THE WORK TO MAKE ePARTICIPATION WORK

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For Aron

Abstract

eParticipation is a new research domain focusing the development of ICT-supported participation in processes of government and governance. These processes may concern involvement of practitioners, citizens and politicians in electronic public administration, service delivery, policy-making and decision-making. The overall objective of this thesis is to discuss how eParticipation is enacted and shaped, in and by practice, and thus contribute to development of practice-based conceptualisation as well as development within the differing practices of eParticipation.

The study is based on interpretive case studies as well as theoretical perspectives assisting the analysis of the research field as multiple and co-related processes and relations of change and learning. The empirical data has been gathered during participation in several research and development projects, conducted within a local municipality in Southeast Sweden. Several of the projects were also part of national and international collaboration. The methodological approach comprises ethnographic studies, including interviews, participatory observations and document analysis. The approach of ethnomethodology was also inspirational for the close examining of how various actors organised their participation or non-participation in the various settings of preparing for or conducting eParticipation. The theoretical basis is multi-disciplinary, drawing on perspectives from technological and social theories, such as political science, ANT and feminist theories along with IS (information systems) research.

The concept of *symbolic eParticipation* is coined in order to explore how the preconceived ideas of managing participation seem to be constricting and limiting local and situated development. At the same time, symbolic eParticipation is inspiring development of local interpretations and participatory work. The mutual shaping of these activities leads to the formulation of the notion *malleability of organisations and citizenship*. The findings indicate that activities of for instance customisation of software or evaluation of consultation tools contribute in creating socio-technical mechanisms, of which they are themselves a part. Those mechanisms embed power relations, and thus become a delegated function of opening up or closing for participation.

An example of such socio-technical mechanisms is the notion of “active citizenship”, which is given higher legitimate status if it is conducted mainly as an electronically mediated activity. The term “*symbolic active citizenship*” is suggested as a concept which describes the legitimate active citizenship. The process of becoming active is thoroughly addressed in this thesis, including variations such as pro-activity and active passivity. These are also mediated by processes of learning in communities of practice. Active participants alternate between being active and actively passive in the processes which are supposed to constitute, form and sustain activities of eParticipation. This fluidity of citizenship has implications for future design of technology and for how to perceive participation in these activities.

The interplay of symbolic eParticipation and organisational and civic malleability described in this thesis, underscores the significance of providing space for negotiations of situating eParticipation.

PART ONE

Prologue

PART TWO

6. Beyond the image of the active citizen

PART THREE

PART ONE

Acknowledgements

"Life," John Lennon wrote, "is what happens while you're busy making other plans."[1]

The quote by John Lennon fits well with the activity of writing a dissertation. Life seems to be something that accidentally happens to you when you are busy writing about participation. However, the world did not give up on me; I was constantly invited to take part, even though I was literally trying to put life on hold, in order to get things done. The world came to me in the form of supervisors, family, colleagues, Flow society members, books, seminars, interesting web sites and requesting mails, contradicting thoughts and theories, hungry cats and coffee-breaks, inquisitive children and social friends, rights and duties as a doctoral candidate and so on in an endless row of sweet, challenging interruptions.

I have received much support and inspiration from many people during my work. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to my formal supervisors Tone Bratteteig, Oslo University and Sara Eriksén at Blekinge institute of technology. I am also grateful to Bo Helgeson and all my colleagues at the division of Interaction and Systems Design at BTH. I especially would like to thank Jeff Winter, BTH, for helping me improve my English. My friends in the divison Technoscience studies at BTH have also given much support over the past years. Agneta Ranerup at the IT-university in Gothenburg, Sölve Landén at Ronneby Municipality and Eva Norling and Kajsa Bjerstedt-Blom at Infocenter offered valuable contributions and support in various ways during my work with the thesis. A special thank you also to Mona Bäcklund. I should also like to emphasise that without all those who have participated in the various projects - the municipal employees, citizens and politicians - nothing would have come of my thesis. To all these people I offer my sincere and hearty thanks, as well as to my friends and family, Kjell and Aron.

[1] Quote form the lyric Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy) by John Lennon, see http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Lennon, http://www.twinmusic.com/lyrics_file/beatles/fantasy/beautiful.html [Accessed 060401]

1. Introduction

> "*Learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it/.../Just as making theory is a form of practice in the world, not a speculation at a remove from it, so too learning is a practice, or a family of them.*"(Hanks in Lave & Wenger, 1991: 24)

My interest is in the ongoing transformation of socio-technical participation – preferably as enacted in local, municipal settings – that is part of a more overarching transformation of the public authorities, which is labelled eGovernment. eGovernment is also the official name of the European Union's political initiative that is aimed at bringing about a rationalisation and modernisation of public administration and its relations with citizens. This is achieved through digital provision and support of services and public administration, and lately also citizens' active contribution in designing those processes (governance). eGovernment is officially defined as:

> "*...the use of information and communication technologies in public administration combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies. E-government is an enabler to realise a better and more efficient administration. It improves the development and implementation of public policies and helps the public sector to cope with the conflicting demands of delivering more and better services with fewer resources*". (COM 2003/567)

However, the scope of my research also includes other spheres, such as informal political domains and civic engagement.

eParticipation has been described as "*ICT-supported participation in processes involved in government and governance. Processes may concern administration, service delivery, decision-making, and policy making.*" (Macintosh, 2006) eParticipation is part of strivings to transform relations between decision-makers and the public, and those activities are expected to help renew the representative model of democracy. The visions of increased and evolved participation are operationalised through the stimulation of new forms of deliberative discussions and other types of participation, on the basis of ensuring access for all (inclusion). This is part of the aim of creating a better basis for decisions or of the ultimate goal of empowering citizens; priorities which are highlighted in new directions for transformation of the public sector. This reconfiguration of public and governmental relations, towards a more direct emphasis on citizens' electronically-aided participation in direct or indirect decision-making processes, puts pressure on all involved parties. It also contributes to the development of new forms of participatory activities. Citizens, politicians and practitioners are expected to

become fully engaged in building a participatory society, and these changes of priorities are causing constrains and tensions as well as hopes for the future.

Similarly, electronically enabled participation influences traditional participation. Customary ways of participating in turn influence how eParticipation evolves. Macintosh (2006) describes tools for eParticipation as the use of information and communication technologies in order to support "*information retrieval, top-down engagement or bottom-up empowerment*". Suggested tools for these activities are often exemplified by webcasts, blogs, chat interviews, discussion boards, quick polls, surveys and petitions; in some cases also decision-making games. Those examples all concentrate on participation as a form of "event", rather than it being embedded in ordinary life and practices. My research, on the other hand, embodies eParticipation as a phenomenon consisting of a variety of socio-technical participations, taking place in varying activities and contexts, of direct or indirect relevance for democratic decision-making but also as part of every day life and its duties.

During recent years eParticipation has gained more and more importance within the development of the visionary information society. The notion indicates a change of direction in the overall development; direct answers to the decreasing trust amongst citizens towards formal political processes and governmental activities. It is envisioned as a formula for the benefit of citizens and their interests, in the overall modernisation of the governmental sector. It is thus functioning both as an invitation and an imperative, for all involved, to become more active. This thesis examines both the prerequisites for, and the enactment of, this emerging phenomenon. I ask why electronically supported participation (eParticipation) in democratic processes within government and governance activities is considered so important at this particular time. The investigation concentrates on how eParticipation is shaped and enacted, in and by practice, and what the basic requirements are for these changes of representation. This is done in order to evolve a practice-based conceptualisation and to contribute to development, both within this emerging research field as well as within the differing practices of eParticipation.

1.1 Research questions as circles on the water

My contribution to this emerging field of research is a discussion about how power relations could be handled in processes of sharing resources and responsibilities, related to procedures of decision-making in practice. These processes of establishing power are part of preparatory and supporting activities, either in direct eParticipation or in activities leading up to eParticipation. They are crucial, and necessary to manage, in order to set the stage for eParticipation in practice.

The overarching research question guiding my work has changed over time. The development might best be described by the metaphor of drops falling into water, causing a changing, broadening overlapping pattern of ripples. Some issues linger for a while; others fade away quickly - just like changes on the surface of water. However, with the purpose of making a critical inquiry based on experiences within practice, the starting point for framing the subject might be to broaden understanding, rather than narrowing down the subject, as often is the case in traditional research. The first drop, which triggered the circular, expanding movement, was to ask the "why?" question: why is technology considered to enhance democratic participation? Why do people want to take part, respectively why do they refuse to take part, in activities or development characterised as eParticipation?

Those questions led me on towards adding dimensions of space and place. Asking, for instance, what are the dilemmas inherent in activities labelled eParticipation and also where eParticipation actually happens? How is it accomplished in practice and what are the practical implications of electronic ways of organising democratic activity and participation? My aim in taking this reversed angle was to bring out into the light the somewhat hidden dimensions of the taken-for-granted picture of what constitutes electronically supported democratic participation. If we take all the above mentioned questions in consideration, how do they affect our understanding of eParticipation?

The final, broadest movement on the surface of the metaphorical pond made me ask; what are the consequences of the results of the critical inquiry? Are there alternative ways to describe and present the democratic aspects of eParticipation? Might there be more fruitful ways?

A summary of the framework of research questions could be specified in the following way:

1. *Why* is eParticipation happening or not happening?
2. *When* is eParticipation performed in practice besides - and beyond - when it is formally presumed to take place?
3. *How* does eParticipation take place?
4. What are *the central ingredients of eParticipation* when played out in practice?
5. *What are the consequences* of a broader theoretical, practice-based understanding of these issues, for the design and development of digital support of participation?

My study on eParticipation concentrates on how people literally get things done; how they make use of their local circumstances, resources and limitations, whilst still having to cope with general visionary and strategic recommendations about how this development ought to be conducted. In my research, I have been exploring the emergence of the participatory trend through close examination of situated, local practices and processes in day-to-day municipal work and in civic engagement. This is done from the starting point that it is necessary to expand the reasoning and the practices in these areas, whether the development of eParticipation is seen primarily as an expansive research field, as a strategically important policy-area, or simply as plain, hard work. This is stressed from a perspective of democratic plurality as described by Arendt (1998). She emphasised a plurality of perspectives and the fact that each perspective in itself has to be understood as containing a plurality of options. This democratic basis underscores that it is possible for all actors involved to learn collaboratively how to conduct, and benefit from, the evolution of eParticipation, whilst eParticipation has at the same time to be understood as containing a multiplicity of actions and activities, which come about in different places and at varying speeds. Research within the eParticipation field does in a sense work according to a normative agenda, i.e. to reinstate the interest for the development of democracy and to work towards establishing inclusive, transparent and accessible decision-making processes.

eParticipation has either direct or indirect influence on decision-making and may be found in many places and in various situations. However, it is differs clearly from any kind of technologically supported participation, due to the fact that it is part of a decision-making procedure. It is not solely to be comprehended as an activity which is going on at the surface of web interfaces. eParticipation has a bearing upon manifold interactions involving a number of different parties. In my discussion I have deliberately chosen to apply a broader perspective, including what could be referred to as the contextual circumstances of

eParticipation. I do so from the conviction that they are inseparable from each other. eParticipation is not happening as a detached phenomenon. It is dependent on the practices where it is introduced and used. At the same time, it changes those practices, as we will see several examples of in this thesis.

The issue of developing methods aimed at managing and evaluating these new forms of participation is increasing in importance. However, there is a risk that trials and evaluations of eParticipation concentrate too much on coming up with "ready-to-go" techniques, denying both the complexity and broad scope of the activities. [2] There is a need for taking into consideration in-depth studies of the complexity of participation in local practice, also including peripheral activities of participation and non-participation. Experiences from the local research and development (R&D) pilot projects that I have been involved in, concerning either general development of the relations between citizens and local administration, or general eDemocracy activities, accentuate the need to regard eParticipation as an activity of co-construction that is not isolated from a workplace context or a specific use context. The activity of eParticipation is not primarily about contributing an opinion on a single occasion. The activity itself is dependent on comprehensive and sustained participation. The citizens, the staff and politicians are all expected to invest their time and effort also in preparing and learning how to handle electronic participation. Methods supporting eParticipation should therefore support multiple relations and not solely focus upon the meeting between the technological interfaces and the surface of citizens' participation.

1.2 Motivation and methods

An important point of departure for my analysis is to acknowledge that research must begin in practice, i.e. by examining the actual actions and activities of people. Focus has to be on how the participants experience their work or activities as public servants, citizens or politicians. Wenger (1998) defines practice as "*being in a position to have an experience of meaning, and this meaning arises out of a process of negotiation that combines both participation and reification*" (ibid:135). Practice involves dimensions of *meaning-negotiation, learning and knowing*. Practice could also be described in terms such as: *community, boundary and locality*.

1.2.1 Practice-based studies and conceptualisation

A sociological orientation concerned with these issues is the ethnomethodological school of Garfinkel (1967) which strongly emphasises the study of every-day life and work practice and how people create structures in their life. Ethnomethodology is a research approach and method focusing on close examination of artefacts in use and local social settings. It is partly derived from a phenomenological philosophy, which emphasises empirical reasoning and ties its studies to materials (Sharrock & Anderson, 1986). Ethnomethodology evolved as a reaction to the difficulties arising from traditional sociology, emphasising that inquiries must begin within frameworks provided by established theories. This could easily be pictured as a practice-theory dichotomy. Ethnomethodology did not want to emphasise this dichotomy. The research orientation rather maintained that objectives, as well as methods, are open to examination. It thereby sets out to examine the process of sociological theorising and to turn

[2] See for instance the initiatives conducted in England by Oxford Internet Institute and Napier University of Scotland, in setting up local consultations and discussion forums by using new technology, information available at www.e-democracy.gov.uk and www.localegovnp.org/default.asp?sID=1133904313292 [Accessed 060822]

the interest to the practical sociological reasoning instead of taking as a basis already achieved abstractions of ordinary life (ibid: 3). Even though I have chosen not to apply a consistent ethnomethodological perspective in this dissertation, the intentions and objectives of the ethnomethodological approach have inspired me to remain close to local actions and to actively question that which is taken for granted, both when it comes to conceptualisations and to the analysis of visions and practices of eParticipation. This aim is in line with my ambitions to critically examine ongoing development within the domain, as mentioned earlier in the research questions. I have studied how people, i.e. citizens, practitioners and politicians, become active participants in their own local practices and how they organise their relations and their practical life. I have also combined those close studies with theories which have provided me with concepts, which I have used for furthering the analysis of what the study could imply.

One reason for conducting practice-based research is a deliberate ambition to contribute to the development of situated conceptualisation and methods, described by Chaiklin (1987:377-401) *"...as concerned with the theoretical description of the practices of individuals in significant societal institutions*." When using this approach it is necessary to take situations within practice as a direct object of study, either within or in relation to societal institutions, meaning situations of significance for the involved practitioners and citizens. In this study, this has been done by studying municipal practices, research practices and interactions between citizens and authorities. My interest in examining real action is combined with a theoretical interest. The practice-based approach does not simply reflect a general interest in human practices. The practices are important, but so is the development of scientific methods and concepts to work with those practices. It is not either practice or theory which has to be in focus, but the relation between them. Rather than seeing research and theory-construction as an advanced exercise in sustaining the separation between theoretical abstractions and empirical experience, it is necessary, when taking on this approach, to acknowledge that they are mutually constitutive. The dialectics of practice is sometimes convincing enough to expand an established theory, ultimately also leading to rearrangement in the studied practice, which in turn leads to rearrangement of research production. Theory is in that sense made in real life, out of practice, in ongoing dialogues concerning how to handle the complexity of life and how to create supportive structures which make us sort things out without oversimplifying or reducing the situation at hand.

1.2.2 Doing ethnography

Ethnography could be defined in various ways: as an empirically oriented methodology, a field practice, a literacy practice or a research strategy. It falls within the framework of what is normally described as qualitative research. Ethnography is based on several important principles, such as descriptive studies of everyday activities in a natural environment and the application of a holistic perspective, i.e. a focus on the relations between activities and not exclusively on individuals or individual activities. Researchers applying an ethnographic perspective strive for an 'insider perspective' or 'a native's point of view', [3] meaning close to practice or "to have been there" as Geertz (1988) once emphasised, that is trying to describe the situations from "within" and not from a neutral stance.

[3] Seminar during the course Work Practice and Technology, on the 20th of August 2001 with Jeanette Blomberg in Ronneby at Blekinge Institute of Technology. Also discussed in Kensing & Blomberg, 1998 and Eriksén, 1998:52.

Ethnography was originally developed within a natural science tradition, which assumes that an empirical and social world exists and can be discovered. The social phenomena are separate from the physical ones, and human activities are meaningful and can be interpreted on the basis of partial and situated perspectives. The positivistic links are apparent in the assumptions that the researcher's view are objective and that the researcher is external to the research process. Searching for universal truths is important and data should be collected in a standardised manner. Critical theories challenge these assumptions by claiming that social products reflect and contribute to shaping the character of society in a dialectic way and that the production of knowledge has consequences, irrespective of whether or not one acknowledges this. Reflexivity has gained more and more relevance in ethnographic research over the past years.

A post-modern critique concerning this stance is that ethnographic methods constitute rather than reflect subject matters (Willis, 2000). However, a more dialectic approach would suggest that ethnography might be the result of interplay of constituting and reflecting, since constitution embeds what is directly observable and reportable along with interpretations, and reflection in a sense plays a role in constitutive acts. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000) defines ethnography as an "*anthropologically oriented method based on close contact with the everyday life of the studied society or group over a fairly long period and addressing cultural issues such as shared meanings and symbols*"(Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:45). They distinguish between different kinds of ethnography, i.e. inductive ethnography with strong emphasis on data, and orientations such as interpretive, critical and post-modern ethnography. The last two categories emphasise critical reflection and questioning of representation and narration, which gives the possibility to account for several different perspectives and situations and present multifaceted data.

My first encounter with ethnography took place during my initial academic studies at Lund University in the 1990's within the discipline of European ethnology. My studies at that time were mainly focused upon cultural analysis as described by Ehn & Löfgren (1982). Their perspective on ethnographic studies of culture has influenced me to see eParticipation partly as a cultural phenomena, drawing also upon the cultural anthropological work of (Bourdieu, 1977, Faubion, 2001: 39-59). Later, in my studies of information systems and work practice, the ethnographic fieldwork methods were introduced for me once again, this time as very useful when focusing on the everyday organisation of work, related to use of technology. Ethnographic research makes possible studies of the situated context of both the design and use of computers, as well as the local work organisation, besides exploration of cultural phenomena. Ethnography is in that sense not only a method for gathering material; it is a '*field experience comprising personal, improvisational multi-method approaches and iterative processes'*.[4]

My work with this dissertation has not been driven by the aim of writing an ethnography in the traditional sense, i.e. to giving a naturalistic description of a situation, place or artefact (Andersson, 1994). I have, as presented earlier, deliberately included a changed agenda of both the conceptual understanding and the practice of eParticipation in my research aims. Hence, I am not taking on an ethnographic research strategy solely for the sake of creating better tools for electronic participation, but also with the overarching objective to contribute to steering the development of eParticipation in more unforeseen and intrepid directions, rather than arguing that it must follow a straight line.

[4] Blomberg, 2001, Work Practice and Technology seminar.

1.2.3 The importance of working on the fringes

The creation of "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of for instance work situations or the use situations of artefacts, is a typical characteristic of ethnography. Thick descriptions are also a method to frame a culture, paying attention to layers of meaning and symbolism and the wholeness of a phenomenon, rather than striving towards simplifying a coherent whole. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000) states: "*Thick descriptions are the first step in the interpretation of culture. The second, the creation of theory, is a pattern-finding process of 'generalizing within cases', in contrast to the procedure in positivism, which constitutes a deductive subsumption of asset of observations under a governing law."* (ibid: 96) Thus, a field experience within my research area implies that an observation of interaction between, for instance, a citizen and a librarian, involved in an activity of searching for proper information on a local public internet terminal, may be of interest. The mutual processes of creating a shared meaning of the activity they both participate within are equally as essential as finding the right facts, or learning how to handle the interface of the artefact. Alternatively it may consist of a study of interactions in a workshop to which members of the municipality have been invited to discuss the improvement of a consultation site. However, the study does not exclusively put emphasis on the formal interactions or what happens among those attending the meeting. The analysis also includes informal or peripheral phenomena, such as paying attention to why a part of one of the developmental projects in my study tends to be repeatedly forgotten or overseen and accidentally placed in what seems to be a "residual category". How this effected the whole project as such will be discussed more thoroughly further on.

Ethnography has been used in systems design, mostly deployed as a method for capturing requirements (Blomberg et. al, 1993). Anderson (1994) discussed in an article the value of using ethnography in systems design, and argued that an approach of analytic ethnography was needed in human-computer interactions, compared to how it hitherto had been used in systems design, as a method of gathering field-material or presenting descriptions of use contexts. According to Anderson, the use of ethnography in IT design contexts missed the whole point of ethnography, since ethnography could also contribute to deliberative questioning of conventional frames and common understanding of a problem, and, by doing so, could open up for a deep and novel design discussion (ibid:151-182). I suggest that my study presents an integrated view, derived from a combination of critical ideals and practical thoroughness, combined with an analytic approach to going through the field- material.

When bringing together several perspectives, such as information system studies and ethnographic fieldwork, along with practice-based, relational theories and sensitivity to the context, the most important thing is to "work on the fringes", according to Star: "*Ethnography always examines the formal and informal, not taking either for granted as the natural way to do things*" (Star, 2002:110). In my research, analysis of concrete interactions in several use and design situations, concerning for instance e-consultation, is combined with findings made during interviews, extracts from field notes, tape recordings or video clips from a documented video conference and participatory observations. A constant move between all these types of materials, along with iterative processes, creates both depth and breadth in the study. A general endeavour to constantly seek mutual understanding and agreement from those involved in the study is also an example of a fundamental ethnographic principle, in order to establish and confirm the relevance and accountability of the analysis.

1.2.4 Radical reflexivity

An awareness of the varying consequences of research production has also been important for my work, manifested in applying what could be called strong reflexivity, which in my interpretation is close to *diffraction* (Haraway (1996), Mörtberg (1997) Elovaara, (2004) Björkman (2005). This means primarily an endeavour to account for the multiplicity of interpretations, which exist at the same time. This notion relates to Lynch's use of the concept of *radical reflexivity* (Lynch 1993:36-38), which is not primarily to conduct self-reflexivity as acts of confession, thinking-out-loud exercises or admitting feelings of self-doubt, or consistently adding a meta-level to what just has been said or done. Primarily it is a kind of systematic re-examination of constitutive acts such as for instance; why has a developmental model called the *Service Development Stairway* become a universal instrument for initiating and controlling change when practice reveals that change and development occur during many different occasions and under varying circumstances? What kinds of consequences does this theoretical tool have on participation? This re-examination turned out to be valid for my own research practice as well. Star describes how the task of an ethnographer examining research practices is to: "*...raise second- and third-order questions about the existence and nature of the whole classification scheme, the taken-for-granted tools used in intra- and interdisciplinary communication"* (Star, 2002: 116). This is what I have tried to do, by adding a reflective dimension about the research production I was part of, besides the reflective analysis of work conducted within the projects, which form the basis of my research analysis.

Another important aspect of ethnography is to pay attention to and even concentrate on moments of breakdown or dilemmas within social interactions and in colliding views of rhetoric and practices. This was not only of importance when describing the actual practice in my dissertation, but also crucial for detecting difficulties when activities and plans for procedures failed to function. This insight had implications for my methodological strategy, which I discuss more in the following sections.

1. 3 Methodological reflections

Research studies are often divided into two methodological categories, either as:

1. An empirical study explained by theory
2. A theoretical discussion illustrated by empirical examples

My contribution to the emerging research field, focusing on eParticipation, does not acknowledge these kinds of separations, since it draws both on theory and practice. The process of conducting research is in practice not as clear-cut and divided as stated in this categorisation. There is a constant interplay between those categories in the process of creating practice-based conceptualisations. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2000), describes this as an *abductive* approach, meaning a combination of inductive and deductive research, and also an interest for the underlying patterns and to add new elements. An *Inductive* approach could in brief be described as research which creates generalisations on the basis of several case studies leading up to general assumptions based on identified patterns. A *deductive* approach takes its starting point in a general rule, stating that this rule explains all individual cases.

If it were to be judged only by the presentation of the analysis, this study could at first sight be interpreted as a discussion illustrated by empirical examples. The process of coming up with a specific research result is in reality based on several iterations along the way. I have constantly moved my positions, starting from practice and following tracks to theory, going back and forth, and through reflexivity have arrived at new starting points in practice. The theoretical strains were repeatedly tested in different situations within the projects, either rejected or accepted in the diverging practices where I took part. The dilemmas of practice were in turn unlocked by the use of specific theoretical concepts, and then questioned on the basis of my analysis, with the ultimate goal to inspire re-conceptualisation.

This research product has evolved during several projects, where some topics have grown in importance. The projects, which will be more thoroughly presented in chapter three, describing the empirical basis, should be interpreted as a topographical map, were some points rise above the others. Table 1:1 below offers a broad overview of the projects, listed in chronological order. It also provides an overview of my shifting roles and primary tasks, either as an active participant in the project or in a more peripheral position.

Name of project	**Duration**	**Role of participation**	**Primary task**
Ronneby 2003	1993- 2003	Municipal employee (librarian)	Use and facilitation (as a librarian) of the developed applications
DIALOGUE	1998-99	Practitioner, sub-project leader	Project development, sub-project leadership
PIM	1999	Researcher, evaluator	Field studies, evaluation
Election 2002	2002	Researcher, politician	Politician, peripheral researcher
TANGO[5]	2002-2004	Researcher	Participatory research
Komindu	2003	Researcher	Participatory research
Flow Society	2005	Member, researcher	Participatory research

Table 1: 1 Overview of projects and my role(s) of participation in each project

1.3.1 About the action-orientation

When consciously adopting an approach that meant doing research and writing as a located subject (researcher), this also meant taking responsibility for my own participation in the negotiations and actions of developing eParticipation. This stance made my actions part of the located work for the transformation of the public sector. It had implications for my direct choices of how to act as a researcher, trying to take more responsibility, along with the growing awareness that my choices could have consequences not solely for our way of doing research, but also for how the result would ultimately be perceived by external parties. The need to take an explicit stance of located accountability thus triggered self-reflexive processes when sorting out what were my own personal aims and goals for engaging in this particular project, compared to what was expected by others. I had to exceed the limits inherent in the

[5] Information retrieved from:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/pdf/programme/sydsverige_en.pdf [051228]

stereotypes which delimit the researcher to accept a role of primarily being an observing researcher and come to terms with what I thought was the best way to intervene in the processes. I had to deliberately think and act as an agent of change. I also had to clarify which sorts of change-processes were the best ones to support in order to reach effects in line with democratic values. My role was thus constantly varying; I was seen both as a participant with a research agenda, and as an active participant in localised development. I had to reflect over these shifts of nuances and their possible implications for research, and I have also made these reflections a part of my research.

It is important to emphasise that my aspirations have been to assure depth, specifics, relations and processes, and to maintain a holistic view. I have also used multiple sources, and my descriptions are based on natural settings, in order to stay as close to practice as possible (Denscombe, 1998). I have deliberately chosen to apply a multi-perspective angle. For me as a researcher, a change- and action-oriented approach gives me the opportunity to participate and act as co-developer, not just place myself in a position where I supervise things going on. A change- and action-oriented approach clarifies the mutual learning processes that are essential for developing research based on democratic values, which in turn is based on values of plurality, equality of perspectives and a greater transparency of procedures and strategic choices. It gives me the opportunity to work in the direction of making local interventions, but also by contributing to the long-term production of empirically anchored conceptualisations.

On a concrete level, research conducted in this study ended up in "modest interventions" (Haraway, 1997). Especially in the municipality-driven project, the *Komindu* project, dealing with eParticipation within a municipality-initiated consultation project, the collaborating researchers[6] directly intervened, by initiating a discussion with municipal officers about the notion of communication and interaction. Other ways of intervening were promoting alternative forms of local politics (interviewing and dialoguing with local politicians); introducing software design from a perspective of ad hoc/situatedness, and mock-up sessions (including municipal officers and the software project leader). The importance of citizen feedback was actively promoted through taking on the primary responsibility of arranging focus groups in collaboration with civil servants, where citizens were invited to take part in order to broaden the input for design solutions, primarily concerning the web interfaces. These were developed and altered throughout the local project. However, the effects of these attempts at intervention were not as extensive as we desired. According to the municipal officers involved they were nevertheless not a waste of time, as they saw these events as opportunities to reflect upon their external and internal roles. The experiences within the DIALOGUE-project and specific activities within the *Komindu*-project were also examples of active trials of implementing co-operative design principles in customisation activities or as in the case with the DIALOGUE-women, to support learning by participation. Examples of such elements were the combined training- and project meetings with the group concerned with adjusting the COP-services application, and the workshops with the practitioners, regarding development of the consultation-site.

1.3. 2 On empirical materials

My primary material consists of open-ended interviews – individual as well as group – with members of the general public, politicians and civil servants in different positions and situations. All interviews were audio taped and in a couple of cases also video taped. I have

[6] This methodological reflection originates partly from internal discussions with research colleagues during the running of the *Komindu*-project.

also used observations and workshops with municipal civil servants, students and other groups of citizens, e.g. the senior citizen groups during the PIM-project and the Komindu-project. An evaluation of public services was carried out in conjunction with individual members of the general public, public employees and a group of women who had taken part in the DIALOGUE-project. I have also used notes from informal conversations. Politicians and civil servants have given me permission to refer to the meetings and discussions that took place within the framework of those projects. The empirical material that was derived out of each project is described in the table below, while a broad overview of the content of the various projects is presented in chapter three.

Name of project	**Empirical material**
Ronneby 2003	Municipal strategy group documents, protocols from the municipal board, project description on the web site, interviews
DIALOGUE	Audio taped interviews, direct participation and observation, personal writings and web production by the participants, workshops and project discussions, interaction in chats, web forums and video conferencing systems, Net-Meetings
The PIM-project	Observations of technologies-in-use, audio taped interviews with practitioners, management and users of terminals, participatory observations during introductions, use and participation in management meetings, previous evaluations, web sites, articles in news press, individual and group evaluation of functionality of the terminals
Election 2002	Web sites, interviews with politicians and practitioners, evaluations, discussions in web forums
TANGO-project	Participatory observations during management and project meetings sometimes also including practitioners, research presentations, research schemes, planning of eGovernment education
Komindu-project	Audio-taped interviews, participatory observations, mock-ups, video taped work shops, video conferences, discussions in web forums, focus group meetings
Flow Society	Participation in planning meetings with management, interviews with members, web sites, academic report

1.4 Research approaches

> "*In science, as in art and literature, the prevalent model places a solitary individual in contact with reality or with sources of inspiration...a revelatory understanding of scientific discovery tends to stress momentary flashes of individual insight as opposed to extended trains of collective work /.../ revelatory models of scientific activity persist...constituting a general basis for the invisibility of technicians and other support personnel, and for our tendency to see science predominantly as thought rather than as work."*(Shapin, 1989: 561)

The following sequences present my basic research approach, how I have perceived and formed my own position in relation to manifold relevant perspectives and viewpoints, essential for conducting studies of local development of eParticipation.

I work within the framework of qualitative research, and place myself in an interdisciplinary tradition, which draws upon an interest for creating context-based, situated development and methods, coupled with the objective of collaborative development within information systems (IS). I have also been influenced by sociology of science studies (STS) and feminist theories, also including political, cultural and social aspects of technology and societal development. The multitude of research perspectives is used in my studies, partly due to the premise that technology must be seen as an essential part of societal building, since technical artefacts become more and more embedded and crucial in our society. An information system is not developed in isolation; it is part of society and influenced by history and contemporary culture. Since both technical artefacts and society are complex they need to be studied and analysed from a variety of perspectives. The aim of research in this area of eParticipation should not concentrate solely on the task of developing technologies supporting enhanced participation, nor discuss how participation changes under the influence of technology. My aim is rather to clarify how supportive technologies simultaneously can open up for participation, at the same time as they hamper participation from taking place. The interdependencies of these interrelated effects must be accounted for in the research, also including how technology itself changes through participation.

1.4.1 A socio-technical approach

Informatics in general has, during the past decades, been informed by research approaches such as Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), with its emphasis on studying the mutual shaping of technology and society, as well as by more design-oriented approaches such as interaction design and evolutionary systems development (Floyd, 1989) which is accentuated within, for instance, Scandinavia. After its introduction in the 1980's and 1990's the SCOT-approach has become an influential source for research on information system development, as use and users are included in the interdependent socio-technical constellations of social construction. Pinch & Bijker (1984: 399-431) brought up the importance of including users in the analysis of technology construction, simply due to the fact that different groups of users have been proven to construct different meanings of a

technology. Later they called this phenomenon *the interpretative flexibility* of a technology (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003). Another central notion developed within this orientation is Socio-technical ensembles (Bijker, 1995), describing the mutual shaping of social groups and technologies, where social processes are understood as a form of closure mechanisms, causing a predominant use to emerge. Along with this line of thought, eParticipation could be described as consisting of a set of social processes (closure mechanisms), including artefacts. It could be argued that a predominant use of the *symbolic eParticipation, i.e. the notion as representing delegated power* is currently occurring in mainstream research and debate. However, users (or citizens) are also "agents of technological change" as followers of the SCOT approach have advocated and further developed in more recent writings.

On the basis of Actor-Network Theory, Akrich and Latour (1992) challenged, the assumption within social constructivism that only people are actors with attributed agency, and emphasised that technical objects too are to be seen as active participants in the heterogeneous networks which constitute technology development. They introduced the term *actants,* aiming to include also nonhumans as participants in the processes (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003:10). This all-inclusive concept of participation has, however, been highly criticised and contested. The approaches described above are of relevance for my analysis, since I argue that eParticipation is co-constructed in and by the relation between theory and practice, evolving in the intersection of use interpretation and reification of processes. A notion such as interpretative flexibility, then, could be used to describe the occurrence of situated practices of eParticipation, indicating that there are multiple ways of developing eParticipation.

1.4.2 Co-construction of users and technology

Grönlund, Ranerup and Gustavsson (2003), describes the motives for this increased interest for users and use in information systems design in the following way: "*There is a gap between technology and users that is not possible to study with methods either from humanities and social science, or systems development. /.../ More and more researchers from different disciplines find the border country between technology and users -use- the most fruitful to study in order to develop technology and not just look at it in arrears and see "how it turned out to be*"(Ibid. 2003: 64)

Oudshoorn and Pinch (2003) claims that users and technology, have often been viewed as separate objects of research and emphasises that it is important to overcome the established approach of viewing those categories as a dichotomy. In order to reach beyond the petrified relation, one must stop regarding technology as predestined, and abandon the essentialist view of users as unassailable and the attached assumption that use is the primary condition. Instead, more effort should be put into exploring mutual co-construction of users and technology. Similarly it is possible to apply this understanding to the issue of developing eParticipation, to concentrate the analysis on the co-constructive relationship between theory and practice, of participation and non-participation and of accessibility and exclusion within practices, including research practices. Citizens or municipal officers are not only to be seen as users of technology who are intended to subscribe to and support electronic participation; they are also contributors to furthering mediated participation as a phenomenon, at the same time as they advance technologies by their participation in, for instance, tailoring activities. On the other hand, technology is also intervening in shaping active citizenship and municipal work, which the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Callon, 1986, Latour, 1993, Akrich & Latour in Bijker & Law, 1992, Holmström, 2000, Elovaara, 2004) has shown, focusing on organisations and technology as a network of both human and non-human actors, where non-

humans are as much actors as humans. ANT, which is a combined methodology and theory (Holmström, 2000) advocates the idea that neither non-humans nor humans are passive entities, however; they either respond to or resist the influence of other entities (Callon, 1993). Holmström (2000) argues that this view of actors is necessary in order to detect the mutual shaping of both technology and society, i.e. the statement that humans shape technology, but that technology also influences or shapes human behaviour. He regards ANT as helpful in information systems (IS) research, since the approach makes it possible to steer away from traditional conceptual dichotomies of regarding technology and the social as fundamentally opposing entities. I too subscribe to this perspective, since it is suitable for my purposes of detecting and discussing dichotomies in eParticipation development, exemplified for instance by presupposed categorisations and imagined dichotomies such as participation/technology, democracy/eDemocracy, informal/formal accessibility, participation/learning and plans/practice.

1.4.3 Analysis of research practices

The STS society originated within sociological and humanity studies and was born out of work conducted by Woolgar & Latour (Woolgar & Latour 1986, Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay 1983, Traweek 1988). Their work opened up for an exploration of science enactment as an anthropological field, focusing on the production of scientific facts from an ethnographic perspective, and studying the practice of meaning-construction, in a detailed, face-to-face context. Bowker & Star (1999) maintain that work within the sociology of science seeks to *"...ground activities previously seen as individual, mental and non-social as situated, collective and historically specific*" (Bowker & Star, 1999: 288). By the 1990's, the research community had taken a "technical turn", and systematic studies of design and use of information technologies were being carried out (Star, 1995, Bowker & Star, 2002: 115). Many STS studies thereafter focused on the technical aspects, combined with studies of materials. The ethnographic perspective in this field contributed extensively to elucidating the inner workings of technology research (Ibid. 2002:115). Another influence on these studies was provided by the tradition of cultural studies, studying researcher's practices as culture.[7]

Star (1995) emphasises the need for applying an ecological analysis when studying the sociology of research. She describes the usefulness of discussing the systemic properties of research in analogy with an ecosystem, including all the components that constitute the system:

> *"This is not a functional (or functionalist) approach, with a closed-system organic metaphor at its core./.../we want to approach science as a set of linked interdependencies inseparable from 'personal troubles, public issues, and social change agendas,' not a social structure with one or more dysfunctional parts. Science and technology become monsters when they are exiled from these sorts of questions."* (Ibid. 1995:2)

According to Star, an ecological analysis entails a restoration of the exiled aspects of science. By ecological, she and her co-authors (1995) mean refusing to look upon the world/science/whatever as sorted by social/natural or social/technical dichotomies and applying instead systematic and dialectical units of analysis. This ecological approach of

[7] See for instance Asdal, Brenna et. al 2001:29, Law, 1991, Haraway, 1992, Star, 1991 and 1995.

analysis is in my opinion useful when framing and analysing the co-production of eParticipation. The exiled aspects of the phenomenon then become crucial for my analysis and essential to linger on, to sketch multiple sketches of, and to re-focus and reshape. These conscious or unconscious exclusions are in my empirical material crystallised in various ways; as in the story about the cleaner, or the conscious or unconscious exclusion of citizens' perspectives and direct involvement in the development of a local eGovernment arena, to name but a few threads that will be explored further in the empirical section.

1.4.4 Technological embodiment of power relations

However, this awareness of the interplay between interdependencies, both within research and technological and society development, is not enough. What we need to know is: *who and what shapes which research-practice/technologies/societies in what way, for what reasons and on what basis?* (Perri 6, 2004:85). It is necessary to get back to bases, to consistently apply a situated, located perspective on the development of eParticipation. There is a need to perform ethnographic studies of different kinds of related activities of participation, along with the mediated activity (eParticipation) itself. These studies have to be conducted within relevant use and work situations, where both design and deployment of technological tools for eParticipation are taking place. Thus, technology is seen as part of a larger arrangement including artefacts, as well as individuals and organisations. Technology contributes to reinforcing a change of rationality in participation and decision-making, by introducing the possibility of multiple participation and consultations, independent of time and place. However, changes in participation as well as in political culture (stating for example which tools are considered democratic, appropriate and accepted to use), are driven not by technology as an independent force itself. They are driven by institutions and individuals using the technology as either means, occasion or arena, or even boundary objects (Bowker & Star, 1999:296-298), for conflict and negotiations on preservation or change of policy, theory and practice. eParticipation technologies are not neutral; rather, design responds to cultural and political pressures which make existing and emerging power relations within society embodied and implicit in the technologies (Akrich in Bijker & Law,1992, Perri 6, 2004).

1.4.5 A problem-driven approach

My interest for the social consequences of design, use and implementation of information and communication technologies, which furthers participation in decision-making processes in the practices of public institutions as well as civic organisations, also places me within the field of Social Informatics (Kling,1999, Sawyer & Rosenbaum, 2000).According to one of the founders, Kling, (1999) is a *"...body of research that examines the social aspects of computerisation./.../ the interdisciplinary study of the design, uses and consequences of information technologies that takes into account their interaction with institutional and cultural contexts*."

Characteristic of this body of research is the conscious application of a multi-disciplinary perspective and the assumption that it is a problem-driven research domain, stating that information and communication technology and the social and organisational settings in which they are embedded are in a relationship of mutual shaping (Bijker, 1995, Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991, Kling, 1999) . This means that the technologies - and the people who design, manage and use them - shape and influence each other in different social contexts, and that this complexity is not something that is possible to simplify; rather it has to be acknowledged in the research analysis. To be able to understand the whole context, the focus must be on

empirically focused work, and the problems examined, rather than applying a grand theory or a certain method. This approach is similar to the domain of, for instance, human computer interaction (HCI) and computer-supported collaborative work (CSCW). This way of reasoning about an experienced problem, is also close to what Schön (1983) describes as being a reflective practitioner. That means working with an experimental approach, where experimenting, testing and dialoguing with the material (in my case the empirical interviews and other sorts of materials from a number of developmental projects besides policy documents) is a conscious method, aiming at creating new knowledge.

Sawyer and Rosenbaum (2000) states that social informatics involves normative, analytical and critical orientations or in some cases a combination of all of these. The normative stance could briefly be explained as endeavours to recommend alternatives for professionals who design, implement, use or develop policy about information and communication technologies. This could for example be through providing empirical evidence that illustrates the varied outcomes of for instance participatory design (PD), showing how users understand and adapt their work practice through complex socio-technical relationships of participation. The analytical orientation aims at developing theories about institutions in institutional and cultural contexts, including information systems, showing how empirical studies can contribute to such theorisation. This branch also has as a goal to deepen the understanding of how use of ICT:s in a particular setting can be generalised to other ICT:s and other settings. A third orientation has a critical agenda (Suchman, 1987, Bratteteig, 2004). examining ICT:s from perspectives that do not uncritically adopt the goals and beliefs of the groups that commission, design or implement specific technical artefacts. This could be exemplified by the intention to present the examination of ICT:s from multiple perspectives (i.e. a variety of users, a variety of designers) or to examine possible failure modes, service losses, as well as idealised expectations of how use will unfold. I place myself in the category of the third orientation, simply due to the fact that I am questioning the fact that eParticipation is taking place in certain pre-figured spaces, and that it will follow a pre-defined path of transformation. The critical approach is also concretely exemplified in this dissertation by the endeavour to present multiple perspectives and experiences from trials of what the participants themselves (including myself), such as the politicians, the active citizens and the municipal officers, define as eParticipation, and how they choose to describe the phenomenon in differing and sometimes also overlapping views.

An important claim of social informatics is that technology does not exist either in social or technical isolation. ICT:s are embedded in cultural and institutional contexts and those contexts influence the way they are developed, what kind of workable configurations are proposed, how they are implemented and used and the range of consequences they have for institutions and other social groupings. They form a socio-technical system composed of an interrelated and interdependent mix of people, their social and work practices, and the norms of use, support and maintenance systems that keep the ICT:s operating. Kling and Shacci (1982) labelled this socio-technical system the “web of computing”. Sawyer and Rosenbaum claim that if ICT:s are seen as something more than a discrete and detached set of tools, they take on an added transformative dimension when networked.

The research body of social informatics calls in question the presentation and use of oversimplified conceptual models about causal effects of implementation of technology i.e. that technology furthers societal change. An example which will be further discussed in my dissertation is the assumption that availability of computers automatically increases accessibility and equality and participation. Other examples of oversimplified claims are; that

ICT will automatically affect working, social and organisational life and thereby also determine what kind of use and what kind of consequences will follow. This reasoning could be traced for instance to the assumption that a certain eParticipation framework and its implementation will further transformation of the public sector. A social informatics perspective implies that the actual implementation of such frameworks can lead to very different outcomes in varying contexts, thus emphasising the importance of the social and organisational contexts and their effect on ICT implementation and use. Context in this regard affects activities concerning design, use, work and also the actual social lives of the people who ultimately use them.

Social informatics researchers have found that regarding ICT as socio-technical systems and considering them in a complex web of social relationships including (but not necessarily limited to) workplace practices and routines, organisational power relationships, and communication patterns, leads to the conclusion that design, implementation and use are influenced by a wide range of non-technical decisions and practices (Bowker, Star, Turner & Gasser 1997). This also has significance for studies of eParticipation.

1.4.6 Participatory design and democracy

Another strand within information systems development (Informatics) is the Scandinavian tradition of systems development, also called Participatory Design (PD) (Nygaard, 1979, Floyd et. al, 1989, Ehn, 1993). This research community could also benefit from my study, since it corresponds to their strong anchoring in participation and basic democratic values, emphasised over the years within this body of research. I have chosen to apply a broader perspective when discussing participation, including also the conditions where the technology is prepared, maintained and used. My focus on participation as a plural activity, comprising a multitude of possibilities and directions, could be used in order to support both the development of requirements for technology design and evaluation of technology and design implications.

PD is, simultaneously, an approach to design, a research area and a research community. Generally, PD could be understood as "*participation of interested parties in development of matters that affect their lives*" and in systems development in particular as: "*The involvement of future users in systems development work activities in ways that enable them to influence decisions that will affect the resulting system and through this the activities in which the system will be used.*"[8] Participation of the user can include everything from representation to direct involvement and may consist of contributions from consultants or active involvement of the users as partners in co-operation (Bjerknes and Bratteteig, 1995: 73). Conduct of co-operative design with active involvement of users is not exercised primarily for the benefit of creating user-friendly systems, but out of the conviction that users should be full participants in the process of mutual empowerment and that they create understanding for each others' practices as well as enhance work practice and skills. It also emphasises that work is fundamentally social, involving co-operation and communication. PD usually often encompasses the use of ethnographic methods in order to inform design processes (Greenbaum & Kyng, 1991.)

The justifications of PD are three-fold: pragmatic, theoretical and political (Greenbaum, 1993 :47). The pragmatic argument stresses the possibility of a better and firmer product

[8] Excerpt from Key note speech by Tone Bratteteig at the Participatory Design Conference in Toronto, 2004.

development, but a participatory design project has multiple effects, i.e. concrete work praxis is developed at the same time as the use-aspects are taken into account within work situations. The theoretical perspective emphasises the importance of the method as a means of solving communication problems from a philosophical perspective; 'involved action, not detached reflection' (Greenbaum 1993:47)[9] then becomes important. The political perspective stresses democratic aspects, citizens' rights to exercise influence over their places of work and their own life situations. There has been a debate going on in the Scandinavian Journal of Systems Design about the justification of participatory design today, where the need for analyses of societal/political/ethical consequences of ICT development were stressed (Beck, 2001:77.) The significance of PD related to my own topic of research is obvious, since development of eParticipation touches upon issues of importance for PD such as: changes of work place skills, democratisation of work and technology production as well as empowerment of citizens and workers.

1.5 Process of procedure - brief outline of the thesis

The introduction in chapter one begins by describing general perceptions of eParticipation and how it is related to eGovernment and participation in democratic policy and decision-making. eParticipation is presented as an emerging research field where the practices are part of incremental, localised change as well as targets for direct influences from steering bodies and decision-makers. This interplay of disciplining and resistance is an important focus in this thesis. The chapter presents further my motives for conducting socio-technical and practice-based research and the overall objective of the research. The aim is to contribute to practice-based conceptualisation which is relevant both for practices and research within the field, and to point out neglected issues and unforeseen consequences and results within eParticipation activities. The research questions are oriented towards a process and relation focus, where the constituting questions are described as why, when and how is eParticipation initiated and conducted, at this moment, in our contemporary society? The aim of applying a critical reflexive approach is grounded in strivings to expand and alter the many assumptions which are embedded in the development, and evoke alternative ways of comprehending the emerging field. The chapter also contains methodological considerations and choices.

Chapter two discusses the democratic basis for eParticipation, and its relation to participatory democracy, as well as the role of deliberation and its relation to formal eDemocracy issues and technologies developed in this area. Chapter three contains an overarching presentation of the research and development (R& D) projects I have been part of in various roles.

The second part of the thesis presents my research analysis, where chapter four contains a presentation of my theoretical basis. My own, practical experiences from several standpoints, basically through having a background as municipal employee, local politician and proactive citizen as well as a diverse research background, has pushed forward the issue of democratic plurality and the application of a multitude of perspectives as important. This insight partly underlies my decision to apply an interdisciplinary research approach, along with the understanding of eParticipation as a holistic phenomenon with implications for several phases of democratic practice and societal issues. The acknowledgement that a multitude of perspectives and interpretations is necessary, in order to fully understand eParticipation,

[9] Greenbaum quotes the philosopher Heidegger.

seems to me especially important to secure, also on the basis of the experiences which are expressed in the varying practices forming the empirical material in this thesis.

The chapter also presents the practice-based and process-oriented theoretical frameworks which have influenced my research, i.e. the network-based Access Rainbow Model by Clement and Shade, the Actor Network Theory, the human action theory by Arendt, along with Bourdieu and Foucault's reasoning about power relations and embodiment of surveillance, coupled with Lave & Wenger's conceptualisation of learning in practice. The chapter also presents the specific concepts which I have found useful when discussing eParticipation based on a practice based view and describes how these can assist in opening up the practices of eParticipation for both a wider and deeper analysis. Since my thesis draws both on theory and practice this also comes into focus in this chapter.

Chapter five initiates the discussion about the creation of mechanisms which are intended to make possible active participation within different analytical layers of society; how the frames for participation are established by processes of translation and exclusion as well as inclusion.

Chapter six picks up the thread of re-conceptualising the notion of active citizenship, which plays a fundamental part in the development of eParticipation. The chapter further explores how it relates to proactive citizenship, also including politics, as well as how it assists in the creation of a symbolic eParticipation. A new concept is introduced to the discussion, derived out of the practical examples which form basis for this thesis, where the emergence of a *malleable citizenship* soon becomes central to the focus and is further developed.

Chapter seven concentrates on the interplay of proactive citizens and the organisations which are intended to be crucial counter-parts in eParticipation. I would like to stress that politicians are a part of both the categories of organisation and proactive citizens. Chapter seven also initiates a discussion about the interplay of structure and practice, how plans and steering of eParticipation are actually used in practice and how experiences in practice could contribute to changing the plans and visions of how to conduct eParticipation. The malleable organisation is described and outlined based on both practical and theoretical reasoning.

Part three, finally, sums up the thesis by discussing more thoroughly how inclusive eParticipation could be accomplished. It also examines the implications that this research study could have, when considering the design of computer systems intended to support a variety of activities in the field of eParticipation.

2. The part and parcel of eParticipation

> *"Citizens /.../ demand more transparency of decision-making and democratic involvement in all phases of policy development. 'Democratic deficit' has become an election theme: a sense of democratic ownership is expected to be reinstated amongst voters"* (COM, 2003/567:7).
>
> *All project leaders in DIALOGUE would no doubt agree that democracy is one of the central themes of their work. They would differ however in their perceptions of what democracy is and how their contribution fits in to it. It is this diversity of approaches to civic involvement that is one of the riches of DIALOGUE.*[10]

The objective of this chapter is to briefly describe the ongoing development of eParticipation, by examining the reasons why the concept is gaining importance, and by tracking its roots and current role in the interrelated processes of developing formal politics, government and governance. Preparation of policy formation and actual decision-making is part of all those processes, and eParticipation is envisioned to play an important role in all three processes.

2.1 Introduction

The gradual shift towards more emphasis on technology-mediated direct representation and participation in policy creation and decision-making processes has gained more and more official attention within the European Union. Macintosh characterises eParticipation as consisting of three main processes; *e-enabling, e-engagement* and *e-empowering* (Macintosh, 2004). These categorisations correspond to the levels used by the United Nations (UN) in their yearly reports examining the state of eGovernment development in the world (UN, 2005). Here, I use the term eGovernment as an overarching concept for the overall modernisation and transformation of the public sector, whereof development of eServices, eAdministration and lately also eDemocracy are part of the whole transformation. The modernisation consists of development of organisational institutions coupled with the production of new practices and technologies and renewal of procedures of interaction.

eInformation enables further action, according to UN: s above mentioned categorisation and eConsultation is considered an example of e-engagement, while e-empowerment highlights the necessity of gaining the right skills for direct involvement. The first two could be seen as mainly top-down initiatives while the third introduces a bottom-up approach.

[10] DIALOGUE Progress Report No.04/990129

The main priority concerning public participation within the overall European development has hitherto concentrated efforts and resources on advancing electronic voting (eVoting).[11] This ambition rendered many pilot projects and financial backup from the European Commission during the past years. Recently, a shift of priorities was introduced in the European context.[12] eVoting is no longer a prioritised goal in the current development agenda (Timmers, 2005). Instead the focus is turning towards other kinds of eParticipation and its application. The core issues in eParticipation are presented as efforts to achieve; "*Active and inclusive involvement of citizens in decision-making, enhancement of democratic processes, the fight against democratic deficit, strengthening European citizenship via citizens' involvement in EU level decisions*."[13] Macintosh and her co-writers (2002) describe in particular increased participation in processes of eDemocracy. They talk about these initiatives as strivings to open up for the increased direct involvement of citizens in policy-making and formal politics, expressed in terms such as: "*a need to restore public confidence and interest in the democratic process*". They point out that it is of the utmost importance to:

> "*Develop, apply and manage information and communication technology (ICT), to address this concern and to support the public to participate in setting agendas, establishing priorities and making policies - to strengthen public understanding and participation in democratic decision making*." (Macintosh et.al, 2002:) .

