Introducing eParticipation

DEMO-net booklet series, no. 1

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Abstract: This report provides an introduction to electronic participation (eParticipation). More specifically, it outlines a definition of eParticipation, its main stakeholders, its focus areas, the tools that support it and the barriers that impede its progress. It further presents three eParticipation case studies and key research findings. Finally, it supplies an overview of DEMO-net, the network of excellence funded by the European Commission to support eParticipation.

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Executive Summary

At present, there are concerns across Europe about the disconnection between political representatives and represented citizens. The causes include the relative decline in the power of political institutions, the emergence of a less ideological, more consensual form of politics and the development of a more individualist, consumerist culture. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that citizens feel insufficiently involved in the democratic processes.

In this context, electronic participation (eParticipation) entails an ongoing alliance between various sectors and levels of society and governance, collaborating experimentally to work out new ways of refreshing the representative relationship. eParticipation describes efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another, and with their elected representatives and governments, using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Thus, eParticipation can satisfy both the citizens' need for being both heard and involved in the democratic process, and governments' need to devise new mechanisms for promoting and encouraging public consultation.

In working towards this goal, the role of the various eParticipation stakeholders is crucial. These include elected representatives, the government/executives, political parties, NGO’s, citizen groups, academia, researchers and industry, amongst others.

Understanding eParticipation involves the consideration of many different issues. Levels of participation can be used as a starting point. These can be classified as: provision of information; top-down engagement and ground up empowerment.

eParticipation can further be classified by its focus area - from simple information provision to mediation, from consultation and campaigning to voting. There are a variety of tools and applications that enable eParticipation, such as chat rooms, discussion fora, quick polls, surveys, online surgeries and ePanels. At the same time, there are barriers that impede its progress; here characterised as political-strategic, organisational and legal, value definition, social, technological and deployment barriers.

Three case studies (from France, the UK and Germany) are presented in order to illustrate the implementation of eParticipation in different participation scenarios across Europe.

A recent survey indicates the current state of eParticipation research globally. The results suggest that deliberation and consultation are the most common eParticipation research activities. The global survey also delineates current trends in the study of eParticipation, and the academic disciplines involved.

This report was prepared by DEMO-net, the network of excellence in eParticipation funded by the European Commission under the 6th Framework Programme. DEMO-net’s objectives are outlined together with sources for further information.

The report is the first of a series of booklets aimed at presenting the eParticipation results emerging from DEMO-net to various stakeholders.
1 Introduction

The objective of this booklet is to provide an overview of eParticipation, which enables broader and more informed participation in the democratic process through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

The report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 describes the state of representative democracy across the European continent and its relation to eParticipation. Concerns regarding the disconnection between political representatives and represented citizens are described, along with the most important causes. Chapter 2 also discusses the role of eParticipation in achieving more active public involvement and promoting public consultation. Finally, the role ICT in promoting a more meaningful, accessible and trustworthy democratic representation is described.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of eParticipation. More specifically, section 3.1 presents the network’s definition of eParticipation and section 3.2 outlines its stakeholders.

Chapter 4 presents important concepts for understanding eParticipation. Section 4.1 describes two approaches to understanding participation levels. Section 4.2 outlines eParticipation areas, and section 4.3 identifies the tools and technologies that enable eParticipation. Finally, section 4.4 discusses the barriers to eParticipation.

In Chapter 5, three examples from France, Germany and the UK are presented in order to illustrate the application of eParticipation in practice.

Chapter 6 provides a brief discussion of the results of a survey on eParticipation research.

Chapter 7 provides an overview of the DEMO-net project. After the project overview, details for communicating with DEMO-net are presented.

Chapter 8 presents the report’s conclusions.
2 The state of representative democracy across Europe and the role of eParticipation

Whereas in the nineteenth century democracy was regarded as a rather subversive, oppositional force, threatening the stability of long-established autocratic regimes, in the twenty-first century an unprecedented number of European states claim proudly to adhere to the principles of representative democracy. On the surface, at least, democracy is alive and well in Europe. But beneath the surface there are some serious concerns about the disconnection between political representatives and represented citizens.

A number of causes are often cited to explain the problematic relationship at the heart of representative democracy: the relative decline in the power of political institutions (contemporary government, as is often said, is too small to control big events, too big to control small ones); the emergence of a less ideological, more consensual form of politics, meaning that political disputes are less engaging and their outcomes less momentous than they used to be; and the development of a more individualist, consumerist culture, which has eroded collective political identities – or what political scientists call the ‘salience’ of political issues in most people’s lives. And there is no doubt that these are real causes that help explain citizens’ disengagement. But might not one, important driver of decline be the failure of our representative system to forge meaningful connections between politicians and citizens – to make people feel properly represented?

There is now abundant survey and qualitative evidence to suggest that citizens feel insufficiently involved, listened to and respected by current structures and processes of political representation. They do not want to abandon existing institutions, such as parliaments, councils, parties and policy consultations, but they want to update them, often looking towards digital technologies, such as the internet, mobile phones and digital TV, as ways of creating a more interactive representative relationship. One of DEMO-net’s research objectives is to explore, extensively and critically, the numerous projects which now exist with the aim of making such e-democratic participation a reality.

