DEMO-net: WP4 Workshop Minutes

E-Participation Public Policies and Implications of e-Participation on the Decision Making Process

University of Bergamo- Faculty of Economics

Monday, 12 March 2007

Participants

- Joachim Åström Örebro University joakim.astrom@sam.oru.se
- Mikael Granberg Örebro University mikael.granberg@sam.oru.se
- Mariella Berra University of Turin mariella.berra@unito.it
- Stephen Coleman University of Leeds s.coleman@leeds.ac.uk
- Agnes Schneeberger University of Leeds a.i.schneeberger@leeds.ac.uk
- Keith Culver University of New Brunswick and Oxford University kculver@unb.ca
- Fiorella De Cindio University of Milan fiorella.de.cindio@rcm.dico.unimi.it
- Arthur Edwards University of Rotterdam edwards@fsw.eur.nl
- Leopoldina Fortunati University of Udine fortunati.deluca@tin.it
- Anna Carola Freschi University of Bergamo anna.freschi@unibg.it
- Michela Balocchi University of Bergamo micbalo@yahoo.it
- Luca Raffini University of Bergamo lucaraffini@gmail.com
- Giovanna Tizzi University of Bergamo giovanna.tizzi@unibg.it
- Gianmarco Bei University of Bergamo gianmarcobei@virgilio.it
- Claudia Padovani University of Pavia claudia.padovani@unipd.it
- Laura Sartori University of Bologna l.sartori@unibo.it
- Christian Schneider University of Koblenz cschneid@uni -koblenz.de
- John Shaddock Yorkshire and Humber Information Society Unit, eRegion Adviser John.Shaddock@YHAssembly. gov.uk
- Thierry Vedel Fondation National de Sciences Politiques thierry.vedel@sciences -po.fr

Workshop Minutes

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Workshop Agenda

1. Welcome by Anna Carola Freschi
2. Introduction of participants : Name, University, main area of research, role as public policy advisors
3. General introduction and overview by Stephen Coleman
   a) eGov policy (theoretical questions)
   b) Research context of eParticipation research
   c) 2 conceptual issues

a) what is the role of the public
b) what is the role of interactivity

   d) 2 questions for workshop participants

a) what is the key question of policy research that researchers haven't addressed so far
b) how might we approach these questions in the discussion today?

4. Planned output:
1) Report, deadline June
2) Discussion forum
3) Individual collaboration

General introduction and overview

Chair: Stephen Coleman

WP4 survey among DEMO-net partners and the international eParticipation research community showed the following dominant themes:

a) Interdisciplinary translation (e.g. among sociologists, communication scholars, economists and computer scientists)

There is a need to redefine the questions about policy research:
1) Problematisation of eGovernance
2) Outline of research questions (to demonstrate the context of the eParticipation research)
3) Who is/are the public
4) What is the key question that are still unanswered? How do we approach these questions?

Difference between 1) eGovernance and 2) eGovernment:

1) eGovernance as a messy form of power (not hierarchical)
2) eGovernment as a centralised top -down form of ruling (missing complexity)

Reference: Rose, N. & Miller, P. (1992) 'Political power beyond the State', British Journal of Sociology, 43(2): 173 -205

The dependence of government on technology:

Digital governance :
a) Representation of social actors
b) Public services
c) Circulation of information

Features: information abundance, interactive, digitisation of organisational behaviour, agency, accessing digital info creates opportunities and causes change

Role of policy: authoritative allocation of values . asymmetric allocation of authority

Issues:
1) why are some items on the policy agenda and others are not? E.g. eProtest is off the agenda (networking is dangerous) while eVoting is on the agenda.

2) Why are some actors involved in the process and some are not? . who is entitled to speak (who are the mouthpieces of eParticipation policy)?
Reference to UK/YouGov survey: eParticipation reflects both digital and political divide (e.g. marginalisation of groups)

3) What defines the patterns of interaction? How do people interact?

3 tensions at the heart of policy

1) Institutional / situated logic of politics . framed conceptions (e.g. Weber)
. institutions are resistant to change
. institutional voids – areas where governments cannot cope with decisions and where they depend on the public to answer
Situated logic: strategies of every-day life . people are interested in issues / immediate environments
Contrast to institutional framework: institutions have rigid memory functions
eParticipation world best out of improvisation . eParticipation is ruined by institutionalising it

2) Instrumental / cultural logic:
a) goal driven process
b) identity and effect . people need to feel respected and good in taking part in it
Reference: Ulrich Beck . sub -politisation of politics away from centres to areas of the non -political (e.g. family, TV)
3) Participatory in-and output
-tension between process and performance
-procedural fairness
-emphasis on performance not on process

-problem: consensual & agonistic output

Fear (of politicians): eParticipation will eliminate consensus
Public: politics is agonistic -> who gets what; who is respected and who is not?
Tensions have to be apprehended as both subjective (notions of efficacy) and objective (notions of fairness)

Public

• Discursive construction . imagine the public (sphere)
• Few people trust the public
• Demos is too differentiated for empowerment . who should participate?
a) General public/national public/who is in?
b) Interested public (e.g. stakeholders in outcome) . exclusion of lots of

participants in the public sphere
c) Marginalised publics (excluded groups of the public, e.g. ethnic minorities)
d) Self-elected public (whoever gets involved in projects)

Q: To whom are we speaking when we speak to the public? To what extent are we accountable to gender/ethnic minority?
Interactivity

• the soul of eParticipation
• lack of meaning
• what is interactivity?
• Use and definitions of interactivity:
a) interface – activity in DEMO-net context; capacity to interact with digital content; restricted
b) Raffaelli: message exchange (3 messages); limited notion
c) subjective interactivity: it occurs when you think you are interacting; interactivity is due to perception of people
We need to think about what we mean by eGovernance . need for theoretical clarity
Aim: stronger/more inclusive deliberative democracy

Morning sessions: questions and discussions to be addressed

a) What are the questions we don't know about/ need to address?

b) How can we discuss/ approach these questions in today's session?

Discussion:

Anna Carola Freschi

• Problem of new location of power in the context of new governance
• Shift from politics to administration(routine)
• What are the new locations and sources of political power?
• Interactivity: reduction of asymmetry in the control of communications flow/information
• Asymmetrical position of civic actors (different kinds) and institutions/political actors (different intensity of power)
• Flow of interactivity . very complex, non-linear nature
• Different 'autonomy' of the different levels of governance
• Symbolic power of technology and technocracy – 'de-politicization'

Agnes Schneeberger:

• Empowerment – how do citizens get empowered if eDiscussions have no political consequences? Is this a threat to future eParticipation? Are elites more empowered by ICTs than citizens?
• Platforms of expressions – are online forums more than platforms of expressions?
• Direct democracy – what is the politicians' stance?
• Tracability of arguments – where do contributions go? What kind of knowledge management and archiving is planned for the future?

Mariella Berra:

• Will of participation from the government agenda . why it is not used?
• Performance . what is the government agenda; how we can evaluate adequately?
• How the common knowledge created in the communication can be used?
• Create experience of cooperation fostering social capital in the communities
• Why politicians are not interested in using technology?

Stephen Coleman:

• Because it (politics) is a monopoly?

Mariella Berra:

• The rebuilding of community should be an opportunity . to build social capital (networks among people, private actors, self organization of society)

Joachim Åström:

• What eParticipation really means for different actors and in different contexts
• Government use it as problem -solving but not so much for power-sharing (administration theory)

• Everyone approves participation
• Use of 'old' frameworks of power -sharing
• Are we limiting the overall scope by what we are doing through the exclusive use of the term eParticipation for this area of research?

Stephen Coleman:

• Power sharing? eDemocracy . eParticipation
• Different contexts: e.g. the Chinese government is interested in eParticipation

Mikael Granberg:

• Missing connections between talking jobs and decision . decision making processes
• Long history of participation offline in DK . what about eParticipation without the "e"? What is the difference? What are the specifics of eParticipation?

Thierry Vedel:

• 2 dimensions of the problem:
a) how to promote participation of citizens
b) how can citizens participate in the improvement of pubic policy
• Digital divide includes several other divides (e.g civic divides, knowledge gap, social divide)
. different political cultures with a) active and b) passive citizens
H: All divides overlap! How can we overcome the different divides?
Information technology will not resolve these divides but increase them

Stephen Coleman:

• Solving the problem of inequality in society
• How can we address this in policy terms?
• Ways: better communications; orchestrated measures to bring disadvantaged people to be represented even more than advantaged
Thierry Vedel:

• Enlarge or deepen democracy?
• Research concentrated on new application services, but they are biased
• Existing fundamental inequalities
• There is no development to create technologies for the less advantaged
Arthur Edwards:

• Politicians continue to do things relevant, to decide, even if citizens do not participate
• Concept of politics:
a) domain of the de-political (family, ethnicity)
b) domain of politics and politicians
. we know too little about the domain of politicians
Stephen Coleman:

• Jens Hoff study: younger politicians are better with email than their older colleagues

• Politicians are worried to loose power to bureaucrats who are technocrats doing technological exercises
• Worry that demands go beyond technological competences

Arthur Edwards:

• Different types of local councillors /styles of representation
• Some are reaching out to the public but there is a lack of translation into approachable issues
a) types of politicians
b) use of new media
• Dualisation:
a) making local policies more interesting for citizens
b) restore power

• How councillors 'tap' resources from citizens
• Strategies of local councillors . how to make alliances (inquiry)
• Triangle: council . citizen . administration

Keith Culver:

• What differences does eParticipation make?
• What categories of knowledge?
• View of Europe: diverse flow of eParticipation . conceptual unity on top but a diverse body
• Autonomous human personalities with interests
• Artificial personalities (e.g. Dutch animal party, Bill of rights for robots on South Korea)
• 'real' democracy on local level . not true, national and international levels are very relevant
• Problem of international participation as a main problem in Europe
• Focus on local level limits the problem
• What is the role of the private actors?

Laura Sartori:

• Who are the actors on institutional and individual level?
• How to identify them? How to include the excluded?
• Stratification of differences

Stephen Coleman:

• What are the policy consequences?
• Generic publics in the future but for now we have segregated stakeholders
• Do self-selected groups have a democratic dimension/representative potential?

Christian Schneider:

• Technical view
• Interactive platform for eParticipation
• If people are not interested in regular participation, how can we make them

participate in eParticipation
• Is technical participation 'easier' and more direct?

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• Concept of eParticipation . historicising it
• Historical specificity of involvement
• eParticipation out of crisis/ lack of political theory
• How to express needs/ how to communicate
• Kinds of instruments showed limitations when new media entered the field; new media only posed other questions but not answering the pending 'old' ones

• How can we carry out old questions in the context of new media?
• Looking at eParticipation in terms of resources: time, work, actors
. who does what? What is the cost of eParticipation? Who makes money with eParticipation (business model bias . economic factor)?
• Debate about eParticipation: money to fund e-participation projects comes from all classes but they don't benefit equally from eParticipation benefits . what is the justification for eParticipation to those citizens who are NOT benefiting from it?
• eParticipation is made from the workplace (spare/robbed time from the work)
. most people use work facilities to make of eParticipation
. people don't want to spent money or time to participate privately
• Issue: role of time and financial constraints
• Concept of immaterial work
• Working class were engaged in conventional political participation . eParticipation cuts them off
• Collapse of digital cities (e.g. Amsterdam)

Stephen Coleman:

• Crisis – eParticipation as a panic reaction?
• Present: what does the public sphere need?
• How to think about added -value?

Claudia Padovani:

• Tracability of issues . use of tools to allow participation of vocabularies
• eDemocracy use in Europe
• conception of eDemocracy: allows visualisation in semantic spaces
• Institutional/situational eParticipation:
e.g. EU communication strategy: willingness but cluelessness on reality
• Is being exposed to knowledge enough?
• Engagement in networks
• Vague idea of decision makers on how to use technology
• Tensions between on-and offline dimensions:
. there are similar tensions both in the on-and offline dimensions
. the challenge is to merge dimensions because they have similar tensions
• Learning effect in the local space to be transferred to transnational level
. connection to offline -participation research

Stephen Coleman:

• EU communication strategy approach: they want consensus
• You cannot have a democratic discussion when only ONE result will be accepted!

John Shaddock:

• 2 way communication/participation
• Debating and selling solutions
• Time scales of political processes in the past have changed: nowadays politicians face short time scales with demands for quick solutions
• Politicians are lonely . lack of support of institutions for their representatives
• How to fit timing of eParticipation with decision -making process?

Stephen Coleman:

• Do we need fast participation? Can this still be deliberative?

Keith Culver:

• Example of citizen juries

Stephen Coleman:

• De-institutionalisation of everything is needed
• Ad-hoc principle
• Innovation cannot co-exist within institutional logic

Fiorella De Cindio:

• Risks – opportunity tension
• Feeling to do something
• Second life
• Technology always runs
• Technological change shapes society
• What is the balance between sides of technological change and social change?

Stephen Coleman:

• The consciousness of a risk diminishes the risk
• DEMO-net is too enthusiastic about technological potential
• We don't RUN eParticipation – we have to understand it
. research should be interventionist before things collapse/fail

Luca Raffini:

• Risk and opportunity of eParticipation and participatory/deliberative democracy
• Link of social change to old and new forms of participation
• Dualisation/ fragmentation of society
• Political parties as instruments of participation to link citizens with institutions and the public
• Dalton: mobilisation of parties

• Now the individual is alone (no party representation) facing the institutions
• Empowerment: how do new forms of eParticipation empower the powerless citizens?
• How to de-power the yet powerful?
• Transformation of power relations in society

Stephen Coleman:

• Do you need to be a social-democrat to be interested in eParticipation?
• Would the right have anything to say about eParticipation?
• Is eParticipation a political reading? . political aspiration
e.g. is the outcome of eParticipation to freely complain about migration? Is this desirable or do we have a more normative (or even moral) approach?

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Empowerment of social actors
• Reconstruction of a social link (reference to social capital)
• Why politics is less central in individual interests/values
• Maybe the liberal model has destroyed this aspect of social relationship / society?
• Where is politics
• New questions:
-is there a process of normalisation of politics?
-marginalisation of those who want to participate by the presence of politicians . e.g. small, active groups without voices in the public sphere

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• Participation and knowledge management
• What decision -making processes among citizens?
• What is their knowledge and opinion?
• Process of sophistication . eParticipation competences
• How can people decide?

Stephen Coleman:

• Knowledge itself is constructed
• Problem of vulgar knowledge

Arthur Edwards:

• e.g. speed ramp discussion – who holds professional knowledge?

Stephen Coleman:

• non -institutional dimension
• DEMO-net has almost exclusively looked at institutions . what about blogs, wikis etc?
• Why haven't we had a discussion about public spaces involving the public?
• What is the added -value for democracy?

Fiorella De Cindio:

• Indicators for eParticipation are weak ; better start with indicators for participation (without the "e"); e.g. user activity via log files
• There is a need to compare on-and offline participation
• Goal: extend and deepen participation

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Are the on-and offline dimension really separated spheres of participation?
• How/why can we distinguish between on-and offline participation?

Stephen Coleman:

• Historical approach . what has changed?
• A comparison on the present is not possible BUT a historical comparison is

Claudia Padovani:

• Participation is not an ended value. There are 3 different aspects included:
. legitimacy
. efficiency (politically contested term)
. justice (politically contested term)

Thierry Vedel:

• What is the value of participation in comparison to eParticipation?

Keith Culver:

• There is a need for an ongoing dialogue between legal theory and democratic theory

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• Connections between talking and decision -making are hard to investigate (e.g. Beppe Grillo blog in Italy)

Stephen Coleman:

• Agenda -setting: empirical evidence that the public can raise issues
• Can you measure influence?
. what would happen if these things would not happen at all?
. a questions that goes around the questions of influence
• Public service broadcasting: Andrew Graham, e.g. BBC Test "public value"
. how do you define a public value test outside economic externalities?
Mariella Berra:

• Different interactions between disciplines (e.g. European view, local view/ different levels and scales)

Thierry Vedel:

• Difficulty to define set of criteria of evaluation of eParticipation

• What was before the Internet?
• The visibility of discussion is more present . before the Internet most discussion took place in the private sphere

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• We should look to measure something
. importance for politics
. need for evidence

Stephen Coleman:

• Instrumental measurement limits the potential (e.g. no need to that for music etc.)
• Why do we need measurement? . institutions force an instrumental approach on it

Mariella Berra:

• Participation is not constant nor equal or a stable value
• In order to enlarge participation you need to measure it

Stephen Coleman:

• Participation is binding for politicians . a source of legitimacy
• E.g. UK ePetition on road pricing got the attention of 1.9 million participants
• Politicians approach: we want to know who the people are who disagree with us . finding out what tools will tame them
• Why does a politician have a website? . they want to collect data about users
• Politicians are interested actors in the same way as citizens are
• It is a source of power to be used against citizens

Anna Carola Freschi:

• In the rhetoric of the political consultants participation is needed to prevent conflict

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• Policy needs to measure public opinion (e.g. German project on innovation . link between innovation and decision -making)

Afternoon session: General discussion on the emerged issues

Chair: Anna Carola Freschi

Summary of main points

1. Different levels of public policies on eParticipation/ multilevel governance

of eParticipation
. specifics of eParticipation policy
. institutional specifics
. comparison/ comparative analysis on ePolicy
. communicational aspect
2. Community and Cooperation
. self-organising effect of civil society
3. Relationship of conflict between problem -solving and power -sharing
4. Problems of political, social and civil divide, with digital divide:
. who are the users of eParticipation tools in a non -institutional context?
. who are participants in general?
. what is their relationship with the new media?
5. Politicians:
. expectations to eDemocracy
. representation styles
. styles of participation
6. Change in public sphere and mass media systems that communication technologies have implied
7. Main traits of the policy arena on eDemocracy and eParticipation
. private sector/industries
. 3rd sector actors
8. Different rhythms between decision -making process and social/economic/technological change
. pressure on the policy-making
9. Relationship between online-offline participation
10.Regulation of the Internet
. implication of social divide, civil rights, citizenship
11.Methodologies/ research instruments
. reflection
. gathering

John Shaddock:

• Opportunity emphasis – rather than the reductionist view of what is

Fiorella De Cindio:

• Difference in participation on different levels (local, national, EU, international)
. the dimension of the local level is relevant for the impact evaluation on politics
. scale and issues

Mariella Berra:

• Best practice of eParticipation . examples
• What are the factors affecting/improving participation levels?

Anna Carola Freschi:

• 2 levels of the discussion: the level at which e-democracy public policies are defined, the level of experimentation/implementation in practise. They can differ (e.g. in Italy national policy to support local initiatives)

Claudia Padovani:

• Scale: EU communication strategy with the aim to create a policy on communication
• Consciousness to interlink eParticipation and communication levels

Stephen Coleman:

• National activities: eConsultation on policies in the UK . 1 month periods
• E.g. "Domestic violence" eConsultation in 2000 with over 1000 contributions; form 2000 -2006 legislation was using forum evidence for policy making
. eConsultation made it possible to reach "hard to reach" groups
. the eConsultation generated an output that would not have been with a survey
• E.g. Stem cell research eConsultation (1 month) results in the participation of an unexpected third group apart from the expected opposing groups of a) scientists and b) moralists which were c) chronically disables people
• Surpassing the barriers of local/national and having something to say or not
• These examples have nothing to do with local or national level but the issue itself has a unifying effect
. consultations pushed politicians to consider evidence
• This kind of consultation would not be possible on the Iraq war

Anna Carola Freschi :

• Politicians seem more interested in hearing from the public where peculiar themes are at stake

Keith Culver:

• Scale in purely technical context is wrong
. e.g. translation mechanisms
• The problem of scale is a cross -cutting issue and cannot be reduced to technological issues
• Process of evolution in the development of policies

Stephen Coleman:

• Technocrats have no power but politicians don't know
• People who run websites are junior in an institutions of government
. political battle: you need senior politicians who want this as well in order to ensure sustainability

Laura Sartori:

• Qualitative analysis is important
• Need for quantitative data basis
• EU level data bases on: 1) individuals, 2) institutions and 3) 3rd actors
• Institutional side is known . we need to go to the individual side (survey design on an individual level)
• We must design specific/targeted policies for smaller groups . multi-targeted policies
• Digital divide: supply and demand policies

• Why/ reason for participation
• Supply means regulation of telecommunication sector
• Access to broadband Internet (infrastructure)
• Different models of eSociety and eParticipation . differences between Europe, U.S., South America; how to recognise this?
• How do we cope with diversity within eParticipation?
. e.g. Estonia (Russian population)
• How is social capital related/connected to the Internet? . problem to find out what are the causes and what is correlation
• What is the connection between the Internet, community, political participation?

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Attention of companies to develop large-scale application for large amounts of participants
• The future of software development is to process large-scale content contributions
• The scale of active participation tends to be the small group
• Instead of large scale e-arena, connections among different small arenas
• Power is not evenly distributed among levels
• If we look at participation only at local level, what is if the power is not there?

Stephen Coleman:

• Companies will solve problems in their own economic logic
. public cannot demand particularity
. public only exists when mediated
• Whether we need to think in public space online . regulatory debate/ public service
• Blumler/Coleman, 1999: "Civic Space of Commons" model
• I don't believe in private corporations creating this space
• Why can't DEMO-net say that to the European Commission? . why can't we YOU (the EC) create a Civic Commons

Mariella Berra:

• I agree. This is a big opportunity but does the EU WANT to create a civic eCommons?

Anna Carola Freschi

• Need of institutional/political consolidation is a good reason

Leopoldina Fortunati:

• Multilevel governance of eParticipation . all levels are connected through the Internet
• Relevant unexpected effects (e.g. immigrants and online newspapers)
• Business sector is more active than public institutions to survey the users, in the perspective of co-design services.
• Who are the actors on the web? . mapping

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Trend to apply business related practices on eParticipation

Mariella Berra:

• Mobile phones as important instrument
• Debate on spectrum

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Any process of social self-organisation studied in current research . any existing case study that would illustrate new forms of cooperation?
• Examples of social networks in Italy that make use of Internet forums (e.g. Val di Susa, No-TAV movement), but they face a wall in the attitude of politicians . politicians don't answer to citizens claims
• Strong contrast between institutional and civic sphere

Stephen Coleman:

• Lack of 'good' evaluations of projects . non-biased by researchers who are involved in the leading of the same project.
• Set of quality criteria
• Tip: new media – new democracy: e.g. Estonia; no one wants to tell you about wasted money
• Researchers are detectives . where are the good case studies?
• Empowerment happens through institutional cracks . it is not happening along institutional lines

John Shaddock:

• Evaluation of success of eParticipation?
• Need to consider also the effect of the civic pressure on politics

Anna Carola Freschi :

• Process dimension; social mobilization and strong pressure on politics may modify the general framing;

Mariella Berra:

• Protest has no direct effect on government but consequences in the long run
• Democratic politics as negotiation, search for compromises
• Arrogance of many politicians

Laura Sartori:

• It depends on political traditions . if politicians didn't listen before, they won't listen now

Stephen Coleman:

• What happens if the generation of politicians changes to younger generations who are more in touch and more technologically knowledgeable? . is this an

issue of 'catching up'?

Arthur Edwards:

• A new generation of politicians WILL come but it is about to see how they make use of the Internet in seeking dialogue with citizens
• Citizens want to know how colleagues do and deal with the Internet
• Which are the ways of politicians to manage political strategies
• Most politicians WANT to be responsive . behavioural patterns
• Inquire the conception of political reality and connections to accountability to voters

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Why should politicians exploit ICTs?
• New plebiscitarian wave or a rethinking of their own political role?
• Prevailing resistance of politicians to participation or effort to manage/control participation

Keith Culver:

• Create competition situation among politicians to cause a pulling effect
• Cross Boundaries program in Canada, interesting case

Fiorella De Cindio:

• Electoral system and level of the election are relevant variable related to the politicians behaviour

Stephen Coleman:

• Politicians are caught in institutional frame
• Levels of trust differ but critique is the same in all political systems
• Representative democracy is NOT working . proposing new technologies
1. the shaping/ re-shaping of the policy process is at the core
2. boosting under -represented groups
3. re-designing political institutions
a) space
b) inequality
c) institutional reform
• Can we go back to the EC and tell them:
a) establish an online public space
b) social inclusion implementation
c) turn EP into a digitally friendly and meaningful institution
• Writing of a proposal that will cause some serious thinking in the European Commission

Thierry Vedel:

• Put together case studies and evaluations (both good AND bad examples) . creation of an assessment database

Anna Carola Freschi:

• UN conference . they are selecting best practice eParticipation examples

Thierry Vedel:

• Term of mediation
. democracy as a system of mediation; also the traditional ways are relevant
. eParticipation as a new means of mediation
e.g. S. Royale website, over 1 million hits . high numbers of participants
• How to condense variety of contributions? . by use of human practice, not by digital agents
• Make use of MA/PhD studies

Stephen Coleman:

• Getting people from one country to evaluate other countries . possible operationalisation
• Critical case studies

Anna Carola Freschi:

• Need for a shift of attention from institutional online sphere to a more general online sphere (independent from institutions)
• Innovation is more diffused on the non -institutional side
• Learn from success and failure of (e)participation
• Need for a contestualization of the case-studies

Keith Culver:

• Bi-national inspection groups/teams
• Virtual eParticipation observatory operated by governments (do it before the Americans come)
• If there isn't a strong European voice, we'll face U.S. dominance in technology

Claudia Padovani:

• Situation on logic/open space on intelligent discussion and inequality issue
• Non-institutional eParticipation

Stephen Coleman:

• We need to communicate coherently the work done today
• We need agreement on what is useful in measurements

Action Plan:

• Send invitations to eDeliberation Google mailing list of Demo-Net
· Position paper by June 2007 (Deadline)
·. institutional inclusion
. re-design of institutions according to principles
. eCommons/public space in Europe (as a new e-public sphere)
. fight inequality and digital divide

. re-design of institutions according to principles
• Contact: Paul Timmons . EC support
• mutual evaluation of case studies
• Further political support

Presented papers

Åström J., Granberg M., *Interpretations of e-participation: focusing elite attitudes,* Örebro University.

Åström J., Granberg M., *Urban Planners, Wired for Change? Understanding Elite Support for E-participation,* Örebro University.

Berra M., *Building e-deliberative democracy practices through digital communities,* University of Turin.

Coleman S., *Foundations of digital government- A critical introduction,* University of Leeds.

Coleman S., *E-participation and the policy process*, University of Leeds.

Culver K., *Government, E-Government, Democratic Theory, Minorities and the Possibility that Justice is Conflict,* University of New Brunswick and Oxford University.

De Cindio F., *On the interplay between the net evolution and the public policies for (e-) participation*, University of Milan.

Fortunati L., *Interactivity and e-participation,* University of Udine.

Freschi A.C., *E-democracy and e-participation as a new field of public policy.Between innovation technology and institutional domains*, University of Bergamo.

Grönlund A., Åström J., Hedström K., *Understanding eParticipation challenges in a governance perspective*, Örebro University.

Lippa B., Westholm H., *White Paper (draft) for the Workshop on E-participation public policies and implications of e-participation on the decision making process*, University of Bremen.

O'Donnell D., McCusker P., Honor Fagan G., *Creating Value in the Public Sphere through eParticipation: Where is the Value?,* Intellectual Capital Research Institute of Ireland.

O'Donnell D., McCusker P., *Enhancing Political Knowledge in the Public Sphere through eParticipation: Where is the Value?,* Intellectual Capital Research Institute of Ireland and Letterkenny Institute of Technologies.

Padovani C., *Communicating Europe together? Participation and (new) media in EU policy discourses, practices and plans to make communication "a policy in its own right"* , University of Padova.

Wimmer M., Shaddock J., Rosendahl A., Schneider C., *A structured approach for extracting strategic-political research needs from eParticipation barriers and challenges*, University of Koblenz-Landau.

Urban Planners, Wired for Change? Understanding Elite Support for E-participation

Joachim Åström & Mikael Granberg, Örebro University

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, citizen participation has been furthered by political elites. In the wake of several symptoms of crises for democracy and administrative decision-making, a growing number of public authorities have been looking for new means to make citizen participate. Especially at the local government level, several new ways of involving citizens in public policy processes have been discussed and tested. More recently this debate has been fuelled by new information and communication technologies (ICTs), as they provide new public spaces and new opportunities for more participatory and deliberative forms of decision-making. According to the proponents, the Internet could sit at the core of reinvigorated institutions that could truly listen and thus re-engage the public (Coleman, 1999).

Many local governments have embarked upon a wave of e-participation policies, but recent developments suggest that the implementation of these policies make up a major challenge for political and administrative elites (cf. Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005). Several studies show that the implementation of such projects are undertaken at a much slower pace than the implementation of efficiency oriented e-administration activities in the public sector. Also, when new modes of participation are implemented they have been criticized for not being supported by the elites when they are in progress. Elites are sometimes absent from these processes, or they claim in advance the right to deviate from emerging proposals by referring to the primacy of representative politics or expert knowledge (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Many commentators have thus come to question the normative foundations of e-participation initiatives: What do elites really mean when they display positive attitudes towards increased citizen participation via new ICTs? Are they aiming for institutional change or the reinforcement of existing institutions? What are the assumptions that underlie and condition "support for e-participation"?

As the attitudes of political elites are crucial determinants for the supply of e-participation opportunities (Norris, 2001: more references), we need to scrutinize these attitudes and the factors influencing them more carefully if we are to understand future directions within this field. To date research on political elites' dispositions with respect to e-participation is sparse; research on what values e-participation enthusiasts hold for politics, planning and citizen participation in general is nonexistent. In this article we seek to address this deficit by analyzing the diffusion as well as the meaning of e-participation support. In doing so we will draw upon a survey questionnaire mapping the support for e-participation in the field of urban planning, targeting chief planners in the 290 Swedish local governments during the spring 2006.

While developments towards e-participation processes can be discerned in many countries, the prospects for implementing e-participation might be considered better in Sweden than in many other countries. The rapid expansion of the Internet, combined with the ongoing broadband expansion, imply that a technological platform now exists in order to develop applications that in different ways are considered to strengthen citizens participation. According to statistics during 2005, 73 percent of the Swedish population between 18 and 79 years of age had access the Internet at home, and out of these 66 percent had a broadband connection (www.nordicom.gu.se). As the use of the Internet and World Wide Web by citizens has increased, the web has been touted as a means to increase citizens' political involvement. According to several state-backed studies in later years, the Internet should be used to promote government accountability and to increase public participation in politics (SOU2000:1; SOU2001:48). This request is valid for various domains of political life, but public participation is regarded particularly important for local planning processes, providing opportunity and encouragement for members of the public to express their views in matters that affect their everyday life. According to the optimists, the Internet has the potential to realise the kind of participatory practice that is often idealised by - but is still missing in - planning.

The disposition of the article is as follows. First an account is given to the Swedish planning context in order to understand existing and pre-existing institutions and incentives in relation to public

participation. Second, two ideal typical models for the development of e-participation attitudes is developed. The e-participation models hold that the opportunities for information and communication via digital technologies might affect attitudinal patterns, either reinforcing the values of pre-existing institutions or contributing to institutional change. Third, the attitudinal survey is described and analysed. As well as describing the diffusion of e-participation support among Swedish urban planners in relation to individual and city characteristics, this section also analyses the meaning of such support by examining whether the predominant beliefs and values found within the group of e-participation enthusiasts are different from other planners. Finally, the fourth section discusses the implications of the empirical evidence on the prospects for the use of e-participation in planning.

The Swedish Planning Context

Compared with many other welfare states, local governments in Sweden are responsible for most welfare functions, from the cradle to the grave. Accordingly, Swedish local authorities have a principal planning monopoly and the planning system is designed for the local authorities (Alfredsson & Wiman, 2001: 117). All local authorities must have and maintain a comprehensive plan. This plan should entail the whole municipal territory, but is not binding. The next and more operational level of planning documents is the detailed development plan which is a binding executive planning instrument. The general idea is that the intentions formulated in the comprehensive plan should be realised through detailed plans and finally manifest itself through infrastructure and housing.

The decision on the creation of a comprehensive plan is formally taken in the municipal council. Environmental and social issues are required to be taken into consideration and so are different types of national interests (Alfredsson & Wiman, 2001: 118; Nyström, 2003: 157-172). The process between the initiation of planning and the formal planning decision through which the plan is adopted is punctuated by a number of formalised "control-stations". The law regulates how the process should be pursued and also which stages that should be included (Nyström, 2003: 172). One important stage is the consultations where the public is given opportunities to study and react to planning-proposals. They are thought of as parts of the demands on transparency and on citizens' opportunities to access, understand and reflect upon planning-proposals (cf. Nilsson, 2003: 18-20). The decision to adopt a plan can be also be appealed by the citizens, but it is only the formal handling or claims that the local authority has exceeded its authority that can be the object of appeals (Nyström, 2003: 179). The comprehensive plan thus takes the shape of the primary entry-point for citizens who want to participate in and influence planning.

The detailed development plan is a binding legal document and is, in relation to the comprehensive plan, of more immediate importance for the physical structure of a city. This points even more toward the need for well functioning consultations; consultations that should take place in two stages (Henecke & Khan, 2002: 20). The first consultation concerns the early planning program. The idea is to get citizens involved in planning at an early stage when the possibilities to exert influence is higher than later on in the process. The second consultation concerns the planning proposal, which is more detailed and much closer to the final planning document. All citizens within an area to which the plan is dedicated are welcomed to give comments on both the planning program and on the proposal.

When the new planning- and building act was enacted in 1987 one central objective was to increase citizen participation in the planning process (cf. Fog *et al.*, 1989). To reach this objective turned out to be problematic, however, and in the mid-nineties the law was revised to further strengthen the potential for citizens to take part in planning. Despite these efforts to facilitate citizen participation through legislation, needs and wants among citizens are still almost exclusively channelled by political parties within professionalized municipal organizations. Citizen participation is trivialized as simply a step in the planning process that must be completed to comply with state regulations. According to more than one commentator, the gap between rhetoric and practice is thus considerable (Khakee, 1999; Henecke & Khan, 2002).

E-participation: Reinforcement or Change?

At the root of discussions about public participation in planning are philosophical questions about the nature of democracy. Whilst there are many theories as to what democracy means, two particular theories are dominant. These are 'elite democracy' on the one hand and 'participatory democracy' on the other. Usually the elite theory has been linked to a 'bureaucratic' or 'instrumental' view of

government and the participatory theory to a 'pluralist' or 'empowering' view of government. One outcome of elite theories of democracy in relation to planning is that public participation is discouraged or denied. The assumption is that governments know best and that public participation would simply lead to inefficiencies in the decision-making process and not add substantially to the quality of the decisions that are made. Participatory accounts, on the other hand, criticize administrative decision-making for its concentration on instrumental rationality, systematic scientific knowledge and view of bureaucrats as experts. From their point of view these characteristics have resulted in problems of inefficiency, delays, lack of democratic responsiveness, and incomplete compliance. Accordingly, proponents of participatory policy-making usually argue in favor of two important transitions. Firstly, public officials must relinquish its elaborately constructed aura of expertise or, put another way, the reluctance to include lay citizens in technical policy deliberations. Secondly, one has to find the means to make citizen participation more manageable for regulators and more collaborative between government and citizens (deLeon, 1992; Healey, 1997; Dryzek, 2000).

In the dominant discourse about democracy today, participation and active citizenship are widely celebrated. While some commentators view this 'participatory turn' in public policy as an important sign of revitalisation and change, others are more sceptical, arguing that there are still differing expectations of how participation should be institutionalized. What divides participation into different objects, they argue, is primarily a matter of location in the structure of power. As democracy is a struggle of power it provides a different experience to those who hold power and those who do not: power holders are more likely to adopt a defensive posture towards social change and concern to protect existing institutions from excessive and 'uncontrolled' participatory input. In this line of reasoning, the attractiveness of participation for elites most likely does not reside in its potential to shift sovereignty from politicians and professionals to deliberating citizens. While the ethos of responsiveness put citizens in the centre by asking them about their needs and demands, there still is a desire to keep them away from the administrative work and the decision-making centres (Blaug, 2002; Vigoda-Gadot, 2004; Fung, 2006).

If participation advances multiple purposes and values in contemporary governance we are forced to ask not only how much participation elites really want, but what is the purpose or value of participation. The relationship between contemporary governance and new information and communication technologies makes this question even more interesting. Potentially, the rise of the Internet can influence elites' predominant attitudes towards participation; strengthen the value or change the purpose of it. Theorists of electronic democracy often argue that new information and communication technologies, for the first time, offer possibilities for enabling more participatory and deliberative forms of decision-making in the administrative state, and of transforming purposive-rational action by experts into communicative action by citizens (Coglianese, 2004). The struggle over interpretations concerning the democratic potentials of ICT is, however, far from over. One view is that the new opportunities on the Internet will only serve to reinforce the grip of established political actors and interests, such as officeholders. Another view says that the new technology can provide the opportunity by which policymakers can, given the institutional and political situation they are in, ask new questions and shift their attention. Postman (1993: 13), for instance, claim that there is an ideological bias in every technology, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another. This bias of technology may lead to its use having influences of which the user may not always be conscious, and which may not have been part of the purpose using it. Sometimes our purposes may also be subtly redefined, or 'reversely adapted', to the character of the available means (Winner, 1977: 229). Suggested by these authors is that we should not stop our analysis once we have revealed the power holders behind a particular conception of e-participation, but instead look for how technology is political significant.

