2014

OPEN GOVERNMENT
AWARDS

CITIZEN — 2014 THEME — ENGAGEMENT

TOP 10 RANKED INITIATIVES

Open
Government
Partnership

1 Denmark

"Statutory Elected Senior Citizens' Council"

Empowered by law, senior citizens actively influence local government policy

Denmark is recognised as a country that contributes to the development and dissemination of participatory democracy. The statutory, elected Senior Citizens' Councils in local government is one successful and well-integrated example of this.

Participatory Democracy

Mutual understanding and respect across generations is crucial for the cohesive force of any society. In Denmark, few 70+ year-old citizens are elected for decision-making bodies in government and municipalities and thus the elderly have gone without representation. Approximately 20% of the Danish population is elderly and the number is increasing; in 2030 it will be about 27%. Senior citizens today are physically well-functioning and eager to contribute to society. With a diverse elderly population, it is important to ensure that society's systems and services are developed in collaboration with representatives of the elderly.

From Grassroots Initiative to Legislation

In the 1990s, as a protest against the lack of involvement in local decision-making processes, senior citizens organisations voluntarily established local cooperation forums in municipalities and named these forums Senior Citizens´ Councils (SCCs). In 1990, citizen involvement was a new mode of collaboration for politicians and civil servants, but since then, it has developed into a legitimate form of cooperation between government and civil society. The Danish government has passed legislation to make SCCs a statutory requirement in all municipalities. Today there are SCCs in all municipalities in Denmark, and the civil society organisation National Association of Senior Citizens' Councils, although politically independent, is supported by the Danish Government.

Democratically Elected

The 98 SCCs in Denmark, one in each municipality, comprise around 1000 members, all of whom have broad knowledge of elderly people's way of living. A few other countries have somewhat similar initiatives but only in Denmark are SCC members elected by, and among, the local senior citizens in a democratic and transparent process. All 60+ year-old citizens are eligible to vote and to run for a seat in the local SCC. The candidates elected are in their 60s, 70s and 80s and are equally split between men and women. Being a member of a SCC is a much-coveted position: often there is a contested election and on average turnout for SCCs elections is 50%.

Obligation to Consult

According to Danish law, city government councils are obliged to consult the local SCC before a final decision is made on any issue relevant to the elderly population. Typical matters would be primary health care, traffic planning, local infrastructure, cultural policy, and the standard of public service for the elderly and for disabled people. Most important, however, is the SCC's potential influence on the city council's proposal for the municipal budget for the following year. The SCCs are a well-established statutory mechanism of participatory democracy which contributes constructively to promoting and supporting politicians' and administrations' focus on elderly citizens' needs, wishes, and resources.

2 Montenegro

Public engagement campaign "Be Responsible"

Citizens report unregulated economic activity and help the government impose fines

The informal (grey) economy is one of the biggest economic challenges in Montenegro. In 2013, it was estimated to account for 20% of the country's GDP. Much of the problem with grey economy in Montenegro lies in the broad public tolerance of this phenomenon and people's reluctance to report it to the authorities.

Engaging citizens with a different approach

For years, authorities had tried to raise public awareness of this issue and engage people in the national campaign against grey economy. But the effects remained limited. People were either disinterested or were reluctant to report instances of grey economy to the authorities, because they did not believe that their concerns would really be addressed. So, instead of telling citizens how damaging grey economy was, the authorities decided to take another approach - that of actually engaging citizens and using their many eyes and hands as assets in the fight against grey economy.

To achieve this, the Government of Montenegro partnered with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and UNDP Montenegro and, in mid-December 2013, the three parties launched the public engagement campaign called "Be Responsible. It's up to you. Zero grey economy." The campaign was subsequently supported by the British Embassy in Podgorica. The goal of the campaign was to encourage citizens to report grey economy, primarily through the use of a mobile app called "Be Responsible", but also through more 'traditional' channels, such as website and toll-free hotline. The app, developed by a team of students and professors from the Podgorica Faculty of Electrical Engineering, with the support of UNDP Montenegro, allowed smartphone users to take photos of different forms of informal economy, such as fake cash register receipts issued in bars and restaurants, black marketeering or violation of consumer rights in shops and supermarkets, and report them anonymously to the authorities.

