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Citizen Participation and the Rise of Digital Media Platforms in Smart Governance and Smart Cities

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ABSTRACT

Many governments and firms do believe that technology can supplant governance and human responsibility. This belief poses the question of who will really benefit from smart cities. This article explores this fundamental question through the study of digital media platforms. The ultimate goal is to understand the link between e-governance and smart city initiatives in our cases of study by testing whether these projects are explicitly for citizens. This article shows how e-platforms represent the use of information and communication technologies with the aim of encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes, improving information and service delivery, reinforcing transparency, accountability, as well as credibility. Thirteen digital media platforms are surveyed, mostly in cities across countries. These e-platforms raise implementation challenges for both firms and policy makers, and new research opportunities for scientist to build up new research and to experiment with the aim to make the benefits for citizens wider and the participatory dimension stronger.

KEYWORDS

Citizen Participation, E-Platforms, E-Participation, E-Governance, G2B, G2C, G2G, Smart Cities, Smart Government

INTRODUCTION

Managing urban areas is one of the most important development challenges of the 21st century –54% of the world population is living in cities, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66% by 2050, as stated in the UN World Urbanization Prospect 2014.

The management of urban areas includes new actions on infrastructures, energy sustainability, natural environment, education, health care, and public safety, to name a few. However, challenges including raising demand for resources, organization and management complexity, make cities main sources of congestion, pollution and waste, exacerbating a variety of socio-economic problems, such as poverty, unemployment, transport, and criminality.

Both the ideas of a smart city and smart government have been conceived as approaches to address such complex urban problems. The smart city and smart government approaches make use

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of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) with the aim of increasing the interactivity, quality, and efficiency of urban services, reducing costs and resource consumption, and improving the interactions between government, citizens and businesses (Alawadhi et al., 2012). Smart city and smart government, however, are also commonly presented as if technology could supplant governance and human responsibility.

In this work, the authors review the rise of digital media platforms in e-governance, analyzing application cases and existing e-platforms for government-to-citizen (G2C), citizens-to-government (C2G), government-to-business (G2B), and government-to-government (G2G) services. The authors hypothesize that citizens to government would be a less developed mode of e-governance in digital media platforms, which is later confirmed for our set of cases. Thirteen digital media platforms for smart governments and smart cities are compared, including *Better Reikjavik* in Iceland, *Fix My Street*, *Open Street Map* and *Small Business Research Initiative* in UK, *Línea Verde* in Spain, *Madame la Maire, J´ai un idée* in Paris, *Billiji*, *New Urban Mechanics*, and *Youth Boston* in Boston city, *Sharing Car Seoul*, *Peta Jakarta* in Indonesia, *Blockpooling* in Singapore, and *Ushahidi* in Kenia. For each of the above-mentioned e-service categories, the authors analyze which platforms accommodate better. This will allow to pursue an in-depth comparison of e-platforms that will be later summarized in Table 1. The researchers also find outliers among the cases analyzed. Those outliers include digital platforms mostly focused on business to government and business to citizens, or hybrid services –including both.

The work proceeds as follows. In the next section, definitions are provided, starting with a brief explanation of e-governance, describing its main stakeholders and their interactions, as well as e-platforms. Then, the authors introduce concepts of citizen participation. Later on, the rise of digital media platforms in smart cities and smart governments analyzing the scope of thirteen existing e-platforms is addressed. The presented typology allows the researchers to give strong examples that

Table 1. Findings and comparisons among e-platforms

E Platform	City/Country	Platform type	Citizen control	Delegated Power	Partnership or collaboration	Placation	Consultation	Informing	Therapy	Manipulation
Better Reikjavik	*Reikjavik, Iceland*	*G2C, C2G*								
Fix My Street	*UK*	*B2G, G2C, C2G*								
Open Street Map	*UK*	*C2C*								
Small Business Research Initiative	*UK*	*G2B, B2G*								
Línea Verde	*Five cities in Spain*	*B2G*								
Madame la Maire, J´ai un idée	*Paris, France*	*G2C, C2G*								
Billiji	*Seoul, Korea*	*G2C, C2C*								
New Urban Mechanics	*Boston, USA*	*G2C, C2G*								
Youth Boston	*Boston, USA*	*G2C, C2G*								
Sharing City Seoul	*Seoul, Korea*	*C2C*								
Peta Jakarta	*Indonesia*	*G2C, C2G*								
Blockpooling	*Singapore*	*G2C, C2C*								
Ushahidi	*Kenya*	*C2G*								