



**Web-COSI**  
Web Communities for  
Statistics for Social Innovation  
INCREASING TRUST IN COLLECTIVELY  
GENERATED STATISTICS

## **Web-COSI “Web COmmunities for Statistics for Social Innovation”**

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## **Deliverable 3.6**

### **How to do (good) things with data.**

### **Civil society data-driven engagement for societal progress and innovation**

#### **Summary**

Statistical data and information can be seen today as crucial pillars and key drivers of knowledge, societal progress and innovation. Within this framework, civil society has a big say and a big role to play. Social groups and organizations active worldwide on a number of issues and fields related to the promotion of well-being are getting indeed more and more engaged with “beyond GDP” data and statistics, with the goal of boosting sustainable forms and models of societal progress and innovation which may be beneficial for all. This Report aims at introducing and analysing three interlinked factors which appear today at the centre of the stage: the growing importance of data and statistical information in complex and fast changing societies, the crucial engagement of civil society actors with “beyond GDP” data and statistics, and the paths toward the achievement of sustainable societal progress and innovation resulting from the connection between the two previous factors. To this end, a first, theoretical section of the Report will be enriched and complemented by the analysis of the results of an empirical Survey involving eight local, national and transnational civil society initiatives which have to do with “beyond GDP” data and statistics and the promotion of societal progress and innovation. Then, building on these theoretical and empirical findings and insights, some relevant steps toward a data-driven societal progress and innovation will be outlined through the provision of a reasoned Decalogue addressed to civil society activists as well as of four key recommendations to national and EU policy makers.

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## INTRODUCTION

More than fifty years ago, a study published by the British leading philosopher John Langshaw Austin gave a relevant and groundbreaking contribution to the study and the comprehension of human language. The study was entitled *How to Do Things with Words*<sup>1</sup>, and therein Austin pointed out that we use language to *do* things as well as to assert things, and that the utterance of a statement like “I promise to do so-and-so” has to be understood as *doing* something, i.e. making a promise. In a few words, in saying something we actually do something.

Building on the name of the title of Austin’s book as a source of inspiration – and, to be honest, not without a residual stretching interpretation – it could be said that also data and statistics show their own performative aspect, which deserves to be highlighted and analyzed. Indeed, as it will be made clear in the following pages, statistical data and information can be considered now more than ever as crucial pillars and as key, active drivers of knowledge, societal progress and innovation. Two additional, fundamental elements, though, are necessary for this to happen: data and statistics must be linked and coupled with the involvement and the empowerment of single and/or associated citizens, and there must be at the same time a clear steering towards the achievement of well-being and social, economic, environmental sustainability goals.

Within this framework, civil society has a big say and a big role to play, especially today. As we will see under both a theoretical and an empirical perspective, civic organizations and groups active worldwide on a number of issues and fields related to the promotion of well-being, are getting more and more engaged with “beyond GDP” data and statistics. Their aim is to boost sustainable forms and means of societal progress and innovation which may be beneficial for all, and in particular the less advantaged. Moreover, in their trying to pursue and meet these ambitious objectives, civil society initiatives are characterized by an extensive and a smart exploitation of ICT tools and of the many empowering potentialities that these tools carry with them.

Therefore, the title of this Report – *How to do (good) things with data. Civil society data-driven engagement for societal progress and innovation* – directly refers to the one of John Austin’s book in order to specifically introduce and shed light on three deeply interlinked factors which appear today at the centre of the stage: the growing importance of data and statistical information in our complex and fast changing societies, the crucial role and engagement of civil society with “beyond GDP” data and statistics, and the viable paths toward the achievement of smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation resulting from the positive and productive connection between the two previous factors.

This Report is structured as follows. In section 1, some updated theoretical reflections will be provided on the role and the importance of data and statistical information – and in particular of “beyond GDP” data and statistics – in disaffected democracies and complex, fast changing societies like ours. Within this framework, further insights will follow on the active engagement of civil society actors with the collection, production and use of “beyond GDP” data and statistics.

In section 2, these theoretical reflections and insights will be empirically enriched and qualified with a Survey consisting in an in-depth case study investigation of eight local, national and transnational civil society initiatives which have to do with “beyond GDP” data and statistics and

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<sup>1</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955, Oxford University Press, London 1962.

the promotion of societal progress and innovation. This section will be based on the presentation of the results of an open, qualitative questionnaire delivered to key informants, representing each one of the civil society initiatives under scrutiny.

Section 3 will be dedicated to introduce and discuss the lessons learned in the course of the previous chapter, and will be focused on the identification of the steps that could be made toward a data-driven societal progress and innovation. To this end, a reasoned Decalogue for civil society activists and four key recommendations to national and EU policy makers will be outlined. Finally, in section 4, final remarks and considerations will be provided, summarizing the main findings and achievements of the Report.

## 1. WHEN CIVIL SOCIETY MEETS DATA AND STATISTICS

### 1.1. DATA AND STATISTICS IN CRITICAL TIMES

As the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has stated, we are living in an *age of uncertainty* within a *liquid society*<sup>2</sup>, i.e. a society marked by deep systemic complexity and by individuals' increasingly diverse, unstable and unpredictable needs, expectations, life trajectories, identities. We have been witnessing for the last three or four decades to an exponential pluralisation of lifestyles, individualization of needs, change of social and environmental contexts, diffusion and development of information and communication technologies. Another sociologist, Ulrich Beck, has interpreted these features of the late modernity under the label of *risk society*<sup>3</sup>, meaning the sustained growth of economic, cultural, political, environmental and technological risks which affect our societies.

At the same time – but not surprisingly if one thinks at the aforementioned premises – western democracies, in particular those in the EU, are facing a major crisis of legitimacy at the political and institutional level whose main symptoms are a lower and lower voter turnout, a declining credibility of political parties and trade unions, a growing gap between people and élites provoking abandon feelings, the fading away of traditional socio-cultural points of reference<sup>4</sup>. The expression *disaffected democracies*<sup>5</sup> coined by the two political scientists Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam seems very appropriate here to synthesize in one term this awkward situation.

It is then necessary to add to this brief overview the detrimental effects of the economic crisis which is affecting a relevant number of European countries since 2008, carrying with it the worsening of living, income and employment conditions' of who belongs to the most disadvantaged social groups (such as young people, migrants, persons with lower skills or education) and the increasingly polarisation between rich and poor territories, both in the EU and within each Member State.

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<sup>2</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Polity Press, London 2007.

<sup>3</sup> See Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society. Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London 1992.

<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit. Critical Citizens Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011; Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008 (French original edition, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Susan J. Pharr, Robert D. Putnam (eds.), *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2000.

All the more important, the multiple crisis' signals which democratic regimes are experimenting are not even limited to the institutional, economic or political-representative dimension, but involve also a fundamental cognitive dimension: in this sense we can properly speak of a diffuse *social readability* crisis which concerns EU countries, and which in turn is connected to the above mentioned loss of social, cultural, political and economic barycentre.

In front of these major difficulties which call into question the very stability of contemporary societies and the legitimacy of their regulative assets and institutions, the importance of producing and disseminating timely, fit-for-purpose and comprehensible data and statistical information on uncertain and fast changing social, economic, environmental needs and contexts strongly emerge. In other words, it is possible to affirm that the present conditions of deep socio-ecological complexity and interdependence have made data and statistical information crucial fields of concern and intervention for both the public at large and the decision-makers.

In this light, the availability of large and accurate sets of statistical data, information and indicators on the various aspects which have to do with the everyday life, instances and necessities of a given community in a given territory can make the difference for the better: on the one hand in the formulation and implementation of policies really respondent to unmet needs, problems and challenges and, on the other hand, in keeping individuals and social groups always informed and able to check the state of health of communities and territories.

Also the adoption of smart, innovative and sustainable lifestyles, attitudes and behaviours inevitably passes through the availability of clear, precise and thorough social, economic and environmental statistics. Not by chance, in the influential Report of the French Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress – established by the former President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy and led by the renowned economists Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi – these insights are summarized in the efficacious formula «what we measure shapes what we collectively strive to pursue, and what we pursue determines what we measure»<sup>6</sup>.

Data and the statistical indicators that can be driven from them are thus fundamental elements of the decision making process. They can be used to understand social and environmental phenomena, their evolution over time and distribution among units (territories, individuals, social groups) and to design appropriate policies and assess them. The production and circulation of data and statistical information are central in the creation of knowledge and in the expansion of the set of information used to decide, steering political decisions and helping citizens form their own opinions on the measured social phenomena<sup>7</sup>.

Within this framework, the recent UN Report entitled *A World That Counts*<sup>8</sup> provides precious elements and key indications on how to fruitfully link and combine the use of data and statistics boosted by new information and communication technologies with the overarching goal of achieving sustainable development and smart societal innovation. First of all, the digital revolution

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, Paris 2009, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> See Enrico Giovannini, *Bringing statistics to citizens. A "must" to build democracy in the XXI century*, in M. Segone (ed.), *Country-led monitoring and evaluation systems. Better evidence, better policies, better development results*, UNICEF, Geneva 2009, pp. 135-157.

<sup>8</sup> UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, *A World that Counts. Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*, Report prepared at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General, November 2014.



which has been taken place for the last two decades is exponentially increasing «the volume of data, the speed at which they are produced, the number of producers, and the range of things there is data, coming from new technologies such as mobile phone or the internet of the things»<sup>9</sup>.

It is thus possible to properly interpret this major transition which we are currently experimenting as a *data revolution*. Furthermore, there is a greater storage and computing capacity, and analytical tools have been improved in order to deal with everyday larger datasets and extract from them high-quality information. «Governments, companies, researchers and citizen group are in a ferment of experimentation, innovation and adaptation to the new world of data»<sup>10</sup>, which can consistently better the condition of our democracies boosting accountability, empowering citizen and providing decision maker with more accurate information.

The above mentioned Report explicitly calls for a mobilization of the data revolution for sustainable development. This mobilization has to be fostered in particular by national and international public institutions in order «to enable data to play its full role in the realization of sustainable development», while governments are called to close «key gaps in access and use of data»<sup>11</sup>, to boost transparency and openness of publicly funded datasets and data on public spending and budget, and to subscribe international standards to ensure data quality and comparability, timeliness and disaggregation.

Despite the enormous amount of information available today, the UN Report denounces the fact that «too many countries still have poor data, data arrives too late and too many issues are still barely covered by existing data»<sup>12</sup>. Even in rich countries with strong statistical offices, data on entire groups of people (e.g. people with disability, or migrants) are lacking, or they become available only after several years since the collection, or even citizens find it difficult to access to them. Accessibility and openness of data is therefore a crucial topic, in that «it can help ensure that knowledge is shared, creating a world of informed and empowered citizens, capable of holding decision-makers accountable for their actions»<sup>13</sup>.

## 1.2. WHY CIVIL SOCIETY COUNTS

Within the insightful “data revolution for sustainable development” framework outlined in the *A World that Counts* UN Report, civil society has a great role to play. It is however necessary to remark that “civil society” is an elusive analytical category, both because it includes a plurality of roles and expectations placed upon it in the different historical, geographical and cultural contexts and because of the heterogeneous social, juridical and structural elements constituting it<sup>14</sup>.

A working definition may therefore be useful to clarify its central components: in this light, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato understand civil society as «a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 8. In this vein, «access [to data] is often restricted behind technical and/or legal barriers, or restricted by governments or companies that fear too much transparency, all of which prevent or limit effective use of data» (p. 15).

<sup>14</sup> See, in this sense, Simone Chambers, Will Kymlicka (eds.), *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 2001.



associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation»<sup>15</sup>. Many actors play a role within civil society (e.g. informal local groups, civic associations and NGOs, social and political movements), connecting, through various mediation levels, citizens to the State and, more indirectly, to the market.

Civil society may be also seen as the kingdom of intermediate associations, based on the principle of voluntary membership, with three specificities: the protection of fundamental rights and updating of social demands; the autonomous and inclusive civic participation; the *public sphere* within which problems, interests and identities are perceived and made spelled out. From the normative point of view, civil society organisations are so well-rooted in their interaction with the public sphere that they are by now essential for human relations based on social solidarity<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, participation exercises practised within civil society help develop social responsibility and civic awareness, and this happens because associative life: (i) fosters integration, creating social cohesion within which solidarity and interpersonal trust may develop (ii); facilitates the expression of the members' needs and interests, stimulating social cooperation and the pursuing of common objectives; (iii) assumes the respect of differences, assuring individual autonomy, mutual respect and solidarity; (iv) contributes to the training, dissemination and sharing of information and knowledge, thus promoting critical approaches in the scientific and cultural fields<sup>17</sup>.

In this way, civil society supports the making of an informed public opinion able to address relevant demands to democratic institutions. And given the above mentioned features of the *risk society* and of our *age of uncertainty*, the involvement of civil society actors has become more and more important in the successful determination and sharing of scientific and cultural collective goals, in the elaborations of public policies, in the implementation of political programs, in the definition of the development model. In a few words, the involvement of civil society actors appears today, with the rapid changes taking place in all spheres of private and public life and lifestyles, crucial to address the harsh challenges we are confronted with<sup>18</sup>.

After this premise, what has to be stressed here is the fact that unlike other intermediary bodies – notably, political parties and trade unions – which are increasingly losing or divesting important functions of social integration<sup>19</sup>, there are today a large number of civil society organizations and groups which still have active and useful sensors scattered throughout our societies and territories. These sensors, in turn, capture, articulate and disseminate social needs, challenges and demands coming from below, making them objects of public debate and policy decision.

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<sup>15</sup> Jean L. Cohen, Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1992, p. ix.

<sup>16</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1991 (original German edition, 1962); Joshua Cohen, Joel Rogers, *Solidarity, Democracy, Association*, in E. O. Wright (ed.), *Associations and Democracy*, Verso (The Real Utopias Project, Volume 1), London 1995, pp. 236-267.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2004; Jean L. Cohen, Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, op. cit. Further reflections on these issues will be provided within the Decalogue addressed to civil society activists (see section 3, paragraph 3.1).

<sup>18</sup> See Archon Fung, *Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance*, in «Public Administration Review», Special Issue, December 2006, pp. 66-75; Joshua Cohen, Joel Rogers, *Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance*, in E. O. Wright (ed.), *Associations and Democracy*, Verso (The Real Utopias Project, Volume 1), London 1995, pp. 7-98.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void. The Hollowing of Western Democracies*, Verso Books, London 2013; Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Polity Press, London 2004.

Most importantly, civil society actors have cultivated and refined in recent years a cultural-scientific sensitivity and vision allowing them to offer a credible reading and articulation of these demands from below. This sensitivity and vision, in turn, has found an important channel of expression in the collection, production, reworking, use, analysis and/or visualization of “beyond GDP” data and statistical information which have to do with issues and challenges of utmost public importance, like well-being or sustainable development.

There are at least three major achievements in terms of boosting societal progress and innovation which derive from the sustained engagement of civil society actors with “beyond GDP” data and statistics. First, civil society engagement have decisively helped to enlarge, strengthen and enrich the public debate – and to gain growing attention and consideration by policy makers and public officials – on the limits of Gross Domestic Product in taking into account fundamental aspects that go into determining the quality of life of people: one example for all, an equitable distribution of the products of economic growth among individuals and groups<sup>20</sup>.

Second, if it’s true that GDP is still the leading indicator that represents the “North Star” that traditionally guides the choices of economic and social policy made by the governments, it is also true that civil society engagement have led to a flourishing of proposals and tools to integrate the GDP with a large number of new sets of indicators that incorporate and synthesize the amount of statistical information related to the assessment and measurement of well-being. In this light, civil society organizations have successfully activated their social and scientific resources and skills, from public protest and advocacy to consultation or cooperation with public institutional bodies (such as NSIs)<sup>21</sup>.

Third, and more in general, civil society engagement with “beyond GDP” data and statistics seems really consistent with the meaning of the portmanteau word *statactivism* recently coined by the sociologists Isabelle Bruno and Emmanuel Didier<sup>22</sup>. The term statactivism has to be employed in fact in describing «those experiments aimed at reappropriating statistics’ power of denunciation and emancipation which consist in a wide number of practices», such as that of «quantifying original data to make an issue visible and relevant»<sup>23</sup>.

Civil society engagement with data and statistics, as it will be better and concretely shown in the next two sections of this Report, reveals thus to be linked to the three main defining features of statactivism, i.e. «denouncing a certain representation of reality, generating a group, redefining the

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<sup>20</sup> See Jean Gadrey, Florence Jany-Catrice, *Les nouveaux indicateurs de richesse*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 2005; Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, op. cit.; Yanne Goossens, et al. (eds.), *Alternative progress indicators to gross domestic product (GDP) as a means towards sustainable development*, Policy Department - Economic and Scientific Policy (European Parliament), Brussels 2007, Study IP/A/ENVI/ST/2007-10.