Reinvesting into the community

In order to sustain public engagement, the Government decided to invest half the revenues from fines resulting from citizens' reports in community projects, such as kindergartens, homes for the elderly, medical equipment or other community projects proposed by citizens themselves. The money would support the project proposals that won the most votes from citizens reporting grey economy. Furthermore, the Government instructed inspection authorities to give priority consideration to citizens' reports and send prompt official feedback to be published on the Be Responsible website operated independently by the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. After less than six months, more than 2,500 'citizen inspectors' throughout the country had the Be Responsible app downloaded to their smartphones, which increased citizens' reports of grey economy by ten times month after month, and generated a public revenue of more than €500,000 in fines. The government delivered on its promise and invested half of this amount, over €250,000, in the five community projects proposed and voted on by citizens themselves: procurement of medical equipment for a children's hospital, renovation of an old people's home, landscaping of a local park, renovation of three day care centers for disabled children and equipping of public kindergartens.

3 The Philippines

"Grassroots Participatory Budgeting Program"

Local government and civil society jointly allocate budgets for development projects

While various Philippine laws provide mechanisms for citizen participation in policy making, decisions on the allocation of public resources still remain largely exclusive to government. At the national level, many departments conduct little or no public consultation on their respective budgets and programs. A very centralized decision making process has led to several problems including:

- mismatch of what government provides with what is actually needed;
- lack of transparency in projects that are being implemented by government on the ground; and
- patronage-based resource allocation at the national and local levels

The lack of transparency and participation over the distribution and use of government resources has led to poorly designed and poorly implemented projects. It has also opened up many opportunities for corruption.

Ownership by the National Government

In response to this, the national government initiated the Grassroots Participatory Budgeting program. The program encourages local governments and civil society organizations to jointly undertake a participatory planning and budgeting process to identify priority projects needed by communities, which would then be funded out of the national budget.

Participatory budgeting has been implemented in many countries, but only at the local or state level. In contrast, this program is initiated and supported by national government and is implemented across all local governments. The national government is committing over US$300,000 for each city/municipality for the implementation of priority projects identified through this participatory process.

Joint-decision making

The program goes beyond mere consultation as decisions are made through a body composed of 50% government and 50% CSO representatives, where the latter are elected through a city/municipal level assembly. It is worth noting that the national government does not accept proposals that are not approved by CSO representatives. The importance given to the role of CSOs in this process and the actual implementation of projects have encouraged more than 8,000 organizations to participate in the program.

What makes the program work is the funding commitment from national government, which serves as an effective incentive to get local governments to work with local civil society organizations, even if they have had an antagonistic relationship in the past.

At its very core, the Grassroots Participatory Budgeting program is a radical attempt to empower citizens and at the same time shift how government operates. The sustained successful implementation of the program has great potential to shift the entire Philippine government to be more open and more citizen-centric.

4 Italy

"OpenCoesione – Monithon"

Citizens track public spending and monitor its impact on the community

Cohesion policy, worth about 15 billion euros per year in Italy, is committed to help less developed regions, in particular in the South, to improve basic services, to broaden the opportunities of individuals and to create favourable conditions for attracting private investment. Cohesion projects finance innovations in research and development (R&D), transport and other infrastructure, and cultural heritage conservation among others. The financial resources for these projects comprise both European Union and specific national funds.

Transparency and Accountability

Since 2012 OpenCoesione allows easy access to detailed information on how cohesion funds are spent. Through the web portal, citizens can identify what projects the 40+ local and national administrations are funding. They can follow the development of each project on a regular basis by viewing and downloading data on how funds are being spent, who is receiving the money, what progress is being made and when they are expected to be completed. The Monithon platform makes a connection between government information and local communities by facilitating a closer look on the OpenCoesione projects and providing civic partners with a way to press forward and report malpractice. But they also allow citizens to collaborate in making these projects work, in accelerating their completion and understanding whether they actually respond to local demand. Monithon is also used in an education project aimed at engaging high school students through digital storytelling in discovering and observing cohesion projects in their territories.

