



Societal & Political Engagement
of Young People in Environmental Issues

A Roadmap for the delivery of e- Participation: lessons learned from the STEP project

WP5 – Pilot Operations and Evaluation



This project has received funding from the European
Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation
programme under grant agreement No 649493



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1 Executive summary

The Horizon 2020 STEP project aim is to develop and pilot test a cloud e-Participation SaaS platform (step.green) enhanced with web / social media mining, gamification, machine translation, and visualisation features, to promote the societal and political participation of young people in the decision-making process on environmental issues. During two years and a half of work, the STEP consortium has conducted research on e-Participation, it has designed and developed new tools and it has piloted these together with six Public Authorities in Europe. Much has been learned during the execution of the project on what are the opportunities and the challenges of conducting e-Participation and creating new innovation in this field. It is now possible to look back at all this work in order to distill some practical recommendations composing a possible Roadmap for Public Authorities wishing to conduct their own e-Participation processes.

This document is intended for Public Authorities working and delivering projects and activities in the area of e-Participation, with particular reference to young people. This document reconsiders a number of the outputs produced by STEP and formalizes in a number of recommendations what has been learned during the execution of the STEP project. Recommendations are offered around a framework for e-Participation composed of six steps which is based (and enhances) a framework proposed in the PanEuropean Best Practice Manual on e-Participation. The framework, together with the recommendations presented in the document, thus offer a reusable roadmap for Public Authorities wishing to conduct their own e-Participation processes.

2 e-Participation in Environmental Issues

Since the 1970s there has been a growing recognition of the link between environmental concerns and human rights. Later, in 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, this link was formally made when 178 Governments adopted the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Principle 10 of this Declaration stated for the first time in an international instrument that “environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens”. This decision was enshrined legally at international level in the Aarhus Convention or the “Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters”, which was adopted at the Fourth “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference in Aarhus, Denmark, in 1998. According to the Convention, any citizen should have the right to get a wide and easy access to environmental information. Public authorities must provide all the information required and collect and disseminate them in a timely and transparent manner. Public participation is one of the most important aspects of the Aarhus Convention. The Convention requires early and effective public participation, when all options are still open on decisions for certain activities’ permissions and when the projects’ plans or even environmental policies are still prepared. Public participation must be promoted during the preparation of environmental laws and regulations, and the authorities are required to take into due account the outcomes of such participation. Public participation, when carried out from the outset, contributes in taking environmental decisions for a project or a specific development activity which are less harmful to the environment, more sustainable and more acceptable to the public. In this way, costly mistakes can be avoided, as hidden or unexpected aspects of a proposed project can be uncovered at an early stage.

In recent years however, studies have shown an important decline in civic and political participation in Western societies at a very general level. Although there also are studies which have not that participation (especially that of young people) is not necessarily in decline, but rather it is in transformation¹. Thus despite participation being seen as fundamental aspect for environmental issues, this desire to include people in decision making seems to clash with more general problems. Indeed, experts attribute the general decline of public participation to “long-term reductions in voting rates, declining levels of trust in politicians, and waning interest in civic affairs as well as evidence of a broader crisis in democracy”². The fact that this potential decline is even greater among young people brings about more concern. Therefore any project wishing to foster participation of Young People in decision making – including in environmental issues – while benefitting from the international recognition of the role of participation, needs inevitably to work toward addressing the decrease in public participation (and especially that of young people).

The new concept of the sharing and collaborative economy coupled with new media technologies seems to provide new perspectives on how to boost interest and participation, also with regards to environmental issues. Campaigns and online platforms/communities that aim to promote recycling, water saving or efficient management of resources are no longer limited to an advertisement on TV, radio or print type. Successful campaigns capitalize on YouTube, user interaction, engaging content gamification and co-creation with the end user. One of the remarkable aspects of the web is that it can bring like-minded people closer and support them in working together to achieve a shared goal. Online spaces can serve as virtual meeting points for individuals sharing common interests to find each other, interact and engage in discussions, and there

¹ <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/youth/tools/documents/perception-behaviours.pdf>

² Banaji, S., Buckingham, D., 2010. Young People, the Internet, and Civic Participation: An Overview of Key Findings from the CivicWeb Project. *International Journal of Learning and Media* 2, 15-24.

are a number of social networking sites where discussions that are focused, for example, on the environment, are taking place. Electronic participation (e-Participation) has been defined as follows: "*the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives*"³. e-Participation aims to support active citizenship supported by latest technology developments, increasing access to and availability of participation in order to promote fair and efficient societies and governments.

New technologies for fostering e-Participation however are not a direct solution to address the decline in civic and political participation across Europe. According to the recent European Parliament Report (Potential and Challenges of E-Participation in the European Union, 2016) one of the biggest challenges for e-participation is European citizens' **disinterest in EU politics**, including the lack of trust in the EU (and the belief that the EU cannot solve their problems). This also represents a more general challenge since e-Participation tools tend to have a very low participation rate at national levels. The other significant challenge is that these e-participation tools may simply be unknown to citizens. e-Participation solutions should then be seen as a rather relevant mean which can be leveraged to increase participation and for this reason their introduction needs to be accompanied by a number of other activities which may very well go beyond the design and deployment of an e-Participation platform. For example, organisations, such as Local Authorities and Regional Councils may become more open and accessible if young people better understand how they work and are allowed to have a say in the decisions made that have an effect on their quality of life. This aspect is independent on whether there also is a platform supporting participation processes. Eventually e-Participation and community engagement may help to break down barriers and negative views of organisations, helping to build trust, but e-Participation is not directly the solution delivering more transparency. Likewise, potential decline in participation to civic life will not be solved by the introduction of e-Participation tools alone as this may be dependent from factors such as mistrust in the political system or general impression that things are difficult to change. e-Participation tools however may offer some help as a way to support better engagement between authorities and the public. Effective e-Participation is the development of relationships with open and clear communication using online tools. Policy Makers / Public Officers should be open to citizen communication; listening and learning to understand the diverse people and issues that they are dealing with. The engagement process for e-Participation is not easy and what works in one area may not work so well in another or with a different group of people. It is important to fully understand what you want to achieve from the process to devise the best solution to achieve it, always keeping in mind that every e-Participation process has a deep contextual component.

In this context the project SocieTal and political Engagement of young People in environmental issues (STEP) was conducted during the period June 2015 – November 2017. The STEP project main objective was to develop and pilot test a cloud e-Participation SaaS platform, (available as a mobile application and through a web platform) to promote the societal and political participation of young people in the decision-making process on environmental issues. STEP has been conducted and piloted in collaboration with 5 Public Authorities (both municipalities and regions in Italy, Spain, Greece and Turkey). STEP is thus an innovation action that via the design and deployment of a novel e-Participation platform had the goal to promote e-Participation in environmental issues. More specific objectives of STEP did include:

³ Macintosh, A. (2006) 'E-Participating in Policy-Making: The Research and the Challenges'. In Paul Cunningham and Miriam Cunningham (eds) *Exploiting the Knowledge Economy: Issues, Applications, Case Studies*. Amsterdam: IOS Press

- Objective 1: To enable public authorities to quickly open their decision-making processes to young people.
- Objective 2: To enable young citizens to participate in decision-making on issues with environmental impact.
- Objective 3: To develop engagement and motivation strategies for increasing youth participation in environmental decision making.
- Objective 4: To pilot test the services in an operational environment in terms of technical, organisational and legal feasibility, with the participation of end users (young citizens) and policy makers.
- Objective 5: To assess the usability, effectiveness and impact of the project in embedding open engagement in public sector processes, and to identify the key barriers for wide scale deployment.
- Objective 6: To ensure appropriate (state of the art) dissemination and realistic exploitation of project activities and results.

In what follows we present a set of **Recommendations** for public authorities for encouraging e-participation by young people. Furthermore, we also propose a number of practical suggestions that augment the high level recommendations. Later in the documents, the core main recommendations are mapped onto a **Roadmap** for e-Participation which can be reused by Public Authorities. To be more specific, what is formalised in this document are a series of lessons learned from the execution of the e-participation project STEP. We reflect on what has worked and not worked in the design, deployment and piloting of the platform. We believe that these lessons will be relevant for future projects and initiatives on e-Participation across Europe. The idea of focusing on lessons learned is that of bringing to the fore issues upon which authorities may need to think and eventually act in devising their own e-Participation. This document does not directly offer general guidelines applicable in any situation. Thus what we propose here more than being something prescriptive should be seen as suggestions that, with further adaptation and contextualisation, may work in contexts different than that of STEP. This document in particular reflects back on research and piloting work that was formalised in a number of STEP output deliverables, in particular *D2.2 Report on Users' Needs and Technical Requirements*, *D4.1 Report on youth motivation strategies*, *D4.2 Best practice report*, *D5.1 Definition of STEP pilots and evaluation methodology*, *D5.2 Intermediate Evaluation* and *D5.3 Final Evaluation*, *D7.1 1st Dissemination Plan*, *D7.7. 2nd Dissemination Plan* and *D7.8 3rd Report on Dissemination activities*.

3 Existing EU Based Guidelines Documents on e-Participation

There are a number of **guideline documents** already available (and created in the context of Europe or European projects) which can guide and support Public Authorities in the creation and deployment of e-Participation processes⁴ for the inclusion of a variety of actors in the decision making, including young people. It is relevant to review some of the existing guidelines and also highlight how in these documents the e-Participation process has been broken down in steps/phases and/or in a number of topics. A similar review of guidelines is available in D5.1 of the STEP project.

The document *Guidelines for successful e-participation by young people* (IJAB, 2014)⁵: “provide those planning an e-participation process for young people with a set of factors they should take into consideration to make the process more effective”. The focus is on making processes “more effective”. The document lists 5 key principles for e-Participation: (1) Alignment with young people’s realities (2) Resources (need to have sufficient for delivering outcomes) (3) Effectiveness & direct influence (4) Transparency (5) End-to-end involvement of young people. Most of what these principles convey is fully aligned with some of the findings of the user-research conducted for STEP (see in particular Deliverables 2.2 and 4.1). Indeed while interviewing Young People we have observed how they were generally interested in e-Participation around environmental issues, but were generally concerned about the ownership of the process and declared explicitly that from their eventual participation they would expect to see tangible results (principle 3 above), that would engage more with problems close to their interests and reach (principle 1) and that they were expecting transparency from policy makers especially in what was the outcome of the e-Participation (principle 4). Thus generally we believe that these principles point to the right direction and have been corroborated by our empirical research and could serve as the basis for any e-Participation process involving Young People. While these principles do not offer practical means (e.g. best practices) to achieve effective e-Participation, they offer a relevant starting point. The guidelines also offer an “ideal breakdown” of an e-Participation project which is composed of 6 phases: (1) Development Phase (when the general principles/parameters of the process are defined) (2) Implementation Phase (when the parameters are put in practice) (3) Access and information Phase (when the tools and information for e-Participation are made available for use) (4) Input and dialogue phase (the actual running of the project) (5) Outcome and Output phase (associated with the results of e-Participation) and (6) Evaluation.

