

INTERNET APPLICATION FOR ENCOURAGING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS

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Introduction

After the advent of localization, globalization and informatization, planning strategies are experiencing a dramatic change in Korea. One of the phenomena is the increase of citizen participation in the planning process, thus resulting in both positive and negative effects on the implementation of many projects and policies.

One recent statistics shows that the conflicts occurred since local autonomy by popular vote in Korea are increasing. Among 173 cases of the conflicts, 97% are related with local development such as refuse disposal facilities, local development projects, intergrated facilities of large region, so on. 65.3% of the conflicts are resolved and the others are remained as unsolved. Many local planners, therefore, have to seek ways to find efficient resolution of conflicts through public participation.

The current dramatic development of information technology can be an effective tool of vitalizing citizen participation. Numerous government authorities throughout the world are using the internet as a tool to enhance

communication. The internet which is a powerful tool for communication can help the participation of citizens in the planning process of local development. The question is how information technology can aid the participation effectively.

The purpose of this study is to examine the possibility of aiding the internet to assist public participation and provide effective ways for broadening public participation in planning process using the internet. In order to achieve this purpose, this paper consists of following steps;

First, this study reviews the literature related to citizen participation and the benefits of using the internet. Second, empirical research is made on the status of the internet application for encouraging citizen participation. The cases are 20 cities/ counties in Kyongnam provincial area. Lastly, this paper tries to find the way in which the local government can communicate with people more efficiently through the internet.

Literature Review

Theory on participation

Citizen participation in its most general terms is any activity by citizens to influence the public decision making, and can be in organized or unorganized form, initiated by either the government or the citizens. In broad sense, citizen participation can take place in various manners ranging from public opinion surveys and public hearings, to citizen advisory boards, to lobbying by special interest groups, to individual contacting of bureaucrats and politicians, and to rallies and protests, as long as they are undertaken in an effort to influence or reflect the citizens' interests in making public decision.

The value of citizen participation can be explained by two democracy theories: classical theory and elitism. Classical theories of democracy place a high premium on self-rule by an engaged citizenry, dispersed power, and the common good pursued through collective deliberation. However, most citizens are not knowledgeable and active enough to help to manage more

complicated society. Few citizens were active participants in the political process as we can see in the low voting rate today.

On the contrary, political theorists responded to classical theory by dividing the political system into two groups: the elite and the remaining mass of citizens. The success of democracy rests on the elites being informed and participative; the citizen's role is limited to choose their representatives among competing elites within a broad political consensus. It is the chosen elite, the representatives of the people, who engage in the kind of deliberation that, according to classical theory, would normally reside in the people themselves.

Urban planning and citizen participation: the pros and cons

After local autonomy in Korea, many local development projects are facing conflicts, and thus not implemented. They are partly because the plan itself is not practical without considering the characteristics of local areas. Sometimes, even though the plan is reasonable, the projects are not smoothly implemented because the residents misunderstood the project because of lack of information or regional egoism.

Urban planning now emphasizes process as much as product, if not more. The reason is clear: too many plans had accomplished nothing other than occupying space on a shelf. The more people involved in developing the plan, the more likely that the plan will appropriately address issues that are important to the community. Plans that have engaged many people have the support that is needed to bring the plans to fruition.

What are the benefits of greater involvement of citizens in deciding matters of urban and regional policy. The merits of citizen participation are particularly elevated in the modern society characterized by diversity and complexity. The citizen participation might ameliorate the current level of cynicism about government and thus enable many local policies implemented. Citizen participation is also an effective means to protect the rights of the minority and the powerless, thereby ensuring equity in public matters.

Citizen participation is argued for not only on equity grounds but also on

efficiency grounds. The disillusionment with technocratic decision making has made policy makers turn to citizen participation for better answers. Participating citizens can be an accurate and rich source of information necessary in policy formulation. Policy implementation becomes easier and smoother, free of public resistance, when public support has been enlisted at the policy formulation stage.

On the other hand, most citizens are not prepared to participate in anything approaching direct democracy. Citizens lack information and, as such, provide nothing more than uninformed opinion. Citizens lack the time and the resources to become sufficiently informed on the multitude of complex issues they would confront. Citizens are susceptible to manipulation by those who would stir up their passions and prejudices or who would expend substantial sums of money to manipulate public opinion to serve their own, narrow special interests.

