

Transport Innovation Without Permission in Agrigento, Italy

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Introducing a digital navigation system for public transport in a medium-sized city like Agrigento, in southern Italy, is not a common idea or at all easy.

Agrigento is a seaside town with a UNESCO archaeological site and a strong tourist industry. It is located in Sicily and has a resident population of 60,000 inhabitants who move around the city almost exclusively by car.

None of them would dream of having an App for local transport, not only due to their habits, but also because the buses have a bad reputation for punctuality. I'm one of them, I live in Agrigento, and the idea of creating an App was inspired by a series of strange coincidences.

I'm a digital strategist who last year participated in the Start-up Weekend Palermo, during which there were several presentations of ideas aspiring to become business concepts. For me, the most interesting idea was "Journey", an App that localised the movement of people in real time on a map. Journey could be used between users in order to know the delay to an appointment that a person would bring.

On the way home, my client, who was also present at the event, asked if it was possible to adapt this idea to localise a fleet of commercial vehicles.

After searching the Internet I discovered that there were several companies that sell GPS trackers with corresponding software to monitor and localise movements of vehicles. For my client it was fine, but there was something that interested me more - the urban transportation system.

I found several transport companies that provided Apps on timetables and bus stops. Among them was the [Moovit app](#) - a local public transit planner that offers real-time information and allows anyone to import the app, as a volunteer, in their own city.

Moovit was what I was looking for. Exploring the different features I realised that if I were to introduce Moovit to the public transport company of Agrigento, [TUA Srl](#), I could offer an even better service:

- allowing the transport companies to upgrade the bus schedule and sends alerts to users.
- allowing users to send companies feedback about delays, overcrowding, cleanliness, accidents and malfunctions.

At that time I had been nominated to join and represent Agrigento as part of the Digital Champions association, promoted by [Riccardo Luna, the Digital Champion of Italy](#). The Digital Champions association's main objective is promoting and supporting digitalisation of institutions so I was very motivated to involve TUA Srl.

While attempting to make contact with TUA Srl, I discussed this project with my clients, friends and colleagues and asked them for feedback. Some of them told me that it would be worthwhile exchanging ideas with the community [Open Data Sicilia](#).

I got in touch with the Open Data Sicilia community, a group of great guys: passionate, competent and generous. I wrote [a post on their Facebook group](#), gathered lots of advice and realised that I had taken the wrong road by not considering the factor Open Data. Their advice would result in [a letter being sent to TUA Srl](#) to request them to publish their transport data in open data format.

I finally got an appointment with the head of TUA Srl and delivered the letter, showing the large number of potential advantages to both the company and public of digitalising the public transport data.

I showed them how easily bus routes can be found on Google Maps, once companies have activated the feature through [Google Transit](#). I showed them [Travic](#), which tracks the movements of buses representing them dynamically as moving dots. And then [OpenStreetMap](#), Moovit, etc.

I explained the infinite possibilities of open data formats and the re-use of intelligence by anyone to create thematic maps, web applications, mobile applications and more.

I pointed out that the first essential step to make it all happen was to release the transport data in open data format.

I also flagged up that there were no cost implications either to them or users for what we had seen together that morning. I warned them that the only obligation would be to update the data should there be any changes in timetables, routes and stops.

To increase their level of trust in my project, I provided them with contacts of other Sicilian companies that had already done all this. I hoped that this would be sufficient to convince them.

Unfortunately, since that day nothing has happened, and my requests for contact, by phone, or email messages went unanswered.

For me an excellent alternative was to involve the city council of Agrigento. I contacted the staff of the mayor directly, but also he was not interested. No answer.

So, now without hope, at the beginning of the summer I made a decision: spend one hour a day collecting [schedules and routes from the site of Tua Srl](#) and put them on Moovit. Moovit is a digital platform created by a private company that, like Google Maps, offers routes of public transport from a point of origin to a destination point and is available for free on all types of smartphones.

After a few months I finished. A few weeks ago I received verification from the Moovit Staff that the data I had uploaded to the site had been successful and the grant application for the city of Agrigento was imminent.

And so, two weeks ago the App became available for free download from the stores of all mobile operating systems and is available to residents, tourists (it is available in 38 languages) and all kinds of users. I am happy to report that yesterday, the web version for Agrigento was also released: <http://tripplan.moovitapp.com>

The news about the launch of the App, was given in Agrigento on 27 October 2015. I was invited to present the app at two press conferences organised by [Confcommercio](#), the local Association of Merchants and by [Distretto Valle dei Templi](#), the local tourist district. I received an invitation for an interview by Radio In Agrigento, and [several online articles appeared](#).

At the conferences, I met a number of residents and users of public transport, who spontaneously and with great enthusiasm, shared their opinions with me. They confessed that the buses do not run according to their schedules and that the drivers suggest disregarding the official timetables and pay attention instead to the specific intervals of time (for example: every 15 min, 20 min or 30 min).

I do not know how much truth is in what I was told, but I do not exclude that it can be true, and I feel that there is something more than a simple lack of punctuality.

If this fact were true then it would explain the reluctance of the Agency of Public Transport and the

Administration of the city of Agrigento and would no longer be a simple distrust of new technologies, but a problem of transparency. Essentially a political problem.