Paying more attention to the communicative element of representation is not an easy task for policy-makers or citizens, for it goes against deep-seated ways of understanding representation. E-participatory forms of political communication cannot be left to the enthusiasm of grass-roots advocates, the inventiveness of technophiles or the imagination of visionary policy-makers. eParticipation entails an ongoing alliance between various sectors and levels of society and governance, collaborating experimentally to work out new ways of refreshing the representative relationship.

What might eParticipation achieve? From the citizens’ perspective, there is a strong demand to be heard. Government generally interprets this as meaning that they want to be consulted. But traditional government-run consultations have not gone far enough. ‘Consulting the public’ tends to mean inviting them to respond to pre-established policy agendas, when the public want to be engaged in a two-way conversation in which the public and representatives steer the content between them. On an everyday level, the most common act of political participation is talking about politics. According to the most recent Oxford Internet Survey, most people (sixty-one per cent) in Britain (we do not expect this to be different in other European countries) say that they frequently (twenty-two per cent) or every so often (thirty-nine per cent) discuss politics with friends or family. But very few of these political talkers ever have a discussion with the people they
elect to represent their interests and preferences. It is as if there are two democracies: one operating informally and conversationally in homes, workplaces, pubs and streets, and another deliberating on behalf of everyone else in parliaments, councils and government departments. There is remarkably little interaction or translation between these two discourses. Representatives need to develop ways of joining these conversations up. As well as leading and reflecting public opinion, contemporary politicians need to be skilled facilitators, capable of recognising, encouraging and summarising the diverse and disparate voices of the increasingly confident and articulate public.

From the perspective of governments – local, national and supranational – there is a need to devise new mechanisms for promoting and encouraging public consultation; mediating between the vast number of active social networks and the official institutions of governance; and in accounting for themselves when they fail to act in line with public opinion. Alongside established polling and survey techniques, many governments are now making use of new democratic procedures, such as citizens’ juries, standing citizens’ panels, online consultations, electronically facilitated open-space events and town-hall meetings. Modern government is, of necessity, a large, remote and faceless machine. A key challenge for eParticipation is to humanise governance, representing it to people, and people to it, in humane and accessible terms.

How can digital technologies play a part in realising the democratic objectives that both governments and citizens seem to be trying to achieve? Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are well positioned to facilitate the kind of close, conversational relationship that could make democratic representation more meaningful, accessible and trusted. This must certainly amount to more than mere opportunities to send emails to MPs, watch webcasts of council meetings and vote online. Making it easier, quicker, cheaper, gee-whizzier to do all the things that have made traditional politics dull and uninviting in the past, amounts to institutional preservation, rather than democratic transformation. Beyond such replicating practices, digital technologies do have a potentially transformative democratic potential. For, with the rise of interactive media, the equation between communication and transmission is no longer defensible as the best or only way of serving the public interest. The interactive features of digital ICT open up unprecedented opportunities for more inclusive public engagement in the deliberation of policy issues. Liu and Shrum define interactivity as ‘the degree to which two or more communication parties can act on each other, on the communication medium, and on the messages, and the degree to which such influences are synchronised’ (Liu and Shrum, 2002).

A significant part of our work within the DEMO-net project is to understand the technical, cultural and political consequences of attempting to make political communication more interactive. Such renewed relationships will not be without their costs: in time, money and organisational disruption. It is not our purpose as researchers to ‘sell’ eParticipation, but to examine it critically and constructively, with a view to being able to offer the best possible advice to policy-makers and practitioners at every level. To this end, we are eager to work across disciplines, sectors and cultures to ensure that the understanding emerging from our work is disseminated and debated as widely as possible.
3 An overview of eParticipation

This chapter provides a working definition of eParticipation as well as the main stakeholders.

3.1 What is eParticipation?

In the DEMO-net project we believe that eParticipation should include all forms of digital engagement ranging from top-down government initiatives to bottom-up community initiatives. Therefore a working definition of eParticipation is:

“eParticipation describes efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling:

- citizens to connect with one another and

- with their elected representatives and governments

using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).”

Over the years numerous terms have been used to describe related domains including digital democracy, eVoting and eDemocracy.

eDemocracy is a term that has been used widely, but with differing interpretations. Simply, it can be described as the use of ICT to support the democratic decision-making processes. In some countries eDemocracy has become synonymous with eVoting, however voting is not the only mechanism whereby citizens can influence democratic decision making. In August 2002 the UK government issued a consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy (UK Cabinet Office, 2002). This consultation document argued that eDemocracy could be divided into two distinct areas – one addressing e-participation and the other addressing eVoting. In the case of the latter the paper argued that eVoting should be viewed as a technological problem. In the case of the former, the document set out the possibilities for greater opportunity for consultation and dialogue between government and citizens.

eDemocracy, according to Macintosh (2004) is concerned with:

the use of information and communication technologies to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes and strengthen representative democracy. The principal ICT mechanism is the internet accessed through an increasing variety of channels, including PCs, both in the home and in public locations, mobile phones, and interactive digital TV. The democratic decision making processes can be divided into two main categories: one addressing the electoral process, including e-voting, and the other addressing citizen e-participation in democratic decision-making.

