A new agenda for e-democracy

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Foreword

This report is based on the policy forum *A New Agenda for E-democracy: Lessons from Initiatives Round the World*, held at Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute (OII) on 6–7 May 2004. It is one of a series of forum-based discussion papers produced by the OII.

The event started on the evening of 6 May with presentations on the opportunities and challenges of e-democracy by Tracy Westen of the US-based Center for Governmental Studies, Stephen Coleman of the Oxford Internet Institute, and Matthew Taylor, policy adviser to the UK Prime Minister. It continued the next day with a roundtable discussion involving 35 specially invited practitioners, policy-makers and commentators from 13 countries (see Appendix 1).

In addition to drawing on the research of many participants, including position papers written for the event, this discussion paper is informed by their relevant knowledge and practical experience in education, business, government and research. Wider sources than those covered at the Forum are also drawn on to provide a broader background.

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The context

In less than a decade, e-democracy has passed through a transition from speculative futurology to piecemeal experimentation and embryonic policy. The earliest speculations about the internet and democracy emphasized the potential for direct, unmediated democracy. Becker argued that 'When the powerful truly feel that they are losing control, that the people are truly upset with them and their decisions, and that there is too much dissatisfaction (and perhaps public protests), then the time will be ripe for them to yield to teledemocracy.' Dick Morris, one-time strategic adviser to Bill Clinton, claimed in his 1999 book, *Vote.com*, that Jefferson's 'utopian vision of a democracy based on town meetings and direct popular participation is about to become a reality.' Although such plebiscitary visions still persist, they have been supplemented in recent years by two other trends. Firstly, there have been a number of experiments in using the internet to make representative democracy more effective. These range from local initiatives, such as municipal planning consultations in Germany and Sweden, to national projects, such as the Estonian Government's TOM portal where citizens can propose new laws, and a series of online consultations in the UK Parliament. Secondly, there has been the emergence of policies for e-democracy, most notably in the UK where both Parliament and the Government has outlined a set of policy principles for e-democracy, and several e-democracy projects have been publically funded. As Joanne Caddy has noted:

> Today, all OECD member countries recognize new ICTs to be powerful tools for enhancing citizen engagement in public policy-making. Despite the limited experience to date, some initial lessons for online citizen engagement in policy-making are emerging:
>
> Technology is an enabler not the solution. Integration with traditional, 'offline' tools for access to information, consultation and public participation in policy-making is needed to make the most of ICTs.
>
> The online provision of information is an essential precondition for engagement, but quantity does not mean quality. Active promotion and competent moderation are key to effective online consultations.
>
> The barriers to greater online citizen engagement in policy-making are cultural, organizational and constitutional not technological. Overcoming these challenges will require greater efforts to raise awareness and capacity both within governments and among citizens.
>
> (Caddy, PP)[1]

The debate about the relationship between the internet and democracy continues, in both the academic literature and broader policy arenas. In May 2004, 35 practitioners, policy-makers and commentators from 13 countries gathered in Oxford to consider three questions:

- what has worked so far?

- what are the obstacles to more e-democracy projects working?

- what policies, methods and tools need to be developed?

These were intentionally simple questions, the answers to which contribute to a complex picture that we hope will help to move forward thinking about e-democracy. The invited participants produced position papers in advance of the forum, setting out their experience-based responses to our three key questions. On the evening before the roundtable forum, participants heard from:

- Tracy Westen of the US-based Center for Governmental Studies who argued that 'the Internet and other digital technologies seem perfectly suited, for better or worse, to a form of direct electronic democracy in which individuals can inform themselves, draft a measure in a group collaborative process, circulate it for signatures, put it on the ballot, and promote it.' With reference to his own work in California, Westen suggested that democracy was in a state of transformation and was becoming neither direct nor representative in form, but a hybrid of the two forms.

- Professor Stephen Coleman of the Oxford Internet Institute who argued that e-democratic methods and processes had the potential to transcend distances (geographical, informational, cultural, emotional) between citizens and their representatives and was leading to what he called 'direct representation'.

- Matthew Taylor, policy adviser to the UK Prime Minister, who spoke about the challenge facing government, generically, in relation to its relationship to people; and his thoughts on new forms of governance within which technologies can be built in at the design stage to facilitate better democratic interaction. He stressed the need to link e-democracy to service delivery.

The forum itself was divided into three main sessions, relating to the three key research questions. This paper is an attempt to summarize both the position papers and the (transcribed) proceedings of the one day forum.

Defining e-democracy

The position papers presented a range of definitions of e-democracy:

E-democracy is a means for disseminating more political information and for enhancing communication and participation, as well as hopefully in the long run for the transformation of the political debate and the political culture. Participants in the field of e-democracy include civil society (organized and non organized), the administration, politicians and—to a lesser extent—the economy.

E-democracy should be defined broadly since computers and telecommunications, particularly tied to the Internet and web, are connected to nearly all aspects of politics and governance. From paving roads to electing politicians, electronic media are reshaping access to what people know, who they communicate with, and what

they need to know to get things done. In all of these ways, technical change can enable more or less democratic patterns of communicative power.

E-democracy (…) covers those arrangements by which electronic communications are used by those with power and the citizens they serve to interact with each other in order to inform and modify the way that power is used. e-Democracy is NOT about paying speeding fines over the Internet (that is e-government); it IS about consulting on whether the speed limit on a particular stretch of road should be raised, lowered or left as it is. It may, one day, be used as a way of empowering citizens in the process of making major national decisions.

E-democracy is anything that governments do to facilitate greater participation in government using digital or electronic means. These initiatives can include e-forums, e-town hall meetings, e-consultations, e-referenda, e-voting, e-rule making, and other forms of e-participation. I believe we can also term it as any form of 'digital engagement'.

Democracy is defined by Webster's as 'a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation.' Electronic democracy is simply the use of technology tools to facilitate democratic activities.

The Internet and e-democracy present one way to positively redefine democratic processes and reinvigorate the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives.

A common thread in these definitions is the assumption that e-democracy has something to do with the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance democratic structures and processes. But what kind of democracy would result from the extensive and innovative use of digital technologies? Would it result in changes to representative democracy—or to the emergence of direct democracy— or to a hybrid form of direct-representative democracy? Tracy Westen argued that the USA (or, at least, California) is moving increasingly 'toward a hybrid form of government' where

> … an initiative may be proposed, the legislature may respond with a compromise, there is negotiation and if it breaks apart the initiative will go forward, and if the negotiations are successful the initiative will be withdrawn and the legislature will enact the legislation, but there is always a chance that an amendment will come through the initiative process again. We will begin to see a conversation between proponents of direct democracy and representative democracy. (TW)

Richard Allan considered that

> In the European context, rather than the initiative processes we might see more mushroom political parties. The reduced cost of entry that

ICTs and the Internet provide opens up the landscape for competitors. I represent a smaller party that uses the Internet more extensively than the larger parties precisely because we do not have their resources. However, there is a perceived threat to the traditional establishment because somebody can come along, set up a new party, perhaps on a single issue, and perhaps on an issue we do not like. The low cost of entry afforded by ICTs might mean these parties are able to win elections even under the representative system without initiatives. We have seen a trend for these new parties in The Netherlands, and in other European countries, particularly the far right parties. (RA)

Janet Seaton's experience in the Scottish Parliament was that the use of ICT helped to build public confidence in the new parliament and has not led to demands for a post-representative democracy:

We have been asking about the efficacy of the e-petition system and the petition system itself, and also whether participating in discussion forums or in online debates has actually met with approval. The results inform us that the experience of participating, of itself, has improved people's perceptions of the Parliament. On the whole, they understand and accept that they will not always get the outcome they want. (JS)

Rona Zevin was also of the view that ICT 'broadened the number of people who can access that process and the number of issues around which people get involved with government about.' Tom Steinberg considered that 'the main division in e-democracy is between those services and projects that are about changing government democratic structures and those that are just about helping people use the existing structures better, and not touching the machines at all.' (TS)

What's been tried? What has worked?

