Supporting young people's political participation through distributed discussion - lessons obtained from an EU pilot

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Abstract

Several studies recently identified risks and advantages to young people in using the Internet and explicitly recognise the importance of young people's informed involvement in tackling these issues. This paper presents the approach, implementation and lessons learned from a recently finished European eParticipation pilot: HUWY. The aim of HUWY (Hub Websites for Youth Participation) was to involve young people in discussions about Internet governance and policy-making. It was carried out by research partners in four countries: Estonia, Germany, Ireland and the UK. The project piloted a novel approach: a *distributed discussion* model was designed, adapted and implemented. This combined distributed and centralised actions at local, national, and international level, both online and offline. The evaluation assessed participants' perspectives and engagement during different phases of the project. A final impact assessment of the distributed discussion model combined a normative approach of assessing intended impacts, using evaluation data and an impact logic schema. Results of the assessment suggest that a distributed discussion model should integrate online and offline activities more fully and increase specific support for facilitation of the discussions. The evaluation indicated importance of the participation of policy-makers, in order to motivate young people to get engaged, but also the difficulties of securing and supporting that participation. This paper concentrates on two aspects of the trial: involvement of policy-makers and using social media.

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1 Possibilities for eParticipation

In line with the idea of giving power to the people through mass media, new digital technologies are discussed as key opportunities for participatory and democratic approaches in politics (Oates & Gibson, 2006). Hopes and ideas for the use of mass media for deliberation and political participation have been discussed in social science discourses, not only since the diffusion of the Internet into our everyday life, but at least since the emergence of broadcast mass media in the early 20th century, and referring back to the rise of newspapers in the 18th century (Habermas, 1974). For example, in his "radio theory", Bertolt Brecht saw the opportunity for two-way communication via the radio which would give the public the power of representation (Brecht, 1967). The Internet currently seems to have the potential to support multi-directional communication for the broad public, with a variety of channels. Theoretically, participation in public discourse and political decision-making can be facilitated via the Internet, potentially increasing people's informed involvement in policy-making Arguments about the positive uses of the Internet for democracy and participation (emphasising increased knowledge, collective intelligence, freedom and public participation (Towne & Herbsleb, 2012) versus negative impacts (spread of stupidity, increased surveillance and isolation(Morozov, 2011) have created a lively debate(Fuchs, 2010; Diamond, 2010). Papacharissi (2008) identifies typically utopian or dystopian visions. Web 2.0, the second generation of web applications designed to facilitate participatory information sharing and collaboration, is the current focus of opportunities for eParticipation[5].[6] The term does not just refer to technical innovations, but rather to changes in the ways the Internet is used and content is produced and shared: the value of Web 2.0 sites is created by the contributions and collaborations of users, thus they are in some sort of partnership with the sites' "owners", especially in terms of the quality of resulting content and sustainability of the site. Web 2.0 sites are platforms, designed to enable and facilitate collaboration (O'Reilly, 2005).

While optimism about the Internet as enabler for eParticipation has decreased, some impacts of the digital public have been validated. On the one hand, recent empirical studies show a decrease in active political participation, despite an increase in the number of people using the Internet(Busemann & Gscheidle, 2010). On the other hand, studies on the "Arab Spring" developments in North Africa or the "Stuttgart 21[7]"

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[5] Examples of Web 2.0 are social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, mashups and folksonomies.

[6] For a discussion of Web 2 and Web 3 technologies and civic participation, see Williamson, 2011; Taylor-Smith and Cruickshank, 2010; Loader and Mercer, 2012

[7] "Stuttgart 21" is one of Germany's and Europe's largest urban renewal projects on train tracks that cut through the center of the Stuttgart city placed underground, creating entire new neighborhoods. Many residents are deeply opposed to the multibillion euro undertaking and their protests led to an arbitration process and contributed to a change of government with a first-ever Länder premier from the Green party.

conflict in Germany give examples of efficient use of social networks, including Twitter and Facebook, to organise activities and the use of social media for public opinion formation (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2011). The nature and degree of impact is widely debated(e.g. GlobalVoices Blog 2011; Diamond 2010; Morozov 2011). Some studies show positive effects on public opinion towards democracy through the use of social media(Emmer & Wolling, 2010: 52f); other studies indicate that the people who use the Internet for participatory purposes are mainly those who are already more active in political processes in the offline world (Lindner & Riehm 2011). So, on the one hand we have the thesis of civic empowerment through the Internet (See Rheingold 1993; Negroponte 1995; Budge 1996; Dertouzos 1997) and on the other the thesis of reinforcement or normalization through the Internet (Davis & Owen 1998; Hill & Hughes 1998; Davis 1999; Hindman 2009; Best & Krueger 2005). Both perspectives identify the Internet having impact on political participation[8]. More recently, Internet researchers are exploring the diverse ways people's use of social media can have political impact, such as van Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj's (2010) analysis of performing citizenship on YouTube in the context of the anti-Islam video Fitna.

2   Characterising eParticipation

HUWY, the pilot project reported in this paper, explores *participation* via different mechanisms. Political participation includes all forms of activities undertaken voluntarily, individually or collectively, with the aim of influencing political decisions directly or indirectly. *eParticipation* refers to ICT-supported participation processes.

EParticipation includes the use of ICT by citizens to connect with each other and with their elected representatives[9]. Another European IST project, DEMO-net[10], specifically emphasises the interaction between different actors during the policy-making process, including the effort needed to mobilise them for this interaction(Tambouris et al. 2007: 9). Thus, if participation requires concrete action from all participants, it becomes apparent that mobilisation of participants, as well as the facilitation of appropriate communication platforms and channels, is a prerequisite for successful eParticipation. Web 2.0 applications, such as social networks, provide new opportunities for this mobilisation.

It follows that four basic characteristics of an eParticipation initiative are:

[8] . For an overview see Grunwald et al. 2006; Lindner 2007

[9] See Macintosh's (2006) definition: "use of information and communication technologies to broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives"

[10] DEMO_net was a Network of Excellence in eParticipation project, funded under the European Commission's sixth framework programme: Information Society Technologies IST (FP6-2004-27219) (2006 - 2008). See [http://www.demo-net.org] (5/24/11)

- to enable citizens to participate in different phases and levels of political decision-making processes;
- to use ICT and the Internet for direct communication between different actors and for information provision to a broad public;
- to involve different stakeholders in the dialogue;
- to dedicate special effort and energy to the mobilisation of participants, both citizens and policy-makers.

Typologies provide more detailed definitions of participation. They help us to recognise participation, by drawing out the salient points. Recognising participation is essential for research investigations and organising participation. Further, typologies can help to categorise participation, which is useful for creating structured descriptions, comparison and analysis. Wimmer (2007) has developed an eParticipation typology, characterising eParticipation projects by stages of policy-making in focus, levels of engagement, stakeholders involved and specific areas of participation (figure 1). This typology is used to provide a structured description of the HUWY project.

Figure 1: Analytical model for eParticipation projects[11]
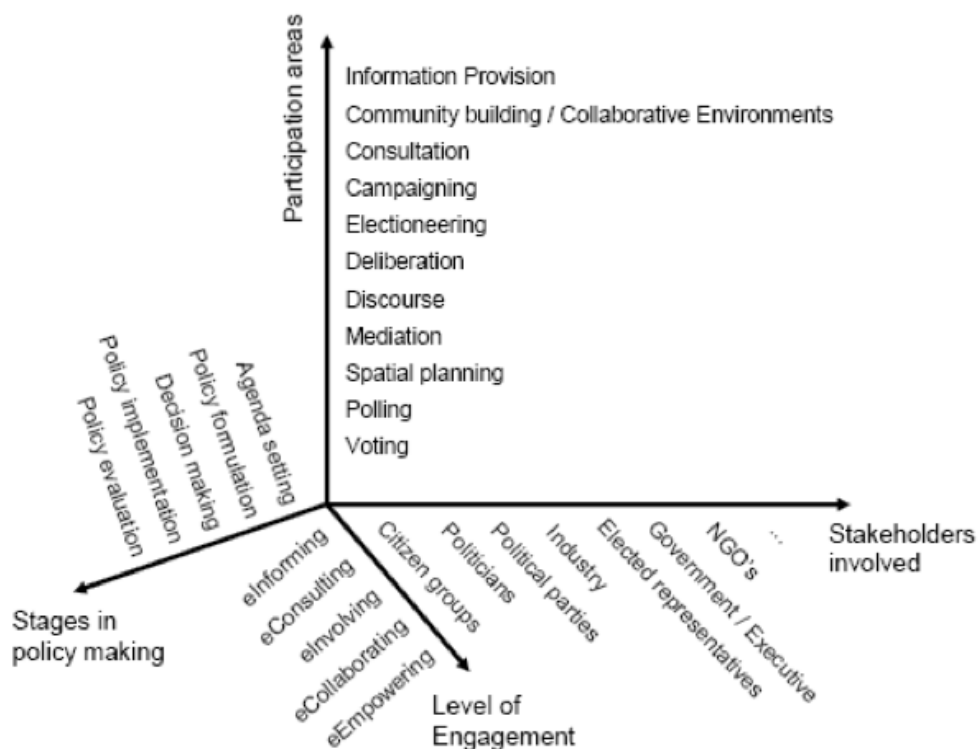
[11] Source: Wimmer 2007:91

3   The eParticipation pilot HUWY to involve young people in Internet policy-making

HUWY[12] (Hub Websites for Youth Participation) was an EU eParticipation Preparatory Action project (Koussouris, Charalabidis & Askounis, 2011), which piloted a distributed (networked) discussion. The pilot ran in Estonia, Germany, Ireland and the UK. HUWY aimed to find good ways to support groups of young people to discuss what changes are needed to the Internet and its regulation and, further, to encourage policy-makers to interact with young people's ideas. This paper focuses on two elements of the pilot: involving policy-makers and using social media[13].

The eParticipation approach used for the HUWY project was a specific method to bring people into policy-making: *distributed discussion*. A family of "hub websites" was designed to support networked discussion. Hubs contained information about the project, well-structured background materials about chosen topics, the results of young people's discussions and feedback from policy-makers. There was one hub website for each of the pilot countries, with localised information and language. This was the central node for that country. Young people could hold discussions on their own websites (e.g. youth organization sites or private social web spaces) or in offline settings. Discussion groups posted their results on their country's hub. The four country hubs were linked by an EU hub http://huwy.eu/: a global entry point for the project and the place to summarise results for EU policy-makers (

Figure 2).

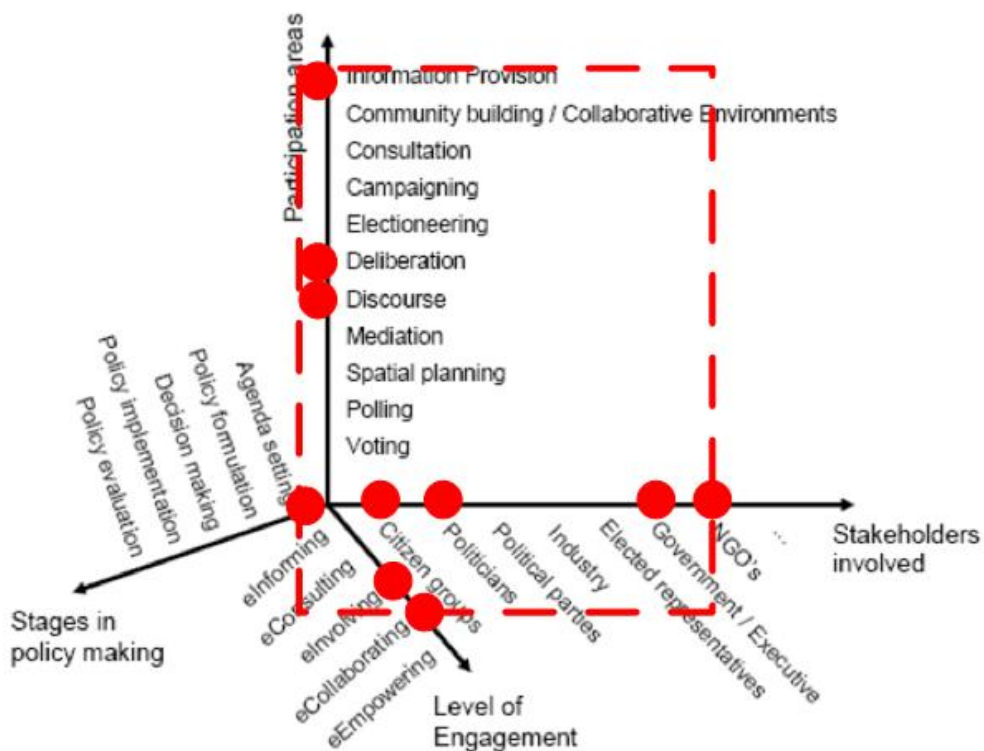Figure 2: The HUWY EU-Hub website

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[12] http://huwy.eu/

[13] For a more detailed description of the project, see Taylor-Smith, Kimpeler & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2012.

Within the four dimensions of Wimmer's (2007) analytical model, the HUWY project can be positioned as follows (Figure 3):

Figure 3: Levels of eParticipation addressed by HUWY, according to Wimmer's typology

- The **stakeholders involved** were *citizen groups* (specifically discussion groups of young people) and *policy-makers*: HUWY involved government departments, elected representatives and NGOs.
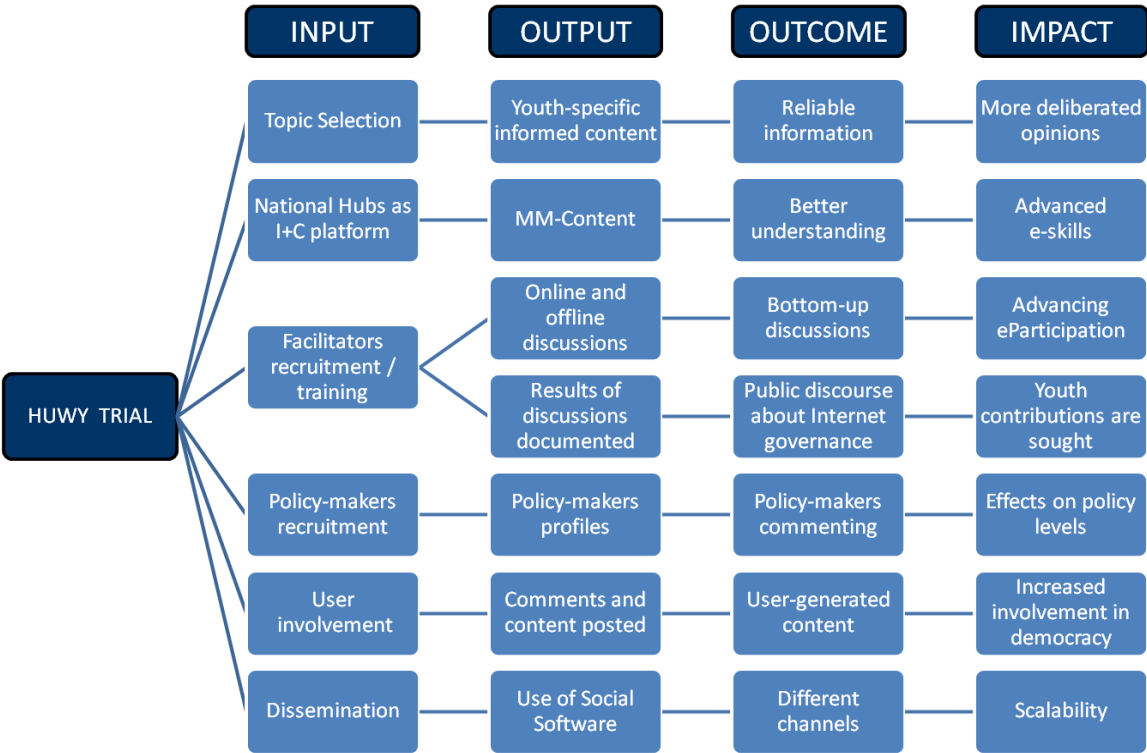
- **Participation areas** targeted were *information provision* for young people and policy-makers, *community building/ collaborative environments* (provision of the hubs as virtual communication and information spaces) and *deliberation* (at the heart of the project approach).
- The **stage in the policy-making** cycle was *agenda setting*, because the young participants were able to choose the topics that were important to them for their distributed discussions, and the discussion results posted reflect their concerns.
- The **Level of engagement** was *eCollaboration:* the aim was to foster dialogue among young people and between young people and policy-makers. This includes levels of engagement such as *eInforming* (HUWY Hub provides background information for citizens, especially young people holding discussions). The platform was designed for bi-directional communication (between policy-makers and young citizens) and to support *eInvolving* (getting young people engaged in policy-making processes).