Benefits of using the internet for citizen participation

The internet can enhance citizen participation by ameliorating the problems of the current methods of citizen participation. Due to the internet's powerful function for communication, the usage of the internet by local government is growing and becoming more prevalent. In the case of Kyongnam, all local governments are using the internet as a tool to enhance citizen participation.

There are some useful functions in the internet which help citizen participation. They are electronic mail and web sites. E-mail that is the most widely available on-line tool has really opened up a whole new arena of communication that never existed before. People who do not have the opportunity to communicate on a regular basis with their elected officials, can make questions that need answers through E-mail.

Although E-mail may be perfect for some agencies, many cities and counties have been able to expand their communication options by setting up web sites. Now, in addition to offering E-mail capabilities, most of local governments have their own web sites that provide 24-hour-a-day accessing

to chat rooms, public records, legislation, business hours and office locations, job opportunities, weather updates, and so on.

With such powerful function for communication, the internet can give a great benefits both to local government and community. To the local government, documents or informations can be transmitted electronically at minimal cost in short time. This can replace huge packages of paper being sent via the mail system or courier. Distance and time are no longer barriers to communication between local government and community. It is also possible to collect information about community that was previously not readily available.

To the community, the internet allows easy access. The internet is available 24 hours per day. For the public, this means that they can access public information and services when required, at their convenience. Applications like electronic mail and online group discussions can bring people together in ways never before possible. This is by no means a replacement for face to face interaction. However, it can be a supplement to face to face contact, in an age when hectic lifestyles make it difficult to schedule meetings and social gatherings.

Methods of citizen participation and its problems in Korea

Citizen participation in the process of urban and regional planning in Korea can be achieved in several ways. They are Bansanghoe (neighborhood monthly meeting), public hearing, committee, public complaints or petition, citizen initiative or citizen forum, referendum, and public opinion monitoring. However, most of them are not effective because of some practical constraints. Basic concepts are as follows.

Bansanghoe (neighborhood monthly meeting)

Bansanghoe is a neighborhood residents' monthly meeting. It is the most common and long-lasting citizen participation system in Korea. Issues

discussed in Bansanghoe are not regional policy related matters, but individual or neighborhood related problems (i. e., public health, road and transportation, sewage problems), demanding solution from the government. However, it often receives criticism of being superficial because it was often used as an announcement window of the government policy rather than as the citizen participatory path. If the operation of Bansanghoe is improved, it therefore could become the most efficient channel of citizen participation in the local autonomy era.

Public hearing

Public hearing is a way of involving citizen participation to collect opinions of citizens or experts on policy and planning issues of local government. The law requires that public hearings should be held for the special issues such as urban planning and medium-term development plan, so on to receive feedback from the public on those issues.

Until today, however, public hearing is open to criticism because of the several reasons: first, it is partially opened because of limited announce time and selected participation. Second, the speakers are intended to be selected among the pro-government persons, so that public hearing is often used to justify the policy of the government agency. Third, public hearing does not usually hold at the very beginning of policy making. Fourth, since the issue raised at the public hearing are not related to residents' concerns, their interests in attending public hearings is marginal.

Therefore, the government should announce the detailed contents of projects and agenda to the public in advance. Also, public hearing should be held at the first stage of the project, and gives audience enough chance to express their opinion.

Committee

Committee is a type of citizen participation which collects experts' opinion in the process of policy-making. Different committees can be organized

according to the characteristics of the agendas. The committees, however, have common problems because of the following reasons. First of all, since committee members are sometimes appointed among pro-government experts or socially leading upper class, thus lack the representativeness of common people. Second, the participation through committee is often procedural step because committees just review or advise on the almost made-up decision rather than participate in policy-making process. In order to use these committees as a real avenue for citizen participation, advisory committee should have balanced members after carefully considering their representativeness.

Public Complaint and Petition

Citizen can participate in local policy making process by directly suggesting or petitioning to local self-governing body or local council. Since these complaints aim at protecting property rights or increasing property values, they pursue private interests rather than public interests. Since these public complaint and petition make them vulnerable to favoritism and corruption, local government should handle citizen requests through more official path.

