



eDemocracy and eParticipation

THE PRECIOUS FIRST STEPS
AND THE WAY FORWARD

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About the publishers

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The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the foundation of the European Liberal Democrats, the ALDE Party. A core aspect of our work consists in issuing publications on Liberalism and European public policy issues. We also provide a space for the discussion of European politics, and offer training for liberal-minded citizens. Our aim is to promote active citizenship in all of this.

Our foundation is made up of a number of European think tanks, political foundations and institutes. The diversity of our membership provides us with a wealth of knowledge and is a constant source of innovation. In turn, we provide our members with the opportunity to cooperate on European projects under the ELF umbrella.

We work throughout Europe as well as in the EU Neighbourhood countries. The youthful and dynamic nature of ELF allows us to be at the forefront in promoting active citizenship, getting the citizen involved with European issues and building an open, Liberal Europe.

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The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom is a German political foundation, which promotes liberal policies and political knowledge in over 60 countries worldwide with the aim of consolidating liberal democracy and building free and prosperous societies.

The Project office for Southeast Europe of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom implements the activities and programmes of the Foundation in Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova in close cooperation with a high number of local partners – liberal political parties, think-tanks, institutes, and civil organisations. Focus areas of our current work at national and regional levels are anticorruption and transparency, freedom of media, economic entrepreneurship, and education. We provide consultancy on all these topics in order to facilitate a transfer of knowledge and best practices. With a large number of diverse public activities and publications we strive to raise the awareness on the principles of liberal democracy, to increase civic engagement, and last, but by far not least, to foster good governance in our four project countries.

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Foreword

As our lives become more digital, we have high expectations of how public services are provided. We want them to be open – yet secure and easy to use. We want them to let us take part more in forming policy and taking decisions that directly affect us.

If people can interact more easily with their elected government or with a particular public authority, that is a good thing.

It promotes trust; it involves people more in matters that affect them directly.

It is democracy in action, even be it a simple administrative operation, like renewing an identity card or registering a change of address.

Digital technology can help support and increase public involvement: good for legitimacy, accountability and – ultimately – trust in government.

This is not only about value for taxpayers' money.

It is about the government and state properly serving its people. And this is where digital can help. In other words: eDemocracy.

Recently in Tallinn, EU leaders committed to developing an e-government to „respect, support and enhance the fundamental freedoms of people, such as the freedoms of expression, privacy and the right to protection of personal data“.

They agreed that digital means should be used to empower people and businesses to voice views, involve people further in creating public services, and ultimately provide better digital public services.

Digital is a force for technological progress, as well as, for social, political and economic inclusion. If the European Union can turn these ambitions into reality, it would be a true digital democracy.

Andrus Ansip

Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of the Digital Single Market



Foreword

The amazing increase in the quantity and speed of information, provided by digital means that were unthinkable just 10 years ago, brings us ever-closer to a digital world. This makes the world perceivably smaller, yet more complex at the same time. Goods and services are delivered in shorter periods, while citizens' expectations towards public services and information, as well as political participation, changes. Whilst traditionally, the interactions of governing bodies with citizens were usually limited to the general acquisition of services, petitions, or referenda, citizens now question top down approaches of governance and demand more inclusion in the processes of modern democracies. New tools open the door for unprecedented interaction with and unprecedented scrutiny of institutions and governments. Citizens can make their voices heard and offer their expertise. They can bridge the often-perceived gap between administration and citizens. Therefore, eDemocracy and eParticipation are not isolated phenomena, but evolutionary steps in, and for, open societies.

However, one should be cautious about the risks involved with every new technology and not dismiss those over the potential gains. Cyberattacks like WannaCry in May 2017 show just how vulnerable software systems can be. Therefore, digital institutions need to be prepared against global cyberattacks. Influxes of false or biased information, both for and by domestic and foreign actors, are shaping opinions and polarising societies.

This publication on the digitalisation of politics is intended to provide an overview of how the countries and citizens of the European Union try to reinvent their democracy, and how far along they are in adjusting their institutions and organisations to the needs of the digital era. It compares the realities in countries of Northern, Central and Southeastern Europe, analysed to provide the reader with information about their ICT potential and challenges.

We are convinced that the European network of citizens through common learnings and exchange, will connect the best of both the EU and the digital realms. For a more democratic, free, and prosperous Europe.

Daniel Kaddik

Director of the Project Office for Southeast Europe of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom

CHAPTER 1

eDemocracy, opportunities and challenges

- The concept
of modern
democracy and
the use of ICTs:
Definitions

by Ronald J Pohoryles

The Digital Revolution changed the human way of life and interaction with the world so rapidly, that the analogue generations are still struggling to grasp the scope and fundamentality of the process. The business world, driven by the necessity of free market capitals, has taken these developments in their stride, perpetually developing newer and better eProducts and eServices. Governments however, have taken radically different approaches across Europe and the world, in either facilitating or hindering this process.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is not to deliver an academic contribution to democracy theory and the potential of ICTs, but to give a brief overview of the different types of democracy and public participation. For the latter, modern information and communication tools play an increasing role. The use of these instruments, which has a high potential, involves, however, risks as well. Furthermore, the use of these instruments depends on the form of democracy, as there are various concepts of how to govern and who takes decisions.

In the *classical form of democracy*, the only participative element is the voting system. Hence the notion of “Stimme abgeben” (in English: to cast a vote), which literally means to delegate decisions to people, or parties and to refrain from any further influence on specific policies. This model was based on the assumption that the mostly uneducated population would not be able to take rational decisions that would be beneficial for the society as a whole. Decisions taken by the majority of parliament were, of course, challenged by diverse forms of protest and contestation, but these forms were illegal and quite often related to violence, like strikes, or attempts at revolution. This model was the predominant form of democracy in the 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to totalitarian regimes across many European countries and beyond.

The radical juxtaposition of the traditional form of democracy is the concept of *direct, or basic democracy*, which means that political decisions, or at least important decisions, are taken by the public at large. Unlike a participatory democracy, which limits the extent of public participation and quite often leads to decisions that are not legally binding for the government or parliament, in the concept of direct democracy every political issue can be initiated, or subjected to a popular vote, and all decisions are legally binding. A related concept is *liquid, or delegated democracy*, which means that the individual citizen can decide on whether they want to participate in the decision on a specific issue, or delegate their voice to somebody, who might be more knowledgeable on the issue at hand.

Increasingly, *modern democracies* allow for *public participation* in various forms. It is quite distinct from both models, as public participation recognises the basic decision-making structure of the representative democracy, i.e. that political decisions are taken by the government or parliament, but allows for public participation on important issues. Advanced forms of public participation allow for the development of a *deliberative democracy*. It can be distinguished between *legally binding decisions of the public at large*, or *non-binding decisions that inform the government or parliament* about the public opinion, as an import source for the decisions taken by elected representatives. Usually, not all topics are open for public participation: for instance, the highest court of Spain decided against the attempt of the Catalan regional government to call a referendum on the independence of Catalonia from Spain, as such an attempt, despite the Catalan Parliamentary decision in favour of the referendum, was against the consti-

tution of Spain. Likewise, the European Union did not allow for a European Citizens' Initiative that was aimed at forbidding abortion, as this initiative, despite fulfilling the formal regulations, was against the basic values of a democratic federal Europe.

Furthermore, there are *formal and informal* ways to participate in decisions: *Formal participatory* modes are directed to the government, or the parliament; *informal ones* have no direct addressee, but should put pressure on the decision-takers through their broad public support of a specific claim. In the first case, they can be initiated both by a Citizens' Initiative or by the government or parliament, and they can define specific groups that are entitled to participate, mostly relating to the group that is affected by the issue at hand. Examples of this are, decisions about an urban, or a regional issue, or decisions that concern specific interest groups, like trade unions, or Chambers of Commerce.

All of these forms of participation can be carried out *online, offline, or in a combination of both*. In light of the focus of this publication, the subject will be limited to online participation and the combination between the two modes.

The first important distinction is between *eGovernance and eDemocracy*, which are often used as synonyms:

- Electronic governance or eGovernance is the application of information and communication technology (ICT) for delivering government services, exchange of information, communication transactions, integration of various stand-alone systems and services between government-to-customer (G2C), government-to-business (G2B), government-to-government (G2G), as well as, back office processes and interactions within the entire government framework.
- Linked to the governance issue is *electronic voting*, which is a "type of vote which is done through electronic systems". Electronic voting, also known as e-voting, implies the use of technology: electronic voting machines, optical scanning voting systems, punched cards and voting kiosks which include casting vote and/or its transmission and tabulation via telephone, internet or private computer networks. It is a form of eGovernance, but as *eDemocracy* as well. In regard to eGovernance, e-voting increases the administrative efficiency and effectiveness, as the supervised polling stations and the counting procedure of the votes can be reduced, or even replaced, and hence the costs to be minimized. With respect to eDemocracy one can expect, for instance, a higher participation rate and inclusion of the otherwise challenged - for being away from their domicile or for being physically impaired. With the exception of e-voting, eDemocracy necessitates a *two-way channel communication*:
 - *e-Consultation* of a non-legally binding character can be used as an instrument to get the opinion of the public at large, or of specific stakeholders, on a specific issue. It is often used for topics of urban or regional development but is not necessarily limited to regions. It could also be used for multi-level consultations.
 - *e-Collaboration* is a more enhanced two-way channel communication. Stakeholders and experts are invited to deliver proposals for a certain project and can hence shape policies. The opinions voiced and the projects proposed can influence the decisions of officials.
 - *e-Referendum* is a legally binding decision-making process that allows the public,

or in specific cases specific audiences, to take decisions that are mandatory for implementation. Such a procedure follows the same rules as e-Voting.

- *e-Citizens' Initiative* is an invitation to the government - local or central, or to the legislature - to propose regulation on matters, where the respective body has competence to rule. The Topic is debated online and so are gathered the signatures. Such a citizens' initiative has to be backed by a certain number of signatures collected from within a constituency.

Beyond any doubt all forms of participation, including the various forms of eParticipation enhance democracy. In modern societies the basic argument in favour of public participation is the construction of the archetype of an *informed citizen*. In the 21st century most of the population is well educated and hence prepared to take decisions according to an *informed opinion*. Furthermore, public participation increases the legitimacy of political decisions. However, there are some objections: usually, the participation rate is quite low and by no means representative. This is particularly true when social stratification plays an important role. And the archetype of the informed citizen is just an ideal type, as education and knowledge are not equally distributed amongst all citizens. Furthermore, there often are other motives for the decisions made by citizens.¹

All of these objections have a certain justification, as do the arguments in favour. When it comes to *electronic participation*, there are additional arguments, both in favour and against the application in specific policy areas, or in specific forms, or on whether to resort to electronic participation altogether.

There are a lot of valid arguments in favour of eDemocracy: it has a high potential for the increase of public participation, which in turn increases legitimacy and trust in the democratic procedures. In modern democracies, the use of electronic information and communication tools is widespread, electronic literacy is present all over Europe to a high degree, and interest in policy might be increased.

However, there are serious objections as well. The first one is about the tension between data protection and, at the same time, the necessity of verification of a valid vote and the subsequent identification of the individual. This problem occurs in all of those forms of eParticipation, where the offline mode allows, or even requires anonymity. This is particularly true for e-Voting and e-Plebiscites. Furthermore, some forms of eDemocracy might exclude some stakeholders. This is particularly true for e-Consultations. As eDemocracy is about fostering civic engagement and open, participatory governance through Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), all who are uneasy with those technologies or have to walk an extra mile in order to access the tools, may be disenfranchised.

Arguably, the combination of offline and online tools is the best way of increasing legitimacy. With respect to the information, the organisation of citizen fora with experts and concerned lay-people increase the degree of knowledge and can lead to informed rational decisions. That

¹ For instance, a project on major infrastructure might be rejected by the population when the citizens are not satisfied with the government. An example is the referendum about the production of nuclear energy in Austria in 1978: the then Austrian Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky announced that he would resign if the electorate voted against the putting into operation of the first (and only) nuclear power plant in Lower Austria. Before this announcement opinion polls showed a clear positive opinion, but after it the final result spelled the end for nuclear power in Austria. By the way, despite the announcement, Bruno Kreisky did not resign.

process, actively enhancing citizen participation, is the digital democracy or Internet Democracy. It incorporates 21st-century information and communications technology to promote democracy.

A good example is the citizen consultation of the European Space Agency: it was held in 26 European countries at the same time, inviting the participants to vote on several issues after an information meeting that was organised as video conference.

Another form of the combination of online and offline decision-making are voting procedures. For instance, the Austrian liberal party NEOS organises a three-step procedure for the elections of the board and the candidates for public elections, whereby the first step is organised as e-Voting.

In parallel, there is a considerable build-up of scientific, technological and political will to further afford national and subsequently supranational eGovernance across the EU, enabling the conditions for a more widespread eDemocracy. National referenda, transnational consultations and European Citizens' Initiatives, all need secure Internet transactions, common rules and trans-EU guarantees.

Across Europe, we find quite different levels of public participation and respectively, eDemocracy. But there are enough reasons to argue that the potential of eDemocracy is in the cumulative value of ever broadened political culture and a culture of democracy with the digital tools to continuously promote and defend participative political development, where the liberties, rights and freedoms of the citizens are guaranteed.

CHAPTER 2

eDemocracy

“Why do we need it?”

by Rumiana Decheva

“The computers would allow decisions in the ‘public interest’ but also in the interest of giving the public itself the means to enter into the decision-making process that will shape their future.”

J.C.R. Licklider, 1963²

² quarterly.demos.co.uk/article/issue-8/digital_democracy/

Half a century after this revelation, the Internet and mobile networks have webbed The World and changed the means by which information is exchanged. Democratic institutions, however, have not changed dramatically. Countries with solid democratic traditions have eagerly introduced new technologies to enhance public participation and collaboration, mostly at local level, where their say is most rapidly implemented. At national legislative level, in those countries, consultative mechanisms assist otherwise trusted representative institutions. In recent years, in countries with low trust in their political systems citizens actively forced themselves into the political arena with the aid of digital tools. Whatever the case, eDemocracy across the world is gradually getting out of the scholarly books and coming into life, to be followed by Liquid Democracy and even Bitcoin Democracy.

The European Union has detailed plans for the Single Digital Market. Whilst eDemocracy is not a part of it, all achievements for the market will also benefit eDemocracy development. More coherent EU-wide rules and application of the eID, personal data protection and eServices will ultimately broaden the territories where eParticipation, eCollaboration and eVoting turn into a norm. Until then, cases from around the world, including such from within EU, shape dot-connected perspectives and mobilise multidisciplinary teams to unveil the salient forthcoming feature of democracy: more aware and active citizens on daily level, as opposed to well-informed citizens, active predominantly in times of elections.

The aspect of eDemocracy, that benefits most from the application of ICT in the democratic processes, is collaboration - interaction that goes far beyond a two-sided information flow. Notwithstanding the very positive impact of consultations, where legislative texts, proposals for action or decisions are opened to the public for opinions and comments, new technologies and online tools enable a collaborative platform for the institutions and the citizens simultaneously to produce ideas, proposals, initiatives for legislative or executive decisions at all levels.

Deliberative and Collaborative Constitution Writing: Iceland

Topping the list of collaborative efforts is the public response to the 2008 - 2010 financial crisis in Iceland. Wrongfully famed as an unsuccessful drafting of a constitution, it offers vast experience on citizen self-organisation and eDemocracy. Fifteen men and ten women formed a Constitutional Council, elected out of 500 applicants, with an unusual, for the prospective task, professional backgrounds. In turn, they chaired committees on specific chapters and worked with over 900 citizens (out of 245,000 total voters' population³), picked by randomised draws, to represent the full complexity of the entire society.

The committees produced consensual texts, presented for online (Facebook) and offline (sent in e-mails) editing by the citizenry: national and international. For the duration of the charged by strong international attention exercise, three initially planned months, extended by one more, around 1000 online contributions and another 300 sent by mail summed up the public participation. Compared to the tens of thousands who took to the streets when the

³ Elections results 2016, www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2016/06/26/gudni_kjorinn_forseti_islands_5/, accessed on 30 September 2017.

political and economic crisis erupted, and the state was pushed to its knees, it is a relatively modest participation. The radical demands for nationalisation of enterprises did not translate into radical texts when the very same people entered the process of drafting the Constitution. It is an example that in a democratic society trust is derived from the participative process itself, without necessarily needing everyone’s input. The unsupervised groups of citizens produced balanced legislative proposals, respectful to rights and freedoms. The fact that the complex process did not allow for passing the text through the several complex stages, does not diminish its importance as the first (and only, so far) collaborative unsupervised drafting of a Constitution in Modern History.



That high spirit of online mobilization manifested again in April 2016, when in a matter of couple of days, following the release of the *Panama Papers*, people gathered around a Facebook event and forced the Prime Minister to step down and contributed to quickly resolving the political crisis. Last year, once again, women in Iceland made the headlines with a creative e-powered protest. On 24 October 2016, most working women left jobs and duties at 14:38 local time, as that is the difference in the pay between men and women. It is not a difference in the fee for equal work, as such a difference is non-existent. It is the gap between what jobs women take and how much they earn, compared to the jobs men afford - not least, based on the different social expectations for their gender roles. A wave of comparative studies turned around the world and the impetus of the event outreached far away countries, making Iceland an eDemocracy example to learn from.

eDemocracy at the Chamber of Deputies: Brazil

On the other side of the Atlantic, starting in 2011, an initiative of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies has gradually opened to citizen participation. After 20 years of work with the Brazilian parliament, and following a fellowship in democracy and innovation with the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cristiano Ferri Faria worked on series of projects to create interest in legislature, whilst also building public capacity for public control and more transparent institu-

tions. The efforts eventually resulted in *e-democracia* platform⁴, that attracted citizens from all walks of life to the legislative process.

The platform has undergone several upgrades and since recently is redesigned, responding to evolved public expectations. The new beta version is far more interactive and user-friendly even for those uneasy with complex institutions - something parliaments worldwide tend to be. Registered users on the website may pose a general question, make a comment to a legislative proposal, follow online debates of the parliamentary commissions and, in time of parliamentary hearings, pose questions on the go. The new site of *e-democracia* provides easy navigation between topics and parliamentary commission sessions, with prior access to pose questions to the parliamentarians. It also indicates the number of people registered as interested on each topic, enables readers to comment on the agenda of forthcoming sessions and post options and suggestions for debates on key national matters. Every citizen may submit complete or partial texts for legislative consideration, which are then open for public debate, analysis and voting. The project works with hackers, turned into partners, for e-solutions in the collaborative efforts. The hackers' laboratory follows on the cutting edge technological advancement and develops software, which may or may not be approved as official. Either way, it builds trust



and contributes to higher inclusiveness and transparency. Based on the philosophy of responsible citizen participation, it contributes to public development in the country and over the past 6 years has involved people from all walks of life in the public debate. Not everyone is happy, though. Deputies may feel overexposed, with any statement being turned into a reason

⁴ <https://edemocracia.camara.leg.br/home>

for massive protests. On the other end, for the lifespan of the initiative, more than a million and two hundred thousand Brazilian citizens visited the site *e-democracia* and presented texts, asked questions, left comments or otherwise participated. There was a surge in mid-2017, when the new features of the platform were introduced. Depending on the area of legislation, it gets between a few comments and thousands of individual visits.

Liquid Democracy and eParty: Argentina

In 2011, in California, DemocracyOS, an open source application was designed for feedback to politicians on political perceptions. When in 2012, all political parties in Argentina turned down the offer to use it, the team around the platform registered in 2013 the first e-party, *Partido de la Red*, or as it is better known in English, the Net Party. With focus on urban cohabitation and development, the followers of the party join its network online and thereafter, get involved in the formulation of ideas, suggest directions for development at local and national level and edit legislative texts online.

The candidates for the elections are nominated in a similar procedure. If elected, they commit to vote according to the consensus reached in the online debate. The members of the party may vote directly on all discussed issues or delegate their vote to another trusted member. The delegation can be revoked at any time, or on a specific topic, the vote to be re-delegated. This “*liquid democracy*” approach failed to gain a seat in the 2014 Buenos Aires local elections nor recently in the national legislative elections in October 2017. With more than 17 000 members and 35 000 likes online, the party still struggles to gain grounds as a Trojan Horse, in an environment reined by solid political stands, rather than by dynamic likes and dislikes. Civic education with hands-on training for the most underrepresented, from the indigenous populations to intellectuals, is an all-inclusive exercise that will mark positively the political process in Argentina.

eKnowledge Sharing, eTools and eMobilisation: The World Has Changed

Based on active citizen involvement and expertise from around the world, The Wikimedia Foundation, with a few hundred employees, founded a global movement for knowledge-sharing, that eventually resulted in free, collaboratively produced educational content across the world, with Wikipedia being just one of the 16 interconnected projects. At present it contains 5,485,970 articles in English, more than a million in German, Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch, Chinese, Russian, to name a few languages. It also offers significant content in dozens of other minor or major languages. Scientists, enthusiasts, public administration and just about everyone in any language around the world has streamed valuable content, thus providing unrestricted access to all to challenge statements and data. Without open and free collaboration, it would have been impossible to even organise these activities. The ongoing activities are the most inclusive and most accessible collaborative project, ever.

Amongst the endless applications created by citizens, that have found both broad citizen and formal use, *Ushahidi*, “witness” in Swahili, stands out. The open source application⁵ was developed almost overnight by a non-for-profit group, specifically good in areas without proper

⁵ www.ushahidi.com



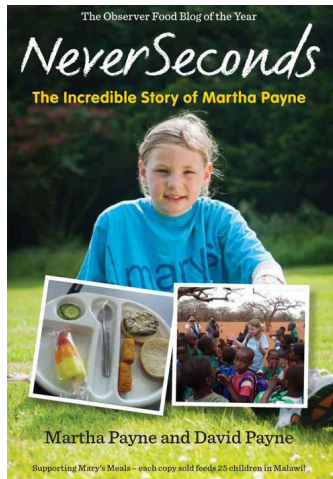
maps and street names. It worked very well in locating and tackling the post-election violations in Kenya in 2007. With time, it was upgraded many times and has been applied by agencies and departments of the UN, by humanitarian response crisis centres and by citizens, for sharing spatial information, in support of the government agencies, or despite the lack of timely and efficient response. The most recent such use is known in the United States during the hurricane Irma. The Nairobi based Ushahidi group has since focused on data collection and analysis for elections observation and crisis management.

During the past three decades, computers, from a heavy commodity available to a select few, became a commonplace, accessible even to children. User friendly applications make it possible to create content, to share and discuss the issues of concern for the youngest users. Children, usually helped or guided by parents, build their own networks and at times, defend their own rights. One such case, of the Scottish girl Martha Payne⁶, made the headlines back in 2012. Nine-year-old at the time, Martha took photos of the primary school meals, uploaded them to her blog and described the discrepancy between what is taught at school as proper nutrition and what is served as school meals, marred by the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. Were it not for the ban imposed, for taking and posting the photos, ordered by the local council six weeks into her small project, the story would have remained within the domain of her primary school. Instead, because of the disrespect for the kid's rights and the national debate this restriction raised, her blog has attracted 10 million individual hits within two years. With support from her father, they channelled that solidarity into a charity initiative and gathered funding for school meals in Malawi. Now, both schools, the one in UK and the Malawian one, have healthy meals.

Even a brief mention of e-solutions cannot be completed without making a reference to the social media and most notably Facebook. A non-for-profit alumni network in Harvard in 2003, became a business and closed the 2016 financial year with revenues of USD 27.638 billion and more than 2 billion active monthly users as of June 2017.⁷ The social media has been credited for the mobilisation of the hundreds of thousands of Colombians who marched against FARC in February 2008, as well as the Arab Spring in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, to mention

⁶ neverseconds.blogspot.bg/

⁷ Constine, Josh (June 27, 2017), „Facebook now has 2 billion monthly users... and responsibility“. TechCrunch. AOL. Retrieved 15 September 2017.



just a few. In the European context, during the afternoon of the e-day of the presidential elections in 2014 in Romania, the domestic observers NGO, Pro Democratia, through its online campaign, managed to raise the turnout significantly, reaching 54% by the end of the day.⁸

With Internet and mobile networks everywhere, the 20th-century model of democracy becomes progressively more obsolete as the generations change. Common in all cases listed above is adversity, transformed through innovations into new horizons. Approaches, open to collaboration quickly adapt and foster further interaction, making eDemocracy a part of the democratic process. The modern representative democracies will have to adapt, as they will gradually be challenged by the unexpected turns of eDemocracy.

eVoting

The aspect of modern democracy most affected by ICT are the elections. Almost all countries, developed and developing, rich and poor, use technology as a part of the electoral process.

It all started long ago, with the aim to guarantee universal suffrage and the right to vote in privacy and secrecy. The first demand for introduction of machine voting was voiced in 1838 by the then considered radical *The People's Charter*. As technology advanced, so did the machine voting solutions and in 1892, in New York, the lever voting machine was introduced to “protect mechanically the voter from rascaldom, and make the process of casting the ballot perfectly plain, simple and secret”. Typically, the larger number of choices presented to the voter or the higher occurrence of electoral fraud has been associated with the higher degree of automation of the electoral process, with mechanical and electric machines emerging during the 19th century, followed by optical scanners for paper ballots in the 1960's. That has paved the way for the first electronic vote cast by a range of computer based devices in the USA, including the direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting machine, and eventually, achieving 100% e-vote in Brazil in 2000 and ever-expanding i-vote in Estonia. All the way, the primary consideration has been to lower the cost, whilst guaranteeing the integrity, secrecy and privacy, and also the timely tallying of the results.

At present, four types of e-solutions are applied, with the aim to expand on the number of political options and preferences, but also to limit the intentional and unintentional interference with voters' will:

Electronic voting machines (EVM), in use in European countries since the early 1990s. The first DRE faced serious criticism for lacking auditability. Now, these voting devices can produce a paper slip, issued on the spot and cast in a type of ballot box for a standard 1-4% audit, which if need be, could avail to a full audit. The EVM polling stations process more voters, and for proportional lists (law permitting), can produce endless combinations of preferences, unimaginable

⁸ Surowiec, P., Stetka, V. ed., Social Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe, 2018

for paper ballots and the manual counting process thereafter.

The voter still goes to the attributed polling station, an important feature for many political cultures, and is identified by the voting machine or by polling staff, according to the technology in use. The dynamics are such that it is difficult to produce an exhaustive list with all countries that use EVMs of any kind, as in some countries the machines are provided but not used yet (Pakistan), other countries are in a process of acquiring the technology with biometric identification of voters (Uganda, Zimbabwe) to discipline voting standards, while others are expanding their use (India, Peru, Ecuador).

Ballot scanners scan ordinary paper ballots and tabulate results electronically. This technology, although in use since 1960's, is with limited geographical use. However, Bulgaria positively tested the use of scanners in the 2016 presidential elections and Malta moved on to purchase scanners for all elections after 2019.

Digital pens can reproduce written text and could be used for votes on blank ballots, where the names of candidates are written in by voters. The technology is not yet in use in the EU but the City of Hamburg has provisions for that.

Internet voting systems are best described by i-voting in Estonia. The country completes the first decade with over a third of the voter population trusting the web with their votes. Online distance voting allows for votes cast from any electronic device, anywhere. This type of vote is cheapest and easiest for elections management bodies and is also the one presenting most challenges. Countries with high digital literacy and high trust in the political system, like Finland, where an i-vote is about to be introduced, can handle the challenges better.

E-tools, as such, would fail to solve most of the malpractices in the conduct of elections, but can magnify many of the deficiencies. Breach of confidentiality and privacy of the vote, or an environment of controlled or influenced vote has great potential of ruining the trust not only in any given elections but also in the entire political system.

i-Vote was decided with a resolution of the EU for the 2019 European Parliament elections. A number of countries have opted out, with reference to their constitutions or other laws, others are still giving that new technology a consideration. Working groups at EU level are already paving the way and if not in 2019, the i-vote will likely be introduced soon thereafter.

An overview of the state of affairs in e-voting (EVMs, scans and i-voting) reveals four tendencies: (i) a step by step introduction, troubleshoot and closely followed up, until public trust in the new technologies allows for broadening their use (Canada); (ii) after testing EMV, scans and i-voting, mainly in the 1990s and 2000s, either over security concerns or due to a lack of public trust, have discounted the e-vote; (iii) new plans for use of e-voting, expanding geographically and based on more advanced e-solutions; and (iv) serious consideration has been given to the use of e-voting for impaired citizens.

A close look at the decisions in all countries with solid democratic traditions reveal, that the grounds are not the capability and reliability of the technology in question, but rather the level of trust vested in the existing and the proposed processes.

