Chapter 21
Stepwise E–Participation:
Good Practice from the
Regional Level in Europe

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors present and discuss the results of the IDEAL-EU project, in which three European Regions - i.e. Tuscany, Catalonia, and Poitou-Charentes - have involved citizens (and particularly young people) in discussing and deliberating on the priorities of the new climate change agenda of the European Parliament, supported by two distinct ICT instruments: a Social Networking Platform and a pan-European Virtual Town Meeting. The authors describe and assess the technical tasks and the concrete initiatives undertaken from project conception to the end of trials. They introduce a participatory workflow composed of four modules: 1) agenda setting and prior analysis, 2) getting support and topic refinement, 3) discussion and deliberation, and 4) orchestration and evaluation. Finally, the authors address the sustainability of the IDEAL-EU workflow and its corresponding ICT infrastructure in the perspective of future utilization in additional eParticipation experiments.

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter presents the results of a EU funded Preparatory Action on eParticipation, entitled IDEAL-EU ("Integrating the Drivers of eParticipation at Regional Level in Europe") and that was carried out over the years 2007 and 2008 by a Consortium composed of six main Partners and two subcontractors from five European countries. The aim was to strengthen and improve the traditional legislative, regulatory and policy-making process by adding an e-participatory dimension to it, providing the legislator, regulator or policy maker with citizens' proposals and contributions arising from the ICT supported trials performed

(initially with reference, but not limited to, the field of climate change and energy). In particular, the IDEAL-EU trials' implementation and operation was meant to develop the quality of citizens' involvement and engagement in public decision-making in two main directions, one of an informative and the other of a deliberative nature. The intention was that of applying modern ICT to enhance both the access to reliable and up-to-date information about policy issues and the ability of citizens to follow and engage in the various stages of the policy process.

An overview of recent models and frameworks for eParticipation (see the beginning of the next Section) shows that researchers have mainly developed models at two quite distant levels. At a high-level, they have modeled the typical steps in a policy/decision-making cycle. These include: (1) agenda setting, (2) prior analysis, (3) policy creation, (4) implementation, and (5) monitoring. At a lower, technological level, research has focused on developing and applying specific technological solutions in specific steps of the process and especially on specific design issues. Our efforts in the IDEAL-EU project were focused on bridging the gap between these two levels of abstraction. Our aim was to develop a much more detailed workflow of the policy adoption process, where we would identify the important phases of the process, the relevant technologies to be used in each phase, and the data (and document) flows that appear between phases.

This Chapter particularly is aiming to present the IDEAL-EU trials execution in the three participant Regions - Tuscany, Catalonia and Poitou-Charentes – in relation to the practical implementation of the *IDEAL-EU workflow*, one of the most original achievements of the Project, based on the five step policy making cycle mentioned above.

The trials were carried out along three main lines:

A. Deploying and disseminating in the three Regions an innovative Social Networking Platform (SNP) that allowed the distribution of thematic information and realization of electronic debates, involving Regional citizens and stakeholders, on the broad topic of climate change and energy in Europe;

B. Organizing on 15th November 2008 an Electronic/Virtual Town Meeting (VTM), in the three venues simultaneously (Florence, Poitiers and Barcelona) to let Regional young people discuss and vote on the most crucial issues at stake and on the related recommendations to European policy makers, in particular to the Temporary Committee on Climate Change, chaired by MEP Guido Sacconi, to whom the deliberation results were handed out three days later;

C. Laying the foundations of a European Network of Participatory Regions (http://www.demo-part.org/), based on the successful track record of the three Governments involved in the project, but open to the wider involvement of other Regional authorities active in the good practices of (e)Participation in Europe.

This Chapter is structured as follows: the next Section ("Background") introduces the state-of-the-art at the beginning of the IDEAL-EU project. It starts by reviewing participatory practices in Europe and in particular the three regions involved, and continues by establishing the background concepts used for the workflow model that is presented in the following Section ("The IDEAL-EU Workflow Model and Technical Architecture"). Reflecting the workflow components, the subsequent Section (entitled "Implementation") explains the technical tasks and concrete initiatives undertaken by the three participant Regions in order to comply with the workflow provisions during the performance of the IDEAL-EU trials. This paves the way (in the

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