



European eParticipation

Study and supply of services on the development of eParticipation in the EU

Deliverable 1.3a

Main benefits of eParticipation developments in the EU – First version

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1 Introduction

This is the first draft of a deliverable about the benefits of eParticipation in policy making at the European scale. The second version is due in October 2008 and the final version in March 2009. This draft should therefore be seen as an initial step towards a more definitive statement on what are the main benefits of European eParticipation. This version could be seen as both a literature review and a scoping exercise, designed above all to properly contextualise the benefits of participation and eParticipation with reference to democratic norms associated with the governance regimes which participation activities are expected to co-exist with or to co-shape. It is stressed that the European scale of action has a number of key specificities when compared with a national or local scale, including its linguistic diversity, its fragmented public sphere and what approximates to a network mode of governance within the EU. Comparisons are drawn between eParticipation at the European, national and local scales. These have a bias towards UK experience in the latter two cases, but since our primary concern is with the European scale, and the purpose of the comparisons are essentially to illustrate the importance of context, this is adequate, although it would be useful, and may be possible, to explore some cross-national differences in governance arrangements in subsequent versions of this deliverable.

2 Initial scoping of the benefits of public participation

A review of the evidence for the benefits of community engagement for the UK Government found that “there is a strong common sense case for community engagement.” (Rogers & Robinson 2004: 51). A literature review funded by the Home Office’s Civil Renewal Unit (Involve 2005) found the following sorts of benefits cited for participation in policy-making:

- tapping ‘local’ knowledge and innovation,
- reducing or avoiding conflict,
- increasing awareness and understanding,
- mobilising new resources including voluntary labour,
- making programmes more sustainable by generating community ownership,
- increasing individual or community self-reliance,
- reducing transaction costs,
- increasing social inclusion or cohesion,
- generating trust and social capital,
- making policy more enforceable by embedding it in social norms,
- generating new groups and organisations and strengthening existing ones.

Some of these benefits relate to *service effectiveness and efficiency*, others to *decision-making quality and legitimacy*, and others to *governance and (active) citizenship* (Involve 2005: 67). Not all go uncontested, and not all are even measurable, but it is noteworthy that many participation practitioners remain convinced of their occurrence,

and often express frustration that attempts to measure the benefits of participation (particularly for the purposes of developing indicators then to be used for benchmarking or targeting) effectively downgrade the more intangible benefits which their experience convinces them are perhaps even more important (NEF 2000). It is also the case that whereas decision-making and/or service improvements tend to be at the forefront of concern from a government perspective, other stakeholders may perceive different benefits in the same process (Lowndes, Pratchett & Stoker 2001a and b). A broad distinction can be drawn between the general public and 'insider' stakeholders, insofar as engagement with the general public tends to bring values to the forefront, whereas engaging with insider stakeholders (referred to below as 'strong publics') tends to bring their particular knowledge and interests to the forefront (Creasy et al 2007: 23). Correspondingly any evaluation should consider the possibility that different types of benefit can accrue to a number of different types of stakeholder¹, such as:

- individual citizens
- elected representatives
- government bodies
- other public sector partners
- political parties
- NGOs
- citizen groups
- the academic and research community
- business and industry
- mass communication media

Focusing more particularly on eParticipation, a report to the Australian government maintained that "the benefits of online policy consultation parallel those of traditional consultation." (AGIMO 2004) But, it goes on, they also carry 'added value':

Online methods ... extend the reach of government consultation through greater access, including availability 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Online methods can also provide a safer and more deliberative way in which agencies can engage with citizens through secure, faster and more manageable ways of handling a large-scale group input. Online methods can also attract sectors of the community (for example, youth) who may not usually engage with government." (ibid.)

In our analytical framework (Smith, Macintosh & Millard 2008) we listed a more extensive but essentially similar range of benefits for eParticipation:

- for project owners:

- cost reduction, resource rationalisation
- time savings
- greater productivity

¹ This classification is a development of the one proposed by DEMO-net, see Tambouris (ed.) 2007: 10.

- staff who are more competent and skilled in their jobs and thus achieve greater output, etc.
- less bureaucracy and administration (administrative burden reduction)
- more transparency, accountability, etc., within the agency
- increased staff satisfaction
- increased security for the agency
- redeployment of staff from back-office (administration) to front-office (service delivery, democracy and engagement)
- increase agency agility and innovation
- decision-makers better informed about public policy and service needs
- increased contact with the public providing opportunity for better relationship building
- better informed public
- improved acceptance levels for new services and policies by the public

- for participants:

- successful access to and use of eParticipation processes
- time savings
- clearer opportunity to comment and participate, with less bureaucracy and administration
- more convenience
- more transparency, accountability, etc., for participants
- expectations of users met
- increased user satisfaction
- increased sense of fulfilment
- increased security for participants

Building on this, group discussion at the first European eParticipation study workshop (Millard 2008: 16) suggested that there are five main types of benefit depending on the stakeholders involved:

- i) For participants – to increase convenience, satisfaction, feelings of involvement, greater engagement and commitment in community and society, also noting that eParticipation is not only a rational but also an emotional experience.
- ii) For organisations -- to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of organisations, for example successful participation can increase the economic viability of private and civil sector organisations, and probably also public institutions as well, by reducing costs.
- iii) For organisations -- to increase the efficiency and quality of their own policy-making.

- iv) For governments -- to support social cohesion and other society-wide policies.
- v) For all –eParticipation can increase overall participation rates and the intensity and quality of participation if undertaken in the right way.

