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10. Involving citizens through multi-platform strategies: *Transparency Watch* in North Macedonia¹

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how civic activism utilises digital media to engage citizens in combatting corruption. It provides a case study of how civil society organisations (in this instance, *Transparency International-Macedonia*) are employing digital media and developing digital tools for creating awareness of the types and levels of corruption occurring within North Macedonia as well as creating a means for civic engagement in the processes of combatting corruption. It is through the examination of the *Transparency Watch* (TW) project in North Macedonia that we begin to understand the complex strategy for developing and employing digital media to engage citizens. In doing so, the chapter views activism for countering corruption from the grassroots level through data collection and infrastructures. It explores the opportunities and challenges faced by grassroots and civic organisations in such endeavours.

TW as a case study assists in developing our understanding of the processes and decision-making involved in the deployment of digital media and tools by civic organisations and grassroots movements. Through this we can begin to better analyse how the relationship between data, civic activism and anti-corruption efforts are understood in practice. At the heart of this case study is this relationship between data production, its uses and civic activism². From this case study we begin to question the how, what and why of data production by civic activist groups and grassroots movements in the framework of their anti-corruption efforts. Addressing these questions allows us to grasp civil society actors' assumptions on and perceptions of the importance of data (Cinnamon, 2020, pp. 628–29) and of the ways in which they can be utilised. Such assumptions do not always give consideration to the value placed on *what* data is collected and from *whom*, as has been raised by some researchers

who have referred to the idea of production/collection of ‘good enough data’³ (Gutiérrez, 2018, p. 5; Gabrys et al., 2016). TW allows us to examine why data is produced and what purposes presentation in different formats serves – for example, within a visual ‘live’ map of specific instances of corruption as reported/verified, and through numerical representation of total numbers and types of corruption by categories. From examination of the proposed outcomes, we can then delve into the earlier processes and decision-making that were the foundations for the development and deployment of a multi-platform strategy. In the specific case of TW, a multi-platform strategy refers to its creation of an Ushahidi-based open-source platform for reporting instances of corruption, creation of both Android and Apple-based mobile phone apps to interact with the platform, and the use of a dedicated Facebook group. The early processes and decision-making for the project are key to understanding the rationale for the selection of these specific digital tools, and how these have also evolved over the span of its running since 2011. It also showcases TW as a case study of data activism ‘in-practice’.

To this end, the chapter will be separated into several sections. In the next section, the chapter provides a review of two different strands of current research linking the evolving literature on civic activism and digital technologies to anti-corruption efforts. These two strands will provide the framework for better understanding the decision-making in the development of the TW platform for the reporting of incidents by citizens, as well as the deployment of a multi-platform strategy by *TI-Macedonia*. Following this, the next section will provide an explanation of the choice of case study and briefly describe the methods employed in the data gathering and the analysis. This section will be followed by a description and examination of the multi-platform strategy through archival documentation and interviews with key actors involved in the *TI-Macedonia* project to identify key considerations in its development and deployment. Here it focuses on four key points relevant to the design and deployment: a) accessibility; b) visualisation; c) security and privacy; and d) challenge sustainability of citizen engagement in using the platform. It then provides analysis of how the data collected by the multiple digital tools are ‘used’ for distinct but inter-related outcomes. The conclusion offers reflections on lessons learned from this case study to better understand how a multi-platform strategy of digital media can be used to counter corruption. It will also offer considerations of how this study may be useful to other practitioners designing and deploying digital technologies in anti-corruption efforts.

FRAMING DATA IN CIVIC ACTIVISM

Over the past decade there has been a growth in literature on grassroots organisations and their use of data. Some authors have highlighted the underlying

assumptions about data perceived as a tool of power and one of influence that can be harnessed by grassroots activists. This in turn creates a particular framework for understanding how digital technologies are used by civic activists in production and adoption of data for challenging social issues (Cinnamon, 2020; see also Burns, 2018 and Kennedy, 2018). For this case study, ‘crowdsourcing’ platform Ushahidi, combined with the use of social media such as Facebook and the evolving mobile technology over the past decade, provides the framework for analysing digital tech choices.

Crowdsourcing For Civic Engagement and Data Production

‘Crowdsourcing’ as a term refers generally to the idea of using digital technologies for collaborative purposes – whether to co-create, share knowledge, coordinate activities, or find solutions to societal challenges (de Vreede et al., 2013). While there are a number of crowdsourcing platforms that exist for various types of engagement of people, there has been little research conducted as to what drives people to engage with crowdsourcing activities. One such study by de Vreede et al. (2013) produced a theoretical model that identified three specific elements for user engagement in crowdsourcing: ‘topic, goal clarity, and motivation to contribute’ were deemed crucial for user engagement (ibid, p. 94). These identified elements are crucial to the selection and use of Ushahidi for the TW project. Ushahidi was one of the forerunners in crowdsourcing applications – created as an alternative means of broadcasting information in the post-election violence in Kenya 2007 when the government established a ban on free media and placed restrictions on all public reporting of events. It is an open-source mapping tool that filled a gap in early crisis management events and was utilised in particular for its ability to accurately map geographically using reports from citizens via text messages, online reporting, or social media posts (de Jong et al., 2016, pp. 79–80). Early uses of the crowdsourcing app did so for improving crisis management coordination, such as in 2010 with crisis mapping in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti (Morrow et al., 2011; de Jong et al., 2016).

Evaluations and research into the use of the platform across different projects demonstrated its relevance as a mapping tool and for the engagement of citizens (Morrow et al., 2011; Mora, 2011; Hellström, 2015). However, a few key issues were raised in some studies related to the methodologies employed by organisations that could affect the quality and quantity of information collected. Methodological considerations about the reporting structure – through different input modes of data collection, the processing of data – in terms of timeframe, and credibility within the validation stage to counter fears about data manipulation and representativeness of data gathered (Morrow et al., 2011; Mora, 2011) were seen as crucial. Such methodological considerations

are determined by the users of the platform (for example, organisations), and located within the development stage of *using* Ushahidi rather than with the platform itself. Ushahidi has been described as ‘only 10% of the solution’, and that ‘the other 90% is up to the organisation using the platform’ (Meier, 2010).

