

Introduction to the Workshop on Government and Citizen Engagement

chaired by

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Introduction

The trend towards more user contributions on the web and an increased interest in social media technology, from both governments and citizens, leads to new potentials and challenges in designing for citizen-government interactions.

For several years now, governments have recognised the potential of the web 2.0 to bring citizens and their governments closer together. Indeed, the social web holds the potential of supporting a better two-way communication where citizens are engaged through public consultations, contributing to the design of government policies. The question is what role governments have to play in this development. How do we best support the notion of government as a collaborator that is more accountable, responsive and transparent? Citizens, government employees, and public institutions all have different, sometimes discrepant goals for their engagement. The challenge of supporting a prolific collaboration depends to a large extent on the alignment of the goals of the involved actors.

Furthermore, several scholars (e.g. Barney, 2000) have argued that any promised democratic revolution in the wake of the introduction and increased use of e-government and e-participation services has failed to manifest itself. As argued by e.g. Toregas (2001), providing mere access to information does not ensure citizen participation, much less does it innately undergird citizen empowerment. In addition, while web 2.0 tools bring opportunities for capitalizing on the communities ideas

and enthusiasm, there are also major challenges, both from a perspective of how to engage people and in terms of privacy, confidentiality or security.

In the workshop we specifically addressed challenges such as how to render information more usable by citizens, how to strengthen citizen influence through citizen-citizen collaboration, how to bridge the gap between citizen deliberation and concrete citizen influence on democratic issues, and how to promote a better two-way communication between government and citizens, building citizen communities that are facilitated by government to discuss and improve government services.

Participants were encouraged to present and demonstrate concrete examples of citizen-government interaction design cases during the workshop. We had interactive discussions to identify the predominant challenges and opportunities in this area. The papers in the workshop looked at both citizen empowerment and governments as collaborators in these interactions.

Contents of the Proceedings

The first three papers are about e-democracy, i.e., about the use of social media in election campaigns and by governments to engage citizens in online participation and deliberation. The paper by Christopher Mascaro and Sean P. Goggins (Drexel University, USA) discusses the use of social media in the US election, the use of Twitter by congressmen and the open data push in the US. The paper also raises interesting issues such as: To what extent are individuals aware of the existence of technology tools to enable them to participate? How does this awareness contribute to participation? In her paper, Janet Toland (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand) presents the use of an e-petition system by a local government to encourage communities to participate and engage in local issues. This topic brings up the issues of representation and legitimacy: Who is participating? Who should be allowed to participate, in particular when issues are specific to a group of people, whether based on locality, citizenship, attributes, etc. Finally, the paper by Rosyidah Muhamad (Latrobe University, Australia) looks at the use of political blogging and the role it plays in the public sphere in Malaysia and raises questions about censorship in online forums for citizen engagement and how it affects trust.

The following two papers explore the use of technology in facilitating citizens participation in urban planning, addressing the disconnect between planning and consultation. Mohammad Ashraf Khan and Andy Dong (University of Sydney, Australia) present the Thumper prototype, a geo-location mobile web application for the democratisation of urban design process using augmented reality. Matthias Korn (Aarhus University, Denmark) investigates how and whether we can leverage mobile location-aware technologies to aid in urban planning. He argues that deliberation activities in urban planning that are situated (or merely co-located) with the places they are concerned with may improve feedback and discussions in such citizen engagement efforts.

The final two papers investigate the engagement with citizens from different perspectives. Alice Baroni (Queensland University of Technology, Australia) presents the use of social media in Rio de Janeiro's Favelas as a form of empowerment for the most disadvantaged communities, looking at how social media can help redefine the inward and outward perception of a community. Finally, the paper by Nathalie Colineau and Cécile Paris (CSIRO ICT Centre, Australia) in collaboration with Amanda Dennett (Human Services Portfolio Communication Division, Australia) studies the use of online communities as a means to provide peer-support to welfare recipients in their transition back to work. In both papers, issues of trust and engagement are important.

References

- Barney, D. (2000): *Prometheus Wired: The Hope for Democracy in the Age of Network Technology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Toregas, C. (2001): 'The Politics of E-Gov: The Upcoming Struggle for Redefining Civic Engagement'. *National Civic Review*, vol. 90, no. 3, pp. 235–240.