Addressing this challenge, two models of e-participation attitudes will be outlined. They hold that the opportunities for information and communication via digital technologies might affect attitudinal patterns, either reinforcing the values of pre-existing institutions or contributing to institutional change. Several studies of e-governance have found that technologies are essentially used for purposes that are long established. Danziger and Kling (1982) and Kraemer and Dutton (1982) once labeled this as

reinforcement politics, which corresponds to conservative attitudes in relation to technology. In this context, *the reinforcement model* is an updated version of elite democracy and rationalistic planning in line with what is sometimes called neo-rational planning (Sehested, 2001). From this perspective, the emergence of new technologies provides considerable opportunities for handling large amounts of information and data, which paves the way for comprehensive planning and a possible strengthening of the professional planner. There is also room for agreeing with a more extensive use of consultation- and decision support systems in this model, as long as the purpose of participation is to make planning more efficient and to develop a more stable knowledge base for planners (Khakee, 2000; Sandercock, 1998a). However, reinforcement… to be continued…

Alternatively, the introduction of information and communication technologies may be viewed as an opportunity for making other and more radical changes that decision makers want to make. In our model for *institutional change*, the opportunities for e-participation are changing the value and purpose of participation in the direction of participatory democracy and communicative planning (cf. Healey & Khakee, 1997; Sandercock, 1998a, b; Forester, 1999; Albrechts & Denayer, 2001). The planners would then strive for a wider array of knowledge to be included in the planning process and the interactive (transactional) capacity of the new technology would be seen as an opportunity for citizens to engage more directly and individually in the planning process. The purpose of e-participation is one of creating a kind of virtual community, where planners, politicians as well as citizens can make initiatives and take part in debate and decision making. This more transactional conception of planning is inclusive and citizen participation is perceived as an interactive process that entails the active engagement of the citizens in the planning process, including definition and formulation of authentic planning problems from the bottom-up (Barret & Fudge, 1981; Healey, 1997). Most importantly this kind of reoccurring interaction has the potential to build trust and therefore also to further legitimate the planning process and its output (Granberg, 2004; ch. 6).

Attitudinal Patterns among Urban Planners

The vast majority of research into citizen participation looks at citizens' perceptions of participation and leave out another important part of the participatory process – the persons who can direct that participation opportunities are created or can limit the participation opportunities available. The analysis carried out in this part is based on a survey questionnaire targeting the administrator's receptacle of that power in Swedish urban planning: planning officers in all 290 Swedish local governments. The survey, conducted during the spring 2006 via a web survey followed by a traditional postal survey, resulted in a 67 percent response rate. It was designed to provide an overview of attitudes concerning urban planning and new information and communication technologies in general, and the diffusion and meaning of e-participation support more specifically.

The Diffusion of E-participation Support

One finding of the attitude survey is that virtually all of the officials support the use of e-participation in planning (34 percent to a very large and 60 percent to a fairly large degree). Firstly, this indicates that Arnstein's (1969) proposition that participation has achieved an unassailable status of motherhood, apple pie and spinach – 'No one is against it in principle because it is good for you' – is still valid. Secondly, the strong support for the use of e-participation indicates that there is a strong faith in the positive democratic potentials of ICT among Swedish urban planners. However, this does not tell us whether e-participation is neutral, in the sense that it is affecting all categories of planners to a similar degree. In other words: besides choosing another mode of participation, are the individual and city profiles of 'e-participation enthusiasts' significantly different from those that remain more faithful to traditional channels of participation?

Both theories and empirical investigation in the field of the so-called 'digital divide' have so far provided us with a better understanding of the Internet diffusion processes among and within societies (Norris, 2001). Socio-economic and demographic variables, such as age, gender and education have been found to exert a significant impact on attitudes towards and use of the Internet in modern societies. Similarly, the use of the Internet in politics and planning is, according to this literature, linked to individual predispositions for traditional forms of civic engagement, information gathering etc. Less emphasised in this literature is variables directly linked to ICTs, such as computer literacy and trust in new technologies, which also may explain the variance in attitudes towards e-participation (Åström,

2004; Hoff, 2004). From such a more technology oriented perspective, planners own use of ICTs may produce greater incentives to move planning online. One argument is simply that technology-users may have greater belief in the opportunities offered by the new technology than non-users. Another argument is that the integration of information and communication technologies in planning presupposes a change of behaviour from those who are supposed to use it. It is therefore reasonable to believe that planners who already use the new technology to some extent, and have invested some 'capital' in it, are more positive towards an extended use than those who must start from square one.

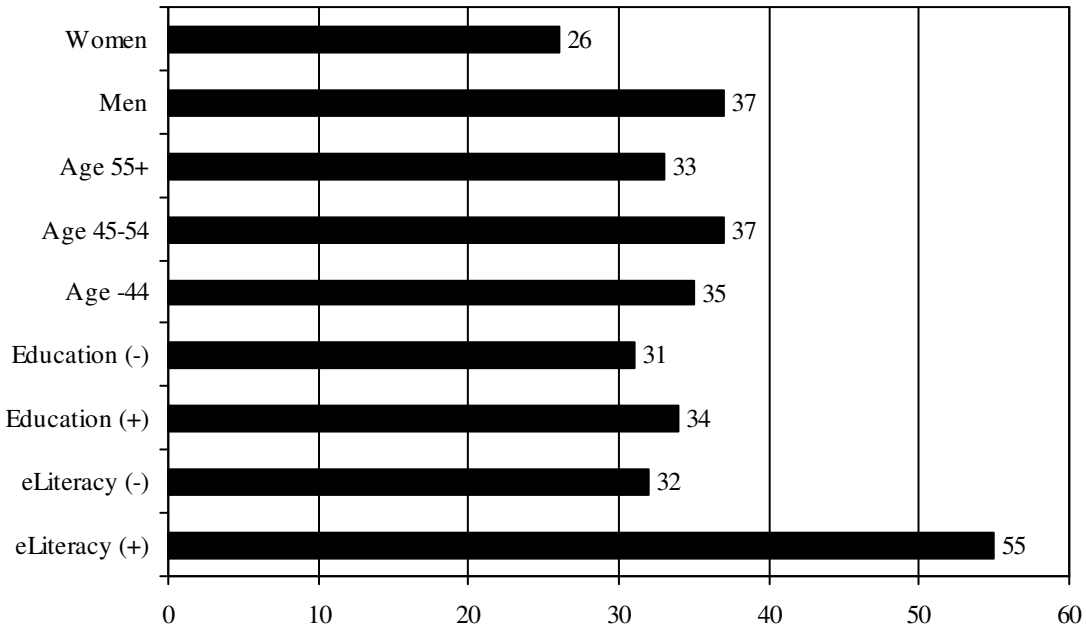


Figure 1.

Percentage e-participation enthusiasts by individual characteristics

The analysis in figure 1 shows the percentage of planners that are most supportive of e-participation – 'the e-participation enthusiasts' – within different social and technological groups. When it comes to the more traditional background factors such as gender, age and education there seem to be no clear attitudinal patterns. A slightly bigger share of the men is strong supporters for the use of e-participation, but at the same time men are more often strong opponents of e-participation. Men thus seem to have stronger opinions, both positive and negative, than women. When it comes to age and education, the attitudes follows the expected pattern but in this case the pattern is not particularly strong. Instead it is the technology-oriented variable that stands out. Planners with high computer skills are markedly more often strong supporters for the use of e-participation than planners with low computer skills: the bigger the (perceived) personal competence, the more positive attitudes towards the use of e-participation.

Are the digital divides eroding by diffusion? Of course the interrelationship between social and technological variables creates a problem here, since it is difficult to isolate the influence of each. However, by using multivariate cross-tabulations we find that e-literacy have a positive effect for each of the other groups. The way in which technology is used by individuals at one stage or in one area thus seems to be of importance for the attitudes associated with the technology at a later stage or another area. This may be interpreted as 'a cumulative technological effect', or a process in which the attitudes are gradually being adjusted to the available means. Interestingly, though, is how the relationships between the social variables and e-literacy are played out. When it comes to gender, most notably, we find that the women planners are younger, that they have higher education and are more e-literate than men. Still, men are more enthusiastic about e-participation, and this becomes even more evident in a multivariate analysis. For instance, we find that 67 percent of the e-literate men and only 36 percent of the e-literate women are e-participation enthusiasts. We may thus conclude that even if the most obvious divides concerning access and e-literacy are absent, other more subtle divides are emerging.

Besides from individual characteristics, e-participation attitudes may depend on city contexts. We will

therefore put the urban planners in their institutional and technological context by analyzing attitudes against the backdrop of city size, economy, electoral turnout, back-office developments of e-government and ICT infrastructure in the city. Among the institutional variables size often turns out to be important when it comes to innovation, not least when it comes to innovation in e-government. This is can be explained by a combination of costs and benefits. Bigger cities can prosper from economies of scale both when it comes to lower cost for experimentation and risk-taking, and when it comes to the gains in a case of successful implementation. Moreover is the ability to spread ideas without constraints of space one of the most striking advantages of ICTs. Another potentially important factor is economy, since experimenting with new forms of participation may not be the highest priority among poor governments. In a democratic context, administrators' trust in citizens may also explain the extent to which administrators feel comfortable sharing power with citizens – the essence of citizen participation. As a delicate mechanism, empowerment can be sustained and kept effective only in a long-term trusting relationship (Yang, 2005). Here, voter turnout will be used as an indicator of a trustful relationship and the prediction is that higher turnouts will lead to more support for e-participation.

If the institutional variables are used to measure local governments adaptability or capacity to change, the technological variables measure changes in the technological opportunity structure. The assumption is that elite attitudes are influenced by the availability of technological infrastructure, such as broadband connections and back-office developments of e-government. These developments directly influences how far local governments can go to provide e-participation, and may also produces greater incentives for them to do so, as the general public and the authority becomes wired.

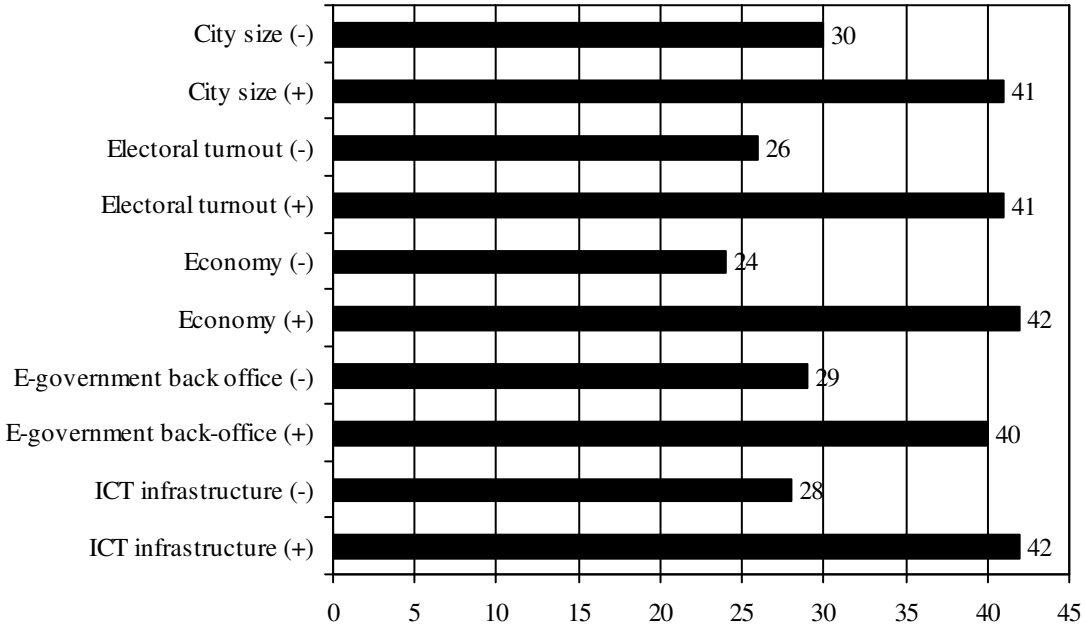


Figure 2. Percentage e-participation enthusiasts by city characteristics

The results given in figure 2 show that all institutional and technological factors analyzed here may plausibly explain the attitudinal variations. There are clear attitudinal differences by city size, economy, electoral turnout as well as e-government back office developments and ICT-infrastructure. In some instances, relating the variables to each other through multivariate cross-tabulations reinforces these differences. For instance, 51 percent of the planners in a context of high electoral turnout and well developed e-government back-office are e-participation enthusiasts while this is the case for only 19 percent of the planners in a context of low turnout and less developed e-government back-office. In other cases the variables are exchangeable, indicating that the impact does not come from each of the variables per se, but through their close association with one another. To examine this further a regression analysis was made, showing that ICT infrastructure is the most important variable explaining variations in attitudes. Also gender and electoral turnout show significant correlations. ... to be

continued….

The Meaning of E-participation Support

Public policies and decisions have seldom been determined through political deliberation, but rather through the technical expertise of officials whose training and professional specialization is geared towards problem solving. Public participation may, however, advance multiple purposes and values in contemporary planning. Other than providing opportunities for participation to ensure perceptions of legitimacy, there are recognizable, concrete benefits for ensuring citizen participation. These may include achieving fairness in the process of government and making the work of government more palatable to citizens, as well as making decision making more effective.

As a first indication we will look at the 'active norms' of planning agencies, focusing on the role and function of local government web sites. How far do these sites provide comprehensive information and opportunities for interactive communication? Although the planners have a positive attitude towards the opportunities offered by the Internet, it is easy to conclude that they fail to exploit these opportunities on their web sites (table 1). This means that there is an interesting discrepancy between what elites say they want and what they really do… To be continued…

Table 1. Support and supply of e-participation opportunities

	Model 1			Model 2	
	eParticipation enthusiasts	eParticipation non-enthusiasts	Mean diff.	Beta	Sig.
1. Maps	.82	.73	.09	.161	*
2. E-mail addresses to Planners	.81	.69	.12	.195	*
3. General Plans	.72	.67	.05	.082	
4. Information on who does what	.69	.59	.10	.112	
5. Detailed Plans	.65	.55	.10	.044	
6. Public Hearing Notes	.63	.60	.03	.037	
7. Link to Planning Rules	.51	.36	.15	.100	
8. Meeting Agendas	.46	.43	.03	.109	
9. E-mail addresses to Politicians	.45	.36	.09	.136	
10. Web GIS	.28	.13	.15	.195	*
11. Discussion Forum	.17	.12	.05	.139	
12. Broadcast from meetings	.17	.11	.06	.097	
13. VR Simulations	.08	.00	.08	.209	**
14. Online Surveys	.05	.06	-.01	.029	
15. Chat Room	.03	.02	.01	.021	
Index 1-15	6.52	5.46	1.06	.272	**

Note: Model 1: The figures represent the mean scores of e-participation enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts on scales from 0-1 without any controls. Model 2: The figures represent standardized beta coefficient in regression models measuring the impact of e-participation support on the planning agencies' supply of e-participation opportunities after controlling for city size and government bashing.

One should be cautious, however, to draw conclusions about preferences on the basis of behaviour. The circumstances – in this case different barriers for e-participation – may be a more important for explaining behaviour than preferences. To find out what the planners really mean by e-participation it is therefore better to analyze their perceptions of citizen participation directly. The list of questions addressed here begins with perceptions of expertise and the traditional institutions of representative democracy and slowly moves up to direct involvement of citizens in actual decision making processes.

Table 2. E-participation support and political preference

	Model 1			**Model 2**	
	Participation enthusiasts	eParticipation non-enthusiasts	Mean diff.	Beta	Sig.
1. 'Planning is a professional activity based on expert knowledge'	1.98	1.88	.10	-.060	
2. 'Citizen influence in planning should be channeled through political parties'	2.83	2.82	.01	.032	
3. 'Citizen experienced-based knowledge is important for planning'	1.32	1.46	.14	.179	*
4. 'Planning receives its legitimacy through public dialogue'	1.40	1.59	.19	.219	**
5. 'Citizens should be able to participate directly in planning decisions, for instance via referenda'	3.09	3.14	.05	.102	

Note: Model 1: The figures represent the mean scores of e-participation enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts on scales from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" without any controls. Model 2: The figures represent standardized beta coefficient in regression models measuring the impact of the e-participation support on political preferences after controlling for city size and government bashing

Firstly, e-participation in planning is not related to traditional party-based politics. A clear majority of the planners think that citizen influence should *not* be channeled through political parties. This is very interesting and can be interpreted in different ways. One interpretation is that this is an indication of the presence of communicative planning and participatory democracy ideals, where the essential idea is that planning should be done through interaction among those who have an interest in the outcomes, the stakeholders. Another interpretation is that citizen participation in planning is about assessing which alternatives best meet politically established goals to make better recommendations to political

decision makers about which course of action to follow. This view, with the planner as the expert speaking truth to power comes closer to the reinforcement model, finds more support by the other answers. Most importantly, expert knowledge is still very important and direct participation in decision making is still dismissed. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the appeal of e-participation is not in its potential to shift sovereignty from experts to a mass of deliberating citizens. On the contrary it can be interpreted as attractive as a means to strengthening the centrality of the planner in the planning process.

However, e-participation is not viewed as a strict alternative to expertise, but can instead complement it by strengthening the planners' competence and expertise. In areas such as planning, citizens may possess essential local knowledge that comes from close exposure to the context in which problems occur. In this area, public participation may therefore be able to frame problems and priorities in ways that break from professional conceptions yet more closely match the citizens' values, needs and preferences. Experience based citizen knowledge can in this way supplement and strengthen planners' expert knowledge.

From our study we can conclude that e-participation enthusiasts have somewhat different attitudes towards participation than other planners, especially when it comes to the value of citizen experienced knowledge and public dialogue. The changes do mainly take the form of 'the same, only more so', but this reinforcement of attitudes may still contribute to important and qualitative changes. If electronic channels provide for more interactive communication between executives and citizens, online consultation and polls by government has the potential to streamline the political process, reducing the reliance on unwieldy intermediary bodies such as political assemblies and parties. Following this line of reasoning, public and private services in the information age would be developed in an interactive process where citizens are involved as co-producers and are thus co-responsible for increasing service efficiency. The impact of new technologies on our representative structures would be the conciliating, mediating, or even adjudicating role of public servants; the increasing reliance on channelling the democratic expression of opinion and preferences through bureaucratic processes (Snellen, 2001; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001).

A potential complication with the reinforcement model is that it can be perceived as conservative and only able to explain stability rather than change (Agre 2002: 319). From such an understanding of the reinforcement model initiatives to use new technology can only amplify existing trends and developments outside existing institutions … to be continued…

References

Agre, Philip (2002). "Real-Time Politics: The Internet and the Political Process" The Information Society 18(5): 311-331.

Albrechts, Louis & William Denayer (2001). "Communicative Planning, Emancipatory Politics and Postmodernism". Ronan Paddison (red.) *Handbook of Urban Studies*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Dehli, SAGE Publications.

Alfredsson, Björn & Jan Wiman (2001). "Planning in Sweden - Fundamentals Outlined". Inger Christoferson (red.) *Swedish Planning - In Times of Diversity*. Gävle, The Swedish Society for Town and Country Planning.

Arnstein, Sherry R (1969). "A Ladder of Citizen Particpation" Journal of the American Institute of Planners 35: 216-224.

Barret, Susan & Colin Fudge (1981). *Policy and Action. Essays on the Implementation of Public Policy*. London, Methuen.

Blaug, Ricardo (2002). "Engineering Democracy" Political Studies 50: 102-116.

Coglianese, Cary (2004). "Information Technology and Regulatory Policy: New Directions for Digital Government Research" Social Science Computer Review 22(1): 85-91.

Coleman, Stephen (1999). "Can the New Media Invigorate Democracy?" Political Quarterly 70(1): 16-22.

Danziger, James N & Rob Kling (1982). "Computers in the Policy Process". James N Danziger, WIlliam H Dutton, Rob Kling & Kenneth L Kraemer (red.) *Computer and Politics: High Technology in American Local Governments*. New York, Columbia University Press.

deLeon, Peter (1992). "The Democratization of the Policy Sciences" Public Administration Review 52(2): 125-129.

Denhardt, Robert B & Janet V Denhardt (2001). "The New Public Service: Putting Democracy First" National Civic Review 90(4): 391-400.

Dryzek, John S. (2000). *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Fog, Hans, Jan Bröchner, Anders Törnqvist & Karsten Åström (1989). *Det kontrollerade byggandet*. Stockholm, Carlssons.

Forester, John (1999). *The Deliberative Practitioner. Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*. Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.

Fung, Archon (2006). "Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance" Public Administration Review 66(s1): 66-75.

Granberg, Mikael (2004). *Från lokal välfärdsstat till stadspolitik. Politiska processer mellan demokrati och effektivitet: Vision Mälarstaden och Östra hamnen Västerås*. Örebro, Örebro Studies in Political Science 11. Örebro universitet.

Healey, Patsy (1997). *Colloborative Planning. Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. London, Macmillan.

Healey, Patsy & Abdul Khakee (1997). *Making Strategic Spatial Plans: Innovation in Europe*. London, UCL Press.

Henecke, Barbro & Jamil Khan (2002). "Medborgardeltagande i den fysiska planeringen - en demokratiteoretisk analys av lagstiftning, retorik och praktik". Working Paper in Sociology. 2002:1/Report No. 36, November 2002, Sociologiska institutionen/Avdelningen för miljö- och energisystem, Lunds universitet. Lund

Hoff, Jens (2004). "Members of Parliaments' use of ICT in a Comparative European Perspective" Information Polity 9(2004): 5-16.

Khakee, Abdul (1999). "Demokratin i samhällsplaneringen". Erik Amnå (red.) *Medborgarnas erfarenheter*. Demokratiutredningens forskarvolym V. SOU 1999: 113. Stockholm, Fakta info direkt.

Khakee, Abdul (2000). *Samhällsplanering*. Lund, Studentlitteratur.

Klijn, Erik-Hans & Joop F. M. Koppenjan (2000). "Politicians and Interactive Decision Making: Institutional Spoilsports or Playmakers" Public Administration 78(2): 365-387.

Kraemer, Kenneth L & WIlliam H Dutton (1982). "The Automation of Bias". James N Danziger, WIlliam H Dutton, Rob Kling & Kenneth L Kraemer (red.) *Computer and Politics: High Technology in American Local Governments*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Mahrer, Harald & Robert Krimmer (2005). "Towards the Enhancement of E-democracy: Identifying

the Notion of 'the Middleman Paradox' " Information Systems Journal 15: 27-42.
Nilsson, Kristina (2003). "Planning in a Sustainable Direction - The Art of Conscious Choices". *Institutionen för infrastruktur och samhällsplanering.* Stockholm, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan.
Norris, Pippa (2001). *Digital Divide? Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Nyström, Jan (2003). *Planeringens grunder. En översikt.* Andra upplagan. Lund, Studentlitteratur.
Postman, Neil (1993). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology.* New York, Vintage Books.
Sandercock, Leonie (1998a). "The Death of Modernist Planning: Radical Praxis for a Postmodern Age". Mike Douglass & John Friedmann (red.) *Cities for Citizens.* New York, John Wiley & Sons.
Sandercock, Leonie (1998b). *Towards Cosmopolis.* New York, John Wiley & Sons.
Sehested, Karina (2001). "Investigating Urban Governance - From the Perspective of Policy Networks, Democracy and Planning". Research Paper no. 1/01, The Departement of Social Sciences. Roskilde University. Roskilde
Snellen, Ignace (2001). "ICTs, Bureaucracies, and the Future of Democracy" Communications of the ACM 44(1): 45-48.
SOU2000:1 *En uthållig demokrati. Politik för folkstyrelse på 2000-talet. Demokratiutredningens betänkande.* Stockholm, Fritzes.
SOU2001:48 *Att vara med på riktigt - demokratiutveckling i kommuner och landsting. Bilagor till betänkande av kommundemokratikommittén.* Stockholm, Fritzes.
Vigoda-Gadot, Eran (2004). "Collaborative Public Administration: Some Lessons from the Israeli Experience" Managerial Auditing Journal 19(6): 700-711.
Winner, Langdon (1977). *Autonomous Technology: Technics-Out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought.* Cambridge, MIT Press.
Yang, Kaifeng (2005). "Public Administrators' Trust in Citizens: A Missing Link in Citizen Involvement Efforts" Public Administration Review 65(3): 273-285.
Åström, Joachim (2004). *Mot en digital demokrati? Teknik, politik och institutionell förändring.* Örebro, Örebro Studies in Political Science 9. Örebro universitet.

Interpretations of e-participation: focusing elite attitudes

Joachim Åström & Mikael Granberg, Örebro University

Keywords
E-participation, participation, democracy, planning, elite, attitudes

Understanding elite support for e-participation

In the wake of several symptoms of the crises for incumbent democracy and administrative decision-making – declining voter turnout, diminishing membership numbers in political parties etc. – citizen participation has been furthered by political elites. A growing number of public authorities have been looking for new means to make citizen participate (Montin, 2006). Several new ways of involving citizens in public policy processes have been discussed and tested especially at the local government level. More recently this debate has been fuelled by the growing importance of the new information and communication technologies (ICTs). ICTs potentially provide new public spaces and new opportunities for more participatory and deliberative forms of decision-making. According to the proponents, the Internet could sit at the core of reinvigorated institutions that could truly listen to and thus re-engage the public (Coleman, 1999). Others agree that the Internet has considerable potential but are more hesitant about its real impact in terms of dynamic government and increased citizen participation (Streib & Navarro, 2005).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a critical discussion by focusing on the important issue of what local elites mean by participation in general and e-participation in particular.

Elites and e-participation

Many local governments have embarked upon a wave of e-participation policies, but recent developments suggest that the implementation of these policies make up a major challenge for political and administrative elites (cf. Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005). Several studies show that the implementation of such projects are undertaken at a much slower pace than the implementation of efficiency oriented e-administration activities in the public sector.

The implementation of new modes of participation has also been criticized for not being supported by the elites. Elites are sometimes absent from these processes (Granberg & Åström, 2007), or they claim in advance the right to deviate from emerging proposals by referring to the primacy of representative politics or expert knowledge (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000).

Accordingly, there is a need to address this deficit by analyzing the diffusion as well as the meaning of e-participation support among elites. There are good reasons to scrutinize the normative foundations of e-participation initiatives: What do elites really mean when they display positive attitudes towards increased citizen participation via new ICTs? Are they aiming for institutional change or the reinforcement of existing institutions? What are the assumptions that underlie and condition elites "support for e-participation"?

In order to shed light on the direction in which digital public life is headed, many empirical researchers have constructed ideal-typical models of democracy intended to work as links between traditional theories of democracy and new electronic manifestations.

These models make it possible to relate statements and actions concerning the new technology to different democratic values. Since the models represent different political ideals, they also promote different ideas on how ICT can be used in order to develop democracy. The framework used here also emphasise the distinct social and political *locations* of different discourses about democracy. What divides democracy into distinct objects is considered as a matter of location in the structure of power. Those who are incumbent are more likely to adopt a defensive posture towards social change and

concern to protect existing institutions from excessive and 'uncontrolled' participatory input (Blaug, 2002).

By identifying different ideal types of democracy, the incumbent and the critical, we can see that democratic intentions may be antagonistic and strategically opposed. This can be further pointed up by comparing the general discourse on eParticipation with that of normative planning theory. While the critical discourse of eParticipation is emphasising the potential for altering the balance of power between outside challengers and established institutions, sometimes even envision the abolishment of intermediary bodies, the democratic discourse of normative planning theory usually takes the planner as a point of departure (cf. Allmendinger 2002). Citizen participation in planning is often perceived as an activity best handled within the existing institutions of planning. In addition, participation is generally seen as an activity justified by its potential to strengthen the foundation of planning decisions. This means that the view of participation in planning is more closely related to incumbent than to critical democracy.

In a study recently conducted we found that virtually all of the officials in a nation wide survey to Swedish planning agencies supported the use of eParticipation in planning (94 percent to a large or fairly large degree) (Åström & Granberg, 2006). This indicates that Arnsteins (1969) proposition that participation has achieved an unassailable status of motherhood, apple pie and spinach – 'No one is against it in principle because it is good for you' – holds for the online environment as well. At the same time, almost 80 percent of the respondents oppose that citizens should participate directly in decision-making. Planners still prefer 'talk' rather than 'action', having positive attitudes towards dialogue and deliberation, but not willing to give the public any real decision-making power.

References

Allmendinger, P., (2002), *Planning Theory* (Houndsmills: Palgrave)

Arnstein, S. R., (1969), 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35/pp. 216-224

Blaug, R., (2002), 'Engineering Democracy', *Political Studies*, 50/pp. 102-116

Coleman, S., (1999), 'Can the New Media Invigorate Democracy?' *Political Quarterly*, 70/1, pp. 16-22

Granberg, M. & Åström, J., (2007 (forthcoming)), 'Medborgardeltagande på entreprenad. Stadsomvandling i gränssnittet mellan offentligt och privat', *Kommunal ekonomi och politik*, 11/2

Klijn, E.-H. & Koppenjan, J. F. M., (2000), 'Politicians and Interactive Decision Making: Institutional Spoilsports or Playmakers', *Public Administration*, 78/2, pp. 365-387

Mahrer, H. & Krimmer, R., (2005), 'Towards the Enhancement of E-democracy: Identifying the Notion of 'the Middleman Paradox'', *Information Systems Journal*, 15/pp. 27-42

Montin, S., (2006), 'Mobilising for Participatory Democracy? The case of democracy policy in Sweden' in T. Zittel and D. Fuchs (ed.), *Participatory Democracy and Political Participation. Can Democratic Reform Bring Citizens Back In?* (London & New York: Routledge)

Streib, G. & Navarro, I., (2005), 'Citizen Demand for Interactive E-Government: The Case of the Georgia Consumer Services', *American Review of Public Administration*, 36/3, pp. 288-300

Åström, J. & Granberg, M., (2006), 'Elite Support for eParticpation - What Does it Really Mean?' in J. Rose (ed.), *Mapping eParticipation. White Papers* (Venice: Demo-Net)

Building e-deliberative democracy practices through digital communities

Mariella Berra University of Turin-Faculty of Political Science

Abstract

Starting from some Italian case studies an effort is made to identify roots of e-deliberative democracy potentiality embedded in digital community networks. These are here defined as socio-technical networks consisting of civic networks and public digital information space. A claim is made that building practice of deliberative democracy requires: a) developing public communication spaces for involving citizens' participation, b) upgrading of service provision by local government, c) setting up extensive and inclusive access policies.

Introduction

A new socioeconomic scenario deeply reshaped by the ICT (Information Communication Technologies) has gradually challenged the classical definition of democracy embracing the concept of citizen participation as an effect of strategic behaviors and impersonal relationships based on the market and law rules. In the socio-political literature a new notion of democracy based on the concept of cooperation among the different institutional and non-institutional social actors encompasses also a functional aspect of information and training of autonomous practices (Wenger, 2002). These might energize administrative systems from outside and induce internal reorganization. In fact, aims, tools and targets of governmental action are increasingly exposed to uncertainties and require to be accompanied by an adequate process of governance. Policies of inclusive access and extensive participation are even more considered as precondition for developing deliberative practices, essential in order to promote the development of collective, social capital, an available productive resource for setting urban /territorial governance policies. (Bagnasco e Le Galès 2002). For this purpose deliberative democracy practices can be considered as mechanisms in which dialogue and decision-making represent interlocking practices for considering citizens as active agents in their own social conditions and plurality of cultures (Dahlberg, 2001).

ICT infrastructures and digital communities (civic networks and on line communities) have already been acknowledged as relevant factors for: a) mobilizing grassroots resources; b) transactional and local networks construction (Castells, 2002), c) communication public sphere expansion (Habermas, 1994). On the operational ground, the existence of digital communities can make it easier a government shift to more inclusive forms of governance as:

- they are based on new forms of communication they make it available more flexible ways of co-ordination available;
- they are open to the different types of actors (local institutions, businesses, associations and citizens) willing to be involved;
- they can exploit the pro-activeness of the adherent actors;
- they can provide a test-bed for exploring innovative public policies.

A claim is made that, although not exhaustive, these are major roots for building e-deliberative democracy practices. The experiences carried out in some Italian regions offer an interesting case study to investigate those roots of e-deliberative democracy

Local Information systems in Italy: some suggestions from the field

Since the nineties, different types of digital communities have been established in many Italian regions, also as a result of European and national initiatives on the Information Society (Berra2003; Occelli, 2005)

After an earlier phase of steady technological-driven development aimed to speed up the modernization of the whole public administration, now the process is levelling out and attention is turned to broader questions concerning its impact on the local government organization (i.e. the need to set up cooperative inter-institutional relationships by web-portal) and service delivery (i.e. the need to overcome spatial disparities in the access to on-line services and assess their effectiveness). Attention especially in some regions such as Piedmont,, Emilia and Tuscany tends also to overcome the technological upgrading. Consequently new forms of communication and of citizen involvement are been structuring and experimenting through the local digital communities**.**
On the basis of qualitative survey in several Italian regions (Piedmont,, Lombardy, Emilia and Tuscany) I have outlined a typology of existent local information systems. A twofold perspective underpins the identification of the different types: the possibility of re-organization of local areas and the communication potentials. In fact, the four types have been built on the way areas of social and political communications have been organized. It is a fact that the ways in which different types of communications are structured through local information based systems have important consequences in reshaping the identity of an environment and putting its development on a path that spurs actions and synergies in strategic sectors, such as logistics and administrative efficiency, and availability of information to citizens eventually including their direct involvement.

LOCAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS TYPOLOGY

A. Good government through technology: civic network model.
An area shaped from above: model of vertical governance (i.e. Turin)

B. Citizens online: community networking model
Widespread communication area set up from the bottom (i.e. RCM, orlittle town)

C. Community on line: civic network and online community model.
Flexible area of vertical and horizontal governance (i.e. Bologna and Florence)

D: Regional and interregional co-ordination: coordinated area of administrative decentralization
Reshaped and rebalanced area (i.e North West model and People model)

In Italy, although technology plays a major role as an enabler within existing structure, so far the gap between informative and transactive services is still wide. The potentials of digital networks to build equalitarian relationships between local government and social actors are still largely unexploited. Existing digital networks are mostly a pre-condition for local government upgrading, but they are less able to support communications between citizens and institutions failing to support deliberative practices and e-democracy tools.

