

**BEYOND PUBLIC SCRUTINY:
STOCKTAKING OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN OECD COUNTRIES**

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Beyond Public Scrutiny: Stocktaking of Social Accountability in OECD Countries

Joanne Caddy, Tiago Peixoto and Mary McNeil

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building open government is a challenge for all countries. Hence the importance of collecting and exchanging experiences on how to put the basic principles of good governance into practice. Transparency and accountability; fairness and equity; efficiency and effectiveness; respect for the rule of law; and high standards of ethical behaviour are all principles that need to be given substance if better public governance is to benefit citizens.

This joint OECD-World Bank stocktaking exercise of social accountability (SA) initiatives in OECD member countries contributes to the global exchange of policy relevant knowledge. The stocktaking exercise produced 40 templates detailing social accountability initiatives in 27 OECD countries and the European Commission. Cases were selected on the basis of their focus and level, and potential transferability of their policy lessons.

This report – undertaken in 2006 – is part of the OECD Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development’s (GOV) efforts to identify emerging trends and develop pertinent policy lessons for all countries seeking to build more open, accountable and responsive government. It also contributes to the World Bank’s series of SA stocktaking exercises, which have been undertaken in various regions of the world. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive inventory of OECD member countries’ experience, nor an in-depth description of the myriad activities underway. Rather, it illustrates the wealth of innovative practices currently available, and provides a rich resource for practitioners.

Beyond Scrutiny

The OECD and the World Bank take complementary, but distinct, approaches to “social accountability”. The World Bank defines SA as “an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, *i.e.*, in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.” While the term is not used within OECD/GOV, the concepts encapsulated in SA are reflected in its approach to building “open government”. Where the World Bank’s focus is on the tools used to ensure SA (*e.g.* independent budgetary analysis, participatory expenditure tracking), OECD/GOV focuses on the functional interaction between governments and the public (*i.e.* information, consultation, participation) throughout the policy cycle.

Building upon the two organisations’ definitions, this report proposes a novel approach to analysing SA initiatives. This innovative classification system identifies SA initiatives based on their ultimate objective, as follows:

- **Scrutiny** initiatives aim to enhance assessment, analysis, and review of government actions.
- **Proximity** initiatives aim to reduce the “distance” between citizens and government by identifying citizen needs and preferences.

- **Engagement** initiatives aim to incorporate citizens into the decision-making process.

Applying Statistical Analysis

Like the other SA stocktaking exercises before it, this review of OECD member countries collected a host of data through the use of standard templates. This project team went one step further than previous work, however, in probing the dataset with the use of statistical analysis. The set of 40 cases was coded and tabulated to highlight the main characteristics and identify key variables, resulting in a set of contingency tables. These revealed a number of statistical correlations. While they cannot be interpreted as indicating a direct causal link between variables, evidence of strong positive and negative correlations among variables do indicate possible relationships that would merit further exploration. For example, SA initiatives that included government-CSO partnerships were more likely to have been evaluated than those that did not. Engagement initiatives tended to be repeated, while proximity initiatives generally were not.

On the basis of the findings presented here, this analytical approach appears promising. It argues for a sequential explanatory research design that starts with the quantitative analysis of a large set of SA cases, complemented by qualitative case studies to deepen understanding of how each variable influences the outcomes of SA initiatives.

Highlights

The 40 cases vary widely in terms of institutional level, initiator, legal basis, and methodology. What they do have in common is their aim to strengthen government transparency, accessibility and responsiveness. Some of the main findings include:

- **Initiators matter:** Government-led initiatives generally aim to enhance proximity with, and engagement of, citizens while CSO-led initiatives focus more on exercising scrutiny.
- **Declared drivers vary widely:** SA initiatives may be implemented as a means to uphold citizens' rights, to enhance trust and effectiveness, to react to public pressure, or to innovate boldly through the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- **A legal basis does not make outcomes binding:** The 40 cases analysed in the report show no link between the existence of a legal basis for SA initiatives and the binding effect of citizens' involvement. If proven through further research, this could temper the belief that legal frameworks alone are sufficient, or indeed indispensable, for SA initiatives to carry weight.
- **Evaluating impacts:** Most information on the impacts of SA initiatives is general, and cannot be quantified nor verified. Evaluation was only conducted in half of the cases. This results often from a lack of incentives to carry out impact assessments, and to the obstacles of conducting a rigorous study. This gap needs to be addressed to ensure continued support of the implementation of such initiatives. Currently, evaluation is not considered as an essential component of SA initiatives.

Policy Challenges and Lessons

This stocktaking exercise has demonstrated that government and civil society SA practitioners across OECD countries face common challenges. Several preliminary policy lessons are proposed for consideration and debate:

- **Choose a topic, clarify objectives, and include relevant issues.** The choice of topic and objective for SA initiatives – and their clear communication – is crucial.
- **Set clear rules.** Setting clear rules prevents frustration among participants. These rules should specify procedural aspects, and the rights and duties of participants.
- **Ensure feedback and follow-up.** SA initiators must demonstrate how participants' contributions and input are being used in order to maintain public interest and involvement.
- **Learn to evaluate, evaluate to learn.** Evaluation must become an essential, rather than an optional, component of SA initiatives if their full impacts are to be assessed and current practice improved.

Further research is needed to ensure challenges are met, and that sufficient lessons can be drawn for policy application.

1. INTRODUCTION

A common goal. Open government is increasingly recognised as an essential ingredient for democratic governance, social stability and economic development. Building open government is a challenge for all countries – hence the importance of collecting and exchanging country experience in putting the basic principles of good governance into practice. Transparency and accountability; fairness and equity; efficiency and effectiveness; respect for the rule of law; and high standards of ethical behaviour are all principles that need to be given substance if better public governance is to benefit citizens. This joint OECD-World Bank stocktaking exercise of social accountability initiatives in OECD member countries is a contribution to this global exchange of policy relevant knowledge. It comes at a good time.

Much has been done. Over the past two decades, OECD countries have introduced an array of concrete legislative and policy measures to enhance government openness in the conduct of public affairs. Their experience to date demonstrates that successful implementation requires a whole-of-government perspective and an awareness that reforms introduced in one area (*e.g.* in making government more transparent) may have system-wide impacts (*e.g.* on the accessibility and/or responsiveness of government). For example, information on public service performance (*e.g.* via scorecards) can lead to higher-quality and more accessible services, which may, in turn, place a higher premium on responsiveness.

But many challenges remain. Both government officials and politicians in OECD member countries are under increasing pressure to take individual responsibility for their use of the power and resources at their disposal. The public increasingly demands information about what decisions have been taken by which officials; in most OECD member countries, the right to access such information is guaranteed by law. There is an expectation that citizens will be made aware and consulted in advance about decisions that affect them. Flowing from this is a right, given institutional form in many states, that the citizen will be able to challenge administrative decisions and seek redress for failures of government.

Global policy dialogue. The OECD is evermore frequently called upon to provide a platform for policy dialogue to help both member and non-member countries in addressing these common governance challenges. This stocktaking of social accountability initiatives is part of OECD/GOV efforts to identify emerging trends and develop pertinent policy lessons for all countries seeking to build more open, accountable and responsive government. It also contributes to the World Bank's series of regional SA stocktaking exercises.

A wealth of innovative practices. The stocktaking exercise generated 40 templates covering social accountability initiatives undertaken by both government and civil society actors in the majority of the 30 OECD countries² plus the European Commission. The exercise identified a wide range of

² The 30 OECD Member countries: Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the

initiatives using a variety of tools and approaches, and also served to create a network of practitioners. These findings and in-country contacts will be useful to both the OECD/GOV and the World Bank as they develop their respective lines of work in this area. This paper presents the key findings of the stocktaking exercise and provides an overview of the range of social accountability methodologies and tools currently in use in OECD countries. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive inventory nor an in-depth description of the myriad activities underway. Rather, it serves to illustrate the wealth of innovative practices currently available and provides a rich resource for practitioners seeking “user-friendly” models, policy analysts spotting emerging trends, and decision makers preparing to meet future accountability challenges.

Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States.

2. METHODOLOGY

The main elements of the methodology followed in preparing this stocktaking exercise are set out below:

- **Template:** adaptation of the World Bank's (WB) original template for use in reviewing social accountability (SA) in OECD countries.
- **Scoping:** identification and initial screening of 80 potential SA cases based on a literature review, reference to OECD Budget Reviews, the OECD/World Bank Survey on Budget Practices and Procedures (2003), extensive Internet searches, and the recommendations of an informal network of experts in OECD member countries.
- **Selection and drafting:** selection of 40 cases that met the pre-defined criteria (see Box 1) and preparation of initial draft templates.
- **Fact checking:** to the greatest extent possible, given time and calendar constraints (*i.e.* summer holidays) emails and telephone contacts were conducted in order to deepen, to enrich and, above all, to check information gathered through the Internet and literature reviews.
- **Data analysis:** the data was gathered the templates were reviewed and analysed; as an outcome of this analysis, trends were identified across the "sample" of 40 cases. The analysis aimed to provide a better understanding of the mechanisms that enhance or limit social accountability practices, and led to a synthesis of the main findings.
- **Statistical analysis:** as an exploratory exercise, the principal factors identified in the templates were subject to statistical analysis using SPSS³ software. The contingency tables produced revealed a number of potential relations among different variables which could indicate promising paths for further exploration.
- **Quality control:** a number of internal and external reviewers were identified to ensure that the template, data collection plans, and draft report met WB and OECD quality standards.

³ Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Box 1. Criteria for case selection

- **Geographical coverage:** broad geographical coverage of OECD countries was sought.
- **Focus:** the main, but not exclusive, focus was on SA initiatives that had as their object the flow of public funds or decision-making powers, broadly defined:
 - **Upstream:** budget preparation, policy preparation, urban planning, etc.
 - **Downstream:** public expenditures, public procurement, public service delivery, policy implementation.
- **Level:** a balanced coverage of both national and sub-national levels was sought.
- **Transferability of policy lessons:** a preference was given to cases that offered the greatest “learning potential” for other countries.
- **Information quality:** cases offering a larger amount of valuable information for the purposes of the exercise were selected.

Consequences and limitations: This stocktaking exercise aimed to provide a broad overview of current practice in the field of social accountability in OECD countries. The set of SA initiatives chosen (40 in total) does not purport to capture the breadth and depth of public scrutiny and participation underway in OECD countries. Nor are the cases chosen intended to be “representative” of a given OECD country. Given these limitations, no firm conclusions regarding trends or categories can be drawn. Nevertheless, this report does provide some valuable insights into current SA developments in OECD countries and identifies several promising avenues for further exploration and analysis.

3. WORLD BANK & OECD APPROACHES TO ACCOUNTABILITY COMPARED

Context matters. While complementary, the approach taken by the OECD and the WB to the concept and practice of “social accountability” differs. This is in large part due to the very real differences in the “client countries” they serve. In OECD member countries, the formal legal and institutional frameworks for good governance and accountability are today largely in place (*e.g.* 29 of 30 members have access-to-information legislation) although implementation and standards vary widely.

This has not always been the case. A recent OECD report recalls that: “A third of OECD member countries were under non-democratic forms of government in their recent history. The key development since the middle of the 20th century has been the spread of constitutional and democratic systems of government. Governance is therefore a work in progress.”⁴ That the goal of building “open government” is recent in historical terms is borne out by a review of the crescendo of access-to-information laws, which has gathered pace over the last quarter century. In 1980 less than one-third of the (then 24) OECD countries had such legislation. By 2005, a total of 29 of 30 OECD countries had adopted laws guaranteeing access to information. As a relative novelty, it is likely that their full impact as “levers” for systemic institutional change has yet to be felt. This observation underscores the potential for mutual learning and exchange of good practice between OECD member and non-member countries, which underpins this joint project.

Institutional mission. The OECD and WB also pursue different, albeit complementary, objectives. The primary mission of the OECD Secretariat is to serve member country governments; this has two consequences for OECD/GOV work on governance and accountability. The first is analytical. While recognising the importance of public *demand* for good governance the OECD’s focus is on the *supply* side (*i.e.* strengthening public sector capacity to deliver on that goal). The second is practical, as the OECD’s committees and working groups are largely comprised of government officials drawn from member countries. As a result, the majority of the accountability initiatives included in the stocktaking are government-led rather than CSO-led.

Terms and definitions: Given its focus on core state functions, OECD/GOV works with a “classic” definition of accountability, namely: “Accountability is the obligation to present an account of and answer for the execution of responsibilities through the political and constitutional structure⁵”. This does not differ greatly from the definition used by the World Bank: “Accountability can be defined as the obligation of power-holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions⁶”. Where the two organisations diverge is with respect to the term “social accountability”, which the WB

⁴ OECD (2005) *Modernising Government: The Way Forward*, Paris: OECD, p. 15.

⁵ OECD (2005) *Modernising Government: The Way Forward*, Paris: OECD, p. 86.

⁶ Malena C. et al. (2004) *Social Accountability: An introduction to the concept and emerging practice: Social Development Papers*, Paper no. 76, December, p. 2.

characterises as: “an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement”⁷. In short, the term is well-established within the WB, and increasingly within the wider development community, but is not used as such within OECD/GOV.

Functional equivalents: However, this is not to say that the concepts encapsulated in the term “social accountability” are absent from OECD/GOV work and reports – quite the contrary. Indeed, the WB description of social accountability mechanisms as those that: “promote both responsiveness and accountability at various stages throughout the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of government policies and programs”⁸ largely reflects the OECD/GOV approach to building “open government”.

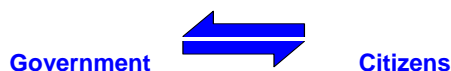
Box 2. OECD working definitions of government-citizen interactions

As set out in a widely-cited OECD report⁹, governments interact with citizens along three main axes during decision-making:

Information: a one-way relation in which government produces and delivers information for use by citizens. It covers both “passive” access to information upon demand by citizens and “active” measures by government to disseminate information to citizens.



Consultation: a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition by government of the issue on which citizens’ views are being sought and requires the provision of information.



Active participation: a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in the policy-making process. It acknowledges a role for citizens in proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.



From scrutiny to voice. Given the relatively well-developed and accountable governance systems enjoyed by the citizens of OECD countries¹⁰, their demands have generally focused more on ensuring greater voice in government decision making than on simply exercising external public scrutiny. OECD/GOV work to date has therefore included a focus on strengthening government capacity to effectively engage citizens and civil society in policy making (*i.e.* the “responsiveness” aspect of

⁷ Ackerman J. (2005) *Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion*: Social Development Papers, Paper no. 82, March, p. 1.

⁸ Malena C. et al. (2004) *Social Accountability: An introduction to the concept and emerging practice*: Social Development Papers, Paper no. 76, December, p. 3.

⁹ OECD (2001) *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy making*, Paris: OECD, p. 23.

¹⁰ Enjoyed by both individual citizens (with their particular interests and preferences) and civil society organisations (CSOs) composed of non-governmental, non-profit making organisations, unions, formal and informal networks, and voluntary associations.

social accountability)¹¹. To capture this relationship, it has developed an analytical framework that distinguishes three main functional types of government-citizen interactions (see Box 2). These forms of interaction can easily encompass a wide range of specific tools and mechanisms – including those used in ensuring social accountability (e.g. access to basic government data on which independent budget analysis rests would fall under “information”).

Impact on choice of cases: Of the four broad mechanisms of social accountability included in the World Bank’s previous regional reviews (see Box 3), the first three are usually conducted by civil society organisations or communities *outside of government* (i.e. independent budget analysis, participatory expenditure tracking, and participatory performance monitoring). The fourth, participatory budgeting, is an initiative driven by government institutions – and is therefore more in line with OECD/GOV’s usual government networks and focus.

Box 3. World Bank social accountability mechanisms¹²

- **Independent budget analysis** refers to research, advocacy, and dissemination of information on issues related to official budgets by civil society and other actors independent of the government.
- **Participatory public expenditure** tracking involves civil society tracking how the public sector spends the money that was allocated to it.
- **Participatory performance monitoring** consists of citizen and community scorecards that solicit user feedback on the performance of public services.
- **Participatory budgeting** relates to the involvement, and consultation, of citizens in the budgeting cycle.

In light of the above, less than one-third of the SA initiatives included in the report are civil-society driven. Many of those selected do fall into the categories used by the World Bank: independent budget analysis (5); participatory public expenditure (2); participatory performance monitoring (1) and participatory budgeting (6).

At the same time, the scope of social accountability mechanisms reviewed in this report has been significantly enlarged to include other tools to enhance social accountability beyond those defined by the World Bank (e.g. citizen juries, e-consultation, etc.) This report casts the analytical net wider in order to capture a greater range of innovative practices which aim to enhance public voice and social accountability in OECD member countries.

Common goals: In sum, while the two partner organisations do not use the same terms, both aim to promote a “virtuous circle” whereby efforts to strengthen “internal” accountability mechanisms within the public sector (e.g. internal audit, financial control, external audit, parliamentary review) go hand in hand with – and are reinforced by – measures to facilitate “external” control by citizens, civil society and business. While this report on stocktaking of OECD countries differs from those conducted in other regions of the world (e.g. Africa, Latin America) it will certainly contribute to advancing our collective understanding of the range of practices and tools currently available to ensure the accountability of government.

¹¹ That said, OECD/GOV work on identifying integrity risks in public procurement also reviews the role of direct public scrutiny (“accountability”).