Citizen Initiative or Citizen Forum

With the introduction of local autonomy, each local government established an administrative innovation team to plan urban management strategy and to collect ideas from citizens. It always receives suggestions via mail and PC on-line and gives rewards to citizens who suggested good idea. Citizens can submit their own development plan and city governments will review it to incorporate in urban planning. Citizen forum is a participatory system in which the persons concerned get together and exchange information for decreasing the gap among their different thoughts.

Referendum

Korea introduced referendum which is a type of direct democracy with the revising local autonomy law. This referendum will contribute to the development of the local autonomy at its fixing stage. If the referendum, however, is misused, the following may appear: first, possibility of local council's powerlessness; second, amplification and justification of regional egoism; third, the possibility of downfall as a protector of class conservatism; and fourth, the possibility of the degradation connected to the corrupted oligarchical politics by the local leaders. It may be too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this referendum at this point, since it has been carried out only for a short time.

Public opinion monitoring system

Public opinion monitoring system often puts its emphasis on citizens' desire and opinion on administration by appointing residents as monitoring personnels who are interested in local administration. Public opinion monitoring promotes citizen participation by collecting information on residents' desires or evaluation of administration. The problems of these monitoring system are that representativeness of public opinion handed over by monitors is low, since the head of local government appoints pro-government persons as monitors and the monitors do not have firm responsibilities in some cases.

In conclusion, the current methods of citizen participation have some common problems caused by limited time and participation. The internet can ameliorate the negative aspects of ongoing citizen participation methods and help enhancing citizen participation.

Citizen participation through home page of local governments in Kyongnam Provincial Area.

20 cities/ counties in Kyongnam Provincial Area have opened their home pages and utilized them as a communication tool. In the beginning, home pages were utilized as advertizing tools for local government. Therefore, they were not utilized for citizen participation tools. In recent years, however, most of local governments revised their home pages and strengthened the function for citizen participation.

In order to evaluate the citizen participation through home pages of local governments, the analysis of home pages was made first and then survey for netizens and government officials were conducted. Analysis of home pages is made focusing on the functions of home pages and degree of information release for citizen participation.

Analysis of home pages of local governments

Home page menu

In order to vitalize citizen participation through the internet, local governments should provide cyber space for citizen to share local information and opinions on local affairs. Two or three years ago, home pages of local governments in Kyongnam are very simple and utilized as a tool for advertising their achievements. However, since the last one or two years from now, most local governments revised the menu of home pages and strengthened the function for citizen participation.

Most local governments open discussion forum between citizen and local government and local council. Therefore, since January this year, many citizen participate in local affairs. Because citizen participation through the internet is in the beginning stage, most of the subjects of participation are related to individual concerns, suggesting very few local development ideas.

City-County	Menu of Home Page				
	Information release	Forum among citizens	Forum between citizen and government	Forum between citizen and local council	On-line survey /voting
Changwon -Si	O	X	O	x	O
Masan-Si	O	x	O	O	O
Jinju-Si	O	O	O	O	x
Jinhae-Si	O	x	O	x	x
Tongyeong-Si	O	x	O	O	x
Sacheon-Si	O	x	O	O	x
Gimhae-Si	O		O	O	
Miryang-Si	O	x	O	x	x
Geoje-Si	O	x	O	x	x
Yangsan-Si	O		O	x	x
Changnyeong -Gun	O	x	O	O	x
Geochang -Gun	O	O	O	O	O
Goseong-Gun	O	x	O	x	x
Hadong-Gun	O	O	O	O	x
Haman-Gun	O	x	O	O	x
Hamyang -Gun	O	x	O	O	x
Hapcheon -Gun	O	x	O	O	x
Namhae-Gun	O	O	O	O	O
Sancheong -Gun	O	x	O	O	x
Uiryeong -Gun	O	O	O	O	x

Note: * Si means city; Gun means county.

Information release and citizen participation

All local governments in Kyongnam provide various general information about community, public administration and local economy through the internet. Most of them, however, are simple statistics such as total population, tourist information, and so on. They do not provide local development plans

in detail. Without accessing the useful information, citizens do not participate in developing local policies. Few cities or counties provide various development-related plans do enhance the citizen participation.