Similarly the interreg project “eCitizen II – Towards citizen-centered eGovernment in European cities and regions” has produced an *e-Participation Best Practices Manual* (2012)⁶, whose main objective is defined as “to elaborate and exchange citizens’ e-participation practices in order to increase and promote participatory opportunities within the European Union member states.”. The manual describes the “guidelines” of an e-Participation in 5 steps: (1) Background Expectations: which requires understanding the local pre-conditions of e-Participation, such as whether the Public Authority is sufficiently equipped to run a project/process, or on what issues should citizens be involved in e-Participation. (2) Planning of the Process: which includes things such as planning activities on who should be involved, the timing and rules, the technological solutions to be adopted. (3) Action: e-Participation Activities: which focuses on the execution of e-Participation and places particular emphasis on the readiness of the Public Authority in the execution of the process, e.g.

⁴ See also a recent blog post from citizenlab <https://www.citizenlab.co/blog/civic-engagement/implement-successful-online-citizen-participation-5-tips-heard-citizens/>

⁵ See https://www.ijab.de/uploads/tx_ttproducts/datasheet/Guidelines_eParticipation_engl.pdf

⁶ See <http://eparticipation.eu/frontpage/e-participation-best-practice-manual/>

whether officials are prepared and ready, whether open and public material is being used for the process. (4) Communication: which focuses on the channels (including e-channels) and the messages that can more effectively deliver e-Participation goals (5) Decision, Evaluation, Feedback: which is about the communication of the e-participation results and an evaluation of the process.

Another Interreg project, the “Immigrant inclusion by e-participation” also has developed a guidelines document⁷ (2012) entitled *E-participation guidelines: supporting diversity*. Although this document is tailored for the specific target audience (immigrants and their inclusion), it contains a number of general recommendations for e-Participation projects. Although this document does not offer a step-by-step guide on how to enact an e-Participation process, as do the documents described before, it considers a number of topics which are relevant and it offers some recommendations on how to address these. Topics include: (1) Community Building (which very much covers the problem of engaging with participants which very often already are members of communities) (2) Collaboration (which covers the ways in which communities can work together but also the aspect of communication of the process) (3) Obstacles (addressing common problems, ranging from technical barriers, to raising awareness for participation) (4) Toolbox (covering a number of tools for e-Participation and what they allow and do not allow).

In the context of the CIP-ICT PSP project myuniversity (a project focused on equipping universities with e-Participation solutions to engage their stakeholders), a deliverable has developed an *e-Participation guidelines and best practices guide*⁸. Although the project is in the context of Higher Education, the guideline document presents interesting aspects. Similarly to the *Guidelines for successful e-participation by young people* (IJAB, 2014) there is a division between general aspects (called Ground Rules, which include the like of Transparency, Trust, Respect, Inclusion, Accountability) and a more practical breakdown of the process called in the deliverable e-participation programme cycle. This cycle is composed of five steps, which in general are very close to what other guidelines documents have proposed, and include: (1) Programming (definition of goals, definition of type of engagement sought, identification of the key stakeholders etc.) (2) Planning (preparation of a workplan and definition of the team leading the process) (3) Design (execution of participatory activities, definition and identification of the tools, preparation of content) (4) Implementation (which encompasses the promotion of the initiative, the facilitation and moderation of the process of e-Participation and the response from e.g. Universities with actions as outcome) (5) Evaluation (which includes the definition evaluation criteria, the data collection and the use and sharing of results and what has been learned).

The most recent example of e-Participation guidelines has been produced by the H2020 project EUth (a project with which STEP has had a close collaboration) in association with the OPIN platform⁹. These guidelines (with final release expected at the end of 2017) are designed to assist initiators of youth participation projects wishing to make use of the OPIN-platform, but will also be of use for youth participation initiators in general. They also provide with advice for how to make use of the platform in particular and for designing and organizing youth participation in general. They offer practical tips, directions and instructions on related issues in order to succeed with a participating pilot by including young people in making real decisions affecting their own lives. The Guidelines take youth participation initiators through the different steps of a youth participation project. Some of the advice and guidance given is applicable to participation processes in general and online youth participation in particular. The OPIN guidelines structure follows four phases from which are presented only the general guidelines: (1) Idea phase (corresponds to the initial ideation of the e-Participation with definition of goals, context, target users a plan for sustainability) (2) Preparation phase (where the details are elaborated and contact is established to the different actors to

⁷ http://projects.centralbaltic.eu/images/files/result_pdf/IleP_result2.pdf

⁸ https://www.myuniversity-project.eu/dmdocuments/D2.4_e-ParticipationBestPractices.pdf

⁹ Developed by the EUth project - Tools and Tips for Mobile and Digital Youth Participation in and across Europe (<http://www.euthproject.eu/> and <https://opin.me/en/>). We consulted a pre-release draft of these guidelines.

D: e-Participation Roadmap

be part of the project, including definition of methods, tools, a communication strategy and the definition of technical elements of the platform). (3) Participation phase (when the e-Participation is executed which includes aspects such as explanation of the process to stakeholders, providing support throughout the process, in process evaluation) (4) Outcome phase (which includes communication of the project and the results, empowering young people with communication of the good outcomes and make sure the results of the process make a difference). The OPIN Guidelines contain a number of interesting recommendations and suggestions and as this is the most recent document on the involvement of young people in e-participation on policy making, is a document worth consulting by public authorities before starting and planning their own initiatives.

4 Framework and Recommendations for the delivery of e-Participation with Young People

Overall the previously described guidelines may offer approaches to guide the action of Public Authorities and they are drawn almost entirely on experiences in e-Participation. Ultimately what seems to be important is that Public Authorities adopt one of the possible planned guidelines and then roll out the e-Participation according to the structure suggested, but also adapting it depending on the specific context. All the guidelines offer some guidance for action and a set of common core aspects: (1) the definition of preliminary planning and background work, including definition of what is the subject of the process, what one wants to achieve and a proper understanding of the target audience of the e-Participation (2) a strong focus on engagement and communication in order to facilitate participation and involve the audience and mobilise consensus around the process (3) the selection of the appropriate e-tools for the achievement of the goals which can also meet the needs of the audience (4) the execution the e-Participation activities in a sustained manner with the involvement of relevant actors (e.g. public officials) (5) an evaluation of what has been achieved and a publication of the outcomes and a plan for how these outcomes will be achieved.

A framework for public participation has been created for STEP (originally published in the D5.1 *Definition of STEP pilots and evaluation methodology*), by combining information from available best practice guidelines and toolkits and adapting it to the project specificities. This framework aims to: provide a high-level consultation to the pilot authorities when deciding how best to execute the pilot needs in environmental decision-making, clearly set out the principles and elements that the pilot authorities should use to implement the public participation via STEP platform, define the local pilot specifications and organize the pilot activities for each public authority, and identify the methods and the means to be followed in order to achieve successful pilots implementation. The STEP public participation framework has been developed by integrating elements from the guidelines (as described in previous section and more in details also in D5.1 of STEP), selecting those that fit better with the project characteristics. Its structure is mainly based on the PanEuropean Best Practice Manual on e-Participation. This original approach did include 5 basic steps: Background, Planning, Action, Communication and Feedback and evaluation. An important note however is that the focus of the STEP project, while being on involvement of Young People in environmental decision making, also was that of an **innovation process** where the design and deployment of a novel web/mobile platform has then been piloted and evaluated. Most of the previously presented guidelines (and also the STEP proposed framework) depart directly from the enactment of e-Participation, while however in the project substantial effort was devoted to the design and co-creation of **the tools** for e-Participation. The approach followed by STEP thus has placed relevant emphasis on the understanding of user needs for e-Participation and on the creation of tools for e-Participation. In this document we thus have decided to add the consideration for tools to the framework, hence proposing 6 steps for e-Participation. After a set of recommendations are formulated for each of the 6 steps and then these are recomposed together in a Roadmap for e-Participation.

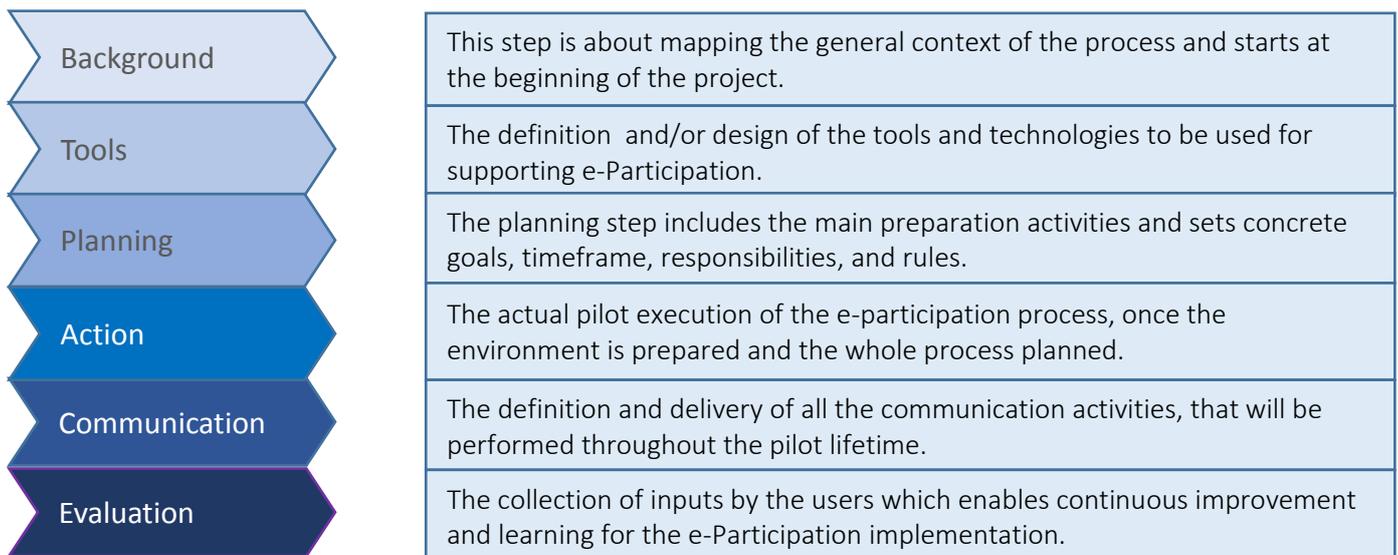


Figure 1- Possible Stages for e-Participation- Framework for e-Participation

Following we present a number of **recommendations** for e-Participation associated with each of the possible stages as presented in Figure 1, and where this is sensible we also provide **additional practical suggestions**. These have been distilled from the STEP experience and from the research and innovation activities conducted during the project lifetime. Later in the document we will also offer a different graphical representation – a **Roadmap** - of the steps for e-Participation as formulated by the STEP project.

