Roadmap Civic Social Media

Building a safe, trusted, responsible, and sovereign
social media landscape.

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PUBLIC SPACES, PUBHUBS, CIVIC INTERACTION DESIGN RESEARCH GROUP

DEFINITION

Civic social media are digital platforms where **members of communities** can communicate, collaborate, and share information **in a safe, trusted way**.

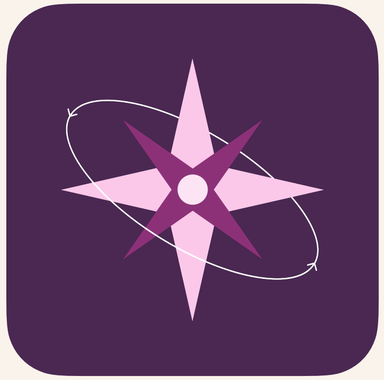
These platforms are **developed responsibly**, based on **public values.**

They are managed in a **sovereign manner** by organisations and initiatives with a **social mission.**

Core values

COMMUNITY-CENTRED

SAFE AND TRUSTED



RESPONSIBLE

SOVEREIGN

DIVERSE ECOSYSTEM

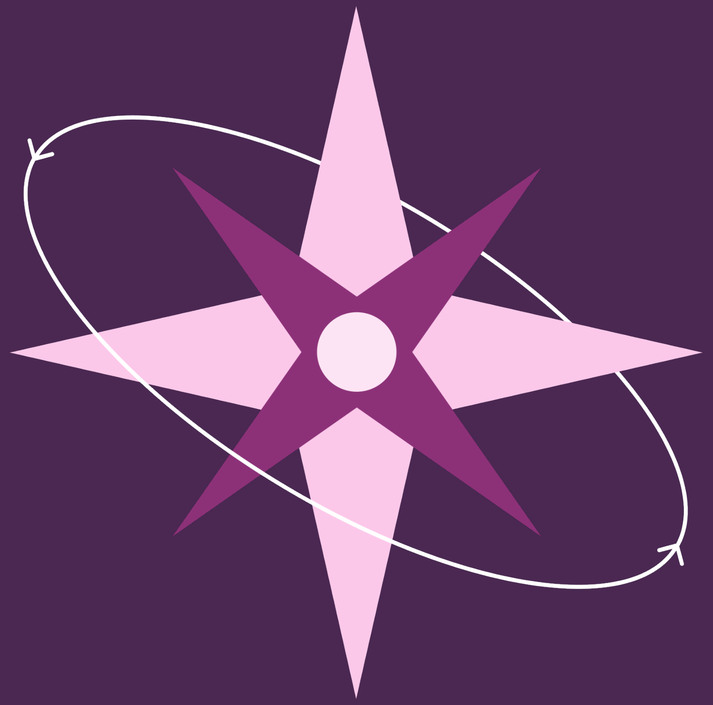
Community-centred

Civic social media are designed for communities whose members want to engage with one another, prioritising the well-being of these communities and their members.

They are not optimized for individuals but are designed for collaboration, dialogue, and exchange within collectives.

Safe and Trusted

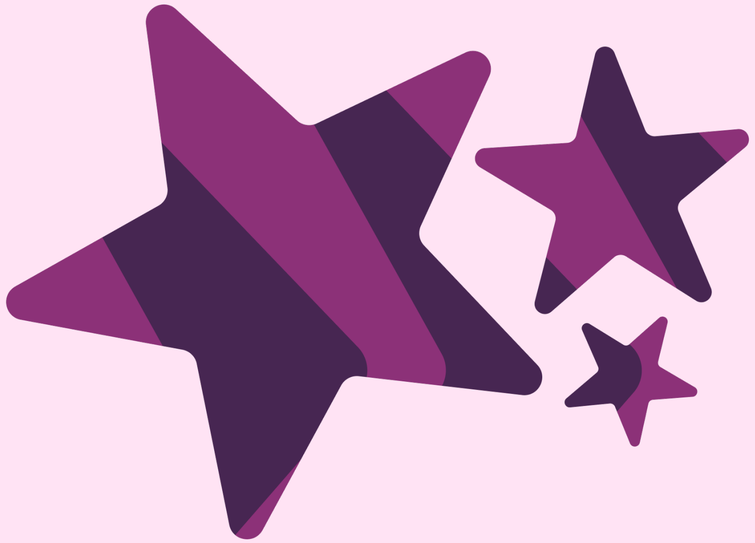
Civic social media foster a respectful culture where members feel at home. Their data are protected, and there are mechanisms in place to prevent disinformation.



