POLIITIKAUURINGUTE KESKUS

PRAXIS

Citizen centric e-participation

A trilateral collaboration for democratic innovation

Case studies on e-participation policy: Sweden, Estonia and Iceland

2013

CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Project is supported by the Swedish agency Vinnova.

Edited by:

Joachim Åström, Associate Professor in Political Science, Örebro University

Hille Hinsberg, Governance and Civil Society Programme Expert, Praxis Center for Policy Studies

Magnus E. Jonsson, Doctoral candidate in Political Science, Research School for Technology Mediated Knowledge Processes, Örebro University

Martin Karlsson, Doctoral candidate in Political Science, Örebro School of Public Affairs, Örebro University

Praxis Center for Policy Studies, Estonia, is an independent, non-political organization, founded in 2000 by the initiative of Open Society Institute. The mission of Praxis is to improve and contribute to the policy-making process in Estonia by conducting independent research, providing strategic counsel to policy makers and fostering public debate.

Örebro University, Sweden, has had a broad spectrum of research related to e-democracy and e-government for the last 15 years. The team of political scientists involved in this project has published widely in the field and have worked together with other disciplines, such as Informatics and Media and communication, in numerous local, national and European projects.

Praxis Center for Policy Studies
Tornimäe St 5
10145 Tallinn, Estonia
Ph +372 640 8000
www.praxis.ee
praxis@praxis.ee

ISBN 978-9949-507-20-7 (PDF)

Abstract

New e-participation services are heralded as an important means to achieve “citizen-centric government”. The project “Citizen-centric e-Participation” is a trilateral collaboration project between Sweden, Estonia and Iceland, combining research with networking to enhance e-participation in three countries. The project network includes partners from local governments, experienced researchers in the field as well as software companies that are exploring new possibilities and markets.

The project, which is running between 2012-14, is funded by Vinnova, Rannis, Nordforsk & Estonian Ministry for Economic Affairs and Communications. The main partners include Örebro University, Praxis Center for Policy Studies, Citizens Foundation, imCode Partner, the City of Reykjavik and Haparanda and Borås municipalities.

Engaging citizens in policy-making is an important aspect of the design and delivery of better public policies and a core element of what is sometimes called ”good government” or ”citizen-centric government”. Using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to gather and analyze public input is expected to stimulate public deliberation. The project explores links between standardized e-participation models and the particularities of local contexts.

This report presents case studies of the e-participation policy development in Sweden, Estonia and Iceland. The case studies give readers a background to the political context and policy as well as technological development in each country and present analyses of important e-participation initiatives in each country.

Keywords: e-participation, e-democracy, open government, citizen engagement, petitions, good governance, civil society

Contents

Introduction **5**

1. e-Participation Policy in Sweden **6**
- 1.1. Introduction 6
- 1.2. A brief history of Sweden 6
- 1.3. Democracy and political participation 7
- 1.4. Citizens' use of ICTs 10
- 1.5. E-governance policies 11
- 1.6. E-participation initiatives 12
- 1.7. Discussion and conclusions 15

2. e-Participation Policy in Estonia **17**
- Hille Hinsberg, Magnus Jonsson and Martin Karlsson 17
- 2.1. Introduction 17
- 2.2. A brief history of Estonian politics 17
- 2.3. Democracy and political participation 18
  - 2.3.1. Central and local government 18
  - 2.3.2. The role of political parties 18
  - 2.3.3. Local governmental institutional structure 19
- 2.4. Citizens use of ICTs 19
- 2.5. E-governance policies 21
- 2.6. E-participation initatives 24
  - 2.6.1. Government-provided initiatives for e-participation 24
  - 2.6.2. Citizen initiatives 26
- 2.7. Conclusion. Policy perspectives 29

3. e-Participation Policy in Iceland **31**
- Magnus Jonsson, Joachim Åström and Martin Karlsson 31
- 3.1. Introduction 31
- 3.2. A brief history of politics in Iceland 32
- 3.3. Democracy and political participation 33
  - 3.3.1. National level 34
  - 3.3.2. Local level 34
- 3.4. Citizens' use of ICTs 35
- 3.5. E-governance policies 35
- 3.6. E-participation initatives 37
  - 3.6.1. National level 37
  - 3.6.2. Local level 38
- 3.7. Discussion and conclusion 40

References **42**

Introduction

The case studies give an overview of the political and administrative context in each of three partner countries – Estonia, Sweden and Iceland - to provide a backdrop for developments in e-government and e-democracy framework. The overall aim of comparing these three countries is to (1) achieve a better understanding of the cultural, political and technological opportunities and challenges of e-participation, and (2) to contribute to the development of improved methods and processes of e-participation.

Each case study also describes a selection of top-down and grass-root efforts in e-participation. In the concluding section of each case study, authors comment on the potential of harnessing ICT in citizen centric governance in the particular context.

The case studies give a background for an academic research paper which focuses on exploring three tensions in participatory mechanisms: (1) The tension between top-down procedures (institutionalized norms and rules) and bottom-up engagement (citizens´ values and needs), (2) the tension between extended participation and quality of deliberation, and (3) the tension between general models for e-petitioning (standardization) and the particular needs of different political and cultural contexts.

The research paper has been accepted to IFIP e-Participation conference in Koblenz, September 2013 and will be published in the conference proceedings.

1. e-Participation Policy in Sweden

Martin Karlsson, Joachim Åström and Magnus Jonsson

1.1. Introduction

Why and how do e-participation policies sometimes flow with politics as usual, and sometimes lead to challenge powerful elites and institutions? The aim of this report is to provide a baseline description of the political context in Sweden, which surrounds and influences e-participation policy. For several reasons, Sweden makes for an interesting case. The political context is characterized by comparably strong political parties that have traditionally been the central channel for civic engagement and political participation. At the same time Sweden is one of the countries in the world where the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have reached furthest, and it has among the worlds' most individualized citizenry. It is therefore a country with strong institutional barriers for innovations of citizen centric political participation and, on the other hand, a country with great socio-technological opportunity structures for such innovation. This tension is clearly reflected in policy practice. Even though quite a few experiments with e-participation have taken place in Sweden, primarily at the local level, the results indicate that the democratic potential of e-participation is nowhere near to being realized yet.

This report is structured as follows: first a brief political history of Sweden is presented with focus on its tradition of party centered political institutions and processes, thereafter the contemporary political, social and technological context of the country is discussed. The subsequent section focuses on cases of citizen participation and specifically cases of e-participation in Sweden. In the concluding section of the report, the opportunities and challenges for citizen centric e-participation in Sweden are discussed.

1.2. A brief history of Sweden

Sweden became fully democratized in 1921 as the last of the Nordic countries when, after a long struggle by the Swedish suffrage movement, women were given the right to vote. The political system that emerged was a parliamentary, representative democracy. This system generated a strong party control as well as a stable party system. The government, led by the prime minister of Sweden, exercises executive power, and government policy is implemented by state agencies (*ämbetsverk*) run by an autonomous civil service. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the parliament, and members of parliament are elected on the basis of proportional representation (voters choose among individual candidates nominated by the parties and a party must gain 4% of the national vote or 12% of the vote in any one of twenty-eight electoral districts to be represented in parliament).

Sweden is known for its consensual political culture, characterized by close co-operation between the government and various civil society organizations. The Swedish government contributes substantial financial support to NGOs and these organizations play an important role in government policy-making. Since before democratization, political participation was largely channeled through popular mass movements such as the suffrage movement, the labor movement, the temperance movement and, not least, the popular mass parties (foremost the Social Democratic Party, the Communist Party

and the Farmers' Party). The collectivistic tradition of political participation in Sweden as well as the strong position of civil society prevailed for the better part of the 20th century. All political parties soon took the form of popular mass parties with comparably large membership organizations and membership-centric systems of internal democracy. A close connection between the civil society and state was established through a corporatist tradition. Representatives of trade unions, industry, the agricultural sector, etc, were invited to participate in the policy process. The strength of the corporatist tradition was enhanced through the long period of Social Democratic rule after the end of the Second World War.

During the last decades of the last century the collectivistic tradition as well as the corporatist system started to erode through a number of converging societal developments. A rise in socio-economic status for many citizens led to their increased individualization. As a result, the formerly strong mass popular movements, including the political parties, lost a large share of their members. The close ties between the state and civil society came unstuck in this process, most notably through the split between the largest trade union in Sweden and the Social Democratic Party in the beginning of the 1990s.

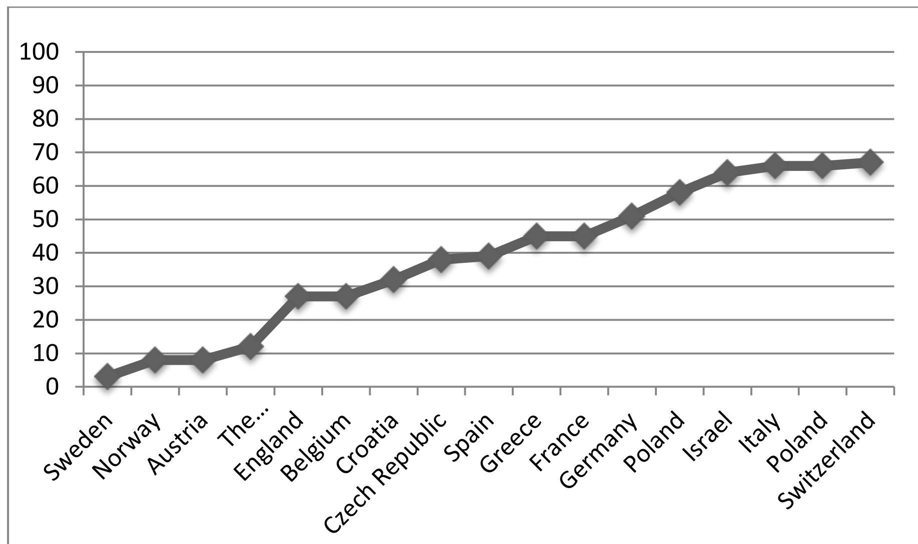
Sweden is often cited for its democratic health: citizens are relatively well informed about politics and turnout in elections is comparatively high (approximately 80% of the electorate vote in local authority, county council and national elections). In the most recent national election, in 2010, 84.63% of the Swedish population voted. At the same time, there is a growing debate in Sweden over the state of democracy. As in many other European countries, the public in Sweden is becoming more dissatisfied with the traditional institutions of representative democracy and with conventional forms of participation. Meanwhile, there are a number of prominent actors promoting a debate in Sweden about how best to address these concerns: the government and its commissions,[1] the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), and researchers in Sweden, such as those associated with the SNS Democracy Audit.

1.3. Democracy and political participation

As has been described above, the Swedish political context is characterized by strong political parties with a central position in the representative democratic system. Political parties have traditionally been the dominant institutions for organizing political representation in Sweden. Every elected politician represents a political party and Swedish elections are party centered. Also, political participation in Sweden has traditionally been channeled through political parties and popular mass movements, fostering a collectivist ideal for citizen participation and democratic citizenship.[2] In a recent comparative analysis of sixteen European countries, investigating the extent of "party democratic" and "citizen democratic" institutions in local government, Sweden is found to be the most "party democratic" political system.[3] On a scale between 0 and 100, where 0 represents a full "party democracy" and 100 represents a full "citizen democracy", Sweden receives a score of 6 (see figure 1 below).

[1] SOU 2000:1; Government Bill 2001/02:80)
[2] Montin, 2004
[3] Denters & Klok, 2012, p. 9

Figure 1. Party democracy and Citizen democracy in 16 countries.



Note: Adapted from Denters & Klok 2012.

One great paradox in the political culture of Sweden is the combination of a strong collectivistic tradition of political engagement centered on strong political parties on the one hand and a highly individualized citizenry on the other. Although Sweden stands out as a country with few opportunities for citizens as individuals to influence policy, according to studies, its citizens are the most individualized among all countries.[4] This is one important characteristic of the Swedish political culture that helps to explain the growing dissent for the party centered system of representative democracy in Sweden in recent years.

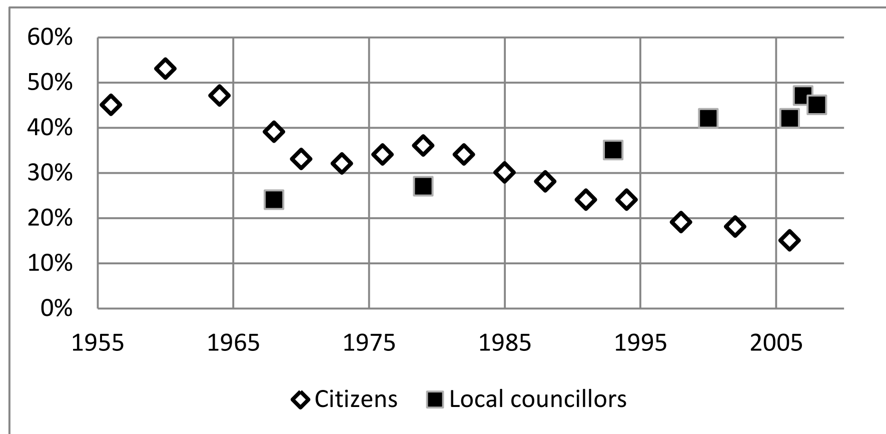
The health of political parties and the institutions of representative democracy in Sweden have been extensively questioned in recent years during widespread decline in voting turnout, political trust, party membership and party identification. Some scholars even claim that political parties are losing legitimacy in Swedish representative democracy.[5] These developments pose great challenges for the legitimacy of the Swedish system of representative democracy in relying heavily on political parties. Political parties are however not solely losing legitimacy and power. The problem is rather that Swedish parties are "[…] at once stronger, but also more remote; at once more in control, but also less powerful; at once more privileged, but also less legitimate".[6] It is this mixture of developments, that Swedish parties remain comparably strong political organizations while losing legitimacy, that has formed the basis for the widespread antiparty sentiment in Swedish politics. Political parties are maintaining, or even strengthening, their powerful positions in representative democracies, but they are doing so while their legitimacy is steadily decreasing.

