

# Making Sense of Gov 2.0 Strategies: “No Citizens, No Party”

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**Abstract:** *One of the main factors contributing to the limited impact of eParticipation projects is the presence of a high level of social complexity that has been identified by Macintosh (2006) as one of the five challenges in the implementation of eParticipation practices. How to make sense of social complexity is still an open issue as well as the way governments can take benefit from the wealth of information that is already available on their constituencies' collective behaviour. In this paper, we contend that the presence of a considerable variance in terms of political interests, educational level and technological skills makes it very difficult to design workable and effective systems to support participation. A modular strategy is then recommended requiring policy designers to make a step towards citizens rather than expecting the citizenry to move their content production activity onto the “official” spaces created for ad hoc participation.*

**Keywords:** Gov 2.0, Web 2.0, Mobile Participation, mParticipation, Social Computing, Digital Divide.

## 1. Framing the Problem

**A**s eGovernment services are continuously expanding worldwide there is a strong interest in measuring the results of public investments. The World Bank (Adamali & Lanvin 2005) created a measurement framework suggesting a 'stakeholders-based' methodology to design surveys that evaluate the impact of eGovernment projects. The eGEP study (Codagnone & Cilli 2006) funded by the European Commission showed total ICT expenditure by public administrations in EU25 to be about €36.5 billion and eGovernment expenditure about €11.9 billion in 2004. Most eGovernment related expenditure is investment and this represents about 5% of public investment. The majority of ICT expenditure is in regional and local governments, which together make up 55% of the total.

As of today, such use of taxpayers' money has failed to deliver a real change in public sector performance. No or little impact has been in fact produced on citizens' lives in terms of convenience or value delivery, as witnessed by the remarkably low percentage of EU citizens that are actually making online transactions with their governments (see *Figure 1* below).

This result is probably due to a variety of reasons, among which we may find:

- Lack of policy intelligence skills in the governance of ICT investments
- Automation rather than innovation of existing processes
- No or little orientation towards the generation of value for the citizenry.

The limited impact produced by this technology driven and internally oriented management of ICT investments becomes an even more severe problem if coupled with the growing pressure on public budgets showed in all financial projections and demographic trends.

Nonetheless, the long-term drive towards eGovernment in Europe can and must not be stopped, as the strategic contribution of the public sector to European competitiveness is undoubted and unquestionable. It is thus necessary to question and rethink the orientation and the incentive systems adopted in the management of public ICT investments.

A recent step in that direction has been made by the United Nations (2008) with the concept of Connected or Networked Governance, which involves “*the governmental promotion of collective actions to advance the public good, by engaging the creative efforts of the whole society*”. This emerging approach to public sector service delivery stipulates the need to move from the old fashioned model of government dispensing services via traditional modes to the emphasis on an integrated approach focusing on the use of technologies to enhance the value of services to the citizen. In this context, (e-)Participation takes up a new role of growing importance in modern societies: not only are connected governance efforts aimed at improving cooperation between governmental agencies, but they also focus on enhancing stakeholders involvement and consultation as well as a more active citizens engagement, supported by ICT tools.

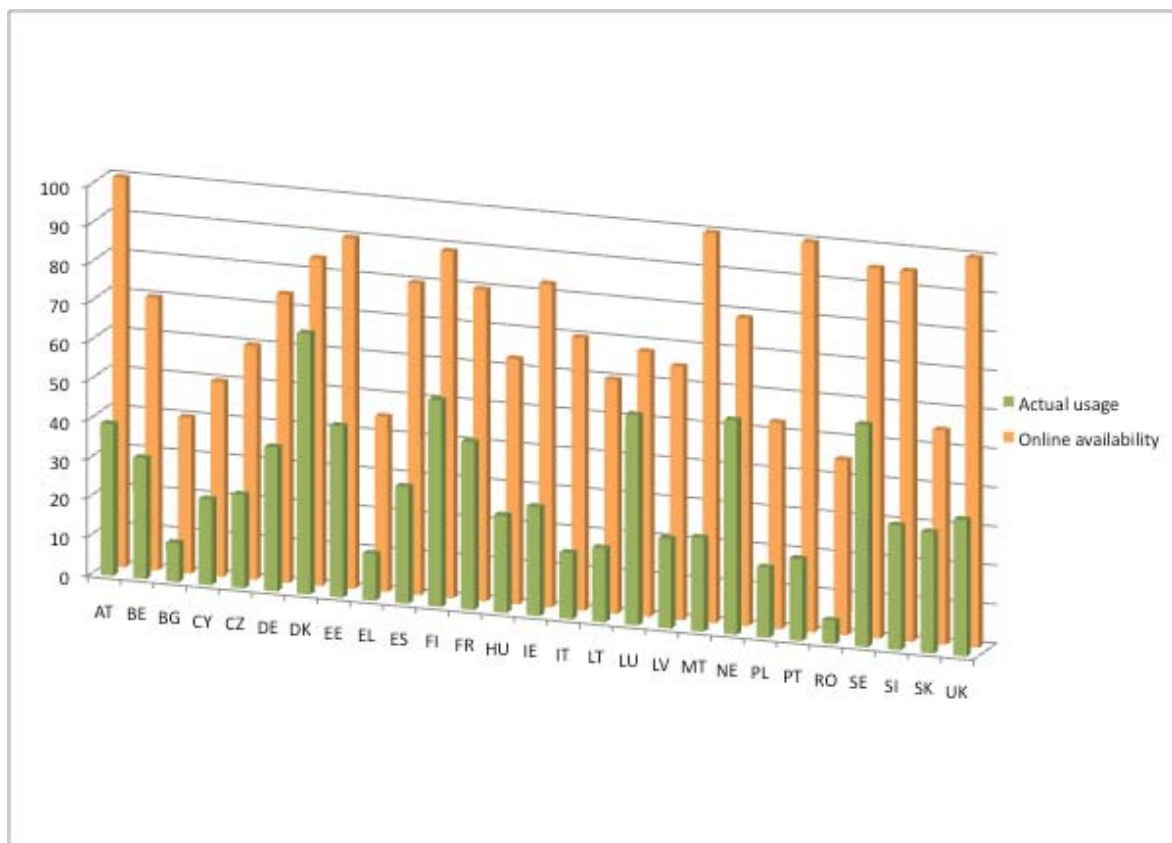


Figure 1: Use of eGovernment services compared to front office availability, EU27 countries, 2009<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, public investments aimed at creating a more open, transparent and inclusive government have followed a similar path to those making services available on line. In the past ten years, a plethora of eParticipation experiments has been documented in Europe and abroad, which have used different technologies and various methodologies to purport to highly heterogeneous policy goals. In spite of the lack of systematic evaluation, a common trait to those experiments is that they have involved a very small minority of citizens with respect to the population as a whole.

For instance, if we look at the more recent and systematic policy attempt to drive the European society towards sharing the best practices of eParticipation - i.e. the Preparatory Actions launched in 2006 by the EC, with three consecutive yearly calls since then – the evidence regarding the

<sup>1</sup> Source: our elaboration of EUROSTAT datasets.

number of participants is not exceptional, even in the best run projects. The following Table includes only the first and second call project trials that are completed by this time, some of which (possibly due to their specific aims) do not show any quantitative results at all:

Table 1: Some quantitative results of the eParticipation Preparatory Action 2006 projects pilots<sup>2</sup>

Project Acronym	Pilot Location	No. Posts (*)	No. Users (*)	No. Views (*)
DALOS	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
LEGESE	Bristol (UK)	146	N/A	4000
	Vysocina (CZ)	N/A	N/A	1000
	Fingal (IE)	N/A	N/A	N/A
LEXIPATION	Hamburg (DE)	968	285	16000
	Thessaloniki (GR)	35	62	12000
	Massa (IT)	202	93	1800
	Alston Moor (UK)	52	273	464
LEX-IS	Hellenic Parliament (GR)	128	74	3797
	Austrian Parliament (AT)	253	152	12332
SEAL	Dutch House of Representatives (NL)	N/A	20	N/A
	Austrian House of Representatives (AT)	N/A		N/A
	Italian Chambers of Deputies (IT)	N/A		N/A
	Italian Senate (IT)	N/A		N/A
TID+	Estonia (EE)	N/A	30	N/A
CITIZENSCAPE	Bristol (UK)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Donegal (IE)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Genoa (IT)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Ziina(SI)	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Seimas (LT)	N/A	60	N/A
Catalonian Parliament (ES)	N/A	N/A		
eCOMMITTEE	CZ, DE, FR, IE, IT, NE, PT, RU, SE	160	110	524
FEED	CZ	N/A	N/A	N/A
	GR	N/A	N/A	N/A
	NE	N/A	N/A	N/A
IDEAL-EU	ES, FR, IT	N/A	1176	14461
VEP	BE, ES, SE	153	140	N/A
VOICE	Baden-Wurttemberg (DE)	47	375	N/A
	Generalitat Valenciana (ES)	26		N/A

(\*) as of January 2009

As Table 1 shows, the quantity of participation can be evaluated in (at least) three ways:

- By counting how many postings were added by the different contributors to the electronic debates. For instance, if we look at the LexiPation project, some pilots were dominated by a comparatively small number of participants with a comparatively higher number of postings per capita, while for some others the situation was just the opposite. Being the technology used much the same, only the societal and possibly content related aspects are left that could possibly help explain such evident cross-differences;
- By using the sheer number of registered users, possibly normalised for the target population size. Though this can be taken as a very rough indicator of pilot success, we will show later that it can be very relevant for a proper appreciation of its outcomes;
- By considering the number of independent visitors (views) to the pilot website coming from the pilot area. Though this has little to do with actual eParticipation, we consider this figure as a good indicator of impact, especially during the pilot preparation and execution activities (assuming a certain degree of hysteresis in dissemination effects). Also this number should be normalised to the target population size.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Charalabidis, Kipenis & Koussouris (2009).

The above examples illustrate a possible research challenge for evaluation, which has been accepted till now by very few scholars, maybe due to lack of data: in fact, quantitative impact seems to be one of the best kept secrets of most eParticipation initiatives. A recent literature survey (Sæbø, Rose & Skiftenes Flak 2008) showed that there were no comparative studies with traditional offline initiatives, though this would seem a sound approach to assessing the outcomes.

The evidence from Table 1 can undoubtedly be partial, but we take it as paradigmatic of the current depth of penetration of eParticipation practices in the complexity of European societies. Among the reasons for these mixed results - which do not affect, by the way, the good technical quality of most experiments - we can tentatively list the following:

- The distribution of online users behaviour was not taken into account. Only a minority of people is willing to actively produce content or offer reviews/feedbacks (10% of Internet users → 5% of the whole population based on a recent estimate by JRC/IPTS – Osimo, 2008);
- Public administrations expected citizens to make the first step (they were waiting for them to move forward from their own online environments to participate in public debates);
- The designated “official” spaces were largely unknown to the general public due to the high costs of promotion and the slow pace of dissemination;
- The topics dealt with were sometimes distant from people’s daily problems and priorities, so that content contributions by non experts was inhibited;
- The tools adopted were not appropriate, or usable only by an affluent and acculturate minority;
- The methodologies implemented were not scalable; thus, they could only be adopted in pilot trials with a limited impact at system level.

The recent explosion of Web 2.0 - the “social interaction” dimension of the Internet – has been seen by many as a potential turning point, enabling a change in the role of users, who would participate more proactively in service delivery, as much in the public sector as in the private. The value of the specific competences and skills of the users is widely recognized as a unique source of service improvement. David Osimo (2008) made a calculation based on existing data, of the percentage of Internet users who are involved at different levels and with various degrees of intensity in the current Web 2.0 applications. The core users of Web 2.0 are those generating fully-fledged content, such as blogs, Wikipedia articles, and videos on YouTube. These are a small minority of Internet users, generally younger and more IT-savvy. A second circle represents those people who provide feedback, comments, and reviews of existing content. This includes, for example, people who rate products, write reviews for Amazon, tag bookmarks on del.icio.us, or even click on the “love or ban” buttons on online radios such as LastFM. The third circle is composed of Internet users who access, read and watch the content produced by the two inner circles. Although not active, these users benefit from new Web 2.0 applications and values. For example, customers read others' reviews before booking a hotel or buying a book. The fourth circle regroups all Internet users who, though they do not deliberately use Web 2.0 applications, provide input and intelligence that is transformed by Web 2.0 applications into services for other users. The act of buying a book on Amazon is exploited by the website functionality “Customers who bought this book also bought”. Reading a newspaper article on elpais.com provides input into the “most read” section of the website. Searching for a term on the website of the State of Delaware (US) becomes a tag which is displayed on the homepage for other users to look at.

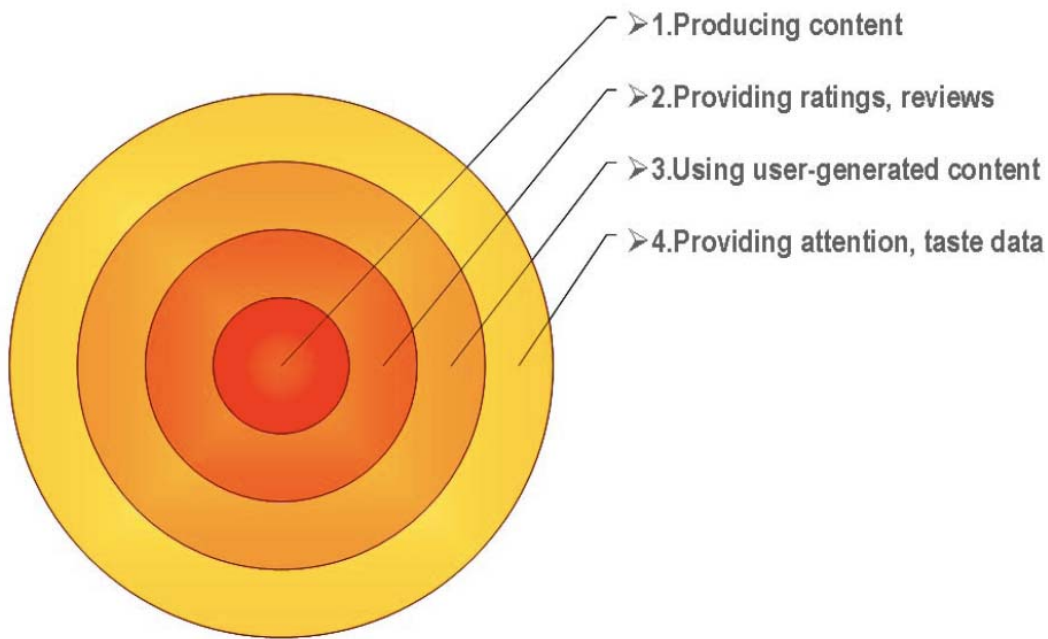


Figure 2: Categorisation of Online Users Behaviour<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Making Sense of Social Complexity

What is missing, however, in the above analysis is a careful consideration of those who are *not* connected to the Internet as yet. The overall size of the four categories in the Osimo paper barely reaches – on average – 50% of the EU population: a result that needs to be complemented if we talk in terms of electronic democracy and, more generally, of political participation. Based on our experience of the Internet, Web 2.0 and society as a whole, we propose a typology of online presence that we dubbed “the ASCU model”, from the initials of the four social characters described in the following Table. Though the individual characters may appear trivial, we are confident that this typology is an exhaustive representation of the complexity of social behaviour, which was identified as a challenge by Ann Macintosh (2006), due to its implications towards political (online/offline) participation.

The classification below represents a first attempt to frame the diverse Internet behaviours and requires further research to be empirically validated. Nevertheless, we are convinced that it could represent a useful starting point for reasoning on the possible strategies to increase the effectiveness of eParticipation projects.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Osimo (2008).

Table 2: The ASCU model

<p><b>The Activists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a small share of the population (say 3-5%)</li> <li>• highly educated, politically and culturally</li> <li>• spend most of their time on the Internet</li> <li>• have time to respond to political calls (incl. eParticipation experiments)</li> <li>• have time to create/share own agendas (b.m.o. blogs, social networks, etc.)</li> <li>• pathology: hijackers...</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Socialisers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a bigger share of the population (say 10-15%)</li> <li>• mostly “Y” and “Z” generations</li> <li>• deeply rooted in the multimedia usage concept (e.g. iPhone™)</li> <li>• low interest in politics as such</li> <li>• tend to create communities and social networks of peers, esp. online</li> <li>• pathology: addicted...</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Connected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the remaining part of the Internet population (say 25-30% of the total)</li> <li>• more akin to the characters of society as a whole (e.g. families, businesses, elderly, professionals etc.)</li> <li>• spend a variable time on the Internet, mostly seen as an additional I&amp;C environment</li> <li>• don’t use eGovernment services though</li> <li>• don’t have time or will to respond to political calls</li> <li>• may have limited skills and/or knowledge of Web 2.0 tools</li> <li>• are sensitive to privacy / security issues...</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Unplugged</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the rest of the world (50% of EU population)</li> <li>• lack of access and motivation to go online due to a variety of known factors such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ low economic wealth</li> <li>○ poor education, Internet skills</li> <li>○ digital divide (broadband...)</li> <li>○ social marginality (immigrants...)</li> <li>○ isolated location (rural...)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• the same factors hamper political/electoral participation as such</li> <li>• if plugged, they can migrate to any remaining profile ...</li> </ul>

The percentages shown in this Table are based on – and perhaps even more generous than – those shown in the previous one or calculated in David Osimo’s study. Though the sheer law of numbers is by no means the only way to assess a performance, our hypothesis is that *there is a close correlation* – which could also be seen as a success indicator! – *between the distribution of trial participants and the one of Internet users (and non users) in the same territory.*

Empirical research (like in Institute for Politics Democracy & The Internet 2007) is required to test this hypothesis by isolating the interconnected social, economic, cultural and technological drivers of their respective behaviours. At this stage, however, we are more interested in projecting the likely evolution of these four communities “size” in the near future (see *Figure 3*).

We make the following assumptions here: thanks to the strong policy making orientation towards eInclusion, it is likely that the share of EU population that is currently “Unplugged” will further decrease, as it happened in the past 5 to 10 years. We also speculate that any additional “plugged” person will randomly migrate towards any of the three remaining profiles, due to several concurrent (and partially offsetting) economic, social and cultural conditions. We might then imagine that the

share of “Socialisers” will also be growing, due to the recent success of Web 2.0 tools, and that this will happen at the expense of the “Connected” community, the size of which might stay more or less the same with respect to population as a whole. (This cannot be satisfactory as a guess, but it serves to keep things simple in our analysis. After all, the forecast that an increasing share of the Internet population will be active in the social networks is consistent with evidence and widely shared among observers).

In this context, what could happen to Internet “Activists”? We are afraid that *their size will remain much the same* - in spite of the further progress in eParticipation methods, tools, trials and experiments.

