



# Evolution Rather Than Revolution

- a Comparative Analysis of the Quality of  
E-Democracy

Alina Östling

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences  
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute  
**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

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## ***Abstract***

This thesis examines the democratic advantages and challenges of e-democracy, as well as its impact. The aim is to address some of the theoretical and empirical gaps in the rapidly developing but still emerging field of e-democracy. Moreover, the intention is to assist e-democracy practitioners in tailoring their projects in a way that addresses the particular democratic problems that they are facing. To this purpose, the thesis presents a theoretical frame and indicators to assess the quality of e-democracy projects.

The quality is explored through in-depth comparison of five case studies of e-democracy initiatives in Italy, France, Sweden and the UK. Two types of projects are examined: e-petitioning and parliamentary informatics (i.e. projects that enable citizens to monitor and engage in legislative activities of parliaments). The thesis provides primary survey evidence from nearly 700 e-democracy participants, as well as from interviews with project stakeholders. In focusing on e-democracy from the user perspective - rather than from the more common perspectives of policy-makers and data/tool providers - and in addressing standards of democratic quality, the thesis contributes to a rebalancing of the e-democracy debate towards civic, over structural and technological characteristics.

The e-democracy projects at hand show that ICT improve access and usability of information, facilitate the interaction between citizens and civil society, and offer important stimuli for engagement. The projects manage to attract previously passive citizens and deepen engagement with those who are already involved in politics. However, the downside is that many of the traditionally under-represented groups in politics are even more absent from e-democracy platforms. Moreover, the projects stop short of establishing direct communication between citizens and their representatives, and of achieving policy impact. In fact, my findings confirm that ICT enable new dynamics but that the traditional political institutions remain change resistant. Rather than permitting a revolution, e-democracy contributes to a slow evolution of the political system.



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## **1. Introduction**

This thesis analyses the quality of several electronic (e-)democracy projects, across varied geographical and political contexts, examining both implementation processes and impact. The aim is to address some of the theoretical and empirical gaps in the rapidly developing but still emerging field of e-democracy.

The range of innovations in digital participation, available to both governments and citizens, has multiplied over recent years (Williamson 2012). The new tools go beyond simple information technology (IT), to include concepts such as social media, big and open data, and Web 2.0, with an emphasis on creation and interaction by users. In the past decade, the number and variety of e-democracy projects have grown in Western Europe (Lührs and Molinari 2010). In line with the importance now being given to e-democracy, a myriad of new participatory institutions, frameworks and instruments have sprung up (Stirling 2008). OECD talks about an explosion of interest in and use of participative web tools and platforms (OECD 2009). E-democracy has today become an important issue on the EU's policy agenda and an integral part of the political landscape in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, little is actually known about its effects on European democracies. Citizens' engagement is often assumed to have a uniformly positive impact on democracy and on the quality of decision-making. At least in theory, these projects enable citizens to set the political agenda and influence policy processes. Many scholars, as well as actors involved in the implementation of e-democracy projects, tend to promote them rather uncritically and profess that digital technologies enhance inclusiveness, transparency and the quality of political participation (Ekelin 2007a; Fromkin 2004 in Chadwick 2009).

However, the reality is more ambiguous. Whilst some effects can be foreseen, most e-

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The Malmö Ministerial Declaration on e-Government made e-democracy one of its four main priorities (entitled "empowerment and transparency through e-Government services and the use of ICT"). E-democracy is also tackled by the European e-Government Action Plan (2011-15), which includes action for enhanced involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes of either their Member States or the EU.

democracy projects result in complex and mixed impact on democratic practice, or in no impact at all (Pratchett 2006). Some projects are dominated by a minority of participants or lobby groups; others show poor deliberation quality and are disconnected from policy making (Lührs and Molinari 2010; Wojcik 2007). From the theoretical perspective, it is not clear what democratic standards and outcomes e-democracy is expected to attain. In practice, participatory initiatives are usually evaluated according to structural characteristics (e.g. the number of participants, the tools used and the general intention of the process) but not according to their democratic quality (EIPP 2009).

My research aims at contributing to the debate about the relation between the Internet, public participation and democracy. In particular, I would like to shed light on the type of democratic advantages and challenges of e-democracy projects, as well as their impact. This is an area that is insufficiently researched to date. Firstly, there is a lack of theories about how ICT affect democracy. Secondly, most claims about the advantages of new participatory mechanisms are based on theoretical and normative assumptions, rather than on systematic empirical evidence (Åström 1999; Grönlund and Åström 2010). The literature so far has focused on descriptions of isolated cases, with little comparative work on digital media and political engagement outside of the United States and the United Kingdom (Anduiza et al. 2012). This calls for a move towards a comparative evaluation of cases (Åström and Grönlund 2011; Lippa et al. 2008).

The research presented here aims at contributing to filling this gap by developing a richer and more nuanced understanding of how e-democracy projects are contributing to democracy in different countries. Moreover, my research could be useful for improving the actual practice of e-democracy. Different forms of democratic problems require different forms of public engagement (Fagotto and Fung 2009) and my findings should be able to assist e-democracy practitioners in tailoring their projects in a way that addresses the particular democratic problems that they are facing. This quality assessment of e-democracy will hopefully be useful for political reformers, civil society activists, and other actors who would like to improve their practice.

My thesis aims at addressing the gaps outlined above by presenting a theoretical frame and indicators for e-democracy projects, and for their democratic quality. Primarily, I assume that there are causal links between, on the one hand, socio-technological context, type of information provided on e-democracy platforms, civic pressure in terms of media visibility and mobilisation of citizens around the projects, as well as political support for the project, and, on the other hand, the quality of these projects. These links are explored through in-depth comparison of five case studies of e-democracy initiatives in Italy, France, Sweden and the UK. These cases include e-petitioning initiatives and projects aimed at allowing citizens to monitor and actively engage in the legislative activities of their parliaments. The following research questions frame my thesis:

- What is the quality of e-democracy projects?
- What affects their democratic quality?

When exploring democratic quality, I distinguish between quality as process and quality as outcome. To this purpose, I use Blanco and Lowndes' (2011) categorization of participatory approaches. They differentiate between two main ways of justifying the need for direct citizen engagement in policy-making: (i) the 'essentialist approach', where the participation process is a constituting element of democratic legitimacy and an end in itself; and (ii) the 'instrumentalist approach' where participation is a means to reach certain socio-political outcomes. In fact, the frontiers between these two approaches are often blurred and tend to be mixed, within the scholarly debate (Blanco and Lowndes 2011).

The essentialist approach is rooted in Barber's concept of strong democracy and in Dryzek's notion of the deliberative turn, and considers public engagement as an essential feature of democracy (Barber 1984; Dryzek 2002). From this perspective, the main challenge is to assess the extent to which participation fulfils certain procedural criteria that ensure its democratic legitimacy. From the instrumental perspective, the key challenge is to find evidence of the impact of participation and to discover the causal links between participation and outcomes. I am conceptualising outcomes as (i) direct: intended as political responsiveness to citizens' claims, and (ii) indirect: in the form of increased civic literacy. Civic literacy is defined as the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in politics, and

embodies increased understanding of and interest in politics, as well as stimulus to participation (Milner 2002). Civic literacy is closely linked to the concept of civic education, as envisioned by Rousseau, Tocqueville, Mill and other prominent political thinkers.

In more recent literature, civic literacy acquired through participation in different deliberative forums is seen as a resource for counteracting privatism,<sup>2</sup> demobilization, individual withdrawal, and exclusion – qualities that increasingly characterize our political lives today. Engagement in public debate gives people a chance to see themselves as capable and responsible members in a shared public life (Button and Ryfe 2005, p. 30). From the social capital standpoint, participation is considered to cultivate civic attitudes and skills, e.g. trust, reciprocity, tolerance and willingness to get involved in politics (Putnam 1993). In the current context of disillusionment with democracy and the erosion of social capital, participatory initiatives are seen as particularly fit for addressing the underlying factors. This is why it is important to investigate civic literacy in the framework of this thesis.

As to direct outcomes in terms of political responsiveness, empirical studies have generally neglected the political outcomes of e-participation. According to Blanco and Lowndes (2011), this could be because of methodological challenges in showing causal relationships, and because of analytical difficulties in identifying the conditions that favour/obstruct the effect of participation. This is why it is imperative also to examine the extent to which participants' proposals are taken into consideration by politicians or civil servants.

The thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter 1 delineates the key concepts related to the quality of e-democracy and the research questions at the core of the thesis. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the state of the art in the field of e-democracy by examining some of the main currents of thought on different elements pertinent to the quality of e-democracy. Chapter 3 examines some of the manifold ways in which democracy and e-democracy can be conceptualised, focussing especially on strong and thin conceptions of democracy. Moreover, selected elements of the quality of e-democracy - equality, accountability, responsiveness

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<sup>2</sup> Privatism can be defined as the concern with or pursuit of one's personal or family interests, welfare, or ideals to the exclusion of broader social issues or relationships.

and civic literacy - are investigated as dependent variables. I conclude the first, theoretical, part of the thesis in chapter 4, by explaining the methodology used during the research design and during the collection of empirical data. The empirical part of the thesis has two identically structured chapters, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, where I analyse and compare the three parliamentary informatics and two e-petitioning cases in separate chapters. Finally, the last section of the thesis makes an overall comparison of all the cases, discusses the findings and draws general conclusions.

### **1.1. What are e-democracy and e-democracy projects?**

Before discussing the quality of e-democracy, some conceptual clarification is in order. The intention of the introductory chapters is to shed light on the meaning of the terms used throughout the thesis. To start with, e-democracy is an ambiguous notion. It is often stretched conceptually to include all sorts of political uses of the technology - from party web sites and campaigning to e-voting devices and administrative services provided by government (Zittel 2004a). In recent times, the concept of e-democracy is at least viewed separately from that of e-government. E-government and e-democracy often depend upon the same technologies, but their functions are distinct. Most e-government devices are concerned with the efficient performance of administrative transactions with citizens, while e-democracy seeks to improve the relationship with citizens and increase their participation in politics.

Oddly, e-democracy research has only partially and inconsistently used the findings of the rich literature on citizens' participation in politics (Avdic et al. 2007). In reality, the characterization of e-democracy is closely related to that of public participation, which Rowe and Frewer (2004, p. 512) define as the "practice of consulting and involving members of the public in the agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations or institutions responsible for policy development".

What further complicates research is that the e-democracy domain is multidisciplinary and suffers from a lack of consistent terminology shared across the relevant scientific domains. Since its birth, researchers and practitioners have generated a wide range of competing and

confusing terms such as cyber democracy, teledemocracy and information age democracy (Åström 1999; Davies 2009). The use of one term rather than another may merely reflect the individual preference of an author, or have a distinct meaning, often related to a specific area of literature or practice. Moreover, e-democracy initiatives are rooted in distinct notions of democracy and apply different democratic values to technological change: something that leaves not only scientists but also practitioners struggling with the definition of e-democracy (Åström 2004).

For the purposes of this thesis, the following definition of e-democracy is adopted (based on Trechsel et al. 2003; Zittel 2004a and 2004b):

*e-democracy consists of new media tools that enable citizens to access information, as well as connect with each other and with their representatives in order to participate in democratic processes.*

The concept above is a sub-set of the broad definition of e-democracy and focuses especially on elements of communication and political participation. It also implies that the use of ICT facilitates and influences democratic processes (Grönlund 2001; Hoff et al. 2000). The term e-democracy has the disadvantage of being slightly misleading: the 'e' - which stands for 'electronic' - can refer not only to new media technology but also to the use of electronic devices such as television and microphone. The term can also be confounding because it does not refer to a new type of democracy but simply to the application of ICT to political processes. However, it is one of the most used and understood terms when referring to relations between computer technologies and political processes.

In general, e-democracy enables various actors to participate in democratic practices like elections, referendums, citizen juries and consultations. However, conceptually, e-democracy embraces more than simply technologically facilitated access to government. It implies both innovation in conventional representative democracy processes and a move towards more deliberative, participatory or direct approaches to democracy. Moreover, in practice, it often involves a blending of different democratic forms, which both builds on and changes existing

institutions. For example, web casting of municipal or parliamentary meetings aims at reinforcing the transparency and accountability of representatives, in order to strengthen existing institutions of representative democracy (Pratchett 2006). In contrast, the European citizens' initiative (ECI), which enables citizens to advance legislative proposals<sup>3</sup> to the European Commission, aims at changing the existing democratic practices. If over one million EU citizens back the citizens' initiative, the European Commission is obliged to examine it and give a formal response (European Commission 2012c; de Witte et al. 2010).

The second part of the concept under study – 'project' – is defined as a temporary undertaking, usually constrained by date, funding or deliverables (Chatfield and Johnson 2007; Nokes and Kelly 2007). According to this definition projects are carried out to meet specific objectives, usually to bring about beneficial change or added value. I have opted for the term 'project', since it has a more neutral connotation with respect to other denominations such as: 'initiative', which might be confused with popular initiatives, 'engagement', which bears the notion of commitment to a cause, or 'action', which echoes European Commission undertakings. Moreover, the notion of project adapts well to e-democracy since most of its undertakings are in 'beta' (i.e. under development and of a temporary nature).

Projects are generally either top-down or bottom-up. In recent times, state actors are increasingly involved in supporting online participation from a top-down perspective (Åström and Granberg 2009). Top-down projects are owned and hosted by state actors. Some scholars argue that this development brings along the danger of stifling grass roots activity, leaving little space for civil society to develop e-democracy approaches of its own (Pratchett 2006). The opposite of the top-down approach is the bottom-up perspective, where citizens are seen as initiators and/or producers, rather than just consumers (Macintosh 2003). This kind of approach is strongly in line with the assumptions of strong or participatory democracy. The classical literature on the socio-political implications of digital technologies claims that grass roots forms of participation are a source of democratisation (Bennet 2003

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<sup>3</sup> Proposals can take on any form, ranging from a proposal that simply states a goal (e.g. "the Commission should act on XY") to a fully formulated draft legislative text (de Witte et al. 2010).

and Castells 1996 in Balocchi et al. 2008).

In short, for the purpose of my research, 'e-democracy projects' are defined as the *use of digital tools by state or civil society organisations (CSOs) to enable citizens to connect with one another and with their representatives in order to participate in democratic processes.* The e-democracy projects studied in this thesis include both top-down initiatives led by state authorities and bottom-up projects managed by CSOs. CSOs are defined as a set of institutions through which society organises and represents itself autonomously from the state (Gramsci 1971). In the framework of my thesis, I will examine the democratic quality of projects from both essentialist (process) and instrumentalist (outcome) perspectives.

In conclusion, "Chapter 1. Introduction" presented the key concepts related to the quality of e-democracy and the research questions at the core of the thesis. The next chapter will give an overview of the state of the art in the field of e-democracy.



## **2. E-democracy: state of the art**

### **2.1. Are citizens satisfied as spectators?**

In recent times, most advanced democracies are experiencing growing citizen dissatisfaction and low voter turnout (Franklin 2004; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Saward 2000; Schmitter and Trechsel 2004; Dalton 2004; Torcal and Montero 2006). All indicators of citizens' trust in political institutions demonstrate a striking decline and citizens are becoming increasingly critical towards government institutions (Norris 1999; Rosanvallon 2008; Morlino 2009). Trust in the EU now stands at its lowest ever level (31%), while the levels of trust in national governments and parliaments are even lower (28% respectively) (Eurobarometer 2012). The widespread concern about the health of democracies has been labelled as the 'democratic deficit', which denotes that there is a gap between public aspirations for democracy (measured by citizens' assessment of democratic ideals) and satisfaction (Norris 2011, p. 5).

The world of political parties is ever more separated from the sphere of citizenry, and political actors seem ever less able to act according to citizens' needs and interests (Mair 2007; Pharr and Putnam 2000). One stream of the academic debate even asserts that representative government has turned into a sort of oligarchy - a self-perpetuating elite that governs passive citizens or 'spectators', who have been excluded from public life (Arendt 1965 in Pitkin 2004). Manin (1995) argues that representative democracy has been replaced by the 'audience democracy', characterized by personalisation of elections, growing importance of public opinion, media-centred public debates and vaguely formulated political programmes that allow a large room for manoeuvre by the elites.

At the same time, several scholars put in doubt citizens' willingness to participate in politics. Coglianesi (2007, p. 28) maintains that most people are disengaged from politics and not knowledgeable enough to make a useful contribution to complex political processes. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), in their influential thesis about stealth democracy, go as far as saying that the majority of (American) people repudiate participatory forms of democracy. Green (2009), who adopts a more balanced stance, asserts that most citizens are involved in politics as spectators, without engaging actively. Political theory has generally treated citizens

either as the 'citizen-governor' - a citizen who debates, acts, protests and decides – or as the 'apolitical citizen' – who takes little interest in and has limited knowledge about politics, and who does not engage as in political activities like voting, or at least not with a full awareness of his/her actions. But, as Green (2009, p. 32-33) argues, there might be a third category of the 'citizen-spectator' in democracies of today – a citizen who has knowledge and interest in politics, yet stays inactive.

There is certainly some truth in the notion of citizens as comfortable spectators. Firstly, participation has a cost: gathering and analysing information takes time, effort and resources, while the policy effects are often unclear. Hence, according to public choice theory, many people fall prey to 'rational ignorance' (Downs 1957). Secondly, for most people, politics is not their preferred area of activity. The majority does not have a firm stand on most political issues, due to lack of either inclination or opportunity to shape a relevant opinion (Pratchett et al. 2009a; Margolis 2007, p. 771). This should not be taken as proof that citizens are indifferent or content with the actual state of affairs.

Given that the existing institutions of liberal democracy are not operating satisfactorily, citizens' negative attitudes and inertia could well be due to the current democratic arrangements and not a definite refusal to engage in politics. Given the growing tension between democratic ideals and reality, citizens are more critical and disenchanted. However, this is not an entirely negative phenomenon. Critical citizens could be motivated to improve and reform the institutions of representative democracy. This might have implications also for new channels of public participation in governance (Norris 1999b).

In fact, despite declining levels of voter turnout, more recent literature reveals a shift towards unconventional participation, which is strongly individualistic but less elite-driven with respect to institutionalised engagement (Hay 2007; Anduiza et al. 2012). Participatory initiatives have increased in the last two decades, not only in Europe, but also in the rest of the world (Åström and Granberg 2009; Talpin 2012). In addition to the 'pull' of opportunities provided by new digital forms of political communication, the 'push' of the weakening power of the vote offers an incentive for unconventional participation (Kriesi 2008, p. 160; Anduiza

et al. 2012, p. 6). A sophisticated public invests less in voting and more in different forms of participatory activities, many of them citizen-initiated (Dalton 2008, p. 54). The growth of alternative forms of democratic activity - such as participation in demonstrations, involvement in associations and signing of petitions - suggests that citizenship is transformed rather than weakened (Rosanvallon 2008). On the whole, citizens seem no longer content with voting now and then, and giving a free hand to their representatives for the rest of the time. An active minority is demanding meaningful interaction with the government and consideration of their views also between elections (Coleman and Blumler 2009; Flew 2008; Rosanvallon 2008).

The Internet has probably contributed to the transformation of many people from passive receivers of information to active creators of content. The UK charity mySociety shows noteworthy project statistics, which confirm these assumptions. Their website WriteToThem, which allows citizens to easily identify and contact elected representatives, has allegedly been used to send over 650,000 messages, around half of which come from citizens who had never written to a politician before. Another of their projects, HearFromYourMP, which encourages British Members of Parliament (MPs) to talk with citizens about things they think are important and gives citizens a chance to react, has over 118,000 registered users and over 200 MPs who have actively used the service to date.<sup>4</sup> Comparably, the Parliament Watch network, which operates in Germany, Ireland, Austria and Luxemburg, registered over 123,000 questions by citizens and over 100,000 answers by their representatives, between 2004-2011.<sup>5</sup> Arguably, suitable arenas for interaction between citizens and governors are today created with innovative solutions online.

## **2.2. Internet as facilitator of participation**

The last decades have brought about a fundamental shift in information dissemination. The old linear information logic of newspaper, radio and television has been superseded by an interactive logic, where content is selected, categorized and frequently even created by

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics retrieved from the MySociety website on 17 January 2011: [www.mysociety.org/projects](http://www.mysociety.org/projects)

<sup>5</sup> The statistics originate from the Parliament Watch website, accessed on 4 February 2013 at: <http://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/international-248-0.html#kapitel1>

citizens themselves (Milner 2009). Many scholars are convinced that the availability of such unbounded possibility for content creation means that the Internet fosters greater political interest, knowledge and communication, and conceivably also political participation. They argue that this can in turn broaden and deepen democracy (Mossberger et al. 2008; Tolbert and McNeal 2003).

Despite divergences about the magnitude of the effect, the academic community generally agrees that the digital media have an impact on political involvement (Anduiza et al. 2012). The rapid proliferation of the Internet, in particular, can intensify participation in politics (Dahlgren 2009). A recent study by the Pew Research Center shows that 73% of adult Internet users in the US went online to get news or information about the 2010 midterm elections, or to get involved in the campaign in one way or another. As recently as the 2006 election cycle just 16% of American adults used online social networking sites. Today 60% are present on social networks, which have emerged as a key part of the political landscape in the most recent campaign cycle. Moreover, over half of adult users state that the Internet facilitates their connection with others who share their political views (Smith 2011).

There is a vast experimentation with various participatory innovations on the Internet (Davies and Gangadharan 2009; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). These, it is claimed, develop new, dynamic forms of democracy - mainly by functioning as horizontal communication channels, allowing multi-actor discussions, as well as one-to one dialogue (Castells 2001; Glencross 2007). In today's wired world, citizens are able to easily connect with each other, contact politicians and obtain a large variety of information, to make informed decisions about a wide range of issues. ICT are able to challenge the traditional barriers to citizen engagement associated with time and space: asynchronous techniques allow them to participate at their own pace, and large-scale participation is possible without incurring the costs of physically bringing citizens together (Smith G. et al. 2009). Moreover, the Internet facilitates organisational capability and provides various ways of spreading opinions (Norris 2001). By using digital tools, citizens can easily create online communities, carry out mass meetings and participate in discussions at a minimal cost. However, e-democracy still struggles with some fundamental limitations, such as socio-economic inequalities and digital

divides. These aspects will be examined in the next section.

### **2.3. Digital divides and inequalities**

In contrast to the high expectations and potential effects of e-democracy depicted in the previous section, the more pessimistic scholars argue that the Internet has limited impact on changing citizens' motivational basis for political activities (Norris 2000). In fact, Milner (2011) asserts that there is no radical shift from voting to alternative forms of participation in politics. People who vote engage in other forms of participation from time to time, but few of those who abstain from voting engage in alternative participation. Oser (2010) – using broad-ranging statistical data - concurs that unconventional forms of participation are not replacing conventional ones.

Supporters of the so-called 'normalisation thesis' argue that the Internet is not improving the rate or quality of democratic participation. E-democracy is simply reproducing, and thereby reinforcing, existing social biases in participation (Norris 2003; Tolbert et al. 2003). Hindman (2009) goes even further by asserting that the Internet, instead of giving voice to ordinary citizens, has in fact empowered a small set of elites. He sustains that – while the digital media have increased some forms of political participation and transformed the ways in which interest groups organize, mobilize, and raise funds - elites still shape how political material on the web is presented and accessed. ICT could be creating new democratic problems, or exacerbating old ones, by increasing, rather than diminishing, the potential for elite manipulation and inequalities of power. (Barber 1984).

In fact, online environments often reflect the classical divides already existing in offline participation (Verba et al. 1978). E-democracy projects tend to attract the wealthy and the well educated in a disproportionate way (Norris 1999a and 2000). Based on cross-national data, Gidengil et al. (2004, p. 142) claim that “the affluent and the highly educated are the most likely to sign petitions, join in boycotts, and attend lawful demonstrations, just as they are likely to vote, to become members of political parties, and to join interest groups”. E-democracy initiatives seem to be replicating and even reinforcing existing political inequalities (Krueger 2002; Norris 2001).

Not only scholars but also state actors are diffident in their approach towards e-democracy, given that lawfully elected representatives risk being marginalised by unidentified groups or individuals (Chadwick 2009). Participatory arrangements in general, not only the online ones, are criticised as lacking representativeness. An active minority threaten to impact far beyond their number: the loudest, the well-resourced and the most confident voices of the public may dominate the debate. To take the case of citizen juries<sup>6</sup>; people who have a high social and cultural status tend to speak more often and lead the other participants (Sanders 1997).

However, another strand of scholarly debate argues that the ideas of normalisation theorists might apply to offline, but not equally to online, participation. Socio-economic characteristics appear to be important for determining Internet access, but their influence is weaker once people do get online. Krueger (2002) argues that if equalised access is assumed, the Internet has potential to bring new individuals into the political process. Having conducted an empirical analysis, he asserts that those endowed with traditional resources, such as civic skills and higher income, are not advantaged in political participation online. Krueger claims that people who participate online draw on a different set of resources and, above all, that Internet-related skills become a key asset. A study by Gibson et al. (2005) shows similar results to that of Krueger (2002), namely that UK citizens engaging in online participation differ considerably from citizens engaging in existing and more traditional forms of politics, such as contacting politicians and officials, discussing politics and being involved in organisational activities. In particular, while women and persons from poorer backgrounds are less likely to engage in more activist politics offline, they are equally as likely to engage in online participation as men and individuals of higher social status - once existing levels of political involvement and digital skills are taken into account.

These findings are related to the much-debated 'digital divides' – namely, differences in

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<sup>6</sup> Citizen jury is a randomly selected and demographically representative panel of citizens that examine an issue of public significance. They hear from a variety of expert witnesses, deliberate together on the issue, and present its recommendations to decision-makers and the public. This information was retrieved from the web page of the Jefferson Center ([www.jefferson-center.org](http://www.jefferson-center.org)), a think-tank on democracy, which allegedly invented the citizen jury process.

access to and proficiency in ICT – which constitute a serious barrier to participation. A considerable number of people do not have access to the relevant equipment and knowledge to use new digital technologies (Norris 2001). In the EU, 27% of households still do not have Internet access, and about a quarter of the population aged 16-74 has never used the Internet (EUROSTAT 2011). Even in contexts where access to technology and Internet is largely secured, certain groups of the population may lack the skills to take advantage of it, particularly where complex forms of engagement are required, e.g. engaging in online discussions or marketing petitions (Pratchett 2006). In fact, only ten percent of European Internet users - or five percent of the whole European population - are estimated to be involved in more complex Internet practices such as producing content or offer reviews/feedbacks (Osimo 2008).

Yet, e-democracy is also a window of opportunity. Recent research suggests that new forms of public participation happening in blogs and on social networking sites could be about to alter long-standing socio-economic patterns. About one fifth of Internet users in the US have posted material online about socio-political issues, or used a social networking site for some type of civic engagement (Smith A. et al. 2009). Younger people (under age 35) are particularly active in new forms of online civic engagement. They represent 72% of those who make political use of social networking sites, and 55% of those who post comments or visual material about politics on the Internet.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that neither political involvement on social networking sites nor posting material about politics on the web is strongly correlated with socio-economic status and educational level (Smith A. et al. 2009). As this cohort grows older, online participation might grow stronger among all groups of citizens.

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<sup>7</sup> The youngest members of this group (the under-25) make up 40% of those who make political use of social networking sites and 29% of those who post comments or visual material about politics online.

## 2.4. Lone and polarised web surfers

New technologies also carry considerable risks insofar as they make it easy for citizens to register their short-term, as opposed to pondered, opinions and pressure governments to respond (Hacker and van Dijk 2000; Sunstein 2007). They could actually weaken democracy through their characteristics of speed, simplicity, isolation and segmentation (Barber 1984). Many scholars and (not least) media commentators repeatedly claim that digital technologies have a tendency to divide and isolate people. With new media, citizens often find themselves spatially and temporally removed from the setting of political activity. This situation fosters a political participation that is disjointed from active engagement: an expression of citizenship that occurs in silence, in a seated position (Green 2009, p. 40).

When using new technologies we tend to shield ourselves from the outside world by means of our monitors, and to put an emphasis on virtual socialisation. Online engagement in political life takes place in a detached and simulated space – while participation should be an open and public act (Sunstein 2007). Computers allow us to privatize our public spaces, and this is a significant shift in people's relationship to politics. This potential trend towards more individualised forms of engagement – emphasised in particular by the social capital literature – could be undermining the sense of reciprocity and trust that is essential for a thriving democracy (Putnam 2000; Putnam and Feldstein 2003). However, more recent research has put this argument about isolation in doubt. Hampton et al. (2011) show that Internet users are less isolated than people who do not use social media; in particular they have a positive relationship to network size and diversity. Several other studies also point to the positive effect of the Internet on social relations and on the improved social capital of its users (di Gennaro and Dutton 2007; Wang and Wellman 2010, Ellison et al. 2007).

Polarisation is another risk for e-democracy. Web surfers tend to prefer connecting with people sharing the same hobbies, similar identities and political views. In fact, most of the virtual communities seem to consist of narrowly defined interest groups (Barber 1999). A study by Sunstein (2007) revealed that political bloggers rarely highlight opposing opinions: in the 1,400 blogs surveyed, 91% of links were to like-minded sites. In the future, this



fragmentation of citizens into self-interested groups speaking to themselves, and the online balkanization of opinions might deepen even further (Bittle et al. 2009; Sunstein 2007). Even when contrasting sides do communicate, discussion often reinforces opposition between groups and individuals, rather than leading to the adoption of conciliatory proposals (Papadopoulos 1995; Cohen and Fung 2004). For example, studies show that people who oppose birth control, after talking to each other, will tend to oppose it even more; or that people who believe that our biodiversity is threatened are even more likely to insist on their point in case after discussion (Sunstein 2002).

Similar concerns emerge from a 2007 survey of circa 1,200 Internet experts<sup>8</sup>, who were asked if they thought that people would be more tolerant in 2020 than they are today. About 32% expected tolerance to grow, while circa 56% disagreed with this scenario saying that communication networks also increase the potential for hate, bigotry, and terrorism. Some respondents pointed out that the partition between the tolerant and intolerant could grow because of the information-sharing tactics people use on the Internet (Anderson and Rainie 2008).

This chapter has given a brief but hopefully comprehensive description of the state of the art in the field of e-democracy, and placed this novel phenomenon in context. The following chapter will derive and define all the relevant concepts from current political theories, so as to make them clearly distinguishable and measurable in terms of empirical observation.

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<sup>8</sup> These Internet experts were mainly “hand-picked due to their positions as stakeholders in the development of the Internet or they were reached through the leadership listservs of top technology organizations” (Anderson and Rainie 2008, p. 7).



### ***3. Conceptualisation***

#### **3.1. Different conceptions of (e-)democracy**

In spite of its long history, the concept of democracy is inherently ambiguous (Held 1987). Numerous writers have attempted to define democracy, and many adjectives have been applied to it during the course of its history (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Saward 2007). These modifiers serve as analytical tools, to clarify the very broad notion of democracy, to characterize specific forms of democracy and to distinguish between its different types (Zittel 2004b).

The equally ambiguous notion of e-democracy originates from the early 1970s, when new digital media such as telephone and computer networks were first perceived as tools for political reform (Barber 1984; Krauch 1972, Etzioni et al. 1975 and Becker 1981 in Zittel 2004a). Currently, digital media are believed to change the nature of political communication and democratic government (Rheingold 1993; Zittel 2004a). ICT are expected to transform the relationship between governments and their citizens and to give rise to a more open, transparent and responsive governance, as well offer more possibilities for citizens' engagement (Pratchett 2006).

The theoretical underpinnings of e-democracy are not new either; theorists have debated over political participation since the dawn of democracy. The first democratic transformations in Greece, Rome and Renaissance Italy took place in small-scale city settings, with a limited demos, which facilitated citizens' direct participation in politics. The possibility of taking part in key political decisions by discussing and voting in face-to-face citizens' assemblies vanished with the development of the larger-scale nation state. Effective representation and participation in democracies became constrained by the scale of constituencies, and by disconnection in time and space (Dahl 1989). Nevertheless, the vision of the Athenian agora, a forum in which citizens could come together to discuss politics, has remained one of the strongest normative ideals for democracy (Chadwick 2006).

The discourse about e-democracy might lead one to assume that it originates from *one type* of democracy. In reality, there is as much variation in conceptions of e-democracy as of democracy itself. E-democracy serves different purposes and values, depending on the type of democracy promoted by the project initiators and managers. Different conceptions of e-democracy can in turn result in different ways to approach the democratic deficit, and in the preference for certain digital tools above others. Thus, different types of democratic intentions have a distinct impact on democracy.

In the following sections, two distinct conceptions of democracy and their implications for e-democracy are explored by using Grönlund's categorisation of strong and thin democracies (Grönlund 2001). Grönlund, in turn, has based his categorisation on Barber (1984), who developed the strong democracy model, and Premfors (2000), who developed the thin model. The strong and thin democracy models are normative ideal types, which should be judged mainly by their analytical utility, and not by their connection to empirics.

### **3.1.1. Strong democracy**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasised the need to educate people as enlightened and active members of the community, can be considered as the first proponent of strong democracy, a concept further refined by Barber in the 1980s (Hacker and van Dijk 2000). Rousseau considered the right to voice an opinion, to propose and to discuss, as being an integral part of the notion of citizenship (Rosanvallon 2008). Today, one stream of the academic literature sees public participation as a remedy for the contemporary malaise of democracy, and as a cure for the problem of lack of communication and trust between politicians and citizens (Culpepper et al. 2007; Warren and Pearse 2008).

Present-day literature applies, among others, the following labels to strong democracy: deliberative, discursive, communicative or participatory. These notions are relatively close conceptually, although there are some nuances, e.g. participationists maintain that public virtue arises from people's direct engagement in public affairs, while deliberationists emphasise the benefits of discussion, as leading to better public choices (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). After the so-called 'deliberative turn', which acknowledged the limits of

participatory democracy in the 1990s, much of the academic emphasis has been concentrated on deliberation as a political tool (Dryzek 2002; Rosanvallon 2008). This academic stream implies that a simple majority decision process is not sufficient; the people's will has to be created through debate and learning. At the same time, the debate has to maintain a high quality and include a large and preferably representative sample of people.

Strong democracy encourages different types of participation, but also professes that engagement should enable citizens to influence the political agenda in the public arena. Participation is considered to improve the quality of decision-making by increasing the breadth and depth of the underlying information (Coenen et al. 1998 in Stirling 2006). Participatory initiatives are assumed to improve the efficiency of policy-making by involving concerned actors who possess important sectoral or local knowledge (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). Broader public participation is approached as a way to gather more diverse and context-specific bodies of knowledge, and to take more careful and explicit account of divergent values and interests (Stirling 2003 in Stirling 2006). Some decision-makers even assume that taking up the concerns of citizens will decrease the costs of policy implementation, because policies will be better targeted, and take stock of the realities of implementation (EIPP 2009). Kriesi (2012) accurately notes that citizens' participation is not just a matter of quantity, but also of quality. He argues that democracy needs engagement that is inclusive, informed and undistorted. Some of the measures that could benefit such qualified participation are favourable institutional frameworks that promote opportunities for engagement; individual resources that promote civic education; an active civil society; and, especially, civic mobilisation by old and new media (e-democracy).

Supporters of strong democracy invest a lot of hope in ICT since these allow for interactive communication, open up opportunities for more and improved debate among a larger public, and for a positive influence on politics (Åström 1998 in Ranerup 1999). This kind of democracy is the most demanding towards new technologies. These tools in turn require intricate solutions for interaction and more complex skills from organisers and users. E-mailing and chats are not sufficient, if the goal is to shape a common stand and to make

decisions. Strong democrats quest for more advanced e-techniques, such as forums, deliberative polls and web 2.0 applications, which support structured discussions and interaction between citizens and power holders, as well allow aggregation and analysis of the emerging opinions (Grönlund 2001).

### **3.1.2. Thin democracy**

The basic idea of thin democracy is that of the competition between elites. Elections are about choosing political leaders on the basis of generic political programmes, which allow the elites to revise their policy in a flexible way. The legitimacy of the politicians' power lies in accountability, where free and regular elections allow citizens to select the politicians who will run their country. Many proponents of thin democracy maintain that participation outside elections does not bring any benefits for democracy, and that a government that gives in to citizens' demands is an irresponsible government. Excessive transparency could contribute to creating conflicts, or force politicians to invest more time in getting the right political profile than in taking responsibility for their decisions (Grönlund 2001). Schumpeter and Sartori, among other scholars, consider that representatives should be left to govern undisturbed, and even suggest that citizens ought to be discouraged from intervening between elections (Parry and Moyser 1994; Schumpeter 1943).

Thin democracy advocates consider that the average citizen is not interested and not competent enough to participate in politics (Surowiecki 2004). In fact, Schudson introduced the notion of the 'monitorial citizen', who is aware of the need for keeping an eye on politics but is usually quite content to allow intermediary groups, such as media, parties and CSOs, to assume this role (Schudson 1999, p. 310). Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) pushed this notion even further by putting forward the concept of 'stealth democracy'. They argue that people dislike many of the practices associated with democracy - the conflicts, the debates, the compromises – and that ordinary citizens simply do not want to be involved in politics.

The thin democracy model has a communication strategy that is quite distinct from that of strong democracy. In particular, ICT are used to gain leadership and political support by reaching many people, and by adapting information to different citizen groups very cheaply.

Moreover, new technologies are used to provide citizens with online information and services, rendering public administration more efficient, and less costly. Thin democracy requires above all digital tools that can assure a high-quality supply of information, visually attractive and with 24h availability, by use of audio, video and graphics. This can be done through simple web pages, e-newsletters and search-engines that allow citizens to easily retrieve information.

Citizens are considered to be above all consumers of public services, and the elites attain legitimacy by providing them with high-quality state administration. Hence, the information is generally not shaped to serve as basis for political discussion or collective decision, as in the strong democracy model (Bellamy and Taylor 1998). The thin democracy approach can in the worst case produce window-dressing projects, carried out with the purpose of educating citizens, engineering their support, and in order to control public opinion by shaping it according to the power holders' agenda (Ekelin 2007b; Fung and Wright 2003).

### ***3.1.3. Conclusions***

The main features of the strong and thin categories of democracy are summarised in Table 1. While the thin model prioritizes information and service provision to voters perceived as 'clients', the strong one wants citizens to discuss politics and act as opinion formers. In fact, public discussion – involving both citizens and representatives - is the latter's core of legitimacy. This does not mean that the thin democracy does not admit any deliberation with citizens; government might be interested in received feedback about its services or to anticipate citizens' demands. However, the legitimacy basis of thin democracy lies not in the input by citizens but in government accountability. At the same time, the representatives have an open mandate, with freedom to change their course of action. Clearly, the two models aim at distinctive goals: the former wants citizens to discuss and engage in politics, while the latter invests all its faith in an elite whose task is to develop and maintain an efficient state administration.

Table 1. Overview of key features of strong and thin democracy

	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Thin</b>
<b>Goal</b>	To give citizens the opportunity to discuss and act on common matters	To develop an efficient administration and to allow elites to gain leadership and support
<b>Base for legitimacy</b>	Public debate	Accountability
<b>Citizen's role</b>	Opinion former	Client and voter
<b>Representatives' mandate</b>	Interactive	Open
<b>Main focus of ICT tools</b>	Discussion, aggregation of opinions	Information and service

Source. Elaboration based on Åström 1999, p. 326 and Grönlund 2003, p. 59.

In terms of ICT tools, some tools better match with specific democracy models. This means that a tool that facilitates government services is fundamental for thin democracy purposes, while a deliberation tool better serves strong democracy. However, this does not mean that a specific tool will promote one democratic form over another. The democratic result also depends on how it is used, e.g. a very complex tool for opinion aggregation might be available. However, its availability does not lead to strong democracy if the opinions expressed lack rational arguments or if politicians choose to ignore the opinions. Barber (1998, p. 585) emphasises that the effects of technology on democracy depend not on the quality and character of the technological tools but on the conception of democracy envisioned when creating and using the tools.

Deliberation, on the other hand, does require intervention, education, facilitation, and mediation-all anathema to devotees of an anarchic and wholly user-controlled net whose whole point is to circumvent facilitation, editing, and other "top- down" forms of intervention.

The normative preference for strong democracy amongst scholars who are using the strong/thin classification (e.g. Premfors (2000), Grönlund (2003) and Åström (1999)) is quite apparent. This preference seems to be grounded in a slightly skewed reading of the idea of thin (liberal) democracy. Premfors, who developed the thin democracy model, sees these



categories as normative ideal types, which should be judged mainly by their analytical utility, and not by their connection to empirics.

The different theories of democracy generate disagreement about how to respond to the presumed democratic deficit. The strong conception of democracy stresses that active citizens should participate in public decisions, while deliberative democracy supporters emphasise the need for political communication within society, and for the emergence of autonomous public spheres. In contrast, thin democracy proponents place a higher value on preference aggregation and participation through voting (Kies 2008).

What is more, distinct conceptions of democracy may also result in different academic assessments of e-democracy initiatives and in different research conclusions (Parry and Moyser 1994). In this thesis, e-democracy is discussed mainly from the strong democracy perspective. This means that the spotlight falls on (i) representativeness of project participants, (ii) communication between citizens and policy-makers, as well as on (iii) citizens' impact on policy.

### **3.2. Varieties of e-democracy**

This chapter has so far introduced the central concepts - democracy and e-democracy – and shed light on different conceptions of democracy – strong and thin. In this section, I will attempt at placing the two types of e-democracy projects under study (e-petitioning and parliamentary informatics projects) within the continuum of e-democracy varieties. This should be helpful for understanding their function and relation to different aspects of democracy.

E-petitioning and parliamentary informatics projects are not representative of the full spectrum of e-democracy developments and during my research I have made several attempts to place them on an 'e-democracy map' by trying to adapt Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969); OECD's model for government-citizens relations in policy-making (one-way two-way relations and partnership) (OECD 2011, p. 2); and Fung's democracy cube (Fung 2006, p. 14). However, neither of these conceptualisations was

appropriate for distinguishing between projects that often have similar aims, and use the same tools and strategies. In fact, at present, there is no generally accepted categorization of initiatives in the field of e-democracy studies.

However, at least a basic categorization of e-democracy varieties is appropriate to introduce the projects under study. This is done by using Trechsel et al.'s (2003) e-democracy matrix. The matrix maps real case examples of e-democracy techniques by illustrating how these are being used and which aspects of democracy they intend to promote (see Table 2). The first technique, e-access, is defined as the use of the Internet to improve electronic access to official documents and to political information. E-access aims at enhancing the transparency of the political process and the quality of opinion formation leading to a greater political involvement of citizens (Trechsel et al.'s 2003, p. 45). The other categories in the Table (e-Consultation, e-Petition, e-Voting and e-Forums) are rather self-explanatory.

Table 2. Matrix of e-techniques and aspects of democracy promoted

	TRANSPARENCY	PARTICIPATION	DELIBERATION
e-Access	x		
e-Consultation		x	
e-Petition		x	
e-Voting		x	
e-Forums			x

Source: Trechsel et al. 2003, p. 45.

Parliamentary informatics projects can be clearly be placed in the category of e-access given that their key objective is to improve access to parliamentary information and to enhance transparency. E-petitioning projects do not fit as well in this category given that they do not provide official but user-generated information. Their main aim is instead to promote participation, as specified by Trechsel et al. (2003) in the matrix. Moreover, some of the e-petitioning and parliamentary informatics projects also provide e-forums, where citizens can express and share political opinions. Hence, they also intend to enhance the process of citizen's opinion formation through their deliberative engagement. If considered from the thin and strong democracy perspectives, it could be argued that with the strong democracy

approach as many as possible of the democracy aspects should be fulfilled (transparency, participation and deliberation), while with the thin democracy approach, transparency is a sufficient prerequisite.

### ***3.2.1. Parliamentary informatics and e-petition projects***

After having mapped parliamentary informatics and e-petition projects, this section examines these two types of e-democracy in more detail on the basis of previous literature. The first part explores Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations (PMOs).

#### *Parliamentary informatics projects*

PMOs are defined as organizations and initiatives that monitor or assess the functioning and performance of parliaments. The majority of PMOs have a large share of volunteers and are non-profit organizations, although some can have for-profit affiliates. A recent survey identified 191 PMOs that monitor more than 80 national parliaments worldwide. These organizations are scattered around the globe but most are based in Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe (Mandelbaum 2011). A growing trend in parliamentary monitoring is 'parliamentary informatics', i.e. the use of digital tools to aggregate information and facilitate citizen participation in politics (Mandelbaum 2011; Dietrich 2011).

Parliamentary informatics is mainly defined as the application of information technology to documentation and dissemination of legislative activity.<sup>9</sup> The most effective parliamentary informatics tools automatically aggregate official information from parliamentary websites, databases and other sources. This data is then organized into formats that are easy for citizens to understand, search and analyse (Mandelbaum 2011). The use of ICTs leads to more informational and analytical transparency of government organizations: more data is recorded and there are also more ways to retrieve this data (Meijer 2003, p. 1). The recent growth of parliamentary informatics initiatives shows that there is an increasing demand for parliamentary data to be made available in a systematic way, for re-use and re-distribution (Dietrich 2011).

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<sup>9</sup> The Parliamentary Informatics page on Wikipedia is currently a reference point for actors involved in such activities.

At the same time, there is a lack of research comparing the practices and effects of public engagement initiatives targeted at parliaments (Carman 2009), in particular with regard to parliamentary informatics projects. These projects provide information and statistics about: individual legislators, legislative proposals, votes thereon, and texts of legislation. They aim at increasing transparency of information, which should help citizens and civil society organisation to hold parliaments to account. One of the key drives of PMO activities is access to information: citizens should be able to get a comprehensive overview of all the legislation processed by parliaments, and monitor individual MPs and general legislative trends. Most PMO projects have in common the following structure: 1) profiles of representatives with voting records, 2) legislative bills, 3) profiles of political parties, 4) a section for context and analysis (Sasaki 2010). Nevertheless, although they are very similar in shape and content, these projects have developed basically independently from each other. Each of them seems to have written a large amount of code, to develop distinct platforms.

Considering the general trend towards e-democracy in the governmental sector, public authorities are still taking a conservative approach to technology-based engagement with citizens. Governments have invested more in provision of one-way information and e-services, rather than in the more interactive e-techniques allowing for partnerships with citizens (Trechsel et al. 2003; Ekelin 2007b; Gibson et al. 2004; Smith 2009; Zittel 2004b). Thus, a *thin* democracy approach seems to prevail in the government sphere. Most parliaments replicate this tendency; they prefer to use passive digital media, such as websites, instead of the more interactive forms such as blogs and social networking (Berntzen et al. 2006; Williamson 2009).

A study of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) showed that the majority (86%) have personal websites, but only half (53%) use social media networks and 40% blogs (Fleishman-Hillard 2009). Generally, MPs see the Internet essentially as a tool for communicating with their constituents (mainly by email and websites) and for campaigning, not for involving citizens in decision-making processes. Web2.0 tools, too, are predominantly used as one-way channel for informing the electorate. Some of the barriers to adoption of

the more innovative and interactive tools are related to workload, the need for more training in digital skills, and issues with identifying whether those communicating are in fact constituents (Williamson 2009).

At the same time, a new generation of parliamentary informatics projects has emerged over the last few years. These combine information from parliamentary websites with social media tools, in order to provide citizens with more information and transparency about the activities of their representatives, and to engage them in the legislative process. Many of them also facilitate the understanding of legal acts e.g. the Brazilian 'Vote na Web' ("Vote on the Web") translates congressional bills into simple, accessible language with clearly defined context and consequences; and the Chilean 'Vota Inteligente' has a section called 'Informed Citizen', which provides contextualization and analysis of the large flow of parliamentary information. Many PMOs take advantage of social media services and of relationships with the blogosphere, to distribute information and analysis from the website. 'Vota Inteligente' uses Facebook and Twitter to sustain interaction with its users and runs a "webinar" series, where invited guests use streaming video to present particular topics of interest (Sasaki 2010). Other projects go even further by offering debate platforms, where citizens can discuss the work of their representatives, and by allowing users to vote on parliamentary bills, and then compare their votes with other users and with MPs.

Somewhat surprisingly, there is not much evidence of collaboration with civil society organizations and mainstream media institutions. One of the noteworthy exceptions is the 'Vota Inteligente', which has established a wide reaching network with national, regional and international civil society organizations, and collaborates closely with mainstream media, such as 'CNN en Español' to spread awareness and put pressure on politicians (Sasaki 2010). Some PMOs also reach out with information and analysis from their websites to offline readers, e.g. the Colombian 'Congreso Visible' generates quarterly reports about parliamentary activities, and the Kenyan 'Mzalendo' plans to produce non-partisan voter pamphlets, to be distributed before elections. Other PMOs are expanding in the field of education, e.g. the Italian 'Senato Ragazzi' has developed applications particularly targeted at schools, so that students improve their understanding of parliamentary activities, while

'Congreso Visible' is partnered with local universities, to take advantage of students' help in inputting data into the system (Sasaki 2010). Having reviewed different types of PMOs and their activities, let us turn to the three parliamentary informatics cases under study: OpenParlamento, NosDéputés and TheyWorkForYou.

### *E-petition projects*

A petition is a request made to a public authority with the aim to change public policy, to call for an official statement or to suggest a certain act by a public institution (Lindner and Riehm 2011). A petition may be oral rather than written, and nowadays it may be sent using the Internet. According to Lindner and Riehm (2011, p. 3) petitions differ from other forms of political participation mainly because they (i) are initiated bottom-up by citizens (as opposed to hearings or consultations), and (ii) usually do not need to meet complex, formal requirements.

Nowadays, most governments allow citizens to petition in some form, and in many countries it is an established right. In most developed democracies, the citizen's right to petition is codified in legal documents, often even in constitutional law or practice (Lindner and Riehm 2011). The history of petitions can be traced back as far as to pre-modern Imperial China, where any citizen could send petitions to the emperor. In Europe, the right of petitioning was first recognized, albeit indirectly, as early as in the English Magna Carta of 1215, and reaffirmed in the English Bill of Rights of 1689 (Navarria 2010). International comparisons demonstrate that both the role of petitions and their political meaning depend upon socio-historical and institutional contexts (Lindner and Riehm 2011). Petitioning is generally more popular among European citizens than all other forms of democratic activity, except for voting (Fox 2012). This is confirmed by the ESS (2010), where the overall average level of petitioning (17%) is higher than all other forms of alternative engagement.<sup>10</sup>

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10 According to ESS5-2010, ed.3.0, the overall average of other forms of engagement are: worked in political party or action group 3%; taken part in lawful public demonstration 6%; worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker 6%; contacted politician or government official 12%; boycotted certain products 13%.

There are two main approaches to e-petitioning: the informal bottom-up initiation by civil society or the private sector; and the more formal top-down process by institutions that encourage citizens' engagement. The first approach is characterized by many different channels of mobilization and protest on the Internet. These channels generally remain disconnected from formal decision-making processes. However, petition campaigns that manage to gather many signatures can effectively mobilize supporters. Many NGOs and interest groups, as a deliberate strategy, implement large signature campaigns, in order to prompt supporters and capture media attention (Baringhorst, Kneip and Niesyto 2007 in Lindner and Riehm 2011). The second, top-down, approach is characterized by its link with the decision-making process; in some cases the petitioner is even entitled to a formal answer (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

Through electronic (e-) petitions, citizens can appeal to their governments through an online facility, by raising their own petition or adding their names to existing petitions (Pratchett et al. 2009b). In Europe e-petitions have gained an important place in formal decision-making processes in recent years. In 2004, the Scottish Parliament was the first in Europe to launch an e-petition system, and the electronic version has spread across many European countries since then (Parker 2009). At the EU-level, a major institutional innovation is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which is a petitioning instrument by which citizens can propose legislation to the European Commission (European Commission 2012c).

In general, the Internet has given a significant boost to the efficacy of petitions by aiding their promotion through interactive websites, and by providing ample background information and campaigning tools such as social networking, web alerts and referrals. At the same time, the Internet allows a large number of people to sign petitions very rapidly, and independently of the time of the day or of signers' location. The formalized process of petitioning, coupled with new digital tools, has a good probability of vitalising public engagement (Åström and Sedelius 2010). From the point of view of citizens and community groups, petitions enable people to raise concerns with public authorities easily and at a low cost, and also give some sense of the support for the issue amongst the broader population.

From the point of view of democracy, one of the potential key problems of e-petitioning is that of inequality: participants using the e-petitioning system seem to be people who are already more engaged in politics than the general public. Petitions arguably fail to attract under-represented groups and can even exacerbate gender and socio-economic biases (Lindner and Riehm 2011). Equality is an interesting dimension to explore; especially since not all empirical evidence confirm that it is a problem. Geissel (2009) affirms that comprehensive local level data with regards to Germany shows that all strata of society are involved in petitioning. There are no noteworthy differences in engagement between men and women, or between different income groups. The only perceivable inequality is the predomination among participants of people with higher education. At any rate, the inequality is less flagrant among petitioners than among those involved in political parties (Geissel 2009). Another weak point alleged by some researchers is the lack of deliberative mechanisms; many e-petition systems only offer the possibility to create or sign an online petition, while there is no space for discussion among participants (Chadwick 2009; Iacopini 2007). One could argue that, when comparing e-petitioning to offline petitions, there is more space for deliberation when people are asked in person to sign a petition.

In practice, e-petitioning has attracted large numbers of citizens in different contexts and countries. If judged in terms of the number of participants, the UK Prime Minister's e-petition website is one of the most successful e-democracy projects of all time (Chadwick 2009). In its first year (2006), over 29,000 petitions were submitted. Accepted petitions attracted 5.8 million signatures from 3.9 million unique email addresses. In particular, when over 1.8 million people signed a petition on road pricing, this triggered a major debate in the media about the role of e-petitions and, more generally, about government-public consultations (Iacopini 2007). In comparison with many other e-democracy instruments, e-petitioning seems to contain something particularly appealing to citizens - perhaps it has to do with the simplicity of signing with a click (Åström and Sedelius 2010). Cruickshank et al. (2010) suggest that e-petitions may actually encourage passive actors to become active in politics. Moreover, according to the White House, which run a survey among petitioners on the We The People petition site in the US, 86% of the respondents said they would create or



sign another petition and 50% stated that they learned something new (Howard 2013).<sup>11</sup> This suggests that participation in e-petitioning boosts civic literacy.

In contrast, state actors are less allured by e-petitioning, e.g. all English local authorities have had the duty to provide an e-petitions facility, starting from December 2010,<sup>12</sup> but a survey conducted on the eve of the deadline showed that only about a third (128 out of 433 councils) had met the demand (Guardian 2011). In fact, in terms of achieving any political results, petitioning remains to be a weak tool. The chances of reaching a private or political goal by petitioning are relatively small. In case of individual complaints, other channels for remedying administrative wrongdoings, e.g. the recourse to courts or ombudspersons, seem more appropriate.

Moreover, when petitions aim at changing public policy, the impact is limited. The effects being described by the literature are limited to the prompting of debate in Parliament or among the general public (Fox 2012; Iacopini 2007). For example, out of the over 14,000 petitions submitted to the British House of Commons, only seven have been debated (Fox 2012, p. 16). One of the few exceptions was the case of the road pricing-petition in the UK (discussed above), where the pressure from key media players seems to have forced the government to abandon the proposed scheme (Navarria 2009). This example is especially noteworthy, given that it concerned an important policy issue of nation-wide concern.

Even when petitions are influential, they normally only manage to put an issue on the policy agenda. They fail to influence the following debate and decision-making processes, which usually happen without the petitioner's involvement. As Jimmy Leach, former head of digital communication at the prime minister's office expressed it: "What we do get (with e-petitions) is, it's part of the landscape of politics, it ratchets up the pressure, it's a way that people let the government know how they feel about something" (Wheeler 2007). Fox

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In his blog post, Howard (2013) states that over 50,000 people responded to the White House petitioner survey.

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The legal requirement is stated in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

(2012, p. 8) describes e-petitions as “a useful ‘fire-alarm’ function, providing citizens with an opportunity to air their views (...) but not a means to empower them (...)”.

However, there are e-petition systems that do connect to formal policy processes and are worthy of note. Although petitioners are not actually entitled to this right, the Public Petitions Committee (PPC) of the Scottish Parliament occasionally invites petitioners to give oral evidence (Riehm et al. 2009 in Lindner and Riehm 2011). Some countries take this formal commitment even further. In Germany and Finland, when a petition gathers 50,000 signatures, the German Bundestag is obliged to hear it in a public session and the Finnish parliament is obliged to vote on it (Eördögh 2012).

And even in spite of formal restrictions, petitions may still become politically influential. In fact, e-petitions can be hard for governments to shake off, especially when many citizens support them. The UK Prime Minister’s e-petition website mentioned above was suspended just before the general election (in April 2010 until August 2011), partly because of the negative government publicity it generated. Its petitions unsettled both Tony Blair, when 1.8 million persons signed the petition about ending road pricing, and Gordon Brown, when nearly 100,000 citizens demanded his resignation in April 2009. According to the Guardian, the current government has chosen to put e-petitioning on ice, in fear of future embarrassment (Napolitano 2010).

Having examined the central e-democracy concepts and varieties, as well as reviewed the existing literature regarding the two types of project under study (parliament informatics and e-petitioning), the next section will deal with the notion of the quality of e-democracy, and the criteria that can be used to measure it in e-democracy projects.

### **3.3. The quality of e-democracy**

The majority of scholars agree that established democracies must reform in order to solve the problem of citizens' dissatisfaction (Diamond and Morlino 2004). Hence, for democracy to maintain legitimacy, improvements in democratic quality are necessary. But in order to improve it, it is imperative first to establish how to assess the quality of democracy. In the framework of this thesis, I will focus on the quality of e-democracy. In particular, this section will propose criteria for assessing the quality of e-democracy projects.

In the e-participation field there is a lack of systematic and comparative studies based on rigorous theory. Participatory initiatives are often proclaimed to be good in principle, and assumed to have a uniformly positive impact on democracy and on the quality of decision-making. In line with this supposition, a myriad of new participatory institutions, frameworks and instruments have sprung up, both offline and online (Panopoulou et al. 2009; Stirling 2008). Instead of being assessed according to their democratic quality, participatory initiatives are frequently systematised according to structural characteristics such as number of participants, tools used and the general intention of the process (EIPP 2009).

In this thesis, I argue that, to give substance to claims about improving democracy, at least some minimal democratic principles should be respected throughout e-democracy projects. To measure the quality of e-democracy, I have identified four dependent variables - mainly on the basis of work by Morlino (2011) and Milner (2002): (i) equality, (ii) accountability, (iii) responsiveness, and (iv) civic literacy. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I make a distinction between the 'essentialist approach', where the participation process is seen as a constituting element of democratic legitimacy and an end in itself; and the 'instrumentalist approach', where participation is a means to reach certain socio-political results (Blanco and Lowndes 2011). Consequently, the first two dependant variables, equality and accountability, are pertinent to the processes taking place in e-democracy projects, while responsiveness and civic literacy represent what comes out of the process (project effects).