The distributed discussion model was devised to be as flexible and inclusive as possible: to enable young people to get involved in issues that were important to them, while they controlled the format and place of this involvement. It was designed to include established groups, like youth fora or parliaments, who had their own online spaces, especially those already talking about HUWY topics. It was also designed to include more casual groups, meeting on social networking pages or even offline.

4   From Objectives to Impacts

Analysis of the HUWY pilot is based on an Impact Logic Chart (Figure 4). The inputs are based on the pilot objectives (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). For each objective a main activity was defined as input. Outputs describe direct results of pilot activities. Outputs are linked to specific outcomes (in relation to the pilot objectives and using evaluation data). Finally, the impact of the pilot for overall policy aims was assessed.

Figure 4: HUWY pilot Impact Logic Chart

INPUT	OUTPUT	OUTCOME	IMPACT
Topic Selection	Youth-specific informed content	Reliable information	More deliberated opinions
National Hubs as I+C platform	MM-Content	Better understanding	Advanced e-skills
Facilitators recruitment / training	Online and offline discussions	Bottom-up discussions	Advancing eParticipation
	Results of discussions documented	Public discourse about Internet governance	Youth contributions are sought
Policy-makers recruitment	Policy-makers profiles	Policy-makers commenting	Effects on policy levels
User involvement	Comments and content posted	User-generated content	Increased involvement in democracy
Dissemination	Use of Social Software	Different channels	Scalability

(HUWY TRIAL)

1.1 Objectives

The HUWY project had three ambitious high-level objectives:

1. **Increase involvement in democracy:** HUWY aimed to create a platform for distributed discussions to support participation in policy-making processes, offering background information and Internet-based communication tools for young citizens to interact with each other and with policy-makers.
2. **Involve young people in policy developments related to the Internet and its governance:** HUWY specifically aimed to address young people as a target group, in order to increase their political engagement. Internet governance is a topic that is in need of increased deliberation and input from all EU-citizens, especially the young. Internet governance needs understanding and acceptance to be successfully implemented.
3. **Advance eParticipation:** HUWY was a trial project in line with the Commission's objectives to advance eParticipation and thus aims at deriving recommendations for future eParticipation projects.

HUWY aimed to advancing eParticipation by piloting a new method: the distributed discussion model. Thus the three high level objectives are broken down into eleven concrete action objectives, which describe the implementation.

Table 1: HUWY objectives

Policy objective 1: Increase involvement in democracy	
Pilot objective 1	To increase young people's involvement in democracy through a positive experience that follows best practice established in eParticipation.
Pilot objective 2	To demonstrate that young people's views are sought and that their opinions are valued.
Pilot objective 3	To contribute to the development of a European public sphere.
Policy objective 2: Involve young people in policy developments related to the Internet	
Pilot objective 4	To involve young people in discussions on issues related to the Internet, its use and regulation.
Pilot objective 5	To support young people to become involved and gain understanding of relevant issues, through providing information in accessible formats and supporting their deliberation; and to provide a useful resource about Internet policy issues, in national and EU contexts.
Pilot objective 6	To map chosen areas of the topic agenda to policy and legislative responsibility (national / EU level) clarifying political structures relevant to the topic.
Pilot objective 7	To illustrate the role of national governments and parliaments, in designing and applying EU legislation, especially via the working relationships between EU and national bodies, as set out in the Treaty of Lisbon.
Pilot objective 8	To support young people to develop and follow best practice in using the Internet, thus contributing to their own safety, their peers' safety and increasing positive experiences of the Internet.
Policy objective 3: Advance eParticipation	
Pilot objective 9	To trial an innovative model for distributed discussion.
Pilot objective 10	To provide a specific and transparent connection between young people and decision-making bodies.
Pilot objective 11	To increase young people's skills in using online tools for deliberation and eParticipation.

1.2 Inputs

The HUWY project structure was designed to support young people's participation through distributed discussions. Young people, as discussion group participants and facilitators, could discuss challenges and threats of the current and future Internet and, ideally, begin to come up with ideas and develop solutions, which could potentially be accepted by different stakeholders. HUWY partners worked with young people in focus groups and workshops to choose topics to focus the project and organise the Hub website content (information provided, discussions and results). Table 2 lists the topics chosen by the young participants for their discussions in the different countries.

