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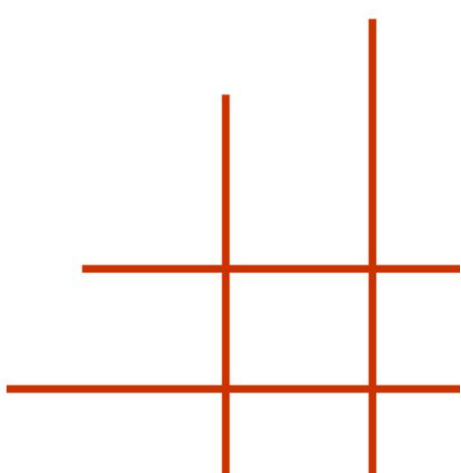
**Proceedings of the C&T 2011
Workshop on Government and
Citizen Engagement**

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Introduction to the Workshop on Government and Citizen Engagement

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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.

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Challenges for National Civic Engagement in the United States

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Abstract. Civic Engagement on the Internet is rapidly evolving. Successful examples of citizen engagement are prominent in recent global media coverage and are the subject of the author's recent paper examining the use of Facebook for national political issues in the United States. With this workshop paper we present a brief overview of some current initiatives of civic engagement at the national level in the United States. We use these examples to form a basis to discuss the challenges facing civic engagement efforts. At the conclusion of the paper we present a series of questions to help inform and examine new and existing civic engagement issues. Although the discussion is specific to the United States, the questions may also apply to other countries and governments throughout the world.

Introduction

The Internet's role in allowing citizens to engage with each other and with their elected officials is changing every day. There are examples of citizens engaging in direct action on large national issues (Egypt, Libya) and examples of virtual community extending local, civic government (Blacksburg Electronic Village). We have recently shown how advocacy groups make extensive use of Facebook to organize and encourage civil discourse through social media (Mascaro & Goggins, 2011). From these examples, it is clear that the nature of Internet based participation in government is under regular revision and reinvention.

Across different levels of government, there is a common set of challenges that arise from the mutual interest in engaging citizens with each other and with their governments. Both existing technologies and technologies freshly conceptualized for new forms of political engagement will play a part in the future of civic engagement. Through our participation in this workshop, we expect to gain insights from other researchers interested in these topics and begin to address some outstanding research questions about the current state of civic engagement and the path forward.

Current implementations of technology that allow citizens to engage with elected officials have been met with varying success. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, allow individuals to seek out and interact with others with similar interests. Other social networking tools such as Twitter, allow individuals to seek information and participate in emergent discourse surrounding events in the community. The unprecedented access that these tools provide citizens has lead successful implementations to be overloaded with activity. The abundance of activity may result in citizens feeling as though their issues are lost in the noise, which may lead to technological political fatigue. This technological fatigue is one of the greatest challenges that must be overcome in national civic engagement efforts to help ensure continued adoption and utilization of these tools.

In the next section, we present a sample of the projects associated with the United States Federal Government and its elected officials that are aimed at informing the public and facilitating civic engagement. This is an incomplete sample of projects, presented to establish a subsequent discussion of the challenges facing projects where governments and elected officials engage citizens using technology. The challenges that we recognize as persistent among these cases include: awareness of the tools for engagement by the public, the role of critical mass in tool-based discourse and the limiting effects of off-topic, conversational noise on substantive discourse. The final section presents the research questions we expect to develop during the workshop, and examine in subsequent studies.

Literature Review

One of the greatest benefits of Internet in the political process is that it reduces the costs of obtaining information and participation (Bimber, 2001). Citizens that utilize the Internet are more likely to be civically engaged than those that do not. Additionally, the costs for elected officials or candidates to communicate with the public have been significantly reduced with the introduction of the Internet to the political process (Krueger, 2006; Vargas, 2008). In the 2008 United States Presidential election, 40% of Internet users with profiles on social networking sites and 50% of those under the age of 30 used Facebook for obtaining political information (Klofstad, 2007; Smith & Rainie, 2008; Zhang et al., 2009). Many

instances of engagement through these tools were a result of individuals already having accounts on these websites and being made aware of the existence of such information through the website.

Barack Obama's 2008 election victory and Howard Dean's pioneering use of the blog in 2004 contributed to the high visibility of national level civic engagement efforts in the United States (Trippi, 2004). The use of technology in the national political process to engage citizens has grown significantly in recent years. Recent Presidential and Congressional Elections, such as the 2008 Presidential and the 2010 Midterm elections, have illustrated the reliance on technology to engage the public and provide information about the political process (Smith & Rainie, 2008; Smith, 2011).

The efficacy of technology utilization in an attempt to engage with the public and facilitate discourse has yet to be fully examined. There are many instances of times that individuals attempt to engage with their elected officials or others on these sites and the discourse becomes lost in the abundance of other participants and comments on the forum. For example, from November 2010 – February 2011, President Barack Obama's administration made an average of 2.5 Facebook wall posts that received on average over 2,200 comments each. A significant number of these comments were shallow and offered little to contribute to the thread of discourse. Those comments that were constructive were often lost in the middle of a large stream of otherwise non-constructive comments. This scale of discourse is overwhelming and limiting in regard to facilitating effective discourse in the current set of tools utilized in these efforts.

In addition to Presidential campaigns, Congressional members are increasingly using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to engage with the public. Websites such as tweetcongress.org have publically encouraged members of Congress to utilize Twitter to further civic engagement in the legislative process (Netherland & McCroskey, 2010). The increasing usage of Twitter by Congress and the perceived campaign and electoral benefits has led to a dramatic adoption of technology for purposes of civic engagement (Schaper, 2010). These perceived benefits have yet to be fully examined, but studies of the 2008 Presidential and Congressional election cycle illustrate some correlation between electoral success and social networking website activity, specifically on Facebook (Williams & Gulati 2008; Williams & Gulati 2009). Further studies related to the 2010 Midterm Election cycle are likely to further the understanding of the effects of such technology on the electoral process in the United States.

In addition to civic engagement efforts, many websites have been established to better inform the public of government activity. Websites such as govtrack.us have been created to aggregate publically available government information. These websites give citizens access to legislation being voted on, the voting records of Congressional members and other pertinent information about Congressional districts (Tauberer, 2010). As time has passed, govtrack.us has

undergone further development to allow citizens to interact with others to ask questions regarding the issues and become better informed. Websites such as govtrack.us have lead to the development of numerous similar websites such as maplight.org that help to further inform the citizenry of the connections between money and politics.

The preceding literature frames a subset of relevant, existing efforts to engage US citizens in national level political processes using technology. The three most salient issues that arise out of these efforts to engage with the public and provide information are awareness of the tools, existence of critical mass within the tool for effective discourse and the existence of a space to effectively partake in discourse that does not become too noisy.

Challenges

Democratic government benefits from an engaged citizenry. In a world with over six billion people, citizen engagement through technology is as once recognized as important and difficult to reliably witness. Awareness of the existence of tools is one of the most prevalent challenges facing these efforts, because individuals must be aware of resources to utilize them. The challenge of awareness related to sites that provide a basis for discourse such as govtrack.us and maplight.org, exists because these websites tend to only be known to those with an interest in politics. Additionally, these sites store an abundance of information that may only be useful to those with a clearly defined information need. This leads these types of websites to be underutilized and unnoticed because of the difficulty citizens have in understanding and utilizing the websites as a resource.

To help overcome issues of awareness, it is important that candidates, elected officials and groups that provide data, establish profiles and forums where there is a critical mass of interested individuals. Popular tools such as Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites already have a critical mass and therefore can help to overcome the challenge of developing a critical mass for discourse and awareness. Therefore, it is important for these officials to understand how to reach out to their citizens and engage them through already existing mechanisms.

In the event that a candidate or group must establish tools that are not already present with a critical mass, care should be taken to ensure that individuals would be made aware of the tool through established means. This can be achieved by linking the newer tools to existing, developed platforms. For example, President Obama used his own suite of tools hosted on my.barackobama.com during his 2008 election. During the campaign President Obama advertised these tools at campaign events, Facebook and other popular social networking websites. Additionally, it is important for these campaigns and administrations to understand where their constituents are and be ready to move to the next technology when it becomes popular.

The final challenge is the amount of noise that occurs on sites where issues are discussed. Previous research has indicated that many individuals take part in national level forums and groups to encounter other like-minded supporters with the intent of engaging with the candidates (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Sweetser & Weaver-Lariscy, 2008). Other research has also shown that deliberative discourse has occurred within Facebook groups pertaining to national level issues in the US (Mascaro & Goggins, 2011). Although such discourse is possible, it is likely that a lot of productive discourse either gets hidden in the large amount of other traffic or individuals shy away from participating in such groups because they believe they will go unnoticed and their contributions to the discourse would be wasted.

Conclusion - Research Questions

Understanding the manner in which individuals become interested and participate in the political process is very important to facilitating effective civic engagement and providing information about the government. The concluding table below lists a series of research questions that can help to guide future research on civic engagement and the provision of government information at the national level in the United States. This table addresses each of the above three challenges in a manner to further understand the effects they have on the civic engagement process so that they can be remedied in current and future efforts.

Awareness of the Tools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and to what extent do individuals become aware of the different technologies that exist for discourse and political information? • To what extent do individuals utilize comments or discussion forums associated with media that they currently use such as comment sections on blogs or newspapers? • Under what circumstances do individuals go to another website that they do not frequent to partake in discourse with other individuals?
Existence of Critical Mass within the Tools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are individuals aware of the presence of others within the discussion board or group in which they participate? How does this awareness contribute to the facilitation of discourse or patterns of participation? • What tool specific features exist to allow participants to view other members of the community or those that are currently online?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what types of forums does the existence of a certain percentage of individuals within a community group, issue group or specific constituency lead to a tipping point of discourse within a technology utilized for discourse? (Mascaro & Goggins, 2011)
Designing to Eliminate Noise within the Tools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there automated mechanisms for individuals to address each other in large-scale discourse such as use of the @ symbol? Do individuals utilize these mechanisms or do they address their comments to the whole forum or individuals in another manner? • Do individuals choose to not participate in longer forms of discourse because of noise or are they just unwilling to participate in discourse? • To what extent do elected officials participate in discourse among the public? How does the presence of officials within a technology get conveyed to participants and what effects does this have on the participation rates? • How do the requirements for signing up for these forums of discourse vary? Do individuals have to prove residency or identity? Is discourse more productive on forums that have requirements for true name registration?

Table I. Future Directions of Research on National Civic Engagement in the United States

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E-Petitions in Local Government: the case of Wellington City Council

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Abstract. This paper presents a case study of the use of e-petitions by local government. Wellington is the capital city of New Zealand and the local city council has a history of making innovative uses of ICT. In 2006 the city council launched a new ICT policy and one of the main aims was to use e-democracy to improve citizen participation. One way of doing this was by launching the use of E-petitions in 2007. This paper discusses some of the issues around the use of e-petitions and analyses the use of e-petitions by Wellington City residents between 2008 and 2010.

Keywords. E-petitions, e-democracy, local government, New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

Wellington is the capital city of New Zealand. The City Council (WCC) has a history of involvement in innovative uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In 1995 it launched an InfoCity Strategy (Huff 1996) which consisted of a number of initiatives based around the rollout of a fast broadband network in the central business district. Alongside the physical infrastructure, WCC put in place a number of projects to help community groups, such as free website hosting. It also improved access to computers in disadvantaged areas of the city.

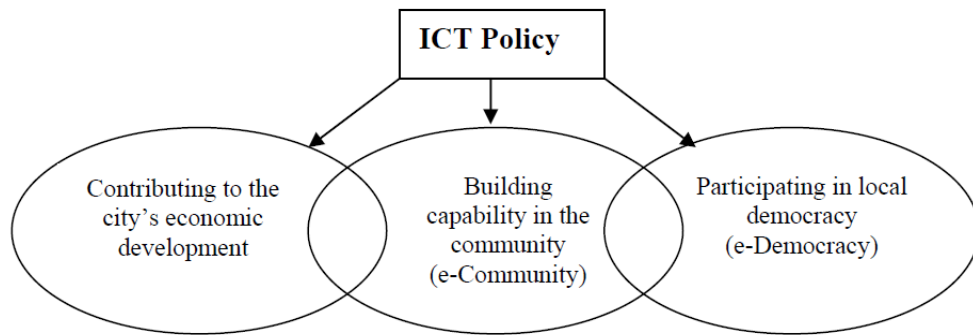


Figure 1: Wellington City Council ICT Policy Overview (Wellington City Council 2006) p3.

