

To Be or Not to Be Active: Exploring Practices of e-Participation

Annelie Ekelin

Department of Interaction and System Design Blekinge
Institute of Technology, Box 520, SE-372 25 Ronneby, Sweden
<http://www.bth.se>
annelie.ekelin@bth.se

Abstract. This paper discusses the interplay of participation and non-participation within institutional and public practices of electronically mediated policy-making in the local public sector. The aim is to contribute to practice-centred development of situated theoretical conceptualisation in the research domain. Applying a dialectical analysis, including also examples and processes of dissociation detected in ethnographic studies of actual use and design of these technologies, suggests a re-specification of the conceptual basis of e-participation.

1 Introduction

Key themes in e-democracy development have more and more emerged as various forms of electronic participation in different stages of democratic processes. Concrete examples of experiments of participatory e-democracy in Scandinavia as well as in other parts of Europe, could be described mostly as strivings towards improvement of information and communication by ICT, rather than achievements of direct involvement of citizens in decision-making within the existing and established forms of representative government. [5] [10] [13] The primary attention has lately focused upon the potential to stimulate new forms of deliberative processes, and visions of improving communication between citizens and decision-makers, as well as ensuring access for all (inclusion) which is also highlighted through the new directions in the e-government development, presented i.e. in the Communications of the European Commission [2] [6] However, these changes in policy put a lot of pressure on all involved parties, i.e. citizens, politicians and practitioners to be constantly active and engaged.

1.1 Need for Situated Evaluations

Recently there have been several demands on comparisons, evaluations and guidance of ongoing governmental pilots and projects of electronically mediated participation within the context of policy-making. [10] Electronic participation (e-participation) has hitherto been almost uncritically promoted and emphasised as having great potential of transforming relations between local administration and the public, and expected to help reform the classical model of democratic involvement.

The issue of developing methods aiming at evaluating and steering these new forms of participation, especially concerning e-consultations and other kinds of public engagement, which are intended to inform or even transform policy-making, [9] is increasing in importance. However, there is a risk that evaluations even though they are well intended and thoroughly organised, scratch only at the surface of the phenomenon, if the interest for these activities mainly concentrates on what could be labelled “conversations at the interfaces” [17]. Experiences from local research and development (R&D) pilots concerning either general development of relations between citizens and local administration or specific e-democracy pilots in Scandinavia [3] described in this paper, accentuate the need of including inquiries into work practices and use-situations as bases for developing methods in this area. Those are often neglected dimensions in mainstream management studies, which ought to be added to the ongoing strivings of picturing e-participation conceptually. The context of the local activity of setting up for instance e-consultations must be better accounted for in future evaluations and discussions, not solely the abstracted knowledge and the *outcome* of the mediated participation. Strivings of characterising e-participation must not get stuck on analysing what is ultimately displayed and visible on the web, they should also include the local work practice of *preparing, supporting and maintaining e-participation*, since these activities also influence the conduct of e-participation. The experiences from these local cases, further described and discussed in this paper, show that denial to take responsibility for the contextual issues and work practices of these activities seriously affects the outcome of mediated participation.

1.2 Interplay of Dissociation and Commitment

Secondly, the activities of promoting e-participation could also, if using an incisive wording, be summarised as concentrating mainly on how to entice people to become more active and how to convince them to stay active forever. Again practice-based evidences suggests that more emphasise must be put on *exploring the interplay of dissociation and commitment*, not necessarily with the prior intention to come up with the right formula on how to minimise non-participation, rather acknowledge that there are different modes and degrees of non-participation also *within* participation and vice versa and that this is an essential part of the dynamics in e-participation. These variations of participation and non-participation must be explored in a dialectic way in order to generate practice-based conceptualisation, which is of great relevance when coping with the dilemma of handling e-participation in every-day situations.

