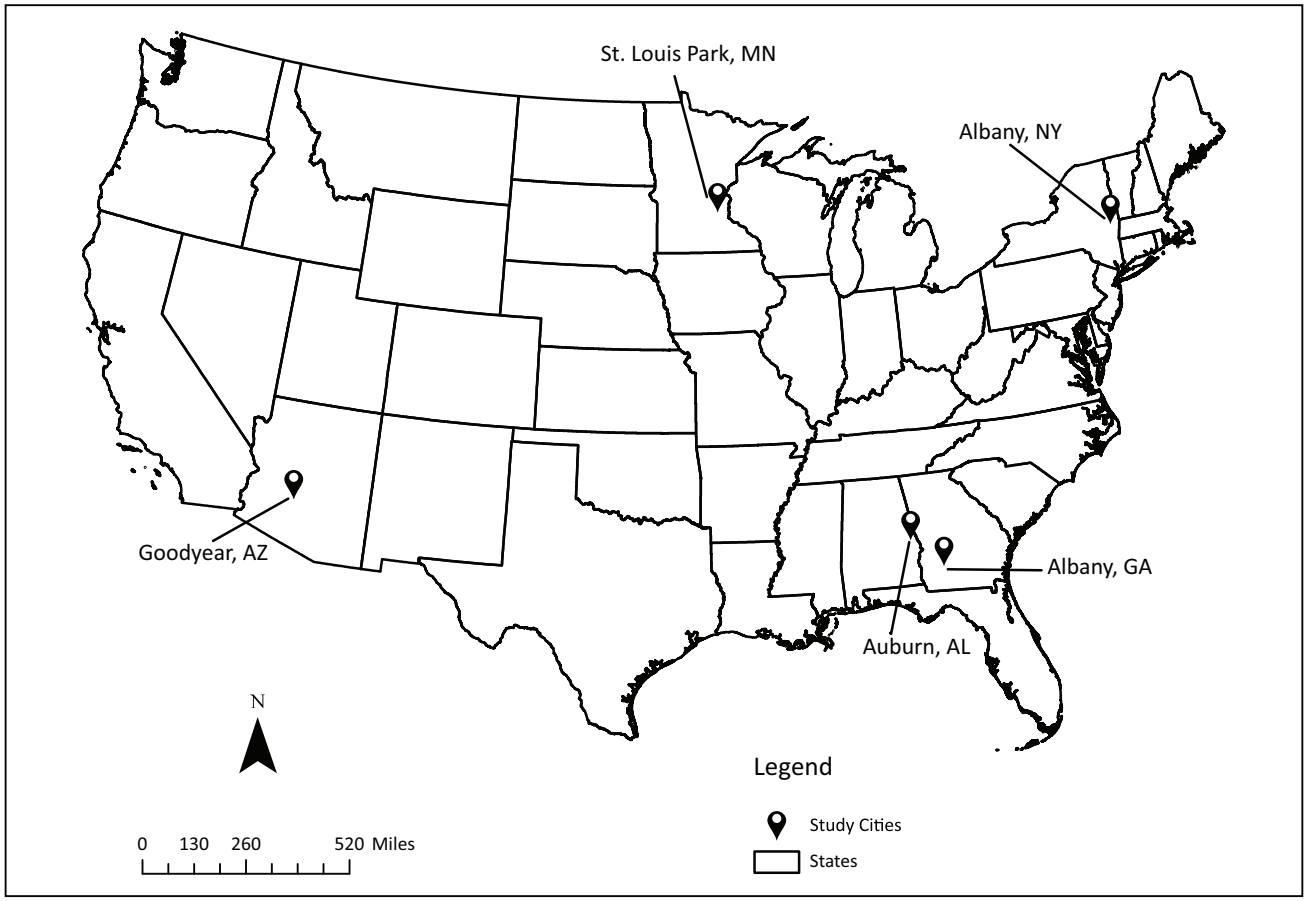

Figure 1. Location of the study cities in contiguous U.S.

Table 1 lists the selected five cities, their population size in 2020, and the plan documents reviewed. Table 2 shows the distribution of major race/ethnicity in these five cities. Two cities have a significant share of Black or African American population (Albany, Georgia and Albany, New York), and one city has a significant share of Hispanic population (Goodyear, Arizona). The reason for selecting cities with different levels of the minority population is to evaluate whether there is any significant difference in minority public participation depending on where they are in the U.S.

