Towards an e-Participation Engine: Where People Take Place

Abstract
The usage of ICT to support the government’s activities, allows the state to develop **new ways of interacting** with the citizens, permitting a new public commitment called **e-participation**. This communication aims at pondering upon this new model of civic involvement and its contribution to improve the processes and the democratic structures, highlighting its **potential to improve the quality of democracy** itself.

Jorge Constantino
jorge.constantino@esg.ipsantarem.pt
Escola Superior de Gestão
Instituto Politécnico de Santarém

Luis Borges Gouveia
lmbg@ufp.pt
Faculdade de Ciência e Tecnologia
Universidade Fernando Pessoa

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1. Introduction
2. Active citizenship
3. Restraints to an active citizenship
4. The globalization of participation
5. Conclusions

*My village is the world. The whole world belongs to me. Here I meet and I mix with people from everywhere to the large world belonging.*
1. INTRODUCTION

Changes are not merely technological

- New social and economic structures
- Emerging governing procedures

Emerging governing procedures

- More efficiency and effectiveness in the various State and AP levels
- Less bureaucratic public services, centred on the citizens

We hope

e-government
The central and local public administration on-line
(mediated by electronic tools)
1. INTRODUCTION

**Participation**
Taking part in **joint activities**, for the purpose of **reaching a common goal**.

- Trivial: “**doing things together**”
- Management + Political Science: Evolves too **participation in decisions**

**E - Participation**
The field in which the **e-gov** intervenes, aiming at promoting a citizens’ **active, inclusive and conscious** decision-making process.

2. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

**Feeling of belonging to a community and participating in its life**

- Cultural participation (recreational associations, ...)
- Community service (volunteer work, ...)
- Political participation (voting, ...)

**Reflects**
The society’s commitment to **building, applying and controlling** public policies, which means **influencing**, by any possible initiatives, those policies.
2. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

An investment in a better way of doing politics:
- allowing to explore new sources of ideas;
- increase the citizens' trust in the public administration;
- promote the quality of democracy;
- enhance the civic abilities;

Is part of good governance (OECD)

The enforcement of the relationship with citizens

More and more demanding levels of active participation.

1. Information available to the citizens
2. Surveying the citizens about definite aspects of governance
3. Active participation
   - promoting the citizens in the decision-making process
   - informing the citizens
   - enhancing the quality of democracy
   - enhancing the civic abilities

Interaction's groups

3. RERAINTS TO AN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Realistic perspective

Evaluate the participation
- dimension
- diversity and quality
- social representation
- stimuli to promote
- promote the trust of the citizens in their institutions

Portuguese case

Low rate of active citizenship
- The economic, social and cultural rights
- Political power organisation

Idealistic perspective

Active Citizenship contributes
- to define better informed public policies
- to promote transparency and responsibility within the administrations
- to promote the trust of the citizens in their institutions

Political participation (voting, ...)

3. RESTRAINTS TO AN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Low rates of active citizenship

- collective lack of participation habits
- personal difficulties felt by the citizens

Critical factor for the success
- To free the citizens and the society from these constraints -

- Facilitate the access to the participation sites (physical access, flexi time and less time consuming activities);
- Seducing the citizens for that task;
- Highlighting and facilitating the possibility of participation;

4. THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION: The world is not Flat!

- Decline of civic participation in many western democracies: USA, ... (Putnam, 2000)

- Canada seems not to have suffered from the sharp decrease of civic participation (Graham Longford, 2005)

- Holland: people haven’t lost their interest on political issues - they simply changed it... (Poelmans, 2005)

- Portugal: despite the low rates of civic participation that have occurred so far, these tend to rise slightly concerning youngsters (Delicado, 2006)
4. THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE PARTICIPATION

Compromise, within the scope of “Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance”
to work together to broaden the political issues,
so that they may allow an effective participation of all citizens
in all countries.

As more and more...

The feeling of belonging to a given community doesn’t prevent
the feeling of belonging to another one from growing.

Each citizen can play more than one role,
making his task more demanding and more complex.

4. THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE PARTICIPATION

Portuguese case
A dynamic of local strong participation is not still ingrained

Within a framework of greater complexity,
the deficit of participation acquires more visibility

The ideal of participative democracy
may fall apart when facing a global participation.
5. PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

We are living e–time!

-very concept must have an “e” to look good

It is important to understand if and how the ICT are changing the democratic systems ... ... to avoid deceptions that may arise from too many expectations

5. PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

ICT

An important tool to promote civic participation

Expressing opinions

Organising petitions

Complaints

Collective activities

New channels of communication electorate \(\leftrightarrow\) the elected

New possibilities for the citizens to intervene in the decisions

New participation Communities (vitals): based on similar interests and free from geographical constraints, timetables, ...

Blogs

Forums

Chats

Mails

Wikis
5. PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

How the ICT affects the social capital?

- **Transformation**: Solidarities based on local groups pave the way for networks which are geographically scattered and share distinct interests.

- **Supplementary**: Creating new standards of social contact used by people to reach their goals, together with the means they already had at their disposal.

- **Reducing**: The recreational activities attract the attention of people who then stay less available for their community interests.
  
  (Quan-Haase & Wellman)

Impact of new tools

Evolutionary (not revolutionary), it results from an extensive negotiation among several forces: established ↔ emerging, fighting ↔ adhering, ...

5. CONCLUSIONS

- **a. Changes** are not merely technological;

- **b.** Active citizenship is a part of good governance;

- **c.** It is important to free the citizens from restraints to an active citizenship;

- **d.** Each citizen can play more than one role, making his task more demanding and more complex;

- **e.** Impact of ICT is Evolutionary.
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