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Preface

This volume comprises the refereed papers presented at OD2010, the fourth International Conference on Online Deliberation, held in Leeds in June 2010. This is the first time the conference has been held in Europe, after three conferences in the United States:

- the first one, “Developing and Using Online Tools for Deliberative Democracy”, organized at Carnegie Mellon University in 2003; (the conference web site is now linked at <http://web.archive.org/web/20060314061609/http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/style/Seminar.html>)
- the second one on “Online Deliberation: Design, Research, and Practice” was in 2004 at Stanford University, organized by the Symbolic Systems Program, the Center for Deliberative Democracy, the Center for the Study of Language and Information, and the Center for Internet and Society, in association with the Public Sphere Project (a CPSR Initiative); (<http://www.online-deliberation.net/conf2005/>)
- the third one, “Tools for Participation, Collaboration, Deliberation and Decision Support”, hosted in 2008 by the School of Information of University of California at Berkeley, organized by the CPSR Public Sphere Project; (<http://www.publicsphereproject.org/events/diac08/>).

While much progress has been made in online deliberation many challenges remain. These challenges require collaboration and research from a number of academic disciplines. The papers in this volume address the challenges, representing further innovative developments in the field from both social and technological perspectives.

The volume is divided into two sections: full research papers describing completed research and exploratory research papers describing work-in-progress and ongoing research. All papers were peer reviewed. Fifteen research papers are published focusing on topics ranging from argument mapping and argumentation to deliberative governance. Eight exploratory research papers are included which consider issues such as a new agenda for online deliberation and ethnographic exploration of deliberation.

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the organisation of this year’s programme: Stephen Coleman, who co-chaired the conference with the two of us; Giles Moss, who co-chaired the Organising Committee; and Todd Davies and Doug Schuler, previous Conference Chairs. We also acknowledge the valuable contribution of the Programme Committee who provided the authors with feedback on their papers.

Milan and Leeds, December 2010

Fiorella De Cindio, Ann Macintosh, Cristian Peraboni

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Research Papers

Mixed Initiative Argument in Public Deliberation

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Abstract: This paper aims to demonstrate the connection between argument structures, such as those that are created and manipulated by argument mapping tools, and argumentative dialogues, such as those that form a part of online deliberative processes. Our approach is to use recent advances in argument-based knowledge representation, and to tie these to tools we have developed that support argument mapping activities (specifically, the OVA analysis tool), and argument dialogue (specifically, the Arvina dialogue system, which is built on top of Google Wave). We use as our domain a recent contentious debate in Scottish politics which involved both wide-scale deliberative aspects and politically complex decision making. By explicitly representing argument structure we demonstrate how online debate tools can support *mixed initiative argument*, in which there is a level playing field between the points of view espoused autonomously by software, and those put forward by human participants.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that two processes, both common in deliberative domains online, can be supported within a single representational framework. On the one hand, arguments online are created, viewed, presented and analysed using systems such as the diagrammatic, highly analytical approach of argument diagramming tools such as Araucaria (Reed and Rowe, 2004) and Rationale (van Gelder, 2007); the discussion facilitation tools such as Compendium (Shum et al., 2007); and the semantic sense-making tools such as Cohere (Shum, 2008) and Debategraph¹. All these systems have more or less explicit conceptions of arguments and their components which facilitate visualisation, manipulation and transformation by machine. In contrast, arguments are also conducted, engaged in and held online. Tools here are much more thin on the ground, and are typically not designed specifically to support argument and debate, but rather to support communication in general, and are often set against a backdrop of explicitly social environments such as Facebook² or Twitter³. The distinction between these two senses of argument is well known in philosophy (Brockriede, 1974), and each has generated entire academic industries in Artificial Intelligence (see, for example, the work of Dung (Dung, 1995) and its many adherents for models of the first sense of

¹ <http://debategraph.org/>

² <http://www.facebook.com>

³ <http://www.twitter.com>

argument, and, in comparison, see many of the papers appearing at the ArgMAS workshop series (Rahwan) for models of the second sense). Little work has been done, however, in trying to connect computational models of the two senses together. Argument in the sense of debate is crucial for deliberation because it is required to execute and control (at least parts of) the deliberative process. Argument in the sense of structured data is also required for deliberation to allow justifications to be recorded and new information to be introduced. So, to build operational models of deliberation, a formal and engineered connection between the two approaches is inescapable.

We have shown previously that such a connection is possible in principle, and have developed a prototype to support that claim (Reed and Wells, 2007). More recently, we have worked with a maturing standard for argument representation, the Argument Interchange Format or AIF (Chesnevar et al., 2006) to show in theory how it might be extended to support a generalised and robust connection between the two senses of argument (Reed et al., 2008). The advance here is to demonstrate how that AIF-based theory can be put into practice with fluid interchange between the two processes enabled by the underlying formal representation. The two systems described here, OVA and Arvina, represent the first example of AIF-based connection of argument-as-debates with the argument-structures they use and create, and the systems aim to serve both as a demonstration of the theoretical robustness of the approach and the practical utility of such tools. Arvina further demonstrates concretely the way in which mixed initiative argument can be supported, allowing stored arguments in the argument-structures sense to be introduced by software agents into new, dynamic arguments-as-debates which also involve human participants.

2. Argument Interchange

2.1. A brief summary of the AIF

The Argument Interchange Format (Chesnevar et al., 2006) provides a high-level specification for the concepts and their interrelations needed for representing arguments and exchanging those representations between a diverse set of tools in the argumentation technology space. The AIF's *Upper ontology* provides a graph theoretic approach to argument structure which distinguishes units of *information* (loosely, propositions or claims) from *applications of inference, conflict and preference* that link them. The general forms of inference, conflict and preference are described by *schemes* in a second part of the AIF, the *Forms ontology*.

Reifications of AIF that provide a concrete specification exist in a number of different ontological and representational frameworks including RDF (Rahwan et al., 2007), OWL-DL (Rahwan et al., 2010) and others.

2.2. Extension to the AIF

Reed et al. (Reed et al., 2008) propose a model in which moves in dialogues can govern and refer to argumentation structures. The approach is ontologically parsimonious in that it attempts to minimise the amount of new machinery required in the AIF whilst not unreasonably burdening what is already there. The assumption that underlies the approach is that there are strong commonalities between the two senses of argument.

The ontological extensions to the AIF are broadly in three areas. First, the concept of information is refined to distinguish a specific sub-type: locutionary information, or simply, *locutions*. These correspond to speech acts (or, more precisely, propositional reports of speech acts). These locutions may be verbal or written, direct or indirect. The proposition *The minister said that the upgrade would unlock Scotland's renewable energy potential* is clearly a report of a locution, but it can also function as propositional information simpliciter (for example, as a premise supporting an argument that ministers sometimes make public statements).

Second, locutions are connected to their propositional content. In our example, there would be a connection from the locution to the information that, *The upgrade would unlock Scotland's renewable energy potential*. The connection here is captured by a new scheme type. The approach borrows heavily from Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) in that the link between a locution and its propositional content is the illocutionary force, which is handled in the AIF extension as an *illocutionary scheme*.

Finally, locutions are themselves interconnected by further schemes. Whereas the inferential connection between general pieces of information is captured by applications of rules of inference, connections that hold between locutions hold in virtue of permitted dialogical transitions, licensed by the dialogue protocol. The schematic nature of the different types of dialogue transition is similar to the schematic nature of the different types of inferential step -- the difference is that where schemes of inference are brought together into theories associated with specific authors (see, for example, the argumentation schemes of – Walton et al., 2009 or Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), schemes of dialogical transition are brought together as a dialogue protocol (see, for example, RPD – Walton and Krabbe, 1995 – or DC – Mackenzie, 1990). The application of fragments of dialogue protocol in the transition between locutions is captured by *transitional inference* scheme applications.

The AIF underpins, or provides a backdrop to, a number of tools being developed under the umbrella of argumentation technology both because it provides a convenient way of representing resources, and also because it offers the potential for exchanging data resources between different tools and projects. Both OVA and Arvina, introduced below, rely on the AIF, and Arvina further relies on the dialogic extensions to the AIF.

3. Domain Background

The Beaully to Denny power line is a proposed 137-mile long power transmission line (BBC News, 2010a) through north-central Scotland, which was given planning consent in early January 2010 (BBC News, 2010b). The issue was contentious and emotive, both politically and environmentally, because the line runs through areas of outstanding natural beauty including the Cairngorms National Park – but it is seen as an essential part of the country's infrastructure requirement for expansion in renewable power generation.

This provides a good example of public deliberation on an important, contentious and complex topic. A public consultation was held, with submissions invited from local authorities, conservation groups and energy supply companies. There then followed a public inquiry, in which evidence for and against the proposal was heard by a panel, in front of an audience.

In addition to the official process, views on the project were expressed through the media by the various parties involved, including Government ministers, environmental groups and spokespersons for the energy companies.

4. OVA

OVA (Online Visualisation of Argument)⁴ is a tool for analysing and mapping arguments online. It is similar in principle to other argument analysis tools, including Araucaria (Reed and Rowe, 2004) and Rationale (van Gelder, 2007), but is different in that it is an online application, accessible from a web browser. This web-based access has allowed for built-in support for direct analysis of web pages, while also maintaining the ability to analyse standard text files.

Analysis

A web page is analysed by providing its URL. The page is rendered alongside the main OVA interface, where text can be highlighted and extracted for analysis (Fig.1).

The main components of the interface are:

- Analysis canvas - the large, white area on the right-hand side
- Web page display - on the left-hand side
- Toolbar - providing tools to manipulate and save the analysis

An analysis is carried out by highlighting text on the web page, then clicking the analysis canvas; this extracts the text into a premise (represented in OVA as a node), which can be used to either support or attack other premises (or indeed, be supported or attacked itself).

Analyses are graph-based, so that cycles and divergent argumentation (in which a single premise supports multiple conclusions) are both allowed.

Missing premises (or enthymemes) can also be added into the analysis, allowing introduction of information that isn't explicit in the text being analysed.

⁴ <http://ova.computing.dundee.ac.uk>

The screenshot displays the OVA (Open Visual Analysis) user interface. The top section shows a news article from the BBC titled "Power line upgrade given go-ahead". The article discusses controversial plans for a new power line from the Highlands to central Scotland, approved by the Scottish government. It mentions that the project would unlock Scotland's renewable energy potential and bring a vital boost to the electricity grid. The development, which attracted more than 18,000 objections, will have to meet strict planning conditions. Campaigners against the plan had called for underground or sub-sea cables. Scottish Energy Minister Jim Mather said the line, from Beaulieu, west of Inverness, to Denny, near Falkirk, was the most significant grid infrastructure project in a generation. He told parliament: "Scotland's electricity network needs significant reinforcement to allow our vast renewables potential to be harnessed, transmitted and exported."

The bottom section of the interface shows a map of Scotland with the proposed route of the power line. The route starts at Beaulieu Substation in the Highlands and ends at Denny Substation near Falkirk. The map includes a scale bar (0 to 100 km) and a compass rose. To the right of the map, there are links to related articles: "The power, glory and controversy", "The Scottish transmission revamp", "Thousands opposed to power line", "Line 'needed' for green gold rush", and "Read Douglas Fraser blog".

On the right side of the interface, there is a conceptual diagram illustrating the challenges and goals of the project. The diagram consists of several interconnected nodes and arrows:

- Central Node:** "The line should be built"
- Left Side Nodes (Challenges/Context):**
 - "Scotland's electricity network..." (connected to the central node)
 - "Currently, we simply do not have..." (connected to the central node)
 - "the need to provide more elect..." (connected to the central node)
 - "[building the line is] an act..." (connected to the central node)
 - "the project would destroy some..." (connected to the central node)
 - "The new line is needed to redu..." (connected to the central node)
- Right Side Nodes (Goals/Outcomes):**
 - "the potential environmental da..." (connected to the central node)
 - "The power cable could have gon..." (connected to the central node)
 - "putting the cable under the se..." (connected to the central node)
 - "but the line already exists, i..." (connected to the central node)

The diagram uses red arrows to highlight the central goal and the environmental and existing infrastructure challenges, while black arrows show the broader context of the electricity network and the need for more power.

Figure 1. OVA user interface

Participants

Once an analysis has been carried out, participants can be added. The participants represent the real people who promoted (or uttered) the premises used in the analysis.

Participants are added by clicking the “Show Participants” button, then clicking “Add”. Premises can then be assigned to participants by viewing the properties of the node that represents it (Fig.2).

Assignment of participants plays a key role in exporting an analysis to Arvina. By assigning a participant to a premise, that premise becomes part of the knowledge base of the agent that represents them, which in turn allows that agent to express opinions.

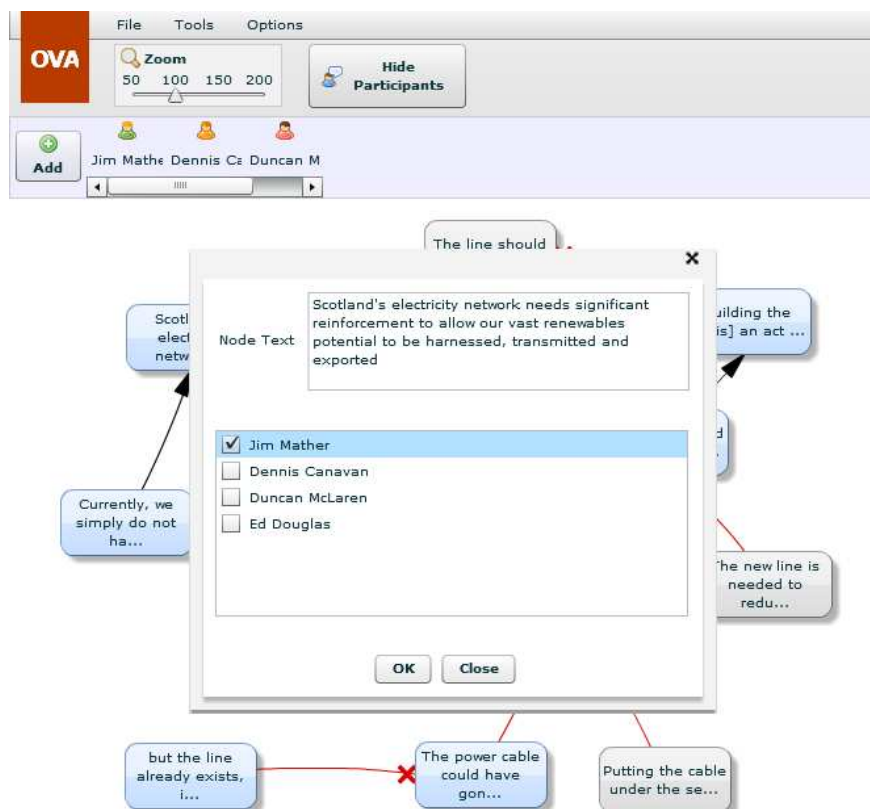


Figure 2. Premise properties in OVA showing participants

Interchange

Once an analysis is complete, the resultant diagram can be exported as a JPEG image or an SVG description, which is convenient for presentation, but of little use from a data manipulation point of view.

OVA saves its analyses to AIF, either to a local file, or to an AIF repository such as *ArgDB*⁵. AIF files can then be processed in a number of ways: ArgDF allows navigation (and expansion) of argument structure through a web interface (Rahwan et al., 2007); ArgDB has components that provide textual summaries of arguments (based on XML transformations) and simple visualisations (based on a graph layout widget that is available to reuse as a component known as OVAview) – these two

⁵ ArgDB is an online corpus of argumentation, hosted at the University of Dundee and is available at <http://argdb.computing.dundee.ac.uk>

components are shown in the screenshot of the web interface to ArgDB (Fig.3); OVAgen supports automated computation of defeat status according to a number of different argument semantics (Dung, 1995) and also provides access to ArgKit (South et al., 2008) which provides further computation services; and finally, the AIF representations in ArgDB are also used by Arvina for providing a dialogic interface to argument resources.

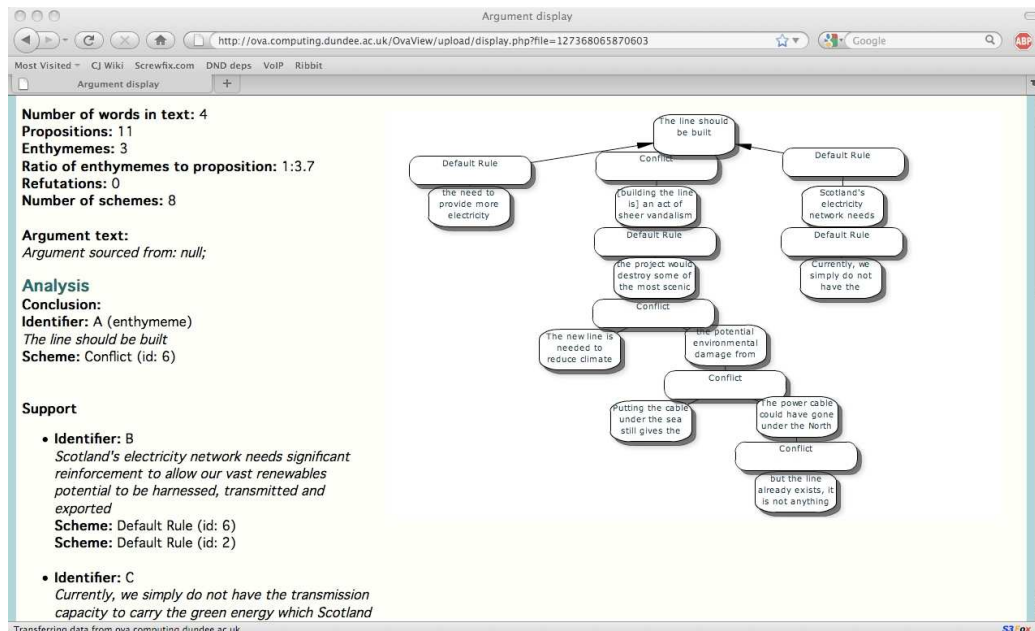


Figure 3. The web interface to ArgDB, with text processing and OVAview graph

5. Arvina

5.1. Google Wave

In 2009, Google made available a new platform by limited invitation. Google described this new web based communication service, *Wave*, as an "online tool for real-time communication and collaboration" (Google, 2010). Designed to merge e-mail, instant messaging, social networking and wiki technology, Wave offers a large number of possible uses augmented by extensions that can provide, for example, spell checking, automated translation among 40 languages, and numerous other applications.

Wave includes a rich API that allows developers to use and build on the platform by way of extensions and gadgets, applications users can participate with, and robots, automated participants within a wave.

5.2. Using Google Wave for argument

Arvina is a Wave application which builds upon the Google API to offer a rich dialogic interface to argument resources. Arvina's basic dialogue protocol is similar in scope to that offered by Magtalo (Reed and Wells, 2007), however using the Wave platform as a base allows a greater interaction between large groups of both virtual and real life participants.



Figure 4. Starting a dialogue

An *Arvina Wave* is created by adding the Arvina robot to any existing Wave. Upon addition the Arvina robot will insert a gadget into the Wave allowing the user to choose a topic from any previously analysed AIF resources (Fig.4). Once selected, the AIF resource is examined to determine the participants involved in the dialogue represented and a new robot is added to the wave representing each of these participants (Fig.5).



Figure 5. Automatically added robots reflect the participants from the AIF resource

In the example of the The Beaully to Denny power line, the original OVA analyses (and their subsequent representation in the ArgDB backend to which Arvina connects) involve the indication of points of view of six participants:

- Dennis Canavan – president of Ramblers Association Scotland
- Ed Douglas – traveller and writer, writing for The Guardian
- Colin Hood – chief operating officer of Scottish and Southern Energy
- Duncan McLaren – Friends of the Earth Scotland
- Jim Mather – Scottish Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism

- Niall Stuart – chief executive of Scottish Renewables

Following topic selection, the user must choose a starting point (an AIF information node from which the dialogue can progress) and having done so is then given two options for each statement, to either ask a question and get the opinion of the artificially represented participants, or to offer their own view by either agreeing or disagreeing with the point being made.

Each time a new point is put forward by either a human or a software participant, the wave is updated to show the new point, and to provide controls for interacting with that new point – i.e., to allow the user to challenge it, support it, or ask for views on it from other participants.

Google Wave encourages an interaction model which is mostly linear, but is also structured. So whilst many use case examples of Wave have a conversational style in which new material is added on at the end, there are also several which rely more on a structural model (rather like the threading model of bulletin boards) or a collaborative working model (rather like working on a Google Docs document simultaneously with other co-authors). These features are preserved in Arvina waves. So, a user can either follow a traditional conversational model and interact, for the most part, with the most recent contribution to the wave; or alternatively, they can dot around, returning to earlier points in the dialogue, or skimming forward to later ones, demanding (perhaps additional) supports or points of view, or adding in further supports and counters of their own, thus exploiting the argumentative structure of the data directly.

Another feature of Wave is also supported explicitly by Arvina waves: the history mechanism. Google shows examples of tracking changes to collaborative documents by moving a slider along from left to right to replay how a document has evolved. In the context of Arvina, the history of a debate can similarly be replayed, showing the blow by blow updates that participants (both human and artificial) have made.

5.3. Mixed Initiative Argumentation Dialogues

Arvina allows for an open mix of both artificially represented participants using knowledge assigned in an AIF resource and real life participants. Any real life participant may ask questions of the artificially represented participants in the form of either “Do you agree with this?”, or, “Why is that the case?” (Fig.6) and so uncover, in a natural way, the participants' views. This method allows a user to direct the course of the conversation and as such, rather than just being presented with a list of claims, they can instead concentrate on the areas which interest them most.

With the first of these questions, “Do you agree with this?”, it is possible to discover a participant's position on any point, either agreement or disagreement. When stating whether or not they agree a participant robot will also offer a supporting reason if they have one available. Further supporting reasons can be discovered by the second question, “Why is that the case?”, which will cause the robot to offer a reason if all the reasons they have for that point have not already been expressed.

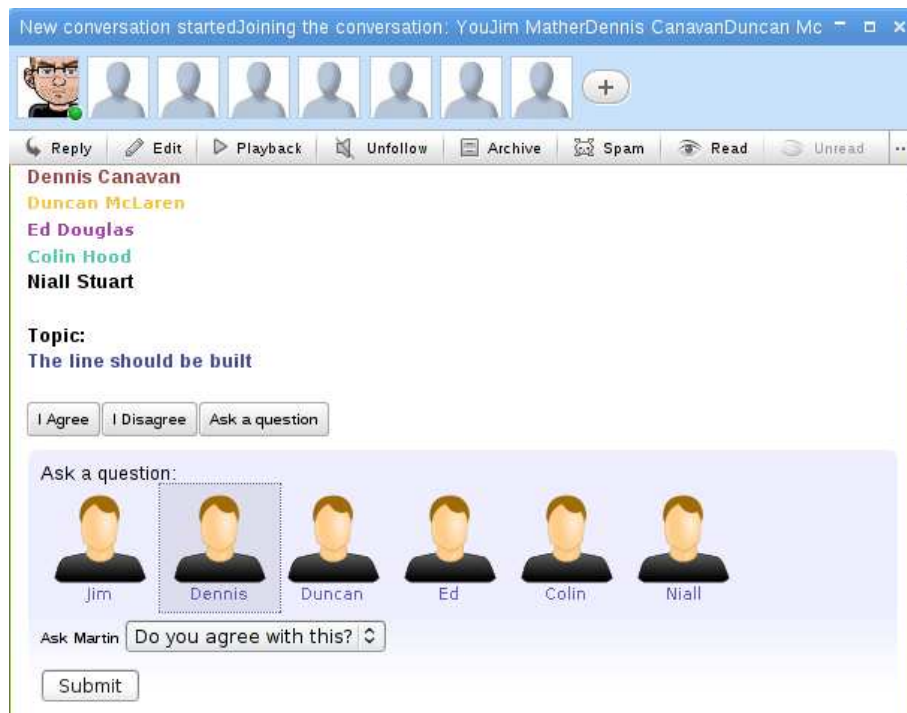


Figure 6. Asking a question of a virtual participant

This same interface can be used to pose questions to real life users, which they can then enter their own answers for. This mechanism allows a full and seamless conversation to take place between real time users and those being represented virtually. In this way even a very simple dialogue protocol provides an interface that exploits a naturalistic style of interaction to provide and intuitive user-driven navigation of a complex interconnected web of arguments.

5.4. Eliciting Further Knowledge

A key feature of Arvina is the ability for participants to engage in a discussion rather than just an interrogation. This is achieved by allowing a user at any stage in the discussion to state their own agreement or disagreement with a particular point and to provide supporting reasons for their view (Fig.7).

This interaction is not limited to the original Wave creator and indeed any number of participants can offer their own opinions and comment on each others views. Although this ability is available by default as a part of Wave, by providing a lightweight structure for these interactions, Arvina is able to harvest these opinions, inserting them into the AIF resource with which it is working and offering them for interaction at a later date. In this way it is possible to build as well as query the knowledge base, growing a resource that can then be used in later conversations as well as any other software which is compatible with AIF. This opens up the exciting possibility of using tools such as Arvina for conducting public consultation processes and immediately integrating the responses into the overall network of arguments.

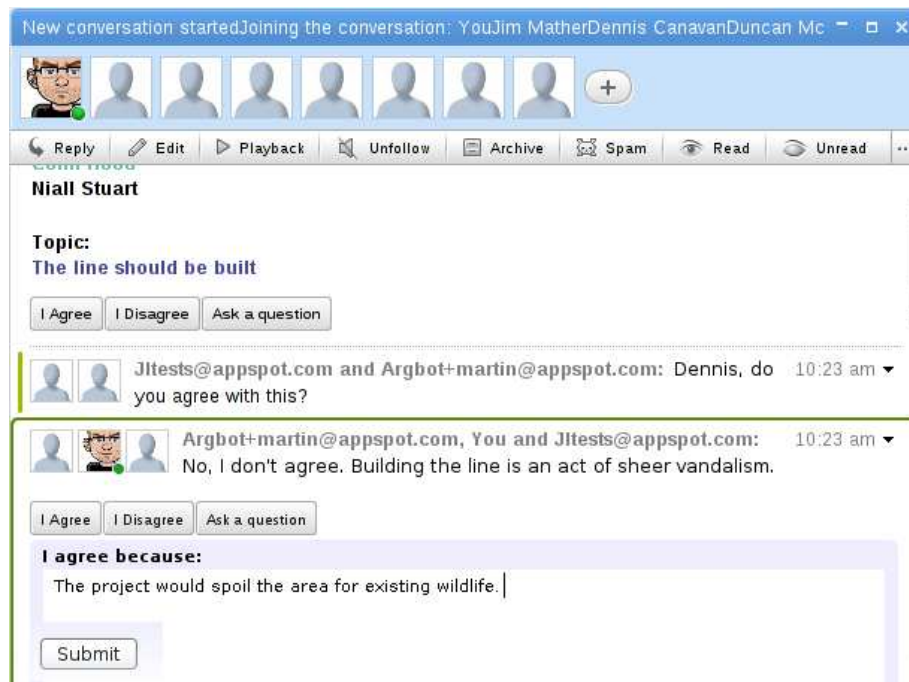


Figure 7. Building the knowledge base

6. Conclusions

Our goal here has been to show how the newly emerging AIF standard can support flexible interchange between two predominant styles of interacting using argumentation in deliberative domains. Tools such as OVA focus on the argument-mapping or issue-based exploration of a deliberation space that concentrates on the inferential structure of the arguments, whilst its debate-oriented counterpart, Arvina, focuses on the process of dialogue and the execution of argumentative deliberation protocol as a structuring metaphor.

One strong example of this flexible interchange is in the way in which structured information can be extracted from the dialogic interface through a lightweight constraint on normal linguistic behaviour imposed by the protocol.

Much remains to be done. The protocols that Arvina executes need to be expanded and refined (a good example of this in the deliberation space is the protocol employed by PARMENIDES (Atkinson et. al., 2006). The AIF itself needs to be revised and updated to ensure that the dialogical extensions discussed here remain consistent across its constituency. And finally, the argumentative components in both debate and knowledge structure need to be integrated with other parts of the public deliberative process, such as inquiry and decision making. But what these tools clearly demonstrate is that the formally describable processes of deliberation can be effectively and precisely linked to the formally describable structures of knowledge around which deliberation turns. This link is a vital precursor to large-scale deployment of argumentation technologies in this domain.

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Analysing Different Models of Structured Electronic Consultation on Legislation Under Formation

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Abstract: Electronic consultation through the Internet has become an important means of e-participation in order to enable interaction and discussion among government agencies and citizens on public policies and decisions. Tools that enhance the quality of electronic consultations need therefore to be designed in a way that better opinions and arguments are produced. Well designed ICT tools can contribute to better, more informed and socially rooted public policies and decisions. This paper analyses two different models of structured electronic consultation in the area of formation of legislation, a highly complex and controversial category of government decisions. The first model is a highly structured e-consultation model based on the Issue-Based Information Systems (IBIS) framework, having as basic elements issues, alternatives, pro-arguments, contra-arguments and comments. The second model is simpler and less structured, having as basic elements questions, answers and comments. Our analysis was based on two pilot cases concerning legislation under formation in Greece and Austria. Evaluation took place using discussion tree analysis and quantitative and qualitative methods.

1. Introduction

Over the last few years, governments of many OECD member countries have been trying to extend citizens' participation in the formulation of government policies and decisions by providing additional Internet-based channels of communication with civil society [1] – [2]. Different information and communication technologies (ICT) tools have been developed and deployed for this purpose, with most of them aiming to support various types of two-ways communication between government and citizens, such as consultations [1] - [5]. However, further research is required in order to develop better ICT-based tools and methods for supporting and facilitating more effective interactions between government organizations and citizens. Specific attention has to be put on enhancing the quality of electronic consultations, so that better opinions and arguments are produced, which can contribute to better, more informed and socially rooted public policies and decisions. An example of this kind is the 'structured e-forum' [6] - [7], which offers the capability to organize structured electronic discussions. In the 'structured e-forum', participants can enter semantically annotated postings and associate them to previous postings according to some predefined rules based on a 'discussion ontology'. This is expected to result in more

effective electronic discussions, with more mentally processed, focused and therefore higher quality contributions of the participants. Such contributions are also much more associated with the contributions of other participants enabling a better communication and interaction among them, in comparison with the unstructured discussions taking place in the usual unstructured forum tools.

This paper analyses two different models of structured electronic consultation on the formation of legislation for addressing problems and needs of the society. The first is a highly structured consultation model based on the Issue-Based Information Systems (IBIS) framework [8] – [10]. It has as basic elements issues, alternatives, pro-arguments, contra-arguments and comments. The second is a simpler and less structured model, having as basic elements questions, answers and comments. For analysing these two models of structured electronic consultation we designed, implemented and evaluated two pilot e-consultations on legislation under formation in the Parliaments of Austria and Greece. The pilots were performed as part of the LEX-IS project ('Enabling Participation of the Youth in the Public Debate of Legislation among Parliaments, Citizens and Businesses in the European Union') (www.lex-is.eu) of the 'eParticipation' Preparatory Action of the European Commission [11].

The paper is structured as follows: In section 2, the theoretical background is presented. Section 3 details the research methodology, which is based on discussion tree analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods. Sections 4 and 5 describe the evaluations of the two pilots. Finally, section 6 summarizes the conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

According to Rittel & Weber, the problems that societies and organizations face can be classified into 'tame' and 'wicked' ones [12]. The wicked problems are the most difficult to address, since they are characterised by high complexity and many stakeholders with different and heterogeneous problem views, values and concerns. They also lack mathematically 'optimal' solutions and pre-defined algorithms for calculating them. Hence, wicked problems only have 'better' and 'worse' solutions, with the former having more positive arguments in favour than the latter. These wicked problems cannot be addressed by the usual 'first generation' design approaches; they require 'second generation' design approaches, which are based on consultation and argumentation among stakeholders. A very useful means to address wicked problems can be the 'Issue Based Information Systems' (IBIS) [8]; these systems are based on a simple but powerful discussion ontology, whose main elements are 'questions' (issues-problems to be addressed), 'ideas' (possible answers-solutions to questions-problems) and 'arguments' (evidence or viewpoints that support or object to ideas) [8] - [10].

An area of such wicked problems governments frequently face is legislation formation. The phase of developing draft bills and refining them till the draft reaches the expected quality and consensus among different stakeholders is highly complex and includes several stages of development. During these stages, different stakeholders may participate, such as experts from ministries, independent experts, members of parliament, parliamentary committees, politicians, public servants, representatives of the affected socio-economic groups, non-governmental organizations, etc. Usually, individual citizens participate to a rather low extent.

In general, each of these stakeholder groups has a different piece of information, experience and knowledge about the problem or issue to be addressed by the legislation under formation. Hence, 'synthesis' of these pieces is required. Besides that, the stakeholder groups usually have different – often conflicting – needs, values, concerns, interests and expectations concerning the legislation under formation. It is therefore of critical importance for the quality and effectiveness of the legislation that

the stakeholder groups can actively participate in the legislation formation process. Communication, interaction and negotiation among the stakeholders help that a mutual understanding is developed and, finally, consensus is achieved to the largest possible extent [13]. To sum up, the legislation formation process is an excellent example of a 'wicked' problem, which needs to be 'tamed' through the use of on-line deliberation.

The use of ICT tools based on the IBIS framework can effectively contribute to conducting structured electronic consultations among the stakeholders of new laws under formation, therewith addressing the above inherent problems and complexities of legislation formation. However, the tools which have been researched and used so far for this purpose, such as e-forum, e-petition and e-community tools, do not adopt the structured discussion approach proposed by the IBIS framework. For instance, most of the political e-consultations on public policy or legislation are conducted in unstructured e-forum environments, which allow participants to enter postings, or postings on other participants' postings, without any semantic annotation or structure. This results in lower levels of quality, focus and effectiveness of these e-consultations.

The use of a structured e-forum tool based on the IBIS framework requires from the participants to make semantic annotations of their postings in an electronic discussion, according to the 'discussion ontology' proposed by this framework: each participant enters a new post by categorising it into 'issue', or 'alternative', or 'comment' or 'pro'/'contra' argument. This will guide the participants to think in a more structured way about the problem under discussion (i.e. which are the main problem issues, what are the solutions and main alternatives for addressing a problem, which are the main advantages and disadvantages of each alternative). Also, the participants have to associate their postings with previous ones entered by other participants, according to the rules defined in the IBIS discussion ontology. E.g. an 'alternative' can be associated only with an 'issue', but not with a 'pro' or a 'contra' argument, while a 'pro' or a 'contra' argument can be associated with an 'alternative', etc.

As participants make more mentally processed and focused contributions, the quality, focus and effectiveness of the discussion is expected to increase. Likewise, the communication and interaction among the participants improves, which further enhances the quality, focus and effectiveness of the discussion. Sequences of semantically annotated and associated postings create threads of in-depth discussions which are more convenient to be tracked, and can be processed by humans or/and computers in order to draw useful conclusions from them.

To evidence the validity and added value of such structured e-forums, empirical investigations are necessary to assess - based on 'real life' evidence -, to what extent these expectations are realized. Our analysis aims on one hand to examine the suitability, advantages and disadvantages of structured e-forum tools as e-participation tools based on the IBIS framework. We therewith assess how well such tools are suited for supporting structured e-consultations on wicked problems related to public policy or legislation formation. On the other hand, the added value of such structured e-forums must be seen in relation to the value of less structured e-consultation models. Hence, we will also investigate the use of simpler and less structured e-consultation models, which may be easier to handle but may constrain discussions to a smaller number of postings. We compare both e-consultation models and therewith fill a research gap as identified in [6], [7].

3. Research Methodology

The methodology adopted to investigate the use of and compare different models of structured e-consultation among stakeholders in the legislation formation process comprises the following steps:

Step I. Analysis of the processes and main documents of legislation formation in the Parliaments of Austria and Greece, which participated in the LEX-IS project.

Step II. Design of pilot electronic consultations on legislation under formation in the two Parliaments: For each of the pilots, the bill to be discussed, the participants, the timing of the consultation and the informative material¹ to be provided to the participants were identified and agreed upon. Then we defined two different models of structured e-consultation to be used in these pilots. The first of them, termed as 'structured forum I', was based on the IBIS framework, so it allowed each participant to enter five types of postings: issues, alternatives, pro arguments, contra argument and comments. We also defined a number of possible associations between them according to IBIS: for each issue participants were allowed to enter alternatives or comments, for each alternative they could enter pro arguments, contra arguments or comments, for each argument (pro or contra) other arguments (pro or contra) and for each comment other comments. Furthermore, we also defined a second simpler model of structured e-consultation, termed as 'structured forum II', which allowed the participants to enter a smaller number of types of postings. It followed the Q-A (Questions-Answers) structure, which has been successfully used in informative pages of many websites. It allowed each participant to enter three types of postings: questions, answers and comments. We also defined a number of possible associations between them: for each question, participants were allowed to enter answers or comments, and for each comment to enter other comments. As stated above, this second structured e-consultation model is simpler than the first, as it allows only three types of postings instead of five allowed by the first model.

Step III. Two structured e-forum tools were developed based on the two e-consultation models. For each types of postings, a different icon was used, which appeared in the discussion tree at the beginning of each posting.

Step IV. The two pilot e-consultations were conducted using the tools.

Step V. Evaluation of the two pilots was performed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluation consisted of the following four stages:

- i) Analysis of the discussion trees formed by the postings of the participants in the two pilots. Analysis included the calculation of the following metrics for each thread: a) number of postings entered by the participants, b) number of postings per type, for each of the allowed types (i.e. for 'structured forum I' e-consultations: number of issues, alternatives, pro-arguments, contra-arguments and comments; and for 'structured forum II' e-consultations: questions, answers and comments), c) percentage of the postings assigned a mistaken type, d) number of postings per level of the discussion tree (as an indicator of discussion depth).
- ii) Quantitative Evaluation: An evaluation questionnaire was used to collect the perceived ease of use and usefulness of the structured e-forum from the participants, adopting the 'Technology Acceptance Model' (TAM) approach [14].
- iii) Qualitative Evaluation: Semi-structured focus-group discussions with participants were used to gain a more in-depth understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the structured e-forum concerning its ease of use and usefulness.
- iv) Synthesis of the conclusions from the above three stages i, ii and iii, for drawing the final conclusions.

In the subsequent sections, we introduce the two pilots and some evaluation results.

¹ Including the bill under discussion, its justification report, relevant articles in newspapers or news websites, etc.

4. The Austrian pilot

The Austrian e-consultation pilot was about a ministerial draft bill titled “Child and Youth Welfare Law” (Bundes-Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz 2009). The main objective of the pilot was to use advanced ICT tools in order a) to discuss the draft bill with young people, who are the main stakeholders affected by this bill, b) to identify positive and negative aspects of the draft bill and c) to make proposals for improvements of the draft bill. In order to reach young people, the Austrian Parliament implemented this pilot in cooperation with eight schools. Young students were asked to discuss in the course of specific classes the draft ministerial bill, both offline and online using the LEX-IS e-participation platform with the above two e-forum tools. In the final stage of the online discussion, each of the eight classes was asked to draft a statement summarizing the opinions provided throughout their discussions (with the help of their teachers). A consolidation round among the classes delivered the final statement that was handed in to the Austrian Parliament.

Overall, 120 young Austrian students of age 14 to 19 years were registered in the e-participation platform and entered 253 postings in total. These participants were provided informative material (prepared by the Austrian Parliament and the University of Koblenz as supportive partner).

To get discussion started, ten threads on the most pertinent topics dealt with in this bill were opened by the moderators (teachers). Subsequent discussions were moderated by teachers. Figure 1 is a screenshot of the Austrian pilot, showing the ten threads and some figures on activity in the corresponding discussion topics.

 Sie sind hier: [Forum Start](#) / [Bundes-Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz 2009](#)

[Neuer Thread](#)

Verwandtenpflege: §21 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 95 Angesehen: 4441
§21 des Ministerialentwurfs legt die Eignungsfeststellung bzgl. Verwandtenpflege fest.	
Recht auf Erziehung: §1 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 37 Angesehen: 1493
§1 des Ministerialentwurfs legt das Recht auf Erziehung fest.	
Rechtsansprüche	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 16 Angesehen: 872
Der Entwurf des B-KJHG 2009 räumt Kindern und Jugendlichen viele Rechtsansprüche ein.	
Datenverwendung: §40 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 12 Angesehen: 697
Der Kinder- und Jugendhilfeträger ist ermächtigt personenbezogene Daten zu verwenden.	
Eingriff in die privaten Lebensbereiche	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 52 Angesehen: 2121
In wie weit und unter welchen Voraussetzungen darf der Kinder- und Jugendhilfeträger in die privaten Lebensverhältnisse von Familien eingreifen?	
Junge Erwachsene: §29 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 12/11/2008 Beiträge: 13 Angesehen: 776
Einbeziehung junger Erwachsener in den Anwendungsbereich der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe	
Interesseneinbringung Gesetzgebungsprozesse, Planung und Forschung: §35(2)4	Start: 14/11/2008 Beiträge: 8 Angesehen: 454
Einbringen der Interessen von Kindern und Jugendlichen in Gesetzgebungsprozesse sowie bei Planung und Forschung.	
Aufgaben der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe: §3 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 25/11/2008 Beiträge: 2 Angesehen: 168
§3 normiert die Aufgaben der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe unter Berücksichtigung der Grundsätze der UN-Konvention über die Rechte des Kindes.	
Kündigung von Pflegeverhältnissen: §19 Abs. 6 des Ministerialentwurfs	Start: 25/11/2008 Beiträge: 0 Angesehen: 134
§19 Abs. 6 regelt, dass Pflegeverhältnisse der Fachaufsicht des Kinder- und Jugendhilfeträgers unterliegen.	
Stellungnahmen	Start: 25/11/2008 Beiträge: 18 Angesehen: 985
Alle entworfenen Stellungnahmen können hier angesehen und diskutiert werden. Ziel der Diskussionen ist der Entwurf einer gemeinsamen Stellungnahme.	

Figure 1: Initial page of the Austrian pilot showing the title of the titles of the threads

For each discussion thread the moderators initially tried to find the best applicable forum type. Four of these threads were created with the structure of 'forum type I' (issue, alternative, pro argument, contra argument, comment), while the remaining six threads were run with the simpler structure of 'forum type II' (question, answer, comment). Overall, 253 postings ("Beiträge") were entered in these threads and 12166 visits ("Angesehen") were counted. Table 1 shows for each discussion thread the number of postings per type and in total, e.g. thread "Verwandtenpflege §21" has 95 postings, most of which (40) are pro arguments or contra arguments (29).

forum/entry	Forum type 1					Forum type 2			Total
	Issue	Alternative	Pro argument	Contra argument	Comment	Question	Answer	Comment	
Verwandtenpflege §21	3	5	40	29	18	0	0	0	95
Recht auf Erziehung §1	1	3	3	2	28	0	0	0	37
Rechtsansprüche	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	13	16
Datenverwendung §40	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	8	12
Eingriff in die privaten Lebensbereiche	2	1	0	0	49	0	0	0	52
Junge Erwachsene §29	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	11	13
§35(2)4	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8
Aufgaben der Kinder und- Jugendhilfe §3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Kündigung von Pflegeverhältnissen §19(6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stellungnahmen	7	3	1	0	7	0	0	0	18
Total	13	12	44	31	102	9	5	37	253
Total %	5%	5%	17%	12%	40%	4%	2%	15%	100%

Table 1: Postings per type for the ten forum threads

Table 1 shows that the forums of type I were used more intensely than the forums of type II, with the former having on average 50.5 postings per thread and the latter only 8.5. This indicates that the more structured e-consultation model of type I forum provides to the participants more stimulation and guidance than the model of type II forum.

From the 253 postings entered, 139 (55%) were comments. Foremost, in the threads “Eingriff in die privaten Lebensbereiche”, “Junge Erwachsene §29”, “Rechtsansprüche” and “Recht auf Erziehung §21” participants used almost only comments for expressing their opinions. This indicates that young students in many cases preferred to choose this more ‘broad’ comment type, instead of the other more ‘specific’ types, such as issue, alternative, pro- and contra-argument (in type I forum), or question and answer (in type II forum). Such behavior of young participants can be explained taking into account that young people are quite spontaneous and tend to write an opinion without much reflection at first hand (e.g. if it is a pro or contra statement, an alternative, an issue, an answer or a question). Also, participants seem to be afraid of writing more ‘high-profile’ types of postings, such as issues or alternatives in the type I forum (6.4% and 5.9% of postings respectively), or questions or answers in the type II forum (17.6% and 9.8% of postings respectively), because these types are deemed more ‘visible’, since other participants usually pay more attention to such arguments. Hence, such entries were expected to be grammatically correct and of very good quality. The conclusion of this pilot case is that young participants may find structured electronic consultations too demanding. Consequently, they tend to use more the broader and less specific types of postings, which require less mental processing and receive less attention, while avoiding the more specific and high profile types/annotations. In this way, the structured way of thinking imposed by a structured e-forum was bypassed to some extent and reduced the high discussion structure that these structured e-forum tools attempt to provide.

To support above argumentation of synthesis, also the percentage of postings which were assigned a mistaken type was studied. Table 2 displays for each thread the percentage of total postings and user postings (i.e. entered by the students and not by the moderators) with mistaken type, which in some threads was quite high. This reflects again the difficulty or unwillingness or laziness of young people to properly participate in such structured discussions. In particular, most of these mistakes are in fact affiliated with the use of the type ‘comment’ instead of ‘pro argument’ or ‘contra argument’ (65 cases) or ‘alternative’ (7 cases) in type I forum, or instead of ‘answer’ (16 cases) in type II forum.

forum/entry	total entries	user entries	mistakenly chosen entry types	mistakenly chosen entry types out of total entries	mistakenly chosen entry types out of user entries
Verwandtenpflege §21	95	93	21	22,1%	22,6%
Recht auf Erziehung §1	37	36	22	59,5%	61,1%
Rechtsansprüche	16	14	5	31,3%	35,7%
Datenverwendung §40	12	9	2	16,7%	22,2%
Eingriff in die privaten Lebensbereiche	52	51	40	76,9%	78,4%
Junge Erwachsene §29	13	11	9	69,2%	81,8%
§35(2)4	8	6	1	12,5%	16,7%
Aufgaben der Kinder und- Jugendhilfe §3	2	1	0	0,0%	0,0%
Kündigung von Pflegeverhältnissen §19(6)	0	0	0	-	-
Stellungnahmen	18	9	2	11,1%	22,2%

Table 2: Percentage of postings with mistaken type

A comparison between the two e-consultation models shows that structured forum I threads were on average assigned a mistaken type of 46.1%, while in the structured forum II threads 31.8 % of the postings were assigned the wrong category. This shows again that the more structured e-consultation model of type I forum creates slightly more difficulties for the participants to semantically annotate their postings than the simpler model of type II forum.

Finally, the depths of the ten discussion threads were examined and compared. In general, an electronic discussion with higher depth (higher level) means higher interaction among the participants. Table 3 displays for all threads the number of postings per level.

forum/entry	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Verwandtenpflege §21	3	13	25	14	17	13	7	3
Recht auf Erziehung §1	1	7	14	12	3	0	0	0
Rechtsansprüche	2	3	4	5	1	1	0	0
Datenverwendung §40	2	4	5	1	0	0	0	0
Eingriff in die privaten Lebensbereiche	1	4	14	22	8	3	0	0
Junge Erwachsene §29	2	9	2	0	0	0	0	0
§35(2)4	2	3	1	1	1	0	0	0
Aufgaben der Kinder und- Jugendhilfe §3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kündigung von Pflegeverhältnissen §19(6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stellungnahmen	7	9	2	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3: Number of postings per level indicating the depth of discussions

The discussions in the forum type I threads reached a higher depth than in the forum type II threads: the average depth for the former was 5.5 levels, while the latter achieved an average of 4 levels. As Table 3 indicates, the first thread had postings down to level 8, the second one went into level 5 and the fifth one went into level 6. This allows the conclusion that the more structured e-consultation model of type I forum, enabling more types of postings and associations among participants, facilitates discussions of more depth with a higher degree of interaction among the participants. The simpler structured e-consultation model of type II forum resulted in less depth. Especially the capability of responding to previous pro and contra arguments with new pro and contra arguments seems to facilitate highly interactive discussions among the participants, though it may result in some cases in simplistic postings, which just repeat opinions of previous postings or contain more or less only “I agree” or “I disagree”. For instance, in the first thread “Verwandtenpflege §21” about 25 postings repeated just the same opinion or simply stated “agree” or “disagree” to the previous postings. In order to avoid such arguments confirming the opinion of others or disagreeing on others’ opinions, we discovered that a polling mechanism would be a very useful feature besides the categorisation of postings.

This would help reducing the risk of unnecessarily blurring a discussion tree, which results in more complexity and less readability thereof.

Table 4 shows the results of the quantitative evaluation of the structured e-forum.

Values for questions 1 and 2: Questions in the evaluation questionnaire:	difficult	medium to difficult	medium to easy	easy
How easy was it to use the structured forum?	11%	22%	54%	13%
How easy was it to access, read and understand the postings of the other participants and the connections among them in the structured forum?	6%	27%	54%	13%
Value for question 3:	much worse	slightly worse	slightly better	much better
What is your general assessment of the structured forum as a tool for important e-consultations in comparison to the normal forum tools?	8%	27%	54%	11%

Table 4: Results of the quantitative evaluation of the Austrian pilot

Most of the respondents found the use of the structured e-forum ‘medium to easy’ (54%) or ‘medium to difficult’ (22%) (question 1). This indicates that to some extent young participants perceived a difficulty in using the structured e-forum and semantically annotating their postings (only 13% found it ‘easy’). Most of the respondents found accessing, reading and understanding the postings of the other participants and the connections among them in the structured e-forum ‘medium to easy’ (54%) or ‘medium to difficult’ (27%) (question 2). However, despite these difficulties, most of the respondents (54%) found that the structured e-forum is a ‘slightly better’ tool for important e-consultations in comparison to the normal forum tools.

A qualitative discussion conducted with a focus group of young students who participated in this pilot revealed a general agreement that assigning the correct type in each new posting was not easy, and for this reason the ‘comment’ type was mostly used as an ‘easy solution’. Another issue raised was that readability decreases the more deep a discussion thread gets. A student summarized these reflections as follows: “Most time we assigned the entry type comment, because that was available everywhere. Otherwise we tried to find an entry type by testing. In general the usage of the structured forum was good but sometimes for me it was hard to follow a discussion through threads with a higher depth”.

Generally, the young students reckoned that the structured e-forum provides significant advantages by allowing the ‘assignment of meaning’ in each posting. For instance one young student noted: “In my opinion an advantage was the better overview about participant’s meanings, which were symbolized with the icons in front of each posting”. However, the use of structured e-forums requires certain structuring capabilities and knowledge as well as experience in using these mechanisms.

5. The Greek pilot

The Greek e-consultation pilot involved an electronic discussion about a bill concerning the ‘Contracts of Voluntary Co-habitation’, which regulates the matter of the formal voluntary co-habitation of two persons of different gender (excluding homosexuals) without being married; this is a highly controversial topic for the Greek society, since there are many strong supporters of it, while some others believe that it should be extended in order to include homosexuals’ co-habitation as well, and on the contrary many citizens are strongly opposing to the institutionalization of co-

habitation without being married, believing that it will further weaken family. This e-consultation, which was organized in cooperation with the Greek Parliament, had 79 participants; most of them were undergraduate or postgraduate students from the National Technical University of Athens and the University of the Aegean, aged mainly between 18 and 26 years. As the participants in the Greek e-consultation pilot were mostly from higher educational level, only one forum of the structured type I (issues - alternatives - arguments-comments) was set up. The moderators initiated discussion with only three important issues. Then the participants were motivated to enter more issues they regard important, or explore any of the inserted threads. This pilot was conducted in the same e-participation platform as the Austrian pilot. The Greek Parliament provided to the participants the draft bill as well as supportive materials.

The 79 registered users contributed in total 131 postings on this highly debated bill, and made 4192 visits in the platform. Figure 2 gives a view on a part of the discussion tree of this Greek pilot (translated into English).

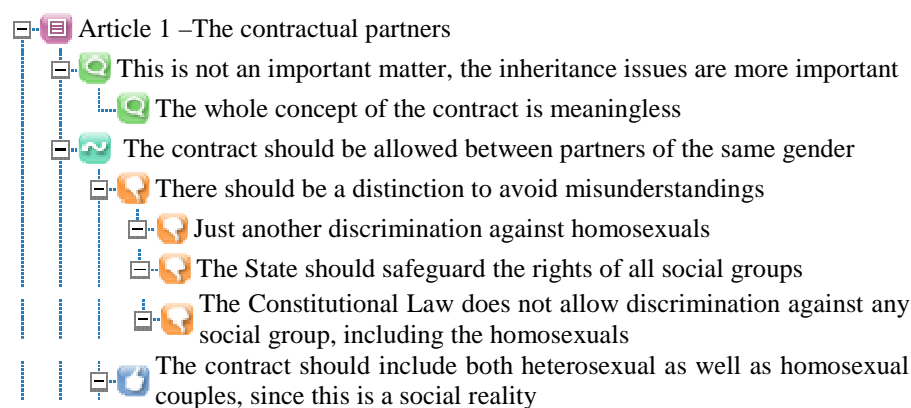


Figure 2. Greek Forum Overview

The number of postings per type revealed 8 'issues', 15 suggested 'alternatives', 13 'comments', 35 'pro-arguments', and 60 'con-arguments'. There was no excessive use of the comment type like in the Austrian pilot. On the contrary, a good and 'balanced' discussion tree was formed, with the expected structure from a well-developed electronic discussion: with several new issues (8) entered by the participants on the root topic (= the bill on the 'Contracts of Voluntary Co-habitation'), a higher number of alternatives (suggestions for improvements) (15), and also a similar number of comments (13) on these issues, and a much higher number of pro-arguments (35) and con-arguments (60).

The number of postings with mistaken type was 13, which results in 10% of the total number of postings. The percentage of simplistic postings (i.e. postings not adding any value/new information) was 8, which results in 6% of the total number of postings. Finally, The level of depth of this electronic discussion was assessed with 7 levels, of which 8 postings were made on first level, 24 on second level, 38 on third level, 27 on fourth level, 20 on fifth level, 13 on sixth level and finally one posting was made on seventh level. The electronic discussion of the Greek pilot was characterized by considerable depth and interaction among the participants.

The results indicate that more sophisticated users (due to university-level education) better utilize the 'discussion structure' such a tool provides, i.e. use correctly and efficiently all the types of postings it allows. I.e. not only the broader categories of postings (such as the comment) were used, but also the more specific types such as issue, alternative, pro and contra argument. As the structured e-forum of type I requires a considerable mental effort in order to think in the structured way such a tool imposes (i.e. to think which are the main issues, what are the main

alternatives for addressing each of them, which are the main advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, etc. already before formulating the posting) and to correctly annotate postings, users that are already well trained in structured argumentation and formulation of arguments are more capable and skilled to use structured e-forums. Sophisticated users are also expected to better exploit the full potential of the more complex e-consultation models for structuring discussion. On the other hand, the evaluations allow the assumption that structured e-forums of type one may be difficult for ordinary citizens to be used. This hypothesis has yet to be proven with another test and a larger and heterogeneous sample.

The results of the quantitative evaluation of structured e-forum by the participants in the Greek pilot are shown in Table 5. Most of the respondents found the use of the structured e-forum 'medium to easy' (68%) or 'medium to difficult' (20%), while a smaller number found it 'easy' (12%) and nobody found it 'difficult'. As can be seen, even the older participants with higher education in this pilot perceived some level of difficulty in using the structured e-forum. The comparison with the Austrian case indicates that the perception of difficulties in the Greek pilot is to a lower extent than in the Austrian Pilot with the younger students (cf. Tables 4 and 5). This is also reflected in the lower percentage of postings assigned a mistaken type and the lower usage of the broad comment type. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the responses in the second question: most of the respondents found accessing, reading and understanding the postings of the other participants and the connections among them in the structured e-forum 'medium to easy' (56%) or 'medium to difficult' (27%), while a smaller number found it 'easy' (12%) or 'difficult' (4%).

Values for questions 1 and 2: Questions in the evaluation questionnaire:	difficult	medium to difficult	medium to easy	easy
How easy it was to use the structured forum?	0%	20%	68%	12%
How easy it was to access, read and understand the postings of the other participants and the connections among them in the structured forum?	4%	28%	56%	12%
Value for question 3:	much worse	slightly worse	slightly better	much better
What is your general assessment of the structured forum as a tool for important e-consultations in comparison to the normal forum tools?	0%	8%	28%	64%

Table 5: Results of the quantitative evaluation of the Greek pilot e-consultation

However, again the difficulty perceived by these more sophisticated participants is slightly lower in comparison with the younger students in the Austrian pilot. Finally, most of the respondents (64%) assessed the structured forum as a 'much better' tool for important e-consultations in comparison to the normal forum tools.

A comparison with the Austrian pilot shows furthermore that the participants with higher education perceived a higher usefulness of the e-structured forum tool for conducting important consultations, since they can better exploit the potential of these tools for structuring discussion.

The qualitative discussion in the focus-group of students of the National Technical University of Athens and the University of the Aegean revealed that the use of the structured e-forum in this pilot was considered an advantage, since it enables a more focused and effective electronic discussion. It was also mentioned that the semantic annotation of postings allowed users to quickly form an opinion as to the progress of the discussion on a specific key issue. The main difficulties referred during this interview had more to do with the design of the particular e-forum tool rather than the concept of the structured e-consultation itself, e.g. it was mentioned that the platform

should provide more space (i.e. a bigger box) for the structured e-forum, which should be only a few 'clicks' (levels) away from the homepage of the platform, so that the user can reach it easily and quickly. The difficulty of correctly annotating new postings was mentioned as well, but to a lower extent than in the Austrian pilot. Another difficulty was the appropriate wording of the title of each posting, which is directly shown in the discussion tree of the structured e-forum (while the full description of the posting is shown in another box by clicking its title in the tree), so that it reflects the content of the posting. In fact, by observing the discussion tree we identified several postings in which the title was not representative of the explanation of the full argument presented in this separate description box provided. Hence, it was not easy for the other participants to understand the content of the posting from the title. As in the Austrian pilot, the teachers started the threads, this problem was not observed there (the teachers mainly used the key phrases of the articles to indicate the topical threads). Another problem mentioned was associated with the moderation of the postings: from the time a posting was entered by a user it usually took 5-6 hours until the moderator approved it and the posting became visible; so it was not possible for this user to see it immediately, and possibly enter additional postings associated with it (e.g. after posting an alternative to add positive arguments for supporting it), while the other users could see it with such a long delay, with negative consequences for the progress of the discussion.

6. Conclusions

This paper investigated two models of structured e-consultation for the process of formation of legislation therewith enabling young citizens to participate. The first model is a highly structured e-consultation model based on the Issue-Based Information Systems (IBIS) framework. It structures discussions along issues, alternatives, pro-arguments, contra-arguments and comments. The second model is a simpler and less structured e-consultation model supporting questions, answers and comments. The main research question was whether the more structured e-consultation forum based on IBIS framework is more suitable for online discussion of draft legislations with young citizens. The investigations based on two pilot e-consultations, which have been conducted on legislation under formation in the Parliaments of Austria and Greece. The evaluation of the cases took place along discussion tree analysis as well as quantitative and qualitative methods.

The main conclusion of the two pilot cases is that young users with lower levels of education and less skills and experiences in structured discussions experienced the more structured e-forum based on IBIS more difficult and demanding than the group of users with higher education levels. Main difficulties result from mental efforts needed in thinking in the highly structured way that such tools impose, in annotating correctly the postings and in general using efficiently the 'discussion language'. The experience was that young users with lower level of education preferred uncategorized postings such as comments instead of pro- or contra-arguments. Also, this group of users tends to enter simple postings (repeating e.g. previous postings, or containing just "I agree" or "I disagree") – here, some polling mechanism along the argumentation trees would be of great help.

The suboptimal exploitation of the potential of the structured e-forum tools for structuring discussions indicates that highly structured e-consultations require adequate skills, capacities and training of the users. Hence, such highly structured tools may not be the best solution for wider citizen participation.

Parliaments are therefore recommended organize e-consultations with a wider public by using simple e-forums, while at the same time they may exploit structured e-forum tools to consult with expert groups relevant for the bills under discussion.

Further research is required in this area for formulating additional models of structured e-consultation among government agencies and citizens, which are either generic or appropriate for particular discussion topics and user groups, and evaluating them extensively in 'real-life' pilots so that a higher maturity of them can be achieved.

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Capturing and Representing Deliberation in Participatory Planning Practices

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Abstract. In this paper we argue for the importance of capturing and representing deliberation in participatory planning practices. We discuss the concept of deliberation in planning theory, and argue for a paradigm that puts deliberation at the centre of public participation to planning decision. We argue that in order to enable effective participation, the normally ephemeral deliberation process needs to be captured and represented so that the information and knowledge gathered during deliberation is visible for all, can be effectively traced, reused, and can actively influence planning decisions. To scaffold this we describe the integration of three technologies to create a collective project memory structured against five dimensions of participatory planning processes: dialogical, social, spatial, temporal and causal. Based on several authentic participatory planning cases, we report that this supported deliberation across planning tasks, communication modes, time and environments. The coupled use of online and offline groupware technologies created a more expressive and transparent participatory knowledge base than is possible with conventional media, and enhanced participatory planning by: supporting the effective capture and representation of deliberation processes and products; providing a rich picture of the social setting in which planning decision develops and supporting reflection in and on planning actions.

1. Introduction

A growing body of evidence confirms that in the hands of appropriately skilled facilitators and analysts, software tools for mapping the structure of deliberations and arguments can be used successfully to add value to policy consultations by clarifying the relationships between key issues, positions and arguments (e.g. Renton and Macintosh 2007; Ohl 2008; van Gelder 2003). Extending beyond policy consultations, such tools are sometimes used for real time mapping to add immediate value in meetings, both face-to-face and online, in a wide range of contexts including science (e.g. Conklin 2006; Buckingham Shum and Sierhuis, 2008). Conklin (2003) documents the use of one such tool to capture the organizational memory of an environmental policy body for over ten years.

IBIS (Kuntz and Rittel 1972) is increasingly emerging as a 'lingua franca' for introducing relatively simple semantic structure to online deliberation. Platforms such as *Cohere* (Buckingham Shum 2008), *Collaboratorium* (Klein and Iandoli 2008) and *Debategraph* (<http://debategraph.org>) are prominent examples of the maturation of IBIS-based tools and their use and development to support online deliberation. In

particular some applications have been devoted to building new forms of policy memories oriented to perform informed deliberation processes (Elliman, Macintosh et al. 2006; Renton and Macintosh 2007). These latter contributions provide evidence of the advantages of argument visualization tools to structure and represent deliberation in policy formulation.

However, to date, no specific applications to the Participatory Planning field are reported in the literature. In this paper we focus on participatory urban and environmental planning practices and on the challenges of capturing and representing deliberation in modern planning arenas. We contextualize the role of deliberation to participatory planning practices and propose a paradigm of Participatory Planning as sensemaking performed through deliberation (§2). Consequently, we focus on the importance of capturing and representing deliberation, and we propose the combined use of three groupware technologies to support this in several contexts, including face-to-face planning team meetings, online deliberation with local communities, and face-to-face public consultation meetings (§3). We describe the three tools (*Compendium*, *FM* and *CoPe_it!* §4-6) and discuss the outcomes of their integration as tested in three participatory planning cases. We summarize the results of the technology deployments, and briefly discuss users' feedback from the evaluation studies. We conclude by reflecting on the role played by technologies in enabling the capture and representation of deliberation process to more effectively reflect, understand and critique the content and the context of deliberation, in the very attempt to provide a wider and more transparent body of knowledge to inform decision-making. (§7).

2. Role of Deliberation in Planning Theory

The concept of deliberative democracy and citizen involvement in planning practices has deep roots in planning theory. It developed and evolved from one theory to another, changing the emphasis given to different aspects and issues related to the problem of participation in planning practices. In particular the concept of planning as communicative process dates back to Habermas's communicative rationality. Habermas introduced a utopian model of communicative arena in which all participants know and share communication rules and objectives, and have access to the same exhaustive base of information (Habermas 1981). These conditions are not realistic in a genuine deliberative arena, where information and power are non-homogeneously distributed, rules are unknown or misunderstood, and objectives are often hidden and adversary. Based on this assumption, we consider Habermas's point of departure, at the most, as a utopian vision to which planning as communicative process could aim.

Our approach builds on the idea of deliberative arenas but takes a more practical metaphor of design as "making sense together in practical conversation" (Forester 1984). This metaphor was first proposed by Forester in the early 1980s, and argues that planning should be construed as sensemaking, aiming to build mutual understanding through a process of design deliberation which involves diverse expertise, organizations, interests groups and community members. In such an approach, participation and citizen involvement should not manifest as a mere 'translation' of community knowledge into technical language, nor should it be an attempt to devolve planning tasks and responsibilities to the community level.

Participation is, rather, part of the design process conceived as “sensemaking”, that is an interpretative process of problem-definition and problem-setting, a process of making sense together in practical planning conversation.

“Planning conversations” are highly constrained by organizational, political and cultural forces, and are practical in the sense of being compelled by contingent issues and case-specific topics. Examples of planning conversations are project meetings, consultation meetings with the local communities, and approval or permits meetings with environmental and institutional bodies. All these can be seen as components of the sensemaking processes through which participants make sense of the problematic context, and discover other peoples’ values and positions. The deliberation process does not necessarily result in agreements on certain values or positions, but it plays a key role in helping stakeholders understand the different arguments and counterarguments at stake. An effective participatory deliberation process should involve careful and mature reflection on (ideally) all relevant issues at stake, by all relevant stakeholders exchanging views on the nature of the problems, and the reasons for and against potential courses of action. Although it is rarely possible to satisfy everyone all of the time, a sense of ownership and transparency around this process will increase the chances of design decisions that translate into better living environments. When trust breaks down, the participatory process has failed.

The core of our work is to understand how this deliberation process can be captured and made available in appropriate ways, using digital tools in appropriate ways, and to understand the practices and skillsets that this requires (we focus on the latter elsewhere, e.g. Conklin, 2006; Selvin, *et al.* 2010). Can the normally ephemeral deliberation process be made tangible as an object for critique and reflection? In particular, by representing deliberation the conversation dynamics are made transparent and a social picture may be drawn of the social process, which helps planners and decision-makers to analyze the social, political and cultural setting in which planning develops. Moreover by representing deliberation we build a database of people’s statements that may be used to explore possible implications of planning choices in the social and organizational context (aspects that could likely elude the technical analysis conduct by the planner). If we assume that deliberation, be it a way to seek common ground through dialogue or be it a way to defend your rights through argument and debate, is how participatory planning happens, therefore deliberation is at the heart of the matter in public participation to planning decisions. The challenge for the planner is then to support deliberation by capturing and representing results of diverse planning conversations into a unique and coherent deliberation process, in which it is made clear what ‘voices’ have been listened to, in which social context, and how they affect the deliberation process toward planning decisions.

3. Capturing deliberation across planning tasks, communication modes, time and environments

In the previous sections we argued that deliberation is a reflective practice, in which stakeholders should be able to stop and reflect on the results of the deliberation and analyze information and knowledge gathered. In order to enable such a reflective practice, deliberation needs to be captured beforehand and deliberation contents,

that is to say all the information and knowledge gathered along the deliberation process, need to be structured and represented. The first issue to solve in this sense is defining where deliberation happens and therefore how we can capture, structure and represent deliberation contents in a way that enables stakeholders to reflect, re-interpret, re-use, and re-purpose those contents in new effective ways. Defining 'where' deliberation happens in modern planning arenas is a complex problem per se. In fact, participatory planning processes are collaborative decision-making processes in which several stakeholders deliberate in different moments, trying to accomplish different tasks, collaborating with different people, working in different organizations and communicating through different media. Moreover, the widespread diffusion of the Web has added a further level of complexity. Since people increasingly use the Web to communicate and work together, information and knowledge exchanged in virtual environments and within virtual communities matters increasingly, and needs to be integrated with other more common forms of information and knowledge gathered through face-to-face interactions. While online interaction makes deliberation easier and faster, a new problem is emerging around how to manage and integrate information and knowledge that comes from different deliberation environments in a unique and coherent deliberation process. In Table 1 we have classified nine deliberation typologies that vary with the communication modes, environments, time and planning tasks that are to be performed.

	Communication Modes		Communication Environments		Communication Time		Planning Activity Context		
Deliberation types	Co-located	Dispersed	Real World Settings (Offline)	Virtual (Online)	Synchronous	Asynchronous	Consultation	Design	Problem and Strategy Setting

Table 1. Deliberation typologies in modern planning arenas

These deliberation types represent all the possible forms in which deliberation can happen in modern planning arenas.

Supporting *deliberation across planning tasks* requires methods and tools for reusing the products of deliberation in one context, in other planning phases, e.g. exchanging information from public consultation meetings and then using it as a reference for technical and political choices. Supporting *deliberation across communication time* means enabling synchronous and asynchronous communication in the same deliberation process, that is to say using information gathered with online deliberation tools to inform face-to face deliberation meetings and vice-versa. Supporting *deliberation across communication modes* means enabling both co-located and dispersed stakeholders to be involved in planning discussion and to be informed on results of planning conversations. Finally supporting *deliberation across communication environments* means enabling integration between online and offline deliberation spaces i.e. using face-to face meeting results to inform web-consultation experiences and vice-versa.

Knowledge media tools offer novel ways to tackle the problem of deliberation capture, representation and management across deliberation spaces. In the following sections we describe the integration of three tools, one standalone and two Web-based, to support capturing structuring and representation of deliberation in Participatory Spatial Planning Practices. We describe how the tools have been integrated and used in the course of three real participatory planning cases. Basing on users feedback, we finally argue that integrating offline knowledge management

tools and Web technologies enables more effective capture and integration of deliberation contents between different deliberation environments (Table 1-1), while at the same time enabling better reflection and understanding of the deliberation process.