Table 2: Topics chosen for youth discussions in HUWY pilots

Topics in UK and Ireland	Topics in Estonia	Topics in Germany
Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying	Cyberbullying
Child abuse	Child safety online	Censorship and freedom of

		opinion
ID theft, privacy and phishing	Safety online (related to ID theft, shopping etc)	Safety online (related to ID theft, shopping etc)
File-sharing	Copyright	File-sharing
Open thread	Open thread	Open thread
Our experiences	Our experiences	Our experiences

Supporting grassroots involvement of young people

HUWY combined distributed and centralized actions: all local content, discussions results, collected facts and arguments, as well as ongoing policy actions, could be shared on each national Hub website and also via the EU Hub. Thus the distributed discussion required both an EU-wide tool for Internet-based eParticipation and face-to-face communication activities, right from the beginning of the project – to "get the grass growing". As a consequence, the HUWY approach relied strongly on involvement of young people and policy-makers throughout the project, via local workshops and focus groups, for defining the scope and themes for discussions, creating materials to support participants, implementing the discussion and sharing results. Involving young people in HUWY meant not only extracting opinions, but getting them engaged in a process of dialogue and deliberation, to explore the topics and possible solutions with their peers. Young people were also encouraged to produce their own content for the platform, to post their discussion results and comment on each other's posts. This task was supported by local workshops, collaboration with youth groups, joint events with youth organisations, HUWY presentations at youth events and conferences. In particular, the HUWY partners helped to organise a summer school, attended by young people from Estonia, Germany and Ireland[14], where young people explored the topics and created multimedia presentations in response.

Involving policy-makers

The involvement of policy-makers turned out to be quite challenging, varying both in terms of approach and success between the four countries. Young people were worried that policy-makers would not listen to their ideas, so space was created on the Hub websites for policy-makers to post profiles, outlining their relevant responsibilities and inviting young people's input. These profiles were to be an important signal that the whole project was of interest to people in power/ decision-makers. Later, policy-makers would provide feedback to young people about their discussion group results, by commenting on the hubs. In this way, HUWY aimed to

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[14] European Youth and Social Media is a Youth Exchange, Letterkenny, Ireland, 23 -30 July 2010

meet objective 2: To demonstrate that young people's views are sought and that their opinions are valued.

The success of getting policy-makers involved depended on the policy levels and their roles and positions, as well as the status and focus of the current government. It needed personal attention and constant liaison activities to keep them interested and get them to upload personal profiles to the HUWY Hub (or provide them to HUWY partners to post). Furthermore, one idea was that policy-makers could use their profiles to encourage young people to get in touch with them or to communicate about ongoing actions from their side (e.g. consultations, petitions, arguments, white papers). Unfortunately this option was not taken by the policy-makers and reasons for this have to be examined further.

Using social media

It was a specific aim of the HUWY project to integrate social software tools into the distributed discussion model, both to support discussions and for recruitment and dissemination (Taylor-Smith & Lindner 2010). The Social Web is a constantly developing and changing field, both in terms of motivations for its use and the range of basic and comparable functionality. Recent studies reveal that the younger generations are overrepresented among the users of social software tools (Franz, 2010). Schmidt,Paus-Hasebrink and Hasebrink (2009) identify three main motivations for the young people's use of these tools: identity management, relationship management, and information management. These motivations need to be understood to effectively involve young people via social media.

1.3   Outputs

In each of the four EU pilot countries, the HUWY Hub websites offered background information about the topics, guidelines for online discussions and facilities to post discussion results and comment on these posts. Information was provided about policy-makers who had agreed to be involved (on their profile pages) and policy-makers could provide feedback to young people by commenting on their results posts.. The (national) contextualised information on the chosen Internet policy related topics in each country was provided by the project partners.

During the project, distributed online *and* offline discussions were facilitated, run by different youth groups (or causal groups of friends), using their own choice of platform and instruments or shared services (e.g. Facebook groups). It should be noted that most groups favoured holding their discussions offline in face-to-face environments. All groups documented their results and uploaded them to their national Hub. It was a challenge to persuade young people to start discussion groups, and to keep the discussions going and get results posted. The discussion groups were supported by the HUWY teams during the whole project. For example, the facilitators were trained and received relevant background information about the project and the topics and supported to use the hub websites. HUWY provided

guidelines for the organisation, facilitation and documentation of the discussions, lesson/activity plans, topic guides, templates for results and hub user guides.

1.4   Evaluation

The project outputs were assessed using the HUWY evaluation methodology. Based on current best practice in eParticipation, this aimed to involve project stakeholders (both in establishing detailed success factors and as participants in the evaluation process); reflect diverse perspectives (summarised as social, technical and political) and use a triangulation of methods to increase the richness and accuracy of evaluation results (Macintosh & Whyte, 2006). Young people and policy-makers identified their preferred evaluation factors and the outcomes that were important to them and these were added to the project objectives.

Young people's evaluation factors were:

- the amount of ideas that are publicly spoken about, that get meaningful feedback from policy-makers; that will be taken into account in the policy making process;
- the number of youth groups involved and ideas posted;
- the number of policy-makers involved; the profile of the policy-makers and the content of feedback provided by policy-makers.

Young people's preferred outcomes were:

- a change to the law or real action taking place;
- policy-makers speaking publicly about their ideas;
- feedback that is meaningful and useful to them

Policy-makers' evaluation factors were:

- the number and variety of youth groups involved
- the content of young people's ideas;
- the publicity around the project

Policy-makers' preferred outcomes were:

- good ideas from young people;
- young people's behaviour regarding the internet will change;
- young people will understand more about how government works;
- HUWY will give young people the opportunity to share their ideas and think about better internet laws, leading to change in policy making action.

