Is E-Democracy a Myth?

Civic Participation and Democratic Reform

Julie Freeman*, Sharna Quirke**

University of Canberra, Julie.Freeman@canberra.edu.au

** *Sage Data Limited, sharna.quirke@gmail.com*

Abstract: Information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer opportunities for greater civic participation in democratic reform. Government ICT use has, however, predominantly been associated with e-government applications that focus on one-way information provision and service delivery. This paper distinguishes between e-government and processes of e-democracy, which facilitate active civic engagement through two-way, ongoing dialogue. It draws from participation initiatives undertaken in two case studies. The first highlights efforts to increase youth engagement in the local government area of Milton Keynes in the United Kingdom. The second is Iceland's constitutional crowdsourcing, an initiative intended to increase civic input into constitutional reform. These examples illustrate that, in order to maintain legitimacy in the networked environment, a change in the culture of governments to facilitate open and responsive e-democracy practices is required. Moreover, when coupled with traditional participation methods, processes of e-democracy enable wide civic involvement and emphasise that e-democracy should not be separated from the everyday operations of government. While online democratic engagement is a slowly evolving process, initial steps are being undertaken by governments that enable e-participation to shape democratic reform.

Keywords: E-democracy, e-participation, democratic reform, e-government

P**rospects of e-government** have been idealised as heralding in a new era of democratic involvement, with opportunities for unmediated discussions, direct participation and representation, and greater transparency and accountability through political openness (see, for example, Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Eggers, 2005; Wong & Welch, 2004). It is argued, however, that governments have placed little emphasis on the development of online practices that enable civic contributions to impact decision-making, instead prioritising information dissemination and service delivery features (see, for example, O'Toole 2009; Jimenez, Mossberger & Wu, 2012). Digital democracy, e-participation, and greater civic engagement have subsequently been labelled myths of e-government (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007); unlikely to occur without broader changes in the culture of government to be more open, receptive and responsive to civic views (Cullen, 2006; Jensen, 2009).

The rapid influx of digital technologies has created immense opportunities for new forms of government–citizen communication. However, it should not be assumed that online government applications will transform democratic structures and practices as rapidly. According to Keane (2009), the current form of post-representative democracy has been in development for over 60

years, with this gradual shift the result of increased public involvement in political processes. This paper highlights that while e-democracy is a slower process than first anticipated, this does not undermine its capacity to facilitate democratic reform. Governments that recognise the technological impact on the paradigm shift in democracy are able to use ICTs to address and adapt to increasing external pressures and broadening understandings of political representation and participation.

This paper explores e-participation efforts undertaken in the United Kingdom (UK) and Iceland to highlight how governments at varying levels are attempting to use ICTs to engage citizens in democratic practices. The UK case from the local government area of Milton Keynes is a targeted attempt to increase youth involvement in the democratic process. Iceland provides a nation-wide example of participatory democratic reform through its crowdsourced constitution initiative. These cases offer evidence of some of the ways that governments can combine ICT use with traditional political participation methods to actively facilitate increased civic engagement in democratic processes. Such developments are increasingly necessary for governments to maintain legitimacy in the networked environment. The success of e-participation initiatives depends, however, upon a change in governmental culture whereby representatives partially relinquish power and open themselves to further scrutiny through more transparent operations, and receptive and responsive communication with citizens. The following section outlines understandings of e-government, e-governance and e-democracy to highlight the role that ICTs play in broader democratic reform.

1. The Pace of Change in Democracy

Changes to democratic processes have never been swift, but nor are they ever stagnant. Keane (2009) suggests that democracy is transforming to incorporate additional deliberative and participatory features, and the current post-representative democratic form has been in development since 1945. Under this form of 'monitory democracy', citizens are enfranchised through advanced technologies and communicative abundance. Power monitoring and controlling bodies, such as citizen assemblies, public inquiries and human rights organisations, help to ensure the accountability of governmental power throughout the entire social and political landscape. The importance of traditional democratic structures does not decline, but their pivotal position in politics is changing due to scrutiny and contestation from external influences (Keane, 2009). E-government holds a vital position during these transformations. For governments, e-government applications offer mechanisms to address and adapt to broadening understandings of political representation, transparency, participation and accountability. In turn, participatory e-government practices offer citizens possibilities for additional involvement, understanding and engagement in the democratic system.

