



Handbook on E-democracy

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on E-dem*

HANDBOOK ON E-DEMOCRACY

EPACE THEME PUBLICATION

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PREFACE

This publication is by the project EPACE. The main objective of the project is to elaborate and exchange good citizen participation practices in order to increase and promote participatory opportunities within the European Union member states.

The driving force for the project is the growing concern about a democratic deficit in many European countries. As a result, state administrations have started to strengthen participatory opportunities and prerequisites for citizen participation in the political process. These include initiatives, information campaigns, pilot projects and various experiments. The projects have generated a wide selection of tools for promoting and safeguarding democracy in fields such as information provision, communication and interaction. Still, there is little verified knowledge of the effectiveness of such projects and of similar experiences in other EU member states. The present publication tries to fill this gap and present a collection of cases which can be taken as a model for citizen-government interaction at different levels using various e-democracy tools.

In this way, the publication serves as practical complimentary resource to the *Recommendation on e-Democracy*, enacted by the Council of Europe (CoE Recommendations in text) in February 2009. It presents a set of best practices and guidelines aiming to facilitate the implementation of the general principles of the Recommendations. In the interest of completeness, the publication also presents some of the main definitions related to e-democracy and a short overview of the principles of e-democracy provided by the CoE CAHDE Recommendation. The material for the publications has been compiled through an analysis of answers to a questionnaire, which was sent to practitioners in the field of e-democracy as well as by a desktop study of the published cases.

This practical presentation of best practices is first of all targeted at public sector officials and institutions responsible for dealing with public participation and democracy issues; though, hopefully, this material can inspire the wider public, including representatives of civil society organizations.

Most of the best practices are relevant at the central government level. However, considering the important role local governments play in many European countries, and the proximity of this institutional level to citizens, a special chapter is dedicated to local e-democracy.

The publication consists of the following parts:

Section 1 briefly introduces the EPACE project, the questionnaires used and the desktop studies. Some of the main definitions of the key concepts of e-democracy are presented here, and as background information, this section also introduces the essential principles of e-democracy in the CoE Recommendations, linking them to some existing practices.

Section 2 is about strategic planning and administration of e-democracy/e-participation in Member States.

Section 3 – the focus point of the publication – presents Good Practices from different European countries, classifying and describing them. Section 4 summarizes the findings of the study and takes a brief look at ongoing processes and trends in Europe regarding planning and implementing e-democracy.

CoE Recommendations suggest that, when introducing, implementing and reviewing e-democracy, it is important to ensure that e-democracy *'is embedded in balanced, citizen-oriented rules and regulatory frameworks, including regulations adopted by public authorities, co-regulation and self-regulation.'* As this study clearly demonstrates, strategic planning practices and the administration of e-democracy vary considerably from state to state. The legislative environment, the level of development of traditional democracy, and the development of political culture are also very different from state to state; thus, it is almost impossible to offer any valid model for planning or administration which satisfies everyone. Still, some main features and possibilities can be emphasised.

The strategic documents featuring e-democracy in Member States could be divided as follows: a) **E-democracy as part of the Information Society Strategy** (Estonia); b) **E-Government strategy with some elements of e-democracy and e-Inclusion Strategy** (Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia); c) **Special policy document for e-democracy, Whitepapers** (Austria); d) **Regional or local strategies** (Italy, Spain, Switzerland); e) **Strategies based on the CoE Recommendations, still in process, envisaged for 2010** – (Denmark, Sweden).

The **main objectives** stated in the listed strategies vary to a significant degree. There are strategies in which the focus is still only on physical access to the Internet, equipment and content or digital skills and services. There are also strategies which define e-voting as one of the main focuses for the implementation of e-democracy.

There are a large variety of bodies responsible for the administration of e-democracy within in the EU Member States. In general terms, the

administration models can be divided into two types: a) a **Centralized model**– which is represented by Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Slovenia, and; b) a **Decentralized model**, represented by Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, and Spain.

The CoE Recommendations also suggest that e-democracy should: *‘promote, ensure and enhance transparency, accountability, responsiveness, engagement, deliberation, inclusiveness, accessibility, participation, subsidiarity and social cohesion’*.

Some of the listed keywords from the CoE Recommendations are present in the cases selected for this publication as Good Practices. However, the overall criteria for selection demanded that they should be **sustainable** (the practice is not a one-off project, but can be implemented several times or regularly), **replicable** (the same or a similar practice can be implemented in several places or contexts) and **institutional** (a supporting legal framework, administrative network, etc., are in place).

In this publication, Good Practices are classified according to the level of involvement they represent (**information, consultation, cooperation**). However, it is sometimes challenging to draw the line between different levels of citizens’ involvement; for example, there are cases in which the levels are more advanced than just consultation, but to consider them as cases of full cooperation would probably be an exaggeration.

Information – there are practices at this level of involvement which stand out from the others by their structure and searching capabilities (the Austrian Participation Portal) or by the quality of their content (the Latvian Public Policy website).

Consultation – important at this level of involvement is that, in addition to ensuring that citizens should have the possibility to get consultation from institutions or politics (for example, for forming their decision for upcoming elections, as in case of the Austrian Wahlkabinet), the consultation should also be transferred the other way round and citizens should be able to consult institutions (Valma and Otakantaa in Finland).

Cooperation – in contrast to more traditional ‘participation,’ this level of involvement is referred to as ‘cooperation’ in this publication with the intention of stressing even more the importance of the contribution and also the possible real outcome for both parties – citizens and institutions. Not only can citizens express their opinions, they can vote for them and the voice of the majority can constitute real proposals for changes to a legislative act (see the case of Estonian Today I Decide and its continuation Portal, osale.ee). It is also evident how large a role the media is playing in the success of e-democracy projects – media coverage increases participa-

tion rates, the media can also emphasise the important issues raised and increase the way citizens become motivated to participate. As was already mentioned, one important component which distinguishes cooperation from lower level involvement – consultation – is e-voting (here the meaning is to vote for some idea or proposal between citizens themselves), which can also be seen in the cases of Rostra in Denmark, Issy-les-Moulinex in France and Madrid Participa in Spain.

When speaking of deepening trends, one should mention the increasingly entrenched practice of participatory budgeting in different cities in Europe. Many countries state in their strategic documents that e-elections (national or regional) will be one of the main future activities for extending e-democracy (examples include Norway - pilot for e-voting is planned for the 2011 municipal and country elections – and Switzerland). However, e-elections cannot be considered as a pure practice of e-democracy, since there has been too little research into e-voting to draw definitive conclusions in terms of its actual influence.

Another trend is the publication of different manuscripts and guidelines which may be considered ‘non-official,’ but which may have a remarkable influence on the enhancement of e-participation and e-democracy. One example of this is practical, the ‘Guidelines for e-engagement for Estonian Local governments’, published by the e-Governance Academy, or guidelines such as the ‘Social Media Guidelines for government and its employees’, published by the Ministry of Justice, Finland.

This publication was drafted, written and published within the framework of the EPACE project (*Exchanging good practices for the promotion of an active citizenship in the EU*) in cooperation with Estonian e-Governance Academy (eGA). The EPACE project seeks to address the challenges related to the decreasing level of political and societal participation of citizens. Especially the young, newly arrived immigrants and people with low education level, to name few, need more diversified opportunities in order to participate in civic activity and to get integrated into the society.

This publication belongs to a series of EPACE theme publications which presents good participatory practices on the following themes: democracy administration; e-democracy; civic education and youth participation and immigrants’ societal and political participation.

The EPACE project is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice Finland and supported by the European Commission Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme. Project Partners are the State Chancellery of Estonia and the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality, Sweden.

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CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

EPACE is a data collection project on several themes related to democracy and citizen participation. Project partners include the Ministry of Justice in Finland (coordinator), the State Chancellery of the Republic of Estonia and the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality in Sweden. EPACE receives support from the *European Commission's* Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme (2007–2013).

The EPACE project addresses the challenges related to a decrease in citizen participation and influence. In particular, young people, newly arrived immigrants and, for example, those with a low level of education need more opportunities for participation, which can socialise them into civic activism and citizen participation. Information on how to improve the facilities for democracy within the European Union member states is vital. The outcome of the EPACE project includes four practical publications on the themes of youth participation and education, immigrant participation, e-democracy and democracy renewal. Each of the publications has a common aim – to offer good practices and tips on participation projects, based on empirical data, to state officials dealing with and responsible for these areas and themes of administration.

The methods used for compiling the publications include an analysis of the answers to the questionnaires and a desktop study of the published cases. The questionnaires were distributed to the central governments of all EU Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland. The responses to the questionnaires form the basis for a handbook on good practices. Relevant officials/experts were contacted when there was a need for more detailed information about strategies or cases. These publications are also inspired by the Good Citizen Participation Practices Conference held December 2009 in Tallinn, Estonia.

Describing EPACE-questionnaires and the desktop study

The methods used for compiling the present publication include an analysis of the answers to the questionnaires and a desktop study of the published cases (EU practices are also used as a source). The questionnaires were distributed to the central governments of all EU Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland. The response rate was 63 %.