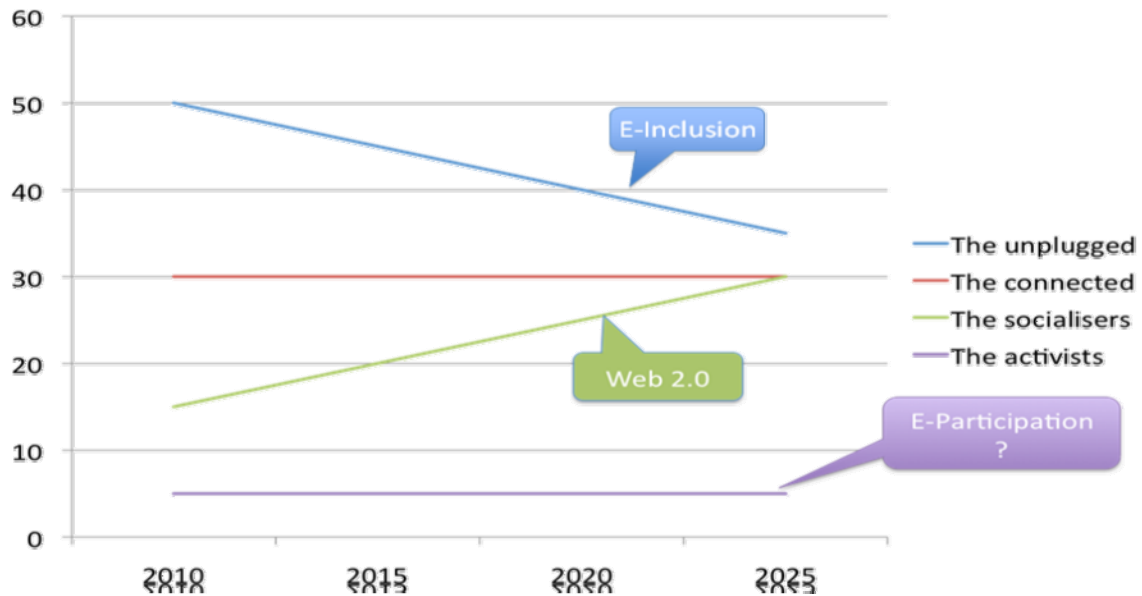


Figure 3: Expected time evolution of the ASCU communities size

### 3. Policy Implications

To start making strategic sense of the previous considerations, we will now try to match the policy makers attitude towards the four profiles introduced earlier, supposing that the former might want to increase the eParticipation pilots success rate with a higher involvement of trials participants from all of the categories. Once again, this classification may look common sense rather than empirically validated, but it can be taken as the start of a more articulated reflection of normative character that goes out of the scope of the present paper.



Table 3: A policy maker's view of the ASCU communities

<p><b>The Activists</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a political minority, yet extremely “noisy” and “powerful” (consensus leaders)</li> <li>• may show a critical attitude/approach towards the ruling establishment</li> <li>• policy makers can be reluctant to base their choices on this community's “will”</li> <li>• typical objection: they are “unrepresentative of the silent majority” of the country</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Socialisers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• too uninterested and uninformed to engage spontaneously in political activism</li> <li>• may react randomly in case their will is forced to express itself</li> <li>• being “the next generations”, their view is important to know (and steer?) for the politicians</li> <li>• policy makers may be gradually more afraid of ignoring “what's happening there”</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Connected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if they are in this category it's because they don't see Internet as the locus of eParticipation</li> <li>• policy makers may want to reach them with propaganda messages – full stop</li> <li>• being “the old generation”, there can be a declining trend in its size over time</li> <li>• how to involve them further is an open issue for eParticipation trial designers</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Unplugged</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if they are in this category it's because the inclusion policies are not 100% effective</li> <li>• policy makers can give priority to offering a representation rather than giving them a voice</li> <li>• how to involve them has quite similar traits to the case of connected people</li> <li>• though they are not on the Internet, they have a mobile phone with them</li> </ul>

What we would like to stress here is that the definition of policy measures should look at present problems bearing in mind future developments too. This, to avoid financing public actions that are inconsistent with the evolution of the underlying contexts. For this reason, it is key to consider an additional ‘ingredient’ having to do with the new trends in Internet access. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the body that leads the development of technical standards for the web, launched in May 2008 a new interest group focusing on the use of *mobile web for social development*. This reflects the fact that the number of mobile phones that can access the Internet is growing at a phenomenal rate, especially in the developing world<sup>4</sup>. In China, for example, over 73 million people, or 29% of all Internet users in the country, use mobile phones to get online. Lee Kai-fu, Google's president in China, announced in 2007 that Google was redesigning its products for a market where “*most Chinese users who touch the mobile Internet will have no PC at all*”.

It is not just China. Opera Software, a firm that makes web-browser software for mobile phones, reports rapid growth in mobile-web browsing in developing countries. The number of web pages viewed in June 2008 by the 14 million users of its software was over 3 billion, a 300% increase on a year earlier. The fastest growth was in developing countries including Russia, Indonesia, India and South Africa. Mobile Internet users from BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) are

<sup>4</sup> *The Economist* print edition, September 4<sup>th</sup> 2008.



more reliant on mobile phones for entertainment content, while users across the United States and Europe view their devices as a resource for information.

Behind these statistics lies a more profound social change. A couple of years ago, a favourite example of mobile phones' impact in the developing world was that an Indian fisherman could call different ports from his boat to get a better price for his catch. Now mobile phones are increasingly being used to access more elaborate data services. If mobile banking is possible using a simple system of text messages, imagine what might be with full web access. But this will require standards to ensure that services and devices are compatible, which explains the interest from the W3C consortium.

According to several experts<sup>5</sup>, the odds are pretty good that the old fashioned model of the Internet (desktop computers on a LAN connected to servers, middleboxes, and other LAN-based desktops by routers and local and long-distance point-to-point links; laptop computers on a WiFi network etc.) becomes totally outmoded in the near future. Implicit in that model is the assumption that all users access the Internet from a desktop or laptop computer, which was substantially true until 5 years ago. Now what is happening is that desktops or laptops are playing an increasingly smaller role in the typical way an Internet user accesses the network; a large fraction of future Internet users may never use what we would think of as a desktop or laptop today.

