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# Evaluating e-Participation

Frameworks, Practice, Evidence

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Lourdes Torres  
Editors

# Evaluating e-Participation

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Springer

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Georg Aichholzer, Vienna;  
Herbert Kubicek, Bremen;  
and Lourdes Torres, Saragossa

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABC	Attitude, behavior, and choice
CAHDE	Ad hoc Committee on e-Democracy of the Council of Europe
CH <sub>4</sub>	Methane
CIRCE	Research Centre for Energy Resources and Consumption
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
CO <sub>2e</sub>	Carbon dioxide equivalents
CoM	Covenant of Mayors
CRed	Community Carbon Reduction Program
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
DG	Directorate General
DVD	Digital versatile disc
e-SQ	Electronic service quality
ECRP	European Collaborative Research Projects
EF	Emission factor
eGEP	eGovernment Economics Project
EIPA	European Institute of Public Administration
EPSA	European Public Sector Award
ESF	European Science Foundation
EST	Energy Saving Trust
EU	European Union
EVM	Expected value model
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FWF	Austrian Science Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GIS	Geographic information system
HCI	Human-computer interaction
I = PAT	Equation in environmental science (Human Impact on the environment equals the product of Population, Affluence, and Technology)
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
ICT	Information and communications technology
IFEU	Institute for Energy and Environmental Research in Heidelberg
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change



IT	Information technology
kWh	Kilowatt-hour
LCCN	Low Carbon Communities Network
LED	Light-emitting diode
LFU	Least frequently used
MRT	Media richness theory
MZES	Mannheim Centre for European Social Research
N <sub>2</sub> O	Dinitrogen monoxide
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NOA	Needs, opportunities, and abilities model
NPM	New Public Management
OC	Online consultation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGD	Open Government Data
PB	Participatory budgeting
PTT	Post, telephone, and telegraph companies
QCA	Qualitative computerized analysis
RCT	Rational choice theory
RFI	Radiative forcing index
RSS	Rich Site Summary
SD	Standard deviation
SES	Socio-economic status (model)
SMS	Short Message Service
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UBA	German Federal Environment Agency
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIZAR	University of Saragossa
UNPSA	United Nations Public Service Award
UNPSD	United Nations Public Service Day
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
WWV	World Wide Views

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Georg Aichholzer, Herbert Kubicek and Lourdes Torres

**Abstract** This book presents the results of a 3-year international research cooperation on concepts and methods to improve the evaluation of e-participation in the area of sustainable development and climate protection.

### 1.1 How It Began

In November 2007, the European Science Foundation (ESF) invited scholars from all over Europe to a research conference entitled “Electronic Democracy—Achievements and Challenges” held in a former monastery in Vadstena, Sweden. Under the moderation of Herbert Kubicek about 40 researchers, well known seniors and young PhD students, tried for 3 days to identify the theoretical and methodological challenges for the future research agenda in different subareas of e-democracy, for example, e-consultation, e-petitioning, e-movements, e-voting, and more. They agreed that the biggest challenge in all of these fields is the evaluation of the deployment, use, and impact of the new electronic tools in their respective context.<sup>1</sup>

The biggest barrier to valid assessment is the lack of comparability in existing research, which is mostly case oriented, providing a set of highly heterogeneous cases. There is a need for international and interdisciplinary comparative empirical

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<sup>1</sup> See the conference report by Herbert Kubicek at [http://www.ifib.de/publikationsdateien/ESF\\_e-democracy\\_Report\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ifib.de/publikationsdateien/ESF_e-democracy_Report_2008.pdf) and the press release by the ESF [www.esf.org/hosting-experts/scientific-review-groups/social-sciences-soc/news/ext-news-singleview/article/edemocracy-research-requires-all-inclusive-approach-esf-conference-told-397.html](http://www.esf.org/hosting-experts/scientific-review-groups/social-sciences-soc/news/ext-news-singleview/article/edemocracy-research-requires-all-inclusive-approach-esf-conference-told-397.html). Accessed July 27, 2015.

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research. As the effects of electronic tools are highly dependent on their context, it is necessary to compare similar tools in a similar context in order to detect success factors. Success can only be assessed and success factors can only be identified by comparing a number of cases with the same kind of participation on the same subject and by the same target group of participants.

