



Seventh International eGov Conference 2008

Workshop

eParticipation Research Projects: From Theory to Practice



3rd September 2008, Torino, Italy

Workshop Agenda – Abstracts



Decision Support Systems Laboratory - National Technical University of Athens

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	3
WORKSHOP AGENDA	6
ABSTRACTS FOR SESSION A	7
An overview of Electronic Participation Projects in the European Union	8
DALOS: Drafting Legislation with Ontology-Based Support.....	10
LEX-IS: Enabling Participation of the Youth in the Public Debate of Legislation among Parliaments, Citizens and Businesses in the European Union	11
ABSTRACTS FOR SESSION B	13
Facilitating European-wide discussion between elected representatives and civil society on emerging policy issues: The DEMOS@WORK project	14
Federated eParticipation Systems For Electronic Deliberation On Energy and Environmental Issues: the FEED Project	15
Stakeholders engagement process in the project FEED	16
Systems and services for eParticipation in News creation and distribution: The WEB-DEP Project.....	18
ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS.....	19
FEED content semantics - the semantic interrelation model based on IMRO and GEMET.	20

INTRODUCTION

eParticipation Research Projects: From Theory to Practice

As eParticipation applications become more and more a reality in European Union and internationally, new challenges emerge as systems and pilots mature. Moving from theory to practice, issues like policy orientation, legislation coverage at National and European Level, technology management and open source software utilisation, local level participation, steering and evolution of the eParticipation solutions, have to be examined under the light of a maturing domain. Within this context, the Workshop will bring together research projects that are currently being implemented, in order to discuss issues around real problems met and solutions proposed, so that a real exchange of knowledge and experience can be sought after. Specific attention will be paid, apart from policy and technology issues, to implementation-related issues, such as impact assessment methods, quality and risk management techniques, stakeholders engagement, dissemination and sustainability.

The workshop aims at bringing together eParticipation researchers and stimulating discussion among representatives of Enterprises, Governments and European Commission on the practical achievements and current challenges of electronic participation research. To achieve the above goal, central part in the workshop will be given to real-life demonstrations and cases analysis, accompanied by additional relevant contributions from other international research projects in the domain. A number of research projects currently being implemented in Europe and internationally have already been targeted, including:

- MOMENTUM Project (eParticipation Coordination Action)
- FEED Project
- DEMOS@WORK Project
- LEXIS Project
- WEB.DEP Project
- DEMO-NET Network of Excellence
- PEP-NET Network of Excellence

Topics of the Workshop

Aiming at demonstrating solid research results and accumulated implementation experience, going beyond theoretical approaches, the workshop topics include the following:

- Electronic participation systems at local, national, regional or international level
- Stakeholders engagement processes
- Approaches enhancing participation of minorities in the decision process
- Legislation-oriented eParticipation systems, involving NGO's and representative bodies
- Technologies for eParticipation
- Tools and Platforms for eParticipation
- Argument visualisation and semantic annotation techniques
- New channels of interaction for eParticipation systems
- Applications of eParticipation systems in areas of digital divide
- Applications of electronic democracy in countries or regions with diverse e-capacities
- Legal and ethical issues affecting the adoption of eParticipation systems
- Novel standardisation approaches in eParticipation
- Impact assessment models and reusable case reports on eParticipation
- Project, Quality and Risk Management Issues

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Target audience

Target audience includes

- eParticipation Research Project Members,
- European Commission officials,
- Industry and Academia representatives,
- National Governments and Local Administration officers,

interested in cutting-edge advancements on electronic participation research. All workshops participants must be properly registered with the eGOV 2008 Conference.