City·County	Types of Information				Participation
	General community information	Public information	Economy information	Development information	No. of Participation through E-mail
Changwon-Si	OOO	OO	OO	O	147*
Masan-Si	OO	OO	OO	OO	2,435
Jinju-Si	OO	OO	OO	OO	2,839
Jinhae-Si	O	OO	O	O	1,256
Tongyeong-Si	O	OO	OO	OO	1,576
Sacheon-Si	O	OO	O	O	659
Gimhae-Si	O	O	OO	OO	1,373
Miryang-Si	OO	O		OO	1,317
Geoje-Si	O	O	OO	O	2,750
Yangsan-Si	O	OO	O	OO	1,101
Changnyeong-Gun	OO	O	O	O	1,550
Geochang-Gun	O	O	O	O	1,540
Goseong-Gun	O	OO	O	O	1,137
Hadong-Gun	O	O	O	OO	226
Haman-Gun	O	O	O	O	813
Hamyang-Gun	O	O	O	OO	884
Hapcheon-Gun	OO	OO	O	O	1,509
Namhae-Gun	OOO	OO	OO	OO	2,699
Sancheong-Gun	OO	O	O	O	505
Uiryeong-Gun	OO	O	O	O	778

Notes: OOO information is provided in detail

OO information is provided fairly

O information is provided poorly

* Changwon-Si recently revised the home page, losing all the E-mails.

Few local governments such as Namhae release important development projects and policy which can have impact on local residents. But, it still provides the abstract of the plans or projects instead of providing full contents.

For frequency of citizen participation through home pages, city is higher than counties. This is because cities have more population and good information infrastructure such as information center and exclusive lines for internet.

Survey Results

The survey was conducted in two different groups; netizens and government officials in Kyongnam Provincial area. The netizens were selected among citizens who have experienced citizen participation through home pages of local governments. The government officials were selected from the departments which need citizen participation for work. Survey for the government officials was made by mail and survey for citizens was made electronically. Since the survey sample was limited for citizen on line, the present study does not permit generalizing the survey findings. The total sample size is 300. 300 is for netizens and 100 for government officials.

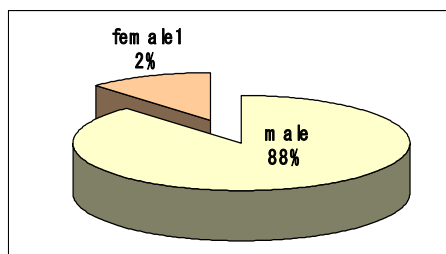
Survey for netizens

Demographics:

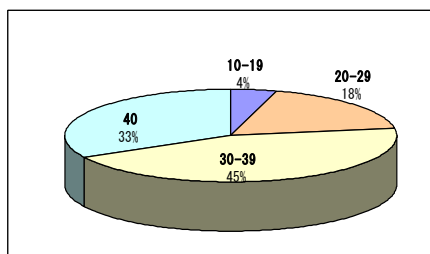
This section describes sex, age, and job. Among survey respondents, 88% were male and 12% were female. As for the age of respondents, nearly four-fifths (78%) were more than 30 years old. Particularly, the percentage of the

people between the ages of 30 and 39 was 45. In the survey, 24% of the respondents were office workers. The second largest group was businessmen, factory workers and service workers. The third was administrative officials.

□ Sex of respondents

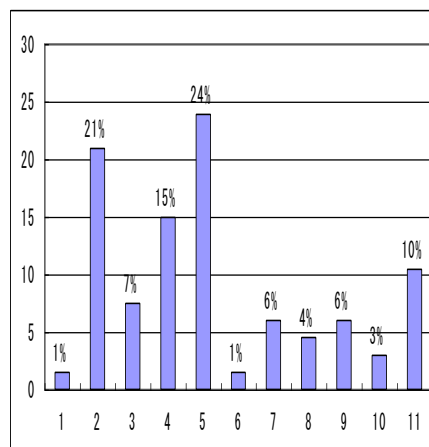


□ Age of respondents



□ Job of respondents

	Jobs	Rate
1	agriculture, fishery	1%
2	business, service	21%
3	professional	7%
4	administrative official	15%
5	office worker	24%
6	labour, part-time	1%
7	technician	6%
8	housewife	4%
9	student	6%
10	inoccupation	3%
11	others	10%

