Project acronym: **DEMo4PPL**
Project full title: **Digital Education Modules 4 Participatory Planning**

OPT-T13: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND E-GOVERNANCE

1. Short description

As a core pillar of an open government, public participation has intrinsic and instrumental benefits. It leads to a better and more democratic policymaking process, which becomes more transparent, inclusive, legitimate, and accountable. It enhances public trust in government and democratic institutions by giving citizens and stakeholders a role in public decision making. By taking into account and using citizens' and stakeholders' experience and knowledge, it helps public institutions tackle complex policy problems and leads to better policy results.

The use of digital tools for public participation is a widespread practice at all levels of government around the world. It is normal for public authorities to be prone to reach out to the public using digital tools, as it might seem more accessible, easy to put in place, allowing for instantaneous and massive participation.

However, the selection of digital tools should not be the starting point when planning or designing a public participation process. There should first be clarity about the purpose, stage of the policy cycle, expected inputs and how they will be used, and the participation method. Only then is it relevant to ask if (and if yes, which) digital tools are the most appropriate.

Moreover, before using digital tools for participation, public authorities must take into account the existing digital divides as well as ensuring that the selected technology is transparent and accountable. The use of digital tools that ensure inclusion and impactful participation also requires technical, human, and financial resources.

The module aims to help students:

- Develop a basic understanding of public participation

- Identify the potential and challenges of the use of digital tools for public participation
- Comprehend the key success factors in designing public participation initiatives

2. Keywords

E-Participation; Public Administration; Open Government; Citizen Engagement; Democracy

3. Content
3.1. E-governance and e-participation

In response to the diffusion of digital technologies, governments are changing their mode of operation to improve public service delivery and achieve objectives such as increased transparency, or citizen satisfaction. Digital transformation in the public sector means new frameworks of service delivery but also new ways of working with stakeholders and citizens.

Whereas "e-government" is modernisation of processes and functions of government using digital technologies as to transform the way it serves its constituents, "e-governance" is about using digital technologies to help government to strengthen interactions with citizens and stakeholders to solve societal problems collectively. E-governance is about engaging citizens and stakeholders and letting them co-produce public services while e-government views citizens largely as consumers of these services (Meijer 2015).

"E-participation" is also about engaging citizens and stakeholders but this concept emphasizes the efforts by public institutions to hear the views, perspectives, and inputs from citizens and stakeholders. E-participation is about the involvement of those who may be affected by or interested in a decision through digital channels. It usually does not cover civic initiatives or political discussions that take place without the involvement of the government as initiator, moderator, or receiver (Le Blanc 2020).

E-participation is a core pillar of open government, which can be defined as a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth (OECD 2017).

3.2. The benefits of public participation

As a core pillar of an open government, public participation has intrinsic benefits. It leads to better and more democratic policy making, which becomes more transparent, inclusive, legitimate, and accountable. Participation enhances public trust in government and democratic institutions by giving citizens and stakeholders a role in public decision making. It also leads to a better shared understanding of opportunities and challenges.

Public participation also has instrumental benefits. It leads to better policy results that take into account and use citizens' and stakeholders' experience and knowledge to address citizens' most pressing needs. The quality of policies is improved, as they are developed based on up-to-date evidence.

Public participation can make governance and decision making more inclusive by opening the door to more representative groups of people. Participation in public decision making can answer the concerns of minorities and unrepresented groups by addressing inequalities of voice and access, and thus fight exclusion and marginalisation. This in turn can create better policies and services, build a sense of belonging, and foster social cohesion.

Involving stakeholders and citizens in the decision-making process supports the public understanding of the outcome and enhances its uptake. Public participation can allow the public to follow, influence, and understand the process leading to a decision, which in turn enhances the legitimacy of hard choices and social support for change. Empowering citizens and stakeholders through participatory processes is also good for the overall legitimacy of the democratic process as it signals civic respect and builds a relationship based on mutual trust.

3.3. Levels of public participation

The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government distinguishes among three levels of citizen and stakeholder participation, which differ according to the level of involvement:

Information: an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and "proactive" measures by the government to disseminate information.

Consultation: a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.

Engagement: when citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g., information, data, and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens and stakeholders in setting the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with public authorities.

3.4. Public participation and the policy life cycle

A key dimension of public participation considers when to involve citizens and stakeholders in policy-making processes, which are typically described by looking at five stages of the policy life cycle. Each stage of the policy life cycle is described below.

Agenda-setting: establishing the need for a policy or a change in policy and defining what the problem to be addressed is.

Policy formulation: defining the challenges and opportunities associated with an agenda item more clearly to produce a draft policy document. This can include: gathering evidence and knowledge from a range of sources including citizens and civil society organizations; understanding the context, including the political context for the agenda item; developing a range of options.

Policy adoption: selecting a proposal, developing political support for it, and formally enacting it into laws and actions.

Policy implementation: a set of actions involved in carrying out a policy that has been adopted.

Policy evaluation: reviewing the effects of an ongoing policy on its intended goals.

3.5. Public participation methods

There are many different methods that can be used to engage citizens and stakeholders in any given context, and new methods are continuously developed and implemented. Seven methods are widely applied across public institutions:

1. Access to information and data

Publishing information proactively and providing information reactively it is the very minimum that can be done. This method promotes transparency, creates awareness about public issues, provides necessary information and creates conditions for more advanced methods of participation.