Some of the benefits listed under the first point relate to the intrinsic and private benefits of eParticipation, but most are derived from assumptions about *reduced transaction and coordination costs*, with the potential to broaden access or increase response rates, the potentially *greater deliberativeness of the medium*, with implications for the quality of participation, and the *enhanced information-processing capacity of the technology*. Many of these benefits appear self-evident to practitioners and authorities. Moreover, the private sector’s growing deployment of social networking tools both in customer relations and within organisations (e.g. to enable teamwork and mutual learning) would appear to validate their utility (Mayo & Steinberg 2007). Yet the evidence base is poor (Coleman, Macintosh and Schneeberger 2008). In fact evidence is lacking on the benefits of public participation per se –surprisingly, in view of the long history of using participative methods in spheres like housing, health and the environment. In relation to community engagement, Rogers & Robinson reported to the British Government: “there are real difficulties in establishing reliable measures” (Rogers & Robinson 2004: 51); and in relation to public participation in policy-making, Involve concluded: “actual cost-benefit analyses of participation are, as far as we have been able to discern, virtually non-existent” (Involve 2005: 61). The latter report adds, however, that in the authors’ opinion benefits are usually *underestimated*, being too intangible, too long-term, and too affected by confounding variables to be captured by standard project evaluation methods. It will be argued here that there is also often a failure to properly contextualise the benefits of (e)Participation with reference to democratic norms associated with the governance regimes which participation activities are expected to co-exist with or indeed to co-shape.

3 Analytical distinctions

The Involve report cited above makes two distinctions between types of benefit of public participation which are useful for analytical purposes:

Instrumental – transformative (intrinsic)

Public goods and values – private goods and values

The first distinction refers to whether the participation process is a means or an end. In other words instrumental benefits are related to outcomes, whilst transformative or intrinsic benefits are process-related. Involve used the word transformative to imply that participants themselves can benefit as a participation process transforms people or organisations. Here we prefer the more neutral term intrinsic because we wish to denote types of benefits that are *intrinsic to the participation process*, whether as an explicit goal or a by-product. They will normally be about *learning* – whether through individual reflection or social learning – but need not necessarily be transformative.

The second distinction is crucial when thinking about *who* benefits: public goods (like better policies or stronger communities) potentially spread the benefits much wider than private goods which only accrue to direct participants (like skills, information, status and income, or benefits in health and wellbeing that are contingent on individual

behaviour change). Secondary beneficiaries of participation that produces public goods could be individuals, groups and communities advocated for, or ‘society’ as a whole, for example as a result of changes in social capital or better policies. In this respect, there can of course be ‘victims’ of participation insofar as participatory policy-making has redistributive effects that produce benefits for some groups and disbenefits for others, or changes the social climate of a place in ways that improve the quality of life for some groups but complicate the lives of others. Many (though not all) of the intrinsic benefits will tend to be private goods, whereas instrumental benefits will often tend to be expressed in terms of public goods and values. The former tend to be better identified in many project evaluations than the latter.

A third important analytical distinction is between the benefits of living in an environment where participation is ‘the norm’ and benefits that are attributable to specific interventions or participation activities. At a macro-level there are some meta-studies that show real benefits of living in participative political cultures, even controlling for demographics (e.g. Frey & Stutzer 2004). These include better health, happiness and quality of life, economic and bureaucratic efficiency, and even higher property prices. Evaluators have been less successful in attributing any such benefits to individual projects: applying a ‘system boundary’ approach as proposed by Fagan et al (2006) would be a useful first step in differentiating long-term and short-term benefits.

4 Participation in different modes of governance

Participation plays a greater or lesser role under different modes of governance. Prevailing governance arrangements therefore partially determine the societal need for participation. In some circumstances it is conceivable that a non-participative process is socially accepted as legitimate, adequate and effective, in which case, some have argued, participation activities become ‘low-benefit’ and possibly ‘high-cost’ interventions (Irvin & Stansbury 2004). Although this argument has some merit, it prioritises the instrumental over the intrinsic benefits of participation and by restricting attention to distinct processes (interactions) it fails to consider the possible long-term benefits of establishing a more participative political culture. Both intrinsic and ‘cultural’ benefits of participation cannot, by definition, be achieved through a non-participative decision-making process, and to some extent they will be unpredictable in advance. The need for participation is actively and dynamically constructed throughout the process, via, for example, message framing in other media, scenario planning, information provision, outreach or awareness raising. Referring to figure 1 of our analytical framework (Smith, Macintosh & Millard 2008: 5), the key benefits of an eParticipation project at the base, middle and top levels of the model will therefore differ because the intervention logics re-define social and individual needs in relation to eParticipation dynamically.

Nevertheless there is a point worth taking from Irvin & Stanbury’s approach, which is that social conditions and political culture, as well as legal and economic systems, set limits that make participation activities more or less difficult to start and maintain, and which may also have implications for the viability of particular participation methods and approaches, including particular eParticipation tools. This section explores these crucial contextual factors using the concept of governance.

Today there is a feeling that we may require new forms of governance commensurate with globalisation and the advent of an 'information society' and increased participation is seen as one part of a necessary response to the limitations on the state's capacity to 'direct' society and 'redistribute' resources to the same extent that was the norm in the 20th century (in both 'halves' of Europe). 21st century states are attempting instead to 'enable' society to regulate itself and to 'coordinate' a new division of labour between partners from all three sectors in order to achieve collective goals and create public goods and values. They arguably find themselves confronting more complex issues and risks requiring exploratory solutions (in an age of unclear rules, unintended consequences and uncertain pay-offs). This was a factor in the adoption of a collaborative, cognitive mode of decision-making in the European Council in preference to bargaining (Lord 2004: 107). Complexity has also led political authorities to seek more public involvement either as a means of risk-sharing or a means of harnessing creative thinking from as many sources as possible. For example, the interim report to the British government on the BSE crisis recommended using participation activities such as citizens' juries and consensus conferences to formulate a policy response to this kind of public health issue (HM Government 2001, cited in Frewer, Rowe, Marsh & Reynolds 2001). In this sense, leaving aside the question of whether there is more or less pressure from society for participation opportunities, there certainly is demand for participation from the state.