4.1 Background: Understanding the user and their needs

The background work conducted for the STEP project falls under two main activities: (a) research with the end user (2) desktop research on decision making procedures. Here in this section we offer some meta-reflections around these two activities.

As part of the user research during the months of June-September 2015, several interviews were conducted with users from the two target groups of the STEP project: Young People and Policy Makers. We have interviewed 28 Young European Citizens (YECs) with the following nationality: Italy, Greece, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Latvia, Germany and Romania. We have interviewed 12 Public Authorities/Policy Makers in the following countries: Italy, Spain, Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom. Of the 28 young people participant, five interviewees live in European countries different from their nationality. We did operate a post-segmentation for the Young People target user group, dividing them into three sub-groups: 16 -22, 22- 26, 27+. We interviewed a balanced mix of genders (14 female, 14 male) and tried to obtain a good distribution of ages across the demographic we are looking at (mainly 18-29). Interviews have been transcribed and later analysed using a qualitative approach. This led to the identification of patterns across the data. In particular four core patterns emerged from the analysis, associated with young people: (1) the existence of some form of trust/mistrust relation between young people and policy makers (2) the need of

young people for being well informed about the topic(s) which undergo e-Participation (3) local/global responsibilities, where young people recognise the global nature of topics such as environmental issues, but also recognise that the best impact is achieved at the local level (4) YECs expressed the importance that information should be tailored to their interests and their location and not too textual in the first instance (5) and finally a fifth theme that emerged is associated with the motivations of Policy Makers and the reasons why e-Participation is conducted, which include for example facilitate the communication with e.g. young people.

Without the use of qualitative research techniques it would have been probably difficult to capture and formalise these patterns. While the process (from preparation of the interview, to interviewing, analysis and formalisation) took about 6 months, and so in the economy of time it was not negligible, the knowledge that was generated however has been of paramount importance for shaping the subsequent activities of the project as well as the design and co-creation activities conducted. For public authorities to seek support of professional social scientists (perhaps personnel already available within the organisation) may make a difference here too.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Background work with the users/audience should where possible be conducted with research techniques supporting the proper and in-depth identification of their needs and potential obstacles for participation.

One aspect associated with the background work needed for understanding the audience and their needs is associated with how they plan and roll out the necessary activities. In conducting interviews with the two core target groups it has been fundamental for the success of STEP to use design modelling tools such as personas and scenarios in order to synthesise results and make them usable throughout the project. It is difficult otherwise to see how e-Participation practitioners can properly formalise common needs and also use them properly for the execution of their own projects.



RECOMMENDATION 2

When conducting background work with the audience it may be relevant to use modelling tools to capture needs and communicate patterns, for subsequent action.

In addition to conducting research directly with the user, the STEP project also surveyed decision making procedures associated with environmental issues at international, national and local level. The work at local level also amount to background for understanding the audience and their needs in terms of e-Participation. As noted in D2.1 of STEP, at international level the decision makers involved are the United Nations, international organisations, European authorities, international universities, research institutions and international NGOs. Their decisions are focused mainly on environmental policy. At national level the stakeholders who participate are national government ministries, environmental agencies, departments,

research and training institutions, universities, business and industry associations, chambers and environmental NGOs. At the local level the stakeholders who take part are local environmental authorities, business and industry associations, local chambers, environmental NGOs, community groups, local universities and research institutions. At local level, simple, short-term decisions are taken, with restricted points of view, requiring low information. However, these parameters are reversed going from local to international level. Running e-Participation processes at local level requires having a clear idea about decision making procedures so as to consider the boundaries within which an action can be conducted. For each of the pilot of STEP background research thus was conducted. This mapping of procedures allowed to consider the specificities of each pilot partner, with a focus on subsequently adjusting the functionality of the platform accordingly, and for specifying the pilot scenarios and in particular the areas in which conduct effectively the e-Participation activities.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Background work on local decision making procedures is important as it helps shaping subsequent phases of the e-Participation process, including the selection of tools and the planning activities

What follows are some additional practical suggestions based on our experience in conducting background research work with the audience for the STEP project.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- It may be relevant to plan your user research around available resources and decide how extensive it can be (e.g. time, money, skills).
- Seek the support of expert social/design scientists (whether external or in-house) in the conduction of the background investigation.
- Spend time identifying what type of information you are seeking from people through the background research (do you need to know needs and obstacles for the design? Do you need information for the identification of which tools to use? Do you need to get information for understanding/deciding what topic should be the focus of e-Participation?).
- The use of known modelling tools makes a difference. Do not just rely on a simple data analysis, seek to transform the analysis into a tool for action. This will let you translate into action your findings.

4.2 Tools: supporting policy making

There is a direct connection between the background work needed to understand the audience/participant to e-Participation and the tools which can be used for conducting the process. The tools selection and deployment needs inevitably to take in account (whenever possible) what are the needs of end-users and the technologies that they currently use or are familiar with. Many relevant aspects emerged from the background research activities that have influenced the design of tools for STEP, but of course some tools were already available and in creating the platform it did make sense to also build around these and capitalise what they could offer. On many occasions the user needs and the available tools also were a match, for example during interviewing it emerged that many young people did consider e-petitions as a “must have” feature of an e-Participation platform and this solution was already available in the platform used as basis for STEP (the platform co:tunity). Our research also suggests that at present, social media account for the highest percent of Internet usage and traffic, with people and in particular young people spending increasing amounts of time on social networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Coupled with the vast smartphone penetration, this indicates the importance of leveraging these channels to reach and engage young people.



RECOMMENDATION 4

The selection of tools should be based on the outcomes of the background research activities but also reasonably on what tools already are available to Public Authorities.

Something which clearly emerged from the STEP background work is that the different pilots have different decision making procedures, and thus a one size fits all approach to the selection of e-Participation tools would not be possible. In other words the same set of tools will not necessarily work in the case in which multiple Public Authorities are involved in the same e-Participation processes or in using the same technological base. Adaptations are always needed to meet existing organisational practices. Thus, for this reason, the STEP platform has been based on a **modular architecture**, integrating individual components which are developed / adapted so that they can carry out specific business functions, and can be reused, each one individually, by public organizations for quickly opening their decision-making processes. This is especially important for public organizations that already have well set-up procedures for managing participation, and do not want to replace them or modify them to be aligned with the tools. In other words the tools should adapt around public authorities decision making procedures and not the other way around. In STEP for example, Public organizations can benefit from the use of partial components, according to their needs, thus integrating them in their regular practice. For example, the Social Media Monitoring Tool (SMMT) may be used by public organizations for identifying citizen trends, and for planning effective participation strategies. By leveraging the capabilities of SMMT, public authorities can identify the most popular channels of young people online. Thus, they can discover and understand environment-related discussions that are already taking place on social media as well as social media accounts that could potentially be engaged in the context of outreach and communication activities.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Modular approaches to tools creation/selection are preferable as they offer flexibility and capacity to adapt to diverse decision making procedures, e-participation processes and needs of end users.

STEP is a citizen dialogue platform where local government representatives and citizens together can identify and discuss problems and create solutions. The STEP platform, at a broad level, thus considers users as belonging to two main groups: participants (e.g. young people) and administrators/analysts (e.g. public authorities). Young citizens can create, sign and comment on petitions on how to improve societal and environmental issues in their city or municipality. Local government representatives can in the role of administrator set up and run citizen dialogues in the format of e-petitions, mini-polls and chats. Dialogues can be public for all or by invitation only - and be promoted by e-mail, push-notifications, custom landing pages and embeddable widgets on the local governments own sites. Incoming petitions can be displayed directly or further to approval by dialogue administrators. Petitions appear as a wall of notes, on a map or in a timeline format. Public petitions can be shared on social networks to gain more signatures and the creator of a petition can be notified through e-mail or push-notifications when petitions gain new signatures or comments, or is registered for further handling by the government representatives (see later in section 4.5 for recommendations on the use of Social Media). The platform makes it possible to engage citizens in real-time conversations (chats) across mobile and desktop devices, and between administrators, other local government representatives with an analyst role and the local citizens. The Public Authority page is fully customizable (with logo, background images, texts, etc). Managing an e-participation process as supported by tools of the like of those promoted by STEP, requires Public Authorities to have a high degree of oversight of the process both in terms of administration and in terms of capacity to draw and formalise properly the results of the e-Participation process. For example STEP offers the administrator belonging to a Public Authority an access to an admin panel where she/ he can manage various aspects of the platform. In particular, dialogues, participants, admin profile, municipality profile, email templates, etc. are managed through the admin panel. It is thus clear that **the management of the e-Participation** process is critical for the success of any initiative and so are the tools for achieving this.

Furthermore, for successful participatory policy making **analysis tools** should be considered in order to offer Public Authorities additional capacities to manage the process but also to generate relevant outcomes. In other words, e-Participation is not just about collecting the input of citizens it also is about drawing conclusions for subsequent actions and analysis tools may support and streamline this process. For example, in STEP, analysis tools have been considered since the beginning as a core concept for the success of e-Participation. To give an example, in STEP a core feature is the visual representations of results, which enables policy makers to interpret the results of their campaigns, view patterns and spot trends, facilitating decision making. SMMT is again instrumental in this respect since it presents end users with aggregated summary statistics and visual depictions of campaigns and topics, and their reach and audience in social media. In that way, campaign managers can gain insights on what works and how successful it is.