2. Open meetings/debates

This method aims to provide information and openly discuss topics of interest chosen without a specific impact in the final decision. It is based on a loosely structured exchange between public authorities and the public. It is used to "test the water" for initial reception of ideas and policies by the public.

3. Public consultation

This method represents a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to a public institution (such as comments, perceptions, information, advice, experiences, and ideas). Usually, government agencies define the issues for consultation, set the questions, and manage the process, while citizens and stakeholders are invited to contribute their views and opinions.

4. Open innovation

This method includes practices, such as crowdsourcing, hackathons, or public challenges, that are used to convene expertise from citizens and stakeholders to find ideas or inspiration, prototype and test solutions, or to improve services or methods.

- **Crowdsourcing** refers to the idea of using the expertise and ideas coming from the crowd (in this case broader citizens and stakeholders). It can be used to gather inputs throughout the policy cycle of any public decision. Through digital platforms, public authorities can gather input from expert groups, targeted stakeholders (such as scientists or developers), or the wider public to answer specific public problems.
- **Hackathons** (from hack and marathons) are in-person or virtual events bringing together public authorities and stakeholders to collaboratively work on ideas, prototype solutions, and services to solve public problems. The idea is to take advantage of the diversity of skills, expertise, and profiles to find new approaches or innovative solutions. Usually, hackathons involve technical communities (developers, coders, designers, data scientists, etc.) to make use of data previously published (in an open data format) by the public authority convening the event. Hackathons are organised during a short period time (24 to 72 hours), where participants can work in sprint to solve a policy problem, design or code digital solutions such as dashboards, applications, websites.
- **Public challenges** are co-creation mechanisms where citizens and stakeholders propose solutions to concrete public problems. The public authority publishes a specific problem or challenge, and then selects the best proposals coming from the public to solve the problem in question. Solutions can be policy proposals, prototypes of mobile applications, project suggestions, etc. Citizens and stakeholders submit their proposals, and, based on previously published criteria, the public authority selects the best ranked solutions. In some cases, the public authority provides a reward to the selected solutions (such as financial compensation, public recognition, or other awards). The public authority can then implement those solutions (as new public services, or as part of a wider policy program) or provide support for the participants to develop their project (as coaching sessions, financial resources, etc.).

5. Citizen science

With the advancement of online technologies, citizen science has become much more prominent and efficient, and is now employed by researchers, advocates, and communities all over the world. The essence of citizen science is that citizens are involved in one or many stages of a scientific investigation, like identifying research questions, conducting observations, analysing data, and using the resulting knowledge.

The key strength of recruiting citizen scientists to contribute to research by collecting and analysing data is the large amount of data citizens are able to collect, the diversity of the data (since citizens are dispersed across different geographical locations and it would be impossible to gather it otherwise), and the opportunity to process and analyse data on a larger scale.

Citizens can also be valuable and active agents in shaping the research process for some projects. Their personal experience of living in a specific location, interacting with a specific environment, and being part of a particular community can yield important insights and helpful suggestions when identifying research questions or

determining the focus of the study. In addition, involving citizens in the co-design of the research project contributes to raising awareness around the issue the study aims to analyse, and can further help influence policy decisions and demonstrate the importance of the issue.

6. Civic monitoring

This method refers to the idea of involving the public in the monitoring and evaluation of public decisions, policies, and services. This participatory method can also be considered as an accountability tool, as it allows citizens and stakeholders to directly participate in making public authorities accountable for their decisions or actions.

7. Participatory budgeting

A participatory budget is a process that involves a specific portion or the entire amount of an institution's budget, so that can be freely and independently decided by all the citizens participating in the initiative. The goal of a participatory budget should be to make fiscal public decisions more open, meaning more transparent, accountable, and participatory. It helps citizens to better understand the functioning of public budgeting, influence spending priorities, and increase budget and fiscal accountability.

3.6.   Digital tools and public participation

E-participation is about fostering public participation through digital tools that can allow citizens and stakeholders to interact and submit their inputs in different ways:

- Being informed through data and visualisations;
- Proposing new projects, ideas, or suggestions;
- Deliberating to agree on shared decisions;
- Voting on suggested ideas or projects;
- Prioritising potential options;
- Drafting strategies, policies, or legislation collaboratively;
- Mind-mapping, interactive polling;
- Recognising patterns and trends in submitted responses, views, and opinions;
- Sharing information or data to fill an existing gap.

Selecting the right digital tool will depend on the participation method used, the public to be involved, the expected output, and the available resources.

3.7.   The dual nature of e-participation

In order to understand why e-participation initiatives succeed or fail, it is useful to consider the dual nature of these initiatives as socio-technical information systems and as instruments for democratic dialogue between citizens/stakeholders and governments.

From a socio-technical system point of view, success is often associated with project management aspects, such as the delivery of the system on time and on budget and

meeting the desired requirements. However, as instruments for democratic dialogue, e-participation platforms are expected to fulfill several ambitious objectives besides delivering a functional system. These include facilitating a deliberative dialogue between government and citizens/stakeholders, increasing citizens' and stakeholders' participation in political decision-making, increasing public trust, enhancing the legitimacy of democratic processes, improving the quality and success of policies. These objectives are quite different from the service-related objectives of socio-technical systems and can be a source for high expectations from citizens and stakeholders.