In his empirical evaluation of e-government in the United States, Norris (2010) highlights that idealistic claims of e-government fostering democratic deliberation and increased civic participation and engagement have not been achieved. He distinguishes between e-government, e-governance and e-democracy, and argues that while these three concepts are deeply intertwined, much academic literature contains the misconception that they are synonymous (Norris, 2010). E-government, according to Norris (2010), is understood as electronic delivery of information and services, whereas e-governance relates more to regulation and control both by governments and citizens. In terms of e-democracy (and its various counterpart names, such as digital democracy

and e-participation), Norris (2010) suggests that it involves providing citizens with access to government institutions and officials, and enabling civic participation in activities and decision-making through ICTs.

E-government enables improved efficiency of governmental services and increased civic access to information. These are important democratic developments as they facilitate civic equity towards public services and enable an informed citizenry. However, by themselves, these applications do not enable civic input into political agendas and policy processes, which would require greater two-way communication through e-participation. E-democracy practices can and do exist separately to government ICT use, which can be seen through, for example, citizen-led online political forums and the abundance of online news sources. But in order to maintain legitimacy and address the increasing external pressures, contestation and scrutiny identified by Keane (2009), government-led e-participation practices are increasingly important and, if implemented, will need to be run through e-government platforms.

ICT use has the greatest value for democratic reform when government provision of information, civic participation in policy-making processes, and regulatory transformations intersect. Here, technological advancements alter the functioning of power and authority through new citizenship practices (Smith, 2002). Effective governance subsequently involves dispersed power, with outcomes the result of a multiplicity of decisions from both vertical and horizontal relationships, rather than strategic decisions made by individual authorities (Ling, 2002). This is not to suggest an overhaul of current democratic structures to create direct forms of democracy, but that there is a need for additional deliberative opportunities for civic involvement and engagement in politics within the representative democratic model.

At present, information dissemination and service delivery often dominate government ICT use (see, for example, O'Toole, 2009; Jimenez et al., 2012). These types of mechanisms provide little capacity for citizen involvement in government decision-making, and civic participation undertaken offline remains more likely to impact the political system (Jensen, 2009). The prevalence of government centricity in e-government developments neglects online civic inclusion in political practices (Verdegem & Hauttekeete, 2010), with interactivity restricted in order for governments to maintain control of information. Opportunities for online civic engagement in government decision-making have subsequently largely remained myths of e-government (Bekkers & Homburg, 2007). In part, this has been due to a government focus on improving efficiency through ICTs, rather than employing their use to aid the effectiveness of democratic processes (Verdegem & Hauttekeete, 2010).

Despite these challenges, civic participation through ICTs has gained continuing and widespread attention, particularly due to its capacity to substantially contribute to democracy through greater engagement (see, for example, Hague & Loader, 1999; Chadwick & May, 2003; Macintosh, 2004; Coleman & Blumler, 2009). In *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy*, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2003) explores three joint perspectives on online engagement: information, consultation, and participation. 'Information' is a one-way relationship where the government produces and distributes information to citizens. 'Consultation' requires the provision of information and involves citizen feedback on issues predetermined by governments. 'Participation' includes active involvement by citizens in the policy-making process, in which citizens can propose policy options and shape the direction of political dialogue. Governments, however, retain the final decision-making responsibility (OECD,

2003; see also Kingston, 2007). It is this final form of engagement that empowers citizens to shape political agendas and alter the focus of government initiatives, enabling citizens to raise their views and suggest alternatives rather than being restricted to topics pre-set by governments. It is also this type of government-led online civic participation that offers governments the opportunity to address emerging external pressures, demands for greater involvement, and changing understandings and expectations related to democratic representation.

Efforts towards more open government and enhanced civic engagement in political processes through ICTs are being undertaken throughout the world. The following section outlines developments in the UK and Iceland to highlight how e-democracy is evolving.