Responsible

Civic social media are designed based on public values: autonomy, openness, transparency, sovereignty, human-centredness, and sustainability.

Social interest outweighs commercial interest in both design and management.



Sovereign

Civic social media are developed and managed by communities themselves or by organisations with a social mission.

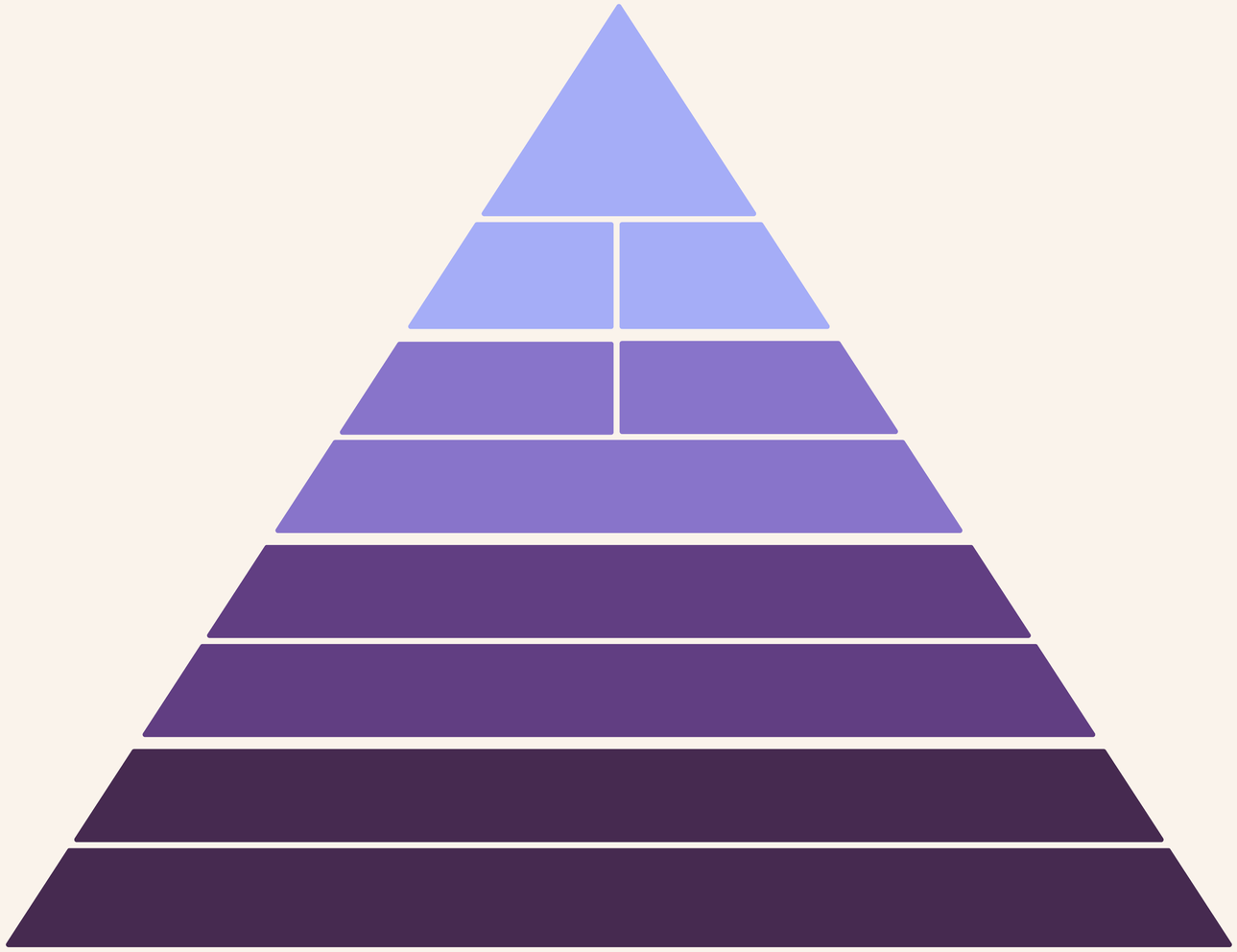
These managers are responsible for safeguarding public values and are held accountable for it.

