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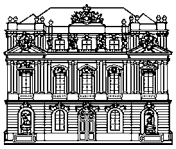
EUROPEANS HAVE A SAY: ONLINE DEBATES AND CONSULTATIONS IN THE EU

FINAL REPORT



EUROPEANS HAVE A SAY: ONLINE DEBATES AND CONSULTATIONS IN THE EU

FINAL REPORT

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INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT
OF THE AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

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Preface

This report provides an assessment of the EU's online initiative *Your Voice in Europe* (http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice) offering online debates and online consultations. The major objective of this study is to investigate how deliberation takes place on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. It involves reflections on deliberation providing the theoretical background for a content analysis on online debates and for qualitative expert interviews on online consultations. Against the background of these results, the study also attempts to analyse in a scenario workshop with Austrian experts how online participation in political issues might be designed in Austria in the year 2025.

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Extended Summary

In 2001, the European Commission set up the *Your Voice in Europe* (http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice) online platform targeting the involvement of citizens, NGOs and businesses in European policy-making processes. The platform is part of the Commission's Interactive Policy-Making (IPM) initiative which is mainly influenced by the White Paper on Good Governance. Initially, the IPM initiative intended to establish a common Internet communication platform for small and medium-sized enterprises. Consequently, the Commission extended the initiative and considered the involvement of civil society networks and non-parliamentarian actors as crucial for the future policy-making of the European Union (EU). The White Paper describes the need to open up European institutions to the broader public to overcome "political apathy" towards the EU and to improve relationships between EU institutions and the European peoples. In this context, new media are considered to represent helpful and valuable tools given their inherent interactive potential to create dynamic networks which surmount time and space constraints. *Your Voice in Europe* attempts to make full use of new information and communication technologies by offering *online debates* and *online consultations*. While the thematic focus of the former is the "Future of Europe", the latter invites citizens, NGOs and entrepreneurs to express their views and opinions on different policy fields relevant for the Union. Interaction on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform among societal players intends to complement respectively revalue the traditional policy-making instruments (such as "offline" consultations, focus groups discussions etc.) of the EU. Certainly, the characteristics of ICTs (interactivity, unconstrained information and communication flows etc.) appear to offer hitherto unknown options to revive the European political public sphere. However, the central question related to a participation platform such as *Your Voice in Europe* is: How do people use *online debates* and how do they assess the impact of their contributions in *online consultations*? Since the Commission's intentions formulated in several policy-documents strongly promote deliberative communication, this study is based upon the following major research question: *"To what extent does the Your Voice in Europe platform enable civic deliberation?"* Thus, deliberation is the theoretical focus and provides the background for empirical analyses on *online debates* and *online consultations*.

Based upon the research question guiding this project report the following chapters have been set up and frame the theoretical and empirical approaches of this study. *Chapter 1* and *2* deal with the problem background informing this study and involve some basic reflections about the role of ICTs for democratic processes. *Chapter 3* deals with more general assumptions and problems related to debates on democratic paradoxes, democratic representation and inclusion, and the role of the individual within democratic societies. Furthermore, it provides the grounds for a more detailed discussion on deliberation and its related core ideas and links to major schools of political thought. Consequently, *Chapter 4* describes the significance of deliberative communication for democracy, decisive components of deliberation, the view of deliberation in gender-focused conceptions of democracy and discusses citizenship concepts framing deliberative communication. *Chapter 5* relates these various foci of deliberation to new media and attempts to embed deliberation in models of digital democracy. *Chapter 6* links the theoretical reflections on political deliberation to the empirical assessments on *Online Debates (Chapter 7)* and *Online Consultations (Chapter 8)* and provides a more detailed discussion on the EU's concept of *Good Governance*. *Chapter 9* represents the results gained in a scenario workshop with Austrian experts in online participation. Against the back-

drop of the analyses related to the EU level, the workshop results describe experts' views on how digital democracy might be designed in Austria in the year 2025. In the following, we will briefly recapitulate what we have accomplished in this project.

Scholars from various disciplines have discussed the roots of contemporary "political apathy" on the level of nation states and also on supranational levels (e.g. the EU). The disconnection of the citizenry from the political public sphere is widely considered as a major indicator for political indifference which becomes visible (inter alia) in low voter turnouts. In fact, democracy appears to be in crisis and political institutions and representatives increasingly run the risk to lack political legitimacy. Jürgen Habermas' description of the "refeudalisation" of the political public sphere delivers one of the most prominent theoretical explanations for such developments. Accordingly, political elites and the mass media have become the central players in political life. Citizens have turned into "mere" spectators whose major task is to provide political legitimacy by voting on pre-defined options. Obviously, voting is not enough to maintain a democratic system and to foster relationships between citizens and political representatives, though. Democracy rather necessitates constant discursive interaction in order to achieve commonly accepted decisions and to establish robust relationships in society. Deliberative communication is supposed to contribute to more vivid and "healthy" participation processes. Basically, it is defined as reflection or thinking through an issue. Deliberation comprises the process which takes place before a decision is taken and it is perceived to be important since it directly (re)integrates citizens into the political decision-forming and -making processes. Its significance mainly derives from the assumption that deliberative processes positively impact on the involved actors. Accordingly, discursive interaction on a critical-rational basis triggers learning effects among the participants and contributes to balanced views on problems of a common concern. In this context, rationality is a major requirement of deliberative discussions which are defined as not interested, disguised or manipulated. Rationality involves "good" cognitive reasons which enable people to solve problems of a common concern through social interaction. The Internet is perceived to provide an appropriate space for unconstrained, deliberative discussions and in fact, there is plenty of "Internet talk". However, various scholars describe these discussions platforms as virtual spaces involving a lot of uncivilised talks which are dominated by individual interests that do not focus on issues of a common concern. Our empirical assessments on the *online debates* and *online consultations* were guided by the overall research question and the following four hypotheses based on Coleman's (2004) assumptions on online participation:

- Most *online discussion* is uninformed and of poor quality.
- *Online consultations* provide a space for inclusive public deliberation.
- *Online consultations* generate and connect networks of interest or practice.
- *Online interaction* between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.

The empirical investigations on *online debates* and *online consultations* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform have revealed the following findings:

The content analysis *(Chapter 7)* investigated the democratic potential of *online debates* and discussed interaction patterns and the discourse quality on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. Against the backdrop of theoretical concepts of deliberation, *interactivity* and *rationality* were identified as the core categories of a content analysis which was based upon a stratified random sample of about 600 discussion postings composed by 225 posters. The descriptive variables (topic; date; length of the posting; name of the poster; language) re-

vealed that about 95 % of the messages were written in English. Interestingly, the length of the messages did not have significant impacts on the discourse quality, i.e. short messages (about a quarter page) were not less rational or balanced in their argumentations than larger contributions (about one page). Basically, the analysed postings can be divided in two groups: The first group of contributions stemmed from a rather small group of posters (Poster Group I: 25 persons). About a tenth of these discussants provided half of all analysed messages. The other group involved a relatively high number of posters (Poster Group II: 200 persons). With regard to the analytical variable *interactivity*, the results show that discussions involved well-developed interactions which were mainly undertaken in small person groups and Poster Group I provided most replies to one precedent message (nearly 80 %). However, Poster Group II used to reply to more than one precedent message which indicates that these discussants were less focused on one particular opinion or view of another discussion fellow. With regard to the message purpose the content analysis shows that the majority of the contributions (75 %) intended to provide information to others and involved personal opinions of posters. "Direct" interaction with other discussants was sought by nearly a quarter of the posters. Those attempted to establish personal discussions with particular posters by approaching them directly via a question or comment. Again, the smaller and more active group (I) involved more direct interactions than the larger Poster Group (II). Regarding the level of agreement within the postings, about 60 % of the online messages were coded as neutral i.e. posters did not clearly express their agreement or disagreement with precedent discussion contributions. With regard to the analysis of the second core category, *rationality*, the assessment shows that about two third of postings included well-formulated and rational arguments whereas the smaller and more active group (I) put forward more rational arguments than the larger group (II) (68 % vs. 64 %). Very "well-balanced" arguments could be found in nearly a third of the postings, i.e. discussants took into account different views on topics in their messages. The postings also show that a high number of discussants were aware of political and socio-economic institutions and processes: Almost half of the analysed messages indicate that posters showed a broad understanding of political and socio-economic mechanisms in society. The discussions on "The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention" did not involve many "hard facts". Figures, historical facts or press statements were used in only 28 % of the messages. The posters also avoided an emotional and ironic tone in most of their messages. Only a fifth of the postings involved emotional aspects and ironic components could be found in only 14 % of the messages. Thus, online discussions were mainly characterised by highly rational communication processes. To sum up, the proposed discussion topics indicate that the participants represent an "expert audience" which does not only debate on profound EU questions (e.g. language dominance in the EU) but also "hot" issues such as Turkey's potential accession to the Union. However, these high-level discussion circles may also restrict the openness and accessibility of the discussion platform and exclude other citizens from the debates. The question on the added-value of these online discussions for the individual citizen remains open and would be an adequate starting point for further research in this field. With regard to the general questions on the qualitative determinants of democracy, the motivation of the participants to take part in these *online debates* would be another interesting point of analysis. To conclude on the first hypothesis we hold that online discussions on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform involve well-elaborated interaction patterns and a relatively high discourse quality which indicates vivid deliberative communication processes.

The expert interviews on *online consultations (Chapter 8)* were guided by Macintosh's (2002) key dimensions to estimate the participative level of *on-*

line consultations and the potential of a participative quality those consultations offer. With regard to OECD's categorisation of participation levels, EU *online consultations* can be described as tools for informed, needs-based policy-making. The EU *online consultations* do not fulfil the requirements of active participation since there is rarely a response provided and it is not possible to follow the ways the own contribution takes. Regarding Macintosh's extended classification on participation levels, *Your Voice in Europe* initiative mainly serves the function of "e-enabling" and "e-engaging" since the consultation of a wider audience leads to feedback recommendations for policy-making procedures. The EU *online consultations* are planned to provide an early input for further decision-making but there is no legally binding structure to use them. This offer of commenting on policy drafts is considered as part of the Commission's reform of governance strategy. For the assessment, six experts were chosen as interview partners due to their professional backgrounds and expertise in the field of *online consultations*. All interviewed experts agreed that *online consultations* cannot replace the classical political techniques of lobbying, which all interviewees considered central to their intensive co-operations with different institutional levels within the Commission as with relevant intermediaries. What seems to be necessary to use *online consultations* more effectively is a systematic methodology for interpretation and presentation of results. This applies for the structured and free text sections in *online consultation* surveys. However, this also requires further financial and staff resources. Some experts also questioned the representativity of consultations, which depends on the extent of accessibility. A main point of critique was also the missing official explanation how the responsible unit will use the consultation results. It is not transparent at all, which contributions are taken into consideration for further policy-making and which ones are excluded and for what reasons. Transparency concerning this point could lead to a better usage and a higher degree of participation. As a criterion for increasing the quality of democracy, some experts pointed out, that the Commission should be ready to accept alternative views (contributions) as a basis for further policy-making. Otherwise the consultations would represent a "consensus manufacture". Furthermore, *online consultations* should not bypass institutionalised instruments of representative decision-making, but there should be more thought on how to link additional participation possibilities and their results to a legitimised framework. With regard to our guiding hypotheses, the empirical investigation leads to the conclusions that:

- *Online consultations do not provide a space for inclusive public deliberation* in a strong sense, since access depends on being already involved in the consultation topic, to belong to interest networks or to be invited to take part. Experts criticise that there is not enough promotion on (ongoing or intended) *online consultations*. The consultations are also more relevant for public bodies, NGOs and other institutional players than for the single citizen.
- *Online consultations can generate and connect networks of interest or practice,* if those taking part are regularly invited for further expert focus groups or panel discussions etc.
- *Online interaction between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.* This depends if the responsible unit puts more light on the results of a consultation:
    - Who took part?
    - What were the selection criteria?
    - Which recommendations were provided by the contributors?
    - Which methodological approach was used for the interpretation of the results and what is the policy-outcome?

Based on the results achieved in the content analysis on *online debates* and the qualitative expert interviews on *online consultations*, a scenario workshop with 11 Austrian experts active in the field of online participation (Title: "e-Demokratie in Österreich im Jahr 2025") was initiated by the NODE project team to assess the significance of online participation in Austria in the year 2025. The main objective was to develop long-term visions of circumstances and requirements appearing to be essential for innovative online deliberation processes in Austria. This scenario workshop had an important function in the process of developing future-oriented online participation. It analysed current experiences in online deliberation at the EU level, framed the development of desirable online applications in Austria in the future and identified those barriers that may hinder the full development of digital democracy in Austria. At the same time, the scenario workshop was one element of our project that directly reflects a major objective of the NODE work programme which encourages "[…] to come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics".[1] Against the backdrop of three short scenarios involving problems of a common concern on the national, regional and local level, the workshop group was asked to identify core requirements which support desirable e-democracy applications in Austria. Accordingly, experts put forward following measures that have to be taken into account in order to arrive at a "robust" e-democracy in Austria. These measures can be subsumed under three different levels:

On the *political and administrative level:*

- Democracy needs time: Citizens have to be enabled to deliberate on public problems at length and should not be forced to make "instant votes".
- Full access has to be granted to publicly relevant information. "Daily politics" and public administrations have to reduce hierarchical hurdles in order to arrive at a more vivid political life in Austria.
- Political representatives have to become more interested in direct interaction with "lay people". Modes of representative and participatory democracy have to be bridged.
- In order to ensure constant democratic developments and to avoid frustration among the participants in case of unsuccessful decision-forming and -making processes, "exit strategies" have to be provided such as additional (face-to-face) focus groups.
- Online information has to be balanced i.e. different (political) views, opinions and values have to be contrasted to enable citizens to choose among a broad variety of political options.

On the *technological level*:

- Identification systems (such as biometrics) need to be controllable and ensure highest security levels for citizens.

On the *educational level:*

- Accompanying measures related to media pedagogics have to be provided in order to enable all kinds of citizens (the youth, the elderly etc.) to become politically engaged.
- The youth has to be trained in deliberation, i.e. young people have to be a provided an open discussion culture which enables the development of discussion and reflection skills. Educational institutions have to implement a non-hierarchical information and communication culture.

[1] See NODE Mission Statement, http://www.node-research.at/englisch/index.php, accessed 22 April 2004.

Interestingly, the final discussion session in the scenario workshop also showed that apart from the necessity that politicians are prepared and committed to involve citizens in political decision-forming and -making processes, most workshop experts agreed that media pedagogical measures are among the most important ones if e-democracy is supposed to play a key role in Austrian politics in the year 2025. Furthermore, most discussants stressed the significance of new media for the political involvement of citizens at the *local level*. The manageable size of participants (relatively small communities) and the direct concernment by local problems were regarded as important determinants for successful e-democracy applications that focus on decision-forming and -making processes.

The scenario workshop provided valuable results pertinent for policy-makers who intend to involve citizens and NGOs in decision-forming and -making processes. As a further result, we offer some basic recommendations for policy-makers for the draft, implementation and evaluation of online participation forms. Additionally, these recommendations are based upon our theoretical reflections on deliberation, our empirical investigations on *online debates* and *online consultations* and the scenario workshop. To this end, we hold that the following basic dimensions should be considered when policy-makers intend to open up democratic participation:

Reflection on political motivation:
Policy-makers should be aware of their basic intentions to offer online participation for political purposes. The involvement of citizens and other societal players in decision-forming and -making processes may trigger expectations in the public which must not be disappointed. Thus, decision-forming and -making processes which are supported or exclusively conducted via new media should be framed and accompanied by the following questions:

- What is the main purpose of citizens' involvement in online participation processes?
- What is the added-value of an online participation process in contrast to offline participation (e.g. consensus groups; expert group discussions; referenda etc.)?
- What exactly is expected to be increased or improved by new media? The relationship between the "governors" and the "governed"? The efficiency of policy-making processes? The legitimacy of decisions?

Reflection on "clashing views and opinions":
In order to avoid political apathy and dissatisfaction, democracy needs diverging opinions which are commonly respected. Online platforms involve such pluralist views on issues of common concern and consensus achievement does not have to be the ultimate goal of an online decision-forming process. Thus, ICTs can never be a better tool to create consensus but rather make visible a wide range of political visions. However, policy-makers should be able to offer and explain "exit" or alternative strategies in case of conflict situations lacking a common agreement on a decision.

Reflection on political transparency:
Online participation requires transparency for those who are invited to participate concerning:

- relevance and reasoning of the online participation process for policy-making;
- relevance and reasoning of the use of participants' online input (e.g. online contributions in debates or consultations);
- relevance and reasoning of the results of online deliberative processes.

Awareness of access barriers:
Access to the political stage is still exclusive. Generally, participation in political decision-forming and -making processes depends on connections to relevant networks. Besides, online participation necessitates certain media literacy skills which may be an additional participation barrier. However, policy-makers have to become aware that lay people (such as doctors, nurses, teachers, white and blue collar workers and so forth) have a lot of knowledge which is useful and valuable for policy-making processes. New media offer the option to collect and analyse such societal potentials. However, organisational and technical access barriers have to be reduced. The political public sphere has to be extended by:

- firstly, acknowledging that citizens are capable and willing to provide political input,
- secondly, reducing hierarchical barriers to the political public sphere,
- thirdly, creating public online terminals to involve those who do not have access to ICTs.

Reflection on appropriate use of new media for political participation:
Various participation modes (from aggregative to deliberative) require different tools according to the policy-making circle, i.e. policy-makers have to decide at first if they want to use ICTs for problem definition or decision-making processes. This determines if new media are used for online deliberation or online voting. Certainly, an "ideal" participation process would involve both participation options: In such process online deliberation (e.g. *online debates* or online discussions) would be accompanied by (offline) face-to-face discussions between citizens, NGOs, entrepreneurs and experts. Consequently, all involved actors would be enabled to cast their preferences online. Moreover, policy-makers should be aware that given different governmental layers in society (supra-national, national, regional, local), online participation options have to be selected carefully.

Reflection on political commitment and trust:
In order to enhance political participation, the moral duty to use results of online deliberation processes has to become ensured. Or, to put it in other words, there has to be a strong political will to consider citizens' inputs in policy-making processes. Otherwise, (online and offline) participation remains an illusion and fosters demotivation and political apathy. In this context, respect is core to participative processes and includes respect in terms of the duration of a deliberative process and the outcome. There has to be an agreement on time, thematic focus and expectations.

To sum up, we hold that online participation does not and cannot replace other techniques of policy-making but involves the potential to enhance them and may increase the quality of a policy-making process provided there is:

- unconstrained access to policy-making processes,
- citizens have the necessary media literacy skills,
- the participation processes are transparent in terms of the evaluation of participation results and
- political representatives are committed to respect the outcome of online deliberation processes.

1 Introduction

The emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has raised the hope of politicians, citizens, political activists and scholars from various disciplines to establish a (virtual) space for free flow of information and communication. Decentralised and interactive networks enable people to get in touch with each other, to transcend spatial boundaries and to enter a digital public sphere or as Sassen (2000, 21) puts it:

> "The Net has emerged as a powerful medium for non-elites to communicate, support each other's struggles and create the equivalent of insider groups at scales going from the local to the global. The political and civic potential of these trends is enormous".

These developments occur against the backdrop of a supposedly increasing political apathy in most Western democracies. Obviously, low voter turnouts across Europe[2] are today's most obvious indicators for citizens' alienation from the political system and its shared identity and question the legitimacy of public institutions and decisions. Indeed, electoral participation is in decline as also IDEA, the "International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance" in Stockholm continuously ascertains in studies on global voter turnouts.[3] Coleman (1999, 1) holds that the "[…] health of civic culture during election periods can be measured by the degree of citizens' participation, both in the polling booth and at the hustings." The discussion on the then so-called "crisis of democracy" mainly informs the socio-political problem background of this study. The debate on the impact of ICTs on democratic participation is another one and builds the core of this research report. ICTs may mitigate this crisis by enabling faster and easier access to public information without the need of information intermediaries. In fact, there is no question that new media have become important tools for political communication. The provision of public information is crucial for civic engagement and e-government services are valuable tools in order to fulfil this premise. Despite the ambitious e-government targets of most EU member states (such as fully interactive public services for businesses and citizens until 2005[4]), Hague and Loader are apparently right though, when they state that "democracy is about more than voting or providing better public information to the citizens" (Hague; Loader 1999, 1). Democratic engagement encloses more than (e-)voting or online information and communication processes between citizens, businesses and public bodies which mainly serve the handling of daily businesses (e.g. gathering information; downloading or transacting forms and so forth).

ICTs transform political processes

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[2] However, there were some remarkable exceptions such as the Presidential Elections in France in 2001 or the Parliamentarian Elections in Spain in 2004. In both cases, extraordinary circumstances contributed to an increase in citizens' participation in the elections. The French election was marked by Jean-Marie Le Pen's (leader of the ultra right wing party "Front National") election victory during the first ballot which brought about strong protests within the country. The Spanish elections in 2004 were clouded by previous terrorist attacks in Madrid.

[3] IDEA is an intergovernmental organisation which seeks to support democratic processes in new and long-established democracies. It draws on comparative experience, analyses democracy trends and assistance, and develops policy options, tools and guidelines relating to political participation, electoral systems, political parties, and post-conflict democracy building. For further information see: http://www.idea.net.

[4] See e-Europe action plan 2005, http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/all_about/egovernment/index_en.htm, accessed 30 March 2004.

2 Problem Definition and Research Question

"Crisis of Public Communication"

In order to be more precise on the theoretical basis upon which the research questions will be posed it is firstly necessary to identify the presumed problem which Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) have called the "Crisis of Public Communication" and that might be eased by new democratic practices such as described by digital democracy models. Apart from decreasing voter turnouts there are several examples showing the citizens' disappointment concerning their governments' representative roles. US-citizens were asked three times in a representative survey (in 1969, 1999 and 2001) if they agreed on the following statement: "Whatever I say the government won't listen". Evidently, perceptions among the interviewed persons have changed over time: While in 1969 about 25 % of the interviewees agreed on the statement, in 1999 almost three quarters consented and in 2001, 82 % of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction by agreeing that they do not feel recognised by the representatives of their political system (see Coleman 2002). Although these survey results reflect the political situation in the United States, they do represent a picture of political apathy that is common to most Western liberal democracies. Scholars have identified various explanations for such developments. Blumler and Gurevitch name two major triggers for this apparent crisis: Broad societal processes encompassing demographic and social transformations which have led to the contemporary known pluralist democracies[5] and the emergence of the political communication systems within the nation states. Accordingly, people's political discontent is related to an ongoing fragmentation within society. People have (had to) become more mobile regarding their jobs and social responsibilities. However, there have also taken place psychic changes affecting the relationships between citizens and their political representatives: New communication forms have opened up the variety of spaces and communities and offer new forms of social identities (see Blumler; Gurevitch 1995, 2). In fact, "[...] in these conditions, government is more difficult, popular support is more contingent and effective communication is more vital" (Blumler; Gurevitch 1995, 2). Hoff, Horrocks and Tops take another turn and outline some influencing historical developments showing different stages of the "crisis of democracy" debate in the post-war period. They stress the work of Jürgen Habermas and Claus Offe in the 1970s and early 1980s in which "steering problems" were mainly produced by the "[…] clash between, or mix of, the rationalities of the market, democracy and bureaucracy" (Hoff 2000, 1) which caused a "legitimation crisis" that continues to impact on society until today. Indeed, the political system is getting "polycentric" (Dijk 2000, 33) and the decentralisation of political activities from the modern nation state to other actors has become a major characteristic of contemporary politics in the 20th century as Hacker and Van Dijk (2000, 210) explain when stating that the

> "[…] locus of control in social and political systems is turning away from the most important democratic entity in the last centuries, the nation state. It is handed over to transnational corporations and all kinds of (in)formal networks with no tradition of democracy and accountability".

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[5] More precisely, the contemporary neo-pluralist democracy is based on the key features of citizenship rights, including one-person-one-vote, freedom of expression, freedom of organisation, a competitive electoral system with at least two parties, a system of checks and balances between the legislature, executive and administrative bureaucracy. Its significance is also based on the existence of multiple pressure groups and a political agenda that is biased towards corporate power (see Held 1996, 217).

However, it appears that (some) political representatives do not necessarily consider this power shift as a real threat for democracy. They rather speak of co-operation with other players supporting governmental reforms and reducing bureaucratic burdens. While public administration gains increasing importance in decision-making processes, parliaments appear to become mere voting bodies authorising the implementation of bills. An OECD report on the impact of ICTs on policy-making processes concludes that "[...] the bureaucracy appears to be increasing its influence as it has the resources to enhance its synthesising and advising role" (OECD 1998, 8). This is even more true when decisions are taken at a supranational level (e.g. in EU institutions) and consequently have to be implemented in national contexts.

Citizens are widely excluded from political decision-forming and -making processes

Moreover, scholars deliver different explanations approaching the problem of political apathy with regard to institutional policy-making. There are those like James Fishkin who argues that citizens do not feel integrated in the political decision-forming and -making process. Habermas states that there are no (non-commercial) spaces left for real and deliberative political discussions since the "public sphere" has been "invaded" by the mass media and political elites. This has resulted in a "silent" public sphere which derives from the fact that people do not feel to have an impact on the political decisions of the *Great* and the *Good* (see Coleman 1997, 135). Certainly, both views do consider that voting is necessary and essential for democracy. In fact, we can say that "[…] elections are a vital feature of all functioning democracies" (Coleman 1997, 138). Dahlgren (2001, 64) though adds that "[…] there is a civic and political life beyond elections that must also measure up to our democratic ideals, not least the character of public discursive communication between citizens". Thus, voting is not enough to maintain a democratic system which shall serve as an identity platform for all citizens of a state or a community. However, discursive communication which is supposed to be "the heart of the democratic process" (Garnham quoted in Coleman 1997, 162) respectively authentic public deliberation seem to have been replaced by "virtual deliberation" (Coleman 1999, 68). This means that deliberative processes take mainly place among political journalists, scientific experts and politicians. Thus, most of the contemporary democracies do not encompass much deliberation (see Wilhelm 1999, 159). Habermas described this development the "refeudalisation" of the public sphere. Citizens have turned into consumers or mere spectators and the mass media and the political elite are running the "public show" (see Calhoun 1997, 26; Webster 1995, 104; Curran 1991, 29). This becomes even more relevant when civic engagement is linked to European issues or as Eder et al. put it: Since the treaty of Maastricht has been negotiated, it has become more evident that there is a fundamental deficiency of democratic principles within the EU (see Eder et al. 1998, 321). Grimm further concludes that there is an obvious relationship between the lack of a European public sphere and the predominating democratic deficiencies of the EU institutions (see Grimm 1994, 117). In this context, we can identify a three-folded deficit involving issues on legitimacy, representation and participation (see Abromeit 2002, 54).

Lack of "authentic" deliberation

In order to discuss the potential of (online) deliberation against the background of an assumed democratic deficit of the EU it is necessary to consider that despite a wide range of democracy models all are linked to the concept of the nation state. The continuing development of the EU necessitates creative approaches towards concepts of citizenship and democracy. Historically, the formation of the nation states has put political power in the hands of national governments (see Ford 2001, 212). This historical process has subsumed previously autonomous regional and national structures of rule under one single sovereign. Thus, formally regional and local governments have become subdivisions of the nation states. According to Ford, globalisation is a major driving force in this process which:

- threatens the ability of nation states to make and enforce meaningful laws and policy. To this end, it undermines the ability of the citizens of a nation to act collectively;
- complicates the cultural identity of the nation state, by fragmenting the idea of "the people" (Ford 2001, 212). Citizens begin to identify themselves as members of an interest and/or ethnic group.
- Finally, the growth of international organisations and economies is accompanied by revitalised localism and regionalism.

Thus, analysing the potential of new participation forms (e.g. online deliberation) is difficult since integral parts of democracy and political participation (such as "citizen", "demos", "inclusion" etc.) may have different connotations on a European than a nation state level. In this context, a number of scholars (e.g. Scharpf quoted in Abromeit 2002, 15) question that on EU level anything else than policy-making by output legitimacy will ever be possible. However, to increase input legitimacy and to include citizens, the European Commission intends to improve participation, which is perceived to be a core element of *Good Governance* (European Commission 2001a, 10):

EU wants to involve citizens in policy-making processes by Good Governance strategies

> "Democracy depends on people being able to take part in the public debate. To do this, they must have access to reliable information on European issues and be able to scrutinise the policy process in its various stages".

Despite this ambitious goal it has to be questioned if the EU will be able to put sustainable weight on input legitimacy of policy-making procedures via online deliberation processes such as provided by online debates and online consultations.

Study Objective: Assessment on the "Your Voice in Europe" platform

This research study explores the concept of deliberation and attempts to analyse the civic and discursive potential of a "new" space for civic deliberation: the Internet. Concretely, we will focus on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform, which was launched in 2001 by the European Commission and which invites European citizens, entrepreneurs and NGO activists to play an active role in the Union's policy-forming and -making processes. *Your Voice in Europe* is part of the Union's "Interactive Policy-Making (IPM)" initiative which came into being in 2001. Generally, interactive policy-making has been discussed in several EU documents representing the outline and the institutional framework for IPM. The White Paper on *Good Governance* (European Governance: A White Paper[6]) is one of the most important documents in this context, as it considers the Internet as a tool for collecting and analysing reactions in the public and to use them in the EU's policy-making processes. The IPM initiative is mainly based on this document and sets a broad framework for the discussion of current hot issues such as the *Future of Europe*.

Major Research Question

However, there is still little empirical evidence about new media's potential to re-connect citizens to the political stage. Subsequently, the major research question we are interested in is *"To what extent does the Your Voice in Europe platform enable civic deliberation?"* This question will guide the entire research process. The *theoretical* key concepts in this report are: *civic deliberation*, *digital democracy*, the *concept of the political public sphere* and the role of *ICTs*. These concepts seem to be appropriate for the exploration of the democratic impacts of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform on civic participation and public discourse. Deliberation presupposes activity, initiative and the will of the people to take part in political life and is rooted in several key concepts on democracy. The concept of the political public sphere provides a model of normative debate on a rational-critical basis and assumes that ICTs enable

[6] European Commission: COM (2001a) 428 final.

citizens to interact directly by breaking up monological information and communication flows. The *empirical* analysis though requires more concrete and empirically "testable" questions. Thus, the overall research question as mentioned above will be split up into several questions to make reliable assumptions about the deliberative character of the *Your Voice in Europe* initiative.