Planning documents from the study cities were reviewed to identify the public engagement mechanisms they applied and what efforts they have taken to reach out to the minority populations. The key focus of this review was to identify what kinds of smart engagement techniques they have applied and what is the race/ethnicity distribution of the participants in their planning process. Race/ethnicity data of the whole population in each city for their corresponding year of the plan preparation was collected from the census and American Community Survey (ACS). Race/ethnicity distribution of the population is compared with that of the plan participants to evaluate how much the planning activities were able to reach out to the minority populations. The study cities are briefly discussed in the following sections.

5.1. Auburn, Alabama

The city of Auburn is located in Lee County of Alabama. It is the largest city in eastern Alabama. The population of the city was 76,143 people in 2020. Auburn has a high share of the Black or African American population (17.6%), but the non-Hispanic White population (68.9%) is the majority, like most other cities in Alabama. The city of Auburn adopted its comprehensive plan, CompPlan 2030, in 2011. The planning process for CompPlan 2030 began in early 2008, and it serves as a general policy guide for future community improvements and decision making. This plan provides the basic framework for land use, transportation, natural systems, other public services, and community improvements (City of Auburn, 2011). It was further updated and adopted in 2018.

5.2. Goodyear, Arizona

The city of Goodyear, Arizona, is a city in Maricopa County. It is a suburb of Phoenix. In 2020, the population of this city was 95,294. This city is selected for this study due to its size, location, and demographic composition (46% minority population). The city of Goodyear adopted the Goodyear 2025 General Plan in 2014 as a roadmap to the future growth. This General Plan is the community vision that also outlines the overall fundamental strategy, community goals, objectives, policies, and action items (City of Goodyear, 2014).

5.3. Albany, Georgia

The city of Albany, Georgia, made to our selected five cities due to having a majority-minority demographic, where about 75% population is Black or African American. This city, located in Dougherty County of Georgia, had a population of 69,647 in 2020. The City of Albany and Dougherty County developed the Comprehensive Plan 2026 to guide the growth of their community. It is a part of their ongoing planning process that seeks to ensure the provision of adequate facilities and services to support anticipated growth (City of Albany & Dougherty County, 2016).

Table 1. Study cities and the reviewed planning projects.

City	State	Population size in 2020 (U.S. Census, 2020)	Planning projects	Year of adoption
Auburn	Alabama	76,143	CompPlan 2030	2011
Goodyear	Arizona	95,294	2025 General Plan	2014
Albany	Georgia	69,647	Comprehensive Plan 2026	2016
St. Louis Park	Minnesota	50,010	2040 Comprehensive Plan	2019
Albany	New York	99,224	Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan	2012

Table 2. Distribution of major race/ethnicity in the study cities.

City	Black or African American alone	Hispanic or Latino	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino
Auburn, AL	17.6%	3.4%	68.9%
Goodyear, AZ	7.2%	29.0%	54.3%
Albany, GA	74.9%	2.5%	20.1%
St. Louis Park, MN	5.9%	4.9%	79.9%
Albany, NY	29.0%	10.1%	49.8%

Source: U.S. Census (2020).

5.4. St. Louis Park, Minnesota

The city of St. Louis Park is in Hennepin County of Minnesota. It is a suburb west of Minneapolis. It had a population of about 50,000 in 2020. It is a typical midwestern city with a majority White population (about 80%), and only 6% Black/African American and 5% Hispanic population. The City of St. Louis Park developed the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and adopted it in 2019. This plan sets forth the policies and programs to govern future land use, transportation, public facilities, economic development, and housing in St. Louis Park (City of St. Louis Park, 2019).

5.5. Albany, New York

The city of Albany, New York was selected as one of the five study cities considering its comparatively higher concentration of minority population (about 50% of the total population). This city adopted a comprehensive plan (Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan) in 2012 and provided detailed documentation of its public participation process along with the racial/ethnic distribution of participants. Albany is also the capital of the state of New York and had a population of about 99,000 in 2020. Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan is the city's first comprehensive plan, and it documents the city's Vision for the future and reflects the residents' values and priorities (City of Albany NY, 2012).

