



Citizens speak out

A louder call for European eParticipation



European Commission
Information Society and Media

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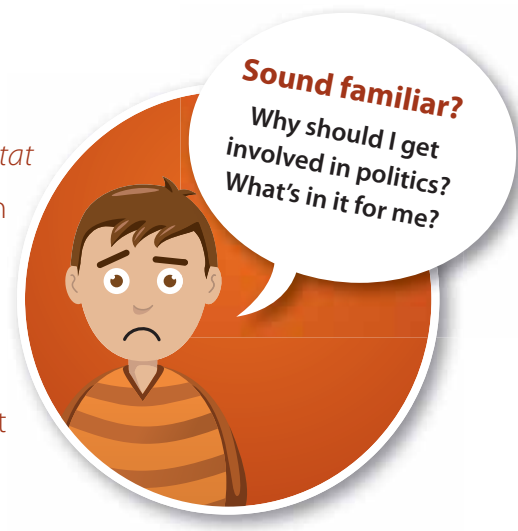
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LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE

Democracy in Europe is under threat – ironically, not from a *coup d'état* but a growing apathy by the 'demos' themselves. The European Union takes this threat seriously. Efforts are under way to re-engage people in politics. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) now make it easier for governments to be more open and for citizens to participate more actively and influence the decisions and laws that affect their daily lives.



Politics still makes news, whether it is the latest parliamentary debate, political commentary, or public protest. But at election time the stories about low turnouts and voter apathy dominate, led by headlines such as “Who trusts politicians anyway?”

The European Union (EU) is working to reinvigorate the political process. In 2007, Europe’s political leaders resolved to make the EU more democratic and transparent. They

proposed to strengthen the role of the European Parliament and national parliaments; at the same time they called for more opportunities for citizens to have their voices heard.

Democracy gets digital

Through the European Commission’s **eGovernment Action Plan** (see Glossary), the EU is committed to harnessing

PEP-NET

PEP-NET is a network promoting local and regional eParticipation. It aims to distribute information, share experiences and foster the wider use of participatory tools and activities.

The network is made up of eParticipation experts, researchers, practitioners, public administrations and citizen organisations. It has set up a blog dedicated to eParticipation and how it is being implemented across Europe. Its goal is to showcase participatory technologies “in action” and show how they can be best exploited through popular Web 2.0 and 3.0 tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). PEP-NET is funded under the ICT PSP.

PEP-NET: www.pep-net.eu



the power of innovative ICTs to deliver more transparent government and more efficient public services.

One of the Action Plan's aims is to strengthen public participation in forming policy and new legislation. Experience suggests that citizens are enthusiastic about getting involved, especially if it is made quick and easy with user-friendly tools.

This is why ICTs lie at the heart of the EU's initiatives to reconnect citizens with the decision-making process.

Everyday communication technologies can be deployed to bridge the gap between politics and the people. And with interactive and collaborative ICT solutions (known as Web 2.0.) comes eParticipation – an easy and attractive way for citizens to have more say in the decisions that affect their everyday lives.

Transparency, empowerment, involvement

In 2006, at the request of the European Parliament, the European Commission launched the **eParticipation** initiative. This funding programme (called a **Preparatory Action**) lasted for three years and promoted the use of ICTs to make it easier for people to participate in decision-making – and consequently produce better legislation.

The eParticipation initiative's first projects used ICTs to make the law-making process more open and understandable for non-expert citizens, helping them see how legislation has an impact on their daily life. The projects aimed to reduce the complexity of legal documents and the decision-making process for public users and provide them with easier access to relevant information.

Did you know that 8% of Europeans over the age of 21 (36 million) have not participated in politics in the past three years?

Source: Eurobarometer

This “top-down” approach focused on improving transparency in order to renew the trust of citizens in political institutions and their elected representatives, and encourage people to voice their opinions and get involved.

From 2007, eParticipation placed more emphasis on a “bottom-up” approach. Projects developed ICT applications

that would enable proactive citizen involvement in concrete European decision-making, especially concerning high-level, Europe-wide issues (e.g. climate change).

The citizen-driven approach puts more power in the hands of the people. ICT is used so that citizens’ voices – potentially millions of them – can be heard and really listened to.

No inertia for eParticipation

A total of 21 projects were launched under the eParticipation Preparatory Action. As a support action for the initiative, MOMENTUM acts as a central reference point. It monitors all the other eParticipation projects, evaluates and consolidates their results and disseminates findings to other players. MOMENTUM seeks to enhance coordination and cooperation among the eParticipation projects and looks for synergies. In this way, interested parties gain a much broader appreciation and understanding of the issues around eParticipation and the ICT solutions that may be available.

MOMENTUM: www.ep-momentum.eu

A study has also been carried out to gather information on the current use of eParticipation across the EU and to better understand the challenges and opportunities involved.

Study and supply of services on the development of eParticipation in the EU: www.european-eparticipation.eu

Other projects related to eParticipation have been funded through eTEN and the ICT Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP). eTEN aimed to accelerate the uptake of ICT services (especially by public administrations) to sustain the inclusive and cohesive nature of European society. The main aim of the ICT PSP, a component of the EU’s Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP, 2007-2013), is to stimulate innovation and competitiveness through the wider uptake and best use of ICT by citizens, governments and businesses. Since the close of the eParticipation Preparatory Action, it is planned that funding for new eParticipation activities will be channelled through the ICT PSP.