2 Theoretical and Empirical Basis

This paper draws primarily on systematisation and analysis of experiences derived from practice [15], basically described as a situated research approach, coupled with a social theory on learning, as elaborated by Lave and Wenger [7]

and further discussed in Wenger [18] and Smith [14]. Greenbaum and Kyng [4] explained the implication of a situated approach towards development of computer systems as deriving mainly out of a social constructionist view, i.e. that the computer systems, often comprehended as purely technical, is mainly generated through and by interactions among people who are engaged in a particular design process, in a specific situation and under certain circumstances. They label this situated design. Those views on learning and design processes as contextual and particular social interactions is also useful when discussing the issue of e-participation both as an activity of mutual learning (among all involved parties) and as several processes of participation, rather than strivings to implement fixed frameworks based on general assumptions about how e-participation might come true. This fluid nature of e-participation needs to be taken into account in examinations and evaluations of activities and goals. E-participation must be seen as relational (i.e. taking place as an evolving set of relations which develops over time). It have to be constructed as an activity that is not cut loose from a workplace context, even though it is a mediated activity, since the activity itself is depending on the concept of full participation, not only by the engaged citizens, but also by the staff and politicians who are intended to get involved in preparing, supporting and maintaining the event as such. Methods supporting e-participation must therefore support a system of relations, including also the work situation, and not solely focusing on support of the single activity of citizen's participation.

Greenbaum and Kyng [4] stressed the point that computerisation often is aiming towards rationalisation of work, rather than enhancing work locally, which might not always be the most economic alternative in the long run. In a similar way the ultimate goal of promoting e-participation must be aiming at enhancing the quality of local attempts of mediated participation, and not take its starting point in the intention to rationalise or formalise e-participation with the ultimate purpose to quantify or transfer generalisations and abstractions out of local contexts. The strong intention to transfer good practices of e-participation, emphasised by for instance the European Commission is in some ways conducted out of the wish to *increase the production* of e-participation, that is enable a greater amount of activities labelled e-participation, but a grounded perspective suggests that the elaboration of e-participation frameworks must be done in order to gain quality rather than quantity of those activities. The social anthropologist Lucy Suchman [16] showed by her research that the local activities of human beings is not as much steered by plans, as based on specific conditions and situations. That is also an argument for emphasising that conceptualisation of e-participation must be rooted in experiences, not just generalised rules, also explaining why it is so important to include work practices and real use- and design situations in evaluations of e-participation and relate those contextual dimensions to future development of concepts in the emerging field. E-participation is thus dependent on the complex situations where the realisation of e-participation actually takes place.

3 Description of Cases

The empirical basis for this paper is ethnographically based work-oriented interviews, and participatory observations [1] of specific situations. The fieldwork took place during two local municipally driven projects, which ran in Scandinavia 2002 and 2004-05. The projects are here called the *Invitation-project* and the *Election-project*, both aiming at furthering e-participation among local inhabitants. These projects could basically be described as attempts to vitalise a public debate on future development of the local society and stimulation of dialogue between citizens to citizens (CÔC), between citizens and civil servants (CÔ CS), and citizens and politicians (CP), by asking “What’s your opinion on future living?” and “What do you want to know about the local society?” respectively “What do you want to know about local politics and the process of voting?” The *Invitation-project* was divided into two parts, each part aiming at developing web support for extended dialogue with citizens. The *Vision Site* was built on the idea of involving citizens in planning the future local society and was in that sense extending what the Swedish law command in formal consultations on spatial planning.