Workshop Organisation

Corresponding WS chair

Dr. Yannis Charalabidis
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Co-chairs

Rob Peters, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
Maria Wimmer, University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany

Workshop Program Committee

Julia Glidden, 21c, UK
Fraser Henderson, ICELE, UK
Catherine Howe, PUBLIC-I Ltd, UK
Jiri Hrebicek, Mazaryk University, Czech Republic
Vassilis Koulolias, GOV2U, Greece
Fenareti Lampathaki, NTUA, Greece
Euripides Loukis, Aegean University, Greece
Maria Perez Ortega, GFI, Belgium
Ella Taylor-Smith, Napier ITC, UK
Anna Triantafyllou, ATC SA, Greece
Daniel Van Leberghe, Politech Institute, Belgium

Location

Politecnico di Torino
Corso Duca degli Abruzzi, 24, 10129 Torino, Italy

More information and programme available at

<http://www.uni-koblenz.de/FB4/Institutes/IWVI/AGVInf/Conferences/EGOV08>



WORKSHOP AGENDA

Torino, Italy, September 3, 2008, 14:30 – 18:00

The Workshop accommodates real-life demonstrations from eParticipation projects, contributions by established experts and organisations in the domain. Agenda is as following:

Session A: Overview and Legislation Drafting (14:30 – 16:00)

- Yannis Charalabidis: “An overview of Electronic Participation Projects in the European Union”
- Daniela Tiscornia, Enrico Francesconi: “The DALOS project: Ontology based Legislative Drafting”
- Anna Triantafyllou, George Kountourakis: “Assisting Legislation Drafting through the use of the LEX-IS Platform”
- Discussion and conclusions Session A

Session B: Legislation Debate at Local Level (16:30 – 18:00)

- Vasilis Koulolias, María Pérez Ortega: “Facilitating European-wide discussion between elected representatives and civil society on emerging policy issues: The DEMOS@WORK project”
- Rob Peters, George Gionis, Tassos Tsitsanis, Jiri Hrebicek, Euripidis Loukis, Yannis Charalabidis: “Federated eParticipation Systems For Electronic Deliberation On Energy and Environmental Issues: the FEED Project”
- Jiri Hrebicek, Michal Hejc: “Stakeholders engagement process in the project FEED”
- Sotiris Koussouris, Anna Triantafyllou, Fenareti Lampathaki: “Systems and services for eParticipation in News creation and distribution: The WEB-DEP Project”
- Discussion and overall conclusions, led by the Workshop Chairs



Workshop on eParticipation Research Projects: From Theory to
Practice
September 3, 2008, 14:30 - 18:00

ABSTRACTS FOR SESSION A

An overview of Electronic Participation Projects in the European Union

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Abstract

The MOMENTUM project scope is to coordinate and support the existing and on coming eParticipation projects co-funded by European Commission, to consolidate their results and provide feedback to them and to the respective EC bodies and other designated stakeholders, advancing the high-level political and institutional engagement. The project performed a detailed analysis of the 13 monitored projects based on specifically designed information templates, that were communicated and filled-in by the project coordinators. These questionnaires, which are included in Appendix B of this deliverable, intended at capturing various aspects, facts and challenges present in those monitored projects.

MOMENTUM team went through a detailed qualitative and quantitative analysis of the gathered data and various conclusions were drawn, which aim at assisting the creation of mechanisms that will ensure proper monitoring and coordination of the European eParticipation projects. Important issues, as derived from the analysis are as following:

- Countries belonging to the Mediterranean basin, along with the UK and Germany are more deeply involved in eParticipation, in contrast to the central European countries. Scandinavian countries on the other hand have a minimum involvement in the 13 monitored eParticipation projects.
- Focus concerning the level of Legislative Process is mainly drawn on EU level, whereas local and national legislation processes are still of a lower interest. Projects that deal with legislation at EU or National level are mainly researching the early stages of legislation process (Formation and Draft Legislation), whereas projects that deal with the Legislative Process at Local level are targeting mainly the Formation and the Implementation process.