THEMES inside

New digital technologies provide the means for more accountability in government through transparent decision-making. At the same time, ICT also improves dialogue and collaboration between citizens, parliamentarians and public servants, so that legislation is more effective and relevant to citizens.



Bridging the gap

Citizens often think that discussions on new laws are unrelated to their everyday activities; government decisions seem out of touch – especially at the European level. ICT applications (e.g. web portals, eServices, etc.) can help bridge this gap by making it easier for citizens to access, understand and see the impact of legislation on their lives.



Cutting through bureaucracy

ICTs have already successfully streamlined public services; now the same technologies are helping to make the complexities of law-making much less confusing. A combination of Web 2.0 and semantic technologies make it possible for citizens to track legal procedures, understand technical documents, express their views and see how they can be taken onboard when drafting legislation.



Calling all citizens

Until recently, the voices heard during policy consultations were mostly lobby groups and a handful of passionate individuals. Thanks to interactive and collaborative ICT applications, it is now possible for millions of people to speak out, and be heard too!



ICT of the people, by the people, for the people

Greater citizen participation relies on the development of innovative ways for people to interact (en masse and individually) with each other and with politicians and public servants. ICT connects up all the relevant actors in the field.

Read on to learn how!

More information

- **eParticipation:** <http://ec.europa.eu/e participation>
- **eGovernment:** <http://ec.europa.eu/egovernment>
- **ePractice:** <http://epractice.eu>
- **eTEN:** <http://ec.europa.eu/eten>

- **Europe's Information Society portal:** http://ec.europa.eu/information_society
- **ICT Policy Support Programme:** http://ec.europa.eu/ict_psp
- **Research Framework Programmes:** <http://cordis.europa.eu>

MEGAPHONES OR MOBILES?

Politicians and the EU are sometimes accused of being out-of-touch with ordinary people's lives. But the Web and new, cutting-edge ICTs are helping the EU – and public bodies at all levels – to open up. Citizens now have unprecedented access to a wealth of relevant information, along with tools to help them follow and contribute to debates and the law-making process.

Despite major initiatives by the European Parliament and the European Commission to improve their communication with citizens, people still remain largely unaware and somewhat distrustful of the decisions being made on their behalf.

Over the past decade, the growth of the Web has changed expectations. People expect to find relevant information at a click of a mouse. And they want to contact individuals directly and quickly – better customer service, if you will.

Governments and public bodies thus need to present a more familiar, friendlier face to citizens.

The Lisbon **Ministerial Declaration** signed in September 2007 stresses the importance of ICT as a driver of transformational change in many areas of public service. Ministers expect ICT to turn governments inside out and reveal their “inner workings” to public scrutiny.

Sound familiar?

I haven't the faintest idea about what goes on in Brussels. But I'm willing to learn.



Theme 1: Bridging the gap

The EU wants to communicate better with its citizens and show how its policies and legislation are relevant to ordinary people.

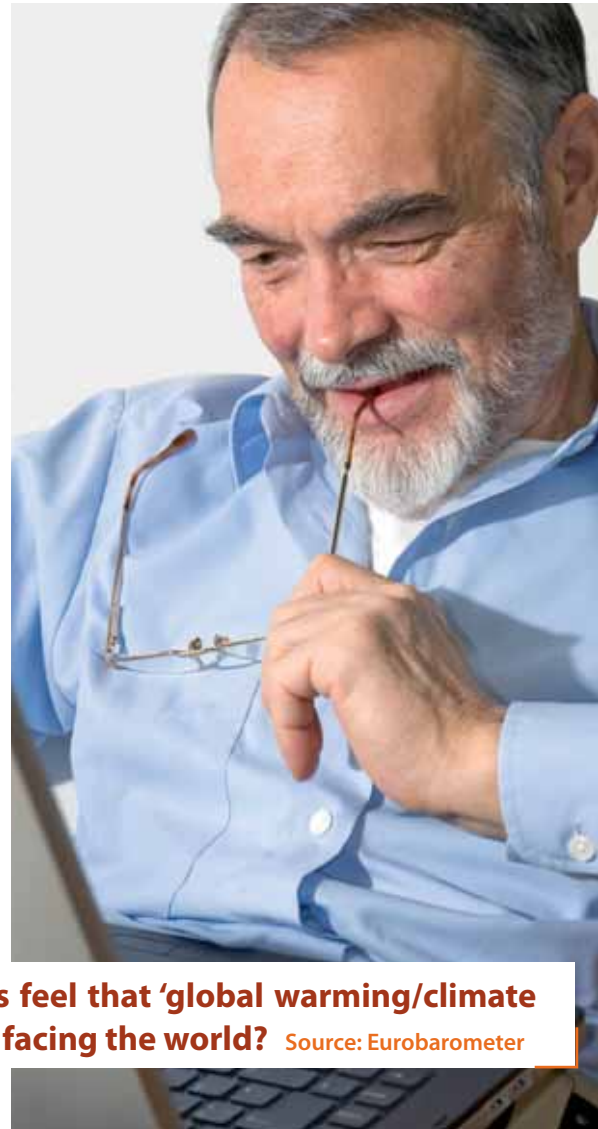
- Novel applications of ICT can make policy discussions and the drafting of new laws more open and accessible to citizens.
- Openness will foster trust and encourage citizens to participate in the deliberations of government.

Innovative ICT makes it possible for governments to “go digital”. From consultations and committee meetings to draft resolutions and final decrees, every step along the route to the passing of new laws can be traced, documented and archived electronically. Governments can open up their databases and provide the public with access (often via the Web, but potentially via other channels, such as mobile phones or interactive television) to relevant information.