The responses to the questionnaires formed the basis for a guide on good practices. Relevant officials/experts were contacted when there was a need for more detailed information about strategies or cases.

The questionnaires asked for the following information:

- Information about strategies related to e-democracy/e-participation and their main objectives
- Information about the bodies responsible for developing and maintaining e-democracy and e-participation
- Information about e-participation tools (The respondents were given a long list of e-tools where they could mark all e-tools used in their respective countries. In the interest of common understanding, a short definition for each tool was presented below the list)
- Information about successful projects
- Information about projects or guidelines for the future

In the next step, the study was completed using a desktop-study which followed the active links provided in the questionnaires to additional information on the Internet. As in many cases, the information about particular case on the original webpage was only in the original language. In such cases, the relevant offices were contacted.

Background information: definitions of key concepts; general principles of e-democracy from the CoE Recommendations; highlights from previous studies

E-democracy is the support and enhancement of democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes by means of technology.

E-democracy concerns all sectors of democracy, all democratic institutions, and all levels of government. E-democracy cannot be isolated from traditional democratic processes. It is additional, complementary to, and interlinked with traditional democratic processes, so as to widen the choices available to the public for taking part in political processes.

E-participation is a necessary component, or even, more precisely, a prerequisite of e-democracy. It refers to the means of ICT-supported participation in processes concerning administration, policy making, decision making, service delivery, information provision, consultation, deliberation, etc.

CoE Recommendations suggest that, when introducing, implementing and reviewing e-democracy, it is important to ensure that *e-democracy*:

First, *'is additional, complementary to, and interlinked with traditional democratic processes, so as to widen the choices available to the public for taking part in political processes.'*

The implementation of this principle - wider choices available - is acutely evident in e-voting. E-voting has already been used four times in Estonia at this time - in local elections in 2005 and 2009, in the parliamentary elections of 2007, and in the European Parliamentary Elections of 2009. E-voting enables people to vote from anywhere using their identity card and a smart-card reader to select their favoured candidate from lists posted on the relevant website.

The direct effect of technology on real political participation, especially on the remarkable increase in the numbers of active people, is often discussed and also negated by many academics. However, one should admit the role of technology in widening the circle of available tools for participating (starting from e-mails to officials and ending with the possibility to read and comment the blogs of higher politicians!). The noticeably larger number of information channels and their technical characteristics have doubtless increased transparency. This, in turn, is an important precondition for the increased trust of citizens' towards state institutions and their legitimacy.

For example, as reported by Andy Williamson¹, the national survey carried out in Britain demonstrates that, for those who are already online, the Internet has made it easier to take part in the civic and political activities around them.

With over two thirds of the British population online, this report explores how people use the Internet to connect with their elected representatives and also the trends in online digital engagement across civic and political life. 70% of respondents agree that the Internet makes it easier for them to participate in civic and political activities. 49% agree that they would generally prefer to use the Internet to participate in civic and political activities. What this research suggests is that higher levels of

engagement and wider participation in the democratic process can happen when citizens feel that they are a central part of it.

However, regarding the level of interaction between citizens and Parliament, this presents a challenge for Parliament and MPs in that the increased use of more deliberative digital media takes time, costs more and cannot – as yet, at least – become a complete replacement for traditional offline methods of communication and engagement.

Second, 'promotes, ensures and enhances transparency, accountability, responsiveness, engagement, deliberation, inclusiveness, accessibility, participation, subsidiarity and social cohesion.'

The listed keywords from the CoE Recommendations are present in cases selected for this publication as Good Practices. However, the overall criteria for selection demanded that they be **sustainable** (the practice is not a one-off project, but can be implemented several times or regularly), **replicable** (the same or a similar practice can be implemented in several places or contexts) and **institutional** (a supporting legal framework, administrative network, etc., are in place).

Third, 'takes account of the challenges, risks and barriers to e-democracy, addressing and overcoming them, in particular through sound risk-assessment and risk-management measures and mechanisms ensuring ongoing evaluation and progress.'

To learn from each other's mistakes is the best way to face challenges and avoid making your own mistakes in the future; therefore, each Good Practice includes a part on lessons learned.

Fourth, 'is embedded in balanced, citizen-oriented rules and regulatory frameworks, including regulations adopted by public authorities, co-regulation and self-regulation.'

Section 2 clearly demonstrates that the practices of strategic planning and the administration of e-democracy vary considerably from state to state. As the legislative environment, the level of development of traditional democracy, and the development of political culture are also very different from state to state, it is almost impossible to offer any valid model for planning or administration which satisfies everyone. Rather, different structures and possibilities are emphasised.

If the previously mentioned items were more general citations from the CoE Recommendations, the following three principles are essential and thorough for planning and implementing e-democracy. They are presented and linked with some examples described in more detail further in this publication.

- 1) E-democracy does not in itself affect the constitutional duties and other duties and responsibilities of decision makers; rather, it can provide them with additional benefits.

Estonian Portal TOM was a public participation portal, which allowed citizens to engage more directly with the legislative and policy-making processes, either by proposing new legislation or by suggesting amendments to existing laws. More in section 3, level of cooperation, Case 1.

- 2) E-democracy requires information, dialogue, communication, deliberation and the ongoing creation of open public spaces where citizens can get together to uphold their civic interests.

Austrian wahlkabine.at is a 'polling booth' which serves as a quick guide through party opinions and helps you to compare your political views with those of the parties in full anonymity. More in section 3, level of consultation, Case 1. Also, many local e-democracy projects – such as the **Valma preparation forum in Finland** - fall into this category. More information about this will be given in section 3, in the subchapter on local e-democracy.

- 3) E-democracy is an integral part of the information society, which has ushered in a range of traditional and innovative tools that can usefully be applied in democratic processes and institutions.

There is a short discussion in the present publication about how social media (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) have also 'invaded' the communication process and relations between citizens and the state. Barack Obama's campaign during the last presidential election in the USA is cited and referred to worldwide as a successful example of the use of social media, but there are also examples here in Europe. UK former Prime Minister Gordon Brown (or rather his team) uses both Twitter and YouTube. For a long time, Carl Bildt has had an influential blog²: Jens Stoltenberg's (prime Minister in Norway) Facebook profile³. Also, many European parliament members participate in social media.

However, as this trend is relatively new, the examples cannot be elaborated upon as much as with other environments and tools.

In the CoE Recommendations, there are sub-chapters of e-democracy with names like e-parliament, e-legislation, e-justice, e-mediation, and e-voting. In the present document, these terms are all considered to be elements or tools of e-democracy. The goal in this document is to present a wider picture and a classification of examples, rather than suggest the level of involvement they represent. For example, e-consultation is one component of e-parliament, as are e-legislation, e-polling, etc.



CHAPTER

2

E-DEMOCRACY STRATEGIES

As stated in the CoE Recommendations: *'E-democracy flourishes best where there are the political will and leadership to make it work effectively by introducing the structural changes needed to take account of the opinions expressed. The incorporation of ICT into democratic processes usually requires structural changes and procedural reform.'*

This section is about strategies related to e-democracy/e-participation and their main objectives in member states.

Strategic Policy Planning

The questionnaires were distributed to all member states, and based on the answers, 71 % of the respondent countries **do have** a document which can be considered more or less as a National Strategy. However, the fact is that those strategies are primarily national e-Gov strategies and e-democracy is listed as just one component among many within these strategies (for example, in Switzerland one part of national e-Gov strategy is dedicated to citizens-public communication).

Mostly, the strategies are very general, being about Information Society as a whole, and pay only modest attention to e-democracy. However, the Estonian Information Society strategy 2013 cites citizen participation as one of its long-term goals.

Many member states note that they are planning to implement a special strategy based on the CoE Recommendations in the near future (Sweden, Denmark).

Strategic documents of the Member States can be divided as follows:

- 1) **E-democracy as part of the Information Society Strategy** (Estonia)
Estonia – The Estonian Information Society Strategy 2013⁴ (approved November 2006) sets out objectives and defines fields of action and measures for the development of the information society as a whole in a long-term perspective.
- 2) **E-Government strategy with some elements of e-democracy and e-Inclusion Strategy** (Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia)
Hungary – There is no specific strategy for e-democracy, but there is a strategy for e-Public Administration⁵ which covers some elements of e-democracy and an e-Inclusion Strategy⁶.
Latvia – Declaration of the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers (available in English)⁷
 Guidelines for Government Communication Policy 2008–2013, (available only in Latvian)⁸; Programme of Consolidation of Civil Society 2008–2012 (available only in Latvian)⁹.
Slovakia – The e-Government Strategy of the Slovak republic¹⁰
Slovenia – The strategies are outlined in the SEP2010¹¹
 e-Government Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2006 to 2010. In SEP 2010, e-democracy represents one of several strategic orientations for the Republic of Slovenia in the development of e-Government.
- 3) **Special policy document for e-democracy, Whitepapers** (Austria)
Austria – Finished: Standards of Public Participation¹² (offline- & online-participation; adopted by the Austrian Council of Ministers on 2 July 2008); Whitepaper EDEM¹³ (principles for e-democracy & e-participation); Austrian e-democracy Strategy; Overview of national e-democracy & e-participation projects (to be updated); In process: e-democracy & e-participation Tools; e-participation Prototype Processes; e-participation Guidelines.

