

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: POLICY, TOOLS AND PRACTICES

Workshop organized by Liberation Technology Program at Stanford University, United States, 11.-12. March, 2013

Call for Papers

Access to information has become one of the most promising tools to combat corruption, increase people's participation in (self) governance and thus, to strengthen democracy. Since the 1960s there has been a steady progress in the number of countries that have legislated access to information laws, and over eighty countries have such laws today. There have also been several social developments and innovations which embrace access to information, such as open constitution reform process in Iceland, open innovation challenges by the United States government, participatory budgeting processes in Germany, Finland and Canada and social audits in India, just to mention few. As a parallel development, the open data movement is evolving in several countries, pushed forward by both civil society and governments, and incentivized by the global Open Government Partnership network. These practices are supported by open innovation and open design strategies, which the public sector is increasingly adopting.

These open and participatory practices give tools for citizens to monitor governments, to hold them accountable, and to practice agency in the public sphere. The right to information and transparency movements can be considerably strengthened by creative use of information technologies – but realizing this potential requires us to revisit the design of RTI policies, tools and practices to update them to serve citizens in the digital age. In re-evaluating the tools for accountability, we should be mindful that increased use of accountability technologies suggests re-articulations of the power structures in modern societies, including new forms of social control, new spaces for public deliberation and new conceptualizations of participation in democracy.

The workshop will convene both practitioners and academics to discuss their work in the area and to examine the theoretical and practical implications of these phenomena. We seek to bring together people engaged in law, policy, social movements, administration, technology, design and the use of technology for accessing information. We propose to go well beyond the issue of accessing information by looking at the use of technology to record, store, process and disseminate public information, and to create interactive spaces in the public sphere so that the full potential of ICT for transparency can be realized.

We welcome submissions focusing on intersection of technology, the right to information and participatory practices, which enhance transparency, including, but are not limited to, the following areas:

1. Technology for transparency

- What are the design improvements and practices to improve digital tools that are used to record, store, process and disseminate information to empower right to information activists? How can, for instance, open design practices enhance transparency, access to information and participatory practices?
- How do social movements use technology, and can technology be empowering for the poor and the marginalized or will/is it be a tool for the privileged?
- What are the emerging power structures in digital democracy, and what is the role of technology in mediating and distributing power?

2. Open data, open knowledge and open access

- What is the role of open data ecosystem in the right to information movement? What are the tools, practices and policies to encourage the use of open data?
- How do open knowledge, open access and open science practices serve transparency in society?

3. Open innovation and transparency

- How does open innovation support transparency in governance, and strengthen right to information?

4. Legal and policy considerations in the use of technology for right to information:

- What are the current limitations of right to information laws established based in the pre-digital age, and what kinds of legal changes are desirable in the digital age?
- What are the legal challenges to accessing information in digital format?
- What are the laws that prepare the context in which the right to information is exercised, and how should they change in the digital age? For example, how should public records laws and the system of recording and managing public information adapt to play a supportive role, and what are the best practices in public record management systems that will enable the effective use of technology by RTI activists?
- What are the challenges involved in using technology to make corporations, civil society organizations and other non-government organizations transparent?

5. Role of media and journalism in transparency

- How do journalists use data to monitor governments? What are the challenges in using data for monitoring and reporting as it stands today?
- What kinds of tools, data formats or practices could enrich data driven journalism.

6. Digital tools for transparency

- How can maps help citizens hold their governments accountable? How should information be designed such that government activities can be mapped?
- How could public agencies use videos and photographs to record their activities, and how can the citizen use such information effectively?
- How do citizens use modern surveillance and other monitoring practices for transparency?
- How can satellites be used to monitor governments?
- How can mobile phones be used to record and access information
- Can better visualization of data make a difference for the right to information movement?
- What is the role of crowdsourcing and co-creation in combatting corruption?

Things to do

The deadline for submissions is 18th of January, 2013. Accepted presenters will be informed by February 1st, 2013.

The form of submission is either full paper (maximum 25 pages) or extended abstract (6 pages). The submissions should be sent to the following email address: vivekdse+rti@gmail.com.

The workshop will be organized at Stanford University in March 11-12, 2013. The workshop is being organized by the *Program on Liberation Technology* at Stanford University, an interdisciplinary program at the intersection of political science, computer science and design engineering.

There is no fee for participating in the conference, and participants are expected to make their own travel and lodging arrangements.

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