Not so remote

The eParticipation Preparatory Action has funded numerous projects to pilot new ICT tools and services that bring the highly complex and largely ignored nitty-gritty of so-called “decision-making” into the public domain. Whether laws are being drafted, implemented or amended, citizens and politicians both require such tools to understand complex legal documents and assess where and how new legislation might have an impact.

Before citizens are willing to participate, they need to understand what the EU does and why. ICT is driving forward this new era of openness and delivering the tools by which public administrations can communicate with citizens.



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Did you know that 62% of European citizens feel that ‘global warming/climate change’ is among the most serious problems facing the world? Source: Eurobarometer

Cluster spotlight: eParticipation and the environment

eCommittee

Ideal-EU

FEED

U@MareNostrum

eMPOWER

The environment is an important issue for people and ranks high on every political agenda. Several eParticipation pilots have therefore focused specifically on environmental issues to demonstrate the possibilities for wider eParticipation tools.

eCommittee is a project that gathers ideas and questions from citizens and interested organisations from ten EU countries to put to European parliamentarians serving on committees looking at climate change and the environment. It uses web-conferencing combined with the European Parliament's new video and audio streaming services to connect the public to the discussions going on in the Parliament.

Ideal-EU uses a web-based platform to give citizens from regions in Italy, Spain and France the chance to debate climate change and energy policy. Public users can share their opinions, upload videos and photos, comment on other peoples' views and send recommendations to politicians. Those taking part have been able to become politicians for the day in a virtual town meeting where they have discussed and voted on key issues. The aim is to release the platform on CD so that public administrations anywhere could deploy it in just hours.

FEED provides seamless access to online content on environmental and energy issues and laws. Relevant information is easy to retrieve and can be presented in a "roadmap" format that takes the user through the various stages and structure of new laws. The project also involves national parliamentarians, officials, citizens, businesses and NGOs in the early discussions around environmental topics. Users can introduce subjects for online debate, make links between online content and upload video commentaries.

U@MareNostrum will help citizens and local organisations identify and solve environmental protection issues around the Mediterranean. Citizens will be able to report problems to help improve the implementation of water protection and management policies, and give their input on the design of long-term marine environmental protection policies.

eMPOWER uses Web 2.0 technologies and social networking to provide citizens and NGOs with opportunities to comment on diverse environmental issues and legislation at national and European level. These discussions will be communicated to relevant public administrations (e.g. national environmental committees) and EU institutions; citizens' views could directly influence policy or draft legislation.

SHOWCASE

EPRI Knowledge

eRepresentative

VoiceE/VoiceS

ICT is at the heart of participatory democracy across Europe, so parliamentarians and public servants need to be ICT-literate.

For more than a decade, the European Parliaments Research Initiative (EPRI) has helped to change politicians' view of ICT from a threat to a useful tool. The three-year **EPRI Knowledge** initiative continues this good work. It has looked at how the 39 parliamentary assemblies of the EU and the accession countries are using ICT and knowledge management techniques. The team has then used this information and the vast wealth of EPRI expertise to inform eGovernment "movers and shakers" about how new ICT could help.

One example of an exciting application of ICT in this area is a "virtual desktop", created by **eRepresentative**, that can help parliamentarians and other citizen representatives keep on top of their work while on the move. The system integrates state-of-the-art information management, mobile technologies and security systems to provide personalised, remote access to information databases, and facilitates information sharing and collaborative working. Over 70% of representatives involved in the project confirmed that eRepresentative was easy to use, allowed trouble-free retrieval and sharing of documents and that the secure discussion space helped them feel better prepared for committee meetings. The principles of the tool can also be used more generally to improve communication with citizens themselves, and to provide them with a means of contributing to debates.

The **VoiceE** project is also looking at tools to improve the transparency of the EU parliamentary process, then to stimulate participation. During the first phase, the partners used an open source Web 2.0 platform to host clear and straightforward information about EU consumer protection legislation so that anyone could understand an important policy issue in just ten minutes, without having to read long legal documents. Citizens are also encouraged to have their say. The platform lets them contribute ideas to debates about proposals and directly contact their local European parliamentarian.

An extension of the project – **VoiceS** – adds more functionality to the platform. It uses data functions developed by other projects to enable automatic translation, text summaries and improved searches. The upgraded platform will integrate with popular social networking sites to make it easier for many more people to get involved. A "serious game" will also help citizens, especially young people, understand the complexities of EU parliamentary procedures.

GOVERNMENT AT YOUR SERVICE

Public administrations are sometimes accused of not providing enough “customer service” to people. But as ICT streamlines the way in which governments make decisions on their behalf, people should prepare themselves to participate in more relevant, citizen-centric legislation.

Agreeing the wording of legal acts and passing them into law has never been simple. Whether a local administration just wishes to amend a by-law, a national government needs a new act of parliament or the European Commission proposes a draft law, getting from early debates and consultations to wording in a statute book is a highly complex, legally precise process.

Reducing the complexity of this decision-making process is important for all levels of public administration, and a priority for the EU. Enlargement of the Union to include new countries presents a new set of challenges for politicians and legislators dealing with cross-border issues and the compatibility of laws and legal systems in each country.

Light work for lawmakers

Simplifying technology is being applied across all governmental functions, including the drafting and passing of new laws. Automated systems are making it easier to manage the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures associated with consultations, committees, readings and rereadings of new legal measures.