In some policy spheres, notably health and education, allocation decisions have effectively been devolved to service users and some formal or informal intermediaries/gatekeepers, such that the framework for service provision is determined by a quasi-market situation, by-passing traditional democratic processes of service design and planning (Josefsson & Ranerup 2003: 178). This represents one common approach to contemporary governance dilemmas, and is in a sense a form of participation, even if people exercising choices (for example between social service providers from different sectors) may be unaware that they are indirectly shaping service planning and providing an input to government policy.

This example demonstrates one of various approaches to reforming the state to meet the challenges of the 'information society', which reflect different political philosophies, theories and visions (in this case a decentralised free-market philosophy). What we expect participative processes, including eParticipation, to deliver depends on how the new challenges are perceived by particular actors in particular contexts. Whereas some of the *intrinsic* benefits of eParticipation for participants (the skills and experiences acquired during the participation *process*) might be treated as largely independent of their governance context, the *instrumental* benefits of eParticipation have to be considered in relation to these contexts. Without being able to specify the type of governance regime one is operating in – or actively constructing, through the eParticipation process itself as well as in other ways – it is impossible to evaluate the preconditions, rationale, objectives and benefits, or even to identify all the relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries of eParticipation. Contextualisation is necessary both to establish the normative preliminaries for empirical research or project evaluation, and because socio-technical phenomena are fundamentally embedding processes in the sense that the 'fit' with an environment affects how appropriation occurs, and that successful interventions are those which manage to 'embed' a process into users' and

governments' technical, economic, legal, organisational, political and cultural environments (Kubicek, Lippa & Westholm (eds.) 2007: 54-6).

5 Characterising governance trends at different spatial scales in Europe

In most European nation-states, notwithstanding proclamations about new styles of governance², regimes preserve the essential elements of representative parliamentary democracies as they evolved in a European context during the 19th and 20th centuries. This is essentially a hierarchical mode of governance. But at a local level and at a supra-national level, responses to the challenges of the information society have more often combined elements from market-based and network modes of governance as well. Appendix 1 and Table 1 contain a detailed description of the key elements of these three archetypal governance modes and of the implications for participation and eParticipation. Here we draw on those theoretical perspectives in characterising governance trends at local, national and European scales within the EU.

At the local scale, Lyons (2007) has argued that local government has assumed a more strategic function which he calls 'place-shaping'. This role entails a change in perspective when it comes to the key outcomes for public authorities, away from 'core business' goals (traditionally revolving around service provision) towards high-level and cross-cutting goals such as well-being, community cohesion and sustainable development. Achieving best value in relation to such a broad goal as well-being requires as a first step that communities collectively establish what it means in their 'local' context, a step which is difficult if not impossible to take except through participation. Local government decision-making has arguably always been relatively more participative than decision-making at higher scales, especially in countries with decentralised administrative systems and/or small local government units. Under these circumstances, politicians and officers are likely to be more 'in touch' with the public, and the public is likely to be more receptive to offers of participation where it concerns issues that impact immediately on their lives.

What may be changing, however, is that participation is becoming a sheer *necessity* for local government to function – to discern the increasingly variegated preferences and priorities of the communities it serves, and to create scope for 'co-production', since many contemporary 'well-being' outcomes (e.g. sustainable development) rely on a combination of collective choices and individual behaviour. The rising prominence of environmental concerns was a major driver of participative approaches, and especially of deliberative methods, at the local scale. International programmes and agreements such as Local Agenda 21, the WHO Healthy Cities movement, the Aarhus Convention and the Aalborg Charter encouraged local and regional authorities to sign up to principles of participative planning both with respect to urban development and (in the case of LA21 and Healthy Cities) with respect to long-term, wide-ranging strategic planning. 'Environmental democracy' is necessarily participative and deliberative because goals cannot be achieved through regulatory decisions alone, but only through persuading individuals to 'buy into' the vision such that it informs the daily choices they make (Kubicek 2007). Engagement can be one means of building shared commitment,

² In recent years some national governments, including Sweden, Norway and the UK, have conducted major reviews of governance in their countries and proposed new methods for involving citizens in decision-making.

especially at the local scale, often beginning from urban development questions. In some countries these approaches continue to be adopted in piecemeal fashion through voluntary initiatives and best practice guidance, but they have nevertheless spread quite widely. In other countries, however, this change in the role of local government has been mandated through new legislation. For example, UK local authorities are now obliged to produce a 'community plan' or similar document in formal cooperation with other public agencies, as a vehicle for implementing a long-term vision, has placed a strong onus on community participation and involvement. Community participation, according to a report for the UK Home Office, "is at the core of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda" (Rogers & Robinson 2004: 44) and the neighbourhood is typically seen as the ideal unit for participation from this standpoint. The newly-revised outcomes framework for Local Area Agreements in England and Wales includes community empowerment as an outcome on which local authorities will be scored, as measured by indicators on perceived influence on decision-making, perceived community cohesion and levels of volunteering. Local government therefore has a strong incentive to increase the use of participatory techniques. A similar incentivisation towards a strategic leadership role also operates when local and regional authorities engage with the EU, given that regions have been offered enhanced programming responsibilities with respect to the Structural Funds in recent years, and the Commission has increasingly been willing to deal directly with local and regional bodies, through partnership contracts, for example (EC 2001: 12-14, Lord 2004: 111). These contractual arrangements place considerable emphasis on participation and community engagement.