On the other hand, ‘digital democracy’ has been defined as (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000) as:
a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC\(^1\) instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional ‘analogue’ political practices. (p1)

### 3.2 Who should be involved?

The main stakeholders in eParticipation include:

1. **Elected Representatives**: those elected through legally binding elections to represent citizens’ interests, in for example: the European Parliament, national parliaments, regional and local councils, etc.

2. **The government/executive**: those officials and representatives acting on behalf of the government in power.

3. **Political parties**: those groups acting as centres for political interests

4. **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO’s) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO’s)**: (usually) democratic entities promoting particular goals, having no affiliation with governments or industry.

5. **Citizen Groups** protecting common interests or pursuing common goals - including lay Stakeholders (unpaid citizens with a deep interest in a public concern who are willing to represent others with similar concerns).

6. **Academia and Research**: besides academics and researchers this group also includes think tanks.

7. **Industry**: private sector private sector companies, agencies and institutions involved in the use or provision of eParticipation tools and services.

8. **Other diverse stakeholders** including mass communication media and quasi non-governmental organisations (QUANGOs).

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\(^{1}\) These terms were expanded earlier in the reference as Information and Communication Technology and Computer-Mediated Communication
4 Understanding eParticipation

This chapter introduces the main concepts underpinning eParticipation. More specifically, it outlines eParticipation approaches, areas, tools and barriers.

More information on eParticipation areas can be found at Deliverable D41 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D41, 2006).

More information on eParticipation tools and technologies can be found at Deliverables D51 and D52 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D51, 2006; DEMO-net D52, 2006).

More information on eParticipation barriers can be found at Deliverable D11 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D11, 2006).

4.1 Level of Participation

According to the OECD (2001) there are three levels of participation: Information, Consultation and Active Participation. *Information* is an one-way channel that informs citizens about a variety of resources available, *consultation* is a limited two-way channel while *active participation* is an enhanced two-way channel where citizens have influence over policy formulation.

Tambouris et al. (2007), based on work by IAP2 (http://www.iap2.org), define the levels of electronic participation as: eInform, eConsult, eInvolve, eCollaborate and eEmpower. Here *eInforming* concerns the one-way online channel that provides citizens with policy and civic information; *eConsulting* is a limited two-way channel that has the objective of collecting public feedback and alternatives; *eInvolving* is about working online with the public to ensure that public concerns are understood and taken into consideration; *eCollaborating* is an enhanced two-way channel between citizens and government where citizens actively participate in the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions and, finally, *eEmpowerment* facilitates the transfer of influence, control and policy making to the public.

4.2 eParticipation Areas

In this section we outline specific areas of citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic process through the use of ICT. These include:

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<tr>
<th>Information Provision</th>
<th>ICT to structure, represent and manage information in participation contexts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community building / Collaborative Environments</td>
<td>ICT to support individuals come together to form communities, to progress shared agendas and to shape and empower such communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>ICT in official initiatives by public or private agencies to allow stakeholders to contribute their opinion, either privately or publicly, on specific issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campaigning</td>
<td>ICT in protest, lobbying, petitioning and other forms of</td>
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</table>
collective action (except of election campaigns, see electioneering as participation area)

| Electioneering | ICT to support politicians, political parties and lobbyists in the context of election campaigns |
| Deliberation   | ICT to support virtual, small and large-group discussions, allowing reflection and consideration of issues |
| Discourse      | ICT to support analysis and representation of discourse |
| Mediation      | ICT to resolve disputes or conflicts in an online context |
| Spatial planning | ICT in urban planning and environmental assessment |
| Polling        | ICT to measure public opinion and sentiment |
| Voting         | ICT in the context of public voting in elections, referenda or local plebiscites |

4.3 eParticipation Tools

A number of software applications, products, tools and components have been used in eParticipation projects. These range from weblogs and alert mechanisms to the more sophisticated consultation platforms. A list of eParticipation tools follows (based on Macintosh et al 2005).

<p>| eParticipation Chat Rooms | Web applications where a chat session takes place in real time especially launched for eParticipation purposes |
| eParticipation Discussion forum/board | Web applications for online discussion groups where users, usually with common interests, can exchange open messages on specific eParticipation issues. Users can pick a topic, see a “thread” of messages, reply and post their own message |
| Decision-making Games | These typically allow users to view and interact with animations that describe, illustrate or simulate relevant aspects of an issue; here with the specific scope of policy decision-making |
| Virtual Communities | Web applications in which users with a shared interest can meet in virtual space to communicate and build relationships; the shared interest being within eParticipation contexts |
| ePanels | Web applications where a ‘recruited’ set, as opposed to a self-selected set, of participants give their views on a variety of issues at specific intervals over a period of time |
| ePetitioning | Web applications that host online petitions and allow citizens to sign in for a petition by adding their name and address online |
| eDeliberative Polling | Web applications which combine deliberation in small group discussions with random sampling to facilitate public engagement on specific issues |
| eConsultation | Web applications designed for consultations which allow a stakeholder to provide information on an issue and others to answer specific questions and/or submit open comments |
| eVoting | Remote internet enabled voting or voting via mobile phone, providing a secure environment for casting a vote and tallying of the votes |</p>
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<th><strong>Suggestion Tools</strong> for (formal) Planning Procedures</th>
<th>Web applications supporting participation in formal planning procedures where citizens’ comments are expected to official documents within a restricted period</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Webcasts</strong></td>
<td>Real time recordings of meetings transmitted over the internet</td>
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<td><strong>Podcasts</strong></td>
<td>Publishing multimedia files (audio and video) over the Internet where the content can be downloaded automatically using software capable of reading RSS feeds</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wikis</strong></td>
<td>Web applications that allow users to add and edit content collectively</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blogs</strong></td>
<td>Frequently modified web pages that look like a diary as dated entries are listed in reverse chronological order</td>
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<td><strong>Quick polls</strong></td>
<td>Web-based instant survey</td>
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<td><strong>Surveys</strong></td>
<td>Web-based, self-administered questionnaires, where the website shows a list of questions which users answer and submit their responses online</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GIS-tools</strong></td>
<td>Web applications that enable the users to have a look at maps underlying planning issues and to use them in various ways</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Search Engines</strong></td>
<td>Web applications to support users find and retrieve relevant information typically using keyword searching</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alert services</strong></td>
<td>One-way communication alerts to inform people of a news item or an event, e.g. email Alerts and RSS Feeds</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Online newsletters</strong></td>
<td>One-way communication tools to inform a general audience or a pre-registered audience of specific news items and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequently asked questions (FAQ)</strong></td>
<td>A ‘tree’ of questions and answers that can be searched using keywords or by inputting a question or statement</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Web Portals</strong></td>
<td>Websites providing a gateway to a set of specific information and applications</td>
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<td><strong>Groupware tools</strong></td>
<td>Tool environment to support computer-based group works</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LIST SERVS</strong></td>
<td>Tool for information provision and two-way interaction that can be used for Citizen2Citizen, Citizen2Administration, Citizen2Politicians etc</td>
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The vision of DEMO-net is that advanced eParticipation applications will comprise a comprehensive set of tools, technologies and associated methods and processes.

### 4.4 Barriers to eParticipation

Improving eParticipation is not simple and involves a variety of challenges. Overcoming these challenges requires an understanding of the barriers that hinder progress. The principal barriers to eParticipation are (Wimmer, 2007):

**Political-strategic barriers:**

- Lack of citizen trust in political institutions.
- Lack of trust that citizens’ participation contributions will be taken seriously and contribute to policymaking, particularly when they are made through electronic media.
- Lack of commitment from politicians and public administrations to interact with citizens via ICT.
- Lack of political will to alter the processes of representative democracy to take account of participation contributions.

**Organisational and legal barriers:**
- Difficulties in adapting responsibilities and decision structures in government institutions to accommodate participation through electronic media.
- Institutional co-operation and co-ordination difficulties and shortages of skills and resources.
- Constraints set by existing legal regulation which is poorly framed for accommodating electronic participation (e.g. principles of secret and personal voting in the context of eVoting).

**Value definition barriers:**
- Difficulties in defining the role of eParticipation in the creation of value: democratic, social, economic, environmental and in governance - and thus prioritising investment.
- Difficulties in specifying and measuring expected value improvements.
- Absence of business and value chain models behind eParticipation initiatives.

**Social barriers:**
- Cultural attitudes and behavioural patterns hindering civic and public engagement.
- Unequal access to technology and technology literacy.
- Lack of political engagement amongst young people.

**Technological barriers:**
- Infrastructure deficiencies (for instance internet access).
- Shortage of eParticipation tool design expertise.
- Insufficient development of key technologies (such as scalability for high volumes of participation, retrieval and visualisation).

**Deployment barriers:**
- Insufficient knowledge exchange between research and practice.
- Lack of guidelines, instructions, support for eParticipation tool deployment.
- Lack of experience of large scale implementations.
5 Three Case Studies

This chapter presents three examples where digital technologies have been used to support citizen engagement. They have been chosen because they represent quite different participation scenarios. The first case study considers the use of technology to support electioneering as used in the recent French presidential campaigns. The eParticipation tool provides information to voters about the candidate but also co-ordinates input from them on the candidate’s manifesto. The second case study illustrates the use of technology for top-down government consultation and focuses on participatory budget making in the Berlin-Lichtenberg district. The third case study is based in the Scottish Parliament and focuses on their use of online petitioning to all citizens to influence the political agenda.