4) **Regional or local strategies** (Italy, Spain, Switzerland)

Italy – Among the most important initiatives, the initiatives of the Tuscany Region are highlighted: the Regional Law on Participation (2006) and the 2007–2013 regional planning initiative, in which many ICT projects to support e-participation are included.

Spain – In the Spanish highly decentralized model of government, the regions have extensive legislative powers. In exercising these powers, the Valencia Regional Government has adopted a Citizen Participation Regional Act of Valencia (Ley de la Comunidad Valenciana 11/2008)¹⁴, which includes an electronic channel among the means of participation that citizens have at their disposal. The regional government of the Canary Islands is undertaking a similar regional Act for parliamentary approval¹⁵. These regional legislative frameworks define specific policies enforced within each geographic area.

Switzerland – National e-Government strategy¹⁶.

This strategy was developed in close cooperation with representatives of the cantons and the municipalities, under the direction of the FSUIT. The strategy constitutes the basis for the Confederation, the cantons, and the municipalities to orient their efforts towards common goals.

5) **Strategies based on the CoE Recommendations, still in process, envisaged for 2010** – (Denmark, Sweden)

The **main objectives** stated in the listed strategies vary to a significant degree. There are strategies in which the focus is still only on gaining physical access to the Internet, equipment and content, and digital skills and services. There are also strategies which define e-voting as one of the main focuses for the implementation of e-democracy.

In evaluating the objectives stated in those strategies their degree of clarity, **Austria** can be highlighted as a good example of state-level strategic planning.

Austria has the Standards of Public participation (2008)¹⁷ for both of-line and online participation. This is a very practical and “handy” document. To facilitate the application of the Standards of Public Participation, a practical guide is available which also offers information on the use of e-participation to involve the public via electronic means of communication, e.g. via the Internet or mobile phone¹⁸.

The main objectives of this document include:

1. Increasing transparency & traceability
2. Improving e-Participation & communication
3. Developing new cooperation models
3. More efficient participation projects
4. Promoting social networks (web 2.0)

In some countries, some so-called democracy renewal or public engagement strategies may also refer to e-democracy as a tool for interaction between citizens and the state.

In the Estonian case, a 'Code of Good Practice on Involvement' was developed in 2005 elaborating the key principles that support active and meaningful participation between CSOs and the wider public. The Code is in the form of recommendations and aims at being applied by government in the preparation of policy documents that are important to the country's development. It does not address e-democracy specifically, but still gives recommendations to state servants on how to use different methods and channels for providing citizens with e-consultations and properly engaging them.

It is also important to note that one new common document¹⁹ for member states is the declaration of the minister; an important political agreement which defines the financing of e-Government filed for next period. E-democracy is one of four main lines in this document.

EU ministers have committed themselves to developing smarter online public services for citizens and businesses by 2015. Among the key objectives for member states and the Commission within the next five years, there is the aim to empower businesses and citizens through e-Government services designed around users' needs, better access to information and their

active involvement in the policy-making process; **among other things, they commit themselves to:**

- **Strengthening the transparency of administrative processes.** We will explore how we can make our administrative processes more transparent. Transparency promotes accountability and trust in government.
- **Involving stakeholders in public policy processes.** We will actively develop and promote effective, useful and better ways for businesses and citizens to participate in the policy processes. Increased public engagement through more effective methods at all levels enhances a government's efficiency and effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions and services.

Next, a short overview is provided on the bodies responsible for developing and maintaining e-activities in the field of e-democracy and the administration of e-democracy.

Administration

Characteristic of the Member States is the large variety of bodies responsible for the administration of e-democracy: the *Federal Chancellery (Switzerland)*; the *Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality (Sweden)*; the *Ministry of Public Administration (Slovenia)*; the *Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Norway)*, etc.

In general terms, the administration models can be divided into two types:

- Centralized model – Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, Slovenia
- Decentralized model – Norway; Estonia, Latvia, Denmark, Spain

The previously mentioned **Austrian** case serves as a good example of a **centralized** administration.

The „**Standards of Public Participation**” (for further information, see afore) were adopted by the Austrian Council of Ministers on 2 July 2008 and the Austrian federal administration recommended that they be applied.

Where policies, plans, programmes, and legal instruments are prepared, the public is increasingly offered an opportunity to participate. Public politics and administration can benefit optimally from such involvement where the participation of the public is exercised at a high quality. This can be ensured by the application of standards aimed at maximising the effectiveness and efficiency of public participation. The present Standards of Public Participation are to help the administrative staff of the federal government in the concrete conduct of high-quality participation processes. They represent a contribution to good governance in Austria.

The Standards of Public Participation were prepared by an inter-ministerial working group, together with the participation of legally established representations of interest, NGOs and external experts, as part of a project commissioned by the Austrian Federal Chancellery and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management.

They were the result of an initiative put forward by the Austrian Federal Chancellery and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management.

In 2002, on the initiative of the Ministry of Environment²⁰, ÖGUT²¹ set up the **Strategic Group on Participation**, which is intended to:

- give the notion of 'participation' clearer contours, develop it further and make it more widely known,
- promote awareness of participation in the public eye and among decision-makers in politics, administration and business,
- work out participation strategies for policies relevant to the environment and sustainability,
- contribute to sustainable development by promoting participation,
- promote participation at the communal, regional and national level,
- make concrete 'how to' guidelines available to people with practical interests.

The Strategic Group on Participation has **25 members**²² – they are qualified experts on the subject with backgrounds in many different fields.

To date, the Strategic Group has been concerned with the contexts and quality criteria for participation processes and with the benefits of and the

limits and obstacles to participation. The results of the Group's discussions are published as '**Worksheets on Participation**', and are intended as aids to practical activity.

The Strategic Group on Participation aided in the production of the **Participation Manual**²³.

The **Estonian** case can be highlighted as an example of **decentralized** administration:

In **Estonia**:

- The State Chancellery coordinates the development of government communication and engagement.
- Some aspects, such as social inclusion, are covered by the Ministry of Social Affairs.
- The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications coordinates state IT-policy actions and development plans in the field of state administrative information systems.
- The Ministry of Interior has the overall responsibility for supporting the development of civil society. Together with other government agencies, it co-ordinates the implementation of the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept, a contract between the government and non-profit organizations, which establishes an equal partnership for achieving common goals.

In **Norway** the parties in the administration chain are:

- The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform
- The Agency for Public Management and e-Government
- The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development
- The Norwegian Board of Technology/ Teknologirådet, which is responsible for elections in Norway and also e-voting. The Norwegian Board of Technology is to be an independent consultative office for technology assessment

The case of **Denmark** is more complex – from one perspective the administration is centralized, but, from another perspective, the activities of local governments are coordinated more by associations of local governments.

In Denmark, the National IT and Telecom Agency coordinates activities regarding e-democracy. As part of the Ministry of Science Technology and Innovation, it will initiate the Strategy for E-democracy in Denmark in 2010. The Agency is responsible for the citizen's portal borger.dk²⁶

Local Government Denmark (LGDK) is the interest group and member representing the Danish municipalities. On their website, Local Government Denmark has an entry about municipalities and democracy, which includes information about e-democracy²⁷.

The same tendency applies in the case of **Spain**:

There is the Higher Council for Electronic Government (Consejo Superior de Administración Electrónica- CSAE)²⁸, which is 'in charge of the preparation, design, development and implementation the ICT policy of the Government, as well as the promotion of e-Government in the National Public Administration'. According to these guidelines, the CSAE is responsible for approving the 'Plan of Electronic Participation and Transparency'. The Directorate General for Promotion of e-Government provides assistance and support to the CSAE. This government unit, which falls under the Ministry of the Presidency, is, consequently, the one which develops in a coordinated manner with other ministries the proposed 'Plan of Electronic Participation and Transparency,' which should be approved by the CSAE.

Due to the Spanish highly decentralized model of government, units similar to the CSAE exist at the level of regional government. These units are responsible for the development of e-Government strategies within their own regions.

In addition to coordinating bodies, there are some expert bodies on e-democracy which actively interact with government.

In the **Estonian** case, the developing and maintaining of e-democracy is outsourced to NGOs or companies – the e-Governance Academy²⁹ is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded for the creation and transfer of knowledge concerning e-Governance, e-democracy and the development of civil society. The responsibility for developing public services (including e-services) and local e-Governance lies with the Ministry of Interior. Also, the State Audit Office deals with evaluating the achievements of the information society. In cooperation with the e-Governance Academy, they have published different audits on the topic (Estonian State Audit Office, 'State support to local authorities in developing the information society,' and 'Quality of public service in the information society'). In 2008, Estonia introduced an eState Charter based on the principles of the Dutch eCitizen Charter. The eCitizen Charter (BurgerServiceCode) is a quality standard for e-Government written from the citizen's perspective.