4. Compendium: a sensemaking tool to map and manage deliberation

Compendium is a hypermedia and sensemaking tool (Buckingham Shum, et al., 2006) that we used as a Knowledge Management system to store, structure and represent deliberation contents. Compendium has been already successfully used in the literature as an argument visualization tool in policy-making (e.g. Ohl, 2008; Renton et al. 2007, Elliman et al. 2006). The use of the tool we describe in this paper is more as knowledge management system for deliberation rather than argument visualization. In particular, an information architecture has been specifically designed to represent deliberation as hypermedia knowledge maps. In this architecture, information units are contributions by stakeholders during deliberation. Each contribution is represented as a node in the hypermedia database, and is indexed according to key descriptors of the deliberation process, which are organized coherently against five dimensions of participatory planning processes: *dialogical*, *social*, *spatial*, *temporal* and *causal*.

Social Dimension: Since one of the main advantages of structuring and representing deliberation is the possibility to draw a picture of the social setting in which planning develops, it is important to trace which stakeholders are making the claim and in which organizational contexts they are involved.

Temporal Dimension: Since deliberation is a process that spans the entire participatory planning process, time is considered key to contextualize deliberation contents to planning actions, so we can track when in the planning process something was said.

Spatial Dimension: The spatial dimension is considered constitutive because in participatory planning processes, people's statements often need to be linked to geographical areas or to spatial objects.

Dialogical Dimension: The dialogical dimension represent dialogues and arguments. This dimension shows the dialogical and argumentative content of the statement and the context of discussion in which it has been raised.

Causal Dimension or Rationale: It refers to the causal chains of arguments that motivate decisions and offers a representation of the planning design rationale.

These five dimensions are heuristic dimensions which have been defined by experimenting information modelling and representation in several planning case study (see following sections for info on SPP, MK, and TG case study). As in a shallow grounded theory approach we have started by analysing video recording of planning meetings, being our elements of analysis the claims raised from the different stakeholders in the meeting. Every time we isolated a claim we had a broad question in mind: "What are the questions I need to answer to understand more about this claim?" Then we started coding and grouping the claims according to the answers to this question. Based on this analysis we recognized and defined the aspects that need to be addressed (the question that need to be answered) in order

to interpret and understand information and knowledge used and generated during deliberation on participatory planning process.

Five testing categories of deliberation contents, reported above, emerged directly from the data, and, of course, from our interpretation of the research question and of the analyzed phenomenon. The five dimensions define the aspects of the deliberation process that need, or use to be, recollected during a Participatory Planning Process. They constitute an information taxonomy that has been used as data collection framework to annotate and classify deliberation contents, and then represent them in the hypermedia database.

The information taxonomy of deliberation contents was tested in a pilot project to represent the contents of a participatory planning process conducted in a southern Italian town, San Pietro Piturno (SPP). SPP case study was conducted within a neighbourhood regeneration programme in a small municipality in the south of Italy (Putignano, Puglia Region). The non-profit organization (ISF, Engineers Without Frontiers) involved in the participatory process, made its data available to evaluate the case study results, and the planners involved in the planning process at institutional level participated in the evaluation phase.

In this case, we tested Compendium's capability to capture and represent deliberation within the consultation process with the SPP local community. Evaluation data was gathered from three sources:

- Lab-based observations: Behavioural observations of two pairs of planning experts exploring the Compendium system, plus four individuals
- Semi-Structured expert interviews: Four semi-structured interviews to test general reactions and explore possible uses of the system for different tasks and different expertise. The interviews were with representatives at different organizational levels (community, technical and political) including an NGO, Decision Makers, Institutions and Spatial Planners
- Questionnaires: issued to planning students after testing the system's usability and information architecture.

The main aim of this case study was to test the information structure and deliberation contents taxonomy and how effective it is to reconstruct and represent the deliberation process (for details of the San Pietro Piturno case study see De Liddo, 2008, chapters 9-10).

Figure 1 illustrates how deliberation in a community meeting was structured and represented in Compendium in a *Dialogical* view. This was created by a knowledge mapper, who extracted and mapped contributions from videos of the consultation meetings, creating a hypermedia database. The dialogues are structured using the Issue-Based Information System (IBIS). IBIS provides a simple structuring notation distinguishing between issues, positions on these issues, and arguments for and against these positions (Kunz and Rittel, 1970). By following the argumentative chain, one can observe roles, trust relationships and decisional steps. By modelling the five views on the deliberation process as a hypermedia space, Compendium provides a multidimensional repository for the deliberation process, organized in content and context sub-repositories, in which every actor's statement can be explored according with its temporal, conceptual, spatial, social and causal-argumentative context.

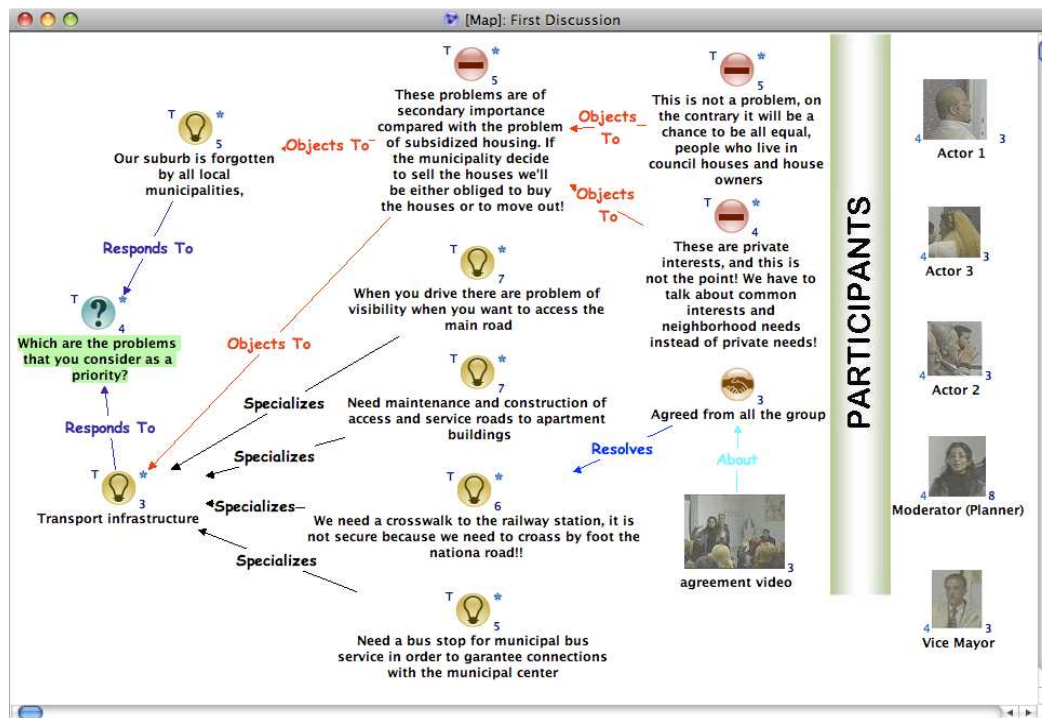


Figure 1. Community deliberation represented in Compendium as a Dialogue Map, linking to stakeholder profiles (right) and key video clips from the community meeting

This was a first step toward the development of an organisational memory providing support for browsing and retrieval of the huge range of formal and informal planning deliberations. Evaluation of the tool in this case study led to a partial revision of the taxonomy, in accordance with a soft systems methodology approach.

5. Improving transparency in deliberation capture and representation

If planning is intended to be participatory and empowering, who controls the records (whether maps or conventional notes) is clearly a significant issue. The work of Bowker and Star (1999) reminds us that classification schemes can be used to erase from collective memory, as well as to assist it: material which cannot be easily classified in an information system or controlled vocabulary may not be recorded at all. Thus, we can envisage that if it was cognitively hard to classify and connect a stakeholder's contribution using a particular discourse modelling scheme, there would be the risk that it was not recorded. Cartography is never neutral, whether spatial, or in the above case, conceptual. The mapping process introduces an important level of discretion as the mapper interprets deliberations (either live, or in this case post hoc) in order to create hypermedia maps, e.g. naming, classifying, linking, summarising — there is an unavoidable ethical dimension to this practice (for detailed analyses of what constitutes the practice of 'knowledge cartography', see Buckingham Shum, et al. 1997; Selvin, et al. 2010).

One strategy to minimise the risk that mapping distorts the record is to provide effective digital video. We developed an integration between Compendium and a videoconferencing tool called FM, in order to improve the transparency of the mediating layer of interpretation that mapping introduces.

FM is a tool developed within the Open University's FlashMeeting Project (<http://flashmeeting.open.ac.uk>). Although FM was designed to support online video-conferences, we also used FM to create reusable deliberation records from face-to-face meetings, since it provides a set of useful features:

- Meeting recording and replay (within a web browser)
- Who is speaking at any moment
- How many times and for how long they spoke (generating analytics for the moderator)
- Annotation of important moments of the meeting (sharing this with the stakeholders live during the meeting and/or making it available in the replay)
- Annotation of spatial object on maps collaboratively manipulated during the meeting (possibility to take different snapshots of the same map, taking trace of the different annotations along the meeting, taking trace of the map evolution)

In the Compendium-FM integration, video of meetings which was annotated in FM during meetings (as one would take notes). These annotations were then imported into Compendium populating the hypermedia database. This integration thus seeks to combine the richness of video for recovering and reconstructing meaning, enriching the terser summaries captured in Compendium. We argue that this improves the transparency of the deliberation process: stakeholders can go back to the raw information source and make sense of the deliberation process in a unbiased way.

We tested this feature in a quasi-naturalistic case study conducted with a group of citizens in Milton Keynes, UK (MK case study). The aim of this case was to test video annotation of face-to-face meetings, in the ongoing phase. We tested FM and Compendium to track a group meeting (consultation meetings or technical team meetings) in which participation was limited to a small number of known people. Participants were all Milton Keynes citizens, so held a real stake into the discussion. Between them, a key role was played by an officer of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, who enriched the discussion with real knowledge and direct experiences of the planning process and its development during the 1970s. All participants were invited to discuss the Milton Keynes Master Plan, and to deliberate about future lines of development for the city. The face-to-face meeting was recorded and live annotated with FM. The annotations were later exported to Compendium, where each annotation was automatically converted into a node in a hypermedia map, and it could be associated with a specific point in the FM video replay.

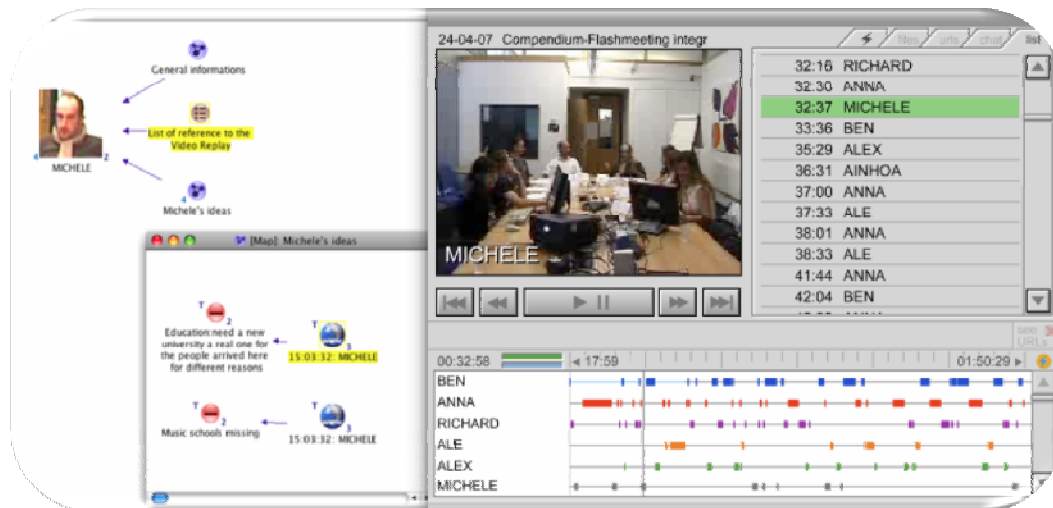


Figure 2. Compendium-FM integration: Nodes in Compendium maps (background) are hyperlinked into the relevant point in the FM meeting replay tool.

Figure 2 shows the FM replay tool: each participant has a timeline showing when s/he spoke. This is launched by double-clicking on an imported, video-indexed node in Compendium, which the mapper has linked to a contribution in a Dialogue Map (as in Figure 1). The link back to the source material makes it easy for anyone to verify that the map is an appropriate summary of what happened. This case study demonstrates how the deliberation process can be made more fully transparent and open to critique (for details of the MK case study see De Liddo, 2008, pp. 102; pp.121-124). Without digital indexing of the deliberation process and instantaneous access to the relevant point in the video record, such verification would be much harder, and in most cases, would never happen.

6. Enabling asynchronous online deliberation: Compendium-CoPe_it! integration

Traditional methods of deliberation and public participation normally require face-to-face, synchronous interaction between citizens, planners and decision makers — the contexts which we have discussed so far. However, the costs of coordinating and hosting such meetings can be high, and of course, they are not necessarily the best way to elicit reflective viewpoints from all relevant voices. Asynchronous online deliberation platforms may, at least for those comfortable with the internet, reduce the costs of participation while enlarging the participation base.

We therefore integrated the offline Compendium tool with CoPe_it!, a web-based tool supporting collaborative argumentation and decision-making in online communities of practice (Karacapilidis and Tzagarakis 2007). CoPe_it! supports the definition of alternative solutions and the analysis and evaluation of the contents in order to drive groups through decision making processes. We developed an import-export of Compendium hypermedia maps for CoPe_it!, enabling online users to contribute statements and arguments (claims, comments or ideas) to the Compendium maps (Figure 3).

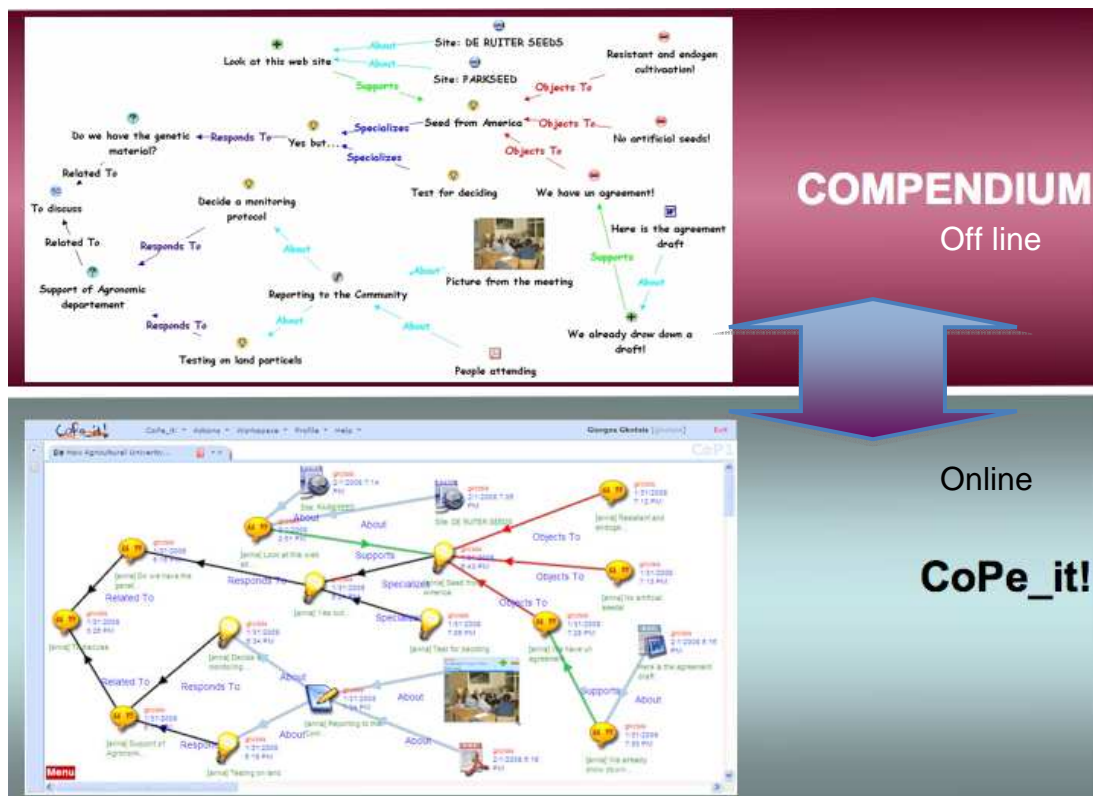


Figure 3. Offline-online Dialogue Map integration: import from the offline Compendium tool into the online CoPe_it! tool.

The Compendium-CoPe_it! integration was tested in a participatory planning case driven in the southern Italy community of Torre Guaceto (TG). This case study is not a conventional planning activity, but concerned the activities performed by a community of farmers to enhance their biological production income. In this case, the planning team was in charge of helping this community of practice to build their past and present project history. Therefore, Compendium and CoPe_it! were used both to rebuild and represent the past history of the community and to capture and represent the new, ongoing activities. The aim was to test the system's capability to capture a deliberation process as it unfolded. Furthermore, this case involved a real farming community of practice, providing the opportunity to investigate participatory planning activities outside an institutional environment, where we could better appreciate the differences and difficulties of working with local communities in their environments and with their communication protocols (for details on the TG case study see De Liddo 2008, pp. 101; pp 105-117).

From a technical perspective, the case study showed that, Compendium and CoPe_it! have high integration potential mainly because they share similar communication principles and visualization languages. Maps developed offline could now be posted in almost identical form for online discussion, and vice-versa. Nodes' positions, label, images, links type and colour scheme were preserved, thus enabling the unbiased and precise identification of user's contributions to the map. Online users could comment on maps from off-line deliberations, and vice-versa.

7. Evaluation

In the previous sections, three case studies have been briefly described in which Compendium, FM and CoPe_it! were proof tested to capture deliberation around different planning activities. Table 4 gives an overview of the evaluation study and of the participatory process phase, time of capturing, meeting environment and gathered information for each case study.

CASE STUDY	Phase of the Participatory Process	Time of Deliberation Capture	Meeting Environment	Information Resources
SPP – San Pietro Piturno	Consultation Meetings	Post hoc, through analysis of the video replay	Real-life, face-to-face meetings.	Videos and actors interviews
TG – Torre Guaceto case study	Community Groups Meetings	On going phase	Real-life, face-to-face meetings and on-line	Life-meeting participation, meeting videos, audio records, and actors' interviews
MK – Milton Keynes Master Plan	Team group meeting	On going phase	Real-life, face-to-face meetings.	Live-meeting participation, meeting videos, screencast, note-keeping maps

Table 4. Case studies overview by main characteristics

Moreover, Table 5 summarises how the combined application of the three tools can effectively support the capture and representation of deliberation in different communication environments and while performing different planning tasks. We see that Compendium supports Co-located, Offline, Synchronous deliberation; while FM supports both Co-located and Dispersed communication modes and Online and Offline deliberation through post-hoc annotation of meeting videos; finally CoPe_it! supports Dispersed, Online Synchronous and Asynchronous deliberation. (Table 5 acronyms: SPP-San Pietro Piturno mentioned in §4, MK-Milton Keynes mentioned in §5, and TG-Torre Guaceto mentioned in §6; the shaded cells show which tool were used by case study and activity).

	Communication Modes		Communication Environments		Communication Time		Planning Activity Context		
Deliberation types	Co-located	Dispersed	Real World Settings (Offline)	Virtual (Online)	Synchronous	Asynchronous	Consultation	Design	Problem and Strategy Setting
<i>Compendium</i>	X		X		X		SPP	TG	MK
<i>FM</i>	X	X	X	X	X				MK
<i>CoPe_it!</i>		X		X	X	X	TG	TG	

Table 5. Deliberation typologies supported by each tool, and planning case studies (by acronym SPP, TG and MK) in which each tool was tested.

Although it is out of the scope of this paper to provide detailed descriptions of the case studies and data analysis, below we provide some of the stakeholder feedback gathered (quotes, translated from Italian, are italicised), and some of the key evaluation results. Those come in particular from the usability study conducted within the SPP project, and summarize quotes from three kinds of stakeholder: planning practitioners (from NGO and Local Government), planning scholars and planning students.

Overall, users “*consider the tools very useful*” to provide a rich representation of the deliberation process that can be used to reflect on planning decisions and to

support decision-making; for example: *“the categorization of information (the information architecture) provides rich data about the deliberation process and these data can be analyzed and used in many different ways to support the decision-making process”*. Compendium can *“offer a rich representation of the critical issues for decision-making such as: defining what is the problem; what are the objectives; and supporting decision maker to reflect and look for alternatives.”* Moreover users particularly appreciated the use of the tools *“to support reflection in action”*; they describe the groupware as a *“means to investigate the process, to understand the problems, to explore solutions and also to understand how to make these solutions operational on the territory.”*

Users recognized the advantages of using the tools to trace and represent design deliberation in that they can help stakeholders to make sense and *“to argue about the evolution of any kind of event that involves several stakeholders.”* They thought that the tools could help to reflect on deliberation in order *“to investigate and to find the right balance and combination between community needs and exploitation of local resources and potentials.”* If used in this way these tools could *“help to draw a plan that is more compatible with the community interests and demands.”* Moreover, by supporting reflection and allowing deep analysis of the deliberation together with the social context which generated it, users considered that *“those technologies can be used to continuously revise and adjust the plan to the community needs”* as long as the deliberation record grows and evolves together with the planning process and with the social context.

8. Conclusions and Future Work

In this paper we have argued that the *deliberation process* is central to an authentic understanding of participatory planning practices. This has motivated a series of discourse technology integration projects to make deliberation more transparent, that is, recording discourse digitally to make it possible to interrogate the planning project memory in ways not possible with conventional documentation, thus making it more rigorous, useful, and accountable.

Each tool integration seeks to address a different facet of this design challenge. Working from videos of community meetings, Compendium was used to index stakeholders' contributions against important five dimensions of participatory planning processes: *dialogical, social, spatial, temporal* and *causal*. The FM videoconferencing tool already makes it easier to navigate and replay an online meeting by participant and annotation, and its integration with Compendium helps further to preserve transparency by providing instant access from terse, semantic hypertext Dialogue Maps, back into the original moment in the richer video. Compendium's integration with CoPe_it! addressed the potential weakness of a single analyst constructing the record of a face-to-face offline consultation, by enabling the wider community to check, annotate and extend the map online consultation.

We propose that the work summarised in this paper provides evidence that hypermedia discourse tools help move us from a deliberation process which is often ephemeral, ill-structured and disempowering, to deliberation which is persistent, more coherently structured and participatory.

There remain some significant challenges to investigate as deliberation mapping tools, such as those described here, begin to mature and become embedded in planning practice. Since Participatory Planning aims to enlarge involvement of the community in the planning process, we now need to engage with the public. In the case studies presented, we have engaged mainly with planning scholars and practitioners, and have investigated the technical aspects of how deliberation processes can be effectively captured across planning tasks, communication modes, time and environments, by integrating and using hypermedia, groupware technologies. We now need to engage with the public and understand how a community interacts with those technologies.

Moreover, as suggested by the expert interviews with a representative of the Regional Planning office, issues of power can occur: "...if we talk about the political and administrative class, I have to admit that those environments are very resistant to change. It could be really difficult to introduce any kind of innovation in the administrative process. There is a cultural resistance to innovation. On the other end, politicians see as dangerous everything that could undermine the spaces and procedure in which unilateral decision develops."

Thus, the accountability that comes from such tools may not be welcomed by all stakeholders, since they redistribute power and control. If, however, authentic participatory planning is not only a fine ideal, but a necessity in order to create sustainable, adaptive communities and decision making processes capable of meeting today's challenges, then we argue that such tools could play an important role.

The "ideal" design for a deliberation platform requires no supervision, but is so cleverly designed that when opened up for mass participation, it still delivers coherent debates and summaries. Setting such high expectations of a platform may be unrealistic, leaving open the question of when and where human intervention is needed to make sense of what is going on. In this view, *platforms*, *people* and *practices* must co-evolve: understanding the "architecture of participation" (to adapt O'Reilly's, 2004 concept from open source code) around these tools is critical, in order to specify the roles and skillsets needed. We are not yet sure that untrained users can make effective use of deliberation mapping tools, so we continue to study the role played by expert "cartographers" in curating project memories of this sort.

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Design Issues for Building Deliberative Digital Habitats

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Abstract. This paper discusses some issues that it is worth considering in the design of deliberative digital habitats. It identifies four spaces characterizing these habitats and proposes three dimensions to be considered when designing them: the *gemeinschaft* dimension, the *gesellschaft* dimension and the *technological* dimension. The aim is to help public institutions as well as grassroots movements to pay the due attention to these critical issues which are often overlooked.

1. Introduction

The opportunities provided by the technologies of the so-called web 2.0 have allowed, in the last years, the creation of digital habitats (Wenger 2009): blogs, blog networks (Keren 2006), micro-blogging sites and, social network sites (Boyd and Ellison 2007), have accompanied mass of people to (re)discover the participatory and interactive nature of the net. So common in its first years – through applications such as newsgroups and Bulletin Board Systems – it had got lost in the early web season. These online social interaction environments have allowed citizens' committees worldwide to debate and organize protests, petitions, and other forms of civic activism, as well as to collect citizens' remarks and suggestions on the state of public spaces, on the quality of public services, on the activity of public officers (De Cindio e Peraboni 2009a), so creating rooms for a kind of distributed watchdogging (Regonini 2009).

In Italy, where traditional media, because of the current political situation, suffer of a democratic anomaly, the net has been, for many citizens' groups and committees, the unique platform for organizing activities, gathering and distributing information, sharing experiences: in summary for sustaining their civic action. Significant examples of initiatives that would have been impossible without the Internet are: the "V-day" organized on September 8th 2007 through the blog of Beppe Grillo (an Italian comedian and the most popular Italian blogger), that draw hundreds of thousands of citizens into the streets, in Bologna and other Italian towns) to demonstrate against the Italian political establishment; two years after, on December 5th, 2009, 500,000 people met in Rome in the "No-B-Day" organized through the "Popolo Viola" Facebook group (Mello, 2010).

However, these initiatives, even when succeed in achieving an actual impact – such as suspending a controversial public work or stopping the adoption of a new law, or the like – run the risk to replicate the evolution of the pre-web civic initiatives

(community networks, civic nets and the like): if they fail to establish a steady dialogue between the citizens and the public institutions and to influence the decision-making process, the citizens' enthusiasm declines, and they will abandon their participative inclination without any significant change in the democratic processes.

Let us now consider what happens when the participatory or deliberative process is promoted by some public institution. Nowadays, an online site is often established with several purposes, including sharing information, setting up the agenda and continuing the discussions online. However, while the phases of the participatory/deliberative process are usually quite carefully designed – typically by identifying the participants, drafting the informational background to frame the issues, and choosing the participatory modality (Bobbio, 2004) – a similar attention is not given to designing the online participation. Quite often, the design is delegated by the promoters (e.g., by the city office in charge of the participatory process) either to some external web agency or to somebody, within the administration, more skilled with the web technologies. The outcome is often a web site which may have an accurate and attractive graphic interface, but includes a “collage” of some popular net applications: some discussion boards, a blog area and some social network features are placed side by side, hoping that this suffices to attract citizens and engage them in the participatory process. When afterwards the promoters realize that the web site is almost empty – a digital city square with no digital inhabitant¹ – instead of recognizing the lack of design, assign the responsibility of the failure to the technology itself, or to the digital divide, or to citizens who are said to be not sufficiently familiar with the web (that thousands of them use everyday!).

Although the main motivation behind the successes and failures of an e-participation web site is in the offline participatory process itself (and it is out of the scope of this paper to discuss this), the way in which the online participation is, or is not, designed plays a relevant role too.

This paper therefore faces with the design of participatory and deliberative digital habitats. It is rooted in the experience accumulated in the last fifteen years at the Civic Informatics Laboratory (LIC for short) of the University of Milan while promoting and managing the Milan Community Network and several related projects for fostering civic engagement and public dialogue through online social interactive systems. The main contribution of this paper is systematizing some design issues within a (first attempt of a) framework for designing deliberative digital habitats. Most of these issues are well known to those who have been directly engaged in early experiences of online participation and deliberation. However, we believe that there is a lack of systematized material that can help people who want to set up a web site to support participatory or deliberative processes. The following section provides elements to specify this framework.

2. Three dimensions for designing deliberative digital habitat

The term habitat in ecology indicates an area or a natural environment that is inhabited by a particular population. Human habitats include many interrelated

¹ It is worth recalling the famous J.J. Rousseau saying: “*Les maisons font la ville, ma les citoyens font la cité.*”

features, especially the immediate physical environment (natural or human-built such as the urban environment) and the social environment where an inhabitant lives in.

For designing digital habitat we have found effective to profit of the expertise and knowledge risen from the early experiences of online environments supporting social interactions. Virtual communities (Rheingold 1993), online communities (Preece 2000) and web communities (Kim 2000), as well as communities of practice (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002), civic and community networks (Schuler 1996, Venkatesh 2003) have been largely studied and guidelines for their design developed. Driving inspiration from (Preece 2000), (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002) and (De Cindio and Ripamonti 2010), all these online environments can be characterized as a set of people who:

- freely interact over time, recognizing a common interest that holds them together for sharing knowledge, experiences, rituals, etc.;
- define implicit or explicit policies for regulating their interactions;
- use an ICT-based communication system.

According to Rheingold (1993), who chose the term “community” (*gemeinschaft*) to denote the early experiences of online aggregation, in (De Cindio et al., 2003) we suggested to name *gemeinschaft* dimension the freely interactions among people and *gesellschaft* dimension the corpus that governs the online life, i.e., the normative aspects typical of a society. Generalizing, in order to build a digital habitat (an online community, a social network, as well as a deliberative website), three different dimensions have to be designed: the *gemeinschaft*, the *gesellschaft* and the technological dimensions. The social environment of the digital habitat is therefore characterized by its *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* dimensions; the physical environment by the technological dimension.

We are interested to consider the specific case in which one wants to build a welcoming online environment where citizens meet each other, with public officers and with their representatives, for establishing public, hopefully effective, dialogue around public affairs. In this case, the experiences we have carried on taught us that there are some issues that have to be considered, or, if one prefers, some questions that have to be answered. In particular, regarding the *gemeinschaft* dimension, one has to design the community participation experience as a win-win game which motivates the various social actors (generic citizens, stakeholders, public officers, politicians, and so on) to interact and participate into the online public arena. Moreover, one has to design the “participatory contract” that the social actors commit to follow: it rules the ongoing interplay between online and offline activities. Regarding the *gesellschaft* dimension, one has to outline the social structure (roles and policies) characterizing the online interactions occurring in the digital habitat. Finally, regarding the technological dimension, one has to choose the technologies to be adopted for enabling the envisaged social environment.

In our experience, these issues are largely overlooked when a public institution promotes a site for involving citizens in a participatory or deliberative process. But they are also neglected when citizens themselves open an online environment for discussing public affairs. “We want to discuss about the election of the new Rector of the University” or “We have to protest against the *ad personam* laws that Mr. Berlusconi (the Italian Prime Minister) want to promulgate”. In both cases the answer to these needs has been: “Let’s open a group in Facebook” and this has been all the design effort. In the former case the outcome has been a complete failure; in the latter one, a great success which, however has been followed by serious problems

which might lead to a definitive break precisely because of the lack of design (Caravita 2010).

In the next paragraphs we will unfold the discussion around these issues, to provide hopefully helpful hints for those engaged in the design of deliberative digital habitats.

2.1 The design of the *gemeinschaft* dimension

According to the above discussion, designing the participation experience characterizing the social environment means identifying ways for enabling the creation of the community as “a set of people who freely interact over time, recognizing a common interest that holds them together for sharing knowledge, experiences, rituals, etc.”. This task is harder in the case of deliberative digital habitats where: topics to be dealt with are usually (already) defined in a top-down way, the deliberation process should involve a defined set of social actor, participants may have very different individual goals, etc. In this case triggering and maintaining the participation is not at all trivial. Below we outline some issues that it is worth considering.

2.1.1 Who are the social actors of the game?

Traditionally, citizens are distinguished into different categories: permanent residents (who spend their lives in a territory), temporary residents (such as students, who dwell in it), and commuters (who come in daily to work or study). Whereas only residents are eligible voters in the municipal/local elections, people belonging to the other categories are significant social actors too. For this reason, it is worth paying attention to establish who has to be involved in a participatory process. Actually, this decision has to be taken for each phase/activity in the participatory process: while it may be worth allowing temporary residents and commuters to participate to public forums – both the offline meetings and their online extension –, only residents might be considered eligible voters in a more cogent decision-making activity, such as a citizens’ consultation with binding outcome.

In an augmented social environment, where technology breaks down time and space barriers, this choices become even more influential and somehow affects the notion of citizenship.

2.1.2 Which participation activities and which benefits for each social actor?

When, slightly above, we have defined the *gemeinschaft* dimension, we guessed a common interest that holds people together, carefully avoiding assuming some shared goal. We have discussed this issue in (De Cindio e Ripamonti 2010) and we believe that it is full of consequence for designing good deliberative digital habitats. Actually a quite common assumption is that the social actors who engage themselves in a participatory or deliberative process do this because they have a common goal, e.g., to improve the quality of life, or to reduce traffic, or whatever else in a city or a city district. But the actual goals for participants (citizens, members of the city council or members of the city government) may be very different. For instance, when municipal elections approach, the main goal for the city council and government members become to be re-elected. However, even if their ultimate goals may significantly differ, all the social actors could be interested to share knowledge and opinions: but “could” is different from “are”. The promoters and designers of the deliberative digital habitat have to ask themselves what the various actors that they want to engage in the public discourse gain from participating.

This is what we mean when we say that the participation experience should be conceived as a “win-win game” whose activities motivate the various social actors to participate to the online public arena. This means identifying a set of activities (both online and offline) which trigger each social actor to involve. Of course, the reward is not necessarily – if never – economical. If a citizen commits some time to signal a problem, some troubles or breaks, or something else in a web site provided by (or in collaboration with) the city administration (as it is the case in quite popular web sites, in Italy and elsewhere²), s/he reasonably assumes that the problem will be fixed, or at least considered, in a reasonable lapse of time, and waits for news about it. In this case, the rewarding is contributing to the quality of his/her city. Of course, if anything happens, s/he becomes frustrated, and unlikely will report again new problems.

When a public institution calls its citizens into some more complex participatory process – as, for instance, a participatory budgeting, or a local Agenda 21 – the participants will invest more time and will expect a corresponding counterpart to their engagement. If there are reasons, or unforeseen events, which prevent a good outcome of the process (e.g., the replacement of the alderman who promoted the initiative), these hindrances, or changed circumstances, have to be made public with great evidence.

2.1.3 How to design participation over time?

When designing the participation experience, it is also important taking into account that participation, rather than a continuum, is a discrete phenomenon characterized by peak moments when the actors are more inclined to participate (De Cindio, Di Loreto, Peraboni 2008). Those moments could be determined by specific situations such as the election campaigns, the protests against either a running or a forthcoming public policy, or against some even minor decision affecting the people's territory and lives (such as the turning in the opposite direction of a one-way street or the opening of new decentralization office³). When shaping the “win-win” game, the designers should be well aware of these considerations for two different reasons: on the one hand, they should avoid assuming that the citizens' participation, once hard-won, will be ever-increasing; on the other hand, they should design the game flexible enough to take the opportunities offered by these hot moments and then consolidate peak participation into a more ongoing practice.

2.1.4 Which is the participatory contract?

Another important brick to set up an effective deliberative digital habitat, is the definition of the ‘participatory contract’ that formalizes the “win-win” game by establishing the mutual commitment between the promoter of the initiative, the participants and the relevant public institution(s). It mainly defines which is the interplay between the online and offline dimensions of participation.

When the participation initiative is promoted by an independent body, this contract makes explicit and clear the relation established with the relevant public institutions. Most of the “2.0 participation initiatives” are promoted outside the institutional umbrella; therefore their contracts are often not as clear as one could wish. One of the most successful cases is FixMyStreet.com, promoted by the independent body MySociety. However, even in this case, the commitment undertaken by the UK

² See, e.g., www.fixmystreet.org, <http://iris.comune.venezia.it/Iris/>, <http://www.sicurezzastradale.partecipami.it/>. We have discussed the differences among them in (De Cindio and Peraboni 2010)

³ both examples are not fancy situations, but come from real cases occurred, respectively, within www.sicurezzastradale.partecipami.it and within www.partecipami.it

councils with respect to the citizens' remarks collected through the FixMyStreet.com website is quite vague and not so well manifest online⁴.

When the initiative is directly promoted and managed by a public body – as, e.g., in the case of the IRIS system by the Venice municipality⁵, or in the case of PeerToPatent.org by the US Patent Office – it is its job to define and make well evident the commitment taken with the people who participate. Public institutions should never make promises that they cannot fulfil: in our experience, citizens accept to engage even if the actual participation boundary is quite limited, but they are firm in demanding that the participatory contract is observed. On the contrary, public institutions are often inclined to promise more than they can, or actually want to do, and it is difficult to convince them that this may be a sort of boomerang.

2.2 The design of the *gesellschaft* dimension

A key dimension in the design of a digital habitat, and in particular of a participatory and deliberative one, consists of the rules which shape and govern the online interactions: which identification policy, which rules the participants have to follow, who is the promoter and who guarantees that the undertaken commitments are fulfilled by all the social actors. These issues are discussed in the next paragraphs.

2.2.1 Which identification policy?

The definition of the authentication and identification policies is a crucial aspect in the design of an effective online participation and it is tightly related to the choice of the social actors issue discussed in §2.1.1. Analyzing several “2.0 participation initiatives” (De Cindio and Peraboni 2010) it is possible to observe that, in order to make participation easier, nearly all the sites adopt a weak authentication policy: often no registration is required and, even when mandatory, participants have only to provide a username (or nickname) and, possibly, an email address that only in few cases is actually checked. Due to this choice, posts are signed by a nickname, which makes them de facto anonymous. Anonymity can be acceptable within some contexts (e.g. when rating a movie on the Internet Movies Data Base). But in the case of deliberative digital habitats, anonymity does not foster the rise of a sense of mutual trust that sites set up for civic purposes should inspire: a public dialogue on relevant civic issues with a group of digital ghosts is neither gratifying nor stimulating.

Our long-standing experience managing the Milan Community Network and several related projects suggests that, in order to create a trustworthy social environment that encourage government officers and representatives to undertake online dialogue with citizens, this weak form of identification is not adequate: the online identity should, as much as possible, reflect the offline identity (De Cindio, Ripamonti, and Di Loreto 2008). If citizens wish to get a public answer from someone who plays a public role and appears online with her/his actual identity, have to do the same, “put their face” and accept the responsibility to participate with their actual identity.

However, there are cases in which it is worth protecting participant's privacy. This may be the case of public consultations, of discussions about sensitive topics, of the public assessments of a public officer that could bounce back on the participants, as

⁴ Within the FAQ (Frequent Asked Question) section of the web site, one reads: “[The problems] are reported to the relevant council by mail. The council can then resolve the problem the way they normally would.

⁵ <http://iris.comune.venezia.it/Iris/>

in the case of the assessment of a teacher by his/her students⁶ as well as in the case of doctors by patients⁷. In all these cases, there is a mismatch between the need of a strong authentication policy (so that, e.g., only the students who have actually taken a class can rate the teacher) with the need of adopting secrecy techniques for protecting participants' identity.

The recommendation to promote, online, the use of actual identities does not mean to adopt a rigid and strict authentication and identification policy. It should be flexible and appropriate for each participation level: weaker (resp., higher) levels of involvement ask for weaker (resp., higher) responsibility.

2.2.2 How to preserve a civil and civic dialogue?

A fundamental issue in designing effective deliberative digital habitats is defining the rules to preserve a fair dialogue among participants. These rules allow preventing flames, limiting troll's actions and fostering the creation of a positive climate characterized by mutual trust among participants. This is the proper context for carrying on discussions about civic issues which may be sensitive and source of conflicts. In order to face with this issue, the lessons learned managing the Milan Community Network, fully presented in (De Cindio et al 2003), are our fundamental basis.

In all the online civic sites we manage, a so-called Galateo (others may prefer to call it Code of conduct, Rules of engagement, and the like) guides the participants' behaviour. It defines a set of standards and specific rules for people' online behaviour that, above and beyond netiquette, on the one hand, and Italian national law, on the other, should guarantee a fair dialogue in a welcoming environment where everyone can feel at ease expressing her/his own ideas and opinions. In addition to be accurately defined, the Galateo must be published with great evidence within the online environment and subscribed by participants when create their accounts. In this way, every participant is acquainted with it and nobody can protest in case of disciplinary actions due to repeated violations.

2.2.3 Who is the referee?

The Galateo brings along with it the need to choose a trusted person committed to let the Galateo be observed: this is the role of the community manager. Rather than being a censor in charge of disapproving messages that fail to comply with the Galateo, or a policeman who bans participants, s/he plays the role of the person who helps participants to state their ideas in fair and civil fashion. Thanks to this work s/he is recognized as a digital communication expert who supports less skilled participants (public officers, politicians, elected representatives as well as generic citizens) in learning and facing with the dynamics typical of the online environments.

Moreover, the community manager acts as facilitator of a more inclusive participation: s/he prods the unregistered participants who contribute quite often to register, so to have the possibility to play a more significant role and access the higher levels of participation. Similarly, in order to increase participant's visibility as community members, the community manager also encourages registered users to complete their profiles.

The identification of one or more community managers who oversee the ongoing activities is therefore a crucial and uneasy issue. When the deliberative digital

⁶ <http://www.ratemyteachers.com/>

⁷ <http://www.patientopinion.org.uk/>

environment is promoted by a public body, the problem is often in finding people with the necessary competence on digital communication, available to spend a lot of time online. In the case of less institutional initiatives, the main problem is that, unlikely, a fully volunteer community manager can assure the necessary continuity. In both cases, the sharing of the role among more persons may become even more complex.

2.2.4 Who is the “guarantor” of the game?

While the community manager has to guarantee that the Galateo is respected by all the participants, there is also the need to assure that the participatory contract is honoured. This introduces the issue of a possible role of third parties as “guarantors” of the initiative.

Even if the participatory contract is well defined, directly managing the activities in the online environment is not necessarily the easier solution for a public institution. It might be critical, for instance, to host a discussion in which some citizens strongly criticize the administration or some of its key persons. We know of several such cases. Moreover, if the public institution does not fulfil the participatory contract, citizens have nobody to turn for help. A trusted third party, which acts as intermediary between the public institution and the citizens, may help to avoid such problems.

This is for instance the role of MySociety which has promoted and manages FixMyStreet.com, as well as of the Foundation RCM which has promoted and manages the Milano Community Network and several initiatives budded from it. Both are non-profit bodies and their fundamental role is:

- establishing a relation with the relevant public institutions (the Milan city council and government, and, respectively, several borough, district, city and county councils);
- defining the commitment the public institution accepts to fulfil with respect to what happens online, and what it requires from citizens in terms of authentication, identification, fairness;
- then guaranteeing that the undertaken commitments are fulfilled by all the social actors.

2.3 The design of the *technological* dimension

As mentioned in the Introduction, the current practice for setting up a deliberative web site too often comes down to the choice of some tools (a forum, a blog, a calendar, etc.). More recently, it may include a page/group in Facebook or consist of a channel in Twitter.

In the previous paragraphs we have discussed that the design has to start by considering some fundamental issues affecting the social environment. However, although we believe that the technology is not the key success factor, nevertheless it can play a relevant role in shaping participation. As the early experiences with online communities have taught, “good technology in itself will not a community make, but bad technology can sure make community life difficult enough to ruin it” (Wenger 2005). Therefore, attention has to be paid when choosing software tools and platform which enable the online environment.

2.3.1 Which spaces and which balance among them?

This choice first of all consists in designing the online spaces which shape the online interacting environment and enable the identified social environment. We believe that they should support:

- free and not finalized interactions which create a sense of community and mutual trust among participants (*community space*);
- finalized interactions for achieving, whenever possible, shared outcomes and decisions (*deliberative space*);
- the possibility for each participant, while interacting with the others, to build his/her visibility and reputation, as the web 2.0 as shown essential for motivating people to participate (*personal space*);
- the gathering, distribution and sharing of relevant content (*information space*).

Fig.1 depicts these four spaces. Let us note that it represents the merge of two complementary perspectives:

- on the one hand, for designing online communities, Wenger (2005) points out the need of *cultivating the community* (i.e., of designing the community space) as well as of *supporting individual participation* (i.e., of including a personal space);
- on the other hand, for designing the e-participation platform we are engaged to develop (De Cindio, Peraboni and Sonnante 2008) we have initially envisaged the need of tools for supporting the community space and tools for deliberation.

The outcomes of the field experiences we have carried on (De Cindio et al. 2003, De Cindio, Ripamonti and Di Loreto 2008, De Cindio, Di Loreto and Peraboni 2008, De Cindio and Peraboni 2009b) and the emergence of the social network sites which strongly rely on individuals and their relations, brought us to realize that these four spaces need each other: without some trust among participants deliberation can neither occur nor even start, as discussed in (De Cindio and Peraboni 2009b); a never-ending public civic dialogue which does not finalize to tangible decisions become frustrating for participants, as the decline of community networks has proved (De Cindio and Schuler 2007); without the possibility of supporting “their arguments by appropriate and reasonably accurate factual claims” (Fishkin e Luskin 2005), e.g., documents, links, photos, video, etc., i.e., by informative resources, public dialogue tend to become ideological rather than rationale (Winkler 2007).

The designer have to find a good balance among these spaces and choose which functionalities each space must provide: for instance, a discussion forum for the community space, the possibility of online citizens’ consultations for the deliberative space, and a personal profile for enhancing the mutual acquaintance among participants.

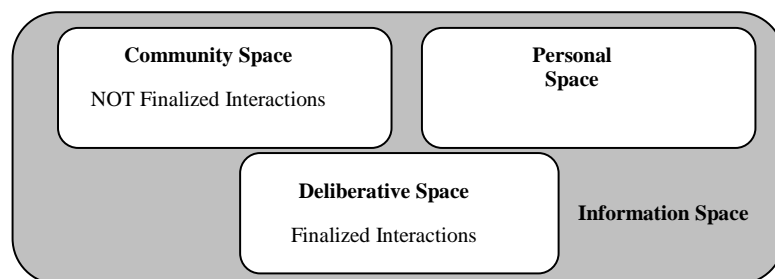


Figure 1. The four spaces of a Deliberative Digital Habitat

2.3.2 Which technologies for each space?

These functionalities can be provided in different ways. Taking inspiration from the framework for the analysis of “Technology for communities” proposed by Etienne Wenger et al. (2005), we claim that the designers:

- a) can either identify a **platforms** (developed by some vendors or developers) which packages all the needed functionalities;
- b) or they can identify a set of **tools** that support the required functionalities, and undertake their merging into an integrated software environment;
- c) in both cases, they have to consider the **features** of tools and platforms that make them usable and differentiate one offering from another (a discussion board may have multimedia attachments, “new” flags, different visualizations, and so on).

These choices may be influenced (in some case, constrained) by the **configuration of technologies** that the prospective participants use: for instance, if social inclusion is a relevant issue for organizing a citizens consultation, the designers have to consider the rate of diffusion of PCs and mobile phones and choose a suitable (combination of) technology.

It is worth mentioning that the reuse of existing software tools and platforms, conceived with different purposes and for different contexts, is frequent. However, they can be inappropriate for supporting participation initiatives which have specific needs. That's why our group has undertaken the development of a software platform initially conceived for supporting mainly the community and deliberative space – and therefore called openDCN, where DCN stands for Deliberative Community Networks (De Cindio, De Marco and Grew 2007). We are now including a personal space, to cope with the emerging behaviours made popular by the web 2.0 style, and developing features to guarantee some degree of osmosis with the most popular social network sites.

From the several participatory experiences we carried out, we have learned that the tools do not necessarily belong to just one space, as we initially taught; they can spread over more spaces. When an instance of a tool is created for a specific initiative, the designers choose which features have to be included. For instance, in openDCN the tool called Informed Discussion (an enriched forum) can be instantiated including or not a wiki to allow participants to write a document which synthesizes the discussion.

3. Conclusions

In this paper we have proposed three dimensions, and discussed some issues within each of them, that it is worth considering in the design of deliberative digital habitats. The aim is to help public institutions as well as grassroots movements to pay the due attention to these critical issues which are often overlooked.

It is worth noting that the win-win game metaphor, used to inspire the design of the *gemeinschaft* dimension, helps us, as designers, to keep in mind that online social environments cannot be actually designed once and for all, but initially enabled and then cultivated (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002) complying with the emergent social behaviour through out their life. Nowadays, this requires the capability of taking into account the emergent role played by the social network sites, i.e., to find ways for driving the mass of active people scattered over the web to online environments designed for civic purposes. Using a metaphor, this is to act as a farmer who create the hive for supporting the bees' social organization, so that they can fly and pick pollen all around, but have a safe place to deposit it and produce their precious honey.

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Online Deliberation and the United States Open Government Initiative

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Abstract. On his first full day in office, President Obama committed to strengthen democracy, ensure the public trust, and promote efficiency and effectiveness in government by creating a system of transparency that promotes accountability and provides information for the public, participation that enhances government effectiveness and improves the quality of decision making, and collaboration that engages Americans in the work of their government. His executive memorandum launched the Open Government Initiative (OGI), an effort across the federal government to transform how it uses technology and collaborative governance. Recently, the Office of Management and Budget issued the Open Government Directive directing federal agencies to publish government information online, improve the quality of government information, create and institutionalize a culture of open government, and create an enabling policy framework for open government. While the OGI and the Directive represent a major step toward making government more transparent, there remains much work to make it more participatory and collaborative.

1. Collaborative Governance: Connecting Transparency to Participation and Collaboration

President Obama's memorandum effectively endorses what scholars and practitioners are calling 'collaborative governance,' a concept that refers to agencies working on policy together and in collaboration with the public and stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. This is a departure from top-down command and control bureaucracy and expert-driven policy analysis. It starts with different assumptions: knowledge is widely dispersed in society and agencies do not have a monopoly on it. A strong democracy needs many voices and values.

Collaborative governance can take various forms, from network governance, public-private partnerships and contracts, to deliberative democracy and innovative online tools for civic engagement. However, for people to collaborate and participate meaningfully in governance, they must have information. The President's memorandum ties transparency and open government to collaborative and participatory governance. It also directs agencies to harness the power of technology to put information online.

2. Leveraging Technology in Governance

The federal government has been working to come into the Internet age over a series of initiatives since the 1990s. The National Performance Review recommended email, electronic filing, benefit transfers, and integrated electronic access to government information and service. In 1996, Congress passed the Clinger-Cohen Act to improve federal IT management.

The E-Government Act of 2002 directed agencies to use new technologies to make government more accessible and transparent to the public. The Act does not expressly define or set standards for public participation or interaction online. It emphasized developing an electronic rulemaking system. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) decided to build a single, centralized system with a common database and public website for all agencies to replace any preexisting systems. This system became the lowest common denominator; OMB prohibited agencies from building more sophisticated ones because it considered them duplicative and ancillary. The system's limits prevented outside groups from easily using rulemaking data to create better public websites. The system lacked common data field across agencies, making it hard to compare similar information among agencies. There was no significant involvement by public users and stakeholders in the system's design.

The resulting e-rulemaking is an important way for the public and stakeholders to participate in governance through technology and represents a big step forward from paper rulemaking processes. Named the Federal Document Management System (FDMS), it has an agency interface and a public interface. Agencies use the password protected FDMS.gov to maintain an e-docket for rulemaking and store digital copies of rulemaking documents. The public can view materials and submit comments through regulations.gov. The FDMS improves access to notices and draft rules and it makes submitting comments much easier.

However, the system has strengths and weaknesses. It is a significant achievement that 170 different rulemaking entities in fifteen Cabinet departments and some independent regulatory commissions all use the same database, docket management system, and public website for notice and comment. Recently, the system added email notification, full-text search, and RSS feed. It also makes it possible for researchers to learn more about the variety of ways people participate in rulemaking, not just through formal notice and comment or negotiated rulemaking, but also interactive forums like advisory committees, meetings, roundtables, and focus groups.

Nevertheless, because it is a closed architecture, the FDMS does not begin to tap the potential for expanding public participation in the policy process. Not all agencies post submitted comments. It lacks interactive tools or web presentation formats. It imposes a disproportionate fiscal burden on a few agencies that do more rulemaking and use it more. In short, it is a barrier to innovation.

A study committee recently recommended an appropriation for new architecture and new governance, including innovative use of web capabilities and state-of-the-art web design to make information more accessible and to increase the breadth and quality of public participation. It is against this backdrop that the President ordered the Open Government Initiative.

3. The Open Government Initiative

The Open Government Initiative is an umbrella for a number of innovative activities, including open data, spending, and platforms, and efforts to increase public participation through more open policy development. For example, agencies must make data available in machine-readable datasets on a new website, Data.gov.



Figure 1. The Data.gov home page

Data.gov includes three searchable data catalogs: "raw" data, tools, and geodata. Each is individually ratable on a five-point scale. OSTP has encouraged state and local governments to post their data. There are new websites for citizens to track government spending on the economic recovery (<http://www.recovery.gov>) and the budget more generally (<http://www.usaspending.gov>). The General Services Administration is hosting a site for more open technology platforms (<http://www.apps.gov>). OSTP created a gallery to showcase other experiments. One was Regulations-gov-Exchange (<http://www.regulations.gov/exchange/>) to explore how to improve e-rulemaking. Moreover, the federal government is encouraging state and local governments to start their own open government efforts, with success in California and others. These efforts represent potentially transformative transparency. The OGI has generated high level positions like Chief Information Officer, Chief Technology Officer, and Chief Information Officers and other staff in many federal agencies.

The Initiative also encourages agencies to involve the public in generating ideas for improving government and policy. Agencies are experimenting with a variety of technologies and social media to engage the public in the policy process. For example, the Department of Homeland Security conducted the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review using a three-stage dialogue process generate ideas on six topics related to security, deepen the discussion, prioritize goals, and recap conclusions. To model more open platforms for generating ideas, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) used the Open Government Dialogue to gather information and input in its development of the OMB Directive. The Directive is the Federal government's policy on open government and the agency plans to reach OGI goals.

4. The Open Government Dialogue

The Open Government Dialogue was a three-stage participatory online process for developing new policy. The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) later observed that agencies usually approach policy-making, for example, rulemaking from the top down: experts draft a proposed rule and then seek public comments. OSTP inverted this: it sought public comments *before* drafting anything. NAPA called it transformational – an effort to make a foundational shift in the relation of the public to policy-making.

Phase I—Using commercially available online tools, NAPA hosted Phase I, in participants were asked to brainstorm online using Ideascale.com (<http://opengov.ideascale.com/>). After creating an account and logging in, participants posted ideas for making the government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. For example, suggestions came up on how to better use federal advisory committees, rulemaking or e-rulemaking or how best to use Web 2.0. Participants could vote on each other's ideas. NAPA monitored the site for seven days and observed traffic that included 30,222 visits and 20,830 unique visitors from every state and territory as well as 123 countries. About 4,000 people registered as users (19% of the unique visitors), contributing 1,129 unique ideas, 2,176 comments, and 46,469 votes. After Phase I, the summary concluded that voters did use the voting mechanism to provide feedback on ideas. However, 'birthers' flooded the site with comments regarding the President's birth certificate that most other users felt were off-topic. NAPA could not remove comments and put them in a 'parking lot' in Ideascale. Moreover, the site did not let other users self-moderate by voting ideas down to minimize or hide them.

Phase II— OSTP addressed these problems in the next phase, a Discussion Phase using the OSTP blog (<http://blog.ostp.gov/category/opengov/>) with a voting mechanism for selfmoderating; a majority of negative votes minimized an entry but left an active link. Phase II allowed participants to deepen the conversation about ideas from Phase I by drafting longer suggestions and commenting directly on each other's entries.



Figure 2. The OSTP blog

It ran from June 3-21 and attracted more than 1,000 comments in response to 16 topics. OSTP continues to use its blog for discussions concerning other Open Government issues, such as the policy regarding cookies on government websites and the White House visitor records.

Phase III—The last phase used a wiki tool to draft policy (<http://mixedink.com/opengov/>). It lasted from June 22-July 6, resulted in 305 drafts by 375 authors, with 2,256 people voting. In theory, participants could draft language collaboratively. Of the three tools, Mixed Ink attracted the fewest participants by far. It had problematic features that allowed participants to use each other's language out of context. The tool was best suited to small groups who share a common goal and know each other.

5. The Open Government Directive

In December 2009, OMB issued the Open Government Directive, informed by White House Chief Technology Officer recommendations and input from the Dialogue. The Directive focuses primarily on the issue of transparent and open government and provides less guidance on how to make agencies more participatory and collaborative. The Directive establishes deadlines for agencies to adopt open government plans and take action. It directs agencies to

1. Publish government information online, including at least three high-value open format datasets within 45 days and an open government webpage as the agency gateway within 60 days;
2. Improve the quality of government information by designating a high-level senior official within 45 days to be accountable for the quality and objectivity of agency spending information;
3. Create and institutionalize a culture of open government by directing senior leaders to incorporate the values of transparency, participation, and collaboration into the ongoing work of their agency using all the professional disciplines and develop an Open Government Plan within 120 days that describes how it will improve transparency and integrate public participation and collaboration into its activities; and
4. Create an enabling policy framework for open government to realize the potential of new technologies and forms of communication.

The Directive also commits the Deputy Director of OMB to issue guidance on the quality of published federal spending information, develop a longer term comprehensive strategy for Federal spending transparency, and together with the Federal Chief Information Officer and Chief Technology Officer, establish a working group that focuses on transparency, accountability, participation, and collaboration within government to provide a forum to share best practices, coordinate efforts, promote participation and collaboration, experiment with new technologies, and take advantage of the expertise and insight of people inside and outside government, including researchers, the private sector, and civil society. The Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, in consultation with others, will review OMB policies to identify impediments and issue clarifying guidance to foster open government.

The Directive's attachment provides more detailed guidance for agencies on the components of their Open Government Plan.

6. The Future of Open Government

The OGI is a major effort to transform how the federal government uses technology and collaborative governance. Its gains in transparency are potential game-changers. However, it has not made as much actual progress toward the goals of making government more participatory and collaborative. There is tremendous potential. While experiments with open policy dialogues are exciting and groundbreaking, future efforts need to build on what we have learned so far. We need to find better ways to recruit participants, move from input to partnership, and embed continuous collaboration in government.

New research on public deliberation suggests that, contrary to the 'stealth democracy' theory that says most people dislike politics, the overwhelming majority of people would like more opportunity to participate in some kind of deliberative session on public policy generally. Critics of public deliberation have pointed out that the usual suspects who participate are not representative of the general population – they are disproportionately white, well-to-do, older, and well educated. The new research suggests that the existing forums have not reached people who are in fact more willing to deliberate than the usual suspects – people who are non-white, lower income, and younger. The OGI, while open to the public through published notice, entailed limited outreach beyond organized networks of interested stakeholders. The OGI allowed only a week or so for Phase I; this may have advantaged participants who knew it was coming. While individuals were in the majority in Phase I, by Phase III participants were more representatives of organizations or networks. People who are less tech-savvy or tech-resourced may have found it difficult to participate. Moreover, it is critical to combine online with face-to-face means of collaborative governance to guard against bias through any single form of public involvement.

Another area where there is room for improvement is the quality of participation. Some commentators have criticized the result as masses of less-than-useful text. Using a platform with appropriate functionality, a moderation feature enables users to police their own community, setting clearer expectations, and providing briefing materials can give people context and keep them on task. Giving users credit for their contributions may create an incentive for higher quality suggestions.

The OGI produced input for OSTP to consider as it drafts the Open Government Directive, which is policy guidance for federal agencies from OMB. However, there is potential to do more than simply get good quality public input. Fung, Graham, and Weil (2007) describe the concept of "collaborative transparency," using information technology to enable users to shape information content and act as self-disclosers. Collaborative transparency systems employ interactivity and customize data. The difference is that government is not providing information. Instead, government acts as convener and facilitator. For example, the public can create information for government by reporting an outbreak of disease to authorities online to map a pandemic. Similarly, Noveck (2009) describes Peer-to-Patent, an online community of volunteer experts who help the federal government evaluate the originality of patent applications. In both cases, the public is not commenting on policy; it is helping govern. To date, experiments with online deliberations have largely been one-off events, not permanent changes in the way an agency does business. Some commentators observe that to make them meaningful, agencies need to embed them in making public decisions and taking public action. They need to adopt deliberation, adapt it to their context, and use it repeatedly over time. Collaborative governance

varies with context and issue, so embeddedness will look different from agency to agency. Indicators include top agency leadership and support, an agency champion, policies, performance indicators for the agency and its staff, and measuring the success of processes to improve their use over time.

The United States is not alone. The United Kingdom and Australia are also experimenting with the power of technology for engaging citizens in governance. EU initiatives cover the entire spectrum of improving access, participation, efficiency, public agency coordination, and rethinking government processes. OSTP's Beth Noveck, Deputy Chief Technology Officer, has observed that the perfect should not be the enemy of the good. The federal government is just beginning to explore technologies potential for leveraging public participation and collaboration with government.

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Discursive qualities of public discussion on the Russian Internet: Testing the Habermasian communicative action empirically

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Abstract. The paper is part of the ongoing post-graduate research into non-moderated, spontaneous and self-organised political discussions among the ordinary Russian citizens on Internet forums. The main focus of the research is develop approaches and measure the deliberative value of online discourses for political communication in general and in the context of democratic transition from communism in particular. The paper presents preliminary results of the empirical discourse analysis of one online debate in Russia in 2007. It starts by laying down a theoretical framework that is based on Habermas' conception of validity claim-making (as part of his broader theories of communicative action, discourse ethics and meaning). Then the paper proceeds by describing opportunities and challenges of the virtual public sphere and its discourses, as well as describes the state of an online deliberative environment in Russia. The developed framework is tested empirically to assess the intelligibility and dialogical quality of one specific case of online deliberation. The preliminary conclusion is that public debates online can be analysed through conceptual framework based on validity claims.

1. Communicative rationality and reasoning

Deliberatively perceived political communication is inseparably linked with the Habermasian notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). It has been a subject of the constant debate, interpretation and re-interpretation (see, for example, useful reviews by Calhoun (1993) and Outhwaite (1996). One of the outcomes of such re-evaluation is a belief that the public sphere can and should be a venue for the renewal of public discourses, which is at the very core of the deliberative democracy as a new social order constructed from below, as opposed to the dominant traditional media systems of political communication constructed from above (Held, 2006), (Coleman & Blumler, 2009).

Habermas' (critical) theories of communicative action, discourse ethics, pragmatic meaning, and truth constitute the theoretic and philosophical bedrock for deliberative democracy (Habermas, 1984; 1987b). Its aim is to reconsider the role of argumentation, rationality and reasoning by rejecting their metaphysical self-sufficiency and to make them instead dependent on the unique context of communication practices including their actors, objectives, rules, etc. In this sense,

rationality is contextualised and validated whenever is expressed by a speaker. As a result, communicative practices become social practices. Moreover, the communicative process of argumentation and reasoning is not just an integral part of such practice, but is the practice itself. Reason and argumentation are never entirely external, static or given, but are uniquely fluid and multi-dimensional that are validated by communication actors to be mutually understood and reciprocally recognised each time they interact.

A need to be reasonable and accommodative towards other participants in social interaction (mediated by speech acts) is a pragmatic side of communicative rationality, and, therefore, needs to be analysed pragmatically rather than logically or metaphysically. The ordinary, practical side of communicative argumentation is comprehensively addressed by Habermas in his discourse theory, which emphasises a pragmatic analysis of argumentation as a social practice. According to Bohman & Rehg (2009: 9), Habermas 'offers his own distinctive definition of rationality, which is epistemic, practical, and intersubjective. For Habermas, rationality consists not so much in the possession of particular knowledge but rather in "how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge". The assessment of arguments cannot rely on traditional aspects of argument-making that typically involves logic (as well as dialectic and rhetoric) because analytically they are unable to understand 'the very idea' of argumentative speech being overburdened by 'ritualised' obligation to constantly produce ever better arguments. This obligation is normatively imposed on discussants, who are placed in the imaginative context of an 'ideal speech situation', especially as far as demands for rhetorical quality to be persuasive are concerned (Habermas, 1984).

The highly demanding requirements of the 'ideal speech situation' are usually criticised as one of the main weaknesses of Habermas' communicative action and discourse theories. While this is correct that such idealised requirements for communication can't be met in real life, it is also true that Habermas has substantially loosened recently the scope and strictness these critical conditions reducing them mainly to a need to include only those who can realistically contribute to the discourse, but not all theoretically potential contributors, and to ensure their equality to do so in a free, non-coerced manner in procedural terms (external factor) and without self-deception (internal factor) (Bohman & Rehg, 2009). The real purpose of such "pragmatic presuppositions" is not to re-create such conditions in real-life discourses; that would not be possible to prove, but to use as an inspirational standard for improving individual discursive and self-learning practices. In addition to the improved quality of personal standards of deliberation, the overall outcome of an actual discourse can also be perfected as participants collectively watch to prevent noticeable exclusions, inequalities, and coercion in contrast institutionalised discourses, in which such function can be played by an external observer (Habermas, 2003; Bohman & Rehg, 2009).

It follows, accordingly, that argumentation and rationality should not be considered in terms of their logical or dialectical properties alone; they need to be perceived as social constructs in the context of shared values, norms and rules (moral and ethical). In the lifeworld, speech acts are used to *coordinate* social actions (not necessarily seek agreement) in order to maintain the preferred values and maintain pertinent solidarities of communicators. This is contrary to the state and corporate business' systems that undertake communicative actions not for coordination, but for pursuing strategic goals and do not imply to be pragmatic and be prepared to

negotiate with others their positions. Mutual understanding is thus fundamental for a 'strong communicative action' of individuals.

Reasoning emerges as a form of non-coercive social act of pursuing 'mutual understanding and reciprocal recognition' and in this sense *is* an ordinary, everyday communicative practice, and the applied argumentation *is* intrinsically discursive, argues McCarthy (1987). Eventually, Habermas creates a mechanism to motivate such consensual attitudes discursively. Through his pragmatic theory of meaning Habermas introduces the 'acceptability conditions' that are needed for a speaker's utterance (or speech act) to succeed in its intended meaning targeting a hearer. These are the conditions, under which the illocutionary force of an utterance can accomplish its goal to be accepted by another hearer and become valid for discourse. Agreement occurs if and when the addressee accepts the speaker's speech act, or rather the meaning it contains, as a sign of understanding the reasons behind the meaning and by doing so the hearer validates the entire discourse and its conditions. Habermas thus argues that to understand a speech act is to understand its indirect meaning and the associated conditions. It can be done only discursively, not just linguistically or logically; this means 'to know how one can make use of it in order to reach understanding with someone with regard to something' (Habermas, 1998: 233). Again, Habermas puts "someone" before "something" to underline the discursive character of the speech act, which is interconnected with many other acts.

2. Types of argumentative discourses and validity claims

Making validity claims is central to Habermas' conception of the interplay between meaning, argumentative reasoning, and mutual understanding. For him, a speech act (and its meaning) is invariably about making claims with certain reason; accordingly, to understand the meaning of what is expressed one should understand what is claimed, what are the reasons behind the claim, and whether the claim is validated? If these 'acceptability conditions' are met, then the reasons is accepted and mutual understanding accomplished. Habermas believes that 'true' discourses start when it is insufficient to make tacitly implicit validity claims, that is, when interlocutors understand each other with minimum reasoning (most typically in the routine everyday talk). In this case a speaker needs to employ a more complex arsenal of 'argumentation and dialogue in which the claims implicit in the speech act are tested for their rational justifiability as true, correct or authentic' (Bohman & Rehg, 2009: 17). In other words, when the claim is properly understood and validated by a responder, the latter takes "an affirmative position" toward the claim and the speech act can be considered successful in accomplishing the goal of its intended meaning.

Validity claims used in the discourse go beyond the neutrality of empirical facts and can be morally and ethically laden. This happens if they reflect attitudes (and intentions) towards others, i.e. are intersubjective; if so, such validity claims cannot be indifferent in moral or ethical terms. In general, the intersubjective validation requires that speech acts should claim at least the following three meanings: (a) be true as a proposition of something (for example, in the form of illocutionary assertives); (b) be morally right and publicly good, i.e. draw on social norms and shared solidarities as a public good, reflecting, for example, norms that advocate certain social order and practices; and (c) be personally authentic, i.e. subjectively truthful in its expression. Being context-sensitive, the process of speech act validation reflects upon a social order, which effectively means the validation of the

entire social order or the “world relations” in the Habermasian terminology. Figure 1 describes the three types of the communicatively defined “worlds”: (a) common for all world, (b) shared worlds of specific social groups, and (c) personal worlds of individuals (Habermas, 1987a; 1987b).

Fact-based OBJECTIVE LIFE-WORLD for all	Value-based SHARED SOCIAL WORLDS for groups	Sincerity-based PERSONAL WORLDS for individuals
Claimed propositional truth about the objective world	Claimed normative rightness of certain groups	Claimed subjective truthfulness about personal intentions
Interpretation of objective life-world’s background knowledge & facts as a basis for making group-neutral propositions	Construction of inter-subjective social solidarities/relations based on shared values as a basis for claiming group-specific interests	Internalisation of objective & shared worlds via acquiring knowledge, competences and values as a basis for claiming personal sincerity
<i>Reproduction of cultural traditions & norm formation</i>	<i>Social integration, inter-personal relations via shared values</i>	<i>Personal development, affiliation & socialisation</i>

Figure 1 Habermasian communicative ‘worlds’

These three main validity claims – propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness – define the entire spectrum and degree of the ‘social intelligibility of such interaction’.