In 2006 WCC developed a new ICT policy (Wellington City Council 2006) which built on existing projects and also added some new initiatives. The policy was divided into three interrelated areas as shown in Figure 1. The e-community aspect was already well developed, but e-democracy and economic development were new areas. This paper concentrates on the developments the council put in place to improve e-democracy

E-DEMOCRACY

For both national and local government lack of participation by their electorates is a cause for concern (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley 2008; Miller 2009). This is apparent in falling voter numbers at elections, and by a general lack of interest in politics between elections. This problem is often particularly acute for local government, though there are some examples of more active participation at the local level (Alport and Macintyre 2007). The Internet offers the potential for government to overcome this issue by reaching out directly to the electorate in their own homes.

E-democracy is the use of ICT to facilitate and encourage participation in decision-making processes (Wellington City Council 2006). It offers the potential to provide greater accountability, can improve access to information and services for hard to reach groups, and can facilitate dialogue between citizens, elected members, community groups and communities (Wellington City Council 2006). There are a number of potential applications such as e-voting, webcasting, elected member blogs and interactive forums.

E-democracy is only part of the solution to the issue of low participation, and policy makers need to be aware that it will only be effective if used alongside more face-to-face initiatives in the community. The groups that have traditionally been marginalized from local government processes are likely to be the same groups

that have limited access to ICT (Wellington City Council 2006; Alport and Macintyre 2007), so any introduction of e-democracy needs to be carefully thought out so as not to exacerbate existing social divisions.

Many e-democracy projects are very good at providing information to citizens, but the flow of information is mainly one way. Elected members create web sites that are essentially “information storehouses” (Alport and Macintyre 2007), many local government websites are designed as “one-stop-shops” offering the facility to download application forms and information sheets. Though such sites are useful any e-democracy project that is aiming to increase citizen engagement needs to take further steps to promote feedback and dialogue.

A survey carried out to evaluate citizen’s attitudes towards e-government in the UK (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley 2008) found that interest in e-government was low overall, but there was some evidence that citizens appreciated the ability to obtain information from government web sites. However there was little interest in using e-government for engaging with the democratic process, and the ambitions of government far outstripped those of citizens (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley 2008). E-government advocate Steven Clift (2008) confirms this. Reflecting on 15 years of activism in e-government, he estimates that only 5% of the public are active users of e-government and the challenge now is to reach the remaining 95%.

E-PETITIONS IN WELLINGTON

E-democracy can be divided into two components. One part is concerned with the electoral process, including e-voting. The other addresses participation in democratic decision making (Macintosh and Whyte 2008). For WCC, e-voting was not considered, as it was not provided for in the Local Electoral Act. The council’s aim was to use e-democracy to encourage citizens to participate between election times.

Petitions have always been a popular way for citizens to engage with local and national government. People are more likely to become actively engaged in politics over a particular issue that has direct relevance to their lives rather than becoming involved in broader institutional agendas. Petitions are less popular with politicians themselves, who view them as not fitting in well with government procedures (Miller 2009). However, for members of the public, the low involvement but high impact nature of petitions means that they are more likely to sign a petition than engage in any other form of political activity. For example, the British Number Ten web site¹, which is used by citizens to petition the Prime Minister directly, is well liked. It was set up in 2006 and in the first two years of operation it received

¹ <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/>

29,000 petitions and 5.8 million signatures in total (Miller 2009). E-petitioning systems have also proved very popular for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly (Macintosh and Whyte 2008).

Before formalising their ICT formal policy in 2006 (Wellington City Council 2006) WCC had already introduced a number of initiatives to improve e-participation, for instance making information on how to participate in the council's decision-making processes available in different languages, and the creation of a "fix-it" page that the public could use to inform the council of a problem. Much of WCC's thinking around e-democracy and e-participation was influenced by the ideas of Steven Clift (2004). One outcome of the new ICT policy (Wellington City Council 2006) was the launching of an e-petitions system² in 2007. As previously discussed such systems had proved popular in the UK, as they were easy to use and open source software was available to implement them cheaply.

One of the reasons for the success of e-petitions is that they are perceived to be transparent by the general public, as there is generally an established process for publishing decision outcomes. The WCC system allows anyone with a verifiable address within the electoral area to create an e-petition to collect signatures about any issue the council is responsible for. After the closing date the petition is presented to the appropriate council or committee meeting, usually the Strategy and Policy committee. WCC reserves the right to refuse a petition, but will give a reason for that refusal (Blyth 2007).

	2008	2009	2010	Total
Accepted	21	21	18	60
Declined	6	20	14	40
Total	27	38	32	100

Table 1: Numbers of accepted and declined petitions between 2008 and 2010

Between 2008 and 2010 WCC received a total of 100 petitions, as shown in Table 1. Of these 40 were rejected and 60 accepted. The reasons for rejecting the petitions were published on the e-petitions web site. Apart from a few outliers that were rejected because they were abusive or slanderous, the reason for rejection generally fell into one of four categories. Some petitions were outside the jurisdiction of the council, others were covered by existing legal processes (for

² <http://www.wellington.govt.nz/haveyoursay/e-petitions/index.php>

example objections to new buildings), some were duplicates of existing petitions, and others were withdrawn after discussion with the council. This last category usually consisted of small scale issues that could be sorted out more speedily by local consultation such as reducing speed limits around a particular school.

Sixty petitions were accepted, attracting 29,246 signatures in all. The accepted petitions were grouped into five different categories as shown in Table 2. The highest number of petitions received concerned transport issues which covered parking, changing bus routes, and traffic signals. Better facilities for cyclists were a hot topic, with one 2008 petition for more cycle lanes attracting 1,355 signatures.

The second most popular category was the environment, which included rubbish collection, recycling, street lighting, noise pollution, control of pigeons and facilities for dog walkers. In 2008, three different petitions were raised protesting against WCC's plans to cull pigeons in the city centre, attracting 894 signatures overall. The pigeon cull was called off. However, as the cull had also received widespread criticism in local media, this could not be attributed to the petitions alone.

	Transport	Environment	Image	Politics	Amenity	Tot
2008	9	7	1	1	3	21
2009	6	5	6	3	1	21
2010	3	4	7	3	1	18
Total	18	16	14	7	5	60

Table 2: Numbers of accepted petitions for different categories between 2008 and 2010

The petition that attracted the most number of signatures overall, 9,957, was one raised in 2009 in opposition to a proposal by the council to phase out free recycling bins and replace them with paid recycling bags. Again this proposal was dropped by the council, but again the e-petition was just one of a number of widespread protests against this proposal.

The third most popular group were petitions that concerned the image of the city, which covered topics like changing street names, erecting monuments, and liquor and smoking bans. Some of these petitions could arguably have been placed in the environment category, but it was decided they were more focused on how the city was perceived by both residents and visitors. The issue of banning smoking in the central city provided a good example of polarized opinions (Miller 2009), as a 2010 petition to ban smoking which collected 672 signatures was swiftly followed by a petition to protect the rights of smokers. However the counter-petition attracted only 40 signatures. In 2011 a petition has been put up suggesting that the

e-petitions system is changed to allow negative responses to a petition as well as positive, which would allow people to register opposition to a petition without having to go to the lengths of setting up a counter petition.

The fourth category covered petitions that were more overtly political, such as making councilors and their family members declare their interests and adding a peace symbol to the WCC logo. Though there were fewer petitions in this category some of them received large numbers of signatures. A 2009 petition to make Wellington a fair trade city collected 1,185 signatures, and in the same year 984 people signed a petition to requesting that the free web site project for community groups should continue to receive WCC funding.

The remaining petitions were placed in the amenities category and mainly focused on saving parts of the city that were threatened by new developments, or adding new facilities such as drinking fountains.

Miller (2009) analysed petitions submitted to the Number Ten website, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly to see what the top themes were. Obviously they are national governments with a very different jurisdiction to a city council. However there were some common concerns, petitions covering transport and environmental issues were top issues for all four petition systems.

One of the reasons for the popularity of e-petitions is their transparency; the person setting up the petition has to declare themselves, as do the signatories. The number of signatures is recorded as is the response of the council to the petition. In some e-petition systems there are some rules around the numbers of signatures collected, The WCC system does not appear to have any explicit rules around numbers. However petitions that collect less than 20 signatures tend to be withdrawn by the petitioner.

The most common council response to a petition was a referral to the Strategy and Policy committee. By 2010 the date that the petition had actually been received by the committee was also being recorded. The amount of information about the response of the committee was variable. Sometimes there was a PDF file which listed fairly detailed actions and sometimes there was a note that the issue had been passed on to council officers to inform their work. Often there was no response other than it had been referred to the committee. This raises questions about the effectiveness of e-petitions, have WCC made any significant changes to their procedures or are the e-petitions simply getting lost in the bureaucracy? Occasionally petitions were presented directly to the council. In the case of policies around cycling and dogs, a number of petitions were being set up around the time WCC was developing formal policies on these issues, and the petitions were referred directly to the groups working on that policy.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Governments in OECD countries have invested significant amounts of time and money in engaging citizens in public decision making, but are paying much less attention to evaluating the success of these initiatives (Macintosh and Whyte 2008). In 2007 the results of a UK government survey showed that the provision of e-government services far exceeded usage by the public, with only 22% of people using the internet to download information, 7% to download forms and 5% actually returning completed forms (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley 2008). Though citizens appreciate the value of online services to some extent, there is very little evidence that citizens see any value in using e-government to engage with policy makers. Theoretically the internet provides the ability to enhance democracy, but citizens are generally unwilling to participate in the online public sphere (Kolsaker and Lee-Kelley 2008). It would be interesting to carry out further research to investigate the reasons behind this.

Petitions have always been a popular means for citizens to engage in politics and e-petitions, which speed up the process of collecting signatures, have also been well received. They provide a low-commitment way for people to lobby and make their views known on various topics. They may not be the favored method of politicians and policy makers but given the low take-up of other forms of electronic engagement their popularity cannot be ignored.

At the local council level, lack of participation is generally a greater problem than for national government, and e-petitions open up possibilities for increasing citizen engagement. What is critical to this ongoing success is the ability of the petitioners to see a transparent and fair response to their petition. Local councils may need to reconsider their decision making processes in order to take this into account.

It is also useful for policy makers to examine the most common topics for e-petitions. Are they simply reflecting knee-jerk reactions, as with the emotional response to the pigeon cull, or do the areas of concern reflect issues that citizens are becoming increasingly concerned with, for example does the demand for better facilities for cyclists reflect growing concerns about the environment by Wellington residents?

There is also the issue of how representative of the general electorate the users of the e-petition system actually are. Though no formal analysis was carried out there were definitely a few names that cropped up a number of times as the proposers of different petitions. One petition at least was started by a Member of Parliament. Overall the petitions had 29,246 signatures between 2008 and 2010; it would be interesting to work out how many different individuals were involved and whether the same individuals were signing multiple petitions. For example the Number Ten web site attracted roughly 5.8 million signatures between 2006 and 2008, but there were only 3.9 million email addresses registered (Miller 2009). Though it could

raise some ethical issues it would be interesting to collect demographic information about the age, ethnicity and income levels of signatories.

As well as the danger of the e-petition system being hi-jacked by a small group of political activists, there are also digital divide issues to consider. The most active users of the internet are educated males, between the ages of 25 and 45 who earn above average incomes (Miller 2009) whereas those with low income are the least likely to have access to a computer at home. However though this issue is important, it should be pointed out that Wellington residents are generally better educated, better paid, and have more internet connections than the national average. This is one of the reasons why WCC was the first local council in the country to launch an e-petitions system, and any lessons learned will need to be communicated to the other local councils in New Zealand.

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POLITICAL BLOGGING AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract. In recent years, Malaysian politicians have increasingly turned to the Internet as a method of communication. Several Malaysian politicians are using blogging as a political tool to garner support from the electorate. Focusing on the Prime Minister's blog, '1Malaysia', as a case study, this paper examines political blogging and the role it plays in the public sphere in Malaysia and of deliberative democracy.

Introduction

As several commentators have noted, the Internet played a significant role in the 2008 General Election. For example Rashid (2009) noted that the Internet was used effectively by the opposition parties in the last election as they highlighted the weaknesses and campaigns thus contributed to the factors denied the National Coalition (Barisan Nasional [BN]) two thirds majority in parliament. Since then, it appears that most Malaysian politicians have discovered the Internet's potential to inform and communicate with the public and have begun to make use of it in diverse forms, such as through the construction of personal blogs as well as Facebook. According to Coleman and Wright (2008), blogging is a new form of communication that can revive the relationship between politicians and citizens, making it more informal, more transparent, and more interactive. Through blogging, politicians are able to broadcast a great deal more information about political news, policy interests, voting records and contact details. More importantly, they engage innovatively through direct interaction with voters in order to create a new style of personalised, accessible and ongoing relationship. Moreover, citizens are able to access relevant information which is a central characteristic of a functioning public sphere and, therefore, of deliberative democracy (Coleman and Wright, 2008).