RECOMMENDATION 6

Tools for facilitating the e-Participation of citizens should be coupled with administrative and analysis tools in order to increase the effectiveness of the e-Participation and allow promoters – such as Public authorities - greater capacity to achieve the desired results and to monitor the process.

What follows are some additional practical suggestions based on our experience in conducting the design and development of e-Participation tools for the STEP project.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Introducing new and several technical tools bring an issue of complexity where public administrations face with different set of problems in engagement process. Simplified tools, clear and easy interfaces and integrations with legacy systems and social media platforms will enable participants engage with the platform easily.
- In order to engage citizens, especially young people, the main interface of the new tools has to be on mobile, easy to reach, teasing with gamification and notification approaches, and has to be supported with incentives for the first comers and leaders of the community.
- Introducing new technical tools to established PA processes should be accompanied by sufficient time and resources that are dedicated to training the prospective end users of the tools to make best use of the new capabilities. High-quality and easily accessible training material along with live hands-on sessions are necessary components of such a training process.

4.3 Planning

The **planning step** includes the main preparation activities and sets concrete goals, timeframe, responsibilities, and rules. This is the first step for realizing what has been sketched out in the Background and for putting tools into use. In STEP the planning phase has been conducted around two binaries: (1) a process for devising a strategy for motivating young people participation to policy making (2) a detailed definition of the e-Participation activities to be conducted (during pilot phase). In this section of the document thus we consider first some recommendations that emerged from the work on the strategy before turning our attention to the planning.

4.3.1 Strategy

One question that has been investigated in STEP is that of motivations to engage in environmental issues. A key distinction has been used as the basis for the STEP strategy that between the **attitude** in engaging with environmental issues (including decision making) and that of environmental **action**. In our analysis of the field, it was noted that the notion of attitude can indeed help explain engagement with the environment. However an attitude is something which is developed over a long period of time and is highly dependent from socio-demographic factors, which are largely outside the control of any e-Participation project like STEP. The notion of environmental action, while more difficult to approach, was considered to offer better strategical ground for building e-Participation.

In the study of attitudes of young people toward environmental issues a common distinction is often made between demographics factors and social factors influencing said attitudes and subsequent behavior and engagement¹⁰. Demographic factors are structural elements of society and they include aspects such as age, social class, residence (urban/rural), political orientation and sex/gender. In this case, the assumption is that variations in demographic factors have a causal influence toward environmental engagement as an attitude. Approaches that consider social factors as relevant for explaining environmental attitude and engagement consider aspects such as: socialization, social norms (normative theories), learning and communication processes and the relations between values and attitudes. When it comes to environmental attitudes several authors have pointed to the relevance of socialization processes taking place with a particular focus on socialization within the family, the formal education system, via influence of the media and among peers.

During the execution of STEP we came to the conclusion that a better strategic option was to focus on the idea of environmental action rather than on attitude toward the environment. In social sciences the notion of action is a key concept and can be defined as a situation in which an agent orients his/her doing taking in account others. Social action requires also intentionality and is directed toward specific goals. Environmental action has been defined¹¹ *“as an action that involves deliberate decisions, planning, implementation, and reflection by an individual or group intended to achieve a specific environmental outcome”*. When talking about environmental action a first important aspect needs to be acknowledged: it is widely accepted in literature and policy debates that there is the gap between a positive environmental attitude and the actual action for the environment. The first (a positive attitude) does not necessarily translate into the second (an action). This aspect has been reported in scientific publications but also in policy reports of the like of the Eurobarometers (see for example Special EUROBAROMETER 295¹²).

In the context of the STEP Deliverable 4.1 *Report on youth motivation strategies* a number of high level recommendations were formulated in order to build a strategy for engagement, taking this distinction between attitude and action as a starting point and focussing on fostering and promoting action over attitude. This decision was grounded also on the general claim that participation to political issue is declining (as we have noted elsewhere) and that while attitude may be relevant, it is in fact the action that can produce a change in the state of affairs.



RECOMMENDATION 7

Action over attitude toward the topic of e-Participation (e.g. environment) should be a strategic guiding concept for e-Participation processes.

¹⁰ Dietz, T., Stern, P. C., & Guagnano, G. A. (1998). Social structural and social psychological bases of environmental concern. *Environment and behavior*, 30(4), 450-471.

¹¹ Emmons, K. M. (1997). Perspectives on environmental action: Reflection and revision through practical experience. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 29(1), 34-44.

¹² European Commission. (2007). Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. Official Journal of the European Union <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>

This strategical choice did bring with it the observation that then demographic factors should be outside a certain intervention (e.g. participation on environmental issues) as demographic factors may very well be outside the reach. Likewise it was considered important to support the action of young people who are not necessarily engaged with the environment (ie. They may be interested to contribute to their local area). This reinforces the recommendation of focusing on supporting action rather than engagement as an attitude.



RECOMMENDATION 8

Since there is a gap between positive environmental attitude and environmental action (i.e. Positive engagement doesn't necessarily lead to action) the tools design needs to strongly encourage action.

A further final point is that the above recommendations were also outcome of a deliberate choice of building a strategy for engaging young people. As noted in the deliverable *Report on youth motivation strategies*, a strategy is not necessarily the forward plan for action but first and foremost an attempt to inquiry in the situation faced by a project or organisation. A good strategy¹³ is in the first place something that “*honestly acknowledges the challenges being faced and provides an approach to overcoming them*”, it is about defining how a project can take steps to move forward out of a definition of a complex situation and limited set of resources.



RECOMMENDATION 9

Base your decision on a strategy approach which builds on your knowledge of the situation and which formulates hypothesis on how to deal with the e-Participation challenges that have been identified.

In this perspective a strategy is an experiment based on testing and designing some sort of hypothesis for action based on the current knowledge of the situation. The elements composing a strategy are thus as follows: 1. A diagnosis of the situation which aims at defining the challenges faced by a project or organisation. This can be seen a critical understanding of what is the situation and what are the critical factors in place and it is something which can be achieved out of the results of the first step of the e-Participation framework (the Background). 2. A guiding policy is the attempt of drawing an approach to deal with the challenges identified in the diagnosis. It is a sort of perspective for action which can be used to tackle obstacles and issues that have been identified in the diagnosis of the situation. For example in STEP we explicitly decided to focus on the idea of environmental action rather than that of attitude. 3. A set of actions which are necessary for the actual implementation of the guiding policy. A number of strategic actions were then proposed in STEP in the forms of recommendations (see appendix 1 for a graphical overview, some of which are presented in the below table as practical suggestions).

¹³ Rumelt, R. (2011). *Good strategy/bad strategy: The difference and why it matters*. London: Profile books

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- The first e-Participation process conducted should be on a smaller scale and be of a simple nature with clearly defined guidelines. Both the scale and scope of the e-participation process can be increased as the activities progress.
- Use appropriate mechanisms e.g. reputational mechanisms. Aspects of gamification such as the leaderboard and point system built into STEP should be used to support empowerment and leadership.

4.3.1 *Planning for Action*

As anticipated, during the execution of STEP a framework for public participation was formulated, by combining information from available best practice guidelines and toolkits and adapting it to the project specificities (see figure 1). In the context of the execution of STEP, this framework aim was to: provide a high-level consultation to the pilot authorities when deciding how best to execute the pilot needs in environmental decision-making, clearly set out the principles and elements that the pilot authorities should use to implement the public participation via STEP platform, define the local pilot specifications and organize the pilot activities for each public authority, and identify the methods and the means to be followed in order to achieve successful pilots implementation.

In order to implement the planning phase, among other core activities of the STEP project a questionnaire was developed for the collection of information from the pilot partners. The questionnaire allows to define the plans for e-Participation in a structured and uniform way. More than a questionnaire for collecting data, what has been developed is in fact a **blueprint template** which can be used by Public Authorities and other actors for a rational planning of the e-Participation activities (although clearly the focus for STEP was on environmental issues). The questionnaire/template includes 10 sections, which are detailed below:

- Objectives and scope: Clear and comprehensive description of the objectives and scope of the participation procedure that the public authority intends to set up.
- Legal framework Legislation: that is relevant to public participation and regulations that the authority has to follow when making a decision.
- Selection of issues to be brought under public participation: Definition of specific issues on which young people will be consulted (through the STEP platform, but this can be done also with other solutions).
- Public participation procedure: Definition of the public participation rules, how public participation will be conducted, and how the decision will be made.
- Timeframe Definition: of the steps and the time frame of the process.
- Resources and skills: Appointment of a person for each of the following roles: Pilot leader, Platform administrator, Responsible for communication, Responsible for training and Responsible for collecting feedback.
- Communication to stakeholders: Definition of the way in which public authorities will distribute the information to stakeholders, and how the stakeholders are involved.
- Communication to young citizens: Definition of the strategy and the means to be used in order to engage young citizens.
- Social media management: Definition of the social media to be used and description of usage rules.
- Inclusion: Plans to promote and ensure inclusion of sensitive communities.

For each of these 10 questions the questionnaire/template offers specific instructions on what the public authority should fill in, a list of detailed questions that should be answered, and recommendations that they should keep in mind when filling it in. The questions and recommendations have been formulated by combining elements of the best practice guidelines for e-participation (see section 3 of this document and annex 1 of STEP D5.1), which have been selected according to their relevance to the project.

RECOMMENDATION 10



Use appropriate planning instruments (of which the STEP questionnaire is an example) to lay down the planning of e-Participation action. This allows to clearly define the principles and elements that public authorities should use to implement e-participation.

Through this planning instrument, public authorities are guided to define and explain the approach of conducting their own public participation and how this relates to the particular characteristics of each public organisation and meet the needs of decision makers, public authority officers and young citizens. Furthermore, in STEP, during the actual planning phase a set of scenarios describing different use cases of have been defined. These scenarios make full use of the functionality of the platform and hence of the tools for e-Participation. The pilot scenarios incorporate both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Through the top-down approach, the public authorities select a specific issue of environmental interest, and ask young people to express their opinion. The following scenarios use the top-down approach: Consultation, Consultation on Environmental Impact Assessments, Round table discussion, Timeline Conversation. Through the bottom-up approach, the public authorities ask young people to bring forward themselves the environmental issues that concern them. The scenarios with a bottom-up approach are: Call for petitions, Call for ideas.