CHAPTER 3

eDemocracy in Europe”

“Reinventing democracy is not easy, of course, it is extremely difficult. But what is clear is that Parliament – representative democracy – is no longer our only option of making democracy work. On the one hand we’ve got a crisis of our current system, and on the other, all these new possibilities. The demand for more participatory, more inclusive ways of making political decisions will continue to grow, and the technology that finds new, cheaper, and more convenient ways of doing it will get better and better. Something, sooner or later, has to crack and we will see, I think, the next grand evolution in democracy itself.”⁹

Carl Miller, Research Director at Demos

⁹ Miller, C. Politics: The Digital Future, Centre for Analysis of Social Media, 2016

The digitalisation of the democratic processes is happening, whether we plan for it or not.

While the use of social media is a mere component of the information flow, it has had a great impact on political campaigning and public oversight of the functioning of elected institutions and public administration. The increasing demand for further opening-up of the decision-making process to the public has fostered an expectation that administrative and other services should also be a mouse-click away.

Major changes in the political landscape during the past two decades can largely be attributed to the digitisation of communication and services. The overreaching access to information, consultations and collaborative initiatives, with the gradual and uneven (when comparing the regions of EU) digitalisation of the participatory democratic processes, in addition to the much broader introduction of ICT in the electoral cycles of the Member States and EU as a whole, have mutually influenced the broad range of factors and actors.

When Barak Obama first used his Facebook account for mobilisation of supporters prior to his first primary elections, it was a novelty. The social network was just gaining popularity, missing many of its current features, and arguably this was the first of the kind dialogue with active (limited to English speakers) citizens that went across national and continental borders. Just a few years later, in 2009, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on his first day in the job, used his private Facebook page to make commitments to the global community and opened it to comments and criticism. What was then accepted with nervous fizzling, a few years later has already become the norm. Presently, if a politician or municipality is not “talking” to the people through social media, it is rather an exception to the rule.

After a very ambitious Malmo Declaration in 2009¹⁰, it looked like Digital Europe is just around the corner. The economic crisis, however, did not allow for major investments in eGovernment in most of the countries, and what was then a more balanced landscape, is a very different one today. At the EU level, after the first action plan for the period 2011-2015, a new one titled Accelerating the Digital Transformation of Government has been enacted for 2016-2020¹¹.

Success to date has been very uneven and citizens of different EU countries live in different digital eras. This does not necessarily impede their partaking in consultation and collaboration with national and European institutions, both on- and off-line. It is an aspect to be taken in mind when assessing the level of eParticipation in the countries where the access to internet is limited and the digital literacy insufficient. Limited awareness of the possibility to raise an issue, to bring it to the attention of one's own or other nations' MEPs and to the European institutions is but one of the outcomes of such limitations.

The recent Tallinn Declaration of the EU Council of Ministers aims both at bridging the existing gaps and new, ever more ambitious perspectives for the EU¹². The three consecutive rotation presidencies of the Council will work so that by the end of 2018, the Digital Single Market

¹⁰ Malmo Declaration, EU Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment, 2009, ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/sites/digital-agenda/files/ministerial-declaration-on-egovernment-malmo.pdf

¹¹ eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 Accelerating the digital transformation of government, ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/communication-eu-egovernment-action-plan-2016-2020-accelerating-digital-transformation, accessed on 30 September 2017

¹² Ministerial eGovernment Conference, 5 October 2017, ec.europa.eu/isa2/events/ministerial-egovernment-conference_en

regulation, the Cyberstrategy, the Free Movement of Data, and Wi-Fi for all, are regulated and underway for implementation.

The new push for eGovernment comes along the lines of enhancement of eDemocracy: one determining the standards in eID, creation, use and reuse of data, safety and security norms, while the other applying those tools and opening new consultative and collaborative channels between the citizens and a representative democracy. Digital solutions have enabled unprecedented collaboration and have enhanced the strive for deeper and broader interaction, into uncharted waters.

In reference to those developments, firstly, the European Parliament commissioned three studies on the state of affairs in eParticipation, based worries by the declining trust in the democratic institutions and the democratic processes 'Potential and challenges of eParticipation in the European Union'¹³, 'Potential and challenges of e-voting in the European Union'¹⁴ and 'The legal and political context for setting up a European identity document'¹⁵. Those studies laid out success stories that may be inspiring to European and national politicians and institutions, as well as a number of challenges: from lack of information on the available opportunities, to a lack of trust that citizens' voice will actually be heard.

Simultaneously, the European Commission assessed the European Citizen Initiative – launched in 2011, allowing European citizens from across the union to mobilise and defend, requiring action on a specific topic, through a minimum of one million signatures from at least seven Member States. On its 5th anniversary, having a mere 3 initiatives making it successfully, in an unprecedented move, the European Commission declared it flawed with shortcomings. Consultations with people involved in successful and unsuccessful initiatives, as well as a very broad stakeholders circle, resulted in a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Citizens' Initiative¹⁶. That request has also been voiced by the European Ombudsman and a number of civil society¹⁷ leaders and analysts during the past year. One immediate result, in addition to the request for legal redress, is the call for elaboration of a new collaborative platform for online collection of support, that aims at making the ECI more accessible¹⁸. Currently the ECI is gradually digitalising.

A report on the state of eDemocracy, commissioned by the European Parliament¹⁹, was deliberated on the 16th February 2017 and united the parliamentarians for a Resolution of the European Parliament from 16th March 2017 on eDemocracy in the European Union: Potential and Challenges (2016/2008(INI))²⁰. The Resolution takes a sober look at the potential of digital means to reach out and to mediate services, and points out serious concerns to be taken on by national administrations.

A step beyond the internal EU deliberations and measures is the Council of Europe activities²¹. In line with the EU strategy, those activities set the margins for collaboration between 47

¹³ [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556949/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556949_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556949/IPOL_STU(2016)556949_EN.pdf)

¹⁴ [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556948/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556948_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556948/IPOL_STU(2016)556948_EN.pdf)

¹⁵ [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556957/IPOL_STU\(2016\)556957_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556957/IPOL_STU(2016)556957_EN.pdf)

¹⁶ www.ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/com-2017-482_en

¹⁷ Democracy International, Statement, 2016, www.democracy-international.org/european-citizens-initiative-reform

¹⁸ ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/?lg=en

¹⁹ EP Report on eDemocracy, February 2017, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2017-0041+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

²⁰ European Parliament resolution of 16 March 2017 (2016/2008(INI)), www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0095&language=EN&ring=A8-2017-0041

²¹ Council of Europe activities in the field of e-democracy, www.coe.int/t/dgap/democracy/Activities/GGIS/CAHDE/Default_en.asp

countries EU Member States and potential candidate countries.

Closing that normative loop are the ongoing amendments to the European Electoral Law. In consultation with the EU Member States new horizons for European citizenship are explored – lower suffrage age, transnational lists for the 2019 European Parliament elections, as well as eVoting. As the date for the next EP elections approaches, we will see some, or many, of the suggested changes enacted by mid-2018. In assistance to the national governments are the CoE adjusted Guidelines²² for the implementation of eVoting.

These dynamics are met with varying degrees of readiness and ability to abide – a fact that will determine when and how all 28 EU Member States will come to have an available, accessible, affordable, accountable, efficient, but also an all-inclusive eDemocracy.

While eGovernment follows very strict frameworks and eventually should comply with all standards for interoperability, eDemocracy does and will continue to reflect the diversity in political culture, popular attitudes and cultural perceptions. Equally diverse are the presented in this publication 14 country cases, grouped in 3 regions for comparative analysis: the North, the Centre, and the Southeast of the European Union. In a limited volume, none of the countries could possibly have a comprehensive overview. Summaries of the cases mark the impressive horizons for a 21st -century democracy, equipped with cutting edge technology.

²² Council of Europe, June 2017, rm.coe.int/1680726c0b

The Nordic Countries: Combining eGovernance with eDemocracy

Exemplary for many governments, in reference to the democratic process, are the Nordic countries. The level of regional collaboration there is second to none in the world.

In the region, alongside the countries with long-established democracies, we have Estonia. During the post-Soviet political transition period (similar to the experiences in Central and South Eastern Europe) the country decided to go digital in order to provide quality and timely services. Today, the only administrative services not available online are marriage, divorce, and property transactions. eEstonia developed flagship iVoting too, with over 12% of all votes in the most recent national elections cast from mobile devices. Another country with an outstanding long-term development of tools and venues for participative democracy is Finland, where “digital by default” administrative services are an aspiration to the government. The combination of democratic process and digital solutions are deeply rooted in Finland.

All Nordic countries have facilitated political participation with the use of ICTs to a relatively high degree. Following the introduction of reasonable eGovernance services, eDemocracy is making it slowly but surely through local governance up into the higher levels.

Arguably, Finland is the most advanced country in this respect. It offers a comprehensive platform for information and enables initiatives, consultations and discussion forums. Political participation in general, and the use of electronic tools, is widely accepted in the Finnish public as an additional element of the representative democracy.

With respect to Denmark the authors of the contribution show a quite differentiated picture. Starting from what they call a 'naive' approach, the public administration came to the conclusion that eParticipation can only be used as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face participation. Furthermore, public sector digitisation is first and foremost on eGovernment rather than on the exploitation of the participatory potentials of eParticipation.

The Norwegian case is interesting as, according to Håvard Sandvik, due to the high trust of the citizens in their government, there is a comparatively low interest in political participation. eDemocracy in Norway is rather limited to the local and regional levels. Given resources and manpower on the governmental side, the slow pace of the development of more digital participative tools in the country to date is quite surprising. According to the author, through a greater reliance on big data in public sector, eDemocracy initiatives can tailor information and make the online policy fora more relevant to the individual local user.

The situation in Sweden seems to be similar to the Norwegian one: the emphasis on eParticipation in Sweden is on the local and the regional levels. The State supports umbrella organizations that operate in Swedish regions and municipalities to ensure that the citizens get the right information for decision-making and to enhance their participation.

By and large, the trust between countries and peoples has produced impressive results in regional collaboration and constitutes a solid prerequisite for the next "digital" step. Are we expecting yet another unprecedented move into uncharted waters? Would the countries, or some of them, move towards federalisation of national data? We will find out sooner or later, but the eyes of many of the less decisive countries, will be on the North, every time good governance is discussed.



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Openness, citizen participation and eDemocracy have been subject to active development work in Finland during the last decades. Examples of such development activities are long-running development projects, such as Hear the Citizens project (2000-2005), the Government's Policy Programme on Citizen Participation (2003-2007) and its follow up with the Government's Democracy Network (2007- ongoing), and the Open Government Partnership initiative. Finland decided to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative²³ and its membership was accepted in April 2013. During 2009, the joint democracy network of the ministries, coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, prepared a democracy policy document and a final act of the Finnish Council of State concerning the promotion of democracy. The democracy policy document was approved by The Council of State on the 4th of February 2010²⁴. The policy document set the target of Finland being among the top ten countries in eDemocracy by the end of the decade. Furthermore, the Government submitted its account on democracy policy to the Parliament in March 2014²⁵. The theme of this account is the promotion of openness and citizen participation and eDemocracy. The Government has also allocated strategic research funds for the promotion of openness and citizen participation.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Finance's action programme on eServices and eDemocracy (SADe) was launched. The aim of the action programme was to develop comprehensive e-services for citizens, companies and authorities. The programme was among the Government's key projects during 2011-2015. The SADe programme comprised of eight projects, which were chosen based on their significance and cost-efficiency, as well as, cross-sector collaboration, customer focus, quality and innovativeness. The aim of one of the eight projects of the SADe programme was to develop state of the art eDemocracy tools. The project, led by the Ministry of Justice, developed e-tools for collecting citizen initiatives, municipal initiatives, as well as e-tools to be used in legislative and other consultation procedures. At the moment a project is developing a National Architecture for Digital Services. It will be a compatible infrastructure facilitating information transfers between organisations and services

The Finnish eDemocracy platform demokratia.fi (democracy.fi) contains three services for launching initiatives (Citizens' Initiative, Local Initiatives, Youth Initiatives) and two Consultation and Discussion forums (Lausuntopalvelu.fi and Otakantaa.fi), as well as information resources. These will be presented more in depth below.

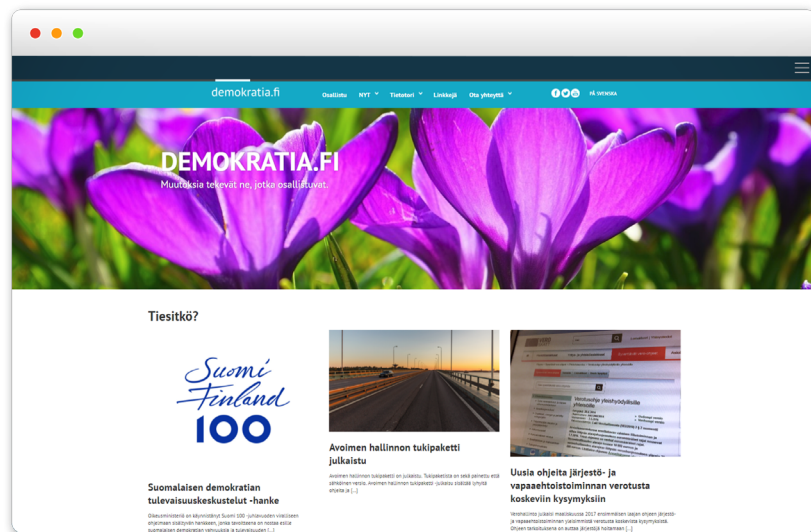
²³ OGP was launched in 2011 to provide an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. Since then, OGP has grown from 8 countries to the 69 participating countries.

²⁴ Oikeusministeriö 2010

²⁵ Oikeusministeriö 2014



"Changes are made by those who take part"
demokratia.fi



Initiatives

Citizens' Initiative

A new form of participation on the state level, Citizens' Initiative, was brought into use in Finland on the 1st of March 2012. It required an amendment of the Finnish constitution. The Citizens' Initiative offers citizens a possibility to have their initiative considered by the Finnish Parliament. A Citizens' Initiative may include either a bill, or a proposal that a bill drafting process should be started. An initiative may also concern amending or repealing an effective Act.

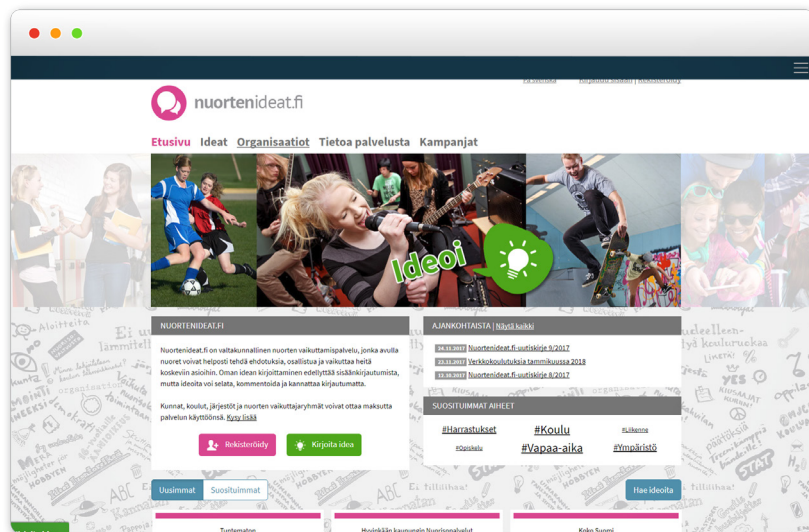
The online collection of signatures can be carried out by an online service, maintained by the Ministry of Justice, which was introduced in the autumn of 2012. The service is built on open-source technology²⁶. An initiative that is instituted online, and for which the statements of support are collected online always requires a so called strong e-identification, for example, the use of online banking codes or a mobile certificate provided by mobile operators. When collecting statements of support via the online service provided by the Ministry of Justice, they are confidential. The names of the signatories may be made public only after the Population Register Centre has verified that the number of statements of support goes up to the required minimum number 50,000. The service is audited by the Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority. The technical requirements of the system are stipulated in the Paragraph 7 and Paragraph 8 of the Law on Citizens' Initiatives (2012/12).

So far, 18 Citizens' Initiatives have passed the threshold of 50,000 signatures and made it to Parliament. One citizen initiative has so far been approved by the Parliament and in one case the Parliament has required the government to start law drafting in the field, in order to amend the legislation in question. The e-tool for collecting citizens' initiatives has proven highly successful with an average of 200,000 visitors a month and with over 2 million signatures collected since its introduction. Altogether over 600 citizen initiatives have been launched. Over 90% of the

²⁶ The code is published on: www.kansalaisaloite.fi/fi/ohjeet/palvelun-avoin-kehittaminen

signatures of support have been collected through the e-service. The reason for the popularity of the service seems to be, according to user-statistics of the service, linked to media exposure and the possibilities of sharing initiatives collected through the service on Facebook and Twitter. Statistics show that about half of the people enter the service through social media. If the media writes about an initiative it also seems to give it an immediate boost in participation.

A survey of how citizens perceive the Citizens' Initiative was carried out in 2014²⁷. Eighty-five per cent of the respondents thought that citizens' initiatives have raised important issues up for public debate. A vast majority of the respondents (80%) thought that the Citizens' Initiative had improved the functioning of Finnish democracy.



“Write your idea”
nuortenideat.fi

Local and Youth Initiatives

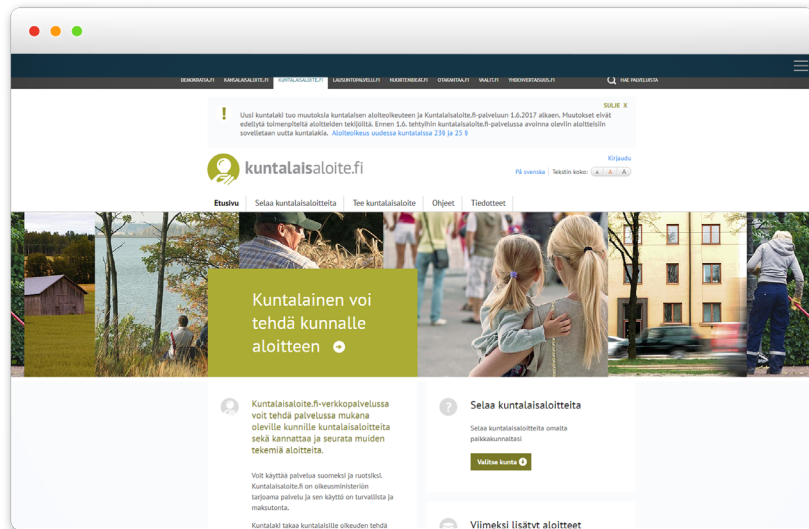
The Nordic states have a long legacy of municipal independence and strong local administration. In Finland, for example, two-thirds of all public welfare services are provided by the municipalities. Municipal self-government in Finland is protected by the Constitution and the activities of the municipalities are regulated by the Municipal Law (415/2015). The municipal law stipulates that municipalities should provide residents the opportunities to participate and exert influence in the decision-making process at the local level. Local councils must ensure that the municipality's residents and service users have the chance to participate in and influence the activities of the municipality. Participation and exerting influence can be furthered, for example, by providing information on municipal affairs and arranging opportunities for views to be presented, and finding out residents' opinions before taking decisions. Local matters are usually

²⁷ The survey was collected on the Citizen Initiative web-service. A total of 710 responses were received

close to a person's daily life and can thus be expected to interest people. Residents of a municipality have the right to submit initiatives on matters concerning the municipality's activities. There are three different types of municipal initiatives:

- Municipal residents can submit initiatives directly to their home municipalities as an individual
- If at least 2% of the municipal residents who are entitled to vote submit an initiative concerning a matter, falling within the competence of the municipal council, the council must take the initiative up for consideration.
- In addition, a minimum of 4% of the municipal residents who are over the age of 15 may submit an initiative proposing a municipal referendum.

The Municipal Law (415/2015) and the Youth Act (72/2006), Paragraph 8 also guarantees young



Every citizen can start initiative for their municipality.
kuntalaisaloite.fi

people the right to participate in the decision-making process on issues concerning them.

Kuntalaisaloite.fi is an online tool for making municipal initiatives and collecting signatures for them. Residents may launch initiatives online to the municipalities that are using the service. It functions in a similar manner as the services for collecting citizen initiatives and is built on open-source technology²⁸. The municipality may also show the initiatives submitted to the service through a widget on its own website.

Nuortenideat.fi is a service where young people may put forward ideas and initiatives. The service provides young people with a low-threshold tool for participation and influence, and gives them an opportunity to express their opinions on how the operation of different organizations could be developed. The service may be taken into use by local governments, schools,

²⁸ The code is published on: www.kuntalaisaloite.fi/api. The Open Data Rest API, providing programmatic access to most of the public data available using the web interface of otakantaa.fi, can be found under: <https://uusi.otakantaa.fi/api/open/docs/>.

NGOs and influence groups for young people. The service provides young people with an easy way to participate and influence, and also to express their opinions on how an operation or a service could be improved. Through the service, one can present one's own ideas or support and comment on ideas presented by others. One can also follow how the consideration of their idea proceeds and get an answer and a decision on it. Young people can present ideas, support or comment on the ideas of others, also formulate their idea into a municipal initiative.

The Kuntalaisaloite.fi e-tool for the electronic collection of signatures for initiatives to municipal authorities was launched in 2013. It has approximately 30,000 visitors a month. Over 2200 initiatives have so far been issued through the service. The online tool for youth participation Nuortenideat.fi has around 700 registered users and approximately 5000 users a month. Since 2014 approximately 500 discussions and initiatives have been launched through the service.

Based on a survey made by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities municipal initiatives have not been used to a very large degree since they were first introduced in the Municipal Law in 1976²⁹. According to survey data only 3-4% of the municipal residents had launched a municipal initiative. The survey was made in 2004, 2008 and 2011³⁰. These studies were done before the e-tool for collecting municipal initiatives was introduced. According to the national election study 11% have launched, browsed or signed an initiative on the kuntalaisaloite.fi e-tool, whilst 57% had not launched, browsed or signed a municipal initiative online, but would be willing to do so. 32% claimed that they hadn't done so and were not interested in doing it. It seems that the e-tool for collecting municipal initiatives, in just two years, would have increased people's willingness to make or participate in municipal initiatives. This may partly be linked to the fact that the possibility of making a municipal initiative has, for a long time been rather unknown to the public. The e-tool has increased the people's awareness of the possibilities of making municipal initiatives.

Consultation

Public consultation is important for comprehensive and responsive policy making that meets the needs of citizens. Consultation has the potential of strengthening the legitimacy of decision making. Consultation may help in re-establishing trust in government and promote public confidence in the legal security because it opens opportunities for stakeholders to obtain information and express their concerns. Public consultation may also strengthen social cohesion as it brings together diverse people to discuss policy issues.³¹ Finland has a long history of cooperation between the government and NGOs in law drafting. This has traditionally been done through broad based committees and working groups. The Finnish Constitution, through the Act on Openness of Government Activities and the Administrative Procedure Act sets the basis for this consultation. More detailed rules for consultation are stipulated in the Consultation Guidelines for Legislative Drafting.

E-tools for consultation

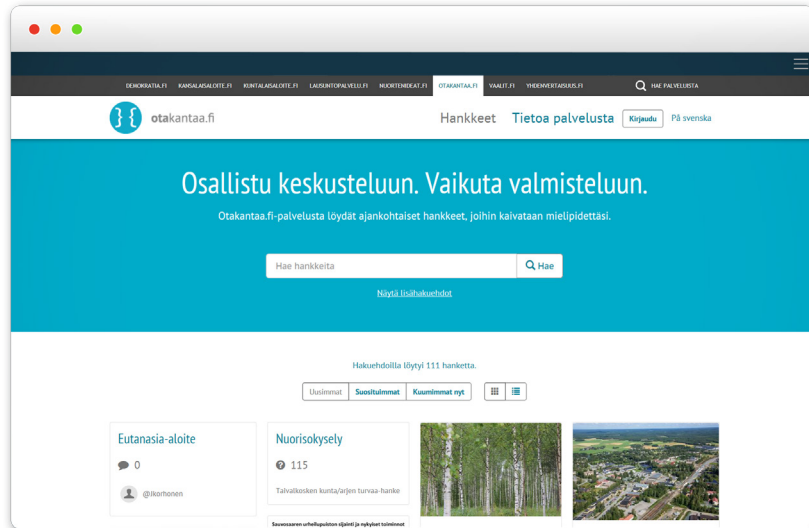
The Governments has published two e-tools which can be used for consultation in law drafting

²⁹ The survey is based on a representative sample of 10520 persons

³⁰ Paloheimo 2013

³¹ OECD 2011, 9-10

process and policy preparation. The Otakantaa.fi service can be used for questionnaires and discussions during the drafting process and the Lausuntopalvelu.fi is created to collect official requests for statements online, which always has to be done before the Government sends a bill to Parliament.



“Take part in the discussion. Improve preparation.”
www.otakantaa.fi

The otakantaa.fi³² website allows public officials and members of the general public to start discussions on various topics. These include everything from drafting new laws to mapping needs and ideas for new policies. Stakeholder engagement is possible through comments and facilitated by tools like polls and discussions. Inputs that have been gathered on the website can be used by public officials to inform further policy making. Consultations can be accessed through a website, listing the consultations sorted by the organisations having initiated them. The website uses open source code³³. The purpose of otakantaa.fi is to enable, enhance and promote dialogue between citizens and the public administration. Key benefits of eParticipation are that it is open to everyone and can be reached by large groups of stakeholders, that it is fast and easy to deploy in organisations (increased cost-effectiveness), that it includes a variety of participation methods (tools and methods to support the consultation process). Participation with less time-bound or physical limits makes the consultation processes more uniform within different organizations. The service has been highlighted as an example of good practices by the OECD.

³² English translation: “Have your say”

³³ The code will be published on github.com, an online portal for software coding and open source projects, in the near future. The Open Data Rest API, providing programmatic access to most of the public data available using the web interface of otakantaa.fi, can be found here: uusi.otakantaa.fi/api/open/docs/.

The **Lausuntopalvelu.fi** service enables statutory consultation online. It makes official requests for statements available to everyone. The statements given through the service are also to be collected conveniently in one place. Requests for statements may be submitted by ministries, local governments and government agencies. The requests for statements and the statements themselves are publicly available to everyone. Statements may be given by NGOs, private individuals, companies and public-sector organizations. Public officials can, via the service, send requests for comments, monitor the stage of the consultation process and compile summaries of comments by utilizing the online tool provided for this purpose. Agencies, organisations and citizens can submit their comments and statements via the service, as well as, browse through statements submitted by others.

Conclusions

E-services have many advantages. Digital services are usually the fastest and easiest way to interact with the authorities and it is the easiest way to reach out to a large number of people cost-effectively. When the use of digital services becomes more widespread, the public service production becomes more efficient, which saves public resources. At best eDemocracy may bring about higher quality in legislative drafting and the accessibility of drafting increases. It also has the possibility of increasing trust in government and satisfaction with how democracy works, if it is properly connected to the decision-making process and it actually makes an impact. It makes participation easier with less time-bound and physical limits and more uniform processes and thus has the potential to increase service levels and improve productivity. eParticipation however requires well-defined processes and that participation channels are properly anchored in legislation and policies. Participation and consultation should always have a purpose and a link to decision-making, otherwise it may even be counterproductive to its purpose. The introduction of eDemocracy requires commitment by the administration and the government. It is also important to ensure the continuity. Promoting and marketing services is essential, as it has been recognized that many good efforts have not gained momentum, as e-services have remained largely unknown to the general public.

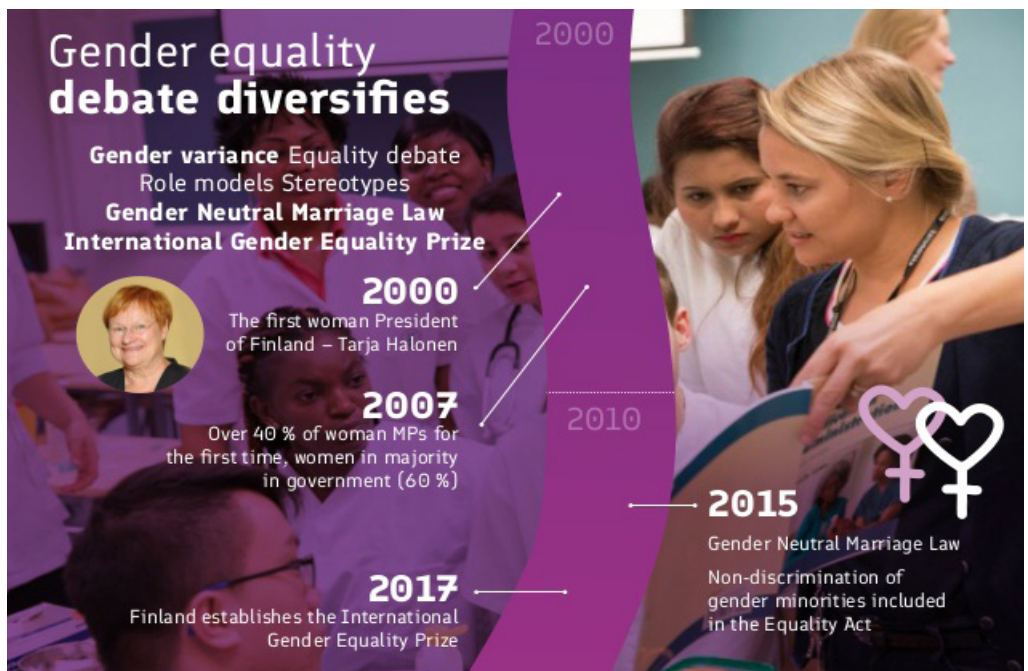
Whilst developing e-services, it is important to recognize that it is the content and the context that matters, not technology in itself. If we invent e-tools without looking at the processes and seeking new ways of doing things, very limited results can be achieved. Moving towards more collaborative and participatory governance requires increasing openness and customer orientation and new ways of opening and publishing government data. It is important that governments and organizations are aware of the benefits of participation and use these to promote citizen involvement.

The starting point is that digital services provided by the public administration must be functional, easy to use and safe. The authorities must ensure that the digital channels are an attractive option to the people. In building digital services, key issues include user-oriented design, renewal of service processes, interoperability of services, and information security and data protection.

Citizens' Initiative on Gender-Neutral Marriage Act

The Gender-Neutral Marriage Act is the first law in Finland that is based on a citizens' initiative. The citizens' initiative promoting same-sex marriage gained more than 160 000 signatories and is so far the most popular initiative. The initiative collected over 100,000 signatures in a day.

The gender-neutral law came into effect on 1st of March 2017. Now marriage is open to all people regardless of person's gender or sexual orientation. All spouses' rights such as the right to take each other's surname and adopt children will also apply to same-sex couples in the future. Same sex couples have already been able to enter into registered partnerships before the new marriage law.



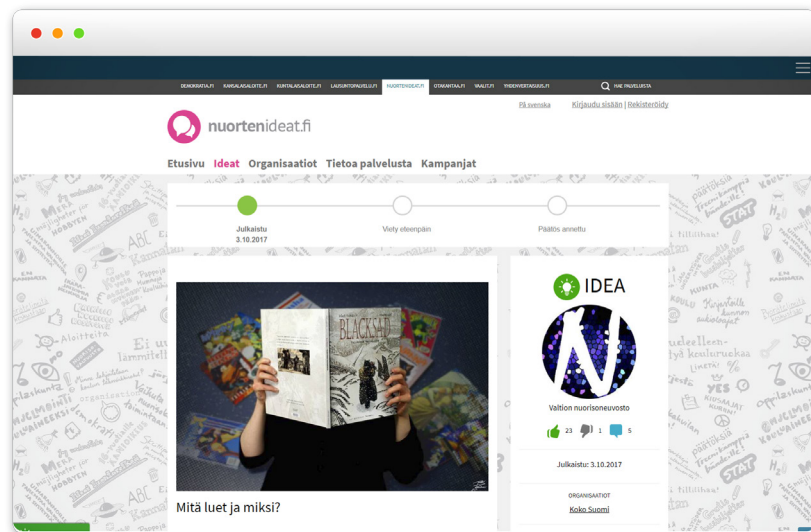
Youth-Inclusive Society

Nuortenideat.fi is an online service for young people to make initiatives and present their ideas. The service allows young people to easily make suggestions, participate and influence the matters concerning them.

The opportunities for young people to participate are regulated by the Finnish Youth Act. The objectives of the Youth Law include encouraging the involvement of young people and offering them possibilities to participate and influence matters concerning them. According to the Youth Act young people also have a right to get their voices heard when a nationwide youth policy is under preparation.

Nuortenideat.fi has been developed in cooperation by The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Justice, and the service can be taken into use without charge by minis-

tries, local governments, schools, NGOs and influence groups for young people. Nuortenideat.fi aims to enhance the interaction and cooperation between young people and ministries, municipalities, schools, organizations and other actors. It seeks to bring forth the opinions of young people, and discuss and consider them in the decision-making process. So far ministries, 55 local governments, schools and other education institutions and 25 NGOs and influence groups, have joined to the service.



“What are you reading and why?”
nuortenideat.fi

In the service, young people can present their own initiatives and ideas or support and comment ideas presented by others. The ideas can also be complemented with a Gallup poll asking other people’s opinions about the idea. Writing your own idea requires a login but the ideas can be browsed, commented and endorsed without logging in.

A discussion may also be started by the organizations when they want to hear the opinions of young people concerning a specific issue. Real-time chat rooms around a specific theme can also be arranged through the service. It is possible that, for example, a member of a local government is invited to the chat room to answer the questions of the young people. The service also gives the possibility to follow the process of an idea developing into a decision. Young people can keep track of their ideas under consideration, and ultimately, they will get an answer and a decision on their idea. The answer to the idea is provided by the organization responsible for the area in question. The users of the service are guided to address their idea to the appropriate organization. The service can be used as a tool for democratic education, for example, in school lessons and in the actions of organizations.

As of today, 580 ideas have been presented in the service since its opening in 2014 and already 380 of them have got a decision. So far, there have been 81,833 chat sessions on the site and it has 57 097 users.

eParticipation in Denmark - A state-of-play report



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Bjørn Bedsted, MA Social Anthropology, Deputy Director of the Danish Board of Technology Foundation. Bjørn is an expert practitioner in citizens' participation. He has led numerous participatory technology assessment projects in various fields involving public engagement. He is the global coordinator of the World Wide Views initiative (global citizen consultations) and recently coordinated World Wide Views on Climate and Energy, engaging 10,000 citizens in 76 countries.



Rasmus Øjvind Nielsen, PhD in governance studies from Roskilde University, Scientific Project Manager at the Danish Board of Technology Foundation. Rasmus is specialised in institutional changes in research and innovation governance. He recently took part in assessing technology options and systems to strengthen eParticipation and direct democracy for the European Parliament's STOA panel, focusing especially on options for new eParticipation tools at the EU-level of governance.

There are good reasons to have high expectations about eParticipation in Denmark. The country has long served as a model for a consensus-oriented and participatory approach to modernisation and structural transitions³⁴. Some of the institutional innovations that have set Denmark apart as a frontrunner towards participatory democracy include: tripartite industrial bargaining dating back to the early 1900s³⁵, participatory technology assessment and the consensus conferences institutionalised in the mid-1980s³⁶, and public participation in spatial and environmental planning at the municipal level, a feature written into law during the 1990s³⁷. In addition to these national innovations, Denmark has championed citizens' participation globally, one example being the promotion of the Aarhus Convention with its provisions for transparency and participation, another being the World-Wide Views methodology, which has facilitated the inclusion of citizens' views into the UN climate change and biodiversity negotiations³⁸. At the same time, Denmark stands out as a frontrunner in digitisation. The European Commission's digitisation scoreboard consistently places Denmark amongst the most highly digitised countries in Europe on indicators such as human capital, digital skills, internet

34 Katzenstein, P.J. (1985). Small states in world markets: Industrial policy in Europe. Cornell University Press.

35 Noted as early as Galenson, Walter (1952). The Danish system of Labor Relations. A Study in Industrial Peace. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press

36 Joss, S., & Bellucci, S. (2002). Participatory technology assessment. European Perspectives. London: Center for the Study of Democracy.

37 Enemark, S. (1999). The Spatial Planning System in Denmark. Danish Association of Chartered Surveyors.

38 Worthington, R., Rask, M., & Minna, L. (Eds.). (2013). Citizen participation in global environmental governance. Routledge.

use, and digitisation in businesses³⁹. Together, these facts about Denmark would reasonably lead to expectations that eParticipation would be high on the agenda and far advanced.

However, there are good reasons to temper such expectations. While some features of the Danish institutional landscape do indeed stand out as exemplarily participatory in international comparison, core democratic oversight functions are weaker than elsewhere. Danish parliamentarians thus have a tougher time setting up independent commissions, holding ministers legally accountable and getting independent analytical support and legal counsel, than some of their international colleagues⁴⁰. Furthermore, in recent decades the adoption of New Public Management reforms has increased centralisation and professionalisation of the administrative and political processes⁴¹, leaving less room for participation in policy formulation and for local democracy. Another trend, partly connected to the centralisation of the government, has been the defunding of independent counsels, such as the Danish Board of Technology, leaving a landscape of mostly privately funded ideology-based think-tanks instead of public 'honest brokers'. Considered together, these facts provide evidence that the 'Danish model' is not exemplary in all regards. In regards to digitisation, government action has been central to reaching the current advanced state. Foregoing competitiveness in the production of ICT, governmental action in Denmark has sought instead to streamline public sector services at all levels of government and to use digitisation of these services to force ICT adoption amongst its citizens⁴². In the context of this strategy, public sector digitisation is first and foremost on eGovernment, rather than on the exploitation of the participatory potentials of eParticipation.

eParticipation in Denmark is pursued most actively at the municipal and regional levels of government. Arguably, practitioners in the field seem to have gone through a cycle of learning, leading to a second-generation standpoint. By this, we mean that practitioners have gone through a period in the 2000s where expertise in participatory practice was one thing, and digitisation expertise was quite another. In this period, eParticipation experiments were most often done with the rather naïve assumption that digitisation could somehow take the price tag and workload out of the participatory process. Today, there is a more widespread understanding that the 'e' in eParticipation is a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face participation.

It is still possible to find examples, in which administrations try to fast-forward through the involvement process with the use of simplistic eParticipation. Without singling out any one example, several administrations have succumbed to the allure of Facebook, only to realise that the unstructured and open-ended nature of its services make it easy to start up a conversation with citizens, but almost impossible to moderate that conversation if it happens to take off. For public administrations, who are under legal obligation to respond to all citizens' inquiries, the workload easily becomes overwhelming. At the other extreme, hundreds of social media groups started by local and regional administrations have suffered the fate of withering away in silence, failing to provide the intended participatory opportunity.

From a practitioner's point of view, we would argue that second generation eParticipation

39 Cf. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2017. Available at: ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi

40 In this and the following example, we follow the argument of Koch, P. B. (2015). 'Myten om det stærke folketing - og ansatser til et realitetstjek', in: *Futuriblerne*, 43:2-3, p. 33-38.

41 Greve, C. (2006). 'Public management reform in Denmark', *Public management review*, 8(1), 161-169.

42 The Danish Government/Danish Regions/Local Government Denmark (2011). *The Digital Path to Future Welfare: eGovernment Strategy 2011-15*, p. 8.

begins from at least three lessons learned. Firstly, the ‘e’ can seldom stand alone, but must be supplemented by well-facilitated real-life dialogue encounters. Secondly, the factors driving success or failure in participation in general, apply to eParticipation as well. These include the willingness to open up the decisions that matter to participants, the provision of adequate and understandable information, processual transparency, careful recruitment, and the delegation of ample resources⁴³. Thirdly, just as no one method is the answer to all things participatory no one digital tool is the answer to all things ‘e’. eParticipation practitioners need to master an entire toolbox (surveys, learning platforms, ideation, debate fora, tagging systems, cluster analysis, and more) in order to be able to construct relevant participatory processes with appropriate digital tools. In our own work, these lessons have inspired us to develop the *EngageSuite* toolbox, which makes construction of complex online or blended processes possible, based on the process expertise of our project managers.

Second-generation approach to eParticipation: Aalborg

The first example is taken from the local level of government. During 2014-15 Aalborg Municipality collaborated with consultants at Agora and researchers at Aalborg University to design and facilitate a process of vision generation for the local implementation of a highly unpopular national reform strategy for public schools⁴⁴. In this process, a range of different digital tools were woven into a multi-method participatory envisioning process. The process involved flash mobs with students, Vox pops



interviews with citizens, meetings with teachers and school leaders, seminars with stakeholders, and it culminated in a large-scale ‘vision day’ where 1300 employees formulated visions for school reform implementation. A Facebook page was set up to disseminate results and gather inputs from the broader public - but this was far from the only digital tool used. Centrally, Aalborg University set up an interactive database for collecting all input and exploring it through visual aids such as cluster analysis. At the vision day, participants would tag their contributions with thematic keywords to enable comparison and grouping on a wide range of parameters. Instead of a finalised set of recommendations, this process produced a living catalogue of visions and suggestions, which the administration could use for inspiration, to challenge internal ideas, and as evidence of support.

⁴³ See e.g. Nabatchi, T., & Leighninger, M. (2015). *Public participation for 21st century democracy*. John Wiley & Sons.
⁴⁴ Described in-depth (in Danish) at slideplayer.dk/slide/2584453/



Aalborg University Copenhagen

Active EU citizenship

In 2014-18 an EU-funded European consortium, coordinated by the Danish Board of Technology Foundation worked to feed citizens' visions into the priority setting process for the EU's research and innovation funding program. In this process⁴⁵, a bespoke digital consultation tool was used to supplement and enhance a structured series of physical dialogues amongst citizens, researchers and policy-makers. The first step was real-life envisioning workshops held in all EU member states, where citizens collaborated on generating visions for future research and innovation. These visions were handed over to a co-creation workshop, where citizens representing each country met with experts to outline possible research and innovation programs. The suggestions from the workshop were fed back into a second round of national workshops, which were supplemented by an online consultation of 3000+ individuals in order to validate and enrich the outcome of the co-creation. Finally, these results were fed into an interactive conference, in which EC officials, experts and the consortium transformed them into concrete research topics for the Commission's framework programme, which it currently seems that half are being fully or partly implemented.

⁴⁵ Described in-depth at www.cimulact.eu/workplan/



The Norwegian perspective on the digital democracy

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Norway is a thoroughly digitalised society, but digitalisation of public services has so far lagged behind digital solutions in the private sector. There are a number of factors which speak in favour of eDemocracy in Norway. The country is geographically large and sparsely populated. As Norway's population grows older, digitalisation serves as an important tool in ensuring closeness to services, regardless of age group and physical mobility. Further, local government reform, resulting in fewer and larger administrative units points in the direction of the need for more eDemocracy.

In spite of several enablers to digitalisation more broadly, and eDemocracy more specifically, there are constraints to this effort. Ironically, the high trust in and legitimacy of the public sector makes innovative change more difficult. Furthermore, the weak tradition of public-private partnerships has meant that knowledge transfer between the private and public sector is limited. Finally, the lacking competitiveness of the public sector, especially at local level, in terms of status, financial and career opportunities has meant that talent has been difficult for local administration to accrue. In Norway, eDemocracy is very much a prerogative of local, not national, government, and their inability to attract the best and the brightest to further such efforts is to the detriment of eDemocracy in this country.

The circumstances for eDemocracy in Norway are far from grim, but given the country's potential, it is surprising to witness the slow pace of eDemocracy to date. I argue that a greater reliance on big data in public sector eDemocracy initiatives can tailor information and make the online political arena more relevant to the individual local user. Furthermore, I argue, in line with the recommendations of Norwegian Council on Technology, that further experimentation is needed in the field of digitisation. Norway's local administrative units have wide prerogatives in experimenting with eDemocracy solutions from different countries, yet not much has actually been done by way of experimentation. Finally, I argue that Norway needs to do more to transfer the technology and know-how of the private sector into the public sector. In an era of increased scarcity of time, public eDemocracy tools have to be as sleek and appealing as private web services, because this is in fact its competition. In the Norwegian case, simplification in terms of private-public partnerships and a knowledge build-up in the public sector, as far as the private sector is concerned, is needed.

Status quo: Norway

Norway is one of a handful of leading countries in digitalisation of the public sector. Already in 2015 as many as 99% of Norwegian households had access to 4G broadband, and at a national level as much as 89% of all public bodies make some use of social media. The use has since proliferated and one can now enter into a virtual dialogue with literally any public institution through their social media presence. Even the Norwegian Police Security Service joined Twitter as early as 2009, curiously welcoming the CIA's arrival on Twitter with a poignant "better late than never".

At the same time, the private sector, in particular the banking sector, has led the way in creating an e-ID system which allows for broad use of public services online. Although national services have become increasingly digitalised, contact with local administration remains troublingly analogue in some parts of the country. According to ICT Norway's 2017 report "IT i praksis", while the state is beginning to deliver, counties still predominantly communicate with its citizens by post. Norway has not been as drastic as Denmark in cutting down on other avenues of communication with the public, although the government has pushed through limitations on receiving non-essential information in the post.

National platforms such as that of the welfare and employment agency (NAV), or the platform for dialogue between government, business and citizens, Altinn.no, are large and well established. The government has launched its own digital post box service, with subscriptions steadily increasing from 200,000 in 2016 to nearly 1 million users in 2017. The Norwegian government has worked towards further digitalisation, not only when it comes to service delivery, but also when it comes to eDemocracy and contact between citizens and the state, and at local levels of government. Norway has, in the last four years, seen a local government reform which reduced the number of Norwegian counties from 426 to 354. This process revitalised the local political debate and commitment, with counties using e-solutions to facilitate the discussion. As local political units become larger, the need for more effective communication with its citizens has increased. Still, the local level is lagging behind.

According to the DESI Index, Norway scores above the EU28 average of digitalisation, and both digital literacy and broadband connectivity is widely common. Nevertheless, the digitalisation of democracy reinforces the resource gap between the haves' and the have-nots in Norwegian society. Recent migrants, older citizens, people with disabilities and the unemployed are especially vulnerable to the digitalisation of public services. For that reason, Norway's greatest challenge is to increase digital literacy and connectivity with these marginal groups in order to ensure that all benefit from the eDemocracy.

The Facts on the Ground:

Norway remains the largest spender on public services as a percentage of GDP in an OECD comparison. Together with Denmark, the country has one of the highest OECD rates of public employees as a percentage of the working population. These two factors show that on the surface the Norwegian public sector has both the resources and the manpower to make advances in terms of eDemocracy.

Norway is a large country, at least in geographical terms. At 323,802 square meters it ranks as one of the largest countries in Western Europe. Its mountainous geography and scattered

cities, towns and villages, means that travel between the different parts of the country can be cumbersome. The distance between Oslo and the border with Russia is the same as between Oslo and Rome, yet there is a train connection for only about half this stretch. The rest has to be traversed by car or plane. Through the reforms of local and regional administrations over the past four years, the physical distance to county and regional capitals has increased. This has enhanced the need for better public digital solutions, including eDemocracy tools. Although 8 out of 10 people now live in towns or cities, the country has 981 defined towns or cities scattered throughout its territory. It has been the stated goal of the Norwegian government, spanning several decades, to allow people equal access to services regardless of where they live in the country. This gives added impetus to look to e-services for answers.

Challenges remain

A bizarre challenge to the rise of eDemocracy in Norway is the relatively high turnout in national elections (77% in 2017), as well as the trust and legitimacy of public institutions in Norway. The former has meant that eDemocracy has taken a backseat to other digitalisation efforts. Service delivery has been the focus of the government's digitalisation White Paper, and less has been done nationally to further eDemocracy. The high legitimacy of state and local institutions also comes with the challenge of inertia and the perceived lack of need for revolutionary, rather than evolutionary changes to the government's approach to digitalisation. A lack of corruption and high trust in public officials overall has also meant that there has been less of a drive to digitalise communication between citizens and the public.

The second major challenge for Norwegian eDemocracy rests with the shortage of talent willing to work in local administration. eDemocracy is mainly a local prerogative in Norway, and counties are given large freedoms to innovate in this regard. However, in order for that to work, these same counties must have the knowledge and resources available for experimentation. A 2016 study by the Norwegian labour union, NITO, shows that while 4.7% of Norwegian engineering graduates would like to pursue a career in local administration, 65.7% would like to start out in the private sector. NITO also found that 71% of counties are struggling to find and hire qualified engineers. This lack of young, technical talent puts the counties in a difficult position to deliver on the government's ambitions for eDemocracy.

The large role of the public sector in Norwegian society also has the potential to impede on public-private partnerships. A strong and comprehensive public sector sees less of a need for support from the private sector, and the public sector can effectively crowd out private service providers in arenas which intersect between the two sectors. In the past four years the Norwegian public procurement processes has been simplified, and a new guidebook, or cookbook, has been designed to ease the path towards increased public-private partnerships. Still, the OECD and the private sector itself, report that the knowledge of working with the private sector is very limited both at the local, regional and national levels of government. Knowing the crucial role played by the private sector in furthering digitalisation in Norway, this does not bode well for future knowledge transfer practices from the private to the public sector. Add to that the struggle to attract talented recruits with technical skills, and it goes a long way to explain the challenge faced by Norwegian local governments in promoting eDemocracy.

What can be done?

Norway is already a highly digitalised country, yet much can still be done to further eDemocracy. The macro figures show that both the necessary conditions as well as the benefits of eDemocracy point to the need for further digitalisation.

First of all, local, regional and state actors need to work together more closely with private sector actors to benefit from the innovation in this sector. As a competitor for the time and attention of citizens, eDemocracy services need to be of a certain quality, which means they can effectively outcompete other time uses by citizens. In the context of Norway, this can be improved by allowing officials more leeway and less rigid interpretations of guidelines when working with private sector actors in public-private partnerships. Further, it can be achieved by strengthening knowledge of the private sector in local and state administration by increasingly hiring from the private sector and by allowing for public employees to be embedded within private companies, working with local, regional or national administrations.

The shortage of staff with a technical background is also a major drawback for local administration, and one which can be addressed at several ends. Firstly, Norway needs to widen its group of graduates with ICT skills. This can be done by increasing funding for these disciplines at the country's universities and colleges, but also by establishing more studentships focused on ICT in public administration. An increased supply of potential employees with a technical background must go hand in hand with a change in hiring practices by the local administration. Local administration has to emphasise recruitment from this background and ensure that those who take up such positions are given the opportunity to grow professionally.

Teknologirådet, the Norwegian National Council on Technology, further recommends greater use of experiments with digitalisation at the local level. The Norwegian focus on equal access to services across the country has made it more difficult for counties to experiment in fields such as eDemocracy, and at a national level there is no institution which encourages and systematises local experiments. It is therefore important that the state, in dialogue with the counties, encourages experimentation with different approaches to eDemocracy.

Concluding remarks

Norway has come a long way in its digitisation efforts, but eDemocracy gets less attention than public service delivery. Local administration is the key to revamping Norway's eDemocracy effort. More experimentation should be done at local level on what works and what doesn't. Furthermore, there needs to be more public-private partnerships and more recruitment to the local administration from the private sector. A greater focus on ICT in public administration is required, and a greater effort made to invest in these subjects at Norwegian universities and colleges.

In spite of good election turnouts, Norway would be remiss if it did not use the benefits offered by eDemocracy. Geography, fiscal situation and demographics all point to the need for further digitalisation.

To improve digital literacy:

The Norwegian telecommunications company, Telenor, provided 500 free courses for the use of smart phones/tablets for older citizens. This kind of partnership with the government provides useful knowledge to citizens, funded by a private company with a self-interest in e-literacy. The courses are useful in increasing the base of Norwegians able to take part in digital democracy, while at the same time benefiting both government service delivery and long-term company earnings.

Counties use social media in local government reform

During the local government reform which resulted in fewer and larger administrative units at the local and regional level, the counties, as well as the state, provided e-platforms for communicating with the citizens. Such platforms eased participation for all groups, including those with disabilities, and collected valuable resources on the reform. Rissa county was particularly successful in using Facebook to gather views from its residents, regardless of their physical location, age or level of ability.

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eDemocracy in Sweden



Lena Langlet has, for 30 years constantly been engaged in development and quality work and projects within the public sector; working in municipalities, the Ministry of Education and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). For the last 10 years she has been responsible for SALAR's extensive participatory project "In Dialogue with Citizens" and she is, since 2011, Head of Democracy affairs in SALAR. To develop democracy and social sustainability is the most important aim for her.



Anders Nordh, project manager at SALAR, responsible for eDemocracy and transparency. He has been leading various ICT projects at SALAR since 2000, with the purpose of developing the work at local level. Mr Nordh have been a part of SALAR:s Citizen dialogue project since 2008. In his work with eDemocracy one important part is to encourage municipalities and regions to use tools for digital participation

In an international context, Sweden has held a long tradition of democracy and transparency. For example, for over 250 years Sweden has had freedom of information laws which allow citizens to access most government information, excepting cases of government confidentiality or privacy.

It also has a tradition of self-governing municipalities with direct taxation rights, allowing them to shape their activities based on local needs, rather than national priorities. However, the central government exercises control over many activities through legislation and targets. The municipalities are responsible for all education (except higher education), all care for the elderly and social care, as well as technical infrastructure, leisure and culture.

In other words, municipalities are responsible for all major issues that concern local residents and where citizens have immediate interest in influencing decisions. In Sweden today there are 290 municipalities, ranging from the largest – Stockholm – with nearly 900,000 inhabitants, to the smallest municipality – Bjurholm – with a mere 2500 inhabitants. The median population per municipality is 16,000.

Sweden is a representative democracy, in which citizens vote for parties that themselves choose who will occupy different elected roles.

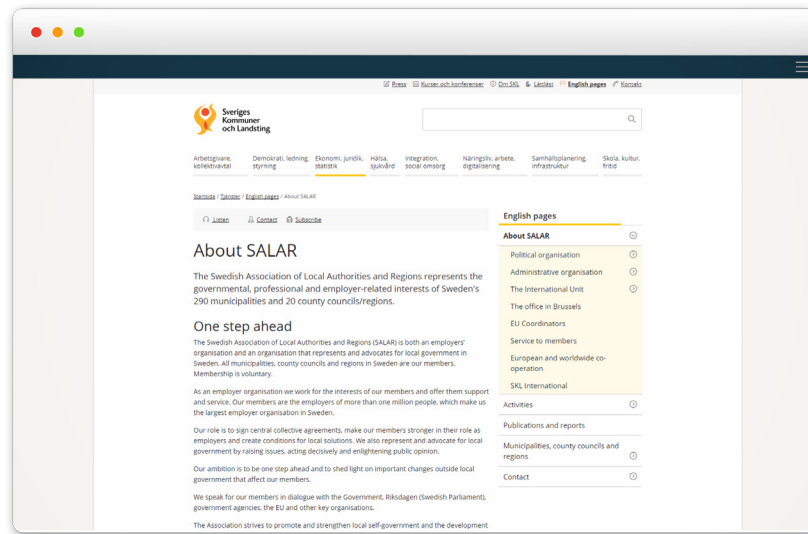
The country was one of the pioneers in introducing digital systems for administrative and other purposes. In municipalities this began in the 1970s, via the introduction of mainframe systems. Over the years, the digital infrastructure has continued to be developed – an expansion that continues today. Currently 93% of the population in Sweden have access to the Internet and 67% use social media. There are 14.5 million mobile subscriptions for a population of below 10 million.

As a nation, Swedes therefore have good conditions for a well-developed eDemocracy, but is it so?

SALAR was established in 2007 as a member organisation for all municipalities and county



SALAR:
“One step ahead”



councils. It is organised by its Congress, comprised of elected representatives from municipalities and county councils. Devised by its Congress, SALAR has as mission to develop the citizen participation in municipalities and county councils, and to ensure that the results of this participation affect decisions and governance.

SALAR's approach is to spread and increase knowledge, to inspire its members and to test working methods together with interested municipalities.

SALAR offers municipalities and county councils the opportunity to participate in different forms of networks. SALAR has 'pure' knowledge networks for elected representatives and employees who want to gain more insight in an area. They organise meetings where researchers with different views on participation discuss the issue, contributing to the topic themselves, and invite experts in the field (often international ones) to share their knowledge.

How can e-solutions develop citizens' participation in the democratic processes?

In order for citizens to have good opportunities to participate and influence, they need to get correct and accurate information. Today, plenty of information is available on municipalities' websites, but this is usually written from the organisation's perspective. This increases the risk that a municipality be accused of having hidden agendas and not being transparent with all the information available.

In a participatory process, there is a need to be open from the start, presenting the complete process with all its steps early and providing as much information as possible, as early as possible. We can see examples of how this can be done today in Sweden. In the participatory budgeting process in Nässjö Municipality transparency is maintained through a project blog. In the field of urban development issues, technology provides new opportunities with visualisations via GIS and 3D animations, etc. Brand new technological opportunities allow us to visualise possible futures and give citizens the opportunity to comment directly on a digital map. This is something we can expect to see much more of in the future. Today, it is mainly the larger cities

that have the skills and resources needed to fully utilise these opportunities.

Over the years, SALAR has highlighted the many benefits that e-solutions provide - they are available around the clock and give citizens unable to physically attend a meeting an opportunity to participate. The widespread use of the Internet provides new opportunities for disseminating information and increasing participation.

Despite all of these benefits, we have not yet reached a “tipping point” where this way of working has become a second nature for municipalities - to provide digital solutions for participation and influence.

Today in Sweden there are around 25-30 municipalities and a few county councils that provide opportunities to submit e-proposals or e-petitions, with varying results. There are probably about as many municipalities that have a digital citizens panel. Several of the municipalities that have tested participatory budgeting over the years have used digital solutions for collecting and presenting proposals and voting, but most of them have also run a parallel face to face process.

All Swedish municipalities have a presence on Facebook today, and many elected representatives are also active in social media. This naturally increases their contact with citizens, but it is rarely carried out in a systematic or structured way.

Between 2008 and 2011, SALAR received support from the central government to develop e-tools for citizen participation. Inspired by visits to other countries, they developed a number of tools: to simulate budgets, to visualize proposals for the citizens' budget, and chat and discussion tools. In addition, some developers have created tools for citizens' panels and e-proposals. The tools are developed in open source and are currently provided primarily by the companies that developed them. There are a number of market actors offering GIS and 3D mapping tools.

At national level there is no legislation that requires that digital solutions for participation or which requires opportunities for citizens to be able to influence decisions. For example, it is not possible to hand in e-proposals or e-petitions to the parliament of Sweden.

In representative democratic traditions, as in Sweden, political parties have not tended to go beyond their own membership to gain views on policies. It has been considered sufficient to hold the discussion within the party membership itself. Today, considering that fewer people choose to become members of political parties, the will to open up needs to increase. The changes are becoming visible and the question really is ‘when’ rather than ‘if’.

The rapid pace of social change increases the need for a stronger democracy between elections. New forms of participation are required to build societies that are socially sustainable in the long term.

One question worth discussing is whether it is actually the municipalities' task to make this happen. Perhaps it is the citizens themselves who need to move this agenda forward. At the very least the digital revolution has given them access to many tools and channels that previous generations did not have.



Nässjö Municipality

Digital Participatory Budget - creating openness and citizen commitment

For several years the Swedish municipality of Nässjö has been working to ensure that the citizens of the municipality's peripheral towns and villages have the opportunity to influence how the municipal budget is spent. One challenge has been to get the local residents involved. Another is ensuring that everyone has equal influence over how the money is spent. When the municipality started working on the digital participatory budget, it became easier for citizens to get involved, the process became more transparent and all residents were given the same opportunity to participate and influence.

Since 2010, Nässjö has sought to give citizens in the municipality's periphery influence over how parts of the municipal budget are spent.

In order to make this happen the municipality at first collaborated with local civil society representatives. These representatives took responsibility for finding out what needs exist in each community. They played an important role in prioritising the proposals that were sent in and determining how the money allocated for each place should be used. After a few years, many of the committed civil society representatives felt that the process gave them too much responsibility and influence in relation to others who live and work in the area. They also felt that the process was too time- and labour-intensive for them.

Transition to the digital participatory budget

When the opportunity to influence part of the budget was extended beyond civil society stakeholders to citizens more broadly, the municipality wanted to find new ways of working, which would enable wider involvement. They also wanted to develop a process which was faster and more effective. For these reasons a blog with digital tools was developed for the participatory budget.

The transition to a so-called digital participatory budget has increased the ability of local residents to directly influence the budget. The process has also become more open and transparent. Local civil society is still active in the work. They make a valuable contribution, for example, when local events are organized around the participatory budget. But today they have no more influence than other local residents in terms of prioritising how the money is spent.

How it works

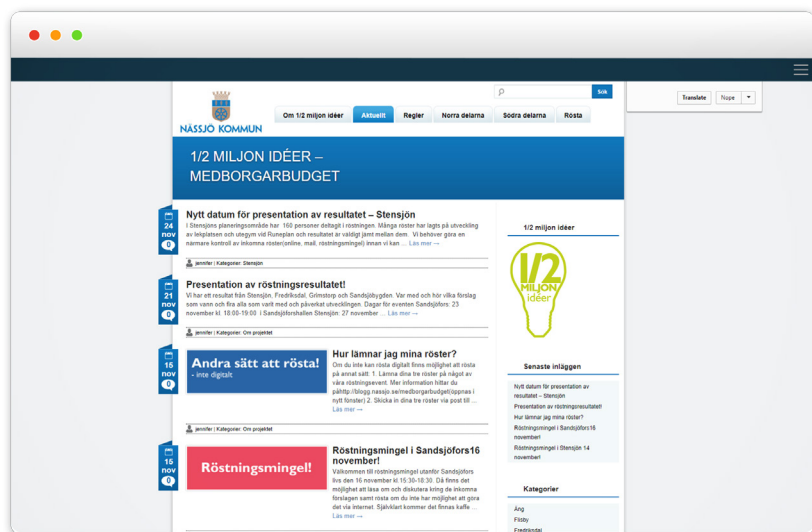
Today, the participatory budgeting process works by allowing anyone living and working in the local area to submit proposals for what they think the money should be used for. Proposals can be submitted either directly on the web, by letter or at local events. About half of the proposals submitted are posted on the web. Once a proposal has been received, the municipality will contact the person who submitted the proposal to gain a better understanding of the proposal in order to estimate the cost for it.

In order for a proposal idea to go ahead and be included as a formal proposal that can be voted on, it needs to be about an improvement of the physical environment which:

- Contributes to the area's attractiveness, identity, security or future development;
- Is a new meeting place or improves an existing meeting place in the area;
- Is suitable for a broad range of users or can be used by as many people as possible.
- Costs a maximum of 200,000 SEK (approximately €20,000) to complete.

All suggestions with estimated costs are uploaded to the blog. All suggestions are marked on a digital map, with a location marker and a more detailed description. It is also possible to follow the different steps from the submission of proposals to the city's final decision on how the money will be used.

The proposals are prioritised by giving each citizen in the area three votes to distribute among the proposals submitted. Voting mainly takes place on the website, but there is also the possibility of voting by letter. There are also face to face meetings in the form of 'a voting mingle', with the aim of increasing involvement.



“Participatory budgeting tool”

Results

A total of 62 proposals so far have been submitted in the Äng, Ormaryd and Solberga areas, which were the first areas to take part in the digital participatory budget. On average, 26% of the local residents participated. In the area where participation was highest, 43 % participated. The stated aim for participation rates in this first round was 25%.

Some of the proposals that the residents voted for, and which are currently underway, are a new kickbike and skateboard course, the development of a playground, the installation of lighting at a local sports track and the development of a lake park where many local residents have their boats.

„Now we are considering if the tool and the working method can be used in other areas, for example, in Nässjö centrally or in schools,“ says Jennifer Cronborn, project manager for the municipality’s work on the participatory budget.

Facts about the participatory budget in Nässjö Municipality

During the 2016 – 2020 period, 500,000 SEK are to be distributed per area, on two different occasions through the participatory budget.

Anyone who lives and works in an area can submit proposals on how to use the money and/or vote on submitted proposals through a digital tool.

Each citizen receives three votes to distribute between one, two or three of the proposals.

During 2016, citizens submitted 58 ideas for development.

During 2017, citizens submitted 120 ideas for development.

50% of the ideas were submitted via the digital tool.

eEstonia: a front-runner



Moldovan teacher and diplomat, residing in Estonia. **Victor Guzun** served as foreign affairs specialist in Moldovan state bodies, NGO sector and higher education institutions. In 2010-2015 served as Ambassador of Moldova to Estonia. Currently is involved in a number of projects in Eastern European and Baltic countries, running a consulting company and teaching international negotiations at Tallinn University of Technology. Victor is constantly promoting e-governance and e-participation, focusing on Moldova and Ukraine. He is the author of a publication addressed to Moldovan local authorities, with the focus on the use of e-governance solutions at the local level, supported by ELF.

In 1991, Estonia regained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with almost non-existing independent links to the world, and with limited international phone connectivity and communication infrastructure. Today, in 2017, Estonia is one of the recognised world leaders in implementing e-government solutions, eDemocracy and cyber security, and successfully spreading these practices around the globe. How was it possible in such a short time?

The Soviet administrative machinery, being highly inefficient and bureaucratic, needed a quick and irreversible change, and Estonia did it. As always, big changes and reforms start with a clear political will. Estonia was lucky enough to have young, open-minded and visionary political class, which created the foundation of the re-born Estonian state – the open, liberal economy with strong free-trade values, a quick and efficient privatisation process, supremacy of the property rights, flat income tax and minimised bureaucracy.

A strategic decision was taken, to start the new chapter with a highly efficient state machine, paperless administration and the implementation of high-end technologies in all sectors of life. In a famous example, Estonia declined to receive, for free, a good but already technologically old Finnish telephone system. Instead, Estonia chose to build a high-end digital telephone system, the example being replicated everywhere. The endless and notoriously slow queues inside administrative buildings, an almost compulsory part of the Soviet reality, were quickly replaced with electronic databases, digitalised archives and efficient channels of information exchange between the state, citizens and business. The quick development of internet infrastructure was immediately seen by open-minded politicians, business, citizens and civil society at large as a huge platform of new possibilities. It was and it is a kind of digital patriotism, almost a digital religion, as one of the journalists of *The Economist* noted.⁴⁶

Understanding this, in 1996 Estonia launched The Tiger Leap project, equipping all classrooms with new, internet-connected computers by 1998. As schoolchildren become computer literate, they brought the obtained knowledge into their homes, often changing the views and priorities in respective families. In 2000, the Estonian government declared Internet Access as a Human Right and a nationwide system of free Wi-Fi hotspots was built. Special programs of state-supported internet and computer literacy were approved (for example, the Look@World project,

⁴⁶ www.economist.com/news/europe/21724831-country-e-residency-wonders-why-others-are-more-sceptical-estonia-trying-convert

which provided computer literacy courses for 10% of the adult population,) and a boom of creation of digital services started. Paper documents, queues, rubber stamps and analogue signatures disappeared quickly and e-Estonia emerged.

In 1996, commercial banks started to implement e-banking solutions which boosted the use of e-based services massively. Today almost all (99,8%) financial operations in Estonia are online, and slowly the expression “going to the bank” is disappearing from the national vocabulary. Since 2000, an e-Tax system was created, allowing citizens and entrepreneurs to drastically reduce the time spent on filing taxes. Today, 97% of all tax declarations are online, using just 3-5 minutes to complete them. During that same year, an e-Cabinet was approved, reducing Government sessions from 5 hours to just 30 minutes long and turning decision-making into a very efficient process, that is organised and entirely paperless. During the year 2000, m-Parking was introduced, allowing drivers to pay for their parking through their mobile phones, today reaching 90% of all collected parking fees. E-Geoportal is functional from 2003, allowing citizens and business real-time information about the official property ownership and rights on real estate in Estonia, eliminating the need to visit specialised state institutions. In 2003, what became one of the most used e-services was introduced: e-School, making all study-related information very easy and accessible for children, teachers and parents, whilst also engaging them in the entire education process. In 2004, the e-Ticket solution was introduced, eliminating the need to buy paper tickets and all related inconveniences. e-Police became functional in 2005, allowing every police office, car or officer to get all necessary information aggregated instantly, leading to the best possible communication and coordination of actions. From the same year, Estonians started to vote online at all three types of elections (parliamentary, EU Parliament and local)



using their ID-cards and later through a Mobile-ID. This service is available from every corner of the world, having started with a mere 2% participation in 2005 and reaching 30,5% in the 2015 parliamentary elections, with votes cast from 116 countries. The e-Business register was introduced in 2007, comprising of real-time data about all legal entities in Estonia. It includes the possibility to establish a new business in just 20 minutes, amending, liquidating the registry data, compiling or submitting annual reports as well as an online accounting e-billing software. A major achievement happened in 2008, when e-Health was launched, a system that integrates data from all healthcare providers into a personal electronic file for every individual, which made all necessary medications or related actions very quick and efficient. Two years later, e-Prescription was introduced and now more than 95% of all prescriptions are issued electronically. In 2014, Estonia launched the first supranational electronic residency scheme in the world, a state-issued electronic ID for non-residents, allowing them to use the Estonian e-services, to authenticate, sign documents, make online bank transfers and open new enterprises here. Currently, there are almost 25,000 e-residents from 143 countries and 4000 companies established by them.⁴⁷

I named just a few from around 3000 available e-solutions, and the process of creation of new e-services seems to be unstoppable. In 2017, the Estonian government decided to take a new massive step, confirming the principles and new regulations, to achieve the 'invisible function' of all public services and to make it mandatory for public institutions from 2019.

Technically, such a massive development and use of online services was made possible by a few key-factors:

- a. Mandatory digital ID-card, now held by 98% of Estonians, containing the system access code as well as the code for digital signatures. It uses sophisticated cryptography technologies, serving as the universal key to all online services in Estonia.
- b. X-Road is the backbone of e-Estonia, allowing the nation's various public and private sector e-Service databases to link up and function in harmony. To ensure secure transfers, all outgoing data from X-Road is digitally signed and encrypted, and all incoming data is authenticated and logged. The system was designed with growth in mind, so it can be scaled up as new e-services and new platforms come online.⁴⁸
- c. The State Portal eesti.ee is a gateway to easy, convenient, quick and secure public information and public services, offering hundreds of e-services under one 'umbrella'.

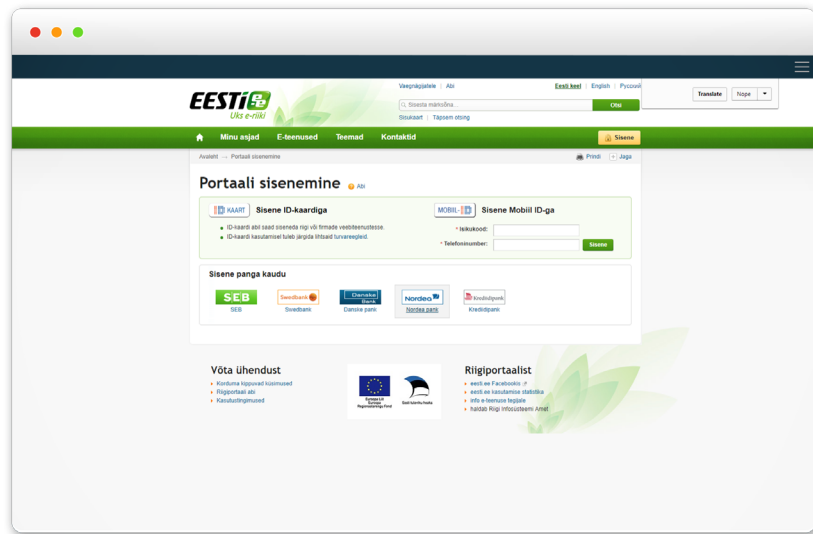
Speaking about the most important principles of e-Estonia, it is important to underline that the state has a centralised policy development, mainly under the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication (legislation and supervision) and a decentralised implementation, meaning that all online services are done mainly by responsible state institutions, making them as appropriate as possible to the real needs of the users. A transparent and efficient public sector, the orientation of the e-services towards citizens' needs and a secure protection of personal data all have the same importance.

⁴⁷ e-resident.gov.ee

⁴⁸ e-estonia.com/solutions/interoperability-services/x-road/



“Access to all services: ID code and Phone number empowered”
www.eesti.ee



If an Estonian is asked about how e-services changed his day-by-day life, most probably they will use phrases like these: “they make my life simpler”, “they redefined my way of doing business”, “computer does not accept bribes”, “computer is not getting tired” etc. E-services changed the lifestyle of citizens and entrepreneurs entirely, allowing them, instead of waiting in queues, travelling to different institutions and losing precious time, to concentrate on how to develop their companies, discover new opportunities or just enjoy life. Despite the critics of i-Voting, the percentage of the population using this tool is continuously increasing. People started to be involved in many e-related initiatives, such as TOM (2000, Today I Decide) online civic participation portal, allowing citizens to engage directly in legislative and policy-making processes by proposing new pieces of legislation or by amending current legislation. In 2007, the State Chancellery launched the portal www.osale.ee (participate.ee) which is now the main portal for civic consultation and participation for Estonian citizens. Rahvakogu (The People’s Assembly) was initiated in 2012 by the Estonian President’s office. A number of NGOs received almost 2000 proposals from citizens on a specialised portal, and the top 15 were selected to be debated in Parliament. Of them, seven have now been adopted as laws.⁴⁹

Estonian municipalities started to use participatory budgeting online platforms in 2013, engaging people from respective municipalities in spending public funds more efficiently. One of the last initiatives, the www.rahvaalgatus.ee platform, enables initiatives which collect more than 1’000 digital signatures to be sent to Parliament for debates and the opportunity to follow if the proposal will become a law. Technology, integrated with the analogue sphere – legal system, economy and developing the skills of the people, is the perfect ground for development of Estonia. A digital society means, first of all, free-thinking citizens, who participate actively in the design of the future of their country.

The Estonian example is widely recognized as one of the best in the world, Tallinn being an

⁴⁹ ega.ee/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/e-Estonia-e-Governance-in-Practice.pdf



“eVoting could be safe”

e-government „Mecca“ for many politicians and decision-makers across the globe. Estonia is seen as one of the most advanced e-societies globally, that grew out of a partnership between a forward-thinking government, a proactive ICT sector and a tech-savvy population. For example, the E-Governance Academy, a Tallinn-based specialised think-tank, has offered eGovernance consultancy to more than 60 countries and trained more than 3000 public officials. The E-Estonia Showroom, an entity designed to offer an overview of Estonian e-solutions, received almost 45,000 visitors from 130 countries, a big part of them being members of official delegations. Digital solutions designed in Estonia are copied or serve as inspiration to many nations, however, the simple copy-pasting of these solutions does not automatically guarantee that the efficiency in respective countries will be the same.

Even in e-Estonia there are a number of issues which need more attention from local decision-makers. In discussions with local eGovernance experts, they stated that there is still room for more coordination between politicians, state institutions, developers of the solutions and end users. Building the trust in e-solutions is also a complicated and time-consuming exercise. Some people are not very active in promoting new solutions, or the outcomes of the new initiatives are not as fast as expected. Another expert stated that some of the solutions are not meeting the quality expectations, leaving the users with a complicated or insufficiently explained interface. “In the same time, some solutions are looking old already and need improvement. Solutions need more coherence, standardisation, user friendly design and architecture”, experts argue.

Successful countries should be ready to experiment with new things and Estonia is definitely doing so, pioneering many aspects of a digital society. One thing is certain – every country at one point or another of their history should and will develop the eGovernance solutions. This is an imperative for modern societies and it is always better to start sooner. That is why Estonia is one of the world’s frontrunners in eGovernance.

Central Europe:

where East and West, North and South meet

Central Europe is very consolidated in adherence to values and common history and very diverse when it comes to response to critical situations, especially political ones.

The region is not very fast in implementing eGovernment and subsequently, offers less opportunity for the features of eDemocracy. However, it is leading in turning the usual one-way communication, from the administration to the citizen, into a two-way street. The bulk of cases across the region give an idea about how a mundane communication can expand into a consultation and even a deliberation of legislative acts.

The police in Berlin, for example, has employed six staff to communicate on Twitter and Facebook with the public on important matters – traffic, incidents of crime and security concerns. It is intriguing to see that informally posed questions get informal replies and more formal queries, equally a formal tone. Over time, part of the discussions has moved towards rules and laws, turning social media into a partner in general civic education and the explanation of the principles of the rule of law. In a similar move, in the Netherlands, some 2000 police officers have opted to be a part of an open-to-the-public social media group. Thomas Gabriel Rudigger, a renown German and European criminologist, specialising in political and cybercrimes, surprisingly to many, states that “police have to be as active online as on the streets”⁵⁰.

A phenomenon, specific to the region is the emergence of “liquid democracy”, applied first by the Pirate Party, born in Sweden, migrating through Germany, to settle in the Czech Republic after the most recent elections. It is an attempt to introduce new aspects into the democratic process - rather than placing the focus on the standard left-centre-right spectrum, it focuses on the active representation and ongoing collaboration between politicians and citizens.

The European region famed with philosophic schools, continues to host fundamental research and assessment of democracy, including eDemocracy.

50 Interview with Thomas Gabriel Rudigger, September 2017, www.letemps.ch/suisse/2017/09/26/thomasgabriel-rudiger-criminologue-police-presente-ligne-rue

Describing the German case, the authors show a discrepancy between the advanced state of the industry and the low level of use of ICTs for eGovernance and eParticipation.

The Austrian case is characterised by a high awareness of the potential of eDemocracy, but a very slow, if any, implementation of the tools. Whilst the development of eGovernance is comparatively fast and provides satisfactory tools and services, eParticipation and eDemocracy is widely discussed in several working groups, but the tools are not yet developed to a reasonable level. Furthermore, there are ups and downs in the work of the committees.

Dalibor Jakus argues that in Croatia the modernisation and simplification of the communication between citizens and public administration does not satisfy the need for participation by the citizens. The author argues that the attempts to introduce eGovernance were quite unsuccessful already, let alone approaches to eDemocracy.

In a similar direction, and based on three case studies, the Slovenian example shows that until now the introduction of eParticipation has had little impact on public policies due to several factors.

Obviously, some of the countries of the Visegrad Group are a quite specific case. Evidently, the introduction of eDemocracy depends on the state of democracy in the countries concerned. The situation, especially in Hungary and Poland is rather perilous, and in terms of eDemocracy, these countries are lagging behind. However, some approaches to eParticipation are quite interesting. Furthermore, the Civil Society takes advantage of the modern ICTs.

In 2011, Poland introduced tools for a participatory budget. The municipalities commit a small share of the budget and invite citizens to decide which project(s) should get funding. However, not all municipalities and regions participate in this activity.

In Hungary the author distinguishes between the phase before 2011 and thereafter. From the beginning of the second period of the Orban-led government, the interest in eDemocracy shifted from government initiatives to the Civil Society.



Bernd Schlömer is a German politician and cyber defense researcher. He is a member of the Berlin House of Representatives and co-opted member of the district Executive Committee of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. Bernd Schlömer engaged in politics firstly within the German Pirate Party, as its treasurer, deputy chairman, and eventually Chairman (2012-2013).

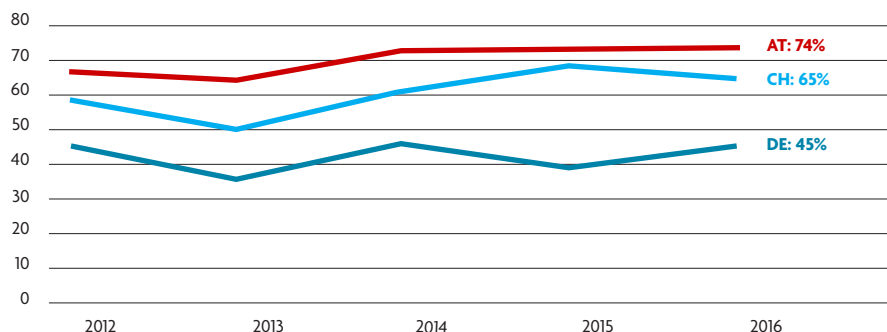


Ann Cathrin Riedel, MdB, is a policy officer at the FDP fraction in the Berlin House of Representatives, expert in communications and digitalisation.

Although Germany is a leading industrial nation, it scores very low on the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), provided by the European Commission⁵¹. Germany is in the last third of countries in terms of digital public services. eGovernment services and opportunities to participate online regarding petitions, budgets or draft laws are hardly known, but even when they are, the burdens to participate are often too high, the websites too confusing, the terms used too inconsistent, and the different log-ins and passwords for the rarely-used platforms are easily forgotten.

In 2009, the German Commission on Federal Reform II laid the groundwork for binding federal and state coordination of IT with Article 91c of the Basic Law. This amendment brought information technology into the German constitution. The State Treaty on IT establishing the IT Planning Council lays the groundwork for cooperation on the use of information technology in federal and state public administrations⁵².

The federal government, together with the states and municipalities, plans life- and company-oriented administrative portals, which have an intelligent linkage, mapping the federal structure across the portals and Service accounts for citizens and businesses⁵³.



Usage of eGovernment in Germany (graphic by Initiative D21)

eGovernment

eGovernment services are modestly used in Germany. Less than a half of the population uses these services. The main obstacle being that these services are largely unknown. Only 45% of

⁵¹ ec.europa.eu/newsroom/document.cfm?doc_id=44392

⁵² www.it-planungsrat.de/EN/it-planing-council/IT-Planning-Council_node.html

⁵³ www.egovernment-monitor.de/fileadmin/uploads/Studien/2016/160915_eGovMon2016_WEB.pdf

Germans have used, or are using eGovernment services. This number hasn't increased since 2012, and those citizens who use eGovernment services are mostly unhappy with their user experience and don't use them again nor recommend them to others.

The numbers of the yearly study "eGovernment MONITOR" by Initiative D21 and the Institute for Public Information Management, however, are showing that citizens who use eGovernment services are trusting them more and more. In Germany, the concerns regarding data protection and data security fell by 20 percentage points compared to 2015. In general, Germans tend to demand online services from their government. Consequently, there is a need for efficient, needs-oriented and user-friendly eGovernment services. 80% of Germans are using the internet. The actual users of eGovernment services are resorting to them more intensively than citizens of Austria or Switzerland, who have a higher rate of citizens using eGovernment services at all.⁵⁴

eParticipation

German citizens are able to make an online petition to the German Parliament, the *Bundestag*. The online petition is public and other citizens are able to sign a petition in order to support a demand to the parliament. To do so, citizens have to register via email at the Bundestag. 1.1 million citizens had registered until the end of 2011.⁵⁵

Petitions submitted online have to get 50,000 supporters during their first four weeks. The petitioner is then able to discuss the topic with members of parliament that are in the petition committee. All petitions will be checked, regardless of their number of supporters. They need, however, to fulfil all necessary requirements, e.g. the jurisdiction of the Confederation.⁵⁶

The state of Thuringia additionally offers an online platform to discuss draft bills for the state⁵⁷. The online platform offers a forum where citizens are able to inform themselves about draft bills and discuss them with other citizens. Opinions can be expressed on every paragraph of the bill. Opinions by fellow citizens can also be read and rated. The state of Baden-Württemberg offers a similar platform to discuss draft bills.

Since 2010, the city of Dresden offers, in cooperation with the *Dresdner Debatte*, an online platform to discuss actual urban development projects (www.dresdner-debatte.de). To include the non-onliners in the city as well, they offer a red container in the centre of the affected area. Citizens can inform themselves regarding the project and enter their ideas to a provided computer. Employees of the City Planning Department are on site to discuss with citizens, answer their questions and support them technically if they want to comment online. Another implemented way of eParticipation is participatory budgeting (*Bürgerhaushalte*) in municipalities. Until the end of 2011, 207 municipalities offered their citizens the opportunity to participate in the budgeting of their household. Proposals can be made on a specific website and citizens can rate the submitted proposals. The most successful proposals are then discussed in the municipal council.⁵⁸

54 www.egovernment-monitor.de/fileadmin/uploads/Studien/2016/160915_eGovMon2016_WEB.pdf

55 www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/Positionen16_E-Demokratie.pdf

56 [epetitionen.bundestag.de/epet/service.\\$\\$.rubrik.oeffentlichePetition.html](http://epetitionen.bundestag.de/epet/service.$$.rubrik.oeffentlichePetition.html)

57 forum-landtag.thueringen.de/

58 www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/Positionen16_E-Demokratie.pdf

Major Challenges

Around 80% of Germans are using the internet.⁵⁹ That is a lot, but still, 20% do not. Democracy needs to involve every citizen, on equal grounds. Citizens who use the internet not only in their free time, but also at work are notably more familiar with the processes in the digital sphere. Non-users and citizens who are not regularly using the internet need to be supported, in order to use online services, and also to get more familiar with them.

Using online services provided by the government is not a question of age or gender. In Germany, it is a question of education. The difference in the usage of eGovernment services between high- and low- educated citizens is 31 percentage points. 72% of citizens with a high level of education have already used online services by the government, while only 41% of citizens with a lower-level education have done so. eGovernment solutions need to be accessible by all, regardless of level of education.⁶⁰

Another main challenge is the lack of representativeness. The most successful ePetition at the Bundestag had 186,356 petitioners (petition against the increase of the liability rate for midwives) - just three percent of all voters. The number of citizens who engage in participatory budgeting is relatively low. In Hamburg just 552 citizens registered to participate, out of 1.2 million eligible voters. The risk that interest groups have a much higher impact on the outcome of these online participations is very high.

Another challenge is the participant's lack of authority. Often, an e-mail address is enough to register on one of the introduced online participation platforms. There is no verification if the person is living in the affected area or eligible to vote at all.⁶¹

The new identity card (neuer Personalausweis) with an eID-function provides an adequate tool for people to authenticate themselves on online platforms. With a card-reading device, holders of this identity card can identify themselves online, especially when they want to use online services provided by the government. So far just a few citizens with a new identity card have activated the eID-function and an even smaller number of people own a card reader in order to use the identity card for online services. Just 4% of all Germans removed all three hurdles to use this kind of verification.⁶²

Another challenge are breaks in the medium when using online services. Taking the ePetition as an example, people need to provide a postal address because the administrative communication will be handled via regular mail. Consequently, people can submit and sign the petition online but the process is not entirely digital.⁶³

Germany needs to increase the speed of digitalisation of the State and participatory opportunities dramatically. The marketing for the tools and platforms provided needs to be increased and oriented at the needs of citizens. The government is developing its services much slower than the economy's and citizens demand and expect the same service-levels from their government as they receive from businesses. The government has to think about whether it provides card readers for the eID for free and offers special services for citizens who use eGovernment services, such as. faster and/or cheaper handling.

