

## **CIVIC TECHNOLOGIES AS TOOLS FOR CHANGE: IS BALANCE BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTIONS A NECESSARY CONDITION TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CIVIC INNOVATIONS?**

Three years after its creation, the AVINA-Omidyar Civic Innovation Accelerator Fund has proved to be a catalyst for thriving experiences of technological innovations for social change in the region. It has turned into a very influential component in the ecosystem of civic technologies, encouraging creation, development and sustenance of civic applications created by regional organizations, which have leveraged that momentum to grow and have an impact in Latin American reality.

This report showcases the lessons learned in these three years of the Civic Innovation Accelerator Fund, the product of the alliance between the AVINA Foundation and Omidyar Network. These lessons help answer questions on the specific impact and weight of online (direct use of the platform) and offline (indirect use of the platform) actions.

### *Issues covered in the paper*

- a) First, the report provides an original answer to the often-asked question about what civic technologies are used for. And it does this focusing on the Fund's area of influence: the vast and heterogeneous region of Latin America. The Fund has undertaken the task of **reviewing a series of cross-cutting concepts which are part of the ecosystem**, and this section shares some conclusions (even those which are still but incipient and partial). "Considering the joint experience of the Fund and its projects, which has shed many lessons, it is possible to put forward today a contribution to the debate about what is needed in order for civic technologies to achieve a real impact among citizens".
- b) The second section delves into **citizen participation** from a theoretical perspective, in order to understand the conceptual framework in which civic technologies work and the impact they have (if any) on those civic involvement and control processes. Besides, it also weighs online-offline strategies in civic innovation projects. It surveys the most relevant literature on these issues. Finally, in a conceptual framework, the section illustrates the concepts which provide the theoretical foundation for the Fund's intervention and justify the need to articulate online and offline actions in civic innovation projects.
- c) In the third section, it discusses how the impact of civic technologies should be consolidated. Here, it presents the **theory of change** as it was originally envisaged. This relates to the way in which the Fund has outlined the **articulation of online/offline processes**.

*Why is a Theory of Change needed? For civic technologies to make a leap in terms of results and promote real transformations and social change in their ecosystem. "The goal is for the technological platform to turn into a strategic tool for citizen-government articulation and*

*dialogue and for the streamlining and implementation of actions, practices and public policies which make a relevant contribution to the citizen's quality of life".*

The Accelerator Fund's three years in the region make it possible for it to review its Theory of Change and revisit a series of lessons which could be turned into a significant contribution towards answering the above questions. For that reason, this section presents the **revised Theory of Change and the types of online and offline strategies identified as needed** in each level. It also presents a summary of the evidence gathered when assessing projects which provide an empirical foundation to the lessons.

After this stage of correction and revision, always based on data gathered through intensive assessments of all projects, it is possible to identify three fundamental aspects in the design and development of civic technologies: 1) the identification of a problem for society and citizens; 2) the development of a prototype designed based on citizen demands; and 3) the consolidation of strategic partnerships.

These three actions are illustrated with successful cases taken from the experience of the Fund's projects.

- d) The last section reviews the main future challenges of the civic applications to be developed in the region. However, it does not try to posit unmanageable or impossible challenges. Rather, after covering this part of the journey, the Fund has managed to survey the true challenges facing civic technology projects in our countries.

These three years of experience also make it possible to orient the answer for the initially-stated hypothesis: "Offline strategies are fundamental and necessary in order for civic technologies (online platforms) to act as catalysts of citizen participation, to have an effect on public policies and to improve people's lives". The report is, ultimately, a comprehensive answer to this question.