



Digital Democracy

The tools transforming
political engagement

Julie Simon, Theo Bass, Victoria Boelman and Geoff Mulgan

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About Nesta

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Executive summary

The rise of digital democracy

Democratic institutions today look much as they have done for decades, if not centuries. The Houses of Parliament, the US Congress, and some of the West's oldest parliaments are largely untouched by successive waves of new technology. We still live in a world where debates require speakers to be physically present, there is little use of digital information and data sharing during parliamentary sessions, and where UK MPs vote by walking through corridors. The UK Parliament building in particular is conspicuous for the absence of screens, good internet connectivity and the other IT infrastructure which would enable a 21st century working environment comparable to the offices of almost any modern business.

At the same time almost every other sphere of life - finance, tourism, shopping, work and our social relationships - has been dramatically transformed by the rise of new information and communication tools, particularly social media or by the opportunities opened through increased access to and use of data, or novel approaches to solving problems, such as via crowdsourcing or the rise of the sharing economy.

Many argue that this gap between the way in which citizens go about their daily lives and the way in which politics and democracy are carried out is one of many factors that has contributed to declining trust and confidence in democratic institutions. Large minorities in the US and Europe no longer see democracy as a good system of government, particularly young people. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index in 2014 and 2015, not only are participation rates low, but the highest levels of disengagement have occurred in 16 out of the 20 countries classified as 'full democracies'.¹

In response many have argued that digital technologies are the answer, and that they alone can encourage greater participation, better decisions, and more trust. The advocates claim that digital democracy can achieve deeper and broader participation, that it can contribute to a richer public sphere for argument and debate than was ever possible with traditional mass media; and that tapping into more individual sources of expertise can achieve better decisions than relying only on professional politicians and civil servants.

Over the last two decades there have been thousands of experiments. In some areas, such as campaigning or monitoring the actions of MPs, there is a rich field of innovation, with myriad apps, platforms and websites gaining significant numbers of users. Petitions sites, for example, can be found across much of the world in one form or another. Other experiments have focused on areas such as participatory budgeting, opening up the problem-solving process for a range of social issues, to a focus on how digital can enhance the more traditional activities of parliamentary and democratic work, such as voting or case management.

So far however, the reality has not lived up to early hopes and expectations. Although campaigning tools have mobilised hundreds of millions of people to try to influence parties and parliaments, the tools closer to everyday democracy have tended to involve fairly small and unrepresentative numbers of citizens and have been used for relatively marginal issues.

Part of the reason is unwillingness on the part of traditional parties and parliaments to adopt new methods at scale, and for important issues. But the reformers have also made mistakes. Often they have been too linear and mechanistic in assuming that technology was the solution, rather than focusing on the combination of technology and new organisational models. They have failed to learn the lesson of the 1990s that democracy is a

cluster of things, including media, civil society, and habits of compromise as well as formal mechanisms of voting. And many were insufficiently attuned to the very different ways in which different types of argument and debate take place, some framed by interests, others by very technical knowledge, others still very much framed by moral positions.

Some of the experiments have also run into the same problem as social media - a tendency to polarise opinions rather than bridge divides as people gravitate towards others who share their political affiliations,² as false information circulates,³ and dialogue hardens opposing positions rather than helping people to understand different views. The current debate on filter bubbles has brought these issues to much greater prominence.⁴

Learning from the innovators

This paper shares lessons from Nesta's research into some of the pioneering innovations in digital democracy which are taking place across Europe and beyond today. Our aim was to address two main questions:

How and to what extent are digital tools being used by parliaments, municipal governments and political parties to engage citizens to improve the quality and legitimacy of their decision-making?

What can be learned from recent digital democracy initiatives about how to get the most from digital tools and create an effective platform for participation?

Our case studies look at initiatives which aim to engage citizens in deliberations, proposals and decision-making. We offer here our findings, tentative in some areas where we are constrained by a lack of data and formal evaluations of outcomes and impact.

The lessons can be summarised into six main themes:



Think twice: don't engage for engagement's sake

- Offering tangible outcomes (such as with participatory budgeting) and

binding votes can make engagement more meaningful, but equally important is demonstrating to citizens how their contributions have been considered, even if the final outcome is not what the individual sought. By engaging people as early as possible (for example, when conceptualising new legislation, rather than just reviewing close-to-final text) people's sense of satisfaction in making a difference is likely to be higher.



Be honest: what's involved and what are you going to do with the input?

- This is important for all stakeholders. Before starting any digital democracy initiative it is essential to consider who needs to be engaged (for example, is the objective

broad, mass participation, or to tap into more niche, distributed expertise?) and how that community can best be reached. Furthermore, clarity of what the process will entail helps manage expectations and create a more effective exercise for everyone involved. The best processes have effective facilitation and moderation to encourage positive and constructive discussions, avoiding the pitfalls of more traditional forums and social media conversation. Providing feedback on outcomes is also essential. Failure to do so risks disillusionment with the process and potentially even greater disconnect from democratic processes.



Digital isn't the only answer: traditional outreach and engagement still matter

- Carefully targeted PR, advertising and outreach underpin almost every successful digital citizen engagement

initiative. Many, particularly those which enable citizens to make decisions or play a very active role in the development or scrutiny of proposals, also blend offline and online activity. This might take the form of promotion via outdoor advertising and local journalism, or through proactive outreach to civil society grassroots organisations, as in Paris and Madrid. Or it might involve targeting digitally active groups via social media, such as in Reykjavik. This is important for bridging the digital divide and increasing the legitimacy of decision-making by broadening the pool of participants.



Don't waste time: get buy-in from decision-makers before you invest too much - Buy-in, ideally broad and cross-party,

is important for a number of reasons. First, adoption by decision-makers and the integration of new ways of working into existing structures and institutions significantly increases the likelihood that proposals or decisions will be adopted and implemented. It also helps to embed new processes into current institutions, or to change ways of working. That said, it is important to be open to quicker and lighter forms of experimentation as well, in order to reduce the barriers to acceptance and help representatives realise its potential. Furthermore, initiatives which have sought to actively connect representatives and citizens, for example through shared discussions, have also seen citizen interest and levels of participation rise, as the perceived impact of their contributions is seen as greater. On the flip-side, however, some initiatives (particularly those led by Europe's newer political parties) have run into criticism. They have promised more direct accountability of decision-makers

to citizens but in the eyes of some, are not living up to the promises made, again reflecting the risks inherent of trialling radically new models.



Don't cut corners: digital democracy is not a quick or cheap fix - There is often a

hope that 'digital' will mean a more efficient and cheaper way of doing something. In none of the examples we have looked at is this the case. To do digital democracy well often requires extensive traditional outreach alongside the use of new communications technology. Digital democracy initiatives require teams to deliver and support them, investment in IT and software, and investment in staff and/or volunteers to ensure they have the necessary skills. In some instances it is important to have capacity to evaluate a large volume of contributions, with a digital back-end that supports analysis and processing of the data obtained.



It's not about you: choose tools designed for the users you want, and try to design out destructive participation - The tool used must

not only lower the barriers to participation by making it easy to contribute, but it should be actively designed to improve the quality of the discussion, debate and output. The best platforms make it easy for participants to see the contributions of others, with some visualising the content to aid understanding. They also introduce features designed to limit the trolling or abusive behaviour associated with many online forums, and to prevent specific groups 'capturing' or 'gaming' the outcome. Open-source tools are optimal for transparency, enabling anyone to verify the code behind voting and other mechanisms.

What next for digital democracy?

In order to grow and enter the mainstream of processes which support parliaments, governments and political parties in their work, digital democracy must address a number of challenges which it still faces. We conclude our report with reflections on these - from developing a more nuanced understanding of what we mean by 'participation' and tackling the digital divide, to improving our understanding of what motivates people to participate and how we can balance aspirations with the reality of what is possible, to minimise the risks of further disillusionment, and make digital democracy a 'new normal'. We also consider the opportunities that new technologies may offer and the areas of our democratic processes where digital democracy initiatives are still far fewer. And finally we call out to the digital democracy community to consider how it can better measure and evaluate the impact of its work, to build the evidence base for what works.

Figure 1: Seven leading examples of digital democracy



Introduction

Digital technologies have transformed the way we live and work. They've revolutionised industries as diverse as media, retail, education and financial services. In some cases, digital technologies have disrupted whole industries – forcing companies to forge new business models and develop new service offerings. In other industries, such as financial services and retail, while the business model has remained broadly the same, digital tools have transformed the customer experience. Changes in the social field have been equally dramatic. Think of education; remote learning is reshaping the higher education landscape, offering access to some of the world's best universities to anyone with a laptop and internet connection.

One domain that seems impervious to the transformative effects of digital technologies is our model of democratic governance - representative democracy, bureaucratic administration, occasional elections and rule by elected or appointed 'experts' – remains largely unchanged since it was invented in the 20th century. The way that political parties, governments and parliaments interact with the public hasn't changed much either. While most recognise the need for public participation, consultation and engagement, these kinds of initiatives are often tokenistic or relatively marginal and rarely involve actually collaborating with citizens or giving them the power to make decisions.

That imperviousness to the effects of digital technology is all the more perplexing at a time when our democratic institutions are in pretty desperate need of reform. Disillusionment with existing political institutions is widespread. Trust in our elected representatives is chronically lacking. Turnout in elections is low (35 per cent for local elections in England and 20 per cent for elections for Police and Crime Commissioners).⁵ Membership of political parties is significantly lower than a few decades ago. Governments are elected on an increasingly narrow share and profile of the population, raising questions about legitimacy and their mandate to rule.

Analysis by the Economist Intelligence Unit in the form of its Democracy Index shows that not only are participation rates low, but the highest levels of disengagement have occurred in 16 out of the 20 countries classified as 'full democracies'.⁶ Indeed, the growth of populist movements in the US and Europe has its roots in the growing perception of a chasm between the political elite and the people. Social movements and protests against entrenched political systems and institutions are giving rise to new political parties such as Podemos in Spain, The Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy and the Pirate Party party in Germany and Scandinavia, many of which advocate explicitly greater citizen involvement in their decision-making processes. It is also breathing new life into older parties and political candidates who position themselves as anti-establishment, from UKIP and Trump in the UK and US, to the Front National, Alternative für Deutschland or the Partij voor de Vrijheid in France, Germany and the Netherlands respectively.

Arguably, the need for reform is particularly acute in the UK for other reasons as well. The Houses of Parliament are an important part of our cultural heritage. But in trying to preserve the customs and traditions of both houses, we've effectively ossified its working practices and processes. Indeed, there have been few, if any, attempts at truly modernising Parliament. Many of the archaic parliamentary procedures that were first recorded in Erskine May's landmark 1844 *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* are still in force today.

The fact that new technologies haven't spurred the creation of new forms or models of democracy is also perverse when we consider that politics is about ideas. It's about the contestation of alternative visions of what constitutes the 'good society'. It involves testing, challenging and honing those ideas through discussion, debate and the use of evidence and then ultimately persuading others of the merits of the idea. As such, politics is essentially about information and communication - two things ideally suited to the use of digital technologies.

Of course, digital technologies alone won't solve the challenges of apathy, disillusionment, low levels of trust and the widening chasm between the people and the political class. In the UK, for example, restoring trust in our democratic institutions might require, among other things, constitutional reform, including a new system of elections or nominations to the House of Lords, some form of proportional representation in the House of Commons, more diversity amongst MPs and changes to the customs and working practices of Parliament.

That is also not to say that increasing use of digital technology is not having an impact. Across the globe there are many examples of where it has led to some improvements in terms of coordination and access to information. Social media in particular has successfully been used to galvanise large groups of supporters for rallies, demonstrations and campaigns. Petitions sites can be found across much of the world in one form or another.

However, as recent votes in both the US and the UK have shown, there is increasing concern about how the internet and social media can work to affect the outcomes of our democratic processes. Debates are perceived as increasingly polarised and fragmented (since people tend to gravitate towards others who share their political affiliations)⁷ and there is growing concern about the speed at which false information and news can circulate.⁸ Sunstein and others argue that this is leading to people taking more extreme positions, thereby widening the gulf between opposing sides of a debate.

More recently, attention has been focused on how polarisation and segregation on social media is occurring involuntarily, as a result of personalised web searches – or what is known as 'the filter bubble'. Eli Pariser, who coined the term, explained his two concerns: *"that algorithms would help folks surround themselves with media that supports what they already believe, and that algorithms will tend to down-rank the kind of media that's most necessary in a democracy—news and information about the most important social topics."*⁹

Meanwhile, governments around the world have been publishing large swathes of data in an effort to promote transparency and openness. However, these developments have left the mechanics of our democracy – the basic institutions, processes and structures of governance – as well as the relationship between citizens and the state, largely unaffected. Across much of the western world, we still have a system whereby a small political class has a monopoly over the substance and direction of policy with decision-making centralised in national and regional parliaments with little input from citizens.

New experiments in digital democracy are showing how digital technologies can play a critical role in engaging new groups of people, empowering citizens and forging a new relationship between cities and local residents, and parliamentarians and citizens. A number of parliaments, including those of Brazil and France, are experimenting with new tools to enable citizens to propose and draft legislation. Political parties such as Podemos in Spain and the Icelandic Pirate Party are using tools such as Loomio, Reddit and Discourse to enable party members and the general public to deliberate and feed into policy proposals. Local governments have set up platforms to enable citizens to submit ideas and information, rank priorities, allocate public resources and receive notifications of upcoming debates. Some of these tools and platforms were trialled in Madrid, Barcelona, Helsinki and Reykjavik as part of Nesta's D-CENT research project.¹⁰

When it comes to more complex democratic processes, such as the development of policy or the drafting of legislation, the best new innovations are explicitly alert to the issues of potential bias. They are finding ways to carefully design processes which eliminate the filter bubble and bring together people with opposing views, or previously unheard views, to discuss, deliberate and, where appropriate, reach a consensus.

While many of these experiments and innovations are relatively new and small in scale, they do illustrate the ways in which digital tools can be used to reinvigorate our democratic institutions. And even if it's too soon to fully understand their impact, political parties, national parliaments and city governments that are keen to better engage citizens in their deliberations and decisions should keep abreast of these developments since these experiments also shed light on broader issues relating to democracy and governance.

Looking at the impact of digital technologies in other fields, we might assume that digital tools could benefit our democracy. We could imagine, for example, that new technologies might make democracy more representative by providing new opportunities for people to participate. New digital tools might make it easier to engage a new or a broader range of participants that could provide new insights and thereby improve the quality of decision-making by parliaments, political parties and governments. New tools and technologies might also improve the legitimacy of our democratic structures and institutions – through a combination of greater transparency, representation and better decision-making.

In what follows, we discuss some of these issues in more detail by exploring some of the most pioneering and innovative examples of digital democracy that exist today. First, we define what we mean by digital democracy and provide a typology, before sharing our learnings on what makes a good digital democracy process, and how current initiatives are affecting the legitimacy and quality of decision-making. These insights are drawn from the detailed case studies we present next. We conclude by pointing to some of the challenges and opportunities for the field of digital democracy.

What is digital democracy?

Definitions

Democracy is not easy to define. That's because democracy is a cluster of practices, structures, institutions and movements. It's an assembly of many different elements – and it's the combination or totality of those elements that we understand to mean democracy.

In this context, it's not surprising that there are numerous definitions of digital democracy. For some it refers to the use of digital tools to provide information and promote transparency, for others it describes the ways in which information and communications technologies (ICTs) can broaden and deepen participation, while others talk of promoting empowerment by enabling citizens to make decisions directly through online tools. We simply define the term as *"the practice of democracy using digital tools and technologies"*.

Within the literature, there aren't any agreed definitions of digital democracy. In part this is because the term overlaps with notions of citizenship, participation, transparency, accountability, governance, e-government, civil society and the public sphere.

However, we can draw a distinction between 'minimalist' and 'maximalist' definitions of digital democracy. The former focuses on giving citizens access to governmental information and enabling them to interact with government through, for example, online consultations and transactional services online. The latter envisages a more participatory role for citizens, enabling them to collaborate with government officials as well as make their own decisions about how they and their local communities are governed.¹¹

Also, when people do use the term, they're often doing so in different ways, referring to different models of democracy – such as representative, participatory (deliberative or collaborative) or direct democracy. For example, part of the rationale behind 'open government' was that democratic structures and processes, and trust in those structures, could be improved through the provision of information and greater transparency. These discussions relate most closely to discourses about representative forms of democracy.

More recently, the term 'open government' has come to include a range of initiatives and policies, from improving internet connectivity, transparency and access to institutional data, to novel ways for citizens and governments to interact for achieving better outcomes.¹² Democratic innovations in this space have included the involvement of citizens in solving specific challenges (e.g. challenge.gov in the USA), creating petitions (e.g. We The People in the USA), making proposals (e.g. Your Priorities in Reykjavik), collaborating with public officials to draft policy (e.g. the Estonian Citizens' Assembly) or carrying out tasks that had hitherto been the preserve of public employees (e.g. Peer to Patent). These examples speak to participatory forms of democracy – or what some have most recently described as collaborative democracy.¹³

There are then numerous discussions about how ICTs could enable direct forms of democracy - through for example, referendums and participatory budgeting, where local residents vote directly on how local resources are spent.

In more recent decades, political discourses have focused on deliberative democracy. This is known as the 'deliberative turn' in political philosophy, and is best exemplified in the work of Habermas, Rawls and Fishkin.¹⁴ For these and other theorists, true democracy entails participation, and specifically, discussion and debate among citizens. The assumption that deliberation is a good thing is pervasive in the field of democratic theory and practice. Discussions about how ICTs can democratise the public sphere, enabling citizens to deliberate amongst themselves and with public officials, link most clearly to these discourses.

At Nesta, we don't favour any particular model of democracy. We're interested in how digital tools can be used to support representative, participatory and direct forms of democracy. Since democracy comes in so many guises, we're also interested in how these tools can be used outside the formal structures of governance and politics. Many of these tools could be used in the workplace or by civil society organisations - such as membership organisations or community groups - to support deliberation and collective decision-making.

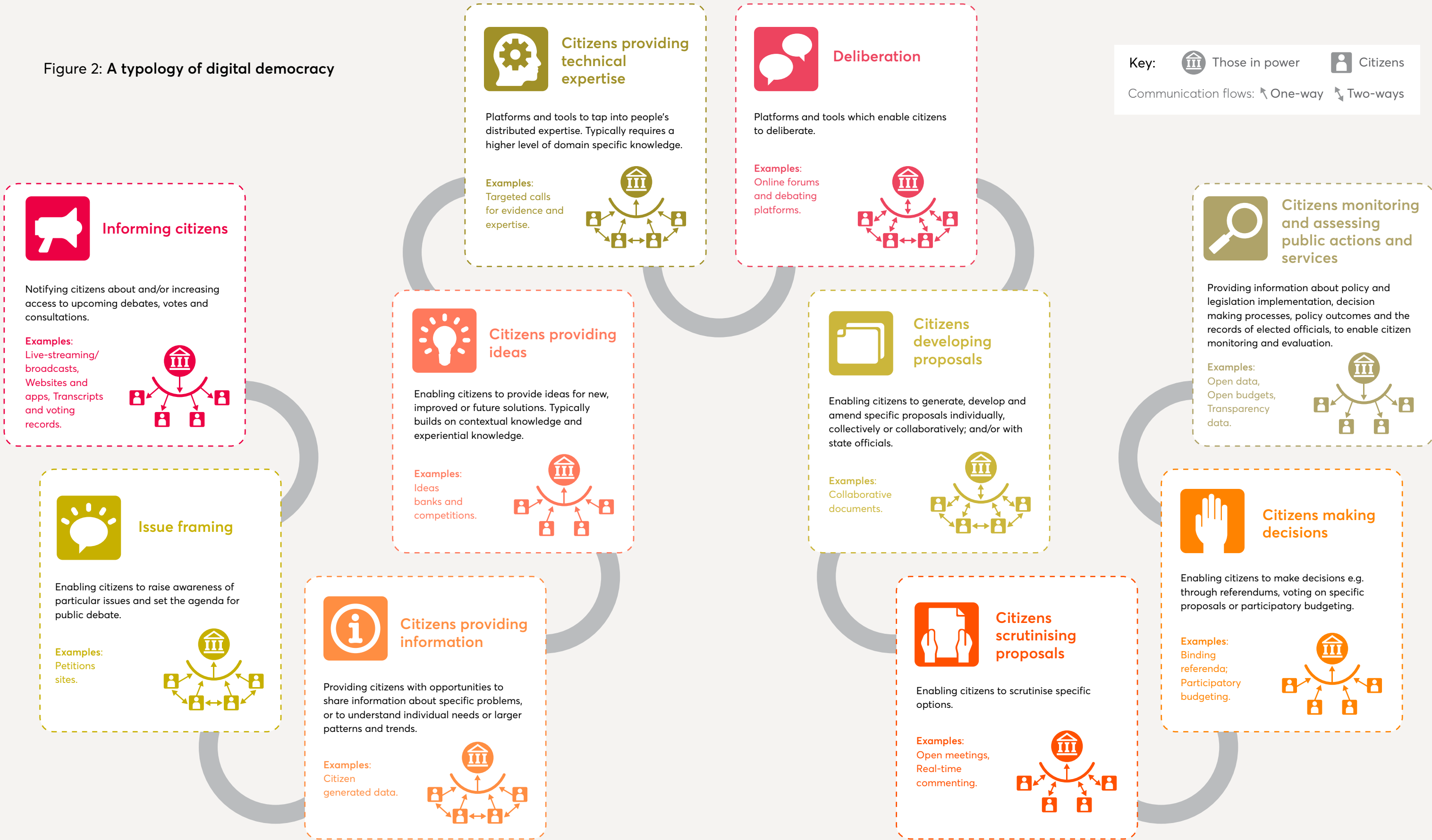
A typology for digital democracy

Since our definition is so broad, we've developed a typology for identifying different aspects of digital democracy. We wanted this typology to be grounded in practice so that it would be useful for practitioners, policymakers and citizens. It is based on different types of activity, but also takes into account issues of power (i.e. decision-making authority) and flows of communication.

Within the field of digital democracy, relatively little research focuses on how our democratic institutions can make use of digital technologies and how citizens themselves can be involved in the practice of everyday democracy - such as raising specific concerns, developing and scrutinising legislative proposals, making decisions or holding public officials to account. The typology we set out below aims to set out these 'everyday' activities.

We've also focused on activities which are organised or at least mediated by power centres - such as governments, parliaments and political parties - since one of our criticisms of the literature is that it has tended to focus on relatively broad and abstract concepts, such as democratising the public sphere, rather than the structures and practice of governance.

Figure 2: A typology of digital democracy



Case studies

A growing field of digital democracy

The last few years have seen a surge in digital democracy projects around the world. Parliaments are experimenting with new tools to enable citizens to propose and draft legislation, local governments are giving residents the power to decide how local budgets are spent, and a wave of new political parties such as Podemos, Pirate Parties and M5S have at their core the idea of participatory or direct democracy.

Many of these experiments in digital democracy were triggered by a crisis. The financial crisis of 2008 prompted the Kitchenware Revolution in Iceland and the anti-austerity 15M movement in Spain, which eventually led to the development of the Your Priorities and Decide Madrid platforms respectively. In Estonia, a scandal relating to party political finances engulfed the country in a political crisis that prompted the President, together with civil society organisations, to set up the Estonian Citizens' Assembly to make recommendations for democratic reforms. This initiative led to, amongst other things, the creation of the Citizens' Initiative Platform, Rahvaalgatus. Meanwhile, the vTaiwan process was set up in the aftermath of the Sunflower Student Movement, which saw the Taiwanese parliament surrounded and occupied by student protesters in response to a proposed trade deal with China.

Many other experiments have taken place against a backdrop of declining trust in politicians and democratic institutions which has created a space for new political actors and projects to emerge. Across much of the western world, governments are facing a crisis of legitimacy. All the projects we've looked at aim in one way or another to address this by providing new channels for citizens to participate in the decisions and deliberations of government.

In some instances, parliaments and governments are initiating new methods for openness and digital participation themselves, such as LabHacker/ e-Democracia in Brazil. More commonly, when the capacity to build these mechanisms in-house is insufficient, these institutions are partnering with open-source 'civic tech' communities to provide the necessary tools and expertise. The impetus can also come from grassroots democracy movements and civic tech organisations themselves, who develop the tools and processes and seek buy-in from decision-makers to embed them in institutional processes. Digitally minded political parties are also driving this change, attempting to practice large-scale grassroots involvement in internal decision-making, and, where they take power, establishing new mechanisms for participatory and direct democracy (such as the Ahora Madrid Coalition).

Many of these tools are gaining traction and momentum and are now being replicated and transferred to new settings. For example, the Icelandic platform Your Priorities has been used in Romania, the UK and Estonia while the platform underpinning Decide Madrid is being used by municipal governments in Barcelona, A Coruña, Oviedo and others. There is now a growing number of tools, many of which are open-source, and a growing body of knowledge and evidence about how to design and deploy an effective online participation tool. This has effectively lowered the barriers to entry for new advocates of digital democracy; policymakers and practitioners can take advantage of this growing field of democratic innovation by adopting and adapting the tools that already exist.