Diverse ecosystem

Civic social media are part of a broader, interconnected media landscape. They consist of initiatives tailored to specific community needs and organisations, building on each other through open-source principles and shared protocols.

A roadmap for Civic Social Media

How do we create an environment where civic social media can thrive?

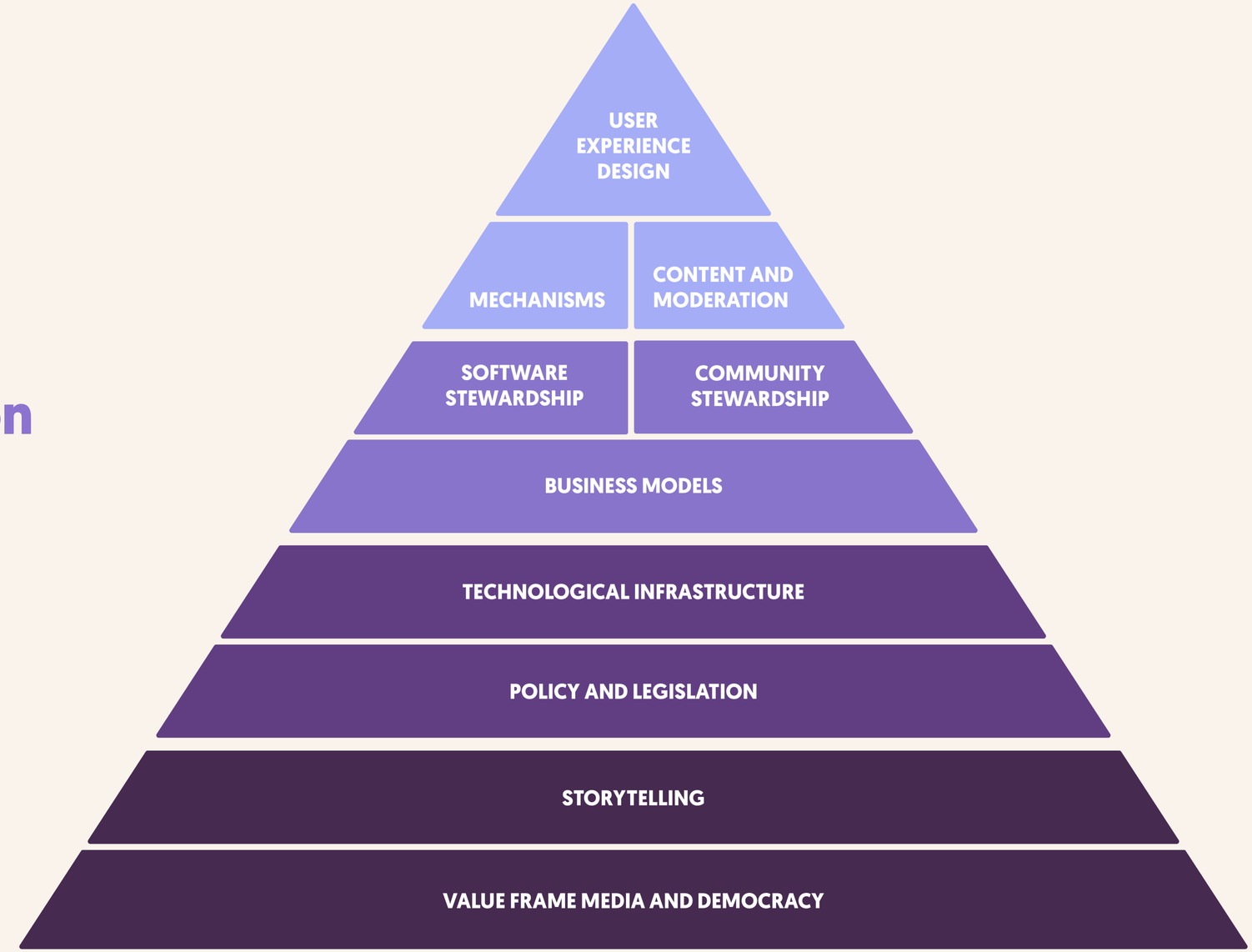


Application

Organisation

Systems

Culture



Culture

Value frame media and democracy

KEY DRIVERS

Growing awareness and evidence of big tech platforms' negative impact

TASKS

Ground civic social media in theories of democracy, media, and policy

Deepen value frameworks: safety, accessibility, openness, inclusivity

Develop shared terminology and conditions: regulation, requirements, funding

Culture

Storytelling

KEY DRIVERS

Public debate on social media, big tech, and democracy

Spotlight on alternatives like Signal, BlueSky, and “Make Socials Social Again”

Culture

Storytelling

TASKS

- Targeted lobbying towards policymakers, funders, civil society
- Governments as partners and role models
- Mobilize networks (libraries, schools, broadcasters) as ambassadors
- Guidelines for appropriate platform usage
- Citizen movement to promote and normalize civic social media

Culture

Storytelling

TASKS

Showcase best practices contributing to public goals through storytelling

Systems

Policy and legislation

KEY DRIVERS

European regulations (GDPR, DSA, AI Act) as momentum for public values and digital sovereignty

Government's role shift: from regulator to active promoter of public digital infrastructure

Systems

Policy and legislation

TASKS

- Government vision on public digital infrastructure including civic social media