Table 1. Distribution of civic networks by geographical area and level of interactivity 2004
Municipalities over 10000 inhabitants

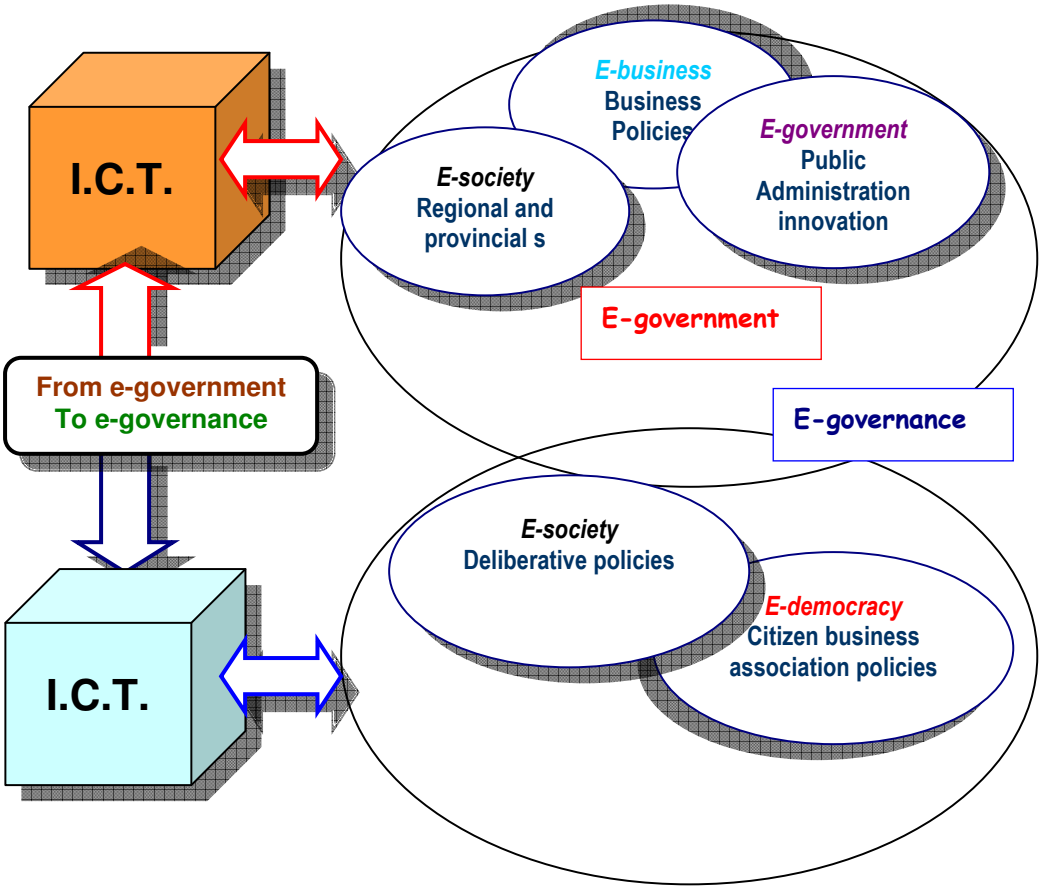
	Institutional Web sites	Forms	Interactive Information	Transactive Services	Authentication
Piedmont	**98,4%**	**95,2%**	**61,9%**	**50,8%**	**39,7%**
North WEST	**96,8%**	**92,1%**	**45,6%**	**34,9%**	**19,4%**
North EST	**100,0%**	**96,3%**	**73,1%**	**53,4%**	**30,1%**
CENTER	**98,5%**	**94,4%**	**51,8%**	**43,7%**	**36,5%**
SOUTH and ISLAND	**94,4%**	**76,6%**	**29,7%**	**19,8%**	**9,7%**

Italy	**96,8%**	**87,1%**	**45,8%**	**34,1%**	**20,7%**

Source: Observatory services on line – Project CRC November- December 2005

By means of ICT it is now possible to realize a few projects supported by the existing regional broadband networks (i.e.Rupar and Wi-Pie for Piedmont, Lepida for Emilia Romagna) within an organizational framework in which the participation of several actors and the possibility to consolidate the outcomes, can foster both the growth of network and the local area development.
The implementation of technological applications geared to improving the use of services by local actors, requires the construction of a more versatile and flexible administration, acting on both the front office and back-office. In the broader development, which includes the direct involvement of citizens, experiments of e-governance can also be set up. The development of these paths requires going beyond the simple application of electronic tools in the interactions of government strictly speaking and social actors. It comprises also the examination of the forecast of the imaginable repercussions in terms of the extension and improvement of democratic aspects of decision-making and of participation (see figure 1).

As well known, aims, tools and targets of governmental action are increasingly exposed to uncertainties and require to be accompanied by an adequate process of governance.. Uncertainties of supply call for a variety of governance mechanisms all pointing to inclusion.and citizens'participation.



.

The extension from an informative to a communicative model may be capable to reach far away and dispersed interests which then would add up to the core interests of institutional and governmental action.
Starting a participative process to shared aims requires overcoming existing gaps, barriers and several level of fragmentations.
A first fragmentation level concerns the relation between the functions of civic networks and community networks. (See typology) The functions of civic networks and community networks are not independent of each other. A combination of the two provides the real qualitative and quantitative

difference in the use of the network and in the development of services. Civic networks have evolved along different lines and served different scopes in relation to the social and administrative regional environment. A case in point is Turin where a difficulty in reaching and involving citizens is seen. A solution to this drawback, not only for the Torinese case but also for all civic networks, could be the harnessing of a framework of co-operation between the public, private, non-profit sectors and citizens. The issue does not really depend on whether the inception model used for civic networks is top down or bottom up, but more so on how relations between the different social actors are framed and how the latter interact throughout the region and how citizen users become involved in the interactive process. Users' auto-activation is an additional tool to cope with resource paucity and help optimize existing ones.

A second fragmentation level concerns the relationship between administrative efficiency and social communication. It needs to combine an economic-instrumental and relational vision of access

The conjunction of social communications and development entails overcoming, on the one hand, a prevalently economic-instrumental vision of access and, on the other, and a purely relational social-centric idea. If the economic scope is detached from the social sphere 'lock-out' mechanisms increase.

For that it is of primary importance for example that the social service networks move from a policy of welfare to a policy of workfare, using for example the technological network for including minorities (i.e. the realization carried out by some Italian provinces such as Asti, Cuneo, Cesena of innovative and territorial active emigration policy through telematic support).

A third level concerns the relation between technological application and the various contexts of action .The choice of technologies to be implemented as regards open source architectures, GRID systems, methodologies P2P, semantic WEB is also crucial for the operating of services, especially for the changeover from information services to those achieving new heights, based on relationships of communications.

Several other types of fragmentations, i.e. between hard and soft sciences, between theoretical and applied research and between research approaches, make impossible to share knowledge tools and practices, and more often increase the difficulties to achieve those capabilities necessary to address social and spatial discontinuities in decision-making, as well as their consequences on the formation of digital divides for both citizens and firms. Understanding how overcoming all these limits can be mostly object of empirical research.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to refer to one interesting example of deliberative democracy , that of participatory budgeting in Puerto Alegre. These experiences have been carried out for 17 years. In his long investigation Luciano Fedozzi has been explored the specific opportunities and challenges of local deliberation practices in governing , which are carried out in real environment, but are already experiencing the virtual environment.

.

Conditions that favour or prevent from the building of "OP- Orçamentos Participativos " (participatory budgeting")

VARIABLES	UNFAVOURABLE CONDITIONS	FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS
POLITICAL WILL TO SHARE DECISIONS	CENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING. VERTICAL RELATIONS State - Civil Society →	JOINT-RESPONSABILITY NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS= JOINT MANAGEMENT State - Civil Society
ASSOCIATIVE TRADITION IN SOCIAL FABRIC	POOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION Particularism and guardianship relations	↔ STRENGHTENEGHT OF SOCIAL FABRIC AND CIVIL NETWORK Pluralism and civil society actors' autonomy
FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE	LOW INVESTMENT CAPACITY Discouraging forms of social participation and trust relationships	VIRTOUS CYCLE Participation and material and personal outcome
GOVERNMENT CAPACITIES	FRAGMENTATION OF PUBLIC ORGANIGATION SYSTEM Absence of intergovernmental integration and management	INTERORGANIZATIONAL AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY MANAGEMENT Efficiency and effectiveness of technical and political procedures and of outcome elaboration
IINSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION OPENNES	INSTITUZIONAL RIGIDITY EXAGGERATED LEGALISME Fear of loosing "the social control"	DEMOCRACY: OPEN SYSTEM FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION Extensive involvement of social actors creativity

Source: Fedozzi (2003)

References

Bagnasco A.-Le Galès P. (2001), *Le città dell'Europa contemporanea,* Liguori Publisher

Berra M. (2005), *Repenser le gouvernement électronique. Les "réseaux citoyens" en Italie,* in "Terminal" Avril

Berra M, (2003) *Information Communications Technology and Local Development. Civic Networks in Italy*, in Informatics and Telematics, XXX, ID. . (2003),*Reti civiche: dalla telematica spontanea alla cooperazione istituzionale*, in "Quaderni di Sociologia", n. 32, 2003

Bobbio, N., (1997), *L'età dei diritti*, Einaudi

Castells M., (2001), The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society , Oxford U.P.

Coleman S and Goetze,J (2001), *Bowling togheter. Online Public Engagement in Policy Delibertion*, at http/bowling togheter.net

Dahlberg L.(2001), *The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring The Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere*, Routdlege

Fedozzi L.(2003), *Orcamentos Participativos:potencialidades, limites e principais dilemas dessa invencao democratica contemporanea,* paper presented to Coloquio Internacional , Capitalismo y democracia. La democracia moderna entre, finanzas barbaras, poderes facticos y crisis de la represantacòn, UNAM Mexico CITY26.10.2006

Habermas J, (1996)*, Between Fact and Norms. Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, MIT Press

Occelli S. (2005) Digital communities as collective *agents* of urban systems. Some evidence for the Turin Metropolitan Area, Turin, NETCOM, 19, 1-2, 79-100

Wenger E., McDermott R., Snyder W.M (2002), *Cultivating Communities of Practice. A guide to managing knowledge*,Harvard Business School Press

Foundations Of Digital Government – A Critical Introduction

Stephen Coleman, Institute of Communications Studies. University of Leeds

Governance and/as technology

To govern is to shape and regulate social order. This is not a task that is carried out by a single body – *the* government or state -, but is shared by a variety of agencies, often acting with little or no knowledge of what the others are doing. The term 'governance' describes this messy, multi-levelled, reticular exercise of power; whereas 'government' describes a more centralised, linear notion of rule which fails to capture the complexity of the contemporary polity. The space of governance is 'the historically constituted matrix within which are articulated all those dreams, schemes, strategies and manouevres of authorities that seek to shape the beliefs and conduct of others in desired directions by acting upon their will, their circumstances or their environment.' (Rose and Miller, 1992) This amounts to more than merely collecting taxes, setting speed limits and declaring occasional wars. Governance embraces a range of social projects, from the construction of 'the good citizen' to the daily disciplining of behaviours deemed to be undesirable. In short, governance is implicated in diverse aspects of taste, moral choice and personal regulation; it is an inescapable regime.

Governance has always been dependent upon technology, in the broadest sense of knowledge, skills, techniques and epistemological strategies, as well as devices, hardware, software and power circuits. As the reach of governance has spread – into new areas of the globe as well as new aspects of hitherto personal relationships -, it has come to rely upon more complex assemblages of technically stored and disseminated knowledge. Information and communication technologies (ICT), from the invention of the alphabet to the ubiquitous presence of CCTV cameras, have been employed in the service of governance.

Technologies are constitutive tools: they do not simply support predetermined courses of action, but open up new spaces of action. For example, the emergence of the printing press in Europe generated a space in which publics could come together as cohabitants of imagined communities; centralised states could disseminate their propaganda to mass populations; and vernacular idioms and dialects could be systematised into official languages. As Benedict Anderson argued in his magisterial study of the rise of nationhood, 'the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.' (Anderson, 1983) Similarly, the invention of the telegraph gave rise to hugely optimistic political predictions about its capacity to assemble 'all mankind upon upon one great plane, where they can see everything that is done, and hear everything that is said, and judge of every policy that is pursued at the very moment those events take place.' (Salisbury, 1889, quoted in Rhys Morus, 2000) Predating some of the more sanguine claims for the Internet as a democratically consultative medium, some mid-nineteenth-century commentators expected the telegraph to give rise to 'a series of conversations carried out … between the metropolois and the world, and every capital of northern and central Europe, as intimately as though the speakers were bending their heads over the dinner table and talking confidentially to the host.' (Wilson, 1855, quoted in Rhys Morus, 459) In reality, telegraphic communication had more to do with transmitting the dominant values of Empire to the furthest corners of the world than initiating a global dinner party.

Not only hard technologies, but modes of technical thought, have had profound effects upon governmental strategies. For example, the emergence of cyberntetics in the 1940s led governments to think of 'feedback' mechanisms as being integral to the liberal democratic process. (Wiener, 1948; Beniger, 1986) As Agar has shown in his study of the British civil service, the mechanisation of bureaucratic routines, from the use of punch-cards to computers, served to shift authority and expertise from individual powerbrokers to institutionalised channels. The image of democracies as self-regulating mechanisms which function best when they are responding to public demand underlies the contemporary rhetoric of e-government, which tends to combine the consumerist norms of new public management (Osborne and Gabler, 1992) with the cybernetic principles of liberal technocracy. (Mayr, 1976)

Because technologies are not simply *used by* governments, but are a constitutive element of governance, it makes sense to think of the rules, routines, structures, language, skills and networks of governance as *a political technology.* At the end of the Seventeenth Century Trenchard argued that 'a government is a mere piece of clockwork, and having such springs and wheels, must act after such a manner: and there the art is to constitute it so that it must move to the public advantage.' (Trenchard,1698) To speak metaphorically of the *machinery* of government, political *leaks* and *re-engineering* government is to tacitly acknowledge that governance is best understood as a technology. An anecdote might illustrate the point. At a recent meeting in Brussels, organised by the European Commission, a group of technologists sat down with a group of legislators and political scientists to work out ways of using digital technologies to support the legislative work of elected Members of the European Parliament. The technologists, who were very aware of the complexity surrounding their technical language, went to great lengths to explain their 'solutions.' The legislators and political scientists were impressed, but had to point out that the European Parliament operates in a number of unique ways, for example, that most legislation is initiated by the Commission and that legislative revision has more to do with negotiation outside the Parliament than what takes place in the chamber. What we were witnessing in this meeting was a process of mutual translation between two technical systems. Wiring the two together required a recognition of potential synergies, but also technical incompatibilities.

Digitising governance

E-governance entails the digitised coding, processing, storage and distribution of data relating to three key aspects of governing societies: the representation and regulation of social actors; the delivery of public services; and the generation and circulation of official information. Digitally-encoded governance is particularly appropriate to processes in which power relationships are steered and shared between diverse state and non-state agencies, rather than being centralised within traditionally linear hierarchies.

Four distinct features characterise digital governance. Firstly, digitised organisations tend to undergo a morphological transition from revolving *around* fixed centres to operating *between* dispersed information nodes. Nobody has described this political process with greater clarity than Manuel Castells:

Historically, power was embedded in organizations and institutions, organized around a hierarchy of centres. Networks dissolve centres, they disorganize hierarchy, and make materially impossible the exercise hierarchical power without processing instructions in the network, according to the network's morphological rule.
… The fundamental dilemma in the network society is that political institutions are not the site of power any longer. The real power is the power of instrumental flows, and cultural codes, embedded in networks.

… The state reacts to its bypassing by information networks, by transforming itself into a network state. So doing, its former centres fade away as centres becoming nodes of power-sharing, and forming institutional networks. (Castells, 1996)

Secondly, digitised governance moves from a condition in which information is scarce, and its value determined by its exclusivity, to a condition of information abundance, in which the most successful networks are those which collectively generate, share and borrow information. As Bimber has argued in relation to collective action,

New means for elites to distribute and acquire information, new possibilities for citizens to identify and communicate with one another, changes in the ways that citizens interact with the news system, and the historical preservation of information, among other developments, contribute toward a state of information abundance in the political system. (Bimber, 2003)

Thirdly, digital governance is inherently interactive. When governments constructed around analogue technologies sought to interact with the public, the will to communicate tended to be frustrated by their capacity to transmit rather than receive messages. As I have argued elsewhere,

The megaphone is the metaphorical medium of demagogic politics. Megaphones transmit, but do not receive; they amplify the voices of the leaders above those of the led; they are territorial, reaching a geographically-defined public in a specific space; they are authoritarian: it is hard to heckle a speaker with a megaphone. (Coleman, 2005)

By contrast, digitised communication resists the logic of what Postman has called 'the one-way conversation.' (Postman, 1986) A government website which said to its users, 'This is is what we want you to know. Read it and then leave us alone' would be regarded as breaching the implicit protocol of digital communication. The potential for feedback is central to the promise of digital commnucation. (That is why political parties and politicians have had such great difficulty adapting to digital media: they want to talk to their public, but do not yet know how to cope with the public speaking back.)

Fourthly, the digitisation of governance impacts upon organisational behaviour, both at the level of institutional purpose and capacity (structure) and human action and reflexivity (agency.) This is what is meant when digitisation is sometimes referred to as a 'transformative' process. The characteristics of technologies both shape and are shaped by the routine generation of meaning, power and norms which define structures. Zuboff's theory of automation and informatization refers to 'the dual potential of information technology to *automate* and to *informate*':

The same systems that make it possible to automate office transactions also create a vast overview of an organization's operations, with many levels of data coordinated and accessible for a variety of analytical efforts. … Information technology … introduces an additional dimension of reflexivity: it makes its contribution to the product, but it also reflects back on its activities and on the system of activities to which it is related. Information technology not only produces action but also produces a voice that symbolically renders events, objects, and processes so that they become visible, knowable, and shareable in a new way. (Zuboff, 1985)

At the same time, as the structural logic of the organisations in which they are working are rendered more visible by the process of digitisation, users find themselves in a more reflexive relationship with their environment, becoming more aware of hitherto tacit sources of power, relations with external actors and unintended consequences of what had once seemed like parochial activities. In the context of e-governance, the effects of informatization and greater user reflexivity could either strengthen or destabilise existing cultures of order and efficiency. For example, street-level bureaucrats, such as local housing officials, might find that the decisions they are compelled to make within an e-governance regime are increasingly systematised and non-negotiable; become more aware of the shortcomings of the system logic by which they are bound; make greater efforts to penetrate areas of governance networks that would have been traditionally inaccessible to them; and even form alliances with co-workers from whom they would once have been spatially disconnected. That, of course, is only one conceivable narrative of e-governance, but it serves to illustrate the ways in which digitisation both

disrupts and opens new avenues for techniques of governing.

In outlining these characteristics of digital technologies and their potential effects upon governance, there is an inevitable risk of this being read as technological determinism: the assumption that cultures and structures cannot resist effects produced by the properties of technologies. Instead, I want to argue for a more sophisticated understanding of this relationship, which owes much to Giddens' theory of structuration and Orlikowski's application of that theory to the study of technological change. As Orlikowski argues, 'The theory of structuration recognizes that human actions are enabled and constrained by structures, yet that these structures are the result of previous actions.' (Orlikowski, 1992, p.404) There is a constantly reciprocal interplay between structural logic and human reflexivity. Orlikowski summarises this well when she states that

technology is physically constructed by actors working within a given social context, and technology is socially constructed by actors through the different meanings they attach to it and the various features they emphasise and use. However, it is also the case that once developed and deployed, technology tends to become reified and institutionalized, losing its connection with the human agents that constructed it or gave it meaning, and it appears to be part of the objective, structural properties of the organization. (Orlikowski, 1992, p.406)

From this perspective, one should not be too quick to speak about e-governance as a single configuration of meaning, power and norms. The digitisation of governance is as much cultural and interpretive as technical and objective.

Barriers to e-governance

While there would seem to be a conceptual fit between governance and digitisation, theoretical expectations and empirical realities are rarely consistent. In the descriptive and evaluative literature on e-governance, four major barriers to success have been repeadedly identified. Firstly, large-scale government projects which utilise emerging and uncertain technologies face the risk of not knowing where technical orthodoxy will eventually settle. As a result, such projects are often blighted by an absence of defined technical standards. Governments can find themselves encumbered by legacy systems which tie them into commercial and technical arrangements that, even if they ever provided short-term benefits, constrain opportunities for future flexibility. At the same time, government, and various local, national and supranational bodies, which are supposed to be 'joined up' through e-governance, often find themselves more disconnected than ever because ICT purchased by different agencies at different times turn out not to be interoperable.

Secondly, there is much evidence to suggest that citizens do not trust governments to collect, store and act upon their personal data. There is a widespread public fear that all interactions with governments are monitored; that governments are unwilling to share information they gather, and will find ways of evading Freedom of Information laws; that data is transferred between agencies without citizens' consent; that stored data will be used to construct negative and unaccountable profiles of particular citizens; and that government data is inherently vulnerable to unscrupulous hackers. As customers in the marketplace, most people are more willing to exchange secure data with supermarkets or travel agencies than they are in their role of voters, tax-payers, service-users or community residents. Public anxieties about the political motives of government actors has led Warkentin *et al* to propose that for e-government to be regarded as legitimate 'it must be removed from the political arena in the minds of the citizens' (Warkentin *et al,* 2002) – by, for example, the use of dedicated intermediaries, such as GovWorks in the USA and DirectGov in the UK acting as information and transaction brokers. Public distrust is not helped by the failure of legislators to enact similar rules for digital as for analogue environments. For most citizens, it remains much easier to authenticate their identity in face-to-face encounters – or even on the telephone – than when they are online.

Thirdly, despite the pervasive talk of 'joined-up' governance and the seamless communication flows enabled by ICT, most governments are highly bureaucratically fragmented and internally fiercely resistant to change. Ironically, the devolutionary benefits of e-governance have often been most successfully implemented by centralised, top-down policy drives which have reengineered processes by overwhelming the oppugnancy of conservative bureaucrats. In their study of the UK Government's web presence, Margetts and Dunleavy (2002) noted that government officials have 'a tendency to find reasons for inaction and for exaggerated risk-averse behaviour on Internet or Web issues' and exhibit 'an unwillingness to divert resources from established ways of doing things o developing Internet communications or transactions.' In the face of this, politically-conceived e-governance strategies often look very different on paper than in practice.

Fourthly, access to computers and skills are unevenly distributed throughout the population, with those who are most excluded from the political process and most in need of government services most likely to be digitally excluded. A number of studies have shown that Internet users and non-users are distinguished by socio-economic status, age and ethnicity. (Thomas and Streib, 2003; Carter and Belanger, 2005) Furthermore, those accessing e-government are drawn from an even more exclusive range than Internet users in general. (Thomas and Streib, 2003) Carter and Belanger argue that

E-government represents yet another technical innovation that certain members of society are excluded from. Benefits such as increased convenience and responsiveness could mobilize the technically savvy while disenfranchising those who are less efficacious regarding computer use. (Carter and Belanger, 2005, p.5)

A technology which improves system efficiency at the expense of exacerbating social exclusion is open to serious normative criticism. Indeed, it is precisely in this normative context that most evaluations of e-governance fall down. There has been a utilitarian tendency to assess e-governance projects either in terms of cost benefits (are they cheaper than other methods?) or whether they provide technocratically convincing 'solutions' (do they 'work'?) The more important evaluative questions, that are rarely asked, concern the normative purpose of e-governance. Are the digitally governed freer, happier, more empowered? What are the relationships between e-governance and social justice? Are citizens entitled to 'digital rights?' How easily might citizens who feel oppressed or disillusioned by new networks of virtual power escape from the clutches of e-governance? These are the thorny questions that we must now address.

Governing the e-public

Amidst the heady rhetoric of modernised, rationalistic e-governance, it is easy to lose sight of those who are being governed. The public, which is always an amorphous spectre within models of democratic politics, is the absent body which can only become present through representation. Political representation is necessary when citizens are removed - physically, cognitively or otherwise - from the locus of public decision-making and their interests, preferences and values have to be expressed via an aggregating medium. To govern democratically is to both acknowledge the absence of the *demos* from day-to-day decision-making and to conjure it into existence through the ventriloquised voice of representative governance.

In contradistinction to the institutional-bureaucratic conception of 'the virtual state' as 'a government that is organised increasingly in terms of virtual agencies, cross-agency and public-private networks whose structure and capacity depend on the Internet and the web' (Fountain, 2001, p.4) is the notion of the virtual public which must be imagined, cultivated, defined and regulated before it can be governed. If the primary objective of e-governance is to produce subjects who are fit to be governed, rather than simply to provide neutral information and functional services in response to objectively discernible public demand, there is a need to understand the specific ways in which public behaviour, knowledge and attitudes are being shaped by technologies of digital governance. This entails an

investigation of ways in which governance has moved from being a process of coercive subjection to one of moral subjectification.

Foucault's concept of *governmentality,* particularly as developed by contemporary social theorists such as Rose and Barry, is particularly useful in helping to illuminate the ways in which e-governance acts upon human conduct with a view to stimulating habits of self-discipline and moralised responsibility which diminish the need for involuntary regulation. (Foucault) Rose has argued that 'Liberal strategies of government … become dependent upon devices (schooling, the domesticated family, the lunatic asylum, the reformatory prison) that promise to create individuals who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves.' (Barry, Osborne, Rose, p.45) E-governance, which is a form of what Rose has called 'governing at a distance' (Rose, p.49) can be understood as precisely such a mode of power in which norms of self-governing conduct are cultivated and disseminated via informal communicative networks rather than centralised command structures. To what extent is it the case that the behaviour, knowledge and attitudes of citizens are moulded by the subtle regime of e-governance?

Regulating the behaviour of e-citizens

E-citizens are presented with a rhetoric of freedom and an environment of circumscription. In this sense, e-governance accords with the contemporary liberal discourse in which free choice is blithely offered and then constrained by an abundant array of techniques to manage, persuade, incentivise and cajole 'customers' along paths consistent with economic efficiency and moral responsibility. Citizens wanting to contact government agencies are increasingly faced with the experience of being at the other end of the line to a call centre, in which all questions will be answered and needs provided for, as long as they are specified questions and legitimate needs. Template rationality is not good at acknowledging or responding to desire, curiosity or dissent, but seeks to promote forms of behaviour consistent with a particular conception of orderly social conduct. In his study of *Information Politics on the Web,* Rogers has argued that citizen feedback to e-government is restricted by what he calls 'the politics of information formatting.' Citing the example of the UK Government's *Citizenspace* portal, in which citizens were invited to debate aspects of Government policy, Rogers notes that, firstly, the rules of the site disallow external hyperlinks to the debate unless permission is given, and secondly, that debate topics 'along the lines of ministerial responsibility instead of gleaning or grabbing them from society …' (Rogers, 2004, p.11) In short, to participate in this particular e-governance exercise, citizens were expected to cut themselves off from the network potentiality of the web and conform to an imposed structure and agenda of debate.

Failure to conform to programmed rationalities can result in a loss of time and money for frustrated citizens, as well as the omnipresent threat that their recalcitrance has been registered by the surveillant gaze of the state. Lyon (2002) has shown how monitorial government technologies are designed to discriminate between fields of action deemed anti-social – and even to identify types of actor expected to manifest nuisance value. As Howard has argued, online interactions with political websites are never inconsequential:

We often cast a data shadow when we complete an electronic purchase, browse websites or agree to participate in a survey. The data shadow follows us almost everywhere. It represents us by profile, but with little color. We are not always aware of its appearance, but others can note the silhouette. It is the silhouette created by our daily activities, and it is one of the parties to the new digitized social contract. Some people have more crisply defined data shadows, depending on how many political hypermedia they interact with. Credit card purchases, voter registration records, polling data, and magazine subscriptions all help create the data shadow. Increasingly, the data shadow represents us in political discourse. The data shadow has become an important political actor. Data shadows not only follow citizens, but political candidates, and institutions cast them as well. Few people can effectively op-out of their digital shadow. (Howard, 2003)

Digital ICT are not unique in their capacity to regulate the behaviour of users. All social communication entails some involuntary accommodation between individuals wishing to finds things out, contact others or be heard and the cultural-technical logic of mediation. The problem of e-governance technologies is not that they are designed with a view to promoting certain forms of behaviour and discouraging others, but the absence of transparency or accountability for these strategies. Governing is a social practice – as is being governed. Such practices do not lend themselves to the discourse of rational functionalism, but should be understood as specific socio-technical choices.

Cultivating the skills of e-citizenship

Historically, citizenship has been regarded as a birthright, the entitlements of which have been the subject of contestation and negotiation over the past three centuries. The free citizen is characterised by autonomous moral agency which is most potently exercised within the public sphere. In this sense, it is the liberal freedom *from* interference, especially by the state, which makes civic action so precious to effective democracy.

More recently, however, a number of cultural and political trends have precipitated a shift towards what Garland has called 'the responsibilization of citizenship' (Garland, 2000) These trends include the weakening of strong welfare structures, which leave more people, in more areas of life, having to fend for themselves; the decline of political deference and rise of volatile political consumerism, which leaves citizens feeling rather like shoppers who can buy whatever they want, as long as they can afford it and predict the uncertain consequences; and the adoption of a strong ideological commitment by both conservatives and social democratics towards a belief that social rights must be balanced by communitarian duties. The need to produce citizens who are prepared for these new conditions has given rise to an expanded field of pedagogy which includes citizenship education in schools; risk communication; the training of expert patients; offender rehabilitation schemes; lifestyle courses and various projects to promote 'sensible' interactions with the media. Citizenship becomes something more like an apprenticeship. One is no longer simply governed; one is educated through a variety of practices, discourses and technologies to become a responsible collaborator in governance. In this context, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in their Recommendation No. 19/2001, has urged member states to pay attention to

improving citizenship education and incorporating into school curricula and training syllabuses the objective of promoting awareness of the responsibilities that are incumbent on each individual in a democratic society, in particular within the local community …

E-governance projects are well-suited to such normative shaping of skills and knowledge. Learning to be an e-citizen entails becoming familiar with techniques of online information-searching, protocols for digitally interacting and the legal regulation of software use. The cultivation of these skills – often referred to as digital literacy - not only point citizens towards a particular view of governance, but govern the process of being governed. What has been called 'digital literacy' is a regulatory project intended to cultivate a citizenry capable of responsible digital interaction. In the context of e-governance, this includes knowing which level of governance one should address in relation to particular problems; being able to navigate through the bureaucratic divisions of departmental and agency remits; behaving in a civilised way; and having appropriate (i.e. well managed) expectations about outcomes. From the perspective of governmentality, none of these skills are politically neutral. A good example of this is the way in which most e-government websites seek to draw an artificial distinction between governance and politics. (For example, few local authority websites in the UK explain the partisan composition of council committees; and councillors are not allowed to use official web spaces to promote their 'political' views.) This online illusion reinforces an implicit view that governments are there to get things done efficiently and politics is there to cause arguments and get in the way. Similarly, government websites tend to be dull and solemn, designed in ways to impress upon users the 'seriousness' of their purpose and their distance from fun or frivolity. None of these messages

are inevitable. The politics of governance could be made more explicit. The democratic process could be made to feel more like pleasure. The emphases and absences to which I have pointed reflect decisions that have been made about how to govern the civic relationship and what citizens need to know to be governed effectively. But who is accountable for these decisions? What if the public would prefer to be communicated with in different ways?

Managing interactivity

The most famous characteristic of digital ICT is the capacity for two-way communication. Instead of the monological discourse of transmissive mass media, the rigid dichotomy between message produces and receivers collapses in an environment of digital interactivity. This has had profound effects upon ways in which shoppers interact with the marketplace, students with educational resources and networks of friends with one another. There are two senses in which e-governance has been an exception to this trend. Firstly, as many studies have found, governmental and political institutions have been slow to incorporate interactive features into their web sites. They still regard the web as a means of one-way narrowcasting. Secondly, even where governments have encouraged a degree of interactivity, this has tended to be vertical (G2C) rather than horizontal (C2C.) Governing elites have failed to connect in their everyday policy-making with the numerous networks of grass-roots discourse which could, if properly harnessed, give substance to contemporary aspirations towards co-governance. (Ostrom, 1996)

E-governance has tended to be risk aversive, acknowledging (sometimes reluctantly) the functional efficiencies of delivering services or conducting transactions online, but refusing to engage with the opportunities for more dialogically and directly representing the public's interests, preferences and values. For example, there have been many strategies, some more successful than others, for the online collection of payments from citizens, ranging from local taxes to parking fines. There is no technical reason why payment for services could not be combined with e-consultations about policies for spending the money being collected, i.e. making a direct connection between taxation and representation. The choice not to do so is a political one. Indeed, it may well be the right policy, but, like much else in the sphere of e-administration, it is presented, in the absence of any debate, as a *fait accompli.*

There is a need for a political debate about digital interactivity and its consequences rather than a bureaucratic strategy to 'manage' the over-talklative public. A strategy for e-governance which integrated horizontal networks with the vertical channels of institutional power, and then attended to the thorny problems of how best to respond respectfully to a newly-empowered public, would look very different from the forms of e-governance that we have come to expect. Its main effect would be to encourage a democratic attitude amongst citizens, which we might define as a perspective based upon the assumptions that power belongs to the *demos,* rather than to politically or economically provileged elites; that policies and social affairs can be influenced by collective action; that no aspect of policy formation or decision-making is off limits for the public; and that neither age, gender or ethnicity, nor vernacular and idiomatic ways of speaking, are barriers to being acknowledged and respected. At the moment, most e-governance projects do little to promote such a democratic attitide, and often create implicit or intentional obstacles to the political efficacy of 'ordinary' people.

What can be expected from e-governance?

The first question to be asked about any technological arrangement is, What is it supposed to do? The answer to this question is far from clear in the case of e-governance. There is no shortage of simplistic and inadequate answers: that e-governance is intended to make government more efficient or less expensive or of a higher quality or simply less conspicuous. But none of these responses refer to the wider question of what governance itself is for. As with debates around e-learning, which have had to engage with theoretical, empirical and normative accounts of why, how and to what ends people

acquire the knowledge that they do, e-governance cannot be discussed intelligently in isolation from broader considerations about power and who should wield it, the public and its role and the desired ends of social order.

Such analysis and discussion calls for new research in three specific areas. Firstly, the question of digital rights for e-citizens. What kinds of guarantees should e-citizens expect when they are interacting with governments online? As well as concerning the obvious questions of data protection, information transparency and security from malignant third parties, there are broader questions to be considered concerning the terms of interactive relationships and opportunities to find and form lateral networks. Secondly, there are important questions about governance of the Internet as a social space, which has been much debated in the literature, but neglected in this introductory chapter. How far should the Internet be accountable to its users? What protection should the public expect from state or corporate control of cyberspace? To what extent are the codes embedded within commonly-used software a means of manipulating public action and debilitating democratic energies? Thirdly, as with any aspect of social existence, there is a debate to be had about social justice and how the new arrangements of e-governance are exacerbating or diminishing traditional social inequalities.

This introductory chapter has set out to prepare the intellectual ground so that some of these questions can be addressed, hopefully disrupting some of the more unreflective certainties about the nature of e-governance and setting the scene for some critical analyses of why, how and to what ends society is both governed and e-governed.

REFERENCES

Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London: Verso

Barry, A., Osborne and Rose, N. (eds.) (1996) *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government,* London: UCL Press

Beniger, J. (1986) *The Control Revolution:* technological and economic origins of the information society, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Bimber, B. (2003) *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power,* NY: State University of New York Press, p.92

Carter, L. and Belanger, F. (2005) 'The utilization of e-government services: citizen trust, innovation and acceptance factors', *Information Systems Journal,* 15

Castells, M. (1996) *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture: The Rise of the Network Society (Vol I),* Oxford, Blackwell

Coleman, S. (2005) 'New Mediation and Direct Representation: reconceptualizing representation in the digital age' *New Media & Society*, 7:2

Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry,* 8:4

Fountain, J. (2001) *Building the Virtual State: information technology and institutional change,* Washington DC: The Brookings Institution

Garland, D. (2000) 'The culture of high crime societies', *British Journal of Criminology*, 40, pp. 347–75

Howard, P. (2003) 'Digitizing the Social Contract: Producing American Political Culture in the Age of New Media', *The Communication Review,* 6

Lyon, D. (2002) *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk and Digital Discrimination,* London: Routledge

Margetts, H. and Dunleavy, P. (2002) *Cultural Barriers to e-Government,* London: National Audit Office

Mayr, O. (1976) 'The Science-Technology Relationship as a Historiographic Problem', *Technology and Culture*, 17:4

Orlikowski, W. (1992) 'The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations', *Organization Science*, 3:3

Osborne, D. and Gabler, T. (1992) *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley

Ostrom, E. (1996) 'Crossing the great divide: coproduction, synergy, and development', *World Development*, 24(6)

Postman, N. (1986) *Amusing Ourselves to Death : Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. NY: Penguin Books.

Rhys Morus (2000) 'The nervous system of Britain': space, time and the electric telegraph in the Victorian age' *British Journal for the History of Science,* 33, p.254

Rogers, R. (2004) *Information Politics on the Web,* MA: MIT Press

Rose, N. and Miller, P. (1992) 'Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government', *British Journal of Sociology*,. 43:2, p.175

Thomas, J. and Streib, G. (2003) 'The New Face of Government: Citizen-Initiated Contacts in the Era of e-Government', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13

Trenchard, (1698) *Short History of Standing Armies*

Warkentin, M., Gefen, D., Pavlou, P. and Rose, G. (2002) 'Encouraging Citizen Adoption of E-Government by Building Trust', *Electronic Markets,* 12:3

Wiener, N. (1948) *Cybernetics* NY: Wiley

Zuboff, S. (1985) 'Automate/Informate: The Two Faces of Intelligent Technology' in *Organizational Dynamics,* autumn, p.9

E-Participation And The Policy Process

Stephen Coleman, Institute of Communications Studies. University of Leeds

I come to this subject as a political communication scholar, but also as someone who has worked closely with the policy-making process. I was adviser to the UK Parliament Information Committee inquiry into ways of using ICT to connect Parliament with the public; a member of the Puttnam Commission which reported on communication between Parliament and citizens; a member of the UN committee on good practice in public participation; and have served as an adviser to the British Prime Minister's Strategy Unit on policy relating to e-participation. I have some experience, therefore, of the practical problems of translating e-participation objectives into the policy process.

