

## GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Immigrant Inclusion by E-Participation (IleP)

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As the Internet becomes more accessible in the European countries, it becomes more and more justified to consider the social media paradigm as potential instruments that support citizens' more effective social, political, and cultural participation in society. Many obstacles, however, remain on the way of harnessing new possibilities to the service of facilitating inclusion and participation of marginalized groups. Immigrants, even though they may use information and communication technologies – ICT for social participation, they may not always benefit from these technologies for participation in the political life or in politics of countries where they have immigrated.

“Immigrant Inclusion by e-Participation” (IleP) is a multi-stakeholder regional project that addresses immigrant communities and public authorities in Estonia, Finland and Sweden. The aims of the project include bridging the tools, activities, and concepts of citizen communities, on one hand, and the governments' top-down participation practices and technologies on the other, in terms of interoperability and integration of technologies. The Joint International Work-

shop on Immigrant Inclusion by e-Participation was organized within the project framework in 2-3 November 2011 at the University of Helsinki in Finland. The workshop gathered authorities on national and local levels involved in e-democracy and e-governance; immigrant and multicultural non-governmental organizations; and researchers in e-democracy and inclusion of immigrants in participatory decision-making processes. The event aimed at creating a discussion forum and interaction between authorities, NGO actors and immigrant societies on immigrant inclusion by e-participation.

The main findings of the IleP project suggest that e-participation of immigrants in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden is challenged by several obstacles. These challenges are grouped under four main areas: access, interaction, cultural/political cultural differences, and technical/management issues. The findings of the IleP also show that the use of ICT by the authorities is not automatically enough for attaining successful e-participation, especially regarding vulnerable groups such as immigrants. Authorities need to be more aware of the diffi-

culties this group encounters in the online social inclusion process and take these difficulties into account. Both authorities and immigrants express the need for guidance and training on how to cope with these challenges in order to make most of the ICT for better e-participation for ultimately a more inclusive society. The IIEP project thus produced two manuals based on the empirical analysis and the expertise of the researchers: one manual addressed primarily to the authorities and the other one addressed primarily to the individual immigrants and immigrant organizations. These manuals provide conceptual and contextual background on e-participation. Their main value, however, derives from the analytical presentation of the challenges and the possible concrete solutions to cope with those challenges:

- **Access:** to immigrants, and allow immigrants to access authorities;
- **Interaction:** with immigrants and immigrant organizations as stakeholders;
- **Cultural/political cultural differences:** be aware of differences, evaluate their institution's political culture;
- **Technical/management issues:** improve the technical and management conditions;

With this special issue, the IIEP aims at sharing its findings but also the discussions of the event with the international research community, and even at elaborating the subject in a wider spectrum with contributions from researchers in this field who were not present at the workshop. The special issue thus brings together various perspectives on how authorities and immigrants may use new ICT for more inclusive and democratic societies. We are delighted to have received papers from other parts of Europe which we believe enrich the discussions.

The first paper, "Young Immigrants' Internet Political Participation in Germany: Comparing German East Europeans and German Turks", is by Viktoria Spaiser who has elaborated the presentation that she has given at the international workshop. She discusses the

differences of the offline and online participation of young people in Germany from two different backgrounds.

The second paper, "E-Migration: a New Configuration of Technological, Geographical and Social Spaces" is by Nihil Olivera whom the special issue welcomes from outside of the event. Olivera presents a theoretical reflection, over a case study of migrants in Catalonia from different backgrounds, about the technological, geographical, and social characteristics of e-migration.

The third paper, "Civic and Political E-Participation of Young Immigrants: 'Digital Hope' For Inclusion?", is by a research team from Portugal that includes Carla Malafaia, Maria Fernandes-Jesus, Norberto Ribeiro, Tiago Neves, Joaquim Luis Coimbra, and Isabel Menezes. This is another paper that the special issue welcomes from outside of the international event. This paper discusses the digital exclusion and the challenges of e-participation by comparing the migrants and non-migrants, who all speak Portuguese, in Portugal.

This special issue also includes an interview with Edward Andersson. Andersson is the deputy director of Involve UK, and he shares his experience and opinion on e-participation from the policy and development point of view.

Finally, the readers find a review of the book of Nico Carpentier, *Media and Participation*, a site of ideological-democratic struggle. Carpentier is an academic expert on media and participation. He discusses in his book the concept of participation and how it relates to ideological democratic struggle in media, based on various theoretical reflections as well as cases.

We hope that you will find this special issue interesting and inspiring for more research in the field of e-participation (of marginalized groups).

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Immigrant Inclusion by e-Participation (IleP) is conducted under the Central Baltic Interreg IV Programme between October 2009 and April 2012. The lead partner of the project is the University of Helsinki, Palmenia Centre for Continuing Education, Finland. The other project partners include Tallinn University,

Institute of Informatics, in Estonia; Ministry of Justice in Finland; University of Helsinki, Social Research/Media and Communication Studies in Finland; and Södertörn University in Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> The IleP manuals are available online on <http://www.supportingdiversity.eu/>

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