2. Government-Led E-Participation

This section details two case studies of government-led e-participation to highlight the broader impact on democratic governance. The first is a local government example from Milton Keynes in the UK, where the aim was to increase youth participation and engagement. The second is Iceland's crowdsourced constitution, a nation-wide project used to gather civic input to directly shape constitutional reform. Details of these cases were primarily obtained through analysis of government documents, websites, and surrounding political commentary. In the case of Milton Keynes, additional information relating to funding and the developmental approach undertaken by the council and its youth workers was provided directly by local government.

These case studies have been selected for examination as they highlight that governments at various levels are developing e-participation practices to facilitate democratic change. In both instances, e-participation is used to support broader, offline civic engagement in democratic reform. By taking this approach, these cases demonstrate the importance of integrating e-participation into governments' everyday practices, rather than viewing it as separate to the operations of government. Whether targeted e-participation initiatives aimed at a particular group of constituents or nation-wide mechanisms for engagement, these cases demonstrate that the success of e-democracy processes is inextricably linked to the ways that civic involvement is considered in broader political processes. That is, the way governments are open to empowering citizens by incorporating their views in decision-making.

2.1. Local E-Participation: Milton Keynes and Youth Engagement

Local initiatives offer useful contexts for e-participation. It is at this level where the bulk of civic involvement in government takes place (Shackleton, 2010), particularly due to increased interest in issues of direct relevance and familiarity to citizens (Margolis & Moreno-Riaño, 2009; Couldry & Langer, 2005). The UK local government of Milton Keynes offers an example of ICT use to facilitate increased local participation in democratic practices.

According to 2011 census data, Milton Keynes has a particularly young population, with 22.3 percent of its approximately 250,000 residents under 16 years of age. By way of comparison, this figure is 18.9 percent across England as a whole (Milton Keynes Council, 2012). With its young demographic, the object for the local government was to increase youth involvement in the democratic process. Until this time, it was common practice for outreach work in youth engagement to be primarily conducted through physical forums such as youth centres and schools. This social contact was built on the premise that positive engagement with a youth worker may lead to wider life aspirations. However, youth centre engagement was decreasing and, with less

young people at centres or out on the streets, the traditional practices of outreach work became increasingly challenging. In other words, Milton Keynes was faced with a withdrawal from public life and a potential increase in political apathy amongst its youth (see Sennett, 1977).

Milton Keynes received funding in the amount of £37,000 from the National Youth Agency to specifically address youth opportunities. The council teamed with a small business that specialises in using emerging technologies as tools to engage and inspire. While some within the council recognised that the online world may have influenced the reduced physical presence at traditional engagement forums, the initial reaction saw technology as a hindrance to, rather than facilitator of, engagement. There was a strong school of thought within the council that it was youth workers who were failing to connect with young people, with scarce physical attendance at centres being the result of poor outreach work. However, the youth workers identified the council's antiquated attitude to the relationship between engagement and technology. After receiving funding, the youth workers started to explore the use of technology to increase participation, including what this type of participation might look like. The end goal remained the same: to develop positive engagement and increase life aspirations; but the forums and how to achieve this were changing.

The first approach to increase engagement was to use *Facebook* and *Twitter* to share information, initially one-way, on behalf of the Milton Keynes Council. The aim was to connect with traditionally 'hard to reach' groups such as disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and hidden communities. The approach created differing reactions across the council, as using social media in a purposeful and targeted way was perceived by some as predatory and inappropriate, rather than being seen as a new form of outreach. There was significant cultural resistance, which is a common trait amongst governments that are reluctant to utilise social media in their communicative practices (see, for example, Jensen, 2009; Chadwick, 2011).

The project made a shift towards more receptive and responsive e-participation by using the same social networking technologies to seek feedback from young people, using open questions and monitoring the responses. This move was a particularly important facet to enable increased engagement, as social media use that is restricted by only allowing youth to like, share or follow issues does little to encourage advanced forms of participation (Macnamara, 2012). Young people in Milton Keynes wanted more transparency and involvement in the decisions being made on youth related issues, particularly transport and employment opportunities in the local area. They identified that the best way to take their concerns forward was via a single point of common contact within the structure of the council, combined with ongoing social media dialogue.