The record of e-democracy initiatives and experimentation is patchy and disparate. There is no obvious logic to where e-democracy has been taken up. The USA, with a high level of broadband access to the internet and a strong record in e-government, has done relatively little; Canada and the Scandinavian countries, with similarly high broadband access have done more, but so has the UK, where broadband access has been low. The new democracies of central and eastern Europe, which came into being at the same time as the spread of the internet, have adopted elements of e-democracy as part of their policies to modernize governance.

In most countries there has been a long-term decline in formal political participation. This does not reflect public disaffection from democracy—the vast majority of citizens in democratic states support the idea of democracy—but there is a growing sense that old institutions, methods of communication and repertoires of political culture are failing to connect with most citizens.

A diverse range of projects were presented in the position papers, including:

- grass-roots projects, directed at but not by government, and government-initiated projects;

- one-off projects, run either as experiments or short-term supports for broader public participation exercises, and more sustained and institutionalized projects;

- local projects and national or even global projects;

- projects intended to promote deliberation and projects more concerned to disseminate information or support the electoral process.

Examples of each of these types of e-democracy project follow.

The BBC's iCan project (www.bbc.co.uk/ican/) grew out of a review of the BBC's political coverage following the last General Election, when turnout fell to a record low. It is aimed at people who are dissatisfied with mainstream politics but who nonetheless care about issues which affect their lives:

> iCan is an interactive service designed to help people participate in democracy and civic life. It operates as a website with support from radio and television programmes and BBC News Online. It serves three main purposes:
>
> *Information provision by the BBC:* authoritative guides to civic life, a database of organizations, classified by issue, and information on all elected representatives.
>
> *Information sharing by users:* articles, guides and advice contributed by iCan users.
>
> *Campaigning tools:* helping users get together to address issues of concern and to gain support.
>
> iCan seeks to address two obstacles which people say prevent them from trying to influence such issues:
>
> *I don't know where to start:* iCan offers leads on approximately 2000 issues in civic life.
>
> *I can't make a difference on my own:* iCan enables people to link up with others who share their concern.
>
> iCan launched in pilot form in November 2003. Alongside the website, the BBC conducted broadcast trials in five areas of the UK: Sheffield, Cambridge, Leicester, Bristol and Wales. The broadcast trials gave contextually relevant promotion of iCan (i.e. when covering stories about grassroots issues) and also, as the site developed, drew on iCan as a source of stories and contacts for news programmes. In the four months to the end of March 2004, the iCan audience grew to 100,000 unique users per month, with 6,500 registered users—i.e. users who contribute to the site. More than 500 campaigns were created. iCan is being used for the purpose for which it was designed—as a forum for addressing issues in civic life.

(Vogel, PP)

Raising the question of the model of democracy being envisaged, Martin Vogel told the forum that:

> It seems to me it is quite easy to get carried away with top-down perspectives on e-democracy. One of the things we are seeing, in this country at least, is a bottom-up approach to e-democracy. In many cases citizens are ahead of representatives and governments in terms of their desire to use new technologies for democracy, and they are seizing the agenda themselves. There are people in constituencies who understand issues better than representatives who are being forced to make decisions on hundreds of issues over the course of a year. They are using new technologies to get in touch with their representatives and point out to them that they feel certain decisions are wrong or that there are complexities they need to understand.
>
> We have seen quite a few examples of what I would call 'guerrilla e-democracy' in Britain, where clever 'techie' people make technologies which they then send out almost virally to people of like mind in order to bring about changes to Bills. A good example in Britain was the very effective email campaign to MPs on ID cards. It brought to their attention some of the complexities of the issue which were not being addressed. (MV)

A final example of an e-democracy initiative originating outside government is the Center for Governmental Studies in California which is testing a new web-based system called *Digital Democracy*:

> It is designed to encourage citizens to participate more actively in the policy-setting activities of government and link the actions of government officials more closely to the wishes of citizens.
>
> Citizens will be able to:
>
> •　Tell public officials which issues interest them by clicking issues on websites.
>
> •　Receive e-mail from public officials describing pending policy decisions.
>
> •　Answer survey questions and comment on pending legislation by e-mail.
>
> •　Receive feedback from public officials on poll results and enacted legislation.
>
> •　Obtain further information on the legislative issues being discussed.

• Increase their policy involvement through other activities (e.g. volunteering, attending town hall meetings, etc.).

Elected officials will be able to:

• Build a database of constituent e-mail addresses and substantive concerns.

• Solicit public comment via e-mail on specific issues coming up for debate.

• Conduct online polls to gain insight into constituent opinions.

• Auto-respond with substantive answers.

• Manage constituent contacts efficiently.

• Administer systems without html experience or complicated training.

• Solve e-mail overload problems.

(Westen, PP)

Government-initiated e-democracy projects are more common (at least in the reports to the forum) than grass-roots initiatives. There were several impressive examples of governments using ICT to involve the public in various levels of policy formation and decision-making. For example, in the Tuscan city of Grosseto a project for gathering citizens' opinions and ideas was launched in 2002.

Citizens were first asked to express written views to help identify and analyse problems, and then to participate in meetings on specific topics. Online discussion fora were also set up. The project, which was carefully monitored throughout its stages, was rated positively by the city: participation from associations and informal groups was high, although individual participation was lower. The use of ICT throughout the exercise ensured timeliness and transparency.

(Battisti, PP)

The US e-rulemaking initiative (www.regulations.gov/eRuleMaking.cfm) is intended to 'increase transparency and make access easier to the regulatory process (…) by allowing citizens to have more direct access to proposed regulations that set public policy':

Key objectives of the initiative include:

• Creating a government-wide, centralized online capability to access and search all publicly available regulatory material no matter what stage of adoption.

• Providing an easy and consistent way for the public to find and comment on proposed rules.

• Building a unified, cost-effective 'back room' regulatory management system to ensure efficiency, economies of scale, and consistency for public customers and the government.

• Many things about E-Gov (www.whitehouse.gov/omb/egov), the Government's program for expanding electronic government, have worked to achieve results. The concept of building once and using many times to leverage IT investments to provide cheaper, faster, and more efficient services to the public has been a success. However, the implementation of the E-Gov initiatives has posed a variety of challenges.

Making the rulemaking process more transparent has offered a new dimension to public participation. Allowing comments to all proposed regulations in one place, as opposed to searching the Federal Register document and then emailing/mailing comments, allows the public to comment more easily. The following table summarizes the cumulative usage figures from January 2003 through March 2004 for the volume of use and number of comments received by Regulations. gov, the US Government's website to facilitate participation in Federal rulemaking.

Successful hits   3,155,730

Average hits per day   9,680

Unique visitors   316,468

File downloads   110,517

Pages reviewed   1,510,292

Comments received   1,646

(Wagner, PP)

A distinction should be made between government projects initiated at the excecutive level and those established by parliaments/legislatures to encourage public participation in the process of legislative scrutiny and policy deliberation. From its outset, the Scottish Parliament (which was recreated in 1999 after a break of nearly 300 years) adopted the principles of accountability, openness, accessibility, power sharing and equal opportunities. One of the Scottish Parliament's four strategic priorities for the period 2004–07 is 'to inform and engage the public and other key stakeholders by increasing awareness and understanding of the Parliament; providing opportunity for participation in parliamentary business and activities; and maximizing the benefits of the new building.'

> The Parliament has always seen the internet as one of the major mechanisms for engaging Scottish citizens in the Parliament's business and activities. We have two websites, which we are currently redesigning. Our most successful initiatives have been: the e-petitioning system (on the main website); webcasting of proceedings; and the discussion forums, which are on the scottishparliamentlive. com site.

> (Seaton, PP)

The Canadian Parliament has experimented with running online policy consultations. As part of its work, the Canadian Parliament's Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities developed *The Canadian Pension Plan Online Consultation with Canadians* (www.parl.gc.ca/disability). This initiative represented the first interactive website for a parliamentary committee in Canada and was regarded by all concerned as a success:

> The project, which sought specifically to inform citizens and get their views on the Canadian Pension Plan Disability Program, was designed with the intent to engage society as active members of the Committee's work. The content-driven website provided, among other things, a list of upcoming events, transcripts of meetings, Committee reports to Parliament, Government responses to the reports, presentations and briefs presented to the Committee, a work plan, a list of committee members and a history of the Committee's work.

> As a consultation mechanism, the website had three specific interactive tools for citizens. *Issue polls* were used to seek input on specific themes. The site also allowed citizens to *share their own stories and experiences* in dealing with government processes and provided them with an opportunity to *share solutions*.

> In order to ensure the consultations were transparent, the Committee created a feedback loop to citizens by posting results of the issues polls as well as some of the individual stories and experiences shared by Canadians who visited the site.

> The results were significant. During the consultation period alone there were almost 170,000 page requests on the website, almost 1500 people participated in the issue poll, 135 stories were submitted and almost 30 people took the time to suggest solutions. When asked about their experience in post-consultation follow up, over 90 percent of participants said they would participate again.

> Those people involved in developing and implementing this initiative believe it was successful because it engaged *citizens as partners* in the decision making process. The Committee's strategy blended the traditional forms of committee consultation (hearings) with an integral e-consultation component. In addition to this, after the consultation participants were asked to attend a national roundtable with officials

to vet the draft report—adding increased legitimacy to the Report's outcomes and recommendations.

(Stewart, PP)

The UK Parliament has run a number of online consultations. The 2003 report from the UK Parliament's Information Committee, entitled *Digital Technology: Working for Parliament and the Public* (pp. 7–8), set out six principles for the future use of digital technology by Parliamentarians:

> • It is essential, in order to run an efficient and professional office, for Members to have reliable remote access links from outside the Parliamentary Estate.

> • There is a case for including a suitable mobile device as part of the standard set of equipment issued to Members, funded centrally; the Speaker's Advisory Panel on Members' Allowances may want to consider this possibility.

> • We suggest to the Speaker's Panel on Members' Allowances that it consider whether resources should be made available to assist Members in networking their computer hardware in both their Westminster and their constituency offices.

> • The House Administration could usefully draw up guidelines for Members and their staff (and indeed House staff) on how to meet expectations of quick response times and on storage of e-mails.

> • Members may wish to use a range of technologies to engage and consult with their constituents, such as via online surgeries and interactive fora. We recommend that support is given to Members to carry out their constituency role in this way.

> • The House Administration may need to review the allocation of resources for remote connectivity to enable additional members of staff to work from the constituency.

The UK House of Commons Modernisation Committee, in its 2004 report entitled *Connecting Parliament with the Public* (para. 59), proposes to regularize the use of online consultations:

> There have now been several experiments with on-line consultation on an ad hoc basis, both by select committees and by all-party groups. They have generally been successful and have proved effective as a way of engaging members of the public in the work that we do and of giving a voice to those who would otherwise be excluded. We urge select committees and joint committees considering draft legislation to make on-line consultation a more regular aspect of their work.

The German Bundestag's e-democracy project (www.elektronische-demokratie.de), designed to enable citizens to discuss selected legislative initiatives online, was deemed to have 'failed completely'. The story of its failure is instructive:

> The failure had two main causes. Firstly, technical problems developed when the sponsor, IBM, insisted on using inappropriate technologies that were applicable for business rather than for e-democracy tools. Secondly, the initiators failed to point out the effect which the suggestions of users would have on the initiative. Thus the project was not widely enough accepted by the internet community. In addition, the political institutions did not take the ideas from online discussions seriously, nor did they see the need to implement these ideas and proposals into the political process. Such online projects will only be taken seriously when the input of users has a legally-binding effect on actual agreements, law initiatives and discussions. Users are quite able to differentiate between real and fake calls for participation. Government administrations and politicians are not interested in using the new ideas put forth as it supposedly means more work and less power. I can name at least 20 projects in Germany to which this applies (every ministry with a forum, every federal parliament, etc.).
>
> (Dowe, PP)

There were several examples of e-democracy being tested at the local level. An online consultation in the northern-Swedish town of Kalix was presented as an example of good practice:

> The first phase of this project took place in September 2000. The idea behind it was to be very open-ended about how to define or describe the problem. So, informative texts and graphics were distributed to the populace via public meetings, fax, e-mail, telephone and newspapers. The question was basically: 'Are you in favour of change?' Almost 1,200 people participated in the 'Kalix 1 Consultation'—many by voting or commenting over the web. This was roughly 8% of the adult population. So, neither the process nor the result was anywhere near definitive and in the minds of many, it was a bit of a disappointment. Of course, how often do 8% of any city's voters participate in any kind of city planning? Such is a rarity. But if the goal was to get substantial citizen input, Kalix 1 fell short.
>
> It is our view (and the view of many in Kalix) that one major reason for the relatively small engagement was that the problem was already well known and there was not much interest generated by rehashing it.
>
> So, a second consultative project was designed: Kalix 2. This time the problem was reframed in terms of the cost and how to pay for any such resurrection of the city centre. In other words, if you want a 'Greener Kalix', should taxes be raised? Should they stay the same? Should taxes be lower? This topic definitely aroused more interest because it

surely concerned all who paid those taxes. So, although the choice of the subject definitely was prompted by what the formulators felt would be of interest to the citizens, the range of alternatives that were offered were quite narrow and so was the range of the deliberative process. The internet was used extensively in Kalix 2. Information was posted about meetings (time and place), about whom to contact and how to do that, chat rooms were set up and used, and last but not least, people could vote on the issue from their home via the internet as well as from public places as well. Every voter was given a password that could be used just once if they voted on the internet.

Did it work? Well, the turnout was far greater and so was the level of interest. About 52% of the people of Kalix participated in some way. And of the 7,000 participants, over 2,000 were over the Internet (about 28%). What is most interesting, though, is that the public's view was that change was possible but only a minor increase in taxes would be necessary.

(Becker and Ohlin, PP)

Other examples of local e-democracy initiatives included Seattle (Washington State), and the UK London borough of Camden:

www.seattlechannel.org is a government website with a difference. As a companion to the city's main website, www.seattle.gov, The Seattle Channel website organizes information by issues and tries to help interested residents to understand and participate in decisions on those issues.

About 30 hours of weekly City Council meetings are broadcast and videostreamed live. There is an indexed archive of more than 1200 videos of meetings and other public affairs programs. These videos are indexed so it is not necessary to watch the entire meeting to hear about one topic under discussion. During many public hearings, official testimony is taken by e-mail as well as in person. Over 1000 people participated in the City's last budget process using e-mail, which is now the predominant method of communication with elected officials.

The Channel's website provides detailed information about the top issues and projects going on in the city. For a typical issue, the website will include:

•   Background on the issue or topic and the organizations that are involved;

•   Videos of relevant public meetings, hearings, forums and other programs;

•   Information on upcoming community meetings;

•   Recent updates as events occur or decisions are made;

- Links to related information on the city, and other websites, news releases, local new stories and reader comments.

TV programming on the Seattle Channel has been expanded to create several weekly and monthly public affairs programs, produced and hosted by contract journalists. There is a revealing study conducted by the Alliance for Better Campaigns titled *All politics is local but you wouldn't know it by watching local TV*. The study examined programming on 45 local television stations for the week of October 5 through October 11, 2003, and found there is a near black out of local public affairs. Of the 7,560 hours of programming analyzed, less than one half of one percent—13 hours—were devoted to local public affairs shows. The Seattle Channel is trying to fill this void in local public affairs programming.