6. Study Findings and Discussion

6.1. Public Engagement Techniques

All five study cities have taken various public engagement techniques for preparing their comprehensive plans. Table 3 shows the public outreach and engagement approaches taken by each of the study cities. The applications of smart engagement approaches vary significantly from city to city. All cities have used their city website or created separate planning websites to post plan updates and request community feedback or comments. Most of the cities also had some form of social media presence, either to quickly interact with the community (in Albany, New York) or to broadcast public meetings (in St. Louis Park, Minnesota). Some of the cities also used interactive engagement websites (Goodyear, Arizona and Albany, New York) or online mapping tools (St. Louis Park, Minnesota). Direct community input came primarily through community/citizen surveys for all cities. However, the survey approaches varied between mail surveys (Auburn, Alabama and Goodyear, Arizona), online surveys (St. Louis Park, Minnesota and Albany, New York), or a mix of online and in-person surveys (Albany, Georgia). Engagement techniques applied by each of the cities are elaborated below.

For Auburn, Alabama, input from the public, external stakeholders, and City staff was a key aspect of the development of their CompPlan 2030. They organized a series of public meetings at different locations in Auburn to gather input from the public. They promoted public meetings through emails, promotional posters, public service announcements, event notices on radio and online, and social media (City of Auburn, 2011). The Auburn Citizen Survey of 2010 and a dynamic GIS-based application on the CompPlan website were the sources of public input for this plan. ETC Institute, a firm specializing in market research for local governments, administered the citizen survey through a mail survey of Auburn residents (ETC Institute, 2010). Besides this citizen survey, the City sent surveys to nearly 100 stakeholder organizations to solicit their input regarding issues and needs in their areas of expertise.

For the 2025 General Plan of Goodyear, Arizona, public participation approaches consisted of Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods (GAIN) Community

Table 3. Public outreach and participation methods applied by the study cities.

Auburn, AL	Goodyear, AZ	Albany, GA	St. Louis Park, MN	Albany, NY
Public meetings	Community Festivals	Kick-off meeting/visioning session	Neighborhood planning workshops	Community forums
Public service announcements	Visioning workshop	Focus group	Town Hall meetings (in-person and online)	Stakeholder roundtables
Event notices on radio and online	Open house meetings	Mayor of the day	City website	Micro-meetings
Community survey	Mobile community	Public hearings	Community survey	Speed planning
CompPlan website	Advisory forum meetings	Media strategies	Social media	Stoop surveys
Social media	Small business summit	Community survey	Online mapping tool (Social Pinpoint)	Walk-shops
	Youth involvement	Plan website		Community drop-ins
	Citizen survey			Community group meetings
	Interactive engagement website (Goodyear Connects)			Online surveys
				Interactive website and social media

Festival, visioning workshop, open house meetings, mobile community meetings, Goodyear Connects, development advisory forum meetings, Fall Festival (GAIN), small business summit, youth involvement, citizen survey, and community meetings (City of Goodyear, 2014). To guide public participation in the planning process, they adopted a Public Participation Plan in 2012. This plan identified the public participation activities to maximize community involvement in creating the goals and policies for the General Plan. They used the National Citizen Survey, conducted by the National Research Center Inc (2015), which provided an affordable and easy way to receive residents' opinions on local issues.

The City of Albany and Dougherty County, Georgia, tried to include citizens of all ages in their planning process for Comprehensive Plan 2026. Albany's comprehensive plan committee used different participation techniques such as a community survey, kick-off meeting/visioning session, focus group, mayor of the day, media strategies, public hearings, and a website (City of Albany & Dougherty County, 2016). They distributed the community survey both online and in-person soliciting citizen opinion on local issues. The survey was available on the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission website and was publicized through local media outlets, focus group meetings, and postcards with a link to the survey (City of Albany & Dougherty County, 2016).

2040 Comprehensive Planning project of St. Louis Park, Minnesota, adopted a community engagement approach consisting of a Fall and Spring plan. The fall activities consisted of neighborhood planning workshops and a community survey, and in the spring, they conducted another community survey (City of St. Louis Park, 2019). They organized four workshops that aimed to cover the city's seven neighborhood planning areas and all 35 neighborhoods. The online survey in the fall attracted almost 1,100 participants, while the spring survey attracted 2,150 participants. There was an online mapping tool added in coordination with the community survey to gather feedback on the proposed land use plan. The online mapping tool was called Social Pinpoint, where users were asked to review the land-use change areas and mark where they can support the change, have concerns, or have ideas (City of St. Louis Park, 2018).

