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**A checklist for the introduction of e-democracy tools**

Prepared by the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee on e-democracy (CAHDE)

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The following list refers to policy makers as well as to individual citizens and NGOs.

Conditions for the introduction of participatory tools differ depending on the intentions and aims of particular democratic processes and the actors' perspectives: is it information you want to offer/get, consultation or involvement you are planning/you claim, collaboration or empowerment you want to achieve<sup>1</sup>?

Reflections on political motivation, role of participants, legitimacy of results, and the appropriate tool are helpful to develop an *agreed* framework for the participative process.

### **General issues to discuss *before* the implementation of an e-participation tool**

- Which concept of governance do you want to follow?

Which concept of citizenship do you want to encourage, or, from the citizen's viewpoint, claim?

The aims and consequences of each concept must be clear and transparent for all. Formulating general objectives for the participative process determines the normative framework.

- Is it a bottom-up or top-down process? If it is top-down, is there an official political commitment not only at the government level, which sets off the participative process, but also at related levels?

Is it possible to guarantee commitment outside election periods?

Ensuring political commitment for the whole process is necessary to avoid failures and frustration, for example, regarding the legitimacy of results.

- What is the aim of the participative process?  
Is it a (consensus based) decision, a compromise between selected groups, a tool to collect experts' recommendations or differing opinions to get an impression of what individuals/the people think?

What are the expectations concerning the role of participants, the process in its entirety and its perceived results? Do they differ from each other?

It is necessary to be clear about the intention and aim of the participative process in order to avoid expectations varying too greatly and the risk of disappointment.

- How to deal with the results of the process?

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.iap2.org.au/spectrum.pdf>, accessed 3 January 2007

Discuss questions of influence capability (related to issues of institutional representation and legitimacy) and reason, the relevance and purpose of the participants' input in the policy making process.

- Is political culture an important influence?

Consider the relation between societal needs and participative behaviour; participative methods, (technical) tools and results, and if it might be necessary to combine various methods to avoid democratic shortfalls.

## **Practical preparation**

### **Diagnostics I (political culture):**

- What are the traditional methods of negotiation, participation and decision making?

An analysis of actors, levels and methods of negotiation and decision making; democratic deficits, power relations and lobbying; general political culture and related policy fields, is necessary to find innovative, needs-based, forms for democratic policy making.

- What is the added value of an online participation process in contrast or in addition to an offline procedure?

### **Diagnostics II (decision making):**

- At which stage of decision making does the process start or fit in best?

Who decides the methods/design of participation and the choice of technical tools? Do they fit the level of decision making, policy field, theme, political culture and patterns of social adaptation and individual behaviour? (To plan a midterm evaluation of the process might be helpful, especially if negative experiences with participative processes have already been encountered)

- Who is entitled to participate and by which selection criteria are individuals/groups invited - or is it an open process, regulated by a particular interest or skill? (discuss aspects of inclusion and exclusion: pros and cons)
- Are the rules of the game, scope of the problem and the relevance of input clear for all? (public relations or other information tools might help here)
- What kinds of resources are needed to take part, (time, money and information, communicative, social and technical skills). Do you know the level and type of

skills and access to participation resources of those who should to participate? If necessary, there must be support to establish equal access for those who are intended to participate or are interested in doing so.

- Is an “as early as possible involvement” warranted or applicable to the range of influence? Is the chosen method as inclusive as possible? (a variety of methods within one participative process can help)
- How to deal with majority/minority proportional results? What is the most transparent method of aggregation?
- Who is responsible for the success of the process? (and who defines “success” ?).
- Who is responsible for transparent documentation and budgeting?
- Who is entitled to decide that the outcome is relevant and legitimate? Discuss how to put the results of a participative process in relation with traditional, legitimate procedures of decision making such as voting etc. or any other institutionalised procedure. Discuss how online and offline procedures might be linked.
- Do you offer exit or alternative strategies in case the process produces a stand-off or does not come to a satisfying end? (Alternative strategies might include a change from online to offline participation, an extended timeframe for the process, inviting additional groups, a mid term evaluation of the process including a public discussion etc.) Includes a discussion on budget.
- What resources are needed to implement the results of the participative process? Who is responsible?

### **Diagnostics III (evaluation)**

- Plan resources (budget, time) for feedback and evaluation designed to test the effectiveness and impact of the tool, including a public discussion on its results.