Speakers in these interlinked worlds are engaged in telling someone about something by exchanging strong communicative acts, i.e. they must strongly cooperate, with the expectation of mutual reciprocity; in doing so they apply a certain degree and type of illocutionary force if want their speech acts to succeed and lead to desired effect on hearers (Austin, 1962; 2005). Indirect illocutionary speech acts describe an act of meaning something, for example, expressing an attitude or a proposition, which according to Searle (1975) can be defined as *assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative* (see also Habermas, 1998). Assertives and declaratives, for example, could be used to state (present) facts or express intentions to change things and thus produce validity claims relevant to the realm of the external “objective world”; directive, commissives and declaratives can be applied to reflect on promises and commitments in relation to certain groups or interests and belong to the shared “social world”; by the same token, expressives and declaratives could be used to disclose the speaker’s inner “personal world”. Accordingly, the level of social intelligibility of communicative interaction would depend on whether the discourse participants succeed in making validity claims along three lines if acceptance. The fully successful speech acts should meet the validity claim criteria in order to reflect on the relations between the three worlds.

3. Virtual re-conceptualisation of the public sphere

The conceptualisation of the virtual character of the public sphere follows the Habermasian tradition of deliberating socio-political communities of equal citizens engaged in public discourse. With the Internet spread and the popularity of online

discussions, many commentators have been re-conceptualising various aspects of the Internet-based public sphere and pertinent virtual communities (see, among other, McIntire (2002), Poster (1997), Dean (2001), Dahlberg (2001, 2004, 2005), Kovacs (2003), Mater (2001), Sinekopova (2006), Fraser (2009), Pinter (2004), Baum (2001), Gandy (2002), Benkler (2006)).

Those who agree with the principled existence of the public sphere and feel a need for its revival, also agree that digital media can be a new hosting platform, where discursively interactive properties can be constructed and strengthened in order to raise the level of democratic participation. Dahlgren (2004) stresses, for example, that '...the theme of internet and the public sphere now has a permanent place on research agendas and in intellectual inquiry for the foreseeable future' both in the media and political communication research leading eventually to 'convergences between mass and interactive media' (41). Likewise, Sinekopova (2006) sees major benefits of the virtual public sphere for civil society, which with its intermediary capacity can be more effective source for democracy. The mediating properties of digital media could help re-establish a lost link between 'public totality and individualised subjectivity' and re-balance the growing complexity and totality of socially-generated contradictions with subjective needs and feelings (Sinekopova (2006: 505, 517). Civil society is eager to engage in political discussion and thus transform the public sphere's static character into a communicatively dynamic space. Bach and Stark (2003) highlight a positively disruptive role of technology and prove that social practices of non-governmental organisations are able to internalise and appropriate new communication mediums to change not only themselves but the way technologies work in and for civil society.

Autonomous and independent citizens are able now to decide individually when to become 'the public' and when to withdraw from discussion and return back to a private realm of the personal world; such flexibility has simply not been feasible in the face-to-face offline setting. The Habermasian communicative (inter)subjectivity takes the centre stage as a factor of equality that enables individuals to participate in public communication practices more equally by keeping the virtual deliberative space as if it is 'empty', i.e. leaving always a space for new participants and new contributions. This prevents, or at least significantly limits, the virtual space to be 'privatised' and sustains its public character. A traditionally singular and unified public as a mass object, a source of the aggregated public opinion, becomes a disaggregated intersubjective phenomenon that can split endlessly into individual subjectivities. Habermasian theoretical abstractions of communicative intersubjectivities emerge as tangible and measurable forms of reality. Individuals are not objectified any longer as the mere recipients of intended subjects of certain actions as it's always been in the case of traditional mass-mediated discourses from above, but are able to self-enact themselves from below.

The relationship between the public (society) and the private (individual) are re-defined and no longer normatively and otherwise separated. Public deliberation online emerges in the new social context of everyday life but is independent from the existing social settings and conventions. By going online, civic interaction and deliberation expand and pluralise the existing systems of political communication allowing the expression of socio-political concerns to everyone, not only to political elites.

4. Opportunities and challenges of deliberation online

The interactive function of the public sphere is the bedrock of democratic deliberation that permits private citizens to enter into discussions with one another in the mediated 'marketplace of ideas' (Dahlgren, 2004). Interaction is intertwined with media products such as news that for politically concerned audience can be a source of 'interpretive freedom' to initiate deliberation. But how intelligent deliberative practices are? What does it mean to be communicatively rational and intelligent in deliberative terms? How to account for what is discussed? And can it reverse the dominance of a traditional top-down paradigm liberal democracy in relation to democratic citizenship, as Coleman & Blumler (2009) ask? Habermas (2006: 411) admits himself that little has been done in obtaining convincing empirical evidence to prove 'the applicability of the communication model of deliberative politics' and the 'truth-tracking potential' of political deliberation. He argues though that it can be possible if the media systems become self-regulating and independent from social environment.

However, much of the existing research paints a rather sceptical picture about the democratic usefulness of virtual deliberation among citizens due to their low capacity of socio-political and also professional intelligibility (Mutz, 2002; 2006; Christiansen, 2004; Norris, 2000; Sunstein, 2006). One of the shortcomings of this view is its methodologically weak justification, when the qualitative properties of online deliberation are assessed not in terms of their own values and benefits, but are benchmarked against the offline face-to-face practices (which are implied to be superior, although these two modes of interaction differ substantially in many ways). Norris (2000) concludes, for example, that online environment is no different from offline media and serves to reinforce positions of those who are politically active. Mutz (2006) also believes that the civic and political socialisation process encourages interaction among the politically like-minded, as the real-life participatory practices do.

Kelly, Fisher, & Smith (2005), however, disprove of the assertion about the like-mindedness and reinforcement model; on the contrary, they prove that participants with diverging political views prefer debating 'with diverse others' by engaging 'each other vigorously, eclipsing the time and energy spent of dialoguing with people they already agree with' (31). But there is no clarity, they believe, whether such online debates make sense in the 'Habermasian metrics of rational-critical discourse', i.e. whether deliberation online falls under the definition of deliberation per se, and if it does whether it can be socially intelligible and thus useful. For example, Christiansen (2004: 2), having analysed an online debate in connection with the organisation of a social movement organisation in Denmark through the Internet, notes that the most active discussants post too many messages and may post them not only in order to communicate dialogically with their interlocutors, but rather to address a wider audience with more strategically constructed messages, which is against a Habermasian way of pursuing rational and dialogical communication practices. She usefully summarises a number of open questions such as 'How the shortcomings of the debate manifest themselves on Web?', 'What the online debate is used for?', 'Which kind of debates take place?', 'Which new "genres" of discussion are realised online?', 'Can a Web debate serve as a predictor of collective actions offline?' She still thinks that if full publicity and accessibility to all contributions is provided, editing and moderation is minimal, and all contributions are treated equally, with very few

excluded from participating in the debate, then deliberation can be dialogic and interactive compared with analogous offline discussion (such as newspaper's "readers' debates").

5. New media and political communication in Russia

Over the past several years, Russia has been enjoying one of the world's fastest Internet growth rates, with 45 million of regular Internet users in 2008 against just 3 million in 2000. Commentators have observed that participation in discussion forums, especially politically oriented ones, and critical towards authorities blogging have become a new and important trait of Russia's new culture (Gorny, 2006, 2007; Schmidt & Teubener, 2005a). At the end of 2007, there were 3.8 million blogs with in Russian and numerous discussion forums (Yandex, 2008 Spring) and hundreds of thousand bloggers (160,000 of active bloggers on *LiveInternet* and 230,000 on *LiveJournal* in 2008). Compared with the West, blogs in Russian are characterised by higher interactivity, tighter connectivity and stronger orientation on news dissemination and public discussion. Even the term 'friend' has a different, a more direct meaning when virtual interactions often turn into real-life face-to-face meetings (at least among those living in the same city, such as Moscow (Gorny, 2007: 111-113). Curiously or seriously, bur Russian bloggers have been discussing an idea of setting up a bloggers' trade union, with a political goal to defend bloggers' freedoms and liberties; this is indicative of the political situation in contemporary Russia and the role of the Internet in political life.

Russian online media is content rich, aesthetically attractive and technologically advanced, with the commonplace user-generated interactive services. All national and major regional newspapers and other media outlets such as information agencies are available online and provide ubiquitous opportunities for commenting, debating or voting on numerous topics. The Internet sites attract a multi-million audience every day; online news and politics are popular with almost 100 million and 32 million monthly visits respectively (as of 9 December 2009, according to LIVEINTERNET). Overall, online news and other information media are the preferred choice to start public debate; they often serve as catalysts of political discussion (Allan, 2006). Russian readers and viewers have always been critical and keen on news and debate even in the past while watching news on television, according to Mickiewicz (1999).

6. Empirical test: Description, hypotheses, method

Each of the three Habermasian communicative worlds can be empirically described in terms of (a) background information, facts, proposed truths about the objective lifeworld; (b) attitudes towards these truths in terms of the acceptance and sharing by interest groups certain societal values (common social world); and (c) individual practices and personal experiences, reflecting socialisation and learning processes (the personal world). As Habermas (1987a) notes 'The meaning of the individual speech act cannot be detached from the life-world's complex horizon of meaning; it remains entwined with the intuitively present background knowledge of interacting participants' (350). The quality of deliberation reflects the level of its social relevance and intelligibility and depends on the cooperatively agreed communicative practices among discussants. It can be measured by using three validity claims made by

participants in their posts (viewed as speech act equivalents). The related research hypotheses would include: (1) the Habermasian notion of validity claims is an applicable and useful tool for studying online deliberation; (2) it is feasible and effective to identify and code validity claims on the basis of their intended meaning and illocution that describe online deliberation practices; and (3) online discourses are socially intelligent if viewed from the Habermasian perspective of communicative rationality and argumentation. However, as this is still an ongoing research not all of these hypotheses can be tested and reported in this paper. .

The proposed case study is a real case of online deliberation practice that occurred on the Russian Internet in 2007 in the political context of the United Russia party becoming an institutionalised pro-power political force supported by President Putin. The party put together President's addresses to the Russian Parliament (*Duma*) and dubbed it as Putin's Plan as its political manifesto. The discussion was initiated by one of the regular discussants on the political forum on *Izvestia*, one of the most popular Russian national newspapers, following the publication of a news article entitled "Only the United Russia Party Can Implement Putin's Plan".

The article was posted on the paper's web site on 21 September 2007 and reflected on the meeting of experts that gathered in the party headquarters to discuss how to implement this Plan. As the article did not specify what the actual plan was, the forum participants joined the discussion, which started on the day of publication and lasted until 1 December 2007 after the exchange of 65 posts sent by 23 unique individuals. The URL of the discussion is on <<http://www.izvestia.ru/forum/board101381/topic39187/?page=5>>.

Politically, the Internet in Russia is free, not censored, unlike the mainstream media (there have been cases of high publicity when some bloggers were persecuted by government officials for libel, yet this is not a widespread practice). In this respect the Internet forum can loosely meet the Habermasian "critical conditions" requirements of a deliberative practice that is open for everyone who wants to make contributions (subject to having Internet access and registration, but the real name is not necessary to submit); the discussion is entirely voluntary and does not exclude deliberately anyone; the forum members are equal citizens as their real socio-economic status is not known (there is certain in-house membership hierarchy indicating the longevity of participation on the forum) and no signs of any coercion due to the members' real-life status or procedurally have been noticed. Discussions on the forum are not moderated in substantive terms, although offensive posts or those that don't fit the forum discussion rules can be deleted by the forum admin staff; it is though not clear whether any instances of self-deception could take place. There are some cases of quasi-deception when one member can be registered under different names, but it in the impersonalised online environment this is hardly a genuine deception to change the course of the discussion. Also, the paper's Internet forum can meet by and large the Habermas' criterion of self-regulated media free from dependence on the socio-political word.

Each posted message (utterance) was coded by a range of parameters. One set of parameters describes posts from a perspective of authorship, time of appearance, etc (Figure 2). Each post is assigned a unique numerical identifier as a combination of three related characteristics: (a) post's number in the order of posting irrespective of the authorship (the biggest figure represents the total number of all posts by all participants); (b) author's unique identifier assigned in the order of posting the first comment to enter the discussion (the biggest number represents the total number of

all participants); (c) author's posts unique identifier assigned in the order of posting by a particular member (the biggest number represents the total number of all comments posted by each member). Thus each post can be uniquely identified by the combination of these three variables in terms of (a) when it is posted, (b) by whom and (c) in which order; any other attributes can be added and remain fully identifiable. For example, an utterance coded as "12-4-2" means that it was the 12th utterance posted by all members but it was the 2nd post and the members ID is 4.

Participant data			Post data			
Name	Status	Participant ID	Participant's post ID	Post ID number	Date of posting	Post total ID
Participants (listed in the chronological order of entering the discussion)	Hierarchy status	Unique identifier of participants (assigned when posting the first comment)	Unique identifier of participants' all posts (assigned sequentially)	Unique identifier of all posts regardless of the sender (assigned chronologically)	Day & month	Unique identifier of each post (assigned as a combination of post ID + participant ID + participant post ID)
a	long-term member	1	1	1	21-Sep	1-1-1
b	long-term member	2	1	2	21-Sep	2-2-1
c	long-term member	1	2	3	21-Sep	3-1-2
d	long-term member	3	1	4	30-Sep	4-3-1
e	long-term member	4	1	5	30-Sep	5-4-1
f	rightful member	5	1	6	01-Oct	6-5-1
g	novice	6	1	7	03-Oct	7-6-1
...						

Figure 2 Participant and post identifiers

In addition to the post and participant unique identifiers, each post is further defined (and coded) by three more sets of parameters describing (a) the posts' illocutionary character (Figure 3), (b) posts' dialogically-rational qualities (Figure 4), and (c) posts' validity claims (Figure 5). Posts will also be coded (in future) and analysed by the fourth set of variables according to the discussion themes and topic so as to understand the public discourse agenda

The analysis of coding results obtained for all empirical cases selected to study online deliberation in Russia should provide sufficient information to prove or disprove the set hypotheses and eventually demonstrate the discursive quality of online deliberation as a communicative social practice in the post-communist context viewed through (a) the lens of dialogical integrity and consistency of discursive interaction, (b) viability of rational and argumentative intelligibility, and (c) topical relevance of online deliberation as socio-political practices to the broader national (or local) agenda of public discourse in Russia.

	Illocutionary character	illocutionary character (one post can belong to more than one character)	including			
			non-interrogative	Interrogative		exclamations
				all	including rhetorical (among all interrogative posts)	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Assertives/constatives - speech acts whereby the utterer expresses a commitment to or belief in the truthfulness of a certain proposition	> 90%	> 50%	40-50%	50%	20-30%
2	Directives - speech acts whereby the utterer intends to commit an addressee to certain action by advising, requesting, commanding	40-50%	> 80%	< 20%	60%	20-30%
3	Commissives - speech acts whereby the utterer expresses a commitment to undertake some action in future by expressing promises and oaths	< 20%	100%	nil		nil
4	Expressives - speech acts whereby the utterer expresses certain emotional state or attitude regarding a certain proposition by congratulating, condemning, admiring, etc.	< 20%	> 90%	< 10%	0%	20-30%
5	Declaratives - speech acts whereby the utterer intends to change the status quo in the real world by putting forward a certain proposition such as declaring a war or peace, announcing someone convicted or free, etc.	< 10%	100%	nil		100%

Figure 3 Speech act types

Discursive qualities								Rationally-argumentative qualities	
personal – directed explicitly to another participant	impersonal - addressed to no one	contains quotes	thematically breaks with previous post - new turn in meaning	relates to main debate theme	not related to a debate theme	contains references to this or other online debates	openly expressed disagreement / opposition	contains facts/ examples/ cases	contains formulated arguments
19	45	21	29	61	4	6	13	29	42
29%	69%	32%	45%	94%	6%	9%	20%	45%	65%

Figure 4 Discursively interactive indicators

Validity claims (more than one VC can be attributed to a post)		
VC-1 Objective World - claims to propositional truth (Lifeworld, background knowledge, social practice, society-wide)	VC-2: Inter-subjective World - claims to normative rightness/ correctness (common social world, shared solidarities, group-specific)	VC-3: Subjective World - claims to truthfulness, sincerity (personal, intentional, expressive, identities, capacities, perceptions)
61 (94%)	21 (32%)	12 (18%)

Figure 5 Types of validity claim-making

7. Empirical test: Analysis

First preliminary outcomes are as follows.

1. **Illocutionary force.** The overwhelming majority of all posts – at least nine-tenth – can be described as illocutionary *assertives* (or *constatives*) belonging to the objective world and proposing to accept the truthfulness of presented facts and background information about it. Nearly half of the posts take the form of questions, with also about half of the questions formulated rhetorically (without expecting an answer). That could be an indirect confirmation that the purpose of assertives is to make a propositional offer rather than rather than be truly interrogative. Not many posts display strong emotion – just one out of three, which tells that emotions are well-controlled during discussion. *Assertives* are the most numerous categories after directives – some half of all posts fall under this description of speech acts that intend to prompt certain action on the addressee part. This is quite a large number of such pro-active posts, many of which take shape of rhetorical questions; this is even more indicative against the background of a smaller number of posts (compared with assertives) with interrogative meaning. No more than one-fifth of the posts are *commissives* and *expressives* that are rarely formulated in the question form. Interestingly, the posts in the form of *declarations* that intend to change the status quo in the real world by declaring something are never formulated as questions; instead they take a form of exclamations (which is understandable); overall, the number of such posts does not exceed 10%. These coding results mean that posted contribution bear a variety of intended meanings and can be analysed as if they were conventional speech acts in the Habermasian manner.

2. Dialogical integrity. The majority of all posts are impersonal (69%), which might be interpreted as a sign that the discussion is not hijacked by few participants and maintains a sufficient level of participatory equality and integrity; and just 2% of all posts are self-directed and thus not dialogical. Almost one-third (32%) of the posted messages contained quotes from others' contributors; this might be an indicator of an cooperatively run discussion (although it must be investigated whether the quotes are inserted on purpose and the link exists between the quote and the post itself). About half of all posts change to some extent the topic rather frequently, i.e. every second one does not continue addressing the same issue as the previous post; however, caution is needed to interpret such information properly, for still over 90% of all posts continue discussing the thread's main theme, namely: What is Putin's Plan? In reality, breaking with the preceding issue represents the variation of the same main discussion theme and does not disrupt the dialogue; on the contrary, such variations may enrich the discussion by adding new issues and expanding the existing ones as long as the main theme of the discussion thread does not change substantially. A relatively low level of posts that display an open disagreement (1 post in 5) may point at a rather high dialogically motivated collaboration among the discussion members.
3. Rational and argumentative consistency. Two-thirds of all posts contain clearly formulated arguments that in the majority of cases (70%) are supported by facts, examples, cases – this is almost half of all the posts (45%). However, the share of postings that refer to online resources is not high at the level of 10% only.
4. Validity claims. The distribution of posts by the character of claims has a clear pattern of dominance of the propositional meaning – 94% of all the posts can be described as belonging to the VC-1 that describes the objective lifeworld and its facts, practices, actors. A far smaller number of posts – about a third – are those that have moral or ethical meaning attributable to the common social worlds (under VC-2 dealing with normative rightness) shared by discussants according to their preferred interests and social solidarities. Finally, about one-fifth of all posts are part of the third personal world (VC-3), in which participants claim information and fact about themselves with sincerity and authenticity (18%).

While each post can reflect on more than one deliberation topics (within the same broader main theme of the given thread), usually no more than 3-4 are actually attributed. The first discussion theme is by default a theme of the seed post that prompts discussion and usually (but not necessarily) is most discussable issue; whereas new topics are usually less attractive for debate. The original seed post that initiated the entire What is Putin's Plan thread was able to maintain discussion up to the post number 37 (out of 65), after which no post mentions the Plan theme. In fact, the main discussion lasted until the 23rd post, when a precise answer was given to the main question raised by the seed post, i.e. the actual Putin's Plan did not exist as a party manifesto but was rather a report. Once this main issue was resolved and the main theme exhausted itself as a discussable topic, other topics began to emerge (such as the Russian political system in general, future of the United Russia Party, government incompetence, corruption, poor economic performance, etc.), but they were all short-lived.. Thus while the debate continued after the main issue was fully

addressed, its intensity and coherence significantly weakened and soon after the thread was abandoned.

8. Narrative case and test: Example

Below is an example of the discourse analysis illustrating the investigation of all three types of validity claims. The very first seed post 1-1-1 that started the discussion:

“Then what is that plan?” (i.e., Putin’s Plan).

This post refers to the objective fact about the existence of a plan, and thus falls under the VC-1 (propositional truth about the objective life-world). It proposes to collectively explore what the plan is. This first post also introduces the thread theme – Putin’s Plan, which is meant to be a real document (that is, part of the lifeworld). There is some sceptical tone about the plan quality, but in general the attitude is neutral and clearly propositional, despite its interrogative form (non-rhetorical). No reference is made to any special interest group, as the plan due to its national scope addresses interests of the whole society; therefore this post is not classified under VC-2 as a claim to the normative rightness and there is nothing inter-subjective in its meaning. Similarly, there is nothing personally subjective, as no references are made to individual experiences or demonstration of personal subjective intentions (VC-3).

The second utterance (2-2-1) contains the claim from the domain of the common intersubjective world; it reads as follows:

Yes, show us the plan! Could they publish the President’s addresses [to the Parliament] as a book and name it the Plan? Then there will be a subject for a talk”.

This post does not add new information, and makes no new claim to the propositional truth; it’s only purpose is to support the seed post 1-1-1. Yet the message is even more sceptical; moreover, it draws a certain dividing line between ‘them’ and ‘us’ by implying that the United Russia party (i.e. the authorities) is a different world for the poster number 2 (and to other members as well); there is a sense of overall criticism and dissatisfaction that the plan is not made public. This is clearly a critical utterance implying certain intersubjectivity.

The third case (3-3-1) illuminates how one post can make all three main claims to ‘propositional truth’, ‘moral rightness’, and ‘ethical truthfulness’ at once; it reads as follows:

“Having read the utterances of the respected forum participants, I have felt a relief that I am not the only one stupid. There are other people too who do not understand what is Putin’s Plan? I am wondering whether there is at least one smart person who can explain what this plan is.”

This is a manifestation of a highly personal experience (claim to ‘truthfulness’), demonstration of sincerity and openness about one’s personal world by from someone who had learned from the previous two contributors about the plan (from the post 1-1-1) and also about its mythical nature (from the post 2-2-1) – their meanings were effectively validated, which is obvious from the meaning of this post 3-3-1; there is a certain amount of emotion involved coupled with some rhetoric; but no one would doubt the truthfulness of this member; this an expressive meaning utterance and highly personal. Yet it claims solidarity with those discussants who want to know what the plan is. Finally, the post has a VC-1 meaning, because the

post is also a reflection of the life-world thanks to the reference to the plan, as well as to the President.

9. Conclusion

This examined data and narratives suggest the empirical applicability of the Habermasian theories of communicative action and discourse ethics in relation to studying online discourses. It appears to be possible to interpret online messages as communicative speech acts in the form of validity claim-making and to categorise them accordingly. Such approach expands the analytical horizon of describing and assessing the discursive quality and intelligibility of online deliberation among ordinary citizens.

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Tools and Technologies in eParticipation: Insights from Project Evaluation

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Abstract. Over the last years the election turnout has steadily decreased in most countries of the European Union, and worldwide. To strengthen democracy, a trend to adopt and integrate Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the traditional processes of policy formulation has emerged. Although ICT will not principally solve the challenges of nowadays' democratic deficit, it facilitates citizens to find, identify and exchange views with like-minded citizens and their elected representatives. This paper presents the results from a recent study that investigates the deployment of tools and technologies in eParticipation trial projects to strengthen eParticipation in Europe. In this contribution, we outline the growing demand for evaluation of eParticipation initiatives thereby describing the problem scope and aims of the study. We review ongoing data collection and analysis efforts of eParticipation projects. Our investigations are particularly focusing on eParticipation processes tackled by several trial projects funded by the European Commission. The evaluation concentrates on the tools and technologies applied to support these processes thereby reconnecting citizens with democracy. The paper finally presents findings from a comparative analysis of how to successfully apply tools and technologies to support eParticipation.

1. Growing demand for monitoring and evaluating eParticipation projects

Over the last years, governments worldwide are experiencing increased disinterest of citizens in political discussions. The election turnout has steadily decreased in most countries of the European Union (EU). Latest turnout results at the 2009 European Parliament election evidences that this trend sustains. A voter turnover below 50% in two thirds of the EU Member States attains alarming proportions for the whole EU (see 00). This trend indicates an increasing demand for international comparative assessments and for effective, standardized monitoring of initiatives that aim at overcoming this apathy of the citizenship and at re-engaging the social capacity of citizens in politics.

To strengthen democracy, a trend to adopt and integrate Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in traditional participation and deliberation processes has emerged. This trend is embraced with the terms e-participation and e-democracy. E-participation fosters active participation of the civil society thereby enabling legislators and governments to be more effective and credible. Decision-making processes should become easier to understand and to follow through the use of new ICTs (see 00 and 00). Hence, political enthusiasm for e-participation evidently carries on at a high level.

In this context, the European Commission (EC) launched the 'eParticipation

The evaluation results concerning the deployment of modern ICT in deliberative processes will be presented throughout this paper. The next section describes the MOMENTUM methodology to monitor and evaluate the e-participation projects. Section 3 documents the findings from a comparative analysis that investigates the application of tools and technologies for eParticipation and to support participative processes in different contexts. From this background, lessons learnt and best practices of how to effectively support participation processes with modern ICT are derived (section 4). Section 5 concludes with an outlook to future activities and research in this area.

The MOMENTUM project grounds on the adaptive management approach (cf. 00) to facilitate the monitored eParticipation projects in being successful and in achieving sustainability. In this particular case, adaptive management is understood as a systematic, iterative process of monitoring and evaluating the e-participation projects for improving their management policies and practices over time. To learn from both, failure and excellence, as well as experiences, MOMENTUM derives constant feedback from monitoring and evaluation. From this, lessons learnt are formulated with the intention to facilitate project management to take corrective actions in regard to established goals.

¹ European Commission (2009a): *e-participation preparatory action*.

² Official project website: <http://www.ep-momentum.eu/>

- 1.) setting the goals and objectives for monitoring and evaluation,
- 2.) conducting evaluation and monitoring repetitively,
- 3.) providing feedback and recommendation to the monitored projects iteratively.

2.1 Monitoring objectives and method

Monitoring provides initial data regarding the current status of the projects and the methodologies and practices they follow. It furnishes data needed to ground the evaluation that the effects of management are within the desired range identified in the objectives. The methodology used to accomplish analysis and categorization of eParticipation projects is based on desk research of existing assessment frameworks 0,0,0.000 Besides that, the particular evaluation purposes shape the methodology. The insights from literature, existing frameworks and the particular objectives of MOMENTUM gave shape to the key eParticipation aspects for monitoring. Besides that, a questionnaire for identifying projects characteristics in every eParticipation area was developed within MOMENTUM. With it, the monitoring results help to achieve mapping between projects along the following lines thereby providing the relevant data base on which the evaluation methodology grounds:

- Domain/eParticipation Areas
- Relevant Institutions and Actors
- Participative methodologies & legislative processes
- Tools & technologies
- Dissemination activities

The monitoring data are collected via email survey and the results are gathered in a repository.

2.2 Impact evaluation objectives and methodology

Referring to Aichholzer and Westholm 00, as well as Aichholzer and Allhutter 00, the impact evaluation aims at providing best practices and lessons learnt, as well as opportunities for further reuse and adoption of related know-how and experiences to the monitored e-participation projects, the EC as well as the relevant key stakeholders.

Core aspect of each impact evaluation is the definition of what impact means. From this, aims of the analysis can be identified, as well as benchmarks to assess if the monitored projects reach impact. In the context of this paper, impact is defined as the degree of engaging target group(s) over time 00. We distinguish between the following five impact levels (starting with the lowest): 0) the project could not raise awareness, 1) the project could raise awareness (i.e. end users know about the e-participation system, but they are not visiting it), 2) majority of end users visits the e-participation system but they are not actively participating, 3) majority of the end users actively participates while a minority just visits the e-participation system, 4) the end users actively participate (i.e. it is likely that they will sustainably use the e-participation system provided).

Since all projects develop an e-participation system (either a platform or at least an application) for supporting the legislation process, the main – and most tangible – results of the e-participation projects to be evaluated are their pilots. The identification of benchmarks departs on the one hand from the commonalities identified through monitoring and the given definition of impact. On the other hand, benchmarks are derived from desk research that focused on the investigation of existing eParticipation evaluation frameworks such as 00, 00, 00, and 00. From these sources, the following key evaluation criteria have been derived: a) tools and technologies deployed, b) deliberation and legislation processes supported, c) topics discussed, and d) policies tackled. In this paper we focus on the presentation of the findings received regarding tools and technologies since ICT is the core element that

distinguishes eParticipation approaches from traditional participation. Indicators to establish a framework and define benchmarks for the assessment of tools and technologies are mainly derived from desk research in the field of eGovernment adoption models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 00, the Uniform Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) 00 and Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) 00. The models mentioned before provide indicators to describe the relation between technology attributes and user behaviour, e.g. usability functionality 00. The list of criteria has further been counterbalanced with elements of the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), which helps “explaining human behaviour in context” 00.

We used questionnaires to collect the data thereby following a twofold approach based on a comparative analysis (cf. 00, 00) of internal and external assessment. Self-assessment was involved to gather information that can only be provided by the projects themselves (cf. 00). Since grounding conclusions only on self-assessment includes the risk of sugarcoated results, the self-assessment results have to be counterbalanced and crosschecked with external assessments involving expert evaluation and peer reviewing 00. In addition, the progress of the projects was evaluated by an iterative process. First round of evaluation took place at the end of 2008 and the second round is currently ongoing (hence the expert evaluation is not yet completed but the peer review and self-assessment is). The results and findings provided in the next section base on the comparative analysis of data collected as follows:

- the self-assessment responds at the end of 2008 and 2009,
- the expert evaluation responds at the end of 2008, and
- the peer review results at the end of 2009.

Evaluation and monitoring lead to the assessment of management strategies and their impacts on the democracy. Based on the evaluation, project managers can make decisions about whether to continue or adapt their current approaches.

3. Evaluation of tools and technologies in legislative and deliberative processes

The methodology to monitor and evaluate the impact of eParticipation projects introduced before was applied and tested using survey data collected from 13 eParticipation projects in the first round of impact and progress evaluation. Since the eParticipation projects co-funded under the eParticipation Preparatory Action of the EC started at different times (projects of call 1 started in January 2007, of call 2 in January 2008, and of call 3 in January 2009) and have different schedules for piloting, project results relevant for evaluation are consequently ready at different points in time. We can, therefore, provide only an overview of the results collected from a set of 7 projects that started and finished their activities at the same time to ensure comparability of the analysis results. Here, we present findings along the following aspects: 1) means used to establish contacts with constituency, 2) mechanisms to ensure quality of tools deployed, and 3) comparison of tools and technologies deployed.

3.1 Means to establish contacts with target group

Participation via ICT is not yet established and still at its initial stage. Applications in this field are new and often did not yet reach a critical mass. Therefore, it is important to establish contacts with the respective target audience thereby attracting it to at least visit the eParticipation system. Because target audience will only continue using

the eParticipation offer if it is attracted and perceives value to visit the eParticipation system, it is crucial that the experiences of the target audience are positive in order to keep them sustainably interested.

Establishing contacts is the first step towards sustainability. **Figure 1** provides an overview of the means used by the different projects to establish contacts with their respective target audiences.

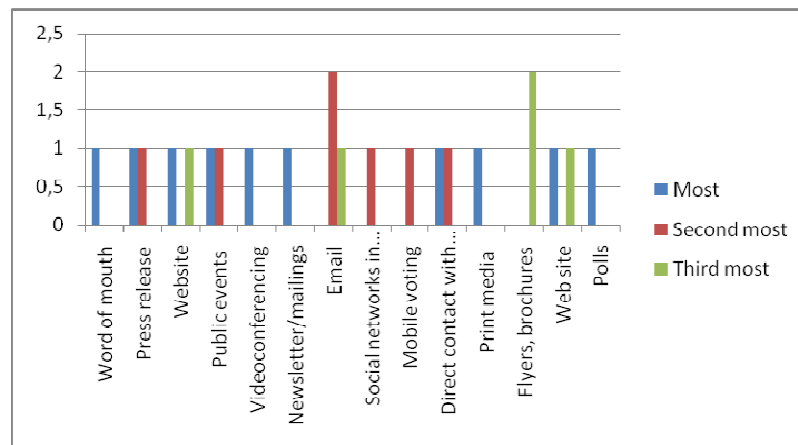


Figure 1. Means used to establish contacts

Figure 1 shows that a wide range of means were used by the projects to establish contacts with their target groups. In order to identify those means that attracted the target audience the most, we compared the means used with the success of the means in contacting the target group. **Figure 2** gives an overview of the means applied to establish contacts that reached the most impact, i.e. that mostly reached target groups.

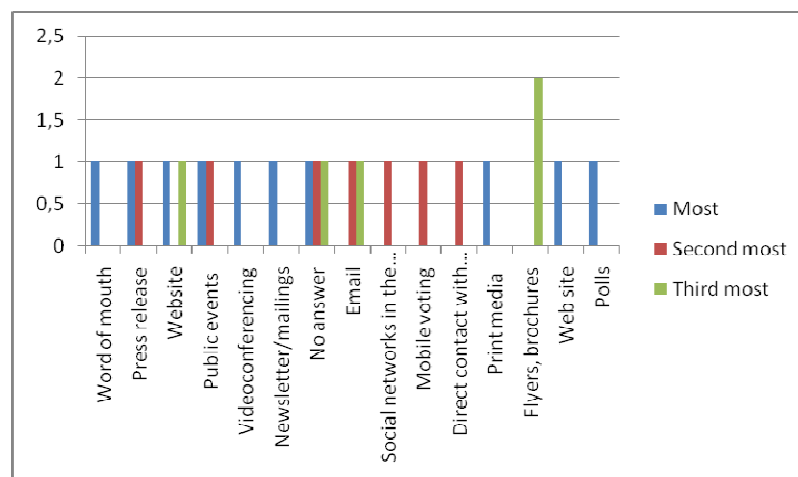


Figure 2. Means applied to establish contacts with the most impact

Only one project actually reached the most impact with the mean (i.e. Website) it used most to establish contacts. Besides, the same project actually reached the second most impact with the mean (email) it used second most to establish contacts. This project was successful since its strategy to establish contacts with its target group paid off. The project spent most effort in means which achieved most impact. Another project reached the most impact with the second most used mean (public events) it used to establish contacts. Again only one project reached third most

impact with the third most often used mean (i.e. print media). The comparative analysis indicates that, although the eParticipation projects used very similar approaches to establish contacts with their respective target groups, no means stands out. Hence, no recommendation can be given for the use of a specific means to establish contacts that reach high impact. In this context, further research is needed to investigate, under which particular conditions a specific means turned out to be successful or failed to successfully and sustainably reach the target group.

3.2 Mechanisms to ensure the quality of the tools and technologies applied

As already mentioned in subsection 3.2, it is important that the target audience experiences the tools and technologies deployed positively. Therefore, we investigated in particular usability, accessibility and functionality. In this subsection, we focus on presenting some results concerning the first two criteria, since the latter (i.e. functionality) has to be considered in connection with the respective context. Unfortunately, this would go beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the degree of innovation achieved by the tools and technologies deployed. It shows that the projects could improve the degree of innovation of the tools and technologies deployed in their eParticipation systems. In 2008, both evaluations (self-assessment and expert evaluation) mainly attested the tools and technologies deployed to be state of the art or incremental innovation. And it shows that in 2008 some project self-assessments were more optimistic than the expert evaluations were. This tendency could be also observed for the results received in 2009.

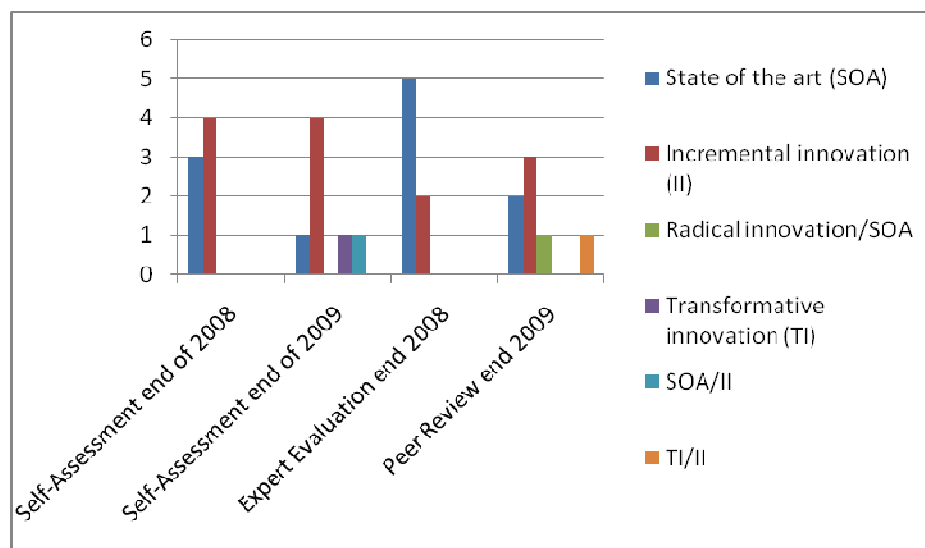


Figure 3. Degree of innovation of tools and technologies deployed

Most important is that the tools and technologies applied offer an added value to the target audience that is both attractive to them and that cannot be achieved through traditional participation offers. In this context, usability issues become also key. In 2009, all interviewed projects claimed to use quality management mechanisms for testing the usability of the tools and technologies applied. **Figure 4** presents the usability assessments received by expert evaluation at the end of 2008 and peer review at the end of 2009.

Are the tools and technologies easy to use?

User friendliness of the tools and technologies deployed

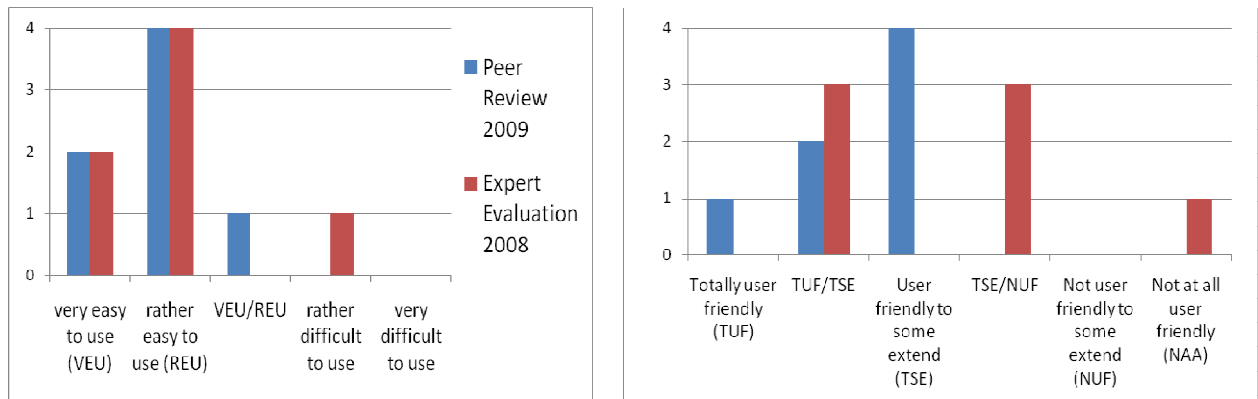


Figure 4. Usability of tools and technologies according to expert evaluation (2008) and peer review (2009)

Comparative analysis shows that tools and technologies deployed by the projects are mainly judged as easy to use. Only one project diverged from the norm. But user friendliness of the tools and technologies drew a less homogenous picture of assessments. Expert evaluation from 2008 was less positive than the judgements of peer reviews in 2009. This shows that projects succeed in improving user friendliness of the tools and technologies deployed.

In this context, the usage of quality management mechanisms is interesting since these deliver the knowledge, information and data to be able to detect and counteract weaknesses of the system and with it improve the system on the whole. **Figure 5** provides an overview of the quality management mechanisms used. Thereby two projects did not indicate which quality management mechanisms they used actually.

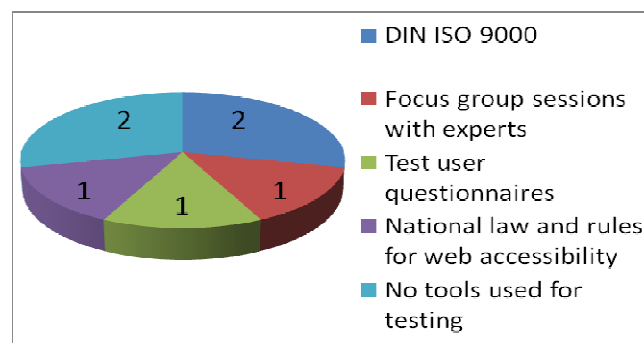


Figure 5. Quality Management Mechanisms implemented according the self-assessments results received in 2009

The application of Internet-based tools and technologies for participation creates new challenges for system security with respect to the social and organizational contexts within which security concerns arise. In particular the success of eParticipation systems and single offers depends on how end users experience and perceive security as a facet of eParticipation. With regard to eParticipation, security concerns and solutions differ between offline and online activities in particular possible consequences for the end user. The projects specified security and protection measurements in the self-assessment at the end of 2009 as follows: Three out of seven projects installed authentication mechanisms and further two projects focused on penetration tests. One project conducted unit testing to investigate each module of the system in isolation and unit JavaScript. Besides, one further project used a special server farm with intrusion tool, and the remaining project stated to perform no security checks. Although nearly all projects placed measures in order to secure and protect their eParticipation system, the measures used differ from each

other.

Since the eParticipation projects are co-funded by the EC and their online participation systems are related to topics of the European legislation, there is a need to consider not only accessibility as such but also if the approach is standardised. **Figure 6** gives an overview of the self-assessment results received in the first round of evaluation (at the end of 2008) and the second round (at the end of 2009). It shows in a comparative analysis in how far the projects believe that their tools and technologies deployed comply to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and which tools they have used to test their participation tools and technologies. Besides, these results are cross-checked with the results of the expert evaluation that took place in the first round of evaluation and with the peer review results of the second round of evaluation.

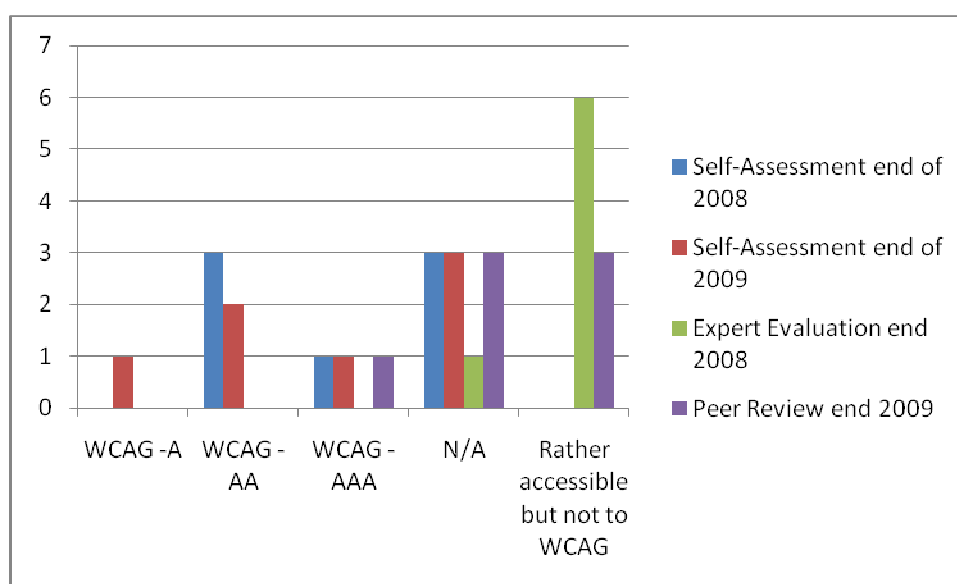


Figure 6. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)

Figure 6 presents an overview of the comparative analysis concerning the compliance of the WCAG by the projects. First distinctive feature is that the self-assessment at the end of 2008 account for more or less the same compliance than at the end of 2009. Only one project could improve its performance according to the comparative analysis of the self-assessment results. In 2009, three projects stated to use one of the following tools to test if the tools and technologies deployed comply to the WCAG: Bobby, WAVE, Web Accessibility Test (TAW). One project hasn't used any tool for testing and two answered that no tool was applicable for testing.

It is noticeable that the projects assess their performance better than the experts or peer reviewers do. **Figure 6** shows that in both rounds of self-assessment, half of the projects claim to achieve a WCAG level. But analysis has shown that the project that claimed the highest WCAG-level (AAA) has not even used a tool to test the WCAG-level. The project that used the TAW, i.e. online tool for analysing the eParticipation system in accordance with Web Accessibility Guidelines (W3C), stated no WCAG conformity seal as the TAW was negative. This is interesting since expert assessment has shown that essential parts of the content are available in audio format, too. In contrary to TAW, the online report generated by Bobby covers all existing accessibility guidelines including WCAG. The project that applied this tool achieved the second highest WCAG-level (AA) in the self-assessment test.

Expert assessment in 2008 concludes that the tools and technologies applied by nearby all projects are rather accessible but they do not comply to WCAG. The peer

reviews conducted in 2009 draw a less clear picture as the expert evaluations did in 2008. Although the statement of three peers, i.e. the tools and technologies applied by the project they have been reviewed are rather accessible but not to WCAG, is in line with the expert evaluation from the year before, half of the answers are in no accordance with the expert evaluation results. Three out of seven peers claim that the WCAG is not applicable to the respective project they have evaluated and only one peer reviewer attested compliance with the highest WCAG-level. Hence, self-assessment is in both times (2008 and 2009) more optimistic than external assessment (conducted by experts in 2008 and peer in 2009).

Comparative analysis presented a very heterogeneous picture across the projects monitored. Some of them refer to all or at least some technology acceptance and quality aspects, and others to none. There is no common understanding or definition between the eParticipation projects regarding quality assurance, usability and accessibility standards, as well as security issues. For future initiatives we strongly recommend to establish a common understanding on implementing eParticipation systems by highlighting a joint framework (guidance) that will help ensure at least a certain minimum level of accessibility, usability and security.

3.3 Overview of the eParticipation tools deployed and used by target users

Figure 7 presents an overview of the eParticipation tools offered by the projects and which are mostly and second mostly used by the target group across the projects.

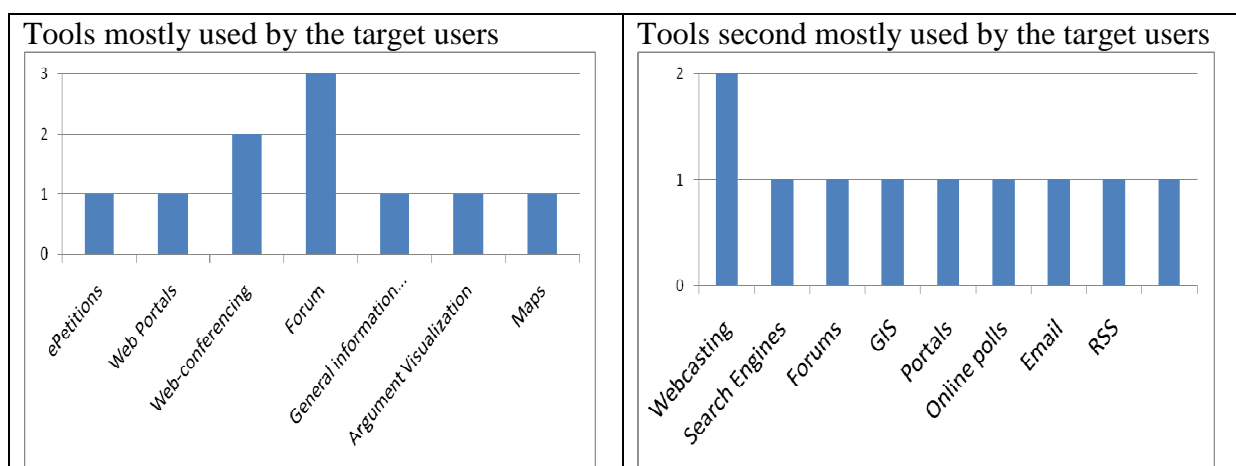


Figure 7. Tools preferred by the target users

Target users of half of the projects used Forums mostly. In addition, Forums are also second mostly used by the target users of one further project and third mostly used by further two projects. Therefore Forums are the most popular participation tool. Moreover, the target users of 2 out of 6 projects (i.e. target users of two thirds of the projects) mostly preferred Web-conferencing. Webcasting is the only tool which is second mostly used by the target users of two projects. Besides ePetitions and Online polls, analysis have shown that Webcasting and Argument visualisation, as well as Search engines and Survey offers are also popular.

4. Lessons learnt and best practices

In this section, we present what we have learnt throughout our evaluation thereby

considering not only the factors that help to effectively support participation processes with modern ICT but also challenges of executing eParticipation projects evaluation.

4.1 How to effectively support participation processes with modern ICT

Most monitored eParticipation projects achieved to stimulate openness, informality and equality. These projects were designed to help citizens and their elected representatives to create and share content. Unfortunately, the projects could not succeed in reaching the elected representatives but only the citizens. In this matter, citizens engagement can be only attracted for short time if their elected representatives do not respond to them.

Besides, it turned out that citizens are interested in the informal ways of participation offered throughout the eParticipation offers of the projects. They like to behave informally thereby rejecting eParticipation offers where they have to register. Therefore, we would recommend to avoid registration if it is not absolutely necessary.

Online discussions are strongly dependent on the very specific topic it is grown around. Therefore, an interesting topic is central to the success of the project and therewith, it is central to the success of eParticipation. A best practice was given by one project that uses the “question of the month” to appeal its end users and performed very well with it.

Analysis has shown that the following aspects are hindering for eParticipation projects to succeed:

- Lack of support from elected representatives resulting not only but also in wanting acceptance of the citizens
- Past oriented thinking and acting, as well as culture of elimination of errors thereby remaining in tried and tested/trusted routines (this is in particularly true for the use of ICT)
- Confusing information, lack of transparency and accessibility
- Lack of sharing information with other projects to learn from their experiences or to create synergies

4.2 Lessons learnt from executing eParticipation projects evaluation

The aim of our evaluation is to convey knowledge gained through experience, in the field of eParticipation, in order to enhance future performance of eParticipation funding programs and projects.

An evaluation of the impact is methodologically difficult, as the trial projects started at different times and lasts too short in time to allow for judgments on impact after the operating system has been established. It is difficult to causally link influence and effect over time when projects have short timescales. The monitored projects take time to develop and to have an impact. For this reason debates took place concerning the earliest point in time to start making assessments of consequences. For our approach it turned out that an iterative process to measure impact at different points over time is the best possible solution. Impact assessment involves progress evaluation thereby iteratively execute the evaluation over time. Monitoring and evaluation activities started after the first round of projects already finished their activities and ends earlier than the last round of projects will finish their activities. Hence, conclusions drawn for the first and last round of projects base more on indications than on strong figures. This is why this paper focuses on the second round of projects that grounds on the results of at least two assessments over time.

Engaging end users in the assessment of the projects was problematic and we could not gather any utilizable information from our approaches. There are several reasons for this: a) compared with research subjects who are more easily recruited (e.g. peers to the project and experts in the fields), end users perceive few incentives

and high costs for participating as research subjects (e.g. standardised answers may frustrate users) therefore their participation is often low, and b) in addition to our evaluation each project conducted an end user evaluation based on a questionnaire thereby mutually cutting the ground from under the others feet.

Better using mail surveys than online surveys. The implementation of the questionnaires via online form as it was conducted in the first round of MOMENTUM's eParticipation projects evaluation was replaced through mail surveys. Although the implementation of online questionnaires via LimeSurvey promised lots of advantages, it turned out to be quite difficult. Several problems occurred such as a) data got lost although respondents saved it, b) the number of problems arised caused extra effort for both sides, the respondents to the questionnaires and the MOMENTUM team who carried out the survey. Therefore, we decided to carry out the eParticipation projects evaluation via mail survey next time.

5. Toward further analysis

In this paper we presented a report based on parts of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of eParticipation projects funded under the eParticipation Preparatory Action of the EC. This evaluation passes through an iterative process including internal and external assessments of the projects that started and finished or will finish at different points in time. Past evaluation (first round of evaluation that was conducted at the end of 2008) included also self-assessment and expert evaluation of the projects that started their activities at the beginning of 2007 and have already finished at the time of the first evaluation. The results of this evaluation are not included in this paper. This paper focused on the projects that started their activities at the beginning of 2008 and finalised at the end of 2009 because these projects took part in both the 1st and 2nd round of evaluation. Hence, we are able to present comparative analyses of the 1st and 2nd round of Self-Assessment which was already completed. Besides, we could compare these results with external assessments from Expert Evaluation that was carried out in the 1st round and Peer Review that was conducted in the 2nd round of evaluation to counterbalance the information received from Self-Assessment.

At the moment the 2nd round of expert evaluation is running and results will be available in a few months. Then also a comparative analysis of 1st and 2nd round of Expert Evaluation is possible. Besides, also the projects that started at the beginning of 2009 have now advanced to the point that their pilots are live. Hence, evaluation of their pilots will start soon involving Self-Assessment, Expert Evaluation, and Peer Review. At the end of the process, we will then provide a comprehensive and wide-ranging evaluation of the projects funded under the eParticipation Preparatory Action of the EC. This comparative study will not only provide feedback on the single projects and calls but also on the eParticipation Preparatory Action itself. From this, we expect profound insights into eParticipation and the design and conduction of eParticipation projects thereby providing helpful lessons learnt and recommendations for future eParticipation initiatives to the EC and other designated stakeholders.

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Direct Deliberative Governance Online: Consensual Problem Solving or Accommodated Pluralism?

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Abstract. This paper describes and analyses distinct patterns of 'governance conversation' observed in interactions on a discussion list that aims to support local, direct, governance in a geographically colocated community in South Africa. Although each pattern relates to governance, making 'binding decisions', which has been seen as a key attribute of deliberative democratic processes, is almost entirely absent from the observed interactions. Nonetheless, the exchanges appear to be relevant and useful to the broader process of local direct deliberative governance. We investigate the extent to which the patterns feature instrumental or expressive dialogue, and subsequently support consensual or pluralist outcomes. The results propose that online interaction is particularly suited to facilitating the pluralist deliberation required to manage complex local governance problems. The outcomes observed in the case study further suggest the potential value of an infrequently investigated context of online deliberation – that of citizen-to-citizen deliberation of geographically local issues; and presents a broader conception of the role of online deliberation in local governance, where formal decision making is frequently over privileged in research.

1. Introduction

This paper describes and analyses distinct patterns of 'governance conversation' observed on a discussion list that was developed and maintained to support local, direct governance. Although each of the patterns relate to governance, we find that 'binding decisions', which have been seen as a key attribute of deliberative democratic processes (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), are almost entirely absent from the observed online exchanges. Nonetheless, the interactions appear to be relevant and useful to the more broadly deliberative process of direct local governance.

The investigation makes a case study of a small, geographically co-located community - where deliberation between citizens directly concerns questions of local governance. In this sense, the case study presents an example of "neighbourhood democracy" (Barber, 2003; Leighninger, 2008). However, it should be distinguished from studies of online neighbourhood democracy, or more broadly online deliberative governance, where the research focus is on the interaction of citizens with government, and where policy formulation in its various forms is both key object and output of communication. In this instance, the online discussion spaces were conceived, set up and are maintained entirely as a spontaneous volunteer effort by

members of the community; formal government, e.g. the city municipality, are neither the object of, nor significant participant in the conversations. Dialogue is between residents and largely concerns how they and their Residents Association might directly resolve local issues. Accordingly, residents understand the problems under discussion well and are often personally affected - and so highly motivated to participate in governance action.

The study draws on a combination of online discussion archives, field notes and interviews with key participants, and follows an approach based on the Structured Case methodological framework (Carroll & Swatman, 2000). Our development of theory has much in common with the grounded theory methodology (Heath & Cowley, 2004), though structured case specifically makes provision for an initial conceptual framework, to be refined, extended and tested through grounded observation. The initial framework employed here has two significant components: an understanding of deliberative governance as much broader process than rational decision making dialogue; and the recognition of deliberation that may equally be valued as instrumental or expressive, a process potentially leading to consensual decision making or to the accommodation of pluralism (Cohen & Sabel, 1997; Gutmann & Thompson, 2004).

The tentative conclusions of the paper are:

- that a broad range of online contributions potentially play a role if we consider local governance as a deliberative process overall, rather than deliberative in each of its components,
- while many of these contributions have instrumental value (to inform, co-ordinate, collate input and resolve local problems), with the expectation of continued association, participants engage in significant expressive interaction that reaches beyond the issue at hand,
- the online lists, which might thus be regarded as an extension of the local public sphere, are driven by a combination of the two modes of interaction, instrumental and expressive
- while there appear to be no formal decision making processes on the lists, they are none the less effective at supporting governance action even where there is little implicit consensus, supporting the community to manage “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973) in a manner which respects the plurality of local opinion.

More broadly the case study proposes the value of an infrequently investigated context of online deliberation – that of citizen-to-citizen deliberation pertaining to geographically local issues; and additionally of a broader conception of the role of online deliberation in local governance, where formal decision making is frequently over privileged in research.

In the remainder of the paper we briefly present our methodology, followed by an overview of the theoretical framing informing the work. The case is described, and five patterns of ‘governance conversation’ subsequently presented which we consider representative of the online dialogue. We discuss the patterns in terms of their contribution to the governance process, and in view of the dimensions presented by the theoretical framing. The final section presents tentative conclusions, as well as points to further questions and future work.

2. Method

The case selection logic follows two principles discussed by Yin (2003) which may initially appear contradictory – the case is both *typical* of villages and neighbourhoods of a given size that exist throughout the world, and relatively *unusual* in what appears

to be a successful 'bottom up' implementation of online media to support local, direct governance. The scope of this study is to investigate the sorts of interaction that practically occur as a result, and the potential impact that the online interactions have on local governance.

The investigation draws primarily on original archive material - the records of online discussions in three closely related lists, over a period of 17 months. The 684 messages in the archive are mainly analysed textually, though simple quantitative measures also inform the work. Archive data is supplemented through semi-structured interviews with key local role players, as well as researchers' field notes of governance events and informal conversations with community members during the same period.

We make use of the structured-case research framework of Carroll and Swatman (2000) as an approach to engage with data from multiple sources. Structured-case features a processual model with three components:

- An evolving conceptual framework representing the current state of a researcher's/evaluator's aims, theoretical foundations and understandings. The researcher begins with an initial conceptual framework based upon prior knowledge and experience and iteratively revises it until the enquiry terminates.
- A research cycle structures data collection, analysis, interpretation and synthesis.
- Literature-based scrutiny is used to compare and contrast the evolving outcomes of the enquiry with literature.

In common with grounded theory, it encourages the researcher to produce new or revised knowledge that is demonstrably rooted in observation (Heath & Cowley, 2004). However, Carol and Swatman's approach is more permissive of an initial conceptual framework or theoretical framing, rather than striving for the 'ideal absence' of such commitment at the outset.

In the terminology of grounded theory, the "unit of analysis" is a list message, analysed within the context of a 'conversation' - a group of related messages. The coding process involves making multiple reviews of the archive, chronologically arranged, to develop a set of message codes and to identify conversations. We subsequently investigate how groups of conversations have similar codes associated. From this emerges the higher-level structure of interactions - what we have referred to as patterns of 'governance conversation'. Note that we use the term 'pattern' in its standard English form, in other words to denote conversations that have a number of key attributes (or codes) in common, rather than to associate with more formal usage such as in "pattern language" (Dearden & Finlay, 2006). Given the size of the case sample, and very specific scope of our study, the patterns are not proposed as a complete typology of any sort, though the patterns we describe are likely to be found in a range of similar contexts. In stead, they are mainly intended to characterise the sorts of interactions we observed in the case, a mechanism to support further analysis.

3. Theoretical framing

The two significant components of our initial theoretical framework are: an understanding of deliberative governance as a broader process than rational decision making dialogue; and the recognition of deliberation that may equally be valued as instrumental or expressive, a process potentially leading to consensual decision making or to the accommodation of pluralism (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). In this section, we briefly expand on the theoretical components in turn.

Kelly (in Budd, 2008) proposes that, in the context of civil society, the term governance can be "used to describe governing arrangements that are more than or greater than merely the institutions of government." Used this way, governance includes "all those interactive arrangements in which public as well as private actors participate aimed at solving societal problems, or creating societal opportunities, and attending to the institutions within which these governing activities take place" (Osborne, 2002). In this context, public participation potentially means more than only interfacing with government about their policies - but direct involvement of citizens in decision-making and also implementing acts of governance. This framing seems particularly relevant at local level, where citizens become directly involved in governing the world they are part of, and formal government has potentially limited reach.

We further refer to governance that is 'deliberative'. In the context of deliberative democracy, deliberativeness is commonly understood as a process of democratic decision-making based on public dialogue (Saward, 2000) where policy is most significantly shaped by "the force of better argument" (Habermas, in Klein, 2004) - a process which requires decisions to be based on "reasons" rather than for example the "entitlement" or "position" (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004) of their proponent. These notions of public deliberation are however predominantly concerned with the tension between various 'publics' and the policies and executive powers of institutional government (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974). Cohen & Sabel (1997) propose a framing of *direct deliberative democracy* more appropriate to our use of the term 'governance'. They advocate local governance where decision-making relies on the direct participation of those most affected by, and accordingly likely also most informed about and motivated to resolve an issue. The local focus of their proposed solution addresses a number of common criticisms of direct deliberative participation – for example that participants lack the specialist skills or knowledge, and the time to be comprehensively involved (Dahl, 1991). In this context, Cohen & Sabel (1997) further dismiss criticism that deliberation necessarily favours the rational, over emotive and other forms of expression. We propose that, given the broader definition of governance we have outlined, it is conceivable that direct deliberative governance be defined as a process that is deliberative in principle, though not necessarily exclusively deliberative in its components. Where citizens become direct actors in the governance process - rather than being confined to indirect participation by the deliberation of policy - there are a range of substantive contributions that they might make.

While the first component of the framework concerns the scope of participation in deliberative governance, the second component concerns the goals and potential outcomes of contribution. It draws elements from a broader characterisation of deliberative democracy in Gutmann and Thompson (2004), who propose that deliberation may be characterised as instrumental or expressive, consensual or pluralist.

An instrumental view considers that "political deliberation has no value in itself, beyond enabling citizens to make justifiable political decisions" (p.22). Many definitions of deliberation, reflected e.g. in Pingree's (2009) recent aggregation of the definitions of prominent scholars of public deliberation, are implicitly instrumental when they suggest the goal of deliberative exchange is to "make sound decisions." To apply the perspective in the broader governance frame proposed by the first part of this discussion - conversations that contribute to deliberative process would only have value to the extent that they contribute directly to problem solving, decision making and co-ordinating of action. An expressive view in turn considers deliberation intrinsically valuable, for one "as a manifestation of mutual respect among citizens" (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p21) The expressive value of deliberation relates

closely to the notion of the public sphere, a deliberative space "in which something approaching public opinion can be formed (Habermas et al., 1974)." While, as we have already discussed, Habermas considers the public sphere as a space 'between' the public and private, the framing of governance we adopt suggests a broader view of the public sphere - as an expressive space existing first and foremost between citizens. Hauser (1998) proposes that "public spheres are discursive sites where society deliberates about normative standards and even develops new frameworks for expressing and evaluating social reality." He emphasises that public opinion is located in "the dialog of informal discourse," what he refers to as "vernacular rhetoric" rather than idealised "rational deliberation". Our approach to local governance interaction particularly takes this view into account.

For the purpose of this study, we take direction from Gutmann and Thompson who consider that the two values - of dialogue as instrumental or expressive - are not incompatible and suggest any adequate theory of deliberation must recognise both. The discussion of deliberation as instrumental or expressive is closely linked to its outcome as a consensual or pluralist process. In other words, "should deliberation aim at achieving consensus through realising a common good, or through seeking the fairest terms of living with a recalcitrant pluralism?" (p.26)

One might argue that an aggregative process, based on a vote between opposing positions, is the extreme implementation of consensual decision making - one where one party wins, and another loses, presumably for the highest overall common good. Habermas instead envisions deliberation which finds genuine consensus through the "force of better argument" (Klein & Huynh, 2004). Saward presents a challenge to this view by stating that deliberation inevitably falls back on aggregative mechanisms where there is a fundamental lack of consensus, to allow decisions to be made (Saward, 2000). The process of deliberation might however exactly move away from such "positions" on an issue (Kahane & Senge, 2007), instead focussing on interests - and particularly means of finding mutually beneficial solutions. In this view, an ideal solution respects and accommodates pluralism, rather than forces decisions between reciprocally disagreeable outcomes. It accepts that potentially there will never be consensus on certain issues. This relates to Cohen's (1997) vision for direct deliberative democracy at local level: "Because of the numerosity and diversity of sites, we want a structure of decision-making that does not require uniform solutions ... because of the complexity of problems, we want a structure that fosters inter-local comparisons of solutions".

To summarise, our review of theory proposes an investigation of deliberative governance that admits a broad range of citizen-to-citizen interactions, targeted at tackling local issues directly, rather purely through engagement with government policy. The framing further considers that in addition to instrumental value, deliberation at this scale may have expressive purpose - and that its value may lie exactly in supporting pluralism, rather than necessarily forming consensus. The process, as we have framed it, locates its 'publics' in the vernacular rhetoric of a local online forum rather than any formally sanctioned debate. This does not discount the importance or impact of formal government - nor of policy dialogue for that matter. Instead we focus particularly on a scope of, and approach to governance that we would argue offers an important compliment to these and which is often under privileged in research.

Where this theoretical frame is applied to the technology of an online list, it seemed that an instrumental view of its purpose predisposes to an instrumental view of technology - as a 'tool' primarily to reduce the coordinative overheads associated with direct deliberative decision-making, and potentially to assist in the process of forming consensus. The expressive view instead encourages the researcher to consider the extent to which technology fulfils a broader social function by extending

the public sphere, by for example creating a space where meanings can be contested. Rather than proposing one or the other as 'ideal' this research sets out to understand how interaction practically happens, given the theoretical perspective we have outlined.

4. Case description

In this section we present demographic information relevant to the online participation of community members in deliberative governance. We subsequently describe the governance arrangements, which both create the need for, and facilitate direct, deliberative governance; and finally discuss the intended purpose of, creation and early evolution of online tools that this study focuses on.

The case comprises a community of approximately 1500 residents, on the outskirts of a large city in South Africa. Its relatively remote location, with very limited local employment, means that the working population are disproportionately represented by independent professionals and business people, who are able to work remotely and so well versed at using online technology. While many residents, retirees for example, conversely have limited exposure to web-based technology, there is an unusually large support base in their neighbours and friends as a result. The overall demographic suggests that the community have formidable human capacity in terms of governance - there are locally resident lawyers, doctors, academics, environmental specialists and technical consultants who variously contribute voluntarily.

In terms of formal government, the village falls within the mandate of the larger city municipality, which supplies basic services and collects revenues. As is common in South Africa, the residents have voluntarily formed a "Residents and Ratepayers Association" (RRA) to attend to matters of local governance and to represent the interests of the community to the city municipality. Because of geographic distances, low population density and limited human and financial resources, formal government have limited capacity at local level in South Africa (Wunsch, 1998). The RRA is accordingly formally recognised by the city municipality, and departments of the municipality interact with the RRA committee daily on matters ranging from infrastructure development to the delivery of basic and social services. In many cases, the RRA have assumed direct responsibility to co-ordinate and execute local governance actions.

In practice, the business of the RRA is conducted by a committee of five volunteers, elected at an annual general meeting. The committee has bimonthly meetings, open to all residents and ratepayers to attend, though in reality the meetings are rarely attended by anyone but committee members. The RRA had accordingly experimented with the use of web-based tools, using volunteer technical assistance, to better co-ordinate their work, involve residents more actively and provide for a more communicative governing platform. Over a period of five years, the efforts included several iterations of a village website, an online forum, a map based incident reporting tool and several mailing lists. The experimental, somewhat ad hoc approach meant that some of these tools had become redundant or had fallen into disuse when this study was conducted. We accordingly based our investigation on the main residents mailing list, as well as two subsidiary lists, which appeared to be the tools most prominently used to conduct governance. Though these email lists afforded technically unsophisticated interaction, they were most accessible and so broadly used - and afforded complex deliberative interaction none the less.

The RRA committee had set up the residents mailing lists primarily to improve their own communicative capacity and the list was initially simply managed as an

outgoing address list in the Gmail (Google) account of the chairperson of the RRA committee. Residents however soon started making use of the list by responding the outgoing emails with requests to the moderator – first to post their own announcements, and once a precedent had been established, to engage others in conversation related to governance. Within 8 months, the returning message volume had increased sufficiently that the RRA channel functioned to all extents as a two-way mailing list. The functionality was subsequently formalised under a new Google email address, the identification changed to reflect its official purpose and invitation sent to residents to use the new, "official" mailing list. A second moderator was also appointed to manage the increased moderation load. Subscription management was none the less conducted manually, with new resident emails in many cases co-opted by the RRA moderators. At the time of this study, the list had 415 subscribers, and 86 of those had posted messages. Though exact figures were not available, the RRA chair estimated that at very least one in every two households were represented by a subscriber on the list. Compared to the offline meetings, the lists had clearly served the purpose of better communicating the business of the residents association, and also involving a larger proportion of residents in governance related dialogue.