(Zevin, PP)

Camden has actively developed e-democracy services with an online portal for consulting young people and was one of the first local authorities in the UK to webcast its council meetings. Camden was chair of the pan-European Telecities working group on e-democracy between 2001 and 2003 and is currently working on an HM Treasury-funded project to create an open source e-democracy toolkit. The toolkit will comprise three components:

- A system that enables community groups to have their own website with polling and surveying capability. The purpose of this tool is to enhance the capacity of the community to engage in online democratic debate and to increase social capital.

- An online citizens' panel that will enable online questionnaires and deliberations amongst a demographically representative group of Camden citizens.

- A system that will enable local representatives to create their own websites, again with deliberative functionality.

(Mangham, PP)

Some e-democracy projects have been aimed at transnational populations. One of the most ambitious was the e-vote project (www.evote.eu2003.gr) initiated by the Greek Government during its Presidency of the European Union.

The initiative was anchored around a website (that received unprecedented traffic: 177,000 respondents). This e-Vote website made a dual contribution: it offered informative content on current European issues and the opportunity to participate in and voice opinion on policy decisions related to these issues. It did so through a clear visual language and information architecture designed to be accessible to all users, irrespective of their familiarity with the medium.

In order to accommodate cultural diversity, the e-Votes and the content were available in all eleven official languages of the European Union, as well as of the ten future member states. The site's architecture provided one click-through access to information on EU basics and to background information to topical issues, so that citizens could be informed whilst expressing their opinion. The privacy of users was guaranteed throughout the e-Vote experience.

Through e-Vote, citizens were invited to respond to multiple choice questions on topical issues such as enlargement, immigration, the environment, and the European Union's role in the world—issues that reflect the political and social priorities of the Greek Presidency's agenda. All the results were public and available in real time. In addition, e-vote offered users the opportunity to voice their opinion in a free fashion by sending comments and suggestions to European leaders through the e-Voice feature, a service offered through an automated feedback form. Of the 60,000 e-Voices submitted, the seven most frequently asked questions were selected via word-usage ranking. Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moller, Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, and Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou responded directly to these questions online.

The Greek Presidency contributed further to the e-vote process by sharing the results with top-level decision-makers. Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou regularly reported on the key findings to the Council of Ministers, so that people's views fed directly into ongoing policy debates. Rather than simply being told what Ministerial councils were discussing, the public was empowered to engage in these discussions. Moreover, the Presidency did not shy away from asking controversial and even politically sensitive questions, not usually voiced through 'traditional' channels of communication with government bodies and official institutions. Both these facts contributed significantly to the project's success.

Extract from paper by Howard and Pateli, available at: www.ijclp.org/8_2004/ijclp_webdoc_12_8_2004.htm

E-democracy projects involve more than set-up costs; it has often proved difficult to maintain them as permanent democratic features. Several of the projects reported were no longer in existence. For example, the Santa Monica PEN project, which appears frequently in e-democracy literature as an example of good practice in the pre-internet age, failed to adapt to the new environment of the web:

The PEN 'electronic city hall' was launched in 1986 as a municipally owned e-mail and computer conferencing system operated, and mainly developed by, Santa Monica's Information Systems Department. The city's residents could use a home computer or one of 20 terminals in 16 public locations to register for PEN and undertake activities on it, such as: retrieving free information about city services; completing some transactions with the City government; sending e-mail to city

departments, elected officials, or other PEN users; and participating in numerous computer conferences on topics of local concern. City authorities guaranteed a response within 24 hours to complaints and requests made on PEN.

The City of Santa Monica limited PEN to playing a role in public discussion, and based its development on the proviso that it would not be used for voting and polling, as was the case in earlier experiments with two-way interactive cable, such as in the Columbus, Ohio, QUBE project of the early 1980s. When used to support interaction between the government and citizens, PEN was generally seen to improve the government's responsiveness to the public. However, this utilization declined as it became more oriented towards the web in the mid-1990s. PEN, along with most local government websites, then became more focused on simply broadcasting—narrowcasting—information to the public. It actually retreated from a more imaginative view of e-democracy with the advent of the web.

PEN had 4,505 registered public users by 1992, about 5 percent of Santa Monica's residents. An average of about four to six hundred individuals used PEN every month. Nearly half of their accesses were to about a dozen PEN computer conferences on local and national issues, such as the homeless. PEN was of value in stimulating discussion, communicating with key opinion leaders, involving people who might otherwise shy away from public participation, and offering an opportunity for a new set of people to become involved in local government. However, participation in e-mail and conferencing declined in the face of controversy over the civility of discussions and with the migration of PEN system towards a web-based source of information.

(Dutton, PP)

By contrast, the Finish Ministry of Finance's *Share Your Views with Us* forum existed as a pilot project for several years (2000–03), but has now become permanent.

The forum was first a pilot project for several years (2000–03). In the Central Government Reform, the project was assessed to be good enough to be made permanent. No formal evaluation or study was made at that stage. The new revised permanent version of the forum was launched in the autumn of 2003. During the planning phase of the new version, specific goals were set up for the forum. At the same time some primary indicators were planned for monitoring the functioning of the forum as well as how well it achieves the goals set.

Even though the forum has been functioning for several years, it is still quite a new phenomenon in the Finnish administration. Through the first years when the forum was in its pilot phase, it was necessary to gather lessons learned and to see how the forum functions. Changes have been made based on the lessons learned, but the basic

principles of the forum have stayed the same from the beginning. Now that the forum is permanent it is necessary for data to be collected on the forum and that this data will be carefully taken into account when planning the future functioning of the forum. The indicators set for the forum will be helpful in assessing its success. It has been decided that in the near future the forum will not go through any major reforms. Now, the emphasis is on the efforts to get the Finnish ministries to use the forum more actively for consulting individual citizens. In measuring the success of this work, the indicators will be necessary.

The results of the forum according to the indicators will be looked at more thoroughly every half-a-year. The Board-of-Editors of Share Your Views with Us will be responsible for making the proposals for the future work.

As part of the evaluation, a survey is being carried out at the moment where both citizen-users and authorities are asked about how satisfied they are with the forum, both its content and the technological aspects. The surveys for citizens and authorities (33 questions altogether) include questions like:

• Where did you get information about the site?

• How often do you visit the site?

• Why (e.g. to comment, to read others comments, etc.) do you visit the site?

• Views on the system's user friendliness.

• Is this forum a good way to take part?

• Do you believe the discussions in the forum make a difference?

(Caddy, PP)

A sustainable e-democracy project, which is not government-run, but commercial, is the UK-based YouGov online polling organization which has been developing 'soft' e-democracy. According to Peter Kellner, this 'allows people to make longer responses to open-ended questions which can then be processed by the computer to map the range of responses and lead to a series of propositions. Respondents can then, in a second phase, consider a variety of propositions, with arguments for and against, and weigh up the consequences in "deliberative polling" before making their decisions. This process can be extended over several waves so that participants are truly interacting, not simply giving their "top-of-the-head" reactions.' (PK)

YouGov has conducted online consultations for commercial and government agency clients which use the greater interactivity allowed by the internet. One example was for the National Patient Safety Agency, which was interested in how the public thought National Health Service (NHS) 'adverse incidents' should be reported. Should

the terminology favoured by medical staff continue to be used, or should more down-to-earth language be employed instead? If so, what kind of language? We took respondents through a series of 'adverse incidents' demonstrating the range of medical accidents that occur, and then asked them to come up with their own terms. In a second wave, a number of respondents' suggestions were put to the whole sample, and a consensus on the best was reached. A parallel process with NHS staff produced conclusions that were acceptable both to medical practitioners and the public.