In Malaysia, an alliance was formed in 1952 between the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and including

Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in 1954, depended on a coalition of ethnically based parties, as did the *Barisan Nasional* ([BN] National Front), its successor, which was established in 1974 and govern Malaysia since then. During this period of continued control, the BN has amended the constitution and increasingly concentrated power in the executive branch and in the office of the Prime Minister in particular. The BN has faced criticism for restricting rights to political freedom and controlling political dissent. Observers have described Malaysia as a soft authoritarian, pseudo democracy, with a synthetic democracy and leading by electoral authoritarianism (Crouch, 1993; Case, 1993; Jesudason, 1995; Schedler, 2002).

Despite the lack of political freedom, the government appears to enjoy widespread support among Malaysian citizens, evidenced in their continuous election victories. Since the 1970s, the BN has won every election at the federal level. The BN won at least 83% of the seats in the national parliament in the elections in 1974, 1978, 1982 and 1986 (Ufen, 2009), while in 1990, 1995 and 1999, the BN maintained a two-thirds majority in Parliament. In 2004, the BN under Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi won almost 95% seats in Parliament. However, in 2008, the BN was unable to maintain its two-thirds majority of seats in Parliament, which was the worst election outcome in Malaysian history for the ruling BN.

Abdullah Badawai was replaced by Najib Razak who has shown himself to be much credible than his predecessor. His “1Malaysia” concept and promises of real economic reforms under his New Economic Model (NEM) and Economic Transformation Plan (ETP) seems to have restored confidence of the people in his government and has garnered popular support for the BN (Chin, 2010). Besides his slogan “People First, Performance Now”, Najib also urged the people to join him to revitalise the country through the concept of 1Malaysia (Azizuddin, 2009). Most importantly, Najib takes a different approach than previous Prime Ministers by using ICT to be close to people. On the official 1Malaysia website, he wrote “1Malaysia is intended to provide a free and open forum to discuss the things that matter deeply to us as a Nation”¹. For example, in a blog posting dated August 23, 2010, Najib asked people to contribute their ideas to the 2011 Budget and promised to incorporate their views in the budget. In fact, this situation is rarely practised in Malaysia as previously the Malaysian government normally exercised state development through a ‘top-down’ approach that excluded the views of the people (Azizuddin, 2009).

This paper examines political blogging and its impact on the public sphere in Malaysia through a case study of Najib’s blog. The focus is on an assessment of the nature of Najib’s blog, by asking questions such as: How does Najib blog? Is Najib’s blog a tool for deliberative democracy and therefore contributing to the public sphere in Malaysia? The time frame of study is from 19 September 2008 when the blog was started to 30 October 2010.

¹ <http://www.1Malaysia.com.my> – retrieved 16 June 2010

Najib Razak's Blog

Najib Razak, Malaysia's Prime Minister, is unique in the Malaysian parliamentary blogosphere in a number of ways. Najib began blogging on 19 September 2008 when he was the Deputy Prime Minister then. His blog is part of the 1Malaysia website which is clearly identified as "The Personal Website of Dato' Sri Najib Razak"². 1Malaysia.com is particularly noteworthy, as it serves as a central communication platform and provides links to the profiles of all other portals. The website is well organised and utilises multimedia tools such as YouTube and a slide-show of pictures from Flickr. See figure 1.

Figure 1



Najib's Postings

Generally, Najib's blog is used as a tool to disseminate news about initiatives or policies of the government. Analysis of the content finds that the blog focuses on explaining the government's actions and decisions, which is sometimes already being discussed in the traditional media. There are four types of postings in Najib's 1Malaysia³ blog postings, as explained below.

First, Najib addresses a number of issues related to government policy. For example, he wrote blogs on the national budget and the National Key Economic Area.

² <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/category/blog/>, retrieved 17 September 2010

³ On the 1Malaysia blog, the postings are organised in 13 categories; 1Malaysia Interactive, 1Malaysia Values, Community, Culture, Economy, Economy/Trade, Event, Government/Policy, Interactive, News/Updates, Personal and Unity. As there are redundancies in these categories, I have combined them under four categories.

It is noted that there is little information regarding his constituency, Pekan, Pahang. Only two postings relate to his constituency.

Second, Najib emphasises the 1Malaysia Values. He uses the blog to inform the readers about the 1Malaysia concept and its eight values which include values such as acceptance and perseverance. From 5 April 2009 until 6 May 2009, the blog postings focus on explaining the concept of 1Malaysia. Najib also announced new programs under 1Malaysia such as the 1Malaysia Maintenance Fund, 1Malaysia Clinic, 1Malaysia retirement Saving Scheme and the 1Malaysia Student Discount Card.

Third, not all of Najib's postings are elicited by developments outside the blog; in many cases he explicitly addresses readers' comments to earlier posts and gives his opinions or answers to questions raised in those comments. Interestingly, Najib also uses video to record some answers and posts these in the blog. He sometimes refers to the names of people who posted the questions.

Fourth, Najib blogs about episodes in his daily life that do not have any direct political component. For instance, in one entry, Najib writes that he bought a new Persian kitten. He even welcomed readers to name the cat. He used the blog to thank his former teacher and expressed his love to his mother on Mother's Day. On the occasion of any festival in Malaysia, he used the blog to express his good wishes to all Malaysian citizens.

In general, the blog posts are not focused on sensitive or controversial issues. Rather, the blog focuses fundamentally on government policies. Only rarely do the blogs focus on Najib's personality. The difference here is that, through the blog, the public has a voice to contribute ideas and thoughts about particular government policies.

1Malaysia Comments

Readers of 1Malaysia need to register their name in the 1Malaysia system before they can post any comment on the blog. Najib no doubt is acutely aware of the possibility of offensive comments by readers and that the appearance of such comments would reflect negatively on his position as Prime Minister. Therefore, only comments with the reader's name (either real name or pseudonyms) appear; there are no anonymous comments in Najib's blog. The comments are moderated so that no bad language is used. Most of the discussion and feedback relates to social and economic development issues.

Judging from the number of comments, Najib does very well in reaching an audience. For every posting, the blog has received no less than 45 comments from the audience. Within two years of starting the blog, it received 20,470 comments, which is considerably more than other politicians have received around the world. According to Ward and Francoli (2008:34) in their study of British and Canadian parliamentary blogs, "nearly 40 per cent of the blogs received an average of less than two comments

per posting”. Noticeably, after Najib became Prime Minister in April 2009, the comments increased considerably from 468 in March 2009 to 1,553 in April 2009. Then, from April 2009 until September 2010, he received an average of 1,119 comments per month. Arguably, the status of Najib, as Prime Minister, is a likely factor in the increase in his audience and the number of comments in his blog. The 1Malaysia blog apparently satisfies individual users’ desire to talk to the most powerful man in Malaysia.

The National Budget 2011

A post in August 2010 titled “The National Budget 2011” received the highest number of comments by the readers – 2,106. The majority of the comments focused on requests for a betterment of their life. Suggestions by the readers include: a) increments in salary, b) implementation of a minimum wage policy, c) reduced taxes and the provision of subsidies for citizens to help them manage the rising cost of living, d) concerns about the quality of education and rising cost of education, e) the need to upgrade Internet and broadband services, f) controls on the price of consumer goods, g) increased development in rural areas to attract opportunities for youth, h) incentives for green technology development, i) increased allocation for national security, j) programs for illegal immigrants.

In the posting “A Budget from *Rakyat*” on October, 14, 2010, Najib praises the citizens’ ideas for the 2011 National Budget. He also states that he and his office have studied all the suggestions given in his blog:

My office and I have studied these ideas and intend to explore the viable ones for implementation, whether or not they are incorporated into the Budget. Some of you who have contributed comments to my blog will be able to recognise your ideas, or a hybrid of those ideas in the Budget. Simply by participating in the exercise, you have contributed to the process of transforming our nation. Thank you for your input and support for the sake of our nation, and let’s keep this up.⁴

The “The National Budget 2011” post prompted reactions to the post itself and also triggered a lively exchange among readers themselves. When one reader put forward a suggestion for the budget, other readers would sometimes second it. Some readers responded with different views but with little debate. For example, the suggestion of ‘School Facilitators’ created lively and long discussion among the users⁵.

Interactivity in the 1Malaysia Blog

Through the blog, Najib interacts with his audience. Even though he does not respond to the comments regularly, he appears to try his best to respond to different issues

⁴ See <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/blog/a-budget-by-the-rakyat/>, retrieved November 27, 2010

⁵ See <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/blog/governmentpolicy/national-budget-2011-ideas-from-the-rakyat/?replytocom=23279#respond>, retrieved November 27, 2010

when he has the opportunity. According to Amhari Effendy, a special officer-in-charge of the Najib blog, “the Prime Minister, at his own time does read his comments via his mobile phone or computers such as I-Pad. Prime Minister also tweets himself personally” (Amhari, 2011). The 1Malaysia team also browses all the comments and sends a report to Najib on a weekly basis (Amhari, 2011).

Based on the analysis of two years of content, it is apparent that Najib picks up a thought or question by the readers in the comment section and replies to these in the form of a new blog entry. He also mentions the reader’s name when answering them. In almost every response, Najib finishes by thanking the reader for the questions and explicitly invites all readers to share their thoughts and interact with him in his blog. It is also apparent that Najib has developed his own way to create the sense of interaction with readers. One noticeable strategy in Najib’s blog is using a video recording to reply to comments by the readers. This makes it obvious that it is Najib who replies to the comments on his blog, countering the claims of some people that Najib does not do so. For example, Bakri Musa (2009: 1), who analysed political blogs, complained that Najib’s blog “is written from a third person perspective instead being personal”.

As well as continually asking readers to contact him, Najib organised an event to meet his online friends. The event was called ‘Tea Time 1Malaysia’ or ‘Tea with Me’, and was particularly aimed at Najib interacting face-to-face with the readers and connecting with them more closely⁶.

Discussion

Deliberative democracy is understood to be a rational discourse in which a certain political position is debated and clarified. Through the arena of the public sphere, people freely come together and discuss political issues and influence political action. The public sphere is important for the exercise of deliberative democracy, and is characterised by two distinctive features. The first is the citizens’ general access to information, opinion and institutions, and the second is the enhanced political participation through discussion and debate on certain issues that would influence the political action (Wilhelm, 2000; Fishkin, 1991). Thus, the Internet is credited with the potential to contribute to the public sphere and, therefore, to deliberative democracy.

Access to information

An important aspect of democracy is access to information. Many political theorists argue that the role of information has led to electronic democracy because the Internet can influence the distribution and flow of information throughout society. Doctor (1992) noted that information can empower people by “ensuring that people have the

⁶ See <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/blog/a-successful-saturday/>, retrieved October, 28, 2010

tools they need to participate in the decision making structures that affect their daily life” (p.44).

In light of this possibility, the 1Malaysia blog shows that the willingness of the government to publish information related to policy would be one element of deliberative democracy. Through this method, the citizens can easily inform themselves on political issues (Jansen and Koop, 2005). Citizens are also likely to be better informed prior to making a decision. However, the information on the 1Malaysia blog focuses on certain policies, some of which are already being discussed in the traditional mass media. Obviously, the 1Malaysia blog only emphasises on that matter.

Najib does not provide any feedback to comments critical of certain aspects of his administration. These are ignored. Indeed, it must be assumed that many comments are not published as the 1Malaysia team reserves the right to not publish comments that they ‘think’ would affect political stability⁷. Moreover, readers need to register themselves in the system by providing their names as well as their email address. This step would make readers aware that their identity could be tracked if they are critical towards the government. This is in contrast to the criterion of deliberative democracy, as, according to Chambers (2003), deliberation is “debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information and claims made by fellow participants” (p.309).

Enhanced deliberative and interactivity

Cyber optimists consider that the Internet could revolutionise democracy for the expansion of the citizens’ deliberation, thereby leading to the formation of rational public opinion to which official policymakers can be held accountable, and enabling citizens to see the result of their influence on the policy action (Azzizuddin, 2009). In Najib’s blog, as mentioned, he allows readers to contribute ideas. For example, a large number of suggestions were made on the Budget 2011 and that posting received the highest number of comments from readers. This shows that people are eager to voice their opinion. Individual voices which may have not have been heard and not come to public notice previously, can do so through the Internet. It is now possible that the ideas expressed through this medium can gain enough public support urging policymakers to take these opinions into account. It also enables the public to contribute to the process of deliberative democracy in Malaysia. Adding to this optimism is Najib’s explicit statement that he would give consideration to the comments and suggestions made regarding the budget.