The three first dependent variables (equality, accountability and responsiveness) are adapted

from Morlino (2011). I have decided to use Morlino's analytical dimensions because they cover the key empirical aspects of democracy and are consistent with the main normative conceptions of democracy (Morlino 2011, p. 193). Morlino's focus on empirics and policy, rather than on theory and values, adapted well to my empirical analysis of cases. Moreover, at the conceptual stage of the thesis, Professor Leonardo Morlino kindly offered his advice and confirmed his support for my adaptation of his dimensions to the analysis of e-democracy.<sup>13</sup> Also other authors, who attempted to develop an analytical framework for the assessment of e-democracy, have used Morlino's conceptualisation of democracy (see e.g. Tuzzi et al 2007, p. 35-36).

Morlino (2011, p. 196) has developed eight dimensions of democracy: rule of law, participation, competition, freedom, inter-institutional accountability, electoral accountability, equality and responsiveness. The reasons for not using the first five of them as dependent variable are outlined in the footnote.<sup>14</sup> The three latter dimensions have been adapted to my analytical framework. Starting with *electoral accountability*, Morlino (2011, p. 199-200) defines it as what the electorate can demand from their representatives. I am using the dimension of electoral accountability in the thesis since I examine the accountability of

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The meeting with Prof. Leonardo Morlino took place on January 19, 2010, at the Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane in Florence.

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The *rule of law* mainly concerns the enforcement of legal norms and, even if the fact of making authorities respect the law could be related to the outcomes of e-democracy projects, I have decided not to go to this depth of analysis in the framework of the thesis. Regarding *participation*, Morlino (2011, p. 202) generally defines the dimension of *participation* as a set of behaviors that allows people to influence decisions by political authorities. He also states that it can affect all the other dimensions. Given that e-democracy is about the very act of participation in politics, it is not treated as a dependent variable. Morlino defines the dimension of *competition* as the situation when there is more than one political actor involved in decision-making processes (Morlino 2011, p. 203). This is another crosscutting dimension that can affect all the other e-democracy dimensions. E-democracy is about involving more actors in decision-making processes, but as in the case with *participation* above, being a crosscutting dimension, it would not suit as a dependent variable in my analysis. The dimension of *freedom* is defined as "civil and political freedom beyond the electoral arena so citizens can articulate and organize around their political beliefs and interests" (Diamond and Morlino 2004, p. 21; Morlino 2011). This dimension is applicable not as a dependent variable but as a contextual factor for e-democracy; without having the freedom to communicate and organize in a given context, it will be very difficult for an e-democracy project to operate or to have any effects. In terms of *inter-institutional accountability*, Morlino (2011, p. 199-200) defines it as the responsibility of representatives to answer other institutions that have the expertise and power to control the behaviour of governments. I am not using inter-institutional accountability because the institutions under analysis (e-democracy projects) do not have the formal power to exercise control over governments.

the representatives to the citizens. However, my variable 'accountability' is not applicable only under elections so the use of the term 'electoral' would be out of place and is therefore excluded. Morlino adopts Schedler's three features of accountability: information, justification and punishment/compensation (Schedler 1999, p 17, in Morlino 2011, p. 199). I am focusing on the information feature, which is crucial for attributing responsibility, since is at the core of the e-democracy projects under study.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of equality, Morlino (2011, p. 207) separates between *formal equality*, i.e. equality before the law and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of socio-demographic factors (e.g. gender, race, language), and *substantive equality*, i.e. the lifting of barriers that limit socio-economic equality. I have used the former definition since socio-demographic factors of participants adapt well for assessing the extent of equality in e-democracy projects. The last of the three of Morlino's dimensions used is *responsiveness*, defined as "the capacity of government to satisfy the governed by executing its policies in a way that corresponds to their demands" (Morlino 2011, p. 208). Morlino emphasizes that this dimension is analytically related to accountability, and that there is a tension between the two. The "tension stems from the possible conflict between the assessment of the elected for the decision they carry out and their related responsibility, and the responsiveness of the elected to the needs of electors." (Morlino 2011, p. 209).

Finally, my fourth variable, civic literacy means that citizens should be knowledgeable and interested in politics, as well as engage in civic activities (Milner 2004). Civic literacy is a fundamental condition for widespread participation in a democracy, and is related to equality. Even if everyone can participate in theory, inequality of political resources can make it harder for lower-status and less literate individuals to engage in practice (Diamond and Morlino 2004). Table 3 summarizes the meaning of the four democratic quality variables and illustrates how the democratic quality variables transform into indicators. The variables are

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Examining justification would have meant going into detail about the reasons furnished (or not) by the representatives for their actions regarding every issue raised by the e-democracy participants. Finally, punishment/compensation is not formally enforced in the framework of e-democracy projects. Although one could imagine that the e-democracy participants that are frustrated with the non-responsiveness of their representatives may punish them at the times of elections

ranged according to whether they belong to the essentialist or instrumentalist category.

Table 3. The meaning of the four dependent variables and their operationalization

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
<b>ESSENTIALIST</b>			
<b>Equality</b>	Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of socio-demographic factors	Representativeness of project participants with respect to their reference population	Socio-demographic characteristics of participants; their levels of participation in politics, and their ICT access, use and skills.
		Participation without domination of any group(s)/interests	The ratio of active vs. passive project participants, and by establishing which organisations are behind participants
<b>Accountability</b>	Responsibility of representatives to answer to citizens: aspect of information	Citizens' opportunity to evaluate the responsibility of government through access to objective information	Participants' perceived access to objective information
<b>INSTRUMENTALIST</b>			
<b>Responsiveness</b>	The capacity of government to satisfy citizens' demands	Citizens' influence on policy and policy agenda	The response received by participants, the evidence about related policy changes
		Citizens' expectations about responsiveness	Participants' expectations about responsiveness
<b>Civic literacy</b>	Citizens who (i) are interested in and have an understanding of society; (ii) possess knowledge/understanding of civic processes; (iii) engage in political activities	Improved understanding of and interest in politics, as well as stimulus for future engagement, after having participated in the projects	Participants' perception of improvement of knowledge/interest, and their willingness to engage in politics

Source: Morlino 2011, Diamond and Morlino 2004 and Milner 2004.

The quality of projects might vary according to the greater or lesser realisation of the four variables in Table ... above. A 'perfect' e-democracy project that has positive results on each variable is probably utopian. Since it is impossible to make a project that fully satisfies all quality criteria, there is often a sort of priority making, and a balancing of different values against each other (Diamond and Morlino 2004; Åström 1999). This prioritization often depends on both the conception of (e-) democracy and the democratic intentions of the

actors in charge of e-democracy projects. From the point of view of proponents of thin democracy, accountability could be regarded as more important than responsiveness. In contrast, responsiveness is a key aim of participatory or strong democrats.

The dimensions of democratic quality are many more than those which could be addressed by this thesis. Firstly, an important dimension that has been excluded from the analysis is 'output-legitimacy' (Scharpf 1999). Output-legitimacy refers to the capacity of a political system to solve collective problems, and to realise the collective goals of a constituency. In terms of e-democracy projects, they are effective when they manage to identify and solve the problems of the relevant community. However, it is hard to trace the relation between a particular e-democracy input (e.g. a petition) and the actual solution to the problem (addressed in the petition). Many factors beyond the e-democracy input will normally influence the quality of the final policy outcome. At the same time, a long period of time is usually required to implement policy and real-life changes. Moreover, the objectives of the many voices speaking in a project are not straightforward, but rather, contested. Shared goals have to be developed and deliberated upon before they can be turned into policies, and this turns out to be very difficult in practice.

To sum up, the democratic quality variables imply that an e-democracy project should offer objective information, a context where participants are representative of their reference populations, and where decision-makers try to satisfy citizens demands and try to take their opinions into account. The variables discussed above have different meanings for different democracy models (e.g. strong or thin). I assume that the more variables that are fulfilled, the higher the democratic quality of projects. The various combinations of indicators are assessed in depth in the empirical part of this thesis. The next sections explain the key hypotheses that frame this thesis.

### **3.2.1. Equality**

The concept of equality examined in this section is closely related to Scharpf's notion of input-legitimacy (Scharpf 2006), which is seen in the inclusive involvement of citizens affected by a political outcome (Barber 1984). This means that a lack of equality among participants poses problems of legitimacy to political outcomes.

The literature on Internet activism is split between the supporters of the mobilization hypothesis, who think that the Internet can give more space to marginalised groups in politics, and the reinforcement proponents, who believe that it merely reinforces existing elites (Breindl 2010). Online equality is important, primarily, because if there are strong divergences among people participating offline and online, new configurations of political influence could come about. Alternatively, if the segments of people involved offline and online converge, existing political inequalities could simply be reinforced (Anduiza et al. 2012, p. 7). The reinforcement school claims that the Internet is likely to reinforce established patterns of political communication, thus widening the gap between elites and non-elites (Norris 2001; Bimber 2003). Essentially, this means that those who were politically active before the Internet are the same people who are politically active on the Internet (Bimber 2003).

The equality variable examined in this thesis consists of the following elements: (i) the socio-demographic representativeness of project participants with respect to the reference population, and (ii) the interaction on the project platform, without the domination of any group interests. The first element is measured by the following indicators: gender, age, ethnicity, education, occupation, income, disability and digital skills. The second is measured by establishing which organisations are behind participants, and by examining the ratio of active vs. passive project participants.



In real life, political equality is never fully achieved. Even in the case of the most common form of public participation – voting – there is always a gap between chances to participate and actual participation. Political participation is principally stratified by social class, which means that those who benefit from high-levels of income, occupational status and, particularly, education are much more likely to engage politically. Moreover, political inequality is often rooted in interaction between socio-economic differences and other forms of inequality, such as gender, race or ethnicity (Schlozman et al. 2004). Domination and over-representation also happen, since engagement can be demanding in terms of physical and cognitive skills or expertise; material barriers, for example, difficulties with the written language or lack of political knowledge, all make it harder for citizens to exercise their rights (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Wojcik 2007). As a case in point, prejudiced practices against people with disabilities, including poorly designed public spaces and inhospitable environments, marginalize them from participation in public life (Seymour and Lupton 2004).

Inequality online is also tightly linked to differences in access to and proficiency in ICT, i.e. 'digital divides' (Norris 2001). A recent Hansard Society paper (2011) examined the question of why men usually dominate blogs. Having found similar levels of Internet access and activity across genders, the paper concludes that this has more to do with women being under-represented in politics than any special gender bias in political blogging. In fact, the gender pattern in British digital politics is similar to the gender composition of the UK Parliament. Given that women are globally under-represented among activists in political parties, unions and civil society organisations (Norris 2007), the gender aspect was particularly important to investigate in the framework of this thesis.

My research also examines the presence of people with disabilities on e-democracy platforms, a question generally overlooked by scholars of new media. Digital divides also concern people with disabilities, especially with respect to their access to online content (Warschauer 2003; Newell and Goggin 2003). In practice, the online world contains social and other barriers for impaired people, similar to those emphasised by the field of disability studies (Goggin and Newell 2003; Ellis and Kent 2011). The lack of accessibility means that they risk being excluded also in the online world. At the same time, a lot of hopes have been

invested in the Internet, for its potential to compensate for disability in daily living and social integration (Bricout and Baker 2010). New technologies can help to highlight people's abilities (as opposed to disabilities) and offer persons with disabilities a chance to engage in communication with non-disabled people, as well as in politics. With this in mind, the Council of Europe (2006) has adopted a Disability Action Plan (2006-2015) to promote the full participation of people with disabilities in society, with a particular emphasis on accessible digital technologies.

However, the political marginalisation does not regard only people with disabilities but also foreign or foreign-born citizens. The share of immigrants is growing in many European countries but, at the same time, they tend to be under-represented in the political process (Bäck and Soininen 1998; Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2008). Yet another vulnerable group is that of older people. According to the European Commission (2010), they are at the greatest risk of being excluded from the benefits of the Information Society. On the other hand, e-democracy has a potential to involve young people, a traditionally under-represented group of the electorate. Today, 11% of young EU citizens take part in activities of a local organisation that aims at improving their community/environment, 8% participate in nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and 5% are active in political parties, human rights or development organisations (Eurobarometer 2011). However, scholars have demonstrated that young people are not as engaged in national elections as other age groups (Buckingham 2000). Although young people tend to be less involved with traditional politics (e.g. voting, joining political parties, civil society organisations), they seem to favour other political acts such as loose networks of community action, also facilitated by new technologies (Brooks 2009). Moreover, Tolbert et al (2003) has found that younger people tend to be more supportive of e-democracy.

The second equality element examined is domination. From the theoretical perspective it is important to distinguish between active and passive e-democracy participation, i.e. equality as presence and equality as voice (Smith 2009). From the point of view of discursive equality, voice (or the possibility to influence) has to be equally distributed among participants. No individual or group(s) of individuals should dominate the discussion at the expense of others

(Graham 2008). In reality, one of the potential problems of e-democracy is that online communities usually have a very small core group of contributors. Earlier studies indicate that lurkers (i.e. the 'silent majority' online) make up over 90% of online groups (Nonnecke and Preece 2000). Active participants tend to create posts, ask and answer questions - while the rest are mostly passive readers (Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009).

Turning to factors that may influence equality, context emerges as decisive to the success for democracy of any technological intervention. Decades of research show that political participation depends greatly on levels of socio-economic development, including civic literacy and computer skills, and an efficient ICT infrastructure (Margolis 2007; Anduiza et al. 2012 p. 2-3). Each of these indicators is assumed to condition the extent to which the projects achieve equality among participants (Fung et al. 2010). These assumptions shape the first hypothesis: "H.1. The wider the spread of (i) civic engagement in politics and (ii) ICT access and skills among different groups in society; the more likely is it that project participants will be representative of the citizenry."

Finally, there is delimitation to my assessment of equality that is worth mentioning. An important variable that could influence equality is the way project participants are selected. If unrestricted access is offered to all, it could result in domination by citizens who have more time, knowledge and resources at their disposal (Rowe and Frewer 2000). In fact, very few participatory instruments applying self-selection seem to achieve inclusive involvement (Geissel 2009). At the same time, self-selection is the easiest and probably the most common approach in e-democracy projects, while targeted or random selections - which are seemingly the best way to overcome inequality - are more rare. This difference between selection approaches cannot be assessed in the framework of this thesis since all the projects have self-selected participants.

### **3.2.2. Accountability**

The accountability criterion implies that e-democracy participants should be able to access objective information. In this thesis, the concept of accountability refers to the functioning of institutional arrangements in which an actor can be held to account (Bovens 2010). Primarily, citizens need objective background information so they can (i) make sense of political decisions, (ii) assess government performance, and (iii) participate in politics in a meaningful way. The aspect of information is particularly important because the problem of insufficient political knowledge among the general public is well documented (Yankelovich 1991 and 1999, and Page and Shapiro 1992 in Fagotto and Fung 2009). Moreover, it is also crucial for deliberation - which should ideally only take place once participants have had the opportunity to get objective background information (Coleman and Goetze 2001).

However, there is an important difference between the availability of information, on the one hand, and relevant, reliable and accessible information, on the other. Different kinds of transparency might (or might not) lead to different kinds of accountability. According to Fox (2007, p. 667), transparency can be either 'clear' or 'opaque'. Opaque transparency refers to dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions behave in practice, or to unreliable information. Even the most progressive transparency models, such as the Swedish one, struggle with undesirable opacity effects, e.g. civil servants may simply omit important information from official documents that are accessible (Olsson 2012). Moreover, clear transparency on its own does not guarantee accountability. Accountability can be either 'soft' or 'hard'. Soft accountability contains the possibility to call those in authority to justify their decisions, while hard accountability goes further, by involving the possibility of sanctions (Fox 2007, p. 668). As shown in Figure 1, transparency and accountability overlap, implying that clear transparency is a form of soft accountability.

Figure 1. The relationship between transparency and accountability

Transparency		Accountability	
Opaque	Clear	Soft	Hard
Dissemination and access to information			
	Institutional 'answerability'	Sanctions	

Source: Fox 2007, p. 669.

Access to information does not automatically lead to improved accountability. Projects also need to tailor the information to users, use effective communication channels and provide means for users to not only access but also effectively use that information (Baena and Kahn 2012). Access to information becomes a more effective tool when stakeholders - in government, civil society, and among the general population - use it to exercise accountability. This notion is closely related to Fox’s (2007) concept of soft accountability discussed above, which emphasises the possibility to call those in authority to justify their decisions.

On the same line, Fung et al., in a study of transparency systems in the United States, conclude that in order for transparency strategies to have positive policy effects “users must perceive, consider, and act on information” disclosed (Fung et al. 2004, p. 4). Based on this and other findings, Baena and Kahn (2012, p. 2) have suggested a simplified approach for analysing ICT initiatives. This approach is based on whether the initiative leads to useful, relevant, and ‘actionable’ information; and whether the information is presented so that it is accessible, facilitates analysis, and allows for interaction and dialogue. The approach contains three key elements that render access to information an effective accountability tool: <sup>16</sup>comprehensibility, accessibility, and interactivity.

Public information is often disseminated in a way that makes it difficult for average citizens,

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The original model by Baena and Kahn (2012, p. 7) names the three key elements: (i) the availability of public information (access); (ii) its accessibility and relevance for stakeholders (use); and (iii) its incorporation into decision-making and/or policy discussions (interaction). I argue that with this wording the difference between access and accessibility is blurred. Hence, I have renamed categories: comprehensibility, accessibility, and interactivity.

and even civil society or the media, to understand, e.g. when presented as aggregated reports or in highly technical language. But Baena and Kahn (2012) argue that the information should not be compromised by an inability to understand it if it is to lead to accountability. The first element of their approach is hence comprehensibility, which implies that the information should be understandable by a non-specialist. E-democracy projects can facilitate the comprehensibility of information by displaying it in a user-friendly format or by using educational tools, which can enhance users' understanding of issues.

The next step towards improved accountability is thus accessibility. Accessibility defines how easy and intuitive the ICT platform is to use. Information provided should be easy to analyse and timely so it can be utilized effectively to hold representative to account. This means that a project allows users to make sense of the information provided and to monitor government performance in a more meaningful way (Baena and Kahn 2012, p. 7).

However, even if the information is comprehensible and accessible, it does not necessarily create opportunities or incentives for users to go beyond being passive recipients (Baena and Kahn 2012). The third element, interactivity, emphasizes the ability to interact directly with other users of information and with public authorities, e.g. by providing users the opportunity to give feedback on policy issues and to share information through social media (Baena and Kahn 2012).

These nuances of transparency and accountability will be treated more in-depth in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Primarily, the assumption is that citizens need objective information so they can understand the issues at stake, assess the government and give feedback in a meaningful way. In this thesis, two types of e-democracy projects are under study and they provide different types of information. Parliamentary informatics projects use official information originating in the parliament, while e-petition projects at stake only provide user-generated background information to place the petitions into context. Hence, in line with this important difference I frame my hypothesis as: H.2. "Projects that draw on official sources are more likely to provide objective information than those that are based on

user-produced information.” Given the importance of information for accountability, the underlying assumption is that objective information is more likely to lead to higher levels of accountability.

### **3.2.3. Political responsiveness**

The literature points to a number of key factors that can affect the outcomes of e-democracy projects: citizens’ mobilisation for a cause, the visibility of the cause or the project in the media; and support for the project by policy-makers (Creasy et al. 2007; Fagotto and Fung 2009; Janssen and Kies 2004; Smith 2009; Macintosh and Whyte 2006; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). The relation between these independent variables and the dependent variable ‘responsiveness’ will be explored in this section.

Responsiveness implies that policy-makers are responsive to citizens’ needs and demands, and try to incorporate their opinion into policy making. The link between e-democracy projects and democracy as a decision-making system is often neglected, which means that citizens’ impact on policy is still rather unexplored (Grönlund 2009). The e-democracy literature mainly focuses on the analysis of activities and outputs, but tends to overlook the effects of e-democracy on policy and democracy in general (Coleman et al. 2007). This is not very surprising; many e-democracy projects simply deal with information provision, and have no other connection to decision-making processes (Panopoulou et al. 2008).

The few available studies on the impact of e-democracy reveal that citizen recommendations are rarely integrated into policy (Horrocks et al. 2000; Millard et al. 2009; Smith 2009, p. 23). Most of the time, they are not even responded to effectively (Coleman and Goetze 2001). Despite the goals stated by the European Governance White Paper, as well as in related policies and initiatives, the situation in the European Union is not very different (European Commission 2001). If policy makers continue to ignore the results of e-democracy, it might turn against them, and aggravate the trust deficit among citizens. Participation conducted for tokenistic reasons alone, with little intention of acting on the information gathered from the public, may prove counterproductive, should the public realize this underlying rationale (Fitzpatrick and White 1997; Rowe and Frewer 2004; Arnstein 1969). In some cases, e-

democracy experiments are already reinforcing, instead of reducing, the mistrust between citizens and policy-makers (Mayer et al. 2005 in Coleman and Blumler 2009).

To a large extent policy effects depend on politicians' intentions, and on how seriously they approach citizens' recommendations (Moro 2010). Several studies about online initiatives of the European Commission reveal that policy makers feel they can choose to accept or rebuff the results of e-democracy initiatives as they please, without providing an adequate justification (Culpepper et al. 2007; Hüller and Quittkat 2009). Even if decision-makers were willing to consider citizens' proposals systematically, their responsiveness could still be affected by objective reasons such as economic or political constraints (Morlino 2009). In these cases citizens should be informed about limitations, preferably in advance of their participation and contribution.

It is also worth underlining the fact that it is difficult to trace the impact of e-democracy on policy. The actual process of shaping policy and policy options is fairly unpredictable - both scholars and practitioners struggle to anticipate what will occur (Davies 2009; Kingdon 1995; Ranerup 1999; Zaharidias 1999). Policy outcomes may be due to factors that are difficult to evaluate, such as the occurrence of simultaneous events, or external pressures influencing policy processes (e.g. Chess and Purcell 1999 in Banthien et al. 2003). When Fagotto and Fung (2009) interviewed decision-makers about policy impact, they found that deliberations with citizens had some influence, but that they were just one factor among others, and that it was difficult to distinguish between the effects of different influencing factors. Only rarely did decision-makers acknowledge that the findings from these deliberations played a dominant role in their decisions.

According to Pitkin's now classic conceptualization, political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives 'present' in public policy making processes (Pitkin 1967). At the same time, representatives should have room to act independently of the wishes of the represented. Citizens have the right to hold representatives accountable for their actions, and the latter are ultimately evaluated on the basis of the reasons they give for ignoring the preferences of their constituents (Pitkin 1967).



However, “(C)itizens’ confidence in the participation process cannot be premised upon ‘getting their own way’” (Pratchett et al. 2009a, p. 13). It goes without saying that not all the recommendations coming from e-democracy projects can be integrated into policy. Hence, there is a need for a systematic approach, one which considers, firstly, whose opinion it is that is really emerging (is it representative for the population which will be affected by the policy?), and secondly, how it should best fit into the existing policy processes.

This is related to Scharpf’s concept of ‘output legitimacy’; responsiveness implies that democratic procedures should produce effective outcomes which reflect citizens’ preferences, and which citizens are *collectively* concerned about and benefit from (Scharpf 1997). This is not always the case with e-democracy projects, which can be biased by the domination of more resourceful groups of citizens (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). This links back to the *equality* dimension; the output is legitimate only if the people affected or concerned participate, and only if no group interest dominates.

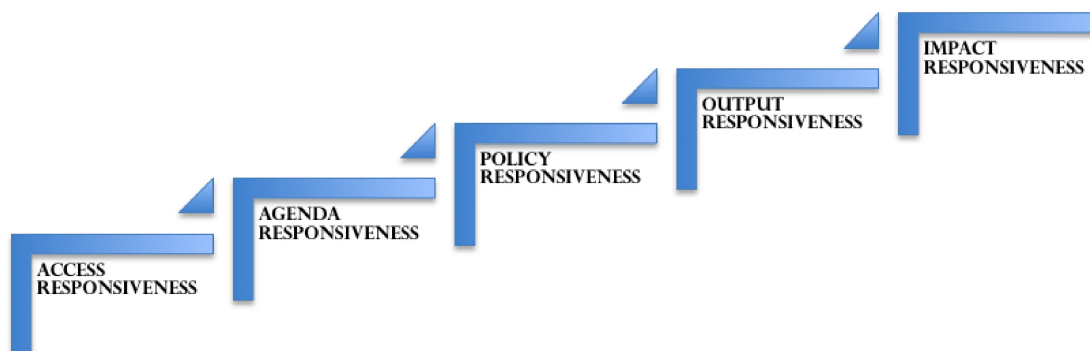
Concerning the measurement of responsiveness in the context of e-democracy, certain criteria specifying the types of actions that state actors must take, in order to be considered responsive, can be formulated on the basis of previous research. To start with, there are various standards for measuring the responsiveness of political systems, ranging from those giving citizens a fair hearing to those actually alleviating the grievances of a group by improving their living conditions. Schumaker (1975) suggests five criteria for measuring responsiveness to public opinion, ranging from very low to very high: access, agenda, policy, output and impact responsiveness (see Figure 2).

Starting from the lowest level, ‘access responsiveness’ indicates the extent to which authorities are willing to hear the concerns of citizens. However, it does not mean that their concerns will be considered. The premise for the next level - ‘agenda responsiveness’ - is based on Page and Shapiro’s (1983) research on public opinion and policy responsiveness. This level is reached when citizens’ demands are made an issue and placed on the policy agenda, e.g. policy proposals/bills that are more aligned with citizens’ recommendations. The third level ‘policy responsiveness’ indicates that a proposal (which includes citizens’

recommendations and is already present on the agenda) is transformed into law/policy. It does not guarantee that the law/policy will be implemented, e.g. because of barriers such as lack of funds or personnel (Schumaker 1975).

The fourth level, 'output responsiveness', represents the degree to which policy-responsive actions are implemented (i.e. the legislation/policy is fully enforced). Nevertheless, even fully implemented policies may not necessarily change the underlying condition that gave rise to the original demand. For a variety of reasons (e.g. cultural or financial considerations), it can turn out that only a very few of the affected citizens are able to take advantage of the implemented legislation. The top level, 'impact responsiveness', is reached only if the underlying grievance of citizens is alleviated by political action (Schumaker 1975). However, the usually long time period required to address the root causes means that measuring the full impact of e-democracy projects is problematic.

Figure 2. Schumaker's criteria of responsiveness



Source: Schumaker 1975.

The next step in my analysis is to measure citizens' expectations concerning responsiveness. Policy-makers need to develop mechanisms for integrating citizens' opinions and to learn how to satisfy citizens' expectations. At least part of the present dissatisfaction with democracy stems from higher citizen expectations of what democracy can deliver, procedurally, and in terms of outcomes. It is reasonable for citizens in democratic states, who are increasingly informed and aware, to be asking for more opportunities to participate and for more responsive government (Diamond and Morlino 2004, p. 30).

However, the notion of representation does not exclude the possibility that politicians might lead citizens “in a direction that can collide with their wishes but that they can agree to follow, if convinced that it is better for their interests” (Jimenez 2004, p. 1100). Ideally, public authorities need to weight impartially those messages resulting from various participation experiences, against other inputs to the policy-making process; explain how the decision was made; and clearly define the role of engaged citizens within that process (Lowndes et al. 2006; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007).

Responsiveness requires that policy-makers justify their policy choices to participants and to the citizenry at large (Papadopoulos and Warin 2007). Scholars seem to agree that, as a minimum, decision-makers should be able to clarify publicly exactly how they will take into account citizens’ views or, in the case of rejection, why citizens’ opinions will not be considered (Culpepper et al. 2007; Fagan et al. 2006). It is of utmost importance that elected representatives demonstrate the appropriateness of not implementing citizens’ preferences on a certain issue (Beetham 1994). Otherwise, they risk disappointing the expectations of e-democracy participants, as well as discrediting future initiatives. In the long run, the failure to meet public expectations might even increase the much-debated democratic deficit.<sup>17</sup>

Having defined the indicators for the DV ‘responsiveness’, the next topic under examination is that of the IVs that are expected to influence political responsiveness. Firstly, based on the theory outlined in Chapter 3.1. (“Different conceptions of (e-democracy)”), the intentions of actors who are associated with e-democracy projects - i.e. those who are running the projects, or state actors to whom the projects are (indirectly) addressed – will be examined. The intentions will be mapped against strong and thin conceptions of e-democracy in the empirical part of the thesis. To do this, the actors’ formal objectives regarding the e-democracy project (as stated on the web, in accessible protocols and in policy documents) will be compared with their implicit intentions, i.e. what they actually expected of it (based on interviews and media sources). Moreover, an assessment will be made of the extent of

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17 According to Norris (2011, p. 5), the notion of democratic deficit “can be applied to any object where the perceived democratic performance fails to meet public expectations (...)”

political support, defined as the decision-makers' approval of the project and their active participation in it.

When studying e-democracy projects, it is necessary to go beyond the exploration of their design and to consider how they relate to existing institutions and actors. Democratic intentions are allegedly the principal element affecting the success of e-democracy projects (Åström and Grönlund 2010; Hacker and van Dijk 2000). E-democracy projects can either build on representative democracy practices or change existing institutions, depending on the democratic intentions of the actors involved in their implementation (Pratchett 2006). The underlying assumption here is that it is not the ICT that bring about any specific level of participation or type of democracy, but that it is human beings who shape technology (Grönlund 2009).

Fountain's technology enactment theory claims that there is a strong connection between technology and its social use; ICT are not objective and freestanding, but devices that actors transform in the process of design and use (Fountain 2001). Diverging opinions about democracy may result in different designs and applications of the same technology (Hacker and van Dijk 2000). Digital tools are not customised in a political vacuum; user-values, institutions and power relations are reproduced and 'technologically embedded' in them (Åström and Granberg 2009; Creasy et al. 2007; Ekelin 2007a).

The current political rhetoric in the field of e-government and e-democracy contains many bright and often utopian images of the future. It tends to proclaim better democracy, and anchor to democratic principles such as equality, inclusion and civic rights (Habermas 1968; Rawls 1993; Stirling 2008). Politicians usually claim that they want to engage citizens in politics, to hear their views and to let them influence policy outcomes. However, the reality is more ambiguous; the underlying purposes of implementing e-democracy are generally far from clear-cut and agreed (Bittle et al. 2009).

In a survey by Åström and Granberg, 94% of Swedish municipality officials responsible for planning said they were willing to use new methods that encourage citizens' engagement. At

the same time, the majority of these officials still believed that planning should be based on expert knowledge, and did not want citizens to influence decision-making directly (Åström and Granberg 2007 in Åström and Granberg 2009). On the same lines, Mahrer and Krimmer (2005), who based their research on extensive document analysis and over 200 interviews in national and regional level parliaments in Austria, found that e-government strategies were only addressing e-democracy as an unfulfilled promise, if at all. On paper, policy-makers are increasingly committed to the idea of civic participation but, in practice, they are still reluctant to lose control and let citizens decide.

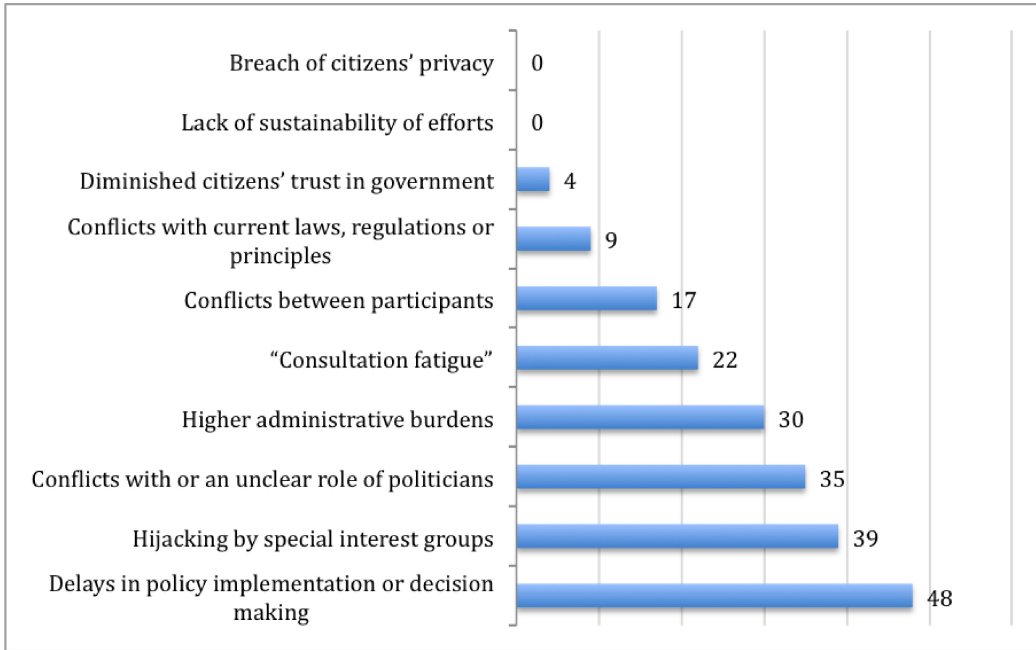
This rhetorical approach seems to be confirmed also at a global level. According to a OECD report on public participation, nearly three-quarters of OECD governments consider e-consultation to be a priority - a far larger share in comparison to the beginning of the decade. At the same time, only one fifth believe that using ICT to foster participation in policy making is important. In fact, government engagement in e-democracy is extremely limited in all OECD member countries, something that has remained unchanged since the 2001 OECD report on the same topic (OECD 2009).

Established political practices are very change-resistant. Representatives have strong incentives to reinforce existing procedures, to secure their stability and development, and to maintain or boost their personal power (Pierson 2000). Politicians and bureaucrats are often reluctant to incorporate e-democracy projects into established policy processes (Chadwick 2009). Engaging in e-democracy can be politically risky and some politicians feel that participatory initiatives threaten their democratic mandate, or that they are simply unnecessary because of it (Pratchett et al. 2009b; Smith 2009). The political action is often either preceded by a risk logic and dystopia, or lead by technical, economical or political necessities (Ilshammar 2002).

Hence, it is not incidental that the OECD survey mentioned above inquires about the type of guidance and protections that civil servants need when they use participative web tools in their work. When asked what they considered to be typical “risks” of open and inclusive policy-making, almost half of the OECD respondents rank delays in decision-making or

implementation as “important” (see Figure 3). Almost 40% feared the risk of special interest groups “hijacking” the process, or generating confusion with regard to the role of (or indeed conflicts with) politicians. The civil servants also cite risks of placing an additional burden on participants, in terms of higher administrative loads (30%), conflicts among participants (22%) and ‘consultation fatigue’ (17%). Equally instructive is the fact that none of them saw the lack of sustained efforts in e-democracy as posing significant risk (OECD 2009).

Figure 3. Governments’ perspective on perceived risks of public participation (% respondents, N=25 countries)



Source: OECD 2009.

The same conservative approach by politicians emerges from Fleishman-Hillard’s (2009) study of how the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) use the Internet to communicate. They generally underestimate the effectiveness of the Internet as a means of reaching out to their electorate. For example, the majority of MEPs see online engagement such as blogging or micro-blogging, online video and online advertising as much less effective tools than traditional media (print and TV). Most of them use Twitter and blogs as a broadcast mechanism, rather than as a chance to engage and listen to citizens. Likewise, although personal websites are more of a one-way tool than an interactive one, MEPs consider them to be the most effective form of communication with respect to all other

social media tools.

A study by Mahrer and Krimmer (2005) shows that many politicians take a clear 'thin democracy' stand and even actively oppose e-democracy. The authors found that a vast majority of Austrian politicians are sturdy believers in the concept of representative democracy. They consider themselves much more qualified than ordinary people and feel that it is their uncontested duty to make political decisions on their behalf. This reluctance towards e-democracy shows that there is a tension between formal and informal decision-making processes (Åström and Granberg 2009). Papadopoulos and Warin (2007) call this "an uneasy coupling of decisional arenas that operate under different principles of legitimation: deliberation (...) between stakeholders in participatory procedures versus competition for authorisation in the representative circuit".

The OECD and Austrian findings are in line with the 'law of suppression of radical potential', which was formulated by the British media scientist Brian Winston and is applicable to all communication technologies, including the telephone, radio, TV and computers (Winston 1998; Ilshammar 2002). He claims that elites make sure that new technologies are integrated into society in a way that reinforces, or at least does not seriously disrupt, the fundamental power relations. While the rhetoric of responsiveness invites citizens to voice their opinions, the elite rarely wants to shift its power to deliberating citizens (Åström and Grönlund 2010). There is often a desire to keep them away from the actual decision making process, because the elite camp assumes that effective decision-making can only be attained through leadership, bureaucracy and centralised control (Blaug 2002).

In fact, the literature indicates that e-democracy projects run by state actors tend to be more conservative than those managed by non-state actors. More often, their aim is to optimise existing organisational practices, and to better regulate the relationship between government and citizens. Ekelin (2007a) suggests that state actors might be more prone to focus on the best way to handle changes in their work practice (i.e. e-government) instead of involving citizens into improving decision-making practices (i.e. e-democracy). They do not strive to radically change the premises of governance. In the worst cases, governments use e-

democracy for reasons of tokenism, e.g. to improve their image among citizens or to keep political activities under control (Avdic et al. 2007). Again, this is in line with the *thin democracy* concept discussed in the previous chapter.

There is a growing gap between politicians and citizens, who tend to have conflicting interests in e-democracy (Rose and Sæbø 2005). According to Blaug (2002), two different camps are at odds: (i) an external one, of citizens who see democracy as a way of challenging existing government institutions; and (ii) an inside camp, in which democracy is considered to be a set of valuable institutions that should be protected and improved. E-democracy has the tricky task of matching these two perspectives. In practice, this means that state actors involved in e-democracy are faced with the discrepancy between their own intentions and what actually happens when citizens get engaged. However, at the end of the day, politicians often have the final word in the decision-making process (Blaug 2002). This might also be the reason for the limited effects of e-democracy.

Eventually, when the elites are ready to transform their institutional practices to accommodate citizens' opinions, they will probably accomplish valuable democratic change jointly with citizens. In fact, Åström and Grönlund's recent case survey (2010) concludes that *strong* democratic intentions – those promoting public engagement, in the belief that it improves the quality of democracy - lead to better deliberation and increased policy impact. This seems to indicate that to make e-democracy work, state actors need to be committed and open to change (Åström and Grönlund 2010). When political support is strong, policy-makers are willing to consider citizens' opinions emanating from projects and (something that occurs rarely in practice) ready to share authority (Fagotto and Fung 2009). Moreover, if politicians are actively involved in an e-democracy project, the debate has greater chances of being serious, balanced, and of leading to a political commitment (Åström 1999; Coleman 2004; Creasy et al. 2007; Lukensmeyer 2009; Kies 2010). In contrast, if the relevant decision-makers are simply absent from the project, it will be harder to feed citizens' recommendations into the formal policy-making arena (Åström and Granberg 2009).<sup>18</sup> Some

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<sup>18</sup> Evidently, this assumption does not hold for cases that are up for mandatory consideration but only for cases where the institutional design foresees communicative influence or advice and consultation.



scholars even claim that political support is a minimum requirement for participatory initiatives to have any effect. The undertakings need either to be supported by decision-makers or to find an environment in which political leadership is not hostile (Fagotto and Fung 2009).

Moreover, political support arguably has positive collateral effects, e.g. citizens seem to be more motivated to participate in deliberation if high-ranking officials also take part (Coleman and Blumler 2009; Neblo et al. 2009). The political support variable needs to be tested, because not all scholars agree that it is important. A recent, comparative study of twenty e-participation cases showed that official sponsorship and buy-in of e-participation is not particularly significant (Pratchett et al. 2009a). Therefore, I will test the assumption about political support through the following hypothesis: "H.3. The stronger the political support of decision-makers for the project or its outputs, the greater the political responsiveness."

The second variable that is expected to influence political responsiveness is that of civic mobilization for a cause. Mobilization of people for collective actions - when they press their case forward, and when their engagement becomes uncomfortable for the elites - arguably increases politicians' responsiveness (Fagotto and Fung 2009). In the context of e-democracy projects, civic pressure often involves attracting a large number of supporters and stimulating action for a cause outside the actual online platform.

In recent times, the role of the Internet as a platform for collective action is growing. According to Rainie et al. (2012), 66% of social media users - or 39% of all American adults - have carried out civic or political activities with social media (e.g. post their thoughts about civic and political issues, press friends to take action on a political issue and vote). People use the web to spread information, create new platforms for debating politics, form communities and run grassroots campaigns. Online mobilisation can occur through various channels ranging from apposite web sites, social networking services and blogs, to traditional media sites.

A prominent example of a large-scale e-democracy mobilisation is the blog of Beppe Grillo,

an Italian politician, comedian and blogger. His blog - [www.Beppegrillo.it](http://www.Beppegrillo.it) - was ranked 18<sup>th</sup> among 70 million blogs all over the world by Technorati, and declared one of the most powerful blogs in the world by the Guardian in 2008 (Balocchi et al. 2008; Guardian 2008).

Today, he has over 1.2 million followers on Twitter<sup>19</sup> and 1.3 million 'likes' on Facebook<sup>20</sup>. His organisation has promoted several campaigns and petitions, culminating in mass events concerning issues such as freedom of information and a 'Clean Parliament'. These mobilisations involved hundreds of thousands of Italians in both on- and offline protests against politicians and policies (Balocchi et al. 2008). Grillo's campaigns have culminated in the huge success of his 'Five Star Movement', which achieved double-digit results in the local elections in 2012, taking the seats of the mayor of Parma and of several smaller towns. The political rise of a newcomer such as Grillo would have been implausible without the Internet (Ehlers 2012). In sum, the mobilization of people for collective action could increase politicians' responsiveness (Fagotto and Fung 2009). In order to verify this assumption, I will test the following hypothesis: "H.4. The greater the mobilisation of citizens around the project or its outputs, the stronger the political responsiveness."

The third variable that is assumed to influence political responsiveness is that of visibility in the traditional media. The traditional media remain an important channel for mobilizing larger groups of citizens (Castells 2007). The literature concerning the Internet and the 'Arab Spring' asserts that when new media had a significant effect on the political situation, this happened in conjunction with more traditional media broadcasters (Farrell 2012). Moreover, other studies indicate that the visibility of a project (or an issue promoted by the project) in the traditional media can more easily attract the attention of politicians. The Fleishman-Hillar's (2009) study of how members of the European Parliament (MEPs) use the Internet reveals that they follow traditional media very closely. 74% of MEPs visit online versions of traditional newspapers on a daily basis, while 42% of MEPs believe coverage in national media (print/broadcast) to be very important in informing their policy thinking.

Overall, 91% of MEPs maintain that media coverage informs their thinking on policy issues.

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19 Source: Twitter consulted on 30 April 2013: [https://twitter.com/beppe\\_grillo](https://twitter.com/beppe_grillo)

20 Source: Facebook consulted on 30 April 2013: <https://www.facebook.com/beppegrillo.it?ref=ts&fref=ts>

Media coverage comes second only to personal contacts with individuals, groups and stakeholders (98% of MEPs think this is important). Moreover, when conducting online research on policy matters, MEPs mainly search for media coverage of the issues. National media coverage is more influential here in informing MEPs' thinking than personal contact, or even the position taken by party or national government.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, only about half of MEPs think that web campaigns by constituents are important.

Projects that attract broad media attention seem more likely to put pressure on decision-makers and, thus, influence policy (Janssen and Kies 2004; Smith 2009). Visibility, and the numbers of mobilised participants, can also result in stronger support for citizens' recommendations by policy-makers, and to greater impact on policy (Creasy et al. 2007). This leads us to assume that, in some cases, visibility and mobilisation reinforce each other.

In order to verify the relevant assumptions by Creasy et al. (2007), Janssen and Kies (2004), and Smith (2009) outlined above, I will test the following hypothesis: "H.5. The greater the visibility the project or its outputs have in the media, the stronger the political responsiveness."

### **3.2.4. Civic literacy**

The scholarly community suggests that e-democracy projects rarely have direct effects on policy. At the same time, indirect effects in the shape of 'civic literacy' - which is here operationalised as increased understanding and interest in politics, which in turn stimulate political participation (Milner 2004) - are allegedly more frequent. I assume that, in the long run, civic literacy may also increase the quality of democracy by influencing the civic pressure (civic mobilization and project visibility in the media), and hence political responsiveness. Civic literacy is a fundamental condition for widespread participation in a democracy. Even if everyone can participate in theory, inequality of political resources can make it harder for lower-status and less literate individuals to engage in practice (Diamond and Morlino 2004).

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21 Among the MEPs, 90% name coverage in national media as important; 89% cite personal contact with constituents as important; and 88% cite the position taken by the national party/governments as important (Fleishman-Hillar 2009).

Civic literacy has many definitions. I define civically literate citizens as those who: (i) are interested in, pay attention to and have a reasonable understanding of contemporary society; (ii) possess knowledge and understanding of civic processes; (iii) engage in civic activities that form a foundation for democracy (Milner 2002). Ideally, citizens should strive to be knowledgeable about society and the issues it faces, as well as disposed and skilled to work towards the common good (Sears and Hughes 1996). The function of civic literacy is to raise the standards of public reasoning and deliberation, as a means of increasing the quality of democracies (Willinsky 2000).

What is more, civic literacy can be considered one of the pillars of democracy. Originally, John Dewey declared: “democracy depends upon the willingness of learned citizens to engage in the public realm for the betterment of the larger social good” (as cited in Rhoads 2003, p. 25). There is a general scholarly consensus that a healthy democracy needs citizens who are civically literate. Almond and Verba showed the importance of citizens' civic skills for stable and prospering democracies back in the 1960s (Inglehart and Welzel 2005 in Geissel 2009).

Furthermore, civic literacy is claimed to encourage political participation, and to foster more equitable societies (Milner 2004). Participatory democracy theorists like Pateman (1970) and Barber (1984) argue that positive effects on civic education materialise if citizens have improved opportunities to engage in policy-making. Not unexpectedly, the more often people engage in politics, the better civic skills they get (Fung and Wright 2001; Pateman 1970). Knowledgeable individuals can better seize whatever impact policy has upon their interests and those of their community, as well as increase their influence on political outcomes (Milner 2003). On the contrary, those citizens who lack the necessary skills to realize what is going on in politics are not able to participate meaningfully.

In the framework of this thesis, it became clear that e-democracy projects do contribute to cultivating civic literacy. However, it was not possible to pinpoint exactly what influences it. The Internet is a new channel that facilitates engagement and online engagement allegedly

increases interest in politics (Hamilton and Tolbert 2012). Numerous studies affirm that e-democracy applications promote political knowledge, interest, discussion and voting (Krueger 2002; Mossberger et al. 2008; Tolbert and McNeal 2003). Moreover, e-democracy can be a good training ground for citizens, and cultivate civil society activists, who in their turn are able to boost the potential of civil society (Talpin 2007).

In line with the previous body of research in the field of media literacy, e-democracy platforms could be considered as one of the available media outlets that form part of the 'environmental factors'. Environmental factors, in turn, affect the literacy capabilities of individuals (Celot et al. 2009). The projects under study (or environments) are different in terms of scope: e-petitions are mainly in place to help citizens to make demands on their representatives, while parliamentary informatics aim at improving access to public information, thus making citizens more knowledgeable about politics. E-petitioning projects under study provide user-created, and usually quite limited, information, while parliamentary informatics projects supply official information from a range of perspective that help to monitor parliamentary performance over time. From this perspective, parliamentary informatics seems to be a stronger tool for fostering civic literacy capacities. This stands at the basis of the last hypothesis: "H.6. If the project facilitates access to objective information, it is more likely to have a positive impact on civic literacy."

### 3.4. Key hypotheses

The aim of this thesis is not to make an exhaustive assessment of the democratic quality of projects on all possible aspects, but rather to assess some of the main variables. Frame 1 displays a schematic representation of the main hypotheses in this thesis. The dependent variables (DV) equality and accountability are 'essentialist', implying that the participation process is important as an end in itself; and DVs responsiveness and civic literacy are 'instrumentalist', suggesting that participation is a means to reach certain socio-political outcomes.

#### Frame 1. Thesis hypotheses

**IV: Social and technological context → DV: equality**

H.1. The wider the spread of (i) civic engagement in politics and (ii) ICT access and skills among different groups in society; the more likely is it that project participants will be representative of the citizenry.

**IV: Information → DV: accountability**

H.2. Projects that draw on official sources are more likely to provide objective information than those that are based on user-produced information

**IV: Political support → DV: responsiveness**

H.3. The stronger the political support of decision-makers for the project or its outputs, the greater the political responsiveness.

**IV: Civic mobilisation → DV: responsiveness**

H.4. The greater the mobilization of citizens around the project or its outputs, the stronger the political responsiveness.

**IV: Media visibility → DV: responsiveness**

H.5. The greater the visibility the project or its outputs have in the media, the stronger the political responsiveness.

**IV: Information → DV: civic literacy**

H.6. If the project facilitates access to objective information, it is more likely to have a positive impact on civic literacy

The following sections explore the variables illustrated above in detail.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Research design**

The literature does not offer any grand theories on the quality of e-democracy. Moreover, e-democracy initiatives are not new as such, but rather an evolution of many existing activities, given an extra push by the widespread deployment of the Internet. Nor is the research investigating these initiatives new; it can rather be seen as a development and refocusing of existing research fields (Sæbø et al. 2007, p. 401). This thesis therefore relies not only on e-democracy theories but also on the participatory democracy literature, and on a series of assumptions from theoretical and empirical sources. Research designs from other e-democracy studies are not transposable, because concepts and propositions relevant to my research are not yet well defined in the literature. The thesis process will instead focus on discovery - as opposed to confirmation - with the aim to improve the fit between theory and evidence (Gerring 2001).

My research draws both on theory and practice. There is a constant interplay between empirics and theoretical discussion, in the process of conducting research, and these categories often blend into each other. The hypotheses presented in the previous chapter are tested both deductively and inductively. This means that, on the one hand, e-democracy projects are analysed by using specific theoretical concepts. On the other hand, the theoretical assumptions are questioned by looking at the actual practice in different e-democracy projects, and by observing patterns in the data that might lead to the development of new theories.

To this purpose, an *outcome-based* causal assessment has been carried out, i.e. a metric with respect to the outcome - the democratic quality - has been constructed. The assessment includes an analysis of the degree to which the independent variables (IVs) are responsible for the dimensions of the outcome: democratic quality (Steinberg 2007a). Assumptions about the relationship between my IVs and dependent variables (DVs) are elaborated according to the theoretical framework outlined in previous chapters.

#### **4.1.1. Data collection method: case studies**

The primary method for testing my hypotheses is case study analysis. The study of causal processes entails in-depth analysis that is generally only possible to undertake on a small number of cases. Small-N studies are also useful for assessing pilot projects that are implemented on a limited scale, to try new ideas (Steinberg 2007a). This corresponds to the reality of many e-democracy initiatives. The case study analysis helped me to expose the causal link that connects the IVs with the DVs, i.e. the democratic quality of e-democracy projects. It served to break down complex chains of events into smaller sequences, and to examine more closely the cause and effect relationship between IVs and DV.

The IVs and the DV were explored by a combination of various methods. Firstly, I conducted a desk research comprising a review of the scholarly literature, mainly about democracy, e-democracy, and public participation; and an analysis of the project documentation, including usage statistics, media articles, and internal project documents. Secondly, I performed online observation of activity on e-democracy platforms, in order to better understand the dynamics of the online communication between users. Thirdly, I did interviews with project stakeholders. Finally, I carried out online surveys of users of three different projects.

The mix of different methods helped to maximise the validity of research results. In particular, interviewing and surveying captured the perspectives and experiences of different stakeholders:

- persons who set up and administrate e-democracy projects;
- elected representatives and civil servants targeted by these projects;
- moderators/administrators of the sites,
- technologists who developed the online tools,
- persons who have used the e-democracy projects under study.

Turning to case selection, the unit of analysis applied in this thesis is that of state- and non-state actors involved in e-democracy projects, while the cases consist of projects. The thesis is based on a comparative analysis of e-democracy projects across different European



countries. The focus lies on the EU because it is a fertile ground for e-democracy initiatives. In the past decade, the number and variety of e-democracy projects have grown in Western Europe (Lührs and Molinari 2010). At the same time, little is actually known about their effects on European democracies. There is a lack of structured efforts to understand the current state of the art of fully operational e-democracy projects in Europe (Panopoulou et al. 2009). I will attempt to contribute to this lacuna by means of my case studies.

My objective is to examine some of the more promising e-democracy projects, in order to establish some general patterns and provisional results of ongoing initiatives. I selected e-democracy projects from two typologies: parliamentary informatics and e-petition initiatives. The time and funding constraints of the thesis project allowed the examination of only a relatively small number of cases. Fortunately, other scholars had already conducted research and surveys of some of my cases (Escher 2011 for TWFY, Åström and Sedelius 2010 for MI, and Whyte et al. 2005 for BEP). Their results provided crucial insights and unique comparative data, and were particularly important in cases where I could not carry out any online survey (TWFY and BEP).

I have chosen the cases by carrying out an analysis of the following sources: academic literature, cases reported in other studies, awards and databases,<sup>22</sup> and cases proposed by experts and colleagues. Moreover, relying on the knowledge originating from studies like that of Fung et al. (2010), the following case selection criteria were used:

- Appearance of influence: projects that seemed to have some political responsiveness or signs of breakthrough in terms of visibility and numbers of participants;
- On-going efforts: in addition to the benefit of actuality, this criterion facilitated the identification of interviewees and access to project documentation;
- Diversity of types of projects: the aim was to examine at least two types of projects (parliamentary informatics and e-petition projects) to validate findings across different project typologies;

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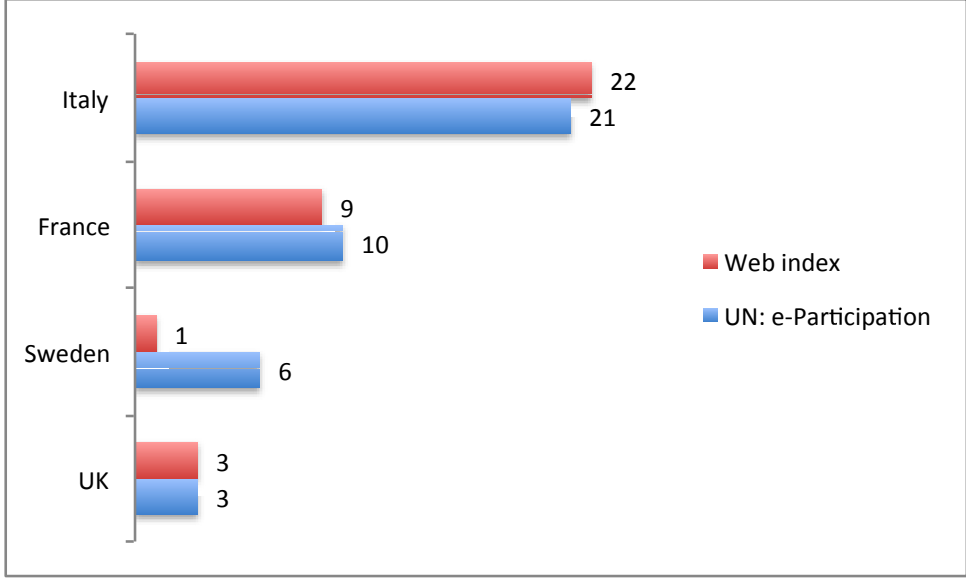
<sup>22</sup> I have used the following databases and listings: ePractice.eu portal ([www.epractice.eu](http://www.epractice.eu)), Cordis project database (<http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm>), eTen project database ([http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/eten/cf/opdb/cf/project/index.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/eten/cf/opdb/cf/project/index.cfm)), e-Europe Awards ([http://www.eipa.eu/eEurope\\_Awards/index.htm](http://www.eipa.eu/eEurope_Awards/index.htm)), Stockholm Challenge ([www.stockholmchallenge.org](http://www.stockholmchallenge.org)).

- Diversity of approach/administration: the inclusion of both top-down (e-petition projects) and bottom-up projects (parliamentary informatics), to allow comparison of different approaches and results;
- Geographic diversity: both northern and southern European countries – a spread typically used when comparing democracies in Europe;
- Local knowledge: I have personal experience of living in all the four countries under study.

The first case selection criterion outlined above ‘appearance of influence’ means that I have opted for cases that suggest an effect, i.e. ‘positive cases’ (Ragin 1997). This choice has been made in order to study the mechanisms whereby a cause produces an outcome. The selected cases are not typical e-democracy cases. In fact, there is no definition of a typical e-democracy case in the literature as such.

Overall, my aim was to examine different projects in terms of technique (parliamentary informatics and e-petitioning projects), type of actor in charge (bottom-up and top-down), polity (national level and local level), and geographical spread (northern and southern European countries) in order to validate findings across different project typologies. I have chosen cases from France, Italy, Sweden and the UK, because of the availability of suitable e-democracy cases in these countries, and because of the noteworthy differences between them. These four countries have different political cultures and tend to rank differently on indices related to e-democracy. The UK and Sweden usually contend the top positions, France occupies a middling position, while Italy constantly lags behind (see Figure 4). The comparison of different contexts allowed me to explore whether distinct political and technological trends shape e-democracy processes.

Figure 4. Ranking of Italy, France, Sweden and the UK on the UN e-Participation index and the Web Index



Source: The Web Index (2013); UN e-participation index (UNDESA 2012).

The main limitation of my case selection is that the cases are not representative of the universe of e-democracy projects. Currently, there is no central register of e-democracy projects. Hence, there is no adequate method for choosing a representative sample. Instead, the aim was to carry out a qualitative, comparative study of a heterogeneous sample of e-democracy projects, with the prospect of discovering significant patterns regarding the quality of these projects, and how it is influenced by different factors.

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23  
 The Web Index designed by the World Wide Web Foundation is an annual ranking of countries on the progress and social utility of the Web. The index combines over 80 indicators to evaluate access, affordability, institutional and policy environment and socio-economic utility of the web, including indicators on the use of the web for mobilizing citizens to influence government decisions and to hold politicians/officials accountable.

24  
 The E-Participation Index assesses the quality and usefulness of information and services provided by a country for the purpose of engaging its citizens in public policy-making.

#### **4.1.2. Data collection tools: online questionnaires, interviews and web analytics**

My two main data collection tools were online questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were aimed at project users, while the interviews helped to analyse both the actual project producers (non-governmental organisations and a city municipality) and the project targets (politicians and civil servants).

