

European eParticipation Summary Report

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... Study

The "Study and Supply of Services on the Development of eParticipation in the EU" is designed to support the initiatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament in the area of eParticipation. Its purpose is to provide a synoptic and coherent view of where Europe currently stands regarding eParticipation, and to provide recommendations for future actions to the main actors.



ICT for Government
and Public Services



European Commission
Information Society and Media

Summary of the “Study and Supply of Services on the Development of eParticipation in the EU”, prepared for the European Commission by

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Table of contents

1. Introduction	4
2. The context and role of eParticipation in Europe	5
2.1 The value and role of eParticipation in European Democracy	5
2.2 Governance will become more participative, engaging and democratic in the 21 st Century	6
3. Benefits and factors shaping the development of eParticipation in Europe	7
3.1 Analytical framework	7
3.2 Factors and benefits	8
3.3 eParticipation benefits and tools in different contexts	9
3.4 A typology of participation and the role of ICT	12
4. The state of play of eParticipation in Europe	13
4.1 The European eParticipation strategy and legal framework	13
4.2 The European Commission and European Parliament	13
4.3 European agencies and Council Presidencies	14
4.4 European political parties	14
4.5 Civil society and international organisations	14
4.6 Mass media	14
4.7 New eParticipation tools	15
5. eParticipation good practice	15
5.1 Characteristics of European eParticipation cases	15
5.2 Lessons for eParticipation design	17
6. eParticipation recommendations – focusing on the European level	20
6.1 eParticipation policy framework	21
6.2 eParticipation of citizens in European public policy	22
6.3 eParticipation across European levels and by organised groups	25
6.4 eParticipation implementation and research	27
References	28

1. Introduction

The European eParticipation study is designed to support the initiatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament in the area of eParticipation. Its purpose is to provide a synoptic and coherent view of where Europe currently stands regarding eParticipation. In addition, the study supports dialogue between key actors and stakeholders, particularly through workshops, consultations and good practice exchange. The study focuses mainly on the European level but has also drawn upon, and has relevance for, other levels (national, regional and local) as well as other contexts, for example the civil (third) and private sectors where eParticipation tools and techniques are deployed.

In the year when the European Union held its 2009 elections to the European Parliament, there is a chance to reflect on the status of democracy and participation across the continent. Also, now that the December 2007 Lisbon Treaty has finally been ratified, there is likely to be a strong boost to both participation and eParticipation, given that *inter alia* it lays out three important democratic principles, amongst which is participatory democracy and the use of ICT for this purpose. This is therefore an important moment to plan for the future. Never before have there been such contradictory and auspicious developments in thinking about how all sections of European society can engage in policy making and political debate. On the one hand, it is clear that many have disengaged from formal politics, voter turnout is falling, membership of political parties is declining, and there is a widespread sense of a loss of trust in government and politicians. On the other hand, there is a surge of grass-root, often single issue engagement in policy making, people generally are more aware of public policy issues, and there are more outlets and channels enabling participation. Much of this is supported, and in fact driven forward, by new ICT tools. These range from the more traditional emails and electronic forums, to the Web 2.0 phenomenon of blogs, social networking, and applications which enable users to upload their own content and manipulate the content of others, as well as facilitate deliberation and debate.

There is a surge of mainly bottom-up activity which some¹ are calling a step change in the way we think about politics and policy making. One of the pressing challenges, therefore, is to align this with formal structures and processes at all levels of government (including the European) but without attempting to take it over. This is indeed one of the main tasks of government and politicians over the next five years. Many commentators have hailed President Obama as the world's first truly Internet politician, and there is no doubt that his intelligent use of ICT in political fundraising and campaigning has opened a new chapter in eParticipation. Now he is in power, the test will be whether he can enact a similar transformation in the way that government itself operates. Of course, the Obama example cannot be easily transferred to Europe where political structures and political parties are very different, but there are clearly lessons and the new President has certainly changed awareness of, and the debate about, eParticipation.

One issue for Europe is, of course, can the established political institutions grasp and learn from such opportunities, or will traditional mindsets and structures resist change? Will eParticipation in Europe remain something done largely outside the formal governance sphere? How can we in Europe use the new tools beneficially, whilst guarding against the undoubted threats posed by the hijacking of participation processes by the already politically and digitally enfranchised?

These are some of the questions addressed in the European eParticipation study and which must be seen in a context where eParticipation is becoming a high profile and highly political issue within the wider eDemocracy area. This itself is against a backcloth in which the measurement and evaluation of eParticipation is a huge challenge. The evidence base is poor

¹Leadbeater 2008, Shirky 2008, Surowiecki 2004, Tapscott 2006 & 2007.

(Macintosh, Coleman, Schneeberger 2009), even evidence on the benefits of public participation is very thin, and there are real difficulties in establishing reliable measures. For example, actual cost-benefit analyses of participation are virtually non-existent. However, many benefits appear self evident to practitioners and authorities (Smith 2009a), and it may be that benefits are usually underestimated, being too intangible, too long-term, and too affected by confounding variables to be captured by standard project evaluation methods. (Involve 2005). There is also often a failure to properly contextualise the benefits of (e)participation with reference to democratic norms associated with the governance regime (model) within which participation activities are expected to co-exist or indeed to co-shape, such as social conditions and political culture, as well as legal and economic systems. (These different models are examined in Smith, 2009a).

There is also a need to contextualise eParticipation in relation to the European Governance White Paper (European Commission 2001), as well as related policies and initiatives, and an important question is are the current institutional arrangements, processes and mindsets of the European Union living up to the principles of this White Paper? In practice it seems that, despite the White Paper, there is often a lack of institutional obligation to consult the public and respond to their concerns, whilst there is a strong institutional obligation to consult and respond within the organisation itself and especially up and down the hierarchy. This is a mindset as well as an institutional issue.

2. The context and role of eParticipation in Europe

2.1. The value and role of eParticipation in European democracy

It is clear that participation has become a highly political issue over the last few years, and that eParticipation is seen as a major factor in this development. Opinions vary widely, however. Some see eParticipation as a saviour to many democratic challenges, others as a threat particularly because of digital divide challenges, whilst others see it as largely irrelevant. The truth is probably a mixture of all three, so the task is to steer a careful path to ensure that realised benefits outweigh all else.

As reflected during discussions at this study's first workshop (Millard 2008), there is much talk of apathy, the democratic deficit, people turning away from politics, declining voter turnout, decreasing membership of political parties, etc., all fears for which there is some justification. However, there is also real evidence (in this study and elsewhere) that people can be mobilised to participate even in this 'apathetic' age using new ICT tools. For example, the recent Hungarian referendum against health reforms, or the UK Prime Minister's ePetition website which saw millions petition against road pricing proposals and led to the policy being dropped. People are clearly not always passive and can indeed be mobilised to vote, campaign, and get involved in politics and policy making. ICT can bring things closer to the individual and be a tool to actively follow events and issues and provide input.

Further, ICT does not seem overall to be likely to impose bigger threats to participation than exist with traditional forms, although the specific challenges may be different. Indeed, in contrast, there could be many more opportunities. In addressing these challenges and realising the opportunities, many questions arise. ICT is a new tool, but does this imply any real underlying change to the goals and objectives of participation? On the one hand, many practitioners and policy makers have the aim not to destroy but rather to enhance representative democracy through information sharing, access, and empowerment for citizens. On the other hand, there are also strong voices calling for forms of direct democracy which by-pass political representatives. Should eParticipation be obligatory, in which directions is it moving, and is it desirable to roll it out to its full extent? What is the role of the eParticipation channel compared to offline activities? Which specific activities could benefit from eParticipation? These are all questions to which we do not as yet have any definitive answers.

One of the main conclusions from this study's first workshop (Millard 2008) was that the desire for engagement and participation across society is certainly not dead, but its nature may have changed both in terms of the issues people are interested in and the mechanisms which should be used to engage them. There are, of course, also serious challenges, such as the

threat of usurpation of the debate by elites, the unaccountability which some forms of direct democracy might bring, shallow and knee-jerk inputs if ICT enables participation to become easy, etc. Are there too many risks, and are these compounded by many examples of 'failures'? For example, early experiments with eVoting in the UK and Ireland, including using mobile phones, have not been successful and have led to complaints about fraud and irregularities as well as technical problems, so further development has been shelved at least for the time being. In contrast, almost 15% of voters in Estonia's recent European Parliamentary election voted online, a steep rise from the 5% figure in the country's 2007 general election.² In some contexts, change may take a long time perhaps a generation, whilst in others change can be relatively rapid.

2.2. Governance will become more participative, engaging and democratic in the 21st Century

The European eParticipation study has demonstrated the considerable potential, still a long way from full realisation, for eParticipation to change the broader interactions between citizens and government. It can also improve the overall quality of engagement and decision-making whilst widening the involvement of all citizens.

In recent years existing concepts of governance and democracy have been dramatically transformed. (See Frissen & Millard 2007, Millard & Horlings 2008, and Huijboom et al 2009). This is due to increasing pressures and expectations that the way we are governed should reflect modern methods of efficiency and effectiveness which draw upon all of society's resources, both knowledge and people. It is also due to expectations that government should be more open to democratic accountability and broad participation. ICT has considerable potential in both these areas through its ability to access and manipulate data and knowledge, and by making government more democratic and participatory through new channels for democratic involvement.

However, the incorporation of new technology into government policy making and into the democratic process can also be fraught with difficulty and controversy. It is clear that eGovernment is not just about putting government services online and improving their delivery. Rather, it also constitutes a set of technology-mediated processes that could improve the overall quality of policy and decision making and change the broader interactions between constituents and government. ICT could re-engineer representative democracy and replace it by more direct forms, but many question whether this is a choice we wish to make, or whether we should rather be supporting our existing democratic processes and enabling them to function better? (Coleman & Norris 2005) Introducing ICT, and various degrees of subsidiarity to localise decision-making, to democratic participation (however defined), can pose profound political, ethical and practical problems, especially in relation to the digital divide, i.e. how can the technology 'have-nots' participate?

ICT is opening up new opportunities, but also reveals new dangers leading to profound consequences for the way we understand what policy making and participation can become. The study examined five important aspects to this as summarized in Table 1.

According to the OECD (2008), participation must be seen within the wider contexts of both new demands on our democratic systems and new forms of engagement by citizens in services as well as policy making. The limits of government action are increasingly visible to citizens. Complex policy challenges ranging from the international to the personal level – in such diverse areas as climate change, ageing populations and obesity – cannot be 'solved' by government action alone. Tackling them effectively will require the concerted efforts of all actors in society and of individual citizens. Governments everywhere are under pressure to do more with less. Most are working hard to deliver effective policies and services at least cost to the public purse; many are trying to leverage resources outside the public sector. Last but not least, governments are seeking to ensure and maintain high levels of public trust, without which government actions will, at best, be ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive. At the same time, more educated, well-informed and less deferential citizens are judging their governments in terms of their democratic, policy and service delivery performance.

² <http://www.vvk.ee/index.php?id=11178>

Table 1: Important opportunities and challenges of the application of ICT to participation

Issues	Opportunities and challenges
Decision and policy making initiated by government	ICT can exploit the vast reserves of data the public sector has available to develop, model, visualise and simulate decisions and policies. Also by involving constituents through political representatives or directly through processes of information, consultation, active participation and elections.
Empowerment from the bottom	ICT can help to leverage the voices and expertise of huge numbers of individuals and groups, setting their own agendas and developing their own policies in new forms of ‘crowdsourcing’, mass collaboration and mass creativity. ³ This can also result in short term single issue politics, and sometimes in instant street politics and forms of mob-rule, but can potentially also build to more permanent countervailing power bases possibly at odds with governments.
Empowering communities and localities	ICT can support the extension of participation beyond formal politics and the ballot box, by promoting subsidiarity at local and neighbourhood level. This leverages local resources, know-how and skills for developing new forms of advocacy, support and social capital, which can both strengthen diverse cultures and interests as well as bridge between them.
Transparency and openness	Can be supported by ICT through freedom of information and consultation, to reveal the purposes, processes and outcomes of government, also through real-time tracking and tracing. This will help place responsibility, reduce corruption and make decisions more responsive, although legitimate privacy and the space for risk taking should be safeguarded.
Accountability, rights and responsibilities	ICT contributes to these becoming blurred as decision and policy-making are opened up and government shares the stage with other actors. Important questions are raised about whose voices are heard and who do they represent, with the ever present danger of trivialisation and short-termism unless the right to participate in policy making is balanced with some responsibility for policy impacts.

3. Benefits and factors shaping the development of eParticipation in Europe

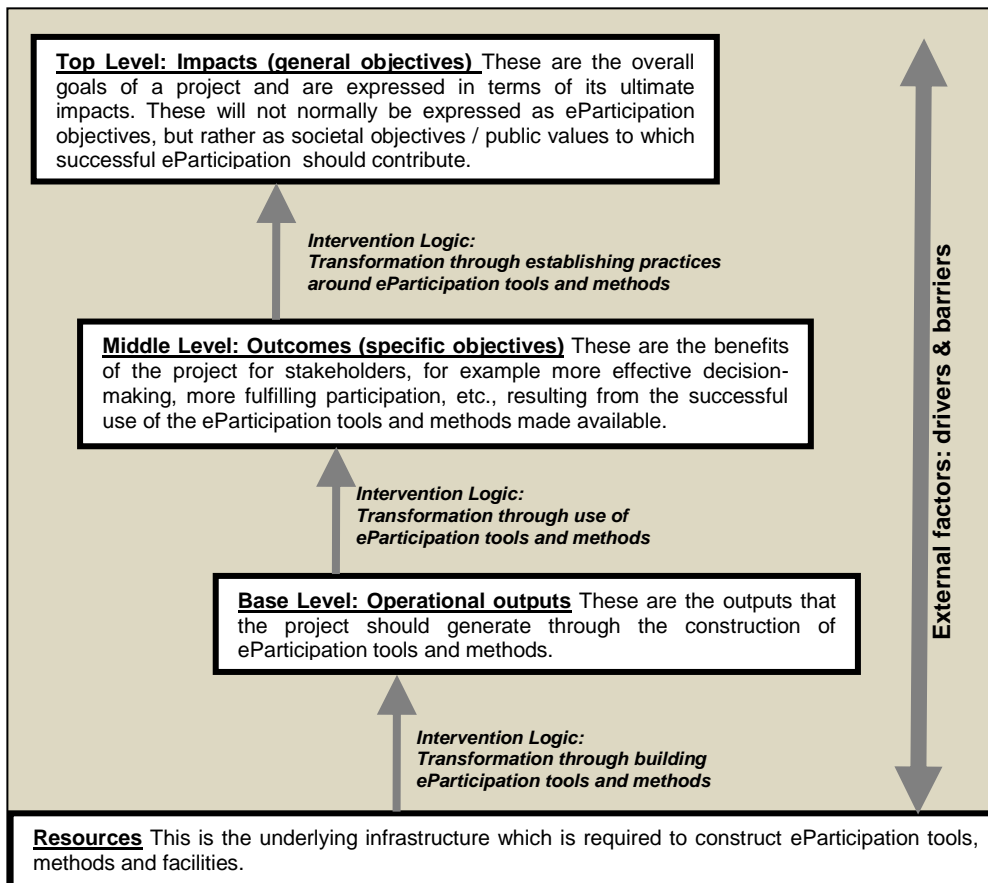
3.1. Analytical framework

In order to map and understand the factors shaping the development of eParticipation, an analytical framework has been developed which attempts to identify the key variables, distinguishing between factors which lie at least partly within the control of the stakeholders in an eParticipation initiative (within the ‘system boundary’) and factors which are largely external (some acting as drivers, others as barriers). (Smith, Macintosh, Millard 2009) Additionally it differentiates aspects of eParticipation which are aligned with the goal-setting strategic rationality of a specific governance regime from those aspects of eParticipation which are relatively insulated from these power relations and which respond to the autonomous needs of social actors. It uses an impact assessment framework, similar to that used by the European Commission, that distinguishes between different levels of goals – outputs, outcomes and impacts – to which eParticipation might contribute towards. (See Figure 1)

The lower-level objectives (project outputs) are project-specific and usually short-term and measurable as they are designed as the direct output of the resources used in the project. The mid-level objectives (outcomes or results of participation) are also project-specific but are designed to provide real benefits for the stakeholders involved, for example through better policy development, policy-making, decision-making, legislation. The top-level objectives are beyond the project (system) boundary and provide benefits to wider groups of actors and stakeholders across society or segments of it. These are societal impacts and are largely defined in relation to public values that have been identified as important features or ambitions in European governance. These can, for example, relate to the high-level policy goals of EU institutions, such as the ‘culture of consultation and dialogue’ put forward in the White Paper on Governance (European Commission 2001), components of good governance to which participation is strongly related such as democracy and citizenship, but also some policy goals which may seem less directly relevant to participation, such as social inclusion.

³ See Surowiecki 2004, Involve 2008, Leadbeater 2008, Shirky 2008.

Figure 1: eParticipation analysis levels



The analytical framework also employs the concept of an intervention logic, which specifies the types of actions necessary to successfully initiate and manage the participation process between the levels by the project owner. They should also attempt to minimise the risks and maximise possible synergies with external factors beyond the project boundary, which can act either as drivers or barriers to the project and which serve to embed it in its social, political, cultural, economic, legal and institutional environment.

3.2. Factors and benefits

Using the analytical framework, a summary of major factors and benefits shaping the development of eParticipation can thus be made using this analytical framework (see Smith, Macintosh, Millard 2009 for a full evaluation):

Resources (relevant to all upper levels)

- ICT infrastructure and building blocks
- New and emerging technologies (e.g. Collaborative environments, Argumentation Support Systems, Ontologies, Semantic Web Services, Knowledge Management and Knowledge engineering, Web 2.0, streaming media technologies, natural language processing and data mining)
- Human resources (people and skills)
- Organisational resources (leadership, management, teams, organisational knowledge resources, etc.)
- Other materials and facilities, such as property, infrastructures, etc.
- Finance and budget (development and operational costs)
- Investments of time required and available to use an eParticipation system effectively:

Operational outputs

- Technical outputs, hardware, software, channels and terminals
- eParticipation tools, e.g. for ePetitions, eConsultations, ePolling, decision-making, games, etc.

- Organisational outputs, e.g. working procedures, process re-engineering, staff training, organisational changes, etc.
- Direct eParticipation process outputs, e.g. eParticipation studies, analysis, awareness raising, etc.

eParticipation outcomes

- For project owners:
 - Cost reduction, resource rationalisation
 - Greater productivity and efficiency
 - Staff who are more competent and skilled in their jobs and thus achieve greater output, etc.
- For intended users:
 - Successful access to and use of eParticipation tools and services by intended users
 - Changed eParticipation use patterns, e.g. more and better use
 - Increased user satisfaction
 - Greater empowerment of citizens, businesses, communities
- For all stakeholders:
 - Time savings and more convenience
 - Simplified procedures
 - Increased security
 - Less bureaucracy and administration
 - More transparency, accountability, etc.
 - Better policy development
 - Better policy-making
 - Better decision-making
 - Improved legislation

Societal impacts

- Democracy, participation and active citizenship
- Institutional transparency and openness
- European Public Sphere
- Culture of consultation and dialogue
- Subsidiarity
- Community empowerment, e.g. increased capacity for collective action
- Individual empowerment, e.g. choice and voice
- Inclusion

External factors which are beyond the control of the project but which should be taken into account by the project (can be either drivers or barriers)

- Governance regime or mode (see Table 4)
- Political culture
- Public agency cultures (mindsets and ways of working)
- Legal environment, including the rule set which governs eParticipation, and levels of security and authentication required
- Policy environment
- Autonomy: scope for autonomous action by project stakeholders
- Technological pool and ICT infrastructure available
- Socio-economic and socio-cultural environments
- Patterns of interest intermediation, i.e. how interests are expressed and mediated

3.3. eParticipation benefits and tools in different contexts

A clear finding of the study was that participation and eParticipation are asked to perform different functions and seek different benefits according to the context in which they operate. A number of such contexts were examined the results of which are summarised in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 2 shows the main types of benefits the study was able to demonstrate for participation, for eParticipation and by stakeholder type. (Millard 2008, Smith 2009a)

Table 2: Main types of benefits and stakeholders

Context	Benefits
Benefits of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service efficiency and effectiveness • Quality and legitimacy of decisions • Good governance and active citizenship
Benefits of eParticipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced transaction and coordination costs in social and political relationships • Greater deliberativeness due to asynchronic and anonymous qualities of ICT • The enhanced information-processing capacity which information technology facilitates
Benefits by stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For participants – increased convenience, satisfaction, feelings of involvement, greater engagement and commitment in community and society, also noting that eParticipation is not only a rational but also an emotional experience • For organisations – improved efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of organisations, for example successful participation can increase the economic viability of private and civil sector organisations, and probably also public institutions as well, by reducing costs. Also the increased efficiency and quality of their own policy-making • For governments – support for social cohesion and other society-wide policies • For all – eParticipation can increase overall participation rates and the intensity and quality of participation if undertaken in the right way
Benefits related to policy and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ends or means: the instrumental benefits (i.e. means to an end) compared to the intrinsic benefits of a participation process (i.e. end in itself, e.g. learning, individual reflective learning or social learning) The type of governance mode (see Table 4) is more important for instrumental benefits than for intrinsic benefits. • Who benefits: public compared to private goods and values which are produced (instrumental benefits are often public goods and intrinsic often private, although this is not always the case) • Short-term / long-term: the more immediate (micro) benefits of a distinct project or initiative compared to the longer-term (macro) benefits of living in a participative political culture. This can also be related to the operational outputs of an eParticipation project, on the one hand, compared to its outcomes and impacts (See Figure 1).

The impacts and benefits of eParticipation vary to some extent depending on the geographic scale involved, as summarised in Table 3. (See also section 5.1)

Table 3: eParticipation impacts, benefits and tools by geographical scale

Scale	Impacts, benefits and eParticipation tools
Local and regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most headway with eParticipation has been made at the local level. • The most commonly used eParticipation tools currently are discussion forums and eConsultation tools. • However, there are considerable variations between cultural contexts, e.g. in Europe ‘deliberation’ tools tend to predominate, notably forums, given that the political culture is typically more participative and on-going. (This applies to the national level as well.) This is compared with the USA where ‘transparency’ tools seem to predominate, such as webcasting, podcasting and Web 2.0 tools like RSS feeds and video sharing. Here, the political culture tends to be to hold representatives more to account and this typically peaks at campaign time.
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that the national level representative system has become formalised and entrenched over often hundreds of years, it is more difficult to find a role for eParticipation, so it is less in use here than at local level. • However, some eParticipation tools have increasingly been developed in recent years to help citizens lobby their representatives more effectively and in a coordinated way, or to enliven the internal democratic life of political parties. The use of basic personal communication tools for similar purposes, especially email, has also expanded.
European	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eParticipation is used even less at the European level than the national level, not least due to the fragmentation of the European public sphere in which the vast majority of media are focused at national and/or local level, and because of the problems of linguistic diversity. • However, some eParticipation tools are starting to be used such as forums, blogs, email, and some virtual communities.

It is thus clear that participation and eParticipation are asked to perform different functions according to the governance context in which they occur. Ultimately, the benefits of eParticipation are value-laden and can be understood in terms of how its effects change, stabilise or improve *a certain mode* of governance. It is argued that whereas an essentially hierarchical mode of governance prevails at the national scale in Europe, elements of market-based and in particular network governance have become more prominent at both the local/regional and the European scale in recent decades, partly in response to the challenges of an increasingly knowledge- and information-based society. Networks are the most significant element of the EU governance regime, but there are elements of hierarchical and quasi-market governance as well. (See Table 4)

Table 4: eParticipation impacts, benefits and tools by European governance mode

Source: (Adapted from Smith 2009a)

Governance	Market	Hierarchy	Network
<i>Definition</i>	Bottom-up but only in aggregative sense rather than deliberative and consensual sense – more scope for plebiscitary type (e.g. referenda and voting)	Top-down but can involve participatory inputs and consultation: traditional, representative democracy	Both bottom-up and top-down often deliberative and consensual Focused around policy networks of organised interests, but increasingly also allowing space for less organised groups
<i>Main level(s)</i>	Mainly local/regional	Mainly national level (some local/regional)	Both local/regional and European level
<i>Public value benefit (impact)</i>	Aggregated demand (counting votes) & co-production	Intermediation of political parties & organised interest groups	Deliberative & collective learning, both strong publics & enclaves
<i>Benefits eParticipation is asked to deliver</i>	Diffuse decision-making to sovereign individuals. The potential of disintermediation and information-filtering is key.	Enable stronger vertical deliberation (representatives use eP to pick up concerns and background knowledge). The potential of information-processing is key.	Diffuse deliberation to new arenas for surfacing issues, consensus-building and problem-solving. The potential of community-building and deliberation-supporting is key.
<i>Type of issues</i>	Issues with clearly delimited user groups or stakeholders and few externalities (e.g. tenant ballots)	Politicised issues requiring allocation decisions between groups or redistribution of power and resources to ensure social cohesion	Often depoliticised issues, especially if they can be formulated as projects requiring collaborative or innovative solutions
<i>eParticipation tools with greatest potential benefits</i>	eVoting, ePolling, ePanels, eSurveys, customer empowerment tools	ePetitions, email, webcasting, eSurveys, ePanels, chat (Q&A)	Forums, blogs, virtual communities, eDeliberative polls, eCitizens' juries, chat, web monitoring tools, transparency-enhancing tools and privacy-enhancing tools

Participation benefits can also be seen both from:

- Social actor perspective – i.e. a bottom-up rationale emphasising the intrinsic eParticipation benefits which are normally realised at the micro-level using eParticipation tools for expression and deliberation (e.g. blogs and forums)
- System perspective with its mediating discourses and devices through which actor-driven forms of participation couple with the political system in ways that may generate more instrumental benefits as secondary effects. Here eParticipation processes are at the:
 - meso level using tools for opinion aggregation (e.g. polls and online citizens' juries)
 - macro level of the European public sphere using tools for knowledge-mapping (e.g. issue crawlers) and mass collaboration tools (e.g. wikis and jams).

The system perspective can also be seen in terms of two broad rationales for eParticipation:

- Mobilising (expert) knowledge for better policy-making. This rationale is associated with more depoliticised policy-making, and/or areas in which European institutions share competences with other levels of government and other actors. Typified by the use of expert groups and committees, it has a long tradition within EU policy-making, is a relatively exclusive ('elite') form of participation, and predates discussion of the 'democratic deficit' or attempts to make governance more open and transparent.
- Securing or improving democratic legitimacy. This rationale is strongest in more

politicised policy areas, either where European-level decisions have redistributive impacts on society, or in areas in which the competences of European institutions are stronger and more exclusive. It seeks to stimulate broad-based participation in framing policy objectives. This rationale for eParticipation has grown in importance as EU competences have expanded, and in response to public debate about the ‘democratic deficit’.

Overall, the EU’s governance arrangements are unlikely to foster mass democracy at the European scale, and the EU’s broadly regulatory rather than redistributive role arguably does not require this for its normal operation, but it does need to stimulate broader participation in relation to basic problem-framing and in order to tap into innovative ideas that may surface elsewhere. So there is a demand for a deliberative participatory form of democracy, to which eParticipation could contribute in three broad directions:

1. making the ‘strong publics’ of existing policy networks more accessible to new participants
2. encouraging and protecting independent or oppositional public enclaves where alternative discourses can emerge and develop
3. improving the connectivity of the system as a whole.

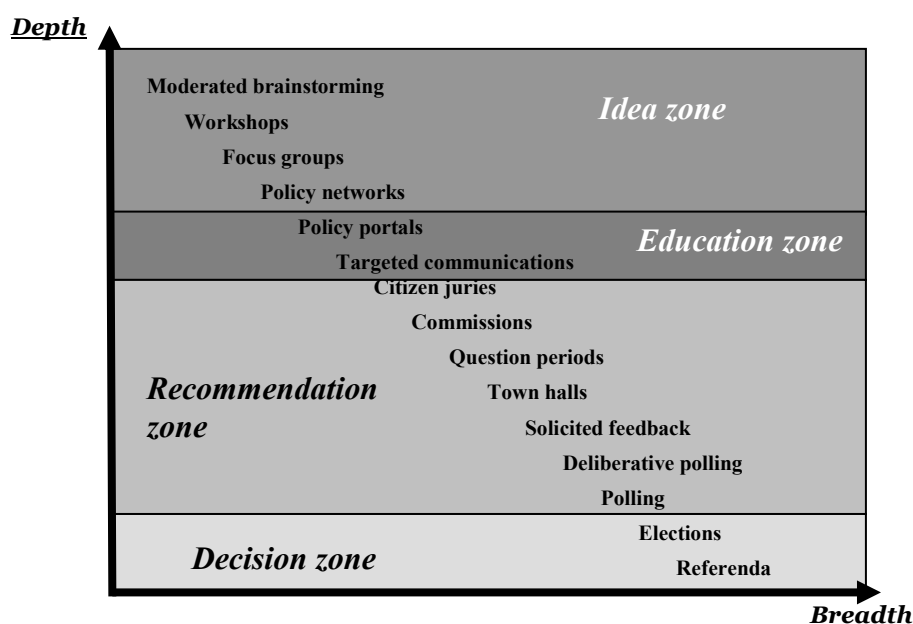
3.4. A typology of participation and the role of ICT

A recent overview of digital age engagement methodologies compares the depth and the breadth of participation with the types of benefits they could be associated with, as shown in Figure 2. This considers engagement and participation types in terms of four ‘zones’: the idea zone, the education zone, the recommendation zone, and the decision zone, each of which is made up of a number of specific types of activity. Thus, ideas are more likely to be generated in the depth of smaller groups (although there could be many of these) using a mix of online and offline techniques, whilst decisions at a societal level need to be more broadly based across mass populations and this could move towards mainly online methods in future.

Thus, although there is likely to be a tendency for ICT to play a stronger role moving down and to the right hand side of Figure 2, the specific application of ICT in practice will vary according to circumstances and objectives, as well as in relation to new applications as they become available. (See also Smith, Mackintosh and Millard 2009 for a full overview of types of participation and ICT tools.)

Figure 2: Digital age engagement methodologies

Source: Anthony Williams 2008⁴



⁴ Presentation at the Lisbon Council “eGovernment 2.0” seminar (<http://www.lisboncouncil.net>), 29 May 2008, on “Government 2.0 -- How Emerging Technologies and Social Networking will Remake Public Services and Democracy” by Anthony Williams co-author of “Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration will Change Everything”, Tapscott & Williams 2006.

4. The state of play of eParticipation in Europe

The European eParticipation study comprehensively mapped the state of play of eParticipation in the EU. This was not limited to isolated eParticipation initiatives, but also provided an overall picture of ICT-enabled interventions that directly or indirectly touch upon eParticipation. (Dalakiouridou et al, 2009)

4.1. The European eParticipation strategy and legal framework

Figure 3 illustrates the main developments in the EU legal framework relevant for eParticipation, 2000-2008. From 2000 onwards, the focus was mainly on issues of transparency and accountability, and was followed in 2002 by laying down minimum standards for consultations as the EU began to insert the stage of consultation in policy making in the framework of good governance. The introduction of Plan D and the European Communication policy in 2005 signalled the use of ICT for better communicating policies to citizens as well as vesting more powers to citizens in policy making. With the “Communicating Europe via the internet” policy document in 2007, the EU refers explicitly to eParticipation as a means of citizen empowerment. The diagram does not yet show the impact of the Lisbon Treaty which is due to come into force by the beginning of 2010 and which introduces new forms of interaction between citizens and European institutions.

Figure 3: eParticipation in EU legislation and policy, 2000-2008



The European eParticipation strategy in terms of EU institutional and inter-institutional implementation is embedded in the concepts of good governance, communication and transparency. ICT-enhanced citizen participation emerged as a priority for citizen engagement in late 2006, whereas before that citizen engagement was perceived in terms of accountability, legitimacy and good governance with limited references to eParticipation. This reflected the EU’s move to adopt a “listening” position vis à vis citizens’ preoccupations in order to attempt to confront the roots of the democratic deficit. In this endeavour, the EU has created eParticipation channels to enrich existing channels of representation, as well as create new ones, foster the transparency and legitimacy of European policy making and generate institutionalised opportunities for public debate on European Issues.

4.2. The European Commission and European Parliament

The European Parliament and the European Commission have acted against this backdrop by offering a range of online debates, chats and consultations, such as Debate Europe, Commission Consultations, EUTube, EUParl TV and Commissioners’ blogs. Extensive use of

social media indicated a turning point in creating public spheres, investing in youth deliberation and allowing EU citizens to voice their opinions or forge relationships with decision-makers. In addition, the benefits of eParticipation are exploited by European Institutions as a means to widen the communication channels with European citizens, render their policies transparent and provide a basis for an all-inclusive environment for citizen participation.

4.3. European agencies and Council Presidencies

While the European Commission and the European Parliament are the most active institutions in implementing eParticipation initiatives, as would be expected considering their mandate and power in policy making, other European Agencies seem to be less involved. This is despite the fact that, although they do not have direct legislative power, they still serve as focal points for connecting and involving relevant stakeholders in their specific domain. However, the centre for vocational training (CEDEFOP) is an exception through its creation of online virtual communities. Recent Council Presidencies also have not directly involved citizens in agenda shaping activities, but instead tended to inform the public through a variety of channels and tools, for example information provision and multimedia (France, 2008) or more dynamic eParticipation platforms (Slovenia, 2008). Moreover, European agency initiatives tend to be quite fragmented in their own institutional sphere, for example the citizen is not normally provided with an overview of eParticipation settings per thematic issue of interest.

4.4. European political parties

European Political parties extensively use ICT to effectively communicate their policies, their beliefs and activities, as well as engage the public in shaping their manifestos, although they generally focus their eParticipation initiatives around European elections. However, there is great variation in the eParticipation initiatives of the different parties. Some provide mainly information only, whilst others enable citizen input to reformulate positions or even formulate them from the outset and thus provide an increased feeling of involvement in the context of representative democracy. The common ground is, however, to widen their audience base.

4.5. Civil society and international organisations

Civil society does not in overall terms harness the benefits of eParticipation. Civil society can be seen as an alternative means of developing public policy in the pre-agenda or agenda setting stage. The most promising examples are derived from citizen journalism initiatives and micro blogging, as well as large and organised single purpose organisations. In general, civil society is envisaged as an external factor in the eParticipation framework (Smith, Macintosh, Millard 2009) notwithstanding its potential to use eParticipation for enhancing democracy, participation and citizenship. This conclusion is reaffirmed by the online lobbying, petitioning and vertical communication channels used to demonstrate the “public face” of social movements. Nevertheless, the number of eParticipation cases, as compared to the research basis of civil society is relatively small, indicating a shortage of online channels able to support the needs of the intrinsic or social rewards of participation. International organisations present more or less a similar picture, with the exception of dedicated forums (like the World Bank) and other purpose-specific eParticipation offerings such as the OECD.

4.6. Mass media

From a mass media perspective (largely newspaper, TV and radio), media-hosted eParticipation sites are primarily used to acquire grassroots opinion of issues of salience in national, regional and local contexts, whilst the European level is not well served. However at the national, regional and local levels, the increased contact with the public results in strengthened and more two-way relationships between the media and the public. Mass media is traditionally considered as the leitmotif of public spheres creation and enhancement, but is hampered at European level both by the relative lack of media as well as linguistic and cultural barriers. Although the mass media do have the potential to bypass the barriers to a unified European public space, most eParticipation initiatives at this level are limited to reporting the problems of European policies in national contexts.

4.7. New eParticipation tools

The use of new eParticipation tools such as user generated content (UGC) facilities, web 2.0 functionalities and social networking, have extended the eParticipation domain. At present these tools are primarily used for informing the public and allowing instant visualisation of policies. However, they are also starting to open up new means and processes to enhance mass participation. In this context, the study also examined platforms not currently practicing eParticipation but with the potential to contribute to new and multifaceted eParticipation initiatives. For example, selected Innovation Jams and Living Labs to establish the user-centric character of such platforms, as well as the mass collaboration that they can support. Using such tools, citizens can be empowered to influence the development of policies, visualise and rate peer suggestions and jointly contribute to improved governance processes. However, it is necessary to be cautious in attempting to transfer mass innovation platforms directly to eParticipation, as the methodological implementation can distort the underpinning democratic settings, whilst defined boundaries and frameworks must exist to delineate such initiatives. Argument visualisation techniques can similarly enhance deliberation quality, as they address the fundamental problem of abstracting contributions and presenting them in different rationales. On the other hand, it is clear that there is strong interest for such tools in the context of eParticipation and that progress is possible (Involve 2008).

5. eParticipation good practice

5.1. Characteristics of European eParticipation cases

The European eParticipation Study has examined good practices across Europe through the identification and analysis of a large number of case studies and initiatives. (Panopoulou et al 2009) The main focus of analysis is the European and trans-national level, although national, regional and local levels are also examined where relevant for European issues. The purpose has been not to label individual cases as 'good' or not, but to identify elements of good practice in terms of results, benefits, lessons learnt, etc.

The survey of eParticipation cases across Europe, however, looked at all levels and was able to identify 255 cases originating from 23 different countries. These cases have international, European, transnational, regional or local scope and are offered in 33 different languages. The overall survey indicates that there is a considerable number of eParticipation initiatives across the European continent, operating at different levels (see Figure 4) and offering different kinds of activities to the public but also to other stakeholders (see Figure 5). The majority of the identified cases provide information and deliberation facilities for various subjects. In addition, most cases target citizens and other stakeholders at local and national levels. However, it has not been possible to detect some aspects for all identified cases, such as their funding source and contact details.

Figure 4: eParticipation levels across Europe

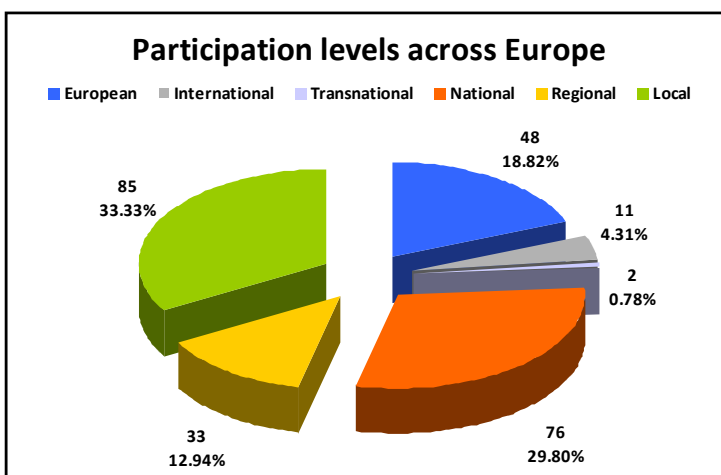
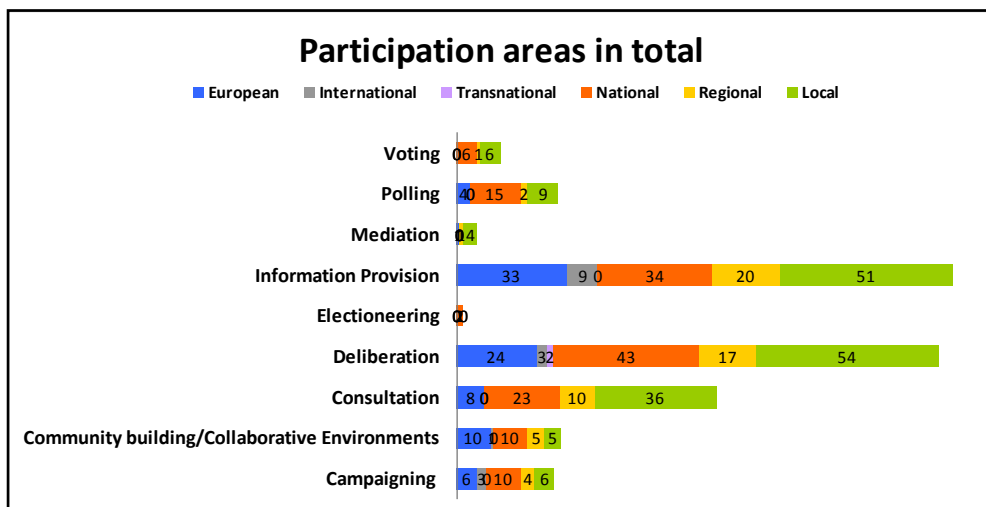


Figure 5: eParticipation areas



Considering eParticipation initiatives with a European scope, many of these have been recently launched both by different EU bodies and by other stakeholders. The survey indicated that the majority of these cases either offer information or provide deliberation and consultation facilities on a number of significant European issues. Given their European scope which transcends national borders, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of the cases are offered in more than one language with the most prominent being English, French and German. In fact, most of the initiatives stemming from the EU are offered in all EU official languages, although (and according to the questionnaire survey) not all of these languages display the same traffic (user visits and posts) online. However, taking the linguistic diversity of Europe into account, it can be assumed that the higher the number of languages used in a case, the wider the potential target group and the greater the possibilities for increased eParticipation.

In terms of eParticipation cases with an international scope, most of them are initiatives launched by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) that focus mainly on information provision, campaigning, deliberation, and community building / collaborative activities. At the transnational level (across the borders of a limited number of countries) it has only been possible to identify two eParticipation cases, both focusing on deliberation activities.

Figure 4 shows that most eParticipation activity takes place at the local and national levels. Again, deliberation, information provision and consultation are the most usual participatory activities offered online at these levels.

Overall, it is clear that certain kinds of activities are more frequent at specific levels. Figure 6 shows that at levels with a broader scope (European and international level) information provision cases are more common, while in levels with a narrower scope (local, regional, national level) consultation and deliberation activities are becoming more frequent. The clear challenge here is that the larger the geographic and population scale, the more difficult it is to use interactive, multi-way eParticipation tools and approaches.

In addition this survey of 255 eParticipation initiatives, the study also examined detailed information from 40 cases, 10 of which are at European or international level.

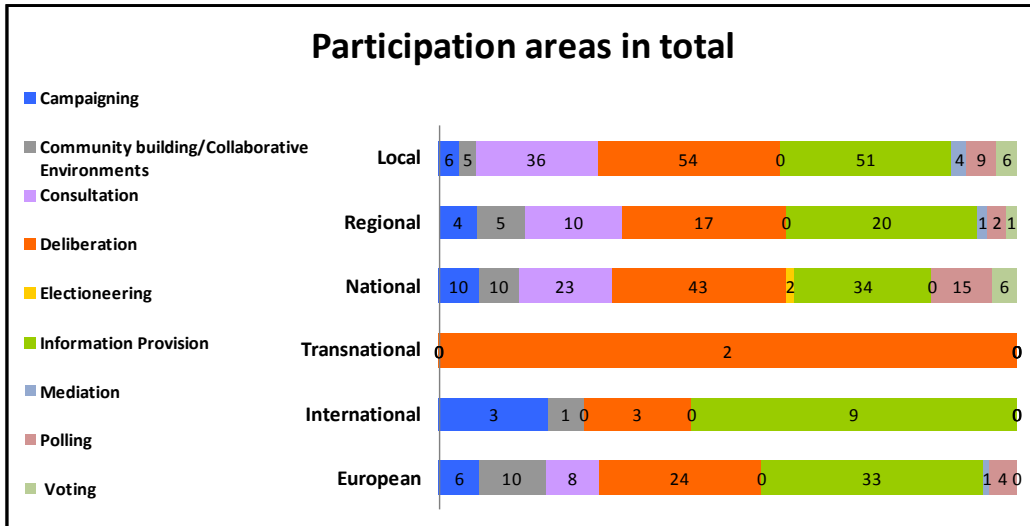
At the European and international levels most eParticipation cases tend to focus on communicating information about legal issues, crime and justice, and some also actively try to engage citizens in policy issues. However, none of the multinational cases delegate power of any kind to participants, although all of them have been launched based on concrete policy contexts and with specific objectives usually stemming from EU and other international priorities.

At the European and international level, governmental bodies (Agencies, Institutions, EC) or NGOs undertake the ownership and management roles of eParticipation initiatives, while at

the national and local levels it is more usual to allocate such responsibilities to consulting organisations with ICT expertise.

The main participants in all cases examined are usually individual citizens, whilst additionally government and politicians are much more involved at national, regional and local levels.

Figure 6: eParticipation areas per level



In the majority of the reported cases, the only channel used is the conventional internet channel through PC access. However, there are also some activities that manage to employ more channels and combine online and offline activities. Emerging technologies are more widely used at the national and local levels than at the European level. Similarly, at the national, regional, and local levels, and excluding eVoting cases where security features are by definition essential, case owners are more concerned with security and privacy than at the European and international level.

For cases that have been operating for some time or have been completed, it has also been possible to analyse the achievements and results of cases. Most cases have been able to engage a large number of participants. However, all case owners agree that they would like to see even more participation, both in numbers and in quality, but that they have a long way to go to achieve the full potential of their initiatives.

As regards beneficiaries, most cases focus on the individual citizen and on the case owners. NGOs, policy makers and European Commission officials, students and academic researchers have also been mentioned.

The most frequently mentioned benefit is information availability, better information exchange and stakeholders' accessibility to it, followed by greater accountability and transparency.

The main problems reported and lessons learnt refer to the need for higher participation by governmental officials, for evidence that participants' input is indeed taken into consideration and that it is at least acknowledged, and for case evaluation through user surveys and other customer-benefit approaches.

For European cases, the main problem is often that sometimes only a limited number of participants have the expertise and capacity to actually comprehend complex EU level policies and provide high-quality input.

Other issues have also arisen, such as the importance of easy and user-friendly access and of single access points, the need for quickly adopting emerging technologies and performing more off-line activities, and the need for more efforts promoting visibility. As regards sustainability, most initiatives at the European and international levels are well established and intend to continue in future. Most cases reported that there is high potential for transferability, even though there is limited evidence of such transference actually taking place.

5.2. Lessons for eParticipation design

One of the main lessons identified by the study is that more focus is needed on better eParticipation project design. A lot has been learned but is seldom applied, so there is too much re-learning of the same lessons and too much repetition of the same mistakes. There is a need for both implementation and research to be more explicit about overall project objectives and how components of an eParticipation process relate to them. This will allow project owners to verify that a proposed logic of intervention (for example using ICT) is reasonably strong, as well as to promote a common understanding of the aims of the intervention and uncover potential tensions with other actors' aims. It is important to design eParticipation processes and assess their impact based on as full an understanding as possible of the relevant external factors which may act as drivers or barriers. This involves asking the questions: how well does the project fit into its environment, and how well does the intervention logic actively embed the project into its environment?

A number of specific lessons are summarised in the following.

1. Processes must be open and transparent

The overall process and outcomes must be highly transparent and open. Most success seems to come when the expectations of participants are outlined from the beginning, including the purpose, the means, the processing of input, and the outcomes. Thus, objectives need to be clear from the outset, and, in particular, the participants themselves need to understand in a transparent way the procedure they need to use, otherwise their interest in participating will rapidly diminish. It is also important to make it clear who is accountable for what, and how redress is to be handled and who should act on the outcomes. In this way trust in the system can be increased. However, transparency and openness, although default positions, must take account of the need to protect the identity of vulnerable individuals in sensitive situations, or to assist 'whistle-blowers'. Similarly, it may sometimes be necessary to enable civil servants or politicians to examine policy alternatives in private before deciding which ones to support, as long as their arguments, rationale and interests are then made fully transparent.