The Albany 2030 Comprehensive planning project of the City of Albany, New York, applied various techniques to engage with the public. Their public outreach techniques included branding and promotion, community forums, interactive website and social media, stakeholder roundtables, micro-meetings, speed planning, Stoop surveys, walk-shops, community drop-ins, online surveys, community group meetings, and a final town hall forum (City of Albany NY, 2012). Their outreach process began in 2009, designed to engage all community members and regional partners in developing a vision for the future. They developed an Outreach Strategic Plan that began with a situation analysis to identify "hard-to-reach" populations and key messages that should be relayed throughout the Albany 2030 planning process (City of Albany NY, 2012).

The city of Albany, New York, considered social media as a key component of the public engagement plan. They used web technology to get higher interest and participation from young professionals and those who rely on instant communication. The interactive website provided outreach, feedback, and information-sharing options. The share option provided an online survey as a quick way to give feedback to the community forums in which hundreds of surveys were completed. The city also set up a Facebook page, Twitter account, and LinkedIn group to allow for feedback and a constant open line of communication (City of Albany NY, 2012). The social media accounts were used regularly to send out reminders and announcements, launch discussions, and provide feedback on inquiries regarding Albany 2030 topics.

6.2. Minority Participation in the Planning Process

As discussed in the previous section, all five study cities have applied different mechanisms to increase the participation of their citizens during the planning process. The application of smart engagement approaches (i.e., planning websites, social media, interactive maps, online surveys, etc.) varied from city to city. To evaluate minority participation in the planning process, we had to rely on their survey data reports since no other planning documents reported the race/ethnicity distribution of participants in public meetings or community events. This is a limitation of this study, but we can also argue that if the smart engagement approaches successfully reached out to everyone, we should see equal response rates from all population groups. Hence, evaluating the survey response rates can be an alternative way to identify whether those smart engagement approaches are helping to encourage overall minority participation in the planning process.

The surveys performed for each planning project in the studied cities were very similar. The main topics were quality of life, city services, amenities, development, and demographics. Evaluating the survey questionnaires, we did not find any question biases that may affect minority participation. The questions asked were conducted in a way that allowed all respondents to answer the questions without feeling discouraged or racially profiled. Although there were demographic questions, respondents were allowed to skip or not answer the questions.

We compared the distribution of three major races/ethnicities (White, Black, and Hispanics) within the total population and among the survey respondents to evaluate if there are low response rates from the minority groups (primarily Black and Hispanics) as found in prior studies (Carr & Halvorsen, 2001; A. R. Williamson & Scicchitano, 2014). For race/ethnicity distribution, we collected data from the Census and ACS of the survey years. While compiling this data, we encountered

difficulty with how planning documents report race and ethnicity. Some cities reported them together with all races (e.g., Auburn and St. Louis Park), while others reported them separately. Therefore, we collected race/ethnicity data from the Census or ACS (depending on the survey years) in a similar fashion for each city to make them comparable.

Table 4 shows the summary of our findings. Lower participation rates of minority groups (i.e., Black and Hispanics) compared to Whites is evident in all the study cities (except for Stoop Survey in Albany, New York) despite the variations in their location and demographic composition. In Auburn, Alabama, the Black/African American population constituted 14% of responses, while they are 16.4% of the total population. On the other hand, the White population had a much higher response than the total population (81% respondents for 73.5% of the population). Goodyear, Arizona showed a similar pattern, but they had significantly lower participation from the Hispanic population (with a −7.6% points difference). Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is the fastest-growing population in the U.S. (Frey, 2019), so such a low response from this group should be concerning. Albany, Georgia, despite having Black/African American population as the majority, received a significantly lower response from this group (−12.8% points difference). St. Louis Park already had a low minority population compared to other cities, but they also experienced lower responses from both Black and Hispanic populations (−4.3 and -3.1% points differences respectively). While these low response rates from minority populations can be addressed by appropriate weighting for statistical analysis, this consistent pattern indicates the inefficacy of the methods employed by the cities to ensure equal participation from minority groups.

