Citizen Participation in Policy-Making
- Seoul City's OASIS (oasis.seoul.go.kr) -

Introduction

Seoul City's Oasis is a portal which enables citizens to suggest policy ideas online, and participate in the city's policy-making process. Oasis was launched on October 10, 2006 in a way to achieve its goals; "enhancing creativity and imagination in administration".

The Seoul City has made various efforts to attract citizens' attention and increase their participation. Before its launch, it placed animated teaser ads avoiding bureaucratic elements. The City also added a new function, *so-called* "Wow Seoul" where citizens are able to upload their photos and video clips such as YouTube and gain information on major tourist attractions in Seoul. In addition, Oasis has been redesigned several times in a more user-friendly manner, so as to improve citizens' accessibility: *e.g.* "guide to Oasis" and "Seoul City policy". Before the re-design, a survey was conducted to reflect users' demands. So, a total of 22 experts and users participated, and addressed technical and design problems in using the portal.

Engaging citizens in the City's policy-making is an advanced two-way relation between the government and citizens based on the principle of partnership. This relation between the government and citizen can be defined as "active participation" by the OECD(2001)[1] where citizens can take a role in the exchange on policy-making by proposing their ideas and policy options. Although the government has the responsibility for the policy decision, it is noteworthy that the citizens' policy options can be adopted and implemented through this system.■

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[1] OECD (2001), *Citizens as Partners*, Paris, p. 16.
OECD defines government-citizen relations in three categories ; *information, consultation and active participation*. Information is a one-way relation in which the government provides information to citizens, while consultation is a two-way interaction between the two. Active participation is an advanced two-way relation, regarding citizens as partners in policy-making.

Process of Policy Making

The ideas posted on the Oasis website can be adopted in the following process: (1) suggestion, (2) discussion, and (3) a policy-adoption meeting.

1. First, once citizens post their ideas on the website, civil servants and a "Citizen Committee" review them and provide feedbacks.

   * "Citizen Committee", providing their inputs and comments on the ideas posted and voluntarily participating in discussion

2. For discussion among "*netizens*", the Seoul City selects some ideas based on the number of comments and hits, and recommendations by a "Citizen Committee". Then, experts, citizens and related civil servants discuss and assess the viability of those ideas. After the discussion, a working-level meeting will be held by the city government to decide on more feasible ideas that will be brought to the final policy adoption meeting, screening out those that do not fit policy implementation.

3. Finally, it holds a policy adoption meeting on a regular basis to decide the adoption of those ideas brought up by the working-level meeting. The Mayor of Seoul City chairs this meeting and invites idea providers, experts, related civil servants and citizens. Furthermore, all the proceedings of policy adoption meetings are recorded and uploaded on the website to share with other citizens.

Besides, the Seoul City posts pending policy issues on Oasis to get opinions and feedbacks from citizens. While the Seoul City is responsible for the selection of ideas in this process, the decision is made up based on the exchange of opinions among all those concerned; citizens, civil servants and experts. As a result, the openness and transparency in decision-making have been greatly improved. ■

Performance & Results

Since the opening of Oasis in 2006, public interests have been increasing, along with the number of visitors to the website. The Seoul City has continued to hold a policy adoption meeting every other month since the first meeting on November 21, 2006.

A total of 2.9 million citizens had visited Oasis and 19,395 ideas had been submitted as of December 31, 2008 – an average 24 ideas submitted per day. Additionally, among those ideas submitted, 71 ideas were adopted.

<Table 1>　the number of selected ideas in each process

No.	Date	Suggestion	Discussion	Policy-Adoption Meeting	Adoption
Total		16,408	1,399	103	71
1st	November 2006.	1,051	106	9	8
2nd	December 2006.	896	148	8	4
3rd	February 2007	1,625	145	9	8
4th	April 2007	1,221	76	9	9
5th	June 2007	848	60	7	3
6th	September 2007	1,239	74	7	4
7th	December 2007	1,637	67	7	4
8th	February 2008	1,003	74	7	4
9th	April 2008	1,250	92	7	4
10th	June 2008	1,335	124	7	4
11th	September 2008	1,282	96	10	7
12th	October 2008	1,677	116	7	5
13th	December 2008	1,344	221	9	7

Currently, 53 ideas adopted have been completed and implemented. Some examples are as follows. ■

1	Wheel chairs and baby carriages are available without charge in the parks for citizens' convenience.
2	The intervals in gratings of drain covers have been narrowed for those using wheel chairs or baby carriages.
3	Foreigners are also able to enjoy Korean movies with English subtitles offered.
4	Newsletter will be distributed to the households having foreign spouses, translated into various foreign languages : English, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese etc.
5	Citizens can cross a bridge on foot over the Han River. A bicycle road is also available. Diverse cultural events will be provided on weekends.

Lessons Learned

Oasis is drawing positive responses from citizens, as they are proud of the fact that their ideas are adopted as a city policy and have more opportunities to communicate with the city. Besides they can better understand city administration. The site also contributed to improving citizens' trust in government, and image of civil servants, while it serves as a channel through which citizens can express their opinions freely.

The success of the Oasis project can be attributed to various factors. Above all, the website encourages citizens to participate in the city's policy making by suggesting ideas, and reflects their ideas in city policies through discussions among citizens, civil servants, and experts, which attracts public attention to, and interest in the site. Also, Oasis proves that Seoul City takes citizens' ideas seriously enough, for the Mayor himself leads discussions about their ideas. The continuous development and success of the Oasis project lies in the Seoul Mayor's leadership and determination to keep up with growing demands for change – citizens' active participation, efficiency and transparency. Civil servants' passion is also one of the success factors.

Then, what makes Oasis different from other participatory systems? It enables both citizens and local governments to suggest their ideas for administrative reform, while other systems focus on citizens' complaints and grievances. In addition, they can suggest ideas and provide feedbacks by using Oasis in anytime they want, not on a temporary basis. With recognition of these benefits, Oasis has been benchmarked by many other institutions, including public agencies and local governments (Presidential Transition Committee, Korea Coast Guard, Busan Metropolitan City *etc.*), universities and private sectors.

Oasis will be more utilized as a good citizen governance model, which is beneficial to both citizens and government. Citizens can have a chance to directly involve themselves in policy-making process; on the other hand, the Seoul City can satisfy citizens' demands by reflecting their ideas in policy development. Also, the Seoul City provides incentives to citizens whose ideas are adopted. Once ideas are adopted, the idea providers are given a prize, equivalent to US $ 100 per idea. The ideas adopted are also re-evaluated and awarded for "creativity" by the city, while the prize winners given a range of US $ 500 to US $ 3,000. The incentive policies have also promoted more attention to Oasis, rewarding citizens' ideas.

Taken together, the Seoul City's Oasis plays a key role in establishing a citizen's governance model. It is also a good practice of e-governance that provides citizens with faster and better services by using the ICT. ∎

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