



Project author or developer:
Smári McCarthy, The Citizens Foundation

Where:
IS / Iceland / Reykjavík

Website:
<https://betrireykjavik.is/>

The Shadow City project (Reykjavík) is the result of a quest by media activists to overhaul or democratise Iceland's democracy in the aftermath of the financial collapse of Iceland in 2008, which sent shock waves through its 320 000 inhabitants' society, and has been leading to a collective self investigation by the Icelanders themselves. With the Shadow City project, and the election of a new mayor seeking a different way of doing politics, the involvement of citizens in the decision-making about Reykjavík has made a radical breakthrough. Re-launched by the city under the new name Betri Reykjavík (Better Reykjavík), through its website and social media, citizens are voicing, debating and prioritising ideas to improve their city. In turn, the city has committed itself to execute the most discussed proposals. First, in early 2010, information activist Smári McCarthy (executive director of the Iceland Modern Media Initiative) came up with the Shadow Parliament Project, an idea that was quickly picked up by Róbert Bjarnason and Gunnar Grímsson, who set up a website that allowed citizens to vote on bills, propose amendments, and discuss ongoing debates in the Parliament. Running up to the 2010 local elections, they set up the Shadow City (and the Citizens Foundation) to allow citizens to decide part of the city's agenda. The platform, 'hacked together' by motivated media activists, is one of the rare cases where new media culture deeply impacts the very structures of politics. After the elections, the Best Party, a new political movement fronted by comedian Jón Gnarr and a host of musicians and artists took power in Reykjavík and decided to firmly integrate the Shadow City concept in the decision-making process. The Best Party supported this development to the current Betri Reykjavík platform. At midday on the last working day of each month, the five ideas most debated through the platform are taken to review panels to be worked out and 'after approval in the city council' to be brought to reality.

