

SESSION VIII – What can we make of what we have heard for practice and policy - Going back to CITIGEN's research questions

Chairs: Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change and Advisor, CITIGEN, India and Lisa McLaughlin, Advisor, CITIGEN, and Associate Professor, Miami University, USA

The idea behind the session was to bring together the discussions taking place and the original research questions of the CITIGEN programme. As the project is a field building activity, revisiting the basic questions is essential. McLaughlin began the session by noting how the six projects had engaged with the terms and come up with their individual meanings, a process which had not occurred at the previous workshop in July 2010. She found it heartening considering that conceptualisation involved re-thinking meaning. She challenged the groups to apply and relate to notions of translocalism and transnationalism, as talking about policies requires to grapple at all levels of analysis. The number of action projects is a sign of the interest in creating bottom-up policy. She said that the projects should go forward in terms of creating energy and ripple effect with increasing numbers of people included in the network. She encouraged the group to work with international policy processes such as the UN, positioning oneself as 'an outsider within'. This was important to ensure the presence of alternative voices in such forums. Singh then opened the floor for comments based on both the research questions of the project and the discussions of the past days.

Sholkamy brought up two suggestions. She felt it was important to develop synergies between projects about ICTs, to look at how people are speaking to issues of technology as a political construct, meaning of affordability and access, speaking to global from the local. Furthermore, the projects need to problematise questions of epistemology and methodology, especially as field experiences are challenging methodological premises. Devika added that citizenship is used not as a frame but as an object to be investigated. She also welcomed the similarities between the Indian and Bangladeshi researches which forecasts closer conversations.

Oi Wan responded to McLaughlin's problematisation of the public sphere idea by mulling over the extent to which Western theory is relevant for the Chinese context. It is important to note that, in this case, the activists being interviewed were trained in Western concepts and hence, held those as their ideal. Lisa McLaughlin shared that she had come across alternative public sphere notions from the South, even though the expression was most of the time connected to Habermas.

Molo Thioune shared that she felt the project was building a field. From this perspective, she felt a level of theorisation would be required and hence suggested a think piece on the theoretical and methodological frameworks. She also said that IDRC was keen on supporting research which pushed for policy influence and added that she would be eager to see more of that element in the project.

Lewis felt that while an introductory framework was required, trying to squeeze all projects into one framework might not be realistic. Andrea Cornwall agreed and added that forcing might end up making the process more exclusionary. She did feel that there was a need to bring the method issues together though, with the thought of reflecting, learning and borrowing lessons from each other.

McLaughlin and Devika pointed out that the space of the project was necessary as it provided a supportive environment for meaningful research and interactive learning.

Singh wrapped the session by saying that there was a need to frame feminist policy through these debates as there are increasing numbers of practices that combine cheap Internet access to locked in proprietary mediums, which makes the public Internet less accessible at low costs.