- Link civic social media to policy areas: safety, sovereignty, well-being, media
- Legal basis for funding (e.g. broadcasting fees, road taxes analogy)
- Identify relevant and missing legislation
- Subtopic policies: digital identity, interoperability

Systems

Policy and legislation

TASKS

- Protect children and youth on social media
- Vision on supervision: freedom of speech, discrimination, hate speech, dis/misinformation
- Reform procurement law: government tasks and limiting rules
- Reform subsidy/funding rules for public organisations
- Legal models for new organisational forms (e.g., steward ownership) that embed public values

Systems

Technological infrastructure

KEY DRIVERS

Awareness: critical infrastructure is largely in foreign hands

Development of European/national open-source alternatives (cloud, digital IDs)

Systems

Technological Infrastructure

TASKS

- Strengthen discourse and plans around public digital infrastructure
- Ontwikkelen interoperabiliteit: netwerken, protocollen, afspraken, techniek
- Consolidate trusted identity systems (e.g., DigiD, Yivi, Apple/Google ID, Datakluis)
- Clarify government role in infrastructure: identity, networks, data portability

Organisation

Software stewardship

KEY DRIVERS

Global civic social media initiatives (PubHubs, Decidim, Pol.is, Mastodon), often open source n)

Funding and management as evolving organisational challenges

Organisation

Software stewardship

TASKS

- Experiment with governance, development, and stewardship models
- Set up support structures: maintenance, innovation, open source, helpdesk
- Develop governance models: accountability, user participation
- Compliance oversight: certifications, training, support (e.g., NVJ, CvdM)
- Build ecosystem: companies for hosting, design, implementation

