URSS Project Report

A Comparative Study of E-Democracy Initiatives In UK Local Government

Leigh Bennett
Prof. Barrie Axford
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There are 468 Local Councils in Britain[1], each with its own website. The goal of this project has been to design a questionnaire that would give a better understanding of what each website is trying to promote, with particular interest in what models of citizenship (if any) are being promoted by local authorities. To design a questionnaire that would enable us to really understand what type of model of citizenship is being promoted, background reading was done in order to better understand the concepts of E-democracy in the 21st Century.

Because of this, the toughest period of the project was at the very start of the research. The problem was two-fold. Firstly having never studied the area of E-democracy in depth, it was particularly difficult to decide on the best place to start. Obviously the internet held swathes of information which has been completely useful, in many ways. The concept of E-democracy has been debated heavily in academic literature; the primary task of the project was to conduct an extensive literature review in order understand the concepts in greater depth. However, the terms we are trying to investigate – E-democracy, E-governance, E-government – can be so general, and having to trawl through various websites and articles was a very time consuming process. This led to the second problem, which seemed like a state of inertia due to having so much information and not being able to really decide where to go with it. However, this is understood to be part of the research process, and therefore a very eye opening experience, though it felt as though one was not quite prepared, not due to any lack of explanation, but more to the point of having never attempted this type of research before. Various concepts that are instrumental to the idea of E-democracy needed to be understood in their entirety before moving on. Having never done this type of research before – from having a more or less blank slate and building from it, was exceptionally difficult. Whilst writing essays and what not, it is very easy to cut large portions of notes and references, and arrive at a clear and concise end and conclusion. With this project, the initial research led only to a questionnaire, which itself will lead to a need for more research and understanding.

In hindsight, the research process would have been aided with a more stringent set of goals. Whilst the goal that was being worked towards was clear, the sheer scale of the project being undertaken was daunting and intimidating. For the URSS project there is a final display and report to work towards, the research that was actually being carried out extends much further than the URSS project itself. It almost seems unnecessary to be writing an evaluation report in the middle of a project that is not completed. The research that has been carried out has been a valuable tool for the project, and goes forward into the questionnaire design. The problem is that, for the researcher the project is now in someone else's hands.

The benefits of the type of research for undergraduates is that it is one way to show and encourage designing a major research project. While the same can be said for dissertations, it is possible to see the benefit the URSS project, because it is a job and can begin to show what is part of research after university. This is particularly valuable for those that are doing dissertations that do not require quantifiable data. It is a chance to be able to undertake a major research project that is different to anything most students will do when they are at university. It can also show the benefits of what field research does for any number of areas in academic research, particularly at a larger scale than most are used to.

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1 Wilson, David & Game, Chris, (2006). "*Local Government In The United Kingdom*". Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Page 5.

Ultimately there have been more benefits than not in participating in this project. The chance to work on a pilot study that will be turned into a cross national project has been eye opening and informative. It was also very beneficial to be part of a research team for the first time ever, and has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience.