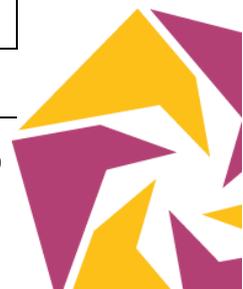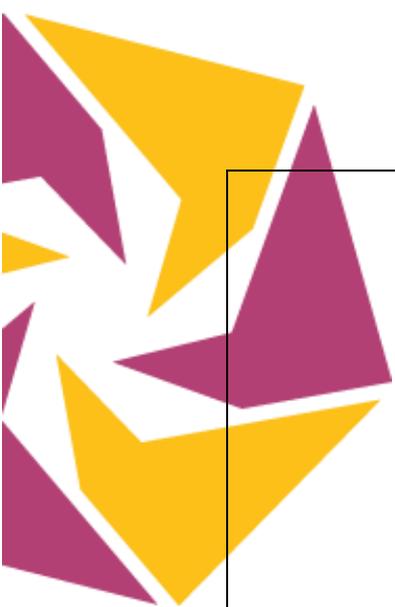# Roadmap for e-participation

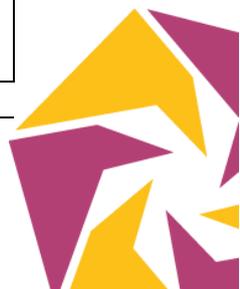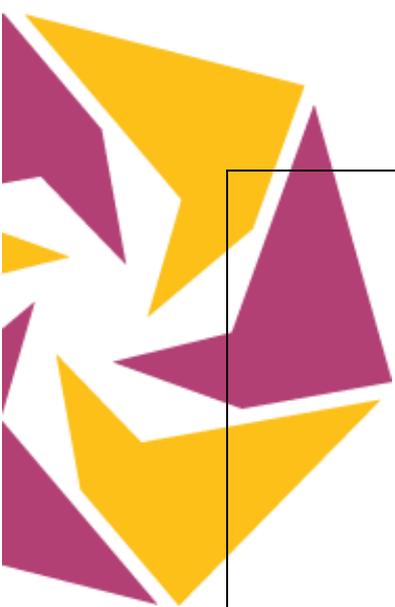| Description and state of the art | |
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|  Definition | Trend, based on the developments in CSCW (Computer Supported Cooperative Work) and groupware, e-democracy and e-government. It can be considered as part of e-democracy.<br><br>E-Participation refers to the ICT supported participation in processes involved in government and governance. Such processes may concern administration, service delivery, decision making and policy making. E-Participation is hence closely related to e-government and e-governance participation. According to a more detailed definition, e-participation is the use of ICT to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives.[276]<br><br>The OECD defined three practical ways in which these interactions could be strengthened:[277]<br>1. Information: Government disseminates information on policy-making on its own initiative – or citizens' access information upon their demand. (One-way relationship)<br>2. Consultation: Government asks for and receives citizens' feedback on policy- making. (Two-way relationship)<br>3. Active participation: Citizens actively engage in decision-making and policy-making. (Advanced two-way relationship) |
|  Addressed societal /business or public sector need | Societal need:<br><br>Participate access to public sector services (political participation) |
|  Existing solutions /applications | There are already many e-participation platforms running, both governmental ones as well as from private organisations. However, the popularity of these e-participation platforms varies from country to country:<br>• mySociety (UK)[278]<br>• change.gov (US)[279]<br>• Citizen Space[280] |

| /services | - Futurium[281]<br>- Puzzled by Policy[282]<br>- SOLVIT[283]<br>- OurSpace[284]<br>- Reddit[285]<br>- Loomio[286]<br>- Agora Voting[287]<br>- kosovakosovo.com (Serbia, Kosovo)[288]<br>- OpenKratio[289]<br>- VTaiwan[290]<br>- Policy Compass[291]<br>- Sirvo A Mi Pais[292]<br>- Frankfurt fragt mich (Frankfurt asks me)[293]<br>- FUPOL applications[294]<br>- Better Reykjavik[295]<br>- Gothenburg, Online forum[295]<br>- The Malmö Initiative[295]<br><br>A study about the potential and challenges of e-participation in the European Union[296] summarizes that e-participation encompasses three interactions: e-information, e-consultation and e-decision-making. Existing initiatives that support e-participation already are<br>- European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)[297]<br>- Online EU Public Consultations[298]<br>- Petitions to the European Parliament[299] |
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| Main actors regarding R&D of this technology | - Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Angewandten Forschung e.V.<br>- Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne<br>- Ethniko Kentro Erevnas Kai Technologikis Anaptyxis<br>- Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche<br>- Stiftelsen Sintef<br>- University of Patras |
| Current research activities | The **Europe for Citizens Programme** (2007-2013) promoted initiatives that facilitate the active participation in the civic and democratic life of the EU.[300]<br><br>The **eParticipation Preparatory Action** – supported by the European Parliament - co-funded 21 pilots promoting the use of ICT in legislative and decision-making processes within parliamentary and government environments.[300]<br><br>The **CIP ICT Policy Support Programme** for 2009 supported projects empowering and involving citizens in transparent decision-making in the EU.[300]<br><br>A large FP7 programme in this area has been the Integrated Program Future Policy Modelling project (FUPOL).[294] |

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| | The EU's 5th & 6th Research Framework Programmes (FP5/6) co-funded several projects to develop concepts, tools and solutions for the use of ICT in participatory democracy. Tools for governance and policy modelling, developed under FP7, will support governments in delivering smarter, targeted and adaptive policies, whilst better understanding cost-effectiveness and impacts.[300] <br><br> The CIP/PSP Projects 'OurSpace', 'Puzzled by Policy', 'MyUniversity', 'Immigration Policy 2.0' and 'PARTERRE' achieved concrete and good results.[300] <br><br> There is also an **EUREKA project** (Achieving increased citizen participation and engagement via electronic voting)[27] in this area. |
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| Impact assessment | **Public sector modernization:** <br> • Image Modernization <br> • Level of political participation <br> • Political transparency <br> • Creation of trust and confidence in the public sector <br> **Public Sector as an Innovation Driver:** <br> • Social equity and inclusiveness |

| Necessary technological modifications | |
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| Potential use cases | There are already many e-participation applications available – for specific problems (e.g. public bathrooms in Frankfurt[301], public city park in New Karonlinelund[302]), for specific target groups (e.g. young citizens – Our Space[284]), on an European level (e.g. European Citizens Initiative[297]), on a national level (e.g. OSALE - The Estonian eParticipation Tool[303]) or on city level (e.g. The Malmö Initiative[295]). <br><br> The main challenge is to find an already similar solution in another city or country and adapt it to the necessities of the target group. |
| Technological challenges | A Finnish study has identified some challenges regarding e-participation on the basis of a crowdsourcing technique, e.g. the risk of misrepresentation of the general populations' preferences. The lack of an authentication process on the website allowed citizens to theoretically have as many profiles as they want, meaning the existence of **fake profiles** must be taken into consideration. [304] <br><br> The 'Puzzled by Policy' project concluded that there was too much focus on the development of the ICT part of e-participation. More attention should have been dedicated to collaborating with policy stakeholders at the EU level and involving EU citizens through better advocacy strategies. [305] |

| | | Julia Reda MEP from the German Pirate Party and her team identified the following challenges of e-participation: **accreditation, transparency, anonymity or real name policies, usability, and the potential of gamification**.[306]

The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) recommends to improve online EU public consultations by making them **more accessible and less technical**.[307]

ECAS further recommends improving the **cost-effectiveness, user-experience and the regulatory framework** of the European Citizens Initiative. For online EU public consultations it was recommended, to **reduce their complexity and always make sure to publish the results on time and accurately and ensure meaningful feedback**.[307]

Sebastian Vogt and his team came to the conclusion that the technical requirements regarding the applied ICT solutions seem to be a particularly substantial barrier to reaching a broad range of citizens and involving them in participation projects. The different ICT solutions need to be **interoperable to improve user-friendliness** by providing a clear overview of the projects. Moreover, it is challenging to prepare and display information in a comprehensive and convenient format. Providing citizens with all of the necessary information is a prerequisite for their informed participation in the projects.[308]

Panopulou and his team recommend to [309]
- Design a system that is appealing, yet simple and easy to use
- Consider error handling, easy reversal of actions, and helpdesk
- Ensure system's appropriateness for the targeted participants

The project 'Puzzled by Policy' states also that the experience gained during the design and implementation of the Inform-Consult-Empower approach revealed that the main challenges to be faced are **not technical, but rather socio-political**.[310] |

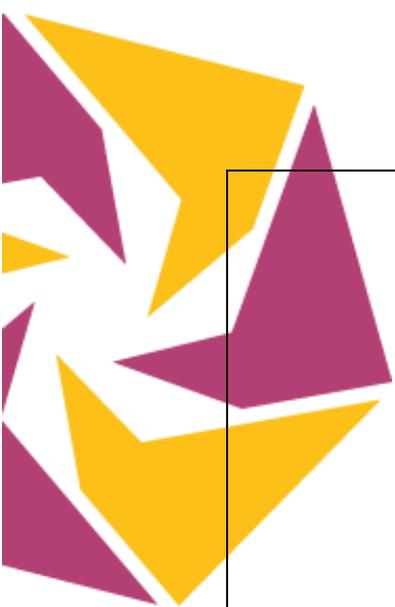| **Necessary activities (in or for the public sector)** | | |
| Development of a specific training | **Open task** | Panopoulou and his team recommend to [309]<br>- Educate and train staff<br>- Acquire skilled personnel |

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| necessary | | |
| **Advanced or adapted ICT infrastructure needed** | 🟩 | Not issues identified in this area. |
| **Change of (public sector internal) processes necessary** | **Open task** | According to the Finnish study [304] the lack of an institutionalised process leads to an arbitrary final result. The Finnish Minister of Environment, and not the citizens, had to take the ultimate decision to change the law. In order to avoid citizens' frustration, it is important to guarantee their opinions are going to be taken into consideration in the final step. The Finnish parliament should have introduced a **binding process or obligation to include the citizen's proposals in the law change.** The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) has performed a SWOT analysis on e-participation and has concluded that the European Citizens' Initiative leaves citizens more frustrated due to its **lack of impact**. Another weakness connected to this point is that the results of the ECI are not-binding. Also online EU public consultations are unlikely to have a meaningful impact on EU decision-making. It is recommended to always publish the results of EU public consultations and meaningful feedback to ensure **transparency and accountability**. It is important to make sure that the results are also published on time and that they are an accurate analysis of the public consultation.[307]<br><br>Estonian government officials have initiated interactive online tools such as TOM and osale.ee for engaging citizens online, but management and promotion of these tools often is neglected over time and therefore these channels are used by rather low numbers of citizens. In the question of administrative culture, **supporting measures range from clarity in institutional duties to ensure democracy development to making changes in civil servants´ job descriptions in order to become more responsive toward citizen interaction**.[295] |

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| Promotion / information of stakeholders necessary | **Open task** | A Scottish study concluded that e-government tools cannot reach their potential if the engagement process they are embedded within is not **promoted** and does not allow citizens to engage in a meaningful and accessible manner, within a suitable timeframe.[307]<br><br>The 'Puzzled by policy' project concluded that a lot of human resources were required to develop citizens' engagement on the platform. It is essential **to create partnerships with mediators** in the policy field which can help support the process. When involving hard-to-reach groups of citizens in policy-making, combining online and offline participatory approaches are needed.[305]<br><br>The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) recommends to[307]<br>• Keep **promoting** the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) as a tool that encourages participation and active citizenship in the EU<br>• Keep **encouraging citizens** to use the ECI to express their own interests and make sure they have a chance to put those interests on the EU's agenda by using it.<br>•<br>The European Citizens Initiative and the Online EU Public Consultations are currently largely unknown to the public.[307]<br><br>Sebastian Vogt and his team came to the conclusion that the benefit of complementary offline activities that support the e-Participation project is acknowledged. Additional actions such as **organizing local events, offering participation via telephone or postcards, which when distributed in advance can also serve as an advertisement for the online portal**, ensure the success of e-Participation projects.[308]<br><br>Weber and his team conclude that **public acceptance can be viewed as a basic requirement** for the success of all political participation measures whose promotion should receive an appropriate priority.[311] |