5.1 Désirs d’avenir – Ségolène Royal

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<tr>
<th>Criteria for description</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General description</td>
<td>Désirs d’avenir – Ségolène Royal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Désirs d’avenirs (<a href="http://www.desirsdavenir.org">http://www.desirsdavenir.org</a>) is the official web site for the campaign of Ségolène Royal, the socialist candidate to the 2007 French presidential election.</td>
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<td>· Besides the functions devoted to campaigning, one of the main features of the site is its many discussion forums. These were implemented to allow French voters to take part in the drafting of Royal’s manifesto.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· With more than 150 000 contributions posted and about 50 000 unique visitors a day on average, this site represents the most popular eParticipation initiative in France.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· The site also includes several campaigning functions: information on Royal’s campaigns events, joining a local committee, financing the campaign, etc. The official web site is the core of a more general platform, comprising the Segosphere (web site devoted to youth), and about 1400 blogs set up by individuals or groups to support Royal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis of initiative</td>
<td>· The project was initiated by Desirs d’avenirs, a non-profit organisation set up by Ségolène Royal to back her candidacy independently from the Socialist Party.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· The web platform was launched in February 2006 and has undergone constant revamping (currently in it 6th version).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>· The goal of the site is to develop a new form of campaigning based on the active participation of voters (and not only party members).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy Context</td>
<td>One of the motto’s of Royal’s campaign was the modernisation of the French political system through the development of participative democracy. The site is aimed at exemplifying Royal’s focus on participative democracy both as a way of campaigning and as a political goal for France.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Direction of communication/ level of participation | The site allows different levels of participation ranging from reading news to contributing posts and discussing issues to campaigning. Its general goal is to promote cooperation, sharing and exchange among its users.  
The site can also been seen as a means to socialise citizens to a participative culture. |
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<tr>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>The site is run by Royals’ campaign team independently from the Socialist party. It relies on the support of about 250 000 e-activists, 850 local branch of the Désirs d’Avenir organisation and the 3500 local chapters of the Socialist party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules of engagement (owner/provider and/or end-user)</td>
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</table>
- To take part in general discussion forums, users must register by providing a valid e-mail address. No personal information is required and participants can use a fictitious name.  
- To take part more directly in Royal’s campaign, users must provide some more personal details. They may opt among different roles: eDebaters (to promote Royal’s message on other discussion forums or blogs available on the web), eWatchers (to identify Web resources which can be useful to Royals’ campaign), eDesigners (to create visuals, banners, videos and other web materials for Royal’s campaign).  
- Participants in forums must respect the forums guidelines (proscribing any kind of smearing, publication of telephone numbers, links to other web sites) as well as the French law (proscribing racism, sexism etc).  
- The platform complies with the French law on Computer and liberties, which protects the privacy of internet users and allows citizens to check their personal details held by any company.  
- Most of the content of the site can be freely used and reproduced under a Creative Commons licence. |
| Moderation, facilitation, content-rating |  
- Forums are a priori moderated by a team of about 10 people (the so-called Netsquad).  
- Users can rate contributions to the forums through a system of stars. A voting system allows users to determine the most popular resources available on the site as well on the web.  
- A team of about 70 volunteers (the so-called Mods) is in charge of summarising contributions on a daily basis. These summaries have been published in a document untitled “Les Cahiers d’Espérance” (the Hopes book). |
| Channel availability | Available only on the web and via PC. However, users who registered on mail lists may receive SMS messages on their mobile phones. |
| Technologies |  
- All software is open source. Video and pictures are not directly available on the site but hosted on the most used platform such as Daily motion, Youtube, Flickr.  
- The site promotes a Web 2.0 approach (RSS feeds, bookmarks sharing). As stated on the site: technological options are also political options. |
| Evaluation mechanisms | Besides the rating system for posts and for blogs or resources linked to the official site, there are no other built-in evaluation mechanisms.  
- Statistics on the site usage are not publicly available. |
5.2 Participatory Budget of Berlin-Lichtenberg

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<th>Criteria for description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><strong>Participatory Budget of Berlin-Lichtenberg</strong></td>
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</table>
| **General description**  | • The consultation process in Berlin-Lichtenberg, an administrative district with 260,000 inhabitants, uses three main columns: Internet, townhall-meetings, and surveys.  
  • The internet platform has become the 'lead-media' for the process providing information, facilitating discussions, collecting and archiving all proposals, counting votes and building a community.  
  • The tool called discourse-machine has been developed in the context of eParticipation and can be used as information and discussion platform within participation processes.  
  See http://www.buergerhaushalt-lichtenberg.de/index.php |
| **Basis of initiative**  | • The project (initiated by the borough assembly of Berlin-Lichtenberg) was piloted in 2005. The borough office has since decided to implement the participatory budget as a regular task.  
  • The aim of the project was to increase the transparency and citizens’ knowledge about financial matters, and to raise the level of effectiveness and fairness of budgeting. |
| **Democracy Context**    | The participatory budget is designed as a consultation process. It adds cooperative elements to the existing representative democracy and increases the accountability of the local administration as well as public acceptance of final decisions which are still made by political bodies. However, the borough assembly entered into a commitment to consider citizens’ proposals and to account for the decision. |
| **Direction of communication/level of participation** | • The internet platform allows citizens to gather information about budgeting and the consultation process. Moreover, it allows citizens to submit, deliberate and revise the submitted proposals jointly.  
  • The internet platform supports eInforming, eConsulting and eCollaborating |
| **Stakeholders**         | • Overall responsibility resides with the borough office of Berlin-Lichtenberg.  
  • The concept for the online dialogue has been developed by Zebralog e.V., a not-for-profit organisation supporting online participation processes. Zebralog was also responsible for moderation of the online-discussion and moderator training.  
  • The moderation team has been recruited from the staff of the borough office.  
  • The internet system has been developed, implemented and supported by Binary Objects GmbH, a privately operated software firm. |
| **Rules of engagement (owner/provider and/or end-user)** | • The level of information required for registration is not determined by the software. For Berlin-Lichtenberg, a specific 'conditions of use statement' has been developed and linked on the registration page, and on the site.  
  • Minimal registration requirements (in order to take part in the discussions) are login name and e-mail address. However, to be able to use the voting feature for Lichtenberg-related issues, information on gender, first name, last name, year of birth, and home address is required. This information is not revealed to the public. |
### Moderation, facilitation, content-rating

The discussion forum is post-moderated. Moderators can add own comments; block and remove authors or comments which do not follow the condition of use statement; recommend comments or write summaries.