This mixture of developments is illustrated well in the area of political representation. As party identification among Swedish citizens has declined gradually over the last 40 years, Swedish politicians have grown increasingly party loyal. The contemporary situation is such that almost half of

[4] Ingelhart & Welzer, 2005
[5] Montin, 2007, p. 187; Holmberg, 1999b
[6] Katz & Mair 1994, p. 19

the local councilors in Sweden express that, in the situation of a conflict between the opinion of the voters, their own opinion, and their own party position, they would choose to adhere to the party position—parties that only 15 per cent of voters can say they identify with (see figure 2 below). In other words, many Swedish politicians are increasingly adhering to the positions of parties that fewer and fewer voters identify with, creating a vast gulf between voters and politicians.

Figure 2. Party identification among citizens and party representation among local political representatives between 1979 and 2008



Source: Karlsson, 2011. Statistics on party identification was collected from SCB, 2011, and statistics on party representation from a number of studies consolidated in Gilljam, Karlsson & Sundell 2010.

In attempts to mend the apparent challenges of Swedish representative democracy, a trend of introducing new forms of citizen participation, not least different forms of e-participation at the local level, have emerged.[7] The national government has put some belief in the potential of ICT-based processes of citizen participation to help to increase participation and trust in political institutions.[8]

These new forms of participation pose a sharp contrast to the strong, party-centered and collectivistic tradition of political engagement in Sweden described above. As a consequence, new forms of citizen participation have often been detached from the traditional party arena of the representative democracy. Officials within public administration rather than politicians or those in party organization have often taken on the role of championing such participatory processes. Political parties as well as governmental organizations have often reinforced this division between traditional political institutions and new arenas of citizen participation.[9]

Although the national government to some degree has supported the introduction of e-participation processes and other forms of participatory initiatives in Sweden, the decentralized character of the Swedish political system evident in the high level of local self-government has left the decision to pursue or reject new forms of citizen participation down to the individual local governments. This has resulted in a highly diversified output as some local governments have implemented participatory

[7] Karlsson, 2012
[8] SOU, 2000:1, Government bill, 2001/02:80
[9] Amnå, 2006, p. 602; Granberg & Åström, 2010; Åström, Freschi & Montin 2010

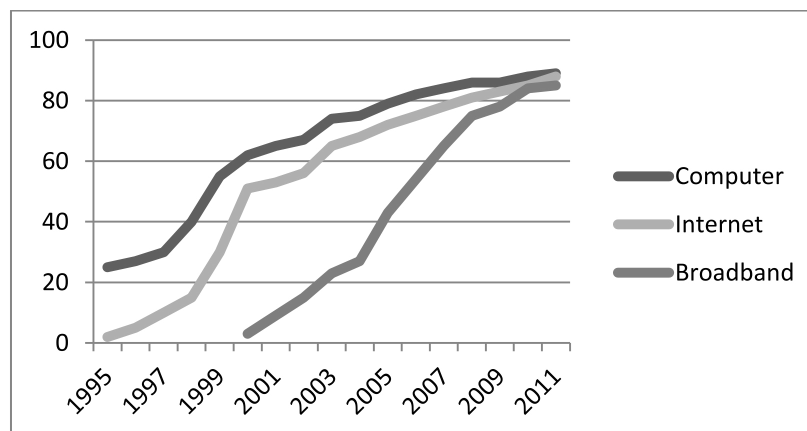
initiatives extensively while others have hesitated to pursue these initiatives altogether. The majority of Swedish local governments have, however, chosen a middle way and implemented limited numbers of participatory initiatives.[10]

1.4. Citizens' use of ICTs

Sweden is one of the countries in the world where Internet access is most widely diffused. Already in 2008, over 80% of the Swedish population had access to the Internet and currently only 11% of Swedes lack Internet access.[11] More than two-thirds of Swedish Internet users access the Internet every day. A majority of Internet users have accessed information from government authorities through the Internet and about half (46%) the users have searched for political information.[12]

As shown in Figure 3 below, the gap between computer-, Internet- and broadband access is closing in Sweden as the broadband expansion progresses. There are still areas, especially in the northwestern parts of Sweden, that broadband has not yet reached.[13] Hence, geographical location is still to some degree an important factor in relation to ICT-diffusion in Sweden.

Figure 3. Access to ICTs in Sweden 1995-2011



Source: Findahl, 2012.

Apart from geography, age is the most important factor in relation to access to ICTs in Sweden. Internet use is most common in the age group 16-24 years (91% of Swedes in this age group use the Internet every day) and steadily declines in relation to age. Over 75s comprise 8% of the Swedish population,[14] and only 22% of this group uses the Internet daily.[15]

---

[10] Gilljam & Jodal, 2005
[11] Findahl, 2012
[12] Findahl, 2012
[13] PTS, 2012
[14] SCB, 2012
[15] Findahl, 2012, p. 11

1.5. E-governance policies

While Sweden's relatively advanced technical infrastructure and tradition of democracy suggests that it might lead the way in e-participation policy, the Swedish government has not taken anything like a clear position on the issue. Instead, other policy issues relating to the Internet, such as the digital divide, privacy and security, have overshadowed e-participation.

The Government Commission on Swedish Democracy (a parliamentary commission appointed in October 1997) provides a reference point for e-participation policy in Sweden. The commission generated 15 research volumes from approximately 100 scholars (across 12 disciplines). The final report was entitled *A Sustainable Democracy*.[16] A minister for democratic issues was appointed at this time and charged with considering democracy and participation in Sweden. *A Sustainable Democracy* not only indicates the need for more "participatory democracy" in Sweden with strong deliberative qualities", but also recognizes the importance of experimenting with e-participation. While the government and the prime minister appeared to welcome the report at the time, the measures that were subsequently proposed in the *Government Bill on Democracy Policy*[17] fell far short of the radical and participatory proposals made by the commission.

At the national level in Sweden, there is very little to report in the area of e-participation. Two government-funded democracy projects are worth noting though. The first, *Time for Democracy*, had the overall objective of increasing participation and awareness of the political process, focusing particularly on voting in national elections. In a two-year period from 2000 to 2002, grants were given to 142 educational projects at a total cost of about SEK 19 million. The second initiative, *Participating Sweden*, is a programme aimed at tackling social exclusion and increasing participation in Swedish society more broadly. SEK 22 million was set aside for the programme, which ran from 2006 to 2009. A proportion of the budget (SEK 4 million) was dedicated specifically to promoting public participation and dialogue among citizens. One e-participation project is due to be implemented in the city of Vara as a part of this programme.[18] The centre-right government in Sweden (elected in 2006 and reelected in 2010) has indicated that it will invest more in e-participation during its period of office. There is, however, still no policy programme that specifically addresses e-participation or e-democracy. The absence of a strategic policy direction means that e-participation continues to develop on an ad hoc and limited basis.

In Table 1 below, some measures of the e-governance policy in Sweden are presented. The data presented stems from the UN e-government survey conducted at six instances between 2003 and 2012. The survey measures and ranks the performances of the countries in the world when it comes to e-government and e-participation, taking into account factors such as human capital, ICT infrastructure and range of government services available online.

[16] SOU 2000:1
[17] Government Bill 2001/02:80
[18] Government Offices of Sweden, 2007

Table 1. UN E-Government Survey

		Sweden	Estonia	Iceland
E-Government	Score	,86	,80	,78
	Ranking	7	20	22
	Trend (2003-2012)	0,02	0,10	0,08
E-Participation	Score	,68	,76	,16
	Ranking	15	8	82
	Trend (2003-2012)	0,11	0,12	0,05
Human Capital	Score	0,91	0,91	0,93
	Ranking	26	25	15
	Trend (2003-2012)	-0,08	-0,04	-0,03
Infrastructure	Score	,82	,66	,88
	Ranking	9	30	3
	Trend (2003-2012)	-0,03	0,16	0,07
Online service	Score (2008)	,98	,71	,46
	Ranking (2010)	24	28	48
	Trend (2003-2008)	0,3	0,07	0,12

Notes: The table presents the index score (on a scale between 0 and 1) as well as ranking position (among a total of 192 countries) of the different items in the UN e-government survey. The latest available data is presented in the table. If no other information is given, the cells present the results of the 2012 survey.

As is evident by the table, Sweden performs well in these surveys across the range of measures. The country is ranked as the 7th strongest when it comes to e-government and is the 15th strongest country on the e-participation index. Among the sub-dimensions of the e-government index (human capital, infrastructure and online services), Sweden performs best in infrastructure.

In comparison to the other countries of this project, Iceland and Estonia, Sweden performs best in the group on the e-government index and second best, after Estonia, on the e-participation index. One factor that should be taken into account in this comparison is that the UN e-government survey focuses exclusively on the national level while most e-participation initiatives in Sweden have occurred on the local level.

1.6. E-participation initiatives

At the local level, e-participation initiatives are few in number and practice in the area has so far, as discussed above, developed in an uneven manner. Nonetheless, there are some notable examples of e-participation practices run by Swedish local authorities. A series of online 'deliberative referendums', undertaken in cities such as Kalix, Malmö, Vara and Sigtuna, are among the most ambitious. In the city of Sigtuna, ten online referendums were conducted in one year and the results were generally encouraging: a relatively high percentage of citizens took part at some stage in these online referendums (between 30% and 60%), the socioeconomic characteristics of participants were fairly well balanced, and the contributions made by participants did have an impact on final policy

decisions.[19] Other examples include online forums, such as in the city of Gothenburg, and e-petitioning systems, for example in Malmö, as will be discussed in more length below.

Gothenburg, Online forum

In late 2004 the city of Gothenburg launched an online forum in relation to a large redevelopment project as part of an innovative effort to break with traditional structures for policy-making and planning.[20] The renewal of the city's Södra Älvstranden area was characterized by two challenging traits. Firstly, considerable responsibilities for the project were outsourced to a company. Ävstranden Utvecklings AB (ÄUAB) was owned by the municipality, and its board consisted of key politicians in Gothenburg and "heavyweight" representatives of commercial interests in the city. This company was given the responsibility of managing the redevelopment of Södra Älvstranden and bringing together investors willing to invest in the project and buy real estate in the area. The basic financing concept was this: a part of the area was planned, developed and then sold to private stakeholders. The money raised through that process were then used to plan and redevelop the next section of the area. In this way, the redevelopment project would have a minimal financial impact on taxpayers.

Secondly, the project aimed at broadening and deepening citizens' participation. Since the municipality was critical about how urban planning was handled by its planning department, also the mission of enhancing citizen participation was "contracted out" to ÄUAB. The following dialogue with citizens comprised two components: an online forum and an exhibition at the City museum. Activity on the online forum was limited in the early phases, but increased as the process continued: by November 2006, 980 posts had been registered on the forum. The contributions focused on city life, housing, transport, the environment and the participation process. In addition, the forum had features such as "question and opinion of the week" and "advice to the editors". Many contributions were direct proposals and opinions about how the new city space ought to be used. The discussion in the forum was vibrant and included heated debates on a multitude of issues.