The project members were municipal officers from the information office and the spatial planning unit, researchers, a small software company and a marketing company. The task was to jointly design an interactive web site describing future development plans for the city. In the periphery of the actual design-process there were also citizens and politicians taking part. They were either invited as participants in what was called focus groups interviews within the project, more correctly described as sessions of user-evaluations involving primarily citizens and municipal officers, or in another realm of the periphery; members in the political steering group (the politicians). The concrete examples of participation and non-participation is primarily taken from those events or peripheral actions, based on the claim earlier described in this paper that work practices and design-in use events also matters for basic stimulation of developing e-participation. A common dilemma, which seems to be troubling the involved parties in developing e-participation (the citizens, the politicians and the civil servants) in this local context was, formulated on empirical basis: 1) the problem of motivating and engaging other people, coupled with 2) the necessity and difficulty of motivating oneself. My aim is to elaborate on these dilemmas from the basis of 3) how to find ways of motivating each other, instead of regarding the lack of motivation as separated problems, which by coincidence seems to occur simultaneously in separate domains?

4 Analysis

Lave and Wenger [7] describes in their presentation of a social theory on learning a process, which they call legitimate peripheral participation. This could in a simple way be described as a form of apprenticeship, but is according to the authors a much more complex activity. It is “*a description of the particular mode of*

engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole." [7] They claim that learning is fundamentally a social process and not solely happening in the learner's head. The authors maintain that learning viewed as situated activity has as its central defining characteristic a process they call legitimate peripheral participation. Learners participate in communities of practitioners, moving toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. Translated into an e-participation context this means that cooperating constellations of local politicians, civil servants and citizens, jointly taking part in for instance an evaluation activity of an e-consultation could be described as participants in a community of practice, enabling learning and full participation. User-evaluations, focus group interviews taking place within these projects were all sharing the specificity of a community of practice, which is; *shared domain of interest, a shared repertoire of resources and mutual engagement* [16], involving also citizens' as equal practitioners due to their characteristic as active citizens'.

In this regard it is appropriate to look upon e-participation in communities of practice as learning in situated activities where it is of importance to focus on the relations as such, in order to detect those moments of balance and integral participation and in what way they relate to imbalance and non-participation. Then e-participation might occur in different kinds of communities of practice, rather than in the prepared places where it is designated to take place, i.e. in the fixed discussion forums presented on the *Vision Site* dealing with spatial planning, or in the pre-defined activities on the web where politicians turned out to be very reluctant to participate actively, with reference to the unpleasant experiences of individual exposure. There did however occur several examples of democratic activity in the somewhat informal space or terrain of the public evaluation meetings where the suggested prototype was tested, where the citizens could combine their own personal interest with acting in co-operation as a group who where in the mode of learning to move from being ordinary citizens to experts on their own use of e-consultation tools.

4.1 The Dilemma of Exposing Inactivity and Incompleteness

During the Election-project the issue of politicians reluctance to take part in debate in public web-forums came up in the public evaluation and in the media. Different actors constantly highlighted the issue in different contexts. One of the politicians (P1) reflected upon his role as "worn-out dialoguing politician", in one of these follow-up interviews: *"The experiences with the Election-site made me think about this. I am not sceptical to the website, but ... there are different expectations on different politicians, but still it is expected that you have to be fully engaged, that you are accountable and being able to answer all kind of questions. I am now talking out of my personal experience here, I am expected to take part in ordinary meetings since I am involved in political committees, internal political meetings in the evenings and then it is expected that I, when I am back at home nine o' clock in the evening I have to go online and check if*

there are any questions for me [in the debate forum]. At that time I have to be intellectually clear, and sit down and compose answers. / ... / It requires much more intellectual strain, and this is often during the evenings, if you are a spare time politician and not a professional politician. / ... /

