

A Framework for Formulating Malaysia's Public Policy through Citizen e-Participation

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses this key issue by enabling the participation of the citizen in formulating Malaysia's public policy through e-participation. Currently, there is no e-participation framework for citizen to involve in Malaysia's public policy formulation. Most public policy formulate by certain group of expertise but the feedback from citizen still lacking. The research embraces the socio-technical research paradigm and uses an Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the theoretical foundation to explore the mutual interaction between all the actors. The proposed e-participation framework has been validated using Delphi Method and evaluated by experts is shown to be workable and practical.

Keywords: e-participation, Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Delphi Method, public policy

I INTRODUCTION

Information Technology and Communication (ICT) have revolutionised human life in myriad ways. The impacts of ICT development are clearly seen in many areas. For instance, the Government uses ICT to modernise the governance process. ICT is the most powerful and suitable tool to improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of governance process as well as to reduce the costs of human errors. Numerous nations around the world spend a large amount of money to implement the ICT technology for the effectiveness of the governance process. The Malaysian Government has spent around RM3 billion to implement the ICT in developing Malaysia's EG (MAMPU, 1997). Many evidences have clearly shown the effectiveness of EG implementation in delivering information and services in high quality standards to the citizens and private sectors as well as increasing the efficiency of management systems in the private sectors.

Few subjects have been discussed about the EG and roles played by the Government in order to digitalise the governance. It is undeniable that Malaysia's EG seems like a platform to deliver information and services to its citizens. However, the citizens' participation concept in EG or mostly called e-participation is abandoned (Suh 2005, Betancourt 2006, Sokolova 2006, Ulziikhutag and Sukhbaatar 2006). A number of studies related to e-participation such as the characteristics to implement e-participation, issues concerned, framework for e-participation and others have been done (Macintosh 2004, Tambouris et al. 2007, Phang & Kankanhalli, 2007 and Islam 2008). United Nations through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division of Public Administration and Development Management has also created e-participation framework for the public.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

By systematically implementing the e-participation in EG, citizens are able to make themselves involved directly in Government's decision making process. This view is supported by Gasper and Squires (2003) who stated that quality must be citizen-centred because public services have a different relationship with their 'customers' based on the democratic context within which these services are to be provided. Therefore, opinions, ideas or information provided by the citizens would assist the Government to make decisions in creating or updating an act, policy or plan that involves citizens' interest. As stressed by the International Association for Public Participation, "any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision making and uses public input to make better decision" (2007). According to a UN report in 2005,

Promoting participation of the citizen is the cornerstone of socially inclusive governance. The goal of e-

participation initiatives should be to improve the citizen's access to information and public services; and promote participation in public decision making which impact the well being of society, in general, and the individual, in particular. E-participation is the sum total of both the government programs to encourage participation from the citizen and the willingness of the citizen to do so. It encompasses both the demand the supply side.

(United Nations, 2005, p.19).

Various e-participation projects have attempted to create citizen-based groups through online forums, virtual discussion rooms, electronic juries or electronic polls (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003). Although such projects received supports from the Government, these projects have limited impact and have not yet led to clearly defined e-participation approach or framework. In European Union, for instance, a recent commission document on citizen participation proposed that all EG strategies should promote online citizens' participation (Commission of the European Communities, 2003).

Malaysian Government has set a main goal and visions for the success of EG implementation. That goal is to improve the convenience, accessibility, and quality of interaction with citizens and businesses; simultaneously, to improve the speed and quality of policy, co-ordination and enforcement as well as the information processed within the Government (MAMPU, 1997). There are five visions to achieve the goal:

1. To transform administration processes of Government through the use of information technology;
2. To drastically improve performance of government processes;
3. To provide high quality, low cost administrative services to public and business;
4. To employ multimedia technology in fostering Government effectiveness; and,
5. To attract world class multimedia web shapers to Malaysia.

As listed above, however, 'citizen participation' term is not included. According to UN Global E-Readiness Reports (2005), the following broad definition of EG has been adopted:

"The use of ICT and its application by the government for the provision of information and services to people. The aim of EG, therefore, is to provide efficient government management of information to the citizen; better service delivery to citizen; and empowerment of the people through access to information and participation in public policy decision-making" (United Nation, 2005, p.14).