The way communications evolved between different actors was the most interesting aspect of the Gothenburg participatory experience. On the one hand, the ambitions were high when it came to creating new arenas for open communication; the activities at the city museum and the Internet debate indicate this. On the other hand, the experiment was characterized by an absence of formal decision-makers. The decision to keep the politicians out of the debate was made by the leadership of the political parties, seemingly influenced by contemporary public management philosophies in which party politics is considered irrational, contributing to locked-in positions, and a hindrance to problem-solving. Another interpretation would be that politicians, by distancing themselves from the participation process, reserved a right to take an independent decision in the end. In any case, the informal citizen participation process became disconnected from the formal decision-making arenas, and potentially worthwhile interactions between these arenas were lost. The decision-makers were unable to communicate important considerations for enabling the formulation of "realistic proposals" and the citizens could not relate to the decision-makers' preferences and priorities. Instead, the "dialogue" was limited to a communication that can be compared with that of a child (the citizen)

---

[19] Åström 2004; Granberg & Åström, 2010; Åström & Norén 2007
[20] Granberg & Åström, 2010

asking for sweets and the responsible parent (the decision-maker) referring to limited resources and difficulties implementing the request instead of actually engaging in a discussion.[21]

In the end, the impact of citizen participation on the actual decisions was limited and it became clear that citizens and decision-makers had different perceptions about what “game” was being “played”. Citizens taking part in the online debate and those interviewed for the evaluation report expressed expectations about an open process where participating citizens have the ability to influence the process. Such expectations were not unfounded—there are several examples of the term “influence” being used in information materials and advertisements that urge citizens to participate in the process. Representatives from ÄUAB and the planning department, however, presented another picture. They stated that the dialogue was characterized by extended public deliberations that constituted “foreplay” or an “additional element” that preceded the formal planning process and the implementation. Consequently, the participation process was more about a diffuse contribution to planning rather than a more direct influence over the future development of Södra Älvstranden. From this perspective, citizen participation was more about sharing problems than about sharing power.[22]

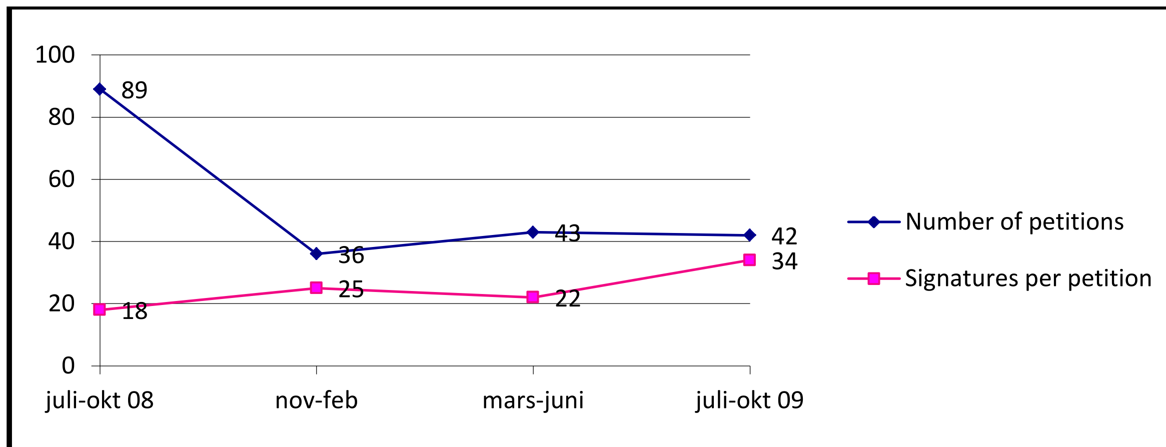
The Malmö Initiative

Sweden has no long tradition of petitioning as a common form of political participation and the development of e-petitioning systems in Swedish local governments has been slow. To date only six (of a total of 290) local governments have implemented e-petitioning (Malmö, Haparanda, Borås, Värmdö, Kinda and Uddevalla). While few local governments have taken the full step to implement e-petitioning, a larger group has joined a voluntary network around e-petitioning initiated by the Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR, 2012). In this network, knowledge is shared between government officials and politicians interested in the potential of e-petitions.

Sweden’s first e-petitioning system was launched in 2008 in the city of Malmö in southern Sweden. The most significant factor for the success of e-petitioning systems is said to be the extent to which public authorities take petitions seriously when preparing an institutional response. However, a research-based evaluation in 2010 concluded that the local authority had big difficulties handling input from the citizens.[23] Just like in Gothenburg, broadened participation was achieved in quantitative terms with about 200 e-petitions the first year. But the political and administrative decision makers refused to give a formal response to petitioners, which the petitioners themselves had taken for granted.

[21] cf. Newman et al. 2004
[22] Granberg & Åström, 2010
[23] Åström & Sedelius, 2010

Figure 4. Number of petitions and signatures in Malmö (number and mean).



Source: Åström & Sedelius, 2010.

After 16 months the actual participation in the Malmö petition system added up to 210 initiatives and 5,500 signatures, distributed as shown in Figure 4 above. The high number of proposals the first months has decreased and settled at a level of about ten proposals per month, while the average number of signatures per initiative indicates a small increase over time. If we compare the result with the situation in the British city of Bristol, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, the number of initiatives is significantly higher in Malmö. Bristol recorded 28 e-petitions during the first period, between September 2004 and January 2006. Secondly, the proportion of signatures per initiative is significantly higher in Bristol, which registered 9,590 signatures during the same period. These differences might be due to differences in design. In Malmö, the process is less formalized than in Bristol; there are no requirements related to the wording of petitions or to municipal review and feedback. The Malmö model thus implies lower thresholds for those wishing to write petitions, but also weaker incentives for those who want to sign.

When asking the petitioners what convinced them to participate in the Malmö Initiative, they state that simplicity is key. Also the competitive element of collecting signatures is important, as well as petitions' ability to generate publicity online and in local media. The critical point is, however, the extent to which this is a real opportunity to get answers on pressing political issues when they arise. A survey among petitioners shows that more than 80% of the respondents "expected the politicians to read the petition", and more than 70% expected feedback on the handling of the petition and that the relevant committees and / or the council would be informed. However, the actual response is not commensurate with these expectations. Several leading politicians opposed a formalized process in which they would consider the petitions in an accountable manner, with reference to the argument that the parties' power to set the agenda may be weakened. When we asked the petitioners whether they had received a response from municipal politicians, only 13% answered yes. For citizens, this may seem like a paradoxical call: "We may not listen, but tell us what you think!"

1.7. Discussion and conclusions

On the one hand, new ICTs have raised high expectations of a vitalization of political democracy in Sweden. Many see an opportunity to use the new technology in order to create better public control

of the political operations, to create a better-informed electorate and to facilitate accountability. Many also see potential with regard to increased participation and a more interactive or participatory democracy. On the other hand, the actual policies often speak a different language. Even if the new information technology has revolutionized the conditions of democracy, it is primarily used in order to generate efficiency and service. Although the Internet is often linked to radical change, its use might be characterized by moderation and caution. To a great extent, the step from ideas via intentions to actual initiatives may be described as a development from two-way communication to one-way information; from early information to late information; from active users to passive users; and from ideological arguments of an interactive or direct democracy to a limited modernization of the indirect democracy.[24]

How can this development be understood? Comparative digital politics research usually accounts for institutional variables, and a gap between expressed intentions and actual initiatives certainly indicates that there are institutional barriers to overcome and that institutional conditions play an independent role vis-à-vis political behavior. Similar to the research literature on the role of the Internet in election campaigns,[25] we believe that the institutionalized role of parties play a key role in determining the extent to which e-participation challenges the elites. Indeed, in many cases where e-participation experiments have been initiated but failed to gain political support, arguments directly refer to the primacy of parties in the Swedish system. In this light, one might argue that the path towards more challenging use of e-participation in Sweden goes via institutional reforms, making it more beneficial for political representatives to listen to citizens rather than parties.

Besides from institutional barriers, however, it may be worth thinking carefully about catalysts for participatory governance and types of ‘crises’ that can ignite change. The deeper the crises, the bolder the tactics, one might expect. Sometimes it is assumed that the worldwide decline in party memberships, electoral turnout and political trust would be enough. However, Sweden is only one country that illustrates that this decline is not necessarily enough to force wider adoption of e-participation – at least not at current levels and not on its own.

There is another dimension of crisis, however, which is not so often recognized, relating to the policy issues at stake. Following Trevisan and Oates, [26] it is reasonable to believe that policy failure might cause people to ask what is wrong with conventional forms of participation, and put extra pressure on the development of new forms. There might also be a greater interest among elites in engaging the public in situations when participation could actually solve policy problems, and ease the burden of government. In other words, irrespective of whether there is an “incremental route” to e-participation, innovation could be triggered by more temporary policy crises. Sweden has not yet experienced such crises or tipping points, but countries such as Iceland and Estonia certainly have. However, these types of crises, in contrast to institutional elements, can move rather easily across different countries. They are less predictable and worth studying also in countries, like Sweden, with a seemingly stable institutional setting.

[24] Åström, 2004
[25] Åström & Karlsson, 2013
[26] Oates och Trevisan, 2012

2. e-Participation Policy in Estonia

Hille Hinsberg, Magnus Jonsson and Martin Karlsson

2.1. Introduction

With its combination of a strong central government, high internet diffusion and a modern tradition of innovative use of ICTs in the political system, the case of Estonia is highly interesting in the realm of e-governance and e-participation.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Estonia has built and developed a democratic structure. Early on in that process, the Estonian goverment turned to ICT solutions to enhance dialogue between the governing and the governed. The earliest and most notable actions were the introduction of the TOM (*Today I Decide*) system in 2001 (a system for submitting proposals in the policymaking process), the introduction of e-voting in 2005 (an ID-card based system allowing citizens to vote online in local, national and European Union elections) and the osale.ee platform in 2007 (a platform for public consultations and getting input on draft policy documents from individuals and interest groups).

Both TOM and osale.ee were created at the state (central government) level in a top-down approach to enhance public participation. Late in 2012, however, a grassroots bottom-up initiative, *Charter 12,*[27] attracted a lot of public debate. The initiative focused on some fundamental democratic problems that, according to the authors, challenged the Estonian political system and establishment. In only a few days, the initiative gathered 17,000 online signatures on a petitioning site and acknowledgement from President Toomas Hendrik Ilves.[28] The initiative grew into a full-fledged participatory process called *Rahvakogu,* or People´s Assembly, which combined online and offline methods to describe proposals for amending legislation concerning accountability of political parties, electoral system and dialogue between the governing bodies and citizens. This report describes a selection of e-participation initiatives and aims to present the Estonian context for e-participation from an institutional perspective.

2.2. A brief history of Estonian politics

Modern Estonia enjoyed independence for the first time in 1918. In 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Estonia, an occupation that lasted until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, and before the global financial and economic crisis, Estonia enjoyed one of the most dynamic periods of economic growth among both transition and OECD countries. Critical to this success was Estonia's transformation from a centrally planned economy to a liberal market economy.

Over the same 20-year period, Estonia also developed—practically from scratch—the functions and apparatus of a modern state, including a legal code, civil service, and national and sub-national

[27] Charter 12, 2012
[28] Lobjakas, A, 2012

institutions that are the backbone of public administration.[29] These governance measures have resulted in budget surpluses, a reasonable level of transparency and flexibility in administrative procedures, and a high level of economic and political stability.

2.3. Democracy and political participation

2.3.1. Central and local government

The tradition of local government in Estonia dates back to the middle of the 19th century. At that time, the municipalities served as institutions for self-management in social issues, first under Russian central rule and later under the era of independence. During the Soviet era, however, the power was drained from the local level since the “cornerstone of Estonian local governance—the municipality—was abolished by the Soviet regime.”[30]

In 1989, two years before the Soviet dissolvement, Estonia drafted the Local Government Act, legislation aimed at creating local political units with democratically elected representatives. After independence, different governments took different paths on the issue of self-government on the local level. However, a structural feature common to all governments is that the taxation system is centralized, leaving little autonomy to the local government to provide public services.[31]

The legal framework for local governments is centralized while local authorities are formally autonomous within the framework of fiscal and normative matters. However, the framework has “not been conducive to actual autonomy and, hence, the development of local democracy.”[32]

2.3.2. The role of political parties

Traditionally political parties are instruments of power and elections are the main mechanisms of the people’s influence over policy-making.

Estonia’s electoral system, the complex procedure of forming a political party and the rules regarding state funding of political parties ensure the clear domination of parties as a phenomenon of representative democracy in Estonian political life. At the same time, parties do not enjoy particular public trust[33] and there is a clear increase in citizens who would not vote for any party (currently 40% of population). Hence, representative democracy needs to be complemented by other forms such as deliberative democracy to achieve a balanced society.

[29] OECD Public Governance Reviews, 2011
[30] Sootla, Georg & Toots, 2006
[31] Ibid, 169-170
[32] Ibid, 190
[33] Madise, 2007

2.3.3. Local governmental institutional structure

The Estonian public administration system includes a one-tier local government as an autonomous level of self-governance. There are 226 local government units, including 193 rural municipalities and 33 cities.

Local self-government is exercised by democratically formed legislative and executive bodies and, with regard to local issues, by means of opinion polls or public initiatives. Residents of a municipality can participate in the local level democracy on three different levels:

1) using the right to vote at the local level elections;

2) participating in the activities of a political party;

3) directly participating in the decision making process, as, according to legislation, a proposal presented by at least 1% of locally registered residents will be formally entered into the legislative process. However, this option is rarely used and has never resulted in an actual legislative initiative.

Local government councils, composed of elected representatives have the right to form council committees in which other local residents may be involved. Furthermore, there are regulations for involving residents in the process of working out a development plan and a general plan of a rural municipality or city. The latter are mandatory strategic documents that provide an analysis concerning the economic and social situation, environmental condition, and trends and preferences for planning the long-term activities and development of the local government.