59 www.initiated21.de/app/uploads/2017/01/studie-d21-digital-index-2016.pdf

60 www.egovernment-monitor.de/startseite.html

61 www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/Positionen16_E-Demokratie.pdf

62 www.egovernment-monitor.de/startseite.html

63 www.epetitionen.bundestag.de/epet/peteinreichen/oeffentlich.schritt1.html

Austria: Many attempts, but much still has to be done



Ronald Pohoryles is an Associate Professor for Comparative Politics and the Head of Research for the European Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences. His main research interest is (European) Democracy and political theory, with a focus on liberal thinkers. He has been in charge of about 100 European projects dealing with these issues. His most recent publication is on the actuality of Adam Smith (*Metropolis*, ISBN 978-3-7316-1149-3).

The Austrian government is quite active in the development of tools for eGovernance, but quite slow in terms of eParticipation, or eDemocracy.

With respect to eGovernance: Since 2005, the development of *eGovernment* is coordinated by a multi-level platform, comprising the agendas of the federal-state-city-municipal cooperation and the ICT Association. The tasks of the platform are the overall coordination of eGovernment activities, the resolution on the eGovernment roadmap, and the monitoring of its progress.

With respect to eDemocracy and eParticipation: After several unsuccessful attempts to implement a working group on eDemocracy and eParticipation, a re-launch was made in 2015, with members being representatives from the central government, the regions and the communities. The re-launch was hosted by an academic institution - the Centre for eGovernance of the Danube University Krems. Among the topics discussed in the working group were e-voting, open data, opinion mining, and the topics for eParticipation addressed were youth, environment, and urban planning.

Several challenges were identified: the identification process, to ensure authenticity, data protection, representativeness, due to participation rates, and the ratio between on-line and off-line participation.

Although the topic of eDemocracy and eParticipation does not seem to have a priority in public politics and policies, there are several civil society activities in the area. The umbrella organisation in Austria is the “Network Civil Society” (Netzwerk Zivilgesellschaft, <https://zivilgesellschaft.wien/netzwerk>) that is connected to the “Academy of the Civil Society” (Akademie der Zivilgesellschaft, <https://zivilgesellschaft.wien/>). The network brings together different initiatives for exchanges of experiences and best practices. The academy offers several courses to enhance the capacity of the voluntary activities of its initiatives. The academy is linked with a research institute, which however, seems to be quite inactive.

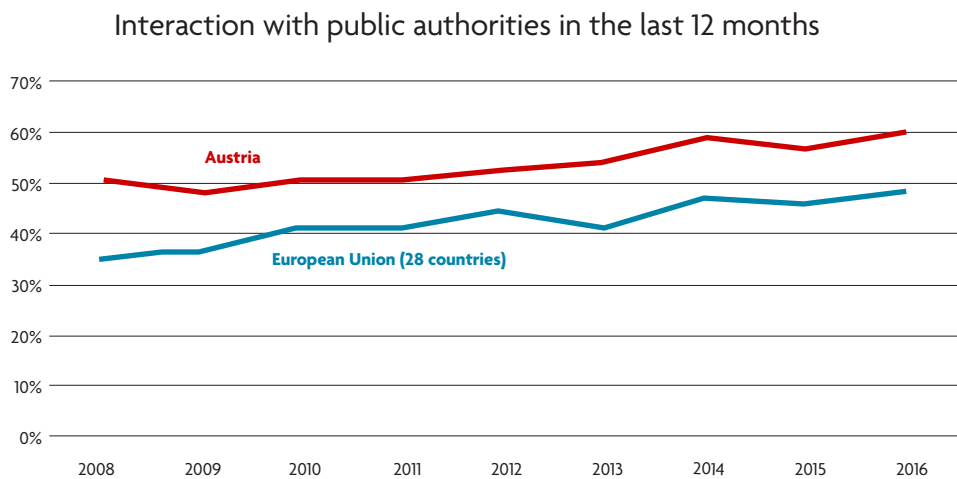
The academy has an important role to play in order to empower volunteers to efficiently and effectively get their message heard. It offers a 4-month training programme, having no explicit module for eDemocracy and eParticipation. The topic is, however, integrated in other modules.

The Network Civil Society has 30 members, of which 25 have their own websites, with topics ranging from migration and asylum, through neighbourhood activities to health issues. Beyond the official membership, there are some 50 initiatives, documented on the homepage of the academy.

The overall impression remains that Austria is by no means a champion in the field.

Basic information on Austria

According to data from EUROSTAT, Austrian citizens are using the internet for communication with public authorities quite actively. In 2016, nearly two thirds of citizens interacted with public authorities via the internet, compared the European average of less than half. The purpose of the interaction was to gather information, download forms, or fill these in via the internet. The access to broadband connection is equal all over Europe: Around four out of five households in Europe have access to a broadband connection.⁶⁴



Source: European Commission, 2015. eGovernment in Austria. Brussels.

Most of the interaction with public authorities is in search of information, or eGovernance, namely an efficiency increase, through the use of electronic forms on- or off-line.

Information gathering can be understood as preparation for both online and offline participation.

- *Informal participation* is mostly organized via electronic platforms like Avaaz. A country specific platform for Austria is “Activism - Petition Online – Österreich” (http://www.activism.com/de_AT/#). Such petitions link various groups of stakeholders with different target groups, such as public authorities, private companies, other organisations and so on. There are no specific procedures on whether, and if so how, the addressees must react to these types of petitions.
- *Formal participation* is ensured by legal provisions. The addressee for such initiatives is a specific parliamentary committee, the “Petitionsausschuss”. In Austria, there are different forms of formal political participation:

⁶⁴ For more information: goo.gl/PNw8VY

- *Parliamentarian Citizen Initiatives*: Such initiatives have to be supported by at least 500 citizens, who have to personally sign the initiative. The initiative can be electronically supported by adult (16+ years old) Austrian citizens. This increases the weight of an initiative for the parliamentary debate.
- *Petitions* are initiated by Members of the Parliament or Members of the Second Parliamentary Chamber or the Council of the Federal States ("Bundesrat"). This instrument is used by politicians to transmit requests of the citizens in their specific constituencies and can be supported electronically by the citizens themselves.
- *Popular consultations*: Popular consultations can be called for by a majority of Parliament, or by the Government. This instrument is used to enquire of the popular opinion on a general and important political decision. It has been only used once, on the topic of mandatory military service. The result is not legally binding, but represents a strong information for the final political decision.
- *Popular Demand ("Volksbegehren")*: This instrument is used by citizens to get their request heard in the Austrian Parliament, which must decide about each specific request. It requires the support of at least 100,000 signatories, or 1/6th of the population of three out of the nine federal states. The Popular Demand has the status of a petition and is not legally binding. Since the introduction of this instrument more than 10 petitions of this kind have been successfully submitted to the Parliament, although most of these were rejected after a parliamentary deliberation.
- *Referenda*: As this instrument is legally binding, it is certainly the strongest form for public participation. A legal initiative is submitted to the Austrian electorate that can accept or reject a legislative initiative. Up until now, only two referenda were called for by the Austrian government, one on the use of nuclear energy in 1978, the other one on Austria's membership in the European Union in 1995. In Austria, the production of nuclear energy was rejected, and the obligatory military service maintained. For referenda, the same rules apply as for general elections and no online instruments are provided.

In general, there are many objections against the use of eParticipation such as the problem of data protection and possible technological problems. The certainty of the identity of the voters and the tradition of the electoral system apply with respect to eVoting. The main issue remains: How much participation is compatible with the principles of a representative democracy? Hence, when it comes to formal eParticipation, the use of the ICT-based tools in Austria is rather cautious and their application quite restricted.

Some attempts to improve the situation were undertaken in the early 2000s. However, only since 2015, a regular project group, coordinated by the Federal Chancellery (E-dem) dealt with the issue. As mentioned before, in 2015 several topics were addressed and remain in discussion up until today. This is particularly true for electronic voting, big data and transparency. Since 2016, there are regular meetings of the project group, however with little progress on the issues under examination.

Conclusions: Major challenges and conclusions

Austria is aware of both, the potential of the use of ICTs and the dangers that are involved. Beyond any doubt, there is the challenge of potential manipulation, populism, identification problems and data protection. Furthermore, the inclusion of public participation into the representative democracy poses a specific political challenge. Past experiences show that the motivation behind the decisions of voters on specific issues might be quite different from the decision at hand. For instance, the decision of voters against the production of nuclear energy in 1978 was heavily influenced by the announcement of the then chancellor Bruno Kreisky, that he might resign if the decision were to be against the production of nuclear energy, which, ultimately did not. The degree of information of the public at large, or how evidence based is the opinion of citizens, is another topic of concern. Verification and data protection, or how can simultaneously anonymity be guaranteed, and proper verification still be possible is a particular challenge when it comes to eVoting.

In Europe, as well as in Austria some basic precautions are already in place, namely specific commissions are in charge of deciding upon the admissibility of specific issues for public participation. In Austria, as well as on the European level, public authorities provide a specific service to citizen initiatives - to consult petitioners on how to submit their requests to the Parliament, and the Parliamentary Commission decides upon their admissibility. Furthermore, there is a threshold on validated personal support for an initiative, before electronic support informally gives more weight to the request of the specific initiative.

Hence, Austria has a lead in providing and using tools for eGovernance, but is rather reluctant in the use of instruments for eParticipation.



Croatia - modernising, simplifying and speeding up communication between citizens and administration

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This article discusses the results of using e-services in the Republic of Croatia since joining the European Union. The eCitizens platform, as one of the most important e-services in Croatia, takes a central role in this contribution. Data from May 2017 indicates that the use of services is quite unequal among the citizens due to insufficient education, lack of representation of ICT in the public sector, dispersion of information, insufficient number of services in the system, and the lack of awareness of the public at large, about available e-services.

Information and communication technologies play the leading role in the transformation of citizens' lifestyle, thus transforming society as a whole. ICT as a generic term encompasses various types of information and communication technologies that enable the generation, storage, processing and exchange of information.⁶⁵ More recently, this term is used to describe the convergence of several technologies and the use of common transmission lines carrying very diverse data and communication types and formats.

Societal development leads to increase in the potential of using ICT systems for economic progress and/or improving the public's quality of life. Advanced public administrations are exploring and introducing ways of using the potential of ICT in their national, regional and local frameworks, to achieve an optimal impact on citizens' right of access to information, in relation to the needs of the respective service delivery.

In order to implement ICT systems, vertically and horizontally across the public apparatus, it is necessary for all stakeholders to cooperate.

Almost all public-sector bodies in Croatia developed e-services by 2017, but problems encountered in that process included:

- a lack of a unique mechanism for the verification of e-Identity;
- a lack of a unique mechanism, namely a central service for issuing credentials and making confirmations of e-Identity;
- a lack of a mechanism for secure delivery of personalised information to users;
- dispersion of information and e-services over various websites and a lack of awareness about available e-services by the public.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ uprava.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/e-Hrvatska/e-Croatia

⁶⁶ uprava.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/e-Hrvatska/e-Croatia



e-Citizens platform



All of the above issues were resolved by the launch of the e-Citizens platform. The project consists of three main components, which make up a joint public-sector infrastructure: a Central Government Portal system, a National Identification and Authentication System and a Personal User Box system.

Each component aims at resolving specific problems: The Central Government Portal solves

the issue of dispersion of information and e-services, the National Identification and Authentication System (NIAS) resolves the problem of electronic identity verification, and a network was developed for issuing one type of access elements, while the Personal User Box (PUB) represents a mechanism for secure delivery of personalised information to the users. By issuing the electronic identity card (eID) with an identity certificate, which is also a credential of the highest level, the Ministry of the Interior has enabled access to all electronic services.⁶⁷

In June 2017, exactly three years after the introduction of eCitizens, 37 e-services are offered to users, and there are aspirations to increase that to 50 e-services. One of the most recent additions offers the ability to obtain a Judicial Clearance Certificate online.

According to available data, from the 10th of June, 2014 until the 1st of May 2017, 402,393 citizens were using eCitizens. This means that only 9.3% of all residents of the Republic of Croatia use the eCitizens, after three years of its existence, although today 98% of all households are covered by broadband internet access.

The most popular services include more than 140,000 personal mailboxes through which users receive information from government bodies, an e-Matrix for printing documents, such as a birth certificates, a health payments service into the National Pension System and MUP (Ministry of Interior) e-printing of certificates and resettlement changes.

Another highly popular service is eDiary, aimed at parents, students and school teachers. Those who used the eDiary service opened it on average 18 times, which is by far the most, compared to the other services.

Statistical data show that 80% of all users come from 10 counties: City of Zagreb (31%), Primorje-Gorski Kotar (8%), Split-Dalmatia (8%), Zagreb (7%), Osijek-Baranja 6%), Istria (6%), Varaždin (4%), Sisak-Moslavina (3%), Vukovar-Srijem (3%) and Međimurje County (3%). In relation to the number of inhabitants in the county, the citizens of the City of Zagreb (16%), the County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar (11%) and the Istrian County (11%) are those who use the e-Citizen system more often than others. Regarding methods of registration, eCitizen can now be accessed through 16 different services, which is a substantial increase from the initial two access points (ePASS and AAI@Edu).

Hence, from May 1 the project “Paperless State” has begun, whereby citizens no longer have to carry documents from one office to another. By introducing the web application “Insight into the personal status of citizens”, public law bodies will have the opportunity to inspect citizens’ documents in a digital form.

⁶⁷ vlada.gov.hr/the-e-citizens-system/15215

The e-services available today are quite diverse, including the eCitizens system, e-counselling, e-registration, e-permissions, e-dossier, e-workbook, e-sign-up and e-prescriptions in healthcare. Electronic excerpts from registers of births, marriages or dossiers of citizens, make it possible to check information online from the Registry of voters. e-Temporary enrolment, or electronically requesting change of voting place in Croatia and abroad, and electronically registering for voting is another e-feature in Croatia. Furthermore it is possible to request electronic records of residence, ownership of motor vehicles, obtain information about one's child's grades at school, review the prescriptions made in pharmacies over the last six months, check one's chosen General Practitioner, order a European Health Insurance Card, request an electronic workbook, obtain information about the expected amount of pension, register as a potential employee, check one's contributions paid to the second pillar of the pension insurance, check tax-book, review one's total receipts, accrued contributions and taxes for each of the ISP Retrievers, participate in consultation with the interested public, search basic cadastral data, file requests for issuing public documents and settlements in cadastral offices, retrieve a Judicial Clearance e-Certificate and effectively administer an electronic identity.⁶⁸ Among the more interesting services, is the e-licenses system that allows all building and construction permits to be issued electronically. For parents, life has certainly been made easier by the electronic enrolment of high school students, available since 2013. It is very efficient to have a system of e-records, through which the one can monitor the status at the national level in the municipal, county and commercial courts, having access to a review of solvers, participants and other relevant case data. Detailed statistics on the work of courts, decisions and court memos are also available. The portal "eAdvice" provides citizens with easy access to all open consultations in one place, and the opportunity for participation in the adoption of regulations, laws and acts issued by public authorities.

In light of such a long list of available e-services, the question of eCitizens' dwindling popularity arises, as does the one about what can be done to increase the number of citizens using the services

Croatia has maintained 24th place, out of the EU28, for a third year running on the DESI Index⁶⁹. The current representation of ICT in the public sector must be taken into account. In the context of the e-Croatia 2020 Strategy, the Croatian ICT industry has recorded an increase in exports each year, suggesting that apart from being sufficiently recognised beyond the borders of Croatia, it is mature enough and capable of addressing every challenge set before it.

Although the development of e-services and their integration into the e-Citizen platform is advancing, experts still note with concern of the small number of citizens using these services, which must necessarily address information and education, but also the ease of use and design of the portal. The services are, for some of the citizens, obviously still far more complicated than the old and simple practice of standing in the queue at the counter.

68 vlada.gov.hr/the-e-citizens-system/15215

69 ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi



eDemocracy practices in Slovenia: a quest for governance impact through an online deliberation

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The first eDemocracy attempts in the Republic of Slovenia began at the break of millennium, when online forums and websites were created by non-governmental organisations, to support public participation in national strategies and decision-making, such as in the National Energy Programme. At the same time, the local municipality of Velenje established an eDemocracy platform, enabling direct online communication of the city's residents with the mayor and town councillors⁷⁰. Cyber-optimistic expectations fuelled an expansion of eDemocracy tools within the non-governmental sector during the first decade of the new millennium, including projects such as the E-participacija and E-demokracija websites, and various e-petitions, e-polls and e-discussions⁷¹. The Slovenian government contributed to these developments by introducing the eDemocracy service⁷², as a part of the eGovernment portal in 2003 and the “I propose to the government” online participatory tool in 2009⁷³. The latter significantly improved the Slovenian Government's position on the global eParticipation index in 2010, ranking as having the 20th most developed eParticipation system in the world. During recent years, civil society has kept its role as a frontrunner in eDemocracy developments in the country, focusing on mobile eParticipation applications and platforms for government transparency⁷⁴. In addition, localised solutions for participatory smart cities⁷⁵ are growing. While Slovenia dropped in the UN eParticipation index to 37th place⁷⁶, new plans are underway to update the government eDemocracy service, in accordance with crowdsourcing principles.

This section presents a selection of practices in the area of eDemocracy in Slovenia. The selection is based on the primary and secondary data sources, available for each practice. The other two selection criteria used, are evidence of a multi-stakeholder approach to eDemocracy involving civil society, and a reference to institutionalised decision-making processes. The practices selected are presented in the following structure: a short description of the idea, a summary of key enablers and success features, a summary of main obstacles and restrictions and an explanation of their democratic impact on governance.

70 Delakorda, Simon. 2003. Prvi poskusi digitalne demokracije v Sloveniji. Teorija in praksa 40 (3): 499-513.

Available at: http://www.inepa.si/images/stories/datoteke/Prvi_poskusi_digitalne_demokracije_v_Sloveniji-Delakorda.pdf

71 Delakorda, Simon and Delakorda Matej. 2008. E-demokracija v slovenskem nevladnem sektorju. In Skupaj smo močnejši! pametnejši, lepši..., ed. Borut Osonkar, p. 59-68. Zbornik prispevkov z druge konference nevladnih organizacij Podravja. Maribor: Zavod PIP. Available at: http://www.inepa.si/images/stories/datoteke/E-demokracija_nevladni-sektor-INEPA-2008.pdf.

72 <https://e-uprava.gov.si/drzava-in-druzba/e-demokracija.html>

73 <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/document/slovenian-portal-allows-citizens-participate-government-decision-making-my-suggestion>

74 “Who influences?” platform <http://www.kdovpliva.si/>

75 “Let's Improve Maribor” platform <https://izboljsajmo.maribor.si/>

76 <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Data-Center>

Practice no. 1: The online Citizen's Forum - European debates

The online Citizen's Forum - European debates (<http://evropske-razprave.si/>) was launched in June 2006, as a response to the European Parliament's resolution on the next steps for the period of reflection and analysis on the future of Europe. The primary goal of the online forum was to involve Slovenian citizens, civil society and members of the European Parliament into a deliberative and facilitated online dialogue⁷⁷. The forum later evolved into a national online space for public debates and consultations on EU policy topics and European issues, and remained active until 2013 under administration of the Institute for Electronic Participation. During its period of operation, more than 1200 user contributions were published on the forum (including those submitted by e-mail or in paper form) and nearly 17,000 unique internet users visited the forum between 2009-2010. In total, 18 official feedbacks from Slovenian members of the European Parliament were provided in relation to 7 consultations and discussion reports prepared by the forum facilitators⁷⁸.

Key enablers and success features of the online forum were the following: (1) the long term financial support of the European Parliament Information Office in Slovenia, (2) conceptual planning and technical implementation by eDemocracy experts and NGO practitioners, (3) facilitation by online moderators from civil society, (4) interchange of the forum with face-to-face discussions including video streaming, opinion follow ups, etc. and (5) online and offline promotion of the forum. Another important feature included MEPs recognition of the forum's applicability for deliberation with citizens. MEP Romana Jordan Cizelj provided the following forum statement to the Climate Change topic: *"Your views and opinions, although sometimes diverse, are presenting to me as an MEP, a valuable source of information and views on the further implementation of environmental policy. I am inviting you to continue with your participation."*⁷⁹

Several obstacles were identified, during the online Citizen's Forum period of operation, when trying to involve citizens and NGOs in consultations with MEPs on regular basis: (1) the lack of skills and time for deliberating complex policy issues (capacity), (2) low motivation for conventional top down engagement (apathy), (3) difficulties in providing evidence of the citizens' impact on EU policy, because of governance complexity (transparency issues), (4) the low public image of politicians and political parties in Slovenia (distrust) and (5) the fact that politicians might exploit the online deliberation process results for their own advantage (an accountability issue)⁸⁰.

Overall, the Citizen's Forum – European Debates was the first practical application of cyber-optimists' vision in Slovenia. Looking at Slovenian MEP's feedback, referring to forum discussions⁸¹, it can be concluded that at least three of them took an online deliberation seriously, by responding to citizens individual questions and proposals as well providing detailed explanation of their political positions and policy-making developments within the European Parlia-

77 Delakorda, Simon. 2007. Citizens' forum: the first successful eDemocracy initiative in the Republic of Slovenia? In *Expanding the knowledge economy: issues, applications, case studies*, eds. Paul Cunningham and Miriam Cunningham, 449-459. Amsterdam: IOS Press.

78 www.evropske-razprave.si/porocila-odzivi/porocila.html

79 www.evropske-razprave.si/forum/34.html?p=1061#p1061

80 joinup.ec.europa.eu/community/epractice/case/line-citizens-forum-european-debates

81 www.evropske-razprave.si/porocila-odzivi/odzivi-odlocevalcev.html

An assessment of Predsedovanje.si indicates that the portal produced a very limited eDemocracy effects and governance impact⁸⁴. On the one hand, the portal provided extensive information and documentation for increased public transparency and awareness of the Presidency, but it failed to provide a participatory impact through e-polling and e-forum deliberations. There were several policy and advocacy obstacles for that: (1) NGOs lacked the political power and policy expertise to shape agenda (Council presidency topics were predetermined prior to the Slovenian Presidency), (2) NGOs failed to rise public interest (due to the general apathy towards the Presidency and EU topics) which resulted in a low level of online engagement and deliberations, (3) NGOs collaborating with Predsedovanje.si were criticised by other NGOs, because the portal was financially supported by the Government Communication Office (legitimacy and ownership issue), (4) Mass media did not follow or support NGO's actions due to insufficient links between the portal and live events during the Presidency, with the exception of debriefings (lack of a multi-channel approach), (5) NGOs lacked experience regarding online engagement and participatory process management, such as technical administration and facilitation skills, (6) the Predsedovanje.si portal was not recognised as a key communication channel, despite the agreement signed (the government institutions provided only two responses during the Presidency, lacking any concrete commitments on future policy developments).

Reflecting on the overall governance impact of the Predsedovanje.si portal, it is safe to conclude that incorporating eDemocracy tools into technocratic and citizen=alienated governance structures, such as the EU Council Presidency, cannot provide a meaningful democratic impact. To benefit from online deliberation in policy-making, both inclusive formal structures and responsibility commitments must be established and respected, in order to generate public trust and participation. In this sense, Predsedovanje.si presented a unique attempt, which provided a much-needed reality check for recent eDemocracy developments in Slovenia.

Practice no. 3: Puzzled by Policy – debating migration issues online

In 2013, the Slovene Philanthropy Association for Promotion of Voluntary Work, initiated an online debate on the migration topic entitled “How to improve the political participation of immigrants and why it is important?”⁸⁵. The facilitated discussion used the U-debate tool, developed by the EU funded eParticipation project Puzzled by Policy⁸⁶. The conversation was implemented in the form of a discussion tree, enabling participants to publish 5 different types of contribution, such as issue, alternative, pro argument, con argument and other comments. The discussion tree also enabled the creation of specific relationships between different types of contributions. During the discussion, 36 relevant contributions were submitted both online (including via e-mail) and offline (via paper questionnaires), providing various suggestions and opinions on the immigration topic. The online discussion was disseminated through Slovene Philanthropy websites, social media, e-mail, face-to-face workshops and events. In total, 1042 unique internet users visited the discussion.

Efthimios Tambouris and Ann Macintosh, 147-156. ePart 2009, 1st International conference Linz, Austria, September 1-3, 2009. Linz: Trauner Verlag Universität.

84 www.inepa.si/images/stories/datoteke/Predsedovanje-si_NGO_e-participation_Slovenia_EU_presidency.pdf

85 join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/en-GB/udebatediscussion.aspx?Thread=212

86 join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/en-GB/home.aspx

After the end of the discussion period, Slovene Philanthropy published a summary report⁸⁷, describing the discussion process and presenting an overview of the conclusions and proposals provided by participants. The summary report was presented at the regular session of the Slovenian Government Council for Integration of Foreigners in November 2013. The initial feedback to the online discussion report highlighted an official conclusion from the session of the Council, stating that it is necessary to find a way of ensuring the representation of migrants within the Council. As a result, all members of the Council were called upon to provide suggestions for establishing a mechanism for selecting migrant representatives in the Council. Conclusions from the session were included in the annual report of the Council.

Those critical of conventional eDemocracy argue that online participation empowers already engaged and well-informed citizens. The Slovene Philanthropy case counters the argument, by enabling the online participation of hard-to-reach and seldom heard-of social groups, such as migrants, ultimately resulting in a concrete decision to improve the political representation of immigrants in the Slovenian government consultative body. However, the online discussion was not easy to implement, because many immigrants were facing real life challenges (e.g. unemployment, social insecurity, a lack of education, xenophobia) and thus had little motivation or capacity to discuss complex policy issues. Also, Slovenian NGOs are familiar with using ICT and social media as an online dissemination and public relations tools, but have less experience with interactive, two-way communication, especially, when it comes to involving citizens or influencing decision-makers. As a result, structured dialogue with NGOs (civic dialogue) in the immigration policy arena is only partially developed as an open and collaborative practice. On one hand, a few NGOs have the professional capacities to act as policy stakeholders on a regular basis, on the other, government institutions are not considering public participation as relevant.

Contemporary developments

The latest eDemocracy and e-transparency developments in the Slovenian civil society sector are following the newest trends in open data and open government. The **Parlameter**⁸⁸ and the Smart Voice of NGOs are just two examples. The Parlameter is a web-based software solution that displays the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia voting results and helps analyse them. The software, developed by the “Danes je nov dan” (Today is a new day) NGO, is available as open source. In addition to visually displaying the results of votes, Parlameter lets users see which members of parliament have taken part in committee meetings and parliamentary sessions. The site also makes it easy to share results on social media and to embed results in online news publications. The **Smart Voice of NGOs**⁸⁹ is a mobile app that combines eDemocracy attempts to foster participatory democracy and open data visualisations. The aim of The Smart Voice is to strengthen civic engagement in local municipalities by enabling non-governmental organisations to provide informed proposals, comments and initiatives in a user-friendly way.

For that purpose, the application will feature visualised data, such as public funding, development of NGOs and participation of NGOs at a local level. The data will be further expanded into indicators comparing individual local municipalities. After submitting its own initiative, an NGO will have the opportunity to gather public support before extending the initiative to the local municipality. The development of the application is coordinated by the Regional NGO Hub in Central Slovenia.

87 join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/Portals/0/PropertyAgent/605/Files/30/PbP-Filantropija-politicka%20participacija-migrantov-porocilo.pdf

88 <https://parlameter.si/>

89 <https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/news/slovenia-voting-analysis-tool>

eDemocracy in Poland



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In recent times, Poland has been faced with serious political problems and has become the *enfant terrible* of Europe. Almost every day, the Law and Justice regime disregards the constitution, liberal democracy and the rule of law. The state of eGovernance and eDemocracy is tightly connected with the fragility of Polish democracy and the vulnerability of the constitutional institutions. In other words, the lack of implementation of crucial reforms in the area of eGovernance and eDemocracy influences the lack of engagement of the society and the low participation in democratic mechanisms. Poland is lagging behind many other countries when it comes to the fast, reliable and connected digital networks which underpin administration, business and private lives.

eGovernance and eDemocracy can't be treated separately as they are two sides of the same coin. eDemocracy is hard to imagine without the implementation of an efficient mechanism of eGovernance. They are linked by digital competences – the State, through eGovernance programmes must provide them, so that citizens are capable of using other eGovernance tools and utilising eDemocracy tools as well. Often, it is hard to distinguish between them, for example, eVoting forms part of eGovernance, but it strengthens eDemocracy. This is why we would like to comment in this article on both, eGovernance and eDemocracy in Poland.

