A State-of-the-Art Review of Applied Forms and Areas, Tools and Technologies for e-Participation

Kostas Ergazakis, National Technical University of Athens, Greece
Kostas Metaxiotis, University of Piraeus, Greece
Tassos Tsitsanis, National Technical University of Athens, Greece

ABSTRACT

The concept of e-Participation is important for both citizens and decision makers. From the citizen’s perspective, e-Participation provides the opportunity to achieve and satisfy the need to be heard by politicians and participate in the decision-making and policy formulation processes through the use of ICT. On the other side, politicians are also able to promote and encourage public participation through communication channels with citizens and act in line with public opinion. During the past years, the e-Participation landscape has been growing and developed. Currently, there are many applied forms and areas of e-Participation. At the same time, there are a growing variety of tools and technologies that are available to enhance e-Participation. In this paper, the authors present a complete overview of the e-Participation landscape, through the state-of-the-art review of these tools, technologies and areas of e-Participation. This overview is of value to researchers and practitioners who want to have a knowledge base for further research and practical implementation in the wider field of e-Participation.

Keywords: Correlation, e-Participation, Technologies, Tools, State-of-the-Art

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, internet and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in general, have made available a massive amount of information that is spread around the net rapidly and is continuously updated. Towards this direction, several communication channels have been developed in order to offer improved and increased access to high quality information (in various forms: text, audio, video, maps, etc), appealing to a wide range of audience of all ages and used in everyday basis by many the citizens. In addition to simple information provision, ICT, offer citizens the opportunity to interact among them, express opinions, participate in
communities sharing common interests, etc. In

general, ICT is a powerful tool that can help
increase social engagement of people, creating
in this way a unique opportunity for achieving
strong public participation in the decision mak-
ing processes, through several e-Participation
forms (Macintosh, Coleman, & Lalljee, 2005).
However, the main raised question is: What e-
Participation can really achieve?

E-Participation is very important for both
citizens and decision makers (Macintosh, 2004,
2006a; Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). From the
citizens’ perspective, e-Participation offers
people the opportunity to achieve and satisfy a
main need, the need to be heard by the politicians
and interact with them (Adams, Haston, Gil-
lespie, & Macintosh, 2003; Adams, Macintosh,
& Johnston, 2005). The main characteristic of
representative democracy is that citizens elect
those politicians who share common ideas and
interests with them, in order to participate on
behalf of them in the decision making process
(Tambouris, 2008). However, in real life, even
political active citizens, they don’t often have
the opportunity to discuss with politicians, and
the expression of their opinion is limited in the
narrow context of a simple political conversation
with other citizens (Graber, 2002). Therefore, it
is important for politicians to be involved in such
communications, so as to have access to various
and diverse opinions and take them into account
during the decision making process, increasing
in this way, the involvement and participation of
citizens in the overall political context (Malina
& Macintosh, 2002).

On the other hand, politicians shall promote
and encourage public participation in order to
create communication channels with citizens and
act in line with the public opinion, to the degree
that this is possible. Elected representatives are
elected from citizens to act for their common
interest and it is important to understand that only
if they represent citizens in a way that reflects the
opinions expressed by the majority, they are going
to retain the power that they were given. Thus,
governance shall be humanized and, through
e-participation, to represent people in direct and
accessible terms (Berman & Mulligan, 2003).

Nowadays, there are many applied forms
and areas of e-Participation. At the same time,
there is a constantly growing variety of respec-
tive tools and technologies that are available
in order to enhance e-Participation. The main
purpose of this paper is to present in a coherent
and comprehensive way a complete picture of
the e-Participation landscape, through the state-
of-the-art review of these tools, technologies and
areas of e-Participation. This overview should
be of value to researchers and practitioners
who wish to have a knowledge base for further
research or for any kind of practical implemen-
tation, in the wider field of e-Participation.

In this respect, the next section provides
a general context and background of the e-
Participation field, presents the associated
critical challenges as well as some methods
to support and increase public participation
through electronic means. Section 3 focuses on
specific areas, where e-Participation is applied.
Section 4 presents existing tools that are used
for the enhancement of e-Participation, while
section 5 presents technologies supporting e-
Participation systems, in terms of information
provision and retrieval. Section 6 presents the
correlation between e-Participation areas and
tools / technologies, and finally, section 7sum-
marizes the main conclusions and some future
research challenges.

2. GENERAL CONTEXT
AND BACKGROUND OF
E-PARTICIPATION

e-Participation is a term that is closely related to
e-Democracy and can be defined as the exploita-
tion of ICT for engaging citizens to participate
as much as possible to democratic procedures,
interacting among them, as well as, with politi-
cians and decision makers and providing them
with the necessary information and appropriate
rights in a way that reinforces their role in the
decision making process (Masters, Macintosh,
& Smith, 2004).

However, there are many other definitions
of e-Participation and e-Democracy, that focus
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