Findings from Albany, New York, warrant further discussion. In addition to online surveys, social media engagement, and community forums, they conducted Stoop Survey to engage hard-to-reach populations (i.e., low-income, minority neighborhoods; City of Albany NY, 2012). They conducted online surveys at several stages but did not report the race/ethnicity distribution of the respondents. They reported that information for Community Forum and Stoop Survey participants. Observing lower responses from minority groups in both community forum and online survey, they conducted Stoop Surveys in targeted areas. Stoop Survey involves walking around underrepresented neighborhoods with paper surveys and surveying citizens encountered on their front stoops or on the sidewalk (City of Albany NY, 2012). Through this approach, the City of Albany planning team was able to collect more responses from Black/African American populations, compensating the low response/participation in the community forum and online survey. The diverse engagement methods employed by this city, as discussed in the previous section, have also helped them gain a better response from minority groups.

These findings show that there are many ways and methods in which cities try to get their community members involved in the planning process. Besides community surveys, they used social media, community forums/meetings, workshops, and city/community events. The methods that helped reach out to the community at large are social media and planning websites. As discussed in the previous section, different cities used social media platforms differently. Albany, New York, used multiple social media platforms and tried to create a more accessible communication channel with the community. St. Louis Park, Minnesota, conducted Facebook Live Townhall meetings, and all other cities have some form of social media presence. All cities also provided either static or interactive maps of their plans online for public comment. Despite all these various methods of engagement, all cities received comparatively lower response rates from the minority populations, as usually found in community meetings (Carr & Halvorsen, 2001; McComas, 2001). Only Albany, New York, was able to reach out to the low-income and minority communities through their stoop survey approach. It indicates that cities should not rely solely on smart approaches for public participation. Any online survey or social media engagement should be supported by targeted community events and surveys (like the stoop survey approach in Albany, New York) to encourage better minority participation in the planning process.

7. Conclusion

Effective community participation and advocacy process provide legitimacy to a good plan (Baer, 1997). Planners are now more aware of the importance of community engagement in the planning process. As we found through this study, community engagement techniques vary significantly from city to city. Exploring the distinctive ways people have been participating in the planning process and taking a closer look at how minorities have been involved will help determine the ways to improve participation from minority communities. Prior studies have identified various reasons for lower participation from minority and low-income communities (Kapoor, 2001; Sen, 2008). Smart engagement approaches based on web technology could be effective in reaching out to minority groups (Afzalan & Muller, 2018; Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010). However, we found through this study that these new approaches of community engagement are failing to overcome the limitations faced by traditional approaches like community meetings and public hearings. Planners should complement these smart approaches with targeted community-specific approaches to ensure greater participation from minority communities. The Stoop Survey technique applied by the City of Albany, New York, is an example of such an approach.

Community members can participate in the planning process through different modes of public

Table 4. Race/ethnicity distribution of population (during survey years) vs. survey respondents.

		Black/African American			Hispanic			White		
Study Cities	Survey year	Survey respondents (%)	Pop. (%)	Diff. in % points	Survey respondents (%)	Pop. (%)	Diff. in % points	Survey respondents (%)	Pop. (%)	Diff. in % points
*Auburn, AL	2010	14%	16.4%	**–2.4**	2%	2.9%	**–0.9**	81%	73.5%	**7.5**
**Goodyear, AZ	2015	6%	8.9%	**–2.9**	20%	27.6%	**–7.6**	79%	75.2%	**3.8**
**Albany, GA	2015	55.6%	68.4%	**–12.8**	3.4%	2.6%	**0.8**	43.1%	26.2%	**16.9**
*St. Louis Park, MN	2018	1.5%	5.8%	**–4.3**	1.8%	4.9%	**–3.1**	91.7%	79.9%	**11.8**
*Albany, NY	Community Forums (2010)	28%	29.1%	**–1.1**	2%	8.6%	**–6.6**	57%	54%	**3**
	Stoop Survey (2010)	59%	29.1%	**29.9**	2%	8.6%	**–6.6**	18%	54%	**–36**

Notes: * Reported Hispanic population together with races, ** Reported Hispanic population separately. Sources: Race/ethnicity data sources for Auburn, AL and Albany, NY is U.S. Census (2010); for Goodyear, AZ and Albany, GA, race/ethnicity data was collected from U.S. Census (2018; ACS 5-year estimate); and for St. Louis Park, MN it was collected from U.S. Census (2021; ACS 5-year estimate), considering the mid-years of 5-year estimates (i.e., 2015 and 2018 respectively).

engagement. Planners should note the preferred engagement approaches for different ages, gender, and races/ethnicity and prepare a public participation plan accordingly. Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that cities increase their number and methods for community engagement that can help reach out to all population groups. To maximize and increase overall civic participation, including those underrepresented, the community engagement process should have multiple open public events at different locations and times. In addition, people should be informed on all platforms, such as online, radio, newsletters, newspapers, blogs, and local tv channels. The information should also be distributed in multiple languages. In addition to providing information in the languages of the target communities, making sure there is someone who can speak in that language is important for increasing minority engagement.

One of the major limitations of this study is that we relied mainly on survey responses, as reported in the planning documents. The other community engagement mechanisms throughout the planning processes did not collect demographic data; therefore, we could not analyze the complete community engagement minorities had in the planning process. Since prior studies have explored minority engagement in public meetings (Hoang, 2021; McComas, 2001), we attempted to cover the broad spectrum of engagement methods with a particular focus on smart approaches. Future studies can expand it further by conducting an ethnographic study of a planning process or analyzing video/zoom recordings of community meetings. As the discourse on smart cities and smart citizen engagement is gaining momentum, there should be a more critical analysis of how to increase minority participation in the planning process.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the editors of this thematic issue and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. The publication of this article was financed with support from the Kansas State University Open Access Publishing Fund.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Abramson, P. R., & Aldrich, J. H. (1982). The decline of electoral participation in America. *American Political Science Review*, *76*(3), 502–521. https://doi.org/10.2307/1963728

Afzalan, N., & Muller, B. (2018). Online participatory technologies: Opportunities and challenges for enriching participatory planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *84*(2), 162–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2018.1434010

Angelidou, M., & Psaltoglou, A. (2017). An empirical investigation of social innovation initiatives for sustainable urban development. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, *33*, 113–125. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2017.05.016

Angelidou, M., Psaltoglou, A., Komninos, N., Kakderi, C., Tsarchopoulos, P., & Panori, A. (2017). Enhancing sustainable urban development through smart city applications. *Journal of Science and Technology Policy Management*, *9*(2), 146–169. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTPM-05-2017-0016

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, *35*(4), 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225

Baer, W. C. (1997). General plan evaluation criteria: An approach to making better plans. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *63*(3), 329–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369708975926

Bamberg, J. (2013). Engaging the public with online discussion and spatial annotations: The generation and transformation of public knowledge. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *14*(1), 39–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2012.738306

Bañales, J., Mathews, C., Hayat, N., Anyiwo, N., & Diemer, M. A. (2020). Latinx and Black young adults' pathways to civic/political engagement. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *26*, 176–188. https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000271

Brabham, D. C. (2009). Crowdsourcing the public participation process for planning projects. *Planning Theory*, *8*(3), 242–262. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095209104824

Brody, S. D. (2003). Measuring the effects of stakeholder participation on the quality of local plans based on the principles of collaborative ecosystem management. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *22*(4), 407–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X03022004007

Burby, R. J. (2003). Making plans that matter: Citizen involvement and government action. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *69*(1), 33–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360308976292

Cardullo, P., & Kitchin, R. (2019). Being a "citizen" in the smart city: Up and down the scaffold of smart citizen participation in Dublin, Ireland. *GeoJournal*, *84*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-018-9845-8

Carpini, M. X. D., Cook, F. L., & Jacobs, L. R. (2004). Public deliberation, discursive participation, and citizen engagement: A review of the empirical literature. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *7*(1), 315–344. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.121003.091630

Carr, D. S., & Halvorsen, K. (2001). An evaluation of three democratic, community-based approaches to citizen participation: Surveys, conversations with community groups, and community dinners. *Society & Natural Resources*, *14*(2), 107–126. https://doi.org/

