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Studying eParticipation in Government Innovation Programmes: Lessons from a Survey

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Abstract

While eGovernment is a well-established field in research and practice, eParticipation trails behind with only a low number of programmes and strategies at the moment. With the lessons learnt from a survey for studying eParticipation in Government Innovation Programmes and Strategies, the contribution at hand analyses the degree of integration of eParticipation in ICT and eGovernment research and implementation programmes and strategies. It sets out the types of approach necessary to accelerate progress. Together with insights from two projects that analysed eGovernment innovation strategies, the synthesis and comparison of the survey data led to recommendations for activities and measures for innovation programme managers to include eParticipation in future programmes and strategies. The work was performed in the context of DEMO_net¹, the Network of Excellence on eParticipation.

Keywords: eParticipation, Government innovation programmes, eGovernment strategies

Introduction

Following the launch of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs in 2005 (European Commission, 2005c) and the consequent recognition that a much stronger focus on innovation needed to be introduced, the Commission presented an Innovation Strategy for Europe to translate investments in knowledge into products and services. Whilst still addressing the SME and education sectors, the Strategy 'Putting knowledge into practice: A broad-based innovation strategy for the EU' (European Commission, 2006b) gave a particular emphasis to the role of governments to lead the way by adopting innovative approaches and exploiting new technologies. The traditional innovation model – pure research => applied research => prototype => commercialisation – has very limited relevance in the global connected economy. Increasingly, innovation takes place not

¹ DEMO_net is a Network of Excellence in the frame of IST, 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission. For further information see <http://www.demo-net.org/>

in the ambit of the single entrepreneur (ref. the great inventors of the 18th and 19th Centuries such as Brunel, Telford, Stephenson, Edison, Ressel, Curie, Krizik, Tesla, Daimler, Benz etc.), not in one place, and increasingly, not in one process, but more through networks bringing together actors in the three sectors. The *triple helix*² model describes the non-linear interaction of academia, government and industry in developing innovation processes. Whilst this was first seen as an approach for the development of products and services in the private sector, over the last decade attention has been paid to the model in the public sector, too. This style of innovative approach seems particularly apposite for eParticipation – the range of disciplines (cf. Wimmer et al, 2007), the need to engage participants from all the sectors, the geographical separation, the different markets and social situations - mean that a network approach is likely to be efficacious in developing and implementing new approaches.

In this context, an overall framework has been developed within DEMO_net for sustainable engagement and integration of eParticipation practitioners. This framework describes the establishment of an eParticipation Community of Practice (ePCoP) via the formation of four Specific Interest Groups (SIGs): one on industry, one on elected representatives, one on the government executives and one on the third sector (NGOs, NPOs, citizens community groups, etc.). The SIGs and the umbrella ePCoP framework formulate regular communication channels with practitioners with the aim of facilitating sustainable networking among research and practice in the field of eParticipation (Schneider et al, 2007). The underlying rationale therefore is that eParticipation research is (like eGovernment) application oriented and, hence, needs a stronger dialogue among research and practice than other, more basic research-oriented disciplines might need (cf. (Wimmer, 2007). The needs and benefits for such a dialogue are manifold: eParticipation research has to bring concepts to application, while eParticipation implementation may need more research-oriented investigations. A direct dialog among these stakeholders is crucial for effectively advancing the field in both domains: research and practice.

To investigate the current status of eParticipation innovation in the European context, European, national, regional and local level Government innovation programmes and were scanned via an online survey. The online survey aimed to identify relevant Government Innovation Programmes and Strategies with Participation and eParticipation either as a central focus or with the themes incorporated amongst others. The DEMO_net survey analysed the degree of integration of eParticipation in ICT and eGovernment research and implementation programmes and strategies and resulted in a collection of existing practice and identification of policy gaps across Europe. Together with insights from two other EC-funded projects, eGOVERNMENT³ and eGovRTD2020⁴, the synthesis and comparison of the survey data led to recommendations for activities and measures for innovation programme managers to include eParticipation in future programmes and strategies.