A high-value Open Data Portal

The open data portal OpenCoesione.gov.it is a single point of access to open, detailed and high-quality data on cohesion projects and provides interactive visualizations, maps and search forms, raw data at the project level and API's - in order to enable the re-use of data by other administrations, researchers, journalists and citizens. As of September 2014, the portal covers 800,000+ projects funded since 2007, representing an overall value of approx. 80 billion euros. Moreover, as part of the overall strategy, the OpenCoesione initiative provides proactive support for citizen engagement activities based on the available information and involves an increasing number of civil society organizations engaged in promoting a more effective use of public funding.

Citizen Monitoring of Cohesion Policy

Monithon promotes citizen monitoring of cohesion policy through active involvement of communities and a shared methodology. Monithon has rapidly evolved from being an innovative new platform, built by the "civic hacking" community, into a transferable civic engagement format. Through monitoring marathons, groups of citizens set out on explorations around their area and collect useful materials (further data, interviews, photos, etc.) on specific projects in order to evaluate the effectiveness of public spending. Bottom-up control over public policies and collaboration with relevant stakeholders has proved particularly effective in local transportation system and reuse of properties seized from organized crime.

5 The Netherlands

"MinjWOZ" – My Law on Appreciating Local Property

Citizens influence how government values property to promote transparent tax assessment

The Netherlands' Tilburg municipality has a special project called MinjWOZ that addresses property valuation for tax purposes. The project gives homeowners an opportunity to consult with the authorities before their property is valued for tax, and to influence the factors that determine how the property value is determined. The venture has boosted public understanding and reduced the number of objections by about 40%.

Concerns on appreciating property tax

Every year after property appreciates, several questions and concerns arise among homeowners as to how it has been realized. Many citizens present objections to the appreciation. Up until the MinjWOZ project, municipalities handled these concerns through establishing special desks, and revising the objection procedure. But these concerns were treated at the end of the process, although they could very well be addressed at the beginning of the process. With MinjWOZ, citizens now have the opportunity to be a part of the process from the beginning by influencing the parameters that determine appreciation of property. Citizens determine whether the parameters are realistic and accurate and if not, they have a chance to correct them.

A truly consultative process on property appreciation

Establishing trust between the authorities and citizens has become an integral part of the process. Citizens were involved in the design phase of the how this consultative and deliberative process would take place. If citizens want to correct their appreciation of property, a notice has to be provided on a website. These corrections are carefully examined, and they are informed via a letter whether the municipality has agreed on the correction. Finally, citizens are given a questionnaire on the ease of use and the intelligibility of the website.

An extensive public survey was conducted in the first year revealed that over 90% of the respondents valued the service and that over 80% of them felt better informed about the processes involved in property appreciation. In the second year, the municipality found that it received around 40% fewer objections from local residents to valuations of their property for local tax. Over 40% of the suggested additions and changes were accepted, resulting in data improvement or enrichment. In the project's third year, processing time was visibly cut by 66%. This meant that the average 30 minutes taken by a civil servant to process the suggested changes were cut to 20 minutes and then further reduced to 10 minutes.

The Tilburg municipalities' strategy was convincing - by starting small with a pilot project, involving project partners like the Dutch Homeowners Association and the Property Assessment Board, soliciting other municipalities' views through a focus group, and by showing empathy with the public by asking the key question, 'How can we best involve the public in valuing property for local tax and how do they go about it?' - the initiative's success was quickly realized. MinjWOZ proved that transparency not only helps the public – by increasing trust and understanding – but also helps the authorities improve their organizational culture. Civil servants who had previously assumed that the public could perhaps not be trusted about the official valuation of their property, and would automatically consider the taxable value too high, discovered in the course of the project that most people can indeed be trusted, and that those who lodge an objection are often justified in doing so. This may be the greatest gain.