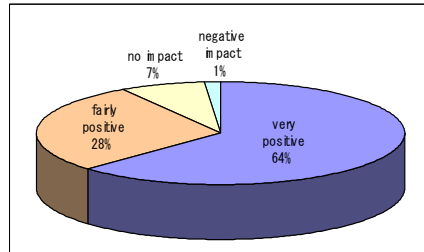
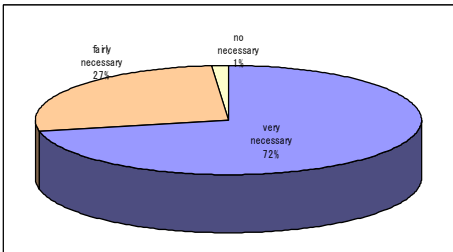


Citizen participation consciousness

Nearly three-fourths of respondents said that citizen participation is

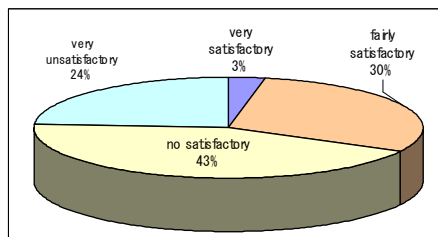
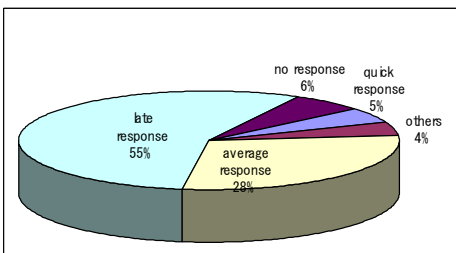
strongly needed for local development policy making. One-fourth responded that citizen participation was needed fairly. For effectiveness of the internet, 64% also expect that the internet would be very useful tool for citizen participation in the near future. 28% said that the internet would somewhat encourage citizen participation

- How necessary is citizen participation
- How effective is citizen participation for developing local government through the internet? policies?



The survey also inquired about the response time of local governments to the netizen’s participation through home pages. 55% said that the response time was very late. 28% said the response time was fairly satisfactory. As for the reflection of their opinion on the local affairs, 43% of them were not satisfied with the results. In other words, most of them think that local governments do not consider citizen’s opinion seriously.

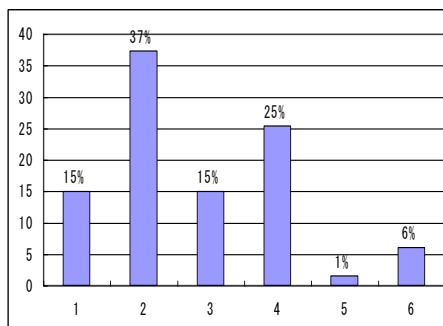
- How soon does local government respond to your opinion or request?
- How do you evaluate the reflection of your opinion on the local policies?



The survey also indicates that the obstacles of citizen participation through the internet is insincere response reflection (37%), poor information release (25%), low cyber etiquette of net citizen (15%), and so on.

□ What are the obstacles of citizen participation?

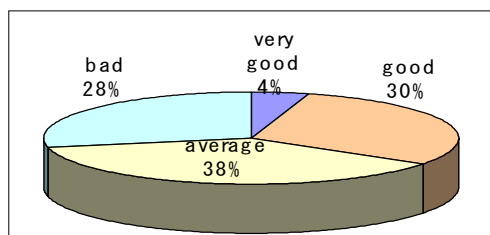
	Questions	Rate
1	government official's negative attitude toward citizen participation	15%
2	insincere response and reflection of government officials	37%
3	low cyber moral of netizens	15%
4	poor information release	25%
5	unstable security	1%
6	others	6%



