

Chapter 1

A State-of-the-Art Review of Applied Forms and Areas, Tools and Technologies for E-Participation

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ABSTRACT

The concept of e-Participation is important for both citizens and decision makers. From the citizen's perspective, e-Participation provides the opportunity to achieve and satisfy the need to be heard by politicians and participate in the decision-making and policy formulation processes through the use of ICT. On the other side, politicians are also able to promote and encourage public participation through communication channels with citizens and act in line with public opinion. During the past years, the e-Participation landscape has been growing and developed. Currently, there are many applied forms and areas of e-Participation. At the same time, there are a growing variety of tools and technologies that are available to enhance e-Participation. In this paper, the authors present a complete overview of the e-Participation landscape, through the state-of-the-art review of these tools, technologies and areas of e-Participation. This overview is of value to researchers and practitioners who want to have a knowledge base for further research and practical implementation in the wider field of e-Participation.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2458-0.ch001

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in general, have made available a massive amount of information that is spread around the net rapidly and is continuously updated. Towards this direction, several communication channels have been developed in order to offer improved and increased access to high quality information (in various forms: text, audio, video, maps, etc), appealing to a wide range of audience of all ages and used in everyday basis by many the citizens. In addition to simple information provision, ICT, offer citizens the opportunity to interact among them, express opinions, participate in communities sharing common interests, etc. In general, ICT is a powerful tool that can help increase social engagement of people, creating in this way a unique opportunity for achieving strong public participation in the decision making processes, through several e-Participation forms (Macintosh, Coleman, & Lalljee, 2005). However, the main raised question is: What e-Participation can really achieve?

e-Participation is very important for both citizens and decision makers (Macintosh, 2004, 2006a; Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). From the citizens' perspective, e-Participation offers people the opportunity to achieve and satisfy a main need, the need to be heard by the politicians and interact with them (Adams, Haston, Gillespie, & Macintosh, 2003; Adams, Macintosh, & Johnston, 2005). The main characteristic of representative democracy is that citizens elect those politicians who share common ideas and interests with them, in order to participate on behalf of them in the decision making process (Tambouris, 2008). However, in real life, even political active citizens, they don't often have the opportunity to discuss with politicians, and the expression of their opinion is limited in the narrow context of a simple political conversation with other citizens (Graber, 2002). Therefore, it is important for politicians to be

involved in such conversations, so as to have access to various and diverse opinions and take them into account during the decision making process, increasing in this way, the involvement and participation of citizens in the overall political context (Malina & Macintosh, 2002).

On the other hand, politicians shall promote and encourage public participation in order to create communication channels with citizens and act in line with the public opinion, to the degree that this is possible. Elected representatives are elected from citizens to act for their common interest and it is important to understand that only if they represent citizens in a way that reflects the opinions expressed by the majority, they are going to retain the power that they were given. Thus, governance shall be humanized and, through e-participation, to represent people in direct and accessible terms (Berman & Mulligan, 2003).

Nowadays, there are many applied forms and areas of e-Participation. At the same time, there is a constantly growing variety of respective tools and technologies that are available in order to enhance e-Participation. The main purpose of this paper is to present in a coherent and comprehensive way a complete picture of the e-Participation landscape, through the state-of-the-art review of these tools, technologies and areas of e-Participation. This overview should be of value to researchers and practitioners who wish to have a knowledge base for further research or for any kind of practical implementation, in the wider field of e-Participation.

In this respect, the next section provides a general context and background of the e-Participation field, presents the associated critical challenges as well as some methods to support and increase public participation through electronic means. Section 3 focuses on specific areas, where e-Participation is applied. Section 4 presents existing tools that are used for the enhancement of e-Participation, while section 5 presents technologies supporting e-Participation systems, in terms of information provision and retrieval. Section 6 presents the

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