It may be no coincidence, therefore, that eParticipation has made most headway at the local scale. There was a consensus among participants at the first European eParticipation study workshop that "many of the most successful cases [of eParticipation] are at the local level" (Millard 2008: 20). Reports for the OECD and the Government Online International Network back up this impression, and go on to claim that local government is ahead of central government in its attitudes to and use of eDemocracy (OECD 2003, Poland 2001). The OECD thus advocates that "national governments should take advantage of innovations being introduced at the local level" (2003: 6). That, however, can be problematic because it means transferring activities from one governance context to another, where the type and level of participation 'required' may differ. At the local scale, for example, the most commonly used eParticipation tools currently are discussion forums and e-consultation tools (Peart & Diaz 2007). However, there are considerable variations between cultural contexts, with 'deliberation' tools, notably forums, much more common in Europe than in the USA and 'transparency' tools – such as webcasting, podcasting and Web2.0 tools like RSS feeds and video sharing – more frequent among US local and state authorities (ibid.). The authors suggested that this reflects the stronger representational bent to American political culture: thus the most dynamic developments in eDemocracy in the USA have been in tools designed to enable the public to hold their representatives to account; in Europe, they imply, political culture tends to be somewhat more participative, and deliberative tools are correspondingly more common. In addition, the rhythm of eParticipation was found to differ, with the USA showing a large peak in citizen activity at campaign times, whereas European eParticipation seemed to be more ongoing. Similarly, differences in the legal environment, this time between different European countries, are invoked to explain the differing take-up of eVoting (Peart & Diaz 2007: 63-4). If context is such an important factor in the differing instantiations of

eParticipation at the *local* scale, we can assume that different (or at any rate differently configured) tools would have very different relevance or appeal as we jump scales³.

The case for participation itself (at least as an enhancement to decision-making) is arguably weakest at the national scale, since representative democracy predominates. To the extent that deliberation is focused on representative chambers and traditional forms of intermediation are deemed adequate for knowledge-gathering or public value definition, then participation becomes a 'low-benefit' and 'high-cost' intervention for public authorities. The main case for eParticipation is then to improve the efficiency of intermediation (better knowledge-gathering and information-processing). Although representative democracy faces legitimation problems in most nation-states, it is most strongly locked in, and many national parliamentarians are more conscious of the potential threats posed by eParticipation (the threat of the automation of the political system and the threat to the pivotal role of 'reasonable deliberators' in representative democracy) than its benefits. In some cases they have actively opposed eDemocracy (Mahrer & Krimmer 2005). Viewed from the ground up, many of the benefits cited in the first section might still be relevant, but they will probably centre on the relationships between citizens and representatives, since this constitutes such a powerful and ingrained channel for processing demands and other forms of input from civil society. For instance, the national equivalent of a community plan is a government programme, yet there is probably no country in the world where government programmes are produced through community planning methods. Instead they are the product of electoral competition between political parties (which may involve different forms and degrees of public consultation, including deliberation, but this is essentially internal to each political party), post-electoral bargaining between successful parties (assuming no one party can govern alone) and formal parliamentary debate. Thus the scope for citizen and civil society input is narrowed and formalised around some well-established channels of influence. Correspondingly, a variety of electronic tools have been developed in recent years to help citizens lobby their representatives more effectively and in a coordinated way, or to enliven the internal democratic life of political parties. Use of basic personal communication tools for similar purposes, especially email, has also expanded.

At the European scale, the institutional design of governance within the EU has always in fact been a form of cooperation between levels, one of co-governance by coalitions of partners from different sectors, with less clear lines of accountability than in (national) representative democratic systems. It has been argued that there has been a movement towards 'metagovernance' at the European scale – "a combination of 'super-vision' and 'supervision', that is, a relative monopoly of organized intelligence and overall monitoring of adherence to benchmarks" supported by multi-level consultation arrangements involving "a widening range of economic, social and political forces" (Jessop 2004: 71-2). Consent is reached through institutions that work on a consensus principle, not through aggregation (Lord 2004), which implies only a limited applicability for types of participation associated with a market-based mode of governance. The forms of participation associated with a hierarchical mode also has

³ The comparisons between local authorities should alert us, however, to the dangers of generalising about common trends at any given scale, such as the national. Consideration of the national scale in the following paragraph is thus only illustrative. In the following extended consideration of the European scale of action the danger of generalisation is not present as Europe is a singular entity.

limited applicability to EU institutions for a number of reasons: power is dispersed rather than hierarchical; citizenship is mediated through different implementation regimes and accountability arrangements in different member states (increasingly so with the Open Method of Coordination); and the established forms of mediation between political system and society (political parties, the mass media) are less focused on a European than a national agenda. The obvious exception, among EU institutions, is the European Parliament, but even here, Shahin and Neuhold found, use of ICT to facilitate direct communication between representatives and represented (whether individual citizens or group interests) is very limited for purposes of knowledge-gathering (2007), certainly moreso than in the UK national parliament (Ferguson 2008). This may reflect the greater peripherality of the European Parliament to the legislative process (unable to propose legislation, etc.), so despite the “increasing pressure” on MEPs to become policy experts, they tend not to see their (electronic) contacts with outside interests as a means of achieving this (Shahid & Neuhold 2007). To understand why, we would suggest, it is necessary to appreciate the different positions of national and European parliaments in the respective governance arrangements. At the European scale, accountability arrangements in particular do not incentivise the development of forms of participation associated with hierarchical modes of governance to the same extent as at the national scale.