Our case studies

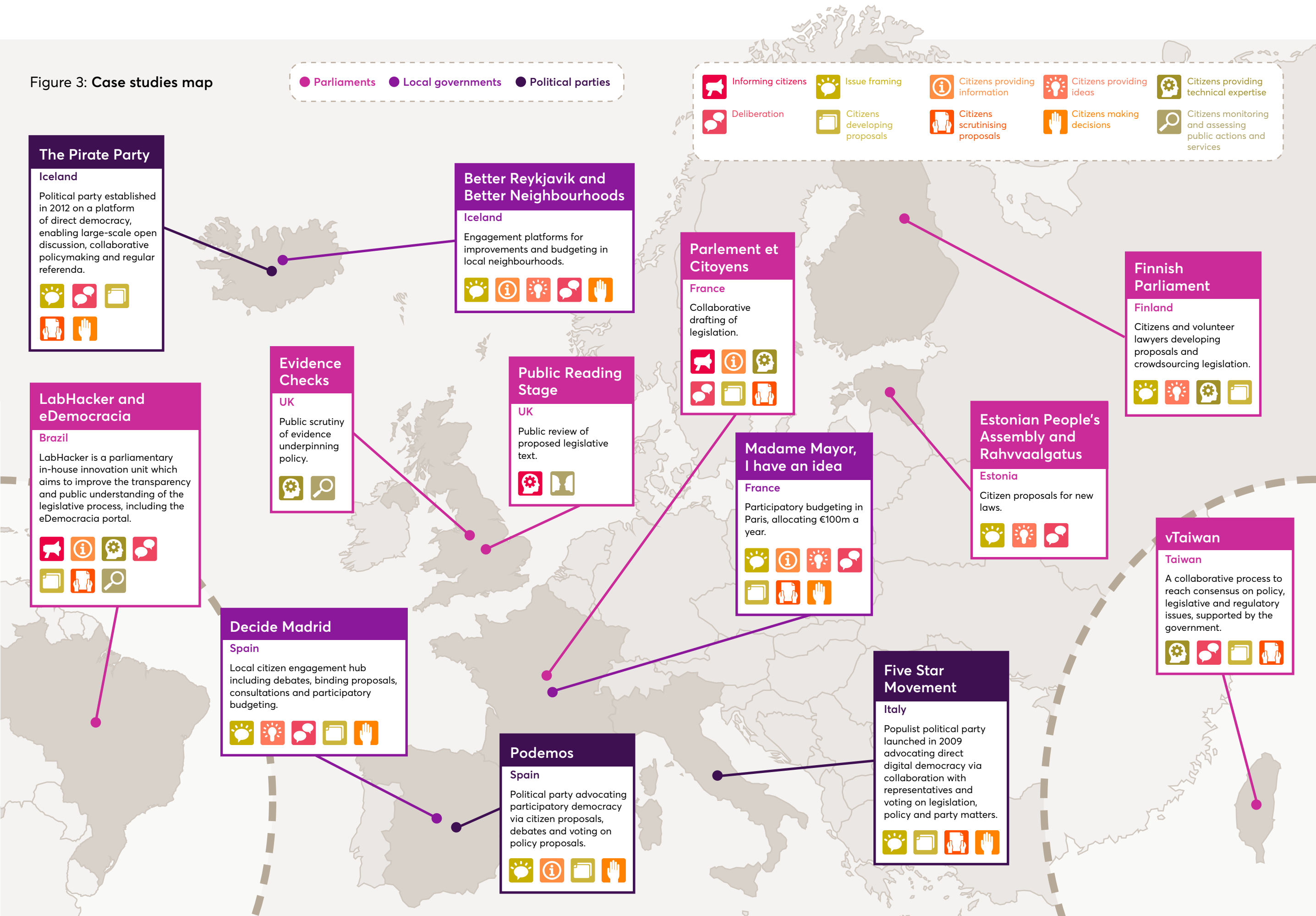
The overall aim of this research project is to see how digital tools can be used by parliaments, municipal governments and political parties to engage citizens to improve the quality and legitimacy of their decision-making. As such we decided to focus our case study research on initiatives which aimed to engage citizens in **deliberations, making proposals and decision-making**. However, some of these initiatives also cover other aspects of our typology of digital democracy, such as citizens providing ideas, citizens providing expertise and citizens scrutinising proposals.

We have also focused on initiatives that have been used within the **legislative branch of government**, rather than by the executive or judiciary. This includes policy development and consultation, legislative drafting, pre-legislative scrutiny, and decision-making. However, many of the tools are transferable and could be used by other arms of government or by institutions and bodies outside of government.

We've also looked at various levels of democratic decision-making and tried to ensure a good spread of case studies between **political parties, city governments and national parliaments**. We have endeavoured to avoid civic tech projects which are not linked into formal democratic or decision-making structures.

We examined 13 case studies, as illustrated on the map. In general we focused on case studies from Europe but we have also included two examples from Brazil and Taiwan as they exemplify particularly innovative and unique approaches to digital democracy. We've aimed to focus on case studies which are less well-documented and for which there is limited secondary research. Our aim is to **showcase experiments** which aren't particularly well known to our audiences of policymakers, parliamentarians and practitioners.

Each of the case studies is at a **different stage of development**. Some are very new and we are only just beginning to understand their impact. Others are relatively well developed, while at the other end of the spectrum is one experiment which was tried, failed and has since been discontinued, but which nonetheless is instructive about how (not) to do digital democracy. For this reason the case studies here vary in length and depth. Our case studies have been informed by a review of the available literature and interviews with those involved in establishing and running the initiatives. We tell seven stories in depth, with the remainder providing an overview of what has been achieved and how.



LabHacker and eDemocracia

Brazil



Informing
citizens



Citizens
providing
information



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Deliberation



Citizens
developing
proposals



Citizens
scrutinising
proposals



Citizens
monitoring
and assessing
public actions
and services

Overview

The e-Democracia portal¹⁵ was set up in 2009 by the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house in Brazil's National Congress, as a pilot project to engage citizens in the legislative process. Led by the Strategic Management and Projects Office, the idea for the platform came after a multi-disciplinary team of parliamentary staff, consultants and digital experts conducted a mapping project to identify digital legislative experiments from across the world. The team decided to *"adapt the mechanism of virtual communities of practice to the formulation of laws to engage a broader segment of society in debates of national legislative issues."*¹⁶

The resulting e-Democracia portal was set up with the aim of making the legislative process in Brazil more transparent, to improve citizens' understanding of the legislative process - which is particularly complex in Brazil - and to make Congress more accessible by providing a new channel for individual citizens to interact with representatives and making the work of Deputies more visible.¹⁷

The portal is now permanent and provides citizens with numerous ways of contributing. Still, the project has had its ups and downs and was nearly cancelled at the beginning of 2013 because it lacked political and administrative support. However, the public protests that took place in 2013 convinced politicians and the administrative board that

public participation in the legislative process was necessary, especially to counter public concerns about corruption.

The e-Democracia site itself is organised into three main areas: virtual communities on thematic areas; 'free space'; and Wikilegis, a tool for drafting bills collaboratively. In each of the virtual communities, citizens can take part in online forums and live chats with representatives, attend live committee hearings and post questions and suggestions in real time, and take part in online polls and surveys. To supplement the discussions taking place in the virtual communities there is a 'free space' for more open ended discussions on any subject relevant to the Chamber of Deputies that isn't already covered.

The platform has been used to encourage public participation on a wide number of draft bills. Initially two virtual communities were set up - on climate change policy and a new Youth Statute - but quickly the number of virtual communities grew to cover areas such as the Amazon, space policy, and the regulations to govern Digital Inclusion Centres (Lan Houses). There are currently 17 virtual communities on themes as wide-ranging as corruption, sport, cybercrime and education. By 2016 (up to September), the portal had attracted about 37,000 registered users, more than 23,000 forum posts and more than 52 million visits.¹⁸

e-Democracia's two greatest successes to date include the Youth Statute Bill, which crowdsourced 30 per cent of its final text from young people across the country, and the Internet Civil Rights Bill, which received 374 individual contributions on the Wikilegis platform, many of which were explicitly referred to by the rapporteur in the Chamber, and adopted in the final bill.¹⁹

Figure 4: Example bill open for comments on the e-Democracia portal²⁰

The screenshot shows the e-Democracia portal interface for a bill titled "Proteção de Dados Pessoais (Participações Encerradas)" with the number "PL 5276/2016". The page is divided into several sections:

- Header:** The title "Proteção de Dados Pessoais (Participações Encerradas)" and the bill number "PL 5276/2016".
- Summary:** A brief description of the bill: "O projeto trata da proteção da privacidade e dos dados pessoais de cada cidadão. Por exemplo, a proteção de seus dados cadastrais em locais como hotéis, lojas, academia, hospitais, bancos e sites. Também protege os dados do cartão de crédito quando você realiza uma compra, assim como de exames médicos e da biometria (impressão digital)."
- Participants and Status:** On the right, it shows "Status da proposta: CCP - Tramitando em Conjunto", "Participantes: 79", "Propostas: 452", and "Contribuições até: 05/08/2016".
- Articles:** The main content area displays the text of the bill, starting with "CAPÍTULO I DISPOSIÇÕES PRELIMINARES" and "Art. 1º Esta Lei dispõe sobre o tratamento de dados pessoais por pessoa natural ou por pessoa jurídica de direito público ou privado, com o objetivo de proteger os direitos fundamentais de liberdade e de privacidade e o livre desenvolvimento da personalidade da pessoa natural." It also includes a list of principles: "I - a autodeterminação informativa; II - a liberdade de expressão, de comunicação e de opinião; III - a inviolabilidade da intimidade, da vida privada, da honra e da imagem; IV - o desenvolvimento econômico e tecnológico; e V - a livre iniciativa, a livre concorrência e a defesa do consumidor."
- Video:** A video player on the right shows a man, identified as "RELATOR Alessandro Molon (REDE-49)", speaking. The video title is "Molon convoca consult." and there is a play button icon.
- Buttons:** At the bottom right, there is a button labeled "Incorporar".

The call-out boxes next to the articles refer to the number of contributions. The page also shows the number of participants and suggestions received, the deadline, the status (in which Committee, for instance, the Bill is being processed) and a video of the Rapporteur giving a very brief explanation of the Bill and calling for participation.

Subsequently, in 2013, the team organised a hackathon to bring together designers, developers, parliamentary staff and representatives to develop apps for computers and mobile devices with the aim of improving transparency and the public's understanding of the legislative process. The event was such a success that the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution to create a permanent hackerspace – LabHacker²¹ – within the Chamber to act as an innovation lab and to forge links between parliamentarians, designers and developers, and civil society actors. The world's first parliamentary in-house innovation lab, LabHacker is now responsible for improving the e-Democracia portal, including via workshops and hackathons, as well as developing new digital tools to broaden public participation and improve the transparency of the legislative process. All the tools used on the platform and being developed by LabHacker are open-source, with the intention of encouraging a wider community of developers to engage in their improvement.

Participation

The portal has attracted relatively high levels of participation. The e-Democracia portal uses social media as well as emails to reach out to potential participants. They also ask committees and parliamentary staff to reach out to potential participants during the consultation process. Between 2009 and 2015, the portal attracted about 37,000 registered users, with over 52 million views. There were about 23,000 forum posts on nearly 4,000 topics; nearly 18,000 messages in interactive parliament events; and over 1,000 suggestions to edit draft bills using the Wikilegis tool. However, between 2009 and September 2016 only 30 Deputies (6 per cent) had used the portal (although 176 are registered).

Relatively little is known about who participates, why, or how representative they are of the broader population. There is currently no requirement for users to provide any data beyond email addresses and location. Indeed, this was a deliberate choice in order to encourage participation. As e-Democracia founder and LabHacker Director Cristiano Faria explains, *"We don't have a digital certification process - that is going to be the next step. Anyone, even if they want to be anonymous, can register, because our first goal was just to engage people; we just wanted to see the gates open and wanted to reduce the barriers of engagement"*.²²

Factors for success

Strong levels of senior political buy-in. The e-Democracia team, and now LabHacker, have a unique position within the Chamber of Deputies benefitting from the influence and access this offers, while retaining a degree of autonomy. One of the remarkable features is how they have been able to remain agile and results oriented while sitting in an organisation which is by its nature highly bureaucratic.

Support from legislative consultants, who sit in a permanent body within the Chamber of Deputies. There are roughly 200 specialists who advise and prepare representatives for their discussions in standing committees, plenary sessions and provide specific technical assistance in the formulation of bills. They play a critical role on the platform as they are responsible for preparing the content for the virtual communities, moderating discussions, analysing the contributions

and reporting back to representatives and any relevant standing committees. As such, these legislative consultants serve as 'technical translators',²³ guiding citizens in their deliberations and helping them to contribute to the bill-drafting process.²⁴ Few Deputies actively participate on the portal so they also play a key role in ensuring that citizen contributions are either reflected in the final bill or in their report to representatives and standing committees for further deliberations.

Feedback loops between citizens and representatives. At the end of the process, a final report is compiled which explains what contributions were used and where the representatives responsible for the bill agree or disagree with the contributions put forward and why. This information is then passed back to the people who participated online. As Faria explains, *"this justification and feedback makes the process transparent"*.²⁵

Ongoing challenges

Manual processing of contributions is time intensive and puts pressure on legislative consultants who are already under pressure to support representatives in a number of other tasks. This problem will become more acute if participation rates rise.

Issues of usability with the interface.

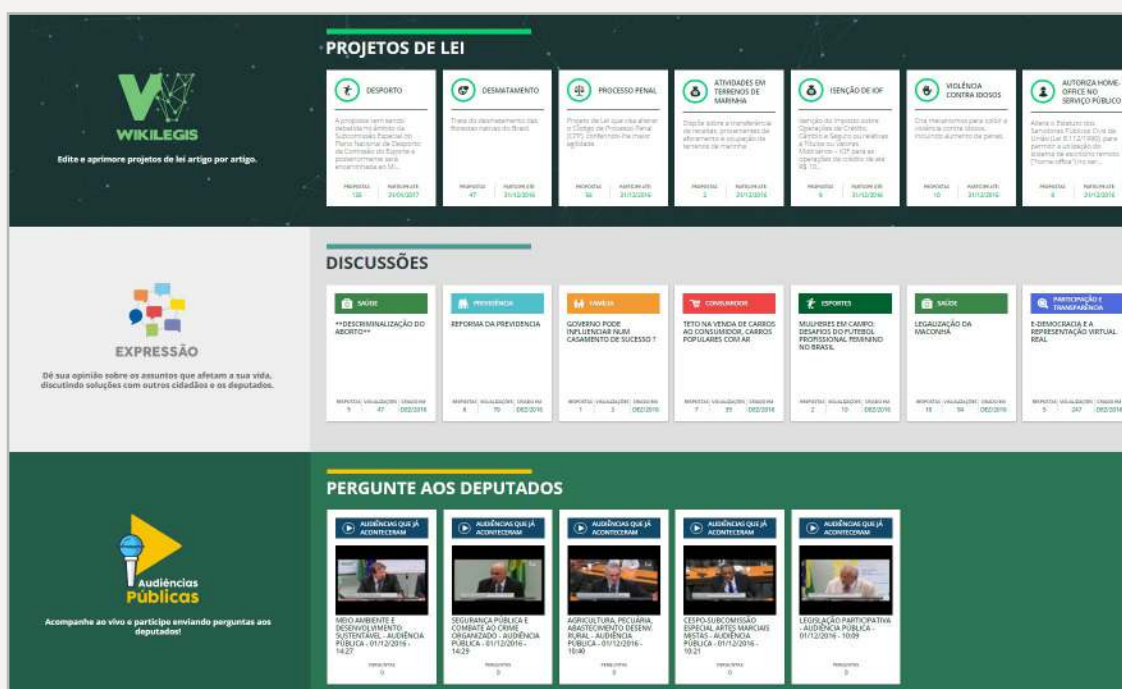
The website is complex and provides a wide range of different tools, virtual spaces and web-forums which can often amass hundreds of comments. This can make it difficult for users to see how their contributions are being used, and how discussions are developing. However, LabHacker has launched a new beta version (see Figure 5) of the site which aims to address some of these problems.

Lack of public awareness of the site, although the slow, organic growth of the platform has been useful in enabling iterative developments and improvements.

Lack of public understanding about why they should contribute and the way in which their participation via the platform links to the legislative process,²⁶ compounded by a lack of understanding about how the legislative process works more broadly. While e-Democracia itself is part of the efforts to break down those complexities, the tool itself can only go so far in doing this.

A lack of clear rules about how people's contributions should be used. For instance, "sometimes we have one case or another of a lawmaker [who] asks for participation but doesn't actually deal with the information. That's crucial, you can't simply say to the population it's open to participation, and then not use the contributions or provide any feedback."²⁷

Figure 5: The new e-Democracia portal²⁸



Main outcomes and impacts

Examples like the crowdsourced Youth Statute Bill and the Internet Civil Rights Bill show how the e-Democracia portal has enabled representatives to hear a wider range of views from citizens, in a way that was previously impossible or difficult. Such information has arguably improved the quality of debate within the chamber and the quality of laws passed using this process. For example, Faria describes how *"someone from the Amazon gave direct contributions with important information, with no intermediary"* and how this *"really helped in bringing a new idea and a new perspective from someone living the problem at the grassroots."*²⁹ Similarly, technical discussions on healthcare regulation and space policy yielded a small number of highly salient contributions that would not otherwise have been heard within the Chamber. And, some of the contributions to draft bills were so useful that deputies *"planned several meetings with particular contributors... that's our ideal."*³⁰

The lack of data on users and their representativeness is a challenge for understanding the platform's impact. Nonetheless, Faria stresses that *"the process is very transparent... it is very different to, say, a contribution given to a representative in his office behind closed doors"*.³¹ In this sense, the e-Democracia platform has injected more accountability into parliamentary proceedings, in that it makes many of the day-to-day functions of the legislative process more open and publicly accessible.

Parlement et Citoyens

France



Informing
citizens



Citizens
providing
information



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Deliberation



Citizens
developing
proposals



Citizens
scrutinising
proposals

Overview

Cap Collectif is a civil society organisation which develops online tools for collaborative approaches to governance, including participatory budgeting, drafting legislation and online consultations. In 2013, they launched *Parlement et Citoyens*, a website which brings together representatives and citizens to discuss policy issues and collaboratively draft legislation. It was conceived by Cyril Lage, a former public policy consultant and parliamentary assistant who had become disillusioned by the opacity of the legislative process, and Armel Le Coz, a service designer working on participatory tools for local governance. Together with two software developers, they put together a prototype of the platform.

Later, the team persuaded a number of individuals – including an MEP, the President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, and other high profile French figures – to endorse their efforts by forming a ‘support committee’ and recording videos to show their public support.³² In the run up to the launch at the National Assembly, the platform received cross-party support from six representatives, and several think tanks.³³ Initial funding came in the form of grants, partnerships and private donations from Google, the *Democratie Ouverte* association, and a couple of representatives. The majority of the development, however, was done and continues to be done by volunteers.

To date, the website has received support from more than 30 representatives, has hosted ten consultations – on issues as diverse as the collaborative economy, criminal justice, open data, the use of pesticides and constitutional reform – and has attracted 10,000 participant contributions (proposals, amendments and comments), 85,000 registered votes and 23,000 registered users.³⁴

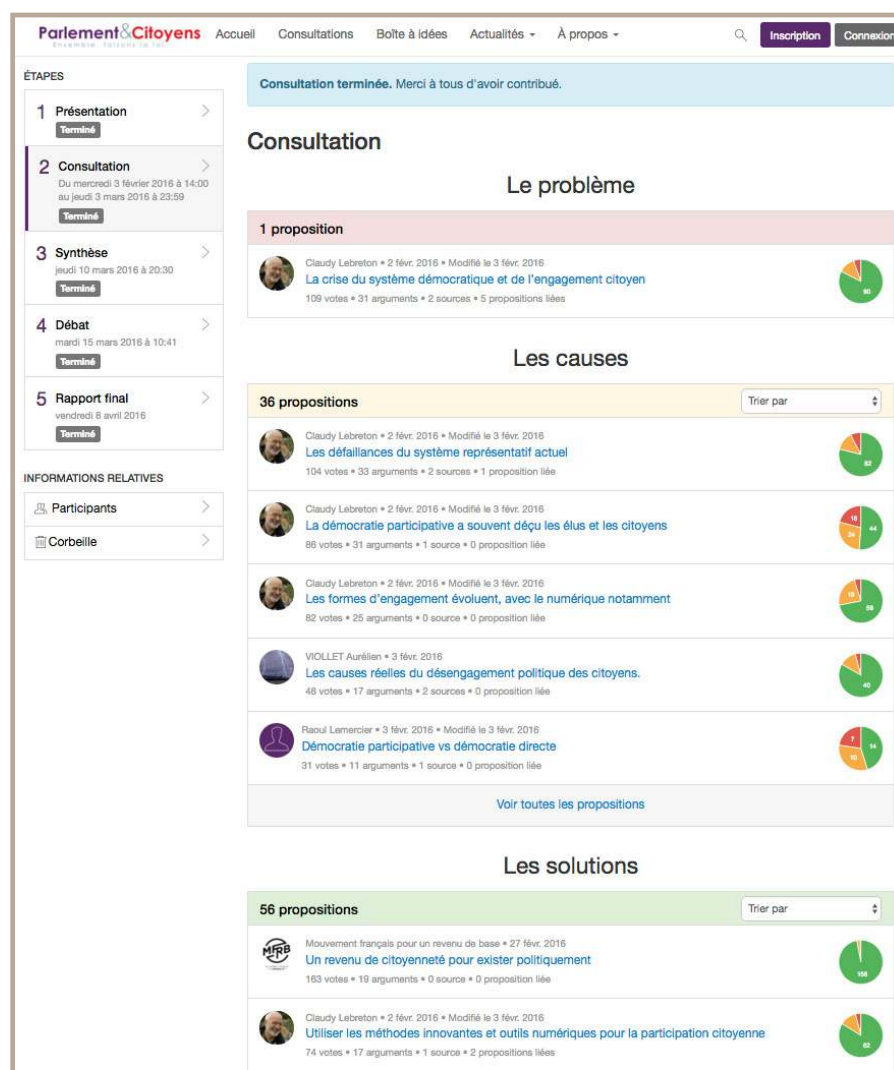
The site goes beyond traditional consultation since citizen contributions inform and shape legislation which is put before Parliament. For example, Senator Joël Labbé’s consultation on biodiversity was endorsed by the Minister for the Environment, Ségolène Royal.³⁵ The consultation, with over 2,000 suggestions, 51,516 votes and 9,334 participants, heavily informed the law which was eventually ratified by the National Assembly. Another success was the 2015 Digital Republic Bill, launched with the support of the Prime Minister, Manuel Valls and the Minister for Digital Affairs Axelle Lemaire. A new, customised platform was created for the Digital Republic Bill, though it replicated *Parlement et Citoyens*’ software and engagement methods. The process crowdsourced 8,500 contributions and 150,000 votes from over 21,000 participants. 90 contributions were integrated into the new text, along with 11 new articles.³⁶

Each Parlement et Citoyens consultation is 'hosted' by a representative to ensure a direct link between citizens and parliamentarians. The process can either be used by representatives to gather comments and host a debate on a particular topic or issues, or to crowdsource contributions on the early draft text of a bill.

Either way, the process follows a specific structure:

1. The representative hosting the consultation provides an 'overview' (including a video) presenting all general information about the topic or bill, including any relevant documents, news, events and rules for the consultation (such as how participants' input will be used).
2. There is then a 'consultation' stage, where topics are broken down into causes, problems and solutions. Or, if there is already a draft bill, contributions are broken down according to specific clauses or articles. Over a 30-day period participants are able to suggest new proposals (or articles) and amendments to existing proposals. They may also create 'arguments' in favour or against a given proposal, submit relevant information such as academic material, or simply vote on other people's contributions. Parlement et Citoyens staff moderate the discussion, publicly archiving any abusive or deliberately unhelpful contributions.

Figure 6: An example of a Parlement et Citoyens consultation³⁷



3. During the 'synthesis' stage, Parlement et Citoyens staff review the contributions, compiling and categorising them – according to problems, causes and solutions or to clauses and articles. Users can then quickly read over an easily digestible summary of all contributions.
4. There is then a 'debate' stage in which contributors from the previous stages are invited for a live-streamed discussion on Google Hangouts with the representative hosting the consultation. Three website participants with the highest number of votes are selected to take part, along with three participants chosen by the representative, and two participants chosen by the Parlement et Citoyens staff to balance the discussion.
5. Finally, the representative in charge of the consultation, in collaboration with Parlement et Citoyens volunteers, compiles a final report or draft bill, explaining how participant contributions were used. The idea or draft bill is then filed for debate in the National Assembly or Senate.³⁸

Participation

The success of Parlement et Citoyens in attracting over 30 representatives, despite facing scepticism from some others, has largely been a result of the team's outreach strategy. As Associate Director Thibaut Dernoncourt at Cap Collectif explains, *"we see what MPs are saying and when we think they're saying something interesting, we call them and tell them what we're doing, and ask if they want to join"*.³⁹

The most successful consultation on Parlement et Citoyens in terms of the number of participants and contributions has been Senator Joël Labbé's consultation on biodiversity, which gained 2,049 suggestions, including 355 suggested new articles, 503 modifications to existing articles, 1,127 'arguments' and 67 new sources of information.⁴⁰ In total the consultation received 51,516 votes on individual arguments or new articles, from a total of 9,334 participants. Though some consultations on Parlement et Citoyens have had fewer participants, they have been very active contributors. For instance, Pascal Terrasse's consultation on challenges for the collaborative economy had 145 participants but 313 contributions, including 69 proposals, 235 arguments and 779 votes.⁴¹

There is currently no detailed information collected by Cap Collectif on those who've used the Parlement et Citoyens website such as age, demographics, geography, and so on. This is largely to make participation as easy as possible, and to prevent the risk of people turning away from the website because of a burdensome registration process. However, during the Digital Republic crowdsourcing exercise promoted by the government, Cap Collectif collected some data about participants and found that 95 per cent of the participants self-identified as citizens, 3 per cent as non-profit organisations, and 1 per cent as for-profit organisations or educational institutions respectively.⁴² A survey of people who took part collected 4,500 responses and showed that most participants were male (77 per cent), most were aged 25-34 and were well educated (82 per cent had completed some form of higher education).⁴³

Factors for success

Buy-in of political representatives.

Representatives are at the centre of each consultation, playing an active role in discussions with citizens. This is partly down to the fact that the platform is designed to make the contributions quickly digestible for representatives to help them respond. The synthesis provides 'a kind of cartography of arguments', showing all the arguments, not simply the most popular ones, allowing representatives to make a more informed decision.⁴⁴ Another reason that parliamentarians support the project is that it fits in with the system of representative democracy; it isn't a platform for direct democracy which could limit their choices.

Meaningful engagement with representatives.

The support from parliamentarians has been crucial in terms of attracting participants and the consultations which receive the best contributions are where representatives provide a 'really deep, argumentative answer'.⁴⁵ In addition, to ensure the integrity of the process, they choose 'big

topics', not little topics or 'fake topics' for consultation. The view of the Parlement et Citoyens team is that *"a consultation will work if you give the proof or evidence to the people that you do not think they are silly"*.⁴⁶

Early engagement of citizens. This prevents the consultation process from being used to legitimise decisions already taken and gives citizens the genuine opportunity to influence and shape the draft. As Derroncourt points out: *"If you know that your text and your bill cannot evolve then there is no point... the fact that you can show that there was a first version of the bill, and then after the consultation a second version of the bill, is very, very important"*.⁴⁷

Transparency and integrity of the process.

Parlement et Citoyens clearly define the rules at the beginning of the consultation process and stick to them throughout. In addition, the view of the team is that because people believe that they can truly have an impact on an issue that matters to them, the incidence of gaming and trolling is dramatically reduced.

Figure 7: The consultations page on the Parlement et Citoyens website⁴⁸



Each consultation is clearly headed with a video from the Representative leading it.

Ongoing challenges

Expanding the number of representatives involved in using the platform. Initially, the project was met with a degree of scepticism. It is now gaining traction – especially since receiving the support of the Prime Minister Manuel Valls – but there still remains much to be done to promote the platform and its benefits.

Ensuring a greater diversity of participants. Although more data is needed, it appears that despite the team's efforts, participants are not representative of wider society. Future outreach is planned to target more excluded and politically disengaged groups.

Website usability. Some participants have complained that on consultations with

thousands of comments it was difficult to read and assess all of them and that the first proposals posted were given most visibility. Users have suggested various ranking and summarising mechanisms but improving the software as the website becomes more popular is a priority.

Long-term sustainability. The ambition is to develop the initiative into an independent NGO with at least some paid staff. This is important as the platform is struggling to find the necessary volunteers to maintain the desired level of activity. Financial support from new members and supporters, including Parliamentarians, is seen as key to this.

Main outcomes and impacts

Parlement et Citoyens *"is not just about improving trust; better decisions can be made thanks to these tools".*⁴⁹ Dominique Raimbourg, the representative who launched one of the platform's initial consultations on prison reform (821 contributions and 2,687 votes from 337 participants),⁵⁰ argued that *"there are always aspects which have not been seen, proposals which have not been envisaged, experiences which have not been taken into account. It is therefore necessary to expand the number of people who can really bring forward experiences, knowledge, analysis and proposals."*⁵¹

In some situations, the very existence of 'more eyes' on a draft bill has clearly benefited the quality of the end result. For example, during Senator Joël Labbé's consultation on the use and sale of pesticides by local authorities, one contributor spotted a potential loophole that would allow local authorities to bypass restrictions and suggested an amendment which was later implemented.⁵² In response to the success of Parlement et Citoyens so far, 20 representatives have formed a working group within the National Assembly, and are planning to submit a parliamentary bill to promote the mandatory use of online consultations in the development of legislation.

Participant feedback is also promising. Following the Government's consultation on the Digital Republic,⁵³ nearly one-fifth of survey respondents (19 per cent) scored their satisfaction with the process as ten out of ten, while 24 per cent gave a score of eight (79 per cent scored it six or more). Further, 52 per cent would definitely take part in another consultation, and 45 per cent would consider it, depending on the subject.⁵⁴

vTaiwan

Taiwan



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Deliberation



Citizens
developing
proposals



Citizens
scrutinising
proposals

Overview

vTaiwan is a consultation process which brings together a wide range of stakeholders and through a mix of online and offline activities aims to encourage participants to achieve a 'rough consensus' on specific issues. It was developed by g0v, a group of digital activists, following the Sunflower Movement in 2014. The process is particularly effective for understanding the plurality of views on a subject, providing a space for deliberation and for reaching agreement on relatively complex and controversial topics.

In 2014 the Taiwanese Parliament was surrounded and occupied by peaceful protesters in response to a proposed trade deal with China. These protests became known as the Sunflower Movement. Civil society group g0v played a critical role by campaigning and creating a raft of digital tools to help with communication and coordination during the protests. In the municipal elections that followed, the Kuomintang (KMT) party suffered a landslide defeat and the Prime Minister resigned. A new Prime Minister from the KMT party, Mao Chi-Kuo, was appointed on a platform based on promoting greater use of open data, big data and crowdsourcing in the public sector.

It was in this context that the new Minister for Digital Affairs, Jaclyn Tsai, proposed that g0v volunteers facilitate an online consultation process on a number of issues. She felt that such an approach could be an effective way of engaging a wide range of stakeholder groups in policy discussions, and could speed up the traditionally slow policymaking process.

It was also decided that such a platform should be independent of government. As such, g0v has played an important role as an independent facilitator of the consultation process.

To date, a handful of consensus items decided through the vTaiwan process have been adopted by lawmakers. These include: a crowdsourced bill successfully passed through parliament on Closely Held Company Law; the resolution of a disagreement between civil society activists on the topic of internet alcohol sales; and an agreement by government to ratify six items on ridesharing regulations (related to issues around fair competition, taxation and insurance); and new regulatory agreements on the sharing economy (specifically related to Airbnb).

There are four stages to the vTaiwan process:

1. An initial 'objective' stage where stakeholders, including citizens are simply asked to introduce themselves on an online forum, or share facts and data about the topic, and agree on definitions. A small group of facilitators approve the validity of crowdsourced facts.
2. A 'reflective' stage where stakeholders then reflect and share opinions about those objective facts. When participation numbers are high this may take place on Pol.is.
3. An 'interpretive' stage where a live-streamed offline meeting or working group is formed, containing key stakeholders who summarise participants' hitherto expressed opinions and draw a list of corresponding recommendations.
4. A final 'decision' stage, where recommendations are handed over to government or parliament who make the decision to reject or implement those recommendations as new regulations or laws.

The vTaiwan website acts as the main hub for participants, embedding all necessary information and tools used in a consultation including: timelines; definitions and introductions to the topic; ministerial statements and documents; online forums or surveys; and links to transcripts and videos of any offline meetings. The tools are often adapted according to the topic being addressed.

Recently, vTaiwan have had particular success with Pol.is, an open-source tool for large-scale opinion mapping, which is now hosted on the vTaiwan website for specific consultations. Pol.is is an online survey tool, scalable to thousands, which asks participants to react in a constructive way to one another's opinions in order to find points of consensus. After several weeks of exchange, the results, including all the data, a list of statements achieving rough consensus, and the most divisive statements, are all easily summarised and downloadable as open data for group facilitators to analyse and mapped out in a visualisation.

Participation

As of December 2015, there were 10,000 subscribers to the vTaiwan mailing list and a total of around 1,000 individual participants contributing to the forums (either providing comments, opinions or asking questions to ministries). vTaiwan's first consultation on Closely Held Company Law involved about 2,000 unique viewers on livestream meetings, with approximately 200 suggestions in total, and 20 contributors in the live-streamed working group meetings.⁵⁵ More recently, discussions on Pol.is have involved anywhere between 350 and 2,300 participants. For example, the Pol.is conversation on UberX attracted 1,737 participants, a total of 47,539 votes cast (that is, reactions to other people's opinions with 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass'), and a total of 196 opinions submitted.

For each consultation, vTaiwan facilitators target the relevant stakeholders – including civil society groups, academics, business leaders and citizens – inviting them to take part in the process and to invite their contacts and any other relevant stakeholders that they're aware of. To do this, they also make use of ministerial networks, gov's community of activists, social media advertising and the vTaiwan mailing list. For instance, in the ridesharing consultation, participants at the 'reflective' stage included representatives from taxi driver unions, taxi drivers and private passenger vehicle drivers and citizen passengers. vTaiwan then invited academics, industry experts, union representatives and business representatives from Uber to the subsequent face-to-face discussion (the 'interpretive' stage).

Factors for success

Government buy-in. This has largely been a result of Minister Tsai's initial commitment to the process (she initially agreed, for example, to host offline meetings in government buildings). In addition, all government ministries are signed up with an account on the vTaiwan forum, and any member of the public can ask them to share information regarding existing laws or regulations, to which the relevant ministry is obliged to respond on the forum within seven days. Cross-party support for the process also increases the propensity of representatives to accept the final outcomes.

Multiple stakeholder buy-in. The engagement of diverse stakeholder groups in forming a consensus, through a highly transparent process, helps give the legitimacy necessary for outcomes to gain support from political representatives in the final decision-stage.

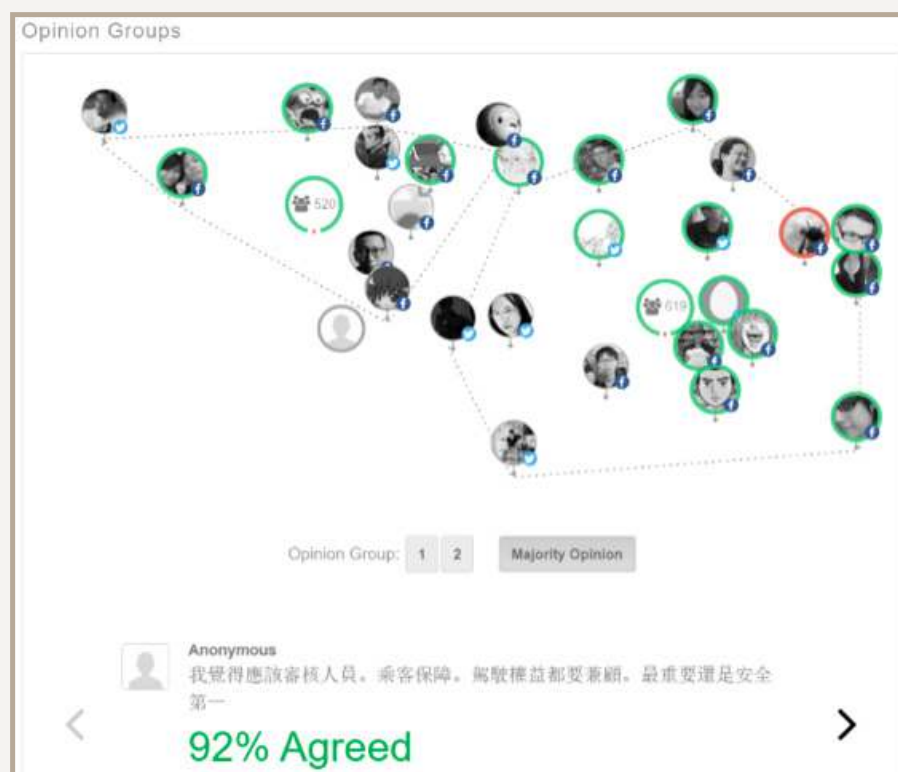
Neutrality. g0v's popularity and its position operating within civil society may have helped in portraying to the public and the stakeholders that the engagement is politically neutral and independent. As Chia-liang Kao, g0v co-founder and leading vTaiwan volunteer, put it: *"people have some issues with coming to a government platform; they feel like they might not be able to express [themselves] freely, or that the government has an agenda"*.⁵⁶

Strong volunteer support. Given that the vTaiwan process is lengthy and made up of multiple stages, having the human resources to facilitate, compile and summarise citizen contributions (in both offline meetings or online forums) has been crucial. Volunteers assist with the moderation of online discussions, performing transcriptions of offline meetings, and other administrative tasks such as organising consultation

meetings, updating web pages, and so on. Volunteers have been drawn largely from the g0v civic community, which experienced a surge in support around the Sunflower Movement: *"we are the first generation that can do democracy, [so volunteers] are drawn largely from the free culture movement, which is very vibrant in Taiwan"*.⁵⁷

An agile operation. Independence and low operating costs have meant the g0v team have been able to employ a highly flexible and experimental approach in developing the vTaiwan process. Audrey Tang, g0v volunteer and lead facilitator for the vTaiwan process, suggests this is in line with the principles of the Sunflower Movement which inspires the vTaiwan process: *"every day we make applications in response to the demand of that day"*. They use open-source software and a toolkit which is constantly being updated and improved by a community of designers and developers.

Use of innovative digital tools. vTaiwan has found success using Pol.is, for example, for the 'reflection' stage. Anyone is able to post a statement, and to 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass' on other statements. On average, there are ten times fewer statements than there are people voting, so, in theory, participants will still realistically be able to see all statements in a group containing several thousand people.⁵⁸ The tool also *"makes the group aware of itself"* by clustering group agreements and disagreements and displaying those groups visually. Unlike traditional forums where the 'reward' is usually the most 'likes', in Pol.is, the 'winning' statements are those that get approval from different opinion groups; as Tang puts it, *"people will strive to find eclectic, nuanced feelings that somehow transcend their differences"*.⁵⁹

Figure 8. Screenshot from the Pol.is conversation on ridesharing⁶⁰

Ongoing challenges

Ensuring all groups are equally represented.

Although the conveners take every effort to ensure that they invite representatives of all standpoints, it does raise some questions as to how representative this can be as it relies heavily on networks of individuals. It's also difficult to assess the representativeness of the platform as it doesn't currently collect background data on participants.

Overcoming the digital divide. So far, consultation topics have been chosen on the assumption that participants are 'netizens', that is, connected to the internet. However, one of the challenges going forward is to explore how the process can be used for topics which require participation from a broader group of citizens.

A high reliance on volunteer support.

While in many respects the support of the g0v community is a strength, it is not clear

whether this is a truly sustainable model. If the vTaiwan process were to be significantly scaled up or the process become more institutionalised, it is not clear whether the necessary level of volunteer support could be maintained.

Political neutrality. On its website, the vTaiwan process is described as neutral and not reflective of the views of any government ministry.⁶¹ However, Audrey Tang, initially a g0v volunteer and the leading creator of the vTaiwan process, has recently been appointed as Taiwan's Minister for Digital Affairs, where she intends to continue work on digital consultations. Moving forward, there may be an associated challenge with how this changes the dynamics of the process, particularly people's perception of it as free from political interests.

Main outcomes and impacts

The vTaiwan process has led to several legislative and regulatory changes. In some instances, this has come when all other routes to find a solution have failed. The issue of online alcohol sales provides a useful example. The major civil society organisations working in the field were in disagreement on the subject and Minister Tsai had predicted that it would take five years to resolve the issue. However, the vTaiwan process broke the deadlock between the various stakeholders, and generated a list of consensus items for lawmakers to implement in just five months. Representatives in government at the time agreed to adopt these recommendations, although this has not yet been done by the new administration.

The transparency of decision-making has also been improved. All the contributions at every stage are publicly available which means that anyone can see how the conversation developed over time and how a particular decision was reached. Of particular note is the consultation on Closely Held Company Law which led to the first bill in Taiwan's history in which civil servants had annotated every line with the specification of where it came from, referring back to a specific point in a video discussion or meeting transcripts.

As Tang explains decisions are also more informed: *"The elected officials still have to see the consultation results of the general public and make the final decision. We're not taking that part away... The point is that the person making the decisions will take full political responsibility for the decisions knowing the popular consensus of the ideas, reflections, and the facts"*.

Finally, it is also difficult for government officials to ignore the outcome of this deliberative process. The crowdsourced Closely Held Company Law bill entered parliament shortly before the summer parliamentary recess, at a time when the two major parties were filibustering and very few bills were being passed. Because representatives from all parties had collaborated with stakeholders during the consultation process, no party wanted to block its progress and it was subsequently one of the only bills during that period to be passed.

The Estonian People's Assembly and Rahvaalgatus

Estonia



Issue framing

Citizens
providing
ideas

Deliberation

The context

In 2012 the ruling Reform Party was beset by a scandal relating to anonymous donations. It was triggered by MP Silver Meikar who admitted channeling funds from unknown donors to the party, and who declared that many other party members did the same. He implicated the Justice Minister Kristen Michal, who subsequently stepped down, despite insufficient evidence to bring charges.

The so-called Silvergate Scandal triggered a decline in support for the major political parties and further increased political distrust and disengagement in a country

already affected by unpopular austerity measures. In November of that year, a group of well-known public figures and intellectuals launched a petition called Charter 12. It was signed by over 17,500 people and was followed by public protests in Tallinn, Tartu and Viljandi under the banner 'Enough of untruthful politics'. Following this, the President held a series of roundtable discussions with the leaders of Charter 12, political representatives and civil society groups in which it was agreed that new proposals were required to address party political funding and increase citizen participation in democratic processes.

What happened?

The Roundtable discussions led to a decision to launch a crowdsourcing process to try and amend legislation in priority areas: reducing the barriers to the creation of political parties; improving political party conduct; reforming the electoral system; and improving public participation in policy making.

This triggered an initiative called Rahvakogu - 'The People's Assembly'. The five phase process comprised: gathering proposals (and comments on them) online; collation and analysis of proposals;

impact assessment and expert opinion on proposed legislative changes; stakeholder deliberation events on five issues identified as priorities; deliberation days to select final proposals for submission to Parliament. The Your Priorities platform was used, adopting the Icelandic template, to enable a rapid roll-out. During the three-week period of crowdsourcing proposals, over 60,000 people visited the site, with 2,000 registered users. Over 2,000 proposals and 4,000 comments were made.⁶² Following the analysis and deliberative processes, 15 proposals were submitted to Parliament.

Impact

Three new items of legislation were passed arising from the original Rahvakogu and another four proposals partially adopted. This is a high level of success compared to similar efforts in some other countries. A study showed that almost half of participants were satisfied with the initial process and there is a growing demand for citizen participation in political decision-making.⁶³

The same survey showed that compared to the general public, participants *"were over-represented in every form of political participation: from formal participation (such as contacting politicians and working in political organizations), to informal participation (such as signing petitions and boycotting certain goods)"*.⁶⁴ They were also much more likely to be educated, professional, right-wing males. In other words, contributors still represented 'the usual suspects' who engage with politics in other ways already.

Rahvaalgatus.ee

One of the laws passed related to the creation of the right for citizen-led proposals to be submitted to Parliament. In February 2016 a new online platform was launched by one of the facilitators of the People's Assembly process, the Estonian Cooperation Assembly Foundation. It was built in collaboration with Let's Do It, the foundation which created the open-source software Citizen OS. Named rahvaalgatus.ee following a public naming contest, it facilitates the process of making proposals, debating and voting on them, as well as digital signing and the sharing of updates. Citizens require 1,000 signatures for their proposals to reach discussion by Parliamentary Committees.

Since its launch in March 2016, six initiatives under Rahvaalgatus have reached the 1,000 signature threshold and four passed to Parliamentary Committees. However, the site faced major technical difficulties in the first six months and so all promotional activity was suspended. Thus the proposals made during the majority of 2016 come only from those who have found the platform by chance or word-of-mouth, rather than as the result of a concerted engagement drive. For this reason there is a skew in the recent successful proposals with two relating to marijuana and three environmental issues.

As of late 2016, the platform is running in beta-mode with improvements being made in response to user feedback. New awareness raising campaigns have been launched, initially focusing on young adults, digitally engaged older people, and Russian speakers who are typically the least engaged with civil society and social issues in Estonia. The plan is for *"an intensive ten months of campaigning and working directly with the main target groups to achieve a critical mass of users for the platform."*⁶⁵ Plans are also being developed in conjunction with partner organisations to raise the overall level of participation.

The Finnish Parliament

Finland



Issue framing



Citizens
providing
ideas



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Citizens
developing
proposals

The context

In 2012, a new Citizens' Initiative Act enshrined the right of Finnish citizens to submit proposals for new legislation or amendments to existing legislation. It was designed to enhance levels of direct

democracy in the country. When an initiative reaches 50,000 signatures of support (paper or online) it is reviewed and debated by Parliament who can choose to accept, amend or reject it.

What happened?

A swift early response to the opportunities of the Act came from the Helsinki-based NGO 'Open Ministry' (Avoin Ministeriö) which established an independent platform for proposed initiatives. €30,000 of funding came from a competition run by Sitra, the Finnish innovation agency. Open Ministry created a platform which enabled citizens to propose an idea and for others to debate and comment on, as well as to register an online signature of support. The Open Ministry platform stood in contrast to the official Ministry of Justice site, which allows only the registering of initiatives and the gathering of e-signatures. Open Ministry generated significant citizen engagement in its early period of operation, with multiple initiatives proposed and thousands of signatures of support.

In addition to crowdsourcing initiatives and collecting signatures of support, Open Ministry expanded into a second area of activity - the collaborative drafting of new or amended Bills in areas suggested

by citizens. In 2016, this was undertaken on Copyright Law, for example. Open Ministry has connected interested citizens with volunteer lawyers who are now collaboratively working on the Bill.

However, by 2016 the Ministry of Justice site had become the main channel for proposing Citizen Initiatives and collecting signatures of support. Open Ministry was struggling to maintain its operation due to a lack of volunteers so the site stopped supporting the registration of new initiatives and now redirects citizens to the official site. The work to collaboratively develop and draft new laws continues.

Other activities have also been undertaken in response to the new Act. In 2013, the Ministry of Environment sought to review and amend the Off-Road Traffic Law. Previous attempts to reform the law, which relates primarily to snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles used in the countryside, had stalled due to the level of controversy over the proposals. The Finnish Ministry of Environment therefore

decided to partner with the Parliamentary Committee for the Future to try and crowdsource a solution. Using a dedicated website a four phase process was carried out: problem mapping; ideation of solutions; evaluation of proposals; and legislative

drafting. Citizens could input into the first two phases before policymakers and lawyers carried out the third and fourth stages. As of late 2016, however, the law remains stalled again at the third and fourth stages.

Impact

As of October 2016, 13 Citizen Initiatives had reached the threshold for scrutiny (via both Open Ministry and the Ministry of Justice), covering everything from gay marriage, fur farming, and membership of the Euro, to euthanasia and the teaching of Swedish in schools. Only one, the Gay Marriage Law, was passed. These initiatives share a number of features: experienced campaign organisers leading a high level of PR and outreach; strong media coverage; and the collection of signatures both online and offline.⁶⁶

Apart from the Same-Sex Marriage Law, there appears to have been limited impact of the Act, with all other initiatives failing to be accepted. There is anecdotal evidence that there is resistance among civil servants and representatives to the approach of Citizen Initiatives, even when Ministers are supportive, with proposals being rejected for minor technicalities.⁶⁷

Questions have also been asked about the extent to which Open Ministry had an impact on the legitimacy of policymaking. A 2012 study of citizens who participated in the first initiative which achieved 50,000 signatures (related to a ban on fur farming) revealed that it was mainly privileged groups participating online, although the majority of signatures were actually collected on paper. Open Ministry participants were typically male, 21-40, well-educated and from urban areas - although this is a younger demographic than many traditional engagement techniques reach.⁶⁸ Similar data is not available for later initiatives or for those processed via the Ministry of Justice site.

However, a survey of participants in the Off-Road Traffic Law crowdsourcing activity also showed similar results. Over 80 per cent of contributors were male and many were politically active (for example, one-third had written to their MP and one-third had written an op-ed article for a newspaper) and three-quarters had participated in online forums before.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the crowdsourcing activity did generate over 500 initial ideas, later merged into 250, and over 4,000 comments from over 700 registered participants.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the stalling of the Off-Road Traffic Law is attributed partly to the way in which the crowdsourcing process was structured. In essence, the online activity generated a huge number of diverse ideas which experts and policymakers then had no meaningful way of prioritising and aggregating them into policy, as citizens themselves were not invited to participate in that stage.⁷¹ It is clear that although the Act set out a clear ambition for increased direct democracy, there is still some way to go to achieve this.

The UK Parliament's Evidence Checks

UK



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Citizens
monitoring
and assessing
public actions
and services

The context

As early as 1999, the UK Government declared that it *"expects more of policymakers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policymaking and better focus on policies that will deliver long-term goals"*.⁷² A decade later, the House

of Commons Science and Technology Committee launched the Evidence Check programme. It was designed to establish what the evidence is which underpins policy in specific areas, how robust that evidence is, what the gaps are, and to determine how closely based on the evidence policies are.⁷³

What happened?

During the course of an Evidence Check two questions are initially asked of Government: (1) what is the policy? and (2) on what evidence is the policy based? The Government response is then considered by the Committee and published online. Comments and further evidence are then invited, with any individual or organisation able to submit a response via a web forum. Oral evidence sessions are held and traditional written evidence submissions are also accepted. Originally driven by the Science and Technology Committee, Evidence Checks have also since been undertaken by Select Committees on Education (in 2014/15), Health (2016), and Women and Equalities (2016, called a Fact Check).

The web forum technology, however, is extremely basic, and serves as little more than a way of capturing written submissions that are published instantly. There is no interactivity that would enable participants to respond directly to comments made by another person. Following mixed responses to Evidence Checks, in 2016 the Science and Technology Committee used a framework, the evidence transparency tool that the Institute for Government developed in partnership with the Alliance for Useful Evidence and Sense About Science, to try and improve the outcomes.