Soon after the residents list was formally announced, a topic generated sufficient conflict and message volume that many list members complained to the moderators, some unsubscribing from the list. As mechanism to deal with the increased volume, and in an attempt to lower what moderators (and clearly some participants) perceived as "noise" on the main list, a second (topic specific) list was set up by a community volunteer using Mailman (Warsaw) technology. Mailman offered more sophisticated tools to RRA moderators, and its automated subscribe and unsubscribe functionality allowed the list to be more self managing. During the period of this study, two more such lists were set up. The work we report on in the following section considers the nature and contingency of interaction in these lists in more detail.

5. Governance conversations

Here we describe the results of coding analysis, five patterns of 'governance conversation', giving a more detailed look into the content of and nature of deliberation on the lists. Note that conversations that were not governance related - such as small ads, lost and found notices and general event notices - were deliberately omitted from the analysis. These contributions potentially increase the value and relevance of the lists, but we consider it outside the scope of this paper to report on the additional dimension.

Announcement: This pattern involves simple informative announcements: advertising a governance meeting, information on service schedules, a press release from the city municipality, a message to create awareness of an issue. Particularly early in its existence, the main list was mostly used to broadcast announcements. In some cases the announcement generated replies – for example to show enthusiasm for an event, or to provide additional information - but did not involve the expression of differences of opinion, or an explicit evaluation of any sort. Though superficially announcements appeared utilitarian, they nonetheless afford the contributor an opportunity to frame an issue or action and implicitly present an opinion or value statement in the process.

Feedback exchange: This pattern includes messages that solicit evaluations from list members, as well as their subsequent responses. It also includes messages which provide ad hoc updates to fellow residents on the progress or otherwise of an initiative. What distinguishes the feedback pattern from other types of conversation is that, though the term implies response, these conversations do not develop into

reciprocal dialogue on the list. Answers are sent directly to the requesting party, who are not obliged to publish these, nor to engage in further discussion. In the alternative form of an ad hoc update, no response is expected. As an example, soon after the list was initiated, the residents association sent out a request for feedback on the performance of a contractor collecting recyclable waste. In this instance they chose to publish some of the direct responses they received, as well as the 'off list' reply of the contractor to complaints. This generated no further discussion however - feedback acknowledged, the issue was considered closed unless further complaints were received.

Stakeholder coordination: Though all of the conversational patterns we identify imply coordination at some level, this pattern relates specifically to the use of the list to co-ordinate community participation in a broader, typically externally initiated governance process. Rather than primarily supporting the deliberative capacity *within* the community in other words, the list was used to provide a stronger voice to the community as a collective entity (to the extent that there was consensus at local level). This process involved a combination of information sharing, encouraging participation, arranging off-line events and ultimately submitting appropriate, coordinated response. In one instance, the list facilitated feedback to an environmental management plan of the city municipality, which would have direct impact on residents' access to a natural, protected area. In another, residents used the list to make collective response to a proposed property development in the wetland adjacent to the village. The development was unanimously disliked, though for divergent reasons, and the list afforded participants the opportunity to broaden their understanding of the potential impacts, and of the most appropriate and legally sound responses.

Deliberative mediation: The pattern broadly involves that an incident is reported, supported as problematic (or dismissed), a responsible party identified and then public pressure or sanction applied to prompt action. This is distinguished from the final category in that the problem is relatively simple, has a clear 'owner' and can be resolved after one or two rounds of discussion, typically without involving significant normative debate or enduring conflict of opinion. Some months after the list had evolved to a many-to-many channel of communication, residents began using it to resolve what they perceived to be governance related problems. In one example, someone complained of being attacked by another resident's stray dogs. This was quickly followed by emails from others - confirming the problem, identifying the owners and applying public pressure on them to act. While in this case the owners quickly acknowledged their responsibility and took action, in other cases those deemed responsible further engage online to negotiate either the true extent of the problem, or their role in its resolution.

Deliberative engagement: In this pattern, conversations involved what is otherwise known as "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) – issues that were complex, included significant normative dimensions and which frequently lead to increased controversy following debate, rather than resolution. Typically the issues had an obvious and significant impact on residents, but there were no known solutions and no clear problem owner. Discussion appeared to cycle through phases – at times dominated by heated normative discussion of the issue, at times by investigation of potential solutions or by reports of incident details. In some cases, an aspect of the issue would prompt conversation resembling one of the four other types identified – for example where a sub component of a broader problem lent itself to deliberative mediation. Overall, shifts in conversation occurred in response to posts on the list (the list became self propagating at times), but also to external events - the status of solutions being attempted, problem incidents. This meant that conversation did not follow a clear sequential pattern, appeared to be recursive, and the problem seemed

to be no nearer resolution after months of deliberation. While there were several such instances in the list archive, the most exemplary case involved the ongoing attempts to manage the destructive behaviour of a rogue troop of baboons. The baboons had taken to raiding houses for food, making frequent attacks and causing significant damage in the process. The incidents also threatened the well being of the animals, an endangered and protected species, as they frequently hurt themselves in the unfamiliar human environment. This provided strong motivation for local residents to attempt to resolve the problem, but also prompted significant normative as well as instrumental debate about the most appropriate resolution. The issue caused sufficient controversy for list moderators to move the discussion into a dedicated list - where it nonetheless generated 34% of overall message traffic during the measurement period.

6. Discussion

The five conversational patterns that we discuss in the previous section propose that a range of interactions online contribute to direct deliberative governance of the case community - given the perspective that the governance process is deliberative overall, rather than composed primarily of deliberative contributions. In this section, we accordingly consider the contribution of the patterns in terms of the dimensions highlighted in the discussion of theory: to what extent does communication have instrumental, or expressive value; and to what extent is communication consensual, or pluralist. We then consider the practical and theoretical implications of the analysis.

The 'announcement', 'feedback exchange', 'stakeholder coordination' and 'deliberative mediation' patterns make the most obvious "instrumental" contribution.

While 'announcement', 'feedback exchange' and 'stakeholder coordination' conversations may be below the level of deliberation, we have described in the previous section how these conversations nonetheless contribute to the overall direct, deliberativeness of the local governance process. Interactions share information, provide opportunity for feedback and provide input to governance processes. As a result residents become directly involved in governance, and the residents association is encouraged to conduct its business in a responsive manner. The first three patterns of 'governance conversation' also most closely reflect the goals of the residents association when they set up the list: Our interviews with list moderators established that the lists were created, and are presently maintained, primarily to lower the coordinative cost (Cordella, 1997) associated with local governance for members of the RRA committee. The main list was accordingly initially dominated by announcement and feedback contributions, with the association using the channel to share governance information, request feedback and keep residents informed of initiatives. Once the list was more formally established, the association directly invited residents to contribute along similar lines: *"You are very welcome to send emails to [the list] intended for the Association, or send us items to go out on the mailing list (village announcements, lost and found, but not commercial announcements)."*

Though not intended by its creators, the list also proved useful to resolve simple problems, what we labeled 'deliberative mediation'. Once a protocol for bi-directional communication had been established - not only between the civic association and residents, but between residents themselves - people appropriate the list to deal with what they perceive as governance problems. In several cases issues are resolved which had been referred to the residents association, but which they were unable to resolve in isolation. Where several independent messages follow up an initial

complaint, adding pressure on the problem owner to act, the social space appears to be very effective at motivating response. An email from the conversation we cited as an example reads: *"After ten years of living in [village], [street] has become a "No Go" [sic] area because of these same dogs. The youngest male, in particular, has threatened me on several occasions ... someone will have to take action before a child gets savaged."* In this case, after 10 similar emails, the owners took action within a day.

We have already discussed that 'deliberative engagement' conversations are less clearly instrumental to direct governance. The dialogue often appears to become an end in itself - driven by controversy, by a contentious post, or by a renewed outbreak of the issue, rather than genuine attempts to resolve. There are multiple cycles of problem definition, discussion of solutions, normative debate - frequently re-treading well known territory without seeming to reach a conclusion or even development of discourse. It also generates significant work for moderators - for 9 months, the baboon discussion alone generated more messages than all other topics combined. In interviews, the moderators confirmed they did not consider such conversations particularly constructive at resolving the issue, much as they recognise the conversations have an informing function. They further report that many list members unsubscribe after, or during confrontational debate, particularly where the discussion degrades to a personal attacks. One message to the forum simply reads: *"Please remove me (again) before I drown in this stuff."*

To discuss the "expressiveness" of conversations in turn: we considered overt normative content an indication of expressive communication. The coding results indicate normative content in all forms of contribution - though in some cases more overt than others, and so more likely to constitute expressive deliberation. 'Announcements' were frequently accompanied by normative motivation, or facts augmented by normative statements. One invitation for example reads: *"As a conservation village, it would be great if we could encourage everyone to sign up for Earth Hour on Saturday."* 'Feedback exchanges' on occasion included a normative interpretation of the facts presented, while in 'stakeholder coordination' interactions the conversation itself was less often expressive, than some of the arguments discussed at second hand. 'Deliberative mediation' involved normative statements to back up an initial problem statement, to signal support - and in some cases to compel the problem owner to act. It is however 'deliberative engagement' conversations, the discussion of wicked problems, that provided the most significant opportunity for expressive dialogue. Posts contained significant normative content - in the baboon related discussion, this included for example the values of community as conservation village, the competition between humans and other species, and the right to self destination - to name but a selection. This more than often lead to discussion that was difficult to moderate, and had a tendency to become personal. At the height of an argument about baboon management, an email reads: *"...[the problems are caused by] the weekend and holiday house owners, who don't read this and will do nothing about it!!!) so here is a good solution for the baboon lovers, why don't you chase all those people out first, right????? they caused it!!!."*

Not all participants agreed on the value of expressive dialogue - some considering it simply humorous, some sufficiently offended to unsubscribe: *"what a load of rubbish - please can we keep to baboons...this not a general forum for ranting and raving unless of course it concerns baboons! Whoever the moderator is should not let posts like this contaminate the discussion please."* Others clearly indicated how highly they value the expressive dialogue: *"Since venturing into the cyberworld of public discussion, it's been an unaccustomed pleasure to receive responses from fellow residents whom I have never met! As such, then, this Forum and the baboon issue, generally, has the wonderful side-effect of representing a gathering place, a*

waterhole, if you like, such as our village, without its marketplace, does not have." The fact that a quarter of messages in the baboon conversation included overt normative content indicates the extent to which participants were compelled to engage in expressive discourse. Expressive discussion, at very least, establishes the range of values held within the community. This in turn formed a significant part of evaluating both the definition of the problem, and the potential solutions considered. We would argue that while 'announcement', 'feedback exchange' and 'stakeholder coordination' had served an obvious instrumental purpose, it was through the expressive content in 'deliberative mediation' and 'deliberative engagement' that the mailing list had evolved from a one-way channel of communication to something approaching an extension of the public sphere. The expressive communication particularly has value to a geographically co-located community - because there is expectation of continued association and a significant likelihood of first hand encounter.

The theoretical framework of this research included a second set of deliberative dimensions – whether engagement serves a consensual or pluralist purpose. 'Announcement' and 'feedback exchanges,' by their definition, did not involve the level of reciprocal discussion that indicated (or required) consensus, nor expressed fundamental pluralism. 'Stakeholder coordination' conversations were based on the assumption that there was sufficient consensus to be able to coordinate a response – a case of 'the community' responding to an external demand. Sunstein (Sunstein, 1999) discusses how such consensual dialogue has the potential to lead to more extreme opinions. In the examples we have cited of this case, the evidence suggests rather the shaping of an informed, possibly broadened consensus - though none the less differences of opinion persisted on some aspects of a case. In 'deliberative mediation', consensus was implicitly expressed, where it existed, for example by the extent to which a complaint gained support, or there was agreement on who was the responsible party. Where this pattern of conversation encountered pluralism, the discussion either died down, or evolved to 'deliberative engagement'. In one example, residents deliberated over powerful external lights on several houses, after some of these had been vandalised. To some, the lights were bothersome and a waste of energy, in opposition to the values of a 'conservation village'; others considered the lights a necessary deterrent to crime. In light of the opposing, but relatively well reasoned and uncontroversial points of view, the discussion quickly died down. Where the discussion relating to baboons initially met a similar impasse, it escalated – most likely because the issue caused significant disturbance and directly affected a large number of residents. Our earlier discussion of 'deliberative engagement' already highlighted the significant pluralism that it entails.

The discussion of consensus and pluralism relates to the extent to which definitions of deliberation consider decision making the instrumental goal of deliberation. Presumably, for a deliberative decision to be made, some level of agreement is required. We have argued against the simplest form of aggregative consensus, in favour of a deliberative solution to be shaped from pluralism. In this case, it appears overt decision making was absent in all five patterns of communication we identified. One might most obviously indicate that the particular online space did not include sufficient mechanisms (such as automated polling) to facilitate aggregative decision making. However, it is significant that protocols to collate input - as might be expected of a face to face meeting – had also not been employed in any of the discussions. In some patterns, such as 'announcement' or 'feedback exchange' there appears to be no need for collective decisions. In 'stakeholder coordination' decision making is not appropriate because engagement in the list is part of broader process - as in case of the wetland development described earlier. During 'deliberative mediation' issues appear to be resolved through more

tacit forms of agreement – by the apparent support any one side of an issue gains. Finally, in case of wicked problems, decisions are by definition not as simple as putting a number of options to a vote.

To use the baboon discussion as an example - while the merits of potential solutions were repeatedly debated, a conclusive decision could not be made because the problem was sufficiently complex and poorly understood that even experts could at best guess at the outcome of action. The participants further did not have the resources, nor the official sanction to carry out many of the proposed “comprehensive” solutions – much less negotiate an agreement between at least three government agencies disowning their share of responsibility to find a resolution. The online deliberation did however lead to an informally co-ordinated, experimental approach to managing the issue - in some instances with improved outcomes. From the range of opinions, norms, problem incidents and potential remedies there gradually emerged a repertoire of arguments and candidate solutions. From these, consensus emerged amidst the pluralism that, at very least, it was in neither human or baboons interest that the animals remain in the village. As a result it became possible for groups to informally test solutions in a way that was self-regulating, without requiring unanimous decision. The ultimate outcome, though not finally resolving the issue, was an informal management strategy – improved reporting, measures to reduce the impact of raids, strategies to steer the troop back out of village once they arrive. We propose that the nature of deliberation online was partly instrumental to the outcome: asynchronous communication (Wellman et al., 2003) meant that many residents had the opportunity to be part of an ongoing dialogue, without the community incurring the cost or complication of regular offline meetings this would otherwise have required; the responsiveness of the medium (Deuze, 2006) made it possible for residents to report incidents accurately, directly after they occurred, as well as to provide immediate feedback on both proposed solutions, as well as experimental implementations; and the relative anonymity of the medium (Price, 2009) facilitated expressive, pluralist interactions which created sufficient common ground to enable level of collective action.

7. Conclusions

While the work that this study reports on is still in progress, we present the following tentative conclusions.

The theoretical overview proposes that a broad range of online interactions potentially contribute to local, deliberative governance – if we consider local governance a deliberative process overall, rather than necessarily deliberative in each of its components. The analysis of discussion archives accordingly presents five patterns of ‘governance conversation’ which all play a significant role in local governance within the case community. Considering the size and nature of the sample, we do not propose anything near a comprehensive typology, though the patterns we describe are likely to be found in a range of similar contexts. In stead, we used the patterns as a mechanism to be able to analyse and discuss this particular case and the range of contributions therein.

The five patterns are:

- Announcement – participants share governance information or advertise a community/governance event.
- Feedback exchange – participants provide or request information in response to a governance initiative.
- Stakeholder coordination – participants coordinate a local response to an externally initiated governance process.

- Deliberative mediation – participants informally mediate the direct resolution of local governance problems.
- Deliberative engagement – participants engage in sustained, pluralist discussion of a complex governance problem.

Our initial theoretical framework further proposed that deliberative contributions be evaluated as instrumental or expressive, consensual or pluralist. We find that the ‘announcement’, ‘feedback exchange’, ‘stakeholder coordination’, and ‘deliberative mediation’ patterns make the most evident instrumental contributions, but also provide less overt expressive contributions. ‘Deliberative engagement’ most clearly supports expressive dialogue. We find in turn that this appears to be instrumental to the shared understanding required to manage inherently pluralist, complex governance problems. The evidence proposes that the online discussions are driven by a combination of the two modes of interaction, the instrumental and expressive. The findings support Guttman and Thompson (2004), that a complete framework of deliberative governance must integrate the two perspectives.

Though the investigation does not show evidence of overt decision-making, there is a strong case that the online conversations significantly support governance action. It appears that the online discussions rarely “create” consensus, but are effective to support action where some level of implicit consensus exists - as we observed in the ‘feedback exchange’, ‘stakeholder coordination’ and ‘deliberative mediation’ patterns. Furthermore, online deliberation appeared to be particularly suited to manage the sometimes unavoidable pluralism (Cohen & Sabel, 1997) that complex issues introduce to local governance. The case analysis supported not only that expressive communication online creates mutual respect (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), but that it potentially allows participants to identify shared interests with respect to an issue, which makes a mutually acceptable management solution possible. We have further argued that, in the context of local governance, the asynchronous and responsive nature of the online medium seems particularly suited to supporting such an ad hoc, pluralist engagement process.

While this single case presents a very specific context of deliberation, the patterns of ‘governance conversation’ we observed are recognisable in, and the issues they pertain to have underlying themes that are very possibly common to the deliberations of communities the world over. Further, the online tools used by the case community are relatively unsophisticated, widely used and easily adopted. While we are unable to generalise on the basis of this study population, the outcomes observed in this case proposes the potential value of an infrequently investigated context of online deliberation – that of citizen-to-citizen deliberation pertaining to geographically local issues; and additionally of a broader conception of the role of online deliberation in local governance, where formal decision making is frequently over privileged in research. This is not to propose local citizen-to-citizen deliberation in opposition to for example participatory institutional policy dialogue, nor to ignore the importance and challenge of democratic, deliberative decision-making where this is required; but in stead to suggest aspects of online deliberation that deserve further research attention.

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What's Wife Swap Have to Do with It? Talking Politics Online

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Abstract. Talking politics online is not exclusively reserved for those spaces dedicated to politics, particularly the everyday political talk crucial to the public sphere. However, past net-based public sphere research has focused mostly on political spaces thereby neglecting an array of other genres. The aim of this article is to move beyond politically oriented communicative spaces by investigating political talk within the British reality TV discussion forum Wife Swap. The purpose is to see whether a forum dedicated to reality TV provides the communicative space, content, and style for politics that extends the public sphere. The central question is whether it fulfils the requirements of rationality and 'decent' deliberation. Moreover, the analysis moved beyond a formal notion by investigating how expressives influence the more traditional elements of deliberation. The findings revealed that Wife Swap participants engaged in political talk that was often deliberative. Moreover, it was a space where the use of expressives played a key role in enhancing such talk.

1. Introduction

One evening before dinner, a few friends and I sat and watched TV. As I flipped through the channels, one of my friends shouted out, "Leave that on. I like that show." At the time, I had no idea what show she was referring to, and as such, I sat there patiently. As the introduction of the series began, I thought to myself, "Please, not another one of those reality TV shows". Sure enough, it was exactly that, a series called Wife Swap. Wife Swap, originally broadcasted in 2003 by Channel 4 (UK), is an award winning reality TV series, which focuses on the lives of families. The twist to the show is that for two weeks the mothers of the two families swap places and take over the role of the other. Given the contrast in the families selected, the show presents a lively form of entertainment from the screams of anger to the laughter of joy. However, entertainment was not the only thing that Wife Swap provided that evening amongst friends. It also, and unexpectedly, provided a communicative space that fostered political discussion. During the first commercial break, we began discussing the behaviors of the two families. By the end of the show, these particular behaviors ignited and fuelled several discussions on parenting practices specifically and the role and importance of parenting for society.

Before the show began, I had a somewhat negative impression of what reality shows were, of the kind of people who watched them, and of what they offered their audiences. Stealing a line from the title of the best-selling book by critic Neil Postman (1985), my thought at the time was, “Yes, we are amusing ourselves to death.” However, after watching the show and participating in the communicative space that it provoked, I began to question my initial impressions on reality TV specifically and popular forms of entertainment in general. Shortly after, I began exploring the various online entertainment-based forums. What I found was numerous communities and forums tied to reality TV. Although a majority of what I read was not political by any stretch of the word, there still were a substantial number of times when the conversations turned political. For example, I came across discussions dealing with everything from the role of bullying among British youth to the Iraq War thus indicating that political talk is not bound to those spaces dedicated to conventional politics (see also Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009).

Net-based public sphere researchers have studied online deliberation in numerous ways. However, most studies have focused solely on *political* communicative spaces or those spaces dedicated to ‘hard’ news and have neglected an array of other genres such as the one discussed above. Such forum types host political talk, which also contribute to the web of informal conversations that constitutes the public sphere. Moreover, these spaces have become more important today when we considered the notion of a shift in politics. As a result of complex economic, political and social changes brought on largely by globalization, new relationships between citizens on the one hand and traditional institutions and the political elite on the other have brought about what some have called life politics (Giddens, 1991) or lifestyle politics (Bennett, 1998). Individuals here increasingly organize political and social meaning around their lifestyle values as opposed to traditional structures and institutions. Thus, we not only need to be more inclusive about where to look, but we also need to reconsider the ‘political’ in political talk; i.e. a notion that also allows for a more lifestyle-based approach is required.

The aim of this article is to move beyond politically oriented spaces by examining political talk within a reality TV forum. The focus is on how participants talk politics. By political *talk*, I am referring to everyday political conversation carried out freely between participants, which is often spontaneous and tends to lack purpose outside the purpose of talk for talk sake, representing the practical communicative form of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, p. 327). It is through such talk whereby citizens achieve understanding about the self and each other, representing the fundamental element of the public sphere. By *political* talk, I am referring to a public-spirited way of talking whereby individuals make connections from issues under discussion to society. The purpose is to examine its democratic quality in light of a set of normative conditions of the public sphere. It is also to move beyond a formal notion of deliberation by investigating how expressive speech acts interact and influence the more ‘traditional’ elements of deliberation. Thus, I present the following two research questions: To what extent do the communicative practices of a reality TV forum satisfy the normative conditions of the process of deliberation of the public sphere; and what role do expressives play within political talk and in relation to those conditions? Together, these questions seek not only to offer insight into the quality of such talk, but also to provide a better understanding of its expressive nature. Moreover, they seek to improve our understanding of how political talk occurs outside the realm of conventional political communicative spaces.

1.1 The Normative Conditions of the Public Sphere

Assessing the democratic value of political talk requires normative criteria of the public sphere. Net-based public sphere researchers have been heavily influenced by the work of Habermas. Though some have constructed different aspects of his theory of communicative rationality and the public sphere, a thorough specification is required. Thus, I offer here a set of public sphere criteria: the normative conditions of the process of deliberation.

Habermas envisions a strong democracy via a public sphere of informal citizen deliberation oriented towards achieving mutual understanding, which critically guides the political system. The public sphere and the web of everyday political conversations that constitute it becomes the key venue for deliberation. Through his pragmatic analysis of everyday conversation, Habermas argues that when participants take up communicative rationality here, they refer to several idealizing presuppositions. Drawing from these (1984, 1987, 2001), seven conditions are distinguished, which provide the necessary conditions for achieving understanding during the course of political talk and create a communicative environment based in and on fairness by placing both structural and dispositional requirements on the communicative form, process, and participant.¹

Rational-critical debate requires that participants provide reasoned claims, which are critically reflected upon. Such an exchange requires *coherence* and *continuity*: participants should stay on the topic of discussion until understanding or some form of agreement is achieved as opposed to withdrawing. Such a process demands three dispositional requirements, three levels of achieving mutual understanding. First, *reciprocity* requires that participants listen and respond to each other's questions and arguments. However, reciprocity alone does not satisfy the process: *reflexivity* is required. Reflexivity is the internal process of reflecting another participant's position against one's own. Finally, the process of deliberation requires an empathic perspective taking (*empathy*) in which we not only seek to understand intellectually the position of the other, but we also seek to empathically conceptualize, both cognitively and affectively,² how others would be affected by the issues under discussion.

Discursive equality is aimed at maintaining equality among participants during the deliberative process. First, the rules that coordinate the process cannot privilege one individual or group of individuals over another. Second, it requires an equal distribution of voice. That is, one individual or group of individuals should not dominate the conversation. Finally, it requires that participants respect each other as having equal standing thereby prohibiting abusive and degrading communicative practices.

1.2 Expressives and Deliberation

If our focus is on everyday political talk, we need to reconsider what we mean by deliberation. Privileging rationality via argumentation as the only relevant communicative form ignores the realities of political talk; i.e. it ignores its expressive nature. Some democratic theorists maintain that rational discourse needs to be broadened, allowing for forms such as greeting, gossip, rhetoric, and storytelling (Dryzek, 2000; Young, 1996). While others have argued that emotions and humor are essential to any notion of good deliberation (Basu, 1999; Rosenberg, 2004). Indeed, expressives are inherent to deliberation. When people talk politics, they not only draw from their cognitive and rational capacities but also from their emotions. It

would be hard to imagine people actively engaging in political talk if their emotions were not there to provoke them. Moreover, as the above authors argue, expressives may play a crucial role in facilitating deliberation. For example, humor and acknowledgements can be effective in creating a communicative atmosphere conducive to achieving mutual understanding.

However, past net-based public researchers have tended to neglect the role of expressives. Neglecting such communicative forms is not an option if our aim is to provide a better understanding of how people talk politics or to assess its democratic value. Thus, in the analysis that follows, the use of expressives is investigated with particular attention being paid to the role they play in relation to the normative conditions. By expressives, I am referring to humor, emotional comments, and acknowledgements. Humor represents complex emotional speech acts that excite and amuse for instance jokes and wisecracks. Emotional comments are speech acts that express one's feelings or attitude, while acknowledgements represent speech acts that acknowledge the presence, departure, or conversational action of another participant, such as greeting, thanking, and complementing.

2. Methods

The Wife Swap forum is hosted by Channel 4's online community pages, and according to the site, it is a place where fans can "chat about Wife Swap".³ The data gathered consisted of the individual postings and the threads in which they were situated. The selection of the data was based on the broadcasting dates of the series, which represented a three-month period. The sample contained 79 threads consisting of 892 postings. This sample was first coded for *political* talk. The goal was to allow also for a more individualized, lifestyle-based approach to politics. In order to achieve this, Graham's (2008) criteria for identifying political talk were adopted. All those threads that contained a posting where (1) a participant made a connection from a particular experience, interest, issue, or topic in general to society, which (2) stimulated reflection and a response by at least one other participant, were coded as political threads.

Once the political threads were identified, they were then subjected to three progressive phases of coding. Graham's (2008) coding scheme, which was developed as a means of systematically describing and assessing political talk, was employed. The scheme also moved beyond a formal notion of deliberation and coded for the use of expressives as discussed above. During the first phase, the coding categories were divided into three groups, which consisted of various types of reasoned claims, non-reasoned claims, and speech acts (expressives and commissives). The unit of analysis during this phase was the individual message. Once all messages were coded, phase two of the scheme began; messages that provided reasoned claims were advanced. During this phase, the coding categories were divided into two groups: *evidence type* and *argument style*. Messages were first coded for the type of evidence used, after which, selected messages were coded again for argument style. The unit of analysis during this phase was the argument. During the final phase, the coding categories were divided into two groups: *communicative empathy* and *discursive equality*. All messages were coded again for empathetic and degrading exchanges. The unit of analysis here was the individual message. For all three phases, the context unit of analysis was the discussion thread

– the relationships between the messages within a single thread were analyzed. I refer the reader to Graham (2008, pp. 23-32) for a detailed account of the individual coding categories, the coding scheme, and an operationalization of the seven conditions.

Regarding expressives, the aim was not only to identify them, but also to see how they were used during political talk and whether they tended to *facilitate* or *impede* deliberation. Consequently, the above analysis represented only the first step. Additional textual analyses on the use of expressives were conducted. Specifically, several separate in-depth readings on the use of expressives for each were carried out with particular attention being paid to indentifying the particular type, analyzing the social structure, and examining their use in relation to the normative conditions. In each case, the selected material was read, re-read, and worked through. Additional literature aided in the analysis; Shibles (1997) taxonomy of humor and Shaver's et al. (2001) categorization of primary and secondary emotions were consulted as a means of categorization. For a systematic account of the analyses carried out here see Graham (2009, pp. 61-63).

2.1 Identifying Political Talk

Nine threads containing 288 postings, 32% of the initial sample, were coded as political threads. What were the topics of these discussions? This question was addressed by categorizing the political lines of discussion, which consisted of 233 postings, into broad topics based on the issues discussed.⁴ The dominant topic of discussion was *the welfare state*, which consisted of 105 posting, representing 45% of political talk. Discussions here focused mostly on welfare reform in the UK and on the morality of the welfare system. Though these discussions seemed to resemble conventional political issues, they were often driven by the life experiences of forum participants. Participants would bring their life lessons to these debates, which for example dealt with losing a job, providing care for a loved one, and the difficulties encountered with the National Healthcare Service. These debates were often driven by storytelling.

The welfare state was not the only political topic of discussion. Indeed, a majority of political talk dealt with two primary topics: parenting and the family. For example, discussions on the life of a single mother, bullying among British youth, child obesity, and the parenting practices of immigrant/minority families and in general represented some of the issues discussed. Thus, much of political talk centered on issues that were more individualized and lifestyle oriented. These topics tended to foster political talk that was both personal and authoritative in nature. In these discussions, it seems that because participants were speaking as parents, bringing their knowledge and experiences to the debate, at times, they assumed the role of an expert, speaking with an authoritative voice when criticizing others.

2.2 Political Talk and the Normative Conditions

Rational-critical debate requires that the discussions in part be guided by rationality and critical reflection. Overall, participants were very rational. As Table 1 shows, there were 219 claims made. Out of these claims, 185 were reasoned, which represented 84% of all claims, indicating that being rational was the norm. In terms of postings, nearly 60% provided arguments, while only 12% contained assertions. The exchange of claims, which represented 72% of the postings, was overwhelmingly the guiding communicative form. Table 1 also indicates a moderate level of agreement

with affirmation claims representing nearly a quarter of the total claims made. Affirmations tended to appear in discussions on welfare reform and parenting practices. Often during these debates, one would find a string of affirmations in support of each other. That said, there still was a moderate level of disagreement, which accounted for 36% of the claims. However, disagreeing is not always accompanied by critical reflection. The level of rebuttals and refutes on the other hand is an indication of this. Thirty-two percent of all claims represented rebuttal and refute arguments, which represented nearly a quarter of the postings.

Coherence requires that participants stick to the issue under discussion. The threads were analyzed and then categorized into lines of discussion. The level of coherence was established by identifying and determining the frequency of divergences, and more importantly, the *relevance* of such divergences. Within the nine threads, 21 lines of discussion were identified. There was one thread where participants did not diverge at all from the issue under discussion. That said, there were six lines, which contained only 16 postings, coded as complete departures.⁵ In other words, 94% of the postings were coherent.

Continuity requires that the discussions continue until understanding or some form of agreement is achieved as opposed to abandoning. It was analyzed from two angles: the level of extended debate and convergence. The level of extended debate was measured via the presence of *strong-strings*.

Table 1. Wife Swap's Claim Type Usage Overview

		Claim type												Total
		Reasoned claims						Non-reasoned claims						
		Initial	Counter	Rebuttal	Refute	Affirmation	Total	Initial	Counter	Rebuttal	Refute	Affirmation	Total	
Claims ^a	Frequency	7	64	42	27	45	185	2	15	2	8	7	34	219
	% of claims	3	29	19	12	21	84	1	7	1	4	3	16	100
Postings ^b	Frequency	7	64	42	27	45	173	2	15	2	8	7	34	206
	% of postings	2	22	15	9	16	60	1	5	1	3	2	12	72

Note. A posting containing more than one of the same claim type were only counted once.

^an=219 claims.

^bn=288 postings.

Ideally, extended debate should consist of counter-rebuttal-refute exchanges with rebuttals and refutes representing a substantial portion of those exchanges. There were 13 strong-strings. The average number of a strong-string was 11 with the largest totaling 31 claims. Approximately 63% of all claims were involved in strong-string exchanges; this represented nearly half the postings. Moreover, 85% of these claims were reasoned, and nearly half were rebuttals and refutes, indicating both the rational and critical nature of these exchanges. Regarding convergence, the coherent political lines of discussion were coded for commissive speech acts, which represent communicative acts of agreement achieved during the course of political talk. There were 17 commissives identified, which represented approximately six percent of the postings. As a means of determining the level of convergence, the number of commissives was compared to the lines of discussion. There were nine threads, which contained ten political coherent lines of discussion. The average number of commissives per line was 1.7. Additionally, the analysis suggests the importance of extended debate in achieving convergence. In particular, 15 commissives were a product of strong-string exchanges.

Reciprocity requires that participants read and respond to each other's posts. The level of reciprocity was assessed by determining and combining a reply percentage indicator with a degree of centralization measurement.⁶ Regarding the latter, the ideal discussion thread should resemble a web of interaction rather than a many-to-one or one-to-many type of discussion. The data from both for each of the nine threads was plotted along a double axis matrix in order to assess the forum for reciprocity.

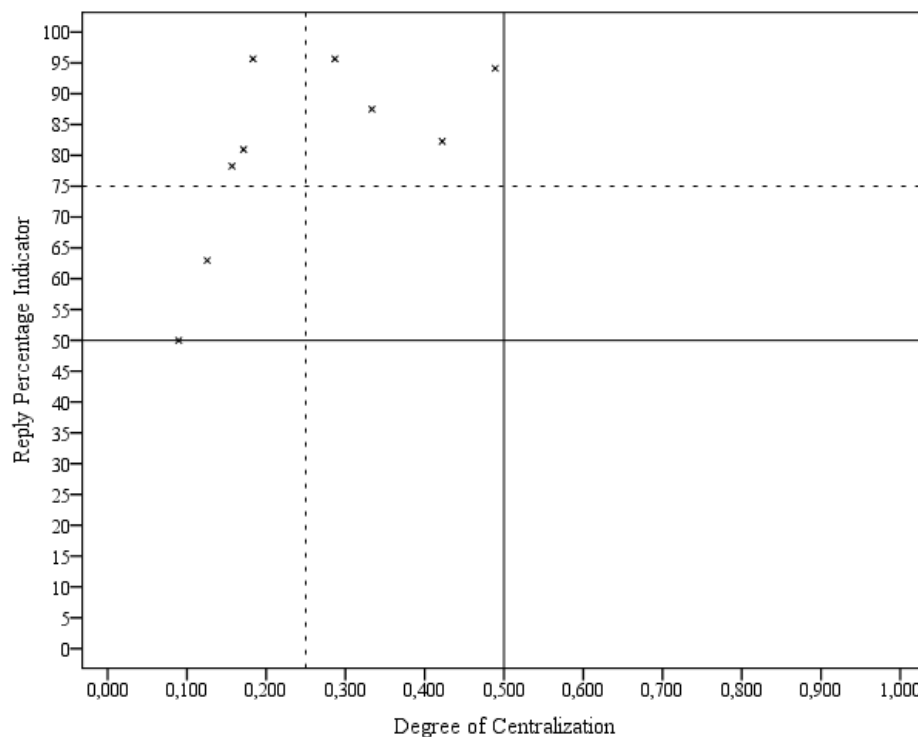


Figure 1. Wife Swap's web of reciprocity matrix results.

First, as Figure 1 indicates, the level of replies was high; only two threads maintained a reply percentage indicator < 75%. The percentage of replies for the whole sample was at 78%. Second, regarding the degree of centralization, the measurement is set on a scale of zero to one with zero representing the ideal

decentralized thread and one the ideal centralized thread. As Figure 1 shows, there were no threads moderately to highly centralized. On the contrary, four of the nine threads were moderately decentralized (those between .250 and .500), while more than half of the threads were highly decentralized (those $\leq .250$). Finally, regarding the combine analysis, those threads that fell within the strong decentralized web quadrant (the top left quadrant) were considered to have moderate to high levels of reciprocity. As is shown, all nine threads fall within this quadrant. So that a sharper distinction between these threads could be made, a second set of criteria was added, represented by the dotted lines, as a way of distinguishing between those maintaining a moderate level with those possessing a high level. As is shown, three threads contained an ideal level of reciprocity (threads $\geq 75\%$ and $\leq .250$). With the exception of two threads, the remaining four threads fell within the top right corner (threads $\geq 75\%$ and between .250 and .500), indicating a moderately high level of reciprocity.

Reflexivity requires that participants reflect another participant's argument against their own. The first step in determining the level of reflexivity is to discover the type and level of evidence use because in order to relate evidence to one's own argument or an opposing argument a participant must know and to some extent understand the opposing position. There were four types of evidence identified, which were examples (56%), experiences (27%), facts/sources (10%), and comparisons (7%). Wife Swap participants frequently used evidence to support their claims, representing 58% of all arguments. However, determining the level of evidence use is only the first step in ascertaining the level of reflexivity. Next, arguments were subject to the four criteria. When a posting or series of postings (1) provided a reasoned initial or counter claim; (2) used evidence to support that claim; (3) was responsive to challenges by providing rebuttals and refutes; (4) and provided evidence in support of that defense or challenge, they were coded as part of a reflexive argument. After applying these criteria, 11 reflexive arguments, consisting of 37 postings (13%), were identified. The average number was slightly more than three postings per argument with the largest totaling ten. Moreover, 20% of all arguments (37 arguments) were coded as reflexive arguments. The results also suggest that reflexivity may be an important ingredient in achieving convergence with 14 of the 17 commissives representing a product these exchanges.

Putting yourself in another person's shoes cognitively and/or emotionally is important to deliberation. However, since deliberation is a social process, conveying empathic considerations is crucial. When participants do not convey their empathic thoughts/feelings, empathic relationships cannot emerge, thus it has little bearing on the social process. Therefore, messages were coded for communicative empathy. Twenty-eight messages, representing ten percent of the postings, were coded as communicative empathy. Statements such as "I really understand where you're coming from" usually occur during the course of reflexive exchanges, suggesting the importance of reflexivity in achieving empathetic considerations.

Table 2. Wife Swap's Rate of Participation and Distribution of Postings

		Posting rate			Posting distribution		
		Participant frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent	Posting total	Percent	Cumulative percent
Postings	1	71	57	57	71	25	25

2	14	11	68	28	10	35
3	18	14	82	54	19	54
4	13	10	92	52	18	72
5 to 9	6	5	97	41	14	86
≥10	3	2	99	42	15	101
Total	125	99		288	101	

Note. The total percentages due not all add up to 100 because of rounding.

Discursive equality requires both an equal distribution of voice and substantial equality among participants. The distribution of voice was determined by measuring the rate and distribution of participation. There were 125 participants responsible for the 288 postings within the Wife Swap sample. As Table 2 shows, the level of one-timers was high, representing 57% of the participants. However, the distribution of participation was egalitarian. The most frequent posters (posting five or more messages) were responsible for < a third of the postings. Regarding substantial equality, participants are required to respect each other as equals. One way to analyze this is to code the discussions for acts of inequality by determining the level of neglected arguments and degrading exchanges. First, 30 arguments were silently neglected, which represented 16% of arguments. However, a closer reading revealed that there was no particular trend to the act of neglecting. Second, regarding active acts of inequality, there were 28 messages coded as degrading, which represented ten percent of the postings. However, most of these exchanges were directed at forum participants claiming to be a Wife Swap family member from the series. When leaving these exchanges aside, the level of degrading among forum participants was low.

2.3 The Use of Expressives

Expressives were a typical feature of political talk, appearing in more than half of the postings. Emotional comments were the most common, accounting for 62% of expressives and appearing in 39% of the postings. Overall, the analysis revealed three aspects on the use of emotions: their type, their social structure, and their relationship with particular variables of deliberation. First, the most frequently expressed emotion was anger. In particular, anger represented 56% of emotions, which usually came in the form of disgust, dislike, or annoyance. That said, participants did express other types of emotions. Specifically, sadness (15%), love (15%), and fear (9%) were also expressed on occasion.

The second aspect of emotional comments was their social structure. Emotional comments tended to fuel more comments that were emotional in the form of *rant sessions*. Approximately 53% of emotional comments (62 postings) were engaged in a rant. There were seven rants. The average number was nearly nine with the largest totaling 15 postings. Rant sessions were usually directed at the parenting behaviors that appeared on the program. Though rants tended to be polarized (ranting together not at each other), they were often driven by advice giving on e.g. parenting practices, which in turn sparked more critical-reciprocal exchanges between participants.

The final aspect of emotions was their relationship with particular variables of deliberation. First, nearly three-quarters of emotional comments were expressed via arguments or nearly half of all arguments were emotional. Emotions here seemed to enhance political talk constructively as opposed to igniting irrational debate, as Mary posting below illustrates:⁷

I am appalled at the lack of understanding of the need which often drives immigrant families to Great Britain in the first place. Education is perceived by many, if not most, immigrant families as the most important gift they can give their children. The need to make money, and the economics involved which allow the distribution of that wealth back to their home communities is the driving force that has immigrant families tolerating the downsides of life in host countries and watching the programme last night highlighted downsides of British life that were embarrassing to see.

In this thread, a political discussion on immigrant families in the UK emerged. As Mary's posting reveals, these types of arguments were often less about expressing raw and intense feelings at something or someone, but rather emotions were used to highlight the importance of the issues for that participant. Emotions also were used in relation to portraying life experiences and stories, as Jane's posting below reveals:

I couldn't agree more with [Mary] society is going down the pan! I teach in a Secondary school and am regularly told to F*** Off by pupils who refuse to be disciplined which really hurts me. I make it very clear that if they talk when I am talking then they are not learning themselves and they are also preventing other pupils from learning. Kids today cannot accept discipline. One kid told me that if his parents don't mind him swearing why should I? he thought nothing of letting rip with a string of obscene profanities in a class where there were several kids who were extremely embarrassed and upset by this tirade. If the school suspends them then the parents come in and demand to know why!!! Parents!!! Who would have them?

In this thread, a political discussion on the importance of parenting for society emerged. In these types of discussions, participants would support their arguments with personal experiences. In some cases like above, they were used to illuminate problems in society, while in other cases they were used to suggest solutions to those problems. Emotions too here seemed to lend weight to these arguments by providing a sense of genuineness and realness to their claims. Finally, emotions were a typical ingredient of degrading exchanges. When degrading did occur, more than three-quarters of these exchanges expressed some form of anger towards another forum participant.

The second most common expressive was humor. It accounted for 23% of expressives and appeared in 15% of the postings. The analysis revealed three aspects on the use of humor: its social function, its social structure, and its relationship with certain variables of deliberation. The first aspect of humor was the way in which it was used, the social function of humor. For example, humor may be used for social bonding, to express frustration and anger towards authority, criticize another, or to reinforce stereotypes (Basu, 1999; Koller, 1988). However, Wife Swap participants used humor mostly to entertain. Humor here usually came in the form of wisecracks, jokes and sarcasm, and it usually focused on making fun of the families appearing on Wife Swap. This type of humor was rarely constructive in relation to the issues under discussion, but rather, it was more oriented towards having a laugh with (or sometimes at) fellow participants. The second aspect of humor was its social structure. Humor invited more humor. When a participant posted a joke, for example, it usually ignited a string of humorous comments, igniting a *humor fest*; 56% of these comments were involved in humor fests. There were six fests. The average number was four with the largest totaling seven postings. The final aspect of humor was its relationship, or lack thereof, with particular variables of deliberation. First, humor was rarely used in conjunction with arguments. Specifically, only six humorous comments were coded as rational humor. Second, humor rarely fostered degrading exchange.

In particular, only six humorous comments were tied to degrading. Finally, humor rarely led discussions off the topic; only 10 were coded as off the topic of discussion.

Acknowledgements were the final expressive. They accounted for 15% of expressives and appeared in nine percent of the postings. There were four types of acknowledgements identified: thanking, complimenting, apologizing, and congratulating. Thanking and complimenting were the most commonly used, representing more than three-fourths of acknowledgements. As discussed above, participants often shared personal stories with each other. When participants did compliment, it was mostly used in conjunction with these stories as a means of support, while thanking tended to be given in response to that support. Consequently, complimenting and thanking tended to foster a supportive and encouraging communicative environment.

3. Discussion

Political talk was no stranger to the Wife Swap forum. It seems that the parenting behaviors and lifestyles of the families from the series ignited numerous political discussions. However, the variety of topics discussed was limited, that is, much of the debate focused on parenting and the family. Consequently, political talk represented a more lifestyle oriented, personal form of politics. Even conventional political topics like health care reform were discussed in a more personal manner; the discussions were often driven by participants' life experiences and stories, which is consistent with Van Zoonen's (2007) research on similar entertainment-based forums.

However, these topics and types of discussions did not take anything away from the deliberativeness of political talk. On the contrary, the Wife Swap forum, a place traditionally disregarded as chat, was a communicative space where the exchange of claims was common practice and the quality of those exchanges was often high. In particular, the levels of rationality, coherence, reciprocity, the use of supporting evidence, and substantial equality were all moderately high to high. While the levels of critical reflection, extended debate, reflexivity, and communicative empathy were moderate. However, there were several conditions where Wife Swap's performance differed from past studies.

First, previous research (Brants, 2002; Wilhelm, 1999) suggests that extended debate on a single issue within online forums is uncommon. However, the findings from Wife Swap revealed that a substantial portion of arguments was engaged in extended debate, which was typically rational and critical in nature. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that these studies relied mostly on observations as opposed to any systematic operationalization of extended debate like the one conducted here. There does seem however to be a link with Beierle's (2004) survey research. Though his study focused on the participants from a governmentally sponsored forum, his findings did suggest that during the course of online debate, participants develop a sense of commitment to that debate. To a certain extent, this seemed to have been the case in Wife Swap.

Second, past studies suggest that achieving acts of convergence during the course of online deliberation is rare (Beierle, 2004; Jankowski & Van Os, 2004; Jensen, 2003; Strandberg, 2008). However, this was not the case in Wife Swap. Almost all lines of discussion ended in at least one act of convergence. One explanation for this may have something to do with the nature of the Wife Swap

forum. As discussed above, Wife Swap tended to display affirming, supportive, empathetic, and personal communicative practices. This along with the personal nature of the issues discussed seemed to have placed more emphasis on understanding, making acts of convergence easier to obtain.

Finally, much of the research has revealed substantial inequalities in the distribution of participation within a variety of online forum types, structures, and contexts (Albrecht, 2006; Brants, 2002; Coleman, 2004; Dahlberg, 2001; Jankowski & Van Os, 2004; Jensen, 2003; Winkler, 2005). However, the distribution of participation within the Wife Swap forum was egalitarian. That is, the discussions were not dominated by a small group of popular participants who frequently spoke to one another. One possible explanation could be again the issues discussed. It seems that having a family and being parents themselves might have created a communicative space where participants were on more of an equal footing; i.e. they all had something to contribute. This combined with the supportive, affirming and encouraging nature of the forum, might have persuaded them to voice that something.

One of the aims of this article was to move beyond a formal notion of deliberation by providing empirical insight into the role expressives play within online political talk and in relation to the normative conditions of deliberation. The findings revealed that expressives were a common ingredient of political talk. Moreover, with the exception of humor, which seemed to be a nonfactor, expressives tended to facilitate political talk rather than impeding it. Emotions in particular played an integral role in the discussions. Though anger was the emotion of choice and was often expressed via rant sessions, emotions tended to play a constructive role during the course of the debates. Participants would frequently provide life experiences and stories, which were typically laced with emotions in a constructive way. They seemed to provide both a valuable means to convey problems and solutions to those problems, while providing a sense of genuineness and realness to the arguments. Moreover, it seems that Rosenberg (2004) may be right in suggesting that productive deliberation requires emotional connections between participants. Such connections within Wife Swap seemed to fuel participants' effort to understand other positions and arguments. Finally, acknowledgements too seemed to foster a civil, cordial, and encouraging communicative atmosphere thereby enhancing political talk, which is similar to Barnes' et al. (2004) findings on deliberation in offline settings.

4. Conclusion

The findings above revealed that political talk is not bound to conventional political spaces online nor is it to party politics. Wife Swap hosted political discussions, which also contribute the public sphere. Moreover, such spaces provoked citizens to engage in political talk, a key ingredient of both the public sphere and citizenship. Indeed, the beauty of such spaces lies in the fact that citizens who participate in them are not there to talk politics, and when the political does emerge, they might not even mention the word 'politics' or believe such talk is taking place, allowing participants to avoid in some ways the negative connotations that are typically associated with talking conventional politics today. Consequently, researchers need to stop privileging politically oriented spaces and start being more inclusive. Such privileging not only provides us with an incomplete picture, but also a distorted one. Are the

participants who discuss politics in politically oriented spaces a good representation of whom and how citizens discuss politics online? Such spaces tend to attract those interested in politics. Consequently, by limiting research to these spaces, we might only end up knowing how a particular group talks politics. By including other genre from the online communicative landscape, future research can gain access to other segments of society; i.e. citizens who may engage less in conventional politics.

The findings from above also suggest the need to be more encompassing about what constitutes 'political' talk. The discussions that emerge in these spaces are an important object for research because they offer us insight into what matters to everyday citizens. They tap into a public sphere that is driven by citizens' everyday life knowledge, identities, and experiences and offer us insight into when the personal becomes political. Moreover, the public sphere is the place where new issues and concerns about society emerge, and should be allowed to emerge, an arena where the 'political' in political talk is constantly changing, though usually not very quickly. A restrictive notion of what constitutes 'political' talk goes against the ideals and the purpose of the public sphere in the first place. Given the increasing inabilities of traditional institutions and structures in coping with new uncertainties, such flexibility seems to be imperative to any notion of the political today.

There needs to be something said about the normative analysis presented above. One of the difficulties with the literature on the public sphere and deliberation is that there lacks concrete benchmarks as to what satisfies the normative conditions at the level of the forum. For example, does a forum where 50% of the claims are reasoned satisfy the condition of rationality? Much of the literature is vague when it comes to defining precisely what is meant by high and low quality, and yet we read about this forum maintaining a high level or that forum being deliberative. There have been few attempts by scholars to define specific benchmarks. Moreover, for some conditions such reflexivity and empathy there is little to no research available to help establish such cut-offs. The analysis above represents an initial step. First, for reciprocity and convergence, specific benchmarks have been provided. Second, the criteria for establishing such benchmarks were given. Finally, though explicit benchmarks were not specified, normative judgments were made, which provides a basis for future research to build upon.

The findings from this study regarding expressives also have theoretical implications. Expressives in Wife Swap were a common ingredient of political talk and seemed to facilitate it. Neglecting these communicative forms is not an option if our aim is to provide a better understanding of how people talk politics or if it is to assess its democratic value. Though it is difficult to prescribe what role expressives should play (more research is needed), it seems that when the topics of discussion touch upon a more personal side within a non-politically oriented context, expressives play a prominent role in enhancing political talk. We as researchers can no longer dismiss such communicative forms as irrational. In fact, the Wife Swap forum illustrates that emotions can make a distinct contribution to the use of reasoning within political talk and thus should be included in any normative account.

Given the textual focus of this study, there are limitations as to what can be said about certain conditions of deliberation and even on the role of expressives. Certain conditions require more than an analysis of the text. Though the indicators used in this study for reflexivity and discursive equality proved useful, ideally such conditions require a mixed method approach. They require a combination of an analysis of the text alongside methods that gauge participants' experiences, perceptions, and

feelings such as interviews. This mixed approach represents the way forward for future research in creating comprehensive indicators of deliberation.

Finally, what does Wife Swap have to do with it? If one is interested in investigating the everyday informal political talk crucial to the public sphere, then Wife Swap has everything to do with it. Wife Swap was a communicative space where participants not only engaged in political talk, they also engaged in *deliberative* talk. It was a space where the use of expressives played a key role in enhancing such talk. It was a space where the mixing of the private and public was the norm, a space where participants took personal experiences and life lessons and bridged them to society at large, fostering a more personal form of politics. All of this seemed to foster a communicative environment that was more about understanding rather than winning. It was an environment that seemed to promote solidarity rather than polarization. It seems that Eliasoph (2000, pp. 82-3) was right when she suggested that communicative spaces organized around family and parenting may be fruitful spaces for “cultivating deep citizenship”. As she states, “If political conversation is happening anywhere, these are likely places to look.” We can no longer afford to neglect such spaces offline or online because if we do we will end up knowing very little about what is taking place in the public sphere.

Notes

¹ There are 11 conditions. However, discursive freedom, sincerity, and structural autonomy and equality have been omitted due to the scope of this article. See Graham (2009) for a comprehensive account.

² Habermas focuses on the former, the cognitive process of what he, calls ‘ideal role taking’ (1996, pp. 228-230), while paying little attention to its affective side.

³ The data was retrieved in November 2005 at:
<http://community.channel4.com/groupee/forums/a/cfrm/f/31060416>

⁴ Fifty-five postings were not included because they were non-political and/or incoherent.

⁵ Out the 15 coherent lines five were non-political (39 postings) while ten were political (233 postings).

⁶ This is based on De Nooy et al. (2005, p. 126) degree of centralization measurement.

⁷ All call signs have been replaced with invented ones.

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Simulating the Ideal eDeliberation: The Roles of Inclusion, Equalization and Rationalization

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Abstract. eDeliberation refers to an emerging body of practices that purposely foster open, fair, and rational discussions over the Internet. However, the ideal concept of deliberation is confronted with the complex social conditions, such as passive citizenship and participatory inequalities. Simulation modeling was used to create situations in which (1) all people who were invited to participate in two eDeliberation projects actually attended the discussions (i.e., the openness-inclusion scenario), (2) all people equally expressed their opinions and supported their opinions with reasons (i.e., the fairness-equalization scenario), and (3) all people expressed their opinions vigorously and provided maximum arguments to support their opinions (i.e., the rationality-maximization scenario). By comparing the observed after-deliberation opinion distributions with these simulation results, we can see how public opinion generated from an ideally inclusive, equal, and argumentative procedure of deliberation will be different. Simulation findings suggest that 44% of comparisons show sizable differences. Rationality-maximization has the strongest impact on opinion distributions. Inclusion has relatively modest influences on opinion changes. Equalization, unexpectedly, has no influence on most opinion measures.

1. Introduction

Deliberation is a communication procedure that is open, fair, and rational [1]. Unfortunately, most of our day-to-day communication does not fit these criteria. Taking discursive participation as an example, everyday political talk between family members and friends is not open enough to include diverse opinions [2]; call-in radio discussions are open but not always reason-centered, along with a dominant role of the host [3]; opinion polls may be open (if the randomness of samples is achieved), fair (when questions make the same sense to every respondent), but not necessarily reason-centered (because respondents do not have to appeal to their rationality to give an answer) [4]. eDeliberation takes advantage of the Internet to engage ordinary citizens in open, fair and rational discussions. It is claimed that the Internet and its ability to transcend the time and space limits make some of the constraints uncritical [5]. For example, the homogeneity that is often associated with everyday political talk will not be the case when diverse people can meet online [6].

However, deliberation practices, including eDeliberation ones, are confronted with the complex social conditions in which they have to operate. These social conditions, such as structural inequalities [7] and passive citizenship [8], might render practices unable to fulfill the ideal of deliberative communication. An open procedure might not be able to lead to universal participation due to the lack of resource to support such participation. Giving participants equal opportunity to voice their opinions does not necessarily mean that everyone will take the chance, because there exist various motivation and resource concerns. Although rationality is central to deliberation, the questions that are supposed to elicit reasonable arguments do not always obtain rational responses. Personal tangents and emotional expressions also appear in deliberate discussions. The persistence of realistic social constraints raises a doubt about the deliberation practices: Are the results of deliberation legitimate when the procedure does not fit the ideal perfectly?

Empirical examination can help us to answer this question by comparing the observed results of deliberation to those which might have been generated in an idealized situation, namely, a fully inclusive, absolutely fair, and highly argumentative procedure. This paper attempts to do two things: First, by the aid of simulation modeling, the consequences of an idealized procedure can be simulated. Second, through the comparison between what is observed and what is simulated, differences can be seen and judgment regarding the legitimacy of deliberate decisions can be made.

2. Method

2.1 Data

The data come from the Electronic Dialogue 2000 project (ED2K) and the Healthcare Dialogue project (HCD)¹, two multi-wave panel projects each lasting roughly one year. The two projects are distinguished from other deliberation studies and the Internet-based studies in a number of ways. While most deliberation studies examine deliberative practices in a face-to-face setting [9], ED2K and HCD take advantage of the unique capacities of the Internet and World Wide Web for circulating information, conveying public discourse, and gathering survey data. Different from most Internet-based studies [10], which examine asynchronous message boards or less formal and happenstance “chat” experiences on the Web, both projects here created synchronous, real-time, moderated group discussions that were designed specifically to produce useful citizen deliberation. Facilitation/moderation was present and, more importantly, was standardized across both discussions and groups. In addition, neither project relied on a convenience sample of Internet users, as is common in most deliberation studies and Web-based studies. Instead, they began with a broadly representative sample of Americans and attempted to recruit from that sample a set of discussion groups that would be, in their entirety, as nearly representative as possible of U.S. citizens. In order to address the digital divide concern, all the people included in the sample were offered free equipment, free Internet, and free training, if needed.

¹ Principal Investigators on both projects are Vincent Price, Ph.D., The Steven H. Chaffee Professor of Communication and Public Opinion, and Joseph N. Cappella, Ph.D., The Gerald R. Miller Professor of Communication, both of the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, USA. The findings only represent the author's opinions.

The core of both projects consisted of groups of citizens who engaged in a series of real-time electronic discussions about issues facing either the unfolding 2000 presidential campaign or the country's healthcare reform. A set of baseline surveys assessed participants' opinions, communication behaviors, political psychology, political activities, and a variety of demographic, personality, and background variables. Subsequent group deliberations generally included pre- and post-discussion surveys. The full text of all group discussions, which lasted an hour apiece, was recorded. A series of end-of-project surveys were then conducted after the last discussion was finished. This paper utilizes two types of data: surveys and discussion transcripts. The surveys included recruitment, baseline, post-discussion, and end-of-project surveys. Content analysis was carried out on discussion transcripts to measure the amount of talk and arguments during eDeliberation

2.2 Simulation modeling

Simulation here refers to the methodology of creating an artificial representation of a real world system in order to manipulate and explore the properties of that system [11]. Simulation as a methodology has not been fully recognized in communication research. The majority of simulation studies we can see in communication research are actually either computer or statistical simulations, which are distinct from the modeling method discussed here. However, simulation actually fits the need of communication research and opens up the possibility of predicting complicated communication trends. Not all modes of communicative actions can be readily observed and analyzed in the reality. Simulation methods provide us a tool that can test even the most idealist modes of communication and their influence.

The fundamental question that simulation modeling tries to answer is – What if? For example, what if group members interact with each other in a perfectly fair situation? Challenges about the preciseness of these answers are always legitimate because simulation is highly constrained by the modeling assumptions. However, a significant strength of simulation is that everything is open to adjustment. For example, if one thinks that group members should not be equally talkative and rather randomly eloquent, we can definitely change the distribution of the amount of talk variable and then simulate the products. What might be more fruitful is to first determine which products we want to see and then go back to change possible functioning variables. For instance, if we want to see a consensus among group members, we can change either the demographic composition of groups, or the communicative procedure, or the initial opinion distributions. We can compare all these possible controls and choose those that are most promising in current situations as guidelines for intervention.

2.3 Procedure

Simulation involves a set of important assumptions. In addition to the assumptions of data missing at random, accurate model specification, and accurate coefficients, simulation assumes that changing the distributions of certain predictor variables (i.e. amount of talk and number of arguments) does not change their relationships with other variables in the model. Specifically, both the coefficients and the distributions of other variables remain the same, despite the fact that the distributions of particular variables in concern have been altered.

Following the logic discussed above, simulations in this chapter went through steps that are very similar to those used by Althaus [12]. In the first step, all opinion

and policy preference questions were recoded into dummies: “1” means supporting while “0” means not supporting. Surveyed post-discussion opinions were regressed on the demographic variables, along with one influence variable (either amount of talk or number of arguments), the pre-discussion measure corresponding to the dependent variable (missing values were imputed), and other available variables. These regression models show that the deliberation variables sometimes predict individual level post-discussion opinions (Amount of talk: 4 out of 30 ED2K measures and 3 out of 15 HCD measures; Number of reasons: 2 out of 30 ED2K measures and 3 out of 15 HCD measures). They provide support for the expectation that simulation findings might be different from observed findings. In addition, by estimating the relationships between post-discussion opinions and each of the predictors, this step provided a set of regression coefficients that can be used to simulate each person’s post-discussion opinions. These coefficients were used to model the probability that a particular individual would choose certain response alternatives to questions posed after discussions. The simulation models often have modest model fits, ranging from .02 to .14. Thirty-eight percent of the model fits were equal to or lower than .05. The mean model fit is .07.

After obtaining the coefficients for each predictor, the second step, the key step of simulation modeling, was taken. In this second stage, the what if question emerges: What if we change the distributive pattern of the deliberation variables? Which kind of consequences would we see in terms of post-discussion collective opinion distributions? Alternatively, the question could be posed this way: If we want to change the collective distributions of certain opinions, which component of the deliberation structure should we focus on? Inclusion, equalization, or maximization of influence?

This second step opens up many possible manipulations of communication procedure. This chapter examines three possibilities (see Table 1): First, the openness-inclusion scenario includes every potential participant in the deliberation regardless of their different backgrounds, assigns these potential participants the mean values of deliberation variables, and examines the difference between simulated all’s and observed attendees’ opinions. Second, the fairness-equalization scenario relies on actual attendees, but uses the means of deliberation variables rather than the observed values for each attendee who did voice his or her opinions and compares the simulated attendees’ opinions to those actually observed. Third, the influence-maximization scenario relies on actual attendees, but changes the influence values into either the highest or the mean scores and compares these two sets of simulated values to see whether maximization of influence makes a difference. In the third scenario, high-value simulations are compared to mean-value simulations in order to control for the equalization effect and isolate the maximization effect.

In each of these scenarios, step two involves changing each potential respondent’s score on amount of talk or number of arguments to either the highest possible value or the mean value by either replacing (if measured values are available) or imputing (if measured values are not available). In ED2K, for example, the highest possible value on the amount of talk scale was 834.50. Each potential respondent’s predicted opinions are calculated by plugging the coefficient values obtained from step one into the new models, substituting only the new values of the altered amount of talk or number of arguments variable. This step produces, for each individual, a new set of probabilities for each response alternative that simulate the

opinions every person might report, were she or he to talk as much as possible or talk at a mean level. This step relies on the 45 regression models (30 in ED2K and 15 in HCD) obtained in the first step and uses 135 simulation formulas (45 opinion measures * 3 scenarios) to exhibit the differences between simulated opinions and observed opinions.

Table 1. Theoretical models to compare simulated and comparison opinions

	Simulated Opinions	Comparison Opinions
Openness-Inclusion	Everybody	Attendees only
	Mean imputation of deliberation variables for non-attendees; Observed values for attendees	Observed values for attendees
Fairness-Equalization	Attendees only	Attendees only
	Mean imputation of deliberation variables for attendees	Observed values for attendees
Rationality-Maximization	Attendees only	Attendees only
	Maximum imputation of deliberation variables for attendees	Mean imputation of deliberation variables for attendees

The final step aggregates all of the individual simulated opinions together, including those of people who originally were missing of the responses and those who did not attend the discussions, by taking the mean of the individual probabilities for each of the alternative responses. These average probabilities, which represent collective post-discussion opinions controlling for individual differences in either amount of talk or number of arguments, will be then compared to the actual percentage supporting certain policies to reveal the differences. Statistical tests of significance of these differences are not applicable here, because simulated data involve alteration of the distributions of the predictor variables. The intent is to compare changes across a large set of opinion measures to identify some general tendencies.

3. Results

In general, 60 (42 in HCD and 18 in ED2K) out of 135 (45 opinion measures* 3 scenarios) simulated opinions differ from observed opinions at a rate equal to or higher than 5%.

3.1 Openness-inclusion

The first comparison is between the observed opinion distributions and the simulated opinion distributions in an ideal scenario, in which everybody we contacted actually attended the discussions and either talked or argued at a mean level of amount. In ED2K, 13 out of 30 opinion measures examined show changes that are equal to or higher than 5%. The changes preferentially go toward more governmental

interventions, such as spending more money on health care or social security, and toward more conservative views on social issues, such as banning abortion. Some of the changes are as high as 10%. For instance, if we had all our potential participants join the discussions and be typically active, we would see that at the end of ED2K, more than half of participants (53% based on amount of talk and 55% based on number of arguments) would favor the government actions on making sure that public school students can pray as part of some official school activity, compared to a minority support (44%) actually observed.

Despite somewhat socially conservative tilt, when it comes to evaluations of presidential candidates, there is a consistent pattern showing that if we could gather full attendance, we would see significant decreases in Bush's evaluations after discussions. One of the evaluation items, viewing Bush as honest, would decrease as much as 10 percent (10% based on amount of talk and 12% based on number of arguments). In contrast, Gore's evaluation on two items would increase after discussions and one of them, making the respondent feel enthusiastic, would increase at an exceptionally high rate (17%).

In HCD, opinion measures are mainly confined to health-related policies. Here, 3 out of 15 measures show a change of preference that is equal to or higher than 5%. These changes include people's preferences on limiting drug manufacturing costs, the perceived importance of personal costs in drug policy making, and the perceived importance of tax increases in drugs policy making. The significant changes that inclusion makes suggest that descriptive under-representation of the disempowered has consequences. Descriptive under-representation can sometimes threaten the representation of opinions measured after deliberation.

3.2 Fairness-equalization

The second comparison is between the observed opinion distributions and the simulated opinion distributions in an ideal scenario, in which everybody who actually attended our discussions were equally active—either spoke an equal amount of words or provided an equal number of arguments. This scenario only produced a few changes in opinion distributions. Three out of 30 ED2K measures and 2 out of 15 HCD measures show differences that are equal to or higher than 5%. The patterns generally mirror those obtained in the first scenario. The ED2K measures show an increased positive evaluation on Gore and the HCD measures show an increased preference on limiting drug manufacturing costs and perceived importance of tax increases in drugs policy-making after discussions. Equalization, unexpectedly, has no influence on most opinion measures. It suggests that making everybody produce the same amount of words or the same number of arguments does not necessarily change opinion distributions. We might conclude that the opinion results from the two deliberation projects would not be much different were all potential participants equally argumentative.

3.3 Rationality-maximization

The third comparison is between two simulations: One is the simulation with mean values of deliberation variables among attendees and the other is the simulation with maximum values of deliberation variables among attendees. This comparison is intended to demonstrate a third scenario in which attendees either were very talkative or provided many reasons. The rationality-maximization effect is so strong that almost every variable that was examined shows a change that is equal to or

higher than 5% (26 out of 30 in ED2K, 13 out of 15 in HCD). In ED2K, different from both previous scenarios, reason-giving often leads to a decreased support in governmental interventions. For example, the support for government's financial investment in universal health care decreases almost 18% no matter which influence variable is used. Again, evaluations of presidential candidates also manifest a pattern that is quite different from those we see in the openness-inclusion and the fairness-equalization scenario. There is a consistent pattern that a highly argumentative group of attendees would have given better evaluations for Bush and lower evaluations for Gore after discussions.

In HCD, simulations show contradictory findings compared to the previous two scenarios. A rationality-maximization simulation shows at least 15% decrease in favorability toward limiting manufacturing expenses. The two concerns showing increases in the previous two scenarios, namely, personal cost and tax increases, actually show decreases (ranging from 5% to 26%) in this scenario. The other significant changes include decreases in the perceived importance of whether health care reforms would expand the size of government, are feasible, would affect the freedom to make medical decisions, would cause partisan disagreement, or affect the economy.

Reason-giving has the strongest impact on final opinion distributions. But serious questions must be resolved before we draw further conclusions: Is high rationality what we want? Furthermore, is a number-of-argument form of rationality what we want? Deliberative democracy theories answer the first question with a clear yes and with a not-so-clear answer to the second question. Habermas' communicative rationality [13] provides a different angle to look at the manifestation of rationality. Instead of defining rationality as potential persuasive influence, Habermas emphasizes mutual understanding and rationally motivated agreements. Unfortunately, the analyses in this project have to be limited to just one — and arguably not a very strong — indicator of "rationality."

3.4 Talk vs. Reasons

The last comparison is between simulations based on amount of talk vs. number of arguments. People who are most talkative do not necessarily have to be the most argumentative. Although amount of talk is often correlated with number of arguments (ED2K total Pearson correlation = .57, $p < .001$; HCD D4 Pearson correlation = .88, $p < .001$) and thus most of time the simulation findings based on the two deliberation variables are consistent in directions, we can see some interesting instances in which different deliberation variables influence outcomes in different directions.

The occasional discrepancy suggests that the effect of the amount of talk is often the same as the effect of the number of arguments. It seems that in the current deliberation practices, when people talk more, they often argue more. However, the few instances of large differences suggest that talk and argument do not always lead opinions toward the same conclusion. The explanation might be that in these instances, people do not necessarily argue more when they talk more. They might spend their eloquence on emotional expression or personal tangents, which are supposed to function differently in influencing opinion distributions. Whether this interpretation is correct is unclear, however, and cannot be resolved with the data at hand.

