

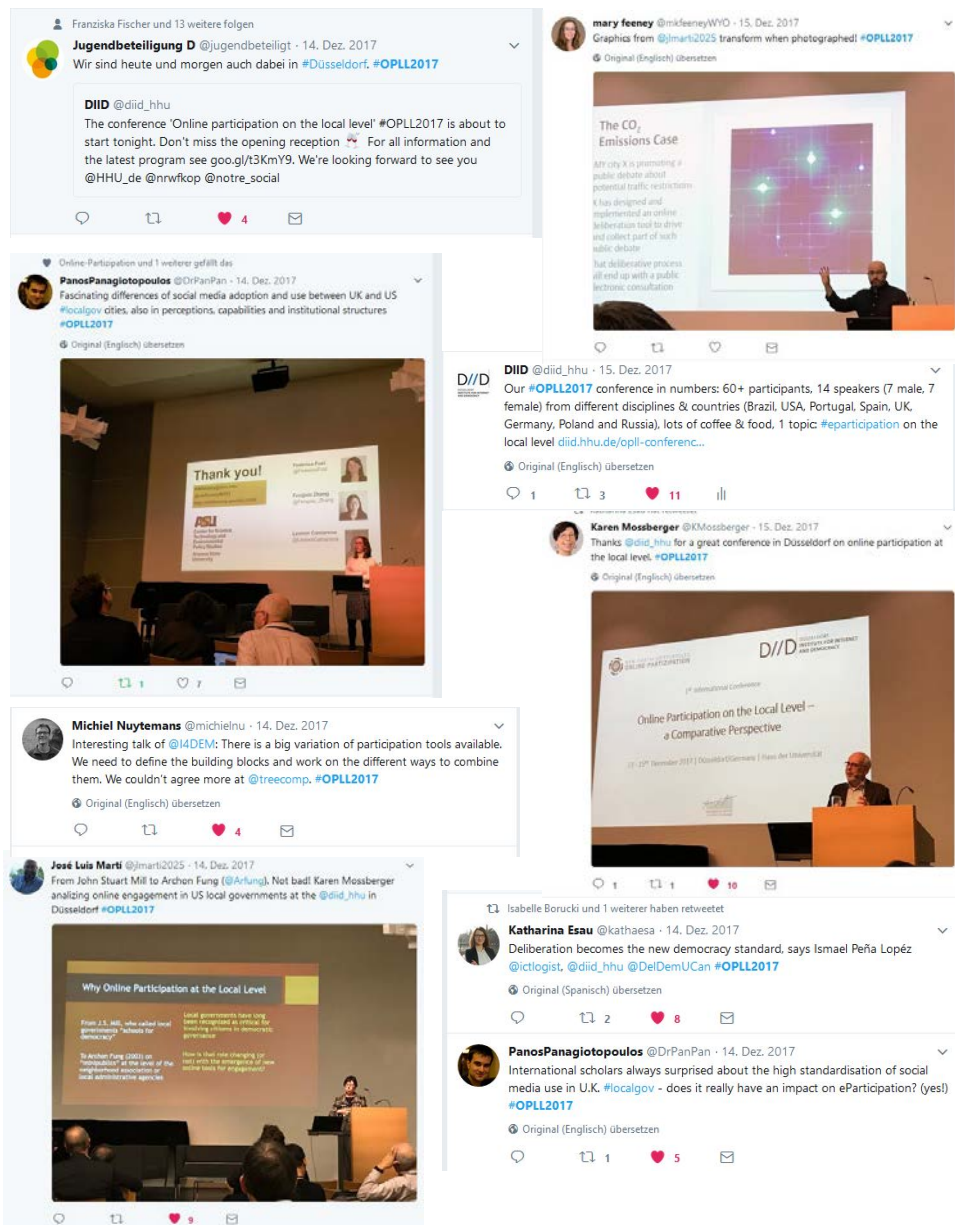


DÜSSELDORF
INSTITUTE FOR INTERNET
AND DEMOCRACY

Online Participation on the Local Level – A Comparative Perspective

1st International Conference | 13th – 15th December 2017 | University of Düsseldorf

Conference Documentation



The first international conference “*Online participation on the local level – a comparative perspective*” took place from 13th to 15th December 2017 in Düsseldorf/Germany at the Haus der Universität. The conference was jointly organized by the [Düsseldorf Institute for Internet and Democracy](#) (DIID) and the [NRW Fortschrittskolleg Online Participation](#) both located at the University of Düsseldorf.