The quotes reveal multiple aims with the increased stimulation of active citizens' participation. The electronically mediated participation activities are in themselves regarded as a tool for accomplishing other goals, besides raising the public's interest for politics. eParticipation is regarded as a strategy to strengthen European citizenship. It also advocates information and communication technology as the preferable way to achieve inclusive participation. This implies that there are multiple aims underlying the shift of priorities towards promoting eParticipation. The goals of eParticipation are highly idealised, and these ideas leads to material consequences such as introduction of technology into public organisations and restructuring of resources and responsibilities. The drive towards increased eParticipation is justified with democratic reasons. The political theoretical ideals of participatory democracy, see Pateman (1970) and Macphearson (1977) also described by Barber (1984) as strong democracy, is an example.

In order to pick up on this thread of the discussion, I find it equally important to examine the various reasons for initiating eParticipation by posing a critical question; in our society, at this particular time, why is there such an emphasis on promoting increased participation in processes of broadening the basis for policy-making and conducting decision-making? What differs from previous participatory turns in society i.e. during the late 60's and 80's (Pateman, 1970, Barber, 1984)? There are of course several answers and complexities in the answers to those questions. At the same time as eParticipation is culturally pictured as a rich area for exploration, reviving great expectations of possibilities to broaden and deepen the scope and results of democratic decision-making, eParticipation must be acknowledged as having a

[11] Examples of eVoting projects are found at http://evote.eu2003.gr/EVOTE/en/index.stm [Accessed 061004]
[12] See for instance: URL= http://www.offentligarummet.se/sundsvall/dokumentationoffentligarummetsundsvall2006.4.3b063add1101207dd4680002318.html [Accessed 070123]. Offentliga Rummet [The Public Room] is a large annual practitioner oriented conference in Sweden concerning development of public sector, and this site is from the 2006 conference in Sundsvall.
[13] Key note speech by Blixt, P G, held at The Public Room, Sundsvall, May 2006.

double function, as a tool for controlling and steering those expectations and possibilities to be expressed in a certain way.

2.2 The multiple functions of eParticipation

One goal of eParticipation obviously concerns the strategic political reasons to promote public interest for the coming European Union elections in 2009 (Timmers, 2005). Another political reason, backing the efforts to raise interest for eParticipation, is the worries expressed in the introductory quote of this chapter, concerning the growing "democratic deficit"[14]. It is often declared in public discourse that people are becoming more and more sceptical about the real value and outcome of traditional democracy enactment and decision-making. Public trust in the political system needs to be restored, and citizens have to be reminded about their obligation to take up their role as active citizens. This raising of awareness is declared necessary in order to rescue the traditional representative democratic system, which is the foundation of our western society. Barber argued in the 80's (1984) that this was an effect of an excess of neo-liberalism, which had undermined modern democratic institutions and brought about several societal crises, such as reluctance among citizens towards voting and civic engagement. This effect, together with privatisation and outsourcing, coupled with a continuing downsizing of public institutions, created alienation among the public. According to some of its proponents, eParticipation is to be seen as a possible cure to this growing alienation towards formal politics.

Macintosh et al. (2002:226) talk about failing political practices and quote Shapiro and Hacker-Gordon (1999), who once pointed out that: "*in reality democracy often disappoints*".Coleman (2005) terms the crisis of modern democracy as a "*widespread distrust of paternalistic representation (manifested by seemingly remote politicians, parties and political institutions); public disenchantment with virtual deliberation (primarily, the political coverage provided by television and the press); and a post-deferential desire by citizens to be heard and respected more"* (Coleman, 2005: 195)

Kearns, Bend and Stern (2002) raised an alarm[15] that participation in politics is at near crisis levels both locally and nationally, referring specifically to local government in Great Britain, thus pleading for a turn towards enhanced participation through eParticipation. The European Commission faced the problem too, in terms of low voting rates during the past elections to the European parliament, even though the citizens were provided with possibilities to conduct online voting. The European authorities have expressed an urgent need to bring their administrative and political bodies closer to the public, asserted by the Swedish European commissioner Wallström in the Plan D.[16]

The above pictures of declining political interest present an increasing erosion of legitimisation for traditional, representative politics. The crucial question then becomes; could this lack of engagement and interest possibly be handled with the help of promoting specific

[14] The notion democratic deficit could be briefly explained as the idea steering bodies in society lack of democracy and seem inaccessible to the ordinary citizen because their method of operating is so complex. Further explanation is found at http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/democratic_deficit_en.htm [Accessed 070124] See also Katz, 2000, pp. 1-36.

[15]The report was conducted on behalf of the *Institute for Public Policy Research* (IPPR), which is a progressive "think thank" organisation in UK, established 1988.

[16] Blog available at: http://blogs.ec.europa.eu/wallstrom [Accessed 070304]

strategies, activities and technologies for eParticipation? All parties (the citizens, the authorities and politicians) in my empirical material expressed a willingness in becoming more active, both offline and online. At the same time, the practices of their every-day life and work reveal both resistance and avoidance to take responsibility for their basic participation, as exemplified by several of the empirical examples in this thesis. This is not always due to ignorance. Rather, it is an effect of balancing the complexities in conducting the appropriate kind of participation with the right kind of tools, i.e. neither the individuals, nor the supportive technologies always fulfil what they promise, due to local, situated circumstances and priorities[17] .

Another reason for the proposed change of direction in the European context towards more emphasis on eParticipation, is the fact that the main focus for the last decade has been to push governments to advance their development of online public services, along with administrative rationalisation and modernisation of the public sector (Kearns et. al. 2002: 10, Grönlund, 2001:26) rather than on advancing their deliberative relations with the public. eParticipation is intended to alter this unbalance and push the citizens' and users' interests and representation, in order to reach equilibrium in the relationship between authorities and citizens.

A report from the UN (2005), which sets out to measure eParticipation development in the world, states the following: *"...e-participation development is still in its early stages for most of the countries of the world"* (UN 2005: 99-102). The UN scores for assessment comprise of, the categories of eInformation, eConsultation and eDecision-Making, and the report underscores that these categories for measurement assume eParticipation at a rather rudimentary level.

The following categories are listed as examples of eInformation in the report[18]:

1. governmental marketing efforts of the benefits of eInformation,
2. Listing or calendar over issue-specific topics open to citizen participation.
3. citizen-to-citizen web forums, e-mail lists, news groups and chat rooms

eConsultations are exemplified in the following way:

1. explaining eConsultation, information on feedback possibilities
2. online consultation mechanisms and tools (i.e. public web forums for topics predefined by government)
3. citizen usage, judgement of quality of discussion, web-casts/meetings, list of services between citizen and government
4. choice of topic for online discussion
5. availability of index/directory of online consultations/hearings, proposed rules and links to documents
6. active encouragement of citizens to participate in surveys/polling
7. inviting citizens to agenda-setting
8. encouraging citizens to participate in discussing key issues

eDecision-Making is specified and measured as to what extent the governments :

[17] See COM, 2005/116 final and chapter 5, 6 and 7 in this thesis.

[18] I have summarised their writing and present it as a numbered list in order to clarify the differences in the categorisation.

1. allow citizens to petition online
2. incorporate citizen input in decision-making
3. Provide governmental feedback on specific issues

The arrangement of this evaluation indicates an interest in advancing the development of eParticipation. However, the basis for the measurement could be questioned, considering that the formulation of measurement categories all seem to originate out of technologies at hand and an already established dichotomy of governments versus citizens. The presumptions behind the measurement seem to assume that citizens must be persuaded to participate, and that governments are the main drivers in this development. It suggests that there are a limited number of participation modes and supportive technologies to choose among and an unquestionable order which states that governments still have supremacy when it comes to agenda-setting. It also presents a somewhat near-sighted focus on how to stimulate *use of the* technologies provided for participation, coupled with a neglect to discuss the representation of all the parties in the actual *design* of the technologies for participation. A reversed, more inclusive approach, taking its starting point in participation initiated in practice rather than in idealistic eParticipation, might have ended up in a totally different picture presenting a plurality of participatory initiatives and differing efforts to contribute locally to changes of representation in decision-making.

However, the vision of a modernised electronic administration is not progressing as expected, the effects of transformation are not considered sufficient, according to a message from the European Commission (COM, 2006/173). The message stresses that a faster implementation of eAdministration must be accomplished during 2006-2010. The public organisations must advance their performance by introducing eParticipation. As stated in the Action Plan i2010, one of the prioritised goals is to:

> "*Strengthening participation and democratic decision-making – demonstrating, by 2010, tools for effective public debate and participation in democratic decision-making."*(COM 2006/173: 4)

In that light it is not sufficient to define eParticipation simply as a new political feature, or an ideological project of restoration of trust, which will give added value to old, established structures of decision-making. It is also functioning both as a tool and a mechanism for changing practices, or as expressed in the above quoted message:

> "*This Action Plan...maps out the way ahead for eGovernment in Europe and provides the focal points for EC programmes, initiatives and policy-making form 2006 to 2010 and a practical way forward through roadmaps and strategic monitoring in priority areas*"(COM 2006/173 : 12)

2.3 From participatory democracy...

The focus in public discussions about general eGovernment development over the past years could also be seen as part of a circling wave of democratisation, a gradual shift towards putting more emphasis on themes concerning participatory democracy and discursive democracy in political visions. Giddens (1990) has talked about the transformation of politics

in terms of: "*The democratisation of democracy*", basically stressing the points of equal co-determination. Castells (1997- 2000) described the rise of a new political network dynamic, where ICT, and internet in particular, is expected to function as an instrument for furthering democracy, in terms of "*informational politics*" (Castells, 2001). This notion points to the enabling potential of internet to foster new, dynamic forms of democracy, mainly by functioning as a horizontal communication channel allowing polyphonic discussions as well as one-to one dialogue. eParticipation is also part of these visions of reviving democracy.

Participatory democracy, as originally described by Pateman (1970) and Macphearson (1977), and reinterpreted by Held (1987), is characterised as citizens' direct representation in the governing of societal institutions, whereof workplaces and local communities are seen as essential parts. Accountable representatives, participatory parties working within a parliament structure, are other parts of participatory democracy, along with allowing experimentation with different political forms. These are the basic characteristics of this democratic form. The basic presumptions for making this happen are the restructuring of material resources in favour of disadvantaged groups, the minimising of public and private bureaucratic power enactment, the creation of an open and transparent information system in order to reach well-informed decision-making, and shared responsibility for child care in order to ensure equal possibilities for participation, for both women and men. Pateman (1985) questioned the nature of public power, the relationship between the private and public spheres, and how far politics and democracy would reach in citizen's lives. Following this line of argumentation accentuates the need for a far-reaching democratisation, not only concerning governmental work, but also the rest of the society (Held, 1987:327). Technology-supported participation has a real potential to fulfil many of those wishes in terms of broadening representation, and the sharing of resources and responsibilities.

A theoretical model which is to be seen as a normative and constructive participatory model of democracy, building upon those ideals of participation, is a model called strong democracy, developed by Barber (1984). The notion of "*strong democracy*" has also gained legitimacy as the preferred system of governance in Sweden i.e. through the *Swedish National Inquiry on Democracy* (Premfors & Roth, 2004:7, SOU 2000/1: 23, Prop. 2001/02:80:27) and is also presented as an ideal within the European Union, emphasising transparency and openness i.e. in the i2010 visionary plans.[19] The *Swedish National Inquiry on Democracy* states the following:

> *"In the theory of deliberative democracy accentuation is made on the signification of discourse for a democratic society. Trust in exercise of power can only be created through interplay with the free discussions among citizens. Democracy provides the framework for discussions among equals. Politics is linked to discussion. Democracy is therefore in need of arenas where opinions are formed, debated and contested. These discussions subordinate self-interests under the public good."*

The governmental bill *Democracy for the new century* (2001/02:80) underlines that the strategy for deepening the Swedish national model of democracy is accomplished through "*broad participation within the frames of representative democracy"* (Premfors & Roth, 2004:7-8).

[19]Information about the European strategic policy framework for the information society and media, i2010, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm [Accessed 070304]

In his book, Barber reflected on the crisis of contemporary democracy, and talks about "*politics as zoo-keeping*" or thin democracy:

> *"[thin democracy]...yields neither the pleasures of participation nor the fellowship of civic association, neither the autonomy and self-governance of continuous political activity nor the enlarging mutuality of shared public goods – of mutual deliberation, decision, and work*"(Barber, 2003:132). He advocates participatory, strong democracy, which he formally defines as: "*Politics in the participatory mode where conflict is resolved in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods*"(Ibid. 2003:24).

An additional third category, quick democracy, was suggested by Premfors (2000: 24) based on contemporary and classic debate on the subject. Quick democracy favours direct democracy, and questions representative democracy, either by arguing for revitalisation of representative democracy or with the goal to reinstate direct democracy. Thin democracy entails the idea that public opinion exists as a delimited entity, and that it is readable through online surveys. The proponents of quick democracy prefer the use of technology as a tool for gathering opinions on different topics, rather than for accomplishing real changes in the co-determination of decisions, and this is therefore to be seen as an elitist-oriented model of democracy.

Strong democracy emphasises on the other hand political discussion as a democratic tool, and strong democracy is also described in terms such as deliberative, discursive and participatory democracy (Åström, 2001). Participatory democracy is thus a combination of direct and representative democracy. The big change lies in the shift of attention from organisations to citizens. The central aim in the model of participatory democracy is the support of citizenship. Development of citizenship is made by means of collective discussion and education. Educating citizens to be active members of the community is the primary aim in this model, originating in the Enlightenment, and ideals from Rousseau.

Premfors (2000) states that the world has been democratised during the last decades, referring to figures which show that, by the year 1995, half of all countries in the world were designated as democracies. The liberal ideal of democracy, with emphasis on government through representation, has been shown to be most successful hitherto in the world. Sweden as well as Great Britain has a history of representative assemblies, functioning more as an advisory board to the ruler, rather than actual decision-making bodies. Premfors also makes a distinction between the understanding of democracy as a form of government and a form of life, and insists that the goal of democracy will always be impossible to reach: "*In a genuine democracy, the goal always remains a myth*" (Premfors, 2000:16). The models of democracy presented above (thin, strong and quick) have also been applied and discussed in the Swedish eGovernment and eDemocracy debate as well as being an important part of the academic knowledge production on the topic(Åström, 2001).

The former European Commissioner of Enterprise and the Information Society, Liikanen, emphasised during a seminar, "*Reinforcing eDemocracy*"[20], that eDemocracy is about

[20] This was a follow-up seminar to the eGovernment Communication 2003. The seminar was held in Brussels the 12th of February 2004 presenting the state of the art in eDemocarcy development and research.

reinforcing consultation and democracy, referring to the development of a new "*culture of consultation*", also affecting the role of politicians. He pointed out that there must be "*new ways of organising the process of rule-making in public administrations"*, and that the call for political commitment creates new challenges for accelerating eGovernment implementation and innovation. Liikanen seems to put an "equals" sign in between eDemocracy and consultation, which indicates that he has a certain model of democracy in mind, namely deliberative democracy, or democracy by discussion and communication.[21]

Deliberation is, in a Swedish definition[22], to consult representatives or stakeholders, i.e. to jointly consider a decision, to discuss and to weigh different perspectives and alternatives, aiming at reaching consensus and a unified perspective. Deliberation is also assumed to function as a way to dissolve ideological or practical conflicts and has quickly become the democratic standard in many countries. However, this form of participation has been contested as a rather idealised view of participation and one argument is that it is not possible to guarantee equality of opportunity for the participants in the discussions (Sanders, 1997). Young (1996: 121) pointed out a number of problems with deliberation, maintaining that 1) deliberation is a culturally biased conception of discussion which runs the risk of silencing some individuals and groups, and 2) the ideal processes of deliberation must either originate from a shared understanding or arrive at considerations of common good. Young advocates what she calls communicative democracy, emphasising that difficulties and differences must be understood as resources rather than divisions that must be overcome. These are interesting aspects when compared to the ideal of a consensus-oriented rationalist model of deliberation, namely the Habermasian discourse model. The basic idea is that everyone who is affected by the consequences agrees upon the actions and arrangements, and only under circumstances that guarantee that this agreement was reached as a consequence of a public deliberative process conducted in a certain way. The logic behind this is basically as follows:

> a) participation on equal grounds and the right for everyone to initiate topics, questions and interrogations
> b) the right to question the assigned topics
> c) the right to initiate reflexive arguments on the criterion and the procedure of the discourse event, as long as the participants can show that they are affected by the content of the deliberation.(Benhabib, 1996, Mouffe, 2000)

Discussions and debates on the internet are of course far from the "ideal speech situation", as envisioned by Habermas. Deliberation consists in reality of complex interweaving of politics, practicalities and possibilities.

In the recent eGovernment debate, deliberation as an important part of strong democracy, or participatory democracy, seems to gain ground before so called thin democracy. One thing necessary to make this eDemocracy model work is the contribution of the informed citizen and efforts towards the stimulation of active citizenship. Other essential elements are that the individualist basis is firmly opposed, due to a fear of the isolation of the individual citizen, and the potential for central manipulation. A complete fragmentation of the political practice is expected. Therefore the formation of collective opinion in discussions and educational contexts is preferred (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000).

[21] Deliberative democracy was originally coined by Bessette, J, 1980, see also Habermas, 1981.
[22] The Swedish National Encyclopedia, NE, http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=151885 [Accessed 070304]

The emphasis on implementing a participatory model of democracy is also close to the pluralist model of democracy which depicts a political system based upon the representation of competing and negotiating interests and pressure groups, or parties. The political system consists of many centres of power and administration. A network conception of politics is favoured in opposition to the centralist view (Ibid. 2000: 42).

A second argument for emphasising a "*participatory turn*" in the latest road map on eParticipation is the idea of spreading politics into society, crossing borders and diminishing the dominance of institutional power (that is formal bodies such as governments, public administration and political parties). Civic networking, public debates, community building and an independent supply of political information are important features of this democracy model. eParticipation brings forward the potential to support those processes of civic organisation and public activism and connect them with more formal political processes, but there are also hindrances to overcome.

2.4...towards democratic eGovernment

General development within eGovernment has, as stated before, focused mainly upon creating electronic services and rationalising governmental administration (Grönlund, 2001(b) and Traunmüller, 2004, Wimmer et.al. 2006). As such it has been envisioned as having a direct impact on organisational work practice rather than on civic life.[23] However, the borders between administration and formal politics are not clear cut. Administrative tasks or eAdministration could become highly politicised in a situated context. This could for instance concern the wish or practical need, expressed by politicians, to delegate political accountability and decision procedures in routine activities to public servants, during the course of the mandate period. In turn, this could become an effective way for the public servants to gain influence on the practice of politics. Public online services could also ensure democratic and direct involvement of users, when it comes to both the design and content of software applications, and could help create service-development of direct concern for people. These governance activities concerning for instance the conduct of online services should also be seen as an important part of developing eParticipation. Another dimension of democratic rights, which is also a prerequisite for people to make informed choices, is a well-adapted, inclusive service provision, and the governing aspects of all these processes are clearly of high relevance. A broad representation when defining visions and ideals on how to proceed with the development of either eServices or other kinds of eParticipation is a general matter of equality. The issue is rather *how* the steering activities could be conducted in an inclusive way. Emphasising these interrelationships stresses the fact that the democratic aspects are mutually interdependent and intertwined in all categories, with all the dimensions presupposing each other, mainly due to the relationships that occur, merge and change in a constant flow between all these ostensibly divided parts.

This reasoning opens up for a wider definition of eParticipation, which is a basic point of departure for my analysis. eParticipation is both about separated activities of developing

[23] This was for instance concretely exemplified by discussions in local network meetings with practitioners during the establishment of the regional eGovernment arena TANGO, where I participated. The involved practitioners (representatives from both the public sector, and local businesses, besides academics) consistently emphasised the need for digitalisation of administration and the production of public online services as the main priority. Ideas about projects or attempts to organise eParticipation oriented activities were considered as having low priority.

online tools for increased participation, and traditional exercises within the established realms of eDemocracy. Additionally, it is part of electronic rationalisation of the authoritative administration. eParticipation must be seen and understood as an *official arrangement* including the means and acts of governing ourselves and others. The simple reason for this is the fact that all those activities of modernising and redistribution of initiatives, along with increased emphasis on electronic consultations and citizen involvement on several levels of decision-making, are happening for a reason. The activities as such are presumed to have a certain effect, thus the activities also have unintended implications on how the participants act in practice. eParticipation is part of a logic which supports the governing of ourselves, and also *operates through, by and with* these effects, in order to establish a certain model of eParticipation. At the same time it is also activities and actions which are happening in informal practices, in places where procedures of mediated participation develop in places and situations of importance and significance to people. eParticipation is to be found in situations of direct concern to the participants, i.e. in communities of interest or communities of practices as well as in visionary speeches. I will return to this topic in chapters six and seven, where I develop this particular discussion further.

2. 5 eParticipation as a technical solution

Gross (2000) defines three basic demands on technology supporting citizen participation and eDemocracy; i. e. public access to information, open discussion participation and electronic voting. A fourth example is community networks, which are initiated and run locally.

Technology is according to Becker (1998) considered important for the stimulation of democratic and social processes and the renewal of society. However, in my opinion, this view places too much hope and weight on only one of the entities in all the embedded relationships in the above statement, namely technology. Internet-based technology has for the past decade been seen as a panacea for democratic deliberation and the enhancement of participation, as an important ingredient of technical optimism. It has turned out to be a more complex issue than first expected. In the foreword to the new edition of his book, Barber (2003) nuances his first so optimistic belief in the possible function of new technologies as enablers of direct and deliberative democracy. He lists a number of problems that have arisen since the 80's such as:

> *"...breakneck speed and instant accessibility tends to undermine deliberation which needs time in order to be cultivated, the dividend of internet into private communities of membership which enforces boundary communication rather than bonding or bridging communication is another issue.*

He also states that:

> *"The dominant form of web life today is neither civic nor democratic..." and summarises: "...technologies have tended, at least initially, to mirror and reinforce rather than transform the societies in which they emerge, the new proto-democratic electronic and digital technologies that seemed so promising twenty-five years ago have in fact become part of the problem that confronts strong democrats, not part of the solution" (Barber, 2003: Xv).*

Dahl (1999) also expressed far-reaching expectations for the potential of new information and communication technology, stressing that this could help in providing accessibility when citizens inform themselves about what is on the political agenda. Technologies could also

simplify consultations in connection with the preparation of decisions, and interactive systems could support deliberative discussions (Dahl,1999: 519) Dahl raised words of caution; that possibilities for deliberation and participation for citizens do not automatically lead to better decisions, when seen from democratic principles about equality and justice. The issue is mostly dependent on the preparedness among citizens, their understanding and interpretation of what constitutes democracy. He also sketched scenarios on how to arrange deliberative sessions with "mini-demos", a topic which has been further explored by Coleman and Götze (2001).

The view of the independent power and yet neutral force of technology is, according to Mörtberg (1997), to be found in "other discussions about society in the future, discussions which reflect technological determinism; technology is seen as a tool and a driving force to create growth, job opportunities and strengthen the country's competitiveness" (ibid.: 25) as well as beliefs that it automatically furthers democratic development. Technology is seen both as the means and end of democracy enhancement. In rhetorical claims ICT is often regarded as autonomous and possible to select freely, as well as being the only way to really overcome limits of time and place, whilst also securing a multitude of access points to information and decision-making in the daily practices of democracy. On the other hand there has also recently been agreement that problems of contemporary democracy go much deeper. Lack of political motivation and lack of the time, effort and skills required for full participation in democratic activities are not primarily solved through technological solutions. Instead, ICT could simultaneously both worsen and diminish the problems stated above. Social and material inequalities are now seen as strongly related to differences in participation, and differences in technology.

What consequences might this emphasis on deliberation and participatory democracy then have for the development of ICT applications? van Dijk asserts that diverging views on democracy can lead to different designs and applications of the same technology and that typical development in line with participatory democracy could be exemplified as: emphasis on information dissemination through Internet sites, planning tools aiming at activating and informing citizens, interface design focusing on narrowing the gap between the information rich and the information poor, focus on access and usability concerns in application construction, electronic discussions in order to serve opinion formation, supportive tools for learning and active citizenship, besides the establishment of public computer networks (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000:44).The current development of applications obviously emphasises the liberal deliberative democracy model.

I find it important to not look solely at eParticipation applications as finished products, something that simply is there to use, but *also examine the located and situated processes*, both of technologies and democratic participation as such. What choices, reductions and residual categories are created during the design process and in what ways do those delimiting acts affect the potential of democratic participation in local practice? I find it important to include practices of the customisation of applications in my analysis of developing eParticipation. I look at how both the technological tools and the participatory modes become tailored into the context where they are both going to be implemented. I study how those processes also become a part of shaping eParticipation, and I see this as a fruitful way to thoroughly unfold the relationship between technology and participation. Which kind of participation is for instance set aside in a particular eParticipation arrangement? At what point and under which conditions does this happen? Is this possible to describe as accidental activities, purposely conducted strategies, or effects of specific unintentional or intentional

choices? How do discussions unfold during the conscious phase of separating certain forms of participation from other forms? I would suggest adding a complementary category of analysis to the levels suggested by van Dijk and Hacker. Taking a starting point in a network-based understanding of ePartcipation as a set of different relationships, including both actors and technology, it is also important to look upon what is not included in those relationships. This means that when analysing applications for eParticipation, it is also necessary to pay attention to what are considered as residual categories of both participation and technical tools in the development.

2.6 eParticipation in processes of eDemocracy

Activities of eParticipation are also part of formal eDemocracy. Early interpretations of eDemocracy were delimited mainly to describe the use of ICT in computer-mediated communication for purposes of enhancing democratic and communicative processes. This often referred to direct contacts between politicians and citizens, and is exemplified on a concrete level with attempts at eVoting. Hacker and van Dijk, (2000) presented the following definition of eDemocracy; *"a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC, instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional "analogue" political practices"* (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000:1). Stillman (2005) suggests a wider definition, based on a pronounced community and citizen perspective: *"The use of information communications technologies by individuals to extend their choices for thinking and acting as citizens, unrestricted by time and place, and culminating in greater collective freedoms under rule of law"* (Stillman, 2005).

Hacker and van Dijk (2000) argued that the claims and results of eDemocracy development until the beginning of 2000 (when their account was published) had improved information retrieval and exchange between different parties involved in democratic activities (authorities, public administrations, representatives, political and community organisations and individual citizens). They claimed secondly that eDemocracy solutions help in supporting public debate, deliberation and community formation and finally, they enhance participation in political decision-making by citizens. According to the authors the first two claims were partially fulfilled, whilst the third was not fulfilled at the time of their analysis. The achievements so far were more and better information access and exchange. An evident follow-up question would then be: how does this effect democracy? Accessible, reliable and valid information is a necessary condition for democracy, according to Hacker and van Dijk, but it is not enough for democratisation. There are certainly many more steps between retrieving information and having an impact on decision-making. Information must in turn be selected and processed by an individual and this act of refinement is strongly dependent on individual skills and preferences, which in these contexts puts the spotlight on skills, and which degree of computer literacy one has reached.

In relation to participation and eDemocracy, a number of key issues could be raised in particular, concerning a somewhat narrow definition of what really counts as eDemocracy, i.e. the use of ICT in computer-mediated communication for purposes of enhancing democratic and communicative processes, strictly focusing on the two-way communication between politicians and citizens. This simplified view could be further elaborated and complicated by posing a number of provoking questions. Where do the preparatory stages or the design of the ICT:s used for participation in those particular eDemocracy processes, fit in? Is it only information and documents with direct relevance to the political decision-making process that

should be presented online and labelled eDemocracy relevant information? Is it impossible to combine results from online consultations with what normally counts as the formal outcome of eDemocracy? If there are only a few people participating in eParticipation activities, what significance is their contribution given in the decision-making process? How can technology support complex debates, which require balanced weighing and deliberation rather than answering yes or no to predefined questions, and if this is made possible, does not technology then favour a certain kind of democracy? Are there ways in which technology and technology-supported methods can help the politicians and civic organisations to evaluate government-funded activities? If so, are not these kinds of evaluations as relevant as; "talking to and with the public" about diverging issues? Is it necessary in all phases to support the transparency of political bodies to citizens?

Examples of pilot projects concerning eDemocracy in Sweden, as well as in other parts of Western Europe, have mostly been strivings towards the improvement of information and communication with the aid of ICT, within existing forms of representative government. The relations between citizens and politicians also include civil servants, due to their role as intermediaries in the dialogue between citizens and politicians. Democracy and dialogue is also a significant part of the development of public services, (Grönlund, Ranerup, Gustafsson, 2003). Another dimension is the development towards a so called consumer democracy (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998) focusing on how ICT: s could help strengthen the citizens' possibility to indirectly steer service development through their choices of services. They could thereby also construct an alternative infrastructure for citizen participation, by governing through influences on the development of services as well as through preferences for a certain service (Grönlund, Ranerup, Gustafsson, 2003). It has been suggested that recent experiments within the domain of eDemocracy development have stimulated engagement and participation through the creation of new meeting places for dialogue and deliberation concerning democracy development. The new deliberative spaces and improved communication in terms of for instance political blogging were recently highlighted and given additional public attention just before and in direct relation to the national elections of 2006 in Sweden.

A concrete Swedish example of an early eDemocracy experiment with participatory ambitions is the online consultations in Kalix in September 2002[24], which gained much international attention. However, according to Ranerup (2002), this was not the very first Swedish experiment. The Kalix consultation was part of the second wave of eDemocracy experiments in Sweden. The first wave occurred between 1996 and 1998, mostly introducing electronic debate forums for dialogue between citizens and politicians on local government issues. The municipality of Ronneby, were I have conducted most of my empirical studies, took part in the first wave, in connection with the European DIALOGUE project, conducted in partnership with Bologna and The London Borough of Lewisham.

eVoting, which could be seen as a part of digitising direct democracy, puts more emphasis on directness than time for thinking, consultation and deliberation. The Swedish publication *Democracy politics* describes the Swedish position in this matter as far from pro-active. It is more of "*wait and see what happens"*, even though Sweden has been active on a European level, contributing to preparing recommendations on legal, technical and operational standards for electronic voting (Demokratipolitik [Democracy Politics], 2003: 31)

[24] The experiment consisted of an online enquiry and chat with the board of the city council, during two occasions the future of Kalix and tax issues were discussed online. See also a report by Westerståhl, 2002.

Relating the former overarching discussion of general results in eDemocracy development to the current situation in Sweden, gives at hand that there have lately been voices raised against what is considered to be an apparent lack of political will within the political establishment to support eDemocracy, and especially eParticipation. In a debate article published in a Swedish newspaper, Ohlin[25], points out the following:

> *"Sweden is at the bottom of the class [in eDemocracy]. We are good at online public services, but pay no attention at all to citizens' participation" (Ohlin, 2005.)*

In this article he refers to the *Global E-government readiness report* (2004) conducted by the UN, where Sweden were ranked number 13 among 25 countries working towards eParticipation. In the year 2005 Sweden had improved and advanced on the list to number 11. Ohlin pointed out that this shortcoming could not be explained by rational reasons, since Sweden by tradition has always supported strong democracy. Some reasons could be the chosen definitions of eParticipation and the limits of the measurements.

These statements are of course one picture of many, describing the state of the art of democratic participation in Sweden. Another picture is presented by a local politician:

> *"I think that there is an inclination in society to look upon eDemocracy as something that has to go on beside the ordinary development of democracy, and elected representatives as something that has to be pushed aside. eDemocracy is a way to extend the concept of democracy with more forms for participation, but it is not a special kind of democracy, or a concept of its own".*[26]

Less critical analysis claims that Sweden is good at online consultations, i.e. on the local level, and particularly in relation to specified, limited areas such as for instance urban planning. One fundamental thing is expressed here, apart from the strong argumentation for citizen's involvement, namely the belief that a connection between providing opportunities automatically will lead to increased participation. This is a predominant view reflecting a causal relationship, which not always is likely to come about, which the dilemmas of participation in this thesis clearly will illustrate, in the analysis of the empirical cases. Of course there must be basic opportunities for participation, but even when this circumstance is fulfilled, the outcome is not given. The outcome depends on several factors, which become visible in local, situated processes of shaping eParticipation, where conflicting interests might counteract the goal of achieving democratic involvement. Participation in terms of gaining influence might be as difficult for local politicians as for citizens in general, when development is steered in a certain direction. Local experiments of developing eParticipation must adjust to what could be called a "best practice regime", where certain eParticipation practices are presented as role models for others.

[25] Tomas Ohlin was the former secretary in the Swedish Governments IT Commission
[26] Politician B, P4/20030926

2.7 eParticipation as situated, local and contextual activities

The second introductory quote to this chapter describes the diversities in the DIALOGUE project, and illustrates the plurality in the project-leaders' chosen definitions of democracy and participation. In 1998 this was presented as one of the benefits with this particular EC-funded project. All three participating countries, Sweden, Italy and Great Britain, presented their own sub-projects and a variety of strategies and solutions to address the common topic; how to bridge the gap between the less privileged groups and those with both knowledge, social and material resources in the information society. The differing solutions were based on local circumstances and needs. This caused both frustration and insights in the project, which will be further described in the empirical parts in the chapters containing my research analysis.

Despite the fact that practices often reveal a need for local plurality and adaptability, methods and models play a significant role in general development of eGovernment and lately also eParticipation. A variety of guidelines and other kinds of recommendations have been introduced frequently in the ongoing debate and as steering mechanisms in practice. Of special relevance for the topic is models which concentrate on issues such as how to secure accessibility for participation or how to best manage participation and change of behaviour, implicating an evolution of technological, social and participatory towards greater maturity. These models prescribe how certain effects are accomplished and how change is achieved. Several access models have for instance been introduced and used in the general eGovernment debate over the years (Aspden and Katz 1997, van Dijk and Hacker 2003, Nilsson, 2005), aiming to support establishment of accessibility on various levels.

Two Canadian researchers, Clement & Shade (2000) have developed a seven-layered conceptual model, called the *Access rainbow model* (Gurstein, 2000:32) .The access rainbow model is a conceptual tool for visualising the many nuances of the notion of accessibility. It is an information-communication infrastructure, describing the key requirements for access definition. This conceptual framework was developed with the explicit purpose of advocating public interests of access to information- and communication infrastructures. It was an attempt to present a basic, workable definition of "universal access" and a method for how to come closer to an ideal of an all-embracing access. However the authors point out that access is not to be seen as an end by itself. Above all it enables further activities, which underlines the importance of discussing access as a prerequisite for mediated participation in decision-making. Access is a key issue in the discussion about eParticipation but is not the goal itself, it is something that enables - but also inhibits - further actions. It becomes important to broaden the discussion by asking questions such as: are there a multitude of purposes with establishing an infrastructure for access? Access to what and for whom? The model is presented in the form of a multi-coloured rainbow:

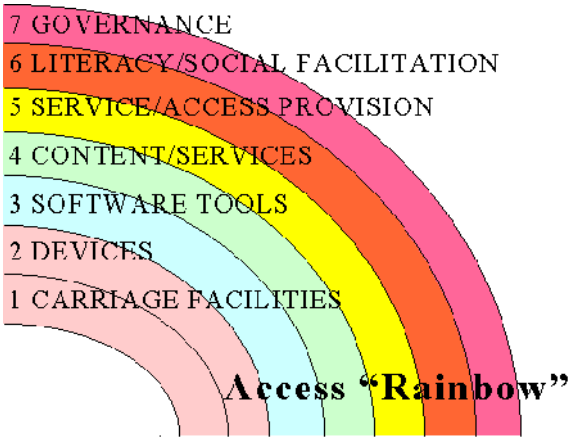

Figure 2. 1
"The Access Rainbow"[27]

Other examples are the participation models describing the practicalities and nature of democratic participation, supported and mediated by electronic means in the three interrelated processes of government, governance and democracy. An example is the suggested analysis and categorisation advocated by UN; i.e. *eInformation*, *eConsultations* and *eDecision-Making* along with a model suggested by Macintosh (2004) where she talks about three different types or levels of participation in policy-making, i.e. *e-enabling*, *e-engagement* and *e-empowering.* They describe stages in growth where e-enabling is considered basic and a prerequisite for e-engagement to occur, while e-empowerment illustrates a more mature state where the initiatives is grounded in a state where the involved actors take responsibility for their part of the relation. This is also described in models of participation in a policy document by the OECD (2001), where information is exemplified as one-way communication between government and citizens. Consultation is presented as a two-way communication and the third stage, active participation, is a shared communication by government and citizens.

A third example, focusing inequalities in participation, was originally introduced by Sherry Arnstein, a political scientist working within the area of urban development and local government in US, in the late '60's. She worked out a basic typology for participation in which she defined the different layers or degrees of participation, the so-called 'ladder of participation.' (Arnstein, 1969: 214-217). The ladder is divided up as follows:

[27] Published with permission of the authors, originally published in Gurstein, 2000: 36

8.Citizen control	citizen power
7.Delegation	citizen power
6.Partnership	citizen power
5. Placation	tokenism
4.Consultation	tokenism
3. Informing	tokenism
2. Therapy	non-participation
1.Manipulation	non-participation

Figure 2:2

The different steps can be explained as follows: Steps 1 and 2 refer to non-participation, where the main purpose is to gain citizens' support for decisions and measures with the use of PR methods. Step 3, according to Arnstein, is the first step towards a legitimisation of participation, though the flow of information is in one direction only. Step 4 covers investigations of attitudes, consultation and questionnaires. Step 5 offers the possibility for citizens to exercise a degree of influence via advisory boards, although the initiative and assessment of the value of any advice is still in the hands of the governmental decision-makers. Step 6 is based on a partnership between different actors, where the responsibility for planning and decision-making is shared, which is also one of the ideals of "good governance" today. Step 7 is the stage where power is delegated. Step 8 entails full citizen control over planning, policy-making and implementation of decisions, i.e. through co-operation, which excludes middlemen, which in a sense could be exemplified by the rhetorical vision of a public administration that has totally transformed into a mature organisation and fully adopted a citizen-centred approach.

The Participation Ladder was originally intended as a theoretical instrument for city planners who had to handle public involvement in urban planning. Today Arnstein's model can be seen as somewhat obsolete because of its built-in opposition, with the power relations between authorities' and citizens' seen as static and unchangeable, a view that could be contested by taking in account Foucault's relational power concept. *The Participation Ladder* describes the view that citizens are either manipulated by the authorities or regarded as equal participants in planning and steering activities and it may very well be so, but are there also examples of the contrary in these moments of participation? In which way do citizens contribute to this play of power, and is this made visible, if the ladder is dismounted and presented as a different set-up? The reality is more fine-grained and has many more layers than those represented in the model, and both citizens and practitioners recreate and maintain dichotomies between participation and non-participation. They are co-constructing participants in the recreation of a base, which was once the starting point of dichotomisation.

There are several complexities in Arnstein's suggested categorisation of participation. What happens if citizens are excluded from a practice, which upholds inclusion? What happens if participants wish to be on steps 5 to 8 but make mistakes according to the 'experts'

(Rydhagen, 2002)? What happens if computer systems, databases and community areas are built out of the assumption that citizens is supposed to take a more active role, than they in fact are prepared for and willing to do? And what will be the consequences if the authorities want to stimulate participation, but do not know how to accomplish this? What are the consequences if citizens deliberately choose not to participate, or if citizens prefer to be on steps 1 and 2 rather than at the top of the participation ladder? And what happens if the citizens choose to be proactive and the organisation welcomes this but is not prepared to manage and take care of these initiatives? Another example in the category of ladders which has been established as prescribing development of eService is the *Service Development Ladder* (SD-ladder). The Rainbow Accessibility Model and the SD-ladder will be thoroughly examined and discussed in Part Two in this thesis. Models show circumstances in a simplified way, without simplifying the content. Yet I would like to ask where are the models, the figures and the concepts of participation that also include the disregarded and neglected issues of participation, that might complicate and blur the ideal or rational picture of participation as activity and ideal, in particular eParticipation? Are there invisible layers between different kinds of participation? Are there examples of participation within non-participation and non-participation within participatory actions? How could we challenge our "habitual thinking" when it comes to contributing to expanding democratic participation? Practices of participation which do not fit into these models are discussed further on in this thesis, particularly in chapter seven.

Finally, I find it equally important to point out that eParticipation is part of a continuous tradition of democratic participation, even if it sometimes is presented as a "new feature". Practice-based interpretations and local interpretations are not always in line with what the rhetoric prescribes as the appropriate way to understand participation in democratic activities. At the same time the situating of eParticipation is not something which goes on in isolation from visions, prescribing theories or earlier established ways of participation and procedures of decision-making. eParticipation is rather formed in the relation between possibilities and restrictions, both in practices and visions.

3. Empirical basis

"*Anything that can be changed will be changed until there is no time left to change anything.*"[28]

In this chapter, I present the research context of this thesis, and introduce my "case studies" - which in practice have been a number of projects in which I have been involved in various roles - together with a descriptive overview of my empirical data. The projects have all been research and development (R&D) projects, often from a perspective of action research. I am in this aspect inspired by what Schön (1995) calls reflection-in-action-, emphasising both thinking *about* action and reflecting *in* action (Schön, 1995:49-69)

My focus has not primarily been on the technological aspects of the systems being developed, but rather on the organisational and societal visions and objectives, and the application of information technology to further these goals. This choice of a broader, open-ended perspective, including organisational and societal issues, is in line with tradition in the academic discipline of Informatics, within which my research belongs. This perspective is inspired by the long tradition of Scandinavian systems development where aspects of plurality of design, and inclusion of social aspects, and users' involvement in design activities have been crucial (IIvari & Lyytinen, 1998, Bratteteig, 2004:9-23) This has been further elaborated upon in the previous chapters concerning research approaches and theories. My main focus of research has been what in one sense could be described as the "peripheral areas" within information systems development, if the development of technology is regarded as the core of the process. I have paid most attention to the activities of customisation, use and users (the concept of users here including citizens as well as politicians and administrative personnel, further elaborated in chapter five). I have also incorporated aspects of design in use, meaning translations and re-situating of artefacts and their intended use, within actual work- and use-contexts, wherein the design aspects have been more or less pertinent and prominent.

3.1 Common features of the projects

During the last decades, several international projects focusing on developing information and communication technology have been running in the Blekinge region. Blekinge is the smallest county in the country, but has a strategic location in the Southeast of Sweden, with the Baltic Sea to the South and East. Ronneby, which is a small municipality in Blekinge, with about 30 000 inhabitants, has been an active actor in these development projects from the very start.[29] The municipality of Ronneby, characterised during the last two decades by its ambitions to create a software-specific business life, has a history of taking active initiatives when it comes to developing eServices. In 1998, this small city was selected as one of Europe's top ten IT-cities, according to the European Digital Cities Project. Ronneby has consciously been striving towards becoming what Caves (2003) would call a "smart community", i.e. "*...a geographical area ranging in size from a neighbourhood to a multicounty region with residents, organizations and governing institutions that are using*

[28] Quote from Wikiquote, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Project_Mangement [Accessed 070305]
[29] Information is found on http://www.ronneby.se/projects[Accessed 060224]

information technology to transform their region in significant ways"(Mälkiä & Savolainen, 2003:17). A significant part of this transformation process is exemplified by a number of ICT-development projects. These have been conducted in co-operation with different countries in Europe, involving various local actors, including researchers from the university, Blekinge Institute of Technology, as well as institutional practitioners, citizens and representatives from local enterprises. These efforts have been an essential part of establishing the regional information society, in line with the Lisbon strategy, discussed earlier, in chapter three, as one of the fundamental visionary documents of the European Union.[30] I have mixed experiences from these projects, being more or less actively involved over the years in this transformation, taking a more or less active part in differing roles and positions, either as practitioner, project leader, local politician, and/or evaluator and researcher. Besides the potentially influential positions I have held in various projects, I have also been a local inhabitant and therefore, by default, a natural part of the target group for these initiated changes. The projects are to be read as kind of topographical map, where some projects forms the highlands, whilst others makes up the backdrop.

There are of course a number of reasons - besides the practical ones - why I have chosen these particular projects as the empirical basis for my research. First of all, I have been active in, and/or concerned by, all of these projects in various stages of my research. My role as participant in the project has also shifted over a period of time, and from project to project, also within the specific projects, and the experiences from all these differing positions have all contributed to formulate a rich picture of participation. They have also, in another way, contributed to my socialisation into the practice of research. Secondly, all these projects contain very good examples of *training of eParticipation,* also covering aspects of the plain hard work that is ultimately needed to make eParticipation work, in order to go beyond the visionary stages. In that sense, the projects all covered different levels of eParticipation. According to a basic evaluation framework for eParticipation, presented by Macintosh (2004), they were all projects aiming at re-situating and reworking the levels of *e-enabling, e-engagement and e-empowering* (Macintosh, A, 2004), or, as one of the municipal attendees formulated it, aiming "to contribute to the pile of experiences of eDemocracy pilots". Another aspect, of importance for me, was to be able to include examples from all parts of the political system, i.e. politicians, citizens, civic groups, municipal administration and educational institutions.

The *Ronneby 2003* project was basically the implementation process for a municipal ICT vision and strategy by the same name, and concentrated on enabling citizens to take part in developing the information society by setting up a basic infrastructure of accessibility. The *DIALOGUE* project concentrated on supporting citizens in developing digital literacy. The *PIM* project highlighted the need for appropriate artefacts and integrated public services. The *Election 2002* project could be seen as focusing on developing an active dialogue between different parties. The *TANGO* project was aimed at developing and training well-informed decision-making, and the *Komindu* project and the *Flow Society project* were both intended to promote training in civic action as well as access to consultations as part of decision-making, but from totally different starting-points. From that aspect *Komindu* was a top-down initiated project, while the *Flow Society* initiative was initiated bottom-up, even though the outcome of the translation process regarding both initiatives (Latour & Callon, 1981, Callon, 1986), showed similarities. This will be further discussed in the empirical chapter regarding formal and informal access to decision-making, in chapter five.

[30] Presentation of the Lisbon strategy available at: http://www.europarl.eu.int/summits/lis1_en.htm and http://europa.eu.int/growthandjobs/index_en.htm [Accessed 060124]

Table 3:1, below, offers an overview of the projects, listed in chronological order. It also provides an overview of my shifting roles and primary tasks, either as an active participant in the project or in a more peripheral position:

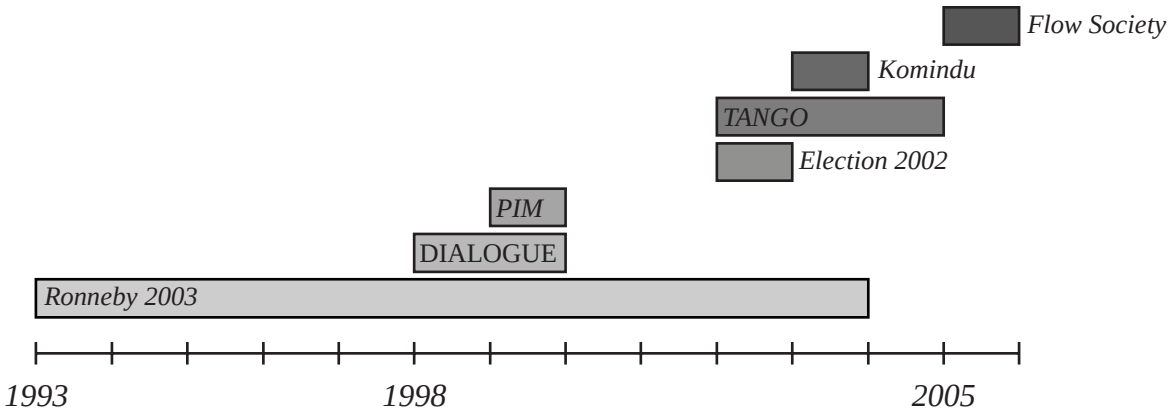

Table3:1: Overview of projects

Another common feature for these projects, which qualifies them as suitable for my research, is the fact that they have all - independently of the final outcome - been formulated and initiated as projects *concerned with participation and the transformation of relations between citizens and the public sector on a democratic basis*. The *Ronneby 2003* project, for instance, advocated equal access to technical infrastructures as well as facilitation in taking advantage of the information society, by using librarians as human intermediaries[31] supporting the citizens primarily in their use of technology. The intermediary function by the librarians was mostly pedagogically oriented, even though other dimensions, such as control and denial, along with support of empowerment, evolved in the interaction process. In the *DIALOGUE* project, the issue of empowerment of citizens was more pertinent as a legitimised focus, although this was not clearly formulated and expressed at the time. Experiences from *Ronneby 2003* and *DIALOGUE* contributed to changes in how citizens were viewed in the following projects. There was a shift from viewing the citizen as primarily consumer or user, towards providing space for the citizen to play a more active role in determining his or her own participation. In the *PIM-project*, the issue of providing all citizens with equal access to public information was crucial, as was the active participation of the civil servants, as ambassadors for a particular device (the public Internet terminal) offering self-service. In the *Election 2002* project, the main goal was to guide first time voters and other interested voters in how to cast a vote through setting up an informative web site, but also through activities surrounding the online initiative. This required a high degree of participation from all involved, from citizens, to public servants, to politicians. There were also attempts to change the relationship between politicians and citizens, but this turned out to be more difficult than expected, as will be shown in the empirical examples further on in the text.

[31] See for instance Pinch, 247-270, in Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003 for relevant discussions about intermediaries roles in both technology development general and e-service development in particular.

The *TANGO* project also aimed at furthering the transformation of the local public sector, through introducing a multi-stakeholder approach to research and developmental projects. The *Komindu project*, too, aimed at changing relations among all these parties, besides broadening the basis for decision-making through public involvement in policy-planning. The pre-incubator *Flow Society* also had ambitions to change and democratise participation in local development, but from quite another perspective, namely grass roots or bottom-up, being the result of an initiative coming from the citizens themselves. I have included this project here as an example of a civic initiative, seeking support from the establishment. This project is also interesting because it shows that participation is not necessarily more likely to happen when a project evolves from civic initiatives.

In my licentiate thesis[32] I bring up another example of a project initiated by a civic organisation. This project was called the *Information Forest*, and was started in 1996 by a regional branch of the Swedish Disability Federation, HSO[33], (an umbrella organisation for 43 associations of, and for, disabled persons). The *Information Forrest* was initiated in response to a consultancy report highlighting the problems of access to information for disabled persons. In this report, access was identified as the primary focus for future eService development. A mapping and identification of different methods of influence and participation was also carried out, and the participating associations were asked to elect representatives who were to be responsible for the information in their associations, with the aim of stimulating a continuous dialogue focused on members' needs. Several other development projects concentrating on raising computer literacy and skills, such as "Brukarstöd" (*User support*) and "*Egen kunskap*" (*Knowledge on your own terms*), were also launched during and as a result of the *Information Forrest* project. After a while, this particular project and the website joined a national campaign which coordinated several sites under a common portal. The idea was to acquire help with the technical development of the site and concentrate local efforts on the contents, in order to satisfy local needs.
In the Swedish public sector the organisation HSO is one example of a civic movement. Another Scandinavian example is Samenet[34]. In my study, these aspects of civic engagement are represented by the members of the association *Flow Society*, bringing together people who are concerned about the local development of the municipality. They are engaged in finding new ways of supporting individual development coupled with an active interest in ensuring and stimulating the growth of the local employment market. In that sense, they are to be seen as objects for eParticipation development and in another way they are also participating in the co-development of eParticipation, which will be further discussed later on.

The projects described here are to be seen as local projects, but are by no means to be interpreted solely as isolated events. They are influenced by an international development, and some of them have also had international implications, due to the international co-operation over several years, which will be more thoroughly described in the following section.

[32] Available at: http://www.bth.se/fou/forskinfo.nsf/0/07cf9d8e91129cc9c1256cb4005194c3?OpenDocument [060224]
[33] http://www.hsoblekinge.se/iCM.aspx?PageId=140 [Accessed 060224]
[34] Samenet is a community network representing the indigenous people in Scandinavia. See http://www.same.net/ [Accessed 060224]

3.2 Project 2003 - setting the regional scene

Out of a total of five municipal councils in Blekinge, Ronneby was one of the first to invest more extensively in setting up an information and communication infrastructure, by initiating an ICT strategy in 1993. In this strategy, the municipality decided to prioritise and introduce software applications in public administration and in services to citizens during the coming ten years. One goal was to enable ICT to become a democratic right. Another goal was to stimulate commercial and learning activities through ICT. Involved partners were several different departments of the local municipality, software companies, and researchers from the Blekinge Institute of Technology located at the Science Park Soft Center. The municipality co-operated in a number of international ICT projects from the mid 90's onwards, and became a member of the *TeleCities* organisation 1995. Ronneby municipality has also been involved in *The Global Cities Dialogue*, a network of cities dedicated to working towards achieving an inclusive and sustainable information society, and overcoming digital divides. Another decision, which had implications for the continued development, was the decision to invest in an optical fibre backbone network in the city, connecting the Town Hall, the Science Park, the public library, schools and housing areas with each other, and providing high-speed connection to the Internet. This initiative rendered the city the position as one of ten selected "*Good Practise Cases*" and "*Success Stories*" in an early report by the European Digital Cities (Mino, 2000). These events have all contributed to developing and sustaining an image, over the past years, of the region as a highly ICT oriented part of the country.

> *"Ronneby in the year 2003, an IT society", was the name of an umbrella project started by the city council in 1993. The official project plan stated that:*
>
> *"The project will give the local inhabitants ample access to information technology. IT will be a democratic right. Dialogue and participation are key words. Renewal, initiative and variety are furthered. Small local spearhead projects are being developed alongside major investments. Ronneby is a test bench for full-scale IT investments."*[35]

The goal of the Ronneby 2003 project was, among other things, to make IT a democratic right, to introduce the information society to the general public, and to attract new companies to settle in the area. The formal adoption of the vision of the IT society stemmed from a visionary municipal policy document. The stated aim was to develop a society in which all citizens were familiar with IT. This was later modified to all municipal employees, a pragmatic but nevertheless important change of vocabulary, made due to decisions taken concerning investments in ICT training of municipal employees.

