Over the past ten years, electronic government (also called e-government or digital government) has evolved to a prevalent field of research and practice. In the past few years, a high demand to focus more on the aspects of good governance in e-government arose. Two terms coined these developments: e-participation and e-governance. While e-participation concentrated on citizen participation in democratic decision making and policy formulation therewith using modern ICT, e-governance and public governance developments focused on organizational and societal value aspects. Recent trends bring together the three foci of past evolutions in research and practice of e-government, e-participation and e-governance. The OECD has published a study in 2009, where it addresses the integration of these three aspects. In the study “Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services,” it is argued that “open and inclusive policy making offers one way to improve policy performance and meet citizens rising expectations. Public engagement in the design and delivery of public policy and services can help governments better understand people’s needs, leverage a wider pool of information and resources, improve compliance, contain costs and reduce the risk of conflict and delays downstream” (OECD, 2009). Likewise, the European Commission (EC) has introduced an objective in its seventh Framework Program, which is dedicated to “ICT for governance and policy modelling” (European Commission, 2011). The objective specifically focuses the involvement of the general public in policy making and in strategic decision making thereby exploiting advancements in ICT. The first set of projects that were funded by the EC started around early 2010 and a second set of projects started in autumn 2011.

The objectives of the EC research and innovation in the area of ICT for Governance and Policy Modelling broadly covered two themes:

a. Governance and Participation Toolsets that proposed advanced tools embodying structural, organisational and new governance models that are capable of
empowering and engaging societal groups and communities through utilizing mass cooperation platforms. These toolsets should also enable creation, sharing and tracking of group knowledge that cuts across language and cultural interpretation and facilitating transparency and tracking of inputs to the policy making processes.

b. Policy Modelling, Simulation and Visualisation to facilitate real-time opinion visualisation and simulation solutions based on modelling, simulation, visualisation and mixed reality technologies, data and opinion mining, filtering and aggregation. Such simulations should allow consideration of options based on the simulated behaviour and wishes of individuals, groups or communities (at local, regional and national levels) to understand the possible outcomes of government proposals, decisions and legislation to forecast potential outcomes and impacts of proposed policy measures. Methods and tools for policy modelling, simulation and visualisation should facilitate the empowerment and engagement of individuals, groups and communities in policy making processes.

This Special Issue of the *International Journal of Electronic Government Research* (IJEGR) is based on a workshop that was organised by the co-editors which was aimed at cross-fertilizing approaches and insights from the first set of projects funded by the EC in the field of ICT solutions for governance and policy modelling. The workshop was organised in the frame of IFIP’s international EGOV (http://www.egov-conference.org) and ePart (http://www.epart-conference.org) conferences held in Delft, Netherlands in September 2011. The aim of this workshop was to: a) provide an environment for cross-fertilization among the projects funded in ICT for governance and policy modelling; b) provide a platform to discuss and exchange knowledge and approaches, and to network among the different EC-funded research projects; c) present approaches and current results of the EC-funded projects in the field; d) discuss relevant aspects pertinent to the topic and emerging in the different projects; and e) identify common themes and directions for future research agendas in governance and policy modelling. The papers from the projects presented at this workshop are offered in this special issue and bring together the state of the art in innovative research in the area of public sector governance and policy modelling research in Europe.

The first paper offered in this special issue is by Kardara et al. and describes how governments can benefit by embracing Web 2.0 technologies and taking advantage of the vast the flows of information available online. The paper is titled “Policy Testing in Virtual Environments: Addressing Technical and Legal Challenges.” The paper presents an overview of a project, in which a novel way of accessing and evaluating public opinion is introduced by using popular virtual spaces such as 3D Virtual Worlds and Social networks, as testing environments and developing an interface that would allow applications to operate inside them, capturing the reactions of citizens to prospective policies. In the paper the authors describe the proposed +Spaces platform emphasising on technical challenges such as Virtual Spaces interoperability as well as legal requirements related to processing user created data and how to addressed them.

The second paper by Wandhöfer et al. is titled “Engaging Politicians with Citizens on Social Networking Sites: The WeGov Toolbox.” This paper continues on the same theme of how governmental policy makers can use social networking sites to better engage with citizens. The idea presented in this paper is to connect both the policy makers and the citizens using social networking. In order to overcome the difficulties of sieving through multitudes of comments in a social networking context to get to the crux of a debate, the project proposed in this paper uses automatic analysis components to summarise and categorizing large volumes of texts. The paper highlights the significance of involving policy makers within the design process when developing tools for engaging them in social
media contexts. The paper describes the phase of combining the policy makers’ requirements with the technical feasibility to develop a software prototype, where the policy analysis tools can be validated within the domain of policy makers and policymaking. The paper sets up the environment for evaluating this approach and to address the question of usefulness with respect to a dialogue with citizens.

The third paper is titled “Citizens Collaboration and Co-Creation in Public Service Delivery: The COCKPIT Project.” This paper is by Kokkinakos et al. and here again the authors highlight how Web 2.0 in general, and social media in particular, constitute the emerging, if not already established, mass collaboration and cooperation platform between citizens themselves, and between citizens and public administrations. They describe the COCKPIT project which builds on these developments and based on a highly synergetic approach aims to define a new Governance model for the next generation public service delivery, by combining various research areas.

The fourth paper by Tsohou et al. is titled “Supporting Public Policy Making Processes with Workflow Technology: Lessons Learned from Cases in Four European Countries.” The purpose of this paper is to investigate the feasibility of adopting workflow tools for the support of the decision making processes that lead to development of public policies, despite the variant institutional settings. To do so, public policy making processes from four countries are examined and analysed. The findings indicate that the policy formulation processes show commonalities among the stages although they belong to different policy domains and contexts leaving open the possibility to use workflow technology’s benefits for the policy-making process.

The fifth paper is by Charalabidis and Loukis and is titled “Participative Public Policy Making Through Multiple Social Media Platforms Utilization.” This paper describes the research concerning the systematic, intensive and centralized web 2.0 social media exploitation by government agencies for widening and enhancing participative public policy making, which is conducted as part of the PADGETS research project (‘Policy Gadgets Mashing Underlying Group Knowledge in Web 2.0 Media’). The proposed approach in this project is based on a central system, which publishes various types of policy-related content (e.g., short text, long text, images, and video) and micro-applications in multiple social media simultaneously. The emerging research questions and challenges, both technical and non-technical are discussed in this paper.

The sixth paper by Wimmer et al. is titled “Method and Tools to Support Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Development: The OCOPOMO Project.” This paper presents a comprehensive policy development approach that integrates scenario generation (therewith engaging stakeholders) and formal policy modelling based on declarative rule-based agent modelling. The paper provides a literature overview on the relevant research fields such as e-government, scenario technique and formal policy modelling. The project has developed the method and a set of tools to support stakeholder engagement and policy modelling along the steps of the OCOPOMO policy development process, which are outlined in the paper.

Compiling this special issue of IJEGR on ‘the state-of-the-art e-government research in Europe’ has been a rewarding experience for us and we hope you enjoy reading the papers contained in this issue.

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