<sup>21</sup> See Jon Hall, Louise Rickard, *People, Progress and Participation. How Initiatives Measuring Social Progress Yield Benefits Beyond Better Metrics*, Global Choices 1/2013, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh 2013; *Redefining Progress, The Community Indicators Handbook. Measuring Progress Toward Healthy and Sustainable Communities*, Redefining Progress, Oakland (CA) 1997; Tommaso Rondinella, Elisabetta Segre, Duccio Zola, *Participative processes for measuring progress: deliberation, consultation and the role of civil society*, paper submitted to «Social Indicators Research», 2015 (under review); Kate Scrivens, Salema Gulbahar, *Mapping initiatives and best practice: the results of citizen dialogue on well-being and societal progress*, Web-COSI project deliverable 2.3, 2014, [http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2013/11/Web-COSI\\_Deliverable-2.3.pdf](http://www.webcosi.eu/images/2013/11/Web-COSI_Deliverable-2.3.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> See Isabelle Bruno, Emmanuel Didier, *Benchmarking. L’État sous pression statistique*, Editions La Découverte, Paris 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Isabelle Bruno, Emmanuel Didier, Tommaso Vitale, *Statactivism. Forms of action between disclosure and affirmation*, in «Partecipazione e Conflitto. The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies», 7(2), 2014, pp. 199-200. «On the whole», conclude the authors, «the use of statistics is part of the repertoire of contention and a major resource for contemporary mobilizations» (ibid., p. 200).

objects of public action»<sup>24</sup>. In this sense, it can be said that a smart and sustainable path toward societal progress and innovation should also include a massive production, collection, dissemination and use of “beyond GDP” data and statistics by civil society actors as a means of social denunciation, criticism and emancipation.

To summarize and conclude, in such an historical era characterized by unprecedented systemic complexity and social, economic, technological and environmental interdependence, a major and ever more increasing need to know, decipher, enrich, discuss, publicize and share statistical data, indicators and information on subjects of public interest and concern – peoples’ well-being and sustainable development, in this case – strongly emerges.

To this end, taking seriously and confirming their role of key drivers of smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation, civil society actors are carrying out and experimenting around these issues a great number of groundbreaking initiatives which disclose fascinating scenarios, approaches, methods and tools. Just like those which will be presented and analyzed in the following section of the Report.

## **2. BOOSTING SOCIETAL PROGRESS AND INNOVATION THROUGH DATA AND STATISTICS. EIGHT REMARKABLE CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES**

Building on the theoretical ground and insights outlined above, here following eight remarkable civil society initiatives will be at the centre of an in- depth qualitative analysis, whose specific aim is to provide a case-study overview of local, national and international experiences led by civil society actors and organizations, all of which – though with different approaches, methods, needs, and ultimate goals – boost societal progress and innovation through “beyond GDP” data and statistics.

This part of the Report is based in particular on the results of an open questionnaire addressed to key informants. The questionnaire, in its turn, revolves around eighteen questions grouped within five different sections which touch and investigate the most important aspects related to the ideation, implementation, aims and results of the initiatives under scrutiny.

In particular, the five sections of the questionnaire are: general information; tools and methods; networks; impact; policy recommendations (see annex 1). The questionnaire has been sent to eight key informants, each one in representation of a specific initiative, who have been explicitly selected according to their playing a key role in the realization of the initiatives – for example founders, executive directors, lead researchers (see annex 2).

All of the respondents have therefore a profound knowledge of how the initiatives in which they are involved concretely function, when and why did they start, who is currently or have been in the past engaged in their implementation, which are their organizational features, their wins and weaknesses, and so on. In particular, these persons have been asked to fill out the questionnaire or, in alternative, to go through it via a dedicated telephone/Skype interview with Lunaria’s researchers. Two of them (the representatives of New Economics Foundation and Sbilanciamoci!

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

coalition) decided to complete by their own the questionnaire, while the other six key informants opted for the telephone/Skype interview.

For what concerns the criteria adopted for the selection of the eight cases to be included in this Report, the decision was made to take into account major civil society initiatives carrying out a massive and innovative work on data and statistics on well-being, in its multiple domains: from environmental sustainability to institutional accountability and transparency, from equitable development to citizens' empowerment and participation.

Moreover, four out of the eight selected experiences focus on the development of statistical "beyond GDP" progress indicators (New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index, Legambiente's Urban Ecosystem Initiative, Sbilanciamoci!'s Quars Index, International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey), while the remaining four cases (Monithon, Openpolis, BetaNYC, Dataninja) combine in novel and impressive ways open data, civic engagement and digital platforms.

Finally, with regards to the geographical criteria informing the selection process, five civil society organizations are based in Italy (Legambiente, Sbilanciamoci!, Openpolis, Monithon, Dataninja), one in the United Kingdom (New Economics Foundation) and two in the United States of America (BetaNYC, International Budget Partnership). But while Legambiente, Sbilanciamoci!, Monithon, Openpolis, BetaNYC initiatives focus on local, regional or national territorial levels, New Economics Foundation, Dataninja and International Budget Partnerships initiatives have instead a European or global geographical scope.

In this way, all territorial levels of the initiatives under scrutiny, from the local to the international, are duly covered and investigated in the present section of the Report. The synoptic table reported below helps to categorize and summarize the eight case studies selected for investigation by name, nationality, territorial scope, nature and well-being domains of these initiatives.

*Table 1. Synoptic table of the eight case studies under scrutiny*

NAME OF THE INITIATIVE	NATION OF ORIGIN	TERRITORIAL SCOPE	NATURE	WELL-BEING DOMAINS
Monithon	Italy	Local, National	Open Data, Civic Engagement, Digital Platforms	Transparency, Accountability, Citizens' Engagement
New Economic's Foundation Happy Planet Index	UK	National, International	"Beyond GDP" Progress Indicators	Environmental Sustainability, Life Expectancy, Life Satisfaction
Openpolis	Italy	Local, National	Open Data, Civic Engagement, Digital Platforms	Transparency, Accountability
Legambiente's Urban Ecosystem Initiative	Italy	Local, National	"Beyond GDP" Progress Indicators	Environmental Sustainability
BetaNYC	USA	Local	Open Data, Civic Engagement, Digital Platforms	Transparency, Accountability, Citizens' Engagement

Sbilanciamoci!'s Quars Index	Italy	Regional, National	“Beyond GDP” Progress Indicators	Equitable and Sustainable Development
Dataninja	Italy	National, European, International	Open Data, Civic Engagement, Digital Platforms	Transparency, Accountability, Citizens’ Engagement
International Budget Partnership’s Open Budget Survey	USA	National, International	“Beyond GDP” Progress Indicators	Transparency, Accountability

## 2.1. MONITHON

Monithon ([www.monithon.it](http://www.monithon.it)) is a civil society independent initiative launched in 2013 and based on an ongoing civic monitoring of projects funded by the Cohesion Policy in Italy, thanks to the availability of open data published on the OpenCoesione (OpenCohesion) institutional web portal ([www.opencoessione.gov.it](http://www.opencoessione.gov.it)). In its turn, OpenCoesione is Italy’s first governmental portal on the implementation of investment’s projects programmed by Regions and State Central Administrations via cohesion policy resources. These investment’s projects are financed either by EU structural funds or national specific funds. OpenCoesione checks and monitors the use of cohesion policy resources, providing accessible information in an open data format on what is funded, who is involved and where.

Monithon capitalizes on this valuable governmental initiative, realizing an innovative and smart combination of open data and civic monitoring. The term Monithon derives in fact from the crasis of “monitor” and “marathon”, and this crasis highlights Monithon’s overall objective: to give life to a sustained and interactive activity of citizens’ observation and reporting based on an extensive civic engagement with open data. Therefore, Monithon tries to establish a virtuous cycle between the institutional and the civil society spheres: in this vein, the Italian government releases basic information on projects and on beneficiaries of funds, and the Monithon initiative further boosts this transparency, asking citizens to actively engage with the open government data and to produce valuable information through it, refining and detailing the one already provided by government institutions.

This information may be related to all the stages of a project’s life cycle (from the monitoring of the related bid of tender, up to its finalization), and is produced in the form of specific reports based on citizens’ field reconnaissance where the projects at stake are being implemented. Citizens are also asked to enrich their reporting activity with qualitative interviews with stakeholders, key informants and experts, the collection of quantitative data, the formulation of specific comments, criticisms and suggestions. Each report is usually complemented with pictures and videos made by the Monithon reporters. The overall information thus provided is then aggregated and geo-referenced onto the Monithon web portal. The final output is a bottom-up, collective storytelling benefiting both the citizenry and the public institutions.

Monithon’s initiative therefore aims at bringing together citizens and public administrations, providing continuous feedbacks on the state of the art of projects linked to the implementation of local cohesion policies as well as raising public awareness on the verification of the correct



destination of funds: how public money is spent, the effectiveness and the quality of scheduled interventions, and so on. The final goal is twofold: to inform, involve and empower citizens on the one hand, and on the other hand to produce an impact on the policy making process at the basis of the projects' financing, improving the efficiency of the public action in its institutional mandate to realize good policies in terms of territorial cohesion and local economic development.

### ***Tools and methods***

It is possible to look at Monithon as a civic community of voluntary members carrying out a plurality of tasks and sharing a plurality of competencies. There is no paid staff: 6 persons – data journalists, researchers, technologists – form the editorial board running Monithon's ordinary administration, e. g. developing the web platform and app as well as the common methodology and tools, reviewing and approving the reports submitted, disseminating and communicating the practice, involving and supporting national and local communities, writing applications for grants and other funding, contacting local administrations to strengthen the link between the civil society participating in the monitoring and the administrations responsible for the interventions.

And a large number of other actors gathers each time around this team: journalists, researchers, civil society organizations, common citizens, civil servants. This is a groundbreaking characteristic, as Monithon's monitoring and reporting activity brings with it the need for the establishment of a composite group made up of different though complementary figures. Just to recall the most relevant ones: someone able to read and interpret complex public budgets and administrative sources, someone with an expertise in data analysis and data communication, someone with a specific interest and knowledge of the local context (its history, the needs of the local population...) where the implementation of a project to be scrutinized is at stake.

But Monithon can also be seen as an innovative, shared method of community building: to this end a toolkit on civic monitoring, providing accurate guidelines to interested citizens and civil society organizations, is regularly published and updated on the website, allowing to replicate everywhere and at any time civic monitoring initiatives. By engaging in a monitoring marathon, citizens give benefit to the whole community and, ultimately, to public policies themselves: they can fill missing information, indicate errors, report on the actual development of projects and, in the end, help to evaluate the whole efficiency of the funding system, with a major return in terms of increasing civic trust, social cooperation, and both institutional transparency and accountability.

Users can do this individually, but the activity increases in its civic importance when is collectively put in place, as it happens during monitoring events: these events involve groups of citizens – often under the guide of local hosting civic organizations – set out on real explorations around the area wherein they live in order to gather information on specific projects of local interest. In doing so, not only the participants collect useful material to evaluate the effectiveness of the funding and generate awareness around those financial plans, but they also experiment with new forms of socialization, cooperation, and control over public policies. In this way, Monithon tries to enlarge the Open Data community towards a wider audience, for a wider (and immediately social impacting, under the community building profile) scope. Not by chance, Monithon is in touch and carries out its initiatives networking with a number of local and/or national civil society organizations scattered throughout Italy. At the international level, it also shares its vision,

methodology and approach with other actors involved in similar projects, such as Promise Tracker in Brazil<sup>25</sup>.

As mentioned above, Monithon is based on an extensive data managing strategy, and ICTs play a crucial role here. Data are initially extracted from the OpenCoesione web portal (in Apis format), additional qualitative and quantitative data are directly produced “on the field” in order to enrich the basic governmental information, data analysis and visualization are then provided to finalize and disseminate in an understandable and easy to access way the monitoring activity. A customized web platform and a user-friendly mobile app to collect data and information; social media to disseminate initiatives; a blog ([www.monithon.it/blog](http://www.monithon.it/blog)) hosting in depth analysis, articles and comments; a mailing list to keep contacts informed; software (Trello, Google Drive) for shared management of activities are all fundamental ICTs tools upon which Monithon organizes its daily work, boosting civic participation. Thus, thanks to the combination of new technologies and open data, anyone can engage Monithon at any moment and according to his or her preferences on the kind of engagement.

### ***Impact***

Monithon’s web platform presently collects 100 reports, which is an important result for a recently established initiative: each report consists in an in-depth investigation on a specific project, involving a diverse group of people with different skills. This corresponds to a “slow hacking” process, i.e. a long process of data collection, field research, qualitative analysis. Monithon is also currently playing a central role in the implementation of A Scuola di Open Coesione (Open Cohesion School, [www.ascuoladiopencoessione.it](http://www.ascuoladiopencoessione.it)), a project launched in 2013/2014 by the Department for Development and Economic Cohesion – within the open government initiative on cohesion policies – in collaboration with the Ministry of Education University and Research. A Scuola di Open Coesione is an innovative interdisciplinary teaching programme targeted at secondary schools classes: it promotes the principles of youngsters’ active citizenship through the civic monitoring of public funding and the use of ICTs, building from the open data published on the OpenCohesion portal.

The impact of the initiative is remarkable: more than 2,500 students and 86 secondary schools involved in 2014/2015. *A Scuola di Open Coesione* helps students to understand, oversee and communicate cohesion policies’ mechanisms and investments, combining civic education, digital skills, statistics and data journalism and developing at the same time a set of soft skills (i.e. critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork). In particular, young participants receive a specific training empowering them to monitor and produce reports (also using videos and photos) on one or more interventions financed by cohesion policies in the territories wherein they live. In this context,

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<sup>25</sup> Promise Tracker - Data collection for civic action ([www.promicetracker.org](http://www.promicetracker.org)) explores how citizen monitoring can extend civic engagement between election cycles. How can citizens hold elected leaders accountable for promises they made during the campaign season? Promise Tracker believes that informed communities, equipped with data, are the best positioned to assess the performance of their representatives and advocate for change on a local level. The MIT Center for Civic Media is currently building Promise Tracker after having set up a web-based tool and complementary set of practices that provide citizens with the capacity to monitor and hold elected officials accountable. Promise Tracker thus explores the role of citizens in gathering data and promoting accountability between elections: it includes a form builder and mobile phone tool for data collection, allowing citizens to deploy data collection campaigns on specific government commitments. Promise Tracker has conducted design workshops in São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, in collaboration with local partners. During each workshop, participants identified issues and infrastructure to monitor, collected data using Android mobile phones, and created data presentations based on the data collected. Groups focused on issues ranging from public safety and accessibility to litter in public parks to access to affordable housing.



the above mentioned Monithon's toolkit is used by the students as a practical guide for carrying out their monitoring and reporting activities, and Monithon's website serves as reporting platform where to publish their reports and the related multimedia materials.

Therefore Monithon shows a valuable impact both on civil society organizations and on students, while the same cannot be said in the case of public institutions. What is missing here is the last link in the citizens-institutions chain, that is to say public authorities are not that prone to take into account the feedbacks provided by the members of the Monithon's community. In fact, in Italy there is not a legal regulatory framework on public consultations binding public administrations in charge of financing and implementing cohesion policies to receive and duly handle citizens' feedbacks. In other terms, all is left to the good will of those public administrators persuaded by the quality and the value of the initiative.<sup>26</sup>

This lack, besides, corresponds to one of the major weaknesses experienced by Monithon: indeed, when citizens do engage in monitoring and reporting activities, they expect that at the end of the process, policy results – a better planning in the management and allocation of public funds for years to come, a stricter institutional control over the project implementation, an improvement in specific aspects of a public financed project they feel very close, and so on – will follow. Otherwise, they perceive their involvement as useless and ineffective, thus losing motivation and abandoning participation. The other two major weaknesses affecting the Monithon's initiative relate to the persistent difficulty to ensure its economic sustainability – Monithon is run by the voluntary work of the members of the editorial board – as well as to the difficulty to effectively disseminate to the large public as well as to the local and national media, experts and CSOs the results of the monitoring activities. For example, it would be appropriate and extremely useful if media regularly drew on the information provided by Monithon on the state of the art of the monitored projects (and the related suggestions for improvement), thus fostering an informed, evidence-based public debate around relevant policy issues or specific projects financed.

In spite of these current difficulties, Monithon undoubtedly indicates a promising path towards the renovation and re-legitimization of citizens-institutions relationships. In this sense, citizens and communities have the possibility to be made aware and then actively engaged in a sustained collaboration and cooperation with public institutions, while public institutions can take charge of the accurate information provided via civic monitoring initiatives and integrate them in ex ante, ongoing and/or ex post assessment of funded projects. Moreover, Monithon provides an interactive platform where a large number of citizens' feedbacks and institutional information are stored, structured and ready for further in-depth analysis. And – maybe the most valuable feature of the initiative – Monithon is a catalyst and a community activator for all those who believe in dialogue with public institutions and are willing to bring forces together to promote smart innovation and sustainable development goals.

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<sup>26</sup> To be clear, a number of public administrations are revealing to be willing to collaborate, even though the point raised above on the lack of formal mechanisms of citizens feedback transmission still remains. For example, many public administrations have been involved in the A Scuola di Open Coesione initiative and participated in the final events of public debate on the results of the researches carried out by the students: the degrees of participation were different, from something similar to electoral rallies, to effective collaboration. Then, the 70 per cent of the A Scuola di Open Coesione teams have completed the process involving public administrations with interviews and events. In some cases (e.g. Municipalities incurred in compulsory administration due to mafia crimes in Calabria region) institutions did not attend at all. And in other cases, their investment in the process was weak, refusing to enter into the merits of the difficulties and shortcomings of the projects monitored by the students.