During the planning phase for the execution of the STEP project, it was decided to breakdown the implementation in four phases.

- Phase 1: Training includes the training of the public officers (in particular with a focus on the STEP platform)
- Phase 2: Testing with core group of users includes the internal pilot exercise in which a core group of users will test the platform before its public launch for identifying potential adjustments that need to be made
- Phase 3: Open pilot is when the platform is openly tested with the participation of young citizens
- Phase 4: Evaluation takes place continuously along the pilot implementation

Phases 3 clearly corresponds – in the e-Participation framework – to the Action stage. Phase 4 corresponds to the Evaluation and feedback stage. We will briefly consider the first 2 phases here, whereas phases 3 and 4 are described in the next sections of the document.

During the execution of STEP, in phase 1, public officers attend training sessions via webinars in order to be acquainted with the features of the platform. In a first stage, the platform operators have been trained on the use of the e-participation component and social media mining tool of STEP. At a second stage, the technical team of STEP organised conference calls with each pilot partner separately in order to address the local pilot needs. The goal of this activity is to get the public authority organisation ready to roll out the e-participation activities but also to be able to cope with any potential background.

In phase 2, for a period of two months, the platform has been tested by a limited, core user group of young citizens selected by each pilot partner. The goal of this phase is to make sure that the platform is, from an operational point of view, working according to specifications, and that the public organisation have in place the structure to support the e-participation process.



RECOMMENDATION 11

Plan ahead your needs in terms of training for platform operators and in terms of testing of the e-participation platform/solution, before starting the actual e-participation process.

What follows are some additional practical suggestions based on our experience in the planning activities for e-Participation.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Don't be afraid to devote resources to a detailed plan. It will save you time during implementation.
- Periodically revise the plan if the performance is not as expected.
- Conduct a planning analysis of the social media monitoring needs of your pilot. This includes among others the selection of topics of interest and actors with relevant social media presence (e.g. organizations, activists, journalists, etc.). This will enhance the monitoring capabilities and the value of insights and information of interest to the pilot that can be gleaned from social media channels.

4.4 Action

In the pilot implementation of the STEP project it was observed that there are large variations in Youth Engagement across the Pilot regions, as well as in response to the various dialogues. In what follows we present some examples associated with the e-participation piloting of STEP which exemplifies relevant actions for conducting successful involvement, engagement and participation of young people.

An example of a very successful dialogue has been the questionnaire dialogue of Mollet del Valles, in which citizens were consulted on proposals to make public space more sustainable, with the Municipality assigning 100,000 Euros of its budget. There was an open call for proposals to make our public space more sustainable (600 submitted through the STEP platform). 447 could be managed at local level. 9 proposals were finally outlined aligned with the Municipality Action Plan and the city territory. The municipality produced a video showing the 9 spots. There was a voting process through the STEP platform, and the winning proposal was selected: re-urbanization of a public square to promote pedestrian mobility. There was an exhibition at the city hall and public library, and a visit to the spot with citizens and officers. A public tender was arranged for private companies willing to develop the project. On the other hand, the dialogues which attracted the least attention were the ones in which it was not clear how the input of young citizens would be taken into account for decision making.



RECOMMENDATION 12

Invite young citizens to take decision that will have a major/clear impact. The more you open your decision-making procedures the bigger will be the engagement of your citizens.

At the beginning of the pilot operation, a challenge faced by the public authorities was to engage young citizens, as STEP was a new tool for them, to which they hadn't been accustomed. To overcome the problem of low participation, the Municipality of Hatay introduced a dialogue inviting young citizens to upload photos that present beautiful natural sceneries, green spots and areas of the Municipality. 432 young citizens participated in the dialogue and uploaded relevant material. The Municipality of Hatay used these photos in order to create a collage that will be uploaded in Hatay's main page of the platform. Although this dialogue didn't have a major impact in decision making, it was attractive to young citizens, as it involved them in a co-creation procedure for the graphic design of the STEP platform main page. It managed to attract a critical mass of users who got acquainted with the platform, and could later be invited to participate in dialogues with significant impact in decision making.



RECOMMENDATION 13

At the beginning, start with “catchy” topics, which attract the attention of young citizens. You can then continue to focus on more important issues for decision making at the core of your strategy.

In the Valdemoro pilot, there was initially a low number of participants, despite the fact that many people were reached through events, activities and workshops. Young people would be interested in using a new platform or app, but it should be well-known and be used by their peers. In order to tackle this issue, the Municipality of Valdemoro decided to implement a mentoring system, in which a team of educators trained youth groups on the use of the platform.



RECOMMENDATION 14

Young people are inclined to participate in decision making if they know that their peers do so. Involve young people in the engagement activities.

What follows are some additional practical suggestions based on our experience in the planning activities for e-Participation.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Involve young citizens in various parts of the process: pre-selection of ideas, voting, implementation, etc. Do not enact e-participation simply as a top-down process.
- Give the opportunity to young citizens to upload media (photos, videos, etc.), to increase their capacity to get involved in the process.
- Conduct your action activities leveraging the already existing strengths you have (e.g. already planned initiatives, your communication resources etc.)

4.5 Communication

As part of the research STEP research activities (for for D4.2 *Best practice report*) a research questionnaire was conducted with millennials. Today, millennials' ages can range from 18 to 33. The questionnaire was conducted in order to gauge their perspective on e-Participation in association with new communication technologies and the way these should be used to develop engagement. Many important lessons were learned from this piece of research and we report here a number of recommendations.

Participants originated from various countries but, as expected, the prevalent countries were Spain (35.1%), Greece (16.5%), Turkey (16.9%) and Italy (11.7%) – the pilot sites. The questionnaire had 231 respondents. The results of this questionnaire offer an initial umbrella for understanding communication for e-Participation. For instance, the findings indicated that although young people are environmentally conscious and care about their communities, they are not very fond of e-Participation. There may be a variety of reasons associated with this, including what has been discussed already as the decline in public participations affecting western countries. Therefore, this situation requires some effort on behalf of policy makers to engage young people in decision making. In other words, the deployment of e-Participation activities, for example via tailored platforms (both web and/or mobile) in itself does not guarantee involvement of young people and thus participation should not be taken for granted and it has to be built and sustained. This is where communication for building engagement becomes of the utmost relevance for conducting e-Participation.



RECOMMENDATION 15

Reaching young people effectively, requires the uptake and integration of digital marketing techniques and campaigns as part of the promotional strategy to better respond to their needs.

Young people are key actors for effective community decision-making and positive outcomes for local residents. Reaching young people effectively, requires an abolition of ordinary and old fashioned marketing, and the uptake and integration of digital techniques and campaigns as part of the promotional strategy to better respond to the needs and wants of millennials. The results of the questionnaire conducted show clear directions as to what would motivate young people to participate and engage with e-Participation platforms. These are reported in the following table as additional suggestions.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- An e-Participation platform should contain accurate and reliable information with regards to environmental issues, preferably in the form of a blog.
- An e-Participation platform should inspire young people to share their ideas and be listened and empowered to co-create rules, legislations and participate in the decision making process.
- To achieve engagement in this respect, the platform should have a variety of interactive features, and especially the ability to vote on content of contributors depending on whether the user likes it or not, as well as the ability to post links and short description pertaining to environmental issues of interest.
- Gamification may be a great means of engagement with the most preferred type of rewards being «following up actions from local authorities» and «receiving social feedback from other citizens».
- Much effort should also be placed in publicity and content. Regarding publicity in particular, the platform should integrate and capitalize upon social media, in particular Facebook and YouTube (followed by Instagram and Twitter).

A huge mistake to avoid when it comes to understanding and communicating to millennials is that they should not be viewed as one uniform group. Millennials have come of age in a time of shifting landscapes and tumultuous change. Growing up in the Information Age, millennials are empowered by information and demand transparency and authenticity. A one-size fits-all approach to building millennial engagement through communication means will simply not work. Millennials are too diverse. Rather than searching for the silver-bullet app or perfect platform that will attract millennials to civic life *en masse*, the key to developing millennial engagement stems from the axiom that all politics is local. Getting millennials involved and keeping them involved requires new engagement strategies that are tailored both to specific local concerns and to the millennial population in all of its diversity. Social media should not be used to “sell” the work that public authorities do but rather to further any cause.



RECOMMENDATION 16

Social media should not be used to “sell” the work that public authorities do but rather to further any cause.

To use social media as a way to further the cause of e-Participation for Public Authorities the following additional suggestions may become relevant:

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Storytelling is of paramount importance. And pictures do engage the audience more in every social network.
- Public authorities need to become transparent and demonstrate the objectives, progress and need of each (environmental) initiative.
- If policy makers can get millennials to get involved with the cause and become social media evangelists for change, a high potential of influence could be unleashed.

Studies suggest that e-Participation has higher chances of succeeding, if it engages citizens through content channels that are otherwise popular, rather than operating independently of them. Our research has confirmed this. e-Participation is expected to be more effective as a passive content requirement of interface behaviour (social media interfaces) rather than as an active requirement of citizens to navigate to a dedicated portal to engage in these activities. In other words, using people’s existing preferences for engagement in online activities should shape e-Participation and not the other way around. As people increasingly spend their time on social media, its inclusion in e-Participation tools is logical as well as a necessary development. Social media can be exploited to the advantage of e-Participation in two ways¹⁴: Firstly, e-Participation projects can use popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to engage mass audiences and raise awareness about the project. SMMT is very useful in this respect, as it can provide insights regarding what mass young audiences talk about, what channel do they use, what is popular

¹⁴ Lacigova O., Maizite A. and Cave B. (2012). eParticipation and Social Media: a Symbiotic Relationship? European Journal of ePractice · www.epracticejournal.eu Nº 16 · June/July 2012 · ISSN: 1988-625X. retrieved December 2015 from: <http://www.puzzledbypolicy.eu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=b3AxtF8evGg%3D&tabid=283>

among them and who is influential. Secondly, if a certain e-Participation project can succeed to take the form of a social media site these types of developments should be highly encouraged. In short, by linking social media to previously existing e-Participation tools, the overarching objective of e-Participation - engagement of audiences that usually are not active participants in policy processes – can be significantly enhanced. Further, experts suggest that the development of new e-Participation tools should leverage the latest developments in the ICT field and social media to ensure e-Participation is not sidelined as an online activity, failing to engage a new generation of European citizens. This explains why SMMT is an integral part of the STEP proposition. SMMT uncovers social media insights that are otherwise hard to be derived. Therefore, it can support public authorities to integrate social channels in their communication mix since it can help them understand what content is appealing to younger generations, which campaigns bring the best results (which campaigns succeed in reaching wider audiences) and what are the key topics of discussions.