In a rare move, the council partially relinquished control of its own website, allowing a page to be re-branded, 'My Say MK' (see http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/positiveactivities/), and the content management to be controlled by youth volunteers. Young people were provided with the power to engage and collaborate with others on issues of common concern within the auspice of the council website. Within a few months, the webpage was enabling dialogue and discussion from young person to young person, supported by the council youth workers. Several engagement events were held (addressing the traditional youth work objectives) and a number of initiatives were taken forward to address the concerns raised around local transport.

Alongside the success of the My Say MK venture, an MK Youth Cabinet was established in 2009. Young people self nominated as candidates with a short two-paragraph manifesto and campaign on local priorities conducted both online and in person. Originally for ages 11-16, but later expanded to 11-19 years, over 2,500 youth e-voted via the My Say MK website in the first election.

This represented ten percent of Milton Keynes' youth population at the time (Milton Keynes Council, 2009). In the most recent election, more than 40 young people stood as candidates for the 25 cabinet positions, and 7,393 voted (Milton Keynes Council, 2011). These figures provide evidence of the initiative's success in facilitating both ongoing and increasing levels of youth engagement. The MK Youth Cabinet now meets monthly and is given a (small) budget to self-manage. Every three months, they meet with the adult cabinet and present their issues. The adult cabinet agrees upon actions to take and responds in the following quarter with updates.

This example offers evidence of the ways that ICT use facilitates increased levels of political engagement. Moreover, in its attempt to counteract declining public life and increasing political apathy amongst youth, these developments have both led to greater political participation in democratic processes and helped to educate youth on the operations of political systems, such as election campaigning and cabinet meetings. Such localised initiatives provide practical settings for democratic engagement, particularly as ICT use at higher levels of government creates problems associated with scale and manageability (Jimenez et al., 2012). Despite such challenges, ICTs can be useful to facilitate broader democratic transformations. The following section outlines ICT use in Iceland's constitutional reform process. Iceland is small country in terms of population (with approximately 320,000 residents), so it does not face the same scale and manageability issues as larger nations. However, it offers a useful example of the way that citizens can contribute to national policy discourse and offers a general framework that other countries may follow.

2.2. National E-Participation: Iceland's Constitutional Crowdsourcing

Founded in 930 AD, Iceland's Parliament, Althingi, is one of the oldest parliamentary institutions in the world. Iceland's existing constitution came into force when it gained independence from Denmark in 1944 and, at that time, Iceland used Denmark's constitution as a basis for its own. In 2009, in the midst of the global financial crisis, Iceland's banking sector collapsed, which lead to extensive civil protests and political instability. The government was forced to resign over its handling of the economic challenges and a new government was formed, which led to calls for constitutional reform.

The government turned to the public and invited 1,000 randomly selected citizens from the national voting registry to attend a forum to brainstorm ideas for constitutional reform. In 2010, 25 of these citizens were elected by the public to form a Constitutional Council. They were tasked with drafting a new constitution for the country, which in turn was to be presented to the public through a referendum and then to Althingi for final approval. The council, consisting of independent delegates of diverse and varying backgrounds including, for example, university professors, farmers, lawyers, and media professionals, undertook a unique approach where end-to-end citizen participation was encouraged during the Bill's drafting. The main themes that the council observed during its work were distribution of power, transparency and responsibility (Stjórnlagaráð, 2011) and, in this vain, actively sought to increase public participation in the drafting process. Most notably, the council used social media and crowdsourcing techniques.

Through the use of ICTs, particularly social media, the council approached the general population to offer their ideas as to what the new constitution should contain. Signalling a change in the open nature of representative government, the consultation offered responsive and ongoing involvement and discussion between citizens and the council, and between citizens. Every week for approximately four months, the council posted a draft clause on its website (see

). Citizens could comment on the website, join discussions on the council's *Facebook* page, via *Twitter* or write their views via letter. Members of the Constitutional Council posted videos on *YouTube* and used *Flickr* to show photos of the council at work. Council meetings were open to the public and streamed live via the website and *Facebook* page.