The conference brought together an international group of researchers from different disciplines to provide a variety of perspectives on local online participation. About 70 participants from Brazil, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Russia, Tunisia and the United States attended 14 talks presented by seven female and seven male speakers on the topic of local online participation. The program included several case studies from different countries as well as empirical studies on actors in the field of online participation and critical reflections on e-participation research in general.



The main aim of the conference was to investigate the role of digital technologies in political participation with a focus on the local level, ranging from small neighborhoods to large municipalities. This encompasses both top-down as well as bottom-up e-participation initiatives (i.e. invited as well as invented spaces). Questions of interest included, but were not limited to:

- How do the results of online participation compare with the outcomes of classic forms of participation?
- How to combine online and offline forms of participation?
- What effects are specific to particular participation formats and how do they compare to each other?
- How do institutions and their members (need to) change when adapting to digital forms of participation?
- How does the context of a particular country shape the role of local e-participation?



The conference started with a public event on Wednesday (5pm to 8pm) and was followed by two days of talks by invited speakers and discussions within six panels. Each 90 minutes-panel provided plenty of time for two presentations and extensive discussion. The 20-25 minutes' talks were followed by a 20 minutes' discussion. Coffee breaks between the panels and the conference dinner which took place Thursday night provided space for further discussion and networking between participants.



In order to provide a comprehensive documentation of the conference we combined the presentations and its abstracts in this publication. In addition to that we also link to video clips of the talks.

Panel 1: Online Participation – stock taking

Paolo Spada | University of Coimbra (Portugal)
The Untapped Potential of Participatory Systems

Participatory systems that combine multiple engagement processes have moved from being an isolated case in the Brazilian city of Canoas and the state of Rio Grande do Sul to a global trend. Many European cities in the last two years have begun to build prototype participatory systems in the form of web containers that describe the variety of participatory processes implemented by the city and available to citizens. To date, these participatory systems are still not fully developed and are not much more than a directory of participatory processes. However, some experiments have shown the great potential of these systems to allow for new and innovative engagement strategies coupled with advanced monitoring and research capabilities. In this presentation I will overview the emerging body of knowledge on participatory systems and I will highlight some of the untapped potential of participatory systems, together with the risk that these new participatory technologies face. The presentation will leverage a vast array of case studies and practical examples from my own work in Brazil, UK, US, Canada, and Europe and will use research conducted over the course of the EMPATIA project in collaboration with the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy (IODP) and the Participedia Project.



Panos Panagiotopoulos | Queen Mary University of London (UK)

eParticipation research: from government platforms to new forms of interaction. A Review



Originally focusing on formal engagement on government platforms, eParticipation research now includes many new types of digital interactions such as social media and crowdsourcing applications. The presentation will review main developments based on accumulated experiences from the 9 years of the eParticipation track, IFIP 8.5 International Conference on eGovernment ([Talk Video](#)).

Panel 2: Case Studies I

Ismael Peña-López | Open University of Catalonia (Spain)

decidim.barcelona, from e-participation to the devolution of sovereignty

In September 2015, Madrid – the capital of Spain – initiated a participatory democracy project, Decide Madrid (Madrid decides), to enable participatory strategic planning for the municipality. Less than half a year after, in February 2016, Barcelona – the second largest city in Spain and capital of Catalonia – issued their own participatory democracy project: decidim.barcelona (Barcelona we decide). Both cities use the same free software platform as a base, and are guided by the same political vision. The Barcelona model is based on ubiquitous deliberation, openness, absolute transparency and accountability and pervasive participation to increase quantity and quality of proposals. In many ways, the model is the institutionalized version of the technopolitics ethos that emerged from the 15M Spanish Indignados Movement, was embedded in the political parties that came after them and ended up entering the governments of many Spanish municipalities. The initiative has implied important shifts in meaning, in legitimacy and in power and has a strong potential of becoming the needed bridge between new citizen movements and new ways of doing politics. It can also achieve an interesting stage if its evolution in several municipalities – autonomous but somewhat synchronized by common ethics and technology – leads to a network of local governments that can end up challenging the powers of the state ([Talk Video](#)).