### Channel availability

- The whole consultation process combines online tools with more traditional means of citizens’ participation, such as face-to-face meetings and paper based surveys.
- To meet the requirements of different eParticipation initiatives the online tool can support different functions.
- The participation platform used in Berlin-Lichtenberg provides an information section, moderated discussion-forum, proposal-wikis, preference-polling and a budget-calculator. Moreover, the users can subscribe to an email newsletter or RSS feeds.

### Technologies

- The discourse-machine is implemented with Open Source software: PHP, MySQL, Apache, and makes use of XML to store data. The projects are usually hosted by Binary Objects GmbH. However, the operator may host the software on own servers. The borough office of Berlin-Lichtenberg operates the discourse-machine on a dedicated server.
- The software can be licensed from Binary Objects GmbH, either as ASP on a monthly basis, or without time limitations.
- The software comes in three versions, with a different set of features, and several add-on modules (e.g. articles flagged on maps like Google maps).

### Evaluation mechanisms

- The software stores anonymously nearly every user action, in order to evaluate the usage of certain features and pages. Further evaluations depend on the interests of the operator. However, most projects also provide a special forum for meta discussions. The discourse-machine provides a sophisticated survey module, which enables the configuration of an extensive variety of surveys.
- At the end of a deliberation phase in Berlin-Lichtenberg all users are asked to use the built-in survey feature to give their opinions on the participation process. General statistics, for example number of registered users or number of submitted proposals and comments are public and visible on the internet platform.

### Further examples

- [http://www.kulturforum-dialog.de](http://www.kulturforum-dialog.de)
- [http://www.berlin.de/mauerdialog](http://www.berlin.de/mauerdialog)
- [http://www.gleisdreieck-dialog.de](http://www.gleisdreieck-dialog.de)
- [http://pvfrm.binary-objects.de/discoursemachine.php](http://pvfrm.binary-objects.de/discoursemachine.php)

### Further information

The consultation process has been evaluated by the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer. The evaluation of the online tool has been conducted by the Fraunhofer Institute IAIS. The evaluation report (in German) is available at [http://www.buergerhaushalt-lichtenberg.de/site/pictures/evaluationsabschlussbericht_zum_buergerhaushalt_2007_lichtenberg.pdf](http://www.buergerhaushalt-lichtenberg.de/site/pictures/evaluationsabschlussbericht_zum_buergerhaushalt_2007_lichtenberg.pdf)
## 5.3 ePetitioner in the Scottish Parliament

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<th>Criteria for description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td><em>Scottish Parliament electronic petitions</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General description</strong></td>
<td>The online petitioning application primarily provides an opportunity for individual members of the public to participate fully in the democratic process in Scotland by raising issues of public concern with the Parliament. See <a href="http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk">http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Basis of initiative** | • The International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC) at Napier University Edinburgh initiated the project.  
• The ePetitions system was officially launched on the 11th of February 2004 by the parliament but had been piloted since 1999.  
• It promotes community democracy through easy access to the decision making body and provides citizens with the ability to influence the political agenda. |
| **Democracy Context** | • E-petitioning should therefore be seen as a means of enhancing accessibility to participation in the political process which in turn will strengthen the accountability of Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to the people of Scotland. Moreover, the existence of a Parliamentary Committee dedicated to the consideration of all petitions provides robust and transparent management of the Parliamentary process for responding to petitions.  
• The Scottish Parliament’s ePetitions System has led the way in offering citizens the possibility of a more active interaction with the political process which is readily accessible and transparent and provides a direct means of holding elected politicians to account other than through the ballot box. |
| **Direction of communication/level of participation** | • The system allows individuals to petition the parliament  
• Level of participation: eEmpowering |
| **Stakeholders** | • Overall responsibility resides with the Scottish Parliament. The Public Petitions Committee of the Parliament manages the process.  
• International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC) at Napier University Edinburgh with support from BT Scotland designed and developed the system.  
• Napier has had a formal contract with the Scottish Parliament from November 2002 to 2005 to provide a hosted electronic petitioning service to the PPC and research and report on eEngagement using the ePetitioner tool. |
### Rules of engagement (owner/provider and/or end-user)
- There is an explicit privacy statement: “Your details will be held in computer readable form to allow the principal petitioner to administer and submit the petition you have signed. Only your name and country will be visible from this site. Your full name and address will be submitted to the Public Petitions Committee”.
- There is a conditions of use statement: “This site is monitored by the Scottish Parliament and duplicate, vexatious and improbable signatures will be removed. Submitting multiple signatures on behalf of others is not permitted and such signatures will also be removed”.