¹² McNeil, M. and T. Mumvuma (2006) *Demanding Good Governance: A Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives by Civil Society in Anglophone Africa*, Washington: WBI, p. vi.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Scrutiny, proximity and engagement

From an analytical perspective, the World Bank approach to SA practices focuses on the tools used (*e.g.* IBA, participatory expenditure tracking) whereas the OECD focuses on the functions (*e.g.* information, consultation, participation). A third, complementary approach to analysing the set of SA initiatives collected has been developed based on these two methodologies. It classifies SA initiatives with reference to their ultimate objective – namely enhancing scrutiny, proximity or engagement. These terms are defined as follows:

- **Scrutiny:** initiatives that enhance assessment, analysis and scrutiny of government actions, focusing on the power of information to extract accountability. Such initiatives are most often led by CSOs (*e.g.* IBA, expenditure tracking) or by the legislative and/or judiciary branches of government (*e.g.* ombudsman).
- **Proximity:** these initiatives are usually led by governments and aim to reduce the “distance” between citizens and governments. They often seek to identify citizens’ needs or preferences but are not designed to seek direct public participation in government actions (*e.g.* public consultations, community cabinets).
- **Engagement:** these initiatives are essentially government-led and effectively incorporate citizens in the decision-making process itself (*e.g.* participatory budgeting).

The typology proposed below has the benefit of being able to incorporate both World Bank and OECD approaches to social accountability (see Table 1), while providing a better “fit” with the population of SA initiatives reviewed (see Table 2).

Table 1. Classifying SA initiatives by objective, function or tools

OBJECTIVE	OECD FUNCTION	WORLD BANK TOOLS	EXAMPLES
Scrutiny	Information	Independent Budget Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Korea - IBA for Women Policies • US - California Budget Project
Proximity	Information Consultation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia –Community Cabinets • Denmark – • Danmarksdebatten
Engagement	Participation	Participatory Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switzerland – Bollingen Participatory Budgeting • France – Participatory Budgeting Education Poitou-Charente

While the classification of SA initiatives proposed by the World Bank does not capture the full range of experiences within the selection of 40 SA cases identified in the OECD countries (e.g. *Denmarksdebatten* in Denmark; *Community Cabinets* in Queensland, Australia), the OECD's functional approach leaves room for overlap in too many cases (e.g. the same SA initiative may include both information and consultation functions). It would appear that the classification of SA initiatives according to their objective offers a clearer framework for their characterisation with fewer ambiguities¹³.

4.1.1 Scrutiny

Scrutiny practices focus on the power of information to extract accountability. Such initiatives may be government led and concern governments' disclosure of information; an example is the *Charter of Budget Honesty* in Australia, a law that aims to improve the formulation and reporting of fiscal policy, facilitating public scrutiny of government expenditures and performance. However, many SA initiatives that aim to ensure scrutiny are led by civil society organisations (CSOs). Independent Budget Analysis (IBA) involves research, promotion and dissemination of information on issues related to public budgets by civil society and other actors independent of the government¹⁴. Examples include the *Independent Budget Analysis for Women Policies* in South Korea, the *Quarterly Bulletin of Public Finances* in Poland, or the *California Budget Project* in the United States. IBA training delivered to CSOs, MPs, journalists and other important stakeholders is an element of the *Budget and Public Expenses Program* in Mexico; in this case, stakeholders are introduced to budget analysis with the aim of enabling them to conduct their own studies independently according to their specific interests.

Public procurement processes are another crucially relevant domain of public scrutiny, given that government purchases correspond on average to 15% of the world's GDP¹⁵. Mexico's *Social Witnesses on Public Procurement* programme represents a milestone in citizens' scrutiny of public procurement procedures; it has significantly reduced the costs of public contracts and increased the number of bidders participating in procurement processes¹⁶.

4.1.2 Proximity

Proximity initiatives concern those actions – usually led by governments – which aim to build a closer relationship between citizens and governments but which fall short of inviting citizens to actively engage in the decision-making process. Queensland's *Community Cabinets* in Australia is a good example of a successful proximity initiative. Ministers hold cabinet meetings in regional cities and towns; according to the initiators of the *Community Cabinet*, the aim of this policy is to “bring politicians together with the people they represent” by listening to citizens' views, concerns and ideas.

¹³ While there may be overlapping objectives (e.g. an initiative may foster scrutiny and proximity at the same time) this classification allows a clearer identification of the principal purpose of SA initiatives.

¹⁴ McNeil, M. and T. Mumvuma (2006) *Demanding Good Governance: A Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives by Civil Society in Anglophone Africa*, Washington: WBI, p. vi.

¹⁵ OECD (2005) *Harmonising Donor Practices for Effective Aid Delivery*, Vol. 3: Strengthening Procurement Capacities in Developing Countries, Paris: OECD, p. 18.

¹⁶ For example, the procurement procedure of the *Comisión Federal de Electricidad* for insurance services, achieved the following results: i) a decrease of 30% in the overall cost thanks to recommendations by the Social Witness to eliminate requirements that increased costs and restricted firms' participation in tenders; ii) during the process, all parties that had expressed interest went on to participate in the tender, when previously only 50% did so (see: www.funcionpublica.gob.mx).

Another common form of proximity initiatives are consultations where citizens provide feedback to governments on previously identified issues. The *Gonesse City Development Consultation* in France involves citizen consultation on the development of the city around six pre-defined themes (e.g. public infrastructures, public services). With this initiative the mayor and his staff intend to create a “sphere where citizens can express themselves”.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are increasingly used as a means of obtaining feedback from citizens and reducing the distance between governments and citizens. ICT offers a reliable means of communication, decentralised storage capacities, and lower costs; some governments have used ICT to better address community interests and improve the performance of decision making. Proximity initiatives leveraged by the use of ICT include:

- *Online Pre-budget Consultation* (Canada): Citizens are invited to participate in the national budgeting process by indicating their preferences and proposing alternatives.
- *Interactive City Council of Jun* (Spain): Citizens are invited to submit proposals for the local budget and general suggestions for the city council agenda online.
- *Danmarksdebatten* (Denmark): Citizens and public authorities have the opportunity to debate public matters through a common online platform integrating local, regional, and national issues. The initiative aims “to contribute to the dialogue between authorities and citizens” and to “allow public authorities and elected representatives to qualify their decisions and to present an issue from all angles” with citizens offering feedback on policy issues.
- *e-Games* (Hungary): In an effort to promote greater interaction among citizens and between citizens and the public administration by leveraging the interactivity offered by ICT, *e-Games* allows people to evaluate the public administration’s performance. Users can assess each other’s comments on specific issues with positive and negative points, which provides an overall judgement of the value of each user’s contribution. The aggregated number of points draws a picture of public opinion based on the forums’ users. Interestingly, “VIPs” (e.g. high-level representatives of the public administration and politicians) are regularly invited to chat with citizens at predefined times. The responses during these online “office hours”, as well as their other contributions, are also scored by users – generating an important source of public pressure.

4.1.3 Engagement

Engagement initiatives include actions that effectively incorporate citizens into governments’ decision-making processes. Among the sample of SA cases collected, participatory budgeting (PB) practices are the most prominently represented. It should be noted, however, that the term “participatory budgeting” has been applied to many different types of initiatives, becoming in practice an amorphous concept with multiple meanings¹⁷. It is broadly defined here as the effective participation of citizens in the allocation of budgetary resources with binding effects.¹⁸ Examples

¹⁷ Within this sample of 40 SA initiatives, some of the practices that are defined by initiators as cases of participatory budgeting are simply public consultation on the budget without any effective binding effect (e.g. the Participatory Budgeting exercise in the city of Palmela, Portugal).

¹⁸ There are two types of binding effects: legally binding effects and politically binding effects. In the latter case, despite the fact that there is no legal obligation for decision makers to act upon input received from

include *Participatory Budgeting on Education* in France; the *Harrow Open Budget* in the United Kingdom and the *Participatory Budgeting of Bollingen* in Switzerland. Special attention must be directed to the *Participatory Budgeting of the Young* in the Netherlands, an initiative that aims at giving young people aged 14 to 19 the conditions and opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to take an active part in local democratic decision-making processes. The methodology applied in this initiative (which was developed by the Dutch Centre for Political Participation¹⁹) has proved to have a high potential for replication and sustainability within the Netherlands. Since 1994, the initiative has been repeated in many different municipalities (between 20 and 30 cases per year). Moreover, partnerships to replicate this initiative abroad have been established with organisations in Romania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Participatory budgeting practices have also been successfully introduced in larger cities and at the regional level, as seen in the examples of Seville, Spain and the region of Poitou-Charentes, in France.