For example, as the legitimacy of democratic processes is associated with broad-based citizen participation, e-participation systems may be expected to be able to mobilize a large or at least a representative group of citizens to fulfill the expectation of enhancing legitimacy. Furthermore, stakeholders may also have conflicting expectations. This puts e-participation systems under pressure to satisfy the interests of several stakeholders with different: socio-economic background, trust in institutions, and trust in digital tools.

The success/failure criteria of e-participation projects most often concern the level and quality of participation. However, any measure of e-participation success should also consider stakeholders' and citizens' satisfaction with the project and the project's salience for stakeholders (Toots 2019).

3.8. Diffusion of e-participation in public administration

There are many studies on the "demand side" of e-participation that focus on the citizens' and stakeholders' skills and motivations to engage with government. Another strand of research takes a different starting point by addressing the "supply side" of e-participation, more specifically, government as a mediator of e-participation initiatives. Although political actors often start initiatives for greater citizen and stakeholder participation via ICTs, public administrations often happen to be the birthplace and locus of participation processes because they have the organizational means to realize them.

Public administrations play a key role in the development of e-participation because they are usually responsible for organizing and administering online communication channels with which citizens can engage in the political arena. Usually, public administrations are responsible for organizing and managing online opportunities and other communication channels with which citizens and stakeholders can engage in the political arena (Steinbach et al. 2019).

The literature has identified three stages in the diffusion process of e-participation in public administration:

1. **Adoption** - describes the process in which organizations become aware of and learn about digital tools; gather information to evaluate the potential benefits (e.g., technical and financial benefits); and make the decision whether to acquire digital tools.

2. **Implementation** - is defined as the integration of digital tools into organizational processes and structures. This stage encompasses the installation and delivery of digital tools within an organization; the diffusion of these tools among users within an organization; the adaptation of organizational procedures and processes to the tools, and the adaptation of tools to existing structures.

3. **Institutionalization** - It refers to the process through which the use of digital tools become a known and routinized activity within an organization.

Although there is the tendency to expect technology to transform organizations and processes, digital technology is, in fact, no more than a potential driver of institutional change, not an independent agent capable of influencing policy-making processes.

Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the adoption of a digital solution and its eventual institutionalization in organizational structures and policy-making processes because the institutionalization of e-participation is not a linear and stand-alone process. While it is possible to formally institutionalize e-participation in a "top-down" manner through legislative and structural changes, informal institutionalization through the shifts in values and beliefs of politicians and administrators requires long-term determined action and cannot be assumed to "automatically" follow formalization.

This means that formal and informal institutionalization that ultimately leads to sustainable institutional change only happens if the ideas and value systems prevailing among the political and administrative actors make them open to the change and stimulate them to actively work towards implementing the change.

To support the institutionalization of e-participation, practitioners' focus should shift from designing a perfect digital tool to understanding the needs, ideas and interests of politicians and public-sector managers who can influence the institutionalization of e-participation. Furthermore, e-participation initiatives should not be conceptualized as isolated "projects" with a fixed timeframe and end result. Instead, it makes sense to regard them as processes of long-term institutional change requiring the ongoing attention and support of politicians and managers, "buy-in" by public officials, sufficient and stable funding, constant monitoring, and finetuning, where the adoption of the digital solution is simply the first step in a long and complicated process (Randma-Liiv 2023).

3.9. E-participation as a collaborative effort

E-participation initiatives are hardly ever provided by single organizations or units. E-participation is a collaborative process involving several actors (e.g., government units, NGOs, businesses, ICT support) that contribute to the functioning of the platform and are likely to have different roles, leading to complex interrelationships among actors.

Four types of actors can be distinguished: a responsible unit in charge of the administration of an e-participation initiative, a technical platform provider, other units involved in the e-participation process and decision-makers using the citizens' input (Figure 1).
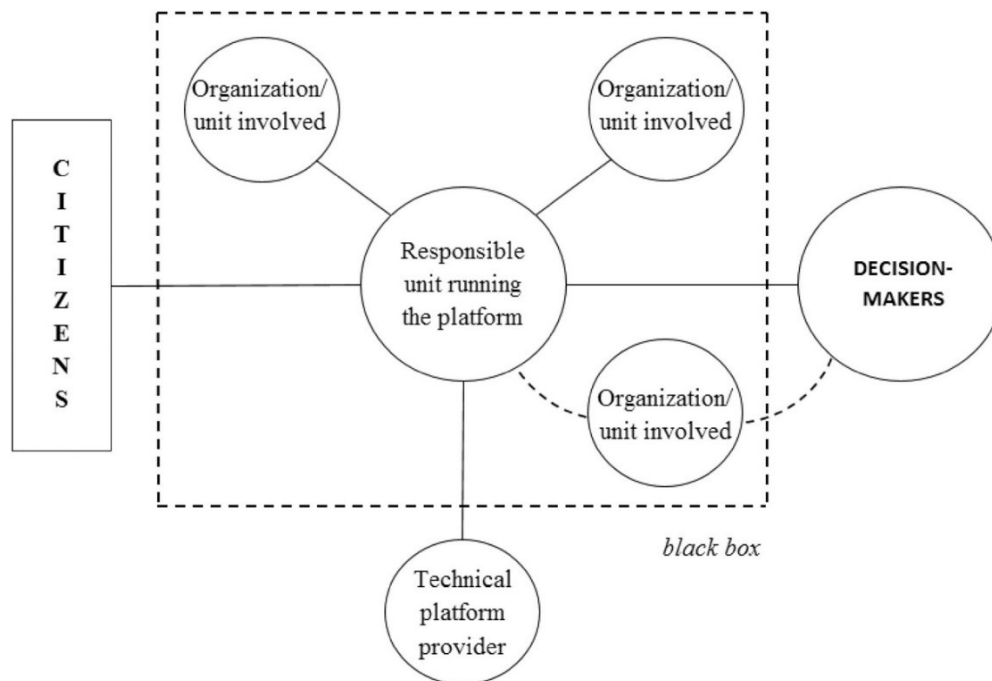
Figure 1: Actors involved in the supply of e-participation (source: Randma-Liiv 2022)