## 2.2. NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION'S HAPPY PLANET INDEX

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is an ongoing initiative and a flagship publication launched in 2006 by the New Economics Foundation ([www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)), which in turn is a leading UK's think tank founded in 1986, aiming at promoting social, economic and environmental justice.

The Happy Planet Index ([www.happyplanetindex.org](http://www.happyplanetindex.org)) is an international measure of sustainable well-being, measuring the ecological efficiency with which 151 countries in the world achieves well-being and health for the whole population. In other terms, it is an efficiency measure, ranking countries on how many long and happy lives they produce per unit of environmental input. Moreover, it is necessary to add that the Happy Planet Index is one of the first global measures of sustainable well-being, and it undoubtedly represents a groundbreaking civil society initiative which has paved the way towards the taking up of the "beyond GDP" international debate. The Happy Planet Index is based on global data on experienced well-being, life expectancy, and Ecological Footprint to generate an index revealing which countries are most efficient at producing long, happy lives for their inhabitants.

As just said, the HPI collect, combines and ranks data on: (i) *experienced well-being*, using the "Ladder of Life" question drawn from the Gallup World Poll, which asks respondents to imagine a ladder, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 the best possible life, and report the step of the ladder they feel they currently stand on; (ii) *life expectancy*, using life expectancy data drawn from the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report (the latest available data); (iii) *Ecological Footprint*, using the 2008 Ecological Footprint data (again, the latest available data) from the 2011 Edition of the Global Footprint Networks National Footprint accounts: the Ecological Footprint is a measure of resource consumption (promoted by the international environmental organization WWF), that is a per capita measure of the amount of land required to sustain a country's consumption patterns, measured in terms of global hectares which represent a hectare of land with average productive biocapacity.

In particular, the HPI measures sustainable well-being as the number of Happy Life Years (i.e. Experienced well-being x Life expectancy) achieved per unit of resource use. This is calculated by dividing Happy Life Years by Ecological Footprint.<sup>27</sup> The final, headline indicator gives a clear sense of whether a society is going in the right direction, providing at the same time a tool to ensure that fundamental issues are accounted for in crucial policy decisions. The Happy Planet Index is thus a measure of progress that focuses on what really matters for human beings: sustainable well-being for all. It tells how well nations are currently doing in terms of supporting their inhabitants to live good lives, while ensuring that others can do the same in the future.

### ***Tools and methods***

The HPI aims at providing an easily understandable compass pointing nations in the direction they need to travel, and helping groups around the world to advocate for a vision of progress that is truly about people's lives. Behind this twofold aim, there is the strong belief that societies should not be deemed successful because of their GDP performances and results, but rather according to the

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<sup>27</sup> More detailed information on the Happy Planet Index methodology can be found in the "Calculating the HPI" Appendix, included in the last edition of the *Happy Planet Index: 2012 Report*. The Report can be downloaded here: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/assets/happy-planet-index-report.pdf>.

efficiency with which they achieve well-being. Along with this, the HPI demonstrates and promotes the crucial idea that good lives do not need to cost the Earth.

For what concerns the issues related to the implementation of the initiative as well as to the management of data, researchers working at the New Economics Foundation carry out all the work. The publication of the first HPI Report in 2006 was possible thanks to the fact that it was partly funded by the international environmental organization Friends of the Earth. As already mentioned, data are drawn from the Global Footprint Network (ecological footprint), Gallup (subjective wellbeing), and UNDP (life expectancy). What matters here is that NEF researchers involved in the Happy Planet Index initiative have engaged and discussed data with both the Footprint Network and the Gallup colleagues in order to reach the best results in terms of statistical and methodological robustness.

It is also useful to highlight in this context that all data used by the NEF researchers to create the HPI are either publicly available, or on requests: in this sense, a dedicated section entitled “Download the data” where most of the information is freely and immediately available in an excel format is hosted onto the HPI website. Moreover, from a strictly computational point of view an algorithm has been used intended to ensure the three components of the Index – life expectancy, experienced well-being and Ecological Footprint – have equal variance before they are combined. With regard to the publication strategy adopted, mapping and ranking tools are regularly used and are considered fundamental elements to help with visualization and ease public understanding. Here again, to this end two sections of the HPI website (entitled respectively “Map view” and “Table view”) have been specifically set up.

Thanks to all these interactive functions with which it has been designed and equipped, it is clear that the HPI website serves as the main gateway for dissemination. Not by chance, alongside the traditional country index report, a second major channel of dissemination of HPI’s overall vision, approach and goals is represented by the creation of a web-dedicated platform which allow people to calculate their own, personal, HPI ([www.happyplanetindex.org/survey](http://www.happyplanetindex.org/survey)). To this end, a survey has been set up asking respondents about their accommodation, health, lifestyle, and the feelings about life: the answers are used to calculate a personal score on the Happy Planet Index.

Finally, in coincidence with the publication of the 2009 Report, the Happy Planet Index working group has launched the *Happy Planet Charter* (<http://www.happyplanetindex.org/supporters/>) with the ambitious, threefold objective of: (i) calling on governments to adopt new measures of human progress that put the goal of delivering sustainable well-being for all at the heart of societal and economic decision-making; (ii) calling on the United Nations to develop an indicator as part of the post-2015 framework that, just like the Happy Planet Index, measures progress towards the key goal for a better future, that is sustainable well-being for all; (iii) building the political will needed across society to fully establish these better measures of human progress by working with a large number of supporters and partner organizations.

### ***Impact***

Both the HPI’s Reports and dissemination initiatives have included quotes and endorsements from a wide range of people, including several politicians and well-known experts and commentators. For example, the above mentioned *Happy Planet Charter* has been signed by a number of civil society organizations, such as the Soil Association, National Union of Students, International Institute for Environment and Development, World Development Movement, People&Planet. While other

leading civil society organizations, Oxfam and Wastewatch to cite a few, have created educational materials using the Happy Planet Index: all this shows well the HPI's networking capacity and at the same time the remarkable impact produced on CSOs.

Also the impact on public opinion has been particularly relevant. Some data: the first Report was downloaded and read in 185 countries, and in the two years after the second Report, the website has been visited half a million times. A widespread media attention, with radio and TV interviews and 45 print articles (key articles in Time magazine, the New Scientist, and Rider's Digest forthcoming) has been registered immediately after the first launch, while articles referring to the HPI are still emerging every week. Not only: in 2011 the renowned Forbes magazine considered the HPI as one of the most powerful ideas. And the online questionnaire related to the calculation of the personal HPI has been completed up to now by 100,000 people.<sup>28</sup>

The picture remains positive also in the case of the impact of the initiative on public actors and institutions. In the UK, the Conservative Party published a report calling for the use of something like the HPI in September 2007 ([www.conservatives.com/pdf/blueprintforagreenecconomy.pdf](http://www.conservatives.com/pdf/blueprintforagreenecconomy.pdf)), and around the same time as future Prime Minister David Cameron started referring to the need for a "General Well-Being" indicator. Moreover, HPI has been chosen as reference point for Ecuador's Buen Vivir project. Other countries where governmental bodies have taken interest include Italy, Hungary, Costa Rica, Colombia and Switzerland. Overall, it can be said that the project contributed strongly to the movement towards measuring subjective well-being, which now sees most major OECD nations measuring subjective well-being in official data sets.

Despite its valuable social, media and institutional impact, it still happens that the HPI is misinterpreted, since general public often considers it as simply a measure of happiness. In terms of weaknesses, HPI simple structure (i.e. the fact the value for each country is given by the application of a very simple formula on three indicators only), hinders the possibility to penalize countries for intuitively bad situations – e.g. human rights abuses. In the last years, moreover, several criticisms emerged about the real effectiveness of the ecological footprint to assess ecological sustainability, highlighting the lack of an alternative indicator to summarise environmental impact.

On the other hand, HPI simplicity represents the strength of the initiative, which is able to capture people's imagination worldwide: it goes straight to the heart of what matters – well-being and health as outcomes, and the environmental as the fundamental resource. This feature, combined with strong communication strategies, has undoubtedly gained popularity to the initiative. At the same time, HPI became over the years also a precious researching tool, since it allows investigating important research questions which call into question fundamental issues which have directly to do with our present and future lives, expectations and needs.

### 2.3. OPENPOLIS

Openpolis ([www.openpolis.it](http://www.openpolis.it)) is an independent civic observatory founded in 2008, in the wake of a similar project launched in 2004, with the aim of carrying out an extensive and ongoing monitoring of Italian politics thereby promoting transparency, accountability and the democratic

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<sup>28</sup> An anecdote on the impact of HPI. Nic Marks – the creator of the Happy Planet Index – was travelling in Northern Thailand and met a farmer who told him: "Did you know that the happiest country in the world is Costa Rica?"... he'd obviously heard something that had to do with the HPI, as Costa Rica is the country leading the HPI world ranking.

participation of Italian citizens. Openpolis carries out a number of projects and tools in order to enable free access to public information on Italian political candidates, elected representatives, legislative activity, and public spending through the implementation of dedicated web platforms. All Openpolis' initiatives work to free data trapped into closed formats – or inaccessible as data are presented according to a bureaucratic instead of a user's logic and language – and to visualize them in a user friendly format, so that information produced and handled by public administrations becomes immediately available, understandable and reusable by everyone.

Openpolis manages three main platforms of data collection and data production. The first is named *Open Parlamento* (Open Parliament, <http://parlamento17.openpolis.it/>), a monitoring initiative which provides citizens, on a daily basis, with a huge amount of quantitative and qualitative information concerning the activity of the Lower and Higher House of Parliament (what elected representatives are doing, which laws they are proposing, how they are voting and so on). Open Parlamento is linked to two Openpolis' flagship dissemination activities: the yearly *Rapporto Camere Aperte* (Open Parliament Houses Report), which presents Openpolis' own account of one year of Italian politics and the *Indice di Produttività Parlamentare* (Parliamentary Productivity Index, <http://indice17.openpolis.it/>) an original index which aggregates data on single politicians in order to show the intensity of their activity in the parliamentary debate and legislative action.

The second web platform is *Open Municipio* (Open Municipality, [www.openmunicipio.it/](http://www.openmunicipio.it/)): in this case data on elected councilors and the legislative activity of city councils are drawn from official political-administrative documents provided by those municipalities that join in the project (presently, the municipalities of Udine and Senigallia). Data are disseminated as soon as they come into force in an open format. The third web platform is *Open Bilanci* (Open Budget, [www.openbilanci.it/](http://www.openbilanci.it/)), which provides access to data and information related to the budgets (both budget plans and final budgets) of all the 8,100 Italian municipalities over the last ten years. These data are drawn from a central Home Office archive and then properly extracted, reworked and released in an open format in order to make them easily readable, comprehensible and reusable. To this end, *Open Bilanci* can also count on a large set of innovative visualization tools and indexes, detailed focus on budget spending areas, specific rankings and comparison of municipal budgets.

### ***Tools and methods***

Thus, Openpolis' approach and tools increase the opportunity for dialogue between citizens and their representatives in central and local governments, pushing institutions and politicians to stick to the rules of transparency. On the other hand, data and information provided and made available for free to everybody support a large number of activities to the benefit of democratic life and civic participation, from parliamentary monitoring to data-driven journalism. In other terms, it is possible to state that Openpolis aims at opening up the closed code of Italian politics through an extensive engagement with open data and a massive exploitation of web 2.0 potentialities, which in turn are both recognized as essential tools stimulating citizens' awareness and participation. Long story short, the final goal is to activate a virtuous cycle of transparency, monitoring, civic participation, accountability thanks to the crucial role played by open data and the web 2.0 as scientific and technological matrixes.

In order to meet these purposes, a large set of skills align and integrate to produce the web platforms and the reporting activities set up and carried out by Openpolis: on the one side we find policy analysts, researchers and data journalists able to find, interpret and narrate data, and on the



other side there are developers, technologists and programmers able to disclose data and visualize them in open formats using open source software. Alongside these two pillars there is a wide community of users and readers made of practitioners (i.e. experts, researchers, lobbyists) as well as common citizens and civil society organizations, which more than often contribute to the identification of new data sources and to the update of already existing data. In this context, again, the role of ICTs is obviously crucial.

Openpolis was in fact founded upon the strong belief that free access to data otherwise inaccessible – because of their format or their collocation – would have revolutionised the way of doing politics, boosting accountability and participation. Therefore, from the very beginning of the initiative, all sort of data managing tools and strategies are being deployed: the data scraping as in the case of the Open Parlamento project, the use of latent data, their analysis also applying data mining techniques, their visualization and their diffusion both via static reports of data journalism and via dynamic widgets.

The overall philosophy and commitment of Openpolis is then well testified by its willingness to networking and campaigning (even if, as it will be made clear in the following lines, a limiting factor is the lack of adequate financial resources): for example, Openpolis actively joins the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral, international initiative launched in 2011 with the aim of securing concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and last but not least harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Besides this partnership, Openpolis holds informal relations with similar projects in Europe and the US, and has been the promoter of the Italian national campaign *Parlamento Casa di Vetro* (Parliament Glass House, see below).

### ***Impact***

All this said, and contrary to the original belief of the founders of Openpolis, the disclosure of data has not had by itself a strong, immediate impact on the public sphere. This is why, alongside the technical work on data, it soon became necessary to develop a number of complementary activities such as reports, widgets and smart visualization tools able to supply information (not only numbers) to a public opinion – citizens as well as journalists – not used to read, interpret and engage with data. This additional and intensive effort of data reworking, synthesis and visualization has finally succeeded in augmenting the visibility of the Openpolis' projects, and in particular the greatest impact has been reached when synthetic information has been extracted from complex data: not by chance, the Parliamentary Productivity Index represents one of the Openpolis' most incisive initiatives.

On the side of public institutions the impact has been rather low, as transparency and accountability are not held as values by Italian institutions. On the contrary, transparency is culturally regarded as something to possibly avoid: resistance against efforts made by civil society to change this habit is particularly high, and demands of collaboration to provide open and understandable data are more than often rejected. Emblematic here are both the cases of the Parliamentary Productivity Index and of Open Municipality. In the first case, parliamentary institutions have initially tried, also with threats of lawsuits, to hinder the project: they began looking at it as a useful tool only when the project gathered wide favour among public opinion. In the second case, municipalities are asked to collaborate providing the data to be visualized in the web platform, but due to the cultural-

institutional close-mindedness stressed above only two out of more than eight thousand municipalities decided to join the project.

Things are not different from the point of view of the policy impact: through the support of a group of Italian MPs, the campaign *Parlamento Casa di Vetro* (<http://uact.it/actions/parlamento-casa-di-vetro/>), calling for effective advertising of activities and votes of parliamentary commissions, managed to present a law proposal for reforming the regulation of the Parliament. A date for the discussion has not been scheduled, though. There has been also an attempt to initiate a collaboration with the Presidency of the Council of Ministry in order to provide transparent data on the implementation of the Government program. The aim is to check if the approvals of the laws foreseen in the program are then concretely followed by the adoption of the appropriate administrative decrees. But also in this case the collaboration never became effective.

It is worth adding that these quite unsatisfactory results in terms of impact should be also brought back to the scarce resources available: financing Openpolis reveals in fact to be very difficult and also private foundations are reluctant in providing financial resources (unlike what happens in other countries). Moreover, another limiting factor consists – as already said – in that the simple release of open data is not enough to change things for the better. This means that a supplementary, gruelling, though crucial effort in promoting a massive “literacy” action is required, targeting common citizens, journalists, politicians and officials on the importance, the use and the possibilities linked to the exploitation of open data. And this in turn implies the need to improve the capacity to network, coalesce, advocate together with other actors, be them CSOs, media partners public officials and/or elected representatives.

In conclusion, Openpolis can be seen as a civil society initiative carrying out a pioneering and extremely valuable work to supply public opinion with free data and information on the activities carried on by public institutions and elected representatives, and ultimately to subvert a deep cultural-institutional resistance against the diffusion and the implementation of transparency and accountability habits and criteria. Given the magnitude of these tasks, the results obtained so far represent initial, though fundamental, steps in the right direction.

## 2.4. LEGAMBIENTE’S URBAN ECOSYSTEM INITIATIVE

Legambiente (League for the Environment) is the most widespread environmental civil society organization in Italy, with 20 regional branches, 1,000 local groups and more than 115,000 members ([www.legambiente.it](http://www.legambiente.it)). Founded in 1980, its distinctive feature is “scientific environmentalism”, that is a specific commitment to develop environmental protection’s programs and projects on a solid base of scientific data and analysis as tools to promote concrete and achievable environmentally sound alternatives. This approach is combined with an ongoing work of information, raising awareness and citizens’ involvement and education on environmental issues such as urban degradation, nature conservation, sustainable development, renewable energy sources, the links between economy and the environment, environmental international cooperation in Third World Countries and Eastern Europe. Therefore, since its foundation Legambiente carries out a large number of initiatives dealing with environmental and sustainable development issues.

