





Tomasz Pactwa
Project Director

Warsaw

Who is involved?

This project is lead by the municipality through the Welfare and Social Projects Department, in partnership with NGO's and private sector technology expertise.

Tomasz Pactwa (Project Director)
Dorota Nowinska (Project Manager)
Karolina Iwinska (Project Coordinator)

About our Innovation

Virtual Warsaw - Using micro-navigation technology to make the city accessible to the visually impaired

Challenge

There are 40,000 blind and visually impaired people living in Warsaw. This group report a strong sense of dependency on others and struggle to actively participate in routine activities such as shopping, spending free time with their friends and employment.

Idea

Virtual Warsaw will support the blind and visually impaired to better access core infrastructure in the city such as services, transport and cultural sites. Through a network of beacons which harness new micro-navigation technology, individuals will be supported to navigate the entire city via an app on their smart phone.

Intended impact

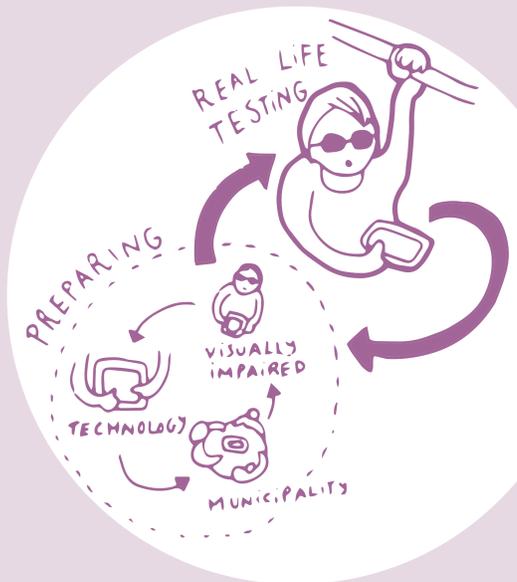
- Increased independence of blind and visually impaired people in Warsaw.
- Better access to public spaces and activities leading to increased participation for those who are blind and visually impaired in city life.

Our journey implementing our idea

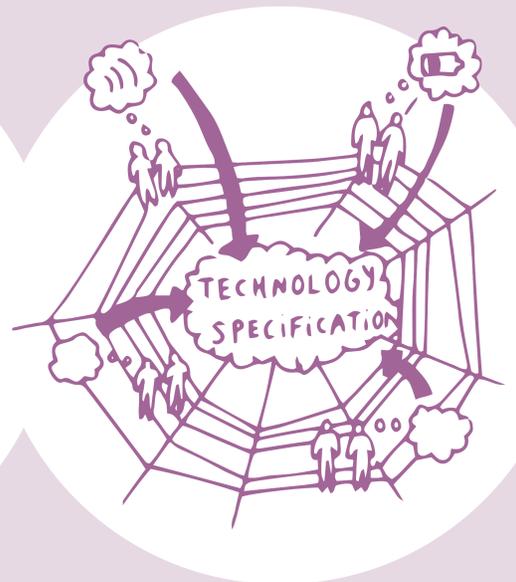
Realising the potential of new technology: How to build a city wide infrastructure

Our project is seeking to build a city wide infrastructure that supports and empowers the visually impaired to fully experience the city. We realise that getting the most out of cutting edge technology requires working in completely new ways, approaching challenges differently and involving different groups, so that we can translate technology into something that responds to the needs of visually impaired people.

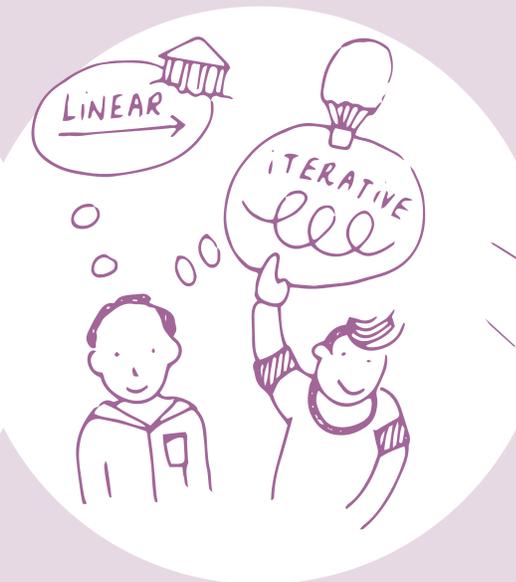
Every experience matters



Supplementing the procurement process



Developing rapid feedback loops



Harnessing opportunities from open innovation



“What we are doing is new, we are the first people facing this challenge, so there is no other way to work on it”
Karolina Iwinska

Next steps

Procuring technology at scale

The team are preparing to procure the technology at scale. It will be a challenge to find the balance between the requirements to prioritise the lowest cost solution and all for a qualitative judgement on who will deliver the most adaptive and technologically superior solution.

Engaging the third sector

Grants have been awarded to 3 NGO's to formalise an ongoing relationship with them, including the Polish Blind Association. They will lead on engaging users in shaping the product and test methods to train the visually impaired to use the app, build confidence in it, and get the most out of it.

What we have done

Trust is a key component of working with visually impaired users. A number of stages exist to ensure the product is strong before testing with the visually impaired how they will use the app and understand the functionality required to maximise the value it adds to people's lives.

Procurement processes focus on service providers. We are casting a wider net to engage less traditional partners such as experts and small tech start ups to understand the potential of technology.

We have engaged a small tech company for the early phase testing. They have a strong learning methodology that enables quick adjustments in response to feedback from the pilots, a rapid decision making process and a more direct relationship between the company and the municipality.

We have recognised that not only the visually impaired can benefit from the micro-navigation system. We are ensuring that the platform on which the technology sits will be open, so that other organisations (private and public) can build systems which use the data.

Key activity

Continually refining our methodology for testing the app, including seconding a visually impaired person with technical expertise into our the team to support the development of the product and user testing.

Attending conferences and sitting on panels to gain exposure to experts in micro-navigation technology and co-hosting the Globe Forum, an event which gathered international experts in the field in Warsaw for two days.

Undertaking 5 pilots in some of the most challenging areas of the city infrastructure, such as the longest bus line in Warsaw. The product is being iteratively improved between each pilot.

Running an open competition to source ideas from citizens and companies identifying opportunities to use the platform for tourism, advertising and mobile payments for goods and services.

Key learning

When stakes are high, and early interactions can have implications for future engagement, building trust in a new product is paramount.

Creative processes can be built to enhance procurement practices which otherwise inhibit the effective purchasing of new technology.

City government traditionally works with big contractors with a track record in delivering at scale. New technology requires new ways of working, testing and proving concepts on the go.

Creating a city-wide infrastructure poses opportunities to use the technology to tackle other problems.