Empirical assessments on online debates and online consultations

The empirical part on the online debates at the *Your Voice in Europe* platform will encompass a quantitative content analysis covering a representative sample of a total of 626 talkboard messages. The analysis of the EU's online consultations will be based upon expert interviews. Both investigations will reflect the theoretical concepts and shall provide empirical evidence as to whether the *Your Voice in Europe* platform enables civic deliberation. The main hypothesis behind this leading question is that ICTs enhance democratic participation since they overcome the inadequacies of traditional media (sender-receiver dichotomy). Wilhelm (1999, 154) argues that cyberspace represents a forum where people can communicate politically. The (positive) effects though are contested (see Hague; Loader 1999, xii). This study should be regarded as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the democratic potential of the Internet in connection with deliberative participation. Its innovative character is mainly informed by bridging classical concepts (such as deliberative democracy, the political public sphere) and new approaches in media studies. Thus, theories from the field of political science are combined with those of communication studies and technology assessment. The authors of this report propose at first a reflection on theoretical aspects pertinent for analysing the potentials and constraints of online deliberation. Basically, discussing issues of democracy and what constitutes a theoretical framework necessitates good knowledge on relevant theories and schools of thought. Based upon the overall research question guiding this project the following major chapters have been set up and frame the theoretical approach of this study:

Hypothesis

- *The paradoxes of democracy*
- *Deliberation: Core ideas and links to major schools of thought*
- *Digital democracy: Definition and scope of a contemporary phenomenon.*

3 The paradoxes of democracy

This chapter deals with several paradoxes accompanying democratic processes in (Western) liberal societies which are also pertinent for the proposed analysis of the democratic potential of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. Given our intention to explain the role and decisiveness of deliberative communication within vivid democracies we raise here several profound questions related to civic participation, political representation, the scope of political decisions (local, regional, national, supra-national i.e. EU) and political accountability. A few questions about conditions and content of a democratic process or a democratic order lead to the necessity of specification and, furthermore, open a box of paradoxes: Whose agreement is necessary and whose participation is justified in decisions concerning issues of a common concern? What is the relevant (national, regional, local) constituency? Or, if we consider a post-national, pluralist context: Is there an issue-based constituency? To whom do decision makers have to justify their decisions? To whom should they be accountable?

Democracy as a historical project implies the notion of a further development and, as Schmidt (2000, 268) calls it, "a sensibility for the structural defects of democracy". In any case, the gap between claim and practicability of democratic norms is arranged around three, closely interwoven, main dilemmas:

Three dilemmas related to democracy

- the question of how to balance ideas of freedom and equality;
- the question of how to solve the dilemma of representation and/or participation for all, and
- the question of how to generate collective decisions out of individual preferences.

Having these questions in mind seems to be an adequate starting point for the analysis of digital participation options within a supra-national context such as created by the EU. Moreover, this approach involves all major aspects pertinent for deliberative communication processes. Furthermore, we can identify some key criteria illustrating some "hot issues" linked to the above mentioned difficulties (according to Abromeit 2002):

- the definition of *the Demos* (involving aspects of inclusion and exclusion; Who is entitled to participate? What are the "access criteria"?);
- the role of the individual within a *Demos* (including concepts of self-autonomy and responsibility);
- the pros and cons of political representation;
- the tension between majority driven decisions and the consideration of minority interests;
- the context between decision-making and the public legitimacy of decisions.

The discussion of these issues provides the background for the subsequent chapter and attempts to link democratic participation via the use of ICTs which is primarily grasped in the notion of digital democracy.

3.1 The definition of the Demos

Each imagination of the demos as *the* core player within democratic societies requires an explanation of who is part of it and why, an identification of the boundaries of the demos, the extent and reason of self-governance and the interrelations of individuals within these boundaries. These clarifications are necessary in order to deal with questions of representation, participation and decision-forming and -making procedures. However, this is even more difficult to clarify if democratic decision-forming and -making is subject to supra-national procedures and is not bound to nations or states. Usually, territorial boundaries specify the basis on which individuals are included and excluded from participation in decision-forming and making. This principle is questioned in the context of a supra-national body such as the EU, though. The extent and scope of the demos has been widely discussed in scientific literature. Dahl (1989, 115) argues that the strong principle of equality appears to be based on the conclusion that everyone subject to the laws should be included in democratic participation processes and also Gastil (1993, 18) stresses the importance of inclusiveness as a main criterion for democratic participation.

Who ought to be part in decision-making processes?

People who are significantly affected by public decisions ought to have full and equal decision-making power:

> "Unfortunately this seemingly straightforward requirement presents a paradox: which comes first, the scope of the demos or its membership? If a group agrees to make decisions that affect only its members, it avoids the problem: however most groups [...] make decisions that directly and indirectly affect many non-members."

Gastil further concludes that a vast majority of groups can only meet the criterion of inclusiveness gradually and he offers a suggestion to clarify the principle of inclusiveness: "A democratic group strives to include those people who are profoundly affected by its decisions, invite those significantly affected, and at least considers the views of those marginally affected." (ibd.) Closely related to the question of inclusiveness and size of the demos (local communities, nation states etc.) is the problem of representation and participation. As a member of the demos, Gastil (1993, 22) analyses, one assumes that no one else than the single citizen is a more competent judge of what is in his/her own interest. This is even more important if it is possible to generalise this assumption to others, so that individual group members are seen as their own best judges. Dahl (1989, 98) states, that in accordance with the principle of equality in the sense of equal rights, the members of the demos must assume that all other members are qualified to participate in making the group's collective decisions. This directly impacts on the extent to which citizens, entrepreneurs and members of the third sector (NGOs) can and should be involved in EU decision-forming and -making processes.

Since these processes are opened up to the broader (EU) public we have to ask critically: Who is invited to participate (only participants who belong to EU member states?) and how might their contributions be reflected in the EU policy?

3.2 The role of the individual within the demos

Goodwin identifies an indirect incompatibility between the two ideals *freedom* and *equality*. Democracy creates limited artificial equality for everyone in the political public sphere, viewed as voters. The liberal value "equality of opportunity" framing the socio-economic sphere also fosters the development of real inequalities which effectively weaken the equality of the vote and other political rights (see Goodwin 2000, 295). "So while democracy threatens liberalism, liberalism undermines democracy" (Goodwin 2000, 295). However, according to Abromeit, the autonomy of the individual is a presumption of self-government: His/her preferences are influenced by group related norms and values. It is also difficult to solve the tension between the individual's preferences and those of the demos. This again brings up questions related to representativity, requirements for political participation, and frames different citizenship concepts (see Abromeit 2002, 122). The categorisation of citizenship is discussed by Dahl (1989, 124) as following:

> "Citizenship as a Categorical principle [means]: Every person subject to a government and its laws has an unqualified right to be a member of the demos. Citizenship as a Contingent principle [means]: only persons who are qualified to govern, but all such persons, should be members of the demos."

In the context of the EU we can state that the European demos is mainly constituted by all citizens of the EU member states. But do they also enjoy the same rights (and obligations) as they have due to their national citizenship? The fact that the EU institutions and political procedures do not follow known democratic practices questions the position of an EU citizen and constrains his/her participation options.

3.3 Concepts of representation

Normative concepts of representation are mainly arranged around questions asking:

- *Who* represents whom?
- *What* (which interests, ideas etc.) has to be represented?
- *How* (e.g. mandate, delegate or elite, independent representative models, responsible to a common will or individual preferences)? and
- *Why* (is representation necessary)?

Numerous scholars highlight the potential incompatibility of the individualistic aspirations of freedom (as followed in the concept of liberalism) and the collectivist democratic notion of "the will of the people". The inherent problem of a "Fiction of Representation" as Kelsen (1929, 30) put it, was already discussed by Rousseau, according to whom one person can never represent another. Goodwin (2000, 292) further explains:

> "[...] Rousseau's view seems to be philosophically sound. If you could represent me ideally, you would need so much understanding and knowledge of me and my interests that you would be virtually identical with me, in which case I may as well represent myself."

Political representation: Core principle of contemporary democracies

Representation has become inevitable, though, given the rise of nation states and based on justifications of the institutional order which includes the proper representation of the individual. The representative is either drafted as a mere spokesman, made accountable by frequent elections or as a legate, dependent on the elector's power of instant dismissal. Another interpretation of representation is to see parliament as a microcosmos of the nation, or to draft representatives as accountable but independent, acting on behalf of their electors but using their own judgement. Behind this notion of the independent representative lies the elitist emphasis on the intelligence and wisdom of the representative and a fear of "demagogy and mob rule" (Hamilton 1948 as quoted in Goodwin 2000, 275). The view that representatives are able to promote the national interest, free of selfish interests, suggests an underlying conception of the common good, which is more appropriate to concepts of radical democracy and which is contradicting that a government's duty is the preservation and pursuit of individual interests.

3.4 Decisions based on majority rule

Depending on the ideological stance, scholars judge the procedures how decisions are taken highly problematic. The criteria for democratic decision-making processes do not specify a decision rule. Historically, it has been contended that the only decision rule appropriate to the democratic process is the majority rule.

> "This leads to the question if there is a process ever which is sufficient enough to ensure that the public good (the public interest, the good of all etc.) will be achieved. Is any collection of people entitled to the democratic process? In short, if democracy means government by the people, what constitutes 'a people'?" asks Dahl (1989, 116).

The problem of decision rule illustrates, that wherever democratic ideas are applied to the real world, actual democracy falls significantly short of ideal standards. If we take a look at the problem of inclusiveness and the structure of the demos we have to ask which persons have a rightful claim to be included in the demos? And if we look at the scope of its authority: What rightful limits are there for the control of the demos? The extraordinary difficulty of finding a satisfactory decision rule shows, that no rule for collective decisions can be discovered that does not possibly produce arbitrary or even meaningless (in a sense of not representative for all) outcomes. But still the application of the principle of the majority rule is at the centre of all conceptions of contemporary democracy. The majority rule is accepted, as political praxis shows, if minorities can trust that these decisions are not used for oppression and if the overall structure for decision-making is guaranteeing that majorities and minorities can change at any time. But the case of minorities is a special problem for liberal democracy since

> "[...] it is based on individual interests and political equality and prefers to overlook the existence of interest groups acknowledging which would detract from the individualistic approach. The citizen is primarily seen as a voter, whose major interest exists in other (private) sphere, so that no conflict of a citizen's political and economic roles appears in abstract theory" (Goodwin 2000, 290).

Concerning the dilemma of turning individual preferences into collective decisions Schmidt (2000, 269f.) states, that it is very difficult to build stable majorities and it gets even more difficult, the more differentiated a society is and the more heterogeneous citizens (voters) are. So the main problem for a democratic procedure is not the majority rule itself but the possibility to manipulate the results of majority decisions, as already little variations of structure, process and context of a decision-making process can produce totally different results. The ideal of turning individual preferences into a collective decision via majority rule and the transformation of the results of a decision-making procedure into mandates shows different results according to reasons of methodology. Schmidt (2000, 271) further concludes, that:

- A common majority will is just fiction. All majorities are formed "out of equilibrium-majorities", which means a constant disproportion.
- Majority rule requires a clear distinction between a public and private sphere, which is, depending on the issue, not always possible.
- The principle of majority rule is suitable for a fast production of a decision, related to a certain issue, time and place.
- Majority rule hurts the democratic principle of reversible decisions and does not include the possibility of "as well as decisions".
- Majority rule promotes the gap between those deciding and those affected of the decisions been taken (e.g. concerning a territorial distinction: local-national-European-global level).
- Usual control mechanisms (like veto) are structured re-actively and not pro-actively.

4 Deliberation: Core ideas and links to major schools of thought

Aggregating models of democracy, proclaimed by representatives of an elitist conception of democracy like Anthony Downs (1957) or Josef Schumpeter ([1942]1989), put the emphasis on the aggregation of preferences mainly consisting of the output of regular elections. Here, the democratic process is interpreted as a competitive procedure in which people have the possibility to choose from a broad offer of political programmes (see Mouffe 2000, 1f.). Political participation in this view is mainly considered to be counterproductive and people should not become too much engaged in political life to avoid a decrease of efficiency. The dominance of this economically oriented aggregate view on (liberal) democracy can be seen as a reduction of democracy to procedures for the treatment of interest-group based pluralism.

Since the 1990s, the term deliberation has become *en vogue* within academia. Fishkin, Bohman or Dryzek are just a few names of a number of scholars who have undertaken a lot of research on deliberation and its significance for democracy. The concept plays a crucial role in modern public discussion programmes, such as citizen juries or study circles and it is the premise of a particular theory within the study on democracy (see Gastil 2000, 357): *Deliberative democracy,* which is

Deliberation is based on reasoned dialogue

> "[…] founded on the principles of reasoned dialogue and deliberation. [It] is rooted in the idea of self-governance in which political truths emerge not from the clash of pre-established interests and preferences but from reasoned discussion about issues involving the common good" (London 1995, 1f.; completion in brackets added).

Mill (1972 as quoted in Goodwin 2000, 249) perfectly summarises the deliberative communication process and describes its importance for political life:

> "In the case of the person whose judgement is really deserving of confidence, how has it become so? Because he has kept his mind open to criticism on his opinions and conduct. Because it has been his practice to listen to all that could be said against him; to profit by as much of it as was just, and to expound to himself, and on occasion to others, the fallacy of what was fallacious. Because he has felt, that the only way in which human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all the modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind".

However, the idea of a deliberatively oriented democracy is not a new one. Literature shows that it can more suitably be called a revival of earlier conceptions of citizenship when looking for solving the problem of representativity:

> "Set against the previous dominance of aggregating models of democracy derived from economics and the theory of rational choice, the idea of deliberative democracy, or decision making based on public deliberation among free and equal citizens, represents a highly significant development in democratic theory" (Passerin D'Entreves 2002, 1).

Towards the improvement of democratic practices

Deliberative democracy emerges from a rich history of debates on normative conceptions on how to find the best way to secure democracy as self-government and emphasises the necessity to develop inclusive and vibrant informal, political public spheres. Literature also offers a number of normative conceptions which mainly argue that deliberation supplements the formal institutions of representative government. The approaches put forward by e.g. Rawls (1979),

Habermas (1992, 1996), Cohen (1996) and Fishkin (1991) provide broad outlines for a model of normative justification for public deliberation. They all recognise and stress the importance of deliberative dialogue for a more inclusive and just form of (liberal) societies, whether the focus is on public reasoning on the common good (Cohen and Fishkin), the existence of a non-coercive communication sphere (Habermas) or the emphasis on neutrality, fairness and mutual respect (Rawls). However, deliberative models of democracy are also subject to some substantial criticism as for instance expressed by Chantal Mouffe (2000). Basically, she considers too many shortcomings in the deliberative approach and proposes instead an agonistic model of democracy. Mouffe points out that the deliberative democracy model denies the dimension of "ineradicability of antagonism" which is supposed to be a constitutive element of the political. Accordingly, it appears to be a "naïve assumption" that there are public spheres based upon rational consensus since pluralism has an inherently conflicting nature:

Critics on deliberative approaches

> "A well functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. […] Too much emphasis on consensus and the refusal of confrontation lead to apathy and dissatisfaction with political participation" (Mouffe 2000, 13ff.).

The "common good": Content of deliberative communication

Basically, the "common good" or "issues of public interest" represent the content of deliberative discourses. All those (partly normative) conditions frame amongst others the model of a vivid public sphere which supposedly provides a (ideal) space for deliberative communication. However, the design and the significance of such spheres of debate and discussion are also subject to ideological influences. This appears to be important to emphasise in order to make clear that public involvement in issues dealing with the common good have been central to several political ideologies. Literature offers us several classifications of models of democracy (e.g. Held 1996; Goodwin 2000; Schmidt 2000 etc.). Political theory shows that democracy models determining deliberation within the public sphere are differently weighted and interpreted in various ideological contexts. Held's (1996) general distinction between two approaches towards the categorisation of democracy models appears to be a useful starting point. Accordingly he distinguishes between those supporting direct or participatory democracy and those focusing on liberal or representative democracy:

- *Direct or participatory democracy:* Citizens are directly involved in decision-making processes (e.g. by referenda) dealing with issues of public interest.
- *Liberal or representative democracy:* Citizens' interests are represented by an elected legislative body.

Deliberative processes can be detected in both approaches. However, depending on the respective school of thought predominating in a society deliberation might be differently embedded in. There are political systems which are more inclined to promote deliberative communication among and with citizens and there are those which are less. Despite some obvious differences within the major schools of political thought, though, some overlapping ideas can be detected when analysing their core thoughts in the context of deliberative processes. In the following we stress those ideologies which have supposedly determined and coined political thought within the Western hemisphere and involve elements that constitute deliberative communication: Liberalism, Social-

ism, Republicanism and Communitarianism.[7] To put it more concretely, these ideologies play a crucial role for the reasoning of deliberative communication and have a major impact on the socio-economic, political or cultural framework within which deliberation is operating. Moreover, each of them stresses particular aspects which all together are integral parts of deliberative communication: Rationality, equality, the common good and community orientation:

- *Liberal thought* emphasises the individual's ability to act in a rational manner and supports the protection of one's interests as justification for participatory oriented policy-making.
- *Socialist thought* stresses equality as a philosophical principle, equal access to deliberative procedures and the necessity to arrange appropriate opportunities for everybody's participation in the public life. Accordingly, this requires equal but different treatment of individual needs. Concepts of democracy based on socialist thought intend to expand democracy from a time and location bound aggregation of interests via ballot box to the democratisation of all spheres of life.
- *Republican thought* puts a strong emphasis on the virtue of its citizens embedded into a common good. The political public sphere is considered as an important "locus" rooted in civil society and framing civic self-determination.
- Similarly to republicanism, *Communitarian thought* emphasises under the notion of a common good the necessity to reinvigorate community-orientation. In reaction to the individualistic approach of liberalism, communitarians stress the idea of an obligation to belong and hold that a satisfying moral identity can only be achieved through a sense of and attachment to a community.

4.1 The significance of deliberative communication for democracy

From a more general point of view, it appears to be necessary to ask why we deal with deliberative communication. Democracy is a complex phenomenon which consists of several dimensions. Voting is often considered the most important feature of democracy. However, there are other "less-common forms of participation": Democratic deliberation is another decisive dimension of democracy and political culture (see Dahlgren 2001, 64; Fishkin 1995, 47; Coleman 1999, 70). Deliberation does not preclude voting or bargaining but puts the emphasis on obtaining a shared sense of meaning and a common will, which are both the product of a communicative process. Deliberation is crucial for democracy since it is supposed to strengthen the people's sense for inclusiveness and, from the policy maker's viewpoint, increases trust in governmental bodies. Thus, an "[…] increase in public information and deliberation will produce a stronger and more frequently renewable and reviewable mandate from the people to their chosen representatives (Coleman 2001, 123). Any view of deliberative democracy expresses an ideal of democratic decision-making and involves a process of reasoned public discussion aiming to reach a widely accepted judgement. Furthermore, it is considered as an account for the legitimacy of political decisions, as Festenstein observes:

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[7] Those ideologies have been widely discussed in significant schools of democratic thought, e.g. by Abromeit (2002), Benhabib (1996), Dahl (1989), Etzioni (1997), Goodwin (2000), Habermas (1996), Holland-Cunz (1998), Mouffe (2000), Sartori (1997), Schmidt (2000) etc.

> "Arguments for deliberative democracy have overwhelmingly been concerned with establishing that democracy conceived as a process of this sort possesses a legitimacy lacking from democratic procedures which are understood merely as mechanisms for the aggregation of private interests or preferences" (Festenstein 2002, 88).

Passerin D'Entreves (2002, 3) argues similarly when he holds that "[…] justice and legitimacy of democratic institutions are best defended on the basis of a normative theory of public deliberation". This is what Christiano (1997, 246) has called the "contribution thesis": Public deliberation can contribute to the worth of public institutions. Christiano has defined two other theses about the importance of public deliberation to democracy: The "necessity and the exclusivity thesis". The former means that a democratic society without public deliberation is undesirable. Public deliberation must be an integral part of any democracy. By the latter he means that deliberation is the only value in democracy: "The only reason why democracy matters is that it involves public deliberation among equals" (Christiano 1997, 246). Although he takes a rather narrow perspective, he makes clear that democracy does not and cannot work without political debates in the public sphere. Democracy must allow conflict and has to provide an institutionalised framework enabling the constructive solution of political conflicts. In addition, it is a major feature and effect of a deliberative discussion that opposing sides communicate about disagreements (see Mendelberg; Oleske 2000, 186). Thus, deliberation is interpreted as a valuable contribution to the mutual understanding within a society.

Deliberation impacts on citizens' lives

Deliberation among citizens is also perceived to have direct impact on their lives as "good democrats". Accordingly, the participation in deliberative discussions leads to more informed and reflective judgements (since people have to discuss their views with those who hold different attitudes) and increases the frequency in political action. Deliberation is therefore an appropriate way to improve citizens' understanding of democratic processes (see Levine 2000, 5; Gastil 2000, 358). Mendelberg and Oleske (2000, 171) list more possible effects:

> "[…] resolve conflict and enhance consensus; make citizens more active; yield decisions more focused on the common good; force citizens to understand opposing perspectives if only to argue against them; yield decisions more grounded in facts and reason; strengthen citizens' commitment to resolving conflict peacefully and enhance trust in democratic procedure."

Five arguments for deliberation

Cooke (2002, 53) summarises the main arguments supporting deliberative conceptions of democracy. Accordingly, her main arguments for deliberation focus on:

- the *educative power* of the process of public deliberation;
- the *community* generating *power* of the process of public deliberation;
- the *fairness of the deliberative procedure*;
- the *epistemic quality of deliberative outcomes*;
- the *identity building power* of public deliberation.

Educative power

The first argument points out that deliberative democracy should be advocated because of the beneficial educating effects it has on citizens. Participation, as a presumption for deliberation in public affairs, is seen as a good in itself since it improves the moral and intellectual qualities of individuals. Carol Pateman is a proponent of the educating approach and holds that public deliberation processes have an integrative effect since they support the acceptance of collective decisions:

> "The major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is therefore an educative one, educative in the very widest sense, including both: the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures. Thus, there is no special problem about the stability of a participatory system; it is self-sustaining through the educative impact of the participatory process" (Pateman 1970, 42).

However, since the "mere" existence of representative institutions (such as parliaments) is not sufficient for democracy, she stresses the importance of a "social training" for democratic participation in which the individual can develop necessary attitudes and psychological qualities required for effective political participation. Consequently, the participatory model is then characterised as one where maximum input (participation) is required and where output includes not just policies (decisions), but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual (educative aspect), so that there is permanently feedback from output to input and vice versa (see Pateman 1970, 43). Cooke concludes on the educative argument, though, that the beneficial effects of participation in public deliberation cannot be the only point of the deliberative ideal of democracy. The educative argument presupposes and requires the availability of some independent standard for evaluating the individuals' moral, practical or intellectual development (see Cooke 2002, 56).

Community generating power

This assumption includes communitarian viewpoints such as provided by Benjamin Barber (1984). It is mainly based on the argument that practices of public reasoning enable the individual to become aware of his/her co-membership in a collective form of life where similar values and traditions are shared. Emphasis on the community generating power of public deliberation can also be found in liberal versions of deliberative democracy, as in the version proposed by Joshua Cohen (1996). Cohen claims that, by requiring justification on terms acceptable to others, deliberative democracy achieves one important element of the ideal community for it expresses the equal membership of all in the sovereign body responsible for authorising the exercise of that power. In this context, Cohen defines democratic legitimacy as a product of an ideal process of deliberation (see Cohen 1996, 102). Indeed, political outcomes are democratically legitimate if they result from a non-coercive decision process which is based on rational argumentation. Basically, this principle is ensured by deliberatively oriented decision processes (see Festenstein 2002, 103). The community generating power of public deliberation is also an important component in "discursive" versions of deliberative democracy, such as proposed by Benhabib (1996) and Habermas (1996). They conceive deliberation as a process of "ideal role taking" in which participants are forced to think of what could count as a good reason for all involved participants who are affected by the decisions under discussion. On their view, the discursive production of shared reasons does not only have a motivating force, the enlarged mentality required for this operation is itself a form of solidarity. Nevertheless, there are also some critical remarks concerning the supposed community generating power of deliberative procedures as Cooke (2002, 57) puts forward, that

> "[...] the community generating argument runs up against the problems, first, of how to show that deliberative participation in public affairs is superior (in its community-generating effects) to non-deliberative participation, second, that the generation of a sense of community cannot be the point of participation in public deliberation but only, at most, a beneficial by product; and third, that not all communities are equally desirable [...]".

Fairness by deliberative procedures

Based on Rawl's conception of "justice as fairness", deliberative communication is expected to improve the outcomes of democratic processes by making them more just, in the sense of more fair. Most of us are familiar with a basic version of this view of fairness: The position that democratic decisions are fair (and also legitimate) in so far as they are produced by fair procedures based on the majority rule. Ideal fairness provides a standard for assessing only the procedure, that is, the formal conditions of participation and argumentative exchange operating in actual deliberative procedures (i.e. whether everyone potentially affected by the outcome is equally entitled to participate). For Benhabib (1996, 68), democratic decisions are fair or legitimate if they derive from deliberative procedures. She bases the practical rationality of the conclusions resulting from public deliberation on observance of the specific rational procedures of decision-making. However, there is no such thing as neutral procedures since "[...] procedures always involve substantial ethical commitments [...]" (Mouffe 2000, 12). Thus, the only standards which help to assess the "fairness degree" of a procedure are internal to the procedure itself as Cooke (2002, 57) concludes: "[...] if the procedure is fair, the outcome is fair".

Epistemic quality of deliberative outcomes

This argument distinguishes between the fairness of the procedure and the rationality of the outcome. It thus posits independent epistemic standards for assessing the quality of the results of deliberation. Benhabib points out three reasons why deliberative processes are essential to the practical rationality of collective decision-making processes (see Benhabib 1996, 71):

- Deliberative processes impart new information.
- Deliberative processes help individuals to order their preferences coherently.
- Deliberative processes impose certain reflexivity on individual preferences and opinions, forcing participants to adopt an 'enlarged mentality'.

Bohman (1996, 4) claims that deliberative democracy refers to the idea that legitimate lawmaking issues derive from the public deliberations of citizens, and that it represents an ideal of political autonomy based on the practical reasoning of citizens. Festenstein holds that "[...] Polities containing a lot of debate on deliberative terms tend to arrive at more just democratic decisions" (Festenstein 2002, 99). This argument also forms parts of Habermas' (1996) theory of deliberative democracy which stresses the cognitive dimension of public deliberation. The intention is to find the best way of regulating matters of public concern, and this best way is judged according to standards of rationality that have a certain objectivity that is judged by a certain procedural standard of fairness.

> "The deliberative mode of legislative politics should be conceived as a syndrome that depends on a network of fairly regulated bargaining processes and of various forms of argumentation, including pragmatic, ethical, and moral discourses, each of which relies on different communicative presuppositions and procedures" (Habermas 1996, 25).

In his view, however, public deliberation does not necessarily aim at compromises, it merely accepts them in situations in which agreement is not forthcoming, its aim is to produce results that are objectively rational. Mouffe (2000, 5) criticises Habermas strict proceduralistic approach "[...] in which no limits are put on the scope and content of the deliberation. It is the procedural constraints of the ideal speech situation that will eliminate the positions to which the par-

ticipants in the moral discourse cannot agree". Cooke (2002, 63) identifies two main problems with Habermas' argument:

> "The first is that it appeals to an epistemic standard of rationality whose basis is quite unclear. The second is that it does not explain how public deliberation contributes constructively to the rationality of outcomes [...]. If general acceptability alone is required, voting (or indeed a coin flip) would be more sufficient."

Identity building power

The fifth argument is grounded in the view that autonomous reasoning is a valuable part of human agency, that publicity is important (especially in the realms of law and politics) and that everyone is in principle deserving equal respect as an autonomous moral agent with a distinct point of view. This argument entails a strong notion of equality in a sense of equal respect: Cooke (2002, 64) argues,

> "[...] that everyone is deemed capable (in principle) of making an informed and insightful judgement on moral matters; more precisely, that no one's argument should be discounted on grounds of race, sex, class, and so on. This implies that rational discussions in which moral arguments are advanced (and such arguments are always in principle relevant in discussions of laws, political principles and public policies), every citizen's contribution must be seen as worthy of consideration".

The ideal of a deliberative democracy fits well with this normative conception. It is supported by a historically bound de-sacralisation ("Entzauberung", authors translation) of knowledge since the 1950s/1960s, which also helps to explain the value attached to publicity, both in the weaker sense that rational outcomes must be capable of being made public and in the stronger sense that justifications themselves should be (made) public. Within this fifth argument citizens are considered to act politically autonomously in so far as they can see themselves as authors as well as subjects of the law. Subsequently, this suggests a deliberative interpretation of self-authorship of knowledge.

4.2 Components of public deliberation

Political talk, Benjamin Barber explains, "[…] is not talk about the world, it is talk that makes and remakes the world" (Barber 1984, 177). Accordingly, he emphasises that political talk is something "extraordinary", something powerful that may trigger consequences. Schudson, Noelle-Neumann and Postman (quoted in Wyatt et al. 2000, 71ff.) hold similar views and argue that political talk is "difficult and decisive" and as such a separate form of discourse which cannot be compared with "normal" conversation. Thus, they hold, political talk should proceed in protected places (see Wyatt et al. 2000, 88). Others, such as Dryzek argue that these "safe" places should be the only homes for public deliberation and he further concludes "[…] the most important alternative location for deliberation is civil society or the public sphere" (Dryzek 2000, 171). This provides also an explanation why Habermas claims vehemently in his concept of the public sphere that political discourse has to be rational-critical. Accordingly, he defines this particular sphere as

> "[…] a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the pub-

> lic sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. […] Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. […] We speak of the political public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state" (Habermas 1974, 49).

Despite some flaws in Habermas' concept[8], it takes into account all major aspects of communication that are pertinent for deliberative communication (see Dahlgren 1995, 9). Thus, it provides a valuable framework to investigate the *Your Voice in Europe* platform's potential for deliberation. Regarding the importance of new media for democracy, Hague and Loader (1999, 6) and Wring and Horrocks (2001, 193) identify several key features; we want to refer to as the most important ones:

Major features of new media

- *Interactivity:* New media dissolve the sender-receiver dichotomy (which characterises the old media system) and allow horizontal and reciprocal communication flows among individuals and organised groups.
- *Global network:* New media overcome spatial constraints and empower citizens to communicate in a (relatively) unconstrained way.
- *Free speech:* New media provide the conditions for (relatively) unrestricted political discussions.

Rheingold (1999, 277) argues that more and more public spaces disappear in our societies and that the Internet is an ideal sphere where people can gather to discuss and exchange their views. In fact, the Internet as a dispersed network connects people and presumably creates what Keane (1991, 145) has called "networks of meaning among various groups of citizens". Thus, the Internet can be a space for politically engaged people and may foster the emergence of multiple micro-public spheres (see Dahlgren 2001, 75).