10.1080/089419201300000526
City of Albany, & Dougherty County. (2016). *Albany & Dougherty County comprehensive plan 2026*. https://www.albanyga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/572/636461293142670000
City of Albany NY. (2012). *ALBANY 2030: The City of Albany comprehensive plan*. https://www.albanyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3759/Albany-2030-Comprehensive-Plan-wAppendices
City of Auburn. (2011). *CompPlan 2030: The comprehensive plan for the City of Auburn*. https://www.auburnalabama.org/CompPlan2030/Complete%20Document%20Updated%209-7-21.pdf
City of Goodyear. (2014). *Goodyear 2025 general plan*. https://www.goodyearaz.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/10645/635531938417430000
City of St. Louis Park. (2018). *Community engagement: Phase 2 report*. https://www.stlouispark.org/home/showpublisheddocument/20667/637553992546530000
City of St. Louis Park. (2019). *2040 comprehensive plan: St. Louis Park, Minnesota*. https://www.stlouispark.org/home/showpublisheddocument/15332/637110597442630000
Clavel, P. (1994). The evolution of advocacy planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *60*(2), 146–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369408975564
Coe, A., Paquet, G., & Roy, J. (2001). E-governance and smart communities: A social learning challenge. *Social Science Computer Review*, *19*(1), 80–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/089443930101900107
Conroy, M. M., & Gordon, S. I. (2004). Utility of interactive computer-based materials for enhancing public participation. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, *47*(1), 19–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/0964056042000189781
Deng, Z., Lin, Y., Zhao, M., & Wang, S. (2015). Collaborative planning in the new media age: The Dafo Temple controversy, China. *Cities*, *45*, 41–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.02.006
Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Park, C. J., & Perry, J. C. (2017). Development and validation of the critical consciousness scale. *Youth & Society*, *49*(4), 461–483. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X14538289
Duggan, M., & Brenner, J. (2013). *The demographics of social media users — 2012*. Pew Research Center. https://www.lernspielwiese.com/_/media/Files/Reports/2013/PIP_SocialMediaUsers.pdf
Durst, N. J. (2018). Racial gerrymandering of municipal borders: Direct democracy, participatory democracy, and voting rights in the United States. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *108*(4), 938–954. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2017.1403880
ETC Institute. (2010). *Final report: 2010 citizen survey*. The City of Auburn, Alabama. https://www.auburnalabama.org/survey/archives/Auburn%20DF%20Final%20Report_March%2023rd%202010.pdf
Evans-Cowley, J., & Hollander, J. (2010). The new generation of public participation: Internet-based participation tools. *Planning Practice & Research*, *25*(3), 397–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2010.503432
Fiskaa, H. (2005). Past and future for public participation in Norwegian physical planning. *European Planning Studies*, *13*(1), 157–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/0965431042000312451
Frey, W. H. (2018). *The US will become "minority white" in 2045, Census projects*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects
Frey, W. H. (2019). *Six maps that reveal America's expanding racial diversity*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/research/americas-racial-diversity-in-six-maps
Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public Administration Review*, *66*(s1), 66–75. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x
Hanna, K. S. (2000). The paradox of participation and the hidden role of information: A case study. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, *66*(4), 398–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360008976123
Harvey, D. (1989). From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: The transformation in urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, *71*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583
Healey, P. (1996). The communicative turn in planning theory and its implications for spatial strategy formation. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, *23*(2), 217–234. https://doi.org/10.1068/b230217
Hoang, B. L. (2021). Racial disparities in public meeting participation? Examining past evidence and nationally representative data. *Urban Affairs Review*, *57*(1), 189–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087419844024
Hollands, R. G. (2008). Will the real smart city please stand up? *City*, *12*(3), 303–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810802479126
Horgan, D., & Dimitrijević, B. (2019). Frameworks for citizens participation in planning: From conversational to smart tools. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, *48*, Article 101550. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2019.101550
Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2018). *An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147949
Irvin, R. A., & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen participation in decision making: Is it worth the effort? *Public Administration Review*, *64*(1), 55–65. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00346.x
Kapoor, I. (2001). Towards participatory environmen-

tal management? *Journal of Environmental Management*, *63*(3), 269–279. https://doi.org/10.1006/jema.2001.0478

Kashem, S. B., Baker, D. M., González, S. R., & Lee, C. A. (2021). Exploring the nexus between social vulnerability, built environment, and the prevalence of COVID-19: A case study of Chicago. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, *75*, Article 103261. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2021.103261

Kashem, S. B., Wilson, B., & Van Zandt, S. (2016). Planning for climate adaptation: Evaluating the changing patterns of social vulnerability and adaptation challenges in three coastal cities. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *36*(3), 304–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X16645167

Kitchin, R. (2016). The ethics of smart cities and urban science. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, *374*(2083), Article 20160115. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2016.0115

Larsson, H., & Grönlund, Å. (2016). Sustainable eGovernance? Practices, problems and beliefs about the future in Swedish eGov practice. *Government Information Quarterly*, *33*(1), 105–114. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2015.11.002

Martinez-Cosio, M. (2006). It is not just who you know: Dominant knowledge and civic participation. *Journal of Civil Society*, *2*(2), 123–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448680600905924

McComas, K. A. (2001). Public meetings about local waste management problems: Comparing participants to nonparticipants. *Environmental Management*, *27*(1), 135–147. https://doi.org/10.1007/s002670010139

Michel Pimbert, T. W. (2001). Overview: Deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment. *PLA Notes*, *40*, 23–28.