Malaysia's EG visions, however, are more focused on the service delivery process to the citizens instead of promoting their participation in the Government particularly in public policy formulation. Definition by United Nation (2005) has clearly stated that EG should take into account the citizens' involvement (e-participation). United Nation in 2003 concluded that *"many decision-makers and researchers still concentrate one-sidedly on the provision of electronic services and regard participation as an unnecessary complexity cost factor"* (as cited in Suh, 2005). Based on that, there is a clear gap in the EG implementation process in Malaysia involving the Government and the citizens. Based on researcher's point of view, that clear gap can be referring to a communication gap that exists between the Government and citizens. This gap must be bridged by creating a mechanism to enable citizens' participation to fully fulfil the purpose of EG. Indirectly, this communication gap will link to research gap in EG field study that involves citizen participation in Government (e-participation).

In general, three EG players were identified: Government public administrators, citizens, and related interest groups. However, these individuals and interest groups do not automatically have the "priority" to formulate a public policy. This scenario then contributes to the mushrooming of blogs created by unsatisfied citizens and politicians to discuss their ideas and opinions in either to support or to reject the current public policy formulation. These blogs, which are supported by many, are usually able to gain policymakers' attention. Some even use the mass media to express their feelings and recently this mode seems to be quite effective to "wake the Government up".

Moreover, the Government should recognise the need of citizens in giving their ideas, opinions or suggestions about public policy formulation processes. The conventional modes of

communication and information gathering mechanisms make it difficult to enable the citizens to participate. Since public policy formulation is a sensitive issue, the Government must revise the current framework of public policy formulation in order to enhance the citizens' participation in decision making process via EG initiative. With a background principle of democracy, citizens' participation in governance process is necessary.

Despite the growing number of case studies, the e-participation remains a relatively new concept and little is known about the different aspect of e-participation framework. This study aims to create a better understanding on the e-participation design in Malaysian public policy formulation process. By observing and analysing the previous e-participation framework and case study on public policy formulation, the research aims to produce an enhanced version of public policy formulation for the e-participation concept through EG initiative in Malaysia.

III METHODOLOGY

This section presents the process how current public policy formulation to be the e-participation framework. This section also stated the method that used to translate current practices of public policy formulation in Malaysia. For evaluation purpose, the researchers explained the use of Delphi method as an evaluation tools on e-participation framework.

A. Case Study : Public Policy Formulation

Naturalistic case study model is used either to improve an existing design theory or framework, or to create a new one. In this study, the researcher applied the naturalistic case study model of the Formative Research Methodology in investigating the case. Reigeluth and Frick (1999) described that a naturalistic case study is used when the case is not particularly designed according to the theory but serves the similar goals and context of the theory. They also added that the cases are analysed to observe the failing and valuable elements of the theory or the model.

Since this study was naturalistic case study, the cases were not purposely designed for this study, but they were selected from real-life projects. In order to observe the variety and current situation of citizen participation in public policy formulation, the researcher contacted anyone related to public policy formulation.

In this process, data were gathered by three ways namely observation, interviews, and documents analysis. Observation was carried out to assess the present citizen participation process. Interview process was carried out through 2 modes, either individual or focus group. This interview process allowed the researcher to analyse the individual's reactions and thought as well as to explore other variables that could be added into this study.

Finally, documents of both methods and output assisted the researcher in making judgments on the elements or components suitable for the e-participation framework. In data analysis, the researcher identified strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities that can improve citizen participation in government process. This process of analysis depended on the researcher's experience in carrying out the study case as well as the relevant knowledge of descriptive theoretical concerning this field of study.

B. ANT as Translating Tool

The concept of Problematization, an element in ANT, is applied in explaining this situation with four steps namely identifying group of user, actors and roles, the cause, and building the actor-network. All steps are discussed as per following.