This particular volunteer politician highlights an important aspect of non-participation in his reflection. He indirectly points out that politics in a debate-forum becomes more of an individual performance than a teamwork, which is not always favoured by all sorts of politicians, because all politicians are not expected to have the same position in the political group which could be said form a certain community of practice. The politician experiences demands that he has to be a competent representative which, in his interpretation means; intellectually clear and focused, able to write and answer all sorts of questions as well as being up-dated about the local and national political agenda as well as current debate on different subjects. He also experiences high demands on his performance of participation. He has to be fully engaged in all activities (off-line as well as on-line), he is held accountable for all sorts of actions, and he is also expected to be active on multiple levels in the organisational structure. This indicates that there are several degrees and levels of participation asked for. A crucial issue also seems to occur in connection to experiences of lacking competence. What is at stake here? Is the role of politicians as “in formed representatives” threatened by the possibility to be questioned by the public? Are politicians safeguarding their legitimacy and superiority as “competent representatives”? Is it concern for old traditions in political practice or is it fear for change of political structures? It may very well be all of this, and earlier research in Europe, conducted by Mahrer and Krimmer has suggested a notion called “the middle-man paradox” [12], in order to identify politicians as inhibiting factors in the general transformation of e-democracy. This notion makes it possible to highlight the fact that those who are responsible for introducing new democratic forms in fact also might be afraid of loosing their gained position as political represents. This is also part of the trajectory in the process of legitimate peripheral participation, which not always is harmonious. It could also be suggested that this particular politician expresses his need for having a possibility to move slowly into the centre of full participation, and that he expresses a need to manage his own non-participation?

A web designer in the municipality who took part in the Election-project describes the demands on the politicians: *“We told them what we expected them to do; [they had] to be active in the debate forum, to write information in the module for candidate presentation... participate in political cafs that were supposed to be conducted in real-time and simultaneously webcasted, lead by a moderator from the local radio station. We expected active politicians. They had to answer questions; after all it is in their interest. They have got a free marketing channel here, but they were reluctant. They said, “it is too close to the election, people haven’t got the time to participate” and so on. But a couple of the politicians said; go ahead and arrange it, and we will assure that someone [politicians] shows up.”*

The web designer presents a picture that easily could be understood as a requirement of the active politician. But from the politicians point of view it

meant that they had to cope with multi-channel broadcasting, and be prepared to interact with many receivers. Some of them were reluctant but a couple of them said that they were prepared to take on the workload of getting things running. However, the interactive cafs were finally cut out of the activity program and the debate in the forums were later on criticised for being dominated by a few talkative politicians, debating mostly with each other.

The politician pointed out that *fear of exposure* is a natural part of everyday experience of a volunteer politician, which one has to cope with. However, his experience of debating on the *Election-site* was a frustrating experience, manifested as an anxiety of exposing himself as inactive and incapable instead of being active and accountable and constantly prepared and open to public evaluation. And for the web designer it was of course a disappointment when the thoroughly developed website and the additional implementation activities turned out to be rejected by those who eventually could benefit the most of the planned arrangement, and for the civil servants who had done everything right according to the action plan on transforming public administrations by inviting citizens to take part in discussions and to inform themselves in time for the election, was it of course a disappointment with low degrees of participation.

In the debate forum about the future development of the city there were also comments made by the citizens asking why politicians did not take part in the debate. The head of the information office (HIO) commented the lack of politician's contributions in the following way: *"Why have not local politicians been active in this debate forum, presenting their opinions, commenting other opinions or discuss with each other? My guess is that the channel still feels a bit unfamiliar and strange for some of the politicians, but not for everyone. Several of the politicians are frequent Internet users. Some politicians probably comprehend the Invitation-site as a "listening ear" rather than a forum for debate, as with the debate on spatial planning and the discussion about future living. Maybe some of them are afraid that the time will not be enough if they start to use the debate forum. One who says A has to proceed with B, and since many politicians are volunteer politicians they find it difficult to manage. We remind them about the existence of the debate forum, then it is up to them to participate or not."*