- The Environment stands as the most popular subject amongst the different projects, whereas Consumer Protection and Energy issues are also very popular.
- At the current stage of the evolution of eParticipation, most projects are focusing on Information Provision and Consultation methods of eParticipation - procedures that actually emulate Opinion Polling, Deliberation and Decision Making are still not in the first line of importance.
- The main means for communication seem to be Web portals using Content Management tools, Consultation Platforms Forums, Deliberative Survey Tools and Weblogs. Such tools, reported to be used at local level, are mainly commercial products, as open source tools seem to an extent immature or not practical enough to be fully used in the last stages of the legislation procedure. On the other hand, projects that deal with EU or National level issues and that are engaged in the first steps of legislation, promote the use of Open Source and Commercial products at the same degree. Regarding the technological infrastructure, modern technologies such as Web Services or Semantics are to be used.

Such facts have led to a categorisation of the projects and to the formation of 2 main clusters which include projects with relative characteristics. The two proposed clusters are formulated mainly based on the legislation level that the projects are targeting (EU or National/Local level) and on the different stages of the legislation procedure, namely Formation, Draft, Implementation and Impact. This clustering approach offers the possibility of performing a more direct and goal-oriented steering and coordination, and in the same time it brings together projects with similarities that can co-operate and exchange knowledge for mutual progression and joint research in their respective fields.

DALOS: Drafting Legislation with Ontology-Based Support

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Abstract

The DALOS1 project aims at ensuring coherence and alignment in the legislative language, providing law-makers with knowledge management tools to improve the control over the multilingual complexity of European legislation and over the linguistic and conceptual issues involved in its transposition into national laws. The presentation outlines the design and implementation activities performed on the basis of a set of parallel texts in different languages on a specific legal topic. Natural language processing techniques have been applied to automatically build lexicons for each language. Lexical and conceptual multilingual alignment has been accomplished exploiting terms position in parallel documents. An ontology defining entities involved in the chosen domain has been developed in order to provide a semantic description of terms in lexicons. A modular integration of such resources, represented in RDF/OWL standard format, allows their effective and flexible access from a legislative drafting application prototype, able to enrich legal documents with terms mark-up and semantic annotations.

LEX-IS: Enabling Participation of the Youth in the Public Debate of Legislation among Parliaments, Citizens and Businesses in the European Union

Anna Triantafyllou¹, George Kountourakis¹, George Gionis²

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Abstract

The vision of the LEX-IS Project is to improve the legislative process in National Parliaments through enhancing public participation in the preparatory stages (legislation formation and debate) with the use of state-of-the-art information technology tools and methodologies, specifically targeting and promoting the participation of younger citizens in the public debate on key-issues for the society.

Within this scope LEX-IS develop a structured forum platform based on an underlying legislative process ontology in order to facilitate organized discussions across the legislative process lifecycle.

Structured Forums is a new form of Forum debating that was introduced in the context of the LEX-IS platform. The philosophy of Structured Forums is that the debate follows a specific structure. At the top level there are Topics, which are major discussion units, specifying also a general category (e.g. Environment). Each Topic contains one or more Threads, which are more specific discussion under the same Topic. Both Topics and Threads are created only by administrators and contain also any relevant info about the discussion (Subject, Summary, dates, legal documents through DocAsset document management, etc). If all Threads of a Topic are closed, it is transferred automatically to the results page, where users can read finalized discussions. Under each Thread, any user can create a discussion-tree, where anyone can post comments/opinions and attach files. These discussion-trees are of 2 distinct types:

Structured Forum Type 1. It contains 5 posting categories (Issue, Alternative, Pro_Argument, Con_Argument and Comment) with specific relations between them (i.e. under each posting category there are constraints about the next posting):

- At the root level there is only an Issue
- For every posted Issue the user can post an Alternative or a Comment
- For every posted Alternative the user can post a Pro_Argument or a Con_Argument

- For every posted Comment the user can post a Comment
- For every posted Pro_ Argument the user can post a Pro_ Argument or a Con_ Argument
- For every posted Con_ Argument the user can post a Pro_ Argument or a Con_ Argument

Structured Forum Type 2. It contains 3 posting categories (Question, Answer and Comment) with specific relations between them (i.e. under each posting category there are constraints about the next posting):

At the root level there is only a Question

- For every posted Question the user can post an Answer or a Comment
- For every posted Answer the user can post a Comment
- For every posted Comment the user can post a Comment