Table 1. The key concept of ANT

| Key concept | Description |
|------------------|--|
| Actor/ Actant | any element which bends space around itself makes other elements dependent upon it and translates their will into the language of its own. Callon and Latour (1986) |
| Actor Network | a set of relations in which an actor constantly influence other actors (Callon, 1986) |
| Translation | the creation and alignment of the interests in Actor-Network. This process consists of four major stages: problematization, intersement, enrolment, and mobilisation |
| Problematization | The first process of translation during which an actor defines identities and interests of other actors that are consistent with its own interests, and establishes itself as an obligatory passage point (OPP) (Callon, 1986) |
| OPP | OPP refers to a situation that has to occur in order for all actors to satisfy the interests that have been attributed to them by the focal actor. The focal actor defines the |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| | OPP through which the other actors must pass through and by which the focal actor becomes indispensable (Callon, 1986). |
| Interessement | It involves a process of convincing the other actors to accept and recognize definition of the focal actor (Callon, 1986). |
| Enrollment | The third process of translation, where other actors in the network accept (or get aligned to) interests defined for them by the focal actor (Callon, 1986) |
| Mobilisation | Mobilisation involves maintaining commitment to a cause of action and the OPP. |

C. Delphi Method as Evaluation tool

The Delphi method is a broadly used and accepted method for gathering data from the respondents within their domain of expertise (Hsu and Sandford, 2007). This method is designed for the communication process group, who are trying to search for an opinion or judgment upon a particular issue. Theoretically, the Delphi method is well suited as a technique for consensus-building by using a series of questionnaires that are produced through multiple iterations from the collected data provided by the selected subjects (Hsu and Sandford, 2007).

The Delphi method offers a possible way for reaching consensus around clusters of ideas, potentially providing insights into some integrative solutions. As suggested by Linstone and Turoff (1975, p. 4), the Delphi studies are more useful when “the problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgments on a collective basis.” Both Czinkota and Ronkainen (1997, p. 842, and 2005, p. 122) informed consensus is more likely to indicate the future directions than the opinions that are gathered from the many uninformed survey participants. The individuals that are selected for the invitation to this Delphi study were all experts in fields relevant to the concept of knowledge for the subject matters.

The Delphi method is usually round-based, which is mostly due to the fact that the data needs to be analyzed and a feedback prepared for the next round; however, the new types of computer aided Delphi which allow for a round-less Delphi, such as the one conducted by Gordon and Pease (2006). The panelists are then confronted to a real-time

feedback, which can be problematic as they may not receive the same data. A more detailed comparison of different Delphi approach is provided by Rauch (1991), van Zolingen (2003), and Zipfinger (2007). Table 5.1 provides a comparative summary of these three approaches.

Table 2. Comparisons of Classical, Policy, and Decision Delphi

| | Classical Delphi | Policy Delphi | Decision Delphi |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| The context is that..... | Reality is given; its interpretation is clear; and consequence are discussed | Reality is given; its interpretation will be discussed | Reality will be created |
| The aim is to... | Produce forecasts | Produce policy | Produce decisions |
| The aim is achieved by... | Creating a consensus | Defining and differentiating views | Preparing and supporting decisions |
| The procedure focuses on... | Facts | Ideas and concepts | decisions |
| The panelists are... | Unbiased expert | lobbyists | Decision makers |
| The panelists try to... | Obtain realistic statement and prognoses | Support and succeed in their standpoints | Create a basis for realistic and useful decisions |
| The participation has to... | Be high in absolute terms (i.e: many experts) | Consider all relevant groupings | Cover a high percentage of the relevant decision makers |
| The researcher tries to... | Arrive at a stability among responses | Structure conflicts | Arrive at a stability among decisions |
| The feedback serves for... | Obtaining the realistic answer or prognosis | Getting well defined group opinions | Stimulating and informing the decision makers |
| Anonymity means that... | The participation in the panel are not known and all answers are anonymous | | The participation are known at the start, |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | | | but answers are anonymous |
| The reason for the anonymity is to... | Hinder arrangements and personal influences | Facilitate extreme viewpoints and objectivity | Support personal answers and raise the participation |
| The strict objectivity of the evaluation has... | Mainly methodological reasons (to be unbiased) | Mainly pragmatically reasons (to get a complete picture) | Mainly ethical reasons (the director of the study must not influence the decision process) |

III. ANALYSIS

A. Public Policy Case Study

Before developing e-participation framework, a case study must be done by researcher. Based on main objective, “develop an e-participation framework in public policy formulation”, a case study relating to the public policy formulation will be conducted. See Figure 1 below shows the general overview of public policy formulation process in Malaysia.