4.2 The Dilemma of Cross-Over Dialogue

The issue of politicians' and civil servants' unwillingness to take active part in an electronic dialogue with citizens was also brought up for discussion in another context and in relation to another project, during a focus group interview (FGI) in the *Invitation-project*, which indicates that this political non-participation runs the risk of becoming an established contradiction in the municipality. Eight citizens took part in the discussion along with municipal officers and researchers. The aim with the session was to conduct a user-evaluation of the website "*Vision Site*" and provide the municipal and the software firm with viewpoints for adjustment of the application. This discussion was circulating around the issue of avoiding exposure of inactivity. From statements made by the civil servants, one could draw the conclusion that there were uncertainties in the distribution

of responsibility concerning who was supposed to run the discussion on the site, and that this was largely depending on under-staffing and changes in work-organisation. This organisational issue also had effects on the interaction with the citizens and was also contributing to the effect of causing a one-way communication, along with the consequences of absent politicians. The joint meeting with the citizens taking part in a focus group interview did provide the involved parties with opportunities to understand the motives behind the choices made, and find out that the unwillingness to respond on the public opinions were more complicated than the simple dichotomisation between opposing parts such as non-participation and participation. In the vision of a functioning e-government world the politicians and local administration must be prepared to open up for participation also in decision-making, and not avoid taking responsibility. But what to do if the work practice puts constraints on or even work against the new demands on implementing a new culture of interaction and the new openness also means vulnerability for the decision-makers and the civil servants?

The potential of online discussions and deliberation is envisioned both as bridging and bounding in rhetorical claims, but the politicians and civil servants who were active in the Election-site described another experience. P2: *“Politicians in general do not communicate with their voters, that is a myth. If I really examine myself, I talk to my party members, my working team but I will not talk to people on the street, I do not cross the categories in which I normally circulate.”*

4.3 Another Item in the Program or a Part of the Decision-Making Process?

During an interview with a politician concerning the running consultation in the Invitation-project the question whether the role of online-discussions were considered an essential part of the total comprehensive planning process in the *Invitation-project* came up. The discussion between the politician and the researchers made clear that the *mix of representative (i.e. involvement in the parliamentary steering group) and full participation (public evaluation of website)* was causing complexity and misunderstanding concerning what role e-participation really should play.

The differences referred to here could be visualised as examples of “formal” and “informal” processes of political participation. There had been a traditional consultation period (formal participation) before the writing of the proposed spatial plan, where the parliamentary group had been involved, according to general procedure. The *Invitation-project* (including also preparation of the *Vision-site*) was in relation to this considered to be an informal part of the traditional spatial planning, since it was not properly adjusted to the formal timeline of the consultation period, and it was also informal in that sense that it was an e-participation initiative, which had not yet gained enough legitimacy among local politicians. However, the issue here is not that distinction, but the issue of *who should really* take part, making clear a predefined division of labour, some politicians’ steer and plan, others make the plans come true. The duties had not only to

be negotiated between the practitioners and the politicians, it had also to be negotiated within the group of politicians and it was also made clear that the actual e-participation had several functions as an event, i.e. as a showcase, a training-dialogue, a marketing effort and so on.

The interviews revealed several difficulties to separate *the immediate or representative role of e-participation in relation to formal participation*. Then there was the issue of “who should really take part in these different types of e-participation”, indicating that participation has to be negotiated within the political community of practice. This distribution of tasks had to be discussed along with the need to form a new, *shared community of practice* together with the citizens who participate in the discussion, the need to transform the dialogue from a one-way communication into a two-way communication and truly interactive space. A professional politician (P3) turned out to be reluctant to define himself as a full participant, because he had a leading political role and therefore also was afraid of putting the lid on the discussion, because he were suspected to take on the leading role. These experiences *and the prior expectations on his participation* were literally hindering him to take active part in the discussion. But he seemed more willing to re-negotiate his motives for non-participation when he became aware of the need of establishing a shared goal and meaning and that the participants had to define a common repertoire, in order to reach any effect with the e-consultation.

There was an obvious mismatch between traditional political practice and the practice of the new dialogue arenas, and also a lack of strategy on how to feed in the outcome of what could be considered an “informal dialogue” on the website into the “formal” or established process of decision-making. An asynchronous discussion forum visualise and reveals both the posted answers but also the shortages in responses, which easily could be interpreted as irresponsibility by the politician, in fact it makes non-activity visible and traceable. The practice described here shows that there could be several explanations to this lack of responding politicians, for instance obscurity about the division of labor within the political group or community of practice, rather than unwillingness to take part. The debate on the website required that the politicians took responsibility also for the process of situating the meaning of e-participation, besides the actual debate about the future society. This is in practice normally is handed over to the civil servants.