Mobile Technology and Social Media in Corruption-fighting Efforts

Within corruption-fighting literature and beyond, there has been growing research into how digital technology – in particular, how social media and mobile technology are used to mobilise citizens (Berki et al., 2011; Wickberg 2013; Hellström, 2015; Dubow et al., 2017). Their uses have increased over the past decade for combatting corruption. One such study by Hellström (2010) discusses the use of mobile technology for combatting corruption, and promoting good governance and accountability. A few of the key lessons learned from Hellström (2010) focused on the design of mobile tech use and identifying the intended beneficiaries, inclusion of clear guidelines for engagement by citizens with such tech (for example, in terms of anonymity), and that use of mobile technology was a part of a larger strategy for combatting corruption. Other literature has examined the use of mobile phone technology in relation to specific uses related to corruption fighting in a number of areas, such as the use of smartphone technology for monitoring of health and education services, government budgets, and comparing performance of government bodies in different districts (Chêne, 2012).

Like with the growing body of literature examining the relationship between mobile technology and citizen engagement, there has been growth in studies examining the use of social media to also engage citizens. Recent studies have analysed social media use for anti-corruption campaigns in Indonesia (Yulianita et al., 2020), as well as examining how the use of social media by activist groups can create new opportunities for collective action. However, Berki et al. (2011) identified social media as a means of creating new opportunities and also how activist networks online could reflect and create new divides. In particular, the study identified a ‘digital divide’ as a real possibility of new tensions, and as a factor that has not been a part of the conventional thinking by drivers for use of social media in anti-corruption efforts. There seems to be a widely held perception of digital technologies as something ‘good’ for combatting corruption without addressing the possibility of the alternative. The growing use of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram as outlets for reaching citizens and to encourage citizen engagement has been seen as both a significant opportunity, but one with significant challenges. Some of these challenges identified revolved around internet access – costs, connectivity as well as hardware availability, and differentiation across regions within many countries; as well as the fact that different social media serve different

purposes in terms of content and distribution (Frolova et al., 2017). Another challenge raised focused on the anonymous nature of social media – allowing for reporting without fear of reprisal and at the same time creating a ‘credibility burden that could hinder its effective use in the anti-corruption fight’ as identified by those examining social media for use in corruption-fighting within Nigeria (Uzochukwu et al., 2014, p. 5). Other studies have focused on how initiatives were defined and measured in terms of outcomes achieved and of the longer-term sustainability of many initiatives to have a real impact on government institutions and legislation (Quaggiotto, 2011).

The Nexus of Civic Activism, Digital Technologies, and Anti-corruption Efforts

While the literature presented previously is by no means exhaustive, the considerations it highlights shed some light on the growing use of digital technology for anti-corruption efforts. It has viewed the growth in use of digital technologies by civic activist groups as a positive and easier route to engage citizens for a variety of causes or social challenges in our developing world of technofixes. However, this growing use and reliance on digital technologies, and the data produced through them for supporting activist causes, should be viewed through the lens of a wider strategic trend we are seeing develop. This interrelationship between activism and data through digital tech revolves around organisations’ growing communication strategies. As Mattoni (2020) mentions, activists use digital media as part of a broader strategy of communication to reach a diverse range of goals. There is perhaps an underlying assumption about perceptions of power and agency of data held by civic organisations and grassroots activists (Cinnamon, 2020). This assumption will be discussed later in the chapter’s discussion and analysis of TW and the perceived role of data for driving anti-corruption outcomes.

However, one notable aspect not addressed in many such studies to-date has been the one of accessibility. This is something that will be briefly addressed later in the chapter, when examining activists’ key considerations for developing and deploying a multi-platform strategy. Indeed, it is interesting to note that there has been growth in the use of social media, mobile technologies, and crowdsourcing platforms like Ushahidi. Nonetheless, these digital technologies not only require connected and secure infrastructures both at the national and regional levels, but they also need to be accessible to users. This is so because without it, the ability of civic activism to make effective use of digital technologies for combatting an issue like corruption, is much more challenging.

CASE STUDY AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Corruption is seen as a serious obstacle within many countries where it has a fundamental impact on the social and economic rights of citizens, as well as on the overall progress of a country towards becoming a stable democracy based on good governance and the rule of law and with a prospering economy. North Macedonia is no different from many other countries around the world, facing issues of governance, corruption and outward migration flows of its younger generations due to social and economic issues, which in turn have created additional social and economic strains in the country. The selection of North Macedonia is one of access and interest. The author of this chapter has direct connections to the TW project through work with the think tank, *Center for International Relations* (CIR), which developed TW in cooperation with the *TI-Macedonia* team.

Transparency Watch is a project ‘encouraging citizens to report corruption’⁴ launched in July 2011, creating a comprehensive system for reporting cases on corruption using crowdsourcing technology based on the Ushahidi platform. *TI-Macedonia* initially encouraged citizens to report corruption they experience or witnessed, using a dedicated web-based platform and a free SMS number (075/076 145111). The platform was created for two purposes:

- a. *Empower victims and witnesses of corruption to use electronic tools, internet and social media*, to address their grievances and thereby enable them to hold institutions accountable in the implementation of anti-corruption related laws.
- b. *To strengthen the ability and willingness of institutions* to receive and act upon corruption-related complaints and to bring about systemic improvements (Transparency International-Macedonia, 2010).