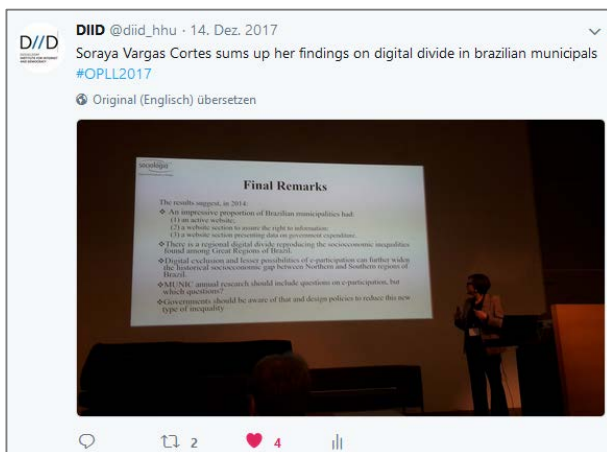


Soraya Vargas Cortes | Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)

Enabling e-participation in municipal governments in Brazil: the digital divide in a highly unequal Federation

One of the characteristics of the current crisis of liberal democracies is the challenge the fragmented civil society placed before traditional forms of participation, while many regard that organizations, such as political parties or trade unions, do not represent their views and interests. Moreover, there are new forms of civil society mobilization and individual active participation through social media. Governments, in Brazil and elsewhere, have developed new mechanisms to reach collective actors and individuals taken advantage of the information technology and computer services (ITCS) there

available. In Brazil, a federation with three levels of government, there is a growing interest in the subject of 'e-participation'. However, most studies address federal and state level of government even considering that, since the 1990s, municipal administration has grown in importance, in terms of revenue, spending and functions. Considering Brazilian federation has striking regional inequalities, the paper analyses if the regional inequalities persist in the conditions that municipal governments offer to e-participation. The main source of data is available in the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE) under the annualized database Research on Basic Municipal Information (Pesquisa de Informações Básicas Municipais – MUNIC) ([Talk Video](#)).



Panel 3: Case Studies 2

Jon Mellon | University of Oxford / World Bank
Digital Citizen Engagement by the World Bank

Citizens are increasingly being offered the opportunity to participate in their government online. But who participates when digital participation is offered and who benefits from the outcomes of the process? We argue that the design of the platform constitutes a political institution which structures the way in which citizen inputs translate into policy outputs. We analyze three examples of digital citizen participation which offer different ways for citizens to interact with their local governments. First, we analyze participatory budgeting in both Brazilian municipalities and Paris both of which offer an online and offline component. We find that while the online process brings in a younger and more economically advantaged electorate, the policy outcomes do not seem to change compared with offline voting. This may be because the proposal selection tends to limit the extent to which different options differentially benefit groups in society. Second, we analyze the Fix My Street platform in the United Kingdom, which allows citizens to report local problems such as potholes. We find that the platform overrepresents economically advantaged and older citizens. These input inequalities map directly onto output inequalities as local governments largely deal with the reports without attempting to account for the input inequalities. Finally, we consider the change.org platform, which has been used to pressure decision makers at all levels. We find that the inequalities in terms of petition creation do not translate into inequalities in the outcomes because the signers largely hold the power in the system. Additionally, we find petitions targeted at local actors are more successful, probably because of the lower level of mobilization required to effect change and the greater likelihood that a single decision maker will have sole power to make the requested change ([Talk Video](#)).



Julia Drozdova | Volgograd Academy of Public Administration (Russia)
E-government potential in management of migration risks.*

Migration risks are an inevitable consequence of current social processes in Russia (uneven economic development, armed conflicts, and social transformations); these risks are constantly reproduced in conditions of social instability and inequality. The author considers migration risks as a measure of uncertainty and possible positive / negative after-effects that occur due to migration and are affected by the quality of their management and the technologies employed including information and communication technology that ensure accumulation of information, analytical effort and planning, organization of interaction between the population and the authorities. E-government is a necessary form of organizing the activity of government bodies including those regulating the migration processes. The author working within the framework of RFBR № 16-13-34011 grant Migration Risks in a Multiethnic Region: sociological and managerial analysis developed a pattern for organizing a management of migration risks which can be only implemented under an e-government. Considering the specifics of running migration processes, the structure of its organization is a multistage process including five steps: defining the goal, risk identification, data acquisition, counseling, monitoring and controlling the implementation of adaptation and integration programs that minimize the migration risks and imply electronic participation, a higher order of government / society interaction under e-government. In the author's opinion, e-government should underlie the management of social risks since it has the required resources and opportunities. Identification of migration risks, establishing a feedback with the population, electronic participation of citizens in the development of practical guidelines on the management and minimization of the risks is an important issue within the framework of ensuring all-nation and regional security, creating a uniform social medium in the multiethnic space of Russian regions and the world ([Talk Video](#)).

* This research is funded by the RFBR (Russian Foundation for Basic Research).