2.4. Citizens use of ICTs

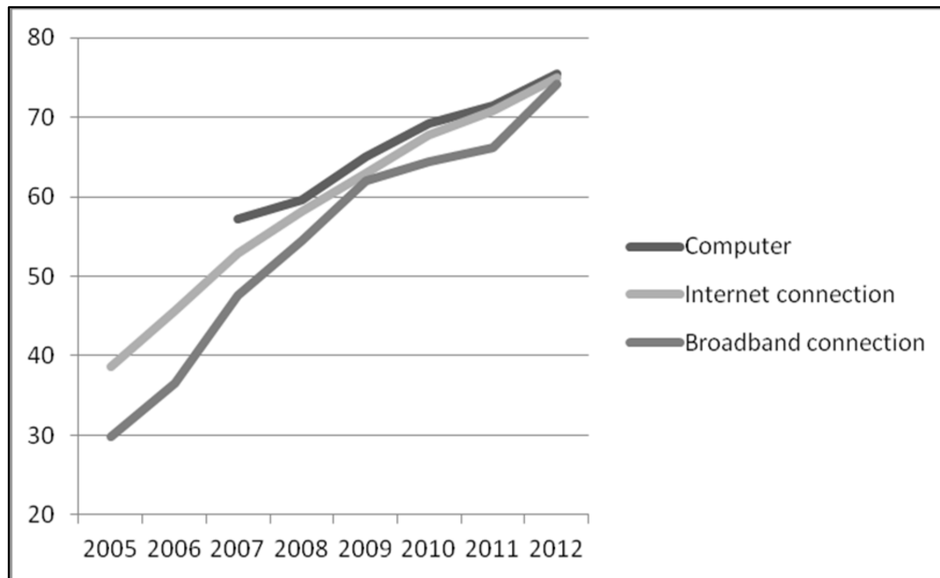
With a diffusion of approximately 77% of the population, Estonia is among the top 30 states in the world when it comes to internet access.[34] Furthermore, 78% of the population (age 16-74) uses the internet on a daily basis[35] and 1200 public WiFi networks are registered. Broadband access has expanded strongly in recent years and nearly closed the gap between computer, Internet, and broadband access in 2012 (see Figure 5 below).

Estonia’s infrastructure is highly developed. More than 99% of all banking transactions are made electronically and 86% of the citizens have a electronic ID-card (which is a necessity to participate in the e-voting procedure and government-provided e-participation systems).

[34] *Internet World Stats*, 2013

[35] Ministry of Economic Affais and Communications, 2013

Figure 5: Share of Estonian households with computer, internet connection and broadband connection, 2005-2012.



Source: Statistics Estonia 2012[36]

Geographic location was still an important factor in relation to ICT-diffusion in Estonia in 2006 because rural areas had lower levels of internet diffusion than urban areas. Although not measured in later years, the trend between 2005 and 2006 points toward a closing gap between urban and rural areas with regard to computer access (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Share of households with a computer in urban and rural settings, 2005-2006.

	2005	2006	Change
Urban	54,18	66,54	+12,36
Rural	40,79	60,2	+19,41
Difference	-13,39	-6,34	

Source: Statistics Estonia[37]

Looking more closely at the minority of the Estonian population that is not using the internet, we can see the primary reasons for non-internet use have changed drastically over the past seven years. Fewer and fewer Estonians lack internet access due to infrastructural and resource-related reasons today than in 2005. At the same time the share of non-internet users that cite a lack of skills and interest in using the internet as important reasons for not using the internet has grown (see Table 3 below). This development demonstrates the progress of IT-infrastructure in the country but also also illustrates the nature of the difficulties in reaching 100% internet access in the population.

[37] Statistics Estonia 2012

Table 3: Reasons for not using the Internet 2005-2012.

	Change 2005-2012
Have access to Internet elsewhere	-14,6
Access costs too high	-5,1
Lack of skills	+26,4
Don't need Internet (not useful, not interesting)	+13,3

Source: Statistics Estonia

There are two interesting figures when it comes to public participation—more than 140,000 e-voters (24.3% of voters) took part in the election of Estonian parliament in 2011 and the Facebook penetration in Estonia is 50% in relation to number of Internet users.[38]

2.5. E-governance policies

Estonia's advanced information and technology infrastructure has gained global attention, most especially for its efforts to implement e-government and further the application of information technology in banking, education, health, transport and public administration.[39]

A well-developed enabling environment (e.g., legislative, political, infrastructure frameworks) is crucial for the implementation of e-government. Estonia has a well-established national infrastructure, including systems and components to support e-government development.

This infrastructure, which includes a secure data exchange layer X-road, various hardware and software components, a public key infrastructure and governmental databases and information systems, provides the basis for enhanced connectivity across the government. The ID cards that more than 80% of the population possesses enable electronic authentication and digital signing that make interaction between state and citizens technologically efficient.

Besides building a strong infrastructure, the main focus of decision-makers in the field of e-government has been on creating and delivering public services. These are delivered—electronically and otherwise—by all levels of government, i.e., either on a national or sub-national level.

Increasingly, the government's role is shifting from direct service provision to service facilitation as the number of actors providing public services, especially at the local level, is growing. However, citizens rarely distinguish between who or which level of government is providing the services—they are more concerned with service access and quality.

Table 4 presents Estonia's scores and ranking on the UN E-government survey 2012.[40] This table also presents the trend in e-government development between 2003 and 2012. The survey measures and ranks the performances of the countries in the world in the areas of e-government and e-participation, taking into account factors such as human capital, ICT infrastructure and range of government services available online.

[38] Reinsalu, 2009a

[39] Ernsdorff & Berbec, 2007

[40] Except "online service" measured in 2010.

Table 4. UN E-Government Survey.

		Estonia	Sweden	Iceland
E-Government	Score	,80	,86	,78
	Ranking	20	7	22
	Trend (2003-2012)	+,10	+,02	+,08
E-Participation	Score	,76	,68	,16
	Ranking	8	15	82
	Trend (2003-2012)	+,12	+,11	+,05
Human Capital	Score	0,91	0,91	0,93
	Ranking	25	26	15
	Trend (2003-2012)	-,04	-,08	-,03
Infrastructure	Score	,66	,82	,88
	Ranking	30	9	3
	Trend (2003-2012)	+,16	-,03	+,07
Online service	Score (2008)	,71	,98	,46
	Ranking (2010)	28	24	48
	Trend (2003-2008)	+,07	+,3	+,12

Notes: The table presents the index score (on a scale between 0 and 1) as well as ranking position (among a total of 192 countries) of the items in the UN e-government survey. The latest available data is presented in the table. If no other information is given, the cells present the results of the 2012 survey.

The UN data confirmed Estonia's forerunner status as an e-government nation. On all measures Estonia is located in the top 30 of the countries in the survey. The highest ranking Estonia receives is in e-participation development, positioning itself among the top 10 in the survey. The trend from 2003-2012 also indicates strong development of E-participation initiatives. The lowest-ranking positions regard IT-infrastructure and online service provision.

Compared to the other countries studied in this project, Sweden and Iceland, Estonia stands out as a strong e-participation nation while lagging behind somewhat in IT-infrastructure despite the evidence of advances in the country's IT-infrastructure described above.

Policy framework

In addition to infrastructure, a favourable legislative and policy framework is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable e-democracy. Several researchers found that decisions made by key officials in the early 1990s shaped the evolution of e-government in Estonia. Right-wing political leaders supported the IT community's early initiatives because these initiatives were consistent with their goals of creating a minimal and efficient state; the understanding that e-government should be more than simply a back-office tool or a channel for service delivery has grown slowly in the IT community and within political circles.

Estonian e-government initiatives have reacted mainly to the demands of the private sector and the general public, and they have been implemented in areas where transaction costs are the lowest. On the list of the top government-provided e-services are tax return declarations, which are filled online by more than 94% of declarants.[41]

The evolution of e-democracy regulation in the form of specific policies has been quite heterogeneous, from traditional FOIA regulations to welcoming civic engagement. The *Public Information Act* established an important foundation for e-democracy in 2001, obliging all public institutions to keep websites and provide extensive online content of public interest, including drafts of policy documents and legislative acts.

Several important processes for democratic development have stemmed from the Estonian Civil Society Development Concept adopted in 2002. It is a strategic document that defines the mutually complementing roles, mechanisms and priorities for cooperation between public administration and civil initiatives.

Complementing the concept is the Civil Society Development Plan for 2011–2014, which sets the objective of creating favourable conditions for citizens' initiatives (including electronic channels) and the development of civil society as a whole. The development plan is focused on strengthening the mutual partnership and cooperation between the public sector and civil society organisations. One of the key areas is fostering public participation, which is seen as a practical measure for sound administration and participatory democracy.

The government also declared the Code of Good Practice for Participation, outlining key principles that support engaging civil society organisations, interest groups and the wider public in policy-making. The code suggests the main principles of participation should be incorporated into the policy planning process. The code gives recommendations to government officials on how to use different methods and channels, including specific e-participation portals for providing citizens with information and inviting them to take part in e-consultations.

Estonia does not have a specific policy on e-democracy or e-participation. E-democracy does not have an institutional owner because the responsibility is divided according to different e-democracy functions; for example, the Ministry of Justice provides access to legislative procedures and ensures the quality of legislation while Ministry for Communication Affairs coordinates the overall e-government strategy and the State Chancellery oversees public participation and consultation practices.

Over the past 5–6 years, however, there has been detectable movement toward specifying e-democracy in governmental strategic documents. The Estonian Information Society Strategy 2013 includes a sub-section on e-democracy, mainly concerned with the design of citizen-centric public services and providing e-channels for the public to interact with government officials. The document stresses the need to develop Internet-based environments to provide citizens with possibilities to participate, and draws attention to the need to raise the people's awareness with respect to the new possibilities and risks involved in the development of an information society.

In 2008, the Local Government Information Society Strategy was approved and special attention was paid to the coordinated development of information society and e-democracy at the local government level. The strategy was compiled through an inititiative of the non-governmental e-

[41] URL:http://e-estonia.com/about-estonia (Retrieved 2013-05-18)

Governance Academy, whose experts involved ministry specialists and local government associations in the drafting process. One of the objectives stipulated was that

"All local governments have Internet-based possibilities to engage residents in the management of the local life — e.g. they have access via website to the decision-making process, which includes having an overview of what is happening at the council's session, being able to submit comments to the draft texts, and if need be, submit their own proposals for amendments to the drafts. All these operations would be done by using the ID-card."

Addressing a more elaborate use of information for the benefits of governance is a set of activities in the *Government Action Programme*, which stresses the use of ICT in providing access to decision-making and legislative processes.

Estonia is a member of *Open Goverment Partnership,*[42] whose action plan focuses on citizen-centric design of e-services, promoting civic engagemenet and harnessing open data for creating new opportunities for businesses and citizens.

2.6. E-participation initatives

Authors have identified different areas of e-democracy, including how to involve non-governmental partners (civil society organisations and citizens at large) in political discussions and the policy-making cycle, both in the government-to-citizen (G2C) and citizens-to-government (C2G) format. Other e-democracy areas include grass-root activism/social networking (citizens-to-citizens or C2C format), online political campaigning and e-voting.

The most well known case connected to e-democracy is internet voting as a technologically-enabled option to exercise citizen´s rights. Internet-voting with binding results has been carried out five times in Estonia: in local elections in October 2005, parliamentary elections in March 2007, European Parliament elections in June 2009, local elections in October 2009 and parliamentary elections in March 2011. At the latest elections, 24.3 per cent of participating voters cast their votes electronically.

A noteworthy example of a successful internet political campaign is the 2009 European Parliament elections, when independent candidate Indrek Tarand collected 25.8% of the total votes and was elected MP after holding a low-budget campaign mainly on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube and actively appearing on online media channels.

2.6.1. Government-provided initiatives for e-participation

E-participation initiatives such as TOM (*Today I Decide*) and its enhanced version, which is integrated into the central governmental participation channel, osale.ee, support civil servants in their engagement practices and enable transparency in policy-making and public participation.

[42] Open Government Partnership website: http://www.opengovpartnership.org/ (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

TOM

The first Estonian site targeted toward deliberative democracy, TOM (launched in 2001), allowed citizens to engage in the legislative process and policy-making. The TOM tool was established as a forum for citizens to propose, discuss and vote on legislative proposals. The deliberative process goes as follows: anyone can propose a change in the existing regulations or describe a new idea for legislation. The proposal is then commented and voted on by other users on the site. Once a proposal is backed by a simple majority, it is forwarded to the relevant government department, which has a duty to respond to the proposal by explaining what action was or was not taken and why. This formal government response is then posted on the site.

When the use was analysed in 2007, the statistics showed that in 6 years, TOM attracted 6000 users and 1025 legislative ideas were proposed.43 Approximately 90% of all proposals the users voted on got an answer from civil servants.

The experience gained from launching and developing TOM and the central participation tool was used to create an international product, TID+, an open-source software that can be used as a model for collecting public proposals.

OSALE.EE

The Estonian government's central participation portal, www.osale.ee ('osale' means 'participate' in Estonian), was launched in 2007, allowing interest groups and individuals to comment on draft policy documents, launch their own ideas and initiatives for new legislation and amendments, and submit petitions. Other users can vote and comment on these proposals. Then the proposal is forwarded to the relevant government department, which in turn posts an answer, explaining what action was or was not taken and why.

Government agencies were advised how to publish draft policy papers, development plans, laws or provisions on the consultation website. Consulting is voluntary and some agencies have been more active than others in using consultations. Besides publishing legislative drafts for public consultation on the participation site, it is customary to email the material to selected non-governmental partners known for their expertise in advocating their members' interests.