The evaluation process used a mixture of methods, applied consistently in all four countries, in order to cover the political, technical and social aspects of the project, from at least three perspectives: young people, policy-makers and the HUWY partners.

- Survey of young participants (questionnaire)
- Semi-structured interviews with young people, discussion group facilitators and policy-makers
- Text analysis of discussion group results & policy-makers' feedback (as posted on the hub websites)
- Quantitative data about discussions (number of posts, groups etc)
- WAI rating (accessibility testing); usability testing and web statistics (Google Analytics)
- Best practice analysis for collection of discussion group success factors (identified by HUWY partners)
- Publicity review (press releases, press coverage etc.)
- Content analysis of workshop reports

HUWY's success in meeting its objectives, including young people and policy-makers' objectives (preferred outcomes and evaluation factors), was assessed using the data from the evaluation instruments. This also enabled the identification of outcomes and impacts.

1.5   Outcomes

The HUWY project followed a "grassroots" approach to help young people organise and facilitate deliberative discussions in small groups. The Hub structure encouraged them to share their results with other groups and a wider public on their (national) platform. The evaluation (specifically the participants' survey and interviews with facilitators) indicated that young people perceived as highly motivating the possibility to discuss topics (especially offline) in small groups and then share the results with others, in particular with young people from other countries, via the EU Hub.

The evaluation results validated the **reliability of information**, provided by the partners on the hub websites. This prerequisite for deliberation, has been achieved. Good standards of online publishing were followed: naming the authors of articles, providing pro and contra arguments where possible, indicating sources of information and links to further reading and other websites. In addition to the hub websites, the Estonian partners commissioned materials specifically to be used by high school teachers in discussions on HUWY topics.

HUWY teams aimed to support bottom up discussions and contribute to a **richer public discourse about Internet governance** through training and supporting facilitators. Co-operations with experienced facilitators from youth groups and schools also had network effects, as they were sometimes able to recruit new facilitators or recommend the HUWY project to people working with other youth groups or young people. However, facilitation was hard work and it was difficult to persuade young people fulfil the role on a voluntary basis. HUWY partners concluded that facilitation should be recognised a scentral to participation and facilitators should be rewarded for their work, in line with other project workers.

Policy-makers commenting on youth group discussions and posts was not really successfully fulfilled. Although some countries, like Estonia, had been quite successful in engaging policy-makers, others, like Germany, had problems in motivating policy-makers to post comments on the HUWY hub. In some countries it seems as if the overall topic Internet Governance too often gets squeezed out of the policy agenda by other (perhaps simpler) topics.

The amount of **user-generated content** was disappointing. Although the discussion groups preferred to hold their discussions offline, in schools, at home or in youth clubs, for example, most of them posted their results on the HUWY Hub websites. Few discussion groups, even those with well equipped and engaged facilitators, produced multimedia content and posted it on the Hubs or on YouTube. The expectations of a strong involvement of social network tools were not met at all. The HUWY posts on Facebook and Twitter came from HUWY project team members and cooperation partners like the German Youth Press Organisation[15].

1.6   Impacts

Young people reached a **better understanding through discussion**. They provided evidence to defend their own views and ideas in discussions with each other. They also gained insight into different views and perspectives, broadening their outlook. In Germany, some of the discussion groups held scenario workshops to develop joint perspectives on possible futures. This helped the participants to imagine outcomes and impacts of current developments in the use of the Internet and regulatory options. Another method used by some discussion groups in Germany was role play. By taking different roles (e.g. teachers, parents, police), young people learned, and better understood, their points of views and arguments. Interestingly, discussion groups who used role play came up with more clearly expressed demands for stricter Internet laws and regulation than other groups. Young people particularly valued engagement opportunities at offline events, especially sharing ideas with policy-makers face to face.

The implementation of the HUWY Hubs was conducive to the development of **young people's (participants') skills and Internet literacy**. Young people not only learned about the Internet in theory through the discussion of threads, challenges and possible solutions; they were also encouraged to practice eParticipation by searching for information on HUWY hubs and other sources, learning about topics and tasks of policy-makers, creating results posts and commenting on other posts.

The **advancement of eParticipation** was stimulated by the distributed discussion model, developed throughout the pilot, which combined offline discussion with online elements like information searching and comments posting etc. The facilitators

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[15] http://www.jugendpresse.de/

recruited for the HUWY project were sensitised and trained to support deliberative thinking, listening to others and to managing their groups.

Difficulties engaging policy-makers mean that the model's potential to provide places where young people could interact with policy-makers cannot really be assessed. Including policy-makers as consortium partners had mixed results. It was most effective where citizen engagement was specifically part of their remit[16].The low involvement rate of policy-makers indicates that the HUWY project is unlikely to have much **impact on policy levels**.

HUWY succeeded in **increasing involvement in democracy**. A qualitative increase in involvement in terms of engagement and interest in democratic processes at the individual level was observed, although, out of the four countries, only Estonia met their target number of participants.