Linked to the platform was the creation of the Advocacy and Legal Advice Center (ALAC)⁵ within North Macedonia. ALAC was created to provide those reporting incidents with the opportunity to gain legal advice to pursue corruption claims through the North Macedonian legal system should they desire to do so. The overall aim of the project was to address ‘tackling and eliminating corruption from society in North Macedonia, as a means for establishing governance and a system of rule of law’, highlighted on *TI-Macedonia’s* website. As *TI-Macedonia’s* Secretary General, Metodi Zajkov stated, ‘Although there had been numerous efforts to tackle corruption in [North] Macedonia, the problem persists to be a major issue in most public and social spheres of the country’ (Neos, 2013, p. 107). Additional pressure back in 2011 of corruption as a serious problem in various sectors of the country’s economic and political

life was seen as a priority due to its impact on European Union membership prospects.

As stated in the Introduction, TW is a case study that allows us to analyse the role and impact of data infrastructures on civic engagement specifically focused on anti-corruption efforts. It is on the *how* and *why* of the data infrastructures developed and employed – in this particular case, the decision-making process on selection for the TW platform itself as well as the other digital tools created and how these along with *TI-Macedonia's* social media presence collectively form the multi-platform strategies for combatting corruption in North Macedonia. The two strands of literature introduced earlier provide the framework for better understanding and analysing the decision-making process and outcomes mentioned. It rests upon highlighting some of the underlying assumptions previous literature has mentioned about data production and civic engagement through digital technologies. Alongside this will be analysis related to the overall digital technologies strategy deployed in the rapidly evolving technological arena over the past ten years.

The data collection uses a multi-method qualitative research approach. This entails archival and online documentation about TW, data collected from and showcased on the live TW platform (both quantitative and qualitative data), review of *TI-Macedonia's* Facebook page and presence, and three semi-structured interviews with the initiators and decision-makers of TW and the multi-platforms strategy using digital technologies. The documents include internal reports, news articles and briefs, speeches, and visual data sets collated and collected from the TW platform. The TW platform is the central hub for processed and verified corruption incident reports, and the *TI-Macedonia* site contains some of the public reports, news briefs, and articles on the multi-platforms used for *TI-Macedonia's* anti-corruption strategy. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online between December 2021 and January 2022 and involve senior decision-makers both from *TI-Macedonia* and the CIR. There are always strengths and limitations to research methodologies selected. The use of multi-method qualitative research should provide a good depth of understanding of the decision-making processes that were drivers for the multi-platform strategy used in this case study. It will in most cases also allow for corroboration of facts between documentation and interviews.

Ethical issues and considerations were taken into account in the data collection – in particular as it involved interviews on a sensitive topic, but also in the review and analysis of the TW project data. Ethical considerations were raised due to the nature of the topic (corruption) and protection of interviewees' current and future well-being given the potential changes to future governments within North Macedonia. The author's institution's specific ethics review procedure was followed to obtain consent from participant-interview-

ees prior to participation and provide interviewees with anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

ANALYSING THE MULTI-PLATFORM STRATEGY: KEY CONSIDERATIONS TAKEN

A clearer understanding of the decision-making processes for the development of TW starts with an explanation and description of the landscape in which the project emerges within North Macedonia. It addresses the key question of how do civil society actors decide what digital media is best for them to counter corruption?

Landscape For Decision-making

Since its inception in 2006, *TI-Macedonia* has been working within the country towards its vision of the ‘elimination of corruption from the Macedonian society and the establishment of a system of rule of law and a society in which citizens and institutions oppose corruption and unlawful policies’ (*TI-Macedonia* website). While work on corruption-fighting had been ongoing, a major turning point came with the publication of the 2010 Global Corruption Barometer. The report highlighted the high level of corruption perceived by citizens within the country. The barometer results for North Macedonia highlighted government institutions were viewed as a large part of the corruption problem within the country. This, along with the United Nation’s Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2011 report on corruption in the Western Balkans served as the impetus for reshaping corruption-fighting strategies within North Macedonia.⁶ It was noted in the UNODC’s survey on public sector bribery completed in 2010⁷ that ‘one in six respondents were exposed to some form of bribery with a public official in the 12-months before the survey’ (UNODC, 2011b). This survey included over 28,000 people in 2010 from the region. In addition to this finding, the report provided comprehensive data about sectors and corroborated the Global Corruption Barometer findings, that corruption was seen as a major issue among citizens within the region and how it impacted their everyday lives.

Much of the corruption reported in the UNODC report by North Macedonians was paid out to speed up processes and shorten waiting times for such things as doctor appointments and public services (UNODC, 2011a, pp. 24–25). One of the interesting results of the UNODC report in 2011 was that it noted bribery was not one way, in that an almost equal percentage of respondents said they instigated the offer to bribe an official as those who dealt with public officials who either explicitly or implicitly requested a bribe (UNODC, 2011b). The reports highlight that for those looking to tackle corruption within the region,

and specifically in North Macedonia, it was not only looking at combatting corruption within institutions but involved finding ways to positively impact citizens' daily lives so that bribery would not be seen as the 'normal' that embeds acceptance of corruption at lower levels. Here, it is not just about the grand corruption to be tackled, but the petty corruption⁸ that has longer-lasting impact on democratic governance, rule of law and protections for citizens.

Key Considerations in Development of the Multi-platforms Strategy

Capacity and vision

It was from the findings in these reports about how corruption was being experienced and perceived, that those within the *TI-Macedonia* office began to look for new strategies to fight corruption and came to view engagement of the population directly as the answer. As Zajkov commented, there was recognition in 2010 that 'any successful anti-corruption initiative must be grounded in citizens' experiences and engage constructively with government to bring about real changes' (Neos, 2013, p. 107). The findings highlighted in the UNODC report and by *TI-Macedonia* in 2010 (TI 2010/2011) coincide with staff discussions at the CIR about factors impacting economic development of countries globally. As a CIR staff member with extensive background in economics and economic development noted back in 2010, 'there's a link between corruption and economic development' and it would be 'interesting to see ...given new technologies, if there's anything that could be done' to facilitate efforts to combat corruption and 'see what effect it has on economic development'.⁹ This led to the CIR team thinking about possible solutions and then seeking a possible case study of where it could be tested. The 'match' between CIR and *TI-Macedonia* came by chance with another CIR staff member from North Macedonia who happened to have connections to *TI-Macedonia* at the time.