Panel 4: Actors in the Field of Online Participation

Mary Feeney / Arizona State University (USA)

What does e-participation mean for managers in small to medium sized cities? US trends & research challenges



Since 2000, our team at the Center for Science, Technology and Environmental Policy Studies at ASU has been collecting data on 500 small and medium sized U.S. cities to understand the adoption and management of technology in local government. Drawing from four surveys (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016), website content data (2010 & 2014), and Twitter data (2017), I present some technology adoption trends in small to medium sized US cities and managerial responses to those efforts. These data provide insights into the organizational, technological, and socio-technical factors that shape local government online participation efforts in the American context. I then outline the challenges facing managers who seek to engage internal and external stakeholders via online mechanisms – including financial limitations, technical capacity, legal issues, and perceptual barriers – and discuss next steps for advancing research in this area ([Talk Video](#)).

Karen Mossberger / Arizona State University (USA)

Emerging Platforms for Online Engagement in US Local Governments – Who is innovating and how?

While the use of social media is widespread in local government, more structured forms of online participation are also beginning to appear at the local level, using a variety of commercial platforms that have become available in recent years. Examples include Peak Democracy's cloud-based platform for online town hall meetings, MindMixer's community engagement platform, Budget Allocator's participatory budgeting software, and Balancing Act's online budget simulator designed to encourage citizen participation. A recent survey of cities and counties in the US revealed that local governments who use such tools are still very much in the minority, as only 17% of respondents reported using these platforms. Still, such tools are becoming more prevalent, compared with earlier studies of online engagement in larger (and generally more innovative) local governments; and a closer look may help to predict how such platforms will affect citizen engagement in the future. Using a 2016 national survey of Innovations and Emerging Practices in local government, we explore the use of online engagement platforms, in comparison with social media and with a number of offline forms of engagement. What characteristics predict use of such platforms, in terms of city size, demographics, metropolitan status, fiscal capacity and form of government, among other factors? Are such cities more likely to report use of many forms of public engagement, to be early adopters for other emerging practices, or both? What are their goals for citizen engagement? And, how successful do they feel the experience was? This paper consists primarily of analysis of the survey data, but will also propose a design for further qualitative research. Several cities in the Phoenix metropolitan area have used these platforms, and Arizona State University is also part of a national partnership with local governments called the Alliance for Innovation. Based on survey data, further research will be proposed to explore the types of questions cities have addressed through these platforms, how they conducted outreach and participation, and how effective they were in terms of representativeness and deliberation, among other criteria ([Talk Video](#)).



Panel 5: Online and Offline Participation

Herbert Kubicek | University of Bremen (Germany)

How to combine online and offline forms of participation?

Expectations have been high that offering online, i.e. electronic or “e-“communication channels in public participation will improve its outreach and quality. However, so far there is no empirical evidence that confirm these hopes. Applying a variety of research methods, the European Cooperation Project e2democracy presents empirical findings on the advantages and disadvantages of online communication compared to face-to-face communication in six consultation processes and seven collaborative citizen panels. To control for contextual differences, one of the consultation processes has been set up paralleling online and face-to-face meetings. In this case organizers showed a preference for face-to-face meetings as regards the content of contributions and the style of discussion. For the citizen panels collaborating with local governments to achieve climate targets, impacts in terms of CO2e savings and dropout rates have been compared for parallel processes online and via telephone. These comparisons, however, do not deliver clear performance profiles of the communication channels or a generalizable assessment of their appropriateness for particular objectives. The factors influencing the choice of communication channels are complex and the analysis shows that assessments depend on the type of participation and the role of an actor in the process as well as on time frames and contexts in which the assessments are made. Showing that none of the channels offers clear advantages over the other, we conclude that practitioners are well advised to follow a multi-channel strategy and offer a media mix of online and traditional modes of participation ([Talk Video](#)).



Sonia Royo | University of Zaragoza (Spain)

Keeping Citizens Engaged: A Comparison Between Online and Offline Participants

This study analyzes whether there are any differences in enrollment and drop-out rates between e-participation and traditional participation in a long-term citizen collaboration project. The theoretical framework is based on networked individualism. Results show that capturing and maintaining citizen interest is a daunting task, even in a sensitive topic that might generate positive and tangible benefits for citizens. The higher levels of accessibility offered by information and communication technologies (ICTs) are not enough to reverse public apathy, and person-to-person contact is more effective to maintain engagement. Based on the findings, some actions to reduce dropout in long-term citizen collaboration projects are suggested ([Talk Video](#)).

