SocMap (GoMap Riga)

PROJECT	GRANTEE	INNOVATION	GRANT
SocMap	Society Technologies Foundation	A map-based social network where users can browse news and engage in civic action through an online local community map	**$265,000**

The Society Technologies Foundation received funding through the Knight News Challenge to create SocMap, a social platform where users can browse news and engage in civic action through a live, interactive online map of their community. SocMap (originally named GoMap Riga) is a portal application that connects users for interaction, self organization, and the spread of local news. SocMap was tested in Riga, Latvia with hopes of eventually expanding to other cities.

THE INNOVATION

The original innovation behind SocMap was a social network where news would be presented in relation to its location on a live, interactive, web-based map. SocMap would pull and aggregate community news found on the web, place these stories on its map, and allow users to browse local news and to search and post local events, pictures, and videos. By being integrated with the major existing social networks, users could interact with local news stories, and have their tweets placed on the map. The application also aimed to provide a platform for civic engagement where users could post initiatives to the map (such as suggestions for a community mural, or complaints of a broken fountain), gather signatures from fellow citizens, and bring the initiative to the attention of the local municipality, media, or police.

IMPLEMENTATION

The project did not unfold as planned. Although the project team built SocMap and experimented for a full year with various ways of attracting users and motivating them to post content to the site, SocMap struggled to reach 1,000 users, the platform ultimately stagnated, and the project team decided to adapt. Using the advanced mapping API that it had created, the project team began creating smaller, more targeted applications that let users interact with municipalities and city governments rather than with other members. SocMap had hired a team of creative developers under the original concept for the platform, but the shift in focus required a new team, one that had business expertise. The core members of the project team, who had been engaged on multiple projects unrelated to SocMap, decided to dedicate themselves full time to the project, and SocMap hired individual directors in business, marketing, products, networking, sales, and technology. SocMap marketed the applications that came out of its original platform to municipalities through the website and Facebook page of the new brand "Stakeholde.rs." As of November 2012, Stakeholde.rs offered four, white-label map-based applications:

- **City Works** allows cities to post completed municipal maintenance projects and enables users to suggest improvements.

- **City Ideas** allows cities to post questions and ideas on a map and solicit citizens' input. Users can vote on the most popular ideas or make their own suggestions.

- **City Growth** presents completed and planned city development projects to citizens and investors. Residents can view these projects, comment on them, and share them over existing social networks.

- **Map Survey** can be used by journalists and municipal governments to create surveys that visualize users' responses on a map-based infographic. Map Survey was used to create HotBills, a citizen-populated data map that visualized the differing costs of heating per square meter across Latvia, and SchoolMoney, another citizen-populated map that presented the costs associated with Latvian public education.

The project team found that creating smaller, more targeted applications was cheaper and easier to experiment with than creating and managing a large website. Stakeholde.rs is now translating Map Survey into English and designing other map-based applications to market to municipalities across Latvia and the European Union. The project's partnerships with external groups were crucial in helping promote these applications. SocMap partnered with the Municipality Union of Latvia, an association of local and regional Latvian governments, to help attract the municipalities to use Stakeholde.rs' tools. SocMap also partnered with the Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism to attract publicity and content for the map-based infographics created with Map Survey.

REACH AND OUTCOMES

As noted above, SocMap's original platform failed to gain significant levels of adoption and engagement, struggling to reach even 1,000 registered users and to expand beyond users the project team had attracted through their own personal networks.

Although its first platform failed, the project used SocMap's mapping API to create four more-successful applications marketed through Stakeholde.rs. By October 2012, one-sixth of Latvia's municipalities (about 20 out of 120 cities) are using Stakeholde.rs' applications to engage their citizens. Stakeholde.rs will begin to turn a profit once approximately 40 more cities purchase its tools. In early October 2012, 13 other European cities signed up for free trials of various Stakeholde.rs tools. Among these cities
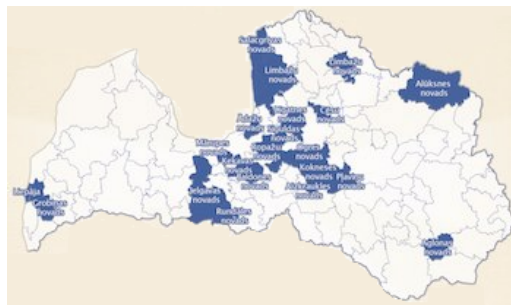
were Amsterdam and The Hague, Netherlands; Munich, Germany; Warsaw, Poland; Terrassa, Spain; and Dresden, Germany.

Map Survey has emerged as Stakeholde.rs's most successful application to date. HotBills took only a few weeks to develop, but within a month of its launch in February 2012, the application was used by two percent of Latvia's population (40,000 people) and over 2,500 users had scanned and submitted their heating bills. Between January 1, 2011 and July 31, 2012, HotBills had 262,593 unique visitors and over 1.1 million page views (90 percent of which came from Latvia), making it the largest crowdsourced journalism project in Latvian history. The tool aggregated this data into a visual map which revealed that the cost of heating per square meter differs by up to several times, that neighboring houses could have vastly different costs, and that Latvians do not know how their bills are calculated. HotBills ultimately helped to provide users with an incentive to talk to their landlords about heating prices, to ask for explanations, and to demand adequate answers.

Stakeholde.rs is primarily focused on marketing MapSurvey to neighboring countries in the Baltic region, but is also in the process of translating the application into English, as a number of local governments in other countries have expressed interest in the tool. The BBC, the *Guardian*, and various Baltic media organizations have signed up for Map Survey's free trial. By May 2013, Stakeholde.rs apps reached 30 subscription contracts in Latvia and two in Estonia. The company was acquired in May 2013 by investors with experience in SAAS for government institutions.