It consists of 10 quality requirements for digital contacts in the fields of information exchange, service delivery and policy participation. To date, the eCitizen Charter has been translated into 19 languages. Adoption of the charter is recommended by the UN, the OECD, the Council of Europe and the UK Cabinet Office.

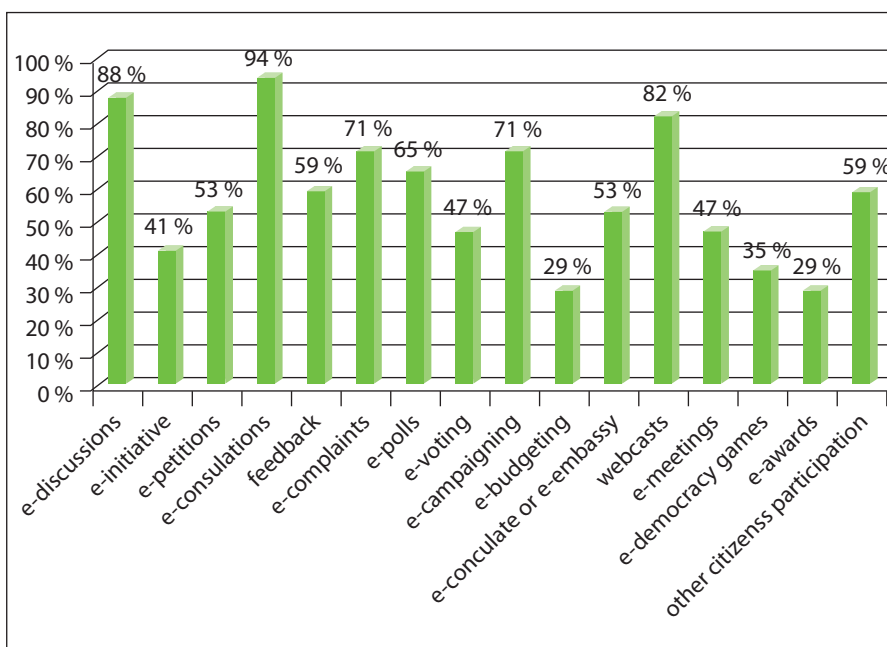


CHAPTER

3

IMPLEMENTATION

According to this study, the most commonly used e-tools are *e-consultations* (web applications for getting feedback from citizens on policies and supporting citizen participation in planning procedures), *e-discussions* (discussion forums monitored by government bodies) and *webcasts* (recordings of meetings transmitted over the internet that allow people to watch and listen to events such as Parliamentary debates or Council Committees). For more details, please see Graph 1 below.



Graph 1: Use of different e-tools in EU Member States based on information collected from questionnaires

Case examples of good practices

The best cases, the result of data from questionnaires and a desktop study, are set up and presented in Table 1. As this table shows, often the e-democracy projects use different e-tools at the same time. A description of each level of citizen involvement³⁰ is provided along the horizontal axis.

Table 1. Sample cases – level of citizen involvement, tools used, institutional level, administrative performance

Levels of involvement	case	e-tools used	institutional level	administrative performance
Information	<i>Case 1: Austrian participation portal</i>	e-information	national	The portal enables one to search cases according to methods, topics, region, case histories, etc.
	<i>Case 2: Latvian Public policy website</i>	e-information	national	The portal is the first and largest online public policy resource in Latvia, publishing policy studies, in depth opinion articles and other relevant resources on issues important for Latvia's democratic development, such as civil society.
Consultation	<i>Case 1: Austrian Wahlkabinet.at</i>	e-initiative, e-discussions, feedback, e-consultations, e-polls	national	Wahlkabinet.at ("polling booth") serves as a quick guide to party opinions and helps you to compare your political views with those of the parties in full anonymity.
	<i>Case 2: Finnish Discussion Forum Otakanta.fi</i>	e-information, e-discussions, e-consultation	national	Otakanta.fi promotes a citizens' public, including anonymous, participation in decision-making processes. Citizens and government officials discuss central government projects on the site.
	<i>Case 3: Danish Odder Nettet</i>	e-information, e-discussions, e-consultation	local	The website offers a range of self-service functions for the citizen, an active debate forum and a consistent flow of local news.
Cooperation	<i>Case 1: TOM in Estonia</i>	e-consultation, e-initiative, e-voting	national	Public participation portal allowing citizens to engage more directly with the legislative and policy-making processes, either by proposing new legislation or by suggesting amendments to existing laws.
	<i>Case 2: Estonian Portal osale.ee</i>	e-participation, e-discussions, feedback, e-consultation	national	The portal has three functions: 1) citizens and interest groups can launch initiatives for new legislative proposals, present ideas and criticisms to the government and submit petitions; 2) citizens can participate in public consultations/hearings; 3) there is also a search function for legal acts according to their stage of preparation.
	<i>Case 3: ROSTRA in Denmark</i>	e-participation, e-discussions, e-voting, feedback, e-consultation	national	Online system for public debate and expression of opinions through voting, facilities based on the Danish Digital Signature.
	<i>Case 4: Interactive City Council (Issy-les-Moulineux) in France</i>	e-participation, e-discussions, e-voting, feedback, e-consultation	local	The Interactive City Council allows Issy's residents to watch and to actively participate in City Council meetings live from the comfort of their living rooms or when on the move.
	<i>Case 5: Spanish Madrid Participa</i>	e-participation, e-discussions, e-voting, feedback, e-consultation	local	The Madrid Participa project is a highly efficient instrument used to increase citizen participation in the decision-making process in the city of Madrid, offering a more dynamic and continuous dialogue between political representatives and citizens.

Information (informative public participation) – The active provision of comprehensive, balanced and objective information designed to help the public understanding of problems, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions to democratic issues. Participants receive information about the planning or the decision. They do not have any influence on it, however. Communication is only one-way, namely from the planning or decision-making bodies to the public.

Consultation (consultative public participation) – Participants can give their comments on a question asked or a draft presented. They can thereby influence the decision, even though the extent of influence may differ considerably. Communication is in both directions, from the planning or decision-making body to the public and from the public back to the planning or decision-making body, as well as, under certain circumstances, once again back to the public; for example, if the comments received are answered. Comments can also be asked for at an early phase of the participation process, for example via interviews. Also, continuous, for example quarterly, dialogues with selected target groups for information exchange are considered to be an aspect of consultative public participation.

Cooperation (cooperative public participation) – Involvement of citizens and groups of citizens, such as interest groups, corporations, associations, and non-profit organizations, in public affairs, so that they can exert influence and improve the quality and accessibility of the results of democratic processes. Participants have a say in the decisions, for example at Round Table meetings, in mediation procedures or in stakeholder processes. The degree of influence is high and may include common decision-making with the political decision-making bodies. Planning or decision-making bodies and the public communicate intensively with each other.

It is sometimes challenging to draw the line between different levels of citizen involvement; for example, there are cases in which the levels of participation are more advanced than just consultation, but to consider them as cases of full cooperation would probably be an exaggeration.

Information

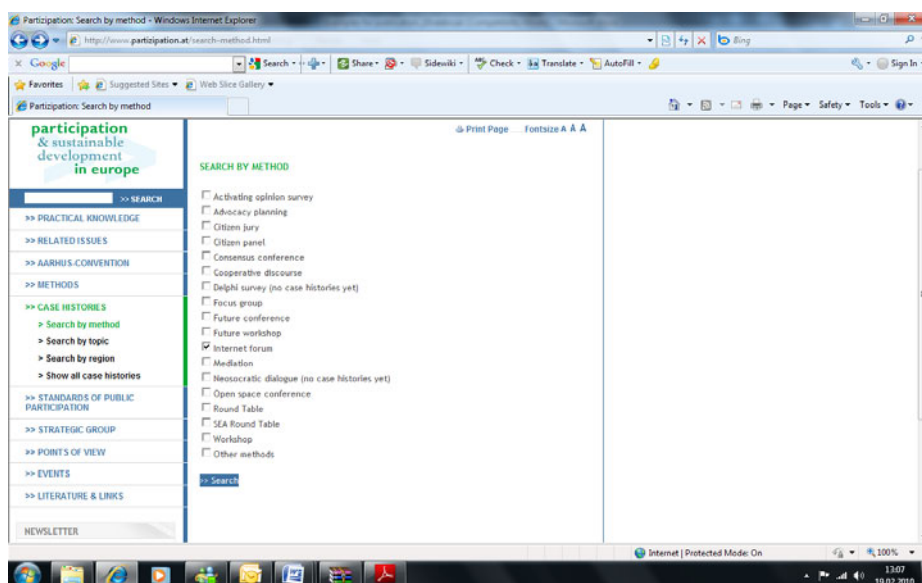
CASE Nr. 1 – Austrian information Portal

- **Year began / duration:** 2001
- **Target group(s):** wider public
- **Objectives:** dissemination of information about participation
- **Description of methods used:** portal which enables one to search cases according to methods, topics, region, case histories, etc.