The trial demonstrated possibilities for a scalable distributed discussion model, centred on an Internet platform. However, relatively low numbers of participants mean that testing of scalability was limited. Scalability effects have not been remarkable through the integration of social networking tools. A further analysis of the role of social software tools in the HUWY project revealed that the potentials of using social networks to support discussions were probably very limited in practice, though they are potentially powerful for dissemination.

2   eParticipation challenges

During the pilot the project teams faced several challenges typically faced by eParticipation actions. Here we focus on challenges around effective involvement of policy-makers and use of social media. The HUWY partners worked with policy-makers throughout planning and implementation phases to use their experience, increase the extent (likelihood) of their involvement and to identify their priorities in terms of outcomes and evaluation criteria.

Policy-makers prioritised:

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[16] For example, the UK's Ministry of Justice became partners through their Citizen Engagement Initiative and were active in the requirements phase. After the initiative finished in February 2010, it was difficult for MoJ to devote time to the project, especially after the change of government in May 2010. State Chancellery of Estonia sustained their involvement, as e-consultation is important to their work. However, they had limited paths to use young people's ideas to influence policy-making.

- having a large number of participants, active discussion groups and results; while at the same time avoiding repetition and duplication of results to interact with;
- involving a wide range of people in terms of cultural background, age, education, gender and abilities
- to deal with cross-border political structures, language and alphabets in the multi-level approach of local actions, national Hubs and an EU Hub. This was especially salient due to the Internet policy theme, as relevant decisions are taken at all levels, from local to global and responsibilities move between government departments.

The social media challenge was

- to integrate Web 2.0, especially social-networking tools, into decision-making processes, without addressing only the early adopters (and excluding other young people.)

Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden. lists the measures adopted during the pilot to meet these challenges.

Table 3: Measures to meet eParticipation challenges in the pilot

Challenges for eParticipation	Measures in the HUWY Pilot
Increasing scale to involve a significant number of people, while avoiding repetition and duplication	On- and offline discussion groups have been integrated via national Hubs
	Groups are encouraged to use external platforms (e.g. social networks) and links to other sites where they have previously discussed the topics.
	- Minimising duplication of participant effort (can link between discussions, rather than re-post)
	- Hubs gather content by theme: easier for policy-makers to interact with.
Involving a wider range of people (culture, age, education and abilities)	Socio-demographic characteristics have not been pre-defined by the HUWY team
	Instead, the definition of group structure, agendas/topics, technologies and platforms are yielded to the groups/group leaders
	Working with established youth groups helped to bring in young people from diverse backgrounds, as some groups had specific goals to include marginalised young people.
	All resources are available to the public on HUWY hubs.
Dealing with cross-border challenges, like political structures, language and alphabets	Addressed right at the beginning: the hub structure allows national activities in line with national framework conditions and links to other countries via the EU Hub
	Content of national hubs attempts to address problems and solutions at national and regional levels
	- However, the complexity of policy-making responsibilities for Internet policies made it unrealistic to provide a mapping of issues and

	responsibilities.
	At the same time, consolidation at EU-level can be realised by the project's EU Hub
	Hubs are implemented in Drupal[17], which has extensive language, alphabet and translation support.
Integrating Web 2.0, especially social-networking tools, into decision-making processes	Groups are encouraged to use available external platforms (e.g. social networks) and links to other sites for their discussions
	• Though this was not really taken up
	Web 2.0 and social networking tools are integrated into the project's communication strategy
	• Though networks depended on young people to increase mobilisation (see below)
	• The project period was a little in advance of social networks being a realistic option to communicate with policy-makers.

2.1   Involving policy-makers

Partners worked hard to liaise with policy-makers. For example, the German project team put much effort in talking to the relevant policy-makers in person and meeting them at parliamentary events, but other topics seemed to have more immediate relevance (importance?) than the contribution to HUWY. At the end, this did not support the expected impact of demonstrating to the youth that their **contributions are sought**. It is possible, for example in the German pilot, that, because policy-makers agreed to be involved and have their profiles posted on the HUWY hub, but did not participate in discussions, this might have left the impression to the young participants that their contributions are not sought. Only one policy-maker was really engaged and posted comments on several discussion results. Other countries had slightly better experiences with policy-maker involvement, with some good quality posts and valued interactions at workshops and events. However, the volume of feedback posted was low in all countries and none implied measurable feedback.

In Ireland and the UK, HUWY teams faced problems due to crises and changes in government during the lifetime of the project. Responsibilities for Internet governance topics moved between people and departments and the policy-making arena changed continually. While elected representatives and civil servants welcomed the HUWY project and the importance of involving young people in discussions about the Internet, when it came to providing feedback, responsibility seemed to be passed along and fail to rest with anyone. The nature of the topic made the transfer of responsibility easier, as the different HUWY themes each had implications for a number of government levels and departments. HUWY's grassroots approach to selecting topics, meant that any alignment with top-down initiatives like government consultations occurred by chance, rather than design. Until results were posted,

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17 http://drupal.org/

HUWY partners could not identify which policy-makers would be best placed to make appropriate responses (Taylor-Smith, Kimpeler, and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, 2012).

2.2　　　Using Facebook to increase young people's involvement

This section focuses on the potential impact of Facebook as a channel for distributed discussions, based on a small study, within the German pilot, in 2011. This analysis of the potential and impact of Facebook within the HUWY project was based on seven qualitative interviews with young German participants (4 female and 3 male)[18]. At the time, these were all active Facebook users. The aim was to get a more detailed idea of young people's behaviour on Facebook and the potential to integrate social media into eParticipation projects. The interviews were structured into four categories, which were derived from the Mobilisation Chain model by Michelis 2009 (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). The categories comprise

- Frequency of use;
- Functions and motives for use;
- How young people received "Wall-Posts";
- User-generated content and active behaviour;
- Memberships of Groups and Fan-Pages.