First, central actors—responsible units running e-participation platforms—are crucial for ensuring both the strategic and operational management of e-participation platforms. A supportive institutional context is expected to provide the responsible units with centrality, legitimacy, and access to resources. This kind of "network centrality" tries to capture the actors in terms of their links to others and emphasizes the crucial role of central actors in decision-making and information processing.

Second, the impact of technology on the public sector is mediated by the institutional context that frames the ways in which the public sector interacts with non-governmental providers, as the majority of technological solutions and products are provided by private firms. In the case of e-participation, technical solutions can be developed in-house, outsourced, or open-source platforms can be used.

Third, there can be a range of other organizations and units that collaborate with the central actor in the delivery of the e-participation platform. These include, for example, organizations to whom responsible units are accountable, funders of the platform, actors involved in the promotion and communication of the platform, technical support, and units checking the validity of citizen input.

Finally, decision-makers are the end-users of citizens' and stakeholders' input—they can be either politicians or responsible civil servants who use the input received through the e-participation platform in the policy design.

The multi-actor setting in the provision of e-participation platforms raises challenges related to collaboration among the actors, including the use of different coordination mechanisms—hierarchy, market, and networks—which differ in their reliance on various

types of incentives provided by means of voluntary agreements, common norms and culture, formal regulations, or coercion.

First, in hierarchy-type coordination, interaction is based on formal authority that derives from legislation, administrative orders, common standards, the rights of inspection, and intervention. Such an approach is characterized by the clear distribution of responsibilities but also by the potential mismatch between rigid organizational structures and complex environments, administrative overload, and other bottlenecks afflicting formal bureaucracies.

Second, the underlying logic of market-type coordination is based on exchange and competition, where guidance and control are provided by the "invisible hand" through supply and demand, price mechanisms, and the self-interest to earn a profit and avoid losses.

Third, the network-approach assumes that coordination is achieved through complex interaction processes among interdependent actors. Network-based coordination relies on cooperation and solidarity among actors whose relations are shaped and controlled by interdependencies, trust, shared values, and reciprocity.

In practice, various combinations of these "ideal type" coordination mechanisms are often used, which represent options that are complementary rather than alternative.

Actors possess different resources and commitment toward a collaborative arrangement (here, an e-participation initiative) and, consequently, certain actors may obtain a more asymmetrical power position than others. Besides the available resources and the position from the formal mandate, the underlying organizational culture strongly affects any collaborative arrangement. The levels of trust, conflict, and social capital can become resources or liabilities during collaboration, thereby also affecting the sense of ownership. Some actors may have low commitment due to coercive engagement and thus have interest in "free riding". Consequently, different actors find themselves searching for a balance between divergent value considerations and similarity. Clearly established organizational design is argued to facilitate trust-building among actors and improve transparency, thereby also contributing to shared ownership of the outcomes and process of e-participation (Randma-Liiv 2022).

3.10. An analytical framework for explaining failure of e-participation

In general, researchers and practitioners have been more interested in the potential of digitalization and the benefits that digital technology is expected to produce for open government rather than studying the actual implementation of e-participation initiatives. This has left its footprint on e-participation literature, which is often plagued by a normative bias and tendency to present the positive and transformational impacts of digital technology on participatory democracy as a given.

Recently, more balanced studies have emerged that have critically reviewed the impact of technology on democratic participation and deemed many claims about e-

participation premature and unfounded (Epstein et al. 2014; Karkin and Cezar 2024). Studies refer to a general weakness of e-participation initiatives to deliver expected outcomes, mobilize enough active users and fulfill the democratic promise of engaging disengaged segments of society (Lutz et al. 2017; Yetano and Royo 2017). An analytical framework can be constructed for explaining the failure of e-participation systems (Figure 2). It rests on four key assumptions:

1. The implementation of an e-participation system can be regarded as an innovation process characterized by uncertainty and susceptibility to changes in the context.

2. While contextual factors and changes are not the immediate cause of failure, context may constitute an important trigger for failure.

3. The failure of e-participation systems is a process where contextual factors interact with the innovation process and stakeholders in a manner leaving the project organization unable to innovate the system according to stakeholders' demands and contextual constraints. As the system no longer serves its stakeholders, stakeholders evaluate the system negatively and stop supporting the system.

