

CITIZEN'S OPEN AGENDA:
A PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVING CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH EXISTING PROJECTS TAKING PLACE IN MONTERREY, MEXICO

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Introduction

I cannot remember the exact date when words like gunned, hanged, dismembered, coup de grace, beheaded, incinerated, dissolved in acid, to mention some, became part of our regular language and the everyday news but, just in the last 7 years, although to date we do not have official numbers, it is generally recognized that more than 70 thousand people have lost their lives in the so-called war on drugs.²

Even though, Monterrey, my hometown, has one of the lowest citizen participation rate of Mexico the war on drugs led to the City's worst social crisis. Tragedies like the killing of 2 graduate students by Mexican army crossfire inside the university campus³ or the dead of more than 50 people in a casino attack have awaken civil society in an unprecedented way⁴.

Theory of Change and Strategic Alliances

As the World Bank points out governments are increasingly opening a wide range of data. However, much of the public has been left behind having as a result low participation and use of this information. Efforts regarding the awareness and imagination of a bigger spectrum of users are now necessary to continuously grow communities of data users, and encourage data 'ownership'.⁵

¹ 10-pager description for Prof. Beth Noveck's class "Government 3.0". Master in Public Administration Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy. Robert F. Wagner Graduate School on Public Service, New York University. December 19, 2013.

² Retrieved from: <http://www.zetatijuana.com/2012/05/28/sexenio-de-calderon-71-mil-ejecuciones/>

³ Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/03/22/mexico.students.killed/>

⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-14674706>

⁵ <http://data.worldbank.org/about/open-government-data-toolkit/demand-for-od-engagement-tools>

In these sense, technology can improve engagement and efficient use of the new data available with a constantly bigger crowd that wants to be heard and do something to rebuild Monterrey's social fabric. Under the understanding that citizen's participation in public policy through well managed technological tools has the ability not only to include more people wisely but also to improve government accountability, this proposal focuses on developing different tools that can enhance citizen's engagement in the following on-going projects that emerged as a response to the violence and untrusting climate the City has been immersed for the last years:

- Hackatons based in Monterrey hosted by The *Citizen's Lab* (CL) with the *UN-Habitat Project*⁶ and *OpenDataMty*⁷, with the objective of creating collaborative spaces where citizens meet to transform data into useful applications.
- The platform *Mayor, How are we doing?* (MHAWD) formed by more than 49 civil society organizations that created an instrument of accountability by committing 9 neighboring municipalities of Monterrey to 10 concrete actions, which are measured and qualified every 2 months according to the government open-data the city councils voluntarily submit.⁸
- The organization *Coding México* (CM) based in Monterrey and Mexico City that focuses on creating "civic technology" through online challenges and efforts for opening data.⁹
- The technological platform *Tehuan 3.0* (T3.0) hosted by the Citizen Integration Center (CIC) and based in Monterrey, whose main function is to receive and disseminate citizen's reports seen by the public via Twitter, email,

⁶ http://www.onuhabitat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=992:registro-onu-habitat-hack-day-monterrey&catid=205:noticias&Itemid=258

⁷ <http://opendatamty.org/>

⁸ <http://www.comovamosnl.org/>

⁹ <http://codeandomexico.org/>

mobile app, SMS or web of everything that needs attention from the community and the authorities.¹⁰

Several interviews with the representatives of each organization or project took place for discussing areas of opportunity and collaboration among them regarding this research and the tools that will be explained in the subsequent pages. The following resources were offered for implementing the tools they consider a priority after reading this proposal: the CL offered a group of volunteers for doing research on the issues that may be involved; CM offered a group of coders for developing the technological applications that may be required for implementation; MHAWD offered access to the government data, and; T3.0 offered access to the crowdsourced data they obtain through the citizen's reports.