The site provides basic information about participation and sustainable development, introduces related issues, such as environmental mediation, refers to interesting case histories of successful participation processes, includes a survey of specialized literature and provides details on forthcoming events – and that is not all. It originated as an information platform set up in the aftermath of the First Symposium on Environmental Mediation in 2001, with environmental mediation as its main focus. Since then, it has been developed and expanded into a central information facility dealing with issues of participation and sustainable development.

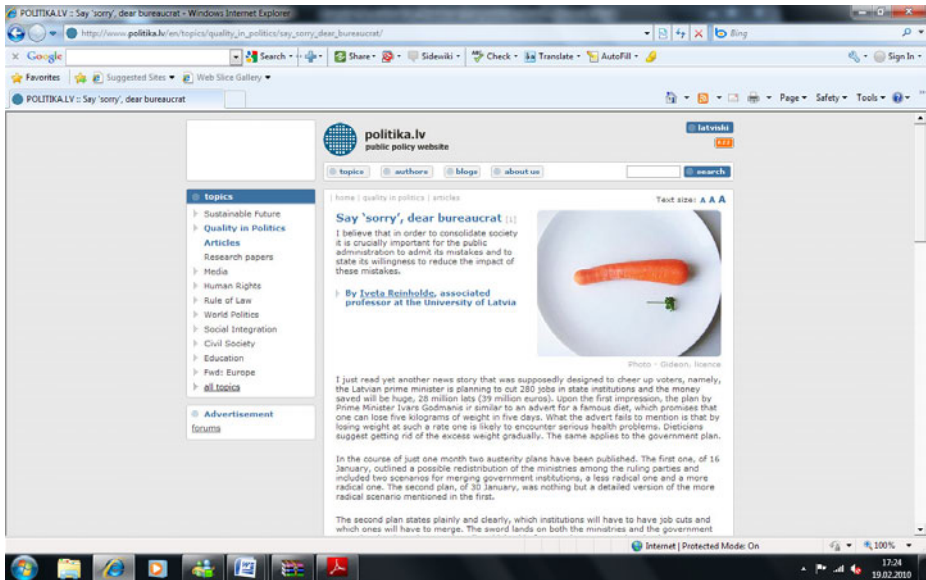
Strategic responsibility for the website's content is in the hands of two experts who have long been concerned with questions linked to the issue of participation.

- **Results or expected results:** Aims of the working group:
 - 1) developing Austrian e-democracy policy; 2) working out an overview of the topics of e-democracy & e-participation; 3) collecting and evaluating national e-democracy & e-participation projects; 4) describing e-democracy & e-participation tools; 5) designing e-participation prototype processes; 6) working out e-participation guidelines
- **Further information:** <http://www.partizipation.at/index.php?english>
- **Coordination and source of finances:** The Working Group 'eDemocracy and eParticipation' was founded in 2006 as an inter-ministerial expert forum within the Federal Chancellery.



CASE Nr. 2 – Latvian Public policy Website

- ***Year began / duration:*** 2001
- ***Target group(s):*** public policy community constituted by researchers, analysts, decision makers, non-governmental organizations, journalists and everyone concerned with Latvia's development.
- ***Objectives:*** The goal of the public policy website, politika.lv, is to improve the quality of public policy decisions in Latvia by promoting analyses based on decision-making and public participation.
- ***Description of methods used:*** e-discussions, e-consultation, feedback, e-polls, e-campaigning, blogging.
- ***Results or expected results:*** Online since July 2001, politika.lv is the first and largest online public policy resource in Latvia, publishing policy studies, in depth opinion articles and other relevant resources on issues important for Latvia's democratic development, such as civil society, European issues, human rights, social integration, the rule of law, corruption, education and information society. In addition to its regular topics, politika.lv has implemented special thematic projects: a European section, undertaken prior to the EU referendum (in 2003), and Elections Specials prior to the municipal elections (2001 and 2005), the Parliamentary elections (2002 and 2006) and the European Parliament (2004) elections. The website has introduced innovative interactive tools and pioneered online public consultations.
- ***Possible evaluation:*** politika.lv is visited by 40,000 different users per month and has almost 4000 subscribers to its weekly mailing list. The user profile of politika.lv is that of a young well-educated professional or student, working in either government, nongovernment or private sectors. Amongst the regular users of the website are journalists, policy analysts, civil servants, politicians, civil society activists and other opinion leaders. The website's resources are widely quoted in the leading news media and it is referred to in the decisions of the Constitutional Court.
- ***Coordination and source of finances:***
Centre of Public Policy PROVIDUS
- ***Contact information and links to further information:***
<http://www.politika.lv/en/354/> and <http://www2.providus.lv/public/26604.html> and providus@providus.lv



Consultation

CASE Nr. 1 – Austrian Wahlkabnet.at

- **Year began / duration:** 2002
- **Target group(s):** wider electorate
- **Objectives:** wahlkabine.at is an online tool for political education which is independent of party affiliations or interest groups. wahlkabine.at does not intend to tell users how and who to vote for. Rather, it aims to raise awareness about political issues and offers guidance concerning party policies on current issues. In contrast, in the popular media, the focus is frequently on a candidate's personality instead of their policies, so that increasing numbers of voters have difficulty determining a party's position.
- **Description of methods used:** wahlkabine.at ("polling booth") serves as a quick guide for understanding party opinions and helps you to compare your political views with those of the parties in full anonymity. Users fill in a questionnaire of approximately 25 questions. These answers are then compared with those given by the parties contesting the upcoming elections. At the end of the quiz, users can access a detailed survey of all questions and answers as well as comments given by the parties. In addition, a glossary provides background information about topical issues.

1. A pool of questions is developed by a team of experts on politics, history, and journalism. This team consists of representatives from the organisations named above, as well as journalists from various Austrian newspapers and magazines.
2. A list of about 40 questions is sent to political parties (executive boards) which are already represented in the Austrian Parliament, in the parliaments of Austria's nine federal provinces, or in the European Parliament. The parties answer the questions and also have the opportunity to comment on their choices. All comments can later be accessed on our homepage.
3. 25 questions will be selected to be included in our online version. These cover a wide range of fields, such as economics, education, energy, environment, family, food, migration, religion, security, social welfare, traffic, women's rights, and art and culture.
4. wahlkabine.at goes online about six weeks before the elections.
5. Users answer 25 questions by clicking 'agree/ yes,' 'disagree/ no' or 'neutral'. In addition, users should indicate whether they consider the issue in question important or not. The online tool then calculates which party's answers correspond most closely with your own. The other parties are ranked accordingly and in descending order.
 - **Results or expected results:** wahlkabine.at is a tool which serves as a basis for political discussion and which provides additional information (party comments, a comprehensive glossary of issues mentioned in the questions) for interested users.
 - **Possible evaluation:** Since 2002, 66 million questions have been answered online and more than 2.5 million users have finished the various quizzes to find out more about where they stand.
 - **Coordination and source of finances:** wahlkabine.at is a project carried out by several Austrian organisations in the field of political education, namely the Institute for New Culture Technologies/to in cooperation with the Austrian Political Science Association, the Society for Political Enlightenment, and the Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck.
 - **Contact information and links to further information:**
<http://wahlkabine.at/about-wahlkabine.at/>

- **Comments:** wahlkabine.at first started before the 2002 parliamentary elections in Austria. Since then, it has been available several times: for the elections to the parliaments of Austria's nine federal provinces ("Landtagswahlen") as well as several parliamentary elections ("Nationalratswahlen") and elections to the European parliament. In 2008, wahlkabine.at became bilingual (wahlkabine.it/ cabina-elettorale.it) as a service for Italian voters in the autonomous province of South Tyrol (Südtirol). wahlkabine.at was available in English for the first time before the elections to the European Parliament in 2009.



CASE Nr. 2 – Finnish discussion forum otakantaa.fi

- **Year began / duration:** 2007
- **Target group(s):** citizens
- **Objectives:** participation and discussion
- **Description of methods used:**

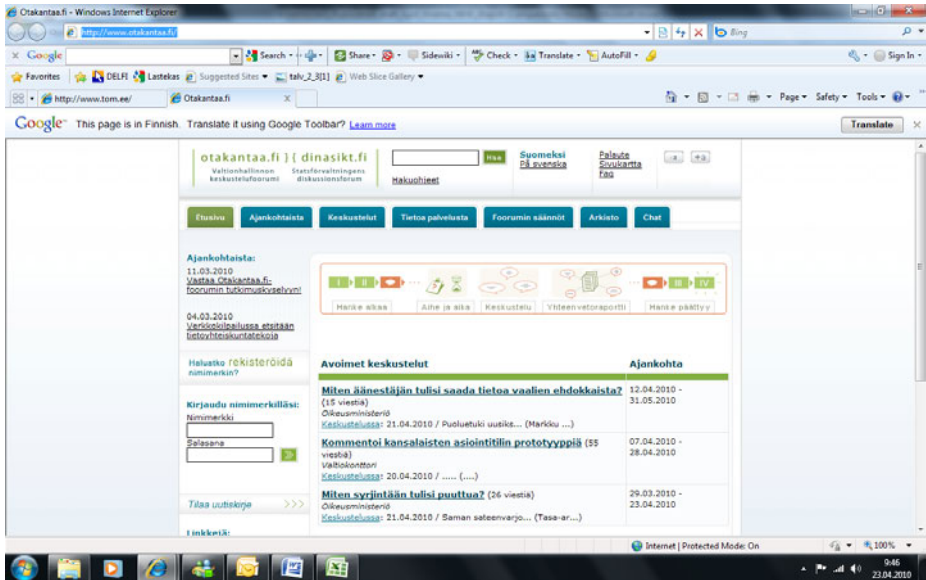
Otakantaa.fi (“Have Your Say”) is the only Finnish central government online service that provides the public with information and participation channels related to decision-making in society.