The next section defines the scope of this paper and provides the context for the survey. The third section explains the overall methodology. It presents relevant activities in other projects. Further, it explains the survey design to gather information on Government Innovation Programmes and Strategies, which have a component on Participation or eParticipation or which have eParticipation as the central focus. Subsequently, the survey results are presented. The results feed into the final chapter on recommendations and conclusions for a more active engagement in advancing innovation in eParticipation research and practice.

Scope of the Study

In this paper, a strategy is understood as a long term plan of action designed to achieve particular strategic-political goals. The steps (and resources allocated) to reach the goals may change due to changes in the environment within which the actions shall take place. Usually, strategies are implemented through targeted programmes (as e.g. the annual policy strategies of the EC that are

² see, for example, the Triple Helix Institute: <http://www.triplehelixinstitute.org/home/index.html>

³ <http://www.egovernet.org/>

⁴ <http://www.egovrtd2020.org>

translated into operational objectives through the commission legislative and work programme (European Commission, 2007a)). These programmes are either of research or of implementation or of both types. In contrast to strategies, research or implementation programmes do have budgets and, hence, also cover specific projects (either already running or calls for proposals).

The programmes on research stress the scientific elements projects need to fulfil, whereas implementation projects focus on practitioner contexts (applications, infrastructure, etc.). There may also be combined research and implementation projects. In this case, projects need to have both, research elements to fulfil as well as implementation components in real environments (prototypes and trials are not understood in this way).

Figure 1 depicts an overview of the concept, which builds our understanding of distinction throughout this contribution.

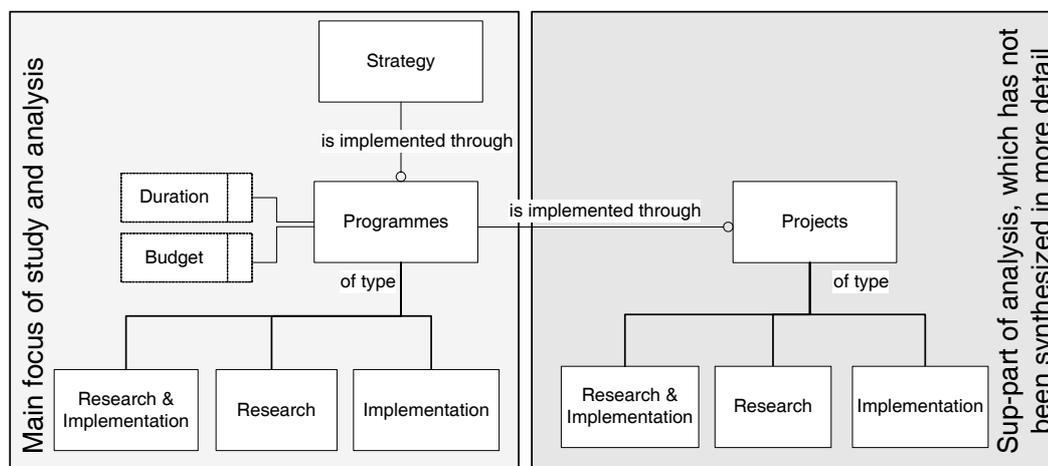


Figure 1: Concept to distinguish strategies and programmes, and indication of the focus of study of this work

Methodology

The methodology to investigate the degree to which eParticipation is integrated in European, national, regional/local ICT and eGovernment research and implementation programmes and strategies consisted of two major parts: first, a study of related activities was performed which might have identified relevant activities, processes, practices, key individuals and organisations with Government innovation programmes and strategies in eParticipation. Activities performed in the projects eGOVERNMENT and eGovRTD2020 have been studied (cf. section 3.1). The analysis did not bring to bear expected insights for innovation in eParticipation, in part because the projects had other objectives. It was concluded that it would be necessary to conduct an online survey to identify and gather relevant information on government innovation programmes which have eParticipation either as core focus or as one priority amongst others (cf. section 3.2).

Alongside these investigations, an analysis of the European government innovation context and its potential was carried out. Among the documents studied were the Lisbon Agenda (European Commission, 2005c), the i2010 strategy (European Commission, 2005a) and recent Ministerial Declarations from Lisbon (European Commission, 2007b) and Manchester (European Commission, 2005b). Combining the survey results with these strategies for innovation, a number of policy recommendations can be derived for Government innovation managers at political and strategic levels to advance the field of eParticipation.

Insights from Related Projects

The coordination action eGOVERNET⁵ aimed at "Building a knowledge service on eGovernment research programmes" (eGOVERNET, 2006, eGOVERNET, 2007). The project's main objective was to coordinate the creation of national eGovernment RTD programmes and initiatives while also encouraging the integration of existing national eGovernment programmes. It was assumed that the project's investigations brought to bear also some relevant and interesting results for eParticipation. It is to be noted that eParticipation was not a specific topic addressed in the project. In (eGOVERNET, 2006), eDemocracy is mentioned as a research area needing particular research programmes in eInclusion, eDemocracy, eVoting, and eCitizens. Dedicated research programmes are only available in a few countries and in some regions (eGOVERNET, 2007). In the report, the authors also stress that there is no simple and direct correlation between a dedicated research programme and successful implementation. The lessons and insights from eGOVERNET relevant for eParticipation researchers and practitioners are to line up and engage with initiatives of eGovernment and eDemocracy at national level in order to effectively exploit synergies in national innovation programmes of the individual countries.

Another relevant project was eGovRTD2020⁶, a specific support action which aimed to develop a research roadmap for Government until 2020 (see (Codagnone & Wimmer, 2007). eParticipation was one of the study themes. In the state of play analysis performed in early 2006, no specific eParticipation programmes and strategies were identified. Among the priorities in national programmes, topics such as supporting decision-making processes, eInclusion and eParticipation, and eVoting programmes were identified. Other eParticipation related research topics can be summarised as improving access to eParticipation services and enlarging eParticipation services.

Through a comprehensive gap analysis, a number of research needs were identified, the following being relevant for eParticipation (summarised from (Codagnone & Wimmer, 2007):

- Lack of a common understanding of the concept of eParticipation and how it can become a successful supportive mechanism to strengthen democracies.
- Lack of understanding of why eParticipation has not yet been successful, and which policies, measures and tools are needed to make it successful.
- Lack of understanding of the impact of eParticipation, of who is affected, of the actors, and of how to secure inclusion.
- Lack of clear concepts to exploit new technologies and to meet the needs of the participatory processes.
- Lack of understanding of how to exploit successfully trends in eParticipation such as social tagging, folksonomies, new internet community concepts, etc.

Online Survey

Given the lack of sound information about the adoption of eParticipation approaches in government, a survey⁷ was designed to identify eParticipation programmes and strategies, as well as research and implementation programmes at European, national, and regional/local levels of government. Registered users were allowed to either type in a new entry or to edit an existing one with the purpose of correcting or completing the respective data entries.

The survey was structured with the following four sections:

1. General data about a strategy or programme.
2. Indication of the general areas and activities the programme or strategy was covering and focusing on. The selections users could make are shown in **Figure 2**. In the case an area was not listed, the respondent could add it by inserting it in the text box "others".

⁵ See www.egovernet.org

⁶ See www.egovrtd2020.org

⁷ The survey is online available at <http://www.uni-koblenz.de/demonet/survey>. Some survey results are presented at <http://www.uni-koblenz.de/demonet/survey/eval>.

3. A more detailed classification along specific eParticipation dimensions⁸ as shown in **Figure 3**.
4. Specific aspects of an innovation policy the programme or strategy covers. A number of general indications were suggested, where the respondents were asked to detail the respective aspects. These indications were:
 - New forms of organization (collaboration, partnership, networked organizations, task-and-finish organizations etc.);
 - Restructured and/or reorganized government (government modernization, tGovernment (transforming government), etc.);
 - Inclusion and access for all;
 - Multichannel and mobile government;
 - Modern and future means of communication (instant messaging, collaborative tools, wiki, video conferencing, video/image tools etc.);
 - Knowledge and Information Management;
 - More transparent and trusted policy making;
 - More direct involvement of people and more direct democracy.

		The strategy / programme aims to advance *					Central focus of programme / strategy *
		Strategies	Methodologies	Evaluation	Processes	ICT	
Covered eGovernment or Participation areas *	eGovernment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	tGovernment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	eParticipation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="text"/>						
<input type="text" value="Add further area"/>							

Figure 2: Classification of the programme or strategy along the general areas and activities searched for: The respondents were asked to specify the area(s) the programme / strategy covers by indicating what it aims for (strategies, methodologies, evaluation, processes, ICT) per area.

		The strategy / programme aims to advance		
		Participation processes	Technologies	Tools
Covered eParticipation phases/areas	eInforming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	eCollaboration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	eEmpowering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	eConsulting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	eInvolvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Community engagement in general	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="text"/>			
<input type="text" value="Add further area"/>				

Figure 3: Classification of the programme or strategy along specific eParticipation dimensions: Respondents were asked to specify the eParticipation phase(s) and area(s) the programme / strategy covers by indicating what it aims for (participation processes, technologies, tools) per phase and area indicated.

⁸ If no indication was given, it was assumed that the programme or strategy addresses eParticipation in general without a specific focus area.

The survey was filled in by 31 persons (of 80 registered users) from 14 European countries. Hence the results are covering a wide range of European innovation programmes and strategies although the results are certainly dependent on the persons answering the survey. Most participants were experts in the field of eParticipation and involved in the projects/programmes they mentioned, so the survey has a self-selecting set of respondents.

The designers of the survey are also aware of the fact that the survey is rather complex. However, first entries were provided by the survey designers to give examples to further respondents. This approach has proven effective. Only minor questions arose and the entries were verified by the authors of this contribution and checked back with respondents.

Analysis of the Survey Results

Overall, 26 entries for Government innovation programmes and strategies were collected through the survey. Among them, 9 are programmes and 17 are strategies. The 9 programmes can be grouped into type research (2), type implementation (5), and mixed types (2). Figure 4 shows the distribution of the different programmes and strategies per country.

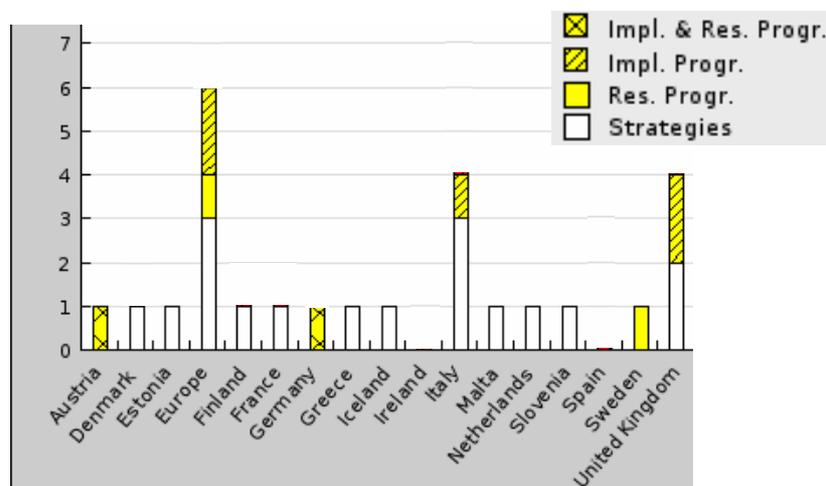


Figure 4: Types of programmes and strategies per country

As can be recognised, research programmes are generally absent: only three countries (besides the EC) published research programmes (two of which are mixed research and implementation programmes). The key pillar for research seems to be the European Commission. However, it is to be noted that the entry refers to the 6th Framework Programme of IST⁹ (European Commission, 2002), which terminated in 2006. Hence, currently the EC does not have open programmes for eGovernment and eParticipation research¹⁰. Only implementation programmes exist (eParticipation Preparatory Action (European Commission, 2007c) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) (European Commission, 2006a)).

Among the entries provided, the distribution of programmes and strategies shows that in a number of countries, eParticipation is covered by one principal programme or strategy. In a few countries

⁹ See http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/index_en.cfm

¹⁰ At the time of completing this contribution, information was available that the new call of framework programme 7 should include new topics of eParticipation research – see http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/egovernment/implementation/prep_action/index_en.htm (accessed 15 May 2008)

(Italy, UK: countries well-known for a high focus on eParticipation), more than two programmes or strategies fostering eParticipation do exist.