> *"The 2003 project aimed from the start to give the general public the opportunity of encountering the new technology when visiting the library. User-friendly software was developed, and the personnel as well as the general public attended courses [. . .] everybody will be given the practical opportunity of finding out what the information society means without having to make any financial commitment. During the last year, channels have been opened up on the web and e-mail introduced, thereby increasing communication between citizens and politicians/civil servants".(ibid.)*

[35] Project plan for P1, retrieved from Ronneby Municipality web site; http://www.ronneby.se/projekt/ [Accessed 060224] (The plan is not available online any longer.) Translation made by author.

The most recently adopted municipal overarching budget proposal and strategic goals in Ronneby, spanning over a three year period (2003 to 2006), states the following concerning the ambitions of general ICT-development in the municipality:

> "*During the coming term of office, different initiatives will be realised in order to reinforce citizens' engagement in different political processes. A stage in this is to work out an IT strategy, which clarifies and motivates the municipal aim and direction on use of interactive media. /.../ the development of democracy demands a developed dialogue between citizens, public servants and local politicians.*"[36]

Further on in the same budget proposal, the *Komindu*[37] project is introduced as a practical example of how to achieve democratic development and increased citizen engagement, described as something "*... beyond the traditional consultation and exhibition procedure concerning spatial planning, where other forms of communication could be tested. All political committees are encouraged to develop the dialogue with "their" customers*."

In line with the ambitions presented in the budget proposal, it is proposed that the ICT-working group of the municipality be re-established and appointed the task of co-ordinating the ICT initiatives. My aim with describing the Ronneby 2003 project, in which I was involved in my role as librarian before beginning my research, is partly to give a background perspective, but also to lay the groundwork for a discussion of research-in-use found in the conclusions of this thesis. I was not granted a *legitimate role as developer* of this project, but played an active part through my involvement in my appointed role of ambassador for the citizens' *local introduction* to the Information Society.

3.3 The DIALOGUE project featuring WWN [38]

The DIALOGUE project, partly funded by the European Commission, started in January 1998 and continued until the end of June 1999 (18 months). This was a European project that emphasised work against the emergence of the digital divide, through empowerment activities targeting those less experienced in use of ICT:s, particularly elderly people, women, immigrants and parents and children. The project included activities such as setting up local groups and local DIALOGUE web sites, and training activities for the use of the Internet and basic software, i.e. building computer literacy. There were also tutoring and writing activities going on, and the use of on-line interactive tools such as chat, debate forums, e-mail and video conference systems, online consultations and on-line debates on key policy issues. In the sub project *Women Write on the Net* (WWN) the activities in some sense could be described as experiments in forming an active citizenship, based on the involved actors' viewpoints, instead of trying to implement an engineered form of citizenship. The reinterpretation of "active citizenship" here could be summarised as a constant challenge of the predominant perception of the user/designer divide and to support the collective forming of citizenship, instead of as often emphasised, the individual forming of "digital citizenship",

[36] This is author's translation of a municipal official document presenting the budget proposal and strategic goals for 2003-2006.
[37] The "*Komindu- project*" is an abbreviation in Swedish, which could be freely translated into the *ComeOnIn-project.*
[38] This project has been thoroughly described earlier in Ekelin & Elovaara, 2000 and Elovaara, 2002, Elovaara, 2004.

a flexible European citizenship or "active citizenship". The project partners were the London Borough of Lewisham, the City of Ronneby, The Municipality of Bologna and the Horizons Unlimited Srl.[39] The project was characterized by a democratic profile, and aimed at developing the use of ICT as a means of furthering democracy and methodological development. This was within the context of European initiatives targeting issues of e-inclusion, attempting to bridge the gap between ordinary people in their everyday life and the developing Information Society; that is, in line with the ideal of overcoming the emergence of "digital divides"[40], which in this particular local context was not given any local interpretation. The stated groups who were supposed to run the risk of being excluded were accepted as the main target groups, even though the concept of digital divide was found to be more fine-grained than first anticipated during the development of the project.

In a presentation of the nominees to the Global Bangemann Challenge 1999, in the public services and democracy category, the objectives and aim of the project were stated as being: "*Empowerment of non-expert citizens by giving them the necessary know-how to use electronic communication tools and applications as part of their daily routine, ensure participation of social groups in the democratic process thanks to electronic communication tools, show the benefits of the IS (information society) to link and create a trans-European citizens' network, involve people in the development of new applications and demonstrate how these can be useful in their day to day life*."

The project targeted two categories of citizens: young people in school, and a cross-section of citizens, with a particular emphasis on minority groups - in Ronneby that in practice meant immigrants. Lewisham focused mainly on consultation processes, by creating opportunities for communities to take part in on-line debate concerning local decision-making, along with deliberation exercises for pupils and teachers, on i.e. environmental concerns, drugs and bullying, but also debates on different topics with the project participants from the partner countries. The project that was carried out in Bologna focused on establishing Internet access points in local libraries, and ICT-training courses for elderly people, as well as trans-European activities. In Ronneby, the different sub-projects were about parental involvement, education on the Internet, and establishing a communication network between women, locally and globally. The latter example is in the following described as the The Women Write on the Net project (WWN project). I took part as a practitioner in the WWN project at that time, in the role of one of two project leaders, in collaboration with a colleague working at the university.

The *WWN* project started out as a sub-project within the framework of the DIALOGUE-project, and provided us (the project leaders) with an opportunity to re-interpret both ICT and the democratic discourse on a local level. The target group included individuals and groups that were assumed to be in danger of being excluded from the growing use of ICT e.g. women with little training and education, unemployed people, immigrants and the elderly. This description of the target group might seem to indicate that the project was a supportive program for the underprivileged, with the aim of levelling out differences in technological expertise among different groups of citizens. However, that was not the main purpose; rather the long-term aim of the project was supporting the development of active citizenship, even though we did not clearly formulate this at the time of the project.

[39] Dialogue http://www.ronneby.se/dialogue [Accessed 060224]
[40] For a general definition of digital divide, see
http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0,,sid9_gci214062,00.html[060224]

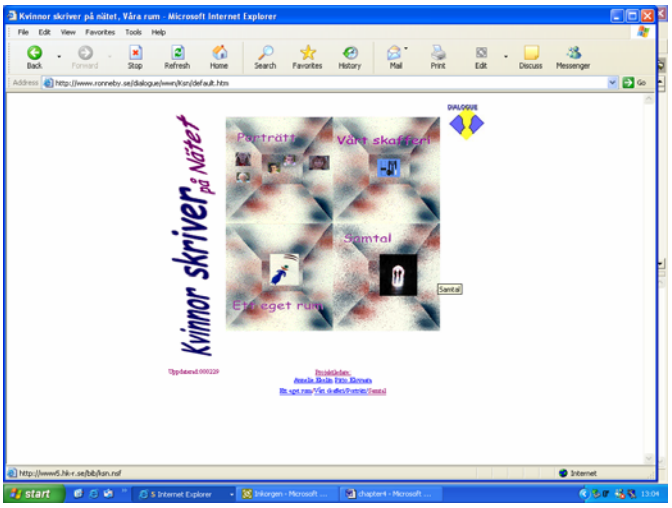

Figure. 3:2. The Women Writing on the Net Project

The starting point of the WWN project was that we would all learn together, by co-operating with and meeting one another, by sharing our knowledge and experience, and by interpreting and formulating - on a mutual as well as an individual basis - our understanding in words and thoughts as well as in writing. Those women who had more training in using the Internet and different computer programs helped the beginners. This reinforced the group identity as well as the self-confidence of each individual. In teaching others you yourself also learn. Above all, you learn by doing. The goal of the project was to introduce the participating citizens to the idea of being designers and producers of ICT, not merely users of technology, to create a shared space for action, both virtually and physically, introducing the idea of Community Networking to the municipality as well as to the women in the groups. Two groups, consisting of women with greater or lesser experience of using computers, met every week for a year to discuss the essentials of life and politics, to conduct writing exercises and to learn how to use the new technology. Basic introductions to word processing, creation of home pages, picture editing in the web environment and searching for information were included in the project. Communication by e-mail, chat forums and video conferences took place between project participants in Ronneby, Bologna and the London Borough of Lewisham.

The project also deliberately provided a physical meeting place for Swedish women and immigrant women. This was an opportunity for immigrant women to practice their Swedish, and to learn about Swedish customs and traditions, cultural phenomena and politics. The Swedish women were in turn given an insight into the experiences and various cultures of the immigrant women.

An essential part of the project was also the methodological development, which focused on the learning process in a specific social context. The aim was to give time and space for writing, discussions and reflection and to combine this with ICT training as a means of integrating action and reflection. This was achieved using a method that stimulated personal development in, and throughout the group. We consciously worked to break down the barriers between expert/non-expert, participant/project manager. Everyday personal experience and reflection were used as the main sources of knowledge. Writing functioned as a means of articulating the individual's voice as well as comprehending the process. Individual elements such as developing skills in using IT aids, and supporting and reinforcing the powers of personal expression by means of written exercises - both group and individual - were also important elements in the greater whole.

During the project, writing played an important role on several different levels simultaneously. One of the central goals was to further grass roots democracy, to conquer and re-define the public arena. If one sees speaking as a political act and political tool, communication between people and the development of the individual voice is fundamental to the development of democracy (Kahlert, 1997:19). Since talking is not yet common in ICT contexts, writing, and the ability to express oneself through writing, is still the main basis of communication and interaction on the Internet. We considered it essential that the individual should be able to rely on his or her own voice, and we stressed the importance of the written word as well as the potential of ICT as a voice amplifier and megaphone (McKay, 1998:187)

The aim of writing was thus not solely to provide material for home pages. Writing was also used as a means of creating a unified whole, of providing a context as well as a tool for different elements of the project. Writing was a way of creating a dialogue and stimulating reflection as well as personal development in, and throughout, the group. It worked as an aid to explaining abstract structures and complicated computer terminology, e.g. when the group illustrated a link and how it works on a home page by using a written exercise. The participants wrote down their spontaneous associations to a particular word or a sentence on small pieces of paper. Once these had been collected and put on a notice board, the connections between the texts were drawn with the aid of lines. A number of possible crossroads were gradually identified, and the result was the creation of a network in concrete form. We could then follow up the exercise with a discussion about how links work on a home page.

A vitally important part of making the results of the women's work visible was to initiate the creation of virtual fellowships and communities. The first stage in this process was to start creating the project's web pages, where the participants were given the opportunity to publish their work and texts. [41] A room of one's own consisted of figurative rooms on the web, also representing different aspects of writing which always ran parallel at different levels: individual, collective and public writing. The four rooms consisted of the Portrait Gallery, the Individual's Own Room (containing poems and stories), our Pantry (with recipes and gastronomic memories) and the Discussion room (a forum for discussions). The categories are neither clear-cut nor separate, however. Everything is woven together and intermingled. In the Discussion room, for example, a wide range of topics was discussed, from the existence or otherwise of rhyme forms, funny stories about the wisdom of children, to the problem of unemployment, and anger at the bombing of Kosovo. In the *Individual's Own Room*, where it was possible among other things to read personal childhood memories, there was a description of a family party described through the eyes of a child, along with an authentic description of class differences in Sweden today. Everything was presented in the public sphere, i.e. on the Internet. In this way, the division or dichotomy between private/public was dissolved in a very obvious way.

[41] URL= http://www.ronneby.se/dialogue/wwn/Ksn/default.htm (Not available online.)

3.4 The PIM project

The pilot Public Internet Monitor Project (PIM) started at the beginning of 1999 and was at the time of the evaluation managed by five national organisations: the *National Swedish Labour Board (AMS), the National Swedish Tax Board (RSV), the National Swedish Social Insurance Board (RFV), the Central Student Grants Committee (CSN) and the Premium Pension Board (PPM).* Three elements worked together in the PIM project: a common gateway[42] for the transfer of information and services, public monitors, and increased co-operation between the participating authorities. [43]

The primary goals of the PIM project were to provide official information and service via the Internet, both for those who have and those who do not have access to a computer connected to the Internet, as well as creating an extended network of IT workplaces or self-service equipment for the clients of participating authorities. In concrete terms, the monitor consisted of a computer connected to the Internet. This was mounted in specially adapted furniture, so called Client Workstation Units that were developed by the Swedish National Labour Market Administration, and connected to a printer. With the help of the respective local authority, approximately 140 monitors were installed in public places such as libraries and civic offices throughout Sweden: in the countryside, in cities, and in suburbs to major towns and cities. With the aid of a monitor, citizens could gain access to a wide variety of information and services from different authorities. It was the joint responsibility of the participating authorities to ensure that the monitors were maintained, and also to develop the shared Internet gateway known as the 'Public Service Market" and the services provided via the portal. The latter covered a wide range of services such as vacant jobs, taxes, social insurance, student grants and the new pension system. In addition to pure information, a range of self-service options was offered, including downloading and ordering official forms, brochures, birth certificates, assistance in calculating tax reductions or accommodation allowances and contact with authorities via e-mail or address and telephone lists and much more.

Figure 3:3. The PIM project offered access to a virtual public square.

[42] For official information about the PIM project in English (P3),see http://www.medborgartorget.nu [Accessed 060124]
[43] See *Serving in co-operation*, 1999 (only in Swedish).

Medborgartorget.nu (*The Public Service Market*) [44] was accessible via the Internet. It was thus not necessary to store any information on the local Internet monitor. It was possible to store information on the monitor where required, but most of the information was accessible via the Internet. Since each authority was responsible for its own information and service, there was no need for separate updating of the information on the gateways index page, apart from the news links presented on the index site. There was also an internal web site protected by a password. This internal site could be accessed by project participants and contained links to statistics, a discussion forum, internal information, press releases, questions and answers and other important information. The internal website functioned as a mutual report and work interface. Those particular functions will be further elaborated in the empirical chapters.

The *National Swedish Labour Board* was responsible for the equipment and technical support during the trial period. The routines governing co-operation at a local level were drawn up in the form of a co-operative model in which the central functions were host/sponsor/local work group. The public Internet terminals were located in country areas and in towns, in public institutions such as libraries and civic offices, as well as in other places where people meet, e.g. commercial centres and petrol stations.

The Public Internet Monitor Project ran as a pilot project for two years. The five authorities participating in the project then had to decide if the cooperation around the monitors was to continue, and how continued joint efforts to provide all citizens with a digitalised service might be extended, developed and financed in such a way that it was viable in the long-term. The results of the Public Internet Monitor Project were highlighted by the participating authorities as being influential for the further development of civic services via the Internet. In the spring of 2001, researchers from three different universities: *Blekinge Institute of Technology (BTH)*, the *Centre for User-Oriented User Design* (CID) at the Royal Institute of Technology (Centrum för användarorienterad IT-design, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan), and the *MidSweden University College* in Sundsvall, Sweden, evaluated the project. A variety of perspectives from different research disciplines (human work science, computer science, ethnology and political science) were applied in the evaluation process.

The investigations, which were presented in two sub-reports, focus on how public Internet terminals in approximately 10 places in Sweden were used. In the section of the evaluation carried out by BTH the report text focuses on the dialogue surrounding the use of the public Internet monitors as well as on selected design aspects. Dialogue in this context refers primarily to local, everyday dialogue, e.g. discussions between different users and those responsible for the monitors as well as how introductions and directed activities were organised and carried out, as well as other ongoing communication, consultation and co-operation, centred on the PIM-terminals.

3.5 The Election2002 project

The aim of the *Election2002* project was to encourage new web based forms of political debate and thus enhance the general political debate in the run up to the national and local election. The web site was created by a commission from the board of the City Council, as part of a democracy development project. It was characterised as an e-democracy project, specifically targeting young voters. The site was discussed and planned during the spring of

[44] See P3, http://www.medborgartorget.nu/ [Accessed 060224]

2002, in co-operation with a reference group consisting of local inhabitants, including students from BTH as well as representatives from the student council of the local upper secondary school. The aim was to create a website with a "young touch" in order to attract new voters, without excluding other groups. The site was open between July the 19th and September the 20th, 2002 and offered general information about elections and the voting process, which was also available in foreign languages. There was a customised debate forum available, inviting the visitors to take part in debate. A participating member system was established for those who wanted to take part in the discussions. The political candidates running for the Municipal Council were invited to write brief presentations on the website. This resulted in information about nine parties. This included an extreme right-wing party, following a democratic decision about the equal treatment of all participating political parties. Additional content included facts and figures about the forthcoming election and earlier local elections, links to the websites of national parties, relevant governmental information, a calendar covering election activities and photos of polling stations around the municipality.

A section of the website called "*Frequently asked questions about elections*" presented some basic information about democracy, such as the fact that democracy means government by the people, and an overview of how the municipal election process normally proceeds in Sweden. There was also a distinction made between direct and representative democracy, and it was pointed out that a democracy consists of freedom of speech, equality before the law and the right to vote. The website also provided local information about how, when, and where voting takes place, and offered a presentation of formal rules and procedures of the election. The procedures of a personal election campaign were presented, along with explanations of, for instance, the difference between abstaining and casting a blank vote.

A debate forum was opened on the site. Among the issues discussed were care of the aged and disabled, environmental issues, school development issues, service development in urban and rural areas, youth issues, culture and tourism development, along with opinions about the local labour market and development of local business life. The municipality conducted an evaluation of the digital debate in this forum and presented figures which summed up the contributions and comments to in total 362. In all, 64 persons were active in the debate in the sense that they wrote contributions, and a total of 118 persons became members during the project period. Statistics shows that about 140 persons visited the website per day and most of them joined the debate forum or checked the presentations of the politicians.[45] The discussion was not moderated, but was supervised by editorial staff from the municipal information office, and had to follow certain rules, such as having relevance for local debate and politics (as this was understood and interpreted by the editorial staff). About 20 contributions were censored and moved to a special archive. Thus they were registered as public documents, even though they were not visible on the website. The web forums covered topics such as: environmental issues, services in urban areas versus the countryside, development of local business life, young people and education, culture and tourism, health issues and municipal economy, as well as more overarching social issues such as racism. Teachers in the local schools used the site as study material and the municipal evaluation shows that messages about local issues rendered most interest. The debate forums gave also a good overview of different opinions about the project and the debate as such. The comments about the debate and the web site varied. For example, one contributor wrote: "*This could have been a good way to have your say and ask politicians questions, if only they had answered. I will not*

[45] The municipal evaluation is available at: http://val2002.ronneby.se/sammanfattning_eng.pdf [Accessed 060124]

bother them again." [46] Others favoured the initiative: "*The strength of the project is that this is a way to find new ways to communicate with a higher degree of interactivity compared to for instance debate pages in a news paper*."

In August, there was a message published in the debate forum, signed "*The Editorial department*":

> "*This debate forum is aimed at discussions about local issues in the municipality of Ronneby. The voters are given an opportunity to get to know how the local parties position themselves concerning different issues. Practical and ideological discussions should be connected to circumstances in Ronneby. Lately there have been general opinions presented about immigration and refugee politics, as well as grading of the activity among different parties. The editorial department is going to put an end to the publication of opinions like this. Some of the already published opinions will be archived and will not be visible on the web, and the sender will get a motivation via e-mail. We are sharpening the censorship further*."

This message gives an idea of the contents of an infected political debate that occurred after providing equal opportunities for debate, and also publishing a link to a party that was hostile towards immigrants, a decision made with reference to democratic freedom and the fact that this party took part in the national elections along with the already established political parties. According to the politicians within the Municipal Executive Committee, this meant they could not be excluded. However, there were other ways of taking care of problems and the ethical dilemma which was arising, which ultimately also had effects on the project development as a whole, as will be discussed later. During the planning of the project, there was a political consensus about providing additional events, such as web-cast "Political cafés", arranged as panel debates in front of a live audience, and focusing on local youth issues, but those plans were never realised. The project group also planned to provide opportunities for the audience to send questions as SMS messages to the politicians during the panel discussion, and discussions were initiated with a local telecommunication company about developing this service. This was not followed through. Nor was an idea to provide multi-party answers to the posed questions in the debate forum realised. The main reason for circumscribing the project was the intense media debate following the decision by the Municipal Executive Committee and the Municipal Board to allow links to all parties. Several politicians expressed that they were reluctant to "share the table with Nazis ". However, there were also other reasons, as described in the interviews presented further on in this text.

[46] Environmental commuter, 020911

Fig. 3:4 The Election 2002 site

3.6. The TANGO project

My empirical material includes experiences from academic multi-disciplinary work concerning the planning of education, and running projects within what was called an arena for e-government development. The TANGO project (TANGO is an acronym for *Thematic Arenas Nourish Growth Opportunities*) was an EU-supported programme partly funded through Innovative Actions within the European Regional Development Funding (ERDF), targeting the Southeast of Sweden, with the specific aim to develop significant competence centres. The project for starting a competence centre focusing on e-government (also called AREGO in certain official documents) was conducted within the framework of this TANGO programme. The TANGO programme consisted of projects, network and arenas. The initial conditions from the commission were to set up a steering committee which had to collaborate with a reference group which in turn had to select a group of experts that would help the region to identify four or five areas of growth where the arenas were supposed to be active.

The TANGO project was described as a joint research and development project (R&D), involving several partners, organised as a sort of "micro innovation system". This aim was clearly expressed in the project description of the e-government arena (AREGO), which had a regional base in Blekinge, but was developed using both a national and global perspective. The project was envisioned to be based on close co-operation and co-action between research and development, business life and society, in line with the model for knowledge based, economic innovation systems/Triple Helix.[47]

Innovation studies and research on the development of national innovation systems has been going on for many years, according to Miettinen (2002) who has conducted a major study on science and technology policy development, in Scandinavia and elsewhere. Miettinen points out that there have been difficulties in defining what a national innovation system actually is and outlines different uses of the term "national innovation systems" in the new millennium. He recognises four trends in the development. Firstly, a shift towards reduced, regional

[47] See chapter one for a definition of triple helix and http://www.ipd.bth.se/e-gov.arena/PDFdokument/AREGOeng1.pdf for a description of the eGovernment arena (AREGO) within the TANGO project.

systems instead of nation-wide systems. Secondly, a move from the generally expressed holistic view towards close studies of the particularities and institutional bottlenecks of innovation systems. The third trend is an orientation towards benchmarking of policy practices and tools. The fourth development trend, which could be considered as most significant for this thesis, is expressed as, "*...a strong urge to understand the quality and problems of interaction between the main institutional interests for the sake of more informed and focused policy decisions. This calls for qualitative studies of interactions through case studies*" (Miettinen, 2002:17)

The TANGO Project is a concrete example of the ongoing reconfiguration of a cluster in a regional innovation system (Miettinen, 2002, OECD, 1999). The TANGO Project is not to be seen as just a single, stand-alone project or example of the establishment of local competence centres in a region that has been promoting itself as "small but nevertheless expansive and pushy" since the late 90's. It is also a vital part in an ongoing enactment and reconfiguration of an extensive national innovation system. Therefore is it important to concentrate on the practices of interactions between different partners on a local level, or the fourth trend according to Miettinen's categorisation. The main focus though, is not only on certain interactions between the different partners involved, but also on *excluded interactions and partners.*

The regional e-government arena within the TANGO project advocated a long-term and process-oriented view, envisioned as a basis for the work within the arena, a view that was expounded in the project description in the following way:

> "*E-government needs a horizontal, transgressing and interdisciplinary approach. The concept of e-government is usually defined in three parts: e-services (the possibility to reach services via electronic channels), e-administration (the administrative systems and processes handling data and electronic documents that is created in the contact with the citizens and between the public administration's different parts), e-democracy (methods to create a more open organisation with virtual meeting places and dialogue between citizens and politicians). A fundamental prerequisite for e-government is a horizontal, transgressing view, to be able to work across existing organisational borders as well as other existing borders. The horizontal perspective must address both internal and external relations in the public sector and include authorities such as municipalities, counties and other units – on the same premises, with the same responsibility and possibilities, and including necessary research for developmental purposes.*"[48]

One of the main goals of the eGovernment arena within the TANGO project was to promote the transformation of local authorities and the development of online public services. Another central goal was to create a space and place for co-operation and the development of co-operation between researchers from different research disciplines, and supporting a multi-organisational approach. A strategy to achieve this was to initiate local projects focusing on specific aspects of e-government such as service design, e-democracy and support for back-office co-operation.

[48] Description of the eGovernment arena in English available at: http://www.ipd.bth.se/e-gov.arena/PDFdokument/AREGOeng1.pdf [Accessed 060224]

Although the eGovernment arena was envisioned as providing a place and space for co-construction of innovation and transformation, by deliberately applying a multi-stakeholder approach, it is worth noting that this did not include any form of non-organisational representation, since those part-taking in the discussions were, besides the project leaders, mainly people from the local university (BTH), and the municipality. The local business life was not present from the beginning in the project, but became engaged later on through the start-up of a regional competence network, also including researchers.

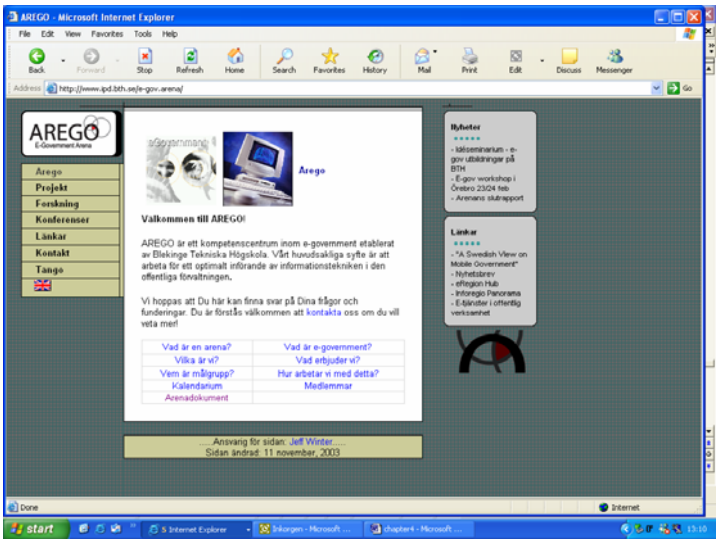

Figure 3:5. The AREGO website – Making cross-boundary cooperation visible.

3.7 The Komindu project

The *Komindu* project was a one-year project which was finally extended by two months, and thus ran from February 2003 through March 2004. *Komindu* was unique among the projects I have presented here in the sense that it offered an opportunity for the participating researchers to perform observations, as well as to design interventions during the development process of two new modules within the municipal website. Three organisations with different organisational structures and goals, the university, a software company and the municipal administration, were supposed to co-operate in order to make the project visions come true.
The *Komindu* project was an attempt to vitalise a public debate on the future development of the local society and to stimulate dialogue with and among citizens, by asking "What's your opinion?" and "What do you want to know about the local society?". The project was divided into two parts, each part aiming at developing web support for an extended dialogue with citizens. The first website, *Vision Ronneby*, was based on the idea of involving citizens in planning the future local society, and was in this sense an extended support for what the Swedish law demands in the way of formal consultations on spatial planning. The second web site had the function of a mailbox for citizens' comments and complaints about the municipality and how it works in general.

The project members were municipal officers from the information office and the spatial planning unit in Ronneby, researchers, and a small software company. The task was to jointly design services and interactive web sites describing future development plans for the city and gathering information in a database consisting of "*frequently asked questions*" and answers to these (FAQ database), providing both direct access for the citizens and also supporting the

work of the municipal front-office unit *Citizen's Online Public Service (COP-service.)*. In the periphery, citizens and politicians were also involved, either invited to take part in focus groups and interviews (the citizens) or as members in the political steering group (the politicians).

In the funding application for the *Komindu* project, the aim of the project was presented as follows: *"The starting point is our own and others' experiences of e-democracy using O-system as the development platform in co-operation with BTH and the software company in order to work towards better and better applications. Based on democratic values, the project is going to develop and evaluate methods for citizen communication with the municipality. Questions, answers and opinions about local municipal interests are going to be highlighted in adaptable web interfaces, which will also be used for presenting relevant facts. Spatial planning, in connection to the comprehensive plan, housing and citizen services are the main issues. The target group is the public in general but also local SME:s."* [49]

The decision to set up two different web sites was taken by the operational management of the project, involving the municipal project leader (MPL), the software company project leader (SWPL), a representative from the Blekinge Institute of Technology (BTH) and a municipal officer (MO) from the planning department. In one of the first progress reports presented to the county administrative board by the project management, both sites were labelled e-democracy sites [50].

The *O-System* development platform is a tool for web communication; a portal supporting management of dialogues between citizens, official administrators and local and regional politicians. The portal consists of a variable number of modules, which can be linked together. The modules are integrated with each other in order to create a seamless flow in the portal. The specific modules are selected, combined, customised or redesigned to fulfil the customers' needs. The software application offers basic functions such as for example publishing, and management of customer relations and interactivity on the Internet or Intranet (based on a Customer Relationship Management, CRM model). The *O-System* has purposely been developed in order to serve and enhance communication between citizens, politicians and public administration units, and to comply with the Swedish government's goal of creating a 24/7 Agency. The software has been developed over several years in co-operation with a large municipality in Sweden. For the *Komindu* project in Ronneby, this meant, to a large extent, local customisation of an already existing software application.

The notes from the project meetings show that the principal decision of producing two websites within the project, built on the same technical platform, was officially taken in May, roughly three months after the project began. Over time, new issues arose and needed to be taken care of, such as naming the sites, marketing, and presentation of the internal organisation. Besides planning of the structure and content of the websites, and what contacts needed to be taken with internal and external users, the project meetings provided space for discussions among the project members about roles and responsibilities and expectations concerning the project as well as the expected results. According to the MPL, the meetings also provided on-the-job training concerning e-democracy development in general and communications on the net in particular. By June, the requirements for how the *O-System* should be transformed and adapted were specified and decided upon, together with detailed

49 From the project description/application the 31st of January 2003, the system is renamed by the author in order to sustain anonymity. (Translated from Swedish by the author.)

50 Progress report no 2: 304-965-03

planning of web design and interfaces, and marketing efforts. Work on engaging and including concerned staff, and introductory internal testing of design and functionality are other examples of activities that took place during the first five months of the project.

The work continued in August, after the holiday period, with operational production with all parties involved, the distribution of external tasks, and continuing presentations in the internal organisations. The local democratic process which the *Vision Ronneby* website was intended to support and enhance was the official consultation period concerning the municipal comprehensive plan, which lasted until November 30th. Then the period for submitting opinions concerning the plan came to an end. During the course of the project, focus group meetings were arranged, which mostly took the form of marketing sessions, or opportunities for discussing general issues around designing municipal web sites targeting the general public. It became apparent that these meetings should have been conducted earlier in the development cycle of the project. On the other hand, late adjustments of the site and collection of opinions from the citizens concerning city planning issues were conducted throughout the entire period, and the focus group meetings were also an opportunity for the civil servants to meet citizens face-to-face and discuss the issue of spatial planning as well as gain insights in user perspectives on presenting online information.

Figure 3: 6 Mock-up from the Komindu-project

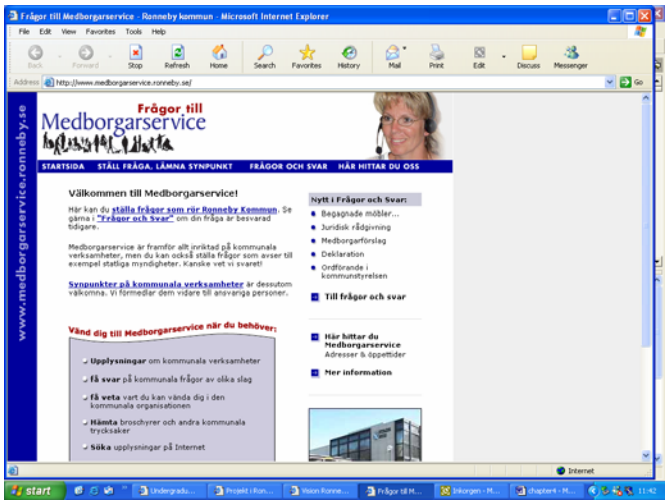

Figure 3:7 The Komindu-project, showing the COP-Services website. Sharing questions and answers

The first of December was the deadline for registering online opinions about the comprehensive plan. The third progress report presented to the county administrative board stated that: *"The next step is to summarise the opinions and come up with potential changes [to the comprehensive plan]. After that the plan will be presented at a public display before the politicians take the final decision [to approve it]."*

The importance of cultivating an experimental attitude within the project was emphasised during one of the first project meetings[51] which involved representatives from the software company, the municipality and Blekinge Institute of Technology. This need for an "experimental attitude" was a recurring theme during the project meetings, or as the municipal project leader once pointed out:

> "*We need to see the web campaign, both the presentation and the communication, as an experiment. Then we can allow ourselves to test things without being too cautious. There are several ideas we need to examine closely before we possibly decide to abandon them. One of these is the idea of interactive maps, where the citizens can show their proposals and give comments.*" [52]

This ambition turned out to be more complicated to live up to than expected, as will be discussed in more detail further on in this dissertation. One example is the "multitude of design perspectives" which was interlaced in this project, meaning the aims of developing both the procedure of formal spatial planning, and the process of developing a web tool for consultations along with intentions to develop methods of cooperative design. Different project participants emphasised different aspects, based on either their practical profession or their disciplinary basis, i.e. the researchers from spatial planning concentrated on finding possibilities to broaden and democratise the basic input for planning, while the municipal

[51] Project meeting 030307

[52] P T&P meeting 030428

representatives were interested in all objectives. Researchers from information science and computer science included the design of the web interface as their main interest. However, it was soon obvious that all these aspects were impossible to separate and single out, they were all mutually constituting and influencing each other.

3.8 Flow Society - Formation and set up of a community of interest

Flow Society is a loosely organised, non-political, civic association and competence network, built on ideas of the need for arenas for mutual exchange, engaging young people, students, unemployed people, and representatives from start-up companies. It could perhaps best be described as a social network, or a community of interest, primarily based on face-to-face meetings, with limited technological support, driven by a couple of local enthusiasts.

The overall aim of the association was formulated in the initial discussions concerning the start-up of the association; to create an uncomplicated, free and open meeting place, striving to promote playfulness as much as serious commitment. An interim board was set up in April 2004. The members also appointed a coordinator. The association was officially presented as a sort of pre-incubator, inviting people to present and discuss their ideas with fellow citizens who have different competences and interests, and who can offer feedback and support. The word pre-incubator in this context refers to both *the stages before engagement in a formal business incubator* and to *the initial stages of general societal engagement* (however not envisioned as direct political engagement). Further discussions concerning the formal establishment of Flow Society led to a closer co-operation with a regional association called Reactor Southeast. This is a cross regional agency focused on Young Communication, Media and the Edutainment Industry, which was already established and locally known and was willing to be responsible for the administrative parts in Flow Society as well as being head of start-up projects. This organisation is currently run by one of the founders of Flow Society. Another external co-operating partner is the Student Company, a small consulting agency managed by students at Blekinge Institute of Technology.

Flow Society's[53] members are people with ideas and a general interest for local growth, people who could be characterised as proactive citizens. The members are people who have decided to dedicate part of their free time to running the association, for the benefit of exchanging ideas, and seeking new ways to invest their personal and/or the members' joint competency. Potential new members of the Flow Society are required to sign up on the "Member chart" in order to become valid members. Everyone is welcome to join the association; there is no age limit. There are mainly two categories of members in the association:

- Citizens who have general business ideas or specific knowledge within a domain, and who are primarily seeking project partners and resources

- Citizens who want to share ideas or participate with enthusiasm in any kind of project. These people have knowledge and ideas they want to share with others and an active interest in getting involved in societal change and development.

The task of the participants within the network is to work in the direction of troubleshooting, to coordinate competencies, support start-up initiatives and pass them on to business

[53] This description of the organisation is primarily based on interviews with the founders of the organisation, P7 041011.

supporting organisations or channel a more general interest for societal issues in a creative direction, but also to become lobbyists and actively work for increased social cohesion and development in the local society.

Among the visions described in the very first draft of the association were ideas on how to support new ways of thinking about local growth and development, concrete initiatives to help young entrepreneurs get in touch with the establishment through "Buddy arenas". Social innovations and social economy in general were other highlighted areas when planning the establishment of the association.[54]

Figure 3:7 The website of the Flow Society: A Playground for serious commitment

The Playground was the name of the combined office and meeting place, initially supported by Soft Centre Ltd[55], a local software-specific business park. *The Playground* is open for students and unemployed people, or anyone who needs a temporary workplace for brainstorming activities or group-support when formulating their ideas. The office is equipped with five public computers, sponsored by the municipality. The network has so far organised meetings, seminars and so called "dialogue seminars", presenting research, local business ideas, or more specific information about, for instance, the phenomena of unemployment and burnout syndrome, immigration and integration issues and some imaginative sessions such as "how can we become everyday-heroes for each other?". Flow Society has also started to hold monthly so called "Brainstorming sessions".

During one of the first member meetings within the Flow Society association, the members where asked to present their ideas on how to utilise the network:

> "*I want help meeting the right people. I want suggestions, advice and mental handrails in finding the right channel and resources for developing my ideas. I am living through my networks but I want to expand them, they are not big*

[54] Notes from organisational meeting, Ronneby [Accessed 040410]
[55] Information available in Swedish on http://www.softcenter.se/ [Accessed 040410]

enough today, since I have changed direction in life frequently and strikingly... this does of course also mean that I too have contacts, channels and experiences to share with others. I see Flow Society as a meeting-point where I can ventilate problems and opinions, and count upon getting honesty in return."

Another one of the members stated:

"*I want to find context and constellations where I can create brilliant solutions to important and unimportant problems, a place where I can take part in staging these solutions*."

A concrete suggestion was to put together a "*Mobile Dream Team*" of people with different products, ideas, problems and competencies, with the task of wrestling with and finding new angles to approach problems. The idea was, among others, to offer this service to the Regional County Board, supporting their strivings to encourage regional growth. Further contacts were made and it was suggested that Flow Society become an inspirer in the joint regional work on developing a local innovation model, BiM (Blekinge Innovation Model), which was the aim of a partnership organisation focused on new growth, including representatives from BTH, municipalities, local incubators, local banks and foundations.

The first concrete project took form during the autumn of 2004.[56] Three of the members in Flow Society started a project for charting the local immigrants' history, investigating the current situation of immigration and comparing it with experiences of earlier immigrants (from the 1950-60's) in order to detect societal changes in attitudes towards immigrants. The project was called "*Ronneby - a garden of multiplicity*". One of the primary goals of this integration project was to "put real faces" on the often so anonymous group of immigrants and to inform about concrete ways in which they individually had contributed to the development of the local society.[57] Other concrete ideas were to start mentoring groups with a mix of young and elderly people, jointly learning how to use computers in a creative way, and some of the members have also taken part in focus groups organised by the municipality concerning various issues.

The civic association *Flow Society* had a website[58] where it was possible for new members to register and to find information concerning the organisation, such as scheduled meetings and up-coming events, links, ideas, a discussion forum and online forms for membership application and a log in function in order to be able to reach the internal material, which was mostly envisioned as the members personal presentations available in a searchable database. One of the founders describes her visions of the necessary changes to the website, which during the project mostly developed into an inactive space, and gave her suggestions on how to make it more interactive:

"*The website should be remade in order to include all the ideas of the organisation. It is very important that this website show the values of Flow Society. It has to be serious and clear to everybody. The website should be used to know when the next meetings are. Information about members could be included; you should be able to register on this website. Every member should write a profile on the website. In this profile, a member must describe himself, his hobbies, passions and the skills available for everybody inside Flow Society.*

[56] P7 Organisational meeting, 040908
[57] P 7, project presentation, 041009.
[58] http://www.flowsociety.com/iCM.aspx

> *As Flow Society has a couple of computers in their office, it could be easy to fill in the form even if the member does not have an Internet connection./.../ An internal application should be established linked with this website to gather the member's information. With the help of such tool, it could be easy for example to launch a new marketing plan by contacting people with their email for example (email announcement, news, etc.)*"[59]

Some of these ideas were actually realised, but other voices were also raised about how to develop the website in a more participatory way. The website was produced hurriedly by one of the members, in order to get something up and running. During the organisational meetings there were discussions about starting up a traditional community network, a locally-based and driven communication and information system, better suited for enhancing the life of the association[60], but the main obstacles were resources and how to get people sufficiently engaged in this extensive work, which mainly had to be driven by idealism. There were people in the organisation that possessed the necessary computer skills to carry out these plans, but nobody showed enough determination to do so, possibly because the first website was originally set up more like a personal blog and not as a co-operative electronic surface supporting the members' collective work.

In the beginning of June 2005, the two founders of the organisation announced that they were going to hand over the chairmanship to the other members and withdraw from the organisation, due to personal reasons and other engagements. The project was to a large extent dependent on the true enthusiasts who initiated it, and the engagement among the other participants slowly died out. The organisation was formally terminated in 2006. The reasons for this will be discussed more thoroughly in the empirical parts of the thesis.

[59] Interview, Pro-active Citizen no: 7, P7/041011.
[60] Miller, C, FAQ , definition available at: http://www.si.umich.edu/Community/faq/What.html or as described in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_network

4. Theoretical basis

> *"The world as we shape it and our experience as the world shapes it is like the mountain and the river. They shape each other, but they have their own shape. They are reflections of each other, but they have their own existence, in their own realms. They fit around each other, but they remain distinct from each other, they cannot be transformed into each other, yet they transform each other. The river only carves and the mountain only guides, yet in their interaction, the carving becomes the guiding and the guiding becomes the carving."* (Wenger, 1999:71)

This chapter will give an overview of the theoretical basis for my discussion in this thesis. I will also present the specific concepts that I have found relevant as tools for opening up and examining the relations and practices that provided me with empirical material.

In order to examine the questions posed in the previous chapter, I make use of a variety of theoretical tools derived from practice-based theories. They all give differing impulses to discuss participation as ongoing processes of change and learning which take place in sets of relations, and they also make it possible to discuss eParticipation as a multitude of actions in varying forms, rather than a univocal phenomenon. This is mainly done with a mixture of conceptual tools extracted from political theory, and practice based and action based theories, together with concepts about socio-technical change. Those theoretical tools will be further discussed in the coming sections in order to elucidate a theoretical framework that will support my ultimate aim of contributing to practice-based theorisation in the field.

Practices of eParticipation - or electronically mediated participation - (Macintosh et. al. 2002: 226, Dawes, et. al. 2003:146), are composed of heterogeneous elements and have bearing upon a wide range of problems and issues, including issues of power and culture. To understand the many facets of these phenomena requires an accumulation of several theoretical perspectives. According to researchers in the field, it is necessary to utilise a holistic approach in order to fully grasp the complexity of eGovernment. This is also relevant for understanding eParticipation. Within this context of evolving electronic participation there are certain elements of domination, conscious steering, or plans of conduct, alongside unexpected outcomes, situated actions and utopian initiatives. All these dimensions have to be taken into consideration and related to one another, and analysed through different theoretical perspectives as well as coupled to experiences from practice.

eParticipation is to be seen as a directed activity managed by authorities, but is also possible to explain as an example of activism initiated from a totally different direction. Practices reveal both authoritarian exercise of power and a simultaneous act of resistance from those who are the object of the transformation of participative decision-making. All these dimensions are not possible to explore further with the aid of one, single grand theory. Therefore, my theoretical framework is more like a matrix for the moulding work of presenting the multiple functions and the consequences of the development of eParticipation.

4.1 The interplay of disciplining and resistance

Technologies that are supplied as means for participation are not solely a way to provide access for citizens, to make possible changes in representation within decision-making. eParticipation is also a matter of conflict around issues of the distribution of power. Since visions of increased eParticipation are aimed at influencing the behaviour of both citizens and municipal employees, it also becomes possible, by furthering technological transformation and modernisation processes within the enactment of democracy, to describe eParticipation as an act of disciplining. Examples of this are the increased official attempts[61] in Europe to convince citizens to become more active in contributing to policy making. Other arguments supporting this claim of "eParticipation as partly an act of domination" are substantiated as strivings to locate new strands, such as eParticipation, within already given frames, such as web forums, voting technologies, and decision-making support, instead of trying to find out how it evolves in practice. However, those technologies and modernisation strategies are situated and interpreted in unexpected ways within practices and local translations, which in turn can lead to countering strategies, both regarding use and design of technologies and administrative change.

Foucault's major themes were, according to Hall (2001) the *concept of discourse, power and knowledge* and the *question of the "subject"*. Hall explains that Foucault talked about discourse as a system of representation, or as "*...a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment"* (Hall, 2001: 72-81). Production of knowledge through language helps create a discourse. All social practices entail meaning and meaning in turn influences what we do. The concept of discourse is in that sense both language and practice. Discourse, according to Foucault, constructs the topic and how it can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. A discourse is hegemonic and supersedes alternative ways of talking about a topic. This particular way of thinking, or this "state of knowledge", appears across a range of texts. They are also expressed as specific forms of conduct in different institutional sites within society and all together these create a discursive formation. According to Foucault, the production of knowledge and meaning is performed "through a discourse". However, this issue of obligatory filtering through discourse has been heavily contested. Is everything really mediated through a discourse? Hall states that the term discourse is not about whether things exist or not, *but where meaning comes from*. This could be explained as a constructionist theory of meaning and representation (Hall, 2001: 73), where things and actions are ascribed meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse. It could be claimed that a topic such as active citizenship becomes meaningful only within the discourse of eGovernment development, but on the other hand it could also be seen as something which is clearly independent and not necessarily mediated through a discourse. I have detected several phenomena within practice that are possible to place outside a hegemonic discourse, such as for example the case of the cleaner that is discussed further in the empirical parts of this thesis. I have therefore chosen not to apply a consistent discourse analysis in this thesis, simply because I am more concerned about how things are actually put to work in practice. My aim is not primarily to disclose domination and fundamentalism within meaning-creation, but also to detect how domination and rigidity change in dialectic relationships. In my analysis, I therefore focus mainly on the relation between domination and local actions, rather

[61] See for instance http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/index_en.htm,and http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/activecitizenship/new_programme_en.htm [Accessed 060921)

than singling out and treating one of the entities as the primary one. In order for the analysis to progress, it is important to focus upon the relationship between the dominating aspects of active citizenship and the aspects of resistance.

In order to describe how power plays a role in the local development of eParticipation, I turn to Foucault's understanding of power as organic within society: as a set of relations between several actors. Power was traditionally seen as moving in one direction (top-down) and exclusively exercised by the state or a similar sovereignty, but Foucault explains power otherwise: "*...it is deployed and exercised through a netlike organisation*". Foucault, 1980:98). Power is not always overarching, but is expressed in "*localised circuits*". Power is then created in changeable social relations or seen as relations between one or several parties. This moves the focus from where the power is positioned (who has power) or the quantification of power (how much power each one has), to detecting *what power looks like* and *how it is enacted*. Foucault states that power is not simply something that creates borders and exercises control. Power is present everywhere. It is not in a centre or on top of things, and does not just become visible at a certain moment. Instead, it is recreated all the time. Another phenomenon which he calls micro-physic power is applied to the body. Techniques of regulation are internalised and embodied. The body has become a site of disciplinary regime; not only the natural body but also the socially constructed body, or the constructed primal meaning within discourse (Foucault 1980:194) .

He also states that political power is made more subtle and is derived from societal processes of control. He means that power relations only occur when there is resistance, that is when a conflict exists, and when someone wants to influence the behaviour and activity of another. The dominating power then takes the strategies of resistance in their service by establishing norms and defining differences. This is for instance related to the discussion in this thesis in the case of acknowledging the importance of active citizenship whilst simultaneously denying proactive civic initiatives.

Even though they do not in general constitute a theory, Foucault's writings about relational power question the whole choreography of power relations. They give impulses on how to think about power in a more dynamic way. Foucault's analysis differs from other power theories in three distinct ways; emphasising that:

1. Power is enacted - not possessed. This means that power is an application of how to exclude and set borders, stating what counts as order and a way of establishing norms.
2. Power is not solely repressive but also productive. It creates resistance or what he calls micro-power.
3. Power is analysed as something that is as much developed bottom-up (Sawicki 1991:21, Svensson 1993:52), in a "micro-physics of power" (Foucault 1979:27), as it is deployed top-down.

His focus is on *how power is enacted* rather than on its appearance, in contrast to a more institutionalised view of power, with its fixed positions between those in power and under-represented. The traditional opposites-based view of power does not fully describe the dynamic arrangements and constant rearrangements of power, or the moments of disciplining, that are exercised implicitly rather than explicitly positioned (Foucault, 1982). Foucault meant that it is in resistance that one can see how power relations are enacted and this resistance work as a form of "power display" (Sawicki, 1991: 21) This is also visible within

the development of eParticipation. In order to analyse eParticipation as a field of power play, power must be understood as a condition where power is enacted in relational terms, where the objects and subjects of power enactment are in constant interplay. There is a contest concerning which values and norms should be guiding, but there are also unintended and deliberate processes of confirming and establishing the basic contradictions. In the cases I will describe further on in the thesis, there are several examples of such trials of strength and a refusal to alter established dualities. Technology turns out to play an important role in all of them.

4.1.1 Knowledge as power

In his later work, Foucault became more concerned with how knowledge and power are related. Foucault discussed for example how power operates within relations between institutional bodies and their technologies (techniques), which he called *apparatus* of, for instance, punishment. *Apparatus* is described as the strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by varying types of knowledge (Foucault, 1980: 194-196 pp).
Knowledge is always a form of power, regulating for instance in what circumstances knowledge is or is not to be applied; effectiveness of power/knowledge. Effectiveness is then seen as more important than "truth" of knowledge, since knowledge basically has the power to make itself true. Power and knowledge are put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others. Power is implicated in the questions of whether we know, and what we think we already know, about eParticipation or active citizenship. This knowledge affects how we regulate, control and steer the activities of electronically mediated participation.

An example of the dialectics of power/knowledge is exemplified in Foucault's later writings where he talks about "governmentality". Marinetto (2003:103-120) states that "governmentality" is based on the assumption that: "*everything can, should, must be managed, administered, regulated by authority*." Studies of governmentality are concerned with: *"... how thought operates within our organised ways of doing things, our regimes of practices, and with ambitions and effects*." (Foucault, 1991b, Dean 1999). The proponents of these studies are concerned with questions such as: *how we govern and how are we governed?*, and *what is the relation between the government of us, the government of others and the government of the state? (*Ibid.) The organised practices or historically constituted assemblages through which we do things such as govern, are to be seen as the regimes of practice or regimes of government by which we are governed or govern ourselves. Dean (1999) suggests that: "*To ask how governing works, then, is to ask how we are formed as various types of agents with particular capacities and possibilities of action*"(Dean, 1999:29). This could easily be related to the increasing emphasis in forming and managing active citizenship or even proactive citizenship[62], based on citizens' willingness to take part in direct activities of eParticipation, or contributing to, for instance, policy-making in other ways, without really jeopardising existing power balances.

Marinetto also raises some doubt about Foucault's theory of domination and states that it fails to explain fully the origins and motives for political developments such as active citizenship and community involvement. Marinetto makes the point that Foucault's exploration of governmentality was unfinished and unclear, but the basic reasoning makes it possible to question whether community involvement is to be seen as a good thing per se, or if it could

[62] Timmers, 2004, appointed head of the eGovernment unit within the European Commission, in a speech at the DEXA E-government Conference in Zaragoza, Spain in August 2004.

also be regarded as an effective way of employing social regulation through citizen's self-government. However, I find elements of this "governmentality" thinking in the enactment and development of eParticipation, and hope that this thread of thought might contribute to expand thinking concerning the interplay of disciplining and resistance within the development of eDemocracy. Michel Foucault's notion of relational power and writings of "regimes of practices", which took form in his later writings about governmentality, have also been important to me when discussing the formation of maturity as an important ingredient in what could be called best practice regimes, and the upholding and reproduction of opposing relations between municipal authorities and citizens.

4.1.2 Active citizenship as a power mechanism

The empirical material that I will present in this thesis gives examples of ongoing local activities which both further and contest the vision of increasing active citizenship. I find it necessary to examine to what extent the local activities and the individual initiatives in this area respond to official initiatives and strategies, and if they do so, how these responses are enacted in practice and what kind of dilemmas of participation might occur. Applying a Foucault-inspired governmentality perspective on my cases, combined with other perspectives, makes it possible to question whether ideas of encouraging people to become active in various activities, are to be regarded as an attempt to implement governmentality, to actively make people think about how, and whether or not, to govern ourselves.

Examples from the particular practices discussed in this thesis reveal the apparent dilemmas and difficulties in meeting and responding to proactive citizens in an inclusive way. Those civic initiatives could at the same time be regarded as counter actions, or as playing an important role as free spaces and islands of resistance, and as in the case with the DIALOGUE-project also as a "room of one's own", where the citizens could form and articulate their own understanding and variant of what it means to be an active citizen. However, it is not sufficient to reproduce the dualism between governmental authority and civic engagement. Those positions are mutually dependent, and the activity of governing is much more subtly divided. Marinetto argues:

> "*Foucault and his followers are not alone in thinking about governing without government, there has been a growing tendency in contemporary analysis, such as the actor-network approach in the sociology of knowledge and the governance perspective in political science, to minimise the significance of the centred society and policy."* (Marinetto, 2003:116)

4.1.3 Monitoring change and use

The pedagogical function of monitoring has a certain place in the power analysis of Foucault, manifested in his writings as changes in the architecture of institutions such as, for instance, hospitals and prisons. Those changes in architecture signalise a more sophisticated power, which no longer has to be explicitly characterised by locks and heavy doors. In a similar way it is possible to make an analogy to what kind of space is really suggested for eParticipation. Is the developmental space for eParticipation already decided by the existing structures, such as the architecture of Internet or the limitations of existing networking-technologies, rather than the need to find new ways of distributing responsibility and participation in decision-making? *Panoptic monitoring*, as described by Foucault, is a tool for disciplining, a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance. Its function is not

primarily to prevent or fight certain behaviour; rather it is a therapeutic operator, a pedagogical machine, an apparatus for observation, information collection and learning (Foucault. 1980:146-165). I have found the notion of the *panopticon* useful when examining disciplining aspects and the creation of mechanisms within the evaluation and steering of the development of eParticipation.