Together with the use of social media for fostering the engagement of young people in e-Participation, the project has conducted more traditional communication activities (using both traditional and new media). All the activities, the various tools used and reflections on the brand identity are fully discussed in the STEP deliverables associated with the Work Package 7 on Dissemination. What we would like to report here are briefly what were the main objectives of the traditional dissemination and a brief overview of the various targets. Indeed, when conducting dissemination activities both the target and what one wants to achieve need to be defined in order to conduct activities that will indeed reach relevant people and also offering a way to measure results. As discussed elsewhere, any e-Participation process is contextual and therefore dissemination objectives and targets for each e-Participation process need to be defined and tailored depending on the context that a Public Authority is facing. However, the STEP objectives and targets may give a taste of what a traditional dissemination/communication approach can give to Public Authorities in the projects. As it has been defined in the STEP Dissemination strategy (Deliverable 7.1), the main objectives of the STEP dissemination activities were to:

- Raise awareness of youth all over Europe about the project. Achieve diversity and inclusiveness by involving a demographically balanced group of young people
- Raise awareness of local, regional and national policy makers and public bodies, especially in the field of decision-making on environmental issues
- Maximise participation in operations offered by the developed platform/ mobile app through the project by drawing attention of young people with the use of targeted communication means
- Ensure efficient communication and understanding regarding the project, obtain support and encourage participation of all stakeholders involved, as well as the wide public in disseminating information and exploiting results
- Establish formal and non-formal networks, also strengthening and valorising existing ones (including social media communities), for the exchanging of ideas and practices, in order to develop the sense of a community in participating in decision making in the fields of environment and sustainable development and the public sphere in general.

During the first eighteen months of project implementation, the main focus of the STEP dissemination strategy was to communicate and disseminate the activities of the STEP project, shaping an identity for the project and paving the way for the next phase, when the platform was ready and the consortium could begin engaging targets in pilot areas. In month nineteen, when the internal testing period of the platform started, the pilot partners launched preparations for local dissemination activities, aiming at presenting the STEP platform in the pilot areas. The rest of the consortium supported the general dissemination of the STEP

project. The ultimate goal is to ensure the STEP platform is known by a significant number of local authorities and young people.



RECOMMENDATION 17

Traditional communication can help you preparing the ground and build consensus before initiating and during the e-Participation activities.

STEP's dissemination activities have ensured the wide reaching impact and uptake of the platform among the following stakeholders:

- Young men and women all over Europe belonging to the age range 18-29, but also to other ages.
- Local, regional and national authorities all over Europe.
- Local, regional and national stakeholders involved in the decision making procedures for youth and environment.
- NGOs active in the fields of political and social participation, environment and youth issues.
- Project partners; partners' staff who will act as members of the Executive Board and the General Assembly, as well as members of the working groups of the project.
- The general public.

The following are the main media used for communication and dissemination in STEP and are reported here as examples of what Public Authorities can use for their own communication:

- Social Media (including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube)
- Mass Media (radio, tv) via Press Releases at appropriate timings.
- Multi-media tools (video via YouTube & other relevant channels)
- STEP Platform (enable easy sharing of links to STEP via other social media platforms)
- Pilot Local Authority Websites (using the STEP widgets / links to STEP platform)
- STEP QR Code / Posters / Flyers
- Existing Networks of Interest
 - Newsletters
 - Events (real-world) (e.g. at a Pilot Level, including Launch events, Open events)
 - Events (online) eg. Webinars
- Targeted promotional material in order to ensure the maximum dissemination of the project, (especially to young people). Promotional items could be: business cards, post-its, USB sticks, cloth bags, hats, etc.

The mix of media (traditional and new media) used by the local authorities to promote e-participation activities should always reflect on local youth's attitude towards IT technologies. For example, in cases of limited use of IT apps and social media at local/ regional level by young people, local authorities should start the promotion of e-participation activities emphasizing on traditional media (press, radio, TV) aiming both to

the encouragement of young people to use IT & social media tools generally, as well as to get involved in the particular e-participation processes.

When it comes to social media, in order to promote an e-participation activity, local authorities should use their already existing accounts especially when they already have an important number of followers. In addition, when they decide to create new accounts, local authorities should have in mind that social media without followers or frequent posts/shares/interactions, etc. have no impact. Creating accounts in all the popular social media platforms has not always a positive impact if the organizations are not able to “feed” these accounts often. Therefore, it is advisable in the case of an e-participation activity, local authorities to select the most appropriate social media tool to communicate it and focus on it. Paid publicity targeting particularly in local youth (through social media) is also highly encouraged (keeping though the rule that there is no point to invest a high amount for a short period, since the best results come when an average amount is invested for a longer period of publicity).

For traditional forms of dissemination as a way to further the cause of e-Participation for Public Authorities the following additional suggestions may become relevant:

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- In case of TV, radio as well as press publicity, the effectiveness and efficiency of such publicity is much greater in the case of interviews (local authorities’ representatives, local stakeholders, young people sharing their e-participation experience etc.) instead of TV spots and radio spots or press publicity promoting the same message repetitively.
- Open events as well as targeted events (e.g. workshops, info days etc.) are highly encouraged. In this case, rather than organizing events especially for the promotion of an e-participation action, it is highly recommended to promote it through events that already attract local youth (annual festivals, meetings, concerts etc.).
- When it comes to social media, in order to promote an e-participation activity, local authorities should use their already existing accounts especially when they already have an important number of followers.
- Use Social Media Monitoring Tools to identify dissemination targets, i.e. social media accounts that are influential and active in the topics of interest for the pilot, and try to engage them in the pilot activities.

4.6 Evaluation and Feedback

It is the case that despite the significant investments made in e-Participation, there has been fairly limited attention to the systematic evaluation of these efforts. The OECD¹⁵ states that “there is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy that governments in OECD countries invest in engaging citizens in public decision making and the amount of attention they pay to evaluating the effectiveness of such efforts”. It is therefore relevant to fill this “evaluation gap” in e-Participation by analyzing its processes against pre-defined criteria. Evaluation of e-Participation efforts is of importance for achieving participation objectives in specific situations and contexts, and for improving e-Participation practices, processes and systems. e-Participation literature often refers to the evaluation framework proposed by Macintosh and Whyte¹⁶ which distinguishes three viewpoints described as overlapping: Democratic (considering criteria to understand how e-participation affects democracy), Project (considering the aims, objectives, and methods of public engagement), and Socio-technical (considering to what extent ICT design affects the outcomes). The difficulty in developing a ‘standard’ evaluation framework for e-Participation is that different platforms have quite different objectives and produce very different benefits and values. For this reason, different kinds of measurement are required and it is difficult to develop a generic method suitable of evaluating all e-Participation systems. Adding to the complexity is the fact that the system will be used by multiple groups of stakeholders, each with their own agendas for using the system and their own set of values¹⁷.



RECOMMENDATION 18

Also the evaluation of e-Participation is contextual and you need to build your evaluation framework around your own objectives and around your identified stakeholders.

As discussed elsewhere in this document, e-Participation can only work effectively when citizens actually engage with the tools and use them. Applications need to be designed with high functionality to enable citizen participation in a convenient and efficient way. This requires understanding who the users are and what they will be doing on the site and this is properly done in the background phase of e-Participation. Appropriate and high-level functionality will match citizens needs better and encourage them to use the platform more, thus increasing levels of e-Participation. It is then relevant to evaluate whether the adopted solutions have indeed met the needs of the stakeholders, hence supporting a smooth and effective e-Participation process. There are two basic categories¹⁸ regarding evaluation; a) ‘Is it doing things right?’ and

¹⁵ Lejarraga, I. (2004). The future of the Internet and democracy beyond metaphors, towards policy. *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy*, 143-162

¹⁶ Macintosh, A., & Whyte, A. (2008). Towards an evaluation framework for eParticipation. *Transforming government: People, process and policy*, 2(1), 16-30.

¹⁷ In the Deliverable 5.1 of STEP is presented the literature discussing the various aspects important to the Evaluation of e-Participation you can refer to that document for additional sources and material for inspiration.

¹⁸ Loukis, E. (2012). *Evaluating eParticipation Projects and Lessons Learnt*. In *Empowering open and collaborative governance* (pp. 95-115). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

b) 'Is it doing the right things?' The evaluation methodologies proposed for STEP for instance were intended to identify both of these aspects and to ensure a successful platform as an end result of the project.

In order to evaluate the opinion of both young people and Policy Makers/Public officers we devised an interim and a final evaluation. The goal of the interim evaluation was to get initial feedbacks and eventually operate adjustments to the process. The goal of the final evaluation is to reason on the project results and project the outcomes toward the future of the STEP platform. For the evaluation we used surveys and interviews. The survey allowed to collect some quantitative data to be gathered using Likert scale questions in addition to open ended questions to allow for more detailed responses. The surveys that have been distributed to young people taking part in the Dialogues corresponded to the type of e-Participation process that people took part in. These related to the 'Call for Ideas', 'Environmental Consultation Process' and 'Call for Petitions' Dialogues that had been put forward at this stage. The link to the Online survey was emailed to participants towards the end of the Dialogue life span. The timing of the end of project and that of the evaluation were the same. However this required a final evaluation to be done when the project was still ongoing. This has created some difficulties in collection of data for example. If you do not have specific motives to run a final evaluation in parallel to the conclusion of your experience, it would be wise to plan some of the final evaluation after the execution of the e-Participation process.



RECOMMENDATION 19

Consider the timing of your evaluation process. While you may want to have an ongoing evaluation in a parallel to e-participation, it may be helpful to have a post-evaluation to capture and evaluate in full the process results.