In addition to the more widespread participatory budgeting practices, other initiatives aim to promote citizen engagement in the decision-making process. For example, the *Berlin Citizen Jury* (Germany) creates a jury composed of randomly selected citizens²⁰ and representatives of the local civil society (associations, companies). It has a fund of EUR 500 000 to finance projects for urban rehabilitation. Any resident or association can submit a project to the jury, which then deliberates to decide whether to finance the project according to its “usefulness” and overall quality (the final decision is generally taken by secret vote). Between January 2001 and December 2003 the juries met about 15 times per year to evaluate about 72 projects, half of which were selected for financing. Last, but not least, the *Civic Engagement Project* in California in the United States aims to help counties incorporate civil society in the decision-making process. This project also highlights the importance of addressing social inclusion and boasts a set of governance structures addressing issues of ethnicity, language and culture.

citizens, strong public pressure generally leads to political commitments that are, in turn, translated into practice.

¹⁹ Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, Netherlands. See: <http://www.publiek-politiek.nl/>.

²⁰ Unlike in PB, where citizens’ participation is voluntary (open selection) and therefore subject to the bias of self-selection, random selection can ensure a better socio-demographic representation of the population at large.

Table 2. Clustering SA initiatives by objective: Scrutiny, proximity and engagement

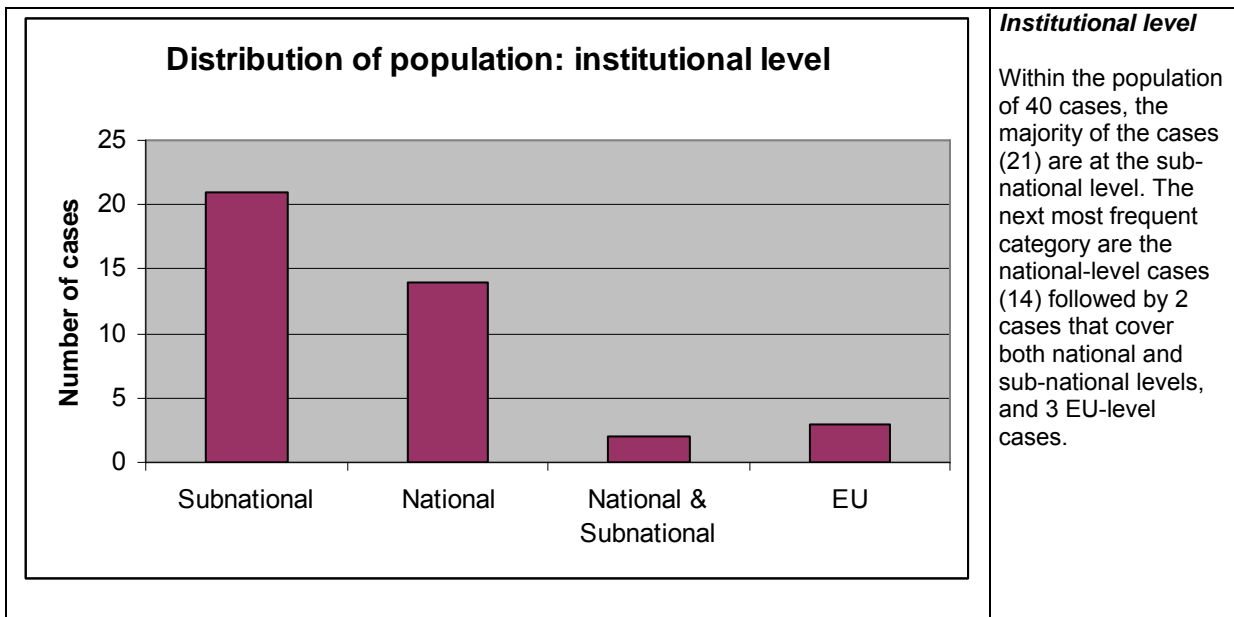
OBJECTIVE	SA INITIATIVE	COUNTRY
S C R U T I N Y	Charter of Budget Honesty	Australia
	Ombudsman Board	Austria
	Assessment of Public Procurement Procedures	Czech Republic
	Evaluation of EC Consultations	European Union
	Sbilanciamoci: Alternative Budget Report	Italy
	Information Disclosure Board	Japan
	Budget and Public Expenses Program	Mexico
	Social Witness on Public Procurement	Mexico
	Ombudsman	Norway
	Quarterly Bulletin of Public Finances	Poland
	Assessment of Reports of State Organisations	Slovak Republic
	Seoul Anti-Corruption Measures	South Korea
	Independent Budget Analysis for Women	South Korea
	California Budget Project	United States
Exercise in Hard Choices	United States	
P R O X I M I T Y	Community Cabinet	Australia
	Online Pre-Budget Consultation	Canada
	National Consultation on Education	Czech Republic
	Danmarksdebatten	Denmark
	European Citizens Panel	European Union
	Himmelina Participation Tools	Finland
	Gonesse City Development Consultation	France
	Municipal Check List	Greece
	e-Games	Hungary
	Consultation on City Plan	New Zealand
	Palmela City Participatory Budgeting	Portugal
	Interactive City Council	Spain
Istanbul Consultation on Transport	Turkey	
E N G A G E M E N T	Participatory Budgeting of Mons	Belgium
	e-Learning on Participatory Democracy	European Union
	Participatory Budgeting on Education	France
	Online Dialogue – Participatory Budgeting	Germany
	Berlin Citizen Jury	Germany
	National Social Partnership	Ireland
	Participatory Budgeting of the Young Citizens	Netherlands
	Participatory Budgeting Seville	Spain
	Participatory Budgeting Bollingen	Switzerland
	Bradford Participatory Budgeting	United Kingdom
	Harrow Open Budget	United Kingdom
Civic Engagement Project	United States	

5. MAIN FINDINGS

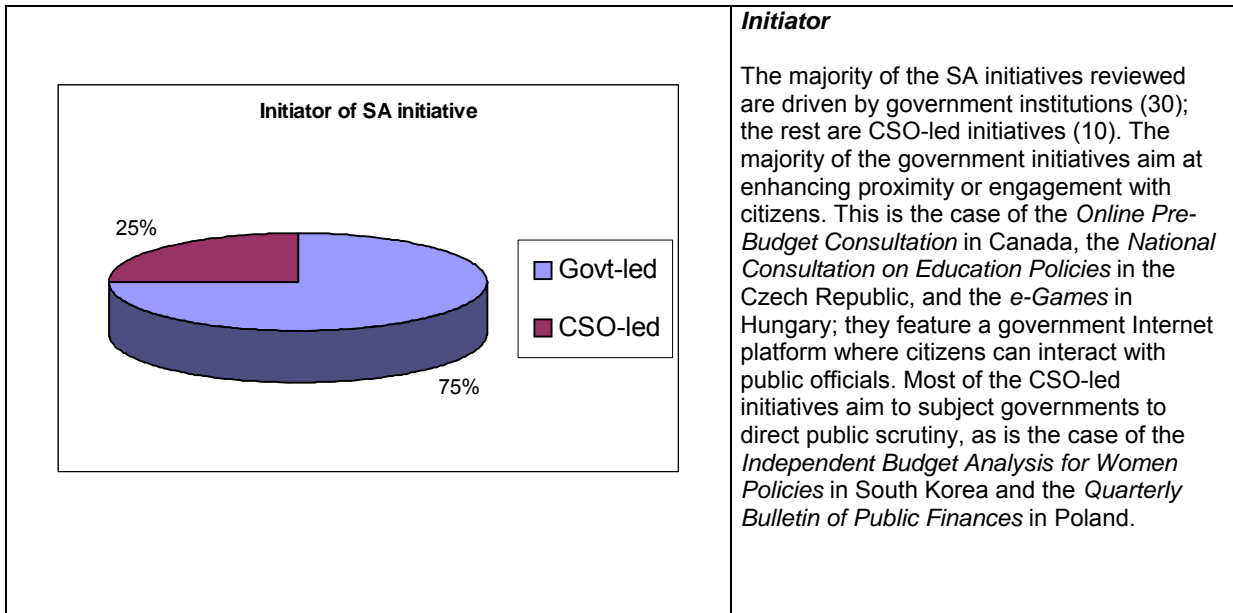
The 40 SA cases examined in this report are very heterogeneous. They vary in terms of institutional level (ranging from the sub-national to the EU level), initiator, legal basis and methodologies. The common denominator among this multiplicity of cases is the fact that they are all expected to help to strengthen government capacity to be more transparent, accessible and responsive. Some distinct categories can still be found among these highly diverse cases. In practice, some cases focus on *scrutiny* (e.g. independent budget analysis, scorecards) while others promote *proximity* and accountability through direct citizen consultation and others focus on *engagement* and participation in decision making (e.g. participatory budgeting, consultations on urban development). This section provides a brief overview of the population of 40 selected SA initiatives. A detailed description of each case may be found in Annex 2.