Two other key points in the decision-making process focused on capacities, and involved the timeframe for development and financing of such a project. While the timeframe for the actual development of the platform was stated to be around two to three months by those involved in the technical support, there were also a few days related to sourcing the technical expertise to work with Ushahidi's platform and source the financial support for the initial development of the TW platform. In addition to the limited funding available to *TI-Macedonia* for undertaking this pilot project, other financial support was provided by the CIR, and the team were able to obtain a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy.¹⁰

Target audience within the larger population

It is through the collaboration on the development of a digital tool to combat corruption and acknowledging that any anti-corruption strategy should include

civic engagement, that we begin to see where activism and digital technologies meet. Work began on developing the rationale that would shape what kind of technology would be selected for the pilot project. The ‘target’ audience of the country’s population was a key consideration by the team in the selection of the type of digital tech selected for TW. While the general feeling was for all sectors of the population to engage with the corruption monitoring tool, many in the team acknowledged that in terms of engagement, the younger North Macedonian population were a group that needed to be reached and were seen as less engaged in politics and the governing processes back in 2010/2011 and more focused on the availability of economic opportunities.¹¹ The perceptions and experiences of corruption were seen by much of the younger generation as undermining governance and economics – issues that were stunting the growth of the economy and opportunities available in North Macedonia. There was recognition within the team that any failure to significantly tackle corruption would perpetuate apathy within civil society and risk a further ‘brain drain’ of the country’s younger generation who were looking elsewhere for economic security and opportunities.¹² In fact, it was a prominent note during the interview when speaking about the development of North Macedonia’s multi-platform strategies that this corruption-fighting work was seen as fundamental to the continued democratic development of the country as well as its future economic prospects.¹³

Accessibility issues

In terms of the initial thoughts about how to use digital technology to engage citizens in the fight against corruption, focus was on how corruption impacted economic development and governance and looking at how technology could be used to ‘empower marginalised communities’ to report instances of corruption confidentially.¹⁴ This led the group to examine a variety of digital technologies deployed in other parts of the world and looking to see how these technologies were being utilised: could they be adapted and repurposed for corruption monitoring, and what levels of engagement of civil society had been experienced through these various platforms. Another important note impacting development was examination of engagement by North Macedonians (in particular, the younger aged population) with social media and mobile phones in 2010. Given the digital engagement trends seen in the country, along with this younger section of the population having been identified as the target audience, it was decided that the development of a platform that could be accessed from a web-browser on a mobile phone or computer would be the best means for engaging the target audience as well as the larger population. People were already using these technologies in their everyday lives and there was a huge growth within the mobile phone take-up over the few years prior to TW’s launch, with growth expected to continually rise for the foreseeable future.

The aim was to find a means of utilising this growing technological trend to enable citizens to anonymously report instances of corruption via Facebook, email, and mobile phones. After consideration of possible solutions and having utilised other digital media to engage citizens (for example, creation of a Facebook page), the team decided to create the web-based TW using the Ushahidi crowdsourcing platform.

As noted by the team and others, including David Kobia, co-founder of Ushahidi, the open nature of the platform is what distinguished it as a new approach. Where the more traditional approach to information gathering and sharing was seen as unidirectional in terms of flow of information (for example, an organisation would collect and be the source of information from stakeholders involved and then collate, process and share this data), Ushahidi allows for multiple stakeholders to submit 'live' data reporting, that then is subsequently translated, categorised and geotagged to be shared with the wider community via the platform's mapping tool (de Jong, 2016, p. 81). This key point about stakeholder interaction with the platform and the multi-directional flow of information made the platform a good fit for what the team envisioned for TW as a corruption-monitoring tool. It allowed interested citizens and other organisations to access the data collected and visually see where incidents of corruption were occurring and what types of corruption, rather than a written report of the data collected delivered annually.¹⁵ The ability of Ushahidi to collect data from multiple sources (for example, text messages – SMS, email, online website link, and smartphone applications) was an important consideration.

The platform would have multiple access points for users, providing a means for collection and collation of data on the corruption monitoring taking place across the everyday lives of citizens. In addition to the crowdsourced web-based platform, additional tools – both digital and more 'traditional' were created to enable access for all citizens. These included a telephone number, email address, postal address, and later, both an Apple-based app and an Android-based app to allow users a quicker means of reaching the web-based crowdsource platform. This reporting of incidents is the first step of the process and is stored within the project's secure database. At this point of the process, details of the report are not included in data appearing on the TW platform (in terms of incident type/place), but the report will show as a 'Reported Incident'/'Received reports – raw count'. This designation lets visitors to the platform know about an incident being reported but contains no details of where or what was reported (Ushahidi Staff, 2013).

Visualisation as an important factor in combatting corruption

TI-Macedonia's Secretary General Zajkov thought the idea that individuals could see the data collection visually and via a free platform, would be a good

means to engage citizens. In evaluating the choice of digital technology to engage citizens in corruption monitoring in the organisations' decision-making processes we see the view held was that 'the new platform will reach far more people than any other project we have done in the past' (Zajkov in Geelan, 2011a). Zajkov stated that 'I strongly believe the social media have the power to engage a diverse mass of young people who can make big changes in society through their active involvement' (Geelan, 2011a). In particular, the mapping and report metrics through Ushahidi to present a 'true' picture of corruption on the ground was an important part of the decision for using the platform.