4.4 The Dilemma of Multi-level e-Participation

During the work with the Vision Site which was basically run as an online e-consultation and planning of the future development of the municipality, several focus groups-interviews were held in order to introduce the new online consultation about the spatial plan, to evaluate the functionality of the consultation-site and also to gather opinions about the proposed formulation of the spatial plan. During the discussion in the group, it became obvious that there were ambiguities concerning the multiple ways to hand in opinions. Several levels of

communication and engagement were requested from the citizens: they were supposed to have their say about the selected themes of the future such as: what about “*the plans on the new residential area between the railway station and the stream*”? Or “*What about the small places in the municipality, how is it possible to sustain public services there*”? The citizens were also asked to evaluate the functionality of the site, and take part in an ongoing evaluation of the project, which was also initiated by the researchers and presented on the site. The citizens were asked to answer an online questionnaire or announce if they were willing to take part in a face-to-face interview.

One of the politicians, also a member of the political steering group for the comprehensive planning process, raised the participatory aspects of the Invitation project and the use of the Vision Site during a project meeting where politicians also were invited: P4: “*In my opinion there has been great confusion concerning the role of the politicians in this process. The former spatial plans were either products of consultants, or a civil servant product where the political committees were called in as expert advice. The city architect and the local government committee chaired jointly the public face-to-face consultation meeting, which took part on several occasions. In my opinion does this open up for [referring to the Vision-site] a more thorough process and a possibility to keep a continuous dialogue with citizens. This will of course have consequences for the formal representative system, emphasising more direct democratic features in the process.*”

Another politician made the following comment about the decision to extend the traditional consultation period by opening up for individual citizens to present their opinion: P2: “*We can’t meet every separate, contribution, what we want is to include the opinions in the process. This is a first throw-in in order to get a reaction, invite to discussion and a way to put forward the strategic vision 2010. This does not compensate other forms of communication. It is one way of discussing, valuing opinions and to broaden the basic data. Democracy has always been criticised, for example when discussing universal right to vote, and there is contempt for elected representatives, and thereby also the citizens who has voted for these specific candidates. There is a gap between the elected and the voters, the general society has developed in that way. I think it is important to see the municipality as an association, not as a company and the citizens as customers. The representative, democratic system in society includes elected, that is a better word than politicians. I think that it is an inclination in society to look upon e-democracy as something that has to go on beside the ordinary democracy development, and elected representatives as something that has to be pushed aside.*”

What he really is (even though unintentionally) putting his finger on is the need of establishing new communities of practice involving all parties; citizens, civil servants and politicians where legitimate peripheral participation allows also multiple forms of legitimate non-participation within established forms of participation.

5 Conclusions

What to say finally about the division of these described conditions or activities of participation, based on experiences within practice? First of all these activities seem to happen at the same time, they are not unconditionally following upon another or compensating one another, they could all be seen not primarily as frozen contradictions, rather they could be interpreted as descriptions of different positions in a field of participation, where the citizens, the practitioners and the politicians gradually are entering processes of learning e-participation by conducting legitimate peripheral participation. However, their trajectory, moving from the periphery to the centre, may look different and may also cause dilemmas of participation and even breakdowns and effects of non-participation. In that sense it was of course a misconduct that debate forums were put up without clear respondents, but there were as practice shows several explanations to that besides for unwillingness to take part; i.e. the issue of exposing incompleteness as inactivity, the difficulties in creating cross-over communication and interplay with formal practices of consultations as well as the fact that the expected role of for instance a participant got in the way for the situated participation. The citizens also expressed difficulties in handling demands on multi-level e-participation. A first step towards legitimising the participation was however taken by the fact that all parties acknowledged, "it has to be taken care of in some sense".