An average of 25 public consultations is carried out annually, initiated by all ministries and the government office. The website has 3,000 registered users, among which are individual citizens and representatives of civil society organizations. Only registered users can comment.

Currently, osale.ee consultations have been integrated with the government´s official legislation site, EIS[44], where the full cycle of legislation and policy-making is accessible for the public. All interested groups and individuals can follow the policy-making process and comment throughout the stages, until the act is presented to the government session.

Although the tool was put into active use by government agencies in 2011, there are rather low usage rates by non-governmental users such as civil society organisations and the wider public. According to

[43] e-Governance Academy, 2007

[44] Government portal: http://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/main (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

a poll on citizens´ awareness of public sector e-services, only 8% of respondents had heard of the osale.ee participation site and more than 3% claimed to have used it to make their voice heard. [45]

The reasons for relatively low interest in these government-provided channels are twofold: first, citizens may lack the interest and robust political knowledge to formulate their ideas and critique in a format suitable for legislative proposals. Second, the motivation among civil servants to participate in direct interaction is low and not encouraged or rewarded.

INITIATIVES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

On the local government level, the mutual impact of different processes and the links between democracy, participation and services should be more visible because people have closer contact with this institution.[46] However, in Estonia, e-participation tools on the local level have been developing at a considerably slower pace than those furnished by central government or created by citizen initiatives.

VOLIS is an online decision-making system for local councils. The application aims to integrate e-governance, participatory democracy, and records management. VOLIS strives to get procedures of the council decision-making online, enabling council members to attend the council session virtually and e-vote. It also offers opportunities for citizens to watch the council session, read the documents of the session and propose items to be discussed in the agenda. The latter is similar to TOM, presenting an opportunity to propose issues for the council to discuss or adopt and collecting supporting signatures.

There are bottlenecks for the effective implementation of the system. One, which is already apparent, is that some local municipalities do not have people who would be capable and motivated to carry out the decision-making process via VOLIS in real time.[47]

Most local council or municipality websites do not have interactive features such as forums, and may lack essential information required by FOIA regulation. In 2009, just half of the local governments complied with the requirement to provide access to councils’ draft legislation on their websites.[48]

Government-provided channels for civic engagement may lack active and numerous users, but the fact that some 20% of internet users have experience in some form of e-participation,[49] i.e., expressing their opinion or engaging with central government or local government institutions, should encourage new experiments and tools for government-initiated dialogue.

2.6.2. Citizen initiatives

Public interest in how participation works in practice is growing. Advocacy groups monitor election pledges, demand more transparency for legislative procedures and comment on whether affected groups have been involved in policy making, whether the dialogue is substantial and whether an

[45] Statistical overview on the use of public e-services: http://www.riso.ee/et/files/kodanike_rahulolu_avalike_eteenustega_2010.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).
[46] EPACE, 2010
[47] Laanes, 2011
[48] Reinsalu, 2009a
[49] Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, 2010a

agreement is reached. The heightened demand and interest is interrelated to the growth and strengthening of civil society, voicing their own views on state affairs, identifying problems and proposing solutions for urgent matters.

MY ESTONIA

"My Estonia" is an example of digital engagement supporting offline community organising. The initiative was designed as a one-day brainstorming event where people were called upon to identify and discuss issues that matter most to them in their localities and neighbourhood. Brainstormers discussed issues of their choice, coming up with ideas to solve the problem. Some groups formed into smaller thematic affinity groups to elaborate on solutions and take matters forward. Organisers provided 400 brainstorming sites where more than 11,800 people participated. There were 16 net forums and 17 sessions were formed in Estonian communities overseas. An online pledge bank was established to list ideas and solutions and initiate further online discussion.

Some community activities sprung from the original initiative. Working with local government officials, a problem-reporting portal, **minu.viljandi.ee** (similar to UK fixmystreet.org), was created in the town of Viljandi. Residents are called upon to monitor their community environment and report broken streetlights, potholes, etc., that need repairs. The portal was launched enthusiastically but later abandoned by the city government with the argument that the information on such problems reaches them by other channels.

A similar community-based initiative, **meie.tallinn.ee,** has been launched to provide a forum for discussing local matters in a neighbourhood in Tallinn, the capital city. The portal functions as a chatroom, uniting neighbourhood residents and civil servants by local city region. The forum is meant for reaching out to neighbours and sharing information on common issues. As the initiative is quite recent, there is no data on user turnout or its effectiveness as an interaction tool with officials in the Tallinn city government.

PETITSIOON.EE

Collecting signatures on the Internet with the aim of supporting various initiatives or protests has gained popularity in recent years. However, there is no legislative base for processing petitions—neither the government nor the parliament has a procedure to handle collective claims. Therefore petitioning is just a form of online campaigning with no formal connection to the legislative process.

The Estonian Homeowners' Confederation created the Internet portal www.petitsioon.ee, where anyone can raise a petition or support the suggested cause. In addition to classical petitioning, there is also a format for conditional participation or pledges to support a certain activity. There is also a form for simple opinion poll that can be used to test ideas and reactions to a petition proposal. Authenticity of signatures is proven by ID-card connection in addition to identification by e-mail address or by Facebook profile.

During the two years that petitsioon.ee has existed, nearly 100 petitions, conditional participation events (pledge campaigns) and opinion polls have been created. Nearly 100,000 users have expressed their attitude by signing a petition. For example, the petition to address monopolies in service

provision collected 33,733 votes and resulted in a set of laws that has by now also entered into force.[50]

The initiators plan to upgrade the portal, providing links to the Population Register and specific geographic locations. This would mean that residents of a local municipality chosen by the author of a petition could be identified on the basis of their residence. That gives legal power to the suggestions, so they would have to be discussed in a city council or a city/rural municipality government.

GOVERNMENT WATCH

The site www.valvurid.ee (Government Watch) tracks how the government fulfills its pledges. The project tracks 539 pledges by two parties that won a national election and formed a coalition. These pledges constitute the government's action programme for 2011 to 2015.

Led by Policy Research Centre Praxis, a network of experts evaluates all policy areas, activities are implemented by ministries and other government institutions and their findings are published on the website. Visitors to the site, a sub-portal of the National Broadcasting Company, have the option to participate in the discussion and comment on the progress or shortcomings of government programme implementation.

The initiative unites a network of more than 30 experts, NGOs and think tanks, offering a format for knowledge-sharing and collective advocacy. Experts use information provided by the government but add content in the form of non-governmental commentary and evaluation.

RAHVAKOGU (PEOPLE´S ASSEMBLY)

Rahvakogu is a deliberative process that stemmed from the Charter 12 initiative, which was a manifesto reacting to political scandals, corruptive party financing and political in-accountability. The manifesto collected more than 17,000 signatures online.

The president of the Republic called on civil society to start a crowdsourcing process to give citizens a voice in controversial political practices. People were asked to submit proposals via rahvakogu.ee (and by ordinary mail) in January 2013. The portal was based on the open source code of platforms Better Rejkjavik and Better Iceland, created by net activists of citizens.is, the Icelandic organization that was also involved in the crowdsourced constitution-drafting.

The web-crowdsourcing stage resulted in 1974 posts (proposals and comments) that were categorized into five focal topic areas concerning electoral regulations, party financing and legitimacy and politization of public sphere. The site gathered more than 50,000 unique visitors from 87 countries around the world.

The material collected in the form of proposed ideas and comments were synthesized and sorted into 49 sub-groups, then assessed by a body of experts, specially convened to analyse the connection of proposals with the current legislation and their potential impact on the problems identified at the beginning of the deliberative process. The grouped proposals were debated in thematic seminars which gathered proposal authors, experts and political party representatives to select the most

[50] Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, 2010b

influential amendments. These were discussed and voted on at a Deliberation Day with 314 participants that represented Estonia's demographic makeup. Deliberation Day resulted in 15 proposals that were selected from the bulk of legislative amendment ideas presented during the process.

All results accrued during the multi-stage process were presented to the parliament by the president, who was the patron of the deliberative process. The parliament issued their feedback on the proposed amendments and gave a timetable when these legislative changes are going to be discussed in the formal procedures.

2.7. Conclusion. Policy perspectives

E-democracy is intended to bring governments and people closer, providing an online opportunity for citizens to express their opinion.[51] The legitimacy of democracy depends on communication between citizens and the state in a broad sense, including elected officials and civil servants, representing government institutions on both national and sub-national level.

It is apparent that the actual value and potential effect on the society of e-government and e-democracy depends on several factors, some of which are connected to external environment—economic, technological and cultural evolving changes in society—while some can be attributed to official policies and decisions to invest public resources.

Various Estonian e-democracy projects have received considerable attention internationally as some of the first government-led initiatives to involve citizens. However, by analysing the existing practice of top-down initiatives, it can be deduced that the provision of tools for participation and democratic involvement has evolved in an inconsistent manner.

Research by Meelis Kitsing,[52] which evaluated online service delivery and participatory elements of Estonian e-government, found online service delivery to be more effective and to have a greater impact than online participation. The research shows e-government implementation as an experiment with ideas and technical solutions instead of deliberate policy striving toward better governance.

According to Kitsing, Estonian e-government outcomes are diverse and cannot be fully explained either by technologically-driven experiments or strategically focused policies.

Estonian government officials have initiated interactive online tools such as TOM and osale.ee for engaging citizens online, but management and promotion of these tools often is neglected over time and therefore these channels are used by rather low numbers of citizens.

Kristina Reinsalu divided the development of Estonia’s e-democracy into three phases. The first was representative or institutional democracy, when the technological basis was created for the next phases. The second phase was consumer Internet democracy, which can be described as a focus on the development of e-services and striving toward a user-centric focus. The third phase is participatory Internet democracy. Reinsalu claims this phase has not occurred in Estonia yet, explaining that although citizens are in the consumer phase and are moving toward the next phase,

---

[51] Christiansen, 2009

[52] Kitsing, 2010 & 2011

officials and politicians are still in the first phase. The public sector has developed the services, but it does not motivate citizens to use these and does not provide help and guidance.[53]

Looking at the difference between expectations for e-democracy tools and their actual performance, it may seem that top-down, institutionalized e-participation efforts drop dead shortly after being born. Government-led experiments with various channels do not create a consistent pattern where each next step is taken after weighing the success and shortcomings of previous tools. Citizen initiatives have more success, as they stem from a focused problem or protest that motivates engagement. However, the infusion of e-democracy is slow and depends on many other factors besides the mere existence and technological quality of channels and tools.

Important supporting factors are legal environment, administrative and political culture. In the case of its legal environment, Estonia has removed most regulative barriers that would hinder transparency or access to information. However, there are some areas where regulations should be updated, according to technology-driven changes in society. For example, the issue of internet freedom versus copyright and privacy protection is an ongoing debate on a global scale.

In the question of administrative culture, supporting measures range from clarity in institutional duties to ensure democracy development to making changes in civil servants´ job descriptions in order to become more responsive toward citizen interaction.

Any top-down e-democracy channel or method will support open and inclusive policy-making if there is sufficient awareness of participation principles among civil servants. The key element in any form of participation is the willingness to hold a government-citizen dialogue.

However, from the "demand"-side for e-democracy, the factors include citizen awareness and motivation, stepping into the shoes of an active participant in policy design and evaluation. New technology is changing the balance of power and use of ICT enables a new model of citizenship in which citizens are both better informed and more demanding. Government officials have to learn to adapt to this new democratic behaviour.

On an international scale, a multitude of succesful cases show that e-democracy may yield good effects on the local municipal level. Issues that are raised and solved in our vicinity matter more, giving motivation for a democratic debate. In Estonia, the e-democracy efforts by local governments and local citizen activism are yet to demonstrate their empowering effect. Harnessed in the right way, e-participation models and tools may form a platform where citizens and officials experience real deliberative democracy.

[53] Reinsalu, 2009b

3. e-Participation Policy in Iceland

Magnus Jonsson, Joachim Åström and Martin Karlsson

3.1. Introduction

The development of Icelandic politics during the first decade of the 21th century is remarkable in many ways. Since its independence in 1944, Iceland has been seen as a traditional Nordic state with a functioning welfare system, a stable and solid semi-presidential electoral system and a strong party system. In the last decade, however, Icelanders have lived through a huge economic boom, then a deep economic bust with the three biggest banks collapsing in 2008[54] and the toppling of its government in the 'pots-and-pans-revolution',[55] or the 'housewares revolution',[56] in 2009. In October 2012, furthermore, Iceland held a referendum on a new constitution, a constitution that was in part crowd-sourced on the internet.[57]

The financial and political crises in Iceland started in the wake of the global financial crisis in 2008, which created a deep and broad sense of frustration and antipathy against the established political system. The legitimacy of the system came into question. In a 2011 opinion poll, only one in ten Icelanders expressed 'great trust' in parliament.[58] The legitimacy crisis led to drastic measures by the Icelandic institutions and, almost overnight, the system opened up for both traditional democratic solutions (such as referendums) and democratic innovations (such as participation via the internet in drafting the constitution).