LEX-IS will attempt to pilot the structured forums approach in the realistic environment of the Hellenic Parliament and in particular across the lifecycle process of a pragmatic issue of current policy. The DALOS1 project aims at ensuring coherence and alignment in the legislative language, providing lawmakers with knowledge management tools to improve the control over the multilingual complexity of European legislation and over the linguistic and conceptual issues involved in its transposition into national laws. The presentation outlines the design and implementation activities performed on the basis of a set of parallel texts in different languages on a specific legal topic. Natural language processing techniques have been applied to automatically build lexicons for each language. Lexical and conceptual multilingual alignment has been accomplished exploiting terms position in parallel documents. An ontology defining entities involved in the chosen domain has been developed in order to provide a semantic description of terms in lexicons. A modular integration of such resources, represented in RDF/OWL standard format, allows their effective and flexible access from a legislative drafting application prototype, able to enrich legal documents with terms mark-up and semantic annotations.

ABSTRACTS FOR SESSION B

Facilitating European-wide discussion between elected representatives and civil society on emerging policy issues: The DEMOS@WORK project

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Abstract

The purpose of the Demos@Work Trial Project is to integrate already-created ICT-based eParticipation and eGovernment tools in a real-life implementation regarding a significant issue of public interest and in concrete legislative processes in order to enhance citizens' participation and to improve legislative processes.

The Demos@Work overarching objective is to facilitate European-wide discussion between elected representatives and civil society on emerging policy issues that have a potential impact on all countries within the European Union. The issue selected for this trial project is in the field of public health, more specifically, the harmful effects of smoking. Nevertheless, more policy areas/ topics will be explored, such as communication/ EU policy.

This will be achieved by configuring and putting into trial a secure, mobile environment through which elected representatives are able not only to engage with citizens on policy issues using a semantically enriched userinterface, but also to communicate and collaborate with their peers. Therefore, the focus of this project is mainly on citizens and politicians.

The project brings together three technical partners, two end-users and an academic institution with considerable expertise in developing and applying eDemocracy and eGovernment solutions at local, regional and national levels of government.

Federated eParticipation Systems For Electronic Deliberation On Energy and Environmental Issues: the FEED Project

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Abstract

The main objective of FEED is to apply a new concept in e-Participation by allowing users to have seamless access to existing federated content that matches their needs for information supporting the several aspects of a public deliberation, when focusing Environmental and Energy issues.

FEED constitutes a Citizen-Driven trial project, that provides the corresponding tools and engages a critical mass of public involvement in the initial stages of the legislative process, taking into consideration also any internal sub-stages that the deliberation procedure may introduce while exploiting the on going results from other, pilot eParticipation Legislation-oriented projects run by members of the FEED Consortium. Specifically FEED focuses at: (a) **Empowering the legislation proposal formation stage**, driven by the decision makers' need to scan the overall environment where the proposed legislation is going to act upon and identify early any social problems and need, and/or establish the background for a policy or a change in a policy, (b) **Support the debate at municipal level** but with a truly Pan-European orientation, which engages a critical mass of participants, (c) **Target the legislative and policy issues of Energy and Environment**¹, allowing for verticalisation and real solution-oriented application of existing tools, capitalising on already gained experience and guided by high-caliber experts present in the FEED team and (d) **Test in practice novel approaches for user involvement**, including content federation, Web 2.0 and social networking techniques, context-driven semantic annotation tools, multiple channel interaction paradigms and trust building approaches.

FEED pilots will engage a considerable number of decision makers at municipal level and large heterogeneous community of affected stakeholders, engaging: (a) 8 Municipalities and local administrations from 4 different countries, (b) 3 highly specialised service and system provision companies, from The Netherlands, Greece and UK, (c) 3 University laboratories from Greece and Czech Republic, bridging the gap between Energy, Environment and eParticipation, having high-caliber energy and environmental experts

¹ EU policy areas defined at http://www.europa.eu/pol/index_en.htm.