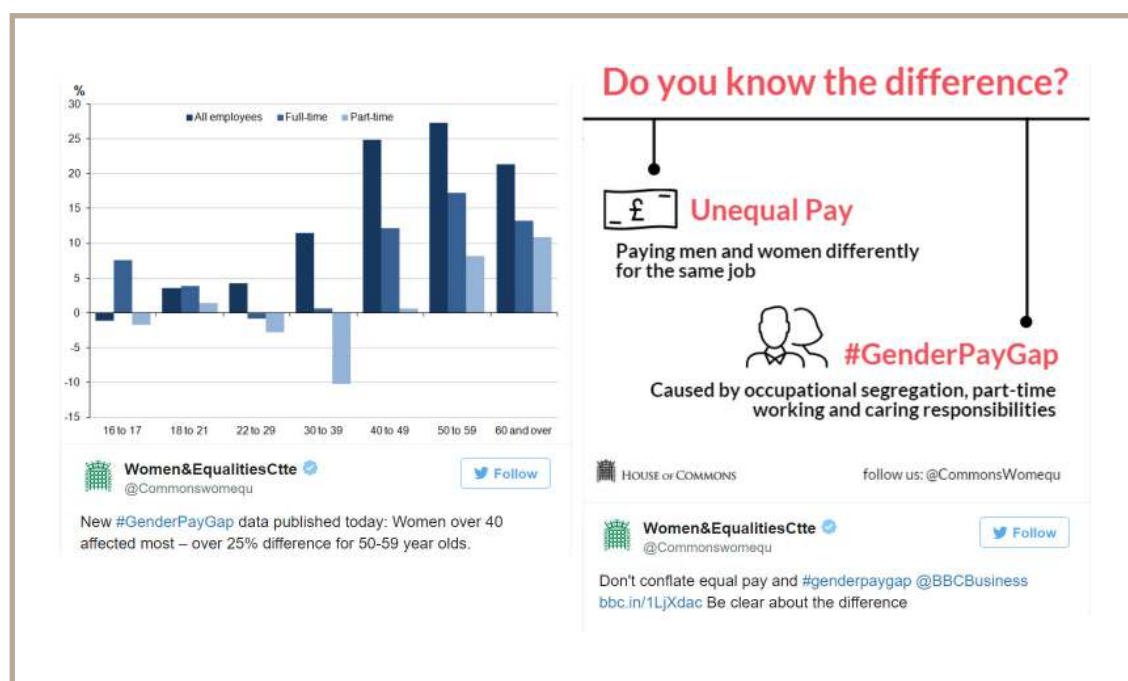
Impact

Engagement with Evidence Checks has been mixed, as has the quality of responses. They have varied from no responses at all on an Evidence Check relating to *"Innovation in, and accelerated access to, healthcare"*, to over 500 on an Evidence Check relating to the smart meter roll-out, although almost all of these were simply worried comments from citizens rather than focused on the quality of evidence.

The Evidence Checks to date have been shown to work better when focused on tight policy issues, and when Committees clearly define the terms of the debate, providing specific terms, definitions or statistics when conducting their outreach. There is also a clear need to consider who the audience is for each Check. The Fact Check run by the Women and Equalities Committee is instructive in this regard. Core to the success of the approach was to target specific organisations and communities on Twitter who were known to have interest, expertise and/or lived experience in the relevant areas. Specific hashtags were used to build a community and an informed debate around the topic (see Figure 9).

The Committee then split the bill into sections and asked for contributions, receiving between three and 12 contributions on each.⁷⁴ By specifically engaging the right community, the content was more useful and focused and much of it was incorporated into the subsequent Ministerial Briefing. It also led to a specific change in the government evidence used. The original evidence provided by The Department for Education included the statistic that 5 per cent⁷⁵ of teachers think homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic bullying is a common form of bullying in their school. This was challenged by two Fact Check participants and subsequently revised to 15 per cent,⁷⁶ followed by a change in the Government's position on the issue.

Figure 9: Using statistics and definitions to build a more informed debate on Twitter



Images courtesy of Tom Shane, UK Parliament.

The UK Parliament's Public Reading Stage Pilot

UK



Citizens
providing
technical
expertise



Citizens
scrutinising
proposals

The context

In 2004 the House of Lords Constitution Committee recommended in its Fourteenth Report on Parliament and the Legislative Process, that both Houses should make sure information about their work is available in the public domain and opportunities for

public input adequately promoted, including *"the greater use of e-consultation"*.⁷⁷ In 2009, the Select Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons (The Wright Committee) reiterated the need for greater public involvement in the legislative process.

What happened?

In 2010 a pilot phase of 'Public Readings' of Bills was launched with the aim of giving the public an opportunity to comment on proposed legislation online. Between 2010 and 2013, three Bills passed through a pilot process. Bills were divided into sections and over two to three-week periods citizens were

encouraged to comment on specific areas of interest, as well as make overarching comments. Following the initial pilot Bill, an improved website was developed using a rapid prototyping process based on user stories and feedback from users and developers from the first iteration.

Impact

There were differing levels of engagement across the three pilot Bills. They ranged from contributions from just 23 organisations on the Small Charitable Donations Bill to over 1,000 comments on the Children and Families Bill. However, in the latter instance an evaluation found that the majority of contributors were prompted to do so by third sector organisations and interest groups, frequently reflected in identical phrasing of comments, and typically individuals who have been involved in campaigning before.⁷⁸

It is evident from the experiences with all three Bills that there are some common challenges with this type of public engagement. First, from the citizen perspective, the dense and technical language can be difficult to understand and the length of such documents can be a deterrent. Clearer guidance is needed about what citizens are being asked to

do and how – i.e. linking comments to specific sections of the Bill, proposing alternatives where appropriate, and keeping comments concise and focused. A lack of feedback and discussion on the site also served to reinforce scepticism about the process.⁷⁹

Second, from the perspective of the Bill Team, there needs to be sufficient time for the inputs to be analysed and, if submissions are insufficiently focused, they can be of limited use. There was also some resistance from MPs to taking the findings into consideration. The Bill Team commented that *"The Department does not feel that it has learned anything new from the Public Reading"*,⁸⁰ with no added value for sections which had already been subject to extensive pre-legislative scrutiny and consultation.

As a result of the pilot's outcomes, the Government decided not to roll out Public Reading Stages for all Bills. Instead they committed to promoting public engagement while seeking *"to ensure a more proportionate and targeted approach, so that the type and scale of engagement is proportional to the potential impacts of the proposal."*⁸¹

Figure 10: A comment on the Small Charitable Donations Bill⁸²

Contents

1. Top-up payments in respect of small donations made to eligible charities
2. Meaning of "eligible charity"
3. Meaning of "small donation"
4. Connected charities
5. Meaning of "connected"
6. Charities running charitable activities in community buildings
7. Meaning of "running charitable activities in a community building" etc
8. Meaning of "community building"
9. Connected charities and community buildings
10. Overpayments
11. Management of top-up payments
12. Change of charity's legal form
13. Power to alter specified amount etc
14. Top-up payments not taxable
15. Northern Ireland
16. Regulations and orders
17. General interpretation
18. Financial provisions
19. Extent
20. Commencement and transitional provision
21. Short title
- Schedule

Search Bill text

Search

1 (1) A charity is entitled to a payment from HMRC (a "top-up payment") if—

- (a) the charity is an eligible charity for a tax year
- (b) the charity has made a successful gift aid exemption claim in respect of gifts made to it in the tax year,
- (c) small donations are made to the charity in the tax year, and
- (d) the charity makes a claim in respect of small donations made to it in the tax year.

1 (2) The amount of the top-up payment is—

$$SD \times \frac{R}{100 - R}$$

where—

SD is the amount of the small donations to which the claim relates, and R is the percentage rate of the basic rate of income tax for the tax year in question.

1 (3) A charity is not entitled to top-up payments in respect of small donations made to it in a tax year in excess of the maximum donations limit for the charity for the tax year.

1 (4) The "maximum donations limit" for a charity for a tax year is—

- (a) an amount equal to double the gift aid donations amount for the charity for the tax year, or
- (b) if less, the specified amount for the charity for the tax year.

1 (5) The "gift aid donations amount" for a charity for a tax year is the amount of the gifts made to the charity in the tax year and in respect of which it has made successful

1 comments

[Redacted], Trustee of two charities:

I am trustee of two small charities and think the Government and HMRC should be congratulated on this legislation. It will provide significant support to small charities and is particularly welcome in these times of austerity.

The way the legislation caters for different charities to ensure fair access to the scheme seems particularly ingenious. For example the community buildings rule seems to be a particularly elegant way of dealing with what was clearly a difficult problem.

The way the scheme works with the Gift Aid scheme is also to be welcomed. They seem to compliment each other well and using the same definitions etc. will make it easy to deal with.

145 days ago Report this comment

Better Reykjavik/ Better Neighbourhoods

Iceland



Issue framing



Citizens
providing
information



Citizens
providing
ideas



Deliberation



Citizens making
decisions

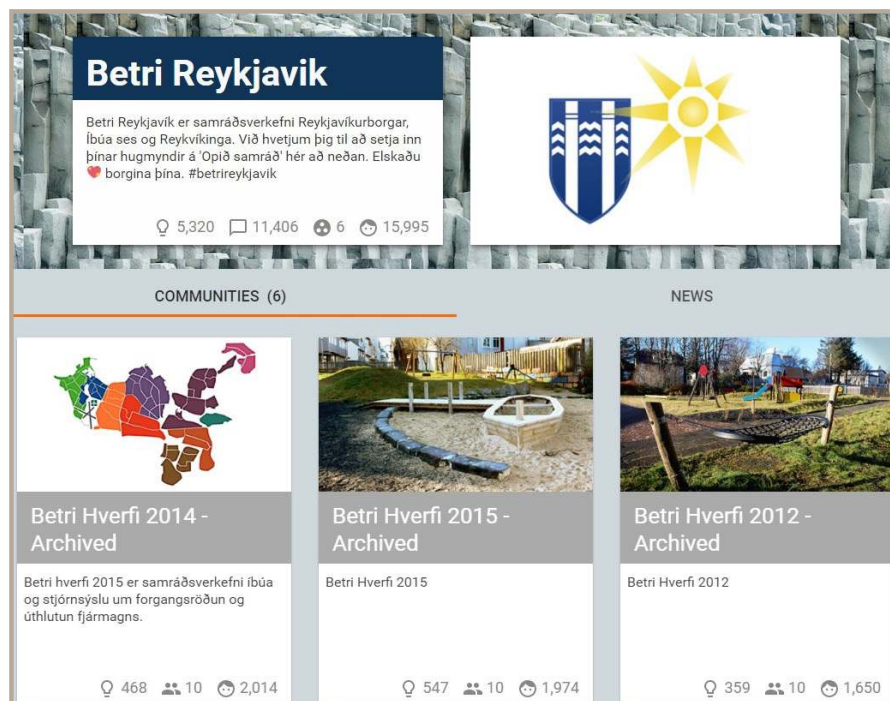
Overview

In 2008, three of Iceland's banks collapsed, sending the country into an economic maelstrom and marking the beginning of the global economic crisis. An investigation into the country's financial collapse accused a cabal of politicians, financiers and business people of corruption and illegal activities. The financial crisis quickly led to a political crisis; the government was replaced by a new administration promising transparency and the newly formed Best Party won local council elections in Reykjavik. In just three years, Icelanders' trust in Parliament fell from 40 per cent in 2008 to just 11 per cent in 2011.⁸³

As a result of these developments, there was a sense of urgency amongst citizens and civil society organisations for new political actors, greater transparency and a greater role for citizens in decision-making.⁸⁴ Your Priorities, an open-source crowdsourcing tool developed in Iceland in 2008 by

the non-profit organisation the Citizens Foundation, emerged in this context.⁸⁵ It was actually the result of a number of earlier projects including 'The Shadow Parliament', a platform which enabled users to track debates in Parliament, discuss debates and propose amendments to bills and 'The Ministry of Ideas', which enabled the discussion of innovative ideas. These two projects were merged into a new platform, called 'The Shadow City' which focused on soliciting innovative ideas from citizens at the city, rather than national level.

Your Priorities has since been used across the world by national governments, city councils, public bodies and civil society campaigns. The platform has now been used by at least 700,000 people, including organisations such as the Pirate Party, the Estonian national government, and NHS England in the UK, among others.

Figure 11: The Better Reykjavik Home Page⁸⁶

Even though it was open to all political parties, it was only the newly formed Best Party that really embraced 'The Shadow City' platform. The Best Party was a protest party and did not have a conventional manifesto. In fact they made absurd pledges – such as free access to swimming pools and towels and stopping corruption by participating in it openly – in order to satirise political parties and political debates. So when they were actually elected, they saw the Shadow City platform as a way of generating ideas and giving citizens greater influence and power over local decision-making. So in 2010 they asked the platform's founders Róbert Bjarnason and Gunnar Grímsson of the Citizen's Foundation to set up a specific platform for the council – Better Reykjavik - to solicit ideas from local residents, and later, Better Neighbourhoods. Five-thousand users registered within a few months of launch.

Better Reykjavik is an idea generation platform for the city and Better Neighbourhoods is the platform for annual participatory budgeting in districts across the city. These platforms enable citizens to suggest, debate, and rank ideas for improving their city. It also gives them the opportunity to vote on specific proposals, thereby giving them the power to make decisions about how local resources are spent and allocated. To date, more than 70,000 people have taken part, out of a population of 120,000 people in Reykjavik.

Anyone can post an idea on the Better Reykjavik platform or add points in response to others which are separated in columns, either 'for' or 'against' the idea. Ideas, as well as the related individual comments, can then be up- and down- voted by the rest of the community. Every month, the 15 most popular ideas are processed by Reykjavik Council by the appropriate standing committee. Citizens are then informed about how and whether these ideas will be implemented. Since 2010, 1,045 ideas were processed by the city council, with 220 approved, 289 rejected and 336 still in process.⁸⁷

The Better Neighbourhoods platform has also enabled citizens to suggest and vote on projects. For the city's annual participatory budgeting exercise, citizens submit ideas which are then evaluated by the City of Reykjavik Construction Board to establish the cost and feasibility of each proposal. Projects which are deemed eligible are then voted on by the public, with the most popular implemented by the city. Each year roughly 450 million ISK (€3.6 million) or the equivalent of 5 per cent of the city's construction budget is allocated to this process.⁸⁸ So far, 420 ideas have been approved through Better Neighbourhoods.

Ideas vary in scope and scale but one of the early successes was an idea put forward by a nine-year-old girl requesting more school field trips.⁸⁹ Other examples include improvements to parks, playgrounds, roads, and other small-scale public investments; larger-scale examples have included projects to renovate a small disused power station into a youth centre, or a project to increase the provision of shelters for homeless people.⁹⁰

The vote is electronic, secure and binding with an authentication process which means that each citizen has only one vote. As residents vote for projects, they can see how the overall budget is reduced. This forces citizens to make a choice between fewer, more expensive projects versus more, smaller and cheaper projects.⁹¹

Participation

Since 2010, 15,962 registered users have submitted 5,312 ideas and 11,362 comments on the Better Reykjavik platform.⁹² Overall, there have been more than 70,000 visitors to the site, remarkable if you consider that Reykjavik has a population of about 120,000.⁹³ However, relatively little is known about who has actually taken part. Early on, the Citizens Foundation tried to gather information such as age, gender, and other profiling data but participation rates slumped. As such, a decision was made *"not to sacrifice participation to get the data"*⁹⁴ and instead use social media or email authentication.

On Better Neighbourhoods, however, the authentication process is managed by the National Registry, which collects data about participants. Participation on the site fell from 6,500 in 2012 to 5,500 in 2014 but then increased to more than 7,000 in 2015, when 950 proposals were made following a large online marketing campaign and the introduction of a new version of Your Priorities that encourages users to share ideas on social media.⁹⁵ The age profile has remained broadly consistent with almost 50 per cent of voters aged 36 to 55; roughly 30 per cent aged between 16 and 35 and about 20 per cent are 56 or older.⁹⁶ Youth participation is particularly low.⁹⁷

Factors for success

Strong support from the city council and clear integration into local government administration. The commitment by the city council to formally process the highest voted ideas on a monthly basis has been important for incentivising engagement by making participants feel like their contributions have value.

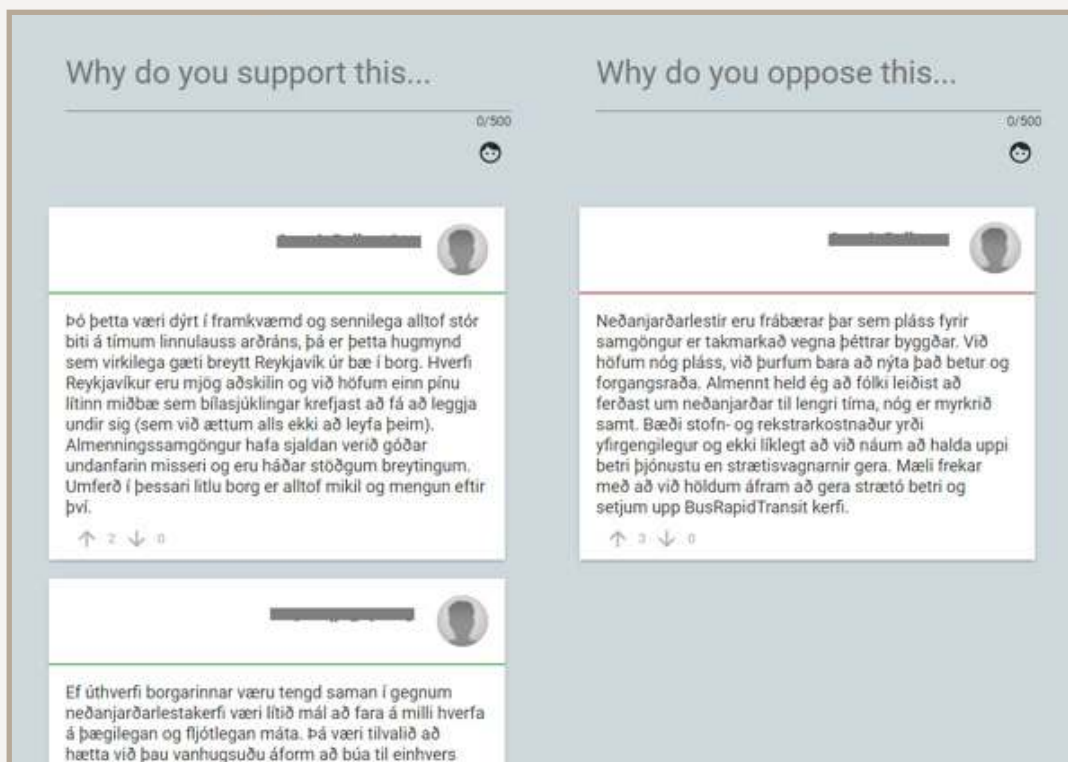
Clear feedback loops between the city council and citizens. *"Saying yes or no is not the main issue"* suggests Grímsson. One positive discovery for politicians has been the realisation that keeping people updated and explaining why decisions have been made, leads to a positive understanding and acceptance, even if the outcome is not the result the citizen was seeking.

Extensive advertising of the programmes.

Although more is needed, data from two days of the participatory budgeting process found that around 50 per cent of visits came from the sharing of ideas on Facebook,⁹⁸ where the platform is advertised.

Interface designed to encourage collaboration and deliberation. In particular, the separate columns 'for' or 'against' make it impossible to reply directly to someone you disagree with. Instead users are encouraged to post broader and more positive arguments that appeal to the whole group. Splitting the debate between two separate columns also helps to show the multiplicity of views on a subject as positive and negative are presented side by side.

Figure 12: A debate on Better Reykjavik⁹⁹



Ongoing challenges

Ensuring breadth of participation and representation. At the moment, relatively little is known about those who participate in Better Reykjavik due to the decline in participation when data was requested. However, a recent evaluation of Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods found that participation is more biased towards those that are university educated, those who have higher salaries and people aged between 36 and 55.¹⁰⁰

Increasing motivations for participation. In a recent study investigating reasons for non-participation, common responses included a feeling that the budget available for the participatory budgeting exercise was too small to create meaningful change and that

only small projects, and not bigger issues, were being addressed using this approach. Other issues included a lack of awareness about the platform and process, and concerns about the quality of proposals.¹⁰¹

Lack of public understanding of the platform and process. The lack of understanding about both the process and the scope of city powers means that *"officials get really annoyed when people who came up with the ideas don't have a clue about what the city is or isn't able to do"*.¹⁰²

Managing resource requirements. The large number of ideas being generated during participatory budgeting is placing strain on both city officials in terms of their capacity, and the IT systems.

Main outcomes and impacts

There is no doubt that as a result of Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods every neighbourhood has seen investment in facilities and infrastructure that would not have been conceived of by local politicians or civil servants.¹⁰³ In part this is because local residents better understand their needs and those of their communities but also because the platform ensures that poor ideas get sifted out by the wisdom of the crowd. It helps to *"open up decision-making processes to a wider range of options and helps the system think outside the box"*.¹⁰⁴

The extent to which the platform has led to improvements in trust of local politics has yet to be analysed. Trust in the city council declined from 22 per cent in February 2010 to 15 per cent in February 2012, but increased to 31 per cent by February 2014.¹⁰⁵ In a 2014 interview, the city's web director Hreinn Hreinsson suggested that *"Better Reykjavik is one of the reasons that the City of Reykjavik administration is quite stable... Trust in parliament is less than ten [whereas] trust in city government is much higher"*,¹⁰⁶ but evidence remains anecdotal. Nonetheless, a recent evaluation suggests high levels of satisfaction with the platforms and process. In a survey of 2,500 people, 67 per cent of those aware of the initiatives were happy or very happy, while only 7 per cent were unhappy or very unhappy.¹⁰⁷

Decide Madrid

Spain



Issue framing

Citizens
providing
ideas

Deliberation

Citizens
developing
proposalsCitizens making
decisions

Overview

The 2011 15M demonstrations in Spain, otherwise known as the Indignados Movement, set the stage for mass political change. As Spain was approaching regional and municipal elections, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against cuts to public services, political corruption, and a lack of democratic transparency. Much of this activity was aided by a dense network of online activity, with activists, bloggers, and website developers campaigning and sharing via social media.

In the 2015 municipal elections, the Ahora Madrid coalition, consisting mainly of the Podemos and Ganemos parties, won 20 out of 57 seats in the Madrid City council. A minority government was formed in agreement with the socialist party PSOE, putting an end to 20 years of government by the right-wing Partido Popular. Almost immediately, in September 2015, the city launched the citizen participation platform

Decide Madrid. It was conceived in the ethos of 15M, with the intention of promoting more direct democracy, accountability and transparency in local decision-making.

Decide Madrid aims to open up a number of channels for public participation in democratic decision-making. Early on, the initiative came up against criticism from the opposition, who described it as an 'internet dictatorship'. The initially slow pace of registrations made it difficult to counter criticisms at first but it has grown steadily in popularity, with approximately 200,000 citizens now registered, although this still represents just a small fraction of Madrid's population of over 3.1 million.¹⁰⁸

All residents of Madrid (aged 16 and over) can participate. Citizens can participate online or via 26 Citizen Service Offices located across Madrid, where civil servants have been trained to assist anyone who has no internet access but wishes to participate.

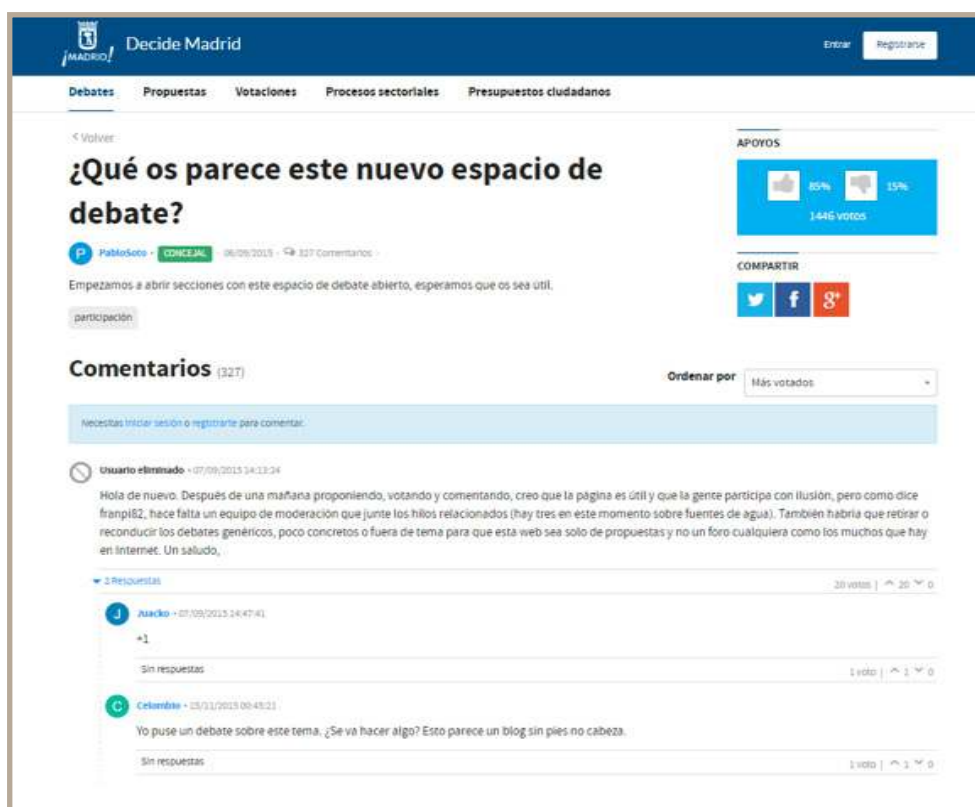
The main features of the Decide Madrid platform are:

1. **Proposals:** Any resident can create a proposal for a new local law which is shared on the platform for 12 months, during which time other residents are able to make votes of support. If proposals gather approval from 1 per cent of the census population over 16 years of age - the equivalent of around 27,000 supporters - they are advertised at the top of the web portal and citizens are given 45 days to further consider and discuss the idea before a final public vote. If approved, the Council has one month following the vote to draw up technical reports on the legality, feasibility and cost of the proposal, which are all published on the platform. The current government has agreed that any proposal that reaches this stage will be implemented.