Interactivity: Core element of deliberation

One specific feature of the Internet here is of particular interest: *Interactivity* which we consider as a premise for deliberative communication. In general, interaction among citizens and between citizens and political representatives enhances knowledge and stronger habits of political participation (see Gastil 2000, 359f.). Thus, interactive communication which overcomes the traditional one-to-many communication forms seems to explain the significance of the Internet for deliberation. Online discussions and consultations provide new ideas and information and offer their users a platform for political engagement (see Blumler; Coleman 2001, 15). But people do not just connect each other to discuss or to chat but also to collaborate, to do something in the political realm, including achieving political aims (see Dahlgren 2001, 75). In addition, new media help to create networks of interest through which people "[…] rediscover the behavioural values of face-to-face participation" (Blumler 1997, 401).

Rational-critical debates characterise deliberative communication

Another important aspect of the public sphere and of deliberative communication is the claim for *rationality*. Rational-critical debates set up the public sphere and determine deliberation. Webster (1995, 101) describes a rational-critical debate as not "interested", "disguised" or "manipulated". Rationality involves good cognitive reasoning, which enables people to solve problems effectively through social interaction (see Dryzek 1990, 217). This form of discourse provides a perfect framework for deliberative discussions among equals. Ration-

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[8] Habermas' concept of the public sphere has been widely criticised. The main points of critique comprise doubts about the historical validity of the concept and the exclusiveness of the "bourgeois" public sphere. For further discussion see Calhoun 1992, 5ff.

ality shall avoid that private interests or arguments that do not result in productive and effective discussions among citizens invade political discourse in the public sphere. With regard to the Internet, we can say that political talk is not a scarcity in the digital world. There are plenty of talkboards, chatrooms or mailing lists, which provide platforms for political discussions. However, the quality of these debates is contested. Two reasons seem to be relevant here:

The Internet: A contested space for deliberation

Firstly, it is argued that Internet users filter Internet communication and tend to participate in those discussions that correspond to their own opinions, attitudes and beliefs (see Levine 2000, 5). This might be important to a certain extent for groups who have been so far excluded by the traditional media coverage. These individuals are now provided a space in which they can exchange thoughts, share information or even develop strategies to improve their positions in society. Furthermore, an inclusive political public sphere (in the Habermasian sense) needs to include a broad community in order to be representative. Thus, Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson argue that electronic connectivity causes "balkanization", "defined as a proliferation of separate communities or conversations that are not in mutual contact" (Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson quoted in Levine 2000, 5). Nevertheless, the fact that today there are more than one singular public sphere, could also be seen as an expression of cultural and political enrichment. Civic deliberation within these different spheres can be spread by the Internet and (re)connect different communities.

Secondly, scholars contend that cheap and fast communication, as it is provided through the Internet, encourages cheap and fast output which often includes offensive or hostile behaviour (e.g. "flaming"; the use of abusive language etc.) (see Levine 2000, 3). The problem of the contemporary public sphere is that there is "too much silence and an insufficient 'babble' of competing views are in the air" (Coleman 1997, 147).

However, rational-critical debate is just one particular aspect, which is claimed by certain scholars. Dryzek (2000, 1f.) for instance holds that "some deliberative democrats, especially those who traffic in 'public reason', want to impose narrow limits on what constitutes authentic deliberation, restricting it to arguments in particular kinds of terms" and he would also "[...] allow argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip". Certainly, deliberation has to be reasoned if citizens should be moved by reasons. Deliberation is not about faith but rather demands conviction and sometimes passion. Civic deliberation must be based upon arguments that can be validated intersubjectively (see Rosenberg 2004, 4). This does not mean that other (passionate) forms of discourse are not tolerated. To sum up, reasoning of some kind is crucial for deliberative discussion. The ideal of deliberation, Fishkin (1991, 36) writes,

> "[…] takes us ultimately to something like the 'ideal speech situation' of Jürgen Habermas – a situation of free and equal discussion, unlimited in its duration, constrained only by the consensus which would be arrived at by the 'force of the better argument'."

Thus, the same requirements that are applied to face-to-face interaction can be applied to civic deliberation online: Reasoned arguments, which may be accompanied by "emotional" or "ironic" elements. Certainly, no actual deliberation corresponds to the ideal. However, as Mendelberg and Oleske (2000, 170) put it: "[...] the ideal [deliberative process] can serve as the end point of a continuum of good deliberation and as a standard against which actual deliberation can be evaluated" (completion in brackets added).

Deliberation triggers learning effects

Another defining feature of deliberative communication is that individuals are prepared and willing to be "moved" by reason. Citizens may alter their opinions and preferences as a result of the reflection induced by deliberative communication (see Dryzek 2000, 31). Since it often remains unclear what deliberation actually means and how it works, we think it is decisive to define deliberation in order to understand its significance within a conception of democracy.

Definitions of deliberation

Deliberation in the widest sense means *reflection* or as Wilhelm (2000, 43) puts it: "Deliberation means thinking through an issue, contemplating its advantages and disadvantages as well as the trade-offs associated with supporting a particular issue or agenda". Another useful definition provides Walzer (quoted in Mendelberg; Oleske 2000, 170):

> "Deliberation is reflective, open to a wide range of evidence, respectful of different views. It is a rational process of weighing the available data, considering alternative possibilities, arguing about relevance and worthiness, and then choosing the best policy or person."

London (1995, 8) understands deliberation as "[…] the formation of the will, the particular moment that precedes choice […]". Dryzek (2000, 2) adds another important feature of deliberation: "[…] communication and reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion [which] rules out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda […]". Following these descriptions, the process how deliberative communication on political issues occurs appears to be rather straightforward: Opinions and statements are subject to public scrutiny for validation or to put it in another way: Citizens discuss, validate and criticise publicly each other's point of view. Saward (2002, 114) defines more extended requirements attached to deliberative processes:

> "If we specify a conception of democracy as 'deliberative' it stipulates that 1) Voting must be preceded by formal and actual deliberation among representative citizens. 2) There must be evidence of successful public facilitation of free deliberation in a range of non-state civil forums 3) deliberation of the first sort in particular must have a determinate impact on the shape of the final outcome, such that (for example) the outcome can be justified and accounted for in terms of themes of arguments that were prominent in the deliberative process concerned, and 4) that the formal deliberation in particular satisfied minimum procedural standards of equal respect and inclusiveness".

To sum up, deliberation takes place when (see Fishkin quoted in Wilhelm 1999, 159):

- Political issues can be discussed at length.
- The communication process among the participants provides space for reflection.
- Opinions and arguments are open for public "test" and criticism.

Additionally, there are not only procedural requirements that have to be fulfilled in order to call a political discussion process deliberative. Festenstein identifies a set of obligations attached to citizens taking part in deliberative communication processes (see Festenstein 2002, 90ff.): Firstly, citizens or participants in the deliberative process are not only required to offer arguments but to offer arguments persuasive to all. "This is not of course to impose the impossible requirement that one's arguments should agree with all the beliefs of one's interlocutors: the point is precisely to change their minds, at least with respect to the proposal at issue [...]" (Festenstein 2002, 90f.). Secondly, there is an obligation to respond to the reason and arguments of others qua reason and arguments. Deliberation has to be considered as a process built upon the "force of the better argument" (participants provide reasons) and not as a bargaining power.

> "This obligation then means that the arguments and points of view of the weak are taken into consideration [...] others insist on the necessity of 'entry rules', pre-political normative criteria, which mark out certain points of view as unreasonable and therefore not admissible into public deliberation" (Festenstein 2002, 90f.).

Thirdly, there is an obligation to modify proposals in the light of the arguments and reasons and put forward in the deliberation in order to arrive at a commonly acceptable proposal. However, it is necessary to detach public deliberative processes from the implausible demand that participants are always required to arrive at an agreement which is completely satisfactory to all (see Eder; Kantner 2000, 315). In some cases a reasoned agreement is the regulative ideal, which, although it may not be possible in actual cases, should nevertheless inform the conception of actual deliberation. Others stress that the fairness of the procedure itself gives the outcomes normative weight.

Within the realm of politics and democracy, we distinguish between a vertical and a horizontal dimension of deliberation: While the former describes reflective communication processes between public institutions and citizens, the latter means recursive and dialogical communication among citizens (see Levine 2000, 5). Finally, there are also deliberative communication processes taking place among members who belong to public bodies, such as parliaments, high courts and so forth. This distinction is necessary since this study deals with deliberation in both directions (horizontal and vertical). Thus, we encompass and analyse communication processes across two different "power layers" in the EU context: Citizen-to-citizen (C2C) and citizen-to-government (C2G) relations. Considering deliberation as a process involving citizens interested in interaction with others necessitates the consideration of the different components making up and determining deliberative processes. Evidently, those factors are shaped by political culture, the ongoing digitisation of information and communication and contemporary phenomena such as the globalisation of socio-economic, political and cultural values, standards and beliefs and (vice versa) their influence on concepts of citizenship and the nation state. Moreover, deliberation is closely related to the (Habermasian) political public sphere involving complex concepts such as equality, freedom, reflexivity, empathy and sincerity (Graham; Witschge 2003).

4.3 Deliberation: Core element of gender-focused conceptions of democracy

A critical theory of democracy intends to question claims and structures of democratic decision-forming and -making processes. Evidently, those approaches grasp most of the dilemmas outlined in the introduction chapter. Equality in terms of access to resources (e.g. ICT access; information access etc.) and power relations between and among governments and citizens play, though, an even more important role when gender becomes a focus point of research. Gender-oriented approaches towards the interpretation of discursive practices in democratic processes have been mainly developed by feminist scholars (e.g. Nancy Fraser). In their research the public-private division of society, the realisation and allocation of liberal rights and the nature of liberal democracy are the main research foci. Particularly, Anne Phillips deals with key issues in democratic thinking (such as liberal democracy, participatory democracy and civic republicanism) and argues that each concept presupposes a gender-neutral understanding of citizenship that continues to privilege the male. Liberal individu-

There are no "gender-neutral" concepts of democracy

alism is, according to the feminist critique, widely built on a notion of the male, heterosexual individual which strengthens the division between the public and the private. Critical theory of democracy shows us that there are some overlaps concerning the requirements for a deliberatively oriented democracy and a conception of democracy including questions of identity and difference, namely, an "utopian" approach towards extensive participation, community thinking and the questioning of power structures. It might not be surprising, that classical and modern democratic thought did not take gender into account. Carol Pateman (1988) has argued in her book *The Sexual Contract*, that the liberal view looks rather different from a feminist, or better, gender-sensible perspective. Feminist theory developed historically re-actively to an assumed "male stream" of theoretical approaches to democracy (Rousseau, Mill, Marx etc.). Since the early 1970s, feminist scholars have discussed a theory of democracy with an emphasis on this utopian, activist approach, reflecting their personal practical experiences with conceptions of gender and male oppression. This has led to the "mainly ideal-typical, direct-democratic idea of democracy, based on critical analyses of economy and power-relations, representative parliamentary systems and the demand for an increased sovereignty" of the people (e.g. by "Räte" or assemblies). Consequently, a critical feminist theory of democracy is supposed to be "analytic, normative and constructive", claims Holland-Cunz (1998, 80).

Extensive participation and discursive communication are crucial for gender-focused democracy concepts

Being strictly normative, feminist theory of democracy deconstructs critically the central terms *equality* and *freedom* based on the construction of gender in connection with aspects of power and the distribution of economic resources. It emphasises expansive participation which means the consideration and integration of all life areas in policy-making processes. Extensive participation and discursive face-to-face communication are integral parts of feminist theories of democracy. However, "disembodied" communication such as provided via new media is thought to support feminist concerns. The emphasis on discursive participation, respectively on "ongoing talks" as Barber (1984, 178) refers to, is central to feminist theory and should promote the turn into a culture of democratic contestation. The Habermasian approach of a discursive ideal, an ideal process of deliberation and decision-making seems to be a proper solution for feminist intentions of radical, direct democracy, states Benhabib (1996, 126).

To sum up, deliberative democracy in a gender related view includes questions of identity and difference, models extensive participation for all spheres of life, and focuses on the individual's responsibility within a community while questioning power structures manifested in male dominated discourses. With regard to the research question on the deliberative potential of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform we take a look on the extent to which gender related issues (involving women's issues and minority issues) are deliberatively discussed or to put it more concretely: How far does this platform provide a space for discussion and consultation involving gender issues? This appears to be relevant since the Internet might be the medium which breaks through what Noelle-Neumann (1984) has called the "spiral of silence"[9]: People on the Internet mainly engage with others who share the same or at least a similar set of values, attitudes and so forth. Members of subordinated groups may feel less "forced" to adopt the opinions of dominant groups. On the Internet they feel rather free to live their social identity, their believes and convictions. Furthermore, this corresponds to Nancy Fraser's (1992, 127) description of public spheres: "[...] they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities".

[9] This model suggests that individuals try to avoid isolation by adopting attitudes or opinions held by the majority of people in society. For further discussion see Noelle-Neumann (1984).

4.4 Citizenship concepts framing deliberative communication

Deliberation as a special kind of communication presupposes the notion of a community and citizens being aware of such a community. There are scholars who argue that deliberative democracy requires social relationships or at least benefits from a shared national identity.

> "Deliberative obligations are grounded in a valuable social relationship. […] The obvious candidate for such a relationship here is citizenship, understood as an ethical rather than a merely legal category. We need to accept that there is a non-instrumental value in being an equal member of community of decision-making about common affairs" (Festenstein 2002, 108).

Status and ideological interpretation of citizenship supposedly determine deliberative processes. Citizenship is commonly understood as a membership in a community called nation state. It is a complex part of collective identity and the concept comprises both, the relation between the individual and the state and relations among individuals within a state. Citizenship encompasses more than the passive acceptance of a pre-constituted "package of rights". Critical debates which mainly occur when we discuss the notion of citizenship in the context of participative processes concern inter alia the following questions:

- Who is entitled to enjoy citizenship and what does citizenship entail for its holders?
- Is citizenship based on a collective identity or does it derive from social policy?
- Is citizenship restricted to the granting of individual rights or does it foresee and demand active participation in political processes?

Components of citizenship

The debate in this chapter focuses on elaborating the meaning of citizenship in substantive terms pertinent for the understanding of deliberative discussions. Based on the experiences of a class-ridden society, Marshall (1992) is well known for identifying three components of citizenship that he calls civil, political and social and which are associated with the institutionalisation of the legal system, parliamentary democracy and the welfare state.[10] Jessica Mathews (2001, vii) completes the debate on citizenship, when asking, if contemporary nation states find themselves under pressure from cross-cutting forces of globalisation and devolution, and if citizenship is therefore becoming an out-dated concept. Clearly, the concept of citizenship per se is still relevant but citizenship concepts which are exclusively based on nationalism are increasingly contested.

> "Nationalism and national citizenship are under attack [...] from two opposite vectors: one toward multinational and global affiliations that transcend the nation-state, and one toward sub-national, regional, and local affiliations that fracture the nation-state" explains Ford (2001, 210).

He defines these global and local affiliations as both, formal and informal, political and economic, "hard-headed and strategic, irrational and romantic" (ibid.). Additionally, citizenship is defined by geography, ethnicity, religion, culture, and by the vectors of rapid transportation and "[…] the media of communication" (ibd.).

The nation state is the only large-scale contemporary institutional setting in which people may develop a sense of a "common good" based on a "shared fate" (Bosniak 2001, 247). Thus, citizenship conceptions are highly relevant

[10] Bauböck (2001, 139) critically raises the question if Marshall had "[…] forgotten about cultural citizenship?"

in the European context, since it is still less clear how people may develop a sense of a European citizenship which is considered to be decisive for a Union representing more than common economic interests. In fact, the author observes, that citizenship is increasingly taking non-national forms, "[…] and that political activists have likewise articulated and promoted conceptions of citizenship that locate beyond the state" (Bosniak 2001, 238). Hence, post-national citizenship, dissolved from nationalism's fundamentally exclusive character, could mean that citizenship is as much an idea as it is a set of institutions and social practices. Therefore any debate over the merits of the idea of a denationalised citizenship is a debate about the meaning of citizenship in the first instance. It is to ask what we believe what citizenship ought to mean and how it influences on political processes such as deliberative communication, as Festenstein (2002, 108) puts it:

> "The theory of public deliberation is a normative theory of social decision making under conditions of pluralism. [...] Yet the difficulty of this ideal is that it relies on that social relationship's meeting the ethical standards that it sets for itself: that citizenship is not merely a legal category in which most of us are in-voluntarily impressed but an ethical relationship whose value we can affirm."

Mouffe points out that the different ways of conceptualising the role of the citizen and of law in political processes express a deeper disagreement about its nature. She concludes that based on the assumption that ethic-political principles can only exist through many different and conflicting interpretations, this might indeed be the privileged terrain of an

> "[...] agonistic confrontation among adversaries. Ideally such a confrontation should be staged around the diverse concepts of citizenship which correspond to the different interpretations of ethico-political principles: liberal-conservative, social-democratic, neo-liberal, radical-democratic etc. Each of them proposes its own interpretation of the 'common good' and tries to implement a different form of hegemony" (Mouffe 2000, 16).

5 Digital democracy: Definition and scope of a contemporary phenomenon

There are numerous approaches, classifications and definitions on digital democracy. Basically, the notion describes

> "[…] the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in all kinds of media (e.g. the Internet, interactive broadcasting and digital telephony) for purposes of enhancing political democracy or the participation of citizens in democratic communication" (Hacker; Van Dijk 2000, 1).

Defintion of digital democracy

Digital democracy is supposed to foster the relations among citizens by creating interactive networks of interests and is assumed to contribute to a more transparent political system. Accordingly, digital democracy can be understood as "[…] a means to improving the responsiveness and accountability of political institutions and enhancing citizen participation in the political process […]" (Tsagarousianou 1998, 167). In addition, there are similar notions such as "virtual democracy", "electronic democracy", "teledemocracy" or "cyberdemocracy" which basically grasp the same phenomenon i.e. the enrichment of democratic participation via new media but which partly differ in their theoretical assumptions. Hacker and Van Dijk provide a more detailed definition on digital democracy upon which this research report is based: Digital democracy is defined "[…] as a collection of attempts to practise democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional 'analogue' political practices" (Hacker; Van Dijk 2000, 1). Their definition is particularly valuable since it recognises the potential of new media for democratic engagement without following a techno-deterministic approach often assuming a complete shift from traditional ways of political participation to the online world respectively the reinvention of democracy. Furthermore, the notion of digital democracy clearly refers to ICTs and CMC. Consequently, the authors consider "ICTs as a dependent variable" (Nentwich 2003, 31) which might be used by different social groups for different democratic concerns and which are socially shaped.[11] Digital democracy can be considered as the result of the ICTs' presumably enshrined democratic potential to support interaction, foster social relations and enable communicative exchange among ICT users, both citizens and political actors. Several European States and the EU itself have set up a number of digi-

[11] The social shaping of technology approach stresses the everyday uses of technologies. It deals with individual usage behaviour, social adaptation and reinvention processes which links questions on technological feasibility to those on user acceptance and desirability (see Lievrouw 2002, 132; Nentwich 2003, 31). The perspective of "social shaping of technologies" (SST) (MacKenzie 1999; Soerensen 2002) today is a major school of thought for the study of science and technology in the Social Sciences (together with the "social construction approach" (Bijker 1987). The SST is a generic approach which is generally understood as being "anti-determinist" and "anti-linear", embracing a variety of specific approaches. The common denominator is the rejection of "technological determinism". In contrast to this position, SST assumes that technology is a product of the interplay between the inseparability of technical and social factors, which includes some – however limited – room for choice in design and use. "Co-construction" and "co-evolution" are preferred to the notion of "impacts" for modelling the relation between technology and society. The SST approach is explicitly documented in research on e-government and e-democracy (Bellamy 1998; Perri6 2001; Kubicek 1997 and 2001).

tal democracy projects[12] all linked to high expectations concerning the electronic involvement of citizens, entrepreneurs and NGOs. However, there has been provided little empirical evidence concerning the success and impact (i.e. increased political participation, reinforced identification with the political system etc.) of such initiatives so far.

Core thoughts of digital democracy

Given the wide range of definitions on digital democracy it is necessary to identify in the following the core thoughts and components of digitally designed democracy and select those which determine the scope of this study. Basically, the term digital democracy encompasses two different dimensions: *Electronic voting* and *electronic deliberation.* While the former is mainly concerned with the legal and technical framework enabling online voting, the latter analyses if and how citizens deliberate on political issues in cyberspace. Consequently, digital democracy concepts involve elements of direct and representative democracy. Proponents of digital democracy can be distinguished according to their theoretical assumptions. While the group of the "cyberdemocrats" assumes a causal relationship between technological innovation and democratic change, "teledemocrats" consider ICTs as means to renew existing democratic practices (such as deliberation and voting processes) and public institutions. Becker and Slayton discuss the teledemocratic paradigm as "the coming age of citizen power" (Becker; Slayton 2000, 211) since it will answer the challenge of flattening hierarchies by engaging all those citizens in the policy-making process who are disappointed with representative politics and not attracted to community politics. Accordingly, the key to a more truly democratic politics of the future lies in the greater realisation and materialisation of teledemocracy representing a "New Democratic Paradigm" (Becker; Slayton 2000, 5) strongly interwoven with the development of ICTs. This study exclusively deals with electronic deliberation which is often linked to the idea of the Greek Agora. In the context of the computer-mediated environment the electronic agora is assumed to represent a realm which is based on interactive Internet tools and services enabling citizens to discuss and debate issues of a common concern (see Coleman 1999, 72). Electronic voting implies elements of direct democracy, such as electronic campaigning, electronic referenda and electronic elections (see Hague; Loader 1999, 33). This is thought to transform representative government into a system much less responsive to traditionally organised pressure groups and more responsive to a broad base of its citizenry. Zittel (2001) argues that digital democracy is inspired by two major sets of political ideas: Participatory concepts and liberal democracy. According to his distinction digital democracy can be analysed on three levels: A general conception of democracy (e.g the liberal model) an institutional/structural dimension (democratic design), and a behavioural dimension (participatory behaviour). Both, participatory concepts and the liberal idea of democracy involve different views of citizenship. The individual as part of the political community sets the basic conception for the participatory ideal in which he or she is, rationally thinking, able to adjust individual interests to the common good. The liberal conception stresses the antagonism between the individual and the political community and perceives individuals autonomously from the community. In this view, citizens are mainly consumers who are represented by elected bodies ensuring the protection of the private spheres of their constituencies. The liberal conception of democracy has become the dominant paradigm in Western societies given the establishment of large nation states. Thus, democratic participation in a "liberal sense" is based upon, and considered as supporting, a strictly representative system. The citizens' participatory behaviour and options are mainly re-

[12] E.g. in the UK: "In the service of democracy", http://www.edemocracy.gov.uk;
in Latvia: "Politika.lv", http://www.politika.lv;
the EU: "*Your Voice in Europe*", http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice etc.

stricted to acts of "voting". Generally, the conceptions of digital democracy tend to follow a broader, normative, utopian idea of participation since both are oriented to diminish deficits of liberal representative democracy by increasing active involvement of the citizens in a qualitative sense. Mansbridge (2000, as quoted in Festenstein 2002, 88) precisely describes the deficits, which caused the re-increasing demand for alternative procedures of creating a political will:

> "Voters pursue their individual interest by making demands on the political system in proportion to the intensity of their feelings. Politicans, also pursuing their own interests, adopt politics that buy them votes, thus ensuring accountability. In order to stay in office, politicians act like entrepreneurs or brokers, looking for formulas that satisfy as many, and alienate as few, interests as possible. From the interchange between self-interested voters and self-interested brokers emerge decisions that come as close as possible to a balanced aggregation of individual interests."

Obviously, the emergence of ICTs has extended the research questions within these approaches due to their usage as new platforms for political engagement. Different frameworks of analysis can be detected concerning the role of ICTs in this context. As a first conclusion, we can say that every digital democracy concept and project is linked to interpretations of democratic participation, visions of citizenship and the public sphere, ideological concepts of democracy and the design and use of ICTs.

6 Good Governance: Policy Framework for the European Commission's IPM initiative

The continuing development of the EU combined with the erosion of national citizenship frames the Commission's policy of implementing *Good Governance*.

From "Nationalisation" to "Internationalisation"

Historically, the formation of nation states is understood to involve the centralisation of power in the hands of a national government, as Ford (2001, 212) observed. This process has subsumed previously autonomous regional and national structures of rule under a single sovereign. Thus, formally, regional and local governments are sub-divisions of the nation states of which they are part. "Internationalisation" seems to be the next historical phase.

> "This internationalisation is characterised, not only by the creation of multinational institutions, but also by the dramatic expansion of their authority at the expense of nation-state. [...] Governmental arrangements like the European Union have therefore taken on functions that have not only long been within the authority of the nation-state but have traditionally defined it" (Ford 2001, 212).

Globalisation: Driving force

Furthermore, he points out, that globalisation and intra-national fragmentations are driving forces which:

> "[…] threaten the ability of nation states to make and enforce meaningful laws and policy, and undermine the ability of the citizens of a nation to act collectively. Evidently, this complicates the cultural identity of the nation state, by fragmenting the idea of 'the people'" (Ford 2001, 212).

The growth of international organisations and economies is accompanied by revitalised localism and regionalism and the revitalisation of different "communities" (or multiple demoi) instead of "people". These developments partially reflect and have begun to promote alterations in the character of national citizenship. Bellamy and Warleight (2001, 5) observe three related factors noteworthy to reason this:

First, the state appears to offer fewer rewards for loyalty and belonging than in the past, thereby at least potentially reducing the cost of the individual of modifying, displacing and supplementing national citizenship.

Second, citizens are increasingly motivated by sectoral, identity- and issue-based concerns. Individuals regard their political engagement less as a general commitment to a political party and system, than more as a concern with various causes. As a result, people become members of a range of new alliances, some of sub-national and others increasingly of a trans-national nature.

> "According to their policy of concern, people line up with different groups and focus their attention on different loci of power. In consequence, they participate in a number of overlapping structures of governance, from neighbourhoods and municipalities to supra-national bodies as the EU, and belong to a multiplicity of demoi" (Bellamy; Warleight 2001, 5).

Third, they further point out that European Union citizenship reflects the fragmentation of national citizenship and not only supplements, but also replaces, interacts and occasionally competes and conflicts with it (see Bellamy; Warleight 2001, 8).

This leads to the discussion of different dimensions of the EU's legitimation crisis, to which the talk of the democratic deficit is intimately related, as Bellamy and Castiglione (2000, 65) analyse:

> "The first concerns the genesis and character of the European polity, the second the type of democratic regime most suited to it. Discussion of the latter dimension often overlooks the connection to the former by regarding democracy per se as intrinsically good."

But presuming that representative pluralist democracy (either liberal or social democratic) is still the appropriate form and space of governance where an European citizenship takes place, the democratic deficit becomes visible when then the EU is judged by standard liberal democratic criteria of accountability and responsiveness, which is based on a mixture of institutional inadequacies and the absence of a substantial feeling of solidarity and community between the different peoples of the member states. For without a clear sense or at least a vision of a European Demos it is difficult to adequately institutionalise government either by or for Europeans. If the EU is a multi level polity containing multiple demoi, then a central political institution based on the principle of majority rule might not really calm the situation. It will lack popular support whilst remaining inefficient as an institutional system of policy-making and control.

With regard to the questions we raised in our introduction, whenever debating *Good Governance* posed as the answer to these problems, scepticism occurs: Is a polity like the EU in a post-national context ever able to put weight on input-legitimacy of policy-making procedures or is an orientation on output-legitimacy sufficient enough for the legitimisation of decisions? This dilemma is a classical and an ideological one and system effectiveness versus citizen participation accompanies policy-making at all levels of governance.

The reproach of nurturing a severe democratic deficit in the supranational construction of the EU consists of the following elements: There is a European Parliament, but it does not possess the function of a true parliament since it is a representative body but not a model of representative democracy. As Abromeit (2002, 20) states, the EU is a democracy without people or to put in another way, the EU is a system that is based on a plurality of elites each with its own uneven and unsystematic linkage to public opinion.

European democratic deficits

Hence, based on this knowledge about the reasons for a European democratic deficit, especially since the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties have come into being, citizenship construction as read in EU policy papers has switched from the elaboration of supposedly identity-generating symbols to the supply of further means of practical popular engagement with Union policy-making. Consequently, the role of the Union institutions in the citizenship construction process is still a crucial issue. Based on the treaties, Warleigh (2001, 23) judges the provisions on citizenship as certainly ambiguously.

> "As the key to the full extent of Union citizenship is nationality of a member state, citizens do not belong to the Union. [...] Union citizenship confers limited rights on its holders. These centre on increased freedom of movement, the right to stand and vote in local and EP elections of member states [...] the right to petition the newly created Ombudsman as well as the EP, and the right to diplomatic protection by another member-state in third countries where one's own state is not represented."

Following Warleigh (2001, 19), the EU has attempted to use citizenship as a means of self-advancement. This type of post-national citizenship seems to be rather tied to human rights than to national sovereignty or a common good and the important instrument for claiming these rights is individual interest formulation via "improved participation" (European Commission 2001a, 10). Partici-

"Good Governance" through political participation

pation is the procedure which is set as a core element of *Good Governance*. According to the UN[13], this policy approach is underpinned by five principles: Openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. *Good Governance* has to be consensus oriented, transparent, responsible, equitable and inclusive and has to follow the rule of law.

> "It assures that corruption is minimised, the views of the minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society" (United Nations 2003).

Furthermore, *Good Governance*, as the UN puts it, requires a bunch of key features:

- direct participation of citizens in the regulation of the key institutions of society, including the workplace and local community;
- reorganisation of the party system by making party officials directly accountable to membership;
- operation of participatory parties in a parliamentary or congressional structure;
- maintenance of an open institutional system to ensure the possibility of experimentation with political forms;
- direct amelioration of the poor resource base of many social groups through redistribution of material resources;
- minimisation (eradication, if possible) of unaccountable bureaucratic power in public or private life;
- an open information system to ensure informed decisions.

EU's White Paper on Good Governance

The Commission answered this call for *Good Governance* by agreeing on the *White Paper on European Governance* (European Commission 2001a), centrally quoting the UN, and points out several proposals for change to improve the member states' and citizen's involvement in EU's policy-making procedures. This leads to a plea for a close co-operation between the European Commission and different actors and stakeholders of civil society. "There needs to be a stronger interaction with regional and local governments and civil society" (European Commission 2001a, 4). Interacting with civil society is seen as a supplement to procedures of policy-making in a representative democracy. There are several other documents framing this intention:

- *Towards the e-Commission:* Implementation Strategy 2001-2005[14]
- *European Governance:* Better lawmaking[15]
- *Action plan:* "Simplification and improving regulatory environment"[16]
- *Communication:* Towards a reinforced culture of consultation and dialogue – General principles and minimum standards for consultations of interested parties by the Commission[17]
- *Decision-Making within the European Union:* Modernising the system[18].

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[13] United Nations (2003). What is Good Governance? http://www.unescap.org/huset/gg/governance/htm, accessed 23 October 2003.

[14] European Commission (2001b).

[15] European Commission: (COM) (2002a) 275 final.

