

# All a Twitter for planning participation

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For his final year research report University of Queensland Bachelor of Regional and Town Planning student, Cliff Schmidt, decided to research the role social networking sites can play in encouraging planning participation.

Mr. Schmidt, who graduated from UQ this week, investigated how powerful communication platforms, like Facebook and [Twitter](#), are developing into useful resources for planners.

“I think it is important to know more about this area to gain an appreciation of the emerging potential of using social-networks as platforms for public participation in contemporary planning,” Mr.

Schmidt said.

As part of his research Mr. Schmidt undertook an audit of current [social media](#) usage, for the purpose of community engagement in planning matters, by four councils within South East Queensland.

Mr. Schmidt noticed that in most cases the conversation was one directional.

“It was evident that for each council, the application of social media was generally limited to informing the community of planning matters and did not provide the opportunity for higher levels of engagement such as collaboration,” he said.

While Mr. Schmidt's research highlighted a number of barriers to public participation, such as the exclusion of individuals who don't have access to the internet, he also identified a number of opportunities.

“Facebook's survey tool provides a means of gaining interactive feedback where a range of policy options exist, while the ability to post up photos, maps and videos on [Facebook](#) allows users to visualise plans and respond with comments” he said.

“Furthermore, the literature indicated that social media presents an opportunity to engage a younger demographic group that would otherwise be unlikely to participate in a traditional consultation process.”

Mr. Schmidt acknowledges that research in this area is still lacking but believes that there is a role for social-networking participation tools, in conjunction with face-to-face public participation, to create a more effective and representative consultation process.

“It could supplement the traditional public participation process by

providing information in a visually stimulating and easily accessible manner. It would also provide the opportunity for public comment and feedback to guide planning options.”

Mr. Schmidt recommended that integrating these tools in the local planning phase via high-tech charrettes would be an effective use of the technology.

“This face-to-face technique fosters involvement and collaboration with the community and combines the benefits of ‘hands-on’ engagement with the innovation of real-time social media tools” he said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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