(Kellner, PP)

Summarizing the discussion about these—and many other—examples of e-democracy projects is best undertaken thematically. Firstly, it was clear from the discussion that the debate about the potential for e-democracy is closely linked to more long-standing debates about the nature of democracy itself. In recent years there have been powerful theoretical challenges to the traditional Schumpeterian notion of democracy as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.'

Secondly, few participants in the discussion regarded the technologies that enable e-democracy as being paramount. The prevailing view was that the technology exists, will continue to develop and will continue to be adopted by governments and citizens. The participants understood that technology is not neutral: it can be put to good or bad use depending on who is in control and how it is used. There was general agreement that the really important factors in e-democracy are people, institutions and processes. Josef Veress noted, for example, that 'there are questions beyond the technical ones about how people will understand the process and get to the real issues behind the information.' He went on to say that 'Voting on its own does not solve the problem [of participation]. You can involve far more people, but if they do not have any real knowledge, it will just mask their misunderstanding of the process.' (JV)

Thirdly, there was a concern that e-democracy projects need to be independently and systematically evaluated. Joanne Caddy suggested that:

We are beholden to think rather strongly about what success would mean. Would we know what success looks like if it hit us in the face? Would we be able to say whether something is a successful online consultation or a successful bottom-up movement? We do not have the tools for either offline or online public participation. This is not a question of technology; it is a question of how we assess the efficacy.

I agree with the idea that we need to have a kind of policy quality measure. Will it actually help in terms of the quality of the decision made, for example? Will it help in terms of customer satisfaction in those who have participated, whether they be elected MPs, or, importantly, the citizens themselves? (JC)

The Canadian approach to evaluating online consultation and engagement activities was summed up in the following table produced by the Privy Council of Canada in 2001:

Design	Organizational	Policy	Technical
Develop online tool in consultation with target group	Assess time and resources needed	Develop government-wide posting policy and guidelines	Develop common software tools and ensure they are user-friendly
Use as complement to in-person discussion	Invest in marketing and promotion	Provide central contact for legal advice (e.g. privacy statements)	Make site available in both highband and lowband versions
Assess need for one-way (i.e. comments) and two-way (i.e. discussion) communication	Consider need for trained facilitator/ moderator (bilingual)	Provide mentorship, training and support to organizers in identifying their IT needs.	Ensure simple access with no/auto plug-ins
Set out objectives, timetable and key questions	Provide regular summaries and an archive of all comments received	Compile and analyse lessons learned	
Clarify role of participants and organizers. Identify government observers	Consider providing support in evenings and weekends (i.e. when site gets highest use)	Develop standard package of materials (e.g. promotional notices) that can be adapted	
Consider asking an independent body to run the consultation on behalf of government (e.g. an NGO)	Organize training for e-consultation administrators and moderators	Coordinate timing of consultations to avoid consultation fatigue	
Ensure relevant links to information sources	Ensure regular feedback	Ensure internal coordination between policy, communications and IT units	

Examples of Federal Online Consultation/Engagement Activities, Ottawa: Privy Council Office, May 2001

What are the barriers?

Four kinds of obstacle to the success of e-democracy were identified in the forum discussion: political, participatory, organizational and technological.

Political barriers

A first political barrier concerns definition. In his talk, Matthew Taylor had argued that e-participation should be connected to the online provision of government services. But Christoph Dowe was troubled by the 'confusion (…) between the two fields of e-democracy and e-administration (…) The difference between e-democracy and e-administration is that e-administration is service-based and to some extent it is very close to government, whereas e-democracy has to do with making democracy work better with communication.' Bridie Nathanson expressed concern that 'the objective of obtaining real citizen engagement is unlikely the further down the road we go with governments taking the initiative and deciding what information they want to put online and what issues they want to consult about, with whom, and within what framework.'

A second political barrier is institutional: politicians and bureaucracies find e-democracy disruptive, at least initially. Janet Seaton pointed to 'internal', institutional barriers to e-democracy. Politicians do not want to engage with untried methods. The other risk was the danger of e-participation working too well, so that 'we cannot cope with what we open ourselves up to.' (JS) Peter Kellner expressed concerns about the regulatory framework for e-consultations. Who should run them and analyse them? Neither government nor private companies would be fully trusted. He felt that 'this should be used to help and inform representative democracy and not replace it. There is a role for structured conversations of a citizens' jury type, or if you a like, some kind of public commission involving the public and not simply experts, and maybe the Oxford Internet Institute.'

Thirdly, there is the problem of locating e-democratic practices within the complexity of governance. Yuri Misnikov pointed to a disconnect between national and local/regional policies for e-democracy. There was also a problem of whether e-democracy policies had adequate political backing: 'Normally these issues are handled by mid-level government officials, advisers, or heads of department, but when it comes to ministerial and cabinet levels it is more difficult. There could be declarations but these are not translated into real political backing. It is a major problem how to get political commitment and support at the highest level so it can help to roll out implementation.' Joanne Caddy expressed concern about 'globalized decision-making, whereby many of the policy decisions are taken out of the reach of national decision-makers.'

Fourthly, there is the question of the public itself. The Schumpeterian conception of the democratic public is much more passive and undemanding than that conceived by some e-democratic theorists. Norris expressed scepticism about public demand for e-democracy, pointing out that his research 'does not support the existence of a demand for either e-government or e-democracy.' Richard Allan responded by suggesting that there was a common tendency 'to confuse the fact that people do not like party politics and the traditional institution with a dislike for politics.' Allan argued that 'In the old days, the politicians were the barristers and only the rich and powerful had access to barristers. If you wanted to go to the court of political decision-making you had to

go through a barrister, and for most people that meant no access. Nowadays they all want their 'day in court', and that is happening because they now have the tools and the confidence to do it, plus a range of other cooperative factors. It reflects the DIY culture of the Internet. Every Internet application, every business that goes online, offers you a much more DIY option than the old option. The rhetoric is for doing it yourself and empowering yourself and this also seems to be happening in politics.' Marty Wagner's response to this was that 'we are making it easier and easier to stop things than to do things' and ICT 'are just new tools for slowing things down.' Wagner was concerned about trying to reflect the views of a volatile citizenry. Arthur Lupia raised three potential obstacles to e-participation. Firstly, what he calls 'the bottleneck of attention': 'The fact is there are so many web pages but you can only view a few at a time. You have to win the battle for people's attention.' Secondly, 'the rules of credibility' whereby people decide what to trust. And thirdly, the need for people to form coalitions and make compromises in the process of decision-making. Tracy Westen saw the public's lack of basic knowledge about the political system, such as who their representatives are, as a non-technical obstacle: 'Until we give citizens the basic information about who works for them and what they do, it is very difficult to see how that electronic democracy can function.'

Barriers to participation

There is an extensive literature about barriers to offline participation. It would be surprising if these kinds of barriers were not replicated in the online context. Rebecca Vigil-Giron expressed concern about the new participatory barrier of reaching digitally excluded groups, such as native American Indians in her own state of New Mexico. Donald Norris expressed concern about differential use patterns of ICT—not just access—and also expressed a worry about the possibility of e-participation exercises being dominated by special interests. Thomas Ohlin also addressed the problem of differential participation in e-democracy. 'We want to know what types of groups have access to the public files that are the basis for much democratic participation.' He referred to work in Sweden which has been looking at 'the changes over the last three years in terms of access to public information and the possibility to participate for a certain number of groups. We looked at the factors of age, language problem, gender, education and income. We have seen that the differences are not very large, but among these groups we still have large problems with age, language and ethnicity.' Joanne Caddy referred to 'the increasing individualism of individual participation in the public sphere' whereby 'people have a "menu" approach to the issues they want to be involved with.'