With this short paper, I am submitting a draft of a longer paper (to be published later this year in a book on e-government) which sets out in more elaborate terms my understanding of the problematics of e-governance. The following points summarise my thoughts about the key challenges facing e-participation in relation to the policy process:

1. There is abundant evidence to show that, even amongst internet users (now a majority in several EU states), e-participation is unequally stratified in ways that could exacerbate traditional political inequalities. In short, the so-called digital divide is further complicated by various political divides, primarily related to income, educational achievements and gender. I have carried out two major surveys of the UK online population in 2001 and 2005 and will be able to report on findings from these at the Bergamo seminar. Unless e-participation projects are linked to policies designed to boost participation amongst under-represented groups, they could be seen as counter-democratic activities. But many e-participation projects do not even seek to capture such socio-demographic data. For example, we do not know how many of the 1.8 million people who signed the UK e-petition against road charges were a) UK citizens, b) car owners, c) men or women; d) working class; or e) lobbyists.

2. E-participation projects are rarely evaluated in a critical fashion by independent reviewers. Most of the evaluation studies that have been produced were conducted by the organisations who ran the project being evaluated. This raises important analytical and ethical problems which policy-makers need to consider. At the same time, many forms of offline citizen consultation have been tried and tested, but we have little research comparing these with e-participation projects. Many criticisms of e-participation could apply to participation in general. But which might apply more to e-participation and, conversely, which weaknesses of offline participation might be less evident in online contexts? This comparative research needs to be done. My suggestion is that policy-makers should build evaluation into initial plans for e-participation projects and these plans should a) involve independent reviewers and b) have a significant impact upon the determination of future e-participation policies.

3. Most e-participation projects are *ad hoc*. Lack of sustainability makes it difficult to determine whether their flaws relate to their one-off, short-term nature or to other inherent defects. There is a need to constitutionally integrate e-participation over time. On the other hand, effective innovation is by nature non-institutional and there is an argument to be made that cultivating dynamic methods of political innovation is best achieved outside the institutional sphere. This is a problem for policy-makers which relates to a wider problem discussed below (point 4.)

4. The central policy dilemma facing e-participation relates to public trust in the process. There are strong reasons for the public not to trust government-managed e-participation. A key policy question is whether government should step back from e-participation and leave the task to other

mediators, such as media organisations, civil society or, as Jay Blumler and I have argued, an independent body charged with running a civic commons. Government could still have an important role to play in such a model of e-participation – as provider of official information and respondent to public input. But that is a distinct role from trying to manage public participation. The UK Government's lamentable record of running a 'national local e-democracy project' leads me to conclude that the central state are the last people who should be asked to run e-participation.

5. A key role for government (and parliament, which we should analyse in distinction from executive government) is to respond to the public's input to e-participation. But there is little evidence of this happening. (Of course, there is a link between this and my point 1; for, if representation in e-participation input is socio-demographically skewed, one might want to urge policy-makers to ignore it.) There is at present hardly any published research exploring how policy-makers (both bureaucrats and politicians) actually deal with input from e-participation. Indeed, it would be useful for our Bergamo seminar to discuss appropriate methodologies for such an investigation, especially in comparative contexts.

6. E-participation is often highly dependent upon the private sector. Not enough research has been conducted on the role and accountability of technology vendors, service providers, private partners etc. My own impression is that many of them do not understand or even much respect the democratic political process. They often present governments with legacy systems which inhibit democratic interaction and technical or organisational innovation.

7. As a democratic theorist, I am interested in how e-participation might affect practices of political representation. I have argued in several papers that we may be moving towards a model of Direct Representation. It would be useful to discuss the implications that this might have for policy-making.

Government, E-Government, Democratic Theory, Minorities and the Possibility that Justice is Conflict

Keith Culver, Department of Philosophy and Centre for Social Innovation Research, University of New Brunswick, Canada (and Associate Fellow, James Martin Institute, Said School of Business, Oxford University).

Recalling the motivations for e-participation research

Among the motivations for research in e-participation, concern for the quality of democratic citizenship has often taken pride of place. There are good reasons for this concern, most connected with the apparent decline of 'social capital'[1] and an associated decline in the most prominent symbol of the health of a democracy: voting. The decline in voting in industrialized democracies is so well known that it is almost painful to recite the familiar evidence[2]. Thoughtful politicians have sought various means to respond to voting trends which raise the alarming possibility of democratically illegitimate governments. Of course, whether legitimacy requires the consent of some representative sample of citizens, some raw number of citizens, or satisfaction of some other criterion remains unclear. All that is clear is that less is bad, more is better, and things which may get us to better are to be supported. States have accordingly provided research funding support for e-participation experiments, and researchers have responded with organizations such as DEMO-Net. So far, this looks rather like the sort of research cycle typical of national innovation systems: problem identification, targeted research involving combinations of academic, government and private sector partners, all leading to a solution. The only trouble in e-participation is that there isn't much of a solution yet visible. No major jurisdiction has adopted e-participation techniques which have made not just a measurable difference to the quality of democratic life, but a perceived, believed, and embraced *transformative* difference to the quality of democratic life, where e-participation techniques displace altogether prior offline practices, or introduce a wholly new decision-making mechanism[3]. In fact, in some jurisdictions the introduction of e-participation techniques has arguably resulted in a *decrease* in the quality of democratic life. Consider, for example the American experience of e-voting, an experience in which the privately held firm Diebold has been associated with a series of blunders whose nature and extent tend to distract from positive attention to benefits which might be gained from a secure and efficient e-voting technology[4]. What are e- participation researchers to do in the face of this situation? Why are e-participation techniques not the subject of more positive attention from governments keen to absorb their lessons?

Does e-participation research have the right problem, or enough of the right problem in hand?

It would be too easy, I think, to dismiss the lack of success mentioned above as an artefact of the novelty of e-participation techniques, or the lack of properly funded opportunities to fully integrate

[1] The *locus classicus* is Robert D. Putname, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[2] The unconvinced may wish to see Canada's recent experience, as reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation here: http://www.cbc.ca/canadavotes/voterstoolkit/voterturnout.html# .

[3] This is not meant to denigrate the noteworthy success enjoyed by organizations such as the International Teledemocracy Centre and its tools such as the e-petitioner. It is worth noting nonetheless that the e-petitioner is largely an online version of offline processes, and does not represent a novel development in democratic processes.

[4] See, e.g, national news coverage in the United States from the national, mass-market newspaper *USA Today*: http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2006-06-26-e-voting_x.htm .

with 'live' political processes which really matter to citizens in jurisdictions ready for change. It may be worth giving serious consideration to the possibility that governments have not taken up transformative e-participation techniques because those techniques do not really aim at the problem of democratic disengagement as it is conceived by senior government officials with greatest influence regarding trial and choice democratic mechanisms – Chief Electoral Officers, for example. To approach and identify those concerns afresh we perhaps need to revisit the question of what motivates e-participation research, what insights and skills best correspond to the motivation, and crucially, what counts as success – and there the question of relevance to senior government officials finds its place. Taking this possibility seriously means taking up interdisciplinary research into the meta-level assumptions, methods, and priorities of e-participation. Particular attention might be usefully given the interaction of e-participation studies with their conceptual backdrop: theories of democracy. It is noteworthy, I think, that since the high-water point of Coleman and Gotze's[5] engagement of fundamental questions of democracy in the context of e-democracy, there has been remarkably little focus within e-participation research on the implications of the best available legal and political theory for e-participation research. It is, in a sense, a dialogue which hasn't yet happened. William Twining, Joseph Raz, Ronald Dworkin, Neil MacCormick (a former MEP), Jeremy Waldron[6] and other luminaries of social and legal theory simply do not figure significantly in talk of e-participation. If mentioned at all, their complex, nuanced views are glossed in passing, as part of less than trenchant literature reviews which survey yet leave un-engaged the typical concerns of legal theory with the interaction between social practices (including technology-driven or –mediated practices) and conceptions of citizenship, law, legal system, legislation, sovereignty, and so on – all of which may be affected by developments in e-participation[7]. A wide range of questions remains to be answered in a manner thoroughly satisfactory to both our best legal theorists, and our best practitioners of e-participation. Questions to be asked include, for example, does increased ease of access increase minimum participation required for democratic legitimacy? Does blurring of political borders caused be e-petitioning pose any threat or compel any change to our conception of state sovereignty? If so, what forms of e-participation are more compatible with state sovereignty? Future research in e-participation ought to encourage a kind of reflective equilibrium between theory and practice, engaging legal and political theorists more closely in project design to ensure that assumptions regarding citizenship, minority participation needs, and so on are comprehensively understood. Similarly, the consequences of e-participation experiments and gradually entrenched mechanisms ought to be brought to the attention of legal and political theorists concerned with the effect of technology and mobility for democratic practices.

Still more specific attention – even closer to the daily problems of senior decision-makers in government -- might be given the relation between e-participation and social and legal theory regarding self, citizenship, and multiculturalism. As Bulgarian and Romanian accession to the European Union raises issues of minority recognition and participation, the time may be particularly ripe for comparative analysis of Canadian and European experience. As an immigrant nation, Canada has long experience of development of policies for multiculturalism, and an equally extensive academic engagement with multiculturalism, minorities' claims to rights of recognition, and the demands those ideals place on governance mechanisms[8]. Yet while figures such as Charles Taylor are sometimes cited in the e-participation literature as having said relevant things in works such as *Sources of The Self*[9], there has been little engagement of e-participation advocates with the body of work on multiculturalism, minorities, dignity and citizenship, perhaps fairly characterized as being led by Will Kymlicka in his books

[5] Stephen Coleman and John Gotze, *Bowling Together* (London: Hansard Society, 2001).

[6] Relevant works include William Twining, *Globalisatoin & LegalTheory* (London: Butterworths, 2001), Joseph Raz *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Pres, 1985), Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: the Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Jeremy Waldron, *Law and Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

[7] See, for example, Keith Culver, "How the New ICTs Matter to the Theory of Law" *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 17, no. 2 (2004), 255-268.

[8] For a helpful review see the Canadian Library of Parliament's summary article here: http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/936-e.htm .

[9] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

including *Multicultural Citizenship*[10] and edited collections including *Language Rights and Political Theory*[11]. This theoretical background might be brought into design and evaluation of a range of e-participation exercises and tools, from use of argument visualization in multi-lingual settings, to multi-lingual avatars for navigational assistance of new citizens in e-participation exercises, e-consultation tools adapted to the informational needs of recent immigrants, and so forth.

What counts as success?

One final point should be made regarding the potential for mutual benefit in closer collaboration e-participation researchers, and legal and political theorists: legal and political theory may be able to contribute to a more satisfactory understanding of what might reasonably be expected from e-participation exercises. Many of the writers prominent in legal and political theory have useful and challenging things to say about some of the ideas often taken as dogma. Consensus, for example, is often thought to be a positive value and goal undergirding such valuable things as 'social cohesiveness,' or more alarmingly, 'social fabric.' Yet it may be that we are setting ourselves impossible goals if our e-participation experiments and later, entrenched practices, aim at goals such as consensus which are inconsistent with what experience and theory both identify as more plausible goals. Sir Stuart Hampshire, for example, argues compellingly in Justice is Conflict that we ought to disregard as a misleading myth, wrongly brought forward from Platonic philosophy, the ideal which supposes that justice is obtained when humans live in a state of unruffled social harmony[12]. On the contrary, Hampshire argues, successful achievement of justice ought to be a rather noisy operation full of to-ing and fro-ing of argument. We ought to expect this, Hampshire says, because human history shows that conflicting desires emerge whenever humans are left for long enough with sufficient freedom of thought and action to develop their own plans of life[13]. Perhaps democracy ought to be very similar, and attempts at unruffled consensus, with everyone heard and satisfied, are simply misguided. The real questions for e-participation may little to do with inclusion and access, and everything to do with finding genuinely novel solutions to the same old questions of the nature of the self, recognition for individuals and groups, meaningful participation for minorities and channeling of conflict under acceptance that justice is conflict. What can e-participation do about that? Can e-participation bring disparate minorities together to form effective coalitions so being small matters less, much as small political parties do within the structure of the European Parliament? Can e-participation find ways of 'scaling' contributions to democratic debate numerically uneven yet politically equally weighty partners can negotiate their way to solutions? In my current activity as an advisor on e-democracy to the Province of New Brunswick's Commission on Self-Sufficiency, these larger questions of democracy are my everyday questions as I strive to ensure that Anglophone and Francophone citizens have equal opportunities to participate, notwithstanding the fact that there are fewer Francophones than Anglophones, and the further fact that the bulk of the Francophone population is outside the major metropolitan areas. Here, in this task, political theory is running up against the limits of current e-participation tools, and the way forward will be unclear without new dialogue and new interaction between legal and political theorists, and researchers more closely connected to choice and development of e-participation technologies.

[10]Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[11] Will Kymlicka and Allan Patten, eds. *Language Rights and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[12] Sir Stuart Hampshire, *Justice is Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[13] Hampshire's colleague and friend Sir Isaiah Berlin is also valuable on this matter, particularly in his seminar *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

On the interplay between the net evolution and the public policies for (e)participation

Fiorella de Cindio- D.I.Co. – Università degli Studi di Milano

The Internet, in its short history, already passed through several 'ages':

-the age of pioneers, which took place from the very beginning until the web creation in the first '90. In this phase, the net is basically a platform for reducing space and time barriers through the e-mails, for cooperation and knowledge sharing through newsgroup, mailing list and the ftp protocol;

-when the web arose, in the early '90, it was basically the user-friendly version of the ftp protocol, i.e., apublishing tool. It quickly gained great popularity but its limited capabilities, as well as the narrowvision of the net as a further channel for information and service supply, have also been responsible for the 'flop' of the so-called net economy.

-afterward, the web has been more and more enriched with interaction capabilities, but only quite recently it really became an environment suitable for developing strongly interactive applications. The shift from publishing to participation, from personal website to blogs, etc, which is the shift of paradigm promoted by the so called web 2.0 -see the quite famous table which opens the (O'Reilly, 2005) article -can also be seen as rediscovering the Internet as it was at the beginning, a worldwide platform for computer mediated communication and cooperation between individuals.

These phases are well reflected in the way in which the public sector and the public policies have conceived and used the net (see Figure 1).

The pioneers phase corresponds to the first --not lacking of ingenuity -'vision' of the Internet as a virtual world able to extend, enrich and ameliorate the physical world and to reduces the distance between the citizens and the public institutions, and, more in general, between the civic society and the government. Community and civic networks succeeded in fostering citizens' participation becoming a sort of online "public square"; however, they often failed in having a real impact on the local institutions' decision making process (Miani, 2002). The reasons for this failure seems to be linked both to social and technical aspects. Actually, it is fairly evident that, in a good number of cases, local bodies prefer to design city sites or portals as a parallel media for distributing information and offering interactive services (e-government), rather than as a shared platform for supporting and enhancing a direct relation with citizens and for involving them in the decision-making process. The city web sites and portals implementing this view, often called as digital cities, corresponds precisely to the vision of the Internet characterizing the web 1.0 phase. National as well as European policies in the field of e-government have largely promoted this

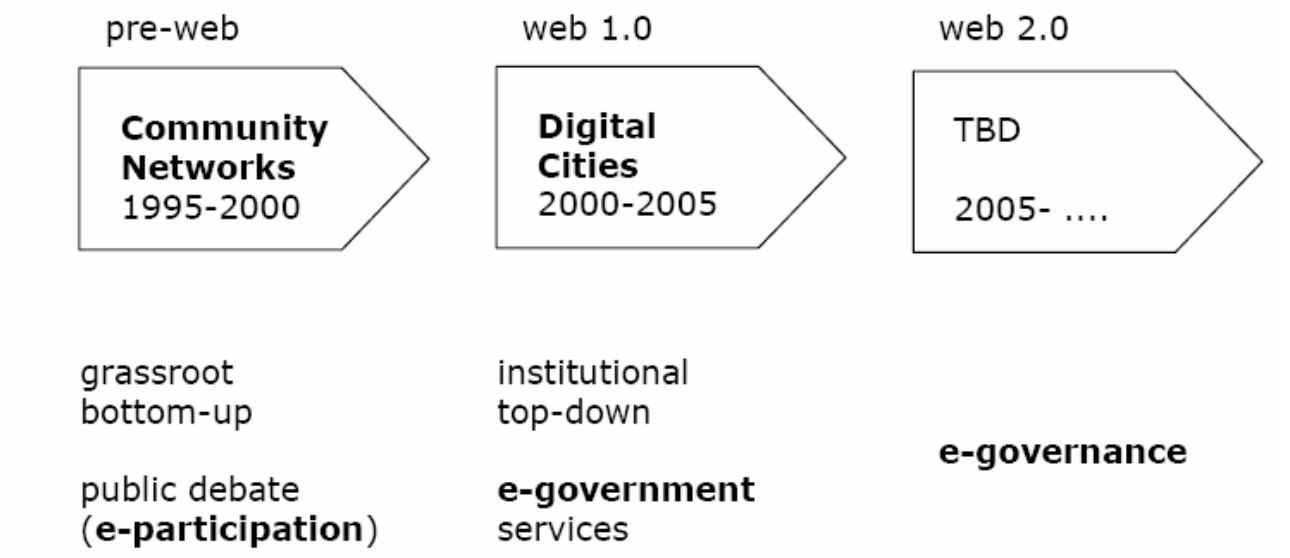


Figure 1

However, the limits intrinsic in this approach are also evident: theoretical studies, as well as empiricalevidence, more and more motivate the necessity of shifting from government (and e-government) to governance (and e-governance), since the complexity of modern society cannot be managed, even at the local level, without the direct involvement of all the components of the society (see, among the others: OECD, 2001; Censis, 2003; and Bobbio, 2004). This is a challenge for theonline counterpart too and well corresponds to the web 2.0 approach.

To achieve results in (e-)governance projects it is worth recalling the lessons we have learned from community networking experiences, including the following factors:

-(e-)participation is an incremental learning process during which the various social actors have to meeteach other --online and/or offline -and develop mutual trust.

-the contract binding the social actors, online as well as offline, must be made as transparent as possible: politicians and pubic managers can involve the citizenry to listen people opinion over a hot topics in the public agenda or they can involve a small number of young people to decide the destination of a space provided by the municipality. whatever the level and extension of the participation is, it has to be clearly declared in advance.

-the same holds online: the rules of behaviour the participants have to follow depending on their role have to be clearly stated (De Cindio et al., 2003); for instance, in order to give room to everybody and make the management of the online environment affordable, it may be useful to introduce a constraints which limits the number of messages/posts each one can write per day. The key point is to declare the rules and explain their motivations.

-a strong message from politicians is necessary to boost participation: we recently did a survey on participation and e-participation in the framework of the project "e21 to enhance digital citizenship within the local Agenda 21 participatory processes" (involving ten Municipalities in the Lombardy Region and co-funded by the Ministero per le Riforme e le Innovazioni nella Pubblica Amministrazione) and we have learned how it can be important if the message communicated to citizens is simply: "if you participate, you decide".

References

Bobbio L. ed. (2004). A più voci -Amministrazioni pubbliche, imprese, associazioni e cittadini nei processi decisionali inclusivi, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane. (in Italian). Available at http://www.cantieripa.it/allegati/A_più_voci.pdf

Censis (2003). 7th Report on Digital Cities in Italy, February 2003. A summary is available at http://www.censis.it/censis/ricerc.html. (in Italian)

De Cindio F., Gentile O., Grew P., Redolfi D. (2003), Community Networks: Rules of Behavior and Social Structure, The Information Society journal, vol. 19, n. 5, pp. 395-406.

De Cindio F., Gemini G., Sartori M., Sonnante L. (2007). Analisi Agenda 21 locale, ICT ed e-partiicpation nei Comuni e21, Deliverbale del progetto e21, A.I.Re.C. Lombardia. (in Italian)

Miani M. (2002). The Institutionalization of Civic Networks: the Case of Italian Digital Cities, presented at the 2nd Euricom Colloquium Electronic Networks and Democracy, University of Nijmegen, October 2002.

OECD (2001). Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making, OECD Publishing.

O'Reilly T. (2005). What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software. Available on Jan.31, 2007 at the URL http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html

Interactivity and e-participation

Leopoldina Fortunati, University of Udine

Interactivity is often seen as one of the innovative forms of citizen's participation to public life, a proof of citizenship political involvement. Unfortunately this vision is based on a mythology, which is produced even at academic level. I would like to discuss the relationship between interactivity and e-participation, on the basis of four researches that I carried out with other colleagues on online newspapers (two researches), online newspaper interactivity and the influence of the internet on journalists' practices in newsrooms. They are all cross-cultural researches carried out in the years 2003-2006 by the newspaper working group of COST A20, a funded research network on the influence of the internet on mass media. But here I will illustrate and discuss only the results emerging from the Italian side of the research.

The first research. This research regards a cross-cultural survey of offline and online newspapers conducted 5 March 2003 in five European countries: Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia (Fortunati, Sarrica, 2004). The main purpose of this research was to understand and measure the influence of the Internet on daily newspapers and vice versa the influence of newspapers on the Internet. The survey was carried out simultaneously in these five countries: the newspapers chosen for Italy were Il Corriere della sera, La Repubblica, Il Sole 24 ore and La Stampa. As for the sites, apart from the sites of these newspapers, we chose the online news service www.gmbox.it, because it was at that time the most visited information site in Italy. We analysed the content of the front page of the first four most-read generalist Italian papers, the front page of the relative sites and the only-online news site cited above.

The second research. The 8th of October 2003 this first research was replicated in 14 countries (which this time were Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Us), but with a more detailed questionnaire. For Italy the newspapers chosen were again Il Corriere della sera, La Repubblica, Il Sole 24 ore and La Stampa, while the online news service was this time a newspaper published only online: ilnuovo.it (Fortunati, Sarrica, 2004a; Fortunati, Sarrica, 2005; van der Wurff, et alii, forthcoming).

The third research. This research regards another cross-cultural project aiming at exploring how the websites of the most important newspapers are embodying in their communicative practice the interactivity in four European countries, such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland and Italy. We collected the data related to the newspapers involved 12 October 2004 (Fortunati, 2005; Fortunati, Raycheva, Harro-Loit, O' Sullivan, 2005). Online interactivity is made up by many elements: e-mails, forums, chats, newsgroups, polls, hyper textual links, portals, games, possibility of homepage personalization (choice of the language, for instance), personalization of news to be sent and received and so on (Downes, McMillan, 2002; Greer, Mensing, 2003; Aoki, s.d.). Among all these elements, in this research we chose to explore only e-mails, forums, letters to the editor, polls, chat, interviews with important public persons, pleas, requests of signalling news or issues and competitions.

The fourth research. The aim of this last research was to explore how journalists assess the changes provoked in their work and professional status by the integration of the internet in newsrooms. This research took place in 10 countries in September-October 2005. For Italy, we selected a convenience sample, made up by 34 independent journalists working for the most read generalist newspapers in Italy: Il Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica, Il Sole 24 ore and La Stampa. A questionnaire was administered in each newsroom to six journalists of the offline and three of the online (except La Stampa where was interviewed the only journalist of the online). This research is part of a wider European research, which took place in 10 countries, in addition to Italy in September-October 2005 (Fortunati, Sarrica, 2006). Here we present the results related to a series of questions on the interactivity, which we added for Italy to the common questionnaire. This added part to the

questionnaire took up some questions, which were remained open in the third research (Fortunati, 2005; Fortunati, Raycheva, Harro-Loit, O' Sullivan, 2005).

The review of these researches will let us to answer to these questions: How is interactivity practised in reality? Did this interactivity influence the formulation of newspapers political agenda? Can interactivity be considered a practice of e-participation or rather should it be considered as a useful predictor of e-participation? Which is the political weigh of interactivity? But in order to be able to answer to this question by illustrating the results of these researches, it is previously necessary to say some thoughts about the concepts of interactivity and participation.

Interactivity and participation

First of all, it must be said that interactivity doesn't rise with the new media (Rafaeli, 1988). Historians of journalism argue that forums and free tribunes are old institutions of journalism (Murialdi, 1982, p.106). In 1990 in Italy a weekly called "La Pubblicazione" came out, entirely written by users. After few months, however, it was obliged to close down (Ambrosi, Tessarolo, 1991, p.73). If we exam the traditional media -radio, television and press – (Bretz, 1983; Deuze, 2003), the medium less endowed to interact with users is the newspaper. In the first two media we cited -the radio and the television- a vivid interactivity, which has spread by means of a trans-medial practice, is present since many years. Telephone and mobile phone are often used to make living calls to the radio and television (Williams, 1988; Fortunati, Manganelli, 1995) (to which today also SMS and e-mails are added). Among these different modalities, telephone or mobile calls have the merit for introducing the spontaneity and vivacity of everyday conversation in a dialogic environment, which, otherwise, would be plastered. However, this interactivity connected to traditional media is technically poorer in comparison to that made possible by the hardware and software of the new media (Kim & Sawnhey, 2002, p.219). So, it is not surprising that in the studies on mass media a relevant issue is made up by the way in which interactivity is integrated in the model of mass communications and in particular in online newspapers (McQuail and Windahl, 1993). According to Thiel (1998) it is interactivity one of the factors, which make the online newspaper a post-modern tool.

Interactivity received from the Internet an enormous impulse (van Dijck, 2006) as there are now millions of people who write to express their opinions and points of view on different matters in online newspaper forums, blogs, newsgroups, chats and so on. The traditional mass media with an inadequate feedback caused by their predominant mono-directional communicative model acquired a possible alternative in the interactive digital environment of the global network. Technically, the internet offers the possibility of a circular communication model. But the fact that the Net is structurally able to offer a more equal communication status to every participant through interactivity and that the communicator and the recipient could all the time change their roles, is a necessary, but far from sufficient condition for e-participation. The internet is only a technological precondition for such participation. So, the crucial thing is to investigate if the practices of use of internet communication are responding positively or negatively to this hope. For instance, from research carried out on the evolution of online newspapers from 199 to 2003 in the US (Greer, Mensing, 2003), it emerges that, after half a decade, the sites have changed in respect of a series of variables, but it is in interactivity that the slowest change is registered.

As to political participation, its definition regards, according to Pasquino (1997), each action and behavior which aims to influence in various ways political decisions and the selection of political power owners, in order to strength or modify the structure and values of the dominant power system. It must be recalled that in the definition of political participation the double meaning of the verb to participate (having a part in a determined action or process and being part of a body, a group, a community) might create some ambiguities. Participation in fact may consist on the one hand in an involvement inside the decision making process and in the choice of persons destined to assume political positions, on the other in an active inclusion inside a socio-political organization at different levels (Fici, 2002). This definition of political participation is apparently accurate. In reality, we cannot consider political participation as a simple action or a generic behavior. We want to argue that political participation is part of the immaterial labor, which is done by people in the reproduction sphere. The flux of

immaterial labor in everyday life is become very intense and complex, leaving little space for extra activities from the necessary, immediate labor to reproduce oneself. In addition to that, political participation rises from a strong sociability and a common sharing of ideas and ideals. Today, sociability has to overcome many obstacles in everyday life. Of course, there is also an intrinsic crisis of politics, due to the fact that policy makers are increasingly self referential, use a complicate language, have lost a true contact with their basis and political movements and credibility towards citizens.
In the current society, to what extent is political participation exercised? The problem is that in the offline world, according to Seriani (2006), political participation is very limitedly practiced. From a research carried out by ISTAT in 2005 with a representative sample of Italian population it emerges that a quarter of respondents never get information about politics, because of their indifference (31.9%), mistrust in politics (20.5%), "politics is too complicated" (15.3%) and 6.1% "have no time to dedicate to it". As to the others, Italians in general get information about politics more than they talk about it. 55.9% of respondents get information about politics weekly and 32.6% every day. At the same time, only 32.8% talk about politics once a week, 30.5% occasionally and 34.2% never. Television (93.7%) and newspapers (52%) are the media from which Italians get political information. To these, radio (31%), discussions with friends (24.8%), relatives (16.9%), colleagues (13.1%), magazines (13.3%) and other publications (4.2%) should be added. However, political participation, which aims to influence the political choices of the country, conditioning the program of political parties and government, is experienced by more limited groups of population. This type of direct participation might require co-presence in collective forms of political "actions" such as listening to a meeting (6.9%) or participating to a demonstration (5.5%) and might require interaction with a party/movement, by dedicating time and labor (1.7%) or by contributing financially (2.7%). In the last decay the frequency with which Italians talk about politics decreases (from 37.1% in 1993 to 32.8% in 2005 for those who talk at least once a week), but at the same time also the number of people who never talks about politics decreases (from 48.6% in 1993 to 43.6% in 2005). Instead social participation (such as the participation to voluntary, ecological, union, cultural, civil rights associations) is increasing.
Given this framework, can we consider writing in forums a political resource to increase citizens' participation and enhance discussion on political matters in the public sphere?

Discussing interactivity and e-participation in the light of these results

First research: 1) If we examine interactivity with and between users in the front pages of offline newspapers, it turns out to be completely absent, thus reconfirming that the relation with users is a secondary business for print papers. On the front page the unidirectional message is all-important, because it is the core business of what the single paper has to say to its users. If we leaf through the whole paper, the situation does not change very much, as for example, in the Corriere only two journalists sign with their address or website. On the contrary, in the column "Letters to the Editor" as many as half of the writers sign with their e-mail address. This not only shows that users are much more evolved than editors, but also that signing with their email address users make it possible to get in touch among themselves. The only information about interactivity that the paper offers to users is actually signalling that it is possible to discuss five topics on line. **2)** At the same time, there is now a better possibility of interacting between users and advertisers. In fact, in Il Corriere della sera (of which for this specific analysis we analysed the entire issue),out of 59 companies that occupy advertising spaces, 67.8% indicate their site, while 32.2% do not. (It is amazing that we found the same proportion in the women's magazine Donna Moderna). As we argued in this case study, "the same thing applies for advertising as for journalistic space: mentioning one's site has the function of sending off into virtual space as in a spreading out of the advertising message, to a trans-medial continuation of it. It is as if the advertising had assumed the logic of the non-finite, of instalments, like a soap opera. The advertising in the magazine thus becomes a premise, the first message of an open communicative chain and therefore a hypertext of persuasion." (Fortunati, 2003). This transformation is very important because it completely changes the dimension of the persuasive message, until recently rigorously mono-directional and now more interlocutory in regard to users. Modernisation, internetization of the publicity message is a very important sign in this and other newspapers, seeing that out of 48 pages of the newspaper around one third is made up of

advertising. **3)** Another relevant fact that emerges from this research is that in the transition from off-line to on-line the source of the news tends to remain concealed (29.8% vs. 80%). This obviously contributes to questioning the reliability and credibility of online news (De Biase, 2002). But what is more, in this situation also the journalist's signature tends to disappear (52.6% vs. 5.3%), thus creating the premises for cutting him/her down in size. The big names on line, those able to attract thousands of users in the offline newspapers, are placed in a minority position, the beneficial effect being above all for editors who can thus reduce the bargaining power of journalists as a category.

Second research. The second research fully confirms the results collected in the previous one and registers some light changes. For instance, after six months in the transition from the offline to the online the source tends to be cited less on the print papers and a little more in the online (21,4% vs. 63,6%), while journalist signature tends to be a little more present in comparison to six months before (72,8% vs. 10,6%), even if the premises for the reduction of its importance and for the diffusion of those which Borsetti (2000, p.153) calls "grey areas" continue to be valid. But, beyond of the comparison with print newspapers, are really used by online newspapers the possibilities offered by the internet? To adequately answer to this question, in this research a series of indexes were built, able of detecting: a) reachability, that is the presence in the front page of addresses, telephone numbers and e-mails of newsrooms, different offices, and single journalists; b) presence of interactions with users: user letters, invitations to comment, chats, forums in the front page; c) discussions on articles, that is polls on the articles, requests to comment on news and possibility to send them via e-mail; d) interactivity of contents, that is the possibility for users to personalize the first page, the presence of research engine or other interactive instruments; e) multimediality of articles: images, sounds, videos accompanying articles; f) use of hyperlinks. The analysis of these indexes allows us to say that print and online newspapers don't differ very much on these indexes. Online staffs and single journalists remain difficultly reachable (Carlini, 2001). The possibilities that online newspaper offer, in terms of multimediality, interactivity and contact with users are utilized very few. If then we exam in particular interactivity with and among users, this seems to be completely absent from the first pages of print newspapers, reconfirming the fact that the relationship with users is a secondary point for traditional newspapers. At the same time, interactivity between users and advertisers turns out to be very modest, but we must take into account that in comparison with the first wave of collected data, these data are much more limited, as in the first study the entire edition of the Corriere della Sera was examined and here only the front page. Although users declared their disposability to pay for better and faster online services, the fact that this new quality of news has not yet been developed is another proof of the caution expressed by editorial groups, at that time, in investing for online development (Pryor, 2002).

Third research. This third research was dedicated to study interactivity and therefore we will report their results in a more detailed way. The only interactive element, which is present in the front page in all the five newspapers, is the e-mail, even if its management remains anyway very mysterious, insofar as in the online newspapers there is no trace of this communicative flux between users and newsrooms. In regard to the other elements which we considered, forums and polls are the most present, while letters to the editor and experts, interviews or chats with important people, pleas, requests of signalling news or issues and competitions, are more occasional. The column "Letters to the editor" is present in the form of forum only in the Corriere. It is interesting to observe that the column "Letters to the editor", during its transmigration from offline to online has undergone two changes. First of all, in the net it is much less popular than in the print editions. Secondly, in the online this column is accompanied by the archive of "Letters of the week". New and old messages are published with an unusual spatial contiguity for newspapers websites. This practice is even more surprising, if one considers that the structure of the print newspaper generally distinguishes news from social memory, dedicating to this last a special space in the newsroom: the archive room. Instead what that remains unchanged in the transmigration from the print newspaper to the electronic one is the formal setting of the letter, which is between a communication addressed to a specific person in his/her professional function and a communication which one hopes become of public knowledge. This ambiguous and spurious modality (in a journalistic sense) of letters tend to extend to all the readership messages. These messages receive from the online editorial staff the same treatment applied by the print newspaper

editorial staff towards letters. Like these, in fact, they are selected and a title is assigned to them. Taking into account what has been pointed out so far, it is clear that readership letter on online newspapers doesn't represent a model of interaction between editorial staffs and readership, but rather the introjections of the mono-directional model of mass communications by the users who apply it when they have a possibility of response.
Passing to analyse specifically forums, the prevalent strategy of management is made up by the forum with an anonymous moderator who selects and gives a title to the messages to be published on the basis of the net-etiquette and traditional journalism rules (no dirty words, curses, insults, etc.), and invites users to send short messages not longer than 30 lines etc.). The effort made by moderators to make users assimilating the etiquette rules seems to be challenging, given the frequency with which pleas and invitations in this sense are launched. As to the content, editorial staffs show to control the agenda setting of forums, because it is almost always the staff who launches the issues which later on are discussed by users. Users who write have the possibility only to react, not to propose and least of all to impose. It is clear that users who write in forums are guests of a public space, which belongs to the editor, and whom responsibility is up to the staff director who has the power therefore to decide what that will be published. Furthermore, the feedback from users is allowed, is not solicited by the paper, and this further on ratifies the asymmetrical relationship between users and newspapers both online and offline. In the end, it is always the moderator who decides to open and close the forum. All these elements depict a framework in which power hierarchy seems to remain unchanged, in contrast with what others argued (cf. for instance Bucher, 2002). There are some shy attempts to overcome it, but they are prattles, which however it is good to register. It is La stampa that sometimes in launching a new forum utilizes an issue emerged by users. This shows that the forum agenda setting begins to be co-constructed by journalists and users all together.
Obviously the skill of the journalists who launch forums is to find the "right" arguments that are the arguments, which might be attractive to be discussed by users. The launch of themes for forums, being a kind of implicit poll, is also a way to measure the emotional temperature of online users about current events. But also users apply their strategies to determine, although in a silent way, forums agenda setting. Users for instance indirectly influence the agenda setting, graduating the messages that they send to the different forums. In addition to this strategy, users often discuss another argument, completely different from the official one of the forum and, despite moderator's invitations, write long messages, articulating their own thought in order to make the discussion really effective. And, in effect, users' messages are in average rather long, to such an extent that the moderator sends many invitations to write shortly. Even more numerous are the invitations to avoid insults, menaces, dirty words etc, on pain of the failed publication of the message itself. Evidently users use forums to given vent to rages and angers. All the frustration of masses without name and face seems in some way to emerge in this public communicative space. Moderators' effort is always that to remind the good manners in a democratic version (fundamentally the respect towards others).
In regard to the offline there is clearly a multiplication of the space dedicated to users' interventions and also a better articulation of this space. But the technical possibilities of interactivity provided by the net are only partially exploited and only inside the classic logic of print newspapers. Forums are far to represent a driving belt of ideas, reflections and stimuli that from users arrive to editorial staffs, strongly conditioning them. At the same time, editorial groups investments in order to build an organizational model of newsrooms, able to support a real bi-univocal exchange, are not sufficient.
Taking into account that the users of our newspapers (except the Messaggero) in 2003 were on the whole 2,708,116 (Source: Ads), the collected messages were 390,542 and many users send more than a message, online interactivity roughly regards almost 10% of online users. This means that the large majority of net people are not interested to interactivity. They prefer to remain anonymous and silent, probably because they are not interested to invest time, money and fatigue in order to re-design information on the net, modify the process of news production, elaboration and distribution in the net. Surfers at the mass level are still children of book and newspapers users and interpreters of a model that separated the activity of reading from that of writing. The discourse on interactivity becomes more detailed, when we pass to use a unit of analysis more circumstantial: the messages both from users and journalists, published on line 12 October 2004. The number of messages is in itself meaningful:

journalists, moderators and experts answers represent only a fifth of the whole messages. This means that the percentage of cases in which the publication of the message in the newspaper is accompanied by an answer is even less than offline, where the research carried out in Italy by Ambrosi and Tessarolo (1991) showed that a third of the letters published in the column of "Letters to the Editor" had an answer from the editor. If we compare then the length of users' messages to that of journalists' answers, it turns out that the latter is 10 times shorter that the former. This means that, even where the answer exists, generally it is much more laconic and speed than users' messages. The number of answers and their length are elements that contribute to depict the relationship between users and editorial staffs, which continues to be asymmetrical also on line. Or rather, asymmetry tends, as we saw above, also to get worse in the model applied in the net. Certainly, the online space that hosts users' interventions is augmented exponentially, but it is governed with the same criteria of the offline. With the consequence that users, as Lieb argues (2003), seem a protected minority and many online newspapers seem mausoleums, instead of saloons.