As expected, eParticipation is often not the key focus of programmes and strategies. Even so, the number of issues included for eParticipation is high with 53 selections (even though only four entries have eParticipation as the central focus!). Second-most prevalent is eGovernment. Least named is transforming Government (tGovernment). It may be concluded that tGovernment is a new catchword that has yet to find its way into Government Innovation Programmes and Strategies.

One implementation programme exists, which focuses on participation in general¹¹. Four of the 26 entries have eParticipation as the central focus in their government innovation programmes and strategies. These four entries comprise one EU-wide and one in the Member States Italy, Austria, and France (with a national, regional and/or local scope). Table 1 indicates the types of entries, i.e. 2 strategies and 2 programmes: one of type implementation and one of type implementation and research.

Table 1: Strategies and Programmes that focus on eParticipation

Name	Category	Type	Body driving the strategy or programme forward
eParticipation Preparatory Action	programme	Implementation	Europe
National Call to promote e-citizenship	strategy		Italy - local and regional levels
Program “Participatory E-Government”	programme	Implementation & re-research	Austria
DREAM+	strategy		France - Nord Pas de Calais region

As pointed out in Figure 5, the main field of activity per area is to advance strategies in the respective areas. Four entries have a concentration on developing eParticipation strategies.

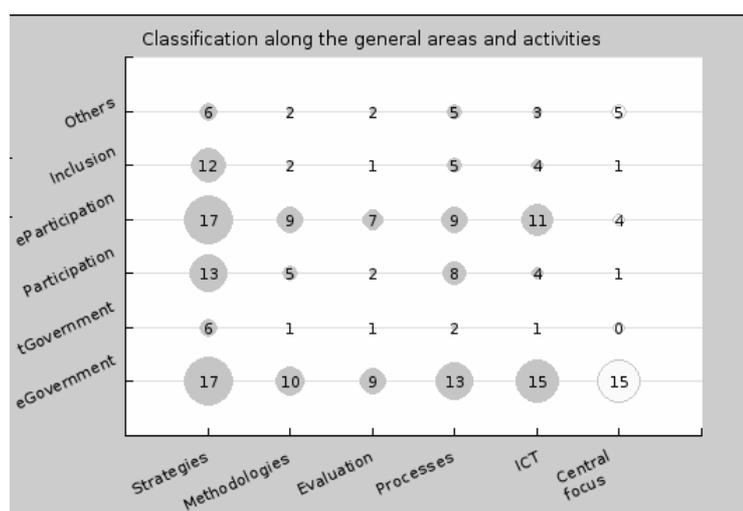


Figure 5: Classification along the general areas and activities

¹¹ The programme was “Innovation Fund” from the UK.

A comparison of the classifications along the specific eParticipation dimensions is shown in Figure 6. The 26 entries provided have a concentration on the following eParticipation processes, technologies, or tools (multiple answers have been permitted): Community engagement in general (N = 27), eInvolvement (N = 22), eInforming (N = 20), and eConsulting (N = 17). eCollaboration is named 12-times, while eEmpowering is indicated nine times in 26 entries provided.

The analysis of the aspects of an innovation policy the programmes and strategies cover did not feature specific eParticipation related aspects. For example, the programmes and strategies which aim at exploring new forms of government interaction and collaboration through new organisational forms (including Shared Services) mainly focus on collaboration across government agencies, especially among different levels of government.

Table 2 details some more specific indications of innovation aspects of the four programmes which have eParticipation as central focus (extract).