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| Need to deal with cyber security issues | **Open task** | There persists the **threat of manipulation** by organised groups (especially in small scale applications).<br><br>Panopoulou and his team recommend in their review paper to [309]<br>• build an absolutely secure system<br>• protect participants' personal data (**privacy)**<br>• ensure **confidentiality** from third parties (e.g. hackers) but also from government<br>• convince citizens that the system is fully secure and private. |
| New or modified legislative framework or regulations necessary | **Open task** | When using e-participation tools, organisations must follow their own policies and procedures relating to record-keeping, data security, intellectual property and privacy. It may be helpful to **develop guidelines for safe and acceptable use** and publicise these to users.[312]<br><br>Important supporting factors are legal environment, administrative and political culture. In the case of its legal environment, Estonia has removed most regulative barriers that would hinder transparency or access to information. However, there are some areas where **regulations should be updated, according to technology-driven changes in society. For example, the issue of internet freedom versus copyright and privacy protection is an ongoing debate on a global scale.**[295] |
| Development of a common standard necessary | **Open task** | For the pan-European tool, European Citizens Initiative coordination should be simplified as it is currently unnecessarily complex due to the **lack of harmonised rules for identification requirements**.[307] There is also the need for Member States to agree upon a European **common set of requirements**, which should include facilitating the signing of European Citizens Initiative by expats as they currently cannot sign an European Citizens Initiative in their country of residence.[307] |

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| Need for a more economical solution | **Open task** | The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) has performed a SWOT analysis on e-participation and has concluded that the European Citizens' Initiative(ECI) [297] is not **cost-effective**, considered the great efforts required to organise it and the low certainty of impact.[307] It recommends to improve the cost-effectiveness of the ECI by reducing the efforts to use it and by clearly (re)defining the outcomes of successful ECIs and start fulfilling them.[307]<br><br>Whilst the tools are generally free to use, e-participation can be **resource intensive** – particularly in terms of staff time and skills. There may be a need for staff to provide support for new users, which should decrease over time. However, there will need to be a commitment from staff to publicise the service widely in order to generate interest, and to encourage people to participate in discussions on an ongoing basis.[312]<br>Because of the anonymity afforded online and the increased distance between participants, some people may engage in behaviour or provide responses that are irrelevant, unhelpful, inappropriate or abusive. Organisations will need to consider in advance how they will respond to such behaviour. There may be a need to moderate contributions from users, especially in comments and discussion forums, and this can be **expensive and time consuming**.[312] |
| **Dealing with challenges** | | |
| Ethical issues | **Open task** | There persists a threat of **digital divide** (both in terms of digital infrastructure and in terms of citizens experience with e-participation)[304, 312]<br><br>The European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) has performed a SWOT analysis on e-participation and has concluded that a significant weakness of the European Citizens' Initiative[297] is that **requirements for identification and personal data are excessive**. It recommends to reduce the excessive identification and personal data requirements to enhance participation.[307]<br><br>The Scottish Health Council concluded that e- |

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| | | participation can also create **barriers to people being able to access or use the service**. Most online content is in the form of text, and similar challenges exist as for other forms of written communication including literacy levels and language comprehension – compounded by the fact many people prefer or find it easier to read from a printed document rather than an electronic screen.[312] <br><br> Some people may feel intimidated by online participation, especially if they feel that they **lack digital skills or literacy**. The anonymity of participants and the loss of cues such as tone of voice or body language can make it more difficult for people to feel engaged. It is also more difficult to follow up conversations which are not taking place in real time. A combination of online and offline engagement methods is advisable.[312] <br><br> It is a problem that e.g. online EU public consultations are **rarely representative** for EU citizens.[307] |
| Societal issues | | No societal issues identified. |
| Health issues | | No health issues identified. |
| Public acceptance | | According to the UN e-Government Survey 2016[313] <br><br> • E-decision making, the most challenging aspect of public participation, rose substantially among the top 25 countries in EPI, from 36% in 2014 to 62% in 2016. <br> • E-consultation has seen remarkable growth in 2016 topping 91% from 73% in 2014. <br><br> Both the European Citizens Initiative and the Online EU public consultations are considered to be **not user-friendly**. The single access point for information about online EU public consultations, Your voice in Europe, is **unattractive, intransparent, not user-friendly and ineffective**.[307] |

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