4. Failure can be avoided if the project organization has the power to change the influential contextual factors or if it manages to align the system to the context (Toots 2019).
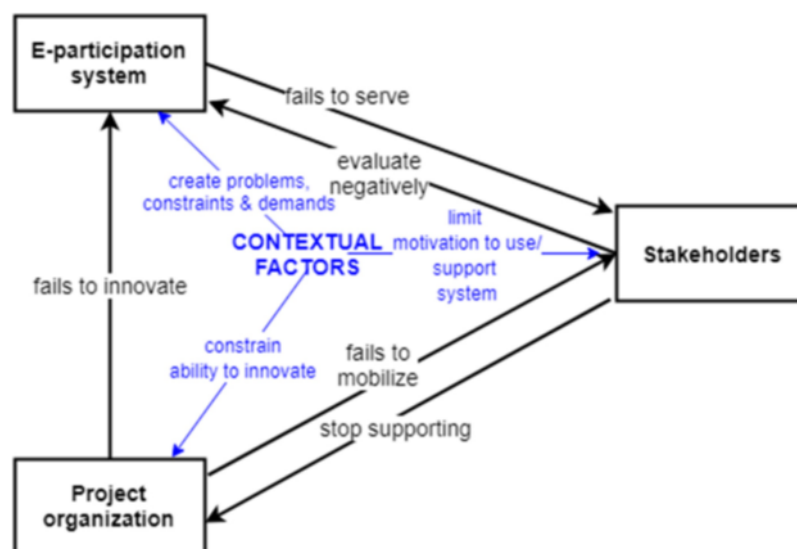
Figure 2: Failure process of e-participation (source: Toots 2019)

3.11. Barriers to e-participation

Barriers to e-participation differ in their domains: government barriers and citizen barriers. Government organizations are believed to possess distinct characteristics that constrain their ability to integrate new practices. These characteristics include ambiguous and competing objectives, the pressure to balance the interests of various

stakeholders, structural and legal complexity, susceptibility to political interests, the influence of state and governance traditions. Technical barriers related to the availability of hardware and software and interoperability but also the ability to deal with issues of privacy and security are highlighted in the literature. Gaps in personnel capacity, technical capacity (number of IT staff and IT skills), and financial capacity are also highlighted in the literature. For e-participation, strong backing by managers and politicians is a particularly important success factor.

Citizen barriers arise when citizens are expected to use e-participation tools. Citizens need the opportunities skills and motivations to engage with government agencies. In the literature on e-participation, the 'digital divide' is identified as a key barrier. The image citizens have of government is another important barrier: if citizens expect little of government or they do not trust government, they will not be willing interact through digital means. The variables explaining participation are very similar in online and offline contexts, including prior social and political mobilization, value orientation, age and gender, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Some studies also relate participation to dissatisfaction with public institutions and sense of urgency. There tends to be an overrepresentation of younger, technology savvy and politically active citizens among those using ICT for political participation. Citizen participation levels also depend on citizens' awareness of participation opportunities, perceived capacity to participate and ease of participation. The only determinants that are specific to online participation seem to be access to technology and Internet user skills.

There are also structural and cultural barriers to e-participation. While many studies have identified a variety of structural barriers such as funding, technology and skills, other studies highlight the importance of cultural barriers, which involve the change in existing routines and value orientations. Bureaucratic culture—formality, uniformity and hierarchy— preserves the traditional ways of interacting with citizens. The failure of participatory initiatives has been associated with the risk-averse culture of public sector organizations, fears of change, and institutional resistance. Cultural barriers can also be identified on the side of citizens. If they see government as unreliable and their own role as passive, they are unlikely to interact with governments in e-participation (Meijer 2015).

An overview of the various types of barriers categorized for the dimensions structure/culture and government/citizens is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of barriers to e-participation (source: Meijer 2015)

	GOVERNMENT	**CITIZENS**
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS	Legal constraints, lack of finances, shortage of personnel and available skills, limited political and management support, lack of coordination, technological constraints	Lack of technological facilities, limited knowledge and competences

CULTURAL BARRIERS	Resistance to change, interference with bureaucratic culture	Lack of interest, little faith in and negative image of government, no perceived usefulness, resistance to technology

3.12. Specific requirements for the design of e-participation

The goals of e-participation platforms as democracy instruments create specific demands on their design. In order to avoid failure due to unrealistic expectations, it is vital to explicitly define the system's purpose and limitations from the outset and consider stakeholders' expectations, needs, skills and patterns of usage during system design. The success of e-participation also depends on the fit between the participation tool, its goals, demand groups and the form of participation. For example, in the case of online public consultations, the deliberative element and moderation of discussions are viewed as important quality and impact factors. E-participation systems are also expected to provide easy access to information, interactivity, and adaptability to technological developments.

E-participation instruments should be fully integrated into public governance processes in order to make an impact. Successful e-participation processes require the involvement of decision-makers and end users and need to demonstrate the impact of participants' contributions on policy outcomes. Several studies emphasize the importance of communication: users should be provided with clear information about the goals and mandate of the participation process and adequate feedback throughout the process. Lastly, the success of e-participation processes requires an active promotion of e-participation tools among the targeted user groups (Panopoulou et al. 2014; Wirtz et al. 2018).