When the Budget 2011 was tabled in Parliament on October 15, 2010⁸, most people in Malaysia, from the civil-servant to the business developers, could expect to be affected by the budget allocations. Regarding the suggestions made by readers of

⁷ See <http://www.1malaysia.com.my/misc/faq/>, retrieved 17 September 2010

⁸ See details on the Budget 2011’ in <http://thestar.com.my/budget/> accessed 4 May 2011

Najib's blog, some assessments of the blog's impact on deliberative democracy can be made. Firstly, the main concern by the majority of readers who commented on the blog was the implementation of a minimum wage policy. In the 2011 budget, there was little reference to any form of minimum wage policy. The few references relate to wage levels for security guards, Imam⁹ and certain religious teachers. It was also announced that female civil servants would have longer paid maternity leave. Education was another main concern expressed in readers' comments. In terms of education, the government allocated a significant amount of money for the operational expenditure and infrastructure such as building schools and upgrading the facilities. The budget also took into consideration the allocation of funds for various programs and training for youth under the 1Malaysia Training Program. As per the suggestions on the blog that the government should increase development in rural areas, the budget also allocated amounts for the purpose of constructing new roads and bridges in rural areas throughout the country and upgrading drainage systems to enhance the quality of the *rakyat's* (the people's) life (New Straits Times, October 16, 2011).

Criticisms were made of the 2011 budget. For example, Lim (2011), director of the Centre for Policy Initiatives, said that the budget is not "the Budget for *Rakyat*" as Najib promised in his blog. The budget did not reflect awareness of the main concerns of the majority of people, namely, the high cost of education and the rising cost of living in larger towns. In fact, the budget allocated huge expenditure on mega projects such as RM5 billion for the 100 storey Warisan Merdeka tower. Some commentators pointed out that this amount should be spent on the expansion of public housing, transport, health and other badly needed services that can truly benefit the ordinary people.

Some online protests were made by people who disagreed with the allocations of the budget. One of these protests was organised through Facebook. It was created anonymously in response to Najib's Budget 2011 speech (MalaysiaToday, October 28, 2010). Over 200,000¹⁰ people showed their protest through the project, by registering on the "1M Malaysians Reject 100-storey Mega Tower" Facebook page. Many analysts warned that if the government ignored these online protesters, it would affect their popularity in the coming election (MalaysiaToday 28 October, 2010).

Conclusion

In sum, Malaysia's government clearly shows an acceptance of the practice of deliberative democracy. This is particularly true of Prime Minister Najib's Razak through his blog, 1Malaysia. Najib uses his blog as a forum for people to contribute their ideas and he also engages by responding to the readers. Compared to other political bloggers, Najib demonstrates a significant commitment to maintaining dialogue with readers.

⁹ Imam in Malaysia often refers to worship leader of a mosque.

¹⁰ During the time of analysis, the number of fan in '1M Malaysians Reject 100-storey Mega Tower' is 294, 684. accessed 21 April 2011

However, deliberative democracy qualitatively requires more than that. The communication tactics by Najib which avoid critical and political debate in his blog show that it is unable to fulfil the process of deliberative democracy. Moreover, through the filter of the 1Malaysia moderating team, Najib selects the comments by readers and only responds to those comments that are not critical. This practice contradicts the principles of deliberative democracy. In addition, even though there were some budget allocations for the people as per their suggestions in Najib's blog, the 2011 budget was similar to the previous budget, making it, as Lim (2011) expressed, 'business as usual'. This lends weight to the warning made by Azzizuddin (2009: 125) that "the BN's government only purpose in accepting deliberative democracy is to maintain its authoritarian agenda". As this study has shown, if the use of the Internet is to contribute to the public sphere and promote the principles of deliberative democracy, political blogging must be substantive – and not, as in the case of Malaysian Prime Minister Najib, merely popular.

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Geo-Located Augmented Reality as a Platform for Citizen Engagement

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Abstract. It may be impossible in physical reality, due to implementation costs involved, for prospective users to preview future urban projects as life-sized 3D models at actual locations, but in augmented reality it is. Besides this feature, the idea of harnessing geo-located augmented reality (GAR) technology as a platform for citizen engagement includes a future possibility of users submitting their feedback in the form of full-scale 3D virtual sketches, also geo-tagged to the site in question. Following is a brief description of an academic research project undertaken to explore this idea by harnessing the GAR interface now available on smartphones, such as the iPhone 3GS/4. An initial prototype web-app was developed and tested for basic functionality, exposing a number of limitations but affirming the overall potential of this idea. It offers a 3D language of communication that is intuitively accessible for professionals and the lay public alike. It also commands a certain mass appeal at a fraction of the cost of popular media, and can therefore increase the influence of citizen deliberations. This potential is introduced via a description of the initial prototype study, to prepare ground for full-fledged development of this idea and subsequent testing within a citizen engagement setting.

Introduction

Geo-located augmented reality (GAR) technology allows virtual 3D models to be viewed as super-imposed images in live video screen views of any given place. Till recently this interface was accessible only by specialized equipment, but it is now offered on compatible smartphones as well as hand-held tablets, via the Layar browser. This technology was identified in the present research project as

bearing potential for application to the context of citizen engagement in public space governance on the basis of three in-built qualities.

Foremost of these is the alternative it offers for addressing the information inaccessibility gap that arises on the side of end-users when they are invited to participate or collaborate in governmental spatial design decision-making processes. This gap is the result of the conventional practice to obligate untrained users to comprehend and comment on two-dimensional representations of what are essentially three-dimensional or four-dimensional spatial design decisions. A shift in approach is visible in recent research and practice, from indirect representation to more direct simulation systems, coupled with the use of internet-based social and crowd-sourcing media, as a more intuitive platform for three-dimensional decision-making. GAR technology replaces the cumbersome coding and decoding required by indirect representational systems and the physically detached displays of simulation systems with a direct in-situ three-dimensional walk-around experiential system.

In addition to this, by virtue of this technology now being available on portable devices such as smartphones and hand-held tablets, the experiential system that it offers can be deployed with equal if not more ease in an outdoor setting as well. This translates into opportunities for collective social encounters based on actual in-person presence of all stakeholders at the site of in question, instead of the constrained virtual presence possibilities provided by social media interfaces.

A third quality is that GAR technology at present commands a certain public charm and mass appeal, which elevates related content to a competitive position against popular media at a fractional access cost. This combination of popularity plus low cost opens the possibility for long-term research-driven citizens' interests to exert an equitable influence in comparison to media-propelled profit-driven interests of commercial stakeholders.

These qualities were explored in practical terms through a scaled-down implementation of GAR technology in the form of an iPhone web-app. Development and evaluation of the initial prototype is described here, beginning with a brief review of the research context of this project, namely published work on alternative technological tools for citizen engagement.

Research Context

Published work on the development of technological support tools for citizen engagement in governmental decision-making processes, specially concerning public space issues, has already been reviewed in detail by a number of authors, including Hanzl (2007), and with reference to cultural considerations in particular, by Foni, Papagiannakis, and Magnenat-Thalmann (2010). Those that relate specifically to the use of GAR technology to facilitate participative design of public spaces are more recent and relatively few (Hii, Zhou, Karlekar,

Schneider, & Lu, 2009), while a larger number of previous works deal with the broader spectrum of underlying issues, bound at both ends by two mutually convergent directions of research: development of IT-based alternatives for improvement of public consultation processes; and, technological innovations for achieving dimensional consistency in the representation of spatial design through realistic life-sized 3D in-situ outdoor imagery. Since an exhaustive discussion of the whole expanse of available literature is beyond the scope of the present discussion, an indicative selection of most relevant and recent sources is presented here, divided into four key sub-categories: issues of perception of three-dimensional information by the lay public; engagement of users by invitation into the spatial design studio; usage of online discussion forums and social media; and, usage of simulation or augmented reality based interfaces.

With regards to the topic of perception of spatial ideas by untrained users of public space through representation systems, there are two main prevailing viewpoints. One group of authors that have conducted an empirical study report that 2D representations supported by rich supplementary information are a more effective medium than 3D visualizations (Smallman et al, 2001), while others have reported benefits of one option over the other to be associated with the nature of the task in question (Nowell, Schulman, & Hix, 2002; Marchak, Cleveland, Rogowitz, & Wickens, 1993). This later view supports the usage of 3D visualizations as best suited for representation of 3D data, as in the context of spatial design decision-making processes. Most recent arguments on this topic include the view that ‘complex problems can be recognized faster with the aid of an interactive adjustment of suitable viewpoints’ (Pantförder & Vogel-Heuser, 2009), which points in favour of real-time responsive 3D simulations, while another argument is that stronger user engagement is associated with the extent of realism captured by a given medium (Neto, 2006). It is on the basis of similar reasons that a comprehensive review by Hanzl (2007), on research and practice related to the usage of IT tools in participatory spatial design maintains that 3D augmented reality systems hold the most potential as the future direction of this field.

This idea has been adopted in a number of ways in research and practice, including involvement of users by inviting them into the governmental decision-making setting itself (Ismail & Sunar, 2009; Bullinger, Bauer, Wenzel, & Blach, 2010). This approach is imminent to be overtaken however, by the emergent practice of online collaboration, due to increased flexibility it offers in terms of contact timings and reduction of travel overheads (Bourdakis, 2004).

Numerous specific techniques for engaging users through web technologies are beginning to be used, researched and taught widely, including: collaborative environments (Barton, Plume, & Parolin, 2005); and, custom-adjusted gaming environments (Donath & Bohme, 2008). Whereas on one hand this form of citizen engagement enables quantitative enhancement due to flexible access times

and close to nil travel costs, its impact in terms of qualitatively affecting the extent to which users are able to perceive crucial spatial information in their own lay terms is nevertheless limited to screen viewing at best, indicating the need for research into even more realistic outdoor formats (Estrin, 2010).

It is this qualitative gap which outdoor or indoor augmented reality (AR) experiential interfaces have the potential to address. Specific techniques that have been explored so far in research and practice include: camera-tracking based life-sized outdoor AR simulations (Papagiannakis, Schertenleib, & O’Kennedy, 2005); indoor, super-imposition of colors on surfaces (Tonn, Petzold, Bimber, Grundhofer, & Donath, 2008); projects similar in concept to the present one but relying on custom-built set-ups (Hii, Zhou, Karlekar, Schneider, & Lu, 2009; Santos, Acri, Gierlinger, Schmedt, & Stork, 2010; Vlahakis, et al., 2001; gaming virtual environments used for art projects, but using custom-built network (Torpus, 2010). Majority of these works however, are based on custom-configured equipment, leaving room for the use of more ubiquitously available devices, such as GAR-capable mobile phones.

In summing up it can be said that out of all these four directions of previous work, outdoor AR simulation appears to create a visualization that is qualitatively closest to end-user experience (Estrin, 2010), while in quantitative terms on-line discussion forums offer a maximum catchment of end-user feedback (Barton, Plume, & Parolin, 2005). A combination of these two technologies therefore holds promise for the most conducive interface for public engagement in architectural or urban design processes. This idea has already been implemented and tested at an experimental level, albeit involving specialized equipment (Hii, Zhou, Karlekar, Schneider, & Lu, 2009; Santos, Acri, Gierlinger, Schmedt, & Stork, 2010; Vlahakis, et al., 2001). There is room for advancement of this idea through the introduction of devices that are less restrictive in terms of simultaneous usage by larger number of users, availability timings and security issues. Accessibility could be improved significantly if equipment or devices already in the possession of users could be used (Estrin, 2010). This could introduce a model for decision-making processes that could significantly shift the economies of scale of public space design processes in favor of common everyday users who are intimately attached to these places. These users otherwise stand largely excluded in the prevalent model of practice, by which design decisions are influenced by the media-popularized interests of commercially-driven developers or government bureaucrats and their chosen consultants, who may have marginal or nil contact with the context in question (Minton, 2009). It is in this overall perspective that the present project offers an alternative idea to use mobile phone handsets that bear GAR capability. Though such devices are yet to be available at prices that could ensure complete proliferation, a move in this direction nevertheless holds significance as a conceptual shift and a possible avenue of future growth.

A Promising Alternative

Drawing on the above thinking, the basic concept underlying this project was to use the iPhone iOS4.0 platform to harness GAR technology offered by the Layar browser [14], to create a more lucrative interface for spontaneous inclusion of users in public space design processes. GAR technology is expected to have a significant future popularity, as indicated by the estimation of its projected market value by Cheng (2010), in turn reporting on Juniper Research: usage of AR services is ‘expected to reach USD 732 million by 2014’ (Cheng 2010). A decision was therefore taken to develop an initial prototype in the form of a specially formatted website dedicated for use on iPhones, termed as a web-app in the iPhone user and developer community.

Existing community consultation activity was identified as the context for the prototype, and was taken into account via published reviews on this topic (Cuthill 2001), available video recordings of typical community consultations, and also by examining archived/live online discussion forums that simulate or offer an alternative to such sessions. A screenshot of the web-app GAR display is included here (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Screenshot showing GAR functionality via the Layar browser (16 cubes with superimposed on live video view)

Evaluation

The scenario selected for an evaluation study was usage of the product by postgraduate students in a university setting. Five tasks were assigned to the voluntary participants: to locate a pre-assigned 3D life-size object and bring into view; and, to recognise and successfully deploy link to the ‘feedback’ webpage. Results revealed areas that needed improvement but were overall positive: participants were impressed by the novelty of the product; and, they invested

more time to understand the navigation system than planned. These indicated the necessity to further streamline the sequence and transition between each function of the prototype.