4.1.4 Counter-strategies and proactivism

The tool of the *panopticon* is useful when analysing disciplinary power, but in order to broaden the power analysis it must also include resistance. The starting-point then must be the *objects of power enactment*, [i.e. the citizens], who in a sense are subordinated and detached but also contribute to this interplay by recreating the historically inherited power-relations, at the same time as they struggle to create resistance towards domination and to set up their own space of action. However, in my cases all participants seem to have experienced powerlessness in relation to what they were expected to do. This was manifested among the practitioners, the proactive citizens and the politicians, all involved as both objects for change as well as subjects actively articulating their own view on how those changes could be choreographed.

Hannemyr (2002: 41-63) who has written about hackers in cyberspace, used Foucault's theories to understand the phenomena and describes hacking as a form of counter-power. He explains a process of power-establishing as: "*... sociotechnical confrontations that are translated into physical ways of organising the room*" (ibid. 2002:3). A pertinent question to ask then becomes; how are these simultaneous acts of disciplining and counter-strategies established, exercised and translated into physically organised rooms or artefacts within local eParticipation practices?

Foucault argues that power works both in the form of subordination as well as subjectification, and by this he means that a citizen is both constituted as a subject and at the same time also constitutes him/herself as a subject out of a certain social practice, as will be described in my cases regarding the discussion about active citizenship. At the same time as the people are the objects of domination, they are also subjects, with an ambition to create their own field of action and agency (Svensson, 1993:52-59). To enact power is to structure other individuals' fields of action, their agency, as exemplified by persuading people to use certain technological tools or modes of participation, rather than developing tools and applications based on their needs and preferences. This subtle power display limits involvement in decision-making. The idea of promoting active citizenship could also be understood as an expression for the ambition to create social control of our undertaking as active citizens. This will be discussed more thoroughly further on in the thesis, when analysing the relations between the practitioners and the proactive citizens.

4.2 eParticipation as symbolic power

Pierre Bourdieu was a French cultural sociologist who started out as an anthropologist. He was one of the main practice-based theoreticians who consistently applied a socio-economic perspective in his analysis. His research was in the beginning located within structuralism, but he gradually moved his focus towards people's actions. His main perspective was transformed from structuralism to individuals and their actions. He had a goal to disclose power and expose why the oppressed remained oppressed. The explanation for this ongoing reproduction

of static power relations is according to Bourdieu to be found in the culture[63], in habitual ways of upholding power. During his life he made several studies of topics such as taste, culture and education and different ways of living. He understood culture as a concept which mostly had a function for the upper classes, where differences in taste and popular culture are reproduced and re-defined in order to sustain asymmetric power relations. He was also criticised for having a pessimistic view advocating that society is static, but also for disclosing illusions, e.g. that what we tend to label as "*good taste*", is actually a cultural construction of the preferences of a dominant group.

4.2.1 Embedded power

A general concept is *habitus*, which in short could be described as the principle that negotiates between structures and practices, to reconcile differences between the individual and the social (Sandberg,1999). Bourdieu concentrated on understanding the dialectical process of incorporation of structures and the objectification of habitus, whereby social formations reproduce themselves. He suggested that human habits are bodily rather than expressed in discourse. Habitus consists of a system of dispositions, i.e. *a collection of cultural competences*. People or groups in society are more or less equipped with capital (resources). The established classes' strategy for the reproduction of their hegemony in society is by distinction; to keep a distance from those in lower positions, to separate themselves from others. We can not lift off our *habitus* (i.e. habit or custom) but it is possible to change; we can gain more cultural capital according to Bourdieu (1977). Bourdieu argues that we all accumulate different kinds of capital, apart from money or other material resources (economic capital). He talks about what he calls *cultural capital* which could be exemplified by formal education, or academic diplomas, but also by informal education or personal competence such as "*knowing how to behave in different circumstances*" or how to talk about and present oneself. If someone has for example the ability to judge art or music, and to present their judgement to others, this is another example of cultural capital. He also distinguished other kinds of capital such as *social capital,* which consists of contacts, family and relatives. A fourth variant, called *symbolic capital,* varies from group to group. It could be exemplified by professional skills, honour, physical attributes and morals.

How is it then possible to relate his discussion about capital to a discussion concerning relations between citizens, politicians and municipal officers? Following the logic of Bourdieu's reasoning suggests that it is possible to ask what being active means and symbolises for different groups in society. Could it for instance be considered as the goal for the citizens and municipal employees, while the activity of the citizenry and the practitioners becomes for the politicians the means or the instrument with which to achieve a political goal? How do they constitute a social room and in what way is eParticipation also a social room for the participants, i.e. is eParticipation seen as significant or peripheral? Are the various activities of eParticipation (eConsultations, design involvement, information seeking and so on) socially determined? Are eConsultations for instance conducted by certain socio-economic group while other initiatives, judging by the comments from hosts and users, can be classified as mainly targeting low-status groups or a stereotype of the pre-defined user?

Bourdieu, as well as Foucault, talked about different modes of domination and developed over the years a theory of S*ymbolic power*, which is embodied in for instance materiality. It is in a sense a subordinate form of power; it is a transfigured and unrecognisable, transformed and

[63] Culture is here understood as "a system of meaning". See for instance Bourdieu, 1977, Löfgren & Ehn, 1988.

legitimised form of other kinds of power. In that sense, this concept also relates to Foucault's notion of the *panopticon*, which could also be described as a delegated and symbolic form of power. Several aspects of eParticipation could be analysed by using the concepts from Bourdieu.

In an article called "*Public Opinion Does Not Exist*" (Waquant, 2005) Bourdieu questions the three tacit tenets at the basis of opinion polls, namely that everyone can and does have an opinion, that all opinions are equal, and that there exists a prior consensus on the questions worthy of being posed. He argues that "public opinion" as presented in the form of spot survey statistics in for instance newspapers, is a pure and simple artefact whose function is to dissimulate the fact that the state of opinion at a given moment is a system of forces and tensions (Wauquant, 2005:15). eParticipation is in a similar ways presented as statistics, and thus made into an artefact, disguising the fact that it is a system of forces, tensions and negotiations. A tool for supervising change, such as the *Service Development Ladder* (*SD-ladder*) is also an example of a development tool in which certain local negotiations and power relations are embedded. Bourdieu continued to integrate micro perspectives (focus on local social construction) and macro perspectives and cultural and institutionalised context. The different levels of a social construction (micro and macro levels) are according to him to be seen as integrated. He also emphasised the symbolic as well as the material dimensions of a phenomenon and the dialectics of the subject and object, termed "*the dialectic of objectification and embodiment"* (Bourdieu, 1977). This objectification and embodiment bears similarities to the process of stabilising participation or *reification*, discussed thoroughly by Wenger (1998), which is another concept of relevance for this discussion.

4.3 Active citizenship and the plurality of action

The preceding reasoning about the implication of power relations in eParticipation leads me to conclude that it is necessary to discuss the need for, but also the threat of, as well as the actual use of, the notion of active citizenship. The notion seems to function more as a cultural image or symbol rather than as an acknowledged practice. There have been numerous reports and policy documents as well as research accounts written about active citizenship during the past years, but little focus has been placed on the practice of active citizens. I find it important to reveal all the shades and nuances in what constitutes the practice of active citizenship, by acknowledging and shedding light on the lived, learned and experienced active citizenship, related to the official attempts to form active citizenship. These experiences must be derived out of organisational practice as well as citizens' practices, in order to bring out the complexity of the multicoloured picture.

Traditionally, citizenship consists of both rights and duties, and is regarded simultaneously as a status and practice (Lister, 1997). There are different types of citizenship: individual citizenship (the right to freedom of expression); political citizenship (the right to vote); and social citizenship (various social benefits such as child allowance), the latter mostly related to the "rights"-discussions (Marshall, 1950, Lister,1997:15). Everyone is assumed to have the same rights and responsibilities. This is what is normally dubbed "universal citizenship" (Lister, 1997: 66). Exercising citizenship today, by electronic means, could be described as an activity that is a part of a distributed and partial, continual co-development of content and affiliation. The notion of eCitizenship in the context of eGovernment is generally described as

a way to create increased autonomy[64] for the individual, rather than focusing on the collaborative and participatory aspects of creating citizenship and membership of a community, or contributing to decision-making.

If citizenship is regarded as a continual activity based on co-construction, this also blurs the boundaries between governmental and municipal authorities, private sector employees and citizens. This on-going co-development of content and activities could be described as a central part of creating an active citizenship[65], exemplified by the experiments with government that have been going on for a while in England, intervening in the shaping of active citizenry in such areas as urban regeneration and local government. In many ways, a prerequisite for this is a wide range of qualifications, knowledge and the engagement of multiple voices (Marinetto, 2003.) Similar initiatives have lately been extracted and expanded into other European countries, as initiatives favoured by the European Commission.

I find Arendt's theory about action useful in order to understand the reasons and logic of the pro-active citizen's community-building, and its function both in public discourse and practice. Her work has been debated and criticised, but over the years also reinterpreted and during the 1990's she was finally re-established as one of the most controversial and interesting political thinkers of the twentieth century. Canovan, in her contribution to the revaluation of Arendt's writings, claims that Arendt's work was mostly misunderstood (Canovan, 2002).

4.3.1 Participation as creative action

Canovan states that the theory of action was considered a "classical defence" of participatory politics in the 1960's. Arendt's thoughts about civic humanism, morals and politics have in some sense been re-established during the late 1990's. Seen as a textbook of participatory democracy in the 1960's, it could also function as a reminder of the vital importance of politics in this decade, when eParticipation is becoming the latest writing on the wall.

Arendt understands human beings as creatures who act, in the sense of starting things, and who set off trains of events. Her writings on actions in *The Human Condition* (1958) were a powerful account of the human capacity for action, celebrating human creativity, stating that people have the capacity to act even in unlikely situations and under limited circumstances. Her work was concerned with the setting for politics, rather than politics itself, and in the introduction to the second edition of The Human Condition (1998) Canovan explains the basics of Arendt's theory (Canovan, in Arendt, 1998:Vii-xx.). Arendt emphasised that politics takes place among plural beings, and understood activity in three forms, where action is distinguished from labour and work. Labour corresponds to the bodily activities of a human being, while work in her interpretation was equivalent to the artificial world of objects that human beings build on earth. Action corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals, or our possibilities to make new beginnings and start new processes. To understand political action as making something (or work) is then a mistake, according to Arendt. The political features of wo/man are plural, and the capability for new perspectives and actions will not fit into a predictable model unless these capacities for action are drastically curtailed.

[64] The notion of autonomy, of the ability to determine the conditions of one's life and life projects recurs in contemporary theorisations of social citizenships rights, according to Ruth Lister 1997:16.

[65] This "active citizenship" is strongly envisioned by the EU, see for instance: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/citizen/citiz-en.html. Also further developed in Lister, 1997: 22.

Arendt speaks also of the down-sides of action, the aspects of unpredictability in action and human beings' lack of control of its effects, but emphasises that there is always a possibility to take *further* action. Among human capacities is the ability to make promises (in a group, not for oneself) and this is more binding. It reminds us that we are not helpless animals; we can engage in further action, and take initiatives to interrupt processes. Arendt also reminds us of political problems caused by plurality itself. Canovan states that action amongst plural actors is unpredictable, and explains that this is why so many trials to find ideal models of politics are supported, instead of action, and all these attempts to mould passive subjects to fit these ideal models are based on an unwillingness to take action and plurality seriously. If we can all agree to work together, we are able to exercise great power. Agreement between plural persons is thus hard to achieve, and never safe from other actors.

Another thing that appeals to me is what Canovan calls the "*unsystematic system building*" of Arendt, constantly emphasising tentativeness and flexibility. Canovan compares Arendt's work to a classical story: "*like Penelope's weaving, constantly undoing its own construction, building by tearing down what we have built*". (Canovan, 2002: 5) Her thinking is made out of trains of theory rather than taking its starting point in a fixed system. She had strong objections about system-building in general, arguing that dynamic and unfinished processes would soon freeze into a static and thereby also a restraining construction. This is what made her theory appear to be responsible, committed and settled, and yet so open-ended and incomplete (ibid.:6).

4.3.2 Plural perspectives and plurality in perspective

Her participatory conception of citizenship and action acknowledges the difference between acting as citizens and individuals; in fact she is talking about what could be called the agency of citizenship, or as Mouffe (1995) emphasises:

> "*The practice of citizenship is, according to Arendt's view, intimately linked to the existence of a public sphere where members of civil society can exist as citizens and act collectively to resolve democratically the issues concerning their life in the political community. /.../The modern category of citizen has been constructed in a way that under the pretence of universality, postulated a homogenous public, which relegated all particularity and difference to the private, and that has contributed to the exclusion of women."* (Mouffe, 1995: 8).

Arendt understood human plurality, and also the plurality of the spaces that form between plural human beings; the necessity to articulate all involved perspectives in order to create space and opportunity for learning how to listen to other people, and space to imagine deliberation with other parts (Benhabib, 1992:155-159pp). Arendt stated that trials of direct democracy are a possible way to test the connection between active citizenship and effective political agency. They could also be regarded as an opportunity for people to experience their own effective agency. If citizenship and democracy is a continuous process, rather than a frozen product that has to be kept that way instead of thawed, the implications highlight the necessity of creating structures which make the development of democracy possible. Such an approach emphasises the learning aspects, specifically learning how to act in order to keep control over an initiative within the frames of citizenship.

As Canovan puts it "*What unites people in a political community is therefore not some set of common values, but the world they set up in common, the "spaces" they inhabit together, the institutions and practices which they share as citizens. Individuals can be united by the world, which lies between them. All that is necessary is that they should have among them a common political world which they enter as citizens, and which they can hand on to their successors*". (Passerin d'Entreves, in Mouffe, 1995: 145pp)

A metaphor used by Arendt, which describes the social space forming between people, is a round table. This table symbolises the world which "*relates and separates men at the same time*" (Arendt, 1998:52). Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round (or the world) and to develop a shared common sense. Without it we are ruled by our subjective experiences, in which only our own feelings, wants and desires are distinguished.

This brings me to the conclusion that active citizenship should be defined and analysed as a collective practice, rather than an individual status or position, and that action in itself is plural, not to be understood as a unified entity. What then becomes necessary to understand in relation to my topic, where the rhetoric on active citizenship prevails, is how the process of reactivating the experience of citizenship is envisioned and enacted on both sides, meaning how the plurality of action is either suppressed or expressed in policy discussions as well as how action is collectively experienced in practice.

4.4 Situated actions and learning through participation

Situated views on learning as contextual and particular social interactions are useful when discussing the issue of eParticipation, both as an activity of mutual learning (among all involved parties) and as several intertwined processes of participation. This is true when compared to focusing solely on the ambitions to implement fixed frameworks or general assumptions about how eParticipation might come true. The fluid nature of eParticipation, and the possibilities for situated learning in relation to specific activities, has to be taken into account in examinations and evaluations of local activities and visions. There are simultaneously strivings to make eParticipation more efficient and to repeatedly quantify the results, by transferring generalisations and abstractions between local contexts, and these have to be related to local needs of mutual learning on site.

A situated approach contests, for example, the assumption that learning is an evident response to teaching. It is rather the case that learning can take place during unexpected occasions and in other places than those formally decided upon. These findings make it possible to claim that eParticipation could very well be developed by taking into account the activities concerning tailoring software within a workplace, along with what actually happened in the web forums that were placed at the citizens' disposal on the consultation site. Procedural stimulation of participation is not always answered by the desired activities.

4.4 1 eParticipation as learning in a social framework

In their presentation of a social theory of learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe a process, which they call *legitimate peripheral participation*. In a simple way, this could be described as a form of apprenticeship, but is according to the authors a much more complex activity. It is a description of the particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates

in the actual practice of an expert, but with limited responsibility for the ultimate outcome. eParticipation could to some extent also be seen as a situated learning-process which takes place in a framework of participation, not solely in an individual mind or unit or as an example of an interaction involving an individual and an artefact. This means that the activity of participation is also mediated by the differences of perspectives among what are considered peripheral participants ; i.e. the municipal employees providing the tool for participation, the politicians involvement or absence when making decisions about which tool to use, and other strategic contextual choices. Understanding and learning are defined and compared to the actual actions that are taking place in the framework of participation, consisting of what Lave & Wenger call *communities of practice.*

They discuss situated learning by placing the spotlight on the relation between learning and the social situations in which it occurs. Literally, they situate learning in the practices and social activities of co-participation. The contextual aspects of learning are considered crucial for how learning evolves. Lave and Wenger locate learning not in the acquisition of structure but in the increased possibility for learners to participate in expert performance. Lave & Wenger does not reject the position that frameworks of participation are structured – it is precisely this that provides the conditions for legitimate peripheral participation. Nor do they deny that expert performance is systematic. The hard question is what kind of system, and what kind of structure. By asking this self evident question they want to promote a radical shift from invariant structures to ones that are less rigid and more deeply adaptive. They regard structure as the variable outcome of action rather than its invariant precondition, and state that structures are reconfigured in the local context of action. With this statement they underline the impossibility of transferring knowledge from one place to another. Wenger (1998) describes in his further writings another concept of great significance for understanding the processes of creating symbolic eParticipation, namely reification. Wenger explains reification as an act of "*making into a thing*", i.e. either to treat an abstraction as substantially existing or as a concrete material object, without reducing its meaning. In a concrete way this could for example be illustrated by a "development ladder", discussed both as a concrete artefact which one literally has to climb, at the same time as it signals something more than a simple physical ladder. This tool is of great relevance when analysing processes of participation, where participation and reification are in constant interplay. I have used this concept as a tool for explaining and discussing the symbolic function of eParticipation.

4.4. 2 The complexity of multi-level learning

Bateson talks about several levels of learning (Star & Ruhleder, 1994: 253.) and is known within psychology for his discussion about contradictions which ultimately cause double bind situations. Bateson's famous theory of the double bind situation is briefly explained as a "transcontextual syndrome" which may be answered by either schizophrenia or creativity. According to Star and Ruhleder, the syndrome occurs when "a message is given at more than one level simultaneously, or an answer is simultaneously demanded at a higher level and negated on a lower one". Translated into the eParticipation context this could be exemplified with the contradictory demands for citizens to be active and involved in politics and decision-making, at the same time as they are denied influence on other levels. Star and Ruhleder exemplify difficulties or even failures of implementation in the case of introducing a new information system in a public organisation and how these problems could be attributed to double messages concerning for instance which system is preferred. The old system was acknowledged by the management on one level in the organisation, but negated on another by

not attributing time or resources enough to learn how it could fit into the old work practice. This situation could in some sense be described as causing such double bind situations among those affected. But the dilemma could also lead to unexpected changes of routine work in practice, and creative thinking. If those moments when communications fail are properly recognised and acknowledged, they can also provide space for re-negotiations. Informal workarounds in a specific work-context are, according to Star & Ruhleder, concrete examples or evidence of the existence of such double bind situations at a work place.

Bateson detected several levels of communication and learning and called them "*organisational and learning challenges*". He discussed three levels of conceptual complexity or as Star and Ruhleder terms it, "*levels of communication and discontinuities in hierarchies of information*" (ibid. 1994: 255) . These conceptual levels are briefly described in the following way; *level one* is the straightforward message, *level two* tells about the reliability of the first statement and *level three* involves a meta-message (the context) which places the statement, concretely explained as *learning something*, *learning about something* and finally *learning to choose among categories and knowing that there are theories of categorisation.* Several dilemmas of communication in for instance the activities of tailoring a software application or activities of deliberation will be further discussed in this dissertation as examples of this complexity of communication.

4.4.3 eParticipation as situated action

If eParticipation is regarded partly as a situated learning-process that takes place in a framework of participation, resulting in a deepening participation, rather than as an activity mostly involving an individual and an artefact, then the learning process and the eParticipation activity have to be mediated by the differences of perspective among the participants. This could also be described as a process of diffraction (Haraway, 1996, Mörtberg, 2000, Elovaara, 2004, Björkman, 2005). Understanding and learning is then defined and compared to the actual actions that are taking place in the participation framework, or the absence of actions in the particular setting. These multiple perspectives have to be related to the invariant structures of, for instance, certain development strategies set up by various authorities. The dialectics between the plurality of perspectives and the invariant structures of development are shown in some of the dilemmas presented in this thesis.

Suchman introduced the notion of situated actions in her dissertation (1987), where she discussed the practice of researchers in artificial intelligence (AI). These studies brought her to acknowledge the necessity of reversing the perspective, to focus on actual activities and how people use their circumstances and practical resources in order to get things running. The daily practice of planning was in that regard to be seen not as imperfect versions of the scientific models, which are representations of these actions. Situated actions are instead to be seen in interplay with the plans of action (Suchman 1987: 50). This is not only applicable to scientific plans for developing machine intelligence, but also to policy planning and other courses of strategic action in the eGovernment field. This approach is influenced by the ethnomethodological view of purposeful action and shared understanding, with a focus on understanding how people's statements serve to organize and sustain an action setting. This began in the late 1950's (Garfinkel, 1967), and states that:

1) plans are representations of situated actions
2) in the course of situated action, representation occurs when otherwise transparent activity becomes in some way problematic
3) the objectivity of the situations of our action is achieved rather than given
4) a central resource for achieving the objectivity of situations is language which stands in a generally indexical[66] relationship to the circumstances that it presupposes, produces and describes
5) as a consequence of the indexicality of language, mutual intelligibility is achieved on each occasion of interaction with reference to situation particulars, rather than being discharged once and for all by all stable bodies of shared meanings

In order to detect situated actions it is necessary to keep the focus on human practice at the level of concrete interactions between individuals, when they are acting in a meaningful social context. Situated actions are not made explicit by rules and procedures. Rather, when situated action becomes in some way problematic, when dilemmas arise, rules and procedures are made clear for purposes of deliberation, and the action, which is otherwise neither rule-based nor procedural, has then to be adjusted in line with them. This view is also relevant when discussing all the plans, procedures and recommendations for how to achieve the transformation of the public sector and eParticipation development. In practice it is rather our mutually established and commonly agreed ways of acting that steer our ways of doing things. Rules and norms are then made out of the distillations of these negotiations, rather than out of either actual practice or planning (Suchman, 1987: 49-67pp, Chaiklin,1993:377) Explication and abstractions are themselves situated social practices; they are also developed in a certain process, in an activity of one sort or another, as in for instance benchmarking.

4.5 eParticipation as a network model and interactive practice

eParticipation thus consists of more than the traditional entities of electronic equipment, democratic institutions, citizens and pre-defined activities. Hacker and van Dijk (2000) suggest a system-dynamic network model of the political system including different actors and institutions. The model is not restricted to the government or the government and its institutions; it includes more actors, i.e. civic organisations, corporations and individual citizens (and following Bijker and Law/Latour also artefacts). Politics is broadly defined as the sum of acts in a community performed with the intention to organise and govern this community (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000: 32).Taking a relational view of democracy as a point of departure means that politics and power are not viewed as properties of individuals or collectives as such, but as properties of the dynamic relationships between them. These relationships consist of communicative actions aimed towards the acquisition, allocation and exchange of material and immaterial rules and resources. The dynamic nature of the model offered here rests upon continuous changes in the relationships between the actors and institutions it describes. As it represents a political system, they are first of all relationships of power. Political relationships are increasingly shaped and materialised by means of ICT, and these means change the relationships between parts or actors in the model (Hacker and V Dijk, 2000:32-33).

However it is necessary to realise that network models like the one described above could emphasise a technological determinist position, by advocating the idea that networks must result in flat organisations and horizontal types of communication. This is not necessarily the

[66] Indexicality is briefly explained as: “Expressions that rely upon their situation for significance”. See Suchman, 1987:58

case, since the involved actors have possibilities to steer by their choices when shaping e-democracy and its applications. Networks have centres too, and they offer many kinds of new complex hierarchies in new combinations, as the dilemmas will show. These infused power relations are in a state of constant flux, and so are political processes. They affect technology development, whilst at the same time technology development itself both shapes and is shaped by politics.

Another important topic, for democratic reasons, is to analyse whether eParticipation is developed and introduced in the examined practices in a participatory way. It is a collective activity involving several actors with different positions and functions, and with different views of and relations to what needs to be developed. The predominant understanding of what constitutes design of supportive technologies for eParticipation must be further elaborated based on local interpretations, and the basic understanding of what makes a certain tool suitable for eParticipation be must challenged. What makes it so essential to make an effort to redefine the design activities and the tools for eParticipation, and to present alternative understandings and interpretations?

4.5. 1. Participatory development of participation

One reason is that in the context of information and communication technology, design practices are mainly ascribed to computer scientists or information system professionals and are regarded as a separate technical project, where social aspects of both design and use scarcely are taken into account. The object of the design process is then seen primarily as a separate development of a technical infrastructure that should support the users in their everyday work (Kensing & Blomberg, 1998), excluding the social and democratic consequences of the introduction of the very same technical infrastructure. The software designers themselves thus often have little or no contact with the work practices for which they are expected to design supportive technology. Social informatics claims, however, that computer systems are socially embedded. In that sense they contribute to changing work and use practice. The organisational behaviour, the development of different ways of working and the introduction of technology into those contexts are interdependent. Therefore, a municipal information system, the technical infrastructure, its adaptation to a specific organisational culture, and the interactive services provided via the system, also contribute to changing the information system, the infrastructure, the modes of adaptation and the organisational culture as well as individual ways of working and democratic acting.

> *"...the technological project is one of congealing and objectifying human activities, it is increasingly also one of finding subjectivity in technical artefacts. The assimilation of lived experience to technique goes both ways, which only makes the project of re-imaging technological objects the more urgent." (Suchman 2002:91)*

The closer coupling of democracy and participation within the visions of eParticipation makes possible even stronger claims that lived experience of democratic decisions must be traceable also in the technologies supporting those activities. In that sense the production of technologies for participation must go deeper into governance, i.e. including also the procedures and in particular the practices and development processes of participatory technologies, in order to account for all aspects of participation.

However, the separated, neatly ordered layers of participation which Bowker & Star (1994) would call *frozen organisational discourse* need to be opened up by Actor Network Theory (ANT). I will use the process oriented method and notion from ANT described as the process of *translation* (Callon, 1986) in order to analyse changes and situated practices. Walsham (1997: 468) briefly describes the translation and enrolment process as creating a body of alliances including both humans and non-humans, through a process of translating their interest to fit the intentions of the actor-network. (Holmström, 2000)

According to the described future visions of the European Union, eParticipation activities are envisioned as the legitimised entrance to participation in future decision-making. The interplay between what is defined as formalised accessibility and occasional, informal attempts to gain access to ICT for enhanced participation have certain effects on the individual's engagement and willingness to become engaged in those activities. The engagement for developing eParticipation in turn contributes to changes in the relations between formalised and informal accessibility. A crucial thing to discuss is then how the dichotomy of activities of formal and informal accessibility comes into being. In order to discuss how how the mechanisms of power are produced in those processes, I will use the concepts of translation as described by Callon & Latour (1981:279). They define translation as:

> *"...all the negotiations, intrigues, calculation, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor of force. 'Our interests are the same', 'do what I want', 'you cannot succeed without going through me'. Whenever an actor speaks of 'us' s/he is translating other actors into a single will, of which s/he becomes spirit and spokesman. S/he begins to act for several, no longer for one alone. S/he becomes stronger. S/he grows."*

Callon (1986) distinguishes four interrelated processes or what he calls "*moments of translations*" (Callon in Law, 1986:203, namely:

> 1.) Problematization or how to become indispensable (includes interdefinition of actors and definition of obligatory passage point)
> 2.) The devices of "interessement" or how the allies are locked into place
> 3.) How to define and co-ordinate the roles: enrolment
> 4.) The mobilisation of allies: are the spokesmen representative? (Callon, 1986: 202-218, Holmström, 2000.)

Those moments of translation show how the network of actors grows and changes. If the accessibility infrastructure is seen as a socio-technical ensemble, the translation processes help the ongoing negotiations and power-play according to what should respectively count as formal or informal, within the envisioned categories of access. This stabilisation process of the actor network in turn affects what is later established as legitimate access to eParticipation.

4.6 My theoretical tool-box

Finally, the features of my tool box can be summarised as follows:

- Power within eParticipation seen as an interplay of domination and resistance. Conceptual tools; panopticon, regimes of practices (Foucault) symbolic power (Bourdieu) reification (Wenger)
- The plurality of active citizenship and participatory actions. Conceptual tools: Arendt's human action theory related to Haraway's notion of diffraction. The categorical work model by Bowker & Star used as a diffraction tool (Arendt, Haraway, Bowker & Star).
- Participation understood as learning within social frames and in multi-levelled complexity. Conceptual tool: the notion of legitimate peripheral participation and multi-level communication and learning (Lave & Wenger, Star & Ruhleder)
- eParticipation seen as a dynamic network model and mutually constitutive interactive practices in differing socio-technical layers. Conceptual tool: the translation model (Callon & Laotur, Callon, Hacker & van Dijk, and the Access Rainbow model, Clement & Shade.)

PART TWO

Introduction

The following three chapters contain my research analysis. I have chosen to study the practices of eParticipation, rather than taking my starting point in any of the many guidelines, handbooks or checklists that have been launched by various actors during the past decades, prescribing how to stimulate or implement eParticipation. Those are all examples of quick fixes for revitalising democratic participation. A critical investigation of eParticipation must begin with a closer examination of situated practice, by asking basic questions such as what eParticipation *becomes* in practice, seen in relation to plans and visions of the topic, but also what eParticipation becomes *because of* practice, as well as because of plans and visions. How are the situated processes of eParticipation enacted in practice when the basis for actual participation in decision-making has to be constantly re-negotiated and translated in various contexts of local practice? And what does it really mean to be and act as an active citizen, when acting and being in the world is based on a multitude of limited positions and understandings (Haraway, 1991, Arendt, 1998) and constant negotiations of identity and membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991)? How might a "mature organisation", which is ready to receive and support citizens' contributions in various local contexts such as service design, local decision-making and policy development, along with community development on the whole, cope with suggested changes towards a more inclusive way of preparing and finally also making decisions? What are the effects on a local level when authorities are supposed to actively move towards a network-based organisation structure, at the same time as they are exhorted to open up for public influences and governance - in line with the five principles of good governance, i.e. work towards greater openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence within decision-making, according to the European Union? [67] These questions will be discussed in this part of the thesis.

Chapter five describes different layers of participation in setting the stage for eParticipation as well as running actual electronically mediated activities. Reconfiguration of accessibility for participation is part of ensuring possibilities for everyone to take part, but is also a way of steering and managing participation. This double-sided process of reconfiguring participation consists of an interplay of activities, simultaneously aimed at restricting and opening up for inclusive accessibility. These strategies need to be identified and made visible. They show how power-relations are transformed into materiality and ascribed a function as mechanisms of control, whilst at the same time, this process of materialisation also invites a broader participation in the re-situating of the control mechanisms.

Chapter six concentrates on aspects of activity, and discusses the double-edged function of the notion "active citizenship", as a contributory concept in the creation of symbolic eParticipation. This effect is contrasted with the notion's potential to stimulate the formation of a malleable active citizenship. In my empirical material, cases within the research and development projects repeatedly revealed both how citizens, politicans and practitioners became active in unexpected ways, as well as how for various reasons they actively chose not

[67] See COM: 2001/428 *European Governance:* A *white paper* Available on http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white_paper/en.pdf [Accessed070123]

to be active. There were also several examples of activities and initiatives which were not prioritised in the devlopment, while other examples were given legitimacy according to pre-defined criterias. The practices thus showed variations and complexities which I found were insufficiently focused on, or not discussed in a deeper sense, in current research within the field. This has also been an important incentive for my research work, i.e. to prioritise and visualise these disregarded aspects.

Finally, chapter seven concentrates on illustrating what happens when plans of conduct meet local enactment of eParticipation. This chapter explores how the local public organisations handle symbolic eParticipation. The analysis scrutinises how the practitioners and citizens adjust to the stereotype and customize it to their own purposes, in order to achieve either greater malleability in eParticiaption or uniformity in their actions.

5. Layers of participation within eParticipation

Accessibility is a basic condition for achieving engaged participation in democratic activities. My empirical findings underline this as one of the most important aspects. Accessibility in the context of eParticipation is not solely a matter of gaining direct access to decision-making through the use of digital tools. It could also be about taking active part in local service maintenance or customisation of a software application which is intended to support eParticipation activities, as well as starting up civic initiatives. Accessibility is equally important for enhancing digital literacy, which is a prerequisite for becoming an active citizen who knows the procedures and rationale for taking part in mediated participation. People thus need to acquire and improve both ICT-skills and citizenship-skills, in order to make appropriate use of eParticipation. At the same time, the practices of eParticipation help to develop new forms of participation and active roles.

One of the starting-points for the discussion in this chapter is an accessibility-model which specifically aims to deal with the complexity of ensuring comprehensive accessibility. I use this model as a framework for discussing participation in different socio-technical layers of a society. Clement and Shade's model adopts a pronounced citizen and community group perspective, as it could be said that they base their discussion and arguments on the active citizen's point of view and requirements. Their basic systemisation of different aspects of access inspired me to reflect more on what the metaphor of the access rainbow could reveal, even in terms of exclusion, both within its scope and in its close surroundings.

When examining how accessibility is locally established through processes of participation, is it important to bear two things in mind; namely, that we as humans are multifaceted individuals, and that we need a plurality of spaces where we can express and deliberate our standpoints. This premise is based on Arendt's theory of human action. For the issue of ensuring accessibility this means that an accessibility infrastructure must take into account the need to be supplied with multiple ways of gaining access, as well as a variety of entrances to plural spaces of accessibility.

Lave & Wenger have in turn shown that participation is learning in practice. If programmes aiming at establishing accessibility take these aspects into consideration, the task of ensuring access becomes more complex than commonly suggested. Accessibility is then not primarily to be seen as the procedure of creating a pre-defined basic infrastructure and making available what is previously defined as appropriate technology. The crucial issue is more about ensuring multiple access-points, several premises, situations, activities and technological tools to ensure that all individuals in practice have reasonable access possibilities. Setting up a coherent infrastructure of accessibility, in line with visionary development plans, does not fully secure the possibility of capturing every single aspect of local and individual variation and need to gain access to participation. The establishment of the infrastructure unavoidably sets aside certain needs at the expense of others. This process of sharing rights and responsibilities in turn creates different power mechanisms which differ on the varying levels of access to participation and access for participation. Participation thereby means different things at the varying levels of the infrastructure. Applying Arendt's reasoning suggests that all

types of participation are equally important and that various types of participation should be allowed on every level.

The notion of universality has been contested and described as "false universality" (Lister (1997) and of course there are both advantages and problems in attempts to standardise access to participation. However, I take the *Access Rainbow Model* (Clement & Shade, in Gurstein, 2000: 32-51pp) as a starting point for further reflection and elaboration in order to contribute to a practice-based conceptualisation of eParticipation. The *Access Rainbow Model* reflects what could be characterised as a comprehensive view of the discussion of access, where access to electronic network services is acknowledged as a complex task, conflating several perspectives, not primarily seen as a matter of providing availability of ICT-facilities. In a similar way eParticipation has to be treated as a complex socio-technical phenomenon, based on reciprocal shaping. Clement & Shade call their model a socio-technical architecture, which has been developed within the research field of Community Informatics. This infrastructure model expands the concept of access beyond mere physical connectivity to embrace Internet-based information and services and issues of digital literacy and governance. It acknowledges the complexity of the notion of accessibility by describing multiple and interdependent aspects of access as exemplified in the earlier introduced illustration of a multicoloured rainbow, presented in chapter three. However, conceptualisations like this soon become frozen, formal representations and thereby also stabilised. In order to discuss the process of formalising as being still open and not as a closed entity, Callon and Latour's translation model can serve as an appropriate conceptual tool to describe the dynamic processes of stabilising unequal relations within the activities aiming at ensuring access for all. I will use these concepts as discussion tools in this chapter, in order to examine the layers of accessibility to participation. These layers are part of paving the ground for the establishment of an active citizenship and a mature organisation, which are presented officially as prerequisites for making eParticipation work in the future.

Several of the projects described in this thesis could be explained as general attempts to establish accessibility infrastructures, in order to further participation or eParticipation. The local municipality, where I have gathered most of my empirical material, has long been working towards regarding and establishing accessibility as a fundamentally necessary infrastructure and has expressed ideals of working towards embracing the whole local society through this infrastructure. Several investments have been made during the past decade, to expand material, human and pedagogical capacities, and the municipality is still working towards evolving all seven layers of the rainbow-model, although not with the same strength as in the 1990's. The rainbow-model identifies seven distinct layers:

						governance
					literacy	
				access/service		
			content			
		software				
	devices					
carriage						

Figure 5:1 Access step by step

According to the model, level one is envisioned as a prerequisite for level two and so on. These layers are equivalent to the spectrum of the rainbow and as such also represent the

multifaceted weaving of prerequisites for accessibility, thereby also comprising aspects such as technical, economic, social and physical aspects of access, as well as how to organise and situate access in and by organisations, as well as by individuals. My empirical experiences bring new interpretations and dilemmas into focus, along with new questions. This chapter attempts to nuance an established concept of great importance for enhancing eParticipation activities. In doing so, I look more closely at how some of the activities within the projects correspond to some of the segments of the rainbow-model, as well as how the access-rainbow appears in the different cases. I will also show how those envisioned layers contain more plurality than one ever could envision. In the final sections of the chapter, these differences and consequences are discussed in the light of eParticipation.

5.1 The first layer-carriage facilities

The first basic layer in the model is carriage facilities, which describes basic resources to store, serve and carry information, i.e. cables, Internet connections and broadband facilities. The issue of broadband was one of the prioritised goals of the European eAction Plan 2005,[68] accepted by Sweden among other European countries, aimed at enforcing and promoting the preparation and expansion of broadband in all countries. In relation to my research area, the first layer of accessibility is further examined by asking questions such as: How do the authorities work for and provide increased accessibility to Internet in the municipality as a whole? To what degree is broadband provided to the citizens and what are the obstacles to establishing this basic infrastructure?

In the first quarter of 2004, according to a Eurostat[69] (the Statistical Office of the European Communities) report on Internet usage across the 25 EU member states, including Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Norway and Iceland, around 82 percent of Swedish inhabitants used Internet on a daily basis. In Ronneby one of the political goals prioritised within the municipality has been to invest resources in building a robust telecommunication infrastructure. The investments are in line with the national and European policy concerning the expansion of broadband, according the priorities set in the *eEurope Action Plan 2005*. Until 2004, the county administration granted subsidies to smaller neighbourhoods for their ICT expansion, in total 1,6 billion (SEK). National support has covered up to 89% of the municipalities' cost. In Ronneby, expansion of the municipal-owned telecommunication network is in progress and was expected to be completed by the end of 2005, although this goal was not yet accomplished at the beginning of 2007. The first optical fibre network was established in the main town, Ronneby, in 1994, also connecting two of the main villages, Kallinge and Bräkne-Hoby, between 1996 and 1998. This initiative provided access for municipal institutions and municipal housing facilities. The last steps in securing carriage facilities in the form of broadband include twenty small villages, and the net is intended to be open for all kinds of service providers. [70]

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[68] European Commission, 2002, *The e-Europe 2005 Action Plan*, URL = http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/index_en.htm [Accessed 02-09-06]

[69] Eurostat, 2005, Statistics in Focus, Industry, Trade & Services, 18/2005 "*Internet usage by individuals and enterprises 2004*".URL= http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1073,46587259&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&p_product_code=KS-NP-05-025

[70] This presentation is based on discussions during a regional workshop during the BENTLI project, see IAW http://www.bth.se/egov/egov_eng.nsf/pages/02a36aa5e1f1c783c125711c005aaa18!OpenDocument and BENTLI project presented at http://www.bentli.net/the_project.htm [Accessed 070409]

However, what may seem self-evident for accessibility reasons is not always without unpleasant consequences when carried out in practice. The issue of broadband is not solely a matter of increasing access by making carriage media widely available and affordable. The investment in such basic infrastructure can also create unintended exclusions when it comes to participation. One example of this is contradictions that can occur in negotiations of ownership and even expropriation of private land, when compared to the benefit to the whole village, as illustrated by the following case.

5.1.1 The case with the insubordinate landowner

This case begins with decisions made as early as 1958, when the Swedish state decided to modernise the national telephone system and introduce automatic switchboards. These were distributed all over the country and placed in separate telephone stations. Nobody could imagine at this time that these decisions would cause a private landowner in a small village in the municipality of Ronneby serious trouble fifty years later, when broadband was coming to town.

The original landowner negotiated with the Swedish National Telephone Company (SNTC)[71], who wanted permission to use a particular spot in the landowner's private garden, in order to serve the whole village with telephone facilities. The landowner got a one-off payment, and in exchange the SNTC got permission to build a station on private land, and an easement, to allow them to maintain the building and the installed equipment. A clause was also included in the contract, stating that the SNTC agreed to stop their activities, dig up the cables and remove the purpose built small building, at the end of the fifty year period. This turned out to be a misjudgement on the side of the company, and similar agreements caused discussions in several places throughout the country, when the new generation of landowners were not so keen on accommodating the new infrastructure for networking and communication. This resulted in several new rounds of negotiations and settlements.

In 2005, a new Private Telephone Company (PTC) took over the original contract, and announced that they wanted to renew the agreement with the private landowners. Most of the landowners agreed, but this particular landowner in this outpost of Southeast Sweden, was rather reluctant to agree to this, as he and his family felt that they were trespassed upon too often, because the station was installed close to their own private home:

> *"They wanted to pay us a trifle for having our permission to use the land for ever. We were not at all interested in renewing the contract, because we have small children running all over the place, and the company often came with huge vans when they needed to repair things. They even came in the middle of the night and woke us up."*[72]

The discussions continued and the PTC maintained that they needed to keep the station, with reference to the public good. The landowners finally agreed upon a new settlement, and the building was left on their land. Then one day, when the landowner came home, he discovered a huge pile of pipes, marked with the municipal logo, in his garden. He contacted the municipality who told him that in order to install broadband they needed to connect these

[71] I have chosen to invent acronyms for the companies and use them in order to keep the anonymity of the private company.
[72] Extract from the transcription of an interview with the landowner's family, conducted as part of P7/050807

cables to the cables in the old telephone station. It turned out that they also were planning to build a second house beside the first one, without his knowledge or permission. The landowner was not at all pleased:

> *"I went completely mad. I asked them whether they had got a building permit and ordered them to remove all their stuff immediately and even shouted in the phone that 'this is not a bloody storage place!' By the end of the day the stuff was gone."*

This incident caused new rounds of negotiations involving representatives from the PTC and the municipality, and ultimately this caused a delay in the total provision of municipal broadband. The delay also had other consequences that the landowners had not thought of when they stopped connection of the cables:

> *"Suddenly we discovered that a lot of bull-shit was spread all over the village, people thought we deliberately stopped the broadband-expansion because we were against technological development on the whole, but this was not true. We wanted broadband installed too, but we were protesting about the way it was supposed to happen, which we felt was deeply wrong."*

In connection with this they were contacted by local politicians, and had the possibility to explain their stance to them, emphasising that they were not against the installation as such, if the PTC and municipality could consider moving their buildings to common land nearby. They were also willing to let the municipality run their pipes through their garden. The municipality was ready to settle the agreement on these grounds, and was prepared to pay a recurring sum for permission to draw the cables. However, the PTC was still not satisfied and decided to apply to the municipality asking for permission to erect a new building in conjunction with the first one. They also told the landowner that they were willing to buy a piece of his garden, but he declined the offer, because the issue for him and his family was still the feeling of encroachment on their property. The situation finally developed so that they had their whole garden dug up during the autumn, and a lot of cables spread all over the gravel paths, but there was no building to connect the cables to, since it now was the PTC who had stopped the project. The landowner and his wife described their feelings about the unexpected turn of events:

> *"We really felt small and powerless in this situation, but we did not want anyone to ride roughshod over us. Obviously we saw the advantage of the development, and we sure wanted to have broadband as much as everyone else, but we felt personally affected by this business. We could accept that the municipality and the state referred to the public good, but not a private company...! We wanted to get rid of their activities, the cars were getting bigger and bigger and another problem we experienced was that it was so difficult to find out who really hadresponsibility for solving this issue once and for all."*

A sunny summer-day in June 2006, the conflict was finally solved and the building was moved to the common land nearby, with the help of a large hoisting crane. A moment of fraternisation occurred when the landowner offered the workers ice-cream and soda against the heat, and the local community group immortalized the event photographically with the help of a local news reporter. The landowner was then free to begin a private building project which he had planned for a while; a car-port. He could do so, in the assurance that he was not

excluding others from gaining access to basic technologies by fighting for his rights, and he was no longer paying the price of being excluded from making decisions about his own land. He had in short accomplished the achievement of a certain degree of co-determination concerning the placement of the physical devices (buildings, cables and wires) of the carriage facilities, which in fact introduces the possibility of a co-determination process within establishment of layer one, if referring to this case in terms of the Access Rainbow Model.

What does this case of the insubordinate landowner emphasise as important, in order to understand eParticipation? The issue of making carriage facilities widely available reveals how the actions of providing accessibility for everyone, could take place on the part of an individual. The goal of securing general accessibility to basic infrastructures, which in turn enables engagement and eParticipation, could exclude some people's right to decide about their own private matters. Applying Latour & Callon's (1981) theory of translation processes as an act of adjusting intentions in an actor-network, further developed in Callon (1986), gives at hand a web of relations, and describes a set of actors, that are part of this first accessibility layer concerning carriage facilities: the landowner, the workers, the representatives of the private company, along with municipal employees and politicians, and neighbours in the community. The actants could here be explained as buildings, cables and wires along with the desirable spot of land and the house in the garden. The situation is steered by the authorities who define the issue: your land has to be expropriated in the name of "the public good". The notion "the public good" is given a symbolic function and thus acts as an example of delegated power (Bourdieu, 1977, Foucault,). The public good is used as a power mechanism in order to secure broadband extension. The actors are soon locked into place and enrolled as allies (exemplified by the politicians and neighbours). The statement "the public good" becomes the "obligatory passage point", which is not negotiable. The landowner described the frustration he and his wife felt when a moment of petrifaction occurred, when they were locked into a predetermined position as "obstacles standing in the way of progress". The politicians and neighbours played their roles as enrolled allies in the establishment of the carriage facilities, even though the landowner did not experience that a clash of interest really existed, since he too was interested in the expansion of broadband - as long as it did not happen at the expense of his right to self-determination.

There was also a break-down when it came to the processes of enrolment, when the municipal authorities did not manage to co-ordinate their roles and when the landowner refused to take on the role as an obstacle to progress. The politicians became spokespersons for the "the public good", which in practice turned out to be "the private company good". It becomes clear that the case of the insubordinate landowner reveals how the phrase "the public good", which has a long democratic tradition, turns into an argument of negotiation and its complete opposite, emphasising a single interest (the private company's interests) instead of symbolising common interests. The landowner and his wife found themselves caught in the dilemma of being accused of hindering the development of "the public good", when in fact they did not want to be steamrollered, and indirectly contribute to the wealth of the private company. Adding to the complexity is the fact that they were just as much in need of accessibility and appropriate devices, as the rest of the community.

They were also exposed to collective community pressure, due to actions taken by the politicians when trying to talk to them (also in the name of the public good), and the landowner also became the "talk of the town" or even "the local village idiot". This combined hostile and humorous view was in fact manifested during a project meeting in the municipality, which I took part in, concerning the Komindu-project, where the example of the

insubordinate landowner was brought up and commented on by the municipal representatives as something that could jeopardise the planned establishment of broadband in the municipality. The importance of making land available for further installation of broadband is referred to as a common interest, despite the fact that it is a private company that is supposed to run the operation. However, the landowner was successful in his negotiations and finally managed to change the intentions of the actor network, by choosing not to enrol in the translation process. It was possible for him to affect the movement within the actor network by offering resistance and by allying himself with other actors and actants. He demanded that the private company should present a building-permit and contacted the politicians and practitioners directly, in order to make them listen to his arguments. Through these activities he referred to procedures in another layer, namely governance. He also discussed his standpoint with the local politicians who had to mediate between the local villagers and those in charge of the project, i.e. both the municipal chairman and the company leaders. His informal actions actually provided him with access to co-determination of the formal process of establishing carriage facilities, which in turn was a basic premise for future eParticipation to evolve. However, he emphasised that eParticipation could not be established at the expense of his own agency.

These experiences clearly put the spotlight on the right to co-determination and governance activities, concerning how the establishment and operation of basic infrastructure should be conducted, worth considering as important in the development of eParticipation. This also makes evident that the basics of the accessibility infrastructure not only needs to be established before co-determination can take place; it also reinforces the need for co-determination within the preceding accessibility layers, in order to account for all of the democratic aspects of setting up an all-embracing accessibility infrastructure.

5.2 The second layer - devices

Following the first layer of securing carriage facilities is, according to Clement and Shade's model, the actual physical devices which the people operate. This could be exemplified by e.g. public kiosks, workstations and universal design solutions. All these features are illustrated in the following case with the Public Access Internet Terminals (from now on referred to as the PIM-project or PIM-terminals).

5.2.1 Prescribing users and use of the PIM-terminals

The national tax-authority's PIM-project was another attempt to establish equal prerequisites for gaining access, but this time the infrastructure emerged mainly out of the second layer, i.e. the availability of appropriate devices. Accessibility was in this case supposed to be established primarily by providing accessible devices. The public terminal was seen as the starting-point and primary feature for establishing an accessibility infrastructure.

The PIM-project was a pilot project concentrating on launching self-service terminals with a common web interface, and was an example of the convergence trend at the time, focusing on creating physical one-stop shops. This trend has turned into a general endeavour among authorities to create web-based single-access points for users. On a superficial level, the terminal falls within the category of a 'self-service system' of the second layer; on closer inspection, however, it is much more complex and has greater significance as a catalyst for network construction and associated factors, for many activities on and between several different levels of the accessibility layers.

An evaluation of the project made it obvious that the mutuality of the process of configuration (Woolgar, 1991) or adaptation of the user and the use played a certain role, when upholding the pre-figured relations of inequality between the experienced and inexperienced user. So did the distribution of tasks among the hosts[73] and sponsors[74]. Still, they were expected to be active participants in the project, without having any general influence on how the project developed. The focus of the evaluation was on the users' experiences and opinions of the project. The categories of users, i.e. sponsors, hosts,[75] local participants and end-users[76] need to be specified. The category of 'user' is complex, not just because it can change as new people come and go (Mackay et.al, 2000), but also because the way in which it is described and defined arises from certain prejudices. The notions of use and users are considered to be techno-centric and have been questioned by several researchers.[77]

The users who were involved in the PIM-project (hosts, sponsors, local participants and end-users) all fall within the common category of 'user', but each one had very specific requirements and expectations when it came to the concept "use". The hosts and participants in the local work groups often functioned as intermediaries, helping to identify and interpret others' needs whilst instructing and guiding them to the required information or service. Thus they used the artefact as a tool for displaying their own competence. Sponsors and hosts also used the terminals for marketing purposes and as a starting point for or means of coordinating collaboration. The end-user was searching for relevant information in accordance with their specific needs, but they also used it as a tool for experimenting with their own capacity or use, i.e. when bypassing the security settings of the terminal. A crucial point then becomes the fact that some users willingly accepted and used the form of digitised service provided by the PIM-terminals, while others did not accept the prescribed use. And the ones who experimented did not solely constitute a category of experienced users, as one could imagine, rather they were driven by situated, contextual-based needs of local adaptation and individualised use.

The PIM-terminals were located in country areas and in towns, in public institutions such as libraries and civic offices, as well as in other places where people gather, e.g. commercial centres, petrol stations and even the National Airport in the capital city of Sweden. They were intended for everyone, although a target group that was considered to be particularly important was the people with lack of practice in computing and who did not have private access to the Internet. Concentration on this group was emphasised in the authorities' stated aims (Serving in Co-operation, 1999) and in interviews with hosts and project members. The importance of 'user-friendliness' was stressed in many development contexts involving new forms of technology, for the purpose of legitimising the project in the governmental climate at that time. These attempts to provide a "universal design" are seen as an essential part of creating accessibility, according to the rainbow model. However, this assumption about the need for universality excludes the burning issue of local adaptation and mutuality. Woolgar (1991) maintains that it is not exclusively technology that must be adapted or configured[78]. Users and use also need to be adapted. This is done, as shown in this case with the PIM-

[73] Exemplified as local service-providers such as for instance libraries, or other organisations where the PIM-terminal were placed.
[74] Sponsors were the local authorities managing the task of supporting the local service-providers.
[75] Most of the hosts interviewed have also worked directly with the end-users.
[76] 'end-user' means a citizen who has used a PIM-terminal.
[77] For a more extensive discussion about the topic see for instance Bardini & Howard (1995) who developed the notion of a reflexive user. Akrich (1992) introduced the idea of the projected user, inscribed into the technology.
[78] Technical term meaning 'adaptation to a system'.

terminal, by defining users' identities in advance as well as by producing limitations and instructions for the use of the technology. Such configuration occurs where knowledge of the user is socially distributed (Woolgar, 1991). Mackay et. al (2000: 753) add to the discussion about the configuration of users, emphasising that configuration is not a one-way process; rather it is a mutual activity. Designers are also influenced by the expectations imposed on them by the organisation and previous use-experiences.