### Moderation, facilitation, content-rating
- The discussion forum is post-moderated. The Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee makes the moderation decision based on the conditions of use.
- Moderator functionality includes: removing a selected comment from public view if the moderator decides it breaches the condition of use statement; adding any moderation comments; pulling together all the comments to produce an overall report; and viewing statistics such as the number of comments removed.

### Channel availability
The Scottish Parliament ePetitioner is only available via PC and the internet. However, a new release of the system for Sheffield City Council is supported on interactive digital TV.

### Technologies
- ePetitioner is implemented in Microsoft Active Server Pages (ASP) and uses a SQL Server database to hold the petitions data. ePetitioner uses the open standard XHTML 1.0 for web page markup, and ODBC (Open DataBase Connectivity standard) to connect to the database. These standards are deployed so that database management systems other than SQL Server (such as the open-source mySQL database) could be readily used instead.
- The system can be licensed from Napier University.

### Evaluation mechanisms
There is an online evaluation questionnaire, presented to the user after signing an ePetition, to monitor what users think of the system in terms of its ease of use, clarity, and overall purpose. The responses provide a means for the PPC to readily assess the perceptions of those who have signed ePetitions.

### Further examples
- [http://www.bristol.gov.uk/item/epetition.html](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/item/epetition.html)
- [http://e-petitions.kingston.gov.uk/list_petitions.asp](http://e-petitions.kingston.gov.uk/list_petitions.asp)
- [http://itc.napier.ac.uk/e-Petition/bundestag/](http://itc.napier.ac.uk/e-Petition/bundestag/)

### Further information
The potential impact of ePetitioner in delivering increased democratic participation for citizens can also be seen from the evaluation carried out by the Napier following the pilots in two English local authorities. Citizens, officers and Members who took part in the evaluation were almost unanimously in favour of ePetitioning. This report is available at:

### 5.4 Summary

These case studies are three out of many examples of the use of digital technologies to support participation. All three of our examples were initiated either by government, parliament or an elected representative. However, it is important to appreciate that there are also a growing number of initiatives that are started and managed entirely by groups of citizens. Such community-based projects typically reflect a local issue or focus on a disadvantaged group within the community. Indeed participation in democratic processes is difficult for some groups for a variety of reasons - physical disability, geography, work schedules etc. eParticipation can offer some previously excluded groups the chance to
make their voices heard. A good example is ‘Netmums’ (www.netmums.org) which is an
information and advice network for carers of young children, a sector which is generally
under-represented in most democratic processes. In addition to offering advice, the
organisation provides networking opportunities and campaigns on topics of most
relevance to its members. Tools used include surveys, responses to consultations on
legislation, campaigning themes, discussion groups - and data on usage of ICT by the
target group. A key feature is that the proactive interventions take place in the context of
softer dialogue on issues of mutual concern, which makes the approach particularly
powerful.

This and other projects will be further studied in DEMO-net, as the consortium will be
undertaking a comprehensive study of eParticipation projects across Europe. This will be
reported in a forthcoming DEMO-net booklet.
6 eParticipation Research Survey

eParticipation, by its very nature, is a hybrid research activity. It relates to democratic theory, political science, communication studies, technology studies, information science, computer science and more. DEMO-net has therefore conducted a global survey into eParticipation research. In the survey we asked research centres to answer a number of questions relating to the type of eParticipation research activity they were involved in, the tools, methods and techniques they were applying and the academic fields and disciplines they based their research in. We have received responses from 108 research centres across 33 countries to provide a map of the expertise in eParticipation worldwide. The figure below illustrates the countries involved.

Our survey revealed the two most common eParticipation research activities: deliberation and consultation. We also found a number of key research themes that were not being widely addressed; these included Mobile communications, Electioneering, Journalism, and Polling.

In the survey we asked the research centres whether they were mainly concerned with research into conducting eParticipation (for instance the design and application of eParticipation tools) or research into observing/studying eParticipation (for instance studying the practice and effects of eParticipation).

For conducting eParticipation research our survey indicates a lack of research in supporting interaction and comprehension and content management which are critical for supporting the diverse range of eParticipation stakeholders in accessing and understanding information.

For observing/studying eParticipation we found a lack of research on technology assessment and impact assessment. An understanding of technological systems is a clear prerequisite for informed and rigorous research in this area. Likewise, an understanding the political and cultural outcomes of eParticipation is critical. As eParticipation moves...
into a more mature stage of research, we need to move from description and understanding to more rigorous evidence-based explanation and evaluation.

In Europe several academic fields and disciplines are well represented in eParticipation research: Political Science, Political Sociology, Media/Communication Science, Public Policy Analysis, Social Informatics, and Information Management. Meanwhile, the following disciplines were less popular in Europe: Cultural Studies, Political Communications, Public Policy Analysis, Social Shaping of Technology, Participatory Design, Knowledge Management, Environmental Management, Innovation Studies, Computational Linguistic, Knowledge Engineering, Software Engineering, Information Extraction. Efforts need to be made in future to draw upon insights from all these disciplinary areas, where this is possible and appropriate. It will then be possible to capture and analyse the complex and multi-sided nature of eParticipation.

eParticipation research in Europe at present lacks socio-technical theoretical foundations and a critical interest is the relation between ‘applied’ and ‘basic’ research activity. There is also a lack of commonly agreed boundaries to its domain of enquiry, and efficient methods for evaluating the impact of eParticipation activities on communities, societies and democracy.