Analysis of the results revealed that most significant of all the observations was regarding the GPS functionality of iOS4.0. Although issues of inaccuracies and delays were known from beforehand, this study helped identify a certain pattern which could reveal insights for a possible work-around to these issues. This pattern became evident while participants made multiple attempts to view geo-located 3-D images. In the first sweep of the assigned geo-position of the image the browser displayed a distance in the range of hundreds of meters, while in the second sweep it displayed a distance of few tens of meters. The first set of distances happened to coincide with the location of one of the nearest towers for 3G signals, while the latter happened to be closer to the actual distance to the geo-located image. Large amount of the time spent during the operation was in reading the text instructions at various stages. Participants felt burdened by this and the visceral content of the web-app also appeared to have suffered on account of it. A number of positive comments were made by the participants ('awesome', 'cool', and 'great'), but appeared to be bogged down by the number of steps involved as well, especially due to non-automated data entry of GPS coordinates.

Among the reflective aspects the most important was the realization that a Java script patch that directly feeds GPS coordinates into a given input form which had already been identified but was saved for later implementation should have been incorporated within the prototype that was used for the current testing exercise. On the whole this evaluation confirmed the envisaged potential of the basic idea of the prototype but at the same time emphasises the need for better performance. Usage of the word performance here underlines the fact that the 3D display of this browser is made possible through the coordination and convergence of a number of technologies and related operative factors, including GPS information exchange, digital compass readings in sync with any change of direction, accelerometer sensitivity, rapid two-way internet communication, and the live video screen display of the device used. These inputs influence the performance of the Layar browser, in terms of time, quality, accuracy, and most of all, reliability.

Conclusion and Future Implications

Overall this study has demonstrated, albeit within certain limitations, the significance of GAR technology available on smart phones as a potential for addressing the information accessibility gap that currently constrains end-users to engage more meaningfully in participatory design processes. Results from the evaluation, though indicating a critical need for several improvements in the prototype design, correspond to the initial research question by providing

evidence for the possibility of using this technology to achieve dimensional consistency between spatial design decisions and their representations as an alternative to overcome the stated gap in participatory design practice. Among the limitations of this study that could be improved upon in future work in this direction, the most significant is the accuracy of geo-positioning offered at present by the Layar browser. Although alleviation of this constraint can be expected with foreseeable improvements in GPS services worldwide, it is nevertheless a serious inhibition for the concept described in this paper at present. In terms of future implications, the 3DPP study offers a ready reference for successive usage of GAR technology for representation of spatial design information. In general this project opens the avenue for further development of the basic concept by transporting it now into the realm of iOS4.0 development. This prospect opens the further possibility of building into this concept a feature for on-the-fly designing of 3D objects as well, as already partially available in the iPhone app called GD3D offered by Google. It would be fortuitous if the time required for this further development could coincide with the availability of better GPS services globally. Furthermore, if decreasing trends in prices of smart phones also continues then this concept could truly serve as a basis for a significant shift in CAAD-enabled end-user involvement in spatial design processes.

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Place and Situated Deliberation in Participatory Planning – A Research Proposal

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Abstract. Within the domain of participatory urban planning, this position paper argues for a focus on the notion of *place* in the design of mobile and/or ubiquitous systems that are used in deliberation processes with central spatial references. I discuss (1) leveraging properties of place as a resource for users in the design of such systems and (2) situating, or merely co-locating, deliberation activities within the places these discussions are concerned with. To support my argument, I outline two exemplary cases that explore this focus on place and situated deliberation to further motivate research in that direction. The first case concerns the different qualities of in-situ reflection and action on proposed changes to the cityscape in contrast to ex-situ reflection and action on those changes. The second case focuses on providing immersive information about citizens' own living environment on the spot for everyone and everywhere through a mobile augmented reality application that visualizes future, planned buildings on capable mobile phones. I conclude with the central questions and problems for future research that focuses on place and situated deliberation.

Introduction

Political deliberation activities at all levels are often characterized by a lack of broad-based citizen participation and engagement. One part of the problem of citizens being frequently uninvolved is that they are not aware of the existence of such discussions in their immediate environment and, even more, often fail to realize the specific implications these may have on their own everyday life. This lack of awareness and the ill-perceived personal relevance of such topics, paired with a perceived powerlessness, leads to a generally low level of participation in deliberation activ-

ities. As a result, a broad spectrum of citizens' interests are not represented to the fullest extent possible and policy-makers are robbed of the perspectives of citizens who may be able to make valuable contributions to policy decisions.

The domain I am primarily concerned with in this paper is participatory planning. As a paradigm in urban planning, participatory planning emphasizes the involvement of the entire community in the municipal urban planning process. Deliberation on and participation in urban planning are an excellent domain to study and develop a notion of place due to their frequent use of spatial references. First mobile applications in this area already exist (e.g., SECLICKFIX, CITIZEN CONNECT, FIXMYSTREET).

General-purpose, consumer-oriented mobile location-aware technologies and services are increasingly emerging (e.g., GOOGLE MAPS, FOURSQUARE, FACEBOOK PLACES, YELP). They all make use of geographic locations in some form or the other and associate possible actions or information with these locations. You may get directions from GOOGLE MAPS, check in at locations using FOURSQUARE or FACEBOOK PLACES, and get reviews for local businesses from YELP. However, each person invests these locations with different meanings – be it social, cultural, historical, emotional, etc. A specific place embodies different meanings for you than it does for me. If we consider participatory planning, and also other domains, how can we, as designers, leverage the meaning that people invest places with at these locations for discussions involving these locations? Or in short, how can we support the use of place as a resource for users in located deliberation processes? I am proposing to study how people use properties of a place to form opinions about specific locations, in order to leverage this through the design of mobile and ubiquitous systems for located deliberation processes.

Understanding how citizens invest a place with meaning may help us in designing systems that support forming and expression of opinions about future potentials of or proposed changes to places. This aims at an improved embedding of discussion processes about future changes within the actual environment, e.g., simply through co-locating such discussions with the objects they are concerned with. Examples, here, are chance encounters of deliberation topics in citizens' everyday lives through physically embedding topics in the their own living environments and making them hyper-locally available with mobile and/or ubiquitous devices. This may increase awareness and demonstrate potential personal relevance of specific topics to individual citizens.

Bringing deliberation topics into the course of everyday life will, additionally, leverage situational relevance – discussion topics that people are only aware of and interested in exactly when and where they are. It is a matter of catching people in the right moment, of seizing the attention slot in their already very busy everyday lives. Citizens may decide for themselves if a specific topic deserves their attention right now, later, or not at all. So, how can we connect to these situations and capture this ephemeral relevance to feed citizens' spatially motivated input into the policy-making cycle? Which properties of a place can be leveraged when citizens form an opinion about a local matter in-situ? How can discussions be truly embedded

or situated in the environment and co-located with the objects they are concerned with rather than merely pointing them out on a map or notifying citizens of their existence?

Background

Suchman's notion of situated action and Dourish's foundations of embodied interaction form the backdrop for this research proposal. Suchman (2007) criticized the then predominant notion of plans in the Artificial Intelligence domain. AI modeled human activity as the formulation and execution of plans, that is, scripted sequences of action that are decomposed into individual operations to be then executed (and monitored) to reach an overall goal. In contrast to this notion of plans, Suchman stressed the situatedness of human activity. She posited an interaction with the world where actions are active interpretations of the world formed in response to specific settings and circumstances. Active individuals form moment-by-moment responses to the situations in which they find themselves. Actions are organized in response to the features of the setting in which they arise.

Dourish (2001) extends this notion of situated action and draws in elements of phenomenology from Husserl, Heidegger, Schütz, and Merleau-Ponty to build a foundation for embodied interaction. Dourish defines embodiment as "the property of our engagement with the world that allows us to make it meaningful" (Dourish, 2001, p. 126). Embodiment, for him, is not just a physical property, but also has social, cultural, historical, and other aspects to it. It means being grounded in and emerging out of everyday, mundane experience. He stresses the relationship between action and meaning, how embodied practical action is the source of meaning, and how the world shapes and is shaped by the activities of embodied agents (Dourish, 2001).

Dourish (2001) uses three aspects of meaning to further specify the concept: ontology, intersubjectivity, and intentionality. Especially the last one, intentionality, is interesting for my agenda here. Intentionality refers to the *directedness* or *aboutness* of meaning, that is, for example, the intentional reference *directed* from a word to a concept, meaning as a relationship between one entity and another. Dourish posits that intentionality is central to interactive technology as computation is fundamentally about representation: computational systems represent and refer to those elements of the world the software developer has chosen to model. So, he writes, "if the key feature of the computational system is that it refers to elements in the world of human experience, then the key feature of interaction with computation is how we *act through* it to achieve effects in the world" (Dourish, 2001, p. 137; emphasis in original). How may properties of place be represented in computational systems that mediate human activity? How may a citizen act through the system to or be supported in forming an opinion? How may a citizen act through the system when participating in a discussion to achieve an effect in the world?

A central aspect to the research proposed here is the notion of place (Harrison and Dourish, 1996; Dourish, 2006) and how it positions itself towards related con-

cepts such as space and location. The notions of situatedness (Suchman, 2007), context (Dourish, 2004), and embodiment (Dourish, 2001) are furthermore related to a notion of place. How does place relate to all these concepts? Is it one particular aspect of context or situation? A richer picture of location? I hypothesize that place is more interesting in mobile deliberation processes than other aspects of a situation, say for example, temporal aspects.

Two Exemplary Cases

In this section I now present two cases that were conducted as part of the EGOV+ project at AARHUS UNIVERSITY and form a preliminary understanding of the notion of place and situated deliberation in participatory planning.

Mobile Democracy

The overall purpose of the MOBILE DEMOCRACY case is to explore the use of geographical information systems (GIS) and mobile technologies as a means of supporting user involvement in municipal planning through participatory design methods. The emphasis lies on improved cooperation, communication, and democratic engagement within in-situ physical planning through mobile, location-aware technology. The main findings from the case are reported in more detail in Bohøj et al. (2011, to appear).

The case consisted of a number of design activities (interviews, workshops, and walkshops) making use of a number of design artifacts (scenarios, storyboards, personas, mock-ups, and prototypes). One of the central outcomes is the concept of two interconnected prototypes: (1) an Android-based mobile phone prototype for *in-situ* reflection and action, that is, while citizens are physically close to the planning object (see Figure 1); and (2) a browser-based desktop prototype for *ex-situ* reflection and action on proposed plans, when citizens are remote to the planning object, e.g., at home or work (see Figure 2). The case especially explores which distinctly different qualities in-situ reflection and action has as opposed to, and in concert with, ex-situ reflection and action in located deliberation.

The findings from the case take a vantage point in understanding how people may come to different judgements “in place” and “out of place”, that is, in-situ and ex-situ with regards to the object of discussion. We explore the various qualities that are attached to a place, and are maybe not graspable elsewhere. In Bohøj et al. (2011, to appear), we argue to strengthen the link between the (physical and located) object under discussion, the discussion itself, and the individuals involved by situating actors in the environment they are discussing about.

We take inspiration for this situated deliberation from Schön’s notions of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1983). We hypothesize that reflection-in-action is more dominant in-situ and reflection-on-action more dominant ex-situ. As this is by no means explained by this simple juxtaposition, we take

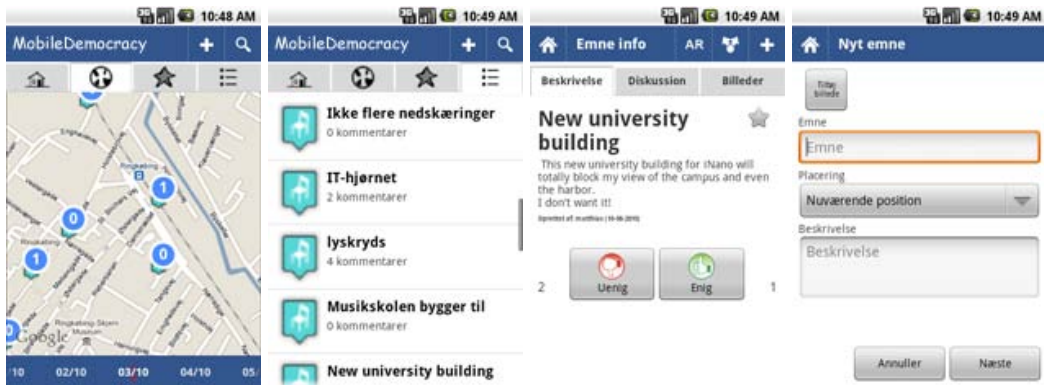


Figure 1. Four screenshots of the mobile prototype showing (from left to right) the map view, the list of topics, viewing topic details, and creating a new topic.