It has been designed to be mutually supportive with www.kansanvalta.fi, which is a data bank on democracy. Both are online

services available to everyone and published by the Finnish Ministry of Justice. Both implement the policy of equality in the fields of minorities, gender and multiculturality. Otakantaa.fi promotes citizens’ public, including anonymous participation in decision-making processes. Citizens and government officials discuss central government projects on the site.

Otakantaa.fi and Kansanvalta.fi are targeted at all individuals and groups interested in social participation and influence those who have access to the Internet. The special target groups of Otakantaa.fi vary depending on the topic of discussion in the forum. In addition to citizens, Kansanvalta.fi is particularly useful for researchers, administrators and educators. The sites are available in both of Finland’s national languages (Finnish and Swedish). Versions of Kansanvalta.fi in English and plain Finnish are also available.

- **Results or expected results:** Since its launch, Otakantaa.fi has attracted approximately 6,000 unique visitors a month. The services aim to increase citizens’ levels of competence in participation and, consequently, their empowerment towards active citizenship. The services support participatory democracy and increase interaction between the government and civil society. They also aim to improve the quality of decision-making and the drafting of legislation and introduce citizens’ everyday knowledge to complement expert information on these processes. The content of both sites is always kept up-to-date thanks to the constant publication of current issues.
- **Further information:** www.otakantaa.fi (in Finnish and Swedish)



CASE Nr. 3 – Danish OdderNettet

- **Year began / duration:** 1998
- **Target group(s):** the wider public
- **Objectives:** easy access to all council information and a forum for public discussions.
- **Description of methods used:** OdderNettet is the Odder District Council website. The website offers a range of self-service functions for the citizen, an active debate forum and a consistent flow of local news. The site consists of a range of services that the council offers to citizens. They can be located by searching a particular area, by a-z listing, through typical situations or by using the search function. It is also possible to read about local planning projects or to investigate the council budget. More than 100 self-service functions are offered to the citizen by way of a personal digital signature. This includes receiving council letters through an e-box, informing the council when moving, signing children up for daycare, changing tax returns, applying for housing and child benefits and much more. At the present stage, 50 % of the citizens sign their children up for services such as daycare on the net.

OdderNettet attempts to be more than just a supplier of council directives and initiatives. It is integrated within community life in general and offers links that might be relevant to citizens, from the local library and business to national websites. The citizens must feel that OdderNettet is their own website. To achieve this, citizens and clubs have the opportunity to establish their own websites for free. The websites also serve as personal gateways to the council and its range of self-service solutions. In addition, local institutions, museums, sport clubs and other local initiatives have access to the calendar where they can add and change information about events.

- **Results or expected results:** The aim of OdderNettet is to gather all council information in one place for easy access and to engage citizens in the democratic process and to achieve a high level of self-service. This is achieved via efficient, direct and updated information about council activities and initiatives, an open, transparent debate and dialogue and a wide range of self-service functions. Since the council launched its website in 1998, it has provided a platform for many tools to engage citizens. The website is considered the most important communication channel for citizens and has around 2500 visitors every day (the council has around 22,000 citizens).

Watching webcasts from council meetings is popular. The council webcasts have had over 14,000 visits during the two years that council webcasts have been available. Compared to the few who physically attend the meetings (14 persons/per year, on average), the increase is considerable. The forum has new entries every day and the latest big debate was surrounding the lcola elections in November 2009, with no less than 420 entries from citizens and politicians. The digital citizen panel has around 300 members who have actively signed on.

- **Further information:** <http://www.odder.dk/site.aspx?MenuID=19&Langref=1&Area=&topID=&ArticleID=1209&expandID=95&moduleID=>
- **Coordination and source of finances:** Council of Odder Commune, some subprojects are EU-funded



Cooperation

There are some examples of projects which have started as consultation projects but which have then been transformed into cooperation projects. We can present here the previously mentioned Estonian Portal TOM and its successor, osale.ee, as an example.

CASE Nr. 1 – Estonian Portal TOM

- **Year began / duration:** 2001-2008
- **Target group(s):** the wider public, state officials
- **Objectives:** The TOM tool is a public participation portal, aimed at engaging citizens more directly with the legislative and policy-making processes, either by proposing new legislation or by suggesting amendments to existing laws.
- **Description of methods used:** The Estonian E-participation project was more ambitious than an e-petition platform. Rather than being a medium for collecting signatures, the TOM tool was a forum for citizens to discuss legislative proposals within a ten-day period following submission and to vote upon them. To take account of discussion between TOM users, authors of legislative proposals had up to three days to amend them before they were voted upon by participants (a simple 50 % plus one majority is needed to pass).

Once a proposal was backed by a majority, it was forwarded to the relevant government department, which then had a month to respond to the proposal explaining what action was or was not to be taken and why. This formal government response was then posted on TOM.

- **Results or expected results:** Given this design, TOM provides an invaluable example for understanding more about citizens' use of e-participation as well as its positive and negative features. The new project, TID+, is a follow-up-project which is all about disseminating the tool TOM and the lessons learned from it to interested parties in the EU. It will re-evaluate and ameliorate the present solution, develop comprehensive documentation on how it can be used optimally, and make it available free of charge for non-commercial use to all interested actors as a tool to increase citizens' participation.

There was a follow-up-project, the Osale.ee portal (www.osale.ee, opened in July 2007) (see next case), which is managed by the State Chancellery in order to facilitate wider participation in politics by citizens and citizen organizations and to create legislation through discussions and consultations and, according to the development plans, in the future it will also allow user-generated content. Currently, the participatory website Osale.ee aggregates the legislative domains of all ministries and represents an attempt to consolidate different opinion seeking environments together under one roof – previously there have been similar online initiatives by the ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and the Ministry of Justice.

- **Coordination and source of finances:** The portal TOM was launched by the Estonian State Chancellery in June 2001 and has been incorporated into the Osale.ee e-participation site as of June 4th, 2008.
- **Comments:** Lessons learned: 1) the importance of media coverage during the whole duration of the project, not just at the beginning; 2) the authors of ideas need some professional advice and support; 3) the authorization issue needs extra attention, and; 4) the moderator is the “heart” of the forum.

CASE Nr. 2 – Estonian Portal osale.ee

- **Year began / duration:** July 2007
- **Target group(s):** all state authorities, the wider public
- **Objectives:** engagement of citizens in the legislative process
- **Description of methods used:** The Osale integrated electronic environment has three functions. First, citizens and interest groups can launch initiatives for new legislative proposals, present ideas and criticisms to the government and submit petitions. Any such proposal is voted upon and commented on by the other users. Then the proposal is forwarded to the relevant government department, which then posts an official response explaining what action was or was not taken and why. Second, citizens can participate in public consultations/hearings. Citizens and CSOs can publicly give their opinion about draft legislation prepared by government agencies. All government agencies have been advised on how to publish their draft policy papers and development plans, laws or provisions on the consultation website. Submission is, however, voluntary and is not regulated by administrative procedures. Third, there is also a search function for legal acts according to their stage of preparation (i.e. since policy proposal to adoption in the parliament).
- **Results or expected results:** As the initiative was implemented recently, it may be too early to evaluate the results. Feedback so far, however, indicates that the consultation site presents opportunities for dialogue between the state and stakeholders. E-governance in general, including e-participation tools, can reduce the administrative burden for stakeholders by enhancing government transparency. E-tools enable the state to reduce the costs involved in obtaining, reading and understanding regulations. Public consultation with stakeholders about these regulations reduces the opportunities for corruption and strengthens awareness of the work of government agencies. E-consultation helps to gauge the expectations of the public at an early stage. This allows the state to avoid costly mistakes. For 2008, the target is that all online ministries will use the public consultations website to hold public consultations for relevant legislation/policies.

- **Possible evaluation: Lessons:**

Lesson 1: e-participation channels will support open and inclusive policy-making if there is sufficient awareness of participation principles among civil servants and their partners in CSOs. The key element in any form of participation is the willingness to hold a government-citizen dialogue.