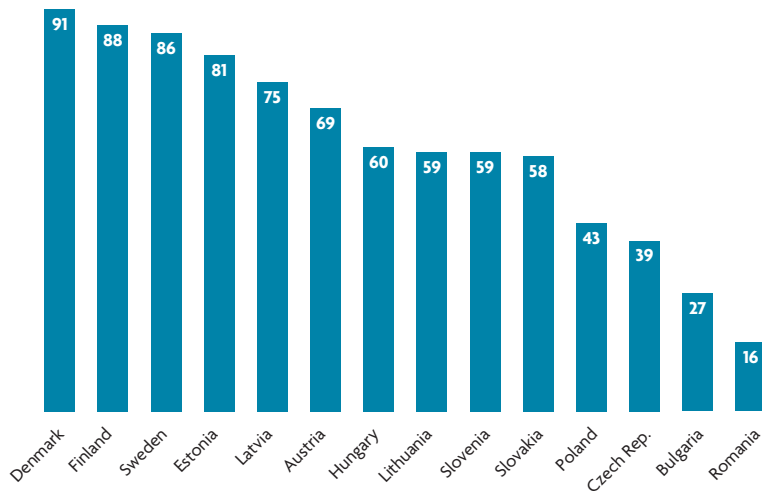
eGovernance

According to Eurostat, only 25% of Poles use e-administration. This percentage is very disappointing as the European average is over 50%, and in countries like Finland or Sweden it is over 80%. The Supreme Audit Office of Poland (NIK) reported in 2015, that regardless of the substantial expenditure on the digitalisation of the administration, usage of e-services is minimal. Still, too many public services require the physical appearance of citizens in an office with paper documents in hand. If the Polish administration is to progress from the Paper Age to the Digital Age, these e-platforms must be used. However, the ultimate goal should be the satisfaction of citizens, as well as time and money saved. The e-administration must offer services compatible with those of private companies. Otherwise, they will only export bad practices from the

traditional bureaucracy to the online world. In Poland today, there are about forty e-services offered, compared to 2,500 in Estonia. The gap between the two countries seems daunting.

Researchers point out that the reluctance, many Poles feel towards the e-administration, stems from the mistrust towards new technologies and new forms of communication⁹⁰. This suspicion comes from low digital competences in a part of the Polish society.⁹¹ Media literacy must become a priority in digital education in Poland (for both children and adults). It helps people develop critical thinking skills, recognise what agenda media makers are promoting, as well as bias, spin, misinformation and lies, and develops the ability to evaluate media messages based on one's own experiences, skills, beliefs, and values. Therefore media-literate people can evaluate the credibility of sources and effectively use online content.

Individuals using the internet for interacting with public authorities



Source: Eurostat

eVoting and eID

Internet voting is a voting mechanism that is increasingly being explored as a means to allow access to the election process for voters, who may otherwise find it difficult to go to their polling station on election day. In some countries, this mechanism was introduced in part to tackle the problem of a decline in turnout, one of the major problems of modern democracy. In Poland, internet voting still sounds like a fairy-tale. Traditional parties in Poland are scared they will lose out when it comes to the online mobilisation of the young electorate. But the position of inclusion in all democratic processes must be supported, especially in elections and referenda, and internet voting is a great tool to do just that. All other arguments regarding

⁹⁰ E.g. mac.gov.pl/files/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/e-administracja-w-oczach-interneutow-2012.pdf, www.sbc.org.pl/Content/151331/Fleszer.pdf
⁹¹ www.polskacyfrowa.gov.pl/media/5180/RK_kompetencje_cyfrowe.pdf

transparency, secrecy and accessibility of internet voting can be answered by the examples of countries that use internet voting successfully.

In Poland, the need for secure online voter authentication mechanisms may be one of the biggest hurdles in implementing internet voting. This issue presents a challenge for many long-established democracies. In order for eVoting to work, the population needs to be IT-literate enough, to use a government-issued certificate to authenticate themselves. The system, like any other new electronic tool for administration, is expensive, so it must be user friendly, efficient and interconnected with other systems. This is precisely why Poland needs the e-ID card system, with secure online authentication mechanisms.

In 2010, the Polish government passed a law that opened the door for eIDs in Poland. Traditional IDs were supposed to be changed in 2011. Many doubted it would happen, because of the lack of executive procedures, and unfortunately, they were right. In 2011, the government moved the date to 2013. In 2012, the Ministry of Interior nullified the tender for new ID cards and announced a new law on IDs. In 2016, the Poles still cannot use eIDs and the new government announced new deadlines.⁹² In addition to the eID card, one can also use a mobile phone to identify oneself for online services (mID). In a world where mobile connectivity is almost universal, this is even more convenient, since one would not need an eID card reader on their computer. A mobile phone can act as a card and a card reader at the same time. Creating an eID card and eVoting systems separately would be a worthless and breach of citizens' trust towards eVoting in particular, and e-administration and the public administration in general.

eDemocracy

eGovernance is Poland's Achilles' heel, but the situation with eDemocracy is even worse. This is due to years of holdups and a lack of political will of previous governments to reform. The current administration is only making things worse by trampling democracy as such, and ignoring all forms of consultations and debates.

Open Government should be Poland's goal – one with the high levels of transparency and mechanisms for public scrutiny and oversight in place, with an emphasis on government accountability. One of the key aspects of open government is the free access to data. Most of the time, citizens are only able to engage with their own governance sporadically. By opening up The Data, citizens and NGOs can be directly informed and involved in decision-making. Open Government ends the idea of clerks as an upper caste, and experts in governing - instead, it stresses the importance of citizens and processes outside the administration. This is a modern paradigm of democracy, a transition from the old, 20th century notion of a limited democracy to an open, deliberative one. The Government of Poland is far from being open.

The Polish government is opening itself very slowly⁹³ without any master plan - instead there is a messy implementation of small projects. The mindset that creates a barrier, not allowing access for all citizens to public information and a degree of control over the public administration must be discarded. Currently, Poland does not want to participate in the Open Government

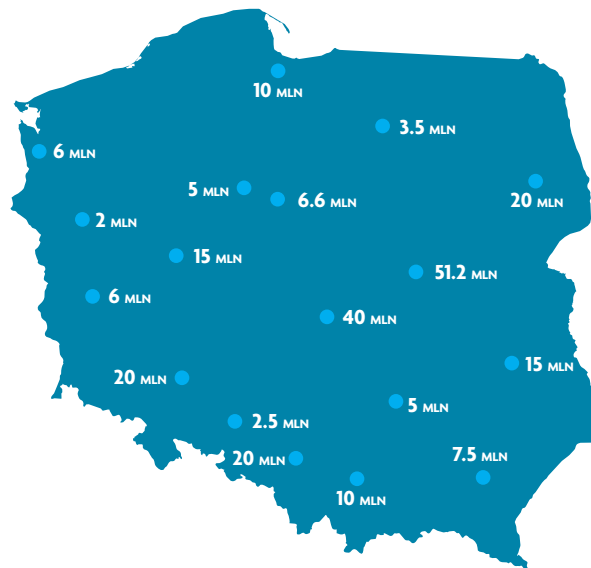
⁹² Polish citizens need an effective e-ID Card can be used as follows: 1. as a national ID card for legal travel within the EU; 2. as a national health insurance card; 3. as proof of identification when logging into bank accounts from a home computer; 4. as a pre-paid public transport ticket; 5. for e-voting; 6. for accessing government databases to check one's medical records, file taxes, etc.; 7. for picking up e-prescriptions; 8. for digital signatures.

⁹³ See: Open Government Data Review of Poland, OECD 2015.

Partnership. Access to public information is often denied by administration officers, in defiance of the law. This reluctance and fear can be overcome only by dialogue. All parties, government, citizens and NGOs should get involved in designing new tools and procedures. Unfortunately, during the term of the current government, this seems impossible.

Participatory budget

Probably the most interesting eDemocracy experiment in Poland relates to with participatory budgeting (PB). This instrument came to Poland in 2011, in the town of Sopot. In the beginning, there were serious concerns about the type of projects that will be submitted by the local community, but together with projects, connected with the modernisation of sidewalks or animal shelters, a mature project of introducing a city-wide system of waste sorting won. In the Polish version participatory budget planning, cities declare the percentage of their budget they want



Citizens' budget
2016 – schedule
Source:
URBNEWS.PL

to open to popular vote. It is usually between 0.5% and 2% of the total budget available for a given city.⁹⁴ Warsaw dedicated 21 million zloty in 2015 to participatory budgeting, that figure increased to 61 million in 2017.⁹⁵ Since 2011 a total of 318,534,957 zloty has been spent to finance projects initiated and selected by citizens.

It's not all so bright though. After the first editions, we can see that it's not at all so *participatory*. First of all, Polish participatory budgets were representing per mil rather than per cent of the total budget. Gerwin indicates eight minimum criteria that should be fulfilled so that participatory budgeting can fulfil its functions⁹⁶ Even such minimal requirements were not met by

⁹⁴ The largest percentage of 3.96% exists in the southern city of Kęty (19,000 inhabitants)

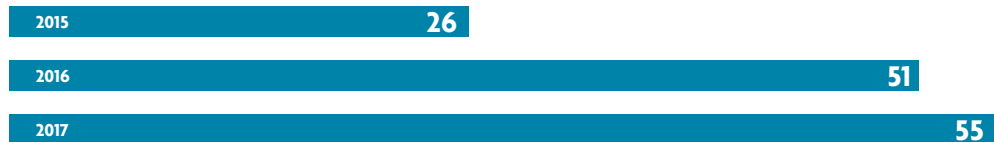
⁹⁵ The scope of action is not only limited to the cities, but was also introduced in Podlaskie Voivodeship on a regional level.

⁹⁶ 1. residents have the opportunity to submit proposals, 2. separate envelope to the civic budget is clearly defined, 3. projects are, as far as possible, accurately priced, 4. public debates are organized, 5. projects submitted by residents are not rejected by officials because of substantial reasons, 6. projects are chosen by the inhabitants, 7. only entitled residents may participate in voting, 8. selected projects are being implemented. M. Gerwin, 8 kryteriów budżetu obywatelskiego /8 criteria of participatory budget. www.sopockainicjatywa.org/2013/01/31/8-kryteriow-budzetu-obywatelskiego

all the participatory budgets in Poland. For example, in 2014 in Poznan, not all submitted projects were voted on, even if they met all the formal requirements.⁹⁷ There was a preliminary selection, done by public government employees. Participatory budgeting struggles to overcome existing clientelism. We can also see that participation is lower this year and less people are getting ready to get involved in Participatory Budgeting.⁹⁸

The fact that municipalities and regions use this tool to engage citizens in taking decisions is good and important. Unfortunately, for many it's the only tool of eDemocracy they use, and are willing to use. It is a square peg in a round hole, an example used to show how modern they are. Often a Participatory Budgeting is a kind of a game with the public, in which local governments spend billions of the public's money, leaving several million for residents to play with. In general, most municipalities show rather negative attitude towards bigger engagement with citizens in the decision-making process.⁹⁹ Participatory Budgeting is still a learning curve. Local authorities should improve it, and make it more citizen-friendly and simple, if it is to still play its original role. What is more, it is important to use eDemocracy tools to give citizens the possibility to consult regular local budgets (big investments).¹⁰⁰

Budget in PLN millions



One should not judge the Polish local eDemocracy based only on official actions and projects. At the lowest level, eDemocracy in Poland is blooming in the form of grass-roots movements. The growth of urban activism in Polish cities provides evidence that online interactions are important in the context of everyday life, as a way of exchanging information, yet this is a very basic way of using the medium. New communication tools, especially social networking platforms, are increasingly utilised by the growing number of social urban movements, working to make citizens' voices heard. Web-based media played a role in mobilising different groups to coordinate larger one-off efforts on particular issues, such as examining the candidates for

⁹⁷ www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877705816330211

⁹⁸ Unsurprisingly, the bigger the municipality, the smaller the participation in the vote. But some cities boast of participation that far outshine the turnout in a regular election. For example, 51% of the inhabitants of Gorzów Wielkopolski took part in the participatory budgeting vote in 2015, whereas the first large city in the ranking of participatory budget participation was Wrocław, where 30% of inhabitants voted. Farther down the ranking is Sopot with 15.4%, Warsaw with 12.4% and Krakow with 11.4%.

⁹⁹ Eg. in 2011, The Office of the President started to work on the new law on cooperation with local government for local and regional development. Most of the urban governments opposed the proposition to strengthen and broaden the participatory dimension of governance procedures. The Union of Polish Metropolis vigorously criticizes the project in their official letter. In the Union's opinion, the proposed citizen-government relationship is too direct.

¹⁰⁰ Nowoczesna Warsaw supports also limiting PB for bigger projects, creating expert panels to solve controversies within PB projects and creating special green participatory budget.

future Members of Parliament or city councillors. The organisation of the urban movements and mobilisation of diverse groups, claiming to have the right to participate in the formulation of the urban development policy, put the problem of social participation procedures on the government's agenda.¹⁰¹

Summary

Sill young, the democratic system in Poland, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, is strongly based on mechanisms of representative democracy and a strong mandate given to the public administration. But technology is changing, and so is the lifestyle of the Polish people. Poles are nowadays permanently connected to their smartphones and other mobile devices, and this changed their way of communication, interaction and decision making, both amongst individuals and private businesses. There is an expectation that the administration and governance will keep up with this evolution.

Social changes, known from the Western world, are also applicable in Poland. Social networks fragmentise society. The new generation of Poles wants to be active, but does not want to be political – it wants to solve problems, but not in the confines of political parties. Local and single issues can ride on this energy and become a power motive for crowds.

Local authorities cannot treat citizen participation in the decision-making processes as an obstacle or a factor which slows down the urban development process, nor can they claim that public participation mostly generates problems. They should treat it as a potential pool of ideas on how to make their decisions more effective and convincing. They should start looking for popular support to reinforce their democratic legitimacy.

¹⁰¹ pl.kge.ug.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Grabkowska_Pancewicz_Sagan_2013_The-Impact-of-Web-Based-Media.pdf



eDemocracy in Hungary: high supply, low demand

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In Hungary, the widespread application of ICT in the political process began after the turn of the new millennium. Until 2010, it involved mostly eGovernment and e-inclusiveness solutions. As political protests have been organised against the second government of Viktor Orbán after 2010, online platforms have been set up, in order to promote such civil initiatives. In this era, the application of ICT in politics served mostly for online political debates, community building and social movement mobilisation. The driving forces behind ICT applications in politics before 2010 were the political expectations for a greater transparency in the decision-making process, the relevant policies of the European Union and the general view of the internet and digital communication as progressive instruments. After 2010, the main reason for utilising such technologies was to realise and demonstrate political statements by the opposition.

eDemocracy in the 2000s: from freedom of information to e-inclusion

Promoting the transparency of ministries, government agencies and municipalities was the goal of the Law on Electronic Freedom of Information, which was released in 2005. The aim of the bill was to satisfy the growing information demands of mass media and of citizens. Another reason were the directives of the European Parliament and Council, in particular the Directive on the Re-use of Public Sector Information (Directive 2003/98/EC), also known as the 'PSI Directive' (Szilágyi, Jóri and Szabó, 2008: 37). This latter act aimed to move forward transparency and fair competition on the internal market by re-using, i.e. disclosing and making available the data and information of public bodies and libraries.

The information providing duty of municipalities inspired indirectly the Üvegfalu (Glass-village) program initiated by the eDemokrácia Műhely Egyesület (eDemocracy Workshop Association). The goal of the project was to aid municipalities in fulfilling their data disclosing requirements, set by the Freedom of Information Law. According to the association, transparency of municipalities could contribute to fighting corruption on the local level. Promoting transparency and fighting corruption were also two important goals of the Open Government Partnership multilateral agreement. The right-wing Fidesz government joined the initiative in 2012. However, the government quit the partnership in 2016 as they claimed that the forum was used not to share good practices as it was intended, but to "denounce certain states". According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade the reports of the Open Government Partnership were biased and based on the opinion of hostile civil organisations continuously criticising the

Hungarian government (Magyar Hírlap, 2016).

The new regulation had a spill-over effect. Just like municipalities, local politicians became aware of the idea of eDemocracy, and they moved beyond simply providing information, but started to involve citizens in the decision-making process. A good example is a project initiated by the local governance of the 3rd district of Budapest. As a central square of the district was renovated, the local community was asked to share their opinion during the planning process. This community planning was conducted not only online, since in many cases on- and offline forms of political participation complement each other in an eDemocracy process. Another project with a local scope is the *miutcan.k.hu*, which aims to bring together people in the same neighbourhood to socialise and organise local undertakings like revitalising community spaces.

eDemocracy also appeared on the national level with the online submission of the so called National Consultations, which have been held by the Hungarian government since 2011. At these consultations, the opinion of citizens is asked on various topics, such as employment, social issues, pensions, etc. During the last consultation on immigration and terrorism, citizens could submit their opinion online as well. Furthermore, a consultation on the regulation of the internet was held exclusively online. However, the primary role of the consultations is not the aggregation of citizens' opinions, but the promotion of the government's agenda, since most questions are manipulative and not balanced (Mikecz, 2016: 83). Nevertheless, the National Consultations could popularise the idea of involving citizens online.

The Digital Divide and e-inclusion were a frequently recurring issue since the early 2000s. The first official document on information society, the *Nemzeti Információs Stratégia* (NITS, National Information Society Strategy) was released in 2001, during the first Fidesz government. After the 2002 elections, the Ministry of Information Science and Telecommunication was set up, which indicated that information technology and the challenges of information society became a more prominent field for the then socialist-liberal government. In 2003 the *Magyar Információs Társadalom Stratégia* (MITS, Hungarian Information Society Strategy) was published. In both strategies the risk of a widening digital divide was recognised, but information technologies were also seen as instruments to include and empower marginalised social groups (e.g. disabled, unemployed, senior and Roma people) in employment as well as in politics.

In 2008, the Year of e-Inclusion, official documents named those factors, which pose a hindrance to it. These were the low employment rate, the aging society and the lack of digital literacy (Sinka, 2009). A bottom-up project was organised to overcome the digital gap in Hungary. The *Login Initiative* in 2007 and the *Wifi-Falu* (Wifi-Village) program in 2008 by the *Internet Terjesztéséért Alapítvány* (Foundation for the Spreading of Internet) aimed to make internet available for small, deprived rural communities in the North-Eastern region of Hungary. Unemployed, underprivileged families could participate in the programs. They could buy the computers and the network devices at a discounted price, while the wireless internet was provided for free (Kollányi and Kurucz, 2008: 53-54).

After 2010: eDemocracy unfolding

Since the mid-2000s ICT became progressively more important for the radical right, as well as for the new leftist social movements. The affiliate of the Independent Media Center (*indyme-*

dia) became a central channel for the Hungarian global justice movement, in order to organise protest events, recruit supporters and spread information. The radical right elaborated an online subculture and mobilised successfully on the internet (Mikecz, 2014). However, these developments were limited to narrow social movement groups. Only as large-scale protests against the Orbán government were organised after 2010, the e-government and e-inclusion aspects of information technologies faded, and their direct political significance became more prominent. eDemocracy unfolded as community building, deliberation and mobilisation, and became an important function of new applications.

As the rules of holding referendums were restricted by the Orbán government, applications were made to simulate political participation on the national level. Opposition parties and social movements supported szabadszavazas.hu, while the investigative news website Atlatzso.hu launched the evoks.hu portal. In order to channel surplus resources, crowdfunding became the established method for civil society organisations. Mostly non-political civil organisations are using the adhat.hu and adjukossze.hu websites for starting crowdfunding campaigns, but political organisations and movements like the Two Tailed Dog Party, refugee aiding groups and a referendum initiative have started such online fundraising as well (Lévia, 2015).

After the 2014 internet-tax protests in Hungary (Szabó and Mikecz, 2015), Zsolt Várady, the organiser of the demonstrations and a social media entrepreneur, launched the portal populus.hu, which was designed to solve local problems by interconnecting people and building communities. The main aim of the, meanwhile cancelled, project was to stimulate participation in order to overcome the political enervation in the country. Recently, a similar platform was built by a new political party, the Momentum. The *Cselekvés Körei* (Circles of Action) is a country-wide network of the party for dealing with local issues and connecting with voters.

Enablers and obstacles of eDemocracy in Hungary

As demonstrated above, several eDemocracy platforms and applications were developed in Hungary since the early 2000s. Before 2010, different government strategies, EU directives and the general enthusiasm for ICT supported the implementation of different eDemocracy solutions. As the second Orbán government came into power in 2010, eDemocracy gained a new impetus, as opposition parties and social movements experimented with online applications in order to increase political participation and mobilise citizens. However, most people are not familiar with these options of online participation, due to various factors hindering the spread of eDemocracy.

Firstly, many functions, like sharing texts, images, contacting elected officials, commenting and voting are already integrated in complex social media platforms like Facebook. Consequently, separate eDemocracy applications with the same functionalities are not deemed as new, innovative instruments of political participation. Secondly, whilst a central goal of eDemocracy is to raise the level of political participation, a certain engagement is necessary to make such platforms working. Since in Hungary political participation beyond elections and organisational membership is lower than in Western European countries, it is harder to start up eDemocracy projects. Finally, if an eDemocracy process does not have a tangible outcome, people will not be interested in using it. In the case of the abovementioned szabadszavazas.hu

application, people can cast their vote just like during a referendum. However, unlike an official referendum, the result is not legally binding, thus people can be hardly convinced to use the platform.

Such hardships could be overcome if local or national authorities would regard the outcome of the eDemocracy processes compulsory for themselves. Furthermore, partnership and cooperation between authorities, civil organisations and citizens during the whole process is crucial. It is important that public bodies have enough resources to manage an eDemocracy project. The whole process can fail, if public servants feel that eDemocracy is an unnecessary burden for them. However, due to the sharp political polarisation in Hungary, it is more likely that such innovations will occur on a local level on less conflictual issues.

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Southeastern Europe: ready for a paradigm shift?

In Southeastern Europe, there are far more very similar questions than answers. Responses on how the countries can face the multiple challenges in the introduction of eGovernment, are a must, before moving on towards the eDemocracy, which will shape the region in terms of its economic and social development. Current paradigms include:

- (i) the relatively low use of internet, even when it is technically available and financially accessible - in many cases, even when included in contract subscriptions, it is not used;
- (ii) the low (relative to the rest of EU) digital literacy, coupled with conservative attitudes that make the introduction of any technological innovation, while fully accepted by many, fully rejected by equally as many groups;
- (iii) the painfully slow administrative reform, with large in numbers, low-paid staff, that must embark on a titanic mission to deliver their day-to-day work, ideally digital by default, while also digitalising the old records and assisting those citizens who cannot handle online requests,
- (iv) the decisions across the region on the introduction of eID – compulsory (as in Estonia) or voluntary (as in Finland). If instituted as compulsory, important segments of the societies will become even more vulnerable, as now they may occasionally “sell” their votes in election times while soon, unknowingly, they may be subject to new vulnerabilities. If decided as voluntary, how many decades it would take before the level of digitalisation of the services reach the current levels in the North?
- (v) Finally, the need for a transitional period to provide redundant services – on and off-line. Given the budgetary constraints, it may turn to be the decisive cornerstone.

Marked with very modest progress, the Southeast of the EU has the unique chance to learn from the experience of all other countries, and when entering the implementation phase of the new plans, to make a remarkable headway. The region also has seen an impressive level of public mobilisation and efforts towards digitalisation are on their way.

Digital Democracy in Greece enters early childhood



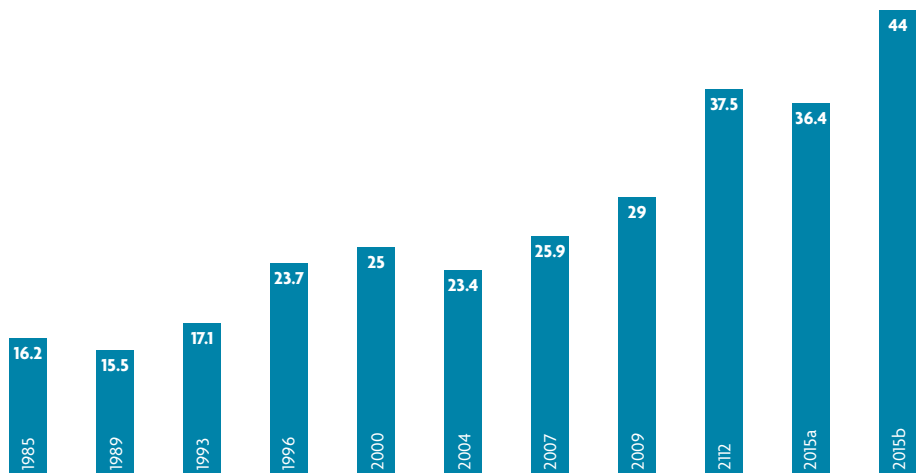
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Approximately 2,500 years after the first Athenian Democracy, democratic institutions in many European countries, including Greece, have been severely criticised for allowing citizens limited access to power.

The protracted Greek financial crisis has brought to light a simultaneous institutional crisis and a massive mistrust toward government organisations. Participation in the last national elections of 2015 dropped to a historic low, albeit that voting is mandatory by law. Poor turnout (Figure 1) can be justified by many reasons, including the expression of disagreement against the bailout policies of all elected governments, since 2009, which have led to social injustices, confusion and anger.¹⁰²

Despite the general, almost unanimous, acknowledgment of the need for radical reforms, this is followed neither by specific actions nor by the adoption of technology-driven tools that can assist in the improvement of the quality of democracy, the enhancement of citizens' democratic expression and engagement and expansion of its limits in Greek society – and this is true for all levels of Greek public administration.

Digital Democracy in Greece went through a prolonged infancy and has just entered early childhood.



Source: GreekReporter.com

Fig. 1
Abstention Rates in
Greek Elections
from 1985 to 2015
in %

¹⁰² greece.greekreporter.com/2015/09/21/voter-turnout-in-greek-elections-drops-to-new-historic-low-infographic/

	Proportion of individuals who:			Frequency of use (on average)	
	Used Internet within the last 3 months	Used Internet within the last 12 months	Never used Internet	Every day or almost every day	At least once a week (including daily use)
EU-28	82	84	14	71	79
Belgium	87	87	11	74	84
Bulgaria	59	62	33	49	58
Czech Republic	82	83	13	65	79
Denmark	97	97	2	89	94
Germany	90	91	8	78	87
Estonia	87	88	10	77	85
Ireland	82	83	15	70	79
Greece	69	70	29	57	66
Spain	81	81	17	67	76
France	86	88	10	70	82
Croatia	73	74	23	63	71
Italy	69	71	25	66	67
Cyprus	76	76	23	69	74
Latvia	80	81	17	68	77
Lithuania	74	75	22	60	72
Luxemburg	97	98	2	93	97
Hungary	79	81	19	71	78
Malta	77	78	21	70	76
Netherlands	93	94	5	86	92
Austria	84	85	13	72	82
Poland	73	75	22	57	70
Portugal	70	71	26	60	68
Romania	60	66	30	42	56
Slovenia	75	76	22	64	73
Slovakia	80	83	15	68	78
Finland	94	94	4	85	91
Sweden	93	95	3	85	91
United Kingdom	95	5	4	88	93
Norway	97	98	2	92	96
FYR of Macedonia	72	75	23	61	70
Turkey	58	59	39	49	55

Fig. 2
Internet use and frequency of use, 2016 (% of individuals)

However, before we recall best practices from other countries that can be beneficial for speeding up the implementation of a national digital democracy policy, it is important to underline one key obstacle that makes it almost impossible for any further discussion on the topic, namely the low penetration of internet use throughout Greece, the digital illiteracy and the digital age and gender gaps.

Greece presents the lowest shares of households with access to the internet in 2016 (69%) faring only slightly worse than Romania and Lithuania (72% each), whilst between 2010 and 2016, a significant increase in the share of connected households is registered. (Figure 2)

One of the lowest broadband connectivity rates (68%) was once again registered for Greece

in 2016, while at the same period, in eleven Member States of the EU, including Greece, more than one fifth of the population were non-internet users.¹⁰³

In addition, 75% of citizens under the age of 24 have access to the world wide web, while 12,5% of those between 55-74 years of age, do not have this possibility. The data also shows a significant gap in use between men and women, especially those living in non-urban or rural areas.

In a country where a big part of the population (almost 20%) lacks the ability to access or the education required to use digital means¹⁰⁴, the question is how representative this model would be. Would any democratisation attempt have any solid grounds, or would it lead to the distortion of people's actual will and the dominance of a digital elite?

Therefore, in order to ensure an actual open society that further enhances freedom of expression, Greece has to take a leap forward towards the development of opportunities for access to all, and the closure of the gender and age digital gap.

With the above-mentioned prerequisites in mind, let's take a look back on the country's efforts on digitalisation of participation.

Two subsequent European Operational Programmes, "Information Society" in the period 2000-2006 and "Digital Convergence" in the period 2007-2013 have incentivised many govern-

ment institutions, as well as local and regional administrations, to introduce Information and Communications Technologies to design a customised developmental strategy with a specific emphasis on competitive Greek sectors such as tourism, shipping, culture and sports. In some cases, the programme has been smartly used to introduce public digital conferences and streaming services, public consultation and dialogue, social networking, informal polling, public information and education.¹⁰⁵ (Figure 3)



Fig. 3
Local example
of digital
convergence.
Municipality of
Molos

However, no significant progress has been registered, as the rate of funds absorption was still low for the period, and no specific or consistent methodology has been followed to measure the impact in local societies.