##### *Online questionnaires*

When researching a particular group of Internet users - in my case users of e-democracy projects - the Internet is the most suitable methodological tool (Compey 1996; Coomber 1997; Gaiser 1997). Despite the widespread Internet usage in Europe, and the great methodological potential of the Internet, its use for conducting academic surveys was still not widespread when I launched my questionnaires. At the same time, it was already recognized that online questionnaires provide the following advantages, in that they (ESRC web resource 2010):

- enable the researcher to contact a geographically dispersed population, useful for conducting cross-country research;
- allow the researcher to contact groups that are difficult to reach, such as the less physically mobile (e.g. disabled/in prison/in hospital);
- represent a cost-effective way to gather input from large numbers of people (Gray 2009 and Fink 2006 in Davies 2010), and make savings for the researcher e.g. in terms of travel, venue, data entry;
- supply data quickly, providing fast alternatives to postal, face-to-face and telephone surveys;
- enhance the effectiveness of research and increase response rates, since online questionnaires can be completed at a time and place convenient to the respondent.

My target population were users of selected e-democracy projects. An Internet-based survey is an appropriate tool for gathering information about users, since their participation in e-

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25 The ESRC web resource is offered by a training programme developed under two ESRC-funded projects: "Exploring online research methods in a virtual training environment" and "Training Researchers in Online Research Methods (TRI-ORM)" between 2004-2009.

democracy projects takes place in online environments. Moreover, the literature suggests that the anonymity for participants offered by online surveys can play a positive role in the research process, reducing researcher bias and being particularly useful for sensitive topics (Hewson et al. 2003). In my case, it was important to guarantee anonymity, because the participants could have perceived some of the questions asked (e.g. the socio-demographic ones) as sensitive. Furthermore, to assure users about the authenticity of the research, to give answers to questions and to show my commitment towards sharing research findings, an apposite survey website was developed<sup>26</sup>, as recommended by Cho and LaRose (1999).

When it comes to disadvantages of the online survey method, the primary risks are connected to participants' recruitment and to sample bias. Survey recruitment is fraught with difficulties around issues regarding anonymity. The regulation of Internet communication and access to data varies from country to country, and also among e-democracy projects. Some of the projects under study were allowed to share the addresses and personal data of registered users to third parties only within certain limits, e.g. it was only possible to contact users who had agreed to receiving email updates about project related issues. Other projects did not want to risk spamming their registered users by sending them invitations to the questionnaire; this seems to be a common attitude in the online world (Fricker 2008). Moreover, it was crucial to establish a relation of trust with the managers of the e-democracy projects. This was possible in most cases by starting with thorough desk-based research, and then by establishing a rapport during the interviews, mostly face-to-face, with the key stakeholders.

Based on Kish's (1965) recommendations, I excluded the use of the probabilistic sampling method.<sup>27</sup> Firstly, this was because e-democracy projects lack a clearly bounded population. Secondly, there is no adequate e-democracy project registry from which to create a sampling frame. Thirdly, proper probabilistic sampling in online surveying is problematic as a rule; e.g.

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26 The survey webpages in Italian, Swedish and French were available at: <https://alinaostling.wordpress.com/> but are no longer accessible after the completion of the surveys.

27 A probabilistic sampling is a method that ensures that each member of the sampling frame has an equal chance to be selected.

it brings with it difficulties in discerning how many users are logging on from a particular computer, or how many accounts/memberships a particular individual might have. Thus, I used the opportunistic sampling method, at the same time seeking a broad dissemination of the survey. To this effect, I tried to strike a balance between, on the one hand, introducing unnecessary selection bias, by extensive dissemination to particular user communities, and, on the other hand reaching adequate response levels (Davies 2010).

Project participants were invited to take part in the questionnaire through the projects' mailing lists/newsletters, to which not all users were subscribed. Even if self-selection is not an ideal method, Coomber (1997) has suggested that it is nevertheless suitable when researching a particular group of Internet users, especially when connecting with groups that are not bound to a particular area, but share a common interest (ESRC web resource 2010). This is the case with e-democracy participants.

Piloting is particularly important in the context of online surveys, because, according to Hewson et al. (2002), there is a direct relationship between the pre-study testing of electronic materials and a diminished risk of complications. Prior to distributing the online questionnaire, all aspects of design were piloted with various types of respondents (e.g. academic colleagues, professors and lay persons) and with different types of computers and browsers. Navigation, spelling, typographical errors, appearance, and readability were all checked and tested. Moreover, the usability was tested by checking that the survey performed the function for which it was designed, with the minimum amount of user frustration, time and effort (Pearrow 2000). According to previous studies, survey testing involving about five persons should reveal around 85% of the usability problems of a web application (Nielsen 2000). Given that 19 persons tested my questionnaires, the testing standards were abundantly fulfilled.

The usability test was quite straightforward: testers were either asked to (i) complete the questionnaire, while I observed how he/she managed the task; or (ii) provide comments after they had taken the survey in isolation (without my presence). In the first case, testers were asked to verbalize their thoughts by 'thinking out loud', while I took notes of the

problems with page design, navigation, content and links. In the second case, when testers were not available for face-to-face meetings, they provided comments in writing or verbally, after having taken the test. By testing usability, potential problems were remedied before the questionnaire was distributed.

Turning to the questionnaire methodology, I surveyed the users of three e-democracy projects: Malmöinitiativet, Openparlamento and NosDéputés. The other two cases analysed in this thesis – TheyWorkForYou and the Bristol e-petition system - could not be surveyed because the respective organizations did not agree to take part.

Malmöinitiativet, launched in 2008 by the municipality of Malmö, was the first e-petition system in Sweden. It has more than 700 users, and has received over 400 petitions and 8,615 signatures since its start. <sup>28</sup> Openparlamento and NosDéputés are parliamentary monitoring sites launched by two different non-governmental organizations, almost simultaneously, in 2009, and they have both received around 400,000 visitors. Openparlamento has over 12,000 registered users, while NosDéputés counts about 1,000 registered users.

The users of the three projects were not obliged to complete the questionnaire, nor did they have to answer all questions if they did choose to participate. Table 4 illustrates the questionnaire invitation mode and timing.

Table 4. Questionnaire invitation mode, timing and duration

	Invitation mode	Date	Duration (weeks)
<b>Malmöinitiativet</b>	Email to registered users	23/02 - 14/03/2011	3
<b>Openparlamento</b>	(a) Email invitation to registered users; (b) Invitation by a blog post.	17/06 - 09/07/2011	3
<b>NosDéputés</b>	(a) Invitation by thematic email alerts; (b) Invitation by three blog posts.	02/05 – 16/08/2011	15

Obtaining representative questionnaire samples of website users is extremely difficult. The results of this questionnaire aim at presenting a comprehensive picture of the characteristics

<sup>28</sup> Statistics for Malmö users cover the period from the project’s launch until October 2010.

and opinions of respondents who took part in the questionnaire. However, the results cannot claim any formal representativeness for the wider project audiences.

Slightly different sampling approaches were used in the three cases, due to the preferences of the project teams, to privacy rules, and to technical possibilities. Malmö municipality gave me access to a database with all registered users of MI (N=487) at the time of the survey<sup>29</sup>. These users had previously given their consent to receiving email communication related to the project. All registered users were sent an email invitation with a link leading to the questionnaire. After a week, users who had not responded received an email reminder.

In the case of OP, the invitation to the questionnaire was carried out in two ways. On 17 June 2011, OpenPolis placed an apposite blog entry, inviting OP visitors to complete the questionnaire<sup>30</sup> and sent email invitations to registered users who had used the OP site in the past year. The email invitation sample was agreed on the basis of technical motivations: the maximum number of invitations that OP could send out was 5,000. Hence, it was decided that only users who had been active in the last year (4,300) would be contacted. Having a sample of relatively recent users probably increased the response rate, as well as the ability of respondents to answer questions about all the site features (fresh memory of use). The blog post inviting users to participate in the questionnaire was published on the OP website, which probably meant that the most frequent site visitors had a higher chance of being invited to take part.<sup>31</sup>

Turning to ND, the questionnaire was announced by inserting a brief invitation text and a link

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29 Note well that registration is necessary only for users who launch or sign petitions. Those who want to browse petitions do not need to sign up to the homepage.

30 The blog entry text in Italian is retrievable at:

<http://parlamento.openpolis.it/blog/2011/06/17/openparlamento-cosa-ne-pensi#comments>

31 Note well, that Openpolis added some of their own questions to the OP questionnaire, namely: (1) How do you assess the facility of use of monitoring functions? Answer: 5-scale from very simple to very complicated. (2) How do you assess the addition of new tools that would allow Openparlamento users to communicate between each other? Answer: 5-graded scale from very useful to completely useless. (3) How do you assess the addition of new tools that would allow Openparlamento users to communicate with MPs? Answer: 5-graded scale from very useful to completely useless. (4) How do you assess the addition of new tools that would allow Openparlamento users to advance their proposals to MPs? Answer: 5-graded scale from very useful to completely useless.



(i) in all thematic user alerts during 15 weeks; and (ii) in three blogpost alerts concerned with Open Data in France. Both types of alerts were emailed to users who subscribed to thematic and blogpost services. Given that the invitation procedure was spread across several months, no deadline for questionnaire completion was set.

Although it is known how many email addresses across the three projects received survey invitations, there is no way to determine exactly how many persons (as opposed to email addresses) were invited. The uncertainty of reach is even stronger in the case of blog post invitations. Due to the sampling mode, it is also probable that frequent and active users were more likely to respond. Moreover, given that previous literature implies that elite segments of population tend to dominate among online participants (Norris 2001; Bimber 2003), it is also probable that well-resourced people were more inclined to take part in the survey. This could have introduced bias in the sample and, hence, into the results. As illustrated in Table 5, the response rate was the same in parliamentary informatics projects (9%). It was also in line with the response rate of the TWFY survey (8%)<sup>32</sup> (Escher 2011).

The response rate to the MI survey was considerably higher (38%). Also other e-petition surveys have received similarly high response rates. For example, the BEP survey carried out by Whyte et al. (2005) had a response rate of 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers), the MI survey by Åström and Sedelius (2010) had a response rate of 54% (n=39), and the survey of 698 e-petitioners selected by a random sample by Riehm et al. (2009 in Lindner and Riehm 2011) had a 50% response rate (n=350).

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<sup>32</sup> The 8% are defined as having missed not more than four out of eleven essential variables. Essential variables concerned netpromoter, referrer, groups, activity, age, gender, education, life stage, income, ethnicity, and disability. 12,333 persons accessed the survey invitation, while the actual number of responses used in analysis was 903 (only those completed before 12 April 2010, i.e. dissolution of parliament for General Election) (Escher 2011).

Table 5. Survey response rates

	MI		OP		ND	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<sup>33</sup> Sent	487		4,300		1,070	
<sup>34</sup> Response, at least partial	177	38	397	9	99	9
No response	310		3,903			
<i>out of which:</i>						
- <i>opted out</i>	8		-			
- <i>bounced invitations</i>	17		50			

A description of the methodology of the other surveys on which the thesis is based is also appropriate in this section. Tobias Escher’s survey of TWFY randomly invited about 20% of site visitors to the survey by a teaser asking, “Did you find what you were looking for?” (Escher 2011, p. 50). If the invited visitors to the site selected either Yes or No to the teaser question (rather than ignoring it) they would be forwarded to a web page containing the questionnaire. Users were not required to fill in the survey, nor did they have to answer all questions if they chose to participate. The survey was designed in order to obtain a more detailed picture on the demography and political engagement of TWFY users and to gather information about their experience using the site. Data was collected from 22 September 2009 until 11 April 2010 (Escher 2011, p. 51).

As part of a larger evaluation, Whyte et al. (2005, p. 12) carried out a survey of e-petition signers in Bristol in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The aim was to monitor users’ perceptions of the site and their socio-demographic profile. The survey was publicised on the e-petitioning web site and via the Councils’ regular e-mail newsletters. As, indicated above, the response rate was very high: 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

<sup>33</sup> Regarding NosDéputés, 1,070 different email addresses received the invitation either by email alert (930 emails) or by blogpost alerts (140).

<sup>34</sup> This row represents respondents who have started the questionnaire, answered at least one question and clicked the [Done] button on the last questionnaire page. (1) The response rate for Malmöinitiativet is calculated as the number of those who responded at least partially to the questionnaire (177) out of those who presumably received the questionnaire (487-17=470), that is: 38% (177/470). (2) The response rate for OpenParlamento is calculated as the number of those who responded at least partially to the questionnaire (397) out of those who presumably received the questionnaire (4,300-50=4,250), that is 9% (397/4,250).

Åström and Sedelius (2010) carried out an online survey of MI users between April and May 2009. The survey was targeted at users who have proposed a petition. The aim was to analyse their perceptions and experiences of MI. The response rate was 57% (n=39). The invitation was emailed to 73 people and reached 69 of them (4 email addresses were invalid).

Finally, it is worth noting that the surveys carried out by the author are self-report studies. This means that their validity can be compromised by a number of factors. Several of the survey questions, e.g. those measuring the effects of project participation on civic literacy and behavioural questions about public engagement after the project participation, are potentially biased by social desirability (when participants respond with answers supposed to be more socially acceptable or desirable), acquiescence (when participants are more likely to agree with the questions than disagree), or recall (by the fact that respondents might simply have forgotten some pertinent details) (Schwarz 1999; Paulhus 1991). In general, people are not always truthful. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all self-report data are invalid, only that they cannot be trusted in all cases (Ericsson and Simon 1993 in Barker et al. 2002, p. 96). All measurement methods have limits, and the potential limitations of the self-report method were considered at the design stage of the survey. However, given limitations of time and costs, it would have been too demanding to survey direct outcomes, e.g. the participants' actual knowledge before and after having taken part in the e-democracy project, or the respondents' actual behaviour in terms of being active politically after their involvement in the e-democracy project. Surveying perceptions is suitable for measuring levels of knowledge and understanding of particular issues, and is a cost-effective method. This is the main reason why the self-report method and perception surveying have been used.

### *Interviews*

The interviews were carried out with (i) actors responsible for managing the projects, i.e. three non-governmental organisations and two city municipalities; and (ii) politicians and civil servants, targeted by the e-petition projects being studied. No politicians were

interviewed in the case of the parliamentary informatics projects because it would have been more difficult and much more time-consuming to get access to national-level politicians (MPs). Moreover, it was assumed that not all MPs are familiar with the parliamentary informatics projects under study, which would have made the interviewing attempt even more challenging. Given the limited resources at hand, I decided to target only local-level politicians, who were all well familiar with the e-petition projects under study and relatively accessible.

I have opted for interviewing as a way of addressing the potential biases and gaps in project documentation. The systematic use of interviews allowed me to gain interesting perspectives, and more in-depth and vivid accounts of the projects at stake. In general, interviews allow researchers to access stakeholders whose perceptions would otherwise be filtered through other, more influential voices (Thompson 1988 in Blee and Taylor 2002).

The face-to-face interviews with project teams and with the relevant decision-makers were partly *structured* and partly *semi-structured*; in order to counter the respective disadvantages of these interview modes. The structured method was used sparingly because it creates an unbalanced relation, where the researcher holds all the power to establish what is relevant and what is irrelevant. This limits respondents in terms of pre-defined topics, and gives them little chance to determine the agenda. Moreover, a too structured approach could alienate the interviewees from the aims of the research, and increase the tendency to give misleading replies (Seale 1998).

The semi-structured part of the interview relied on an interview guide with a consistent set of topics, a kind of checklist for deciding what to treat next in the interview. This method has a number of advantages; above all, it provides more breadth and depth of information, since respondents can express their standpoint, experience, expectations and critique in their own words, rather than in the words of the researcher (Blee and Taylor 2002). It also gives more space to the respondents' voices, while diminishing the influence and the manipulation of the researcher (Ragin 1994 in Blee and Taylor 2002). Moreover, it allows respondents to challenge, clarify and re-contextualize the knowledge (about e-democracy projects) available

through documentary sources or other interviews. To sum up, at the same time as providing detail, depth and an insider-perspective, semi-structured interviews also allow hypothesis testing and quantitative analysis of responses (Aberbach and Rockman 2002).

The interview target group were persons involved in commissioning, developing and managing e-democracy projects. Thus, to adapt my research methods to the target, so-called *elite interviews* were carried out by means of open-ended questions. In fact, open-ended questions, (by not imposing categories or choices on the interviewees' reasoning processes) have been endorsed as the best mode for elite interviewing (Rivera et al. 2002). In contrast to the structured part, the open-ended questions allowed more flexibility to explore other issues and nuances, based on the interaction with the interviewee. The aim of the interviews was to cover e-democracy variables, which have already been researched and, at the same time, to give room for unexpected responses that might allow the development of the research in new, potentially useful directions (Blee and Taylor 2002).

Qualitative interviews help to discern when theory does not fit the data, and are especially useful in areas where there is not much prior research – precisely the case in the field of e-democracy. Open-ended questions give interviewees the opportunity to organize their answers within their own frameworks. This increases the response validity. Conclusively, open-ended questions were suitable to my research because I was exploring a rather abstract issue of democracy, in the relatively uncharted field of e-democracy (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). The knowledge gained through interviews helped me to generate new themes and categories of analysis for my research, and even to revise and extend existing e-democracy theory.

However, the semi-structured method also has its drawbacks. Interviews are based on artificially constructed realities, where the respondents make use of retrospective interpretation, and sometimes fail to make accurate accounts of their experiences, or simply conceal or misrepresent information. Other, more 'technical' risks include deviation from the key themes during interviews, the reduced capacity to make systematic comparison between interview responses, and the time-consuming analysis of the latter. To offset some of these

risks, the *structured* part of my interviews consisted of a pre-established schedule of questions, where all the respondents were asked the same set of questions, in order to make data more easily analysed and comparable (Blee and Taylor 2002; George 1979).

The interviewees were selected in a deliberate sampling process, according to their particular role or experience in the e-democracy project at stake, rather than because they were representative of the larger population. The sampling was carried out in stages. Interviewees were added as I gained more insight into the projects and the related stakeholder groups, when new aspects were raised by respondents, and in order to increase the diversity of interviewees in terms of ideologies and organizational positions (Klatch 1999 in Blee and Taylor 2002). The sampling was of course also guided by theoretical considerations, and reflected the underlying assumptions of the relevant research literature (Blee and Taylor 2002).

When possible, with the limited resources at hand, interviews were carried out face-to-face. The rest took place over the telephone. Analysis and interpretation were conducted in parallel with the data collection, so that these initial analyses could lead to adjustments of the study, i.e. concerning selection of interviewees, questions to ask and additional topics worth exploring. This was done with notion that: “Interpreting interview data involves working both up from data and down from existing ideas, propositions, concepts, theories and hypotheses (...)” (Blee and Taylor 2002). This flexibility also allowed me to develop new avenues of inquiry, and to abandon areas that seemed unproductive (Rubin and Rubin 1995 in Blee and Taylor 2002).

Once all the interviews notes in a specific case had been written up, I reviewed the data in order to identify common, recurrent, or emergent themes. This involved looking for similar traits between respondents, e.g. to see if the same type of interviewees (such as politicians) proposed recurring themes. Analysing patterns allowed me to move from a descriptive examination to an analysing one (Sweeney and Pritchard 2013).

## *Web analytics*

Finally, in order to assess the projects' media visibility, and in particular their prominence on the web, I used the following web analytics tools: (i) Google Search, (ii) Alexa, and (iii) Social Mention. Google Search, a web search engine owned by Google Inc., is the most-used search engine on the web.<sup>35</sup> The main purpose of Google Search is to comb for text in publicly accessible documents offered by web servers. In my analysis, I have used Google's general tool for searching webpages, and two of its specialised services Google News and Google Blog search. Google News is a news aggregator that selects information from more than 4,500 worldwide news sources by an automatic aggregation algorithm. My Google News search comprised their archive option for news content older than 30 days. The Google Blog Search was used to carry out searches regarding the projects at study in various services in the world of blogs, e.g. Blogger, Live Journal, Weblog.

Alexa, which is a leading provider of global web metrics, was also used to analyse the relative visibility of the project websites on the web. The Alexa rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors to a site and pageviews over the past three months. The inbound links are taken into account, since they can help to improve the site rank in search engines, and serve as a measure of a site's reputation. According to the Alexa metrics, the site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked as number one.

Finally, also Social Mention was used to examine and compare the visibility of the project websites. Social Mention is a social media search platform that aggregates user-generated content from across the web into a single stream of information. It allows the monitoring of over 80 social media properties including: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Digg, and Google. Social Mention uses four monitoring dimensions: strength, sentiment, passion and reach, described as follows:

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Alexa "Top Sites By Category - Search Engine Ranking". Retrieved 22 January 2014 at: [http://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Computers/Internet/Searching/Search\\_Engines](http://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Computers/Internet/Searching/Search_Engines)

- Strength is the likelihood that your brand is being discussed in social media. A very simple calculation is used: phrase mentioned within the last 24 hours divided by total possible mentions;
- Sentiment is the ratio of mentions that are generally positive to those that are generally negative;
- Passion is a measure of the likelihood that individuals talking about the selected brand will do so repeatedly. For example, if there is a small group of very passionate advocates who talk about the brand all the time; the passion score will be higher. Conversely, if every mention is written by a different author, the score will be lower;
- Reach is a measure of the range of influence. This is the number of unique authors referencing your brand, divided by the total number of mentions.

This chapter on methodology is the last in the first, theoretical, part of the thesis. After having reviewed the key concepts related to the quality of e-democracy, the state of the art in the field of e-democracy, and some of the manifold ways in which e-democracy can be conceptualised, I will now move to the empirical part of the thesis, by introducing the first set of the cases under study: parliamentary informatics projects.



## **5. Parliamentary informatics projects**

The empirical part of the thesis consists of two sections; the first focuses on parliamentary informatics projects in Italy, France and the UK, while the second concerns e-petition projects in Sweden and the UK. Each empirical chapter provides brief project backgrounds and then turns to a comparative analysis of the projects, dependent variable by variable.

This chapter explores three Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations (PMOs): OpenParlamento, NosDéputés and TheyWorkForYou. PMOs are defined as organizations and initiatives that monitor or assess the functioning and performance of parliaments.

### **5.1. The case of They Work For You**

*“For all its faults and foibles, our democracy is a profound gift from previous generations. Yet most people don't know the name of their MP, nor their constituency, let alone what their MP does or says in their name.” (www.theyworkforyou.com 2011).*

TWFY is a parliamentary informatics site and resembles OpenParlamento and NosDéputés in terms of content and structure. It allows citizens to become thoroughly informed about parliamentary activities, and to discover what their MPs are working on in Parliament. TWFY is run by [mySociety](#), which is itself a project of UK Citizens Online Democracy, a registered charity. The charity runs mySociety as a project, but also owns a company called mySociety Ltd. TWFY is the most popular mySociety website, receiving on average between 200,000-300,000 visits per month (Escher 2011). MySociety Ltd sells services such as building websites, consulting or planning, to the public, private and third sectors, and already has a number of important clients such as the BBC, the Cabinet Office and Google. The profit made goes into running the charity's projects, while the web site users do not pay for the services.

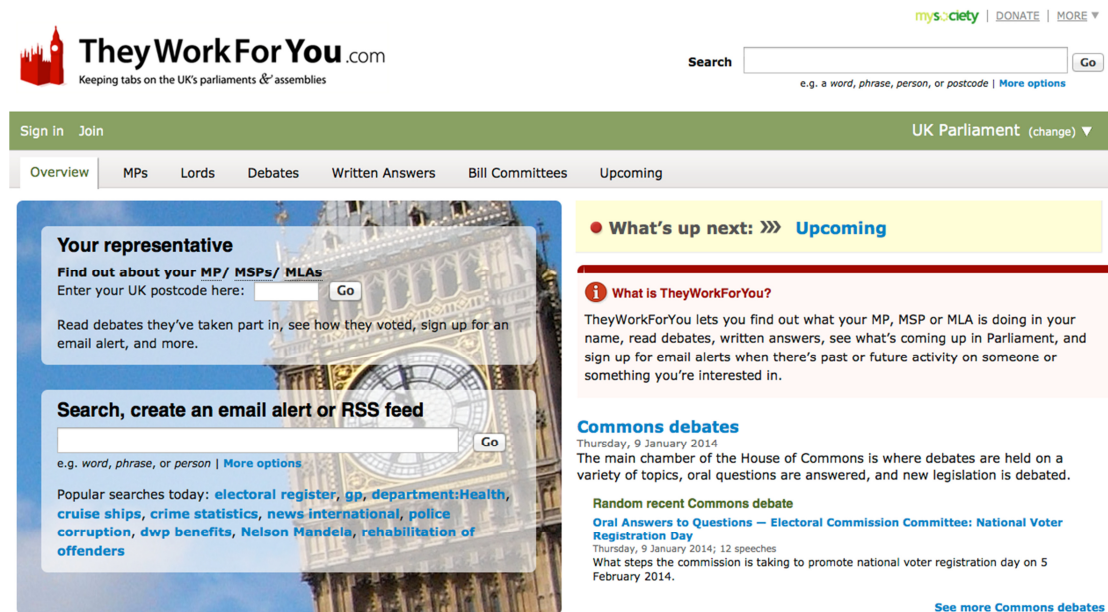
The mySociety projects were originally built almost entirely by volunteers. Even today, it employs only one person to keep the TWFY site running and up-to-date; the rest remain volunteers. MySociety began in September 2003, but its founders spent the first year raising money and soliciting the public and each other for ideas. Their first funding arrived in

September 2004, and before the end of 2005 they launched a number of projects (TWFY, [HearFromYourMP](#), [PledgeBank](#) and [WriteToThem](#)). Other projects started in 2006 ([No 10 Downing Street Petitions Website](#)) and in 2008 ([FixMyStreet](#); [WhatDoTheyKnow](#) and the [FreeOurBills](#) campaign).

MySociety has two key goals; (i) to build websites that give people simple, tangible benefits in the civic and community aspects of their lives; and (ii) to teach the public and voluntary sectors how to use the Internet most efficiently, to improve lives. It develops sites according to certain core principles, such as cheap scalability, tangible outputs and high usability. Nearly all of their code is open source.

TWFY aims at bridging the democratic deficit, in the belief that a mixture of transparency and public engagement can solve Parliament's problems. The main goal is to provide better information than that of official sites; to allow easy navigation, tracking of parliamentary activities and fact-checking; to enable citizens to act as watchdogs and make MPs feel accountable; and to allow people to engage in politics and reduce the costs of lobbying (Escher 2011). It allows users to find out what MPs are doing in their name, read debates and written answers, see what is coming up in Parliament, and sign up for email alerts, when there is past or future activity on someone or something they are interested in (see Figure 5). Users can also post so-called annotations, i.e. additional information about any parliamentary act, such as a blog post or a Wikipedia article. The annotation should add value to the contribution, and not be an opinion, a rant or direct message to a politician.

Figure 5. Screenshot of the TWFY homepage



Source: TWFY homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>

TWFY has an impressive historical record of parliamentary information: its website, Hansard<sup>36</sup> Commons Debates, records debates going back to the General Election of 1935 and knowledge of MPs back to 1806. TWFY was one of the first initiatives of its kind, worldwide, and MySociety has replicated its prototype on the basis of the [Scottish Parliament](#), the [Northern Ireland Assembly](#) and the [Welsh Assembly](#). Moreover, other PMOs around the world have used TWFY as a model for similar projects. It is the most well-established and broad-reaching of the three parliamentary informatics cases under study.

<sup>36</sup> Hansard is the name of the printed transcripts of parliamentary debates in the Westminster system of government.

## 5.2. The case of OpenParlamento

The origins of [OpenParlamento](#) can be traced back to the creation of the non-profit association Depp,<sup>37</sup> in 2003. Depp was launched by a team of people experimenting with the Internet, to promote information, transparency and public participation. For the 2006 elections in Italy, they developed a voting advice application (VAA) called 'Voi Siete Qui'. In July 2008, the association OpenPolis was created.<sup>38</sup> Later, OpenPolis developed a homonymous project,<sup>39</sup> a sort of Wikipedia dedicated to politics and politicians, which allows users to access, create and update information about politicians, and to check its correctness. Openpolis contains data on all the 130,000 elected representatives at all institutional levels in Italy (EU, national, regional, provincial and municipal) and helps users to keep track of their declarations on specific issues (Del Lungo 2009). It offers various content management options (e.g. tagging and graphing), allows users to find their local representatives, 'adopt' them, follow their activities and contribute to an online database by uploading updates on the chosen representative. Depp has also developed a series of other innovative Internet projects such as 'Economia Partecipata', a participatory budgeting project for the Lazio region (2009), and an e-learning platform, 'Senato Ragazzi', targeted at secondary school pupils, who are given a chance to learn actively about the work of parliament, by suggesting, rating and commenting on bills proposed by other students.

OpenParlamento was created as a spin-off project from OpenPolis, and officially launched in June 2009. The user basis of OpenParlamento and OpenPolis is the same. This means that if a user registers for OpenParlamento, (s)he automatically registers also for OpenPolis. The focus of my analysis lies on OpenParlamento. In instances where the information refers to both OpenParlamento (henceforth abbreviated as OP) and OpenPolis, this will be clearly indicated in the text. OP compiles information about all the legislative acts presented in the two chambers of the Italian parliament (in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) on a

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37 Depp stands for "Democrazia elettronica e partecipazione pubblica" (in English, author's translation: "e-democracy and public participation").

38 Information accessed on 16 March 2010 at: <http://www.openpolis.it/chisiamo>

39 The projects of Openpolis have been developed by Depp Srl (<http://www.openpolis.it/chisiamo> accessed on 16 March 2010).

daily basis. Its goal is to offer a user-friendly, transparent and impartial system of communication, accessible to all citizens. All users can register for free and have the possibility to (see Figure 6 for a screenshot):

1. access information about individual MPs, their activities in terms of legislative acts and parliamentary votes, and statistics about MPs who are more/less present and active in the parliament, and those who do not adhere to their party line when voting;
2. monitor parliamentary activity, follow the activities of specific MPs over time, as well as the processing of one or several acts in the Parliament;
3. participate, with the possibility of amending, describing, commenting and voting on legislative acts directly online, through a WIKI-type of software.

Figure 6. Screenshot of the OP homepage



Source: OP homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at: <http://parlamento17.openpolis.it/>

OP gives users the possibility to consult all the acts discussed and produced by the Parliament. The search options and filters facilitate navigation among legislative acts (draft laws, legislative decrees and law decrees <sup>40</sup>) and non-legislative acts (motions, questions, speeches etc.). For every act, OP shows its text, its state of progress in the legislative process, information about the signatories and rapporteurs, and the result of the voting. All MPs have

<sup>40</sup> In Italian: disegni di legge, decreti legge, decreti legislativi.

a personal page, with a summary of activities carried out. These pages contain information on their date of election, their presence and absence in the parliament, missions, acts presented, votes and interventions. Moreover, OP shows the areas of interest of the MPs, their index of activities and the MPs who are closest to each other in terms of voting and signatures. The result of every Parliamentary vote, including the positions of various groups, and the vote of every single MP, are available online. In addition, OP draws attention to 'rebel MPs', i.e. those who do not vote according to the position of the group to which they belong.

The OP monitoring tool allows users to follow each MP and each parliamentary act continuously. Users receive notifications each time a specific MP is active, or when an act proceeds (e.g. at the presentation of an act, new signatories, voting or interventions). The OP also classifies all the acts according to their area(s) of interest. This way, users can choose to monitor a certain area, and receive personalised updates, either on their personal OP page or by email. Moreover, users can vote 'favourable' or 'unfavourable' on each parliamentary act, and post a description of the act in order to make it more comprehensible to other users. A wiki application that allows the writing and modifying of texts produced by others is applied for this purpose. Users can comment on every act present on OP, and share their evaluations, judgements and reflections about them. They can also insert notes (similar to amendments) in the actual text of the parliamentary acts.

### **5.3. The case of NosDéputés**

[Regards Citoyens](#) - a group of volunteers formed on the web – developed and launched NosDéputés (henceforward abbreviated as ND) in September 2009. They were inspired by, among others, their equivalent *TheyWorkForYou* in the UK. In June 2010 they became a formal association, with the overall aim of promoting citizens' free access to and use of public data. The association has laid down the following objectives: (i) to create tools that help citizens to evaluate public policy and the activities of the elected; (ii) to promote the use of public data; (iii) to promote free licence of public data; and (iv) to support the release of public data. Since its creation, Regards Citoyens has launched various initiatives. Apart from ND, they also offer an application by which users can follow parliamentary debates via

Twitter, and have conducted studies on the impact of the electoral boundary reform, and on MPs' presence in Parliament. In 2010, Regards Citoyens finalized, jointly, with the French branch of Transparency International, a study about the influence of lobby groups on Parliament.<sup>41</sup> For this purpose they involved 3,000 online volunteers, using web-based crowdsourcing.<sup>42</sup> The volunteers scanned through over 1,000 parliamentary reports, containing data on over 16,000 lobby representatives, a very high number compared with that of the 120 officially registered lobbyists.

ND offers citizens new instruments, which allow them to analyze and understand the work of the elected representatives in the French National Assembly. Similarly to OP, ND has emerged as a one-stop-shop for easily accessible parliamentary information. The premise is that every voter should have easy access to information about the activities of his/her MP. Regards Citoyens strives to make this type of information clear and accessible for all, and a support to the development of citizenship expertise (Petiot 2010). In terms of information, ND provides extensive data about each MP, e.g. their date of election; professional responsibilities such as presence on parliamentary committees and positions covered outside Parliament; their parliamentary activities, such as written or oral questions, interventions, proposed amendments and participation on committees and in parliament (see Figure 7 for a shot of the homepage). Users can also 'follow' an MP by RSS-feed, email or by a widget that embeds the follow-function directly on their own site.

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41 In French: Transparence International France.

42 The concept of "crowdsourcing" was coined by Jeff Howe in an article on Wired in 2006, defining it as "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call". This concept has been widely adopted by several organizations and initiatives such as Wikipedia, Google, NASA, and the US Congress (Ferro e Molinari 2010).



Figure 7. Screenshot of the ND homepage



Source: ND homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at: <http://www.nosdeputes.fr/>

The data on parliamentary activities are updated daily so users can follow the work of parliament, basically, live. ND also offers tools such as; (i) an option of searching the site by key words, and inventive applications such as (ii) tag clouds on the main page, which allow users to see what topics are mostly debated in parliament at the moment, and a list with the last legislative proposals debated by MPs, (iii) a RSS flow on many of its pages, which allows users to follow the latest comments and activities of individual MPs and (iv) a possibility to monitor, step-by-step, the processing of legal acts in the parliamentary process, combined with information about the interventions of relevant MPs.

Moreover, ND users are encouraged to participate actively, and express their views about issues debated in Parliament. The interactive features allow users to make comments about the parliamentary work of individual MPs directly on the MP's personal page, available at ND, and to start a discussion regarding a legislative proposal, or participate in an ongoing debate. To help citizens to understand, analyse and comment on draft laws, Regard Citoyens has



developed a tool called *Simplifions la loi 2.0*. Usually, the path of a draft law before the two parliamentary chambers accept it is long; the draft is discussed, amended and voted on, article by article, in committees and then in plenary. The text changes considerably over time, which makes it hard for a lay citizen to decipher these legal documents.

Regards Citoyens' simplification tool presents legislative texts, where users can express their opinion article-by-article and line-by-line. Moreover, when a part of the legislative text has been commented upon by MPs, or modified, or when it refers to another law, a link towards these latter facilitates understanding of the context of the draft law. This simplification tool has been applied as yet only to a few laws, since the preparation requires a lot of manual work by the Regards Citoyens team.

## **5.4. Case comparison**

In this chapter, I will make a case comparison from the perspective of four dependent variables: (i) equality, (ii) accountability, (iii) responsiveness, and (iv) civic literacy. I will begin with the variables of equality and accountability, which are 'essentialist' in nature. Here, the participation process is a constituent element of democratic legitimacy, and an end in itself. Thereafter, I will examine the 'instrumentalist' variables, responsiveness and civic literacy, which are focused on project outcomes.

### **5.4.1. Equality**

The equality aspect examined in this thesis is the representativeness of the reference populations in e-democracy projects. This will be measured by socio-demographic characteristics of participants, by their levels of participation in politics, and by their ICT access, use and skills. The underlying assumption is that e-democracy projects should be inclusive and that no individual or group should dominate the participation arena at the expense of others.

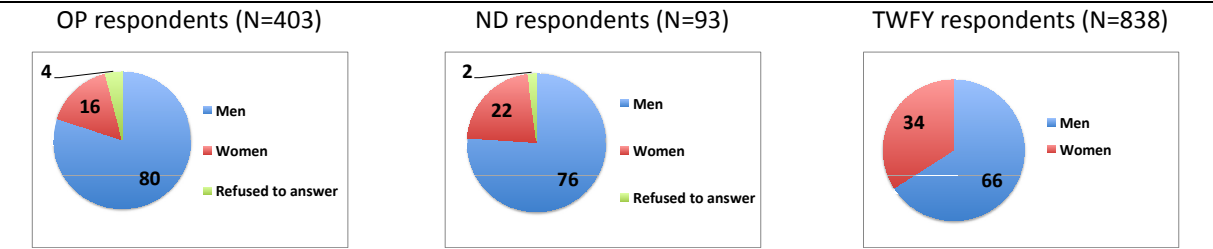
The data, which forms the basis of the equality analysis, originates mainly from the two online surveys carried out among OP and ND users (2011). The data on TWFY users comes from the online survey conducted by Tobias Escher (2011). His results provided crucial

insights and unique comparative data. Not all the survey questions in my surveys correspond with those in Escher's, which means that some of the comparative data in this chapter is only available for OP and ND. I have included key statistical data in the actual text below, while placing more statistical details in Annex I. This has been made to facilitate the reading; this way the reader avoids getting lost in details.

*Gender*

Women are clearly underrepresented in OP, TWFY and ND. Only between 16 - 34 % of respondents are women, while their share in national populations is between 51-52%<sup>43</sup>. The gender inequality is particularly striking in OP, where only 16% of respondents are women. TWFY, with 34% female respondents, scores best on this dimension (see Figure 8). The male domination on ND and OP is confirmed by other sources. The ND's own data shows that 90%<sup>44</sup> of those who have registered on ND, and indicated their gender, are men. In the case of OP, an indirect substantiation originates from Alexa, a provider of global web metrics. According to Alexa, the OpenPolis.it (OP's mother-site) appeals more to men than to women.<sup>45</sup>

Figure 8. Gender distribution among respondents



Source: Author's surveys 2011; Escher 2011.

The share of women across the three projects reflects what is happening in terms of the political participation of women at country levels: the UK shows the best gender balance,

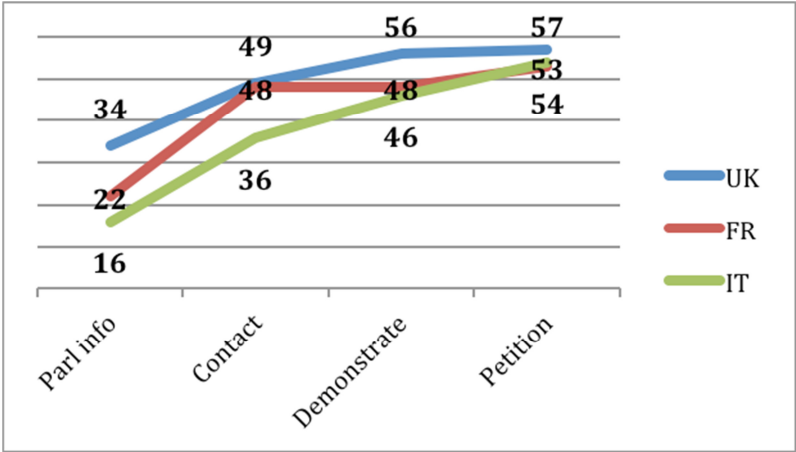
<sup>43</sup> In Italy, women constitute 51% of the population (ISTAT 2010b); in France 52% (INSEE 2010d); and in the UK 52 % (Oxford Internet Survey 2009).

<sup>44</sup> The ND's statistics (displayed on their website) refer to the period Sept 2009-Dec 2010 (total N= 324).

<sup>45</sup> Source: Alexa's Global Rank accessed on 9 January 2013. Note well that when users register for OP, they automatically register also for OpenPolis and vice-versa.

while France and Italy have inferior scores (see Figure 9). Italy lags behind considerably, in terms of demonstrating and contacting politicians/government officials. This implies that the pattern of gender inequality discernable in the projects could be influenced by the state of gender equality in national politics. Figure 9 also illustrates the fact that the proportion of women engaged in parliamentary informatics projects tends to be much lower than that of women in alternative participatory activities such as contacting politicians, demonstrating or petitioning. Hence, parliamentary informatics might be even more gender unequal than other forms of political engagement.

Figure 9. Politically active women as compared to men in Italy, France and the UK (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the level of participation in TWFY/ND/OP ('Parl info'); in contacting politician/government officials ('Contact'), in taking part in a demonstration ('Demonstrate') and in petitioning ('Petition'). See Annex I for further statistical details.

Source: Author's surveys 2011; European Social Survey (ESS) ESS1-2002.

Overall, the survey indicates that women are under-represented in parliamentary informatics projects, and that the situation in each of the three projects reflects the country context. Moreover, the survey suggests that parliamentary informatics projects are less inclusive than other forms of political participation.

## Age

The age of the respondents varies considerably within the projects but most of the OP and ND respondents are aged around 40-50. The average age of ND respondents<sup>46</sup> is somewhat higher than that of the French population. In contrast, the average age of OP respondents is lower than the national average (see Table 6).<sup>47</sup> Overall, the average age of OP and ND respondents is higher, when compared to that of the typical Internet user in the EU. At the EU-level, Internet users are most frequent in the age group 16-24 (94%), as compared to 78% in the age group 25-54 (EUROSTAT 2012d).

Table 6. Age of respondents compared to country mean age

	<b>OP (N=146)</b>	<b>Italy's population</b>	<b>ND (N=89)</b>	<b>France's population</b>
Mean	39	44	50	40
Min/max	12-88		18-77	

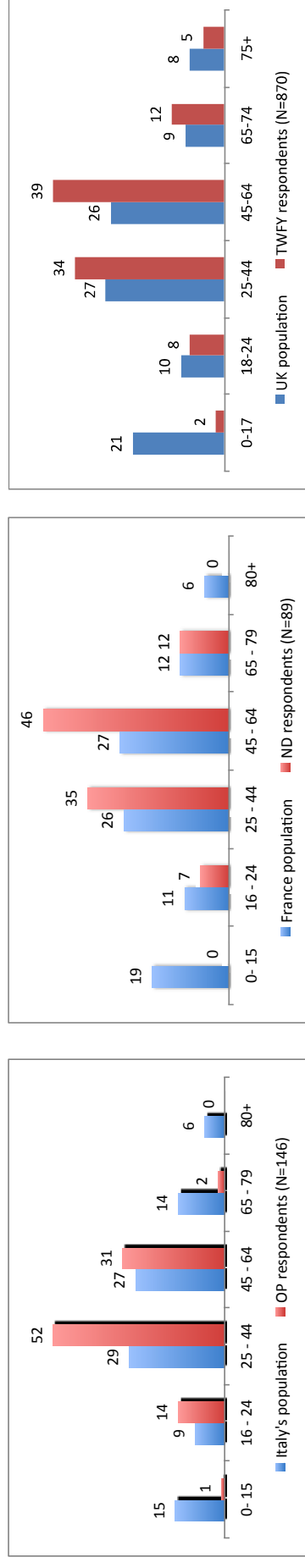
Source: Author's surveys 2011; INSEE 2010a; ISTAT 2012.

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46 The ND average is roughly confirmed by the NosDéputés' own data, which indicates that the mean is 44 years. The ND data originates from the questionnaire that users may answer at the time of registration, and which contains a question about age.

47 There is no relevant data for TWFY.

Figure 10. The age distribution of OP, ND and TWFY respondents vs. their national populations (%)



Source: Author's surveys 2011; Escher 2011; ISTAT 2010a; INSEE 2010a; Office for National Statistics 2010a.

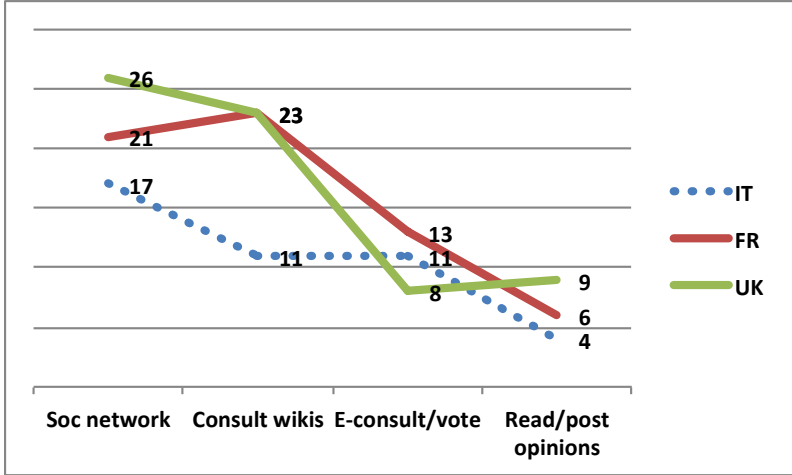
The modal age group is 25-44 in OP, and 45-64 in ND and TWFY. The age group 25-44 seems to be considerably over-represented in OP (by 23%) and somewhat over-represented in ND and in TWFY (by 9% and 7% respectively) in comparison to the country data (see Figure 10). The next age group (45-64) is over-represented in all projects. Unsurprisingly, the most under-represented groups seem to be the youngest (0-15/0-17) and the eldest (80+).

48 The age distribution of parliamentary informatics users has also been compared to that of alternative forms of participation at country-level, but no particular pattern emerged from this comparison. Alternative forms of participation are here intended as: (i) contacted politician/government official; (ii) taken part in a lawful demonstration; (iii) signed a petition; (iv) voted in the last national elections, as in the ESS1-2002.

The less elderly cohort (65-74/79) is surprisingly well represented among respondents. According to the TWFY survey, 65-74 year olds are more numerous in proportion to the UK population. Correspondingly, the proportion of retired, sick or disabled respondents in TWFY is very high, with respect to British Internet users in general (Escher 2011). In ND, 65-79 year olds are perfectly represented. Given that the European Commission (2010) claims that older people are at the greatest risk of being excluded from the benefits of the Information Society, the overall results from the two surveys are positive. They indicate that parliamentary informatics also manages to attract older users. The situation is reversed in the case of OP, where this cohort is under-represented.

Figure 11 illustrates that Italians aged 55-74 are less active online when compared to their French or British counterparts. This could explain why the over-65s are under-represented on the OP platform.

Figure 11. Online participation by people aged 55-74 in Italy, France and the UK (%)

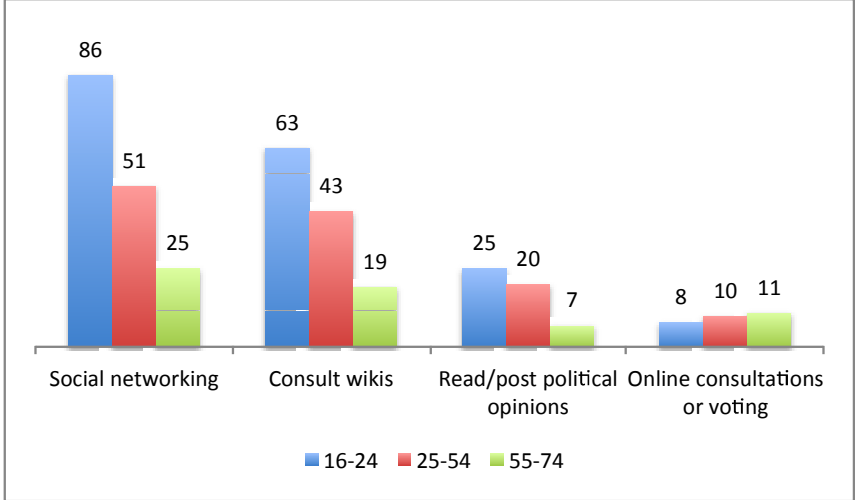


Source: EUROSTAT 2011e. See Annex I for further statistical details.

Previous research (Norris 2001; Rice and Katz 2003) suggests that Internet usage is negatively correlated with age. Current EUROSTAT statistics also show that people aged 55-74 are the group less inclined to participate online, except when it comes to online consultation, where the difference between age groups is minor (see Figure 12 below). Hence, it is particularly intriguing to find that older people have the digital skills and motivation to engage in

parliamentary informatics in France and the UK.

Figure 12. Online participation by age group in the EU-27 (%)



Source: EUROSTAT 2011e.

In sum, the age comparison between projects and national populations indicates that there is quite a lot of disparity in the engagement of different age groups in parliamentary informatics. Nevertheless, TWFY and ND have managed to involve a seemingly representative portion of people aged 65-74/79.

*Ethnicity*

Turning to the issue of ethnicity, projects show slightly different patterns. The overwhelming majority of OP respondents are Italian citizens born in Italy (see Table 7). The remainder originate from a variety of other countries, most of them EU Member States. No particular ethnicity prevails among them. The proportion of foreign-born and foreign citizens among OP respondents is between 6-7% lower than among Italy’s overall population.

Table 7. Percentage of people born in Italy and with Italian citizenship among OP respondents, compared to the Italian population (%)

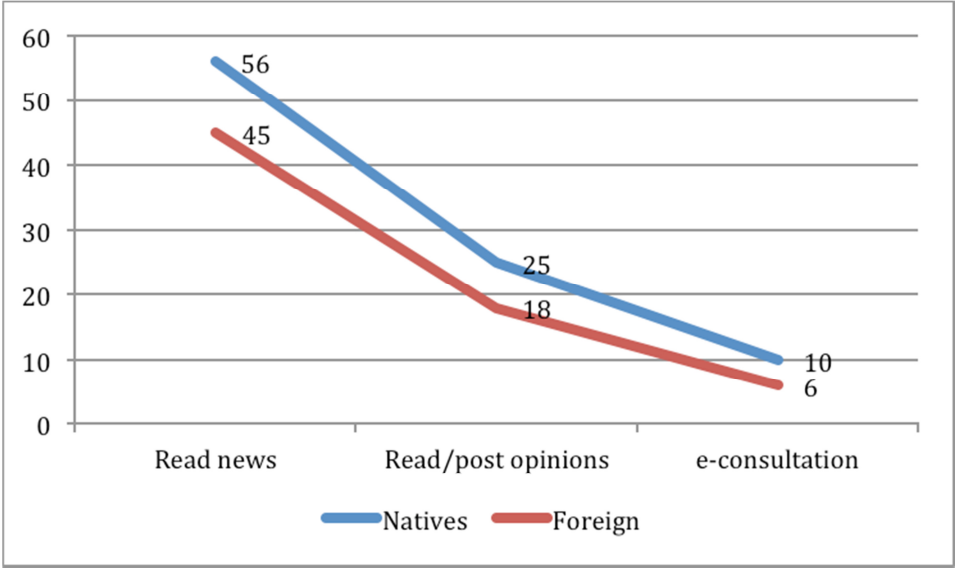
	<b>OP</b>	<b>Italy</b>
Born in Italy	98	91
Italian citizenship	97	92

Source: EUROSTAT 2012c.

The apparent under-representation of foreign persons among OP respondents reflects the overall trend in Italy. Figure 13 indicates that the online participation rates in activities similar to parliamentary informatics (i.e. reading news, posting opinions and participating in e-consultation) of foreign-born/non-nationals are consistently lower than those of natives/nationals. It is worth noting that the participation of foreigners on OP is even lower than the lowest percentage of online participation, e-consultation, shown in Figure 13 (3% vs. 6%).



Figure 13. Online participation of foreigners and natives in Italy (percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months)



LEGEND: The categories ‘foreign-born’ and ‘non-nationals’ have been merged into ‘foreign’, and the categories ‘natives’ and ‘nationals’ have been merged into ‘natives’.

‘Read news’ stands for reading/downloading online newspapers/news; ‘read/post opinions’ signifies reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites; ‘e-consultation’ stands for taking part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition).

Source: EUROSTAT 2011d. See Annex I for further statistical details.

In contrast, TWFY data in Table 8 shows a good ethnic balance; white users are only slightly over-represented with respect to the British population (95% vs. 93%).<sup>49</sup>

49

There is no EUROSTAT (2011d) data on online participation of foreigners and natives in the UK (percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months), as indicated for Italy in Figure 14.

Table 8. The ethnic composition of TWFY respondents compared to that of the British population (%)

	<b>TWFY (N=814)</b>	<b>British population</b>
White	95	93
Asian/Asian British	3	4
Black/Black British	3	2
Other ethnic group	1	1

Source: Escher 2011; The Office for National Statistics 2002.

In sum, the available statistics indicate that TWFY users reflect the ethnic composition of the national population, while the OP is potentially dominated by Italian users, disproportionately to the actual share of Italian-born persons and Italian citizens living in Italy. Note well that this difference between OP and TWFY might be due to the fact that two different statistics are being compared: one concerns the place of birth, and citizenship, while the other looks at the ethnicity of the population. There is no data on ethnicity of ND users since this was considered by the project team to be a sensitive question.

*Education*

Respondents’ level of education of is well above the national average (see Figure 14). The proportion of OP respondents who finished university is five-fold with respect to that of Italy’s total population; while among TWFY and ND respondents twice as many have a university degree, in comparison to their respective country populations. The existence of many PhD holders among the OP and ND respondents (7-8%) confirms the predominance of higher educational attainment among the project users.<sup>50</sup>

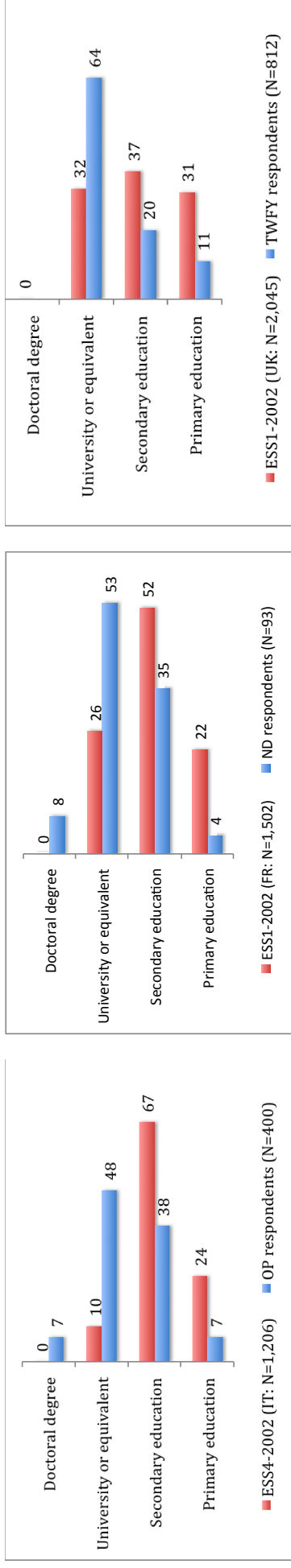
At the other end of the spectrum, there are few people with lower education levels among

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50 Alexa, a leading provider of global web metrics, confirms that parliamentary informatics users are educated above the average. According to Alexa’s metrics, the audiences of ND and OpenPolis (OpenPolis is OP’s sister-site: when users register for OP, they automatically register also for OpenPolis and vice-versa) show higher averages of postgraduate education compared with the global Internet population. Source: Alexa’s Global Rank accessed on 9 January 2013.

respondents. The difference between project respondents and country populations is between three and fivefold for those who only completed primary education. In sum, in terms of educational attainment, the respondents are not representative of their country populations.

Figure 14. Educational attainment of respondents vs. their respective country populations (%)

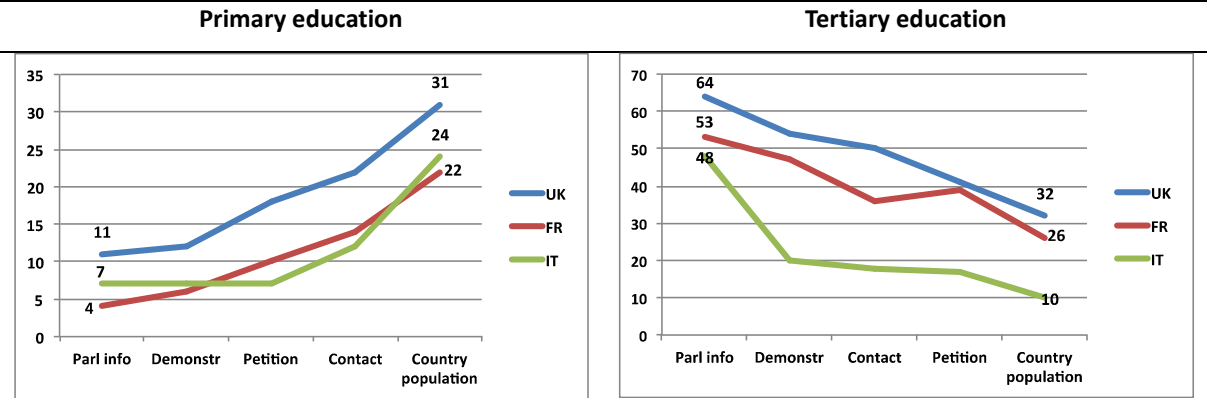


51  
 52  
 53  
 Source: Author's surveys; Escher 2011 ; ESS1-2002 ; The Long Term Economy 2009.

51 Escher's survey comprised a category called 'other education' (5% of respondents). In the TWFY survey, the 'primary education' category is called 'basic education' and includes people with education up to secondary school. Moreover, the category 'doctoral degree' was absent.  
 52 In the ESS1-2002, the category 'doctoral degree' was not present.  
 53 According to an elaboration of the data on the website the Long Term Economy (2009), the rate of researchers as share of the population is 0.002% in Italy, 0.003% in France and 0.004% in the UK. The country population data was taken from ISTAT (2011b), INSEE (2010e), and the Office for National Statistics (2011a).

Figure 15 compares the data where the difference between respondents and the general country populations is greatest - i.e. for people with the highest and the lowest education levels - with the equivalent groups in ESS1-2002 who have (in addition) engaged in alternative forms of political participation. This analysis indicates that both the politically active nationals and the project respondents have fewer lower-educated and more higher-educated people among them, with respect to the country averages. Moreover, the project respondents seem to be more similar to their co-citizens who are alternatively engaged in politics, than to their respective general country population.

Figure 15. The share of persons who have engaged in politics in alternative ways in Italy, France and the UK, by educational level (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows participation in TWFY/ND/OP ('Parl info'), in taking part in a demonstration ('Demonstrate'), in petitioning ('Petition') and in contacting politician/government officials ('Contact'), and the overall country population ('Country population').

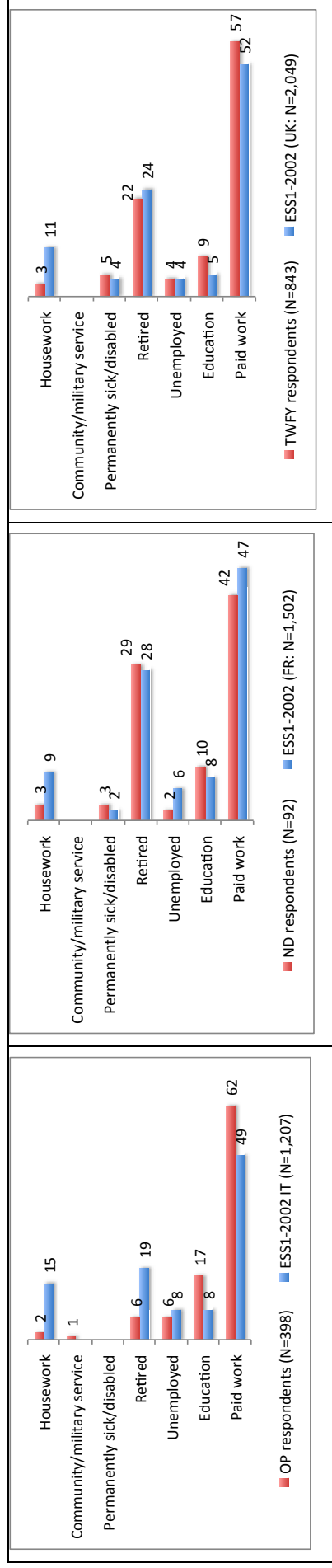
Source: Author's surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002. See Annex I for further statistical details.

In sum, the project respondents' level of education is higher than the national average, and disparities seem to be even stronger among parliamentary informatics participants than among their co-nationals engaged in other political activities.

### *Occupation*

A very low share of respondents is engaged in housework, or looking after children or others (2-3%) as their primary occupation, which stands in contrast with the relatively higher country-level averages (9-15%). In terms of people who are involved in paid work, the survey results are dissimilar across cases. The OP and TWFY respondents are more involved in paid work than their average country population, while the opposite is true for the ND respondents (see Figure 16).

Figure 16. Main activity during the last seven days (%)



54

Source: Author's surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002.

Another noteworthy difference between the respondents and their co-nationals concerns the category of people in education. All projects have a larger share of people in education than their respective countries: OP and TWFY have even close to double the share.

54 The category "Other activity" was omitted from the graph because of space limits. These are the results for "Other activity": Italy ESS1=2002: 1% and OP 6%; France ESS1=2002: 1% and OND 10%; the UK ESS1=2002: 1% and OP 0%.

OP stands out from the rest of the projects as having three times fewer retired people with respect to the Italian country average. The share of retired among OP respondents is also lower than among Italians who engage in unconventional political activities.<sup>55</sup> This could be due to the lack of digital skills among elderly people in Italy. In fact, only a minor proportion of Italians aged 55-74 (22%) uses the Internet at least once a week, in comparison to their equivalents in France (51%) and the UK (58%) (EUROSTAT 2011e).

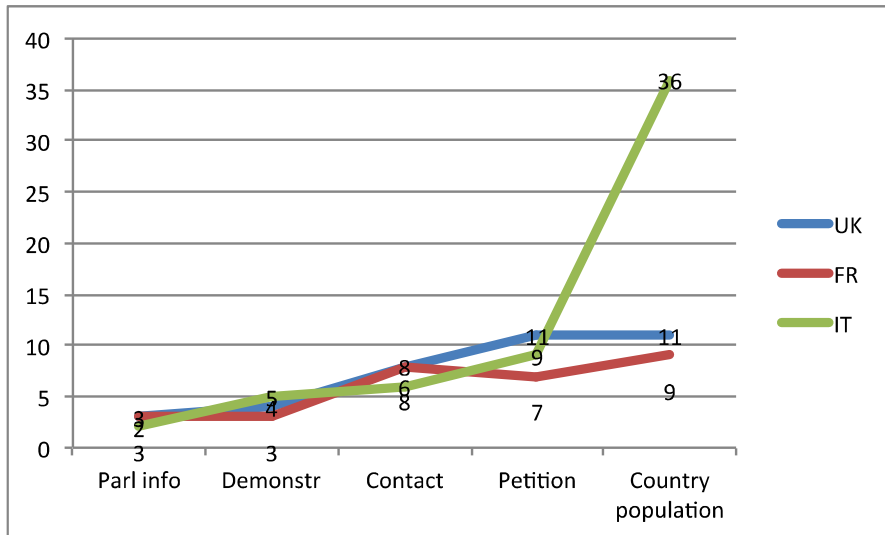
The two indicators where the gap between survey respondents and their respective country population is greatest – persons involved in paid work and housework – have been compared against the averages among people who have engaged in alternative forms of politics. The results for housework indicate that the survey respondents are more similar to the people who have engaged in alternative forms of politics, as opposed to the general country population (see Figure 17). In contrast, the category of paid workers show mixed results (see Annex I for further statistical details).

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55 The share of retired people among those who have (i) contacted politician/government officials 15%; (ii) taken part in a lawful demonstration: 13%; (iii) signed a petition: 12% in Italy (ESS1-2002).



Figure 17. The proportion of persons engaged in housework, or looking after children or others, among respondents and among people who have engaged in politics in alternative ways in Italy, France and the UK (%)



Source: Authors' surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002. See Annex I for further statistical details.

In sum, persons in education are over-represented, while people engaged in housework, or in looking after children or others are under-represented among respondents. Concerning the other categories, the evidence varies from case to case.

### *Income*

The question about income was not put to OP and ND users because the organisations in charge of the projects considered the question to be too invasive of user privacy. However, according to the web metrics provider Alexa, ND appeals to users who could be defined as higher-income earners (income between USD 30,000 and USD 100,000).<sup>56</sup>

The income question was problematic also in the TWFY survey: it was the question most often left unanswered, with about a quarter of participants skipping it. The available TWFY results

<sup>56</sup> Source: Alexa's Global Rank accessed on 9 January 2013.

indicate that income seems to be closely linked to online engagement. As illustrated by Table 9, high-income earners are over-represented among TWFY users: 42% earn more than GBP 40,000, compared to 16% among the UK population (Oxford Internet Survey 2009). Moreover, intermediate and low-income groups are under-represented on TWFY. This is in line with data on politically engaged people in the UK. According to the Oxford Internet Survey (2009), over half of the people in the highest income range in the UK (with an annual household income of over GBP 40,000) have been politically active within the last year. They are twice as likely to be politically active with respect to people from the lowest income group (under GBP 12,500).

Table 9. Income comparison: TWFY users vs. the UK population (%)

Monthly gross household income	TWFY respondents (N=671)	UK population (N= 2,013)
Less than GBP 12,500	16	26
Between GBP 12,501 - 40,000	42*	58
Over GBP 40,000	42**	16

LEGEND: \* Less than GBP 37,500 \*\* Over GBP 37,500

Source: Escher 2011; Oxford Internet Survey 2009.

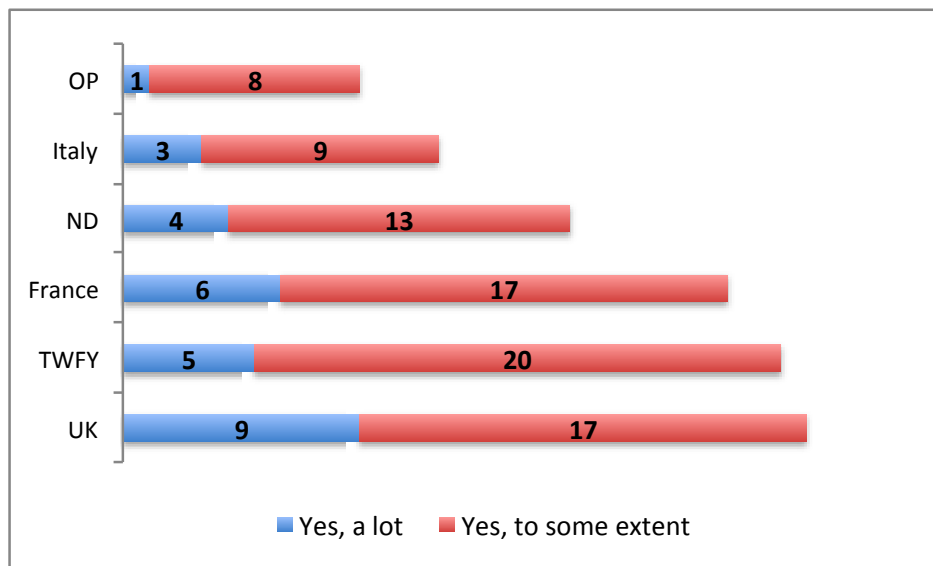
### *Disability*

Overall, project respondents have fewer disabilities than their co-nationals (see Figure 18). Although these differences are small, they could still play a role, since disability rates tend to be low among the general population. In the case of TWFY respondents there appear to be fewer seriously disabled people, but the TWFY average and the UK one (serious and less serious disability together) are almost the same (25% and 26% respectively). The survey results concerning the question of severe disability are generally confirmed by answers to the question about respondents' main activity during the last seven days, where there was a response option of 'permanently sick/disabled' (0% in OP, 3% in ND and 5% in TWFY, see Figure 18).

As illustrated by Figure 18, the results tend to go hand in hand according to the country: the UK population and TWFY respondents have the highest share of disabled people; the French

population and the ND respondents are found in the middle; and the Italians and the OP respondents have the lowest share of disabled persons.

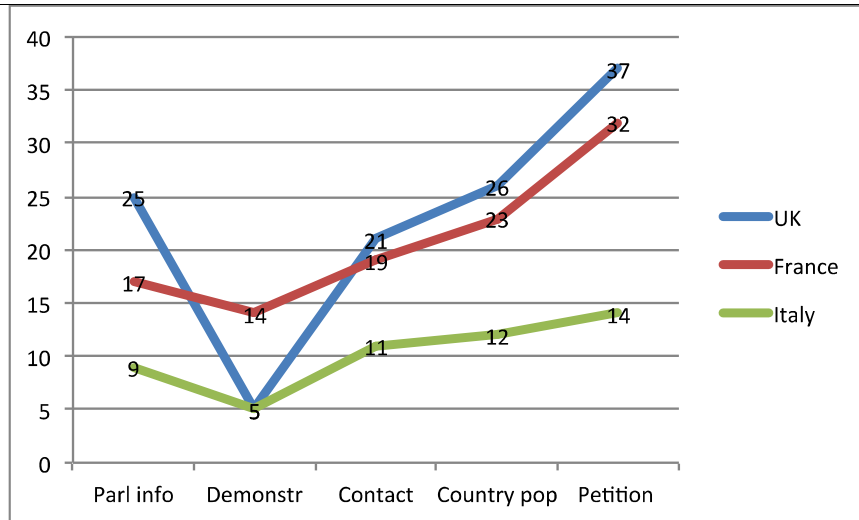
Figure 18. Respondents with health problems and disabilities compared to country averages (%)



Source: Author's surveys 2011; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002.

The survey data was also compared with the country data in ESS1-2002 for persons who engaged in alternative forms of political participation. The analysis indicates that the project surveys tend to reflect the participation patterns at the country-level (see Figure 19). The share of disabled persons among the project respondents is generally lower than among people who have contacted media/politicians or petitioned. However, if we compare the respondents with those who have taken part in a demonstration, the situation is reversed. The share of disabled among the project users is notably higher, in the case of TWFY five-times higher. This could imply that the parliamentary informatics projects at hand have at least enabled some physically disabled people to engage in politics.

Figure 19. People with health problems and disabilities among (i) project respondents, (ii) co-nationals involved in alternative forms of participation, and (iii) the country population (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the level of participation of disabled people in TWFY/ND/OP ('Parl info'), in a demonstration ('Demonstr'), in contacting politician/government officials ('Contact'), the overall country population ('Country pop'), and in petitioning ('Petition').

Source: Authors' surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002. See Annex I for further statistical details.

### Internet access and skills

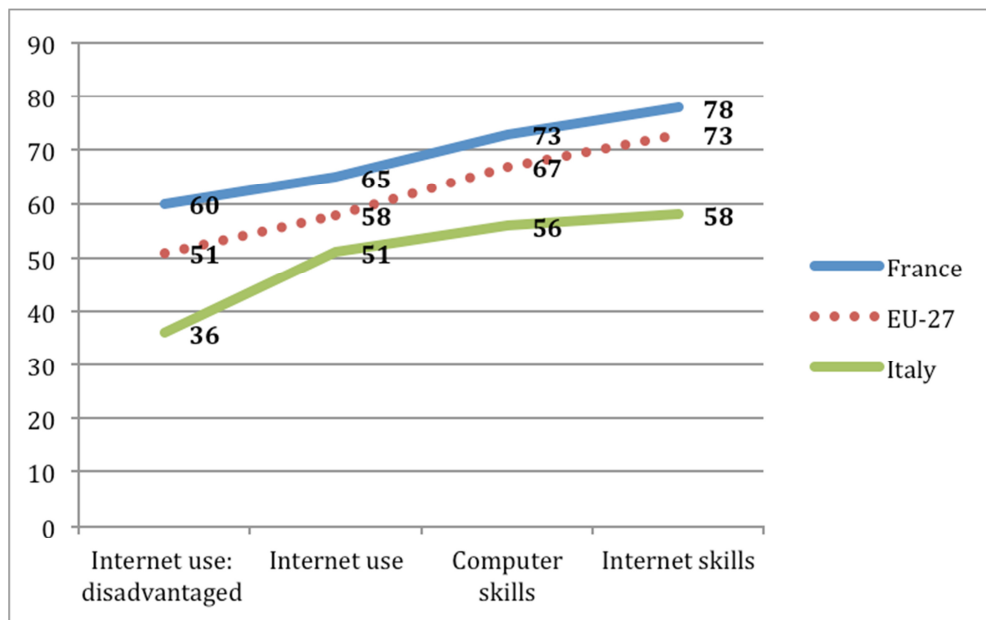
Previous research in the field of political involvement shows that political participation depends on the extent of digital skills and on an efficient ICT infrastructure (Anduiza et al. 2012 p. 2-3). A selection of these indicators, which are assumed to condition the extent to which the projects under study achieve equality among participants, is examined in this section.

The user surveys show that a clear majority of OP and ND respondents use the Internet (almost) every day (88% and 78% respectively).<sup>57</sup> These user levels are much higher than among the national population: 37% higher in OP, and 13% higher in ND with respect to the national averages (see Annex I for details). Although OP respondents use the Internet more frequently

<sup>57</sup> The question in the Author's surveys was "How often have you used the Internet during the last three months?" Answer options: "Every day or almost every day". OP (N=365); ND (N=74). Concerning users' Internet access and skills, the data is available for OP and ND but not for TWFY.

than ND respondents, these results are reversed at country level; France has more Internet users than Italy, and also surpasses Italy on other indicators such as Internet use among disadvantaged people,<sup>58</sup> and computer and Internet skills (see Figure 20). France also scores consistently higher than the EU-average, while Italy scores lower. Note well that it was not possible to contrast these data with country-level statistics for people engaged in alternative forms of political participation, because the ESS1-2002 dataset lacks Internet-use data for France, while later ESS-rounds lack any data at all for Italy.

Figure 20. Internet use and digital skills (%)



Source: EUROSTAT 2012b; European Commission (2012a); European Commission (2012b).

Likewise, France ranks well above Italy in terms of Internet and broadband access. Note well that Italy lags over ten percent behind the EU-27 average, while France ranks slightly above (see Table 10). Moreover, the global ICT Development Index (IDI), which monitors progress in ICT

<sup>58</sup> For the measurement of the Digital Agenda target, disadvantaged people include three main groups of individuals: (1) those over 55 years of age, (2) the low educated (ISCED 0-2), and (3) those who are out of the labour market (the inactive, retired and unemployed). These three groups constitute those, which have been shown to be most disadvantaged in terms of their access and use of the Internet. Measuring these three groups, the EC is able to cover a large proportion of the eExcluded, as individuals often belong to more than one disadvantaged group.

developments and measures the evolution of the global digital divide, ranks France (place 18) better than Italy (place 29) (IDI 2011).<sup>59</sup>

Table 10. Internet access and broadband connection among households (%)

	Internet access	Broadband connection
<b>Italy</b>	62	52
<i>EU-27</i>	73	68
<b>France</b>	76	70

Source: EUROSTAT 2011.

Almost all OP and ND respondents are advanced Internet users who get information about politics online (see the dotted lines in Figure 21). Most of them also use social media. Moreover, they are active participants and content producers; the majority has posted on political forums and made reviews/ratings online (between 51-77%). Somewhat fewer respondents have created their own blogs and uploaded videos (around 30-40%). Strikingly, one fourth of the OP users and 16% of those of the ND have edited or created a Wiki-type posting.

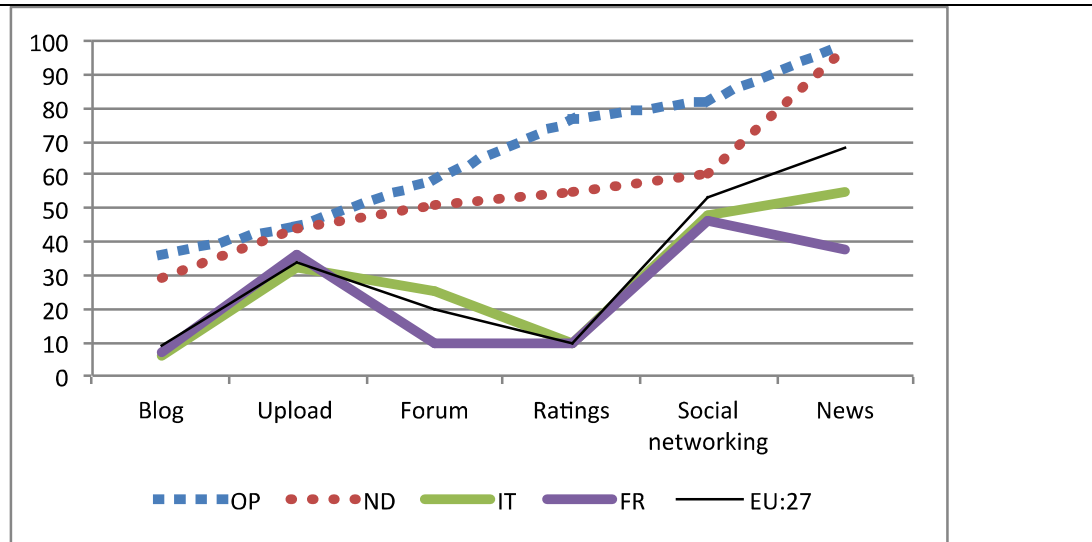
Moreover, OP and ND project respondents are much more advanced users than their co-nationals, especially regarding accessing online news or information, posting on forums and rating/reviewing web content (see Figure 21). The respondents' Internet skills also exceed those of the overall Internet user population in the EU-27. In fact, the gap between respondents and the national/EU averages diminishes only when it comes to uploading content, and in the French case in terms of social networking.

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The IDI is divided into three sub-indices: (i) access sub-index, (ii) use sub-index and (iii) skills sub-index, each capturing different aspects and components of the ICT development process.

Figure 21. Comparison of advanced use of the Internet among survey respondents and individuals in their respective country (as percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the data for those who created their own blog ('Blog'); uploaded videos on e.g. YouTube ('Upload'); posted on an online political forum ('Forum') ; provided ratings/reviews of web content ('Ratings'); used online social networking sites ('Social networking'); obtained news or information e.g. about current events or politics ('News'). See Annex I for further statistical details.

Source: Author's surveys 2011; EUROSTAT 2011d and 2012b; Wikipedia Statistics 2011; Pascu 2008.

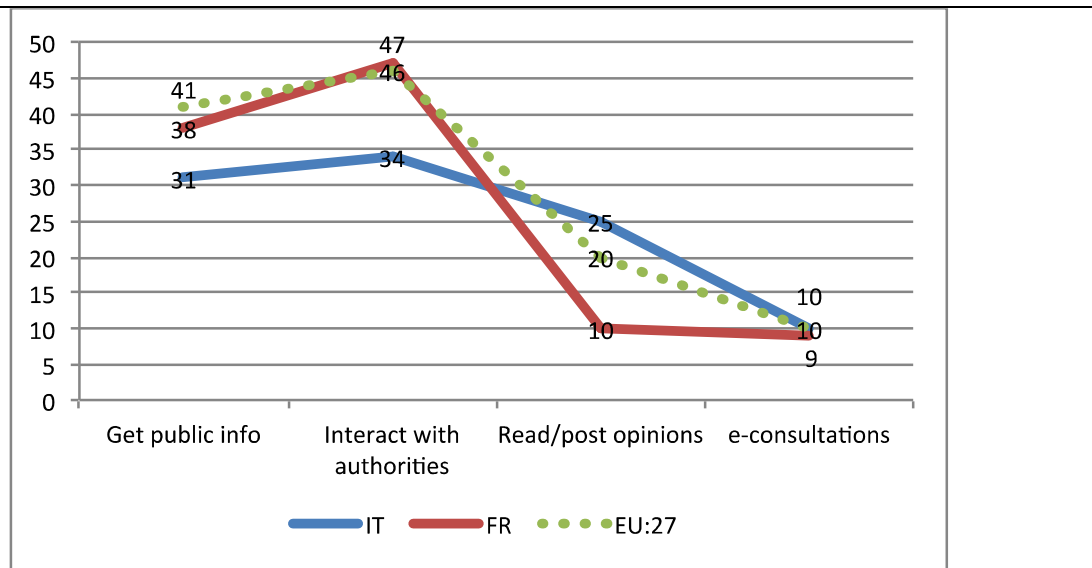
After having reviewed the patterns of Internet use among respondents and in their countries of reference, the next elements for analysis are the levels of e-government and e-participation in Italy and France.

When examining differences in Internet usage between Italian and French users, as opposed to all citizens (including those who do not use the internet), the gap between Italy and France shrinks. The French score higher than the Italians with respect to online interaction with public authorities, but the pattern changes when it comes to e-participation (see Figure 22). The Italians score higher than the French on e-consultation and on political opinion making. On the

60 The statistics for the category "Posted on an online political forum" originates from EUROSTAT (2011d), where the relevant question wording was 'Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites'.

latter, they even lie above the EU-27 average. This higher level of e-participation among Italians is in line with their strong scores on the advanced use of the Internet (see Figure 21 above).

Figure 22. Online interaction of French and Italian Internet users (percentage of individuals who used the Internet in the last 3 months) (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the data for those who obtained information from public authorities online ('Get public info'); interacted with public authorities online ('Interact with authorities'); read or posted opinions on civic/political issues via websites ('Read/post opinions'); took part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic/political issues ('e-consultations'). See Annex I for further statistical details.

Source: EUROSTAT 2010d and 2011d.

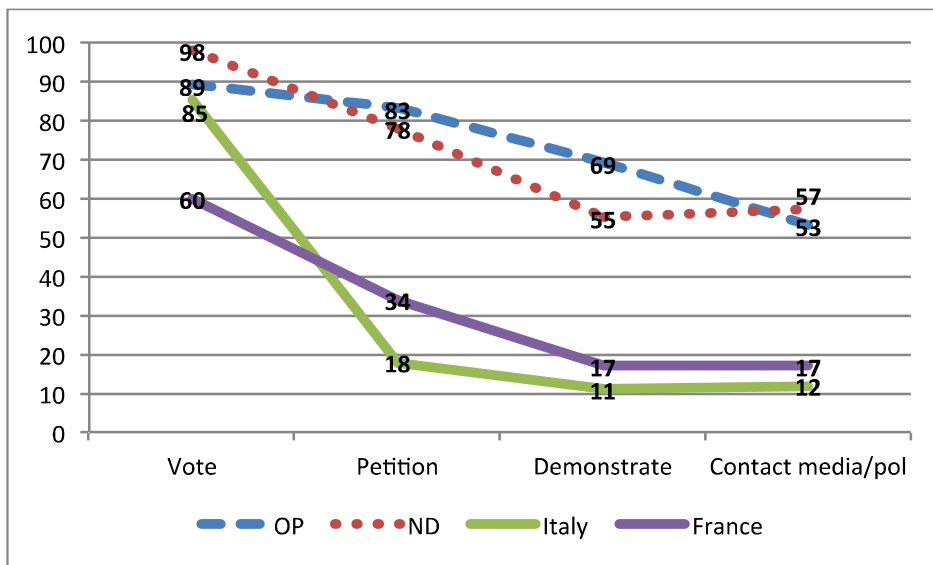
In conclusion, parliamentary informatics participants tend to be frequent and experienced Internet users. They tend to score much higher on relevant indicators in comparison to their respective country population. At the same time, OP respondents rank higher than the ND ones on all indicators. When it comes to country-level data on the advanced use of the Internet, France and Italy tend to score quite similarly and no clear pattern of leadership is visible. However, Italian users lead in terms of e-participation, while the French excel in e-government. In contrast to previous premises by Anduiza et al. (2012), my research shows that the ICT context (country-level) seems to have little influence on parliamentary informatics participants.



### Political participation

After having reviewed online participation, this section follows with an examination of offline participation. An overwhelming majority - 89% of OP respondents and 98% of ND respondents - voted in the last parliamentary elections. These turnout levels are higher compared to the national averages, especially in the case of France (see Figure 23). A large share (between 53-83%) of respondents is also engaged in unconventional political activities. These figures appear especially striking if compared to the much lower – in some cases five or six times lower - national participation rates. At the same time, while ND users score slightly lower in comparison to OP users, France shows higher political participation rates than Italy on all but one of the indicators (voting). This indicates that the context has a rather weak influence on project users.

Figure 23. Political engagement of project respondents vs. their co-nationals



Source: Authors' surveys; IDEA 2008; ESS1-2002. See Annex I for further statistical details.

TWIFY respondents too are more politically engaged than their average reference population: 28% of the former have participated in demonstrations, signed a petition, contacted a politician, boycotted a product, donated money or worn a campaign badge, in comparison to 18% of the

British population (ESS1-2002<sup>61</sup> ).

Turning to the politically inactive, a large number of OP and ND respondents *never* engaged in any of the political activities under consideration: their proportion oscillates between 30-45% for all activities, except for petitioning, in which about one fifth of respondents never engaged (see Table 11). Similarly, close to half of TWFY users have not engaged in any other political activity apart from using the TWFY website. 60% of TWFY users had never even looked up information about their MPs before they visited the site. What is more, one in five users (i) has not been politically active within the last year, (ii) was not part of any political or community groups, and (iii) has tried to find information about representatives for the first time with the help of TWFY (Escher 2011, p. 5). This shows that the projects have enabled a substantive number of people to engage in politics.

Table 11. Respondents who *never* engaged in any of the enumerated political activities (%)

	<b>ND</b>	<b>OP</b>
Posted on an online political forum	43	40
Contacted politician/media	41	44
Demonstrated	41	30
Signed petition	22	17

Source: Author's surveys 2011.

Another related finding is that many respondents (35 % of OP and 42% of ND respondents) stated that they would *not* have made their proposals<sup>62</sup> except on the project site in question. In sum, this and the result in Table 11 above indicate that e-democracy projects manage to capture the attention of a considerable share of respondents who are normally politically inactive. To some extent, this goes against the assumption that online political participation is

61 The political participation rate of the British population in the ESS1-2002 (18%) was calculated as an average of percentages on the indicators included in Escher's survey, i.e. participated in demonstrations, signed a petition, contacted a politician, boycotted a product, donated money or worn a campaign badge.

62 See Annex 1 for statistical details.

less inclusive than offline participation (Hindman 2009).

### *Passive/active participation*

Equality is also examined by analysing the balance between passive and active participants, and the potential domination of an active minority.

Overall, passive clearly prevails over active participation in all three projects. While the total number of visits varies between 200,000 and 400,000, the number of comments or messages does not even reach 1% of these visits (see Table 12). On OP, the misbalance between passive and active participants is particularly flagrant when more articulated, written input is required. The number of OP visitors (over 400,000) and registered users (12,237) is much larger than the number of user descriptions (154) and comments (821) on legislative acts.<sup>63</sup> The OP users also have the possibility to vote in favour or against proposed legislation, and in this respect the ratio of active participation is quite high (over 8,000 votes).<sup>64</sup>

ND has slightly fewer site visitors than OP, and far fewer registered users.<sup>65</sup> However, the ND users have in total made more comments (870) than the totality of OP users (821 comments). If the activity ratios are compared to the number of registered users, the differences are less flagrant. OP still has the lowest activity rate (17%) but ND and TWFY show rather strong results (90% and 127% respectively).

Of the three projects, TWFY has the highest number of site visitors, registrations and activity rates. The gap with regard to the other two projects is especially marked regarding monthly

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It is not mandatory to register in order to access information on OP but only registered users can vote and make postings on the web site.

64 The exact figures are 8,122 votes for legislative acts and 43 for legislative amendments.

65 The difference in numbers of registered users between the OP and ND probably depends on OP's close links to the OpenPolis project: when users register for OP, they automatically register also for OpenPolis and vice-versa. The OpenPolis was launched already in 2008 and has a broader scope; it offers information not only about the national MPs but also about regional and local politicians.

visits per capita, which are tenfold greater on TWFY. This surpass in terms of users is not surprising: TWFY was created much earlier than OP and ND (in 2004) and might even have been a prototype for the other two projects. Moreover, the organisation behind TWFY (mySociety) also runs a number of other, successful platforms which are famous across the globe, and which link into TWFY.

Table 12. Comparison between user statistics

	66 <b>OP</b>	67 <b>ND</b>	68 <b>TWFY</b>
Total number of visits	421,897	370,100	-
Monthly visits (average)	32,000	26,000	250,000
Monthly visits, per capita <sup>69</sup>	0.0005	0.0004	0.004
Registered users in total	12,237	966	20,500
Registered users/month	424	30	250
Comments (OP, ND); annotations (TWFY)	821	870	26,000
Comments as % of registered users	7%	90%	127%
WIKI descriptions of legislative acts	154	n/a	n/a

Source: OP and ND website statistics 2010-2011; Escher 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

User contributions (comments, descriptions and messages) tend to reflect media coverage peaks, publication of new project studies or tools, as well as project buzz on external blogs and forums (see Figure 24). In some cases user activity is high in topic-based discussions that attract attention from a particular group, e.g. nurses or military personnel. Overall, the number of

66 Registered users include either people who have signed up for OpenPolis or OpenParlamento users. This data covers July 2009 - June 2010.

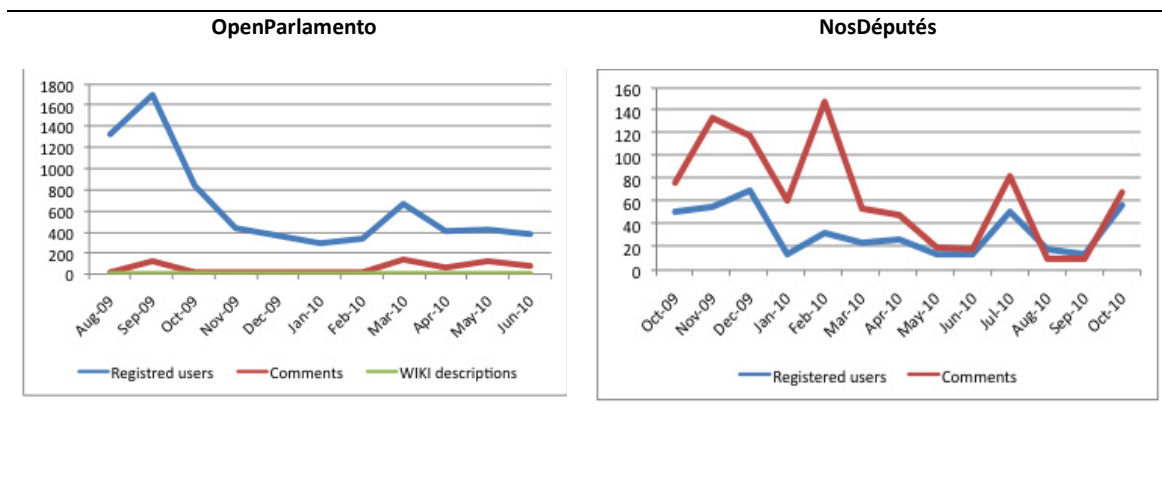
67 This data covers September 2009 - October 2010.

68 This data covers January 2005 - November 2010. According to Escher (2011), (1) there are over 20,500 registered people (email addresses) as of March 2011; (2) every month, the number of registered people (email addresses) increases by 200 to 300, as of March 2011; (3) over 26,000 comments are made on debates, and each month between 200 to 300 new annotations are added, as of March 2011.

69 The population data for Italy is 60,820,787 (ISTAT 2011c); for France 63,136,180 (INSEE 2011); for the UK 63,181,775 (Office for National Statistics 2011b).

comments per month on OP and ND has not increased much since their launch. The Figure below shows that the numbers of registered users and of user comments tend to go hand in hand on ND, especially since May 2010.

Figure 24. Registered versus active users on OP<sup>70</sup> and ND<sup>71</sup> in 2009-2010



Source: OP and ND website statistics.

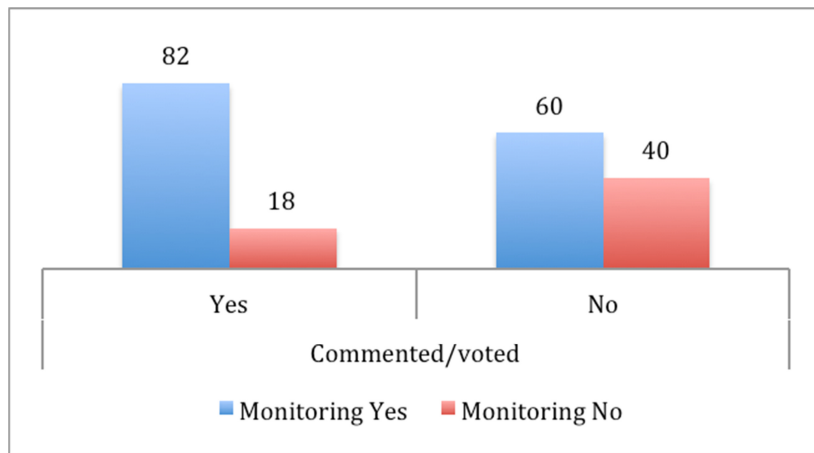
To check whether the same respondents were involved in different activities, in the case of OP (where data was available) responses were cross tabulated (see Figure 25). Predictably, this analysis showed that a substantial share (40%) is inactive independent of the type of activity. However, 60% of those who have never voted/commented on anything are still monitoring politicians or acts. This result is quite coherent since monitoring requires less effort than voting/commenting. There is also a consistent share of 'super-users' (82%), who have been involved in both monitoring and voting/commenting.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Data covering July 2009-June 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Data covering September 2009 - October 2010.

<sup>72</sup> The cross tabulation was not possible in the case of ND but only in the case of OP, where relevant questions were posed. Moreover, note well that the OP sample was slightly biased towards the more active users, due to the sampling method: only people who had been active on the site in the past year received the survey invitation.

Figure 25. Cross tabulation of responses on monitoring and commenting/voting on OP (%)



Source: Author's surveys 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

The difference between passive and active users is related to the debate about the risk of minority domination on e-participation platforms (Glencross 2009; Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009). In the following section, I have examined user posts on OP and ND websites, in order to understand if this risk is tangible. The analysis shows clear signs of minority domination. A large share of OP comments (64%) focuses on merely three legislative acts. Most users limit their interventions to one or two comments, while a minority floods the debate with over ten comments. However, this still means that not all OP users have even made the effort to vote once, and there is no data that allows us to establish whether the votes are distributed evenly among users, or whether a minority of users has cast the majority of votes.

The legislative act most voted on<sup>73</sup> by users of OP, to date, has received over 2,000 votes, which is rather an exception to the rule. The next most voted on act has received less than 200 votes. This more active engagement in voting, in contrast to written input such as comments or descriptions of legal acts, might be due to the easiness of casting a vote - just pushing a button in favour or against – compared to the effort of putting together intelligible comments.

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<sup>73</sup> The draft law S.1142 on creation of a register for health professionals and nurses has gathered 2,132 votes to date (13 July 2010). Source: <http://parlamento.openpolis.it/community>

A pattern of minority domination emerges also on ND; the five most active users have produced about 30% of all comments<sup>74</sup>. The most active user of all is far ahead of the others, having posted 113 comments (circa 12 % of the total). At the same time, 70% of users have made no comments at all, while 21% have left not more than one comment. Together with this domination, there is also a pattern of gender inequality in ND. The project statistics show that 72 % of those who have made over five comments are men. The most active man has made 113 comments, while the most active woman has made 10 comments.<sup>75</sup> It is also worth keeping in mind that the level of anonymity on OP and ND is high; hence, it is plausible that the same person or group of persons has registered and provided comments under several user names. This means that the domination might be even stronger than it appears from the statistics.

The uneven ratio of the few active users versus the many registered ones confirms the claims about minority domination in the literature. Statistical data show that only a marginal share of the EU-27 population is effectively involved in producing content, e.g. only about 10% of Internet users created their own blog/website or provided ratings/reviews of web content (EUROSTAT 2012b; Wikipedia Statistics 2011; Pascu 2008). Moreover, online communities usually have a very small core group of contributors - estimated at 1% of visitors – who actively post, ask and answer questions, while the rest are mostly passive readers (Glencross 2009; Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009). Similarly, an e-democracy study in Estonia showed that one single user accounted for 10% of all the legislative proposals, and that the ten most active users generated almost a quarter of contributions (Glencross 2009).

This section has examined the risk of minority domination on e-participation platforms. The design of OP and ND projects did not put in place any measures to prevent individuals or groups from dominating discussions. The moderation is kept to a minimum. This, on the one hand, gives

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74 The statistics refer to the period Sept 2009-Dec 2010. At the time there were 1055 registered users and 943 comments. The five most active users made over 30 comments each.

75 The statistics referred to above are displayed on the website and cover the period Sept 2009-Dec 2010. At the time there were 1,055 registered users and 943 comments. The five most active users had made over 30 comments each.

maximum liberty to participants; on the other hand, the moderators are not equipped with any tools with which to distribute the debate space equally, or to prevent people from dominating the debate. This could be termed a neutral approach to equality. But it is important to note that apparently neutral methods can in practice entrench inequalities among participants.

An analysis of the user posts on OP and ND websites indicates that there is an active minority, while most users remain passive. This finding is in line with the past literature on online involvement (Glencross 2009; Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009) and current data, which show that only a marginal share of the EU-27 population is effectively involved in producing content (EUROSTAT 2012b).

Even if the parliamentary platforms are open to all, many other factors such as education, gender and digital literacy determine the opportunity to participate. Hence, in order to strive for real equality, the under-represented groups should be encouraged to engage, by pro-active moderation and marketing approaches. If the necessary conditions for involving the passive or 'dominated' groups are not created, parliamentary informatics projects might end up replicating offline inequalities, online.

#### *Who is behind the participation?*

The survey results show that a very low proportion of respondents participate on behalf of others, which suggests that users are promoting their own opinions on the sites. Nearly everyone (93-96%) on OP and ND claimed to participate on their own behalf (see Table 13). The remaining respondents were mainly engaging on behalf of an interest group, an association, or (in a very few cases) on behalf of a party. The number of respondents participating on behalf of a company or a state institution was negligible.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The question about participation on behalf of others could be considered as sensitive since users who are lobbying or promoting a hidden agenda would not openly say so. However, these self-reported results could perhaps give a hint about distribution between engaging on own behalf or behalf of a third party.



Table 13. Response options: "I participated on behalf of..."<sup>77</sup>

	OP		ND	
	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)
...on my own initiative	<b>93</b>	113	<b>96</b>	26
...an interest group or an association	<b>11</b>	13	<b>11</b>	3
...a political party	<b>7</b>	8	<b>4</b>	1
...a state institution/authority	<b>3</b>	3	<b>0</b>	0
...a private company	<b>1</b>	1	<b>0</b>	0

Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

### *Conclusions*

An in-depth analysis of the respondents' socio-demographic profiles shows that the representation of many groups of citizens is skewed. On the one hand, women and people engaged in housework and looking after children, and persons with lower levels of education are under-represented with respect to country-level averages. There also seem to be other types of inequalities in some of the projects, such as under-representation of foreign participants (OP) and strong over-representation of people with higher incomes (TWFY). What is even more revealing is that the inequality among e-democracy users seems to be stronger than among people engaged in unconventional political participation.

Furthermore, the survey shows that the project respondents are used to both navigating the Internet and getting involved in politics. This suggests that parliamentary informatics might be attracting mostly resourceful people who are already politically engaged. At the same time, the country context does not seem to affect the project users: although the French generally have higher levels of digital skills and political involvement than the Italians, the OP respondents score consistently higher than the ND respondents.

<sup>77</sup> The full question was: Did you petition/participate on your own behalf or on behalf of an organisation/group? "I petitioned/participated on behalf of...". The total percentages do not add up to 100% because it was possible to indicate multiple choices on this question.

The uneven ratio of few active project users versus the many registered ones, as well as the deeper analysis into user posts on OP and ND, confirm the scholarly evidence about minority domination online (Osimo 2008; Glencross 2009). This finding is in line with the past literature on online involvement (Glencross 2009; Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009) and current data, which show that only a marginal share of the EU-27 population is effectively involved in producing content (EUROSTAT 2012b).

In sum, respondents are not very representative of their country populations. On a positive note, parliamentary informatics manages to attract some people who were not politically active before. However, there is a risk that a large share of those who access parliamentary monitoring platforms, and express their opinions, are well educated and politically engaged men, at ease with digital media and habitually involved in politics in one way or another. It is important to keep in mind that the equality dimension cannot be assessed with certainty, since user identities of survey respondents remain unknown and since the sample is limited. Nevertheless, given the limited number of truly active users, it is improbable that all societal groups concerned by legislative acts in Parliament are involved.

#### **5.4.2. Accountability**

The accountability criterion implies that users should be able to access objective information. For the purpose of my research, I assume that official data are likely to enhance accountability, since the data retrieved by the parliamentary informatics projects from official parliament sources could be considered as raw data, not skewed by the media or any other potentially biased stakeholder. It is simply information about the behaviour of members and groups in parliament, information which is subsequently aggregated and graphically displayed by the parliamentary informatics projects.

It transpires that the accountability criterion is the strong point of parliamentary informatics projects. The projects collect valuable information and present it in a more accessible way than other, more centralised venues, such as physical parliamentary offices that keep paper records,

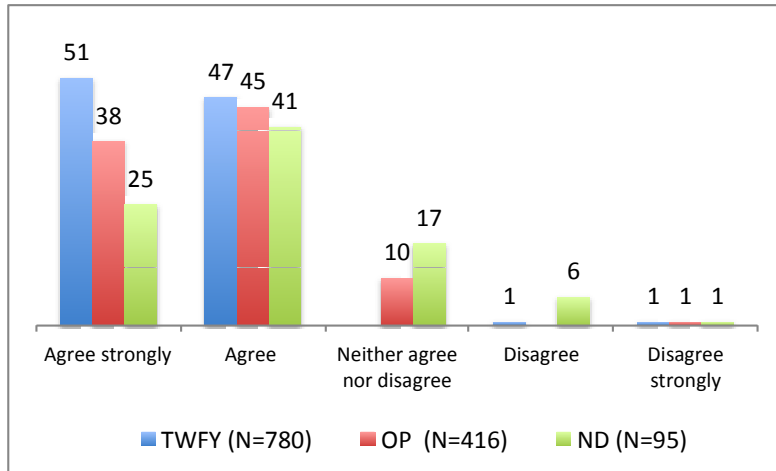
or even with respect to parliaments' official websites. They merge data in ways that allow citizens, media or civil society organisations to extract specific information for their own interests, e.g. the voting pattern of a party on a particular topic. As one of the OP survey respondents expressed it: "The site (...) serves the purpose of understanding facts without the influence of external interpretations" (author's translation). This neutral and user-friendly approach to providing information is more compatible with the Internet habits of today's users (Fung et al. 2010). What is more, the interactive features of parliamentary informatics allow citizens to debate politics. This should facilitate development of their preferences and perspectives, and allow them better to question their representatives.

The site users are fairly convinced that the information on these platforms is objective. As shown in Figure 26, a vast majority of TFWY (98%), OP (83%) and ND (66%) respondents say that the site information is objective and few users disagree with this statement (1%-7%). It is noteworthy that the ND users are more hesitant: almost every fourth respondent doubts that the information is objective.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The calculation behind the statement "almost every fourth respondent doubts that the information is objective" is based on the percentages of respondents who answered 'neither agree nor disagree' (17%), 'disagree' (6%), and 'disagree strongly' (1%).

Figure 26. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “(The OP/ND website) provides information in an impartial and objective way”<sup>79</sup> (%)



80

Source: Escher 2012; Author’s surveys.

Moreover, some users believe that parliamentary informatics projects present information in a more neutral and factual way, in comparison to the partial picture presented by traditional media channels. This is illustrated by two relevant comments from TWFY users: “It is good to see what was actually said rather than hearsay from the media” and “You can access factual information rather than rely on the media’s interpretation” (TWFY survey, Escher 2011, p. 30).

Regarding the sources of information used by e-democracy projects, I assumed that if official sources are used (as opposed to e.g. user-created information), accountability is more likely to be enhanced. This assumption is based on the widely acknowledged notion that transparency generates accountability, which implies that public access to official information allows the impact of government policies to be assessed, so improving accountability.

<sup>79</sup> The question in the TWFY survey (Escher 2011) was formulated in the following way: “How much do you agree with the following statement? “TWFY provides information in an unbiased and unpartisan way”. The response options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, and don’t want to answer. There was no option of ‘neither agree nor disagree’.

<sup>80</sup> 6% among OP respondents and 5% among ND respondents answered ‘don’t know’.

As mentioned in “Chapter 3. Conceptualisation”, different kinds of transparency might (or might not) lead to different kinds of accountability. According to Fox (2007, p. 667), transparency can be either ‘clear’ or ‘opaque’. Clear transparency should reveal reliable information about institutional performance, while opaque transparency stands for dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions behave in practice. Nevertheless, clear transparency on its own does not guarantee accountability.

Accountability can be either ‘soft’ or ‘hard’. Soft accountability contains the possibility of calling on those in authority to answer questions about their decision or actions (also termed ‘answerability’) (Fox 2007). The obligation to justify their decisions can be formal (induced by checks and balances) and informal (imposed by the public) (Bühlmann and Kriesi 2013, p. 53). Hard accountability goes even further by involving the possibility of sanctions (Fox 2007, p. 668).

In practice, clear transparency and soft accountability are realized by organisations such as OP, ND and TWFY, which are able to transform opaque into clear information. They investigate, valorise existing data and produce clear information about institutional performance and the behaviour of individual MPs. Firstly; this allows citizens to obtain information without having recourse to an intermediary (such as the media). This is an important benefit, since certain data in the public domain are not easily understandable to the lay citizen, and normally have to be translated into comprehensible information by either journalists or watchdog organisations (Fox 2007). Secondly, interested parties such as researchers, NGOs and journalists are able to process and analyse parliamentary information in ways that were not possible in the past (Dietrich 2011).

However, the projects under study are not able to guarantee action upon the information revealed (i.e. hard accountability). This means that OP, ND and TWFY lie somewhere between clear transparency and soft accountability on Fox’s graph (Figure 1).

Most parliamentary informatics projects were developed in response to the challenge of limited

and dispersed information about parliamentary activities. And today OP, ND and TWFY are allegedly the key unified and easily accessible points of parliamentary information in their respective countries. TFWY was one of the first initiatives of its kind worldwide. Likewise, nothing similar existed in Italy or France before the launch of OP and ND. Despite the fact that the three national parliaments publish online information about their activities, the data is not organized in a truly user-friendly way. In a recent survey, British users frequently stated that TWFY is more usable than government websites (Escher 2011, p. 29).

On the whole, PMOs have made official information more accessible to all citizens capable of using computers, as opposed to singular experts and specialized journalists. With the help of these platforms, people can take an informed and well-grounded stance on political issues. They transform information into a political resource that enables citizens and CSOs to identify the weak links in the chain of public action, and to bring forward cases of mismanagement or corruption. In response to the need for clearer information, OP and TWFY allow the integration of official data with the more reader-friendly descriptions and clarifications of legal acts provided by users.<sup>81</sup>

Accessibility of information – besides being an aspect of accountability - is also closely related to the concept of equality. According to Escher's survey of TWFY (2011), a large majority of users (80%) found the information they were looking for and considered the site to be easily navigable and well structured. Nevertheless, there were noteworthy differences between users who found relevant information and those who did not. Curiously, the differences were not substantial when it came to political knowledge, but were mainly demographic. Those who failed to find what they were looking for were more often:

- women (they failed twice as often as men);

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81 Note well that progress in this sense on OP has been slow; there are only 154 descriptions of a total of 34,505 acts available. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess whether these descriptions are neutral and comprehensive. This tool has also been somewhat problematic; many users make use of this space for commenting and proposing ideas instead of making an objective description of legal acts. The problem has grown to a point where OP is considering a temporary removal of this tool.

- older people (especially aged 55-64);
- less likely to have a university degree (54% vs. 66%);
- twice as likely to have a disability than successful users.

It is worth noting that this was not a question of becoming familiar with the site: half of the unsuccessful users were in fact repeat users who still failed to find information (Escher 2011). This could depend on the relative difficulty in accessing the complex political information for a lay user, especially for a less skilled one (Fung et al. 2010).

A drawback for the quality of accountability of parliamentary informatics projects is the inadequate access to parliamentary information. This is one of the most common challenges faced by PMOs around the world: over 60% of them have difficulties in accessing desired information (Mandelbaum 2011). This finding is confirmed by another survey, which found that 60% of the civic hackers surveyed claimed that the main obstacle to their activity was the non-availability of public data (Osimo 2011). In fact, the OP's and ND's access to descriptions and full texts of legislative acts is not always straightforward. ND makes a lot of effort to extract some of the necessary data from the Assembly's web site, and they have not yet been able to establish any collaboration regarding data with the appropriate Assembly office (Petiot 2010). Occasionally, OP and ND struggle even to get the accurate data, given that parliamentary sources on which the projects rely are not always complete or up-to-date (Del Lungo 2009; Petiot 2010). For the benefit of accountability, OP and ND act as parliamentary 'watch dogs'; while working with the data they occasionally discover and report errors to their respective parliament.

To examine the importance of the information disseminated on these parliamentary informatics sites for accountability, Baena and Kahn's three-tier approach is helpful (Baena and Kahn 2012). This approach contains three key elements that render access to information an effective accountability tool: comprehensibility, accessibility, and interactivity. This means that projects need to tailor the information to users, use effective communication channels and provide means for users to not only access but also effectively use that information (Baena and Kahn

2012). The first element, comprehensibility, means that the information provided should be understandable by a non-specialist. The parliamentary informatics projects excel in this regard, they help users to navigate in the highly technical context of legislative activity by displaying information in a user-friendly format and by explaining how the parliament works, e.g. by showing succinctly who submitted the law proposal, when, its last status, by offering keywords that define the proposal, and by visualising its parliamentary passage (see Figure 27).

Figure 27. Screenshot of the page of a decree on the OP website

The screenshot shows the 'openparlamento' website interface. At the top left is the logo 'openparlamento' with the tagline 'Informati, monitora e intervieni nei lavori del parlamento'. To its right is the 'openpolis' logo with the text 'È uno strumento openpolis'. Below the logo is a navigation bar with links: 'Atti', 'Voti', 'Parlamentari', 'Argomenti', 'Comunità', 'Open blog', and 'Precedente legislatura 2008-13'. The main content area features a header for 'S.1254' and a 'Lascia un commento' button. The text of the page reads: 'Senato, disegno di legge ? presentato da Maria Chiara CARROZZA e altri'. The title is '[Decreto Stipendi Scuola] Conversione in legge del decreto-legge 23 gennaio 2014, n. 3, recante disposizioni temporanee e urgenti in materia di proroga degli automatismi stipendiali del personale della scuola'. It includes details: 'presentato il: 23/01/2014', 'tipo di iniziativa: di Governo', and 'link alla fonte'. The status is 'ultimo status: 23/01/2014 Senato: assegnato (non ancora iniziato l'esame)'. A section titled 'iter parlamentare del disegno di legge: ?' shows a timeline: '23/01/2014 DL.3/14' (green arrow), 'S.1254' (yellow arrow), 'da approvare al Senato' (grey arrow), 'da approvare alla Camera' (grey arrow), and 'diventa legge' (grey arrow). At the bottom, there are 'argomenti' tags: 'salari', 'insegnanti della scuola', 'lavoro', 'scuola', and 'personale non docente nella scuola'.

Source: OP homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at:

[http://parlamento17.openpolis.it/index.php/atto/index/id/22109/sf\\_highlight/S+1254](http://parlamento17.openpolis.it/index.php/atto/index/id/22109/sf_highlight/S+1254)

In terms of accessibility, the parliamentary informatics projects offer information that is easier to analyse in comparison to the websites of the parliaments themselves. They allow users to monitor government performance in a more meaningful way, e.g. by aggregating relevant information over time (such as data on the presence of MPs in the parliament) and by giving the possibility to compare different data sets (e.g. positions of different MPs with regard to a law). Moreover, users can tailor the information to their interests on an ad-hoc basis, e.g. by signing



up for thematic alerts about legislative activity.

The third of Baena and Kahn's elements, interactivity, emphasizes the ability to interact directly with other users of information and with public agencies. On parliamentary informatics websites users can both give feedback on parliamentary activity (e.g. by voting in favour or against laws), and share information through micro blogs and social networking sites. This is fully in line with the Baena and Kahn's element of interactivity, which suggests that informational resources should be integrated with social media, as this can greatly facilitate user participation by allowing for rapid sharing of public information, thus expanding a site's potential scope and breadth of information dissemination (Baena and Kahn 2012).

### *Conclusions*

The objectivity and transparency of information are probably the most important contributions made to democracy by parliamentary informatics projects. This is also most likely the reason for their success among users: the majority is convinced as to the accuracy of information provided. TWFY, OP and ND are designed in a way that allows participants to explore, to learn about issues and to consider the merits and trade-offs between several options.

The parliamentary informatics projects facilitate access to official information, which is a precondition for informed demand of explanations from citizens to their representatives. This also means that they thereby promote what Fox (2007) calls soft accountability. In line with the claims of Fung et al. (2010), the major value of PMOs is that they present official information in a more user-friendly and constructive way with respect to governmental stakeholders. Moreover, parliamentary informatics projects act as 'watch dogs'; while working with the data they occasionally discover and report informational errors to their respective parliament. The soft accountability introduced by the PMO into the legislative process should in turn make the public's control of representatives more effective, and raise MPs' investment in acting in the public interest (Carey 2009 and 2012).

After having analysed the variables 'equality' and 'accountability', which fall into the 'essentialist' set of variables, where the participation process is both a constituting element of democratic legitimacy, and an end in itself, the next section will examine the first 'instrumentalist' variable - responsiveness - which is focused on the project outcomes.

### **5.4.3. Responsiveness**

*"(The Internet) made it easy to speak in cyberspace but it remains difficult to be heard"*  
(Hindman 2009, p. 142).

This section will examine the first 'instrumentalist' variable, responsiveness, which is focused on project outcomes. 'Responsiveness' implies that policy-makers are receptive to citizens' inputs by reacting to their claims about parliamentary performance and conduct, and by doing their utmost to incorporate their opinion into policy-making.

In practice, a recent survey among PMOs argues that parliamentary watch activities can have beneficial effects on the behaviour of individual MPs. PMOs can help to identify deficiencies within a parliament's overall framework and may uncover the reasons why individual MPs underperform. However, it is apparently more difficult to influence collective behaviour, or to bring about institutional reform (Mandelbaum 2011).

Among the cases at hand, the available evidence suggests that, of the three projects, TWFY has had most success in impacting on politics. The first instance of TWFY's influence dates back to 2009, when the UK experienced a major political scandal over MPs' expense claims. This example will be described in more detail in the section on civic mobilisation. The second piece of evidence as to TWFY's influence on politics and politicians is the fact that 2% of visits to the TWFY site can be directly attributed to the UK Parliament, while an additional 2-3% come from other government sources (Escher 2011). This would give good reason to believe that state actors are interested in, and responsive to, TWFY.

In the French case, Regards Citoyen (the organisation in charge of ND) claims to have influenced the decision of the National Assembly to enforce the rule imposing fines for absence of MPs from obligatory sessions, as well as prompted MPs to increase their presence during parliamentary sessions. The association also argues that ND was widely used during the latest electoral campaign by various parliamentary candidates (Regards Citoyens 2012).

At the same time, the French minister for relations with Parliament, Alain Vidal, has voiced disapproval regarding ND. According to the minister, ND statistics have had a direct and harmful impact on parliamentary debate (PC INpact 2012). In particular, he claims that ND slows down parliamentary work, as MPs increase the number of interventions, regardless of whether they have anything valuable to add, just to improve their statistical scores on the website (Le Lab Europe 1 2012). His criticism is directed at the way the site counts the number of times an elected official speaks on the floor of Parliament. Given that the Minister did not offer any evidence to support his claim, Regards Citoyens has conducted an analysis of parliamentary debates between 2007-2012. This analysis shows the opposite effect: recent debates have been briefer than those in the years prior to the launch of ND (Regards Citoyens 2012). In either case, the minister's intervention shows that the ND is well known among parliament officials, and that it might have influenced at least some of their behaviour.

The French minister is not alone in his concerns. Different MPs and PMOs around the world affirm that the rating of MP participation can induce an upswing in quantity, as opposed to quality, of the debate (Mandelbaum 2011). TWFY received similar accusations back in 2006, when The Times published an article that claimed that MPs were submitting more and more questions in order to improve their rankings on TWFY (Eaves 2012). The Times maintained that some MPs were making plentiful brief interventions and tabling numerous written questions, simply to boost their statistics on TheyWorkForYou.

According to The Times, frequently over 700 questions a day were asked and the volume of

written questions had risen 18%, compared with the previous financial year (Hurst 2006).<sup>82</sup> Moreover, MySociety publicly states that MPs' researchers have admitted to tabling questions to increase their superiors' rankings on TWFY (TWFY website 2013). In 2006, the Times article triggered a debate in the House of Commons on the increase in questions, led by Peter Luff (Luff 2006). In response, MySociety held a meeting with the Parliament to improve metrics, removed the absolute rankings and added some more explanatory text for users.