In reflecting on this choice of digital technology – it exposes how, as Cinnamon (2020) and Gutiérrez (2018) discuss, grassroots organisations are drawn to digital technologies that enable them to proactively engage in data production. Within the TW platform – visitors are provided with two views of trended data – it shows all reports submitted, as well as details for validated reports (Neos, 2013, p. 110).¹⁶ The platform provides multiple streams of data visually – there is the geographic map, a dynamic timeline that allows users to filter data by month/year, and a table that allows for selection to specify the type of incidents reported one is interested in and to view data related only to that category. The data from the dynamic timeline and the listed categories of incidents reported informs what geographical data is shown on the map. That data is being produced not only to be utilised for proposing policy changes to governments, but more importantly, the data and access to it in 'real time' is part of the larger communication strategy to create engagement of citizens in the normative discourses about corruption. The mapping, timeline, and categories list are viewable by visitors to the live website https://transparency-watch.org/?l=en_US.

The visual allows for greater impact on 'holding people to account and make sure people really feel a part of the anti-corruption process' (Geelan, 2011b). The visualisation of the corruption incident reports also allows citizens to take a more active interest in what types of corruption are occurring and where, in terms of location, and this allows for citizens to feel like their 'voices' are being recognised through incident reports. This in turn encourages awareness among other citizens and hopefully, the desire to engage in discussions and actions to address corruption as an issue (locally and nationally).

Security of data and privacy of participants

In the early development stage, TW identified some key challenges, these included: the issue of access via multiple mediums, privacy for individuals electing to file reports, and security of sensitive data. In delving further into this issue of security of data being collected from multiple points (as demonstrated in Figure 10.1 – Data Processing Structure Plan), it was learnt that a number of levels of security have been put in place to prevent hacking and breaches to

access the data and trace its lineage. During the interview, the levels of security were created from the point of contact by citizens with an incidence report through storage of the ‘raw’ data, to the process of validation and conversion of the qualitative data of raw reports into quantitative categorised ‘readings’ of the data collected.¹⁷ Due to the sensitive nature of the data being collected, the interviewee asked for details not to be recorded and published, to maintain integrity of the security protocols in place.

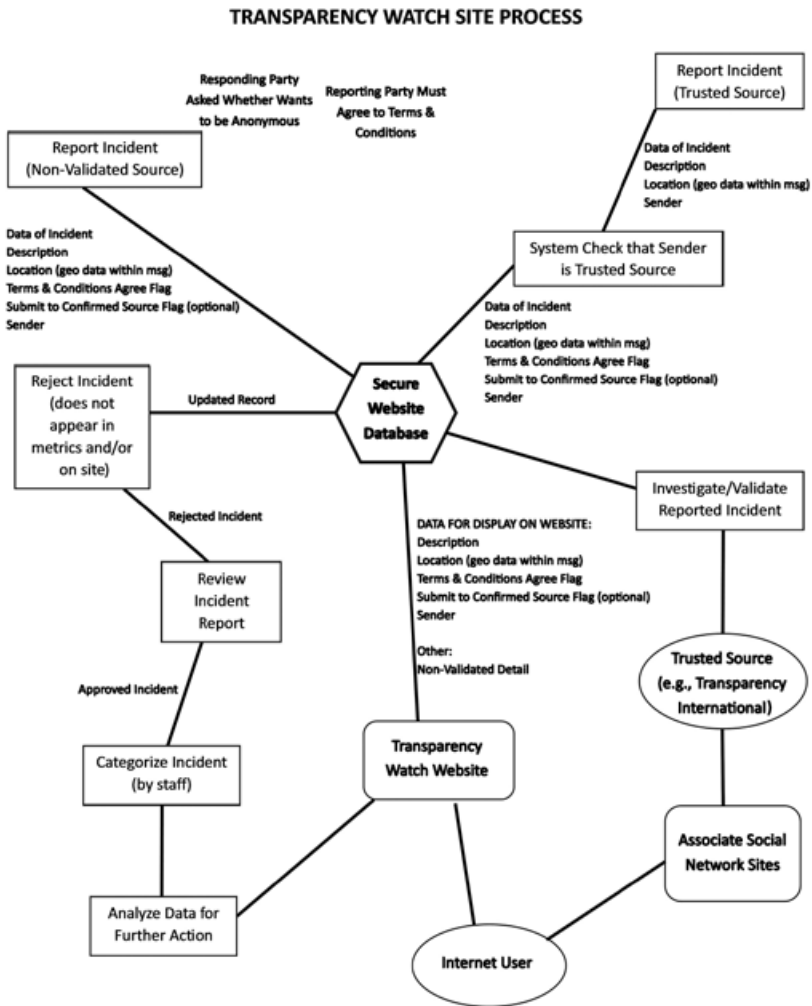
In addition to securing data and minimising access to raw data, there is also the issue of privacy for individuals reporting incidents. One of the key provisions made for privacy was the setting of the 5-kilometre radius of incidents on the mapping tool. This was because ‘reports of corruption are inherently of risk to the person reporting it’ (Ushahidi Staff, 2013), so this is the reason for the safeguarding feature mentioned earlier – whereby details of reports are only displayed on the platform site once there has been validation of the reported incident *and* where the reporting party has approved the report to appear publicly in detail.

Multi-platforms strategy: data collection and inter-related outcomes

In this section, we explore and analyse key issues related to the multi-platform strategy used for corruption-monitoring in this case study. Presented below is a graphic that outlines a draft of the TW site process for the data production process. It highlights the thought process of decision-making, as well as the capture, verification, and communication of the data collection, through the TW platform as well as through social media.

