



## Infrastructuring Neighbourhood Assistance



### SOCIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD NETWORKS IN CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT STUDIES

The exhaustive literature on social capital has shown the importance of the development of a personal network in order to have a successful social life. For instance, this is useful for looking for a job, studying or even participating in the political life. Digital platforms such as the German website [nebenan.de](http://nebenan.de) allow citizens to extend their social network in their own neighbourhood as well as to exchange informal support. The University of Vechta has led behavioural economic research on factors empowering citizens to register in social neighbourhood networks for neighbourhood assistance and citizen engagement purposes. Key results are the appliance of injunctive social norms and modelling schemes displaying the current number of active neighbours when recruiting citizens for participating online.

#### About LIKE!

Local governments, citizens, universities and SMEs have joined forces to co-create smarter, more efficient and more innovative services through 9 transnational pilot projects covering 3 core themes:



#### Relations to Workpackages

The outcomes of this research project is a new form of engagement, in the sense that it permits to gather information on the way to encourage citizens to be socially engaged using digital social tools.

#### Local partners

Research Associates, University of Vechta (Chair of Management of Social Services):

- Vivien Breitrück
- Bernd-Josef Leisen
- Romain Herault



## Internet access and social cooperation

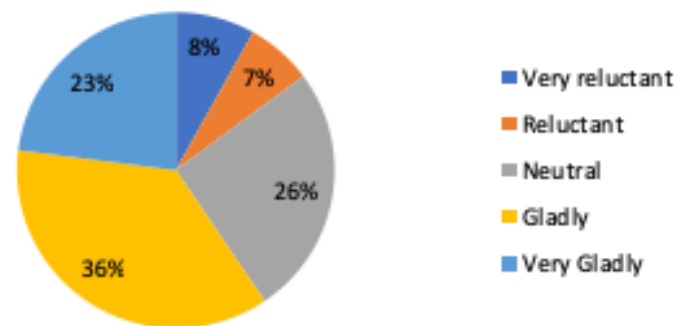
In August 2018 an experimental survey on the local folk event 'Stoppelmarkt' was held. This was well suited for capturing a mass of locals as each surrounding village has its own marquee. The survey aimed at gathering information on the following subjects:

- The citizens' access to internet;
- The willingness to use digital services of the local municipality and their recommendations for improving upcoming e-governmental services in Vechta;
- Their readiness to get in contact and cooperate with their neighbours.



*Experimental survey at 'Stoppelmarkt'*

### How gladly would citizens offer help to their neighbours?



*Data acquired from the survey*

## Data acquired

A sample of 76 participants were gathered and the results were positive concerning their internet use. Indeed, 96% of them had an access to internet and 59% were using social networks every day. Moreover, participants were open to the idea of cooperating with their neighbours as only 15% of them would be reluctant to offer help to their neighbouring community. Thus we saw a great potential to build a new network community and to study the determinants of engagement in digital social neighbourhood networks.



## Factors of engagement in social neighbourhood networks

In a second research step the cooperation with the German social neighbourhood network nebenan.de could be established, which supported the invitation of Vechta's citizens to join an online social network connecting neighbours with each other. Through this service, neighbours can chat, organise events and social groups as well as offer or require services from each other. We distributed three types of door-to-door leaflets that only differ in single text fragments: First, the control treatment imposing the injunctive social norm, second a combination of the injunctive and descriptive social norms and third the modelling scheme and injunctive social norm.

## 'Modelling', 'Injunctive social norms', 'Descriptive norms'

- Modelling is in behavioural sciences a concept which demonstrates how individuals copy behaviours from each other in the name of a social norm. So norms are implying social pressure influencing individuals to reproduce behaviours simultaneously. In that sense, the social pressure is modelling behaviours.
- Injunctive social norms are different than modelling as these norms are directly calling citizens to respect or adopt a specific behaviour that should be done. For instance if a local government calls its citizens to share goods and services with each other in the name of solidarity, this one is using an injunctive social norm. So the pressure is done through a direct interaction between citizens on the specific behaviour to adopt.
- Descriptive norms are characterised by the perception of a certain group on the behaviour to adopt based on what they think everyone does or already did.

**"In contrast to descriptive norms, which specify what is done, injunctive norms specify what ought to be done."**

<sup>1</sup>Cialdini, R. B., Kallgren, C. A., & Reno, R. R. (1991). A focus theory of normative conduct: A theoretical refinement and reevaluation of the role of norms in human behavior. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 24, pp. 201-234). Academic Press.

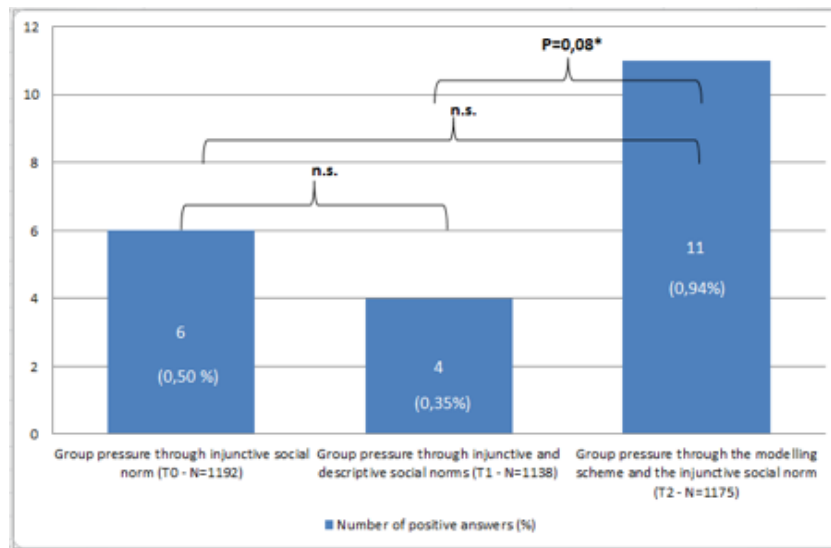


Survey of the University of Vechta



## Results of the experiment

After comparing the effect of both invitations, we found a relevant difference as we received significantly more positive answers from those who received the treatment 2 than individuals who got the treatment with a combination of the injunctive and descriptive social norms. These results are relevant for public authorities who are willing to raise participation in using social digital tools. They show that referring to social engagement norms and to the impact of citizen engagement on the community will have a better effect than describing what is already done in an existing community. Besides this result, our action created an online neighbourhood community of 163 members in Vechta.



Results after data-analysis

## Relevance to Like!

The project Infrastructuring Neighbourhood Assistance contributed to the aims of Like! to several extends: By doing a survey on internet access and social network, the University of Vechta gathered important information on the attitude of citizens towards their willingness to use digital engagement services and to engage in general. Therefore, the project allows public authorities to implement effective digital services. In addition, by using these results, we finally initiated the national famous online community nebenan.de even in rural areas like Vechta in which citizens can help each other. Moreover, we carefully analysed the conditions they would be more likely to join such online platforms. Thus, the positive development of the digital culture and engagement in the city of Vechta is one of the outcomes in Like!.