On the other hand, the weakness of an electoral mandate, or other formal representative accountability mechanisms, can be an opportunity to build legitimacy on a different basis, including through forging more direct links between a ‘listening’ Commission and citizens or their formal and informal advocates. Prior to the most recent round of reforms to EU institutions, Lord observed that “the term ‘democratic deficit’ often masks an unjustified presupposition that the EU should follow similar democratic practices to those found in national arenas.... [when in fact] a legitimate and democratic Union may involve innovations for which there are no precedents in national experiences of democratic politics.” (2000: 21) In fact, as early as 1997 the Forward Studies Unit recommended that the EU adopt what could be called an ‘enabling state’ model, coordinating the ‘self-regulation’ of societal actors (Lebessis & Paterson 1997), although there have also been voices calling for elements of direct democracy, at least as a ‘safety valve’ so that key policies could be challenged and reversed by direct popular initiative (Lord 2000). The White Paper on European Governance (EC 2001) largely endorsed these proposals, calling for partnership models of governance and introducing the Open Method of Coordination. A general aspiration was expressed that the EU needs to find ways of ‘reaching out to citizens’, and four main channels were highlighted: local and regional government, civil society organisations, connecting with looser citizens’ networks (the annual Car Free Day campaign was given as an example), and finally the EUROPA website, “set to evolve into an inter-active platform for information, feedback and debate, linking to parallel networks across the Union.” (EC 2001: 11) Following the rejection of the proposed European Constitution, more concerted efforts were made to foster a deliberative participatory democracy, initially through a series of decentralised events but subsequently also through the promotion of the European Public Sphere idea, including ambitious plans for the EUROPA web portal (see Dalakiouridou, Tambouris & Tarabanis 2008 for a fuller account).

One of the most notable features of governance within the EU has been what amounts to the chartering by EU institutions of peak level interest organisations, and the role they

have assumed in legitimising EU policy making within a system of 'bargaining democracy' and dispersed power. This nurtured an intensive, if not very extensive form of participative policy-making. According to Greenwood:

The EU is built upon pluralist foundations of checks and balances, with institutional designs to empower interest groups as guardian of the public interest by checking the power of public institutions ... and upon each other, with very deliberate attempts by the Commission to nurture the landscape and power of citizen interest groups... [T]hese are supported by funding and by policy initiatives such as open access and transparency to enable actors to observe the actions of each other. There is a tradition which sees them as potential agents of deliberation ... It is, however, much more difficult to make a case for the role of organized civil society interests in fostering mass democracy given the highly institutionalized basis of EU policy making, which incentivizes elite bargaining, and the difficulties of mobilizing disparate and disengaged stakeholders. (2007: 341)

One could object that these arrangements actually had corporatist rather than pluralist foundations (for example, the tripartite Economic and Social Council was for a long time the Commission's principal means of consulting social interests), which may have evolved in time to admit a wider range of stakeholders. At any rate, such sectoral arrangements were appropriate to the preponderance of regulatory over redistributive policy-making, where specific interests rather than society as a whole are frequently the key stakeholders (affected parties). More recently a case can be made that "the main axis of interest representation in EU policy-making has gravitated towards a system of network governance" (Lord 2004: 112) with room for self-organised policy networks to become established alongside those which are explicitly chartered from above⁴. Nevertheless, organised groups still dominate, though even their role has become wider and more flexible. Greenwood cites numerous examples of how "organized civil society has become the natural constituency of the European Commission" (2007: 343), playing the multiple roles of supplier of expert knowledge, unofficial opposition in a consensus-based political system, agent of popular legitimacy and source of demands for more participation.

The system of interest representation within EU decision-making has often been criticised for cultivating an 'NGO elite' operating effectively as a partner of EU institutions but cut off (at least the Brussels-based officials) from their mass memberships and constituencies (e.g. Warleigh 2001). Democratising such a network mode of governance is essentially a matter of making sure network architecture is as open as possible, and here there is obvious potential for use of electronic tools to support networking processes. The Interactive Policy-Making tool, for example, launched in 2001, could be seen as a corrective to corporatist tendencies since it combined disintermediating and re-intermediating components which ought to be more

⁴ Former Commission President Romano Prodi heralded a switch from hierarchies to networks as a model for the operation of the EU in a speech to the European Parliament in 2000, albeit referring only to governments cooperating: "I believe we have to stop thinking in terms of hierarchical layers of competence separated by the subsidiarity principle and start thinking, instead, of a networking arrangement, with all levels of governance shaping, proposing, implementing and monitoring policy together." Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/news/2000/02_00/speech_00_41.htm (accessed 12/6/08)

open to unorganised interests.⁵ What is important to note is that the need for such an instrument was explicitly derived from a changing governance context applicable to EU institutions⁶, which had begun to lay great stress on the importance of impact assessment and evaluation of Commission policies and programmes. The underlying principle was that high-quality, electronically-enabled interaction between citizens and enterprises on the one hand, and the Commission on the other, including the facility for the former to give spontaneous feedback on issues affecting them, would lead to benefits such as better responsiveness to stakeholder demand, improved efficiency in analysing and sorting relevant data, better predictive knowledge about the likely impacts of policies, and more inclusive policy-making (TEEC 2005). One of the outstanding difficulties when trying to open governance processes is identifying, addressing and mobilising some of the stakeholders who need to participate in the more complex division of labour of a network mode of governance, but may not themselves realise that they ‘need’ to do so. In other words, the means by which the European Commission (or any other agent) can animate the necessary network(s) of actors, as called for by the Forward Studies Unit a decade ago (Lebessis & Paterson 1997: 28), are still less than clear.