At the local level, a parallel process started in the capital city of Reykjavik. In the Reykjavik City Elections, held in May 2010, the newly established political party, Best Party (*Besti flokkurinn*), that "started as a parody of the old parties"[59], received 34,7 per cent of the votes. With the two traditionally strongest parties, the Independence Party (*Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*) and the Social Democratic Alliance (*Samfylkingin*) at 33,6 per cent and 19,1 per cent respectively. Having won the upper hand, the Best Party formed a coalition government with the Social Democratic Alliance.. One of the first projects executed by the new local government was the launch of the innovative *Better Reykjavik* website, allowing citizens of Reykjavik to participate in the local political process online.

Why and how do e-participation policies sometimes flow with politics as usual, and sometimes challenge powerful elites and institutions? The aim of this report is to provide a baseline description of the political context in Iceland, which surrounds and influences the e-participation policy. It is one out of three similar baseline reports within the project, *Citizen Centric e-Participation: A Trilateral Collaboration for Democratic Innovation*.[60] The other two reports are focusing on two other cases:

[54] Gylfason et al., 2010
[55] Hardarson, & Kristinsson, 2010
[56] Kristjánsson & Indridason, 2011, p. 159.
[57] Ministry of Interior, 2012
[58] Gylfason, 2012
[59] Hardarson & Kristinsson, 2011
[60] The project, which is running between 2012-14, is funded by Vinnova, Rannis, Nordforsk & Estonian Ministry for Economic Affairs and Communications. The main partners include Örebro University, Praxis Center for Policy Studies, Citizens Foundation, imCode Partner, the City of Reykjavik and Haparanda and Borås municipalities.

Sweden and Estonia. The overall aim of the comparative analysis in these three countries is to (1) achieve a better understanding of the cultural, political and technological opportunities and challenges of e-participation, and (2) to contribute to the development of improved methods and processes of e-participation.

3.2. A brief history of politics in Iceland

In the scholarly literature, it is common to start the history of modern Iceland in 1904, when the country was granted home rule but remained under Danish rule. In 1904, the Danish government contained a post of minister of Iceland, and in 1918 Iceland became a sovereign state, a kingdom under the Danish crown. The Danish-Icelandic Act of Union was bound for a 25-year period, and was then planned to be renegotiated.

In 1944, after a turbulent period of engagement in World War II, there was a referendum on independence from Denmark (whom, according to many Icelanders, had not supported Iceland very well during the war). 98,6% of the citizenry participated, and the results in the referendum was 99,5% for and 0,5% (or 377 citizens) against an independent Iceland. On the 17th of June 1944, Iceland celebrated its independence and declared Iceland a republic. When Denmark granted Iceland independence, Iceland became a sovereign state and organized itself as a semi-presidential republic with parliamentary rule. The president is elected by popular vote, while the parliament is elected through party lists. For many Icelanders this was the “re-establishment of democracy”,[61] referring to the fact that the first parliament, the Althing (Alþingi**)**, was established in 930 CE.

Iceland has a multiparty system with a modern tradition of the rule of the Independence Party (*Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn*)[62] and the Progressive Party (*Framsóknarflokkurinn*).[63] These parties have always ruled in coalitions and never with a majority.[64] This should, however, not be confused with the fact that minority cabinet rule has been absent in Iceland in the post-war era.[65] Since 1930, the Independence Party has gained the most votes in every election,[66] but has shared the office of prime minister with the Progressive Party on a number of occasions.[67] The tradition of liberal/conservative rule was broken in 2009 when the Social Democratic Alliance, with Iceland’s first female and homosexual prime minister, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, as party leader, won the elections with 29,79 per cent of the vote.

The role of the political parties is, despite their strong position in the current political system, not very old as an institution. Kristjánsson exclaims: “We must clearly underline that the Icelandic version of ‘parliamentary government’ did not include any notion of rule by organized political parties. In nineteenth-century Iceland, ‘democracy’ implied direct national self-rule of the people, by the people and for the people.”[68] The party system took its form during the 1930s and kept its shape until the

---

[61] Kristjánsson, 2003, p. 399
[62] The Independence Party is a merger of the old liberal and the old conservative party.
[63] The Progressive Party is a liberal and agrarian party.
[64] Petersson, 2000, p. 94
[65] Kristjánsson & Indridason, 2011, p. 158
[66] The only time since 1930 that the Independence Party got under 30 per cent of the total votes was in 1987 when the party received 27,2 per cent.
[67] It should also be noted that the Social Democratic Alliance have had two Prime Ministers during this era. These occasions have however been short, 1947-1949 and 1958-1959.
[68] Kristjánsson, 2004, p. 163

1970s when there was a storm of critique for the system. This dissatisfaction led to rather big changes in the electorates' relationship to the government, and the party system has since then, as in many other western democracies,[69] seen a high degree of electoral volatility and lower levels of party identification.[70] The political parties are also, as in many other states, losing active members. Kristjánsson argues that "political parties in Iceland have become almost empty shells"[71] and that, contrary to what is expected in a citizen-focused democracy, "government policies are primarily determined by special interest groups, the government bureaucracy and lately by European Union (EU) laws and regulations through Iceland's membership of the EEA"[72]. The problem of power balance in the Icelandic system has also been discussed elsewhere, and it has been considered that Iceland traditionally has been ruled by a rather small political elite founded on family ties, certain schools and friendships, which tied political parties, banks, corporations and newspapers to each other.[73] The "ordinary citizen" has, thus, traditionally not had a central role in Icelandic politics.

With the creation of the new nation-state of the independent Iceland came also the creation of the welfare state. This development resembles the other Nordic states, even though the development came a bit later, and not to the same extent as in the other Nordic welfare states.[74] "For the greater part of the century however," the historian Gudmundur Jonsson writes, "active state involvement in the making of modern society was primarily focused on economic tasks such as the development of the economic infrastructure, active industrial policy in support […] Social policy has played only a subordinate role in public policy and debate."[75] The focus of Icelandic welfare politics is thus not on social equality, but rests instead on social policies "which emphasized market solutions and self-reliance (with a great deal of family support), not on a socially defined minimum level of living based on a social right."[76]

The political history of Iceland paints a picture of a rather young state with a stable electoral system, a functioning and rather stable party system and healthy welfare policies. However, it also shows tendencies of groupings among the elites in society; that there are some individualistic features in the social system, and that the political parties have problems with recruiting new members.

3.3. Democracy and political participation

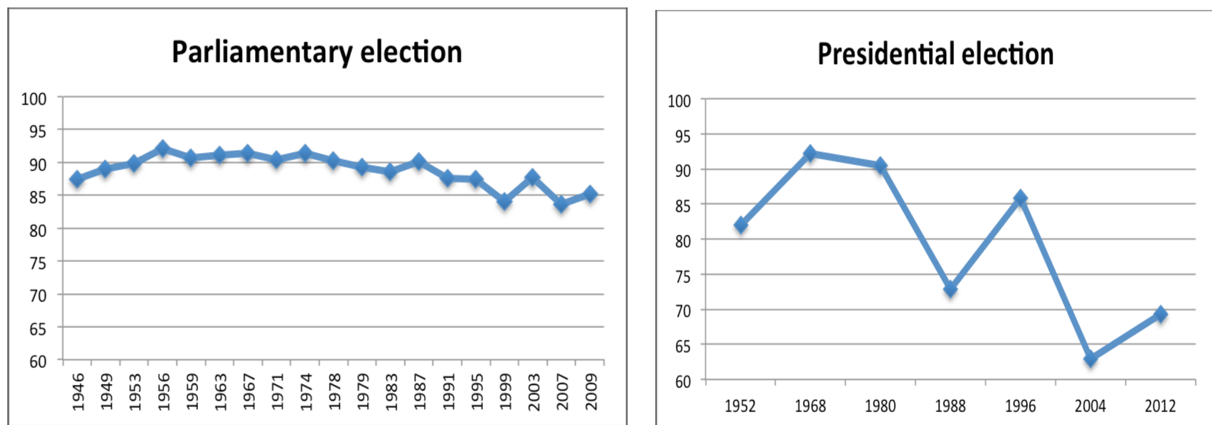
Since political participation is expressed both in institutional terms, such as voting, and non-institutional terms, such as demonstrations, it is important to note that the focus here will be upon institutional participation. It is also important to note that democratic innovation is more often applied in local contexts (e.g. public planning) than in national contexts.

[69] Dalton, 2008
[70] Kristjánsson, 2004
[71] Ibid. p. 165
[72] Ibid. p. 165
[73] Petersson, 2000, pp. 171-177
[74] Jonsson, 2001
[75] Ibid. p. 250
[76] Ibid. p. 265

3.3.1. National level

With its system design as a semi-presidential parliamentary democracy, Iceland's possibilities for democratic participation are officially high. The citizens can vote both for the president in the popular vote, a political party or candidate in the parliamentary vote and a political party or candidate in the municipal elections. And participation has, indeed, been high in both parliamentary and presidential elections, even though it has been sinking for the last few decades.

Figure 6: Electoral participation in parliamentary and presidential elections 1946-2012



Source: Statistics Iceland. URL:http://www.statice.is/

The democratic innovation rate has, however, been low until very recently. The referendum is the only instrument that has been used, apart from elections. The use of referendums has, however, also been low with only one occurrence, and that was about the independence in 1944.[77] Since 2010, however, the use of referendums has been frequent. In 2010 there was a referendum on the loan guarantee to foreign banks, a government decision that was voted down by 98,10% of the population. In 2011 a similar, yet different issue in detail, referendum was held, in which the government, once again, was defeated – this time by 59,77% of the population. In October 2012, a referendum addressed the new constitution in general, and six articles in particular.

3.3.2. Local level

With its structure as a unitary state, the national government of Iceland rules the state, while the local authorities, with restrictions from the national level, rule the municipalities. There are also eight administrative regions, but they have no executive power.

The municipalities of Iceland have a strong cultural and historical status that goes back to the first "free men" that conquered Iceland in 800 AD. This tradition becomes obvious when looking closer at

[77] It is important to point out here that this concerns the independent Iceland. Four referendums were held during the "home rule" era 1908-1944, on alcohol policies and compulsary community service.

the municipal system, and it is noticeable that, despite the small population, there are 75 municipalities. One of the “main characteristic of the Icelandic municipal system”, Hovgaard et al. explain, “is the great number of small, sparsely populated municipalities.”[78]

With its ambition of a welfare state, the Icelandic state has traditionally been active in the municipalities. The most usual form of support has been through industrial support, agricultural support and support to the local fishing industry. There has however been shift in the recent two decades, and these “[c]hanging policies in the fishery and agricultural sectors, the withdrawal of state subsidies and the devolution of growing numbers of tasks to a municipal level have had an important impact locally.”[79]

The Icelandic system is thus decentralized in the sense that the municipalities have authority in questions concerning local issues. The state is placing a legal framework on the municipalities, but within this framework, the municipalities are able to govern themselves. A more recent development has led to a shift that even more political issues are handled by the municipalities, which has put more pressure on smaller municipalities, which in turn has led to a development of, for example, amalgamations.

3.4. Citizens’ use of ICTs

Together with other late industrial democracies, Iceland is one the most advanced countries when it comes to the diffusion and use of ICTs. Already in the beginning of the new millennia, some scholars noticed the “Icelandic miracle” when it came to internet diffusion.[80] In 2008, 88% of the population had access to the internet at home, and 86% of the population used the internet daily.[81] And in 2012, 96% of the population had been connected to the internet within 3 months, 95% had internet access at home (96% in the capital area), 92% of the population had a broadband connection (93% in the capital area), 91% of the population used the internet daily, and 44% had accessed internet through their mobile/smart phone.[82]

3.5. E-governance policies

The first two computers that came to Iceland in the 1960s were used by the Icelandic State and Municipal Data Centre to collect personal data, and by the University of Iceland to conduct research.[83] In 2012, 96% of the population had access to a computer at home, and 95% had access to the internet.[84] The growth has thus been vast.

Already early on, the government of Iceland recognized the potential of ICTs, and with the development of the World Wide Web, Iceland aimed high. In the starting lines of the 1996 document,

[78] Hovgaard et. al, 2004, p. 21
[79] Skaptadóttir & Jóhannesson, 2004, p. 63
[80] Dupuy, 2003
[81] All statistics can be found at Iceland official centre for statistics website; URL:http://www.statice.is
[82] Ibid.
[83] Benediktsson et. al, 2003
[84] Figures from the Iceland official centre for statistics website; URL:http://www.statice.is

'*Icelandic Government's Vision of the Information Society*' (i.e. only one year after the release of the WWW), the sitting prime minister, Davíð Oddsson, expressed that:

"… [t]he Government of Iceland has therefore formulated a policy on the issues of the information society. Such policy formulation is an attempt to ensure all citizens full and equal access to the innovations and options that will be available. […] Information and telecommunications technology […] not only open up new possibilities for the future development of Icelandic society, but also create a turning point in the presentation and understanding of the cultural values the nation has created in past centuries […] The chief objective is that Iceland shall be in the forefront of the world's nations in the utilization of information technology in the service of improved human existence and increased prosperity." [85]

There seems to be little doubt that the Icelandic government took the issue of information technology seriously from the very beginning.