The type and the capacity of user and their actions in the future were structured and defined in advance by the interface of the PIM-terminal. At the same time the interpretation of that interface differed locally. Insiders 'knew' their organisation and thus also the PIM-interface. Others did not have this knowledge and were therefore considered to be covered by what someone defined as universal design. The user was prescribed as having a configured relation to the organisation, which was mediated by the interface as it encouraged a certain kind of use. A mutual launch of devices took place, and both design and use were adapted in accordance with a pre-defined model of users. The PIM-terminals were supposed to facilitate contact with authorities for certain groups of citizens. This also affected the presentation of the content, which was simplified. This fact was clearly exemplified by some of the user introductions and presentations of the PIM-terminals. The hosts, who all worked in different places, had similar presumptions about the predefined users; they were described as underprivileged and illiterate persons from lower income-groups:

> *'There are only five icons. It's absolutely clear to those who aren't computer literate that "this is for me". This is just the right kind of user, of course, because personally I'd never use anything that works this slowly' (Host C).*

> *'A well-educated lawyer wouldn't sit in front of a public internet terminal; it's more for people who for different reasons are looking for a job, need help in getting money, training and education, insurance and so on. It's also a question of democracy, those who have a computer at home, the majority, most people believe, they don't come here. But you can wonder why all our computers are booked if everyone really does have a computer? It's also a strange idea that just because many have a computer, then everyone does. That's just not the case' (Host A).*

> *'People don't beat about the bush, they come right out and say: "we've separated, what shall I do"? I have to fall back on experience and it's definitely easier if the information is all in one place. Sometimes it's difficult to understand official language – a translation is needed' (Host E).*

An important part of configuration was creating the optimum preconditions for making service as accessible as possible for the individual. Formal or less formal introductory sessions demonstrating how to use the monitors, or perform other directed activities, were not only aimed at providing information; they were also aimed at creating an understanding of the content and variety of services provided, as well as helping users to interpret and sift complex information, and directing users who were not familiar with the Internet in the right direction. The main target group for such directed activities was inexperienced users. Introductions and activities were regarded as a form of exchange and a stimulation to learn and discover more. The chance to steer how users should use the terminals was seen to be an advantage:

> *'We look at it and think it works well. It's great that it's locked. There are those, of course, who can get by the locks, but most people use the monitor for the right purpose; this is shown by the statistics. Even if 50% of the searches are not the right sort, the other 50% are and that is excellent' (Host C)*

Another example of configuration was the so-called 'kick-off meetings' at the local level. The model of host/sponsor/local work group was described by the interviewees as an important contact chain, which was also dependent on reciprocity and that the numerous actors took responsibility for their part of the communication. These meetings were a forum in their own right for discussing practical questions. But they were also a means of constituting mutually agreed role divisions and areas of responsibility. One way of stimulating responsibility was to create the preconditions for participation at all levels. Finding routines and methods for maintaining continuous feedback related to everyday activities was considered by the hosts and sponsors to be part of local adjustment. However, it was not followed up in practice by the project management, even though an internal website was set up in order to support this gathering of feedback and user problems.

A few of the interviewees (hosts and sponsors) said that they did not know about the internal work interface; if this was due to inadequate information from the authorities, misunderstanding, or quite simply missing the information was not clear. However, when I showed them the function, the positive reaction to the fact that it was possible to gain access to user statistics shows the importance of continuously confirming and transmitting positive project results to all participants. Hosts and local citizens gave several concrete examples of how a local adaptation process could be stimulated even more. They expressed a desire for services to be adapted at a local level on a continual basis.

It was acknowledged that the project had received support in the form of upstart meetings and new contact channels, but at the same time there were no attempts (mostly due to economic reasons) to include the end-users, the hosts and sponsors in a real feedback loop. There was no support or allocated resources for these kinds of activities. This caused disappointment concerning the lack of interest for the project from highest level of management:

> *'Nothing can grow from underneath, especially not in authorities. You must get approval from above if you're going to get anywhere… in this project they tried to build something up from the bottom up. But everything costs money and authorities have none - and haven't had any for some years /…/ The service we're building up now should ideally cost nothing. It sounds fine but at the same time we're cutting down all the time. No real money was invested in the project. Nothing in advertising or anything else . ..(Sponsor B)*

> *'It worked like this: the monitors were just installed. There wasn't really any more to it. There were no demonstrations as such. We were just told that this was how they worked and were given a number to ring in case of any problems. That was it' (Local workgroup 1).*

Applying the concept of translation in an analysis of this case ends up in suggesting that this is an actor-network with problems. The authorities did not quite manage to raise support for their intention to "create a universal access point for the disadvantaged groups". The obligatory passage point suggested by them was the PIM-terminal, locked in the form of the entrance site to the project and the internal web site. The cause of supporting those with no or

little competence in computing served as an obligatory passage point, and the enrolment of allies in the form of engaged users, hosts, sponsors and local work groups was successful. The problem was located somewhere else; it was due to the lack of interest from the highest management. There were also other shortcomings in defining the devices or locking the allies into place, exemplified by the fact that the terminals in practice were used for several purposes; i.e. as marketing objects, as boundary objects for co-operation between different authorities (i.e. local tax offices and municipality representatives) and even as ordinary internet terminals, since a couple of users found out how to bypass the security configuration. The project initiators did however manage to engage the proper spokespersons, at the local levels, but did not manage to gain legitimisation from higher levels of management. The project as such also competed with other internal projects working on figuring out appropriate solutions for easy access to public service and information, and the PIM-project was therefore not properly stabilised.

The project did in itself cause activities, and network creation, and the terminals even took up a life of their own, when finally abandoned by the authorities. Several years later, they played a role in the Komindu-project, where the COP-services had incorporated them in their services. They were also apprehended as a symbolic accessibility infrastructure, as will be exemplified further on, in the story about Jim, which will be presented in chapter six.

The PIM-terminals were however unequally distributed, since the basic physical infrastructure (broadband) was not established at the time. The internal statistics within the authorities showed that it was the sparsely populated areas that showed the highest usage statistics throughout the project, despite the lack of basic physical infrastructure. This indicates that there might be other reasons for the popularity of the PIM-terminals, which is not necessarily explained by the argument about creating easy access to public services. Even though the piece of furniture was very large and tangible in the milieus where the terminals were placed, it was obvious that they symbolised more than easy access for the users, hosts and sponsors. They were also the authorities personalised, and were a tool for configuring the use of not solely the terminals but also the information provided by the terminals, as well as the anticipated user. The physical embodiment of the internet-connection was seen as crucial for enhancing accessibility but also as a hindrance for accessibility. Even if the terminals were experienced as simple and all-inclusive, covering the most important authorities, they were clearly also experienced by those possessing computer literacy as old-fashioned and outdated, a relic of the past, and the terminals were also adjusted by the users themselves.

In conclusion it is possible to state that the problem with the physical attributes, meaning the in-built internet-terminal, caused more problems for the authorities than for the users. The higher level of authorities did not accept the terminal as an example of “good, universal function”, even though the terminals worked well as a device in their specific local context. People found the devices useful, but not for what they were originally designed for, namely to increase self-service for untrained users. They had instead more of a function as a boundary object (Bowker & Star, 1999) for negotiating the local issues of accessibility. In the various use contexts, they were also ascribed to be local access points with an intermediary function. The local experts gained symbolic credibility through their role as “hosts” even though the issue of local co-determination was unsolved concerning the development and operationalisation of the infrastructure. According to the interviews this was because of the project’s nature; since it was initiated as a bottom-up project, it gained very little support from the highest management and was thus bound to fail.

5.3 Third layer - software tools

In the rainbow model, software tools are presented as a category covering the programs that operate the devices and make connections to services. They are technically concretised as web browsers, applications, groupware, operating systems, word-processing and similar artefacts, whose essential aspects are compatibility and usability. According to Clement & Shade (2000), software is a critical ingredient when extending the traditional information and communication infrastructure with possibilities for digital networking. Other important aspects are that software could be embedded in a multitude of devices, and should be possible to use across a range of technical platforms. The aim of developing web solutions or system solutions in web format is clearly in line with what is considered a basic level of accessibility according to the description of level three in the Rainbow model. The aim of developing tools for supporting the interplay of discussions is clearly in line with extending the scope of accessibility in terms of two-way communication. How this is related to decision-making is another issue. Is it also of interest to distinguish in what way applications are used as tools for supporting certain democracy models or how applications become a hindrance in supporting certain eDemocracy models. Could a flexible system based on module-thinking also become a hindrance, due to the fact that the modules themselves are shaped with a certain democracy-model in mind?

5.3.1 Reproducing habitual eDemocracy

I use the O-system as an example of a software tool representing this layer. This could basically be described as a component-based application including a database and web interface, used for managing and administrating consultations with citizens in the Election2002 project and the Komindu-project. The municipality of Ronneby had been co-operating with a small software company, from now on simply called The Software Company (SC), for a couple of years, aiming at finding web solutions that were suitable for the management of dialogue with citizens, and the modernisation of existing ICT-systems, as well as contributing to the development of new applications. The company was involved in both the Election2002-project and the Komindu-project on comprehensive planning, including the development of Citizens's Online Public Services (COP-Services). The project leader at the software company (SCPL) described the ongoing co-operation (referring to the Komindu-project) with the municipality as a sort of eDemocracy oriented project, even though he revealed an ambiguity concerning the use of eDemocracy labels. He distinguished their work in the software firm as being of a more durable character, compared to their closest competitor, also aspiring to represent an eDemocracy profile:

> *SCPL: "This is not primarily an eDemocracy application; it is a web development platform for almost everything, web solutions or system solutions in the web format.*
> *CH[79]: But you are marketing yourself as an eDemocracy company?*
> *SCPL: Well, that depends on how it fits in with the circumstances...it is a bit problematic, how we do that, really. It has been a main track and it still is, but we have also got large products targeting official administration, which are bigger than the eDemocracy part in total. We want to call ourselves a web development company, but in the contacts with Ronneby we are more of an*

[79] Interview conducted 030507 by Christina Hansson, who also took part in the *Komindu*-project (P6). I got access to the transcript of the interview by permission.

eDemocracy development company compared to what we present in the private customer-contacts. We adjust to the customers' assumptions, without lying /.../ it is a problem for us what to write on our web site so customers will understand that we can offer eDemocracy solutions. Of course we try to highlight the focused areas and present all of them. We want to show the whole range. But we don't call ourselves an eDemocracy company, others give us that epithet.
C: Who is your worst competitor?
SCPL: It is XX who have made quite a few municipal polls. They have concentrated on that. It is simple communication with a narrow focus. I don't think they have as many customers as we have since we do more stuff. On the other hand their customers have made bigger things, even though they are primarily concentrating on single events. We focus more on a running dialogue than communication. We try to start up a process and a forum that will stay alive, instead of conducting an opinion poll, and that's it, as they do."[80]

This quote makes clear that the SCPL distinguishes between an eDemocracy application and a general web development platform. It also illustrate that their main focus is targeting administrative tasks, and that he separates the administrative parts from eDemocracy development. He prefers to call his company a web development company rather than a company specialising in eDemocracy development. He also states that their aim is to present solutions that are sustainable. The problems of finding the right marketing image is not really the problem here, since every company has to exhibit multiple faces in order to get and keep customers in a competitive business climate. The issue is more about the comprehension of eDemocracy and development. In the discussion here several things seem to be ambiguous, such as the differences/borders between an eDemocracy application (which seems to be apprehended as a finished product) and a web development platform (dynamic and changeable). This indicates that eDemocracy applications in some sense are comprehended as a sealed package rather than a changeable and dynamic space. The other differences/borders that become apparent are the relations between management and eDemocracy. eDemocracy also needs to be administered and managed, and what the company in this case may be concentrating most on is developing solutions for the administration and management of eDemocracy. However, by doing this they unconsciously influence the development of eDemocracy as a whole, since the suggested way of looking after eDemocracy is influenced by how we think it should be represented and handled - either as a product or a process, seldom apprehended as a whole; meaning that process and product are mutually determining.

The interview with the SCPL also raises the need to include politicians more when discussing the use and implementation of applications, and the event of selling in an application is to a large extent described as a way to open up for the politicians a possibility for "learning by participation" (Lave& Wenger, 1991). Decision-making is nowadays often envisioned as a multi-stakeholder task, which needs support through technical means, but if the politicians lack proper knowledge about how these technical tools work and what possibilities they offer, they are unlikely to have any ideas about how this particular tool could ultimately support different types of eDemocracy development.

CH: Who are the purchasers generally?
SCPL: It is mostly people from the information offices, they are most frequently the ones that have to run it. We often have contacts with two, three or four

[80] P6/030507

people, the chief of the municipal administration, the head of the information office, the web master and sometimes the head of the ICT department. We would like to have more contact with the politicians; it is a problem that we often discuss. When we are supposed to sell something we would like to establish the product amongst them too. Since they are difficult to reach, we have to try to introduce it for the administrative heads. If they like it they take it further to the politicians. That is always a problem. They may not be able to present it in the best way for the politicians, not as we could present it. We can describe all the advantages and possibilities, and have all the experience. Maybe they can't answer questions as well as we can. There is a backlash there. It is difficult since they are often volunteer politicians. You can't take all of them, and you have to find representatives, which is always a problem. It always starts processes when one tries to reach politicians. The municipal commissioner who is working full time is easier to get hold of, and they often take part in the process. I think we could do this even better if we were able to establish this in a good way among the politicians. They are the decision-makers who are going to order it from the administration. It is in their interests. The initiative should come from the politicians, it ought to be of interest for them, seen both from a political and management point of view. In this way, they could ask questions and get information."

The quote above stresses the urgent need to target politicians as the ultimate purchasers of eDemocracy applications. The SCPL presents a picture where the administrative managers in the municipality often play the role as intermediaries or even obligatory passage points in the process. This reveals that the role of politicians as the ultimate purchasers of eDemocracy systems is unclear, envisioned as they are as the ones who should decide in these matters, a decision which in reality is often delegated to the municipal officers.

There are some issues crystallised in the dilemmas presented above, which are worth singling out for further discussion. Political aims/values/strivings/ideals are intertwined with software development - it is not just a matter of "pure" technical development. An application is embedded in what already exists and which also embeds ideals, norms and behaviour, which in turn help to form our understanding of what already exists. An eDemocracy tool could simultaneously be comprehended as a sealed package and as a dynamic and changeable process, depending on which democracy model one refers to. This raises the question of whether this accessibility layer also should include access to production processes, rather than access to sealed packages.

The issue of supporting the interplay of discussion by providing a certain kind of software could clash with the needs of weighing and profiling the local needs in a customisation process. If only one kind of software tool is presented to the citizens, there is also the problem of how to handle multiple uses and differentiation in use. Another dimension is whether the promotion of certain kinds of dialogue, described by the SCPL as preparing for a "more durable discussion", is steered by the availability of web based components, rather than the local needs of eDemocracy. Is this also a political issue and, if so, also a clear example of an attempt to steer and normalise eParticipation? Since the politicians have in reality abdicated from their role as purchasers of democracy-tools, then more power to form eDemocracy is delegated to the software firms and the uniform applications, which thus play a crucial role in the standardisation of eParticipation.

5.3.2 A residual category of the Komindu-project

The *Komindu*-project included several activities and partners, of which one did not render as much publicity as the *Vision Ronneby* part. The *Citizens' On-line Public Services* (*COP-Services*) was an initiative aimed towards establishing a combined virtual and physical municipal help desk backed by employees working in the reception of the city hall as well as people from the municipal libraries and the information office.

In the planning phase of the Komindu-project, the aim was presented as two-fold; to develop online consulting concerning the comprehensive planning process and to set up a Citizens' Online Public Services (COP-Services) portal. The second part soon became what could be called a residual category of the Komindu-project. This was not because it was ignored; rather it was due to lack of understanding concerning how the two parts were related, as well as a lack of time and resources and project managerial priorities. Phrases such as: "...and then we have the COP-services, too", or "...has anyone thought about how to include the COP-services?" soon became frequent. Another example of disregard was that the COP-services were accidentally forgotten when a public event concerning the project was discussed and planned. This mistake was pointed out by the MPL, and adjusted in time for the public meeting. Neither did the representatives of the COP-services take part in general project meetings very frequently, due to problems with staffing, which seemed to be impossible to solve. After a while I was the only researcher left who showed active interest in this particular part of the development, and it soon became obvious that this residual category exposed a lot of interesting facets concerning additional democratic aspects, such as the relation between technological development and workplace democracy. The aspects of the local situating and tailoring of software stood out as even more important when considering the layer of making software tools available. In short, the software tools were not to be seen as something that were developed at one site and used in another; use and design were inevitably intertwined, and this has of course consequences for how eParticipation could finally be apprehended.

Firstly, it raised questions concerning the relationship between participation and service development, other than those questions that are normally highlighted in debates concerning the development of so called consumer democracy or service democracy. This is a form of democracy characterised by an output-oriented public-service provision, addressing citizens as customers, which is formed as a top-down model (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998, Hacker & van Dijk 2000). Service design or tailoring of software in this particular context also reveals the need to apprehend democratic development as a process of change. Software tools are not ready-made entities and neither is eDemocracy to be seen as a ready-made tool for enhancing formal democracy. Rather, democracy has to be understood as an interactive practice, in the same way as use also is a kind of interactive practice.

Secondly, it is interesting to explore whether this intentional or unintentional oversight of parts of the project had consequences for the legitimisation processes and the knowledge-production on the whole, concerning the Komindu-project. These issues become interesting when focusing upon distinctions such as whether the whole project put most effort into creating a web tool for consultation processes in general (as stated in the objectives of the project) or if the primary aim was to develop a situated tool for a specific purpose, namely spatial planning. Those different aims were not elucidated during the project, but came up during the interviews. The separate processes in some sense collided and in other ways were inseparable.

One of the researchers involved in the Komindu-project[81] made a compilation of the varying research interests, as presented at the beginning of the project by the multi-disciplinary team of researchers who took part in the project. This is presented in the table below (table 5:1). This picture of interests changed during the project. When comparing the intentions with how the action-oriented involvement and actual presence of researchers during field studies actually turned out, this effect became obvious. However, I must stress that activities belonging to politics, such as gaining legitimisation for planned actions, or informal, invisible co-operation or settling of agreements, along with the endless row of administrative procedures which are of course a natural part of a project, are not illustrated in the table:

[81] Permission given by Jeff Winter to use the table as empirical data.

	Research interests	*Information office*	*Spatial planning office*	*COP-Service*	*Soft-ware comp.*	*Politicians*	Citizens
R1	The planning process and organisational integration Citizens' participation		**x / o**		**(x) (o)**	**x / o**	**x / o**
R2	Co-operation between technology, politics and organisations	**x / o**	**x / o**	**x**	**x / o**	**x / o**	
R3	Citizens' participation	**o**	**(x) / o**	**x / o**	**o**	**x /o**	**x / o**
R4	PD och agile services		**(x) o**	**(x)**	**x / o**		
R5	Technology-and organisational integration	**o**	**x / o**	**(x) / (o)**			
R6	COP-Services			**x**			
R7	Technology, digital divide					**(x)**	**(x)**

Table 5:2 Overview of research representation in project meetings and practical activities. The letter (x) symbolises planned participation while (o) represents actual outcome.

The result of the deviations from expected interests and participation, and the direct representation of researchers in actual project activities such as mock-ups, project meetings, interviews and workshops, shows a heavy concentration on one side of the project: the spatial planning section. This part of the project fortified its position as "number one priority" during the progress of the developmental project. The spatial planning aspects stood out as especially important and significant for the project, sometimes also at expense of the COP-services. The Information Office gained more and more importance during the project process, partly because they were well represented in the project management, where they took the function as obligatory passage point. No, or marginal, research interest was shown in certain aspects, such as digital divide and politicians' and citizens' participation, and were not covered at all. The researchers' plans regarding direct participation were not consciously abandoned during the course of action. Their participation was simply adjusted due to contextual circumstances such as lack of time, decreasing or increasing focus upon various themes, due to shifting interests for the conducted research among the practitioners, practical problems of co-ordination of several research perspectives, and existing and changing power relations (i.e. the COP-Services gained more interest and legitimacy during the process of work). The senior

researchers were extensively caught up in the turmoil of every-day negotiations for reaching legitimacy and resource allocation. This also went on at different levels during the project, concretely exemplified as informal negotiations, and research and project management, as well as administrative work. However, in a democracy-oriented project like this, ultimately aimed at evolving democratic participation, the issue of direct participation seems crucial to the success of the whole project, not least for sustaining trust and co-operation among the participating partners. A crucial outcome of these circumstances was that the COP-services were given less development time and less attention in the overall project.

Similar illustrations of the practitioners', politicians' and citizens' representation in the project would have shown divergent pictures, depending on motivation and reasons for taking part. The picture of the practitioners' participation would have been extensive, since taking part in the project was part of their work tasks or their responsibilities as project managers. According to them, other aspects such as seeing the project as an opportunity for in-house training also played a significant role for their participation. In the beginning, the politicians showed their sincere interest in the project by giving it the green light in the municipal decision-making bodies, but they were not represented in the project management group. Their primary argument for dropping direct representation in the project was lack of time.

A diagram showing the citizens' participation would have shown another pattern, namely that their intended participation was not quite articulated from the beginning, since they were not invited to take part as representatives in managing and running the project. They were instead targets for the project, and participated indirectly through mediating tools such as web forums, focus group interviews and/or as participants in evaluation of the project results.

These experiences illustrate the interdependency between how the managerial choices played a significant role in the co-construction of a marginalisation of a certain part of a project. At the same time, the act of exclusion also constructed the choices made and the final results of the project. All these aspects contributed to the successive construction of the invisible parts of the act of marginalisation, and as such to the stabilisation of already existing power relations among the local authorities, which stated that certain organisations were considered more important than other. As researchers, we also contributed to this confirmation of an already established order, by changing our participation in the project in line with what seemed to be the norm, during the duration of the project.

5.4 Fourth layer - content and services

The fourth layer of the Rainbow Model describes content of services; in short, the information and communication services that people find useful. It could be exemplified by the content of databases, government information, civic and local events and political processes or, related to my empirical data, the planning process within, for instance, the Komindu-project. It could also be described as the publications on the web produced by the women in the writing groups within the frames of the DIALOGUE-project. An exemplification of this point may be how people experienced the boxes of facts presented on the Vision Ronneby site as more valuable than the debate forums provided for discussions and deliberation; and to the people who took part in the focus-group interviews, the possibility to pose questions to the COP-Services seemed more appealing than having the possibility to participate in the actual revision of the comprehensive plan and give their opinions in the provided debate forums. In other words the test-groups experienced the content and services differently, compared to what the

municipality and the software company expected. This could be explained as a result of the conflict between the visionary goals of communicating the comprehensive planning process on the web site as still being open and in progress, and the practical, operational need of presenting the comprehensive plan on the web site as a product.

5.4.1 The problem of illustrating ongoing changes

During a video conference[82] conducted within the *Komindu*-project, involving participants from the municipality's information offices and City Planning office, researchers, the project leader from the software company (SCPL) and the municipal project leader (MPL), the issue of interactivity was highlighted several times. In one sense, the discussion circled around two fixed points, that could be described as *interactivity understood as an open process* or *interactivity as a product*. The video conference was a follow-up to a couple of mock-up sessions which had been conducted with the project members (involving people from the software company, civil servants from the municipal information office and the office of city planning, as well as researchers). The discussion was supposed to concentrate on the structure and content of the planned web site for comprehensive planning, as well as interactivity. Two different paper prototypes, produced by the civil servants during a mock-up session, were also used in the discussion. Interactivity was supposed to be interwoven on all the web pages and was in the discussion understood merely as "debate forums"; that is as separate categories or spaces within the presented material. The content on the web site was specified as maps (all in digital form), text, pictures, and debate forums.

Previously, during another project meeting, there had been discussions about the appearance of the web site, and whether the site should give an impression of "being under construction" in order to illustrate that the spatial plan still was in preparation, or if the site should be presented as a product, more of a "tourist brochure". One concrete example was discussions on how to support questions and opinions by the use of graphical presentations and visualisation. One example was to describe information and other content in the form of maps where the citizens were given the possibility to rearrange objects on the map, for instance in order to visualise where they geographically wanted to place a camping ground. One advantage described for this solution was to support those who wanted to present proposals even if they did not want to or were not able to describe their opinions in text. A navigation function was also suggested on the maps, enabling orientation for where different services and landmarks were placed geographically.

Another concrete example presented in the discussion was the possibility to publish aerial photographs where the proposed changes could be sketched and visualised as different layers on top of the photography. One of the municipal officers confirmed that there were aerial photographs available but he pointed out that the task seemed "too complicated to accomplish". The project leader from the software company asked:

> *SCPL: "Is this your intention, to illustrate changes on the web site, is this supposed to be the main focus? And if so, how is this to be done?*
> *One of the municipal officers answered:*
> *CS1: "We have some thoughts about how the area should change."*

The area he had in mind was "The Wedge" an inner city area close to the railway station.

[82] Arranged and conducted during P6/030428

The software company project leader continues:

> *SCPL: "Let us say that the area is presented in nine groups mirroring the different changes. How should we form these - as text with illustrations? Both? Should there be information in combination with pictures and/or a map? Should we make it "journalist-style"? And sort it into bigger groups: The Wedge area, the Villages and the Walk-and-bike-city"?*
> *CS2: XX[83][name of a civil servant] wants to lift forward the Walk-and-bike-city, it is a transverse theme in the material which corresponds with the municipal policy. [They were referring to a health-promoting campaign which was supposed to involve the municipality as a whole.]*

The software company project leader pointed out that he urgently needed qualified material such as pictures and texts, in order to get the work done. He suggested that they focus on nine areas of change. The MPL and the civil servants confirmed that some of the material was already available while the rest was "in progress". The MPL gave the information that an advertising agency was supposed to summarise the spatial plan into comprehensive focus areas and formulate invitations to the debates. The discussion went back and forth, and touched upon issues such as; how to give form to change and communication? The format of "questions and answers" was not considered enough, the aim was rather to find ways to inspire people to really deliberate several opinions.

> *CS2: Are the main issues for the area enough in order to get a discussion going? [meaning The Wedge area]*
> *SCPL: No, but they are enough to formulate topics around, it really doesn't matter for us, the important thing is to get the discussion going and get hold of the good opinions. It could be both specific and more general questions, but how are we supposed to describe changes, are the descriptions supposed to be presented through sketches and maps or aerial photographs?*
> *Should we choose both or place them on top of each other? We need to choose a style, here. Give me some examples of how you want to illustrate change. It is a bit diffuse here, we have to start building a web page; should it be maps, sketches or photographs?*

The discussion continued about how to proceed, and the idea of sketching new bridges or "paint a nice road" (as one of the municipal officers posed it) directly on aerial photographs was presented as a possibility. For a brief moment there seemed to be some sort of agreement on how to proceed. SCPL asked if it was possible to order an aerial photograph with high resolution.

> *MPL: We have to come to a decision, and it seems like the main track here is to proceed from aerial photographs with added sketches. I find it hard to get stuck on that, it could be one plan or one of several alternatives. Do we need to think differently for other focused areas? Is it possible to have different graphical styles for different areas? The first solution is not possible for The Villages since we have no aerial photographs for these areas. Is it possible to choose other ways to present the material?*

[83] Used instead of a name in order to keep anonymity of the informants.

The municipal officers explained that the maps were not sufficient either; they were already weak spots on the old web and had not been modified or even produced yet, so if it was possible to choose different styles for different focus areas, that would have been the best solution. One argument was that the focus area called The Villages was too big to develop further. Another viewpoint was that the maps were not fundamental in the material about the villages; their function was more like illustrations for a text.

Van Dijk (2000) asserts that interactivity is a misused and vague concept, and defines several levels of interactivity. There is the elementary level; feedback launching is an example of a two-way process. Interactivity in a more narrow sense could be understood as a chain of action and reactions implying message independence. Finally there is the level of reciprocity, as an exchange and mutual understanding of interacting partners and the relevant social contexts. In his analysis, two-way communication represents the spatial dimension; synchronous communication is about the time dimension. Another dimension is control over communication, described as the possibility for role exchange between senders and receivers, and finally the contextual and mental dimension, which is about the intelligence of contexts and shared understanding (van Dijk, 2000: 47). The empirical experiences from the discussion above show that it is far from self-evident that this ideal rationality will occur, and also stresses the question; how is it possible to reach this ideal in an electronic context?

The project leader from the software company was a bit worried about the lack of clarity about the interactive elements for the Vision site, which he expressed during a follow-up interview after the video conference session:

> *SCPL: I keep on asking what they really want to know from the municipality and if there is something special that the citizens really want to know about, but it is floating away...I think it is interesting to focus upon that. Are there any concrete issues? Shall we do this or that? What do you think is the principal direction? If we do it like this, what is your opinion of that?'/.../ Now we are in the position that we do not quite know what people are supposed to do there. [On the web site] What draws people to this web site, what are they supposed to do there? Are they only supposed to read the information about the spatial plan, think about it, and then submit a comment - if they have any? It feels too vague. I would like to have something that is more distinct, like: This and that...this is what we want to ask you about and here are the questions ...like in some sort of opinion poll or at least make the issues much clearer. For example: Should we merge the city centre with the peripheral areas in the municipality, make questions like that explicit. The SWOT-analysis is a good thing, a couple of good things came up during the video conference. There are actually some things to build on for the moment./---/ If they just want to publish the spatial plan for information purposes, without thinking through the issues...Then they have to go back to themselves as citizens and ask: OK, what would attract me to [name of another municipality]? It has to be something rather concrete that I can react to in order to prioritise and go there."*[84]

[84] P6/030507

During an interview with the software project leader he stressed the issue of citizens' participation seen from a citizen perspective and made comparisons to other development projects that the company had been with:

> *SCPL: We are still in some sort of piloting phase/.../it feels frustrating sometimes. /.../This project [meaning the Komindu-project] has to be more thoroughly dealt with and the other ones are more apparent and systematised. I have done several projects on the e-democracy track, based solely on our system-solution, where we have presented a concrete solution, and wrapped up the project in a couple of days. And then the service is running. That is of course our aim, to build in the logic in the system so one does not have to think about what the headlines on the buttons should be. They do not have to be involved in a development project if they don't want to. The functions are ready-made...In Ronneby it is more of development so we really can't compare the two of them.*

5.4.2 Upholding inequality in power-relations

The excerpt from the discussions reveals that power relations could also influence the content of services, and which organisations, departments and interest-groups should have the possibility to provide the content. This raises issues of whether exclusions are constructed in discussions concerning the creation of layer four. This underlines that influence on procedures is asked for in all layers, and forms part of far-reaching demands on co-determination.

The fourth layer also becomes a part of a political process, since the content is influenced by taking into consideration what the people involved imagine could be "politically sensitive", and what is or is not suitable. The need to be able to interact meaningfully with others is strongly envisioned here and the need for useful, reliable information is emphasised, which in turn favours a one-way view of communication. This highlights how the web forum becomes a way of activating citizens rather than using it as a space for dialogue and interaction. Another issue is how it is possible to prevent eDemocracy from being apprehended as another implementation of a service on a website instead of situated development on site.

A clash between the conscious or unconscious choices of reproducing, and the need to shape, becomes obvious in the discussion. The presentation of the comprehensive plan on the web seems to be considered as separated from the formal consultation process concerning comprehensive planning, which implied a more direct involvement of citizens. The web format is envisioned to open up for a broad engagement from groups that do not normally participate in the consultations. However, since the web does not imply a duty to take part as compared to a formal remittance procedure, this may very well not be the case. The formal process guarantees a broad participation built on an interest for the topic, while the web consultation could be steered by other motives such as availability, curiosity and by chance.

5. 5 The fifth layer - service and access provision

The fifth layer in the Rainbow-model supplements the aspects of developing service content with a focus upon those organisations and other types of actors that is supposed to provide citizens with network services and places for public access. This could be exemplified by authorities such as schools and libraries, but also by community networks and other private

suppliers. Another example is the municipal officers who took place in this discussion about interactivity on the *Vision Ronneby* site during the *Komindu*-project.

5.5.1 An interactive feature or an obstacle to participation?

During the design and customisation process of the Vision-site within the Komindu-project, a specific discussion was initiated at a project-meeting concerning how to develop the interactive features on the site. The municipal officers introduced the SWOT-analysis as an example of how to run a discussion in real life. The suggestion to make a virtual SWOT-analysis came up early in the design discussion as a solution which could help to reach a higher degree of interactivity on the site. A SWOT-analysis is originally a way to chart strategy, development and potential risks and is a technique used primarily for initiating a discussion among different stakeholders at a meeting. The letters SWOT are an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. The SWOT analysis is essentially a brainstorming technique (Porter, 1985, Bödker, Kensing and Simonsen, 2004) and a way to structure and overview input in a multi-stakeholder discussion. Strengths and weaknesses are intended to describe the structural conditions or internal capacity for a group's ability to carry out change and development. Opportunities and threats are other aspects of importance in the description of changeability.

The SWOT-analysis method had been used previously in the municipality, during traditional consultations and face to face meetings, in discussions with groups of citizens, in connection with the formal process of spatial planning. The objectives for using the technique then was to order and structure the discussions, and this was also one of the motives for reproducing the technique on the web, besides raising the degree of interactivity. Several issues were raised during the design discussions, including the following: how to relate debate forums to a SWOT-analysis? This is an interesting point which could be interpreted and understood in a number of ways. Did it indicate that traditional debate forums were seen as separate spaces for communication? Was the SWOT-analysis interpreted as being equal to dialogue and therefore one sort of channel for discussion among several alternatives?

Other issues discussed were if the focus of the SWOT-analysis should be, for instance, comparison of local Villages or if the discussion should be free? This spurred discussion on how to facilitate this kind of discussion online, if instructions were needed and how they should be formulated? Someone asked what the issues were and if they should be visualised by examples of results from earlier SWOT-analysis. Should the individual answers be made public? Should it be possible to edit other people's contributions and present revised versions? Should the SWOT-analysis be filtered by the municipal officers? These were some of the details which had to be extensively discussed during the design meeting. One of the civil servants commented:

> *CS3: Do your own SWOT-analysis - what would come out of that? If people in the Villages do that by themselves?*

This comment was clearly taken as a humorous remark by all participants, but it did still bring up a crucial aspect; the possible shift of initiative-taking and agenda-setting that this interactive feature could imply. Other participants in the meeting declared that several published SWOT-analyses would probably create discussions among people, if they only were given the possibility to read each others' contributions. Other stated that, based on

experience of the misuse of debate forums in earlier projects, it was necessary to formulate restrictions concerning the dialogue. This led to another important issue: should just anyone be allowed to do a SWOT-analysis? Could for instance people from the neighbouring villages do a SWOT-analysis about the village next to them?

The participants in the design-group came up with more suggestions in the same direction as the SWOT-analysis. Some of them were in line with a local health-theme which was supposed to be presented in the municipality as part of a municipal profile emphasising exercise and healthy living in general. Could it for instance be possible to publish an interactive "test-your-bike-quiz"? Online web cameras presenting pictures from cycle paths? Could the "Walk-and-bike-city" be presented in alternative and inspiring ways? Were there perhaps other themes in the material which could be related to the suggested ones, i.e. health-aspects and public transportation? Those issues were not taken any further and were not included in the final solution, even though they were creative enough; they did not gain importance when the suggestions were weighed together. The SWOT-analysis was implemented on the site.

The interpretation of change was picked up several times in the discussions within the design-group. The following excerpt from the discussion reveals diversity in both understanding and interpretation of representation and interactivity:

> *CS3: The starting-point is the comprehensive plan; we can't discuss change if it is not presented in the planning-document. This is the basis for future decisions, which in turn leads to new decisions, new statements of remittance...and so on.*
>
> *MPL: Yes, that is how we see things, but the individual citizen may not bother about the comprehensive plan. There is a danger that the Villages are comprehended as an obscure area compared to a dynamic, progressive area. It could add fuel to the debate about "city versus country areas", when the goal for the whole municipality is to maintain services...*
>
> *R1: How much should one leave to the citizens' interpretation?*
>
> *CS1: There are a number of policies written about that, but I consider that too much...as belonging to an extended course.*
>
> *R1: Is it possible to present evaluations, different conclusions? Contrasting interpretations of the material?*
>
> *MPL: But how will the individual citizen apprehend the fact that we provide some people with special opportunities and critical space to have their say? Let us say, there are 12 people who say "close the countryside" and thousands against it...*
>
> *R 1: How is it then possible to work with controversial issues?*
>
> *R2: Could it not be valuable for a citizen to see the divergence of perspectives? It is not primarily for the purpose of presenting the full range of the issues concerning a particular subject, it is more about visualising in what way perspectives may differ...*

R2: It is about creating added value [to the process of comprehensive planning] when using the web, not just reproduce the comprehensive plan in digitised form...we have tried to stress that in our discussions earlier.

CS3: And it is also a question of debate, if we create opportunities for debate it may inspire people to read the comprehensive plan in a different way.

MPL: Some voices, or interviews, can of course invite communication and that type of interaction, but what has to be tested is discussions between several people, not just two people; even if there is no dialogue in an actual sense, the citizens could decide on other opinions and be provoked.

R1: The web could also bring up those issues that are not presented in the spatial plan, not just the good intentions...

CS2: It's a good idea, there could be rather simple interviews with some people who have read the text with their "own glasses on" and it is not necessary to make a summary of the whole spatial plan, it could be like comments such as "this is my opinion", a municipal commissioner, a professor, a young mother, a fisherman or anyone...it could be interesting to get these different...I think it has to do with the part of creating debate, it does not really have anything to do with the actual comprehensive plan and the presentation of it...

CS3: If you can read other opinions, it might spur an interest, if we fit these interviews into the material, maybe it would get people interested in logging on and having a look, and read it in another way?

R1: Then it is possible to get the feeling we have talked about, that it feels best when there are several people discussing and not "me talking to myself", instead people would have the feeling of sharing and participating in a discussion, maybe not in real-time, but still...

This excerpt from the discussion brings several dimensions of representation to the surface. First there is the issue of who shall have the precedence of interpretation, not only when it comes to presenting their opinions, but also their views on change and reproduction of already established ways of working.

Even though the politicians were not directly represented in this particular discussion, they were indirectly given space, since the civil servants were quite aware of the controversial political issues (one example of this is the divide between city/country areas, and to what degree there was political permission to present conflicting arguments concerning maintenance of services). Those issues had to be handled with care, in order to avoid adding too much fuel to the ongoing local political debates.

The idea of a multitude of voices on the web site is both accepted and rejected in the discussion. Accepted, when it comes to the issue of testing discussions where several people attend (polyphonic discussions) and not just two persons (two-way communication) - not necessarily in a dialogue with each other, more in line with the political debating culture of convincing someone about what is the "the right opinion" and perhaps making them change their minds. It was rejected, when it comes to the issue of providing differing and contesting

opinions. In a sense this clarifies that there is some sort of consensus about "the right opinion", even in this group of participating practitioners and researchers.

One of the politicians, also a member of the political steering group for the comprehensive planning process, raised the participatory aspects of the *Vision Ronneby* web site during a project meeting to which politicians were also invited. He was rather critical about the structuring around SWOT-analysis, since in his opinion this was too narrowly focused, and required from the citizens a pre-understanding of developmental processes as well as political processes. He also stressed that one of the shortcomings of the whole project was that it was emphasising: "*Communication in the wrong stages of the process*" and asked:

> *"How is it possible to integrate opinions when the product [referring to the comprehensive plan document] is almost finished*? /.../*In reality it has been no citizens participating in the discussions. Well, of course this has given them a possibility to react and have their say, but does it really affect the results? Or is it merely a play to the gallery*?"[85]

Another politician made the following comment about the decision to extend the traditional consultation period by opening up for individual citizens to present their opinion:

> *"We can't treat every separate contribution, what we want is to include the opinions in the whole process. This is a first throw-in in order to get a reaction, invite to discussion, and a way to put forward the strategic vision for 2010. This does not replace other forms of communication. It is one way of discussing, valuing opinions and to broaden the basic data.*"[86]

According to two civil servants who were involved in the project, the formal work on the spatial plan did not change because of the online consultation on the *Vision Ronneby* site. Their experience was that it mostly functioned as a separate project, which should have begun earlier in the planning process. They also thought that the software firm was steering the actual forming of the web site, and pointed out important aspects of providing content of interest to the public:

> *"We had wishes that were not implemented, for example the issue of direct feedback, a 'thank you for your opinion' to the citizens. It is a pity that they did not take this seriously, they said it was not technically possible to accomplish this. We told them about this the first time we saw the prototype, before the summer*." [87]

In a previously conducted interview concerning the development of the Komindu-project, the software company's project leader (SCPL) emphasised the need to envision participation on the web site from a citizen perspective, and not solely discuss or apprehend communication from a practical or political point of view. His comprehension of what was given prominence in the discussion adds an additional dimension to how the play of communication and decision-making unfolded during the project:

[85] Public meeting during P6/041208
[86] Interview with Politician B, P6/041016
[87] Group interview with two civil servants, P6/041123

> *"Feedback on what happens with my proposals and questions is really important. When you publish on this web site you have to know, as a citizen, how the material is going to be used and what will happen to it. If I as a citizen submit a proposal, I have to know if it counts or not. That is a thing that has been pushed aside in our discussions, which I find very important. You must know if something you say matters or if it is something that is done in order to show off. I think that this is something that is difficult to leave aside. Do they really want to communicate? I think that this is something you grasp very quickly as a citizen when you enter the web site and want to do something. Are they really interested in hearing the voice of the citizen?"*

The differing statements and interpretations by the SCPL and the staff members, about the importance of giving feedback to citizens, show that not all requirements and wishes were clearly defined or apprehended during the sessions. This breakdown in communication could be explained in several ways. The focus remained mainly on the areas which also were of interest to the politicians, and there was not considered to be enough time within the time frame of the project to develop themes which were suggested by the citizens.

> *"We thought that these were important focus areas. And compared to the traditional way, with information meetings and dissemination of material, we got more individual opinions, which was not the case earlier. During the local meetings in the municipality there were mostly elderly people attending, we did not reach the young people. I think this media could attract them, both the content and the appearance, asking how do you want it to be in the future? How could we make it "new"? Give us your visions and more alternatives."*

There were also discussions during several meetings about the issue of "*shifting focus areas"*. The exposure of the *Walk-and-bike-city*, *The Villages* and the renewal of the city-block *The Wedge* were good as a start, but according to the discussion, the possibility to change the focus was a way to give a feeling of constant change, which was considered essential for the experience of interactivity. On the whole the municipal officers had expected more of the public debate on the web site, and they were both actively promoting the debate in schools and in other ways: "*one has to constantly push the use*", as one of them expressed it. In the interview they reflected on whether this depended mostly on the medium or the content. They emphasised the opinion that there should have been more focus on change in the plan and that there should have been a variety of reflections and interpretations presented on the web site, which they thought lacked "*real people giving opinions*".

When I asked them how they experienced the mock-up sessions which were part of the early suggestions for the design of the *Vision Ronneby* site, they gave the following answer:

> *"We thought it mostly functioned as a space for sketching and we really wanted the "digital plasma screen!"*

The plasma screen they referred to was a digital screen board, which had been used in other projects at the university. This option was discussed early in the project meetings as a possibility to bring in more playfulness in the planning and preparation of the web sites. This was not possible to accomplish during the project, but is certainly an option of potential for future planning work at the department. Instead of answering this need for playfulness they constantly experienced that the planning material had to be "dressed up" and tailored to the

medium, rather than the other way around, which ought to be the case in order to fulfil different needs. There was little room for spontaneity and since several people were involved in the production of the web sites, they sometimes had the feeling of functioning more like a "manufacturing department" rather than taking part in teamwork:

> "*There was always this 'technical brake' coming in between, and this constant question; how to solve this technically? We experienced it as a real obstacle, adding to the complexity of the task.*"

Their overall experience was that it was fun to contribute to the project, and that the presentation of the comprehensive plan became different and felt more professional, but the main issue was still not solved: "*Is this more of partial description of consequences rather than a vision for 2010*?"

5.5.2 Multiple participation on several levels

During a focus group interview, where citizens, municipal officers and researchers discussed and evaluated the prototype of the Vision Ronneby Site before launching, the SWOT-analysis was introduced. As one can read from this excerpt of the discussion there is uncertainty among the citizens about what a SWOT-analysis really is, and the combination of several ways of submitting opinions also creates confusion.

> *AE: Does everyone know what a SWOT-analysis is?*
> *(Several seem uncertain)*
> *Citizen 1: What is it? A SWOT?*
> *AE: Well, SWOT is an abbreviation for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats...in this case a method for capturing what you think about your village.*
> *Citizen 2: Yes, right!*
> *AE: The idea then is to do such an evaluation...of the village. This is only available on the pages about the villages.*
> *Citizen 3: I don't know about this SWOT-analysis, but I think the different factors measured are just Strengths, Weaknesses, Possibilities and Threats.*
> *Citizen 3: But if you really want to know that...maybe it should be formulated as a question instead?*
> *Citizen 4: What's good about that?*
> *Citizen 3: Why not translate it into questions, what's bad, what's good and so on...?*
> *CS1: Into questions?*
> *Citizen 3: It's just a thought...*
> *AE: Make it clear, so to speak? Addressing the citizens...so you feel as if they are addressing you as a citizen?*
> *Citizen 3: Yes.*
> *Citizen 5: I think this word, SWOT-analysis, it becomes...oh no, I can't do something like that! I think it is too...technical, to make people want to answer such simple questions.*

The discussion continues about several issues of functionality on the site and someone asks how the opinions finally will be taken care of by the officials and the politicians?

CS1: This is the place [demonstrating a form on the web site] were you can send opinions to the Office for City Planning...like a letter. Where the opinions will be treated...like other incoming opinions...
AE: But the opinions that are brought up in the SWOT-analysis, aren't they equal to this kind of opinions?
CS1: Well...
CS2: No, there is a difference.
CS1: No...they are not of the same importance...
R1: But it says so on the first site!
CS1: Is that right?
AE: Yes.
CS2: Yes, it says that all opinions will be taken into consideration, but they will not get a direct answer to the opinions they submit... in the SWOT-analysis, then. But if you write into the Office for City Planning about something...then you have the right to...get an answer.
Citizen 1: Is it registered?
CS2: Do you mean the [opinions in the] SWOT-analysis?
Citizen 1: No, these...
[the woman is referring to another form for writing opinions available on one of the other theme-sites]
CS1: These ones are equal to a letter...
Citizen 1: Then they should be registered.
CS2: Yes, they have the same value as a remittance letter that is sent into the Office of City Planning. Yes, they have.
Citizen 1: And then they are public too.
CS1: But the answers in the SWOT-analysis are not...?
Citizen 2: What is this then? Interactivity for the sake of appearances?
Citizen 3: Is this explained somewhere...?
CS2: Yes, it says so in...
Citizen 4: So this is treated as a public document then?
CS2: Yes it is.
Citizen 4: Well, I don't think it is made clear, you get the same feeling wherever you are on the site...you expose your e-mail, and your phone-number and name...
AE: You give that to the civil servant?
Citizen 4: Yes you do, but at the same time as the civil servant gets it, it is regarded as a public document. And it looks exactly the same as the other documents here where you are guaranteed anonymity, where you are protected.
AE: You mean this one? [pointing to the questionnaire that is addressed to the research activity of evaluating the website]
Citizen 4: Yes!
AE: You mean this one "Want to take part"?
Citizen 4: Yes, that's right.
AE: It is easy to mix up.
Citizen 4: These two sites look the same.
CS1: That is a point!

The discussion concerning introducing an already established technique (the SWOT-analysis) for structuring and steering input from the citizens concerning how they imagine their future villages, clearly shows how this mechanism for securing diversity of access works in the

opposite direction. What is imagined as playing a role as an inviting feature (the SWOT-analysis) actually obstructs rather than opens up for more interactivity, while other suggestions such as the interactive "test-your-bike" quiz is left outside the discussion.

The actor-network here consists of the municipal officers, the software project leader, the researchers, and the sketches of the web site. In the periphery there are also the citizens and the politicians. During the design discussion, the SWOT-analysis soon becomes established as an indispensable interactive feature, an obligatory passage point, gaining supremacy over other suggestions for how to increase interactivity. The symbolic function of the SWOT-analysis is given more prominence than the actual functionality, which is proven in the focus group meeting, which also includes the end-users of the site; i.e. the citizens. The device of interest is locked into place as a proper interpretation of how to stimulate interactivity, but is rejected in the real use situation, where the citizens find it impossible to relate to. The translation process suggested by the actor-network failed in this aspect to create a body of allied actors, since it did not manage to translate the citizens' interests in line with what the actor-network advocated as the proper way to promote interactivity. It was soon obvious that the citizens needed not only general skills on how to use interactive features; they also needed skills in evaluating and delivering different forms of opinions, and in discerning which level of opinion-sharing and engagement was asked for in the differing spaces for dialogue that were presented on the web site. The mechanism that was intended to open up and invite people to participate, closed for participation instead, since it required a certain level of both computer literacy and active citizen literacy from the participating citizens, who were supposed to submit their multi-leveled opinions through the website.

5.6 Sixth layer - literacy and social facilitation

Digital literacy and social facilitation is an important part of accessibility. Clement & Shade state that the introduction of new technology and learning how to use it is basically a social process combining both formal and informal ways of learning. The sixth category is intended to cover the skills required to fully grasp the potential of information and communication technology. This layer coincides to a large extent with the previously presented categories of service content and accessibility providers. Possibilities for facilitation and sufficient resources to arrange learning opportunities for citizens are fundamental for raising competence in computer literacy. These dimensions make up the sixth layer in the Access Rainbow Model. The providers of this could be exemplified as local experts in workplaces and neighbourhoods, training courses and so on. As stated in the model:

> *"ICT's are complex and still immature technologies requiring a range of skills to use effectively, especially when creating new content. Acquiring these skills is largely a social process involving a combination of formal and informal methods within the context of supportive learning environments. The means for acquiring networking skills need to be affordable, readily available, attuned to the learners varied life situations and sensitive to language, cultural and gender differences." (Clement & Shade, 2000:)*

The DIALOGUE-project and the establishment of the pre-incubator Flow Society could serve as practical examples of such facilitation, supplied by different stakeholders; in this case the municipality and a civic group. Librarians, teachers and other categories of municipal officers

(mostly information officers) were trained and appointed the task of acting as local experts or "ambassadors" for enhancing computer literacy (or in a wider sense, digital literacy) in line with the municipal 2003-strategy in Ronneby in the late 1990's. Digital literacy comprises a wider definition of the skills required for effective and worthwhile navigation not simply on the Internet but also in the information society as a whole. The municipality invested in ICT-studios in several accessible places, such as the public library, and the local citizens were given free access to Internet and were also allowed to use the computer equipment for free. The activities and the equipment have over the years been integrated in ordinary library services and further developed as citizens' public services. Over a period of about ten years, when the municipality was especially successful in gaining developmental money from the European Union and through establishing private/public partnerships with for instance local industry and other regional partners, citizens were given the opportunity to participate in a number of introductions to using computers and the Internet, held by librarians and other trainers.

In a project such as DIALOGUE, aiming to support and increase citizens' computer skills and general involvement in the founding of the information society, there were two parallel aspects which had to be stimulated simultaneously, both support for the empowerment of the individual and general involvement in society. If something was to happen on several levels at once, the training had to begin on a basic level, taking its starting point in the daily experiences of the participants. To be given the tools and the opportunity to acquire ICT- and information society skills did not seem enough; when the women came together, the need for co-operative activities was apparent. As project leaders we had to constantly fortify several simultaneous processes; the involved actors' motivation to express themselves had to be encouraged, as well as the general engagement and participation, along with the project process itself. In order to achieve development both in terms of increased empowerment and democratic reflections, we had to help to connect individual aspects of learning with learning by participation in a group, and connect this process to societal phenomena of relevance. Empowerment of the individual had to happen through and within the group. We did this by emphasising that the sessions had to be regarded as opportunities for mutual learning, and that we all (including the project leaders) were learning as a group and not solely as individuals.

5.6.1 Differences in interpretation

However, the activities of the *WWN-project* were in the beginning met with scepticism by the European partners. Our interpretation of democracy was as something which could go on in more informal places, not directly tied to formal political processes. During the project this issue of clashes between informal and formal politics was debated several times and was finally turned into an advantage of the project, emphasised as a possibility to experiment with different forms of stimulation of active citizenship and eDemocracy development. The English sub-projects concentrated their efforts more on relating their citizen activities to the formal democratic system, i.e. they directly related their activities and training sessions to local democracy, such as setting up citizen juries and running ICT- introductions in order to advance computer literacy. The sub-projects thus focused on different parts of the democratic system. One of the English participants made a critical reflection, concerning the realisation of their part of the project, on the common DIALOGUE list[88]:

[88] Message published on the European common e-mail list P2/990308

> *"I became very disillusioned over the DIALOGUE project and did not participate much. My reasons/excuses were: I often could not get to a computer when the live chats were on – and that seemed to be the most interesting bit. I really wasn't very interested in what the Council decided to consult us on. I felt that the council were not interested in my agenda - I even e-mailed the Leader in desperation but got no reply. I found the technology irritating - those long lists of addresses which I often clicked on by mistake with even more annoying consequences."*

A British local project leader answered the disappointed participant:

> *"Sorry you found the project so annoying. As we said at the beginning we relied very much on you to be active participants and help us to develop the project in the way you wanted. We did ask at a live meeting in October what topics people wanted to be consulted on and chose 2 of the ones that came up - education and community safety. It's not necessary for discussions to be our agenda but it does help for us to consult on an area where we are making decisions because then we can try to do something positive with the results. Please let me know what topics you want to discuss we can try to include these in future discussions. Maybe things will get better in the next stage."*

The following conversation concerning the local project in Lewisham[89] took place between two of the participants (P1) and (P2) and one of the local project leaders (LPL):

> *LPL: Can you let me know who has not been able to log on - as far as I know nobody had problems accessing the DIALOGUE site in Lewisham with the passwords they were allocated.*
> *P2: I had similar problems on one occasion on the Lewisham site and was then iven a new password.*
> *LPL: If you were talking about the European DIALOGUE site then we didn't give people a password for this.*
> *P2: So I couldn't get in to contribute and I was even blocked from using the link there back to Lewisham.*
> *LPL: As you know the timetable meant that we were very pushed to get our own activities up and running. I think we did encourage communication as much as we could between DIALOGUE participants in Lewisham and making links with our partners. Accessing the European DIALOGUE web site has come out of this communication which is great. We can't think of everything upfront on a very new project like this - sometimes things just evolve.*
> *P2: I know how difficult it can be to iron out all the problems but it is frustrating if one is trivially prevented from communicating on a project that is all about communication.*

Among the project members in the various local projects running in the three involved countries, there had been also been complaints about insufficient dialogue. At first this was felt to be a problem between the project leaders, but this resulted in discussions about what

[89] The conversation took place on the common e-mail list P2/ 990304

should or should not be public on the main European DIALOGUE project site, and whether or not the common list also ought to include the citizens who were participating in the various sub-projects. Opinions differed among the different countries, but several mails from local participants in the English groups suddenly appeared on the common list, and we (the local Swedish sub-project leaders) forwarded those mails to the women in the WWN-groups, since they had expressed interest in communication with the citizens form other countries. A woman from the WWN-group (Swede) was a bit annoyed about the lack of communication and answered one of the English participants in the following way:

> (*Swede): "Hello! I just learnt from one of the members in your 'group' that you miss responses from Ronneby and Bologna. I must admit that I don't know what to reply to! We haven't got any questions from you and I can't reply to the correspondence you have internally (is that the correct word? I mean emails within your 'group'). Furthermore I must tell you that on the whole I know very little about your part in the DIALOGUE project. That might be the explanation why you haven't heard anything from me (us). Anyhow, I'm happy to get your mails giving me an opportunity to read something in English! So thank you very much! Looking forward to getting more emails from you! I would appreciate if you tell me a little about yourself and the project, too! Kindest regards (from Sweden)!* [90]
>
> *P1: Thanks for your response. Yes you are right about us in Lewisham corresponding internally but that is mainly because people in Ronneby and Bologna have not responded by email. Anyone who wants to is welcome to join in. The DIALOGUE project is an experimental way of involving local communities in decision making using information technology. Unfortunately the Lewisham part of the project has now ceased, presumably because the funding has run out. My role is purely that of a local citizen who is already familiar with the Internet and who would like to see a greater opportunity for democratic decision making and freedom of information. I know nothing at all about the involvement of Ronneby and Bologna. Are you part of a project or are you just individual Internet users?*
>
> *LPL: "It is really sad that there has been so little contact between our participants and the English people, the chat-sessions were very successful I think, and now we know, that they should have taken place earlier in the project."*
>
> *P2: Yes, but there were technical teething problems./.../ In some ways email is easier than chat as there is no time constraint, especially off-line. Ideally we should have an automatic mail list server that we could all contribute to and I am presently standing in for one.*

The previous quote from an e-mail dialogue between project members describes the difficulties in coordinating a European project, but also how local restrictions to accessibility become an obstacle to communication and participation. This was also one of the critical comments made by the European Commission's annual review of the project that: "the

[90] This conversation took place on DIALOGUE e-mail list on 990224. The copy she refers to is that all mails were distributed to all members on the list.

activities of the project seemed to occur in isolation and that there was insufficient integration applied in order that the contracted parties could share experience and develop and disseminate best practice."[91]

The isolation experienced between the projects occurred in some sense because of differences in interpretation concerning how broad participation should be defined. The goal of applying a broad, inclusive view covering all involved parties, featuring peripheral and informal aspects of corresponding democratic values and encouraging active citizenship as separate activities, not directly tied to formal procedures, was pushed aside by a view consisting of the formal, institutional definitions of how communication between the participants should take place. In parts of the project, communication was envisioned as taking place as a top-down steered activity; others envisioned it as a horizontal event including all participants. Time constrains and language problems also created certain limits for sufficient integration to take place. However, in some aspects, the project tested how to situate projects locally, in varying contexts, although this in turn created difficulties of objective comparison. On the other hand, this was also a way to acknowledge a plurality of actions and actors, even if this was not fully carried through.

There were also apparent initiatives at promoting certain ways of participation rather than encouraging local creativity, and also obvious examples of internal exclusion within the project, which praised itself on having a particularly inclusive agenda, according to the project goals. The difficulties in ensuring internal project governance add to the complexity of facilitating computer literacy and social support, in line with recommendations in the sixth layer of the Rainbow-model. In conclusion; a project with technological inadequacy and internal lack of confidence when communicating and sharing democratic ideals, runs into problems when aspiring to facilitate others in developing democratic participation and enhancement of computer skills. Still, the project was nominated as one of the candidates for an award in the Bangemann Challenge competition in 1999.

5.7 The seventh layer-governance

The final layer within the described access model is labelled governance and I put forward the issue of democratic decision-making concerning the development and operation of societal matters (Clement & Shade, 2000: 37), i.e. through public consultation processes, research and social impact assessments, the introduction of new institutions and so on.

A general definition of governance is that it describes those networks, processes and practices through which citizens (or other non-informal participants) exercise control over the organisations to which they belong, or have influence over activities they are affected by. Patterns of governance are changing, with new mechanisms for accountability and participation being called for both by policy makers and citizens (Holford, John and van der Veen, Ruud , 2003:3). Governance consists for instance of processes of internal sense-making of political problems, public policy-making and deliberation processes, also including the evaluation and regulation of these processes (Perri 6, 2004:2).

The topmost of the rainbow-coloured layers emphasises public influence on the decisions which constitute both the development of the access infrastructure and how it is supposed to

[91] Peer review of P2 (IS97182) cited in a mail in the discussion list by project management.

be operated. The central challenge for governance is, according to Clement and Shade, to foster a democratic process that allows the stakeholders to become informed of the issues and participate equitably in choosing among alternatives. This reveals certain critical points such as: fair and equal participation and the presentation of several alternatives.

5.7.1 Symbolic consultations

In the context of the municipal development discussed in this thesis, several official strivings to arrange public consultations took place, as in the case with the *Komindu-project*. A follow-up activity on branding the municipality was arranged as a top-down consultation. Citizens were given the possibility to present what they thought was a proper slogan for the city, by answering: *"What's in your heart?"*. These instances of local examples of consultation processes, supported by technology, could be counted as part of governance procedures, in the sense that they could influence the development and operation of local politics and ultimately how the public authorities' activities are conducted. But this is only if those trials are taken seriously, and the dilemmas I will present here will clearly show the difficulties of ensuring these basic assumptions for governance, namely fair and equal participation and presentation of a variety of alternatives.

However, the consultations did not imply attempts to involve citizens in contributing to development of, for example, an eStrategy for the municipality. This could have been a radical activity aiming at achieving basic democratic governance in terms of opening up the decision-making process and distributing power. Instead of this, many of the activities concentrated on the activity of upholding symbolic eParticipation; in practice this was the case, when the consultations were not followed up by actions in line with what the resulting consultation suggested. I posed a question to a municipal employee, whether he thought that the municipality was ready to arrange eConsultations and citizen involvement concerning more politically controversial issues, such as public consultations concerning a politically suggested articulation of an eStrategy, but he was uncertain about that:

> *"If I have to answer it would more likely be a no instead of a yes./.../ The critical question is as always what shall be done on the administrational level compared to which role the politicians shall take and to what extent they shall push things to happen or at least sanction the activities. Concerning an eStrategy, the first speculation is about whether there will be one at all and if so, who decides that this will happen? /.../ a sleeping ICT-committee will be raised in order to discuss the issue. This discussion should also include who is given the responsibility for the strategy and in what way it should be conducted. The discussion will also touch upon internal processes and systems, even though the target group often is - but not always - located outside the municipal organisation. These are other aspects of e-government than the democratic aspects. Then the crucial issue becomes how to identify economic arguments supporting transformation rather than talking about improvement of net-based services which is more or less required by the public."* [92]

The inquiry *"What's in your heart?"* was presented on the web as part of a campaign aimed at investigating what kind of positive values the citizens ascribed an old slogan; *"Ronneby - at*

[92] MO 1, P7/ 050329.

the heart of the Garden of Sweden". Over the years, this slogan had been a leading theme in marketing activities concerning the municipality. The process of renewing the concept of the slogan was initiated by the working committee of the municipal executive board, and the information office was invited to take responsibility for profiling the municipality in line with the old slogan, but in a new way. The project was also regarded by the elected politicians as a way to concretise an official, overarching activity goal for local, municipal work between elections, namely to stimulate active citizenship.

The *Vision Ronneby site* was considered a suitable platform to expose this process, along with a campaign of replacing the old information boards placed along the entrance roads to the city. One of the involved public officers describes the process in the following way:

> *"In order to avoid a pie-throwing-debate we decided to inform about the background and initiative of replacing the old information boards on the web. We did that with the help of the platform Vision Ronneby, partly in reshaped form. In doing that we started a new process, which was not planned in detail or decided in preparation; it was more like taking care of certain ideas and concretising them. The background was the following: certain persons, schooled in public relations and profiling activities stated that the citizens view of and comprehension of the place should be included to a great extent when conducting visionary profiling activities. So the decision to reactivate the Vision Ronneby site and the O-system for this purpose was taken by the information unit of the municipality. And the web site we were supposed to use was adapted by the company, in line with our instructions. "*[93]

However, this activity did not imply further development or customisation of the O-system. The project developed in the direction of a consultation of citizens, including both offline and online activities, now in co-operation with a place-marketing company. The consultation was conducted in several steps. The people who took part in the initial focus groups were selected by the local officials involved in the project, together with a project group and a reference group. The selection was conducted based on recommendations from participants and the company put up some general guidelines reassuring that only few municipal employees should take part and that leading local politicians were banned in the representation. The continuing work was described in the following way by the public servant:

> *"On the web site there is a debate forum running and we have also offered opinion polls to the local public. The inquiry was based on thoughts that came up during the focus group interviews. About 450 answers came in during a period of two weeks. The inquiry was open to anyone. In addition we invited about 800 people to answer a similar inquiry. The group included decision-makers from public institutions, business and media. All got the message about the inquiry via e-mail and a web address to the inquiry, which no other people knew about. About 200 persons of the 800 who were asked filled in the form." (ibid.)*

The working committee of the municipal executive board sanctioned the project but raised concerns about the fact that there could be activities or ideas discussed in the consultation that the politicians would find impossible to support. Objections were also raised concerning the

[93] MO 1, P7/ 050329.

risk that the individual politicians who took part would present a biased opinion, which they were not allowed to do since they were elected representatives. There was also reluctance among several of them to actually take active part in the debate forums, according to the public servant, who also made the following reflection:

> "*They regard Vision Ronneby as a forum for the public to give their opinions about the current and future society, not a place where the politicians need to account for themselves and their opinions. Maybe this kind of discussion will take place later on in a future phase of the project. They are not yet ready for that, in their own opinion. At the same time they wanted us to notify them about direct questions that were posed, in order to facilitate action if necessary." (ibid.)*

In the debate forum comments were also made by the citizens asking why the politicians were absent from the debate. The public servant commented upon the lack of politicians in a direct answer in the debate forum:

> *"Why haven't local politicians been active in this debate forum, presenting their opinions, commenting on other opinions or discussing with each other? My guess is that the channel still feels a bit unfamiliar and strange for some of the politicians, though not for everyone. Several of the politicians are frequent Internet users. Some politicians probably see Vision Ronneby as a "listening ear" rather than a forum for debate, as with the comprehensive planning and the discussion about Future living. Maybe some of them are afraid that time will run out if they start to use the debate forum. One who says A has to proceed with B, and since many politicians are volunteer politicians they find it difficult to manage. We remind them about the existence of the debate forum, then it is up to them to participate or not."*

The municipal employee was in a way describing how the politicians expressed a need to conduct legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in the specific online communities of practice which were set up during the consultation. Room was not made for this activity, since the engaged citizens regarded the politicians more as recipients of their opinions than equal participants in a mutual learning situation.

In the new debate forum, where the profile and branding of the municipality were supposed to be discussed, several citizens took offence at the "absent politicians" in the debate. The head of the information office made a statement about the lack of politicians during the running debate:

> *"Why have local politicians not been active in this debate forum, presenting their opinions, commenting other opinions or discuss with each other? My guess is that the channel still feels a bit unfamiliar and strange for some of the politicians, but not for all of them. Several of the politicians are frequent Internet users. Some politicians probably comprehend the Vision Ronneby as a "listening ear" rather than a place for debate, as with the comprehensive planning and the discussion about future living. Maybe some of them are afraid that there won't be enough if they start to use the debate forum. One who says A has to carry on and say B, and since many politicians are volunteer politicians*

> *they find it difficult to manage. We remind them about the existence of the debate forum, then it is up to them to participate or not."*

He also pointed out that there had been a change in attitude among the politicians:

> "*In the debate forums running until 2002 comments from politicians were sporadic. I got the impression that the politicians felt estranged from this way of communicating./---/During the Election 2002 we made new efforts and we also held introductions for local politicians, and the debate forum was then used by quite a few over a period of two months. Both individuals and politicians made daily comments and commented on each others contributions. The statistics show that considerably more people informed themselves about the debate without contributing their own opinion.*"

The translation process concerning governance activities reveals also difficulties. The initiative o problematisation was symbolically handed over to the citizens who were invited to take part in the discussions and contribute to branding the municipality, since the symbolic eParticipation pushed aside the citizen's suggestions. The local press [94]described it as the responsive department was told to "do their homework again" since the politicians found it too vague. The head of the information office described in the article how they prepared and elaborated the proposal in consultations with varying focus groups and reference groups. They also carried out a public web dialogue and an opinion poll, all in line with democratic governance. The objective for this was to get a broad and unbiased discussion on the topic. He commented the backlash in the following way in the article:

> "*I guess it is rather uncommon to work in such a prejudiced way with this kind of municipal issues, but we decided to try a new method. But it was obviously too visionary and too much of new thinking*."

5.8 Across the rainbow: presenting the wholeness of a rainbow

This chapter started out by discussing the creation of mechanisms with the function of either opening up or delimiting participation. These mechanisms could be described as a structure or a set of structures, i.e. rules, inernet sites, PIM-terminals or web forums, or other kinds of places or frameworks enabling active participation. These mechanisms were constructed in different socio-technical layers, and these layers could be framed by the Access Rainbow model. The suggested layers in turn consisted of several variations of participation, exemplified by dilemmas experienced in different local cases which could be tied to the varying layers. The aim of this exercise was to account for the multiplicity of perspectives that exist simultaneously, within what at first sight might be apprehended as a uniform entity. Concretely, this could be illustrated through a consultation site such as the *Vision Ronneby* site, which on closer examination contains several layers of participation beneath what ultimately was displayed on the internet as a tool for eParticipation. This method of diffraction is in line with Haraway's and Arendt's appeal for the acknowledgement of multiplicity within singularity (Arendt, 1998, Haraway, 1996 and 2000, Mörtberg, 2003).

[94] Hinderson, in Sydöstran, "Backlash for a too visionary profiling"/ 051025

However, this exercise revealed that some aspects occur simultaneously on several stages of the accessibility model, in different cases. It also became obvious that some mechanisms required participation which crosses the layers, and that one kind of mechanism could function as a translation of other layers.

5.8.1 Criss-crossing the layers

The key themes which cross the suggested layers according to the Rainbow model could be summarised in the following way; *accessibility for eParticipation is something which has to be co-developed in local activities and the local process of situating accessibility is an interplay of informal and formal participation.* The first main point is:

- Demands for co-determination occurred in several layers

This is for instance exemplified by the case of the insubordinate landowner. Accessibility for him and his family became a highly physical and tangible problem that invaded their own private space. They experienced what Bourdieu would call a symbolic violence enacted towards them, manifested by a pile of cables in the garden or big lorries in the yard. They were in a sense caught in a catch-22 situation, experiencing how their choice of excluding themselves as providers of space for basic carriage facilities, forced them into a position where they were regarded as enemies of the public good.

The politicians also found themselves caught in another catch-22 situation, since they became the advocates of a private company's right to expand, by claiming public rights. They did this at the cost of denying someone co-determination on this basic level. The politicians' behaviour in this conflict could of course be excused by the argument that they, as elected by the people, were acting on behalf of the public interests and therefore had to disregard the landowner's private interests. However, this mixture of private and public interests in setting up the basis for accessibility blurred the picture of whose interests the carriage facilities actually were serving, which was a highly political issue. In this case, bringing forward the argument of "the public good" was questionable. The municipality also raised the issue of making room for future intended expansion of the physical infrastructure, in order to meet an expected increase of access in the village.

What do these negotiations raise to highlight the relation of formal and informal participation within the layer of basic carriage facilities? The notion "the public good" played a specific role in this translation process. It was expressed as an obligatory passage point in the process of establishing support for setting up carriage facilities. However it was soon obvious that this was not a closed notion, since it was reopened as an effect of the local discussions between the actors, and also turned out to include individual interests. "The public good" had to be renegotiated and represented also the co-determination of how the infrastructure should be set up. What at first place was experienced as the establishment of formal access was afterwards adjusted in the local negotiations through the landowner's informal participation. This happened when the actors were faced with the informal claims of co-determination in another socio-technical layer (layer one) than that which was previously determined (layer seven).

The establishment of the basic infrastructure (the broadband cables) counted on participation or consent from peripheral actors such as the insubordinate landowner. He in turn found other

allies, such as discussions with local politicians, in order to make his protest heard. His resistance could easily have been dismissed as an odd protest with no relevance at all. Instead, he was actively fighting to achieve co-determination in this issue, which ultimately triggered negotiations which changed the whole procedure of the installation of the cables. The insubordinate landowner was successful in his protest and managed to alter the whole translation process.

Criss-crossing the layers make it obvious that the seventh layer of the Rainbow access model, which describes governance, is pertinent in all of the layers. Co-determination of how the carriage facilities should be established was raised as important in the empirical examples, as was the need to co-operatively decide how the devices and software tools for eParticipation could be developed and customised, for instance in the Komindu-project.

However, governance looks different in all the differing layers, due to the translation processes described. Concerning the PIM-terminals, the need for co-determination was manifested by the fact that the terminals were used for several purposes in practice; i.e. as marketing objects, as boundary objects (Bowker & Star, 1999) for co-operation between different authorities (i.e. local tax offices and municipality representatives) and even as ordinary internet terminals, since a couple of users found out how to bypass the security configuration. The project initiators did manage to engage the proper spokespersons on the local levels, but did not succeed in gaining legitimisation from higher levels of management. The project as such also competed with other internal projects working on figuring out appropriate solutions for easy access to public service and information, and the PIM-project was therefore not properly stabilised and accepted.

- The symbolic function of an accessibility-structure

In the described cases, the symbolic function of accessibility was important. The landowner experienced how accessibility was turned into something which had to be established without his consent. His denial to accept the terms for gaining access was pictured as a threat to the whole project of establishing the basic infrastructure for eParticipation. The issue of accessibility was in this case a delegated symbolic function, and turned out to be a mechanism which opened up for the renegotiation of what accessibility meant in this particular local context. The cables could be drawn in another way, and the notion of “public good” could be used as a tool for steering citizens’ behaviour.

For the hosts, the PIM-terminal turned out to symbolise the unfortunate citizens, but for the citizens the terminals symbolised a functioning infrastructure offering access to the authorities. The DIALOGUE-project offered accessibility for the participants, but on another level it negated the occurrence of certain kinds of participation. It stimulated participation whilst steering this participation in certain directions.

- Embodiment of power-relations in a device

The empirical material also exposes how certain democratic values in a translation process become embedded in the artefact during the development of, for instance, an eParticipation tool. The case with the Vision Ronneby-site clearly shows this. The software company project leader differentiated between an eDemocracy application and a web development platform. This reveals that eDemocracy was apprehended primarily as a product, not as a process. The tailoring process of the software elucidated conflicting aims between different purposes of the

tool, which in reality needed to support different forms of eParticipation (the practitioners' participation and the citizens' participation.) The decision to produce a communication tool which was accessible to all parties, and possible to use in different settings, built on the same technical platform, was in the end impossible to realise fully, due to the fact that the separate functions (a tool for maintenance of services and a tool for maintenance of communication) supported different democratic models. The Vision-site represented a top-down model of consultation. The other part of the project, had a completely different aim, namely to develop a functioning software support for the management of questions about municipal services. This part of the project had on the contrary a bottom-up approach, furthering the users' (the public servants) involvement in tailoring a tool with the starting-point in their own actual practical needs and local work practice. This tool played a totally different role in the local work practice, where it altered traditional divisions of work (the COP-services for instance gained more control of the subjects than the experts) due to their intermediary function.

- The possibility to re-open stabilised concepts by design-in use activities

Neither was the prescribed use accepted by the active citizens. During a process of customising a tool for eParticipation, a certain part of the project gained less support compared to another part of a project. This was partly due to an unconscious development of invisibility on the part of the involved parties, which raised questions within the project about how to alter this order. The same thing happened with the cleaner, who was not accepted as an active citizen, even though she actually was active at her own initiative, according to what is prescribed by symbolic eParticipation. Still, she was not accepted due to the way the translation process evolved. Once again, the issue of co-determination was made apparent, but within another layer than where it was expected to occur. During discussions about content, the SWOT-analysis soon became the obligatory passage point, displacing more creative solutions about how to create interactivity. In the case of the DIALOGUE-project, the problem of securing internal project governance added to the ways in which the facilitation of computer literacy and social support were actually played out in the end.

- Accessibility and participation has to be co-developed in a dialogue

In the case of the groups of writing women, the issue of co-developing accessibility was important. This blurs the boundary between the two upper layers in the access rainbow infrastructure. The issue of governance is equally important in both the fifth and the sixth layers, since the objective of this sub-project was to involve the women in both the development and the operation of their own accessibility, by providing them with tools to empower themselves and redefine their role as users and take on the responsibility for publishing their own content. They were also encouraged to take responsibility for advancing their own literacy and becoming proactive citizens. The project leaders, including myself, felt the limitations in finding the right mixture of establishing support and giving space for developing individual agency. In that sense this attempt to encourage civic networking started in its complete opposite, instead taking its starting point in the top layer of the Access Rainbow model, by starting with defining a situated structure of governance as a basis for achieving the other suggested premises.

However it should be said that nothing at all would have happened if the municipality had not installed suitable carriage facilities in the town a couple of years earlier or if they had not, in co-operation with the European project, provided the group with free access to computers and appropriate software tools. However, the issue of social facilitation and computer literacy, as

well as content of services, could very well be discussed in a reverse order, since the cases presented here reveal a need for co-determination of how to carry out social facilitation, along with what should be included in the services and how computer literacy should be defined and established by participation.

Another point detected in this exercise is the demonstrated duality of software and content, and several situated accounts underscoring how accessibility is something that has to be co-developed in a dialogue. Accessibility is not something that has to be given to a certain group, handed over by those who have accessibility to those who have not. Accessibility entails practices of design-in-use; there is an apparent need to apply a constructionist view on accessibility. Literacy and social facilitation are not something one imposes on a certain marginalised group, they have to be constructed in reciprocal learning about differences in conditions and differences in handling resources. And finally, governance has also to be decided upon in order to work; one can not decide that people should be active if they not are given the tools to define their own ways to be involved. This shows that rainbows do not appear in bits and pieces, and neither do accessibility infrastructures. They have to be defined and established during reciprocal activities of learning by participation within all the layers of the Access Rainbow model, but also in activities of mutual influence of the layers, and between the reciprocity of defining accessibility structures and a democratic, inclusive society.

5.8.2 eParticipation never comes alone

A double bind-situation, according to Star & Ruhleder (1994), occurs when a message is given on more than one level simultaneously or when an answer is demanded on one level and at the same time negated on another. In the case of the illustrated socio-technical layers in this chapter is it possible to detect such mismatches. The upper layer of governance encourages citizens to become more actively involved in the preparation of policies and decisions, as well as more directly involved in decision-making procedures. At the same time, the issue of co-determination is negated on other levels. This could create either petrifaction or creativity. The insubordinate landowner, the altering of the use of the PIM-terminals, or the reluctance among the citizens to accept the suggested SWOT-analysis as a tool for their eParticipation, are some examples of how the mechanisms could trigger informal participation rather than adoption of the suggested formal types of participation.

Those examples bring forward the issue that neither a mechanism nor a concept necessarily needs to be used as prescribed, and that local configuration or adaptation processes also extend or re-formulate the motives for localising a specific tool for eParticipation in a certain place. The mutual processes of appropriation may cause both convergence with the context but also a proliferation of contexts in which the device is given new meaning. The second layer of the rainbow-model emphasised the importance of providing citizens with relevant devices. However, citizens are not a homogenous group, and needs are individual and devices play different roles for different people

The COP-services and the dissatisfied participants in the DIALOGUE-project, along with the "*What's in your heart-consultation*" are examples of how mechanisms can, on the contrary, exclude from participation.

A final aspect, which crystallises itself in this analysis of how steering mechanisms within eParticipation are constructed, is the fact that *eParticipation never comes alone*. Every layer includes its own kind of maintenance (of goods or relations), whether it is about devices and tools or carriage facilities, as well as aspects of continuous evolution of equipment and communication. The creation of malleable mechanisms for ensuring broad accessibility seems to be crucial in order to secure that inclusiveness and multiplicity become central features of eParticipation.

6. Beyond the image of the active citizen

> '*You are a politician as soon as you get up in the morning. You influence your environment even if you are not an elected politician...you are a political creature...*[95]

> *"Greater information and access, in turn, opens up decision-making to direct public scrutiny by individual citizens and indirectly via media and oversight institutions – all of whom will hold governments to account for their decisions and actions*. (OECD 2001:73)

The discussion in the previous chapter focused on the multitude of dimensions and perspectives which have to be taken into consideration when setting up an infrastructure for comprehensive and inclusive accessibility, in accordance with visions of broadening participation and decision-making. Another important element in eParticipation is active participation by several parties, particularly engaged citizens. Activities and programmes to stimulate citizen engagement have become more common during the past years, also due to attempts to create a common European citizenship. Active citizenship seems to gain a certain status if it is conducted electronically. This issue is also crucial when preparing for eParticipation. If the citizens, politicians and practitioners refuse to be active in the anticipated ways, i.e. by using the electronic tools provided, the visions of a participatory and inclusive information society will fail in practice. Citizens must therefore be trained and guided in how to behave as active citizens.

This chapter will further explore the presumptions about what it means to be an active citizen; which roles and what kind of participation active citizenship predicts. These presumptions will be discussed in relation to activities enacted in practice, initiated and performed by citizens in various ways and from differing locations. Those practical examples are discussed and related to plans for how to support and steer the cultivation of active citizenship in the actual making of eParticipation. My analysis addresses the double function of the category of active citizenship, how it in practice alternates between closing for and opening up for participation, depending on how the suggested roles within the category are interpreted and staged locally. This simultaneous double-sided effect appears in the empirical examples, where I present both experiences of pro-active citizens and the actual responses or initiatives from the authorities. Active citizenship is not to be seen as a totally sealed category, nor is it a completely open category. What needs to be addressed more thoroughly and handled further within development of eParticipation is the process of becoming active, but from another starting-point than the strivings to create uniformity of behaviour or normalisation.

[95] Quote from interview with Politician A P4/020828.

In the multi-layered web of relations that is supposed to constitute, form and sustain activities of eParticipation, active participants are both active and actively passive. When introducing changes of participation in contemporary democratic processes, the citizen, or rather the notion of active citizenship is in focus. Active citizenship is commonly defined as active engagement in collective activity in one or four areas or "domains"; that is the state/ formal politics, the workplace, civil society and the private domain (Holford, Veen, van der R, 2003, Lister, 1997). The notion of active citizenship also represents official attempts to manage identity, highly promoted by the European Union and other steering bodies. The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the European countries which have made great efforts to promote education in active citizenship, in community-based education and individual support. Since citizenship education became a part of the national curriculum 2002, this kind of education for active citizenship has been disseminated and supported by information and communication technology and especially the Internet. Another official definition describes active citizenship as follows:

> *New forms of representation and public participation are emerging in all our countries. These developments have expanded the avenues for citizens to participate more fully in public policy-making, within the overall framework of representative democracy in which parliaments continue to play a central role.* (OECD, 2001, preface)

Active participation is regarded as a new frontier, which has to be settled by citizens characterised by "a go-ahead spirit". This is acknowledged in several ways:

> *Active participation is regarded as a relation based on partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue - although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation rests with government.* (OECD 2001: 12)

There has also been a long tradition of citizenship education in Germany, since democratisation of the country was prioritised by the German authorities, after the Second World War. [96]

Another argument reasons that recent developments in society at large, such as globalisation, call for new and more devolved kinds of political and social structures, in which citizens will play a more active part. It is considered necessary, for democratic reasons and with regard to the successive development towards a more inclusive and responsible European society, to change the hierarchical communication between authorities and citizens, and gradually transform it into a dialogue-model based on horizontal structures and networking, made possible and enhanced by the use of new technology (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998, Hague & Loader, 1999).

This not only opens up opportunities for participation, it also puts pressure on citizens to take responsibility to contribute more actively and extensively to decision-making. In addition, they have to be active primarily in a uniform way, i.e. electronically, if they are not to run the

[96] See NIACE Briefing Sheet NO: 39, February 2003, on promoting adult learning. URL= www.niace.org.uk/information [Accessed 061026] and Marinetto, 2003.

risk of being excluded or even exclude themselves from vital parts of developing society. However, people are seldom permanently uninterested or disengaged, and sometimes they want to take part but lack the skills, knowledge and courage to participate. Also, people are seldom permanently engaged and active, and they are not constantly available and willing to contribute, even if that sometimes seems to be one of the primary characteristics, due to the requirements of our contemporary society. In addition there is the issue of social and political inequality, which interferes when people are to decide how to live or how to share obligations such as decision-making. The challenge of how to engage and support citizens to become involved and absorbed in society-building is considered fundamental in a democratic society, yet so difficult to achieve. In order to survive, democratic societies need citizens' participation in political processes. However, "democratic activity", "active citizenship", and "society-building" are not unitary entities or stable conditions, even though they are treated as such, and are expected to be so, when it comes to defining the strategies for how to accomplish - or maybe avoid - all of them.

The introductory quotes at the beginning of this chapter represent the various effects of eParticipation; the potential to respond to the ideals of incorporating these visions as a natural way of living and/or a pressure to be able to cope with those increased demands for action. The quotes also describe the challenge inherent in the task of developing a broadened participation. The first one indicates that the pressure and call for action is of paramount urgency; that we all have to regard ourselves as active human beings. However, the actions of proactive citizens are not always without complication for the administrators or the politicians. Pro-activity is not manageable to the same extent as *symbolic eParticipation* or *symbolic active citizenship*, which will be presented more thoroughly in this chapter. Symbolic active citizenship is part of eParticipation, and thus steers practice. Whilst practice adjusts to the projected image of how active participation should proceed, individuals constantly redefine the very same symbolic active citizenship, based on their own circumstances. This means that there is an interplay of delimited participation and unbounded participation, a steering of actions, and simultaneously a resistance towards formalisation. All those dimensions have to act together in developing new ways of participation. In the various projects in my research study, the need for possibilities to *learn by participation*, on the basis of self-determination, was identified as one of the main priorities among citizens, municipal officers and politicians. The image of the active citizen functioned both as a delimiting factor, and as inspiration. I will, in what follows, introduce a discussion concerning the disciplining use of active citizenship (symbolic active citizenship), as a form of symbolic mechanism for power enactment, as well as its potential to open up for participation. I will also unfold the practices of what, for the purpose of distinguishing between the varying interpretations and local articulations of active citizenship, I have chosen to call proactive citizenship.

6.1 Symbolic active citizenship

Strivings to normalise and unify activities within eParticipation could be seen as part of a symbolic active citizenship. Those attempts at formalisation contribute to establishing a transfigured legitimated form of authoritarian control over the inhabitants' activities and actions as citizens. Active citizenship is seen as one of the primary conditions for achieving sustainable development of society as a whole and it is thereby crucial to plan, steer and manage it.

At the same time, active citizenship consists of initiatives originating and conducted from other directions, by engaged individuals, civic organisations and groups. Symbolic active

citizenship could be explained as a projected image of how active citizenship *ought* to be enacted, which has been internalised by the involved actors. This is an effective way of steering an activity in a certain direction and of controlling development. Symbolic active citizenship is in that sense an expression of disciplining which is made invisible and transformed to be a part of daily routines, identified as the legitimate and proper way to perform active citizenship. This image of the ideal behaviour as an active citizen soon becomes a matrix, which the individual incorporates as the proper way to behave.

Symbolic active citizenship is thus to be understood as a mode of domination, where the citizens contribute to upholding this relation by adjusting to the assumptions, and by adapting their participation in line with what is required by the ideal picture of how to be a pro-active, active or passive citizen. The ideal of the active citizen is in turn transferred into subjective social structures of acting when performing active citizenship locally. The individual embeds certain cultural norms of how to perceive the role, and how to accept that this is the only way to think and act as an active citizen. The tools provided for eParticipation thus "feel" like a natural part of performing active citizenship, since these are officially presented as the normal and legitimate ways of acting.

The possibility to participate in decision-making and the inconvenience of abdicating from the lifelong role of being an active member in society, are played out as an inevitable prerequisite driving the development of our future society, as well as the development of equal participation in democratic activities. To some extent, active citizenship functions, as a "regime of practice" (Foucault, 1991, Dean, 1999) which citizens have to take up, accept and appropriate as a way of being and living.[97] At the same time, this emphasis on the cultivation of a committed attitude towards sharing the practices of decision-making also affects authorities and politicians, who either resist or are reluctant towards suggested changes in what was previously considered to be their exclusive arena. The tricky question then becomes how to prepare for participation and mutual learning on equal terms for all involved parties, rather than regarding the issue of active citizenship mostly as an authoritarian commission of telling others how to behave. Or from another angle; to perceive those moments of participation as an opportunity for individuals and groups to advocate their own ways of being active and thus negotiate their participation based on the locally identified circumstances, as a response to preconceived participation. Otherwise there is a risk that the apprehended duality between those apparently different and opposing entities (the authorities and the citizens) is sustained by all parties, in order to avoid changes of the informal places and social groups where politicians and citizens feel safe and secure enough to act.

The aspects of domination within symbolic active citizenship could be revealed by stating the following questions: For whom are the notions of active citizenship and participation useful? For what purpose, other than the earlier reference to democratic survival, do people need to be active or activated? How do the authorities cope with the dilemma of handling proactive citizens that does not seem to fit in with the prepared matrix for how to conduct active citizenship within the given and almost settled frames of eParticipation?

Lave & Wenger (1984) discuss learning by participation as a successive transformation, which does not have to be either linear or logical, even though it describes a move from a stage of ignorance to full participation. This is also applicable to processes of learning active

[97] Regimes of practice was originally coined by Foucault (1991), and could briefly be explained as a term capturing the organised practices through which we are governed and govern ourselves (Dean, 1999) See also Burchell, Gordon & Miller, 1991.

citizenship. In order to describe these gradual shifts of nuances in commitment, Lave & Wenger introduce a conceptual tool which they call *legitimate peripheral participation*. This is to be understood as "*the particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole*." This description implies that increased engagement is *a process of becoming*, rather than a goal in itself. The process transforms all the involved parties, including the settings where the participation is supposed to be enacted. Lave & Wenger studied the activity of situated learning in *communities of practice.* Those communities are to be understood as groups of people who share a concern or interest for something they do together, and learn how to do it better through their interaction. Bowker & Star point out the similarity between the concept of communities of practice and the notion "social worlds", coined by Strauss (1978) (Bowker & Star, 1999: 294. [98]

I will discuss how this gradual increase in participation will occur in the interplay of two dimensions of active citizenship; i.e. symbolic citizenship and proactive citizenship. The latter dimension is represented by the manifold activities initiated locally by various groups or individuals.

6.2 The multiplicity of being active

The suggested double function of the apparently univocal category of "active citizenship" needs to be analysed in detail. Symbolic citizenship strives towards uniformity, a mode which is automatically implied in the hosting category of "active citizenship". My empirical material reveals that the category also implies multiplicity which has to be unfolded in order to detect the full spectrum of being an active citizen. I do this simply by asking; what is active citizenship in practice? Taking on this perspective, rather than replicating a pre-defined declaration of what active citizenship ought to contain, reveals a heterogeneous mixed practice of situated activities and multiple roles. My conscious unfolding and presentation of multiple, simultaneous actions are not to be seen as opposing activities towards formal attempts to incorporate and re-shape active citizenship; it is rather an exercise in diffraction (Haraway, 1996). I suggest this plurality as a starting-point for discussing what it really means to be active, as a versatile individual co-operating with other versatile individuals, who must find ways of working together towards accomplishing a common goal which is located in a specific, situated context.

The conformity of "active citizenship" has to be opened up and described with a multitude of dimensions or orderings (Star & Bowker, 1999), as expressed both in mainstream apprehension and in my empirical material, where several approaches to action have to be counted as belonging to the category of active citizenship. Star & Bowker (1999), in their writings about the theory and practice of classification and its categories, provide me with a workable concept. I use their description of categorical work as a diffraction tool in order to track the multiple functions of the category as well as the multiplicity of origins to action, disguised within the category of active citizenship. If partly described as a form of classification system, the notion of active citizenship could in turn be seen as an important element of eParticipation. The category of active citizenship implies for instance, in accordance with my empirical findings:

[98] Further development of communities of practice in Wenger, 1998.

The informed and engaged consumer
The responsible citizen
The learning-oriented citizen
The political citizen
The active user and designer citizen
The "stimuli- or provocation-responding", reactive citizen
The proactive or innovative citizen
The inactive citizen

The seemingly sealed category thereby reveals a multitude of approaches to action, which could be concretised and understood in several ways. To begin with, active citizenship could be described as a category that could either be an assigned or a self-chosen label. Active citizenship, seen in the wider context of eGovernment, is strongly characterised as being an active consumer, given the fact that most development in this area hitherto has been focused on advancing and developing useful e-services for citizens, rather than inviting citizens to take part in preparing and sharing decision-making. This concentration on eServices has not fully implied a radical shift of attitude towards citizen-centred services, as stated in the rhetoric. On the contrary, it has contributed to steering the development of eDemocracy in general towards primarily satisfying the needs of the service providers, leading to an emphasis on research on and the development of administrative-centred technical solutions. As a result of this one-sided focus, which was apparent in several of the projects I was involved in, there is a mainstream comprehension of eDemocracy as one eService among many. Citizens are expected to take part in service evaluations, or contribute to deliberation concerning burning issues, at the request of the authorities, rather than contributing on an equal basis to the re-distributing and sharing of decision making.

Being proactive, or taking on a formal political role as citizen, as well as being a non-active citizen, is to a large extent a chosen strategy, but as shown in the cases with inactive politicians, it could also be something that is not entirely self-chosen. Neither does taking on the role of being an informed and engaged consumer or reactive citizen, or even a designer-oriented citizen, need to be something that citizens choose for themselves; it could more or less be forced upon them. The active citizen is also a statistical artefact, for example in the benchmark reports and progress reports on how well the Information Society - and eGovernment in particular – is developing. The category "active citizen" could also be either visible or invisible for other people. A proactive citizen could for instance be ignored and neglected by the establishment, and thereby marginalised.

Another way to de-construct "active citizenship" is by tracking its filiations, that is how the category is related to people. The category is loosely or tightly coupled to different project members within my inquiries. The Flow Society members, the politicians, the public servants, the system designers, the focus-group members, all experienced varying levels of filiation to the category of active citizenship, which is demonstrated in the various practical examples given in this dissertation. There are examples of politicians who expressed tight coupling to the category for instance, by describing their own feeling of being a "political zoon"[99], or the need for citizens to look upon municipal work as "collaboratively creating a welfare-association." [100]

[99] Politician A, P4/020828. The phrase "politikon zoon" was coined by Aristotle and means briefly "political animal", see Ekelin, 2003, and '*Sex, power and citizenship'*, 1983.
[100] Politican B P6/030926

There were also citizens who did not find themselves especially attracted to the category of active citizenship, due to lack of competence or interest for engaging in specific or limited topics, such as spatial planning, during the *Komindu*-project. Others clearly corresponded to the reactive citizen, such as the young woman, living in a small village close to the city, who during a focus group interview aired her reluctance to contribute to the discussion on the *Vision Site*. When I asked her what could attract her to be more active and inclined to use the provided web forum or the *SWOT-analysis*, she answered:

> "*I could consider taking part if it is something that really concerns me and my life. It is for example necessary if they want to shut down schools or rebuild roads or close down the railway. Of course I could consider writing my opinion [in an online forum], and I think it is positive to have the opportunity to do so whenever I want to, if there is something I really believe is wrong. An active citizen is in my opinion someone who cares about the local neighbourhood, but most people are not interested in all kinds of questions, they chose certain areas. I find it as difficult to engage myself by going online, as it is to take part in physical meetings... being active in such a way does not work for us, even if the technology is available, since we work double shifts. It simply does not match our working hours."* [101]

The issue of time and working conditions constrained her and her husband's possibilities to take part in any organised activity, more or less imposing her to take on the reactive citizen-label. It was also obvious that she regarded active citizenship as something that was not primarily conducted in front of a computer.

The *scope of filiations* describes how *durable* the filiations are, which was not uncomplicated, as seen in the examples discussed here. The initiative of starting up a pre-incubator for young unemployed people could for instance be regarded as a temporary activity, but when examined more closely, it was obvious that the people involved had been engaged in several bottom-up initiatives and projects within the municipality, which indicated a durable interest for conducting active citizenship. The problems of sustainability here seemed more to be in defective communication with the authorities, or the problems of finding the right kind of preconditions for participation among the involved members in the civic organisation. On the part of the decision-makers, it was also a matter of avoidance and reluctance to take pro-active initiatives seriously. The scope of filiation of active citizenship also includes whether the category covers all aspects; its *thickness and scale*. The filiations have an *ecology*, that is a space or terrain, where the category is played out. This ecology could be either *familiar or unfamiliar*. This could for instance be translated into electronic spaces, as in the practical example with the web forum during the *Komindu*-project, which was experienced as familiar terrain by the citizens, compared to the *SWOT-analysis*, which was apprehended as too complicated. For the municipal employees the *SWOT-analysis* was experienced as more familiar compared to the ordinary web forums, since it corresponded more to their symbolic capital, in this case represented by their working skills. Other examples of spaces where the filiations of active citizenship operated were for instance in a "*Room of one's own*" during the DIALOGUE-project, where the women's actions described a tight coupling to the category of active citizenship. They actually extended their role as learning-oriented citizens towards becoming proactive citizens. The online-forum for debating local political issues, provided for young voters during the *Election 2002*-project is, on the other hand, an example of a space or

[101] Politician C, P6/031120

terrain where the coupling to the category of active citizenship was found unfamiliar by the young people, largely through the fact that there were no clear respondents in these forums. In my interviews, the young participants claimed that they used online forums daily for other purposes, as a space or terrain for "hanging around" rather than for the purpose of being or becoming active citizens. Yet those spaces could have been a place where the young voters could have conducted legitimate peripheral participation, if they only had been organised as online communities of practice, involving both young people and decision-makers.

The category of active citizenship has a loose *density*, since it is permeable to other categories. The inactive citizen is one example of this overlap of categories. The issue of inactivity exists within the active citizenship category and they are thereby not to be seen as opponent dimensions. The politicians are in some sense regarded as the prototype for active citizens, though having a superior position in the formal political system. As a consequence of this they are repeatedly presented and envisioned as an opposing part to the active citizens in the official debate. However, a politician is in some sense just an active citizen who has transformed her/his active citizenship into *legitimate* full participation.

According to Bowker & Star (1999: 310-317) a new category can even scatter the host category and make it *tangle and fall apart*, as in the example of the debate in the online forum concerning the re-branding of a municipality, discussed in more detail in chapter seven. The active citizens, who were invited to take active part in re-branding the municipality, experienced that their definition of "active citizenship" was not in line with what was expected from them, or rather what the symbolic active citizenship prescribed. The citizens were selected and invited based on previously shown interest and involvement in municipal development, and it was suggested that they take part in focus-group meetings and in online consultations, contributing to the discussion both online and off-line. Their active participation was at first highlighted and acknowledged in the whole process of re-branding and in the local press. When the final decision had to be taken about how to re-brand the municipality, their contribution was denied. In the end, the established view of how the municipality should be officially represented defeated the new interpretations. The kind of active citizenship that the proactive citizens advocated was shattered by the uniform symbolic active citizenship and the view of the legitimate decision-makers.

Other crucial issues regarding the filiations of the active citizenship category are whether they are possible to remove and by whom, and how obvious the filiation is, or whether the filiation is reversible or irreversible, as in the case of the "*What is in your heart*?" consultation, which will be further presented in chapter seven. Here, the authorities both invited people to become active and at the same time drew the line for the amount of participation required, as well as what the participation would finally result in.

6.3 Olga's story: Not during working hours - exclusion in work practice

During the evaluation period of the PIM-project I visited different places where the PIM terminals were placed, and by chance I heard about a cleaner in the library who was not allowed to use the terminal during working hours. One of the local hosts described the background for me:

> *"In the beginning, I introduced the terminal for the staff. I did that in the morning, before the library opened. I thought everyone ought to have an interest in knowing about the authorities and their services on the internet. One morning, when I came down to the library hall, I found one of the cleaning ladies in front of the terminal. Since I didn't know if she could manage on her own, I asked her if she wanted me to show her. But she had already used it several times and knew exactly how to handle the machine..."*[102]

Later, I asked the host if I could get in contact with the cleaner, and the management arranged a meeting. She was supposed to let me in through a door in the basement, below the main entrance, before opening-hours. She was a middle-aged immigrant woman, who we can call Olga, originally from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who worked at the library. When I asked her to tell me how she got in contact with the PIM-terminal, she described it as "it was just there one day". She told me that she had learned to use it on her own, on lunch-breaks and whenever she felt she had the time to explore the new device that had suddenly been placed in her working-environment.

When management found out that she was using the terminal, she was stopped from doing so. The motivation was that she had to work her scheduled hours, and not conduct personal errands during working hours. This could be seen as an example of how tradition and work practice could work as an obstacle to an individual who has a job that traditionally does not support personal initiatives to enhance skills and personal development, in order to activate their citizenship. We sat and talked for a while and she showed me how she searched the web for new jobs, looking for education opportunities for herself and her son (she was interested in finding an education in gardening), but she also searched for information and on-line forms about, for instance, health insurance. When I conducted the interview and Olga showed me how she used the terminal, she initiated a discussion on the placing of the terminal and how the light in the environment caused reflections on the screen and thereby also affected the comprehension of the interface. She turned out to have valuable insights, which could have been of importance for future placement of the terminal, if only she had had the opportunity to put forward her ideas, and there had been formal ways to gather such feedback.

The rhetorical discourse on accessibility emphasises that services are to be provided "around the clock" and made available through a multitude of access points, but symbolic active citizenship is given a restraining function in practice, where legitimate peripheral participation is not included in the definition. In Sweden nowadays, most users gain network access through their employers or through educational institutions, but accessibility is not included in working-hours for all individuals. In practice, the visions of increased autonomy for citizens through the use of technology are restricted by unwritten rules, old traditions and hierarchical orderings in the work place. These relations are transformed into a delimitation of an active citizenship, including only a chosen few and excluding those who do not fit in the category. Despite those local restrictions, Olga managed to move towards full participation through her own initiative, since she found a location which she thought was available for her, even though she was not included in the formal introductions and training sessions.

Olga was regarded as a newcomer in using public services, but she was not taking part in a legitimised trajectory which was supposed to lead to full participation. However, her predefined non-participation had an enabling function for her, because she did not aim

[102] Host No:3, P3/990306

towards full participation. It was simply not a goal to start with. For example, Olga did not experience herself as an active participant, moving towards full participation in the quest of identifying herself as an active citizen. She was regarded as a newcomer, not only by herself but also by the local community of practitioners, who were about to build up a local community of practice on their own, where they could advance their citizenship skills and their use of the PIM-terminals, through in-house local introductions and training sessions. She was allowed to conduct legitimate peripheral participation within this located participation framework and since access was provided, she could make an active move towards becoming part of the community of practice, and to begin her learning trajectory.

The fact that the devices which were chosen to provide all people with accessibility to public information intruded on the cleaners' working space was not even considered as a basis for including her, either in formal training in using the device, or in decision making concerning the operation of the terminals. Her exclusive experiences of how the appearance of the artefact's interface changed for the users in differing lighting conditions was not even detected, since there were no formal ways to gather those experiences, which could for example have come across if she had been invited to take part in a session for enhancing literacy and social facilitation.

Looking upon this practice as a form of actor network, where the translation process plays an important role, reveals the fact that the cleaner is made invisible not only through pure oversight, but also through her own way of choosing marginalisation in a network. The cleaner did not participate at all in the process of problematisation, even though she was an indispensable actor in terms of the objectives of the project, which were to contribute to empowerment and self-service for socially and economically disadvantaged groups and individuals. This reveals that the inter-definition of actors took place in an already limited group that primarily legitimised each other. The definition of "supporting the have-nots" did not function as the only obligatory passage point, since the cleaner clearly defined herself as an actor, even though she was not included in the network as a legitimate ally, according to the self appointed actors in the network (the authorities, hosts, sponsors, and local work groups). Yet she played her role as active citizen and user, and she was also acknowledged as such by the hosts who detected her activities. This was regarded as an additional phenomenon, rather than as legitimate participation and an outcome of the project's objectives. The citizens coming from the outside were however regarded as "users". The cleaner did not come from the outside; she was literally already inside the building, and therefore fell between the categories of providers and users. She was both an insider and an outsider in the local context of this library. She was neither acknowledged as a visible nor as a non-visible actor, since she was in-between the predefined categories. Symbolic active citizenship finally got in her way, restricting her ability to develop further due to the fact that active citizenship is already limited to include the ones who are defined as the "visible non-visible actors" in the discourse about "have-nots".

This underlines the fact that providing services for participation is not enough. Invisible borders that exclude in more subtle ways, are exemplified by the experiences in the case of the cleaner. She had an invisible job and was also invisible as a worker. The making of invisible borders in the visions of "including everyone in the introduction of new technology", shows that disregard happens even within the frames of inclusiveness. In discussions and visions about the new information and knowledge society it is often argued that the borders between private and public spaces are erased; the borders between free time and working hours are for instance considered irrelevant. But the example of the cleaner shows that

transgression of borders is not possible for everyone. Societal divisions in work are integrated in the shaping of the practice of information and communication technology. It is not enough to be an active citizen, eager to learn and to achieve digital literacy. Existing power relations and work practices delimit an individual's ambitions to transgress the border of what this particular working group is allowed to do, challenging established assumptions about what is considered appropriate to conduct within working hours.

6.4 Jim's story: To be or not to be pro-active?

One morning when I arrived at work at the university there was a telephone message waiting for me. A man, here called Jim, was anxious to get in touch with me and discuss a project he was currently planning and formulating. In a e-mail, he explained a bit more about the project and how he got to know about my research (through a local politician who had told him that 'she is involved in the PIM-Project in some way'). Jim was an adult student at a School of Social Studies, with an interest in computing. He presented his project as: *"a mini-project, I call it the Interactive Waiting-Room, which basically is a vision about expanding the so called Citizens' Offices [later it became clear that, by this notion, he was referring to the public PIM-terminals] that are placed in various public spaces, suggesting that these could contain some sort of 'laundry schedule' where one has the possibility to book an appointment, for instance with the civil servants at the social service department."*

He wanted to discuss the potential of the idea, whether this kind of solution already existed, and where he could find out more about it, if it did. When answering his mail, I pointed out that he probably meant the PIM-terminals, and that the project was soon supposed to shut down. He showed up one day with a power-point presentation, where he showed some concrete ideas or basic sketches of a web based interface, providing the individuals with a booking system, information, interaction features and a search engine. The individual should log in with a personal identification number, and a personal code. Among suggested features of the system were a calendar, information about laws, general advice and guidelines, descriptions of how an errand is handled by the authorities, how to appeal against a decision and submit complaints, descriptions of internal resources in the social service departments, external resources and links to other relevant sources, information about the client/user organisations, as well as information about e-mail addresses and a mail program. Everything was very simply and consistently described and visualised, and the more interactive features were concretely envisioned. These included an e-mail account of one's own, accessibility and lack of accessibility to application forms, or possibilities to post appeals and complaints to the authorities. He also proposed a section for research, containing online polls and advice about how to get in contact with researchers, such as information for those who were interested in taking part in as informants research projects, in focus groups or interviews. It also included a module for statistics.

Exclusion and inclusion was a prioritised topic in Jim's studies of social work, coupled with issues of power structures. Jim pointed out that online services were a new kind of public arena, supposed to assist people in their strivings to create "a good quality of life". It was during a discussion in his study-group that, rather than getting into the rut of focusing on the groups that already had basic resources for advancing their active citizenship, he got the idea of suggesting new access points for those who are condemned to reside at the bottom end of society. He presented radical and far-reaching ideas about a potential target group for his application; namely the group of homeless people, which at the time was constantly growing,

even in this relatively prosperous region of Southern Sweden. These circumstances were actually unknown for many local inhabitants.[103] In order to make them more accessible to this particularly excluded group in society, he wanted to place the PIM-terminals, equipped with the suggested interface, at common lodging houses for refugees, or in other possible environments where those people used to show up from time to time. Other suggested locations were the region's prison and the teenage receptions in the local health care centre. This was in order to reach the groups that he thought were crucial to reach with the information and the possibility of easy access to interaction with the social authorities, based on their specific needs. The examples Jim brought up were in a sense the ultimate niche where the PIM-terminals really could have fulfilled their intended role of enhancing access for certain excluded groups. Those who have either chosen to exclude themselves or who have actively been excluded by society, fall outside of the mainstream categories of citizens and are therefore not at all visible in the discussion about equal rights to information and participation. Jim pointed out the possibilities to democratise the use of the PIM-terminals even more, by actively targeting the invisible groups in the category of excluded. This was also in correspondence with ideas that had been circulating in the steering group of the project, where they had an ongoing discussion about finding alternative locations for the PIM-terminal. However, since the PIM-project was already banished by the authorities, and the steering group already dismissed, they never got to know about Jim's suggested future use of the PIM-terminals.

Those two examples of proactive citizens illustrate clearly how initiatives could come from unexpected places and arise from unprepared conditions, and thereby also dissolve the limits of what symbolic active citizenship prescribes. They are both examples of proactive citizens, yet they start their trajectory towards learning and developing an active citizenship from different locations. Olga started from a position of peripheral learning, which was partly allowed and partly denied, since when the staff at the library found out what she was doing they encouraged her to carry on her activities. She was finally restricted in developing her active citizenship, since she was caught exceeding her powers by the cleaning management, and she was hindered in her newly initiated move from ignorance towards increased interest for participation, by the visible and invisible rules of work practices within her profession. Jim could be said to have started from a position of marginality, with little possibility to create legitimate peripheral participation, since his initiative was created from a location which was not acknowledged within the scope of symbolic active citizenship. He also presented a broadening of active citizenship, including even those who are restricted from conducting their active citizenship by laws (the prisoners), or by economic resources (the homeless people). He also remained in this marginal position, since his ideas never reached the established community of practice that was once gathered around the democratic activity of setting up multiple access points to online-information for inexperienced users. This engagement was apparently not in line with symbolic active citizenship, since the governmental authorities decided to abandon what Jim still experienced as an established infrastructure with great potential.

[103] In February in 2006 was the number of homeless people estimated to in total 143 individuals in the whole region of Blekinge, according to the local social welfare services.

6.5 A spare-time politician's dilemma of exposing inactivity and incompleteness

Other issues came up in another context, and during other projects within the framework of this particular Swedish municipality, which turned out to have implications for local attempts to involve the citizens more actively in consultations and other forms of participation. On a supranational level, the European Union addresses active citizens directly, in the visions of pushing eGovernment to actively include democratic ideals in the ongoing development:

> "*It is important to foster direct communication between citizens and policy-makers. Through online forums, virtual discussion rooms, and electronic voting, citizens can express their views, directly question the decision-makers, and so contribute with an informed opinion to the democratic process."* (COM, 2003:10)

This is of course an irreproachable aim, based on democratic values. There is just one problem associated with this visionary embellishment of the state of things. It *presupposes active citizens and active politicians,* preferably simultaneously and equally active. That is not always the case, as we will find evidence of in the following examples describing practices of non-participation.

After the work with the *Election 2002-project*, the issue of the politicians' unwillingness to debate in public on-line forums was brought to the fore. It was brought up in the public evaluation and in the media. At that time I was conducting interviews with politicians and citizens for my licentiate thesis, and the issue was constantly highlighted in different contexts by different actors. One of the politicians reflected upon his role as "worn out dialoguing politician", in one of these follow-up interviews:

> *"The experiences with the Election2002-project made me think about this. I am not sceptical to the website, but ...there are varied expectations for different politicians, but it is expected that you all have to be fully engaged, that you are accountable and are able to answer all kind of questions. I am now talking from my personal experience here. I am expected to take part in ordinary meetings since I am involved in political committees, internal political meetings in the evenings and on top of they expect that, when I am back at home nine o'clock in the evening, I should go online and check if there are any questions for me [in the debate forum]. I have to be intellectually clear, and sit down and compose answers. You have to be much more careful with written words, compared to speech. What I can say to you in five minutes, I have to sit down and write and when it is written then it is written... It requires much more intellectual effort, and this is often during the evenings, if you are a spare time politician and not a professional politician."*[104]

This particular volunteer politician highlights several aspects of non-participation in his reflection. He indirectly points out that politics in a debate-forum becomes more of an individual performance than teamwork, which is not always favoured by all sorts of politicians. The politician feels the pressure to be a competent representative, which in his interpretation means intellectually clear and focused, able to write and answer all sorts of questions as well as being up to data with the local and national political agenda, and actively following contemporary debate about different subjects. He also experiences strong demands

[104] Politician A, P4/020828.

on his performance of participation. He has to be fully engaged in all activities (off-line as well as on-line), he is held accountable for all sorts of actions, and he is also expected to be active on multiple levels in the organisational structure. This indicates that several degrees and levels of participation are asked for. What is it at stake here? Is the role of politicians as "informed and elected representatives" threatened by the possibility to be questioned by the public? Are politicians safe-guarding their legitimacy and superiority as "more competent" or is it all about a fear of exposing incompleteness? Mahrer & Krimmer (2005) suggested a descriptive notion for this kind of dilemma, as they have identified politicians as inhibiting factors in the general transformation of eDemocracy. This notion highlights the fact that those who are responsible for introducing new democratic forms might also be afraid of losing their gained position as political representatives, a fear which in turn could inhibit a comprehensive change of old political structures.

The comprehensive demands for politicians' active participation, when conducting eParticipation, are confirmed by a civil servant in the municipality who took part in the project. The civil servant describes the raised expectations for the politicians' participation during the *Election 2002- project*. The suggested plans of action were presented to the politicians and formally agreed upon, during a preparatory meeting:

> *"We told them what we expected them to do; [they had] to be active in the debate forum, to write information in the module for candidate presentation... participate in political cafés that were supposed to be conducted in real-time and simultaneously running live at the municipality web, led by a moderator from the local radio station. We expected active politicians. They had to answer questions; after all it is in their own interest. They have got a free marketing channel here, but they were reluctant. They said "it is too close to the election, people haven't got time to participate" and so on. But a couple of the politicians said; go ahead and arrange it. We guarantee that someone [a politician] will show up."* [105]

The civil servant presents a picture that could easily be described as a requirement for the active politician. It makes clear that the politicians had to cope with multi-channel broadcasting, and be prepared to interact with many receivers. Some of them were reluctant but others declared that they were prepared to take on the extra work-load. However, the interactive cafés were finally cut out of the activity program and the debate in the forums was later criticised for being dominated by a few talkative politicians, debating mostly with each other.

The above described practical dilemma presents the experiences of a local politician, who finds it difficult to become an active respondent in a web-based dialogue, due to fear of exposing incompleteness and inactivity instead of engagement. The *Election 2002 -project* turned out to be a frustrating experience for him, manifested as an anxiety of exposing himself as inactive and incapable instead of being active and accountable and constantly prepared and open to public evaluation. On the other hand, for the civil servant it was also a disappointment, when the thoroughly developed website and the additional implementation activities turned out to be rejected by those who could have benefited most from the planned arrangement. And for the citizens who actively wanted to inform themselves and take part in discussions with politicians previous to the election, it was also a disappointment that so few

[105] CS5, P4/ 030409

politicians actually showed up in those new dialogue-arenas, These results could ultimately lead to the establishment and confirmation of a conflict between politicians and citizens in further e-consultations and participatory activities organised by the municipality.

6.6 The problems of pre-defined dialoguing

There were however more aspects of the issue of repeated examples of non-participation by the politicians in the municipality. This was revealed during an interview about the *Komindu*-project, together with a politician. Chronologically, this project was run after the *Election 2002*-project, when the municipality, according to the prescribed steps of development, should have matured in their performance. Thus, the issue of reluctance among politicians to participate in online dialoguing with citizens was still an issue within the municipality, which is exemplified in this discussion between two researchers (including myself) and a politician, about the ultimate aim of the *Komindu*-project:

> R1: *But isn't there a risk with this project, that it does not become a dialogue between politicians and citizens, that it becomes just a dialogue between citizens? /.../since in this particular project there has been no representation of politicians?*
> PB: *There has been…*
> R1: *Politicians?*
> PB: *There has been...yes there has.*
> R1: *Not directly involved in the project group.*
> PB: *No, not in the project group working directly with the set up and running of the Komindu-project, but there have definitively been politicians involved in the parliamentary group which presented the basis for this discussion [referring to the online consultation concerning spatial planning which was one of the goals with the project]*
> /---/
> R1:*But this kind of project...in order to make the project successful, in what they are aiming to be successful with, to provide these dialogue arenas, then there really must be a dialogue going on...if the politicians don't show up in these arenas, there is no point in doing it?*
> PB: *Do you think that is how it should be?*
> R1: *Maybe the citizens think it is important? That you get the feeling that it is a dialogue, and not just a one-way communication, where you give your opinion...*
> PB*: What kind of politician do you think...is it those that have been in this parliamentary group, or should it be politicians that have not been involved in that group who should have that dialogue?*
> *R1: It depends... If the project, if it is called Komindu, and communication and dialogue is the main aim of the project...then, perhaps you have to support, and encourage, really try to shape it into a dialogue and not into one-way communication, as it is at the moment.*
> *PB: Well, maybe there is something in that...*
> *R2: It also depends on what the aim really is...is it, like you say here, to stimulate a dialogue between citizens? Or is it to stimulate the dialogue between citizens and politicians, or maybe between citizens and their municipal officers?*
> *PB: Well... well...*

/---/
R2: It is about clarifying the purpose of the project...and the fact that there are several aims here.
PB: I didn't think that I should...but maybe I should do that. When you put it like that.

The politician distinguishes between the actual project group directly involved in setting up the *Komindu-project* and the steering group for the project, which included politicians. He presents a hierarchical ordering, which places the steering group outside and above the whole project. When he points out that politicians have been involved, he refers to the traditional, formal consultation period which had taken place before the online presentation of the revised spatial plan, where according to this politician the parliamentary group had been actively involved. He interpreted the *Komindu*-project (meaning the preparation of the *Vision Ronneby* site) mostly as an additional technique for communicating the new, revised spatial plan and as a way to get a broader engagement among citizens concerning the coming implementation of the political plans. In that sense, the consultation was not properly adjusted to the formal timeline of the traditional spatial planning process. However, the critical issue here is not that miscalculation, but the issue of the politician's doubts about *how* he should actively take part, which was more explicitly revealed in a follow-up interview[106], conducted by me after a public meeting concerning the *Komindu*-project. He then described that his main reason for not taking an active part in the online discussion, was that he felt that his actions were restricted by presumptions and expectations held by the citizens, about *how* he should participate. He preferred therefore not to participate, because the participation was not likely to be conducted on his premises.

The reluctant politicians described in this chapter both started their trajectories towards conducting active citizenship and eParticipation from what could be called a legitimate position, compared to Jim, the proactive citizen described earlier. The politicians were in that regard closer to the symbolic active citizenship, at the same time as they were proactive citizens who had transformed their initiatives into legitimate positions and a higher degree of participation. But their choices not to participate in electronic discussions and consultations, had effects for a shift of the dialogue structure in the municipality, due to their positions within the established and legitimate political practices.

The issue of politicians' conscious avoidance of involvement in electronic dialoguing with citizens was also brought up for discussion in other contexts and during several discussions within the different projects. One example was a focus group interview (FGI) during the *Komindu*-project. Eight citizens took part in the discussion together with municipal officers and researchers. The aim of the session was to conduct a user-evaluation of the website "*Vision Ronneby*" and provide the municipality and the software firm with viewpoints for adjustment of the site. The excerpt from this focus group interview[107] begins with one of the civil servants who took part in the meeting reflecting on communication:

CS: In the beginning of all this [referring to the Komindu-project] when we had discussions about how to communicate. And I've got a vague memory that the

[106] Politician B, P6/ 031210
[107] Focus group interview (FGI), P6/031125

politicians didn't want to take part [in the online dialogue]. They didn't want this kind of direct communication.
AE: Why?
CS: They were not able to manage all the demands on answering questions. They said…that they could not put so much effort into this, and it would look very bad if they did not do it.
Citizen 1: That's interesting…
AE: So, they were afraid of that kind of exposure?
Citizen 1: It should be the opposite, in my opinion!
CS: Yes. And it is the same with the civil servants too. In the beginning we talked about this dialogue that we were supposed to have, back and forth, this... direct communication. But it is the same for us, we said, how will this work out? Who takes responsibility? Who will really do this? This has been more of a one-way communication, so to speak. Give us your opinions and let us take care of them.
Citizen 2: Yes and in that way you were able to keep control of the process. I do understand your reasons here; it's all about practicalities...

This discussion during the focus group interview circulated around the issue of avoiding the exposure of inactivity**.** From the statement of the civil servant, one could draw the conclusion that there were uncertainties in the allocation of responsibility, but in fact it largely depended on under-staffing and changes in the work-organisation. This organisational issue affected the interaction with the citizens and also, together with the consequences of absent politicians, contributed to the effect of causing a one-way communication. The joint meeting with the citizens who took part in a focus group interview provided the involved parties with the opportunity to understand the motives behind the choices made, and find out that the unwillingness to respond to the public opinions was more complicated than a simple dichotomisation between opposing parts. In the best of eGovernment worlds, the administration should not avoid responsibility but must be prepared to open up for participation even in decision-making. In this particular practice it was not just reluctance towards changing established habits or work practices which made the actual performance difficult; the economic contraction of the organisation and temporary vacancies were also elements which made it impossible to introduce a new culture of interaction in the municipality. Symbolic active citizenship counts upon actors who *produce, deliver and improve their performance in the process***,** in a similar way and in a pre-defined order. In practice was this impossible to achieve, since scarce resources and local restrictions were an obvious hindrance for this extensive production of change, involving several parties.

6.7 Analysing the variations of active citizenship

During the gathering of empirical material for this thesis I found several examples of active citizenship which did not fit within the given frames of what was considered to constitute an active citizenship. The limiting function of this symbolic active citizenship is exemplified in figure 6:1, which describes how the earlier presented cases, such as the insubordinate landowner and the stories about Olga, Mike, Jim and Fred, turn out to fall either outside, beside or between the envisioned categories.

Symbolic active citizenship	
Legitimate pro-activism	*Olga, the landowner*
Legitimate active citizenship	*Mike, Jim*
Legitimate passive citizenship	*Fred*

Figure 6:1

Being pro-active, active and even passive (although willing to become active) is accepted within the stipulated frames of symbolic active citizenship, as long as it is performed within the prescribed limits. According to the rhetoric, passive citizenship is a state which is seen as possible to alter and turn into its opposite. However, my empirical material shows that there are many more layers which are not visible within the given frames for how active citizenship shall be performed. Olga is outside this framework, because she is not recognised either as an active or a passive citizen and through her own definition is not proactive. Neither is the young man Mike acknowledged as being active or proactive within the given frames. He is located outside the framework. The empirical examples show that *the passive role could be a way of choosing to be active*, as in the case with Fred, the reluctant politician. This behaviour also falls outside symbolic active citizenship. The case of *Election 2002* illuminates the tenacity of symbolic active citizenship; that it is more important to uphold the framework than it is to really reach out and oblige the young people. However, symbolic active citizenship closes the active citizenship and there are no mechanisms to handle the problems which occur when the image of the active citizen shadows the authentic, ongoing actions.

6.7.1 Learning in varying positions

Lave and Wenger (1991) describe in their presentation of a social theory of learning a process that they call legitimate peripheral participation. This could in a simple way be described as a form of apprenticeship, but is according to the authors a much more complex activity, describing a particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert. The legitimate participants have limited responsibility for the ultimate outcome as such and their participation is therefore also limited. Legitimate peripheral participation is not to be understood as a structure; it is a way of acting in the world, which takes place under widely varying conditions (Hanks in Lave & Wenger, 1991:23). This reasoning is relevant when discussing the activity, among all the actors involved in eParticipation, of moving towards full participation.

eParticipation could to some extent also be seen as a situated learning-process which takes place in a participation framework where several communities of practice make room for

participation. This means that the activity of participation is also mediated by the differences of perspectives among those that are considered peripheral participants in some communities of practices, but that have a central position in other communities. The core activity of eParticipation is therefore not to be reduced to simply involving an artefact and an individual. The core activity takes place in a participation framework which includes multiple levels of participation from various locations, such as the municipal employees' participation in tailoring a tool for citizens' participation, or the politicians' involvement or absence, when making decisions about which tool to use. Among other strategic contextual choices, these also have an impact on the final outcome of the located eParticipation.

According to Lave & Wenger, understanding and learning has to be defined and compared to the actual activities taking place in a participation framework. For example, a situated approach contests the assumption that learning is an evident response to teaching. Learning can take place on unexpected occasions and in other places than those that are formally decided upon. In a similar way, eParticipation does not always take place in the designated places, such as in the designed online consultations. Instead, learning took place in the focus group meetings during the *Komindu project*, where citizens were given the possibility to test the functionality of the suggested tools, and at the same time had the possibility to discuss their own citizenship and electronically aided activities in a social group. The answer to procedural stimulation of participation is not necessarily the activities that are desired. Active citizenship could be viewed both as a special type of social practice providing several participation possibilities and openings for conducting legitimate peripheral participation. The preconceived ideas of what active citizenship is could also stop those practices from conducting legitimate peripheral participation.

Learning could thus be seen as a part of every-day activities. This ongoing informal every-day learning of active citizenship is exemplified in this thesis by, for instance, the group who jointly created a pre-incubator for those who needed access to a kick-off arena. It could also be exemplified as taking part in tailoring software at your job and thereby also contributing to general software-development activities. A third example is the citizens who presented their opinions or user-feedback of a municipal web site. All these are examples of how the learning participation framework is continuously extended and broadened in and by practice, also including informal aspects of everyday learning. Active citizenship is not to be seen as a stable identity or specific location which one has to reach. The crucial locus and precondition for this transformation is a transformation process, based on learning through increased participation in a productive process.

The legitimate peripheral participation framework shapes the ability of a community to reproduce itself through a participation process. The development of eParticipation is also a process of deepening engagement. The goal for this process is to create a community of active citizens and their gradual move towards full participation. Legitimate peripheral participation is not a simple participation structure in which an apprentice occupies a particular role at the edge of a larger process, and an active citizen is consequently not to be regarded primarily as an apprentice, working towards becoming a practitioner or politician. The goal is rather to build and sustain new communities of practice, where citizenship could be collectively enacted and reshaped. Compared to the politicians, who could be said to possess the professional role of being an active citizen, the proactive citizens are in some sense subordinate in status.

6.7.2 Re-defining the roles

The pro-active citizens are also defined in relation to the practitioners. Even if the citizens' goal may not be to become professionals, they are gradually moving closer to the domains the practitioners uphold and the proactive citizens are in that sense aspiring experts. In some parts of the performance, they could also be regarded as sole responsible agents. Each role described here (as subordinate in status, aspiring experts and citizens with delegated responsibility) implies different sorts of responsibility, a different set of role relations and a varying interactive involvement. On the other hand, the politicians and the practitioners are also becoming subordinate in status, in other kinds of communities of practice, where the proactive citizens define the values based on what they apprehend as the nucleus of being active. When politicians choose to disregard their role as co-learners of *active citizenship* (i. e. by refusing to accept new ways of communicating through ICT), they all assist in sustaining the dichotomy between *the image of the reluctant politician* and *the image of the inactive citizens*. The politician's decision to avoid activity might be strategic from his point of view, and necessary in order to keep his autonomy and assure reliability in his political sphere. It might however be interpreted differently by those who are located in the margins of this particular community of practice (the marginalised or peripheral actors in this case are represented by the citizens), as an act of negligence, a lack of competence or ignorance. The result is not only an absent politician but also an interpretation by the legitimate participants that he is not an aspiring member ready to begin a new trajectory within their alternative communities of practice.

The notion of legitimate peripheral participation could thus function as a conceptual bridge when discussing how eParticipation is played out in practice, emphasising the learning aspects of gradually becoming a member in the various communities of practice that form practices of eParticipation and that practitioners, politicians and citizens are in turn formed by. When they enter processes of transforming their engagement and participation by conducting legitimate peripheral participation, the citizens, the practitioners and the politicians, mark out different positions in a field of participation. However, the trajectory of moving from the periphery to the centre may look different and may also cause dilemmas of participation and even break-downs and effects of non-participation. There is not only a range of participation modes. A range of participant roles also exists, which Wenger (1998:164-187pp) suggests should be described as follows: *full participant* (insider), *full non-participant* (outsider), *peripheral participant* (participation enabled by non-participation, whether it leads to full participation or remains in the periphery) *marginalised participant* (participation restricted by non-participation, whether it leads to non-membership of a community of practice or to a marginal position in the constellation).

An interesting aspect of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice is the interplay of participation and non-participation. Wenger describes this interplay as a source for shaping identities. He points out that identity in practice is *lived*, i.e. made up by experiences that involve participation and reification, as well as non-participation. Reification means, according to Wenger (1998:58-62) "making into a thing", treat (an abstraction) as substantially existing or as a concrete material object. Reification marks a twist in language; it does not making mean abstractions into a proper material object, rather into symbols, i.e. justice portrayed by a blindfolded woman.

Identity is also *negotiated.* It is a way of becoming. Identity is pervasive and ongoing, and not condensed to specific periods (like youth or old age) or tied to specific settings (i. e family,

working life). Identity is in that sense socially determined, and *part of community membership.* It is also a *learning process,* which Wenger defines as a process of incorporating the past and future into the meaning of the present. Identity is also a *nexus* which combines multiple forms of membership, and is manifested in an *interplay between local and global.* Active citizenship is thus also part of an individual's identity or, for some, a large part of the entire identity. Non-participation in that sense presents the contrasting negative example which helps to clarify a person's identity, by pointing out the non-acceptable characteristics. Our own practices include elements of other practices; we come in contact with communities of practice where we do not belong. Non-participation is thus to be seen as a part of living in a landscape of practices which one feels one does not belong to. Identity becomes a mixture of being in and being out. Experiences of non-participation are an inevitable part of life but those experiences take on a different kind of importance when participation and non-participation interact to define each other, as exemplified by the relation between *symbolic active citizenship* and *proactive citizenship*.

Wenger establishes two interrelated positions within non-participation, which are of interest for the coming discussion about inactive politicians:

1) *Relation of peripherality*. Some degree of non-participation is necessary to enable a kind of participation which is less than full, seen from a participation aspect. Non-participation is then seen as an enabling factor of participation (this enabling peripheral position is exemplified in the case of Olga, which was previously presented in this chapter).

2) *Relation of marginality*. This is defined as a form of non-participation which prevents full participation. Here, the non-participation aspect dominates and defines a restricted form of participation (the decision-makers' decision to not take citizens' suggestions seriously is a clear example of such marginality).

Peripherality and marginality include a mixture of both participation and non-participation, but produce totally different experiences and identities. Wenger claims that the difference between being peripheral and having a position of marginality must be understood in the context of trajectories that determine the significance of forms of participation.

There are, as described in the everyday dilemmas of the proactive citizens in this chapter, a number of obstacles to overcome, at least when the sought action is enacted as an initiative of one's own. Whenever a citizen decided to be "active", or found his or her own way of appropriating technology or communication, they met with resistance. At the same time, the pro-active citizens' actions could also be interpreted as resistance towards the established ways of acting. As such, they are initiatives that partly are effects of experiencing a peripheral position, and trials of gaining access to empowerment and legitimate participation. This was clear in the example of the cleaner, who found her own way to learn the function of a new device, which she suddenly found was placed in her working environment. The politicians who refused to carry out a dialogue were in turn an example of how the category of active citizenship, which is basically intended to open up for participation, also had the double function of restricting the possibilities for autonomy and self-determination. This also created a position of marginality, not for the citizens this time, but for the politicians.

When discussing symbolic participation, it is important to clarify who is included 'in' the category and who is envisioned as residing 'outside' the category. This is an issue that is apparent in the case of Olga. In the drawing up of boundaries in this empirical example, active citizenship becomes visible as a right and a duty to take personal responsibility for learning how to use new technological devices in the work place. This right is found to be restricted in practice, as not everyone is included and, as shown in this particular example, because employees are not prepared to react to and act upon new and unexpected ways for citizens to act, while the duty still remains as a prerequisite for active citizenship (this woman still has the same obligation to use eServices, along with the citizens who started out from another position and who were equipped with more resources).

6.8 Summing up the analysis

The reasoning in this chapter has described and analysed two basic and inter-related conditions and prerequisites for engaged participation and active citizenship, which lead towards several conclusions. Firstly, citizens must be supported in learning that several possibilities and locations for participation exist. Secondly, the managing bodies need support in realising active citizenship, through opening up for multiple ways to participate, taking care of initiatives which originate from several locations. This reasoning underlines the necessity to allow space for a variety of actions and activities, in order to prevent delimiting and restraining effects of eParticipation, such as symbolic active citizenship.

Active citizenship is not to be understood as a predefined, uniform role. The notion contains various elements of engagement, knowledge, political inclination, innovation, provocation, and responses, but also grades of inactivity. The inactive politicians who declined to take active part in online discussions and consultations also conducted active citizenship in order to resist symbolic active citizenship, as did the citizens who contributed on their own terms, through starting up a learning trajectory by conducting legitimate peripheral participation. Active citizenship then occurs in the interplay of symbolic active citizenship and proactive citizenship, i.e. it occurs as a *malleable citizenship.*

eParticipation does not benefit from being defined as a single solution. It manifests itself as a multitude of activities, as shown in the examples of the cleaner Olga and the social worker Jim. If examined through the focusing lens of symbolic active citizenship, Olga's activity was apparently peripheral, but when examined through the diffraction lens, in this case provided by Bowker & Star, her activity contributed profoundly to changing her role towards becoming an active citizen, and thereby also altered the symbolic active citizenship, as well as the notion of pro-active citizenship. This means that eParticipation and active citizenship must be understood as a multitude of activities and varying grades of participation, and in accordance with this reasoning eParticipation must offer many entrances, locations, and degrees of participation.

A way to describe and understand this process of the simultaneous opening and closing of active citizenship is to talk about the two interrelated dimensions of gradually increasing participation, combined with a multitude of locations to set out from. The politicians, the cleaner and the innovative social worker all took part in a learning process. They wanted to move their location, but for various reasons. Olga wanted to find out more about a new device and the services it offered and thereby left her position of peripherality. The hesitant politician and the spare-time politician both felt uncomfortable with exposure in a dialogue arena where they had no control over their own participation and no direct response to how others would

experience their participation. Therefore, they actively denied these forms of eParticipation. By doing so, they also marginalised themselves in a new potential community of practice, instead of opening up the possibilities to learn through peripheral participation in a new forum. Fighting the restrictions that rest upon a politician, which are inherent within symbolic active citizenship, and choosing to become an inactive politician, also transforms the citizens' possibility to be influential. The aspects of active citizenship, which are inherent in the political role, presume that they are supposed to be active. Inactive citizens do not have the same implications, since they are also expected to be non-active in a pre-defined way. The active citizens in turn gain more autonomy and power than the activity of attending a dialogue in a web forum was supposed to create, according to what is prescribed by symbolic citizenship. This made it possible for the attending citizens to move quickly towards full participation, as they were offered a multitude of locations and variations of activity.

It is thus possible to state that citizens and politicians, even if they show the same degree of participation, gain different control and influence of the situation or the activity, depending on their differing locations and starting-points in the field of participation. The politicians are expected to be active and lead, according to their political role, whilst the citizens are supposed to be ready to advance their participation. However, as shown here, occasions exist when the roles are different. The politicians wanted to stay in their community of practice, while Olga and Jim tired to become part of a new community of practice. The politicians wanted to reproduce their habitual participation, consisting of formal politics. They were also afraid of losing their autonomy, as they could not find a position within the new forms of eParticipation where they could start their own journey of legitimate peripheral participation.

A way to handle those dilemmas of conducting legitimate peripheral participation is to arrange communities of practices based on the participants' differing needs and varying feelings of membership and autonomy. The crucial issue when it comes to stimulate active citizenship is not the choice of becoming active or not. Rather, the most important aspect turns out to be the issue of feeling in control of your own activity, regardless of if it is a matter of *being ignorant* or *fully engaged.* In fact, one of the inactive politicians, described how he used his inactivity as a tactical instrument, and made an active choice not to intervene in the online debate, since he knew that he would automatically be ascribed a certain role by the discussants, based on his previously defined status within the formal political system. He would thereby also lose influence on choosing how to become active. In this particular case the politician expressed a feeling that his "active citizenship" would be beyond his own control, which he could not accept. For this particular politician, non-participation then becomes an aspect of participation that makes crossing boundaries difficult, because each side is defined by opposition to the other side. Membership in one community of practice (the practices of politicians) means marginalisation in another (the practices of citizens). The identities of non-participation that these politicians develop become an integral part of the cultivation of active citizenship in their own communities of practice. In dealing with their marginality in the citizens' practices, they place this complex mixture of participation and non-participation at the core of their practice and their identities as politicians. Non-participation could of course be experienced as an example of conscious manipulation of another person's actions (dialogue as a show for the gallery), but non-participation could also be a consciously chosen and legitimate position, in order to await the next move, to avoid taking responsibility for the mutual learning that might occur in these activities. The politicians were not interested in changing their political practice, since they experienced a heavier workload owing to increased demands for taking individual responsibility, but very little response from the citizens in taking their share of society-building. However, the effects

of non-participation among politicians is also to be understood as an act of *excluding themselves*, not only from developing new forms of democratic activities, but also from the possibility to conduct legitimate peripheral participation in the overall transformation. At the same time they are also *excluded by the citizens* who demand that they take their share of responsibility for dialoguing and decision-making. From both sides, this causes a circle of the reproduction of those regimes of practices or frozen relations concerning exclusion, and this is in the long run causes no development of participation at all, hindering the development of a more inclusive approach to making progress.

Symbolic active citizenship would be more changeable if the right of the people to become active on their own terms was met with more malleability. This does not mean that all kinds of pro-activity are good; the activities must be judged in relation to local circumstances and possibilities. When the mechanisms are stabilised, and no longer allow change, there are no methods or ways to find out which of these mechanisms is given a function as an entrance or closure for participation under specific circumstances. This is an issue which has to be addressed in the design. There must be room for change and adaptability, for a variety of activities and actions, rather than being active or proactive in certain ways. The aspect of change is important; there must be a capacity for adaptability in the structures.

The main task in this chapter was to de-construct the traditional categorisation and show the limits of the current categorisations of active citizenship. I thus suggest that pro-active, active and passive citizenship are part of a much more fluid citizenship. They are not a projected and reified image of *symbolic active citizenship* that sets out to describe the limits of active citizenship, rather than the multiple variations and possible beginnings.

Active citizenship changes over time; it is dependent on the reasons why it is acquired, and the nuances of inactivity within active citizenship must be acknowledged. In that regard, malleable active citizenship is more dependent on the local arrangements and local preconditions, all the various communities of practices that are already a dynamic part of eParticipation, rather than reified symbolic active citizenship. Legitimate peripheral participation could be used as a tool to understand these interchanging activities. An alternative strategy would therefore be to arrange support for citizens' communities of practice and the possibility to conduct legitimate peripheral participation, combined with a multitude of locations from where to conduct the activities. Strivings towards acknowledging the multiplicity of being active, as well as acknowledging the fact that there is room for a multiplicity of activities within a malleable citizenship, could be a way to achieve engagement based on full participation.

The variations of a malleable citizenship could finally be described by this model:

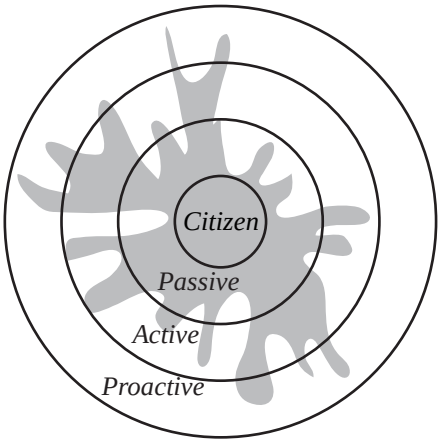

Figure 6:2 The fluidity of a malleable active citizenship[108]

[108] Illustration by Kajsa Bejerstedt-Blom.

7. The malleable organisation

"*... accelerate best practice exchange, in line with the model R&D – piloting-implementation-best practice-policy. eDemocracy must enter R&D and there has to be an increased attention for linkage to policy, and also an increased attention for combination of technology and organisational research.*[109]

[The public sector shall]
"*Help economic business growth, support and bring about innovation, provide high quality services, close democratic deficit, help restore democracy, create democratic ownership, cope with demographic change, safeguard security, liberty, justice, deepen internal market and convergence, enlargement, optimise multi-level governance*"(COM 2003: 567 final)

Symbolic eParticipation does not only prescribe citizens' actions, as described in the previous chapter; it also presents detailed requirements for the staff's performance in a wired organisation. The public sector has an extensive "to-do list" and is in many ways regarded as the final fix for entire sectors of society, at least to judge by the second initial quote above, which describes heavy pressure on public organisations, when it comes to both achieving changes for themselves and supporting others in their change processes. All this has to be accomplished with tight budgets. An ideal public sector has to live up to an almost anorectic ideal; it has to be "*lean and attractive*"[110]. The first quote above envisions the linkage between research on and the development of methods for sharpening the performance of the public sector. These two figurations contribute to forming the ideal picture of how public organisations should behave in order to achieve the devleopment of eParticipation.

The objective of this chapter is to go behind these representations of ideal performance and explore which kinds of mechanisms are used in order to steer the manifold processes constituting the practitioners' practice. It is also crucial to explore how these representations are handled in local settings, and thus detect the interplay of imagined action and actual facts.

[109] Timmers, in a speech at the DEXA eGovernment Conference in Zaragoza, Spain, August 2004.
[110] Quoting Timmers who used this expression during his speech.

The previous chapter described active citizenship as part of a symbolic eParticipation. It also discussed how legitimate peripheral participation could be seen as an element of symbolic eParticipation, and how it contributed in redefining the role of the active citizen, assisting in creating a malleable citizenship.

Plans and visions of how to steer and support adaptability among active citizens are an essential part of symbolic eParticipation. Visions help in categorising what is seen as as symbolic active citizenship, i.e. what actions are delegated to function as symbolic participation. Civic actions and initiatives, or what I have chosen to call proactive citizenship, are also part of this broad spectrum. In some cases these proactive actions clearly work as counter-strategies, giving prominence to aspects of plurality and the right to co-determination, instead of reduction and uniformity, as for instance in the case of the insubordinate landowner described in chapter five. These meetings often take the form of confrontations, since they reveal stabilised power relations. How, then, is symbolic eParticipation implemented in mechanisms of power? I will concentrate my analysis on the interplay in these confrontations, rather than on the opposing parts. In order to be able to focus upon the interplay of symbolic and proactive citizenship, both parts have to be examined together. I start out by discussing the organisational circumstances for the local authorities.

Symbolic eParticipation requires active practitioners, and they, as well as citizens, have to be steered in a certain direction by the legitimate decision-makers. Those disciplinary strategies will be further explored in the following sections. I will concentrate on exemplifying what happens when symbolic eParticipation meets practice, as it is played out in what could be defined as the practitioners' communities of practices.

7.1 eParticipation as maturity of performance

Symbolic eParticipation is a part of the general visions of eGovernment and as such is bound to be expressed in similar ways; as rhetorics, methods, good practice regimes and as models and guidelines for how the involved parties should proceed in order to reach a common goal of the democratisation of participation and government. The goal is repeatedly envisioned as mature orgnisational performance and an equally mature performance of active citizenship.

The mainstream discourse on general eGovernment development reveals how specific words have apparently become pregnant with meaning, possessing overpowering weight and importance. *Maturity*, which seems to be worth striving for in an organisation, is such a word; or rather, the ability to *perform maturity*, in service development or in developing a culture of every-day appropriation of ICT, as well as in supervising communication involving several parties. Examples of this kind of mature communication are, for instance, inviting citizens to take part in eConsultations, or feedback-cycles concerning for instance eService development.[111]

Maturity originates from psychology, and is a concept which basically implies that characteristics are developed to a level where they are in working order. This level of development is the result of an interplay between different capacities and elements.[112] Maturity is considered to enable possibilities for new behaviour and new learning processes, which have previously been impossible to develop. In psychology maturity is envisioned as a

[111] See *eGovernment Readiness Report*, 2005.
[112] NE (The Swedish National Encyclopedia) URL=http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=257763, 20050627

description of a balanced condition[113], indicating broad-mindedness, achieved by an individual as a result of what is considered a normal development. The term normal supports the assumption that there exist certain standards for what is considered to be defined as development. Maturity could also describe a stage of the stagnation of creativity and less hunger for experiment and change.

Maturity is regarded as something that is possible to visualise, materialise and measure. It is also something which is possible to gain, and the process of reaching it is often described with symbolic metaphors such as climbing ladders. This condition could be visualised as differentiated from other stages through layers in a scoring framework. These metaphors of development traditionally function as parables, and are thereby loaded with religious and cultural symbolism. The image of the ladder in particular(Cooper, 1989:180) indicates a sort of inauguration, a *rite of passage*, where the rungs could be interpreted as symbolising the growing strength among the organisations (assuming a growing insight among employees about the properness of both digitisation and efficiency improvement at work, and lately, the need for opening up to citizens' involvement and participation), on their path towards accumulated knowledge and the realisation of transformation. A ladder embodies and represents the transition from one level to another; a move from one way of being to another stage. In that sense, a rainbow metaphor, as the Access Rainbow model, could also serve as a powerful metaphor for a transformation process and reunion of divided awareness. However, it could also work in the other direction, delimiting the transformation by excluding what does not fit in with what is considered mainstream.

7.2 Objectifying of local practice

Methods and models are examples of symbolic artefacts, which play an important role as mechanisms for control in these stages. They appear in concrete, almost physical manifestations, but loaded with symbolic value. One example is the *Service Development Ladder (SD-ladder)*, which I will present more thoroughly later in this chapter.

A crucial part of symbolic eParticipation is the constant objectifying of local practice. It is also exemplified by attempts to steer the procedure, i.e. in the European Union, through actively promoting repetition of good practices. Even though this goal is not explicitly declared, this is often an effect within practice, i.e. a globalisation of methods and models is taking place, along with what could be called a constant measuring of maturity of performance as a univocal and objectified phenomenon. Local practices, on the other hand, display the need for balancing and conciliating divergence, handling partial perspectives, and situated ways of facilitating learning, at the same time as they try to make sense of the many recommendations for how to behave. The one-eyed focus on first and foremost promoting eParticipation as a uniform development creates a dilemma, when maturity on one hand is envisioned as something which could be transferred and objectified and established as a kind of "good practice-regime", and on the other hand is experienced as a complex phenomena, tied to personal and contextual circumstances. The many attempts at accelerating the exchange of best practices in the European Union and repeated trials to establish a view that practices of democratic participation are possible to advance within the frames of R&D projects, as exemplified by one of the initial quote in this chapter. The refereed model emphasises the necessity to adapt eDemocracy to a certain progress-model, originally picturing how research and development projects should proceed, by following the envisioned

[113] NE, http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=257763[Accessed 070409]

phases of piloting, implementation of findings, and development of best practice, which in turn are supposed to end up in a guiding policy. This is also a way to secure that a normalised change of the public sector takes place and that regulated relations with the citizens are established, according to the visions of development.

Organisational maturity has become a crucial reference point when describing an organisation's behaviour. There are general assumptions that both development and the use of services and technology is more or less mature, which also indicates that there are certain degrees in maturity, or more complete ways of managing eGovernment. eParticipation becomes a central feature of an organisation's accomplished degree of simultaneously performing and supporting digital literacy. This process is envisioned as possible to work towards by going through certain pre-figured developmental phases. eParticipation is, in accordance with this reasoning, considered more mature than participation without technical support.

7.3 Good practice as a power mechanism

Benchmarking (COM, 2006:173 final) is a technique for knowledge transfer, primarily used in businesses, but lately exerting considerable influence on general eGovernment development. According to the Swedish National Encyclopaedia,[114] "benchmarking" means a reference point or criterion and is a measurement in the form of a comparison of a product or a service, in relation to what is considered to be the best available example in the area. It has become a management technique used in order to compare an organisation or an authority, sometimes also parts of the whole organisation, with what is considered a well-functioning organisation, representing what in general is called good or best practice. In business and organisational development the tradition is to encourage staff working within "the good example" as well as within "the bad example" to engage in sharing experiences. The participation and the comparison activity are intended to work as an instrument for knowledge transfer between authorities, triggering organisational change. In eGovernment settings this ideal of mixing different contexts does not seem to be the main goal; the emphasis is instead put on finding a virtual match with the help of objectified examples or organisational role models presented as good or best practice. These try to establish a view that learning is imposed form outside, apart from within the experiences at a particular, located setting. Change and opportunities for learning are rather envisioned as coming from the outside, something which has to be adapted and domesticated and incorporated, rather than growing within a particular situation or context.

Applying business models to the practice of public administration, with the aim of spurring a desirable development of eGovernment, without giving sufficient thought to which kind of consequences this import may have on the already existing processes and practices has in some cases turned out to be a mistake. [115]

In a global survey of eGovernment,[116] the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) (Jupp, 2002:1-32 pp) model was launched as an instrument for managing citizen relations. This model was backed by Microsoft and represented formal attempts to bring about closer contact with citizens. CRM was then described as 'an emerging force in eGovernment' (ibid. 2002:4).

[114] NE, Benchmarking, URL= http://www.ne.se/jsp/search/article.jsp?i_art_id=126181 [Accessed 20050627]
[115] See Lenk & Traunmüller, http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/fb3/lehre/lenk/dexa.doc [Accessed 021213]
[116] *The Global Accenture Study on E-government*, 2002, URL= http://www.accenture.com/xdoc/en/industries/government/eGov_April2002_3.pdf [Accessed 021213]

It was also pointed out that 'a key to successful e-government is the citizen-centric approach of customer relationship management – treating citizens and businesses like customers by tailoring services to their needs rather than the needs of the agency delivering them' . This has in several cases been an empty promise, due to difficulties in realising those visions caused by organisational hurdles. This taken-for-granted view on how to bring about closer relationships does not include the dilemma of balancing the needs of several parties, neither the differentiation nor the effects of exclusion within inclusion that might occur in those managerial exercises.

The global consultation firm, that performed the previous survey, stated in another global evaluation of eGovernment, published in the year of 2004,[117] that Sweden was among the top five of what they called "eGovernment leaders", behind Singapore and the United States, and the world leaders in the area, Canada. The report also described Sweden as a rare bird in the colony of eGovernment leaders, due to the fact that, at the time of the inquiry, no central eGovernment action plan was in existence in the country. The building of an eGovernment architecture was decentralised, with a great deal of autonomy for agencies on all levels. The local authorities set their own targets and decided their own strategies for how to achieve the goals. It is important to point out that local government as a phenomenon has a long tradition in Sweden. The local authorities and the county councils/regions are responsible for providing a major part of all public services. They have a considerable degree of autonomy and independent powers of taxation. Local self-government and the right to levy taxes are stipulated in the *Instrument of Government*, one of the four pillars of the Swedish Constitution. Sweden's local authorities and county councils/regions have a great deal of freedom to plan and organise activities after their own fashion. Their responsibilities are regulated partly in the *Local Government Act* and partly in laws and statutes covering specific areas. The scope for local and regional self-government is of course affected by decisions taken within the EU.[118]

The consultancy firm also pointed out that even though the SAPM[119] conducted regular assessments of the eGovernment development, the measurements had merely focused on usage, without grading the content and *maturity* of public sector websites (Accenture, 2004:100). The report also stated that SAPM claimed that the Swedish people knew their local authorities and national agencies and therefore had no need of central, intention-based orientation portals in order to find what they were looking for. The report pointed out that Swedish internet users visit eGovernment websites regularly and that a very large part of the general public has had some experience of eGovernment. The conclusions about the Swedish model of eGovernment were summarised in an almost astonished tone:

> "*Sweden has one of the most different eGovernment programs of any of the 22 countries surveyed in this report. The non-interfering policy of its central government means that the program is highly decentralized; yet this does not seem to have posed many problems for the citizenry to date. Usage of government websites is still quite high. However, the government may be*

[117] Accenture, 2004, *eGovernment Leadership: High performance, Maximum Value. URL= http://www.accenture.com/NR/rdonlyres/D7206199-C3D4-4CB4-A7D8-846C94287890/0/gove_egov_value.pdf* [Accessed 070409]

[118] See http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/01/97/27/c97e685a.pdf [20050627]

[119] SAPM is a Swedish Agency for Public Management which supports the Government in evaluating and following-up state and state-financed activities URL=http://www.statskontoret.se/default____309.aspx [Accessed 070409]

> *underestimating the potential of a well-designed user-centred portal. If more focus were spent on aggregating and enhancing services, more people might use the portal on a regular basis for an overall improved experience."* (Ibid: 2004)

In summary, the local authorities which were involved in the projects tied to this research study, expressed and exposed difficulties and dilemmas of handling the cry for "performance of maturity" which they often interpreted as a cry for alignment. In practice, they had to cope with the repeated demands for centralisation and adaptation and mature behaviour, at the same time as they were expected to support citizens in developing a mature active citizenship. The practitioners found little room for conducting their own learning processes and cultivating their maturity, when adjusting to the symbolic eParticipation

7.4 The globalisation of a symbolic ladder

The need to continuously follow-up, measure and regularly monitor the development and implementation of what in Sweden, during its initial development, was called "the 24-hour authority" or "24/7 agency", along with a growing number of attempts to normalise and objectify local development, gradually gained greater importance over the years. These control activities were initially nationally managed by the SAPM, even though their role towards local and regional authorities was solely to provide guidance for development. Since 2006 responsibility for this development has now been taken over by VERVA (Swedish Administrative Development Agency) [120]. Certain measurement instruments were given more prominence in the debate, also in the municipality of Ronneby. They were presented by the authorities as a sort of normalisation chart, against which local performance could be compared or reflected.

One concrete example of a guideline intended to support development, but with a double-edged function of also supervising change, is the previously mentioned *SD-ladder* which was introduced by the SAPM (SAPM,2000:21) in Sweden in the year 2000. Since then it has been given legitimacy and a practical function as a general combined measurement instrument and guideline for how progress should be made, particularly within the development of eService, and thereby also functions as a mechanism for power-enactment. The model rapidly became a dominating criterion of successful development of foremost national eServices, but it was also used in local municipal settings. In another version found in a brochure presented by the SALAR (The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions)[121] is the SD-ladder described as a system of co-ordinates with the two co-ordinating axes respectively spanning from low to high levels of service maturity and low to high technological maturity (SALAR, 2002: 23.).The different steps are presented in the following way, from the bottom to the top, where number four is the highest possible level:

[120] Verva has been instructed by the government (Ministry of Industry) to work towards the increased use of e-commerce in the public sector. This assignment was passed on to Verva in 2006 by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, which started working on it in 2003. More information is found on URL= http://www.verva.se/web/t/Page____3011.aspx [Accessed 070409]

[121] Information about SALAR on URL= http://www.skl.se/artikel.asp?C=756&A=180 [Accessed 070409]

			Integration
		Transaction	
	Interaction		
Information			

Step one, (Information), describes a low maturity level of service and technology, meaning packaged information about the authority and its services. Step two (interaction) represents a higher degree of service and technology maturity, Step three (transaction) is a medium-level. Step four (integration) means a high level of service and technology maturity, and is, according to SAPM, a web portal with co-operative networking functions, seamlessly linking a number of authorities and other social institutions. However, implicit in these requirements for eServices are also the prescriptive roles and expectations for the organisation, where the fourth level has the most radical implication for the ongoing reconfiguration of the interaction between the organisations and the citizens. The fourth level does not solely present technologies which are able to interact, but also practitioners with high skills in managing technological and cultural behaviour.

The SD-ladder was inspired (SAPM, 2000: 21:36) by another model originally produced and presented by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) [122] who stated that the guide was compiled with the help of several government agencies with responsibilities for internet policy. The stages of online service-delivery are described in the following way:

> *Stage 1: a website that publishes information about the agency and its services to all Internet users (information)*
> *Stage 2: allows any internet user to browse and interact with the agency's database or databases. (interaction)*
> *Stage 3: includes the first two stages and permits users to enter information on the website, exchanging or transacting secure information with the agency. (transaction)*
> *Stage 4: is the same as Stage 3, but in addition the agency, with the users prior approval, shares that user's information with other government agencies." (integration)(ibid.)*

As can be seen in comparison, these two models have a lot in common. A third variant, or interpretation, is presented by the European Union (EU), and was according to a public servant at SAPM a slightly modified version of the Swedish model:

> "*Sweden was the chair country when EU initiated recurrent measurements of the public sector's use of the web as a channel for service delivery independent of time and space. After minor modifications our 24-hour staircase became the model. The top stage (integration) was considered difficult to measure and was renamed as "completeness". There were also certain difficulties in agreeing upon what kind of services should be measured, due to differences in organisation of school, health, and home care. Another example is the Swedish Traffic Security Register, which handles all registrations of Swedish cars, while in Germany this is handled by the local authorities in the cities. Gradually there*

[122] Available in the *Better Practice Guide-Internet Delivery Decisions*, URL= http://www.anao.gov.au/director/publications/betterpracguides.cfm [Accessed 070409]

was an agreement upon twenty services within the state, the municipality and the county council" (Östberg, 2004).

In the report of the fourth measurement on electronic public services, conducted as a web-based survey by a world-wide consultancy firm in October 2003, (Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (2004: 4) another representation of the four-stage framework can be found, showing similarities with the previous examples. The different stages are illustrated as follows:

			4) Full electronic case handling
		3) Two-way interaction	
	2) One-way interaction		
1) Information			

This measurement of how the qualitative development of eServices evolves could also be seen as a strategy for standardisation and normalisation of the development as a whole, or a way to implement the standardised technology solutions which are often used in these settings. *The SD–ladder* could clearly also be seen as an *obligatory passage point.* According to actor network theory (Callon 1986, Suchman, 2002) an obligatory passage point is part of an ongoing translation. In this context the passage-point is exemplified as a measurement-tool, essential both in production and use, for control of a hybrid system. The hybrid system is equivalent to the local interpretations of eGovernment which have to be normalised and objectified. This obligatory passage point greatly influences all other operations and partial translations, enabling supremacy and control. In this case, for the EU and other steering-bodies, it functions firstly as a way to harmonise eGovernment development as a whole, and secondly to harmonise world wide actions in a certain direction, namely to adopt more technology in their organisations.

7. 5 Situating the SD-ladder

During a local network meeting within the TANGO-project [123], including several stakeholders such as municipal employees, researchers and representatives from local enterprises, a discussion took place concerning the current state of local eGovernment development in the municipality. A municipal officer, here called *Sven*, introduced his own version of the *SD-ladder*. He described it mainly as a measurement tool, which he applied to the local settings. The two dimensions in his version of the co-ordinating system were *utility and time* versus *technical complexity*. The four steps were in this version defined as:

[123] eGovernment Network meeting, P5/20041006

			4) Integration
		3) Transactions	
	2) Interactivity		
1) Information			

In his presentation, he also distinguished between the services which were made available through the public interface to the municipal web portal and the services available on the organisation's intranet.

Sven concretised the model by relating it to his own experiences of the local organisation and exemplified Step One (information) as 4000 websites (more or less static). Information was also exemplified as databases containing news, or information about specific issues such as information about tourism and businesses and politicians. For specific groups of citizens, text-to-speech capabilities were emphasised. The second category (interactivity) was exemplified by web forums, booking-systems for tourist cottages, apartments and sports arenas, the telephone system, electronic forms (which at the time were locally stored in a company-based archive), the e-mail system, an electronic bulletin board system, and a calendar, but also by local practices of software customisation. The third category (transactions) was represented by examples such as the library catalogue and an accounting system which allowed for transactions along with booking systems. The fourth step was primarily interpreted as the technical integration of different computer systems, rather than co-ordination of different interests in co-determination. The fourth level (integration) was considered empty and unreachable.

Two obvious remarks concerning his descriptions of the SD-ladder is that the self-service systems, which required a high level of skills and activity from the local citizens, were given prominence in his presentation. Additionally, he included local, organisational practices of customisation within the organisation as an example of interactivity. By this he indirectly pointed out that those self-service systems had to be adapted to local circumstances; an activity which was likely to have implications for the role of the municipal employees.

In a follow-up interview[124], when we discussed his presentation, he made the following reflections on his categorisations and use of the model:

> "*The borderline between different steps is really not so sharp. I see this as an overarching model, which could be of help when following the overall progress in the municipality; it is in that sense interesting to follow and pay attention to how well the model is provided for. There is also a pedagogical aim with the model, in order to show the current state and to maintain knowledge*."

[124]Municipal officer (MO) Sven, P7/20050627

Sven had thoughts about the advantages of the model and explained why he favoured using it:

> "*Of course it also works as a tool for managing organisational development. I do not always speak openly about this in my contacts with the departments, but it sure is important. The issue is* ***how*** *to walk upwards and this steering-document sure makes it easier to climb faster. However, the ladder could also turn into a blind alley, if some departments act too quickly because they want to be fast climbers. It may very well be so that an initiative connects two specific systems, and leaves the rest behind and then you have got another drainpipe, albeit an extended one. Therefore is it important from an organisational point of view that these initiatives do not take place in isolation and in the form of drainpipes, which will not contribute to an open solution. I have discussed this issue with different actors and disturbed the peace in my neighbourhood, so to speak."*

7.5.1 The unreachable fourth step

One difficulty, which the municipal officer pointed out as central, was a typical deadlock situation, which often occurs when an existing basic technical platform is found to be insufficiently flexible and the many sub-solutions make a wider integration impossible. This also makes more advanced services impossible to develop. In this kind of situation, one step ahead often causes two steps back, since the knotty problem has its basis in political reasons. Nobody wants to argue for a costly total renewal of the basic platform in the local organisation, even though it might be better in the long run, rather than making numerous quick fixes in order to keep the already existing online services up and running. However, a basic degree of system flexibility is required in order to develop advanced services in accordance with the requirements for reaching the last step. The local political reality is that the budget will not allow such a fundamental renewal in a small municipality. Or as expressed in his own words:

> *"It is easier to do the minimum instead, and stay on the lower levels. The question is what really gains a hearing in practice. And the danger is that if you do not point out the direction regarding eService development, then the attitude will be a wait-and-see position; nobody wants to take up the role as experimental laboratory."*

However, according to this public servant, a possibility to reach the fourth step, and thereby also develop services with more direct significance for users and public organisations, was by investing in GIS-applications, where maps and graphical presentations have the potential to visualise selected information depending on which question is posed to the system. The potential of including citizens more actively in determining and suggesting what kind of online services, and what technological solutions should be prioritised in the municipality was not brought up at all in the interview. The participation described in his account was primarily focused on the practitioners' involvement. He described a plurality of interpretations of the concept of the 24/7 agency among the practitioners working in different sections of the municipality:

> *"I sent a question to twenty four heads of departments within the municipality and asked what they had done in order to develop the 24/7 agency. Some of*

them answered: "it is wrong to send us a question we have no knowledge about", others presented their differing meanings of the concept. Yet another example of an answer was that they had not done anything yet, when in fact they had been working in this direction for a while. A couple of them managed to elaborate the idea and illustrated examples of further development."