An indication of political responsiveness is also illustrated by the findings of the ND survey, which shows that five respondents were contacted by MPs or civil servants regarding their proposals. Three of them received a reaction formulated in general or vague terms. One person learnt that a similar proposal had already been processed by the parliament, and another was told that his/her proposal would be incorporated into a political decision. This should point to a certain interest by the Parliament, and – above all - to the potential to influence it. However, one must be careful when judging this result, since the number of respondents was quite limited. It is also plausible that those who were more active in making proposals on ND, and who did receive a response, were also those more eager in replying to the survey.<sup>83</sup>

In any case, users have strong expectations about impact (see Figure 28). Between 47-70% of OP and ND respondents expected that their input would be considered by MPs, and 37% of ND respondents were strongly convinced about it.<sup>84</sup> What is more, about half of ND and one third of OP respondents believed that their participation would lead to political action. This is rather surprising, as OP and ND do not promise any direct communication channel with parliaments. Moreover, a large majority of respondents (circa 70%) had strong expectations about finding supporters for their causes, and about half of them were expecting to attract attention for their

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82

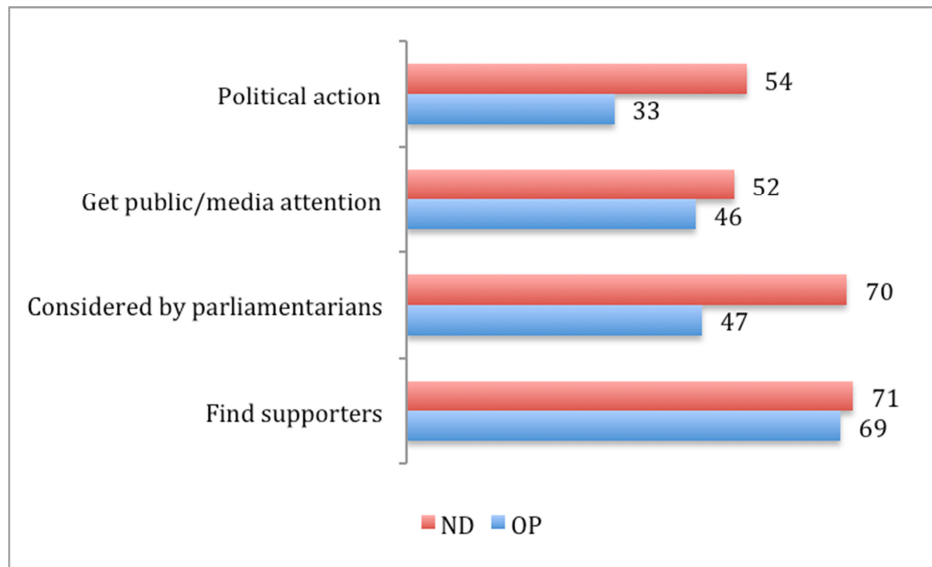
Hurst (2006) also reports that each question costs an average of £138 for a minister to answer.

83 The question about whether users were contacted by MPs/civil servants regarding their proposals was not included in the author's survey of OP because of limited space.

84 19% of the OP respondents were strongly convinced about parliament's consideration.

85  
cause from the general public or media.

86  
Figure 28. Expectations of ND and OP respondents (%)



Source: Author's surveys 2011.

Another indicator of user expectations is that an overwhelming majority of OP users (circa 80%) would be eager to communicate with and advance proposals to MPs (see Figure 29). These respondents are more numerous, and more strongly convinced, than those who would like tools to communicate with each other (74%).

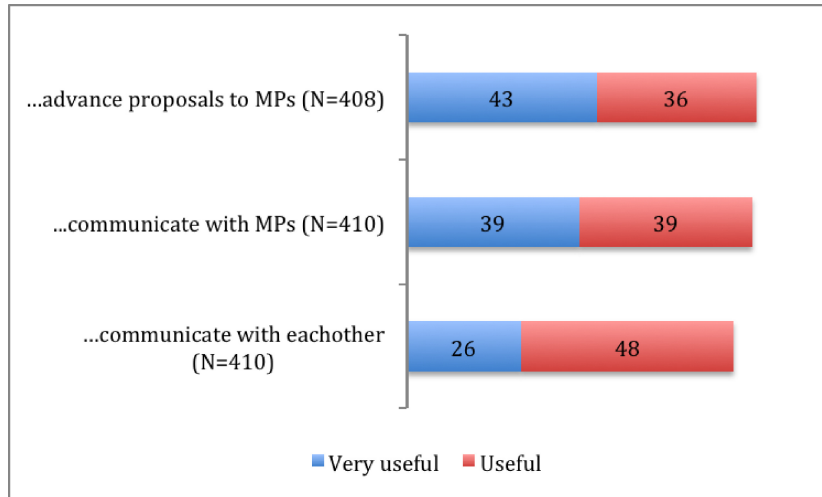
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85 There is no data about expectations of TWFY respondents.

86 The survey question was "What kind of expectations did you have when participating in OP/ND? I expected that my contribution would..."

Figure 29. Respondents' views about how useful it would be to add new communication tools to

<sup>87</sup>  
OP (%)



Source: Author's surveys 2011.

Overall, project users have very strong expectations of parliamentary response to their inputs. Many of them are also eager to communicate with MPs and to advance proposals to them.

### *Political support*

This section elaborates on the democratic intentions of actors who are associated with parliamentary informatics projects, i.e. those who are running the projects, and state actors to whom the projects are (indirectly) addressed, and map them against the strong and thin conceptions of e-democracy. The aim is to analyse the attitudes of the power-holders towards the projects, and in particular their support for OP, ND and TWFY.

On the basis of interviews with the project associations and of a review of project documents and online material, the primary goal of OP, ND and TWFY proves to be to provide user-friendly and free access to public data about parliamentary activities. All three associations behind the

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<sup>87</sup> Answers to the question: "Do you think it would be useful to add new tools to OP? Tools that allow users to..." These questions were asked only of OP users because the OP team was considering adding new instruments to their site and wanted to include an additional question where respondents evaluated how useful a number of tools would be.

projects promote the release of public data, free of license. In fact, the ND project was initially born out of an exchange of messages on a forum opposing the controversial HADOPI law.<sup>88</sup> The HADOPI law made some of the file sharing and downloading taking place on the Internet illegal, and allows the switching off of Internet connections of individuals accused of copyright infringement.

This type of law, which is spreading around the world, raises serious concerns regarding filtering and removing of content. The HADOPI law in particular has been criticized by the UN Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (Global Censorship Chokepoints 2012). Besides being opponents of HADOPI, the ND founders are also members of the Free software movement. One of the ND spokespersons is actually the vice-president of the French Association for the Promotion and Defence of Free Software (Association pour la Promotion et la Défense du Logiciel Libre). The background of the parliamentary informatics teams under study is very much in line with the profile of hackers, as portrayed in the literature, which shows their most common political expressions to be the Free/Libre and Open source software movement and the use of hacking principles for promoting social change (Levy 1984; Jordan and Taylor 2004; Breindl 2010, p. 7).

The organisations behind OP, ND and TWFY all emphasize the value of transparency, impartiality and accountability. They fit well into the area of practice designated as Open Government, which holds that citizens have the right to access the documents and proceedings of the government, to allow for effective public overseeing of government action. Open Government also promotes the idea that transparent access to public data can foster better understanding by the public of the way in which political decisions are made and, in certain cases, provide a catalyst for political involvement. The supporters of this idea believe that the processing, aggregation and mashup of data could contribute to these objectives (Blondeau and Allard 2009).

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<sup>88</sup> The HADOPI law (number 2009-669 of 12 June 2009) is the law promoting the distribution and protection of creative works on the Internet. This law also created a government agency called HADOPI (Haute Autorité pour la diffusion des œuvres et la protection des droits sur internet), an anti-piracy unit that monitors peer-to-peer networks.

The majority of PMOs consider themselves to be non-partisan, i.e. not affiliated with any political party or cause (Mandelbaum 2011). According to Dietrich (2011), some of the most noteworthy and influential PMO projects have been developed by individual ‘civic hackers’, rather than by solid organisations. These are social entrepreneurs who are motivated above all by civic ideals (Dietrich 2011). The ‘hacker ethic’ is based on freedom, sharing, openness, cooperation and the wish to contribute to a certain world improvement (Levy 1984; Castells 2001). A recent survey of civic hackers on behalf of the European Commission showed that 90% of them are motivated by the desire to identify needs that have not yet been satisfied, and 80% by the desire to make a difference. Financial gains play a marginal role. In fact, 82% of the civic hackers surveyed are volunteers, while the running costs for the platforms are kept very low (below EUR 1,000 per year in 80% of the cases) (Osimo 2011).

Moreover, the parliamentary informatics projects under study have an overarching aim to involve citizens in politics. By offering tools for citizens’ engagement in parliamentary activities (e.g. comments or voting on laws), the PMOs adopt a bottom-up perspective; i.e. citizens are seen as initiators and/or producers, rather than just consumers of policy (Macintosh 2003). In fact, this approach is in line with scholarly claims that grass roots forms of participation are a source of democratisation (Bennet 2003 and Castells 1996 in Balocchi 2008) and fits well within the strong democracy model.

At the ‘receiver end’, the Italian and French parliaments tend to take a conservative or thin approach to e-democracy. According to the project coordinators of the Italian and French cases respectively, some of the MPs consider the projects not so much as a chance to interact with citizens but more as an opportunity to improve their personal or party visibility, while some French MPs seem to show enthusiasm about e-democracy projects mainly in order to improve their image as supporters of accountability. One of the members of the OP team describes the attitude of public authorities towards e-participation in the following way (Steinberg 2007b):



*“(...) administrators are interested in e-participation projects, but they want to reduce the possibility of issues emerging directly from citizens, and of course they try to change the nature of the project from a participative one, into a consultative one. A kind of Poll 2.0, if one wants to be cynical.”*

The gap between the intentions of the project teams and those of the parliamentary actors is exemplified by the case of ND. The ND team struggles to extract some of the necessary data from the Assembly’s web site and has not yet been able to establish any collaboration regarding data with the apposite Assembly office, despite several attempts (Petiot 2010). According to Mandelbaum’s global survey (2011, of nearly 200 parliamentary monitoring organisations, one of the key challenges facing these organisations is the resistance by MPs, parties and/or parliamentary staff to their activities. Similarly, a survey of civic hackers on behalf of the European Commission showed that government attitudes have generally been indifferent (50% of the respondents claim this). Only 18% describe them as supportive, although no one defines them as ‘hostile’ (Osimo 2011).

There are different reasons for the resistance of state actors. Firstly, parliaments often question either the methodologies used for evaluating parliamentary activity, or the organisations’ (presumed) political allegiances (Mandelbaum 2011). Secondly, there seems to be a lack of digital proficiency among MPs. The World e-Parliament Report (2010) claims that the biggest challenge for Parliaments’ use of ICT for communication with citizens is that members are not familiar with the newest communication technology. The Fleishman-Hillar’s (2009, p. 6-9) study of how the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) use the Internet confirms that the majority of MEPs do not currently take full advantage of social media tools as a means to engage with voters, e.g. about half of the MEPs do not use social media networks at all (e.g. Facebook, MySpace); and circa 60% have either never heard of Twitter, and sharing tools such as Flickr and Digg, and have no plans to use them. This tendency is confirmed by the OP team, which claims that many of the Italian MPs are not very advanced Internet users. MPs probably avoid engaging in parliamentary informatics projects because they lack the necessary skills, or have not yet

realised the full potential of this type of Web 2.0 applications.

The projects under study enjoy different levels of endorsement. ND does not seem to have any concrete support from politicians. Returning to the recent comments about ND by the French Minister for Relations with Parliament, Alain Vidal: he does not disapprove of the project, or of open data in general. On the contrary, he thinks that the site has made parliamentary activity in France more transparent. Rather, he considers that ND's measurement of parliamentary activity does not accurately reflect the reality. Regards Citoyens has discussed this with the Minister, but the attempts to bring any joint improvements to the representation of parliamentary activity have not resulted in any concrete contribution of better data supply by the parliament (PC INpact 2012).

OP tends to enjoy some parliamentary support (or at least interest), even if the evidence for this is weak. This support is illustrated by a relatively high response to a survey and a campaign among MPs, carried out by OP. The survey asked MPs about the best way to make a qualitative assessment of parliamentary activities and 16% (156 out of 952) of MPs completed the survey). The MPs advanced some useful proposals for improving, on the one hand, OP's performance index, and on the other, parliamentary practices in general (e.g. most respondents agreed that the tax files of MPs should be published openly).<sup>89</sup> The transparency campaign 'Parliament – House of Glass' (ParlamentoCasadiVetro) aimed at changing parliamentary rules, in order to make the work of parliamentary committees more transparent, by asking for more public information about their deliberations and by the introduction of electronic voting. The campaign (still on-going at the time of the writing) managed to gather support from 298 MPs.<sup>90</sup>

In the case of TWFY, there appear to be considerable signs of political support. The amount of

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89 The information was retrieved from the Openpolis web page on October 2010. The survey was launched in February 2010.

90 The information was retrieved on 4 August 2013 at the campaign website: <http://parlamentocasadivetro.openpolis.it/#campagna> The campaign was meant to last until the first week of august 2013.

traffic between TWFY and Parliament suggests that many British MPs are following the project. Moreover, the current Prime Minister of the UK (at the time the Conservative leader), David Cameron (2009), has praised TWFY and called for a local version of this type of initiative, in his pledge of more information to people.<sup>91</sup> Some MPs are even citing TWFY when assessing colleagues' performances (Hands 2009; Attlee 2008; Wishart 2007; Royall of Blaisdon 2008; Eadie 2009), and there is mention of representatives who have tailored their work programmes to get high scores on the TWFY website (Salter 2010).<sup>92</sup> As the MP Earl of Erroll put it "(...) if I want someone to find out what I am up to in Parliament, I tell them to go to theyworkforyou.com."<sup>93</sup> Most MPs seem to be positive towards the project and some even suggest that Parliament should collaborate with TWFY, to improve people's access to information (Prentice 2008). At the same time, others are painfully aware that TWFY reinforces Parliament's accountability and feel exposed (see Frame 2 below).

This relatively high level of political support for TWFY is probably related to the embeddedness in elite networks of the organisation that is running the project, mySociety, and its founder and director, Tom Steinberg. Tom Steinberg has worked as policy analyst at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit from 2001 to 2003, and is frequently asked by governments to help formulate policy advice relating to digital issues.<sup>94</sup> For example in 2007, he co-authored the "The Power of Information Review" with Ed Mayo for the UK Cabinet Office, and from 2010-2012 he was a member of the UK government's Public Sector Transparency Board. Tom Steinberg also wrote numerous policy papers for both Labour and Conservative MPs, Ministers and party staff

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91 David Cameron's citation: "This will give people the power to hold local government to account, and to develop new public services like a local version of TheyWorkForYou (...)".

92 The search for the term 'TWFY' in Parliamentary proceedings on TWFY's search engine yielded 30 results; this means that 'TWFY' has been mentioned in parliament on 30 occasions.

93 Extract from Earl of Erroll's appearance in Parliament, 18 December 2008. Source: TWFY website <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2008-12-18a.965.0&s=theyworkforyou#g993.0>

94

This information is available on the MySociety website: <http://www.mysociety.org/about-tom-steinberg/>

between 2007-2011.

**Frame 2. Living in a goldfish bowl - what MPs say about TFWY**

*“In this technological era, we need to be able to respond quickly and effectively to organised lobby groups. As the technology has moved on, so our response is tracked electronically and very carefully. We know of the website TheyWorkForYou, which tracks responses and how quickly we get back to constituents. More and more, we are living in a goldfish bowl as a result of technology, and the advanced communication techniques used by non-governmental organisations, interest groups, community associations and, yes, political parties. It is wrong that Members of Parliament are expected to do their job, to take the kicks and the brickbats, without the ability to respond in at least a semi-21st century manner.”* Martin Salter, Labour Party (Salter 2007).

*“I agree with what my hon. Friend said about TheyWorkForYou.com and the way in which its measurement of the effectiveness of a Member of Parliament in a performance league table puts Members under incredible pressure.”* Mark Harper, Conservative Party (Harper 2006).

*“I am assiduous, as are all my colleagues, in ensuring that questions are answered whenever possible, but we have a problem in the House with researchers trying to prove a point, and with the TheyWorkForYou.com website, which seems to measure Members' work in quantitative rather than qualitative terms.”* Jack Straw, Labour Party (Straw 2006).

*“The wonderful website, theyworkforyou.com, which specifies in providing painstakingly and often painful details on all our appearances and interventions in this House (...).”* Janet Anne Royall, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon, Labour Party (Royall of Blaisdon 2008).

### *Civic pressure*

Civic pressure is operationalized as civic mobilization and media visibility in this thesis, and both are expected to influence political responsiveness. Mobilization of people for collective actions, in which they press their case forward and in which their engagement becomes uncomfortable for the elites, arguably increases the chances of political response (Fagotto and Fung 2009). In the context of e-democracy projects, civic pressure often involves attracting a large number of supporters, and stimulating action for a cause outside the actual online platform.

As acknowledged at the beginning of the chapter on political responsiveness, MySociety (the organisation in charge of TWFY) seems to have been successful both in mobilizing people and in impacting on politics. One of the key examples of TWFY's influence dates back to 2009, when the UK experienced a major political scandal over MPs' expense claims. Public outrage was caused by revelations of misuse of the expense claims mechanism, following failed attempts by parliament to prevent disclosure under Freedom of Information legislation. When the parliamentary proposals were announced, MySociety stated clearly that it objected to them, pointing out that full details of those MPs who voted in favour of limiting disclosure would be available to their constituents via the TWFY website. They also invited people to write to their MP, using the WriteToThem website, and to set up a Facebook group to rally support.

According to the director of MySociety, over 7,000 people joined the Facebook group and sent thousands of emails to over 90% of all MPs – and most of this seems to have happened within 48 hours (Steinberg 2009). Moreover, at the height of the MP expenses scandal (in May 2009), a noticeable usage peak occurred on TWFY, when many people visited the site to see the expenses records of their MPs (450,000 visits within one month, compared to a usual monthly average of 200,000-300,000) (Escher 2011, p. 4). The news coverage of TWFY also more than doubled in 2009, with 141 news articles (compared to a typical average of circa 60 articles per year), predominantly related to the MPs' expenses scandal (Escher 2011, p. 11). The UK newspapers, including major news outlets such as the websites of the Telegraph and the Guardian, regularly

referred their readers to TWFY for details on their representatives' expenses data (Escher 2011).

The BBC acknowledged that the online campaign led by mySociety was an important contribution towards cancelling the MP vote (Thompson 2009). The scandal resulted in a large number of MP resignations and sacking announcements, together with public apologies and the repayment of expenses, and even in imprisonment of several MPs. It also created pressure for political reform extending beyond the issue of expenses (BBC 2012). The resonance from the scandal among the UK population was remarkable: according to a Hansard Society (2010) poll, 71% of people said they had discussed MPs' expenses in 2009, compared to only 41% who said they had discussed politics or political news in general.

There are also hints of civic mobilization springing up around OP and ND, although empirical evidence is scarce. In these two cases, collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs) seems to have played a certain role. OP has collaborated with the CSO Action Aid to produce an advocacy report, mainly about the role of Parliament in development aid policy in Italy. Moreover, OP data has helped a civil society campaign against privatization of water to underpin its arguments. Regards Citoyens (the organisation in charge of ND) engages too with CSOs: it has carried out, jointly with the French branch of Transparency International,<sup>96</sup> a study about the influence of lobby groups on Parliament.

Partnering with CSOs turns out to be useful for conveying messages and for mobilizing mass users. CSO intermediaries are likely to be more motivated and more effective in using parliamentary informatics projects than ordinary citizens, above all when these platforms enable them to advocate effectively. As a case in point, NGOs are the primary users for similar projects such as the Cidade Democrática in Brazil, the Uchaguzi and the Budget Tracking Tool in Kenya, the Fair-Play Alliance in Slovakia, and the Kiirti in India. This could be related to the comparative difficulty in these countries for a lay user in accessing complex political information (Fung et al. 2010). Moreover, politicians are usually more receptive to the criticism of organised

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<sup>96</sup> The name of the organisation in French: Transparence International France.

stakeholders, such as CSOs and the media, than to that of ordinary citizens. This pattern has been seen in the case of similar PMOs such as the Indian Mumbai Votes and the Slovakian Fair Play Alliance. Fung et al. (2010, p. 23) found that these projects manage to influence politics because relatively unified organisational actors, such as journalists in mainstream media and NGOs (rather than ordinary citizens) make most use of the information provided. Political actors tend to be more sensitive to the criticisms of civil society actors than to the more diffuse, harder-to-discern views of the general public (Fung et al. 2010).

ND and TWFY have also been involved in a slightly different type of mobilization. They have mobilized online crowds for the cause of transparency. TWFY has mobilized over 6,000 volunteers to urge candidates for the UK 2010 parliamentary election to fill in a survey about their opinions on key election issues.<sup>97</sup> More recently, over 350 volunteers helped TFWY to implement video coverage of parliamentary debates, and some of them are continuing to do so (Escher 2011). ND managed to mobilize over 3,000 persons, to help them to categorize those lobbying actors who had accessed MPs, by means of a web-based crowdsourcing<sup>98</sup> application. A similar mapping exercise of lobbying in France was based on public hearing lists that are annexed to parliamentary reports. Supporters categorized nearly 17,000 of the listed names, in less than two weeks. The word-of-mouth message about the initiative spread through Twitter, and on numerous blogs, and resulted in the recruitment of yet more volunteers.<sup>99</sup> This large-scale and swift collaboration drive shows that TWFY and ND have a strong mobilization potential, which could have future impact on politics.

The next civic pressure indicator - media visibility - seems to have played a decisive role in ND's influence on MPs' behaviour, although the evidence for this presumed impact is only anecdotal.

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97 Source: TWFY post 15 April 2010 at: <http://www.mysociety.org/2010/04/15/theyworkforyou-election-survey/>

98 The concept of "crowdsourcing" was coined by Jeff Howe in an article on Wired in 2006, defining it as "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call". This concept has been widely adopted by several organizations and initiatives such as Wikipedia, Google, NASA, and the US Congress (Ferro e Molinari 2010).

99 Source: Regards Citoyens website (dated 16 August 2010) accessed on 08/02/2011.

Regards Citoyens has carried out two studies on MPs' absenteeism from parliamentary sessions. After the release of the first study - which received a lot of media coverage - the National Assembly finally started to enforce the already existing rule imposing fines for absence of MPs from obligatory sessions. Moreover, after the publication of the follow-up absenteeism study, some MPs - who were particularly pointed out by the media - seem to have increased their presence during parliamentary sessions (Author's interviews 2011).

All three projects under study had their peaks of general media visibility. However, there is mixed evidence about their prominence on the web. According to Google statistics in Table 14, TWFY is a clear leader in all categories, with millions of hits on Google (all search categories) and close to 400,000 hits on Google blogs<sup>100</sup> OP has far fewer hits, while ND is the lowest in the classification (under 10,000). Overall, OP and ND score quite similarly according to the calculated average (2.3 and 2.7 respectively).

Table 14. Google hits for OP, ND and TWFY

<i>Search tool</i>	<b>TWFY</b>	<b>My score*</b>	<b>OP</b>	<b>My score*</b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>My score*</b>
Google	1,310,000- 4,190,000	1	39,100-848,000	2	4,160-9,490	3
Google blogs	377,000	1	2,190	2	1,230	3
Google news archive	255	1	19	3	98	2
<b>Composite scores**</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>2.3</b>		<b>2.7</b>

\* In 'my score' 1 is the highest, while 4 is the lowest score. My scores are set on the basis of how many hits each project got, e.g. TWFY gets score 1 in news since it has the highest number of hits; ND gets 2 since it has the next best number of hits (although only half of TWFY) etc.

\*\* The composite score is calculated as the average score of the three hit dimensions (general, blogs, news).

Source: Google search on 14 June 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

100 However, Google blog search engine is not fully reliable; it counts some contents on TWFY as blog posts and includes these in its search (Escher 2011).



ND seems to have more visibility in the more traditional media channels (online newspapers as opposed to the blogosphere or the Internet in general): it has five times more hits than OP, according to Google News. This tendency is confirmed by the fact that several pieces of news about ND have appeared in big newspapers such as *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Liberation*, as well as on radio and some TV channels. At the same time, OP is the project with the strongest long-term link with the traditional media; they have a weekly collaboration with one of the key printed magazines in Italy, *Espresso*.

Hereafter another approach to measuring web visibility is examined: the *Social Mention*. Social Mention is a social media search platform that aggregates user-generated content from across the web into a single stream of information. Social Mention uses four monitoring dimensions: *strength*, *sentiment*, *passion* and *reach*, described in detail in the Methodology chapter (4.3. “Research design”). Social Mention gives slightly different visibility results, when compared to Google statistics. As illustrated by Table 15, TWFY is still the uncontested leader in terms of overall mentions (236) but ND (105) scores far better than OP (18).

Table 15. Social mention results for TWFY, ND and OP<sup>101</sup>

	<b>TWFY</b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>OP</b>
mentions	236	105	18
strength	34%	0%	0%
reach	68%	23%	6%
sentiment	1:1	8:1	1:1
passion	25%	67%	55%
last mention	4 minutes ago	1 month ago	6 months ago
unique authors	170	34	8
retweets	52	21	0

Source: Results retrieved on 9 January 2013 from <http://socialmention.com>

101 Searched terms: (1) TWFY: "theyworkforyou". The terms <http://www.theyworkforyou.com> and "[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)" gave fewer mentions, which were also less relevant to the project. (2) ND: "NosDeputes". The terms "<http://www.NosDeputes.fr>" and "[www.NosDeputes.fr](http://www.NosDeputes.fr)" gave fewer mentions, which were also less relevant to the project. (3) OP: "OpenParlamento". The terms "[www.openparlamento.it](http://www.openparlamento.it)" and <http://www.openparlamento.it> gave less mentions, which were also less relevant to the project.

Social Mention shows that only TWFY is discussed to some extent in social media (strength: 34%). Moreover, TWFY has the broadest reach among the three projects (i.e. the number of unique authors referencing it is high with respect to the total amount of mentions), and its last mention occurred just four minutes earlier, at the time of measuring. TWFY also shows the largest number of retweets (52). The wide-reaching visibility of TWFY is probably due to the fact that the organisation in charge of it, MySociety, also runs tens of other e-democracy websites, which are interlinked and contain mutual promotion.

ND also shows many retweets (21), a predictable result since the project team has invested heavily in Twitter, e.g. they run an initiative called *Twittering in the hemicycle*, where they cover parliamentary debates in just about real-time. At the same time, only ND is credited with a really positive sentiment on the web (8 positive mentions vs. 1 negative one), the rest of the projects being received neutrally. Moreover, ND and OP have higher rankings than TWFY in terms of passion, indicating that there are people who repeatedly talk about them.

Finally, TWFY also ranks best of all three projects according to Alexa, a web metrics provider, which analyses websites' visibility to search engines. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked #1. Alexa ranges the project websites in the following way: (i) TWFY with rank 238,728 and 3,661 sites linking to it; (ii) ND with rank 260,038 and 618 sites linking to it; and (iii) OP<sup>102</sup> with no rank at all.<sup>103</sup>

Note well that the higher ranking of TWFY might be due partly to the fact that it has existed for a longer period of time than the other two projects. Another consideration worth making is that Google, Social mention and Alexa's search engines do have limitations; depending on the timing of the search, the results fluctuate. However, the abovementioned trend (TWFY as leader, ND as follower and OP last) has remained the same when checked by the author on several occasions,

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102 Alexa ranks Openpolis.it (OP's sister site) at 326,954 with 3,661 sites linking to it.

103 This ranking means that e.g. TWFY is ranked #238,728 in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings; or put in another way, there are 238,728 sites with a better three-month global Alexa traffic rank than Theyworkforyou.com. Source: Alexa's Global Rank accessed on 9 January 2013.

and should give a broad idea of the web and media visibility of the projects under study.

Another relevant finding is that the projects' visibility was boosted by previous initiatives carried out by their associations. The three PMOs were all groundbreaking, and received attention both in the mainstream media and online. TWFY - the most popular of mySociety websites - is regularly mentioned in newspapers (with an average of more than one article per week) and received the New Statesman's media award as early as 2005 (Escher 2011). The example of the mySociety MP expenses campaign described above also shows the reinforcing effect in cases where one organisation owns many online initiatives, with regard both to spreading the word as well as to mobilising for a cause. In similar fashion, ND draws on previous success and visibility. ND was founded by two persons who ran a satirical debate platform (<http://www.deputesgodillots.info>), to denounce MPs' behaviour in parliament. This militant platform attracted a lot of media attention and visitors, and was a good trampoline for the visibility of the ND, which followed shortly after. The launch of ND received a lot of media interest, mostly from the web based press. The numbers of site visitors in the first days after its creation actually caused the server to crash.

OP can be considered an offshoot of the Voting Advice Application (VVA) 'VoiSieteQui' launched by its mother organisation Depp, back in 2006. VVA was not promoted through any traditional communication channel, only by emails to friends and acquaintances. Nonetheless, (similarly to ND) it became so popular that the server was regularly down because of the generated traffic. What is more, during the 20 days preceding elections, the VVA received over one million unique visitors (Zerbini 2008). Being preceded by successful initiatives such as the abovementioned VVA, probably improved the visibility of OP.

In sum, TWFY is the unchallenged leader in terms of mobilization, rate of participation and online visibility, while the other two projects lag rather far behind. ND seems to be slightly more visible with respect to OP, and has also managed to mobilize thousands of internauts to work on rendering the lobbying of the French parliament more transparent.

## *Conclusions*

Parliamentary informatics users (in ND and OP) have very strong expectations about the parliamentary response to their inputs. They expect their input to be considered by MPs and believe that their participation will lead to political action. An overwhelming majority of OP users (circa 80%) are also eager to advance proposals and communicate with MPs.

Despite the high expectations, our analysis points to but a few instances when projects have achieved political influence. Arguably, according to Schumaker's scale (1975), ND achieved 'output responsiveness' when it influenced the National Assembly to enforce the rule for absence of MPs from parliamentary sessions. TWFY conceivably got some 'policy responsiveness' when it managed to reverse the Government decision to exempt MPs from the Freedom of Information Act.

Moreover, both TWFY and ND enjoy a certain extent of 'access responsiveness'. In the case of TWFY, 4-5% of visits to the site come from the UK Parliament and other government sources (Escher 2011), which give good reasons to believe that the parliamentarians are concerned about what is shared on the platform. In the case of ND, parliamentary actors have contacted some of the survey respondents regarding their online proposals. This also indicates that they are responsive. However, these findings reveal that Schumaker's scale has some limitations. As presented above, the same project might simultaneously show different outputs on the scale, which means that the scale is not very useful for making comparisons between the projects.

TWFY has a sizable political responsiveness, arguably the strongest among the three projects. In line with the initial assumption about independent variables, TWFY also shows the best results on visibility, mobilisation and political support. Of the three projects, TWFY enjoys the most significant political support: as a case in point, the current British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has praised the project. OP only shows weak signs of MPs' interest and ND does not seem to have any political support at all.

Moreover, in comparison to the other two projects, TWFY turns out to be the uncontested leader in visibility, both on the web and in the traditional media, and in mobilization. Both TWFY and ND excel in another type of mobilization: they have managed to mobilize online crowds to help them in making parliamentary activities more transparent. This indicates that they have strong mobilization potential.

Overall, the parliamentary informatics projects under study fit Fung et al.'s (2010) category of interventions that complement traditional media efforts, by making information about politicians, officials or governmental activities available to the general public. The key advantage of this type of project is that they provide credible information (that is searchable and in principle verifiable by anyone), and are of high interest, as well as utility, to journalists and political campaigners. In line with the claims made by Fung et al., my findings suggest that these projects are influential (i) if the information collected is taken up by journalists, NGOs or political campaigns, and (ii) if it is actionable to voters. This, in turn, enhances the quality of the public sphere and improves political responsiveness.

Arguably, as suggested by Michener (2012) in regard to PMOs in Latin America, parliamentary informatics projects would benefit from integrating even more into civil society ecosystems (media, NGOs, academia) in their countries, as well as abroad. MySociety seems to have succeeded in this endeavour to a greater extent than the other two projects. The OP and ND teams, with their limited resources and highly technical backgrounds, tend to focus more on collecting data, upholding the technical infrastructure and building new tools. This might limit their reach-out to potential allies, as well as their impact on parliaments.

On a positive note, recently there has been a significant move towards a global PMO network.

An Opening Parliament Forum<sup>104</sup> has been created, in order to help connect civic organizations engaged in monitoring, supporting and opening up their countries' parliaments and legislative

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104 See <http://www.openingparliament.org> for further information.

institutions. The Forum serves as the home of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness, a set of shared principles on the openness, transparency and accessibility of parliaments. The Declaration is supported by more than 120 organizations from nearly 75 countries, and all the three projects under study have signed up to it. This might enhance their political impact in the future.

After a thorough examination of political responsiveness to parliamentary informatics projects, another type of outcome - civic literacy – will be analysed in the next section.

#### **5.4.4. Civic literacy**

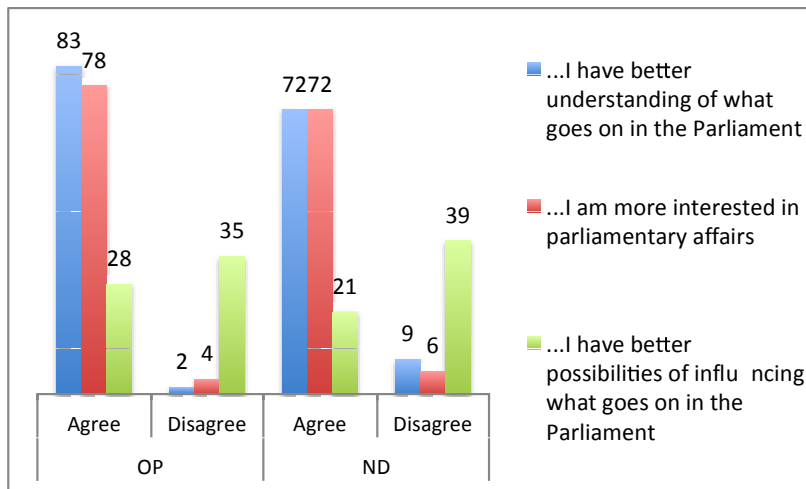
The parliamentary informatics projects under study not only have direct outcomes in terms of political responsiveness, but also turn out to have indirect outcomes in the form of increased civic literacy. Civic literacy is here defined as increased understanding and interest in politics, which in turn stimulate political participation (Milner 2004).

The projects seem to have given a significant boost in civic literacy to their participants. As illustrated by Figure 30, a striking majority of OP and ND respondents (72-83%) have a better understanding of and more interest in politics, after having participated in the projects. About one third of OP respondents are strongly convinced about this. As one of the OP users put it “I believe that the diffusion of instruments like Openparlamento is of great help for the development of a state of mind that is attentive towards (civic) rights and obligations” (Author’s survey 2011). However, the respondents are more dubious – and rightly so – about possibilities of impacting on Parliament. Between 17-18% of OP and ND users actually disagree *strongly* with this possibility.<sup>105</sup>

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105 Note well that quite a number hesitated on this question: between 30-32% neither agreed nor disagreed and around 6-10% answered “don’t know”.

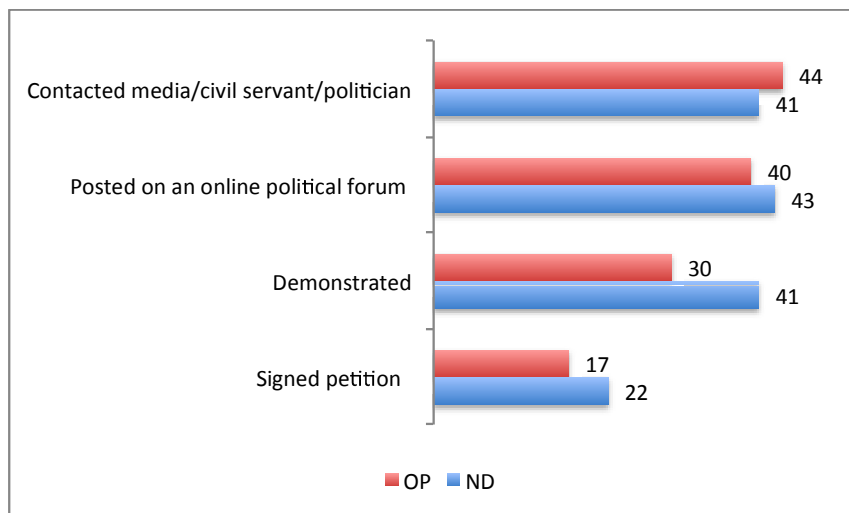
Figure 30. The OP and ND respondents' expectations regarding participation outcomes (%)



Source: Authors' surveys 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

In terms of stimulus to participation, the OP and ND surveys reveal that around 40% of respondents had never posted on online forums or contacted the media or politicians before participating in the projects (see Figure 31). Somewhat fewer users had never demonstrated or signed petitions. This suggests that OP and ND managed to capture the attention of a considerable number of respondents who were normally politically inactive.

Figure 31. OP and ND respondents who had *never* engaged in any of the political activities listed



Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

Moreover, a substantial number of respondents stated that they would (probably) not have made their proposals *except* on the project sites (40% of ND (N=10) and 33% of OP users (N=39)).<sup>106</sup> However, very few respondents (between 0-7%) became politically active only after (not before) their engagement in OP or ND (See Annex I for further statistical details). The low level of the two aforementioned results could be due to the fact that most of the survey respondents were already very active politically, in many different ways and channels<sup>107</sup> and also because not enough time passed between their engagement in parliamentary informatics projects and the survey, for them to seize an occasion to engage.

The stimulus to participation is demonstrated by the fact that an overwhelming majority (98% of OP and 79% of ND respondents) said they would consider getting involved in any of the abovementioned political activities in the future.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, a cross tabulation of answers (see Table 16) shows that a vast majority of respondents (up to 97%) who had *never* participated in any of the said activities were inclined to engage in the future. This shows that OP and ND have a potential as catalysts for political participation.

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106 Note well that their share is considerably lower with respect to those who would have engaged in any case; ND: 56% (N=14); OP: 62% (N=72).

107 See chapter "5.2.3. Responsiveness" for data regarding respondents who were involved in political activities compared to country populations.

108 OP: 98% answered 'yes' to the question "Would you consider doing any of the abovementioned activities in the future?", while 2% said 'no' (total N=357). ND: 79% answered 'yes' to the question "Would you consider doing any of the abovementioned activities in the future?", while 5% said 'no' and 17% 'don't know' (total N=70).



Table 16. Respondents who had *never* engaged in any of the listed political activities but who would consider participating in the future

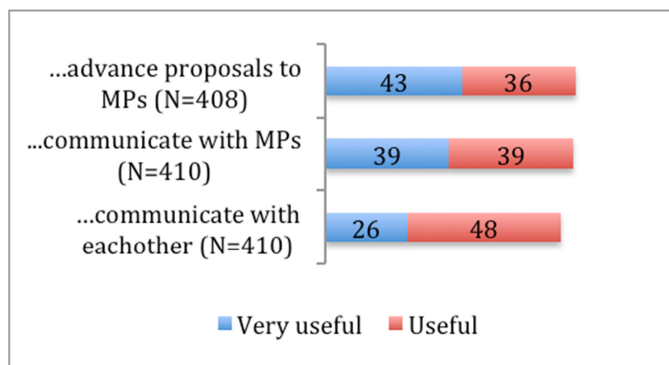
"Would you consider doing any of the abovementioned activities in the future?"	OP		ND	
	N	%	N	%
Contact media/ civil servant/politician	145	<b>97</b>	26	<b>70</b>
Participate in a demonstration/protest	88	<b>97</b>	25	<b>71</b>
Sign a petition	51	<b>96</b>	15	<b>75</b>
Post on an online political forum/discussion group	126	<b>96</b>	26	<b>68</b>

Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

The questions in Figure 32 below were included in the questionnaire upon request of the OP team. The answers illustrate that an overwhelming majority of respondents (circa 80%) would be eager to communicate with and advance proposals to MPs. Around 40% of them even stated that such tools would be very useful. Additionally, three quarters of respondents would also appreciate having tools to communicate with each other.

Figure 32. Respondents' views about how useful it would be to add new communication tools to

<sup>109</sup>  
OP



Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

109 Answers to the question: "Do you think it would be useful to add new tools to OP? Tools that allow users to..." These questions were asked only to OP users because the OP team was considering adding new instruments to their site, and asked to include an additional question where respondents evaluated how useful a number of tools would be.

The TWFY survey conducted by Escher (2011) posed slightly different questions related to civic literacy. According to its results, TWFY users possess considerable political knowledge: four out of five claimed they knew the name of their MP before using TWFY. This is an excellent score in comparison to the country-level statistics: according to the Hansard Society's data, less than half of the UK population can correctly name their MP (44%). At the same time, 60% have never before looked up information on what their MP was doing in parliament, before visiting the TWFY site. Moreover, about 90% of users say the website has improved their knowledge about their representatives (Escher 2011, p. 5). This indicates that TWFY is a valuable tool for civic literacy.

Although the TWFY respondents are more politically engaged<sup>110</sup> than the average British citizen, close to half of them have not been engaged in any other political activity, apart from using the TWFY website. What is more, one in five users (21%) has not been politically active within the last year, was not part of any political/community groups, and has tried to find information about MPs for the first time with the help of TWFY (Escher 2011). This suggests that the project stimulates a large number of otherwise politically inactive citizens.

In sum, many of the participants increased their knowledge and interest in politics thanks to the projects. A substantial number of survey respondents also stated that they would not have made their proposals other than on project platforms, and that they would like to engage politically in the future. This suggests that the projects boost civic literacy and offer the opportunity to engage to a large number of otherwise politically inactive citizens.

Parliamentary informatics offer citizens improved opportunities to engage in policy-making and, as suggested by previous research (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Hamilton and Tolbert 2012), this brings along positive effects on civic education. Reflecting on this, and on other pieces of research (Krueger 2002; Mossberger et al. 2008; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Anduiza et al. 2012),

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In the TWFY survey, political participation includes, e.g. taking part in demonstrations, signing a petition, contacting a politician, boycotting a product, donating money or displaying a campaign badge.

the survey results indicate that the actual involvement in parliamentary informatics projects - with their user-friendly digital tools that diminish the costs of engagement – could be an important factor for enhancing civic literacy. Hence, from the instrumentalist perspective, which is focused on the effects of participation (Blanco and Lowndes 2011), parliamentary informatics projects have achieved positive effects.

## 5.5. Conclusions

The survey results indicate that certain groups that are traditionally less politically active are even more absent from parliamentary informatics platforms. The respondents' socio-demographic profiles differ considerably from those of their co-citizens. Women tend to be under-represented; only a small proportion of respondents are engaged in housework and in looking after children/others, and the level of education of respondents is well above the national average.

Certain projects also seem to face other types of inequalities, such as under-representation of foreign participants (OP) and strong over-representation of people with higher incomes (TWFY). What is more, the inequality among e-democracy users seems to be stronger than among their co-nationals engaged in other political activities. In fact, as well as being habitual Internet navigators, the majority of project respondents are also politically active. In short, parliamentary informatics projects seem to mainly attract resourceful and privileged people.

Even if parliamentary platforms are open to all, many other factors such as education, gender and digital literacy determine the opportunity to participate. From the *essentialist* perspective the projects fail to fulfil the *equality* criterion. This lack of inclusiveness poses problems of input-legitimacy to the outcomes of parliamentary informatics projects). The survey results generally support the reinforcement thesis: namely, that the Internet strengthens established patterns of elite political communication. Hence, to strive for real equality, under-represented groups should be encouraged to engage, for example by pro-active moderation and targeted marketing.

On the positive side, the projects have managed to attract older people, who are usually under-represented in politics, and capture the attention of a considerable number of respondents who were not following parliamentary affairs before. Further research with larger user samples is needed to establish whether parliamentary informatics projects compensate at least for some of the inequality, by raising civic literacy levels also among those groups traditionally side-lined in the political realm.

Turning to the second *essentialist* dimension - *accountability* - the transparency of information is probably the most important contribution made to democracy by parliamentary informatics projects. By facilitating access to official and objective information, they enable citizens to demand explanations from their representatives, thereby backing soft accountability. The greatest value of PMOs is that they present official information in a more user-friendly and constructive way with respect to governmental stakeholders. This is also most likely the reason for their success among users: the majority is convinced of the accuracy of information provided.

Turning to the first *instrumentalist* dimension - *responsiveness* – the analysis points to very few instances where projects have achieved political influence. Arguably, ND achieved ‘output responsiveness’ when it influenced the National Assembly to enforce the fine rule for absence of MPs from parliamentary sessions. TWFY conceivably got some ‘policy responsiveness’ when it managed to reverse the Government decision to exempt MPs from the Freedom of Information Act. Moreover, both TWFY and ND enjoy a certain extent of ‘access responsiveness’, meaning that parliamentarians are concerned about what is happening on the platforms.

TWFY has a sizable political responsiveness, arguably the strongest of the three projects. In line with the initial assumption about independent variables, it also shows best results on visibility, mobilisation and political support.<sup>111</sup> Overall, the parliamentary informatics projects under study

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111 Note well that the institutionalization variable was a constant in parliamentary informatics projects (absent in

fit Fung et al.'s (2010) category of interventions that complement traditional media efforts, by making information about parliamentary affairs available to the general public, in a form that is easily accessible and neutral, of high utility to the media and to civil society, and actionable to voters. This, in turn, enhances the quality of the public sphere and improves political responsiveness.

Concerning the second *instrumentalist* dimension - *civic literacy* – the findings suggest that participants increased their knowledge of and interest in politics, thanks to the projects. A substantial proportion of survey respondents would not have made their proposals other than on project platforms, and would like to engage politically in the future. This suggests that the projects boost civic literacy and offer the opportunity to engage to a large number of otherwise politically passive citizens.

Parliamentary informatics offer citizens improved opportunities to engage in policy-making and, this brings along positive effects on civic education. The survey results indicate that the actual involvement in parliamentary informatics projects – with their user-friendly digital tools that diminish the costs of engagement – could be the important factor for enhancing civic literacy. Hence, from the *instrumentalist* perspective, which is focused on the *effects* of participation, parliamentary informatics projects have achieved positive effects.



## **6. E-petitioning projects**

This is the second section of the empirical part of the thesis and concerns e-petition projects in Sweden and the UK. It provides a brief project background and then turns to a comparative analysis of the projects, dependent variable by variable. This section explores two e-petitioning projects: e-Petitioner in Bristol (UK) and Malmöinitiativet in Malmö city (Sweden).

### **6.1. The case of Bristol e-Petitioner**

Bristol City Council began to experiment with e-democracy as early as 2000 and has adopted a multitude of e-participation techniques since then, including deliberative polling tools, e-voting, e-panels and a Connecting Bristol blog - to name but a few. The development of the e-Petitioner (henceforward abbreviated as BEP) stemmed from the earlier experience of the Scottish Parliament. Bristol launched a pilot e-petition project in 2004, in a joint effort with the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, sponsored both by national and European Union funds (O'Malley 2010). Together, they became the first local authorities in the UK to pilot e-petitioning. Building on this experience, Bristol's e-petitions website was re-launched in a new shape in January 2008, in partnership with the company Public-i. The e-Petitioner allows citizens to raise and sign a petition, read background information on the issue, and add comments to an online forum associated with each petition (see Figure 33).

Figure 33. Screenshot of the BEP's homepage

**Online Petitions**  
Register | Login

**EPetition Home**  
View Petitions  
Add A Petition  
Petition Guidance  
Get RSS Feed

Welcome to our online petition system. Here you can add your name to an existing petition or you can create a new one.

Taking part in or creating a petition is one way individuals, community groups and organisations can get involved in what the council does. It allows people to raise issues of public concern, giving councilors the opportunity to consider the need for change.

[View Petitions](#) [Add A Petition](#)

Anyone who lives, works or studies in Bristol can sign or create a petition. There is no age limit - children and young people can also take part in or create a petition.

To set up a new petition, you must be a registered user within the e-petitions website. Click the 'Add A Petition' link on this page and follow the instructions on screen.

To sign a petition, click the 'View Petitions' link on this screen. You will then see all current petitions. Click on the petition you are interested in and you will see information about the topic. If you want to sign, complete the details requested and click 'Submit my signature'.

Also, read the [Bristol City Council Petition Scheme](#) - which describes the arrangements for submitting petitions to the council.

**New Petitions**

<b>Close Avon Crescent to Vehicular Through Traffic as Precondition of Ashton Vale to Temple Meads Metrobus</b> 82 Signatures Ends Wed, 31 Dec 14
<b>Save School Road Respite Centre</b> 526 Signatures Ends Sat, 1 Feb 14
<b>Freeze Council Tax</b> 64 Signatures Ends Thu, 22 May 14
<b>Uninterrupted Cycle Lane on both sides along entire Gloucester Road</b> 369 Signatures Ends Thu, 13 Mar 14

Source: BEP homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at: <http://epetitions.bristol.gov.uk>

The initial aim of these e-democracy initiatives in Bristol, and of the e-Petitioner in particular, was to (Hayward, date unknown):

- attract new groups of participants since traditional methods of engagement mainly involve older, retired, white, middle class people;
- facilitate and broaden input into local decision-making;
- create ongoing links with citizens;
- evolve techniques of engagement to meet changing customer demands.

The e-Petitioner has enjoyed strong support from Bristol Councillors and from the departments which are directly involved in the day-to-day servicing of representative government (Iacopini 2007). The City Council has even adopted a procedure whereby the petitions submitted by citizens are automatically referred to a council officer, committee or councillor for consideration. Feedback is then publicised on the e-petition web site (Bristol City Council Petitions Scheme 2012).



## 6.2. The case of Malmöinitiativet

The idea of Malmöinitiativet (henceforward abbreviated as MI) originates from Malmö City's 2004 e-Strategy. The e-Strategy was very well received in the political sphere and some of the city neighbourhoods even decided to launch e-democracy pilots, e.g. an e-consultation regarding the construction of a stadium and a chat with politicians (Åström and Sedelius 2010). According to one Malmö City politician, the success of the e-Strategy depended on a rapid implementation of pilots and close cooperation between civil servants and the elected politicians.<sup>112</sup> On this wave of success, Malmö also received the prestigious award 'IT-municipality of the year' in 2005, and reached second place in the 'best municipal web site', a contest organised by the largest ICT newspaper in Sweden (Internet World) in 2006.<sup>113</sup> Contemporarily, Malmö City established contacts in the e-government networks at EU level, and became known for its 24 hour digital assistance for citizens. Through these channels, Malmö City linked up with Bristol City Council - a pioneer in e-democracy at the time. After a study tour to Bristol, Malmö politicians derived inspiration and support for their development of larger-scale e-democracy pilots.

E-democracy is still an experimental area of practice and the growth of its innovative potential allegedly depends on individual advocates and early adopters (Lührs and Molinari 2010). In fact, Malmö City has been very quick – although not always successful – in taking up new digital tools and Web 2.0 applications. In 2009, they launched one of the first municipal information desks on Second Life<sup>114</sup> in Sweden. The project was criticized in the media for being costly and belated<sup>115</sup> and turned out to be a failure. The Malmö City virtual islands were closed down in 2010 (Jerräng

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112 Persson's presentation, Offentliga rummet 2006.

113 Starring, official statement, Malmö city council, 19/02/2007.

114 Second Life is an online virtual world developed by a private company (Linden Lab). Second Life users can interact with each other through avatars. Residents can explore the virtual world, meet other residents, participate in individual and group activities, and create and trade virtual property and services with one another.

115 According to the local newspaper Sydsvenskan, media attention to Second Life in Sweden peaked in 2007. Source: <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/digitalt-och-teknik/article629100/Malmö-stad-lamnar-Second-Life.html>

2002; Eklundh Paglert 2008). Despite this shortcoming, the same year, Malmö City established a group on Facebook, in order to promote cultural activities and tourism (Wilhelmsson 2010).

In terms of e-democracy, Malmö City also runs an electronic panel - the biggest municipal citizen panel in Sweden - that allows politicians to ask city residents about issues, ahead of making decisions. The issues treated by the panel are proposed by the City Council committees and the cumulative answers are published on the Council site. The panel involves 1,427 participants and all city districts are represented. The main difference between the panel and MI, is that the panel is driven by the Council's need to get opinions and reaction on issues that they have themselves framed and defined, while MI aims at encouraging the creation of ideas (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

MI is the first e-petition system in Sweden, and Malmö City has developed the project mainly on the example of its British precursors (Åström and Sedelius 2010). The preparation of the Malmöinitiativet project started in January 2008 and it was launched online six months later. Malmö City initially had ambitious e-democracy objectives concerning both MI and the Malmö Panel (Projektplan 2008), to:

- increase citizens' interest in politics;
- increase voter turn-out in the general elections;
- reach out to and engage in discussion with new citizen groups;
- increase knowledge about the municipality and its state of affairs;
- create new arenas for citizen engagement and influence;
- increase the effectiveness of and awareness about societal planning.

Moreover, the project plan emphasized that the dialogue with citizens should become a component of the organisational management, and a basis for decision-making; "dialogue in the form of consultations with citizens (will become) a central tool helping to gather a broader and deeper basis for the decision-making process, and increase the quality of the latter" (Projektplan 2008, p. 4). Despite the ambitious project goals, MI does not yet enable citizens to impact upon

policy decisions, at least not in any formal or direct way. There is no process in place that allows citizens to track whether the city council representatives consult their petitions or not. The consideration of petitions depends wholly on the personal motivation of the representatives. In practice, MI allows users to launch or support a petition, view both ongoing and archived petitions, and discuss petitions in an apposite forum (see Figure 34 for a screenshot of the MI homepage).

Figure 34. Screenshot of MI's homepage

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Malmö Initiative (MI). At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Malmö logo and menu items: 'Medborgare', 'Företagare', 'Turism', 'Kommun & Politik', and 'Ansök & beställ'. A search bar is also present. The main content area is titled 'Vad är Malmöinitiativet?' and contains the following text:

Malmöinitiativet är en plattform där alla Malmöbor kan komma med förslag och synpunkter som gäller Malmö.

Här kan alla som vill diskutera, komma med förslag eller bara följa debatten. På Malmöinitiativet kan du också stödja andras initiativ och visa att det finns fler som tycker likadant i en särskild fråga. Även du som är förtroendevald kan vara en del av Malmöinitiativet. **Om minst 100 personer skriver under ett förslag så skickas det vidare till aktuell nämnd som ett informationsärende** (nu kan du också se vad nämnderna har svarat förslagsställarna - du kan se både de aktiva och inaktiva initiativen!).

**Vill du stödja eller kommentera ett förslag?**  
På Malmöinitiativet kan du stödja ett förslag genom att lägga till ditt namn och din adress på initiativets namnsamling. Varje förslag har en text som beskriver förslaget, och ibland finns det också lite bakgrundsinformation som hjälper dig att bestämma om du vill skriva under.

Du kan också se vilka andra som har skrivit på namnlistan (bara namn och bostadsområde - inte adress) eller diskutera förslaget i forumet.

On the right side, there is a 'Logga in' section with a login form (Användarnamn, Lösenord) and a 'Logga in' button. Below it, there are links for 'Lösenordsåterställning' and 'Registrera'. There is also a link for 'Andra alternativ för inloggning (OpenId, Google...)'. Below the login section, there is a 'Nya Förslag' section with a RSS icon, listing recent proposals:

- Boende för hemlösa  
12 Underskrifter  
Avslutas Må, 31 Mar 14
- Tärningstolett  
6 Underskrifter  
Avslutas Fre, 28 Mar 14
- ÄNDRA MALMÖ STADS LOGGA  
4 Underskrifter  
Avslutas Lör, 31 Maj 14

Source: MI homepage, accessed on 9 January 2014 at: <http://initiativet.malmo.se>

### 6.3. Case comparison

In this chapter, I will make a case comparison from the perspective of four dependent variables: (1) equality, (ii) accountability, (iii) responsiveness, and (iv) civic literacy. I will begin with the variables equality and accountability, which fall into the 'essentialist' set, where the participation process is a constituting element of democratic legitimacy and an end in itself. Thereafter, I will examine the 'instrumentalist' variables of responsiveness and civic literacy, which are focused on project outcomes.

### **6.3.1. Equality**

The equality aspect examined in this thesis is that of the representativeness of project participants with respect to their reference population. As a baseline, participants of e-democracy projects should be fairly representative of their reference population, and no individual or group(s) should dominate the participation arena at the expense of others. In this setting, active and passive participation is also taken into account. The central assumption of the thesis is that representativeness is conditioned by social context, which in turn is operationalized as socio-demographic indicators; participation in politics; and ICT access, use and skills.

As explained in chapter 4, I have conducted an online survey of MI users, but not of BEP users; where surveys from secondary sources (Whyte et al. 2005; <sup>116</sup> Macintosh et al. 2005) were used for comparative purposes.

#### *Gender*

Women are under-represented in both MI and BEP (Author's survey 2011; Whyte et al. 2005). They constitute only between 35% and 38% of respondents respectively, while their proportion of the city population is 51% (see Annex I for further details).

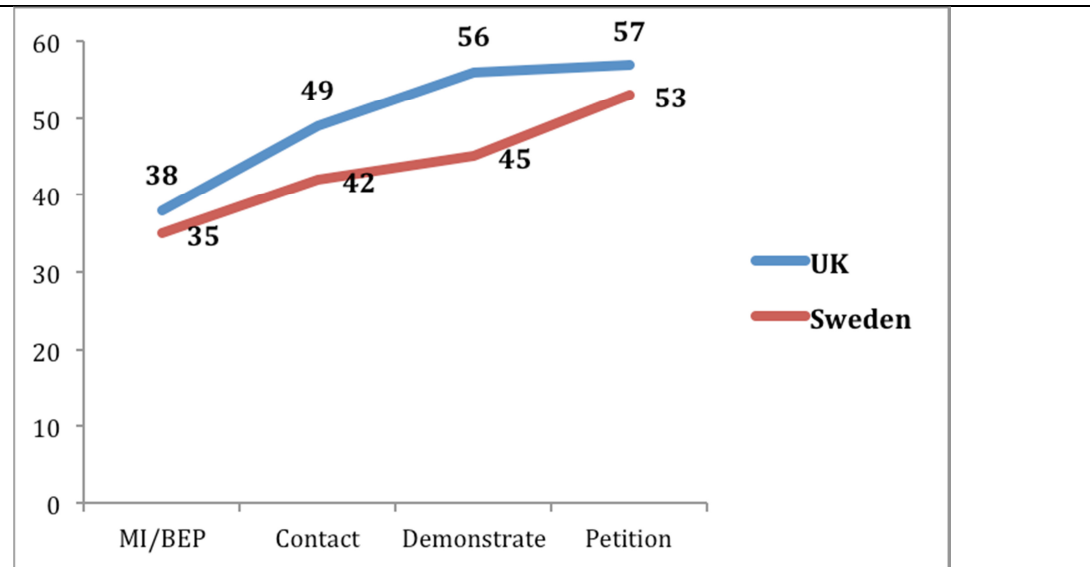
Figure 35 illustrates that the proportion of women on MI and BEP platforms tends to be much lower than among co-nationals engaged in other political activities. Hence, this could imply that e-petitioning might be even more gender unequal than other forms of political engagement. Moreover, the patterns tend to be consistent between the two countries: BEP and the UK display a marginally better gender-balance than MI and Sweden on all indicators. This suggests that the context has a certain effect.

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116

The BEP evaluation carried out by Whyte et al. (2005) included a survey of e-petition signers in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The response rate was very high: 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

Figure 35. Levels of political engagement of women in MI and BEP, and in Sweden and the UK (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the level of participation in MI/BEP; in contacting politician/government officials ('Contact'), in taking part in a demonstration ('Demonstrate') and in petitioning ('Petition'). See Annex I for further statistical details.

Source: Author's survey 2011, Whyte et al. 2005; ESS1-2002.

### Age

Most MI respondents are aged around 40-45, i.e. somewhat older than the average municipal citizen (36 years old). There is no exact data for BEP but the modal age group among respondents is 25-50, i.e. somewhat younger than its municipal equivalent (45+) (see Table 17). The 'mature group' (aged 25-44/50) dominates among BEP and MI respondents, and constitutes a much higher proportion with respect to the municipal population. In the case of BEP, the proportion of respondents in this group is almost three times greater than that in the municipal one. Moreover, the younger cohort seems to be particularly under-represented among MI and BEP users. This is in line with previous findings by a survey among the Scottish population which was undertaken by Carman (2009, p. 16), and which showed that people aged 18-24 are less likely than the average to sign a petition (19% vs. 10%).

Table 17. Age distribution of MI and BEP respondents vs. their municipal populations

	Bristol				Malmö			
	BEP respondents (%)	Age group	City population (%)	Age group	MI respondents (%)	Age group	City population (%)	Age group
<i>Young</i>	13	0-25	23	16-29	4	0-25	18	0-25
<i>Mature</i>	63	25-50	23	30-44	54	25-44	33	25-44
<i>Middle-aged +</i>	24	50+	35	45+	42	45+	37	45+

Source: Author's survey 2011; Whyte et al. 2005,<sup>117</sup> and Statistics Sweden 2010.<sup>118</sup>

Looking more closely at the age distribution of MI respondents, it emerges that; on the whole, it is quite in line with that of Malmö's population (see Figure 36). The main discord occurs in the age group 25-44: over half of respondents fall in this group; while among the Malmö population its share is only one third. A minor dissonance also concerns the younger parts of the population. Very few (only 4%) of the respondents are under-25. This is rather surprising considering that it is mostly young people (aged 16-24) who use the Internet in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2010).<sup>119</sup> Note also that the age distribution pattern in MI is roughly confirmed by Åström and Sedelius' (2010) evaluation of MI.<sup>120</sup>

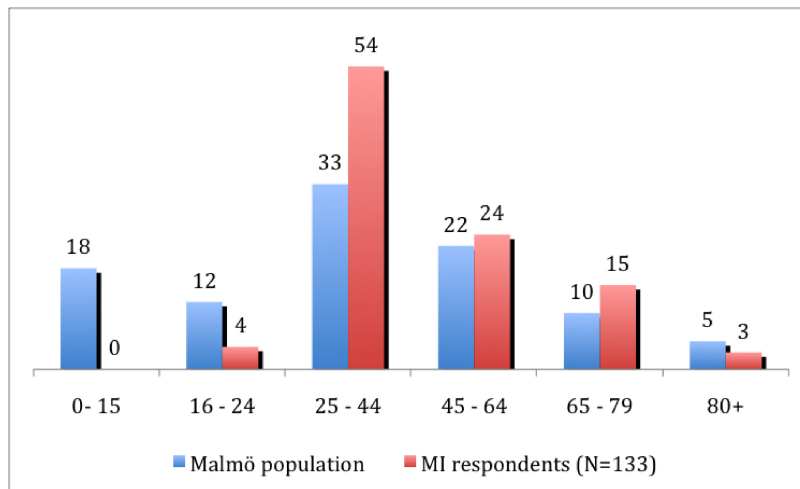
117 The BEP evaluation included a survey of e-petition signers in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any of those site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The response rate was very high: 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

118 Data from 1 January 2010.

119 Moreover, no one is under-16 among MI respondents, while in Malmö city this group represents 18% of the population.

120 The survey run by Åström and Sedelius indicates that users have the following age distribution: 4% (under 20 years old); 39% (aged 20-39); 35% (aged 40-59) and 14% (60+). The statistics embrace those who have created at least one e-petition and responded to the project evaluation questionnaire.

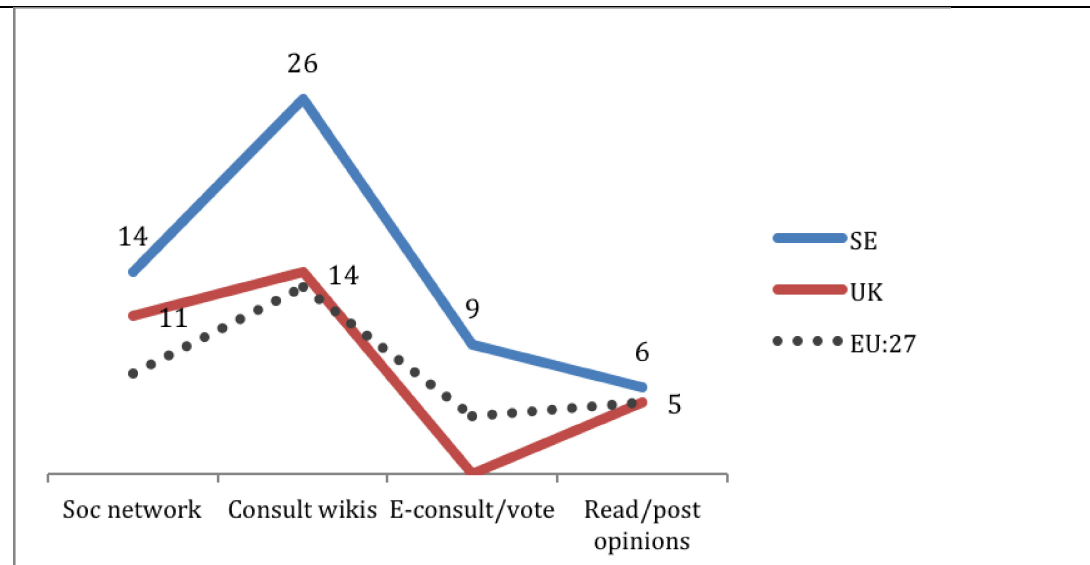
Figure 36. Age distribution of MI respondents vs. Malmö's population (%)



Source: Author's survey 2011; Malmö City website 2010.

The older cohort (aged 45-64) and, surprisingly, the elderly (65-79 and 80+) are well represented on MI. As stated in the chapter concerning equality in parliamentary informatics projects, such an engagement of the elderly in e-petitioning is particularly intriguing since previous research (Norris 2001; Rice and Katz 2003) suggests that Internet usage is negatively correlated with age. Likewise, current statistics show that persons who are over 55 are less inclined to participate online (EUROSTAT 2011e). It is however consistent with the country-level statistics on political participation in Sweden. As illustrated by Figure 37, Sweden consistently rates higher than the UK and the EU-27 averages when it comes to online participation of the age group 65-74.

Figure 37. Online participation in Sweden, the UK and the EU-27 of people aged 65-74 (%)



LEGEND: 'Soc network' stands for participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to Facebook, twitter, etc.); 'Consult wikis' for consulting wikis; 'E-consult/vote' for taking part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic or political issues; 'Read/post opinions' for reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues. Note well that data is missing for 'E-consult/vote' for the UK (zero in the Figure).

Source: EUROSTAT 2011e.

In sum, overall, the cohort aged 25-44/50 dominates among BEP and MI respondents, and constitutes a much higher share with respect to the municipal populations. Furthermore, the younger cohort seems to be particularly under-represented.

### *Ethnicity*

Turning to the issue of ethnicity, the two projects show slightly different patterns. In contrast with usual trends in political participation, black and minority ethnic groups are only slightly under-represented on BEP with respect to the city population (see Table 18).<sup>121</sup> Yet another evaluation of BEP indicates that ethnic minority users were almost in proportion to the local

<sup>121</sup> It is worth noting that 7% of respondents declined to answer the ethnicity question.



population (Macintosh et al. 2005, p. 86). It is worth noting that Bristol Council is working towards preventing inequalities, e.g. it plans to offer support in submitting and translating petitions for those who do not speak English as their first language (Bristol Council 2010).

Table 18. Ethnicity of Bristol e-petition signers (%)

	e-Petition signers	City population
White	86	92
Black or Minority	6	8

122

Source: Whyte et al. 2005.

In comparison to BEP users, MI respondents differ from Sweden's population to a greater extent. A high proportion of Malmö's population is of foreign background (39%), while considerably more petitioners seem to be Swedes. 86% of MI respondents were born in Sweden compared to only 70% of Malmö's population (see Table 19). Similarly, 93% are Swedish citizens compared to 86% of Malmö's inhabitants.

Table 19. Ethnicity of MI respondents vs. the municipal population (%)

	MI respondents (N=136)	City population
Born in the country of reference	86	70
Citizenship of the country of reference	93	86

123

Source: Author's survey 2011; Statistics Sweden 2009.

This under-representation of persons of foreign origins among MI respondents reflects the overall trend in Sweden. Table 20 shows that the participation rates of foreign-born/non-

122 The BEP evaluation included a survey of e-petition signers in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The response rate was very high; 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

123

Statistics from Statistics Sweden are dated 31 December 2009 and 1 January 2010.

nationals in online activities similar to e-petitioning are slightly lower than those of native born/nationals. The participation of foreigners on MI is at the same level (10%) as the lowest rate of participation among the three online activities represented in Table 16 below (10% of foreign-born are reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues). This indicates that e-petitioning, at least in the MI, is even less inclusive than other forms of online participation.

Table 20. Online participation of foreign-born and non-nationals versus natives and nationals in Sweden (percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months) (%)

	Foreign-born	Non-nationals	Native-born	Nationals
Reading/downloading online newspapers/news	79	74	84	84
Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites	10	-	12	12
124	11	-	13	13
Taking part in e-consultations/e-petitioning				

Source: EUROSTAT 2011d.

### *Education*

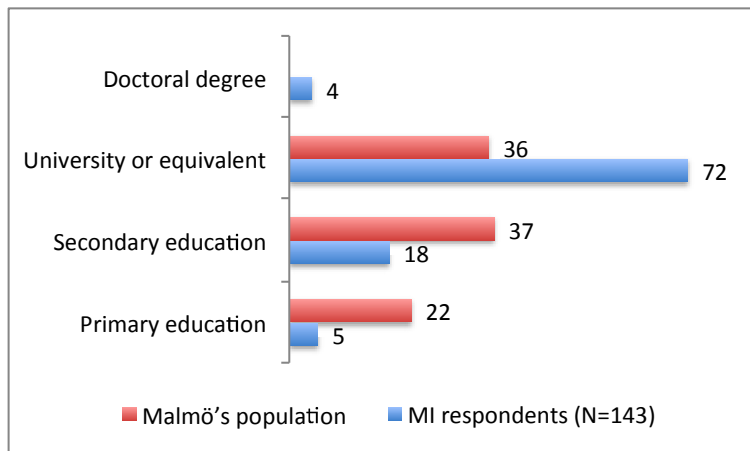
The respondents' level of education is well above the national average. Twice as many MI respondents have a university degree compared to their co-nationals average (see Figure 38). At the same time, people with primary education are heavily under-represented on MI (5% vs. 22%). This pattern is confirmed by a previous MI survey, which claimed that people with higher education prevail over those with lower levels of education, among active MI users (Åström and Sedelius 2010).<sup>125</sup>

124 The full title of the category is: "Taking part in on-line consultations/voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition)"

125

Active MI users were defined as those who have created at least one e-petition and responded to Åström and Sedelius (2010) project evaluation questionnaire.

Figure 38. Educational attainment: MI respondents vs. Malmö's population (%)



126

Source: Author's survey (2011); Statistics Sweden's register (2010).

The survey indicators for which the difference between respondents and the country population was greatest - i.e. for people with higher, secondary and lowest educational levels – were compared with groups that have engaged in alternative forms of political participation.

Regarding people with primary education, the analysis indicates that survey respondents are more similar to persons who have engaged in alternative forms of political participation, than to the general population (see Figure 39). This finding does not hold in the case of persons with tertiary and secondary education: survey respondents are more similar to their fellow citizens than to people who have engaged in alternative forms of participation (see Annex I for further statistical details).

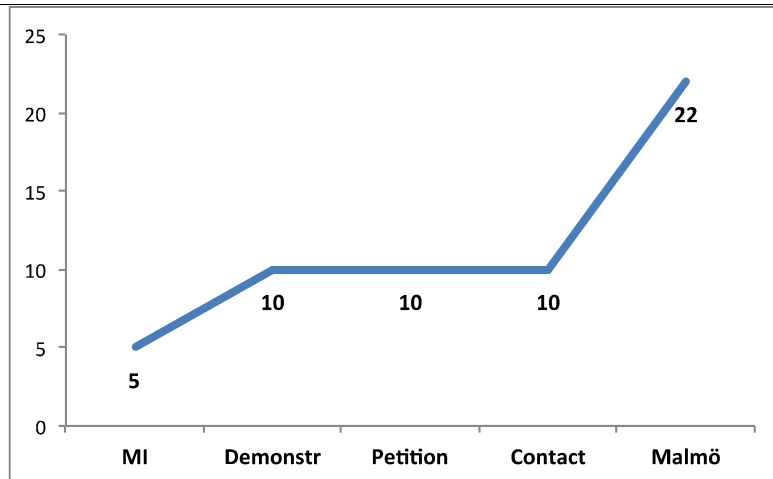
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126

The Malmö population statistics do not contain any data on doctoral degrees. However, according to an elaboration of the data from the website the Long Term Economy (2009), the rate of researchers as share of the population in Sweden is 0.005%.

177

Figure 39. The numbers of persons with primary education who engaged in politics in alternative ways (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis in the Figure shows the educational levels of MI users ('MI'), people who took part in demonstrations ('Demonstr'), contacted a politician/government official ('Contact'), signed a petition ('Petition'), and the general Malmö population ('Malmö population').

Source: Author's surveys; ESS1-2002; Statistics Sweden's register "Befolkningens utbildning" 2010.

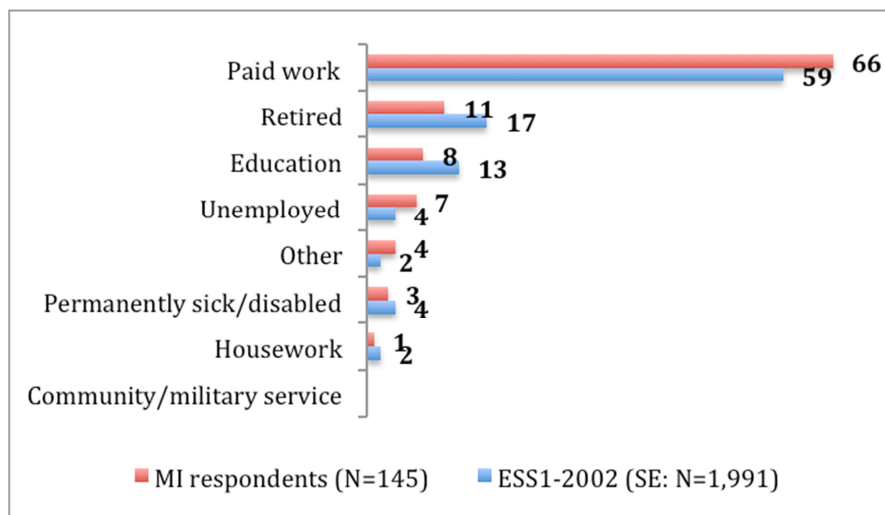
There are no equivalent survey data for education among BEP users, nor for occupation or income. However, in March 2011, Bristol Council made a so-called Experian Mosaic<sup>127</sup> analysis of petitioners. This analysis shows that the petition signers are predominantly young, well-educated city dwellers (a group that comprises young professional families, well-educated singles and student singles) and wealthy, creative professionals living in Bristol's most sought after neighbourhoods. It is noteworthy that the area of residence also seemed to be important among MI users: a previous survey showed that the majority of respondents lived in a central part of the city, which means that certain – better off - neighbourhoods were over-represented (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

<sup>127</sup> Experian Ltd is a private company applying a tool called 'Mosaic Public Sector' that classifies all consumers in the UK by allocating them to one of 7 super groups, 15 groups and 69 types. These paint a detailed picture of UK citizens in terms of their socio-economic and socio-cultural behaviour. The data comes from public and Experian proprietary data and statistical models (e.g. the Census estimates, Electoral roll, Council Tax property valuations, house sale prices, self-reported lifestyle surveys and other consumer data).

## Occupation

With respect to occupation, MI respondents are fairly well aligned to the national population (see Figure 40). Concurrently, there are more people in the sector 'involved in paid work' and in that of 'unemployed' among respondents, in comparison to the average Swedish population. Moreover, fewer respondents are involved in education.

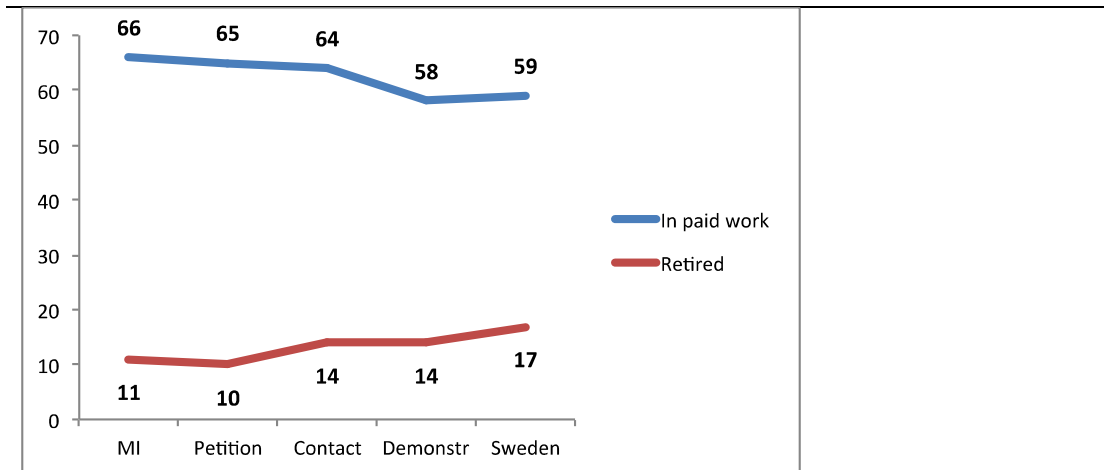
Figure 40. The main activity during the last seven days of MI users and the Swedish population (%)



Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002.

The three groups where the gap between survey respondents and their respective country population is greatest – (i) retired people, (ii) persons doing paid work, and (iii) those involved in education – have been compared against the data for the same groups among people who have engaged in alternative forms of politics (see Figure 41). In the case of retired persons and persons doing paid work, it appears that the survey respondents are more similar to people engaged in alternative participation than to the average Swede. No correlation was found in the case of people involved in education (see Annex I for details).

Figure 41. Alternative forms of engagement in politics, by those in paid work and by retired people (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis in the Figure shows the occupation of MI users ('MI'), signed a petition ('Petition'), contacted a politician/government official ('Contact'), people who took part in demonstrations ('Demonstr'), and the general Swedish population ('Sweden').

Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002.

### Disability

Disability among surveyed users of MI and BEP is less widespread than on the national and municipal levels. This is consistent with the previous findings of a survey of the Scottish population by Carman (2009), which showed that disabled people are somewhat less likely even to be aware of the possibility of a political tool such as petitioning.

BEP respondents with disabilities are five times fewer than amid the general Bristol city population.<sup>128</sup> Broken down further, the figures show that, there are fewer people with severe disability (4%) and with some extent of disability (13%) among MI respondents, in comparison to

<sup>128</sup> It is worth noting that Bristol Council is working towards preventing inequalities, e.g. it plans to offer support in submitting and translating petitions for users of British Sign Language and people with learning difficulties (Bristol Council 2010).

the Swedish levels (see Table 21).<sup>129</sup>

Table 21. MI Respondents with health problems and disabilities (%)

	MI	Swedish population		MI
Yes, a lot	3	7	Yes	4 19
Yes, to some extent	7	20		

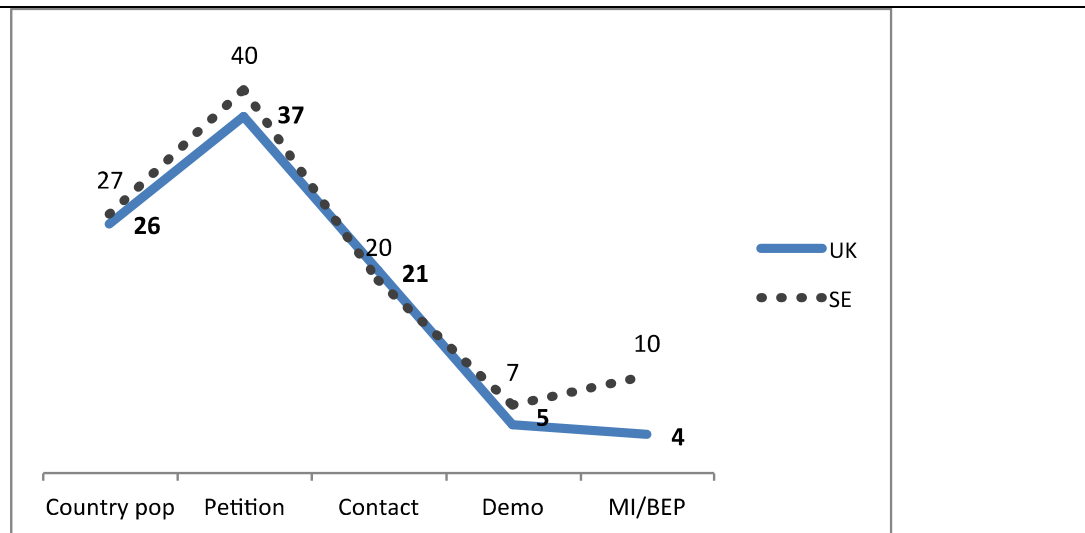
Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002; Whyte et al. 2005. See Annex I for further details.

These data were compared with the equivalent country-level groups in ESS1-2002 who have (in addition) engaged in alternative forms of political participation (see Figure 42). The analysis shows that the proportion of disabled among respondents is considerably smaller with respect to people involved in alternative participation. Hence, in general, the e-petition projects have probably not prompted or facilitated access of disabled people to political engagement. The only exception is that there are more people with health problems among BEP respondents than among those who participate in demonstrations. This could imply that BEP has at least enabled some physically disabled people to engage in politics.

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<sup>129</sup> Paradoxically, occupational statistics in the previous section show that the number of permanently sick and disabled is slightly higher among MI respondents than amid the Swedish population (3% vs. 1%).

Figure 42. People with health problems and disabilities (i) in MI/BEP, (ii) among the general population in Sweden and the UK, and (iii) among those engaged in alternative forms of participation (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis in the Figure shows the data for the general country populations in Sweden and the UK ('Country pop'); for people who signed a petition ('Petition'), contacted a politician/government official ('Contact'), took part in demonstrations ('Demo'), and MI/BEP users ('MI/BEP'). Note well that the categories 'Yes, to some extent' and 'Yes, a lot (of disability)' were merged. The abbreviations 'SE' stands for Sweden and 'UK' for the UK.

Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002.

### Internet access and use

One of the key predictors of online engagement is arguably the extent to which people use and are skilled in digital media (Anduiza et al. 2012). Previous research in the field of political involvement shows that political participation depends greatly on the levels of digital skills, and on an efficient ICT infrastructure (Anduiza et al. 2012 p. 2-3). A selection of these indicators, which are assumed to condition the extent to which the projects under study achieve equality among participants, are examined in this section.

Data on Internet use and skills is available only for MI, not for BEP. A substantive majority of MI respondents use the Internet every day or almost every day (97%). This level of use is much



higher than that of the Swedish population (73%).<sup>130</sup> This pattern is confirmed by a previous survey of MI: all its respondents stated that they use the Internet daily (Åström and Sedelius 2010).<sup>131</sup>

Moreover, an overwhelming majority of respondents are advanced Internet users who use social media and get information about politics online (see Figure 43). Many are active participants and content producers; over half have made reviews or ratings online, while over one third have created their own blogs and uploaded videos. What is more, 25% of users have edited or created a Wiki-type posting. The Figure below suggests that there is a sizeable difference between MI respondents and the general Swedish population. In particular, the gap tends to be large concerning activities such as getting information about politics, social networking, content rating or reviews, blogging and wiki-creation. The disparity between respondents and the national population shrinks only when it comes to uploading videos. Some of these survey statistics are confirmed by Åström and Sedelius' study (2010), which showed that the majority of MI respondents are very familiar with social networks and circa 30% run their own blogs.<sup>132</sup> There is no data on Internet use by Bristol petitioners.

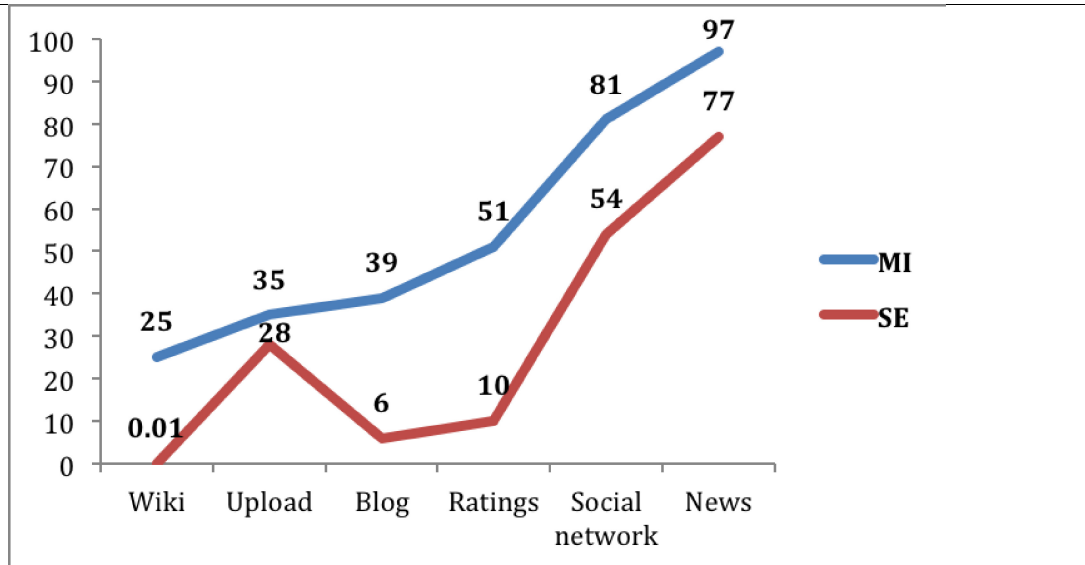
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130 The survey question was "How often have you used the Internet during the last three months?" and N=143. In Sweden, 75% of men and 71% women use the Internet on a daily basis. Source: Statistics Sweden 2010.

131 Only active users were surveyed, i.e. those who had created at least one e-petition.

132 These survey results have to be considered with caution since the survey sample was very small (39 e-petitioners) and included only the most active participants.

Figure 43. Comparison of advanced use of the Internet among MI respondents and individuals in the Swedish population (as percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months)



LEGEND: The X-axis shows the data for those who created their own blog ('Blog'); uploaded videos on e.g. YouTube ('Upload'); posted on an online political forum ('Forum')<sup>133</sup>; provided ratings/reviews of web content ('Ratings'); used online social networking sites ('Social networking'); obtained news or information e.g. about current events or politics ('News'). MI respondents ('MI') and individuals in the Swedish population ('SE').

Source: Author's survey 2011; EUROSTAT 2010c, 2011b and 2011c; Wikipedia Statistics 2011; Pascu 2008; Findahl 2010. See Annex I for further statistical details.

### Political participation

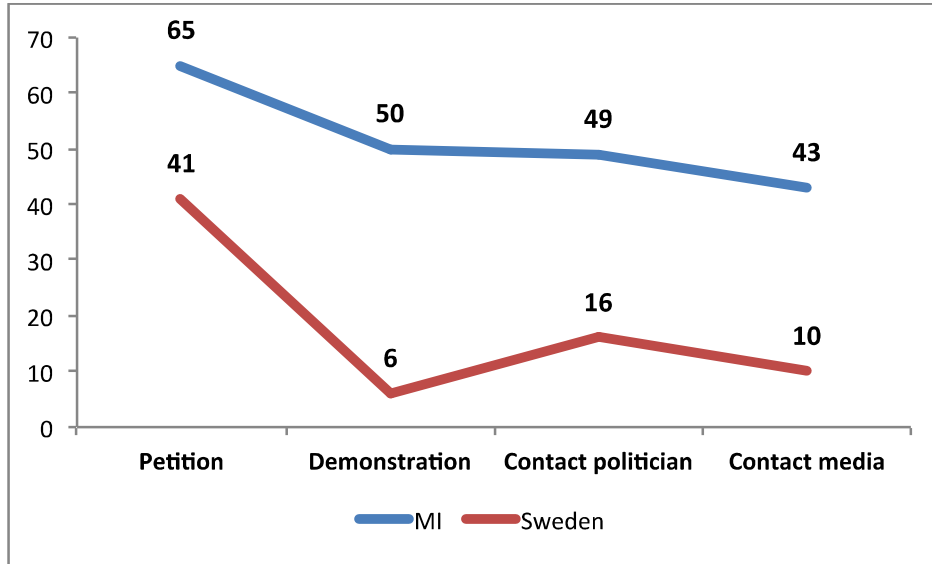
After having reviewed Internet use and online participation, this section now turns to offline participation. An overwhelming majority of MI respondents (91%) voted in the last parliamentary elections. This turnout level is somewhat higher than the national average (85%) (see Annex I for further statistical details). There is no data on electoral participation for BEP.

Figure 44 illustrates that a large proportion (between 43-65%) of MI respondents is engaged in

<sup>133</sup> The statistics for the category "Posted on an online political forum" originates from EUROSTAT (2011d), where the relevant question wording was 'Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites'.

unconventional political activities. These figures appear especially striking when compared to the much lower – in some cases eight times lower - national participation rates.

Figure 44. Political engagement of MI respondents vs. their co-nationals (%)



Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002; Living Conditions Survey 2009. See Annex I for further statistical details.

### *Passive/active participation*

The variable equality is also examined by analysing the balance between passive and active participants, and the potential domination of an active minority. Overall, passive clearly prevails over active participation. In terms of active users, there are important differences between MI

and BEP (see Table 22). MI attracts over 100 new petitions per year,<sup>134</sup> while its archetype with less population of reference - the BEP - gets about 30 e-petitions per year (Åström and Sedelius 2010; O'Malley 2010). As illustrated in Table 22, the number of MI petitions appears to be rather high when compared to some of the established e-petition initiatives in communities with larger populations, such as the Scottish and Queensland Parliaments. MI even rates well compared to nation-wide platform such as the House of Commons and the Downing Street systems in the UK,

<sup>134</sup> This estimate is based on statistics from December 2010, by then, MI had attracted over 400 petitions. On average, it gets about 10 new petitions per month.

if the yearly average as percentage of population is taken into consideration.

Table 22. Petition statistics covering the period from the projects' launch until the end of 2010

	MI	BEP	Scottish Parliament	Queensland Parliament	UK House of Commons	UK Downing Street
Target population	293,909	433,100	5,000,000	4,400,000	62,641,000	62,641,000
Petitions (total)	410	210	-	-	14,092	-
Petitions (yearly average)	100	30	170	30	22,547	29,000
Petitions (yearly average as % of population)	0.03	0.007	0.003	0.0007	0.04	0.05
Signatures	8,615	74,363	-	-	3,000,000	5,500,000
Signatures (as % of population)	3	17	-	-	5	9
Registered users	723	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Author's survey 2011, Malmö City website 2010; Office for National Statistics 2010b; World Bank 2011; Fox 2012; Åström and Sedelius 2010; O'Malley 2010; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2009.

135

The situation looks different with regard to the question of petition signatures. The number of signatures on BEP and MI is quite substantial when compared to their respective city populations (circa 17% and 3%, assuming that every signature is unique). BEP has received considerably more signatures (74,363) than MI (8,615) and also rates much higher than national e-petition systems in the UK, if counted as percentage of population (see Table 22).

Around two thirds of MI respondents have proposed or signed petitions (see Figure 45). In contrast, very active participants (those who have proposed or signed numerous petitions) are few. Moreover, roughly one third of respondents have never proposed or signed any petition.

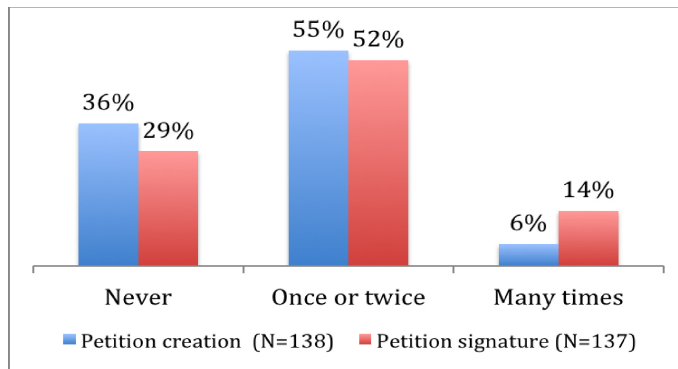
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Statistics for Malmö users date back to October 2010. Population statistics for Malmö originate from Malmö City website (2010). Population statistics for Bristol originates from the Office for National Statistics (2010b). Bristol has an estimated population of 433,100 for the unitary authority in 2009 and a surrounding Larger Urban Zone (LUZ) with an estimated 1,006,600 residents. The UK population data refers to 2011 and originates from the World Bank (2011). The UK House of Commons' yearly average was calculated on the basis of the available data for the period 1 August 2011-14 May 2012 (Fox 2012).

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Note well that the level of activity could be influenced by the survey invitation mode; only people registered on the site were invited to the survey.

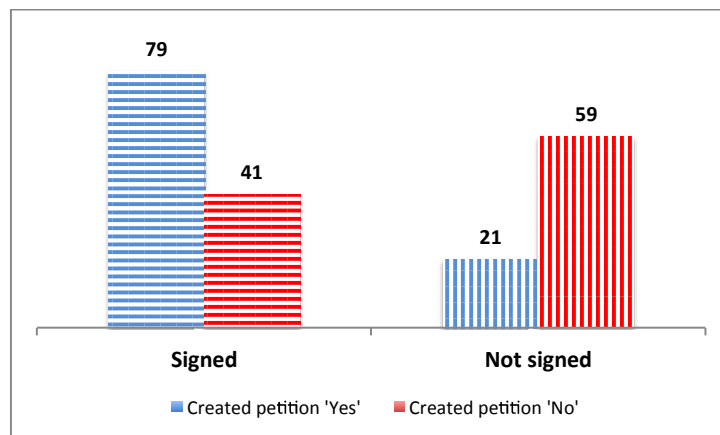
Figure 45. Petitioners and petition signers on MI



Source: Author's survey 2011.

To check whether the same MI respondents were involved in different activities, responses were cross-tabulated as shown in Figure 46. This analysis showed that an overwhelming majority has both signed and created petitions once or twice (79%). In contrast, almost two-thirds (59%) have never signed or created any petitions. In short, respondents are much more active than the average Malmö citizen, only 3% of whom have presumably signed a petition (see Table 22).

Figure 46. Cross tabulation of responses concerning creating and signing petitions on MI (%)

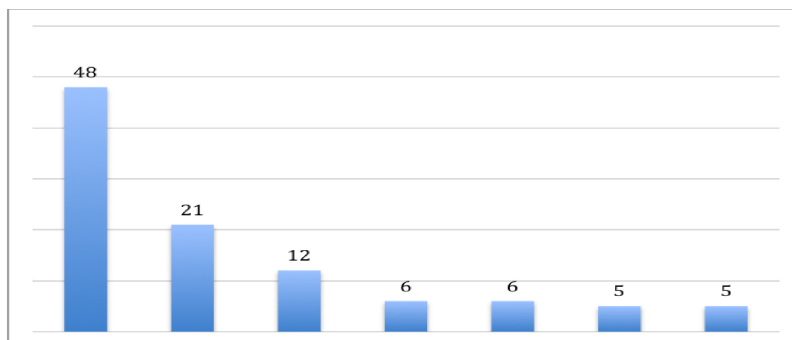


Source: Author's survey 2011.

### Minority domination

Turning to minority domination, two very active MI petitioners have created 48 petitions (16% of the total) and 21 petitions respectively (Åström and Sedelius 2010). MI also had ‘peaks of domination’; in just one day a single person created one third<sup>136</sup> of active petitions (Åström and Sedelius 2010). However, the two above-mentioned petitioners have received little support in terms of signatures: 120 persons signed the former (0.01% of total registered users) and 232 persons signed the latter (0.03%) (MI website 3 September 2010). Moreover, my analysis shows that there are few people who make a large number of contributions (see Figure 47). The active participation on MI resembles the famous ‘Long Tail’;<sup>137</sup> very few people make many contributions, while most make only few contributions.

Figure 47. MI’s Long Tail: number of proposals by the most active petitioners<sup>138</sup>



Source: MI website, consulted on 3 September 2010.

There is no data on domination among BEP users. However, also in Bristol, there are instances when groups, which are not representative of the local population, or not immediately,

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136 The one third is made up of 29 out of 94 active petitions.

137 The phrase the Long Tail was first coined by Chris Anderson in 2004 when he discussed the consequences of the abundance boom created by technology (Chris Anderson. The origins of "The Long Tail". May 08, 2005). This concept has since been used in many circumstances, e.g. to illustrate that a limited number of blogs have many links into them but "the long tail" of millions of blogs may have only a handful of links into them (essay by Clay Shirky: "Power Laws, Weblogs and Inequality").

138 Only users who have made at least five petitions have been included in the graph.

concerned by the issues at stake, probably, dominate the debate. This seems to have been the case in one of the biggest BEP petitions “Save the railway path from becoming a bus route” (January 2006), according to one of the interviewed politicians. The interviewee stated that most people living in the area around the path were positive towards getting a bus service, while most of the signers came from other areas of Bristol.

The driving force behind the petition “Save the railway path from becoming a bus route” was a cyclist association, with obvious interest in cycling paths as opposed to bus routes. According to the interviewee, the decision taken against the bus route caused problems for shopkeepers in the concerned area. The Council addressed this systemic weakness in a newer version of the petition scheme (approved in November 2010), which assesses signatures on the basis of where in Bristol the people who signed live, work or study. Based on this information, the Council is able to decide either to have a full debate, or to call an officer to account at an overview and scrutiny meeting.

In short, the uneven ratio of few active users versus the many registered ones, as well as the comparison to relevant city populations, confirms the evidence about minority domination in the literature. Yet, at least in the case of MI, the participation arena is not completely subjugated, since those petitions launched by the dominant users have received only a limited number of signatures.

#### *Who is behind the petitions?*

Earlier findings show that e-petition users consist of both individuals and pressure groups. A study of the Scottish Parliament found that over half of the petitioners were individual members of the public, about 20% were local community groups and the smallest category was composed of so-called pressure groups carrying out lobbying (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2009). MI displays a similar pattern: an overwhelming majority (83%) claimed to petition on their own behalf (see Table 23). At the same time, 23% were petitioning on behalf of an interest group or an association. As a case in point, a network of civil society organisations in

Malmö were pressing forward one of the most signed petitions on MI, concerning a dangerous factory, at the time of writing (in March 2011).

The share of respondents participating on behalf of a party, a company or a state institution was quite limited (0-2%). In the comment space, some of the respondents mentioned that they petitioned on behalf of their community, neighbours or on behalf of a particular societal group e.g. students or lonely people. Note well that this question could be considered as sensitive, since users who are lobbying or promoting a hidden agenda would not openly say so.

Table 23. MI survey responses “Did you petition/participate on your own behalf or on behalf of an organisation/group?”, "I petitioned/participated..."<sup>139</sup>

	(N)	(%)
...on my own initiative	77	83
... on behalf of an interest group or an association	21	23
... on behalf of a political party	2	2
... on behalf of a private company	2	2
... on behalf of a state institution/authority	0	0

Source: Author's survey 2011.

### *Conclusions*

An analysis of user surveys suggests that women, the lower educated, disabled people and the younger cohort (under-25) are under-represented on both MI and BEP. Moreover, petition signers on BEP seem to be predominantly well-educated city dwellers and wealthy, creative professionals living in Bristol's most sought after neighbourhoods. On a positive note, the elderly are well represented on MI, and black and minority ethnic groups are only slightly under-represented on BEP.

At the same time, the share of MI respondents that participates in elections and in

<sup>139</sup> It was possible to indicate multiple choices on this question: a petition could have been submitted on e.g. both a persons' and an organisation's behalf.



unconventional political activities is higher with respect to the national level. A clear majority of MI respondents use the Internet every day, often in a sophisticated way, by engaging in social media and getting political information online. Their level of activity and use is much higher with respect to the Swedish population. This confirms findings from a study of the German parliament petition system, where the results indicated that the petitioners were characterized by an above average level of general political participation and Internet use (Lindner and Reihm 2011).

In terms of activity, when compared to their respective city populations, the number of petition signatures on BEP and MI is noteworthy (17% and 3%). There is an active minority on MI, which launches many petitions. However, the participation arena is not subjugated since the dominating users manage to gather only a limited number of signatures. What is more, the very low share of respondents petitioning on behalf of others seems to indicate that users are promoting their own opinions on the sites. In short, although the survey samples are limited, they could still point to interesting patterns of inequality. The available data indicate that MI and BEP might be perpetuating many of the traditional inequalities.

After having analysed the first essentialist dimension - equality – the next section will focus on its second dimension – accountability.

### **6.3.2. Accountability**

The accountability criterion implies that users should be able to access objective information. On the whole, MI users have a positive perception of its accountability. More than twice as many think that the information is correct rather than incorrect; very few (4%) think that the information is difficult to understand; and over half consider that the information is relevant. However, every fourth respondent thinks that the petition information is biased (see Figure 48). It is worth noting that this survey question was probably perceived as a rather difficult one: many respondents hesitated before giving an answer.

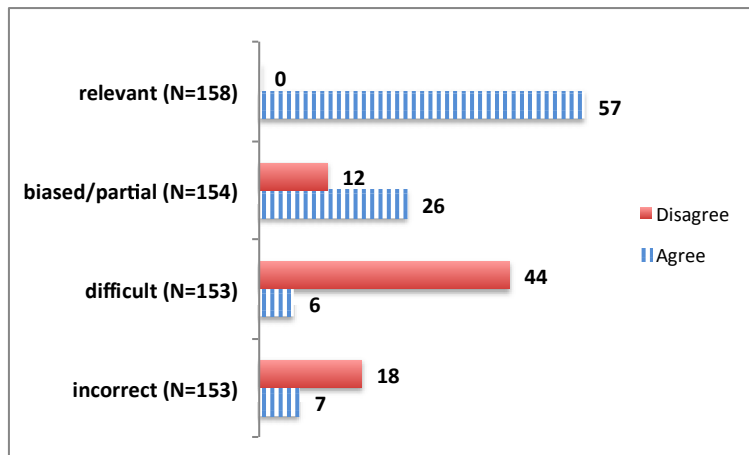
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18 persons skipped the question altogether, while the share of “neither agree nor disagrees” and “don’t knows”

Figure 48. Respondents' opinion about the quality of information on MI (%)



Source: Author's survey 2011.

Many of the respondents (26%) are simply being rational when stating that the information on MI is biased. In fact, on both MI and BEP individual petitioners are in charge of putting together the background information about their proposals. As one of the respondents puts it: "(Malmöinitiativet) is publicity for an issue, so one has to read it through a polemical filter" (Author's survey 2011). Hence, it is not surprising if the information generally consists of one-sided accounts, in favour of the petition that the user is promoting. Moreover, on MI, the amount and detail of information provided by petitioners has generally been rather scarce (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

At the same time, it is worth noting that there are alternative approaches to information on petitioning sites, e.g. the Swedish petition project Argumentera is run by an organisation that frequently offers arguments both for or against a petition issue, and most of the petitions it hosts provide links to organisations and information sources (e.g. portals, media articles) with opposing views.<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting that the number of links is quite limited (one or two for and against), and they probably do not constitute a comprehensive picture of each issue treated.

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was over 21 % on all options, and even reached 40 % of respondents concerning partiality of information.

141 Of course it is difficult to imagine any counter arguments for some petitions, e.g. a petition appealing for freedom of speech.

Argumentera usually links to interest organisations – as opposed to independent information sources - which could give a slightly skewed representation of matters. At any rate, the Argumenta project has innovative approach towards more balanced information.

Moreover, Baena and Kahn's assessment instrument for accountability are helpful in assessing the importance of the information disseminated on the petitioning sites under study (Baena and Kahn 2012). Their approach contains three elements that render information an effective accountability tool: comprehensibility, accessibility, and interactivity (Baena and Kahn 2012). In terms of the first element, comprehensibility, information provided should be understandable by a non-specialist. Given that only 6% of the survey respondents find the information difficult to understand, MI seems to fulfil this requirement. Concerning the second element, accessibility, the e-petition projects do not really allow users to monitor local government performance. They do not aggregate information or give the possibility to compare public data over time. Moreover, users cannot tailor the information to their interests on an ad-hoc basis, e.g. by signing up for thematic alerts. Finally, in terms of interactivity, at the very core of any petition projects is the possibility of giving feedback about government performance. Moreover, both MI and BEP users can share the information and promote a particular petition via social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter). This can both facilitate participation and expand the breadth of information dissemination. However, only in the case of MI can the participants interact with their peers directly on the project platform, by deliberating in the apposite online forum, while BEP does not offer such a possibility.

In conclusion, the information provided on the e-petition platforms under study is easy to understand and to share across social networks. Both BEP and MI allow giving feedback about government performance, and MI even enable users to discuss it with their peers in a forum. However, the e-petition projects do not offer any monitoring tools for comparing information, or by allowing users to tailor data to their needs. Hence, they are not making the information more 'accessible', as termed by Baena and Kahn (2012). Moreover, the background information to petitions is not impartial. The partiality is largely due to the source of the information: users who are promoting their petitions are inclined to provide one-sided accounts of issues. The

potential impartiality of information on the e-petition websites at study is not an appropriate precondition for accountability.

After having analysed the variables 'equality' and 'accountability', which fall into the 'essentialist' set of variables, where the participation process is a constituting element of democratic legitimacy, the next section will examine the first 'instrumentalist' variable - responsiveness - which is focused on project outcomes.

### **6.3.3. Responsiveness**

This section will examine the first 'instrumentalist' variable, responsiveness, which is focused on project outcomes. Responsiveness implies that policy-makers are receptive to citizens' inputs, and do their utmost to incorporate their opinion into policy making.

BEP outperforms MI in terms of political responsiveness to citizens' claims. Even the interviewed politicians affirm that MI did not have any noteworthy impact on political processes in Malmö. Malmö City Council has debated only one petition, proposing a traffic block at one of the main city squares (Möllevångstorget) and even this petition was eventually rejected. As one of the respondents put it "There is no lack of virtual spaces (...) but little demand from politicians, officials and inhabitants. (MI) should be integrated into a more active debate focused on the creation of initiatives and (the participants should) expect that discussions can become uncomfortable for all parties" (Author's survey 2011).<sup>142</sup>

According to a 2010-survey by Åström and Sedelius (2010), only 13% of MI's most active users received a reply from Council politicians. My survey (2011) confirmed a low level of responsiveness: it showed that politicians/civil servants contacted an even smaller share of

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142 Translation by the author from Swedish.

petitioners (7%).<sup>143</sup> In response, some of the contacted users were informed that a similar proposal had already been/was being processed by the municipality, or that the proposed issue would be presented during a forthcoming policy debate or meeting. In the free survey space dedicated to comments, petitioners also stated that they received encouraging words concerning their engagement, or an assurance that their proposal would be forwarded to the responsible unit. One respondent was even promised that his/her proposal would be adopted. The rest were simply either told that the proposed issue did not fall within the municipality's remit, or were given a response formulated in general or vague terms (author's survey 2011).

As illustrated by the Bristol Council website, five BEP petitions have had a certain impact (see Table 20). However, most of these concern issues of minor importance such as safety, a bus route and an artwork – as opposed to substantial policy or community changes. Moreover, other factors apart from the petitions could have influenced the outcomes. According to some of the interviewed councillors, many of the petition proposals in Table 24 would have been fulfilled in any case, and some of them were already planned. As a case in point, the petition “Save the railway path from becoming a bus route” (2006) was probably accepted not only in response to citizens' pressure but also because the bus route turned out to be too expensive. This confirms claims in the literature that it is difficult to distinguish between the effects of different factors that influence policy. Citizens' inputs are just one factor among others, and only rarely play a dominant role in political decision-making (Fagotto and Fung 2009).

However, it is worth underlining the fact that successful e-petitions seem to have boosted the priority of issues and helped to speed up their implementation. It is also noteworthy that one of the interviewed Bristol politicians believes that those petitions that were rejected also play an important political role, e.g. The Big Save Our Parks Petition (March 2011) - which was rejected by the Council majority, despite over 7,000 petition signatures, wide media attention and a united protest by all the opposition parties – may well have affected the outcomes of the local election in May 2011 (Weston 2011).

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143 The 7% represented N=12 persons.

Table 24. BEP petitions with impact

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i># of signatures</i>
<i>Road safety</i>	The Council improved safety along a road where a pedestrian fatality had taken place.	*
<i>Plastic recycling</i>	A petition was raised asking for plastics to be collected within the kerbside collections. This was deemed too expensive but another, recycling improvement was carried out: plastics collection points were increased from 9 to 39.	*
<i>Save the railway path from becoming a bus route (Jan-Dec 2008)</i>	The impact of the petition and related activities was identified as being 'very significant indeed' and 'pivotal' in deferring the development of the bus route plans.	10,206
<i>Keep Banksy art (2006)</i>	A petition asking for a piece of street art by artist Banksy to be kept following calls for its removal. The Council took the decision to let the artwork remain.	3,196
<i>Better lighting and more police patrols on the cycle path (June-Dec 2008)</i>	Due to attacks on the cycle path, there was extensive media coverage of both the incidents and the e-petition. The Council fulfilled the petition requests in a speedy manner.	545

Source: Bristol Council website, accessed on January 2011. (\* *Missing data*).

It is not uncommon that e-petition systems create unfulfilled expectations. In the case of the UK e-petition platform run by the government and the House of Commons (<http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/>), declarations by politicians and the website information have deluded many citizens into believing that once they secured 100,000 signatures, their petitions would be debated in the House of Commons. The e-petition platform states "(that it is) an easy way for the public to engage with politics in this country" and "e-petitions are an easy, personal way for you to influence government and Parliament in the UK"<sup>144</sup>. In practice, this is not the case. For debate, e-petitions have to be championed by an MP, and the Backbench Business

144 Citations retrieved on 26 January 2013 on the House of Commons e-petition website at: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/>

Committee<sup>145</sup> has to schedule a debate, often at very short notice. Media reports and the manifold emails received by the Backbench Business Committee suggest that this has resulted in predominantly negative attitudes among disenchanted petitioners (Fox 2012, p. 8).

In the case of MI, a previous evaluation suggests that citizens perceive it as a great democratic opportunity. A weighty majority - about 80% – believe that MI can (i) strengthen citizens' voice in relation to the City Council; (ii) improve the Council's decision-making basis; and (iii) bring citizens closer to the Council politicians. Over 70% also suppose that MI can enhance citizens' trust in the Council and its politicians (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

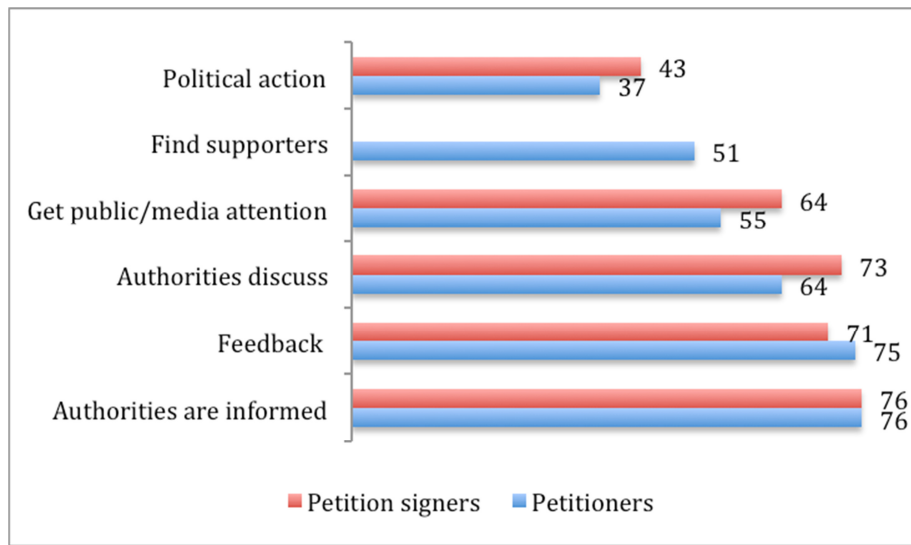
Users also have high expectations in terms of response to their petitions: more than 80% expect politicians to read their proposals (see Figure 49). This is in line with previous findings by Carman (2009), who surveyed the users of the Scottish Parliament's petition system. He found that 86% of respondents expected that their concerns would be listened to by the Parliament. Somewhat fewer MI respondents (70%) expect a relevant committee and/or the Council to be informed, and also wish to have feedback about how the petition was received and how it will be handled. About half of the respondents also expect the related committees and/or the Council to discuss petitions and even to implement them in practice. Some users have even higher expectations; they would like the Council to take an active role in e-petitioning: as one petitioner puts it: "... (the City Council) must have reasonable expectations about how much time people can invest in their proposals. (They) cannot work infinitely on them, it must be the Council's role to develop the proposals and take them further"<sup>146</sup> (Åström and Sedelius 2010).

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145 The committee is responsible for determining the business before the House for approximately one day each week.

146 Author's translation from Swedish.

Figure 49. Expectations of petitioners and petition signers (%)



Source: Author's survey 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

This trend of high expectations is confirmed by the author's survey (2011). Both petitioners and petition signers have strong expectations regarding accountability and responsiveness. Over 70% of respondents anticipate that authorities are informed about petitions and expect feedback about how they were received and processed (see Figure 50). What is more, nearly one third agree strongly with this statement. A substantial majority (64-73%) expects authorities to discuss petitions in a meeting. Furthermore, over half of the respondents hope that the general public/media will notice their petition and that they will then leverage further support. A considerable share (around 40%) also thinks that the petition will prompt legislative or policy-making action.

Morlino (2009) suggests a complementary way of measuring responsiveness: that of citizens' satisfaction with political processes.<sup>147</sup> In regard to e-democracy projects, this could be a question about how satisfied users are with the participatory process. In fact, looking at the

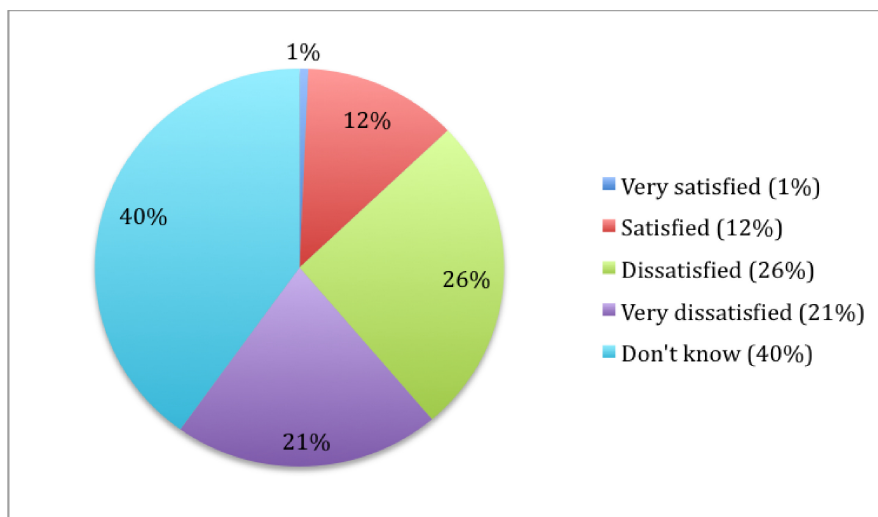
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147 Morlino also acknowledges that considering the complexity of policy environments, decision-makers can manipulate citizens' perceptions of responsiveness. Although this conceptualization has its drawbacks, it can be used as a proxy for direct effects in cases where there is no documentation reflecting any policy change as a result of citizens' input.



survey data, the gap between expectations and political responsiveness is underpinned by a high level of dissatisfaction: almost half of the respondents (47%) are dissatisfied with the way in which the municipality handles submitted petitions (see Figure 50). A fifth of respondent is very dissatisfied with the process, while only 1% is very satisfied. However, it is also worth noting that a large share of respondents was weary of answering this question: 40% stated “don’t know” and 17% skipped the question altogether.<sup>148</sup> This could be a result of the respondents’ uncertainty about what to expect after petition closure. In fact, Malmö City’s homepage offers little information about how petitions are processed.

Figure 50. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with how the municipality handles petitions after the signature collection is finished? (N=147)



Source: Author’s survey 2011.

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148 30 persons out of 177 skipped the question.

Finally, Frame 3 below shows several relevant comments from respondents. These mostly express frustration and disappointment with MI.

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**Frame 3. Comments from MI respondents**

"Malmöinitiativet is a hypocrisy, just a channel to make people feel heard when they really aren't."

"The feedback on my initiative was very poor. I was promised that an officer would review the petition. Instead, the gathered signatures did not play any role and I was asked to submit a "Citizens' proposal". This felt wrong since I expected the Malmöinitiativet to be 'a full-fledged system' that allowed people to reach decision-makers."

"Poor feedback. Suggestions should be addressed at the city district level and also be written about in the neighbourhood newspaper".

"Now, it feels like a way for politicians to avoid receiving e-mail, like "Let them write here, we can just delete it when they have forgotten about it. A sort of 'kill two birds with one stone'; they (citizens) may ease their hearts and we (politicians) do not have to sit and answer emails all day." Or those petitions that are actually implemented simply do not get due visibility. Personally, I became less interested in influencing policy after my participation in Malmöinitiativet, since I understood that nobody cared about what I had to say."