2. eParticipation must be engaging

A major design problem is that most people don't particularly want to know about 'politics' or 'democracy', but they do care about many specific issues and they do want to be able to express their views about them, exchange views, as well as find out information. In order to promote participation, therefore, it is absolutely essential that the eParticipation process is entirely designed to maximise audience participation - branding, publicity and all participative elements must be incredibly engaging. (Involve, 2008) This is critical because, if the goal is to engage large numbers of people through eParticipation, the process used must extremely interesting and engaging if a critical mass of participants is to be achieved. Many large engagement processes struggle to engage sufficient people. Participant feedback showed that processes can feel too worthy or bureaucratic and therefore not necessarily an enjoyable way for citizens to spend their ever more limited free time. Those processes which have engaged millions have either been extremely easy or extremely appealing. However, they have tended to be oppositional and failed to support solutions. If processes are to be developed which are solution focussed they will be very hard to make as quick as an ePetition, for example. They must therefore be extremely engaging. If there are any barriers to entry the incentives to overcome these must be significant. (Involve, 2008)

3. Participation as a fundamental right

Participation must be seen as a fundamental right in a democracy which contributes to better policies and greater societal stability, and can be a safety valve for ordinary people in their everyday lives. However, for the latter to happen, it is essential that (e)participation efforts are acknowledged, that feedback is given where appropriate, and that evidence is provided on the impact of people's participation, even if this did not fundamentally change anything, although the reasons for this must be clear and transparent. Recognition is required and must be open and communicated, so that a participative culture is created and maintained.

4. Frame the debate to balance simplicity with nuance and tackle shouting and trivialisation
 Tools and procedures should be developed and made available to minimise problems of shouting, abuse and trivialisation in eParticipation which can also occur, given that the Internet is a highly effective tool both for organising and propagandising single issues. It is thus important to provide incentives and tools for citizens or their intermediaries, including civil servants, to accurately and fairly frame the debate, so that it balances simplicity and leverage, on the one hand, with nuance and the need to compromise with other issues on the other. It is important to avoid 'false polarisation', which often happens when single issues supporters do not listen to each other, but instead focus much more on genuine disagreement which recognises complexity and trade-off. However, intelligent and balanced framing does not mean 'spin' which only promotes the EU policy line, as participation should be open about alternatives and contradictory evidence. (There are other channels than participation for the EU institutions to promote their views). Any debate framing should thus remain neutral otherwise credibility will rapidly be lost.

5. Success criteria for citizen engagement
 The study has shown that there is a large number of success criteria for citizen engagement which European institutions should generally adhere to and help to improve:
 - Be clear about the purpose and what you expect eParticipation to do (and not do), and focus on real (e)participation needs at the outset of the process.
 - Overall processes and outcomes must be highly transparent, open and in most cases negotiable, as this helps build confidence.
 - High level (political) backing can be critical.
 - Use words and language people understand, and not just 'coded' information. For example, there may be cases where, in order to involve stakeholders in policy-making, providing policy drafts may not be enough but instead such drafts should be explained or commented in terms simpler than those used in European law.
 - Listen as well as ask and tell, including let people express their anger and frustration.
 - Timing – get participants involved early in the policy lifecycle.
 - Provide feedback on inputs, show how it is used so the citizen doesn't feel that their input is simply disappearing into a black hole ... if does not affect the outcome, explain why.
 - If inputs are ignored, cynicism breeds.
 - Before start, decide how to collect input, how to analyse it, how to use it, and make this clear to participants.
 - Directly address the needs/interest of participants, and involve them in this.
 - Use careful, independent, trustworthy moderation ...with transparent guidelines.
 - Clear, transparent, rules-based discourse and accountability may be more important than ICT to increase participation.
 - Different tools/processes (like ePolling, eVoting, eConsultation, ePetitioning) if part of the same policy process must not be disconnected.
 - Must take citizen inputs very seriously (whether they are asked to give them or they give them anyway), show how they are used, etc. A rationale needs to be provided for the final outcome or decision which specifically addresses participant inputs.
 - Provide independent monitoring where appropriate to ensure balance as well as to minimise mis-use and inappropriate online behaviour.
 - Always be wary of the digital divide, so do not assume that every view or need is captured.
 - Evaluate – including asking the participants!

6. Match technology and channels to the participation need
 Much greater understanding is required regarding which activities and levels of participation need which kinds of technology and which channels. It is clear that successful eParticipation initiatives are usually not purely virtual, but that the 'e' can often help sustain a 'live' and vital process. Multi-channel, including the human channel, are often the most effective. There is a need to match the habits and trends of citizen

engagement with technological choices. Right now eParticipation efforts are mostly supply-centric but this needs to be changed to much greater citizen-centric approaches. Some forms of eParticipation also require privacy-enhancing tools, not just to protect identity, but also to guarantee a space 'outside power' where alternative discourses can surface and flourish (e.g. minorities and vulnerable groups, non-traditional participants)

7. Quality of online environment

Pay close attention to the quality of the online environment, given that eParticipation is also a social experience in which dialogue itself can be a highly rewarding process in its own right, bringing intrinsic as well as instrumental benefits to participants. This can be enhanced by designing appropriate online environments for new initiatives, and respecting the norms of the existing environment in existing online spaces.

8. Content quality and presentation are important

In order to enhance citizen participation, content quality and presentation are important. Relevant and easy to use background information should underpin the online engagement process and be presented in a factual, focused and simple manner. Legislative proposals, policies and other documents are often presented in technical or legal jargon. To overcome this, for example, an agency could publish a summary recapping the main points clearly laying out how citizens can be affected and how the policy or legislative piece addresses a certain problem.

9. Prioritise feedback processing and visibility

For example, European Commission eParticipation tools, such as Interactive Policy Making and Consultations, should report in a more detailed manner on how the feedback acquired was taken into account across the legislative procedure. A report on the main findings and main concerns would help generate new knowledge. Similarly, deliberation-oriented initiatives, underpinned by the use of social media (such as EUTube, Debate Europe, etc) could summarise and underline the salient issues and concerns to citizens. This would serve both the “listening Commission” as well as help build the motivation of citizens to participate in the process.

10. Enable opinions to be expressed on the outcomes

Every citizen who participates in the debate or consultation should be given an opportunity to express their opinion on the final outcomes and options recommended. For example, if deliberation kits or online games are used as part of the process, citizens participating should, by right, be able to express a final opinion as part of the wider process. Voting, polling and petitioning must not be disconnected, isolated processes. According to Involve (2008) this is important because it:

- forces each person to become an active participant and think through how they wish to express their opinions
- ensures that the initiators of the process know what each person thinks through the data created, and what the level of consensus or disagreement actually is
- increases participant satisfaction and ownership as many enjoy the process of participation and feel a subsequent sense of ownership and interest in the final results
- facilitates connection to wider processes – it is clear that when this doesn't exist the process remains disconnected and has less appeal to participants, and also provides less value for the overall process.

6. eParticipation recommendations – focusing on the European level

In this final section, the findings of the European eParticipation Study are used, together with other relevant sources, to offer a set of recommendations. (For more details and background see Millard et al 2009) These are designed to take account of the current political situation in Europe and recognise that, although some are relatively modest and easy to implement, others are more radical and risky and perhaps not all are feasible in the short-term. However, those recommendations that fall in the latter category are proposed as realistic medium term

aspirations which would progress the cause of participation and democracy in Europe. A step change in priorities, structures and thinking is needed, and these recommendations are designed to enable this.

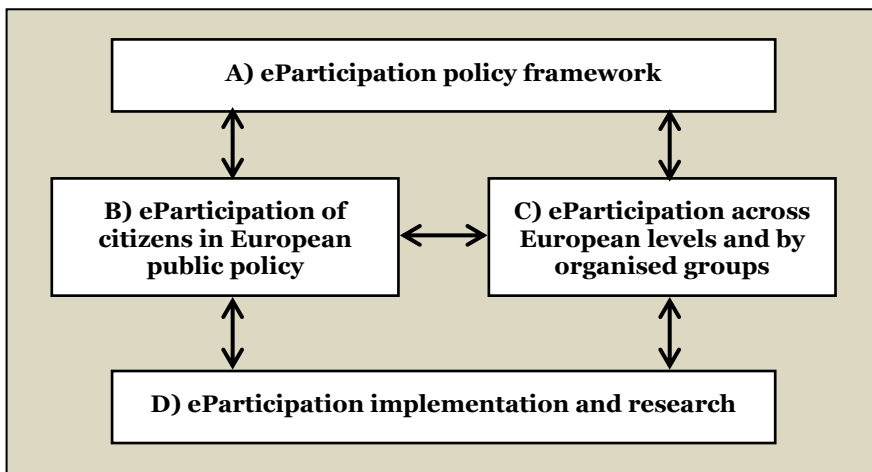
The current economic crisis, coupled with some disquiet about the workings of democracy in many European countries and particularly at the European level, call for some bold, imaginative thinking during a period when there is no doubt that both institutional arrangements and mindsets need to change. The opportunity provided by this crisis is too good to waste.

The recommendations attempt to specify what should and could be done mainly at European level, although many will also have implications for national, regional and local eParticipation. The primary audience addressed is policy makers and managers, although the recommendations are also relevant for others, including practitioners, consultants and researchers.

Given that the recommendations are focused on the European level, they are divided into four groups as depicted in Figure 7:

- A) eParticipation policy framework: designed to strengthen the overall European policy context for eParticipation, including its global role.
- B) eParticipation of citizens in European public policy: addresses the critical issue of how to better engage citizens as individuals, communities, and in informal and interest groups in European issues and public policy, including the challenge of developing a European public space.
- C) eParticipation across European levels and by organised groups: examines how eParticipation could support the networks of organised groups in the European decision- and policy-making process.
- D) eParticipation implementation and research: addresses the broad implementation and research needs of eParticipation, particularly in the European context (it is outwith the scope of this study to propose a detailed research agenda).