The method applied to analyse the interviews was qualitative content analysis of transcribed interviews.

Figure 5: Mobilisation Chain Model for eParticipation[19]
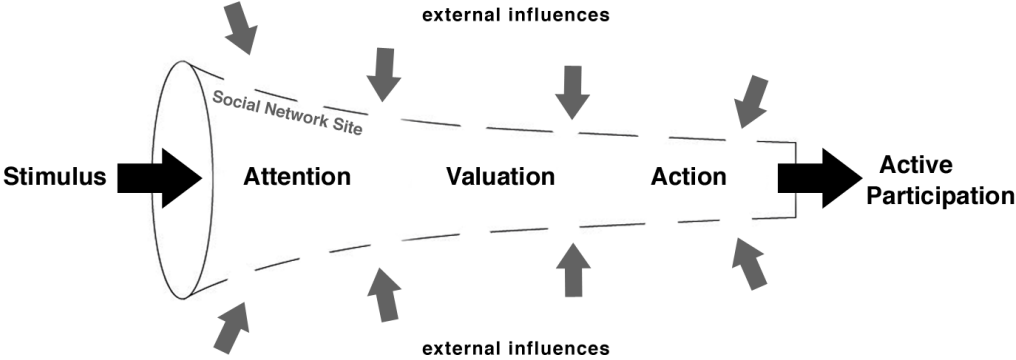
The theoretical framework for this analysis is the Mobilisation Chain model, which has been further developed for the use in the HUWY project. The chain model

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[18] This investigation was only carried as part of the German pilot, so its findings may not all apply in other cultures. It is also closely based on Facebook, so findings may apply to similar community sites, but are unlikely to apply to less similar tools, like Twitter. Participants were all young people and the insights may not generalise to all age groups.

[19] Chain of Mobilisation on a Social Network Site (own illustration; further development of "Paradigm for Attention & Participation" by Michelis, 2009

depicts the relative importance of external influence factors for the successful negotiation of a participatory action. It is suggested that such a process starts with a stimulus. For example, possible stimuli in HUWY may have been an experience with Internet fraud or the invitation to join a discussion group about topics of relevance to the participant. A successful stimulus is defined by *attention* attracted and has to be kept interesting through a phase of *valuation*, in order to finally lead to a concrete *action*, which is defined as active participation. This chain model was used to develop an idea of the steps to be negotiated by potential participants in discussions on HUWY topics (or similar) on their social network site (specifically Facebook).

The analysed cases (interviews) provide insight into the potential use of Facebook for eParticipation. A hypothesis was formed, based on current knowledge about the reasons why young people use Facebook and for what purposes (management of identity, relationships, and information (Schmidt, Paus-Hasebrink & Hasebrink 2009): that the benefit of implementing Facebook pages (or similar) in eParticipation initiatives is limited. The results validated the hypothesis in the following ways:

- When using Facebook, the young interviewees focus mainly on private communication and management of their peer-group relationships.
- Active participation actions, like spreading information, sharing recommendations and managing information, are only of secondary relevance.
- If web content is shared via Facebook with friends, awareness is subject to imprecise scanning of new Wall-Posts, ignoring certain recommendations and less frequent visiting the platform.
- Interviewees were more likely to arrange private appointments and try to stay up to date about daily topics with their friends.
- Incoming information via Wall-Posts is limited by extensive use of filter functionality.
- Joining Pages or Groups is mainly done to simplify information management.

The highest (theoretical) potential can still be assumed in the approach of an appropriate stimulus (e. g. a Wall-Post) when it is spread by young people among themselves (depending on the respective relationship between two young people) and when topic and media format are orientated towards the target group. Therefore, to involve young people in an eParticipation initiative, it is important to be aware of their potential as effective networkers (ambassadors) among their peers and supply frequent information updates for these ambassadors to post. However, it's not clear how well this supports mobilisation of new participants.

The use of Facebook in the German HUWY pilot demonstrated that simply "being present" on Facebook is not enough to harness the potentials of social network tools. Young people are more or less active Facebook users but reaching them this way depends on understanding their behaviour on this platform.

3   Recommendations

The HUWY pilot highlighted the strength in a flexible approach, including differences in implementation between countries and various ways to involve diverse young people, both on and offline. In order for this approach to be effective, the hub websites need to be technically reliable, at the centre of communication processes and comprehensively integrated with offline events.

Organising and facilitating discussions is central to the success of the model. Organisers and facilitators need to be rewarded, as well as trained and supported.

Ways need to be found to increase the involvement of policy-makers throughout, especially encouraging their meaningful public involvement by including relevant information in their profiles on the hub websites. All youth group results posts should receive a response from relevant policy-makers.

To use social networks to reach and mobilise young people for eParticipation, young people should be persuaded and supported to take on the role of ambassadors. Young people who are already participating are probably the best way to convince other young people to join in via social networks. Technical developments alone are unlikely to be enough: a social strategy is necessary, based on young people's motivations and preferences. eParticipation initiatives need to follow current developments and implement carefully targeted strategies to profit from existing and new potentials of social media.

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