3.13. Planning and implementing e-participation

Participation processes should be organised only when there is room for meaningful citizen participation in the decision-making process. Participation processes initiated by a public authority that do not lead to a meaningful contribution to policy making or lack substance, time, or other resources to be well-implemented risk disappointing citizens and compromising their trust in government.

To support public authorities, the 2022 OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes developed a ten-step path to planning, implementing, and evaluating a public participation process:

1. Identifying the problem to solve and the moment for participation

The first step when planning a citizen participation process is to identify if there is a genuine problem that the public can help solve. If there is, then the problem needs to be defined and framed as a question. Citizens can be actively involved in any of the

stages or throughout the policy cycle: when identifying the issue, formulating policy, making decisions, implementing policy, or evaluating it.

2. Defining the expected results

A clear understanding of the expected outcomes or results of the participation process is needed to define the desired inputs or contributions from citizens and the impact they will have on the final decision.

3. Identifying the relevant group of people to involve and recruiting participants

Different types of groups can be involved in a participation process, such as a broad group of citizens from diverse backgrounds, a representative group of citizens, a particular community based on geography or other demographic characteristics, as well as stakeholders, ranging from non-governmental organisations to businesses or academia.

There are different possible strategies for recruiting participants depending on the expected inputs, the targeted public, and the participation method. Prior to recruiting participants, a mapping exercise can be useful to identify relevant groups of citizens (for example, those affected by the problem to solve) or categories of stakeholders (for example, civil society organisations, businesses, groups of experts etc.) that hold the most relevant experiences, points of view, or expertise.

In many traditional participatory processes, such as public consultations, there is often an "open call" to recruit participants. Participation is usually encouraged by advertising the opportunity through different channels (online, social media, post, posters). Participation is open, so anyone who wants to is able to come in person or contribute online. Recruitment via "open call" aims to involve as many people as possible, however, there is a wealth of research that demonstrates that certain demographics tend to disproportionately participate, notably those who are older, male, well-educated, affluent, white, and urban.

Public authorities may also conduct participation through a "closed call" for participants, meaning that they might choose specific members of a community who have a particular expertise or experience needed to address a policy issue.

Civic lottery, or sortition, is used as a shorthand to refer to recruitment processes that involve random sampling from which a representative selection is made to ensure that the group broadly matches the demographic profile of the community. A civic lottery attempts to overcome the shortcomings and distortions of "open" and "closed" calls for participation. It ensures that nearly every person has an equal chance of being invited to participate in a participation process and that the final group is a microcosm of society.

4. Choosing the participation method

5. Choosing the right digital tools

Digital tools can allow citizens and stakeholders to interact and submit their inputs in different ways. They should be chosen to facilitate the participation method. Policy

makers should keep in mind the existing "digital divides", plan for technical, human, and financial resources needed to deploy digital tools, and choose tools that are transparent and accountable. When possible, digital tools should be chosen alongside in-person methods.

6. Communicating about the process

Public communication can help at every step of the way – from recruiting citizens, to ensuring the transparency of the process, to extending the benefits of learning about a specific policy issue to the broader public. Constant, clear, and understandable communication that uses plain language is most effective.

7. Implementing the participation process

There are general considerations that concern the implementation of any participatory process: preparing an adequate timeline, identifying the needed resources, ensuring inclusion and accessibility, and considering a citizens' journey through a participatory process.

8. Using citizen input and providing feedback

The inputs received as part of the participatory process should be given careful and respectful consideration and used as stipulated in the beginning – with clear justifications if any inputs or recommendations are not used or implemented. Communicating to participants about the status of their inputs and the ultimate outcome of their participation helps to close the feedback loop.

9. Evaluating the participation process

Through evaluation, the quality and neutrality of a participatory process can be measured and demonstrated to the broader public. Evaluation also creates an opportunity for learning by providing evidence and lessons for public authorities and practitioners about what went well, and what did not.

10. Fostering a culture of participation

A shift from ad hoc participation processes to a culture of participation can be supported by embedding institutionalised participation mechanisms, multiplying opportunities for citizens to exercise their engagement beyond participation, and protecting a vibrant civic space.

4. Classroom discussion topics / case studies

Case Study: Decide Madrid

The UN has awarded the citizens' participation platform "Decide Madrid" with the prize to the best public service of 2018. The international organization has chosen it as the winner of the category "Making institutions inclusive and ensuring participation in decision making" because the platform has established an open and transparent governance model in which citizens can participate.

In Madrid (and Spain, in general), the Administration has traditionally collaborated with citizens when they are part of an association or a civil society cluster. Citizen participation regulations in Madrid date back to 1988. Neighborhood associations have traditionally been the actors involved in participatory processes and individual citizen participation is more recent. Specific ICT procedures to facilitate the effective participation of citizens in local governance were established by Law 57/2003 and requirements for online public consultations by Law 39/2015.

