

Tools for Transparency: The Role of Civic Technology in Increasing the Transparency of the State

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Abstract : The operation of the state can often appear opaque to citizens wishing to access official information, who have to negotiate a path through numerous levels of bureaucracy rationalized through institutional policy to acquire what information they want. Even where individual states have 'Right to Information' legislation guaranteeing citizen access to information, public sector conformity to such laws vary between states and between state organizations. In response to such difficulties in bringing citizens and information together, many NGO's around the world have begun designing and hosting digital portals to facilitate the requesting and receiving of official information. How then, are these 'civic technology' tools affecting the behavior of the state? Are they increasing the transparency of the state? This study looked at 5 Right to Information civic technology sites in Chile, Uruguay, Ukraine, Hungary and the UK, and found that such sites were providing a useful platform to publish official information, but that states were still reluctant to comply with all requests. It concludes that civic technology can be an important tool in increasing the transparency of the state, but that the state must have an institutional commitment to information rights for this to be fully effective.

Keywords : digital, ICT, transparency, civic technology

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