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Introduction to Civic Innovation and Disruptive Technology

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> *This article is the introduction to a new E-dition series for 2013. This first of six installments will be published exclusively in the E-dition and will provide insight into innovative tools and modern civic engagement methods.*
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> *To reach all MAP members with this valuable resource, an abbreviated version of this article will also appear in the January/February issue of the Michigan Planner magazine . Stay connected to future issues of the E-dition to follow this six part series.*

Technology keeps moving forward. The once new and scary concept of social media is now *de rigueur* in local governments and community organizations, and by now, most local governments have a fairly sophisticated web presence. The way is paved for the next frontier at the intersection of community development and technology: civic innovation and disruptive technology.

Civic innovation refers to an innovation that improves a product, service or process in the civic arena. Transparency, open data, and civic engagement are three main goals of the civic innovation movement. The concept of transparency takes the position that government operations should be clearly documented and available for all to see, from pothole maintenance to city council meetings. Open data means that access to public data is not only available but highly accessible and useful, enhanced through applications that improve the utility of data to the public. Civic engagement seeks the input and participation of the citizenry as not only a basic ingredient of democracy, but also a critical component of building effective applications that improve local government function and everyday lives.

The movement toward transparency and open data got underway in 2009 with President Obama's [Transparency and Open Government Initiative,](#) which led to the launch of [data.gov,](#) a portal to public data across all federal agencies. Free, publicly available data provides the structure upon which most innovative civic applications are built. For examples, see [*Atlantic Cities*'](#) recent catalogue of the [Best Open Data Releases of 2012,](#) which highlights everything from Philadelphia crime maps to San Francisco pedestrian injuries, to New York City rat sightings.

Examples of applications designed to increase civic engagement by amplifying the public voice include tools that allow users to [report potholes](#) to city staff, permit citizens to [crowdfund](#) civic improvements, and increase community input into [master plans](#) and [transportation plans.](#)
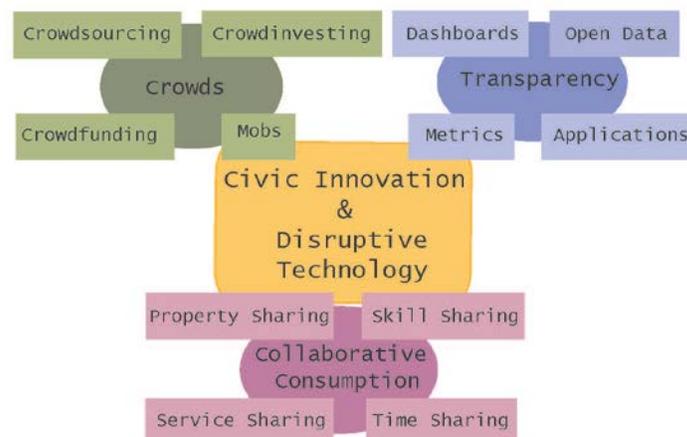
The civic innovation space employs mobile (smart phone) applications, social media tools, crowdsourcing, gaming applications, and community networking tools that provide new ways for citizens to engage with their community- whether to obtain real-time transit schedules, help maintain civic infrastructure, share cars and bikes and tools, fund new park projects, even invest in real estate.

Civic innovation that fundamentally changes the economic, social, political or environmental structures or processes of a community is increasingly referred to as a "disruptive technology." Examples of disruptive technologies include applications that allow neighbors to micro-invest in real estate in their neighborhood, homebuyers and renters to evaluate the walkability of potential neighborhoods, and travelers to book a weekend apartment in a strange city. NextCity recently compiled a profile of 77 civic "disruptors" who are changing the game in cities across the nation.

The remainder of this series will delve deeper into case studies and examples of various civic innovation projects and disruptive technologies. The planned editorial calendar for the rest of 2013 is as follows:

March	Crowds Part One:	Crowdsourcing for Civic Engagement
May	Crowds Part Two:	Crowdfunding, Crowdinvesting and Mobs
July	Civic Hackers	
September	Collaborative Consumption	
November	Transparency	

If you know of a civic innovation technology or disruptive technology currently deployed in a Michigan community, please contact the author at ninaignaczak@gmail.com.

RESOURCES:

www.data.gov/
[Best Open Data Releases of 2012](#) (*Atlantic Cities*)
[2012 City Disruption Index](#) (*Next American City*)

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