Figure 7: Four areas addressed by the recommendations



6.1. eParticipation policy framework

1. Mainstream eParticipation across Europe as part of a coordinated “open engagement policy”

Europe needs a coordinated open engagement policy incorporating eParticipation across all institutions which puts the interests of citizens and other legitimate interest groups at the centre, and provides clear simple structures and incentives to openly engage as many as possible in developing the European project. Whereas (e)participation in its narrow definition is an activity, engagement also implies a wider set of attitudes and relationships between government and citizens resting ultimately on citizen ownership, partnership, inclusion and empowerment together with the institutional arrangements, cultures and mindsets which support this.

- Put the interests of citizens first in engagement and participation policies and embed eParticipation into these.
- Take one step back and clarify and agree the overall aims and impacts expected. For example, the aim to shift the balance of power and responsibility between institutions, organised groups and citizens in a measured manner in line with the five principles of the 2001 European Governance White Paper: openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.
- Link to and build on relevant provisions in the Lisbon Treaty, specifically on democratic equality, participative democracy and representative democracy.
- Need clear, simple structures and specify the roles, competencies and expectations of stakeholders.
- Requires financial commitment as participation and engagement are just as important as services or other functions. This will help to embed the European values articulated in the 2001 Governance White Paper and the Lisbon Treaty. Participation and engagement can indeed be said to be the necessary “services” for 21st Century Europe.
- Establish a European Centre of Excellence for eParticipation and eEngagement, perhaps as a hub of existing networks.

2. Embed eParticipation and eEngagement into Europe’s overarching policy architecture

eParticipation and eEngagement, in addition to being coordinated between different institutions, also need to be firmly embedded into Europe’s wider policy architecture.

- eParticipation and eEngagement should become prominent in the successors to Lisbon 2000 and i2010 as well as the i2010 eGovernment Action Plan.
- They must be integrally woven into and support other major European policies, such as democracy, social inclusion, cohesion, sustainability, community, economic development, plural society, citizenship, wellbeing, global relations, human rights, rule of law and legislation, separation of powers, etc.
- Work closely with the Council of Europe on the “Recommendations for Electronic Democracy” (2009)

3. Use Europe’s eParticipation approach to influence and learn from other global actors

Europe needs to strengthen and exploit its potential global leadership role in eParticipation both to influence and learn from other global actors.

- Linking to global values such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, relations between states, the Millennium Development Goals, etc.
- For example vis à vis the OECD, UN, World Bank, as well as individual countries.

6.2. eParticipation of citizens in European public policy

4. Launch a coordinated cross-institutional strategy to build an integrated European public space

A long-term cross-institutional and coordinated strategy is needed across all European Union institutions to build an integrated European public space, which should be part of the recommended “open engagement policy”.

- Need clear objectives, target groups and envisaged outcomes
- Need strategy to identify, overcome or by-pass barriers, such as language, legal or regulatory obstacles, different notions of citizenship, etc.
- Create and safeguard a European public space composed of different enclaves/nodes in which different kinds of learning and problem-solving can thrive but with the aim of linking rather than unifying these.
- Build on existing initiatives like Commissioner Wallström’s Plan D work, PreLex since 2001 (monitoring of the decision-making process between institutions), etc.

5. Establish a cross institutional coordinated “Service for Public Engagement”

The overall goal is to make institutions citizen-centric, as opposed to institutional-centric, open, transparent, inclusive, accountable, and responsible directly to citizens in a coordinated

and largely standardised way. The service would make it easier for citizens who mainly do not care about the EU structures or the mechanisms of engagement and participation. People do not want to understand or grapple with governance institutional structures or processes, but they often do want to be involved in discussing and solving policy issues.

- Provide a single access point or one-stop-shop, for most if not all citizen engagement with European institutions, including a single approach, mechanisms and tools. The ‘architecture’ of participation and eParticipation seen from the perspective of Europeans needs to be made much more easy and standardised, as well as flexible and open-ended.
- Agree common standards, codes of conduct and behaviour, charters, quality guidelines, decision-aids, agreed structures and rules for debate, policy input, etc.
- Develop good practice guidelines which are easily accessible and consolidated, perhaps inspired by those developed by the Council of Europe (2009), but more concrete and operational.
- Appoint an internal cross-institutional “Champion” or “Office of Public Engagement” with real power and influence to help coordinate policies and strategies, share good practice and build institutional expertise and memory.
- Operate an effective external communication and awareness raising strategy.
- Build on existing initiatives such as the Commission’s minimum standards for consultation, but go much further and seek to extend coordination between institutions.

6. Help establish or support an independent, neutral trusted third party service for eParticipation

There are a number of functions which the European institutions cannot, or should not, perform for themselves in order to promote eParticipation and eEngagement. An independent, neutral trusted third party service, not controlled by the European institutions, should be identified or set up in cooperation with other stakeholders, for example to:

- Act as a ‘champion’ and ‘watchdog’ for the European citizen in relation to participation and engagement in European affairs.
- Act as a sort of ‘ombudsman’ for citizens vis à vis the European institutions.
- Agree and publicise a citizen charter of rights and responsibilities for citizens in public engagement, building on what is there already (such as relevant provisions in the Lisbon Treaty), and open these to debate and amendment by citizens.
- Identify and implement frameworks for real motivation, incentives and rewards for citizen participation.
- Continuously monitor the potential risks of participation and inform citizens about these, as well as offer possible solutions and assistance
- Provide both pro-active and passive moderation, as well as help frame debates in a neutral and balanced way, as needed.
- Monitor and uphold citizens’ privacy and data protection rights vis à vis the European institutions and other interests.

7. Cooperate with other public, private and civil actors to support the European public space

It is not possible for the EU institutions to create a European public space in isolation. A large number of non-EU and non-government institutions are successfully exploiting eParticipation, including the private sector, many civil sector organisations like NGOs, as well as traditional media players.

- The EU institutions should, much more than at present, partner with and learn from these organisations where it makes sense to do so. Go to where citizens already are, including social networking sites, media, civil society organisations, including engaging younger people.
- Ensure linkage to local, regional and national contexts.

8. Unleash the empowering potential of easy to use Public Sector Information

Transparency and the availability of all Public Sector Information (PSI) for re-use in machine-readable format should be the standard default position. This is already happening for

commercial purposes but should now also be extended to re-use by citizens and the civil sector for public policy or other legitimate purposes.

- Provide public access to machine-readable datasets, normally in aggregated form so that individuals cannot be identified.
- Respect commercial, private and citizen data and identities according to legal requirements and existing regulations.
- Ensure that European officials and political representatives retain a confidential space for discussion and advice at the earliest stages of pre-agenda setting thereby not undermining creative and new thinking, but ensure that discussion and advice which specifically form the basis for agenda-setting or policy proposals are made transparent.

9. Build citizen participation from the bottom

This study has shown that most citizens are interested primarily in single specific issues which have a direct impact/influence on their own lives where they live, whilst some are also interested in such issues which have wider geographic relevance like climate change, migration, crime, economic conditions, etc. These interests should be used to build citizen participation in a European public space from the bottom.

- Show how local debates have wider European relevance and provide tools and mechanisms for hooking them together in a two-way process that both provides context for a local debate as well as concrete substance for the wider debate. Localities can, also, in this way learn from each other.
- Specific topic hooks should be used to extend the participation process and encourage a natural process of widening out to broader multi-issues many of which will have European resonance.
- Harness informal social networks, both online and off, in this process.

10. Listen to and exploit the buzz

It is imperative that the European institutions listen to the everyday needs and wishes of citizens, in order to tune EU initiatives to citizen initiatives. In addition to directly engaging citizens, a powerful approach is to listen to the buzz on electronic media of all types across Europe, looking at the common issues and opinions, identifying European relevance, using material directly as evidence or test beds for developing European policy, etc.

- Use automatic internet crawlers, etc.
- Look for the relevance of the buzz to European issues and aggregate up to feed into the work of the European institutions, as well as how European issues can be used to legitimately support national and sub-national issues by disaggregating down.
- Limit this to open and public online activity and debate, and only listen to private debate with permission and where this is in the European public interest, thus respecting and protecting privacy and data.
- Build on what is already happening, such as newspaper monitoring by the European Parliament and the Commission proposal to set up a system to monitor internet debate.

11. Take citizen input very seriously – at least as seriously as other inputs

A mindset change amongst many in European institutions is needed to take citizen input very seriously – at least as seriously as other inputs. This is about thinking differently, getting citizens involved as early in the process as possible, and being prepared to assist the shift of power between institutions, organised groups, citizens, communities and other actors, and focusing on how this can be done.

- Recognise both that participatory democracy matters and that citizen and grass roots movements matter to participatory democracy and thus to eParticipation.
- Ensure the needs of the stakeholders involved are directly addressed, and enable participants to adopt different roles.

12. Actively support participatory, digital and political literacy

Ultimately, it is probably not possible to get around the problem of ‘elites’ which can dominate discourse and the political sphere given that this has always been the case historically. The introduction of ICT will not change this, although this study has shown that, if the technology

is applied with care, it may in some cases mitigate the problem. It is also important to strongly support the participatory, digital and political literacy of those currently excluded.

- Encourage, design and support skills acquisition and education/training in participatory, digital and political literacy.
- Ensure ICT channels complement non-ICT channels and invest in new interfaces which are more intuitive and better embedded in everyday activities.
- Support the emergence of self-organising mechanisms in particular where they support key European values and goals
- Build upon what is already happening, such as the CIPAST training package for participation.

6.3. eParticipation across European levels and by organised groups

13. Open up the European decision-making network to new groups and inputs

Significant benefits to the quality and legitimacy of policy making at European level can be achieved by opening up the European decision-making network to new groups and inputs. A (new) balance and complementarity between the internal and the external is needed, as it is clear that there is more talent, expertise and sometimes also legitimacy, outside European institutions than inside them.