Stakeholders engagement process in the project FEED

Jiri Hrebicek, Michal Hejc

Faculty of Science, Masaryk University, 602 00 Brno, Kotlářská 2

Abstract

The main objective of FEED is to apply a new concept in e-Participation by allowing users to have seamless access to existing federated content that matches their needs for information supporting the several aspects of a public deliberation, when focusing Environmental and Energy issues. Through FEED, existing federated content and/or other knowledge material (some of it already under processing and by other current eParticipation projects), are contextually annotated or channeled according to the issue and deliberation process specifics, allowing this way the platform users to perceive, search for and retrieve it in the contest of a participative e-activity.

One of the main parts of FEED project is Content Annotation and Retrieval subsystem. Its purpose is to annotate the content so that it can be interrelated to specific concepts (i.e. debated issues on the platform, pieces of legal information, specific stages of the deliberation process, etc) and retrieve federated content that is relevant to a specific user input (i.e. an opinion, a request for informative material, a request for relevant opinions, a request for relevant legislation, etc). The main component of this subsystem is the Content Semantics component that holds all the semantics necessary to annotate information through the FEED platform.

Specifically the system separates among several distinct categories of semantics and also will provide the necessary functionalities to annotate with such semantics existing content.

The FEED content semantic is primary based on a Dutch Information Model Spatial Planning (IMRO) which is used in digital exchange and deliberation between all Dutch governments.

IMRO taxonomy is the Dutch Legal interoperability instrument for digital maps in spatial planning. It is the pivotal semantic retrieval "bridge" of Legal Atlas between regulatory articles (text) and area's of application (maps). For FEED purpose it is needed to add common environmental point of view. It will be

derived from its integration with the environmental taxonomy related to INSPIRE - GEMET (GEneral Multilingual Environmental Thesaurus).

GEMET, has been developed by the European Topic Centre on Catalogue of Data Sources under contract to the European Environment Agency, and is currently published and managed by the European Environment Information and Observation Network. GEMET is a compilation of several multilingual vocabularies, and has been designed as a general thesaurus, aiming to define a core general terminology for the environment. The current version is available in 22 languages, and contains over 6,000 descriptors.

The integration and associated problems (available formats, technical solutions) of these two taxonomies will be discussed in this paper. Especially the problem of content structure seems to be a bit overly general to be of direct use for semantic annotation. The idea is that citizens from any European member state can use the system do search for relevant documents in the specific region. To enable this functionality, it is necessary to have a some kind of mapping between IMRO (the 'Dutch GEMET') and the multilingual GEMET standard.

Systems and services for eParticipation in News creation and distribution: The WEB-DEP Project

Sotiris Koussouris¹, Fenareti Lampathaki¹, Anna Triantafyllou²

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² Athens Technology Center S.A., Rizariou 10, Chalandri 152 33, Athens. Greece, a.triantafillou@atc.gr

Abstract

The WEB.DEP project primary aim is to establish an important communication and information management network hosted by the National News Agencies of the Western Balkan countries, which would allow any civil organization and/or citizen to submit complete proposals, plans or simple ideas for democratic integration, social reconstruction, development, education and culture, health, emigration etc. This presentation outlines the design and development of the platform, in accordance with the various challenges that the project had to face, namely multilinguality, quite low internet penetration in the Western Balkan Countries, cultural diversity and of course societies emerging from recent conflicts – hot cultural issues. 3 different portals were implemented, each one including a communication forum. Themes for discussion were selected with the use of a specified process which ensured the exclusion of topics which could raise conflicts within a discussion. A specified e-Participation mechanism was designed and implemented which includes the whole lifecycle of a discussion; starting from the initiation of a discussion and ending with the replies from the governmental side on the comments drawn by the citizens. As a result, the link between citizens and governments is strengthened and citizens get motivated in using ICT for expressing their opinions and take part in decision making procedures.

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

FEED content semantics - the semantic interrelation model based on IMRO and GEMET.

Jiri Hrebicek, Karel Kiswa, Matej Stefanik

Faculty of Science, Masaryk University, 602 00 Brno, Kotlářská 2

Abstract

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