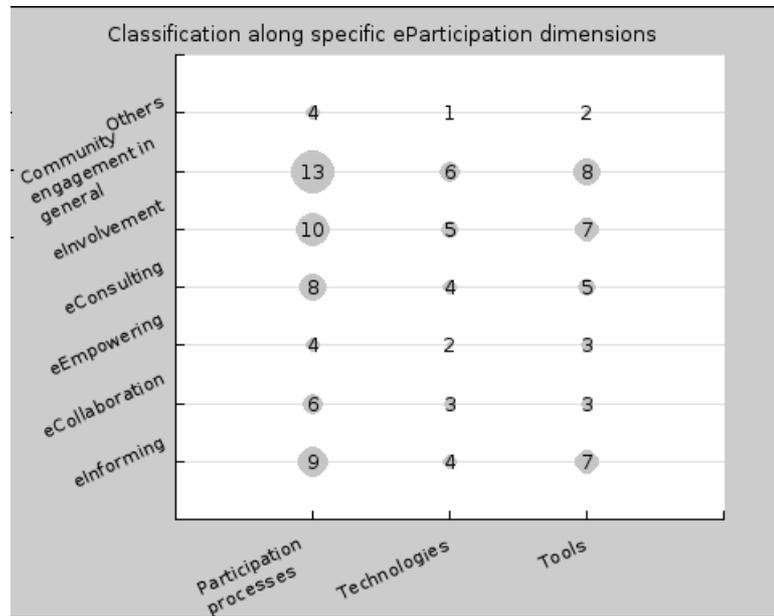


Figure 6: Classification along specific eParticipation dimensions

Table 2: Specific innovation aspects for programmes and strategies with focus on eParticipation (extraction)

	eParticipation Preparatory Action	Programmes		
		National Call to promote e-citizenship	Programme "Participatory E-Government"	DREAM+
New forms of organisation		It aims to promote cooperation among institutions, civil society organization, industry and services providers with different competences (communication, ICTs, specific policy fields, etc.)	Identifying fields of E-Democracy and project organisation and realising applications and projects	
Inclusion and Access for all	Activate citizens in the legislation drafting process and get them involved	It has inclusion as one of its goals, paying specific attention to rural communities, women, and young people.	WAI-conformity, easy to use applications	
Multichannel and mobile government		Multichannel is strongly encouraged, including the integration of online and offline communication tools.		
More transparent and trusted policy making		The program addresses projects of e-democracy built on specific decision making processes.		Local projects are supported which aim to create more transparency, citizen involvement and trust in local decision making processes.
More direct involvement of people and more direct democracy	Legislation process	It encourages innovation of the forms of the involvement of the citizens in the public decision making at local level. Each proponent (local and regional institutions) has identified methodologies, ICTs, decision making process, and policy fields of experimentation.		The objective is to develop local projects that aim to create more transparency and citizen involvement and trust in local decision making processes.
Other	Development and use of ICT in legislative and decision making processes within parliamentary and government environments.			

From the synthesis of the survey results it can be concluded that the degree of integration of eParticipation in ICT and eGovernment research and implementation programmes and strategies is not high. In particular, research programmes are scarce. Although a number of programmes and strategies touch eParticipation issues briefly, only a few really have eParticipation as their central focus. The overall aim of the strategies and policies is to create more transparency and citizen involvement in decision making processes (cf. Figure 6 and

Table 2).

Another insight from the analysis is that although the European Commission seems to be the key pillar for research, it only promotes one eParticipation programme. But this follows (mostly) the underlying rationale that eParticipation needs a stronger dialogue among research and practice (cf. section 0). The eParticipation Preparatory Action brings together academia, government and industry in developing innovation processes even if its focus lies in implementation. Further details of the survey results and its reflections are available in (Scherer et al, 2008).

Recommendations for eParticipation innovation in Europe

There are two primary dimensions to the approach needed to promote the take-up of eParticipation tools and applications. The first is to develop and demonstrate the tools. The second dimension is to create the space (and command the resources) for development of eParticipation engagement and activity. Engaging with policy makers is key to promoting and accelerating the innovative use of eParticipation tools and techniques. The policies and strategies analyzed in this paper fall into three general categories:

