A Framework for Scoping eParticipation
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ABSTRACT
Governments worldwide realize the importance of strengthening active participation of citizens in the political process. By recognizing the need for engaging the social intelligence of citizens, governments will be able to govern more effectively and credibly. The field of public participation has been recently enhanced with the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) thus leading to electronic participation (eParticipation). In this poster we propose and populate a framework that can be used to scope eParticipation and investigate its relation with traditional public participation. The structural elements of the framework include democratic processes, participation areas, participatory techniques, ICT tools and ICT technologies. The results allow obtaining a better understanding of the new field of eParticipation.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
K.4.1 [Public Policy Issues]
K.4.2 [Social Issues]

General Terms
Management, Human Factors, Theory

Keywords
Participation, eParticipation, Participatory Techniques, Participation areas, ICT Tools

1. INTRODUCTION
Governments worldwide realize the importance of public participation and are trying to re-engage citizens in the political processes in order to strengthen democracy. Citizens in many countries are also demanding a more active role in democratic processes and are not content with just being a part of the voting process. It therefore comes as no surprise that the interest on public participation is increasing over the last years for practitioners and researchers alike. Public participation can be considered as “the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services” [8].

The last few years we are experiencing an unprecedented growth and adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Following this trend, electronic Participation (eParticipation) has been recently proposed to indicate the integration of ICT support in the traditional participatory process.

The field of eParticipation is currently a rapidly evolving one. In many cases, the main driving forces of eParticipation are the advances in the technological area.

However, in order to smooth the transition from participation to eParticipation, there is a need for a better understanding of the traditional participatory process and of what is to become ICT-enabled. Indeed, this transition should not be merely technologically driven, i.e. cannot take place without a prior understanding of the techniques and processes involved in the participatory domain. As stated in a report by OECD “technology is an enabler not the solution” [4]. It is therefore critical to understand how to integrate ICTs with traditional ‘offline’ tools and techniques. It is equally important to obtain a better understanding on public participation and the relevant supporting ICT tools.

The objective of this paper is to present a framework that scopes eParticipation and provides its main layers. These layers will be populated in order to understand the potential of each one and its relations with the other layers.

2. FRAMEWORK
The proposed framework depicted in figure 1 has democratic processes as its starting point. These are construed broadly rather than narrowly. These processes include voting, campaigning, campaign financing, public debate and discussion, civics education, and processes within and between political parties, grassroots organisations, information intermediaries and communication between policy makers and the public [3].

![Figure 1. The eParticipation Framework](image-url)
Democratic processes include participation areas where citizens can interact with their representatives (G2C) or between themselves (C2C) and provide resources and social intelligence to the collective. Participation areas can be defined as the specific area or areas of citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic processes [6]. They therefore address the issue of “what”, defining the context and the scope of the participatory process. Participation areas include the following: Information Provision, Community Building/Collaborative Environments, Consultation, Campaigning, Electioneering, Deliberation, Discourse, Mediation, Polling, Participatory Law-Making, Policy Processes and Citizenship Education [1].

As a next step, participatory techniques are introduced, which can be defined as the methods used to engage and involve citizens (but also stakeholders, decision-makers and politicians) in the democratic process. Therefore, participatory techniques address the issue of “how” the participatory process is brought to bear. There are numerous techniques that have been employed to facilitate participation. A non-exhaustive list of these techniques includes 21st Century Meetings, charettes, citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polling, Delphi, expert panels, focus groups, public hearings, participatory evaluations, planning cells, scenario workshops and others [2], [7].

The next layer in the framework includes ICT tools that can be used to enhance and support techniques. These tools consist of software applications, products, tools and components which are based on ICT technologies. Categories of ICT tools used to support eParticipation are: eParticipation chat rooms, eParticipation discussion forums/boards, decision-making games, virtual communities, online surgeries, ePanels, ePetitioning, eDeliberative Polling, eConsultation platforms, eVoting platforms and suggestion tools for formal planning procedures [1]. The introduction of tools and technologies in the traditional participatory process leads to electronic participation (eParticipation).

The authors’ analysis reveals that ICT tools can not support every participatory technique. Participatory techniques may require significant modifications that alter their initial structure in order to be adapted to an eParticipation context.

Our work was concentrated on three levels of the framework as technologies cannot support the participatory process in isolation from tools, techniques and areas, while democratic processes lie more in the field of political sciences.

It should be noted that there is also a bottom-up approach that can be envisioned from the present framework. Emerging technologies can result in the development of innovative ICT tools. New tools can lead to the introduction of new participatory techniques that were not previously possible in the absence of supporting technology. These tools can lead to a broadening of the participation activities and hence to new types of citizen participation. In this case, the use of ICTs is no longer simply supportive, but rather takes on a proactive role, which can result in a broadening and re-defining of the scope of the public participation domain. By the process described, it is also theoretically possible for new technologies to eventually instigate new democratic processes [5].

3. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

In the present poster, a framework for eParticipation has been presented which consists of the following layers: democratic processes, participation areas, participatory techniques, categories of tools and ICT technologies. This framework can provide valuable insights when used for the following purposes:

1. Relate participation areas with participatory techniques and participatory techniques with ICT tools (this has been further analyzed in [5]).
2. Investigate the way emerging technologies can instigate new participation areas, new democratic processes and new ICT tools for supporting eParticipation.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work in this paper was conducted within the DEMO-net Network of Excellence (http://www.demo-net.org), a project funded by the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission (FP6-2004-IST-4-027219).

5. REFERENCES