6 United Kingdom

"Sciencewise"

Citizens engage in policymaking on complex science and technology projects

Sciencewise, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, is an innovative engagement project that helps government departments use public dialogue to drive decisions on issues involving science and technology.

Engaging citizens in science and technology policy

The key idea behind Sciencewise is to empower both the citizens and the government, transforming those areas of policy where there has been traditionally minimum public engagement. Gaining popularity across government, Sciencewise opens up previously inaccessible policy areas to public involvement, helping to embed it in the policy-making process. The programme works with a government agency to develop, fund and commission a public dialogue, which brings together members of the public, policymakers, scientists, and other experts, to discuss a public policy issue. Through all-day deliberative events, debates, in-depth interviews and learning activities, citizens are presented with multiple opportunities to feed their thoughts into the policymaking process. Crucially, dialogue is always solicited at a stage of policy-making where it can be directly influenced by public perspectives.

A two-way deliberative process

Unlike standard consultation, Sciencewise is a two-way process: dialogue is neither solely about informing the public nor extracting information from them. It is deliberative, giving citizens a chance to develop their views through conversation with policy makers and experts. Participants are recruited to ensure that they represent a wide range of backgrounds and views (they are not self-selecting). A case study helps illustrate this process:

Case study:
Dialogue on hybrid and chimera embryos for research

The use of human/animal embryo in research, even though potentially leading to the development of new treatments for many diseases, raises profound ethical issues. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and Department of Health were keen to explore public attitudes towards the ethics, risks and benefits of mixing human and animal genetic material. The project consisted of four distinct elements:

1. Deliberative public dialogue, with 12 small discussion groups held across the UK, as well as a full-day workshop
2. Open public meeting held in London and attended by 153 participants
3. An opinion poll involving 2, 037 respondents
4. A formal written consultation to which 810 responses were received

Overall, more than 3,000 members of the public took part in the dialogue. The findings were analysed and summarised in a series of reports, subsequently published on the HFEA website. They grounded HFEA's final decision on allowing hybrid/chimera embryo research in principle, at a meeting held in public. The project had a major impact on understanding and awareness, both in terms of new learning and in helping public participants to think clearly about the issue.

7Mexico

"Centro de Integración Ciudadana (CIC)"

Citizens report on security issues and access legal and psychological aid for crime victims

Monterrey, having only a few years earlier been known as a beacon of progress in Latin America and hailed among the safest cities across the region, was in 2010 facing its most challenging time in its history. Violence and crime had taken over the city. Fear and distrust in local law enforcement authorities were widespread among citizens. Citizens did not know who to turn to in this time of need.

A trusted network for security concerns

The Centro de Integración Ciudadana (CIC) was created to address the need of providing a trusted network and organization where citizens could (1) share "near real time" information on events related to security in their city and (2) be advised by trusted team of lawyers and psychologists should they fall victim to crime. The initiative was designed to leverage mainstream adoption of mobile and social technologies and build on the early warning dynamic that was emerging on Twitter at the time. The CIC-Tehuan platform (means "us" in Nahuatl) integrates rich conversations on Twitter into a powerful map of citizen reports. Tehuan was designed to empower decision makers with an easy to use, fact-based tool. While citizens help to identify and prioritize issues, businesses monitor events that may impact their operations - and government can directly communicate efforts to solve them. Citizens are frequently reminded "We are all part of the solution" and have to take ownership and participate. CIC encourages participation by sharing short motivational and instructional videos on YouTube, doing interviews in local news and radio, executing "below-the-line" marketing campaigns and shares messages over its social networks targeting universities, sponsor companies, parish and neighborhoods communities.

