Inclusive citizen participation – experiences on e-democracy in Finland

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Democracy in Finland

• Finland generally scores well in international studies on democracy.
• The fundamental rights, including voting rights and the right to participate and influence are written in the Finnish Constitution (2 §). The Constitution (14 §) stipulates that it is a duty of the administration to enhance civic participation and provide adequate participatory opportunities.
• Nordic tradition of active civil society and openness.

Problems/challenges:
• Declining electoral participation
• Growing differences in participation between different socio-economic groups

Aim of democracy policy (Government Report on Democracy Policy 2014 & implementation):
• Ensuring that decision-making is based on wide, active and inclusive citizen participation
• Enhancing public discussion as well cross-sectional interaction and cooperation in administration
• Continuous systematic development and review of democracy
Why e-participation in Finland?

**Internet in active use**
- An ever growing number of people in Finland are Internet users.
- Among the population (aged from 16 to 89), 85 % use the Internet (Statistics Finland)

**Internet is used in multiple ways**
- Finns use the Internet most for everyday matters, information search and communication
- Finns also use the Internet to handle matters with authorities and access public services

**Demand for new ways to participate and influence**
- Internet provides effective tools for different types of participation
- Overall e-participation plays an significant role in todays’ democracy policy in Finland.
E-participation environment platform
(Action Programme on eServices and eDemocracy, modul by Ministry of Justice)

Aim was enhancing communication and enabling dialogue as well as interaction between citizens, NGOs, politicians and public servants.

Services were developed during 2009-2015.

All are in Finnish and Swedish, accessible, easy-to-use and free of charge for users.
Website for e-participation services and democracy databank

Information from various democracy-related sites and news in the field of political decision-making

Summarises the eDemocracy web services

Links to other public authorities' websites with information on current matters that are being planned or prepared

Latest news from, e.g., the Parliament and the Government
System for the electronic collection of signatures for citizens’ initiatives

A tool for direct democracy at national level

Electronic signatures, 6 months for collecting them

A way to submit an initiative to the Parliament to enact an act

Over 500 initiatives, 200,000 visitors/month

Audited by Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority

Users’ names are not visible to the public
The citizens’ initiative in a nutshell

• A citizens' initiative may include either a bill or a proposal that a bill drafting process should be started. An initiative may also concern amending or repealing an effective Act.
• Online system requires so called strong e-identification, for example the use of online banking codes or a mobile certificate provided by teleoperators.
• When the collection is completed, the organizer shall submit the statements of support to the Population Register Centre for validity check
• Parliament has an obligation to consider a citizens' initiative that gained 50 000 supporters, but it is up to Parliament whether it wishes to approve an initiative, with or without changes.
System for the electronic collection of signatures for initiatives to municipal authorities

A tool for direct democracy at a local level

A way to submit an initiative to municipal authorities

Initiatives can be supported by others or submitted directly to the authorities

Over 1000 initiatives, 20,000 visitors/month

Municipalities can decide whether to adopt the tool or not

Users’ names are not visible to the public

demokratia.fi
Service for young people to put forward their ideas

Young people’s initiatives or ideas for municipality, school or NGO

Operates at both local and national level

Ideas can be supported by others or submitted directly to the organisations

Low threshold to participate

366 initiatives, 3,500 visitors/month

Youth Act 8 §: young people should be heard in matters concerning them
Channel for participation and interaction open to all

Public authorities, NGOs and citizens can open discussions

Drafting of laws, planning strategies and programmes, evaluation of services and policies

A tool for mapping citizens’ needs and ideas

Several participation tools: discussion forum, chat, web questionnaire, poll

Over 300 participation projects, 15,000 visitors/month
Service for making official requests for statements

A tool for collecting statements electronically

Requests for statements may be made by public authorities

Statements may be given by NGOs, companies, public authorities or private individuals

All statements are public and may be commented by anyone

Over 560 organisations registered as users, 2500 visitors/month
Some statistics on website visits

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<th>2015</th>
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Key benefits of e-participation

- Open to everyone; reaching larger groups of stakeholders
- Quality, effectiveness and acceptability of drafting increases
- Variety of participation methods (tools and methods support)
- Participation with less time-bound or physical limits
- Uniform processes
- Less dependency on particular persons, less overlapping information systems
Fundamental Rights’ Dimensions

Accessibility

Transparency and access to information

Data protection and identification

Paper vs digital world

Engagement

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Thank you!

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