To make the picture of the relationship between users and newspapers more complete, we examined also the way in which users reveal their identity. Online newspapers users are a people without face: only 25% of those who write in forums introduce themselves with their name, surname and e-mail, that is with the maximum of credentials usually provided online. In reality also this one, which seems to be the most explicit presentation, might reveal to be absolutely vague, to not say evanescent. A name and a surname without a place of residence and other data such as, for instance, age, gender and profession, don't mean anything. Furthermore the e-mail address might reveal a lure, because one can create a lot of them and quit them in case of need. Almost 40% give only their name or nickname that is an extremely ephemeral attestation of them. These data justify our talking of minimal self , to use Laschs' expression (1984) about online interactivity. The relationship between users and journalists might be further talked out, by analyzing the measure of their relational closeness. To completely get it, we examined how the relationship is encoded and ritualized in messages openings. In other words, how users turn to the staff or a single journalist and forumists and, vice-versa, how journalists turn to users.

65% of users enter directly in the virtual space, almost a fifth turn explicitly to forumists, only 15,2% turn to journalists or to experts who manage forums. It is evident that users are uncertain in regard to the most suitable way to turn to their interlocutors, maybe given the complexity of the communicative relationship, that is, as we saw, one to one and to many at the same time. The tendency to under-develop their identity at virtual level seems to contradict other users' behaviors that are spread among audiences of other media. These behaviors refer to a strong tension and desire of popularity: think, for instance to the success of reality shows. But, while in TV people perform a representation, here people must discuss ideas, express points of view, say their opinion, that is involve their authentic selves. Surely, we should not forget that the renounce to give information about own identity might shelter from self-censures. However, users' behavior in the forums of on line newspapers is simply and clear: users don't perceive yet the real possibility of a true freedom of expression, don't feel that they can deeply involve themselves in discussing their ideas and opinions. They are still reticent, as if they are afraid to loose in some way the control on their personal sphere. As to journalists' answers, the disparity of journalists' behavior emerges very clearly. In the majority of cases they begin the message discussing immediately a subject; very few turn to the single user with an opening in which they call him/her by name. In addition, there is not reciprocity of emotional feel by journalists, who tend to keep a distance from users, turning to users in a way, which ratifies latter inferiority. But it must be said that the "minimal identity" of online users doesn't encourage another behavior on the part of journalists.

From journalists' behavior in the forum it clearly emerges that the power relationship between them and users is not at all brought into question. At the same time, from users' behavior it emerges equally that there is not sufficient participation to create a public opinion, made up by distinct and precise individualities and with the diffusive strength allowed by the net.

Fourth research. In this research a new important organizational aspect of interactivity emerged. Neglected in the studies carried out in this field so far, this variable, related to the context where communicative fluxes between users and headings take place, regards first of all the organizational labor that the editor should promote in order to manage communicative fluxes arriving to headings and

especially to online newspapers. If this work is not sufficient, as in the cases analyzed by us, the interactivity level is destined to remain low, that is interactivity will be more apparent than substantial (Hanssen, Jankowski, Reinier, 1996). The organizational variable of interactivity has further brought to light also that the application of the current communicative model to the study of interactivity (Kim, Swahney, 2002) is limited. This model in fact doesn't show that the management of interactivity in newsrooms is at least tri-directional (editor, journalists and users) and that the communicative flux does not become more equal either when it becomes multi-directional. The reason is that it is made up on the one hand by a paid and regular labor (that of journalists) and on the other hand by an unpaid labor which is executed in the sphere of social reproduction (users).
As for editors who are the first pole of the triad presiding over interactivity in the media, it emerges a scarce propensity to invest suitably on the potentialities connected to communication with users. Scarce investments are probably at the basis of the absence of people whom task is to read the content of forums and import the issues proposed by online users. Furthermore, editors seem to assume that print headings could not benefit from new technologies, since they give information on users' behaviors mainly to online journalists. As for journalists, instead, it emerges a series of interactive practices that almost half of interviewees declare to carry out spontaneously in online and offline headings. But this activity is rather informal and refers to an interactivity do-it-by-yourself, which starts from the bottom not only among users but also journalists. Although this spontaneous commitment, journalists are scarcely aware of the importance of online communities that developed around the website. This lack of understanding is attributed also to a stereotype expressed by the majority of journalists: the audience prefers print to online newspapers. Interviewees, anyway, agree on the fact that the future of newspapers is in interactivity and multimediality. This research has focused on professionals of information, leaving on the background the third actor of interactivity: users. It seems that, on the whole, they acquired a certain, indirect influence on journalists, although the power they can exercise in addressing editors' and journalists' choices doesn't seem radically strengthened.

Conclusion

From the results of these four researches, we can say that present interactivity in online newspapers has lead up to the revitalization of newspaper readership, that now, somehow, can intervene and comment on current affairs and political and social events, although with a modest outcome. Few are the internet possibilities, which are exploited. But I will not join the chorus of those who complain about the fact that online newspapers don't fully exploit the technical possibilities of the net. This is an otiose discourse and is valid for all the information and communication technologies, included mass media such as print newspapers, television and cinema. As it doesn't happen that people use an invention because it exists, similarly the degree of use of the functional possibilities of a medium varies according to how much it is compatible with the complex framework in which manufactures, service providers, telecommunication enterprises, designers, and users play their game. The extent and modalities of use are in relation to the social process of co-construction of every medium. The more equal model of public interaction, that the internet offers, influences peripherally and indirectly the political agenda of newspapers. In Europe, after a first decade of experimentation and implementation of interactivity in online newspapers sites, users have been very limitedly able to challenge the power of the media on content, given that media groups are largely still defining news topics. In addition, forumists present themselves recurring to a minimal identity and often write in aggressive and offensive terms. Vague identity and scarce solidarity make very problematic talking about communities, even at virtual level. Furthermore, in forums communication modality is writing and it is this modality that makes the discussion less fluid, since it is asynchronous and also more tiring. Politics is one of the arguments (and often marginal) about which users write and discuss, as a recent research, carried out by Digital Pr (an institute specialized on digital communication) on newsgroups and forums, shows. According to this research which examined more than 36 millions of messages published from January 2002 till June 2003 in 3,778 virtual communities (767 newsgroups and 3,011 forums), it emerges that, among the most debated issues online politics is only in the 13th place, current affairs in the 26th and the news even in the 40th. Upon a whole of 36,443,364 messages that were considered, those related to politics were only 3.3%, those on current affaire were 1.2% and those on news were 0.5% (Observatory on

online information, 2003). If discussing politics is not the point, how can we interpret this choral participation in forums? In my opinion it represents the attempt to use forums like a place in which common knowledge is elaborated, beyond the conditionings which the structuration of social groups, such as family, job colleagues, school, and so on, produce.

More specifically, this is a pre-political stage, in which users try to make public the private. Rather than understanding this as a form of invisible political participation, we should think to the spectacolarization of communication and the exhibition of the self, even if in an anonymous form. Writing in forums is a phenomenon, which regards more the social sphere rather than the political. Online newspapers users, therefore, don't express in the majority of cases the will to strengthen their power in regard to information. A certain counter-power on information is probably built more inside other experiences or modalities such as we-journalism, blogs and so on. The only way that politics has to overcome its crisis is seeing that people recover the political passion that rises from a strong sociality and solidarity. Online newspapers forums are instead inhabited by fragile sociability, in which the mediation by the internet means a more limited and distorted communication, even if freer from a certain point of view, and are inhabited by fragile identities that are willing but also afraid to deal with the public dimension. A frequent mistake is making media user coinciding with the notion of citizen. But the notion of citizen is a notion founded on a net of rights/duties, that of media user is founded on a practice of consumption, which is designed as a form of social control. Citizens are much more than media users and not necessarily such. In online newspapers forums we can observe a process in which the private becomes public (not yet political). Furthermore, if we apply the definition proposed by Millefiorini (2002), according to which elements such as interest for politics, political discussion or political information can not be included in the participative behaviors, it results that current interactivity has nothing to share in practices of political participation. The levels of interest and political discussion, which sometimes are traceable in online newspapers forums, cannot be considered either indicators of political participation. How can we thus conceptualize them? In our opinion, they can be considered useful predictors of potential political participation, or they can indicate a major or minor lean to participation and in this sense it is interesting to study them.

However, the fact that writing in online newspaper forums is not a political, but a pre-political "activity", doesn't mean that the presence of millions of users has not a political weigh. In effect it forced traditional editorial groups to completely reconfigure their organization, for instance by merging the editorial staffs of the online and offline, recurring to outsourcing for journalistic products, producing free press and so on.

References

Ambrosi, Eugenio, Tessarolo, Mariselda (1991) *Dalla parte del lettore. Ricerca sulla posta dei quotidiani italiani*. Roma: Edizioni del Lavoro.

Aoki, K. (s.d.) *Taxonomy of Interactivity on the Web*, available at aoir.org/members/paper/Aoki.pdf

Borsetti, Giancarlo (2000) *Internet fa bene al giornalismo*, in Problemi dell'informazione, a.XXV, 2(6): 148-153.

Bretz, R.. (1983) *Media for Interactive Communication*. Beverly Hill, CA:Sage.

Bucher, H.-J. (2002) *The Power of the Audience: Interculturality, Interactivity and Trust in Internet Communication*. Available at: medien.uni-trier.de/fileadmin/bilder/ mitarbeiter/Bucher-Power-of-the-audience.pdf

Carlini, Alessandro (2001) *La preghiera del mattino nell'età del web. Ricapitoliamo: è cambiato tutto, ma i giornalisti sono rimasti gli stessi*, in Problemi dell'informazione, a.XXVI, 4(12): 438-444.

De Biase, Luca, (2002) *Libertà, velocità, comunità. Dell'identità giornalistica nell'orizzonte digitale*, in Problemi dell'informazione, a.XXVII, 2(6): 211-221.

Deuze, M. (2003) 'The web and its journalisms: considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online', *New Media & Society* 5(2): 203--230

Downes, E. J. and S. J., McMillan (2000) 'Defining interactivity: A qualitative identification of key dimensions', *New Media & Society* 2(2), 157-179.

Fici, A. (2002) *Internet e le nuove forme di partecipazione politica*. Milano: Angeli.

Fortunati, L. 2003. *The adventure of newspapers online. A case study: the Italian women's weekly Donna Moderna*, SIGIS report and paper presented at the COST Action A20 Second International Conference, "Towards New Media Paradigms: Content, Producers, Organisations and Audiences", University of Navarra, June 28.

Fortunati, Leopoldina, Manganelli Anna Maria (1995) *Le telefonate in diretta. Vol.I La televisione, Vol.II. La radio*. Roma: Telcom Italia.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M. (2004) Off and On-line newspapers in Italy. In *Towards new media paradigms. Content, producers, organizations and audiences*, eds. Ramón Salaverría & Charo Sádaba. Pamplona: Ediciones Eunate, pp. 797-822.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M. (2004a) On line o ancora sulla carta? La battaglia è tutta in prima pagina" in *Problemi dell'informazione*, 4(12), pp.486-510.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M. (2005) Going Online Without Exploiting it. In Richard van der Wurff & Edmund Lauf (eds) (2005). *Print and Online Newspapers in Europe. A Comparative Analysis in 16 Countries*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, pp. 173-86.

Fortunati, L. (2005) Forme di interattività. Un'indagine sui quotidiani on line in Italia, in *Problemi dell'Informazione*, 30(1):89-113.

Fortunati, L., Raycheva, L., Harro-Loit, H., O' Sullivan, J. (2005) Online News Interactivity in Four European Countries: a Pre-Political Dimension. Comparing Practices in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland and Italy. In Pere Masip and Josep Rom (eds.) *Digital Utopia in The Media: from Discourses to Facts. A Balance*, Barcelona: Blanquerna Tecnologia I Serveis, vol. 1, pp.417-430.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M. (2006) Internet in redazione. Un'indagine in Italia, *Problemi dell'informazione,* n°4, pp. 510-540.

Fortunati, L., Sarrica, M. L'interattività in redazione, *Problemi dell'informazione*, forthcoming.

Greer, J. and D. Mensing (2003) *The Evolution of Online Newspapers: A longitudinal content analysis, 1997-2003*, paper presented submitted to the Newspaper division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for the 2003 annual conference, Kansas City, MO. Available at: www.inma.org/subscribers/papers/2003-Greer-Mensing.doc

Hanssen, L., Jankowski, N.W., Reinier, E. (1996) Interactivity from the Perspective of Communication Studies. In N.W. Jankowski, L. Hanssen, (eds.) *The Contours of Multimedia*. Luton: University of Luton Press, pp.61-73.

Kim, Pyungho & Swahney, Harmeet (2002) *A machine-like new medium -theoretical examination of interactive TV*, in Media, Culture & Society, 24, pp.217-233.

Lasch, Christopher (1984), *The Minimal self. Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*. New York: WW Norton &

Company.
Lieb, Thom, (1998) *Inactivity on Interactivity*, in Journal of Electronic Publishing, 3(3) [http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/03-03/lieb0303.html].
McQuail, Denis & Windhal, Sven (1993) *Communication Models*. London: Longman.
Millefiorini, A. (2002), *La partecipazione politica in Italia. Impegno politico e azione collettiva negli anni Ottanta e Novanta*. Roma: Carocci.
Murialdi, Paolo (1982) *Come si legge un giornale*. Bari: Laterza.
Pasquino, G. (1997) *Corso di scienza politica*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
Pryor, Larry (2002) *La terza ondata del giornalismo on line*, in Problemi dell'informazione, a.XXVII, 2(6):223-233.
Rafaeli, S. (1988) 'Interactivity: from new media to communication'. In R.P. Hawkins, J.M.Wiemann and S. Pengree (eds.), *Advancing communication science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Processes*, pp. 110-134. Newbury Park, California: Sage.
Seriani, L.L. (2006) *Partecipazione politica e astensionismo secondo un approccio di genere*. Reperibile presso il sito www.istat.it/istat/eventi/2006/partecipazione_politica_2006/partecipazionepolitica.pdf, consultato il giorno 15 febbraio 2007.
Thiel, Sheila (1998), *The Online Newspaper: A Postmodern Medium*, in Journal of Electronic Publishing 4(1998)1, www.press.umich.edu/jep/04-01/thiel.html.
van der Wurff, R., Lauf, E., Balcytiene, A., Fortunati, L., Holmberg, S., Paulussen, S., Salavarria, R. Online newspapers in Europe, forthcoming.
Van Dijk, J. (2002) *Sociologia dei nuovi media*. Bologna: Il Mulino (ed. orig. 1999, *The Network Society. An Introduction to the Social Aspects of the New Media*. London: Sage).
Williams, Frederick et al. (1988) *Research Methods and the New Media*. New York: The Free Press.

E-democracy and e-participation as a new field of public policy.Between innovation technology and institutional domains

Anna Carola Freschi, University of Bergamo

The emerging field of structured public policies on e-democracy and e-participation at all territorial level (from international to local level) and the first attempts to evaluate their impacts raise many problems for the research. Here we focus only few of them, summarized in the following points.

E-democracy and e-participation public policies documents declare to face the political participation decline in the advanced democracies and to foster the building of democracy in the emerging/emerged countries. Why technologies should help to reach these goals? The answer is clearly linked to the prevailing diagnosis of the illness/deficit of democracy and political participation, that converge in stressing the need for new and interactive channels among citizens and politicians. The main problems of contemporary democracy are interpreted basically as communicational problems on one hand (also considering the extended process of transformation of the public sphere and its relationship with the political processes) and, on the other side, as cognitive problems, as a consequence of the augmented complexity of politics in our globalized and highly fragmented societies. This general diagnosis and the related therapy (a technological innovation applied to communication and political process) mirrors the mainstream of neo-liberal, global and technological society, contributing to stress the un-relevance of politics and society itself and of the public institutions in the "new economy" (Barber 2004, Matellart 2001). Actually the deficit of representative institutions (political parties, governments and assemblies) are structurally dependent not only by a generic cultural change, but also by the social, economic, communicational structural change that the classical political actors and structures are unable to manage in the new conditions.

The common assumptions of the mainstream view on "new democracy" concern for example: a) the priority given to the involvement of individual 'lay citizen', assumed as the prototype of a medium citizen, according to the model of an abstract consumer in the market; b) the scarce attention paid to the reforms of the collective actors functioning, e.g. political parties, as main actors of representative democracy; c) the common stress on the involvement of citizens in consultation practices, formally oriented by deliberative principles and often embedded within e-government policies. All this aspects reveal in practice ambiguous faces.

a) The search for the *atomized individuals participants* could imply, according to Ginsborg (2006), a dangerous reduction of the space for the active self-organized citizenships. This search underestimate the emerging of a new kind of politics and citizenship within the information and knowledge based society: a politics outside from the institutional and political realm, embedded in professional and consumption networked practices (Beck 1986), and a critical citizenship, well educated with high political expectations but not inclined to participate in political parties (Norris 2001). This new kind of participation could be also explained as a specific face of the general trend of individualization of social/political participation in globalized society, growing specularly to the in-active citizenship.

In practical term we need to consider the prevailing counter-factuality of this perspective. From the research findings about some Italian experiences it emerges the difficulty to actually intercept the 'lay citizens' in participatory process, with interesting effects. Among the 500 participants to a recent electronic town meeting promoted by a regional Government, notwithstanding the efforts of the local Public authorities to extend the variety of citizen consulted, only 20 persons were selected on a casual

basis. The rest were citizens politically very active (over 55% are graduated, 75% living in medium sized cities, 80% declaring a general interest in politics, 80% declaring a feeling of 'passion' for politics, 30% associated to a political party and 30% participating in the associational life of a political party, 53% using Internet as source of political information every day, around 90% voting at the local, general elections; 77% voting at all national referenda) and close to the regional government majority, so that the e-consultation could appear a new kind of political party convention, particularly if you consider that the more radical positions rejected to be involved in the process (Freschi et alii, 2007). Some reasons of this self-selection effects could be better coped, but other ones seem to be not easy to be overcome. Moreover the goal to involve lay-citizens could be coupled with the goal to include more conflictual visions and actors, *de facto* excluded from the decision making arena for different, more structural, reasons.

b) Through e-democracy politicians and governments seem to look for a direct relationship with their public, to overcome the *crisis of political parties* in their role of political intermediation. Notwithstanding, in the national context (mainly European) where political parties have played a central role of intermediation of the political demands, there is little attention about the need of democratization of the their internal life, while this goal should be pursued by specific institutional intervention. The Italian Constitution for example bases the legitimacy of political parties in the functioning of democratic internal rules, that could be update in the light of the ICT, as it has just happened with regards to public communication of the public institutions with specific laws to improve transparency and access to the administrative procedures. As political parties seem in general to be very reluctant to adopt Internet technologies to democratize their communication and organization (Margolis, 2001), it is not rare in Italy that the same political leaders involved in public policies in the field of e-participation (or participation *tout court)* are very less active on this issue within their own political parties. Moreover, antipartitism and even antipolitics seem have gained ground in the rhetoric of the "new" individualized politics with the support of the emerging new e-participatory mainstream, whose main pillars include a certain naive network culture, apparently insensitive to the fundamental and unavoidable power dimension of every social relationships (on and off line). As Lusoli (2006) underlines, the rhetoric on e-democracy, with its recent shift to e-participation, give weak attention to vertical dimension of democracy (the process to select political leadership and the qualities of the political mandate). This element suggests to dedicate more analytical efforts to the specific decisional process *on* e-democracy and e-participation experiences. Who are the promoters of such policies? What about the political context of this experimentations? What are their visions about democracy/participation, the role of citizens?
The growing attention to consultation practices within e-democracy experiences needs to be analysed in depth also with much attention to the implications of the citizens participation for the policy process (from the agenda to the output and implementation). In the Italian case the recent national policy (launched in 2004) has tried to address e-democracy local projects towards a discursive, open and inclusive model of deliberative democracy, till now with scarce results: the majority of local initiatives selected are inspired to a restricted model of deliberative polls, paying weak care to the development of open spaces for free discussion; tend to stratify the access of the citizens to the different level of information flows implied in the decisional process; often exclude conflictual social actors.

c) This considerations bring to consider why e-democracy has finally become so fashionable (but still lacking in terms of concrete applications) with reference to consultation practices that involve citizens in some phases of the decision making. E-democracy and e-participation public policies have known an extraordinary attention from the beginning of the new millennium, in coincidence with the new wave of social movements, intensively using ICTs, and claiming, among other issues, for the democratization of the public institutions and of the emerging governance, whose legitimacy is vigorously contested precisely because of the closeness of the new arenas to the new social actors. At local (and inter-local) level a typical expression of this claim is represented by the increased participation in NIMBY protests around infrastructural policies. Is the renewed institutional interest on e-democracy also a functional answer to these claims/pressures? In what terms: to open a dialogue with emerging social/political

actors or to better manage their political dissent (Bolognini 2001)? Where the wave of experimentation of new local governance forms has found in e-participation a new inspiration as in the case of Italy, many doubts in favour of the second hypothesis come from the research findings on older and more recent institutional experiences of e-democracy at local level (Freschi 1998, 2007; Freschi et alii 2007). Here the e-democracy experiments to involve citizens in the political process have been generally almost completely ineffective in the political empowering of self-organized expressions of civil society and/or non active citizenship.
Moreover, the growing interest on e-participation in the context of the neoliberal model of (e)democracy seems to deal with the relationship between *e-government and e-democracy policies*, that appears to be particularly crucial in terms of the definition of the decision making arena about e-democracy (agenda, actors, etc.).
A trend to reduce the properly political decision making process to the good/efficient administration is one of the aspect within this general frame. For example, a peculiar aspect has emerged from the landscape of the Italian projects: there is a trend to shift consultation practices from strategic issues to administrative issues, more related to a better provision of public services than to the political decision making, in one word, more e-government (advanced services) than e-democracy/e-politics. This shift seems coherent with a peculiar de-politicized view on democracy, but also reflects an apparently structural change of politics in the era of governance dominated by the unique imperative of economic efficiency (Touraine 2001).

In general the recent revival of interest for the 'ICT applications' to foster the participation of citizens to the life of political institutions (mainly governments) has been strongly connected to the development of large scale e-government public policies. E-democracy policies raise up almost completely from this policy frame: the modernization of public administration in post-industrial, post-welfare, neo-liberal, flexible, post-democratic *lean* state/public institutions, according to a line of organizational thought lead by a model of technical/abstract rationality, based on the efficiency principle. This specific policy frame puts in evidence the trend toward a technocratic vision of democracy implied at different level. For example, often in the rhetoric of e-democracy citizen appears as subject to be *educated/trained* to political participation (in terms of contents, channels, specific procedures of participation etc.). The citizen to which this policy has targeted for isn't properly the active citizenship able of autonomous knowledge and self-organized collective political action: it's precisely a not-expert, not-politically active citizen.
The peculiar frame of e-democracy policies should be more deeply focused also with reference of the background of its actors/decision makers and services providers. In fact, e-democracy policy is a field of public policy with an expected high impact on the political institutional domain, concerning the relationship among the citizens and the political institutions, but it is framed in the context of the technological innovation policies (e-government plans) with a very weak (missed or avoided) coordination with the public authorities charged of institutional issues (Freschi 2004). In sum, it is a case of public policy with relevant implications at institutional level, but strongly imprinted by managerial models (Chadwick,-May 2003).This aspect and its implications in terms of the lack of integration of substantive and technological issues/competences, is a problem common to all the sectors of e-government policies (health sector, education sector, etc.).
The arena of e-democracy and e-participation policy is characterized by a high density of experts coming from the private industries and from the technological research field. The public officials come from the management of e-government innovation, often oriented to a managerial and technocratic culture. The political personnel implied has been constituted by emerging/challenging/marginal politicians, according to different contexts, in different phases. For example in Italy, where the political elite has been for a long time almost hostile to technological innovation issues (Carboni 2004, Formenti 2004), the first political pioneers in ICT in the middle of the 1990 have been very often marginal or/and/so female leaders; only in the recent years participation (and e-participation) is achieving the status of strategic issue for the top level political leadership at local and national level (Freschi 2007). In sum, the grow of a new political/administrative professionalism, that blends computer scientists and industries, new political communication consultants, experts on participation and co-design of the

public services, a new generation of politicians more independent from the democratic control within their parties, is a specific phenomenon related to the emerging of a e-democracy/e-participation policy field to be more investigate.

A final concern regards what are the public policies relevant to achieve the goal of a wide and strong participation of the citizens, individual and associated in formal or informal ways, in the era of the digital communication. There is a growing evidence of some limits of the e-democracy institutional initiatives, limits explained mainly in terms of the nature of the political process. It doesn't mean that nothing could be done to get better results of e-democracy/e-participation initiatives in terms of transparency, openness, inclusiveness, accountability, and clear implications on the decision making. Notwithstanding, other limits come from the wider changing environment of politics/democracy in global and digital society. In this perspective "crossing the boundaries" of the technological sectorialism, a new integration of public policies in a general vision of democracy and society relationships updated to the age of the digital society seem to be considered more seriously to face the issues of the Internet governance (and its model), with its impact on the public sphere, e-privacy, digital divide, education, institutional reforms, as some Italian scholar has suggested claiming for a new Bill of Rights on the Internet (Rodotà, 2006).

References

Barber B. (2004) "Which technology and which democracy", in Jenkins H. Thorburn D., *Democracy and the new media*, MIT Press
Beck U. (1986) *The risk society*,
Bolognini M. (2001) *La democrazia elettronica*, Carocci, Roma
Carboni C. (2004) *La nuova societ à, Laterza, Bari*
Cellini E., Freschi A.C., Mete V., Tizzi G. (2007) *Who are the participants in e-democracy projects?*, submitted to COST Conference 2007
Chadwick A., May C. (2003) "Interaction between states ans citizens in the age of the Internet", in *Governance* 16(2)
Formenti C. (2004) *Mercanti di futuro*, Einaudi, Torino
Freschi A.C. (2004) La partecipazione dei cittadini, in DeCindio,DePietro,Freschi (eds.) *E-democracy: modelli e strumenti delle forme di partecipazione emergenti nel panorama italiano*, FORMEZ-CNIPA
Freschi (2007) (ed.), *Benvenuti a partecilandia. Un'esperienza italiana di electronic town meeting, (Welcome to partipation land. The experience of the electronic town meeting in the Italian case*, forthcoming
Freschi A.C. (2007) *Reti digitali e partecipazione locale. Lontano dalla rete civica (Digital networks and local participation: far from the city network)* forthcoming
Ginsborg P (2006) *La democrazia che non c' è,* Laterza, Bari
Lusoli W. (2006) "Di finestre, triangoli e cerchi: l'economia politica nel discorso sulla democrazia elettronica", in *Comunicazione Politica*, spring 2006
Margolis M. Reisnick D. (2000) *Politics as usual*, Routledge, London
Mattelart A. (2001) *Histoire de la société de l'information, La Découverte, Paris*
Musella F. (2006) "Il progetto democrazia elettronica fra modernizzazione e nuova dipendenza," in *Comunicazione Politica*, spring 2006
Norris P. (1999) *Critical citizens*, Oxford Un.Press,
Rodotà S.(2006) *Una costituzione per Internet,* in "La Repubblica" (www.repubblica.it)

Understanding eParticipation challenges in a governance perspective.

Åke Grönlund, Joakim Åström, Karin Hedström. Örebro University, Sweden

Abstract: This paper describes in brief the ideas and ambitions of the DemocrIT research group at Örebro University, the Swedish partner in the DemoNet project. While not trying to encompass the whole field, the group views eParticipation in a systemic perspective in which direct political participation is only one area. eParticipation is more fruitfully seen as one perspective of governance in general, which means that infrastructural issues pertaining to government-citizen communication generally should be discussed. Examples include the design and execution of e-services, physical planning processes, as well as media and communication, journalistic content produced both by media institutions and by individuals, such as blogs.

Scientific perspective

The DemocrIT research group is aiming for a more comprehensive understanding on the conditions for e-participation and e-democracy by pulling together insights from four different disciplines: informatics, political science, history and media and communication studies. Taking on this challenge we are involved with empirical research and theoretical questions ranging from the invigoration of formal politics to the 'explosion' of informal politics, from global trends to local responses, and from political ideas to technical practices.

One important perspective is that of the public sphere. Put simply, the public sphere is comprised of any and all locations, physical or virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted and exchanged openly. The public sphere perspective thus leads us to study not only the declining tendencies and struggles for renewal within formal political institutions (parties, governments, parliaments etc) but also politics in a broader sense, for instance journalism and activist networks. Drawing on the literature on multi-level governance, we also find it important to study how local and global is linked, why and what that means.

In order to shed light on the direction in which digital public life is headed, many of us work with constructed ideal-typical models of democracy intended to work as links between traditional theories of democracy and new electronic, for example indirect, direct and interactive democracy. These models make it possible to relate statements and actions concerning the new technology to different democratic values. Since the models represent different political ideals, they also promote different ideas on how ICTs can be used in order to develop democracy. Another quite common strategy has been to discuss specific forms and techniques of electronic participation in relation to specific democracy values. When it comes to Internet voting, for instance, competing values such as user convenience – security, public – private, participation – equality have been at the centre of attention. In a similar vein, we have discussed democratic values at stake when introducing on-line discussion forums and other eParticipation technologies.

When it comes to perceptions of technology, many of us rely on constructivist schools of thought like actor-network theory, the theory of large technical systems, critical theory of technology, structuration theory, social construction of technology, and also IS field schools such as the Scandinavian School of information systems and Social informatics In order to understand the dynamics of political change these theories are often combined with various policy-relevant theories. These include new institutional theories, taking into account the ways in which institutional norms and rules influence the development, use and effects of information and communication technology within organisations.

The research we do

In Sweden, e-participation and e-democracy has very much been considered a local challenge. Therefore, much research within the DemocrIT research group has been, and still is, devoted to the causes and consequences of local governments' use of the Internet in democratic processes. One of the projects on this theme right now is called Digital planning? Integrating new information and communication technologies in urban planning. This project is explicitly comparative, focusing developments towards participatory planning in the UK, the US and Sweden. On a national level we are doing research to gain cross-national understanding on the policy and politics of Internet voting, and also concerning the formation and transformation of computer law, and the deregulation and privatisation of technical infrastructure.
When it comes to civil society, our research is for instance devoted to issues concerning the transformation and re-institutionalisation of news distribution, how different media institutions are using the Internet in order to attract citizens and give them opportunities for participation, and how politics interact with entertainment in today's media environment. Another field of interest concerns social movements and different kinds of online activism. The Internet can be used in political activism in many different ways, either directly in online campaigns, or indirectly, in mobilising offline political action such as street-demonstrations and public gatherings. While case studies of selected Internet campaigns and organisations have up to now dominated the research field, one of our research projects focus on comparative research on social movements and the Internet.

As for more directly ICT-related issues, there are a number of ongoing fields in which we take part, including ICT design issues, HCI and CSCW, deliberation, information, public participation in evaluation and design of political ICTs, Methods for generating ideas and eliciting user reactions.

Problems we address

Firstly, many of us are involved in different types of mapping exercises: To what extent do different political actors, in different spheres, make information available to citizens and what means for interactive communications do they offer? A second problem is to explain and understand the causes, driving forces and counter forces in this field, for instance to analyse how various conditions (different countries, different spheres etc.) are producing certain aspects of e-participation, and how certain mechanisms operate under different conditions. A third kind of problem concerns the consequences of different actors' use of e-participation tools for democracy. Are e-participation tools pulling us towards more direct or interactive form of democracy? Are there tendencies towards convergence or divergence between countries? etc. We are also concerned with ethical issues with ICT use.

Figure 1 below serves to illustrate the domain we study.

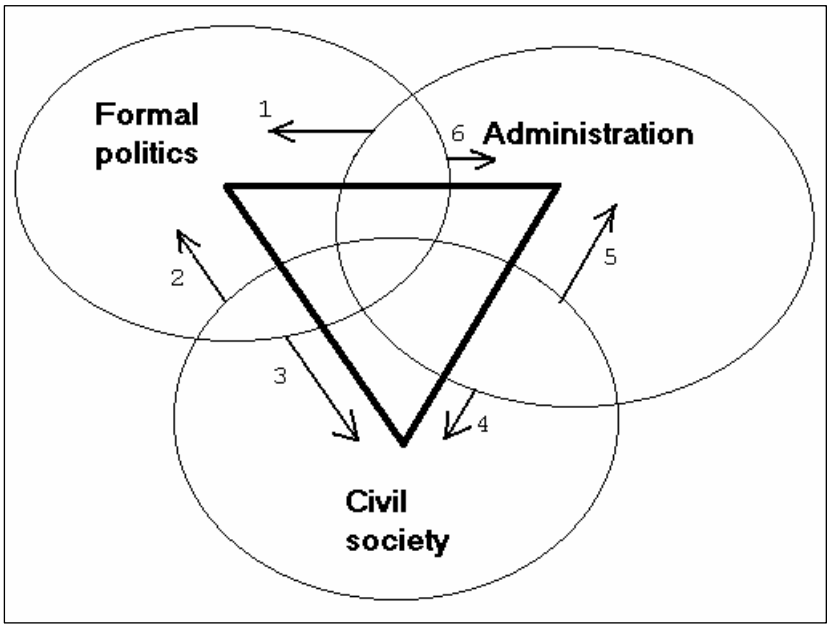


Figure 1

As of Figure 1, basic spheres and relations in a democratic government system include Formal politics, Administration and civil society. Arrows indicate influence, and circles indicate domains of control. Domain intersections indicate "transaction zones" where control is negotiated by e g lobbyists and media on the left-hand side, intermediary service deliverers on the right-hand side and professional interaction in government boards and committees on the top side. As IT not only permeates but also interrelates all spheres there are two things requiring attention:
- eParticipation changes the (power) relations among actors in societal processes.
- These changes are not only the planned ones, but emerge as use becomes institutionalized ("structured", "inscribed" as of popular theories in the field, ST and ANT respectively…)

Technology comes in as an infrastructure where the development crystallizes, or, as in terms of Structuration Theory, where the new institutional settings are gradually structured (Figure 2)

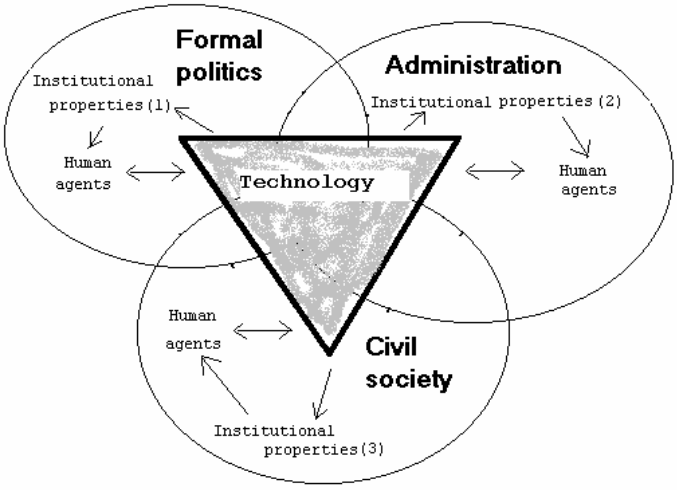


Figure 2: A structurational model of technology, based on but extending that of Orlikowski [20:410]

eParticipation challenges and barriers

We are beginning to see the importance of connecting the demand side and the supply side of the eParticipation equation more directly to each other. There is today quite extensive research on how parties, parliaments and governments make use of the Internet, indicating politics as usual. At the same time there is a growing research on the Internet as a public sphere, indicating a vitalisation of informal politics: voices are raised, claims are made and groups are being organised. The relationship between these different developments, how they interplay and act as pressure on each other, needs more attention from researchers. Making this connection is important since the initiatives for amplifying voice within civil society must go together with initiatives that improve receptivity to voice within states if participation shall become effective. In addition, we need to learn more about how government initiatives, where they are taken, are actually affecting citizens' motivation, resources and participation in political decision-making.