Iceland is well positioned for such e-democracy practices as it has one of the highest household Internet penetration rates (at 95 percent in 2012) in the world (Statistics Iceland, 2012). Until recently, however, Iceland had received a relatively low ranking in relation to its participatory e-government development. In 2010, the United Nations' e-participation index ranked Iceland at 135. A rapid increase in online engagement initiatives saw this placing jump to number 26 in 2012 (see United Nations, 2010, 2012). It is likely that previously limited participatory online features contributed to, at least in part, the fact that the traditional letter method was the most commonly used form of public participation in the constitutional reform, totalling 3,600 responses in contrast to the 370 comments posted on the website (Stjórnlagaráð, 2011). This may also be because traditional letters allow a more comprehensive message to be developed compared to the nature of online communications, which is often restricted to shorter word limit contributions. This observation highlights the importance of combining traditional and online forms of participation to encourage active involvement in democratic reform, and to ensure equity of civic connection with government for those with limited ICT access and skills (see, for example, OECD, 2003; Beynon-Davies & Martin, 2004; Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker, 2001).

Public involvement in Iceland's constitutional reform took place from beginning to end – from the initial ideas and discussion, to the development and drafting of the Bill, to voting in its referendum in 2012. Just under 50 percent of the voting population participated, with 64.2 percent voting in favour of a new constitution based on the crowdsourced version (Kosningavefur Innanríkisráðuneytisins, 2012). This result is not, however, binding as Althingi retains responsibility for the final decision to pass the new constitution. Althingi did not approve the new crowdsourced constitution. Instead, some political parties are proposing further amendments to the document and Althingi has raised the threshold of votes needed to approve constitutional changes, both in Althingi and amongst the public. Shortly after this, Althingi was dissolved in preparation for the general election in late April 2013, meaning constitutional changes become the responsibility of the next government in power.

While the actual impact that Iceland's citizens, including the Constitutional Council, had on democratic reform remains questionable, this example signals that governments are beginning to recognise the need to address external threats, perceived or otherwise, on parliamentary and elected representation through more open government, with greater emphasis placed on transparency and public involvement. Iceland therefore offers a useful example of the way that government-led online participation practices can be employed in order to address changing democratic understandings and expectations.

3. The Role of ICTs in Democratic Reform

In the past and still today, e-government techniques include limited consultation exercises seeking reactions and views from citizens to government controlled initiatives. These often occur in closed forums, such as emails to a generic inbox set up specifically for the consultation and seeking responses to pre-set questions. In contrast, government-led e-democracy is less controlled with free dialogue and greater transparency that opens political processes and discourse. The case studies

presented here illustrate that the scope of government Internet use has advanced from its original focus on one-way information dissemination and service delivery to incorporate e-participation by actively seeking civic views to inform broader democratic processes. E-democracy should not be considered as a list of discreet activities conducted online between an individual and the government, but as continuous engagement between multiple individuals and their government in an open and transparent platform. In this regard, these case studies support Norris' (2010) empirical survey-based evidence that e-government does not naturally lead to e-democracy; whilst they are interrelated, they are not synonymous (Norris, 2010).

One noticeable common characteristic in both of these cases is that of continuous, triangular engagement, using qualitative dialogue to achieve specific aims and objectives. Engagement was not based upon one-way, transactional activities such as a series of online surveys, petitions or voting, which are often ill-described as e-participation activities (Norris, 2010). Rather, engagement consisted of ongoing dialogue both bilaterally between citizens and governments, and more broadly amongst various citizens with integrated feedback offered to governments, moving towards a triangular engagement approach. In this way, citizens' awareness of other perspectives helps to foster debate and increase understanding, and also improves the transparency of political issues and processes throughout society.