From these hopeful and visionary lines, a series of developments took place within the frame of e-government, i.e. e-solutions aimed at services and administration. In more recent government documents, such as 'Iceland the e-Nation', Iceland's policy document for paving the course of 2008-2012, one can read that "Icelanders shall become the leading nation in electronic services and the utilisation of information technology"[86] and that "Iceland shall become an e-nation – offering self-service of high quality at a single location".[87]

In general, there is a limited focus on e-democracy in government policies. However, in 'Iceland the e-Nation', it is noted under 'eParticipation and eDemocracy', that "[t]he opportunities for democratic participation and communication with public bodies shall be expanded, for instance by allowing people to become involved in formulating policy, determining regulations and public body decision-making. Trials shall be conducted with e-voting in municipal elections."[88] This is a more pro active statement than, for example, the Swedish equivalent.

The government's focus on implementing e-services and not e-democratic solutions becomes obvious when comparing Iceland to other states. As we can see below, Iceland is ranked among the top 25 in the world when it comes to e-government, but only ranked as number 82 when it comes to e-participation. In comparison with the other countries of this project, Iceland performs roughly on the same level as Sweden and Estonia regarding e-government, human capital and infrastructure, while lagging behind considerably when it comes to e-participation as well as provision of online services. This comparison must although be made with consideration of the fact that Sweden as well as Estonia are both pioneer countries with regards to e-democracy and e-government.

[85] The Icelandic Government, 1996
[86] Prime Minister's Office, 2008, p. 5
[87] Ibid. p. 5
[88] Ibid. p. 12

Table 5: UN E-Government Survey

		Estonia	Iceland	Sweden
E-Government	Score	,80	,78	,86
	Ranking	20	22	7
	Trend (2003-2012)	0,10	0,08	0,02
E-Participation	Score	,76	,16	,68
	Ranking	8	82	15
	Trend (2003-2012)	0,12	0,05	0,11
Human Capital	Score	0,91	0,93	0,91
	Ranking	25	15	26
	Trend (2003-2012)	-0,04	-0,03	-0,08
Infrastructure	Score	,66	,88	,82
	Ranking	30	3	9
	Trend (2003-2012)	0,16	0,07	-0,03
Online service	Score (2008)	,71	,46	,98
	Ranking (2010)	28	48	24
	Trend (2003-2008)	0,07	0,12	0,3

Notes: The table presents the index score (on a scale between 0 and 1) as well as ranking position (among a total of 192 countries) of the different items in the UN E-Government Survey. The latest available data is presented in the table. If no other information is given, the cells present the results of the 2012 survey.

3.6. E-participation initatives

The combination of a strong and stable political system, rather strong political parties and a governmental focus upon e-services and e-administration has resulted in few, almost none, innovations for e-democracy in Iceland up to 2008.

After the economic and political crisis in 2008, this has, however, changed. Far from being experienced in using ICTs for solving democratic issues, the Icelanders, less than two years after the crisis, found themselves able to write their new constitution through social media. On the local level, the participatory tool *Better Reykjavik* was introduced and participatory budgeting was conducted online during 2012.

3.6.1. National level

With little experience of e-participation activities at the national level, much focus will be put on the recently conducted constitutional process.

The current constitution was adopted in a referendum in 1944 and was almost entirely adapted from the Danish constituion. After the political and financial crisis in 2008, the trust for the establishment fell to an all-time low. Because the prospect of re-writing the constitution had been a subject of public debate for some time, after 2008 it became one of the targets for change. “When countries crash,”

Gylfason argues, "a natural thing for their inhabitants to do, *inter alia*, is inspect their legal and constitutional foundation to look for latent flaws and to fix them."[89]

It was decided that the constitution should be re-written, and with that decision, a rather unique process unfolded. In short, the parliament decided to call for a national forum of 950 citizens to discuss constitutional reform,[90] to elect (by popular vote) a constitutional council comprising 25 delegates and, lastly, to take a proposed bill to parliament for a vote. What happened was that the delegated in the constitutional council came up with its own format for writing the bill, and instead of keeping the text within the council, the constitutional draft was posted online, to be drafted by the citizens of Iceland. Gylfason[91] describes the decision as:

The Council decided to invite the people of Iceland to participate in its proceedings via the Internet. This decision was a natural one in view of the fact that the constitutional revision process was set in motion by the Pots and Pans who took to the streets after the crash. There was interest. So, conducting Council meetings live on the Internet and inviting the public to peruse and respond to the Council's written work step by step was a natural thing to do. This was a good way to harness the enthusiasm and expertise of ordinary citizens.[92]

With this decision, the constitution of Iceland was opened for all citizens, and discussed, re-written and contested in social media, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr.

In July 2011, a constitutional draft was handed over to the parliament and in October 2012, an advisory referendum was held on the six most controversial issues in the new constitution and if the new constitution should be decided upon at all. Of 236,911 citizens in voting age, 114,570 participated.[93]

3.6.2. Local level

Despite the, until recently, low degree of e-participation at the national level, there has been some activity at the local level, however mostly in the capital city of Reykjavik.

The first example of an e-participation initiative was the e-voting approach to the airport referendum in 2001. The referendum concerned whether or not the domestic airport should stay at the (then) current location, or to be moved after 2016. The turnout was disappointing – only 37% participated – and the results were hard to interpret, since 51% voted for "move" and 49% voted for "stay". The mayor later decided to go with the result and move the airport.[94] Despite the low turnout, the initiative opened up for e-participation in Reykjavik.

Another example is the project of drafting a new 'Local Agenda 21' policy in Reykjavik. The project was conducted at city hall and included two groups: citizens and stakeholders. The aim of the project

[89] Gylfason, 2012, p. 3
[90] *The Constitutional Council – General* Information. URL http://stjornlagarad.is/english/. (Accessed: 2012-12-13).
[91] Gylfason was a member of the Constitutional Council.
[92] Gylfason, Thorvaldur. 2012. *Constitutions: Send in the Crowds*. URL: notendur.hi.is
[93] Ministry of Interior, 2012
[94] Reynarsson, 2001

was to consult citizens via the internet, at a website created by city hall, on which citizens could contribute with ideas, comments and general observations. These contributions were later e-mailed to the Department of Environment and processed into the new policy document.[95]

The final example, and the case for the current research project, is the project *Better Reykjavik*. Started by the non-profit organization Citizens' Foundation, the website Shadow City (Skuggaborg) was created in 2010 and soon became part of the political campaign in Reykjavik local elections. After the victory of the Best Party, the website was reconstructed and implemented in the local municipal system as Better Reykjavik.

The original idea with the website and the project was, among others things, to "fill the gap between citizens and politicians".[96] When sketching a shallow picture of the project, one could say that it is a website on which the citizens of Reykjavik, after registering, can post, discuss and "vote" upon political issues concerning local politics. The founders and civil servants at city hall,[97] consider the system as an e-initiative system as it shares many features of e-petition systems found elsewhere. But there are important differences in the details of its construction.

First, it is largely run by a non-profit organization, which emphasizes the bottom-up character of the project. The administration and bureaucracy had no insight in the system while it was created, and thus no way of changing the technical system to fit the political system. What happened was almost the opposite, i.e. that the political system had to take the technical system into consideration. Thus, the technical solutions and the problem of implementation is, more often, it seems, solved by changing political processes than the other way around. This has created some problems, but on the other hand it has created some possibilities for the new administration to formulate a new participatory framework for the municipality.

Second, local government has not a set threshold number of signatures for handling petitions. Instead they reserve time for the petitions with the most signatures each month within each committee, which may signal a stronger willingness to address the concerns of the citizens.

Third, Better Reykjavik offer citizens more opportunities to contest, refine, or combine one another's ideas and arguments than is usual in e-petition systems. For instance, there is an opportunity to contribute with arguments for or against a petition and other citizens can thereafter review these arguments in terms of how helpful they were in understanding the issue. Moreover, this system has the option not only to sign in favour of a petition, but also against it. All in all, this seems to be an innovative implementation of the e-petition idea with promising results. Compared with the e-petitioning system in the city of Malmö in Sweden, Better Rejkjavik has gathered more than three times as many petitions in the period 2008-11 (1,647 against 449), more signatures per petition and, perhaps most importantly, more deliberation on the site.[98]

[95] Guðmundsson, 2007
[96] Quote from interview with the founders of the site Gunnar and Robert.
[97] A common understanding we found in interviews with civil servants at City Hall, Reykjavik conducted in May 2012.
[98] Kristensson, 2012

3.7. Discussion and conclusion

In conclusion, Iceland is a country with two faces: a pre-crisis face and a post-crisis face. The first face pictures a young state in development, with a stable electoral system, a functioning and rather stable party system and healthy welfare policies. Furthermore, it shows an Icelandic leadership embracing the potential of ICTs for e-services. At this time, despite leadership recognition of ICTs in general and strong ICT infrastructure, there was no particular focus on e-participation. Thereafter, the financial and political crisis, starting with the fall of the three largest banks in 2008, forced the political establishment on its head. The second 'face' depicts a post-crisis Iceland, characterized by low trust in politics and established elites and high trust in citizen participation and ICT solutions, with original and innovative e-participation at both national and local levels.

Iceland may not be an e-participation champion according to the measurements of the UN, but when it comes to providing innovative solutions that challenge powerful elites and institutions, Iceland certainly is among the leading countries: nationally, with reference to the constitutional process, and locally with reference to Better Reykjavik. Departing from the traditional post-war understanding of Iceland as a safe and stable welfare democracy, the development in later years is somewhat puzzling. Only judging by the universal properties of online communication and the institutional barriers of existing political institutions, which is the traditional approach in comparative internet research, Iceland would be an unlikely site of such experimentation.

Following the argument of Trevisan and Oates, the Icelandic case rather calls for a new approach to comparative research, "based on a wider, more flexible understanding of 'context' that accounts for the interplay between national constraints and circumstantial offline catalysts".[99] While the insight

[99] Trevisan & Oates, 2012

that technology alone cannot bring about the attitudinal changes needed for permitting consultations with greater delegation of power is not new,[100] the emphasis on circumstantial factors in general and different degrees of crises in particular is. This is, in turn, much due to the fact that institutional variables go a long way in explaining stability (which has usually been the phenomenon to explain) but goes far shorter in explaining change (which so far has been rather unusual).

However, in Iceland the deep financial and political crisis was without doubt the springboard for innovation in e-participation. It was the main factor behind the attitudinal changes and the adoption of new, bolder tactics. Yet, it did not replace (at least not altogether) the importance of institutional elements. The facts that Iceland, as many other western democracies, has been faced with a declining number of citizens joining political parties, and that the political establishment was seen as a small elite in cooperation with other small elites in other societal spheres seem to have contributed to strong reactions from the public after the crash of the banks in 2008. Furthermore, with the old and strong tradition of local rule, the citizens of Reykjavik reacted to the crises, not only by national demands, but also by voting in an anti-establishment party to city hall. The institutional arrangement made this process possible, and when granted access to city hall, the Best Party was able to pursue one of its initial goals, which was to make citizens participate via the internet.

The specific context of Iceland in general and Reykjavik in particular is of course highly interesting beyond the phase of policymaking. Two specific questions, which are related to the state of crises, stand out.

Firstly, how does the context of crises impact on actual participation? In the literature, two competing claims can be found. While some authors argue that distrust can be a motivating factor for participation, others claim that trust is a prerequisite for participation. There are also potential mediating factors. For instance, the relationship between trust and participation is said to be dependent on self-confidence about one's capacity to understand politics.[101]

Secondly, how does participation impact on trust? Despite decades of trials with participation the effect of participation on democratic legitimacy is not very well understood. Can citizen participation help to restore trust? How, why and under what conditions? By studying who is participating, why and how attitudes are changing (if they are), the Icelandic case holds the potential of informing these important debates with new and interesting evidence.

[100] Åström et al, 2011; Åström & Grönlund, 2011
[101] Hooghe & Marien, 2013

References

Part: e-Participation Policy in Sweden

Amnå, E. (2006). Playing with fire. A Swedish mobilization for deliberative democracy, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(4): 587-606.

Åström, J. (2004). *Mot en digital demokrati? Teknik, politik och institutionell förändring*. Örebro: University.

Åström, J., Freschi, A-C., & Montin, S. (2010). "Electronic and representative democracy: A happy couple? Comparing online dialouges in the UK, Sweden and Italy", In Amnå, E (Ed.) *New Forms of Citizen Participation: Normative Implications*. Baden-Baden: Nomos verlag.

Åström, J., & Karlsson, M. (2013). Blogging in the Shadow of Parties: Exploring Ideological Differences in Online Campaigning. *Political Communication*, 30(3): 434-455.

Åström, J., & Norén, M. (2007). *Medborgarorienterade offentliga e-tjänster: innovation och lärande i örebroregionen*. Örebro: Örebro University.

Åström, J., & Sedelius, T. (2010). *Representativ demokrati 2.0: En utvärdering av Malmöinitiativet och Malmöpanelen*. Malmö: Malmö Stad.

Coleman, S. (2005). New mediation: and direct representation: reconceptualizing representation in the digital age. *New Media & Society*, 7(2): 177-198.

Denters, B., & Klok, P-J. (2012). Citizen Democracy and the Responsiveness of Councillors: The Effects of Democratic Institutionalisation on the Role Orientations and Role Behaviour of Councillors. *Local Government Studies*, Online first.