The milestone for Greece's new digital era can be traced to the years 2009-2010, when the Papandreou administration presented digital democracy as a strategic pillar in the effort for the country's total re-engineering, with the introduction of the Open Government Initiative, later followed by Greece's participation in the Open Government Partnership in the year 2012. This process led to important innovative actions towards open governance, such as the Government Portal ERMIS - an open e-deliberation and recruitment platform, the Transparency Program (Di@vgeia), the open taxation data initiative (TAXIS), as well as other steps.

Furthermore, all the Greek governments that followed, made a series of commitments to further promote open governance, including boosting public engagement, enhancing public resources Management, opening up data and enhancing transparency.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Internet_use_and_frequency_of_use,_2016_\(%25_of_individuals\).png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Internet_use_and_frequency_of_use,_2016_(%25_of_individuals).png)

¹⁰⁴ Focus on Tech Life for Greece research.(March-April 2017)

¹⁰⁵ Local example of digital convergence. Municipality of Molos, Fthiotida Region, 2007 www.mwlos.gr/content/psifiaki-dimokratia

¹⁰⁶ www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/greece, including National Action Plan for Greece

Greece submitted its first National Action Plan for Open Government in April 2012, for the period 2012-2013 to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the second in July 2014, for the period 2014-2016. Currently, the third national action plan for the period 2016-2018 is being prepared by the Greek government, aimed at holding a broad consultation with citizens, civil society and all stakeholders in order to launch new legislative proposals.

A promising case study: The ‘Transparency’ Initiative (Di@vgeia)¹⁰⁷

Since the 1st of October 2010, all Greek government institutions are obliged to upload their acts and decisions on the internet with a special attention paid to issues of national security and sensitive personal data. Each document is digitally signed and assigned a unique Internet Uploading Number (IUN) certifying that the decision has been uploaded on the “Transparency Portal”. Following the latest legislative initiative (Law 4210/2013) of the Ministry of Administrative Reform and eGovernance, administrative acts and decisions are not valid unless published online.

The main objectives of the Programme focus on safeguarding the transparency of government actions, eliminating corruption by exposing it more easily when it takes place, observing legality and good administration, reinforcing citizens’ constitutional rights, such as the participation in the Information Society, and modernising existing publication systems of administrative acts and decisions.

The Programme has been selected and presented as a Best Practice at the 6th European Quality Conference, held within the quality conference cycle of European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) “Doing the right things right - Towards a more result-oriented public sector in Europe”.¹⁰⁸

To date, approximately 25 million acts have been uploaded to the platform by approximately 4,500 governmental and non-governmental institutions, whilst only 79,122 users, including citizens are actually using the platform. (Figure 4)

In the same context, the Open Government project “*has been designed to serve the principles of transparency, deliberation, collaboration and accountability and includes three initiatives:*

Open calls for the recruitment of public administration officials. Top level and mid-level



Fig. 4
Transparency Program
Ministry of Administrative Reform and e-Governance

¹⁰⁷ www.diaevgeia.gov.gr/ More information on the Transparency Program initiative: diaevgeia@yap.gov.gr. Informatics Development Agency, Ministry of Administrative Reform and e-Governance

¹⁰⁸ www.eupan.eu/en/events/show/&tid=82

openings in the public sector are available on the Internet. Applications are submitted on-line using a platform available on the *opengov.gr* website.

Electronic deliberation. Almost every piece of draft legislation, or even policy initiative, by the government, is posted on a blog-like platform, prior to their submission to parliament. Citizens and organisations can post their comments, suggestions and criticisms article-by-article.¹⁰⁹

However, as seen with the “Transparency Initiative”, in a system operating for seven consecutive years, only 692 public consultations have been registered, as well as 164 public calls and 42,087 applications. (Figure 5)

Reservations and criticism

Are those attempts to democratise a daily public life that is actually democratic? Are citizens’ digital liberties being adequately safeguarded?

And if they are, why do Greek citizens seem distant or reluctant to engage?

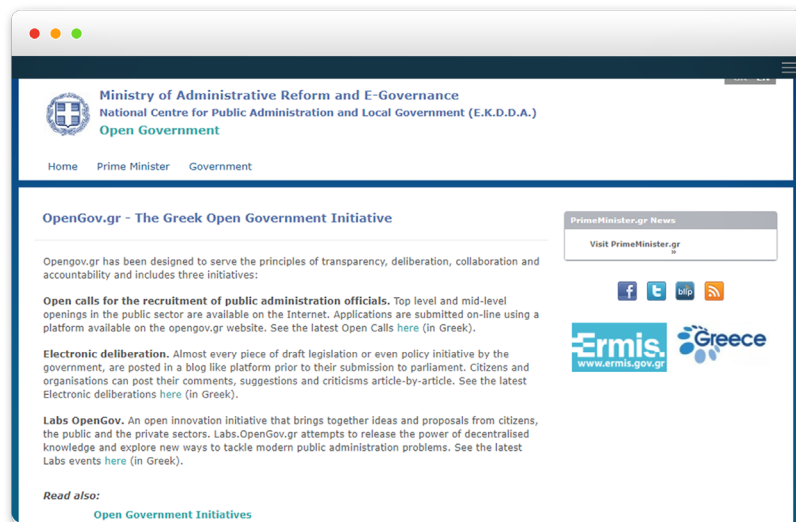



Fig. 5
 OpenGov.gr -
 The Greek Open
 Government
 Initiative

Korina Pateli, an Assistant Professor at the Panteion University, strongly objects the notion that administrative acts are available in formats that are easy to access, navigate and comprehend, regardless of the citizen’s knowledge level of the inner processes of the administration¹¹⁰.

“It’s not clear who the beneficiaries from opengov.gr are. It does not offer any moderation facilities, related to the specification of the agenda, the handling of the public discussion, or the guidance of the average user, who is totally lost. It does not have any structure-chronological or other- that could lead to the automation of content management. Actually, there is no content manager; texts are long, not converted to hypertexts, unreadable, written in a difficult and incomprehensible legal jargon that makes it almost impossible for a citizen to follow the

¹⁰⁹ www.opengov.gr/en/

¹¹⁰ www2.media.uoa.gr/sas/issues/24_issue/08.html

argumentation, and in a format, that cannot be edited. Moreover, there is no feedback at all, it's not announced a priori when a consultation starts and often, the duration of each consultation is short and usually varies".

In addition to Prof. Pateli's criticism, the renowned Professor of constitutional law at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Nikos Alivizatos, expresses his disappointment at the abolition of the electronic voting system in the university of Athens by the government in his article entitled "Unforgivable Stubbornness" published in 2015.¹¹¹

During 2012 and 2013, the e-polling system "Zeus"¹¹² was introduced for the university rector elections. It was the first time in Greek history that the majority of the Greek parliament acknowledged that it is constitutionally acceptable for elections to be held without the electorate's physical presence. With participation reaching 80%, one of the highest, if not the highest rates ever recorded in the history of the specific elections, a permanent e-polling system was verified as the best solution to enhance participation of the electorates, reluctant to participate either due to a lack of time or due to fear of the extremist student or non-student groups, that often occupy university premises, obstruct regular academic life and bully the academic community.

Despite the vast acceptance from all stakeholders, the e-voting system was surprisingly abolished in 2015, a decision that is not, until today, substantiated by any solid arguments.

Prof. Alivizatos' words demonstrate his reservations: *"It's absolutely impossible for me to believe that the Minister of Education has taken this irrational and stubborn decision...and associated himself with a disastrous, as well as undemocratic, political choice"*.¹¹³

Significant delays in the implementation of the National Plan 2016-2018

As seen by the Open Government Partnership Monitoring and Assessment Report, Greece has reached a 21% completion rate of the total compliance obligations the country has committed to. (Figure 6)

Despite the fact that the Greek government has recognised *"the critical factor of transparency, accountability and citizen engagement, to enable the transition to a new public administration model, that is looking for new ways to continuously improve the services provided to citizens and enhance eDemocracy and eParticipation"*¹¹⁴, no major steps have been taken in this direction, and minimal progress has been made, in regard to the openness and the public sharing of all public data, as well as the open governance and the citizens' participation rate, which is still among the European lowest. (Figure 6)

It seems like Greece keeps setting ambitious goals, but fails to deliver a coherent and credible action plan with measurable results.

It remains to be seen, how Greece's next administrations will choose to deal with the free flow of public information, citizens' engagement to decision making, and adoption of open technologies, in order to fight corruption and bureaucracy, and prepare the grounds for more liberties in a truly open society.

¹¹¹ www.kathimerini.gr/812294/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/ena-asygxwrhto-peisma

¹¹² E-polling system "Zeus" was used for the rector elections in 2012. zeus.grnet.gr/zeus/

¹¹³ www.kathimerini.gr/812294/opinion/epikairothta/politikh/ena-asygxwrhto-peisma

¹¹⁴ www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/greece, including National Action Plan for Greece

The question on whether Greece can successfully overcome the childhood diseases to move fast to the exciting and revealing adolescence, remains.

Liberty Forum Greece, by principle, believes in, and will support any government's' efforts that enhance liberal ideas and an open society under the rule of law.

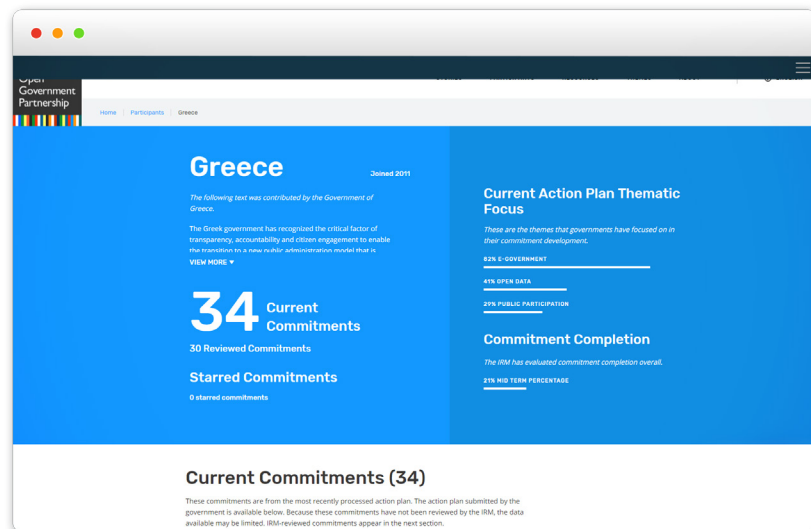


Fig. 6
National Action
Plan for Greece
for 2016

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 L.4048/2012 for amendments to opengov.
 Public Open Data law, N.4305/2014, <http://data.gov.gr/>



Turning 'the silent majority' in Bulgaria into active citizens

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... we are working on an idea of eDemocracy. This is the fulfilment of the dream of mankind for the perfect management of the world... ..

Solomon Passy, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bulgaria

EDemocracy has a few prerequisites: access to the internet, access to information, interest in public affairs (active citizenship) and the ability to assemble online to debate and agree on important for the community matters. The ultimate result is not a letter to the government - instead, it is the governance itself. More importantly, it is directly related to the culture of democracy that a nation develops and defends.

To estimate the niche for eDemocracy in the overall process, one needs to understand the grounds before its introduction. The Economist Intelligence Unit, in its 2016 annual report titled "Revenge of the "deplorables", ranks Bulgaria 47th, one position lower than its 2015 scores. Its state of democracy assessment, based on 60 indicators grouped in 5 categories, allocates to the country a democracy index of 7.01 (out of 10), with staggering disparity between the categories: Electoral process and pluralism 9.17, Functioning of government 6.07, Political participation 7.22, Political culture 4.38, and Civil liberties 8.24. What is felt by many in the country is best illustrated by those figures: in a genuinely good electoral process with high standards of pluralism and liberties, and people who participate in the decision making, but with a very weak understanding of the political processes. As elaborated further on, the civics, the fora for political discussion and decision making are the weak points, on the one hand, and would be the grounds for the introduction of eDemocracy tools, on the other.

Representative Democracy and its Readiness to Go Digital

Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic, with guaranteed political participation of all citizens in choosing their representatives in a variety of institutions.

The Bulgarians have voted in peaceful and well-organised elections, every year since 2009, and sometimes, in a number of polls. Although the country is among the few EU members that still receives fully fledged election observation missions, the most recent rounds of the presidential, legislative and municipal elections are assessed by independent observers as free

and fair, with no major breaches of the established good practices.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, we witness re-occurring problems during the preparation, campaign and e-day. Most notably, it is assessed that up to 10% of the vote is controlled, which comprises a corporate vote in mono-industrial areas and vote buying in cities with marginalised populations.¹¹⁶ To tackle this, the Election Code provided for new technologies, both in casting the vote and scanning the paper ballots. Based on that, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) introduced machine voting (e-vote in a controlled environment), first as an experiment, and after thorough assessment and additional public debate, it is expected to be mainstreamed. The State Agency of eGovernment and CEC actively work on the implementation of distance e-voting, with simulation tests in 2017¹¹⁷ and feasibility, according to the President of the Republic, for its introduction for the diaspora vote in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Similar to other countries, Bulgaria also faces a declining turnout. The traditional, representative democracy is not perceived as perfect and referenda are not seen to add trust.

All elected institutions – the office of the president, the council of ministers, the parliament and the local authorities have websites to timely inform the public about taken, or about to be taken, decisions. The hard part is to find the information on the dozens of sites. For a person with little or no experience in government administration, it could be next to impossible to access the, intended for general public, databases and records, (land records, real estate, medical records, etc.) for there is no unified system, and every administration has spent a lot of the public resources available to it, to build independent soft- and hardware infrastructure, incompatible with the rest. There are no interlinks between the different ministers nor between ministries and agencies.¹¹⁸ The currently existing e-services are still very limited and in many cases, replace only the visit to the offices for application, but not the visits for receipt or further submission of documents. A recent example is the introduction of the employment history e-record, where the administrations that require it cannot access it online, so the citizen prints it and then delivers it in person. In the words of the director of the State Agency for eGovernment, 49 laws plus hundreds of administrative acts are yet to be amended, if eGovernance is to succeed.¹¹⁹ That also implies eDemocracy.

Low use of the otherwise included in communication subscriptions services, indicates a lack of real use of the existing e-services, but it also reflects on the very low digital skills of some age and education groups. Although those skills are hardly covered by the formal school curriculum, 25% of the first graders are active on social media, by the age of 13 that percentage reaches 60%, and by the time of leaving school at 18, some 80% are active on Facebook alone, in addition to the other segments that use different digital applications. At the same time, the digital skills drop significantly among those over 50. In 2017, the EU DESI places Bulgaria on the 27th place, a drop down from the 2016 23rd place, which is to be credited to the other lagging-behind-coun-

115 OSCE, EOM to Bulgaria 2017. www.osce.org/odihr/elections/bulgaria. (accessed on 01.09.2017).

116 Пламен Димитров: Има опити за корпоративен вот, система показва след 5 минути за кого са гласували работниците. В News – online news portal from Bulgaria. 29.09.2015. www.bnews.bg/article/196928. (accessed on 28.08.2017).

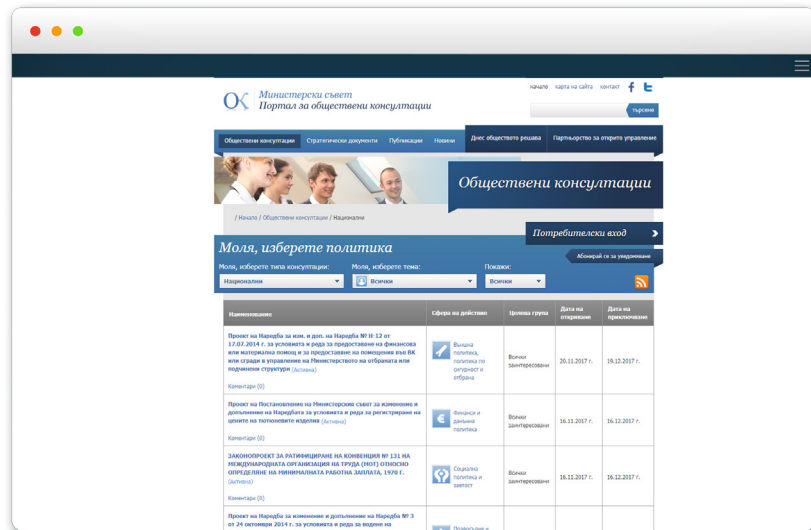
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119 Article in news



Portal for Public Consultations: the pro-forma consultations did not generate any citizens' activity during the last 10 years



tries' faster development. Simultaneously, in 2016, with 33% of the adult population that had never used the internet, Bulgaria scored by far the worst. It corresponds to the relatively high share of school dropouts and youth who leave compulsory education institutions with a very poor level of schooling.

Low pay for staff in the public administration is another a reason for institutional resistance against innovations – in a country where the state is the biggest employer, hardly any political party would sack incompetent officers to replace them with talented youth. A brief reference in DESI summarises the state of affairs quite unpleasantly for the country: “Bulgaria progressed in the enhancement of its broadband infrastructure and in open data developments. However, its low performance in digital skills, digitalisation of businesses and of public services are acting as a brake to the further development of Bulgaria’s digital economy and society.”¹²⁰

Direct Democracy and the Impossibility for Direct eDemocracy

There are four forms for direct participation in the government: referenda, citizen initiatives, European citizen initiatives and Town Hall meetings.

All three **referenda** since return to multiparty democracy were organised within the last 5 years, and conveniently for the voters, the two with qualifying turnout were held together with the elections. The legislation, however, makes it very hard for citizens to call a referendum and even harder to see it tabled at the parliament. In a country with 6.8 million voters (a figure highly exaggerated according to experts, due to high migration) and turnouts of below 4 million voters in a good year, 400,000 signatures are a prerequisite to initiate a referendum and then, according to the turnout, the result is either a suggestion to the legislators, or is presented as a legislative act for consideration by the parliament. If one option is favoured by the voting majority and the

¹²⁰ Digital Economy and Society Index 2017 - Bulgaria

turnout is equal or higher than the turnout during the last legislative elections, only then does it oblige the parliament to turn it into legislation. So far, the only citizen referendum (run though by a private TV channel) was called after the collection of over 750.000 signatures in 2016 – all done on paper, as per the existing law.

The **citizen initiatives** are either national or local, and suggest to the government or the legislature a resolution of an existing national or local problem. Many citizen initiatives have seen high interest, but all of them have failed to make it to the legislators' table.

The European citizen initiative gives opportunity to citizens across EU to address the European Commission with suggestions for solutions at the European level. For the EU citizens residing in Bulgaria, when initiating or supporting it, the local laws apply, and all identification of the persons and records are paper based only. That takes time to identify every signatory and thereafter to duly register it all, through another paper-based act with the administration. A review of the participation of the Bulgarian citizens in the ECI suggests a very low interest or difficulties that have made it close to impossible to partake.

The **Town Hall meeting** is a gathering of citizens in towns, or identifiable parts of cities, with a population of up to 10,000. The respective local authority must take into consideration the decision of the meeting.

The only digital aspect of the process of all forms of direct democracy is the use of social networks to spread the information about the event. All stages of making propositions, debating and voting follow the traditional paper track.

School and university graduates, in general, lack information about the possibilities to participate in consultations and deliberations at all levels. The democratic process is not known nor thought at Bulgarian schools, and civic education (formal and informal) is non-existent. At a glance, there are conflicting trends: the most frequent users of internet and social media, the youth below 30, are the least interested in online public debates. Closer look suggests lack of venues to learn and debate on the matters of importance for society, that includes issues pertinent to the graduates.

eDemocracy's difficult birth

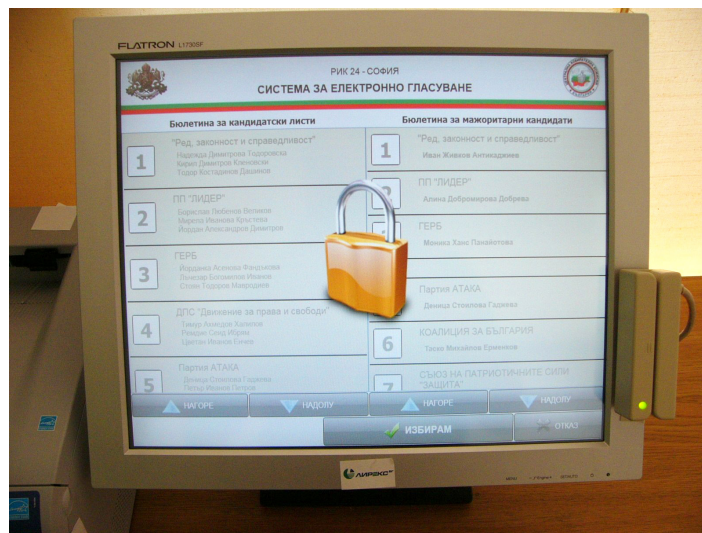
Wider introduction of eGovernment will significantly ease the access to information, and make procedures easier to follow and more transparent, which will lead to an increased level of trust in the institutions and lower the cost of administration upkeep. The much-needed participatory democracy or grassroots democracy can benefit largely from the wider use of e-services.

In this line of thoughts, it is only natural that in 2016 Bulgaria made seven concrete commitments to the Open Government Partnership, to which Bulgaria was one of the first to subscribe. The fact that the focal point for the OGP is the person in charge of the administrative reform of the government is also positive, as it can guarantee synchronisation of the efforts. Adverse, though are the purely technical aspects of all commitments, limiting the initiatives to inform the public rather than to involve the citizens in the processes.

After significant amendments to the eGovernment Act in 2016¹²¹, the government promised to introduce eGovernance in a bid to increase citizens' participation, to raise the level of trans-

¹²¹ www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/bulgaria

parency and to ease the communication with and between different ministries and government agencies. Arguably, the government still hasn't done enough to discuss and debate possible solutions. Bulgaria, a country with an old ICT industry and use, was one of the world's pioneers to declare the decision to introduce a programme for eGovernment. In recent years, however, the development is only seen in the form of spending, with no results on the ground. Since 2001, over 1.5 billion euro were spent for the development and implementation of e-services¹²², yet virtually nothing has been done. In September 2017, the head of the state agency for eGovernment, frankly declared that Bulgaria has to start its e-reform from the very beginning, as the currently existing platforms and programs cannot work together: technically, administratively and legislatively.¹²³ To the broad public, such a statement comes as a disappointment and justified anger for all that money spent. For someone inside the processes, it is an overdue admission and important first step.



eVoting Project
in Bulgaria

At this point in time, eDemocracy has a very limited scope of existence: groups of interest for discussion and debate on social networks, focused on matters of national and local referenda. Amongst the notable cases are: the civil society national support for Trun Municipality referendum in June 2017. A community of 2000 elderly voters (59% of the total voters' population in the area), had their vote observed and tabulated in a parallel exercise by domestic observers from across the country, to defend their vote sealed with 93% against gold mining in the area. Mining would have deteriorated the quality of underground and spring water, as well as the air, in addition to other devastating affects to the environment, but without outside help, their voices may have been ignored. Another example is the public online debate on the rule of law and the transparency of the judicial system initiated by the resignation of the justice minister in 2016 and the subsequent, aligned with his position, statement by the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Cassation. Institutes, specialised in good governance and non-governmental organisa-

¹²² www.investor.bg/novini/261/a/realno-elektronno-upravlenie-v-bylgariia-do-4-godini-220403/

¹²³ Електронното правителство започва отначало' 07.09.2017. В-к Дневник available online at

www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2017/09/07/3038023_elektronnoto_pravitelstvo_zapochva_otnachalo/. (Accessed on 07.09.2017).

tions expressed support initially, through street demonstrations and later organised large scale debates on social media. As a result, within 10 months, the general public's understanding of the role of the different layers in the judicial system had massively improved, and many who had no previous knowledge, sought information and became actively involved in the debate.

Other positive examples include e-mobilisation for local referenda and defence of Natura 2000 sites, as well as other campaigns for fundamental and environmental rights.

Furthermore, there are no political-party e-debates; the e-consultations have been limited to comments posted on the websites of programs and projects. As the administration that runs the websites has spent little time to present submitted to them comments, critiques and proposals, little enthusiasm is generated by those consultations, except in the area of environment and energy - key areas for recent public debate.

The way ahead towards a more participative governance

The administrative reform is one of the keys to enabling more participation, including eParticipation. Second to that, is a proper, well-planned eGovernance, that provides not only e-services but also e-deliberations and e-consultations with visible for all participants interventions and outcomes. So far, a myriad of minor advances has been presented as a huge success in order to justify enormous public spending, and there is a mounting deficit in public trust in the eGovernment. An honest and clear assessment with identification of shortcomings and a roadmap for progress would be a good start.

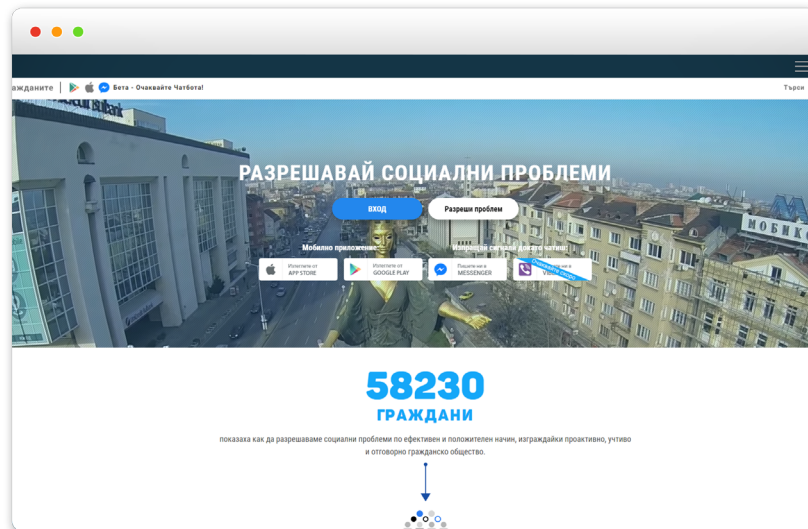
With over 65% of the population having access to internet and being one of the top five in terms of quality of the connection, there are solid grounds for the further development of eDemocracy, consistently bearing in mind the risks of exclusion of vulnerable groups. Technology and the access to it is the minimum necessity for citizens to participate more efficiently. Most importantly, in Bulgaria, the most commonly associated with eDemocracy feature is the electronic access to information and the ability to communicate electronically.

Bulgaria is still in the process of synchronising the interconnections of its own governmental and municipal institutions. Many do not use a common database and municipalities, until recently, were unable to access data of others. As access to information is somewhat available, or becoming more readily available online, one can also expect many platforms for debates in near future. If not mainstreamed to the respective elective and government offices, they may turn against them, in an unnecessary confrontation. So far, the space to exchange ideas is not foreseen to be at the e-platforms nor on the freshly restarted eGovernance. There are legislative restrictions, but the mentality of the decision makers, not convinced in the benefits of wider citizen involvement in the decision-making process, is a noteworthy an obstacle.

While considering the e-services, it is important to plan for eDemocracy, as the public trust and citizen support go far beyond the EU Single Digital Market commitment. Legal amendments, so needed for eGovernance must finally take off, to also enable eDemocracy. For example, once the eID is administered, participation in local, national and EU citizen initiatives will become easier and citizen activity may rise. Once legal measures are taken, the civil society will make the necessary steps to add to citizen mobilization. As with the other serious aspects of eDemoc-



The citizens application



racy, for a successful next step, more and better education, including digital skills, is a must.

Last but not least, the government has a role in funding and otherwise supporting civil society participation in civic education, with a goal to develop the political culture. Otherwise, the country will keep reporting on political participation in an environment of extremely low political culture, so sadly tested in the 2016 referendum, when 2.5 million voted for the narrowing of their own civil and political rights.

Grajdante.bg (The Citizens) started as a simple response to corrupt police inaction. Citizens started taking photos, initially on the streets of Sofia, of expensive cars parked in forbidden places. The police administration took a serious note making their Facebook page more popular. Currently, in addition to Facebook and Twitter accounts, the voluntary community handles a website with links to businesses, local and central administration, as well as debate forum.

The website plays the role of a civic education forum for the 60,000 citizens who have joined, in the last few months. Local and central administrations have declared their partnership and support. The Prosecutor's Office takes the signals seriously, as do the hosts of the website. The understanding of the active citizens (aged 20–22) is that wrong information could be a sensation, but not a tool to solve existing problems. Informed, mobilised and provided with the tools for deliberation young people is what the society needs for a good shake.

The National Initiative “Participation, Not Predestination!” organised by the most active civil society organisation in the field of citizen's initiatives, aimed at major changes of the legal framework that would ease both the initiatives and the citizens' activity in all public debates.