Home page improvement

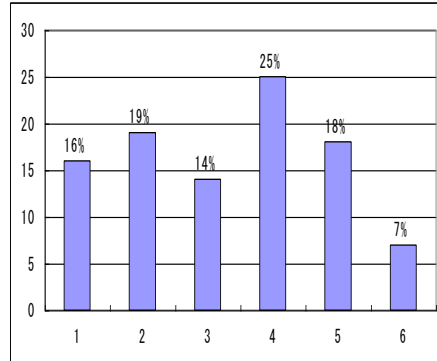
The survey found that 30% thought that the home pages of local governments were fairly satisfactory. 38% thought home pages were not bad and 28% thought home pages were bad and thus should be revised. The function that should be improved in home pages are to provide more information (25%), to offer civic forum among citizens (19%), to provide direct communication channel to government officials in charge (18%), and so on.

□ How do you evaluate the functions of home pages for citizen participation?



□ What are the functions of home page to be strengthened?

	Question	Rate
1	on-line voting and survey	16%
2	civic forum among citizens	19%
3	communication channel between citizen and mayor	14%
4	release of development plan or projects	25%
5	communication channel between citizen and government officials in charge	18%
6	Others	7%



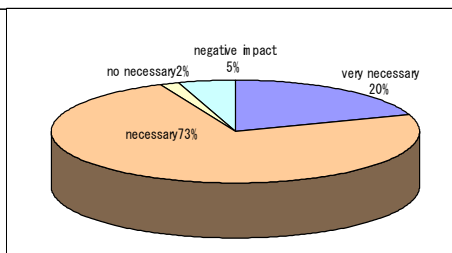
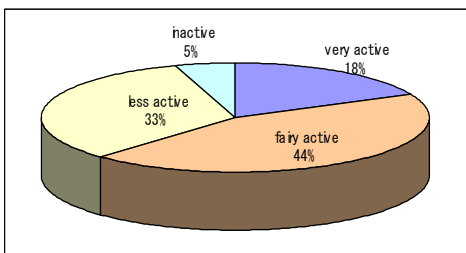
Survey for government officials

Citizen participation consciousness

More than 93% of local government officials realize the necessity of citizen participation for developing local policies. However, 62% of them think they practice citizen participation. The most popular strategies of citizen participation in local governments are explanatory meeting and public hearings. They methods that should be vitalized are explanatory meeting and public hearings.

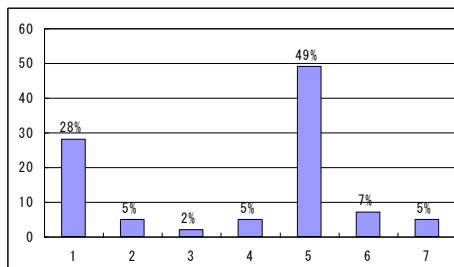
□ How much do you practice citizen participation?

□ How do you think about citizen participation?



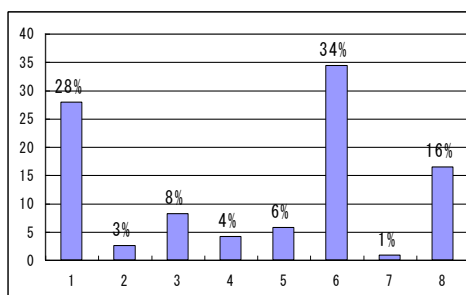
- What are the strategies mostly widely used?

	Question	Rate
1	public hearing	28%
2	survey	5%
3	committee	2%
4	bansanghoe	5%
5	explanatory meeting	49%
6	home pages	7%
7	others	5%



- What are the strategies for vitalizing citizen participation?

	Question	Rate
1	public hearing	28%
2	public monitoring	3%
3	referendum	8%
4	committee	4%
5	survey	6%
6	explanatory meeting	34%
7	bansanghoe	1%
8	others	16%

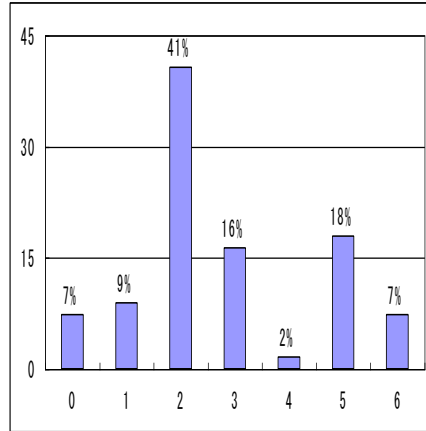


The survey shows that the main obstacles of citizen participation are inefficiency due to regional egoism (41%), low citizen participation consciousness (18%), political abuse of a certain organization and individual.