- The design of eParticipation processes should be tailored to the functional differentiation of EU policy-making, recognising that different sectors of policy-making have different modes of governance and therefore require different types of input from citizens, interest groups, private interests, and other stakeholders.
- Create Europe-wide networks of interest groups, think tanks and consultancies.
- Consider how to integrate input from different channels and modes of participation.
- Ensure a diversity of learning environments connected to European policy-making
- Build on what is already happening, such as SINAPSE (a Commission tool for engaging experts in policy-making) and CONECCS (a database of self-appointed civil society representatives and now a register of European interests set-up by the Commission)

14. Make the European policy-building network more effective, open and transparent

In order to open up the European policy-building network to new groups and inputs, it both has to be more effective in using inputs and also more open and transparent so that new groups are able to participate.

- create networks within the European institutions to coordinate public consultation across sectors and sustain an 'institutional memory'
- Connectivity in the European public sphere can be improved by example using social tagging and book-marking, and Web 2.0 tools.
- Focus on tools that would render existing formalised actors (so-called strong-publics) of policy networks more transparent and accessible.
- Improve the functioning of the networking system for example through the use of 'clearing houses' (such as in the Aarhus Convention Clearing House for Environmental Information Management).
- Provide frameworks of incentives and support where appropriate.
- Link to and build on PreLex since 2001 (Monitoring of the decision-making process between institutions)

15. Support and provide incentives for European Parliamentarians to engage in eParticipation

It is clear that parliamentarians and their work can benefit greatly from the use of eParticipation tools, but this cannot be forced or encouraged artificially.

- The use of ICT should be seen in the wider context of the work of parliamentarians and linked to their roles, duties and preferences, as well to other (including non-ICT) channels for participation.
- The benefits of eParticipation must be clearly seen and easily obtained.

- Frameworks of incentives and support should be designed specifically for parliamentarians.
- For example, top level civil servants should support parliamentarians getting involved in eParticipation outreach, online chats, etc.
- Encourage Parliamentarian working groups for political innovation, including the use of eParticipation and eEngagement tools between rather than only during elections.

16. Start with national or sub-national levels of eParticipation where it is appropriate

The idea of a European public sphere which is unified is a chimera since national and sub-national public spheres will continue to be much more important, especially given that most of the media, stakeholder groups and the power are here. Although there is a need for more European eParticipation, this will often need to take place in a national context, which could then be built to the European level for those citizens and stakeholders interested in this.

- It may be more appropriate, for example, to begin with 27 separate national spheres in order to build momentum, and only then attempt to connect the outputs of discussion processes
- Build on existing successful examples like the European Citizens' Consultation or the "meeting of minds" initiative on neuro-science.

17. Identify and support existing cross-border communities and interest groups

The European institutions should help to nurture, sustain, learn from and partner (where appropriate) these, for example by providing them with resources, tools, guidelines, and other forms of support.

- Growth and development need to come naturally, so the role of the European institutions is to provide opportunities, incentives and support, rather than pre-designed schemes or attempting to take them over.
- Identify and assist other potential initiatives which could promote debate and consultation spilling across borders, including at local level, for example by providing frameworks of incentives and support.

18. Facilitate public policy links across levels and between sectors

One of the tasks which EU institutions could usefully perform is to use ICT tools to help facilitate public policy links between local, regional, national and European levels in both directions, as well as links at a given level across Member States, and also links to and between different sectors across Europe,

- There could be a strong EU role to monitor the buzz at different levels as well as at the same level in different countries, and link them together through a service to aggregate, compare, contrast, match and disaggregate as appropriate.
- Identify local issues and debates which may be local but which are similar or could be useful elsewhere, as well as those which have European level relevance.
- Provide tools and mechanisms for hooking these issues and debates together including semantic support in terms of language, culture, legal systems, etc.
- Learning and cooperation between levels and across sectors should be promoted.
- Provide frameworks of incentives and support where appropriate.

19. Strengthen professional communities at European level

Networks of organised professional groups should be encouraged to use online debate and knowledge exchange tools at the European level (or between groups of countries) much more than they do at present.

- eRule or eRegulation-making should be more widely exploited in Europe, adapted to the European situation.
- For example by employing user-controlled wiki systems that allow everyone in the group to join the discussion and contribute.
- Provide frameworks of incentives and support where appropriate, as well as appropriate tools and guidelines.
- Again, build on what is already happening, much of which takes place through the "Your Voice in Europe" umbrella, including the Interactive Policy Making tool, the European Business Test Panels, SINAPSE and CONECCS.

6.4. eParticipation implementation and research

20. Build a coordinated cross-institutional eParticipation implementation and research strategy

A medium-term cross-institutional and coordinated strategy is needed across all European Union institutions to support eParticipation and research both for European level initiatives and how the EU can support national, sub-national and stakeholder initiatives. This should be designed to reduce duplication and to be part of the recommended “Open Engagement Policy” and within the purview of the proposed “Service for Public Engagement”.

- EU institutions and staff should be more directly involved in the eParticipation initiatives they sponsor. This is already being done in some countries (like the UK) where civil servants participate as advisers and experts rather than decision-takers when taking part in civil or commercial networks.
- Experiment with different types of research projects, for example longitudinal approach, small-scale comparative action research.
- Ensure at least low-level financial support is available to innovators on the periphery and is not monopolised by the major research centres.
- Better research is needed into the roles and impacts of different actors and user situations in eParticipation.

21. Scale up, roll-out and learn from exceptional initiatives

Many exceptional initiatives with good impact which satisfy the needs of European eParticipation should be more widely rolled-out, for example locally or nationally, and including by actors other than the EU, by civil groups or by citizens themselves. Such initiatives, however, typically suffer from limited visibility and face serious funding problems.

- The EU should devise mechanisms for identifying and supporting such exceptional initiatives which have widespread potential, and to sustain or transfer them to new contexts.
- It is important to continue to focus on good practice, transferring good ideas and tools, knowledge sharing and transfer, a charter or checklist of norms and standards, etc., for example, through an upgraded ePractice.eu service or an adapted CIP with simplified submission rules, faster payments, etc., so that the administrative burden is as low as it can be consistent with upholding quality and financial probity. It is also essential to enable users to find the knowledge they need more quickly and accurately by adding an intelligent filter.
- Promote the visibility of eParticipation initiatives through, for example, awareness raising activities and improved communication strategies.

22. Build on-going evaluation into all initiatives

Adequate evaluation of eParticipation initiatives is generally poor or nonexistent, resulting in much wasted effort and resource. Much more rigorous evaluation and cost-benefit analysis is needed built into all implementation and research initiatives as a standard component using a comparable approach, and which can lead to an identification and understanding of what works and what doesn't. Such a culture of evaluation and feedback must become routine, however it is important to keep it simple to understand and implement as well as keeping it relatively standard for ease of comparison.

- In order to exploit the full potential of ICT in participation, EU eParticipation initiatives should routinely collect data on their own processes, participants and results.
- Every eParticipation initiative should include a well designed and laid out evaluation scheme as part of its operation. Even more important would be using a common evaluation strategy for all EU initiatives, so that results are comparable. All project and case owners should be strongly encouraged to keep records of what happens, monitor as go along, and undertake proper evaluation.

23. Apply the principles of good eParticipation design within an on-going learning framework

More focus is needed on better eParticipation project design. A lot has been learned but is seldom applied, so there is too much re-learning of the same lessons and too much repetition of the same mistakes, for example:

- Overall processes and outcomes must be highly transparent, open and in most cases negotiable.
- Make it clear who is accountable for what.
- Ensure that eParticipation efforts and inputs are acknowledged and used.
- Ensure that feedback is given where appropriate.
- Ensure that evidence is provided on the impact of people's participation.
- Provide independent monitoring where appropriate to ensure balance as well as to minimise mis-use and inappropriate online behaviour.

24. Develop multi-channel solutions

In a context where at least 30% of Europeans will not be online for the foreseeable future, where ICT is still in its infancy as regards participation, and where ICT is unlikely ever to meet all the needs of participation (especially those related to its social and community experience, and the needs for considered long term and highly nuanced debate), multi-channel solutions are highly desirable.

- eParticipation rarely stands alone. Both implementation and research should focus on why and how switching between channels occurs.
- The role of intermediaries needs to be better understood and encouraged where appropriate.
- eParticipation can be and often needs to be combined with traditional channels like meetings, personal consultations, mass media, the use of the telephone and mass mailings, etc.
- Alternative e-channels like digital TV, kiosks, mobile phones could also be exploited especially for enhancing the participation of specific target groups.

25. Experiment with mass-collaboration platforms, opinion markets and other new tools

New ICT tools are already being deployed in the private sector, many are currently being researched, and some are being piloted in the public sphere. Many of these promise new forms and new scales of eParticipation, but also potentially new challenges and dangers.

- Given the importance of eParticipation to Europe's future, it is essential to experiment with these new tools to support European policy making and democracy, also because of the leadership and economic advantages this will bring.
- EU institutions should focus energy on experimenting and rolling out new Web 2.0 and web 3.0 tools such as social networking; mass collaboration platforms; bidding, opinion, decision and prediction markets; innovation jams; tools for aggregating and summarising arguments and discussion trends; tools for tracking and tracking links between decisions and policy outcomes; the use of multi-lingual and semantic interoperability; policy modelling and visualisation techniques; etc.

26. Focus research and implementation on increasing trust through data protection, identity management and security

Identity management, data privacy and security are the *sine qua non* of successful eParticipation, especially in the context of Web 2.0 personalised tools and social networking and the highly interactive and participative processes involved.

- Well functioning and ubiquitous federated and interoperable identity and/or authentication systems are vital.
- New approaches to trust are needed to ensure eParticipation is successful, not just for data protection but also for example, through transparency, openness, a trust which goes between all stakeholders, reducing the cultural and legal barriers, access to independent support and monitoring, etc.

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