# AGORA 2.0

## ONSITE PUBLIC DISPLAY

IDEASCALE API USE CASE

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## Increasing Engagement with Onsite Public Display

In 2012, a group of PhD students from University of Trento and FBK - Fondazione Bruno Kessler set out to empirically investigate the hypothesis that creating an onsite public display in the city of Trento, Italy's public relations office would enhance civic participation. The students were interested in this study, because although nearly **55% of the total Italian population has internet access, that number drops to less than 12% for citizens over the age of 65.** The students believed that offering this would not only engage an older population, but increase overall participation.

Using IdeaScale's open API, the students created Agora 2.0, which presented **an interactive, public display of an online IdeaScale community.** Both public administration staff and citizens could post polls, questions, and opinions about local issues online and see them displayed within the office, as well.

The public display included a community question or proposed project as well as supporting project information and instructions on how to vote for or against each initiative while standing before the display. Each vote had a corresponding, color-coded mouse click that allowed participants to get involved on site.

Over the course of one month, the developers observed live visitor traffic at the public relations office, reviewing usage data and system logs, field notes, and semi-structured user interview data to track project success. And, **of the 1,000 citizens to visit the office that month, approximately 250 of them interacted with the public display.** That's a 25% increase in engagement for the city of Trento, Italy.

When interviewed after they had voted on the public display issue, citizens said what incited them to interact most often was the:

- **Displayed topic**
- An **interest in the technology**
- The informational **notice boards**, which encouraged participation.

Another observation was that (more often than not), on site voters were likely to support the question or project featured on the public display. Another discovery (and a somewhat surprising result) was that onsite participation exceeded online participation.

After the experiment concluded, the group identified that the key factors in designing successful, engaging public display systems were:

- A **large public display with easy interaction** technology.
- That **relevant content** is key to engaging potential users.
- And that **community engagement improved** when there was a relevant, onsite display.

"Open data collection and sharing **promotes a sense of community** in both urban and rural environments," said Gianluca Schiavo, an Agora 2.0 project lead, "we believe that if more communities can adapt their systems to engage citizens across multiple channels, not only will district, city, or country-wide programs improve, public sentiment will also improve. IdeaScale's open API allowed us to create a tailored, open data gathering system that appealed to a wide variety of users. We look forward to improving Agora 2.0 as well as replicating this study in other cities and communities in the future."

To learn more about Agora2.0 and its evaluation see the paper "Agora2.0: Enhancing Civic Participation through a Public Display" available here and the paper "Bringing Together Online and Onsite Technologies to Support Large-Scale Civic Participation" presented at the Large-Scale Idea Management and Deliberation Systems event available at comtech13.xrce.xerox.com.

Agora2.0 project began as a research project during an applied PhD course on "Collaborative and Social Computing" at the University of Trento and later continued as an independent initiative. The team consisted of Gianluca Schiavo, Jorge Saldivar Galli, Marco Milano, and Tooba Nasir. The team leveraged the help of domain experts such as Gregorio Convertino, Massimo Zancanaro,Rob Hoehnand Fabio Casati.