[16] European Commission: (COM) (2002b) 278 final.

[17] European Commission: (COM) (2002c) 277 final.

[18] http://www.europa.eu.int/institutions/decision-making/index_en.htm, accessed 27 September 2004.

"Interactive Policy-Making": An EU initiative

Although these documents formulate different measures to counteract the democratic deficits of the EU, all of them build upon increased participation options for citizens, entrepreneurs and civil society actors. The contemporary tools for *Good Governance*, to improve participation for stakeholders and individuals of civil society are ICTs, the guiding policy to establish these interactions is the Interactive Policy Making (IPM) Initiative (European Commission 2001)[19]. IPM provides (online) tools "[…] that will help the Commission, as a modern administration, to respond more quickly and accurately to the demands of citizens, consumers and business" (European Commission 2002c, 7). Legitimating the polity via needs based policy-making is then set as the core aim of *Good Governance*. To do so, the IPM initiative as part of the "e-Commission" initiative offers the possibility to participate through a web portal: "[…] this web portal enables citizens, consumers and businesses to give input to new initiatives, give feedback on the application of existing legislation, discuss the future of Europe or lodge complaints"[20].

Online debates and online consultation are part of EU's Good Governance strategies

Two major sections which are relevant for political engagement structure the portal: *Discussion* and *consultation* platforms. While the former includes debates on the EU and its future, the latter enables the above mentioned target groups to contribute to the Commission's policy-making processes by giving their input to new policy initiatives. However, using ICTs to enhance political engagement does not only imply the provision of participation spaces, yet necessitates questioning the actual democratic potential of these platforms since it is less clear "[…] which online discussions are truly deliberative and supportive of larger democratic practices and institutions" (Gastil 2003, 128).

Furthermore, there is a need for analysing the empirical evidence about new media's potential to re-connect citizens to the political stage and the Commission's webportal is an obvious, testable example. This brings us back to the empirical part of answering our main research question: *"To what extent does the Your Voice in Europe platform enable civic deliberation?"* A content analysis on the political discourse on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform and expert intervies on online consultations will offer us conclusions on the democratic potential of *Good 'online' Governance*.

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19 http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/index_en.htm, accessed 17 October 2004.

20 http://ipmmarkt.homestead.com, accessed 16 September 2004.

7 Content Analysis on Online Debates

7.1 Background

The analysis on the deliberative potential of the EU online platform *Your Voice in Europe* is related to questions on concepts of democracy and discourse quality. We have pointed out in the theory chapter of this report that *freedom* and *equality* are significant variables framing the assessment of a participation model such as an online discussion board. Political participation is often subject to economic constraints which become visible in questions on access. Clearly, publicly accessible participation options are desirable and necessary, though, have to be assessed critically against this background (keyword: Internet access). The question on equality relates to the necessary (rhetorical and cognitive) capabilities to participate in political discussions. How to assess debates which are mainly dominated by eloquent discussion participants and which exclude all those who may have valuable contributions but cannot participate due to their rhetorical skills? Furthermore, the quality of (offline and online) debates is determined by the organisational framework. How much freedom do participants have regarding the selection of discussion topics? Which discussion contributions are set on the talkboard by the moderators and which ones are excluded? This content analysis on online debates on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard covers, against the background of the major research question, the deliberative quality of the political discourse.

Content analysis on political discourse on Your Voice in Europe

Basically, the theoretical analysis has shown that several approaches dealing with deliberative processes lack empirical evidence. This content analysis seeks to provide first empirical evidence in answer to the posed research question. Consequently, the major research question can be refined and split up into more specific and "testable" questions. This appears to be decisive in order to make reliable assumptions about the deliberative character of the talkboard:

- To what extent do participants in the discussion forum reply to the postings of other discussants?
- To what extent do posters seed discussion(s)?
- To what extent do posters merely provide information and/or express their political opinions?
- To what extent do participants seek information from other discussion participants? To what extent do they seek direct interaction with others?
- To what extent do discussants agree or disagree on political issues?
- To what extent are political issues related to EU matters debated rationally?
- To what extent are emotional and/or ironic aspects involved in the discussions?
- How far are gender and minority sensitive issues debated on the talkboard?

Your Voice in Europe: A moderated discussion forum

Before we present further details on the empirical analysis, we would like to describe briefly the organisational framework of the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. In general, there is only slight moderation taking place on the talkboard. However, the participants have to respect certain "talk rules" which are outlined in the "talk policy" of the *Your Voice in Europe* homepage. Basically, the platform is designed to give "[…] European citizens complete freedom to

express their views on, and discuss the future of Europe".[21] The initiators state that contributions are not modified, though, some minimum criteria have to be fulfilled. If the discussants do not respect the discussion rules, he or she might be banned from the talkboard.

> "On the basis of these considerations, the moderator reserves the right not to publish certain contributions. This simple line of conduct is necessary to ensure a democratic debate, complying with the basic rules of politeness and of respect for others."[22]

Thus, the assessment of the quality of discourse has to be undertaken against the background of these basic discussion requirements. The empirical investigation can only take into account those discussion contributions which have been granted access to the talkboard.[23] Discussants have to fulfil the following standards:

- "Contributions must be genuinely related to the debate on the future of Europe, as defined by the Declaration of Laeken.
- If this is not the case, we suggest the sites and/or discussion corners devoted to the subjects dealt with in the message.
- The content of contributions must not be illegal, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing, libellous, vulgar, obscene, threatening for the private lives of other people, hateful, racist or objectionable in any other way.
- Contributions must not contain messages of a violent or pornographic nature or be likely to constitute a major affront to human dignity.
- Contributions must not contain incitement to commit crimes or offences.
- Contributions must not contain incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence on the basis of race, ethnic origin, nationality, beliefs or religion.
- Contributions must not defend nazism, terrorism and war crimes or dispute the existence of crimes against humanity.
- Contributions must not contravene intellectual property rights and, in general, the property rights of other people (e.g. patents, trade marks, trade secrets, etc.).
- More generally, contributions must abide by the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- Contributions must not pursue a commercial goal."[24]

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[21] See editorial policy of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform: http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/contribu/editorialpolicy_en.htm, accessed 2 September 2004.

[22] See editorial policy of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform: http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/contribu/editorialpolicy_en.htm, accessed 2 September 2004.

[23] Unfortunately, it was impossible to receive any figures about all those messages that were not put on the *Your Voice in Europe* by the talkboard's moderators.

[24] See editorial policy of the *Your Voice in Europe* platform: http://europa.eu.int/futurum/documents/contribu/editorialpolicy_en.htm, accessed 2 September 2004.

7.2 Research Design

Content analysis is a quantitative method involving a qualitative interpretation process and aims at identifying and counting the occurrence of particular aspects in a text. This instrument enables the researcher to say something about the messages of such texts and put them in a wider social context (see Hansen et al. 1998, 95). Content analysis was the most appropriate research instrument for this empirical investigation since it was the purpose of this assessment to analyse the political discourse on the talkboard and not the political stance of individuals or a group of persons. Thus, other approaches (such as a user survey) were rejected due to time and money constraints.

Studies on online discussions

There has already been undertaken some research on online talkboards: Wilhelm (2000, 86ff.) for instance undertook a content analysis on Usenet political forums'. The purpose of his research was to find out how far these talkboards enable deliberation in the public sphere. Content analysis seemed to be adequate "[…] since the deliberativeness of online political communication is really about the substantive components of messages as well as about reciprocity between message posters. […] Content analysis was determined to be the tool most amenable to discoveries about the [research] questions" (Wilhelm 2000, 90; completion in brackets added). Another important research project was done by Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1998, 173ff.). They were interested in the captivation of participatory communication on networks and examined how captivation occurs through interactive communication processes and they also used content analysis for their research purposes (see Rafaeli; Sudweeks 1998, 173).

Hypothesis

Against the background of these studies, our empirical assessment on the *online debates* is also framed by the following hypothesis based on Coleman's (2004) assumptions on online participation: Most *online discussion* is uninformed and of poor quality.

7.3 Methodology

7.3.1 Definition of the variables in the coding frame

The proposed content categories resulted from an extensive literature review on theoretical concepts on deliberation (see theory chapters in this report) and (the few) existing empirical studies on online deliberation. They were developed in order to operationalise the outlined research questions. Given that deliberation can be defined as a communicative process, *interaction* among discussants is a core aspect which has been split up into several variables. The second key feature is *rationality*. In fact, defining rationality turned out to be a challenge. Most scholars describe the role of rational discourse in political talk but only few among them explain what a rational debate on political issues is meant to comprise.

Variables help to classify the content and provide the "technical" frame of the analysis (see Hansen et al. 1998, 106). We distinguish between variables that have a mere descriptive function (topic; date; length of the posting; number of the poster; language etc.) and those that fulfil an analytical task, i.e. variables that are directly related to the research questions. Finally, we identified ten analytical variables split up into two major categories: 1. *Interactivity* and 2. *Rationality*.

Two major content categories

1. Interactivity
has been defined as a category covering three main variables: *Message format*; *Message purpose* and *Level of agreement*.

Message format: This category identifies the main format of the message i.e. whether posters reply to one or more precedent message(s) or whether they seed a debate. Messages are coded as "seeding a debate" when posters either start new discussion topics or when they do not reply to other postings but start a new discussion within an existing thread.

Message purpose: The focus of a message is detected by this variable. The content analysis shows several options: Posters may express their statements without making any references to first person pronouns such as "I, me, my, mine". In this case the posting can be regarded as a statement that provides information. Postings that do indicate first person, e.g. "I think that ..." or "my favourite position in this context is … because ..." are coded as opinion. Messages that indicate at least one sentence of instance of inquiry are coded as "pure" information seeking. If postings include any evidence of "direct" engagement with other participants of the discussion forum (e.g. "What do you think, James?") or if messages involve a more general appeal to the discussion group (see example below) then the message is coded as "direct" interaction. Postings that mainly contain experiences or personal stories (e.g. "In my job I experienced that ...") are coded separately.

The following is an example showing what has been understood by: "Direct interaction". It refers to a statement in which the poster calls his/her fellow discussants to provide answers, ideas, proposals etc.

Example: "But I have yet to hear one, just one, good reason why religious references in a constitutional document should be there. I am open to such ideas. I am waiting to see them and give them their due regard. Got a reason for it? Let us hear it." (posted on 22nd of November 2002).

The level of agreement delivers more information about the extent to which posters are interested in interaction. The expression of agreement or disagreement is a direct reaction to precedent postings and indicates that the posters have followed the discussion on the talk board. However, this may also apply to messages that are considered to be neutral. If a posting was the first of a batch or a thread or if a message did not allow the assessment of the level of agreement (e.g. a message only refers to a web site or only contains a quote or question) then it was coded "4" ("no indication").

2. Rationality
has been operationalised by the following variables: *Rational argument* used in the statement; *"Balance" of arguments*; *Awareness of political and/or socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances*; *Facts* used in the postings; *Emotional and ironic* tone in the message.

Rational argument is supposed to be an integral part of deliberative debate. This variable attempts to investigate whether posters use their reason to underpin their statements. Messages are regarded to be rational if the poster provides reasons to validate the truth of assertions. These reasons are open for criticism and provide the groundwork for further discussion. Reasons do not necessarily involve facts. Rational argumentation rather enables third persons to reconstruct the argumentation thread within the messages.

The following example shows what has been understood by rational argument.

Example: "[…] for a lot of people in Europe it is tremendously important to have a reference text, a constitution, that can hold together the values of such different people that, moreover, fought each other during centuries" (posted on 10th of June 2003).

The "balance" of arguments can be considered as additional information concerning rational argumentation. This variable informs more precisely about the "balance" of arguments and how posters discuss and deliberate on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. Messages are very well-balanced if posters put forward several arguments to underpin their statements. This may involve counter arguments (e.g. Although I disagree on ... I admit that ...). The use of arguments and counter arguments can be defined as a pluralist view, which indicates that the message is very well-balanced. Postings are moderately balanced if posters include only one argument. Moderately balanced arguments do not involve a pluralist view. Messages are ill-balanced if they do not provide a base for deliberative discussion (e.g. posting is a mere quote, a question etc.).

The following quote is an example for a very well-founded argument.

Example: "[…] some wish to create a superstate, a United States of Europe. The Union is seemingly continuing on the road to integration without explicitly stating its intentions. The EU already possesses its own currency, while its legal system has established superiority over that of Member States. Moreover, there is now the European Rapid Reaction Force and talk of greater co-operation in relation to foreign policy. However, Europe still lacks a homogenous people, and this is unlikely to change. Much integration has taken place without the express consent of Europe's people […]" (posted on 30th of April 2002).

Awareness of political and socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances is regarded to be important for the formulation of rational argumentation. This variable attempts to find out whether posters show such awareness to underpin their statements. Posters show awareness if they refer to political, economic and/or cultural events in society (e.g. Parliamentarian debates), democratic institutions (e.g. the European Parliament or national councils), official documents (e.g. memoranda, directives etc.), intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies (e.g. WTO, Amnesty International, Greenpeace etc.). The posters show "implicitly" awareness of political and/or socio-economic circumstances by using keywords such as "political responsibility", "the power of democratic vote" and so forth.

Example: "Democracy implies a willingness to freely accept a decision taken by majority vote. A veto is therefore not a democratic instrument. Sure democracy is not perfect, but if you know of something better, please enlighten us" (posted on 28th of January 2004).

Facts: The use of facts might be an essential part of a rational argument. Facts involve for example historical events or reasonable figures, i.e. figures that seem to derive from "reliable" sources such as public bodies (like the EU Commission, DGs etc.) or public institutions (like the media).

The following is an example for the provision of "hard" facts. The poster refers to an article of the Irish Constitution in order to underpin his/her argument.

Example: "According to Article 29.5 of the Irish Constitution it is stated that … […]" (posted on 4th of September 2002).

Emotional and ironic tone in the message: This variable attempts to discover whether there are emotional and/or ironic aspects in the postings. Messages are emotional if they contain a very "personal touch" either in a positive (e.g. "Thank you for your great comment, you're the best!") or negative sense (the usage of abusive language, swearing, insults, obscene words, and hostile comments). Ironic comments include jokes, funny or less serious statements. Traditional concepts on deliberative discussion identify rational argumentation as the decisive component of rational-critical debate (see Habermas' conceptions

on the use of public reason). More tolerant positions also allow emotion or humour in deliberative debates (see Dryzek).

The following examples illustrate an emotional statement:

Example: "What a primitive way of dealing with different opinion! […] Shame on you!" (posted on 14th of May 2002).

Gender and Equality aspects: Assuming that Internet discussions forums provide space for marginalised groups in society this category seeks to find out how far gender sensitive issues (e.g. women rights, anti-discrimination discussions etc.) are represented on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform.

The following Table 7.3-1 gives a rough overview on s the analytical variables.[25]

Table 7.3-1: Coding Variables

Variable	Value
Message format	1. Reply (mainly) 1 precedent message
	2. Reply (mainly) to more than 1 precedent message
	3. Seeding a debate
	4. Non-applicable
Message purpose	1. Statement in terms of information provision
	2. Opinion
	3. "Pure" information seeking
	4. "Direct" interaction
	5. Own experience(s)
	6. Other
Level of agreement	1. Agreement
	2. Disagreement
	3. Neutral
	4. No indication
Rational argument	1. Yes
	2. No
	3. Non-applicable
"Balance" of arguments	1. Very-well balanced/founded
	2. Moderately balanced/founded
	3. Ill-balanced/not founded
	4. Non applicable
Awareness of political and socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances	1. Yes
	2. No
	3. Non applicable
Facts	1. Yes
	2. No
Emotional tone in the message	1. Yes
	2. No (neutral)
Ironic tone in the message	1. Yes
	2. No (neutral)
Gender and equality aspects	1. Yes
	2. No (neutral)

[25] The complete coding book (with more detailed descriptions) and the coding table are attached in the appendices.

7.3.2 Sampling of the postings

The key date for the empirical analysis about the political discourse on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform was the 4th of March 2004. Thus, postings that were put forward after this date were not considered in our analysis. Consequently, the sample exclusively includes messages posted from the beginning the debate forum was set up (in 2001) until the 4th of March 2004. Given the wide range of subjects discussed on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard this investigation sought to identify a "hot" overall theme for the empirical analysis in order to ensure thematic consistency and up-to-dateness. The on-going European wide debate about the draft of a European Constitution informed the decision to choose the following overall themes from the *Your Voice in Europe* platform for a quantitative content analysis: "The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention". Particular attention was given to "gender sensitive" issues within this thematic context. However, as the analysis showed, there were only a very few discussion examples addressing such issues. The following ten issues could be identified under the headings of these two overall themes and provided the sample with the postings that were subsequently analysed:

- European Convention – Preliminary Draft Constitutional Treaty
- The Debate on the Future of Europe – the Laeken Declaration
- Draft Constitution: the democratic life of the Union
- Debate on the Future of the European Union – Convention (1)
- Debate on the Future of the European Union – Convention (2)
- Debate on the Future of the European Union – Convention (3)
- Draft Constitution drawn up by the Convention
- Young people and the future of Europe – the Youth Convention
- Youth Discussion – Does Europe need a Constitution?
- Results of the European Summit on the Constitution.

These ten issues consist of a wide range of sub-topics which were initiated by the participants and which cover various discussion topics (e.g. "Pros and cons of a directly elected EU President"; "Israel to be granted full membership in the EU"; "The End Goal of the Union – a Superstate?" etc.). By drawing a *stratified random sample*, the high amount of topics[26] (until the 4th of March there were 2,168 topics under the headings of the ten issues), could be decreased. In a first step, all topics with 0 responses (738 cases) were excluded from the sample i.e. all topics that involved only one posting were not considered in the analysis since they did not triggered any interaction processes. Interestingly, about a third of all discussion topics did not attract the attention of other discussants. In a second step, we took into account only those topics that at least included four postings. The rational behind was the assumption that interaction necessitates rather well-developed communication processes to assess the deliberative quality in a discussion. Four postings were considered as a minimum requirement for the assessment. In the end, there remained 702 topics including 1,335 posting. It was our goal to analyse between 500 and 600 postings of these 702 discussion topics. This sample size was perceived to be appropriate in order to make statistically reliable assumptions. However, in a first analysis of the postings we observed that the amount of postings among the discussion topics varied considerably. There were topics which included only a few postings and there were others which contained more than 50 messages. In order to guarantee a balanced sample distribution we built posting classes. The ma-

[26] A topic deals with a particular issue and involves a posting thread.

jority of the topics (71 % in our sample) consists of discussion threads involving between 5 to 14 postings. In contrast, only 2 % of the relevant topics include discussion threads containing more than 55 postings. The following table illustrates the distribution more clearly and shows how the final sample for the content analysis has been achieved.

Table 7.3-2: Distribution classes for discussion topics

Distribution class Number of postings per topic	Topics	Topics in %	Topics drawn	Topics drawn in %	Postings drawn (Sample)
5 to 14	497	71 %	32	71 %	277
15 to 24	120	17 %	7	16 %	126
25 to 34	46	6 %	3	7 %	84
35 to 44	12	2 %	1	2 %	38
45 to 54	12	2 %	1	2 %	45
more than 55	15	2 %	1	2 %	56
Total	702	100 %	45	100 %	626

Basically, the single posting was determined to be the unit of analysis. The maintenance of the discussion context was ensured by analysing only complete discussion threads.

7.3.3 Coding example

The following posting is a sample message and shall show how the above mentioned content categories were applied. The message was posted to the issue "Results of the European Summit on the Constitution" on 18th of February 2004. The poster started a discussion labelled the thread "Meeting of Big Three" referring to a summit of European political leaders discussing economic issues, the creation of jobs, a common European defence policy and so forth.

Poster X (from the Netherlands):
"After thinking about the discussion between Britain, France and Germany going on today, I began to feel that this is a necessary meeting. In my opinion – the discussion of the economy, creating jobs, a European defence etc. are all necessary and have spoken about for ages without any step in ANY direction. At least finally it seems that some countries are taking the initiative and at least discussing a plan to put forward. The doubt raised by Italy and Spain about a "European directorate" cannot be further from the truth in my opinion. Surely these countries could have seen for themselves how impossible it is to even come up with a workable plan, let alone agree on it when all 25 members are each trying to gain as much for themselves without any consideration for working as a COMMUNITY (especially Spain after the failed constitution talks). I think it is therefore inevitable that countries will work in groups, come up with proposals that suit them, and try to pass them through the EU by encouraging other States to vote with them. Of course, they will need a vote amongst ALL member states for the proposal to pass, but at lest the fact that a plan was made is commendable (unlike Spanish and Polish vetoing WITHOUT an alternative plan to the voting procedures!). In short, I applaud the fact that Britain, France and Germany are taking the initiative in strengthening our Union by creating closer ties. We need closer ties between existing members before enlarging even more."

This message is the beginning of a discussion thread *(seeding a debate)* and the poster puts forward his/her opinion concerning the sense of a common European policy on various issues of public interest. Consequently, the posting was coded as *Opinion* since the poster provides obvious indications such as "In my opinion …; I think …; etc. Concerning the level of agreement, the posting was coded as *neutral* since it is the beginning of a discussion and does not involve any hints of agreement or disagreement with other discussants. In terms of rationality the author *provides reasons* explaining the importance of a common European policy and the constraints associated with it. Thus, the argumentation thread can be reconstructed and reasons can be verified. This is also a *well-balanced* argument since the author recognises the flaws and strengths of the voting procedures within the EU institutions. The author also *shows awareness* of political processes by giving an overview of the institutions and member states involved in the process of developing EU policies. Finally, the message does *not involve* any *emotional* or *ironic* aspect and, apparently, does *not deal* with an issue related to *gender or minorities*.

7.3.4 Reliability

Particular attention was given to the internal consistency of the data. Approximately one-third of the postings were coded by an independent coder. Prior, the coding "rules" and coding book were extensively explained to the coder. The intercoder reliability percentage rate was calculated by the formula: Number of agreements/(Number of disagreements plus number of agreements). Generally, an intercoder reliability of about 78 % should be achieved (Livingstone 2000). An intercoder agreement of 100 % can be reported for the "objective items" (topic; date; length of the message; name of the poster etc.). Concerning the analytical variables the intercoder reliability is lower. Coders agreed in about 85 % of the variables making up *interactivity*. The agreement level for the *rationality* variables ranged between 70 % and 80 %.

7.4 Results and discussion

7.4.1 Groups of messages and posters

The quantitative content analysis is informed by a representative sample of 626 discussion postings stemming from 225 "identities".[27] The analysis has proved that indications about the posters countries of origin are of no use since some posters obviously made different statements. About 95 % of the postings were written in English and only a few were in French or Spanish. The sample covers the period between the 30th of January 2001 and the 23rd of February 2004. The number of messages has been split up into two groups in order to compare them. This classification is based upon the *median*.[28] Accordingly, 25 persons contributed to nearly 50 % of the messages and every discussant within this

[27] The content analysis identified 225 posters. Since some persons used nicknames it be the case that discussants "used" several "identities" when posting a message.

[28] The media describes the central tendency in a group and represents the middle value of all measures in a group (http://thewager.org/glossary.htm, accessed 12 July 2004). The number of discussants on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard with values above the median equals the numberof posters with below the median.

group posted at least 6 messages. The other group represents all those discussants who posted five or less messages:

Two poster groups

- *Poster group I:* Persons that posted more than 5 postings within the inquiry period. This group is constituted by 25 persons.
- *Poster group II:* Persons that posted less than 6 postings within the inquiry period. This group is constituted by 200 persons.

Small and more active group dominates the online discussions

This first result shows that a rather small group of posters dominated the political debate at the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. Authors belonging to Poster Group I may possess better rhetoric skills than those of the other group. Dryzek (2000, 70) argues that deliberation "in practice" involves communication that is determined by those who can best articulate their arguments, opinions and convictions. The smaller group of posters are best trained in discussing with others while a big majority of the other authors lack these capabilities and the interest in regular online discussion. This result would seem to confirm the thesis that people mainly use Internet talkboards, chatrooms or bulletin boards just to make a statement without having a keen interest in interacting with others. Certainly, the discussion theme is an important determinant. Those coming up with "hot" topics might receive more response than others and this may also stimulate the motivation to participate constantly.

7.4.2 Interactivity amongst the Your Voice in Europe talkboard participants

Message format

Interactivity is perceived to be one of the core features of ICTs. In fact, it is dialogical communication that distinguishes the Internet from traditional media. Deliberative debates highly depend on interactive communication processes. The *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard enables interactive communication. Thus, the first two research questions aim to investigate to what extent participants reply to the postings of other discussants and to what extent they seed discussion(s).

Most postings involve replies to other messages

In general, the analysis shows that the talkboard users rather replied to messages than they seeded discussions: 89 % of the postings are replies and only 11 % comprise messages that were intended to start a new discussion. This high rate of replies is an important indicator that people were listening to each other.

Table 7.4-1: Message format by message group

Message format		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
	Reply to one precedent message	240	76.9 %	184	60.1 %	424	68.6 %
	Reply to more than 1 precedent message	53	17.0 %	73	23.9 %	126	20.4 %
	Seed a discussion	19	6.1 %	49	16.0 %	68	11.0 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p<0.05; df=2; chi-square 23.750 Cramer-V 0.196.

Table 7.4-1 indicates that messages posted by Poster Group I are those that contain the most replies. This verifies the assumption that smaller groups of people involve a higher degree of interaction than larger groups. Consequently, we conclude that the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard appears to be rather appropriate for deliberative debates among small groups of discussants than for mass deliberative processes. Perhaps the talkboard can be regarded as a "micro-public sphere" (Keane 1998, 170) in which small groups of citizens come together to debate. Basically, we can conclude that the message format depends on the size of the message group. The decisive question here is: Is the relationship statistically significant? The rather low Cramer-V index[29] (0.196) indicates only a weak relationship between the dependent and independent variable. This derives from the fact that both groups are considerably homogenous regarding the distribution of contributions except in one point: Poster Group II provided more messages seeding a discussion than Poster Group I and was less focused on one particular opinion in a message. Accordingly, nearly a quarter of the analysed postings in group II were replies to more than one precedent message.

Message purpose

Critics of online deliberation argue that there is only "cheap" and "fast" communication taking place on the Internet. It appears to be a common prejudice that people rather use online discussion platforms to make statements instead of interacting with others. The expected result is "uncivil interaction" which is also known as "flaming" (Dahlgren 2001, 76). Thus, the output of online talkboards is often perceived as communication of inferior quality. It is the third and fourth research questions seeking to investigate whether the above quoted assumptions also apply to the messages posted on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. To what extent do they merely provide information? Do they have an information need and do they therefore seek information from others?

Table 7.4-2: Message purpose by message group

Message purpose		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
	Information provision	98	31.4 %	81	26.5 %	179	29.0 %
	Opinion	128	41.0 %	159	52.0 %	287	46.4 %
	"Direct" interaction	78	25.0 %	55	18.0 %	133	21.5 %
	Other*	8	2.6 %	11	3.6 %	19	3.1 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p<0.05; df=3; chi-square 9.387; Cramer-V 0.123.

** This category summarises the results of three variables indicated in the coding book, namely "Pure information seeking", "Own experiences" and "Other".*

[29] Cramer-V was the appropriate correlation coefficient which ranges from 0.0 to 1.0. While 0 indicates "no correlation" between the two variables, 1 signifies a "perfect correlation". Basically, a Cramer-V index of 0.2 describes a weak variable correlation, an index from 03. to 0.4 a moderate correlation and an index from 0.5 to 0.8 a strong correlation. The correlation coefficient "Phi" was used for 4-field tables.

Posters were interested in "direct" interaction with others

Clearly, the majority of the messages comprises statements in terms of information provision and opinions in which the posters express their stance concerning a particular topic (75.4 %). More than a fifth of the postings involve instances indicating that posters sought direct interaction with other discussants i.e. people call their interlocutors by their names and interact with them directly. In general, the two poster groups (i.e. those more and those less active) do not show any significant deviations from each other. Again, there is a statistical dependence between the two variables but the relationship is very significant. Two categories ("Opinion" and "Direct interaction") show considerable differences in the message groups: About 52 % of Poster Group II involves statements that were coded as "Opinion" while the smaller but more active Poster Group (I) only account for 41 % in this category. "Direct interaction" was higher (25 %) among Poster Group I than in the other discussant group (18 %). This is an additional indicator that interaction among discussants correlates with the size of the group. To sum up, the more active smaller group I seems to be more interested in direct interaction and less in voicing opinions.

Level of agreement by message group

62.8 % of the postings were coded as "neutral", meaning that the authors did not clearly express their agreement of disagreement. 12.6 % of the messages did not allow the assessment of the level of agreement since they were either at the beginning of a discussion thread or their content was a mere quote, question etc. Only a quarter of the postings involve a clear indication that authors either agree of disagree with others.

Table 7.4-3: Level of agreement by message group

Level of agreement		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
	Agreement	37	11.9 %	39	12.7 %	76	12.3 %
	Disagreement	37	11.9 %	39	12.7 %	76	12.3 %
	Neutral tone in message	198	63.5 %	190	62.1 %	388	62.8 %
	No indication	40	12.8 %	38	12.4 %	78	12.6 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p>0.05; df=3; chi-square 0.263;

Only a small number of messages involved clear agreements or disagreements on other views

The high number of "neutral" messages may result form the fact that the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard was a rather closed circle of discussants. As outlined before, 225 persons contributed to the talkboard in the analysed period. Dahlgren (2001, 76) argues that a "like-minded exchange" is the output of "[…] isolated mini-public spheres that do not necessarily link up with larger forums of discussions". Nevertheless, we do not agree that discussants on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard were a completely homogenous group of people. Our qualitiative analysis shows that a relatively low rate of clear agreement or disagreement may indicate that discussion did not involve very controversial opinions and approaches. Basically, consensus achievement is not the ultimate aim of deliberative communication. Dryzek (2000, 48) for instance argues that deliberation does not necessarily lead to consensus since plural societies always bring along diverse attitudes. However, he holds that different opinions and reasons must sustain deliberative scrutiny.

7.4.3 Rationality on the Your Voice in Europe talkboard

Rational argument

The sixth research question explored the extent to which messages contain rational argument, which is perceived to be an integral part of a deliberative discussion process and mainly consists of "cognitive reasons". This analysis concentrated primarily on the discussion process. It is an empirical investigation about political talk among (European) citizens which is considered to be "[...] principal mechanisms by which we can retest and thus repossess our convictions (Barber 1984, 190). In this context, political talk can be understood as a process which informs about the way how things are expressed, presented and discussed. Arguments are defined as rational when they enable the listener respectively the reader to reconstruct the argumentation thread or as Rosenberg puts it: "[...] communicating one's own views in a way that can be understood and accepted by the other; and [...] coming to understand the meaning and value of the other's view in her terms."