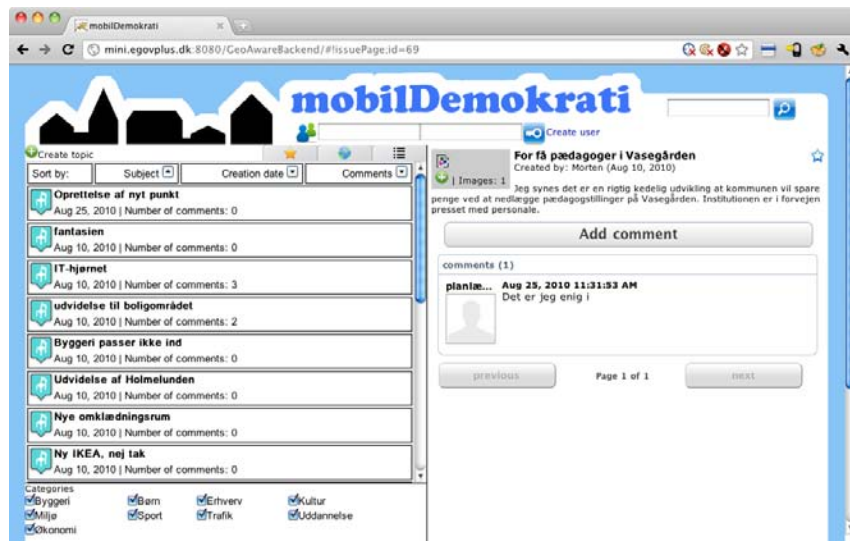


Figure 2. Screenshot of the desktop prototype, here, with a list of topics (left) and a topic detail view with comments (right).

the two to constitute a continuum affected by performed and potential actions connected to the ongoing process of reflection and understanding. We found that *being there* helped fathom the complexity of the planning object through physical and sensual immersion, while remotely collaboration and sharing through community and deliberation spaces was more prevalent.

In our design, we explore such a combination through, firstly, providing an initial trigger by way of in-situ actions through the mobile phone motivated by the spatio-temporal relevance of the planning object. Based on that trigger, a second ex-situ space for reflection and action supports reflective, comprehensive discussions in the form of a desktop application visited remotely. This support of in-situ and ex-situ participation allows citizens to engage in continuous reflection-in and on-action as a collaborative activity with other citizens, hereby inspiring citizens to increase their democratic engagement.

AR City

AR CITY is an augmented reality (AR) application for Android smart phones that visualizes future planned buildings aligned with reality on top of the phone's live camera feed (see Figure 3 for a screenshot). The case connects to this research proposal on two dimensions. First, concerning the application domain of citizen deliberation in land use planning, it explores the aspect of informing citizens about changes to their own living environment on the spot. Providing information must come before any form of opinion making and expression can take place in order to lead to effective deliberation. Second, the case explores the relationship and engagement of citizens with places mediated through the smart phone and the AR CITY application. It deeply integrates with properties of these places and, exemplary, explores properties such as the spatial location and the surrounding environment of a place.

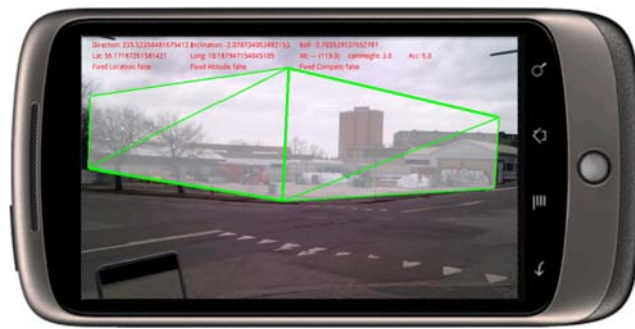


Figure 3. Screenshot of the AR CITY system showing outlines of a planned building through the phone.

The problem in urban planning this case is motivated by is that although changes to the cityscape are usually announced in the press and other outlets by the municipality, citizens are still often unaware of them or the implications they may pose. Architectural drawings and textual descriptions are often unapt or insufficient in communicating these plans to interested residents, who may not always be able to read and fully understand them. Furthermore, they are often published for the city as a whole rather than being filtered according to the areas a citizen may be interested in (e.g., close to home or work). We argue that a mobile AR approach to city planning may improve the awareness and understandability of municipal plans by displaying planned buildings anchored in reality and aligned with the current surrounding cityscape in real-time.

As one result from this case, we found that bringing AR to the masses and placing it in the hand of every user poses the new challenge of developing *instantaneous* AR systems, that is, enabling any user with a capable smart phone to view AR visualizations immediately at any location without the need for manual initialization that requires specific knowledge of the local site. In our system's design, we combine this proposition of *instantaneous* mobile AR (warranted through pure sensor placement of virtual objects) with a facility for closer inspection and deeper engagement

by the user (warranted through an additional manual calibration of virtual objects for better accuracy and stability) in dual-functionality systems.

We are, furthermore, taking into account how to best solicit feedback and facilitate deliberation of citizens on proposed changes to the cityscape. For example, how polished and realistic should visualized building models really be in order to not intimidate users on giving feedback? In which aspects should virtual representations align with physical reality and the laws of physics and when should they rather not in order to facilitate sense-making and opinion forming about these new structures? Such considerations certainly all depend on the kind of feedback and deliberation that is wished for. Within the domain of municipal planning, however, the AR CITY concept potentially offers new alternatives to engage with our living environment by achieving an awareness of and new insights into proposed changes to the cityscape.

Conclusion

Form these two preliminary case studies we can see that *something* can be gained from a focus on the notion of place in designing mobile applications for citizen deliberation. They also demonstrated how deliberation that is situated in the environment it is concerned with may bring up contributions that are qualitatively different from those where deliberation takes place remotely from them. The central question now concerns making aspects of place available for the design of such systems used in deliberation processes with a central spatial reference: How can a design support the use of *place* as a resource for users in located deliberation processes? And more specifically in connection with participatory planning, how can we effectively embed or situate that participation within the place it is concerned with through the use of mobile and/or ubiquitous technologies?

While we have learned that every human activity in the world is situated and embodied, how can we go beyond being aware of the general implications this poses for the design of interactive systems and consider how we can further make use of this insight. We may identify aspects that are common to a number of situations. By leveraging such a common element, e.g., situations that occur at a specific place, we can try to draw in properties of place as a resource for location-aware interactive systems. Specifically in participatory planning with its frequent use of spatial references, we may (re-)gain the perspectives of citizens who will be able to make valuable contributions to policy decisions through a design of deliberation systems that take place and situatedness to be central. A study of place as a resource in located deliberation may thus lead to significant insights on how to design mobile deliberation systems for tomorrow.

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Deliberation and empowerment in Rio de Janeiro's favelas

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Abstract. In modern day Brazil, new media initiatives centred in local communities are attempting to change the face of mainstream ideas about favelas and their inhabitants. One of these initiatives is Viva Favela which is ideologically and physically supported by the NGO Viva Rio that is based in Rio de Janeiro. This non-government organisation runs projects that provide favela residents with skills to take, edit and print their own (photo)journalism contents that enable a community-based framing and documentation of favela life, personalities and issues. The NGO furthermore has developed a range of public venues for displaying these works of (photo)journalism, thus minimising the invisibility that favela dwellers feel in Brazilian political life. This paper takes a discursive and ethnographic approach to investigating how community media might contribute with the aims of empowering people and supporting deliberation within Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

Introduction

VIVA FAVELA is attempting to change mainstream ideas about favelas and their inhabitants by shifting the focus from poverty, shortages, violence and criminality to images of the ordinary life which include the myriad events that occur in the day of the favela. Photographers from VIVA FAVELA, whom I interviewed between

November 2010 and January 2011, mentioned that their job aims to positively present the name 'favela', because the low income suburbs could not be associated only with bad things and events. 'Favela' is often translated simply as 'slum' or 'shantytown', but these terms connote negative characteristics such as shortage, poverty, and deprivation referring to favelas which end up stigmatizing these low income suburbs (Valladares, 2008, p. 1). Scholarly studies, organisations, and, in this paper, a nongovernment organisation VIVA RIO, have made great effort to re-signify the meaning of the name 'favela'.

Despite the steady, sharp drop in income inequality in Brazil since 2001, the country is still one of the most economically unequal countries in the world (de Barros, de Carvalho, Franco & Mendonça, 2007, pp. 22-23). Approximately one third of Rio de Janeiro's 10-million-plus residents live in favelas. Homicide and drug-related crime rates are rampant in these communities. Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan area has one of the highest murder rates in the world due to regular shoot-outs between police and drug dealers and confrontations with each other. Regarding critiques and scholarly studies of violence and criminality in Brazil's favela see [Misse & Lima (2006); Soares et al., (2009); Soares et al., (2005); Soares (2000); and Ventura (1995)].

Ramos and Paiva (2007, p. 15), through quantitative studies of Brazil's main daily newspapers, found that the journalistic report about Brazil's favelas and low income suburbs, especially in Rio de Janeiro, almost always regards these territories as "exclusive spaces of violence" (Ramos & Paiva, 2007, p. 77), and the voices and perspectives of favela dwellers are under-represented.

Dissatisfied with the way the traditional media had portrayed the favelas and their residents, community leaders from different favelas in Rio de Janeiro appealed more than a decade ago to the NGO VIVA RIO for support. The advent of the internet, the dream of a magazine produced by the people, for the people, and with the people from the low income areas became a reality. In 2001, the VIVA FAVELA website was established. Assisted by professional journalists, community correspondents (reporters and photographers selected by VIVA RIO) started to produce the portal content, and by 2008, they had already built a database of nearly 50,000 images by community photographers (Jucá & Nazareth, 2008).

VIVA FAVELA was conceived from the premise of a third-generation of human rights which contains a clear plea for the right to communicate, which is embedded in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This non-government organisation (NGO) runs projects that provide favela residents with skills to take, edit and print their own images that enable a community-based framing and documentation of favela life, personalities and issues. The NGO furthermore has developed a range of public venues for displaying these contents of communication, thus minimising the invisibility that favela dwellers feel in Brazilian political life. "Viva Favela is not just a local web portal or an online magazine about favelas. It's part of an international movement of visual inclusion

to change dominant media” (Lucas, 2008, p. np). In their own ways, both the community and mainstream media that operate in the favela incorporate Brazilian cultural, social and political processes, which are constituted in turn by a diverse mix of voices, creeds, colours and perspectives. VIVA FAVELA’s website illustrates this well through its motto, *Tudo junto e misturado* (All together and mixed up). This expression, which is borrowed from favela dwellers, effectively means ‘unity in diversity’. In Brazilian culture, especially, in a city like Rio de Janeiro where the idea of a ‘divided city’ is very potent, this phrase is a noteworthy signal of the intention to break down boundaries and divisions, strengthening the voice of the people via access to media.

Data Collection

This paper presents the partial results of a research project which investigated the working practices, self-understandings, and discourses of community media photographers working alongside photojournalists of the mainstream media. This work reflects particular understandings of the role that photographic representations of the favelas might have in political agency or in representing favela people’s views within Brazil’s favelas. To do this, the study has examined collective instrumental case studies. This article will only show the working practices of the project VIVA FAVELA, and how it has influenced government policies.

In my attempts to understand not only how community photographers see the world but also how their ‘world’ and their subjectivities are constructed by discursive practices, I went to Rio de Janeiro in order to conduct open-ended interviews with community and mainstream photographers. The way I conducted the interviews depended on the person and the situation. Sometimes, the interview went on for two hours and a half and sometimes around 35-40 minutes. As Patton (2002, p. 27) points out “Participant observers gather a great deal of information through informal, naturally occurring conversations. Understanding that interviewing and observation are mutually reinforcing qualitative techniques is a bridge to understanding the fundamentally people-oriented nature of qualitative inquiry”. In so doing, I allowed photographers to decide where they wanted to be interviewed. When it was possible, I went to their communities attempting to understand their lifestyle, neighbours and everyday life. As Patton (2002, p. 49) argues “Understanding comes from trying to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, from trying to discern how others think, act and feel”. Following his principle, I went into six different favelas to have direct contact with community photographers in their own place of living. I got close to favela communities by talking to the children, because I understood that it was a good way of getting to

know about the favela everyday life. Another decision which I made was to go into the favelas by bus even though I had my own car in the city.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I was open to getting to know favelas and their communities, photographers' viewpoints and ways of living and, in so doing, I needed to go whenever the phenomenon took me. In the following stage, I focused on certain aspects, and questions, which emerged from photographers own voices, such as how photography can be used as a tool for social change and empowerment in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. I adopted ethnographic techniques because they provide insights into how to get to know others' worlds and what it means to participate or be in the field. Therefore, ethnographic principles were very useful when I needed to conduct my interviews and to understand community and mainstream photographers' worldviews, motivations, self-understandings, and practices.

