Chapter 1
The Potential of E-Participation in Sustainable Development Evaluation:
Evidence from Case Studies

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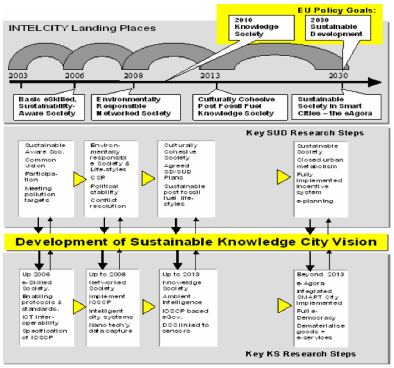
ABSTRACT

If sustainable development is really to be based on substantive community participation, a change in attitudes, beliefs and values is required. Even these changes will not be sufficient to reach the ambitious goals set across Europe through the Local Agenda 21 and other policy documents. The rigorous adaptation of decision-making processes to include community participation is necessary. Development and specification of indicators play an important role in bridging this gap. The indicators should not only form a technical input in the latter type of assessment tools but act as media to communicate the progress towards sustainable development to the local communities and other stakeholders. This chapter deals with the issue of e-participation in decision making and sustainable development evaluation. It presents first a critical overview of sustainable development and knowledge society indicators, metrics and assessment tools currently in use. Then, it introduces the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in urban regeneration processes by using a number of European case studies. Finally, it states the need for a more systematic approach to integrate CSOs earlier in the decision-making process and to ensure a more effective use of sustainable development indicators – with the help of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-933-0.ch001

Figure 1. Summary of the roadmap diagram developed by Intelcity (Curwell,2003)



INTRODUCTION

The Lisbon European Council (CEC, 2000) sought to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". Given the importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for today's economy, the i2010 strategy is a key element of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment. It promotes the positive contribution that ICT can make to the economy, society and personal quality of life (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010). The Knowledge Society (KS) is seen as a key factor by the European Union (EU) for achieving Sustainable urban development (SUD) in Europe, following the so-called "*eAgora*" model. Ancient Greeks went to the Agora, a civic square used for public assembly or commerce, to do business or discuss plans for their community. The Intelcity (2003) roadmap, developed under the EU's 5th Framework Programme, envisaged modern Europeans acting similarly in the context of eAgora that could support the improved management of cities and help to achieve long-term physical, social and economic sustainability – by bringing together previously unconnected information sources and making it digitally available to planners, developers, policy makers and individual citizens.

The eAgora vision is based on the active participation of citizens (supported by ICTs) in decision-making. It encourages collaboration between different stakeholders in policy-making processes. The trajectory to achieve the eAgora vision is shown in Figure 1. The timeline raises a question: *How are we progressing towards achieving the eAgora and the knowledge society aimed by the EU?*

IntelCities (2004), a research project in EU's 6th Framework programme, looked at the types of policies currently adopted by cities to engage their citizens in public participation. It suggests that until both sides of the equation – policy makers in cities and the citizens – engage with and exploit digital technologies more fully, the eAgora will remain an unrealized vision (Lombardi & Cooper, 2007; Lombardi et al., 2009).

It remains uncertain whether the eAgora can be an effective vehicle to enable citizen engagement that can contribute to sustainable development by 2030 (Cooper et al., 2005; Lombardi & Cooper, 2007). The answer to this question requires quantitative evidence that is acceptable to all parties involved, turning the question into*: What aspects of civic behavior do we need to evaluate and how? Is the eAgora an effective space for displaying this kind of information?*

The current lists of indicators, indices and assessment tools which have been developed to measure and display performance in the eAgora