Table 7.4-4: The usage of rational argument by message group

Rational argument		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
	Yes	213	68.3 %	196	64.1 %	409	66.2 %
	No	69	22.1 %	90	29.4 %	159	25.7 %
	Non applicable	30	9.6 %	20	6.5 %	50	8.1 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p>0.05; df=2; chi-square 5.422;

Discussions are of high quality

About two thirds of the postings involved rational arguments. The "design" of the messages did not allow the assessment of the poster's use of rationality in only about 8 % of the examined cases (e.g. the posting was a mere quote, question etc.). Concerning a statistical dependence between the variable Poster Group and rational argument it is to mention that there is no such significant correlation. The messages of Poster Group I are slightly more rational postings on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard (68.3 %). Obviously, the difference between these two groups is marginal. Thus, continuous participation in the discussions on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard does not necessarily mean that one message from one particular Poster Group are significantly more rational than those of the other. Moreover, some discussants ("lurkers") use to monitor online discussions over a period of time until they become active (see Stegbauer 1999, 1ff.). Certainly, the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard does not correspond to the ideal deliberative process which normatively comes close to what Habermas has called the "ideal speech situation". However, the results indicate that posters are willing to discuss on a rational base. This does not apply to Internet talkboards in general nor shall it mean that it is the merit of the Internet or the analysed talkboard that discussants use their reason. Indeed, it merely shows more clearly what we have already known before: People are (against the assumptions of some elitist scholars, e.g. Lippmann) capable to discuss rationally and critically if they are provided public spaces to do so.

The "balance" of arguments

Very well-balanced debates are those in which the discussants consider that there are different ways as to how a particular topic can be approached, seen and debated. We argue that very well-founded arguments are part of a deliberative discussion since they help to increase the quality of the discussion. It further shows that discussants are willing to reflect on the views of others. Perhaps the usage of very well-balanced arguments can be regarded as a "social skill" which derives from an open-minded and liberal *Weltanschauung*. Moderately balanced arguments do not necessarily involve pluralist views but still proof that the discussion participants are prone to provide well-founded explanation(s) for their opinion.

Table 7.4-5: The "balance" of arguments by message group

"Balance" of arguments		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
	Very well-balanced/founded	104	33.3 %	76	24.8 %	180	29.1 %
	Moderately balanced/founded	117	37.5 %	133	43.5 %	250	40.5 %
	Ill-balanced/founded	60	19.2 %	74	24.2 %	134	21.7 %
	Non applicable	31	9.9 %	23	7.5 %	54	8.7 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p<0.05; df=3; chi-square 7.970; Cramer-V 0.114

Posters are aware of different views and opinions

More than two thirds of the postings to the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard can be defined as "balanced" messages (69.6 %). 29.1 % are very well-balanced and 40.5 % are moderately founded. Ill-balanced arguments account for approx. a fifth of the postings. Again the two poster groups show rather homogenous distribution figures which mark the very weak relationship between the two variables. While about a third of very well-balanced arguments can be found within the group of more active discussants (Poster Group I), only about a quarter of the messages of group II use very well-balanced arguments in order to underpin their statements. Apparently, posters who contribute to the discussions more frequently deliver more "balanced" arguments than those who participate infrequently. We suppose that the discussion process is more intensive among those who debate regularly. There may be a greater need to underpin one's statement if discussants have a profound debate.

Awareness of political and/or socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances

In order to be able to deliberate on a particular topic, people must have a certain knowledge concerning the debated issue. Barber (1984, 177) points out that deliberative talk on political issues is "serious" talk – not in an elitist but in an intellectual sense. We hold that the "quality" of a deliberative talk increases when the discussants show a certain political and socio-economic understanding of society.

Table 7.4-6: Awareness of political and/or socio-economic processes and circumstances

		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
"Awareness"	Yes	164	52.6 %	126	41.2 %	290	46.9 %
	No	116	37.2 %	158	51.6 %	274	44.3 %
	Non applicable	32	10.3 %	22	7.2 %	54	8.7 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p<0.05; df=2; chi-square 13.221; Cramer-V 0.146

Almost half of the messages on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard involve aspects which may indicate that posters are aware of political and socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances. The messages of Poster Group I are those which show a very high rate of awareness (52.6 %). In general, awareness was shown in two ways: Posters either referred to democratic institutions (the EU Parliament, trade unions and so forth) or showed a more general knowledge on "meta-issues" such as democracy, constitutions etc.

The usage of facts

Deliberative discussion may involve the usage of facts. "Hard facts" such as figures or historical events may be used to underpin a statement. Factual discussion processes appear to be more serious and sometimes even more important than a debate in which discussants "just talk" to one another without referring to any facts.

Facts do not play an important role in online discussions

Posters on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard hardly used facts in their messages to underpin their statements. Only 28 % referred in their messages to "reliable" facts. The messages posted by Poster Group I show a slightly higher usage rate (29.8 %).

Table 7.4-7: Facts used in the message

		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
Usage of facts	Yes	93	29.8 %	80	26.1 %	173	28.0 %
	No	219	70.2 %	226	73.9 %	445	72.0 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p>0.05; df=1; chi-square 1.029;

The results here are also interesting with regard to the previous analysis on the usage of rational argument. Although posters did not extensively involve facts in their comments they mainly argued on a rational basis. We assume that there might be considerable differences in the discussion processes taking place among

citizens and the discussion processes among politicians. Citizens may not have as many figures and facts available at hand as politicians have. Perhaps, there is less competition among citizens since they need not focus as much on winning (a discussion, debate or election) as politicians do. This shall not mean that politicians do not use their reason when they are debating. However, it shows that there are different discussion processes in society. There are those which proceed in "protected" and highly regarded environments (such as Parliaments) and there are discussions which take place in all those places (e.g. on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard) where people meet and talk about a political issue. Both processes follow different discussion patterns.

Emotion and irony

The revision of deliberation theories has shown some normative requirements for deliberative discussion. Rationality is considered to be a crucial element of deliberation processes. More "stringent" scholars (e.g. Habermas) hold that deliberation should mainly be determined by rational-critical debate. Others (e.g. Dryzek) are more tolerant and allow other communication forms as well (such as emotion, humour etc.) as long as deliberation takes place in a non-coercive fashion.

Table 7.4-8: The usage of emotional aspects by message group

		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
Emotional aspects	Yes	68	21.8 %	52	17.0 %	120	19.4 %
	No	244	78.2 %	254	83.0 %	498	80.6 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p>0.05; df=1; chi-square 2.276;

Table 7.4-9: The usage of ironic aspects by message group

		Message group				Total	
		Poster Group I (> 5 postings)		Poster Group II (4 and 5 postings)			
Ironic aspects	Yes	58	18.6 %	31	10.1 %	89	14.4 %
	No	254	81.4 %	275	89.9 %	529	85.6 %
	Total	312	100 %	306	100 %	618	100 %

N=618; the sample size does not include messages that clearly deviate from the overall thread ("The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention"). Thus, all postings that were coded as "non-applicable" in the category "message format" have been excluded from the analysis. p<0.05; df=1; chi-square 8.967; Phi 0.120

Messages are not significantly emotional or ironic

The messages of both poster groups do not involve a significant high number of emotional or ironic aspects. Only 19.4 % of the postings can be considered as emotional and even less than that include ironic elements (14.4 %). In fact, only a few posters expressed their emotions by venting their anger or making fun of others. Interestingly, postings from the more active group (I) involve a higher rate of emotional and ironic components than those of group II, though.

Discussions on the Internet are often described as "flaming" which is highly emotional or ironic talk. However, this conception could not be verified for the political talk on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. On the contrary: Discussions were rather unemotional and not substantially ironic.

Gender sensitive issues

Gender and minority related issues are no thematic foci of online discussions on Your Voice in Europe

The Internet is perceived to provide a platform for discussion issues which usually do not receive a broad public attention. As we have discussed in the theory chapter, new media might be *the* medium breaking through the "spiral of silence" (Noelle-Neumann 1984). In this context, gender and minority issues play a particularly important role. However, the content analysis revealed that only very few contributions addressed issues which can be subsumed under the category gender or minority sensitive issue. In total, only two of the examined discussion threads involved indications related to gender issues. Both were made within the issue on "Draft Constitution drawn up by the Convention" and discussed the role of men and women against a religious background and its relevance for the draft of a European Constitution.

Examples on discussants' perceptions on the significance of online disucssions

In the following we will provide some estimations of *Your Voice in Europe* discussants concerning their views on the value of online discussions. The study results indicate a relatively high interest in communicative exchange. Discussion participants used the *Your Voice in Europe* platform to discuss their political ideas, opinions and views with others. However, the "visit" of an online discussion does not necessarily mean to take an active part in a discussion. Politically interested citizens might also firstly "monitor" the discussions and become involved at a later stage as the following comment of a poster shows: "I don't often visit this forum but every now and then I take the time to experience how other people think and what their dreams are."[30] Even though we cannot claim that these quotes represent a representative sample of contributions, they illustrate that the *Your Voice in Europe* platform does provide a communication space for some participants.

Accordingly, a discussion participant holds that

> "[i]n any case, the whole idea of debate, especially one online, as I understand it, is to learn from each other and to remove, in as much as possible, unexamined assumptions that hinder the reaching of truth."[31]

The significance of political debates was discussed in another contribution:

> "Debates can have two purposes; you either debate to win people over to your point or debate to learn for yourself. I find the last as being the most rewarding and mind expanding, but must admit that I sometimes use my skills in that area to do the first as well. The trick is not to let you become blinded by your own wish to win an argument, and be ready to learn from others when they have something to teach you. Not an easy thing to do for anybody."[32]

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[30] Message posted on 31st of May 2002.

[31] Message posted on 6th of March 2002.

[32] Message posted on 7th of March 2002.

Interestingly, one discussant makes a direct reference to online discussions and emphasises the importance of learning effects that might be achieved when debating with others. In fact, proponents of deliberative communication, such as Coleman and Gotze (2001, 12) increasingly stress that mutual learning is a particular strength of deliberation. Another discussion participant refers to the significance of rational argumentation but also considers some constraints related to it:

> "I see reason as a tool, a very powerful and useful tool that enables us to look at ourselves and our surroundings with criticism. Despite the fact that somebody use it in that way, I do think that it is not something that tells us everything we should do nor a way to answer all the questions of life and death. But nevertheless, it is valuable and can help us find parts of the truth."[33]

7.5 Summary

This empirical analysis investigated the democratic potential of online debates and discussed interaction patterns and the discourse quality on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. Against the backdrop of theoretical concepts of deliberation, *interactivity* and *rationality* were identified as the core categories of a content analysis which was based upon a stratified random sample of about 600 discussion postings composed by 225 posters. The descriptive variables (topic; date; length of the posting; name of the poster; language) revealed that about 95 % of the messages were written in English. Interestingly, the length of the messages did not have significant impacts on the discourse quality, i.e. short messages (about a quarter page) were not less rational or balanced in their argumentations than larger contributions (about one page). Bascially, the analysed postings can be divided in two groups: The first group of contributions stemed from a rather small group of posters (25 persons). About a tenth of these discussants provided half of all analysed messages. The other group involved a relatively high number of posters (200 persons).

With regard to the analytical variable *interactivity*, the results show that discussions involved well-developed interactions which were mainly undertaken in small person groups and most replies to one precedent message (nearly 80 %) came from group I. However, Poster Group II used to reply to more than one precedent message which indicates that these discussants were less focused on one particular opinion or view of another discussion fellow. With regard to the message purpose the content analysis shows that the majority of the contributions (75 %) intended to provide information to others and involved personal opinions of posters. "Direct" interaction with other discussants was sought by nearly a quarter of the posters. Those attempted to establish personal discussions with particular posters by approaching them directly via a question or comment. Again, the smaller and more active group (I) involved more direct interactions than the larger Poster Group (II). Regaring the level of agreement within the postings, about 60 % of the online messages were coded as neutral i.e. posters did not clearly express their agreement or disagreement with precedent discussion contributions.

The analysis of the second core category, *rationality*, the assessment shows that about two third of postings included well-formulated and rational arguments whereas the smaller and more active group (I) put forward more rational argu-

[33] Message posted on 5 March 2002.

ments than the larger group (II) (68 % vs. 64 %). Very "well-balanced" arguments could be found in nearly a third of the postings i.e. discussants considered different views on topics in their messages. The postings also show that a high number of discussants are aware of political and socio-economic institutions and processes: Almost half of the analysed messages indicate that posters have a broad understanding of political and socio-economic mechanisms in society. The discussions on "The Debate on the European Constitution" and "The European Convention" did not involve many "hard facts". Figures, historical facts or press statements were used in only 28 % of the messages. The posters also avoided an emotional and ironic tone in most of their messages. Only a fifth of the postings involved emotionnal aspects and ironic components could be found in only 14 % of the messages. Thus, online discussions were mainly charactersised by highly rational communication processes.

To sum up, the proposed discussion topics indicate that the participants represent an "expert audience" which does not only debate on profound EU questions (e.g. language dominance in the EU) but also "hot" issues such as Turkey's potential accession to the Union. However, these high-level discussion circles may also restrict the openness and accessibility of the discussion platform and exclude citizens from the debates. The question on the added-value of these online discussions for the individual citizen remains open and would be an adequate starting point for further research in this field. With regard to the general questions on the qualitative determinants of democracy, the motivation of the participants to take part in these online debates would be another interesting point of analysis.

Finally, to conclude on our hypothesis we hold that online discussions on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform involve well-elaborated interaction patterns and a relatively high discourse quality which indicates vivid deliberative communication processes.

8 Qualitative Expert Interviews on Online Consultations

8.1 Background

Generally, the use of ICTs for consultation processes involving citizens, businesses and NGOs has become a common trend in societies. Governments increasingly support the development of ICTs to enable consultations on policy-related matters, but still it is not obvious how far contributions from interested parties and citizens are integrated or reflected in the governmental processes of policy-making. The stimulus on the governmental side to use ICT for policy-making processes is, as the OECD (2002) holds, to produce better quality policy, to build trust among the involved, to share responsibility for policy-making actors and gain acceptance for policies. Online consultations can be found in two forms that correspond with different stages of decision-making:

Two forms of online consultations

- *Issue based fora* which are organised around policy issues, presented as discussion threads. Responses are thought to gauge opinion and solicit ideas.
- *Policy based fora* which are organised around themes and issues that directly relate to the draft of a policy paper. Discussion threads or single contributions are intended to solicit responses from those affected.

The European Commission expressed in its White Paper on *Good Governance* the will and need to reform the relationships between EU institutions and the Union's citizens, businesses and NGOs by the use of ICTs. The *Your Voice in Europe* platform is the Commission's official tool to improve such relationships and open up new forms of co-operation. The Commission describes the platform as a "single access point for all consultations" which is considered to be "extremely popular, having been used by over 3 million citizens, not only from Member States but also from candidate countries and beyond, since its launch in October 2001".[34] Regarding the main purpose of *Your Voice in Europe*, the Commission states that the online platform

> "[…] enables the creation of online, structured consultations, in the form of a questionnaire, which is completed by you on the internet and from which we can obtain your views and feedback on a particular policy related issue. The mechanism enables us to ask you multiple-choice questions as well as give you the opportunity to provide a free text response to certain more specific questions".[35]

Your Voice in Europe: The Commission's "eyes and ears"

Furthermore, the initiators consider the *Your Voice in Europe* platform as a "neutral instrument" which is described as the Commission's "eyes and ears". Citizens, local governments and businesses are regarded as the reflecting audience. The main purpose is to learn more about the public's needs related to EU legislation:

> "The European Commission wants to learn about problems and difficulties you have experienced in relation to EU legislation. We want to be better informed about your opinions and suggestions. The Feedback Mechanism enables us to do just this: It collects feedback from citizens, consumers and business about what is happening 'on the ground' in the EU."[36]

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[34] http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/faqs/index_en.htm, accessed 20 January 2005.

[35] http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/faqs/index_en.htm, accessed 20 January 2005.

[36] http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/faqs/index_en.htm, accessed 20 January 2005.

Advantage of online consultation mechanism

The main advantage of this online consultation mechanism is the "easy to use" effect which is supposed to support the formulation of needs-based policy-making. Against this backdrop, online consultations can be considered as tools helping to realise the Commission's strategy on *Good Governance*.

> "The Online Consultation Mechanism enables us to perform statistical analysis on the results immediately, meaning that we are able to act upon your opinions and views much more quickly and effectively, than before. We hope that this will result in policy making that from the outset takes better account of your views."[37]

Nevertheless, the Commission is aware of various constraints related to online consultations since

> "[…] results cannot be considered representative in the way that survey results based on a scientifically selected sample can", but still the results "[…] consist of input from stakeholders from specific target groups. This approach is in line with the Commission's inclusive approach to open governance which intends to give all interested parties a chance to contribute to the Commission's policy-making process."[38]

Online consultations are complementary policy-making tools

Moreover, the Commission uses online consultations as complementary tools to traditional forms of consultations (such as written responses to White Papers etc.). Thus, online consultations are new means for the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the EU's policy-making process.

More than 20 DGs co-operated in the construction of the feedback database which stores data relevant to the DGs' policy areas. A Steering Committee directs the progress of the data collection and a pilot group (consisting of DG members) has been installed to find "best practice models for optimum use of the database". According to the Commission's "Interactive Policy-Making" (IPM) unit, the tool supported 30 online consultations since January 2003. Over 300 intermediaries (such as Euro Info Centres, European Consumer Centres and the Citizens Signpost Service, unions and business representatives etc.) throughout the EU, candidate countries and EFTA countries have already participated in online consultations. The *Your Voice in Europe* platform contains various opened and closed consultation processes, a mixture of issue- and policy based fora with a different presentation of (interim) results. Consultation results are mainly presented as charts focusing on socio-graphic characteristics. Some consultations are open to the general public; others are targeted at particular groups.

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[37] http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/faqs/index_en.htm, accessed 20 January 2005.

[38] http://europa.eu.int/yourvoice/ipm/faqs/index_en.htm, accessed 20 January 2005.

8.2 Evaluation process and research hypotheses

Three hyotheses on online consultations

Coleman (2004, 6) offers several research hypotheses for analysing the Internet as a means of fulfilling these objectives and, at last, of transcending representative structures with participative elements. The following hypotheses will guide our research on the EU's online consultations:

- *Online consultations* provide a space for inclusive public deliberation.
- *Online consultations* generate and connect networks of interest or practice.
- *Online interaction* between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.

Based on the work of Macintosh (2003) and Macintosh and Whyte (2002) the analytical tool for the evaluation of the political, technical and social impact of online consultations is the analysis of text based online contributions. Qualitative expert interviews shall help to learn more about the significance of online consultations for both the initiators of online consultations and the participating (private and professional) actors. The latter method was chosen to investigate the extent to which public authorities, industry and business associations, citizen networks and individuals judge the EU's communication platform as an appropriate space to enhance the quality of participation and to catch a citizens'/users' perspective of how far this input is reflected in EU's policy papers. Furthermore, expert interviews were considered as the appropriate method, since "[…] most evaluations on consultations focus on citizen's satisfaction surveys, a real impact of contributions to government consultation exercises has not been widely researched and documented" (Macintosh; Whyte 2002, 3).

Context to NODE key questions

For the sake of a clear policy-context to key questions of NODE and our project we take a closer look at the consultation process for the communication on "General Principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties by the Commission" (COM (2002) 704). The consultation process for this communication is, as outlined on the website, based on the Commission's White Paper of *Good Governance*, which stresses the importance of involving interest groups and civil society organisations into consultation processes. It is also based on the Commission's IPM initiative which involves the policy to offer mechanisms of feedback and consultation while the latter is "[…] designed to receive and store rapidly and in a structured way reactions to new initiatives."[39] During this consultation process about "Minimum standards for consultations" the Commission received a total of 88 contributions[40], consisting of comments by governments of EU member states (Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom), one non member country (USA), international, European and national organisations (covering both the private sector and NGOs), regional and local authorities, religious organisations and churches, individual citizens and businesses.

The main arguments expressed in the consultation contributions focus on the following points:

- The scope of the general principles and minimum standards has to be clarified.
- A clearer link between the Commission's impact assessment procedures and the use of consultation needs to be established.
- The operational implications of the general principles should be expressed more clearly.

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[39] http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgc/consultation/index_en.htm, accessed 5 April 2004.

[40] http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgc/consultation/index_en.htm, accessed 5 April 2004.

- The constraints on European and national organisations should be taken into account when preparing comments on Commission consultation documents.
- The use of selection criteria for targeted consultations should be explained in more detail.[41]

Commission's commitment

On the *Your Voice in Europe* website, the Commission points out that "[…] all the reactions and comments the Commission received have been carefully analysed to see whether, and to what extent, they could be incorporated into the final design of the general principles and minimum standards."[42] The final communication of the Commission on "General Principles and Minimum Standards" includes a justification, which comments and propositions were taken into the final document and why:

> "Many of those consulted wanted a clearer explanation of the kinds of initiatives to which the new consultation framework will apply. In response, the Commission clarified the scope of the consultation standards. However, the Commission has not taken up the idea proposed by some participants that the scope of the standards should be generally widened (to cover all consultation), or that they should be separated from the Commission's approach to extended impact assessments. This decision meets the overriding principle of proportionality, which must govern the Commission's administrative practice (see the general principles under the heading of 'effectiveness'). It is also linked to the fact that the Commission has to assess its consultation needs on a case-by-case basis in line with its right of initiative" (European Commission 2004)[43].

The following experts were chosen due to their professional backgrounds and expertise in the field of online consultations.[44] The interviewees were representatives of interest-organisations, who contributed several times to EU offline and online-consultations, representatives from the European Commission involved in the policy strategy around the IPM initiative, and responsible officers of the IPM initiative (see Table 8.2-1 and questionnaire attached in the appendices):[45]

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41 http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgc/consultation/index_en.htm, accessed 5 April 2004.

42 http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgc/consultation/histo_en.htm, accessed 2 October 2004.

43 http://europa.eu.int/comm/secretariat_general/sgc/consultation/index_en.htm#_Toc46744746, accessed 2 October 2004.

44 Experts were selected according to the categories: Institutional level; NGOs; Interest Groups; Regional and local interests.

45 The expert interviews were conducted in English and German. To avoid translation mistakes and misinterpretations, relevant statements remain in their original language with a short sum-up as an introduction or a follow-up. Terms which are italicised in quotes, express a strong accentuation by the interviewee.

Table 8.2-1: Interviewees on Your Voice in Europe online consultations

No.	Name	Institutional Background	Address	Date of interview
1	Ilse Stadlmann – A	European Commission Internal Market Unit A3 Interactive Policy-making (IPM)	Office: Avenue Cortenbergh 100, 01/131, B-1040 Brussels	19 May 2004
2	Andreas Henkel – B	Stabsabteilung Wirtschaftspolitik, Wirtschaftskammer Österreich	Wiedner Hauptstr. 63, A-1045 Wien	9 June 2004
3	Norbert Templ – C	AK Wien, Abt. Außenwirtschaft und Integration	Prinz Eugen-Straße 20-22, A-1040 Wien	14 June 2004
	Valentin Wedl – D	Abt. EU und Internationales		
4	Maarit Nyman – E Isabelle Van-Beneden F	European Commission, DG Enterprise, Unit A.1, Development of Enterprise Policy	Rue de la Science 15-5/53, B-1050 Brussels	6 July 2004
5	Eva Schultz – G	EUROCITIES	Square de Meeûs 18, B-1050 Brussels	6 July 2004
6	Eva-Maria Salger-Kuhn H	European Commission, DG Justice, Unit B 3, Information Technologies	Rue du Luxembourg, B-1050 Brussels	Answers were provided by e-mail

8.3 Methodology

Initially, it was planned to set a sample of contributions of the consultation "Minimum Standards" in relation to the official policy paper by means of qualitative content analysis. Since it turned out that it is impossible to detect individual contributions in the policy paper on "Minimum Standards", this approach was rejected and qualitative expert interviews on the impact and quality of online consultations were conducted. Basically, online consultations consist of "written talk". A comment, if defined as a reduced discourse, is conceived as a means of conveying meaning. Estimations and value orientations about the policy impact of consultation processes illustrate and stabilise the text-based analysis of comments and the policy paper. This is conducted by semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide focusing on the content of the statements. With this method the interviewee is defining the micro-structure of the interview. This offers the possibility to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies and to seize estimations and values (see Froschauer; Lueger 2003). Based on Macintosh's and Whyte's (2002) approach to conduct an impact evaluation process along key-dimensions, the proposed dimensions for the structure of our expert interviews can be summarised as such:

Expert interviews based on key dimensions

- Level of participation process
- Stage of decision-making
- Actors
- Usage of technologies
- Rules of Engagement
- Duration and sustainability
- Accessibility
- Resources and promotion
- Usage of outcome
- Critical success factors.

Subdimensions

These dimensions were built around the main question: *"Do you consider the EU's online consultation platform as an appropriate space for civic participation?"* According to the thematic requirements of NODE we introduced the following sub-dimensions to our interview guide:

- Understanding of democratic principles
- Gender aspects
- Political dimensions of online consultations
- Future images of democracy.

Interpretation process

The interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed 1:1. A short protocol (date; time; location; first impressions by the interviewer) ensured the documentation and illustration of the interview situation. The first interview was conducted as an orientation interview, to test the understanding and logical set of the interview questions. The analysis of the transcribed interviews involved the following stages:

- a reduction of the interview text to paraphrases according to pre-defined categories and sub-categories;
- a sequential and extensive analysis (criteria of difference; similarities and anomalies);
- a hermeneutic interpretation framed by Coleman's hypotheses (see above) and our main research question.

8.4 Results of expert interviews

Three levels of participation

The OECD Report "Citizens as Partners: Information, consultation and public participation in policy-making processes" (OECD 2001) is the basis for the assessment of the participation level. Accordingly, the OECD report identifies three different levels of political participation:

- "*Information:* A one-way relationship in which government provides information of public interest procedures.
- *Consultation:* A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to government. It is based on the prior definition on information. Governments define the issues for consultations, set the questions and manage the process, while citizens are invited to contribute their views and opinions.
- *Active participation:* A relationship based on partnership with government in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making. It acknowledges that citizens have an equal position in the agenda setting process, although the responsibility for final decisions rests within government" (OECD report, as quoted in Macintosh 2003, 2).

Extended levels of participation

Macintosh (2003) extended the OECD's classification and developed three levels of participation focusing more concretely on the role of ICTs in digital democracy initiatives. For the analyses of the interviews this extended classification was used as a frame for the key dimensions:

- *E-enabling* refers to the use of technology to enable participation, describes the support of those who would not typically access the Internet and describes how new media are used to reach a broader audience and how relevant information is provided in a format that is easily accessible and understandable.
- *E-engaging*: This level describes the use of technology to engage with citizens. It aims at consulting a broad audience, to enable in-depth contributions and to support deliberative debates on policy issues. In this context, the term "to engage" refers to the top-down consultation of citizens by governments or parliaments. It is a top-down approach since citizens and/or businesses are actively approached by public bodies.
- *E-empowering* describes the use of technology empowering citizens and/or NGOs to influence the political agenda and participate in policy formulation. In contrast to the latter category this level is characterised by a bottom-up approach since initiatives are started from the "grassroots" (see Macintosh 2003, 3).

I. Level of participation process

The discussion on the policy background of the Commission's IPM initiative served as an interview warm-up for the first and second dimension. For person 1A and 4E, the White Paper on *Good Governance* is an important document which sets the timeframe till 2006 to create and implement the IPM initiative. Expert 6H points out that the idea for this tool was influenced by the results of an Eurobarometer survey from 2002 in which business associations and enterprises criticised the Commission for not knowing what is relevant for further economic development.

> "The 'General principles and minimum standards' are basic for this. The use of IPM is just one part of whole [...] necessarily, there are in addition bilateral meetings with stakeholders, e.g. European business organisations" (4E).

Whereas some representatives have not yet read the background papers, others (2B and 5G) are convinced to have influenced the development of the IPM initiative by having sent critical comments concerning the transparency of the policy-making procedure of the Commission and policy recommendations to the relevant unit. Expert 5G describes the reason for citizens' involvement via ICTs. Accordingly, the main purpose is the

> "Exchange of experiences [...] awareness raising is the main purpose of taking part in consultations. Conclusions are drawn into policy documents. But there is no legal, more a moral binding structure to use the contributions" (5G).

Regarding the participation and impact level of online consultations, interviewee 4E points out that there is no legal obligation to use these public comments: "We don't have any obligation, any legal obligation to take the comments into account" (4E).

Awareness raising

"Awareness raising" is *the* main argument to increase citizens' participation in the Commission's policy-making procedures and an evident presumption for the participation in online consultations (5G). The level of participation "*ends* at consultations for citizens" is other experts' interpretation (3C and 3D). Consultations are made for institutional representatives or NGOs, the citizens' place is to take part in open chat fora (3C and 3D). Interviewee 4E points out that the intention of online consultations from an EU perspective is to look if contributions are

> "[...] balanced [if the EU] take[s] into account the concerns of these different stakeholder groups. So, that [is] the kind of feedback, we were looking

> for. And then, we also of course received very many detailed comments for example, that you should absolutely take into account co-operatives and their specific programme problems, or you should take into account the regional dimension, or you should add, for example this and that paragraph, you should add micro enterprises and things like that. And all those comments are extremely useful. But then the question is that […] we don't necessarily have to take them into account now. [...] But globally, I mean, when I think about the feedback that we received, the feedback was extremely positive, I mean almost everybody said that, the programme structure is right, it is balanced, we addressed the right elements, we haven't forgotten any major things, so in that sense, [...] the result was overwhelmingly positive. [...] And there also, I mean, it's quite easy for us to see what is feasible, I mean, we always work in a certain framework, and here our framework is set by article 157" (4E).

Interviewees consider the participation level either as an option to provide reactively contributions in response to certain propositions made by the Commission or as a pro-active way (from the "bottom") to propose needs-based policies. This refers to the second participation level, as defined by the OECD (2001). Obviously, this process still does not touch the third level, active participation, since there is no obligation for the Commission to use the online contributions for policy-making. It is difficult to assess how far online consultations have broadened the options for citizens, businesses and NGOs to play an influential role in EU's policy-making processes. There are different perceptions. While the Commission considers online consultation as an active tool to involve more relevant actors in the public policy-making, other actors doubt the significance of these online tools. Moreover, interviewees repeatedly claim that there is a lack of responses from the Commission's side while acknowledging the great (staff and cost) effort needed for the realisation and evaluation of online consultations:

No obligation to use contributions

Lack of response

> "But it's impossible for me to say, to what extent it has enhanced the possibilities for citizens [...] but I think [...] we have seen one example where at least an effort was made [...] at least I know that there were constant comments from citizens, from organisations, from local authorities, from all kinds including citizens to which the Commission also responded [...] and the task force within the secretary general encouraged institutional issues, at least for seven times, they tried to keep a level of continuing responses to all the comments posted on this website [...] and I think that is for those who actually make the effort to engage as citizens then directly in issues being discussed at European level, that's the only thing that can make you keep up your interest, but at the same time, it requires an enormous amount of work from the side of the Commission, I mean, we compare online and offline consultations saying that we can reduce costs and resources by organising online consultations, but they still require a minimum level of continuing to response [...] and you can't eliminate costs completely" (5G).