Some practical challenges:
Participation in ICT design
Involvement/motivation/representation of citizens.
Lack of political awareness/interest/priority with governments and public administrations.
Limited ongoing practice/researchable examples.
Resources to work experimentally.

References

(This list is not directly underpinning this paper but indicates literature we find relevant to our work)

Akrich, M. (1992). The De-Scription of Technical Objects. In W. Bijker & J. Law (Eds.), *Shaping Technology/Building Society. Studies in Sociotechnical Change*.Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

Bijker, W. (1995). *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and Bulbs*.Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Bijker, W., & Law, J. (Eds.). (1994). Shaping technology / building society: studies in sociotechnical change.Cambridge Ma: The MIT Press.

Bloomfield, B.P., & Vurdubakis, T. (1994). Boundary Disputes. Negotiating the Boundary between the Technical and the Social in the Development of IT Systems. *Information Technology & People, 7*, 9-24.

Berg, M. (1999). Patient care information systems and health care work: a sociotechnical approach. *International Journal of Medical Informatics, 55*, 87-101.

Berg, M. (2001). Implementing information systems in health care organizations: myths and challenges. *International Journal of Medical Informatics, 64*, 143-156.

Kling, R.and Crawford, H.andRosenbaum, H.andSawyer, S., & Weisband, S. (2000). *Learning from Social Informatics: Information and Communication Technologies in Human Contexts. V 4.6*.Unpublished manuscript.

Kling, R. (1987). Computerization as an Ongoing Social and Political Process. In G. Bjerknes & P. Ehn & M. Kyng (Eds.), *Computers and Democracy. A Scandinavian Challenge*.Aldershot: Avery.

Latour, B. (1986). The powers of association. In J. Law (Ed.), *Power, Action and Belief* (pp. 264-280). London, UK: Routledge & Keagan Paul.

Latour, B. (1991). Technology is society made durable. In J. Law (Ed.), *A sociology of monsters: essays on power, technology and domination* (pp. 103-131). London: Routledge.

Latour, B. (1996). *Aramis or the love of technology*.Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Law, J., & Bijker, W. (1992). Postscript: Technology, Stability and Social Theory. In W. Bijker & J. Law (Eds.), *Shaping Technology/Building Society. Studies in sociotechnical change*.Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Bolter, J. D. and R. Grusin (2000), *Remediation. Understanding New Media.* Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.

Dahl, R. A. (2002), *Demokratin och dess antagonister*. Stockholm: Ordfront & DemokratiAkademin.

Feenberg, A. (1991), The Critical Theory of Technology. New York
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feenberg, A. (1999), *Questioning Technology*. London
New York: Routledge.

Feenberg, A. (2002), Transforming Technology. A Critical Theory Revisited: Oxford University Press.

Hacker, K. L. and J. v. Dijk (2000). LondonThousand Oaks New Dehli: Sage Publications.

Lievrouw, L. A. and S. Livingstone (2002), *The Handbook of New Media.* London: Sage Publications.

Manovich, L. (2001), *The Language of New Media.* Cambridge, London: The MIT Pre

Preece, J., Y. Rogers, et al. (2002), *Interaction Design. Beyond Human-Computer Interaction.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sclove, R. E. (1995), *Democracy and Technology*. New York
London: The Guilford Press.

Terchek, R. J. and T. C. Conte (2001), *Theories of Democracy. A Reader*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

White Paper (draft) for the Workshop onE-participation public policies and implications of e-participation on the decision making process

Barbara Lippa & Hilmar Westholm, Institut für Informationsmanagement, Bremen.

Electronic or digital democracy are rather recent terms for which a generally agreed definition has not yet been found (for examples, cf. Tsagarousianou, Tambini & Brian, 1998; Hague & Loader, 1999; Jankowski & van Selm, 2000; Coleman & Gøtze, 2001). We define edemocracy in this context similar to Hacker & Van Dijk's (2000) definition of digital democracy as the use of ICTs (mainly the Internet, and mobile technologies) and CMC (computer mediated communication) to enhance active participation of citizens and to support the collaboration between actors for policy-making purposes without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions in democratic communication, whether acting as citizens, their elected representatives, or on behalf of administrations, parliaments or associations (i.e. lobby groups, interest groups, NGOs) within the political processes of all stages of governance.

The use of e-democracy tools depends on the kind and number of democratic processes in society. During the past ten years we have learned that the Internet only provides a platform for supporting democratic procedures and that the use of such provisions is still determined by the standard model of political participation (Dalton, 1988) and by the political culture which influences the extent and the direction of civic engagement. This is in line with the basic assumption developed in technology assessment research in the late 1970s arguing that ICT is an amplifier of existing or emerging social trends (cf. Reese, J., Kubicek, H., B.-P. Lange, Lutterbeck, B. & Reese, U., 1979). The offerings of e-democracy tools directly depend on the kind of participation offered by public administrations and political bodies as these tools have to be embedded into these institutions. The choice which tools are used and which share of the whole information and communication offerings e-democracy tools will have in relation to other media and forms (print media, physical meetings), varies depending on the subject, the scope and range, and the addressees of the participation offering in question.

This participation setting establishes the immediate context for e-democracy tools. In addition, the extent and frequency of offered e-democracy tools is influenced by the use of these tools by citizens and NGOs and may also be a response to demands for participation by citizens and/or NGOs.

As specific context for e-democracy, we suggest to look at four trends or conditions which influence the offering of and the demand for participation. By analyzing these factors, it should be possible to explain differences in the kind and scope of participation between countries but also to make predictions about offerings and their acceptance as they may establish a more or less favourable and supportive environment (for these factors in a broader context see Kubicek & Westholm 2005).

(1) The most frequently mentioned factor is the political interest and the resulting civic engagement. Since citizens have become less deferential and dependent, and more consumerist and volatile, old styles of representation have come under pressure to change and the traditional affiliation to established mass institutions such as churches and trade unions gets lost (Putnam, 2000). In many democracies, not only participation rates in elections in the long term are decreasing, there is also a decline of membership in civil networks and long-term political engagement in general with less commitment to the political process and less trust in government (Coleman & Gøtze, 2002). Nowadays, citizens prefer selective, focused and limited involvement in political processes and transparency of political-administrative procedures. But there are still differences between countries and variations depending on how controversial issues are and how the voters assess the importance of an election. (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2004).

Similar differences exist as to what extent direct-democratic procedures are appropriate to support and supplement representative democracy – sometimes combined with deliberative elements: citizens' initiatives, referenda and ballots become part of the constitutional law, mostly on the local level. "Legislatures are increasingly squeezed between the general public and the executive; the new

technologies make plebiscite democracy more feasible and this possibility is putting pressure on representative democracy" (OECD, 1998, 8). But these forms of votes are often criticised because they reduce complex political problems to simplifying yes/no-alternatives (Bellamy and Taylor, 1998), and ICT-supported voting by "pressing the button" amplifies this risk as well.

(2) Communication culture covers a whole bundle of different trends such as the openness of political discourse, tolerance for minorities, the existence of common values, etc. which vary to a large extent between EU-member states. New means of cooperation are emerging such as consensus-building strategies with mediation and covenants as results. One decisive but still rather open trend is the future role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Given the alienation of parts of society towardspolitics on the one hand and the globalisation of economic activities, of standards of human rights, ecological risks and ICT-networks on the other hand, new political organisations are emerging which act increasingly independent from the borders of nations and seem to be a symptom of globalisation as well as an answer to it.

Meanwhile, interest groups are also better informed, better linked through networks, and, according to a survey in eight OECD-countries, better able to bring pressure to bear, especially on the middle levelof bureaucracy (OECD, 1998, 8). NGOs have used the advantages of the Internet as one of the first political stakeholders, often involving other media or means of communication (remember the NGO-protest against the WTO-conference in Seattle in 1999 organized via the Internet). Practices of representation are of extreme importance for these groups because contact to target groups normally can only be provided via the media channels.

Electronic mailing (-lists) are a good example for cheap dissemination of specific information over far distances.

(3) Many countries have launched freedom of information acts providing access to government information for citizens. In particular NGOs are making use of these access rights. However, at the same time public administrations are required to act like enterprises and to look for new kinds of revenues. One idea is to sell the information that is gathered for administrative purposes. A prominent example is geographical information. This is in line with a more general trend of commodification of information. There are not only chances of new revenues for administrations, but the administrations themselves suddenly have to pay for information which was available for free before. New intellectual property rights are requiring payments for providing information to citizens, raising costs of public libraries etc. Partly due to the Internet, many citizens expect that information which is available within government is made available to the public as well, and a large majority expects that this information is provided for free without any special charges. This expectation collides with the economic pressure for cost effectiveness on public administration and with the trend towards commodification of information described above.

(4) Awareness of trust and data privacy issues concerning ICT also has a strong influence on participatory processes and the use of e-democracy tools. But this attitude varies over Europe, as also the general trust in governmental bodies does. Citizens and companies want to know how their data are used and how personal (and business) data and privacy are protected. Governmental agencies are insisting on strong data protection regulations while these tendencies could interfere with enhancingICTs. Transparency may become an even stronger demand, because of concerns of corruption and spending of taxpayers' money.

This description of the specific context of e-democracy shows that these factors or conditions themselves depend on a broader context of general socio-economic conditions and developments.

In our research, which is partly action-research-based applied science and partly literature study based, we mainly make experiences supporting the aspects mentioned under (1) and (3) which shall be presented in the following theses proofed by examples provided in more detail at the workshop:

a) E-participation does not have crucial impacts on the change of participation procedures themselves. The "E" by now only supports existing tendencies (the communication-strong elite, the "haves"; strong scepticism on the politicians' side).

b) Opportunities offered by governments to participate at specific e-procedures are often not embedded into the political or organisational process (cf. for the term "adaptability/embedding" Westholm 2003): This means, that the providers of eparticipation techniques often don't know the

whole context of a project where esupport is requested. Therefore, contracts between the e-participation conducting institutions and the deciding committees make sense (but that's a general point for participation, not only "e"-relevant). Meanwhile, the input citizens give often is not used by civil servants or politicians. One reason for this is that techniques to edit the input are missing. These techniques can be provided (1) by externals, e.g. researchers who synthesize the input within their research project, (2) by the government unit which means extended work for civil servants, or (3) by technical means, for instance forum techniques that focus the input in a phase model or wikis that delegate the work of editing to various authors. Here research is necessary.
c) Sometimes, processes in the back office can be simplified by using e-participation tools: If the citizens (or institutions involved) can provide their ideas and input electronically, civil servants can directly work on it.
d) With no doubt, e-participation offers a very good opportunity to bring freedom of information into force. But in most projects we research, we don't have a solution to the question by whom the content (of a website for instance) can be provided constantly? Mostly, within a project it is possible to start a (good) website but after some months external sources are missing and either the administration or citizen groups have to do it alone and don't have the time resources. A further point is the demand for commoditisation of information which is much more time intensive.

References

Bellamy, C., & Taylor, A. (1998). Governing in the Information Age, Buckingham Philadelphia: Open University Press.
Coleman, S., & Gøtze, J. (2002). Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation, London: Hansard Society.
Dalton, Russel J. (1988). Citizen Politics in Western Democracies. Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and France. Chatham N.J.: Chatham House Publishers.
Forschungsgruppe Wahlen Telefonfeld GmbH (2004). Politische Partizipation in Deutschland. Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Bevölkerungsumfrage. Mannheim: Bertelsmann Foundation
Hacker, K.L., & Dijk, J. van (2000). Digital democracy: Issues of theory and practice. London: Sage.
Hague, B., & Loader, B. (eds.) (1999). Digital democracy: Discourse and decision making in the information age. London: Routledge.
Jankowski, N.W., & Selm, M. van (2000). The promise and practice of the public debate. In: Hacker, K.L., & Dijk, J. van. Digital democracy: Issues of theory & practice. (pp. 149-165). London: Sage,.
Kubicek, H., & Westholm, H. (2005). Scenarios for Future Use of E-Democracy Tools in Europe. International Journal of Electronic Government Research, 1 (3) 33-50.
OECD (1998). Impact of the Emerging Information Society on the Policy Development Process and Democratic Quality, PUMA Policy Brief (15). Paris: OECD.
Putnam, R. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Reese, J., Kubicek, H., B.-P. Lange, Lutterbeck, B. & Reese, U. (1979). Gefahren der informations-technologischen Entwicklung. Frankfurt/M. and New York: Campus.
Tsagarousianou, Roza, Tambini, D., & Bryan, C. (1998). Cyberdemocracy: Technology, cities and civic networks. London: Routledge.
Westholm, H. (2003): Online Democratic Engagement: A Multi-channel Strategy to Enhance Deliberative Policies; in: European Journal on Communication Research, Vol. 28, Issue 2/03, S. 205-227.

Creating Value in the Public Sphere through eParticipation: Where is the Value?

David O'Donnell *Intellectual Capital Research Institute of Ireland*

[Note: This proposal for Bergamo Workshop is based on collaborative work with Paul McCusker (Letterkenny Institute of Ireland) & G. Honor Fagan (National University of Ireland Maynooth) – we are all involved in eParticipation research in Ireland]

> The capacity of the public sphere to solve problems *on its own* is limited[14]. But this capacity must be utilised to oversee the further treatment of problems that take place inside the political system ... the communication structures of the public sphere *relieve* the public *of the burden of decision-making*; the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalised political process' (Jürgen Habermas, 1996: 359 & 362).

This is very much a working idea. It is a very preliminary attempt to address the question of value, specifically public value and citizen value, in eParticipation discourse, practice and research.[15] It is motivated by the report from the Edinburgh Demo-net workshop, and by our own experiences as researchers over the past number of years. In other words, why bother with this stuff?—what does it contribute?—why is it worthwhile?—and so on. Such reflexive questioning leads us to address some of the 'taken for granteds' within our research/practice community. eParticipation refers to efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another, with civil servants, and with elected representatives using ICTs. But is eParticipation really of value to citizens, society and economy?—is there real evidence to back up this foundational assumption? In other words, is democracy itself of value?

If eParticipation is of value to citizens, society and economy—where is this value?—what is its nature?—how does it manifest itself?—how do we research it?—can such value be measured?—and so on. These are deceptively simple questions, but the more one thinks about them and attempts to grapple with them the more complex and frustrating the 'question of eParticipation value' becomes. As Macintosh and Whyte (2006: 3) put it: "rigorous evaluations of eParticipation applications are hard to find". The challenge here was succinctly summarised in Edinburgh in 2006 as follows:

> [The] challenges and barriers of public value and public value creation are multidimensional by nature: economic, social, socio-technical and political sciences need to bring forward a clear understanding of the public value and the impact of modern ICT to generate public value in the context of eParticipation. Practice has to demonstrate the scientific concepts explaining public value in the context of eParticipation. (Demo-net Workshop, Edinburgh, 2006: 32)

This helps, and we will take all the help we can get. Now we are addressing something that is multi-dimensional, and we are also seeking some scientific concepts. The reality begins to dawn that this is too big and the pragmatist insight unfolds that one can only digest a ton of multi-coloured rice one bite at a time, and over time; that said, the humility of acknowledged ignorance does tend to have a grounding effect so we decide to satisfice with a small few bites! Distinctions must now be made in order to progress. Which bites do we take? From where? How? Where do we draw the boundaries and how do we make distinctions?

To begin - we bite on democracy, and the role of participation/eParticipation in democratic processes; for scientific concepts we draw on political science, the discourse on deliberative (as distinct from other forms of) democracy, and specifically the work of Jürgen Habermas[16] and the Frankfurt School critical tradition. Within

14 Cohen and Arato (1992) also note 'the *limited scope for action* that civil society and the public sphere afford to non-institutionalised political movements and forms of political expression' (in Habermas, 1996: 370).

15 Of necessity we focus mainly in the OECD area and the EU in particular; over 2 billion people do not have access to basic electricity, let alone the Internet; see Desai et al. (2002) for a global listing of the 'technology achievement index' (TAI) of nations. (Desai, Meghnad, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Clares Johansson & Farnsisco Sagasti (2002) Measuring the technology achievement of nations and the capacity to participate in the network age. *Journal of Human Development*, 3(1): 95-122).

16 Habermas, Jürgen (1996) Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and

eParticipation processes, and following Habermas (1996) on communicative interaction, one can claim that there is value in each such interaction. But all interactions are not of similar value—such value will depend on content, participant relationships, and context. The procedural properties of the communicative relation are universal—but issue, content and people are always contextual to particular lifeworlds and subject to differing impacts from their related systems of economy and administrative power with both law and technology viewed as possibly mediating such impacts. Research also supports the claim that both workers and citizens learn in deliberative contexts leading to the provisional claim that eParticipation may enhance political knowledge in the public sphere.

As members of a research group we are reasonably strong enough in the 'social, socio-technical and political sciences' noted in Edinburgh. Value? The dismal science beckons and, albeit somewhat tentatively, we attempt to answer the call here. The fact/value distinction is as old as time, is far from settled, but does lead us towards scientific concepts in economics[17]—but again, as with democracy, there are many forms of economics so we must make further distinctions. 'Economists do bowl with political scientists and sociologists, but in separate lanes'; micro-economists now study social interactions in the family and in communities and macro-economists note the influence of institutions, such as the judiciary and transparent government, on economic and social development (Costa & Kahn, 2002)[18]. We tend to privilege developmental economics, largely influenced by the work of Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, and we complement this with some insights from recent research on intangibles (both social capital and intellectual capital) as we have a sense, although we present no definitive empirical evidence as yet, that value in eParticipation is largely intangible.

Can we begin now? No. There are different levels of analysis possible—citizen/individual, collective/community, local, regional, national, supra-national, administrative, executive, representative, global, and others. We privilege citizens here placing this exploration more from a lifeworld than from a system perspective—that sorts that one, while leaving more than enough rice for others, particularly those who have more systems and administrative/managerialist appetites, to be dining out on. Can we begin now? No. The issue of research method remains—does one follow the analytical or systems approaches (seeking explanatics, prediction and control) or a more hermeneutic approach (seeking understanding)? As we know so little we make no apology for privileging the latter in empirical research here—understanding precedes explanatics in this case—but we advocate multiple methods to be used as appropriate, as in the more sophisticated literature on intangible value and intellectual capital[19].

At this stage we look back at our own co-creative experiences and dialogue with some Irish activist citizens involved in eParticipation, and we make a judgement call, as distinct from an analytically validated scientific finding, on three intangible values that we can identify and mutually agree on: accessibility, involvement, and mutual recognition[20]—and we touch on these throughout this exploratory paper. The complexity of the issue of eParticipation value addressed has not gone away—but we have, hopefully, made aspects of it less opaque and we now at least have some less vague idea of which bits and pieces of it we are trying to get at. This is a short introduction—but, it has taken us more than a few years of experience in this area to write it.

The structure of the remainder of the paper is as follows: (i) we first address democracy in general terms

---

democracy. William Rehg trans., Polity: Cambridge.

17 Note that this does not signify our support of the *economic theory of democracy* which 'presupposes a methodological individualism and focuses mainly on the process of legitimation', enlightened self-interest, and the idea that 'transactions between rationally choosing voters and political elites supposedly yield decisions that are rational insofar as they take into account the aggregation of individual interests of equal weight' (See Habermas 1996: 333-4 &ff; Coleman & Kaposi, 2006; and Sen 1977: 328ff on 'rational fools').

18 Costa, Dora L. & Matthew E. Kahn (2002) Civic engagement and community heterogeneity: an economist's perspective. Paper prepared for *Conference of Social Connectedness and Public Activism*, Harvard University, May.

19 See O'Donnell (2004) on how multiple methods may be used across differing ontological perspectives (analytical, systems, hermeneutics) and integrated using 'relative methodics' (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997; see also Mingers, 2004) in a discussion on doing empirical research on the Habermasian (1984, 1987, 1996) communicative relation. This 2004 paper provides a succinct introduction to the Habermasian communicative relation as a source of intangible value that can be translated to discourse on eParticipation (note that the communicative relation provides the foundation for Habermas' (1996) major work on deliberative democracy and law). We do not replicate any of this work here as our main focus in developing the present working paper is to gain some critically pragmatic insights from the dismal science on which we can build future more interdisciplinary oriented work.

20 Brettschneider (2006), in an ambitious attempt to integrate liberal and proceduralist theories of democracy, bases this on three core values of democracy: equality of interests, political autonomy, and reciprocity. Although somewhat critical of Habermas he notes the centrality of reciprocity in the work of both Habermas and Rawls.

and we note its fragility; (ii) we then begin a more economistic exploration on the eParticipation theme where a number of values, constraints, and mediating factors are identified; we draw out insights, among others, on the following:

Habermas on deliberative democracy: In the final instance, as Habermas reminds us, only the state acts. That said, eParticipation provides a new form of social space that can be appropriated by a public sphere that 'distinguishes itself through a *communication structure* that is related to a third feature of communicative action; it refers neither to the *functions* nor to the *contents* of everyday communication but the *social space* generated in communicative action' (Habermas, 1996: 360). The citizenry participates but, paradoxically, does not make the final decisions—'the communication structures of the public sphere *relieve* the public *of the burden of decision-making*; the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalised political process' (Habermas, 1996: 362). This is our main theoretical contribution in terms of political theory before we address value—citizens do not *make* policy or make final decisions—but they can *contribute* to and *influence* such policies and decisions. This is a key distinction that we emphasise. The trick, and the real difficulty, is to mobilise such public spheres—to bring the public 'in', so to speak—and this is not primarily a technological problem.

- Development economics on participation/transparency and growth (Joseph Stiglitz; Amartya Sen) – broad macro-level value of democracy – the new economics of information/knowledge, non-rivalous etc.
- Homogeneity/heterogeneity of communities and links to participation. A key insight emerging from recent studies in development economics is that 'civic engagement is lower in more heterogeneous [as distinct from homogeneous] communities'—that is, heterogeneity tends to lower social capital (Costa & Kahn, 2002)[21]. Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity and income inequality predicted past [and perhaps future] state educational expenditures in the US (Goldin & Katz, 1999)[22], for example. This distinction is teased out.
- Centralisation/decentralisation, particularly fiscal decentralisation, and differing contexts across Europe. We draw on Frey and Stutzer (2004), who analyse data from the first wave of the European Social Survey conducted in 2002. They find that for all three indicators of political participation that they draw on, measured correlations indicate a positive effect of fiscal decentralisation on local power; in more fiscally decentralised nations: (i) less people think that politics is too complicated; (ii) less people think that they could not take an active role in politics; and (iii) more people are engaged in political discourse. We then take in some insights from the Austrian School of Economics (F. Hayek) on economic justifications for decentralisation and we briefly address the literature on learning in deliberative contexts.

We tentatively conclude that economic arguments exist, or can be crafted, for the inclusion of citizens in discussions related to decision-making and policy making that directly affects them and that eParticipation does have modest potential in influencing such decisions and policies. The focus in this white paper is to stimulate discussion on the broad themes noted above so as to identify some such values, and enablers and constraints on their creation, in an eParticipation context.

[Note: we have an initial draft paper in progress on this theme – also attached (note Honor is not on the author list here as she is also presenting another slant on or work at Bristol: david.odonnell@ireland.com – and which could be uploaded when it has been progressed a little further – similarly, if this proposal is accepted then this white paper proposal can be further tightened up based on the themes we have identified thus far and any feedback that you provide]

21 Costa, Dora L. & Matthew E. Kahn (2002) Civic engagement and community heterogeneity: an economist's perspective. Paper prepared for *Conference of Social Connectedness and Public Activism*, Harvard University, May.

22 Goldin, Claudia & Lawrence F. Katz (1999) Human capital and social capital: The rise of secondary schooling in America, 1910-1940. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29: 683-723.

Enhancing Political Knowledge in the Public Sphere through eParticipation: Where is the Value?

David O'Donnell, Intellectual Capital Research Institute of Ireland & Paul McCusker, Letterkenny Institute of Technology

> '*The capacity of the public sphere to solve problems on its own is limited*[23]*. But this capacity must be utilised to oversee the further treatment of problems that take place inside the political system ... the communication structures of the public sphere relieve the public of the burden of decision-making; the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalised political process*' (Jürgen Habermas, 1996: 359 & 362).

INTRODUCTION

This is a working paper. It is a very preliminary attempt to address the question of value, specifically public value and citizen value, in eParticipation discourse, practice and research.[24] It is motivated by our own experiences as researchers over the past number of years. In other words, why bother with this stuff?—what does it contribute?—why is it worthwhile?—and so on. Such reflexive questioning leads us to address some of the 'taken for granteds' within our research/practice community. eParticipation refers to efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another, with civil servants, and with elected representatives using ICTs. But is eParticipation really of value to citizens, society and economy?—is there real evidence to back up this foundational assumption? In other words, is democracy itself of value? If eParticipation is of value to citizens, society and economy—where is this value?— what is its nature?—how does it manifest itself?—how do we research it?—can such value be measured?—and so on.

These are deceptively simple questions, but the more one thinks about them and attempts to grapple with them the more complex and frustrating the 'question of eParticipation value' becomes. As Macintosh and Whyte (2006: 3) put it: "rigorous evaluations of eParticipation applications are hard to find". The challenge here may be succinctly summarised as follows:

> [The] challenges and barriers of public value and public value creation are multidimensional by nature: economic, social, socio-technical and political sciences need to bring forward a clear understanding of the public value and the impact of modern ICT to generate public value in the context of eParticipation. Practice has to demonstrate the scientific concepts explaining public value in the context of eParticipation (Demo-net Workshop, Edinburgh, 2006: 32).

This helps, and we will take all the help we can get. Now we are addressing something that is multi-dimensional, and we are also seeking some scientific concepts. The reality begins to dawn that this is too big and the pragmatist insight unfolds that one can only digest a ton of multi-coloured rice one bite

23 Cohen and Arato (1992) also note 'the limited scope for action that civil society and the public sphere afford to non-institutionalised political movements and forms of political expression' (in Habermas, 1996: 370).

24 Of necessity we focus mainly in the OECD area and the EU in particular; over 2 billion people do not have access to basic electricity, let alone the Internet; see Desai et al. (2002) for a global listing of the 'technology achievement index' (TAI) of nations.

at a time, and over time; that said, the humility of acknowledged ignorance does tend to have a grounding effect so we decide to satisfice with a small few bites! Distinctions must now be made in order to progress. Which bites do we take? From where? How?
Where do we draw the boundaries and how do we make distinctions?

To begin -we bite on democracy, and the role of participation/eParticipation in democratic processes; for scientific concepts we draw on political science, the discourse on deliberative (as distinct from other forms of) democracy, and specifically the work of Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt School critical tradition. Within eParticipation processes, and following Habermas (1996) on communicative interaction, one can claim that there is value in each such interaction. But all interactions are not of similar value—such value will depend on content, participant relationships, and context. The procedural properties of the communicative relation are universal—but issue, content and people are always contextual to particular lifeworlds and subject to differing impacts from their related systems of economy and administrative power with both law and technology viewed as possibly mediating such impacts. Research also supports the claim that both workers and citizens learn in deliberative contexts leading to the provisional claim that eParticipation may enhance political knowledge in the public sphere.

As members of a research group we are reasonably strong enough in the 'social, socio-technical and political sciences' noted in Edinburgh. Value? The dismal science beckons and, albeit somewhat tentatively, we attempt to answer the call here. The fact/value distinction is as old as time, is far from settled, but does lead us towards scientific concepts in economics[25]—but again, as with democracy, there are many forms of economics so we must make further distinctions. 'Economists do bowl with political scientists and sociologists, but in separate lanes'; micro-economists now study social interactions in the family and in communities and macro-economists note the influence of institutions, such as the judiciary and transparent government, on economic and social development (Costa & Kahn, 2002). We tend to privilege developmental economics, largely influenced by the work of Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, and we complement this with some insights from recent research on intangibles (both social capital and intellectual capital) as we have a sense, although we present no definitive empirical evidence as yet, that value in eParticipation is largely intangible.
Can we begin now? No. There are different levels of analysis possible— citizen/individual, collective/community, local, regional, national, supra-national, administrative, executive, representative, global, and others. We privilege citizens here placing this exploration more from a lifeworld than from a system perspective— that sorts that one, while leaving more than enough rice for others, particularly those who have more systems and administrative/managerialist appetites, to be dining out on. Can we begin now? No. The issue of research method remains—does one follow the analytical or systems approaches (seeking explanatics, prediction and control) or a more hermeneutic approach (seeking understanding)? As we know so little we make no apology for privileging the latter in empirical research here—understanding precedes explanatics in this case—but we advocate multiple methods to be used as appropriate, as in the more sophisticated literature on intangible values and intellectual capital[26].

[25] Note that this does not signify our support of the economic theory of democracy which 'presupposes a methodological individualism and focuses mainly on the process of legitimation', enlightened self-interest, and the idea that 'transactions between rationally choosing voters and political elites supposedly yield decisions that are rational insofar as they take into account the aggregation of individual interests of equal weight' (See Habermas 1996: 333-4 &ff; and Sen 1977: 328ff on 'rational fools').

[26] See O'Donnell (2004) on how multiple methods may be used across differing ontological perspectives (analytical, systems, hermeneutics) and integrated using 'relative methodics' (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997; see also Mingers, 2004; Dutton et al., 2006) in a discussion on doing empirical research on the Habermasian (1984, 1987, 1996) communicative relation. This 2004 paper provides a succinct introduction to the Habermasian communicative relation as a source of intangible value that can be translated to discourse on eParticipation (note that the communicative relation provides the foundation for Habermas' (1996) major work on deliberative democracy and law). We do not replicate any of this work here as our main focus in developing the present working paper is to gain some critically pragmatic insights from the dismal science on which we can build future more interdisciplinary oriented work. Andriessen (2004) provides a very useful overview on valuing intangibles.

At this stage we look back at our own co-creative experiences and dialogue with some Irish activist citizens involved in eParticipation, and we make a judgement call, as distinct from an analytically validated scientific finding, on three intangible values that we can identify and mutually agree on: accessibility, involvement, and mutual recognition[27]—and we touch on these throughout this exploratory paper. The complexity of the issue of eParticipation value addressed has not gone away—but we have, hopefully, made aspects of it less opaque and we now at least have some less vague idea of which bits and pieces of it we are trying to get at. This is a short introduction—but, it has taken us more than a few years of experience in this area to write it.

The structure of the remainder of the paper is as follows: (i) we first address democracy in general terms and we note its fragility; (ii) we then begin a more economistic exploration on the eParticipation theme where a number of values, constraints, and mediating factors are identified; the paper concludes that economic arguments exist for the inclusion of citizens in discussions related to decision-making and policy making that directly affects them and that eParticipation does have modest potential in influencing such decisions and policies.

ON FRAGILE DEMOCRACY

"The idea of democracy as a universal commitment is quite new, and it is quintessentially a product of the twentieth century" (Sen, 1999: 4).

When asked what was the most important thing that had happened in the 20TH century the heterodox economist, and Nobel laureate, Amyrta Sen replied—the rise of democracy. Sen (1999) argues that "democracy has three distinctly positive contributions. First, it enriches individual lives through more freedom (involving political and civil rights). Second, it provides political incentives to rulers to respond positively to the needs and demands of the people. Third, the process of open dialogues and debates, that democracy allows and encourages, helps in the formation of values and priorities, and this constructive function of democracy can be very important for equity and justice as well as efficiency."

Hamlett (2003) argues that theoretical and praxeological developments in both participatory public policy analysis and deliberative democracy provide fruitful initiatives for constructivist scholars eager to address normative concerns. So, is democracy necessary for social and economic development? Surprising as it may seem to the present largely European audience here in Bristol, this remains an empirically open question[28]. At a global level the Kantian project of a global 'cosmopolitan order', ongoing for the past two hundred years or so, is very far from being achieved and remains somewhat fragile as the recent expression of unilateralist superpower hegemony amply demonstrates (Habermas, 2006). Nor can it be claimed at the present time that colonial ideas of those who are either 'fit' or 'unfit' for democracy' are found solely in the history books. Within the EU, both France and
The Netherlands rejected the proposed European constitution, many EU states declined to open their labour markets to new entrants, the zenophobic far right exerts a sizable influence which is also manifest within sections of academia, and there is quite some distance to be travelled before a sense of European identity embeds itself in 27 diverse European states and a multiplicity of European lifeworlds. Democracy is decidedly not a, or to be, taken-for-granted.

There is now substantial empirical evidence for the 'low level of perceived political influence and the low level of political discourse in Europe' (Frey & Stutzer, 2004; Coleman, 2005). Unsurprisingly, a

[27] Brettschneider (2006), in an ambitious attempt to integrate liberal and proceduralist theories of democracy, bases this on three core values of democracy: equality of interests, political autonomy, and reciprocity. Although somewhat critical of Habermas he notes the centrality of reciprocity in the work of both Habermas and Rawls.

[28] Following WWII there was some belief in a tradeoff between democracy and economic growth: the Soviet Union's industrial expansion and the growth of many East Asian economies in the 1960s and 1970s (without full participatory democracy) provided some support. Mild forms of 'citizen' participation were/are found in Fascism, Totalitarianism, etc. (see Stiglitz, 2002); note the recent trip to China in 2006 by the UK eParticipation firm DialogueByDesign.

major concern in recent political science commentary is that government (local, national, EU) has become both isolated from and unresponsive to its citizenry. Sen (1999) argues that 'the force of public discussion is not only one of the correlates of democracy' but that its cultivation can make democracy itself function better; sentiments very much in tune with the basic tenets of deliberative democracy. Democracy, by definition, demands a two-way flow of communication between government and civil society (Habermas, 1996).

> The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. Like the lifeworld as a whole … the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action … tailored to the general comprehensibility of everyday communicative practice. (Habermas, 1996: 360)

Technology alone is not a panacea for solving political problems through discussions in the public sphere—but it is now commonly argued that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the potential to facilitate such improved flows of communication, information sharing, feedback, and influence on policy making—hence, the fields and practices of eDemocracy and eParticipation.

Coleman (2005) argues that the "decline in public engagement is best understood in the context of radical changes in public attitudes towards democratic institutions and actors, specifically attitudes of trust and efficacy". This is where insights from economics may assist some initial understanding as economists, not all of them of course, have addressed issues related to institutions, trust, and efficacy/efficiency. Coglianese's (2006: 10) recent review of studies of citizen participation in the 'old days' before the ICT 'revolution' finds a 'paucity of participation by ordinary citizens in agency rulemakings' in the US; most who do are representatives of various interest groups. Has this really changed in the information society?—not that much, we suspect—but we leave this for the moment as another open empirical question. That said, we unequivocally dismiss those who over hype and tend to revolutionise everything associated with ICT. We adopt the pragmatism of incremental evolution here.

> Will e-rulemaking actually increase thoughtful citizen participation in regulatory policymaking? The answer appears to be, after a careful consideration of the available evidence, decidedly "no". Based on the experiences to date with several different types of e-rulemaking, no signs of a revolution appear on the horizon. (Coglianese, 2006: 7-8)

We concur. There are pockets of substantive evolution—there is not a revolution in sight.

> Historically, power was embedded in organizations and institutions, organised around a hierarchy of centres. Networks dissolve centres, they disorganise hierarchy, and make materially impossible the exercise of hierarchical power without processing instructions in the network, according to the network's morphological rules. (Castells, 1996)[29]

Not simplistically so. The advent of new technology may lead to new modalites in the nature of relations between money, power and lifeworld; it does not necessarily lead to changes in the nature of those relations (O'Donnell & Henriksen, 2002).

> [T]here is no deterministic relationship between new media and democratisation. New [ICTs] can be utilised to replicate forms of bureaucratic practice and hierarchical power. This is most likely to happen
> when the socio-technical design of new media hardware, software and content is narrowly conceived and unaccountable; when elites retain exclusive access to ICT; and when interactive features are neglected or switched off, thereby blocking the feedback path which

[29] Cited in Coleman & Kaposi (2006).

> makes new media inherently polylogical. The use of new media for democratic purposes has more to do with political motivation, design and cultural acceptance than inherent technical affordances. But the relationship is dialectical: at any one time, the structure, regulation and uses of specific technologies are the subject of competing interpretive battles involving diverse actors, including producers, managers, users and commentators. (Coleman & Kaposi, 2006: 8).