There are, furthermore, elements of the socio-political landscape of Europe which complicate the operation of a network mode of governance and associated forms of participation. The weakness or fragmentation of a European public sphere is often seen as a factor inhibiting deliberation (Eriksen 2007): the national focus of most media channels suggests that “deliberation may be too fragmented to be aggregated into a single public space at Union level” (Lord 2004: 21). A second barrier is language. Attempting to operate with 23 official languages, EU institutions are not ideal forums for developing deliberative democracy, given that this imposes the highest standards in terms of mutual comprehensibility and coherent argumentation. Few Europe-wide political or civil society organisations’ websites, for example, use more than one or two languages⁷. In fact, as Rose demonstrates (2008), English has emerged as a lingua franca both from above (within EU institutions) and from below over recent decades. Knowledge of English as a foreign language also correlates well with Internet use, and since Rose regards these as the two main preconditions for participation in a European public space, he deduces that between a third and two-fifths of the EU population is capable of doing so. Electronic channels may help overcome language barriers, through translation facilities or non-verbal communication for example, or they may contribute indirectly to the dominance of English in the European public sphere. Nevertheless the linguistic diversity of Europe constitutes an institutional barrier to certain types of eParticipation and this places limits on the benefits which can be expected.

Given the problems caused by language and the fragmentation of the European public sphere, it may be important to support not only participation in the policy networks of ‘strong publics’ (Eriksen 2007) which are crucial to decision-making in the EU, but also to support communication and deliberation within cultural or linguistic enclaves, in line

⁵ Some applications, notably the Feedback Mechanism, positioned institutions such as European Information Centres in a crucial data-gathering and data-processing role, which the mid-term evaluation report saw as a failure to utilise the capacity and ubiquity of the Internet to create direct linkages with stakeholders (TEEC 2005: 12).

⁶ The IPM is explicitly mentioned in the White Paper on European Governance.

⁷ For example, PES uses English and French. The civil society organisation Attac is one of the best, supporting English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch.

with the consociational model which Lijphart has applied to the EU (Lijphart 2008: 156-8). eParticipation tools that facilitated this would be a promising way of broadening participation because enclave deliberation tends to include more non-traditional participants (Sunstein 2002). Moreover, eParticipation is demonstrably good at facilitating 'enclave deliberation' (discussion among like-minded individuals) on a broad geographical scale, which is usually interpreted as an anti-deliberative feature of the Internet (Wilhelm 2000: 13) but can be a positive for democracy under some conditions. Given that much public debate on Europe is inevitably filtered through national media and framed with reference to 'national interests', whereas there are well-founded doubts about the level of public interest in affairs which are constructed as 'European' (Millard 2008: 17), it is important to consider ways of improving the quality of national (enclave) deliberation on Europe, rather than seeking only to transcend national power containers.

6 Conclusion

The importance of theorising how the structure of governance is evolving at the European scale is that it affects how we conceptualise the potential benefits of participation, since many of these are value-laden and can best be understood in terms of how they change, stabilise or improve the functionality of *a certain mode* of governance. Thus if we can say what combination of the market-based, hierarchical and network modes gives the best approximation of how governance is, or 'ought to be' evolving in the face of current social and political challenges, then we can more readily identify the benefits that are most relevant to that *normative governance project*. We need to be able to answer the question: 'What is (e)participation being asked to do (either from above or from below) in this particular historical and geographical situation?'

The suggestion here is that the network mode of governance provides a good approximation for how European democracy functions at the present moment, in which participation is essentially being asked to help construct consensus on individual policy issues between a range of actors and interests organised into policy networks. Europeans are also participating in oppositional public sphere segments which constitute a vital cultural substrate of democracy at a European scale, including networks extending beyond the bounds of the EU. Tools that would render the 'strong publics' of policy networks more open and accessible, including those that can identify hitherto marginalised stakeholders (countering the legitimacy problems of a network mode of governance), and tools that would protect oppositional or subaltern public enclaves (allowing alternative discourses to surface and flourish) would be of greatest value. This might point towards e-methods such as discussion forums, blogs, deliberative polling and citizens' juries, as well as web monitoring tools, as potentially beneficial. However there are also elements of market-based and hierarchical modes of governance operating at a European scale, and a corresponding need for different types of participation: in the first case, to mobilise and aggregate a more spontaneous opposition among the *diffuse* general public beyond Brussels-centric policy networks; in the second, to strengthen electoral accountability, which is weaker in the EU's one formal representative body, the European Parliament, than in most national parliaments, and arguably needs to be strengthened in parallel with the expanding competences of the European Parliament. Again there may be certain types of e-methods which would

be most likely to deliver these normatively-established benefits, and thereby improve both the functionality and legitimacy of European governance arrangements: e-voting, e-polling, e-surveys and e-panels, perhaps, in relation to market-based governance; or e-petitions, webcasting and basic personal communication tools like email in relation to hierarchical governance. We propose to explore these hypotheses further, both conceptually and taking into account the empirical evidence of our case-gathering and case-analysing activities, in subsequent versions of this deliverable.

7 Appendix 1

For present purposes, we can contrast three scenarios, modelled on archetypal modes of governance – hierarchies, markets and networks (see table 1).