1. The first of these is eParticipation itself (i.e. those few examples where eParticipation is recognized and ordered as a dimension of government). Analysis showed that there are, as yet, only few government strategies which have eParticipation as their focus. eParticipation as a topic in government is not well resourced and, like its counterparts in industry and academia, it is not yet well established as a theme in its own right. However, the policy makers who do operate in this arena are extremely amenable to dialogue on the topic, have experience of practical examples, a clear view of priorities and a perception of the political and resource obstacles and opportunities which lie before them.
2. The second arena is eGovernment. eGovernment is now a well-established field. Its focus until the end of 2005 and, arguably, often since then, has been purely on individualistic service delivery to citizens. There is a considerable emphasis on efficiency and cost savings deriving from the use of technologies in dealing with citizens' requests and in providing information services. To some extent, eParticipation is counter-cultural to the prevailing ethos in eGovernment - eParticipation, with very few exceptions, will not demonstrate short-run cost savings. The strength of this policy arena is that the platforms and technologies are well understood, the arena is relatively well-resourced, and the processes of procurement and contacts with industry are well established.
3. Citizen Engagement /Inclusion in at least some of the Member States is a strong and often well resourced arena. There appears to be relatively poor penetration of ICT activity into this field. This is potentially the area in which eParticipation could make the most rapid progress and in which it could have the greatest impact. There are already clear policy directions, clear objectives and resources allocated to achieve a range of outcomes from social cohesion through inclusion to neighbourhood management. At the political level there is the opportunity to increase dialogue and participation to underpin democratic legitimacy. A very different approach will be needed to engage the policy makers in this arena, in contrast to those in the eGovernment arena.

Table 3 summarizes these three arenas showing their strengths and weaknesses.

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses of each of the arenas for implementing eParticipation

Arena	eParticipation	eGovernment	Citizen Engagement/ Inclusion
Strengths	Good policy understanding (where it is a recognised theme); clear priorities	Well-established field; good resources and technology support; experienced in procurement	Often well-re-sourced; clear policy direction; clear objectives
Weaknesses	Generally poorly defined as a theme; poorly resourced	Focus on individual services and on cost savings; eParticipation is counter-cultural;	Relatively poor penetration of ICT

It is likely that each of these categories will require a different approach, and policy makers in each arena will have different interests.

In order to foster more active Government innovation for eParticipation, the following measures need to be explored:

- Digging deeper into the suggestions as can be derived from eGovRTD2020
- Creating a Network of Innovators involving national and regional actors, e.g. through the DEMO_net network, which operates on the *triple helix* principle or by engaging with the eGOVERNMENT network
- Creation of eParticipation Living Labs
- Supporting the transforming process more effectively through active engagement and dialogue among research and practice
- Developing a transformation agenda: plan the processes to foster transformation, including
 - Identifying actors and engaging actors through the use of a tailored approach to the audience, the creation of forums the actors can engage with (including SIGs and Living Labs), the offer of assistance/creation of dialogue on home turf, a focused dialogue with DG Information Society and Media of the EC, the consequent monitoring of changes (i.e. catalogue of national/regional policies), the identification of leaders and motivators to drive the initiatives;
 - Advancing eParticipation as a topic (e.g. through roadmaps influencing implementation strategies) and interact with government strategy planners;

In particular, the practitioner dialogues need to discover and explore mechanisms to deliver the Lisbon eGovernment Ministers conclusion that 'by the end of 2008 each Member State shall identify and exchange information on their national initiatives that aims to make intensive use of electronic means to in-crease participation and public debate' (European Commission, 2007c) in an effective way.

Conclusion

eParticipation is a theme currently being widely discussed in research and practice. An analysis of Government innovation programmes and strategies has been performed in order to gather a better understanding of where and how to engage in innovation in the public sector with the aim of advancing progress in the field.

The paper presented first an analysis of related activities in eGOVERNMENT and eGovRTD2020. The main input to studying government innovation programmes and strategies across Europe was, however, a survey conducted under the auspices of DEMO_net to gather existing knowledge of innovation programmes across Europe and its member countries. The outcome of the survey is a collection of existing programmes and strategies across Europe, including eParticipation. The survey shows the eParticipation focus in various programmes and strategies, which is still rather marginal.

The work at hand represents a guidebook for engagement with eParticipation issues and where the focus lies. In terms of strategic government innovation programmes, the survey results give some sense of the focus for future action. Further indications have been provided through the reflection on Government innovation contexts.

Next steps in this respect are to engage actively with practitioners in order to establish a dialogue between research and practice. Further strong effort is needed to engage policy actors and innovation managers to foster eParticipation research and practice; otherwise the risk exists that the Lisbon objectives and i2010 eGovernment Action Plan's eParticipation and Inclusion priorities will not be met satisfactorily.

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