Summary:

- There is no legal obligation to take into account the online comments.
- The level of participation ends at the stage of consultation.
- The level of participation depends on the intention of consultation's initiator (i.e. if the consultation intends the definition of a policy problem or the evaluation of an already existing policy paper).
- Online consultations are supposed to help to reduce costs.
- The Commission has too little resources to respond to all contributing actors.

2. Stage of Decision-making

According to Macintosh, this key dimension considers the temporal aspect of online consultations, i.e. *when* citizens might be involved in a policy-making circle (see Macintosh 2003, 3)[46]. 6H explains that the Commission decides to open a policy-making process for public consultation "at the beginning of a legislative process, before finalising a Commission proposal, Green Paper, White Paper etc." The decisions for or against a consultation are made within "the Commission hierarchy, at level of Director together with a spokesman responsible for the issue, and all contributions are taken into account" (6H). Then the contributions are grouped together around problems or topics that are common to most of the answers. However, interpretations are to be avoided: "We try to stay as neutral as possible" (6H). The director or spokesman is responsible for the selection of contributions and the results "are published on the website" (6H). Interviewee 1A points out that the difference to offline policy-making is, that contributing to the policy-making process was hitherto realised *per naturam* at a late stage, when the Commission sent out their policy drafts in form of a White Paper and member states could provide comments. This meant a lot of long lasting paper work. The new quality of online consultation is that it is easier to reach stakeholders who can additionally make a contribution. This approach has also been intended with the Commission's reform of governance strategy.

> "[...] das heißt es gibt auch weiterhin noch die Position Papers, es gibt die traditionellen Abläufe in dem Rahmen der Ratsarbeitsgruppen, im Rahmen der Koordinierung des Europäischen Parlaments usw. Zusätzlich versucht man aber herauszubekommen was sind die Wünsche der Einzelnen. Als komplementäre, zusätzliche Sammlung von Informationen" (1A).

The main consideration of online consultations as a complementary aspect of policy-making to the traditional ways makes it difficult to assign them to a particular stage of decision-making. Depending on the EU unit's (GDs) intentions, online consultations are applied at all or different stages of the policy-making circle:

> "Und jetzt heißt es natürlich, dass sich die Leute […] überlegen, im Rahmen des Schreibens von dem Papier der Richtlinie, wann mache ich die Konsultation. [...] Manche verwenden es ganz am Anfang, wenn sie Ideen sammeln [...] es bleibt den politischen Units überlassen, wann mache ich die Konsultation, wichtig ist, wir müssen sie machen [...] in welcher Form jetzt auch immer, ob jetzt das IPM System genutzt wird, was über Internet läuft und sehr strukturiert ist, oder in traditioneller Form, man muss sich halt überlegen, wie man es macht, oder man kombiniert es" (1A).

Independently from the stage of decision-making, the consultation document should be something that is easy to read in a sense that it was written for the wider public:

> "And the advantage clearly compared to the situation where you do the consultation at the latest stage, is that, of course, when we start the consultation, and we already have the feedback from the stakeholders, we have that input, and we can build on that input, and we can really take that input into account, right from the beginning. And the advantage also is that, when we have a specific consultation document, which really was specifically written

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[46] The policy-making circle according to Macintosh (2003, 3) covers the following dimensions: Agenda setting; Analysis of problem or problem definition; Policy creation; Policy implementation; Policy monitoring and again Agenda setting. Prittwitz (1994, 57) uses different terms but pursues a similar approach: Initiation; Estimation; Selection; Implementation; Evaluation and Termination of policy.

for this consultation, is that it is a much more transparent way to do a consultation than for example consulting when we already have a legal instrument, because a legal instrument, it doesn't give very much details on the background" (4E).

"Early input" as basis for problem-oriented policy

The "early input" is seen as the basis to elaborate a really needs-based, problem-oriented policy

"[...] that we can really use it, we can see whether what we are proposing is what stakeholders want, and how they see the problems, [...] and if the structure, basically, if the structure is right, or are there some other elements, [...] which should be taken into account. [...] If you do it at a later stage, of course, it's more difficult then to start inserting the input on something that you have been building for a longer time, that has become, to a certain extent, something that is more or less established" (4E).

All interviewees state that online consultations do not and will not replace conventional techniques of negotiations like lobbying activities. They rather offer an additional possibility to influence policy-making via an official point of view, shaped by an inner-institutional agreement and the institution's identity. Sometimes the positions are very personalised, experienced 2B. A more critical view is expressed by 3C, who considers online consultations as a governmental strategy of self-defence to include the "enlightened public": "Aber ich glaube, dass sich heutzutage ein politischer Prozess oder auch eine politische Institution es schwer leisten kann, nicht offen und nicht transparent zu arbeiten" (3C).

Summary:

- Online consultations make it easier to reach stakeholders at any stage of the decision-making process.
- Online contributions are grouped together without any interpretations.
- Online consultations do not intend to replace classical negotiation techniques.
- To fulfil criteria of *Good Governance* transparency regarding the use of consultation results is required.

3. Role, identification, self-estimation of actors

This key dimension focuses on *who* should be involved in online consultations, *who* should select the participants. It identifies the stakeholders, their respective roles and the target audience. We would like to expand this and include the self estimation of actors concerning their role within the online consultation process. This shall help us to assess the openness and transparency of the policy-making process. In this context Macintosh illustrates:

"The increased number of stakeholders risk complicating the questions of who owns the results and who has responsibility for communicating their impact on decisions, so identifying and clarifying these responsibilities is useful in characterising e-participation initiatives" (Macintosh 2003, 4).

Need to realise the e-action plan

Expert 5G's self-estimation as a governance officer is to try to co-ordinate or integrate the different parts to a European level and to bring in balanced views on social and environmental aspect of policies. 1A stresses the role of the IPM unit in the realisation of the e-action plan. Accordingly, IPM has the purpose, to find projects which ease the exchange of data between administration and the Commission, but also to support policy-making procedures concerning involvement of relevant players and policy content:

> "Ursprünglich haben wir uns konzentriert auf die reine Sammlung von Informationen. Alles. Dann hat man gesagt, Aufgabe der Kommission ist aber mehr oder weniger Politikgestaltung, Direktiven, Regulationen usw. vorzustellen, also weg von reiner Sammlung, Information, mehr Ausrichtung auf Nutzung im Rahmen der Politikgestaltung" (1A).

Other interviewees define their main task to do lobbying for those they represent as direct and effective as possible, so the personal contacts at the European Parliament are considered to be more important than using the online consultation tool. Additionally, they send policy recommendations for Green or White Papers, which include agreed statements of their institution or organisation. 3C and 3D judge the homepage of the Lisbon Strategy as the most important website for NGOs and other intermediaries since it also enables the submission and discussion of position papers. "Hier wird wirklich Politik gemacht" (3C and 3D). The *Your Voice in Europe* website rather appears to be "window shopping" (3C and 3D). 4E and 4F define their mission as central in the policy-making circle, as "to develop an enterprise policy and to see what the other relevant units are doing [...] it's a very dialogue-based relation that we have with other institutions" (4E and 4F). An important strand of their entrepreneur policy work is the policy implementation, framed by the multi-annual programme for entrepreneurship and enterprises. The legal base of their work is

> "[...] article 157, which gives the Commission a mainly co-ordinating role in industrial policy and related fields. [...] Consultation is something that is inherent in our work practices. [...] with this new guidelines and new tools [...] it's easier to reach the stakeholders we want to reach [...] So, the idea is to find out: What are the problems? What kind of policies should be designed? What kind of problems should be addressed? [...] The idea is that we should draft measures that help industries to adapt themselves to the structural change, to have measures that we promote innovation. The extended impact assessment means that before we have this programme we should analyse what are the impacts (social, economic, environmental) and to analyse the wider impact, we need stakeholder consultation. [...] Now we have information in a more systematic way" (4E).

Summary:
- While most experts consider *Your Voice in Europe* as a useful tool for policy-making, some regard other EU online platforms as more significant for policy-making.
- New media support the data exchange between different levels of governance.
- Online consultations followed by an in-depth analysis (e.g. via focus groups or expert interviews) are called extended impact assessment. This is supposed to be useful for better (needs-based) policy-making.

4. Usage of technologies

This key dimension considers how citizens can be engaged in political decision-making processes, the application of technology and the design of involvement structures. 1A explains the development of the IPM tool as a dynamic questionnaire, with a quite simple, ready to use structure, with a low level of literacy required and a simple identification function. Each unit could propose a structure, according to the problems or questions they expected:

Dynamic consultation survey

> "Politikbereiche, wenn die geklickt werden, öffnen sich dynamisch. Und so hat jede Generaldirektion uns Schwergewichte gegeben, wo sie wissen wollten, gibt es Probleme vor Ort. Das heißt, es ist ein dynamisches System, das ermöglicht, dass man statistisch einmal die groben Daten kriegt, dass man

> weiter geht, ‚description of the problem, who, what, why'. Zum Beispiel war das Problem Informationsdefizit, [...] dass verschiedene rechtliche Grundlagen einander widersprechen [oder] ist das Problem, dass die Administration nicht geholfen hat, falsch informiert hat, falsche Kontaktpartner gegeben hat oder ist das Problem zurückzuführen auf die Europäische Kommission, die handeln sollte, auf einen Mitgliedsstaat, der national was machen sollte, liegt das Problem in Prozeduren etc." (1A).

Userfriendly survey design

Additionally, IPM offers a questionnaire to assess the impact of a policy, to get an estimation of the dimension of unintended problems caused by a particular policy. This easy-to-use design of the tool also leads to the conclusion that results are easier to analyse:

> "Und durch diese Art Fragebogen ist dann, bei der Überlegung, welche anderen Formen von Applikationen gibt es für dieses technische System, unweigerlich die Idee entstanden, Konsultationen zu machen, die jetzt nicht mehr über Intermediaries laufen, sondern jetzt natürlich konkret, direkt" (1A).

1A explains that the Commission now has the option to provide questionnaires which mainly correspond to the frame of the directive intended to be enacted. The questionnaires enable the contributors to choose among pre-defined answers but also provide space for further comments (free text field). Again, the major advantage of this tool is to receive promptly results which can be evaluated along different and diverse dimensions (e.g. countries) as 1A states:

> "Und IPM ist nur eine technisch ausgeklügelte Form der Konsultation, die eben das Internet verwendet und die versucht, über Strukturen die Analyse zu erleichtern. Weil, was war das Problem früher, man hat Unmengen Positionspapiere gekriegt, man hat Unmengen Seiten gehabt, in allen möglichen Sprachen, und dann hat keiner Zeit gehabt, das wirklich anzuschauen" (1A).

Other interviewees (1A, 4E, 6H) also hold that the IPM tool enables easy analyses of contributions corresponding to transparency requirements. Online consultations are effective tools since results are immediately visible in percentages and charts or graphs. It is the decision of the responsible unit, to decide, if they want to inform other units about the results or to publicise them. Free text can be filled in different languages but has to be translated and analysed separately. It depends on the methodology chosen according to the participation policy of the respective unit, if they add a public consultation or a face-to-face consultation with stakeholders or the relevant target group. Also focus groups or expert interviews are sometimes added. The IPM unit clarifies the kind of electronic involvement and provides the necessary software. Expert 1A considers the IPM tool as an analysis instrument for further policy planning:

> "Wie kriegt man Konsultationsmechanismen, wo man schnell Analyse machen kann, und da hilft eben IPM durch diese Möglichkeit mit dem Klicken hat man sofort jeden Moment während der Konsultation grobe Richtlinien, kann sogar schon während der nächsten Ratsarbeitsgruppe sagen, in der Konsultation haben wir jetzt einmal diese Richtung oder jene Richtung, das heißt die Analyse ist irrsinnig leicht, oder man kann schauen, pro Mitgliedsstaat, je nachdem wie ich die Konsultation aufbaue" (1A).

Methodological design simplifies the policy problems

Others, from the stakeholders' or intermediaries' side, criticise the questionnaires' methodological design since it simplifies the problems. This leads to the assessment that the results are not useable at all or disappear in somebody's drawer:

> "Man konnte auf die Fragen eigentlich nur wichtig und sehr wichtig beim Online-Fragebogen antworten. Was sie dann mit dem Ergebnis anfangen, ist für den Müllkübel. [...] Und das ist auch der Grund, warum wir eigentlich

relativ skeptisch sind, überhaupt solche Online-Konsultation zu machen. Jetzt ganz abgesehen davon, dass es ein Riesenaufwand ist, wenn man (selber) eine Datenbank betreibt. [...] Für die ein, zwei Konsultationen, also Impact-Assessments, die die Kommission zu Richtlinien über so ein Panel veranstaltet. Und das Problem ist, dass die Leute vielleicht ein-, zweimal im Jahr so was bekommen, und dann haben sie längst vergessen, dass sie in diesem Panel drinnen sind [...] und dann müssen wir erst wieder irgendwie nachwassern, dass sie vielleicht (das) antworten und, sagen wir uns mal, wir haben ja jetzt nicht, keine Erfahrungen im Sammeln von Wissen und Stellungnahmen, sage ich jetzt so. In dem Fall halt antworten wir eher durch gewählt Organe, was auch eine Art Demokratie ist" (2B).

Summary:
- The IPM tool involves simple and dynamic questionnaires which are easy to use and which provide instant consultation results.
- Critical remarks refer to the questionnaires' design which, according to some experts, simplifies policy problems.

5. Rules of Engagement

This key dimension considers which personal information will be needed and collected, how it will be used by the tool, and what citizens can and cannot do during the online participation process. This is important to analyse since

"[...] the amount of personal information requested should be described along with any privacy statement on how it will be used. Also, it is useful to provide an example of any conditions of use statement so that the full rules of engagement can be appreciated. It is important to appreciate if and how users are made aware of how the personal information they enter will be used and who will have access to it" (Macintosh 2003, 5).

We extend this dimension for the rules of engagement for policy makers who intend to use IPM within the policy-making circle. On the *Your Voice in Europe* site there is a privacy statement regarding rules of personal data protection[47]. As 1A describes, if a unit decides to open a policy-making process for consultation, extended talks about purpose, aim, central questions and the target groups are needed.

"Wenn jemand das IPM System verwendet, treten die an uns heran, wir haben eine generelle E-mail Adresse [...] und dann gibt es einmal das erste Gespräch mit denen, wo man abklärt, was wollen die machen, macht es einen Sinn, kann man das überhaupt so grob formulieren, dass man eine öffentliche Konsultation macht, oder ist es rechtlich so spezifisch und so schwierig [...] Oder wie viele Antworten erwarten die, wenn die mir sagen, sie erwarten nur 30 Antworten, dann sage ich, es ist besser auf traditionellen Weg zu arbeiten" (1A).

Little difference to traditional ways of commenting

Another expert does not see much difference to traditional ways of commenting on policy drafts:

"Das hätte ich auch geschrieben ohne die Online-Konsultationen, aber ich habe mich halt an diesen Fragebogen gehalten, weil die Leute bei der Kommission gerne das in einer Struktur lesen, wie sie es den anderen auch vorgegeben haben und ist alles in der gleichen Reihenfolge gekommen, dann tun sie sich leichter und dann übernehmen sie es vielleicht auch leichter [...] weil früher habe ich [...] natürlich schon auch gesagt [das ist eine] falsche Fragestellung, nachher haben sie einen Roman bekommen, und dann haben

47 http://europa.eu.int/geninfo/copyright_en.htm, accessed 8 October 2004.

sie wahrscheinlich sehr spät das in ihr System umbauen können, nicht? Da versuchen wir uns jetzt schon daran zu halten, an die Spielregeln" (2B).

Basically, consultations are designed for stakeholders and other organised interest groups and do not intend to collect the interests of single citizens in the first place, adds 2B. 1A agrees in so far, as this expert stresses the necessity to bind the interested unit to the intended usage of the outcome:

Consultation purpose must be justified

"Wenn jemand eine Konsultation macht, muss er uns von Anfang an erklären, *wie* er es verwendet. Wenn er es nicht im Rahmen von Politikgestaltung verwendet, heißt es bei uns: Ok, wenn wir Zeit haben, das zu machen" (1A). Others define the guidelines or rules of engagement as such: "You have to carefully elaborate the questionnaire for the online consultation together with the IPM team. You have to bear in mind that the results are subject to statistical evaluation, and avoid questions that cannot be statistically evaluated, and limit the questions that trigger free text reply. [You have to] foresee options for the answers (yes/no, several options to tick etc.)" (6H).

Summary:
- The *Your Voice in Europe* platform provides a privacy statement.
- There is no much difference to traditional ways of commenting on policy drafts.
- The IPM unit sets the consultation rules: EU units which intend to open a policy process for an online consultation, need to explain how and for which reason the consultation should take place.

6. Duration and Sustainability

Macintosh states that "the UK Government Cabinet Office Code of Practice on written Consultations for national departments says that twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation. It also points out that inadequate time for responses is the single greatest cause of complaint over consultation by government" (Macintosh 2003, 5). Consequently, this key dimension provides us perspectives if the consultation was a one-time experiment or an on-going well established initiative. With regard to the Your Voice in Europe consultations 6H states that "the average timeframe for consultations is three months." However, "It depends on the topic, an invitation for a discussion on the constitution (would need) more time" (5G).

Summary:
- The average timeframe for an online consultation is three months, depending on the topic.

7. Accessibility

This key dimension considers the number and origins of participating actors. We extend this dimension for the aspect of qualitative accessibility (e.g. How is it possible to receive information that a consultation is taking place? What kind of background information do participants need for taking part?).

Need of basic knowledge

"The minimum thing that you need to do (for a consultation) is availability on the web, to be accessible in terms of facilitating, finding the information" (5G). However, "[...] it needs a lot of basic knowledge", states 5G and explains that "it is necessary to be member of the relevant networks, e.g. SME networks, which disseminate the information via a sort of snowball effect. If you do not have information about an on-going consultation, it's not easy to find Your Voice in Europe".

Similarly, the view of interviewee 2B: "Wenn man nicht über eine stattfindenden Konsultation Bescheid weiß, kommt man nicht hin. Außer man ist issue- oder interest-geleitet" (2B). Whereas 4E points out that the IPM tool is easy to use especially for people who do not have so much expertise or knowledge on the consultation subject:

> "The IPM tool is also suitable for someone who doesn't have so much information about this multi-annual programme, [...] but to be able to answer to this more detailed impact assessment questions, you need more information" (4E).

1A shares the critical views and detects a lack of information particularly for people who are not members of issue- or target group-oriented networks:

> "Die Bürger wissen es ja effektiv nicht. Es ist zwar die Pflicht, und sie machen es auch, von diesen Netzwerken, die Leute drauf aufmerksam zu machen, wir verwenden das weiterhin für die Europäische Kommission im Rahmen der Politikgestaltung, aber für den Bürger selber ist das nicht so präsent" (1A).

And the interviewee concludes on accessibility:

> "Wir sind noch in der Lernphase. Weil wenn man jetzt so […]schaut, wie die Generaldirektionen Konsultationen machen. Es gibt manche, die nehmen sich Zeit, die reden auch vielleicht mit Leuten, die nicht so fachspezifisch orientiert sind, und die verstehen es hervorragend generelle Fragen zu richten, die auch verständlich sind. Dann gibt es andere, da arbeitet halt der Fachmann, der seit Jahren in dem Fachbereich arbeitet, der Jurist ist, so schwierige Fragen stellt, dass ein normaler Bürger, der da das erste Mal reingeht, verzweifelt ist und einfach nichts anfangen kann. Das heißt, da sind wir wirklich auch noch in einem Lernprozess, eine Art Guide zu erstellen, und vor allen Dingen, es ist in der Kommission eine change of culture [festzustellen]. Weg von der Fachsimpelei, wie formuliere ich eine Frage anständig, dass es wirklich verständlich ist, und das ist natürlich ein Multiplikatoreffekt, wenn jetzt die Konsultationen, die mir jetzt (leider) noch zu schwierig sind, dann werden die Leute nicht wieder reinsteigen in dieses Service in einem Jahr" (1A).

No selection criteria for participants

6H states that there are no selection criteria for interested parties to take part in consultations: "Your Voice in Europe is open to everybody in the EU, in case a selection is necessary, decisions are made within the Commission hierarchy (Director level together with spokesman responsible)" (6H).

Accessibility is dealt with in a top-down, pro-active way. Responsible departments try to inform different target groups and individual stakeholders via extensive e-mail correspondence to inform about the consultation, the IPM tool and additional questionnaires related to the impact part. 4E adds that,

> "[...] we offer an additional questionnaire for a more structured feedback, which is not on the IPM website, but on the Enterprise Europe webpage. If people wanted to do more comments, they could [from the IPM tool] download the questionnaire" (4E).

1A sums up, that online consultations could be used for any theme depending on the structure of the questionnaire. However, the expert admits, that consultations are not representative. Only those can participate who know about it:

> "[...] diese Konsultationen sind ja nicht repräsentativ, es kommt rein, was rein kommt. Und jetzt wurde von DG Markt das European business(es) panel gemacht, was mit der gleichen Software funktioniert. Und da ist die Idee, dass gemeinsam mit den Mitgliedsstaaten eine repräsentative Auswahl von Unternehmen getroffen wurde, und die Konsultationen, die über das Euro-

pean business(es) panel laufen, da gibt es pro Mitgliedsstaat einen National-Koordinator, der hat einen Haufen von Unternehmen, nach bestimmten Unternehmensgrößen" (1A).

Interviewee 2B also questions the representativity of consultations: "220 Antworten von ca. 40 großen Unternehmen. Es gibt kein balanciertes, repräsentatives Bild" (2B). However, one of the most important requirements for participation is accessibility in terms of public information provision. In fact, expert 3C stresses affordable access to public information as a *conditio sine qua non* for online participation and 3D highlights the necessity to make consultation results transparent:

> "Kostengünstiger Zugang zu Information, geregelt über [Prinzipien der] Daseinsvorsorge ist Voraussetzung" (3C). "Access zu Informationen über die Art der Ergebnisse und Begründungen von Selektionen in allen Sprachen" (3D).

Summary:
- Access to online consultations needs a lot of basic knowledge.
- Access to online consultations depends on (social and/or business) status.
- The representativity of consultations results is highly questioned.
- The *Your Voice in Europe* webpage is not easy to find.

8. Resources and Promotion

Lack of promotion

Macintosh found out, that traditional promotion measures such as press releases might not be sufficient enough for supporting online involvement. This also seems to be the case for the *Your Voice in Europe* platform: "Wir können sagen, dass wir jetzt so weit sind, dass […], die Konsultationen funktionieren. Was uns zusammenfassend fehlt ist Promotion" (1A). Basically, promotion activities for the online platform are undertaken by the Commission's press release office. However, most interviewed experts said, that promotion does not make any sense if the consultation itself is of inferior quality:

> "Konsultationen funktionieren nur, wenn die Qualität der Fragebögen gut [ist] und wenn diese Adresse, Your Voice in Europe, publik ist [....] Das heißt, es hängt so von der konkreten Konsultation ab, und wie sie gemacht ist, generell eine Promotion Linie zu bauen ist wahnsinnig schwierig. Und wir geben auch die Verantwortung dafür in die Generaldirektionen, die unser System nützen. Wir sagen, macht Promotion […] wir verständigen natürlich die Kommissionsrepräsentationen, wir verständigen unsere Netzwerke, aber alles andere ist eigentlich eine Frage, was man daraus macht" (1A).

Certainly, if consultations are too simple or of poor quality, participants will react negatively and may not see any added value in the provision of contributions:

Negative feedback

> "Natürlich gibt es auch negatives Feedback, ganz speziell wenn Konsultationen einfach schlecht sind. Das heißt, wenn Fragebögen zu simpel sind, da ist es dann wieder heikel, weil für manche ist eine Sache zu simpel, für einen Akademiker ist eine Fragestellung einfach simple oder einfach schon irgendwo gefärbt, und für einen Bauern oder für einen jungen Schüler oder einen Pensionisten, der findet sich schön durch den Fragebogen durch. Das heißt, das sind subjektive Statements. Wir haben aber generell in jedem Fragebogen so eine Art: Waren Sie zufrieden mit dem Fragebogen, was sollte geändert werden? Und ich meine, ich gehe einmal davon aus, dass die Leute, denen es nicht gefällt, nicht teilnehmen, das heißt die schauen vielleicht rein und nehmen nicht teil, aber wir haben im Moment keine Möglichkeit,

das festzustellen, wie viele Leute haben wirklich reingeschaut, aus welchen Gründen haben sie nicht teilgenommen, war es der Grund, dass sie das furchtbar gefunden haben?" (1A).

Summary:
- There is a lack of good promotion activities.
- The quality of the questionnaires and the evaluation quality of the results needs to be improved.
- Participants feel disrespected and reject the consultation if certain quality standards are missing.

9. Evaluation and prospected usage of outcome

The respective section of the questionnaire was structured along political, technical and social perspectives to find out how a policy-making process can be improved by online consultations and how particular units make use of consultation results. It was the intention to provide findings on a certain, always self-defined (i.e. defined by the interviewee) "success" or "increase of participation quality" of the policy-process. 1A states that offline consultations have never been evaluated or analysed so far due to lacking resources. Online consultations are much easier to evaluate. Thus, IPM support for online consultations includes also exact evaluations in order to learn increasingly about the process efficiency and the exploitation of the consultation results:

Online consultations are easy to evaluate

"[...] da gibt es einen extrem positiven Fortschritt. Vielleicht auch, weil jetzt gerade was IPM anbelangt. Ich schreibe da nach so zwei, drei Wochen an die Generaldirektion, an dieses Service, an diese Unit und frage: Was habt ihr damit gemacht? Das heißt, wir machen hier so eine Art Monitoring, wo die Leute so lange gequält werden, bis ich was zurückbekomme, was ein bisschen heikel ist, aber es funktioniert" (1A).

Nevertheless, the usage of the consultation results also depends on the internal "unit culture" which determines the assessment of the contributions and the extent to which the consultation results are considered in the design of a particular EU policy. The analyses of the contributions are usually undertaken by an external contractor who provides exclusively descriptive analyses but does not make any in-depth interpretations. These results are open for the internal Commission staff and are not publicly accessible (e.g. for those who have contributed):

Evaluation results are not open for public use

"Diese Analysen dürfen nicht Politikgestaltung machen, die Kommission will nur eine Analyse, und aufgrund der Analyse entscheidet die Kommission, was macht sie jetzt, was entscheidet sie, ändert sie was, ändert sie nichts. Das heißt, die Analyse ist nichts anderes als eine Aufbereitung dieser Datenbank. Und das hängt jetzt wieder ab, was die Unit will [...] es ist für die Dienststellen eine Empfehlung mehr oder weniger, ja. [...] Und der Vorteil von diesem System ist jetzt, dass eigentlich jede Generaldirektion, wenn ich zum Beispiel DG Enterprise bin, und ich würde konkret Fälle finden aus meinem Politikbereich e-business, dann klick ich DG Enterprise, gehe in die Unterstufe e-commerce, e-business, und habe sofort 3.000 Fälle" (1A).

Expert 2B uses the consultation contributions as a tool for lobbying activities. As a participant in European Commission's project groups, the expert could influence the design of the questionnaire for the consultation. The interviewee concludes that there is always a methodology on the question design depending on the answers one expects. Furthermore, the questionnaire structure and quality have to be questioned:

Tool for lobbying

"[...] wie gesagt, also ich versuche es jetzt für mich noch einmal zusammenzufassen. Also ich kann nicht viele Themen spielen, ich habe eine einge-

> schränkte Möglichkeit zu Leuten [durch]zudringen [...]. Ich kriege eine sehr unterschiedliche Response *von* Leuten. Die gesellschaftlichen Gruppen sind sehr *unterschiedlich* vertreten. Es *kann* trotzdem ein relevantes [...] Ergebnis herauskommen, *könnte*. Insgesamt ist es etwas [...] für den Prozess einer Rechtswerdung natürlich (offener Raum). Ja, das kann für Interessensvertretungen nützlich sein, muss aber nicht [...] die Resultate sind abrufbar und (werden unmittelbar nach Abbruch der Konsultation veröffentlicht, steht da jetzt drinnen, auf diesem Your Voice in Europe. Die Verfügbarkeit in elf Sprachen stimmt meistens nicht. Konsultationsdokumente sind oft nur in einer Sprache. Auswertung ist ausschließlich in Englisch, allenfalls in Französisch und manchmal in Deutsch. *Wenn ich eine Mixtur* an Antworten habe und dann eine numerische, also eine arithmetische oder mathematische Auswertung mache, dann kann ich durch die Art der Fragestellung natürlich die Art der Antworten provozieren und habe dann, was weiß ich, eine 80 % Mehrheit, dass das wahnsinnig wichtig ist. Die Antworten werden entsprechend den Bedürfnissen derer, die gefragt haben, *aufbereitet"* (2B).

Lack of transparent data analysis

In fact, most of the asked experts miss a transparent data analysis. The results can, if defined at its best, be used as bench marks. Those, who have sent contributions should be invited for a kind of reviewing of the process and the responsible unit should explain, why some contributions are used for further policy-making and others not, even if policy-making processes need more time, adds 2B.

Experts from the Commission consider the policy suggestions ("lots of suggestions") often to be "too specific" (4E) for the draft of a far more generalised policy frame. The responsible unit puts these suggestions in different thematic baskets and it depends on the responsible persons of the unit, what they do with these suggestions. But all contributions are taken into consideration when drafting a framework programme, states 4E. Generally, most of the interviewed experts are surprised by the level of contributions:

High quality of contributions

> "Personally what surprised me was that the level of the contributions was very high, very professional. Because I was expecting people sending some contributions just for fun, or using the IPM tool for saying that everything that you do is nothing worth, or things like that, but that didn't happen. And that I have to say surprised me, because when you put something on the Internet, you could expect that you have also the possibility that it is misused to a certain extent, but that didn't happen. We received a lot of position papers of stakeholders, they were also very valuable. Comments from people who were very concerned about micro enterprises and their specific needs. We are trying to take into account what kind of environmental or social impacts our programme will have. The IPM tool is more open than a specific stakeholder consultation provided by the special unit on special questions" (4E).

The integration of contributions is based on a consultation report provided by IPM in co-operation with the unit commissioning an online consultation. Then the Commission starts drafting a working paper. Contributing persons or stakeholders are not informed about the further usage of their contributions, but

> "[...] when they send in their contribution, they automatically receive a message accumulating that we, we received the contribution. And if people send in many questions, or whatever, we reply […] but still, there is no obligation to use the results or to make a consultation" (4E).