Among its flagship publications, there is the *Urban Ecosystem Report (Rapporto Ecosistema Urbano)*, [www.legambiente.it/contenuti/articoli/ecosistema-urbano-2014](http://www.legambiente.it/contenuti/articoli/ecosistema-urbano-2014)) which is an annual survey



on the environmental sustainability of all the Italian 104 provincial capitals, realized in collaboration with *Ambiente Italia* and *Il Sole 24 Ore*, respectively a scientific and a media partner. The *Urban Ecosystem Report* was launched in 1994, and it is the first Italian survey aimed at collecting data on the environmental state of health of Italian cities as well as at evaluating the environmental loads, the quality of natural resources, and the “green” management of the 104 municipalities taken into account.

To this end, every year the *Urban Ecosystem Report* gathers – by means of specific questionnaires addressed to local public administrators and bureaucrats, and the use of official statistical data – statistical data on 125 environmental parameters, resulting in a total amount of more than 125,000 data collected. This huge amount of information is then re-classified within 26 sustainability indicators, with the final purpose of producing a synthetic index which measures the environmental sustainability in the Italian capital provinces. The indicators applied in the realization of the *Urban Ecosystem Report* take into consideration the main environmental components which directly relate to citizens’ well-being and the quality of life in urban areas: air pollution, water and energy consumption, waste production, transports and mobility infrastructures and facilities, green spaces, environmental policies.

### ***Tools and methods***

The reason behind the birth of the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative was the dramatic lack of information on the multiple dimensions related to the environmental sustainability in Italian cities. In the early 1990s, in fact, no systematic collection of data and statistics on these issues was entirely available for the large public at the national scale. Alongside the need to fill this information gap, there was also the purpose of providing a scientific tool based on a rigorous and systematic collection and analysis of data and able to drive the policy making process towards a more informed, forward looking and sustainable model of management of environmental policies in urban spaces. That is to say, scientific environmentalism at its best. The successful implementation of the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative derives from and depends on a strict collaboration between different persons as well as on the alignment of their different competencies. On the one hand, civil servants, public officers and employees which are in charge of running the local administrative machinery services (e.g. water, energy, transports, waste...) are called to provide all the information required in the questionnaire delivered to the 104 municipalities taken into account in the Report; while on the other hand the members of the Legambiente’s groups scattered throughout these municipalities are directly involved in the collection and in the analysis of local data.

When this first step is completed, the huge amount of data thus collected is transferred to the headquarters of Legambiente in Rome, where they are assembled and refined. Scientific advice on the consistency and robustness of data is then specifically supplied by *Ambiente Italia*’s researchers, the above mentioned scientific partner of the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative. At last, a final editorial advise on the findings of the Report before its publication is provided by the staff of the renowned economic daily newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*, media partner of the initiative. *Il Sole 24 Ore* also widely disseminates the results of the annual Report once published. While the internal network – made up, as said, of an ensemble of local groups, public officials, researchers and practitioners, media and scientific partners – set up by Legambiente is extremely dense and functional, the same cannot be said in the case of an external network of organizations, carrying out similar projects and sharing similar visions and objectives, with which the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative is formally and regularly

in touch in Italy and in Europe: this is felt as a gap limiting the impact and the enhancement of the initiative that should be filled in the very next future.

For what concerns instead the role played by the ICTs within the initiative under scrutiny, the initial use of the fax in order to send (and then receive it, once filled) the questionnaire has been replaced during the years by the use of e-mails, though some municipalities – in particular, the smaller ones – still require to send the questionnaires by postal service, a method which implies waste of time and paper. Next year, nevertheless, there will be the tentative launch of an online platform where who is in charge of completing the questionnaire will have access via personal ID. This will undoubtedly lead to facilitate the whole data collection procedure and to a great saving of time, but could nonetheless have a potential negative impact, in that the direct relationship with those responsible of providing information – due to the digitalization and consequent anonymisation of the process – might interrupt, leading to a paradoxical backlash. In fact, the establishment of personal relationships with civil servants and public officials corresponds to the valorisation of an invaluable human capital which grows year by year, allowing them to actively joining in the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative while feeling a sense of sharing and attachment to it. If Legambiente were a public institution (such as for example the Italian National Institute of Statistics, ISTAT), the problem would not arise at all, since the completion of the research process is ensured by the legal obligation for Italian municipalities to meet other public administrative bodies requests.

### **Impact**

The *Urban Ecosystem Report* has been gaining ever more scientific authoritativeness and public credibility, leading to good results in terms of social, political and institutional impact. The publication of the Report is indeed connected to a wide media coverage at the national as well as at the local level, allowing public opinion to be aware of the findings and the information thereby provided. Also civil society groups and organizations gain a great benefit from the dissemination of the results of the *Urban Ecosystem Report*, allowing them to be regularly informed and updated on the environmental sustainability performance of the major Italian municipalities.

In other terms, the publication of the survey represents a precious mean of empowerment for CSOs: upon the Report's scientific evidence it becomes indeed possible to them to launch advocacy initiatives, to carry out further analysis and focuses, and to raise specific issues and demands at the national, regional or local scale. This is also true at the international scale, as the *Urban Ecosystem* is known, appreciated and seen as a source of inspiration for some civil society organizations interested in replicating similar initiatives abroad (for example in Brazil, Australia and Portugal).

Moreover, also thanks to the above mentioned factors boosting the social impact of the initiative, over the years there has been a remarkable growth of the attention reserved to the Report by local administrators. This successful policy impact happens first of all because of the negative reputation of those municipalities showing bad performances in the rankings of the Report, or not providing to Legambiente the required data and information. While the initial reaction coming from municipalities was minimizing or discrediting the findings or the methodology itself of the Report, during the years local governments have been led to take its insights and results more and more into account, which in turn has meant an increased attention and sensibility to the relevance as well as the need for the good management of environmental policies in Italian urban centres.

It is worth adding here that the *Urban Ecosystem* initiative has had a relevant impact on public research institutions, notably the ISTAT. In particular, in 2004 a close collaboration between

Legambiente and ISTAT started: the aim was that of refining environmental indicators and of easing and conforming the requests addressed to Italian municipalities which are included in both the Legambiente's *Urban Ecosystem Report* and the ISTAT's annual survey *Rilevazione dati ambientali nelle città* (Environmental Data Collection in Italian Cities). As a crucial result, the collaboration between the two organizations has led the ISTAT to take from the *Urban Ecosystem Report* and replicate in their survey some items, such as the whole section on the eco-management practices carried out by local administrations (e.g. buying recycled paper, toner recycling, using energy-saving lamps at workplaces...). In other terms, a good example of production of statistical information consisting in both a mixed CSOs-NSIs approach and in a knowledge transfer from CSOs to NSIs.

In conclusion, while the major weakness of *Urban Ecosystem* is linked to an eventual loss of effectiveness if no continuous updating is provided, its major strength resides in the ability to take an effective and immediate picture of environmental sustainability in Italian cities through data and information easily readable and reusable for a large number of stakeholders and areas of interest. It represents therefore an important service tool for common citizens, local administrations, and practitioners with an interest in raising awareness as well as in enhancing the quality of policy making on environmental related issues.

## 2.5. BETANYC

BetaNYC is a not-for-profit organization and an organizing force for local civic engagement based in New York City (<http://betanyc.us/>). It is a network of “civic-minded” volunteers who contribute their skills toward digital platforms, open data and local empowerment. Its overarching purpose is to build and foster a community who sustains a thriving local civic technology ecosystem. Before coming into existence as an organization in 2013 – taking the current BetaNYC name – it started off in 2009 as “Open NY Forum”, that is as a meet-up, an opportunity for people passionate about open government to come together and have conversation about how open government was developing. At that time, US President Barack Obama was launching influential presidential as well as federal open government initiatives, and in turn New York City was centralizing its efforts around open government transparency. Therefore, a group of citizens wanted to get together and talk about these issues, and they started meeting up using the software [meeting.com](http://meeting.com). Since then, BetaNYC evolved into what it is today, i.e. a civic organization dedicated to improving lives in New York through design, technology and data.

BetaNYC can be seen as the product of the city's desire to have a better understanding of its transparency and open data initiatives: it envisions an informed and empowered public that can leverage design, technology and data to hold government accountable and to improve economic opportunities and well-being for all. Since its very beginning, BetaNYC has worked with New York City government, elected officials, community boards, and community groups to engage NYC's “civic-minded” technology and design community.

Today, BetaNYC helps to pass transformative open government legislation, supports NYC's civic oriented start-up and builds a dedicated community who believes in the power of neighbours helping neighbours. Community building and community empowerment are undoubtedly BetaNYC's major aims, if not the most important ones. BetaNYC is currently trying to turn the

civic tech-community into a workforce that is ready to be engaged in problem solving. To this end, a number of scouting initiatives aimed at training and certifying its community members' skills are ready to be launched.

BetaNYC organizational plan also includes the achievement of three other aims in the next few months: the establishment of an academy of content to teach NYC's citizens how to use technology, data and design; the launch of a fellowship program where unemployed college students work with NYC's local councils to teach how to use civic municipal data in order to boost local decision making processes; the valorisation of a laboratory where to host civic innovation events and where to realize design and technology coaching activities, with the final goal of giving life to a sort of software engineering shop committed to tech development.

As it will be shown in the following lines, the fundamental mix of ingredients allowing BetaNYC to carry out all the above activities and to reach its ambitious objectives is made of extensive networking, sustained advocacy and the restless realization of projects and events addressed to demystifying open data, technology, and government.

### ***Tools and methods***

First of all, it is worth noting that BetaNYC's members regularly and frequently meet to hack (i.e. develop), yack (i.e. discuss), and map (i.e. plan) projects and initiatives, using these occasions to brainstorm on current issues and activities in NYC and abroad. For example, BetaNYC organizes a weekly "hacknight", conceived as a civic tech and open data study hall which is designed for technologists, designers, developers, data scientists, map makers, and activists who are working or are willing to work on civic technology projects.

Hacknights are thus ideal locations for all those who want to work on already existing projects, start a new project (or find one to join), get feedback from experts and officials, and learn about tools for local empowerment, open data and open government (<http://www.meetup.com/betanyc/>). In turn, the list of projects launched by BetaNYC or co-launched in partnership with like-minded civil society groups and organizations is really impressive: dozens of projects on a wide range of issues – involving hundreds of citizens and combining in various (and always innovative) forms and degrees bottom-up data collection processes, civic engagement and civic empowerment practices, and extensive use of ICTs<sup>29</sup> – are hosted, publicized and provided with links and information onto the dedicated BetaNYC Project List platform (<http://projects.betanyc.us/>).

Moreover, as mentioned above, BetaNYC carries out an enormous work on open data through the implementation of a specific Community Data Portal (<http://data.beta.nyc/>) which can be considered New York City's premier community data sharing platform. Built on the same software as the US and UK governments use to share data, Data.Beta.NYC provides a free data sharing civic technology community with application programming interfaces (API): it presently offers 95

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<sup>29</sup> Just to cite but a few, showing their importance and innovative character. *CityGram NYC*: it is a geographic notification platform designed to work with open government data and allowing residents to designate area(s) of a city they are interested in and subscribe to one or more topics; *Bow*: it is a repository of police abuse cases against people of color; *The People's Roadmap to a Digital New York City*: it shows values and recommendations formulated by people of New York looking at technology as a catalyst for empowerment and bridging inequalities; *Heat Seek NYC*: it aims at tapping the internet of things to empower tenants, landlords, community organizations, and the justice system to tackle NYC's heating crisis; *homeless-nyc*: it is an Android app focused on providing assistance for homeless people in New York City; *NYC Property Tax Map*: it allows to visually explore NYC property tax bills at the tax lot level; *AskThem*: it is a tool to monitor and interact with local governments in the United States; *Dangerous Roads NYC*: it is an online resource for finding bike, car, and pedestrian injuries or fatalities along a route or within a specified area in NYC; *Bike Share Best Practices*: it is a collection of bike share data best practices.

datasets on diverse hot topics such as public safety, transportation, health, housing, and others, across New York City. These datasets are fed and updated by BetaNYC along with a number of other groups and organizations. And they are being used to build apps, websites and visualizations tools, while are regularly featured in articles and written about in news reports and blog posts.

All this huge amount of data and information, of projects and events, needs to be duly and attentively managed under the twofold perspective of favouring and increasing public interest and debate, and of giving the possibility to the members of the BetaNYC's community network to engage in intensive, ongoing, focused and productive discussion. While in the past these aims were pursued through a mix of Google groups, meet-ups and discussion lists, in 2014 an important step has been undertaken when the whole resource management activity has been centralized and rationalized through the implementation of Talk.Beta.NYC, which is built on the 100% open source Discourse.org platform, is designed for touch devices and is optimized for reading (<https://talk.beta.nyc/>).

Talk.Beta.NYC has rapidly become an open platform for NYC's open communities of utmost importance and a central location for all of them. In other terms, it is a "one stop shop" for all conversations relating to civic technology, open data, open government, BetaNYC's workgroups, and the City's data. It came out from the awareness that BetaNYC's open data program could and should have been improved. Like any technical object, objects need platforms for discussion. In this light, data represents a story that has to be collectively and publicly brought to life, probed, analyzed and shared: for NYC's data program to improve, it thus emerged the need for a platform for extensive data conversation. There is a crucial point to be highlighted here. The most part of the information about data and data-driven government, indeed, is not written down anywhere, while it's a lot of storytelling, of personal narratives and experiences with data and public agencies, with policies, policy-makers, bureaucrats, and policy-making processes.

In other terms, a key element of data scraping, data processing or data analysis is the community itself. This is why community and data needs to seat in ways that are respectful and complementary to each other, and this is why a deep relationship between the two has to be enhanced. Talk.Beta.NYC thus answers to these wants integrating discussion channels and the Community Data Portal, with the final result of bringing datasets alive and of enabling broad conversation among a wide range of actors: end users, data stakeholders, data providers, data maintainers. It has been explicitly conceived as a centralized platform to allow all stakeholders – government and the public – to collaborate within a safe and open space<sup>30</sup>.

All this considered, it is easy to understand the value attributed to networking: BetaNYC works indeed as a sort of network of networks scattered along all territorial scales and involving a large number of stakeholders. Its inner circle is primarily made of people with technological, design and data skills. Some of its members are also civil servants or public officials employed in public agencies, with an expertise in data and/or ICTs related policy making. Then comes a second circle of not profit organizations or community based organizations dealing with service delivery, with an

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<sup>30</sup> "Safe space" and "Open space" are the two cornerstones around which the whole organizational philosophy of BetaNYC is built. They refer to the creation and the maintenance of a space of no discrimination and of a welcoming environment wherein everyone is admitted with his or her own idea and personality. Everyone is thus to be seen as equal regardless of gender, class, language, religion, technical skill level, design skill level, and so forth. This is a very pragmatic method based on a problem solving mentality, which ensures that people collaborate around solutions to problems and challenges without incurring in policy disputes or discriminatory ideologies. This approach is codified into the BetaNYC's Code of Conduct and Anti-Harassment Policy (<https://github.com/BetaNYC/What-is-BetaNYC/blob/master/Code-of-Conduct.md>), which governs all of BetaNYC's events and online discussion spaces.



interest in jointly carrying out civic tech projects and initiatives in a problem solving perspective. At the local level, BetaNYC partners with like-minded organizations such as Civic Hall (<http://civichall.org/>) and Coalition for Queens (<http://www.c4q.nyc/>).

Moreover, BetaNYC is inaugural member of the NYC Transparency Working Group, a collection of NYC's good government groups who support efforts to use information technology to make New York City government more open and accountable, and to get the greatest public value from the city's wealth of digital information (<http://nyctwg.org/>). At the national level, it also collaborates with leading tech university-based institutions such as The Gov Lab (<http://thegovlab.org/about/>) and the MIT Media Lab (<https://www.media.mit.edu/>). At the international level, it is member of Code for America's Brigade, a global volunteer network that contributes its talents toward improving local governments and community organizations to better use information technology (<http://www.codeforamerica.org/>).

### ***Impact***

Despite its recent establishment, BetaNYC has succeeded in obtaining an undoubtedly relevant impact. Its work has been already featured in leading US journals and magazines, notably the New York Times, Bloomberg, Atlantic Cities, Huffington Post Live, TechPresident, PandoDaily, Streetsblog, and City&State. Also its impact on other civil society organizations is valuable. The case of Transportation Alternatives is emblematic here. Transportation Alternatives is a non profit organization founded in 1973, whose mission is to reclaim New York City's streets from the automobile and to promote bicycling, walking, public transit. With 100,000 active supporters and a committee of activists working in every NYC borough, it fights for the installation of infrastructure improvements that reduce speeding and traffic crashes, save lives and improve everyday transportation for all New Yorkers (<https://www.transalt.org/>). Transportation Alternatives is leading the NYC public debate and the initiatives linked to "Vision Zero Now", a road traffic safety project which aims to achieve a highway system with no fatalities or serious injuries in road traffic (<https://www.transalt.org/getinvolved/vision-zero-now>).