In mid-2016 the threshold of votes required to take a proposal to the next stage was halved (from 2 per cent of the population to 1 per cent), because too few ideas were reaching the next stage. So far 13,000 proposals have been created but only two have made it through. These include a plan to make Madrid '100 per cent sustainable' and another for a single public transport ticketing system.

2. **Debates:** Debates do not trigger a specific action by the Council, but are a useful way of gauging the public's opinions on a given topic. Registered users can open and contribute to debates, vote in favour of or against a motion, or provide additional comments. In some cases, Councillors contribute to debates (see Figure 13). Their contributions are highlighted, helping to boost public participation and establishing a direct channel of communication between citizens and local representatives.

Figure 13: 'What do you think of this new debate space?' - The first debate launched on Decide Madrid by Councillor Pablo Soto who co-created the platform¹⁰⁹



3. **Participatory budgeting:** The city allocated €60 million (€24 million for city-wide projects and €36 million for single-district projects) for the participatory budgeting process, which is planned to take place on an annual basis. In addition to collecting proposals on the platform, physical debate spaces are organised in each district where people can discuss and work together on ideas. All proposals then go up for an initial public vote: citizens are allowed ten votes for city-wide proposals and ten votes for projects in their chosen district. The Council then considers each of the top-voted proposals, reviewing cost, legality, technical feasibility, and fit with the criteria of the Council's investment budget. In 2016, 5,184 proposals were submitted in the first round.¹¹⁰

If there are any duplicates the Council encourages people to unify their efforts. Finally, all feasible proposals (623 in 2016), are put to a final vote whereby each citizen is allocated a specific portion of the budget and may vote for any proposal they wish until their budget is depleted. The highest voted proposals are included in the initial draft of the city Council's annual general budget.

4. **Sectoral Processes:** This section of the platform hosts consultations on a diverse range of issues. For example, citizens have been able to vote on designs for the remodelling of the Plaza d'España, contribute to a Human Rights Plan for the city, and comment on the draft text for the Transparency Ordinance of the City of Madrid. In April 2016, residents were given the chance to suggest and vote on questions to be put to Politicians of all parties during a special 'Open Plenary' day.

Participation

Any citizen can create an account with just an email address and in this way make proposals and comment on all sections of Decide Madrid. In order to be able to vote on proposals, however, individuals must provide information such as national identity number, date of birth and postal code. The verification process automatically adds gender. This enables a greater level of understanding about the overall profile and mix of participants. The 2016 participatory budgeting exercise yielded 45,522 total participants. Of these, there was an equal gender split (51 per cent male; 49 per cent female) and although it was skewed to those aged 30-49 (60 per cent) and away from older voters (10 per cent aged 60 or over), there was participation across all age groups.¹¹¹

However, a recent poll of 1,004 people commissioned by the city Council discovered that only 56 per cent of residents are aware of Decide Madrid. Yet while 75 per cent of university educated people had heard of it, that compares to 45 per cent whose highest level of education is Basic Secondary (to age 16) and 39 per cent of those completing Upper Secondary studies (to age 18). In terms of registrations, the education gap is less significant, with 21 per cent of university educated respondents registered, compared to 13 per cent of those achieving Basic Secondary and 17 per cent of those completing Upper Secondary. At the moment data is not gathered according to ethnicity or socio-economic background, for example, but there are plans to increase data analysis in the future.¹¹²

Why has Decide Madrid been successful?

Significant PR and communications. A launch campaign in 2015 led to the Decide Madrid platform seeing high peaks of around 3,250 contributions per day. In the following two months, daily activity stabilised at around 500 contributions, mainly on the 'proposals' section. Since then,

additional waves of PR, outdoor advertising (see Figure 14) have led to spikes in activity, albeit on a short-term basis. €200,000 of public money was used to promote the 2016 participatory budgeting process, equating to more than €4 per voter.¹¹³

Figure 14: Outdoor advertising promoting Decide Madrid¹¹⁴



Tangible outcomes. The nature of participatory budgeting means that citizens can easily see the benefits of participating as direct financial investments are made in their chosen projects. Increased engagement with city councillors is also tangible and participation by councillors in online debates has led to increased participation.

User-friendly website design. Miguel Arana Catania, Participation Manager for Madrid City Council, explains how the website seamlessly integrates the different

opportunities for participation in one platform, observing that it's "very important that all... features appear on one platform. So people see a range of processes when they come to visit the site, instead of having a website for different things."¹¹⁵ In addition, the site is designed so that users can easily find the content they're interested in, with proposals given prominence on the landing page. The site also has a 'filtering system' which means the most popular proposals appear at the top of the page and comments are also organised so users can reply to each other, often collapsing into 'sub-debates'.

What are the main challenges facing the project?

Financial and human resource requirements.

The participatory budgeting process received thousands of ideas from citizens which had to be processed by civil servants with feasibility plans developed for more popular proposals. Although the platform has been designed to minimise the administrative burden as far as possible, and is undergoing constant improvement in this respect, the scale of the task remains large.

Improving citizen visibility of proposals. The high volume of proposals currently makes it difficult for users to identify those of interest, leading to a high degree of duplication. This may partly explain why despite over

13,000 proposals, only two have reached the required threshold for the next stage.

Broadening participation and increasing representativeness.

At present, less than 10 per cent of the population of Madrid is registered. A Council survey showed that only 11 per cent of those who have not registered cited a lack of internet/IT access as the reason, compared to 27 per cent claiming a lack of time, 16 per cent considering it of no interest, 11 per cent blaming laziness or 11 per cent feeling it is pointless.¹¹⁶ It is evident that there is much more work needed to explain the benefits of the system to most citizens.

What have the main impacts and outcomes been?

The Decide Madrid platform is still young but early indications around the impact of the site are positive. In particular, the team is happy with the quality of citizen contributions; there are very few instances of trolling and many show a high level of sensitivity to disenfranchised groups and aim to improve social cohesion, such as through improving housing for victims of domestic violence.

However, in order to increase the legitimacy of decision-making, it is necessary now to focus on increasing the number of participants, and to improve the overall representativeness of those contributing – to make sure that both the youngest and the oldest are being heard, and monitoring characteristics such as socio-economic background, to ensure that no group is unwittingly excluded.

On a wider level, the initiative has had significant impact beyond Madrid – there has been interest from a number of other cities around the world looking to emulate the project. According to Miguel Arana Catania, *"next year we're talking with around 15 cities that are trying similar things, and many others in Spain"*.¹¹⁷ Already cities in Spain such as Barcelona, A Coruña and Oviedo have launched very similar platforms, based on the open-source Consul software which underpins Decide Madrid.

Madame Mayor, I have an idea

France



Issue framing

Citizens
providing
informationCitizens
providing
ideas

Deliberation

Citizens
developing
proposalsCitizens
scrutinising
proposalsCitizens making
decisions

Overview

In 2014, the new Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, set out a vision of a more collaborative city which responded to social demand for greater citizen participation in decision-making. This has since been summarised by Pauline Véron, Deputy Mayor of Paris, who said *"We knew that it was no longer enough for us to merely inform or provide information. Parisians wanted to actually help projects evolve... We wanted to construct a stronger relationship with citizens"*.¹¹⁸

In September 2014, just a few months after the election, a participatory budgeting process was piloted. For the pilot, the ideas were not crowdsourced - 15 proposals were put forward by the City administration for discussion and vote by Parisians. A budget of €20 million was allocated to the selected initiatives and citizens were able to vote online and offline.

In 2015 the participatory budgeting process was expanded and fully launched. A total of €500 million has been earmarked for the process until 2020. The budget for the 2016 iteration is €100 million, up from €65 million in 2015, with small increases planned in each of the following years. In 2016, €10 million of the budget was reserved for children to vote on projects for youth and education, and €30 million for projects in deprived areas ('quartiers populaires') to address concerns about representation.¹¹⁹

Now all proposals are generated by Parisians themselves. The process has

five phases: during January and February project proposals can be made online, which are in turn supported by many neighbourhood workshops. Anyone can comment online on the proposals. From March to May there is a co-creation process to bring together, online and in person, representatives of similar proposals to develop and refine proposals.

Over the summer selected projects are then shared online for public review. These meet minimum criteria such as being for wide public benefit, technically feasible, and within budgetary scope. They are selected by an elected Committee, based in the relevant arrondissement or Paris-wide, depending on the project's geographic scope, made up of representatives of political parties, the City Administration, civil society, and citizens. Support is provided for projects to assist people in promoting and campaigning for their idea. In September citizens are then able to vote, either online or in person at designated locations with people trained to provide support. Successful proposals are included in the December budget and work begins the following year.

Once projects have been approved, there are multiple ways for people to follow their progress - from updates on the online platform, to infographics created by the team, to Google maps showing how particular areas will be changed by the choices made (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: A map which shows all the projects in one district of the city¹²⁰

Participation

Paris has seen some of the highest level of participation of any participatory budgeting process in the world. In the initial 2014 pilot over 41,000 votes were cast in total. Nine projects were selected, ranging from vertical gardens to urban sports facilities to the renovation of outdoor 'kiosks' for music and arts in public spaces.

The 2015 iteration represented a significant expansion of the initiative. Over 5,000 ideas were proposed, of which 3,000 passed the initial basic criteria. Those were subsequently whittled down to 624 which were then put forward for a public vote. In the final stage 67,000 votes (+/- 3 per cent of the population) were cast and 188 projects accepted.¹²¹ In 2016, participation rose dramatically with 158,964 people voting on a final selection of 219 ideas, from an initial 3,158 proposals.¹²² The number of participants was boosted particularly by just over 66,000 children who took part in a special ballot to allocate €10 million reserved for projects in schools and colleges. Of course, those children may in turn have encouraged families to take part in the city-wide process.

Understanding exactly who participated, however, is more complex. Some information is captured on those who vote online, but not on those who vote in person. Of the 45,151 votes cast electronically in 2016, 34 per cent came from people aged under 30. Over half of them also voted for a project in one of the more marginalised areas of Paris. The lack of data overall, however, makes it difficult to know if the process is representative by age (or indeed gender, or other socio-economic variables). The proportion of voters from 'quartiers populaires' was 8 per cent, while the residents of those districts make up 15 per cent of the Paris population, suggesting there is still more to be done to increase engagement in those areas.¹²³

Factors for success

Senior political support - The participatory budgeting initiative has been driven from the outset by Mayor Anne Hidalgo. This has conferred huge benefits in terms of being able to leverage the necessary resources to deliver and grow the programme, as well as raising its profile locally, nationally and globally.

Blending of online and offline activity - The digital aspect of the participatory budgeting programme is explicitly only part of the answer. While the website is invaluable, in the first round only 60 per cent of people chose to vote online, and by 2016, fewer than one-third of votes were cast electronically. The online activity is supplemented with a huge number of offline workshops, groups and civil society-led activity which galvanises participation at a local level.

Support from civil society - Engaging citizens from all groups and facilitating participation is essential - the workshops and collaborative activities are integral to

the programme. Local organisations have played an increasingly important role in promoting the initiative and enabling people to develop their ideas.

Ongoing citizen engagement after the vote - Significant effort is made to ensure that citizens are able to monitor progress on the implementation of each project voted for. The website hosts a page for each project which includes the schedule for implementation and photos of work in progress (see Figure 16).

The transparency of the process - As noted by Clemence Pène, Digital Strategy Advisor to Paris City Hall, the requirement to put all information online means *"no politician can just reject some idea, and we have to put every explanation online and the entire process is under the citizen's control"*.¹²⁴ The results of each vote broken down on the site and available in more detail via the OpenData. Paris.fr portal.

Figure 16: The update page on the participatory budgeting website¹²⁵



Ongoing challenges

Processing and developing ideas - It takes significant time, money and proactive outreach to run a programme at this scale. The first year in particular placed significant strain on the small team delivering it. Over 2015-2016 this was addressed in a number of ways: the size of the team working on citizen engagement was increased significantly (to 14 people); relations with civil society were strengthened; and there was further investment in back-end improvements to the website to reduce the administrative burden.

Finding the right balance of information provision - With so many ideas, comments and suggestions being made, it is increasingly challenging to find the optimal balance between providing citizens with the level of information and detail they need to make an informed decision, without overwhelming them and ultimately putting people off participating at all.

Generating ideas to address more complex issues - Most of the ideas proposed in the first rounds related to environmental improvements such as cycle lanes, sports facilities, or greening of the city (see Figure 17), rather than initiatives to tackle problems of social cohesion, for example. Part of this may be related to the fact that only 'investment budget' is available for the participatory budget, and so projects cannot incur significant ongoing costs for the City. It also appears that even though people are experts in their own lives and communities, they may still need 'nudges' to tackle more complex issues.

Raising awareness and engagement - Growing participation and ensuring representativeness remains a challenge, despite the success to date. There needs to be an improved understanding of exactly who is contributing and further development of targeted approaches to increase participation from under-represented groups.

Figure 17: A map of green vegetation walls being installed across Paris following the 2014 vote¹²⁶



Main outcomes and impacts

Despite only having been running for three years, the Paris participatory budgeting programme is already being held up as an exemplar of what can be achieved with the appropriate level of commitment and investment. Just over 400 projects have now been funded across the city and every resident will be able to see the results of at least one investment very close to home. The commitment to continuing growing the programme through to 2020 also reinforces the importance which the City places on it.

Nonetheless, although the budget allocation process is carefully structured to ensure that all geographic communities benefit, there remains a question about the extent to which some of the more marginalised populations of Paris (for example, minority ethnic groups or low-income groups) benefit. It is possible that ambitions will grow as the results of each round become more visible within communities but the skew to more 'lifestyle' ideas may also reflect the intrinsic challenge of tackling 'wicked' social problems, such as the long-standing isolation of suburbs where poverty, unemployment and disengagement are high and opportunities few, and/or the lack of participation from the groups most affected by them. This is an issue common to most participatory budgeting programmes so it will be important to evaluate how the city's attempts to address this fare.

More broadly, the participatory budgeting programme would benefit from an evaluation to understand what impact it is having on the citizens of Paris in terms of issues such as their trust in democracy and democratic institutions, both at the local level and more widely, or the extent to which citizens feel they can influence decisions, and so on.

Icelandic Pirate Party

Iceland



Issue framing

Citizens
providing
informationCitizens
providing
ideas

Deliberation

Citizens making
decisions

Overview

The international network of Pirate Parties is well known for their work championing issues around freedom of information and copyright reform, though in Iceland the party is distinctive for its efforts to branch out and discuss broader societal issues. The Icelandic Pirate Party - founded in 2012 by a number of internet activists - has adopted an anti-establishment stance in response to widespread decline in political trust, following the financial and political crisis of 2008-2009.¹²⁷ The Pirates now stand as Iceland's joint-second most popular party. In October 2016 the party won nearly 15 per cent of the vote and ten out of 63 parliamentary seats, though narrowly missed out on forming part of the new governing coalition.¹²⁸

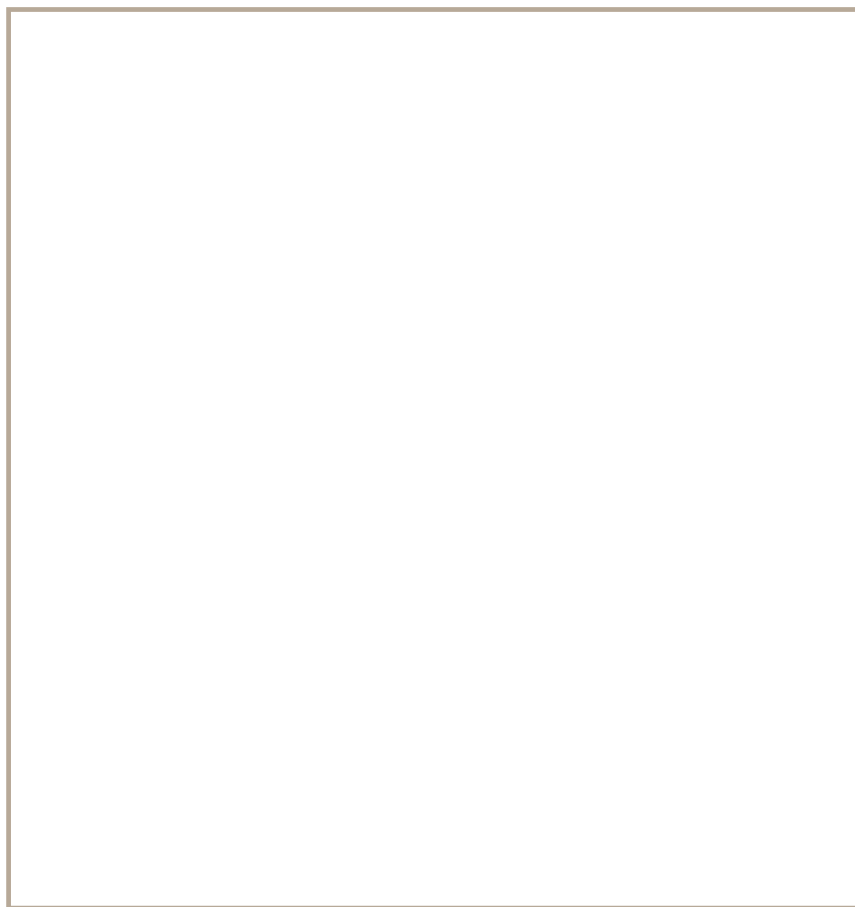
The party's 'Core Policy' is the first policy the Pirates created, and underpins all other policies. It includes the right to privacy; transparency and responsibility; freedom of information and expression; direct democracy and the right to self-determination including everyone's *"unlimited right to be involved in the decisions that relate to their own affairs"*.¹²⁹ As such, the party promotes an image of authenticity, transparency, open debate, and participation in the creation of party policy by anyone.

The blending of offline and online methods of engagement plays an important part in the party's efforts to achieve these goals.

For instance, the party holds regular video-recorded meetings around the country encouraging open participation and discussion of policy issues between new and existing members. Anyone may propose a policy in offline meetings, and, if approved by 5 per cent of meeting attendees, it is then submitted onto the online policy crowdsourcing portal: 'x.piratar.is' (initially known as 'Wasa'il').

The tool is clearly established within the party's formal policy processes: every single policy, once written up, must go through the x.piratar.is platform.¹³⁰ There is a 'debate' phase which lasts a week, in which any member can read or submit a comment alongside the policy draft. This is followed by a referendum-style vote which lasts a further week, whereby a majority of over 50 per cent must approve the policy for it to become accepted as the official party position. True to the party's 'hacker' mentality,¹³¹ the platform is also designed to allow the iteration and improvement of party policy over time. At meetings, any member can propose new versions of the policy or suggest the reopening of previous policies for updating, in which case the platform can display different versions, new adjustments via tracked changes, and an indication to the party member who has approved any alterations. Currently a select group of senior party members is in charge of managing and adopting comments into the draft policy.

Figure 18: A debate on the x.piratar.is platform on fisheries policy¹³²



Translation by Google

X.piratar.is also hosts the Pirate Party's internal online elections, including regional primaries, elections for the Executive Council, the Complaints Committee, and other internal positions.¹³³ Many of the candidates that stood have no prior experience in local or national politics.

In addition to x.piratar.is, the party also hosts online discussions using forum tool Discourse (discourse.piratar.is) for open debate on specific policy issues with input from senior party officials. Some of the liveliest online debates happen on the Party's Facebook group, also known as Pirate Chat: *"We have probably one of the biggest Facebook groups in Iceland, and you regularly see media headlines directly quoting from people discussing and arguing on that group."*¹³⁴ These online debate spaces provide useful opportunities for ordinary people to share concerns with senior members of the party, or to gauge the level of support on a new policy idea or topic. Unlike x.piratar.is, the Discourse and Facebook pages are open to non-members.

Participation

In August 2016 the party's registered membership stood at 'about 2,500 members', though this is growing rapidly. Smári McCarthy, Pirate member of parliament and co-founder of the party, attributes the dominance of young members to the party's very 'open' style of debate and discussion: *"our image bothers people who are more conservative and also people who are kind of used to a different type of debate... the people who like the kind of pre-set authorities and that elders must be respected, those people are somewhat put off by us"*. Nonetheless, the demographic profile of Party members is shifting to older demographics quite quickly as the party broadens its policy platform and increases in popularity.¹³⁵

Regarding the digital platforms, the Party's forum on Discourse and Facebook currently have 550 and 10,000 members respectively. Indeed Iceland has one of the highest levels of Facebook usage in the world as a percentage of the population.¹³⁶

Participation on the x.piratar.is platform has been lower, perhaps due to the fact that more technical knowledge is required to contribute to the drafting of a policy, or due to the tool's basic user-interface. Policies have gained an average of 100 votes in 2015 and 2016, with often under 50 debate contributions. Although these figures appear low, debates and votes happen relatively frequently. Over 100 national Pirate Party policies have been debated and ratified on the x.piratar.is platform since its creation in 2013, with a total of 7,268 votes cast on those issues.¹³⁷ Moreover, the internal elections for Metropolitan Primaries on x.piratar.is have been relatively successful in attracting members, with a registered total of 1,034 votes for 105 candidates.¹³⁸

Why was it successful?

Meaningful opportunities to participate.

The party's processes for direct participation in policymaking is showing promise for its clear link to decision-makers, and binding vote mechanisms which give the membership clear incentives to participate. This process is certainly not tokenistic; channels exist for ordinary party members to contribute to the creation of party policy.

Making the most of offline and online methods. Members are allowed to put forward initial ideas in physical meetings, while the digital platform adds an additional layer of transparency and scrutiny by the membership before the policy is ratified. Furthermore, the x.piratar.is tool is a useful

way to summarise and solidify offline debates into a clear output which can go up for final debate and vote. Rather than being perceived as talking shops, it helps to give physical meetings a 'crystal clear outcome'.¹³⁹

Small in scale. The party still has a relatively small membership, which has arguably made a more horizontal form of governance more manageable. While processes will need to iterate and adapt as the party grows and matures, the Pirates benefit from being able to mobilise people in the context of Iceland's closely-knit and well integrated population of around 320,000 people.

Challenges

Perceptions of amateurism. The party's efforts to promote an 'open' and horizontal structure of policy formation, debate and decision-making has brought some criticism, particularly where conversations on Facebook appear difficult to follow among the hundreds of commenters. McCarthy describes that the ethos of *"everything up for debate"* within the party does have its downsides: *"because of this we have this slight image of being somewhat chaotic and, you know, like a thousand voices speaking simultaneously."*¹⁴⁰

Lack of expertise and experience among members. McCarthy describes a concern that *"we have an increasing number of people active in the party's internal operations who aren't fully familiar with our core policy, ... who have never learned how to read through a law,*

*never learned what the difference is between a constitutional law and a regulation."*¹⁴¹

The Pirates therefore face a challenge in balancing the perception of the party's horizontality and openness with the need to appoint the appropriate expertise to organise and run the party effectively.

Challenges with the digital tool. x.piratar.is has a very basic user-interface. Comments build up in a long list (like an online forum) and can become difficult to read or respond to where the number of contributions is high.¹⁴² Furthermore, the quality of policy proposals on the platform is not always high, and the party has considered whether to raise the 5 per cent threshold of members required at party meetings to submit proposals online.

Main impacts and outcomes

So far the party has successfully mobilised a number of people for broad online discussions on either Facebook or on the Pirate's Discourse forum. Although this is positive, debates within these spaces only indirectly contribute to issue framing or agenda setting for the party. In contrast, the x.piratar.is website forms one important part of the party's internal policymaking process, and it has provided a useful way to publicly and officially legitimise internal policy decisions. For example, amid public outcry around a government fisheries policy that was perceived to benefit a small group of companies, the Pirate Party decided to crowdsource input for a fairer fisheries policy. The policy gained input from offline meetings with grassroots members and other stakeholders from around the country, before being debated and ratified unanimously by 80 members on the digital platform. *"I would say our fisheries policy is quite excellent"*, says McCarthy, but overall the quality of policies on the platform has been mixed *"we would like to increase the quality of them, but so far so good"*.¹⁴³

One could argue the x.piratar.is platform has also played a role in improving the effectiveness of decision-making within the party. The 2016 parliamentary elections have brought an increasing pressure for the Pirate Party to present a wide-ranging policy platform to the public. As a consequence, in the months running up to the parliamentary election, 49 national policies were ratified by the membership and adopted as party policy.¹⁴⁴

With an expanding membership, and triple the number of parliamentary seats following the 2016 election, the party now faces a continuing and greater challenge to meet the expectations of their new voters. However, so far none of the crowdsourced policies have made it into tangible political outcomes passed at the national level, due to a lack of sufficient parliamentary power; *"I'd say the greater amount of success has been kind of steering the public debate into better waters"*.¹⁴⁵

Podemos

Spain



Issue framing

Citizens
providing
informationCitizens
developing
proposalsCitizens making
decisions

The context

2011 saw a radical shift in the political landscape of Spain. Demonstrations against austerity measures, along with increasing levels of dissatisfaction with the current political parties and system, together with a series of corruption scandals, gave rise to the 15M movement (also known as the 'indignados'). The 15M movement grew rapidly, making strong use of social media and digital tools for organising. In 2014, with

General Elections looming, it gave rise to a new party in the form of Podemos ('We can') to "convert indignation into political change".¹⁴⁶ It explicitly claims to "aspire to reclaiming politics for the service of ordinary people... We promote direct democratic participation for everybody in all spheres of political decision-making, as well as in the execution of public policies."¹⁴⁷

What happened?