Opening channels of communication online to aid transparency requires governments to partially relinquish control of communications, which empowers citizens to further scrutinise political processes. This may be a daunting thought for politicians who fear losing control of political messages. It is difficult to predict the possible outcomes and consequences arising from the increased visibility of previously hidden political practices, which may lead to volatile sites of resistance (see Thompson, 2005). Further challenges also arise from this situation in terms of who maintains accountability for the decisions that are made (see Wong & Welch, 2004). In the cases presented here, the governments ultimately retain decision-making power while drawing from civic input. Governments may be reluctant to incorporate civic views into decision-making if it is the governments that bear the burden of responsibility for decisions that may be unsuccessful.

Conversely, potential benefits from transparent e-participation practices include, for example, increasing government legitimacy and improving civic satisfaction with political processes. Such benefits cannot be achieved without governments being prepared to trial new forms of democratic involvement. In both of these case studies, the governments had previously acknowledged that their communications surrounding political issues were not resonating with citizens. The actions taken were therefore necessary to maintain governmental legitimacy by increasing the transparency of their operations and enabling continuous dialogue with citizens. The success of opening representation and enabling ongoing dialogue depends, however, upon a culture change within governments themselves to become more amenable to civic input, and being prepared to relinquish a degree of control.

Both Milton Keynes and Iceland highlight that a government culture change to facilitate e-democracy processes can take place (see Cullen, 2006). Such a change requires governments to become more responsive and receptive to civic views (see Jensen, 2009; Gauld, Gray & McComb, 2009). Milton Keynes has developed an ongoing process that reflects the growing need to gather civic input on issues that affect the community. The Iceland case provides evidence that external pressures are creating the need for change in the open nature of government. Iceland had just gone through a period of economic and political upheaval, with civil protests and claims made that the

government's lack of transparency contributed to the depth of the problem. This series of events meant the government needed to re-emphasise its legitimacy. To do so, the government accepted and engaged with a process of e-democracy to further empower citizens through greater transparency and involvement in political decision-making. This observation highlights a key point: If the economic and political upheaval had not taken place, then it is possible that engagement in, and acceptance of, the e-democracy process may not have been undertaken or as welcomed. This suggests that, to prevent similar predicaments, other governments may need to take a more proactive approach in culture change to open their representation to greater civic involvement.

These case studies also highlight the importance of combining both on and offline methods of political participation in order to encourage greater democratic engagement (see Beynon-Davies & Martin, 2004; Lowndes et al., 2001). The reasons for this are two-fold. On the one hand, using both traditional and online methods of participation enables wider engagement by ensuring equity of civic involvement with government. On the other hand, democratic reform is not something that can take place entirely through the online realm. The virtual is only used in support of the physical – to aid democratic reform and adapt the governance structures and processes that resonate through all aspects of everyday life. E-democracy practices therefore should not be thought of as separate to everyday processes of government, but as mechanisms that can be used to achieve governmental aims. Use of ICTs for democratic reform does not require governments to completely diverge from traditional understandings of political processes, but to adapt the political mindset in order to recognise that new mechanisms can support traditional objectives.

This paper highlights that, whether targeted approaches like engaging local youth or wider initiatives such as seeking feedback from a nation's population to re-write the constitution (arguably the most valued and fundamental piece of legislation in a democracy), digital technologies are playing a key role in democratic reform. The impact of such ICT use is, however, ultimately reliant upon the willingness and capacity of governments to incorporate civic views in decision-making.

4. Conclusion

Democratic change is a gradual process and the adoption of ICTs by governments is no different. Use of ICTs to facilitate democratic practices does, however, offer opportunities to take the next step in broader democratic reform to shape the future of democracy. For this reason, e-democracy and the implications that stem from the observations presented in this paper are important for governments to understand in order to advance current practices. While this may come slowly, once the decision is made to implement participatory practices, e-democracy processes can be achieved reasonably quickly. The cases presented here highlight that, in order to address increasing scrutiny and external pressures to maintain legitimacy, governments are beginning to develop transparent e-participation practices that offer citizens a greater degree of power in decision-making processes. The success of current mechanisms is, however, limited through government retention of decision-making; the likely result of concerns surrounding accountability and the potential negative ramifications of poor decisions for government legitimacy. Despite these limitations, these case studies illustrate that governments are taking the initiative to enable citizen input to inform decision-making, an important step forward for democratic reform.