In this framework, BetaNYC has worked with Transportation Alternatives to improve the 2014 NY fatal traffic crashes dataset developed by the latter. Over time BetaNYC has helped its fellow advocacy organization to understand the value of putting the dataset in a machine readable format, of publishing and updating it on a daily basis, of having easy access to it, of devising and deploying geo-codification functions and visualization tools. In a few words, BetaNYC made sure that "Vision Zero Now" data were the best possible data (<http://data.beta.nyc/group/vision-zero>). BetaNYC also helped other organizations in the city to get data for free advocating for no privileged data access to certain datasets of public interest, so that these organizations were able to use them without having to pay thousands of dollars each time. The cases of the freeing of ACRIS and PLUTO datasets, which are now both open and publicly available, are the best examples.

Under the point of view of the impact produced on the community at large, it is necessary to add that BetaNYC gives a fundamental contribution in reorienting a number of talking points, one of which is NYC BigApps: an annual competition, sponsored by the New York City Economic Development Corporation, providing programmers, developers, designers, and entrepreneurs with access to municipal datasets – from the NYC Open Data portal and other private and non-profit data sources, such as those collected onto Data.Beta.NYC – to build technological products that address civic issues affecting New York City (<http://bigapps.nyc/p/>). Thanks to the advocacy work done by

BetaNYC and other CSOs, BigApps has turned to be a problem-solving competition through technology and data, asking participants to confront with and try to solve NYC tough challenges, such as zero waste, affordable housing, civic engagement, lifelong learning.

For what concerns the policy impact, it is worth noting that, through its involvement in the above mentioned NYC Transparency Working Group, BetaNYC helped in the implementation of the city's Open Data Law in 2012 ([www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/open/local\\_law\\_11\\_2012.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/open/local_law_11_2012.shtml)). Today, three years later, BetaNYC is still providing feedback and guidance on things it would like to see realized by the city's government after the enactment of the law, thus advocating – also thanks to the assistance and the collaboration of two city council's representatives who are BetaNYC supporters – for the strengthening of the legislation. Moreover, BetaNYC has successfully advocated the NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services for the implementation of “The City Record Online”, i.e. a fully searchable and regularly updated database of procurement notices from New York City agencies.

While the major weakness of BetaNYC consists in its financial resource constraints, the “secret” behind all the above cited successful records in terms of impact (as well as one the major strength of the organization) is BetaNYC's capacity to integrate the political power of traditional civic groups and the technological power of BetaNYC and other newer civic organization that have technology within their DNA in order to advocate together, with a much louder voice, for better policies. Another fundamental element to be taken into account here is the fact that BetaNYC has gained over time ever greater institutional credibility through the establishment of good working relationships with a large number of NYC departments and agencies, with which there are now regular and fruitful contacts and exchanges. This is for sure an important piece of the BetaNYC's tireless and ongoing effort to achieve its final end, i.e. “bring the city in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” improving the living conditions of all New Yorkers.

## 2.6. SBILANCIAMOCI!'S QUARS INDEX

Sbilanciamoci! ([www.sbilanciamoci.org](http://www.sbilanciamoci.org)) is an Italian civil society coalition launched in 1999 and currently involving 46 major Italian associations, NGOs and networks active on social issues, solidarity, environment, civil rights promotion, education and health monitoring, consumer protection and alternative economic activities, from fair trade to ethical banking. Since its foundation, Sbilanciamoci! proposes alternatives to the Italian budgetary policies, arguing for social and environmental priorities. It pushes for a change in the perspectives behind public policies, proposing new economic and social priorities for a solid world in which more attention is given to people's rights and the environment instead of the needs of the market economy.

Sbilanciamoci! elaborates annual reports where, after reviewing the orientations of economic policies emerging from the Budget Law and the State Budget, develops alternative proposals about how to use public expenditure towards the goals of environmental sustainability, social and economic justice, rights promotion ([www.sbilanciamoci.org/controfinanziaria](http://www.sbilanciamoci.org/controfinanziaria)). From the analysis of public policies rose the need of a tool able to measure and compare well-being among Italian regions, that led in 2003 to the definition of a composite indicator, i.e. the Quars, Italian acronym for Index of Regional Quality of Development: from that date, yearly Quars Reports have been published up to 2012.



In Sbilanciamoci!'s approach sustainable well-being is typified by a good quality of development. Quality of development, in turn, characterizes a region in which the economic dimension (production, distribution, consumption patterns) is compatible with environmental and social factors, where the social and health services adequately meet the needs of all the citizens, where participation in cultural life is alive, where economic, social and political rights and equal opportunities are guaranteed and where environment is protected.

The launch of the Quars initiative in coincidence with the publication of the first Quars Report in 2003 have been for sure a relevant event, as it succeeded in providing – one of the very first experiments led by civil society actors in Italy in this field – a new measurement tool and an evidence-driven framework upon which it became possible to measure and evaluate regional and national public policies in terms of their heading towards sustainable well-being objectives and priorities. The aim of the initiative was in fact twofold: on the one hand, to boost the “beyond GDP” debate at both the public sphere and the institutional levels, while on the other hand to supply a forward-looking vision, an innovative approach and methodology, and a robust set of scientific standards which could concretely contribute to the enlargement and the deepening of that debate.

At the same time, the creation of a sustainable well-being index for Italian regions was meant to provide an useful advocacy tool to pressure politicians and public institutions towards the implementation of well-being sensitive and well-being-centred policies. More in general, the overall cultural-political aim of the Quars initiative was to shed light on the structural limits of the GDP in taking into account fundamental needs that go into determining the quality of life of people, and accordingly to change current policy-making to meet these more than often disregarded needs.

### ***Tools and methods***

To build a shared measure of social and environmental sustainable development, Sbilanciamoci!'s researchers, supported by a team of experts who are used collaborate with it, extensively engaged the CSOs partners of the coalition in order to learn civil society's priorities, to identify variables and weights, and at same time to grant legitimacy to the selected variables and the way they are combined. This wide and prolonged consultation process allowed Sbilanciamoci! to select key dimensions and variables that were ultimately combined into the Quars composite indicator, using standard and sound statistical methodology.

The consultation process was therefore the central activity which led to better defining the concept of quality of development. The Quars is in fact representative of a large and diverse group (though limited to the Italian civil society only), the members of which have different approaches to well-being and regional development issues, and different priorities for a desirable development path. At the basis of the construction of the Quars there was first of all the identification of the variables that form its structure. The final stage of the consultation process led to a set of 41 variables that are representative, as much as possible, of the idea of sustainable well-being that animates the work, the actors and the aims of the Sbilanciamoci! coalition. This set is composed of environmental, social and economic variables, further grouped into seven dimensions of equal importance.

These seven dimensions are defined as follows: (1) *Environment*: evaluation of the environmental impact deriving from the forms of production, distribution and consumption, and policies adopted to mitigate its effects; (2) *Economy and labour*: working conditions and income distribution guaranteed by the economic system; (3) *Rights and citizenship*: accessibility of services and social inclusion of young people, the elderly, underprivileged people and immigrants; (4) *Education and*

*culture*: participation in the school system and quality of the structures, education of the population, cultural activities; (5) *Health*: quality, proximity and efficiency of service, general health of the population; (6) *Gender equity*: absence of sex-based barriers to participation in economic, political and social life; (7) *Democratic participation*: political and social participation of citizens and elements of good governance.

The choice between producing a composite index or maintaining the whole set of variables was discussed during the above mentioned consultation process. Although the cons of merging all the variables into a single number have been presented, the effectiveness of a tool able to compare Italian regions and to produce rankings was the most important aspect when taking into considerations the aims of a civil society coalition that needs to spread as much as possible the idea underlying the index. A single number, as well as the seven sub-groups which are composite indicators themselves, attracts easily the attention of the media, of the large public and of policy makers. Then, a single number to refer to is more effective in advocacy activity and can become an identification mark for the coalition.

For what concerns the data management aspects related to the implementation of the initiative, all data considered in the Quars Report are drawn from institutional sources and are freely available, even though not all of them refer to the same year and a few are not updated every year. The consultation process have also led to the definition of some sub-composite-indicators, still based on official data. Some of them are indexes produced by Italian leading civil society organizations, such as Legambiente or Cittadinanzattiva, while some others has been elaborated only for the Quars. The composition of the seven dimensions into the Quars is able to provide an overall and sound picture of well-being in Italian regions, ranking them and synthesizing in a single number the differences provided by the analysis of a high number of variables.<sup>31</sup>

Ranking as well as visualization tools are thus integral part of the Quars Report, being conceived as fundamental elements to boost public impact and understanding and to favour media dissemination strategies. The yearly Quars Reports are freely downloadable onto a dedicated section of the Sbilanciamoci! website ([www.sbilanciamoci.org/Quars](http://www.sbilanciamoci.org/Quars)), while Sbilanciamoci!'s social media – Facebook and Twitter – are used to announce and then disseminate the publication of the Reports.

### ***Impact***

The publication of Quars Reports is traditionally followed by the realization of dedicated events of dissemination, such as public workshops and seminars, co-organized throughout the country by a range of CSOs joining the coalition. The impact of the initiative on civil society organizations in Italy is undoubtedly relevant: as said before, the Quars has pioneered the “beyond GDP” debate in Italy and has represented one of the first well-being composite indicators showing clear advocacy goals. This positive result has been obtained also thanks to the fact that the involvement of 46 major CSOs in the Sbilanciamoci! coalition has led to a sort of multiplier effect which in turn has fostered the success of Quars initiative.

With regard to the impact on public institutions, over the years Sbilanciamoci! has extensively worked to animate public debates on well-being measures and to pressure national and local governments and institutions to adopt a wider set of indicators. Among the positive outcomes, there is the inclusion of Quars amongst the best practices at EU's Beyond GDP conference and

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<sup>31</sup> More detailed information on Quars methodology, variables and data sources can be found in the 2011 Report, downloadable here: <http://www.sbilanciamoci.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Quars-2011.pdf>.

participation in the OECD's Global Project. The adoption of Quars by regional governments in Lazio (the region of Rome) and Tuscany in their documents for economic planning shows the possibility of applying Quars as a tool for public regional reporting.

The application of Quars for official regional reporting stands for its policy relevance and its usefulness as a policy tool. In particular, local authorities are asked to intervene on all aspects addressed by Quars. In this way, Quars is meant to support decision-making on each dimension considered (as well as on each one of the variables). Sbilanciamoci! has been also asked to assess the quality of development in the provinces of Rome, Trento and Ascoli Piceno and in the municipalities of Arezzo and Cascina: to this end, local Quars indexes have been devised on purpose by the researcher of Sbilanciamoci!.

It is worth remarking that in 2011 Sbilanciamoci! partnered with the provincial government of Rome in the "New Indicators of Well-Being" project, which aimed at the adoption of a set of well-being indicators to support the Province of Rome Strategic Plan, i.e. a strategy designed to gear political and policy action toward a sustainable and equitable territorial development model. The project led to the identification in 2012 of a set of 49 indicators of societal progress, people's well-being, inequality and sustainability which have been used both as an information tool for citizens and as a guide for setting goals in public policy.

The "New Indicators of Well-Being" project has been then selected in 2014 by the OECD as best practice to be included in its flagship publication *How's Life in Your Region? Measuring Regional and Local Well-being for Policy Making* (<http://www.oecd.org/regional/how-s-life-in-your-region-9789264217416-en.htm>). Furthermore, in 2012-2013 Sbilanciamoci! has been regularly involved by the ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) and the CNEL (National Council for Economics and Labour) in the scientific consultation process which led to the creation of the BES (Italian acronym for Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being, [www.misuredelbenessere.it](http://www.misuredelbenessere.it)) set of indicators.

For what concerns instead the policy impact, the Quars initiative has played in 2015 a central role in the issuing of a Parliamentary Bill – it is explicitly mentioned therein as a highly valuable and groundbreaking experience – named "Disposizioni per l'utilizzazione degli indicatori di benessere nelle politiche pubbliche" ("Dispositions for the use of well-being indicators in public policies"). The Bill, which is to be discussed in the next few months, has been promoted and signed for first by the MP and member of the Chamber of Deputies' Budget Commission Giulio Marcon (also co-founder and former spokesman of the Sbilanciamoci! coalition) and aims at the adoption of well-being indicators in public policies' definition, implementation and impact assessment: it is the first attempt to formally integrate a set of well-being measurement and evaluation tools in the policy-making process at the national level.

All these good news said, three weaknesses affecting the Quars initiative still remain. First, presently the initiative has not economic sustainability, *de facto* impeding to keep on with it. Second, media coverage and the attention of the large public is not that wide, thus meaning that something has to be improved in the dissemination strategy, starting from a better use of ICTs tools. Third, the above mentioned launch of the BES has in some way made it useless to continue with the publication of the Quars report, as the former has obviously a greater scope in terms on variables and domains taken into account, political and institutional relevance, scientific prestige, and statistical robustness.

This point may nonetheless be seen as a success for the Quars initiative, not only because Sbilanciamoci! has actively participated – taking to the fore the vision and the approach underlying the Quars – to the scientific consultation process leading to the creation of the BES, but also and

above all because the initial and overarching goal of enlarging and deepening the debate on alternative measures to GDP pioneered by Sbilanciamoci! has been finally reached when two major Italian institutions, such as the National Institute of Statistics and the National Council for Economics and Labour, have decided to give life to the BES set of well-being indicators.

In this sense, and a little bit paradoxically, the major weakness of Quars initiative corresponds to its major strength: while the last publication of the Quars Report dates back to 2012, newer, more refined, more relevant (under the political-institutional profile), measurement tools have been created and disseminated. Also, maybe even largely, thanks to the valuable ten-year advocacy, cultural scientific and role played by Sbilanciamoci! with its Quars initiative.

## 2.7. DATANINJA

Dataninja (<http://www.dataninja.it/>) is an Italian informal network of data journalists, data analysts and civic activists that share competences and projects, covering several thematic areas (economy, politics, social phenomena) and using the most advanced ICT techniques in order to acquire, analyze, narrate and visualize data. It has been founded in 2012 by a data scientist and a journalist, and now it counts five more members joining its editorial board: a geologist and open data expert; a journalist, activist and social media editor; a data journalist; a desk researcher; one journalist more. Within a few years, Dataninja has rapidly grown up and has been recognized as an important hub of a wider international network of data professionals, data journalists, public analysts, civil society activists that join together to carry out innovative data-driven journalism initiatives. In this sense, it can be seen as a major catalyst of collective experiences and initiatives which have in common a massive and collective work on data.

Dataninja's website hosts a large number of news and links to the most interesting, both in terms of contents and in terms of technology applied, Italian data journalism projects. Alongside the journalistic work, and thanks to the implementation of a dedicated platform onto its website, Dataninja has also developed a line of e-learning programs – made of online courses in MOOC-Massive Open Online Courses format – on the use of open data, data journalism, and social network analysis (<http://school.dataninja.it/>). Courses are mainly targeted to journalism students but also to public administration officials (e.g. Emilia-Romagna Region, Municipality of Bologna, Ministry of Economic Development). In addition, Dataninja supplies consultancy to public administrations about open data dissemination and data visualization techniques and practices, and it organizes advocacy campaigns at the local level in order to boost transparency on all the above mentioned issues.

The overall aim at the basis of all Dataninja's projects and initiatives can be traced back to the very nature of journalism in democratic societies. Under Dataninja's perspective, data-driven journalism and civic journalism find a high convergence point: journalists should have first of all the duty to supply the widest provision and the widest dissemination of free, accurate, precise and independent information on matters of public interest. And the struggle over data, as it easy to understand, plays a crucial role here, coupling to the struggle over democratization. A central element and an essential precondition in fostering democracy (and the democratization of society as well) is indeed the enforcement of strict criteria of publicity, accountability and transparency which allow democratic systems to keep their public legitimacy and to ensure at the same time that citizens be provided with

the knowledge tools needed to participate extensively and wittingly to political, social, cultural and economic processes.

### ***Tools and methods***

The two most relevant and emblematic data journalistic initiatives developed by Dataninja are named, respectively, Confiscatibene and The Migrants' File.

For what concerns the former, Dataninja has been part of the Italian civil society network that set up the Confiscatibene web platform at the end of 2013. The goal of this initiative is promoting the transparency, reuse and exploitation of assets seized and confiscated to the organized crime in Italy through the collection, analysis and monitoring of data and information related to these assets. To this end, a team of practitioners and experts in the fields of open data and of civic monitoring and reporting (web developers, graphic designers, journalists, civic activists), carried out the project in order to facilitate and promote an open and large access to data and information provided by the ANBSC (Italian acronym for National agency for the administration and destination of seized and confiscated assets). Those data were indeed not complete nor reusable or updated, and they were published in thousands of web pages, making impossible for the large public to read, share, analyze and disseminate them.