5.1 Key characteristics

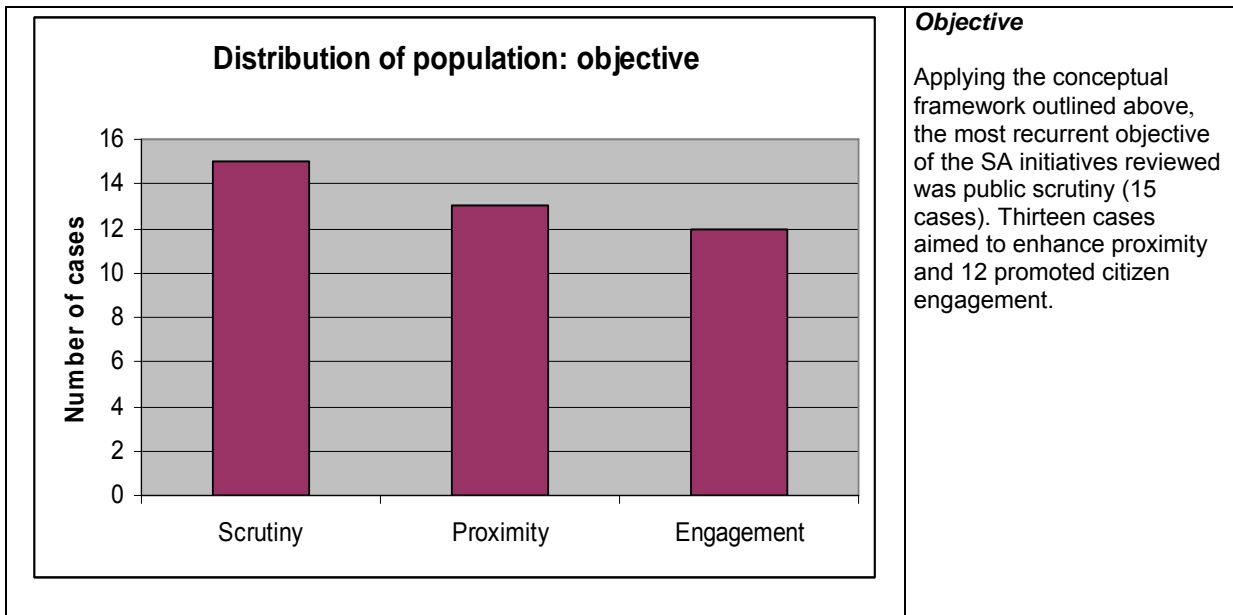
Institutional level



Initiator



Objective



Stage of the decision-making process

The majority of the SA initiatives reviewed focus on the agenda-setting and decision-making stages of the policy cycle. The *Interactive City Council* of Jun, Spain, which allows citizens to collaborate in setting the agenda of City Council sessions, illustrates the involvement of citizens at early stages of the decision-making process. The *Social Witness on Public Procurement* in Mexico – where a citizen participates in public contracting procedures and acts as an external observer in order to promote transparency, diminish the risks of corruption, and improve efficiency and effectiveness –

is an example of the association of citizens at the decision-making stage. The rest of the initiatives focus on the evaluation stage (except for one example of a CSO being associated at the implementation stage, the Irish case *National Social Partnership Agreement*). Public participation at the implementation stage is usually only found when there is a specific co-production agreement between government and CSOs (e.g. in the delivery of public services). Given that the main focus of this stocktaking was public scrutiny and engagement in decision making, rather than service delivery, it is not surprising that only one example of co-production has been identified in the cases selected. A detailed description of each SA case can be found in Annex 2.

Legal or policy basis

Just over one quarter of the SA cases are based on legal or policy requirements. For example, New Zealand's Local Government Act of 2002 obliges all local councils to undertake public consultation when developing their Long Term Community and Council Plans (LTCCP). An example included in this report is Wellington's City Council.

About 20% of the SA cases are based on a specific government programme. An example is the *Civic Engagement Project* in California, United States. This was based on state government Proposition 10, which prioritised funding for projects aimed towards young children and families that enhanced civic participation. Another example is the *Social Witnesses for Public Procurement* in Mexico, which was launched within the framework of a broader government anti-corruption programme²¹.

More often than not, however, legal or policy norms are an enabler or are cited as a *post hoc* justification rather than being a driving force. For example, while the *Online Pre-Budget Consultation* in Canada refers to the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada²², this policy does not oblige public authorities to launch specific initiatives. Rather, it provides a legal framework for their existence.

5.2 Analysis of key factors

Initiator: The nature of the initiator seems to a large extent to determine the characteristics of an initiative. Government-led initiatives tend to aim at better informing and/or enhancing proximity to citizens as a source of legitimacy for decision making. CSO initiatives tend to be focused on promoting scrutiny, indicating that lack of trust in government and demand for greater transparency are at the origin of their efforts.

Drivers: Although the reasons to justify the launch of these initiatives vary widely, they are generally driven by a predominant focus on:

- ***Rights:*** a normative approach which regards increased transparency and/or citizen participation as valuable in its own right.
- ***Trust:*** governments are constantly looking for ways to enhance public trust, recognising that their actions will have effective results only if they are seen as legitimate.

²¹ Programa Nacional de Combate a la Corrupción y Fomento a la Transparencia y el Desarrollo Administrativo 2001-2006

²² The Communications Policy of the Government of Canada states that all departments should: Consult the public, listen to and take account of people's interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services.

- *Effectiveness*: in order to allocate their scarce resources more effectively, governments need to co-operate with citizens (e.g. by consultation), allowing them to identify and respond to citizen needs.
- *Reactivity*: governments may also launch SA initiatives simply in reaction to internal or external pressures (e.g. public criticism, political challenges, peer pressure among governments).
- *Innovation*: the desire to innovate (e.g. use ICT) may itself drive SA practices. In the best case, efforts to modernise government underpin SA initiatives. In the worst case, it may remain superficial (i.e. SA as a solution looking for a problem).

Binding effects²³ and legal basis: Of the 40 SA initiatives reviewed, 14 have had – to different degrees – a binding effect. This binding effect may be of a legal nature, as in the case of Australia’s *Charter of Budget Honesty*, or politically binding as in the case of *Participatory Budgeting* in the French region of Poitou-Charentes. It is important to note that of these 14 cases, 11 are at the sub-national level, and only three at the national level. A possible hypothesis is that the higher the institutional level, the lower the likelihood that citizen participation in SA initiatives will have a binding impact on government decision-making processes.

Of the 14 SA initiatives that have had a binding effect, there are only two cases where the initiatives are underpinned by legislation or policy. In short, no causal link between the legal basis and the binding effects of citizens’ engagement in social accountability has been found in this, admittedly limited, sample. If borne out by further investigation, this finding would appear to temper the widespread belief in the importance of establishing legal frameworks as a necessary condition for SA to flourish. On the other hand, it bodes well for reformers willing to promote effective SA mechanisms in countries which lack a fully developed legal framework.

Government programmes: Government programmes that specifically aim to enhance civic participation in policy formulation, and provide funds to that effect, seem to have a greater ability to mobilise citizens to participate; an example is the *Civic Engagement Project* in the United States. The context of broader government programmes may also stimulate the implementation of specific SA initiatives. Such is the case of the *Seoul Anti-Corruption Efforts* in South Korea and the *Social Witness on Public Procurement* in Mexico. Both initiatives were launched within the framework of large anti-corruption programmes initiated by central government.

Government/CSO partnerships: Of the 40 cases, 23 involved government/CSO partnerships – some formal and some informal. Many SA initiatives implemented by governments (e.g. consultations) explicitly aimed to reach beyond organised civil society to engage with individual citizens. This may be an effort on the part of governments to diversify their contacts beyond what they often regard as the “usual suspects”. However, by doing so, governments miss the opportunity to call upon existing civil society structures and competencies to help mobilise a broader range of citizens and optimise social accountability practices. In short, by ignoring CSOs when launching social accountability practices, governments risk increasing their costs and reducing the effectiveness of their policies.

²³ As mentioned previously (see footnote 16), two types of binding effects are considered: legally binding effects and politically binding effects.

Target groups: Of the 40 cases, 21 were directed at specific target groups or made particular efforts to reach specific groups, with most of the target groups being defined within broad categories, such as “young citizens” or “medium- and low-income families”. How citizens’ participation or consultation is targeted, and how they are selected, appears to have considerable impact. Open selection processes have the advantage of giving the chance to participate to all citizens who wish to do so. However, open selection runs the risk of bias (in that self-selected citizens are more likely to have a specific interest in the issue); additionally, some citizen profiles and interests may not be represented. Stakeholder participation tends to be representative of particular interest groups. However, an exclusive reliance on the participation of stakeholders usually does not allow policy makers to capture the broad preferences of the general public. Actively recruiting participants in order to reflect the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the wider population may result in preferences which are closer to those of the general population²⁴. One promising approach would seem to be the combination of different methods, as in the case of the Berlin Citizen Jury, which combines random selection and stakeholder participation.