E-democracy is a means, not an end, to democratic reform. Evidence from Milton Keynes and Iceland demonstrates that it should be understood as a process of continuous dialogue, rather than a series of discreet or static activities facilitated by technology. Moreover, e-participation needs to be coupled with offline participation methods. This enables broad opportunities for civic engagement, and may help governments recognise that such practices are not separate to the everyday operations of government; they simply offer an additional means to support democratic processes. Achieving this may enable governments to maintain their legitimacy in the networked environment, but this will require a change in organisational culture to address increasing pressures, both external and internal, and to be more responsive and receptive to civic views. The outcome of culture change, combined with the transparent and interactive nature of many social media techniques, is likely to lead to a power shift between citizens and their elected decision-makers, which requires politicians and institutions relinquishing a degree of their own power. This is a likely cause of existing government reluctance to implement opportunities for e-participation, with the focus instead often remaining on e-government practices.

To date, the emphasis of government centricity in government ICT use remains pervasive. Greater focus needs to be given, by governments and researchers alike, on the potential for citizen-led practices to contribute to democratic reform. Chadwick and May (2003), for example, highlight that a participatory model of e-government recognises a more horizontal process where activities through non-government websites contribute to civil society. Further research into the types of civic pressures that create the need for e-democracy processes may help governments in planning for their future. At this time, it would be a substantial leap forward for governments to consider non-government communications in decision-making processes. But the examples of Iceland and Milton Keynes highlight that a change of culture is possible, with citizens and communities beginning to set political agendas within government-led initiatives. A gradual democratic shift through e-participation has begun.

References

Bekkers, V., & Homburg, V. (2007). The myths of e-government: Looking beyond the assumption of a new and better government. *The Information Society: An International Journal, 23(5)*, 373-382.

Beynon-Davies, P., & Martin, S. (2004). Electronic local government and the modernisation agenda: Progress and prospects for public service improvement. *Local Government Studies, 30(2)*, 214-229.

Chadwick, A. (2011). Explaining the failure of an online citizen engagement initiative: The role of internal institutional variables. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics, 8(1)*, 21-40.

Chadwick, A., & May, C. (2003). Interaction between states and citizens in the age of the Internet: 'E-government' in the United States, Britain, and the European Union. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions, 16(2)*, 271-300.

Coleman, S., & Blumler, J.G. (2009). *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Couldry, N., & Langer, A.I. (2005). Media consumption and public connection: Towards a typology of the dispersed citizen. *The Communication Review, 8(2)*, 237-257.

Cullen, R. (2006). E-Government and the Digital Divide. In P. Hernon, R. Cullen & H.C. Relyea (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on E-Government: Serving Today and Building for Tomorrow* (pp. 289-313). Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc.

Eggers, W.D. (2005*). Government 2.0: Using Technology to Improve Education, Cut Red Tape, Reduce Gridlock, and Enhance Democracy*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Gauld, R., Gray, A., & McComb, S. (2009). How responsive is e-government? Evidence from Australia and New Zealand. *Government Information Quarterly, 26(1)*, 69-74.

Hague, B.N., & Loader, B.D. (Eds.) (1999). *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*. London: Routledge.

Jensen, M.J. (2009). Electronic democracy and citizen influence in government. In C.G. Reddick (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Strategies for Local E-Government Adoption and Implementation: Comparative Studies* (pp. 288-305). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global.

Jimenez, B.S., Mossberger, K., & Wu, Y. (2012). Municipal Government and the Interactive Web: Trends and Issues for Civic Engagement. In A. Manoharan & M. Holzer (Eds.), *E-Governance and Civic Engagement: Factors and Determinants of E-Democracy* (pp 251-271). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global.

Keane, J. (2009). *The Life and Death of Democracy*. London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd.

Kingston, R. (2007). Public participation in local policy decision-making: The role of web-based mapping. *The Cartographic Journal, 33(2)*, 138-144.