4. Conclusions and discussions

Simulation findings suggest that 44% of collective opinions that are predicted by simulation models differ from the observed post-discussion opinion distributions at a rate equal to or higher than 5%. In other words, if our deliberation practices were able to reach a normally ideal situation in which deliberation is fully inclusive, absolutely equal, and highly argumentative, we would see opinion results that are different from those observed. If realistic constraints prevent practices from being ideally deliberate, how much should we rely on decisions that are generated from deliberation to inform policy-making? The suggestion would be that we should treat deliberation findings as only one indicator of deliberate opinions, subject to various errors. Therefore, when we try to utilize deliberation findings to inform policy-making, we should always make clear the sources of these errors (e.g., representation of participants) and the potential size of these errors.

In addition, varying the three components leads to opinion changes in different directions. Whereas both inclusion and equalization lead to changes in the same direction, maximization of rationality often leads in an opposite direction. This contradiction implies that normative criteria of deliberation are not empirically consistent. Deliberation as a model of democracy summons forces that stretch public opinions in different directions. Thus, deliberate opinions are thus more complicated than knowledgeable opinions or informed opinions. The prediction of deliberate opinion changes is thus harder than we might expect.

All the findings above should be interpreted along with the awareness of the limitations of the simulation modeling method. The accuracy of the opinion changes predicted by the simulation models is limited by the explanatory power of the models (i.e., the model fits). Most of the simulation models in this chapter have R-square values that are low to modest in size. This is mainly because there are only a few predictor variables available for analyses. We should expect that as the number of predictors increase, we will see better model fits. A second methodological issue that is worth mentioning is that the two deliberation variables, amount of talk and number of arguments, are not always significant when used to predict individual-level post-discussion opinions. However, results are presented at the collective-level, and thus, those opinion changes that are equal to or higher than 5% do not necessarily mean that the two deliberation variables significantly predict individual opinions in those models. On the other hand, if we have significant deliberation variables at the individual level, it is certain that collective-opinion changes are significant as well. A third issue is that, in order to control for pre-discussion opinions, imputed pre-discussion opinion variables were used in the models because many cases are missing on pre-discussion measures as well. This kind of two-step modeling (the first is to impute pre-discussion opinions based on demographics and other variables, and the second is to simulate post-discussion opinions based on demographics and other variables) introduces more uncertainty into the final findings. However, since the conclusions are all about general patterns rather than specific changes, the tolerance of inaccuracy is relatively high in this set of analyses.

In summary, simulation modeling in this paper helps to provide some general predictions regarding an ideal deliberation. An ideal deliberation does probably generate collective opinions that are different from the ones observed. Openness, fairness, and reason-giving each appear to play a distinctive role in defining the ideal situation and exert idiosyncratic influences on resulting opinions. The many

significant findings in the openness-inclusion and rationality-maximization scenarios suggest that future deliberation practices should address the issues of unequal attendance and shallow rationality. However, the lack of consequences of fairness-equalization implies that unequal influence might not be as harmful as we might expect.

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Mobilising Civic Resources Through eParticipation in the European Public Sphere: Problem-Solving, Relegitimisation or Decoupling?

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Abstract. European authorities are becoming interested in mobilising civic resources through participative processes. Some of these have emerged from the bottom up, whereas others have been established as top-down solutions to governance failures. Essentially there are three rationales for citizen participation:

- mobilising knowledge resources for problem-solving
- relegitimising the polity through political debate
- an actor-driven rationale of autonomy, decoupling participation from 'big' politics.

The paper explores the use of eParticipation by the Commission in a case which, from a top-down perspective, responds to both the problem-solving and relegitimising logics: an online consultation using the Interactive Policy-Making tool, combined with an online discussion forum, conducted to inform multilingualism policy in 2007-08. An analysis of the online discussion shows that it moved through several phases, in which different participation logics were dominant. The resulting policy document reflected neither the claims nor the suggestions put forward by discussion participants, but this should not necessarily be seen as a failure. The policy issue had been placed in the public domain, and citizen participation, by partially decoupling the discussion from the policymaking process, had begun a process of problem redefinition, enriching a multi-tiered European public sphere by creating issue publics and performing cultural citizenship.

1. Introduction

There appears to be a secular trend towards more participative styles of governance. Part of this trend may be bottom-up: the continuation of several centuries of struggle by groups and social movements for democratic rights and inclusion in decision-making processes. But not always is it evident that governments and other public authorities who invite citizens to participate are responding to pressure from society to relegitimise the dominant social contract in a polity. There is also a top-down explanation for the advent of more participative governance, which seems to be linked to the increasing complexity of social problems. More participation, in other words, may be part of a 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. 21st century states confront indeterminate issues and risks, and in a context of unclear rules, unintended consequences and uncertain payoffs they may be more

inclined to seek a different 'division of labour' between state, market and society in order to achieve collective goals and create public goods and values (Jessop, 2003; Peters, 2006).

For these reasons, participation is increasingly demanded of us by modern states. The pursuit of governmental objectives involves attempts to mobilise the self-governing capacities of individuals, groups and communities, such that 'active citizenship' is normalised as a responsibility as well as a right. Thus it has been argued that 'advanced liberal government' reserves a major role for the 'technologies of agency' (Dean, 1999: 1678), or that empowering people to co-govern and self-govern has become a key governance strategy because "unless they are prepared to assume responsibility for and participate actively in solving their own everyday problems, the system stands little chance of being able to connect with them and deliver them the welfare goods they demand" (Bang, 2003: 243).

At the same time we are witnessing changes in the nature of citizenship, from a political to a cultural citizenship, expressed through people's everyday participation in popular culture (Hermes 2006), and from a bounded to an unbounded citizenship, expressed through participation in communities of interest and action extending beyond the nation state (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove 2005). It follows that there is always likely to be an underlying tension between system-oriented participation (what we might call co-governance) and self-governance as the practice of political freedoms on an actor's own terms. Bang's concept of culture governance implies that to utilise people's self-governing capacities to the full extent, rulers must "pay heed to the irreducibility of the 'small tactics' of lay people in the political community for making a difference" (Bang, 2003: 248) and link this popular creativity to goal-setting, if only indirectly. This means guaranteeing a space for participation within what Goffman would call back regions of the social system. Participation, as a specific form of social integration, can be thought of as 'regionalised' according to the locales in which it takes place. Each locale acts as a power container, and there exists a hierarchy of locales, through which social and system integration are articulated across time-space (Giddens 1984). Back regions – essentially locales which are distant from power centres – resemble Habermas' literary public sphere in the sense of being insulated from dominant power relations, both governmental and commercial (Habermas 1989)¹. Here, participation may be driven by a search for cognitive reassurance rather than the pursuit of interests.

Summarising, an analytical distinction can be made between three different rationales for the participation of civic actors in politics:

- 1) mobilising knowledge resources for problem-solving;
- 2) relegitimising the polity through political debate;
- 3) creating space for autonomous collective action and alternative discourses, decoupled from formal policy processes.

The purpose of this paper is to assess which of these rationales was dominant during an online debate linked to participative policymaking, a style of policymaking in which governments, and in particular the European Union, are investing considerable resources. It also aims to assess whether the intended rationale of the organiser was matched by the enacted rationales of participants.

1.1 Participation in the governance of the European Union

Until recently, the dominant rationale for participation in European Union governance was the first of the above: a deliberately depoliticised mode of policymaking in which

¹ Discursive practice in the literary public sphere is insulated from determination by power relations, which is not the same as saying that the two are completely unconnected: the public sphere, as a component of civil society, is always in a fundamental sense in opposition to the power of the state.

'strong publics'² were engaged in participation (for example via expert advisory groups and committees) not for reasons of legitimacy but because the Union (principally the Commission) required external expertise due to the limitations of its own legal competences, administrative capacities and knowledge resources. Participation of this type continues to play a central role in the governance of the EU, in keeping with its predominantly 'network' mode of governance (Smith 2009). Indeed participation in expert groups has been growing in quantitative terms: the number of expert groups organised by the EC increased from around 600 in 1990 to over 1200 in January 2007 (Gornitzka & Sverdrup 2008). Such arrangements were and remain appropriate to the preponderance of regulatory over redistributive policymaking, where specific interests rather than society as a whole are frequently the key stakeholders (affected parties).

More recently, however, the rationale for participation in European policymaking has partially shifted towards the second type of securing democratic legitimacy. The EU is a political entity whose mode of operation and in particular whose policymaking is criticised by many as lacking legitimacy. The term 'democratic deficit' is increasingly used to capture this legitimacy failure, defined on the Europa website itself as "a concept invoked principally in the argument that the European Union and its various bodies suffer from a lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen because their method of operating is so complex."³ A concern for their own democratic legitimacy has therefore been a factor of growing importance in the communication policies of European institutions, and has led many of them to attempt to communicate not only with their habitual 'strong publics' but with the general public(s) and with loosely organised 'issue publics' – citizens' networks that coalesce around particular issues, sometimes in the form of campaigns, but also less tangible 'currents of opinion' and platforms for the discussion of particular issues – to stimulate broad-based participation in framing policy objectives.

The third rationale for participation – autonomous collective action and discourse – almost by definition cannot be planned or even made explicit by authorities, but occurs spontaneously to the extent that collective actors are able to create independent spaces or (as will be seen) 'invade' institutional spaces to organise around autonomously defined projects and discourses.

Table 1. A multi-tiered European public sphere and equivalent forms of participation and citizenship

<i>Tier</i>	<i>Micro-level</i>	<i>Meso-level</i>	<i>Macro-level</i>
<i>Locale / power container</i>	Localisation (not necessarily location)	Nation	Europe
<i>Public situation (after Haug)</i>	Encounter or assembly public	Mass media	Socio-technical system
<i>Type of public (after Eriksen)</i>	Enclaves and issue publics	General publics	Strong publics
<i>Regionalisation (structuration theory)</i>	Back region	Front region	Front region

² The key distinction between strong publics and general publics is that the former are arenas with direct links to centres of decision-making power, although they do not actually take decisions; the latter are arenas for opinion formation (Eriksen & Fossum 2002). 405).

³ http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/democratic_deficit_en.htm

<i>Integration (structuration theory)</i>	Social	System	System
<i>Participation rationale</i>	Intrinsic and autonomous	Instrumental and relegitimising	Instrumental and problem-solving
<i>Citizenship</i>	Localised and cultural	Bounded (by the nation-state)	Unbounded (trans- national or cosmopolitan)

These three rationales for participation can be associated with different sectors, or levels, of the public sphere. A multi-level public sphere has been proposed by numerous authors (e.g. Keane 2000, Eriksen 2007, Fraser 2005, Haug 2008) as either a normative or empirical model for Europe. Table 1 illustrates these conceptions, bearing in mind that the correspondences between them are not exact. It also suggests how they can be related to different forms of participation and citizenship and different types of regionalisation and integration according to structuration theory. Given that the weakness or fragmentation of a European public sphere is often cited as an inhibiting factor for both deliberation and democratic legitimacy (Eriksen 2007) it has been suggested that, while the EU itself seems to conceptualise the European public sphere in a rather simplistic unitary and linear manner, we ought instead to consider the hypothesis that “the public sphere follows the EU’s existing governance system by also developing a multi-level structure in which, at each level, citizens relate to different institutions of governance.” (Bärenreuter et al 2008: 21).⁴ Thus the table can be read as indicating the types of public sphere required for the effective governance of the EU, in which strong publics play the dominant role as communication partners for political authorities at the European scale, but in which there is also an increasing imperative to engage other types of public, including ‘general’ publics and ‘issue’ publics, which may manifest themselves primarily at a smaller scale of action. This therefore requires that the opinion of these publics is somehow ‘sluiced’ into the institutional channels through which strong publics operate, viewing the multi-tiered public sphere as a hierarchical structure, or that other mechanisms are found for translating participation and citizenship performed at lower levels in different types of public into signals that can be understood political authorities at the macro-level.

1.2 Interactive Policy-Making

The remainder of this paper will focus on an example that at one level remains a highly institutionalised form of eParticipation, but which, it will be argued, has been deployed in ways that have allowed civic actors to find new ways of engaging with European policymakers according to different rationales, and whose long-term consequences remain unclear.

The case study concerns a policymaking process carried out by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture using the Interactive Policy-Making tool (IPM). This online tool, launched in 2001, was intended for collecting and analysing public opinion for use in EU policymaking, and it included both consultation and discussion platforms. Primarily it is used for managing online consultation processes with existing ‘strong publics’; but, when deployed for open public consultations, it acts as a certain corrective to corporatist tendencies since it combines disintermediating and reintermediating components which ought to be

⁴ See the Eurosphere working papers series for a rich and growing repository of research on the European public sphere: <http://www.eurosphere.uib.no/knowledgebase/workingpapers.htm>

more open to unorganised interests.⁵ In particular it may have rendered consultations more susceptible to the mobilisation of 'issue publics' such as temporary public mobilisations emerging from the hidden networks of social movements and latent inter-organisational networks taking advantage of the networking possibilities of online communication. 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 policymaking (TEEC 2005). Thus IPM is interesting because it combines the problem-solving and relegitimising rationales for participation.

In addition, the consultation process analysed here used IPM in association with an online discussion forum, which introduces the possibility – maybe even the likelihood – that autonomous actor-driven forms of participation will occur. Under certain circumstances participation processes can take on user-determined meanings that bear little relation to the intended purposes of authorities but fulfil autonomous needs not directly linked to the search for political influence. This has been described as a 'decoupling' of top-down and bottom-up participation processes, and implicitly involves contesting the very way in which the participation process has been officially framed (Bang & Dryberg 2003). Some online tools seem to favour decoupling because they reduce the ability of organisers to stage-manage a process. For example in a consultation about the site of a new airport for Paris, the environment of an online discussion forum "favoured a redefinition of the subjects [of debate] that actors find pertinent" such that fundamental questions about a political issue, which had been 'organised out' of the official terms of debate, reappeared as participants appropriated the tool (Monnoyer-Smith 2006: 12). Such redefinitions did not occur, at least to the same extent, during a parallel offline participation process, whose less flexible structure left participants with the choice to either play by the rules or reject the process out of hand. At best they could stage protests outside the venues for public meetings, but these did not necessarily appear 'on the public record' (unless they attracted media coverage) whereas the online public discussions did.

1.3 Multilingualism

This case study concerns a consultation on multilingualism, an issue likely to become a surrogate for wider public debates about identity and integration in Europe, since "multilingualism is a value" (HLGM 2007: 17) and how it is understood and defined has far-reaching implications for how Europe itself is constructed. For example, it can be defined in terms of individual abilities to speak more than one language or in terms of the coexistence of different language communities in the same space. Such choices have practical implications (whether to prioritise language learning or translation / interpretation / intermediation services, for example) but above all they have political implications because they affect fundamental political issues such as social cohesion (one of key themes of the Lisbon strategy). Moreover multilingualism is seen as a prerequisite for active citizenship at European level (European Parliament & Council of the European Union 2006: 13), and is part of the response by the EC to the 'democratic deficit' because it is identified as a key enabling factor in the creation of a 'European public sphere' whether by means of transnational public service broadcasting or by means of transnational eParticipation (HLGM 2007: 13,

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).

17). Therefore political attention to multilingualism itself signals a shift to a more participative mode of governance.

Although an active European policy to promote multilingualism within the education sector can be dated from the Maastricht Treaty on 1992, it was not until the advent of the Barroso Commission that the first comprehensive framework was developed, gaining momentum after 2007, when multilingualism was made a separate portfolio (HLGM 2007: 5). Even if this decision was motivated in part by the need to find a job for the new Romanian Commissioner, Leonard Orban, a series of wider social, political and institutional trends had given the issue greater 'policy relevance' for European institutions and created a double rationale for soliciting public participation: firstly, migration and globalisation have increased the urgency of finding solutions to the 'problem' of multilingualism as a daily reality of communities across Europe (a problem-solving rationale); secondly, resistance to the increasing dominance of English as the *de facto* European lingua franca, together with the resurgence of regional identities over recent decades, have politicised multilingualism (a relegitimising rationale). In practice, the heavy involvement in the process by the 'Esperanto community' also introduced an autonomy rationale to the public discussion of multilingualism, which became particularly apparent as the threads of the online discussion forum 'unravelling'.

Despite the growing availability and improving quality of automated online translation tools, the evidence remains sketchy as to whether the Internet is a favourable environment for multilingual communication, but what is becoming clear is that different online social media can be associated with distinct, often hybridised linguistic or semiotic genres (Wodak & Wright 2007). These authors studied an earlier attempt by the European Commission to use a discussion forum as part of the public discussion on the proposed European constitution, which was notable because it was one of the first discussion forums supported by the European Union in which members of the public were invited to post messages in any of the EU's official languages. The Futurum discussion forum also marked the shift by European authorities towards a rhetorical commitment to more participative governance, in that it was explicitly connected to the EU's acceptance of the existence of a 'democratic deficit' and with its attempts to address this. In fact "the online debate [on Futurum] was not listened to, summarized, or otherwise fed into the Convention process" (Wright 2007). The case studied in the present paper promised a more tightly structured dialogue because the forum was launched in concert with a formal public consultation on a specific policy. Indeed, unlike Futurum, it is claimed that the discussion on the forum did inform the resulting policy, although it is unclear how and to what extent. As will be revealed, however, the meanings participants derived from participation in the online discussion, and the types of citizenship they performed, were only very tenuously connected to the parallel policymaking process, raising similar questions to those aired by Wodak & Wright (2007) about what kind(s) of public sphere new social media actually sustain, and what is the 'right' way to use them if seeking to improve the connections between the state and civil society.

1.4 The multilingualism consultation

In the course of preparing a policy initiative on multilingualism, the Commission launched a consultation process in autumn 2007, inviting organisations and individuals to give their views and expectations concerning language policy. The whole process consisted of several different elements: the formal online public consultation, a report from a high level group on multilingualism (an expert group set up in September 2006), a report from a 'group of intellectuals' (a group of 10 personalities set up for the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, chaired by the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf), a report from a business forum (an advisory

group with representatives from small and large companies set up in 2007), a public hearing held on 15 April 2008 in Brussels with 167 stakeholders, mainly representing educational and cultural organisations, and the 'suggestions and critical assessment' (in the Commissioner's words) received via a 'Have Your Say' discussion forum on multilingualism. The next section of the paper focuses on the latter.

1.4.1 The online discussion forum

The 'Have Your Say' discussion forum on multilingualism was not directly linked from the consultation webpages, but from the Commissioner's homepage (it was actually built into his homepage, so that the menu options display around the edge of the discussion area).⁶ Apart from the press release cited, no other official publicity was found for the forum, but a few other organisations picked up on it. In particular, it was advertised in the Esperanto magazine *Libera Folio* in October 2007 and readers were encouraged to use it. In the social web, it had a very modest presence, although it was slightly more visible than the consultation page itself: for example, there are two links to the forum in blogs indexed on Technorati.com, and two Delicious.com users have bookmarked the forum, whereas there were no traces of the consultation webpage on either of these platforms when a search was performed in August 2009. Low visibility is not necessarily a disadvantage for this type of online discussion: Wright (2007) has suggested that lack of advertising was a factor explaining the 'success' (in terms of deliberative quality) of the debates on the European constitution on Futurum, since it meant that "generally, only interested people would have gone to the website and come across the discussion".

The structure of the forum was unusual. Only one discussion thread was open at a given time, and there was no possibility for users to start new threads. Each one was introduced by the Commissioner, and there followed a series of replies displayed un-nested in reverse chronological order – thus more like a blog than a standard forum. This structure might have been expected to encourage vertical debate, but as will be seen, this was only the case during certain phases.

Altogether there were three threads on the forum. Each thread began with a few paragraphs of commentary from Commissioner Orban, followed by a specific question. The first question, dated 24 September 2007, was 'Why do you think it is important to learn languages?'. The second question, dated 6 February 2008, was 'Do you experience problems in your everyday life that are due to language difficulties: to inadequate or unavailable translation for example of product descriptions or user manuals?' The third question, dated 15 August 2009, was 'Did languages influence your business or your career?' It is clear, however, from the way in which the questions are framed, that these are essentially prompts, and that discussion of all language-related topics was welcome. The following sections summarise the content of the second discussion thread, which followed the online consultation and which included the period in which the official Communication was published. This thread has been chosen because it captures a critical moment in the ongoing dialogue between Commissioner Orban and the public: Orban used his opening remarks to respond at some length to issues raised in the first thread, claiming to have "followed your views with great interest" but noting that "many answers went well beyond this first question, anticipating other areas of debate", the implication being that he welcomed the expansion of the topic of debate. He claimed to have seen a consensus around the importance of 'keeping the meaning' of the Union's motto of Unity in Diversity. He then addressed a sizeable number of contributors who were using the forum to advocate for an enhanced status for Esperanto within EU language policy, prefacing his own opinions by stressing the limited scope of the policy review underway due to the nature of Community law on

⁶ Since the new European Commission assumed office in late 2009, the forum is no longer available.

languages (in particular the political impossibility of giving official status to languages other than those of member states). He tried to convey a sense of respectful disagreement with most of the arguments for Esperanto. Finally he encouraged further use of the forum for discussion among citizens: "the Multilingualism Forum should be a discussion forum for you and not just an exchange between you and me." There were 200 contributions between 6 February 2008 and 11 August 2009, submitted in numerous different European languages.⁷

The following analysis does not attempt to evaluate discursive or deliberative quality, but tries to identify the dominant participation rationales during different phases of the discussion.

1.4.2 PHASE 1 (6-19 Feb 2008, 80 contributions)

The first 50 responses came in within a week, with another 30 in the second week. Almost all were from advocates of Esperanto, with a majority writing in French (often also with an Esperanto translation or vice versa), which is indicative that a relatively well-organised issue network had mobilised.⁸ The majority of contributions were addressed to Mr Orban in the second person (always the 'vous' form in languages which have this distinction, and only one contributor – an Iranian – addressed him by his first name Leonard). Towards the end of the period there were more frequent contributions commenting on the Commissioner's words in the third person. Many of these were more confrontational in tone, but only one contribution could be called offensive, even though the majority opposed the Commissioner's views on Esperanto. Many adopted a polite, dialogical tone, often explicitly welcoming the opportunity for exchange, the establishment by the Commission of a discussion forum which welcomed contributions in any EU language, the Commissioner's declared interest in discussion with the general public, and his recognition of Esperanto. The typical response could be summed up as rational counter-argumentation, which took one of two forms: either it adopted a *problem-solving rationale* and presented factual corrections or technical arguments in favour of adopting Esperanto as the EU's common language, often adding practical suggestions; or it adopted a *relegitimising rationale* and presented political claims (or counterclaims), usually referring to the injustice of adopting English as the de facto lingua franca of the EU. The former type of contributions often challenged the Directorate General to commission more scientific research or properly review the evidence about the feasibility of different ways in which the EU could use or promote Esperanto. Many scientific studies were cited, typically with links. Also falling within this category were numerous personal narratives about the advantages of knowing Esperanto or the ease of learning the language. The latter type of contributions often expressed frustration at the Commissioner's self-professed competence limits (which some saw as alibiism) and called for the EU to exercise its powers (change the law, ensure genuine multilingualism exists at least in the institutions, intervene against allegedly discriminatory national language policies).

Thus there were countervailing attempts to either depoliticise or politicise the issue of multilingualism – on the one hand, to mimic traditional community methods like expert groups, and on the other, to link the issue to wider value-laden debates about the nature of Europe as a political, social and cultural entity. What both had in common was an insistence that participants had a right to be involved in problem definition, something which they suspected was not the case. One participant

⁷ The author was only able to analyse the content of contributions in English, French, Polish, Czech and Slovak, which covered nearly 60% of the total.

⁸ In France the Esperanto community is politically-organised, having fielded candidates in recent European elections as Europe Démocratie Espéranto. See <http://www.europe2009.fr/>

expressed cynicism about the whole process: "There's a big difference between investigating a problem without any preconceptions about the 'best solution' and formulating a problem with the solution already in your mind." [my translation from French]

Two contributions took issue with the Commissioner's comment that the forum should be a place for horizontal debate, stressing that they wanted to address him in the first instance, and that horizontal debate was difficult in any case because of the multitude of languages used in the forum. There were only three direct references to other contributions in the first 50 posts, emphasising the predominantly vertical structure of the dialogue in this phase.

In addition to the discussion on Esperanto, there were a few 'position statements' from interest groups such as the Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires and some regional language communities, likewise addressed directly to the Commissioner.

1.4.3 PHASE 2 (20 Feb – mid-September 2008, 57 contributions)

The intensity of exchange fell off markedly after the first few weeks, as is typical of threads in most online discussion forums. The nature of the discourse also changed in a number of respects. Participants more frequently referred to the Commissioner (if at all) in the third person, and addressed or referred to one another's contributions more often. To aid the discussion, it became quite common practice to translate others' contributions, especially those in less commonly spoken languages, into French, English or Esperanto.⁹ The dialogue thus became more horizontal in structure. The sense of frustration became increasingly evident in relation to the consultation exercise, and to Commission policymaking on multilingualism as a whole. A number of participants cast doubts on the sincerity of the Commission's professed openness to public debate and input (e.g. "It's clear that the facade of multilingualism aims to create an illusion ... when English has long since been the unique language practised exclusively by the Commission" [my translation from French]) or expressed cynicism about the Community method of policymaking ("When one wants to kill an idea, one sets up a commission to silence the demands" [my translation from French]). The Commissioner was portrayed as distant and unapproachable, partly because his office's interventions in the forum were rare, but also, because, according to one contributor whose words were then translated by a second from Polish into French, his responses to emails were 'evasive' and he had refused to be interviewed by the Esperanto magazine *Libera Folio* (although he did eventually agree, and an extensive interview with him was published on 28 March 2008). Despite users' frustrations, a *relegitimising rationale* was still dominant at this point.

As forum contributors began to sense their own lack of influence, however, the rationale for participation shifted a second time from the *relegitimising rationale* to a *rationale of autonomy*. Participants questioned the utility of the forum as a means of participating in policymaking, but they continued to use it both to criticise power and to share ideas and opinions. Discussion assumed a value of its own, and correspondingly there was a growing sense of community, camaraderie and solidarity among forum participants. Several of them exchanged email addresses in order to continue networking activities 'off-forum', although they had to be inventive to subvert the forum's automated censoring of email addresses. Solidarity was also expressed between representatives of different minority (regional) language communities who used the forum to express their sense of victimisation by discriminatory national language policies. The type of arguments advanced about the role of Esperanto in

⁹ According to Wodak & Wright (2007) spontaneous translation also occurred in the Futurum discussion forum, although in that case users tended to translate their own contributions rather than those of others.

Europe also changed subtly. For example, there were gradually fewer demands for the EU to use its powers to promote Esperanto as a lingua franca, with some contributions going as far as to argue that this would be contrary to the ethos of the language: "Esperanto is about equality and direct human to human contact. Esperanto does not seek to replace one imperial language with another ... But these are imperialist times, and you, [Commissioner Orban] an official representative, cannot directly oppose imperialism. So, maybe it's better that your office is against Esperanto. Perhaps more open-minded Europeans will look into Esperanto and find a useful tool with which to talk to their neighbors." The politics of Esperanto were presented as a nonviolent politics, antithetical to the exercise of state power: "to put an end to the domination of culture and of the dominant language in order to give back the people their speech rights" [my translation from French]. One participant suggested that the forum itself had perfectly illustrated the principles of linguistic democracy which Esperanto stands for: thanks to the organic emergence of the practice of translating each other's contributions, and of using Esperanto in addition to one's native tongue, (s)he had been able to communicate with fellow Europeans across language barriers. This illustrates the autonomy rationale: the forum had become a space for the *practice* of a certain discursive politics of multilingualism rather than a discourse about (the politics of) multilingualism.

During phase 2 of the discussion there were only occasional references to other elements of the policy development process on multilingualism such as the work of the group of intellectuals, whose report became available during this period (two contributions criticised its recommendations for a 'personal adoptive language' as too timid or too elitist "to stem the march of English"), and the forthcoming publication of the Commission's communication in the autumn. Phase 2 can therefore be characterised as an increasingly horizontal, self-sustaining discussion taking place in the shadow of – with a background awareness of, but distanced from – a policymaking process.

1.4.4 PHASE 3 (mid-September 2008 – August 2009, 63 contributions)

In this phase the intensity of exchange was lowest, although not markedly lower than in phase 2. In fact it is surprising that the thread continued to be live for over a year and a half despite little active moderation. In phase 3 the *rationale of autonomy* ceded ground once again to a mixture of the *problem-solving and relegitimising rationales*, in that there was less of a sense of community among participants. The pattern was for brief, isolated claims and suggestions to trickle in. The discourse was disconnected, as if the Esperanto 'issue public' (as manifest in this space) was in the process of demobilisation. In April 2009, however, there was a brief mobilisation of a second 'issue public', when several members of the Spanish-speaking community in Catalonia described their experience of linguistic discrimination by the Catalan regional authorities.

The dialogue was mostly vertical, with the bulk of contributions addressed directly to the Commissioner. Many of them had a petitioning nature, advocating on behalf of particular causes or constituencies. Others provided personal narratives, or made specific complaints about the gap between policy and practice in the EU's implementation of multilingualism, for example on the Europa website. Paradoxically, this was the most 'on-topic' phase of the discussion, in which around half of contributions actually addressed the question posed by the Commissioner at the start of the thread.

The most surprising feature of phase 3, however, was the lack of any discussion of the Communication on Multilingualism published by the Commission on 18 September 2008, since this was the key outcome of the consultation itself. The fact that the moderator did not announce its publication in the forum, or even place a link

there, and that participants did not pick up on it spontaneously either, implies that both sides saw the purpose of this freer discussion space as independent of the formal consultation process.

2. Discussion

In the resulting policy on multilingualism, announced by the Commission in its Communication of 18 September 2008, the consultation process is invoked essentially to legitimise the existing policy direction on multilingualism: the analysis of the situation contained in the previous 2005 communication 'A new framework for multilingualism' ("the value of linguistic diversity" and "the need for a broader policy to promote multilingualism") had been "confirmed by a broad consultation in 2007-08 which included an online consultation attracting over 2 400 replies, and two advisory groups [the high-level group and the business forum]" (EC 2008: 3). There is no acknowledgement in the Communication of the strident opposition to current policy directions in the Have Your Say discussion forum, which Commissioner Orban nevertheless claimed had been "very important in the elaboration of the strategic communication".

Although the Communication claims to initiate "a qualitative shift" in multilingualism policy (EC 2008: 4) its wording is cautious and self-limiting, reflecting the strictly limited competences of European institutions in this area. The main policy instrument for taking things forward is a "structured dialogue" with identifiable stakeholders, and giving a prominent role to expert groups (a business forum and a civil society forum have since been set up as permanent advisory bodies). The dominant rationale remained one of problem-solving. The actions set out for European institutions steer clear of any regulatory instruments, and concentrate on facilitation and incentivisation: monitoring, developing metrics, setting up platforms for sharing good practice, promoting student mobility through existing EU programmes, disseminating, awareness-raising, linking intelligently with policies in other sectors, and making recommendations to the member states, which are acknowledged as "the key decision-makers on language policy" (ibid.: 4).

How might we explain the evident tension in the Commission's approach to this consultation and to the political use of its outcomes? Participation was invited on the basis of both the problem-solving and the re-legitimising rationales, but the official policy that resulted only appears to have taken into account the former. Thus, for example, the press release announcing the launch of the consultation and the Have Your Say forum on 26 September 2007, gave three examples of the types of issues the consultation was to explore safeguarding lesser spoken languages against the trend towards one lingua franca, integrating migrants into society and the value of maintaining a multilingual EU administration. Yet these essentially political questions, which attracted a lot of feedback, are given only marginal attention in the Communication. The Commission's apparent disingenuity in stressing aspects of the process which were later 'organised out' of the policy output should be seen in the context of the politics of multilevel governance. It evidently felt obliged to defer to the right of member states to determine their own policy on the status of regional languages and to respect the rule that only national languages can be designated as official EU languages. But in creating a more open space for policy development at European scale it had arguably altered the balance of power, since the stating of positions and raising of arguments in an official public space indicated a demand for European action. Members of the high level expert group noted that "the link between language policies or language education policies and political power is somewhat of a taboo subject" (HLGM 2007: 21), and the consultation process itself

went some way towards removing such taboos. De jure, the outputs of the participation process were a series of technical recommendations on promoting multilingualism, but de facto it enabled citizens and organisational stakeholders to participate in problem (re)definition. In other words, rather than just mobilise knowledge for problem-solving, the process mobilised arguments which began to redefine the problem and created a space for more autonomous collective action and discourse, raising alternative scenarios, politically unthinkable in the present, but not necessarily so in the much longer-term. These scenarios implicate the Commission's own competences and the EU's democratic legitimacy.

In relation to the European public sphere and the purported need for spaces of transnational deliberation which would add a missing layer to European democracy, a number of insights follow from a comparison of this case with those studied by Wright (2007) and Cammaerts & Van Audenhove (2005). In the case of Futurum, Wright argued that its hosting by a political authority detracted from deliberative quality. Cammaerts & Van Audenhove studied three forums hosted by organisations affiliated to transnational social movements, which they found to be spaces relatively well-suited to the performance of a cosmopolitan or 'unbounded' citizenship, but the hosting by a member organisation tended to promote information and mobilisation at the expense of 'real debate'. Coleman & Gotze (2001) have suggested that the ideal host for democratic deliberation might be a public service broadcasting organisation like the BBC, whose neutrality is widely respected. The problem for the European public sphere, of course, is that there is no highly visible and universally-trusted mass media outlet operating on the same scale as the polity of the European Union. If this suggests that Europe will inevitably lack any 'master forum' for public deliberation, it is all the more important to observe how different publics take shape and act in the various kinds of more 'compromised' spaces that are made available. This study suggests, however counter-intuitive it may seem, that there are openings within policymaking processes themselves for expressions of cultural citizenship that achieve their communicative power by decoupling these spaces from the policymaking cycle, although the issue publics that emerge may well have been attracted initially by the prospect of influence. In this case, the political institutions did not succeed in recoupling cultural citizenship to the formal consultation process. Yet localised and unbounded citizenships resemble one another insofar as they are socially constructed rather than empirically given (Cammaerts & Van Audenhove 2005), and that they are linked to long-term cultural change rather than short-term decision-making. In that case a listening, supporting and translating approach on the part of political authorities like the EU may be a more appropriate response than one which treats online discussion simply as an input to a consultation process.

3. Conclusion

Having argued that the online discussion on multilingualism saw forms of participation inspired by all three rationales – problem-solving, re-legitimising and autonomy – with a progressive 'decoupling' of the community from the policy process itself (followed by a partial return to a mixture of problem-solving and re-legitimising action in the later stages after the Esperanto community had demobilised) the question remains how public authorities could improve their ability to listen to these kinds of public debate: how can they recouple the sort of autonomous actor-driven participation that flourished during phase 2 of the online discussion with the political system? Coupling will never be a perfect fit, since it involves the connection of network structures of the public sphere(s) to the hierarchical systems of political and legal institutions "with specified media and codes" (Bader 2008: 4). There is a risk of

introducing fundamental conflicts to policymaking which, according to proponents of a strictly regulatory EU, has hitherto been relatively successful because policymaking is deliberately under-politicised (Majone 2002). There is also a trade-off between autonomy and influence, meaning that participation in the public sphere will always produce some knowledge that is redundant, in the sense that it cannot be used by the political system, at least in the short-term: some part of the efforts of participants will always be 'wasted' from a purely instrumental perspective. But it is important to find ways of preserving the benefits of the redundant knowledge produced in participatory processes, since their validation may not only increase the rewards of participation for individuals but also contribute to society's stocks of knowledge and hence to its long-term sustainability, as well as to its governability, recalling that "not all and everything depends on 'politics'" (Bader 2008: 23).

Technical problem-solving with obvious 'strong publics' may have little to gain from mobilising civic resources via the social web: there is little need to involve new actors, because the affected parties are clearly identifiable and their outputs are 'appropriately formatted', whereas those from other publics may not be. On this point the present analysis concurs with Wright (2007), as it does on the limitations of a discussion forum as a medium for surveying public opinion within a 'general public' in response to a delegitimising rationale, given the small and unrepresentative participation and the apparent capture of the discussion by particular groups. The notion of an 'issue public', however, may be more pertinent to the types of collective organisation and communicative action that occurred within the multilingualism discussion forum. These can be understood as forms of collective action that emerge from the micro-level public sphere, and retain most of their characteristics, but which can coalesce temporarily and – crucially – leave traces of their existence in the meso-level or macro-level public sphere. The process is not quite analogous to the crystallisation of temporary public mobilisations of 'hidden networks' in the manner predicted by new social movement theory (Melucci 1989), because in the latter case the public manifestation of social movements occurs precisely to make concrete demands to the political system. Issue publics like the Esperanto public that took shape within the multilingualism discussion forum did not formulate political demands so much as replicate a cultural politics that has its roots in the everyday practice of a micro-level public sphere. What is unusual is that it took place within a heavily institutionalised space apparently close to the centre of power. Winkler & Kozeluh made a similar observation about the discussion on Your Voice in Europe, which worked best (in terms of interactivity and rationality) among a small group of 'expert' regular contributors replicating a form of communication more typical of a "micro-public sphere" (2005: 45). This partially contradicts Bärenreuter et al's hypothesis that the European public sphere may develop a multi-level structure that correlates to the framework of multi-level governance in the EU. Here we do not see a straightforward mapping of the public sphere onto formal governance mechanisms (for example by sluicing a considered public opinion into an equivalent governance institution such as a committee or expert group). Instead it saw an appropriation of a 'sphericule' within the macro-level public sphere for civic action more appropriate to the micro-level public sphere. This reflects the fact that contemporary structures of governance, when the term is understood in its broadest sense, are highly complex and overlapping.

If this analysis is accurate, then two important implications follow. Firstly, the fact that expressions of cultural citizenship typical of the micro-level public sphere (i.e. characterised by an autonomous participation rationale) can occur in online spaces hosted by governmental authorities challenges certain Habermasian assumptions about the necessary conditions to ensure that discursive practice in the 'literary' public sphere is insulated from determination by dominant power relations. Secondly,

it implies that the notion of recoupling this kind of public participation to the political system is more complex and multi-faceted than Wright's notion of 'sluicing' information generated by online discussion back into a policymaking process. Sluicing is certainly one form of recoupling, and improved moderation may be important in this regard: moderators with a high level of authority and autonomy (Wojcik 2007), and with the capacity to carry out time-consuming offline tasks such as summarising discussion, escalating demands and suggestions, or advocating (as a third party) for positions that seem to command support in the discussion (Edwards 2002), could enhance some aspects of deliberativeness, as Wright (2007) claimed had happened in the Futurum forum. But the role of sluicing should not be overstated, as other forms of translation may be equally if not more important to democracy. The key translations are those between political and cultural citizenship. In replicating micro-level forms of participation at the macro-level in a form which leaves a permanent trace in a space linked to a power centre, the collective actors here termed 'issue publics' were translating political into cultural citizenship. An equally effective mechanism for translating cultural citizenship back into political citizenship is still to be found. Such a mechanism would require that actions construed from a system perspective as non-participation could be recognised and incorporated into the long-term reproduction of political systems and thereby increase their capacity for experimentation and renewal.

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What does it Take to Make Online Deliberation Happen? A Comparative Analysis of 28 Online Discussion Forums

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1. Introduction

Recent research on the topic of online deliberation has more than earlier been focused on finding determinants of differences in outcome and characteristics of public deliberation online and applied comparative research approaches (Jansen & Kies 2005, Hendricks 2006; Macintosh & Whyte 2006; Wright & Street 2007; Åström & Grönlund 2010; Davies 2009:6f., Kies 2010). This has meant advancement from the prior domination of case studies and the dichotomous division between E-optimists and E-skeptics. This research has so far been able to pinpoint some crucial factors determining success and failure in online deliberation. Primarily, recent research has been successful in showing the importance of relating the amount and quality of deliberation to the design of online environments and instruments for deliberation (Wright 2005; Wright & Street 2007; Åström & Grönlund 2010; see also Morison & Newman 2001; Davies & Gangadharan 2009: Part VI; See also among others Linaa Jensen (2003) and Karlsson (2010) for single case studies supporting this claim). One specific design-related issue that has been depicted as a crucial feature for online deliberation is the level and style of moderation of online discussion forums (Coleman & Goetze 2001; Trénel 2009; Wright & Street 2007; Davies & Gangadharan 2009: Part V). Also the connection between online forums and political institutions has been found to be important for the level of participation and deliberation. Both the phase of the policy process as well as what weight the citizen participation is given in the policy process seems to have an impact on participation (Åström & Grönlund 2010; Fung 2006, Linaa Jensen 2003).

This paper aims to contribute to research about conditions for fostering public deliberation in online settings by way of empirically investigating theoretical assumptions about determinants of online deliberation other than the design related and institutional factors underlined in previous research. The analysis will be conducted through a comparative study of online forums for which the above-presented factors are held constant. The 28 online forums compared in this paper share the same design (technological, as well as process), have the same connection to the policy process, were moderated in the same way, and implemented simultaneously. Still, great divergences are apparent in the level of deliberation occurring on the forums. On some of the forum discussions between participants

were scarce and voting was the dominating form of participation, while on other forums discussion was much more intense. Attention is therefore drawn towards alternative factors for understanding online deliberation. The paper presents statistical analysis of aggregate data regarding (n=28) online discussion forums initiated by the EU-commission.

2. Case Description

The European Citizens Consultations 2009 (ECC) was a participatory project implemented in all EU-member states and initiated by the EU-commission as the major project of the Debate Europe program (COMM 2008). The aim of the project was to produce a set of recommendations to the EU-institutions regarding social and economic issues decided upon by citizens from all over Europe. The process included several phases implemented during a period of eight months (December 2008 to August 2009). The project included online discussion forums and face-to-face deliberative conferences that were implemented in all EU member states as well as a common pan-European deliberative conference with participants from all countries and five regional outreach events directed at stakeholders.¹

This analysis will focus on the public online discussions that made up the initial phase of the ECC process. The online discussion forums had an agenda-setting function for the rest of the process, and were implemented in order to give the broader public an opportunity to influence the process. Each forum produced a list of ten recommendations creating the starting point for the deliberative conference with randomly selected participants that was held in each country. Citizens were invited to register as participants on the forum in their country² and then got the chance to debate the issues they found most important for the social and economic future of Europe, and put forward proposals for what actions the EU should take (ECC 2009). Throughout the process, participants could vote in favour of (but not against) proposals, all participants were allowed to place one vote on each proposal on the forum with the exception of the proposals that they had posted themselves.³ The ten proposals in each country that received the most votes were then selected to set the agenda for the next phase of the project. All in all, registered participants could choose between three activities: writing discussion posts (either contributing to an existing discussion thread or launching a new one), writing proposals for other participants to vote on, or voting on other participants' proposals.

The forums were all moderated by one moderator working one and a half hours a day throughout the project period. The style of moderation used was what Wright and Street (2007:857) depict as silent moderation, when the moderator is allowed to delete messages without leaving any traces visible for the participants. Besides the moderator, each forum was supported by an outreach person contacting stakeholders such as political parties, NGOs, and political bloggers and encouraging them to participate in the forum or advertise the project with banners on their websites in order to make the forum better known to citizens. Banners advertising the forum were also visible on the EU-commissions national websites as well as the

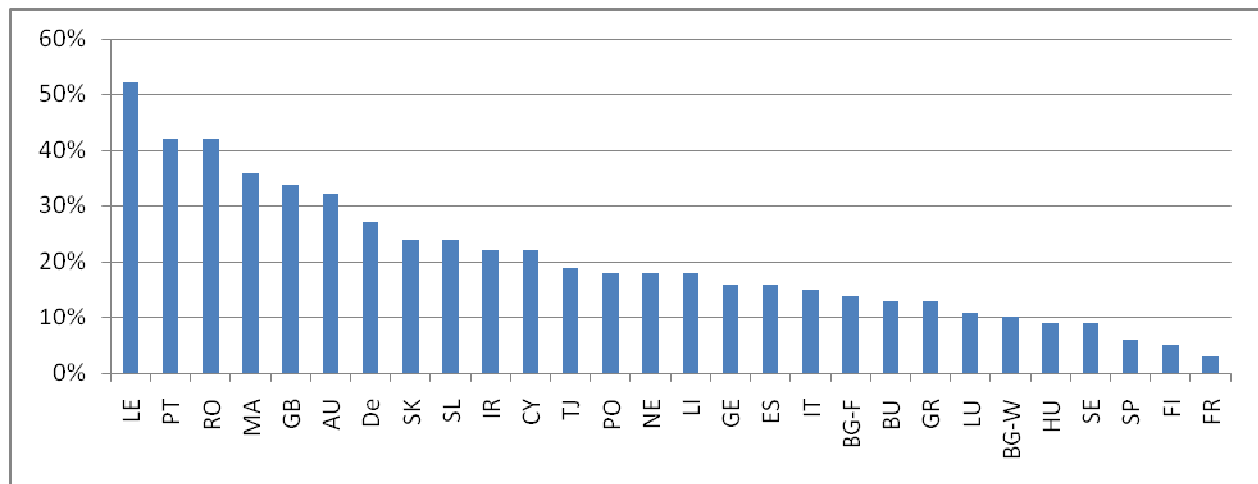
¹ For more information visit the project website: www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/

² In Belgium two forums were launched, one in French for the Walloon region and one in Dutch for the Flemish region.

³ Visitors that had not registered as participants were not restricted from any area of the forums but could view all discussion posts, proposals and all statistics on voting and participants.

websites of the organizations implementing the ECC project in each country.

Figure 1. Level of deliberation - the share of activities on the forums out of discussions made



Comments: The figure shows the percentage of all manifest activities on the forum in each country made up of the posting of discussion-posts.

Even though all 28 forums shared this design and were advertised in a similar way, the level and character of participation on the forums varied greatly. The busiest forum (the French) received over 26,000 unique visitors. Most of the forums (25 out of 28) had less than 5000 unique visitors. The least lively forum (the Maltese) had only 327 visitors during the period of the online consultation (See Appendix 1 for full participation statistics of all 28 forums). The forums also varied significantly regarding the level of deliberation taking place. The participants on the ECC forums had three different manifest activities at their disposal when participating on the forum, they could issue proposals for other participants to vote, themselves vote on other participants proposals or engage in discussion with other participants by way of writing discussion posts. Measured as the percentage of all manifest activities on the forums made out of the writing of discussion posts, the level of deliberative activities varied between 52% and 3%. In four of the forums over 90% of the activities registered among the participants were of aggregative nature, meaning that they were made out of voting and the issuing of proposals, and consequently less than 10% were deliberative. Six of the forums had instead over 30% deliberative activities. An overview of the level of deliberation on the different forums is presented in Figure 1 above.

3. Research design

Since the level of deliberation varied greatly between the different forums neither the design of the ECC forums, neither the style of moderation nor the connection of the forums to the policy process can be said to have created a low or high level of deliberation in general. Other factors must be investigated in order to understand why the amount of deliberation varied between identically designed and simultaneously implemented discussion forums. This study will attempt to explain the emergent differences in the intensity of deliberative participation occurring on the forums in relation to other patterns of participation on the forums. This way, theoretical assumptions about determinants of online deliberation can be empirically

investigated. Several theoretical arguments have been made about determinants of the engagement of citizens in deliberation and this study will investigate four claims about what conditions are favourable and unfavourable for deliberation in online participation. These claims complement the list of identified determinants of deliberation discussed in the introduction of this paper that this study design holds constant.

3.1 Number of participants

The intensity of deliberation occurring in the forums may well be dependent on the number of participants. Deliberation is often expected to be regarded as more meaningful by participants when occurring in a relatively exclusive setting when a responsive discussion is more likely to occur. Meirowitz (2007) has showed in game theoretical models that the incentives for deliberating should decrease with the number of participants joining if the discussions are, as in our cases, followed by a decisive vote. Schlosberg et al. (2009), Persson (2007), and Karlsson (2010:104) show in case studies that mass-participation in participatory processes can lead to an aggregative rather than a deliberative approach (Schlosberg et al. 2009:144) to participation. In participatory settings with many participants, strong argumentation may be regarded as less important than strength in numbers as single arguments may be lost in the larger flow of information. In their seminal work on size and democracy Dahl and Tufte (1973:44) suggest the existence of a connection between size of demos and political competitiveness, meaning that a large demos is less likely to generate a cooperative form of political engagement than a smaller demos. In connection to the studies discussed above the suspicion that a discussion forum with many participants is less likely to generate deliberative forms of participation will be investigated in this study through a test of the following hypothesis:

H1: The more participants registered on a discussion forum the less deliberation will occur between the participants.

3.2 Opinion diversity

Stromer-Galley (2003) identifies two competing perspectives on the function of the Internet as a public sphere and political behaviour online. According to the "homophily perspective" the Internet promotes fragmentation of the public into narrow, homogenous groups. Sunstein (2001) has argued, in line with this perspective, that the vast possibilities offered by the Internet to exclusively discuss with likeminded people results in a situation where deliberation will occur more often in opinion wise consensual settings than in settings where opinions differ greatly. The opposite argument is put forward in what Stromer-Galley calls the "diversity perspective" which states that diversity promotes incentives for online discussions to a greater extent than homogeneity. Stromer-Galley's research findings are in line with this perspective as her respondents express that they are intrigued by online deliberation as a form of participation for the reason that a diversity of opinions are offered (2003: The diversity perspective). Other studies has indicated that in settings such as the ECC forums where lay citizens are invited to participate and hence "partisanship is less prominent" then in parliamentary assemblies, the discourse of deliberation is more constructive and less polarized (Thompson 2008:511, with reference to Steiner et.al 2004). The conflicting pictures of online engagement painted by the homophily and the diversity perspectives will be investigated in this paper through a test of the following hypothesis specifically addressing the diversity

perspective:

H2: The more a forum is characterized by a diversity of opinion the more deliberation will occur between the participants.

3.3 Aggregative dynamic

As the process design shared by our 28 cases features both deliberative discussion and aggregation of preferences through voting, this study raises the issue of combining voting and deliberation. For most scholars of deliberative democracy, the role of deliberation is one prominent episode in a sequence of events leading up to a political decision (Barber 1984; Fishkin 1995; Guttman & Thomson 1997; Bohman 1998:415; Goodin 2005). Deliberation is often seen as a necessary prelude for decision-making through voting in order to ensure that the decision is being made in relation to the relevant knowledge about the issue at hand as well as with regard to opposing arguments. Deliberation is however not usually seen a sufficient mechanism for decision-making in itself. Hence, a decisive vote is often seen as necessary or at the least as a necessary evil (See Saward 2000:42 for an overview). The procedural constraints of deliberative practices are set in motion in order to create a refined opinion formation among the voters before the decisive act of voting and, correspondingly, in a body of elected representatives preceding a parliamentary vote.⁴ Public deliberation is thought to encourage more thoroughly considered voting behavior, where participants are more likely to be exposed to and take into account opposing views (Barber 1984; Fishkin 2000; Chambers 2001). Decision-making procedures, including deliberative phases, are thought to create substantially better decisions (Dryzek 1994; Cohen 1997; Fearon 1998). In accordance with this line of thinking the combination of voting and deliberation is not just possible, but a necessity in creating legitimate democratic decision-making procedures.

Whether or not an open and equal exchange of knowledge and opinions in deliberation is possible and likely to occur if followed by a decisive vote is a subject given increasing attention, not least from game theorists (See Dickson et al. 2008 or Landa & Meirowitz 2009 for overviews). Recent studies have underlined the importance of not taking the occurrence of deliberation for granted, and instead shown that it can be strategically correct for agents, being citizens or decision-makers, to not actively participate in deliberation when decisions are being made through voting (Dickson et al. 2008; Stasavage 2007; Merowitz 2007). Chambers (2001) argue that designs where deliberation and voting are combined can create a greater focus on aggregation and strength in numbers than on deliberation and strength in arguments. When the constraint of consensual decision-making through unanimity is abandoned the risk emerges that a (unthreatened) majority will lack strong reasons to listen to the arguments of the minority (Chambers 2001:242). Indeed, in some cases of online deliberation, discussion spaces have been abandoned when the possibility of voting is offered (Åström 2004:200; Karlsson 2010:101).

As the forums compared in this study share the same design, no comparison can be made between deliberation in forums that offer the possibility of voting and forums that exclusively offer deliberative forms of participation. The fact that the participants focus on deliberation and voting was so greatly divergent between the different

⁴ Or in a third option that deliberation among citizens can create a knowledge basis for parliamentary decision-making.

forums underlines the fruitfulness of investigating the relationship between voting and deliberation even within a specific design that creates opportunities for both forms of participation. Instead, we have an opportunity to investigate whether the occurrence of an aggregative dynamic, visible through a more intense voting practice, is affecting the level of deliberation. The relationship between voting and deliberation will be investigated through the following hypothesis:

H3: The more the participants of a forum engage in voting the less deliberation will occur between the participants.

3.4 Level of engagement

As is widely recognized in the literature on deliberative democracy, deliberation is a costly form of public participation for societies and individuals alike (Elstub 2008:189; Habermas 1996:325f.). To engage in a deliberative process demands more of a participant than engaging in an aggregative form of participation such as signing a petition, registering as a member of a group, or voting on one of a set of predetermined alternatives (Schlosberg et al. 2009:144). It is therefore likely that the level of engagement among the participants can explain the occurrence of deliberation on the forums. This might be especially true in a forum with the design used in ECC where both aggregative and deliberative forms of participation are offered. The suspicion that a higher level of engagement among participants is needed in order to foster deliberation will be investigated by testing the following hypothesis:

H4: The higher the level of engagement among the participants in a forum the more deliberation will occur between the participants.

The four hypotheses presented above all regard patterns of participation on the forums; as such, they expect to find explanations of a phenomenon by investigating differences between the cases that all are found on the same “level of explanation” as the dependent variable. Other factors that create a larger distance between the object of explanation and the explanatory factors could of course be regarded as interesting to investigate. On the top of a list of such factors should probably be cultural and contextual factors. An obvious difference between the cases in this study is the countries in which they are implemented. Hence, cultural explanations might be possible to find concerning the level of deliberation occurring on the forums. Although they are excluded from this study, such factors must be kept in mind by the reader as possible alternatives or even underlying explanations to the results of this study. The exclusion of cultural and contextual factors does not render this study meaningless. Even though the factors of explanation included in this analysis might be contextually and culturally dependent, they could possibly emerge in any context or any culture and are hence important to investigate in relation to the level of deliberation.

4. Dependent and independent variables

Deliberation is a concept for which empirical operationalizations are both numerous and widely debated. One common characteristic among many operationalizations is that they discriminate between deliberation and other forms of communication and

interaction (Steiner 2008; Neblo 2007). Deliberation is separated by a varying set of procedural/substantial constraints. Only to the extent that the investigated practices of communication employ such constraints are they qualified as being deliberative. The operationalizations of deliberation used in this paper make the bold move away from including such constraints and indicate the level of deliberation by measuring the mere occurrence of discussions on the forums. In opposition to the act of voting (and posting of a proposal) the writing of discussion posts is in this study regarded as an act of deliberative participation

One definition of deliberation used by Scott Wright and John Street seems suited for our purpose to separate deliberative and aggregative participation on the forums. Wright and Street proposes that “[t]he essence of deliberative democracy lies in the idea that citizens engage not only in registering preferences, but also in talk about those preferences” (2007:851). In connection to this definition the central division between the act of voting and the act of writing discussion posts is just this, that the discussion posts (and the preferences they express) are made available for open scrutiny (Wilhelm 1998:315), and a discussion about them. Votes are on the other side only registered preferences that does not invite to any discussion. By employing this broad and allowing definition and operationalization the paper also connects to Fishkin's (1995:41) concept of “incompleteness” in deliberation. Fishkin sees deliberation not as a sole and exclusionary concept, but underlines the importance of regarding communicative practices as more or less deliberative. In connection to Fishkin the operationalization used in this paper regards practices that are thought to some extent deliberative.

The measurement used for studying the level of deliberation on the forums is the average number of discussion posts written by a registered participant (the total number of discussion posts on the forum divided by the number of registered participants). This measurement is weighted against the size of the forums (the number of participants), rendering the different forums comparable. The measurement could be said to regard the relative amount of deliberation on the forum or the intensity of deliberation. Another advantage with this variable in comparison to other possible measurements⁵ is that it does not automatically contrast the practices of discussion and voting. A forum characterized by much discussion according to this measurement can at the same time have had a high intensity in aggregative forms of participation through voting.

Table 1. Dependent variables

Factor	Operationalization	Variable
<i>Deliberation</i>	The more discussion has occurred between participants on the forum the higher level of deliberation.	Average number of discussion posts per participant.
<i>Voting</i>	The more votes posted by the participants on the forum the higher the level of voting.	Average number of votes per participant.

As the primary concern of the paper is to investigate determinants of online deliberation and not online participation more widely we will need to include a second dependent variable besides the variable for intensity of deliberation. In order to make any conclusions about the investigated hypothesizes in relation to the intensity of

⁵ One other possibility is to use the variable displayed in Figure 1, the share of all activities on the forums made out of discussions. While this is a great variable for illustrating the divergence in the level of discussion between the forums, it presupposes that voting and discussion makes up a null sum game since the maximum level of discussion (100%) excludes any voting and vice versa.

deliberation on the forum we must also investigate the hypotheses in relation to aggregative forms of participation. We are this way able to conclude whether or not the investigated relationships are exclusively concerning deliberative forms of participation or online political participation in more general terms. A corresponding measurement is therefore included for the level of voting activity on the forum, the average number of votes per participant. Including this measurement in our study makes it possible to determine if the results from the analysis regard deliberative forms of participation specifically or effect voting behaviour equally (or more strongly). If so, our results would regard participation more generally and not be applicable specifically in relation to deliberative practices of political participation. The two variables for the levels of discussion activity and the level of voting activity are hence made comparable in relation to the independent variables (See Table 1 above) and are studied in relation to those variables in the same manner so that we can conclude whether the investigated relationships are exclusive for either one of the forms of participation or common for both.

The independent variables regard the patterns of participation on the different forums, the operationalizations described in Table 2 below present attempts to empirically address the complex theoretical concepts discussed above with the material available. As the material is constricted to statistics of the participation and activity on the 28 forums some of the operationalizations may be disputable and seen as sub-optimal. Still these attempts at operationalizations present what is thought to be the best available empirical indicators for addressing the above described hypotheses.

Table 2. Independent variables

Factor	Operationalization	Variable
<i>Number of participants</i>	The higher number people registering as participants on the forum the higher the level of participation.	Number of registered participants on the forums.
<i>Opinion diversity</i>	The smaller share of the participants voting for the most popular proposal, the more diversity of opinion is apparent on the forum.	The percentage of all participants voting for the most popular proposal. (reversed)*
<i>Aggregative dynamic</i>	The more intense voting participation the more evidence of the occurrence of an aggregative dynamic on the forum.	Average number of votes per participant.
<i>Level of engagement</i>	The lower share of unique visitors to the discussion forums website registering as participants on the forum the higher the threshold for participation. Participants on a forum with a higher threshold for participation are seen as sharing a higher level of engagement than participants on a forum with a lower threshold for participation.	The percentage of unique visitors to the forum registering as participants. (reversed)*

Comments: *= The scales of the variables are reversed in order to create positive measurements of the investigated concepts.

5. Methodological considerations

This study rests on analysis of aggregate data; the cases up for comparison are the forums and not the participants on the forums. With this circumstance follows some considerations that need to be addressed. First, this analysis excludes analysis of any differences in the patterns of deliberation on the forums dependent on the individual characteristics of the participants as such data are not available. Factors related to the gender, age, social position, education, and the cultural backgrounds of the participants will remain unnoticed in this analysis. Second, the analysis includes

only a low number of cases. The ECC project included 28 online forums which all are included in this study. The usual research approach for attacking this kind of comparative data with few cases, a qualitative analysis inspired by Boolean truth-tables (See for example Kies 2010:101 & Pratchett et.al 2009), rests heavily on the possibility to categorize and group the different cases based on the investigated qualities. The cases compared are categorized dependent on a set of factors and their success in an output variable (also categorized often in successful/unsuccessful) is then analyzed in relation to the different settings in the independent factors.

Since our cases lack clearly distinguishable differences, sharing the same design, institutional affiliation and moderation, a categorization and of the cases is difficult. What does differ between the cases is instead the participation statistics, as seen in figure 1 above there is a great divergence between the cases in the level of deliberation on the forums. There are also differences in other participation statistics (see appendix 1) available for analysis. The variables presented above are able to analyze with the help of this statistics (as is shown in tables 1 and 2 above). The best methodology for addressing this kind of differences in statistics is not a truth-table design relying on exclusive categories, but instead statistical methods including all variation in the variables in the analysis. We are therefore employing bivariate correlation analysis of the participation statistics of the forums in this study. In order make a statistical analysis possible with these few cases, a higher level of uncertainty is tolerated in the correlation analysis used in the analysis than is usually the case. In the empirical analysis, significant correlations with 90% certainty or higher will be interpreted.

Another circumstance that needs to be addressed is the snapshot nature of our measurements. Even though the studied discussion forums have emerged gradually and cumulatively during a period of four months, all our measurements regard the state of the forum after the discussions and voting was finished. Hence, the analysis will interpret the patterns of participation as visible through and determined by the state of the forum at this point in time. This is done even though the forums could have looked very different with regard to, for example, the level of participation, the aggregative dynamic, and the divergence of opinion at a different point in time. Therefore, this analysis rests on the assumption that the character of the forums at the end of the discussions reproduces with satisfying certainty the character of the forums when the most participation took place. It is assumed that the relative relationship between the different statistical figures used in the study (voting, discussion, participation, votes for the most popular proposal, etc.) and visible in the snapshot at the end of the process is similar throughout the period of online discussions.

A second difficulty stemming from the snapshot design of the study is determining the causal direction of a relationship between two variables. Since there is no difference in time between the independent and dependent variables there must be a logical reason for us to believe that the independent variable in our models effect the dependent variable and not the other way around. For three out of four of our hypotheses this is not a problem; in these cases it would be illogical to expect a reversed causality. In the fourth case, the relationship between diversity of opinion and the level of deliberation, reversed causality seems possible. Our model wants to investigate whether the diversity of opinion influence the level of discussion occurring. But a positive relationship could possibly stem from the fact that extensive

deliberation creates a greater diversity of opinion. The reader must therefore have this possibility in mind when investigating the results. What speaks to the advantage of our interpretation of the relationship is that the reversed relationship described above diverges from most expectations about the opinion effects of deliberation. In the literature, deliberation is generally thought to promote a higher level of agreement rather than a diversity of opinion (see, for example, Sunstein 2003; List 2007)

6. Analysis

When putting the arguments about the relationship between different patterns of participation and the level of deliberation to empirical scrutiny interesting results emerged, some of which confirm and others that clash with prior argumentation and research. The level of participation in the forum that was expected to have a negative impact on deliberation, is displaying no significant relationship to the level of deliberation. The same factor does on the other hand show a strong and significant positive relationship with the level of voting on the forums. Hence, on the basis of these results, many participants cannot be said to be at a disadvantage for deliberative forms of participation but at a clear advantage for aggregative forms.

Table 3. Bivariate correlations, patterns of participation, and the level of deliberation and voting

	Level of participation	Opinion diversity	Aggregative dynamic	Level of engagement
<i>Deliberation</i>	-,251	,349*	-,158	,338*
<i>Voting</i>	,724***	,578***	-	-,108

Comments: N= 28, *: p 0,1, **: p 0,05, ***, p 0,01

The opinion diversity on the forum seems to connect with Stromer-Galley's findings of attracting a higher level of discussion, as we find a positive relationship between the variable for opinion diversity and the level of deliberation on the forum. An even stronger relationship is found regarding the level of voting on the forum that as well seems to be enforced by the diversity of opinion. These results do not indicate that participants avoid participating in settings with diverse opinions but rather that opinion diversity encourages participants to engage in deliberation and voting.

The pressing question of whether the emergence of an aggregative dynamic on the forum excludes deliberation was addressed through a correlation between the level of voting and the level of deliberation on the forums. Results indicate that no significant negative relationship between voting and deliberation was present on these forums. The correlation produces a non-significant coefficient indicating a nonexistent relationship between the two variables. On the basis of these results we can also conclude that within the realm of these 28 forums, the results indicate that the level of voting and the level of deliberation are seemingly unrelated.

The last factor investigated regarding the pattern of participation on the forums is the level of engagement among the participants. This factor was studied by creating a measurement for the "threshold for participation" on the forums. A low threshold is thought to equal a low engagement while a high threshold indicates a high level of

engagement among participants. The analysis shows a positive relationship between a high threshold/high level of engagement and the level of deliberation on the forums while no significant relationship is visible for the level of voting. This result indicates that deliberation is reinforced by a more engaged group of participants while the level of voting is unrelated to the level of engagement. The results of the analysis are summarized and related to the four hypotheses of the study in Table 4. In sum, the analysis has found support for two of the four hypotheses within the cases of the ECC online discussion forums.

Table 4. Results of the analysis in relation to the hypotheses

Hypothesis	Test	Support
<i>H1: The more participants registered on a discussion forum the less deliberation will occur between the participants.</i>	Correlation between: <i>Number of participants & Deliberation</i> (See tables 1 & 2 for operationalizations)	Not supported Pearsons r: -,251 Significance: ,197
<i>H2: The more a forum is characterized by a diversity of opinion the more deliberation will occur between the participants.</i>	Correlation between: <i>Opinion diversity & Deliberation</i> (See tables 1 & 2 for operationalizations)	Supported, but stronger correlation with intensity of voting Pearsons r: ,349* Significance: ,069 (To be interpreted with caution due to the possibility of reversed causality)
<i>H3: The more the participants of a forum engage in voting the less deliberation will occur between the participants.</i>	Correlation between: <i>Aggregative dynamic & Deliberation</i> (See tables 1 & 2 for operationalizations)	Not supported Pearsons r: -,158 Significance: ,422
<i>H4: The higher the level of engagement among the participants in a forum the more deliberation will occur between the participants.</i>	Correlation between: <i>Level of engagement & Deliberation</i> (See tables 1 & 2 for operationalizations)	Supported Pearsons r: ,338* Significance: ,079

7. Summary and Discussion

In this paper divergences have been analyzed in the level of deliberation between 28 online forums sharing similarities regarding many of the factors that prior research on online deliberation has seen as important for understanding online deliberation. With this research design, additional and alternative explanations to the occurrence of online deliberation have been investigated. The results of the analysis indicate that the diversity of opinion and the level of engagement of participants seem to be important for understanding these divergences while the size of the forums and the aggregative dynamic of the participation seems unrelated to the level of deliberation. The analysis also indicates that the level of voting and deliberation seems to be dependent on different factors with the exception of diversity of opinion, a factor that seems to work reinforcing for both forms of participation.

So what can we learn from this analysis when designing future practices of online deliberation. First, the analysis gives us no reason to believe that we should avoid combining voting and deliberation. The 28 forums studied employed the same design

including both deliberation and voting, and got very different results regarding the level of deliberation. Since the level of voting and the level of deliberation were unrelated, the divergence between the 28 forums in the level of deliberation seems to be dependent on non-voting-related factors. An aggregative dynamic or the simple occurrence of a decisive vote in the design of the forum does not seem to rule out the possibility of intense deliberation occurring on the forum. Neither should large-scale discussions be avoided, on the basis of these results, for the reasons that they could weaken deliberative forms of participation. The results of this analysis show us that between the smallest forum of 82- and the largest of 9 400 registered participants, no such pattern could be found.

The analysis also tells us that two factors should be carefully investigated. These are the level of opinion diversity regarding the issue up for deliberation and the level of engagement among participants. The analysis gives us reason to believe that deliberation is more likely to be successful if the issue of deliberation is surrounded by a high level of engagement and conflicted opinions rather than being an issue that renders participants indifferent or is surrounded by a high level of consensus regarding the topics under investigation. The influence of the level of engagement among participants is exclusive for deliberative forms of participation, a result that mirrors earlier studies indicating that public deliberation is a more demanding form of political participation than many other available modes of participation.

In sum, these results paint a picture of online deliberation as a more robust form of political participation than earlier studies have claimed. Under the specific circumstances shared by these cases, deliberation is seemingly unaffected or even reinforced by several factors that were believed to be problematic for online deliberation. As a recommendation for practitioners of online deliberation, the results can be interpreted as saying: do not fear mass participation, controversial topics, or combining voting and deliberation. Instead, focus your attention on finding forms and issues that promote a high level of engagement and interest from participants.

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Appendix 1: Descriptive statistics

	Votes Proposal nr 1	Votes	Proposals	Posts	Participants	Visitors
<i>Austria</i>	148	577	36	283	381	1877
<i>Belgium - F</i>	164	675	35	119	517	1751
<i>Belgium - W</i>	165	422	35	48	387	1428
<i>Bulgaria</i>	105	223	24	38	224	847
<i>Cypruss</i>	24	175	15	54	124	376
<i>Denmark</i>	228	330	12	66	360	958
<i>Estonia</i>	139	176	7	34	238	1492
<i>Finland</i>	418	749	11	42	732	2202
<i>France</i>	3829	40087	257	1204	9400	26741
<i>Germany</i>	1400	2081	132	805	4296	12179
<i>Greece</i>	44	225	30	38	207	767
<i>Hungary</i>	248	1488	29	146	557	2795
<i>Ireland</i>	134	299	24	92	319	775
<i>Italy</i>	354	1614	84	305	1069	3986
<i>Latvia</i>	32	86	19	113	164	999
<i>Lithuania</i>	69	399	34	97	220	621
<i>Luxemburg</i>	87	324	35	43	196	712
<i>Malta</i>	12	37	8	25	82	327
<i>Netherlands</i>	164	343	21	82	339	730
<i>Poland</i>	384	1229	18	282	1020	4424
<i>Portugal</i>	147	614	63	499	595	2600
<i>Romania</i>	34	136	13	108	214	847
<i>Slovakia</i>	148	163	7	55	305	543
<i>Slovenia</i>	148	277	20	96	305	1102
<i>Spain</i>	3414	14376	115	868	5011	26425
<i>Sweden</i>	290	792	13	75	617	1624
<i>Czech Republic</i>	183	344	12	84	405	1384
<i>United Kingdom</i>	235	715	37	384	641	2236

Comments: The table displays descriptive statistics for the 28 cases. All figures are in absolute numbers and regard the period when voting and discussion was open for the participants, except the number of visitors for which no data was available for the first month of the project. Data was collected from Google analytics and the ECC websites in February 2010.