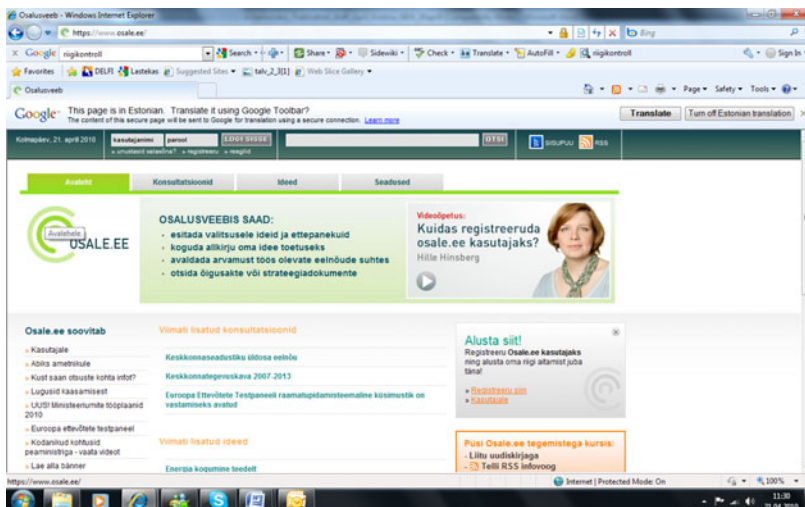
Lesson 2: when an e-participation channel has been established, there should be the will and resources available for constant promotion, the provision of a user help-desk and the dynamic development of technological features. The technical side should be 'foolproof,' easily understandable, navigable and convenient for users.

Lesson 3: portal aims and usage rules should be clearly defined and explicitly described for all stakeholders and users. The operation, administration and moderation of the consultation website should not be too formal or technologically complicated to hinder the two-way discussion.

Lesson 4: co-operation and co-ordination with institutional users, i.e. online ministries, is vital. Regardless of whether the portal use is voluntary or mandatory, there should be a help-desk offering technological support, hands-on user training and easily accessible advice.

Lesson 5: continuous promotion should be planned for general participation principles and specific campaigns for ongoing consultations in e-participation channels. Links should be established to outside sources, such as online media and blogs.

- **Coordination and source of finances:** Estonian State Chancellery Implementation €49–299,000; yearly cost: €1–49,000
- **Contact information:** www.osale.ee



CASE Nr. 3 – Danish Project ROSTRA

- **Target group(s):** state authorities, the wider public
- **Objectives:** enhancement of participation, feedback
- **Description of methods used:** ROSTRA is an online system for public debate and the expression of opinions through voting facilities based on the Danish Digital Signature. The tool is a part of the Danish citizen's portal borger.dk (called afstemning og debat) developed by the Danish National IT and Telecom Agency. The tool is available to all Danish authorities. All debates and votes are shown on the national citizen portal. It is also possible to integrate the tool with other websites and designs. Authorities can define which groups of people are allowed to participate in a specific vote (i.e. citizens of a specific municipality). To help the Danish authorities set up and use the debate and voting system, the Danish National IT and Telecom Agency have established a hot-line. Codes of conduct are available for both authorities and citizens. This Danish National IT and Telecom Agency will implement the tool with a marketing plan aimed at the Danish authorities to increase the volume of the debates and votes.
- **Results or expected results:** On the basis of the ROSTRA tool, Denmark developed a new voting system for binding elections pertaining to the Danish parochial church councils.
- **Evaluation:** The pilot project was evaluated in late 2008 to decide whether this type of electronic voting system should be used in elections pertaining to the Danish parochial church councils and other binding elections to ensure the possibility of casting the vote digitally.
- **Coordination and source of finances:** developed by the Danish National IT and Telecom Agency Open source software; public funding national; implementation: €49–299,000 ; Yearly cost: €1–49,000
- **Contact information and possible links to further information:** <http://www.epractice.eu/cases/Rostra>
- **Comments:** Lessons learned: 1) a network of authorities is very important; 2) intensive marketing is necessary; 3) user involvement in the development process produces user-friendly solutions.

Local e-democracy

The transformational aspects and nature of democracy have been most interesting and evident at the level of local governments, which have sometimes been defined as the “training ground for democracy”³¹. At the level of local governments, the mutual impact of different processes and the links between democracy, participation and services is much more visible and people have closer contact with this institution. The present sub-section aims to give a brief account of local e-democracy projects.

Chadwick³² points out that many of the proponents of community networks come from a background in urban planning and that such services could have a larger impact on increasing e-participation than many of the so-called practical services. The city of Tampere in Finland has also developed two different, partly Internet-based, channels for residents to participate in the planning of services and urban areas, called **Alvari** and **Valma**.

The **Valma** preparation forum is an electronic participation service for the residents of Tampere. It offers easy access to official information and possibilities to comment early on issues prepared by the City of Tampere. It is a tool for the city administration to get rapid feedback. The aim of the city administration is not to get as many comments as possible, but, rather, to get comments which are well argued or offer new insights or ideas for planning.

Valma has been integrated within the city’s main workflow system. Therefore, residents can easily read all official documents pertaining to each issue via the Internet. Everyone can also see the other’s comments. It is possible though to send comments just to the officials and decision makers in charge. Issues can be commented upon without being registered on Valma. On the other hand, if an individual wants to register as a service user, she or he can get short email news from the City. It is also possible to make your own profile by ‘ticking’ sub-sections for the city and interesting themes like traffic, zoning, culture, sports, etc. If issues concerning those sub-sections or themes appear for comment in Valma, emails are sent directly to the resident.

When introducing new and effective e-participation services, the administrative structure and work practices should be evaluated and changed accordingly. If this is not done, the novel possibility to participate in the process might appear as a curiosity, with only minor effects on decision-making. Thus, the resident’s interest in participating might in fact diminish. In Tampere, the Valma project advanced at an equal

pace with the development of the city's new administrative model. Thus, integration was achieved already during the project. The work will continue within the routines and processes of the city. Tampere is also a partner in the EU-financed eCitizen2 –project, in which the experiences with Valma and other e-participation systems are shared with other European cities.

An example of a local e-democracy project, which in this publication is categorized even at the third–cooperation level, is that of the **Issy-les-Moulineaux (France) Interactive City Council**. This was done mainly to support the city government for the rest of its activities supporting participation, besides the technical possibility to participate in the city council meeting online.

The **Interactive City Council** allows Issy's residents to watch and to actively participate in City Council meetings live from the comfort of their living rooms or while on the move. The City Council meetings are broadcasted simultaneously over cable network TV and the Internet. To take part in the Council meetings, Issy's residents just have to tune in. They can ask questions live of their elected representatives by phone (toll-free number), or email and get immediate answers.

Despite the fact that City Council meetings have always been open to the public (as required by law), only a few citizens attended the meetings before the creation of the Interactive City Council. Today, 45% of Issy's households are regularly participating online. The key factor for its success was an increase in transparency, which improved many citizens' views of their elected representatives. Never before had so many people attended the Council meetings and very few inhabitants had imagined the extent of the tasks the Council Members are entrusted with. By promoting and developing a new form of citizenship, enabled and empowered by ICT, Issy has succeeded in integrating its citizens into the democratic life and decision-making process of its local community. Today, the City Council meetings are part and parcel of Issy's local political life: the City Council meets about six times a year, beginning at 18:30 in the evening. The broadcasting of the Council meetings is preceded by a news programme on Issy's local TV channel T2i (Issy's Interactive Television), which presents and explains the main items on the Council meeting agenda. The objective is to present and to explain the main topics that will be discussed during the Council meeting in a way that allows citizens who are not very familiar with the technical or administrative language used to follow and to participate in the meetings. A Council meeting can last up to 6 hours. Prior to the start of each Council meeting, leaflets informing people about

the meeting's agenda and the estimated time schedule for each item are distributed to every household. Thus, people can tune in during the period of time the Council is discussing the subject they are interested in. The citizens consult the agenda of the Council meetings on the website, watch meetings via cable TV, the Internet or mobile phones, ask questions live or consult the decisions several months after they have been adopted. This has completely changed the ways of accessing municipal information. In Issy-les-Moulineaux, consultation has become a notion that has regulated the city's decision-making for a long time now. Today, no project sees the light of day without at least one public meeting, and no decisions are made without those concerned being consulted. The great success of the Interactive City Council, which has been an important part of a series of actions aimed at promoting participatory democracy (e.g., the initiative 'Allô Monsieur le Maire' – offers the possibility to directly ask questions of the mayor and engage in public consultations or an electronic forum on the city's web site), paved the way for further e-consultation initiatives: for example, in 2002, the 'Issy Citizen Panel' was launched. The Citizen Panel is a representative group of citizens that is regularly consulted via the Internet by the City Council on important local issues. Also, in 2002 a 'Participative Budget Making Platform,' enabling citizens at a district level to assist the city in setting local investment priorities, was created.

