eParticipation to support the Information Society

eParticipation lives in the Internet.

The Internet technologies that help us to organise and share information are changing the way we live and work: we live in an Information Society. The EU aims to update our legal frameworks to promote positive, creative and safe use of the Internet. People who use the Internet need to be involved in this policy-making process. However, opinions may be polarised on certain issues (file sharing and copyright) and balances between freedom of expression and privacy, bullying or exploitation are hard to create via legislation.

Legislation and political initiatives which affect the Internet should be grounded in technology – aware of what is possible, and any side effects. Equally, cultural impacts require consideration: the Internet facilitates our work, social life, communities and democracies and becomes our dominant media. "We need to ensure that the correct value settings are in place so that the information society has a reasonable chance of running smoothly, of not crashing"[1].

The **HUWY** project[2] illustrates some of the specific requirements of science and technology dialogues: sharing information and expertise, whilst also respecting participants' cultural groundings. Informed public engagement and media panic have real impact on policies and lives: recently in genetic engineering, vaccination programs and climate change. The depth of Internet penetration into our daily lives should not obscure its radical impact on our society or its base in science and technology.

HUWY is an eParticipation Preparatory Action project, which aims to get young people talking about policies and laws which affect the Internet and to channel their ideas to governments and parliaments, national and EU. HUWY believe that young people are valuable expert stakeholders in current Internet governance issues like cyberbullying, privacy and file-sharing. Internet topics are priorities for public engagement: to increase democratic engagement and bring user-centricity into policy-making, to create a better Internet, better Internet culture and better laws.

EParticipation is not just about collecting opinions, but about bringing people together to share insights into their own contexts –citizens, policy-makers, experts. It's about exploring both differences and common ground and taking time to understand each other's values and constraints. In eParticipation, science and technology themes require the provision of relevant information, which facilitates engagement and understanding. The early months of the HUWY project showed that young people were very interested in Internet policy issues, once they had become engaged. They had a wealth of experience to share, but this was not always sufficiently grounded in knowledge, for example about technical or legal aspects, to support meaningful dialogue. Accordingly, our goals were to engage and inform, in order to spark and support discussions. We'll use this example to explore practical methods and hope that workshop participants will share their own experiences and ideas for supporting successful eParticipation on science and technology themes.

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[1] [1] Duff, A. (2008). The Normative Crisis of the Information Society. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 2(1), article 1.

[2] http://huwy.eu/