Participation, Not
Predestination

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eParticipation on the rise in Romania

Ana-Maria Stancu is an NGO civic activist for 16 years, former Executive Director of *Asociatia Pro Democratia*, President of the *E-Civis Association*, who has worked continually and enthusiastically to bring new technologies into civic education and civic participation. Among other activities in the field, she designed two online video games for civic education, conducted trainings on implementation of online score card systems and partnered in two hackathons for NGOs."

Offline participation

In a comparative study of data from 2012 and 2016, the Multimedia Foundation in Romania managed not only to measure civic participation in the country, but also its development over the four-year period¹²⁴.

Their main conclusions were:

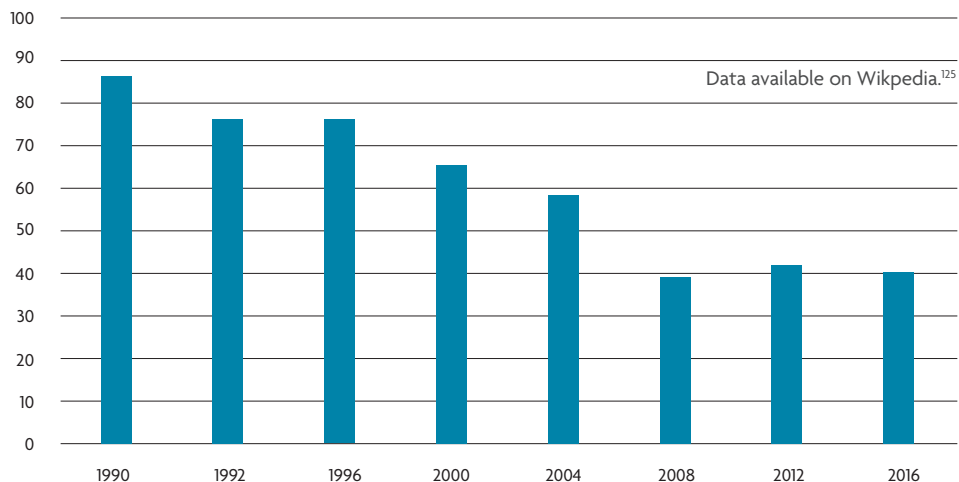
the main form of civic participation in Romania is the electoral one - although that has decreased over time and it is at a low level right now;

Romania remains a society in which people have almost no trust in their peers, in which the intolerance towards outsiders (especially Muslims) is rising, and in which the participation and willingness to participate in voluntary activities is decreasing.

One positive change noted is that citizens have increased faith that they can influence political decisions and a greater willingness to be more active during electoral campaigns or protests.

However, the downside of the citizens involvement is that they tend to be more polarised than in the past, and less willing to listen to political views that are contrary to their own.

Recent years (starting from 2013) registered some of the largest protests in Romania since the fall of communism. The first major ones were against a project that would allow a protected



¹²⁴ infopolitic.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Cultura-Participativa%CC%86-Evolutii-2016.pdf

¹²⁵ ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alegeri_%C3%AEn_Rom%C3%A2nia#Rezultatul_alegerilor_%C3%AEncep.C3.A2nd_cu_1990

Protests against the Government Emergency Ordinance, Picture: Radu Tudoriu



natural area (Rosia Montana) to become a gold extraction site, thus polluting and destroying it.

Later, new major protests occurred after an unfortunate fire in a nightclub in Bucharest. The protesters asked for the resignation of the mayor of the sector and of the Prime Minister, because they believed that the fire was the fault of the authorities that took bribes for licenses and authorisations.

The most recent protests took place during this winter, against a Government Emergency Ordinance that would make it possible for people with judicial convictions to get out of jail, faster than the term decided by the judge.

All these offline protests had two things in common: on the one hand, the concept of corruption which had reached a public saturation level and, on the other hand, the online activity.

#salvatirosiamontana #colectiv #rezist were hashtags that brought people together and managed to encourage them to act offline. The internet – specifically the social network Facebook – allowed citizens to be directly informed about certain aspects of what is going on. One could conclude that these protests wouldn't have been possible without the online activity.

The conclusions, looking at the data and events, is that people are activated based on their emotional stimulus, and the new technology helps them to better transmit these emotions to their peers. It might be, that the answer to low civic participation is the use of new technologies.

Online participation

de-clic.ro – is the newest platform for engaging citizens in Romania. The goal of the platform is to initiate petitions, call for actions and promote civic activism online. A similar, but older platform, is petitieonline.net – a website where citizens can initiate and/or sign petitions. The first de-clic petition was launched in May 2015 and it targeted the abusive cutting of trees in Romania¹²⁶. So far, some 572,268 citizens have signed one or more petitions on this platform. Out of this number, almost half are registered for the platform's newsletter alert. The petition that received greatest attention was the one against the Romanian Ombudsman¹²⁷, generating 146,819 signatures.

¹²⁶ www.de-clic.ro/campanie/salveaza-padurea-ia-drujba-din-mana-holzindustrie-schweighofer

¹²⁷ campaniamea.de-clic.ro/petitions/victor-ciorbea-te-concediem

civicalert.ro – is a platform for reporting problems in the community and transmitting them to the responsible authorities. Citizens often don't have the time to research what institution is responsible for a problem in their community, but they can send the problem, and the people behind the platform identify the right decision maker and send them an official letter signaling it. The project started in 2015, and for a year or so was very visible due to a partnership with one of the national radio stations. A similar platform to report community problems by citizens is domnuleprimar.ro – the messages are transmitted to the mayors of the relevant community.

factual.ro – is a platform like the American Truth-o-meter that fact checks declarations of politicians and public officials. The goal of the platform is to offer citizens in Romania an informed presentation of public issues.

piatadespaga.ro (The Bribe Market) – it is a platform where citizens can tell about their interaction with the public administration – whether they were asked for bribe or not, and if so, what was the amount of it. During the first year when it was launched (1999) – 500 cases were registered, in 2000 and 2001 – no cases, in 2009 – 850 cases and in 2017 – 175 cases – which shows a very instable use of it.

inspectorulpadurii.ro (the Forest Inspector) is an initiative of the Ministry of the Environment, Waters and Forests in order to bring more transparency concerning forest exploitation in Romania. The idea behind the platform is that any citizen that observes a truck transporting wood, can check online if it has an authorisation. If the truck doesn't have one, they can alert the Ministry, because it would mean that this is an illegal transport of wood. The project started in June 2016 and the newly appointed Minister announced in June 2017 that the platform will be closed. At the same time, Greenpeace Romania also launched a platform called Save the Forest:

salvezpadurea.ro through which the citizens can report cases of possible of illegal tree cutting. WWF Romania also had a similar idea (wood tracking) and advocated for a system like the Forest Inspector.

Youth engagement

Because civic education is not very appealing to teenagers, the E-Civis Association created two online games, to help them get informed in an attractive manner, using gamification techniques.

e-parlament.ro (E-Parliament) is an online video game that simulates the activity of the Romanian Parliament. The goal of the game is to inform teenagers, and to try to increase trust in the Romanian Parliament – as a fundamental institution in a democracy – by showing them that MPs are actually working, and have knowledge about the field they represent. The game simulated the everyday activity of an MP – Monday players would have questions about the Romanian political party that they chose to represent in the game, Tuesday and Wednesday would have questions about the domain of the Permanent Committee they chose to represent in the game, on Thursday they would have a law proposal on which they had to vote, to see whether it will pass or not, and on Friday they would have a situation from their constituency that they had to solve.

razboipolitic.ro (Political War) is an online game, whose goal is to familiarise the public with the political figures in Romanian politics and to teach them – while playing the game – certain notions regarding public institutions in Romania. The game is based on cards with Romanian

politicians, each of them having 3 attributes: experience, wealth and online presence. Each attribute was established, based on public available data (official CV, wealth declaration and blogs or social media accounts). Each player had to pick the attribute to be played on and this way it could find out information about the certain political figure. At the same time when the player would hover over the card – this would turn showing them passages from the Romanian constitution.

Government transparency

E-Consultation is an informative bulletin sent out by the Ministry of Public Consultation and Social Dialogue to registered stakeholders. The bulletin contains information about project proposals, and requests and registers feedback from citizens and groups. The bulletin also transfers the user to the web site consultare.gov.ro, where they can see a calendar of public debates organised by the public institutions.

issuemonitoring.ro is a service platform that provides its users with on-time information about legislative projects in the Romanian Parliament, Committee talks and reports on different issues. The platform was implemented through a European project and functions as a social enterprise. It offers, for paying subscribers, real time e-mail alerts regarding the introduction or development of project proposals on monitored issues, access to all official documents regarding a specific initiative gathered from official institutions, real time information from debates in the special committees, and reports on the monitored issues. Besides the clients, average citizens can receive information regarding new proposals and development, however not on specific subjects, but rather general ones.

transparenta-bugetara.gov.ro (Budgetary Transparency) – The Ministry of Public Finances created the national verification, reporting and control system for financial situations, legal engagements and budgets of the public authorities in Romania. Any citizen can access the data.

The positive side, looking at all the examples of eDemocracy in Romania, is that more and more people are willing to dedicate their time to building apps and platforms for civic engagement. Not only that, but there are groups like GovIT, Geeks for Democracy or Code for Romania and hackathons taking place in order to create more instruments for participation.

The downside to this is that there are many parallel efforts, of the abovementioned groups and also the NGOs, and they are not coordinated. This causes not only a doubled effort and time from the implementers, but also a dissipation of possible users.

One other very important aspect to be noted here: technology is good, but it is also very expensive to create. Funding organisations are usually very careful on awarding large sums of money on a single contractor and, sometimes, some of them are not very familiar or simply don't understand the new technologies. In these cases, it is very hard to convince them to give money to an NGO that asks for 15,000 – 20,000 euro to make an educational video game, not knowing if that will be a success or not. Social and civic activists, as well as funding organisations should be more aware of the possibilities of new technologies and use them to their full potential, as this could contribute to solutions for increasing the participation and improvement of governance.

In lieu of conclusions

by Ronald J Pohoryles

The origin of political participation is contestation. Politics and policies always had an impact on the quality of life of citizens and those who felt disadvantaged voiced their protest. In former times, this – sometimes violent – protest, was aimed at the implementation of social and civil rights, directed against the monarchical order, or other forms of authoritarian governance. This led to the modern forms of representative governance. However, as the social and cultural conflicts during the 1960s proved, the legitimacy of the limitation to the decision-making power to the elected bodies, parliaments and governments, decreased. Hence, the need for public participation became an obvious issue.

As these examples show, conflicts have a very important part to play in increasing the quality of democracy and can be quite productive: As the great liberal and political scientist, Sir Ralf Dahrendorf argues, conflicts are necessary for progress. Furthermore, he relates social and political conflicts to the changes of the social structure (Dahrendorf 1967). One of the most important factors for the claims for political participation, is the increase of knowledge among the public at large, due to a better democratic education system.

Political participation is not a new issue, nor is it “policy innovation” in a strict sense. It is the response to citizens’ contestation, and the introduction of political participation is a response of the political system to their revindication. To understand the relationship between protest and contestation on the one hand, and the strife for political participation on the other, an empirical study from the 1980s - when there weren’t many legal provisions for public participation - has shown that people, who were involved in protest activities against a local infrastructure project have, with respect to the decision-making process quite different intentions: whereas some of the activists were aiming at a local referendum (with the clear intention to reject the project entirely, the majority held different views: some of the activists just wanted the project reconsidered by the decision-makers, after being advised by experts, while others sought the inclusion of the citizens by decision-makers (Pohoryles and Eckstein 1988). Obviously, a formalised participation procedure is more efficient and effective than the classical mode of decision-making, involving the elected decision-makers and the public administration.

This is, in the meantime, widely understood. The mere contestation of citizens might lead to the hindrance of a specific project, but hardly ever to the implementation of alternative solutions. On the urban, regional, national and European levels, citizens’ participation received an ever-increasing attention in the public opinion, since the 1980s. Hence, politicians have considered pragmatic solutions, to ensure satisfying modes and levels of political participation of the concerned citizens. Examples in this book have identified various forms of political participation:

- **citizen initiatives**, initiated by the civil society, that could be directed to specific public bodies, or even companies, but can also rest on their own activities without any specific addressee;

- **petitions**, initiated by the civil society and directed to local, regional, national, or the European parliament;
- **citizens consultations**, initiated by the decision-makers, but not legally binding. There are various forms of these consultations, from face-to-face meetings between decision-makers, experts and the citizens, to voting procedures or for instance, consultations with a representative sample of citizen-experts [1] (“Planungszellen”, Dienel 2009 with a historical review);
- **referenda** initiated by citizen initiatives, or by public authorities that are legally binding.

Another important form of distinction, is between *forms of participation* and the *level of participation*. With respect to the form, the distinction is between *manifest participation* (legal and illegal forms), *latent participation* (civic engagement) and *non-participation*. In reference to the level of participation, it can be distinguished between individual forms, initiated by citizens and collective forms, initiated by specific stakeholders (Ekman and Amnå 2012).

Let us reiterate: Political participation is a complement to the representative democracy. One can distinguish it from mere protests that can be informal, or even illegal. And it is quite relevant to understand the limits of public participation: public participation is not, and should not be ‘direct democracy’, and even less ‘fluid democracy’.

Up until now we have just discussed ‘politics’, *i.e.* the modes of political participation. But we have not yet looked at ‘policies’, *i.e.* the policy contents and hence the role of political participation in representative democracies (Sabucedo and Arce 1991). Given the framework of a representative democracy, what topics should be dealt with, and in which form of public participation? Most authorities are aware of this problem. For instance, the European Parliament has installed a specific commission that assesses the contents of an intended European Citizen Initiative, that requires the support of at least 1’000’000 citizens in at least 7 countries, to be submitted to the Parliament’s debate. Assessment criteria include, among others, the compatibility with European values. Some Member States have installed similar bodies.

A cautious look at public participation

Whereas the ‘politics’ of public participation, *i.e.* the forms and procedures may pose some pragmatic problems (legislative barriers, too strict regulations, etc.) the ‘policy issues’, *i.e.* the contents of a specific initiative, pose a more fundamental problem. The cornerstone of even the most advanced democracies is their representative character: the elected parliament is responsible for the political decisions that organise the society and the economy. History taught us that other forms, like the attempt of having a direct democracy, has led to authoritarian regimes, like in the so-called ‘soviet republics’. Populists tend to abuse public attitudes to increase their power. Although this is true even when we understand public participation as just an additional element to the representative democracy, the damage remains limited: as in this understanding, the distinction between legal and illegal forms of public participation are legally defined, and legal forms are limited to single issues. The democratic order of the state and society remains untouched, and the public authorities remain, in most cases, the decision-takers. Hence, a carefully designed legal framework is an important issue.

This leads us to another important topic: the political culture of a specific state, which is related to its history. The political culture is quite diverse in Europe, and this is reflected in the state of public participation and its legal statute. Obviously, advanced democracies with a long democratic history find a good balance between a representative democracy and the role of the different instruments of public participation. Public participation was carefully introduced into the representative democracy. By contrast, countries with a shorter history of democracy have not yet introduced legal public participation into their representative systems, which are, quite often, in an unstable condition. This explains the differences in level and legal provisions for eDemocracy between the European Union's Member States.

eParticipation, eGovernance and eDemocracy

Different modes of eCitizenship

As already underlined in the beginning of this chapter, the authors consider electronic forms of participation only as a technological tool. Hence, some authors have distinguished electronic participation according to specific technologies. Hagen identifies three different forms of electronic participation: *Teledemocracy*, *Cyberdemocracy*, and *Electronic Democratisation* (Hagen 1997). Examples for *Teledemocracy* are, for instance, Town Hall meetings, reaching out to the electorate using interactive media, television call-in programmes and live computer conferencing. *Cyberdemocracy* goes beyond the Teledemocracy approach and allows for deliberations and opinion formation. The self-explaining term *Electronic Democratisation* is the explicit, or implicit recognition of the principles of a representative democracy and comprise all forms of eGovernance and eParticipation. Such a distinction does not, however, satisfy the aim of this publication. As the purpose of this book is to assess electronic participation from a political view, perhaps a pragmatic distinction is more helpful.

The modern technologies of the 21st century touch upon every aspect of our lives, including governance and the way we communicate. Hence, with the development of modern ICTs, online participation became more and more popular. One could argue that, this development has led to a new quality of political participation. Beside the traditional stakeholders, electronic participation brought new actors in the field, such as Small and Medium Enterprises, and major international companies like Google and Facebook. The business sector, and more specifically companies dealing with online services, play an important role in developing and offering electronic tools.

CHAPTER 4

Diverse eDemocracy, as diverse as the EU itself

by Rumiana Decheva



The diversity in attitudes toward and implementation of eTools for democratic participations across the European Union is striking. As different as the country cases may sound, however, when faced with a well-balanced representation of legal, practical, political and citizen view points, all experiences ultimately meet at the bottom-line: the EU Member States are truly concerned with the opportunity for citizens to be ever more actively involved in the decision-making process, and either plan to enhance eParticipation, or, when presented with a proposal from the citizens, make use of it.

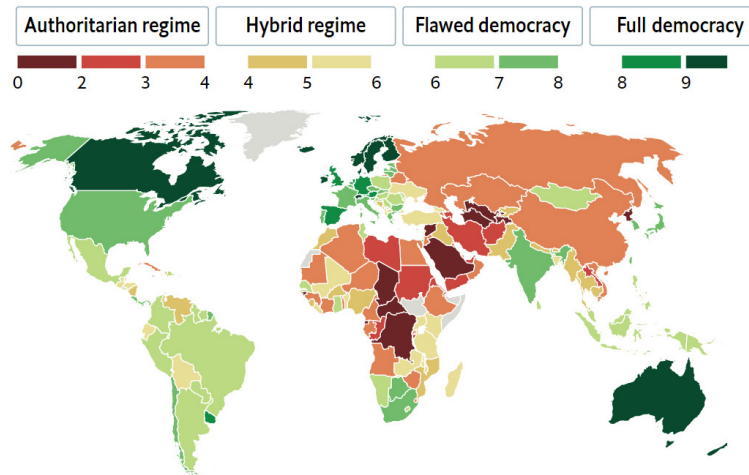
As 'digital' is but a mere feature of eDemocracy, it marks the evolution of the traditional democracy into a participative one, coupled with trusted high-level digitalisation. For long, the USA and parts of Europe were at the forefront of digitalisation as well as in the assessment scores of the state of democracy. Since 2008, when China overtook the US in access and use of digital tools, the EU also has a new competitor to compare with. More assessment, a better understanding of the ICT development in the East and its impact on the general economic and societal development is beneficial for individual countries as well as for the Union.

During the last decade, it has been observed how e-tools, in daily use over time, may compensate for fragility in the democratic foundations present from the onset. Supporting example could be the e-money in broad circulation in China, a phenomenon that gradually erodes the state banks' (and to a limited level, the political) control.

Would countries of EU benefit in a similar way, where digitalisation speeds up the democratic process?

At a glance, the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index (graph)¹²⁸ shows a general decline in the number of counties with full democracies over a period of 10 years, on account of many countries, including EU Member States and the US.

There is an overlap of the territories of 'high democratic standards' and a high level of digital information, services, consultations, tests of new voting technologies, and involvement of cit-



¹²⁸ Economist Intelligence Index, 2017, www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2017/01/daily-chart-20, accessed September 2017

izens through citizen initiatives and petitions in the decision making. Advanced countries have achieved this and currently plan for such new developments, that may ultimately exclude those lagging behind.

The ambitious planning and preparation processes for digitalisation is primarily aimed at business development and market environment. It is very plausible, that by the time primary school children enter the labour market, the bulk of today's professions and trades would either vanish or modify dramatically. Careers, appealing to the youth today, may no longer be in demand in a short period of time. In addition, the dynamics of the labour market, and the entire paid-work scope and placement within regulated offices and enterprises, will evolve around ICTs' own evolution. In view of that perspective, the Single Digital Market is taking shape, and by the end of 2018 it is expected that the adjusted eGovernment plan for 2016-2020 will be ready for implementation, setting targets beyond 2020.

Would a Single Digital Market enhance eDemocracy?

Based on all evidence, the impact will vary depending on the political culture and the state of democracy – in the individual member states and across the Union.

The strength of the European Union is in its diversity, but when it comes to digitalisation, it turns into a weakness and a vulnerability. The three scripts (Latin, Greek and Cyrillic), with large number of language specific letters, challenge unified data management. In addition, the use of 24 official languages of the EU, 5 semi-official and a myriad of community languages, poses a barrier for the efficient use of readily available information – online and offline. As a result, good (and bad) practices referenced in English, and to an extent in French, have better chances to pop-up in searches, while specific cutting-edge experience in Finnish, Danish and Estonian, to name a few, would not easily surface. It also works vice versa: content in written Chinese, building up in large volumes, is shared and used by people who otherwise use non-interlegible spoken languages. In Europe, we can hardly benefit from the experience of the largest internet-based community that uses Chinese: as of March 2017, about 700 million Chinese internet users have a high-speed internet connection and since 2014, those accessing the web on mobile devices surpassed those using PCs. Over a quarter of all users reside in rural towns¹²⁹, profoundly affecting the state-people relationship, away from state control. Arguably, the most common applications are better developed than their Western analogues.

Diversity, on the other hand, can be once again a prerequisite for numerous independent and unrelated attempts to enhance eDemocracy, and make it work for many of the countries, if not for the entire EU territory. Information sharing on specific to eDemocracy topics, in the scale of the exchange on eGovernment and other EU priority topics, is a must, for a more coherent understanding on what has been planned, what has worked and what has faced challenges. This publication is aimed at the learning, sharing and building of the eDemocracy community.

Some of the advantages of eDemocracy

Perhaps for the first time since the Agora in ancient Hellenic cities, citizens can participate directly in decision-making. Moreover, they do not need to be in a physical location at a specific time. Technology has already provided the means to follow, partake and deliberate on any

129 McDonald, T., Social Media in Rural China, ECL Press 2016, discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1514479/1/Social-Media-in-Rural-China.pdf

matter, from the comfort in any place on Earth. Like never before, active citizens in democratic societies have a say, which can be heard loud and clear.

Two centuries of built-up bureaucracy around the bastions of power, challenged in syndicate struggles, wars and civic movements, slowly (in many of the countries) but surely gave way to an ever more transparent, accountable, and efficient institutions.

Electronic tools are instrument that enhance the engagement of citizens, increase the legitimacy of public policies and effectively decrease political apathy. Electronic services already ease administrative and financial transactions across EU, gearing up for a level of interoperability that will change the perspectives on borders.

So far, to a varying degree, eTools are intentionally applied by governments for deliberations and opinion forming. In the best of cases, citizens can raise an issue to the government, parliament or local authority, as well as gather, as majority or minority, in defence of specific topics, and use several channels for legal amendments, administrative action or citizen mobilisation around a cause. In the worst of cases, the public is informed of deliberations on legal acts and governance at all levels and can follow the process. The input and response may vary and follow rather hierarchical procedures, as opposed to having a more inclusive process.

Due to the broad application of ICT on any given issue, be it as specific as environment, social services, security or rights, or more general, focused on the terms society operates in. The initiator can involve technical experts and the public to add value to the content, without a major financial and administrative burden. Digital tools, like no other technological advancement, have provided equal access for public participation and debate to people from remote communities, as well as to the physically and socially impaired.

Those perspectives create new relationships between elective bodies, public administration, and citizenry. How they will evolve remains to be seen. As the distance between people and institutions decreases, civic education and a profound understanding of governance become ever more important, hence, eDemocracy.

Some aspects to beware of

While expansion of public participation is eminent, public and policy makers are aware of the limitations of the broad immediate introduction of e-tools.

Access to the internet is a prerequisite for the use of digital tools. Internet is not used equally across the territory of the EU, or within the Member States. And yet, many of those users access online services and applications for a specific purpose – social interaction and basic information. The use of eGovernment services and participation in public matters online requires greater confidence and skills. At this point, there are geographic pockets of great success and large territories with limited advancement.

While traditional Town Hall meetings are an easy place to spot the real feelings, atmosphere and attitudes, online deliberations tend to be undertakings in solitude. Based on a 'like', a 'dislike' and a few comments, the solidarity between fellow citizens cannot manifest by itself. The more extreme and controversial positions may gather stronger interest on the sole ground of dissatisfaction with local or central government performance. They can easily generate a seemingly strong community and consolidate disaffection into negative populist moves against specific

groups or initiatives.

Representing only the views of the interested public, that is used to handling digital tools and is interested in public affairs, the constituted majority on any topic may be a mere island within the reality of disinterested citizenry. Even in elections, that tend to represent the most consolidated opinions on policies and development perspectives, the results reflect only those who have shown interest and cast vote. A decreasing turnout (with notable exceptions in the North of Europe), means that ever larger factions of tax payers and citizens remain unrepresented. Digital tools might only have a side role to play, in an otherwise thorough and continuous assessment of attitudes and perceptions, as the only way to overcome resistance to governance and legislation.

Even more problematic, is the prospective introduction of eServices and eParticipation on a large scale, without raising the skills of the users nor providing comfortable alternatives. Those with lower online interactions skills may, and probably are, less aware of the risks of misuse of personal data, and may leave tracks of their identities, exposing themselves. In the extreme cases, especially when it comes to marginalised communities, they could become victims of unlawful financial transfers or vote-buying, during an iVoting process. Overcoming the implicit contradiction between data protection and the secure identification of citizens is an important issue: decision-makers and the public at large must rest assured that the opinions voiced, or the vote given, definitely comes from a person who is entitled to participate, and at the same time anonymity is granted in the cases where this applies (like e-voting). And yet, there must be a mention of the more general concern regarding the possibility of the hacking of networks and manipulation of elections results. Every country and every society need an individual, and adapted to their environment, response and mitigation measures.

The new world that opens

Being mindful of all disadvantages and threats posed, not that much by the prospects of the forthcoming eDemocracy, but rather, by the way and pace of its introduction, one cannot close their eyes and ignore the changed World.

Education and training from the most renowned institutions of higher learning has become a mouse-click away. No matter how few, or many, make use of that, the economic and social life of the communities of their residence benefit from the skills and knowledges acquired. When using eTools for any of the purposes, one gains experience and confidence for all other applications, eventually mobilising with like-minded people for deliberation on local, national, European and World matters. The economically globalised world becomes an *Agora* for global knowledge sharing and decision-making. The better prepared our societies are, the greater the benefits for our economic and social development will be.

The European Union at present is the largest and the most important international cooperation and development partner in the World. The taxes payed in Europe, have contributed to major changes in the lives of the people on all continents. With European support, small indigenous communities in the high mountains in Peru, Tanzania, and Nepal have further developed their arts, have gone digital and become self-sufficient in a short period of time. Major public works across Africa and Asia have re-connected communities within their countries and

across the continents. Digital tools have enabled doctors across borders to take part in operation theatres half a world away. Applications test health parameters and advise on medication in places where doctors have never reached. In a long list of countries, that could never be exhaustive, the EU and the Member States directly or through the UN programmes funding and technical assistance, has facilitated census, biometric voters' registers, civic education and electoral administration, contributing to a freer and fairer representation of the people in their elective bodies.

People from around the globe express gratitude for that assistance, but also voice concerns about malpractices and more efficient opportunities for the use of European solidarity. All this happens in real time, online. Europe, as a community, must be prepared for the escalation of the people-to-people exchange and for all other effects that come with such a process of global opening.

Whilst individual countries are considering whether or not to resort to eGovernance and eDemocracy, they may be left behind in a process powered by human and financial resources in other parts of the world.

The way forward

All recent European initiatives, the Resolution of the European Parliament¹³⁰, the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the eVoting¹³¹, the approved changes to the European Citizens Initiative in September 2017, and the Ministerial Meeting of the European Council in October 2017, all point to the determination of the EU institutions and the Member States to commit to a more inclusive, accessible, participative and transparent process.

That said, the strong commitment of the EU to the market aspects of development of digital tools is not matched by equally firm and demanding standards in applying the democratic tools, especially in countries where political culture and state of democracy fall short of the founding values of the European community. As eDemocracy tools are a supplement to democratic development, focusing only on the technicalities would lead to a lengthy process in many of the countries.

eDemocracy features, such as eGovernment, eGovernance, eDeliberation, eParticipation and eVoting gradually make their way, in some form and shape, and will eventually become more prominent across the EU. Democracy, as such, is based on dialogue and deliberation. For an inclusive and participative process, online initiatives need physical fora for confirmation and reassurance of the stated positions. On the other hand, all venues for debates – on local, national and global matters, benefit from digital assemblies.

It is a long and fascinating road ahead, where the leverage of the quality of the European education, social system, economy and culture (including values) will be permanently tested and they ought to be up to the demands of our time. As we aspire to move towards a society with universal transparent and fair governance, eTools will be our best of friends.

Considering the best working examples eDemocracy could be our most powerful tool on this road.

¹³⁰ European Parliament resolution of 16 March 2017 on e-democracy in the European Union: potential and challenges (2016/2008(INI))

¹³¹ search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680726f6f

About the editors



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THE PRECIOUS FIRST STEPS
AND THE WAY FORWARD



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