Deliberative practices²⁵: Although they are included in 19 of the SA initiatives, many successful SA cases do not include deliberative practices – at least to any large degree. While deliberative practices are not an essential component of social accountability practices aimed at enhancing scrutiny, they may be an important element for engagement (*e.g.* consultations, participatory budgeting). Effective deliberative processes rely on discussion in small groups (sometimes in combination with larger assemblies) facilitated by an external mediator who ensures that all participants have an equal opportunity to express themselves. Participants receive the information they need in order to engage in informed discussions beforehand. This information process may be complemented by the presence of experts that can explain the issues at stake.

ICT as a tool: Of six practices characterised by the use of ICT²⁶, one operates at the EU level, three at the national level and two at the local level. For most of the cases – with exception of the Hungarian e-Games – the use of the Internet is seen as an additional means of interaction between citizens and their governments to complement already existing practices. Among the cases reviewed, it appeared that the national-level SA initiatives tend to prioritise the use of ICT as the main tool, whereas those at the local level include ICT as an accessory tool in the process.

Media/advocacy support: More than half of the cases (26 of 40) mentioned some form of media or other support. However, in most of these cases there are no clear descriptions of the actions undertaken. Overall, it can be said that there is little information available on specific activities to ensure that the SA initiatives are widely publicised. A notable exception is the case of Wellington City Council in New Zealand, which prepared a detailed communications plan and evaluated its success afterwards. In terms of awareness-raising actions there is little sign of investment either upstream or downstream, with little effort to communicate the results of the SA initiatives. Experience shows that

²⁴ For an overview of how participants can be best recruited see: Simmons, R. and J. Birchall (2005) *A Joined-up Approach to User Participation in Public Services: Strengthening the Participation Chain*, Social Policy & Administration, (39) pp. 260-283.

²⁵ Deliberation is defined as an opportunity for citizens to formulate their preferences by participating in a discussion where arguments for and against a given issue are exchanged in the course of a debate before a decision is taken.

²⁶ While information about all of the 40 cases can be found on the Internet, initiatives are only included in this category when the use of ICT goes beyond simply providing information online, and where a degree of online interactivity is an important component of the initiative (*e.g.* online consultation).

this lack of communication, particularly with regard to results, may generate deep frustration among citizens who do participate and then receive no feedback or realise that their efforts lack visibility.

Repeated/scaled up SA practices: The majority of the SA initiatives reviewed have been repeated (31 out of 40). Another six initiatives were designed as one-off events (*e.g.* a public consultation on a 10-year urban development plan). At first glance, there is an apparent correlation between the repetition of these SA practices and the existence of a legal requirement: of the 11 initiatives that mentioned the existence of a legal framework, seven were repeated (63.6%). However, of the 29 initiatives that did not mention any legal basis, 24 (82.8%) initiatives were repeated. The contingency tables constructed with the data from the 40 SA cases and their analyses show no significant statistical relation among repetition and legal basis (see Annex 3).

In contrast, of the 12 cases that were classified as engagement initiatives, 100% were repeated, with the contingency tables indicating a statistical relation between repetition and engagement activities (see Annex 3). Of course, such figures are the outcomes of a reduced number of cases, but they raise an interesting hypothesis which might merit further investigation: effectively incorporating citizens in the decision-making process may be a greater guarantee of replication of the initiative than the presence or absence of a legal framework for SA. The methodology adopted in this report did not allow for the collection of information on how these repeated practices have evolved over time. Further effort should be made to understand the learning processes that these practices may have engendered (*e.g.* methodology changes) and their possible adaptation to specific contexts.

A minority of cases have been scaled up. However, since the conduct of this research did not allow for tracking the initiatives over time and was based only on information provided by initiators, there is not much that can be said about the incentives or obstacles that influence whether SA initiatives are – or are not – repeated or scaled up. Overall, the existence of a legal basis does not appear to be a sufficient condition for the successful institutionalisation of SA mechanisms.

Information on costs: One of the most elusive aspects of the data collection exercise was hard data on costs – both to government and to citizens. As a consequence, at present it is not possible to establish any concrete relation between the cost of initiatives and their sustainability.

Costs to governments: Information on the costs of the SA initiatives was available for only 13 cases, and all were characterised by a general lack of precision concerning human and financial resources allocated²⁷. This lack of transparency is somewhat paradoxical given that the SA initiatives themselves sought to ensure greater government transparency. In the majority of cases, these costs were given in terms of human resources allocated, and in a very general way. Of these 13 cases, only seven gave information on the budgetary resources allocated to the initiative. This paucity of information does not allow for any judgements to be made concerning the cost/benefit of the SA initiatives themselves. It is likely that since there are no established parameters of costs for SA initiatives, initiators are reluctant to provide such data because they cannot judge whether, in relation to other events, these costs are too high or too low²⁸. This creates a vicious circle of non-disclosure of information, perpetrating the belief that SA initiatives are costly. This gap in information on costs may also simply be related to organisational matters. For instance, several government units or CSO

²⁷ A theme worth exploring, and which is not examined here, is that of the political costs and/or gains of SA initiatives (*e.g.* by opening up a space for challengers) and the relationship between these costs and the sustainability of the SA initiatives.

²⁸ For a review of the literature on the costs and benefits of participation see: Warburton, D., E. Andersson and R. Wilson (2005) *The True Costs of Participation - A draft framework*, London: Involve (www.involve.org.uk/civicrenewal/).

partners may contribute their own resources in implementing the same SA initiative, making it difficult to clearly define overall costs. Last, but not least, this lack of information on costs may be due to the fact that the transparency on the initiatives themselves is not considered a priority.

Costs to citizens: There is even less information available about the costs incurred by citizens when they take part in SA initiatives (e.g. time, transport)²⁹. Citizens tend to expect their governments to be transparent, and one of the best ways of ensuring government transparency is ensuring the involvement of citizens in government processes. Nevertheless, even though many citizens make vocal demands for transparency, far fewer are willing to get involved in public affairs. As stated by Gerry Stoker, “The greatest empowerment of all is a system of governance that makes life easier, more livable and more full of potential. Running things yourself and making choices can be fulfilling. Having things run for you in a way that enables you to live your life can be even more rewarding.”³⁰ In this sense, citizens tend to act as free-riders, hoping that the tasks that will ensure accountability and reinforce democracy will be carried out by others. In fact, surveys in democratic countries have repeatedly shown that few citizens participate in political life in ways other than voting.³¹ In this context, creating spaces for public participation may be seen as a necessary, but not sufficient, action to enhance engagement.

The costs and benefits of participation for citizens is a key issue to be considered before the implementation of any policy that aims at citizen involvement. Clearly, variance in costs is not the only explanatory factor for levels of participation. However, there is potentially a strong link between costs and participation levels: if all other factors are taken as constant, the probability of citizens’ participation will be inversely proportional to the costs of participation. With regard to benefits, experience shows that citizens tend to be particularly sensitive to the measure of their real impact on decision making – that is whether they are “only” being consulted or whether they are effectively participating in government-led initiatives. Citizens tend to perceive consultations as being less important and less vital than participation practices. In many cases this is reflected in the lower numbers of citizens participating in consultation as compared to participation practices. Citizens might also perceive benefits of participating in SA initiatives that result in their acquiring competencies, skills and a sense of personal empowerment (e.g. grant management, networking).

Information on impact/evaluation: Information on impact was available for more than half (26 of 40 cases) of the initiatives. However, there is great variance in the precision and clarity of the information provided on impacts. Most of the information is general (e.g. increased accountability), not measurable and not verifiable. Only a minority used precise definitions of impacts (e.g. impact on a final decision) while most used a weaker definition and indicated more systemic and diffuse impacts of the SA initiatives. Information on evaluation was found in less than half of the cases (19 of 40). This indicates that evaluation is not considered an essential procedure in the majority of the initiatives. Among the cases that do mention an evaluation, the quality of the information provided varies considerably and there is little mention of their results or use.

²⁹ These costs may be either material (e.g. money spent to travel to a meeting) or immaterial (e.g. time spent deliberating).

³⁰ Stoker, G. (2005) What is local government for? Refocusing local governance to meet the challenges of the 21st century, London: New Local Government Network.

³¹ It should be emphasised: despite the fact that citizens do not take advantage of all opportunities and rights that are offered to them under a democratic system of governance, this does not imply that they are indifferent to them. See: Dahl, Robert A., 2000. “A Democratic Paradox?” *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (1), pp. 35-40.