Scenario A assumes a change in the mode of governance to a quasi-market mode, in which political leadership becomes more strategic and there is more scope for self-government of a plebiscitary type (e.g. referenda and voting). Public value is established in society through quasi-market mechanisms by aggregating demand (counting votes) or by co-production (allowing citizens, as consumers, to ‘vote with their feet’ or their personal budgets). There is little scope for deliberation or intermediation because interests are seen as fixed (but citizens can become more enlightened, more conscious of their own interests, through discussion). A generalised public sphere is empowered in decision-making at the expense of representative bodies / chambers ('governance without government' (Bovaird 2005: 226)), but representative mechanisms that aggregate interests are also used⁸. eParticipation could enable widely diffused participative decision-making, implying use of aggregative tools but also tools that empower service users as customers, who thereby participate indirectly in service planning, through the mediation of quasi-markets.

Scenario B assumes little change in mode of governance from the hierarchical mode typical of 20th century democracies, but to adapt to the information society governments need increasingly more accurate and timely knowledge of public concerns. Public value is established through the intermediation of political parties and organised interests and by deliberation in formal representative arenas. Empowerment of the general public sphere may be viewed as potentially dangerous, and decision-making power is retained by state. eParticipation could deliver allocative efficiencies through better knowledge-gathering and information-processing, implying predominantly vertical communication. Often, however, it is construed as a threat: automation, majoritarianism, push-button democracy. Representation systems generally assign representatives considerable leeway to exercise judgment as ‘reasonable deliberators’ (i.e. to treat their manifesto pledges as a script to be developed creatively in the context of the parliamentary process).

Scenario C assumes a change in mode of governance to a network mode in which political leadership becomes more strategic (metagovernance) and many governance functions are distributed within networks. Public value is established in society by deliberation and collective learning, diffused from representative chambers to ‘deliberatively more demanding’ segments of the public sphere which might function as strong publics (Eriksen 2007), policy networks (Lord 2004), project teams, communities of critical reflection or insulated subaltern enclaves. Multiple segments of the public sphere are thus empowered: at the agenda-setting phase through persistent catalytic learning and identity-forming processes initiated in enclaves; and sometimes at the decision-making phase when “deliberation substitutes, so to speak, for government” in committees and policy networks (Eriksen 2007: 39). New forms of intermediation

⁸ Cognitive capabilities presupposed by aggregative as well as deliberative models of democracy are “immensely burdensome” in their pure form, which is one reason why they are normally met through mechanisms of intermediation (Lord 2004: 72). In practice, therefore, the 'politics of presence' which a perfect direct democracy would institute often becomes a 'politics of representativeness' under Scenario A.

emerge, raising questions about the nature of representation and accountability: deliberation presumes discursive autonomy with few if any limits, and therefore weakens the ties between representatives and the groups they represent. If, however, non-participants are also to benefit, the connection cannot be severed, and Phillips therefore suggests that accountability should be conceived as a basis on which to authorise deliberators to speak from shared experience and tacit knowledge of their constituency. She also adds that, as deliberative processes are both educational and corrupting (dislodging individual and group interest from their determining position on political behaviour), it is always healthy for the deliberative assembly to have a certain proportion of ‘unreconstructed’ deliberators present. (Phillips 1995). A related problem is that consciousness of the public gaze, or of official surveillance, is not necessarily conducive to deliberative democracy. Habermas described how an apolitical literary public sphere was an important precursor of the modern political public sphere: in the seclusion of salons and coffee houses 18th century bourgeois public opinion could “problemat[ise] ... areas [of life] that until then had not been questioned” (1989: 36). In this sphere (which Habermas initially includes in the realm of private life (ibid.: 30)) discourses could develop without immediately threatening relations of domination and could therefore institute a form of social equality in which rational argumentation prevailed over status differentials. Democratic arenas require upkeep and surveillance by public authorities to protect their trustworthiness (Coleman 2003: 153) and yet deliberation often thrives in forums that are situated at a critical distance from the centres of power, in contrast to Scenario A, where citizens partake in decision-making directly (with immediate consequence, and without space for critical reflection). eParticipation could contribute to resolving these difficulties: it could render strong publics more open and accessible, countering their democratic legitimacy problems; and preserve oppositional or alternative segments of the public sphere as the fertile cultural substrate for democratic politics, for example through making available ephemeral spaces where citizens can practice what Habermas calls publicity or what Foucault calls criticism (problematizing unconsidered modes of thought)⁹. ICT can obviously improve network connectivity, but eParticipation is also demonstrably good at facilitating 'enclave deliberation' (discussion among like-minded individuals) on a broad geographical scale, which is usually interpreted as an anti-deliberative feature of the Internet (Wilhelm 2000: 13) but can be a positive for democracy under some conditions.

8 Table 1

	<i>Scenario A</i>	<i>Scenario B</i>	<i>Scenario C</i>
<i>Type of governance</i>	Market	Hierarchy	Network
<i>Locus of decision-making</i>	General public sphere	Parliamentary arenas as strong publics (general public sphere oppositional)	Network of public sphere segments where deliberation substitutes for government
<i>Rationale for participation</i>	More self-government by exercising direct	Allocative efficiencies, knowledge-gathering	Co-production of public values, collective

⁹ See Morison & Newman 2001, Strosser-Galley 2002 and Clift 2004 for discussion of the impact of different hosting arrangements on the quality of online political discussion.