Dowe expressed concern about 'pseudo-participation': 'We are all aware of how many forums there are, but nobody really cares about them once they are closed.' Peter Kellner asked 'What happens to the output of the conversation?' Janet Seaton suggested that 'People will want to participate if they understand how they can contribute to the political process, and believe that their contribution will be taken seriously. Elected representatives and democratic institutions can contribute by employing e-democracy initiatives only where participation is meaningful, and can be shown to be so.

Cheryl Stewart spoke about the need 'to look at e-democracy in the context of the larger citizen engagement agenda'. E-democracy should not stand alone.

Organizational barriers

The success of any democratic exercise is as much a matter of process as values and aspirations. Some of the barriers to e-democracy reflect immature or under-resourced organizational approaches. Andreas Papandreou raised the problem of publicizing/ marketing online democratic experiments. His message was that 'We should try to avoid designing projects that will ultimately fail and thus disenchant people with the whole process. You do not want to have a deliberative process where people ultimately feel it is just a gimmick by a politician to get you involved, but in essence I am not being involved. You need to be very clear about the limitations of what you are providing.' Vasilisis Koulolias expressed a concern about a lack of coordination across e-democracy initiatives and called for 'a central point where people can find out what e-democracy projects are running.'

Papandreou was also concerned about appropriate techniques for aggregating mass public input, as in the EU e-vote. 'This raises the issue of AI and how you can use filters effectively to look at mass levels of participation and employ complex search engines to try to find frequencies of questions posed to politicians and use these to get the issues raised.' Joseph Veress argued for the need for trusted intermediaries to help people have confidence to participate.

Technological barriers

Finally, there is the e-element: we are used to the rhetorical depiction of ICT as a democratic enabler, but the reality is rather more complex. Technologies are socially constructed to perform specific functions. Marty Wagner warned that the technology is not neutral, but transformative: 'it changes the game'. Andreas Papandreou expressed concern about the gap between wanting to use e-democracy techniques and understanding the technology. Too often e-democrats are dependent upon experts and commercial interests, which have their own wish to promote specific tools.

Vasilis Koulolias pointed to a problem in thinking about e-democracy in terms of a single technological platform. He favoured being 'more innovative in deploying projects that use different platforms, and not only the Internet or mobile communications.' Tracy Westen proposed that:

> Attention should not be confined to just one technology (e.g. the Internet). In the digital age, all political communications will be reduced to a digital bit-stream, and the bits will be distributed by Internet, television, cable television, satellite television, cell phone, microwave, optical fiber and wireless networks. Users will ultimately not care how they receive this data, only how useful it is and how quickly they can access what they need. e-Democracy projects should therefore consider integration of technologies through multiple platforms. (TW)

Norman Jacknis suggested that 'the Internet could still be made easier to interact with' by utilizing 'more conversational (artificial intelligence-based) interfaces, support for

multiple languages in a diverse society, and even non-visual delivery mechanisms, such as speech recognition and computer speech.'

What's needed from policy and research?

The practitioners, academics and policy-makers were asked to suggest areas of research and policy that would help overcome existing barriers to e-democracy.

What do we need to know?

As Manuel Castells has argued, society is increasingly characterized by network relationships in which:

> … communicative power comes from their capacity to be interpreted and rearranged in a multi-vocality of meanings, depending on the receiver, and on the interactor. Any assigned meaning becomes instantly obsolete, reprocessed by a myriad of different views and alternative codes. The fragmentation of culture and the recurrent circularity of the hypertext, leads to the individualization of cultural meaning in the communication networks. The networking of production, the differentiation of consumption, the decentring of power, and the individualization of experience, are reflected, amplified, and codified by the fragmentation of meaning in the broken mirror of the electronic hypertext—where the only shared meaning is the meaning of sharing the network.

Citizens are required to make their own sense of the world around them, searching for information and constructing knowledge as part of their reflexive civic status. Thierry Vedel proposed that we should look more closely at how citizens use information and what they demand from e-democracy projects:

> … one strand of research should look at the actual users of information resources and how they combine different sources of information. Of course, the Internet is changing so many things because it can provide people with new tools and facilities, but at the same time the Internet can often complicate the situation (…) Citizens know far more than we think and they use very sophisticated strategies to get information. Citizens can use very selective processes to find information. (TV)

Vedel also pointed to the necessity of gaining better understanding of how organizations adapt to new flows of information and communication:

> The impact of the Internet on communication between elected officials and citizens, or communication within political organizations means that people can have very quick interactions. However, the communication between elected officials and citizens still has to adhere to established rules of law which have not changed. Consequently, in many French administrations you can raise questions via email but you will get a written reply, because by law if an elected official's response is not in

writing it has no legal basis. It will be a slow process, but we have to change the rules and the institutions around people. (TV)

Tracy Westen wanted to see tools developed which could help create civic networks:

How do we identify other like-minded individuals with shared concerns about particular issues? How do we combine with other like-minded individuals, so that our collective lobbying clout can be more effective? (TW)

Pierre de la Coste expressed the view that 'there is not enough work being done to discover what people want from e-democracy, e-administration and e-services.' In a similar vein, Peter Kellner suggested:

Why not conduct a consultation exercise with the public about democracy and consultation? I would see the exercise in various forms, including open platform, closed YouGov-type surveys, some moderated discussions, some sequential questionnaires, and some having more information than others. We could possibly kill two birds with one stone. Firstly, we would be finding out what people felt about democracy in terms of things like the drawbacks and whether they felt they were left out. We could find out what they are most concerned to get involved in and in what form and in what way. Secondly, one could test how far one could create with a random set of citizens, people who are willing to engage at some depth with new information and ideas.

One thing that struck me over this afternoon is that, so far, I do not think we have talked about engaging the very people we are talking about engaging. Therefore, I am proposing that we close that circle by having some form of engagement exercise, not only here in Britain but also in America, Australia, Canada, Greece, New Zealand and the other countries that are represented here who want to do this on a multinational basis. Do all roads lead to Rome? Do we get the same answers by the different means? Or, do we arrive at different answers, which would be not only interesting but also worrying? I think this exercise could be a very rich experience. (PK)

Arthur Lupia felt that more, and better, studies of website usability were needed. These should 'try to replicate the user's environment' and should be tested by independent users within comparative settings. Paul Timmers was concerned about the accessibility and neutrality of online consultations and polls: 'If you invite the public into the deliberative process you have to ensure the questions are framed in a way they can understand them.'

Richard Allan called for 'quite straightforward quantitative research (…) over time' to 'assess the amount and nature of communications that representatives receive.' This 'would give us the ability to understand how people are communicating with us, and perhaps provide a knowledge base for selling it to other elected representatives. For instance, we could tell them that now they can contact all these 18-year-olds who

want to use the Internet, but there is no contact with the ones who do not use it.' Allan also suggested that we need better knowledge of who uses the internet.

Alasdair Mangham called for research on 'how we build tools which are specifically designed for democratic purposes':

> So far, smart people have been taking tools that were built for something completely different and repurposing them so that they can start engaging people in the democratic debate. For instance, they have taken ideas like a chat-room and attempted to re-engineer it so it can work in the context of democracy, without really looking at how democracy works. To extend the analogy, it would be like saying a specific parliament building cannot be built, but instead you can use the space in the little-used multi-storey car park. (AM)

Chris Lee argued for the need to research low-cost technologies that could facilitate e-democracy. Mangham also called for research on e-tools to coordinate work within government institutions.