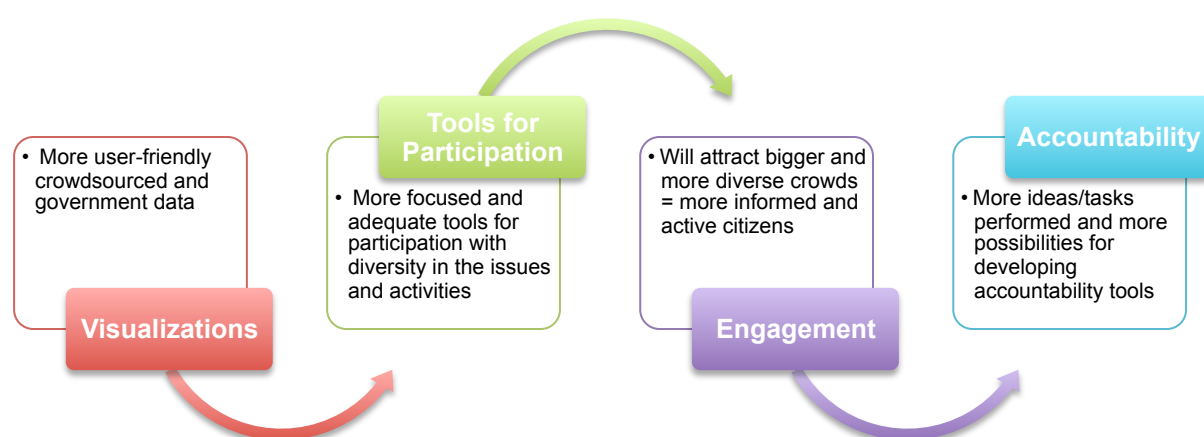
General Objective and Expected Outcome

The general objective of this proposal is to develop tools that, taking advantage of the crowdsourced and government data already available, will catalyze, inspire and create more opportunities of citizen engagement with the specific goal of improving government accountability.

The common element of the tools further proposed is the ability to create a user-friendly crowdsourced and government data that will simplify its use, therefore facilitating more participation. Furthermore, the variety of the tools, issues and means of participation have the strategy of involving different kinds of users under the understanding that the more diversity in the offer will foster more citizen participation and therefore will generate more possibilities of creating better accountability mechanisms. The following flow chart reflects the stated assumptions and theory of change in a more simple way:

¹⁰ <http://tehuan.cic.mx/tehuan/>

Chart 1. Theory of change



Available Data and Tools

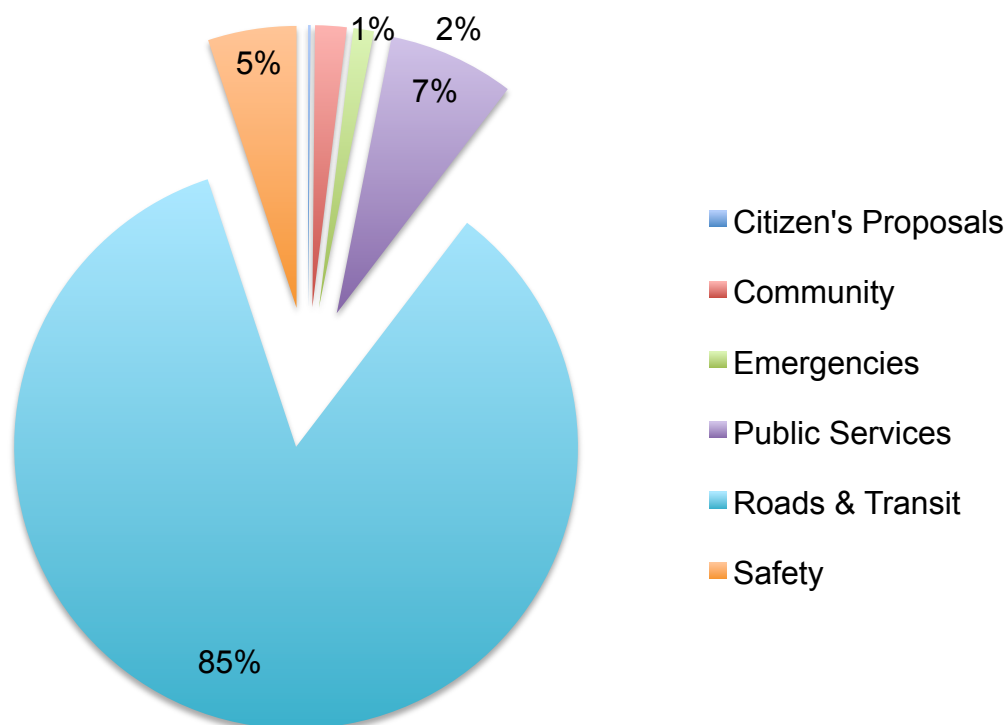
As stated before, the platform of T3.0 will be the provider of the crowdsourced information. This pilot initiative promotes citizen participation by providing a virtual space for spreading information through citizen's reports related to topics of interest to the community. The citizen's reports can be created, voted, rated, shared and commented through Facebook, Twitter, E-mail, SMS text messages or Tehuan's webpage. After receiving a report, the platform notifies the corresponding government official, which in turn, can report when the problem/issue is fixed/resolved. The following table and graph reflect the categories, types and level of participation for the issues that have been reported through the platform.

Table 1. Categories and types of citizen's reports in the platform T3.0.

Tehuan 3.0 (+63,200 accumulated citizen reports, 90 reports on average)		
Public Services	Roads & Transit	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewerage (381) • Illumination (3,111) • Electricity Shortage (132) • Water leakage (410) • Neglected parks (255) • Trash collection (112) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Accidents (44,200) • Pothole/Damaged roads (2,571) • Works/Lanes Closed (1,073) • Broken traffic light (3,451) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcements (140) • Public Events (551) • Citizen Observer's (398) • #MtyMuyBien (8)
Citizen's Proposals	Safety	Emergencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community (16) • Safety (5) • Public Services (6) • Roads & Transit (65) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire (805) • Theft (1,200) • Risk Situations (1,081) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health emergencies in general (715)

*Numbers in parenthesis refer to the number of citizen's reports received regarding that matter.

Graph 1. Level of participation by category in the platform T3.0.



After receiving and validating the reports they are uploaded to the platform. Besides the map with the accumulated reports, users can choose to visualize the data as follows:

- Heat Map
- Influence Radio Map
- Time Animation Display
- Recurrence Display
- Report trends
- Reports comparisons
- Municipalities Scorecards
- Graphic Network Chat

Additionally, the platform offers the possibility to search for text or tags of the specific interest of the user, that can also subscribe to receive notifications also on their issues of interests and finally, it provides detailed information since the data can also be filtered by:

- Category/Issue
- Date
- Municipality
- Report Status
- Distance by:
 - Exact point
 - Polygon
 - Geographical location

Regarding the government data MHAWD has access to the following information of the 9 Municipalities committed to the project:

Safety	Transparency	Public Spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of reliability tests performed on law enforcement officials; • Wages of law enforcement officials; • Rate of law enforcement officials per every 1,000 inhabitants, and; • Number of crimes committed in each municipality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of compliance with transparency laws; • Number of authorized and unauthorized casinos in each municipality, and; • Data regarding private contracts for the provision of municipal public services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data regarding the open-street projects taking place in each municipality; • Reforestation activities and number of trees per municipality, and; • Number of sports units and the activities each offers.

However, since the objective of MHAWD is to measure the compliance with the objectives each municipality committed to achieve during the current Mayor's term, the data offered to the public focuses solely on reflecting the progress for each issue to the specific goals mentioned but does not opens the gathered data in general.

New Tools To Improve Engagement and Accountability

In line with the theory of change recently exposed (+visualizations & +tools = +engagement = +accountability), the current crowdsourced and government data available and the on-going T.3 civic engagement platform and MHAWD accountability mechanisms, the following add-ons are proposed for complementing and enhancing the activities these organizations are already achieving:

1. Mapping Crime Reports

Although Tehuan's platform does maps citizen's crime reports it does not crosses the information with the government's official numbers. The cross-reference of the information could give the community more certainty about the information and clear understanding of crime in their area, that displayed with and user-friendly

visualization that includes search/filter options, could create more incentives for visiting the platform and widen the public interest in engaging with it.

Available examples:

- “Crime Statistics”: <http://www.police.act.gov.au/crime-and-safety/crime-statistics.aspx>
- “NYC Crime Map”: <http://maps.nyc.gov/crime/>

2. Budget Expenditure Explorer

Even though one of MHAWD actions focuses on the transparency of private contracts for the provisions of municipal public services, the general reports on municipal expenditures are hard to read and understand. A clear visualization of how is the municipal budget spent could enhance and catalyze the need for accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, the budget expenditure explorer could focus on MHAWD specific area of interest, that is, transparency on private contracts. Clear information about the percentage of public expenditures given to private companies could reveal link/hidden interests in the assignation of public budget.

Available examples:

- “Kenyan Budget Explorer”: <http://twaweza.org/uploads/flash/budget-visualization-kenya-000/Kenya.html#/home/viewType=Bubbles&spending=Actual&split=Purpose&year=2010-11>
- “Open Checkbook”: <https://opencheckbook.demo.socrata.com/>

3. Mapping Municipal Services

As explained before, one of T3.0 features is to map citizen’s reports regarding problems with municipal services. However, citizens are unaware of the frequency some of these services should be provided. By developing a visualization that lets them know this information according to its location, citizens will have the possibility to easily detect, not only when a service is completely broken, but also when it is delayed. Thus, municipalities can take action to adjust the strategy for delivering the services and at the same time, citizens will have a clear idea of how efficiently their

taxes are spent on services, providing solid ground to develop more budget accountability tools.