B. ANT Translation of Case Study

In reflection to the above ANT concepts and findings, this paper suggests the following e-participation framework. The proposed framework has five main building blocks, based on the translation of ANT to support the e-participation pillars as shows in Figure 2.

C. E-participation Framework evaluation

The researchers used two round of evaluation for searching a consensus of e-participation framework. In first round, the experts should be selected from the people who in charge in public policy formulation. After that the experts will answer some question to see an understanding of citizen participation in public policy formulation. For the second round, the researcher used a decision was made on the level of consensus reached in terms of the standard deviation as described in the following table:

Table 2. Decision for the level of consensus reached in Delphi study

| Standards Deviation | Level of consensus achieved |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| $0 \leq X < 1$ | High level |
| $1 \leq X < 1.5$ | Reasonable/fair level |
| $1.5 \leq X < 2$ | Low level |
| $2 \leq X$ | No consensus |

All the elements in e-participation have been ask to experts to get their consensus on the e-participation framework. An analysis of the results section yields a conclusion that a reasonable overall level of agreement exist regarding the expert opinion. The aggregated expert’s opinion introduces most pressing building block in e-participation framework. These building blocks as a key of e-participation framework to encourage public for participate in public policy formulation through online. The Figure 3 below is the experts’ opinion on five building blocks in e-participation framework.

The level of consensus achieved by the experts is measured by considering the standard deviation of opinion. It can be concluded that an overall high level of agreement exists regarding the suggestion building block in e-participation framework. However, technology building block has some different opinion by experts. Based on feedback, some expert are disagree in term of technology building block. One of the expert comment “In my point of view, this (technology) building block is other part of e-participation platform. I think the suggestion e-participation framework is more focus on the process itself, not to the base of e-participation. However, the other 4 building block are very reliable for e-participation framework”. The other expert also comments “in my opinion, technology building block is not a main process in e-participation compared to the other building blocks. This technology is a compulsory element when it comes with “e”. So my suggestion this technology building block can be there or otherwise. The final comment has same idea about technology building block, “it should not be in e-participation framework as a main building block but it just as a supporting element to the framework itself.

As a conclusion, a high level of consensus was achieved in the second round survey. However, it must be remembered that the existence of a consensus does not necessarily mean that the

correct answer, opinion or judgment has been identified. The real significance this study's outcome must be kept in mind. The group of

experts agreed all the suggestion building block in e-participation framework is important.