The divergence of answers among the practitioners could not solely be explained as a lack of competence or knowledge. It might also be approached from another angle, acknowledging that the legitimate definitions of how eGovernment should be conducted may not always be coherent with the way practitioners prefer to define and envision changes in their work practices. The situated practices do not always correspond to formal representations and plans.

7.5.2 "The inner picture no longer fits in with reality"

During a network meeting with the local eGovernment Network Group in the TANGO-project, another public servant, here called *Tom*, from a local branch of a national authority, gave his own reflections on how a transformation towards eGovernment had influenced his work situation:

> *"Our authority has been centralised lately; we have started a helpdesk which is open 24 hours a day. This is a developmental strategy by the management, in order to reduce local staffing, which in turn is leading to a higher concentration of work tasks locally and people have of course got into a scrape because of this, when so much money is supposed to be invested in technology*."[125]

An external company took over the responsibility for maintenance and services which formerly were the task of an in-house IT-department and Tom the reflected as follows, concerning these changes:

> "*It is technology and rational motives driving the development, and of course the largest groups have to be handled with the help of technology, but the down-sizing locally has also had effects such as loss of local competence. In my opinion the development is steering us to prioritise the organisation instead of considering the consequences for the individual citizens*."

Tom describes several changes in work practice and points out that the responsibility for further training and education has been delegated to the individual worker, and is no longer the special responsibility of the authority. He also describes changes in work routines concerning the task of scrutinising and checking data, which has been automated:

> *"There are certain parameters within the system which set the limits for the amount of evaluations we are allowed to conduct. This of course threatens our professional pride since we want to make broader investigations, but these categories and separations are made by the computer nowadays and such things do of course lead us to question whether the technology is providing the best solution for examination, since human intuition is not at all prioritised. I think*

[125] Public servant (PS) *Tom*, P5/20041126

this is particularly difficult when it comes to estimations and judgements. "The inner picture" does not fit in with reality any longer and even if it is possible to change an activity it is much more difficult to change the way of thinking. It takes time."

In another domain, in other settings and situations, citizens are experiencing difficulties in reaching what they call the establishment. Their active participation and contribution to decision-making has in the recent official rhetoric concerning eParticipation been up-graded as a main priority, yet several of them find that their suggestions are not properly recognised or given legitimacy in local practices. The reasons for this are of course diverse. One reason could be the dilemmas described previously in this chapter, i.e. the difficulties for the local authorities to align themselves with the prescribed developmental phases, due to local circumstances or local restrictions. The concentration on economic rationalisation as described by *Tom* is leading to unpredicted consequences such as prioritising of inner organisational matters, instead of opening up the organisation and allowing for more eParticipation. The coming sections will reverse the perspective and concentrate upon a couple of citizens and their direct encounter with the symbolic active citizenship, and what they experienced when they took a step forward towards becoming more actively involved in societal matters.

7.6 Encounters between symbolic eParticipation and pro-activism

An illuminating example of such a confrontation between symbolic active citizenship and proactivism is the story about Mike, a young man who started and ran his own local, youth-oriented web community. When seeking support and legitimisation from the local authorities for his initiative, they were at first positive. In the process of finding the right channels in to the organisation, his initiative was pushed aside by what was considered as a more legitimate proposal. It was the authorities' dominating strategy of exhaustion and kindly denial which finally felled his attempts at taking on the role of being a proactive citizen. The actual organisation of a youth-oriented site within the municipality was instead incorporated in an official, municipality-initiated project, namely the *Election2002* project. Another example of direct confrontation is the example of the two Flow Society members, Susan and Walt, describing their disheartening experiences of taking part in a municipally-initiated consultation. They were both invited to contribute to a local consultation about municipal development through a combination of both offline and online activities.

Some representative citizens were at first invited to take part in focus groups, evaluation groups and in answering online surveys, where they were symbolically delegated responsibility. At the end of the consultation, the representatives of the citizens were rejected as equal participants, since the citizens' suggestions for the future branding of the municipality were rejected by the formal decision-makers.

7.6.1 A pro-active young citizen – Mike's story

Let me now introduce Mike, a young, productive man in his mid-twenties. He describes himself as "*engaged in things that I find interesting*"[126] , such as movie-making and web

[126] PC 1, P7/050314

design. At the upper secondary school he got involved in the student board, because he wanted to influence local school politics. Among several activities he took part in developing a local course in democracy as a possible optional course for the students, and he was very much responsible for developing an ICT-program, which was a newly started profiled program in the school. After finishing an additional three year university education in media technology he has been active in trying to establish a start-up company within the media business. He is also active in founding an organisation aimed at functioning as a pre-incubator for young entrepreneurs, *Flow Society*, at the local innovative business centre. He also works part-time as a project leader for advocating a business-idea that was originally developed within a group of young people. The aim is to set up possibilities for unknown young artists to submit and distribute their art through the local library. This initiative was met with great interest by the local library and Mike continued by starting up several functions at neighbouring libraries in the region. During his previous studies he also got involved in starting a site, *Ronneby Right Now*, targeting young people between the ages of fifteen to eighteen, providing local information about up-coming events and as a virtual meeting place.

> *"It quickly developed into something more, it did not just function as a web site, it became more of an on-line community, a mini-Lunarstorm for the youngsters here in Ronneby. We had a member system and gathered a couple of hundred members and the site had lots of hits per day. It was extremely popular. We had several development ideas, and we also wanted to arrange our own events, not just point out what was already going on. We arranged discos for kids and stuff like that. We wanted to publish articles about the local cafés on the site and give local bands the opportunity to present themselves and their music on the site."*

Mike did not want to give up the idea. At about the same time as the politicians and municipal officers discussed an information campaign towards young people, later on materialised as the *Election2002-site,* he insisted on presenting for the municipality his own site and the strategy for how it could be developed further. They thought it was an interesting idea that they should consider closely. It soon became obvious that they had other things in mind; they were currently planning a common youth site functioning as a gathering point for the schools, the local social workers and other youth-oriented institutions. *Mike* ran out of energy and decided finally to let *Ronneby Right Now* go into hibernation.

> "*My dream scenario, which I also tried to sell to the municipality, was to gain enough acknowledgement and financial support to run this independent youth site. I wanted the municipality to sponsor this possibility for the young people and let them rule this place, without putting municipality seal on the site. It should be about events but also important things, but managed by ourselves. When it comes to initiatives targeting young people there are often hidden agendas behind the initiative, an ambition to lead the young people in a certain direction, but I think the important thing is to let the young people think themselves. Even if the municipality had taken over the initiative, they did not have to change a thing, the important thing is where the initiative comes from and who should manage the initiative.*

Mike was also reluctant towards a phenomenon of symbolic eParticipation, materialised as urgent requests to take part in eSurveys, which had been facing him more frequently lately, when entering the municipal web site:

> "*I do not care about all these pop-up windows urging me to fill in a survey or an opinion-poll about something more or less irrelevant, since I consequently question whether this is done for the purpose of justifying spending money on technology-development, rather than really taking my opinion into account. I always have the feeling that since my opinion has never been valued before, why should they really bother now?*" [127]

There are of course several explanations why some kind of pro-activity is rejected and pushed aside by the symbolic active citizenship, finally ending up as an isolated initiative, with no further connection to the functional active citizenship. A crucial issue is how the municipality can recognise the good initiatives and incorporate the pro-active citizens' ideas and activities, without taking over the initiative. There are of course time dimensions involved too. What had happened if *Mike* had persisted in developing his own youth community? If he had been invited to take part in setting up the official site, to actually conduct legitimate peripheral participation in the practitioners' community of practice, instead of being denied access? Maybe the interaction between the symbolic active citizenship and the proactive citizenship would in a long-term perspective have reached the point when it had been regarded as official. What should Mike have done in order to gain access, when he was offered no formal possibility of access to conduct legitimate peripheral participation?

There were other obvious examples of difficulties for young people to gain legitimisation, described by another pro-active citizen who we can call *Walt*:

> "*It is like they can not really see what kind of society they have created. /.../ They must be better at supporting private initiatives and entrepreneurship, because this is not the case today. There have been a lot of initiatives lately, young people setting up and running LAN (local area networks), big gatherings of national computer game sessions which did not get any support from the local municipality, but they managed to interest other parties. Is it not important enough, because these initiatives are coming from young people? The established ones tend to think like they always have done, when something new comes up they immediately react by saying: 'Wait a minute, this is something new, we do not know about it'. And they feel how the ground beneath their feet starts to shiver and all they can think about is how to secure their own positions, instead of really listening and trying to understand what these new things could bring to the future*."

7.6.2 A disheartening experience of unifying hearts - Susans and Walt's story

One of the initiators of the pre-incubator Flow Society, here called *Susan*, was besides this engagement also selected to take part in policy-consultations organised by the local municipality. She was invited as a representative for the student category in the focus group-interviews during the "*What's in your heart*"-consultation. She describes herself as an active person, having a vision of how to change society as a whole, not the local municipality in particular. She prefers to call herself a social entrepreneur and describes her background as coming from a politically engaged family (her father was a voluntary politician), even though

[127] Proactive citizen (PC1) P7/050314

she was always the one who was "the most loquacious". Early on she was seen as a person who questions everything and was forced to cope by herself, to engage in social matters and to take responsibility even in difficult situations. Her engagement in the profiling-consultations concerning the municipality arose from a strong urge to create societal change generally, not primarily out of concern for the local development in the municipality and she was a bit worried about the objectives of this particular consultation:

> "*I think it is important to have a broad possibility to take part in discussions, even if you are a non-party person. There have to be spaces where thoughts could be juggled around jointly with other people. Discontent occurs when there are too many interspaces; that is why a social democrat that is averse to immigrants runs the risk of falling out and finally become a neo-Nazi. If there had been a possibility to discuss the matter with immigrants and others, maybe he would not have taken that decision. It is not possible to always sweep the issues under the carpet; I can't understand this attitude of not allowing things to be brought up for discussion. /.../ Decisions concerning the every-day lives of people must be brought closer to themselves /.../then there will be a much better basis for decision-making.*"[128]

She also connected the initiative to democratic development as a whole:

> "*Why is this not called an e-democracy development project and ran by the politicians? Maybe because it is easier to buy a service? In that way it is easier to keep it at a distance...take for instance the Election2002 project, where they wanted more young people to take part, but they did not take the suitable, adequate measures to include them through the existing channels utilised by the young people. If you do not put the tools in the hands of people there will be no change, if it does not happen on the process level, nothing will happen. It has to be pushed into the system, and civic social engagement is the first step, then there has to be mutual exchange in an arena where the politicians can catch the thoughts of the public, a place which allows discussions and where you can juggle words and understandings together*."

Another participant Walt, who was involved in the consultation, made a similar reflection:

> "*I got invited to the branding -discussion and soon began to wonder: what if the municipality does not care a shit about this?! There was also money spent on organising focus groups in order to find a new branding profile for the municipality, I heard that they had to reverse the work since a couple of politicians were protesting when a group of 20-30 people said: this is the way to go and the politicians did not accept that and I really started to wonder "who really had the serve in this game?". We have to bridge the various circuits, branding work is about creating identity and soul, maybe there are not so many non-party politicians, but the ones that exist are like isolated islands outside the established organisation and they just keep on running in their own systems without any contact with others. This is not good enough."* [129]

[128] Pro-active citizen, PC2, P7/050527
[129] Pro-active citizen, PC3, P7/050628

This example could be contrasted by the difficulties *Susan* experienced in the civic association *Flow Society* where she soon became indispensable due to her engagement. She left the project, partly because she felt that she was expected to take too much responsibility for the project. The second initiator also dropped his engagement due to experiences of a far too heavy workload. The minutes of the last board meetings[130] reveals several difficulties in raising interest enough among the members to take responsibility for running the project. Walt described how it all started and explained why it failed in the end:

> *We got support in the form of premises and access to the Internet at the business park . We also got a couple of computers from the university library and a small amount of financial support from the local business incubator. We tried to mingle as much as possible at different official gatherings and we did this on voluntary basis. We were told that there were funds to apply for, but we had nobody that could spend enough time on writing the applications. We asked for initial support to be able to hire someone for part-time work during a couple of months. But the municipal commissioner said he could not account for spending tax money on initiatives like this and I tried to argue that it was a matter of supporting young people and find new structures for doing so and thereby also stimulate engagement in society. I claimed that I wanted to invest my share of tax money in this particular idea and he kept on arguing for a while. Then we came up with the idea of having people paying a symbolic entrance admittance fee, which was ten Swedish crowns but also, more importantly, a demand of investing ten hours of your time in the project./.../ I guess we did not got the right backup because we were too vague, in order to get the possibility to play ball you have to be very concrete..."*

In this context, in an organisation based on voluntary work, were similar demands on engagement posed on the members, as with the practitioners on the municipal work places. The translation process for this particular civic initiative reveals difficulties, which is more complex to describe than as a simple clash between established groups in society and young, aspiring participants. The process of problematisation was mostly driven by two fire souls which also established the obligatory passage points in the form of a website and a physical meeting place. They managed to gather a group of allies, consisting of the manager for the local business center who provided them with a site and an internet connection free of charge. The municipality provided the group with computers. The devices of intressement were soon locked into place, represented by a white board for brainstorming where all the plans and discussions were visualized during the internal and external meetings. The roles were internally defined in such way that the members were intended to be equal participants, but this was not quite accomplished. The formal organization structure for organizations required that a chairman, a secretary and a cashier was appointed. This arrangement was necessary in order to apply for money from various supportive funding bodies including the municipality. The enrolment of participants was not successful even if the spokespersons of the civic organisation were representative and active. In this context, in an organisation based on voluntary work, were similar demands on activity posed on the members as it was on the practitioners in the municipal work places. The reluctance among the civic participants to take responsibility for running the project finally also made it impossible to carry on with the initiative, especially since the fire-souls had left the scene.

[130] Board meeting P7/050601

7.7 The reification of practice and the panoptic function of reified practice

In order to open up the empirical examples in this chapter, I have to make use of conceptual tools, borrowed from Foucault [1972] (1980) Wenger (1998) and Bourdieu, 1977. I have found the notion of *panopticon* (Bentham, 1995, Foucault,1984:147-165). inspiring when examining the disciplining aspects within evaluation and steering of the development of eParticipation, coupled with the concept of *reification* (Wenger, 1998) along with Bourdieu's reasoning about *symbolic power.*
The pedagogical function of monitoring has a certain place in the power analysis of Foucault, manifested in his writings as changes in the architecture of institutions, such as for instance hospitals and prisons. These changes in architecture signalise a more sophisticated power, which no longer has to be explicitly characterised by concrete manifestations. Foucault draws upon Bentham's writings about the model prison, described primarily as a "round-the-clock surveillance machine"[131] . Foucault described it as follows (1975):

> *"Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary: that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it: in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers."* (Foucault, 1975:195-228)

The newly introduced traffic-surveillance cameras in Sweden, photographing speeding offenders, as they pass by the camera, is an example of a modern panopticon, interpreted in a classical way. Nothing more than a flash tells you that you are watched by this non-human apparatus, yet it is an obvious symbol for the authorities' supreme control. *Panoptic monitoring*, as described by Foucault, could also be interpreted more freely, even if the primary function of a panopticon is to serve as a tool for disciplining, a technology of power designed to solve the problems of surveillance. Its function is not primarily to prevent or fight a certain behaviour, rather it is *a therapeutic operator, a pedagogical machine, an apparatus for observation, information collection and learning* (Foucault, 1975, 1980: 146-165). In line with this reasoning is it possible to talk about an eGovernment architecture, where the power is expressed in a subtle, symbolic way. The *SD-ladder* is a symbolic artefact within general eGovernment development that is used for surveillance - not in its concrete meaning, but by working as a pedagogical mechanism for therapy and simultaneous information collection. This model has profound implications for the development of symbolic eParticipation. In practice is it used as a tool for the enactment of control, at the same time as it generates participation, since it opens up for re-interpretation and translation when re-situated in local contexts. The *SD-ladder* was referred to in several of the projects in this research study. It served as a mechanism for negotiating power, not solely in order to check the current state of maturity in the organisation or among the citizenry, but also as a tool for observation, control and surveillance to ensure that learning was steered in a certain direction. The model assisted in the ongoing co-construction of characters who were inclined to learn

[131] Quote from Theory of Surveillance: The Panopticon, available at: http:// carome.org./panopticon1.htm

and behave either as active practitioners, active politicians or active citizens, delimited however by certain norms and legitimised criteria for activism and learning.

7.7.1 Making practice into a thing

Wenger (1998) describes in his writings another concept of great significance for understanding symbolic eParticipation, when he discusses the constant interplay of participation and reification. Wenger explains reification as an act of "making into a thing", i.e. either to *treat an abstraction as substantially existing or as a concrete material object*. A reification marks a twist in language, but it is not about materialisation of abstractions into physical objects, but rather into symbols for something else. Wenger exemplifies this act of creating symbolic meaning by the figure of the blindfolded woman who has come to represent justice. In the case of the *SD-ladder*, it could be maintained that the model represents organisational transformation and change of practice. The process of reification thus creates a shortcut to communication concerning this transformation.

Reification relates to the concept of the *panopticon* (Foucault, 1980) as well as *symbolic power* (Bourdieu, 1972), where the use of both the *SD-ladder* and the symbolic active citizenship are inscribed into the social spaces where they are supposed to have a disciplining function. The double symbolic function of the *SD-ladder* is apparent when the ladder is literally interpreted and presented as a "thing", possible to climb, as exemplified by the practitioners. At the same time as the ladder symbolises appropriate measurement criteria, it invites participation within local settings in the public sector.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that relations of power and domination are made symbolic, that they are not explicitly visible between individuals, or between different positions. Following Bourdieu's reasoning suggests that eParticipation could be defined as a *field*, i.e. a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relations, which are organised both vertical and horizontally. Individuals occupy different positions in this field, defined by which kind and amount of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital they possess. The symbolic capital is in a sense to be understood as the accumulation of all the other capitals. Symbolic capital is defined as prestige, honour and the right to be listened to and is in itself an important source of power. Symbolic power is then to be understood as power which is made invisible, transformed to be a part of daily routines, and identified as legitimate and righteous. It is explained as common sense and the normal way of conducting eParticipation, and as such it is an attempt to transfer the legitimate definitions of characterising eParticipation, thus advocating what I suggest could be called symbolic eParticipation. If an agent (e.g a municipal employee) uses his or her symbolic power in order to change somebody's (e.g the proactive citizen's) activities and behaviour, they exercise what Bourdieu calls symbolic violence. However, symbolic power and cultural preferences are perceived as legitimate by those with less symbolic capital and while perceiving this enactment of legitimate symbolic power as legitimate, the proactive citizen is complicit in her subordination. The imposition of the category of active citizenship on citizens is for instance perceived by the citizens themselves as desirable.

Symbolic power is thus to be understood as different modes of domination. The symbolic violence causes misunderstanding and misrecognition of the individual actions among the proactive citizens, emphasising the dominant categories of how to perceive eParticipation. Related to the creation of symbolic eParticipation, this could be illustrated by the example that certain ways of conducting eParticipation are given prominence and that their nomination and

legitimisation is embedded in symbolic structures such as an *SD-ladder* These models are, in turn, transferred into subjective social structures of acting and thinking, functioning as a form of *habitus*, a system of dispositions consisting of lasting acquired schemes of how to perceive things, or the only way to act and think. The SD-ladder "feels" like the proper way to achieve maturity, since these dispositions are engraved in our minds as normal and legitimate.

Active citizenship is an example which to a large extent has become an abstraction with symbolic value, an objective structure which has successfully been transformed into subjectivity, as part of individual's natural way of thinking. To be an active citizen is considered the normal state of being. The reification of active citizenship is not equivalent with acting as citizens, but the notion is clearly empty without the participation of those targeted. Conversely the production of such reification is crucial to the kind of negotiation that is necessary for citizens when they have to find out how to become active and how to bring together the multiple perspectives, interpretations and aligning of interests which participation entails (Wenger, 1998: 62). In order to act as citizens they need a reification around which to negotiate meaning. The crucial thing then becomes how this reification is produced, if it comes from the outside or is taken from the context where the negotiation of meaning takes place. In the same way, active citizenship has to be defined with respect to specific forms of participation that contextualise the meaning of the notion. It cannot be assumed to be intrinsic or universal. According to Wenger, participation compensates for the limitations of reification. This could be exemplified by the many educational efforts, teaching how to behave as an active citizen, which have taken place in Europe for several years. On the other hand, the reification also compensates for the limitations of participation, by supporting the creation of structure and firmness within participation. Wenger maintained that, whereas in participation we recognise ourselves in each other, in reification we project ourselves onto the world. Since we do not recognise ourselves in those projections, the meanings take on an independent existence. This contrast between mutuality and projection is an important difference between participation and reification (Wenger, 1998:58) , as between pro-activism and symbolic citizenship.

The concept of reification describes the process of giving form to our experiences by producing objects, which in turn changes our experiences into "thingness". Those things with inherent symbolic value create important points of focus. Participation means negotiation of meaning around those focus points, which in turn leads to new reifications. Any community of practice produces abstractions, tools symbols, stories, terms and concepts that reify something of that practice in a congealed form, e.g. an *SD-ladder*. It is important not to forget that this model is originally a reification of a specific practice and context, which has been given the opportunity to be elevated from that particular practice and serve as a symbolic artefact, representing development in general terms. I interpret it as a notion which basically captures the process of making a cross section of practice into a thing, and then attributing symbolic value to the thing. In the next step this detached thing is presented as something which has to be applied on local circumstances. The practices that are described here rather used it as a foil to their situated practice, and a help when detecting their own circumstances and settings.

However, reifications are not to be seen as a "bad thing". There are many advantages which must be acknowledged. The process of reification also makes it possible to create a focusing effect. But to allow for the portability or globalisation of a reification, such as for instance the *SD-ladder* or the concept of active citizenship, is also its danger, since it can become a substitute for deep engagement. The evocative power of reification is thus double-edged.

Reifications may seem disconnected, frozen into an artefact or a model that does not capture the richness of lived experience of for instance the interplay of citizen engagement and organisational maturity. An *SD-ladder* could be seen as detached from practice, a substitute for what it is intended to reflect, and finally rejected by those who are supposed to appropriate it, but it also functions as a resource and a reason to begin a process. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that participation and reification represent duality, and not opposites. Wenger points out that participation are not merely what is not reified; reification does not exclude participation and vice versa. They take place together; both require and enable each other, as two interacting dimensions. Wenger states that an interacting duality means that both elements are always involved and that both can take different forms and degrees, i.e. intense participation and intense reification as exemplified by the various forms of active citizenship (comprising multiple forms such as reactive citizenship, the strategically inactive, and the isolated proactive citizenship and so on). Participation and reification describe an interplay, and it is the interplay, which provides a framework to analyse the various ways in which they are always both things at once, that is interesting to understand. The duality of participation and reification suggests that people and things, symbolic active citizenship and proactive citizenship, as well as the double-edged function of a *SD-ladder* implying both surveillance and an invitation to participation, can not be defined independently of each other.

7.7.2 The surveillance of practice or practices of surveillance

The *SD-ladder* is a concrete example of how power is delegated into an object represented by a ladder, which has been ascribed symbolic value. In practice it reveals a double function, namely opening up for participation whilst simultaneously superintending participation. The pedagogical, controlling and observing function of the *SD-ladder* creates an effect of closure, as in the case with the young boy *Mike*, who did not fit in to the predefined matrix for development. At the same time, the rhetorics of eGovernment, for instance, open up for participation, due to its emphasis on supporting active citizenship and the provision of inclusive accessibility.

The *SD-ladder* has as stated previously rapidly become an important reification with great implication and significance for the development of local government, at the same time as it could be said to represent a successful globalisation of a particular maturity-model, given specific prominence within general eGovernment development. The *SD-ladder* rapidly became a symbol for the best practice regime in Sweden and Europe and it was in that sense an example of a power mechanism which had been successfully transformed into reification or a workable symbolic artefact. One dimension of this phenomenon could be described as taking the form of a *panopticon.* Several of the practitioners in the research projects treated the *SDL* more or less as an artefact and/or a kind of surveillance tool, used for measuring organisational maturity. At the same time the model also invited practitioners to participate, literally inspiring them to “climb upwards towards higher levels of maturity” and as such it was also envisioned as a useful resource (Suchman, 1987) for local interpretation and development. Guidelines, development models, or a situated, local process of development or cases which have been frozen into ”good or best practice”[132], all render a double function of both surveillance of particiaption and opening up for participation within eParticiaption in practice. This duality of surveillance/participation is in that sense two sides of the same coin; the *SD-ladder* was a reification that was successfully transformed into concrete, physical manifestations (treated and discussed in local network meetings almost as a physically

[132] See for instance URL= http://www.egov-goodpractice.org [Accessed 070409]

existing ladder) or as a useful symbol for a maturity-process. However, maturity is not transferable; it means different things for involved parties in different settings. The meaning of maturity is often negotiated and established in a community of practice, anchored in direct and personal experience. The globalisation of maturity-models is also a way to distribute certain values.

7.7.3 The multiplicity of practice

The practices also demonstrate a plurality of actions and problems in handling the dilemma of doing things according to a specified order, as for instance imposed in the form of an R&D model described as phases of: piloting-implementation-best practice-development of policy. A ladder also has a reversed function. The steps not only go upwards, they could also take you to lower levels, as described here by one of the public servants. Additionally, it is possible to place a ladder flat on the ground, and applying such a metaphor to the vision of a progressing development makes it possible to create a totally different perception of how development is taking place. All phases within prefigured stages of development may not follow upon one another; they may occur simultaneously. They could also be in a constant state of flux and re-conceptualisation, and development could therefore be seen not primarily as something coming from the outside. Rather it is to be acknowledged as a co-production within local situated practices, where the plans play a role as foils to the present situation. The experiences presented by the public servants in this chapter reveal that there are no clear-cut borders between the different stages.

The failed consultations, and the disappointment among the citizens who invested time and effort in getting involved, became a part of the power play between symbolic active citizenship and proactive citizenship. Since a division already existed between the involved parties, the gap widened even more and a functional active citizenship had no chance to occur. Problems occur when, for instance, an *SD–ladder* is used as a measurement tool, when instead it could serve as a learning resource. Explications and abstractions such as the *SD-ladder* are themselves situated practices, which have been defined and compiled in a certain context, produced in a particular process of activities, sustained by local relations. They therefore have to be understood as part of the social practice in which they play a part, and not mistakenly be taken for being universal and transmittable. Problems in applying them in other contexts arise not because they are abstractions, but from the detachment of the reifications from the practices in which they once were created. Practices are not possible to impose on another practice, but practices are able to learn from each other, if they are given a chance to set up their own communities of mutual learning and produce their own reifications for local use. Models could work as useful representations, but it is equally important to ask for whom they are useful and to what extent they are based on lived experience.

Development in practice could be pictured in shapes and forms other than those suggested by the neatly ordered maturity-models, the numerous guidelines, and steering documents. Local development of eParticipation is incremental, taking place in different settings, under varying conditions. It comes in bits and pieces and at varying tempos. It is manifested as modest interventions, such as earlier described in the case with the cleaner, or in the case with the writing women in the DIALOGUE-project, where the symbolic eParticipation opened up for their own initiatives to freely develop their proactive citizenship by conducting legitimate peripheral participation in a local community of practice. In a similar way, it is possible to make an analogy to what kind of free space is really suggested for eParticipation, not necessarily limited to the designated online spaces for participation.

Measurement and charting of progress within eGovernment development is in another aspect also similar to an act of standardisation. All these imagined actions and activities, the common policies and guidelines, along with the transitional criteria and pre-packed technical solutions that are actively pushed into local contexts, are all in some sense used as a "set of agreed-upon rules for the production of textual or material objects" (Star & Bowker, 1999:13-16) stripped of origin and context and therefore also seen as possible to transfer and implement elsewhere. Other parts of these processes are recommendations for strategies and actions that follow upon a joint agreement among the European Union members, manifested for example in the eEurope Action Plan and recently in the i2010 strategy.

A process of reification also becomes an act of normalisation, a way for authorities to define the normal or ideal type of eGovernment or eParticipation. When this reification is established, it also has to be objectified, distributed and communicated and used in order to achieve adjustment and standardisation of diverse local, situated experiences and interpretations. The dimensions of those are in some sense idealised, as in the case with the advocacy of an all-inclusive information society and a co-ordinated and globalised eGovernment development, since they embody goals of practice and production that are never perfectly realised.

The two public servants described practices and effects of reification and prescribed changes. *Sven* talked about the *SD-ladder* literally as a ladder, and described the organisational behaviour in terms of "staying on the lower levels", "how to walk upwards" or "being fast climbers". In that sense he acknowledges the ladder's reification and symbolic value. At the same time he referred to the model's additional function as a kind of panopticon, as a steering document and a tool for managing organisational behaviour; a way to maintain knowledge and a help to point out the direction. In this particular network meeting, where he presented his own version of it, the model was an invitation to discussions and comparisons between the represented local authorities. It also worked as a reference point when he asked the local heads of departments to come up with their own solutions and interpretations of how to proceed in eGovernment. As such it was also an invitation to local activity.

Tom, in turn, gives a personal reflection of negative effects of technological development combined with economical rationalisation, exemplified by the reduction of local staffing, loss of local competence, and an unexpected effect of a higher concentration on keeping the organisation floating rather than opening up for citizen-involvement. He also questioned the enabling potential of technology and talked about a mismatch between "the inner picture" and the officially envisioned positive changes that eGovernment was supposed to lead to. *Tom* is perhaps primarily picturing the down-side of a mature organisation, but his experiences are nevertheless part of the circumstances for his organisation. From his point of view, the higher levels of eGovernment development, with the complexity of combining both technological integration with an open-minded and effective organisational behaviour which is prepared to open up for public involvement, may seem unreachable. The envisioned transformation is after all a reification of another localised participation process (i.e. the process of producing the model) based on other specific circumstances and priorities. It was finally transformed into a symbolic reification and matrix for how to achieve transformation in general. The local interpretation that *Tom's* management comes up with is to prioritise a heavy concentration on computerisation combined with harsh economic centralisation, rather than preserving local competence and local resources. The visions of incessant advancement is in reality causing a

closing function. The basic organisational survival foregrounds the goal of administrative rationalisation and efficiency, maturity of performance and integration.

7.8 The specifics of a malleable organisation

As presented in the initial parts of this chapter the visions and rhetoric suggest that a high degree of maturity is reached if democratic and inclusive eParticipation is possible to implement. How then is it possible to describe a mature organisation? The findings in this chapter, which have concentrated on detecting the interplay of pro-activism and organisational performance, suggest that a certain kind of maturity is needed; *malleability*. This means an organisation that knows how to take up suggestions for change, and an organisation that can acknowledge that everyone has the right to make suggestions. A mature, active organisation needs to be able to answer the proactive citizens, and to change their performance towards becoming an adaptable organisation. The experiences of the particular practitioners and proactive citizens in this study underline the fact that it is not enough to change the citizens' active participation; the participation of the organisations requires negotiation skills and a capacity for change and adaptation. In order to sum up the discussion in this chapter I will suggest the following points of departure for the concluding discussion in the last chapter:

1. A mature organisation is not the one with best performance; it is an organisation that is prepared to negotiate between the structures and the local, situated practices
2. It is an organisation with the capacity to resolve reifications by participation and a preparedness to participate in creating reifications which will function for its own localised learning
3. It is also a malleable organisation with the capacity for adaptation to a malleable active citizenship
4. The organisation needs an understanding of the process of embedding symbolic power in the mechanisms it uses for change, at the same time as it is steered by those mechanisms
5. A malleable organisation needs sensitivity to processes of exclusion within inclusion and the role of non-participation within participation

PART THREE

8. Conclusions

In her analysis of research practices within HCI (Human computer interaction) and AI (Artificial intelligence) Suchman (1987) showed that people do not follow a plan. Instead, they use it as a resource when structuring their own practices. This finding is equivalent to the way eParticipation was prepared for and carried out in varying practices, as found when analysing how various actors actually took part in these activities. eParticipation was defined by these practices, and the daily work of establishing eParticipation was part of a simultaneous change and preservation of already established procedures. However, the practices turned out to contain several possibilities to achieve multiple results and outcomes, together with strivings to create uniformity.

My focus has thus been on how processes, relations and change procedures evolve, despite limitations and restrictions in local circumstances, but also because of these restrictions. The task of developing a practice-based conceptualisation of eParticipation must also address the role that formal plans and theories play in practice as well as what practice brings to theory. My primary goal has not been to underline the differences between formal and informal procedures; it has rather been to discuss how different forms of both formal and informal participation hinder the development of either pure uniformity or full multiplicity of eParticipation. The varying practices, consisting mainly of research and development projects, were studied through the use of ethnographic and ethnomethodological methods.

Part One of the thesis contained the introduction to my thesis and the presentation of its theoretical and empirical basis. The research analysis was described in Part Two, consisting of chapters five, six and seven. Chapter five also presented the motivation for my research work. Cases within the research and development projects that formed the basis of my empirical material repeatedly revealed the fact that citizens, politicians and practitioners became active in unexpected ways, as well as the fact that, for various reasons, some actively chose not to be active. There were also several examples of activities and initiatives which were not given priority in the development process, and other examples where legitimacy was granted according to pre-defined criteria. The practices thus showed variations and complexities which I found were not sufficiently focused upon, or discussed in a sufficiently profound sense, in current work within the research field. To prioritise these disregarded aspects has been an important incentive for my research work. The analysis continued in chapter six, in a discussion of the occurrence of symbolic active citizenship. The empirical examples in chapter six illustrate how eParticipation partly becomes an act of domination, steered by habitual mechanisms of power distribution, and thus describes the occurrence of symbolic eParticipation and symbolic active citizenship. At the same time it is important to point out that eParticipation also consists of proactivity and initiatives which are initiated both within and outside the established forms of eParticipation, as several examples in this thesis show. Chapter seven discussed what is required from the organisation in order to support inclusive eParticipation.

Thus, my research analysis combines both empirical findings and practice-based concepts, derived from theoreticians such as Arendt, Haraway, Foucault, Bourdieu, Lave and Wenger, Callon and Latour. All these have provided me with a theoretical basis for discussing participation from various perspectives. A uniting theme for these theoreticians is their combined interest for human agency, and structures related to processes of change. These

theoreticians have also contributed through their close scrutiny of what people actually do when they are active, bringing to the fore the importance of the social aspects of acting together. My theoretical and methodological choices support the basic aim of my research: to investigate which entities constitute eParticipation and how is it possible to work towards a more inclusive eParticipation through conceptualisation from within practices.

The theories of Arendt and Haraway served as a basis to address plurality and locality within eParticipation. Lave & Wenger and Clement & Shade provided the framework for sorting out the complexity of these socio-technical practices. Chapter five discussed the creation of mechanisms which either delimited or opened up for participation. These mechanisms could be described as a structure or a set of structures, i.e. rules, Internet sites, places, or frameworks that enabled active participation. These mechanisms were uncovered and described in different analytical layers, framed by the access rainbow model. Some mechanisms required structures which cross the layers, or worked as translations of other layers. Concretely, this could be explained by the way a consultation site such as Vision Ronneby contains several layers of participation beneath what is ultimately displayed on the Internet as a tool for eParticipation, i.e. the *Vision Ronneby website*. Clement & Shades frameworks also made it possible for me to examine important values concerning equal participation and democracy and relate them to technical matters. Arendt and Haraway's concepts correspond to the multiple demands of finding the possibility to evaluate a continuously changing plurality and uniformity as an interacting phenomenon.

Concepts derived from Bourdieu and Foucault was of importance for reasoning about the occurrence of incremental changes over time, and the embodiment of power. This perspective is highly relevant for my analysis, since sharing power is a crucial issue when discussing changes of policy-making and practices of decision-making.

In the task of discussing the practices of eParticipation I have also described the occurrence of symbolic eParticipation. The empirical examples illustrate how eParticipation partly becomes steered by mechanisms which embed habitual power-relations, expressed in the form of symbolic eParticipation and symbolic active citizenship. Symbolic eParticipation thus embodies power relations which, in a process of translation, are made invisible and transformed to become a part of daily routines, and are finally identified as legitimate and correct by those who are affected.

Symbolic eParticipation could briefly be explained as the ideal and projected image of eParticipation, which is expressed in many ways; as rhetorics, methods, best practice regimes, models and guidelines for how to develop eParticipation. Certain ways of conducting eParticipation are given prominence in the official debate and these legitimised ways of conduct become embedded in symbolic structures such as the *SD-ladder*. Other examples of embedding are the notion of active citizenship, and the best practice-model advocated by EU, but also in the practical procedures of how to conduct introductions to new technology and eParticipation activities. These models are in turn transferred into subjective social structures of acting and thinking, functioning as a form of *habitus*, which is to be described as a system of dispositions, i.e. lasting acquired schemes of how to perceive things, to act and think. Sometimes, the ideal picture of eParticipation also depicts how the parties concerned should act in order to reach a common goal. The goal is often envisioned in terms of mature organisational performance and an equally mature performance of active citizenship. How is it then possible to make these ideals fit together?

8.1 In need of a malleable relationship

It is equally important to point out that, as several examples in this thesis show, eParticipation also consists of proactivity, and initiatives which are initiated along with or due to symbolic forms of eParticipation. There are situations and activities where incremental transformation of this presupposed frozen opposing power-relation between pro-activity and symbolic eParticipaiton occurs; where eParticipation becomes something more than attempts to steer and normalise the ways in which people take part. These practices show that eParticipation has the real potential to become dynamic, productive and multi-dimensional, ultimately leading to changes in representation and decision-making. These changes take place in the form of modest interventions within the attempts to implement extensive change programs. The citizens, practitioners and politicians create their own interpretations and practices of mediated participation which in turn influence the already established processes and work practices. By taking part, they point out new directions and possibilities. The actors define their own role in these changes of representation procedures, at the same time as they adjust to what the official mainstream debate finds appropriate to grant legitimacy.

eParticipation thus requires individuals who understand how to handle malleability in organisations, in mechanisms and in active citizenship. Active individuals who know how to provide space for plurality and to make visible how other kinds of roles and activities are available, including proactive, active and passive participation. Participation is not linear or gradual, it can be both linear and gradual at the same time; increases and decreases in engagement are part of a gradual move towards becoming full participants. Preparing for this requires a way of thinking which is based on dynamic relationships. eParticipation is not about attempting to fit a certain role description, or performing best during the casting of a role; it is about jointly creating a co-working role, a multiple set of movable positions. In the same way, the establishment of accessibility for participation is not something which has to be put in place; accessibility is co-constructed in a relation which allows for changeability.

A mature organisation is an organisation which acknowledges and emphasises the need for sensitivity and a readiness for detecting how eParticipation could include all these who are active outside the pre-described role of eParticipation: an organisation with sensitivity and a readiness for negotiating the creation of new roles, new mechanisms and new meeting-places. This implies continuous changes in the relation between citizens and the state. A malleable organisation must be able to take care of several participation strategies and acknowledge that these sometimes exists simultaneously as variations or nuances of being passive, active, proactive, weak, strong, late or quick. These are all variations that occur in the process of becoming an active citizen, an active politician or an active practitioner.

8.2 The creation of marginalisation

Symbolic eParticipation also creates exclusion, as in the case with the COP-services, where the municipal officer's participation was marginalised in a project working to develop support for public dialogue and consultation. The disregard of parts of the project was discovered during the process of customising a tool for eParticipation. These findings put the spotlight on the necessity of including the preparatory aspects of setting the stage for eParticipation, since these aspects also delimit the final outcome of mediated participation.

Symbolic eParticipation also occurs through actors' active promotion of uniformity in conducting eParticipation, as strivings at reification of practices, and as strivings to project those reifications on other practices. It could also be described as cultural preferences and assumptions that there is one proper way to conduct eParticipation, and the assumption that there are limitations in the alternatives of how to become active.

Symbolic eParticipation represents the embodiment of power in cultural norms, which in turn steers the involved parties' behaviour. The notion of "the public good" was in the case of the subordinate landowner used against the individual as a power-tool, but not in the name of the collective. In reality, this notion functioned as an instrument for private interests (the private company). Certain eParticipation activities are advocated as more comprehensive than others; some activities are seen as legitimate in comparison with others. In that sense, symbolic eParticipation restricts and delimits change, as much as it opens up for more participation. In another setting, in the case of the practitioners discussing a localised version of the *SD-ladder*, the symbolic eParticipation instead opened up for participation, by functioning as a tool for reification of their own practice, which in turn could be used in a situated way when promoting change.

8.3 The limitation with a symbolic eParticipation

The pressure of becoming an active citizen seems lately to have become more urgent. In spite of this, the actions of proactive citizens are not always welcomed. Pro-activity is not manageable to the same extent as *symbolic eParticipation* or *symbolic active citizenship*. As shown in this thesis, at the same time as symbolic eParticipation works towards streamlining activities, more and more examples of local initiatives from individuals and groups occur. These initiatives are all examples of micro-power, which indicates that there is interplay of delimited participation and unbounded participation. The steering of actions happens simultaneously with resistance towards formalisation, and all those dimensions have to play together in developing new ways of participation and the support of malleability. The need for possibilities to *learn by participation*, but from a perspective of self-determination, was identified as one of the main priorities among citizens and municipal officers as well as politicians in the various projects in my research study.

Strivings towards the formalisation of active citizenship support the establishment of symbolic eParticipation. These attempts at formalisation represent in some way a transfigured legitimised form of authoritarian control of the inhabitants' activities and actions as citizens. It is seen as crucial to plan, steer and manage active citizenship. To borrow a Foucauldian phrase, active citizenship to some extent functions as a "regime of practice", which citizens have to take up, accept and appropriate as a way of being and living. The proactive citizens' agree to the subordination, by incorporating the norms that are prescribed by symbolic eParticipation and making them their own. The ideal of the active citizen is in turn transferred into subjective social structures of acting when performing active citizenship. The individual embeds certain cultural norms of how to perceive the role, and thus accepts what they perceive as the only way to think and act as an active citizen. However, they also present their own initiatives, which sometimes become successful, although others are pushed aside in a translation process.

The aspects of symbolic active citizenship were revealed by examining for whom the notion of active citizenship and participation was useful. The answer to this is complex since in the local projects described here it both hindered and facilitated participation. Another crucial

question was for what purpose people had to be activated. A crucial answer to this was the fact that these changes in representation are part of the overall modernisation of the public sector. The authorities experienced problems in coping with the pro-active citizens who did not fit in with the prepared matrix for how an active citizenship should be conducted, as predicted by the given and almost settled frames of eParticipation. However, in the breakage of these structures, several examples of a malleable active citizenship were detected. Lave & Wenger's learning by legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework for detecting these changing needs.

Other examples of proactive citizenship are the case of the cleaner or of the women's writing group within the DIALOGUE-project, discussed earlier in this thesis. They became involved in practices which allowed them slowly to become active by taking part in a process of legitimate peripheral participation. The cleaner gained access and started out her trajectory of becoming active on her own initiative. The groups with writing women were included as participants in an EU-funded project, targeting underprivileged members of the information society, where the ultimate aim was to define strategies and methods for ensuring the involvement of all citizens. Within the framework of symbolic active citizenship, they were given possibilities to develop their own proactive citizenship, and to set up a community of practice on their own, where they could choose their own degree of engagement. Those practices represent the plurality inherent in the unifying and standardising category of active citizenship. In the end however, all of the proactive citizens were denied access to participation, both the use of eParticipation and contributing to the development of eParticipation. This was due to reasons which could be partly described as a mismatch with symbolic eParticipation. Instead they had to assent to conduct *isolated proactivity,* which in turn separated the symbolic active citizenship and the proactive citizenship even more in this particular context, ultimately hindering the occurrence of a malleable active citizenship.

8.4. Modest interventions from positions in-between

Symbolic eParticipation thus comprises a projected image of how active citizenship ought to be enacted, which is an effective way of steering an activity in a certain direction and of controlling development. Symbolic active citizenship is in that sense domination which is rendered invisible, transformed to be a part of daily routines, identified as the legitimate and correct way to perform active citizenship. This image of the ideal behaviour as an active citizen soon becomes a matrix which the individual incorporates as the proper way to behave.

One example is the cleaner, who was not accepted as an active citizen, even though she actually was active on her own initiative. Symbolic eParticipation prescribes proactive citizenship as the ultimate state, a sign of a "mature" active citizenship. Thus the cleaner was not seen as a proactive citizen since she did not conduct what normally is called pro-activity, and neither was she seen as a non-active citizen, since she actually did something in order to advance her position. She did not fit into the prescribed categories of symbolic active citizenship, since she was not active from a legitimate position, i.e. she was neither part of the predefined stages of the less privileged, nor was she one of the facilitators. She did not take part in the introductions, due to her own choice to exclude herself from the proactive category, whilst at the same time, the local circumstances and traditions of subordination also excluded her. She was involved in co-constructing her own invisibility, since she contributed by reproducing the symbolic citizenship, which did not include her "in-between position" as a legitimate starting-point for becoming active.

However, there are possible situations where modest interventions and incremental transformation of these habitual power-relations occur – in the citizens', the practitioners' and the politicians' own definitions and variations of what the shape of participation in democratic decision-making may be, and in their own definitions of which role they find appropriate to assume, in the process of transforming representation in decision-making or in the preparatory phases of those processes.

8.5 Symbolic eParticipation and learning

Another important part of my study is the insight, based on the combination of empirical findings and theoretical reasoning, that participation is learning in communities of practice. Learning took place in the self-appointed practices of interest within the projects which are pictured in this thesis, underlining the fact that there must be a readiness within the practices of citizens, practitioners and politicians to create and support communities of practice.

My contribution to the growing research body within the research field could in some sense be compared to what in information systems design is called user studies. However, my intention was to go deeper into the discussion since I have looked more closely at how varying groups of users (citizens, politicians and practitioners) organise their active participation or non-participation, and I have discussed this in combination with theoretical perspectives. In practices of developing information systems is it well-known that "the moment of truth" arrives when the designers have to deliver a system intended to do certain things, and they discover that people are not inclined to use the system as anticipated. The users tend to find their own ways of using and utilising the system, instead of making use of the predefined functions. If eParticipation is in a similar way presented as a designed system which has to be introduced, there is a risk that it might not work as anticipated. The problems experienced in achieving a functioning support and an acceptance for participatory activities may thus originate from *how we choose to define and set up eParticipation*, rather than from the highly situated activity of choosing which design or what kind of technical solution should support the activities.

eParticipation is so much more than a normative model, a specific technology, a method or a development ladder, or whatever is currently emphasised in the rhetoric as the right way to achieve results. It is first and foremost a multiplicity of actions and activities in varying communities of practice, conducted by several interested parties or actors. eParticipation is actively to take part, as a practitioner, politician and citizen - but not primarily by following a pre-defined path. There is a multitude of ways to become an active participant. One strategy is to conduct legitimate peripheral participation in the natural communities of practices within local settings, where the practices of citizens, practitioners and politicians concentrate their efforts on figuring out how to make eParticipation work in practice. eParticipation could also be defined in terms of the local practices and processes of suggesting a youth oriented web community, as in the case of the proactive citizen Mike, or as in the case of the cleaner, or the writing women, who found their own ways of becoming active citizens, despite the symbolic violence that symbolic eParticipation tends to enact on an individual when it takes control and pushes initiatives into the periphery. eParticipation is also represented by the people who were engaged in setting up an association called Flow Society, and through that kind of activity also became involved in a top-down initiated eConsultation concerning the future development of a municipality. This activity brought them closer to full participation, through their legitimate peripheral participation, until symbolic eParticipation effectively stopped their advancement, when their contribution was not considered sufficiently legitimate in the whole

consultation. The establishment of the basic infrastructure (the broadband cables) counted on participation or consent from peripheral actors such as the insubordinate landowner. He in turn found other allies, such as discussions with local politicians in order to make his protest heard. His resistance could easily have been dismissed as an odd protest without relevance. Instead he chose to fight actively to achieve co-determination in the issue. This ultimately triggered negotiations which changed the whole procedure of the installation of the cables.

The analysis finally leads to the conclusion that eParticipation is something which is not possible to fully achieve by following an oversimplified model or pre-defined path to improvement. It is something which needs to remain malleable in order to support the plurality which both practices and participation consist of. When eParticipation is turned into symbolic eParticipation, it becomes its opposite and thereby becomes ineffective. eParticipation is more than a vision; it is about acknowledging the citizens' right and obligation to enact democratic participation, on their own terms, in their own fashion whenever they choose to be active. The arrangements for this multiplicity must be malleable. New roles of participation and eParticipation are not implemented, they occur in the overlap of the old and the new cultural structures.

The actual work that is required to make eParticipation work has in this thesis been described and recognised through the analysis of the double-sided and double-acting process of creating eParticipation, whilst at the same time; the involved actors are inevitably shaped by symbolic eParticipation.

9. Epilogue

> "*Once I saw a huge white archway looming out of the distance, it was a fogbow, a rainbow as it appears in thick mist, but the first time you see such a thing it is otherworldly, you soon forget the consensus reality that was so easily accepted before you came here.*"[133]

I started my writing with the intention to define a fogbow and in what way this simile could be used when describing information systems development. As you all may be well aware of, things happen with good intentions. As my dissertation evolved over time, there were sudden changes of scope and focus, which made the use of this metaphor inappropriate. The fogbow (also called a mist bow or white rainbow) was in the beginning an illustrative and useful metaphor, which made possible a multi-faceted discussion of socio-technical development in my licentiate thesis (Ekelin, 2003).

It symbolised the possibility of including that which is not obvious at first glance and which can only be distinguished by studying actions and activities in their context of everyday situations. It was also an indirect way to talk about reflective reinterpretations of what is normally taken for granted. Later on, the use of this metaphor got in the way of clarity. It suddenly seemed too strained and impossible to account for. Maybe because it is one of those phenomenon's of unspoken completion and beauty which has to be undefined and obscure for ever in order to keep the attraction, which will not lend its name to imitations.

For those who, like I do, share an interest for 'optical phenomenon, which manifests itself as a white arc which is visible in fog'[134], I highly recommend the web site 'Atmospheric Optics'[135] which describes a fogbow as follows: 'Fogbows are formed by much smaller cloud and fog droplets which extensively diffract light to reproduce a broad and pale bow.'[136] Nothing more need to be said about fogbows, whether they may appear or not. After all it might just be a matter of perception...

[133] Quoted from http://www.biroco.com/mist.htm by Joel Biroco. [Accessed 06-04-01]
[134] Nationalencyclopedin,[The Swedish National Encyclopaedia] , 1995.
[135] See http://www.sundog.clara.co.uk/atoptics/phenom.htm by Les Cowley [Accessed 02-11-26]
[136] Quoted from the section 'Fogbow formation,' http://www.sundog.clara.co.uk/droplets/fogform.htm [Accessed 02-11-26].

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ABSTRACT

eParticipation is a new research domain focusing the development of ICT-supported participation in processes of government and governance. These processes may concern involvement of practitioners, citizens and politicians in electronic public administration, service delivery, policy-making and decision-making. The overall objective of this thesis is to discuss how eParticipation is enacted and shaped, in and by practice, and thus contribute to development of practice-based conceptualisation as well as development within the differing practices of eParticipation.

The study is based on interpretive case studies as well as theoretical perspectives assisting the analysis of the research field as multiple and co-related processes and relations of change and learning. The empirical data has been gathered during participation in several research and development projects, conducted within a local municipality in Southeast Sweden. Several of the projects were also part of national and international collaboration. The methodological approach comprises ethnographic studies, including interviews, participatory observations and document analysis. The approach of ethnomethodology was also inspirational for the close examining of how various actors organised their participation or non-participation in the various settings of preparing for or conducting eParticipation. The theoretical basis is multi-disciplinary, drawing on perspectives from technological and social theories, such as political science, ANT and feminist theories along with IS (information systems) research.

The concept of symbolic eParticipation is coined in order to explore how the preconceived ideas of managing participation seem to be constricting and limiting local and situated development. At the same time, symbolic eParticipation is inspiring development of local interpretations and participatory work. The mutual shaping of these activities leads to the formulation of the notion malleability of organisations and citizenship. The findings indicate that activities of for instance customisation of software or evaluation of consultation tools contribute in creating socio-technical mechanisms, of which they are themselves a part. Those mechanisms embed power relations, and thus become a delegated function of opening up or closing for participation.

An example of such socio-technical mechanisms is the notion of "active citizenship", which is given higher legitimate status if it is conducted mainly as an electronically mediated activity. The term "symbolic active citizenship" is suggested as a concept which describes the legitimate active citizenship. The process of becoming active is thoroughly addressed in this thesis, including variations such as pro-activity and active passivity. These are also mediated by processes of learning in communities of practice. Active participants alternate between being active and actively passive in the processes which are supposed to constitute, form and sustain activities of eParticipation. This fluidity of citizenship has implications for future design of technology and for how to perceive participation in these activities.

The interplay of symbolic eParticipation and organisational and civic malleability described in this thesis, underscores the significance of providing space for negotiations of situating eParticipation.

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