Non-participation could of course be experienced as an example of conscious manipulation of another person's possibility to act, or even seen as a token activity, but non-participation could also be consciously chosen and a legitimate position in order to await the next move, to avoid taking responsibility for the mutual learning that might occur in these activities, such as in the case with the reluctant politicians who did not want to be active participants and motivated their choice with practical reasons. They were not interested of changes in their political practice, since they experienced a heavier workload due to increased demands on taking individual responsibility, but very little response from the citizens in taking on their share of society-building. However, the effects of non-participation among politicians is also to be understood as an act of excluding themselves not only from developing new forms of democratic activities, but also from the possibility to conduct legitimate peripheral participation in the overall transformation processes of government. At the same time the citizens, who demand them to take their share and responsibility for dialoguing and decision-making, also exclude them. This causes a circle of reproduction of those regimes of practices or frozen relations concerning exclusion from both sides, and this is in the long run causing no development of e-participation at all, hindering a more inclusive approach to develop in order to make progress.

The practical examples also reveal that the issue of motivating others, while avoiding to motivate oneself, got in the way of upholding a debate, both among politicians and municipal officers. They were more concerned of what the other parts were doing or not doing, than seeing the possibility of e-participation as a way to motivate each other in learning by participation.

References

1. Blomberg, J M.Burrell and G Guest: An ethnographic Approach to Design, in Jacko, J and sears. (eds.) Handbook of Human-Computer Interaction in Interaction Systems. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. New Jersey, (2002).
2. Communications of the Commission, available at: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/activities/egovresearch/doc/highlights/egov_action_plan_en.pdf [Accessed 060528].
3. Ekelin, A, P. Elovaara, S. Eriksén, C. Hansson, S Landén, A. Larsson, I. Olén and J. Winter: "A Small Project about Big Issues". Short paper. Proceedings of the Participatory Design Conference PDC2004, Toronto, Canada, July 27-31, (2004)
4. Greenbaum, J and Kyng, M (eds.) Design at work: Cooperative Design of Computer Systems, Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ. (1991).
5. Hague, Barry N and Brian D. Loader [eds.]: Digital Democracy: discourse and decision making in the information age Routledge, London (1999).
6. i2010, European Information Society for growth and employment http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm [Accessed 060315].
7. Lave, J., & Wenger, E. Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, (1990).
8. Lave, J and Chaiklin, S (eds.) Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, USA, (1993)
9. Macintosh, A: "Characterising E-participation in Policy-Making", in Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, (2004) 1-10.
10. Macintosh, A: eParticipation: How and what to evaluate? Available at: http://bibliothek.fh-burgenland.at/macintosh_abstract.pdf [Accessed 060315].
11. Macintosh, A, Davenport, E, Malina A and A. Whyte: "Technology to support Participatory Democracy". In Electronic Government: Design, Applications and Management, (2002) 226-248
12. Mahrer, H Krimmer, R: Towards the enhancement of e-democracy: identifying the notion of the "middleman paradox" in Info Systems Journal, 15 (2005) 27-42.
13. Mälkiä, M (ed.) eTransformation in Governance: New Directions in Government and Politics. Hershey, PA, USA:Idea Group Inc. (2003).
14. Smith, M. K "Communities of practice", The Encyclopedia of Informal Education, www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm , (2003) [Accessed 060209] (14).
15. Strauss, A L., and Corbin, J. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 2nd Edition, (1998).
16. Suchman, L. Plans and Situated Actions: the Problem of Human-Machine Communication. Cambridge University Press, New York, (1987).
17. Suchman, L. "Writing and Reading: A Response to Comments on Plans and Situated Actions", in Journal of the Learning Sciences Vol. 12, No. 2, (2003)299-306.
18. Wenger, E: Communities of practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press , USA, (1998).