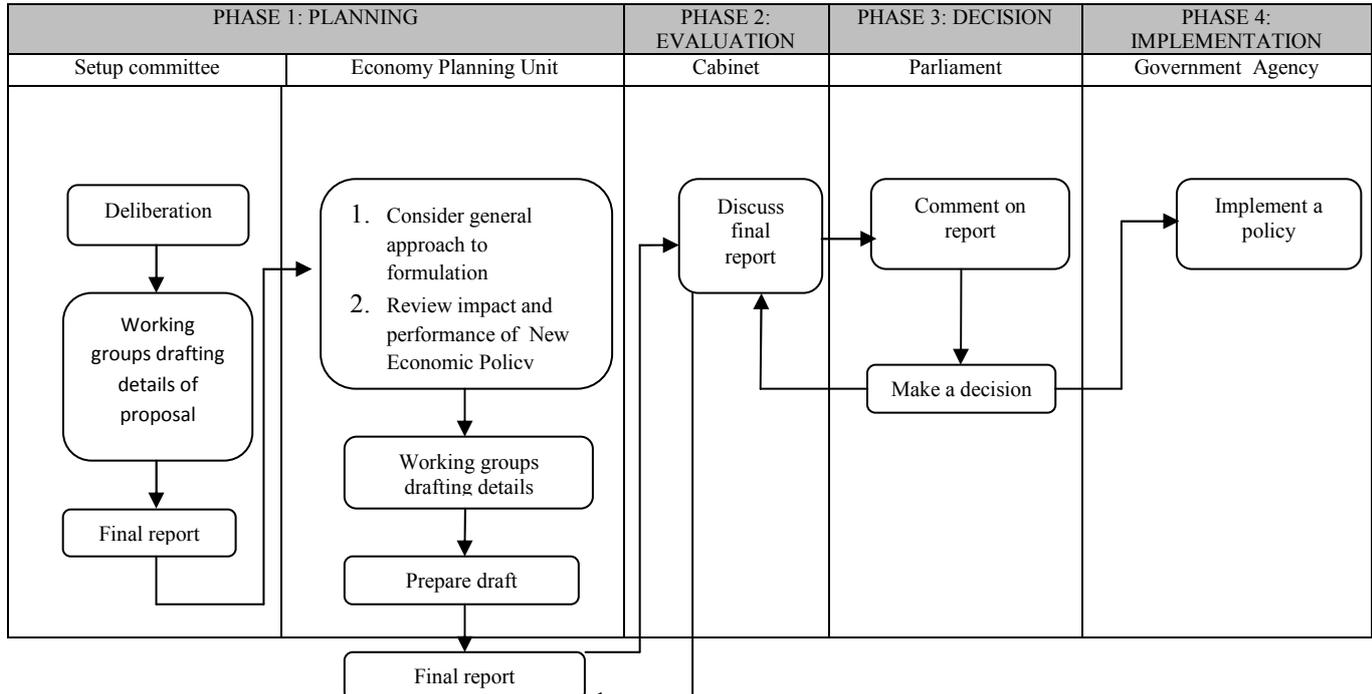


Figure 1. General overview of public policy formulation process in Malaysia

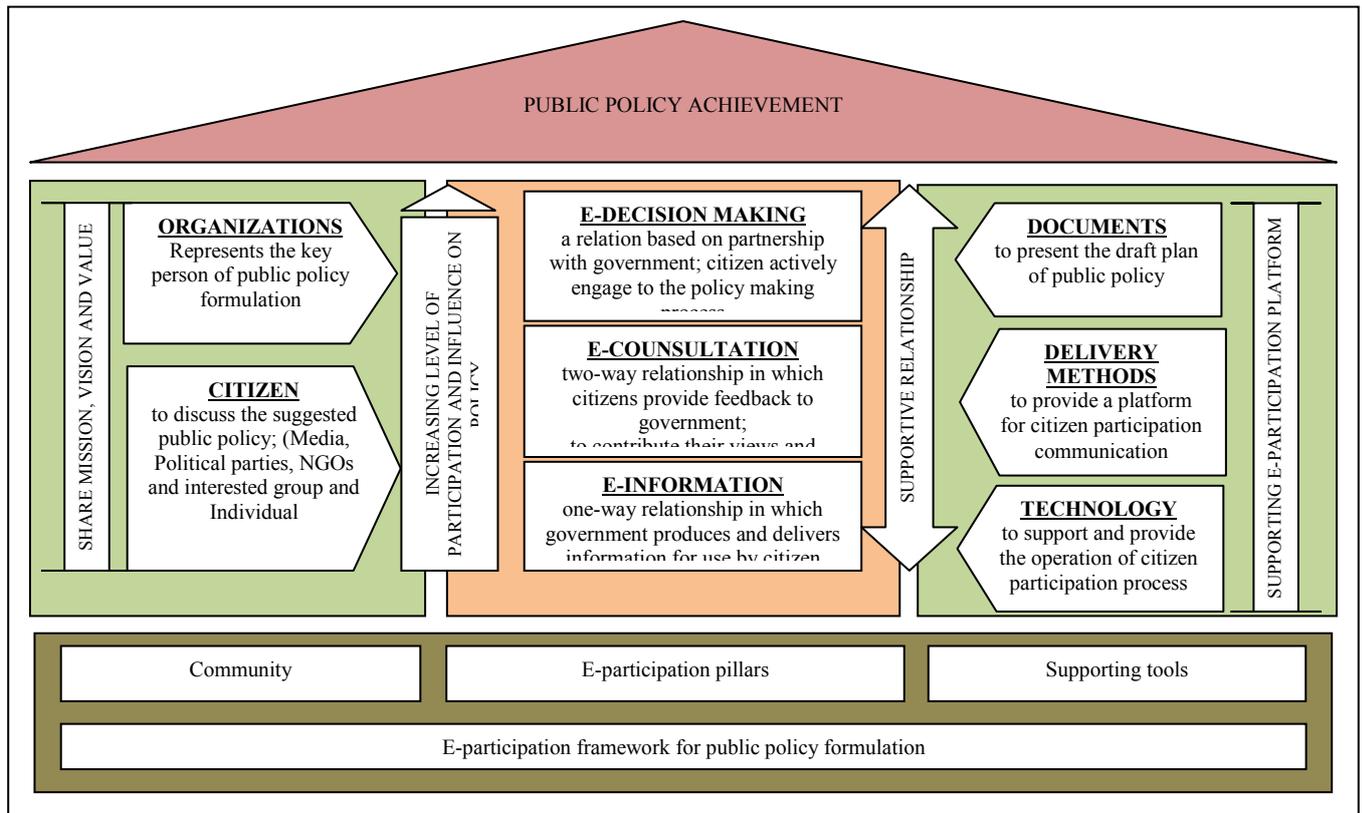


Figure 2. E-participation framework for public policy formulation

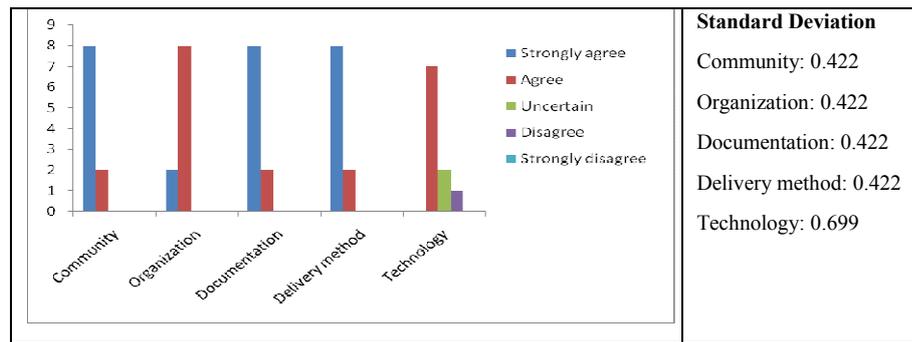


Figure 3. The experts' opinion on five building blocks in e-participation framework.

IV CONCLUSION

In this research, public participation has been developed to include four basic characteristics as the driver to develop e-participation framework.

1. Participation: that is a citizens in their capacity as lay people "rather than members of interest groups, business or government. Concern of citizens as a public rather than driven by the media of money and administrative power that facilitate the operations of the market and state,
2. Communication: Although initially defined to require face-to-face interaction, in the light of the potential of e-participation, the definition has been broadened to include other forms of deliberation. Participants, that is, the public and the decision makers, have to be reflexive. They must critically examine their values, assumptions and interest. Two-way communication also requires sincerity: each participant making a sincere effort to make known all relevant information.
3. Influence on decision: the communities have some bearing on the outcome, that participation is not merely tokenistic. It does not require consensus to be reached, but seeks a solution that is agreed upon and is workable. The public must be able to challenge and defend claims, that is, every participant must be equally entitle to introduce and question and assertion under consideration.
4. Better public policies: the results of participation should be integrated into public policies and have a measurable influence on the outcome. Experiences collected, recommendation made, and insights gained should be incorporated into the decision or

analysis. Public policy effectiveness is impacted?

For participation to be direct and meaningful, the interested and affected parties must first be identified. Meaningful participation needs to actively seek out the uninformed, uninterested, disenfranchised and acknowledge their views (or lack thereof) in the decision making process. The process of identification must allow for self-identification as well. Bottom -up participation, in which citizens and local communities take the initiative to affect change, must also be incorporated. Strategies need to have the flexibility to allow unplanned participation to shape the process as well. Second, people must be informed and educated. While direct and meaningful participation requires an informed citizenry, access to information alone is not sufficient to ensure that a higher level of participation in achieved. Information exchange has to occur in different directions. Not only must the citizens be initiated into the language of experts and policy makers, but those traditionally in decision making positions need to learn the language of lay persons. Third, all those affected must be able to interact, that is communicate, discuss, deliberate. Finally, the outcome of the participation should have an effect on the policies themselves.

The e-participation framework (Aizi, 2011) is a suggestion framework of broad based information dissemination, with scientific know-how and tools being made accessible to "average" citizens and lay people. Additional, the e-participation framework has shown that the ladder of e-participation can be ascended and interactive features as well as and two-way communication included.

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