ICT does not necessarily lead to greater citizen emancipation and involvement; it can, and often is, applied to further strengthen extant power relations and enhance control.
Frey and Stutzer's (2004) outline of the state of fiscal decentralisation in Europe, which we discuss in some detail below, provides a useful counterpoint to those who simplistically adopt the overly optimistic, and naïve, discourse of those who claim that we are living in a new networked information society where centralised forms of control no longer apply.

> [D]ecisions by governments do have profound implications for … basic human right(s) … should be made openly, and with the active and open participation of those affected by them. I am convinced that openness and participation will affect the nature of the decisions being made … Greater openness can be justified on instrumental grounds, as means to ends—ends like reducing the likelihood of the abuse of power. … [G]reater openness has an intrinsic value. Citizens have a basic right to know. (Stiglitz, 1999b: 26-27)

In the final instance, as Habermas reminds us, only the state acts. That said, eParticipation provides a new form of social space that can be appropriated by a public sphere that 'distinguishes itself through a communication structure[30] that is related to a third feature of communicative action; it refers neither to the functions nor to the contents of everyday communication but the social space generated in communicative action' (Habermas, 1996: 360). The citizenry participates but, paradoxically, does not make the final decisions—'the communication structures of the public sphere relieve the public of the burden of decision-making; the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalised political process' (Habermas, 1996: 362). This is our main theoretical contribution to this conference—citizens do not make policy or make final decisions—but they can contribute to and influence such policies and decisions. The trick, and the real difficulty, is to mobilise such public spheres—to bring the public 'in', so to speak—and this is not primarily a technological problem. Now, back to the 'value question'.

ON PARTICIPATION & ePARTICIPATION (small 'e'; big 'P')

Based on six eGovernment best-practice cases analysed, Rainer and colleagues (2006: 26) conclude that progress in the eParticipation field is 'a question of integration rather than invention'. First, how does one gather input from various channels (phone, email, mail, etc.), 'integrate it technologically and sort it according to topics'. Second, how does one involve a 'wide array of users and keep them interested?' Third, how does one integrate different levels of administration? One observes the 'systems' level of analysis of these authors here, which is perfectly valid. In this paper we try to take more of a 'lifeworld' perspective.
According to Stiglitz (1999a), 'Participatory processes must entail open dialogue and broadly active civic engagement, and they require that individuals have a voice in the decisions that affect them.' Why begin to tease out the economics of eParticipation?—and to quote probably the least ideological liberal to find a desk at the World Bank! Basically, economic arguments tend to carry weight with leading actors and decision makers, particularly at national level, and especially in government departments of finance[31]. Stiglitz (1999a) uses the term 'participation' in its broadest sense, to include transparency,

[30] Accessibility is central to ICT facilitated structures and spaces here; see Acland (2003: 6-7) for concise practitioner derived rules of thumb on enhancing accessibility and involvement in eParticipation.
[31] As Lars Hasselblad Torres of www.AmericaSpeaks.org put it in answer to the question on 'where is the value?' on the ukie & consult dowire listserv: 'It's a nut many federal managers in the US, who are "champions" of this work, want to be able to answer—to better make the case internally.' Useful comments on these lists were also made/received from Steven

openness, and voice in both public and corporate settings. Participatory processes may be institutionalised not only at national government level, but also at local and provincial levels, at the workplace, and in capital markets. Thus far, there has been little discussion of how business and employers might facilitate worker-citizens in taking part in eParticipation processes.
In fact it is probable that many might receive official disciplinary warnings for abuses of company property and time were they to do so—yet most citizens probably access the Internet more at work than they do at home! With increasing emphasis on corporate governance and emerging ideas of corporate social responsibility, however sceptical one views such developments, there is a case for labour law and progressive trade unions and works councils to address here. Estlund's (2003) research on the workplace and democracy, for example, is motivated by her dissatisfaction with the neglect of the workplace in political and social theory and in most accounts of civil society. Stiglitz probablyearned his Nobel prize, if in part, for his earlier work on human capital or 'worker capital'—yet he has become one of the most eloquent advocates of what could be termed 'citizen capital'.

Processes, not just outcomes, are key to this broader interpretation of participation—where value may also be found within such processes themselves.
Citizens may value 'increased possibilities for participation as much as faster, smoother transactions' with administrative agencies/agents; outcomes related to governance and citizenship differ from outcomes stated simply in terms of transaction cost reductions, efficiency, and speed' (Fountain (2003: 44). As the output quality of any participation exercise is difficult to determine, Rowe and Frewer (2000) suggest the need to consider which aspects of the process are desirable and then to measure/evaluate the presence or quality of these process aspects in terms of both 'acceptance criteria', concerning features of a method that make it acceptable to the wider public, and 'process criteria', concerning features of a participation process that are liable to ensure that it takes place in an effective manner.

The skills gap, however, is a real issue and precedes both acceptance and process. Massive financial investment in both infrastructure and human capital would be required to ensure equality of eParticipation in terms of accessibility to online processes and to ensure that levels of complexity in legislative material/information presented electronically be re-ordered so that it becomes understandable to the 'average citizen'—who remains as a mere abstraction. Take Ireland for example.
Currently there is very little research on the relationships between demographics and online participation (Demo-net, 2006). The most recent comprehensive study of ICT in Ireland finds that "the main digital divide among private individuals relates to divergences between groups defined in terms of education, social class, age and economic status. Age and education are possibly the most important structural dimensions of potential e-exclusion" (Williams et al., 2004). The Irish economy in recent years is consistently at the top of the OECD growth table with an average GDP growth rate of 7.5% between 1995 and 2005 and the fourth highest GDP per capita in the world in 2005 (OECD, 2006). Yet it has one of the worst broadband internet uptake rates in the OECD (24of 31 in 2005), due largely to issues arising from the privatisation of the Irish telecommunications sector. Sophisticated eParticipation methods/technologies are of zero value to those with no skills, no online access, or a poor and horrendously slow dial-up connection. Without access/accessibility, involvement is not on, and mutual recognition cannot be even entered into the value equation[32].

Lenos, Pedro Prieto Martín, Kevin O'Malley, Stuart W. Shulman, Ella Smith, Patrick Dufour, Andrew Acland, Tom Steinberg, Gez Smith, Peter Thomson, Matthias Trenel, Hans Hagedorn. Thanks to Steven Clift for setting up these useful knowledge-sharing lists.

[32] In the local rural village in Ireland where one of the authors lives, where it is not apparently economical for the dominant hegemon to provide broadband, an explosion of BEBO usage among teenagers/early twenties has been noted following a community initiative in bringing in satellite broadband access. With access, this demographic group has become much more active online, network effects are visible in its expansion, and it is now possible to think about how one might address this group in terms of democratic oriented eParticipation; prior to the provision of high-speed access in this rural village such thinking would be merely wasted abstraction. The author has also spent considerable time convincing non-ICT savvy 40something and 50-something parents that online social networking sites such as BEBO and MySpace are educational,

Another key insight emerging from recent studies in development economics is that 'civic engagement is lower in more heterogeneous [as distinct from homogeneous] communities'—that is, heterogeneity tends to lower social capital (Costa & Kahn, 2002[33]). There is growing interest in the economics of social capital and the association between social capital and effective institutions. Social capital is "understood roughly as the goodwill that is engendered by the fabric of social relations" and which is capable of being "mobilised to facilitate action" (Adler & Kwon, 2002: 17). Accounting and finance academics and practitioners have tried and failed over the past century or so to translate the value of 'goodwill'—it is simply recognised by its 'residual' nature. Researchers and practitioners of eParticipation are likely to meet similar problems in conceptualising intangible value. Similarly in the intellectual capital discourse many now explore the relationship between social capital and intangible value creation (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) where the accounting treatment of 'goodwill' is re-coded as an indicator of ignorance and the point of departure for real work. Low trust levels predict less efficient
judiciaries, more corruption, and lower quality government bureaucracies; conversely, high trust levels predict economic growth and financial development; and absence of social capital may explain low levels of spending on such public goods as education and welfare (Costa & Kahn, 2002). There is now a vast literature on social capital— but the key point that we wish to emphasise here is that:

> Whether an attribute of an individual or a society, social capital is produced by individual's participation decisions. An individual can to some extent increase the number and depth of [her/his] connections with others, but the value of these connections depends upon the actions of others. Social
> capital, therefore, depends both upon individual socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and upon the characteristics of society. (Costa & Kahn, 2002).

Here we find some support from the economics literature on the probable value of 'mutual recognition' / 'reciprocity' within both participation and eParticipation processes and the necessity of addressing the homogeneity / heterogeneity continuum in any eParticipation context. Accessibility and involvement are necessary, and of value, but insufficient without mutual recognition from respective lifeworld participants and critically from system agents. Neither of the latter two forms of mutual recognition can be taken for granted. This is the deliberative democracy argument. As Habermas might put it—the communicative rationality of various lifeworlds has to be injected back into the systems of money and power. This is not that easy to conceptualise, or alone achieve, due to the different logics in play where the dominant "all pervasive language of the market puts all interpersonal relations under the constraint of an egocentric orientation towards one's own preferences. The social bond, however, being made up of mutual recognition, cannot be spelled out in the concepts of contract, rational choice, and maximal benefit alone" (Habermas, 2003: 110; see also Fagan et al., this Conference, Sen, 1977).
Economics, particularly of the neo-classical variety, has its theoretical limits when it comes to addressing mutual recognition!
The classic example on the former cited by Costa & Kahn here is the 'Florida Effect' in public school expenditure. The average taxpayer in Florida is a white senior citizen—typical public school students are Hispanic; and there is less support for public school expenditure in Florida than in US states where students and taxpayers are of the same ethnicity. Racial, ethnic, and religious diversity and income inequality predicted past [and perhaps future] state educational expenditures in the US (Goldin & Katz, 1999). Spending on public goods such as education, roads, sewers and garbage pick-up is inversely related to an area's ethnic fragmentation, after controlling for other socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Alesina et al., 1999). Sobering if dismal insights for those of us of a more Kantian cosmopolitan persuasion or for those who may simplistically advocate eParticipation processes as a

---

good for skills development and, if appropriately used, 'of value'!

[33] See Costa & Kahn (2002) for complete list of citations/research studies here.

panacea for many of the ills besetting our increasingly diverse societies[34]!

On mutual recognition from the latter (that is, system agents) there is ample evidence of the latently strategic actions of administrative agents and political representatives who go through the motions in a pretence at serious deliberation with citizens but who ignore input, fail to provide substantive feedback, and proceed to make unilateralist 'we know best' decisions in policy that directly affects such citizens[35].

Nor does eParticipation necessarily lead to an increase in trust levels, a key to increasing levels of social capital and intellectual capital. Coleman (2004), in an analysis of two eConsultations in the UK context – WomenSpeak and the Communications Bill – finds no definitive correlations between eParticipation and increasing trust levels:

> [The hypothesis] that online interaction between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them, is not supported by the findings from these studies. In the case of WomenSpeak[36], many of the participants were dissatisfied with the contributions from MPs and were unconvinced at the end of the consultation that MPs had been interested in what they had to say. Participants in the Communications Bill consultation were more divided over these questions, but, on balance, most considered that the committee had been interested in what they had to say and that members of the committee had participated in a satisfactory way.

Moreover, there are distinct differences in how citizens perceive the political process across Europe. Frey and Stutzer (2004) analyse data from the first wave of the European Social Survey conducted in 2002. Three items capture citizens' perceived understanding of politics, their effectiveness, and their involvement. On the item— 'How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on?'—responses on 'regularly or frequently cannot understand' range from 25% of Norwegians to 63% of Greeks; Ireland ~36% and UK ~41%[37]. On the item— 'Do you think that you could take an active role in a group involved with political issues?'—responses in terms of 'probably not or definitely not' in 19 of 22 are over 50%, ranging from 35% in Denmark to 78% in Spain; Ireland ~70% and UK ~65%.
Finally, on the item—'How often would you say you discuss politics and current affairs?'—responses in terms of discussing politics 'less often than once a month' is only 15% in Switzerland but 50% in Greece; Ireland ~40% and UK ~38%. Frey and Stutzer (2004: 4) conclude:

> … the survey results indicate that there are many people in Europe who are alienated from the democratic process despite Europe's commitment to democracy. However, the results also show sizable differences across countries. We hypothesise that part of the variation is due to difference in
> local governance. For example, it is suggestive that citizens in Switzerland, the only country in Europe that gives citizens extended direct democratic participation rights at all levels of government, have relatively high local power. A look at the rankings indicates that citizens in Switzerland belong to the top third with regard to local power and discuss politics more often than people in any other European country (2004: 4; emphasis added).

The project of the Kantian global cosmopolitan order begins at local level. eParticipation is about

[34] We promise not to mention BigBrother again in this paper.
[35] See O'Donnell et al. (2006a), Fagan et al. (2006) & Stephens et al. (2007) for examples from our own recent research on eParticipation in Ireland.
[36] Involving women survivors of domestic violence.
[37] Pardon our privileging of 'these islands' here for this Bristol presentation. For full graphics on these three items, and the very interesting correlations between levels of fiscal decentralisation and the power of local lifeworlds, see Frey & Stutzer (2004).

power and leads to questions on its centralisation/decentralisation in particular contexts. Does local government, for example, raise its own finance through local taxes or does it obtain its funding from central government's department of finance as in Ireland. For the former one may expect local interest in getting involved in local taxation issues; for the latter, probably little as it does not appear on the agenda if the local authority does not have the power to raise them. To the issue of homogeneity/heterogeneity in local lifeworlds we can now add the issue of centralisation/de-centralisation of power which is largely, if not completely, linked to finance. Back to Habermas – money, power and lifeworld – all three, and the mediating influence of law and technology, must enter into any substantive consideration of the value of eParticipation. Potential value in eParticipation will be substantially reduced in contexts where local government has little real power—a perennial discussion in Irish political discourse where it competes with the century old discourse on draining the river Shannon; the Shannon still floods regularly and Ireland remains one of the most centralised democracies in Europe (see footnote 15 below).

Frey and Stutzer (2004: 8) find that for all three indicators of political participation noted above, measured correlations indicate a positive effect of fiscal decentralisation on local power; in more fiscally decentralised nations

(i) less people think that politics is too complicated;
(ii) less people think that they could not take an active role in politics; and
(iii) more people are engaged in political discourse.

Frey and Stutzer (2004) note that 'this seems a promising starting point for further research; we concur while also noting that processes of decentralisation at national level parallel processes of further centralisation at a European level. It must also be noted that although Switzerland is diverse in terms of language etc there is probably a high degree of cultural homogeneity within each canton. A key point here is that the institutions of governance are significantly different across nations and that the nature of these institutions must impact on lifeworld-governance system relations and on possible opportunities for citizens in such lifeworlds to influence local and/or national policy and decision making. Forms of possible eParticipation value capability probably correlate with institutional possibilities for creating such value. In Switzerland, a federalist and highly decentralised society, Frey and Stutzer (2004: 6) note that democratic participation at local level generates the incentives necessary to bring about efficient outcomes of fiscal federalism; further, 'in addition to this instrumental value, participation is also valued in its own right and citizens gain procedural utility from living in an environment that grants political participation possibilities'. Such possibilities contribute to the 'procedural goods' of democracy (Lane, 1998); 'self-respect, feeling of personal control or understanding and public resonance'.

Ireland is found to be the least fiscally de-centralised in this study—promoting eParticipation at local level in Ireland is likely to be a much more difficult proposition than in Switzerland[38]. Because of the similarity in rankings between Irish and UK responses on these three items, it makes empirical sense for us as an Irish research group to study and learn from experiences in the UK's Local eGovernment initiative in which Bristol City Council played/plays one of the leading, and most active, roles[39].

Centralisation/de-centralisation related to power and participative decision-making is also generating a massive business literature. There is much discourse on the knowledge economy and on knowledge workers—there is far less on knowledge society and knowledge citizens. In the fields of both human resource management (HRM) and labour economics the whole area of employee participation in both decision making and financial participation also remains very weakly understood (see Poutsma, 2006 for a recent EU review on financial participation), notwithstanding considerable research effort. In

[38] The countries included in this aspect of Frey and Stutzer's (2004) study, with the fiscal decentralisation scores (1 to 5) in parentheses, are as follows: Switzerland (4.0)), Denmark (3.0), Italy (3.0), Sweden (2.8), Germany (2.6), Poland (2.6), Norway (2.5), Hungary (2.5), Slovakia (2.4), Spain (2.3), Slovenia (2.2), Czech Republic (1.9), United Kingdom (1.8), France (1.7) and Republic of Ireland (1.3).

[39] It is not an accident that this exploratory working paper finds its first airing in the south west of England!

terms of participation in decision-making in the workplace, this:

> "can be direct or indirect and there are substantial differences between information, consultation and decision making wherein the timbre of labour's voice can be addressed in terms of depth, level, form and scope ...
> One-way-traffic in communicating information by capital to labour remains the dominant mechanism … In terms of greater freedom in decision-making by labour on everyday operational issues one can view such developments as necessarily imposed due to the difficulty of monitoring intangible work.
> The greater the depth, level and scope and the more strategic the issue, however, one finds that capital tends to rely on communicating sufficient information to labour as distinct from engaging in any consultation process; decision making by labour on strategic issues is simply not on the agenda."
> (O'Donnell et al., 2006b: 115)

One could make parallel arguments on the relations between the citizenry and the elites of representative democracy—neither George Bush nor Tony Blair, for example, drew on participatory processes on their strategic decisions to breach the UN Charter and go to war against Iraq in 2003; issues of 'national security' are unlikely to find their way onto eParticipation agendas.

Gherardi and Nicolini (2000) note the emerging emphasis on the social and constructive character of knowing and learning—in opposition to the managerialist mainstream's one-sidedly rationalist, mentalist and representationalist view of knowledge and its obsession with predicting it, exploiting it, and most centrally, controlling it. This more social and constructive conception portrays 'organisational knowledge' [or indeed the political knowledge of a mobilised public sphere] as a 'form of distributed social expertise … knowledge-in-practice situated in the historical, socio-material, and cultural context in which it occurs' and as having the following characteristics:

> (i) it is situated in the system of ongoing practices;
> (ii) it is relational and mediated by artifacts [which for the purposes of this paper can refer to ICTs and eParticipation methodologies[40]];
> (iii) it is always rooted in a context of interaction and it is acquired through some form of participation in a community;
> (iv) it is continually reproduced and negotiated, and hence it is always dynamic and provisional. (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000: 333).

eParticipation may be reasonably viewed as a form of citizen knowledge-inpractice which is contextual, contested and (from Bacon to Foucault) power-laden both within its lifeworld/public sphere context and emanating from external system influences. Citizens may learn and political knowledge may be created in eParticipation practices that follow a deliberative logic. As John Gastil (2006: 4) puts it: 'deliberative events are often found to increase participants' levels of political knowledge. Knowledge gains depend on the provision of new and accurate information, as well as the perception that the information is credible.' During such deliberative interactions citizens can not only express their own viewpoints, the norm in most extant one-way administrative driven forms of e-participation or e-consultation, but they can 'observe, and challenge, others with similar or opposing viewpoints or beliefs. In other words, both citizens and legislators (or their administrative agents) learn through participation in such communication flows— hence the stock of political knowledge is increased; at

[40] See Lukensmeyer & Hasselblad Torres (2006) for a US study; Macintosh & Whyte (2006), Macintosh et al. (2005), Rainer et al. (2006), Whyte et al. (2005) for reviews of a more European context; much work from this side of the pond is surprisingly neglected by Gene Rowe, a graduate of Bristol Business School at UWE, but whose work in this area is well worth exploring (Rowe and Frewer, 2000, 2004, 2005; Rowe et al. 2004).

least in theory. This facility to view more than one perspective on issues, and to communicate laterally with other citizens may enhance perceived balance, process credibility and somewhat ameliorate the power imbalances inherent in any deliberative process where the representatives of organised commercial interest groups tend to speak loudest and longest.

That said, it is probable that a tiny percentage of a population are sufficiently involved in particular policy issues to be able to answer substantive questions about many such issues[41], "resulting in extreme inequality in decision-pertinent knowledge. Sometimes only leaders have policy knowledge, itself an extreme form of inequality" (Muhlberger & Weber, 2006: 25). In one of the few analytical tests in this area, Muhlberger and Weber (2006) report mixed findings on a study of 500+ Pittsburgh residents who attended a one day deliberative event, but find that the deliberative process is a 'crucial' motivator. Gastil's (2004) studies on participants in the National Issues Forums in the US also report mixed findings[42].

We view such citizen knowledge-in-practice as foundational for a functioning deliberative democracy. Such local knowledge, both declarative and procedural, is not available to central government policy- or/and decision-makers unless it is communicated to them; nor are the viewpoints of local or central government agents available to local communities unless they be communicated to them in an accessible form and in a language that they can understand[43]. This demands shifts in extant balances of power—where resistance from both administrative and representative agents are to be expected based on the massive empirical literature on power and change management: it is sufficient for present purposes simply to state that this literature exists (see Henriksen et al., 2004 on power and change). This leads to the question of coming up with some convincing economic arguments to justify such shifts in power; and to provide an economic rationale to representatives with real power to initiate such change. Although heavily influenced by, and active participants in, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, which tends to privilege the collective over the individual, we now form a strange strategic alliance here for theoretical purposes.

In an increasingly knowing-intensive economy and society some insights of the Austrian School of Economics, shorn of its mid 20century ideological baggage, which rabidly privileged the individual over the collective, are worth considering here. Foss (2001: 8) refers to situations in which the following two claims are descriptively adequate as 'Hayekian settings': (i) 'because of the increased need for firms to be source diverse, specialised knowledge in production, knowledge, as seen from the point of view of a manager, is becoming increasingly dispersed' in a Hayekian (1948) sense -'In other words, when such knowledge is not possessed by any single mind, it is still necessary to somehow mobilise it for the carrying out of a productive task or a number of such tasks'; and (ii) 'because of the increased importance of sourcing specialist knowledge, knowledge assets controlled by individual agents ("knowledge workers" [or knowledge citizens]) are becoming increasingly important in production …in the sense of accounting for a greater part of the value added to goods'.

Translate these insights from one branch of the organisational economics of the firm to the public sphere and knowledge citizens and the need to involve citizens in policy discussions and decision making that directly affects them, and where only the citizens themselves 'know' what is decisive,

[41] Tom Steinberg on January 122007 noted that the Travel Tax Petition in the UK had hit 300,000 signatures – representing ~ 1% of the population. (UKIE dowire listserv)

[42] Gastil's (2004) first study 'indicated that deliberative civic education had a negative relationship with participants' group efficacy and conversation dominance and positive associations with the ideological and demographic diversity of participants' conversation networks. A second study demonstrated that 'civic dispositions and behaviours were positively associated with forum experiences that involved higher levels of reading, listening, observing, and enactment. These findings suggest the potential value of deliberative forums as a means of civic education, but they also demonstrate that forums vary considerably in their educational impact.'

[43] It is now regularly noted that if the European Constitution, rejected by France and The Netherlands, is to be passed in future referenda—it will have to be re-framed in a language that the 'average citizen' (who still remains an abstraction) can understand.

becomes apparent—and the power shifts that this entails can be justified in economic terms. This does not, of course, necessarily mean that such power shifts will ensue. Poor decisions waste tax-payers money[44] and well as often having deleterious side-effects or negative externalities to adopt the language of the economists; as knowing-society becomes ever more complex, and impossible to fully understand or indeed centrally control, one can draw on Hayekian arguments for devolving input to many key decisions to those who do 'know what is required'—quite often local citizens in local lifeworlds where eParticipation can probably make some valuable contribution to such democratic processes: similar arguments could be made for devolving certain functions from central government to local government. At the macro-economic level this may result in financially improved, if not optimum, solutions; but as the analysis cited above by Frey and Stutzer (2004) makes clear, this demands that the particularities of each political and administrative system be addressed. There is no universalist equation readily available here; we have identified a number of distinctions – homogeneity/heterogeneity in the community; degree of decentralisation of power, particularly fiscal power; key demographic antecedents; availability of ICT infrastructure and skills; and so on. But these are simply generalist variables worthy of consideration and then applied to the particularities of any eParticipation event in its particular lifeworld-system context. As Habermas (1996: 387) puts it: 'Those involved must start with their own current practice if they want to achieve clarity about what such a practice means in general'.

CONCLUSION (tentative)

For those of us who subscribe to the Kantian belief in global 'cosmopolitan order', the U.N. Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the constitutionalisation of international law, and further deepening of the European project—assumptions and taken-for granteds, of whatever ilk, are dangerous. Drawing on insights from the dismal science, we make the not unreasonable claim that democracy itself cannot be assumed—to do so is to run the risk of losing it—as it has to be continuously re-generated from local lifeworlds by citizens themselves.
Democracy is the core European value. To address value is to evaluate:
Thus far, we have asked quite a few questions on 'value', and found very few definitive answers. Retaining the focus on a citizen-centred perspective, we have in recent times addressed such questions to activist Irish citizens and we have noted three to accompany this exploratory working paper: accessibility, involvement, and mutual recognition. The foundation of deliberative democracy is the unforced force of the better argument within the set of participatory communicative relations. Key for any citizen is to get in, to be able to take part in the conversation, and to be recognised. Labour,language, power, money and knowledge are the critical themes.
The main barriers to citizen participation in policy and decision making are probably not technological; hence, we have initiated an exploration of the dismal science seeking to identify citizen value and an economic rationale for eParticipation.

Following Stiglitz' developmental economics, the mere fact of participation in democratic processes is a public good in itself. Following Hayek (1948: 83-84), we translate his insight on the 'economic problem' to the problem of participatory democracy "as mainly one of rapid adaptation to changes in the particular circumstances of time and place" where "it would seem to follow that the ultimate decisions must be left to the people who are familiar with these circumstances, who know directly of the relevant changes and of the resources immediately available to meet them". However, even if decision making power is devolved or decentralised it does not necessarily follow that citizens will partake of such opportunities. That said, economics and politics, albeit linked, draw on their own intrinsic logics related to the systems of money and power; following Habermas, eParticipation is primarily of the lifeworld where it is probable that many quite simply do not possess a good enough understanding of regulatory

[44] Kevin O'Malley of Bristol City Council, via the UKIE dowire list, provides the example of the UK's Poll Tax, and the massive expenditure that could have been saved, had the government that unilaterally implemented it consulted UK citizens on its appropriateness.

policy issues at the national (or European) level but may have much greater familiarity and understanding of circumstances, relevant changes and resources at local level. It follows that progress is probably best pursued at this level; if citizen participants do not make the final decisions (which they rarely if ever do), they can influence the nature of such decisions. The real trick is to mobilise such eParticipatory public spheres: as Habermas (1996: 364) puts it—'There can be no public sphere without a public'.

Comments, suggestions, critiques etc. to the authors are most welcome.

REFERENCES

Acland, Andrew (2003) e-Participation and the future of democracy. Dialogue by Design, www.dialoguebydesign.com

Adler, Paul. S., & Kwon, S. (2002) Social capital: Prospects for a new concept. Academy of Management Review, 27(1): 17-40.

Alesina, Alberto, Reza Baqir & William Easterly (1999) Public goods and ethnic divisions. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 114(4): 1243-1284.

Andriessen, Daniel (2004) IC valuation and measurement: classifying the state of the art. Journal of Intellectual Capital, 5(2): 230-242.

Arbnor, I. & B. Bjerke (1997) Methodology for creating business knowledge. Sage: London.

Brettschneider, Corey (2006) The value theory of democracy. Politics, Philosophy & Economics, 5(3): 259-278).

Castells, M. (1996) The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture: The Rise of the Network Society (Vol I). Blackwell: Oxford.

Coglianese, Cary (2006) Citizen participation in rulemaking: past, present and future. John F. Kennedy School of Government Working Paper RWP06-027, Harvard University.

Cohen, Jean L. & A. Arato (1992) Civil society and political theory. Cambridge, MA.

Coleman, Stephen (2004) 'Connecting parliament to the public via the Internet: Two case studies of online consultations', Information, Communication & Society, 7(1): 1-22.

Coleman, Stephen (2005) Direct representation: Towards a conversational democracy. Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR): London.

Coleman, Stephen & Ildiko Kaposi (2006) New democracies New media What's new? A study of e-participation projects in new-wave democracies. E-Governance Academy, University of Leeds. http://www.ega.ee/handbook/#_Toc132047448

Costa, Dora L. & Matthew E. Kahn (2002) Civic engagement and community heterogeneity: an economist's perspective. Paper prepared for Conference of Social Connectedness and Public Activism, Harvard University, May.

Desai, Meghnad, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Clares Johansson & Farnsisco Sagasti (2002) Measuring the technology achievement of nations and the capacity to participate in the network age. Journal of Human Development, 3(1): 95-122.

Demo-net (2006) Report of the 1st Stakeholder Workshop – Challenges and Barriers of eParticipation Research and Practice', (Eds. Alexander Kramer, John Shaddock & Maria Wimmer), Edinburgh, June 14, www.demo-net.org

Dutton, W.H., A. Carusi & M. Peltu (2006) Fostering multidisciplinary engagement: communication challenges for social research on emerging digital technologies. Prometheus, 24: 129-149.

Estlund, C. (2003) Working together: How workplace bonds strengthen a diverse democracy. Oxford University Press: New York.

Fagan, G. Honor, David R. Newman, Paul McCusker & Michael Murray (2006) E-consultation: evaluating appropriate technologies and processes for citizens' participation in public policy. Final Report for the HEA. http://www.nuim.ie/nirsa/econsult/

Foss, Nicolai J. (2001) Misesian ownership and Coasian authority in Hayekian settings: the case of the knowledge economy. The Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics, 4(4): 3

Fountain, Jane E. (2003) Information, institutions and governance: advancing a basic social science research program for digital government. John F. Kennedy School of Government Working Paper RWP03-004, Harvard University.

Frey, Bruno & Alois Stutzer (2004) The role of direct democracy and federalism in local power. Working Paper No. 209, Institute for Empirical Research in Economics, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Gastil, John (2004) Adult civic education through the National Issues Forums: A study of how adults develop civic skills and dispositions through public deliberation. Adult Education Quarterly, 54: 308-328.

Gastil, John (2006) "How balanced discussion shapes knowledge, public perceptions, and attitudes: A case study of deliberation on the Los Alamos National Laboratory", Journal of Public Deliberation: Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 4. http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol2/iss1/art4
Gherardi, Silvia & Davide Nicolini (2000) To transfer is to transform: the circulation of safety knowledge. Organization, 7(2): 329-348.
Goldin, Claudia & Lawrence F. Katz (1999) Human capital and social capital: The rise of secondary schooling in America, 1910-1940. Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 29: 683-723.
Goodin, Robert E. & John S. Dryzek (2006) Deliberative impacts: The macro-political uptake of mini-publics. Politics & Society, 34(2): 219-244.
Graf, Rainer, Arne Jaitner & Edgar Krassowski (2006) The good practice database and eParticipation/eDemocracy. Nov 10, eGovernment Good Practice Framework, http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovernment_research
Habermas, Jürgen (1984, 1987) The theory of communicative action—Vols. 1 & 2, Thomas McCarthy trans., Polity: Cambridge.
Habermas, Jürgen (1996) Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy. William Rehg trans., Polity: Cambridge.
Habermas, Jürgen (2003) The future of human nature. Polity: Cambridge.
Habermas, Jürgen (2006) The divided west. Ciaran Cronin trans., Polity: Cambridge.
Hamlett, P.W. (2003) Technology theory and deliberative democracy. Science, Technology,
& Human Values, 28(1): 112-140.
Hansard Society (various) http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/
Hayek, Friedrich. A. (1948/1945) The use of knowledge in society. In F. A. Hayek, Individualism and economic order (pp. 77-91). The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London [first published in American Economic Review, XXXV(4): 519-530, 1945].
Henriksen, L.B., Nørreklit, L., Jørgensen, K.M., Christensen, J.B. & O'Donnell, D. (2004) Dimensions of Change: Conceptualising Reality in Organisational Research. Copenhagen Business School Press: Copenhagen.
Information Society Commission (2003) e-Government more than an automation of services. Information Society Commission: Dublin, Ireland.
Irish Government (2007) Irish Government Knowledge Society & eGovernment Policy, Department of the Taoiseach. http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=175
Lane, Robert E. (1988) Procedural goods in a democracy. Social Justice Research, 2(3): 177
Lukensmeyer, Carolyn, J. and Lars Hasselblad Torres (2006) Public deliberation: A manager's guide to citizen engagement. IMB Center for The Business of Government.
Macintosh, Ann (2004) Using information and communication technologies to enhance citizen engagement in the policy process. In Promises and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of online citizen engagement. OECD: Paris.
Macintosh, A., S. Coleman & M. Lalljee (2005) e-Methods for public engagement: Helping local authorities communicate with citizens. Bristol City Council for the Local eDemocracy National Project; http://itc.napier.ac.uk/ITC/documents/eMethods_guide2005.pdf
Macintosh, Ann & Angus Whyte (2006) Evaluating how eParticipation changes local democracy. eGovernment Workshop '06, Brunel University, Sept. 11.
Martín, Pedro Prieto (2006) Putting eParticipation research in the service of civil society. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, www.e-participa.org
Mingers, J. (2004) Paradigm wars: ceasefire announced – who will set up the new administration? Journal of Information Technology, 19: 165-171.
Muhlberger, Peter & Lori M. Weber (2006) Lessons from the Virtual Agora Project: The effects of agency, identity, information, and deliberation on political knowledge, Journal of Public Deliberation: Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 6. http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol2/iss1/art6
Nahapiet, J. and S. Ghoshal (1998) Social capital, intellectual capital, and the organizational advantage. Academy of Management Review, 23: 242-266.
O'Donnell, David (2004) Theory and method on intellectual capital creation: Addressing communicative action through relative methodics. Journal of Intellectual Capital, 5(2), 294-311.

O'Donnell, David & Lars Bo Henriksen (2002) Philosophical foundations for a critical evaluation of the social impact of ICT. Journal of Information Technology, 17(2), 89-99.
O'Donnell, David, Paul McCusker, David R. Newman, John Morison, G. Honor Fagan, Simon Stephens & Michael Murray (2006a) On consultation cynicism: Whither e-consultation? Working Paper, http://www.demonet.org/demo/author/odonnell
O'Donnell, David, Mairead Tracey, Lars Bo Henriksen, Nick Bontis, Peter Cleary, Tom Kennedy & Philip O'Regan (2006b) On the 'essential condition' of intellectual capital— labour! Journal of Intellectual Capital, 7(1): 111-128.
OECD (2006), OECD in Figures 2006-2007: OECD Observer 2006/Supplement 1. OECD: Paris.
Poutsma, E. [Ed.] (2006) Changing patterns of employee financial participation in Europe. Nijmegen School of Management, Final Report for EFES.
Rowe, Gene & Lynn J. Frewer (2000) Public participation methods: a framework for evaluation. Science, Technology & Human Values, 25(1): 3-29.
Rowe, Gene & Lynn J. Frewer (2004) Evaluating public-participation exercises: a research agenda. Science, Technology & Human Values, 29(4): 512-556.
Rowe, Gene & Lynn J. Frewer (2005) A typology of public engagement methods. Science, Technology & Human Values, 30(2): 251-290.
Rowe, Gene, Roy Marsh, Lynn J. Frewer (2004) Evaluation of a deliberative conference. Science, Technology & Human Values, 29(1): 88-121.
Sen, Amartya (1977) Rational fools: a critique of the behavioural foundations of economic theory. Philosophy & Public Affairs, 6(4): 317-344.
Sen, Amartya (1999) Democracy as a universal value. Journal of Democracy, 10(3): 3-17.
Stephens, Simon, P. McCusker, D. O'Donnell, D.R. Newman & G. H. Fagan (2007) On the road from consultation cynicism to energising e-consultation. Electronic Journal of e-Government, (in press)
Stiglitz, Joseph, E. (1999a) The role of participation in development. World Bank, http://www1.worldbank.org/devoutreach/summer99/article.asp?id=5
Stiglitz, Joseph, E. (1999b) On liberty, the right to know, and public discourse: The role of transparency in public life. Oxford Amnesty Lecture, Oxford, January 27.
Stiglitz, Joseph, E. (2002) Participation and development: perspectives from the comprehensive development paradigm. Review of Development Economics, 6(2): 163-182
Whyte, Aangus and Ann Macintosh (2002) Analysis and evaluation of e-Consultations. e-Service Journal; 2(1): 9-34.
Whyte, A., A. Macintosh, A. McKay-Hubbard & D. Shell (2005) Towards an e-democracy model for communities. International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University for the Local eDemocracy National Project; http://itc.napier.ac.uk/ITC/documents/ecommunity_council_D2_Model_v2_2.pdf
Williams, J., Blackwell, S. and Whelan, B.J. (2004) Survey assessments of the information society in Ireland. Economic and Social Research Institute: Dublin.