Through the implementation of a large set of user friendly visualization, research, geo-localization, ranking and mapping tools, Confiscatibene has transformed these data in an open dataset. The dedicated web platform hosts nowadays large, open datasets (released in a .csv format): besides the ANBSC dataset (detailed at the regional, provincial and municipal level and complemented with a smart visualization interface), also a number of other ones specifically related to Italian regions (e.g. Campania, Liguria, Toscana) and municipalities (e.g. Milano, Bari). Forthcoming is also the establishment of a technological link to the Monithon's web platform that will allow citizens to carry out civic monitoring initiatives on seized and confiscated assets, thus providing further and more in depth data and information on them. Confiscatibene can be regarded as the first integrated, interactive and collaborative web platform in Italy aimed at producing an informed picture on the state of the art related to issues of such major importance.

Besides working on the setting up of the initiative, building on Confiscatibene's findings, Dataninja has realized an extensive, detailed and updated journalistic inquiry on seized and confiscated assets in Italy. The journalistic inquiry has been recently and massively published onto 20 Italian leading newspapers and weekly journals. Furthermore, a number of innovative research and dissemination activities are still taking place, stemming from the core idea of the initiative. One example is the measurement of the potential impact of assets seized to the organized crime (but not still re-assigned for civic use as they should, according to the dictate of the Italian Law on this matter), through the combination and correlation of official data on the amount of job employments in the not profit sector provided by the ISTAT and the own data collected by Confiscatibene. It is also worth adding that nowadays Dataninja is setting up a partnership with the Italian association Libera ([www.libera.it](http://www.libera.it)) with the aim to produce a similar project on confiscated properties at the European level.

The other major initiative leaded by Dataninja is The Migrants' Files' ([www.themigrantsfiles.com](http://www.themigrantsfiles.com)): moving from the pioneering work on the number of deaths of emigrants seeking to reach Europe carried out by the Italian journalist Gabriele Del Grande and disseminated onto the Fortress Europe blog (<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it>), Dataninja started to develop this project in order to produce



an accurate time series of migrants casualties. Given the magnitude of the task and the lack of information and sources, in August 2013 Dataninja decided to build up an European network of data journalists from six countries, ultimately coordinated by the German team of Journalism++ (<http://www.jplusplus.org>).

Partially funded by the non-profit organization Journalismfund.eu (<http://www.journalismfund.eu/>), the team of European journalists, using harvesting and fact checking techniques, started an enormous work to put together all the data available on migrants casualties since 2000. The approach which have been adopted consists in using the “open-source intelligence” (OSINT, a method originated by the intelligence services) in order to acquire data from publicly available resources such as news media, public data or grey literature.

This huge wealth of materials has been thus collected, screened, cross-checked, analyzed and registered within a unique database. The main data sources for The Migrants’ Files are the above mentioned Fortress Europe blog as well as United for Intercultural Action, a wide European network of over 550 organizations across Europe struggling against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees ([www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org)). The Migrants’ Files’ database also includes data from Puls ([www.puls.cs.helsinki.fi](http://www.puls.cs.helsinki.fi)), a project run by the University of Helsinki and commissioned by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission.

The lack of compatibility between data sources required an extensive and additional effort of data cleaning and fact-checking: to this aim it was used OpenRefine, an open source analysis tool. In a second stage, The Migrants’ Files’ working team established a database on Detective.io ([www.detective.io](http://www.detective.io)), i.e. a web-based tool for open source intelligence investigations specifically designed to support information gathering efforts for large-scale investigative reporting projects. Moreover, early in the process of developing The Migrants’ Files’ data methodology, sixteen students from the Laboratory of Data Journalism at the University of Bologna contributed valuable fact-checking of more than 250 incidents.

The Migrants’ Files’ database of emigrant deaths now structures all the information in machine-readable format, and the data are organized according to name, age, gender, nationality. Every fatal incident is recorded by date, latitude, longitude, number of dead and/or missing as well as the cause ([https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YNqIzyQfEn4i\\_be2GGWESnG2Q80E\\_fLASffsXdCOftI/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YNqIzyQfEn4i_be2GGWESnG2Q80E_fLASffsXdCOftI/edit?pli=1)). Moreover, The Migrants’ Files’ website hosts an additional mapping and visualizations tool which help users to easily access all the data and information provided. Among the impressive results of the initiative: The Migrants’ Files’ found out that by aggregating sources the number of dead and missing migrants was 50% higher than previous estimates; mortality rates between migration routes vary widely, from 2 dead per 100 successful journeys in the Canaries to 6 near Malta and Lampedusa; no EU Member State or EU institution gathers official data on migrants deaths and as EU Member States constantly close the routes with low mortality, they push migrants towards the more dangerous ones.

The Migrants’ Files is an ongoing initiative. The team continues to collect intelligence on the deaths of Europe’s would-be emigrants. The project aims to further improve the quality of its data, to shed more light on the situation of emigrants seeking refuge in Europe and to consistently track European asylum and migration policy. Second product of this team has been the release in June 2015 of an investigation about the so called “money trails”, i.e. an as accurate as possible, given the lack of data, account of the costs linked to migration: how much do migrants pay to reach Europe and how much does Europe spend to contain migration floods.

## ***Impact***

The picture outlined above gives an idea of the large number and variety of actors involved in each initiative carried out by Dataninja: researchers, analysts, journalists, data experts, technologists, civil society activists and organizations, whose skills and knowledge come together boosted by common intentions and a strong bias towards societal progress and innovation. In this context, almost every kind of data managing tools are used. These tools are specifically developed and customized by programmers according to the needs of each single project issued by Dataninja, and then given back to the community in an open format. Also ICTs plays of course, as already seen, a very crucial role here.

In terms of impact, it is necessary to highlight first of all that Dataninja is connected at the national, European and international level to a wide network of subjects carrying out similar initiatives and/or sharing similar approaches and goals, for example that of boosting network-building among data journalists throughout Europe. To name a few: Journalism++, Journalism Fund, Journalism Grants, European Journalism Center. Furthermore, Dataninja belongs to the Global Investigative Journalism Network and has a number of informal relations with subject like the Knight Foundation or the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. Dataninja also actively participates to several “hactivist” initiatives (i.e. initiatives aimed at influencing the political agenda towards freedom of information and freedom of speech using the power of computers and programming), such as those promoted in Italy by Spaghetti Open Data.

Thanks to this wide network of collaborations, relationships and contacts Dataninja succeeds in obtaining a good impact, in particular in relation to mass media and, secondly, to the public at large. For example, the launch of a European publication day on March 21st, 2014, has made it possible to widely disseminate the findings and results of The Migrants’ Files’ initiative. Journalistic inquires and articles have been thus published simultaneously on European leading journals and newspaper, such as Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Zürich), Sydsvenskan (Malmö), L’Espresso (Rome), Le Monde Diplomatique (Paris), RadioBubble (Athens) and El Confidencial (Madrid). A formal recognition of the great value of this initiative has come with the gaining of two European major journalistic awards: the Data Journalism Award in 2014 and the European Press Prize 2015.

Also the Confiscatibene initiative has registered a positive impact, in particular at the institutional level: after the launch of the project, the set up of the web platform and the publication of the first results and journalistic articles, there has been in 2015 a parliamentary point of order in Italy about the lack of updated data on confiscated and seized assets. In the meantime, the ANBSC institutional agency in charge of collecting and releasing these data asked Confiscatibene for support in data dissemination and visualization. It is possible to underline, then, that Dataninja’s impact on mass media, public opinion and public institutions is amplified by its strong and solid networking activity in Italy and abroad. And this, in turn is undoubtedly a point of strength marking Dataninja.

Nevertheless, there is to say that the number of data journalists joining the network is still pretty low, as it is low the “data literacy” level of Italian public opinion, journalists, civil officials, and politicians. This is a major, even if “exogenous”, weakness that affects Dataninja’s overall capacity to improve, enlarge and have a wider impact. But the initiative – with its groundbreaking nature, aims and organizational approach – is destined to set the pace in the next future towards an ever greater public and institutional attention and awareness on the importance of data as well as of data-driven advocacy and policy making.



## 2.8. INTERNATIONAL BUDGET PARTNERSHIP'S OPEN BUDGET SURVEY

The Open Budget Survey is an initiative developed since 2004 within the Open Budget Initiative ([www.internationalbudget.org/opening-budgets/open-budget-initiative](http://www.internationalbudget.org/opening-budgets/open-budget-initiative)), i.e. a global research and advocacy program launched by the International Budget Partnership (see below for details) with the aim to promote public access to national budget information and the adoption of accountable national budget systems. The initiative raises from the awareness that public budgets are of utmost importance for each citizen, being the blueprints for how governments raise and spend public funds for the implementation of policies and programs that translate their priorities into concrete actions. Moving from this awareness, the International Budget Partnership ([www.internationalbudget.org](http://www.internationalbudget.org)) was launched as a transnational network in 1997 by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a CSO based in Washington (<http://www.cbpp.org/>). The objective of the network is to engage and collaborate with CSOs all over the world in order to undertake budget analysis and policy advocacy. The International Budget Partnership (IBP) builds on the capacity of CSOs to read and analyze in detail government budgets, participate in budget building processes, and engage in evidence-based advocacy.

The work of the IBP is thus fuelled by the core assumption that each democratic government has the primary duty to provide their citizens with timely, comprehensive information on its national budget: that is, the first condition which allows citizens to participate in an effective way to the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policies and budgets. Building on these premises, the Open Budget Survey has been developed as a comprehensive analysis and survey that evaluates whether governments in more than 100 world countries give the public access to budget information and opportunities to participate in the budget process at the national level.

The whole initiative is made possible and concretely implemented thanks to the presence of more than 100 civil society organizations and researchers that are part of the IBP's international network and that are involved in the collection of the data for the Survey. The project is ongoing: after a pilot initiative in 2004, the first Open Budget Survey full Report was released in 2006, and is currently being published every two years. Moreover, in order to easily measure the overall commitment of the countries surveyed to transparency and to allow for comparisons among countries, IBP created the Open Budget Index (OBI) from the Survey. The OBI assigns a score to each country based on the information it makes available to the public throughout the budget process. Therefore, the territorial level of the initiative is both international and national.

The overall aims of the Open Budget Survey initiative revolve around three main pillars: research, community building, advocacy. For what concerns research, the purpose is to realize a solid and objective data collection process and methodology, which in turn is essential to ensure the credibility of the monitoring as well as of the comparisons among countries. Then, capacity building is meant to provide all the technical skills to the researchers involved in the project in order to allow them to look for, read and interpret complex institutional documents related to national public budgets' formation and implementation: this, in turn, ensures that dissemination and raising awareness initiatives on these issues can be launched and carried out, to the benefit of peoples and communities around the world. Last but not least, the findings and results of the Survey are intended to provide civil society actors with useful (and objective) groundwork to engage in

evidence-based advocacy, and at the same time they represent precious tools to encourage and foster dialogue and cooperation between civil society and public institutions.

### ***Tools and methods***

The Open Budget Survey is therefore an objective, independent, comparative, and global survey that collects every two years information about government's management of public finances. Transparency refers here both to availability and completeness of the documents related to the budget process and at the same time to the opportunity for citizens to participate in the decision-making process and to monitor formal oversight institutions.

The data production process starts with the development of the questionnaire, that in occasion of every round of Survey publication is updated according to the international directives (125 questions appear in the last 2012 Report). The questionnaire is filled out on an online platform by independent civil society organizations researchers from more than 100 world countries, who have an expertise on national budgets system and practices. If there aren't CSOs active on the topic, the questionnaire is filled by academics, experts or think tanks.

The draft of the questionnaire is then firstly checked by the IBP staff, that verify the completeness of the answers with the involved researchers, and then in a further round of the process by an independent, anonymous, expert reviewer in each country, that verify the internal consistency and accuracy of the answers. The revised questionnaire is also sent to the government in order to review country results (even if it has to be stressed that the OBS is an independent civil society research): this is of crucial importance to start developing a dialogue between civil society organizations, citizens and governments.

In the final step, the IBP referees differences in answers between researchers and reviewers, and all data and comments on the Survey are published online, on the IBP's website. At global level, the findings and results of the Survey are publicized in occasion of an international public event of dissemination (usually held in Washington) aimed at focusing the attention of the world public on the importance of transparency in budget processes and at fostering the dialogue between governments and civil society organizations. Moreover, all the civil society organizations involved in the realization of the Survey are in charge of organizing a national event of dissemination in their respective countries, in order to promote a better understanding and a better implementation of budget systems, improving civic engagement practices and encouraging the adoption of effective participatory policies.

For what concerns the data dissemination strategy, as just said all results are available on the IBP's website. Here users can find the full Reports in different languages and all the country Reports and questionnaires, but also a dedicated mapping and ranking tool which easily allow them to explore data and compare different countries. In addition, the Open Budget Survey Data Explorer (<http://survey.internationalbudget.org/>) lets users examine the results of the Survey in different ways, including maps and timelines: it reveals to be a very useful and easy to use tool. In particular, through the Open Budget Index, that assigns countries covered by the Survey a transparency score on a 100-point scale using 95 questions from the Survey, it's very simple and intuitive to compare the overall commitment to budget transparency among countries.

It is also possible to compare data taken from each round of the Survey by ranking and score, and the users have a chance to customize maps and reports and download data in open formats. Finally, users can find a detailed explanation of all the methodological issues related to the data collection

process and to the Open Budget Index calculation method. In September 2014, the International Budget Partnership launched a new device: the Open Budget Survey Tracker ([www.obstracker.org](http://www.obstracker.org)), i.e. an online monitoring tool that provides monthly updates on whether central governments are releasing the information on how they are managing public finances. This tool allows citizens, civil society, media, and experts to monitor in real time progresses and performances in each country taken into account in the initiative.

The Open Budget Survey overall dissemination policy and strategy is thus very effective in strengthening and promoting the initiative. And, as mentioned above, ICTs play a crucial here both in the data production and in the data dissemination activity.

### ***Impact***

Due to the peculiar nature of the Open Budget Survey, its impact differs in relation to the different countries involved, meaning that each case should be considered by itself<sup>32</sup>. Thus, if on the one hand it's definitely true that the Open Budget Survey (along with its smart and user-friendly ranking, visualization and mapping devices) represents a useful and viable tool to investigate and raise public awareness on transparency and participation in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policies and budgets, on the other hand the impact is more effective on the civil society organizations engaged in the realization of the initiative than on the public at large.

These CSOs have indeed the great chance to exploit and disseminate the collected data and information at the national level to improve peoples' capacity to understand and analyze government budgets, to participate in budget processes, and to engage in evidence-based advocacy. In other terms, it can be said that the impact of initiative on the public at large crucially derives from the successful mediation role played by civil society organizations.

For what concerns the policy impact of the IBP's initiative, it seems more relevant at the international and global level. The Open Budget Survey and the Open Budget Index are increasingly being used as working and/or advocacy tools by national governments, civil society groups and international donors. Over time, things are changing for the better: a few years ago the idea of advocating for and strengthening public control, transparency and participation in national budgets' processes was unthinkable, while today, also thanks to the IBP's groundbreaking initiative, these issues are considered of primary relevance by leading International Organizations (IOs) and Donor Agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank or the EU.

The IMF, for example, has recently revised its *Fiscal Transparency Code* (<http://blog-pfm.imf.org/files/ft-code.pdf>) including a dedicated paragraph on civic participation, and the World Bank took some elements of the Open Budget Survey in its renowned *Worldwide Governance Indicators* project (<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>). Again, until a few years ago nobody talked about citizens' participatory budgets, while nowadays they are cited and welcomed as good practices in a number of guidelines adopted by IOs. Thus, at the macro-level the impact of the initiative can be seen as by no doubt successful, while at the level of single national governments this impact does not directly depend on the Open Budget Survey initiative as such, but – as already said – on the capacity and the role of each civil society organization involved.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, at the national government level, Indonesia committed to increasing its ranking in the Open Budget Index as part of its *Open Government Partnership* action plan, while in Mozambique the Open Budget Index is included in the *Performance Assessment Framework* negotiated between the government and its donors that provide aid through budget support.

Another remarkable and positive impact at the global level regards the Open Government Partnership (OGP, [www.opengovpartnership.org](http://www.opengovpartnership.org)), i.e. a multilateral and multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2011 that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. Currently 66 countries adhere to the OGP, and in all these countries government and civil society are working together to develop and implement ambitious open government reforms<sup>33</sup>. What is relevant here is that among the governments' admission criteria to the OGP (related to fiscal transparency, two points are awarded for the publication by the governments under scrutiny of each of two essential documents (Executive's Budget Proposal and Audit Report) for open budgets, using a sub-set indicators from the 2012 Open Budget Survey.

In spite of all the above mentioned good news, some weaknesses remain. First, the Open Budget Survey initiative is "structurally" limited to provide access to public budgets' information: however wide, accurate and precise the information provided is, the Open Budget Survey cannot go further, looking at the impact on citizen's real life. Second, it is still difficult and laborious to communicate to the large public why the Open Budget Survey is so important and how transparency and participation in budget processes can really improve peoples' living conditions. Third, there is inevitably a time gap (two years) between the collection and the release of the data of the Open Budget Survey.

On the other hand, two major strengths characterize the initiative. In this vein, the worldwide network of civil society groups, experts, and practitioners that concretely support the development of the initiative represent undoubtedly an added value and a strong point. Then, the Survey is based on an accurate methodology conferring to it a scientific authority: it does not reflect opinions, as it measures observable facts related to budget transparency, accountability, and participation in a very rigorous and solid way, thus supplying a precious tool which allows to carry out reliable advocacy-based initiatives as well as an evidence-based policy making.