	<i>Scenario A</i>	<i>Scenario B</i>	<i>Scenario C</i>
	choices via quasi-market institutions	(consensus not a goal)	learning, consensus, state metagovernance
<i>What is eP being asked to do?</i>	Diffuse decision-making to sovereign individuals. Disintermediation and information-filtering potentials key.	Enable stronger vertical deliberation (representatives use eP to pick up concerns and background knowledge). Information-processing potential key.	Diffuse deliberation to new arenas for surfacing issues, consensus-building and problem-solving. Community-building and deliberation-supporting potentials key.
<i>Effects on intermediation</i>	Disintermediation (but information intermediaries can reduce info. costs)	Re-intermediation (preference intermediaries and information intermediaries)	Disintermediation (rediscovery of possibility of unmediated publicity) and re-intermediation (interaction intermediaries)
<i>Who participates?</i>	Each citizen in own name, aggregated to public opinion	Representatives of social interests, citizens as respondents	Emerging communities – project teams, strong publics, policy networks
<i>Primary beneficiaries*</i>	Citizens (have interests represented, capacity to act as consumers)	Decision-makers (better access to localised knowledge)	Communities where participation occurs
<i>Secondary beneficiaries*</i>	Instrumental benefits spread to those with identical interests (non-participants identify with participants)	Instrumental benefits spread if representation effective	Instrumental and intrinsic benefits spread from strong to general publics if public sphere segments connected
<i>Relationship between representatives and represented</i>	Politics of presence (meaning in practice representativeness)	Politics of representation (advocacy for group interests/identities)	Politics of presence (tension between advocacy and community-building)
<i>Numbers required</i>	As many as possible!	Enough to ensure good local knowledge. Too many can complicate decision-making	Emphasis on new relationships, their sustainability and organisational memory
<i>Test for social inclusion effects / participative equality</i>	Inclusive or exclusive sample	Included or excluded constituencies and social interests	Inclusionary or exclusionary politics: key tests are treatment of diversity and surfacing new issues

	<i>Scenario A</i>	<i>Scenario B</i>	<i>Scenario C</i>
<i>Linguistic barriers</i>	Low (easy to employ multi-language format for eVoting)	Medium (representative elite must be fluent in lingua franca, citizens less so)	High (communication in EPS requires fluency in lingua franca)
<i>Type of issues</i>	Issues with clearly delimited user groups or stakeholders and few externalities (e.g. tenant ballots)	Collective consumption issues requiring allocation decisions between groups or redistribution of power and resources to ensure social cohesion	Cross-cutting interdependent issues (e.g. environment, infrastructure) conceived as projects requiring collaborative or innovative solutions
<i>eP tools with greatest potential benefits</i>	eVoting, ePolling, ePanels, eSurveys, customer empowerment tools	ePetitions, email, webcasting, eSurveys, ePanels, chat (Q&A)	Forums, blogs, virtual communities, eDeliberative polls, eCitizens' juries, chat, web monitoring tools

* In considering beneficiaries of eParticipation, the focus is on instrumental or outcome-related benefits. Intrinsic or process-related benefits by definition restricted to those who actually take part.

9 References

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10 Study deliverables, status and availability

Highlighted deliverables are completed and available on our website, where applicable and not for internal use.

Deliverable number	Deliverable title	Projected availability
D 7.1	Study Management Plan (internal use)	Jan 08
D 3.1a	First Workshop material (internal use)	Mar 08
D 6.1	Project web-site: www.european-eparticipation.eu	Mar 08
D 6.2	Publicity material (internal use)	Mar 08
D 1.1a	Major factors shaping the development of eParticipation – First version	May 08
D 1.2a	Key actors in the EU in the field of eParticipation – First version	May 08
D 1.3a	Main benefits of the eParticipation developments in the EU – First version	May 08
D 1.4a	Mapping the state of play in eParticipation in the EU – First version	May 08
D 3.1b	First post-workshop report	May 08
D 4.1a	Framework for eParticipation good practice – first version	May 08
D 5.1a.	eParticipation Recommendations – first version	May 08
D 6.3a	First newsletter	May 08
D 7.2	Study Management Plan Update	Jun 08
D 7.3	First Technical Report	Jun 08
D 4.2a	eParticipation good practice cases – first version	Jun 08
D 3.2a	Second Workshop material	Sep 08
D 3.2b	Second post-workshop report	Oct 08
D 5.1b	eParticipation Recommendations – second version	Oct 08
D 6.3b	Second newsletter	Oct 08
D 1.1b	Major factors shaping the development of eParticipation – Second version	Oct 08
D 1.2b	Key actors in the EU in the field of eParticipation – Second version	Oct 08
D 1.3b	Main benefits of the eParticipation developments in the EU – Second version	Oct 08
D 1.4b	Mapping the state of play in eParticipation in the EU – Second version	Oct 08
D 4.1b	Framework for eParticipation good practice – final version	Oct 08
D 4.2b	eParticipation good practice cases – second version	Oct 08
D 3.3a	Third Workshop material	Nov 08
D 3.3b	Third post-workshop report	Nov 08
D 5.1c	eParticipation Recommendations – third version	Dec 08
D 7.4	Second Technical Report	Dec 08
D 3.4a	Fourth Workshop material	Feb 09
D 3.4b	Fourth post-workshop report	Feb 09
D 5.1d	eParticipation Recommendations – fourth version	Feb 09
D 1.1c	Major factors shaping the development of eParticipation – Final version	Mar 09
D 1.2c	Key actors in the EU in the field of eParticipation – Final version	Mar 09
D 1.3c	Main benefits of the eParticipation developments in the EU – Final version	Mar 09
D 1.4c	Mapping the state of play in eParticipation in the EU – Final version	Mar 09
D 4.2c	eParticipation good practice cases and diffusion – final version	Mar 09
D 5.1e.	eParticipation Recommendations – final version	Mar 09
D 6.3c	Third newsletter	Mar 09
D 6.4	Report summarising online discussion	Mar 09
D 6.5	Final report on dissemination activities	Mar 09
D 7.5	Final Report	Mar 09