Lessons learned: *Lesson 1:* putting in place the technology is not enough – to make such a project a success, it has to be coupled with a sound communications campaign designed to build awareness of this new opportunity and to inform and educate citizens on how to use it.

Lesson 2: new technology is changing the balance of power – such use of ICT enables a new model of citizenship, in which citizens are both better informed and more demanding. Local governments, and in this case, the members of the City Council, had to learn to adapt to this new political behaviour. Furthermore, they need to be perfectly acquainted with all cases concerning local life and reply live to the citizen's questions. It already happened that the members of the city council reviewed their initial decision after a discussion with the public.

Lesson 3: you can always do better – with technology evolving as rapidly as it is, there is no time to stand still once the projects have been implemented. There is always a margin to improve your service and you should continuously look for new technological solutions to be included in your service to better meet citizens' expectations and needs.

One more Good Practice of the local e-democracy project which has gone beyond the consultation level and used secure e-voting technology to make people's voices really decisive in the administrative process of the city is the **Madrid Participa** project in Spain.

It is a highly efficient instrument used to increase citizen participation in the decision-making process in the city of Madrid, offering a more dynamic and continuous dialogue between political representatives and citizens. When compared to traditional citizen consultations, the Madrid Participa's approach of using secure e-voting technology in combination with paper ballots enables the Madrid City Council to carry out more convenient and user-friendly consultations while avoiding the costs of a traditional vote. To date, the e-consultations platform implemented has been used regularly in 22 citizen consultations involving more than 3.5 million citizens. The target group of Madrid Participa is all the citizens registered in Madrid over the age of 16. Given the fact that, typically, the e-consultations are about relevant district issues, the City Council found it interesting to include younger citizens as well as immigrants in the consultation initiatives, even though the legal voting age in Spain is 18.

Madrid Participa is the first initiative of this kind in Spain which has implemented a secure e-voting platform to regularly perform binding e-consultations among its citizens. Therefore, it is a clear point of reference for other European city councils interested in carrying out 'serious' citizen consultations. Since 2004, the City Council of Madrid has gained valuable experience by running more than 20 e-consultations in various city districts.

Lessons learned: *Lesson 1:* a platform which is used for (multiple) e-consultations must use state-of-the-art security to guarantee the critical and specific security requirements. These specific security measures are necessary to generate trust among the citizens.

Lesson 2: it is necessary to provide voters with multiple voting channels to guarantee their participation. Participation from polling stations with computers and paper ballots, and remotely through the Internet, is a must. Other channels such as Java mobile phones or SMS are complementary, and their use depends on the available budget and on security and usability issues. Citizen registration and voting processes must be simple in order to increase participation rates.

Lesson 3: greater efforts should be made to broadcast the initiative using all media channels and neighbourhood associations. This is critical for achieving a high awareness of the project among the citizens, so they know that they can give their opinion on different issues. The involvement of local

neighbourhood associations is important, as the council can reach more people at almost no extra cost. It is also very important that the council asks the citizens questions that affect their everyday life.

Finnish pilot projects under the theme

Case: Finnish Participation Environment

- Year began / duration: A preliminary report will be made between 1 January and 30 June 2010; the environment will be realised in partnership with civil society and other players, implementation project during 2011–2013
- Target group(s): stakeholders in civil society, administration, government, Parliament
- Objectives: interaction, information sharing and mash-up, tools, new methods of participation and social influence, tools to be offered, guidance, training and resources

Description (of methods used):

The participation Environment will

- be an interactive, guiding and informative Internet-based participation environment;
- be offered as a combination of services to governmental organisations, Parliament and NGOs;
- bring central and local government and Parliamentary participation services into one 'net space';
- integrate existing e-government and online information provision services into one participation environment

Results or expected results:

- the influence of citizens and civil society on matters and processes important to society will grow and deepen
- new methods using social media will offer possibilities to take part in decision-making processes more efficiently than now
- co-operation and collaboration will increase among stakeholders
- a government that is more open about its processes

Coordinating instance: Ministry of Justice, Finland

Source of finances: SADe Programme by the Ministry of Finance

Further information: Oili Salminen, Ministry of Justice,

email: oili.salminen@om.fi

The background is a solid light green color. Overlaid on this are several thin, white, curved lines that intersect to form a complex, abstract pattern. These lines vary in thickness and curvature, creating a sense of movement and depth. A prominent dark green square is positioned in the upper right quadrant, containing the chapter title.

CHAPTER

4

SUMMARY

It has been debated since the 1980s, that is, since the Internet was born, whether the Internet in and of itself will increase the level of political awareness of the public. Even though many are of the opinion that the people who make extensive use of online political information tend to be the same people who are already strongly interested in politics, it is clear that the Internet does allow people to do what they usually do, but to do it in a different way and to do it better. However, some cases selected for this publication as Good Practices also demonstrate that participation can be increased remarkably with e-tools (the case of OdderNettet project from Denmark, for example).

One should admit the important role of technology on widening the circle of available tools for participating (starting from e-mails to officials and ending up with the possibility to read and comment on the blogs of higher politicians).

At the same time, the technological component is not enough. As in the case of many practices presented in this publication, supporting activities are even more significant (for example, 'e' and 'non-e' activities) from the perspective of institutions and politicians, which we could talk about as real e-democracy and e-participation.

As the study and Section 2 clearly demonstrate, the practices of strategic planning and the administration of e-democracy vary considerably from state to state. As the legislative environment, the development level of traditional democracy, and the level of development of the political culture are also very different from state to state, it is almost impossible to offer any valid model for planning or administration which satisfies everyone. Rather than doing that, different structures and possibilities are emphasised.

However, one could conclude that one of the key-aspects is close cooperation between different institutions. In Austria, for example, there are many different institutions (the independent 'Working Group E-Democracy/E-Voting' within the Austrian Computer Society, connecting experts in public administration, businesses and science) and remarkably many academic institutions (Danube University Krems, the University of Technology Graz, the Austrian Academy of Sciences) are involved in strategic planning and the administration of e-democracy and one real outcome of this cooperation can be that there are also many Good Practices on e-democracy in Austria.

The following is a short summary of practices according to the level of involvement they represent.

Information – there are practices at this level of involvement which stand out from the others by their structure and searching abilities (the Austrian Participation Portal) or by the quality of their content (the Latvian Public Policy website)

Consultation – important at this level of involvement is that, in addition to ensuring that citizens should have the possibility to get consultation from institutions or politics (for example, for forming their decision for upcoming elections, as in the case of the Austrian Wahlkabinet), the consultation should be transferred the other way round and citizens should be able to consult institutions (Valma and Otakantaa in Finland).

Cooperation – instead of more traditional 'participation,' this level of involvement is referred to as 'cooperation' in the present publication with intention of stressing even more the importance of the contribution and also the possible real outcome for both parties – citizens and institutions.

The cases at this level should demonstrate that the contribution from citizens, guaranteed through activities at two levels of involvement, has real consequences.

Not only can citizens express their opinions, they can vote for them and the voice of the majority can constitute a real proposal for changes to a legislative act (see the case of Estonian Today I Decide and its continuation Portal, osale.ee). These cases also indicate the risks which may hinder real participation and may be considered as reason why the first of the above-mentioned cases 'died out.' If a citizen decides to contribute to such a complicated process as law-making, then the other side should answer with the same degree of commitment. Every piece of input deserves a well-argued, thoroughly elaborated and non-bureaucratic response and further discussion, not just a negative answer with reference to other legal acts which obstruct the recently made proposal.

It also became evident how large a role the media is playing in the success of e-democracy projects – media coverage increases participation rates, the media can also emphasise important the issues raised and increase the way citizens become motivated to participate.

As was already mentioned, one important component which distinguishes cooperation from lower level involvement – consultation – is e-voting (here the meaning is to vote for some idea or proposal between citizens themselves), which can also be seen in the cases of ROSTRA in Denmark, Issy-les-Moulinex in France and Madrid Participa in Spain.

When speaking of deepening trends one should mention the increasingly entrenched practice of participatory budgeting in different cities in Europe. Many countries state in their strategic documents e-elections (national or regional) will be one of the main future activities for extending e-democracy (examples include Norway – a pilot for e-voting is planned for the 2011 municipal and country elections – and Switzerland). However, e-elections cannot be considered as a pure practice of e-democracy, since there has been too little research into e-voting to draw definitive conclusions in terms of its actual influence (for example, in Estonia, because there are not many other experiences to the same degree). Nevertheless, according to Vassil's analysis (Vassil, 2007³³) of Estonian e-voters, the number of people whose participation depended on e-technologies is small but present: 10 per cent of the e-voters claimed that they would not have voted if Internet voting had not been an option and 95 per cent of e-voters were convinced that they would not like to vote in the traditional way if e-voting continues to be available (Vassil, 2007).

Another trend is the publication of different manuscripts and guidelines which may be considered 'non-official,' but which may have a remarkable influence on the enhancement of e-participation and e-democracy. One example of this is practical, the '**Guidelines for e-engagement for Estonian Local governments**', published by the e-Governance Academy.

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