

BORDERS TO CROSS

Title:	2.6
Name workshop:	Transparency and new technology
Projects presented:	1. Better Reykjavik 2. Transformed by you
Workshop director(s):	Josien Pieterse
Name rapporteur(s):	Yiqing Zhang (Emily)
Date and time of workshop:	30/10/13 11:30-13:00

It is hardly surprising to know that new technology has greatly influenced the democratic renewal, however, it is always worth asking how citizens are involved in the process and how policymakers can adapt to these developing democratic practices to enhance the transparency level of governments.

The use of technology in democratic field has changed the power-ratio between governments and citizens, enabling the latter to monitor the performance of the former as well as offering the former a new channel to collect grassroots suggestions and opinions. Citizen's willingness to participate in democratic activities through internet (for example, on-line platform) formed a clear contrast with their reluctant attitude towards real life participation, providing an opportunity for governments to involve normally apolitical citizens in the process of building and strengthening of democracy.

1. Iceland Better Reykjavik project:

The center of the Better Reykjavik project is an eDemocracy website called "Your Priorities", where participants can voice individual priority and choose best ideas from all the proposed priorities. By designing two opposing columns listing favorable arguments and unfavorable arguments respectively for top priorities, every proposal can be well debated before being picked by the government for implementation, thus increasing the professionalism of citizen initiatives. Originated from Estonia, Greece and Bulgaria's grassroots methods and replicated to 12 Balkan countries, the project had successfully attracted over 70,000 participants worldwide and educated citizens regarding expertise knowledge such as budget-making.

2. Transformed by you project:

Before setting up a specific project, three preparations need to be done by policymakers: firstly, to understand needs and motivations of citizens; secondly, to design principles and prototypes to regulate participation; and thirdly, to distribute methods that can be helpful to assist citizens. These involve the opening up of information; the building of relationships to stimulate collaboration; to cultivate creativity to help people make sense of issues as well as their motivations and skills; and to insist on crowd source principles, which include accessibility, simplicity and usability.

While governments are becoming more and more transparent with technology innovations such as detailed open online data on government expenditure, there is worrying about whether citizens can make full use of the data, for its implications are generally implicit and the information it conveys probably require professional knowledge to process. One suggestion is that NGOs may function as a mediator to help “translate” the raw data to easily understandable interpretations, thus citizens’ participation can remain effective and productive.