In terms of approach, for STEP Structured Interviews were carried out to evaluate the platform in greater depth with small samples of both young people and policy makers/public officers from the various Pilot Cities. From the interviews the general perception was that the platform was attractive and the young people who were interviewed said that they had enjoyed using it. For the public officers who were interviewed, they voiced concerns over the length of time it was taking to raise awareness of the platform to the target group. They raised concerns over usability and technical issues of the platform and some municipalities mentioned that as the platform was not an integrated component of their current software then staff would be less likely to engage with it. Public Officers felt that setting up a new dialogue for the first time could be challenging, help videos are available, but usually people want to just complete the task without accessing any help. It was mentioned that there was a lot of different functionality within the platform, but mostly public officers were using a small subset of this (Ideas/Petitions/Consultations) and not really making full use of the rest.



RECOMMENDATION 20

Public authorities should ensure that they provide clear guidelines for how participant's input will be used and what feedback will be given to them (including likely timeframes).

For the execution of e-Participation evaluation by Public Authorities the following additional suggestions may also become relevant:

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- In the evaluation phase inform young people how their actions have made a difference, state how any information was used and highlight any actions following a consultation.
- Define properly the tools you want to use for evaluation. We used small online surveys and interviews, but other options may be better for your purposes and the specific local conditions of your process.
- Plan for some actions taking in account the results of your evaluation, especially for your future e-participation endeavours (e.g. how to do better next time? What to improve in your tools? What has worked and what not?)

5 Conclusion: Roadmap for Planning your e-Participation with Young People and beyond

In this additional deliverable of the STEP project we have presented a framework for conducting e-Participation which has been used for the STEP project. The framework has been built around the one proposed by the *e-Participation Best Practices Manual* (2012). While every e-Participation process remains necessarily contextual and often local it remains also relevant to have tools that can help navigate the process of conducting e-Participation and that can help taking decisions based on lessons learned by others. Thus in this document a number of recommendations have been proposed as way to raise attention to potential critical points and helping taking decisions. These recommendations can be seen as a **Roadmap for e-Participation** which essentially augments the proposed e-Participation framework. Figure 2 thus presents this Roadmap in a graphical and intelligible manner for future reuse by Public Authorities. A final recommendation is to consider that the steps of the roadmap while presented in a linear fashion, may in fact overlap in many ways also depending on how each public authority decides to organise the e-participation process. For example communication may begin also in parallel with planning and should definitely be conducted in parallel with action. Likewise the evaluation should probably start in parallel with the action and in any case the definition of the evaluation methodology should also start in the planning phase.

What follows is also a set of questions which may help further navigate some of the decisions you need to take for your own e-Participation projects:

- Know why you are planning the initiative – what are the expected outcomes?
- What is your plan for identifying the stakeholders in the early stages?
- What activities will you conduct in order to know your intended stakeholders? – be clear on what their needs and requirements are
- Have you matched the tools to the process? – do you have the right technological support for what you would like to achieve? Do you have proper tools for analysis and management also?
- What kind of information will you be collecting (e.g. Survey responses / images / text based posts).
- Have you identified relevant people (staff) to take charge of the e-Participation process and for the different roles?
- Have you defined a social media strategy for your initiative”?
- Have you defined the topics for the e-Participation? Remember to use those who can lead to engagement of your audience
- Do you know how the posts and inputs will be dealt with? – do you plan to interact with the posts online? if so do so in a timely manner.
- Do you have a plan to advertise the initiative widely? People won’t participate if they don’t know about it.
- Have you ensured any communication is clear, concise and jargon free?
- Have you allowed sufficient time to ensure the process is not rushed?
- Have you set dates for completion and reporting back on the process?
- Do you know and have you states how will the evaluation findings will be used and reported?

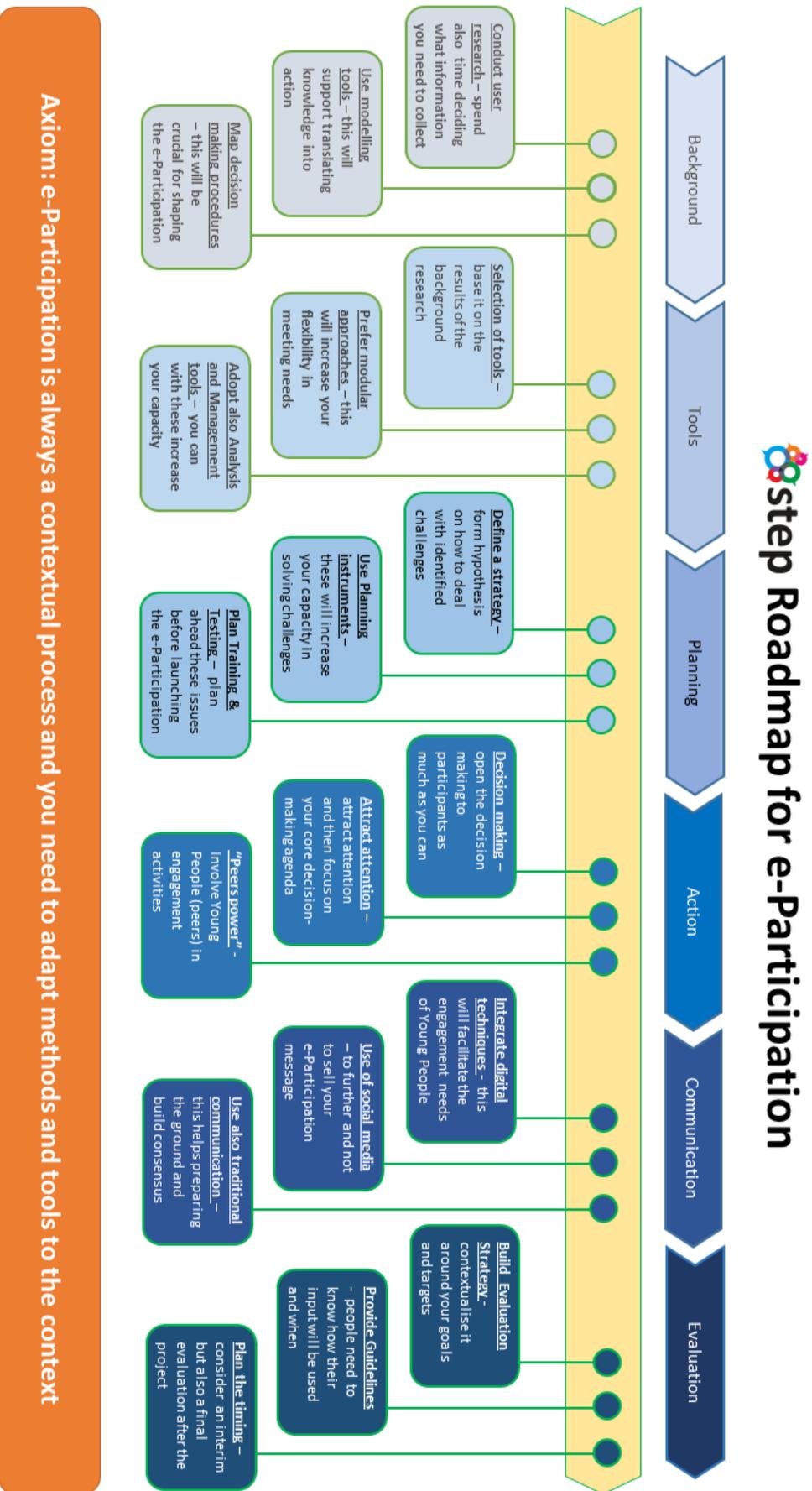
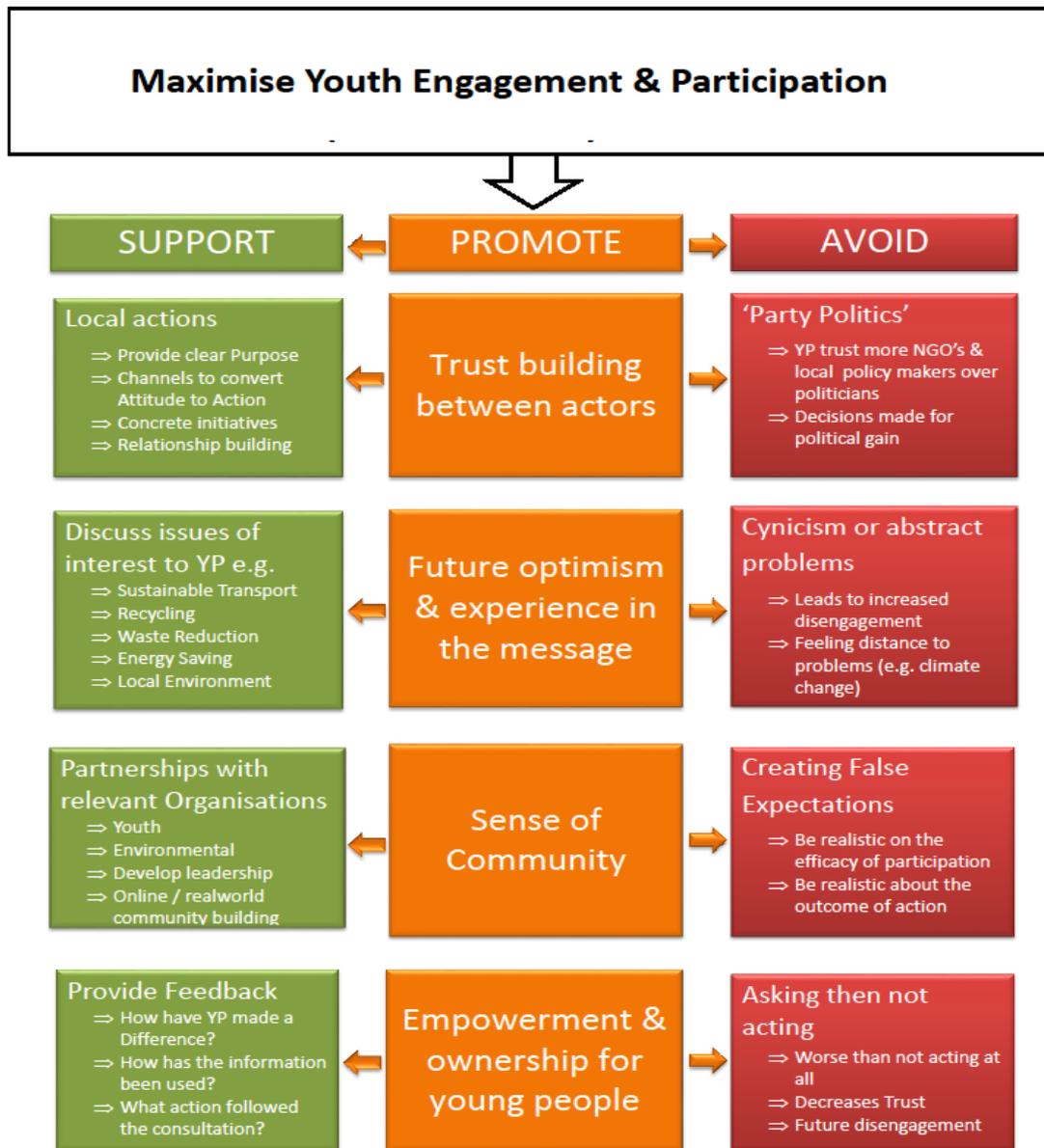