Kosningavefur Innanríkisráðuneytisins. (2012). *Outcome of the Counting of the Votes Cast in the Referendum on 20 October 2012*. Retrieved January 30, 2013, from http://www.kosning.is/thjodaratkvaedagreidslur2012/english/nr/7991

Ling, T. (2002). Delivering joined-up government in the UK: Dimensions, issues and problems. *Public Administration, 8(4)*, 615-642.

Lowndes, V., Pratchett, L., & Stoker, G. (2001). Trends in public participation: Part 2 – citizens' perspectives. *Public Administration, 79(2)*, 445-455.

Macintosh, A. (2004). Characterizing e-participation in policy-making. In *Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Science (HICSS'04)* (pp. 50117-50126). Washington: Computer Society Press.

Macnamara, J. (2012). Democracy 2.0: Can social media engage youth and disengaged citizens in the public sphere? *Australian Journal of Communication, 39(3)*, 65-86.

Margolis, M., & Moreno-Riaño, G. (2009). *The Prospect of Internet Democracy*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Milton Keynes Council. (2012). *Milton Keynes 2011 Census Headlines*. Retrieved January 25, 2013, from http://www.mkiobservatory.org.uk/document.aspx?id=10185&siteID=1026

Milton Keynes Council. (2011). *Youth Cabinet Report: March to May 2011*. Retrieved January 25, 2013, from http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/positiveactivities/displayarticle.asp?ID=65261

Milton Keynes Council. (2009). *Youth Cabinet Report: March, April & May 2009*. Retrieved January 25, 2013, from http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/positiveactivities/displayarticle.asp?ID=65261

My Say MK. (2012) *My Say MK by MK Council* (website). Retrieved January 25, 2013, from http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/positiveactivities/

Norris, D.F. (2010). E-government... not e-governance... not e-democracy: Not now! Not ever? In J. Davies & T. Janowski (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV'10)* (pp. 339-346). New York: ACM.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2003). *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*. Paris: OECD Publications.

O'Toole, K. (2009). Australia local government and e-governance: From administration to participation? In M. Khosrow-Pour (Ed.), *E-Government Diffusion, Policy, and Impact: Advanced Issues and Practices* (pp. 174-184). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global.

Sennett, R. (1977). *The Fall of Public Man*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Shackleton, P. (2010). Engaging citizens through local e-government: An Australian experience. In C.G. Reddick (Ed.), *Citizens and E-Government: Evaluating Policy and Management* (pp. 418-434). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global.

Smith, R. (2002). Modern citizenship. In E. Isin & B. Turner (Eds.), *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* (pp. 105-116). London: Sage.

Statistics Iceland. (2012). *Access to Computers and the Internet in Households 2002-2012*. Retrieved February 2, 2013, from http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Tourism,-transport-and-informati/Information-technology

Stjórnlagaráð. (2011). *The Constitutional Council – General Information*. Retrieved January 29, 2013, from http://stjornlagarad.is/english/

Thompson, J.B. (2005). The new visibility. *Theory, Culture & Society, 22(6)*, 31-51.

United Nations. (2012). *E-Government Survey 2012: E-Government for the People*. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations.

United Nations. (2010). *E-Government Survey 2010: Leveraging E-Government at a Time of Financial and Economic Crisis*. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations.

Verdegem, P., & Hauttekeete, L. (2010). A user-centric approach in e-government policies: The path to effectiveness? In. C.G. Reddick (Ed.), *Citizens and E-Government: Evaluating Policy and Management* (pp. 20-36). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Global.

Wong, W., & Welch, E. (2004). Does e-government promote accountability? A comparative analysis of website openness and government accountability. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions, 17(2)*, 275-297.

About the Authors

Julie Freeman

Julie Freeman is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the News & Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra, Australia. Julie received her PhD in Communications from Monash University in 2011. Her research interests include e-government, local government, ICT-enabled citizen participation and engagement, digital democracy, and the policy contexts of government 2.0.

Sharna Quirke MSc

Sharna Quirke is a consultant in public sector transformation and performance measurement. She has worked with governments worldwide on IT led transformation projects with a special focus on digital inclusion and the use of technology to deliver improved public services. She also advises public institutions and charities on the benefits of open source data to help measure social outcomes and improve operational business efficiencies.