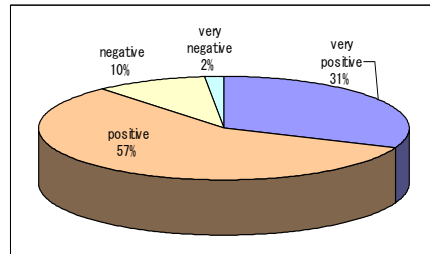
Government officials also thought the citizen participation through the internet was regarded as good method for encouraging citizen participation. 31% of respondents expected that citizen participation produce very positive impact for local development. 57% expected the fairly positive impact with small problems.

□ What are the obstacles of citizen participation?

	Question	Rate
0	no answer	7%
1	procedural event without reflection	9%
2	inefficiency due to regional egoism	41%
3	political abuse of some groups or individual	16%
4	negative perception toward citizen participation	2%
5	low participation consciousness of citizen	18%
6	realistic barrier of citizen participation	7%



□ What do you expect the impact of citizen participation through home pages?

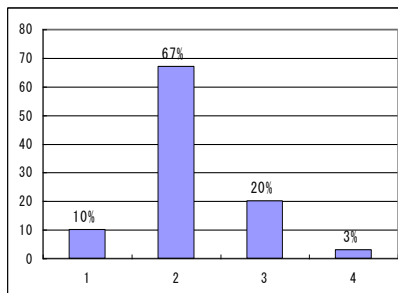


Conflicts consciousness

The survey found that 67% thought that the conflicts were unproductive. On the contrary, 20% thought conflicts could produce more positive results. The main reasons for conflicts are regional egoism, and the lack of communication skills between government officials and citizens. As for the involvement of civic group for solving the conflicts, the government officials basically agree even though they expect some problems. When the conflicts were occurred, government officials thought that they should be solved by negotiation.

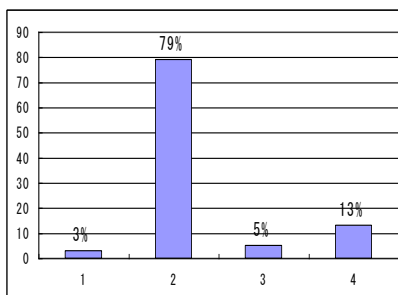
□ How do you think about conflicts?

	Question	Rate
1	destructive and unproductive	10%
2	more unproductive than productive	67%
3	often productive than unproductive	20%
4	no idea	3%

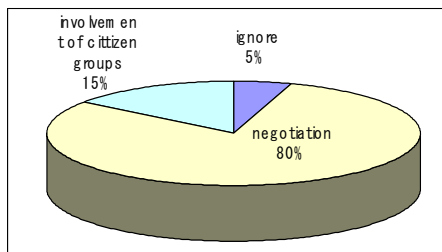
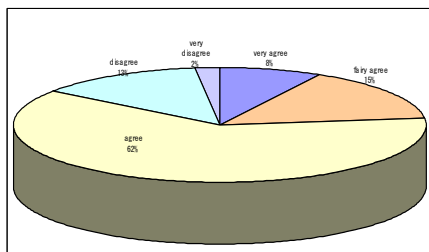


□ What are the main reason of causing conflicts?

	Question	Rate
1	political abuse of citizen group	10%
2	regional egoism of citizen	67%
3	lack of information release	20%
4	poor communication skill	3%



□ How do you think about participation of citizen group in solving conflicts? □ What are the best way to solve conflicts?



Based on the survey and analysis of home pages of local governments, we can summarize several main findings and implications. First of all, citizens and government officials both agree on the necessity of citizen participation with small differences in degrees of favor.

However, there are big gaps between consciousness and practice of citizen participation. Even though both governments and citizens basically agree the importance of citizen participation and the benefits of the internet for that, it will take time to change consciousness into practice due to lack of trust between governments and citizens.

