

Institution: Edinburgh Napier University
Unit of Assessment: 11 - Computer Science and Informatics
Title of case study: Enabling greater citizen participation in governance: e-petitioning
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In 1999 Ann Macintosh joined Edinburgh Napier University to establish the International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC). The centre has been very successful in delivering a wide range of services that go beyond the early vision of teledemocracy to encompass many novel forms of e-participation including e-petitioning and extensive youth participation. The centre has attracted significant funding from both UK and European sources to support research that has led to the deployment of e-participation by a number of governing bodies across Europe and led to significant participation of people in the democratic process. In particular the e-Petitioner system developed from the original ITC research and now exploited by the organisation public-i has proved highly popular and very effective with a large number of local authorities and other organisations.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Digital governance, or teledemocracy, concerns the societal impact that information and communication technology (ICT) has on the process of government. It concerns not just the technological infrastructure to support governance processes, but also how and why people participate once a suitable infrastructure is in place. Although the provision of on-line government services dates back to 1978, it was the late 1990s before the subject really got established with the publication of a special issue of IEEE Computer in Feb. 2001 (Volume 34, issue 2) and early investigations into 'government on-line' by a number of governments.</p> <p>In 1999 the International Teledemocracy Centre (ITC) was established as a joint project between Edinburgh Napier University and BT Scotland and Professor Ann Macintosh was appointed to lead the initiative. BT Scotland provided some resources mainly in the form of senior management promoting the ITC within Scotland and software development time. Thanks to this input, the first e-petitioning software system was subsequently developed for use by the new Scottish Parliament, which had been established in 1998. This software was developed into a number of different versions focusing on the different needs for different types of participation.</p> <p>However, from the early days of the ITC the focus of the research involved a socio-technical approach to understanding the wider issues of e-participation. These included the functionality, the 'look and feel' of the software, processes, guidelines, instructions and integration into the organisation's business, whether the organisation is a local authority, national government or other institution. Early on a novel research approach was developed (Section 3, reference 1) that enabled a focused research programme to be undertaken that dealt with issues such as transparency and trust in e-participation. The research considered different user groups such as young people (Section 3 reference 2) and journalists (Section 3 reference 6), different types of consultation such as petitions and elections (Section 3 reference 3) and their different requirements for both software and processes (Section 3 reference 4). The influence on policy making (Section 3 reference 5) is another important aspect of the work.</p> <p>Research into e-participation continued through the 21st century with funding from the European Union and contract research with local authorities across Europe. The research has produced a rich understanding of the e-participation process in general and e-petitioning in particular. The software system called e-petitioner was developed and evaluated during this period during the EuroPetition project. Most e-petitioning systems inherit something from ITC's original systems, but it is the accompanying processes and integration into the democratic process that also demonstrates the impact.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whyte, A. and Macintosh, A; Transparency and Teledemocracy: Issues from an 'E-Consultation.' In Journal of Information Science; July 2001, 27 (4) pp187-198. 2. Macintosh, A., Robson, E., Smith, E., Whyte, A. (2003). Electronic Democracy and Young People. Social Science Computer Review, 21(1), 43-54 3. Xenakis, A., Macintosh, A. (2004). Major Issues in Electronic Voting in the context of the UK pilots. Journal of E-Government, 1(1), 53-74. 2003 4. Adams, N., Macintosh, A. (2005). e-Petitioning: Enabling Ground-up Participation. In:

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Funabashi, M., Grzech, A. (Eds.) Challenges of Expanding Internet: E-Commerce, E-Business and E-Government. (pp. 265-279). Poznan, Poland: IFIP.

5. Macintosh, A. (2006). eParticipation in Policy-making: the research and the challenges. In: Cunningham, P. (Ed.) Exploiting the Knowledge Economy: Issues, Applications and Case Studies. (pp. 364-369). IOS press.
6. Taylor-Smith, E. And Buckner, K. (2008) 'Designing e-Participation with Balkan Journalists'; in Peter Parycek and Alexander Prosser (eds.) 'EDem08 E-Democracy Conference, 29th – 30th September 2008, Danube University Krems, Austria', Austrian Computer Society, Vienna, Austria

Funding:

1. EU: SmartGov (IST-2001-35399) February 2002 to January 2004. The project partners were the University of Athens, the Greek Ministry of Finance, Archetypon, TNB, Indra, the City of Edinburgh Council.
2. EU FP6-2004-26985 eRepresentative Project from February 2006 to July 2008 <http://www.erepresentative.org/> developed and evaluated Tools to support elected representatives.
3. EU - WEB.DEF: Western Balkans Democratic Participation: January 2007 to March 2009 <http://www.web-dep.eu/> developing Online portals and community forums to increase democratic participation in the Western Balkans.
4. EU- Europetition 2009 – 2011 ICT for Public Services programme. eParticipation Programme of DG Information Society of the European Commission.
5. EU - HuWY: Hub Websites for Youth Participation Project ran from January 2009 to March 2011 <http://huwy.eu/> Pilot distributed dialogue to inform and involve young people on Internet policy themes (e.g. Cyberbullying, Child abuse, ID theft, privacy and phishing and File-sharing) in Estonia, Germany, Republic of Ireland and UK