A model for crowd-sourced problem-solving

Three years later, the security situation has subsided. CIC has received over 80k reports since its launch and provided over legal and psychological aid to over 1k crime victims and their families. CIC receives over 25k unique visits, has over 6k downloads of its mobile apps (iOS / Android) and publishes over 2.5k validated citizen reports per month that are channeled to authorities. The number of CIC assisted kidnapping victims who file a complaint with the authorities went from a low 20% in early 2012 to almost 70% by the end of 2013.

Over the last 12-18 months, CIC has garnered much attention from other cities across Mexico and Latin America who would like to replicate the model. In turn, CIC has "packaged" its technology platform and approach to grow as "franchise" model beyond Monterrey. The nearby city of Saltillo launched this model in mid 2013. Today, CIC is working hand-in-hand with SEGOB to set the stage and launch CIC in other major cities in Mexico under the Programa Agentes Innovacion led by the Office of the President.

The intended outcome for this platform was to build a trust network of citizens to serve as early warning system for citizens and authorities for issues specific to security. The actual outcome resulted in a much broader and sustainable platform for citizen engagement. It serves as reference of how citizens have successfully organized to engage government in a constructive and collaborative dialogue to address issues of common concern.

"City of Children of Miraflores Program"

Children propose ideas to help the City Council meet their infrastructure and security needs

City of Children of Miraflores Program is aimed to transform the Miraflores district into a friendly space for children and adolescents, where they can embrace their citizenship in an autonomous but participatory way, express their demands and share their experiences. Before this program, the requests made by children and adolescents were not considered in decision-making and in the process of formulating public policies in the Municipalidad Distrital de Miraflores, a Peruvian local government. Therefore, there were almost no child-oriented participation spaces in the district of Miraflores, Lima City, and the perception was that children must be receivers instead of builders of their future.

Giving a voice to children

This initiative has been implemented since 2011 and is a participation mechanism in the district addressed to children and adolescents named "Children's Advisory Council in Miraflores". It is composed of 14 children and adolescents, aged from 7 to 11 years, and provides a space where children's requests are taken into consideration on local public policies such as: Democratization of public spaces and promotion of games, Children Who are Friends of Their City Meetings, Public hearings for children: Listen Up Miraflores, among others. Moreover, alliances with the School of Education of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, the Ombudsman's Office, public and private schools, were created in order to promote this participation.

The Municipality also partners with the Child Leader's School Program which helps develop leadership skills through an innovative methodology called: "listen-form-empower", using games and dynamics, in order to help children become the main characters in their cities. Finally, the Municipality has the Citizenship Program composed of civil servants in charge of creating participation spaces that ensure the fulfillment of children and adolescents' participation rights, and articulate these efforts with other authorities in the district and other groups.

Children's ideas transform into concrete action

These projects that provide a space for participation have been created by children. To date they have 23,900 children beneficiaries. Child participation has increased by 1,300% as a result of awareness raising programs in eight public institutions. As a consequence of ideas proposed by the Children's Council, 10,000 security bracelets have been distributed to the children of Miraflores. This initiative is a good example of how creating a space for child participation has an impact on the Municipalities' public policies. The Municipality has implemented concrete actions based on proposals given by the Children's Council; which is a good practice that can be reproduced by other municipalities in other countries. This practice was distinguished as finalist in the category of Consultation and Civic Participation in the context of the Best Practices in Public Management Annual Award 2013 organized by Peruvian nonprofit organization Ciudadanos al Día.

9 United States

"Collaboration and Innovation through Prizes, Crowdsourcing, and Citizen Science"

Federal Agencies launch competitions to find citizen solutions to urgent policy problems.

By harnessing the knowledge of the public, government can leverage crowd-sourced solutions to difficult problems, yielding new insights and innovative solutions. At the beginning of the Administration, President Obama emphasized the importance of more inclusive and open government, directing the Administration to "find new ways of tapping the knowledge and experience of ordinary Americans."

In response to the President's call to action, a number of Federal agencies have launched open innovation efforts, offering citizens a way to participate in policy-making, improve government services, and offer solutions to tough problems. Such initiatives have harnessed the expertise, ingenuity, and creativity of the American public much more effectively today than ever before.