Online Deliberation and Impact on Decision: A Local Planning Case

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Abstract. How participation to local planning could be more deliberative online? What is the impact on policy decisions of various types of online posts and posters? These questions have guided our assessment of the online deliberation organized by the Camargue Natural Park on its management plan in February 2009. After a short description of the context and process design, several deliberative features are evaluated. This analysis is completed by a comparison with similar face-to-face events and a survey of a large sample of participants and “non-participants”. Then, we analyse the actual impact of this deliberation on the decision by comparing the pre-deliberation plan, the post-deliberation plan and the opinions expressed during the process. Following “computer-mediated communication” and deliberative theories, we expected that this online process would increase the deliberative features of the stakeholder participation. Several “deliberative benefits” have indeed been observed (more opinion and thematic diversity without an increase of “flames”) and the impact on decision is significant. Nevertheless, speech is apparently more concentrated than in face-to-face events and the impact on decision mainly concern “vague” proposals and modifications suggested by local governments and professional stakeholders.

Keywords. online deliberation, impact on decision, local planning, local governance, stakeholder participation

1. Introduction

The question of the “impact” of institutional and interface designs on online participation has already guided various researches. Many case studies have been

compared in case surveys (Grönlund & Aström, 2009; Pratchett & al., 2009). Some studies have directly compared different online designs (Coleman, 2004; Davies, 2005; Wright & Street, 2007; Desquinabo, 2009) or face-to-face vs. online debate designs (Iyengar & al., 2003; Monnoyer-Smith, 2006; Min, 2007). The variations observed can be related to the actual process of debates or their outcomes. The process assessments often use deliberative theories variables (e.g.: representativeness, equality of expression, proportion of “flames”) or cost/benefit analysis. Outcome variables go from political knowledge to social trust gains and from opinion change to impact on policy decisions. In the case of local planning processes, public participation is encouraged by laws and treaties at National and International scale (e.g. Aarhus convention). But participation is usually limited to selected professional stakeholders and experts in a few thematic meetings (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Fung, 2006). Even when sponsors and managers want to widen the participation, they have to overcome many barriers (long procedures, complex documents, important organizational costs, etc.). In this context, what online process could facilitate a more “deliberative” and less expensive participation that would impact significantly the decisions?

To answer this question, the Intermed project (2008-2011, funded by the French National Research Agency) aims at designing Internet tools and testing their potential benefits for local planning debate. These tests use case-study, comparative and experimental designs. In this paper we will present a research on the online deliberation organized by the Camargue Park on its management plan. The goal of this study is to evaluate the deliberative features and the impact on decision of this participative process. To assess this process we have also compared it with face-to-face deliberations organized on the same management plan. More deliberative debates (inclusive, equal, diverse, etc.), a significant impact on decision and several economic benefits for organizers were expected. After a short discussion on Internet potential benefits for this type of debate (2), we will describe the context and the tools used for this online process (3). Then we will precise the evaluation design of our study (4) and present the main results of our assessment (5). In the conclusion, the limits and further directions of our research are discussed.

2. Internet potential for deliberation on local planning

Local planning processes evaluations are not frequent, but general features and challenges can be described (2.1.). For this type of public participation, Internet devices could have many potential benefits and fewer pitfalls than in general (2.2.).

2.1. Public participation and local planning

Compared to “deliberative events” like deliberative polls or consensus conferences (Gastil & Levine, 2005), local planning debates have generally several institutional features that do not facilitate public participation. The procedures are long (3 to 6 years from diagnosis to policy plan), the texts are over 100 pages, the themes are

complex, uncertainty is high and organizers have limited resources. Therefore, small group deliberation between lay participants is difficult to organize, except with large findings (Hartz-Carp, 2005). Given these “institutional features” and political routines, only a few “expert” or “professional” stakeholders (Fung, 2006) generally participate to planning processes in thematic meetings. The participation of most of stakeholders and citizens is then limited to meeting attendance or uninformed answers to polls (Chess & Purcell, 1999; Fung, 2006). If “lay” citizen participation faces numerous barriers, the participation of a large part of the stakeholders is still problematic for many local governments. Indeed, the implication of the maximum of stakeholders is limited by organisational costs and by large inequality of speech and influence between “lay” and “professional” stakeholders. In this context, what is the potential of Internet for such process? More precisely, what online process could facilitate a more “deliberative” and less expensive participation that would impact significantly the decisions?

2.2. Internet potential for deliberation on local planning

The main potential benefit of Internet for public deliberation in general is its impact on organisational and financial costs. If managers and participants can save time and money, participation events are expected to be more frequent, interactive and representative (Iyengar & al., 2003). More generally, if information and expression on public issues takes less time for participants, they should probably participate more, especially if they are “lay” stakeholders or “ordinary” citizens. Beyond “cost” factors, some Internet interface features may facilitate more inclusive, interactive and equal debates. According to many experiments in “Computer-Mediated Communication” studies, usual features of online interfaces (lack of status indication, asynchronous and written communication, physical distance, etc.) enhance the equality and diversity of expression in group discussions (Spears & Lea, 1992; Strauss, 1996). Some large experiments or observations have since confirmed these results (Coleman, 2004; Price, 2006; Monnoyer-Smith, 2006). Thus, in stakeholder consultations, Internet tools could facilitate the expression and the impact on decision of the less expert and organized. Such outcomes could then lead to more informed, legitimated and accepted decisions.

One of the most frequent pitfalls of online debates is the high proportion of flames generally observed in online political discussion (Davis, 2005). Moderation devices and practices can reduce this problem (Coleman, 2004; Wright, 2006; Pratchett & al., 2009) but their cost is high for local governments. Moreover, these tools can also decrease participation rates or the level of perceived fairness of a public debate when confidence between participants and government is low or when the moderation rules are vague (Wright, 2006; Wojcik, 2007). However, moderation problems could be less important in stakeholder consultations: the participants are not anonymous and they also meet in face-to-face meetings. As a consequence, the proportion of “flames” is likely to be small even with a slight moderation. Indeed, the potential benefits of Internet devices for a class of public debate vary according to its institutional features and specific goals (Smith & al., 2008).

3. Context and tools of the Camargue online deliberation

The studied deliberation is one of the last “participative event” in a long process run by the Camargue “Regional Natural Park” on its management plan (3.1) Given the institutional features of this participative event and its context, a specific electronic design has been proposed to the Camargue Park government (3.2)

3.1. Institutional and social context of the process

Camargue County is a coastal Regional Natural Park located in the south of France, near Marseille. Since its creation in 1970, a succession of conflicts has occurred between farmers, salt producers, hunters and ecologists. More recently the tension is high between the two main cities (Arles and Saintes-Marie de la Mer) and the supporters and opponents of a possible bridge over the Rhône. Like every park it legally has to adopt a management plan. This plan must define the main goals and policies for the protection and the sustainable development of the concerned area. A diversity of themes is consequently at stake (water management, farming, tourism, urbanism, transport, governance, etc.). Incentives or limitations are possible, especially about the businesses or infrastructures allowed in the Park area. However, a park management plan mainly defines the general goals and the specific commitments of the Park joint union and of its administrators (national and local governments). Like most of the local planning processes, the Camargue process is very long: it began in 2005 and it is supposed to end in 2010. At each step of the process different types of public participation have been organized, generally with the same group of stakeholders. At the end of each step, an outline of the “public” proposals is given to the park representatives for an “official validation”. At the end of the process, local representatives and national government will finally adopt (or do not adopt) the co-written document (Cf. Table 1).

Steps	Participation
Area diagnosis (05-06/2006)	A few national and local governments experts and selected stakeholders
General goals (09/2006-06/2007)	A phone survey (250 participants) and 20 public meetings (300 participants)
Management plan “elaboration” (12/2006-07/2007)	40 thematic workshops (5 themes x 8 meetings) with approximately 100 stakeholders invited
Management plan “precision” (10/2008-03/2009)	16 thematic workshops and one global meeting with approximately the same 100 stakeholders Online deliberation of around 80 stakeholders
Management plan “validation” (Summer 2009-End of 2010)	“Public consultation” (mostly information) Local and National governments vote

Table 1. Camargue Park management plan process

The step of the process mainly concerned by our evaluation is the online deliberation of around 80 stakeholders that began on 22 January 2009 and ended on 28 February 2009. These 80 stakeholders have been invited by mail and email to give their opinion and debate on the management plan project before the beginning of the “validation phase”. The 20 stakeholders involved in the workshops who were not “formally” invited online were the national state agencies: they were represented by only one national government representative.

3.2. E-tools for costless and more deliberative planning debate

Given the main institutional features and goals of planning debates between stakeholders, the Internet device tested was a website with an annotation tool, a controlled login and a “slight” moderation. The invited participants could read the management plan (one page for each of the 20 chapters), select any part of the text and comment it with no expression or size restriction. All the invited participants were able to read all the annotations and know who wrote it and when. They could also visualize to which part of the text the annotations were referring (Cf. Figure 1). The debates were not moderated: the participants were just warned that different type of “illegal” messages could be suppressed by a moderator.

1.4. Améliorer la qualité des eaux et des milieux aquatiques

Mettre en place d'un réseau de surveillance de la qualité des eaux

En application de la Directive Cadre sur l'Eau (DCE) visant le « Bon état écologique » des milieux aquatiques, l'état des lieux du Bassin du Rhône, adopté par le comité de Bassin le 04 mars 2005, définit les masses d'eau suivantes sur le territoire du Parc :

- 3 masses d'eau pour le Rhône : Le Petit et Grand Rhône jusqu'à la limite de remontées des eaux salées, le Rhône de Beaucaire à la Méditerranée.
- 2 masses d'eau littorale : le littoral au droit du delta et le Golfe de Fos,
- 6 systèmes lagunaires : complexe Vaccarès, marais périphériques, la Palissade, les Salins de Giraud, les Salins d'Aigues-Mortes, le complexe Fourneau Cabri,
- 1 nappe d'eau souterraine : les limons et alluvions du Bas Rhône (Camargue).

L'une des principales pressions évoquées est la déstabilisation des équilibres actuels par l'intensification des pratiques agricoles, touristiques ou industrielles, qui pourrait à terme entraîner une banalisation, voire une dégradation des milieux.

ARPE a fait une annotation le Tue Feb 24 2009 10:16:00 GMT+0100 :
Mettre en place un réseau de surveillance de la qualité des eaux

Departement 13 a fait une annotation le Mon Jan 26 2009 15:19:00 GMT+0100 :

SM Palissade a fait une annotation le Mon Feb 23 2009 15:36:00 GMT+0100 :
Il n'est nulle part fait référence aux réseau de surveillance DCE lui même. Qu'en est-il de son articulation avec les préconisations faites ci-dessous ?

ARPE a fait une annotation le Tue Feb 24 2009 10:27:00 GMT+0100 :
prévoir de mettre la référence exacte "Directive 2000/60/CE du Parlement européen et du Conseil du 23 octobre 2000 établissant un cadre pour une politique communautaire dans le domaine de l'eau"

TDValat a fait une annotation le Thu Feb 19 2009 11:13:00 GMT+0100 :
Lagunaires et zones humides associées (les marais périphériques ne sont pas des lagunes)

Figure 1. Online deliberation interface screenshot

This type of annotation tool was supposed to entice the participants to read the different parts of the planning document and select the sections or proposals they wanted to comment. This possibility is particularly important for local planning processes in which the documents discussed are generally over 100 pages long. To collect complex information and evaluations of stakeholders, free flow text has been preferred to poll, although a form of pre-structured expression has been suggested: participants were asked to precise if their message was a comment or a modification proposal.

The controlled and identifying type of login (e.g. “Asso_camarguais” for “Association des camarguais”) has been chosen to create accountability and limit the need for moderation. Indeed, systematic pre or post-moderation is too expensive for this type of local government, especially if the level of participation becomes high. Moreover, censorship could have a negative impact on trust and dissuade some stakeholders to continue their participation to this long and complex planning process.

4. Hypotheses and evaluation design

In order to test our hypotheses about the benefits of this online process for stakeholder participation (4.1) we have analyzed several process and outcome variables of this online deliberation and of other similar face-to-face events with several methodological tools (4.2).

4.1. Hypotheses

We expected that this stakeholder online deliberation should have more deliberative features (e.g. speech equality) than similar face-to-face workshops, a significant impact on decision by every type of participants and organisational benefits for public managers. The definition of these process and outcome variables refers to previous research on public participation (Beierle & Konisky, 2000; Rowe & Fewer, 2004; Coleman, 2004; Price, 2006)

First, according to many results in “Computer-mediated Communication” studies (Spears & Lea, 1992; Strauss, 1996; Witschge, 2004), this online deliberation was expected to:

- decrease the concentration of speech vs. comparable face-to-face debates (% of messages and % of words by each participant and type of participant)
- decrease the “thematic specialization” of the participants (% of parts of the plan discussed by each participant and type of participant)
- without a significant increase of “flames” (e.g. blames or insults of groups or individuals).

Second, if these process features are observed, deliberative theories (Gastil & Levine, 2005) predict:

- an increased perception of satisfaction and competence gain by the participants
- more influence on decision by “lay” stakeholders (who participate and speak less than the “expert” or “professional” stakeholders in face-to-face workshops).

Third, given the limited cost of moderation, economic and organisational benefits of this online process for this type of consultation will be confirmed:

- if the organizers are satisfied with the participation rate and with the type and quantity of information and opinions gathered

- if its cost (preparation, moderation, processing) is inferior to comparable face-to-face processes

4.2. Evaluation design

To test our hypotheses, we have used several methodological tools: face-to-face interview, phone survey, workshop proceeding analysis, policy plan comparison and online post analysis. We have collected data on the online deliberation and also on two set of face-to-face workshops that could be compared to the online process (the 40 thematic meetings organized between December 2006 and July 2007 and the 16 thematic meetings organized between October and December 2008). During these workshops, approximately the same stakeholders were invited to debate about the main policies to adopt in the management plan.

First, the organizers and main “moderators” of the process have been interviewed in order to collect:

- their assessment of the workshops main features (distribution of speech, level of conflict, etc.)
- their level of satisfaction with the information gathered (in the three processes)
- their estimation of the three processes general “cost” (preparation, moderation and outline)
- and their estimation of the different stakeholders’ influence on decision

Second, a large part of the invited stakeholders (60%, n=49) have also been interviewed. Almost all the posters and around 50% of the “non-posters” have been interviewed for each type of invited stakeholders (local government representatives, public agency experts or managers, profession representatives and local association representatives). This phone survey was designed to collect:

- data on their practices (previous participations in the process, general use of Internet, level of participation in this online process)
- their assessment of the online deliberation (usability of the website, interest and diversity of the debates, level of learning on the plan and on the opinions, park governance and government)
- and the reasons why they did or did not post messages

Workshops proceedings have also been analyzed to assess more precisely the participation rate of each type of participants in each thematic meeting. The online process features (concentration of speech, proportion of flames, etc.) have been analyzed “directly” on the participation data collected online (text of the annotation, text annotated, author, etc.)

Finally we assessed the actual impact on the decision by comparing the pre-deliberation plan with the post-deliberation plan and with the annotations posted on the website. For instance:

- if a post suggests to replace: *“The park will encourage livestock in the x area”* by *“Ranching will be encouraged in the x area but intensive livestock is not compatible with the park vocation”*
- and that the second proposal replaces the first in the post-deliberation plan

- we conclude that the post had an impact on the decision.

Seven types of modification proposals have been distinguished in our analysis: “form” (syntax or spelling), “self-commitment” (a stakeholder suggest to add, modify or suppress one of his commitments), “diagnosis”, “general goal”, “park (joint union) commitment”, “action or limitation” (e.g. ban motorcycles on certain roads), “other stakeholder commitment” (a stakeholder suggest to add or modify another stakeholder’s commitment). This typology is a continuum from types of modification proposals whose impact is likely (e.g. “form” and “self-commitment”) to types of modification proposals whose impact is unlikely (e.g. “other stakeholder commitment”).

5. Main results

We first present several analyses of participative and deliberative features of the online process compared with similar face-to-face processes (5.1). Then, our evaluation of the impact on decision is detailed by types of modification proposals and by types of participants (5.2). Finally we summarize the managers’ assessments of this online process, especially concerning its organisational and economic benefits (5.3).

5.1. Participation and deliberative features

According to our survey (n=49; 60% response rate), almost 90% of the interviewees have visited the web site at least one time, even the “non-posters” (n=32). Despite this result, we can not conclude that 90% of the invited stakeholders (n=82) visited the website. Indeed, at least half of the 33 stakeholders who could not be interviewed are retired or active farmers without broadband. Our survey and managers interviews can only allow us to claim that at least 60% of the invited stakeholders have visited the website and read at least a few posts. As shown in table 2, this level of attendance is slightly better than face-to-face workshops attendance, though we do not know precisely how long most of the visitors spent on the site and how many posts they read.

The volume of posts can be considered as high (625 posts, 21 296 words, M=34 words/post) knowing that only 82 stakeholders were invited, that they had to post structured and located comments on a long document already discussed at several occasions. Nevertheless, this participation is clearly concentrated: only 20 stakeholders sent at least one post. According to our survey, the main reason for “non-posting” is the “lack of time” (37% of the “non-posters” interviewed). More interestingly, some stakeholders did not post because their opinion was “already included in the plan” (22% of the “non-posters”). The third reason is probably the length of the deliberation (38 days) which was not sufficient for some highly-structured organizations. Indeed, according to the park managers, 15 “big” stakeholders first annotate the plan in “internal meeting” and sent it by mail or email after the deadline (mostly “big” agencies and business lobbies). Our survey can

confirm this problem for at least 7 stakeholders. Finally, Internet access or website usability were a barrier for only 11% of the non-posters interviewed and 4 posters “lost” a few messages.

A first analysis of the distribution of attendance and participation show that local governments and public agencies participate more online than lobbies (cf. table 2). This pattern is also observable in traditional workshops but business representatives are particularly absent online. This under-participation has various explanations. As mentioned above, some “big” lobbies (mostly business ones) did not use the website mainly for organisational reasons whereas most of “small” lobbies (small business lobbies or cultural associations) did not participate because they had their comments “already included in the plan” or because of access problems.

	Local Governments	Agency Experts	Business lobbies	Other lobbies	Total
2009 online deliberation (38 days)					
Nbr of invited stakeholders	10	17	31	24	82
% who visited the site and read posts	> 90%	> 80%	> 40%	> 50%	> 60%
% who posted at least 1 message	60% (n=6)	30% (n=5)	10% (n=3)	27% (n=6)	24% (n=20)
2008 workshops (16 meetings)					
Nbr of invited stakeholders	10	~35	~40	25	110
% who attended at least 1 meeting	70%	46%	45%	28%	44% (M=7/ meeting)
2007 workshops (40 meetings)					
Nbr of invited stakeholders	10	~35	32	23	100
% who attended at least 1 meeting	70%	51%	44%	52%	51% (M=14/ meeting)

Table 2. Attendance level of the online process vs. similar face-to-face processes

Concerning the distribution of speech (% of messages and % of words by each participant and type of participant) and the level of “flaming”, the data collected on face-to-face events were mainly based on managers’ memories. For most of these managers, distribution of speech was “relatively equal” in the 2007 workshops but more concentrated in the 2008 workshops. In spite of the approximation of these assessments, it seems clear that the online process did not facilitate speech equality: only 20 stakeholders have posted at least one message and the 10 most active

posted 88% of the messages and 82% of the words. On the contrary, the level of flames has certainly not increased significantly: only 2 flames can be observed in the online posts.

As shown in table 3, thematic specialization has significantly been reduced. As expected, participants widely used the possibility they had to read and comment different parts of the management plan. In the face-to-face processes, only some local government representatives and a few “professional” stakeholders managed to participate to several thematic workshops. Whereas disagreement with the content of the plan is frequent, direct expression of disagreement between participants is as rare online as offline: most of posters are not interested by the same topics or try to avoid conflict. Less than 10% of the posts are linked to a common part of the plan. As in face-to-face workshops the only highly controversial issue is the possibility of a new bridge on the Rhône that oppose an inhabitant association (“pro-bridge”) to most of the other stakeholders (“anti-bridge”). This issue concentrate most of the disagreements (and agreements) expressed between stakeholders (10 posters participate to this debate), 8% of the posts and more than 28% of the words.

	2007 face-to-face workshops	2008 face-to-face workshops	2009 online deliberation
Type of Information and opinions	List of goals and possible policies (very vague)	More precisions on lobbies’ commitments (hunters, etc.)	Additional policy proposals, commitments and form modifications
Thematic specialization	Most of participants confined to one theme	Most of participants confined to one theme	90% of posters talk about most of the themes
Expression of disagreements	Very rare according to the moderators, except on one issue (the “bridge” issue)	Rare (the workshops were homogenous: hunters with hunters, etc.)	40% of messages disagree with the content of the plan <5 % of messages disagree with another poster

Table 3. Deliberative features of the online process vs. similar face-to-face processes

Finally, we also assessed some deliberative outcomes of this online process with our survey. These outcomes only concern the interviewed stakeholders who read at least several posts (n=22). More than 77% found the debate interesting and 68% claim that the opinions expressed were enough “diverse”. In spite of these statements, knowledge gains do not seem important: only 50% claimed that the online process increased their knowledge on other participants’ opinions and 41% on the management plan.

5.2. Impact on decision

According to the process managers, *“almost all the proposals precisely formulated have been included in the new draft of the management plan”* and *“common goals and policy proposals have also been included if no explicit disagreement was expressed by other participants”*. Our analysis confirms only partially these claims (cf. Table 4). A large majority (69%) of the modification proposals (n=494) have been accepted. However most of the accepted proposals are “form correction” and “self-commitment” (e.g. a local government proposes to modify its “voluntary” commitment to collect data on water quality). General goal proposals are often accepted (61%) but “policy proposals” (limitations or collective actions) are generally not accepted even if no disagreement is expressed on the web site. Moreover, most of the park commitment or collective actions accepted are vague and mainly concern production of information, technical assistance and consultation. The impact on the decision is thus clearly related to the type of proposal, its degree of “vagueness” and its controversial potential.

	Local governments	Agency experts	Professional lobbies	Lay lobbies	Total
Nbr of modification proposals	172	76	193	53	494
% accepted	78%	70%	69%	34%	(69%)
Nbr of “form correction”	12	25	48	3	88
% accepted	92%	88%	77%	100%	(83%)
Nbr of “self-commitment”	97	16	15	7	135
% accepted	91%	95%	93%	86%	(91%)
Nbr of “diagnosis”	14	12	32	5	63
% accepted	64%	67%	78%	0%	(67%)
Nbr of “general goal”	16	7	27	16	66
% accepted	81%	57%	63%	38%	(61%)
Nbr of “park commitment”	23	10	45	3	81
% accepted	52%	40%	64%	33%	(57%)

					(%)
Nbr of “collective action or limitation”	3	2	10	17	32
% accepted	0%	50%	40%	6%	(19%)
Nbr of “other stakeholder commitment”	7	4	16	2	29
% accepted	29%	0%	50%	50%	(38%)

Table 4. Impact on decision of seven types of posts by four types of stakeholders

The impact on decision also varies according to the type of stakeholder involved. The first reason is the distribution of proposal types: public agencies proposals are mainly “form corrections” or “self-commitment” whereas “lay” lobbies or associations generally propose to add or modify policy goals or collective actions (e.g. to build a new bridge or ban genetically modified organisms).

The second reason is the “status” of the stakeholder: more or less “institutionally” powerful and more or less in a minority. For instance, the leading residents association tries to influence the “bridge issue” despite its minority position and its lack of power. The other leading opponent (the city of “Saintes-Marie de la Mer”) has more impact on decision certainly because the management plan has to be signed by its mayor. Still, most of its proposals have not been included in the plan. Inversely the main “professional stakeholder” poster (“La tour du Valat”, 206 posts) has the largest impact on decision. It is a well funded ecological association with many experts who work frequently with the park representatives. They are one of the main participants to the workshops since 2006. This association is also “pro-park” and “anti-bridge”. They produce a lot of useful expertise on the Camargue county and during the online process at least four of its experts have read and annotated every chapter of the management plan. These features probably explain that 71% of their 162 modification proposals have been accepted and that their “collective action” or “other stakeholder commitment” proposals had more impact on decision than most of the local governments’ proposals.

5.3. Organisational and economic benefits

The process managers claimed that they are satisfied with the participation rate and with the type and quantity of information and opinions gathered. Many additional comments, proposals and form corrections have been collected (625 posts and 494 modification proposals) with a limited cost and without a flame increase. The total cost of this online process (preparation, moderation and processing) is clearly inferior to the usual cost of a comparable face-to-face consultation. The total costs estimated by the park managers are approximately:

- 30 000€ for the 40 workshops organized between December 2006 and July 2007 (~590€ per participant “who attended at least 1 meeting”, with an average of 14 participant per meeting)
- 15 000€ for the 16 workshops organized between October and December 2008 (~305€ per participant “who attended at least 1 meeting”, with an average of 7 participants per meeting)
- 5 000€ for the online deliberation organized in February 2009 (~100€ per participant “who read at least a few posts”).

Most of the online deliberation cost was for the processing: the posts analysis and the “integration process” (i.e. the bargaining between public managers and park representatives on “what proposal should be integrated in the plan with which wording”). Despite this result, the leading public manager emphasized that the annotation system induced the posters to “locate” their comment in the text and consequently allowed an easier “integration process”.

6. Conclusion

The online deliberation evaluated in this article targeted approximately 80 stakeholders who were invited to give their opinion on the management plan project of the Camargue Park. Given the main institutional features and goals of this type of public participation (selected and non-anonymous stakeholders, long and complex document, etc.) the Internet device tested was a website with an annotation tool, a controlled login and a “slight” moderation. We expected that this stakeholder online deliberation would have more deliberative features than similar face-to-face workshops, a significant impact on decision by every type of participants and organisational benefits for public manager. Our results confirm most of the expected organizational benefits: many additional policy proposals and form corrections have been collected with a limited cost and without flames. Several “deliberative” benefits have also been observed: most of the invited participants have visited the web site and read some posts, most of the “readers” found the debate interesting and most of the posters expressed themselves on every chapter of the plan without an increase of flames. On the opposite, speech is apparently more concentrated than in face-to-face events (even if many “non-posters” did not post because they had “*all their comments already included*”) and expression of disagreement between participants is as avoided as in face-to-face workshops. A majority of the proposals posted during this online deliberation had an impact on the new version of the plan. This result could be expected considering the type of participant selection chosen (Coleman, 2004; Grönlund & Aström, 2009). Yet, most of the “policy proposals” on precise collective goals or actions were not accepted. The “lay” stakeholders impact the decision but less than local government and highly professional (and more consensual) associations

Globally, it seems likely that the “basic” Internet tool proposed had several benefits. For this type of online participation a moderation tool is not useful and online polls would have decrease the information gain for organizers. Regarding interfaces and tools, several improvements of the website usability have been asked and cartographic annotation could probably enhance participation and deliberative features. Nevertheless, the key for a wider and more deliberative online planning is clearly “institutional”. The length, complexity and “vagueness” of this type of management plan were probably the main barriers for most of the non-participants. Most of the issues are clearly not “salient” (Pratchett & al., 2009), most of the goals or actions proposed in this plan are not quantified and most of the “strategic” decisions (bridge and road projects, farming incentives, urban limitations, etc.) were not to be taken during this procedure. In further assessments of this type of participative e-governance process, several methodological barriers should be overcome. For instance, direct observation of similar face-to-face events could improve the comparison of speech concentration, disagreement expression and impact on decision. Our knowledge of online designs effectiveness for public deliberation would also be improved by studies of processes using different online interfaces and tools in identical or similar institutional and social contexts.

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Mapping the Practice of Online Deliberation

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Abstract. Scholars and practitioners are increasingly employing online tools to implement public deliberation. Although these endeavors share a general understanding of deliberation, they vary in important ways. In this research I focus on the concept of deliberation underlying the practice of online deliberation. I argue that varying designs of online deliberation convey different ways of understanding deliberative democracy. The study seeks to gain insight about the theory of democracy underlying the practice of online deliberation. Based on a sample of fourteen websites that are currently facilitating deliberation, I examine the goals attributed to deliberation, the nature of the deliberative process, and the roles attributed to citizens, communities and institutions in this process. The analysis illuminates a distinction between host websites and convener websites, and demonstrates how these two types of websites differ in the concept of deliberation that they convey. The research concludes with directions for further inquiry.

1 Introduction

The integration of the web in contemporary life opened up new opportunities for citizens to engage in public deliberation, leading scholars and practitioners to develop and apply web-based software to implement public deliberation online (Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Shane, 2004). These endeavors range from academic experiments (Price & Cappella, 2002) and online deliberative polling (Iyengar, Luskin, & Fishkin, 2003), to policy deliberations (Coleman, 2004; Smith, John, Sturgis & Hisako, 2009), community initiatives (Dahlberg, 2001), newspaper forums (Tanner, 2001), transnational deliberation (Nanz & Steffek, 2005), and engaging citizens in the planning of public space (Gordon & Manosevitch, 2010).

These endeavors share two key premises. First, the premise that deliberative public discussion is key to healthy public life (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Second, the belief that the unique characteristics of the web could help mitigate barriers to deliberation and thereby broaden the reach and effectiveness of deliberative democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Coleman & Gotze, 2001). Yet significant differences between the websites in the particulars of their work. The goal of this research is to gain broader understanding of online deliberation forums as an emerging arena in the practice of deliberative democracy. My focus is on the theory of democracy underlying these endeavors. Specifically I examine the goals attributed to deliberation, the nature of the deliberative process, and the roles attributed to citizens, communities and institutions in this process. Based on a sample of fourteen websites that are currently facilitating deliberation, this report offers a critical analysis of the practice of online deliberation.

2. Theoretical argument

Research on the political qualities of the Internet has evolved from an initial optimism that the web would open up an array of opportunities for citizen involvement (e.g. Dahlgren, 2000). This continued to a key debate about the political value of the web, with some scholars pointing to evidence of deliberative online discussions (Wilhelm, 2000), and others pointing to issues of flaming, homophile and fragmentation that impede upon the potential of the Internet to harness democracy (e.g. Davis, 1999). In recent years, scholarship has taken a more nuanced approach, examining different types of public spheres within the Internet (Dahlberg, 2007), and making qualified statements about the potential of the Internet as a whole. The debate moved from pointing to specific examples in support of varying macro-level evaluation of the internet, to a more nuanced approach that seeks to evaluate different types of online spaces, and their unique qualities and effects.

A major area of inquiry in this context is the question of the technical and organizational architecture of the discussion space (Wright & Street, 2007; Janssen & Kies, 2005; Coleman et al., 2008). This line of research is premised on the view that the Internet can foster effective deliberative discussions. However, this is not a necessary disposition of the hardware or software. It needs to be facilitated. As argued by Wright and Street (2007) "The democratic possibilities opened up (or closed off) by websites are not a product of the technology as such, but of the ways in which it is constructed, by the way it is designed." (p. 850). In other words, the potential of the internet to embed deliberative democracy lies not in the medium itself. Rather, it is the way by which the internet is used that will determine the extent to which the web could facilitate inclusive and effective public deliberation. For example, research finds that a-synchronic forums are more adapted to host deliberative debates than synchronous discussion spaces. While anonymity can help promote a safer and more open discussion, it is also the primary factor that undermines the deliberative potential of the Internet, because it seems to cause a "general lack of civility" (Barber, Matson, & Peterson, 1997). Other significant design factors are rules and moderation style (Jensen, 2003; Wright & Street, 2007).

Design matters for the quality of talk generated in an online space. But design matters in a deeper sense as well. The way by which deliberation is designed determines who participates, in what way, what topics are discussed and for what purpose (Fung, 2003; McAfee, 2004; Ryfe, 2005). Most importantly, design determines the political outcomes that public deliberation efforts are able to pursue (Fung, 2003).

Deliberative theory of democracy is broad. The goals attributed to public deliberation range from informed citizenry (Zaller, 1994; Ryfe, 2002), and informed public opinion (Fishkin, 1995), to mobilizing citizens for participating in the creation of public policy (Biaocchi, 2001; 2004). The expectations from citizens also vary. From providing informed public opinion (Fishkin, 2005), to working through issues together (Mathews, 1999).

Taken together, the design of online deliberation reflects a particular understanding of the deliberative theory of democracy, and by consequences determines the nature of the process. In this paper I think about design in the broad sense. Not the technical features used by websites, but the design of the deliberation process that the websites offer. In essence, the design of online deliberation conveys an understanding of deliberative theory of democracy.

The goal of this research is to map out the practice of online deliberation in terms of the theory of democracy underlying it. The driving hypothesis of is that varying design choices chosen for online deliberation reflect varying conceptions of deliberative democracy, specifically the goal of public deliberation, the role of citizens and institutions in this process, and the nature of public deliberation. In turn, such design choices affect the possible consequence that such deliberation is able to achieve. Identifying the theory of democracy underlying online deliberation endeavors could help illuminate the possibilities of the current practice, and directions for further development.

Defining online deliberation websites: Online deliberation is a broad concept that has been used to refer to political discourse that occurs in an array of virtual spaces including blogs, chats, message boards, web-based consultation forums, political forums, online news space, and more. In this research I focus on online deliberation websites. Based on Janssen & Kies (2005) I define these as spaces of discussion that are hosted on the web and have been created for the purpose of fostering deliberative public discussion about public issues.

3. Research design

The sample: A snowball method was used to identify websites that would qualify for the study, combining a Google search and a review of scholarly literature¹. Sample websites met two criteria (1) their primary and explicit purpose is to engage citizens in public discussion of issues; and (2) they were not confined to a particular issue, community, or geographic location. Not included were blogs, because though they may evolve into group discussion, public deliberation is not their identifying feature or primary function. Similarly, the sample did not include forums found on websites as a by product, or a secondary service or initiative, such as forums found on websites of professional organizations, government institutions, corporations, and newspapers. Altogether the 14 websites were included: America Speaks.org, Viewpoint Learning.org, E-the people.org, E-Democracy.org, Do Tank, Web Lab, Dialogue Circles, Truth Mapping, Open-Space Online, By the People, DroppingKnowledge, OnlineGroups.Net, and Soliya's Connect Program.

Method: The analysis is based on an overview of the content posted on the sample websites during the months of October 2008 - May 2009. Specifically, the analysis focused on (1) content posted on the websites' About page, in particular their mission statement and declared goals, (2) descriptions of the intended goals of the forums, and (3) guidelines and rules for initiating and participating in the forums. The study did not examine the content of specific conversations within the forums.

4. Analysis

The analysis suggests two broad distinctions that are useful to understand the variance in online deliberation forums. First, a distinction between websites

¹ A useful resource for identifying websites was the National Coalition for Dialogues and Deliberation which offers a list of online deliberation projects on its website.

according to the primary role that they take in the deliberation process. I distinguish between websites that host deliberation, and those that convene deliberation. Second, a distinction between the primary goal driving the websites. Here I distinguish between websites driven primarily by the goal of reinvigorating democracy, and those that view themselves primarily as a service or software providers (Results are summarized in Table 1). Following is a detailed explanation of each distinction, findings are discussed under the varying dimensions of the deliberation process: The goal attributed to deliberation, the role attributed to citizens and institutions in the process, the nature of the process, and the implementation of online tools (results summarized in Table 2).

a. Primary Role of the Website in the Deliberation Process: Host or Convener?

Hosts are websites that provide the space, the tools and the guidance needed for deliberation. They enable the process, encourage it and support it, but do not initiate or convene deliberation, and do not take any active part in the deliberation occurring in their forums. The analysis identified seven host websites: E-Democracy, E-the People, Democracy Lab, TruthMapping, dropping knowledge, openspace online and online groups.net.

Looking specifically at each site, E-Democracy it provides free virtual space and software for communities to create online forums. The website also provides detailed information and guidelines to assist the process, including a guidebook for initiators of forums, an hour long webinar, a wiki and a blog for participants to share ideas. However, the site does not initiate public deliberation, and does not take any active part in the actual forums. Similarly, E.thePeople provides free virtual space and software for citizens to initiate deliberative discussions and invites citizens to take part. But, the website does not initiate or facilitate any of the discussions occurring on its platform.

Democracy Lab asks citizens to register to "get involved." Registered users can start a discussion, create a document and invite friends. Upon registration, the website sends an automatic reply email with definitions for four concepts that are needed for effective use of discussion opportunities within DemocracyLab, including: tagging, discussions, documents and blogs. But here too the website does not initiate topics or discussions, nor does it take action to lead or direct discussions.

OpenSpace Online offers its web-conference method as a service for purchase by interested parties to purchase. Once the service is purchased from the website, the process led by the user in its entirety. For example, the description of the Single conference on demand model, the website states that "...organizers can then plan, organize, and prepare their own OpenSpace-Online meetings independently, simply and quickly." (Ender, 2005, 17)

In droppingknowledge public discussions are based on questions posed by users from around the world. The website provides a list of 24 possible themes, and within each theme an array of possible topics. Within this structure, users are free to pose questions and provide answers to any questions already posed. Again, the website does not pose any questions, or provide content under any of the questions posed by users.

Truthmapping too does not initiate or lead discussions. Rather, the software provided by the website is a-priori designed to yield a rational discussion. The website provides an overview for the discussion process that is offered, and explanations how the software overcomes common barriers for effective online

discussions. However, the website does not initiate discussions, or participate in them. Rather, for online discussion to take place, users need to add topics or comments to existing topics, and, if desired, users can form teams for discussions of their choice.

Online groups.net also provides software and web space for groups to create websites for discussion and sharing of information. The website provides the steps necessary for starting a website, an online "tour" that demonstrates the process, example case studies of groups that have been using the process, a brief explanations of benefits, and a list of features offered by the process, and frequently asked questions. As in the other host website, onlinegroups.net does not initiate any deliberative process, but offers its software as a service for users to apply as desired.

In sum, all seven host websites offer the software and the web space necessary to implement online group discussion, as well as guidelines and the theoretical rationale to justify the importance of their endeavor. However, none of the websites initiate or take part in actual deliberation that occurs on their site.

Conveners are websites that not only enable online deliberation by providing the necessarily tools and support. They take the leading role in the process, and make it happen. These are websites of organizations that take it upon themselves to initiate, plan and lead the process of deliberation. Here, citizens cannot initiate a discussion of their choice. Rather, participation is determined by the organization and monitored by it. The analysis identified seven websites that correspond to this category: AmericaSpeaks, Viewpoint Learning, Public Voice, Soliya's Connect Program, Ascentum and WebLab. These organizations are not confined to a particular issue or community. Their projects vary in topic and geographic location. Although these convener websites work in collaboration with a wide range of private and public institutions, they lead the deliberative effort in its entirety.

To illustrate, AmericaSpeaks has created a national infrastructure that is designed to link public input on policy questions with decision-makers. Each deliberation project is initiated, planned and managed by the organization. Citizens join the actual discussion, but the topic for discussion, the recruitment process, and the duration and structure of deliberation are all determined by America Speaks. Similarly, Viewpoint Learning offers its method as a service to clients. Topics here are selected by the clients, but the deliberation process is initiated, planned and managed by the organization.

Soliya's Connect Program also facilitated a structured process—a curriculum—designed for college classrooms to follow. Interested college professors choose to join the program, but the curriculum is pre-planned by Soliya, and structured to fit the semester timeline. Finally, By the People conducts online deliberative polling, where the organization determines the issue topic, and the questions to be addressed in the actual deliberations. Furthermore, By the People recruits participants, randomly divides them to groups, and sets the time frame and duration of each discussion.,

The distinction between hosts and conveners is important because it is a key characteristic that conveys the differences in the concept of democracy that these websites convey. In particular this distinction helps explain differences in the roles attributed to citizens, communities and institutions in the process of deliberation. As I elaborate below, hosts convey a citizen centered approach to online deliberation, while conveners take a more institution centered approach to this process.

b. Primary goal of the website: Democracy Driven or Service Provider?

Democracy driven websites those websites that are driven primarily by ideals of the deliberative theory of democracy. They seek to strengthen democratic life by promoting constructive public discourse. These websites are usually run by non-profit and often foundation-based organizations, which share the overarching goal of reinvigorating democracy. For example, E-Democracy, E.the People, America Speaks, By the People, and Democracy Lab. For example, E-Democracy states on its About page that it builds online public space in the heart of real democracy and community. E-the People states that it "is a public forum for democratic and deliberative discussion... that allows members to have maximum control over the topics and frames for discussion..." AmericaSpeaks indicates that its mission is to reinvigorate American Democracy by engaging citizens in the public decision-making that most impacts their lives.

The transnational websites examined here are also driven by ideals associated with deliberative democracy, but they use the language of dialogue and understanding. This makes sense when thinking in global terms, and extending the idea of deliberative democracy beyond national borders. The core of deliberative theory is the importance of talk and conversation for obtaining mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. For example, dropping knowledge—an international project based in the USA and Germany, hosts a worldwide exchange of ideas about pressing issues from around the world. The website highlights the importance of communication, and the power of multimedia in inspiring new thinking. Another example is Soliya's Connect Program which facilitates online dialogues between students from the US and predominantly Muslim countries. Soliya also explains that their goal is to provide young adults with the skills, knowledge and relationships they need to develop a nuanced understanding of the issues that divide them. Their ultimate goal is to "empower young adults to play a constructive role in creating a more informed, just and peaceful global society."

Service providers are those websites that are run by organizations or companies in which their primary drive is to provide online deliberation as a service. These are mostly for-profit private organizations. In this category I include Web Lab, Ascentum, Truth Mapping, and Open-Space Online. In practice, it is common for democracy driven organizations to collaborate with service-providers (or buy their services) to implement deliberation. For example, America Speaks collaborated with Web Lab to facilitate online deliberation in their project titled "Listening with the City," and with Information Renaissance² in their online deliberation project "Americans Discuss Social Security." Therefore, how service-providers understand the ideals of deliberative democracy, and how they translate these ideas to computer mediated communication, is detrimental to the nature and outcome of the deliberative process they offer.

² Information Renaissance is a nonprofit corporation that also employs online tools to facilitate citizen deliberation. The website currently appears to be inactive, and therefore was not included in the sample.

Table 1. Primary role of the website by primary goal

Website type	Host	Convener
Democracy Driven	E-Democracy e-thePeople DemocracyLab Truth Mapping droppingknowledge	America Speaks Viewpoint Learning BythePeople Soliya's Connect Program
Service Provider	OpenSpaceOnline Online groups.net	Ascentum WebLab

Goal of deliberation: informed citizenry, engaged public, public policy, education?

Convener websites implement a pragmatic approach that views public deliberation as a means of engaging the public in the process of thinking through issues, and thereby promote informed citizenry and public opinion. These sites usually make the link between the public and policy makers, and assure that public opinion generated from the deliberation is reported to policy makers. For example, America Speaks' project titled "Listening to the City" facilitated a two-week online dialogue with 800 citizens of New York about rebuilding Lower Manhattan post 9/11. The results of deliberations were conveyed to key government organization involved in developing the area, who expressed a commitment to consider citizens recommendations as expressed in the project (The Civic Alliance, 2002). A similar project was Voices for Healthcare undertaken by Viewpoint Learning. Again the project was geared toward generating informed public opinion with a commitment to share the results with policy makers (Furth, Gantwerk & Rosell, 2009). A third example are online deliberative polling convened by By the People. Here a representative sample of the population is brought together to discuss issues and then answer an opinion survey about the issue. The goal is to reveal what citizens would think about the issue if they became more informed about it and talked about it with a diverse group of fellow citizens. A recent example is "Citizenship in the 21st Century," where a representative sample of the population discussed the meaning of citizenship and democracy in modern American society. These discussions were disseminated on the web and broadcasted on PBS.

Host websites include both U.S. based organizations and international organizations. The common thread among these organizations is that they all speak of online deliberation primarily as a means to promote public discussion and public understanding of issues. But their particular goals vary. On the narrow end of the spectrum is E-the People, a U.S. based organization that provides space and tools for online public deliberation. The stated goal is promoting intelligent, diverse and deliberative discussion which is not necessarily confined to a particular issue or community focus, and not aimed at an outcome beyond the conversation³.

On the other end of the spectrum is E-Democracy which takes a broad view of public deliberation. It does not suffice with promoting informed discourse and understanding, but views online deliberation as a means of helping communities to work through issues, and ultimately strengthen communities and society at large.

International organizations that facilitate online deliberation are driven primarily by the goal of raising understanding and awareness of issues among people from

³ The primary goal of the website is discussion of issues. But, the website also offers citizens an opportunity to initiate and join petitions and polls.

around the globe. For example, Soliya's Connect Program focuses on the relationship between the U.S and the Arab and Muslim world. Dropping knowledge facilitates open worldwide discussion of issues. The aim is to foster worldwide exchange of views, ideas and "people powered solutions" on any issue from around the globe, in particular issues that are underrepresented in the media. (Table 2)

The role of citizens, communities and institutions in democracy

Host websites take a passive role in deliberation. Although their *raison d'être* is the existence of online deliberation forums, they do not take active steps in initiating forums, maintaining them or participating in them. Deliberation, as prescribed by hosts requires citizens' initiative. Simply put, in these websites online deliberation will not occur unless an individual steps up to initiate and drive the process. This reality conveys a citizen centered approach to democracy, where citizens' voices guide the entire deliberative process. As E-thePeople.org explicitly states, "aimed at a creating of citizen-centric public spaces on the Internet."

For example, In E-Democracy deliberation occurs in community based forums. Citizens must create a forum, recruit participate and follow other steps for the forum to occur. In E-thePeople and droppingknowledge discussions begin with user's action. In E-thePeople, registered users start a discussion, in droppingknowledge users pose a question. Neither organizations initiates any of the deliberations that appear on their sites.

Convener websites take an active role in the deliberation process. They seek broad and representative groups of citizens, and employ a variety of deliberation tools in each of their projects This approach suggests a limited role for citizens. It suggests that an effective deliberative process requires a large scope initiative which necessary requires much funding, planning and structure. Citizens are expected to engage with others in thinking about issues, and sharing knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. But citizens are not expected to take an active role in making the process happen, sustaining it or taking the steps that are needed to translate deliberation into action or public policy. For example, America Speaks states that it "gives citizens an authentic voice in local, regional and national decision-making ..." In other words, it is America Speaks that provides citizens with the opportunity to voice their mind, and not the citizens that initiate or enable this process. (Table 2)

5. The deliberation process

Convener websites take a highly structured approach to the deliberation process. Online deliberation in these websites has specified stages, a predefined desired outcome, and a timeline. For example, in Voices for Healthcare, a project convened by Viewpoint Learning, the pre-planned online dialogue began with "personal deliberation" in which participants were directed to spend 20-30 minutes online with an interactive choice book to create their own vision for health care. The next stage was an online discussion with other citizens. Here again deliberation was highly structured. The number of participants was predetermined to be 30-50, and the duration of the discussion was confined to a one-week timeframe on designated dates (Furth et al., 2009). In another project involving America Speaks, 3000 citizens deliberated online discussion about ways to benefit from Health IT while

safeguarding privacy. Here too the process was planned by the organizers, limiting it to one issue-topic, one-week time frame, with the ideas generated being summarized in a report delivered to public officials (NAPA, 2009).

Host websites offer a process which is organic in nature. It begins with a citizen's initiative, does not require a plan or a predetermined structure, and does not specify a desired outcome or timeline beyond the broad goals attributed to deliberation by the website. The issue topic is initiated by citizens, named and framed by citizens, and evolves organically through the deliberative process. This is true for all host websites examined in this research.

For example, in E-Democracy citizens start an online community forum that is not restricted to any particular topic. Once the forum is created, forum members may raise topics for discussions. The discussions are not predefined or pre-planned. There is no limit to the duration of a particular discussion, nor is there a defined set of questions or issue frames. Rather, deliberations evolve organically as participants lead it via their participation. Similarly, in E-the People, discussions are initiated by citizens, and can evolve in varying directions according to subsequent citizen contributions. In droppingknowledge again discussions are initiated by citizens, and topics evolve from questions that citizens pose. Here too the deliberative process evolves organically, both in content and duration, according to the contributions of interested citizens. The only structure provided by the site is a list of topics and sub-topics from which people can choose. But the range of topics is broad and comprehensive, and therefore this structure serves as an organization tool and does not confine the deliberation content.

In all of the host websites the process does not entail a specified product that the discussion must yield. In most cases, there are no reports that summarize citizen voices, and no direct link with public officials. (Table 2)

Online, face to face or both? Some websites restrict deliberation to the online medium, while others take an integrated approach where online deliberation is used in combination with other means of engagement. Within the online medium I found websites that adhere to one type of online tool, and others that integrate a combination of varying online formats, including online synchronic meetings, online a-synchronic written conversations, and online written choice book.

Most of the host websites stick to the online medium as the single tool they provide for deliberation. This includes E-Democracy.org, E-the People. Similarly, and as expected due to geographical constraints, transnational deliberation is confined to the online medium, yet these websites integrate varying online formats to enrich the deliberation process. For example, Soliya's Connect Program uses video conferencing technology where small groups of university students from the US and the Middle East meet weekly. Dropping knowledge uses film clips as a means to instigate public deliberation and enhance understanding of issues that are removed from the daily lives of many citizens from around the globe.

Convener websites such as America Speaks, Viewpoint Learning, and By the People take an integrated approach in implementing deliberation. They integrate a variety of models, both online and offline, and thereby offer a deliberative process that involves a population that is large both in the number and type of groups that it represents. For example, in a project called "Voices and Choices" America Speaks in collaboration with 80 foundations facilitated citizen deliberation about ways to secure the economy of Northeast Ohio. The project combined individual interviews, group workshops, online forums, online choice books and town meetings, and engaged

about 21,000 citizens in deliberations about the region's strengths and challenges, and possible directions for solutions (Voices & Choices, 2006).

Table 2. Role of citizens and institutions, structure of deliberation by primary role of the website

Role of the website	Host	Convener
Primary goal of deliberation		
Education	Dropping knowledge	Soliya's Connect Program
Informed public discussion	TruthMapping E-the people E-Democracy	
Informed public opinion	Democracy Lab	By the People
Working through issues in local communities	E-Democracy	
Affecting public policy		America Speaks Viewpoint Learning OpenSpaceOnline Online groups.net
Key driver of the deliberation process		
Citizens	E-Democracy E-the people Democracy Lab TruthMapping Dropping knowledge OpenSpaceOnline Online groups.net	
Institutions		America Speaks Viewpoint Learning By the People Soliya's Connect Program Ascentum WebLab
Nature of the process		
Organic	E-Democracy E-the people Democracy Lab TruthMapping Dropping knowledge OpenSpaceOnline Online groups.net	
Structured and planned		America Speaks Viewpoint Learning By the People Soliya's Connect Program Ascentum WebLab

Among service providers we find both approaches. WebLab, OpenSpace Online, TruthMapping.com, and OnlineGroups.Net are confined to online deliberation, while Ascentum offers a deliberation process that integrates both online and face-to-face formats.

6. Concluding remarks

This research offers a distinction between hosts and conveners, and demonstrates how these two types of websites differ in the concept of deliberation that they convey. In short, hosts follow a citizen centered approach to democracy. Accordingly they take a passive role in deliberation, and offer a process that is organic in nature. Conveners follow an institution centered approach to democracy, with citizens' role limited to providing substantive input but designed to have an actual impact on public policy. Accordingly these websites take an active role in the process—although not in the discussions themselves—, and offer a deliberative process that is highly planned and structured.

Differences found make sense. If citizens are at the center, it makes sense that the website would take a passive role, and that the suggested deliberative process is not pre-planned or pre-structured. Similarly, if institutions are at the center, and the perceived goal of deliberation is effective and timely results, then it again makes sense that the website (or the organization behind it) would take an active role and offer a process that is highly planned and structured.

Both approaches, I argue, are productive for a democratic society. Citizen-centered approach empowers citizens to raise issues and work through them together. The organic nature of the process creates the potential to for a genuine public voice to emerge, not only in voicing opinions but in raising issues, naming and framing them. It opens an opportunity for exploration and creative problem solving process that accounts for citizens' perspectives and interests. It also provides a space for communities to bond through discussion, and enhance their social capital. This bottom up process by definition accommodates to the character and needs of the community involved. Citizens are not pressed to discuss issues during a limited time frame as they are in convener websites, and are not constrained to top-bottom dictated questions and frames.

Yet the strengths of the citizen centered approach are also their caveat. Lay citizens have limited resources, and may not be able to meet the demands of certain issue contexts. For example, in "Listening to the City," the highly structured deliberation process convened by America Speaks enabled thousands of citizens to take part in a public process of thinking together about the design of a significant public space. Citizens' voices were limited, *but* they were heard. These citizens felt empowered, they connected with other citizens, and their aggregated opinion was shared with city designers. In other words, institutional centered approach to online deliberation—as practiced by convener websites—enables a fairly efficient process of engaging a broad range of citizens in the discussion of issues, and generating informed public opinion that may affect policy.

This research is based on a content analysis of the sample websites. It provides important insight on the theory underlying the varying endeavors offered by the sample websites, but it cannot account for how citizens who participate in these deliberations understand deliberation, its goals and effects. Another limitation regards the question of effects. Archun Fung (2003) points to the implications of design options on possible outcomes that deliberation may yield. He argues that illuminating variations in designs and their corresponding outcomes is important for practitioners who seek effects. Future research may undertake a multi-method approach, supplementing content analyses with survey or interview data to gain insight on the impact of website structure on participants' understanding of the

practice of online deliberation. Research may also expand the analysis to investigate how varying design options may contribute to democratic governance.

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Appendix 1: Description of sample websites⁴

America Speaks (<http://www.americaspeaks.org/>) is a non profit national organization, whose mission is to promote informed citizenry that affects the public policy. America Speaks works in collaboration with other organizations and institutions, and integrates a variety of models, both online and offline, to engage the public in deliberation.

Ascentum <http://www.ascentum.ca> is a private Canadian consulting firm that provides tools for consultation and dialogue for both the private and the public sector. Their tool may be customized to accommodate varied numbers of participants, from 10s to 1000s. Their dialogue process combines a variety of tools, online and offline, synchronous and asynchronous discussions, and a mix of both.

By the People: Online deliberative polling <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/btp/>

Is a project implemented by the Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. By the People conducts online deliberative polling in which a representative sample of the population is brought together to discuss issues after which they answer an opinion survey about the issue. The goal is to reveal what citizens would think about the issue if only they became more informed about it and talked about it with a diverse group of fellow citizens. The online deliberative polling is done in collaboration with Polimetrix, a public opinion firm, and it combines real time online meetings and weekly text-based discussions.

E-Democracy.org <http://e-democracy.org/> (formally Minnesota E-democracy) is a nonprofit citizen-based organization whose mission is to improve citizen participation in democracy via the use of information networks and communication technologies. Established in 1994, their ongoing focus is on the use of online forums to improve citizen participation in governance in their local communities. The website currently hosts issue forums for communities in the U.S., U.K. and New Zealand. They provide extensive training materials and guidelines for citizens interested in hosting forums, and provide the software and the web space needed to do so. They also sponsor election-year online partnerships to promote citizen access to election information and interaction.

E-the People <http://www.e-thepeople.org/> is an online public forum for democratic deliberative conversation that seeks to promote intelligent, diverse and deliberative discussions. The forum is operated by the Democracy Project, a nonprofit organization aimed at creating a citizen centric public space on the internet. The website is designed in a way that allows members to select topics and frames of discussion. The goal is promoting intelligent discussion which is not confined to a community focus, and not necessarily aimed at an outcome beyond the conversation.

Democracy Lab www.teachingdemocracy.org is Democracy Lab provides online forums for use in high school and college classroom. NIF style forums run for ten weeks, corresponding to the academic school year. Students dialogue in small groups and are guided in a process that takes them from dialogue to inquiry and action. Since 2010, the program has been taken offline due to financial considerations, but curricula materials are still available on the sit.

dropping knowledge

<http://www.droppingknowledge.org/bin/projects/archive.page> is a global initiative originally based in Germany and the U.S.A. with the goal of turning apathy into

⁴ Descriptions are based on information provided on the organizations' websites.

activity. By hosting an open conversation on pressing issues as articulated by citizens from around the world, the organization seeks to foster a worldwide exchange of viewpoints, ideas and “people-powered” solutions. Dropping Knowledge believes that questions, values, new technology and visual communication can be powerful catalysts for that change. They use films to raise awareness and discussion of underrepresented issues from around the globe.

OnlineGroups <http://onlinegroups.net/> offers groups free websites that serve as a list server and a message board with file-sharing and chat. Based in New Zealand, the website strives to make collaboration easy and overcome barriers to collaboration that result from different work schedules, geographic location and computer systems. They express their priority as “making it easy for people to get their work done, while protecting their privacy.”

OpenSpace Online - www.openspace-online.com is a private for-profit firm, that sells software designed to facilitate online deliberation in a variety of settings. Developed by Gabriela Ender and her team from Germany, the internet real-time methodology OpenSpace-Online, seeks to promote autonomous, responsible, respectful, and results oriented collaboration. Available in German and English, the Internet conference method features successive phases in which 5 to 75 people can work simultaneously. Participants work together with a goal and solution oriented manner for 2 to about 8 hours.

Soliya's Connect Program <http://www.soliya.net> is a non-profit transnational organization that uses web-based videoconferencing technology to facilitate dialogue between students from diverse background across the globe. The flagship program, the Connect Program, uses web-conferencing to bridge the gap between university students in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and the United States. The goal is to provide students the opportunity, skills, and tools to shape and articulate their own viewpoints on some of the most pressing global issues facing their generation. Connect Program is facilitated by a cross-cultural team of young leaders drawn from more than 25 countries. 18-hour facilitation training course is provided via Soliya's custom-made web-conferencing application. The training provides facilitators with collaborative leadership and conflict resolution skills that they can use both via Soliya's programs and in other contexts at a local, regional, and global level.

TruthMapping <http://truthmapping.com> is a free online tool that provides a focused, rational method for adversarial discussion that overcomes the limitations of standard message boards, e-mail and even conversation. The website states that they are designed for people who believe that reasoning should be at the heart of public debate. The declared goal of is to elevate the level of public discourse

Viewpoint Learning <http://www.viewpointlearning.com/> is an organization that offers a variety of tools to engage groups in dialogues to meet varying needs, both in the public and the business sector. The online dialogue consists of two components: An Interactive Survey in which participants work individually on a series of choices and tradeoffs surrounding the issue of focus; and a Small Group Dialogue in which participants are randomly assigned to groups that work together through the issue with the purpose of finding common ground. The online dialogue uses software created by WebLab.

Web Lab Small Group Dialogue Process (SGD) <http://www.weblab.org/home.html>

Web Lab is a non-profit organization dedicated to developing innovative Web-based projects that bring fresh perspectives and new voices to the discussion of public issues. The declared goal is to use the Web as a positive, transformative force

in people's lives and in society at large. The organization use a small group dialogue process as an effective, which they regard most effective discussion tool built to foster intimate, high-quality exchanges. By limiting the group size, Web Lab seeks to emphasize each member's values, encouraging a sense of belonging and an investment in frequent visits. They argue that the result of this model is a structured experience requiring minimal intervention, and employing a high quality signal-to-noise ratio.

Exploratory Papers

Comment Fields and Content Analysis: A Means to Study Interaction on News Sites

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Abstract. In examining the comment fields of six sites of professional journalism (two municipal sites, two national sites, and two global sites), this case study seeks to examine the nature of conversations taking place by the public on these sites. The definitions offered within this case study exist to form a foundation for examining what normative merits exist for these social spaces and the conversations that occur within them. Rather than draw direct conclusions from the limited sampling offered, the paper proposes a method by which interaction on journalism sites might be evaluated in future studies. To assist with this, the paper utilizes four key measurable to define interaction within the comment fields: Comment Interaction, Content Interaction, New Content Introduction, and Introduction of a Complex Argument.

1. Introduction

For many scholars and philosophers that deal in communication, the key question of the last 70 years has involved the spaces of meaning-making: physical, social, and mental. From the democratic demands of Jürgen Habermas' evolving public sphere (Habermas 1989, 25-31) to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic interpretation of language (Bakhtin 1981, 369-370), the obligation upon communication to examine the ethical spaces of meaning-making, whether via the public or interactions of language, have rarely been so immediate as they are for those who study the nascent spaces and interactions of the Web. With less than two decades of history from which to draw and a changing environment that in this time has seen the Web move from bulletin boards and email to Facebook and YouTube, an enormous burden falls upon those in the field of communication to examine how these new spaces shape the conversations that occur within them.

Few areas can claim to feel this burden to the same degree as journalism. With the crushing blows to print news over this same time period, journalism has leaped into the arms of the Web for its economic survival. In doing so, professional journalism has created a myriad of new places for public mean-making by integrating social networking technology directly into the news sites. However, what is the nature of this meaning-making? How do people use it? How does this use reflect upon what we expect of ethical and useful meaning-making?

Before we can evaluate any normative expectations of these public spaces, first we must understand what is already happening within them. This chapter seeks to present an opening foundation for the larger normative discussion regarding mean-making by the general public on news sites; the key to setting this foundation rests in examining the basic question of what types of conversations are already occurring in these new spaces.

One of the least examined aspects of Web communication arises in the building block element of comment fields. The ubiquitous comment field appears on forums, blogs, and increasingly on professional news sites. Moreover, new Web applications continue to arise that utilize the premise of comment fields, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Google Buzz. These Web applications are then mimicked by established media sites to capitalize on the phenomenon known as the social Web. The integration of these tools no doubt makes news sites seem more modern and relevant, yet little work has occurred that examines how people use these comment fields on news sites and the potential ethical implications surrounding their use. Do these comment fields change the readerships' understanding of the article? Do the comment fields carry weight similar to the article itself? These are key questions that seem worth asking even as newspapers seek relevancy and simple survival in the social Web.

Thus, understanding the core functionality and nature of comment fields becomes vital to understanding how they affect online journalism. Yet, perhaps because the comment field is seldom seen as the focus of any given page, the comment field as a unit of discussion—and potentially deliberation—has been largely ignored. This paper examines the nature of interaction occurring within six professional news outlets that utilize comment fields as a means to increase readership interactivity. This chapter offers a quantitative analysis of what occurs within the comment fields of these news sites. By explaining how comment fields are used, this chapter hopes to inspire a new conversation about their use on news sites and the risks of such use.

1.1 What is a Comment Field?

Comment fields share a tradition of spatial relation, taking the form of a string of entries that appear side-by-side in a linear chronology, either past to present or present to past, and which are tied to a specific visual focus. This focus might be a blog entry, status update, a news article, a video, or even a live performance. In their earliest forms, comment fields simply used a discussion topic thread as a focus, but blogs expanded this territory into the form of focus more common to news sites, where comments follow either a key video or textual article. Currently, comment fields can even focus upon live events, such as the use of Twitter to follow speeches, protests, or natural disasters—perhaps the best known popular cases of this occurred during the Iranian protests and President Obama's first address to Congress, which made it so far as to warrant mention in the United Kingdom's *Guardian* newspaper (*Guardian* 2009). While this integration of comment fields into live events creates a pressing need to understand the nature of discussion that occurs within this aspect of the social Web, it should not completely overshadow the effect comment fields have upon textual and recorded news articles as well.

The following image demonstrates a typical representation of comment fields as seen from a short-lived blog I ran while attending the 2008 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference in San Francisco:

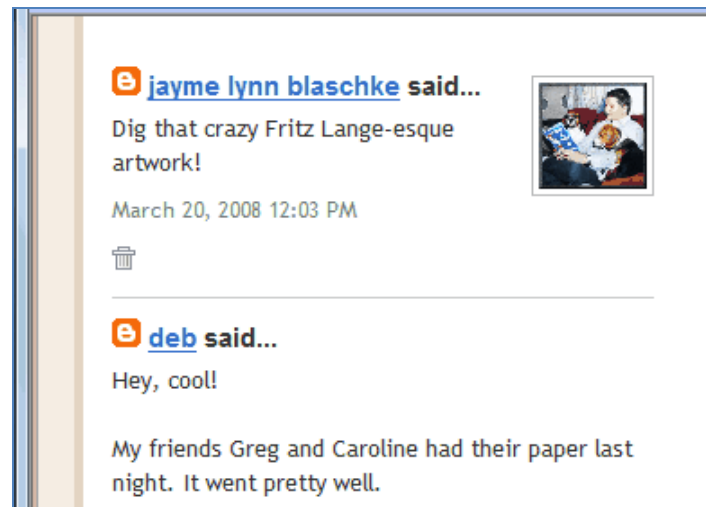


Figure 1. Blogger Comment Fields

While scholarship addressing blogs, Facebook, and even Twitter has started to grow, little work exists on the comment field specifically. When one considers the effect of comment fields in personal spaces, this might be a defensible oversight given the vast range of social media available for study; yet, with the rise of comment fields in professional journalistic spaces (CNN, The Guardian, International Herald Tribune, etc.), the possible effect of the comment field as content can no longer be neglected. This remains particularly true if journalism's attempt to save the newspaper continues to evolve into an attempt to turn news sites into social sites with comment fields, rating systems, avatars, and linked blogs. While this paper does not judge such attempts as a whole, it notes that the choice to do so places a new emphasis upon studying how these elements function within journalism.

By examining six Web sites utilized by established news media outlets, the author hopes to illuminate the nature of dialogue occurring within comment fields in these journalistic spaces. Specifically, regarding comment fields on news sites, is content dialogue occurring and to what degree?

2. Case Study and Methodology

This study examined six news Web sites in an attempt to gather a wide range of comment fields from local, national, and global news providers. The focus remained largely centered upon a United States perspective. Among global sites that used comment fields, the two—CNN and the International Herald Tribune—were owned by United States corporations (Time Warner and The New York Times Company, respectively). While The Guardian has added comment fields as of 2009, the use of comment fields is becoming ubiquitous in U.S. news outlets given its growth in municipal papers as represented within this study by the cities of Portland, OR and Austin, TX. In fact, the company that provides comment field capabilities to the The Guardian is based in the United States and is the same company that provides the service to USA Today and The Austin-American Statesman.

The following newspapers were selected for this study:

- **The Austin-American Statesman (local)**: A city paper for Austin, Texas with a metro area slightly over one million people.
- **The Portland Oregonian (local)**: A city paper located in Portland, Oregon with a metro area approaching one million people.
- **USA Today (national)**: The primary news daily within the United States that lacks a metro identity.
- **The Washington Post (national)**: Focused on the Washington, D.C. area, this paper also covers a number of national topics and is sold across the United States.
- **CNN (global)**: The sole cable news provider examined, CNN has a more historically established global focus than other U.S. cable networks, including CNN-branded divisions on multiple continents.
- **International Herald Tribune (global)**: Owned by the New York Times Company, the Tribune promotes itself as a globally-focused news daily.

For each news outlet a search was done using the site search engine: once for the term traffic and another for the term endorses. The choice in terms was driven by two criteria:

- Each term needed to be a common news word to increase the likelihood it would appear in an article for each news agency during the time selected
- The terms together should pull from two different sections of each online news agency

Traffic issues are common fodder for news and the 2008 primary elections in the United States ensured that endorse also possessed a high frequency of use during the study period.

Initial searches were completed using the Statesman, CNN, and USA Today Web sites with a date range of January 21st through January 30th. A second information gathering was done using the Oregonian, Post, and Tribune for a date range of February 27th through March 30th to create a comparison at each level: local, national, global.

3. Coding

Based on the work of Sally McMillan in her article, The Microscope and the Moving Target, tight coding was considered essential to this case study due to the history of weak coding in Web content analysis (McMillan 2000, 91-93). The following definitions were used and exclusively applied.

- **News Web site**: The branded Web site of an established news outlet with a traditional form of publication either as a news daily paper or telecast. All outlets were members of the Associated Press.
- **Article**: A piece of reporting that appears on the branded Web site, credited to either the AP or the staff of the news organization owning the paper. This excluded unpaid bloggers.
- **Comment Field**: A post by a labeled user that is specifically attached to the article in question.
- **User/Username**: A recognizable label attached to a comment that demarks who or what account made the comment.
- **Content Interaction**: A comment field that referred directly to the textual content of an article.

- **Comment Interaction:** A comment that quoted actual text or a username from another comment field attached to the same article.
- **Introduction of New Content:** A quote, quoted fact, or link to outside material not mentioned in either the article or another comment field.
- **Introduction of Complex Arguments:** Multiple ideas expressed within a comment that are denoted by the use of multiple sentences or semicolons to identify separate thoughts.
- **Unique Poster:** The number of unique users identified by name in each string of comment fields attached to a single article.

Each comment field entry was coded for each trait it possessed from the above list. This methodology was used to look at what type of interaction occurred within the context of the comment fields and no attempt to draw conclusions about the news sites based on these data was pursued due to the limited number of sites viewed. While the statistics might appear to suggest trends based on news site size or the type of news organization, this paper stops short of endorsing any such reading at this time due to limited sample size.

4. Results

Among the six Web sites, eleven of twelve possible matches were found. The lone exception was that CNN did not have an article for traffic within the set date range for comments. However, in all other cases matches were found. This resulted in a pool of 206 comment fields across eleven articles and six Web sites.

While the full data set is available from the author of this study, the results have been summarized below for the sake of space and clarity. The percentages quoted reflect the total percentage of the 206 posts that contained the form of content listed as coded by the earlier definitions.