The eParticipation Preparatory Action supported projects that would reduce complexity at any of the four main stages of deliberation, i.e. proposal formation, debating draft legislation, implementing new laws, and following up and monitoring their impact.

Theme 2: Cutting through bureaucracy

ICT can help strip away unnecessary bureaucratic complexity.

- ICT can help legislators work more efficiently, for example by routing documents to the correct officials, detecting similarities between texts and making it easier to retrieve information.
- ICT can improve interoperability and cross-border collaborations, making European-wide eParticipation more feasible.

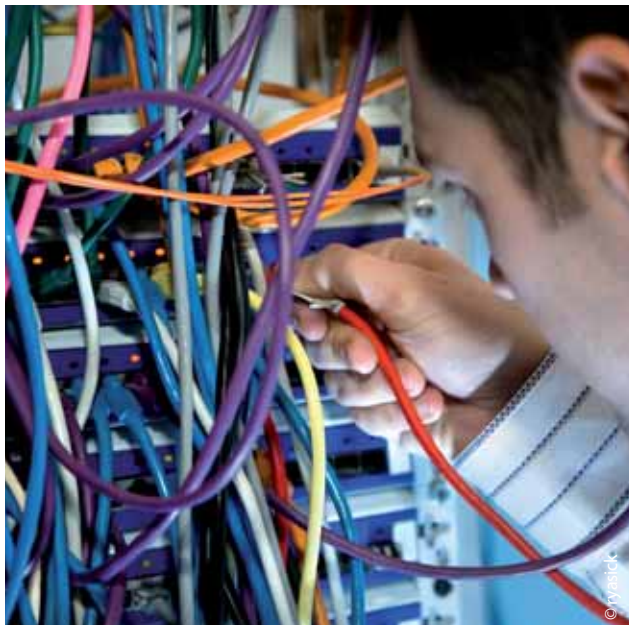
Sound better?

Citizens are already democratically active with a keen interest in public issues such as waste management. Projects like this help to keep people informed on the legal and political aspects at the regional level.

(Comment from the LEGESE project)

Did you know that 78% of European citizens are uncertain about who they could turn to if they had an issue or concern?

Source: Eurobarometer



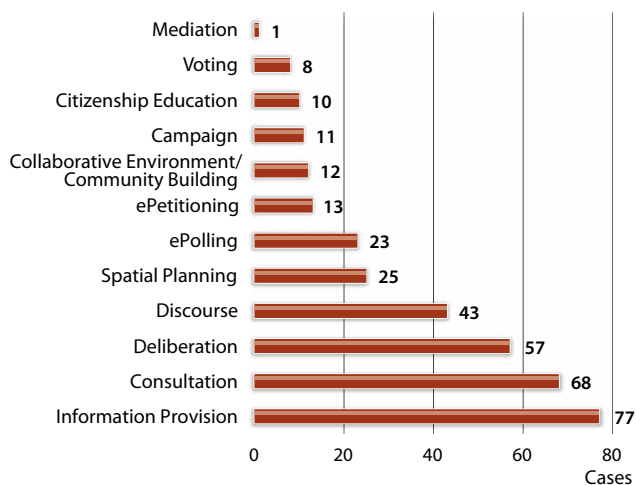
One way in which ICT can simplify processes is by automating how documents and information are passed between colleagues and imposing rules on what people can and cannot do with a document. In the paper-based office, working practices are most efficient when everyone sticks to the rules (and no one leaves crucial paperwork at home). As legislators move to paperless systems the rules cannot be broken. Software can also spot the relationships and links between documents and retrieve information far faster than anyone could by digging around in a filing cabinet.

In this way, ICT systems are helping to streamline bureaucratic processes and manage – even drive – the progress of legislation through the system.

Sometimes it is not always possible to remove complexity for legal reasons, but ICT can be used to make sure that citizens are not excluded, providing them with access to legal documents and related information, rendered in ways that are easy for non-experts to understand.

ICT has already demonstrated its ability to cut through red tape; it may have a background role compared with the high-tech tools of Web 2.0, but citizens can be sure that bureaucracy will not get in the way of eDemocracy.

eParticipation Areas



A snapshot of typical areas of application for eParticipation technology in Europe

Source: eParticipation Good Practice Cases (July 2008)



A place for all ePractitioners

With so much emphasis on the development and delivery of **eGovernment** at all levels of administration, Europe is home to a wealth of knowledge and experience in the field. The **ePractice** portal provides an online venue for everyone interested in eGovernment, eHealth and **eInclusion** to link up, share their experiences, discuss best practice and keep abreast of new developments. A specific eParticipation community has been set up and boasts more than 150 individual members. A wide range of professionals use the online forum to ask questions, share knowledge and offer one another support in their eParticipation projects, which could encompass anything from theoretical research to technology deployments. The eParticipation community hosts blog discussions, news items and good practice guidelines. It is also possible for members to promote events and share documents and other resources.

eParticipation and eDemocracy Network: <http://www.epractice.eu/community/eParticipation>

SHOWCASE

QUALEG DALOS LEGESE SEAL

“If you look at the eParticipation tools some public administrations have implemented, such as online forums and ePolling, you see that the management of them is quite complex,” says Norbert Benamou, technical coordinator of the **QUALEG** project. “Often a forum is created for citizens to input their thoughts about a certain policy issue, but is then ignored by public administrators – while e-mails can frequently go unanswered because they do not reach the right person.”

The **QUALEG** system uses natural language processing and semantic indexing to sort the information provided by citizens and send it to the right person. By pulling together the data, policy-makers are given a global view of public concerns and how people view administrations’ work.

QUALEG’s technology has been tested in two trials. The Polish city of Tarnow used it for eConsultation over public works policies, letting the local council obtain feedback efficiently from both citizens and business partners. In Saarbrücken, Germany, it was used to help organise cultural events.

Semantic technologies like those used by **QUALEG** are being developed by a project that will help to overcome problems involved in the translation of legal texts. By developing a systematic description (ontology) of legal terms, the **DALOS** project will provide law-makers and European citizens with linguistic and knowledge management technology to be used in the phase of legislative drafting and in the retrieval procedures.

The project will improve the quality of legislation, enhance the coherence of legal documents in different languages, and also make it easier to automatically retrieve and interpret legal texts and rules related to their implementation.

The **LEGESE** project also uses ontologies to provide citizens with easy access to and understanding of the huge body of EU legislation. The project provides local authorities with a set of tools to find and set up links on their own websites to relevant EU legislative documents and EPLive/ EPTV webcasts from the European Parliament. Citizens can read legislative documents in their own language, and see how they have been implemented in their local area. As a web-based service, **LEGESE** complements and enhances at a regional level the European Parliament’s own EPLive webcasting service and EPTV web television channel, and provides a potential boost to those services – both in functionality and ease of use for citizen-centred eParticipation.

The **SEAL** eParticipation project, meanwhile, will make it much easier for legislators to write draft proposals and legal texts. By analysing patterns and identifying connections between legal sources, drafters can draw on existing content to simplify the writing of new versions and amendments – and pick up on errors. IT tools will also support collaboration between interested parties, routing documents to the right people and allowing much closer interaction between parliamentarians and the people who have to write the legal documents.

HAVE YOUR SAY – AND BE HEARD

Fancy being a politician for a day? The idea may scare some people now, but soon it could become a regular hobby. ICT is making it possible for anyone who is interested in trying to influence legislation and its implementation – and all from the comfort of their own home. Join the debate, suggest some laws and see what happens...

In the pre-Web days of a decade or so ago, public debates had to be held at a specific time and location. They were open to all, of course, but in practice could only accommodate participants up to the capacity of the venue.

Now, thanks to the blogging, instant messaging, social networking and web-streaming technologies, it is possible to hold live debates and ongoing discussions with people from anywhere around the globe. The EU has identified these technologies as the key for getting more people involved in

its work of participatory government – discussing issues, forming policies and drafting laws.

One of the most traditional ways for the general public to try and influence decision-making is by organising a petition. A number of Member States have already introduced online petition systems to facilitate the collection of signatures and open petitions up to a wider audience. EU leaders are also placing greater emphasis on citizen-led legislation. In particular, the European Citizens' Initiative proposes that

Sound better?
Projects like this are
a great way to have
our opinions heard,
at last!

(Citizen comment from
the Greek pilot of the
LEX-IS project)



Theme 3: Calling all citizens

Innovative communication tools allow a great number of people to voice their opinions – and for their views to be taken into account in policy proposals and draft legislation.

- Tools such as blogs, instant messaging and social networking can connect citizens with officials and stimulate dialogue.
- Millions of people could potentially participate in online eParticipation initiatives.
- The most successful eParticipation lets participants take the lead on discussion topics and policy proposals.

Did you know that more than three-quarters of eParticipation initiatives in Europe involve citizen consultation, debate and discussion?

Source: European eParticipation study



citizens will have the opportunity to call on the Commission to bring forward new policy proposals if they have the support of one million people from a significant number of EU Member States.

Feeling consulted?

A consultation that collects the views of millions of citizens is hard to ignore for parliamentarians or legislators. Any ensuing law-making exercise would have to demonstrate how the views from participating citizens had been taken into account.

ICT makes mass consultations, large-scale, transnational debates and widespread participation a reality. It also makes involvement in democratic decisions more attractive, especially to younger people (see cluster spotlight later on).

Public meetings tend to be poorly attended, but a public consultation integrated into popular social networking sites would give a more up-to-date image and entice many more people to participate with minimal effort. The work of the EU to foster **eInclusion**, whereby no one is excluded from accessing these digital services, will ensure that no one misses out on their chance to speak out.

Opportunities for citizen-driven eParticipation, where ordinary people pick the topics and make the proposals, will probably produce the highest audiences and lead to the most satisfactory outcomes. However, whilst the EU is actively encouraging this bottom-up approach, citizens will most likely focus on local and national issues; EU-driven eParticipation platforms will focus on cross-border issues of interest to citizens where European legislation has a clear role to play.

Cluster spotlight: eParticipation and young people

HuWY

LEX-IS

VEP

Young people are often accused of being apathetic when it comes to politics. And it is largely true. They find the concept of public debating in dark wood-panelled chambers just too old-fashioned and hard to relate to. But they are more than happy to say what they think if given the chance to express themselves in more familiar environments. The latest ICT tools are the perfect medium for giving young people a powerful voice.

The **HuWY** project is looking for citizens' ideas on the way the internet is run and policed. Young people choose the topics and questions, host the discussions on their web pages and post the results. These discussions will be analysed and insights presented to policy-makers for inclusion in parliamentary debates.