Today, Podemos is experimenting with methods of direct democracy in a number of ways, including a large network of 'Circles' (in-person meeting groups), but mainly through its digital platform Plaza Podemos. The original Plaza Podemos was hosted on Reddit but a new version, 2.0, is now built using Consul open-source software, based on the Decide Madrid platform.

Plaza Podemos 2.0 is the primary engagement tool which enables people to make Citizen Proposals, and start and participate in debates. Podemos also makes extensive use of social media and open source software such as nVotes to help make decisions (e.g. the selection of MEP candidates in 2014) and Titanpad for collaborative document editing. Registration is via a separate platform, Participa. This open-source platform enables many of the

less deliberative and secure functions that Podemos requires, such as voting or the making of donations.

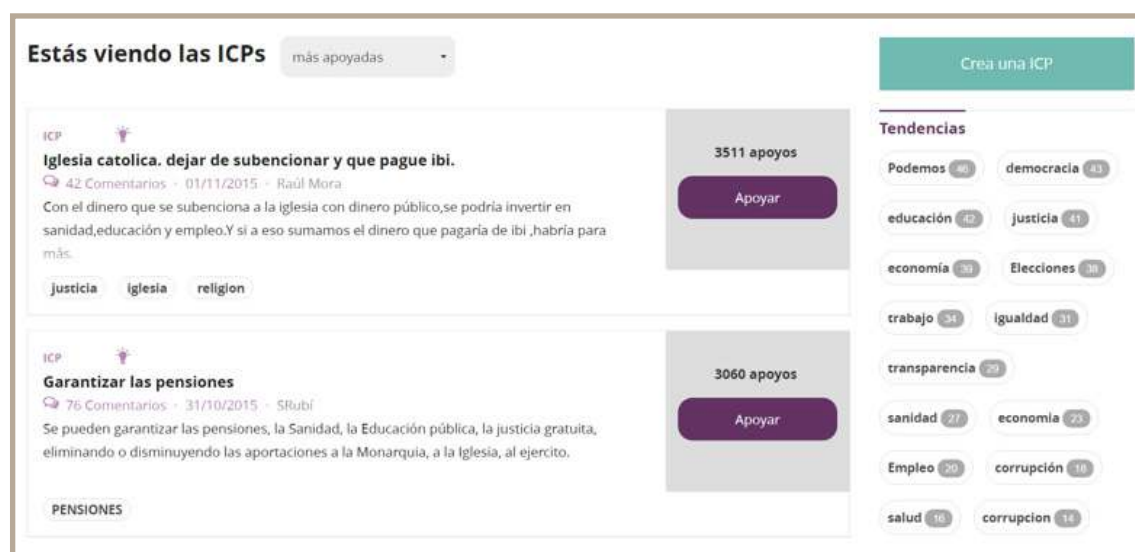
Citizen Proposals are the main mechanism for change. If a proposal receives support from 10 per cent of the almost 434,000 people registered, (or 20 per cent from Circles) the proposal goes into a one month development phase with the proposers and the organisation. The final version is then put to a binding vote of supporters.

In Madrid, where Podemos is part of the City Council governing Ahora Madrid coalition, the party is experimenting with new engagement methods via Plaza Podemos. These include enabling citizens to choose a number of questions to be asked in plenary sessions and committees each month, and an attempt to crowdsource feedback on the city's proposed law on Public Participation.

Also, separate from Plaza Podemos, citizens are offered the chance to vote on which social action programmes should benefit from a €300,000 fund which is raised by

capping the salaries of all Podemos Elected Member salaries (EU, National, Regional) and diverting the remainder.

Figure 19. The most supported proposals on Plaza Podemos in early November 2016. One relates to the payment of taxes by the Catholic Church and the other to guaranteeing pensions and other public services¹⁴⁸



Impact

Podemos appears to be taking some interesting steps in the direction of direct democracy and experimenting with digital tools to achieve this, successfully engaging a large number of people online. Around 1,400 proposals have been made (although over half received fewer than 40 votes) and over 300,000 people have contributed to at least one debate on either the original Reddit Plaza Podemos or Plaza Podemos 2.0.¹⁴⁹

However, in many instances it also appears that the rhetoric is somewhat ahead of the reality. So, for example, while Podemos is encouraging more deliberation and engagement among citizens, and theoretically votes are binding, the high threshold and lack of promotion of popular proposals means that this does not happen. Party leaders are obtaining feedback from citizens and using 'open consultation' but there is currently no direct or explicit link between that input and the decisions ultimately made.

This mismatch between the narrative around a party of direct democracy and the reality for citizens is starting to become evident through Plaza Podemos itself. One of the major issues is that for a proposal to become binding it has to reach an extremely high threshold of support. So far only six proposals have reached the second stage and none have met the threshold. Interestingly, four of those appear to be related to how Podemos works, such as too many people holding multiple Party roles, and finding a way of discounting non-active members when calculating the threshold for proposals to make it more achievable. Further, no proposals have even made the second round in the last 18 months, suggesting perhaps a disillusionment with the process.

Five Star Movement (M5S)

Italy



Issue framing

Citizens
developing
proposalsCitizens
scrutinising
proposalsCitizens making
decisions

The context

Since 2007, Italy has seen sustained periods of crisis including recession and austerity, political scandals and corruption, all giving rise to falling levels of trust in political parties, representatives and institutions. In the midst of this, one blog, authored by Beppe Grillo, a comedian, soared to become the seventh most popular blog in the world in 2007. It was characterised

by a willingness to identify corruption in public and commercial life, and a style of angry political satire. A 2013 survey of Grillo supporters found that they are typically pessimistic about the future of Italy and have low levels of trust in Italian and European democracy and political institutions, but have high levels of trust in the internet, over all other media.¹⁵⁰

What happened?

With the popularity of the blog and Grillo soaring, fans were encouraged to meet in person, arranging events through MeetUp - a website for organising offline discussion groups - to talk about the issues that mattered to them and consider how they might be able to take action. Following this, Grillo and his partner, Roberto Casaleggio an internet entrepreneur who promoted the blog, approached independent candidates in local elections to see if they wanted to be endorsed by Grillo. Many did and some MeetUp groups also proposed candidate lists.

In 2009 a meeting was held to agree a set of core principles which candidates endorsed by Grillo would adhere to, and the Five Star Movement (MoVimento 5 Stelle or 'M5S')

was born. The movement declares itself to be established on the principles of direct democracy and eschews the denomination of 'political party'.

Until 2015, when a separate, online platform was launched, the Grillo blog remained the central online portal for the Movement. The new site - known as 'Rousseau' - is used for collective decision-making by registered citizens on policy options and to select candidates or expel members. It was also used to decide on the constitution of an EU Parliamentary group with the British political party UKIP. In addition, all M5S politicians are required to draft Bills and then share the text online, with an explanatory YouTube video, for two months of debate by members.

Figure 20: Screenshot of the Rousseau homepage¹⁵¹

Impact

It is evident that the blend of successful social media outreach and offline activity is hugely powerful and has been highly successful in propelling M5S to positions of power and in transforming the political landscape. They first won seats in 2012/13 local elections and have since won 109 seats in the 2013 General Election, becoming the second biggest party. National candidates were selected via online vote but only just over 20,000 (of 255,000) members voted, a low turnout given the emphasis on online engagement. They have rejected public funding and instead crowdfunded their campaigns. They also returned 17 MEPs in 2014 and M5S candidates became Mayors of Rome and Turin in 2016.

Analysis of the Bills proposed by M5S politicians shows that most receive a fairly high number of comments (e.g. an average of just over 600 for the 19 Bills on employment) but there are differing levels of interest (e.g. 115 average comments on the three Foreign Affairs Bills). However, with one notable exception, there is a very low level of response from Bill proponents (ranging from zero to an average of ten to 20) and the team running the platform are finding that many of the suggestions are not useful. They point to the need for a culture change so that *"the people need to enter into this process and must learn how to use it for functional direct democracy... Giving some help and support to the citizen is important"*.¹⁵² As of February 2016, 171 Bills have completed the discussion phase but only 11 have been presented to Parliament.¹⁵³

M5S now finds itself at a crossroads, trying to balance their obligations to deliver on the responsibilities of elected Members who sit within traditional democratic institutions, that have previously been the target of attack. There is increasing evidence of a more hybrid approach, including changing the position on allowing MPs to participate in prime time television interviews, which was previously discouraged for example, while continuing to criticise mainstream media. It remains to be seen how the challenges of representative democracy can be blended with the aspiration of direct democracy within M5S.

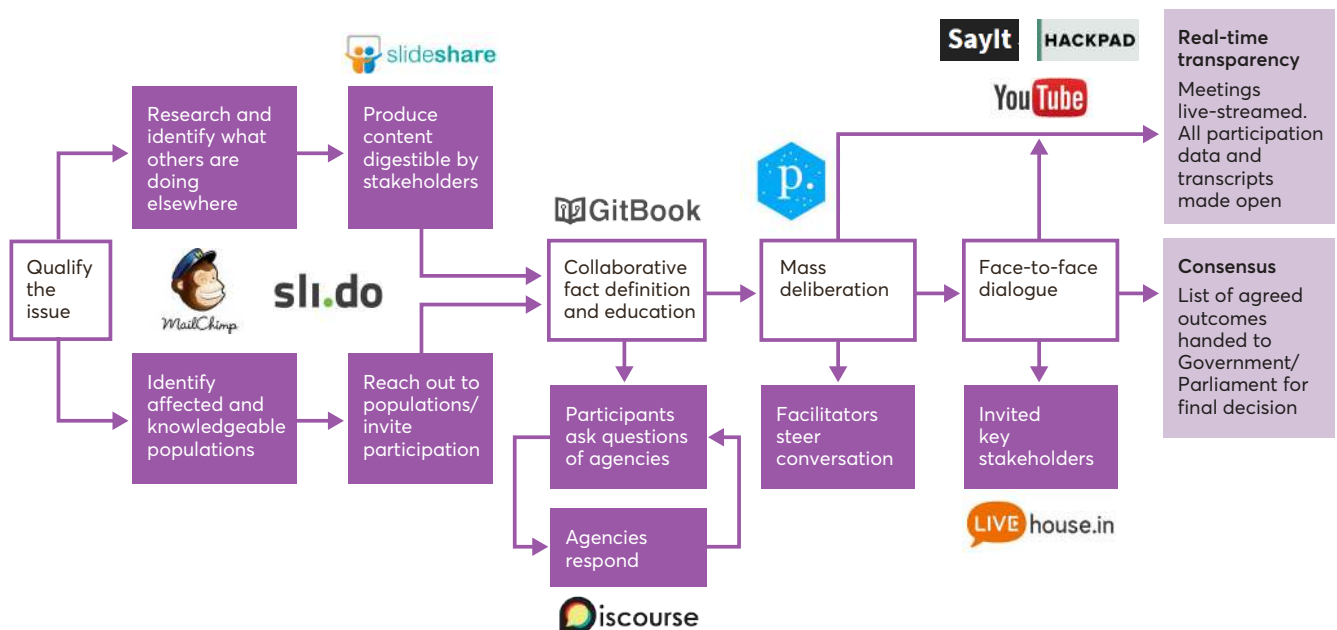
What makes a good digital democracy process?

There is a pervasive assumption within the field of digital democracy that citizen engagement is a good thing per se. Certainly a healthy democracy requires participation from its citizens. However, there is strong evidence about the harms that can result from poor participation exercises - such as greater levels of apathy and disillusionment, and further erosions of trust.¹⁵⁴ Some have gone as far as to say that political participation creates *"civic enemies who have grounds to hate one another"*.¹⁵⁵

To avoid the major pitfalls of poor participation exercises, it's important to design the process effectively. A successful digital democracy initiative is not about simply taking an off-the-shelf tool and deploying tried and trusted communication methods. Too many innovations in this area exist simply as an app, or web page, driven by what the technology can do, rather than by what the need is.

In contrast, many of the best examples we have come across have been designed carefully over multiple stages, incorporating a number of methods, tools and resources (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: An illustration of the multi-stage vTaiwan process, deploying multiple digital tools



Adapted with permission from Colin Megill, Pol.is

Even though many of the initiatives studied in this report are far from perfect, relatively new and still in development, we have been able to identify six common factors for success.

A first group of factors relates to the question of how we should design the process and communicate with both citizens and representatives so as to maximise their interest and engagement. This means having clarity over the purpose and methods of engagement; engaging people early enough so that their contributions aren't simply tokenistic; communicating clearly about the aims, objectives, rules and expectations of participation exercises; and underpinning activity with online and offline outreach.

The other factors relate to practical issues around the support that is required. It means ensuring that the necessary ecosystem of support is in place, from backing by decision-makers, to financial and human resources. The final point is technical: making sure that the interface is appropriately designed for the type of user and type of activity, with a view to maximising the quality of contributions.

Figure 22: Planning for success



1 Think twice: don't engage for engagement's sake

A participation exercise will only be successful if people feel that there is value in their contribution – either because they are able to influence and shape decisions, or because it taps into some sort of intrinsic motivation, or because the issues at stake are substantive. It encourages more people to participate, and to do so in a useful way. There are multiple ways in which this can be achieved, including explicitly by making votes binding, handing over control of some budgets, and more implicitly by engaging people early in the process and keeping them informed throughout.

Giving people a stake

Underpinning any good citizen engagement process is the principle that people must be given the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way. Where participants' contributions are not considered or simply used to legitimise decisions which have already been taken, this will lead to poor quality contributions and/or greater levels of distrust and disillusionment. If people are given a stake, however, they are more likely to take the process seriously. As Thibaut Dernoncourt from Parlement et Citoyens explains, *"When you say to people it's a constructive space... why would somebody want to play a game? I think people will want to play games when they see that the process is not true and is not fair."*

Two of the ways to give people a stake, which are covered in this report, are making votes binding (such as on the Decide Madrid platform or the Pirate Party's x.piratar.is platform for creating party policy) and giving people the power to decide on significant budgets (as is the case with participatory budgeting processes in Paris, Reykjavik and Madrid). In each of these cases, policymakers trusted the people and put power in their hands, and that trust was rewarded with high levels of participation and good quality contributions.

For example, the 'proposals' section of the Decide Madrid platform is much more popular than the 'debates section'. This is because proposals can become binding and therefore offer greater political efficacy than the debates section which simply resembles other online forums on social media.

Engaging people early

There are also less explicit ways of communicating the meaningful nature of the activity. One of the most common messages from the case studies was the need to engage citizens as early as possible, to give them the chance to set the agenda and frame the problem. As Audrey Tang, founder of vTaiwan explains, *"If you engage early enough, you can't go wrong. If you engage when you have no idea how to solve the issue, then you can't go wrong. If you engage with already a draft, it would take very, very high-skilled rhetoric to make this work. That's the critical issue."*⁵⁶ Indeed, the vTaiwan process is designed in such a way that the early stages are genuinely open-ended. For instance, in the early stages, government

ministries and other actors are specifically prohibited from sharing their version of a draft bill or any opinions about the topic, as this may cause them to have an undue influence over the process before other stakeholders have had a chance to understand the facts and formulate their own views. The view is echoed by Thibaut Dernoncourt of Parlement et Citoyens,

*"It's important for the politician to have space for making this law evolve. If you know that your text and your bill cannot evolve then there is no point, it will only be consultation for consultation's sake. If you make space, if you say 'I've got ideas and I want to discuss the solutions with you' then this is the best case because you won't have any difficulty in showing that there was evolution between your first point of view and your second point of view."*¹⁵⁷

This is a particular problem with collaborative approaches to drafting legislation. There is a danger that most of the substantive decisions have already been made by this stage, therefore limiting the role that citizens can play in shaping and influencing its direction. The UK Public Reading Stage pilot suffered from exactly this criticism. Given the amount of pre-legislative scrutiny, the Bill Team concluded that the public reading did not provide any 'added value'.¹⁵⁸

Communicate and provide feedback

Another way to demonstrate to participants that their contributions are of value and taken seriously is to ensure that the process is transparent, with clear communication and feedback. As the case studies in this report show, it's imperative for their motivation that participants understand how their contributions are being used, even if that means simply receiving an email explaining why an idea wasn't taken forward, or a report outlining why a contribution wasn't integrated into a final version of a draft bill, or how the idea was discussed by a parliamentary committee. This is particularly important where progress (e.g. in the legislative process) may be complex or slow. Without this, the risk is that people lose interest and faith in the platform or project.

These kinds of feedback loops have been integral to the success of the e-Democracia portal. At the end of an online consultation, a final public report is compiled which explains which contributions were used and where the representatives responsible for the bill agree or disagree with the contributions put forward and why. As Faria explains, *"this justification and feedback makes the process transparent"*.¹⁵⁹ It creates a positive cycle of engagement in politics; participants start to believe that they can make a difference when their contributions are taken seriously.

The founders of the Your Priorities platform have come to a similar conclusion. *"Saying yes or no is not the main issue"* suggests Grímsson, *"If people don't know that you're doing something with it then they'll think that you're not doing anything with it. But if you send them an email saying that for this or that reason we are not able to implement your idea, 99 per cent of the time people say 'OK, not a problem'. This was the biggest surprise for politicians in Reykjavik"*.¹⁶⁰



Be honest: what's involved and what are you going to do with the input?

Be clear about who you are engaging and why - then tailor your activities accordingly

As illustrated in our digital democracy typology, there are myriad forms of citizen engagement. Fundamental to selecting the right activities is having clarity about the nature of the issue to be addressed and who needs to be engaged. Some types of engagement will be more problematic than others. For example, broad public consultation on a highly contested issue - and the way in which these two criteria intersect - should shape subsequent choices about the most appropriate type of digital democracy activity.

When should we be encouraging broad, mass scale participation and when should we be tapping into more specific communities of expertise? When should citizens be consulted and when should they be invited to formulate policy? To answer these questions one needs greater clarity over the aims of engagement. To do this, we first need to understand the type of problem being addressed.

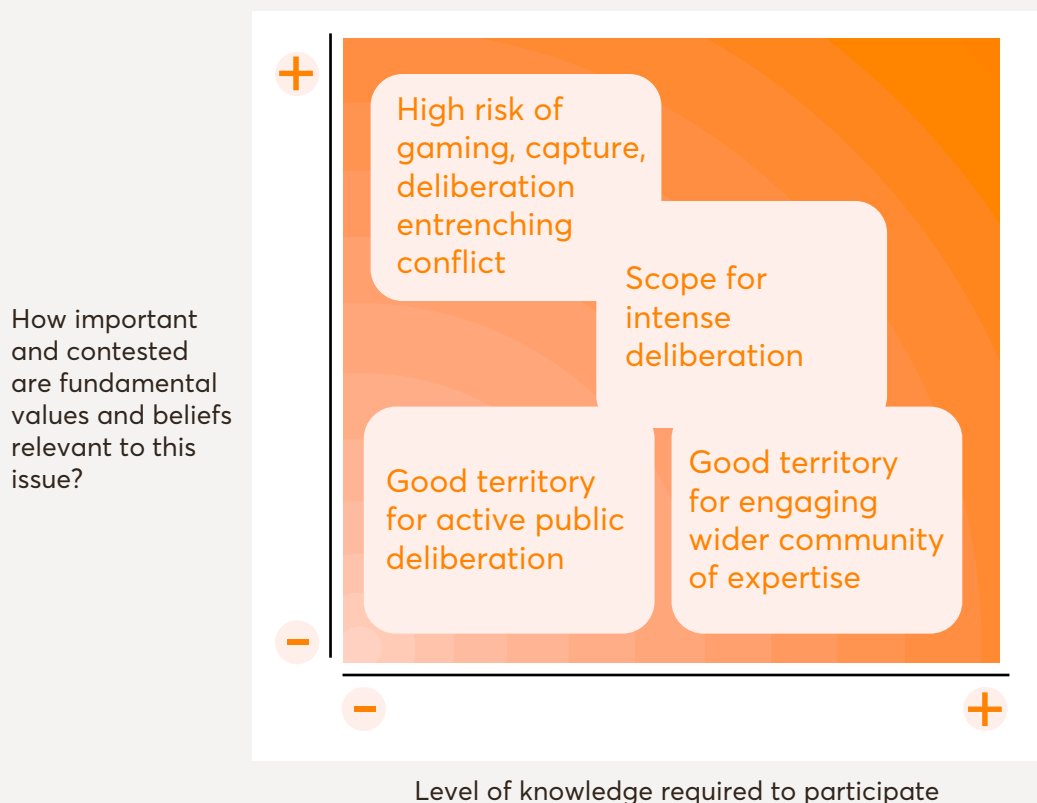
It's important to distinguish between whether the problem requires specific knowledge, information or expertise to be solved, or whether it requires a value judgement from citizens. One approach is to map issues along two dimensions as shown in Figure 23: knowledge and beliefs. Engagement is possible in all areas, but each quadrant presents its own risks and challenges. For example, there are some issues where the public has local or experiential knowledge and others where specialised technical or scientific knowledge is required.

With the latter (bottom right quadrant), it makes sense to limit participation to smaller numbers of 'experts' rather than opening up the issue to the crowd. In these instances practitioners should consider that the purpose of digital engagement may be less about gaining widespread and high levels of participation than about tapping into the most relevant, expert informed decisions across society.

There are then a set of questions which are based on beliefs or values – such as a woman's right to an abortion, same sex marriage and human rights. These questions don't have an objectively correct answer and therefore raise specific challenges for those organising participation exercises.

There are potential risks with engaging the public on issues where everyone has an opinion based on deeply held values (for example gun control in the USA), where polarised debate is unlikely to change people's opinions. Then there are issues where people may not have strong opinions or much knowledge, in areas which are relatively controversial – such as healthcare and bioethics – which could be fruitful for carefully designed online deliberation exercises.

Figure 23: Mapping knowledge and belief spaces



Our case studies have adopted different design choices as ways of encouraging high quality debate on thornier topics. Cap Collectif's Parlement et Citoyens split topics into their 'problems', 'causes' and 'solutions' to ensure that debate is easier to navigate both for participants and facilitators. vTaiwan are careful to frame the question in as narrow and practical wording as possible to avoid overly ideological responses. These approaches mean that complex issues have to be broken down and addressed one piece at a time, but it ensures that debates are more focused and productive. Another design option is to bring important neutral information to the fore, so that people are encouraged to inform themselves about the facts and definitions on a topic before they contribute. We expand on examples of this in the following section.

Give people the information they need to participate effectively

It's essential to articulate the aims of engagement at the outset. This means providing clear information about what the project aims to do, how the process works, how people's contributions will be used and the rules of engagement. It is also important to make sure your expectations and needs match what people have to offer - or find ways to bridge the gap, for example by upskilling people or providing additional resources. Contributions are usually more useful if people have a framework to contribute within, and it reduces the risk of participant disengagement.

It's essential to set out how the project or platform works – not only to manage people's expectations but also to retain their trust. This means establishing clear rules about how people can participate and how their contributions will be used, and then sticking to these rules. This was echoed in most of the case studies.

As well as clarifying the rules of engagement, it also needs to be clear to participants what kind of skills or time they'll need to participate and what you're asking people to do should be commensurate with their skills and experience. If it is not, then the process must support and enable participants to move up the learning curve, otherwise the quality of contributions will suffer. For example, during the early stages of the e-Democracia portal, interviews with participants found that there was a lack of understanding amongst users about how the site worked and why and how people should participate. Attempts to resolve this have included a short video on the homepage, explaining in very simple terms what the project aims to achieve and how people can participate.

This may also include educating participants about how certain democratic processes work. For example, the challenges with the e-Democracia portal were compounded by a lack of understanding about how the legislative process works, which affected participation rates and the quality of people's contributions. The same issue quickly became clear to Senator Joël Labbé during his first Parlement et Citoyens consultation on pesticide use. The public wished to push for earlier implementation of the law than he knew would be feasible if he were to get the law passed.

"It goes both ways because it is important for us representatives to get the variety of opinions of citizens on the proposals and texts we're working on and it is also important for us to be able to educate citizens so they understand that it is not possible to click your fingers to take decisions, instead you have to write laws that are solid legally/juridically and make us go in the right direction and in the direction of citizens' expectations. But to do that you need time for the process, the legal writing, the debate and the time for negotiation and strategy planning to find a majority."¹⁶¹

In the case of e-Democracia, attempts have been made to address the issues caused by limited public understanding of legislative processes through the use of 'legislative consultants'. They play a critical role by providing background information, moderating discussions and providing a link between participants on the portal and representatives in the Chamber of Deputies. The need to guide people through new and unfamiliar processes is also reinforced by the experience of M5S and their attempts to consult and collaborate on new legislation:

"We need to change the culture ... You can see that the comments, the suggestions, the feedback we are receiving is not really at the level we are expecting because the people need to enter into this process and must learn how to use it for functional direct democracy ... Giving some help and support to the citizen is important because we're getting a lot of feedback on a European law, but [it's] not really useful".¹⁶²

Where the topic of consultation itself is complex or highly contested, clarity over the subject matter will be necessary too. To this end, vTaiwan draws on the Regulation Room, an experimental approach to e-participation in government regulations by academics at Cornell University. This work found that contributions by broad audiences in online deliberations are improved when participants are provided with clear information about the topic before they make a contribution.¹⁶³ For this reason, relevant information and clear frameworks for the discussion – such as definitions, neutral educational resources and well defined objectives – are summarised clearly at the beginning to improve collective understanding of the facts. In addition, in the early stages of the consultation, government departments may be required to provide their own official statements and to publish any raw data related to the topic. These statements are then published on Slideshare on the vTaiwan website under a strict criteria of accessible language and readability.