Viva Favela portal and online newsroom

By March 2010 (Mesquita, 2010), VIVA FAVELA had grown into a collaborative web portal through which people from low income suburbs across Brazil could be the protagonists of their own stories which, up to then, had rarely if ever been told by the mainstream media. The contents of VIVA FAVELA are created by its community correspondents and/or correspondents 2.0, as Viva Favela calls them, from Brazil's low income suburbs. Some of them attended VIVA FAVELA's multimedia workshops either in VIVA RIO NGO setting or favela communities. The project *Vamos fazer uma revista?* (Let's create a magazine?) was established at this time. VIVA FAVELA chooses the topic and stipulates a deadline, and then a meeting to discuss the news agendas of the next magazine happens in its online newsroom. As VIVA FAVELA has over 500 correspondents the online newsroom was created as a way of exchanging experiences, and discussing what is worth covering in favelas. The meeting starts at 5 pm on Mondays. Anyone can attend the meetings as long as they register on the website. Each edition (bimonthly) has a different invited editor who conducts a debate and decides which contents will be published in the magazine. The first edition *Festa na Favela* (Party in the Favela) had as its editor a renowned REPORTER of GLOBO BROADCAST, Caco Barcellos. It is a noteworthy signal of the dialogic relationship between VIVA FAVELA and the mainstream media even though Barcellos is known for his interest in themes related to human rights, violence, criminality and social justice.

As well as this bimonthly online magazine community correspondents can upload their contents of communication on the VIVA FAVELA website freely whenever they can. In this process, no one decides what will be published. VIVA FAVELA's staff only monitor its website content to check whether it is in accordance of VIVA FAVELA's editorial line.

Viva Favela's multimedia workshops

In 2010, as VIVA FAVELA had grown into a collaborative web portal (Mesquita, 2010), it conducted some multimedia production workshops at the VIVA RIO NGO setting in order to teach ordinary people how to write, photograph, record audio, edit and upload their work on the Internet. These workshops, which are uniform top-down training programs, aspire to give participants skills to become active media producers. These programs have resulted in the creation of short movies, photographs, podcasts, and written texts by favela dwellers from across Rio de Janeiro's low income suburbs. Some recurring themes include favela culture, fashion, garbage, police intervention in the favela and social issues. Afterwards, the workshops' participants upload their own content on the VIVA FAVELA portal for publishing.

Howley (2010, p. 184) stresses that participatory communication "raises the community's awareness of its own resources and talents as well as its capacity to alter or transform some aspect of daily life". This concept is connected to an idea of deliberation which says that it is not just identifying a problem, but enabling citizens to name and frame issues and work progressively through processes that help them towards identifying, evaluating and choosing solutions.

Based on Dewey (2007/ 1922), Romano (2010, p. 3) notes that deliberation is not only a dialogue, a debate or conversation even though deliberation encompasses different forms of communication. Deliberation is a process in which people take part before making a decision related to issues that affect their lives. "Politics is not something that only happens in the realms of government or formal political processes. Politics occurs whenever individuals act alone or with others to identify and resolve issues, both minor and momentous, that affect their community" (Romano, 2010, p. 4). Thus, the processes which happen through multimedia workshops and collaborative online newsroom conducted by Viva Favela are political processes. There people are challenged to reflect on their own community and themselves in order to identify their issues and resolve them. Collaborative content creation and photography have been applied by this community-based initiative as a tool for social change in Brazil's favelas. As Mathews (2002, p. 17) pointed out "While it is common for institutions and government agencies to talk of empowering people to deal with their problems, the most important empowering moves in the opposite direction, from citizens to institutions".

Mayra Jucá, who is THE COORDINATOR of VIVA FAVELA, and whom I interviewed in December 2010, in Rio de Janeiro, said that VIVA FAVELA's multimedia workshops were interrupted for a while because the project, during 2010, mainly focussed on an online newsroom and the creation of a bimonthly collaborative online magazine (Let's create a magazine?). Moreover, the NGO

VIVA RIO has tried to expand the project VIVA FAVELA overseas. Since 2004, it had a branch in Haiti where it has developed different kinds of initiatives. However, Jucá mentioned that, in 2011, they have an intention to restart the workshops at VIVA RIO settings.

Regarding the relationship between VIVA FAVELA and favela communities, Mesquita who is an EDITOR OF THE CONTENT of this project has acted as a mediator between favela communities and VIVA RIO. At the beginning of November, I accompanied Mesquita in six different Rio de Janeiro's favelas, so as to understand how Viva Favela works, and how it creates its partnerships and carries out its workshops in these low income suburbs. At that time, a group from the NGO DIACONIA, physically located in Recife, was in Rio de Janeiro in order to strengthen the dialogue with the NGO VIVA RIO. Like Viva Rio's projects, DIACONIA aims to contribute to a process of citizenship and defense of human rights for disadvantaged classes in northeast Brazil. Supervised by Mesquita, DIACONIA's group and I went to Santa Marta, Cantagalo, Pavão Pavãozinho and Cidade de Deus (City of God) to get to know those favelas and make connections with the people from there. The outcomes achieved by favela residents of these two days were:

1. a photographic screening in the middle of Pavão Pavãozinho's square;
2. collaborative creation of graffiti on the wall of LENS OF DREAMS, in the City of God (Cidade de Deus);
3. collaborative creation of a stop motion short-movie in Cidade de Deus;
4. editing of the images captured in Cidade de Deus at VIVA RIO setting;
5. screening of the stop motion short-movie during a party at the VIVA RIO setting.
6. strengthening the dialogue between DIACONIA's group, VIVA RIO and people from Rio's favelas aiming to further collaborative initiatives.

Asked about a political impact which the project VIVA FAVELA might have through its processes of supporting deliberation and contributing with the aim of empowerment, Jucá (2011) argued that VIVA FAVELA had had a political impact at two different levels, personal and governmental. In the personal dimension, she stated that the project had encouraged its 'community correspondents' to see themselves as someone who is capable to generate information by using communication tools to spread out one's own worldviews. This process allowed them to engage in conversations beyond social, educational, and geographical boundaries of the favelas. However, she mentioned that the most remarkable thing was when the contents of the communication they produced were displayed by the traditional media and/or other media. It resulted in a bigger impact by generating public discussion, job opportunities, partnerships, and/or even government actions at the local level. In terms of government policies, Jucá (2011) mentioned a

project which had attempted to transform the city of Rio de Janeiro into a digital/smart city. This program was inspired by THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SECRETARIAT OF RIO DE JANEIRO STATE, Franklin Coelho. He, who had already founded the program PIRAÍ DIGITAL, in PIRAÍ REGIONAL COUNCIL, worked at the NGO VIVA RIO and became engaged in the project VIVA FAVELA when it had telecentres in different low income suburbs of Rio.

Reflections

The social divide in Brazil, [“for example, as of June 2007 only 13 percent of the nation’s households owned a PC and just 3 percent of the population had broadband access” (Clarke, 2009, p. 146)], is one of the impediments that THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT faces to take the role of community-based initiatives in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas.

The history of Rio’s favelas assembles stories about disadvantaged classes who struggle for a life of dignity. This includes such areas as: the drugs trade, which increases in importance and, sometimes, acts by financing local services; a civil society which demands safety and social justice; and, a STATE GOVERNMENT which “seems to have given up all social concern” (Valladares, 2008, p. 11). To tackle the increase sense of insecurity and fear among many sections of Rio’s society, THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT set up the first UPP (PACIFYING POLICE UNIT) at the favela of Santa Marta, Rio’s south area, in December 2008. It aimed to reestablish control over Rio’s low income territories, strengthen the dialogue with favela residents, and increase community participation. From that moment on, favelas in Rio have faced a process of state pacification and intervention through THE POLICE. Projects like RIO CIDADE DIGITAL work in partnerships with the UPPs in favelas, however, in contrast to the NGO VIVA RIO, which, since 1993, has dealt with favela communities and has built partnerships with people within Rio’s favelas to achieve common goals by creating a trusting work environment, UPPs have faced challenges in interacting with favela dwellers because there is a lack of trust in relation to THE RIO DE JANEIRO POLICE which has a long history of corruption. In relation to THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT, the fear is that those initiatives are aimed primarily at government election campaigns and/or attempts to build an atmosphere of security and an image of “Rio, Capital da Inovação e do Conhecimento” (Rio, Innovation and Knowledge Capital) for coming international events, such as WORLD CUP in 2014, THE OLYMPIC GAMES in 2016, and environmental events like THE RIO+20, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

During my fieldwork in Rio’s favelas I noted that favela communities which had UPP had faced a process of transition which had built new relationships

among favela residents and THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT and THE POLICE. Favela communities are very concerned about the stage of post-pacification, because they say that just THE POLICE are not sufficient to solve their problems. They ask for a long-term social program which would include training courses, job opportunities, schools, and child services. To respond to favela demands, THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT is establishing THE UPP SOCIAL (SOCIAL PACIFYING POLICE UNIT) in partnership with the IPP INSTITUTO PEREIRA PASSOS (PEREIRA PASSOS INSTITUTE) and THE UN-HABITAT which works from the premise of giving voice to locals in order to identify their own demands by working from a bottom-up perspective. THE UPP SOCIAL which combines secretaries, civil society, and the private sector attempts to strengthen the dialogue with favela communities by engaging people in conversations to identify their own resources and demands, and to solve their problems.

For ten years, VIVA FAVELA has tried to promote the principle of digital inclusion for the purpose of social change by initiating the processes of community dialogue and collaborative content creation. Today, THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT through, first, THE UPP and, then, THE UPP SOCIAL is attempting to promote citizenship, economic, urban, and social development in ‘pacified’ favelas by combining civil society, secretaries, and the private sector. Within the next couple of years, THE UPP SOCIAL will be established in different Rio favelas, if it proceeds according to THE RIO DE JANEIRO GOVERNMENT’s plan. The greatest questions will be how the THE UPP SOCIAL will be established and how long it will last, and if it will be harnessed toward giving voice to favela communities and creating a less divided city, and, in other words, a more equitable society.

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Capitalising on the Potential of Online Communities to Help Welfare Recipients

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Abstract. Social Media provides an opportunity for better two-way communication between governments and their citizens. So far, this has been explored mostly in the context of engaging citizens through public consultations to help design new policies and releasing datasets to enable their use for innovative applications by the public. In our work, we are exploring yet another use of social media in governments, as a new channel to support specific groups. In this model, the government takes a mediation role, facilitating the creation of online communities for specific groups of citizens, thereby capitalising on the potential power of such communities to provide social and emotional peer-support and get feedback on social security policies. We propose to explore the issues that arise in this context.

Introduction

With the development of Web 2.0, people have become more active participants in the creation and sharing of information, and, through this process, have met people they were unlikely to have met otherwise, and developed informal groups online. Over the years this culture of participation has been very strong,

demonstrating how quickly people can organise themselves, support each other, share ideas and construct new knowledge.

Governments and organisations recognise the potential of the social web, and they have begun actively increasing their online presence. They use Twitter and Facebook to keep the public informed (e.g., tweetMP to follow Australian Members of Parliament on Twitter, the Facebook page of the Bedfordshire Police), release data sets that can then be used in mash up projects (e.g., mashup Australia or data.gov.au to access and reuse public datasets from the Australian Government), and engage people through public consultations (e.g., Public Sphere to engage people in public policy development, Future Melbourne to involve people in the design and strategy of the future shape of their city, Together for London to encourage commuters to debate behaviour on public transport).

While this engagement to date has been mostly focused on data (e.g., dissemination, sharing and feedback), its potential social dimension has largely been ignored. Governments can expand their role to not only be a collaborator, but also a mediator facilitating the creation of online community groups aimed at providing social support to disadvantaged citizens. Welfare programs have changed over the recent past, and governments can take advantage of the power of such communities to provide the social and emotional peer-support currently missing in the implementation of social security policies.

Beyond the provision of financial support

Many developed countries provide an income support payment for people with low or no income who have the responsibility to care for one or more children. In recent years, however, welfare systems have changed, and the financial assistance that people used to receive without any mutual obligation requirement is now provided in exchange for work (or some form of community participation) and offered for a limited period of time. These measures, while aimed at encouraging people to undertake activities to improve their prospect of job, did not have the expected impact with respect to influencing people's behaviour. Early studies evaluating the effectiveness of these reforms failed to show any financial gain, or significant improvements in job prospects (e.g., Ziguras, 2004; Cameron, 2006; Sawyer, 2006; and Cox and Priest, 2008). These evaluations also point to the fact that the transition can be difficult, and thus people need help.