### **3. LESSONS LEARNED. STEPS AHEAD TOWARDS DATA-DRIVEN SOCIETAL PROGRESS AND INNOVATION**

The eight civil society initiatives which have been presented and analyzed above differ in various respects: nationality, territorial scope, methods, fields of interest, organizational philosophy, just to cite but a few. Some of them are more effective in terms of media impact, others in terms of institutional impact. Some are much older established than others, have wider networks of formal and informal relationships with public institutions and fellow civic organizations, or are more focused on ICTs and digital platforms.

In spite of these undeniable differences, these initiatives still share a fundamental matrix – and a common, or at least very similar, cultural and scientific approach – which has to be highlighted here, in that they all represent valuable and groundbreaking data-driven societal progress and

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<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that IBP's Executive Director Warren Krafchik is a founding member and past civil society Chair of the Open Government Partnership, and is presently civil society member of its Steering Committee.

innovation practices stemming from a shared need to boost well-being and the overall democratization of society thanks to an extensive provision of data and statistics which, in their turn, represent and are to be considered as fundamental citizens' engagement, information and knowledge tools.

In their being, as said, deeply and inextricably rooted in the data revolution process as well as in the “beyond GDP” debate which have been both taking place and flourishing for the last two decades, and in their fostering or even in their being situated at the vanguard of that process and that debate, these eight civil society initiatives reveal a number of important things which call into question a wide range of issues and a wide range of different stakeholders, notably civic activists, technologists, journalists and bloggers, experts and practitioners, policy makers and public officers. They show for example that social progress and technological innovation can go hand in hand, that environmental sustainability and economic development can feed each other, that successful experiences of cooperation between citizens groups and public powers can be concretely arranged and carried out, that policy making processes can be improved at all levels, that *better policies for better lives* – to recall the renowned motto of the OECD – can be finally implemented and to the benefit of all.

Above all – and *at their best* – the initiatives which have been investigated in the previous section show that civil society has gained over time and nowadays plays a central role in providing precious data and statistics on a number of crucial issues of public interest (while raising public attention and awareness); in bridging the gap between citizens and political institutions; in allowing citizens to be data users as well as data producers; in stimulating new forms of civic “2.0” participation and advocacy through a smart exploitation of the potentialities of digital technologies; in “democratizing data” thanks to the launch of massive crowd sourced and open data initiatives and to the adoption of innovative visualization and communication data tools.

In this light, it is possible to bracket the differences within this collection of eight civil society experiences and to find instead a single, meaningful *fil rouge* among them, a single thread which intersects and then collects one by one the pieces of an original story of civic passion and public engagement with data and statistics, with societal progress, empowerment and innovation. All this said, though, positive and successful aspects of this civil society story must not be exaggerated nor exalted. The aim, here, is not that of depicting an apologetic narrative of events.

Things are much more complex and as we have seen endogenous and exogenous difficulties, weaknesses, and negative backlashes of all kinds (e.g. lack of resources, skills, effective impact on public opinion, institutional or political consideration...) are always part of the game. Rather, this story looks really like a laboratory experiment which has to do with data, technology and innovation and is being conducted by trial-and-error. The final result of the process is unknown and, maybe, will be ever unknowable and in discussion, that is open to either negative or positive outcomes and subject to a typical back-and-forth dynamic.

In the meantime, it is worth to register and take stock of the positive steps which have been undertaken so far in order to possibly avoid the repetition of past mistakes and to value the wins. Therefore, here following a short Decalogue will be provided, which is addressed first of all to civil society activists who are passionate or are willing to confront with the crucial issues at the centre of this Report. It consists of ten points which can be of help, and which, in any case, directly derive from the civil society experiences which have been under the lens of the researchers involved in the realization of the Report.



Then, four key policy recommendations to policy makers will follow. This logical and chronological order – the Decalogue for civil society activists preceding the recommendations to policy makers – is not accidental: civil society is called to do its relevant part in the game, but policy makers have really a key role to play – and a great responsibility to assume – in order to produce decisive steps ahead towards data-driven societal progress and innovation. Just like the Decalogue, also the policy recommendations build on and in some way intersect and generalize the main findings stemming from the above in-depth analysis of the eight civil society initiatives.

Finally, both the Decalogue and the policy recommendations will provide reflections on democracy as well as implications for the renovation and, to the extent, the re-legitimization of democratic systems at the local, national and EU level. In this sense, they do not represent fragmented parts but a single block of discourse which tries to gather together democracy, innovation, data and civil society as interconnected elements feeding each other.

### 3.1. DOING USEFUL THINGS WITH DATA. A REASONED DECALOGUE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS

#### *Well-being for all is the goal*

Well-being is a complex, “catch-all” concept carrying with it a plurality of meanings, determinants and fields of implementation. It has to do not only with health, income and/or education’s conditions, but also with the quality of networks of support, solidarity and participation to which everyone of us has access, as well as with the possibility of living in an healthy and not degraded environment. Moreover, well-being crucially implies the presence of viable, transparent, attentive and responsive governments, institutions and public services. All these are crucial elements which call into question multiple dimensions and domains of human life. Still, these elements are not properly counted or are even completely neglected in the calculation of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), that is the indicator that traditionally guides the choices of economic and social policy made by the governments<sup>34</sup>. As already remarked in section 1, presently we can count on many proposals and tools to integrate the GDP, thus overcoming its shortcomings, with large and refined sets of indicators that incorporate and synthesize the amount of information, data and statistics related to the assessment and measurement of citizens’ well-being.

The “beyond GDP” movement is largely fed worldwide by civil society experiences such as those carried out by New Economics Foundation, Sbilanciamoci!, Legambiente and International Budget Partnership. These experiences shed light on the multiple well-being dimensions and determinants (from balanced economic development to good governance, from environmental sustainability to public budgets’ transparency) and at the same time provide useful and concrete approaches and tools which address complex problems and issues related to the realization of well-being. In this vein, advocating successfully for well-being for all as a fundamental goal of societal progress ever more implies and means the capacity to gain, combine and further enhance and enlarge scientific knowledge and credibility with political and institutional attention and with public support and consensus.

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<sup>34</sup> See, in particular, European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament - GDP and beyond: measuring progress in a changing world*, Brussels 2009, COM/2009/0433 final.

### ***Societal progress and innovation is the way***

An healthy and vibrant civil society is both a fundamental carrier and an essential precondition for smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation in democratic regimes<sup>35</sup>. The eight initiatives which have been investigated in the previous section seem to confirm the validity of this statement. Of course, within the broad expression “smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation” different elements converge. Two of them, closely interrelated, can be singled out and highlighted here. First, there is the ability to provide more equitable and fulfilling forms of collective organization and action which build on the empowerment of individuals and the valorisation of their actual skills and unexpressed resources: the crowd sourced data provided by Monithon and BetaNYC are good examples of this attitude, as well as the teaching programmes on how to use technology, data and design carried out by BetaNYC or the training programmes on public budgets’ analysis implemented by International Budget Partnership.

Second, societal progress and innovation inevitably passes through the art of looking at and approaching urgent social problems and challenges under new perspectives. In other terms, there is a cognitive dimension of utmost importance which refers to progress and innovation and is essentially based on a restless exercise of social critique. This exercise, in its turn, is characterized and fed by an extensive use of data and statistics and the related production of counter-information<sup>36</sup>: for example, Sbilanciamoci!, New Economics Foundation and Legambiente have put at the centre of their initiatives the critique to the GDP and to the social and environmental damages caused by unsustainable and ungoverned economic growth, and are trying to steer governments’ policy-making towards the objectives of well-being and happiness for all. While Openpolis, Dataninja, BetaNYC, Monithon and International Budget Partnership aim at reforming the traditional, unsatisfying model of institutional action through the adoption and the promotion of a “smart governance” paradigm based on the pillars of transparency and open data, civic engagement and sustained cooperation and exchange between citizens and institutions.

### ***Data are the compass***

If well-being for all is the goal at the heart of civil society organizations and groups boosting societal progress and innovation, data are the compass which marks the way forward. All the eight initiatives presented above – in the same way as an infinite number of other initiatives worldwide – valuably and impressively work with data. In different ways and forms, they produce, collect, open, contest and/or visualize data in order to shed light on, illustrate, analyze, criticize and interpret those aspects of reality which are closely related to peoples’ quality of life and worth of being more deeply investigated or reconsidered under new scientific lens, cultural perspectives, methodological approaches. Moreover, data and statistics provided by civil society actors assume a crucial empowerment and advocacy (and sometimes even confrontational) role, in that they are explicitly and concretely produced and disseminated to raise public awareness, to stimulate participation, to

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<sup>35</sup> For a general overview, see Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, op. cit.; Virginia Hodgkinson, Michael W. Foley (eds.), *The Civil Society Reader*, University Press of New England, Lebanon (NH) 2003; Erik Olin Wright (ed.), *Associations and Democracy*, Verso (The Real Utopias Project, Volume I), London 1995.

<sup>36</sup> See Alain Desrosières, *Statistics and Social Critique*, in «Partecipazione e Conflitto. The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies», 7(2), 2014, pp. 348-359.

gain public consensus and to address public powers and institutions asking them for changes, amendments or improvements<sup>37</sup>.

The collection, production and use of data and statistics by civil society actors is thus meant first and foremost to obtain a better and a broader awareness, understanding and knowledge on a number of issues and themes of public concern, and at the same time to provide solid basis for civic and political advocacy, participation and improvement toward the goal of ensuring well-being for all. In their turn, societal progress and innovation are deeply grounded in and strictly connected to the production, collection and use of data and statistics. And the expression *scientific activism* (or even *statactivism*<sup>38</sup>) could be the best one to elicit the profile of civic groups and organizations boosting societal progress and innovation through an intensive engagement with data and statistics.

### ***Problem solving is the attitude***

On the basis of what has emerged so far, it seems possible to state that one of the most relevant aspects which characterizes the “scientific activism” approach adopted by civil society organizations and groups engaged with data and statistics is their wide sharing of a sort of pragmatist and transformational vision<sup>39</sup>, which in turn is entrenched in a strong *problem solving* attitude. In this sense, people involved in civil society initiatives such as those analyzed in section 2 are interested not only in high-level policy results or speculations, but also in fixing, solving and/or improving specific aspects or portion of reality they feel very close: the social utility of a public financed project in their city, the road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in their neighborhood, the performance of their elected representatives in the Parliament, the quality of a public service at the municipal level, just to cite but a few examples directly taken from the analysis of the case studies of Monithon, Dataninja, BetaNYC, Openpolis, Legambiente.

In other terms, the above mentioned “scientific activism” approach seem to be consistent with a kind of *practical policy making* that – more than often in innovative and groundbreaking forms, and always through an extensive collection and use of data and statistics – can leverage crowdsourcing and collect dispersed knowledge to concretely and positively improve the way actual interventions, policies and decisions are planned, financed, implemented or evaluated. In this light, data and statistics coupled with direct and sustained civic engagement express a huge and concrete potentiality in order to change things for the better. On the other hand, smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation largely depends on and is boosted by the deployment by civil society actors of a problem solving attitude rooted in a pragmatist approach which sees practical action and engagement as privileged means towards the goal of ensuring better knowledge and better lives for all.

### ***“Make it public” is the mantra***

Civil society can be seen as a unique “sphere of disclosure” where otherwise disperse and weak inputs coming from below are initially felt and perceived, then gathered together and generalized,

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<sup>37</sup> In this light, the provision by civil society groups working with data and statistics of specific rankings (Open Budget Partnership, New Economics Foundation, Legambiente, Sbilanciamoci!, Openpolis are relevant examples here) which show the best as well as the worst performances of state, regional or municipal actors could be compared to as a sort of *naming and shaming* strategy with clear advocacy implications.

<sup>38</sup> See Isabelle Bruno, Emmanuel Didier, Tommaso Vitale, *Statactivism. Forms of action between disclosure and affirmation*, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> See above all one of most renowned masterpieces by John Dewey: *The Public and Its Problems. An Essay in Political Inquiry*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1927.

and finally brought to and discussed within the public fore<sup>40</sup>. The eight initiatives analysed above are good examples of what civil society does in order to ensure and boost societal progress and innovation, i.e. first of all make public urgent and unmet (or not completely met) needs, problems and issues which have to do with citizens lives and their well-being. But these initiatives not only bring to the fore unmet needs, problems and issues, but also complement them with specific data and information which are crucial to their interpretation and resolution. The term “public” reveals two other meanings. On the one hand, it is connected to the widespread request, addressed to governments and institutions by a large and increasing number of civil society groups (such as Legambiente and Monithon), to disseminate as much as possible data and information on matters of public concerns, thus favouring public understanding and debate: that is, the very precondition of societal progress and innovation.

On the other hand, the “make it public” motto directly refers to the work – carried out for example by BetaNYC, Dataninja and Openpolis – aimed at freeing and publicize previously entrapped and undisclosed data and statistics. The availability of open data, in turn, decisively boosts the generation and circulation of statistical information and counter-information within the public sphere, thus enriching and qualifying public debate – with clear, positive implications in terms of societal progress and innovation. If democracy, as Norberto Bobbio has stated, can be conceived as *the exercise in public of public power*<sup>41</sup>, the respect of criteria of visibility and transparency is of utmost importance in that it guarantees sustained and long-lasting citizens’ scrutiny on public affairs, their informed and better judgement, and their broader attachment to democratic institutions. Today, the “struggle over data” to make them ever more open, public, understandable and usable by everyone is at the very centre of the process of granting legitimacy to democratic systems.

### ***Empowered participation is the pillar***

There is no sustainable societal progress and innovation – and no legitimate democratic regime indeed – without extensive and sustained civic and political participation. In this light, civil society is not only, as just said, a unique “sphere of disclosure” but also a fundamental sphere of collective association, organization and action which decisively prompts citizens’ participation to democratic life and public affairs<sup>42</sup>. The initiatives which have been analysed above show that stimulating an informed and intelligent civic participation is both the pillar of their activities and the engine of their actual functioning. In other words, the thermometer of their successful impact in terms of public utility and importance is represented by the degree of citizens’ empowered participation and involvement achieved.

Participation can take at least two different forms here: citizens can be directly asked by civil society organizations and groups to produce themselves data and information (see the examples of Monithon, BetaNYC, Openpolis), or they can be provided with them by civil society organizations and groups (see International Budget Partnership, New Economics Foundation, Legambiente). In

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<sup>40</sup> See, in particular, Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1996 (original German edition, 1992); James, Bohman, *Public Deliberation. Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1996.

<sup>41</sup> See Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987 (original Italian edition, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> See for example, Carolyn M. Elliott (ed.), *Civil Society and Democracy. A Reader*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 2003; Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1984; Michael Walzer, *The Civil Society Argument*, in Id., *Thinking Politically. Essays in Political Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) 2007, pp. 115-133.

this case civil society actors stimulate citizens' participation through the provision of data and information which can be easily exploited in order to gain empowerment, awareness, understanding and knowledge on matters and issues of utmost public interest and concern. And moving from the availability of these empowering and advocacy resources, single and/or associated citizens can finally – wittingly and consciously – take action. It is also necessary to remark that the collection of data and information is often used as an autonomous means of participation by civil society organizations which launch own advocacy actions and initiatives addressed to political and institutional representatives and agencies (see the paradigmatic cases of Sbilanciamoci!, Openpolis, BetaNYC).

### ***Protest-and-propose is the strategy***

If empowering participation is the pillar of their initiatives, civil society groups and organizations engaging with data and statistics and aiming at societal progress and innovation still confront with a number of difficulties in order to gain public, political and institutional attention and consideration. A double and convergent strategy combining a legitimate “protest” against an unjust or unsatisfying condition with concrete and feasible proposals to change, amend or improve things may be the winning step to overcome those difficulties. The investigation of the eight civil society experiences have shown that all their proposals are based on and are related to the production of qualified data and information, which in turn provide new, additional or refined knowledge on previously underrated social, economic, environmental or political-institutional phenomena.

The scientific robustness of these proposals, indeed, reveals to be an added value which allows to spark credibility and trustworthiness, thus favouring the impact of the initiative at stake on a wide range of different stakeholders: journalists, experts, political actors, public officials as well as the public at large. But these proposals draw inspiration first of all from an initial “no” to a specific state of things and a consequent desire to act to change. In other terms, it seems possible to highlight a virtuous circle here leading to the realization of successful civil society practices: the legitimate protest against something seen as necessary to be changed, amended or improved gives life, passion and strength to the proposals; while credible and feasible proposals stemming from solid scientific knowledge further boost and qualify that protest, allowing it to be duly and seriously taken into public account.

