Chapter 13

A Citizen–Centric Platform to Support Networking in the Area of E–Democracy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes experiences acquired during the research work conducted as part of the European Project Tell Me (www.tellmeproject.eu). The project envisaged to support the pan-European creation of Living Labs as new forms of cooperation between government, enterprises, citizens and academia for a successful transfer of e-Government, e-Democracy, and e-Services state-of-the art applications, solutions, know-how, and best practices. In this chapter, authors explore the potential of providing an existing system (DEMOS) allowing moderated and goal-oriented discourses between the citizens and the policy makers to become parts of open-ended ventures to allow the creation of collaborative networks for Electronic Democracy. This work also recommends that this form of support network elevates e-Democracy of a country and thus improves e-governance systems at the grass roots.

ORGANIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

After the "Helsinki Manifesto" (2006) put the "human-centric way" at the very centre of the measures needed "for turning the Lisbon Strategy (2000) into a living reality", the topic of competitiveness and innovation in Europe has been enriched of a further dimension, namely, co-creative collaboration with the forthcoming users of the developing products and services. This is especially useful in the field of (private and Government) e-Services, where the people can be considered as "twice" beneficiaries, namely of public services as such – impacting per se on their lives and businesses – and of ICT based or supported services, where the question becomes to which extent this novel user-centric approach can improve customization (if not "tailoring") to individual needs and requirements.

Some "champions" of this new dimension of innovation belong to the so-called ENoLL – European Network of Living Labs. In a purely business perspective, a Living Lab can be seen as a service providing organization in the topic of R&D and innovation, based on the "co-creation" concept, which focuses on people in their daily living environments as active, if not decisive, contributors to products and services design, development and testing.

In spite of a limited evidence on the known experiences – most of which could count on a significant external funding - it can be affirmed that the cost of building up and maintaining a Living Lab from scratch (i.e. deploying the communication and collaboration infrastructure, gathering and orchestrating the community of users, carrying out the requested evaluation services) can be substantial, thus preventing a long-term impact into the regional innovation systems.

Here is where the Tell Me project initiative starts up. Through the adaptation of a service already operational in Germany and other European Countries, originally thought for the animation of democratic discussions and participative public opinion formation at local and regional level, establishes a solution for the networking and interaction of Living Lab trials participants during the development and implementation of innovative projects. More specifically, Tell Me objectives were to investigate the administrative viability of the service on a European scale and to identify the conditions for future, pan-European deployment of the service under a juridical and a financial perspective.

The service is based on an existing infrastructure for moderated and goal-oriented discourses involving citizens and political institutions as well as project developers and investors, at national and European level.

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