The ESF offers the format of European Cooperation Research Projects (ECRP) for this kind of research under a two-step review process and with particular support for the cooperation between research teams from at least three different countries. It was during the conference that four researchers from Austria, Denmark, Germany, and the UK sat down together and started a discussion on what such a research cooperation might look like. We agreed that we were most interested in evaluating government-initiated processes of citizen consultation and collaboration. From previous research on this kind of participation, we knew that a salient issue and personal concern are the most important success factors for reaching a large number of participants. As this discussion coincided with the preparation of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, we agreed that climate protection is an appropriate subject of individual concern and, at the same time, of European significance. In addition, the subject of fighting climate change has a methodological advantage because it allows the comparison of the impact of participation in a quantitative way via the measurement of the CO<sub>2</sub> reduction achieved<sup>2</sup>.

We also felt that the four of us only covered the northwest of Europe and that we should get a partner from Southern Europe on board. We invited the research team at the University of Saragossa, Spain, to join us and they accepted. The group of six senior researchers, Georg Aichholzer (AT), Jens Hoff (DK), Herbert Kubicek (DE), Ann Macintosh (UK), and Lourdes Torres and Vicente Pina (ES) not only represented different countries but also different disciplines, and thereby permitted a comprehensive and interdisciplinary concept of evaluation. We met several times in order to elaborate a coordinated research plan for an ECRP, which was submitted to the ESF in April 2008. The official title is “Comparative Assessment of E-Participation in the Context of Sustainable Development and Climate Change.” For outside communication we chose “e2democracy,” meaning “electronic environmental democracy.”

## 1.2 The Set Up

In order to assess the impact of electronic tools a quasi-experimental design seemed necessary, in which one group of citizens participated by traditional means (face-to-face, telephone, and mail) and a second group via the Internet. There should be more than only one project of this kind in each participating country. We agreed to find three local communities of different sizes in each of the participating countries. For the acquisition of cooperating local communities, the signatories of the Aalborg

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<sup>2</sup> In this book we use the terms carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2e</sub>) interchangeably.

Commitments<sup>3</sup> were considered to be the most promising, as they had committed themselves to having their citizens participate in the efforts of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction and to providing a regular monitoring. However, several of the signatories did not welcome the offer of a free evaluation of their activities and a complementary contribution to their monitoring, and it took some time for letters of intent to be included in an application for funding.

The joint application successfully passed the review process by the ESF, but an additional review by the national research funding organizations is necessary for the funding of each team. While the Austrian, German, and Spanish agencies; the Austrian Science Fund (Der Wissenschaftsfonds—FWF); The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft—DFG; and the Ministry of Science and Innovation (Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación) in Spain approved the funding, the Danish and the British agencies did not. Therefore, the remaining three teams had to take over the tasks assigned to the two excluded teams.

When the national research teams were established and the local communities which had provided letters of intent were informed, some were not willing or able to provide the necessary personal support for carrying out the project. In Germany, in particular, it turned out that the three cities which had signed the Aalborg Commitments and letters of intent to participate in the project had not conducted any kind of citizen participation in their initiatives against climate change, or any systematic monitoring including private households. Consequently, they were not able to raise the resources for setting up participation processes with their existing budgets or were afraid that they would not succeed in recruiting the desired number of 400 panelists. So, the search for participating communities had to start all over again. In Spain, the cities of Saragossa and Pamplona immediately upheld their commitment to the project. The third local administration which had signed a letter of intent, the Provincial Government of Biscay, was more interested in issues of water supply rather than CO<sub>2</sub> reduction when planning the details. The research team was willing to follow this priority but the results would not have been comparable. In Austria, an active involvement materialized for two of the contacts which had signed letters of intent to participate in the e2democracy (e2d) project. In the case of Bregenz, the definite agreement came about immediately, and in the case of Styria three regions had been considered for participation by the Regional Development Agency Styria<sup>4</sup> (southeastern Styria, Schladming, and Mariazeller Land); the decision was finally made in favor of the latter within a rather short time span. Negotiations with our original third candidate, the city of Vienna, extended over several weeks, starting with the Local Agenda 21 Office which finally found it would be more appropriate the project be hosted by the city's Climate Protection Coordination Office. After several meetings of scoping the fit with the Coordination Office's strategies and activities it finally became clear that they preferred to pursue alternative formats of citizen participation and advice in energy efficiency as opposed to joining the e2d project. Initial attempts to continue the search for interested alternative candidate

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.sustainablecities.eu/aalborg-process/commitments>. Accessed July, 28, 2015

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.landentwicklung-steiermark.at/>. Accessed July, 28, 2015