Michelson, M. R. (2001). Political trust among Chicago Latinos. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *23*(3/4), 323–334. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2166.00092

Miraftab, F. (2003). The perils of participatory discourse: Housing policy in Postapartheid South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *22*(3), 226–239. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X02250305

Misra, S., Kwon, S. C., Abraído-Lanza, A. F., Chebli, P., Trinh-Shevrin, C., & Yi, S. S. (2021). Structural racism and immigrant health in the United States. *Health Education & Behavior*, *48*(3), 332–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981211010676

Munier, N., Albarracin, J., & Boeckelman, K. (2015). Determinants of rural Latino trust in the Federal Government. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *37*(3), 420–438. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986315586564

Nance, E., & Ortolano, L. (2007). Community participation in urban sanitation: Experiences in northeastern Brazil. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *26*(3), 284–300. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X06295028

National Research Center Inc. (2015). *The national citizen survey*. https://www.goodyearaz.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/13277/635893964046770000

O'Grady, M., & O'Hare, G. (2012). How smart is your city? *Science*, *335*(6076), 1581–1582. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1217637

Office of Management and Budget. (2010). *2010 standards for delineating metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas*. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2010-06-28/pdf/2010-15605.pdf

Office of Management and Budget. (2021). *2020 standards for delineating core based statistical areas*. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/07/16/2021-15159/2020-standards-for-delineating-core-based-statistical-areas

Praharaj, S., Han, J. H., & Hawken, S. (2017). Innovative civic engagement and digital urban infrastructure: Lessons from 100 Smart Cities Mission in India. *Procedia Engineering*, *180*, 1423–1432. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.04.305

Quick, K. S., & Feldman, M. S. (2011). Distinguishing participation and inclusion. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *31*(3), 272–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X11410979

Sen, S. (2008). Environmental justice in transportation planning and policy: A view from practitioners and other stakeholders in the Baltimore–Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Region. *Journal of Urban Technology*, *15*(1), 117–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/10630730802097849

U.S. Census. (2010). *Decennial Census summary file 1*. https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2010/dec/summary-file-1.html

U.S. Census. (2018). *2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2018/acs-5year.html

U.S. Census. (2020). *QuickFacts: United States*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221

U.S. Census. (2021). *2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2021/acs-5-year.html

Van Herzele, A. (2004). Local knowledge in action: Valuing nonprofessional reasoning in the planning process. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *24*(2), 197–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X04267723

Watson, V. (2003). Conflicting rationalities: Implications for planning theory and ethics. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *4*(4), 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/1464935032000146318

Weber, L. M., Loumakis, A., & Bergman, J. (2003). Who participates and why?: An analysis of citizens on the internet and the mass public. *Social Science Computer Review*, *21*(1), 26–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439302238969

Williamson, A. R., & Scicchitano, M. J. (2014). Dimensions of public meeting participation: Evidence from Florida's Truth-in-Millage Act. *Urban Affairs Review*, *50*(1), 134–146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087413480463

Williamson, W., & Ruming, K. (2020). Can social media support large scale public participation in urban planning? The case of the #MySydney digital engagement campaign. *International Planning Studies*, *25*(4), 355–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2019.1626221

About the Authors

Shakil Bin Kashem is an assistant professor of Regional and Community Planning at the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning at Kansas State University. His research interests center on urban social vulnerability, equity planning, and community resilience. Prior to joining K-State, he was a teaching assistant professor of GIScience at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and received his PhD in Regional Planning from the University of Illinois.

Dora Gallo received her Master in Regional and Community Planning degree from the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning at Kansas State University. She is experienced in field supervisor work, surveys, traffic modeling, data analytics, and project management. Currently she is working as a transportation planner at Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization in Wichita, Kansas.