Figure 24: Example slides from a vTaiwan Speaker Deck¹⁶⁴

Facilitate and moderate the process

Facilitation and moderation are often essential in making participatory exercises work on a day-to-day basis. Where the process of participation is stretched across multiple stages with offline and online components, facilitators can also play a useful role in publicly compiling and summarising the results of these discussions. This proactive role further increases transparency and can be important in online forum settings where contributions can become difficult for participants to keep track of due to their volume. Where lawmaking processes are particularly slow or complex, facilitators should also play a role as 'translators'. This might include answering people's questions about the law; or keeping participants up to date with relevant legislative developments.

On many platforms moderators and facilitators also play a critical role in ensuring quality contributions and help to limit trolling or other abusive behaviour, thereby ensuring more constructive discussions between participants. The Parlement et Citoyen process, for example, is actively moderated to deter abusive or inappropriate comments. When people make comments which are offensive (often flagged by members of the community), the offensive parts of their comments are publicly archived in the 'bin' section of the consultation, though not deleted. This open approach to moderation encourages facilitators to be clear and transparent about the reasons for censorship. The success of this approach stands in contrast to the moderation of M5S forums in Italy, where the unexplained deletion of some dissenting comments has caused criticism from some quarters.

3



Digital isn't the only answer: traditional outreach and engagement still matter

It's an unfortunate truth that if you build it, they might not come. Good PR, advertising and outreach underpin almost every successful digital citizen engagement initiative. Many, particularly those which enable citizens to make decisions or play a very active role in the development or scrutiny of proposals, also blend offline and online activity. This is important for bridging the digital divide and in attempts to increase the legitimacy of decision-making by broadening the pool of participants.

It should go without saying that the channels used for outreach and communication should be targeted carefully to match your aims and target audience. It is particularly important in the early phases when public awareness will inevitably be lower and word-of-mouth referrals are yet to take off.

Several of our case studies offer examples of how to engage a wider population in democratic processes, including targeting harder to reach groups, particularly through the use of offline advocacy. For example, Rahvaalgatus.ee is a new Estonian citizen campaigning platform that was developed in response to a law giving citizens the right to address parliament with enough signatures. The platform has been launched alongside a staff campaign to raise awareness among the most 'passive groups' in terms of political engagement, namely youth, elderly people and Russian speakers. Teele Pehk, CEO of the Estonian Co-operation Assembly, summarises the kind of hard work that has to go into gaining critical mass. For petitions platform Rahvaalgatus.ee, this involves building relations with civil society organisations and pre-existing networks to spread the word about people's right to collectively address parliament:

*"We have a strategy to first map the organisations, active spokespersons, networks of all three groups, then get to know their activities where we could fit in with our messages (citizens rights and participation channels) and then make a detailed plan of action with different events, media appearances and consultations towards the target groups ... For example, the Union of Youth Organisations is raising awareness about the newly acquired election right for 16 and 17 year olds, and we got our messages to their lectures."*¹⁶⁵

Experiments in Paris have also shown how to achieve broader participation by using extensive offline outreach alongside digital activities. A proactive combined approach is progressively increasing participation and raising awareness of the participatory budgeting project.

Figure 25: Infographic promoting the participatory budgeting process in Paris, 2016, with Twitter hashtag¹⁶⁶



*"We do a lot of advertising, like posters. We invest a lot of money in that. We're doing also a lot of social network campaigning, a little sponsoring on social networks, and some public meetings. More and more. Last year we tried to target the networks through ideas. So, for instance, I would go to this place that is very into recycling to ask people to put some ideas on this very political project, but I think that this year the process starts to become more natural for people and we have more spontaneous meetings, like, in the city places."*¹⁶⁷

Despite the need for active outreach, there are many ways in which digital technologies can help to augment and improve offline methods of engagement. In the case of vTaiwan's offline meetings, interactive live-streaming tools were used to engage broader audiences and enrich the physical debate. This was an important addition where people wanted to join the meeting but could not, say, because of work responsibilities or distance. At the same time, transcription tools such as SayIt were used to record and archive conversations in a structured and searchable format. This created a comprehensive electronic record of all the debates and decisions made over the course of the process. In these ways, digital blended with offline methods to create a more coherent, transparent and accessible exercise in public engagement.



4 Don't waste time: get support from decision-makers before you invest too much

Securing buy-in from those in power is essential for the success of participation exercises. At a very basic level, it means that people's contributions are more likely be taken seriously and used in some way. This is most effective when there is cross-party support. Access to decision-makers can also provide an additional incentive for citizens to contribute, potentially increasing their sense of political efficacy. Many of the most successful examples have started by engaging a small group of highly motivated representatives and working with them to develop the initiative and gain traction.

For some types of digital democracy, particularly those where the ambition is to hand citizens decision-making power, it is simply not possible to operate without institutional buy-in. Robert Bjarnason, founder of the Your Priorities platforms Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods, explains that it wouldn't have been possible to set up the project without the support of senior leaders in the city council: *"If a civic society organisation sets up a participation platform not connected to the government, what would be the point of that? It's just another discussion group."*¹⁶⁸ The commitment by the city council to formally process the highest voted ideas on a monthly basis has proved crucial in incentivising engagement and achieving impact.

This point is underlined by those who led the first People's Assembly process in Estonia. There, although the process was initiated by the President, particular attention was paid to ensuring cross-party support for the initiative. It was thus raised above the level of party politics and maximised buy-in to the eventual outcomes, including the establishment of Rahvaalgatus as a permanent mechanism for citizen engagement.

*"We actually involved representatives from each political party in the working group, in the working team. So whenever we convened to discuss how are we going to form the process, how are we going to sort out the proposals, how are we going to analyse, how are we going to make impact analysis, then these people from each of the political parties in the Parliament were present, and they could argue and they could be cynical and they could be very opposing, but they were part of the process and they were actually part of the design".*¹⁶⁹

That said, it is important to be open to quicker and lighter forms of experimentation as well in order to reduce the barriers to acceptance and help representatives realise its potential. Sometimes, 'just playing' is the easiest way to let everyone - citizens, politicians and bureaucrats - *"experiment and realize that digital democracy innovation is not as scary as it seems"*.¹⁷⁰ To this end, the LabHacker team in Brazil has developed a range of 'serious games' and light-touch opportunities for participation, from visualisations of Deputies' contributions in the Chamber on various issues, to games about how decisions are made in parliament.

Buy-in is also important where access to representatives is an important part of the project. One of the reasons e-Democracia and the LabHacker project in Brazil has been successful is its unique position within the Chamber of Deputies. This means that as an in-house innovation

lab they are able to enjoy a certain level of autonomy and flexibility, while at the same time having direct access to representatives and the stamp of credibility from high-level support.

In general, Faria and Cunha, members of the LabHacker team, argue that participation rates tend to be higher, and citizens' contributions tend to have a greater influence on the legislative process when an enthusiastic and involved representative and their supporting staff 'champion' the use of digital tools for collaboration. The same has been found by Parlement et Citoyens where the active involvement of representatives is one of the keys to success.

*"People participating can see that there is somebody behind the consultation; you're not speaking to a computer. Second, it's not fake. If the MP is really involved, she or he will take what people say and include this."*¹⁷¹

By targeting a smaller number of enthusiastic representatives, projects are more likely to get off the ground and demonstrate impact. So despite resistance and disinterest from the majority of politicians, the LabHacker team have found success by targeting a small number of enthusiastic, digitally enabled MPs. This is a lesson also demonstrated by Cap Collectif's Parlement et Citoyens team, whose goal *"is not to convince everybody that consultation is the best way, but to work with everybody that is already convinced and will take the process seriously. That's the difference. We don't have many MPs, we have 30, but those 30 are really involved and we can do lots of good stuff with them"*.¹⁷²

Where the scale of ambition for the project fails to meet the level of necessary buy-in, then even the best processes and tools may fail to deliver on expected outcomes. For example, in 2012 Finland enshrined into law a new Citizen's Initiative Act, specifically designed to promote the development of new legislation in response to citizen concerns. Yet the response of Parliamentary Committees to citizen proposals has been lukewarm at best – only one law, on Same-Sex Marriage, has been passed. Open Ministry, a civil society platform championing much of the activity, did not acquire close enough links to decision-makers and there has not been the necessary cultural change, stalling progress:

*"The Committee which takes up the proposals in Parliament should work in closer relation to the people who developed the proposal ... because now many of the law proposals which came into the committee were rejected, or the Committee recommended to the plenary that the proposals should be voted down, in many cases because of technical problems with the initiatives. The committees could fix those technical issues in the proposal and just bring a corrected version, it just requires political will."*¹⁷³

As well as limiting the potential outcomes from such initiatives, a lack of good links with decision-makers can also negatively impact the motivation of citizens participating. In some instances, particularly with political parties adopting new direct democracy approaches, the rhetoric and ambition is somewhat ahead of the reality. Parties such as Podemos in Spain and the M5S in Italy are therefore struggling to balance their stated intentions of crowdsourcing ideas and collective decision-making with the realities of participation in a representative democracy and a rapid rise to power. Experimentation with new tools and approaches takes time and where decisions are not as transparent as anticipated or decision-makers do not listen as closely to their supporters as hoped, there is a risk that people will lose faith with the initiative and, potentially, feel further alienated from democratic processes more widely.

5



Don't cut corners: digital democracy is not a quick or cheap fix

While it may seem obvious, without access to the necessary finance, human resources and skills, it is highly unlikely that any attempt to engage citizens, be that through digital or traditional means, will be a success. In particular, the human resource requirement is one area frequently underestimated by those trialling digital democracy initiatives for the first time.

Finance is naturally required to fund most parts of a new initiative, even those which are primarily volunteer run. It is clear, however, that any staff costs aside, the main area of financial investment required is in outreach and communications. There will also inevitably be additional costs related to IT, software, or the other requirements of citizen engagement such as insurance or risk assessments.

The second area relates to the high level of time required by the team to get participatory processes off the ground and to keep them running, including those which are largely volunteer-run. Both Parlement et Citoyens in France and Open Ministry in Finland have struggled to maintain their activities due to fluctuating or insufficient numbers of volunteers.

These lessons were learned swiftly in Paris after their 2014 pilot of participatory budgeting when the demands on civil servants were acute. As the city has ramped up its participatory budgeting programme and begun to experiment with other forms of citizen involvement in decision-making, they have increased the size of the team supporting this activity. There are now 14 civil servants in a dedicated citizen engagement team and investment has been made in the back-end of the website to reduce the time required by staff. The vision, support and leadership of the mayor, Anne Hidalgo, has been instrumental in ensuring that the programme has the necessary resources to grow.

The Decide Madrid team has been going through a similar learning curve. Council staff faced significant challenges in drawing up feasibility plans for popular proposals which, according to Decide Madrid developer Raimond Garcia, *"was hard because sometimes people are not very specific, they just wrote a paragraph: 'we need a school here, we need a park there, we need a museum, we need a place for art' and that is not very specific and the evaluators have a hard time"*.¹⁷⁴

Ensuring adequate web-systems and standards are in place to store and keep track of ideas in the back-end of the website is also fundamental. This has been particularly important for participatory budgeting exercises but a similar challenge is faced in Brazil where the processing of people's contributions on the e-Democracia portal is done manually by the legislative consultants. Again, this is a very time-intensive process and presents problems for the platform's ability to scale.

Finally, it is also essential that resources are invested in developing the chosen tool or platform, and that the team has the necessary skills (or access to them) to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This applies equally to those who start off with an open-source platform as it does to those who are developing one from scratch. Although open-source tools can save significant startup time, they still need to be adapted and customised to suit particular needs and contexts. For example, Decide Madrid built its platform from scratch but it is now being adopted and adapted by several other cities across Spain, in turn contributing to the open-source resource. The Citizens Foundation addresses this issue by offering relatively low-cost technical support for customisation of Your Priorities.

6



It's not about you: choose tools designed for the users you want, and try to design out destructive participation

Whilst perhaps obvious, the importance of ensuring that tools and platforms are easy to use and navigate must not be understated. This means for example, providing operability across a number of devices and allowing social media interaction, but it also means that the design of the platform should be such that people can understand how they can contribute and the views of other participants. Platforms which fall short on this often suffer from declines in participation rates or the information received is not as useful as it could otherwise have been. Good design promotes more constructive deliberation between contributors and reduces abusive behaviour. Improving how contributions can be seen and responded to by others is an ongoing challenge for developers but various approaches, including visualisation and built-in controls are being tested.

Make it easy to contribute

Platforms and tools which aim to attract high levels of participation should lower barriers to entry. One mechanism for doing this is asking people to complete 'micro-tasks' first. For example, simple up- or down-voting mechanisms allow users to quickly filter the best ideas as a group, such as in Reddit or Consul. For more deliberative exercises, participants in Pol.is are simply asked to 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass' on other people's statements. This process may only take a few seconds, but the data as a whole forms a useful picture of the group's consensus or divergence on a set of issues. Indeed the vTaiwan UberX deliberation successfully involved taxi drivers and Uber drivers on Pol.is, by specifically encouraging them to pull over for ten minutes to participate on their smartphones.

Similarly, where participation initiatives involve multiple phases and tools, it's important to guide users through the whole process from a single place. The Decide Madrid and vTaiwan websites, for instance, act as single hubs including all debates, proposals and votes with clear timelines as well as information on rules of engagement and other resources.

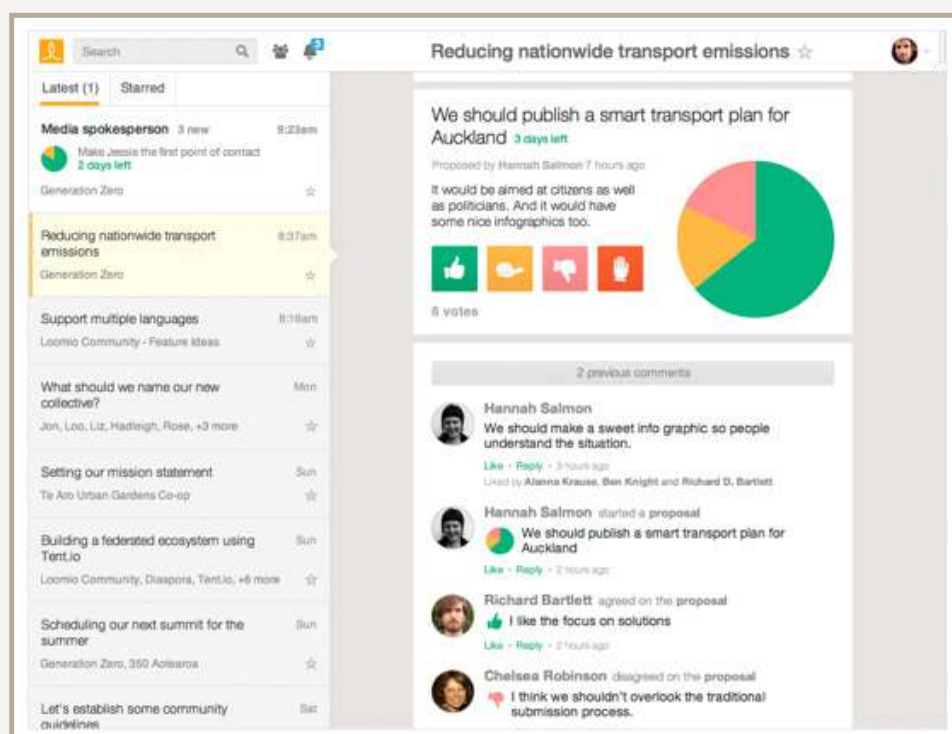
Make it easy to see contributions

It's also important that people taking part can see the contributions of others – to better understand how they can contribute, what has already been said, and the different views of the group. This has been a problem in more open online spaces – such as online fora or web-chats, where participants create a massive amount of text that is difficult to follow or analyse. Contributions may also be generated quickly without reference to others, often leading to high levels of duplication. The x.piratar.is platform in Iceland has a very basic user interface, for example, which means that comments from Pirate Party members simply appear as a continuous list making it difficult to keep track of what has been said on a topic or to respond and discuss in an effective manner.

For Decide Madrid, the large volume of comments and proposals meant that, as developer Raimond Garcia observes, *"from the beginning we were overwhelmed by the number of proposals that were being made and the people were having a hard time finding proposals that they agreed with or removing duplicate proposals, maybe there are 100 proposals that are the same"*. Together with the high threshold number of votes needed, this might explain why despite over 13,000 proposals only two have reached the required threshold for the next stage. When the Decide Madrid team manually merged duplicate contributions, they unwittingly opened themselves up to criticism: *"other political parties will say that we censor ... We want to make it all transparent and open and find a mechanism that applies to all proposals equally"*. In response, new functionality is being progressively added to the Consul software. For example, when a user is about to create a new proposal, they are now presented with all the existing proposals which already have a similar title in order to reduce the chance that participants will post an idea that already exists. In addition, proposal authors will soon be able to retire their proposals in favour of another proposal, in order to maximise support for an idea and reduce duplication.¹⁷⁵

Another effective way of making participants' contributions easy to see is through visualisations. For example, tools like The Deliberatorium or Assembl encourage participants to provide more focused contributions by placing their comments or ideas at a specific point in a logical argument tree. Cap Collectif's Parlement et Citoyens platform ensures that topics for discussion are clearly disaggregated: participants' proposals or arguments can only be made within one particular section of the broader topic, making large discussions easier to summarise. Loomio, a tool for collaborative decision-making within small groups, is structured like an online chat room, but the level of agreement or disagreement is visualised in a pie chart to the side of the screen to give participants a better understanding of the group's opinions.

Figure 26: Screenshot from consultation in Auckland, New Zealand using Loomio¹⁷⁶



Similarly, in contrast to an open 'chat' style conversation, Pol.is participants are asked to react with their level of agreement to one another's statements. People are less likely to add a new statement unless they feel their view has not yet been expressed by someone else, which helps to reduce the number of duplicates. Over time, clustered minority and majority opinion groups, and the highest approved statements are presented visually (see vTaiwan case study), helping guide the conversation towards a clearer conclusion.












One important note in terms of transparency also relates to the advantage of open-source tools. When the code is publicly available, anyone can verify what is behind voting and other mechanisms on a site, eliminating worries about what is happening inside the 'black box' and whether results are subject to manipulation.

Design out negative behaviour

Most people's experience of political engagement online is limited to social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter. Much has been written about the filter bubble which exists on these platforms, which constrains people's exposure to ideas and opinions that they already agree with. When interaction between highly disagreeing groups does happen, it can often descend into abuse. It's therefore important to consider how design features can help to reduce trolling, abusive comments or co-option by specific groups.

Pol.is, for example, is designed to encourage people to work through the group's disagreements by being asked to react to one another's statements one by one. Other open 'forum' tools also make use of incentives. The forum tool Discourse has in-built positive reinforcement or 'gamification' features whereby active users, over time, earn public 'badges' and gain trust from the community. Trusted users gain abilities, like the ability to moderate or resolve disputes.

Figure 27: A list of the 'badges' available within a Discourse forum (along with the number of people within the community who have earned them)¹⁷⁷

Community			
✓ 	Editor	First post edit	1770
✓ 	First Flag	Flagged a post	129
✓ 	Nice Share	Shared a post with 25 unique visitors	1144
✓ 	Promoter	Invited a user	4
✓ 	Welcome	Received a like	2836
✓ 	1 year anniversary		1292
	Campaigner	Invited 3 basic users (trust level 1)	2
	Good Share	Shared a post with 300 unique visitors	47
	Tech Support	10 Accepted answers	4
	Champion	Invited 5 members (trust level 2)	1
	Great Share	Shared a post with 1000 unique visitors	17

Another way of reducing trolling and abusive contributions in online fora is to remove the ability to respond directly to other people. For example, Your Priorities introduced two separate columns 'for' or 'against' in the discussion of an issue, making it impossible to reply directly to someone you disagree with on the platform (see Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods case study). Instead users are encouraged to post broader and more positive arguments that appeal to the whole group. *"You have to write a counter point that stands on its own - that has no reference to the other point. This has increased the quality of contributions and has really eliminated personal attacks".*

Another form of negative behaviour that could potentially arise is that of certain groups attempting to 'game' the outcome of a process. This is clearly more of a risk where decisions by citizens are binding (such as voting on the adoption of a certain policy), than where there are other levels of decision-making involved before any outcome is acted upon. Mechanisms such as up-voting can sometimes encourage groups to mobilise supporters in order to influence the outcome of an online conversation. vTaiwan tackled this by introducing a mechanism in Pol.is that measures the opinion groups before and after. In order for an idea to reach the successful threshold of agreement, it had to gain the support of *"all of the majority plus half of the initial minority"*. This subsequently made mobilisation by a majority group less of a problem.

What is the impact of digital democracy on the quality and legitimacy of decision-making?

At the outset of this research we set out to understand the extent to which new tools and technologies might improve our democratic institutions and processes. More particularly, however, we were interested in the ways in which digital tools could improve the quality of decision-making, make democracy more representative by providing new avenues for participation, and potentially reduce the costs of public participation in democratic deliberations and decision-making. We also wanted to ascertain the ways in which new tools and technologies could improve the legitimacy of our democratic structures and institutions – through a combination of greater transparency, representation and better decision-making. So what do our case studies tell us on these points?

Can digital tools make democracy more representative by providing new opportunities for people to participate?

The evidence from our case studies on this is pretty mixed. Most tend to show that participation is skewed to those who are already politically active and towards well-educated, young men in urban areas. For example, a survey of those who took part in the Digital Republic crowdsourcing exercise showed that most participants were male (77 per cent), most were between the ages of 25-34 and were well educated (82 per cent of participants had received some form of higher education).¹⁷⁸ A survey of those taking part in the Estonian People's Assembly process found that participants were much more likely to be educated, professional, right-wing males, who already engage in politics both formally (i.e. contacting politicians and working in political organisations) and informally (i.e. signing petitions and boycotting certain goods).¹⁷⁹ Indeed, we found few examples of online participation which mirrored the demographic structure of society. The case studies we examined do not suggest that digital tools are currently making democracy more representative. However, in some cases, these projects did reach younger audiences who traditionally tend to participate less. For example, while Open Ministry participants were typically male, 21-40, well-educated and from urban areas – this is a younger demographic than many traditional engagement techniques reach.¹⁸⁰

However, it does seem that when done in conjunction with offline and outreach activities, digital democracy initiatives can broaden participation. This is the case in Madrid and Paris where participation has taken place across all age groups. However, it is difficult to know for sure what the effects of digital technologies on participation are since most of the case studies collect so little data on who is participating. Similarly, it is difficult to know how and to what extent digital technologies have broadened participation in grassroots political parties because of a lack of data.

Can digital tools improve the quality of decision-making by parliaments, political parties and governments?

The quality of decision-making can of course be highly subjective. What one group views as a positive outcome for society may not be the same as another – an issue integral to all forms of democracy, we leave that aside here. Instead, we consider the quality of decision-making from two perspectives: a) the extent to which the evidence on which decisions are based is sound (i.e. robust technical evidence where appropriate, and that the plurality of evidence is available to decision-makers, including that of 'experts by experience'); and b) that the decisions made are technically fit-for-purpose, so subsequent legislation, regulation or policy is free from loopholes, for example.

Viewed from these two perspectives, the feedback from our case studies is clear. All the examples we studied can provide at least anecdotal evidence of how these tools and processes improve the quality of decision-making by having more eyes on a document or process, or by bringing in people with a greater diversity of experiences and expertise to provide input or scrutiny.

The most common way in which decisions are improved is simply by increasing the pool of ideas accessed or suggestions made, which decision-makers acknowledge would not have otherwise been considered in the process.

In this respect, Grímsson and Bjarnason talk animatedly about how Better Reykjavik and Better Neighbourhoods have improved the quality of local decisions: *"in every neighbourhood there is now all kinds of stuff - playgrounds and toys and benches - and all kinds of ideas that would not have occurred to either the politicians or the bureaucrats"*.¹⁸¹ At the more technical end of the spectrum, several pieces of legislation and regulation across the globe have been improved by people spotting loopholes or brokering consensus to ensure that they are approved and are fit for purpose.

In some instances, particularly in relation to political parties, the evidence is thinner as to the overall impact on the quality of decisions. A gap between the aims and aspirations of parties such as Podemos and M5S mean that decision-making often appears to be still quite disconnected from the input provided by members and citizens.

Can digital tools improve the legitimacy of our democratic institutions and processes?

The evidence at the moment is tentatively positive with regards to legitimacy. However, there are various definitions and theories of legitimacy.¹⁸² In general, legitimacy rests on the idea that governing structures and processes should reflect and be responsive to the will of the people ('input legitimacy'),¹⁸³ that actions taken should seek to provide solutions to problems faced by people to support and promote their welfare ('output legitimacy') and that the process itself should be fair, transparent, inclusive, cost-effective and so on ('process legitimacy'). So, for example, processes which are broad, inclusive and representative will have high levels of input legitimacy while processes which lead to positive outcomes will have high levels of output legitimacy.