According to Keshav (2005), a good model for the future Internet would be “a very large number of cell-phone-like, mobile, wireless, lightweight, end-systems, connected using CDMA and GPRS (and potentially, IEEE802.11 as well), to well-managed cell-phone provider networks, that provide access to a highly connected bandwidth-rich wired core and associated centralized servers”. Moreover, based on their technical and nontechnical advantages, this author believes that cell phone handsets will quickly displace the PDAs. Over the longer term, “docked” cell phones, or terminals coming with a dock that takes power in, and provides keyboard, video, and mouse out, may even displace laptops and, of course, desktops. These terminals may be connected to the Internet on a fixed line, or may provide CDMA/GPRS and WiFi access. Much like an iPod, such docked devices with large local storage would allow users to carry all their data with them all the time. In other words, they would not only provide data access, but also data and computing mobility.

Following this train of logic, as the fraction of users accessing the Internet from cell phones grows, there will be a strong financial incentive for Internet application service providers like Yahoo and Google to establish a presence on this provisioned network. Over time, this may also be true for most, if not all ISPs (VoIP providers and website hosts included). If this happens, the future Internet would integrate the best ideas of the last fifty years of telecommunications: temporal statistical multiplexing gains through packet switching, traffic management using provisioned MPLS paths, and end-to-end quality of service guarantees using effective scheduling disciplines. As a surprising consequence, the “holy grail” of cost-effective, always-available network access, multimedia networking, and end-to-end quality of service might finally be achieved.

And yet, there is still a lack of understanding about how *mobile can be a powerful, complimentary mass media*. It can be boiled down to two key differentiators: 1) mobile is interactive; and 2) mobile has unique features including SMS and MMS. These differentiators create something that no other media can – the ability to *respond to, initiate and maintain a dialogue* between those wanting to communicate, whether they are family and friends, colleagues, or brands and advertisers, or citizens and policy makers.

This cell phone dominated network may soon deliver the long-held vision of ‘anytime anywhere information access’, which we consider as the embryo of the concept of *Ubiquitous Society*. In short, while the essence of the early Internet was to connect people to data – possibly all the data of the world – by leveraging on a specific machinery (the PC+telephony couple), now the trend is

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<sup>5</sup> Pew Internet and American Life Project, *The future of the Internet III Report*, retrieved online at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/The-Future-of-the-Internet-III.aspx>

towards a ubiquitous form of access to data, applications and services decoupled from any particular machine. The users assets are becoming not localised or even localisable, the user of a service can be anyone and the supply chain is possibly everyone and everything. With cell phones being the dominant platform for accessing the Internet and its services, the final outcome will probably be a seamless integration of the real and virtual dimensions of our daily lives.

There are many signals now already going in that direction. The easiest to collect is obviously the explosion of Web 2.0, which has already gone far beyond people's leisure time. According to a recent McKinsey (2008) survey, companies that are deriving business value from Web 2.0 tools – such as blogs, RSS, wikis, podcasts, peer-to-peer, mash-ups and the like - are already shifting from using them experimentally to adopting them as part of a broader business practice. Concepts such as 'crowdsourcing' – coined by Jeff Howe, in an article on Wired in 2006, dubbing it as "*the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call*" – have been largely adopted by several Internet initiatives, starting from Wikipedia and going on with Google, NASA, the US Congress etc.

In 2007, AMF Ventures (Ahonen 2008) measured the relative accuracy of audience data by the three major media channels - TV, Internet and mobile – and found that:

- on TV, the total audience data that can be captured is 1%
- on the Internet, the total audience data that can be captured is 10%
- on mobile, the total audience data that can be captured is 90%

With that, it is clear that mobile is the only mass media channel capable of replicating each of the previous ones, and mobile offers seven unique benefits. Maurice Levy, the CEO of Publicis - the world's second largest media company - put it very well in 2006 when he said, "*In a couple of years, most of the information you share, most of the advertising you read, most of the messages you send, most of the music you listen to will transit through your cell phone*". (By the way, the above statistics show a striking similarity with those of eParticipation projects attendance...)