Data collected

While TW started with its platform designed through the Ushahidi crowdsourcing tool, the plan from the beginning was to expand to include mobile phone apps with the growing mobile use within the country. As the prevalence of mobile use has grown in North Macedonia along with advancement in mobile technology, this allowed for the creation of mobile apps (Android and Apple) that can be linked to the TW platform. These were completed in 2012 and 2013 respectively for the Android app and the Apple app. The apps offer the same basic functionality as the platform on the website and in fact are integrated with the platform for the recording of incidents and viewing of the mapping tool and data¹⁸ (Neos, 2013, p. 111). The Android mobile app allows users to report cases of corruption as well as view reported cases by category and geographic location – as available via the platform on the internet (Transparency International-Macedonia, 2012). One important aspect to note about the app (listed as *Prijavi Korupcija – Transparency International-Macedonia* in the Android app store), is that the application does not reveal private information to the public. In addition to the web form via the platform for reporting inci-



Note: Permission for re-use of the graphic here provided by CIR and TI-Macedonia.
Source: *Transparency Site Process* documentation (internal document), TI-Macedonia/Center for International Relations (2011).

Figure 10.1 Data processing structure plan

dents and the use of the smartphone apps available, reports can still be filled in via telephone or email to the *TI-Macedonia* team, as well as using the hashtag #korupcjaMK on Twitter. One note of the apps’ use via the smartphone was

someone logging a report at Skopje International Airport coming into the country, and their experience with border control and customs officers.¹⁹

The following two graphics (Figures 10.2 and 10.3) show results of all data collected in 2011 and then in 2021. It demonstrates the level of data collected; however, it only provides total numbers in terms of traffic and not the number of incident reports or categories of incidents submitted and then passed through the verification process (refer to Figure 10.4 for an example of these details).

Summary

Reported period Year 2011
 First visit 14 Sep 2011 – 06:33
 Last visit 31 Dec 2021 – 23:15

	Unique Visitors	Number of Visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Viewed Traffic*	< = 2,528 Exact value not available in "Year" view	3,448 (1.36 visits/visitor)	44,738 (12.97 pages/visit)	219,812 (63.75 hits/visit)	2.47 GB (752.66 KB/visit)
Not Viewed Traffic			36,211	54,523	451.47 GB

*Not viewed traffic includes traffic generated by robots, worms, or replies with special HTTP status codes.

MONTH	UNIQUE VISITORS	NUMBER OF VISITS	PAGES	HITS	BANDWIDTH
JAN 2011	0	0	0	0	0
FEB 2011	0	0	0	0	0
MAR 2011	0	0	0	0	0
APR 2011	0	0	0	0	0
MAY 2011	0	0	0	0	0
JUN 2011	0	0	0	0	0
JUL 2011	0	0	0	0	0
AUG 2011	0	0	0	0	0
SEP 2011	178	1,403	4,229	4,229	47.97 MB
OCT 2011	840	16,126	68,488	68,488	514.59 MB
NOV 2011	1,383	18,996	98,035	98,035	1.20 GB
DEC 2011	1,047	9,203	49,060	49,060	740.84 MB
TOTAL	3,448	44,738	219,812	219,812	2.47 GB

Note: Permission for re-use of the graphic here provided by CIR and TI-Macedonia.
Source: Internal Summary Report generated by TW – CIR – TI-Macedonia/Center for International Relations (2022).

Figure 10.2 Data collected of incident reports from 2011

Processing of the data: Verification and validation of incident reports

The processing of data is a part of the verification-validation stage. Once a report is received, *TI-Macedonia / ALAC (Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre)*²⁰ staff then perform an investigation of the reported incident. A review of the complaint is conducted based on the information submitted, any related data, and on interviews with complainants. This investigation could be quick, or it may last months before a resolution is reached. A decision is based on the available information, including follow-ups with citizens throughout the process, and with inclusion or reference to institutions or government entities as necessary. Only through this thorough process, taking due diligence to

Summary

Reported period Year 2021
 First visit 01 Jan 2021 – 00:05
 Last visit 31 Dec 2021 – 23:57

	Unique Visitors	Number of Visits	Pages	Hits	Bandwidth
Viewed Traffic*	< = 17,003 Exact value not available in 'Year' view	27,850 (1.63 visits/visitor)	93,260 (3.34pages/visit)	157,787 (5.66 hits/visit)	1.49 GB (56.07 KB/visit)
Not Viewed Traffic			282,559	316,023	3.94 GB

*Not viewed traffic includes traffic generated by robots, worms, or replies with special HTTP status codes.

MONTH	UNIQUE VISITORS	NUMBER OF VISITS	PAGES	HITS	BANDWIDTH
JAN 2021	1,447	2,207	7,001	12,635	79.13 MB
FEB 2021	1,184	1,788	6,908	12,126	105.92 MB
MAR 2021	1,542	2,264	10,521	16,880	166.04 MB
APR 2021	1,566	2,374	6,418	15,303	146.28 MB
MAY 2021	1,562	2,378	6,569	11,746	104.44 MB
JUN 2021	1,509	2,405	6,004	12,494	119.09 MB
JUL 2021	1,356	2,252	5,702	10,336	102.49 MB
AUG 2021	1,428	2,330	8,822	13,358	108.26 MB
SEP 2021	1,423	2,435	6,056	10,505	101.07 MB
OCT 2021	1,342	2,450	10,466	14,874	178.59 MB
NOV 2021	1,362	2,615	13,201	17,267	228.18 MB
DEC 2021	1,282	2,352	5,592	10,263	85.60 MB
TOTAL	17,003	27,850	93,260	157,787	1.49 GB