This potentially sets up a tension between participation and the quality of decision-making. There may be some instances where a small group of people make a better decision than the public at large, or where the crowd isn't as wise as a small group of experts – for example where questions are highly technical or scientific. In these cases, processes may be perceived as less legitimate but lead to better quality decision-making or the inverse, where some processes are seen as legitimate, but lead to poorer quality decision-making. In these cases, policymakers need to decide the appropriate balance according to the task in hand. Participatory budgeting is the kind of exercise which depends on building a high degree of legitimacy among citizens, whereas simply using crowdsourcing for the purpose of tapping into distributed expertise may benefit from more targeted crowdsourcing.

In terms of 'process legitimacy', the evidence is rather clearer. All of the case studies have, to various degrees, improved the transparency of how decisions, legislation and policies are made. Simply by opening up the process to citizen involvement is, by default, an improvement. Some initiatives have sought actively to go further, for example by publicly archiving an audit trail of every document or material relating to a decision, as in vTaiwan. The Brazilian eDemocracia portal is also a good exemplar, informing people of upcoming debates and legislation, live-streaming public hearings, and providing feedback about how representatives made use of contributions. As Faria explains,

"What we can guarantee is that the process is very transparent... it is very different from, say, a contribution given to a representative in his office behind closed doors".¹⁸⁴

Involving people in this type of two-way communication requires authorities to be more explicit about the aims and outcomes of policymaking, in turn helping to open up the 'black box' of legislative processes.

Measures of participants' satisfaction are another way of gauging levels of process legitimacy. Although there is relatively little evaluation of this where it has been done, most participants report being relatively happy with the end results, even if they did not achieve the decision they were originally seeking. However, the benefits for trust in democracy more widely remain to be explored.

Overall, however, there is insufficient evidence to equivocally say much on this. Although all our examples are increasing the transparency of some democratic processes, and the majority can demonstrate at least some benefits for the quality of decisions, we simply do not know enough about who is taking part, or why, to be confident of the extent to which they are increasing representation. The evidence clearly suggests that the current effectiveness of these tools alone is probably insufficient to improve the legitimacy of whole processes per se. We must therefore treat with caution claims that such tools can increase the legitimacy of and restore trust in our democratic institutions and processes.

Can digital tools and technologies make public participation cheaper?

Finally, digital solutions are often held up as a route to cutting costs and driving through savings in the name of efficiency. To consider digital democracy tools in this way would, however, be a mistake. In every instance, the costs for the organising institution have in fact increased as a result of launching these initiatives. Costs are incurred in the form of: investment in new platforms; human resources to work on projects/sifting proposals; communications and marketing to make citizens aware of new opportunities for participation and to engage decision-makers and support them to make use of these tools.

Smaller scale, one-off types of engagement are naturally less resource-intensive but as activities increase in scale and scope, and where the targeted audience is much wider, there is typically a commensurate requirement for greater investment. This is particularly important in the short-medium term as new processes and ways of working are established, tools integrated, and skills developed. So initiatives such as LabHacker in Brazil have resulted in a sustained investment in salaried staff and the necessary support for the team. Other types of engagement, such as participatory budgeting, not only require significant amounts of time from civil servants, but also substantial additional budget for outreach and communications, as can be seen in Paris, Madrid and Reykjavik.

What next for digital democracy?

There are now hundreds of digital tools and platforms being used across the world to engage citizens in democracy. Many of them are described in this report – and some of the most promising examples demonstrate how digital tools can be used to engage citizens in order to improve the quality, legitimacy and transparency of decision-making. However, there's still a long way to go before these kinds of activities become widespread and commonplace. Moreover, there are a number of challenges, common to all or most of our case studies, and a number of gaps in the field, which need to be addressed or resolved before digital democracy can reinvigorate and restore the public's trust in our democratic institutions and processes. In what follows, we reflect on some of the challenges, tensions and gaps within the field.

Developing a more nuanced understanding of participation

Clearly some engagement activities – such as participatory budgeting (PB) – require mass, broad-scale participation to ensure the quality and legitimacy of the process. With PB, it is essential that those participating are broadly representative of the local area, that minority groups and interests are represented, and that different geographic areas are also represented. This is to ensure that public expenditure isn't skewed in favour of a particular group or geographic community. And also, since PB is about generating and selecting good ideas, there's value in generating as many ideas as possible; after all, *"the best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas and throw the bad ones away."*¹⁸⁵

However, in many other cases, it is more important to engage a smaller number of people rather than the public at large. This might be because those participating need a high level of scientific or technical knowledge to take part – for example with Evidence Checks or when contributing to draft legislation which is highly technical. This might also be because the activity at hand is of most relevance to a specific community of interest (e.g. fishermen or former servicemen). Or because the activity itself requires a considerable time commitment from those taking part and consequently only a small number of people will be able to take part. In these cases, what is required is targeted outreach to specific groups of people and communities of interest, or even individuals, rather than 'the public' in general. This more focused outreach is often intended to represent a balance in terms of ensuring that engagement goes well beyond 'the usual suspects' and brings the plurality of views on a topic into the discussion, while avoiding the pitfalls of promoting tokenistic mass participation on a topic on which few are well-placed to comment.

From a pragmatic perspective, the decision to involve fewer citizens can also reflect the resource available to manage citizen contributions – it is better to seek fewer high quality contributions on more niche and technical subjects that can be effectively reviewed and used than to generate thousands of contributions that cannot be processed, risking the disillusionment of those who participate to no effect.

This requires a more nuanced understanding of democracy and what we mean by participation; it means being clear about the aims, objectives and methods of engagement. It also means being comfortable about explicitly aiming to engage a smaller range or group of citizens, rather than being concerned with achieving participation which is representative of the broader population.

This is also a far more pragmatic approach; the literature on democracy and public participation overstates people's desire to take part. Indeed, many people do not want to be engaged, and where they must take part, they want the experience to be as quick and easy as possible. It's also pragmatic since resources for public participation and democracy are finite and such exercises tend to be costly. Simply building a participation tool or platform is no guarantee that it will be used. Engagement requires significant resources in order to raise awareness of the project and reach out to participants through dedicated marketing and communications campaigns.

Bridging the digital divide

One of the greatest challenges for those organising participation exercises can be attracting participants. In some cases, a lack of access to the internet or a lack of digital skills can be a barrier. As internet penetration improves, concerns about the 'digital divide' and 'digital inequality' will become less pressing but it's important to note that, in 2016, over five million adults in the UK (10.2 per cent of adults) had never used the internet.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, there is still a huge correlation between age and internet use – the older you are, the less likely you are to use the internet. For example, of those taking part in the Decide Madrid platform, participation was skewed towards those in the 30-49 age bracket (60 per cent) and away from the older voters (10 per cent aged 60 or over), even though there was participation across all age groups.

One solution is to limit online activities to those topics where the digital divide is less or not at all relevant. For example, vTaiwan has so far only chosen topics for debate that are related to digital affairs. As Chia-liang Kao, co-founder of the g0v community and vTaiwan pioneer, describes: *"that's a really important starting point, because we are limiting the issues that we can talk about on this platform, ensuring that we don't have to deal with the digital divide yet, assuming that most of the stakeholders are online, but that's an assumption at first"*.¹⁸⁷ However, such an approach significantly curtails the kinds of issues that can be discussed and addressed through digital democracy initiatives.

In the majority of instances, offline approaches clearly need to be used to reach out to those who lack digital skills or access. There are already numerous examples of online participatory budgeting exercises such as Madame Mayor, I have an idea, which have a strong offline component, with municipal governments doing outreach to target specific groups – often the elderly and ethnic minority groups – to make sure that participation is broadly representative of the local area. In the first round of Madame Mayor, I have an Idea, only 60 per cent of people chose to vote online. This was largely due to the huge number of offline workshops, groups and civil society-led activity which galvanises people at a local level to take part.

Figure 28: A group of participants at the Rahvagoku deliberation day in Estonia¹⁸⁸



A few initiatives, such as vTaiwan and eDemocracia are taking things one step further by digitising the content of offline contributions, such as through publishing transcripts and recordings. This ensures that everyone can participate in a way which meets their needs, while maintaining the high levels of transparency afforded by publishing everything online. Nonetheless, as digital democracy initiatives become more widespread, policymakers will need to remain alive to the problems raised by the digital divide and ensure opportunities for everyone to contribute regardless of their skills, abilities, access to technology or preferences.

Understanding motivations for participation

There is surprisingly little evidence on what motivates people to take part in digital democracy initiatives – whether it's online deliberation exercises, or crowdsourcing information or online participatory budgeting.

There is a significant body of research which examines why people volunteer and take part in other forms of participation – such as politics, social movements and ethical consumerism. Important factors include: personal interest, a desire to make a change, life experiences, family background and exposure to civil society, and a desire to make connections and new friends.¹⁸⁹ There is also some research which tries to understand the motivations of those taking part in crowdsourcing projects like developing open-source software and innovation challenge prizes. The research shows that people contribute for a variety of reasons – such as enhancing their reputations, developing skills, expectations of reciprocity and receiving tangible returns.¹⁹⁰ In the literature on open-source software one of the key drivers is participants' needs for the software they're developing.

Ultimately, people rarely participate for altruistic reasons – they need to see benefits of their participation. And, ideally, these benefits should be tangible, immediate and visible to the broader community of participants. Evidence from our case studies suggests that these are important factors for success in digital democracy initiatives.

Where participation exercises can't fulfil these requirements, policymakers need to think about incentives for participation. Should policymakers consider financial rewards or prizes for small groups of participants? For larger participation exercises, could we envisage a system akin to air miles where participants receive credits for participation which can be redeemed against local services or tax rebates once they've reached a certain amount?

Research on whether prizes and rewards incentivises participation is relatively mixed – for example, the size of a prize doesn't seem to have a significant impact on levels of participation, but some structures, such as winner-takes-all award structures seem more effective than multiple prize structures for ideation and trial and error projects.¹⁹¹

So where does this leave advocates of digital democracy? Should they assume that most people won't engage deeply and design systems which rely on shallower forms of engagement when they're looking for mass participation? For deeper forms of engagement should they focus on far smaller groups of people and appeal to their needs and desires for opportunities to develop their reputations, learn skills and so on? What are the dangers and opportunities of using mechanisms to tap into people's extrinsic motivations? What is certainly needed is a better understanding of the kinds of feedback mechanisms and incentive structures that work best for particular forms of online participation.

Balancing aspiration and reality

Another challenge for digital democracy pioneers, closely linked to understanding of individual motivations for participation, is how to ensure that what people ultimately experience, and the outcomes of participation, are at least broadly in line with the expectations set at the outset. This appears to be particularly, although not exclusively, an issue for the new political parties such as Podemos, the Pirate Party, and M5S. On the one hand, these parties have grand stated ambitions for direct democracy and to dramatically shift the balance of power, giving members and citizens a far greater, or even binding, say over policies, candidates and a host of other areas related to democratic and party political processes.

In reality, however, these parties have experienced rapid growth, with new members elected at the municipal, national or European levels. Inevitably, this has placed a strain on the capacity of these parties to deliver on their ambitions. New technology platforms are being developed and tested, there is a rapid increase in the number of users, and the methods themselves of online engagement are also an area of rich experimentation. And of course these forms of direct digital democracy are also new to the majority of citizens, leaving it uncertain how different groups will respond and engage, and requiring constant innovation and iteration to adapt to their needs. It would be remarkable if any organisation could hit the ground running without teething problems or a steep learning curve.

Nevertheless, there does seem to be a gap between these parties' stated aims in terms of participatory democracy and what is currently taking place on the ground. For example, while M5S espouses direct democracy, there are criticisms that the leadership has overly

controlled debate and decided what was open for discussion or voting on online platforms, and that there is a lack of transparency over final decision-making. There have also been complaints that dissenting voices and criticisms on the original blog forum were removed by moderators and classed as trolls.

Interestingly, however, the rhetoric of many parties and digital democracy activists does not actively manage the expectations of citizens in this respect. As can be seen on the message boards of Podemos or criticisms of M5S, if this happens it can lead to some disillusionment and disengagement by citizens. As the ambitions for digital democracy grow, those leading new initiatives may wish to consider how citizens can be 'brought on the journey' and whether a greater degree of transparency about the experimental nature of some activities and to gradually scale-up what can be achieved, would be more beneficial for all involved.

Making digital democracy the 'new normal'

It is extremely clear that buy-in from decision-makers is hugely influential in terms of the take-up and development of digital democracy initiatives.

For digital democracy to have true impact on legislative processes and the outcome of democratic decision-making, it must be embraced by those in positions of power, including those in opposition.

Citizen engagement initiatives at the national and local level should be free from party politics. Mayoral backing for the participatory budgeting process in Paris, the creation of Lab Hacker in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, and Prime Ministerial support for the Estonian People's Assembly all exemplify this. Yet strong leadership alone is generally insufficient to change what may be centuries of tradition around the roles of elected officials and their interactions with citizens. In almost every case we find examples of pockets of resistance to increasing citizen engagement and/or the use of digital tools to do so.

To tackle this there is a need for significant reform of the way in which our public administrations and democratic institutions operate.

Traditional siloed forms of working need to be replaced with more cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary working, and there must be clear incentives and motivation for civil servants to embrace innovative new approaches. A culture of experimentation must be encouraged, and failure accepted as part of this.

Part of this means finding new ways to enable civil society and 'civic tech' entrepreneurs and innovators to develop and scale their ideas. The ecosystem of government needs to enable, both in practical and financial terms, their growth and contribution. Successful innovations should be adopted and incorporated into the standard processes of policy making and legislative development.

Mainstreaming these kinds of initiatives also necessitates quite significant cultural change amongst representatives; it requires them to re-appraise their role as representatives in the 21st century and their relationship to citizens and their constituents. It requires placing the citizen at the heart of our democratic processes as the rule rather than the exception, with a clear awareness of the value of these kinds of engagement exercises.

Capitalising on new technologies

A number of new technologies also present interesting opportunities for digital democracy. One significant opportunity is text-mining. Crowdsourcing exercises often face a challenge of how to process large amounts of unstructured text generated by participants and this can be highly time-consuming for facilitators. Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods, also referred to as 'text mining', could therefore provide a method for learning algorithms to summarise and synthesise the comments, ideas, and concerns highlighted in massive crowdsourcing exercises. Learning algorithms are being used to detect sentiment, such as instances of positive, negative or neutral opinion, or for detecting the occurrence of key-words, concepts or themes in large databases of text. This might be used, for example, to provide an estimation of the originality of a citizen's idea based on the use of rarely-used words.

So far, experiments in this area have suffered from relatively low levels of accuracy in data categorisation, and a relatively shallow understanding of deeper levels of meaning within natural language.¹⁹² That said, the technology shows promise in bringing highly distinctive words or keywords to the attention of facilitators,¹⁹³ or in tracking and automating the moderation of abusive or highly negative comments in open online forums. Over time, as datasets continue to increase in size, and the more data becomes available for algorithms to improve their learning and accuracy, this technology will become more and more valuable.¹⁹⁴

Online discussions have commonly been characterised by text-based, anonymous and asynchronous interactions. The emergence of Virtual Reality (VR) technologies could potentially hold some promise for improving the quality of interactions, and building empathy amongst participants. Beyond the creation of virtual environments, the potential of omnidirectional cameras to be placed into meetings, committee rooms, or even parliaments, could give outsiders who wish to participate a clearer perception of the environment in the room, including people's non-verbal expressions. However, more research is needed into whether VR can make real differences to the quality of interaction; pilots in this area are scarce.¹⁹⁵

Figure 29: Audrey Tang, Taiwan's Digital Minister, experimenting with virtual spaces for deliberation¹⁹⁶



Blockchain - the technology which underlies the digital currency Bitcoin - could help to improve the security and transparency of electronic voting systems. Put simply, Blockchain provides a decentralised database or 'public ledger' of transactions which can be seen by anyone in a network. Any new transaction must be validated by every other computer within the network before being published on the ever-growing, public list of transactions. This technology is highly transparent and tamper proof (it's impossible to change or amend transactions). This has led to some excitement around implications for voting, specifically for a more transparent and 'incorruptible' method for tallying votes.¹⁹⁷ However, while the technology could be used to count votes accurately, it is not clear how the technology would maintain the anonymity of voters, therefore raising problems around the principle of ensuring a secret ballot.¹⁹⁸

Addressing the gaps in digital democracy initiatives

When looking for case studies, we examined a broad range of digital democracy initiatives. Most of these involved citizens putting forward and voting on ideas and proposals (e.g. Decide Madrid and Better Neighbourhoods/Better Reykjavik) or providing information (e.g. Fix My Street, m4water in Uganda). Some provide an arena for public deliberation (e.g. vTaiwan and e-Democracia) or for citizens to work with representatives to collaboratively draft legislative proposals (e.g. Parlement et Citoyens or Legislation Lab which was used in 2011 to crowdsource contributions for the new Constitution of Morocco). Very few, if any of the projects we looked at, were about citizens being involved in the implementation and execution of the ideas and proposals that had been subject to a public vote. For example, with Better Neighbourhoods/Better Reykjavik, Decide Madrid and Madame Mayor, I have an Idea, there are currently no mechanisms for engaging citizens after the ideas have been voted on and implemented as part of an impact assessment or evaluation stage.

In addition, and despite the wide range of civic tech projects which aim to provide transparency and scrutiny of public actions (e.g. I Paid a Bribe, Corruption Watch in South Africa, or Fact Check in the US) we found few examples of governments and parliaments which had developed digital tools to enable citizens to monitor, evaluate, and assess the quality and performance of public services (e.g. Penplusbytes in Ghana).¹⁹⁹ Whilst governments and parliaments around the world have been publishing huge amounts of data as part of a broader agenda of open government – and these certainly do provide citizens with information to scrutinise public actions and decisions about public spending – we identified a gap in terms of specific participation platforms, tools and projects which actively invite citizens to take part in ongoing discussions about the implementation and evaluation of public projects.

What would such an exercise look like? Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre is often seen as the gold standard for such exercises. One of the key principles of the participatory budgeting process is that participation does not end once the budget is decided - the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the budget is also part of the participatory process. Could such a group be convened using digital tools, and do some of the new technologies now entering the mainstream offer solutions? How could this be extended to other forms of digital engagement, such as the development and implementation of policy? It may well be that such groups and activities are better suited to offline meetings and in-person advisory groups. However, it is striking that so few of the digital democracy projects we examined considered involving citizens in this way.

There is also scope to scale up processes such as participatory budgeting to tackle some of the problems of existing models, such as in many US States where citizens regularly vote to 'have their cake and eat it' by simultaneously choosing an increase in services alongside a cut in taxes. For example, in California, the legislature is bound by both a cap on property taxes and a guaranteed expenditure on education. A model which forces people to make trade-offs within a budget envelope might go some way to resolving such tensions but has yet to be tried on areas of expenditure which fall outside short-term investment projects.

Understanding what works in digital democracy: impact and evaluation

Digital democracy initiatives are almost always explicitly or implicitly closely aligned with ideals around greater transparency, open data and increased collaboration to improve the quality and legitimacy of decision-making. The creators of digital tools are concerned with disrupting and challenging entrenched and traditional forms of democratic decision-making in the belief that these newer ways will be better, or at the very least positively supplement, their predecessors. With so much scrutiny focused on the shortcomings of current systems, and the opportunities of digital, it is therefore somewhat ironic that currently so little attention is being paid to evaluating the outcomes of these digital initiatives themselves.

In many of the cases we have looked at we do not even have the data to fully ascertain who is participating. In some cases, such as Better Reykjavik, there has been a conscious decision to not collect data in order to lower the barriers to participation. Undoubtedly it is an important consideration and balancing the need for data with the desire to engage is difficult. Many others collect some basic demographic data such as gender, age or place of residence but this alone can only give us a basic indicator as to whether citizens beyond the 'usual suspects' are being engaged. It remains largely unclear whether new digital tools are broadening participation, for example bringing in wider demographic or socio-economic groups, or those who are 'seldom-heard' for any reason, or if those who previously engaged offline are simply switching to online.

Similarly, there are only a few examples of external evaluations of new tools and programmes. While they sometimes provide more detailed insight into participant profiles and motivations, such as in the case of Open Ministry in Finland or Rahvakogu in Estonia, these represent only snapshots in time and do not provide a longer-term view of how participation is evolving. Comprehensive research into the experience of participants and its effects on their trust in democracy, political parties and political processes is also conspicuous by its absence.

Unless we understand exactly who is participating and its impact on those individuals, it is impossible to address questions about whether digital tools are broadening representation and increasing the legitimacy of decision-making.

Equally, other metrics and analysis of the impact of new digital democracy tools are also lacking. There is little consideration, for example, of the costs vs. the benefits of such tools, or indeed evaluations of the impact of greater citizen engagement in democratic decision-making. These are not simple questions to answer. How can we begin to determine, for example, what constitutes a 'successful' digital tool? The number of participants? The number of contributions? The number of 'high quality' contributions? The proportion of ideas that are passed into legislation? The level of engagement by decision-makers with citizens?

Clearly the answer will be highly context specific but the complexity of the challenge does not mean that attempts at impact measurement should be parked. Greater attention must be paid to developing theories of change or clear objectives from the outset, against which the success or failure of these initiatives can later be measured. And as with all innovation, there must be better sharing of learnings about what works, and what doesn't work, in digital democracy.

The limits to digital democracy

Finally, it is important not to overplay what can be achieved through digital tools and technologies. Within academic circles, the past two decades have seen much enthusiasm and optimism about the potential impact of new technologies on democracy. At the more techno-utopian end of the spectrum, advocates argued that ICTs would democratise our public sphere, provide new arenas for public deliberation, facilitate new forms of participation, and encourage far greater levels of public participation. It was hoped that together, these would lead to the creation of a more informed citizenry, challenge the power of elites, and ultimately lead to greater legitimacy and trust for our democratic institutions.

The reality hasn't lived up to the hype. In part this is because some of the predictions about how new technologies would be applied turned out to be incorrect, but it's also because the potentially transformative effects of these new technologies on our democratic institutions were overstated. Some of these claims were overly technologically deterministic and failed to take into account the cultural, social and institutional changes that would be required to realise the potential of these new technologies or to transform our democratic processes and institutions.

In the UK, for example, restoring trust in our democratic institutions will probably require, amongst other things, structural reforms to the House of Lords, a move to more proportional forms of representation in the House of Commons, greater diversity amongst MPs in terms of their backgrounds, work experience, ethnicity and gender,²⁰⁰ and cultural change within parliament to bring some of its more idiosyncratic customs and working practices in line with the 21st century.

Digital technologies alone won't solve the challenges of apathy, disillusionment, low levels of trust and the widening chasm between the people and the political class – but they could play an important role nonetheless. To understand how digital technologies could make our institutions more open, and reshape the interactions between citizens and the state, we need greater experimentation, better evaluation to identify 'what works', and a greater understanding of how online activities can be used to supplement and support more traditional offline methods of engagement.

Conclusion

While digital democracy initiatives alone won't be able to tackle the more entrenched and endemic problems with our democratic institutions, they should nevertheless, be part of a number of approaches and initiatives to restore trust, transparency and legitimacy. The examples of digital democracy we have investigated are working alongside and together with more traditional forms of citizen engagement to enhance what can be achieved from both.

It's worth noting that the vast majority of the examples we identified aim to support our system of representative democracy - not to undermine or supplant it. Although a handful aspire to incorporate some aspects of direct democracy, for example by giving citizens

the power to make binding decisions as in the cases of Decide Madrid or some of the new political parties like M5S or the Pirate Party, generally the aim is to support the work of representatives by better engaging citizens.

As Diego Cunha of LabHacker explains, *"The idea is not to question the representative authority, it's to crowdsource, it's to get new ideas, better ideas. So it's up to the lawmakers whether these can be used or not. The idea is to give more legitimation to changes in the law."*²⁰¹

This is echoed by his colleague Cristiano Faria: *"what we create is a list of participatory opportunities to let law-makers choose their preferred path; the options are not institutionalised, they're just recommendations for the law-maker to choose from... At the end, it's still a very traditional representative system, what we are offering is to help make this more modern, more transparent, with better listening and crowdsourcing"*.²⁰²

Similarly Thibaut Dernoncourt explains how Parlement et Citoyens isn't a platform for direct democracy; instead, the idea is to harvest and present as many opinions from the community as possible, allowing representatives to make a more informed decision: *"What we're saying is 'ok, people do not agree, but that doesn't mean that we cannot make a decision for everybody'"*.²⁰³ These sorts of initiatives shouldn't be seen as a threat to the work and aims of parliaments, governments and parties, but rather as part of the toolbox for supporting and improving their work. Indeed, for Senator Joël Labbé, this is precisely one of the benefits of Parlement et Citoyens:

*"As time has gone by, politicians have become very disconnected from what people expect. It is partly the politicians' fault but it is also partly the people's fault. People who say 'we have elected them now they should get on with it' and those who say 'we elected them so they should defend our interests'. So with law which is co-created, it allows and forces politicians to take a new look at themselves, to take into account the opinion of their voters not just during their election campaigns, but also throughout their parliamentary work, in order to recreate the link between people and politicians and to make sure that politicians are followed by the greatest possible number of voters and citizens."*²⁰⁴

And while many of the initiatives in this report are relatively new, they do show how digital tools and technologies can be used to improve the quality of decision making, policies and legislation and the transparency of decision making processes. At a time when modern democracy and its institutions are coming under increasing scrutiny and challenge from citizens who feel disaffected and disconnected, it is all the more important that tools which can help to alleviate those tensions are adopted and ways of working adapted to bridge the gap between citizens and those in power.

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