The 2008 financial crisis, austerity policies, and subsequent protests (15M movement) led to new political parties. One of them led Madrid city council between 2015 and 2019, with the commitment to implement tools for citizen participation through the Internet. Decide Madrid (https://decide.madrid.es/) was launched in September 2015, to promote high levels of citizen participation in the policy-making process. Participation can be carried out through five modules: debates (e-forums), proposals (requests made by citizens), polls (carried out when a proposal receives the support of 1% of registered residents over 16 in Madrid or when the city council wants citizens to decide on an issue), consultations (tool used by the city council to seek input from citizens on a certain issue), and participatory budgeting.

For debates no feedback to citizens is usually provided. Although most of the legally mandated public consultations include a link to download a report with statistics about the consultation, up to mid-2020, it was rather difficult to find it. Since mid-2020, a direct link to the report is provided and its content has improved including the targeted citizens, profile of the respondents (age, gender, and district), frequency of the words most used per open question, connections among them, and so on. However, no information about the impact on decisions made is provided. The limited feedback to participants makes it difficult to legitimate e-participation and has negatively influenced citizens' participation levels.

Decide Madrid integrates a gamified interface (e.g., thumbs up and down for proposals, a virtual assistant, visual aids, banners and competition rules) and is accessible to people with disabilities (conformance to W3C and AENOR certification). Citizens, associations, nongovernmental organizations, and companies can register in the platform, create debates or proposals, and make comments in all modules. However, only registered citizens of Madrid can verify their accounts and vote on proposals. The verification processes and almost all participatory activities can also be done offline in any of the 26 citizen attention offices.

The open-source software developed for the platform, Consul, has been implemented in more than 100 organizations around the world, most of them in Europe (especially in Spain) and Latin America (see http://consulproject.org/en/). The Consul code, freely available on the Internet, allows any organization to use and adapt the platform to its own needs. The improvements made by any organization or individual user can be exploited by the rest, fostering collaboration between them.

The guidelines and procedures supporting the working of the platform were approved by different agreements of the city council since October 2015. The platform is

embedded in the formal policy-making processes, because all areas of government use it to carry out public consultations.

Decide Madrid is a top-down initiative that has been created, funded, and managed by Madrid city council. From 2015 to 2019, Decide Madrid was managed by the Department of Citizen Participation, within the Area of Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Open Government, which depended directly on the Mayor's Office. Since 2019, this department belongs to the Deputy Mayor's Government Area. Madrid incorporated external expertise for platform development, by employing some of the tech activists that created the tools used to organize the supporters of the 15M movement.

Collaboration with other units of the city council has been high and fluent (e.g., coordination with offline activities or promotion among groups at risk of social exclusion, among others). Some services and departments also collaborate by proposing topics for the consultations and evaluating citizens' proposals. External collaboration has also been important, particularly with the organizations using Consul, in improving the software.

The platform is managed by a core area of government inside the city council hierarchy. The activities carried out through its five modules are clearly defined: polls and participatory budgets are based on binding opinions and votes, whereas it is up to the politicians to decide what to do with the results in the other modules. The (Deputy) Mayor's Office acts in cases of disagreement.

Decide Madrid had strong political support from the mayor, who adopted the position of a change agent. Two other important political leaders were the councilor responsible for Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Open Government, with wide experience in programming and in the management of software companies, and the executive advisor and director of Decide Madrid, one of the creators of a software that allows debates between people. The set-up and operational costs have been funded by the city council's budget and its financial sustainability is guaranteed.

Communication staff within the Department of Citizen Participation work in collaboration with other units for promotion purposes. A main priority was the creation of an international and active network of organizations interested in e-participation that resulted in continuous improvements in the Consul software.

Robust governance choices regarding process-related factors (open-ended goals, modularity of the platform, and innovation) and organizational design, combining network governance (through high internal and external collaboration) and hierarchy (through a top-down approach, core central department, and formulation of written rules), have allowed Decide Madrid to survive the change in political leadership that occurred in 2019 (Legard et al. 2023; Royo et al. 2024). Table 2 summarizes the key features of Decide Madrid.

Table 2: Overview of Decide Madrid (source: Royo et al. 2024)

Population served	6.5 million (Madrid metropolitan area)

Level of government	Local
Branch of government	Executive
International recognition	Consul software used worldwide
Previous experience with participation	Mediated by neighborhood associations
Participatory activities	Debates, proposals, consultations, polls, participatory budgeting
Formalization	High
Inception	Top-Down
Collaboration	High internal and external collaboration
Accountability relationships	Hierarchy
Political leadership and senior management support	High in the period 2015-2019
Resources	Stable and sufficient
Feedback to participants	Limited

Discussion topics

Topics that can be discussed in the classroom include:

- The dual nature of e-participation
- Barriers to e-participation
- Specific requirements for the design of e-participation
- Key features of Decide Madrid

5. Assignments

Assignments for this module can be classified in two categories:

1. Create a hypothetical scenario, where groups of students will have to plan a public participation initiative by: identifying the problem to solve and the stage of the policy life-cycle; defining the expected results; mapping the target groups; choosing the participation method.

2. Analyze an existing online participation platform, where groups of students will have to select local participation initiatives in EU member states and assess the level of engagement offered to participants, the information availability, and feedback to participants.

6. Summary of learning

Q1: What are the main benefits of public participation?

A: Benefits of public participation include:

Instrumental benefits: public participation can enhance trust in government and democratic institutions by giving citizens a role in public decision making. It also can lead to a better shared understanding of opportunities and challenges.