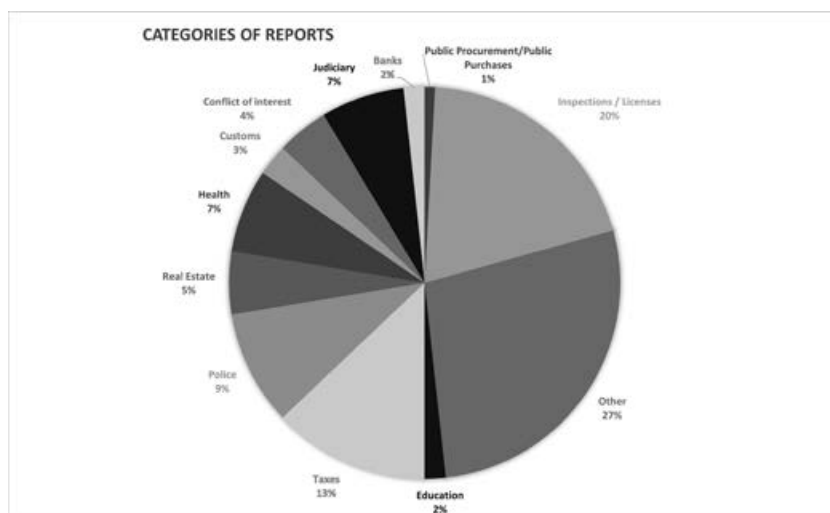
Note: Permission for re-use of the graphic here provided by CIR and TI-Macedonia.

Source: Internal Summary Report generated by TW – CIR – TI-Macedonia/Center for International Relations (2022).

Figure 10.3 Data collected of incident reports from 2021

determine the validity of individual reports, will the case then be decided as admissible or if not, unsubstantiated, or false. Once a report has been validated, it will be updated on the project's website from 'Reported Incident' to 'Validated/Verified'. It is only after the completion and passing of the validation stage that complainants are then asked if they agree to have the anonymised report details included on the platform site as part of the data visibility. At this point in the process, ALAC²¹ will provide complainants with the findings of the review and present options available to the citizen should they wish to pursue the complaint further and take legal remedies in their own capacities²² (Neos, 2013). This processing of data through the validation stage represents, as Morrow et al. (2011) and Mora (201) mentioned, a means of ensuring credibility, as well as countering fears about data manipulation. The credibility issues are of importance in data activism, as Cinnamon (2020) and Gutiérrez (2018) mention, due to how and why activists use data collected from digital technologies like TW. It also integrates what was said by Meier (2010), that the data collected in the use of an Ushahidi-based platform is only as good as the verification and validation processes that an organisation creates around collection. Figure 10.4 demonstrates the composite results of incident reports from 2015 as an example, that have gone through the verification process and

are then assigned to categories. The figure indicates 84 incident reports filed during the period and categorised under 12 categories of corruption.



Note: Permission for re-use of the graphic here provided by CIR and TI-Macedonia.
Source: Internal Summary Report generated by TW – CIR – TI-Macedonia/Center for International Relations (2022).

Figure 10.4 Data collected of incident reports from 2015 to highlight the categories of incident reports

Communication of data: accountability and contribution to systemic improvements

The overall purpose of TW²³ was to ‘enhance the quality of democratic governance by enabling citizens to participate in the fight against corruption by using new electronic tools and at the same time, to effectively hold their government accountable and contribute to systemic improvements’ (Neos, 2013, p. 108). This contribution to greater accountability of the government and the implementation of systemic improvements would lead to improvements in people’s lives and prospects. It links to issues about the uses and perceptions of ‘power’ of data by civic and grassroots organisations. The issue of ‘poor data’ was a concern raised by the *TI-Macedonia/CIR* team as well as by earlier users such as Ushahidi Haiti who identified ‘data, technology, accuracy and credibility, exposure and privacy’ (de Jong et al., 2016, p. 88) as key issues for the credibility of a project overall. Such concerns and Ushahidi’s own assessment that ‘poorly identified (and displayed) data not only gives the public a false picture of what’s really being reported but does not provide

the organization accurate information views to be used [for] monitoring and evaluating the project' (Ushahidi, 2013), were reinforcement for creating a validation process within the TW process. This was created to minimise the damage that false claims could have on the overall work of the project. These decisions and modifications to processes demonstrate a key point raised by the likes of Gutiérrez and Milan (2018) and Cinnamon (2020) of 'the way that discourses that ascribe value, power, and agency to data shape a belief that citizen engagements with data can lead to the advancement of grassroots political goals' (Cinnamon, 2020, p. 625). Within projects like TW, there is an understanding of how engaging citizens in corruption monitoring creates 'data' about citizens' experiences of corruption for pursuing resolution of the issues raised. This data also provides quantifiable examples of corruption in terms of the number of experiences and trends (types of corrupt acts) found. In both cases, the data can and is used to build awareness and change attitudes among citizens that can then travel 'upwards' to have impact on institutions and policymaking within the country.

For example, 'In the period from 2012–2015, a total number of 481 written letters were sent as requests for access to public information, complaints, appeals and additional contacts on local and national level. Total number of answers from the institutions is 318' (Transparency Watch, 2016). While the content of the correspondences described here cannot be shared publicly in order to secure clients' identity and privacy, it does demonstrate how data production from the grassroots level is understood as a necessary tool to drive changes in legislation and processes. It is a tool for impacting governmental changes, but importantly as well, it has the knock-on effect of increasing public awareness and attitudes about corruption in North Macedonia. An example cited from the TW documentation and interview (2021) was the impact that TW was having on legislative change through the use of data produced in multiple ways. Here we are referring to numbers produced of the total incidents reported, the total number of validated reports, and then using the specific details of some reports to highlight corrupt practices that should be changed. On November 09, 2015, the Assembly adopted the law for protection of the reporting persons. This change refers to the whole country, not for particular cities or regions, and allows for whistleblowing by those working within public institutions.

