**Demand driven eParticipation**

Francesco Molinari, mail@francescomolinari.it

Brendan Galbraith, b.galbraith@ulster.ac.uk

**Abstract (~500 words)**

Electronic Participation has traditionally focused on the use of ICT for citizen involvement in political decisions and public policy making. This concept, together with the companion of Electronic Voting, has been increased over the past 10 years across a huge number of elaborations and pragmatic implementations. The ICT industry and the public sector itself have taken benefit from these experimentations in terms of stock taking, lessons learnt and the financing of both infrastructures and processes. However, there appears to be a dearth of cases were technology has been “disruptive” in terms of reversing the top-down attitude of modern governments in approaching their constituencies and/or stakeholders. In other words, the adoption of digital tools empowering policy makers, civil servants, citizens and businesses has not fostered per se the transformation of western societies in the direction of a more collaborative, open and inclusive decision-making environment. Meanwhile, the advent of open data and Web 2.0 movements has started to shifted attention towards the potential of self-organising virtual communities in driving accountability, transparency and reliability (i.e. both quality and trustworthiness) of public action. While the dimension of collective engagement can be attractive to direct democracy advocates and seem to be deployed effectively in a variety of “side domains” to political participation (such as participatory design or the co-evaluation/co-production of public services, e.g. in smart cities), the question remains open as if all this may suffice to realise the dream of “democratising democracy” in full.

There is a third way, however, between the two extremes of ceremonial adoption of eParticipation solutions by the incumbent governments and the need for them to accept (or suffer) the political pressure of little known, uncontrolled and unmanageable “virtual constituencies”. We posit that the extension of this undefined terrain is larger than we might expect and can be characterised as “*Demand driven eParticipation*”. That is, fulfilling the requirement for more inclusive and empowering digital tools that respond to specific needs emerging from various “customer” categories, in such a way that conventional (i.e. non ICT supported) participatory actions could never manage in full.

We provide examples of successful eParticipation trials and subsequent commissioned eParticipation solutions that have been inspired and ultimately driven by three main customer groups: individual governments, civil society groupings and unconventional “intermediaries” such as Universities and Living Labs. We analyse the drivers of adoption and the specific needs that the used tools have fulfilled and how they can be developed to increase impact and wider reach. We conclude that some of the reasons for late or slow take-up of these innovations at broader EU level may have to do with a poor awareness of the diversity of needs, lack of documented cases (both success and failure stories), and confusion of goals, instruments, and expected results.

In short, a more mature approach to democracy certainly includes the appropriation of a range of eParticipatory tools that already exist on the market and have to be aligned with the solution of real (and usually tricky) problems of prospective adopters.