Chapter 13
Portals as a Tool for Public Participation in Urban Planning

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ABSTRACT
In this article it will be shown how different general types of portals can be utilized to foster public participation processes in urban and regional planning. First portals and the objectives of their use in the public sector are explained. This happens before the background of different concepts of administrative reform and a transition of government to an electronic manner. Then public participation will be described and different categories thereof are presented. This part forms the basis for the delineation of electronic participation in urban planning. Finally the already introduced general portal types will be applied to distinguish several kinds of participation portals.

INTRODUCTION
Public administrations utilize the advantages of portals in various dimensions. Electronic government supports a transformation of the way how governments and their administrations conduct their daily business. Public institutions try to achieve a more open style of communication with their citizens. Many, especially at the local level, even seek a stronger involvement of active residents.

Information and communication technology can support the involvement of citizens in many fields of government: from policy development through budget planning towards urban land use planning. The different activities can be concentrated and made accessible with the help of internet portals supporting participation. According to current research internet portals can be divided into four categories: Entry points, information pools, service centers and service clusters.

Entry points provide the user with A-Z listings to the websites of public administrations, local government, members of parliament, political organizations, relevant media and public institutions. Information pools make information from the public
realm available in easy to understand language and different media formats. In the field of participation they might provide information about tools for publishing, participation and self-organizing for citizens like wikis, chats, blogs and news groups. Service centers can offer direct participation through different methods and tools. Citizens can get directly involved in budget planning or urban land use planning activities. Service centers could also provide e-voting processes of public bodies and political organizations. Service clusters give an overall access to many different participatory portals. They provide one-stop-access to all participation processes and support citizens by offering search and notification services (von Lucke, 2008).

In this chapter two examples of public participation processes relying in part on electronic portals in Germany will be depicted and categorized according to the above described model. Instances will be chosen from different administrative levels and thus differing geographical scopes.

The objective is to illustrate the potential of portals for supporting public participation. By depicting two current examples of internet portals in Germany the potential as a tool for participation is shown.

The research methods used include literature review and internet research. In order to identify, understand and classify selected examples of e-participation portals in Germany relevant literature will be reviewed. This work will cover the fields of participation and e-participation as well as internet portals. Internet research will be conducted to identify the examples, especially in the field of urban planning, for further analysis and to gain knowledge about best practices of e-participation portals. The objective of this design is to understand the potential of internet portals to provide an additional channel for participation in the field of urban planning.

BACKGROUND

Portals: Objectives and Types of Internet Portals

Internet portals play an important role in the modernization of the public sector. Their ability to provide a unified access to different services and IT-systems can enhance the service delivery of public sector organizations. Thus in this chapter the underlying conditions and goals for using portals in public authorities and the different types of such portals will be delineated.

In order to keep competitive as a city, region or nation and at the same time cut costs public authorities constantly have to re-define their core mission and procedures. Reducing red tape and thus becoming more attractive for citizens as well as businesses is a major goal. With the rise of the Internet in the mid 1990s the focus of electronic government initiatives became providing online information and digital public sector services. With more and more services being accessible through electronic media further raising the bar in electronic service delivery is increasingly difficult. The customers and clients of the public sector expect better services as they are used to online purchasing, banking, auctions and more complex digital process chains like in the automobile sector. Public authorities have realized the need to provide even more multifaceted electronic processes. For this to happen though, still separate back-end systems within the public administration have to be integrated (United Nations, 2008; Lenk, 2007).

One approach to allow for more flexibility is to separate the customer facing parts from the general staff of a public authority. Traditionally public administrations are organized vertically. Every officer fulfills both paperwork and customer care. Thus highly trained and specialized staff members often have to deal with more ordinary tasks like guiding customers through filling out forms. By
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