Findahl, O. (2012) *Svenskarna och Internet 2011.* World Internet Institute: Gävle.

Gilljam, M., & Jodal, O. (2005). ”Kommunala demokratisatsningar – vägen till en mer vital demokrati?”, In Esaiasson, P. och Westholm, A. (Eds.) *Deltagandets mekanismer: Det politiska deltagandets orsaker och konsekvenser*. Malmö: Liber.

Gilljam, M., Karlsson, D., & Sundell, A. (2010). *Politik på hemmaplan: Tiotusen svenska fullmäktigeledamöter tycker om politik och demokrati*. Stockholm: SKL Kommentus.

Governmental bill 2001/02:80, *Demokrati för det nya seklet* ("Democracy for the new century").

Granberg, M., & Åström, J. (2010). "Civic participation%and interactive decision-making: A case study", In Amnå, Erik (Ed.) *New forms of Citizen Participation: Normative implications.* Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Holmberg, S. (1999a) "Down and down we go: Political trust in Sweden", In Norris, P. (Ed.) *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holmberg, S. (1999b), "Wishful Thinking Among European Parlamentarians", In Schmitt, H., & Thomassen, J. (Eds.) *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ingelhart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). Exploring the unknown: Predicting the responses of publics not yet surveyed. *International Review of Sociology*, 15(1): 173-201.

Karlsson, M. (2011). ”Kan medborgardialoger stärka den representativa demokratin?”, In Hellberg, A-S., Karlsson, M., Larsson, H., Lundberg, E., & Persson, M. (Eds.) Perspektiv på offentlig verksamhet i utveckling: Tolv kapitel om demokrati, styrning och effektivitet, Örebro: Örebro University.

Karlsson, M. (2012) Participatory initiatives and political representation: The case of local councillors in Sweden. *Local Government Studies,* 38(6): 795-815.

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1994). *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organization in Western Democracies*. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage

Montin, S. (2004). “The Swedish Model: Many Actors and Few Strong Leaders”, In Berg, R., & Rao, N. (Eds.) *The Local Political Executive*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Montin, S. (2007). “Mobilizing for participatory democracy? The case of democracy policy in Sweden”, In Zittel, T., & Fuchs, D. (Eds.) *Participatory democracy and political participation – Can participatory engineering bring citizens back in?*. Oxon, London: Routledge.

Newman, J., Barnes, M., Sullivan, H., & Knops, A. (2004). PublicParticipation and Collaborative Governance. *Journal of Social Policy*, 33(2): 203-23.

Post och telestyrelsen [PTS] (2012). “Bredbandskartan”, Website: http://bredbandskartan.pts.se

(Accessed: 2013-07-30).

SOU 2000:1. *En uthållig demokrati! Politik för folkstyrelse på 2000-talet.* Stockholm: Fritzes.

Swedens Association for Localities and Regions [SALAR]. (2009). *Elva tankar om medborgardialog i styrningen*. Stockholm: SALAR.

Swedens Association for Localities and Regions [SALAR]. (2012). "Nätverk e-petitioner". Website: http://www.skl.se/vi_arbetar_med/demos/demokratiutveckling/medborgardialog/natverk_medborgardialog/natverk_e-petitioner_medborgardialog (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Statistics Sweden [SCB]. (2011). Graden av partiidentifikation 1956-2010. Procent. Website: http://www.scb.se/Pages/TableAndChart____272978.aspx (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Statistics Sweden [SCB]. (2012). “Folkmängden efter region, civilstånd, ålder och kön. År 1968-2011”. Website: http://www.scb.se/Pages/SSD/SSD_SelectVariables____340487.aspx?rxid=d58e9054-0867-4be5-b982-a8bf8cd502db&px_tableid=ssd_extern%3aBefolkningNy (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Part: e-Participation Policy in Estonia

Charter 12. (2012) Website: http://www.harta12.ee/eng/ (Accessed: 2012-11-29).

Christiansen, J-A. (2009). “E-democracy”, In Rahman, H. (Ed.) Handbook of Research on E-Government Readiness for Information and Service Exchange: Utilizing Progressive Information Communication Technologies. Hershey: Information Science Reference.

e-Governance Academy (2007). “Analysis report on TOM tool”. Website: http://www.ega.ee/files/TID_Analysis_Report_June_2007.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

EPACE (2010). “E-democracy handbook”. Website: http://www.kansanvalta.fi/en/Etusivu/Tutkimusjakehitys/EPACE/EPACEjulkaisutpa (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Ernsdorff, M., & Berbec, A. (2007). “Estonia: The short road to e-government and e democracy”. In Nixon, P. G., & Koutrakou, V. N. (Eds.) E-Government in Europe: Re-Booting the State. London and New York: Routledge.

Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (2010a). “Statistical overview on the use of public e-services”. Website: http://www.riso.ee/et/files/kodanike_rahulolu_avalike_eteenustega_2010.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (2010b) “Information Society Yearbook”. Website: http://www.riso.ee/et/pub/2010it/eng/Estonian_IT_yearbook_2010.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Estonian Ministry of Economic Affais and Communications. (2012). “Statistical Overview 2011-2012”. Website: http://www.riso.ee/en/content/statistical-overview2011%E2%80%932012#.UZkTQbUqx8s (Accessed: 2013-05-18).

Internet World Stats (2013). *Top 50 Countries with the highest Internet penetration rate*. Website: http://www.internetworldstats.com/top25.htm (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Kitsing, M. (2010). An Evaluation of E-Government In Estonia. Paper presented at the conference “Internet, Politics and Policy 2010: An Impact Assessment conference”, Oxford University, September 16-17, 2010. Website: http://microsites.oii.ox.ac.uk/ipp2010/system/files/IPP2010_Kitsing_1_Paper_0.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Kitsing, M. (2011). Success Without Strategy: E-Government Development in Estonia. Policy & Internet, 3(1): 1-21.

Laanes, L. (2011). Building an Inclusive Information Society at the Local Level in Estonia. Paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Information Law, Thessaloniki, May 20-21. Website: http://conferences.ionio.gr/icil2011/download.php?f=papers/159-laanes-abstract-en-v001.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Lobjakas, A. (2012). Charter 12: Estonia's stab at direct democracy. Website: http://www.opendemocracy.net/ahto-lobjakas/charter-12-estonias-stab-at-direct-democracy (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Madise, Ü. (2007). Elections, Political Parties, and Legislative Performance in Estonia: Institutional Choices from the Return to Independence to the Rise of E-Democracy. Tallinn: TUT Press.

Ministry of Economic Affais and Communications (2013). “Statistical Overview 2011 – 2012.” Website: http://www.riso.ee/en/content/statistical-overview-2011%E2%80%932012#.UZkTQbUqx8s (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

OECD Public Governance Reviews (2011). Website: http://www.valitsus.ee/UserFiles/valitsus/et/riigikantselei/uldinfo/dokumendiregister/Uuringud/OECD_Public%20Governance%20Review_Estonia_full%20report.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Reinsalu, K. (2009a). Information Society Yearbook 2009. Website: http://www.riso.ee/en/pub/2009it/#p=1-1-1 (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Reinsalu, K. (2009b). The Implementation of Internet Democracy in Estonian Local Governments. Tartu: Tartu University Press.

Sootla, G., & Toots, A. (2006). "Report on the State of Local Democracy in Estonia", in Soós, G. (Ed.) Local Democracy in Central Europe - Reports from Bulgaria, Estonia, and Slovakia. Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative. Budapest: Open Society Institute.

Statistics Estonia (2012). Estonian Board of Statistics. Website: http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=IC20&ti=HOUSEHOLDS+HAVING+A+COMPUTER+AND+INTERNET+CONNECTION+AT+HOME+BY+TYPE&path=../I_Databas/Economy/20Information_technology/04Information_technology_in_household/&lang=1 (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Part: e-Participation Policy in Iceland

Åström, J., Granberg, M., & Khakee, A. (2011). Apple Pie – Spinach Metaphor: Shall E-democracy Make Participatory Planning More Wholesome? I, 26(5): 571-586.

Åström, J., & Grönlund, Å. (2011). "Online Consultations in Local Government: What works, When and Why?" In Coleman, S., & Shane, P. (Eds.) *Connecting Democracy: Online Consultation and the Flow of Political Communication*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Benediktsson, O., Gunnarsson, J., Hreinsson, E. B., Jakobsson, J., Kaldalóns, Ö., Kjartansson, Ó., Rósmundsson, Ó., Sigvaldason, H., Stefánsson, G., & Zophoniasson, J. (2003) "Computerisation of the Icelandic State and Municipalities: 1964 to 1985". Paper presented at the History of Nordic Computing, Throndheim, 16-18 June 2003.

Dalton, R. J. (2008). *Citizen Politics – Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Washington D.C: CG Press.

Dupuy, G. (2003). The Icelandic miracle: The internet in an emergent metropolis. *Journal of Urban Technology*, 10(2): 1-18.

Gissurarson, H., & Mitchell, D. J., (2007). The Iceland Tax System - Key features and lessons for Policy Makers. Prosperitas, 7(5): 1-19.

Gissurarsson, H. (2004). "Miracle on Iceland". The Wall Street Journal Online, 29th January 2004. Website: http://courses.wcupa.edu/rbove/eco343/040compecon/Scand/Iceland/040129prosper.htm (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Guðmundsson, H. J. (2007). "The role of public participation in creating a sustainable development policy at the local level. An example from the City of Reykjavík, Iceland". Report (For publication in: Local Environment. The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability), The City of Reykjavik, Department of Environment.

Gylfason, T., Holmström, B., Korkman, S., Söderström, H.T., Vihriälä, V. (2010). *Nordics in Global Crisis: Vulnerability and Resilience*. Helsinki: The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy.

Gylfason, T. (2012). Constitutions: Send in the Crowds. Website: http://notendur.hi.is (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Gylfason, T. (2012). From Collapse to Constitution: The Case of Iceland. *Cesifo Working Paper*, No. 3770. Munich: Cesifo.

Hardarson, Ó., & Kristinsson, G. H. (2010). Iceland. *European Journal of Political Research,* 49(7-8): 1009–1016.

Hardarson, Ó., & Kristinsson, G. H. (2011). Iceland. *European Journal of Political Research*, 50(7-8): 1002-1003.

Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). A Comparative Analysis of the Relation between Political Trust and Forms of Political Participation in Europe. *European Societies*, 15(1): 131-152.

Hovgaard, G., Eythórsson, G. T., & Fellman, K. (2004). *Future Challenges to Small Municipalities - The Cases of Iceland, Faroe Islands and Åland Islands*. Stockholm: Nordregio.

Icelandic Prime Minister's Office (2008) "Iceland the e-nation Icelandic Government Policy on the Information Society 2008 – 2012". Website: http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/information-society/English/nr/2974 (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Jónsson, G. (2001). The Icelandic Welfare State in the Twentieth Century. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 26(3): 249-267.

Kristensson, R. (2012). *Förenliga motsatser? En jämförande studie om aggregering och deliberation i två e-petitionssystem*. Master Thesis in Political Science. Örebro: Örebro universitet.

Kristjánsson, S. (2003). "Iceland: A Parliamentary Democracy With a Semi-Presidential Constitution", in Strøm, K., Müller, W., & Bergman, T. (Eds.). *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Kristjánsson, S. (2004). Iceland: Searching for Democracy along Three Dimensions of Citizen Control. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27(2): 153-174.

Kristjánsson & Indridason, I. H. (2011). "Iceland – Dramatic Shifts", In Bergman, T., & Strøm, K. (Eds.) *The Madisonian Turn – Political Parties and Parliamentary Democracy in Nordic Europe*. University of Michigan Press.

Ministry of Interior (2012). "Advertisement of the results of the referendum on 20 October 2012". Website: http://eng.innanrikisraduneyti.is/news/nr/28296 (Accessed: 2013-07-30).

Prime ministers office, (2008). *Iceland the e-nation Icelandic Government Policy on the Information Society 2008 – 2012.* Website: http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/media/utgefidefni/Iceland_the_eNation.pdf (Accessed: 2013-07-31).

Petersson, O. (2000). *Nordisk politik*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.

Reynarsson, B. (2001). Reykjavík – the Future City. Paper presented at the conference: Area-based initiatives in contemporary urban policy, Danish building and Urban Research and European Urban Research Association, Copenhagen 17-19 May.

Skaptadóttir, U. D., & Jóhannesson, G. Þ. (2004). "The Role of Municipalities in Innovation - Innovations in three sectors of society in two municipalities in Iceland", In Aarsæther, N. (Ed.). Innovations in the Nordic Periphery. Stockholm: Nordregio.

The Icelandic Government (1996). "Vision of the Information Society". Website: http://eng.forsaetisraduneyti.is/information-society/English/nr/890 (Accessed: 2012-08-23).

Trevisan, F., & Oates, S. (2012). *Same Receipe but Different Ingredients? Challenges and Methodologies of Comparative Internet/Politics Research*. Paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, August 30th – September 2nd 2012.

Wade, R. (2009). Iceland as Icarus. *Challenge*, 52(3): 5–33.