4.1 Content Interaction: 85.92% of Posts

As expected, most of the comment fields reflected on the context of the article. However, the amount of additional discussion was surprising; the comment fields averaged almost 100 words per post. The interaction also seemed to reflect upon the style of posts. While spelling errors, punctuation problems, and other issues frequently arose, emoticons were noticeably absent. This suggests a formality to comment fields on news sites that challenges the way we think of posts on many other social sites as brief and even playful. The time taken to write such long posts suggests the writers take this interaction seriously, and this suggests a new type of civic and public action, even if its worth is not yet validated. How newspapers govern and evolve such spaces could have an immense affect upon how and whether civic involvement grows or falters in these spaces.

The following example shows a comment field from The Washington Post interacting with the article:

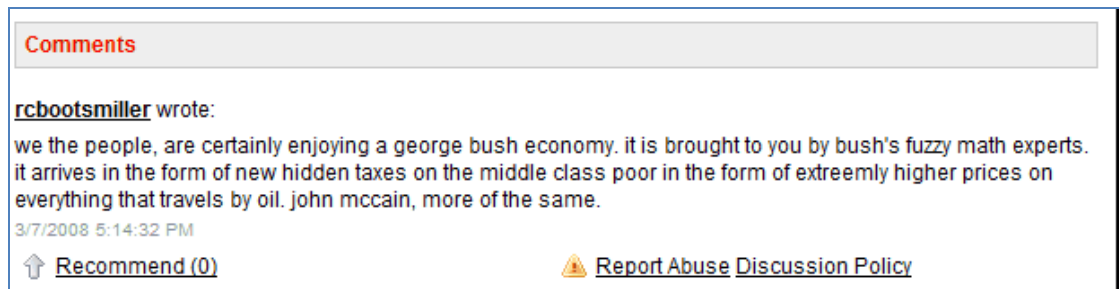


Figure 2. Article Interaction Post

4.2 Comment Interaction: 9.7% of Posts

A low rate of comment interaction comparative to article interaction should be expected. In fact, given the tight coding this study required for comment interaction (quoting a username or quoting direct text), the rate of comment interactions seems quite high. While the majority of comment fields fail to produce traditional back and forth dialogue, they do produce some internal reactions. The most important aspect of this may simply be proof that many people who post comments also read the comments left by others.

This is key since—when posting occurred in this study—the average post count was almost 20 posts per article; comment interaction, thus, required considerable commitment of time to read and engage. While this study's highest post count on a single article was 86, several articles that did not meet the strict search criterion of this paper's methodology had well over 100 posts.

This sample from The Oregonian demonstrates comment interaction:

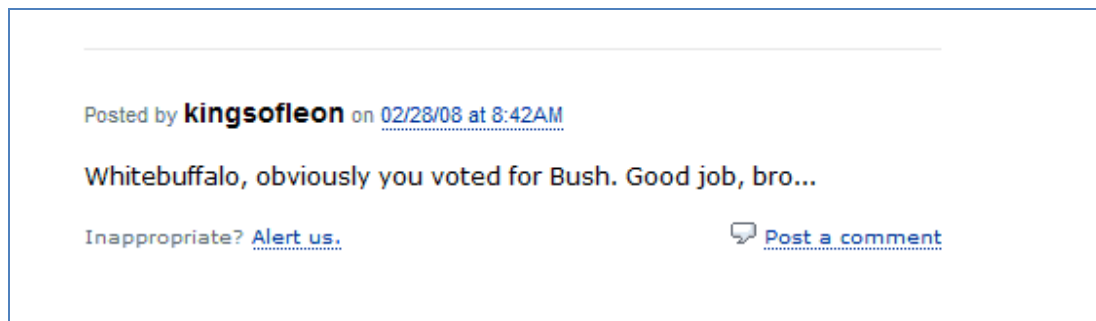


Figure 3. Comment Interaction Post

4.3 Introduction of New Ideas: 31.07% of Posts

The flood of opinions and public analysis may not stir too much immediate concern within the ranks of news organizations, but the introduction of unverified links and facts not presented within an article might give pause. If people are reading these posts, which previous results suggest they are, then the news sites are also introducing the facts and links within the comment fields. Since all the sites observed contained some form of moderation, there also exists a tacit—if somewhat ambiguous—editorial approval of links and facts contained within the comments.

While opinions speak to a personal dialogue, it appears that many users took it upon themselves to cite sources and introduce considerable amounts of new information into the article discussions. Even in this limited sampling, users linked to political Web sites, organizations, and even other major news sites to elaborate on the facts or related issues.

Citations often did not relate directly to specific information but were links to general sites. No attempt was made in this case study to verify the accuracy of citations.

Here is a USA Today example of new information being introduced:

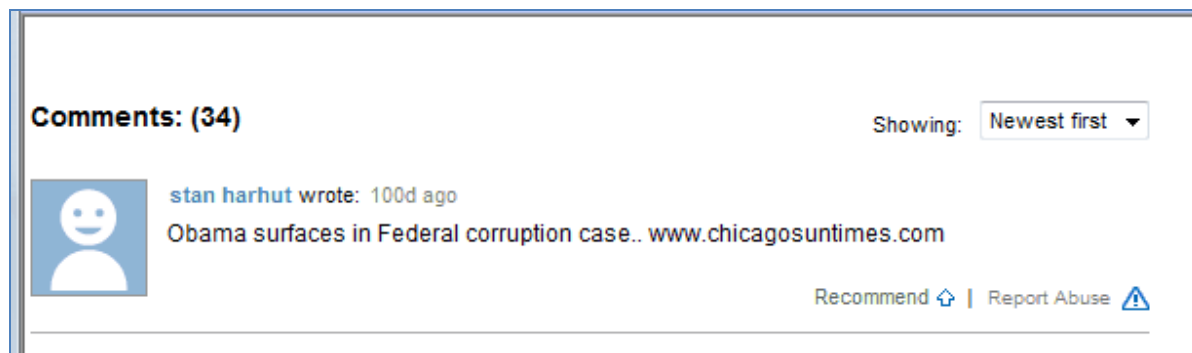


Figure 4. Introduction of New Ideas Post

4.4 Introduction of Complex Arguments: 88.83% of Posts

This statistic offered one of the most compelling insights into news site comment fields. People truly wish to write and express themselves in these posts, if we take volume as an indication. They may vary greatly in skill, but the effort to produce certainly seems evident. These were seldom scatter shot asides, but significant commentary, rants, tirades, proselytizing, and all the forms of discourse we might expect were shouted into the public spaces or agora.

Here is a response from CNN demonstrating a multilayered response:

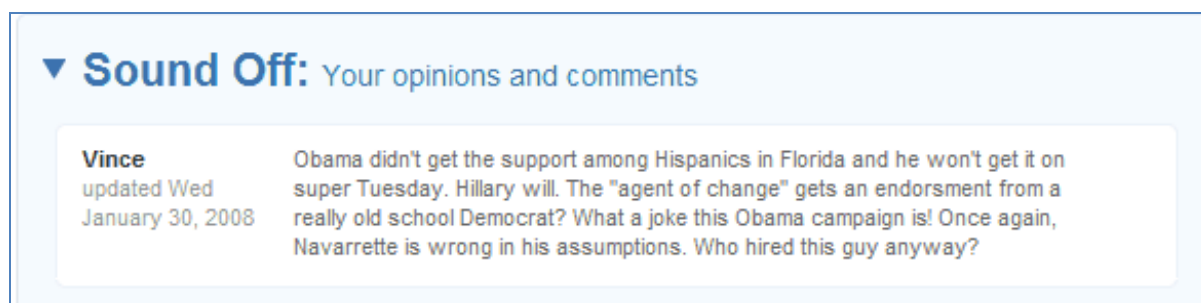


Figure 5. Introduction of Complex Arguments Post

5. Conclusion

Once again, the exercise herein was to demonstrate a form of content analysis that might illuminate interaction within comment fields on news sites. This early study clearly suggests interaction occurs, but the limitations of the study cannot at this time show the existence of verifiable deliberation as standard occurrence.

From a semiotic standpoint, the introduction of new ideas and engagement between posters does suggest that meaning is being manipulated within this space, however. The introduction of new facts to an argument, the discussion of those facts, and the discussion of how those facts relate to the article are all strong possibilities, given the types of interaction and content introduction find within this study. Still, given that only 9.7% of comment posts interacted with

other posts, whereas 85.92% interacted with the article, there appears to be an extreme minority of readers engaging with the type of interaction amongst themselves that could be considered deliberative. Most interaction is directed at the article, and journalists did not respond in a visible way to any posts on any of the articles studied. In fact, it would essentially be impossible for a widely circulated AP article to have an author respond to the posts on every site that published the article.

Thus the early studies, while hopeful for the possibility of interaction and deliberation, do not show a meaningful outlet yet emerging. The posters seem to direct their argument toward the unresponsive articles, with a small minority of posters addressing other comment fields. How readers who do not comment are influenced by these interactions remains unknown. One future possibility would be to assign groups of individuals a list of online articles to read without explicitly asking them to read the comment fields, and then test their knowledge of content found only in the comment fields. This could give more insight into the deliberative value of comment fields to influence the opinions of those who do not choose to post their own comments.

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European Web-Deliberation: Lessons From the European Citizens Consultation

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Abstract. The European Citizens' Consultation (ECC) is a 3.8 million participative experiment that was conducted by a broad consortium of more than 40 European partner organizations, and co-funded by the European Commission under its "Debate Europe" project. Its objective in 2009 was to consult the EU population on the issue of "social and economic future of Europe" by offering the possibility to any citizens to express its opinions and elaborate proposals on a specifically designed web site and by organizing large face-to-face consultations in all the 27 EU countries. This paper offers an in depth analysis of the web discursive platform that was experimented for the first time in 2009. With almost 150.000 unique visitors, 29.536 registered users, 5.640 postings and 1.142 proposals, it is arguably the broadest pan European online participative experiment ever realized. Our objective is to evaluate on the basis of normative criteria inspired by the deliberative theories the quality of the debates and of the proposals that emerged from this innovative discursive agora.

1. Introduction

Despite the novelty of the topic, research aiming at evaluating the level of deliberation of online debates has rapidly gained a great interest among the academic community. A reading of the literature reveals that several researchers have already attempted to analyze the functioning and deliberativeness of a great variety of online debates such as political newsgroups (Schneider 1997; Hill & Hughes 1998; Wilhelm 1999; Davis 1999; Hageman 2002; Bentivegna 1998; Dumoulin 2003; Fuchs 2006), web-forums of political parties, cities or associations (Tanner 2001; Tsaliki 2002; Desquinado 2007; Kies 2008; Wojcik 2006; Jankowsky & van Os 2002, Greffet & Wojcik 2008, el-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009), web-forums hosted by mass media (Schutz 2000; Berdal 2004), e-consultation forums (Beirle 2002; Coleman et al., 2002; Hansard Society 2006; Albrecht 2003; Monnoyer-Smith 2006; Fishkin 2009; Schlosberg et al. 2009) as well as experimental web-forums that generally promote forms of debates that involve at the same time politicians and ordinary citizens (Jensen 2003a; Jankowsky & van Selm, 2000).

This paper offers a preliminary analysis of the web discussion platform that was experimented for the first time for a broad pan European consultation on the topic of the

“social and economic future of Europe” (European Citizens Consultation of 2009). This discursive platform has been implemented in order to offer the possibility to all the EU citizens not only to debate on the topic of the consultation but also to elaborate and vote on concrete proposals. With almost 150.000 unique visitors, 29.536 registered users, 5.640 postings and 1.142 proposals, it is arguably the broadest pan European online participative experiment ever realized.

The objective of this paper will be to evaluate on the basis of normative criteria inspired by the deliberative theories the quality of the debates and proposals. The analysis is divided in four sections. In section one, we briefly present the European Citizens Consultation and how the web debates were integrated in the process of this complex transnational consultation. In section two we define the deliberative criteria and the methods we privileged for their operationalization. In section three and four we present our findings concerning the quality of the online debates and proposals.

2. Brief introduction to ECC project and its online phase

The European Citizens' Consultation is a 3.8 million participative experiment that was conducted by a broad consortium of more than 40 European partner organizations, led by the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), and co-funded by the European Commission under its “Debate Europe” project. In order to gather in a deliberative way the opinions of citizens coming from the 27 member states it follows a particularly elaborated methodology partly inspired by deliberative model implemented by *AmericaSpeaks* and by the precedent consultations coordinated by the foundation Roi Baudouin, namely the *European Citizen's Deliberation on Brain Science* (2005) and the first European Citizens Consultation that was implemented in 2007 (Goldschmidt et al. 2008). The entire consultation is divided in four major phases. In the first phase, all the European citizens are invited to visit the web site launched in each of the EU Member States in December 2008 to generate public debate and ideas on what role the EU can play in shaping our economic and social future in a globalised world. In a second phase, these ideas were fed into the national face-to-face consultations taking place in all 27 Member States, over three weekends, at which a total of 1,600 citizens - chosen at random using professional opinion research institutes - were debating to produce ten recommendations for action at EU level at each national event. In the third phase all the participants at the national consultations were then asked to vote online or by mail on all the recommendations generated by these events to choose their top 15 recommendations. In the fourth and final phase, some 150 citizens who took part in the national events have been invited to travel to Brussels for the European Citizens' Summit on May 10-11 to hand over and discuss these recommendations with top EU policy-makers, including the European Commission and Parliament Presidents and the EU Presidency.

The discursive web-portal was designed by the French firm La Netscouade and was subdivided into 28 national web sites open to all EU citizens and one general web site (the European portal) which provided the general information and direct access to the national web sites. The national web sites were structured in three sections: the information section, the debate sections, and the section for elaborating and voting on

proposals. It is important to note that in order to actively participate at the online consultation whether for posting a message and/or to elaborate and vote on a proposal, citizens were required to register to the forum. The 28 web sites (plus European portal) were managed by national partners under the responsibility of the French information agency Toute L'Europe. Our analysis is limited to the first part of the process (from December 2008 to March 2009), that is the phase during which citizens could access to information about the ECC process, and were invited on their national web site to discuss and make proposals to be voted upon. This is arguably the most important added value of the usage of Internet to the global consultative process as it aimed to enrich the 27 national consultations with debates and proposals stemming from all the EU citizens.

3. Deliberative criteria: choice, operationalization and findings

The empirical investigation on deliberation is still a very exploratory field of research in which there is no standard method for measuring it. There is no agreement on the model of deliberative democracy that should be adopted, on the deliberative criteria that should be assessed and on the way these should be operationalized. In line with Dahlberg (2004) we argue (Janssen & Kies 2005; Kies: 2010) that a valid measurement of deliberation should be based on the Habermasian discursive criteria (1989; 1996; 2005) and that their operationalization should be adapted to each criterion according to the nature, objective and characteristics of the debates scrutinized. Concretely the only way to achieve a satisfactory measurement of deliberation is by combining different methods aiming to assess the visible presence of deliberation (content analysis) as well as the internal presence of deliberation (surveys, interviews). A common mistake that should be avoided is to assess deliberation on the basis of a limited number of criteria that can easily be measured for a great number of case studies. Such minimalistic research strategy generally leads to superficial and erroneous results.

Concerning the ECC online phase, we adopted different criteria for evaluating the debates and the proposals. For the online debates we have measured 1) how *inclusive* the forum were by looking at the number of visits, registered participants and postings; 2) we assessed whether they promoted *transnational exchanges* which would contribute to create a "real" European public sphere by looking at the origins of the visits to the different national web-forums; 3) we looked at the quality of the discursive exchanges by assessing the criteria of *reflexivity*, *justification*, *equality*, *respect*; 4) we observed whether they were dealing with the topic of the consultation (*topicality*); 5) we assessed whether they had a concrete impact (*external impact*) by asking participants to the national consultations whether the ECC online forums were helpful for participating at the national consultations. We did not assess the hardly observable criterion of *sincerity* that requires that participants make a sincere effort to reveal all relevant information and intentions. We suppose nevertheless that in the case of ECC the level of sincerity should be satisfactory because the issue at stake is not of decisive importance and for the participants did generally not belong to interest groups which would limit their freedom of expression. It should be noted that we could not include for practical reasons all the

criteria that should be assessed for measuring exhaustively online ECC phase and that some criteria could not be operationalized in an optimal way.

The deliberativeness of the proposals was assessed 1) by counting and comparing the *number of proposals and votes* in different countries; 2) by assessing whether for the most voted proposal a *justification* was provided for their implementation; 3) by evaluating the *concreteness* of the proposals, i.e. whether they are based on measures that are clear and applicable; 4) by assessing whether they are related to the topic of the consultation (*topicality*).

The two tables that follow provide a detailed review of the definition of each deliberative criterion, the ways these were operationalized and our major findings for each deliberative criterion.

Table 1. Evaluation of messages

Criteria	Meaning	Operationalization	Findings
Inclusion	The ECC forums should host posting and users that are representative of the multiplicity of opinions on the topic of consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of registered users to the online forum - Number of posting within the forums - Pre-existent political interest for EU matters (Data obtained through “google analytics”) 	<p><i>Average</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Almost 30.000 registered users and 150.000 unique visitors (good!) - However seems to attract essentially citizens already interested in EU (Most visits came from referring websites related to the EU. Ex: Euroactive; European movement etc.)
Transnational exchanges	An EU deliberative forum should encourage transnational exchanges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proportion of visits stemming from countries different from the ones where the online forum is hosted. Data obtained through “google analytics” 	<p><i>High</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30% of visits from other countries (essentially EU) - Level particularly high for small countries and English speaking ones
Equality of debates	There should be an equal participation of all the citizens registered to the forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey analysis - Activity of registered users in 7 countries (proportion that posted at least one comment) 	<p><i>Low</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only 18.4% registered users were active (low) - Participants to national consultation are slightly more active than the average.
External impact	The debates in the web forum should enrich the national consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey analysis 	<p><i>Average</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 49% considered that ECC online forum was helpful for participating at the national consultation
Reciprocity /reflexivity	There should be a real exchange of opinions in a debate. Participants should interact with each others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proportion of messages that correspond to a reaction to a precedent message - Number of threads containing at least one message - Survey analysis 	<p><i>High</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 54% messages were reflexive - 49% of thread active; average 1,5 msg per thread - 9% of respondents consider forum non reflexive
Respect	Personal attacks and non respectful behaviors should be avoided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content analysis for in 11 countries - Survey analysis 	<p><i>High</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2% of non respectful messages - 74% perceive debates as respectful
Topicality	The posting should be related to the topic of the consultation and to the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content analysis for 11 countries 	<p><i>Low</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 23.5% not related to consultation - 47% not related to EU
Justification	Arguments and proposal should be justified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Length of messages for 11 countries - Survey analysis 	<p><i>Average</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Average of 160 words per posting - 71% said that ‘the contributions to the debates were generally insightful and intelligent’

Table 2. Evaluation of proposals

Criteria	Meaning	Operationalization	Findings
Nbr of proposals and of votes	A high number of diverse proposals and of votes increases chances to have good proposals and reflects high interest of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counting number of proposals for each country - Counting and comparing for 11 countries the number of votes for 15 most voted proposals 	<p>Average</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1142 proposals elaborated (particularly in France, Germany, Spain and Italy) - The number of votes for the proposals vary greatly according to the countries
Justification	Proposals should be justified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of 15 most voted proposals for 11 countries - Survey analysis 	<p>High</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 72% of proposals were justified - 63% do (fully) agree with the statement ‘online proposals were generally insightful and intelligent’.
Concreteness	A proposal is more likely to have a concrete impact if it is based on measures that are clear and applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of 15 most voted proposals for 11 countries - Survey analysis 	<p>Average</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One third (33%) of the online proposals were not concrete
Topicality	Same as for messages (<i>see supra</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of 15 most voted proposals for 11 countries - Survey analysis 	<p>Low</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One third (32%) was not linked with the topic of the consultation - 30% found that ‘many proposals were not related to the topic’

4. Evaluation of debates

Inclusion: In absence of any comparable participative experiment we can hardly fix standards of participation that would measure the inclusive nature of the ECC online forums. It seems fair to consider that such standards should not be too elevate for the level of usage of political web-forums is still limited and because the consultation is general, EU related and likely to have just a limited impact. If we agree with this more modest inclusive requirement we should consider the participation was globally satisfactory. A total of 29.536 people registered to the forum of the 28 national ECC web sites and it received between January 1st and May 31st almost 150.000 unique visitors. Most of the web sites experienced a peak of attendance during March when the national consultations took place and May 2009 the month of the European Citizens Summit. With no surprise the web forum of the larger countries were more visited than the small ones. Each national web site was visited by an average of 30.8 unique visitors per day which means that the web sites together received 864.2 unique visitors per day for this period. In order to obtain a more accurate comparison of the 'performances' of each national Web site, we calculated for the 27 EU countries the proportion of visitors of the national web sites compared to the national population (see figure 1). It appears that the ECC web sites have been visited by 0.027 percent of the EU population. The countries where the proportion of participation was the highest were the small ones (Luxembourg, Malta, Estonia, and Latvia). This can be explained by the fact that in small countries it is easier to acquire a high visibility, but also because, as we will see in next section, in these countries the proportion of visits coming from others countries is particularly high.

This purely numerical data on visits and users' registration provide just a superficial approach of inclusion. A more accurate evaluation of the inclusion however requires that we also observe whether these registered users were active and representative of the plurality of opinions that are related to the topic of the consultation. In absence of socio-demographic data, we could approach the representativeness of the users by tracking how the users accessed the ECC website. The traffic on national web sites is mainly provided by referring sites. This source is the first one on 23 web sites, followed by 'direct access' and 'search engines'. Among the referring web sites, European institutional web sites like *Europa*, and social networks like *Facebook* played a key role, since they generated the biggest traffic to the ECC portal. Web sites of associations involved in the ECC process like the *King Baudouin Foundation* and *Toute l'Europe* constituted also an important source of traffic. Other associations mentioned as 'sources' are the *European Movement*, *Active Citizenship*, and *Euractiv*. These findings suggest that the online communication campaign succeeded in mobilizing 'friendly' networks and institutional web sites that are generally visited by a well educated public that is already familiar with European matters.

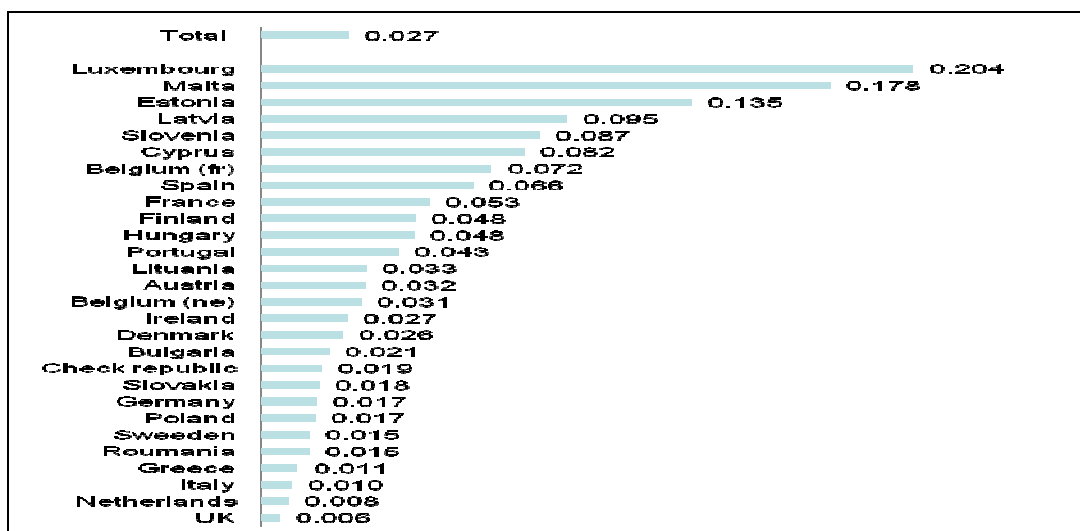


Figure 1. Proportion of registered users per country

Transnational exchanges: Apart from the EU countries (all ranked in the top 30) visitors came from the United States (ranked 21st), Switzerland (ranked 23rd), and Turkey (ranked 30th), followed by Canada, Brazil and Mexico. The national web sites also received foreign visitors: on average almost 30 percent came from another country. The countries with high score of 'external' visits were, as we expected, the English speaking ones (United Kingdom: 60%; Ireland: 46%) and the small ones (Malta: 55%; Luxembourg: 48%; Estonia: 40%; Cyprus: 40%). These rather optimistic data suggesting the web-forums have contributed to the emergence of a truly EU public space should be counterbalanced by the fact that what is measured is only visit of non national citizens. The analysis instrument (google analytic) does not allow to assess whether non national resident where also active.

Equality of debates: From December 2008 until March 2009, the phase where everyone was invited to actively contribute to national web-forums, a total of 5.598 messages (threads and replies to these threads) were submitted. For a sample of 7 countries we counted the proportion of registered users who posted at least one contribution and the result is particularly low for less than one registered user out of five (18.4%) wrote at least one message or a proposal¹. We can assume that some users registered to the forum out of curiosity, without any intention to concretely participate to the debates, or just for voting or reading the messages and proposals. Among the citizens who were chosen to participate to the national consultations 39% visited their national online forum and important differences could be observed between the 27 countries (for more country specific details see Kies & Wocjik, forthcoming). With no surprise the correlation analysis reveal that participants who visited the forum tended to be citizens who already used the internet for taking part in (political) debates or searching for information on political matters. The main reasons for not using the forum

¹ Through this sample we assessed the activity of 2748 users and 507 were active. The proportion per country is the following: Bulgaria: 15.7%; Ireland 10%; Italy : 16.9% ; Luxembourg : 15.8% ; Malta : 10.9% ; Romania : 42.1% ; UK : 19.7%.

is 'the absence of time' (40 %), while 27% said 'to prefer face-to-face debates over online debates' and 18% that they 'do not feel comfortable with online debates'. Only 16% mentioned the 'absence of internet connection'.² Among the participants who visited the web-forum a passive usage of the forum was privileged to an active one: 89% sought for information and 87% were only interested in reading the contributions of other participants. The activity levels decrease when a more active use of the forum is asked for one third voted for proposals (33%), 23% participated in the online discussion, 14% elaborated a proposal and 12% initiated a debate. In sum, the active participants to the national consultation who registered to the forum were only slightly more active than average activity among the registered users. This comes as a surprise for we would expect that the participants to the national consultation would be motivated to be active in forum.

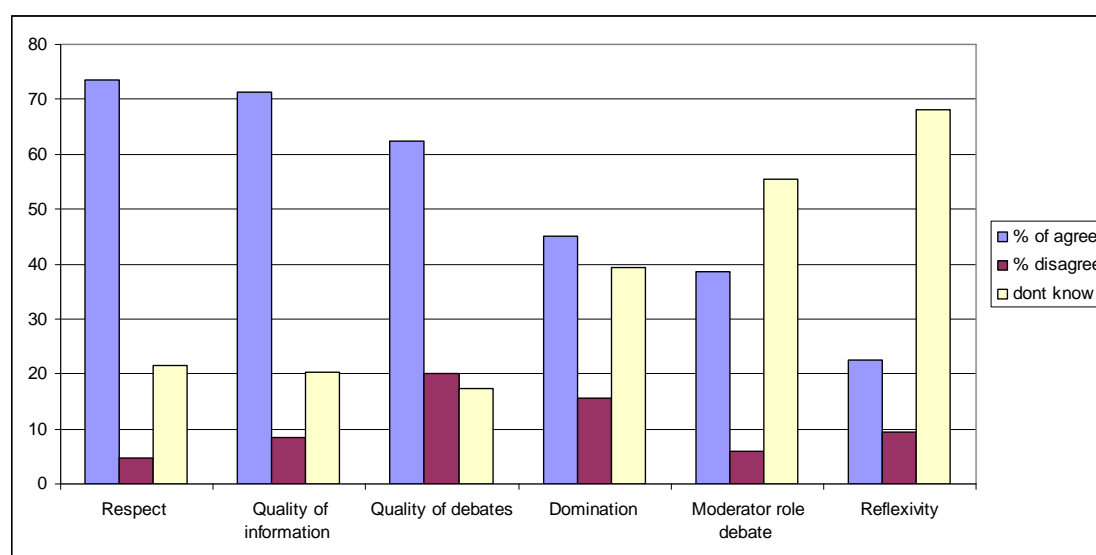
External impact: With regard to the relation between the online phase and the national consultation the participants to the national consultation were asked whether the participation at the ECC online forum was considered helpful for participating at the national consultation. 51% answered 'never' or 'rarely', while the other half said this was 'sometimes' or 'often' the case (N: 997). There are major differences between the countries: in 9 countries more than 60 percent declared that participation in the online debates was sometimes or often helpful (with Romania and Ireland with more than 70%), while in 7 countries less than 40 percent considered that this was the case. This mitigated appreciation of usefulness of the online forums can probably (partly) be explained by the broadness of the topic of consultation.

The following tables provide the findings concerning the quality of the debates. The first one is based on the content analysis of the all the messages contained in a sample of 11 national web sites. This corresponds to a total of 2951 postings that were scrutinized for evaluating the deliberative criteria of *reflexivity*, *respect* and *topicality* and *Justification*. The second table provides the responses of the participants to the national consultations on their perception of the quality of the web-debates.

² The other reasons were chosen by just a minority of people: 'Absence of impact on decision makers' (9%), 'Online debates are not serious' (7%); 'complexities of registration procedures' (5%); 'no interest for ECC forum' (3%).

Table 3. content analysis of deliberativeness of online forum for 7 countries

	Threads with msg	Average responses	Reflexivi ty	Average words	Absence of respect	Irrelevant messages	Politisat ion	EU reference
Austria	81.6	2.2	70.8	116	3.9	62.7	2.8	38.7
Cyprus	21.0	0.4	46.5	243	0.0	4.7	9.3	62.8
France	46.5	1.5	50.5	105	1.5	38.5	5.8	38.7
Germany	55.3	2.3	74.4	117	1.7	25.6	1.1	13.2
Greece	22.2	0.4	35.1	219	0.0	2.7	5.4	62.8
Ireland	54.1	1.5	59.8	180	0.0	5.4	16.3	77.2
Italy	66.7	1.8	65.7	164	1.2	33.9	2.8	76.1
Luxembourg	29.6	0.6	40.5	217	0.0	40.5	17.1	71.4
Malta	30.8	0.8	45.8	98	8.3	12.5	4.2	37.5
Roumania	70.0	2.5	35.6	151	6.7	19.2	0.0	45.2
UK	62.2	2.2	67.4	146	3.4	13.1	7.6	59.7
Average	49.1	1.5	53.8	160	2.4	23.5	6.6	53.0

**Figure 3.** Evaluation of online forum by participants at online consultation (N: 534-560)

Reflexivity. More than half of the messages (54%) referred to a preceding message. The level of reflexivity was generally higher in countries where a large number of messages were posted, such as Germany, Austria, and the United Kingdom, compared to countries where few messages were posted like Romania and Greece. The reflexive character of the debates was also measured by looking at the length of thread that is by counting the number of messages contained in each thread. Almost half of the threads (49%) received at least one message and the average number of messages contained in the threads is 1.5. The perception of reflexivity was assessed by asking to the participants to the national consultation if the users of the forum 'took (their) opinions and arguments into account'. Most of the respondents (68%) had not opinion, 23%

considered that the debates were reflexive and 9% did not agree. This high level of absence of opinion derives from the fact that only a limited number of national participants were active on the ECC forum.

Respect: Overall the debates were extremely respectful. In the 11 countries analyzed only 2% of the messages were coded as non respectful and 74% of the respondents to the survey perceived the debates 'to be generally respectful'. This particularly low score could be interpreted twofold. On the one hand, it suggests that the forum is perceived as a serious and influential discursive locus, and that the topic is not conducive to extreme and non respectful debates. On the other side this high rate of respect may also suggests that there was no strong interest for the consultation, for otherwise the discussions would have been more intense and rude.

Topicality: Due to the broad nature of the consultation we expected that most of the messages should be on topic. This was not the case for 24% the messages were coded as not related to the social and economic issues. The rate of irrelevant messages was particularly high in Austria (63%), Luxembourg (41%) and France (39%) and was particularly low in the countries where a limited number of messages were posted (Greece, Cyprus and Ireland). And only 53% of the messages referred to the EU. The allusion to Europe was frequent in Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg and seldom in France, Malta, Austria and Germany.

Justification: If we accept the highly controversial supposition that the level of justification is positively correlated with the length of the messages, we can argue that the ECC postings were rather well justified. For the 11 countries analyzed the average length of the messages was 160 words, which corresponds to a paragraph of 10-12 lines (in Times New Romans 12). The messages tended to be longer in countries where few messages were posted (Cyprus, Greece, and Luxembourg) and tended to be shorter in countries where the number of messages was higher, such as France, Germany, Romania and United Kingdom. The high score of the first category of countries derives probably from the absence of debates that imply generally short comments and answers. This approximate assessment of the level of justification is confirmed by the survey realized among the participants to national consultation who were a majority (61%) to agree that 'the contributions to the debates were generally insightful and intelligent'.

5. Analysis of the online proposals and votes on them

Number of proposals and votes: 1142 proposals were counted on all 28 ECC web sites. Proposals were particularly numerous on five web sites: France (257), Germany (132), Spain (115), Italy (84) and in a lesser extent Portugal (63). In some of these countries the high score derives from the presence of interest groups such as a pro-Esperanto group, animals' rights group and an antiabortion group who were particularly active and elaborated similar proposals on various web sites. The number of proposals was much more limited for the other countries: 12 web sites contained between 20 and 50 proposals and 11 web sites had less than 20 proposals. A more thorough analysis

was carried out in 11 countries. For 9 countries we selected the 15 most proposals and for Malta 8 and for Romania 13. In total we analyzed the number of votes as well as the content of 156 proposals. Clearly there is variety between the countries. In France the most voted proposal received 3829 votes, in Malta only 12 votes. The last proposal in France received 445 votes and only 1 vote in Malta and Romania.

Justification: The majority of the proposals analyzed (72%) were argued or justified. This result is validated by the survey: 63 percent of the participants to the national consultation do (fully) agree with the statement 'online proposals were generally insightful and intelligent'.

Concreteness: One third (33%) of the online proposals were not concrete, i.e. they did not recommend any concrete actions for their realization. This result contrasts with the high expectation of the participants in the national debates. From the questionnaire distributed just before the start of each ECC, it appears that 66% of respondents 'agree' or 'fully agree' with the statement that 'the proposals elaborated in the online forum will be useful to structure the debates during the national consultations'.

Topicality Among the 15 most voted proposals analyzed almost one third (32%) was not linked with the topic of the consultation. This result is consistent with the answer of 30 percent of our respondents who also found that 'many proposals were not related to the topic'. Moreover, in some countries this score is particularly high. This was the case in Germany, Austria, France and Ireland where respectively 60%, 53% and 47% (in Ireland and France) of the 15 most voted proposals were not linked with economic or social issues. Considering that ECC has been organized under the aegis of the EU the fact that only 42% of online proposals referred to the EU may appear as a surprise. Once again, there were important differences amongst the countries of the sample. In France, only 20% of the most voted proposals mentioned the EU role whereas in Greece or Luxembourg this is the case for 80% of the proposals.

6. Conclusive remarks

To conclude, our exploratory analysis suggests that the online consultation phase experimented for the first time in 2009 was particularly useful for increasing the awareness of the project with the general public. It presents a great potential to enrich the national debates with opinions and proposals stemming from a broad public. Concerning the forum the positive aspects were that it has been able to attract the attention of a rather high number of citizens and to favor numerous transnational exchanges and a good level of interaction (*reciprocity*). We also observed that the debates were respectful and the messages appeared to be justified. The negative aspects of the ECC forums is that they tended to attract citizens who were already interested in EU issues, that only a minority of registered users posted a comment or elaborated a proposal and that many postings were not related to the topic of the consultation. Concerning the proposals we observed, from a positive side, that they were numerous and that the most voted proposals tended to be well justified. From negative

perspective we noted almost on third were not concrete and not related to the topic of the consultation.

Overall we would argue that the experience was satisfactory if we consider that it has been realized for the first time. We suggest that it could be improved in the future by a stricter definition of the topic of the consultation. A broad topic such as 'the social and economic future of Europe' leads inevitably to comments and proposals which are off topic or too abstract. On the opposite if the topic of the consultation would more precise like the regulation of banks or the future of pensions, it is more likely that the comments and proposals would be more concrete and therefore more useful as input for the national consultation and the decision-makers. The online phase could also be improved by reinforcing the advertisement of the project among the categories of the citizens who are generally not interested in (EU) politics. The communication campaign on the internet was efficient to mobilize European association networks and social networking portal, however, the communication around the project in the mass media was less prominent. An intelligent collaboration between the mass media (in particular TV) and the internet has always proved to be the most effective mean to involve new citizens in the political process.

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Ethnographically Exploring Deliberation Through Policy Pertinent Social Media Production in Ontario

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Abstract. The premise of this paper is that the online infrastructures for public participation in policy-making are in flux and assembled across various sites – government, corporate and public spaces. Public consultation forums facilitated by government may fulfill early eGovernment visions of participatory democracy online. Social media (i.e. Facebook, YouTube or blogs) often assembles an array of actors to facilitate eParticipation in policy on corporately owned platforms. In Ontario, Canada, enthusiasm for the government infrastructures for online deliberation has waned somewhat. The experiences of citizens who produce and facilitate social media-based participation in policy-making requires further research in Ontario. This exploratory paper presents my use of ethnographic and actor-network theory traditions to conceptualize a research approach to examine social media-based policy participation in Ontario.

1. Introduction

In Canada and other democracies, many questions linger concerning the implications of digital technology for democracy (Borins, 2007; Jenkins, Thorburn, & Seawell, 2003; Sclove, 1995). The trend of using information communication technologies (ICTs) to facilitate policy participation in Ontario, Canada has been inconsistent. Borins and Brown (2007) note that at the start of Premier Dalton McGuinty's first year of his first term in office (2003-2004), the province enthusiastically engaged citizens.¹ One example was the Town Hall Ontario portal (TownHallOntario.gov.on.ca) for deliberative online consultation. The Town Hall Ontario portal however is described to have had a "spectacular rise and fall" (Borins, 2007). The link provided above is no longer active. In the absence of a deliberative, government-run consultation portal in Ontario for a wide array of policy issues, corporate social media platforms such as blogs, Facebook and YouTube have become channels Ontario citizens have used to participate in policy.²

The appropriateness of these third party and largely corporate infrastructure for policy participation is questionable. Although news reports have called Toronto the Facebook capital of the world (Shimo, 2007), it was almost simultaneously banned

¹ The term citizen is used in this document to refer to individuals residing in an area or interested in its politics. This may include individuals who may not have adult citizenship rights (i.e., youth, migrant workers, landed immigrants, etc.).

² Ontario does presently have an online environmental registry <http://www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ERS-WEBExternal/> and citizens are often invited to submit comments to regulation via email addresses

from Ontario government employees' computers (Benzie, 2007) Still, social media and citizen opposition to particular policies have prompted McGuinty to rethink intended policy directions and call for policy participation opportunities for citizens to take place online (Campbell, 2008).

It is within in this context of shifting and intersecting public and private infrastructures for policy participation that I examine ethnographic and actor-network theory (ANT) traditions as methodological scaffolding in section 2.0. Section 3.0 presents an initial pilot exploration of the deliberations surrounding *Bill 85: The Photocard Act* (Ontario, 2008). Bill 85 is the provincial legislation to allow for the issuance of optional radio frequency identification (RFID) equipped identity cards to comply with border crossing requirements for passport alternatives for Canadians entering the United States. Section 4.0 looks towards future work using the exploratory methods described in this paper within a larger study.

2. Methodological scaffolding

2.1 Ethnography of policy participation and ICTs

Ethnographic research including participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis can be used to understand experiences of public policy (Becker, 2004). Fieldwork can also be used to understand how policy mandated processes affect citizen participation. Lang (2007) for example, attended the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to gain understanding of the process. Jensen (2005) examined the consensus conference on electronic medical records in Denmark. There is also great potential to merge with ethnographic traditions to understand ICT use and end-users. A variety of scholars have also attempted to use ethnography to understand the use of the internet in everyday life. The internet has been explored ethnographically in everyday life in a developing Caribbean nation (Miller & Slater, 2000) at the public library (Balka & Peterson, 2002) in a Toronto neighbourhood (Clement, Aspinall, Viseu, & Kennedy, 2004), and in domestic contexts (Bakardjieva, 2005).

These examples of ethnographies of technology-in-use draw heavily upon the uptake of ethnography as a method in human-computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported co-operative work (CSCW) fields (Suchman, 1987). The use of anthropological methods to inform design or policy is part of a turn to apply ethnographic knowledge gained from everyday life (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1992). In the case of some of the authors in the Canadian context (i.e., Clement, Aspinall, Viseu, & Kennedy, 2004) an attempt was made to understand the impact of connectivity policy and contribute to the design and implementation of such services. My research draws upon this tradition in that eGovernment policy in Canada and Ontario supported online consultation and deliberation for certain time periods. Exploring deliberation surrounding policy issues in Ontario also draws upon the actor-network theory tradition.

2.2 Science and technology studies and Actor-network theory

Science and technology studies (STS) and in particular, actor-network theory (ANT) further inform my research methods. Actor-network theory (ANT) is a research approach which was first defined by a series of publications in the mid 1980s (i.e., Callon (1986) on scallops, Latour (1988) on the pasteurization of France). From these publications and numerous others, an ANT tradition was established within STS and amongst a group of scholars who choose to study the social construction of

technology (SCOT). ANT can be used to study socio-technical systems which stabilize (or fail to stabilize) and include both human and non-human entities. In describing the basic characteristics, Law (1999) states that “actor-network theory may be understood as a semiotics of materiality” and a study of performativity where “entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located” (p. 4). Simply stated, ANT is used to describe networks which are social and technical.

Deliberation or public participation in policy-making, are a kind of socio-technical system which can be studied. In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (2005), edited by Latour and Weibel this potential application is demonstrated. In the introductory chapter, Latour (2005) calls for a consideration of “object-oriented democracy” where each socio-technical network associated with politics is examined as something which can be assembled or disassembled. Latour and colleagues effectively demonstrate that ideals such as deliberation or participatory politics can be examined as a relationship of assemblages.

2.3 ANT influenced ethnography to study policy participation

A variety of forms of ethnographic research connect to actor-network theory (ANT) and are outlined in figure 1.0. Descriptive ethnography, politically engaged ethnography and creative (designerly) ethnography are each possibilities which relate loosely to the research, practice and design categories familiar to the online deliberation community (Davies & Gangadharan, 2010).

Beginning at the top of figure 1.0 and moving counter clockwise, Latour and Woolgar’s initial uses of ethnography, as ANT was being developed, may be considered descriptive. For example, the book *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Latour & Woolgar, 1979) was based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in a neuroendocrinology laboratory. One of the most important contributions of the work was to draw upon fieldwork to identify how scientists deal with problematic data sets and how these practices do not conform to standard views of science. Using ethnographic methods allowed for a discussion of the construction of scientific facts. Similarly, and by extension, ethnography and ANT can be used to study the assemblages of democracy (Latour & Weibel, 2005).

Politically engaged scholarship is another possibility. A variety of scholars who utilize ANT recognize that it need not be politically disengaged scholarship based on observation. An exemplary model of this approach is the work on the Issues Crawler software application for crawling hyperlinks (Marres, 2004). As a researcher, Marres (2004) was interested in the controversy surrounding the ownership of the Development Gateway website. A number of non-governmental organizations were concerned that while the site claimed to be run by an independent NGO called the Development Gateway Foundation, the site was actually being run by the World Bank. To better understand the issue, Marres deployed the Issue Crawler software and determined the World Bank was running the site from a cease and desist email.

As the Issue Crawler example research indicates, it is possible to incorporate creative practice within the methodological toolkit of a researcher. The Issue Crawler required conceptualization and design development to be useful in research contexts. Similarly, research carried out much earlier by Latour reflects a potential role of creative practice for the researcher. In *Aramis, or, For the Love of Technology* Latour (1996) provides an interesting example of ANT. Firstly, Aramis is concerned with the design of a transportation system in France which intended to combine the convenience of the automobile with the mass transit attributes of the train or subway. The Aramis technology was invested in extensively. The story of Aramis however, is primarily one of a failed transit vision. To tell this story through Aramis utilizes

“scientifiction” (Latour, 1996, p. 82) where ethnographic practice is combined with narrative fiction. While ANT clearly contains the elements necessary to frame and situate ethnographic research, other literature also provides important influences.

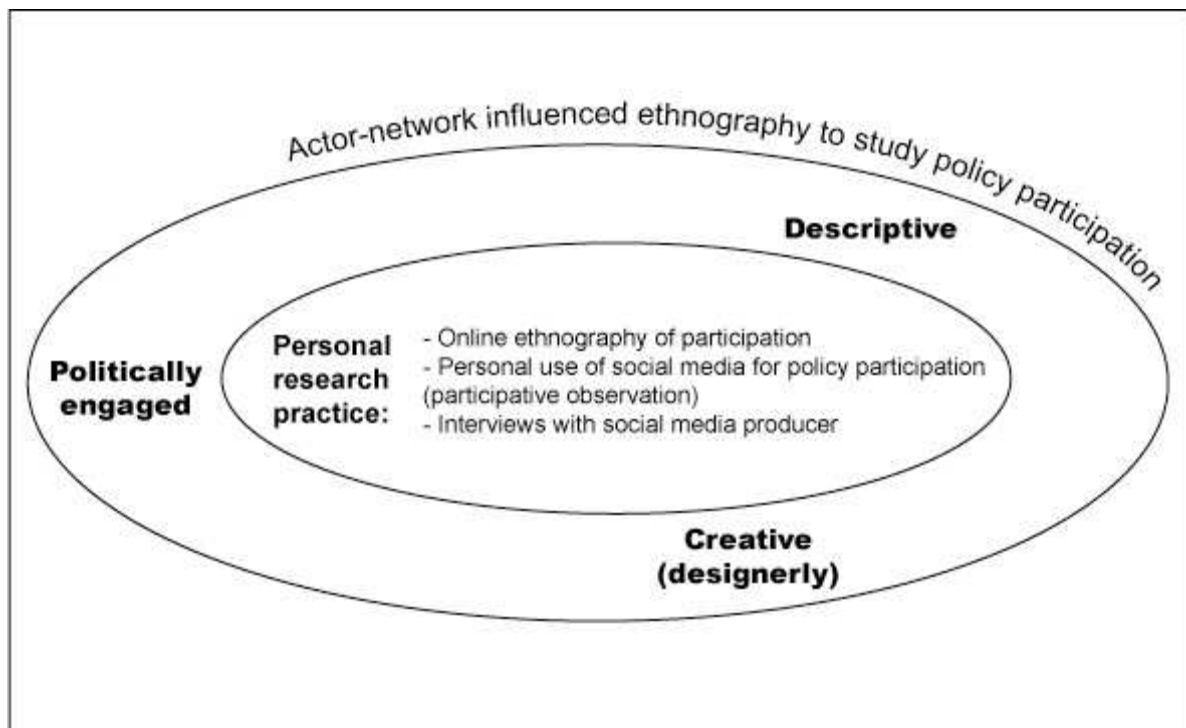


Figure 1: ANT influences

3. Ethnography informed by ANT in practice

Having outlined the possibility of descriptive, politically engaged and creative applications of ANT, I now describe the application of this spectrum in research concerning Ontario's *Bill 85: The Photocard Act*. Bill 85 is legislation which was passed in Ontario in 2008 to allow for drivers' licenses and ID cards to be issued with radio frequency identification (RFID) chips, to communicate citizenship information and to carry out photo comparison of all applicants (McPhail et al., 2009). This legislation was controversial for civil liberties activists concerned about surreptitious tracking and the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario for the lack of inclusion of an 'off' switch for the RFID chip.

Next, I outline the step-by-step ethnographic activities which I undertook to seek to understand the status of deliberation for this bill in the online realm. First, the Ontario Legislature's website provides a record of official debates and the verbatim comments made during limited, in-person public hearings (McPhail et al., 2009). Second, from the public hearing records, it is possible to identify a number of policy interested community members and organizations and to carry on. Third, I used social media as a content producer or facilitator of participation on www.IDforum.ca discussion forum or YouTube videos intended to provide information and analysis of enhanced drivers' licences through the Performing Identities research grant. Fourth, systematic web searches of social media can be carried out to seek out further instances of deliberation, outside of the governmental hearing process. Fifth, archiving and coding the web artefacts of public participation and deliberation is possible. Finally, the ethnographic engagement can be extended to interview social

media facilitators or content creators to discuss their experiences with policy participation and whether they were able to contribute to deliberative politics.

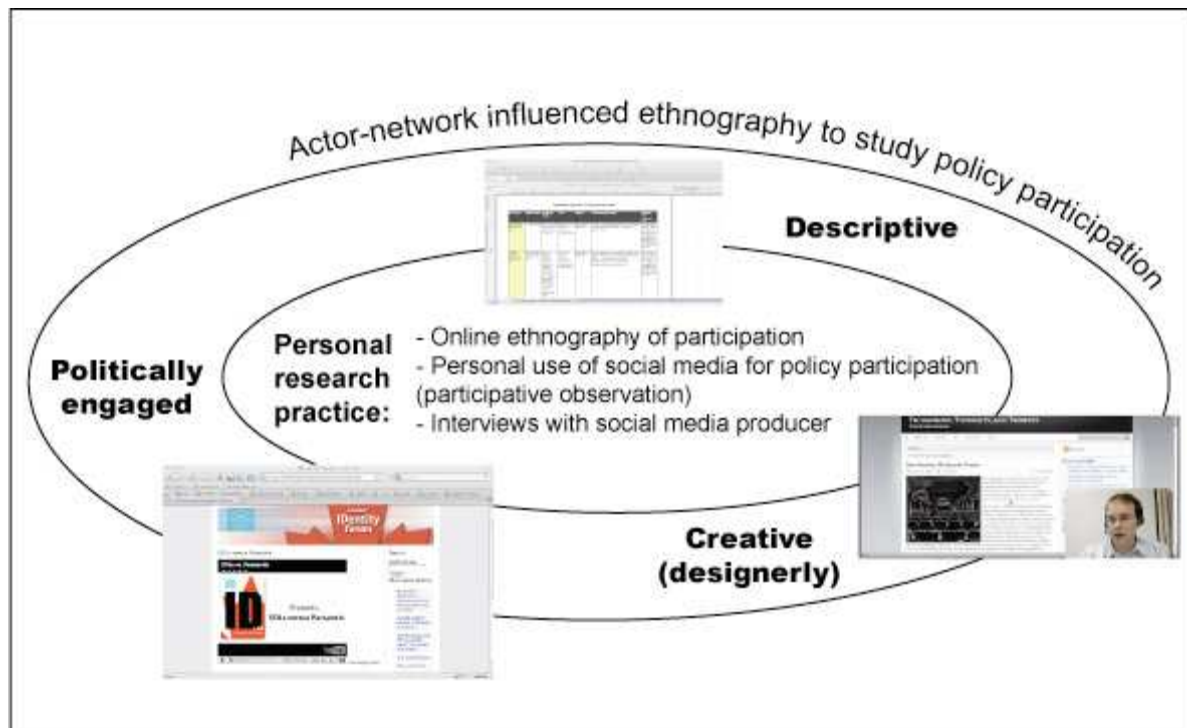


Figure 2: Research activities and ANT comparisons

3.1 Synthesis

The research steps described above can be situated within an ANT framework (see figure 2). Although descriptive, creative and politically engaged ethnography need not be mutually exclusive, various research activities correspond. I use detailed web research and social media searches to describe where and if deliberation is occurring and this connects to descriptive ethnography. In the mid-space between politically engaged ethnography and creative practice, my contributions to the IDforum.ca website and YouTube videos apply. In this manner I attempted to foster discussion, provide information and provoke discussion. Between descriptive and creative ethnography, interviews and particularly the use of screen capture technologies to understand design (including use) of social media contribute to creative and descriptive ethnography.

4. Future work and conclusion

My future research proposes to use five to 15 Ontario bills as starting points to research web and social media based deliberation and participation. On a preliminary basis, I anticipate that the bills selected will include some form of government-facilitated participation (i.e., a public hearing) or pertain to youth. In the case of bills with government facilitated participation, I am interested in examining if deliberation is facilitated by government officials and if it is happening in citizen facilitated online spaces. Additionally, I am interested if youth relevant bills feature increased online participation as youth are sometimes presumed to be digital natives and immediately comfortable with online participation. Having described my future work in brief, it is important to note that all theoretical influences have not been described in this short,

exploratory paper. The purpose of this paper was to outline how ethnography influenced by actor-network theory can serve as methodological scaffolding for a research project. With future work, the methods will inevitably iterate and be fine-tuned.

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Political as Usual? Revolution, Normalisation and a New Agenda for Online Deliberation

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1. Introduction

Attempting to measure the apparently revolutionary impact of technologies upon government and society is an issue that has vexed academics and commentators. From the telephone to the television, and from the printing press to the radio, it seems as though each new technology is met with claims that it might somehow have revolutionary effects. Most striking, according to some commentators, is how each technology has failed to live up to the hype (Winston 1998; Margolis and Resnick 2000), leading to sustained criticism. The most common complaint put forward is that wildly speculative claims are made about new technologies and how they will create wholesale, revolutionary changes. For example, John Naisbitt has argued that: 'along came the communications revolution and with it an extremely well-educated electorate. Today, with instantaneously shared information, we know as much about what's going on as our representatives and we know it just as quickly. The fact is we have outlived the historical usefulness of representative democracy and we all sense intuitively that it is obsolete.' A critic would question whether we do, indeed, now have an extremely well-educated electorate, one that wants to make their own political decisions – and on the back of an apparent communications revolution. The second, but less widely made complaint, contradicts the first one: relatively small changes are marked out as being revolutionary or transformative. The following claim made in the Guardian newspaper from the 2008 US Presidential election highlights this: 'Barack Obama's campaign offered fresh examples yesterday of the power of technology to transform electoral politics, unveiling plans to text and email supporters when he decides on his vice-presidential candidate, and to incorporate voters across the country [using online chats] in the proceedings at the Democratic party's convention in Denver at the end of the month.' The question raised by critics here is quite simple: will texting or emailing supporters the name of the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee and using online chats really "transform electoral politics" as claimed by the Guardian? The two examples highlight the complexities of assessing the impacts of technology on politics.

Studies of deliberation on the Internet, and the nature of the online public sphere more generally, have not been inculcated from these issues. Popular discourses about the "revolutionary" impact of new technology on politics have produced a burgeoning scholarly response, much of it heavily influenced by the so-called normalisation hypothesis, associated with the work of Margolis and Resnick (2000).

As will be outlined in more detail below, this essentially argues that the Internet will have limited, if any impact: politics as usual. This article argues that the revolution/normalisation “framework” has, for a number of reasons, had a negative impact on research to date. First, many scholars have failed to consider the nature of revolution fully, tending to assume that a revolution would require a fundamental change to the political system. This article argues that the either/or dichotomisation of revolution/normalisation is false: a more nuanced understanding of “revolution” is required if we are to fairly assess the impact of ICT on politics, and e-deliberation in particular. Revolutions are complex, occurring on a number of levels and to different degrees: the so-called normalised use of new technologies can have a revolutionary effect upon politics; that is, revolution *through* normalisation. The article will argue that the pre-eminence of this debate has led scholars to focus research on how existing institutions use new media, such as political parties and government, when they are not necessarily best-placed to exploit the potential of new media. Moreover, it has encouraged unduly narrow, traditional definitions of politics, with normative underpinnings that may not hold in the context of new media.

One example from my own work will illustrate this: I have previously operationalised a Habermasian notion of idealised deliberation to study the EU (and other) government-run online discussion forums. While this in itself is interesting, the danger is that a) using such a model of deliberation sets an unrealistic goal and measure for debate online and that b) much of political discussion on the Internet occurs in non-official spaces such as the www.netmums.org.uk and www.moneysavingexpert.com forums. Put simply, the revolution/normalisation framing of debates shapes the selection of cases, the choice of research questions and how subsequent results are interpreted – with the danger that researchers are being unduly pessimistic about the prevalence and nature of debate online.

2. The “Internet Revolution” and Theories of Technology

People who believe in the potential of new technologies to revolutionise politics and society think that there will be wholesale changes to the functioning of the political system. Effectively, technology deterministically generates a democratic state of affairs – however conceived – because the characteristics of new technologies overcome barriers to “idealised” direct or deliberative democracy. Such “believers”, and it is often presented in such biblical terms, are often accused of a blind faith - an almost cult-like obsession, detached from the reality of how technologies are experienced and used in society at large. Such characterisations are often fair. Masuda, for example, has argued that ‘the technical difficulties that until now have made it impossible for large numbers of citizens to participate in policy making have now been solved by the revolution in computer-communications technology’. Rheingold (1993, 14) argued that computer-mediated communication has the ‘capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy’s monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps thus revitalize citizen-based democracy.’ Phil Noble, meanwhile, argued that: ‘The internet will do for politics what the machine gun did for Bonnie and Clyde. ... The Internet will revolutionize politics as we know it.’¹

¹ (Deb Price Candidates Hit E-Campaign Trail: They Tap the Powers of the Net to Reach Voters, Their Pockets The Detroit News nov 26 1999, A1. in Davis, Elin and Reeher Click on Democracy Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 56)

These accounts put forward an idea of what a technologically-led political revolution *might* look like in the future, but do not outline how this will happen, or consider the factors that shape the diffusion and impact of technology. As Vedel (2006, 232) puts it: 'The idea of electronic democracy is often evaluated by analysing its possible consequences on the political systems ... By contrast, the conditions that are required for it to be implemented are more seldom questioned.' These issues provide the background for perhaps the biggest criticism of revolutionary accounts of new technology: they adopt a technologically determinist position that assumes technology in some way independently determines human behaviour without fully considering the social and institutional context for their use.² Deterministic thinking is very unpopular amongst scholars who see its 'causal technicism' as 'a simple-minded approach to socio-technical analysis which assumes a unilinear technological "impact"' that places the 'social significance of the information age' on 'the technology and its characteristics' (Bellamy and Taylor 1998, 2). This school of thought, known as the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), places the emphasis on how technologies are adopted and used by people, and the institutional, political, economic and other factors that influence this. Winston has forcefully argued for a historically informed understanding of the revolutionary potential of new technologies: each new technology is greeted with the same revolutionary hype, but the hype is never met because the impacts of technology are repressed by social and institutional factors following what he calls the "*law*" of the *suppression of radical potential*' (Winston 1998, p6 italics in original). In a similar vein, Bellamy and Taylor (1998, p170) have argued that:

Despite the powerful hyperbole which surrounds the notion of an information age, heroic scenarios for reinvigorating government through the application of ICTs are fundamentally misleading. The institutions of governance will mould and fashion the revolutionary potential of ICTs into an evolutionary reality. [...] The heady images which are so often associated with ICTs, together with the technologically determinist expectations that they will transform the nature of relationships in and around governance, are balanced by the relative insusceptibility to change if the normative and assumptive worlds which suffuse political institutions.

It is my contention that technology does not determine human behaviour, though it can influence and constrain political action (see Winner 1988). I believe that the technological determinism evident in so many revolutionary accounts has distracted researchers from focusing on the actual impacts of technology upon politics. The revolutionary *potential* of new technologies do not lie in some innate quality that they possess that force human beings to behave in a particular way. The revolutionary *potential* lies, instead, in how new technologies are designed, exploited and adopted (or not) by humans in particular social and political contexts – that is, in a complex interplay between social and technical determinism (Chadwick 2006 18-19).

² According to Street (1992, 30), technological determinism contends that: 'technology sets the conditions for the operation of the political system, including the political agenda, even if it does not determine the policy output.' Street goes on to identify two types of technological determinism. The first idea is that technology forces society to change: 'Technical change can appear to present people with no choice; it constitutes a demand to adapt [...] It is a process that cannot, ultimately, be resisted' (Street 1996 check year, 30). The second type of technological determinism identified by Street relates to Marxist ideas that the political order rests upon, and can be explained by, the technological foundations on which society is built.

In response to these debates, there has been an empirical turn in the literature (see, for example: Bimber and Davis 2003; Coleman *et al.* 2002; Davis 1999, 2005; Dunleavy *et al.* 2006; Gibson and Ward 1998, 2000, 2003; Gibson *et al.*, 2003a,b,c,d, 2004; Wilhelm 2000; Wright 2006, 2007, 2008; Wright and Street 2007) sometimes referred to as cyber-realist (Shane 2004). One of the most important early contributions in this field was Michael Margolis and David Resnick's seminal book "Politics as Usual".

3. Politics as Usual

In *Politics As Usual*, Margolis and Resnick (2000) argue that the revolutionary potential of politics will normalised (or neutered) by the socio-political reality. Their theoretical work is cited extensively, but often researchers do not fully appreciate their actual argument. If anything, people have read more into the normalisation hypothesis than what is actually suggested; it has been extended and mixed in with broader arguments such as those put forward by Winston, mentioned above. They do not, for example, argue that normalisation of the internet means it 'will make no difference' (Muhlberger 2002). One explanation for this confusion is that Margolis and Resnick fail to provide a clear definition of revolution. In their theoretical chapter they make very limited reference to the "revolutionary" literature. Instead they somewhat vaguely outline a picture of how the internet, and the types of politics that occur on it, evolved as the World Wide Web developed:

- Intranet politics: predominant in the pre-WWW world. Internet users regulated themselves independent of state and other "interference"
- Politics that Affects the Net: refers to the actions, policies and regulations of (largely) nation states
- Politics on the Net: how the net is being used for political ends

They start their account of the internet's evolution by arguing that there was a brief "revolutionary golden age", akin to a Lockean state of nature. The driving logic was altruism rather than money; every person was free and equal; and behaviour was regulated internally, without interference from government. The position builds on a libertarian tradition (the "Californian ideology") that influenced many early thinkers (Vedel 2006). But, as with Locke's State of Nature, this "golden age" quickly wilted in the face of state and market regulation. Politics that Affects the Net superseded Intranet politics and normalised cyberspace: 'Cyberspace has become a focus for contending social and political forces that wish to tame it. When it comes to governance, the age of laissez-faire and self-regulation belongs to the past of the Net; the future belongs to government.' Margolis and Resnick (1999, 5) also put some of the blame on technical changes. The World Wide Web created a "new Net" that favoured (inegalitarian) presentation over the apparently broadly egalitarian form of conversation featured on newsgroups and empowered web designers at the expense of ordinary users.

While this virtual state of nature was, undoubtedly, a historically popular picture of the internet's revolutionary potential, it is based, like so many "golden ages", on a slightly distorted picture of reality. No one would dispute that the net now has more external regulation, but the net has always experienced external regulation, whether by broad US government policies on barring commercial uses of the Net, legal restrictions or technical limitations. If we are willing to accept this, we must combine

an analysis of contemporary intra-net politics to see if it has experienced 'a decline in importance' (ibid 9) alongside analysis of Politics that Affects the Net. Consider, for example, the norms of behaviour that govern blog interaction or netiquette; how users help to shape Facebook "rules" (and how external regulation such as legal challenges that forced the closure of the Scrabulous game); or the mixed regulatory approach adopted by eBay with its user feedback and dispute resolution services. Such issues are quasi-political; quasi-Intra-net Politics. The historical account is imbued by a positive normative view about the desirability of a libertarian state of affairs. This is set up as being the measure by which to determine whether or not the internet was having a revolutionary affect. In so doing, other potential revolutionary changes that did not meet this libertarian ideal are effectively cut off. This is problematic because research suggests that regulation is often necessary to help generate freedom, with established institutions continuing to play an important role (Budge 1996).³

On the first page of their book, they present a very different, and what I consider to be a much more realistic, simplified account of the internet's revolutionary potential. It is grounded in their third category, Politics on the Net. They state that: 'Not long ago, the internet was heralded as a technology for creating new forms of community, empowering citizens, and challenging existing power structures'. This second interpretation probably adds to the confusion mentioned above. It is, however, very important: if we use their first picture as our yardstick for measuring the internet's revolutionary impact it could readily be dismissed. But, if we choose the latter, the picture is far more confusing – and interesting. First, I will look at what Margolis and Resnick found from their own empirical studies – which focused largely on Politics on the Net.

Their early empirical study of politics on the net in America suggested that the websites of established institutions such as the Democratic and Republican parties and mainstream media dominated and that governments were offering largely static websites that provided somewhat limited information and little or no space for interaction. It would be fair to say that Margolis and Resnick considered their empirical results to be disappointing. The internet 'has not become the locus of a new politics that spills out of the computer screen and revitalizes citizenship and democracy.' (ibid 2). They blame this, in part, on the development of the Web: 'Political life on the Internet has moved away from fluid cyber-communities, in which civic life centers around free discussion and debate. It has entered an era of organized civil society and structured group pluralism with a relatively passive citizenry.' (ibid 7). In particular, they blame political parties and their elected representatives for developing: 'Web sites that mirror the metrotowns of the "real" America' as they threaten 'to pave over the delicate growths that have sprung up along the information superhighway. Far from remaking American politics, the

³ For Blumler and Coleman (2001, 17-18): 'Free speech without regulation becomes just noise; democracy without procedure would be in danger of degenerating into a tyranny of the loudest shouter – or, in the case of e-democracy, the most obsessive, loquacious poster.' This position is supported by Barber (2003, 42): 'The pretence that there can be [no regulation] at all, that discourse is possible on a wholly unmediated basis, breeds anarchy rather than liberty and data overload rather than knowledge.' These arguments have been supported by empirical analyses of Usenet, celebrated by Margolis and Resnick's unnamed "optimists": debates tended towards argument (flame wars) rather than deliberation, with unrepresentative participants and a dominant minority (Wilhelm 2000, Hill and Hughes 1998, Linaa-Jensen 2003). This led Davis to conclude that (1999, 167) 'even the Internet's most democratic corner is not as democratic as it appears.' (though see critique below). Recent research has emphasised the importance of moderators or facilitators in encouraging online debates (Blumler and Coleman 2001, Edwards 2002, Wright 2006) and how website design can influence the nature of the debate that occurs (Wright and Street 2007). If this is correct, moves to a more governed, pluralistic internet may facilitate a vibrant public sphere (Loader 1997).

development of cyberspace, and particularly of the WWW, seems more likely to reinforce the status quo.⁵⁴ They conclude that: 'Far from revolutionizing the conduct of politics and civic affairs in the real world, we found the Internet tends to reflect and reinforce the patterns of behavior of that world. Politics on the Internet is politics as usual...' (2000 vii) However, they also note that: 'With the normalization of cyberspace, the political uses of the Net are becoming more varied and intense. The Internet is no longer simply a space for online political discussion.' (ibid. 21) That is, politics on the net might be extended, though not towards their first picture of an internet revolution. Thus, Margolis and Resnick do not argue that normalised politics means that nothing is changing: 'The Net, and especially the Web, certainly will have an influence on offline political life...' (ibid. 14) It is simply that 'The utopian vision of a worldwide agora that would revitalize democracy has to confront the harsh reality of lawsuits and regulations, commerce and entertainment, political parties, organised interest groups, political activists, and, most important, masses of bored and indifferent citizens. Although revitalization is still possible, it is much more difficult than the optimists once imagined.' 22. Having outlined their argument, and discussed some of the issues with interpretation, I will now discuss some of the issues that I believe this has helped to generate with studies of online politics.

4. The Problem with the Revolution/Normalisation Frame

There are three principal concerns with the revolution/normalisation frame. First, many researchers, when attempting to measure whether the internet is revolutionising politics, ground their empirical analysis in the very revolutionary accounts of which they are so critical. In other words, they broadly accept the terms of the debate put forward by the so-called "revolutionaries". To note that the internet: 'has not had nearly the effects on society that either its proponents or its detractors predicted.' (Margolis and Resnick 2000, 1-2) too willingly accepts their frame of analysis, and in no way means that it isn't having deeply significant – and perhaps even revolutionary – impacts.

Second, the revolutionary frame can influence what research questions are adopted and which aspects of the internet are analysed (Strandberg 2008). Considering all the hyping of the internet's revolutionary implications for politics, the revolution often appears silent. But as Jenkin's and Thorburn (2003, 2) put it: 'maybe these disappointed observers were looking in the wrong places, searching for some decisive moment that would embody the new power of digital media – the contemporary equivalent of Roosevelt's "fireside" chats on radio or the Kennedy-Nixon debates on television.' On my reading, a preponderant amount of research has been conducted into the impact of the net on political parties and their elected representatives. It is relatively easy to identify their blogs or Facebook profiles compared to ordinary activists or the politically-minded blogger who may comment infrequently or indirectly about politics. This may explain the heavy research focus here (my own included – see Wright 2008). It would also appear that, in the attempt to assess whether politics is being revolutionised, there follows a "logical" jump that this should be determined by looking at existing political institutions, using existing political (and other) theories. The concern is that analysing the Facebook profiles or blogs of political parties and elected representatives, while *prima facie* interesting, may be missing the point. It may be the case that more democratically important

political and social changes occur amongst the interactions of ordinary citizens (Coleman and Blumler, 2009) and may not be political acts as understood by more traditional definitions (Coleman 2005; Van Zoonen 2005). Following the work of Ray Oldenburgh (1999), the political changes arguments may occur in so-called Third Spaces.⁴ The point here is not to argue that there is a revolution occurring in such spaces, but that, the revolutionary frame may have pushed people to look in the wrong places.

Third, the revolution/normalisation frame distorts how researchers make sense of their empirical findings by creating undue expectations, and this could lead them to be too pessimistic in their analysis about the impacts of technology on politics. In the face of all the hyping of technology, there is a danger that an implicitly pessimistic mindset is adopted; Margolis and Resnick, for example, are self-affirmed sceptics (Margolis and Resnick 2000, 202).⁵ Consider the following examples.