Use of divergent views remains unclear

The question that remains open is on the usage of divergent views and statements for the policy-making processes. How to decide which views should be taken into consideration and who is entitled to make such decisions? In terms of self-evaluation, 6H reflects, that there were no critical voices since the IPM

platform has been implemented. If there is anything, that could be improved, it would be that

> "More staff should be available with the IPM team in order to help with the co-ordination of the different language versions and the finalisation of the questionnaires" (6H). In terms of usability, the expert judges the website being "[...] excellent, there is always feedback given to the contributing organisations, results are stored on the website for public use, and consultation participants always give positive feedback" (6H).

5G points out, that it depends on the stakeholder's interpretation of "impact" if a positive or negative feedback is given:

> "[...] because I think there can be different ways of seeing that your input has had an impact, ok, we can see when with regard to the convention work that our input already has had input because there are formulations in the constitutional treaty that we provided too [...]" (5G).

There are clear advantages of online consultations which are good instruments to reach the public, but only,

> "[...] if the event is properly announced in the national newspapers with a press release. Another advantage of the IPM consultation tool is that you can use the graphs produced by the system in presentations. If you want however a complete picture, you have as well to analyse the comments made in the free text fields. In our case this has represented a month's work because of the important number of free text remarks received" (6H).

Furthermore, contributing parties are invited to the plenary working sessions, and the public is informed via a press release or via a conference (6H).

Summary:

- Offline consultations have never been analysed so far. The evaluation of online consultations is much easier with the IPM tool.
- EU units have to make a statement about the purpose of an online consultations and how they intend to use the results.
- Online contributions are also useful for supporting classical lobbying activities.
- Evaluation methods are influenced by the intention of the unit which demands for an online consultation.
- Equal representativity of societal groups is not given in online consultations.
- Experts miss the statements on the usage of consultation data. Results might only be used as bench marks.
- More staff is required in the EU units to deal with consultation results since there are a lot of free text comments in various European languages.

10. Critical success factors

This dimension is based on the selection of questions including critical voices. Experts were asked about the general weaknesses of online consultations and what they would consider to be a positive result in terms of implementation, maintenance and usage of the online platform. 1A states that more staff is needed if online consultations should be more efficient:

> "We need people who know which are the relevant cases for the Commission and who can judge which cases belong to which unit, as we have 28 policy areas. The intermediaries decide the relevance of a comment. Until now, there are 40,000 cases in the database. And who judges the relevance?" (1A).

Quality control required

2B claims for an urgent quality control for the questionnaire's structure:

> "Der Fragebogen ist zu selektiv, er entscheidet vieles schon vorher. [...] Ein methodisch ausgereifter Fragebogen [...] man sollte überlegen, welche literacy wird verlangt [...] Leute müssen auch wissen, dass es so etwas gibt. Und es muss gezeigt werden, wie so was Einfluss nehmen kann. Die Ergebnisse müssen transparenter dargestellt werden [...] Und dann gehört wahrscheinlich eine transparente Geschichte hinterher, was die Ergebnisse waren, womöglich auch, was die *Kategorien* der Ergebnisse waren" (2B).

Most of the interviewed experts criticise, that the contributing parties are not representative at all, there should be "a statistically clean sample of contributors" to reflect all relevant actors in society. 2B criticises, that the questionnaires serve interests of individuals and do not offer the possibility for consensus building, whereas, on the contrary, 3C and 3D regard the consultations as a "consensus manufactory". A weak point is, for sure, the response structure. The analyses of full text messages and the translation of contributions are highly contested. Some experts also criticise not having received any reaction on their contribution: "Und ich habe von dort jedenfalls keine Antwort bekommen, dass es angekommen ist. Also man konnte ja, nicht nur die Fragebögen ausfüllen, sondern umfangreicher auch antworten, per E-mail oder so" (2B). 3C also criticises, that they do not know, what happened with their contribution since they did not receive any answer:

> "Wir bekamen keine Antwort. Nur ein Dankeschön natürlich, dass wir uns da beteiligt haben, aber keine Antwort, *was* konkret jetzt damit gemacht wurde [...] über diese Online-Schiene weiß ich nicht, was mit unseren Positionspapieren passiert ist. Also es gab da keine, im Grunde genommen *keine Reaktion*" (3C).

Expert 5G holds an opposite opinion:

> "Our views were taken into account at the 'Minimum Standards' consultation. We responded to their working document, they took our views into account [...] They consider representative associations (like us) as next to civil society" (5G).

Online consultation is a good information medium

Nevertheless, experts consider positively, that the IPM tool is a good information medium to get insight what other stakeholders think on a certain political problem, single issue or general policy draft and to catch moods and estimations. It remains unclear though how far the single contribution influences the policy-making process and the content of the policy itself. But these estimations, single opinions and general moods can

> "[...] nur im Hinterkopf der Politikmacher Einfluss nehmen, indirekt also. Man freut sich aber, wenn man z. b. bei Konsultationen zu ‚Minimum Standards' dann einen Halbsatz [vom eigenen Beitrag] findet" (3C).

The experts interviewed repeatedly questioned the selection of contributions. 3C and 3D criticise, that, the content provided on the *Your Voice in Europe* website only involves accomplished interests. According to 3C and 3D a successful implementation of the website would build upon transparency criteria. In contrast to the position of expert 2B, 3C and 3D consider the provided tools as a "production for consensus, a consensus manufactory":

> "Mit den Konsultationsprozessen wird Konsens hergestellt, Meinungen werden letztlich aufgeweicht. Produktion von Konsens, Widerstandspotential wird von vornherein entkräftet, kanalisiert, in bestimmte Bahnen gelenkt [...] Und indem sich alle (äußern und), letztlich haben sie umso weniger Durchschlagskraft je mehr (ihr euch) die Zeit (vergeudet), bei irgendwelchen *Chatforen* im Internet mitzumachen und irgendwelche Stellungnahmen abzuliefern. [Es kommt zu] einer *Verbürokratisierung von potentiellem Pro-*

test. Das Wissen um Konfliktpotential ist da, [man will] aber den Diskurs schon von vornherein abfangen, um letztendlich die notwendige Zustimmung zu bekommen" (3D).

Thus, the selection criteria are not considered to meet transparency standards: The problem definition of a discourse depends on the responsible officer or on the unit leading the discourse. It is also not clear, how consultation results are translated into the institutionalised policy-making process since there is no legally binding structure. The most important issue to increase the acceptance of the IPM tool would be a more detailed reasoning which positions will be taken over in the planned policy. 3C and 3D explain: "Rückmeldungen inhaltlicher Art wären sinnvoll. Die Kommisssion soll begründen, warum sie Forderungen nicht nachkommt." Otherwise the entire consultation process would represent an "illusion of relevance". Hence, consultation results only provide static estimations ("Stimmungsbilder") (3C and 3D). However, the option to get involved and to reflect one's own position in contrast to the other contributors is considered to be a very positive aspect of the IPM tool. But again the critical point of view is, that the Commission has the duty to reason decisions:

Relevance illusion

"Die Kommission muss einer Begründungspflicht nachkommen. Mit Konsultationen wird nicht das Europa der BürgerInnen geschaffen. Es können ja nicht alle teilhaben. Der Mechanismus von Laienkonsultationen kann niemals die Repräsentativdemokratie ersetzen" (3D).

To sum up, a successful online consultation or online participation process would be:

"Wenn die Einrichtung, die ihn veranstaltet, eventuell auch zu ganz anderen Ergebnissen [kommt], das wäre eine [erfolgreiche Konsultation]. Ein allgemeines Beispiel, abstraktes, wenn die wirklich das so ernst nehmen, dass sie sagen, ok, die haben einfach recht, gut, dass die uns das sagen, wir machen das jetzt dann ganz anders, oder wir ziehen den Vorschlag zurück, das geht ja wirklich nicht. Dann wäre es erfolgreich, dann wäre es auch wirklich relevant gewesen, wenn man sich das sagen könnte [...] Ansonsten, vielleicht ist es auch, kann man Erfolg schon daran ansetzen, dass alle die Möglichkeit gehabt haben oder auch wahrgenommen haben, aus der Sicht vieler gehört zu werden" (3C).

Summary:

- Experts miss transparency and clarification related to the selection and relevance of online contributions and related to the categorisation of the results.
- In order to maintain the significance of online consultations, reasoned feedback is necessary concerning the usage of contributions for further policy-making.
- Online Consultations are adequate tools to learn about the opinions and views of other involved stakeholders.
- Successful consultations also appreciate and consider alternative views which may deviate from an already established policy approach.

11. Understanding of democratic principles

This dimension intends to comprehend the experts' approach to conceptions, ideas and symbols of democracy. Interestingly, the terms democracy, democratisation or participation were used very rarely during the interviews while the terms governance, transparency, support for policy-making, stakeholders' needs, better information provision were used very often. Expert 4E reflects

Linkage problem

on the problem to connect additional participation possibilities to democratically legitimised, institutional ways of decision-making:

> "[...] so it means that [although] when we are [analysing] the context with different stakeholders and we are consulting them in a more systematic way, it doesn't mean that we have an obligation to take everything that they suggest into account, because there is also this more democratically based process with institutions like Parliament, so we can't in a way bypass these democratically based decision-making procedures, and that's even not the idea, but the idea is that we are in dialogue with the stakeholders, that we are dealing with important news and their feedback to us, and then we [...] have to see how we take it into account" (4E).

Classical problem of democratic theory

Furthermore, interviewees 3C and 3D point out fundamental problems of democratic theory concerning the level of participation in relation to representative democracy. They ask how it is possible to compare a single contribution of a citizen, a single opinion, with an aggregated contribution made by a union or other interest organisation. Also 2B focuses on the problem of institutionalised decision-making and how to link additional participation possibilities in a legitimised manner.

> "Es hat niemand eine Verpflichtung. Wenn wir dem Parlament eine Stellungnahme zuleiten, hat es keine Verpflichtung, dass sie das übernehmen, nicht? Also insofern kann es dafür auch keine Verpflichtung geben. Weil wir immer noch halt eine Politik haben, die generell, jetzt sage ich einmal, von der repräsentativen Demokratie geprägt ist [...] Und Aufgabe eines Politikers ist Verantwortung zu übernehmen. Infolgedessen muss ein Politiker verantwortlich mit den Resultaten umgehen, natürlich auch die Verwaltung, die sie veranlasst hat. Man kann sagen, die Verwaltung muss sie entsprechend aufbereiten, von mir aus auch, öffentlich bereitstellen, sage ich jetzt einmal, indem sie auf Your Voice in Europe halt publiziert werden, vielleicht etwas ausführlicher als bisher. [...] Und muss auch von den Politikern gewichtet werden, es muss einfach gewichtet werden" (2B).

Summary:
- Online consultations shall not bypass democratically legitimated decision-making processes.
- Online consultations do not solve the problem of aggregating preferences.
- It is still unclear how to link additional participation options to the institutionalised and legitimated participation procedures.

12. Gender and minority aspects in online consultations

Online consultations do not touch gender aspects

There were no gender and minority aspects touched in the interviews. This dimension played a marginal role in the discussion on the impact of consultations on EU policy-making. The experts were also selected regarding to gender sensible criteria, but the thematic priorities of consultations did not include gender relevant issues. Furthermore, the contributors were not single citizens, who could be categorised over a male/female distribution since contributions were mainly agreed statements submitted by organisations.

Summary:
- In most cases, thematic priorities of consultations do not include gender sensible issues.

13. Political dimensions of online consultations

This additional dimension attempts to gauge estimations on experts' knowledge on the impact of online consultations on the policy content and implementation strategy (policy), influencing aspects of the institutional order (polity) and power relations (politics). 1A points out the necessity for online consultations as a problem definition tool for the institutional level but also to assess the impact of policies. Citizens and stakeholders are mainly seen as the reflecting audience:

Reflecting audience

> "Die Ziele, die wir jetzt als IPM Initiative haben, sind, mit der Hilfe von Erfahrungen und auch Meinungen von Bürgern und Enterprises, dass man feststellt, wo sollen neue Aktionen gesetzt werden, wo soll die Kommission tätig werden, wo sollen Mitgliedsstaaten tätig werden. Aber auch um festzustellen, was für Auswirkungen haben die Vorschläge bzw. die Nicht-Vorschläge. Und alles unter Nutzung des Internets, weil man gesagt hat, das Internet ist die rascheste Möglichkeit zum Informationsaustausch" (1A).

If a consultation is closed, it remains a political decision to add workshops or focus groups for further research or the fine-tuning of a policy draft. "Ich meine, alles andere ist dann eine politische Entscheidung, d. h. wie es weitergehen soll" (1A). The problem of involving public consultation processes in the policy-making process is one of the main critiques which always comes up when talking about participation:

> "Ich meine, dass die Leute natürlich dann teilweise negativ reagieren, wenn man ihnen erklärt, dass der Politikprozess dann drei, vier Jahre dauert. Das ist dann halt wieder die Kehrseite. Und das ist das, was halt vielleicht ein bisschen jetzt zu negativem Feedback führt, weil der Politikgestaltungsbereich der Kommission dauert" (1A).

Political culture

It is also a matter of political culture, how far consultations are intended or conceptualised to influence the policy, polity, politics dimension.

> **"**Und das ist etwas, wo wir uns mit dem Briten zum Beispiel fundamental unterscheiden, weil [...] die haben eine völlig andere Art zu arbeiten, in der Politikgestaltung. [...] Was immer durchkommt: Welche Fragen will ich stellen, und was will ich damit erreichen? Man kann schon in der Erstellung des Fragebogens Einfluss nehmen, wenn ich mich durchsetzen kann, welche Fragen sind wichtig?" (2B).

3C and 3D experienced, that policy-making within the EU's institutional framework is mainly done via lobbying activities. In their opinion, *Your Voice in Europe* can only be an additional instrument but never replace the traditional and possibly more important ways of informal policy-making. They consider the IPM tool as a complementary instrument to increase the acceptance of policies in the public. Accordingly, *"Die Politik der kurzen Wege"* (3C and 3D) is much more effective and the real tool for policy-making.

> "Um da den Bogen zu dem Thema zu spannen, es gibt einfach eine Duplizierung von Diskursen […] Auf allen Ebenen [...] Das ist auch das Problem, nicht? Dass man nicht weiß, wo, ich würde jetzt sagen, wo dringt man durch. [...] Es findet so viel in Wahrheit über Konsultationsprozesse auch separat abseits statt, in oder im Rahmen irgendeiner bestimmten Generaldirektionen" (3C and 3D).

Summary:

- Citizens are considered as the reflecting audience who provide valuable input. But online consultations are not *the* tool to change power relations.
- The effect and impact of online consultations depend on the political culture within the EU units and their policy intentions.

14. Future images of democracy

"Consensus manufactory"

This final dimension intends to answer the question if experts estimate the little "e" influencing expectations and conceptions of democracy or if it is another tool to broaden access to a certain conception of democracy. On the one hand, 3C and 3D describe the talkboard to be a "consensus manufactory." On the other hand, although they judge the *Your Voice in Europe* platform as a sum up of opinions and not an effective policy-making tool, these experts consider some positive effects on democracy:

> "Früher gab es das nicht. [...] Ich wusste natürlich welche Positionen der Gewerkschaftsbund (einnimmt), welcher Gewerkschaftsbund oder einzelne Gewerkschaften, wo die Regierenden Kontakte haben. Aber was jetzt die zivilgesellschaftlichen [Akteure] zu diversen Prozessen sagen auf europäischer Ebene, das könnte man dann durchaus über den direkten Kontakt vielleicht erfahren, ja? Also insgesamt, *das ist natürlich schon ein sehr positiver Schritt*. Ich habe über dieses Instrument die Möglichkeit, die Positionen und Meinungen von sehr vielen anderen Akteuren einzuholen. *Ganz* einfach und das halte ich für sehr positiv" (3C).

Expert 5G is more sceptical about this position since the Commission presents the outcome of the consultations without defining its relevance:

> "The Commission is in charge of presenting the outcome of the consultation process, and I think that's the least that you can require from the Commission in terms of feedback on a consultation. [...] What could be the structure for a social dialogue between the Commission and the social partners? We should work towards a more institutionalised framework for consultations and dialogue" (5G).

Summary:
- Online consultations offer the basis for participative processes if the various contributions are used as a starting point for the formulation of a policy and not the final result.
- Generally, online consultations are important tools if the Commission is interested in civil society's contributions.

8.5 Conclusions

The expert interviews were guided by Macintosh's key dimensions to estimate the participative level of online consultations and the potential of a participative quality online consultations offer. With regard to OECD's categorisation of participation levels, EU online consultations rather correspond to the first participation level since they are used as a tool for informed, needs-based policy-making. The online consultations do not fulfil the requirements of active participation since there is rarely a response provided and it is not possible to follow the ways the own contribution takes. Regarding Macintosh's extended classification, *Your Voice in Europe* initiative mainly serves the functions of "e-enabling" and "e-engaging" since the consultation of a wider audience leads to feedback recommendations for policy-making procedures. The online consultations are planned to provide an early input for further decision-making, all contributions are taken into account, but there is no legally binding structure to use them. This offer of commenting on policy drafts is considered as part of the Commission's reform of governance strategy. All interviewed experts agree that online consultations cannot replace the classical political technique of lobbying, which all define central to their intensive co-operations with different institutional levels within the Commission as with relevant intermediaries.

What seems to be necessary to use online consultations more effectively is a systematic methodology for interpretation and presentation of results. This applies for the structured and free text sections. However, this also requires further financial and staff resources. Some experts also question the representativity of consultations, which depends on the extent of accessibility. A main point of critique is also the missing official explanation how the responsible unit will use the consultation results. It is not transparent at all, which contributions are taken into consideration for further policy-making and which ones are excluded and for what reasons. Transparency concerning this point could lead to a better usage and a higher degree of participation. As a criterion for increasing the quality of democracy, some experts point out, that the Commission should be ready to accept alternative views (contributions) as a basis for further policy-making. Otherwise the consultations would represent a "consensus manufacture". Furthermore, online consultations should not bypass institutionalised instruments of representative decision-making, but there should be more thought on how to link additional participation possibilities and their results to a legitimised framework.

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, our interviews were also guided by Coleman's research hypotheses. If we link those assumptions to the results of our expert interviews we can conclude that:

- *Online consultations do not provide a space for inclusive public deliberation* in a strong sense, since access depends on being already involved in the theme, to belong to interest networks or to be invited to take part. Experts criticise that there is not enough promotion on (ongoing or intended) online consultations. The consultations are also more relevant for public bodies, NGOs and other institutional players than for the single citizen.
- *Online consultations can generate and connect networks of interest or practice, if* those taking part are regularly invited for further expert focus groups or panel discussions etc.
- *Online interaction between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.* This depends if the responsible unit puts more light on the results of a consultation:
  - Who took part?
  - What were the selection criteria?
  - Which recommendations were provided by the contributors?
  - Which methodological approach was used for the interpretation of the results and what is the policy-outcome?

9 Scenario Workshop: "e-Democracy in Austria in the year 2025"

9.1 Background and Objective

Based on the results achieved in the content analysis on online debates and the qualitative expert interviews on online consultations, a scenario workshop (Title: "e-Demokratie in Österreich im Jahr 2025") was initiated by the NODE project team to assess the significance of online participation in Austria in the year 2025. The main objective was to develop long-term visions of circumstances and requirements appearing to be essential for innovative online deliberation processes in Austria. The workshop was held and organised in co-operation with *Plansinn* (http://www.plansinn.at)[48] on the 10th of December 2004 in Vienna and involved 11 Austrian experts active in academia, public interest chambers and politics.

Purpose of the scenario workshop

This scenario workshop had an important function in the process of developing future-oriented online participation. It analysed current experiences in online deliberation at the EU level, framed the development of desirable online applications in Austria in the future and identified those barriers that may hinder the full development of digital democracy in Austria. At the same time, the scenario workshop was one element of our project that directly reflects a major objective of the NODE work programme which encourages "[…] to come up with options and alternatives for the further development of democratic politics".[49] Discussing scenarios on how online participation in Austria might look in the future is necessary to inform an appropriate adaptation of current online deliberation practices. The original description of the workshop objective was to conduct foresight and macro scenario-building exercises. As a consequence of further refinement of the project's methodology, the objective was slightly modified towards the assessment of online participation forms in Austria at different political "power layers" (national, regional, local). The rationale was that different problems necessitate different solutions and different participation mechanisms. Problems affecting the national level (as to be discussed below in scenario 1) need different approaches on the usage of new media for public involvement then problems at the local level (see below scenario 3). Given that this project mainly focused on the role and significance of new media for democratic development at the EU level, the scenario workshop was introduced to gain valuable knowledge on how to use new media for online participation in Austria.

The following experts were selected and invited to participate due to to their activities and expertise in the field of online engagement:

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[48] Wolfgang Gerlich and Sonja Gruber from *Plansinn* were responsible for the moderation of the workshop. We want to thank them for their valuable workshop proposals and their helpful and excellent support.

[49] See NODE Mission Statement, http://www.node-research.at/englisch/index.php, accessed 22 April 2004.

Table 9.1-1: Scenario Workshop Participants

Name	Institution
AICHHOLZER, Georg	Institut für Technikfolgen-Abschätzung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
BETZ, Fritz	FH-Studiengang "Informationsberufe", Eisenstadt
HENKEL, Andreas	Stabsabteilung Wirtschaftspolitik, Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, Wien
KOZELUH, Ulrike	Zentrum für Soziale Innovation, Wien
MAIER-RABLER, Ursula	Academic Director, ICT&S Center – Center for Advanced Studies and Research in Information and Communication Technologies & Society, Universität Salzburg
NOVAK, Barbara	SPÖ, Gemeinderätin/Landtagsabgeordnete, Wien
OSTLEITNER, Alexander	Die Grünen, Referent für Kultur und Technologie, Wien
REICHARD, Susanne	ÖVP, Bezirksvorsteherin, Wien-Wieden
STRASSER, Michaela	Fachbereich Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften, Universität Salzburg
TEMPL, Norbert	Abteilung EU und Internationales, Arbeiterkammer Wien
WINKLER, Roman	Institut für Technikfolgen-Abschätzung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften

9.2 Methodology

In principle, a scenario is a tool which is used for policy analysis and to describe a possible future. As such, a scenario has to fulfil certain critera. With regard to our purposes the following two conditions framed and determined the scenario development process (see PRISMA 2002, 4ff.):

- A scenario should be plausible, but does not have to be probable. Indeed, given the uncertainty of the future, it needs to be explicitly stated that a scenario is not a prediction, but only a possibility, as likely as many other possibilities.
- A scenario should not describe the developments that led to the described picture of the future. Instead, participants might be asked to project backwards from the posited future to better understand how that future might arise.

The scenario workshop involved two important stages: In stage 1, the project team developed in co-operation with *Plansinn* three exploratory scenarios. Each scenario represented a different "public problem" and was designed against the background of the following questions:

- How may e-Democracy be designed in Austria in the year 2025?
- Which online participation forms might be desirable and/or less desirable at the national, regional and local level?

Experts "drafted" future pictures on e-Democracy in Austria

Stage 2 included the assessment of the scenarios in a half-day workshop. The main idea of the scenarios was to provide the invited experts a rough problem background on a particular issue of common concern which might be considered relevant for Austrian citizens. However, the "scenario content" (the pro-

posed problem) per se was not intended to represent the main focus of analysis. Instead, experts were asked to elaborate the proposed scenarios and to develop innovative approaches how problems affecting different layers of politics might be solved via online participation and the involvement of the public.

Accordingly, the project team developed the following scenarios:

Scenario level	*Scenario Cases for Austria in the year 2025*
National	The national government intends to rethink its defence policy and starts negotiations with three different defence alliances. Since national defence is a very sensitive topic in Austria, the government wants to make use of online participation forms involving Austrian citizens and NGOs in order to come to a nationally acceptable decision.
Regional	Austria faces a severe energy crisis. Given a steadily increasing energy demand, the national government has either to (re)open the nuclear power station in "Zwentendorf" (Lower Austria) or to build an hydroelectric power plant in the nature protection area of Hainburg (Lower Austria). Since both options strongly affect the people in Lower Austria, the regional government intends to use new media for the decision-forming process.
Local	The local government of "Bad Aussee" in the Austrian province of Styria wants to use an untenanted factory hall for public purposes (e.g. opening a nursing home; youth center etc.). In order to involve the local citizens in the decision-forming process, the government intends to make use of online engagement mechanisms to learn about local citizens' desires and needs.

9.3 Group results on scenarios

According to these rough scenarios, experts split up into three groups:

National scenario: Georg Aichholzer; Alexander Ostleitner and Norbert Templ (expert group I).

Regional scenario: Andreas Henkel; Ursula Maier-Rabler and Susanne Reichard (expert group II).

Local scenario: Fritz Betz; Barbara Novak and Michaela Strasser (expert group III).

Their major task was to sketch "future pictures" on the usage of new media for public participation and to propose strategies in order to solve the posed problems. Consequently, the results of each expert group were jointly discussed in the workshop group. All participants were asked to assess the proposals of the other groups and to identify desirable and less desirable aspects related to each scenario.

9.3.1 Results from expert group I

The first scenario group dealt with the *national scenario* involving online decision-making processes concerning Austrian government's intentions to access a defence alliance. Three workshop participants sketched the following "future picture":

The "Global Times" newspaper reports that Austrian NGOs strongly protest against the government's defence intentions. The government offers three alliance options: Austria's access to the NATO, the European defence alliance or the GUS defence alliance. Peace activists represent a powerful opposition to national politicians and start to use the Internet to provide counter-information to the "broader public". Online information campaigns have been initiated to inform the public on the consequences of an accession to one of the three defence alliances. NGOs establish a common Internet platform providing information and discussion forums which considerably contribute to public opinion formation. Moreover, NGOs start to build online networks for political mobilisation (e.g. street demonstrations). Finally, on- and offline activities force the government to withdraw from its intentions.

Scenario analysis and discussion

National level: Experts stress information provision and civic communication

Against the scenario background, the group stressed the usage of new media in opinion formation processes. The experts of the first group held that online services would be rather used for information provision and civic communication instead of e-voting processes in which citizens decide on the accession to one out of three defence alliances. In this context, the Internet is (still) considered to be a "counter-medium" which will have gained importance due to decreasing ICT costs and high diffusion rates among citizens. Thus, experts focused on the question on how citizens and NGOs may use new media for political participation. The question on how the government could use the Internet to come to a consensus-based decision was not dealt with in this group. Experts from group I expected that e-activism would be more important in this sceanrio and new media would rather serve "civic interests" than governmental intentions. The scenario group members argued that at the end national issues would have to be decided on a governmental level and that online participation (e.g. online discussions and online information) could only contribute to "design" public opinion.

In the joint discussion, a participant belonging to expert group III criticised the view in this scenario that new media are mainly considered as political "counter-instruments" used by NGOs. This expert supposed that the Internet will rather become a commonly accepted medium for political purposes that will not anylonger be exclusively used by grassroot organisations but also by "ordinary citizens".

9.3.2 Results from expert group II

The second scenario group dealt with the *regional scenario* involving online decision-making processes against the background of a severe energy crisis. This forces the national government to either reopen a nuclear power station or to construct a hydroelectric power plant in a nature protection area. The regional government of the province where one of the two power stations are intended to be activated (Lower Austria) uses new media for the decision-forming process. Three experts put forward the following "future picture":

New media have substantially contributed to increase political awareness among Austrian citizens. Nearly 100 % of all Austrians are connected to the Internet and use new media for political information reception. The regional government decides to initiate an e-voting referendum on the two proposed options (i.e. nuclear power station vs. hydroelectric power plant). However, only 13 % of those citizens eligible to vote participate in this online voting. 11 % express their refusal to both options and 2 % are in favour of one of the two options. Given this extremly low turnout rate, the result merely represents a very vague estimation since it is not at all representative. The EU Commission forces the government, though, to come to a decision and a consensus group involving EU energy experts, national politicians and economy experts is set up.

Scenario analysis and discussion

Regional level: Experts stress e-voting options

In contrast to the former expert group (I), the experts who dealt with online engagement related to a regional problem did not stress online deliberation (such as online debates or online consultations) but online voting. This mainly derived from the assumption that nearly all citizens will have access to the Internet and most problems related to e-voting (such as privacy concerns) will be solved by then. The joint discussion in the group showed that experts from other groups (I and II) were concerned that citizens might have to answer such "either/or" questions and will not be offered the option to discuss several alternatives before a legal decision will be taken. Moreover, decreasing voting turnout rates should alert politicians and citizens and necessitate creative ideas how political participation could be increased by new media. This let experts assume that "100 % connectivity" does not automatically cause "100 % participation." New media only reflect existing trends in society i.e. citizens that are not interested in becoming politically engaged will continue to remain from (online and offline) political life. Finally, some experts called for political actions to maintain a (socially) coherent society which was considered to be an important basis for political involvement and consensus building.

9.3.3 Results from expert group III

The third scenario group dealt with the *local scenario* involving online decision-forming processes concerning a local government's intentions to use an old factory hall for public purposes. The experts involved in this group proposed the following "future picture":

A virtual information and discussion space enables local citizens and politicians to put forward dynamic usage options for the factory hall. The proposals involve textbased and multimedia information which is publicy discussed in this space. The design of the provided information enables citizens with different media literacy skills to participate and ensures that almost all interested persons can be involved. The final decision concerning the usage of the factory hall is taken via an online referendum, which also involves the local youth (minimum voting age is 14 years). Citizens can cast their online votes from their homes and due to the high rate of old people living in the village, people are also provided online voting stations in public institutions. Authentification and security are ensured by biometric mechanisms. There is a relatively high turnout rate (between 40 % and 70 %) since citizens are directly affected by this decision.

Scenario analysis and discussion

Local level: Experts call for bridging online deliberation and online voting tools

In this scenario the involved expert group (III) expected that the potential of new media to provide information in various formats (e.g. text, 3D animations, music etc.) will support the decision-forming process in the local community. Hence, people with different media literacy skills can benefit from these mulitmedia presentations. This was considered as a "community-building" process since the future purpose of the common good in question (the factory hall) becomes more visible. Basically, at the local level the involvement of citizens at an early stage of a political decision-forming process appeared in the view of experts as very desirable. People feel more affected by political issues that directly "surround" them and render them more willing to become engaged. Members from the other expert groups (I and II) criticised, though, that multimedia may also simplify problems, especially those that cannot be visualised. Thus, online participation should be accompanied by offline participation options (such as common discussion groups). Moreover, some experts expressed severe concerns regarding the identification via biometric mechanisms for the voting procedure.