The use of data production has been one part of *TI-Macedonia's* larger strategy for fighting corruption. It has paired this with the use of traditional media and social media. To this end, in 2013, a team of *TI-Macedonia* lawyers collaborated with journalists working in the field of civil and investigative journalism for NOVA TV²⁴ to create a series of TV stories reporting on the analysis of citizen reports submitted to TW. The story documentaries aired on regional stations in North Macedonia with special debates on the topics high-

lighted in the stories, for the purpose of creating awareness and drawing the public into debates about corruption, governance, and engagement for change (Neos, 2013, p.112). Additionally, it created a Facebook page as another tool to connect with supporters and provide updates on reports and events, similar to Berki et al.'s (2011) reflections on how social media tools could be harnessed to fight corruption. This page has been set up to provide users with information and updates about corruption-related issues and legislation within the country and has around 1.8 million members signed up. This is seen as an interesting uptake given the population in North Macedonia is somewhere around 2 million.

CONCLUSIONS: REFLECTIONS ON CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE DIFFUSION

Arguably one of the key challenges that the TW project has experienced, like many of the digital technology tools used for combatting corruption, has been that of *sustainability*. Sustainability here relates to two things: firstly, it is sustainability of the platform itself as a digital tool. The TW platform is now over ten years old and requires upgrades to keep it working but also to allow it to consider digital and societal changes that have occurred over the past decade in North Macedonia. Related to this issue of upgrading is the requirement for funds to make new improvements to how the platform works, how it integrates with the mobile applications created, and how the entire infrastructure is secured from the growing global threats of cyberattacks.

The second way in which we can consider sustainability is in terms of users of the TW platform. Over the past decade, while overall growth has been seen in hits to the platform, and the number of reported incidents has also increased, the report numbers have also fluctuated. The link between the TW platform and the TW Facebook page provides a good strategy for countering sustainability issues related to users.

Other reflections are related to sizing and transferability of a multi-strand strategy that uses social media in combination with a crowdsourced platform and mobile apps, like TW have. There is perhaps a strong possibility of diffusion for use of such a strategy by other grassroots and civic activists' organisations in combatting corruption. The two key questions that will have a more determining impact on using TW as a model for other similar organisations based elsewhere, are: a) funding to develop and deploy a crowdsourced platform with associated mobile applications and a social media presence combined to reach citizens and impact discourses around corruption within a country, and b) the 'landscape' within the prospective country. By 'landscape' I mean, what type of government is in place, what has been the role of civic organisations previously in the country and how do people perceive their

role in relation to institutions, and how do they view the issue of corruption within their country or communities?

Despite such large question marks about the adaptability and possible diffusion of the TW platform and strategy elsewhere, it should be noted that there has been specific interest by other groups in getting assistance and advice from *TI-Macedonia* to develop similar platforms of their own. *TI-Macedonia* has over the last several years assisted others to develop similar, smaller platforms. For example, *TI-Macedonia* have used what it has learned to assist Kosovo's TI team to develop a similar platform to monitor public procurements specifically.²⁵ One of the key questions in considering the diffusion of the ideas and multi-platform strategy used by *TI-Macedonia* is *WHY* would other grassroots groups decide to do so? For what purpose and to what end? What considerations do other groups share like *TI-Macedonia*'s own? If like North Macedonia, other grassroots groups are looking to 'hit' multiple outcomes simultaneously – using data production as a means to drive change at the institutional and societal levels, raising awareness to drive citizen engagement directly in combatting corruption – then a multi-platform strategy would maximise impact. Such a strategy would also allow an organisation with limited resources to consider how they can tier development of their corruption-fighting strategy to achieve desired outcomes in the longer-term.

NOTES

1. Fieldwork for this chapter was completed with the support of Transparency International-Macedonia, the Center for International Relations (USA) and with financial support from UACES (University Association for Contemporary European Studies), UK.
2. On this topic, see also Chapter 9 in this volume.
3. This term has been used to refer to non-expert generated data such as citizen groups through participatory and crowdsourcing platforms like Ushahidi.
4. www.transparency-watch.org.
5. ALAC – Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre was implemented as a project in 2003. The ALAC Centre provides free legal advice to victims and witnesses of corruption while also seeking to 'translate the experiences of citizens into structural changes through evidence-based advocacy' (Neos, 2021, p. 110). Further details about the function and history of the ALAC related to *Transparency Watch* can be found in the interview article by Neos (2013).
6. For both the Global Corruption Barometer and the UNODC Report on bribery in 2011, the use of North Macedonia's previous name – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYR of Macedonia) is used in these reports as this was in use prior to 2019.
7. This was completed with funding from the European Commission.
8. Grand corruption generally thought of as an abuse of high-level power and influence that benefits an individual or the few at the expense of the many. Petty corruption is typically considered the more everyday abuse of entrusted power

by those with limited authority in their positions (for example, low-to mid-level public officials) who use this position/authority for personal gain. It frequently involves the exchange of favours or small sums of money.

9. Interview with Interviewee Z, conducted on 14/12/21, online.
10. National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is an independent, non-profit foundation dedicated to growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world. Further details about its work can be found at: www.ned.org.
11. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
12. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
13. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
14. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
15. Interview with Interviewee Z conducted on 14/12/21, online.
16. Interview with Interviewee Z conducted on 14/12/21, online.
17. Interview with Interviewee X conducted on 20/01/22, online.
18. Interview with Interviewee A, conducted on 14/12/21, online.
19. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
20. See also Chapter 7 in this volume, which focuses on the analysis of the whistleblowing platform *ALAC – Allerta Anticorruzione* of Transparency International Italia.
21. The *Transparency Watch* project worked in conjunction with a provision to provide legal assistance (through its legal assistance centre – ALCA) to those wanting to take further action in their experiences of corruption (Interviewee Y, Interview A 2021). The project has had a two-fold objective (Interviewee Z, Interview A 2021; documentation on ALCA process).
22. Additional note, the ALAC provides legal advice but is not a legal service that can assist citizens to pursue their cases in court. Interview with Interviewees Z and Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.
23. *Transparency Watch* – the digital platform launched by *TI Macedonia* in July 2011. (<http://transparency-watch.org/>).
24. NOVA TV, <http://www.novatv.mk/>.
25. Interview with Interviewee Y conducted on 14/12/21, online.

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