5.3 Exploring possible links between variables

In the course of this stocktaking of social accountability initiatives in OECD countries, the rich dataset offered by the 40 templates was coded and tabulated in order to highlight main characteristics and identify a number of key variables (see Excel sheet in Annex 3).

In the spirit of exploration, an additional analytical step was taken. The set of descriptive variables was transposed to a dataset and subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS software. The aim was to produce contingency tables in order to examine the relations between variables (*i.e.* the frequency with which certain variables appeared together) when looking across the whole “population” of 40 cases (see Annex 3 for the full results of these correlations).

Table 4. Selected positive and negative frequencies

Variable 1	Variable 2	Frequency
Government/CSO Partnership	Evaluation	+
Deliberation	Engagement	+
CSO	Target Groups	+
Evaluation	Engagement	+
Engagement	Repeated	+
Proximity	Repeated	-
Legal Basis	Engagement	-
National	Engagement	-

Table 4 illustrates a selection of positive and negative correlation coefficients. Even though these frequencies were statistically significant³², they cannot be directly interpreted as indicating a necessary causality between variables. Nonetheless, they show to what extent two variables were present in a SA initiative (positive correlations) or to which extent these variables tended *not* to be in the same SA initiative (negative correlations), thus indicating possible relationships that that deserve further analysis.

On the basis of this analysis, set of 40 SA cases examined in this stocktaking exercise demonstrate the following:

Positive frequencies:

- Social accountability initiatives that included government-CSO partnerships were more likely to be evaluated than those cases where there were no such partnerships.
- Engagement practices tended to promote more deliberation.
- CSO-led initiatives tended to focus more on target groups.
- Engagement initiatives tended to include evaluations more often than other initiatives (*i.e.* scrutiny, proximity).
- Engagement activities tended to be repeated more, as compared to other initiatives³³.

³² The indexes of correlation (PHI) were submitted to significance tests appropriate to the sample.

³³ In fact, all engagement activities were repeated.

Negative frequencies:

- Proximity initiatives tended not to be repeated.
- Engagement activities tended not to have a legal basis.
- SA initiatives at the national level did not tend to effectively integrate the citizens into the decision-making process.

Given the small population of cases available, these findings fall well short of providing robust statistical correlations – let alone indicating causal relations. Nor were they intended to do so. What they do offer are some initial indications of promising directions for further research, especially if larger datasets could be generated on which to test these working hypotheses.

One suggestion for future research would be to adopt a sequential explanatory research design, where research begins with quantitative data collection and the statistical analysis of a large population of SA cases (as attempted for the purposes of illustration here). The next phase would consist of case studies to collect qualitative data with the aim of providing more in-depth interpretation and validation of the correlations identified in the first phase. Employing these complementary methods (quantitative and qualitative) would allow researchers to maximise the benefits and compensate for the trade-offs each method offers (*e.g.* breadth vs. depth). This would broaden understanding of the role that different variables play in influencing the outcomes of SA initiatives (*e.g.* the presence or absence of a legal framework, government-CSO partnerships, etc.).

6. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FOR POLICY

What emerges clearly from this diverse set of social accountability initiatives is that government and civil society practitioners across OECD countries face a set of common challenges. This stocktaking exercise has allowed their collective experience to be tapped, and leads to a number of policy lessons for consideration and, hopefully, debate.

Challenges		Policy lessons
Clarifying objectives	The choice of topic and objective for SA initiatives – and their clear communication – is crucial. There is little point in government promising engagement when what is actually on offer is simply greater proximity. Equally, CSO-initiated SA initiatives might have more impact if they were to focus on specific “entry points” where public scrutiny can exercise the greatest systemic leverage for reform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose your topic, clarify your objectives. • Ensure the issues at stake are relevant to citizens.
Raising public awareness	All too often initiators of SA appear to believe that it is sufficient to simply post information about events on the Internet in order to reach a wide audience. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even in OECD countries with high levels of household Internet use, there is a need to invest significant efforts in raising public awareness through traditional media (e.g. radio, TV, pamphlets, posters), new media (e.g. SMS alerts on mobile phones), and via existing intermediaries and networks (e.g. CSOs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in communication. • Use existing networks (CSOs).
Choosing who to involve, when and how	Only once SA initiators have clarified whether their objective is scrutiny, proximity or engagement can they choose who to involve and the appropriate tools to use. If the objective is to ensure public scrutiny for a highly technical policy issue, then a small professional watchdog which divulges its findings to a wider public may be sufficient. If proximity is the goal, then a coalition of civil society organisations may be best placed to act as relays to “close the gap” between decision makers and grassroots groups or individual citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower the threshold for engagement. • Engage upstream. • Build partnerships.
Defining the “rules of the game”	In order to avoid frustration among participants, it is important to establish a set of clear rules. These should specify both the procedural aspects (e.g. time available for debate, length of oral or written submissions) and the respective rights and duties of the participants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear rules.

Demonstrating results	Maintaining public interest and involvement in SA initiatives requires initiators to tighten the “feedback loop” and demonstrate how people’s contributions have been used. The challenge is two-fold: to demonstrate efficacy and immediate results while also building support and momentum over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure feedback and followup.
Preserving memory	One of the greatest impediments to ensuring collective learning and improvement of SA initiatives over time is the high rate of staff turnover in both government and CSOs. Institutional memory and the chance to move beyond experimentation towards mainstreaming SA will be lost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build skills. • Share lessons.
Collecting information on costs	The current lack of information on the true costs of SA initiatives prevents any serious debate on their merits or drawbacks. This hardly serves the interests of either proponents or detractors of these new governance models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in data collection.
Estimating impacts	Even if complete information on SA costs was available, glaring gaps in our knowledge about the real impact of SA initiatives remain – on the process and outputs of government decision making and on outcomes. Evaluation should not simply be an optional extra but an essential component of these initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to evaluate, evaluate to learn.

7. QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This stocktaking of 40 social accountability initiatives in OECD countries has provided a very limited overview of the myriad activities underway. In so doing it raises more questions than it answers. Of these, the following appear to merit further in-depth discussion and investigation:

- ***Amplifying multiplier effects.*** Do SA initiatives have a greater impact if they are embedded in a wider policy framework or package? (*e.g.* is the SA initiative in Himmelin made more effective by the presence of a national Civic Participation Policy Programme in Finland?)
- ***Disseminating good practice.*** How are innovative SA initiatives disseminated? Which actors and practices help to ensure the transfer of ideas from one place to another, allowing initiatives to be adapted and adopted in different contexts?
- ***Me or we?*** Deliberation may change, reinforce or have no effect whatsoever on actors' preferences. Can a higher dose of deliberation move citizens beyond "pure" accountability based on narrow self-interest (*e.g.* feedback on the public services they themselves consume) towards a greater willingness to consider the wider public interest? If so, to what extent?
- ***Context matters, but how much?*** Can we clarify the role and impact of actors' strategies, and legal, political and cultural frameworks on the workings of specific SA measures? (*e.g.* compare a similar instrument at work in different countries).
- ***Commitment outweighs laws.*** In OECD countries, where basic governance arrangements are already in place, specific legislation plays less of a role as a catalyst for introducing social accountability than political leadership and funds. Mainstreaming social accountability and maintaining commitment over time, however, would appear to benefit from the presence of explicit legal or policy provisions.
- ***Does social accountability save money?*** The example of Mexico's social witness programme would indicate that, at least in some instances, direct public scrutiny and social accountability can save money for the public purse. To provide a complete answer, however, would require: a) better estimates of the costs and benefits of SA; and b) the costs of not ensuring social accountability.
- ***Who does it apply to?*** Does social accountability differ when applied to the executive, the legislature and the judiciary? Do international organisations have a role to play in promoting or benchmarking social accountability?
- ***With rights come responsibilities.*** When CSOs and citizens acquire the right to have a real impact on decisions – which are then implemented by government – who is accountable for failure? How can our definitions and practice of accountability be adapted to the shifting balance of rights and responsibilities?

Democracies, both old and new, have much to learn from one another. As the wider cross-regional SA stocktaking exercise illustrates, innovative practice in strengthening government accountability and engagement is by no means the exclusive preserve of OECD countries. The emergence and spread of participatory budgeting is itself instructive in this regard. This methodology was originally developed in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and has since been taken up by a growing number of cities across Europe. Countries that have traditionally been propagators of democratic values and practices now find inspiration from younger democracies. This exchange of experience, and the increasingly widespread experimentation with innovative tools for accountability, bodes well for the future of government openness.

