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Dr. Sylviane Toporkoff
President Global Forum/Shaping the Future
Partner & Founder ITEMS International
Full Professor University Paris 8, Institute of European Studies

eParticipation and how ICT changes the fundamentals of political
processes and democracy

Děkuji za pozvání na tuto prestižní setkání

All recent elections in Europe and in the US demonstrated a growing disinterest of citizens in politics -- a trend that threatens our democracies.

In order to countervail this development, the European Commission - about 10 years ago - launched a large number of call for projects in the area of eParticipation and eDemocracy. The intention was to “re-inject” democracy in the daily life of European citizens without them noticing.

At first, all stakeholders, cities, regions and citizens were most enthusiastic and considered electronically mediated participation, or eParticipation, as the solution. However, short time after, the limits of eParticipation appeared. The way the so-called “eParticipation” has been implemented was perceived as an artificial tool by the citizens.

For instance, in late 2004, **the city of Gothenburg in Sweden** launched an online forum in order to break with traditional ways of policy-making and to increase citizen’s participation. At first, the citizens eagerly participated but then ceased as it became apparent that there was a large gap between the initial high ambitions of the project and the fact that all discussions and exchanges lacked of formal decision-making.

This example perfectly illustrates the feelings of the citizens, who were encouraged to join the decision-making process via participative online tools. They committed themselves and made propositions -- but at the end their thoughts and suggestions weight little in the balance when decisions were required. eParticipation initiatives were deserted.

As for many other concepts or ideas, there are as many definitions of eParticipation as there are researchers. eParticipation is composed of two elements: “e” and “participation.” Participation refers to taking part in, either in the sense of taking part in some communal discussion or activity, or in the sense of taking some role in decision making. **“E”-participation can only works if people and groups trust in their governments and especially if the users have the feeling that there are not “playing” managing but really have an impact on decision-making processes.** This point is the one which often lacks and entails disinterest and a lack of involvement.

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As you all know, The European Year of Citizens 2013 highlights the importance of engaging citizens in all policy matters. eParticipation initiatives are in line with the European eGovernment Action Plan (2011-15) and the Malmö Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment, which support the use of ICTs in civic life.

A good news! It seems that eParticipation is now again considered as relevant. This surprising resurrection and interest for eParticipation can be explained by the appearance of tools which can perfectly fit and change the participative processes. Social networks leads especially young people to express voice in the democratic process.

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It Permits a wide variety of contributions that can be considered, analysed and included in a new policy. A website where people can put their comments is not enough anymore. Citizens want the politics to let them be “Policy Shapers”.

Mails, smart phones and convergence, Twitter, Blogs, Facebook - social media and networking tools, YouTube, Flickr and podcasting, Wikis and Wikipedia -- various new Internet-based formats of extended citizen’s participation have emerged and provide access to high creative potential that have been lost in the traditional consultations

Some smart examples

PPT page 4 Issy-les-Moulineaux

PPT page 5 more Smart examples

Web 2.0 technologies enable public authorities and governments to engage especially young citizens in participation with transparency and collaboration. The Arab revolutions for ex. have demonstrated the undeniable power of Web 2.0 and its power to support politic changes.

Governments, regional and local administrations are now seeking to improve their efficiency, acceptance and legitimacy of political processes and to reach those objectives. There is a move to involve citizens as both end-users and actors in many domains.

A general claim held by many observers of current trends in modern mass democracies is that the WEB 2.0 has the potential to fundamentally change democratic politics and democracy. However to succeed the various eParticipation initiatives it is important to carefully identify topics and objectives of the initiatives.

It is also important to target the relevant users, to select the most adapted tools, to not forget to communicate to attract users, and finally there must be a clear will of the Government, the region or the city to take into account the citizens' feed backs and have a credible commitment among policy makers to take the consequences of public participation into serious account

Open Data also plays an important role for return, exchanges and debates in the context of eParticipation initiatives. For many politics, making data public is a way to have citizens "working for the city and improving it". This could be done by Apps which are specifically designed, based on open data.

Open Data and eParticipation allows to better structure the exchanges. Open data refers to the fact that certain data are made accessible, consultable and shareable by everyone without copyright or IPR issues.

So, it is important to make all the data simple, provide low-cost accessibility, web sites connectivity and multilingual eSolutions and eServices if you want to access all citizens and in some cases cross border eParticipation.

To facilitate a wider and faster adoption of eParticipation there is a requirement of **eSkills and digital literacy** in order to increase the mobility, quantity and quality of high-end information and improve the image of digital politics and promote their role in society.

It is important if you want to reconnect ordinary people with politics and policy-making and making the decision-making processes easier to understand and follow through the use of ICTs

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance" Abraham Lincoln

So, policy innovation is all about collaboration-iteration which is the process of repeating a set of instructions a specified number of times until a specific result is achieved.

Even if the technology is ready, to facilitate eParticipation, leaders and doers have to be involved. If the leaders are not ready there will be no real e-participation: all the good examples come from open minded leaders. This is true all over the world.

They have to develop capacities to bring publicly available, reliable data into the policy-making processes. They have also to ensure transparency in order to maximize individual empowerment.

Hyperconnectivity has concrete consequences and requires offering real “service design with real value add information” and not just “sort of”.

And it's just the beginning: we are only at 1% of our potential connectivity. Moreover, most of the design services are all but friendly systems!!! It is important to create an attractive environment.

There is growing demand among the public and the commercial sector for more direct public involvement in the legislative process and for transparency in administration. Thus, eParticipation is today an integral part of smart cities. A true, functional smart city is not only characterized by smart transportation, energy, grid, urbanism but also the fact that citizens take an active role in their cities.

So, to assure the entire collaborative network, it's more than technology.

However, this can only work if people and groups trust in their governments and vice-versa, yes, but also if people trust in the different ICT tools.

The User-Centric Mobile Cloud Device brings a global evolution from the Mobile Era to the Personal Era which gives rise to the question of privacy and security.

How do we ensure e-participation as a facilitator for politics, while also addressing the risks that it creates?

Cybersecurity is essential to engage the public more meaningfully in policy deliberation than has so far been

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We all know that there is an increased risk of existing infringements: cybersquatting, counterfeiting, or phishing.

Examples: 78% of large organizations were attacked by an unauthorized outsider in the last year (up from 73% a year ago).

20 % of large organizations detected that outsiders had successfully penetrated their network in the last year –up from 15% a year ago).

However we all know that Cybersecurity is NOT (only) a technical problem but a balance between technology, people and processes: 31% of the respondents don't evaluate how effective their security expenditure is.

Conclusion

E-participation is a way of influencing global policy-making.

To open the debate, for some experts and countries, the next step of eParticipation is reaching “eSelf-Government”. This means that some services normally provided by

the city or region will be ensured by Self-Governmental Organizations which could be Neighborhood association, NGOs, cooperatives, vigilante corps...

Of course within the limits of the law

This was considered in many presentations made at the Global forum 2013 last month in Trieste and particularly by the Presentations made by the Japanese speakers especially for medical, education, environment (such as Energy management; Smart Grid/City, Public Transportation) and disaster prevention.

This seems mainly considered as a way for countries with isolated areas and problems of financing to continue to ensure the continuity of services. This idea could also be developed in others countries for financial reasons.

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