Tomas Ohlin (and Ted Becker, who was not present) called for more research on the potential of the internet as a channel for public deliberation:

> As we all know, one of the most important properties of any democracy, whether representative or direct or some hybrid or degree of both, is the importance of informed deliberation before voting on any kind of issue, problem or plan. Legislative assemblies routinely engage in debate. Political campaigns are premised on the assumption that voters will cast ballots on what they learned during the campaign. City planners hold hearings where evidence is presented and weighed before plans are made and implemented, and so on. There have been a smattering of innovative citizen deliberation projects that have had (or are in the process of having) direct impact on the public decision making processes of some polities. But by far the clearest examples of this phenomenon are face to face (F2F), not electronic in whole or in part and when, perchance, this does occur via some *electronic* input, it is frequently accidental or serendipitous and difficult to measure since there was no way to construct measurement instruments for something that is unexpected. (Ohlin and Becker, PP)

Bill Dutton argued for the need to 'get away from a mass media paradigm':

> Too many people (…) continue to look at this as 'television thinking' applied to the Internet. The Internet is a different medium; it is not TV. We do not want lowest common denominator e-democracy. TV is 'one to millions', 'one to billions'; the Internet is not the best technology for that because it is 'one to one, many to many, one to many, many to one'. All the discussion about e-democracy will not be confined to the Internet, it is multimedia. You cannot assess the Internet as if it is TV, and in terms of a mass audience and mass use—there is a

very diverse group of citizens. TV news is only watched by a small, diminishing proportion of the public. (WD)

In relation to this point, Martin Vogel said that the BBC 'is looking at ways of bringing talk into coverage of politics. I am not sure it has been entirely successful so far. There has been a rush towards voting and texting in messages and sending in emails, but it is quite superficial and does not amount to much. We are now trying to look at ways of making interactivity more meaningful.'

Several participants (RA, CD, JC) were concerned to establish more rigorous methods of evaluating e-democracy projects.

What policies are needed?

In its most ambitious sense, proponents argue that e-democracy entails a new conception of citizenship, where the e-citizen is empowered in ways that have hitherto been unavailable to most people. Tracy Westen proposed a Digital Bill of Rights, giving citizens access to government information through a 'digital freedom of information act'; opportunities for citizens to identify their elected officials and find out what they do and when they do it via email notification of all upcoming decisions on issues on which one registers an interest; retrievable videos of city council and the legislative body meetings; software to help citizens organize, lobby and combine around issues of importance; free email accounts; publically funded information during elections in a digital format that is online and searchable about candidates' positions; electronic voting systems that are both private and secure; and an evolving form of direct democracy which might not involve the initiative process for binding the votes, but could involve non-binding annual public opinion polls on important issues (TW). Not all participants subscribed to these proposals.

In relation to the rights of the e-citizen, Richard Allan referred to the UK House of Commons Information Committee's adopted principles for digital interaction between the public and Parliament (reproduced above), and Andreas Papandreou argued that e-tools were needed to help representatives find citizens. He argued that:

> … there is a huge demand for democracy. In the past century, one of the best ways to ensure against famine was the ability of people to voice their views. There is a huge demand. People may not have the means to actually express that demand. Those who need it most do not have the funds. Democracy is a kind of public good, and many people enjoy the benefits of it, but the costs are concentrated (…) The more we can give people cheap tools of interaction and communication, the more we will be able to strengthen democracy, and people will look at how they can use their voice in better ways. (AP)

On another aspect of citizens' rights, Norman Jacknis wanted policies to protect minority rights in the electronic democracy era.

Alasdair Mangham argued for sustainable rather than experimental or pilot e-democracy projects. He said that that 'it would be good to have a national, local e-democracy policy. I do not think anyone has sat down and agreed the policy for e-

democracy for our national government, or a policy for our local government.' Cheryl Stewart observed that 'we are in a holding pattern around trying to develop standards around e-democracy and getting "pilotisis".'

A key policy question, which came up several times, concerned whose responsibility it is to promote and administer e-democracy. Donald Norris was firmly of the view that 'we do not want government to hijack e-democracy. We want government to be part of the equation, but to echo what many people have said, government is not democracy.' Joanne Caddy favoured the use of trusted intermediaries:

> Brand names mean something. For instance, you feel you can trust the Smithsonian site for reliable information, or the BBC site. These mediators are often outside of government, or at arm's length to government, but they will become increasingly important and citizens will look to them for packaging and facilitating the access to information. Then we have to consider the regulatory environment for those and how we can build credibility into information mediators. (JC)

Richard Allan wanted to see policies developed to facilitate global democratic debates:

> I get hundreds of letters every year about the WTO, or the EU. People want me, as their known local representative, to engage with those institutions, even though, constitutionally, I have no locus at all. Again, for me to turn around and conspire in powerlessness with them would be extremely unhelpful. 'I cannot do anything either', is not an appropriate response. (RA)

In contrast, Chris Philipsborn favoured 'the micro approach', arguing that 'there is a citizen demand for e-democracy but it is on a local scale.'

Nick Penston argued that e-democracy must be integrated into 'mainstream policy developments' and we should 'avoid creating an "e-democracy ghetto".' Joszef Veress pointed to the need to assess 'the productivity goals of e-democracy', by which he meant 'the capacity of civil society for self-organization and self-regulation and for creating networks which can work together to allow civil society to be connected regularly to governments, the political elite and the business elite.'

Conclusion: what next for e-democracy?

Democracy has always been a social experiment. It has worked best not as a constitutional and institutional edifice, but as an aspirational set of guiding values, constantly being refined, updated and morally interrogated. E-democracy is, in one sense, a stage in the historical evolution of the democratic experiment. Itself an experiment, e-democracy seeks to use new, interactive technologies to give greater reality to the democratic claim that government is in some sense both by and for the people. E-democracy is not an experiment in replacing what has evolved so far (in the sense that communist or fascist ideologies sought to recreate governance from the roots), but a supplement or complement to the existing models.

The idea of e-democracy as a hybrid solution to the old theoretical debate between representative and direct democracy is suggestive. If the problem with direct democracy is populism and the frustration experienced with representative democracy is disconnection between representatives and the represented, the notion of direct representation, as a politically appealing and constitutionally responsible synthesis of both, could turn out to be a way of reinvigorating democracy's legitimacy in an age of interactive services and relationships.

There is not a single, accepted definition of e-democracy. The meaning of this term will differ between political cultures and will depend upon whether it is being applied locally, nationally or globally. Countries are likely to learn from one another as they take further steps down this road; there is a place for international comparisons and standardized evaluation methods.

It is very clear from the forum discussion that the debate about e-democracy is essentially a debate about what kind of democratic governance people want and think feasible in the digital age. The e-democracy debate has given people permission to question basis elements of the democratic experiment. Some critics of e-democracy are in fact sceptical about the very notion of popular rule; some defenders of e-democracy would question whether democratic governance has ever really been given a chance. But the most forceful message from the forum was that e-democratic trends are emerging whether particular actors (politicians, bureaucrats, citizens) want them or not. The choice is not between governing in the age of the internet or not, but how contemporary governance can utilize and be in step with the digital opportunities that surround them and the digital expectations of an increasingly online generation. The debate is about adaptation rather than ideals.

The problem of endless experimentation is that wheels tend to be recreated and sustainable projects are scarce. It was clear from the case studies that more coherent evaluations of experiments are needed and should be shared internationally. One outcome of the forum could be a virtual network for such evaluations to be shared between scholars, practitioners and policy-makers from various countries. A distinction needs to be made between short-term pilots and ongoing experimentation, designed to learn appropriate lessons as they develop. Democratic projects will only have an impact within a sustainable context; one-off exercises will always run the risk of being seen as tokenistic or politically marginal. Sustainable e-democracy requires strong buy-in from political and administrative actors.