Ways to vitalizing the citizen participation through the internet

Enhancing the consciousness of citizen participation

There is no doubt that information technology can aid citizen participation. The question is that how long it will take to vitalize the citizen participation through the internet. Despite recent advances in information technology, we are well short of the consciousness of citizen participation. Many government officials still think that citizens are selfish and don't have enough knowledge of public issues. On the contrary, citizens have negative attitudes against local government.

We need to raise the citizen participation consciousness. Effectiveness of citizen participation greatly depends upon consciousness and behavior of citizens. Even if a society may be able to prepare an excellent information system for citizen participation, participation will not be really effective until the consciousness of citizens and government officials is raised and they take their responsibilities.

Local governments should have open mind for citizen participation. Of course, there would be many trials and errors in applying the internet to citizen participation. However, practices will be needed for accomplishing positive effects of citizen participation. Consciousness should be raised for both sides. Local governments should offer a variety of useful informations

and should respond to the citizen's request as soon as possible. Citizen should request governments to release more information and should be interested in government's policy and administration which may have impact on their local life.

More information should be released

Information leads to increasing of citizen participation. Without access to the necessary information, participation in the planning process is inequitable and ineffective. At the present, most local governments provide very superficial and simple information such as demographic or economic statistics of the area, community events, weather, and so on. Very few local governments provide important development projects and policies in detail.

Also, the information should be timely and easy to understand. If the waiting time is too protracted, or the format of the information is too indecipherable, the information cannot be fully utilized. Information should be provided in the beginning of policy development. Many local governments offer information too late, the community doesn't have much time to discuss it. Therefore, information should be released from the beginning stage of policy making.

Home pages should offer more communication channels

In order to vitalize citizen participation, three types of communication channel should be prepared; discussion forum between citizens, forum between citizen and local government, forum between citizen and local council. Most local governments provide different communication channel except discussion forum among citizens. Many citizens offer their opinions through mayor's page on the individual basis because they think mayor is the person who has the power to make decisions.

However, as indicated in this survey, many netizens also want to have civic forum for discussing local policies among citizens. Without the civic forum, citizen contact local government on individual basis. Therefore they

don't have a chance to share their opinion with other citizens or civic groups to devise better policies. Experience and the literature show citizen participation is much more effective if it is channeled through a community organization.

On the other hand, the menu should be concise and easy to find. Citizen can't find the proper sites to offer their opinions for certain subject because the home page menu is complicated. Sometimes, the menu is hidden in the back and the description of menu is not made, therefore similar opinion was written in different menu.

Infrastructure should be prepared

In the case of rural community, it is not easy to access to the internet because of lack of information infrastructure. The rural area has very poor internet facilities including exclusive line for the internet. Even in the city, while apartments have an exclusive line for the internet. but house do not have those lines. It is because private companies are not interested in establishing infrastructure for those areas due to low earning rate. 10 counties in Kyongnam do not have good internet infrastructure because local governments are poor financially and the private companies are not interested in establishing infrastructure in those areas. Therefore, the establishment of internet infrastructure for rural areas should be supported by governments.

In addition to physical infrastructure, it is important to establish mature cyber moral. One of the great obstacles of citizen participation through the internet is the poor internet culture of citizens. In the case of local governments in Kyongnam, most of government officials who run the system worry about the cynical comments against specific person or organization. Some local governments delete the opinion made by anonymity in order to avoid those problems.

Conclusion

There is a growing recognition that it is better to involve citizens in developing important policies. However, in traditional forums such as public hearings, citizens often have no control over meeting agendas, and they frequently are blocked by the unavailability of critical data and information.

The internet can be an important tool both as a source of critical information and for communication with its various constituencies. This is by no means a replacement for face to face interaction. It is, however, an important supplement to in person contact, in an age when hectic lifestyles make it difficult to schedule meetings and social gatherings.

However, beyond enhancing the level of participation, information technology has not yet demonstrated that it can improve the quality of participation, by moving beyond simple opinion sharing. It takes more time to evaluate the impact of the internet application for meaningful citizen participation. To address the shortcoming and to evolve citizen participation, the internet should be vitalized to supplement the current public participation methods.

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