Our work aims at helping people currently receiving welfare payments find a job and become financially self-sufficient. More specifically, we are targeting families in receipt of Parenting Payment (PP) who will be transitioned to Newstart Allowance (NSA - an unemployment benefit) and have new compulsory participation requirements when their youngest child turns six years old (for couple families) or eight (for single parents). As the relationship between

governments and citizens is largely one-way and the support offered by government is mostly financial or informational, our aim is to complement existing welfare transition programs, by exploring the social and emotional dimension of this relationship. In partnership with Centrelink, the Australian Government's service delivery agency, responsible for administering social welfare payments, we explore the use of an online community, facilitated by Centrelink, as a support group for parents in receipt of income support.

A community for parents transitioning from welfare to work

The challenge for us is to create the right kind of community that people will value, building on a culture of citizens' collaboration, participation and information sharing. An important question is whether such online communities would be useful for groups of citizens. There is certainly a value in being able to share experiences with other people who are in the same situation. The potential (or promise) that an online community could be a place for mutual help and support, with the opportunity to share information and connect with other people, could be appealing compared to traditional government processes which tend sometimes to be impersonal. This online community may also provide alternative ways to disseminate targeted information to groups of citizens (e.g., bust myths, correct misconceptions, and be more responsive to specific or personal questions).

However, being involved in online interactions is quite different from running and facilitating an online community group. This is not a role traditionally filled by governments, and it is not clear that people would want such a community be monitored by the government or would feel free to talk knowing that forums are moderated. These are the issues we are proposing to explore.

Method

To provide useful and effective support, we needed to get an understanding of what would be useful for families during this transition process and the difficulties and/or obstacles they face. We also wanted to explore with them the idea of using an online community as a support group. The data was collected through group interviews and an online survey.

The people invited to either the group interviews or the online survey were Centrelink customers currently on Parenting Payment (PP) and about to transition to Newstart Allowance (NSA) and customers already on Newstart.

Group interviews

During November 2010, four group interviews were organised and facilitated by the Centrelink Concept Lab. Each focus group was scheduled for one and a half hours. Out of the 25 participants initially recruited, 17 attended including 15 participants on PP and about to transition, and two participants having recently made the transition to NSA. Participants were mostly mothers, with only two fathers.

During these group interviews, participants discussed their understanding of the transition process, their feelings about their requirement to return to the workforce and to regularly report to the government, and the social barriers they perceive as affecting their ability to participate.

Online survey

The online survey was a follow-up of the group interviews to confirm with a larger group of customers our initial findings. In December 2010, customers having an online account with Centrelink were invited to participate to the survey.

Among the 899 customers who were contacted, 47 participated to the survey; but only 44 completed the survey. Most of the participants were females aged between 28 and 56 years old, with only 4 fathers. We had an equal participation from both groups (i.e., 22 in PP and 22 in NSA). Most of the participants were coming from large populated states such as New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD).

Understanding of the transition process

For many this transition comes as a surprise. There was no clear understanding of what was going to happen next, what was expected from them (beyond the broad requirement to have to look for work) or what the consequences of the change would be for them, both financially and in terms of family life organisation. The following quotes, coming from people who participated in the online survey, illustrate this.

“I had been informed in an interview that nothing would change for me when my daughters turned 8. When I went in to organise the change I was shocked to hear about all that was required. I was even more shocked to discover the drop in the support I would be receiving from Centrelink.” (P42: a 39 year old mother)

“I wasn't prepared for the financial disadvantage or the change of payment arrangements of both Newstart and Family Payment. I had to rearrange all my automatic bill payments. It was a night mare because I could not receive the payments on the same day of the week as I previously had received Parenting Payment. Very stressful, varying advice from staff at Centrelink, confusing times.” (P11: a 54 year old mother)

People's feelings about the transition

As illustrated in Figure 1 and the comments below, the lack of understanding of what is going to happen and what to expect make people feel apprehensive. They are overwhelmed by the changes in the family routine and budget this is going to require.

“I know that I have to apply for newstart and have asked what I can expect to receive as to work out a new budget & have been told that from what I earn probably nothing. I don't earn a great deal as only work part time as have 2 primary aged children, so that is scary to be losing all that money. There will be very stressful times ahead until I can ascertain exactly what money I will receive if any.” (P29: a 43 year old mother)

“I feel overwhelmed because our finances are very stressful and I am not sure how everything is going to work out.” (P15: a 31 year old mother)

Others felt angry and not supported by Centrelink:

“I was not made aware until that phone call, how much information would be needed, how many details I would have to go over AGAIN [...] So much mucking around and misleading information left me extremely lost, angry and frustrated.” (P48: a 43 year old mother)

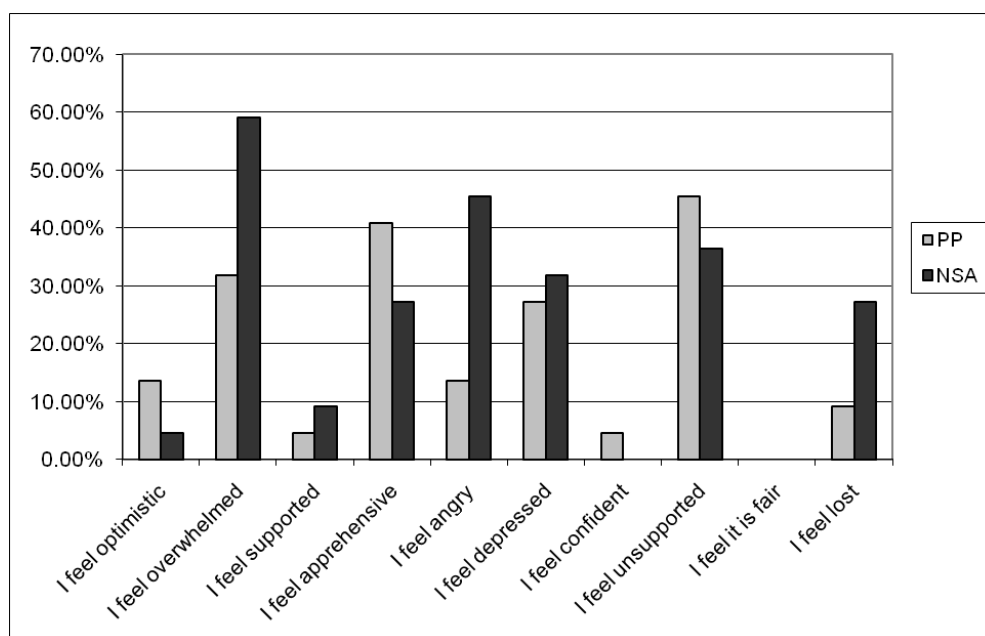


Figure 1. Online survey results: Participants' feelings about the transition process

A majority of participants also reported being not well equipped to make the transition or to adjust to their new situation. In the group interviews in particular, some expressed a lack of confidence and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Many felt that they were not equipped to look for a job, mostly because they had been out of the workforce for many years. They felt that they required much more support from the government than they were getting to enable them to find jobs. In the online survey, only half of the participants reported having a support

network, which gives us the opportunity to develop this aspect further through the online community work.

Usefulness of an online community for parents

Participants were described a scenario where they were offered the opportunity to join an online community of parents who are going through the same transition process, just like them, and, in this context, they were asked to consider a number of ideas and indicate whether they think it would be useful and it could help them, or not. We are presenting here some of the feedback collected.

Overall, the response was positive, with about 32% of participants¹ thinking it would be a good idea and 54.5% that some people might benefit from this support, as illustrated by some of the participants' comments we collected:

"i think a lot of parents would find this most beneficial as there is a wide amount of different situations that we all come from though all being parents (we have in common)we would have a support network also and maybe not feel so pressured into an unrealistic situation..." (P16: a 44 year old mother)

"I have no support network at all currently, no family to turn to. Such an online community would be a huge boost. It is hard caring for children on your own." (P2: a 46 year old mother)

Participants were asked to express their opinion towards a set of nine statements about the online community. Three of the statements were related to the regulation of behaviour in the community. As shown in Figure 2, participants felt strongly about the need to remind members of appropriate behaviours (88.64%), the need for the community to be monitored (93.18%) and the need for the discussion forums to be moderated (88.64%). People were concerned about the reliability of information in the community, but more importantly that forums could become a place for people to complain, drawing on negative feelings, as illustrated with the comment below.

"I think the online community could focus too much with people's frustration and negative feelings and become more of a place to complain than a place for mutual help and support." (P43: a 34 year old mother)

We had one statement about facts and who holds the authority on facts. Most of the PP group (73%) agreed that only Centrelink officers should provide the facts against 36% only in the NSA group. Because people interact with a range of agencies (e.g., Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) and service providers (e.g., Job Services Australia) to get information, they may regard them as authoritative sources as well.

We had also three statements related to how people identify themselves with the community. A large majority of participants (91%) could relate emotionally to

¹ These figures are taken from the online survey responses. They also reflect the sentiments captured during the group interviews.

parents in a similar situation, and learn from them what to expect next (79.55%). Participants showed also a certain level of commitment towards such an online community, reporting their willingness to work in partnership with other parents like them (68%), as shown below.

“I think that is great idea. None of my friends or associates are single mothers and I miss the opportunity to share information that could make a difference or be of any help. Sharing ideas on budgeting, hearing of others successes, [...] I would relish the opportunity to connect with other people who are in the same situation...” (P41: a 34 year old mother)

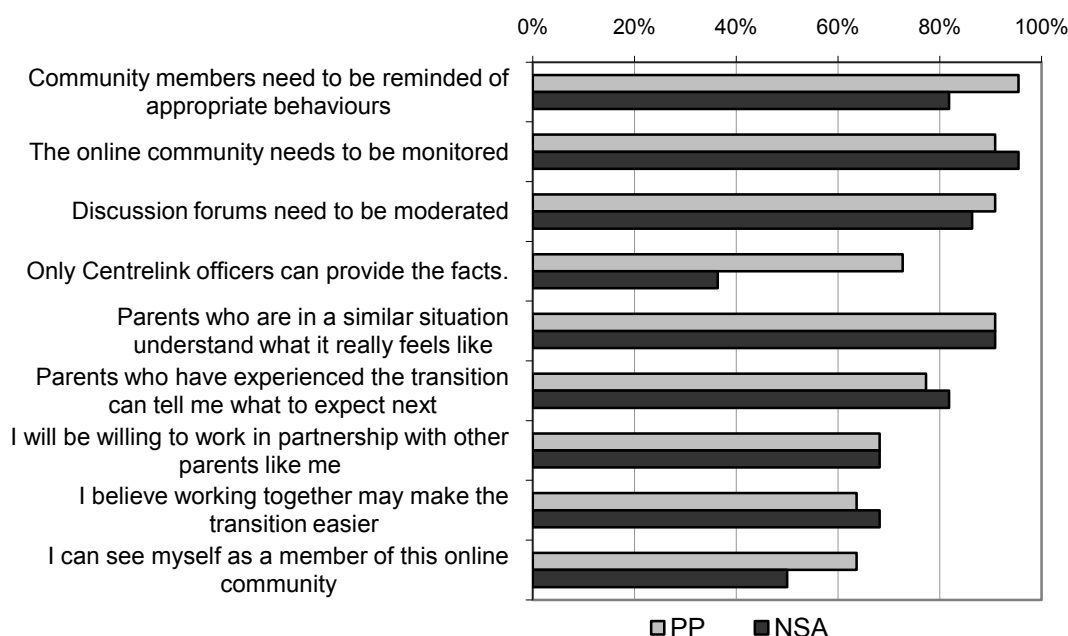


Figure 2. Participants' attitude toward the online community: percentage of agreement with each statement for each group.

Finally, the last two statements were measuring the sense of value in having such an online community group available and the sense of belonging it may create. Two third of the participants believed working together with other parents may make the transition easier, and 57% of them could see themselves as a member of this online community. When asked whether they would join such an online community, 34% of the participants reported that they would be happy to join; 48% of them reported that they might give the community a try; and only 18% said they would not be interested. It was interesting to see that almost all the participants who said they would be happy to join such an online community could see themselves as a member of it.

Overall people were open to the idea of the community, in particular to the opportunity to share (45.4%) and work with other members (41%). Participants from the NSA group were more enthusiastic about the project with one in four supporting it completely. This may be due to the fact that, in this group, people have already made the transition and have found it hard to adjust to the changes. Very few people (2.2%) did not see any value in the idea.

Conclusion

What we are proposing contributes to the body of work studying the growing participation of citizens in government issues. The research questions we address here raise new challenges in designing social media technology able to support citizen-government interactions, while allowing governments to take on a new role, that of a mediator, within communities of specific groups of citizens.

By facilitating the creation of online groups, governments can capitalise on the potential power of such communities to provide social and emotional peer-support, they can connect more closely with people and better understand the impact social security policies have on them.

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