More information on the eParticipation research landscape can be found at Deliverable D41 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D41, 2006).

More information on the “basic conceptual map” of eParticipation research can be found at Deliverable D61 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D61, 2006).

A simple framework to scope eParticipation areas and tools can be found at Deliverable D51 of the DEMO-net project (DEMO-net D51, 2006).
7 An overview of DEMO-net

This chapter provides an overview of the DEMO-net project as well as some additional networking activities performed during its first year, i.e. 2006.

Currently, research in eDemocracy and eParticipation has been fragmented, disparate and unfocused. DEMO-net provides the necessary coordination for joined-up, multidisciplinary research to advance the state-of-the-art in research technologies and evaluation frameworks for eParticipation. The ultimate aim of such research is to enable broader and more informed participation in the policy making process.

The core objective of DEMO-net is to strengthen scientific, technological and social research excellence in eParticipation by integrating the research capacities of individuals and organisations spread across Europe. The intention is to advance the way research is carried out in Europe with respect to quality, efficiency, innovation and impact. The network with this overall objective will provide a major contribution to the strategic goals set by the European Council.

The three major research objectives are:

- Establish a baseline for research and policy making in eParticipation. This will be realised by creating a corpus of materials that stores research and policy documents in an accessible form.
- Investigate barriers to eParticipation. This will involve looking at current and emerging technologies, methodologies and techniques for successful deployment in future projects.
- Establish sets of criteria that allow for the evaluation of future eParticipation initiatives to be undertaken in a systematic and standardised way across Europe.

DEMO-net is a Network of Excellence project funded under the European Commission's sixth framework programme: Information Society Technologies (IST) which started on the 1st January, 2006.

DEMO-net is engaged in many network activities. In addition to those already reported earlier, DEMO-net:

- Administers a recruitment and membership program - currently 74 members (in addition to the original partners) including 20 associated institutions and 21 student members.
- Promotes and funds research visits and exchanges (over 70 to date).
- Runs a network and program of activities (e.g. annual colloquium, edited book) for PhD students – currently 62 active students.
- Prepares dissemination material for web masters and the general public (posters and leaflets in 11 languages).
- Organises eParticipation workshops and events, both stand-alone and at significant European events (including IST 2006, dg.o 2006 and 2007, eChallenges 2006).
• Works with the Policy Advisory Panel (which held its inaugural meeting on 10th October 2006 in the European Parliament).

• Publishes press releases, scientific papers, and articles in magazines and newspapers.

• Produces radio transmissions (“Democracy in the age of Internet” for the Austrian Radio and TV Company ORF).

• Works closely with the ‘Ad hoc Committee on E-Democracy of the Council of Europe’ (CAHDE) whose remit is to make recommendations to the Committee of Ministers on possible further action in the field of e-democracy, in the framework of the Council of Europe’s agenda on strengthening democracy and good governance.

• Runs the annual European Workshop on eParticipation.

• Develops and maintains eParticipation resources at the Demo-net website (www.demo-net.org).

• Promotes eParticipation dialogue through a wiki, discussion forum and blog.

Getting Involved in DEMO-net

We would like to hear from all those with an interested in eParticipation. The easiest way to learn more about DEMO-net is to visit our Web site, at:

www.demo-net.org

The site provides:

• information on the project and its activities

• online application of persons and organisations to become DEMO-net members

• dissemination material such as brochure in 11 European languages, 3-fold flyer for easy printing, poster etc

• contact details
8 Conclusions

In the contemporary political system, citizen dissociation from the existing democratic structures requires new means for stimulating citizen-based political participation. This DEMO-net booklet presents one approach to providing those means - electronic participation (eParticipation).

We argue that eParticipation describes efforts to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives and governments using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). We identify the various stakeholders in eParticipation, including elected representatives, government executives, political parties, NGO's, citizen groups, academia, researchers and the industry.

Understanding eParticipation involves the consideration of several different parameters. The first is levels of participation (e.g. eInform, eConsult, eInvolve, eCollaborate and eEmpower). The second refers to eParticipation areas, covering an extensive list of specific areas of citizen involvement, enabled by the use of ICT from information provision to law-making. The third parameter concerns eParticipation tools and technologies, embracing a wide range of software applications, products, tools and components varying in the level of sophistication. The fourth refers to eParticipation barriers, which include political-strategic, organisational and legal, value definition, social, technological and deployment barriers.

In order to elucidate these points and illustrate the practice of eParticipation, three eParticipation examples are reported from France, Germany and the UK.

We further presented a survey of more than 100 research centers in 33 countries, which revealed the most common eParticipation research activities.

DEMO-net provides the foundation for multidisciplinary research in eParticipation and seeks to widen participation in the policy making process by integrating the research capacities of individuals and organisations spread across Europe.
References