"I suspect that you will reach the same conclusion that many Malmö residents already noted; that all measures allegedly aiming at increasing participation/democracy, are merely 'window dressing'. No change, except that politicians give the impression of being involved. "

"The initiative would be good if politicians had the smallest interest in it. Unfortunately, even the opposition seems uninterested. "

"I was curious about Malmöinitiativet to begin with and thought it was a good initiative, but I lost interest fairly soon. It is too cumbersome and slow. I longed for a little faster contact with politicians and officials."

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149 Author's translation from Swedish.

But it does not work that way."

"(I) had expected feedback of any kind. Nobody got back to me. Therefore, I think that it (MI) is just the same old sham-democracy initiative that we encounter on a daily basis ... At some point, one would have wished to be pleasantly surprised by some feedback."

There is no detailed data about what BEP petitioners expect from the project. However, an evaluation of BEP indicates that users had modest expectations that their views would have some impact on decision-making, but strong expectations that the council would in any case publish some sort of response to their input. Overall, citizens were satisfied with the BEP arrangements (Macintosh et al. 2005, p. 86).

#### *Political support*

This section elaborates on the political support and the democratic intentions of Malmö and Bristol municipalities towards e-petition projects. The intentions are mapped against the strong and thin conceptions of e-democracy. This includes a comparison of (i) the municipalities' formal objectives concerning the e-democracy project as stated on the web, in accessible protocols and policy documents; and (ii) their implicit intentions, i.e. what they actually expected of it.

To start with, both municipalities have extensive experience with participatory tools. BEP and MI are only two of a series of on- and offline participatory initiatives run by Bristol and Malmö municipalities. Bristol Council began to experiment with e-democracy as early as 2000 and has conducted a multitude of e-participation projects since then, including deliberative polling tools, e-voting and an e-panel. Malmö is also a pioneer in digital tools, and has adopted strong participatory tools such as 'citizen proposals' (medborgarförslag), by which residents can propose ideas that are mandatorily discussed by the Council. Both municipalities are hence used to receiving bottom-up policy proposals and are, according to some of the interviewed

politicians (Philipson 2010; Stone 2011),<sup>150</sup> prepared for a dialogue with citizens. The local politicians and civil servants recognize that political innovations are positive and seem to approve of citizens' participation in politics outside the elections. Moreover, the two Councils have made a considerable effort in learning how to engage with citizens through activities such as study trips, conferences and project evaluations.

At the time of its launch, BEP was part of the Local e-Democracy National Project (LeNP). The LeNP was set up with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to help local authorities exploit the potential of new technologies for democratic renewal. The project aimed to bring together councils, central government and the private sector to deliver local e-Government solutions. Some of the key LeNP objectives were very much in line with the 'strong democracy' perspective: to (i) promote e-democracy to support, complement and enhance the activities of representative government (but not to undermine it); (ii) make decision-making processes more transparent; (iii) provide opportunities for negotiation and consensus building; (iii) improve the inclusiveness of policy-making, or, at least, not to further disadvantage those who are already in some way excluded or less powerful in the political process; (iv) ensure that citizen engagement is closely linked to decision-making processes and that those who take decisions are responsive to the communities which they serve (Macintosh et al. 2005, p. 89).

BEP had strong support from councillors right from the start (Macintosh et al. 2005). Councillors consider the e-petition system to be a way in which people can express their approval or concerns, and bring issues to the attention of the local politicians. The leader of the Council has also made it clear that the e-petition project should be focused on democratic outcomes (Brewin undated). The politicians seem to agree that BEP serves as a basis for starting a debate or protesting against Council decisions, rather than for generating ideas. From their point of view, BEP works similarly to a poll, by indicating the level of support from the population for certain issues.

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Please see the interview list in the Annex for references.

In Bristol, both politicians and civil servants are equally keen to engage with citizens. According to an evaluation back in 2005, officers and members of the Council almost unanimously supported the project. Councillors and departments who are directly involved in the day-to-day servicing of representative government also showed a considerable commitment to the project. Moreover, the evaluation found that BEP made the councillors' role more visible among the general public, while offering greater convenience to citizens who wish to raise concerns with their council (Whyte et al. 2005). The positive attitude of Bristol politicians and officials was also confirmed by the interviews carried out within the framework of the thesis in 2011.

A more concrete confirmation of the strong support for BEP by the local government is the fact that the petition process is fully visible and institutionalized. All petitions are automatically referred to a council officer, committee or councillor for consideration. Bristol council also increased the efficiency and transparency of the petition process by new BEP guidelines in November 2010. The updated scheme has improved procedural visibility and offers support to petitioners. Petitioners get acknowledgements of receipt and notifications of results; and a response summary with links to relevant committee papers is accessible for all on the website. The petition organizer receives written confirmation of the outcome of the full Council debate, of the Council's decision and an explanation, in the event of the Council not being able to take the action that has been requested. Petitioners may also seek advice from the Council's Democratic Services, about how to frame their petitions and how their proposals might be considered (Bristol City Council Petitions Scheme 2012).

Moreover, the updated guidelines allow petitioners to prompt a full Council debate if they gather over 3,500 signatures (Bristol City Council Petitions Scheme 2012). According to some of the interviewed politicians, this has resulted in an increased importance for BEP. In fact, the threshold is more generous than that proposed by the national statutory guidance, which recommended 5% of the local population. In the case of Bristol, the 5% threshold amounts to 21,000 signatures, a number that the Council thought would be reached very rarely. The new

threshold of 3,500 corresponds to 1% of the adult population of Bristol, and the councillors feel it is an appropriate figure, signifying a substantial level of interest, to justify a full Council debate. However, the Author's analysis of website statistics shows that between 2008-2011 only two petitions managed to gather over 3,500 signatures, one of which effectively reached over 21,000 signatures.<sup>151</sup> This means that the lower threshold adopted is not as significant as claimed.

The updated scheme also has another threshold of 1,000 signatures, at which petitioners are allowed to request that a relevant Council officer be consulted. Between 2008 and 2011, only eight out of 127 petitions have reached this threshold.<sup>152</sup> It should be recognised that low (or no) thresholds might result in an excessive workload for the relevant council. However, considering the current number of petitions above the threshold, the threshold could be raised without submerging the Bristol Council. Hence, both in terms of democratic intentions and empowerment of petitioners, the new BEP is still rather weak. Not many petitions will provoke Council reactions in the future, unless many more people start engaging with BEP.

Bristol politicians' concerns about the petition systems regard, in the main, domination by certain groups of population, division of communities over issues and the fact that politicians use e-petitions for campaigning purposes before local elections. One of the Bristol councillors also expressed concerns over the updated Petition Scheme that allows citizens to present their petition in front of the Council in person, suggesting that this might result in long and inefficient Council sessions. Moreover, the politicians are aware of the risk of ignoring citizens' proposals. According to the interviews carried out with politicians, there are already signs of apathy among people in response to the rejection of a widely supported petition. Some interviewees even predicted that the petitioners might 'get back' at the ruling party, which rejected the petition, at

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151  
Statistics from BEP website consulted on 11 August 2011.

152  
Statistics from BEP website consulted on 11 August 2011.

the upcoming election.

On the whole, the attitudes of Malmö politicians towards new methods of citizen engagement tend also to be open-minded. They see it as an opportunity for meeting people on their own terms and to hear about their everyday problems. They also aim at reaching people who do not generally engage, and would like to improve residents' knowledge about politics by increasing the number of information channels. Some local politicians even adopt a strong democracy-attitude by stating that politicians should go beyond 'polite listening'; start systematising the dialogue with citizens and responding to them seriously (Philipson 2010). They consider MI to be a tool for expressing the will of the people and are convinced that political decisions could be improved through citizens' participation (Nilsson 2010). Three out of the six interviewed politicians go even further, by suggesting that MI should be merged with the 'citizen proposals'-instrument, which would mean that all MI petitions have to be answered to (Philipson, Gillberg and Nilsson 2010).

Right at its launch, MI was marketed as a project of political unity. On the main campaign photo, there are three politicians representing the political landscape from the left to the right: the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokraterna) and the Moderate Party (Moderaterna). Two years into the project (2011), MI still enjoys the support of the entire range of political parties making up the Malmö City Council. All of the interviewed politicians (from different and opposing parties) are positive towards the project.

The initial purpose of the MI was to create a new arena for citizens' influence, and a platform where politicians could reach and discuss with new citizen groups (Projektplan 2008). The Council aimed at developing an effective procedure in order to manage MI, where (i) the principal petitioner would be contacted and supported, (ii) the relevant Council Committee would be informed about new petitions on a monthly basis and (iii) the petition page updated with information regarding the progress of the petition and related decisions (Persson 2008; Projektplan 2008). Just after the official project launch, politicians declared in the local press

that MI would broaden citizens' engagement in everyday politics, and that they would listen to and consider their proposals.

In practice, however, these have remained unfulfilled promises. Despite the positive attitude towards MI, there seem to be no real interest in exploiting the full potential of the petitioning scheme. The consideration of petitions is left to the voluntary initiative of politicians or civil servants. The Steering Group in charge of Malmöinitiativet has decided that they should not be forced to answer the petitioners (Nilmander 2009). The members of Steering Group and the political secretaries of parties can choose to consult the e-petitioning pages, pick the 'best proposals' and report back on them to their party. MI users are expected to be creative within a controlled framework, while politicians are free to listen or to ignore their proposals.

My interviews (2010) suggest that MI is generally seen more as an open forum for ideas and opinions than as a petition service. An interviewed Malmö politician affirms that the Steering Group members should act as 'ambassadors' for MI in the relevant Council committees (Nilsson 2010). At the same time, considering that these ambassador roles are not institutionalized, the promotion of petitions in committees most likely depends on the politicians' enthusiasm about the project, or a single petition. Even when politicians present petitions to their party group, there is no standard follow-up routine. Hence, many of the petitions simply get lost in the process. Only a few politicians, distributed evenly across the political parties, are active on MI. According to the MI website (consulted in September 2010), two politicians have launched e-petitions; one politician has signed a petition, while three have participated in the discussion forum.

On a positive note, the mechanism for channelling proposals seems to have improved lately. After the interviews and the user survey in the framework of this thesis were completed, the Malmö council introduced a new feature to guarantee that if at least 100 persons sign a petition, it is forwarded to the relevant Council committee as an information note (Malmö City 2011). From the MI website it appears that the relevant committees have taken the time to respond in



writing to the petitioners.

In sum, notwithstanding the generally positive attitude towards MI, many politicians are still resistant to a formalization of the process. They hold on to the notion of representative democracy, and consider direct democracy approaches alien. E-petitioning is hence considered to be a channel for improving the visibility of politics and politicians. From this perspective, they would like citizens to take greater interest in the preconditions for complex decisions, and to empathize with the difficult choices that the politicians have to make.

The more critical Malmö politicians believe that the municipality lacks the necessary resources to process and respond to all incoming citizen's suggestions. Some of them even claim that MI is a 'leftish' invention, of little value (Åström and Sedelius 2010). According to one of the thesis interviewees, local politicians are interested in accepting petitions because this enables them to have more power within their own party. Similarly to the Bristol councillors, Malmö politicians also perceive some risks related to petitioning. They see digital divides as problematic, and are aware that the petitioners hardly constitute a representative sample of the population. Consequently, they are concerned that some groups in society will be favoured on the expense of others. Moreover, one interviewed politician emphasized that not all proposals are acceptable from a democratic point of view, even when they represent people's will, for example in the case of petitions that promote discriminatory measures (Nilsson 2010).

The political support for MI and BEP differs at the conceptual level. The Malmö politicians consider MI to be a bulletin board, while the Bristol politicians are ready to listen to citizens and to incorporate (at least some of) the proposals in their decision-making processes. In the case of MI, politicians emphasize that citizens' participation has to take place within the framework of representative democracy. They see a threat that MI might clash with principles of representative democracy. The common notion is that once the people have elected the politicians, these politicians must be given the opportunity to rule according to their proper judgement. While discussing MI, certain interviewees emphasized the importance of an efficient

e-government, over that of e-democracy. The overall idea behind MI is to strengthen and legitimize, but not to change the type of democracy. This attachment to traditional democracy processes is partly due to a perceived threat to party power. Politicians are worried about the consequences e-democracy might have for the role of the parties and for the electoral turnout (Åström and Sedelius 2010). Hence, they are adopting a thin approach to democracy and participation. Citizens are seen as sources of information and opinions rather than as partners (Fagan et al. 2006).

### *Civic pressure*

Both BEP and MI have turned out to be compelling platforms for civic mobilization. According to interviews with Bristol politicians, BEP has triggered both protests and demonstrations. The Big Save Our Parks Petition (March 2011) resulted in lively meetings outside the Council, and prompted people to engage in Council debates. What is more, it spurred the creation of the volunteer groups that now help to take care of Council parks. Three of BEP's successful petitions (*Keep Banksy art, Save the railway path and Better lighting and more police patrols on the cycle path*) attracted a large number of signatures and received extensive coverage in the local, national and even international media (TV, radio, newspapers). The *Save the railway path*-petition also gained wide publicity via the Sustrans and other 'green' networks, public demonstrations and meetings, campaign websites and online groups. This e-petition attracted the highest number of petition signatures (over 10,000) ever since the system was launched in 2004 (see Table 20).

On MI, the biggest and fastest moving mobilization drive originates from the most signed e-petition since the project launch (over 2,700 signatures).<sup>153</sup> This petition was concerned with a factory that handles a dangerous substance (propylene oxide), located in the middle of a residential neighbourhood. The network of civil society organisations and individuals created around the e-petition was very well organized. They already ran their own web site that

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153 Source: MI web site 3 September 2010.

contained information about different state authorities that people could contact to protest about the factory, a media archive, a signature gathering section and – most impressively - an agenda of physical activities such as open meetings, protest flash mobs<sup>154</sup> and demonstrations (Giftfri Stad 2010). The network's promotion on Facebook, in the blogosphere, and in the traditional press, as well as on TV, spread information widely among the general public. According to Åström and Sedelius (2010), the speed of communication contributed to the feeling of being engaged, among like-minded participants. The signatures in this case escalated very quickly: just two days after the launch, the petition boasted nearly 1,000 signatures (MI web site on 3 September 2010; Lindhe 2010). The participation of 13 already established CSOs, the Left Party and an association affiliated to the Social Democrats in the network certainly contributed to the excellent promotion and organisation around the petition.

Another petition that managed to mobilize a fairly large number of people put one of Malmö's focal squares – Möllevångstorget - in the spotlight (see Frame 4). This petition caught the attention of politicians by the sheer numbers of people participating, and by its leverage on social networks and the media, which amplified the effect of the mobilization. The story was picked up by the traditional media and received a lot of attention among the general public, which obliged the politicians to respond publicly to participants.

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154 The term flash mob is generally applied only to gatherings organized via telecommunications, social media, or viral emails. Flash mobs are a specific form of smart mob, originally describing a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, do something unusual for a brief period of time, and then quickly disperse. The term flash mob is claimed to originate from the term "smart mob", i.e. a large group of people who gather in a (usually) predetermined location, perform some brief action, and then quickly disperse.

#### **Frame 4. An MI petition that galvanized local residents:**

##### **Möllevångstorget free from cars!**

In October 2008, a proposal to close off Möllevångstorget - a central market square – to traffic was launched on MI. It received many signatures (324), placing itself at third place on the list of the most signed e-petitions (as of November 2009, Åström and Sedelius 2010). The initiator did not stop at this; he launched a Facebook group – reaching 675 members in September 2010- to gather more supporters and reach out with information (Facebook 8 September 2010). What is more, he transformed the petition

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into a citizen proposal, which requires consideration by the Council within a year. (Södra Innerstadens Neighbourhood Council 2009). The making of a citizen proposal certainly contributed to the fact that the Traffic Committee discussed the petition but the broad media attention was also influential (Interview with the MI project manager 2010).

The Traffic Committee voted against the proposal, with the reasoning that the proposed traffic block would hinder the flow of public transport and cars to and from the surrounding neighbourhood; increase the amount of kilometres driven in the area and on the surrounding streets; and worsen road safety (Traffic committee minutes 19 August 2009). Two nearby streets had been previously closed for car traffic and, according to the committee chair; additional traffic blocks would kill commerce in the market place (Morfiadakis 2010). However, for some local politicians, the request would not be defeated by this negative response. Both the Green and the Left party representatives were against the rejection; one of them stated in the local newspaper that it was only a matter of time before the square became free of traffic (Persson 2009).

Turning to media visibility, BEP shows better overall results than MI as regards prominence on the web. According to Google measures (average score on all three categories: general hits, blogs and news), BEP ranks higher than MI (Table 25). Nevertheless, MI scores exceptionally well on general web visibility compared to BEP. Considering that MI is an initiative targeted at Malmö city residents, it has excellent online visibility (17,900 general Google hits). At the same time, it is somewhat surprising that BEP appears to have fewer general Google hits than MI, especially

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155 Municipal councils can voluntarily introduce the Citizen Proposal (Medborgarförslag) modality, which gives residents the right to make Proposals to the council. A Citizen Proposal has to be considered by the council within a year of its submission.

since Bristol municipality has invested quite heavily in all sorts of digital tools, e.g. webcasting, blogs, quick polls and interactive voting.

Table 25. Google hits for MI and BEP

<i>Search tool</i>	<b>MI</b>	<b>My score*</b>	<b>BEP</b>	<b>My score*</b>
Google	11,100-17,900	1	451-4,990	2
Google blogs	396	2	4,770	1
Google news archive	0	2	6	1
	<b>Composite score**</b>	<b>1.7</b>		<b>1.3</b>

*\* In 'my score' 1 is the highest, while 4 is the lowest score. My scores are set on the basis of how many hits each project got, e.g. BEP gets score 1 in news since it has the highest number of hits; MI gets 2 since it has the next best number of hits.*

*\*\* The composite score is calculated as the average score of the three hit dimensions (general, blogs, news).*

Source: Google search on 9 March 2012. See Annex I for further statistical details.

The Social mention results roughly confirm BEP's stronger online presence (69 mentions) with respect to MI (48 mentions),<sup>156</sup> while Alexa only reports metrics regarding the municipality websites that host the petition pages.

In terms of traditional media presence, MI has received attention in the daily press and on radio, and appeared on TV (Åström and Sedelius 2010). Despite a certain extent of media coverage, many Malmö residents are not yet aware of MI. Among Malmö Panel<sup>157</sup> participants, 19% have no opinion about MI. This indicates that they are probably unaware of its existence. The limited awareness about MI has also emerged from interviews with citizens carried out in the framework of the 2010 evaluation of the Malmö Panel and MI (Åström and Sedelius 2010). What is more, not only citizens but also some of the consulted Malmö politicians were unaware

156 Scores retrieved on 17 January 2011 at <http://socialmention.com> The combinations "initiativet.malmo.se" and "epetitions.bristol.gov.uk" were searched for.

157 Malmö Panel is another participatory tool of the Council where people are selected for consultation as a representative sample of city residents.

of MI or had a very approximate idea about its aims and functioning (Author's interviews 2010).

### *Conclusions*

In conclusion, both MI and BEP have managed to achieve some 'access responsiveness'. This deduction can be made based on the fact that the Councils decided to create these e-petitioning systems in the first place. Moreover, it is clear that BEP has outrivaled MI by reaching 'output responsiveness'. Yet, the 'output' does not come in the shape of important policy changes, but as improvements in minor amenities, e.g. improved road safety, better lighting and more police patrols in target areas.

The interviews with politicians corroborate scholarly claims about the difficulty in distinguishing between different factors that influence policy (Fagotto and Fung 2009). They confirm that a petition is just one factor among others, and rarely plays a dominant role in political decisions. However, successful BEP petitions seem to have boosted the priority of issues and helped to speed up the implementation of reforms. It is also noteworthy that rejected petitions too can play a political role and are even sometimes assumed to affect electoral outcomes.

Moreover, there is a considerable gap between responsiveness and user expectations. MI has so far only shown a weak response to its petitions, while its users have very strong expectations. Over 70% of survey respondents anticipate that authorities will be informed about petitions and expect feedback about how they were received and processed. A considerable share also expects authorities to discuss petitions in a meeting, and even thinks that they should prompt policy-making action. These expectations are not met in reality.

Turning to democratic intentions, in principle, BEP and MI both enjoy considerable political support. In practice, Malmö politicians are not really committed to exploiting the full potential of the petitioning scheme. They consider it rather as bulletin board that they can consult now and then, but without assuming responsibility to respond. In contrast, Bristol Council has fully endorsed e-petitioning: BEP is institutionalised and integrated into the existing decision-making

system. This finding confirms the assumption about the significance of institutionalization for achieving responsiveness (Fung 2006). To date, only five BEP petitions have been implemented and none of them has brought about any major policy change. This suggests that policy-makers are committed to the idea of citizens' engagement, but not to the actual sharing of power with citizens.

Both MI and BEP have managed to mobilise the masses, including petition signers and people outside the petition system. Often relying on support from organised civil society, they have prompted campaigns, flashmobs and demonstrations. MI showcases the highest number of petitions but BEP boasts almost ten times more petition signatures. Moreover, BEP's biggest petition has attracted more signatures than the MI's equivalent. Overall, BEP has better online visibility than MI, according to Social Mention, Google blogs and Google news ratings, even if MI excels in overall Google hits. In short, civic pressure as in the amount of petition signatures seems to influence responsiveness to some extent. However, there does not seem to be any obvious correlation between media visibility and political responsiveness.

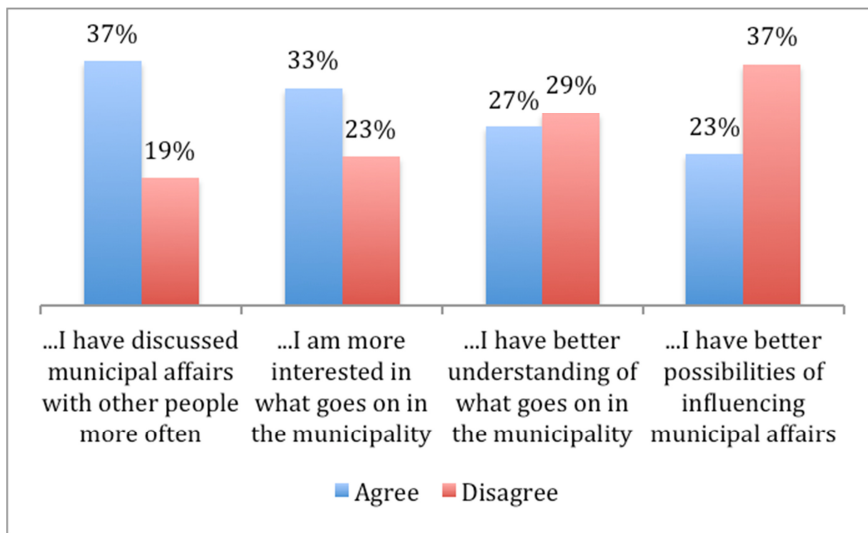
After a thorough examination of political responsiveness to e-petitioning projects, the second instrumentalist dimension - civic literacy – will be analysed in the next section.

#### **6.3.4. Civic literacy**

Civic literacy is operationalized as increased understanding of and interest in politics, qualities which in turn stimulate political participation (Milner 2004). There are strong indications that MI has boosted civic literacy among participants. A large share of MI respondents state that they have an increased interest in what goes on in the municipality (33%) and that they have discussed municipal affairs with other people more frequently (37%) after their participation in MI (see Figure 51). About one fourth of respondents also think that they have a better understanding of what goes on in the municipality, and improved possibilities to influence municipal affairs. Still, those who disagree with these statements are more numerous, and between 15-17% even disagree strongly. It is also noteworthy that about one third of

respondents (between 28-35%) are uncertain about what to answer. This could be because of the unclear message conveyed by the Malmo municipality, about the purpose of MI, and about the processing of petitions. There is no data on BEP users in this respect.

Figure 51. OP and ND respondents' expectations regarding participation outcomes

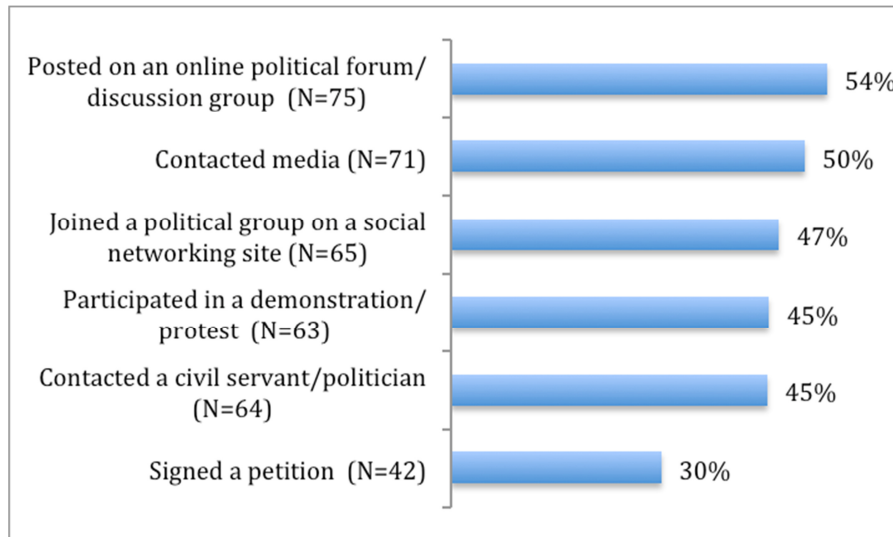


Source: Authors' surveys 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

As concerns stimulus to participation, the MI survey reveals that about half of respondents had never engaged in the political activities under consideration (see Figure 52). Predictably, considerably fewer respondents had never engaged in petition signing (30%). This implies that MI managed to capture the attention of a considerable share of respondents who were normally politically inactive. We lack the relevant data for BEP but an evaluation report from 2005 indicates that most of the users had not been previously engaged locally (Macintosh et al. 2005, p. 86).



Figure 52. MI respondents who *never* engaged in any of the political activities under consideration



Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

An evaluation of BEP affirmed that e-petitioning strengthens 'civic mindedness'. Allegedly, BEP has been mainly used by people who believe that community action can influence policy-making, but who have not previously taken such action (Whyte et al. 2005). Similarly, previous research by Åström and Sedelius (2010) showed that over half of the respondents would not have made their proposals other than through MI. My survey confirms this finding: 57% of respondents stated that they would (probably) not have made their proposals other than on MI.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Åström and Sedelius found that 94% believe that MI has made it easier to petition Malmö City.

At the same time, in the case of MI, very few respondents (between 3-8%) have been politically active only after (and not before) their engagement in MI (see Annex I for further details). These two aforementioned results could be due to the fact that most of the survey respondents are already very active politically (see chapter 6.2.3. Responsiveness for data regarding respondents

<sup>158</sup> Their share is considerably higher than those who responded that they (probably) would have (42%), and only 12% were definitely certain that they would have used another channel to express their voice.

who were involved in political activities compared to country populations), and also because not enough time passed between their engagement in MI and the survey, for them to seize an occasion to engage.

The literacy effect comes into action again when an overwhelming majority (78%)<sup>159</sup> state that they would like to get involved in any of the above-mentioned political activities in the future. What is more, a cross tabulation of answers reveals that between 65-70% of respondents who had *never* participated in any of the political activities in Figure 53 above are inclined to engage in the future (see Annex I for further statistical details). This suggests that MI stimulates political participation.

In sum, many of the participants increased their knowledge and interest in politics thanks to the projects. A substantial share of survey respondents also stated that they would not have made their proposals if it had not been for project platforms. MI and BEP have strengthened the civic mindedness of their users and made it easier to petition municipalities (Whyte et al. 2005; Åström and Sedelius 2010). A substantial majority of survey respondents are also committed to getting involved in political activities in the future, thanks to the e-petition projects. Finally, with reference to the initial assumption about what causes responsiveness, BEP performs better on most indicators and has – in contrast to MI – achieved some political impact.

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159 The 78% correspond to N=110. 6% answered 'no' and 15% said 'don't know' to the question "Would you consider doing any of the abovementioned activities in the future?".

## 6.4. Conclusions

Starting with the socio-demographic indicators, the survey results indicate that certain groups that are traditionally less politically active are even more absent from e-petitioning projects. Overall, the characteristics of MI and BEP users confirm the traditional pattern of under-representation in politics of certain groups such as women, younger people and those with low levels of education. These findings also corroborate the results from studies of the Scottish and German petition systems, which concluded that petitioners come from a narrow socio-demographic range (Carman 2009; Lindner and Reihm 2011).

At the same time, the share of MI respondents that participates in elections and in unconventional political activities is higher with respect to the national level. A clear majority of MI respondents use the Internet every day, some at a sophisticated level, by engaging in social media and accessing political information online. Their level of activity and use is much higher with respect to the Swedish population at large. This confirms findings from a study of the German parliament petition system, where the results indicated that petitioners were characterized by an above average level of general political participation and Internet use (Lindner and Reihm 2011). In terms of petition activity, when compared to their respective city population, the number of petition signatures on BEP and MI is quite noteworthy (17% and 3%). There is an active minority on MI but the participation arena is not subjugated, since the dominant users manage to gather only a limited number of signatures.

Generally, the survey results suggest that MI and BEP are perpetuating many of the traditional inequalities. From the essentialist perspective, the projects do not meet the equality criterion, which poses problems of input-legitimacy to the outcomes of parliamentary informatics projects (Blanco and Lowndes 2011). The available data generally support the reinforcement thesis according to which the Internet strengthens established patterns of elite political communication (Norris 2001; Bimber 2003).

Turning to the second essentialist dimension - accountability - the MI respondents generally

have a high regard for the information provided on the website. At the same time, many are aware that this information can be biased: users who are promoting their petitions are inclined to provide one-sided accounts of issues.

Concerning the first instrumentalist dimension - responsiveness – the analysis points to few instances when the projects have achieved political influence. Arguably, according to Schumaker's scale (1975), both projects have managed to achieve some 'access responsiveness'. This deduction can be made firstly on the basis of the very fact that the Councils decided to create these e-petitioning systems in the first place. This points to a certain willingness to listen to citizens' concerns. Secondly, it is clear that BEP has outperformed MI by reaching 'output responsiveness'. Yet, the 'output' does not come in the shape of important policy changes, but as minor improvements in amenities, e.g. improved road safety, better lighting and more police patrols in target areas. However, successful BEP petitions seem to have boosted the priority of such issues and helped to speed up their implementation.

At the same time, the democratic intentions of the two Councils turn out to be very different. The Malmö politicians are not really committed to exploiting the full potential of the petitioning scheme. Leaning towards the thin democracy approach, they consider MI to be a bulletin board that helps them in tracking the mood of the electorate. In contrast, Bristol Council has actually integrated BEP into the existing decision-making system. This finding confirms the assumption about the significance of institutionalization in achieving responsiveness (Fung 2006).

Both MI and BEP have managed to mobilize the masses, including petition signers and people outside the petition system. Often relying on support from organised civil society, they have prompted campaigns, flash mobs and demonstrations. MI showcases the highest number of petitions but BEP boasts almost ten times more petition signatures. The fact that BEP is institutionalized, enjoys more political support and has attracted more signatures than MI seems to have helped its petitions to achieve more impact on local affairs.

At the same time, my analysis showed that civic pressure arising within e-petition projects also carries potential risks. If consideration of e-democracy causes is based mainly on media visibility and the quantity of signatures or followers, the media and campaigning organizations with lobbying resources will have greater chances than ordinary citizens to impact on politics (Fox 2012, p. 13).<sup>160</sup> In the case of BEP, a cyclist association appears to have applied significant civic pressure to stop the construction of a bus route, while most people living in the area were positive towards getting a bus service.

Finally, both BEP and MI seem to have increased civic literacy among participants. Many of the MI participants have increased their knowledge of and interest in politics, thanks to the project. A considerable share of MI respondents who had not previously engaged politically, and who would not have made their proposals other than on the website, would now consider engaging in politics in the future. MI and BEP have strengthened the civic mindedness of their users and made it easier to petition municipalities (Whyte et al. 2005; Åström and Sedelius 2010). In line with previous research (Krueger 2002; Mossberger et al. 2008; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Anduiza et al. 2012), the survey results indicate that the actual involvement in e-petitioning projects - with its user-friendly format and tools that diminish the costs of engagement – could be an important factor in enhancing civic literacy.

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(Fox 2012, p. 13) gives the example of some major newspapers that supported effective petitions in the UK, and how this affected the use of time on the debate floor of the House of Commons.



## **7. Conclusions**

This thesis outlines a model for thinking about the quality of e-democracy processes and outcomes, a model which is based on a thorough analysis, of previous literature in the field of democracy and e-democracy, and of five empirical cases. The empirical chapters 5 and 6 outlined the connections that can be observed between the quality of e-democracy and a number of independent variables. In this final chapter, the case study results are compared across variables and across types of projects, to draw general conclusions.

### ***Equality***

The projects examined in this thesis – parliamentary informatics and e-petitioning – are open for all, even for immigrants without the right to vote and those who are under the age threshold for voting. However, the survey results indicate that the Internet tends in fact to perpetuate political engagement by the ‘usual suspects’. The socio-demographic profile of e-democracy participants suggests that the representation of many groups of citizens is skewed. Women, the youngest and the oldest age groups, persons engaged in housework, groups with lower levels of education and people with disabilities tend to be under-represented. Moreover, the survey data suggest that e-democracy projects are even less inclusive than other forms of political participation such demonstrating or contacting politicians.

In further corroboration of the findings above, and confirming results from previous studies by Bimber (2003) and Jensen (2006), the survey data show that the majority of e-democracy participants are already politically active, both in traditional and alternative ways. Moreover, they have also high levels of digital skills and are experienced Internet users, seemingly more so than their co-nationals. At the same time, generally, the level of participation and the level of digital skills in the participants’ countries do not influence the inclusiveness of e-democracy projects. This means that the first hypothesis “H.1. The wider the spread of (i) civic engagement in politics and (ii) ICT access and skills among different groups in society; the more likely is it that project participants will be representative of the citizenry” has mainly been disproved.

This finding is consistent with previous surveys, which show that Internet users are generally more likely to be politically engaged (Pew Research Centers Internet and Life Project 2011).<sup>161</sup> Hence, people who use the Internet could simply be more akin to each other in their patterns of political engagement, than to their co-nationals. The thesis research also confirms the scholarly evidence about minority domination online (Osimo 2008; Glencross 2009; Jakob 2006 in Bittle et al. 2009). The active project users are considerably fewer compared to the many registered ones, as well as in relation to their populations of reference. The e-democracy participants fit into Green's typology of 'citizen-spectators', who stay inactive politically, although they have knowledge of, and interest in politics (Green 2009).

In sum, e-democracy projects do not seem to achieve a high level of equality on their platforms. Many of the traditionally under-represented groups in politics have even more limited presence on e-democracy platforms. There is a risk that a large share of their users is well-educated and skilled males, at ease with digital media and habitually involved in politics in one way or another. This lack of inclusiveness poses problems of input-legitimacy to the outcomes of parliamentary informatics projects. Hence, the results on the equality dimension mostly support the reinforcement thesis, according to which the Internet strengthens established patterns of elite political communication. On the positive side, the surveys indicate that e-democracy projects manage to attract people who do not normally engage in politics. This is a valuable contribution to both equality and democracy, especially now, when citizens' trust in political institutions demonstrates a striking decrease (Rosanvallon 2008; Morlino 2009; Eurobarometer 2012), and in times of recession, when the appeal of traditional forms of citizen participation, such as voting, declines (Aitamurto 2012). E-democracy, with its range of novel tools, could work as a bridge between Internet-savvy citizens and traditional democratic institutions.

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161 The Pew survey emphasized that people's use of the Internet is having a wide-ranging impact on their engagement with civic and social groups. About 80% of Internet users participate in groups, compared with circa half of non-Internet users. Moreover, social media users are even more likely to be active: 82% of social network users and 85% of Twitter users are group participants.



In any case, further research with larger user survey samples is needed to confirm or disprove my findings. It is especially important to establish whether e-democracy compensates for at least some of the inequality, by raising civic literacy levels among those groups traditionally excluded from the political realm. Moreover, to test the findings of this thesis, future research on e-democracy should also include cases in other contexts outside Europe, and cases of different types of organisations running these platforms (not only those with a technological focus, but also those grounded in civil society). The latter might prove to have a stronger appeal for different types of citizens, and to be more inclusive. Finally, it is important to be aware of potential self-selection bias when recruiting participants in e-democracy surveys. Considering previous evidence about elite-domination online (Norris 2001; Bimber 2003), it is probable that well-resourced people are more inclined to respond to similar surveys. Hence, it is possible that the results in terms of socio-demographics and equality are skewed by self-selection.

In terms of suggestions for counteracting the problem of inequality, several solutions could be considered by those who are designing and running e-democracy projects. Firstly, a possibility would be to survey (potential) users, in order to understand whether any groups are seriously under-represented. Secondly, when planning the layout of the platforms, or promotion campaigns, project teams could collaborate with organisations that represent the interests of the under-represented groups (e.g. women's, ethnic minorities and disability associations). Thirdly, there are inventive technological solutions for people with lower (ICT) literacy levels. Participation can be facilitated by using simple language or by making creative use of government data (e.g. presenting it in interactive formats or by infographic displays for people with different literacy levels).

### ***Accountability***

In terms of the second essentialist dimension, accountability, the two categories of projects (parliamentary informatics and e-petitioning) show quite distinct results. Parliamentary informatics projects are solidly based on premises of accountability. They aim at providing easy access to objective information about parliamentary activities, which in turn should allow

citizens to hold their representatives to account. My findings show that they succeed with this mission. Parliamentary informatics projects transform opaque into clear information. They investigate, valorise existing data and produce clear information about institutional performance and the behaviour of individual MPs, thereby putting into practice soft (i.e. not enforceable) accountability.

Firstly, parliamentary informatics platforms allow citizens to access information without recourse to an intermediary (such as traditional media). This is an important benefit, since certain data in the public domain are not easily understandable to the lay citizen, and normally have to be translated into comprehensible information by either media or watchdog organizations (Fox 2007). Secondly, citizens themselves act as watchdogs to some extent; while working with the data they occasionally discover and report errors to their respective parliament. Thirdly, these programmes enable interested parties such as researchers, NGOs and journalists to process and analyse parliamentary information in ways that were not possible in the past (Dietrich 2011).

In contrast, e-petitioning projects offer only user-created information about petition topics. Given that users aim at promoting their petitions, their accounts of issues are inclined to be one-sided. In fact, many survey respondents believe that the information provided on the petition platform is biased. Hence, the e-petition projects do not improve accountability from the informational perspective. Considering the distinctive results based on examination of parliamentary informatics and e-petitioning projects, where the former use official sources, while the latter do not, the second hypothesis is confirmed: "H.2. Projects that draw on official sources are more likely to provide objective information than those that are based on user-produced information." In sum, parliamentary informatics projects could be considered as an effective mechanism for allowing additional accountability relations. According to Bühlman and Kriesi this type of mechanisms are getting increasingly important because of a generalized lack of confidence in the functioning of democracy (Bühlman and Kriesi 2013, p. 62).

## ***Responsiveness***

Turning to the first instrumentalist dimension - responsiveness - the analysis points to very few instances where projects have achieved political influence. The 'external' democracy camp, according to Blaug (2002), belongs to citizens and civil society organizations, which see democracy as a way of challenging existing government institutions. In fact, many project users have very strong expectations about feedback to their inputs. They expect their suggestions to be considered by politicians, and acted upon. However, most projects only reach 'access responsiveness', according to Schumaker's scale (1975). This means that authorities are sometimes willing to hear the concerns of e-democracy participants but not necessarily to consider them. The mere access to information and the possibility to contribute with content – the core elements of e-democracy projects at hand - do not lead to political responsiveness.

The thesis research confirms Blaug's theory (2002) about the 'inside camp' of state actors, who consider democracy to be a set of valuable institutions that should be protected and improved. The state actors tend to adopt a conservative approach toward e-democracy, by using new media as a broadcast mechanism rather than a chance to engage and listen to citizens. Being staunch believers in the concept of representative democracy, politicians consider that they are better qualified than ordinary people, and feel that it is their duty to make political decisions for citizens. What is more, they generally believe that their position is threatened by e-democracy, and some even actively oppose e-democracy. Hence, the third hypothesis has been reasonably confirmed: "H.3. The stronger the political support of decision-makers for the project or its outputs, the greater the political responsiveness." In the cases at hand, the generally weak political support seems to have led to a weak political responsiveness.

The politicians' 'thin democracy' stand represents a drawback for both e-democracy and democracy. At least part of the present dissatisfaction with democracy stems from higher citizen expectations of what democracy can deliver, both procedurally and in terms of outcomes. Therefore, the inside camp should make it clear from the outset as to how citizens'

proposals are going to be handled, preferably develop mechanisms for integrating citizens' opinions, and more generally ascertain how to satisfy citizens' expectations. The external camp should try to secure commitment from politicians and civil servants, both at higher and lower levels, since resistance can occur at any level.

Moreover, civil society should consider adhering to global initiatives such as 'The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness'. The Declaration includes a set of shared principles on the openness, transparency and accessibility of parliaments, and already seems to have had positive effects on parliamentary responsiveness. It is supported by more than 130 organizations, from 75 countries, and 40 of these organizations are conducting advocacy measures, using the Declaration. Civil society organisations in Liberia, Germany, and Argentina are also forming coalitions in their respective countries, around this Declaration. The push from the international community for improved standards can be a strong incentive for some countries to open up. Evidence from Latin America indicates that instead of the usual confrontational 'name and shame' approach used by civil society, it might be more constructive to point parliaments to the progress in other countries, e.g. as in the case of adherence to the Declaration.<sup>162</sup>

An additional stimulus for political responsiveness stems from civic pressure in the form of public mobilization and media attention. In line with other authors (Anduiza et al. 2012), my research suggests that e-democracy projects represent an alternative to institutional gatekeeping mechanisms. Parliamentary informatics projects in particular complement the work of the traditional media, by making political information accessible to the general public. The analysed e-democracy projects encourage flexible political organization and communication outside of traditional media networks. This, in turn, allows both state and civil society actors to break the domination of the mainstream media. Even smaller NGOs can implement more

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Information sources: (1) The OpeningParliament.org forum accessed on 8 September 2013 at: <http://www.openingparliament.org> (2) RE:IMAGINING DEMOCRACY blog hosted by the [Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS](#). Accessed on 8 September 2013 at: <http://democracyoneday.com/2013/03/28/inspire-your-parliament-to-change/>

targeted and direct engagement strategies, thus lowering their distribution costs (Williamson 2012). This, in turn, enhances the quality of the public sphere, and, in some cases, even improves political responsiveness.

The empirical findings in this thesis suggest that media visibility and civic mobilization are imperative for the political impact of e-democracy projects. All the projects under study have a strong mobilization potential among the public, and some of them have succeeded in putting sufficient civic pressure on politicians. A number of widely endorsed petitions and parliamentary issues seem to have had their priority boosted among politicians, and this has helped to speed up implementation of the required reforms. Among the cases at hand, TWFY has spearheaded in terms of visibility, mobilization and numbers of participants. Often relying on support from organised civil society, TWFY has prompted campaigns, flash mobs and demonstrations. In sum, TWFY exhibits most civic mobilization and media visibility, and has achieved most political responsiveness out of the projects at study. This confirms the hypotheses regarding civic pressure: “H.4. The greater the mobilization of citizens around the project or its outputs, the stronger the political responsiveness”; and “H.5. The greater the visibility the project or its outputs have in the media, the stronger the political responsiveness”.

However, hypotheses H.4. and H.5, regarding the causal link between civic pressure and political responsiveness, are only confirmed in parliamentary informatics projects, and not in e-petition cases. Furthermore, the analysis of the responsiveness-variable also showed how difficult it is to distinguish between the different factors that influence policy decision (Fagotto and Fung 2009). E-democracy projects only represent one element among others, and rarely play a dominant role in political decision-making.

### ***Civic literacy***

Turning to the second instrumentalist dimension - civic literacy - the overall results suggest that the analysed projects increase political knowledge and interest, and offer the opportunity to participate to many otherwise politically inactive citizens. E-democracy projects give people improved opportunities to engage in policy-making and, as suggested by previous research

(Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Hamilton and Tolbert 2012), this brings along positive effects on civic education. Reflecting on this and other pieces of research (Krueger 2002; Mossberger et al. 2008; Tolbert and McNeal 2003; Anduiza et al. 2012), the user survey results indicate that the actual involvement in e-democracy projects - with its user-friendly digital tools that diminish the costs of engagement – could be an important factor for enhancing civic literacy. In the long run, when participants are more knowledgeable and can claim their rights to influence policy, civic literacy may also impact on civic pressure and, thus, on political responsiveness.

Notably, parliamentary informatics users (OP and ND) became more knowledgeable and interested in politics, when compared to e-petition projects users (MI). As to political participation, however, the situation is reversed. This indicates that parliamentary informatics users learned in the process of using the projects, while e-petitioners were spurred to participate to a greater extent. Given that the two types of projects have separate goals and design, this is logical. E-petition projects aim at drawing attention to local issues and attracting petition supporters, not at learning. Moreover, the only information provided is that contributed by users, whose accounts are mostly brief, subjective and one-sided. MI stimulates people to participate probably because it is easier to feel involved in local (as opposed to national) issues that are of immediate concern. In contrast, parliamentary informatics projects are aimed at improving the accessibility of official information, and stimulate acquisition of knowledge. Parliamentary informatics projects are designed to spread objective and user-friendly information; this is why people learn more. This confirms “H.6: If the project facilitates access to objective information; it is more likely to have a positive impact on civic literacy”.

## **Concluding remarks**

The overall conclusion of this thesis is that e-democracy has not dethroned the representative democracy model, nor radically transformed the mind-set of decision-makers. The e-democracy projects under study mainly facilitate the dissemination and interpretation of information, as well as the creation of networks between people. But it does not mean that they can solve entrenched problems of closed political systems or citizens' apathy. E-democracy gives citizens the technological possibility to engage in politics but, in contrast to the idea of 'technological determinism', it does not revolution democratic practices.

Whilst this research clearly shows that the quality of e-democracy matters - both in terms of processes and effects on participants - the relationship between the influencing factors and democracy is harder to pin down, and necessitates much further theoretical and practical attention. There is little that is deterministic in e-democracy projects. The quality of process and outcomes is not uniform across e-democracy projects examined, and this leads to different results on different variables. No single project, then, can solve all existing democratic problems. Yet, they can help to improve different aspects of democracy. Parliamentary informatics projects have the potential to enhance transparency and accountability, as well as improve civic literacy, whereas e-petition projects stimulate political participation. They offer important tools and stimuli for engagement, to the connected European citizen. The projects manage to attract previously passive citizens and deepen engagement with those who are already involved in politics.

Given that e-democracy projects prompt many people to engage in politics for the first time, they can be seen to contribute towards vitalising public engagement. The e-democracy projects at hand indicate that ICT facilitate the interaction between citizens and civil society and give important input into the public sphere. However, the downside is that the participants do not mirror their populations of reference. Moreover, pushing beyond this, the projects stop short of establishing direct communication between citizens and their representatives, and of achieving

policy impact. This kind of impact largely depends on the democratic intentions of state actors, who still adhere to a relatively thin notion of democracy. The bottleneck in the political system occurs at the level of government institutions. E-democracy rarely affects laws, policies or public action. In fact, my findings confirm that ICT enable new dynamics but that the traditional political institutions remain change resistant. Rather than permitting a revolution, e-democracy contributes to a slow evolution of the political system. E-democracy will doubtlessly continue to play a significant role in political communication, conceivably incrementally so, in the drive towards a 'strong democracy' model in the future.



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<sup>1</sup> CAPE is dedicated to creating new ways for citizens to confront pressing public problems. CAPE is housed within Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, non-profit opinion research and public engagement organization founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance.



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4 The Technology for Transparency Network is a research and mapping project that aims to improve understanding of the current state of online technology projects that increase transparency and accountability in Central & Eastern Europe, East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the former Soviet Union. The project is supported by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, a donor collaborative that includes the Ford Foundation, Hivos, the International Budget Partnership, the Omidyar Network, the Open Society Institute, the Revenue Watch Institute, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

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## ANNEX I. SURVEY RESULTS

### PARLIAMENTARY INFORMATICS PROJECTS

#### *Equality*

Note well that the ESS1-2002 round has been used for comparison throughout the thesis because this was the last ESS-round carried out in Italy.

#### Section: Gender

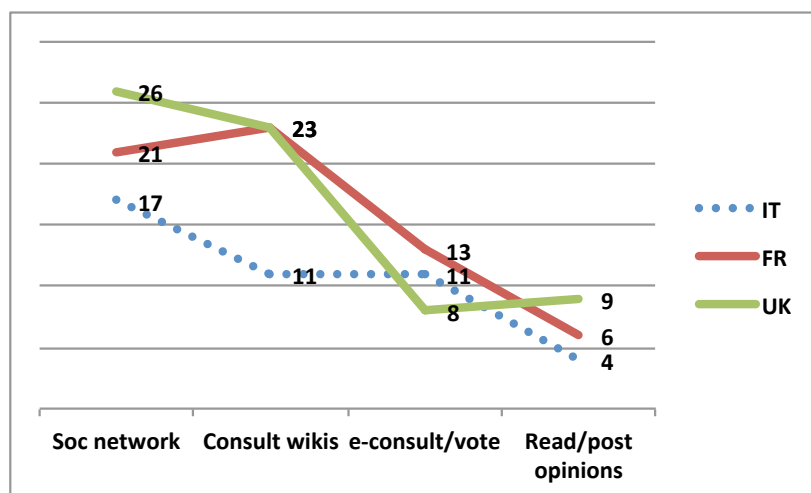
Table 1. Politically active women as compared to men in Italy, France and the UK (%)

	Italy	France	UK
Contacted politician/government official	36	48	49
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	46	48	56
Signed a petition	54	53	57

Source: European Social Survey (ESS) ESS1-2002, United Nations Statistics Division 2012.

#### Section: Age

Figure 1. Online participation by people aged 55-74 in Italy, France and the UK (%)



Source: EUROSTAT 2011e.

Table 2 is explanatory to Figure 1 above.

Table 2. Online participation by people aged 55-74 in Italy, France and the UK (%)

	<b>Soc network</b> Internet use: participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to facebook, twitter, etc.) (I_IUSNET)	<b>Consult wikis</b> Internet use: reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (I_IUPOL)	<b>e-consult/vote</b> Internet use: consulting wikis (to obtain knowledge on any subject) (I_IUWIKI)	<b>Read/post opinions</b> Internet use: taking part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition) (I_IUVOTE)
<b>IT</b>	17	11	11	4
<b>FR</b>	21	23	13	6
<b>UK</b>	26	23	8	9
<b>EU:27</b>	25	19	11	7

Source: EUROSTAT 2011e.

### Section: Ethnicity

Table 3. Online participation of foreign-born and non-nationals versus natives and nationals in Italy (percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months) (%)

	<b>Foreign- born</b>	<b>Non- nationals</b>	<b>Native- born</b>	<b>Nationals</b>
Reading/downloading online newspapers/news	45	44	56	56
Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites	18	18	25	25
Taking part in on-line consultations/voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition)	6	5	10	10

Source: EUROSTAT 2011d.

### Section: Education

Table 4 compares the data where the difference between respondents and the country populations is greatest - i.e. for people with highest and lowest education levels - with the equivalent groups in ESS1-2002 who have (in addition) engaged in alternative forms of political participation. This analysis indicates that the politically active nationals and the project respondents have fewer lower-educated and more higher-educated people among them with respect to the country averages. Moreover, the project respondents are more similar to their co-citizens who are alternatively engaged in politics than to their respective country population.

Table 4. The share of persons who have engaged in politics in alternative ways in Italy, France and the UK, by educational level (%)

	Primary education			Tertiary education		
	IT	FR	UK	IT	FR	UK
<i>Overall country population</i>	24	22	31	10	26	32
<u>People in the respective country who have:</u>						
Contacted politician/government official	12	14	22	18	36	50
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	7	6	12	20	47	54
Signed a petition	7	10	18	17	39	41

Source: Author's surveys 2011; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002.

### Section: Occupation

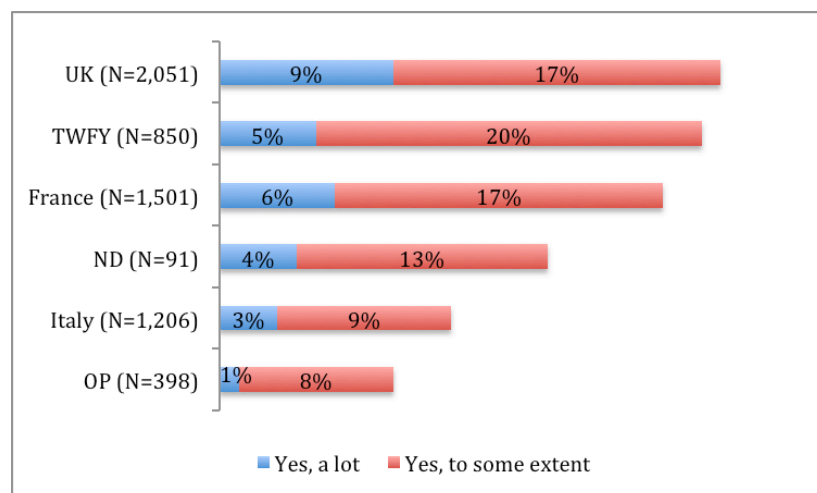
Table 5. The share of persons (i) doing housework, looking after children or others; or (ii) involved in paid work, who have engaged in politics in alternative ways in Italy, France and the UK (%)

	Housework etc.			Paid work		
	IT	FR	UK	IT	FR	UK
<i>Overall country population</i>	36	9	11	32	47	52
<u>People in the respective country who have:</u>						
Contacted politician/government official	6	8	8	65	52	51
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	5	3	4	55	60	59
Signed a petition	9	7	11	63	55	58
<i>Project respondents</i>	2	3	3	62	42	57

Source: Authors' surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-2002.

## Section: Disability

Figure 2. Respondents with health problems and disabilities compared to country averages



1

Source: Author's surveys 2011; Escher 2011 ; ESS1-2002.

Table 6. Respondents with health problems and disabilities engaged in alternative forms of participation (%)

	IT	FR	UK
<i>Overall country population</i>	12	23	26
<u>People in the respective country who have:</u>			
Contacted politician/government official	11	19	21
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	5	14	5
Signed a petition	14	32	37

Source: Authors' surveys; Escher 2011; ESS1-20022

1

The TWFY data originates from Escher's survey (2011). His survey did not contain the nuance of 'a lot' or 'some extent' of disability but had two separate questions: (1) "Do you have a health problem or disability, which prevents you from doing every day tasks at home, work or school or which limits the kind or amount of work you can do?" ('yes' or 'no'). 20% answered 'yes'. (2) "Which of these descriptions best describes your current situation?" One of the answer options was "permanently sick or disabled" and 5% answered 'yes'.

2

The relevant ESS1-2002 question was "Are you hampered in your daily activities in any way by any longstanding illness, or disability, infirmity or mental health problem?" And the answer options were: (i) Yes, a lot; (ii) Yes, to some extent; (iii) No; (iv) Don't know. (ESS code: hlthhmp). The table represents aggregated data for the response options 'Yes, a lot' and 'Yes, to some extent' under question.



**Section: Internet use and skills**

Table 7. "How often have you used the Internet during the last three months?" (%)

	<b>OP</b>	<b>Italy*</b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>France*</b>	<b>EU-27*</b>
	(N=365)		(N=74)		
Every day or almost every day	88	51	78	65	58

\* *Frequency of Internet access: daily.*

Source: Author's surveys 2011; EUROSTAT 2012b.

Table 8. Internet use and digital skills (%)

	<b>Daily Internet use</b>	<b>Internet use: disadvantaged people</b>	<b>Computer skills</b>	<b>Internet skills</b>
<b>Italy</b>	51	36	56	58
<b>EU-27</b>	58	51	67	73
<b>France</b>	65	60	73	78

Source: EUROSTAT 2012b; European Commission (2012a); European Commission (2012b).

Table 9. Statistics on advanced use of the Internet among survey respondents compared to country statistics (as percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months)

	OP		IT	ND		FR	EU:27
	(N)	(%)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Edited any page/created a Wiki page 3	96	<b>25</b>	0.004	14	<b>16</b>	-	-
Created your own blog 4	141	<b>36</b>	6	26	<b>29</b>	7	9
Uploaded videos on e.g. YouTube 5	175	<b>45</b>	32	40	<b>44</b>	36	34
Posted on an online political forum 6	234	<b>59</b>	25	46	<b>51</b>	10	20
Provided ratings/reviews of web content 7	301	<b>77</b>	10	50	<b>55</b>	10	10
Used social networking sites 8	328	<b>82</b>	48	56	<b>60</b>	46	53
Obtained news/information about current events/politics 9	403	<b>99</b>	55	91	<b>98</b>	38	68

10

Source: Author's surveys 2011; EUROSTAT 2011d and 2012b; Wikipedia Statistics 2011; Pascu 2008.

3

The country-level statistics originate from Wikipedia Statistics, stating that there are circa 3,000 editors of Wikipedia articles in Italian (this corresponds to 0.004% of Italy's population, hence this figure is used as a proxy). Data for UK and France are not available since Wikipedia provides statistics by languages, not by countries (Wikipedia Statistics 2011). Wikipedia is the largest publicly available Wiki and one of the most visited sites in the world (Pascu 2008).

4

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for creating websites or blogs.

5

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content to any website to be shared.

6

The statistics for the category "Posted on an online political forum" originates from EUROSTAT (2011d), where the relevant question wording was 'Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites'.

7

The country-level data originate from a EU-wide estimate by Pascu (2008).

8

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to Facebook, twitter, etc.). In this case, the statistics refer to 2011.

9

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for reading/downloading online newspapers/news.

10

All the country-level data originates from EUROSTAT 2012b, the only exception is the category "Posted on an online political forum" that originates from EUROSTAT 2011d

Table 10. Online interaction of French and Italian Internet users (percentage of individuals who used Internet in the last 3 months)

	<b>IT</b>	<b>FR</b>	<b>EU:27</b>
Obtaining information from public authorities online (2010)	31	38	41
Interacting with public authorities online (2010)	34	47	46
Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites (2011)	25	10	20
Taking part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic/political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition) (2011)	10	9	10

11

Source: EUROSTAT 2010d and 2011d.