4. Details of the impact

The impact of the research during the assessment period of 2008 – 2013 is notable for its broad reach and significance for a number of beneficiaries. The e-Petitioner system has been used by the Scottish parliament (Section 5, evidence 1) and the Bundestag in Germany (Section 5, evidence 1). It is currently used by 24 local authorities across the UK (Section 5, evidence 6). It is used by the student union at King's College, London (Section 5, evidence 3) and by local authorities across Europe (Section 5, evidence 4). The software company Public-I built an open source e-petitions system for Bristol City Council, based on the ITC system and supported by ITC consultancy (Section 5, evidence 5).

The Scottish Parliament used the ITC e-petitions until August 2012 and are still using the system to track petitions submitted up to August 2011. A total of 1344 petitions were processed by the system. A report on the use of the e-petitioner system for the Bundestag (Section 5, Evidence 1) states:

“The Scottish Parliament was the first elected assembly in the world to introduce an electronic petition system and integrate it into parliamentary procedure. In particular, the technological functionalities of internet-based signing and discussion of petitions on the E-Petitioner system have attracted considerable international attention and recognition by academics and politicians alike. “

ITC translated and adapted e-Petitioner for the German Bundestag. This was used during the assessment period and received a very positive review by Riehm, Böhle and Linder (Section 5, Evidence 1). They comment “Judging by the popularity of the e-petition platform alone, public petitions can be seen as an unqualified success. The share of electronically submitted petitions to the German Bundestag rose from 17% in 2006 to 34% in 2010. At the same time, public petitions appear to be particularly attractive for citizens, since their share of submitted petitions rose from 5% to 24%. Overall, from September 2005 to the end of 2010, more than 3 million signatures were counted for about 2,100 public petitions, and more than 100,000 written contributions to discussions were posted on the forums.”

As stated above, the e-Petitioner system is used by 24 local authorities across the UK (See Section 5, Evidence 6). For example, the Royal Borough of Kingston were using the e-Petitioner service in April 2009 and 17 petitions, with a total of 561 signatures were raised between 1/01/2008 and 31/03/2009. Birmingham City Council have a very active e-petitioner site and Bristol

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has 255 petitions at various stages of being processed.

The e-petition web site gives this example:

“Bristol City Council was one of the first councils to use our ePetition system and has seen significant participation since the system started in January 2008. One petition has seen more than 30,000 signatories, while another has seen in excess of 10,000. Notable petitions have included:- Better lighting and more police patrols on the cycle path: a petition pressed for a safer cycle route to encourage greater cycle use into the city and improvements in related environmental and community safety issues.

Keep Banksy: a petition called for a piece of street art by artist Banksy to be kept following demands for its removal. Following widespread support the piece was preserved.” (Reference from Evidence 6)

Figures supplied by the data controller at Public-I for the assessment period 2008 – 2013 lists 1185 petitions at 32 institutions across Europe with 124,569 unique signatories (Evidence 8). Thus there is considerable reach and significance of this case study for society and culture and for the empowerment of individual citizens.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Ulrich Riehm, Knud Böhle and Ralf Lindner (2011) Electronic Petitioning and Modernization of Petitioning Systems in Europe http://www.tab-beim-bundestag.de/en/pdf/publications/reports/AB146_Summary.pdf
2. UK local Authorities: Birmingham http://epetition.birmingham.public-i.tv/epetition_core/:
Bristol http://epetitions.bristol.gov.uk/epetition_core/:
Royal borough of Kensington http://www.kingston.gov.uk/achived_petitions
3. King’s College Student Union: <http://petition.kclsu.org/>
4. Some local authorities using e-petitioner across Europe: Commune di Vicenza, Italy http://www.europetition.it/epetition_core/:
Andalucia, Spain <http://www.europetitionandalucia.es/>:
Sweden -joint venture between Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, Linköping and Piteå http://europaforslag.se/epetition_core/
5. Quotation from Public-I’s website: “Our e-petitions tool has been created using non-proprietary technologies that are free for anyone to use. Developed around Local Government best practice and working closely with Bristol CC and [Edinburgh] Napier University.” <http://www.public-i.info/products/>
6. <http://www.public-i.info/products/epetition/>
7. Contact at Public-I (1 of 2)
8. Contact at Public-I (2 of 2)