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ANNEX 1. MAIN FEATURES OF THE 40 CASES

COUNTRY	Case name	National Level	Subnational Level	EU Level	Nat/ Sub	Gov led	CSO led	Info
Australia	Charter of Budget Analysis	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Australia	Community Cabinet	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Austria	Ombudsman Board	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Belgium	PB Mons	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Canada	Consultation on Budget	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Cz Republic	Natl. Consult. Education	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cz Republic	Assesment Procurement	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Denmark	Danmarksdebatten	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Finland	Himmelina part tools	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
France	Gonesse City Development	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
France	PB on Education	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Germany	OnlineDialoguePB	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Germany	Citizen Jury	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Greece	Municipal Check List	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Hungary	e-games	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Ireland	Natl. Social Partnership	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Italy	Alternative Budget Report	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Japan	Info. Disclosure Board	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Korea	Seoul Anti-corruption	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Korea	IBA for Women Policies	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Mexico	Budget Pub. Exp. Prog	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mexico	Social Witness	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Netherlands	PB of the Young	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
New Zealand	Consultation on City Plan	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Norway	Ombudsman	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
Poland	Bulletin public finances	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Portugal	Palmela PB	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Slovak Rep.	Assessing state org rep	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Spain	JUN Interactive city council	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
Spain	PB Seville	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Switzerland	PB Bollingen	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Turkey	Consultation on Transports	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
United Kingdom	Bradford Part. Budgeting	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
United Kingdom	Harrow Openg Budget	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
United States	California Budget Project	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
United States	Civic Engagement Project	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
United States	Exercise in Hard Choices	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
European Union	e-Learning on Part. Democ.	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
European Union	European Citizens Panel	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
European Union	Evaluation of EC consult.	0	0	1	0	1	0	0

COUNTRY	Case name	Consultation	Participation	Stage	Legal basis	Govt Inc/ prog	Binding	Repeat
Australia	Charter of Budget Analysis	0	0	dm	1	0	1	0
Australia	Community Cabinet	1	0	as/dm	0	0	0	1
Austria	Ombudsman Board	1	0	all	1	0	0	1
Belgium	PB Mons	0	1	as/dm	0	1	1	1
Canada	Consultation on Budget	1	0	as	1	0	0	0
Cz Republic	Natl. Consult. Education	1	0	as/dm	0	0	0	0
Cz Republic	Assesment Procurement	0	0	eval	0	0	0	1
Denmark	Danmarksdebatten	1	0	all	0	0	0	1
Finland	Himmelina part tools	1	1	all	1	0	0	1
France	Gonesse City Development	1	0	as	1	0	0	0
France	PB on Education	0	1	as/dm	0	0	1	1
Germany	OnlineDialoguePB	0	1	as/dm	0	1	1	1
Germany	Citizen Jury	0	1	as/dm	0	1	1	1
Greece	Municipal Check List	1	0	eval	0	0	0	0
Hungary	e-games	1	0	all	0	0	0	1
Ireland	Natl. Social Partnership	1	1	all	0	1	1	1
Italy	Alternative Budget Report	0	0	dm	0	0	0	1
Japan	Info. Disclosure Board	0	0	all	1	0	1	1
Korea	Seoul Anti-corruption	0	0	all	0	1	1	1
Korea	IBA for Women Policies	0	0	as	0	0	0	0
Mexico	Budget Pub. Exp. Prog	0	0	all	0	0	0	1
Mexico	Social Witness	1	0	dm	1	1	0	1
Netherlands	PB of the Young	0	1	as/dm	0	0	1	1
New Zealand	Consultation on City Plan	1	0	as	1	0	0	1
Norway	Ombudsman	1	0	all	1	0	0	1
Poland	Bulletin public finances	0	0	eval	0	0	0	1
Portugal	Palmela PB	1	0	as/dm	0	0	0	1
Slovak Rep.	Assessing state org rep	0	0	eval	1	0	0	1
Spain	JUN Interactive city council	1	0	as/dm	0	0	1	1
Spain	PB Seville	0	1	all	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	PB Bollingen	0	1	as/dm	0	0	1	1
Turkey	Consultation on Transports	1	1	as	0	0	0	0
United Kingdom	Bradford Part. Budgeting	0	1	as/dm	0	0	1	1
United Kingdom	Harrow Openg Budget	1	1	as/dm	0	0	1	1
United States	California Budget Project	0	0	as/dm	0	0	0	1
United States	Civic Engagement Project	1	1	as/dm	0	1	0	1
United States	Exercise in Hard Choices	0	0	as/dm	0	0	0	1
European Union	e-Learning on Part. Democ.	1	1	all	0	1	1	1
European Union	European Citizens Panel	1	0	as/dm	0	0	0	0
European Union	Evaluation of EC consult.	1	0	eval	1	0	0	0

COUNTRY	Case name	Scaled up down	Target group	Info on impact	Info on costs	ICT	Media/ advocacy	Info on eval
Australia	Charter of Budget Analysis	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Australia	Community Cabinet	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Austria	Ombudsman Board	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Belgium	PB Mons	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Canada	Consultation on Budget	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Cz Republic	Natl. Consult. Education	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Cz Republic	Assesment Procurement	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	Danmarksdebatten	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Finland	Himmelina part tools	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
France	Gonesse City Development	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
France	PB on Education	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Germany	OnlineDialoguePB	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Germany	Citizen Jury	0	1	1	0	0	1	0
Greece	Municipal Check List	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Hungary	e-games	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Ireland	Natl. Social Partnership	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
Italy	Alternative Budget Report	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
Japan	Info. Disclosure Board	0	0	1	1	0	1	1
Korea	Seoul Anti-corruption	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Korea	IBA for Women Policies	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Mexico	Budget Pub. Exp. Prog	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	Social Witness	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Netherlands	PB of the Young	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
New Zealand	Consultation on City Plan	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Norway	Ombudsman	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Poland	Bulletin public finances	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Portugal	Palmela PB	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Slovak Rep.	Assessing state org rep	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	JUN Interactive city council	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Spain	PB Seville	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	PB Bollingen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey	Consultation on Transports	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
United Kingdom	Bradford Part. Budgeting	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
United Kingdom	Harrow Openg Budget	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
United States	California Budget Project	1	1	0	0	0	1	0
United States	Civic Engagement Project	0	1	1	1	0	1	1
United States	Exercise in Hard Choices	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
European Union	e-Learning on Part. Democ.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
European Union	European Citizens Panel	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
European Union	Evaluation of EC consult.	0	1	1	0	0	0	1

COUNTRY	Case name	Deliberation	F/Partnership	Scrutiny	Proximity	Engage	Potential repetition
Australia	Charter of Budget Analysis	0	0	1	0	0	0
Australia	Community Cabinet	1	0	0	1	0	1
Austria	Ombudsman Board	0	0	1	0	0	1
Belgium	PB Mons	1	0	0	0	1	1
Canada	Consultation on Budget	1	1	0	1	0	0
Cz Republic	Natl. Consult. Education	1	1	0	1	0	0
Cz Republic	Assesment Procurement	0	1	1	0	0	1
Denmark	Danmarksdebatten	1	1	0	1	0	1
Finland	Himmelina part tools	1	1	0	1	0	1
France	Gonesse City Development	1	0	0	1	0	0
France	PB on Education	1	1	0	0	1	1
Germany	OnlineDialoguePB	1	1	0	0	1	1
Germany	Citizen Jury	1	0	0	0	1	1
Greece	Municipal Check List	0	1	0	1	0	1
Hungary	e-games	1	0	0	1	0	1
Ireland	Natl. Social Partnership	1	1	0	0	1	0
Italy	Alternative Budget Report	1	1	1	0	0	1
Japan	Info. Disclosure Board	0	1	1	0	0	1
Korea	Seoul Anti-corruption	0	0	1	0	0	1
Korea	IBA for Women Policies	0	0	1	0	0	1
Mexico	Budget Pub. Exp. Prog	0	1	1	0	0	1
Mexico	Social Witness	0	1	1	0	0	1
Netherlands	PB of the Young	1	1	0	0	1	1
New Zealand	Consultation on City Plan	1	1	0	1	0	1
Norway	Ombudsman	0	0	1	0	0	1
Poland	Bulletin public finances	0	0	1	0	0	1
Portugal	Palmela PB	1	0	0	1	0	1
Slovak Rep.	Assessing state org rep	0	0	1	0	0	1
Spain	JUN Interactive city council	1	0	0	1	0	1
Spain	PB Seville	1	1	0	0	1	1
Switzerland	PB Bollingen	1	0	0	0	1	1
Turkey	Consultation on Transports	1	1	0	1	0	0
United Kingdom	Bradford Part. Budgeting	1	1	0	0	1	1
United Kingdom	Harrow Openg Budget	1	1	0	0	1	1
United States	California Budget Project	0	0	1	0	0	1
United States	Civic Engagement Project	1	1	0	0	1	1
United States	Exercise in Hard Choices	1	1	1	0	0	1
European Union	e-Learning on Part. Democ.	1	1	0	0	1	1
European Union	European Citizens Panel	1	1	0	1	0	1
European Union	Evaluation of EC consult.	0	0	1	0	0	1