

# **We-Transparency: How ICTs and "collaborative knowledge" are reshaping politics**

Marco Bani, Phd candidate in Politics, Human Rights and  
Sustainability - Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa

# Social Media

- New ways of democratic participation, pressures for new institutional structures, new processes and frameworks that lead to a more open and transparent government are all coming from social media.
- Social media refers to a set of online tools that are designed for and centered around social interaction [Bertot, 2011]. In practice, social media serves as a catchall phrase for a conglomeration of web-based technologies and services such as blogs, microblogs, social sharing services, text messaging, discussion forums, collaborative editing tools, virtual worlds and social networking services [Hansen et al., 2011].

# We-transparency

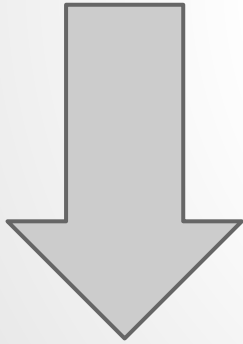
- *We-Transparency*: a social transparent, non-hierarchical, system of governance that exploits new technologies to restore a more satisfying democracy that feeds interaction, participation, accountability. Besides, a transparency that can be increased by the same governing structure with the release of updated, open and well structured data, but can also directly feed itself through the efforts of individuals or associations that supersede political actors, disseminating, sharing and processing information otherwise not accessible.

# We-transparency

- The *We-Transparency* paradigm aims at:
  - Fostering democratic participation and engagement.
  - Icelandic case: Crowdsourcing a constitution
  
  - Using crowdsourcing to foster transparency.
  - Bulgarian case: For Fair Election
  
  - Fostering accountability through transparency and openness.
  - Italian case: Open Polis

# The icelandic case: Crowdsourcing a constitution

- Economic default
- Political default
- A new kind of corruption
- Lack of accountability



**A new constitution**

# The icelandic case: Crowdsourcing a constitution

- Constitutional Assembly (CA) with the purpose to prepare a Constitutional draft to be passed to Parliament at the end of the work.
- The new constitutional council prioritized the use of new technologies:
  - Website, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr
- The official website of the Council became an incubator of comments. The CAC received approximately 370 formal proposals which were discussed in three sub-committees and about 3600 ideas and suggestions posted on the web by visitors.

# The icelandic case: Crowdsourcing a constitution

- The Constitutional Assembly in Iceland is something very close to direct democracy at work a way to restore faith in the government after the big failures happened in the recent past
- The experiment of collective participation was possible thanks to the small size of the nation
- Are 370 formal proposals and 3600 comments enough in order to talk about "popular will"? Do the 25 members of the Constitutional Council, who had very different profiles and varied opinions but approved the final bill unanimously, share a common view on what was wrong with the former constitution?

# Bulgarian case:

## Crowdsourcing transparency

○Crowdsourcing: “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call” [Howe, 2008].

○ Elections can be rigged in many ways, and voter fraud is varied. For instance, ballots can be changed or manipulated, voters can be influenced through intimidation or bribery, violence can shut down polling stations, or ballots can be changed after the election before the announcement of results.



**Crowdsourcing transparency**



# Bulgarian case: Crowdsourcing transparency

- Bulgaria, presidential and local elections (23 to 31 October 2011).
- A study commissioned by the European Commission showed that 97% of Bulgarian are thinking that corruption is a major problem for the country.
- "For Fair Elections" thanks to a coalition of nonprofit organization
- From early August 2011 until November 2011, 10.141 user visited the website, with 253 published report
- New crowdsourcing initiatives

# Italian case:

## Crowdsourcing accountability

○ *Openpolis* was created in 2006 as a not-for profit association interested in opendata and politics. The idea behind the project is that citizens have already the information they need for to evaluate the activity of the public powers.

○ It currently monitors more than 225.285 politicians, 360.000 duties, more than 17.348 official declarations. Almost 19.000 users access and share the information of the website.

# Conclusions

- Using the *we-transparency* paradigm would feed a grass-root form of democracy with a low impact on public resources.
- Governments should be more reachable, available and relevant to users, giving responsiveness of policy to technological change and fostering a “call to action” of their citizens, giving incentives that will encourage usage of government services through social media. Incentives which do not necessarily being financially, but mainly related to the "social reputation", the true currency of web 2.0.
- It's one thing to solicit participation and feedback but quite another to actually incorporate social media technology -driven participation into government regulation, legislation, services. This shift requires processes and mechanism by which comments, feedback and other interactions are incorporated.
- The *we-transparency* expresses its full potential when all the political stakeholders (political parties, institutions, citizens, civic associations) are working together, each with its own prerogatives and responsibilities. However if it is lacking a public agent it may also work, but incisiveness is lost.

# Conclusions

○A new kind of “grass-root democracy”, a *we-democracy*, a new way for enterprises, political parties, civic associations, citizens and in particular governments to increase participation and transparency.

○It is thus possible to have a truly representative democracy, where the voter does not exercise its democratic power only in the voting booth, but is continually informed and encouraged in his role of *controller* and *proponent* of policies in support of the institutions.

○This is why transparency should be a priority, especially for governments in need of legitimacy. But using only the “eyes” of citizens is no more sufficient. The *we-transparency* aims to use the knowledge of people and citizen to help government in making and deliver public transparent policies, or to replace him in case of too much secrecy or lack of comprehension in the choices that are made in the public sphere, as a collective intelligence fostered by Internet and digital tools to access, store and process different data.