Figure 2- Roadmap for e-Participation

Annex I – STEP suggested actions for increasing engagement of Young People in e-Participation



Annex II Pilot Plan Questionnaire

Objectives and scope	
<p><i>Describe clearly and comprehensively the objectives and scope of the e-participation procedure that you are seeking in making policy decisions (e.g environmental).</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What does the organizing authority aim to achieve through this e-participation procedure? To get feedback on the plans of the local government or generate new ideas and suggestions? Or both? ▪ What is the level of participation? (Select one from: Inform, Consult, Involve, Engage, Empower)¹⁹ 	
<p>Things you should keep in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The aim of participation has to be presented in brief and clear terms ○ Be specific about your priorities and their impact on the scope of the decision. ○ Provide an explanation of why this specific e-participation process exists and include its limitations. ○ Identify the level of the needed participation. ○ Understand the needs and conditions of your e-participation in order to design an effective process. ○ Take into account the willingness of young people to participate with their own vision or ideas. ○ Identify where public input is desired and possible. 	
Legal framework	
<p><i>Describe the relevant legislation that has to be taken into account when planning a public participation procedure.</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which are the legal obligations of the authority in relation to making a decision? ▪ Which are the procedures that need to be followed? 	
<p>Things you should keep in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make sure that you are aware of the full extent of your legal obligations in relation to making the decision ○ Participation should not be limited to instances and issues in which it is required by law. Participation should be promoted in all issues that have to do with public interest. 	
Selection of issues to be brought under public participation	
<p><i>Describe the issues on which young people will be consulted.</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which are the issues for which your organisation will use conduct e-participation for decision-making? ▪ How important are these issues for the municipality / region? 	
<p>Things you should keep in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chose specific issues that the provided input has a real potential to help shape the decision-making. ○ Focus the pilot implementation on policies/issues that are of direct interest to the local young people. 	
Public participation procedure	

¹⁹ According to the IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum the five levels of increasing public engagement are:

- **Inform:** to provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public
- **Consult:** To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
- **Involve:** To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered
- **Engage:** To engage with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution
- **Empower:** To create governance structures to delegate decision-making and/or work directly with the public

<p><i>Determine the public participation rules.</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will decision criteria be established through the pilot process? Who will be involved in the decision-making? Who will make the final decision: the participants (for example, through voting) or the local authority? ▪ How will the final decision be made if the participatory process results in numerous disagreements? ▪ How will the public be kept informed throughout the process? How will the affected participants be informed of final decisions? ▪ How will you handle e.g. petitions created by the citizens themselves? ▪ Which are the commitments and obligations of your organisation? ▪ How are different departments of your organization involved? Other authorities? ▪ Which are the ground rules to be established for a clear ethical framework of the process (e.g. being aware of child protection, minority and disability issues)? ▪ How will you implement the legal framework for privacy protection? How will you ensure that processes explicitly avoid manipulating or abusing potential participants? 							
<p>Things you should keep in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure that those affected understand the scope of the decision, the decision-making process and any constraints on the process. ○ Use well-defined rules about how public participation will be conducted and how the decision will be made. ○ Explain all sides of an issue and present the pros and cons to make more thoughtful decisions. ○ Provide an honest opportunity for the public to influence the decision. ○ Focus on building relationships between and among stakeholders. ○ Create and share truthful, comprehensive, and clear information. ○ Ensure that the organizing authority is committed and able to involve the public. ○ Assess and assemble needed skills and resources for a successful e-participation. ○ Protect personal data, commercial confidentiality and intellectual property ○ Address transparency issues in the frame of democratic electronic participation. ○ Ensure open data/information are available to the public. ○ Collect the personal data just for the specified purposes of the participation process and not for further use. ○ Keep the personal data in a form that permits the identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes of the pilot. 							
Timeframe							
<p><i>Outline your schedule in accordance with your e-participation timeframe and your requirements.</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the timeframe for your process implementation – the beginning, the phases and the end? When should the decision be made for each of the pilot scenarios above? ▪ Will the organizing authority commit the necessary resources? Can the required staff commit the necessary time? 		Months					
		Training					
		Internal pilot exercise ²⁰					
		issue 1					
		issue 2					
		issue 3					
		issue 4					
issues ²¹	Consultation	Consultation	Round table	Timeline	Conversation	Call for	Call for

²⁰Select a popular issue for an internal pilot exercise and test it as a guide with limited user participation.

D: e-Participation Roadmap

		on EIA	discussion			petitions	ideas
issue 1							
issue 2							
issue 3							
issue 4							

Things you should keep in mind:

- o Define the steps and the time frame of the pilot process and timeline.
- o Keep all pilot activities moving forward, organize the activities, keep track of goals and objectives over time, and integrate different team members' activities.
- o Use your time carefully in order to avoid wrong pursuits.
- o Inform the participants and the stakeholders for the time constraints or scheduling requirements.
- o Do not define too short timelines to genuinely give people a chance to contribute.
- o Ensure that engagement will not come far too late in the decision-making process.

Resources and skills

Appoint a person for each of the following roles: Process leader, Platform administrator, Responsible for communication, Responsible for training and Responsible for collecting feedback in accordance with their skills. Guide them to work coordinated so as to use effort and resources effectively. Their responsibilities are described below:

Process leader

- Oversees the progress of the e-participation process
- Appoints the resources
- Decides issues for public participation and Informs policy makers about the results

Platform administrator

- Platform moderation
- Contact with technical team

Responsible for communication

- Engagement of young users and stakeholders

Responsible for training

- User training

Responsible for collecting feedback

- Collects the key feedback and provides input from users to the technical partners, and for evaluation

Communication to stakeholders

Identify how you will distribute the information to stakeholders. In addition describe the communication process and how the stakeholders are involved in the pilot process.

Answer the following questions:

- How will you identify the key stakeholders?
- Through which channel(s) do you plan to reach the stakeholders (Personal contact, Mass mailing, Press releases, Press conferences etc.)? Which are the local press and media that you will use to disseminate your e-participation in your area?
- How will the uninterrupted communication between stakeholders be ensured?
- How will the decision makers know about the e-participation results?

Things you should keep in mind:

²¹ Change the table according to your needs and the functionalities of your platform/service

- o Identify and use the best communication channels.
- o Use a hybrid mix of traditional and digital communications to communicate with stakeholders.
- o Comprise members as well as experts from related fields with high-level of communication knowledge and experience in policy making.
- o Foster a sense of ownership and engage stakeholders through accountability and increased responsibility.
- o Ensure the resources for the effective communication and promotion of the activities.

Communication to young citizens

Describe the strategy and the means to be used in order to engage young people in your area. Suggest the ways of engagement and the fields of interest to be aimed to attract young users.

Answer the following questions:

- Which communication channels (Personal contact, Mass mailing, Press releases, Press conferences, etc.) would allow you to most effectively reach the young citizens? Is it enough to distribute information via traditional communication channels or should other channels be used? Which other channels will you propose? Which are the events that your organization plan to launch so as to attract young people?
- How will your organization motivate young citizens to be engaged in the e-participation? How will your organization build trust and awareness in order to communicate with them in familiar settings?

Things you should keep in mind:

- o Ensure the effectiveness of the communication tools, in order to be fine-tuned and adapted to the environments, resources and communication channels of young people.
- o Ensure that the participation process is handled transparently and the interests of young participants are protected.
- o Encourage young people to connect to personally meaningful topics and enable them to express their opinions and actions through tools and practices that they are comfortable with.
- o Build synergies and participatory events targeted to young people.
- o Allow young people to interact with other users and the authorities.
- o Inform young people how their actions have made a difference.
- o Allow young people to raise complaints and grievances via participatory platform.
- o Recognize the local / national organisations that can be used to attract young citizens.
- o Support the action of young people who are not necessarily engaged with issues that are the topics of your e-participation.

Social media management

Name the social media to be used and regulate the actions of the person responsible.

Answer the following questions:

- Which social media accounts will you create in order to promote the e-participation?
- Who will be the administrator/s of your social media accounts?
- Do you wish to allow social media users to comment without your permission?
- Who will be authorized to manage (comment, answer, post, approve) the content of the social media accounts?
- How often do you intent to feed your social media account/s with content?

Things you should keep in mind:

- o Identify the social media channels to be used and assess their impact.
- o Treat social media as an effective channel for the dissemination and distribution of information.
- o Motivate key stakeholders to follow the e-participation social media.
- o Take into consideration the fact that social media is not perceived as an official information channel.
- o Use social media campaigns and contests.
- o Keep the posting rate high and persistent.

Inclusion	
<p><i>Suggest your plans that promote and ensure inclusion in your process. State your principles through the lens of inclusion and identify sensitive communities that you should involve in the participation process.</i></p> <p>Answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How do you plan to include young people with fewer opportunities (eg. because of social/economic obstacles, cultural differences, etc.) in the public participation process?▪ Which are the communities or identified minorities that you should involve and achieve local inclusion?	
<p>Things you should keep in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Include people of different/diverse cultures, people from regional or remote communities, people with disabilities, older/younger stakeholders, and those with real life experience relevant to the decision being made.○ Follow procedures and structures that promote inclusion.○ Try to include the all stakeholder groups and participants affected by the decision-making.○ Limit emphasis of interventions on certain factors that are antecedents of good engagement as this risks the exclusion of entire categories, based on socio-economic factors or geographical location.○ Make adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation and ensure inclusive approach.○ Be aware and take account of the needs of diverse communities to be able to participate in a meaningful way.	