The vision of the **LEX-IS** project is to encourage younger citizens to enter debates on key societal issues that feed into draft legislation. The partners are working on schemes to add metadata that will make it easier for people to retrieve and understand information and track the progress of deliberations as ideas are discussed and laws drafted.

The Virtual European Parliament (**VEP**) project hopes to attract at least 600 young participants from Sweden, Spain and Belgium. Using the latest Web 2.0 technologies, participants will be able to exchange ideas in real time, collaboratively write reports, and respond to mobile voting and surveys. The ultimate aim is to create a virtual public room for dialogue between citizens and European parliamentarians.



More than two-thirds of voters between 18 and 24 did not vote in the 2004 European elections.

Source: Eurobarometer

SHOWCASE

DEMOS/Demos@Work

eParticipation ID

EuroPetition

An innovative web portal is allowing EU citizens to provide direct feedback on smoking issues to European Parliamentarians. The **Demos@Work** project is making full use of the latest Web 2.0 technologies to allow real-time exchanges of information and ideas between citizens and some of their elected representatives. Officials are able to keep constituents up to date on news and upcoming events, and gauge public opinion by posting polls and topics for deliberation. Citizens that are registered users can take part in discussion forums, tell their own stories in blogs, view topics under discussion, access related documents and vote in the polls.

Past experience suggests that citizens are ready for such interactions. The results of the eTEN-funded **eParticipation ID** project, for example, far exceeded expectations. Following the deployment of its web services in ten local authorities across Europe, the debating chambers of participating local authorities were full to the limit. At the same time, hundreds of citizens tuned into local debates via the web, using an innovative online service called Public-i.

The core service is the Web-streaming of council meetings, but members of the public can also access relevant documents, presentations used by the speakers, and background information. The suite also offers ePetitions, discussion groups, and Web-based magazines, which local authorities can deploy with little expertise and at low cost.

The two-year **EuroPetition** trial is also gearing up for mass participation. It wants to prove that open-source ePetition services, already in operation in the UK and Sweden, could be used for a trans-European ePetition service. The project will provide ePetitioning facilities for local authorities to run online petitions for their communities on local issues. The service allows the petitioner to “market” the petition as well as viral tools (such as Facebook widgets) to help increase participation. The EuroPetition technology will allow local or regional authorities to jointly launch, manage and submit transnational ePetitions on European-wide issues. Multilingual ePetitions could also be run by individual citizens or European organisations (e.g. NGOs). The project partners will coordinate and submit five cross-border petitions to the European Parliament’s PETI Petitions Committee and one pan-European “Citizens Initiative” supported by 4.9 million citizens across the EU.

A NEW AGE OF INTERACTIVITY

Government has the chance to really get alongside its citizens. Where politicians and officials were once difficult to contact and slow to respond to enquiries, ICT now lets people add them to individual lists of electronic “friends”. Technology is driving a revolution in the way people can interact with government.

From public consultations to parliamentary voting, the process of democratic decision-making has worked successfully for hundreds of years. It works but it is not something that ordinary citizens get very excited about. But maybe that is all changing. The latest applications of ICT are creating new and attractive ways for citizens to interact with the officials and representatives of government.

For example, by the old rules, it would be extremely time-consuming for citizens to let elected representatives know their views on debates coming up in the European Parliament.

They would either have to write a letter or book a face-to-face appointment. Today, though, they can quickly send off an email, add comments to a parliamentarian’s blog, and find and interact in many ways with other people that share similar views. And to find out if their elected representative was listening, citizens just need to watch the European Parliamentary sessions as they are streamed live over the Web.

The European Commission is keen to see such novel forms of eParticipation and interaction fully integrated into institutional environments. The eParticipation Preparatory

Theme 4: ICT of the people, by the people, for the people

European action on ICT is paving the way for citizens to use the latest technologies to interact with government.

- Around a quarter of the European population will soon regularly use social networking tools.
- Web 2.0 technologies are an ideal vehicle for reconnecting citizens with the work of government.
- More research and pilots are needed to develop solid technologies and adapt legal systems to greater citizen involvement.



Action has made significant progress in this direction, but the ultimate goal is to step away from paper-based drafting of legislation and move into fully Web-based systems. Once everything is in digital format, it will be much easier to implement schemes that allow citizens to actively participate at all points along the journey in the passing of new laws.

The funding of eParticipation projects through the eParticipation Preparatory Action ended in 2008, but the ethos lives on. Funding for projects to pilot eParticipation technologies is planned under the eGovernment theme of the ICT Policy Support Programme under the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP).

Further research

Fulfilling the EU's ambitious goal of more participatory decision-making is complex and challenging. Research is the first step to providing answers and workable solutions.

In addition to the activities funded under the eParticipation Preparatory Action, the **Research Framework Programmes** have supported early stage research into **eGovernment** (including eParticipation) for more than a decade. The Fifth and Sixth Framework Programmes (FP5 and FP6), the EU's major research funding scheme, have supported more than 30 projects to develop concepts, tools and solutions for the use of ICT in participatory democracy.

Today, ICT is transforming the way we live and how we participate in society. Broadband internet, mobile phones, Web 2.0 and other recent technological breakthroughs are reshaping communities; applications of these technologies foster better social inclusion, improve access to public services and offer the potential for lifelong, active participation in society.

eParticipation spans a vast range of approaches – from online consultations to collaborative drafting of legislation – but the powerhouse technologies behind these approaches still need

further refinement and research. Moreover, authorities also need help to understand how to adapt and make participatory democracy an everyday activity.