Panel 6: Evaluation of Online-Participation

Norbert Kersting | Universität Münster (Germany)

Monitoring and Evaluation of E-Participation

Monitoring and evaluation instruments are meant to enhance the quality of policy implementation. It is obvious that in numerous cases this monitoring and evaluation of online and office participation does not exist or is not applied by external actors. In the participatory instruments of the invented space, monitoring and evaluation is often ignored, there is no time or there is no funding to implement it thoroughly. The paper refers to the long history of participatory research. It shows that there are numerous participatory methods, but only a few concepts of evaluation. It criticizes theoretical concepts leading to indicators such as the Arnstein ladder of Participation, political action studies, civic engagement and the theoretical and historical blindness of newer instruments. Finally, it argues that categories and concepts do not differ in research on online and offline participation - but the theoretical foundations of political participation do ([Talk Video](#)).



Maria A. Wimmer | Universität Koblenz

Evaluation of e-Participation Initiatives

Citizen participation over the internet has been on the agenda of research and practice for more than 15 years. First approaches mainly focused on the provision of tools for online citizen participation in different areas. However, the success of such solutions was queried soon, as the number of citizens engaging in online discussions via e-participation tools was often rather limited. In our research, we argue that e-participation initiatives need to be based on iterative cycles of project initiation, engagement and evaluation of the initiative. For the evaluation of e-participation initiatives, researchers propose different evaluation frameworks. The presentation will introduce several evaluation frameworks for e-participation and reflect the applicability of these frameworks in different e-participation initiatives ([Talk Video](#)).

Panel 7: Case Studies 3

Anna Przybylska | University of Warsaw (Poland)

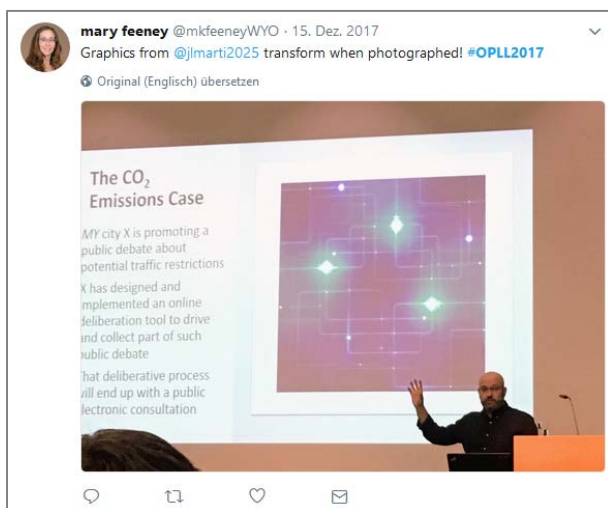
ICT solutions for public consultations: Methodology and design of inDialogue

The aim of the presentation is to reflect on the design of the inDialogue software that has been developed to intervene in the organization of public consultation processes in local governments. The design has been informed by the results of empirical studies. In those studies, we evaluated the practice of public consultations in Poland referring to the norms constitutive for the model of deliberative consultations. The inDialogue software is expected to respond to the problems revealed during the evaluation. It helps to convey the knowledge about the methodology of public consultations and supports the teamwork for their better organization in the city hall. It facilitates planning of public consultations which can be conducted through face-to-face meetings and paper questionnaires as well as through online text or voice meetings and electronic questionnaires. The presentation starts with the overview of some theoretical assumptions and associated research findings relevant to the institutionalization of deliberation in public consultations. The following presentation analyses empirical data collected from the Polish local governments. In this background I will discuss tools and procedures of the inDialogue software ([Talk Video](#)).



José L Martí | Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona (Spain)

Crowdlaw and the internal/external dimension of online local participation



One of the new paradigms that has been advocated to understand the new possibilities of local participation enhanced by the new technologies is the so-called crowdlaw, as a particular subtype of Open Government. Under this approach, ordinary citizens can be deeply involved in different stages of the legal cycle and through a variety of forms of participation. They can participate in information pooling, in deliberation, or in decision-making properly. And they can contribute in such a variety of forms to stages like public diagnostic, law and policy-making, law and policy enforcement, law and policy adjudication, law and policy control, and law and policy revision. This is seen by some as one of the most important innovations to come in the next years to improve government at different levels, and also at the local one. But one of the effects of adopting this new approach is that the boundaries between internal and

external participation (the participation of local citizens or the participation of citizens from other towns, regions or states, is importantly blurred. In other words, crowdlaw is very good in enhancing both the internal and the external dimensions of local participation (i.e. citizens from other places, including other states may be involved in different ways in the local participation of our city and contribute largely to it. This may have crucial effects for the way we conceive local politics. This paper explores all these effects and implications, focusing particularly on the way in which public local participation should be conceived in this new scenario, and advances a new vision of how local politics, and particularly public local deliberation may scale up to extralocal (potentially global) politics ([Talk Video](#)).