

# Citizen–Oriented Decision Making

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## INTRODUCTION

The potential of information communication technology (ICT) opens up whole new sets of concepts and practical solutions to be developed when working with research and development (R&D) on new democratic praxis in the knowledge era (OECD, 2001; Keskinen, 2001). It is not sufficient to try to use ICT as a voting tool without first ensuring universal access to data, information, and knowledge for citizens in order for them to build their knowledge base and, second, to empower citizens to become independent decision-making collaborators. This interactive decision-making approach calls for new models that will complement, evolve, and reform the current representative democracy to better suit the modern needs of rapidly moving and changing societies (Becker, 1995; Keskinen, 1997; Becker & Slaton, 1997).

As many researchers have pointed out, the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is globalized (Albrow, 1997), not only in an economic sense, but also in social, political, environmental, and technical senses (Axford, 1996; Kuosa, 2001, pp. 257–269). The Internet, global media and advertising, and multinational enterprises and brands (Klein, 2001; Florida, 2002) have created a more global consciousness (Rifkin, 2001) supported by rapidly evolving ICT (Castells, 1996, 1998), and a new geographical dimension: cyberspace. Cyberspace can be seen as a complementary dimension with the more tangible social and geographical dimensions. Societies in the developed world have changed dramatically in the past 200 years, and the speed of change does not show any signs of slowing down. Should not the old-fashioned representative democracy change along with this process too (Kuosu, 2004; Keskinen et al., 2003; Keskinen, 2004)?

The new decision-making model, presented in this article, attempts to close the gap between the needs of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries by emphasizing citizens' active role in political decision making. This model is based on legally supported participatory citizenship (Barber, 1984), as is the case in the Multiphase Referendum Method, for example. The model focuses on citizens' needs and regards citizens as collaborative decision makers. Political authorities are tied with decisions taken in legally orga-

nized deliberative procedures. Thus, this model is called the "Citizen-Oriented Model."

## BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF E-DEMOCRACY RESEARCH

The basic assumptions of the traditional representative democracy are explained in detail by Held (1987). The new models of strong and participatory democracy are extensively discussed by Barber (1984). Further, the most modern deliberative and teledemocracies are discussed and explained by Becker and Slaton (1997, 2000). Hence, we have made the following basic assumptions for research and development of the citizen-oriented democracy:

1. We assume that employing ICT for decision making can contribute to better decision-making procedures.
2. We pursue the transformational politics, which means that our aim is to change existing power structures, from stiff to dynamic, through empowering citizens.
3. We assume that the representative model is still valid, and other models are complementary to this. This does not mean that the present representative model should stay unchanged, rather, it means that different models have their proper uses for different purposes during the total decision-making life cycle. This calls for a conscious process to integrate new, participatory, and deliberative models with the representative one in a new innovative way.

## THE CITIZEN-ORIENTED MODEL

The concepts of this model are described in the following section. The most important approach is that different decision-making models can be used in different stages of the decision process. This means that all the models of citizenship are not mutually exclusive, but they play different roles during the life cycle of the process, and,

furthermore, in true democratic fashion, this should also be decided by the citizens.

In the Citizen-Oriented Model, citizens are considered as decision makers with equal opportunities to representative decision makers. The vital difference to all other models is that the citizens set the agenda, not the politicians, so this process should be interactive and based on win-win strategies. However, there has to be a procedure to coordinate this process and avoid contingency/continuous need of voters input. In other words, citizens should, in many cases, be in the role of strategic decision making, and conventional decision makers in the role of executives (OECD, 2001; Becker, 1995; Keskinen, 1997).

### Tools of Citizen-Oriented Model

Almost all deliberative/participatory democracy ICT tools can be used in this model as tools of any chosen phase of the decision-making process, hence it is one specific approach to e-democracy. Relevant and already used tools can be listed as follows: Internet, text messages, digital TV, local TV and radio, online debates, online polls, citizens' jury, deliberative poll, drawing lot, funnel model, e-vote, multiphase referendum. It is also clear that present state-of-the-art interactive communications methods must be further developed for facilitating genuine dialogue among parties concerned (Carson et al., 2002, 2003; Keskinen, 1999; Keskinen et al., 2001).

### Examples of Successful Methods in Use

A number of successful methods have already been used throughout the world. Some of these methods can be grouped under the term "deliberative designs" because of their high levels of group interactivity, coupled with thoughtful discussion.

*The citizens' jury* is one example of a deliberative design and was created by Ned Crosby in the United States in the 1970s. The "jury" is typically selected using stratified sampling in order to match a profile of a given population. The participants (usually a group of 12-20) spend two to three days deliberating on a "charge" under the guidance of an impartial moderator. Participants have opportunities to question experts and to discuss the complexities of the issue and are asked to work toward a consensus response. Hundreds of citizens' juries have been conducted throughout the world since the mid-1970s, for example in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Carson & Martin, 1999).

Consensus conferences have many similarities with the citizens' jury and have been conducted in Denmark since the mid-1980s. Usually a consensus conference allows more control of the "witnesses" or experts to be

called and is organized under the watchful eye of a steering committee. This method often involves preparatory workshops for the participants as well as the final deliberation. Like a citizens' jury, it culminates in a written report. The Danish Board of Technology delivers the recommendations from its consensus conferences to the Danish Parliament. Consensus conferences have been conducted in many other countries, for example, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom (Slaton, 1992).

Planning cells have been conducted in Germany since the mid-1970s and overcome the weakness of size that is inherent in a small "jury." Peter Dienel who first convened these planning cells typically conducts a series of simultaneous "cells," for example, 20 cells (each with 25 participants), thereby offering validity and reliability with his results (Slaton, 1992).

The deliberative poll was designed by James Fishkin and is even larger in scale. The deliberative poll is an opinion poll with a deliberative element, and Fishkin has conducted a number of these (mostly in the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Denmark). A phone survey is conducted, and then hundreds of respondents are invited to come together at a single location. When they gather, they deliberate on the issue and have an opportunity to work in small groups (each like a citizens' jury or planning cell), also spending time in plenary sessions when experts are questioned. At the end of the gathering (usually conducted over two to three days), participants are surveyed again. There is no pursuit toward consensus, and the responses are individual. The model has been successfully used by Ted Becker and Christa Slaton in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand (Becker & Slaton, 1981; Becker, 1981; Slaton, 1992).

### A Selection of Local/Regional E-Democracy Projects and Pilots in Finland since Mid-1990s

In the following list, there are some Web sites and other sources listed concerning the various local and regional e-democracy pilots conducted in Finland. Finland is considered to be one of the most modern and advanced countries in developing the use of ICT in the world. For example, eTampere has been internationally rewarded several times for its innovative applications for e-democracy in the City of Tampere, Finland.

- **OSKU:** Citizens' information society based on local resources, OSKU—Learning Regions Project, <http://www.oskut.net/english.html>
- **eTampere:** Ferguson and Baron (2002), Local e-government now: A worldwide view, report of Socitm I&DeA, June 2002, Executive Summary in <http://>

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