Concluding thoughts

Against the backdrop of experts' estimations on how new media may contribute to solve the above outlined public problems, the workshop group was asked to identify core requirements which support desirable e-democracy applications in Austria. Accordingly, experts put forward the following measures that have to be taken into account in order to arrive at a "robust" e-democracy in Austria. These measures can be subsumed under three different levels:

On the *political and administrative level:*

- Democracy needs time: Citizens have to be enabled to deliberate on public problems at length and should not be forced to make "instant votes".
- Full access has to be granted to publicly relevant information. "Daily politics" and public administrations have to reduce hierarchical hurdles in order to arrive at a more vivid political life in Austria.
- Political representatives have to become more interested in direct interaction with lay people. Modes of representative and participatory democracy have to be bridged.
- In order to ensure constant democratic developments and to avoid frustration among the participants in case of unsuccessful decision-forming and -making processes, "exit strategies" have to be provided such as additional (face-to-face) focus groups.
- Online information has to be balanced i.e. different (political) views, opinions and values have to be contrasted to enable citizens to choose among a broad variety of political options.

On the *technological level:*

- Identification systems (such as biometrics) need to be controllable and ensure highest security levels for citizens.

On the *educational level:*

- Accompanying measures related to media pedagogics have to be provided in order to enable all kinds of citizens (the youth, the elderly etc.) to become politically engaged.
- The youth has to be trained in deliberation i.e. young people have to be a provided an open discussion culture which enables the development of dis-

cussion and reflection skills. Educational institutions have to implement a non-hierarchical information and communication culture.

Interestingly, the final discussion session in the scenario workshop also showed that apart from the necessity that politicians are prepared and committed to involve citizens in political decision-forming and -making processes, most workshop experts agreed that media pedagogical measures are among the most important ones if e-democracy is supposed to play a key role in Austrian politics in the year 2025.

Furthermore, most discussants stressed the significance of new media for the political involvement of citizens at the *local level*. The manageable size of participants (relatively small communities) and the direct concernment by local problems were regarded as important determinants for successful e-democracy applications that focus on decision-forming and –making processes.

9.4 Toolkit: Recommendations for policy makers

The scenario workshop provided valuable results pertinent for policy makers who intend to involve citizens and NGOs in decision-forming and -making processes. In this chapter we attempt to offer some basic recommendations for policy makers for the draft, implementation and evaluation of online participation forms. This will be based upon our theoretical reflections on deliberation, our empirical investigations on online debates and online consultations and the scenario workshop. To this end, we hold that the following basic dimensions should be considered when policy makers intend to open up democratic participation:

Crucial dimensions for the planning and realisation of online participation

Reflection on political motivation: Policy makers should be aware of their basic intentions to offer online participation for political purposes. The involvement of citizens and other societal players in decision-forming and -making processes may trigger expectations in the public which must not be disappointed. Thus, decision-forming and -making processes which are supported or exclusively conducted via new media should be framed and accompanied by the following questions:

- What is the main purpose of citizens' involvement in online participation processes?
- What is the added-value of an online participation process in contrast to offline participation (e.g. consensus groups; expert group discussions; referenda etc.)?
- What exactly is expected to be increased or improved by new media? The relationship between the "governors" and the "governed"? The efficiency of policy-making processes? The legitimacy of decisions?

Reflection on "clashing views and opinions": In order to avoid political apathy and dissatisfaction, democracy needs diverging opinions which are commonly respected. Online platforms involve such pluralist views on issues of a common concern and consensus achievement does not have to be the ultimate goal of an online decision-forming process. Thus, ICTs can never be a better tool to create consensus but rather make visible a wide range of political visions. However, policy makers should be able to offer and explain "exit" or alternative strategies in case of conflict situations lacking a common agreement on a decision.

Reflection on political transparency: Online participation requires transparency for those who are invited to participate concerning:

- relevance and reasoning of the online participation process for policy-making;
- relevance and reasoning of the use of participants' online input (e.g. online contributions in debates or consultations);
- Relevance and reasoning of the results of online deliberative processes.

Awareness of access barriers: Access to the political stage is still exclusive. Generally, participation in political decision-forming and -making processes depends on connections to relevant networks. Besides, online participation necessitates certain media literacy skills which may be an additional participation barrier. However, policy makers have to become aware that lay people (such as doctors, nurses, teachers, white and blue collar workers and so forth) have a lot of knowledge which is useful and valuable for policy-making processes. New media offer the option to collect and analyse such societal potentials. However, organisational and technical access barriers have to be reduced. The political public sphere has to be extended by:

- firstly, acknowledging that citizens are capable and willing to provide political input,
- secondly, reducing hierarchical barriers on the political and administrative level,
- thirdly, creating public online terminals to involve those who do not have access to ICTs.

Reflection on appropriate use of new media for political participation: Various participation modes (from aggregative to deliberative) require different tools according to the policy-making circle, i.e. policy-makers have to decide at first if they want to use ICTs for problem definition or decision-making processes. This determines if new media are used for online deliberation or online voting. Certainly, an "ideal" participation process would involve both participation options: In such process online deliberation (e.g. online debates or online discussions) would be accompanied by (offline) face-to-face discussions between citizens, NGOs, entrepreneurs and experts. Consequently, all involved actors would be enabled to cast their preferences online. Moreover, policy-makers should be aware that given different governmental layers in society (supra-national, national, regional, local), online participation options have to be selected carefully.

Reflection on political commitment and trust: In order to enhance political participation, the moral duty to use results of online deliberation processes has to be ensured. Or, to put it in other words, there has to be a strong political will to consider citizens' inputs in policy-making processes. Otherwise, (online and offline) participation remains an illusion and fosters demotivation and political apathy. In this context, respect is core to participative processes and includes respect in terms of the duration of a deliberative process and the outcome. There has to be an agreement on time, thematic focus and expectations.

To sum up, we hold that online participation does not and cannot replace other techniques of policy-making but involves the potential to enhance them and may increase the quality of a policy-making process provided, there is access to policy-making processes, citizens have the necessary media literacy skills, the participation processes are transparent and political representatives are committed to respect the outcome of online deliberation processes.

10 Conclusions

The problem background of our research was informed by discussions in scientific literature on the democratic deficit on the EU level. Scholars from various fields have analysed the citizens' alienation from political systems in general, and the institutions of the EU in particular. Accordingly, citizens' participation options are mainly restricted to time and location bound acts of voting. There is a lack of "real" deliberation involving non-political and societal elites into decision-forming and -making processes. "Needs-based" policy-making as an adequate answer to counteract political apathy and as a central term of *Good Governance* strategies requires interactive communication as provided by new media. The European Commission decided to use ICTs for "interactive policy making" (IPM) purposes in order to improve the relationships between the EU institutions and European peoples and to increase input legitimacy of EU policies. IPM is part of the European Commission assumptions on *Good Governance* and provides the online platform *Your Voice in Europe*. Two major sections relevant for political engagement structure the Commission's portal. *Online debates* and *online consultations*. While the former includes debates on the "Future of Europe", the latter enables various target groups (such as NGOs, public interest groups and private businesses) several options to contribute to new EU policies but also to give feedback or lodge complaints on the draft of existing policies.

The main question guiding the whole research process of this project asked about the extent to which the *Your Voice in Europe* platform enables civic deliberation. The hypothesis behind relates to the assumption that ICTs enable democratic participation since they supposedly create interactive communication networks among citizens, NGOs, businesses and policy-makers. Moreover, ICTs support the emergence of interest groups and networks which are integral components of pluralist societies. Thus, the Internet appears to provide a space which partly meets the conditions related to the concept of the political public sphere. This mainly refers to the Internet's major characteristics such as its global scope and the provision of (relatively) unconstrained information and communication flows. Against the background of these assumptions, ICTs appear to set an "ideal" frame for deliberative communication. We defined deliberation as reflection or thinking through an issue. Basically, deliberative discussions are non-coercive communication processes which are open to different views. During the whole process of deliberation, people discuss and validate each other's points of view. The major element of civic deliberation is political talk involving "good" cognitive reasons. Rational-critical discourses are core to deliberation, though, other discourse forms such as humour, emotion or rhetoric might be part of deliberative discussions.

Our empirical assessments on *online debates* and *online consultations* were guided by the overall research question and the following four hypotheses based on Coleman's assumptions on online participation:

- Most *online discussion* is uninformed and of poor quality.
- *Online consultations* provide a space for inclusive public deliberation.
- *Online consultations* generate and connect networks of interest or practice.
- *Online interaction* between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them.

The empirical investigations on *online debates* and *online consultations* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform revealed the following findings:

Content analysis on Online debates

This assessment attempted to analyse the deliberative potential of online discussions and discussed the discourse quality and interaction patters. The theoretical background was provided by reflections on deliberation as discussed at the beginning of this report. *Interactivity* and *rational-critical discourse* represented the core categories of a content analysis which was based upon a stratified random sample of about 600 discussion postings composed by 225 persons. The analysis showed that there was a relatively high degree of interaction among posters. Indeed, people answered each others questions respectively commented on the others statements. However, it is important to consider that it was a relatively small group of discussants (25 persons) that dominated the discourse on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform. Thus, we conclude that the talkboard is not adequate to enable mass deliberation, but it enables small groups of people to exchange each other's views. In this sense, we rather recommend John Keane's assumptions about micro-public spheres which provide space for small communities to assemble. The agenda on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard was set by its participants. This shows that new technologies indeed involve the potential to enhance civic self-determination. However, the freedom to discuss and debate always depends on the organisational and political framework of the respective platform. Thus, it is important to mention that *Your Voice in Europe* is a moderated talkboard which is framed by certain discussion rules. The results of this content analysis exclusively refer to those postings that have been put on the talkboard. Unfortunately, there are no figures or comments available concerning the number of messages that were banned from the talkboard. Concerning, the second major content category within this analysis, rationality, it can be stated that a high number of messages (about 66 %) contained rational arguments. Posters mainly provided "balanced" arguments which indicate that discussants on the talkboard had a strong interest in discussing seriously and not in flaming. We conclude that despite "uncivil interaction" on the Internet, there is also rational discussion taking place which is proved by the messages on the *Your Voice in Europe* talkboard. So, do the *online debates* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform involve civic deliberation? With regard to the *first hypothesis* we state that *online discussions on the Your Voice in Europe platform involve well-elaborated interaction patterns and a relatively high discourse quality which indicates vivid deliberative communication processes*. Thus, we would further argue that the debates widely fulfil the requirements for civic deliberation since the talkboard enables interaction among discussants: Political ideas and opinions can be articulated, exchanged and negotiated.

The question on the impact of the online debates on the policy-making remains open, though, since it is unclear how the Commission will use these contributions for its policy-making. An IPM Communiqué from October 2001 merely informs that

> "'Your Voice in Europe' also gives access to 'Futurum', an on-line debate on the future of Europe. The ideas collected will contribute to proposals to update the EU Treaties at the Inter-Governmental Conference planned for 2004."[50]

[50] See Press Release "Interactive Policy Making: Commission launches 'Your Voice in Europe'" from 22 October 2001, http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/01/1459&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en, accessed 2 September 2004.

Qualitative expert interviews on online consultations

Based on the analysis of expert interviews, *online consultations* positively support the exchange of opinions between different EU governmental levels and European intermediary organisations (i.e. those affected by public policies). *Online consultations* allow a quick analysis of participants' estimations regarding a certain policy. Moreover, they are supposed to be more effective in terms of data collection and cheaper than traditional methods of consultation. However, *online consultations* do not replace classical techniques of policy-making (such as lobbying activities). Critical remarks mainly concern aspects of the democratic quality of the process since there is no legal binding to use consultation results, but "only" a moral duty to consider the output of consultation processes. Thus, the use of consultation results strongly depends on the political will of the responsible EU unit. Access to consultations highly depends on knowledge about the thematic focus of the consultation and a kind of belonging to relevant expert networks. This said, *online consultations* do not open a debate on policy-making for the public. Furthermore, *online consultations* mainly lack transparency with regard to the evaluation of consultation results and the selection of the invited parties to participate in *online consultations*.

If we link the results gained in the expert interviews on *online consultations* to the formerly stated hypotheses, we can conclude that:

- *Online consultations* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform do not provide a space for inclusive public deliberation, since access depends on being already involved in the thematic issue and in relevant interest networks in order to be invited to participate. Furthermore, interviewed experts criticise that there is not enough promotion on (ongoing and intended) *online consultations*. Finally, *online consultations* are more relevant for public bodies, NGOs and other institutional players than for the single citizen.
- *Online consultations* can generate and connect networks of interest or practice, if those taking part are regularly invited for (offline) expert focus groups or panel discussions.
- *Online interaction* between representatives and represented leads to greater trust between them. This presupposes that the responsible unit puts more light on the results of a consultation though:
  - Who took part in the consultation process?
  - What were the selection criteria for inviting parties?
  - Which recommendations were provided by the contributors?
  - Which methodological approach was used for the interpretation of the results and what is the policy-outcome?

Finally, it is of utmost importance to consider that in both cases, *online debates* and *online consultations*, the deliberative quality is not established by the technology per se but derives from the social and political culture within which new media operates. Thus, the Internet in general and the *Your Voice in Europe* platform in particular can only be the means to contribute to more deliberative and democratic societies.

The results of the empirical analyses of the *online debates* and *online consultations* on the *Your Voice in Europe* platform were also useful starting points for the assessment of future digital democracy in Austria within a scenario workshop with Austrian experts active in the field of online participation. The intense discussions on future digital democracy models in Austria among the 11 experts resulted in the development of a "toolkit" involving recommendations for policy-makers who intend to use new media for decision-forming and/or -making processes. Accordingly, we identified five major points of reflec-

tion that should be considered by policy-makers when new media are applied for online participation:

- *Reflection on political motivation*
- *Reflection on political transparency*
- *Awareness of access barriers*
- *Reflection on appropriate use of new media for political participation*
- *Reflection on political commitment and trust.*

To sum up, this project showed that the *Your Voice in Europe* platform does involve the potential to enable civic deliberation with regard to the *online debates*. However, the platform mainly attracts very skilled discussants and it is questionable if it is also a suitable participation platform for "non-mainstream issues" related to gender or societal minorities. It furthermore turned out that the *online consultations* are very "exclusive" participation instruments. However, those who have the necessary thematic knowledge and belong to particular networks of interest benefit from online consultations since they support the creation of various networks. Once more this assessment also showed that political commitment is a premise for enhanced (online and offline) participation. If participants' contributions are not taken seriously, online participation platforms will not substantially contribute to revive democratic processes and relationships.

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Appendices

A1 Project Management and Administration

NODE-Project meetings/visits (internal)

Title	Data and Place	Objectives
Kick off meeting (Roman Winkler and Ulrike Kozeluh)	July 1, 2003, Vienna	In depth meeting covering organisational matters and content issues
Research Seminar with Prof. Michaela Strasser (Project Partner, Univ. of Salzburg)	August 11, 2003, Salzburg	Quality assurance concerning theory report (WP 2)
ITA Seminar	October 7, 2003 and September 15, 2004, Vienna	Project Presentation
Research Seminar with Prof. Stephen Coleman (Project Partner, Oxford Internet Institute)	November 5, 2003, Oxford, UK	Quality assurance concerning theory report (WP 2)
Project meeting with NODE team dealing with "Zur politischen Rolle und Bedeutung von ATTAC im Kontext der Europäischen Zivilgesellschaft" (Prof. Alan Scott)	March 22, 2004, Vienna	Presentation of NODE projects; searching for overlaps and synergies for workshops, publications and intended project proposals within further NODE calls.
Project meeting with NODE team dealing with "How Democratic is E-Government? Public Knowledge Management and Governmentality in Europe" (Dr. Fritz Betz)	March 26-27, 2004, Vienna	Presentation of NODE projects; searching for overlaps and synergies for workshops, publications and intended project proposals within further NODE calls.

Conferences and/or workshops attended/organised

Title	Data and Place	Title of Presentation
Informatik Tagung 2003, Workshop: "e-Democracy"	October 2, 2003, Frankfurt a. Main	Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der Europäischen Union
ICA/IAMCR Conference: "Digital Dynamics"	November 7, 2003, Loughborough, UK	The changing role of electronic deliberation
"AGORA" Demokratie-forschung	November 10, 2003, Vienna	Project Presentation
Lecture at the Donau Universität Krems, MSc Programme "eGovernment" (Roman Winkler)	April 22, 2004, Krems, Austria	Elektronische Demokratie in Theorie und Entwicklung
AGORA-Demokratieforschung – Roundtable (Ulrike Kozeluh)	March 1; April 19; May 17; June 14, 2004; September 6; October 11; November 29 2004 and January 11, 2005, Vienna	Ongoing Presentation and Discussion on NODE project
"Connex Network" Kick-off conference on "Connecting Excellence on European Governance" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	September 10-12, 2004, Mannheim	Presentation of NODE project results within Research Group 4: "EU-Society Relations and the Formation of a Multi-Intermediary Political Space"

Title	Data and Place	Title of Presentation
Meeting, 6th Framework Programme, IST Project, "Intelcities" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	October 20-22, 2003, Vilnius, Lithuania	Presentation of NODE project results within Workpackage 5: "Debating E-Democracy as a tool for sustainable e-cities regeneration."
10. Kommunikations-wissenschaftliche Tage "Medialer Wandel und Europäische Öffentlichkeit" (Roman Winkler and Günther Brandstetter)	November 12, 2004, Vienna	Presentation on "Europäisierung von Öffentlichkeit durch Online Debatten"
NTA1 Konferenz "Technik in einer fragilen Welt" (Roman Winkler)	November 25-26, 2004, Berlin	Presentation on "Neue Medien als demokratiefördernde Plattformen: Online Deliberation auf dem Prüfstand"
Meeting, 6th Framework Programme, IST Project, "Intelcities" (Ulrike Kozeluh)	December 14-15, 2004, Valencia	Presentation of an E-democracy ontology
Scenario Workshop "e-Demokratie in Österreich" (Roman Winkler and Ulrike Kozeluh in co-operation with PLANSINN)	December 10, 2004, Vienna	NODE Scenario Workshop with 11 invited experts from academia, public chambers and politics.

Publications

Date and Type	Details
September 2003, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, Elektronische Demokratie: Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der EU, 2003, S. 6-7.
2003, book article	Winkler, Roman, Aichholzer, Georg, 2003, Elektronische Demokratie: Online Debatten und Konsultationen in der Europäischen Union. In: Dittrich, K. et al. (Hg.) Informatik 2003. Innovative Informatikanwendungen. Band 2. Bonn: Köllen, S. 256-260.
2003, book article	Winkler, Roman, 2003, E-Democracy: Potentials and Constraints of Online Participation in the Political Public Sphere. In: Prosser, A., Krimmer, R. (Hg.) E-Democracy: Technologie, Recht und Politik, Wien: OCG, S. 5-14.
September 2004, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, Wer redet mit? Diskursqualität in EU Online Debatten, 2004, S. 3-4.
December 2004, article in ITA-Newsletter	Winkler, Roman, EU Online Konsultationen. Erfahrungen, Erfolgsfaktoren und Hemmnisse, 2004, S. 3.
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman/Kozeluh, Ulrike, Zivilgesellschaft Online: Anspruch und Umsetzung deliberativer Beteiligung am Beispiel der EU Diskussionsplattform Your Voice in Europe. In: Knodt, Michèle, und Barbara Finke (Hrsg.): Europäische Zivilgesellschaft. Konzepte, Akteure, Strategien. Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2005. (Working Title)
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Kozeluh, Ulrike, E-Democracy: A Theoretical Background for Online-Participation. Encyclopedia of Developing Regional Communities with Information and Communication Technology. Information Science Publishing, Australia
Forthcoming: Summer 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman/Kozeluh, Ulrike/Brandstetter, Günther: Europäisierung von Öffentlichkeit durch Online Debatten und Online Konsultationen. In: Langenbucher, W., Latzer, M. (Hg.), Medialer Wandel und Europäische Öffentlichkeit, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
Forthcoming: Spring 2005, book article	Winkler, Roman: Neue Medien als demokratiefördernde Plattformen: Online Deliberation auf dem Prüfstand. In: NTA1 Konferenzband "Technik in einer fragilen Welt."

Press coverage

Date and Type	Details
30 July 2004, radio report Ö1 "Wissen Aktuell"	Title: Bürgerbeteiligung mittels Internet
18 October 2004, media report in Der Standard	Title: Am Boden der Tatsachen bleiben: Was E-Democracy wirklich kann
13 December 2004, media report in Der Standard	Titel: Ein kleiner Zirkel von Experten
February 2005 (to be planned), media report in Der Standard	Report on results on "NODE" Scenario Workshop "e-Demokratie in Österreich"

A2 Coding book for Content Analysis on Online Debates

Descriptive data

Variable 1 – Discussion topic

Variable 2 – Date

Variable 3 – Time

Variable 4 – (Nick)Name of the poster

Analytical data

Interactivity

Variable 5 – Message format (MFORM):

Value 1: Reply (mainly) to 1 precedent message

Value 2: Reply (mainly) to more than 1 precedent message

Value 3: Seed (mainly)

Value 4: Non applicable

Variable 6 – Message purpose (MPURP):

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Statement in terms of information provision	The poster expresses his/her statements but there are *no* references to first person pronouns such as "I, me, my, mine". Note: to code 1, the information does not have to be accurate. It can be information that only the poster considers to be valid (e.g. "… when they get privatised, they won't be laughing …").	To analyse messages in terms of whether they involve solely the provision of information;
2. Opinion	The message states a clear opinion by the author. To be an opinion, the statement must indicate first person, e.g. "I think …" or "I hold that Italy's position on that is …". If first person is not indicated then it is not coded as 2.	To analyse messages in terms of whether they are mainly based on individual perceptions;
3. "Pure" information seeking	A message is coded as 3 if it includes any evidence of information-seeking behaviour. A message may have included a long diatribe on a particular political issue, but if there was at least one sentence or instance of inquiry, then it is labelled as 3 rather than 1.	To make assumptions about the posters "information need";
4. "Direct" interaction	A message is coded as 4 if it includes any evidence of "direct" engagement with other posters. The poster's statement may include questions such as "What do you think?" or "What's your opinion on that?" or the like.	To make assumptions about the posters interest in reciprocal interaction;
5. Own experience	A message is coded as 5 if it rather involves the poster's personal experiences than arguments upon which other talk board participants can deliberate.	To filter messages that are mostly based on personal "stories";
6. Other	A message is coded as 6 if the statement clearly deviates from the overall thread or If the statement does not contribute to the discussion because it is a mere insult etc.	---

Note: *If a poster uses pronouns like I, me, my, mine and also raises a question then the posting is coded as 3 or 4 since it is the major intention of this category to measure interactivity among the posters.*

Variable 7 – Level of agreement (AGREE):

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Agreement	A message in which the poster clearly states his/her *agreement* with one or more precedent message(s).	The level of agreement delivers information about the extent to which posters are interested in interaction. The expression of "agreement" or "disagreement" is a direct reaction to precedent postings and indicates that posters have followed the discussion on the talk board. However, this may also apply for "neutral" messages.
2. Disagreement	A message in which the poster clearly states his/her *disagreement* with one or more precedent message(s).	
3. Neutral	A message in which the poster does not clearly state his/her agreement or disagreement.	
4. No indication	If a message is the first message of a batch or a thread. If a message does not allow the assessment of the level of agreement (e.g. a message only refers to a web site or only contains a quote etc.)	

Rationality

Variable 8 – Facts used in the statement (FACTS):

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes 2. No	Facts involve for example historical events, reasonable figures (i.e. figures that seem to derive from "reliable sources" such as public bodies like ministries or public institutions like the media) and so forth.	The use of facts might be an essential part of a rational argument.

Variable 9 – Rational argument used in the statement (RATIO):

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes	The poster provides reasons to validate the truth of assertions. These reasons are open for criticism and provide the groundwork for further discussions. *Reasons do not necessarily involve facts.* Rational argumentation rather enables third persons to reconstruct the argumentation thread in the message (*intersubjectivity*).	Rationality is supposed to be an integral part of a deliberative debate. This variable attempts to find out whether posters use their reason to underpin their statements.
2. No	The poster *does not* provide reasons to validate the truth of assertions.	
3. Non applicable	The "design" of the message does not allow the assessment of the poster's use of rationality (e.g. posting is a mere quote, a question or message mainly contains abusive language etc.).	

Variable 10 – "Balance" of arguments (BALANCE)

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Very well-balanced/ founded	The poster puts forward several arguments to underpin his/her statement. The posting may also involve "counter-arguments" (e.g. "On the one hand we have to consider that …; on the other hand there is no doubt that …" or "Although I disagree on … I admit that …" etc.). The use of arguments and counter-arguments can be defined as a "*pluralist view*" which indicates that the message is very well balanced.	The "balance" of arguments can be seen as additional information concerning rational argumentation. While variable 9 measures whether the poster has used rational arguments in his/her statement, variable 10 informs more profoundly about the "balance" of arguments. This provides more precise information about how posters discuss and deliberate on the talk board.
2. Moderately balanced/ founded	The poster mainly puts forward one argument in order to underpin his/her statement. The argument provides a base for deliberative discussion. Moderately balanced arguments do not involve a "pluralist view".	
3. Ill-balanced/ not founded	The poster's arguments do not provide a base for deliberative discussion. Answer in variable 9 was NO (2).	
4. Non applicable	The "design" of the message does not allow the assessment the poster's use of wall-balanced arguments (e.g. posting is a mere quote, a question or message mainly contains abusive language etc.). Answer in variable 9 was non applicable (3).	

Variable 11 – Poster shows awareness of political and/or socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances (AWARE)

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes	The poster refers to political, economic and/or cultural events in society (such as Parliamentarian debates), democratic institutions, official documents (e.g. memoranda, directives, laws etc.), intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies (e.g. WTO, Greenpeace etc.). The poster shows implicitly awareness of political and/or socio-economic circumstances by using keywords such as "political responsibility", "the power of democratic vote" etc.	The awareness of political and socio-economic institutions, processes and circumstances is considered to be important for the formulation of rational argumentation. This variable attempts to find out whether posters show such awareness to underpin their statements.
2. No	The poster does not refer to political, economic and/or cultural events in society (such as Parliamentarian debates), EU or national institutions, official documents (e.g. memoranda, directives, laws etc.), intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies (e.g. WTO, Attac etc.). The poster does not show implicitly awareness as defined above.	
3. Non applicable	The "design" of the message does not allow the assessment of the poster's awareness of political and/or socio-economic processes (e.g. posting is a mere quote, a question or message mainly contains abusive language etc.).	

Variable 12 – Emotional tone in the message (EMOTION)

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes	The message contains a very "personal" touch either in a positive ("Thank you for your great comment! You're the best!) or negative sense (abusive language, swearing, insults, obscene words, and hostile comments).	Traditional concepts on deliberative discussion identify rational argumentation as the decisive component of rational-critical debate (see Habermas' conceptions on the use of public reason). More tolerant positions also "allow" emotion or humour in deliberative debates (see Dryzek). This variable attempts to find out whether there are emotional aspects in the postings and if yes, how they are related to variable 9 (rational argumentation).
2. No (neutral)	The message *does not* contain a personal touch.	

Variable 13 – Ironic tone in the message (IRONIC)

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes	The message contains ironic comments.	This variable attempts to find out whether there are ironic aspects in the postings.
2. No (neutral)	The message *does not* contain ironic comments.	

Variable 14 – Gender and equality aspects (GENDER)

Value	Description	Purpose
1. Yes	The posting indicates gender sensitive aspects (e.g. women rights, claims, etc. or those demands of other supposedly marginalised groups in Europe)	Internet talk boards are perceived to provide space for deliberative debates among people whose interests have been hitherto widely excluded from political debates. This variable intends to gauge how far the EU's platform is used to discuss gender sensitive issues.
2. No (neutral)	The posting *does not* give any indication of gender sensitive aspects	

Coding frame

Descriptive data					INTERACTIVITY			RATIONALITY						GENDER
#	Topic (V1)	Date (V2)	Time (V3)	Name (V4)	MFORM (V5)	MPURP (V6)	AGREE (V7)	FACTS (V8)	RATIO (V9)	BALANCE (V10)	AWARE (V11)	EMOTION (V12)	IRONIC (V13)	SENSITIVE (V14)
1														
2														
3														
4														
5														
6														
7														
8														
9														
10														
11														
12														
13														
14														
15														

A3 Expert Interview Guide for Online Consultations

Interviewee:_____

Date and Location:_____

Purpose

- Extent of impact of contributions in "Your Voice" consultations on the EU policy making
- Bottlenecks and challenges for transferring results of consultations to EU policies.

Introduction

- Explaining the thematic background of interview, content of project, embedding within the framework of the research programme (NODE), the personal position within the project.
- Asking for permission to record the interview.

"Your Voice" interactive participation platform – social, technical and political aspects

- What happened before?
  Were you involved in any "offline-consultations"?
- Do you know the policy framework of Your Voice?
  Other relevant documents?
- Driving forces (individuals, organisations, institutions) behind?
- Critics at time of implementation and now?
- How far do online consultations address "hot issues" which supposedly play an important role for the EU's policy making?
- Generally, what could/should be improved?
- How do you assess the design of the online consultation site in terms of "usability"?
- What are the main differences between online and offline consultations?
  What are the advantages/disadvantages of online consultations?
- How far have online consultations influenced your personal work?
  What was/is the "added-value" of online consultations?

The consultation process

- Do you have a consultation process in mind?
- Are there guidelines the consultation process has to follow?
- How to get information about an opening consultation process?
  (active/passive?)
- Selection criteria for interested parties to take part in consultations?
  - Who decides? Which process?
  - Which organisations are mainly taking part?
  - What about citizens without an organisational background?

- Selection of topics opened for a consultation process?
  - What about gender/marginalized group topics?
  - Who decides? Which process?
  - Level of contributions: rationality in contributions, relevance for the policy topic?
  - What is the average timeframe for consultations?
  - What are your experiences with feedback mechanisms? Have you got any feedback from the consultation participants?
  - Storage of contributions?

Impact on policy making

- At which point of the policy making process do you (or the commission) decide to open a consultation?
  - Who decides? Which process?
  - Who decides that a consultation is open for the public or exclusively for stakeholders?
- Who selects relevant contributions/comments?
  - How would you define "relevant"?
- Process of summarising the contributions: How is it structured?
  - Which criteria do you use for summing up contributions?
  - Is there an interpretation process?
  - Who is responsible?
  - What happens with the results?
- During and/or after the consultation process:
  - Is there feedback or response given to the contributing organisations?
- What is the binding structure (if it is non-legally, is it morally?) of using the contributions for policy drafts?
- Where do summaries/contributions go to in case they are not used for policy drafts?
- Who decides which contributions are used for plenary sessions?
  - Do you also invite contributing parties/individuals to the plenary/ working sessions?
- Who else uses summaries/contributions?
  - Is the public actively informed about results after a closing date?

Summary

- "Citizens play an active role in the policy making process" front page of *Your Voice in Europe*
  - What is your estimation?
- Bottlenecks, ranking of problems (social, technical, political)
  - What are your propositions for solutions?
- Critical factors for a successful usage of online consultation possibilities? (political, legal, cultural, economic cost factors?)
  - How would you define a "successful" online consultation?

Thank you very much for your co-operation!