Organisation

Community stewardship

KEY DRIVERS

Need for public values-based communication platforms and platform management knowledge

AI as moderation tool; concern for algorithmic bias

Organisation

Community stewardship

TASKS

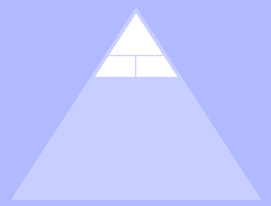
- Social media integration strategies, moderation, community management skills
- Guides for community stewardship; develop Civic Social Media Canvas
- Organisational structures aligned with community interests
- Professional protocols: editorial charters, moderation rules, training
- Integrate civic social media into broader organizational processes

Application

User experience design

Content & Moderation

Mechanisms



KEY DRIVERS

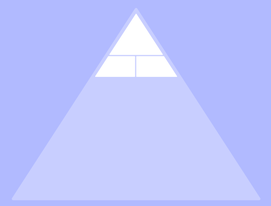
Global civic social media community emphasizes tech design, but UX needs more attention.

Application

User experience design

Redactie & Moderatie

Mechanismes



TASKS

- Enhance UX and design quality
- Design for collectivity, collaboration, connection—role for design education
- Develop new mechanisms and information architecture: filters, algorithms, balance individual–collective
- Design patterns for curation, selection, filtering
- User-friendly onboarding/login; attribute-based authentication

Application

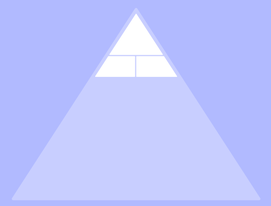
User experience design

Redactie & Moderatie

Mechanismes

TASKS

- Visibility patterns for people and information
- Age restrictions and parental control
- Online–offline relationships (e.g., KennisCloud)
- From memos to demos: tangible use cases (e.g., mental health)



COLOPHON & BACKGROUND

This roadmap is the result of a collaboration between the Civic Interaction Design Lectorate at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences , PubHubs , Public Spaces , the City of Amsterdam and the Universities of Nijmegen and Utrecht on the development of a UX design and Use Cases for PubHubs. This research was made possible by a financial contribution from the SIDN Fund . Public Spaces took the lead in developing the Roadmap.

The themes in this roadmap emerged from desk research into recent developments in the field of social media and the broader design research trajectory of the AUAS into the User Experience and Use Cases for PubHubs. The focus was on the design of what we have come to call Civic Social Media, and that design angle has also colored this roadmap. Specifically for this roadmap, two additional workshops were organized in which project partners and representatives of various organizations such as Waag, Ypsilon, Rathenau Institute, KennisCloud and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations provided input.

Various other research agendas, manifestos and research reports have inspired us, such as the work of Waag on the Public Stack ; the Tech Radars of the Municipality of Amsterdam; the Rathenau programme Inclusive Social Media ; the Rathenau reports on safeguarding public values in the digitalisation of society; the WRR advice on Media and democracy and AI ; and the work of the Commons Network on digital community goods. Concrete examples in the Netherlands we found at GebiedOnline and Openstad , among others . In the recent public debate we find connections with the activities around the campaign Make Socials Social Again and various manifestos and position papers that have been published, such as Bert Hubert's Manifesto Big Tech Alternatives: What should be better. Internationally, the work around New Public , Decidim and Pol.is . has been a source of inspiration, as well as the recent discussions around the Euro Stack , the Nesta report Towards public digital infrastructure , and the work of Open Future .

COLOPHON & BACKGROUND

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Research team Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences: Esther Hammelburg, Jorgen Karskens, Eva Oosterlaken, Harold Pflug, Martijn de Waal

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www.pubhubs.nl
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Illustrations and graphic design
Eva Oosterlaken and Lianne Siemensma