Highlighted Initiatives

- The National Archives engages citizens to help unlock historical government records through crowdsourcing projects on the Citizen Archivist Dashboard. Since 2012, citizens have contributed millions of tags, metadata, transcriptions, video subtitles, and digital images to the project.
- The FCC works collaboratively with industry, academia, public interest organizations, and others to develop open platforms for measuring broadband performance through its Measuring Broadband America program. More than 250,000 members of the public have provided speed testing data, comments, and feedback on improving Internet connectivity. The data, reports, and other products have benefited consumers as Internet service providers improved performance.

- NASA's International Space Apps Challenge is an annual, international mass collaboration over a 48-hour period each year in cities around the world. In three years, more than 2,000 crowd-sourced solutions have resulted in methods to monitor air, water, and urban pollution, track environmental mishaps, alert citizens of health or weather-related disasters, and track the stars.
- Thousands of citizen and professional scientists are working together through Nature's Notebook, a project of the U.S.A. National Phenology Network, which is funded primarily by USGS. Nature's Notebook collects biodiversity information to advance science, inform decisions, and communicate with the public about the changing environment. This information, on the timing of life cycle events such as tree-leafing and bird migration, is critical to manage wildlife, invasive species, and agricultural pests; to understand drought and wildfire risk; and to manage risks to human health and welfare.

10 France

"Data.gouv.fr",
the social and collaborative open data

A government portal allows the public to vote on, improve, and submit visualizations of government data.

Citizen engagement is at the heart of data.gouv.fr, which has been entirely coded and designed around this principle. The platform is the first government open data portal open to citizen submissions.

Going beyond an open data portal

The first national open data portal data.gouv.fr had been launched in 2011 and contained data from all ministries, who had been engaged to do such by several executive orders. However, one year later, it had become critical to find ways to scale the open data policy, and to make the government data opening process engaging and self-sustainable. It was also important to identify the most useful data to be opened and shared, for the highest impact for democracy, economic growth, and efficiency of public action. The idea was that to scale and succeed, the open data policy had to be driven by a fruitful dynamic for all stakeholders, sticking to their needs and usage, and where both producers and re-user of data would see concrete benefits. To better understand what a national open data portal should be, a 9-month process of co-design was envisioned: it combined a dozen workshops organized with the civil society, an open online consultation, and a highly iterative, agile development phase that involved the community from the very first day. Designed by and for civil society, data.gouv.fr has become a community of producers and users sharing public interest data: it is now the first government portal open to contribution by anyone. Users can now vote for useful datasets, improve the data shared by public authorities, post their own interpretations, data visualizations or applications. Besides, the platform hosts general interest data published by non-profits, universities, associations, journalists.

Contribution of high-value datasets

With this new dynamic the portal is starting to scale. After 6 months, data.gouv.fr demonstrates a real and sustainable shift in the government's approach to engaging citizens, and in the balance of powers: 330 organizations are now providing data, among which 110 certified public services and 220 providers from the civil society. Beyond central administrations and agencies, it convenes data from more than 80 local governments, NGOs such as WWF or the Red Cross, researchers such as the Paris School of Economics, corporations, citizens, collectives such as Regards Citoyens and the Open Knowledge Foundation France, OpenStreetMap, or companies like DataPublica or OpenDataSoft.

High-value datasets such as a complete cartography of health data, data on elections, state and local budgets, public safety, and environmental data which were not available before in open data have been added by a variety of providers. There are many examples of new, exclusive information which have become more accessible to citizens: for instance, the newly released French political parties' detailed accounts for election campaigns. The new data.gouv.fr now points to four times as much information as the previous version, and users went up 50% in 6 months. More than 1400 examples of data re-use have been posted on the portal. The platform creates unprecedented collaborations between government and citizens, and the forms of dialogue and cooperation initiated through the platform are spreading "offline": every week, datacamps and hackathons take place and fuel the platform with new datasets, new data improvements, and new reuses.

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AWARDS

Panel of Judges

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