Chapter 6
Ubiquitous Participation Platform for POLicy Makings (UbiPOL): A Research Note

ABSTRACT

The purpose of UbiPOL project is to develop a ubiquitous platform that allows citizens be involved in Policy Making Processes (PMPs) regardless of their current locations and time. However, literature highlights one of the foremost reasons that make citizens de-motivated in engaging themselves in policy making—the ignorance of germane policies and PMPs within the government organisations. It is highly

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INTRODUCTION TO UBIPOL

With the needs of new governance models to enable the wider and deeper participation of citizens in PMPs, electronic participation (e-Participation) research studies have shaped a new stream of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications in electronic government (e-Government) (Bingham et al., 2005; Vigoda, 2002). Recently, the rapid advances in mobile computing technologies also facilitated the emergence of mobile participation (m-Participation) to allow citizens to be involved in PMPs even on the move (Haaker et al., 2006; Junglas & Spitzmüller, 2005). This type of system mostly focuses on how to provide citizens with ICT tools for access to the central debating forums within governmental systems (Kanstrup et al., 2006; Macintosh et al., 2005). However, as many research studies hinted the effectiveness of such e-Participation tools can be maximised only when the end users (citizens) are committed and have proactive attitude to the PMPs (Macintosh, 2007). As a result, it is an issue to devise ICTs to make citizens motivated to be involved in PMPs apart from enabling them to access the PMPs.

UbiPOL project seeks to develop a new governance model in which citizens can participate in policy making processes in the middle of their everyday life overcoming spatial and time barriers. The core of the governance model is a ubiquitous participation platform that motivates its users to be involved in PMPs. Literature reveals that one of the reasons that make citizens de-motivated in policy making is the ignorance of relevant policies and PMPs in governments and their roles in the policy making processes (March & Olsen, 1997; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; March & Olsen, 1989). Specifically, citizens feel that there is a glass barrier between their everyday life and PMPs in government. It is suggested that the more they find connections between their everyday life activities and relevant policies, the more they become pro-active or motivated to be involved in the PMPs. For this reason, UbiPOL aims to provide context aware knowledge provision with regards to policy making, i.e. through UbiPOL enabling citizens in identifying any relevant policies along with other citizens’ opinion ‘whenever they want’ ‘wherever they are’ according to their everyday life pattern. As a result of this platform, citizens are anticipated to be more acquainted with the newest relevant policies and PMPs for their participation during their routine life activities. Moreover, this platform is also anticipated to provide policy tracking functionality through a ‘workflow engine’ and ‘opinion tag’ concept to improve the transparency of PMPs. As a final point, the platform intends to facilitate policy makers to collect citizen opinions more efficiently as the opinions are collected as soon as they are created in the middle of citizen’s everyday life. UbiPOL provides security and identity management facility to ensure only authorised citizens can have access to relevant policies according to their roles in PMPs. The delivery of the opinion and policy data over the wireless network is secure as the platform uses leading edge encryption algorithm in its communication kernels. UbiPOL is a scalable platform ensuring at least 100,000 citizens can use the system at the same time (e.g., for e-Voting applications) through its well proven automatic load balancing mechanisms. The privacy ensuring opinion mining engine prevents unwanted revealing of citizen identities and the mining engine prevents any unrelated commercial advertisements are included in the opinion base to minimise the misuse of the system.