As the capabilities of ICT continue to develop, technology offers Europe an opportunity to embrace a vision of democracy from which no one is excluded. Exciting possibilities in the medium term might include:

- technologies to canvass and automatically monitor and collate comments from citizens to produce a “continuous opinion stream” that keeps legislators and elected representatives abreast with public opinion;
- live, streamed, multilingual debate, possibly integrating speech recognition and automated translation.

Such changes in processes and procedures will lead to a radical shake up of the political system and the need for new models of governance.

The EU's current broad-based research programme, FP7, is paving the way for research in ‘ICT for governance and policy modelling’ which includes the development of mass collaboration tools.

ICT research in FP7 looks to develop new tools and technologies that are robust and that lead to entirely new approaches to citizen engagement. More specifically, FP7 projects will develop appropriate models for managing the digital democracy, but also building analytical tools that should help administrations to understand, interpret, visualise and harness the growth of “citizen empowerment”.

Citizens in the driving seat?

The EU is making significant investments to drive eParticipation forward, supporting the development of novel technologies, robust infrastructures and a sound legal basis. Will citizens take up the call? It is time they were asked.

SHOWCASE

TID+
ICiNG
CitizenScape
VIDI
WAVE
LEXIPATION

In June 2001, the Estonian government launched a public participation portal named “Today, I decide”, or TID. It has proven to be a big success, allowing citizens to propose and discuss new legislation. **TID+** improved the platform and produced a comprehensive guide on how it can be put to best use in other EU countries. The software will be made available free for non-commercial use to all interested actors in order to increase citizen participation.

The **ICiNG** project, meanwhile, has developed a set of online technologies designed by citizens, for citizens. The platform is designed to deliver a so-called “thin-skinned city” – one that is sensitive to the needs of its citizens and to the local environment. Access to ICiNG’s tools is possible on a range of devices (home computer, hand-held devices, environmental sensors) and at different levels. The Urban Mediator (UM) module lets communities deliver local, location-based discussions, activities and information. UM uses interactive maps to represent local information that users can share and customise.

In Dublin, for example, citizens can use this facility to participate in the city’s accessibility audit, taking photos of problem spots with their mobile phones and uploading them to the city authorities with a comment and map reference.

CitizenScape aims to first attract and recruit citizens employing Web 2.0 functionality. Then the plan is to “migrate” users to more formal online democratic tools (such as petitioning). These formal tools will be the means

by which users can influence decision-makers – in this case local councillors.

Online interactions using social networking and other Web 2.0 collaborative tools are certainly useful, but frequently legislators only get to see metrics like the number of contributors, rather than real insights into people’s opinions. The **VIDI** project will use novel visualisation techniques to display citizens’ comments in a more meaningful way, allowing legislators to interpret discussions in a variety of ways (e.g. likes/dislikes over time). It will improve the analysis of discussions and reveal viewpoints hidden behind the big picture of “public opinion”.

The **WAVE** project, meanwhile, will also use visualisation techniques, this time to help citizens and legislators alike better understand the potential impact of complex environmental laws on climate change. The project will focus on cross-border discussions around drafted and implemented legislation. A wiki will also allow participants to issue feedback to parliamentarians on legislation.

LEXIPATION is another project to use argument visualisation tools to help citizens understand the complexities of draft legislation. In particular, it helped users – the general public and civil servants – see how clauses are justified and how proposed amendments may affect the legislation and its impacts. The aim was to improve interaction between policy-makers and citizens, businesses and interested groups on policy formation.

Building the European eParticipation House



● FP5 1998-2002

● FP6 2002-2006

● FP7 2007-2013

● CIP 2007-2013 ICT PSP

● eTEN 2000-2006

● eParticipation Preparatory Action 2006-2008

● EU Treaties and Institutions

● - i2010 eGovernment Action Plan

- Manchester Ministerial Declaration 2005

- Lisbon Ministerial Declaration 2007

PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE ePARTICIPATION PREPARATORY ACTION

Selected in 2006

DALOS: Drafting Legislation with Ontology-Based Support

Linguistic and knowledge management technology to help in the drafting of legislation and for data retrieval.

www.dalosproject.eu

Legese: Easing Participation in Legislative Processes

Tools and services for local authorities that facilitate citizens' access to and understanding of EU legislation.

www.legese.org

LEX-IS: Enabling Participation of the Youth in the Public Debate of Legislation among Parliaments, Citizens and Businesses in the European Union

Development of tools (especially retrieval of documents and visualisation of legal processes) that help citizens, especially young people, to make contributions to the formation of legislation and parliamentary debates. www.lex-is.eu

LEXIPATION: An advanced ICT Tool for enhancing Citizen's Participation in the Legislative Process

The creation of "living-lab-like" communities of citizens and public authorities involved in moderated online discussions.

www.lexipation.eu

SEAL: Smart Environment for Assisting the drafting and debating of Legislation

Technologies to find links and relationships between legislation and legal documents. www.eu-participation.eu/seal

TID+: Enabling citizens' initiative to eParticipation

Adaptation and dissemination of the Estonian "Today, I decide" platform allowing citizens to propose new legislation.