#### 4. Conclusions

What are the implications of this analysis for connected Governance and electronic Participation? We argue that according to the ASCU model, there will be *four recommended strategies* for a modern Public Administration in the Web 2.0 and Mobile Era:

1. Innovate policy making through *crowdsourcing* concepts and ideas to the most active Internet users (the small size of whom becomes no more a problem in this scenario);
2. Learn more about people's opinions as expressed on the social Web, by using advanced tools for what we call *citizens intelligence*;
3. Involve Internet skilled people into a more interactive approach with public decision makers through *policy visualisation and simulation* tools;
4. Include the unskilled or marginalised categories of society into a new participative model of policy design through the establishment of systems of *mParticipation*.

A summary of these four concurrent strategies is shown in the following Table:

Table 4: Pragmatic implications of the ASCU model for policy makers

<p><b>Exploit the <b>A</b>ctivists for Crowdsourcing of Ideas, Concepts → Policy Innovation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• existing eParticipation technologies are fit enough, only the social aspects must be improved (OECD 2003)</li> <li>• innovative methods and tools (such as Virtual Meetings) can be very supportive to the goal</li> <li>• little potential conflict with the rule of representation (participation is a policy tool - not a goal in itself)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Listen to what the <b>S</b>ocialisers have to say → Citizens Intelligence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• innovative tools for reputation management have never been used in the public sector till now</li> <li>• discreet, yet systematic collection of feedback from the “crowd” can help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ frame new policy initiatives</li> <li>○ fine tune existing ones</li> <li>○ better prepare participatory trials</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Show the value of their direct Internet presence to the <b>C</b>onected → Policy Visualisation and Simulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as they are not using eGovernment services, would they be convinced of taking part in eGovernance anyway?</li> <li>• incentives to policy makers: moderate to low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ possibly through new legislation forcing to increase the usage of Internet resources from the public</li> <li>○ also a pressure from stakeholders to improve the quality of electronic governance</li> </ul> </li> <li>• incentives to people: moderate (the old sad story of free riding...) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ scope for mParticipation here</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Connect the <b>U</b>nplugged via mobile resources → migrate from (e-) to (m-) Participation and Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not only is mobile Internet more widely diffused and diffusible, but mParticipation can also help politicians <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ find/locate citizens where they are (GPS features)</li> <li>○ keep them continuously updated of the policy advances</li> <li>○ push them to socialise and interact more</li> <li>○ involve them more stably in the public decision making process</li> <li>○ exploit new ways of providing public services (e.g. through co-production with users)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

In our opinion, the value deriving from the development and implementation of such a modular eParticipation strategy is threefold. Firstly, it allows accounting for a high level of social complexity with respect to technological use and political participation. Secondly, it increases the chances of a successful implementation by providing a range of tools to be used in different ‘mixes’ according to the specificities of the context and of the policy making process considered. Thirdly, it provides a policy platform aimed at responding to the needs of a more collaborative working environment to support government and civil society working in partnership (Chen et al. 2008, p. 99).

In other words, the presence of a considerable variance across the population in terms of political interests, educational level and technological skills makes it very difficult for anyone to design workable and effective systems to support participation. This is why it is important for us to

stress the necessity of a change of approach in the implementation of eParticipation experiments that also keeps into account the new scenario introduced by Web 2.0 and mobile communication. In fact, the increased possibilities of content creation for Internet users and the birth of social networks have created more and more virtual spaces for the expression of political views, problems, ambitions, a phenomenon that currently grows up quite unobserved if known at all. Moreover, the pervasive diffusion of mobile Internet in the world deserves a more careful consideration from eParticipation pilot designers, with all the related challenges (such as privacy and security protection, for instance) that this may imply.

To conclude, governments should become more aware of social complexity, as well as of the wealth of information that is already available on their constituencies' collective behaviour, if they aim at a more conspicuous and longer lasting impact of eGovernance and eParticipation trials. This attitude of course requires policy designers and implementers to make a step towards citizens rather than expecting the citizenry to move their content production activity onto the "official" spaces created for *ad hoc* participation.

*"Participation and Party have the same roots. In our opinion, it is not by coincidence...."*

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