Citing survey results of political website readership, Stephen Schifferes stated that: 'only 17% of people had visited the Conservative Party website'. On what basis or expectation is this finding interpreted as "only 17%"? If we were to reframe this finding, the fact that 17% of people made the effort to look at the Conservative Party website could be considered surprisingly positive. Similarly, Harris Interactive interpreted a survey finding that 44% of Americans read political blogs 'several times a year' or more with the following headline: 'More Than Half of Americans Never Read Political Blogs'.⁶ Again, one has to question what the expectations were when this interpretation was made. Richard Davis has published two widely cited books that analyse the impact of the internet on American politics. I have already quoted a conclusion from *The Web of American Politics* (1999, 167) that the promise of Usenet is hollow and not very democratic. In the second book, *Politics Online* (2005, 67), he returns to the analysis of Usenet, concluding that: 'people often talk past one another when they are not verbally attacking each other.' Tables X and Y contain the empirical data on which the analysis was built.

	Responses to other Posts (%)	Flaming (%)	Attack on Third Party (%)	Evidence references (%)
Constitution	68	37	28	9
Radical-left	90	62	37	13
Republican	94	33	20	10
Clinton	87	11	8	12

Davis (199, 167)

⁴ This is a call for more, and broader, research – and not a criticism of the research that has been conducted.

⁵ It is surprisingly common for researchers to say at the outset that the internet will not create significant social change. Bellamy and Taylor (1998 preface vi), for example, in their excellent and well-considered book *Governing in the Information Age* somewhat contradictorily were keen to drop the 'intellectual baggage of technological determinisms' because, in part, 'it serves to pre-form our scholarly thinking' yet make what appears to be an equally pre-formed assumption that new technologies will have limited impact: 'New technologies will not open society's door to a better future. Nor will they bring with them a frightening future of human despair.'

⁶ 21 aug 08 http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=879

	Responses to other Posts (%)	Attack on Poster (%)	Attack on Third Party (%)	Inclusion of Other Materials (%)
Clinton	86.5	10.6	7.9	11.9
Constitution	68.3	36.7	28.4	9
Radical Left	89.5	61.8	36.9	13.2

Davis (2005, 67)

I would argue that, in a relatively ungoverned and poorly designed space such as Usenet, these are surprisingly positive results that suggest people were actually engaged in debate (especially when one considers that a number of posts would be seeding new discussions). At what level would responses to other posts have to be for them to be considered positive? While there was evidence of flaming⁷, these particular groups are generally considered to be some of the most vitriolic on Usenet and cannot be extrapolated into a broader commentary of Usenet debates as Davis has done (Stromer-Galley 2003, Wright 2005). The research findings were interpreted in the context of utopian, cyber-optimist arguments that Usenet would facilitate idealised models of deliberative democracy, revitalising the public sphere. The problem is that they are precisely that: ideal. If we were to lower the barrier, say placing the emphasis on discussion rather than deliberation, then these results might be interpreted much more positively.

It is my contention that each of these interpretations is informed by the hyping of technologies implications for politics. If we start with the expectation that the internet will lead to particular types of massive change, there are two dangers. Firstly, that anything that is happening will pail into relative insignificance and be assessed as such. Secondly, that other, potentially revolutionary change, might be occurring but is ignored, dismissed or missed completely. It seems clear that a much more sophisticated model for making sense of the impacts of new technology is needed. We must, firstly, be very clear what we think a revolution would look like, and, indeed, have a clear, nuanced definition of the term: revolution. Combined together, there is a distinct danger that researchers are underplaying the significance of the impact of the internet upon politics. Given these concerns, I would like to finish this article by suggesting three directions for the future of research. I will begin by thinking about the nature of “revolution” itself.

1.1 Reinterpret the Internet “Revolution”

The first suggestion is that researchers must carefully consider what we mean by the term revolution, and that a more nuanced approach is necessary if we are to fairly assess the impact of technologies on politics. While I believe there is a danger in maintaining the discourse of revolutions (see above), given how important it has become within both the field and the popular imagination, I believe that this more nuanced approach is preferable.

Scholars have been quick to dismiss so-called revolutionaries as idealistic and the like. It is undeniable that they *do* have a point. Too often, technology is hyped as having revolutionary potential without a full understanding of what happens in

⁷ It must also be said that the nature of the debates would be considered a democratic strength amongst agonistic thinkers.

practice; the latter may be very different from the potential. But to completely dismiss the impacts of technology on the altar of a false dichotomy between revolutions versus normalisation is equally wrong. It should be remembered that the revolution-normalisation dichotomy is more of a discourse than a coherent framework or analytical tool to help make sense of empirical results. To fairly assess the internet's impact on politics, we cannot just answer the question of whether they are revolutionary, or not. The underlying research goal must be to analyse and interpret what effects the internet has on politics across a spectrum of potential outcomes. There is a danger that the semantics of revolution obfuscate fair consideration of actual impacts. As I have previously argued: 'The smaller, incremental changes that can occur (often at the periphery) remain potentially very important: there is a danger that their significance can be over-looked.' (Wright 2008)

How to define what constitutes a revolution is one of the great scholarly questions, debated by people such as Marx, Williams and Hobsbawm, yet, as noted above, many scholars have failed to adequately define what they mean by the term. "Revolution" is bandied around rather too freely. If we do not have a working definition of revolution, it makes it very difficult to understand what causes them, to determine when one actually happens and to measure their effects. There are many different types of revolution. The nature of revolution depends on the context e.g. political, social, economic; global, national, regional, local. While researching revolutions, I have read literally hundreds of different definitions. The three most common themes were: fundamental change, speed of change, and violent change. The latter, which typically refers to regime change of some form, is not particularly relevant, and will be omitted.⁸ At its heart, revolution is about observed change. I believe that there is, however, a populist assumption that revolutions occur fast and lead to massive change on a national or international scale (in the political context this could be a new political order or democratic system).⁹ We can see this tendency in the cyber-optimist literature. If we were to uncritically accept this kind of account, it would set the bar extremely high for an ICT-enabled revolution. But revolutions can be very complex; we need only think about the agricultural revolution.¹⁰

If we accept that agricultural changes were revolutionary, it would suggest that populist account of revolution are inaccurate. One only has to briefly peruse the myriad of books written about the agricultural and industrial revolutions to see that our depth of analysis and understanding of the internet "revolution" is shallow and under-developed. This is unsurprising: it is questionable whether the agricultural revolution would have been identified as a revolution at an equivalently early stage in its development. It may well be that, in attempting to assess the impacts of new technologies on politics at such an early stage, we are effectively trying to pin the tail

⁸ There is often the same lack of clarity about what is meant by "fundamental change" and how fast the "speed of change" must be for an event to be called revolutionary (or whether some mix of the two makes a difference).

⁹ This belief is informed by some informal research where I asked a range of students, colleagues and friends to write down their definition of revolution.

¹⁰ The British agricultural revolution occurred over the 18th and 19th centuries and is generally considered to have been facilitated by a mixture of new technologies such as Jethro Tull's seed drill, threshing machines and steam-driven ploughs; scientific breeding of animals (e.g. Robert Bakewell's New Leicester sheep); changing farming practices (Norfolk Four Crop rotation) and administration (e.g. the enclosure of land). The effects of these changes are said to have been revolutionary – it allowed increased population growth and urbanisation that laid the foundations for the industrial revolution.¹¹ While the impacts are generally considered to have been revolutionary, they certainly were not in any way fast or sudden; there was not one moment, one technology or one event which marked the change.¹¹ Indeed, it is arguable that the more significant revolutionary changes were actually secondary effects, based on a plethora of interlinked developments.

on a donkey without really knowing what the donkey looks like. Nevertheless, it is helpful to think through the nature of revolution in the context of new media.

Before an initial attempt to do this, I would like to add some further notes of clarification. First, I do not attempt to provide any geographical or other size limitations within the different categories. That is, a super revolution could potentially occur on a local level. For example, a move within one state (e.g. California) towards internet-enabled direct or deliberative democracy might constitute a revolution depending on the practice. Second, given the context of the agricultural revolution, I do not make any specific limitations on the timescale for each category of revolution. Third, revolutionary change does not necessarily have to occur because of some amazing innovation. The actual technical “innovation” may not be that innovative – it could, for example, be the tweaking of an already existing format, the mashing together of two different existing technologies, or the discovery of a new way for people to exploit an already existing technology (e.g. email). There can be significant differences between innovation and application. Thus, we must be careful to look beyond purely technical “revolutions”. Following this logic, to claim that the ‘process of “normalization” would empty the internet of most of its innovative potential’ does not mean the impact will necessarily not be revolutionary (Vaccari 2008, 2 – summarising Margolis and Resnick’s work). Of course, this leaves one open to the accusation that change is evolutionary rather than revolutionary and thus we must look in detail at the extent and significance of change. The following is an initial attempt to delineate two theoretical categories or models of internet revolution to help stimulate debate.

“Super” Revolution

A Super Revolution would require a wholesale change to the system of democracy (e.g. a move to direct or deliberative democracy and would lead to changes in established institutional structures and power arrangements. The Super Revolution category is similar to the ideas put forward by the “traditional” revolutionary thinkers that dominate contemporary debates. These distinctions are, of course, matters of degree. My assumption is that Budge (1996), in his seminal work, was right: any move towards idealised forms of democracy (in his case, direct) will retain some aspects of the representative system such as political parties and parliament. While some might see this as the suppression of radical potential, this can be considered revolutionary change so long as the core decision-making power is moved from a body of elected representatives to the citizens themselves. It should be said that the likelihood of super revolutionary change occurring is extremely low, even if new technologies do make it theoretically possible.

Normalised Revolution

A normalised revolution is one where new technologies are creating deeply significant, perhaps wholesale changes to the function of *established* political institutions. It is a revolution from within. Adopting new technologies, perhaps to neuter their (super revolutionary) radical potential (Winston 1998), does not mean that technology is itself completely neutered – it can still have significant, perhaps revolutionary effects, on how institutions operate. Consider the following statement published by Joe Trippi (former campaign manager for Howard Dean) in *Wired* magazine. It suggests (debatably) that the internet is fundamentally changing representative politics: ‘What’s really going on is a political phenomenon, a

democratic movement that flows naturally from our civic lives [...]. The 2008 election will be the first national contest waged and won primarily online. The Web puts us over the tipping point; it's democracy's killer app.' While I disagree with the analysis, the sentiment is of a normalised revolution. The key factor with a normalised revolution is that decision-making power still rests with elected representatives, but that new technology can, to paraphrase Barber's term, help to create stronger *representative* democracy. It revolutionises the practice of existing institutions and practices.

4.2 Look in different spaces

While the study of political deliberation online is still in its infancy, a number of empirical studies have been conducted. Virtually all research has focused on established political events (e.g. elections), institutions (e.g. parliament/party websites), activities (e.g. government-run online consultations) and actors (elected representatives and journalists blogs and social networks). A few early studies looked at online political discussion more generally, such as on Usenet forums, but these studies chose largely to focus on explicitly party-political areas (Wilhelm 2000; Davis 1999, 2005). While this research undoubtedly had significant value, it is time to cast our research net more broadly when looking for political debate online. Following the work of Ray Oldenburgh, Robert Putnam and Stephen Coleman, "everyday" political conversation can have real democratic value, and these informal gathering spaces may have far greater meaning to participants than say a government-run online discussion forum. Relatively few people participate in government forums for a variety of reasons, yet a space such as the www.moneysavingexpert.com forum has around 18 million posts, with a significant amount of political discussion. Researchers (Davis 1999, 2005; Wilhelm 2000) often make grand claims about the nature of online deliberation on the basis of very narrow studies that cannot be extrapolated into this broader commentary.

4.3 Move beyond "elite" models of deliberation

As noted by Coleman and Blumler (2009), many studies are grounded in a "deep, sombre, rationally-bounded cerebral rumination" picture of online deliberation that is "more suited to the Senior Common Room than the workplace, community hall or public square." While this undoubtedly has a place, clearly many online spaces are very different from this. Coleman and Blumler "are happy to settle for a *more deliberative democracy*" (2009, 38 original emphasis) that "would take seriously a range of forms of public talk, from the informal and conversational to the consultative and evidential." At the moment there is a danger that we used idealised, and arguably impossible criteria by which to measure deliberation that preclude a positive outcome at the outset. While Habermas-inspired models do still have a significant role to play, researchers need to consider more flexible approaches to online discussion (Freelon, forthcoming).

4.4 Increase experimental (social science) research

Social scientists have tended to focus their research on assessing the impacts of new technologies without intervening directly in the practice. Research has suggested that there are a number of ways in which online discussions could be facilitated, such as through consideration of forum design and moderation. While it is true that there have already been a number of experiments with designing online

deliberation, and conferences such as this help to overcome this, inter/multi-disciplinary efforts arguably need to be redoubled with greater involvement of social science in broader fields such as computer and decision science.

5. Conclusion

This article has set out an agenda for future research, informed by a critique of the revolution/normalisation frame that has influenced much existing research to date. The article has raised more questions than answers, but I hope that it will inspire debate about the future of online deliberation studies, and more generally about how we should theorise the potential impacts of technology on politics.

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Deliberative e-Rulemaking Decision Facilitation: Challenges to Enacting Real World Deliberation

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Abstract. This paper describes the challenges facing a federal government funded initiative to promote deliberation to improve the public comment process by federal and state government agencies in the U.S. The three year project has met several difficulties. Some have been technical, such as the challenge of producing quality summaries. But our primary obstacle has been in securing partnerships with government agencies. Due to institutional, legal, and organizational challenges many government agencies are resistant to opening up the public comment process to a deliberative structure. The paper describes the objectives of the original research project and details the challenges faced.

1. Introduction

One of the largely untapped areas for experimentation of online deliberation involves electronic rulemaking by federal and state government agencies. In the United States and in many other democratic nations, government agencies are required to invite public comment in advance of enacting a regulation. This public comment process represents perhaps the largest potential arena for direct public input into government, and certainly a critical arena for input and improvement of federal and state agency regulatory rules.

For the past three years, we have been involved in a project meant to expand the potential of e-rulemaking while using this practical context to address key issues in advanced information technology and the social science of deliberative groups. This exploratory paper describes the novel technological and structural approaches to online deliberations with which we have been experimenting, and describes some of the major challenges we have encountered in attempting to test this approach with federal and state government agencies.

2. Justifying Deliberation

Deliberation allows people to put their 'heads together', but in its typical form this occurs only at the level of small, uncoordinated groups. These small, ad-hoc groups can have inherent shortcomings, at a variety of levels.

At the individual level: **Poorly Informed Participants** — Individuals are often less than fully informed on policy issues (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Gilens, 2000; Neuman, 1986), in part because of information costs—the time and effort needed to become informed. Poorly informed participants are not aided by current agency practices of providing a great deal of raw information online, but virtually no tools to organize or understand this information (Noveck, 2004). **Unsophisticated Participants** — Individuals may possess low levels of sophistication with regard to a topic (Converse, 1964; Luskin, 1987; Neuman, 1986). In brief, they do not organize their understandings of the topic under abstractions and generalizations, they are "aschematic" or non-experts (Zeitz, 1997). An inability to understand a topic in terms of abstractions and generalizations, instead greatly impedes people's ability to think in creative and intelligent ways about that topic.

At the group level: **Unique Information Sharing** — People typically do not share unique information they possess, limiting what they can learn in a group discussion (Gigone & Hastie, 1997). **Spiral of Silence** — People who sense that they are in a minority on an issue are less likely to contribute to a discussion (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997; Noelle-Neumann, 1993), limiting the range of perspectives expressed and contemplated. **Lack of Engagement** — In an effort to be polite, participants may avoid conflict and minimize thoughtful analysis (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002; Eliasoph, 1998; Rosenberg, 2005; Ryfe, 2005). Deliberation evokes a conception of citizenship that stresses consensus (Muhlberger, 2005b). This tendency may be higher among unsophisticated participants who are insufficiently confident in their ability to analyze and critique other points of view. Thus, participants in public deliberations may fail to engage due to a "spiral of agreeableness."

At the collective level (the set of all discussion groups): **The Problem of Scale** — Large numbers of participants in a multitude of small groups create three key scale problems. **Output Volume** — First is the problem of the volume and organization of deliberation outputs, which bears directly on the problem of how officials can digest the outputs of such a deliberation. **Information Sharing** — The second problem is that of sharing useful information across groups. Individual groups may identify good ideas and facts, but the full value of these ideas and facts would be exploited only if they were shared across the collectivity of groups. In the absence of such sharing, good ideas and facts may vary randomly in policy implications across groups, resulting in zero average effect on policy attitudes across groups, as found in one study (Muhlberger, 2005a). Sharing information across groups could also stimulate the development of additional good ideas and facts and help the community of groups develop 'collective intelligence'—the capacity to intelligently address policy issues as a collectivity. Increasingly, small work groups are seen as useful information processing devices (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). The question is how to effectively take the intelligence of individual groups to the collective level of all groups. **Coordination** — To address the problem of information sharing and to encourage collective intelligence, groups may

need to be coordinated. For example, group representatives could share a group's ideas across groups. But, this raises problems of coordination such as how to keep representatives accountable to their home group members, who will not have the time or motivation to follow all aspects of their representatives' discussions.

3. How Technology Can Help

Deliberative practitioners believe that good facilitation is necessary for deliberation. Discussion facilitation is important for deliberation, but only an automated discussion facilitator would be feasible for the e-rulemaking process. Government agencies, however, have little budget to deploy human facilitators, particularly for large rulemakings involving thousands of citizens. Government officials consulted for this proposal indicated that besides the costs of human facilitators, organizing such facilitation—hiring, training, and scheduling—would be prohibitively time consuming and complicated. Human facilitators would, like participants, have limited memories and limited ability to process information.

Natural Language Processing technologies have progressed to a point where they are useful for a range of applications, such as answering questions (Strzalkowski and Harabagiu, 2006) and translating documents between languages (Wilks, 2009). With respect to digital government applications, NLP technologies are being developed and deployed that assist in a number of ways, including categorising issues during a rulemaking deliberation (Cardie et al, 2008), or attempting to summarise the contents of a completed discussion (Tigelaar et al, 2010). The focus is on using established NLP techniques to assist in the on-going process of a deliberation.

Over the past two years, we have been developing an artificial Discussion Facilitation Agent (DiFA). This agent, based on Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies, is designed to: a) help participants quickly and easily learn about complex rulemaking background information (thereby helping to remedy the problem of poorly informed participants, unsophisticated participants); b) help connect participants to those of like- and dissimilar-perspectives (to help with unique information sharing and possibly minimize spiral of silence and lack of engagement); c) offer suggestions for new topics for potential discussion based on the conversation that has transpired thus far (to help limit spiral of silence and lack of engagement).

We are deploying the Question-Answering system HITIQA (Small and Strzalkowski, 2009). HITIQA was developed to aid intelligence analysts ask complex questions of unstructured data. Trials have shown that HITIQA outperforms traditional search tools such as Google in terms of time efficiency when finding answers to questions. To connect participants together, we are classifying each sentence of each post with a dialogue act (Bunt, 1994) using our CuDAC classifier (Webb and Liu 2008). Dialogue acts are labels that characterize the function of each sentence, in terms of the role it plays in the discourse. For example, we can identify statements of opinion (such as "I think that network neutrality is good") and use such statements to connect participants to those expressing opinions on related issues, building communities of like-minded deliberators. We can also point participants to existing or new posts and threads in the ongoing deliberation that touch on subjects they post about. In a similar vein, DA

labeling can identify questions raised in deliberation postings. We can send these questions to HITIQA automatically and have them answered as a background process, with the hope that the information returned will be useful to the ongoing deliberation process. Finally, we can use simple keyword techniques as a means to identify current trends in the deliberation. If we have pre-surveyed participants, including a list of topics that centrally interest them, we can possibly identify issues which have not yet been raised and use these to prompt individual participants to suggest new topics. By providing a daily email update with new questions, new links to posts and threads, and a synopsis of the topics of deliberation each day, we hope to keep users informed and engaged.

4. Multiple-Level Deliberation

In addition to utilizing technology to assist deliberations, we wanted to provide online deliberative forums that implement a multi-level deliberation process (MLD). Though democratic deliberation may improve the quality of comments, it poses problems for government agency officials. Through interaction, the number of comments is likely to grow substantially, making rulemaking even more unwieldy for officials. Though they may hire outside consultants to read all comments, in the end what is learned must be funneled through a handful of officials who are likely to remember and be able to work with a quite limited number of important points. Deliberation and deliberative e-rulemaking therefore faces a problem of scale. In addition, scale poses a problem in sharing and intelligently using information within deliberation groups. People can meaningfully deliberate with only a few people at a time. Muhlberger (2005a) finds that policy attitudes converge among discussion group members, but each group is randomly distributed around a global mean that does not differ from that of nondiscussants, yielding no net difference in opinions between discussants and non-discussants. This global cancellation of discussion effects may occur because the information that causes convergence among group members is not shared across groups. Good ideas and observations in one group have no opportunity to spread across groups, and the body of groups does not have a chance to develop collective intelligence and thereby function as a community. Muhlberger (2005a) finds, however, that deliberation serves a crucial motivating function to bring participants to the experiment, without which their attitudes would not change.

Multi-level deliberation (MLD) seeks to address the scale and information problems of standard deliberation by utilizing a structure of multiple-levels of groups. MLD was inspired in part by the social organizational technique of sociocracy. According to qualitative accounts, sociocracy was successfully deployed in running Dutch businesses (Endenburg, 1998; Endenburg & Pearson, 1998). A MLD type deliberation was utilized in the participatory budgeting process adopted by the city government of Porto Alegre Brazil in the 1990s (Fung, 2002). Ten percent of the city's population participated in layered deliberations that resolved difficult budget issues. Urban infrastructure development greatly increased while corruption and patronage appear to have declined. The World Bank enthusiastically promoted participatory budgeting, and by 2000, 140 Brazilian municipalities adopted some form of the process.

In MLD, participants meet in small online discussion groups of about 10 discussants. After a full round of group discussion, participants select two members to represent their views at a higher-level group that represents multiple lower-level groups. Representatives would be selected with proportional representation to insure a full range of views at higher levels. Because the hierarchy of MLD groups involves exponentiation, a handful of levels could represent tens of thousands of discussants. Information can travel both up and down the multi-level structure, allowing the groups to share information and develop more specialized and intelligent functions. Lower-level group members would follow the progress of higher-level groups, and representatives would return to their lower-level groups to describe what they had learned in higher-level groups and obtain input. Good information as well as the most engaged representatives should filter through to higher-level groups, and the top-most group would summarize the best information and ideas of the larger public. In addition, the top-most group could interact directly with public officials.

5. Lessons Learned

The original plan of research was to conduct two rounds of pilot testing and then to experiment with real rulemaking by government agencies. We conducted two rounds of pilot testing with undergraduate students at a major research university in the United States on the topic of network neutrality, which is the issue of whether there should be government regulation of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and internet backbone companies related to their ability to throttle traffic on the internet to increase performance and to treat some internet traffic differently.

The pilot testing was meant to allow us to test some of the technology, in particular an element of DiFA that makes information about the regulation available to participants. This component, Question-Answering, allows participants to query a database of information using full sentences, rather than key words. The database is driven by Natural Language Processing technology that allows a user to ask a question as they would another human and to receive a factoid answer or short explanatory paragraph returned as a result. We found, however, that undergraduate students were disinclined to use the tool, preferring instead to use a familiar information search tool, such as Google. It should be noted that the function of the tool was not highlighted to the students, nor were they required to use it. We made it available to them before and during the deliberation and were curious to see if they would use it given its presence in the deliberative space. As it turned out, they were not curious about it. Indeed, in general they were not knowledgeable about the subject nor were they particularly engaged with the topic, which may have further minimized their inclination to use the tool to learn more about the topic.

We also worked to secure a partnership with a state or federal agency to experiment with a real rulemaking. This proved challenging. First, the project began near the end of President George Bush's term as president. As such, federal agencies were disinclined to participate in a rulemaking experiment like ours. Given that heads of agencies are executive government appointees, there are often changes in agenda and focus that accompany a change of administration. Those spearheading efforts to enact rules under

existing heads did not wish to slow down the process for fear of having their effort stopped when a new agency director was appointed. Our project would possibly slow down the process whereby an agency sought a rule change. Second, some agencies only wanted to participate in the project if we could guarantee a desired outcome for the agency. In effect, they were looking to the deliberation as a way to steer the public towards a particular view the agency preferred, which violates basic tenets of deliberation. Third, government agencies work on a very slow and uncertain timetable, generally. Our project was funded for two years, and having been unsuccessful securing a partnership with an agency in the first year and a half, we requested a one-year extension from our funder. We have been in conversations with one federal agency for over a year on a rulemaking involving state parks. Two months before the deliberation was to begin, the agency decided that there was too much political controversy surrounding the rulemaking topic, controversy that might have negative effects on the mid-term elections. As a result, the agency is considering delaying formal rulemaking on the issue till after the elections—which is after our project is due to end. On the other hand, the agency head on occasion sees graphic evidence of the harms caused by the lack of a rule and seems to be wavering about whether to pursue a formal rulemaking, even in the face of political pressure. Even if the formal rulemaking is not pursued during the course of our project, we are told that we can pursue a non-formal information seeking deliberation that is not too tightly affiliated with the agency. So, this deliberation may still happen. Fourth, some government agency officials we spoke with about our project expressed interest but also legal concerns. At state and federal levels, there are clear mandates for how public comments are to be conducted, evaluated, and utilized by an agency. Inserting a novel online, public deliberation into the mix caused concern for legal personnel at some of the agencies.

We did secure a partnership with the New York State Department of Environmental Protection a year ago. In a few weeks, we will host a deliberation for them that utilizes the DiFA agent, but not the MLD process. The topic on which they are seeking comment involves a change to a form that currently is required for all major building or development projects that might have an environmental impact. The form has not been modified in several decades and proposed changes to the form will introduce such considerations and environmental justice and greenhouse gas emissions. The new form also requires details for projects that have any environmental impact, whereas the prior version only required details for projects with substantial implications. The relevant parties are those who must fill out the form or evaluate the project based on information on the form, including local zoning boards, builders, and attorneys. The likely participants are too few in number to experiment with MLD.

We also faced challenges with the technology. We originally had hoped to advance NLP techniques for summarization, for example. NLP generally requires large amounts of corpus data in order to harness statistical techniques for improvement. Because we have had only pilot data to work from, which has generated a relatively small corpus, we have not been able to fully harness these techniques to improve summarization. Our efforts at developing a way to create sensible summaries of the discussions have been largely unsuccessful as a result.

Thus, this project aimed to harness Natural Language Processing and MultiLevel Deliberation to experiment with and to improve e-rulemakings. Because the success of

our project has rested on establishing partnerships with government agencies, we have faced considerable risk in being able to test our theories and our technology.

In looking to future projects, the success of such rests on having a longer timeline in order to accommodate the slow pace of finding and then working with a government partner. Alternatively, it would be beneficial to have already secured a willing government agency, which we had done, before embarking on creating an e-rulemaking opportunity and/or securing funding to support such an endeavor.

There are larger, structural forces that make e-rulemaking challenging. Federal and state governments need to clarify the legal complexities that arise when inviting public comment through public deliberation. In the case of our partnership with the Department of Environmental Conservation, we found a legal team there that was inclined to read the legal mandates involving public comments in such a way that made an electronic deliberation on the change appropriate and possible.

More importantly, state and government agencies must become more interested and willing to hear deliberative comments from the public. One of the obstacles we routinely encountered when discussing our project with officials was a sentiment that comments from the public were burdensome and ill-informed, and that a deliberative project like ours would likely only lead to more work with seemingly little payoff. Unless government officials come to see value in genuinely seeking comment from citizens, projects like ours will continue to occur on only a limited basis.

Although we have little control over securing partnerships with government agencies, we have a ready-pool of potential deliberators in our college students. We conducted a large deliberation utilizing undergraduate and graduate students from our respective universities. We deployed a range of Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools and also experiment with a Multi-Level Deliberation (MLD). Although students are not an ideal population for deliberating on a somewhat esoteric topic like network neutrality, they can at least help us to identify what some of the promises and problems with the technology and the deliberative structure might be.

We also had a chance to experiment with the DiFA tools when the Department of Environmental Conservation held a small deliberation in April. Although we did not have the numbers of participants we would like to experiment with, we were able to deploy our NLP technologies in a deliberative context with a group of citizens and public officials who greatly care about the form that is being revised. Theirs serves for us as a case study for what is possible when a willing agency is found.

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Facilitation Procedures for Written Online Deliberation A Research and Development Project in the Field of Deliberative Democracy

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Abstract. We are studying and developing a model of written online deliberation, which may involve a potentially very large number of participants (in the order of several thousand or more) and would provide all of them with the right to propose, and not only with the right to comment on others’ proposals. Such a populous online activity cannot be moderated and facilitated by a staff of professional agents, because such a staff would become too large and hence inoperative, and also because it would not necessarily be trusted by all those wishing to participate. Rather, it should be designed as a mostly self-regulatory system that implements carefully elaborated procedures for assisting, guiding, constraining and rewarding participants, inciting them to act in a spirit of mutual respect and productive collaboration pursuing the common good. Relevant field data are virtually absent because none of the current online deliberation projects has ever attracted more than a few hundred participants, and yet they deliberated under the guidance of a staff of facilitators. Hence, our research would inevitably make use of some speculative reasoning, and probably also of computer simulation, to better understand social behaviour of a large number of participants in presence of specific procedural constraints and incentives. Those facilitation procedures, enforced by an appropriately developed software system, should also provide for the forum’s robustness against “mob attacks” and similar dangers.

1. Statement of the Problem

Within the actual development of electronic democracy, which aims at compensating for the so-called *democratic deficit* in the EU and in other countries and organisations, the *eParticipation* paradigm is the most promising one, but at the same time the most difficult to implement. For it puts emphasis on the role of citizens in the legislative and other governance processes, offering them broader possibilities to exercise their initiative, in particular, to formulate and discuss “bottom-up” *their own proposals*, rather than simply discuss proposals made “top down”.

This universal *right to propose*, however, creates specific problems. Namely, once a large number of citizens has been drawn into an eParticipation campaign, many of them can start writing (or speaking) at their own initiative and more or less simultaneously, thus creating what we can call a “crowd buzz”. How then we can

make online deliberation among participants more ordered, more purposeful, and also more respectful to each other? By what means participants can notice and select the best proposals? How groups of similar or compatible proposals could be discovered by participants, and how they could then be advanced or collaboratively developed to become final proposal(s) that could then be put on vote or submitted to appropriate authorities?

All these questions still remain open. Among the EC-funded initiatives, it seems that only the “DEMOS” project and its follow-up named “LexiPation” [1] have actively investigated into problems related to interaction and collaboration in eParticipation. Within that project, a *phased approach* to open policy-making has been applied, and specific *procedures of interaction* between participants, experts, and moderators/editors have been designed and used. Yet the different instances of the “DEMOS” project (in Italy, Greece, Germany and the UK) always dealt with a relatively small number of participants, up to 285 in Hamburg. To enforce those procedures of interaction within such a limited community of participants, DEMOS/LexiPation was able to use a *hired staff of moderators and editors*.

Briefly, current efforts in eParticipation mostly address the problem of a *scanty participation*: how to attract more participants, how to ease their participative work, and also—how to make their participation reasonably ordered and productive right now, when it still remains scanty.

However, regulation and facilitation of participants’ activities will become much more problematic when the number of participants will grow up to, say, several thousand people, or even tens of thousands, that is, after the problem of too scanty participation will have been solved by whatever means.

One very interesting project is carried out by R. J. Pingree (“HeadsTogether”, School of Communication, Ohio State University [2]). It addresses some of the problems stated in the present paper; though the proposed solution is more *structural* than *procedural*. Namely, it defines a taxonomy of deliberative actions; participants must specify the “type” of their every contribution and link it to some parent contribution if any (e.g. by linking a “solution” to a “problem”). In this way, a semantic tree of contributions is maintained by the participants themselves. Contributions are rated by participants (presumably mostly by those who take part in the same “sub-discussion”), so that subordinates of the same node constitute a ranked list. We mostly agree with this structural approach; however, it lacks specific procedures *inciting* participants to act fairly, thoughtfully and productively. In other words, the “HeadsTogether” project is mostly about *assisting* well-intentioned participants in their productive work, while our project is about *impelling* participants, through a system of restrictions and incentives, to work in a more productive way, and by *protecting* the deliberative forum from various kinds of misbehaviour.

2. Context of our Study

The above considerations have drawn us into the study of *procedural aspects of mass eParticipation*, and more specifically, of mass eParticipation aimed at *collaborative development* (of draft laws, administrative decisions or other dispositions of public interest). Such a goal implies a somehow restricted form of eParticipation, when participants are expected to submit well-thought and well-prepared *written contributions*, rather than rapidly exchanging oral or written remarks

on each other's remarks. We believe that only such a written *asynchronous* or "deferred" type of online deliberation can make mass collaborative development possible. We are thus not interested in chat, mobile or other "immediate" forms of online deliberation or interpersonal communications.

Further on, we are mostly interested in "homogenous" *deliberation among individuals*, rather than in a more general "mixed" form that could involve stakeholders of different nature, power and size, such as administrations, NGOs, industries or academia. The reason is that, while a mixed form of participation seems offering a richer discourse, at the same time it impoverishes the individual citizens' discourse by making it dependent on, or even dominated by, the more powerful institutional discourses. Those institutional participants could instead play some more special roles, e.g. by providing expertise and facilitation to citizens' participation. In contrast, the *opinions* of those institutions should remain purely *informative* for the participating citizens, in a way as to allow institutions to comment on proposals but not to vote in their support.

In the following we will use the term *online deliberation* (or *eDeliberation*) to designate the central phase of a more complex multi-phase *eParticipation* process, where the latter may also include some preliminary steps or phases (such as selecting a subject matter for discussion and providing participants with an initial information on it, before they enter into deliberation), and also some conclusive steps, like voting on a set of final proposals. In contrast, the activity of participants in *cooperatively developing* those final proposals is considered to happen within the central phase, i.e. as an integral part or an enhancement of the online deliberation.

3. Assumptions and Arguments

The starting point of our reasoning is that mass eParticipation (in the above defined sense) cannot be moderated and facilitated by professional agents, because their staff would become too large and hence inoperative, and also because it would not necessarily be trusted by all those wishing to participate. Rather, it should be designed as a mostly *self-regulatory* system that implements carefully elaborated *procedures* helping participants to interact and to collaborate. A small number of "external facilitators" could probably be used as arbiters, to resolve disputes between participants arising when the "procedural regulation" fails.

While alleviating the need for a large external staff, procedural self-regulation could at the same time provide for the system's *robustness* against various problems that may hinder fairness, efficiency and effectiveness of mass eParticipation. Among those problems are the "crowd buzz" (when many people speak/write without listening/reading each other); a "mob attack", when many people suddenly constitute a majority in support of an opinion, without having seriously deliberated on it; and an opposite problem of an "oligarchic ruling", when few participants "retain the power" on the forum for a long time and suppress opposite majority opinions.

With regard to *collaborative development* leading to the editing of "final" proposals or solutions, participants should be helped in the tasks of finding similar or compatible ideas in their initial proposals, and of merging and further advancing those proposals in timely created *ad hoc* working groups. While there exist several techniques, methods and instruments for *automatically performing semantic analysis and comparison* of texts and for presenting the findings in a graphical or other easily

understandable form (such as the so-called “argument visualisation”), we believe that such tools should play only a *subordinate role* and should be *equally available* to all participants (not only to some staff of editors/facilitators) helping them to formulate their opinions and to take their decisions. In this way, our procedures for effective participation, deliberation and development can be seen as *independent* of whether such semantic analysis tools are or are not present in the system.

One of our initial assumptions is that, when appealed to participate in a discussion pertaining to the *common good*, citizens generally should behave in a rather “Habermassian” than “Arrowian” way, i.e. by trying to better understand others, by being ready to change their opinions, and finally, by preferring *communication* and *collaboration* (in the spirit of Jürgen Habermas) to *competition* and *bargaining* (more in line with Kenneth Arrow’s “Social Choice” theory).

Of course such a well-intentioned behaviour, in order to be really practiced on an eParticipation forum, must be supported by a set of *restrictive procedures*, and also by some *incentives* for participants to behave correctly, and as productively as they can. Our research aims at understanding which kind of incentives would work, by studying and developing (or even inventing) and then modelling and testing a set of procedures, restrictions and rewards, directed to establishing an *efficient and productive online political mass deliberation*. To begin with, we don’t believe that such a “Habermassian” project could receive great help from the game theory, or the social choice theory, or like.

We also assume that such procedures need to be carefully studied and designed *before* their deployment in a really large eParticipation forum or campaign; after the start of a campaign, very little can be done or modified experimentally. The reason for that is that a mass eParticipation forum should be sufficiently *empowered* to produce decisions which are, if not binding, at least authoritative enough, in order to be seriously and positively considered by authorities. *A powerless institution would never attract a large number of participants*. On the other hand, one cannot experiment with an empowered institution in course of its operation.

We conclude this section with the following remark. If, by using appropriate procedures, we achieve high *productivity* of a deliberation, this would create a “positive feed-back”: the eParticipation forum would attract a larger number of participants, which would make it more *representative* and hence *authoritative*, which in turn would make it yet more attractive and would involve even those usually inactive citizens, and so on. The only question here is *not to have the productivity decreasing with the increase in the number of participants*, for if that were to happen, it would likely cause a “negative feed-back”, when disappointed participants leave, thus diminishing representativeness.

4. The Content of our Research Programme

Our research is devoted to the study and development of optimised *facilitation procedures* for written online deliberation in an eParticipation forum that (1) would make the citizens’ participation both *efficient and productive*; (2) would promote *fairness and collaborative spirit* among participants by not only imposing on them some behavioural restrictions, but also installing some incentives and rewards for them; and (3) would facilitate participants’ collaboration, by offering them appropriate

collaboration tools and also by impelling them to converge their efforts when their initial proposals have been found similar or compatible.

The procedures, tools and algorithms we are considering would include: (1) *phased approach* to eParticipation, where an open eDeliberation on a given subject matter is preceded and followed by some number of well-delimited steps; (2) *mutual appraisal* by participants of each other's contributions according to at least two different parameters; (3) *random selection* of participants for performing some assigned tasks such as moderation and initial appraisal (peer review) of new contributions; (4) automatic derivation of the most appropriate *aggregate characteristics* of contributions and of their authors; (5) creation of appropriate *incentives* for participants. An eParticipation system software should enforce systematic application of these procedures.

In the following sections we propose a detailed list of *questions* that should find their answers in course of development of such system. This list of questions specifies by itself a research and development programme of great importance and of great complexity. It should investigate into various aspects of behaviour of citizens participating over Internet in a populous political forum; in particular, (1) how this behaviour would depend on the level of empowering the forum as an independent political institution; (2) how it would depend on various types of incentives/rewards installed, and on various forms of restrictions imposed, (3) issues related to participants' confidentiality (pseudonymity, encryption, authorship), etc. Interaction procedures and parameters should be carefully defined, with a special emphasis on how they would affect participants' behaviour.

5. The Proposed Method

The above sketched research programme should be pursued by creating a multidisciplinary *discussion group* or a project, where those questions will be investigated in more details, before starting the software development. Next, a *software platform* should be designed and programmed, implementing the functionalities of a Web-service (and its respective client counterpart) for a *mass* eParticipation. Then, before starting real-life experimentation with the platform, some *modelling* should be performed on it, with the aim of studying statistical responses of the system to various changes in the modelled participants' behaviour, such as their activity as readers, their fairness (i.e. impartiality when appraising quality of others), their own productivity in writing proposals and/or comments, their disposition toward cooperation, and also the level of danger created by potential "mob attacks". Numerical parameters are subject to tuning at this stage. Finally, a large scale participation campaign would be prepared and handled, on a topic and in a context where the campaign would be sufficiently *empowered* to attract a large number of citizens.

Currently we are still in the *conceptual phase* of the above described programme, by lack of funding or of an institutional frame. Namely, we have indeed more or less definite answers to most of the questions proposed hereafter; the present form of a questionnaire has been chosen as more apt to generate fresh independent ideas rather than a mere criticism.

We do not assume that all the questions in the following sections can be answered by speculative reasoning alone. Rather, some modelling tools may be

needed, or even a practical experimentation on an appropriately built eParticipation platform (hereafter, such a platform will be called a “forum”). It should however be stressed that significant procedural (or even parametrical) changes can only be applied to our system *between* consecutive eParticipation campaigns, and not *in course* of a campaign.

Note In the following, each time when we ask whether a human staff is necessary for performing a given type of tasks on the forum, we do not mean “can we get it unmanaged at all?”, but rather “can we perform those tasks by some programmed means, or by participants themselves who act according to a programmed procedure?”

6. Organising a Productive Participation

Here we propose a list of questions concerning various *roles* or *actors* in a populous self-regulatory eParticipation campaign.

1. Can a populous eParticipation forum be entirely *self-moderating*, or it should always use at least a small number of specially trained moderators, e.g. as arbiters when resolving moderation disputes?
2. Should such forum always have recourse to *external expertise*? Who would be the experts, should they always be high-profile specialists (that should presumably be paid for their work)? Or, voluntary experts, e.g. students in appropriate disciplines, could also be accepted as experts? May the experts’ intervention consist of providing initial expert surveys only, or some further interaction with participants would typically be required in course of deliberation (e.g. to clarify terms, to bring additional information, etc.)? Should such interaction be always done on request from participants, or sometimes at the experts’ initiative as well (e.g. when an expert discovers some misunderstanding or an ungrounded or deceptive reasoning by a participant that hasn’t been discovered by other participants)? Would it be considered necessary in course of deliberation to make sometimes requests to additional experts that have not been solicited at the beginning (e.g. to technical or financial experts for estimating feasibility and cost of a proposed solution)?
3. Could the process of editing participants’ contributions (e.g. of rewording, merging or combining them) be always done by distinguished participants who have proven their editing ability e.g. by their own well-written contributions, or it should make use of professional staff editors?
4. Could registration on the forum be uncontrolled, thus making it possible for one physical person to create several “fake participants”? Which are the real dangers of such a “weak registration” for the whole deliberation? If however participants’ unique correspondence to physical persons (and even stronger, to adult citizens who are members of a given constituency, e.g. residents of a given country/region/municipality) should be enforced, which kind of “strong registration” method could be used? To what extent confidentiality of the participants, e.g. the mere fact of participation, should be preserved?
5. Should the authorship of every contribution be strictly preserved, or this is not of prime importance in the context of collaborative discussion pertaining to the common good?

7. Defining the Stages of a Participation

The DEMOS/LexiPation project defines a number of preliminary steps to be performed before a real deliberation can start, in order to better delimit its scope and to define sub-topics that can be discussed separately. Those steps involve participants but are guided by professionals.

6. Our first question is, whether such a guidance is really necessary. Maybe comparable results could be achieved by participants themselves, e.g. in course of some “preliminary deliberation” when specialists are solicited by participants for providing information rather than for organising and supervising them?

7. Considering the process of elaboration of common proposal(s), there may be defined several iterations, involving participants, editors and experts. In the above referenced DEMOS/LexiPation project, there are two such iterations. Our question: are such iterative steps always necessary or maybe the process could be organised more “smoothly”, where each one among the competing alternative proposals proposal is advanced at its own pace, though following mostly the same procedure?

8. Specifying Procedures for Participants’ Interaction

Participants would like to see all contributions grouped according to similarity of ideas expressed therein and also to see the “best” contributions in each group placed “on top” of all others. To that end, they should be themselves requested to appraise both the “quality” of every contribution and the degree of “agreement” of the appraiser with the author. Here we have several questions:

8. How to incite participants to view and appraise contributions submitted by others? Would it be a sufficient incentive if e.g. some number of appraisals performed by you gives you a “ticket” for submitting your own contribution?

9. How to protect the contribution appraisal process from the “claque effect”, when somebody organises his/her friends to support his/her contribution and to assign it a highest quality? We can apply a compulsory “peer review” scheme to get appraisal grades from randomly selected participants; but we cannot at the same time restrain other participants to appraise any contribution at will. Should the latter be considered as less important (e.g. with a lesser weight) than the grades obtained from peer reviewers? Should the authorship (registration pseudonym) of every contribution be hidden all the time it is under peer review and at will appraisal?

10. How many parameters are necessary for meaningfully appraising a contribution — are the two above-mentioned parameters (quality and degree of agreement) sufficient, or more detailed parameters are needed? Should those parameters be binary (e.g. “agree” / “disagree”) or multi-level ones?

11. How to incite participants to appraise contributions *fairly*, e.g. by assigning a well-earned high quality level to a contribution with which they firmly disagree? Could we e.g. automatically assign higher weight to such “mixed appraisal grades” of a kind <+,-> and <-,-> as compared to simple <+,> and <-,->, by considering that the latter two are more likely to be unfair or “politically biased” than the first two? Or, should we avoid applying any such method because it breaks the “presumption of fairness”?

12. Would it be possible to automatically distribute contributions into *groups* of contributions according to similarity of their ideas by applying some *clustering*

algorithm to the set of those appraisal grades? Or, an additional semantic analysis of contributions (e.g. by volunteered or randomly selected participants) should better be applied as well? (In the DEMOS/LexiPation project, this manual task of semantically grouping contributions is performed by a staff of editors).

13. The same question can be put about clustering *participants* according to contributions (and hence ideas) that are supported or preferred by them. The system could then automatically alert such “probably likeminded” participants, suggesting them to watch each other’s activity more attentively, possibly aiming at creating “groups of interests” or “working groups”. Such a method is already used by several eCommerce companies (by posting on their Web-sites suggestions of a kind “People who liked this, also liked that and that”). The question is — in the case of a political deliberation, how far can we go by using only system-generated knowledge on participants’ preferences?

9. Maintaining Stability of a Participative Forum

Even if we succeed in developing and implementing the above-mentioned procedures inciting participants to behave correctly, to appraise others fairly etc., there will always remain some risk of a “mob attack”, when a large group of participants (esp. newcomers to the forum) springs up for imposing their opinion or solution without any serious reasoning and against any deliberative practice. Such a thing may easily happen in an open political forum, unlike the stable elected parliament. Therefore, we must put a special emphasis on searching for means to protect the forum from such mob attacks. Moderation alone cannot help, as an attack could be carried out around an opinion which may have been initially expressed in quite correct terms; what would appear dangerous here is its sudden mass support, not accompanied by any reflective and deliberative effort.

The problem is not unknown to moderators of various discussion forums, both political, technical or commercial ones. Typically it is solved by assigning more rights to “senior” active participants than to new or episodic ones. We propose to study the possibility of applying similar methods to an eParticipation forum. The following list of questions could be helpful in elucidating the problem:

14. How to define the “seniority” of a participant? Is it dependent on the total time they remain registered users, or on the number of contributions they have read and/or posted? Or else, on some aggregate score(s) based on the appraisals of their contributions (and maybe also of their other actions on the forum)? Or else, on their fairness in appraising others’ contributions (assessed automatically by the system according to some algorithm, or explicitly assessed by other participants)?

15. What the seniority should mean to the participants — higher weight of their appraisals? Or, higher weight of their votes in favour of their preferred proposal? Or, having their own contributions immediately visible at the top of the list without any peer review? Or, having some specific rights, such as being eligible as editor, or as arbiter in case of disagreement on moderation, or the right to propose a new theme for discussion, to select experts, etc.? Should promotion to some seniority level be reversible (when it goes down) and on which occasions?

16. If the seniority level (i.e. the weight) of a participant is to be derived from some aggregate characteristics of their own contributions, should then both the above-

introduced basic appraisal parameters — contribution quality and degree of agreement with it — be used in this calculation? Or, maybe, each of those parameters should define its own concept of seniority, e.g. the one dealing with appraisal actions, and the other with voting on proposals?

17. Could it be envisaged to translate seniority of participants, or their higher “weight” or “reputation”, into some “real life” rewards for them, having either moral or material value, such as the “pay for participation” practiced in the Ancient Athens, or some preferences for them when applying for public service positions, or like? In this way, when trying to solve the forum stability problem, we would introduce at the same time valuable incentives for participants. Of course this can only become possible if and when an eParticipation forum becomes institutionalised, its proposals and/or decisions start to be seriously taken into account by the authorities, and, as both a cause and a consequence of that, the forum attracts more participants and becomes really representative. Well-designed mass deliberation procedures would be instrumental for of such a “positive feedback” process.

10. Assisting Participants in Collaborative Development

To impel participants to work collaboratively, the DEMOS/LexiPation project also uses a staff of editors backed by experts. We anticipate that this could be done mostly by participants themselves, according to some software-controlled procedure, that would perform the tasks of finding similarities in proposals (or just of assisting participants in doing that), of impelling participants to work together, and of further assisting them.

18. Could such procedure make efficient use of the above-mentioned methods of grouping presumably similar/compatible proposals and of clustering participants supporting them? Or, alternatively, emphasis should be put on explicit actions by participants, who can e.g. report to authors similarities found in their contributions?

19. Which kind of incentives could be installed for authors, pushing them to work collaboratively rather than to pursue their own projects individually? How such system of incentives to participants for joining their efforts in a collaborative development could be merged with the system of appraising individual contributions and calculating individual seniority levels, which inevitably creates some level of *competition* rather than *cooperation* between participants?

20. More particularly, we probably need procedures and algorithms of re-assigning seniority (or reputation, or activity, excellence etc...) points acquired by individual participants to their whole working group, and then re-distributing those points back to those participants in an appropriate proportion, depending on their respective inputs into the common work. Should this proportion be calculated by the system or by participants themselves? Which parameters should be used in the calculation? Here also, as in other cases discussed above, we think that the system should perform such an algorithmic calculation based on appraisal actions by participants, rather than on whatever semantic analysis of contributions.

21. In a similar way, it should be possible to deduce from *collective authorship* of a cooperatively developed proposal (or of a text in which it is contained) individual “partial authorships” for every participating author. Should such a partial authorship be expressed just quantitatively (as a percentage), or it should better be specified in

more specific qualitative terms (e.g. by pointing out those features or options introduced by the given author)? Here we clearly enter into the field of collaborative development “in general”, that is, applied to technical/scientific/artistic matters as well as to the political ones (where, by the way, “authorship” can easily turn into “intellectual ownership”, e.g. patents on technological innovations). It would be extremely interesting to compare facilitation procedures for collaborative development that have been or will be proposed in those various non-political fields, and see what can be used in a political deliberative development.

22. More particularly, could any existing software system of assisting people in collaborative development (such as e.g. Wiki) be adapted or enhanced to become supportive for cooperative development of proposals on a political forum? Or, there is a need here of an essentially new system?

11. Conclusions

Participative democracy in today’s very large constituencies implies *open public deliberation over Internet*. On the other side, an open assembly (comprising self-appointed participants rather than selected or elected ones) should be sufficiently *populous* in order to be considered representative of the whole constituency. Furthermore, granting every citizen the *right to propose* (in addition to the ordinary right of vote) makes such an open online assembly potentially too “noisy”, and prone to malicious actions. Hence, deliberants must obey strict *procedures*, aimed at making their actions both orderly and productive. According to our approach, the procedures should not only impose restrictions, but also provide *incentives* to participants, and those incentives should be based on their *mutual appraisal* rather than on actions by external (hired) staff. Which kind of incentives would work needs a careful study. Our research programme, still in a conceptual phase, suggests a multidisciplinary study, development and modelling of such a set of online procedures and incentives, followed with their pilot testing.

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Participatory Frames in Deliberative Devices: the Ideal-EU Case Study

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1. Introduction

This paper presents the first results of a broader study that aims at comparing the respective virtues of on-line and face-to-face (f2f) deliberation. Our general hypothesis (which will not be developed here) is that the power relations established through off line deliberative setups among stakeholders and lay participants is reconfigured online. Lines of flights described by Deleuze (Deleuze, Guattari, 1988; Rachjman, 2000) can conceptually frame this movement of escape from a prescriptive off-line set up (Foucault, 1977) where speech act is confiscated by elites (Bourdieu, 1991). Online setups then offer an alternative arena for people to express themselves; nevertheless they also have to endure new technological constraints. (How) Is power redistributed online and (how) is participation affected by the two technical scenes is our main concern is this government-founded work.

The following study is part of a 3 case-studies empirical field which analyses some characteristics of online debate, but focused on a specific population: the youth. The Ideal-EU experience developed all along 2008, was set up by the Poitou-Charentes, Tuscany and Catalonia Regional governments, financed by the European Union, to foster public discussions among European citizens – and especially youngsters (16-30) – on the issue of climate change. To do so, the three Regions created a sophisticated deliberative procedure, relying on both online and f2f participation. In autumn 2008, they set up an electronic town meeting (ETM) involving 150 volunteer (though diverse) citizens in each region, which was doubled up with a dedicated interactive website for preliminary on-line discussion¹. The website was mostly composed of a discussion forum, which received about 2400 messages (divided in 185 discussion threads) in its 4 months of existence. The ETM – which took place on the 15th of November 2008 – divided participants in small discussion tables (10 participants each), that were moderated by a neutral facilitator to ensure the quality of deliberation. Ideas and proposals voiced at each table were progressively synthesized by a theme team, and participants were then asked to vote on a few pre-set questions related to the discussion themes. The results – both the synthesis of the discussion and the poll results were then transmitted to the Temporary Committee on Climate Change of the European Parliament. This deliberative device was therefore aimed at producing an informed public opinion, capable of influencing public decisions. The use of the internet and of video-conference during the ETM was supposed to overcome the territorial barriers between the regions and to produce a truly European opinion on this crucial public issue. In this paper, we will explore the quality of deliberation in its two facets to evaluate the comparative advantages of one scene to the other.

¹ <http://www.ideal-debate.eu>

2. Deliberation in the Ideal-EU project: comparative virtues of deliberative setups

Various authors have proposed coding schemes for measuring the quality of deliberation (Dahlberg, 2001; Trénel, 2004; Janssen, Kies, 2004; Steiner & al., 2004; Stromer-Galley 2007; Black, Burkhalter, Gastil, 2010), each trying to operationalize Habermas' model of ideal speech situation. Our option here is slightly different as our objective is not to compare online deliberation with an ideal situation but with an alternative one which is the off-line counterpart of the discussion. We posit that the ideal speech situation remains a normative horizon, a weberian ideal type, to evaluate and compare various existing arrangements which can reveal other forms of argumentative exchanges than linguistic rational ones (Monnoyer-Smith, 2009).

Following previous academic work on the role played by deliberative devices layouts on the shape of participation and its nature (Wright, Street, 2007; Monnoyer-Smith, 2007; Witschge, 2008; Coleman, 2008), we investigate further how these mediating factors (Albrecht, 2006) are relevant in explaining, among other sociological factors, differences between on and off-line forms of participation.

2.1 Coding and evaluating the quality of deliberation

In order to compare the quality of both types of deliberation, we selected four criteria, largely following the grid described by Janssen and Kies (2004), although with minor differences: (1) inclusiveness; (2) reciprocity (3) level of justification and politicization of the arguments; (4) level of information and reliability of claims.

We systematically coded on-line and f2f discussions in the Ideal-EU project, namely all discussions observed during the French e-town meeting (3 sessions of 60 minutes; i.e. 167 messages were coded), and a sample of 40 discussion topics on the French Ideal-EU on-line forum (467 on-line messages were coded in total). On-line discussion topics were selected randomly, in order to get a representative sample of the on-line forum discussions as a whole.

2.1.1 Inclusion

A first question we raised is the degree of inclusion of both f2f and on-line deliberation. Empirical studies generally show that the absence of physical contact on the internet allow a more egalitarian discussion between participants with reduced patterns of social dominance and therefore fosters a greater inclusion of low-status persons in comparison to f2f (Dubrovsky, Kiesler & Sethna 1991; Rice 1993; Walther 1995; Hollingshead 1996, Dahlberg, 2001; Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimmons, 2002).

We coded inclusion with two different perspectives:

- (a) Inclusion regarding the type of discourses that can be voiced: on-line discussions could allow other types of assertions than arguments to be expressed in the public sphere. Given the excluding potential of argumentation, on-line deliberation should foster the expression of anecdotes, personal stories and emotions.
- (b) Inclusion regarding the content of discourses: on-line discussions could allow the expression of arguments that could not have been voiced in public.

This embodies a double stake for deliberation. Internet could first of all enlarge the realm of legitimate speech and therefore the potential participants – the higher inclusiveness of on-line formats should attract (or avoid excluding) actors generally remote from the public space. Discursive inclusion could therefore translate into a greater social inclusion. Then, this higher inclusion could enrich deliberation, and in

so doing foster better collective decisions. The level of inclusion of Ideal-EU deliberation was here operationalized by evaluating:

- (c) the frequency of expression of personal experiences, anecdotes and stories, i.e. of non-argumentative modes of expression;
- (d) The range of arguments actually expressed in the discussion.

2.1.2 Reciprocity

The second criterion aims at evaluating the level of interactivity of the debate, i.e. its level of dialogism. To what extent speakers actually answer each other in the Ideal-EU discussions? The level of reciprocity was measured by the nature of the answers given to the previously voiced arguments (expression of agreement, disagreement, or on the contrary change of subject or even breaking off of the discussion). This question is crucial as the expression of dissent, and more broadly the exposure to opposite opinions appear as essential criteria of the deliberative nature of an interaction (Witschge, 2004; Sunstein 2007; Lev-On, Manin, 2006; Talpin 2006). In a word, there is no deliberation without disagreement. When all speakers agree, discussion becomes useless, or at best monological. The evaluation of the degree of responsiveness of the discussion should therefore help defining the nature of the discursive interactions observed: is it a true exchange of arguments or a set of monological arguments juxtaposed one after the other without any logical link?

2.1.3 Level and nature of normative justifications

The third criterion derives from the idea that deliberation supposes not only an exchange of arguments, but that these arguments are backed up and justified by reasons (rather than by threat, force or money). We tried to evaluate these theoretical hypotheses by measuring the frequency of public good justifications, in contrast with self-interested one. Especially, as our case-study allowed for both on-line and f2f deliberation, it allows testing the power of publicity on actors' justifications: to what extent the lower publicity constraints on the internet influences the justifications used by actors? Are self-interested justifications more frequent on-line than f2f? We also tried to evaluate a feature that is very often ruled out of deliberation analysis, namely its relationship to politics. The question of the politicization of the discussions appears indeed essential given the power of the argument (at least in France) that deliberative democracy would foster a depoliticization of policy-making. To what extent is it possible to talk about politics (Gamson, 1992; Eliasoph 1998; Duchesne, Haegel, 2007) in a deliberative forum²?

2.1.4 Level of Information

Finally, what matters for deliberation is not only that arguments be oriented towards the common good, but also that they include some form of rationality (Mendelberg, 2002). As deliberation is, among other goals, aimed at enlightening both participants and public policies, the fact-regarding nature of discourses (Offe, 1997) is also crucial for its quality. In a word, the cognitive or epistemic impact of deliberation requires it be informed (Estlund, 1997; Bohman, 1997). We evaluate the cognitive content of deliberation by both scrutinizing the external elements speakers used to back their arguments: do they use external sources (newspapers, books, TV shows, websites, etc.), other participants, figures of authority, or empirical data to back up their claims? Then, a second criterion is the precision of the quoted sources. Is the reference precisely given to the audience (through a hypertext link for instance on the website), vaguely or merely mentioned without any precision? We nonetheless

² We opted for a strict definition of politicization. A message was coded as politicized as long as it included a reference to the organized field of politics: State, government, minister, political party, association, taxes, or to traditional political cleavages incitation/taxation; freedom/solidarity; sustainable development/profit, etc.

abandoned the idea of evaluating the reliability of the claims made by the participants – if they are factually right or wrong – to focus on the textual elements that give strength and reliability to the arguments made.

Before we move to the analysis of our empirical data, one last precision is needed. Few non-experimental deliberative projects allow for both on-line and f2f participation, and the Ideal-EU project being one of them appeared as a perfect occasion for testing systematically the dynamics of on-line and f2f deliberation. In what follows, we therefore compare the two, but in order to understand the impact of the technical device (internet vs. physical presence) on deliberation, it also appeared necessary to compare these results with another factor. Following the literature (Albrecht, 2006), we wondered indeed if another underlying element influencing the dynamics of the discussion could be hidden behind the obviousness of the technical device. The media and news reports also have an impact on the framing of the discussion and therefore on the way people will talk about climate change, the examples they might use and how they are affected by it.

We therefore divided the corpus along two types of framing, local and global ones that appeared especially salient in the discussions. For the on-line forum, the frame of the discussion was derived from (1) the title of the discussion thread; and (2) the first message of the thread (that always appeared on the top of the page). For the e-town meeting, the frame was derived from the questions raised by the table facilitator, themselves coming from the organizers. The latter had indeed planned two general discussion sessions (“which energies for tomorrow's Europe?”, “How to decrease energy consumption?”), and a local session (“mobility in Poitou-Charentes”). Local frames referred therefore to individual practices and issues, while global frames referred to general problems.

2.2 An enlargement of legitimate modes of expression? The link between personal justification, discussions frames, and technical device

To what extent discussions on the Ideal-EU website allowed an enlargement of legitimate modes of expression? Was it easier for participants to voice personal experiences, anecdotes and more broadly emotional discourses on-line or f2f? It seems that participants tends to give more justifications online than f2f, their level of personal justification being approximately the same (9.2% online, 10.2% f2f)³. Not surprisingly, the use of personal experience – both on-line and f2f – appears more frequent when discussions are framed locally (17.8 % of interventions), than globally (7.8 % of interventions). We can then assume that the framing effect is a more decisive factor when it comes to the enlargement of legitimate modes of expression than the technological dimension of deliberations. We therefore need to go further with a regression analysis to quantify the level of contribution of both factors (frame of discussion and on/off line discussion) to the form of justification. We can nevertheless stress that on the whole, participants rarely backed up their arguments with personal experiences whatever the topic or the context of interaction: in this debate, global consideration on climate change was the focus rather than the individual environmental behaviour.

³ Assertions were coded as « personal experiences » when they were based on personal examples and anecdotes. This type of discourse is marked by the frequent use of modal markers such as « me », « myself », « I ».

Table 1. Use of personal experience and general justifications⁴

	<i>No justification</i>	<i>Personal experience</i>	<i>General justification</i>
On-line	28	9.2	67.6
F2f	49.1	10.2	45.5
Local frame	41.6	17.8	46.5
Global frame	39.6	7.8	57

From a more qualitative perspective, it was also striking to observe how, in the case of the e-town meeting, participants could switch their modes of expression according to the indications (and therefore the framing) of the moderator. We thus see how similar participants can move, according to the framing of the facilitator's indications, from a very down-to-earth and personalized discussion, where they can voice examples and anecdotes related to their daily life, to a political discussion on « our model of development ». In this regard, we can conclude that the enlargement of the legitimate modes of expression does not depend so much on the device – on-line or f2f – than on the framing of the discussion, certain modes of expression appearing more or more less legitimate according to the assertions that preceded them, especially when they are voiced by symbolically powerful actors, namely moderators. This is consistent with previous findings: Trénel (2009) states that “the challenge for facilitators in (online) deliberation is not only to provide a space for citizens with different interests and opinions but also to provide a space where citizens with different ways of expressing themselves feel equally welcome”.

2.3 Little disagreement, but more on-line than face-to-face

Does online discussion foster the expression of disagreement? While often f2f group pressure silences dissent (Mansbridge, 1998; Eliasoph, 1998; Conover Johnston et al. 2002; Duchesne, Haegel, 2007), the question whereas on-line discussions should be able to favour the expression of disagreement has been studied in length with mixed results (Sunstein, 2007; Dahlberg, 2001; Stromer-Galley, 2003). We here coded disagreement in a strict sense, through the use of terms such as « I don't agree », « No, but », « however », « nevertheless » etc. to measure the level of controversy during the debates.

Our first results indicate a slight difference between on-line and f2f discussion when it comes to the expression of disagreement: 12.3 % of the messages disagreeing with previous ones on the forum, against 12.6 % f2f. Nevertheless, on this topic again, the framing of the discussion seems more relevant in terms of disagreement, as it appears much more frequent during global discussions (14.1% of the interventions) than local ones (4%). These results need however to be nuanced, as the sum of disagreements and « expression of agreements and disagreements » changes the picture. As a matter of fact, expressions of both agreement and disagreements most of time meant disagreement, presented in a gentle and diplomatic manner: « I agree, but ... », the rest of the message arguing against the previous message. When these two categories are summed, the on-line forum appears as the place where disagreement was expressed more often (24.1% of messages expressed a disagreement on-line, against 16.8 % f2f). This reflects both the higher length of on-line messages (where both for and against arguments could

⁴ Messages could contain different types of justifications (both general and personal) which explain why the sum exceeds 100 %.

be voiced) and above all their greater sophistication, as they included recognition of previous participants and disagreeing or qualifying points.

Table 2. Frequency of expression of agreement and disagreement

	<i>Agreement</i>	<i>Disagreement</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Breaking off</i>
On-line forum	16.4	12.3	54	11.8	5.5
E-town meeting	13.8	12.6	61.1	4.2	8.4
Local framing	17.8	4	66.3	4	7.9
Global framing	13.6	14.1	58.1	7.5	6.7

The norm in public discussion appears nevertheless to be neither agreement or disagreement, as about 60% of all interventions on-line, and 70% of f2f ones did not express any form of judgement towards previous participants' opinion. Explicit expression of agreement was rare and most of the participants kept on discussing without explicitly expressing neither agreement nor disagreement (the « neither » category).

On-line discussions seem also to foster the expression of mutual agreement⁵, slightly more than in f2f conditions (16.4% of messages, against 13.8%), indicating a civilized online discussion with very little flaming effects. The over-representation of expression of both agreement and disagreement on-line – reveals that participants take into account previous participants' points, even and therefore reinforces the constructive aspect of on-line discussions.

2.4 More constructive and informed discussions on-line

From this perspective, discussions would appear more constructive on-line than f2f, interlocutors repeating arguments previously expressed, stressing the contributions of each other in a more respectful manner than f2f, where verbal battle can always arise. When physically co-present, participants rarely highlight the contributions of the other interlocutors, to avoid losing face (Monnoyer-Smith, 2007)⁶. On the contrary, we have witnessed in many debates how public arenas can be a show place for stakeholders who can prove to be more critical and vindictive than online where they nuanced their talk. But this needs to be further explored.

An interesting result of our study is that discussions did not appear more monological on-line than f2f. On the contrary, as we already stressed, on-line discussions allowed for an easier expression of both agreement and disagreement, and conducted to less breaking off the discussion (participants changing subject completely with previous speakers), than f2f (5.5 % vs. 8.4%). The constructive nature of on-line discussions is also evidenced from another data: the frequency of references to other participants to back up an argument (see Table 3 below). 19.5% of on-line messages referred to other participants, against only 4.2% of f2f interventions. This partly contradicts the result of some previous research that

⁵ Just like for the expression of disagreement, the agreement category was understood in a strict sense as the explicit expression of assent, through the use of terms such as « I agree », « as you rightly said », « indeed », « it is true that », « in keeping with », etc.

⁶ Laurence Monnoyer-Smith stresses for instance that in the case of the Public Debate on the construction of a 3rd airport in Paris (DUCSAI), on-line speeches were more polished, and less emotional or even aggressive, than f2f ones (Monnoyer-Smith, 2007).

stressed the monologic aspect of on-line discussions (Wilhem, 1998; Dumoulin, 2002) and especially when they imply writing rather than speaking (through web cams for instance, see Stromer-Galley, 2007).

Last but not least, on-line deliberation appears in our research to have been more informed than f2f one, whatever the framing of the discussion. 53.6 % of on-line messages relied on an external source (data, examples, other participants, laws, newspaper articles and websites), against 29.3% of f2f interventions. Not only were online messages better referenced, but also more precise, as 21.4% of on-line sources were somehow indicated (in the better but less frequent case through a hypertext link), against 8.4 % of f2f interventions. Despite the use of a discussion guide during the e-town meeting – that was used very little in the observed interactions – deliberation was more informed, arguments being better backed-up and more precise, on-line than f2f.

Table 2. Frequency of expression of agreement and disagreement

	<i>On-line forum</i>	<i>E-town meeting</i>	<i>Local framing</i>	<i>Global framing</i>
No back-up	46.4	70.7	59.4	59.5
Back up	53.6	29.3	40.6	60.5
Factual	33.3	3.6	27.7	26.8
elements				
Authorities	6.1	4.2	3	4.8
Other	19.5	3.6	11.9	10.7
participants				
External	10.1	3.6	5	7.1
sources				
Not precise	78.6	91.6	85.1	85.3
Vague	14.2	7.8	9.9	10.4
quotation				
Precise	7.2	0.6	5	4.3
sourcing				

3. Conclusion

Although these are preliminary findings which will be compared with our two other field analysis using the same methodology, one can nevertheless stress 3 interesting aspects of our study.

First, inclusion factor in terms of range of arguments expressed seems to be more sensitive to facilitator's and media framing than to the characteristics of the deliberative arrangement, although both factors probably play a role. We still lack elements to be more precise about inclusion as personal and social data were not available on online forums.

A second aspect is that expression of both agreement and disagreement are emphasized online, even if a majority of participants don't rely on preceding message or speech to express their opinion. Two complementary hypotheses can be made out of this observation. First, voicing opinion is easier online where one's personal face (in a Goffmanian perspective) is less at stake; second, participants take more time to elaborate their answer and therefore structure their message in a more sophisticated fashion.

Which leads us to our third point. Information and references are more frequent online than off-line. This could be easily explained by the very nature of the technological interface which allows browsing, quick links, cut/paste quotes and information gathering. This is an important finding as academic literature has stressed that online participants were usually less informed and less educated than offline ones (Coleman, 2004; Albrecht, 2006; Monnoyer-Smith, *ibp*). This means that a quality debate can emerge out of participants who are usually either absent from public debate or at best, silent.

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