### Section: Political participation

Table 11. The level of involvement in political activities of project respondents and country populations

	<b>OP</b>		<b>IT</b>	<b>ND</b>		<b>FR</b>
	(N)	(%)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(%)
Voted in the last parliamentary/national elections	341	<b>89</b>	85	91	<b>98</b>	60
Contacted media	210	<b>53</b>	-	52	<b>57</b>	-
Contacted civil servant/politician	210	<b>53</b>	12	52	<b>57</b>	17
Participated in a demonstration/protest	273	<b>69</b>	11	51	<b>55</b>	17
Signed petition	333	<b>83</b>	18	73	<b>78</b>	34

12

13

14

Source: Authors' surveys ; IDEA 2008 ; ESS1-2002.

11

For the category "Posted on an online political forum/discussion group" the relevant question wording in EUROSTAT (2011d) was 'Reading and posting opinions on civic/political issues via websites'.

12

The survey results are based on the following answers to the question "Have you done any of the following activities before or after your participation in OP/ND?" "Yes, before", "Yes, after", "Yes, both before and after" and "Yes, but I don't know exactly when".

13

Country-level statistics for parliamentary elections originate from IDEA's website. Statistics for Italy date back to the 2008 elections, and those of France to the 2007 elections.

14

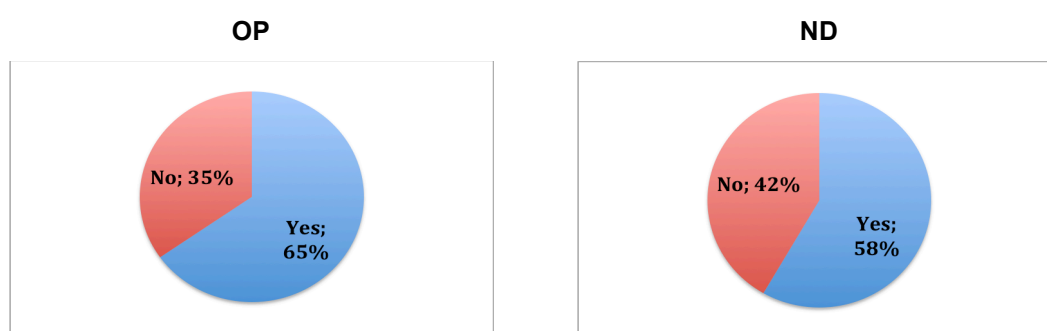
Note well that while the ESS1-2002 survey had a question regarding contacting civil servants/politicians, in the OP and ND surveys the question asked about contacts with either media or politicians/civil servants.

Table 12. Respondents who *never* engaged in any of the political activities under consideration

	ND		OP	
	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)
Posted on an online political forum	<b>43</b>	39	<b>40</b>	158
Contacted politician/media	<b>41</b>	38	<b>44</b>	176
Demonstrated	<b>41</b>	38	<b>30</b>	119
Signed petition	<b>22</b>	20	<b>17</b>	67

Source: Author's surveys 2011.

Figure 3. "If OP/ND did not exist, would you have found some other way to make your proposal?"



15

Source: Author's surveys 2011.

### Section: Passive/active users

To check if the same OP respondents were involved in different activities, responses were cross-tabulated in Table 13. Predictably, this analysis showed that many (125 users) are inactive independently of the type of activity. However, the majority of those who has never voted/commented on anything are still monitoring politicians or acts (186). This result is quite coherent since monitoring requires less effort than voting/commenting. There is also a consistent share of 'super-users' (102 persons), which has been involved in both monitoring

16

and voting/commenting.

---

15

OP: N= 116; ND: N= 25.

16

The cross tabulation was not possible on ND but only in the case of OP, where relevant questions were posed. Moreover, note well that the OP sample was slightly biased towards the more active users due to the sampling method: only people who had been active on the site in the past year received the survey invitation.

Table 13. Cross-tabulation of responses on monitoring and commenting/voting on OP

		Comment/voting of acts		Total
		No	Yes	
Monitoring	(N)	125	22	147
	<b>No</b> (%)	<b>40</b>	<b>18</b>	34
	(N)	186	102	288
	<b>Yes</b> (%)	<b>60</b>	<b>82</b>	66
<b>Total</b> (N)		311	124	435
		100	100	100

Source: Author's surveys 2011.

## Responsiveness

### Section: Media visibility

Table 14. Google hits for OP, ND and TWFY

Search tool	TWFY	My score*	OP	My score*	ND	My score
Google	1,310,000-	1	39,100-	2	4,160-	3
(total)	4,190,000		848,000		9,490	
Google	377,000	1	2,190	2	1,230	3
blogs						
Google	255	1	19	3	98	2
news						
<b>Composite scores</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>2.3</b>		<b>2.7</b>

Searched terms:

TWFY: "TheyWorkForYou", TheyWorkForYou, [www.TheyWorkForYou.com](http://www.TheyWorkForYou.com) "TheyWorkForYou";  
 "TheyWorkForYou" in Google blogs and Google news archive.

OP: "OpenParlamento", OpenParlamento, [www.OpenParlamento.it](http://www.OpenParlamento.it) on Google; "OpenParlamento" in  
 Google blogs and Google news archive.

ND: "NosDéputés", NosDéputés, NosDeputes, [www.NosDeputes.fr](http://www.NosDeputes.fr) on Google; "NosDéputés" in Google  
 blogs and Google news archive.

\* In 'my score' 1 is the highest, while 4 is the lowest score. My scores are set on the basis of how many hits each project got, e.g. TWFY gets score 1 in news since it has the highest number of hits; ND gets 2 since it has the next best number of hits (although only half of TWFY) etc.

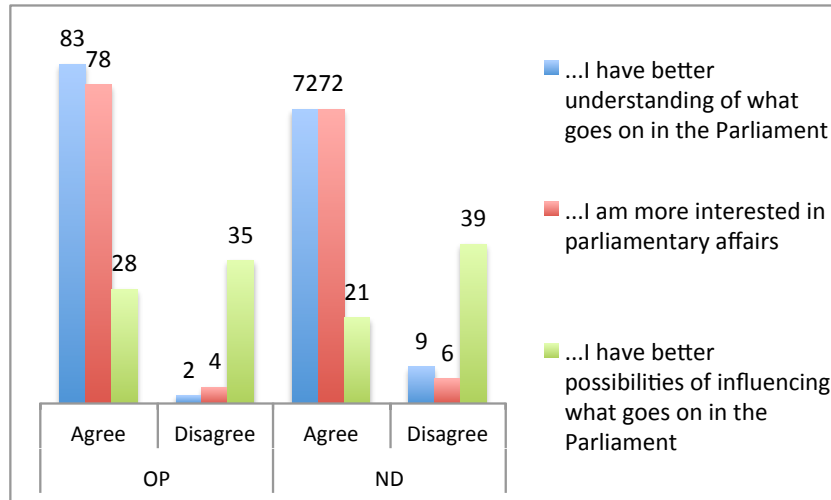
\*\* The composite score is calculated as the average score of the dimensions: general, blogs, and news.

Source: Google search on 14 June 2011. See Annex I for further statistical details.

## Civic literacy

### Section: Political interest and knowledge

Figure 4. The OP and ND respondents' expectations regarding participation outcomes (%)



Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

Complete results to the question illustrated in Figure ... "After your participation in OP/ND, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "I now feel that..."

- OP: "I have better understanding of what goes on in the Parliament" (N=417), (don't know=3%); "I am more interested in parliamentary affairs" (N=404), (don't know=2%); "I have better possibilities of influencing what goes on in the Parliament" (N=406), (don't know=6%).
- ND: "I have better understanding of what goes on in the Parliament" (N=92), (don't know=2%); "I am more interested in parliamentary affairs" (N=93), (don't know=3%); "I have better possibilities of influencing what goes on in the Parliament" (N=92), (don't know=10%).

## Section: Stimulus to participation

Table 15. OP and ND respondents who engaged in any of the political activities under consideration only *after* their participation in the projects

	ND		OP	
	(%)	N	(%)	N
Demonstrated	<b>0</b>	93	<b>2</b>	398
Signed petition	<b>2</b>	93	<b>6</b>	403
Posted on an online political forum	<b>4</b>	90	<b>4</b>	399
Contacted politicians/media	<b>7</b>	92	<b>5</b>	398

Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

## E-PETITION PROJECTS

### *Equality*

#### Section: Gender

Women are underrepresented in both MI and BEP. They only constitute between 35-38 % of respondents, while their share in the respective city population is 51% (see Table 16). The gender data for MI is confirmed by a previous study (Åström and Sedelius 2010), which shows exactly the same share of women (35%).<sup>17</sup>

---

17

The gender statistics in the evaluation made by Åström and Sedelius (2010) are based on the number of men and women who have created petitions (active and concluded) on MI as of 20 November 2009; not only those who have responded to the questionnaire. This data show that there are 35% of women and 65% of men among MI users.

Table 16. Gender distribution among petitioners (%)

	<b>Bristol e-petition 18 signers</b>	<b>Bristol City population</b>	<b>Malmö 19 respondents</b>	<b>Malmö City population</b>
Men	62	49	62	49
Women	38	51	35	51

Source: Author's survey 2011, Whyte et al. 2005, Statistics Sweden 2009.

Table 17. The share of politically active women in Sweden and the UK (%)

	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>UK</b>
Signed a petition	53	57
Voted in the last national elections	50	54
Contacted politician/government official	42	49
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	45	56

Source: ESS1-2002.

### Section: Age

Table 18. Average age of respondents compared to the country/municipality averages

	<b>MI (N=133)</b>	<b>Malmö City population</b>
Average	45	36
Median	40	-

Source: Author's survey 2011; Statistics Sweden 1 January 2010

18 The BEP evaluation carried out by Whyte et al. (2005) included a survey of e-petition signers in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The response rate was very high; 54 percent (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

19

MI survey respondents by gender: 35% (N=50) women and 61.5% men (N=88); 3.5% (N=5) refused to answer.



Table 19. Online participation in Sweden, the UK and the EU-27 of people aged 65-74 (%)

	<b>Soc network</b>	<b>Consult wikis</b>	<b>e-consult/vote</b>	<b>Read/post opinions</b>
I_IUSNET - Internet use: participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to facebook, twitter, etc.)		I_IUWIKI - Internet use: consulting wikis (to obtain knowledge on any subject)	I_IUPOL - Internet use: reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites	I_IUVOTE - Internet use: taking part in on-line consultations or voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition)
SE	14	26	9	6
UK	11	14	-	5
EU:27	7	13	4	5

Source: EUROSTAT 2011e.

### Section: Education

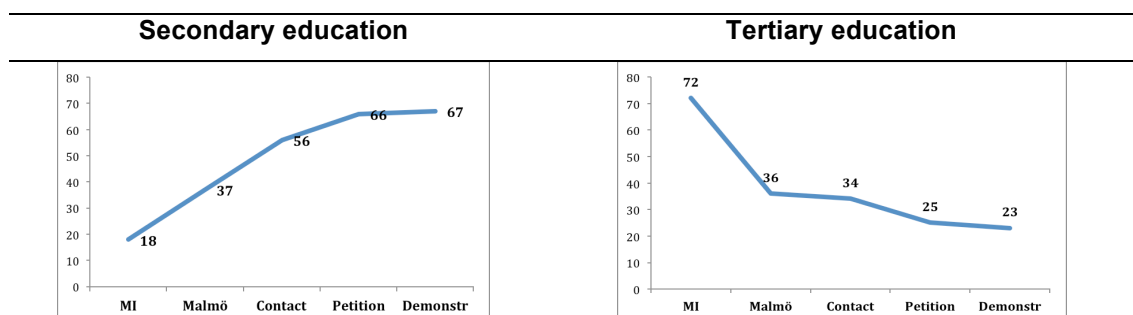
Table 20. The share of persons with tertiary, secondary and less than lower secondary education that has engaged in politics in alternative ways in Sweden (%)

	<b>Tertiary education</b>	<b>Secondary education</b>	<b>Primary education</b>
<i>Malmö's population</i>	36	37	22
<i>Project respondents</i>	72	18	5
Contacted politician/government official	34	56	10
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	23	67	10
Signed a petition	25	66	10

20

Source: Author's survey; ESS1-2002; Statistics Sweden's register "Befolkningens utbildning" 2010.

Figure 5. The share of persons with secondary and tertiary education who engaged in politics in alternative ways (%)



LEGEND: The X-axis in the Figure shows the educational levels of MI users ('MI'), people who took part in demonstrations ('Demonstr'), contacted a politician/government official ('Contact'), signed a petition ('Petition'), and the general Malmö population ('Malmö population').

Source: Author's surveys; ESS1-2002; Statistics Sweden's register "Befolkningens utbildning" 2010.

### Section: Occupation

Table 21. The share of (i) persons involved in paid work, (ii) retired persons, and (iii) people in education among MI respondents, the Swedish population, and those who have engaged in politics in alternative ways in Sweden (%)

	In paid work	Retired	In education
Country population	59	17	13
Project respondents	66	11	8
Contacted politician/government official	64	14	11
Taken part in a lawful demonstration	58	14	19
Signed a petition	65	10	14

Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002.

## Section: Disability

Table 22. Respondents with health problems and disabilities (%)

	MI (N=138)	Swedish population (N=1,996)		BEP	Bristol City population
Yes, a lot	3	7	Yes	4	19
Yes, to some extent	7	20			
No	91	73	No	94	81

21

Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002; Whyte et al. 2005.

Table 23 below shows aggregated data for the response options 'Yes, a lot' and 'Yes, to some extent' for the question regarding health problems and disabilities.

Table 23. People with health problems and disabilities in MI/BEP, among the general population in Sweden and the UK, and among those engaged in alternative forms of participation (%)

	UK	SE
<i>Country population</i>	26	27
<i>Project respondents</i>	4	10
Contacted politician/government official in the last 12 months	21	20
Taken part in a lawful demonstration in the last 12 months	5	7
Signed a petition in the last 12 months	37	40

Source: Author's survey 2011; ESS1-2002.

21 The BEP evaluation included a survey of e-petition signers in the format of an exit questionnaire to all those who signed an e-petition. However, it did not survey any site visitors who decided not to sign any petitions. The response rate was very high; 54% (478 out of 890 e-petition signers).

## Section: Internet use and skills

Table 24. Advanced Internet use among survey respondents vs. their fellow citizens

Q: "Have you personally used the Internet for the following purposes?"	MI		Sweden
	(N)	(%)	(%)
Edited any page/created a new page on a Wiki	142	<b>25</b>	0.008
Uploaded videos on e.g. YouTube	142	<b>35</b>	28
Created your own blog	142	<b>39</b>	6
Provided ratings/reviews of web content	142	<b>51</b>	10
Used online social networking sites	144	<b>81</b>	54
Obtained news or information e.g. about current events or politics	145	<b>97</b>	77

Source: Auhtor's survey 2011; Wikipedia Statistics 2011 ; EUROSTAT 2010c ; Findahl 2010 ; Pascu 2008 ; EUROSTAT 2011b ; EUROSTAT 2011c.

## Section: Political participation

Table 25. Voting statistics for MI respondents and Sweden

	MI		Sweden
	(%)	(N)	(%)
"Yes, I voted in the parliamentary elections in September 2010"	<b>91</b>	133	<b>85</b>
"No, I am not eligible to vote"	<b>7</b>	11	
"No, I didn't vote"	<b>2</b>	3	
"Don't know"	<b>0.7</b>	1	

Source: Author's survey 2011; Statistics Sweden's website 2010.

22

The country-level statistics originate from Wikipedia Statistics. These state that there are circa 800 editors of Wikipedia articles in Swedish (0.008% of Sweden's population). A similar estimate is provided by Söderling (2011), stating that there are circa 1,000 active users who correct errors in the Swedish version of Wikipedia (Wikipedia Statistics 2011).

23

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for uploading self-created content (EUROSTAT 2010c).

24

The 6% indicate bloggers as % of the Swedish population (Findahl 2010).

25

The country-level data originate from a EU-wide estimate by Pascu (2008).

26

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for participating in social networks (EUROSTAT 2011b).

27

The country level statistics used for comparison concern individuals using the Internet for reading/downloading online newspapers/news magazines (EUROSTAT 2011c).

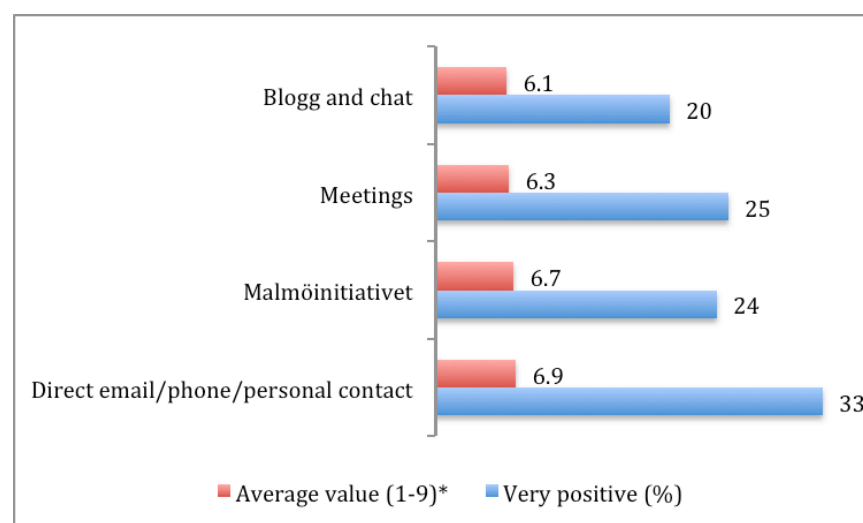
Table 26. MI respondents and co-nationals involved in political activities (%)

	MI respondents		Sweden
	(N)	(%)	(%)
Signed petition	91	65	41
Participated in a demonstration/protest	69	50	6
Contacted civil servant/politician	70	49	16
Joined a political group on a social networking site	66	47	-
Contacted media	61	43	10
Posted on an online political forum/discussion group	57	41	-

29

Source: Author's survey 2011 ; ESS1-2002; Living Conditions Survey 2009.

Figure 6. Malmö Panel's rating of MI as communication channel with politicians in comparison to other channels



\*The value ranged between 1-9; one being very negative and nine very positive.

30

Source: Malmö Panel results from March 2009.

28

The questions about (i) contacting the media (as a separate question), and (ii) joining a political group on a social networking site were asked only in the MI survey, not in the OP and ND surveys.

29

The response percentages from the MI survey are based on the following answers to the question "Have you done any of the following activities before or after your participation in Malmöinitiativet?" "Yes, before", "Yes, after", "Yes, both before and after" and "Yes, but I don't know exactly when".

30

Participants' responded to the following question: "How positive or negative are you towards the following methods for making it easier for citizens to communicate with politicians and other responsible persons in Malmö?" The results were weighted based on the statistics relating to the distribution of

### Section: Passive/active users

The analysis in Table 27. shows that (i) many respondents have both signed and created petitions once or twice (53 persons); (ii) 37 respondents have never signed or created any petitions; (iii) around 20 respondents has either signed or created a petition; (iv) while only a very restricted number of respondents has participated on MI many times.

Table 27. Cross tabulation of responses concerning creating and signing petition on MI

		<i>"Have you created any petition on MI?"</i>			
<i>"Have you signed any petition on MI?"</i>		Never	Once or twice	Many times	<i>Total (N)</i>
Never (N)		37	19	1	57
<b>Never (%)</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>21</b>		
Yes, once or twice (N)		22	53	6	81
Yes, many times (N)		4	11	5	20
<b>Yes (total: %)</b>		<b>41</b>		<b>79</b>	
	<i>Total (N)</i>	63	83	12	
	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>		

Source: Author's survey 2011.

The Table below presents a summary version of the cross tabulation of responses concerning creating and signing petition on MI.

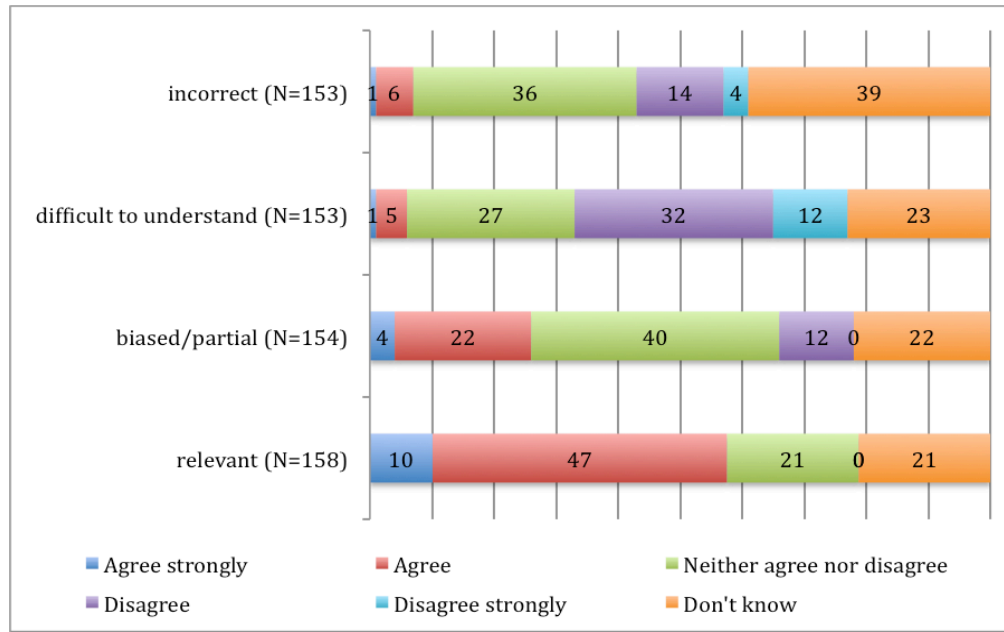
Table 28. Cross tabulation of responses concerning creating and signing petition on MI (%)

	Created petition 'Yes'	Created petition 'No'
Signed	79	41
Not signed	21	59
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

## Accountability

### Section: Sources of information

Figure 7. Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: "In general, when the petitioners describe their proposals on Malmöinitiativet's homepage, the information they provide is..." (%)



## Responsiveness

### Section: User expectations

Table 29 illustrates that the disagreement with the response options regarding expectations of petitioners and petition signers was generally much lower than agreement. The only response option showing somewhat higher disagreement percentages is 'political action'.

Table 29. Expectations of petitioners and petition signers (agree/disagree) (%)

	Petitioners		Petition signers	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Authorities are informed	76	3	76	1
Feedback	75	2	71	3
Authorities discuss	64	5	73	3
Get public/media attention	55	9	64	6
Find supporters	51	8	-	-
Political action	37	17	43	14

Source: Author's survey 2011.

### Section: Media visibility

Table 30. Google hits for MI and BEP

Search tool	MI	My score*	BEP	My score*
Google	11,100-17,900	1	451-4,990	2
Google blogs	396	2	4,770	1
Google news archive	0	2	6	1
	<b>Composite score**</b>	<b>1.7</b>		<b>1.3</b>

Searched terms:

MI: "Malmöinitiativet", "initiativet.Malmö.se", "http://initiativet.Malmö.se" on Google; "Malmöinitiativet" in Google blogs and Google news archive.

BEP: "Bristol e-Petitions", [epetitions.bristol.gov.uk](http://epetitions.bristol.gov.uk), <http://epetitions.bristol.gov.uk> on Google; "epetitions.bristol.gov.uk" in Google blogs; and "Bristol e-Petitions" in Google news archive.

31

Responses to the survey question "What kind of expectations did you have when participating in MI? I expected that my contribution would..."



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*\* In 'my score' 1 is the highest, while 4 is the lowest score. My scores are set on the basis of how many hits each project got, e.g. BEP gets score 1 in news since it has the highest number of hits; MI gets 2 since it has the next best number of hits.*

*\*\* The composite score is calculated as the average score of the three hit dimensions (general, blogs, news).*

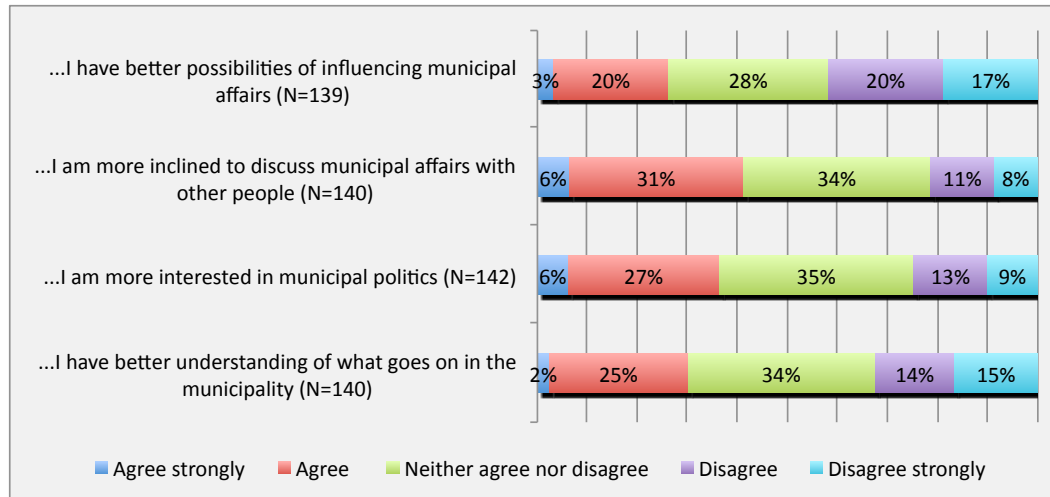
---

Source: Google search on 9 March 2012. See Annex I for further statistical details.

## Civic literacy

### Section: Political interest and knowledge

Figure 8. "After your participation in Malmöinitiativet, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? "I now feel that..."



Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

Table 31. MI respondents who engaged in any of the political activities under consideration only *after* their participation in the project

	(%)	(N)
Posted on an online political forum	3%	140
Demonstrated	3%	139
Signed petition	4%	140
Contacted a civil servant/politician	5%	142
Contacted media	5%	141
Joined a political group on a social networking	8%	139

Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

Table 32. Respondents that have *never* engaged in any of the listed political activities but that can consider participating in the future

"Would you consider doing any of the abovementioned activities in the future?"	(%)	(N)
Participate in a demonstration/protest	65	37
Sign a petition	65	24
Post on an online political forum/discussion group	67	46
Join a political group on a social networking site	67	41
Contact civil servant/politician	68	40
Contact media	70	47

Source: Authors' surveys 2011.

## ANNEX II. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

SWEDEN: MALMÖ INITIATIVE			
Name	Organisation	Title	Interview date
Anneli Philipson (V)	Malmö municipality	Chair, Steering committee for democratic development; Councillor, equality and democracy; party affiliation: Left Party	27 Sept. 2010
Carina Nilsson (S)	Malmö municipality	Member, Steering committee for democratic development; Councillor, culture and leisure; party affiliation: Social Democrat	28 Sept. 2010
My Gillberg (MP)	Malmö municipality	Member, Steering committee for democratic development; party affiliation: Green Party	26 Sept. 2010
Rickard Wendel (M)	Malmö municipality	Member, Steering committee for democratic development; party affiliation: Moderate Party	29 Sept. 2010
Jürgen Lindemann	Malmö municipality	Member, Steering committee for democratic development; civil servant	27 Sept. 2010
Grethe Lindhe	Malmö municipality	Project Manager, Malmö initiative	23 June 2010
Vesna Lagerstedt	Malmö municipality	Moderator, Malmö initiative	23 June 2010
UK: BRISTOL E-PETITIONER			
Kevin O'Malley	Bristol Council	Senior Programme Manager at Connecting Bristol programme	1 April 2011
Michael Brewin	Bristol Council	Research and Consultation Officer	1 April 2011
Deborah Kinghorn	Bristol Council	Policy team, participated in development of the Petition Policy	1 Apr. 2011
Ron Stone	Bristol Council	Labour Councillor	1 Apr. 2011

Mark Wright	Bristol Council	Liberal Democrat and Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Value for Money	1 Apr. 2011
Lesley Alexander	Bristol Council	Conservative Councillor	1 Apr. 2011
Mark Weston	Bristol Council	Conservative Councillor	7 Apr. 2011*
Tess Green	Bristol Council	Green Party Councillor	21 Apr. 2011*
<b>UK: THEY WORK FOR YOU</b>			
Tom Steinberg	MySociety	Director MySociety	31 Mar. 2011
<b>ITALY: OPENPARLAMENTO</b>			
Vittorio Alvino	OpenPolis/Depp Srl	President, OpenPolis/Depp Srl	27 Apr. 2010
Ettore Di Cesare	OpenPolis/Depp Srl	Member, project coordinator at OpenPolis	27 Apr. 2010
Guglielmo Celata	OpenPolis/Depp Srl	Member, responsible for technological aspects at OpenPolis	27 Apr. 2010
Valter Carraro	OpenPolis/Depp Srl	Moderator, OpenPolis	9 June 2010*
<b>FRANCE: NOSDEPUTES</b>			
Tangui Morlier	Regards Citoyens	Co-founder, Regards Citoyens	14 Oct. 2010*
Benjamin Ooghe-Tabanou	Regards Citoyens	Co-founder, Regards Citoyens	19 Oct. 2010*
Brice Person	Regards Citoyens	Member, Regards Citoyens	19 Oct. 2010*

\* Conducted via Skype.

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Enkät angående Malmöinitiativet

+ Aggiungi pagina

## PAGINA 1

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

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## Inledning

Välkommen!

Tack för att du tar dig tid att fylla i enkäten!

Svaren kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt och endast presenteras på aggregerad nivå, dvs. de kommer inte kunna tillskrivas enskilda respondenter.

Jag skulle vara tacksam om du kunde fylla i enkäten innan den 9 mars 2011. Det borde inte ta mer än tio minuter! Har du frågor eller något du undrar över så ta gärna en titt på: [undersökningens hemsida](#) eller kontakta undertecknad (alina.ostling@eui.eu).

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**Alina Östling, doktorand på European University Institute ([www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu))**

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Dividi pagina qui

**D1** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Modifica logica della domanda \(2\)](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Har du lämnat in något förslag på Malmöinitiativets hemsida?**

Nej, aldrig      Ja, en eller två gånger      Ja, många gånger      Vet ej

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 2** [Modifica opzioni della pagina](#) ▼ [Aggiungi logica della pagina](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

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**Dina initiativ**

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

**D2** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Lämnade du in förslaget för din egen räkning eller å någon annans vägnar? "Jag lämnade in förslaget(n)..."**

...å en intressegrupps eller förenings vägnar  
 ...å ett politiskt partis vägnar  
 ...å en statlig myndighets/institutions vägnar  
 ...å privata företags vägnar  
 ...för min egen räkning  
 å någon annans vägnar (var god ange för vilken typ av organisation/aktör )

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

**D3** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Modifica logica della domanda \(2\)](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Har någon tjänsteman eller politiker kontaktat dig med anledning av ditt/dina förslag?**

Ja      Nej      Vet ej

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 3** [Modifica opzioni della pagina](#) ▼ [Aggiungi logica della pagina](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

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**Dina initiativ**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D4

**Vad fick du för svar från tjänstemannen eller politikern?**

Att liknande förslag redan har lagts fram eller håller på att behandlas av kommunen

Att förslaget inte faller under kommunens ansvar

Att förslaget är irrelevant eller ej tillämpligt

Att förslaget kommer presenteras under ett möte eller en politisk debatt

Att förslaget kommer integreras i ett politiskt beslut

Svaret var formulerat i generella/vaga termer

Annat (var god ange)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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PAGINA 4

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**Dina initiativ**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande





Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D7 Modifica domanda ▼ Modifica logica della domanda (2) Sposta Elimina

**Har du skrivit under någon annans förslag på Malmöinitiativets hemsida?**

Nej, aldrig                      Ja, en eller två gånger                      Ja, många gånger                      Vet ej

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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PAGINA 7 Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

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**Andras initiativ**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D8 Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**Fundera utifrån följande påståenden över vilka förväntningar du hade när du signerade förslaget(n): "Jag förväntade mig att..."**

Instämmer starkt      Instämmer      Varken instämmer eller tar avstånd      Tar avstånd      Tar starkt      Vet ej

- ...förslaget skulle uppmärksammas av allmänheten/media
- ...berörda myndigheter skulle informeras
- ...berörda myndigheter skulle diskutera frågan på ett möte
- ...det skulle finnas en återkoppling om hur förslaget tagits emot och hur det skulle hanteras
- ...förslaget skulle förändra lagstiftning eller leda till politiska åtgärder
- Annat (var god ange)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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PAGINA 8 Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

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**Andras initiativ**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D9

**I vilken utsträckning instämmer du i eller tar avstånd från följande påståenden?  
"I allmänhet, när Malmöinitiativets initiativtagare beskriver sina förslag på hemsidan..."**

Instämmer starkt    Instämmer    Varken instämmer eller tar avstånd    Tar avstånd    Tar starkt avstånd    Vet ej

...är informationen relevant

...är dem partiska/ger dem en ensidig bild av frågan

...är informationen svår att förstå

...förekommer felaktig information

*Hur skulle du annars beskriva informationen som initiativtagare uppger?*

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

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### Diskussionsforumet

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D10

**Har du någonsin bidragit med kommentarer på Malmöinitiativets diskussionsforum?**

Nej, aldrig

Ja, en eller två gånger

Ja, många gånger

Vet ej

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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PAGINA 10

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### Allmän bedömning av Malmöinitiativet

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D11 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Efter att du medverkat i Malmöinitiativet, i vilken utsträckning instämmer du i följande påståenden?  
"Jag känner mig nu..."**

Instämmer starkt    Instämmer    Varken instämmer eller tar avstånd    Tar avstånd    Tar starkt avstånd    Vet ej

...mer insatt i vad Malmö Stad gör och inte gör

...mer intresserad av kommunala politiska frågor

...benägen att diskutera kommunala politiska frågor med andra människor

...ha större möjligheter att påverka inom de kommunala verksamheterna

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

D12 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Är du nöjd eller missnöjd med hur kommunen hanterar förslagen efter avslutad namnsamling?**

Mycket nöjd

Ganska nöjd

Ganska missnöjd

Mycket missnöjd

Vet ej

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

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**Hur hittade du till Malmöinitiativet?**

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D13 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Hur fick du kännedom om Malmöinitiativet? "Från..."**

Malmö stads hemsida

En annan hemsida

En sökmotor t.ex. Google, Yahoo, Ask

Malmö stads publikation t.ex. affish, broschyr

Artikel/annons i en tidning eller tidskrift

Radio

TV

Sociala nätverk som t.ex. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace

Vänner/kollegor/familj  
 Annat (var god ange)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Politiskt deltagande

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D14

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**Har du gjort något av följande före eller efter din medverkan i Malmöinitiativet?**

				Ja, men jag kommer inte ihåg exakt när	
Nej, aldrig	Ja, <u>före</u> min medverkan i Malmöinitiativet	Ja, <u>efter</u> min medverkan i Malmöinitiativet	Ja, <u>både före och efter</u> Malmöinitiativet	Vet ej	

Bidragit till ett politiskt forum/diskussionsgrupp online

Deltagit i en demonstration eller protesthandling

Deltagit i en politisk aktionsgrupp genom ett socialt nätverk online, t.ex. genom Facebook

Kontaktat en politiker eller offentlig tjänsteman på riks- eller lokal nivå

Kontaktat media

Skrivit under en namnsamling (frånsett ev. förslag signerade genom Malmöinitiativet)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

Dividi pagina qui

D15

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**Skulle du kunna tänka dig att engagera dig i någon av de ovannämnda aktiviteterna i framtiden?**

Ja	Nej	Vet ej
----	-----	--------

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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Elimina

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### Politiskt deltagande

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D16

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

#### Röstade du i det senaste riksdagsvalet?

Nej, jag röstade inte

Nej, jag är ej röstberättigad

Ja, jag röstade i det svenska riksdagsvalet i september 2010

Ja, jag röstade i ett annat riksdagsval utanför Sverige

Vet ej

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Internetanvändning

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D17

Modifica domanda ▼

Modifica logica della domanda (1)

Sposta

Elimina

#### Hur ofta har du i genomsnitt använt Internet de senaste 3 månaderna?

Varje dag eller nästan varje dag

Åtminstone en gång i veckan (men inte varje dag)

Åtminstone en gång i månaden (men inte varje vecka)

Mindre än en gång i månaden

Aldrig

Vet ej

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Internetanvändning

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D18

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**Hur du personligen använt Internet för följande ändamål?**

Ja Nej Vet ej

Lagt upp video på t.ex. YouTube

Redigerat ett befintligt Wiki-inlägg eller skapat ett nytt Wiki-inlägg på t.ex. Wikipedia

Skapat din egen blogg

Betygsatt/recenserat webbinnehåll

Använt sociala nätverk som t.ex. Facebook eller LinkedIn

Hämtat information/nyheter om t.ex. aktuella händelser eller om politik

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Sysselsättning

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D19 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### Vilka av dessa beskrivningar passar bäst in på vad du har gjort under de senaste sju dagarna?

Förvärvsarbete (eller för tillfället ledig/på semester/föräldraledig/sjuk), anställd, egenföretagare

Utbildning, även under lov/ledighet

Arbetslös

Ålderspensionerad

Förtidspension p g a sjukdom eller funktionshinder

Militärtjänstgöring eller samhällstjänst

Skötte eget hushåll (ej som löneanställd)

Annat

Vet ej

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

D20 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### Hindras du på något sätt i dina dagliga aktiviteter av någon långvarig sjukdom eller funktionshinder, krämpor eller psykiska besvär?

Ja, mycket

Ja, i viss utsträckning

Nej

Vet ej

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## Demografisk information

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D21 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### Vilket år är du född?

Ange DAG/MÅNAD/ÅR i siffror

DD MM ÅÅÅÅ

/  /

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

D22 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### Vilken är din högsta utbildning?

Ej avslutad folkskola/grundskola

Folkskola/grundskola

Gymnasium  
Universitet/högskola  
Forskarutbildning  
Vet ej

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Demografisk information

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D23

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

#### Om du lägger ihop alla inkomstkällor, vilken är ditt hushålls totala nettoinkomst i månaden?

Ange din nettoinkomst i SEK efter skatter och andra transfereringar (t.ex. föräldrapenning, bostadsbidrag, studiemedel, socialbidrag). Ange inkomsten utan mellanrum mellan siffrorna och gör en uppskattning om du inte vet den exakta siffran.

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

Dividi pagina qui

D24

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

#### Vad har du för kön?

Kvinna

Man

Vill ej  
uppgge

Annat (var god ange)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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### Demografisk information

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande



D25 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### Vilket medborgarskap har du?

Annat (var god ange)

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D26 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

### I vilket land är du född?

Annat (var god ange)

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### Kommentarer till enkäten

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

D27 [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**Vi uppskattar din hjälp i enkäten!**  
**Om du har några kommentarer om enkätfrågorna eller något du vill tillägga något kan du använda utrymmet nedan:**

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

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[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**Tack för att du tog dig tid att fylla i enkäten!**



[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

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[Anteprima indagine](#)

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+ Crea indagine

Hai un account BASIC | Per rimuovere i limiti di un account BASIC e ottenere domande illimitate, [passa al livello superiore!](#)Questionario per gli utenti di  
OpenParlamento

Progetta indagine

Raccogli risposte

Analizza risultati

## Modifica indagine

Anteprima indagine

Invia indagine »

Per cambiare l'aspetto della tua indagine, seleziona un tema qui di seguito.

Copy of Blue Ice

Modifica tema

Crea tema personalizzato

## TITOLO E LOGO

Modifica titolo

Aggiorna per aggiungere il logo »



Questionario per gli utenti di OpenParlamento

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## PAGINA 1

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Benvenuto/a e grazie per il tuo interesse al questionario!

Sto facendo un dottorato di ricerca nel campo della democrazia elettronica e svolgo questa indagine per conoscere il punto di vista degli utenti di [Openparlamento](#). La tua opinione aiuterà a far progredire la democrazia elettronica.

Occorrono circa 5 minuti per completare il questionario. Le risposte individuali resteranno strettamente confidenziali.

Ti prego di compilare il questionario entro il 4 luglio. Se hai domande riguardo al questionario, puoi dare uno sguardo alla [pagina web del questionario](#) o contattarmi al seguente indirizzo: [alina.ostling@eui.eu](mailto:alina.ostling@eui.eu)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**Alina Östling, dottoranda presso Istituto Universitario Europeo ([www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu))**

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**D1** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Modifica logica della domanda \(2\)](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**1. Hai mai avviato il monitoraggio di un politico, un atto legislativo o un argomento su Openparlamento?**

Mai                                      Una volta o due                                      Tante volte                                      Non so

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

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**PAGINA 3** [Modifica opzioni della pagina](#) ▼ [Aggiungi logica della pagina](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

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**D2** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**2. Come valuti la facilità d'uso delle funzionalità di monitoraggio?**

Molto semplice  
Semplice  
Né semplice né complicato  
Complicato  
Molto complicato  
Non so

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**D3** Modifica domanda ▼ Modifica logica della domanda (2) Sposta Elimina

**3. Hai mai partecipato attivamente al sito di Openparlamento, cioè commentato, descritto o votato atti parlamentari?**

Si No Non so

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**PAGINA 5** Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina Mostra solo questa pagina

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**D4** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**4. Con quale frequenza hai partecipato alle seguenti attività sul sito di Openparlamento?**

	Mai	Una volta o due	Tante volte	Non so
Commentato un atto parlamentare				
Descritto un atto parlamentare o modificato un testo scritto da un altro utente				
Votato favorevole/contrario a proposito di un atto parlamentare				

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**PAGINA 6** Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina Mostra solo questa pagina

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**D5** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**5. Che tipo di aspettative avevi quando hai partecipato al sito di Openparlamento?**

Indica in quale misura sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni.  
**"Mi aspettavo che il mio contributo..."**

	Molto d'accordo	D'accordo	Né d'accordo né in disaccordo	In disaccordo	Molto in disaccordo	Non so
...sarebbe stato preso in considerazione dai parlamentari						
...avrebbe portato ad un provvedimento legislativo o politico						

Né  
 Molto d'accordo    D'accordo    d'accordo    In    Molto in    Non  
 d'accordo    né in    disaccordo    disaccordo    so  
 disaccordo

...avrebbe attirato il sostegno di altre persone

...sarebbe diventato noto al grande pubblico o ai media

Altro (specificare)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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**PAGINA 7**

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D6**    Modifica domanda ▼    Aggiungi la logica della domanda    Sposta    Elimina

**6. Hai partecipato a Openparlamento per conto proprio o per conto di una organizzazione/gruppo? (Barrare tutte le caselle che interessano)**

**"Ho partecipato per conto..."**

- ...di un'associazione o un gruppo di interesse
- ...di un partito politico
- ...di un ente pubblico
- ...di una società privata
- ...proprio

Altro (specificare)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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**PAGINA 8**

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D7**    Modifica domanda ▼    Aggiungi la logica della domanda    Sposta    Elimina

**7. Se Openparlamento non esistesse, avresti cercato un altro modo per far sentire la tua voce al Parlamento?**

Sicuramente si      Probabilmente si      Probabilmente no      Sicuramente no      Non so

---

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande
Dividi pagina qui

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**D8** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**8. Dopo aver iniziato a utilizzare Openparlamento, quanto sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con le seguenti affermazioni? "Ritengo di..."**

	Molto		Né					
	d'accordo	D'accordo	d'accordo	In	Molto in		Non so	
			né in	disaccordo	disaccordo			
			disaccordo					

...essere più interessato/a a ciò che accade in Parlamento

...avere migliori possibilità di influenzare ciò che accade in Parlamento

...avere una migliore comprensione di ciò che accade in Parlamento

---

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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**PAGINA 9**

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**D9** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**9. Come valuti l'aggiunta in Openparlamento dei nuovi strumenti che permettono agli utenti di...?**

	Molto utile	Utile	Né utile né inutile	Inutile	Del tutto inutile	Non so
--	-------------	-------	---------------------	---------	-------------------	--------

...comunicare tra loro

...comunicare con i parlamentari

...avanzare proprie proposte ai rappresentanti o parlamentari

---

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande
Dividi pagina qui

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**D10** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**10. Quanto sei d'accordo o in disaccordo con la seguente affermazione?**

	Molto		Né				
	d'accordo	D'accordo	d'accordo	In	Molto in		Non so
			né in	disaccordo	disaccordo		
			disaccordo				

Molto d'accordo    D'accordo    Né d'accordo né in disaccordo    In disaccordo    Molto in disaccordo    Non so

OpenParlamento fornisce informazioni in modo imparziale ed obiettivo

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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**PAGINA 10**

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D11**

**11. In media, con quale frequenza hai usato Internet negli ultimi tre mesi?**

Tutti i giorni o quasi tutti i giorni

Almeno una volta alla settimana (ma non ogni giorno)

Almeno una volta al mese (ma non ogni settimana)

Meno di una volta al mese

Mai

No so

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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**PAGINA 11**

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D12**

**12. Hai utilizzato Internet per i seguenti scopi?**

Si    No    Non so

Creato un blog

Usato siti di 'social networking' (p. es. Facebook o LinkedIn)

Caricato un video (p. es. su YouTube o Vimeo)

Fornito voti/commenti su contenuti web



Si    No    Non so

Modificato o creato una pagina su un sito "Wiki" (p. es. su Wikipedia)

Ottenuto notizie/informazioni (p. es. su fatti di attualità o di politica)

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**D13**    Modifica domanda ▼    Sposta    Elimina

**13. Hai svolto alcune delle seguenti attività prima o dopo la tua partecipazione a Openparlamento?**

	No, mai	Si, <u>prima</u>	Si, <u>dopo</u>	Si, sia <u>prima</u> che <u>dopo</u>	Si, ma non mi ricordo Non so la data esatta
--	------------	---------------------	--------------------	---	--

Scritto su un forum politico/gruppo di discussione su Internet

Contattato i media o i politici

Firmato una petizione

Partecipato ad una manifestazione

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)    [Dividi pagina qui](#)

**D14**    Modifica domanda ▼    Aggiungi la logica della domanda    Sposta    Elimina

**14. In futuro, potresti considerare di fare una delle attività elencate nella domanda precedente?**

Si	No	Non so
----	----	--------

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**PAGINA 13**

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D15 Modifica domanda ▼ Aggiungi la logica della domanda Sposta Elimina

**15. In occasione delle ultime elezioni politiche hai votato?**

No, non ho votato

Si, ho votato in occasione delle ultime elezioni politiche italiane nell'aprile 2008

Si, ho votato in occasione di altre elezioni politiche non italiane

Non so

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande Dividi pagina qui

D16 Modifica domanda ▼ Aggiungi la logica della domanda Sposta Elimina

**16. Indica il genere:**

Maschio

Femmina

Preferisco non rispondere

Altra identità di genere (specificare)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 14 Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

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**Copia di pagina:**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D17 Modifica domanda ▼ Aggiungi la logica della domanda Sposta Elimina

**17. In che paese sei nato/a?**

Altro (specificare)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande Dividi pagina qui

**D18** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**18. Qual è la tua cittadinanza?**

Altro (specificare)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 15** [Modifica opzioni della pagina](#) ▼ [Aggiungi logica della pagina](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

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[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

**D19** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**19. Quando sei nato/a?**

**Si prega di inserire l'anno in numeri**

*Questo dato personale non verrà diffuso se non in modo aggregato in analisi statistiche*

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

**D20** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**20. Quale è il titolo di studio più elevato che hai conseguito?**

- Senza titolo
- Licenza elementare
- Licenza media/avviamento professionale
- Diploma di scuola media superiore
- Diploma universitario o laurea
- Dottorato

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D21** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**21. Quale delle seguenti alternative descrive meglio la condizione lavorativa in cui ti trovavi la settimana scorsa?**

Occupato/a (o temporaneamente in congedo)	In servizio civile o servizio militare
Studente/essa (inclusi i periodi di vacanza)	Dedito alla cura del nucleo familiare
Disoccupato/a	Altro
Pensionato/a	Non so
Inabile al lavoro	

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande [Dividi pagina qui](#)

**D22** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Aggiungi la logica della domanda](#) [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**22. In qualche modo sei ostacolato/a nelle tue attività da qualche malattia di vecchia data, da qualche inabilità, infermità o problema di salute mentale?**

Si, molto                      Si, in parte                      No                      Non so

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 17** [Modifica opzioni della pagina](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D23** [Modifica domanda](#) ▼ [Sposta](#) [Elimina](#)

**23.**

**Grazie per aver completato il questionario!**

**Qualora avessi dei commenti e suggerimenti, puoi utilizzare lo spazio sottostante:**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

Torna alle mie indagini

Anteprima indagine

Invia indagine »

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**Chi siamo:** [Management](#) • [Consiglio di amministrazione](#) • [Partner](#) • [Redazione](#) • [Contattaci](#) • [Opportunità di lavoro](#) • [Mappa del sito](#) • [Aiuto](#)

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Aggiorna euprofiler

Home Le mie indagini Servizi di indagine Piani e prezzi

+ Crea indagine

Hai un account BASIC | Per rimuovere i limiti di un account BASIC e ottenere domande illimitate, [passa al livello superiore!](#)

## NEW\_Enquête des utilisateurs du site Nos Députés

Progetta indagine

Raccogli risposte

Analizza risultati

### Modifica indagine

Anteprima indagine

Invia indagine »

Per cambiare l'aspetto della tua indagine, seleziona un tema qui di seguito.

Copy of Blue Ice

Modifica tema

Crea tema personalizzato

### TITOLO E LOGO

Modifica titolo

Aggiorna per aggiungere il logo »



NEW\_Enquête des utilisateurs du site Nos Députés

+ Aggiungi pagina

### PAGINA 1

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

Mostra solo questa pagina

Bienvenue et merci de votre intérêt pour cette enquête!

Je suis une chercheuse spécialisée dans le domaine de la démocratie électronique et je réalise cette enquête afin d'obtenir la perspective des utilisateurs sur le site de [Nos Députés](#). J'espère que les résultats du questionnaire pourront aider à faire avancer la démocratie électronique.

L'enquête ne devrait pas prendre plus de 7 minutes. Toutes les réponses seront gardées dans la plus stricte confidentialité. Les informations recueillies dans cette étude ne seront divulguées que sous une forme agrégée et ne seront pas attribuables directement à des individus.

Si vous avez des questions sur l'enquête, vous pouvez consulter [la page d'accueil pour l'enquête](#) ou me contacter à l'adresse suivante: [alina.ostling@eui.eu](mailto:alina.ostling@eui.eu)

*Chaque question est facultative, n'hésitez donc pas à sauter une question à laquelle vous ne souhaiteriez pas répondre.*

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**Alina Östling, chercheuse auprès de l'Institut universitaire européen ([www.eui.eu](http://www.eui.eu))**

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 2

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

Mostra solo questa pagina

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D1 Modifica domanda ▼ Modifica logica della domanda (2) Sposta Elimina

1. Avez-vous déjà posté des commentaires sur le site de Nos Députés?

Oui, une ou deux fois      Oui, plusieurs fois      Non      Ne sait pas

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 3

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

Mostra solo questa pagina

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D2 Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

2. Quel genre d'attentes aviez-vous quand vous avez posté des commentaires sur le site de Nos Députés? Veuillez m'indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord ou non avec les propositions suivantes:

"Quand j'ai posté des commentaires sur Nos Députés, je m'attendais à..."

			Ni			
Tout à fait	Plutôt	d'accord,	Plutôt pas	Pas du	Ne sait	
d'accord	d'accord	ni pas	d'accord	tout	pas	
		d'accord		d'accord		

- ...ce que les parlementaires les considèrent
- ...ce que mes commentaires conduisent à des mesures législatives ou politiques
- ...ce que mes commentaires se traduisent par le soutien d'autres personnes
- ...ce que mes commentaires deviennent connus au grand public/aux médias
- Autre (précisez s'il vous plaît)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 4

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

[Mostra solo questa pagina](#)[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

D3

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**3. Avez-vous posté des commentaires sur le site de Nos Députés en votre nom propre ou de la part d'une organisation/groupe?**

(Cliquez sur toutes les réponses qui s'appliquent à votre cas)

"J'ai posté des commentaires..."

...de la part d'un groupe d'intérêt ou d'une association

...de la part d'un parti politique

...de la part d'un établissement public

...de la part d'une société privée

...de ma propre initiative

Autre (précisez s'il vous plaît)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[Dividi pagina qui](#)

D4

Modifica domanda ▼

Modifica logica della domanda (2)

Sposta

Elimina

**4. Est-ce qu'un fonctionnaire ou un politicien vous a contacté au sujet de vos commentaires sur Nos Députés?**

Oui

Non

Ne sait pas

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[+ Aggiungi pagina](#)

PAGINA 5

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

[Mostra solo questa pagina](#)[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

D5

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**5. Quel type de réponse avez-vous reçu du fonctionnaire ou du politicien?**

Qu'une proposition similaire avait déjà été/est actuellement discutée par le Parlement

Que la question proposée ne tombe pas sous la responsabilité du Parlement

Que la question proposée n'est pas pertinente

Que la question proposée serait présentée lors d'un débat parlementaire

Que mes commentaires seraient incorporées dans une décision politique

La réponse que j'ai reçue était formulée de manière très générale/vague



Autre (précisez s'il vous plaît)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 6**

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

[Mostra solo questa pagina](#)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

**D6** Modifica domanda ▼ Aggiungi la logica della domanda Sposta Elimina

**6. Si le site de Nos Députés n'existait pas, auriez-vous trouvé une autre façon de faire entendre votre voix au Parlement? Diriez-vous que c'est ...**

...très probable   
  ...plutôt probable   
  ...peu probable   
  ...pas probable du tout   
  Ne sait pas

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#) [Dividi pagina qui](#)

**D7** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**7. Après avoir commencé à utiliser le site Nos Députés, dans quelle mesure êtes-vous d'accord ou non avec les propositions suivantes?**

**"Je sens maintenant que ..."**

	Tout à fait d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Ni d'accord, ni pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Pas du tout d'accord	Ne sait pas
--	----------------------	-----------------	------------------------------	---------------------	----------------------	-------------

... je suis plus intéressé(e) par ce qui se passe au Parlement

... j'ai une meilleure compréhension de ce qui se passe au Parlement

... j'ai davantage de moyens d'influencer ce qui se passe au Parlement

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 7**

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

[Mostra solo questa pagina](#)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D8** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**8. Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous d'accord ou non avec la proposition suivante?**

	Tout à fait d'accord	Plutôt d'accord	Ni d'accord, ni pas d'accord	Plutôt pas d'accord	Pas du tout d'accord	Ne sait pas
--	----------------------	-----------------	------------------------------	---------------------	----------------------	-------------

Nos Députés fournit des informations d'une manière impartiale et non partisane.

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 8** Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

[Mostra solo questa pagina](#)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D9** Modifica domanda ▼ Modifica logica della domanda (1) Sposta Elimina

**9. Avec quelle fréquence, en moyenne, avez-vous utilisé Internet pendant les trois derniers mois?**

- Chaque jour ou presque
- Au moins une fois par semaine (mais pas chaque jour)
- Au moins une fois par mois (mais pas chaque semaine)
- Moins d'une fois par mois
- Jamais
- Ne sait pas

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

**PAGINA 9** Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼ Aggiungi logica della pagina Sposta Elimina

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

**D10** Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**10. Avez-vous personnellement utilisé Internet pour les raisons suivantes?**

Oui   Non   Ne sait pas

pas

Fournir une évaluation en donnant une note/des commentaires sur le contenu web

Créer mon propre blog

Rédiger une page existante ou créer une nouvelle page sur un site "Wiki" (ex: sur Wikipedia)

Télécharger une video (ex: sur YouTube ou Vimeo)

Utiliser un réseau social (ex: Facebook ou LinkedIn)

Obtenir des nouvelles ou des informations (ex: sur l'actualité ou sur la politique)

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 10

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

Mostra solo questa pagina

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D11

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

11. Avez-vous fait l'une des choses suivantes avant ou après votre engagement sur le site de Nos Députés?

Non, jamais	Oui, avant	Oui, après	Oui, avant ET après	Oui, mais je ne me rappelle pas la date exacte	Ne sait pas
-------------	------------	------------	------------------------	--	-------------

Contacté les médias ou politiciens

Ecrit sur un forum politique/groupe de discussion sur Internet

Pris part à une manifestation

Signé une pétition

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

Dividi pagina qui

D12

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

12. Envisagez-vous de faire l'une des activités citées dans la question ci-dessus dans l'avenir?

Oui

Non

Ne sait pas

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

## PAGINA 11

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

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D13

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**13. Avez-vous voté aux dernières élections nationales?**

Non

Oui, j'ai voté aux dernières élections législatives (juin 2007) et/ou aux dernières élections présidentielles (avril 2007)

Oui, j'ai voté lors d'une autre élection nationale hors de France

Ne sait pas

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[+ Aggiungi pagina](#)

## PAGINA 12

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

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D14

Modifica domanda ▼

Sposta

Elimina

**14. En quelle année êtes-vous né?**

(sous la forme 1900)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[Dividi pagina qui](#)

D15

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**15. Quel est votre genre?**

Femme

Homme

Je ne veux pas  
répondre

Autre identité de genre (précisez s'il vous plaît)

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[+ Aggiungi pagina](#)

PAGINA 13

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

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Sposta

Elimina

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D16

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**16. Quel est le niveau d'études le plus élevé que vous ayez atteint?**

Non scolarisé

Certificat d'études primaires

Brevet élémentaire/brevet d'étude du premier cycle/brevet des collèges

Baccalauréat

Diplôme universitaire

Doctorat

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[+ Aggiungi pagina](#)

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D17

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**17. Parmi ces situations, laquelle s'applique le mieux à ce que vous avez fait au cours de ces 7 derniers jours ?**

Travail rémunéré

Le service civil ou militaire

Etudes/en formation

Au foyer, s'occupant des enfants ou d'une autre personne

Sans emploi

Autre

Retraité ou pré-retraité

Ne sait pas

Malade ou handicapé de manière permanente

[Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande](#)[Dividi pagina qui](#)

D18

Modifica domanda ▼

Aggiungi la logica della domanda

Sposta

Elimina

**18. Etes-vous gêné d'une manière ou d'une autre dans vos activités quotidiennes par une maladie de longue durée, un handicap, une infirmité ou un problème de santé mentale?**

Oui fortement

Oui dans une certaine mesure

Non

Ne sait pas

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 15

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Aggiungi logica della pagina

Sposta

Elimina

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

D19 Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

19.

**Je vous remercie pour votre contribution à cette enquête!**

**Si vous avez des commentaires que vous aimeriez faire à propos de cette enquête avant qu'elle ne finisse, utilisez l'espace ci-dessous s'il vous plaît:**

Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

+ Aggiungi pagina

PAGINA 16

Modifica opzioni della pagina ▼

Sposta

Elimina

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Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

Modifica domanda ▼ Sposta Elimina

**Merci pour votre contribution à l'enquête!**



Passa ad un piano superiore per aggiungere altre domande

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