The relationship between e-democracy and the broader e-government agenda was raised several times by forum participants. On the face of it, there are three quite obvious propositions to be made about this relationship: firstly, e-democracy cannot be separate from e-government because how governments make policies, pass laws and deliver services—locally, nationally and globally—is the most important democratic agenda facing us; secondly, e-democracy is bigger than government, involving the more autonomous political spheres of communities, workplaces, culture and even the family; and thirdly, as well as government-to-citizen (G2C) and C2G interactions, there is an important sphere of C2C interaction through which social capital is generated and democracy strengthened. These propositions are in tension with one another, but are

not contradictory. E-democracy is both top-down and bottom-up; it is both about the institutional processes of hierarchies and the more fluid arrangements of networks.

Another problematic relationship of e-democracy is with technology itself. Participants agreed that technology was merely a facilitator, whereas democracy is the problematic deliverable. Much of the debate about e-democracy operates with an under-theorized conception of technology as reified collections of hardware, software and wires. A more sophisticated conception of technology includes consideration of the production and relation between knowledge, practices, roles and cultural devices. Forum participants were hesitant about confronting questions of technology; they tended to either ignore the technologies or call for a catholic approach to the use of multimedia. More thought needs to be given to how and why ICTs are produced, purchased and used in specific ways. For example, as Dutton suggested in the forum discussion, one could argue that ID cards are more central to the future of e-democracy than e-voting, but 'most academics and practitioners seek to define e-democracy more narrowly, such as linking it with e-consultation or e-voting.' It is certainly true that any serious attempt to assess the impacts of digital technologies upon democracy must firstly examine technologies that are not intended to have democratic effects as well those that are, and secondly recognize the politically negative as well as the benign effects of ICT.

For several of the forum participants, e-democracy had a potentially transformative role to play. Kellner's view was that:

> The capacity of public institutions to distribute information, argument and questions without constraints of cost or time, coupled with the ability of electors to engage in debate and give full responses whenever they want, without leaving their home, provides an opportunity for democratic innovation that is unparalleled in modern times (…) Modern technology allows those citizens with an interest or expertise in a particular subject to delve into it as never before. There is no technical reason why ministers and parliamentarians should retain their privileged access to information. It can be truly democratized. (PK)

Stuart McKee's sense of the historical significance of the trend towards e-democracy is stated in equally powerful terms:

> We've arrived at a critical crossroads during this time of change, poised on the edge of a global metamorphosis that affects us all. Humans have faced these historical moments before in the form of the printing press, photography, the telephone, the radio, the television and the Internet. As these new technologies continue to erase boundaries, remove limitations and blur borders, the world feels 'smaller'. Ideally, this connectedness will lead to the emergence of a global citizenry—a population that may still only vote locally, but which will think, act and organize globally. The question we should be asking is whether we will participate in this development or whether we will simply watch it happen. Have we positioned our organizations to be instrumental in this time of change? (SM)

Giddens has written suggestively about the need to 'democratize democracy'. E-democracy could be seen as being central to such a modernizing project. We are convinced that future research on e-democracy needs to focus on the dynamic nature of contemporary democractic structures and processes.

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Schumpeter, J. A. (1976) Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, 5th edn. (Allen and Unwin: London), p. 250.

Footnotes

[1] Where we quote directly from the position papers, citations are given as (name, PP); where verbatim quotes from the forum are used they are marked with initials in parentheses. Other references and quotations are cited in the usual academic fashion.

Appendix 1. Forum participants and position papers

Titles of position papers are shown in italic. Where more than one author contributed to a position paper, this is indicated: note that not all Forum participants presented position papers. People who could not attend the Forum are indicated with an asterisk.

Richard Allan MP, Secretary, UK Parliament e-Democracy Group

The e-Democracy perspective of a UK Member of Parliament

Daniela Battisti*, Strategy and Policy Office – Coordinator of the Research and Studies Unit, Minister for Innovation and Technologies, Italy

The Italian Way to e-Democracy

Christopher Philipsborn, Head of BT European Corporate Affairs

BT's Experience in e-Democracy Projects

Joanne Caddy, Administrator, Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development, OECD1

Promise and Problems of e-Democracy

Stephen Coleman, Cisco Professor of e-Democracy, Oxford Internet Institute

Researching the New Agenda for e-Democracy

Pierre de la Coste, author of 'L'Hyper-République', Paris

Christoph Dowe, Executive Secretary, pol-di.net e.V.

Political Communication and Digital Developments: pol-di.net in Germany

William Dutton, Director, Oxford Internet Institute

Uncaging e-Democracy

Mátyás Gáspár*, President, EUTA; with

Tom Wormald*, International Relations Manager, HTA,

Szilard Molnar*, Researcher, ITTK, and

József Veress, Deputy President, National Development Office, Hungary

(e)Democracy and Telecottages in Hungary

Professor Paul Herrnson, Director, Center for American Politics and Citizenship, University of Maryland, College Park

Norman J. Jacknis, Chief Information Officer, Westchester County, New York

e-Democracy Initiatives, Obstacles and Future Directions: The Case of Westchester County, New York

Peter Kellner, Chairman, YouGov

e-Democracy—What is the Market Research Society's role?

Vasilis Koulolias, Access2Democracy, Athens

Christopher L. Lee, Executive Director of Administrative Services, City of Mobile, Alabama, USA

The City of Mobile's Focused Strategic e-Democracy Initiative

Arthur Lupia, Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan

Stuart McKee, Director, Washington State Department of Information Services and CIO, State of Washington

Washington State: A Leader in Digital Government

Alasdair Mangham, Programme Manager, E-Services Development Team, London Borough of Camden

Building a New Paradigm for e-Democracy

Yuri Misnikov, ICT-for-Development Coordinator, Democratic Governance Regional Programme, UNDP Regional Centre, Bratislava

Establishing Productive e-Democracy Linkages between Technology, Society and the Economy

Alisoun Moore, CIO, Montgomery County Maryland

e-Democracy: A View From the Field

Victoria Nash, Policy and Research Officer, Oxford Internet Institute

Bridie Nathanson, Director, Polpit Ltd, eDemocracy consultancy

Donald F. Norris, Maryland Institute for Policy Analysis and Research, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Tomas Ohlin, Stockholm, Sweden; with

Ted Becker*, Auburn, USA

The Impossible Dream: Measuring the Power of Internet Deliberations in Setting Public Agendas and Influencing Public Planning and Policies

Andreas Papandreou, Assistant Professor of Environmental Economics, University of Athens, and member of Access2Democracy

Using Web-based Questionnaires to Promote e-Democracy

Nick Penston, Public Sector Business Development Manager, Cisco Systems

Key Issues and Policy Challenges for e-Democracy

Janet Seaton, Head of Research and Information Services, Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament: Developing e-Democracy

Tom Steinberg, MySociety project, UK

Cheryl Stewart, Director of Parliamentary Affairs, Office of the Minister of State for Public Health, Government of Canada

The Internet and e-Democracy: An Opportunity to Create a Space for Engagement between Parliament and Citizens

Paul Timmers, Head of Unit eGovernment, European Commission, DG-Information Society

Agenda for eDemocracy: an EU perspective

Dirk Toornstra, Director of Parliamentary Documentation and International Cooperation, European Parliament

Thierry Vedel, Research Fellow, CNRS, Paris

Rebecca Vigil-Giron, Secretary of State, State of New Mexico

> *New Mexico's e-Democracy Initiatives*

Martin Vogel, Project Leader, BBC iCan

> *Supporting Participation in Democracy and Civic Life*

G. Martin Wagner, Associate Administrator for Governmentwide Policy, US General Services Administration

> *e-Democracy and e-Government in the United States*

Paul Waller, UK Cabinet Office

> *UK e-Democracy Projects: Experiences, Plans and the Role of Policy Makers, Experts and Researchers*

Tracy Westen, Adj. Professor, USC Annenberg School of Communication; CEO, Center for Governmental Studies

> *Innovations in Communications Technologies and the Democratic Process: Recent US Projects and Lessons Learned*

Rona Zevin, Director, Office of Electronic Communications, City of Seattle

> *Seattle's Democracy Portal*