Communicating Europe together? Participation and (new) media in EU policy discourses, practices and plans to make communication "a policy in its own right"[45]

Claudia Padovani-University of Padova

Contents

- Political context 1 – Participation and ICTs in the European Information society policy discourse. Empirical investigation: eDemocracy IST funded projects issue networks.
- Political context 2 – Participation (and ICTs) in the EU Commission efforts to address the democratic deficit. Focus: ICTs as tools for a communication policy?

A. Political context 1 – ICTs and eDemocracy in the European Information society policy discourse [46]

The policy discourse on the development and challenges of the European Information Society has focused on benefits deriving from the use of ICTs from its early stages (the 1993 Delor's White paper on growth, competitiveness and occupation). But it is only in 1996 with the document "Living and working in the Information Society. People first" that a specific reference to transformations in democratic practices can be found. Yet this has not been a central concern in following statements and developments in the policy field have shown over time a very fragmented approach to the use of ICT to foster participation and involvement of European citizens.

We find almost no mention of democracy and participation in the official documents related to the Lisbon Plan and eEurope (2000, 2002, 2005) where the focus is mostly on the need to foster effective public administration services on line, on the need for more transparency in the conduct of the decision-making processes as a step towards democratic practices and on eParticipation often equated to eInclusion of marginal sectors of society. Then a renewed interest for electronic citizenship and democracy through the use of technologies can be found in the most recent documents of the Barroso Commision, such as i2010, where one of the 5 central objectives (in the eGov Action plan) is precisely "strengthening participation and democratic decision-making" . Overall the policy discourse on eDemocracy and eParticipation in EU documents appears fragmented and not always a crucial challenge in the development of the European Information Society. Only in recent years eDemocracy seems to have acquired a certain autonomy in respect to eGovernment (see Timer's Agenda for eDemocracy, 2005), though no consistent comprehensive frame has emerged so far.

Empirical case: eDemocracy ITS funded projects issue networks

In order to test the evolution and relevance of European efforts to promote eDemocracy through specific programmes, we have conducted an investigation on issue networks that could be traced on the web

[45] The following short comments build on research activities carried on at the University of Padova, Department of Historical and Political Studies, by an interdisciplinary research team coordinated by Claudia Padovani: PRIN project 2005-2006 "Electronic citizenship: analytical categories, research methods, empirical indicators" (the unit from Padova focusing on "Electronic citizenship: ICT, participation and governance transformation between local and global"); PRIN project 2007-2008 "Communication rights between local and global: networks of movements and transformation of governance processes" (the unit from padova focusing on the European context).

Members of the research team are: Giorgia Nesti, Arjuna Tuzzi, Elena Pavan, Stefania Milan Matteo Cernison, Francesca de Paulis.

[46] This paragraph builds on "eDemocracy e reti tematiche nella sfera europea del Web", paper presented at the SISP congress (Italian Society for Political Science), Bologna September 2006 (available only in Italian).

starting from eDemocracy projects supported within the 5th FP (IST programme). Our main research questions where: do we actually find European issue networks on eDemocracy as a central focus? Has the EU support contributed to the emergence and strengthening of such networks? What are the main subjects/actors (nodes in our networks) that are engaged with these projects: EU institutions, local administrators, private entities, civic organization?
From a review of several sources of information concerning EU funded projects and of the websites related to events organized within the cluster eDemocracy of the 5th FP, a number of best practices have been identified (e.vote, cybervote, ePower, Webocracy, ePoll and eVoting) and assumed as the starting points for our investigation.
We have reconstructed the issue networks emerging from those best practices (where they connected amongst themselves in the web? Would they recognize others through linking? Would they perceive themselves as part of a European communication space of debate?). We also reconstructed the issue networks of project partners. We finally identified the event network stemming from a relevant Seminar held in Bruxelles in February 2004 ("eVoting and eParticipation" organized by the eGov unit of the European Commission).
Starting from this last mentioned event network what appears immediately is a clear distinction between the cluster of institutional supranational subjects (on the right side of the map) and the cluster where the actual European debate on eDemocracy takes place (left side).

These issue networks are generated through the use of a software, developed by Govcom.org, which allows to trace the "social life of issues on the web", identifying actors, events and documents that make up the web space concerning a specific topic. The software (www.issuecrawler.net) operates through co-link analysis. More information can be found at www.govcom.org.

Using the same tool we generated a map that shows the issue network of "deep referents" of the IST projects under investigation.

eDemocracy_IST_ALL_IST3 - Iteration 3, Depth 3, Starting Points non privileged

Here we see that IST eDemocracy projects are part of an issue network that has a common reference the europa.eu.int and IST sites. Nevertheless even these two sites appear not to be central to the overall network which, moreover, includes many non-EU sites.

From the analysis it may be outlined that EU funded IST projects, even the best practices, do not seem to be part of relevant networks in the virtual space. Furthermore they have not generated any consolidated connection among themselves (at least not on the web): they do not link to each other and they hardly link to other relevant European sites that address eDemocracy and contribute to the broad debate in the web-sphere. Overall the impression is that **a quite lively eDemocracy and eParticipation debate is taking place on the web, but this space of communication is not really relevant to EU funded project nor these projects have been identified as relevant (innovators, interlocutors, ways to create a Europe-specific area of discussion) by the rest of the network**.

These are just insights from a small analysis, and certainly more qualitative investigation, both of websites content and of projects themselves, could certainly shade light on these problematic aspects. Moreover, the 6th FP seems to have shifted attention from eVoting to eParticipation and could show different dynamics in the structuring of issue networks on the web. Nevertheless we always consider the investigation of issue networks on the web more as a means to generate new questions than to offer definitive conclusions. In

this case **our new questions pertain to the capacity of EU policies in the field of eDemocracy and eParticipation to make full and effective use of those very instruments that are at the core of innovative participatory practices, conceiving them not just tools for sharing information, but as means to generate new relational spaces of meanings.**

B. Political context 2 – Participation (and ICTs) in the EU Commission efforts to address the democratic deficit[47]

Since the year 2000 the debate on the European democratic deficit has become an issue of public concern. With the nomination of the Prodi Commision after scandals generated by the Santer precursor, the Irish referendum against the Nice Treaty, the low voter turnout in European elections; but also more recently with the stop to the Constitutional Treaty process of adoption (France and the Nethelrands 2005) and critical outcomes in Eurobarometer polls on the European public opinion the "European project" has entered an evident critical stage.
The distance between European citizens and the Brussel's institutions is fostered and enhanced by a number of different aspects: an excessive technocratic approach in the institutional arrangements, the complexity of European policy making, the need for more transparency and accountability of decision-makers conduct, critical European reports by the media.

Efforts to address the situation, with a specific focus on communication efforts to be adopted by the institutions in order to reduce this distance from the citizenry, are evident from a number of documents (and initiatives) adopted between 2001 and 2006. From the White Paper on Governance (COM (2001) 428 final) to the White Paper on a Communication Policy (COM (2006) 35) passing through the Communication "Towards a culture of consultation and dialogue" (COM (2002) 704), the "New framework for cooperation on matters related to information and communication in the EU" (COM (2001) 354) and on a "strategy of Information and communication by the Union" (COM (2002) 350 and several others.

In the White Paper on Governance (2001) key principles for renovating political processes within the Union are identified in terms of: responsibility, effectiveness, coherence, openness and participation. These principles have become key words (some times catch words) that inform all subsequent documents. The realization of such principles should be at the core of any efforts to address the challenge to reinforce democracy through communication and participation and through a reduction of the distance between European institutions and citizens. In the words of Margot Wallstrom, vice-president of the Barroso Commission and responsible for the Commission Communication strategy, "the European project cannot go ahead without public support. It must be a project which the citizens of Europe understand and in which they are actively involved. The people need to take ownership of the project and set the agenda" (communication at "Communicating Europe Together" Conference, Berlin 18-19 January 2007).

The three initiatives presented between 2005 and 2006 – Action plan to improve Communicating Europe by the Commission (SEC (2005) 985), The Commission's contribution to the period of reflection and beyond: Plan-D for democracy, Dialogue and Debate (COM (2005) 494) and the White Paper on a Communication Policy (COM (2006) 35) – taken together "set out **a long-term plan to reinvigorate European democracy and help the emergence of a European public sphere, where citizens are given the information and the tools to actively participate in the decision making process** and gain ownership of the European project" (COM (2005) 494: p. 2-3).

The Action Plan was meant to improve the way the Commission presents its activities to the outside world, Plan-D aimed at stimulating a wider debate between European institutions and citizens and the White Paper started a consultation process with different stakeholders on the principles and means to support the **final**

[47] This paragraph builds on a research conducted within the course of International Communication at the University of Padova in 2006, through which an indepth analysis of the Commission White paper (COM(2006)35) was conducted in order to develop a colletive response to the relevant Consultation. I also bring insights from participation in the Berlin Conferente "Communcating Europe Together", 18-19 Janurary 2007.

goal of DG Communication: that of **making communication one of its strategic objectives, recognizing it as a full policy in its own right**.

Here, again, some open issues arise:

The first set of issues pertain to the role and function foreseen for new technologies as means to promote and foster concrete efforts in the European democratic space. How is the ICT potential recognized in those document? What experiences and practices is the Commission referring to when indicating ICTs as tools that need to be "used better"? What vision of communication and (e)participation emerge from those texts?

A second set of questions concerns the reality of participation, and eParticipation in particular, in this whole process if future developments may witness communication becoming a public policy in the Union. Which actors (stakeholders) have been identified and involved up to now? Which actors and sectors of society will the Commission and other institutions be able to identify and involve, having a specific competence on information, communication and knowledge issues? With what goals and potential impact on decision-findings and decision-making will these subjects be involved?

In addressing the first set of questions we propose a brief analysis of the above mentioned documents, while in response to the second set of issues insights are offered derived from my personal participation in the "Communicating Europe Together" conference, held in Berlin in January 2007 (I was invited as a speaker in workshop 4 "Common principles: Charter, intersistitutional agreement or legal base?")

Focus: Media and ICTs as tools for a communication policy?

In reviewing the three above mentioned documents from the point of view of ICTs' potential contribution and relevance in the foreseen communication strategies, we can briefly focus on the sections specifically devoted to the use of tools for the promotion of communication processes and participation.

The **Action Plan** states explicitly that "communication is more than information" since it establishes relationships and initiate a dialogue with citizens. The three basic principles adopted by the Commission (to "earn people's interest and trust") are: listening, communicating and "going local". Listening is about citizens expressing their concerns; communicating responds to the challenge of appropriate exposure of EU policies; going local means to prioritize local concern, languages and channels of communication.

But when it comes to identify means and tools through which all this should be done, all we find in the document is a section devoted to "better use of tools" (par. 6) where (only) the Internet is mentioned as one tool amongst others (audiovisual, publications, cooperation with journalists) and nothing specific is said about the potential of ICTs to support to listening and communication. The whole paragraph is devoted to the europa.eu portal and efforts to be made to facilitate navigation and multilingualism.

Plan-D, focuses on the need to stimulate a wider debate on the European project, through the involvement of "civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties" as well as specific groups, young people and minority groups. But here again, when it comes to Promoting citizens' participation (par 4.2) all is said concerns "more effective consultation". As part of the listening process the Commission "intends to use and improve existing tools for collecting feedback directly from citizens, consumers and business…". Here the Internet is mentioned (par. 4.3.2) as an important forum of debate and the Commission "should explore the use of every interactive communication medium" using "state of the art Internet technology to actively debate and advocate its policy in cyberspace".

Thirdly, the **White Paper on a Communication Policy**. Its goal is the involvement of different "stakeholders" in the process and invite them to contribute to the consultation process. Section 3 is entirely devoted to "Working with the media and new technologies", addressing various aspects that are necessarily interrelated: from the Europe by Satellite initiative to critical aspects of media coverage, from the engagement of different levels of authority in communicating Europe and issues to "exploiting the potential of new technologies". Once again, ICTs are recognized as "new forums for civic debate" and "tools for cross-border democracy". In the conclusion the Commission adopts a rather vague statement: "political leadership is needed if Europe is to fully exploit the Internet's potential and ensure that it does not create new divisions in society".

What seems to be lacking from all these documents is a recognition of the many practices and processes that are already taking place in different contexts, at different levels, making full and innovative use of these

technologies, experimenting their interactive potential, experiencing in practice the principle of "participatory democracy" which is mentioned in art. 47 of the new Constitutional treaty. Recalling our set of questions, in those documents we find a **clear awareness of the potential of ICTs in fostering participation, but no mention is made of good practices or relevant experienced interlocutors/stakeholders who should be engaged in fostering the use of ICTs. The deriving vision of communication and participation through ICTs remains quite general, not addressing some of the most problematic aspects**, such as: participation of whom (specific actors)? for what (in what relation to policy finding and policy making)? what relation between on-line and off-line participatory practices?

As far as the second set of questions, concerning participation of different stakeholders in the discussion, ideation and possibly in the future implementation of a European communication policy, the Berlin conference, expressively devoted to a "multi-stakeholder dialogue", once again raises some concerns. As far as which actors are been involved, the tendency is towards identification of institutional levels of policy-making (national and regional) to be engaged alongside the need to strengthen inter-institutional commitments. But the presence and relevance of non-state actors, especially civil society organizations, was quite marginal.
Moreover, **the "civil society sector" the Commission seems to have outreached in its communication effort** (through the funding of 6 projects and the organizations of specific forums of debate as part of the White paper process) **does not seem to have any specific competence/be active in information and communication issues and technological applications** (from those groups and associational entities that promote to pluralism and the independence of media, to issue concerning privacy of communications, to the very theme of ICT usage to foster participation).

In order to engage with different stakeholders in this ambitious policy plan **a much greater effort in mapping the European context, particularly identifying actors who could bring specific expertise and knowledge to a European communication policy strategy is needed**. This is an effort undertaken by our team, through a research plan that is currently being undertaken. We are elaborating a comprehensive framework for mapping the European communication policy landscape and reconstruct issue and policy networks that are active in the three policy areas of mass media, telecommunication and information society. Amongst our objectives is to create a meaningful database, with a specific focus on multi-stakeholder dynamics, which could become a resource for European policy makers, including Commission members operating on the communication policy plan. Demo-net will certainly be a central subject in the map we are constructing, but it will also be important to work within a conceptual frame that recognizes on the one side the relation between convergence in technologies and convergence in policy issues; and on the other side the inter-linkages of different issues that pertain to communication processes in society as relevant to a better democratic functioning of the European communicative space.

A structured approach for extracting strategic-political research needs from eParticipation barriers and challenges

Maria Wimmer*, John Shaddock°, Andreas Rosendahl* and Christian Schneider*

* University of Koblenz-Landau, Institute for IS Research, Research Group eGovernment, Universitaetsstr. 1, 56070 Koblenz, Germany.
° Local Government Yorkshire and Humber, UK

Scope of investigation

In the course of phase I of Demo-net, a number of eParticipation barriers and challenges have been identified. Deliverable D 1.1 [2] reports the results from the stakeholder dialogue executed on 16th June 2006 in Edinburgh. Despite of this focused report on challenges and barriers of eParticipation research, the OECD study [3], the UK local eDemocracy study [4], as well as a number of other sources and position papers from Demo-net partners in work package 6[48] have identified barriers and challenges of eParticipation.
One can ask: so what? How can we embark on this large number of hindrances and challenges identified in the many sources, and how can we turn them into needs of research, and concrete actions? In this contribution, we demonstrate a structured approach to extract research needs, research themes and concrete actions for eParticipation research and implementation. The overall concept is introduced in Figure 1.

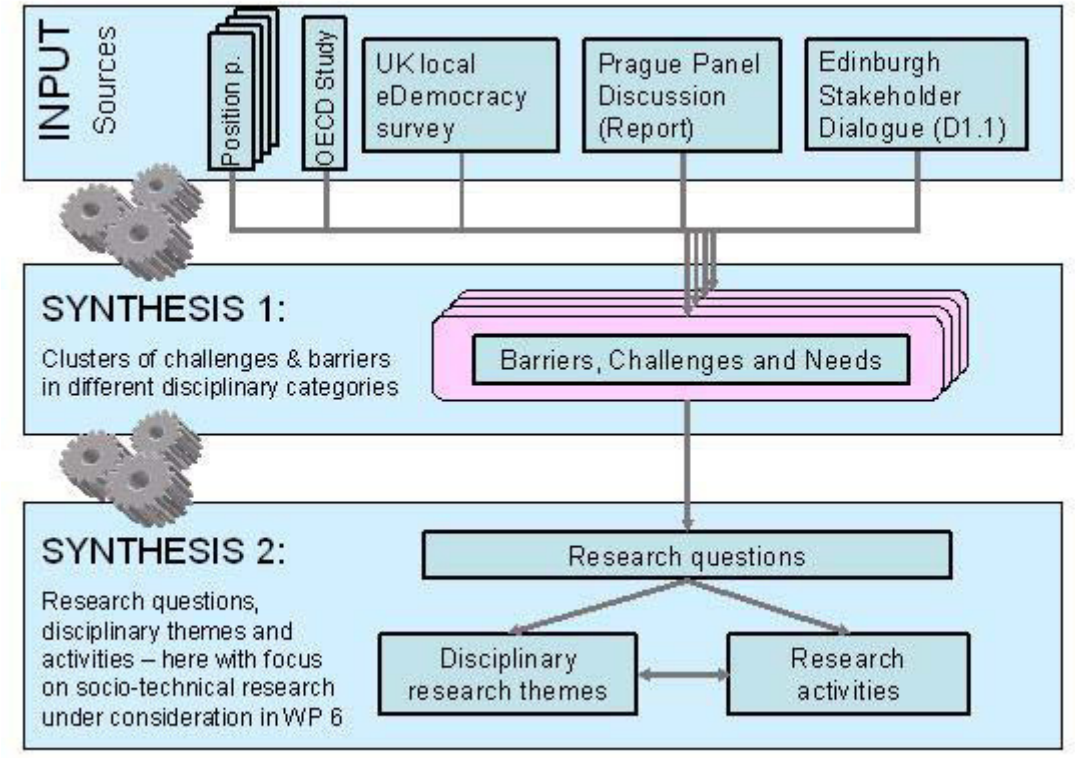


Figure 1: Synthesis of barriers and challenges to identify themes and actions in eParticipation research

[48] Internal documents of Demo-net partners to contribute to D 6.1

The focus of examples will be on political-strategic categories of issues. With this concept, the overall aims of Demo-net, and eParticipation research in general, will be supported by creating a better understanding of the complexity of the field, by turning barriers and challenges into research needs and themes, and by demonstrating the interdependencies of certain aspects. The concept proposed will help to overcome the barriers of current eParticipation and to exploit the potentials of modern ICT for better informed citizens, higher engagement of citizens and increased consultation by politicians and governments.
Democratic organisations have choices to make in the pursuit of eDemocracy. They can be

• inert (i.e. pursue democratic ends without engaging with the technologies);
• reactive (introducing approaches in response to changes in society and demands from their publics); or
• proactive, using the technologies to provide democratic leadership and to promote democratic engagement.
Each approach is legitimate and appropriate in certain sets of circumstances; organisations will need to decide the particular challenges they face and the tools they wish to investigate.
In the following and in the presentation, we first reflect examples of barriers and challenges of public eParticipation policy from various sources. Then, we introduce a concept to analyse these aspects, thereby turning them into research needs, clustering them, and formulating research themes and actions thereof. We exemplify the concept based on the barriers and challenges introduced, and conclude with a reflection of the potentials of such a strategic instrument to analyse problem scopes, identifying options and needs, which in turn can be formulated in terms of research themes and concrete actions to tackle the problems. Thereby, the interrelations of problems, needs and research themes can be demonstrated.

Examples of barriers and challenges of public eParticipation policy

To prepare the stakeholder dialogue on eParticipation barriers and challenges, a number of questions have been prepared for a structured and focused discussion. Table 1 gives an overview of these questions and what they aimed at.
As can be recognised, a number of questions were addressing issues of public eParticipation policies, political-strategic aspects of engagement, and motivators for public engagement. In [2], the barriers and challenges uncovered have been grouped thematically in the following categories:

- Political-strategic issues

- Organisational issues (covering also legal aspects)

- Public value generation issues

- Social issues

- Socio-economical issues

- Socio-technical issues

- Technological issues

- Deployment issues.

Table 1: Topics and questions to motivate a structured and focused discussion on the eParticipation challenges and barriers

Topic	Possible questions
Successes (or failures)	What examples do you have of eParticipation in practice? What are the fruitful research areas? What has worked and what hasn't? Is eParticipation moving forward as quickly as you would anticipate (in research and in practice)?
Relevance	How important is eParticipation? Is it central to eGovernment/eGovernance or just one component?
Future of Democracy	Can you describe what changes you see taking place in the processes of democracy over the next twenty years – at the local/neighbourhood, national and international levels? What are the implications for eParticipation research and practice? What challenges will this give?
Stakeholders	Who will use eParticipation techniques? Who will decide what approaches to adopt? How will market and non-market (e.g. community-based) applications of eParticipation co-exist?
Technology	What are the interesting technological developments in eParticipation? How will those developments change what is possible? Will they change what we understand as democracy? What are the problems of applying the developments in practice? Which technological constraints need to be addressed?
Social context	What key social changes will impact on the approaches to eParticipation. Will society in the future be more or less inclusive? What approaches will increase inclusion? What are the constraints on being more inclusive? How will the structure of power change and what impact will eParticipation have on that?
Organisation	What organisational challenges do developments in eParticipation create? Will geography be more or less important (i.e. will democracy be more tied to location or less)?
Business case	What is the business case for eParticipation? Are there cost savings to be made? What is the financial benefit of greater participation in democratic processes? Will eParticipation make the business of government easier? Will it contribute to the effectiveness of local communities?
Political sphere	What are the implications of developments in eParticipation for democratic decision-making? How can the legitimacy of political decision-making be maximised? Which new approaches are needed?
The Public	Is there a public demand for eParticipation? From whom? How is this expressed? What will make democratic engagement easier? What problems are there at present?

As an example let us consider some political-strategic barriers and challenges. The range of such issues reaches from aspects of a general discussion on democratic and political matters to aspects of impact of eParticipation and citizens' engagement in political decision making – including the impact of technology in participation.
Barriers identified are e.g.:

-Lack of political support
-Lack of promotion activities attracting citizens' interest and encouraging them to get politically involved
-Lack of trust in political institutions and in political representatives
-'Language problems' between administrations, political representatives and citizens

Challenges extracted are, among others:
-Exploit proper communication strategies, and strategies how to manage them
-Compliance with legal frameworks
-eDemocracy and eParticipation are possibly affecting traditional democracy models
-Potential contrast between "representative" and "participatory" democracy, and consequences and implications if ICT is widely used for engagement; understand what the impact of eParticipation and more direct participation is – and impact where?
-How to secure transparency of political and policy processes

-Distinguish between policy participation and social participation
-Develop different models of engagement while taking into account different power (governance) layers
-Fast feedback must be ensured leading as well to increased speed of impact
-More inclusion of citizens leading to more responsibility
-Understanding that eParticipation represents a societal benefit, which does not involve a loss of political power;
-Clarify what is in for a stakeholder to participate (what is the added-value of eParticipation options for citizens)?
-Consider eParticipation as an enabler for governments and administrations to achieve 'better' informed political decisions

The barriers and challenges need to be further synthesised to define the research needs, themes and actions. Next, we introduce the concept supporting this process of synthesis.

A structured approach to synthesise eParticipation barriers and challenges

In recent discussions on what to do next with the barriers and challenges identified for eParticipation, the project partners were seeking for means to synthesise these results. In Figure 2 details our structured approach sketched in Figure 1. The conceptual model guides in extracting needs and research themes, and in how to tackle the problems uncovered by recommending actions and measures to take.

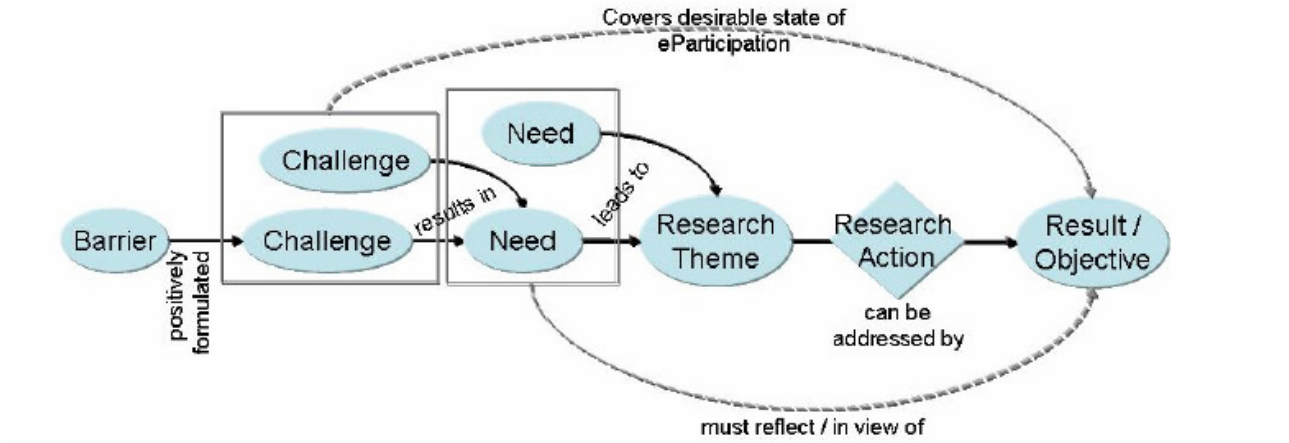


Figure 2: Conceptual model of turning barriers into challenges, into needs, and into concrete research themes, and research actions – all on the basis of well-known overall aims of eParticipation

To group the research themes, the clusters as introduced above are being used. These have been derived, on one hand, from the set of questions used to motivate a discussion on eParticipation challenges and barriers (see Table 1). On the other hand, the categories were derived from a holistic approach to understand eGovernment and eParticipation research and its multidisciplinarity (see [5], [1] and [2]).

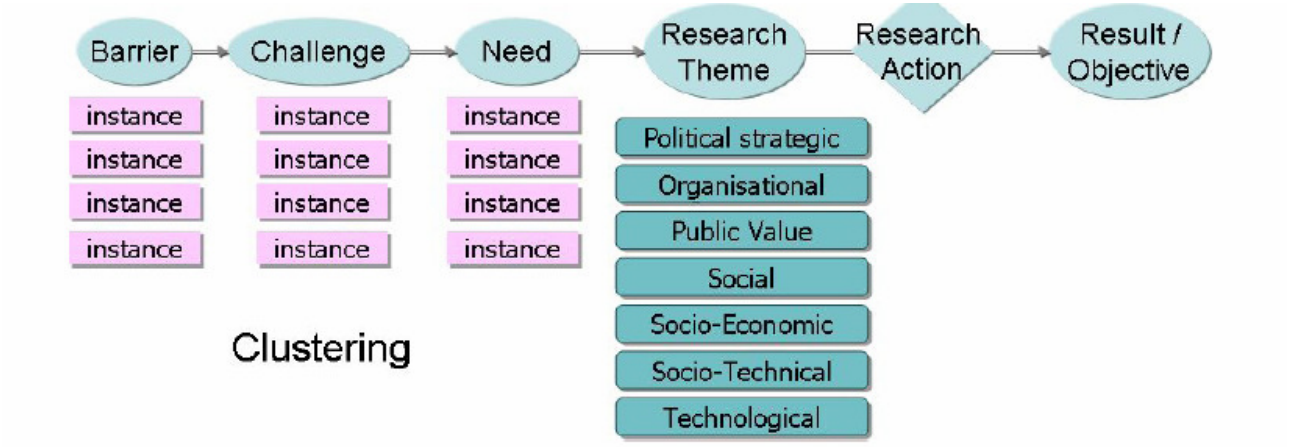


Figure 3: Detailing the concept, with categorisation of research themes according to the clusters as defined in D 1.1 of work package 1

This structured approach is currently being implemented in a PHP and MySQL implementation, which allows the exact tracking of the evolution of a phrase identified in a source from its qualification as an aspect (barrier, challenge, need, etc.) in the chain of argumentation shown in Figure 2. Consequently at each point, the preceding and succeeding aspects can be extracted, e.g. the needs stemming from a challenge and feeding into certain research themes. In this way, the whole argumentation tree from barriers to clustered research themes and actions can be shown based on a certain focus topic chosen.
In the following, we exemplify this process by selecting a barrier from the political-strategiccategory, and another one from the public value category.

Research themes for eParticipation policy

To exemplify the structured approach introduced before to synthesise eParticipation barriers and challenges, we first select the barrier: "Lack of political support". This barrier can be formulated positively into two challenges as shown in Figure 4. Investigating these challenges, one can derive a number of research needs, which lead to another number of research themes. The next step of elaboration is to propose research activities to investigate certain needs and research themes. In further synthesis, a final step towards the contribution of the research theme and activity chosen to the overall eParticipation objectives can be added. Actually at this point, monitoring and assessment of success and contribution to public value generation will come in[49].
The second example focuses on the challenge[50]: "Understand the mutual reinforcement of social integration/social capital and eParticipation". The argumentation trace of the challenge into needs, research themes and activities is shown in Figure 5.

[49] This step has not yet been elaborated.
[50] No barrier was formulated in the source document, although one could easily be defined as for example: "Lack of understanding the mutual reinforcement of social integration/social capital and eParticipation"

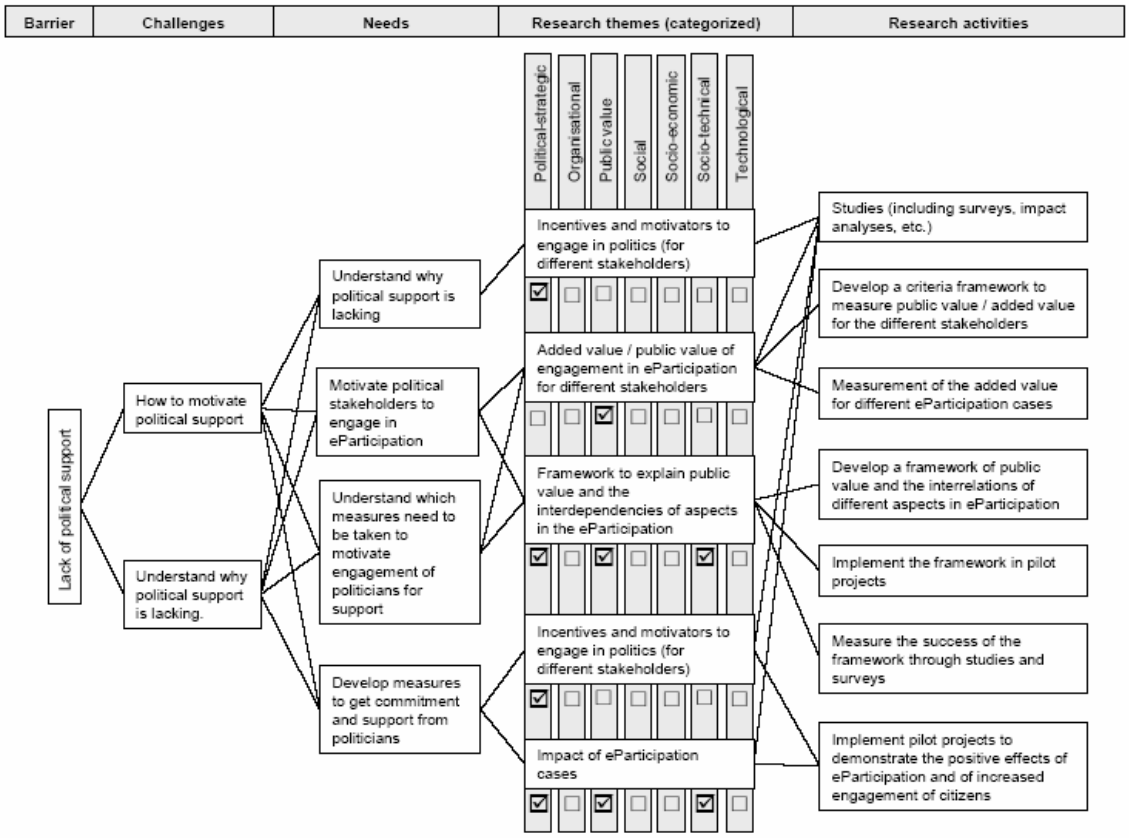


Figure 4: Argumentation trace of the barrier „Lack of political support" (political-strategic category)

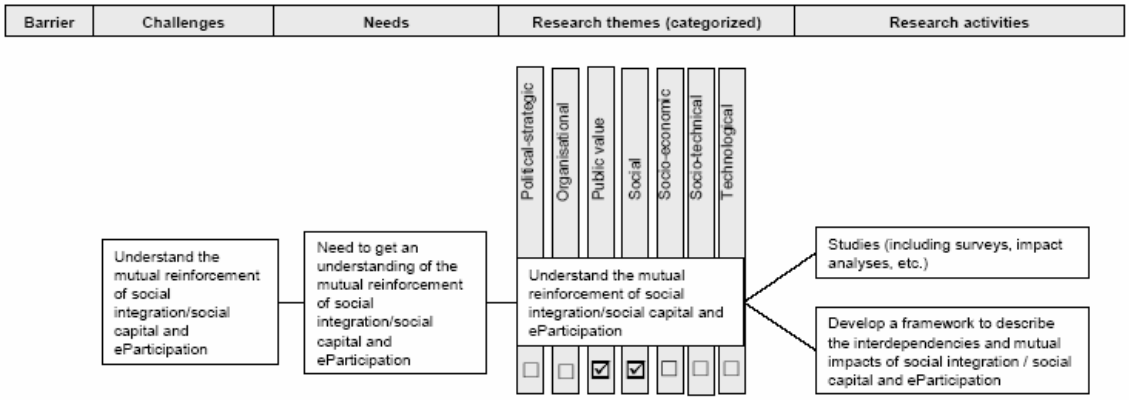


Figure 5: Argumentation trace of the challenge „Understand the mutual reinforcement of social integration/social capital and eParticipation" (category public value generation)

The two examples presented provide a first test of the concept introduced in the chapter on "A structured approach to synthesise eParticipation barriers and challenges". The synthesis work is currently ongoing. It will deliver a well-structured analysis of barriers and challenges in eParticipation to be researched under certain scientific disciplines and categories as listed above. Apart from that, one can extend the approach to monitor and assess the success of certain measures towards fulfilling certain needs and overcoming barriers identified.

Concluding remarks and outlook

In this contribution, we have introduced a structured approach to investigate and analyse eParticipation barriers and challenges, which have been identified in Demo-net and in other literature. The main

problem of current discussions is that they lack a proper concept of turning barriers and challenges identified into a pathway of needs and research themes or actions to respond to these needs. The approach introduced presents a concept and prototypical implementation to track the line of argumentation and to link the research themes and measures with overall eParticipation objectives. It will also assist practitioner organisations as they develop their own strategies for eParticipation.
Next steps are to finalise the implementation to synthesise the vast amount of barriers and challenges identified within Demo-net's first phase of activities, and to turn these issues into well formulated research themes, which are grounded in research needs, challenges and barriers as identified. Apart from that, ideas have to be generated as to how to monitor and evaluate the success, impact and compliance of research themes' implementation through research measures thereby fulfilling certain eParticipation objectives. These aspects are part of next activities in Demo-net. The concept introduced can be a valuable means to trace the advancements and to provide a ground for developing a measurement framework for success in eParticipation research and implementation.

References

[1] Bicking, M., & Wimmer, M.A. (2006). eGovernment Research in Europe: Disciplinary Understanding and State of Play from eGovRTD2020. In Andersen, Gronlund, Scholl.
Wimmer (Eds). EGOV 2006 communications proceedings, Trauner Druck, Linz, pp. 1 – 12.
[2] Wimmer, M.A. & Kramer, A. Deliverable 1.1: "Challenges and Barriers of eParticipation Research and Practice", http://www.demo-net.org/.
[3] Macintosh, A. & Coleman, S. Promise and Problems of E-Democracy, Challenges of online citizen engagement, OECD, 2004,
http://www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?K=5LMQCR2JHSLT&lang=EN&sort=sort_date%2Fd&sf1=Title&st1=Promise+and+Problems&sf3=SubjectCode&st4=not+E4+or+E5+or+P5&sf4=SubVersionCode&ds=Promise+and+Problems%3B+All+Subjects%3 B+&m=1&dc=2&plang=en
[4] Pratchett, L. Barriers to e-Democracy, Local government experiences and responses, 2004, http://www.icele.org/downloads/Researchreport.pdf
[5] Wimmer, M.A. (2003). Approaching secure and trustful eGovernment applications: technology won't make it alone! In P. Cunningham, M. Cunningham, P. Fatelnig (Eds.), Building the Knowledge Economy: Issues, Applications, Case Studies. Part 1, IOS Press, Amsterdam et al., pp. 626 – 632.