### ***Networking is the keyword***

As we have seen, stimulating civic and political participation and mixing protest and proposal are two interrelated ingredients that mark the way in which civil society actors organize and act. There is also another fundamental element which has to be highlighted, that is *networking*. Networking is intended here as the practice of establishing, consolidating and/or enlarging a politics of alliances with a number of different subjects in order to favour the success, the impact and/or the resonance of a civil society initiative<sup>43</sup>. In the present condition of growing social complexity, networking seems to be a viable answer to dynamics affecting civil society of social fragmentation and diminished capacity to interpret and take control over increasingly decentred and centrifugal phenomena. Therefore networking assumes a specific cognitive meaning, in that it is related to the

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<sup>43</sup> See Donatella della Porta, Mario Diani, *Social Movements. An Introduction (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden (MA) 2005.



art of collecting and of putting in productive relation otherwise dispersed knowledge, resources and forces in order to gain a better grasp over social processes of all kinds.

All the civil society initiatives which have been investigated, in various forms and degrees, carry out networking actions which allow them to improve, enrich, obtain a broader social, cultural, political impact. Emblematic are of course the cases of Sbilanciamoci! and International Budget Partnership, which are themselves large networks made of civil society organizations. But all the other six initiatives taken into account in the analysis are part of local, national or supranational networks, be them civil society networks or civil society-institutional networks. The implementation of networking practices lead to close, sustained and beneficial cooperation and exchange between different actors – activists, experts, journalists, politicians, public officials – with the twofold aim of sharing information, methods, plans of actions, objectives and to give further strength to civic initiatives. In this sense, networking is a keyword which belongs to the vocabulary of civil society organizations and groups and a “must” to drive smart societal progress and innovation.

### ***ICTs are the catalysts***

There is today wide consensus among academics and practitioners on the idea that in the last four decades a rapid, massive and irreversible historical transition has taken place at the global scale, leading from industrial society to the so called *information society*<sup>44</sup>. In the information society the creation, distribution, use, integration and manipulation of information is an extremely significant scientific, economic, political, and cultural activity. Its main driver are digital information and communication technologies (ICTs), which have resulted in an information explosion and are profoundly changing all aspects of social organization: the information society works in other words through a constant flow of information through technology<sup>45</sup>. Data and statistical information are of course part of the ongoing transition, and the use of the expression “data revolution” seems very appropriate here. Of course, the internet allows great and sustained public visibility, dissemination and debate over data and statistics, and as we have seen civil society is able to fully and successfully exploit this means.

More importantly, thanks to the availability of a large set of ICT tools (e.g. digital interactive and wiki platforms, smartphone applications and mobile devices, data decoding software and new social media) civil society organizations and groups as well as single citizens can become data producers, collectors and analysts (as well as data protestors) at any time and everywhere. Thus, web 2.0 technologies completely redefine – carrying with them a huge potentiality in terms of democratization – the way that people interact with data and statistical information, and innovative methods can be used to reach audiences who would never usually be interested in statistics. In this light, it is worth recalling the valuable experiences carried out by Openpolis, BetaNYC, Dataninja, Monithon, which testify a groundbreaking work on and around data based on – and decisively boosted by – a smart and extensive use of ICT tools: data are freed from entrapped formats or sources; additional digital applications and tools (e.g. visualization tools) are implemented in order to translate and make them understandable; data analysis, elaboration and storytelling are provided with the aim of further explore, explain and spread their meaning. In this way, the information gap

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<sup>44</sup> For a general overview, Frank Webster, *The Information Society Reader*, Routledge, London and New York 2004.

<sup>45</sup> See in particular, Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume 1: The Rise of the Network Society (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, Oxford, Wiley Blackwell 2010.

between the rulers and the ruled can be reduced, while “cold” data (such as those extracted from institutional sources) become “warm” data when they are adopted, interpreted, discussed and enriched by groups of citizens.

### ***Community building is the value added***

The full exploitation by civil society actors engaged with data and statistics of the potentialities of new technologies represents today a fundamental step and a fundamental means in order to achieve positive results. To be clear: this is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition. What is really decisive here is the capacity by civil society groups and organizations to involve individuals and to fully enhance and drive their skills, resources, energies to the benefit of the community. This means first of all that the use of new technologies should always be carefully designed and calibrated to address specific needs and problems of real existing citizens, starting from those of the less advantaged. Civil society initiatives exclusively centred and/or dependent on new technologies without any tangible community engagement or implication are doomed to failure in the long run, or at least to remain empty, useless boxes. In other words, community building and the related valorisation of social capital are the key to ensure long lasting impact and success to civil society initiatives<sup>46</sup>.

In this light, looking at the eight civil society experiences analysed in section 2 (and in particular at those based on extensive and intensive use of ICT tools, i.e. BetaNYC, Monithon, Openpolis, Dataninja), it is possible to affirm that the collection and dissemination of data, statistics and information is always coupled with and oriented by the overarching aim of fostering local, national or supranational communities, providing them with knowledge which prompt their active civic engagement. In addition, the design and implementation of data visualization tools as well as of dissemination activities and training programmes<sup>47</sup> correspond to the will to favour widespread digital literacy and to make communities aware of the growing importance of becoming familiar with data and statistical information. Finally, it is also necessary to highlight that community building and the valorisation of social capital positively add to the aforementioned two aspects of deployment of problem solving attitudes and of empowering participation: all these are in fact closely connected elements which in turn – building on and moving from concrete social needs, problems, challenges – can boost smart, sustainable societal innovation and well-being.

## **3.2. HOW TO IMPROVE THINGS WITH DATA. FOUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS**

### ***Reduce the digital gap***

There is a growing need of an accessible, affordable, and regulated internet infrastructure. In this regard, there are a wide range of policies and tools which will allow improving the internet, like investments and regulations to guarantee accessibility in rural areas and for people with disability, or the promotion of infrastructure sharing. Nevertheless, infrastructure by itself is not enough.

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<sup>46</sup> See the seminal works by Robert Putnam: *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2000; *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Like those on data analysis, data journalism, data collection and/or the use of new technologies provided by International Budget Partnership, BetaNYC, Dataninja, Monithon, Dataninja.

Technology can empower a revolution, but technology is not the revolution. The infrastructure to become a tool for progress and development must be accompanied by a widespread digital literacy. Literacy has proven to be the active ingredient in an empowered and prosperous democracy.

Digital literacy in the same way can give individuals the tools for empowerment, regardless of age or socioeconomic and cultural background. Citizens need to have the tools and knowledge at their disposal to be able to think critically about information presented to them in order to distinguish between good-quality and bad-quality information and to act consciously within the public sphere. Within this framework, and given the rapidity in the evolution of digital technologies, lifelong learning policies and programs aimed at digital literacy and targeted in particular to the less advantaged social groups play a crucial role, and must be widely enacted and enhanced by policy makers at all territorial scales.

### ***Make citizens count***

Civil society actors have been playing a seminal role in the last decade in the fields of raising awareness, of stimulating debate and of producing innovative and useful set of data and indicators to inform and counter-inform public opinion and policy makers about issues of utmost public interest and concern. This has allowed to boost the awareness of the relevance of well-being indicators, open data and transparency in ensuring societal progress through the adoption of fully informed, smart public policies. In this vein, civil society actors and citizenship at large should be as much as possible involved in the processes of definition, sharing and dissemination of measurement tools, policy objectives and policy tools.

There is a wide range of citizen-produced and crowd-sourced data that can be immediately available and useful in the design of effective policies: citizens can provide important feedback on the quality of a several public services in real time – via dedicated smartphone applications or digital interactive platforms – to make an example, or data can be captured to monitor their needs. Citizens and civil society actors are also producer of information, through monitoring and reporting activities. Ways should be explored, found and arranged so that public institutions be committed by institutional mandate at least to take these information into account when designing policies. In addition to that, public institutions should devise and implement active listening projects and an agile strategy where community groups, individuals, and civic hackers can fully realize collective projects.

### ***Open data, now!***

Open data are strictly connected to at least two keywords which pertain to the vocabulary of both democracy and well-being, i.e. public transparency and participation: there is no real citizens' participation without real political and institutional transparency, and no political and institutional transparency without the availability of free, accessible, comprehensible and updated data and information which allow citizens to consciously and wittingly participate to democratic life. Therefore, policy makers and public institutions are called to enact appropriate laws and carefully monitor their full application within the administrations: too many cases are registered where viable laws on this matter exist but there is no actual enforcement of them.

Furthermore, data must be presented in a machine-readable formats, freely accessible, openly licensed, and available in a non-proprietary formats. The structure of the data should be then represented in its most disaggregate state with as much location data as permissible. Too often

public institutions produce only aggregated and infrequent updates. In this vein, national and EU policy makers should fully enact the guidelines and key principles on open data of the *A World That Counts* Report<sup>48</sup>, published in 2014 by the UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.

### ***Increase well-being, not GDP***

There is wide consensus among academics, civil society activists, politicians, officials on the idea that well-being does not correspond to and does not mean only economic growth and the related increase of Gross Domestic Product. In spite of this, GDP continues to be the predominant (when not the sole) compass which orients and informs key policy decisions and choices. Instead of looking at crucial aims which have to do with peoples' well-being – such as a more sustainable and equitable development – the old paradigms of economic growth and productivity still appear at the centre of the political agenda. In the same light, even though today we can count on broad and scientifically robust sets of well-being indicators, these are not yet fully recognized as they should as fundamental tools for the definition and evaluation of public policies.

The elaboration of well-being indicators must not be considered as a mere theoretical or academic exercise, but as a crucial preparatory step towards the implementation of ever more sustainable, equitable and forward looking policy measures. Decisive legislative and administrative steps are needed and should be thus undertaken to formally integrate a set of well-being measurement and evaluation tools in the policy-making process at the national and EU level, ensuring real societal progress through the adoption of fully informed, smart public policies. And well-being, environmental sustainability, social quality and gender equality measures and indicators should be also used to assess the effectiveness of implemented laws and of economic and public spending decisions.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

As we have seen in the course of the previous sections of this Report, in the so called *information society* and in the *data revolution* era – i.e. two of the main features which characterize our late modernity – data and statistical information represent crucial pillars as well as key, active drivers of knowledge, societal progress and innovation. Within this framework civil society has a big say and is actually playing a crucial role.

Social groups and organizations active worldwide and at all territorial scales on different issues and fields related to the promotion of well-being are getting more and more engaged with “beyond GDP” data and statistics, with the goal of boosting sustainable forms and models of societal progress and innovation which may be beneficial for all, and in particular the less advantaged.

In this light, within the Report three closely interlinked factors which appear today at the centre of the game have been presented and investigated under both a theoretical and empirical point of view,

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<sup>48</sup> UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, *A World that Counts. Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

also highlighting important implications for the renovation and, to some extent, the re-legitimization of democratic regimes: the growing importance of data and statistical information in complex and fast changing societies, the crucial engagement of civil society actors with “beyond GDP” data and statistics, and the paths toward the achievement of sustainable societal progress and innovation resulting from the connection between the two previous factors.

The results of the theoretical and empirical analysis carried out in the previous sections show that, recalling the title of the Report, civil society actors are eager and able to *do good things data*. Indeed, they introduce, experiment and publicize groundbreaking, meaningful and impacting approaches, contents, methods and tools – including a smart, innovative and extensive use of ICT tools – related to the use, collection, production, visualization, analysis and/or dissemination of “beyond GDP” data and statistical information, which in turn favor citizens’ debate, participation and empowerment as well as the valorization of social capital at the community level and political-institutional reform and improvement.

In other words, the achievement of smart and sustainable societal progress and innovation goals cannot do without the engagement of civil society actors and the activation of their material and, above all, cultural, scientific and cognitive resources. In this vein, the Decalogue outlined above and built on the results of the empirical survey on eight civil society experiences, is specifically intended to identify these precious empowering resources in order to successfully drive future civil society initiatives.

But if civil society is called to do its relevant and unique part, policy makers – at the national and EU level – have a key role to play and a great responsibility to assume. The four recommendations addressed to them which close section 3 of this Report move from this awareness and this urgency. Here, the enacting of policy measures and decisions aimed at reducing the digital gap, opening data, making citizens count and increasing peoples’ well-being would really produce decisive and concrete steps ahead towards (smart and sustainable) data-driven societal progress and innovation.



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## ANNEX 1. LUNARIA'S QUESTIONNAIRE



**Web-COSI**  
Web Communities for  
Statistics for Social Innovation  
INCREASING TRUST IN COLLECTIVELY  
GENERATED STATISTICS



This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 610422

### HOW TO DO (GOOD) THINGS WITH DATA CIVIL SOCIETY DATA-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIETAL PROGRESS AND INNOVATION

**Lunaria**, an Italian Association for Social Promotion based in Rome ([www.lunaria.org](http://www.lunaria.org)), is involved in the two-year European Project *Web-COSI. Web Communities for Statistics for Social Innovation*: an FP7 project funded by the DG CONNECT within the ICT Work Programme 2013 ([www.webcosi.eu](http://www.webcosi.eu)).

Web-COSI, with the partnership of **OECD**, **ISTAT** (the Italian National Statistical Institute, leader of the project) and **i-genius** (a UK-based community of social entrepreneurs), aims at improving the engagement of citizens and society at large with statistics in the area of new measures of societal progress and well-being.

Under the mantra “Statistics for Everyone”, Web-COSI explores **innovative ways to bring the production, promotion, access and engagement with statistics to life**: using the opportunities given by Web2.0, the project, built upon the increasing trust in collectively generated statistics, will improve the collection, production and visualization of data towards the integration and complementarity of official and non-official statistics.

Therefore, the main objective of Web-COSI is to **foster the engagement of citizens on statistics** (in particular focusing on beyond GDP indicators), **using the opportunities of Web 2.0 technologies** and studying how these opportunities are exploited by stakeholders and citizens.

Within Web-COSI activities, Lunaria is realizing a **Report** - entitled “How to do (good) things with data” - **aiming at taking stock of valuable initiatives led by civil society actors** in Italy, Europe and worldwide. A specific attention will be devoted to the impact of the initiatives under scrutiny as well as to the formulation of recommendations addressed to civil society activists as well as to politicians.

To this end, here attached you may find a **short questionnaire**: it would be really appreciated if you could complete and return it to Duccio Zola, Web-COSI scientific coordinator for the Lunaria Research Unit ([zola@sbilanciamoci.org](mailto:zola@sbilanciamoci.org)). If you have problems or doubts in filling out the questionnaire, or if you prefer as an alternative to go through it via **telephone or Skype interview**, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me at any time.

With my best regards,

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Lunaria - Association for Social Promotion  
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## HOW TO DO (GOOD) THINGS WITH DATA

### CIVIL SOCIETY DATA-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIETAL PROGRESS AND INNOVATION

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

##### 1. Name of the initiative

##### 2. Brief description of the initiative

##### 3. When did the initiative start?

##### 4. Is the initiative still in progress?



**4.1. If not, when and why did the initiative end?**

**5. Which is the territorial level of the initiative (local, regional, national, European, international)?**

**6. Which are the aims of the initiative?**

## SECTION 2. TOOLS AND METHODS

**7. Who is engaged in the implementation of the initiative (researchers, politicians, officials, citizens, media partners, civil society organizations...)?**

**8. Which is the role in the initiative of each one of the above mentioned stakeholders (data providers, scientific advice, policy advice, final dissemination...)?**

**9. Which data managing tools and strategies (data collection by data scraping or data mining, data production, data mapping, data ranking, data visualization...) do you use to carry out the initiative?**

**10. Which is the role of ICT in your initiative (data dissemination through websites, data collection through mobile apps and/or web-platforms...)?**

### SECTION 3. NETWORKS

**11. Is the initiative part of one or more networks? (Please, specify which kind of network, territorial level of the network, number of organizations involved, website of the network...)**

*11.1. If yes, when and why has the network been established?*

*11.2. If not, are you planning to join a network in the next future? And why?*

## SECTION 4. IMPACT

**12. In your opinion, which is the impact of the initiative on the public at large?**

*12.1. Does this impact correspond to your expectations?*

**13. In your opinion, which is the impact of the initiative on civil society organizations?**

*13.1. Does this impact correspond to your expectations?*

**14. In your opinion, which is the impact of the initiative on public institutions?**

*14.1. Does this impact correspond to your expectations?*

**15. Did the initiative register any policy impact so far?**

**16. Could you please describe the major weaknesses of your initiative?**

**17. Could you please describe the major strengths of your initiative?**

**SECTION 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**18. What would you ask to public institutions in terms of policies to be implemented in order to support the success of your initiative (more data/information/documents, better access to them...)?**

## ANNEX 2. LIST OF RESPONDENTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### **BetaNYC**

Noel Hidalgo

- Co-founder, Executive Director •

### **Dataninja**

Andrea Nelson Mauro

- Co-founder, Member of the Editorial Board •

### **Legambiente's Urban Ecosystem Initiative**

Mirko Laurenti

- Head of the Urban Ecosystem Program •

### **Monithon**

Paola Liliana Buttiglione, Chiara Ciociola, Luigi Reggi

- Co-founders, Members of the Editorial Board •

### **New Economics Foundation's Happy Planet Index**

Saamah Abdallah

- Senior Researcher at the NEF Centre for Well-being •

### **Openpolis**

Vittorio Alvino

- Co-founder, President •

### **International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey**

Elena Mondo

- Open Budget Survey Supervisor •

### **Sbilanciamoci!'s Quars Index**

Andrea Baranes

- Co-spokesman of the Coalition •