Available example: "Information and alerts system about the water supply in the city of Oaxaca":

<http://codeandomexico.org/organizaciones/4/retos/14-sistema-de-informacion-y-alertas-sobre-el-suministro-de-agua-en-la-ciudad-de-oaxaca>

4. Living Cities Initiative v. Monterrey

As reflected by Graph 1, the biggest interest of the people that participates in T3.0 concerns roads and transit information. Taking inspiration from the *Living Cities* initiative the platform could attract more users by developing a visualization that reflects the traffic density of the city. The simple exercise of observing its movement can foster important questions regarding urban and street planning. Again, the more accessible the information is made, the more people can engage with it.

Available example: <http://here.com/livingcities/>

5. Emergencies First Responder

As a way of improving active citizenship and sense of community, drawing inspiration from the Pulse Point application can enhance the emergency citizen's reports feature. This app empowers everyday citizens, who are trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and are willing to assist by providing life-saving assistance to victims of sudden cardiac arrest. The location-aware application will not only notify trained citizens that someone nearby is having a cardiac emergency and may require CPR but also will dispatch advanced medical care and show the location of the closest public accessible Automated External Defibrillator.

Available example: <http://pulsepoint.org/app/>

6. #MtyMuyBien: Volunteers in Action

T3.0 platform recently launched a campaign called #MtyMuyBien that promotes the reporting of witnessing a citizen's good deed. Although this feature has the lowest

participation rate of the platform, it also represents a big area of opportunity by complementing it with mapping the volunteer opportunities that take place in the city. This new feature will connect T3.0 with other local civil society organizations and at the same time open a new space for tailored research according to the users/volunteers interest. The result would be a win-win situation for the platform that will engage with more users and nonprofits, the participating civil society organizations will hopefully obtain more volunteers and the users will have more options to search for a specific issue, date and/or location.

Available example: “Volunteer Match”: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

7. Enhancing the Citizen’s Proposals Feature (Wiki-Surveys)

The citizen’s proposals reports are T3.0 category with the lowest participation rate. However, drawing inspiration by the All Our Ideas model, a free and open source website that provides a user-friendly tool for collecting and prioritizing ideas in a democratic and transparent manner.¹¹ By seeding some examples, the users may decide through *pair-voting*, and even adding their own suggestions, which are the issues that most concern them. Obtaining this information, for example the top 10 citizen’s concerns, would help governments, nonprofits and activist to develop more community’s interested-oriented projects that will foster more civic participation.

Available example: “All Our Ideas”: <http://www.allourideas.org/>

8. Utility Hackatons

Once obtaining more clear information about the community interests through the Wiki-Surveys, focused Hackatons can be implemented to generate a space where similar passions and different specialties can come together for the challenge of solving the citizen’s biggest concerns. Even though hackatons are already taking

¹¹ Salganik, Matthew J. and Levy, Karen E.C., “Wiki surveys: Open and quantifiable social data collection”, accessed December 09, 2013, <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1202.0500v1.pdf>.

place in our city, they could be a compliment of the current proposals, that if created, the new tools and visualizations could give more data for targeting the participants objectives and available resources that they will use for inspiration.

9. Capacity Development

As more groups of citizens may get interested in participating in the on-going or future projects mentioned before, “opened data literacy and aftercare” programs like: 3 to 5-days intensive boot camps, ‘Open Data Literacy’ week-long virtual courses, and/or sustained aftercare engagements could enhance the participants incentives for participating and better their contributions and skills, as suggested by the Open Data World Bank’s project.¹²

Implementation

The key of this proposal is collaboration; creating effective teams among organizations. It is important to state that additional research is needed to find out about the viability for each proposal, especially addressing the *tropicalization* issue, that is, if the population in Monterrey has the same characteristics or interests as the population where the initiatives were successful. However, given that the T3.0 platform already exists and that the interviewed organizations already showed their interest in building new projects together, the proposals, initially, are cost-effective and each may cause a big and beneficial impact to our society.

The origin of civil society organizations in Mexico can be tracked back to 1984, when after a devastating earthquake, citizens discovered that a lot more can be accomplished if they got involved and worked together for the common good. The present climate of violence has also shaken our foundations, and only through citizen’s engagement and accountability, we will be able to rebuild our social-fabric.

¹² Retrieved from: <http://data.worldbank.org/about/open-government-data-toolkit/demand-for-od-engagement-tools>

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