<http://tidplus.net>

Selected in 2007

CitizenScape: eParticipation in Legislation Implementation

A citizen-driven initiative integrating Web 2.0 social networking and more formal online tools to debate and participate in the implementation of EU environmental legislation at a local level. www.citizenscape.org

Demos@Work: Enable European-wide discussion between elected representatives and civil society

European-wide discussion between citizens and elected representatives on the harmful effects of smoking through the creation of an online platform. www.demosatwork.org

eCommittee: Online participation of citizens in EP Committee activities

Online gathering of citizens' questions to pose to the European Parliament's Climate Change and Environment Committees. www.ourclimate.eu/ourclimate

FEED: Federated eParticipation Systems for Cross-Societal Deliberation on Environmental and Energy Issues

Seamless access to existing federated content that matches users' needs for information on environmental and energy issues to support discussion on these topics. www.feed-project.eu

Ideal-EU: Integrating the Drivers of eParticipation at Regional Level in Europe

Use of social networking tools and virtual debating tools to help citizens from several Member States debate climate change issues. www.ideal-eu.net

MOMENTUM: Monitoring, Coordinating and Promoting the European Union eParticipation Projects and Initiatives

A Support Action to monitor the existing eParticipation projects, consolidate their results and provide feedback to them and other relevant stakeholders. www.ep-momentum.eu

VEP: Virtual European Parliament

Creates a virtual European Parliament in which young citizens can participate via their mobile phones and Web 2.0 technologies and tools. www.virtualep.eu

VoiceE: Giving European People a Voice in EU-Legislation

Web 2.0 technologies which allow citizens in a region in Spain and in Germany to discuss European consumer protection legislation. www.give-your-voice.eu

Selected in 2008

eMPower: Empowering citizens to influence decision-making and policy formulation on environmental issues

Using Web 2.0 technologies to allow citizens and NGOs to express their views to national and European decision-makers, and to form proposals on a range of environmental issues and European policies and legislation. www.ep-empower.eu

EuroPetition: eParticipation through Petitioning in Europe

Developing technologies for officials and citizens to create and manage online petitions with the aim of collaborating on a pan-European scale. www.europetition.eu

HuWY: Hub Websites for Youth Participation

Using online discussion tools to collate the views of young people about internet governance and to incorporate these views into future parliamentary debates. www.HuWY.EU

U@MareNostrum: Strengthening Public Participation for water protection and management

Supporting citizens and local organisations in providing

feedback on water management and marine environmental protection policies around the Mediterranean.

www.uatmarenostrum.eu

VIDI: Visualising the Impact of the legislation by analysing public Discussions using statistical means

Developing novel techniques to display citizens' comments from online discussions in a more meaningful way, allowing legislators to better interpret the views of citizens.

www.vidi-project.eu

VoiceS: Integrating Semantics, Social Software and Serious Games into eParticipation

An extension of the VoiceE project, adding more functionality to the VoiceE platform, such as the use of the ontologies, text summaries and improved searches, as well as social networking tools and a "serious game" to help citizens understand the complexities of EU parliamentary procedures.

www.give-your-voice.eu

WAVE: Welcoming Argument Visualisation to Europe

Developing ways to visualise the impacts of complex EU environmental legislation on climate change to make it more accessible and easier to understand for citizens.

www.wave-project.eu

Project funded under CIP: ICT Policy Support Programme

PEP-NET: Pan-European eParticipation Network

A network created to help promote local and regional eParticipation. It aims to distribute information, share experiences and foster the wider use of participatory tools and activities. The network is made up of eParticipation experts, researchers, practitioners, public administrations and citizen organisations. www.pep-net.eu

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
eParticipation	From “electronic participation”. Participation in the processes of government, especially policy-making and legislation, supported by ICT.
eInclusion	The use of ICT to make society fully inclusive, ensuring that the benefits of ICT are made available to everyone without discrimination.
eGovernment	From “electronic government”, also known as digital government and online government. The use of ICT to provide better public services to citizens and businesses.
eGovernment Action Plan	The EU’s strategy to address the modernisation of public administration through the use of ICT. eParticipation is one of the five priorities.
Ministerial Declarations	Declarations signed in Manchester in November 2005 and in Lisbon in September 2007 by ministers from Member States responsible for the eGovernment initiative confirming their commitment to improving public services through the use of ICTs.
European Citizens’ Initiative	Giving European citizens the possibility to call for legislation.
eParticipation (Preparatory Action)	A three-year action (2006-2008) that supported real-life pilots to demonstrate the use of ICT to bolster citizens’ participation in democratic decision-making. The last group of projects from this action will run until the beginning of 2011.
Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP)	A funding initiative that aims to encourage the competitiveness of European enterprises and help develop the Information Society (2007-2013).
ICT Policy Support Programme (ICT PSP)	Part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP), ICT PSP aims at stimulating innovation and competitiveness through the wider uptake and best use of ICT by citizens, governments and businesses.
eTEN	eTEN supported the deployment of trans-European eServices in the public interest. It aimed to accelerate the take-up of ICT under six themes: eGovernment, eHealth, eInclusion, eLearning, Services for SMEs and Trust & Security. Funding for new projects ended in 2006.
Research Framework Programmes	The main financial mechanism through which the EU supports scientific research and development. The current Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) runs from 2007-2013, with a total ICT budget of over €9 billion.
ePractice	ePractice.eu is a web portal created by the European Commission to build up and support the community of professionals working in eHealth, eGovernment and eInclusion. ePractice.eu includes a community specifically for eParticipation and eDemocracy practitioners.

European Commission

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**ICTs lie at the heart of the European Union's initiatives
to reconnect citizens with the decision-making process.**

**Learn about the policies and projects really making a difference
to the eParticipation landscape in Europe.**



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