Intrinsic benefits: public participation can lead to better policy results that take into account and use citizens' and stakeholders' experience and knowledge to address citizens' and stakeholders' most pressing needs.

Inclusive policy-making: public participation can strengthen the representation of minorities and often excluded groups, and thus fosters social cohesion.

Legitimacy and smoother implementation: public participation can support the public understanding of the policy outcome and enhances its uptake. Public participation can allow the public to follow, influence, and understand the process leading to a decision, which in turn enhances its legitimacy.

Q2: What are the main barriers to e-participation?

A: Barriers to e-participation can be categorized for the dimensions structure/culture and government/citizens.

Government structural barriers: Legal constraints, lack of finances, shortage of personnel and available skills, limited political and management support, lack of coordination, technological constraints.

Government cultural barriers: Resistance to change, interference with bureaucratic culture.

Citizen structural barriers: Lack of technological facilities, limited knowledge and competences.

Citizen cultural barriers: Lack of interest, little faith in and negative image of government, no perceived usefulness, resistance to technology.

Q3: What are the main mechanisms that ensure coordination among actors involved in the organization of a public participation initiative?

A: Coordination mechanisms differ in their reliance on various types of incentives provided by means of voluntary agreements, common norms and culture, formal regulations, or coercion. Three "ideal-type" coordination mechanisms can be identified.

Hierarchy-type coordination: it is based on formal authority and clear distribution of responsibilities that derive from legislation, administrative orders, common standards, the rights of inspection, and intervention.

Market-type coordination: it is based on exchange and competition, where guidance and control are provided by the "invisible hand" through supply and demand, price mechanisms, and the self-interest to earn a profit and avoid losses.

Network-type coordination: it is based on cooperation and solidarity among actors whose relations are shaped and controlled by mutual interdependencies, trust, shared values, and reciprocity.

In practice, various combinations of these "ideal-type" coordination mechanisms are often used, which represent options that are complementary rather than alternative.

Q4: At which stage of the path to planning and implementing public participation should digital tools be selected?

A: The selection of digital tools should not be the starting point when planning a public participation process. The first step should be to identify the problem to solve and the stage of the policy cycle for participation. The second step should be to define the expected results. The third step should be to identify the relevant groups of people to involve and define the strategy for recruiting participants. The fourth step should be to selected a participation method. Only then is it relevant to ask if (and if yes, which) digital tools are the most appropriate.

Q5: What are the main features of the Decide Madrid platform?

A: Decide Madrid is a "top-down" e-participation initiative adopted by the executive branch of the local government in the metropolitan area of Madrid. Detailed regulations support the operation of this platform, thereby referring to a high degree of formalization and accountability relationships based on hierarchy. The set-up and operational costs have been funded by the city council's budget and its financial sustainability has been guaranteed. The open-source software developed for the platform, Consul, has been implemented in more than 100 organizations around the world and this has facilitated collaboration with external organizations using the same software. Collaboration with other units of the city council has also been high and fluent. The major drawback of the platform has been the limited feedback to participants.

Quiz

Q1: Instrumental benefits of public participation concern:

a) Enhancement of public trust in government

b) Improvement of the quality of policies, as they are based on up-to-date evidence

c) Inclusion of marginalized groups in policy-making

d) Legitimacy and smoother policy implementation.

A: d

Q2: A public participation initiative reaches the stage of consultation when:

a) the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders

b) citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa

c) citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources to collaborate during all phases of the policy cycle and in the service design and delivery

d) citizens and stakeholders are involved in the monitoring and evaluation of a policy.

A: b

Q3:The practice of crowdsourcing refers to:

a) events bringing together public authorities and stakeholders to collaboratively work on ideas, prototype solutions, and services to solve public problems

b) a co-creation mechanisms where citizens and stakeholders propose solutions to a concrete public problem

c) citizens' involvement in one or many stages of a scientific investigation, like identifying research questions, conducting observations, analysing data, and using the resulting knowledge

d) the use of platforms to gather inputs from expert groups, targeted stakeholders (such as scientists or developers), or the wider public to answer specific public problems.

A: d

Q4: True or False: Citizen science is a participation method that is used to convene expertise from citizens to find ideas or inspiration, prototype and test solutions, or to improve services or methods.

A: False

Q5: True or False: If we consider public participation as an instrument for democratic dialogue, success is associated with project management aspects, such as the delivery of the system on time and on budget and meeting the desired requirements.

A: False

Q6: Structural barriers to e-participation concern:

a) change in existing routines and value orientation

b) funding, technology, and skills

c) barriers that arise only when citizens are expected to use digital participation tools

d) barriers that arise only in the domain of government.

A: b

Q7: True or False: Users should be provided with clear information about the goals and mandate of the participation process and adequate feedback throughout the process.

A: True

Q8: Fill in the blank: _____ can help at every step of the path to planning and implementing public participation – from recruiting citizens, to ensuring the transparency of the process, to extending the benefits of learning about a specific policy issue to the broader public.

A: Communication

Q9: Fill in the blank: E-participation typically involves four types of actors: a responsible unit in charge of the administration of an e-participation initiative, a technical platform provider, other units involved in the e-participation process and _____.

A: Decision-makers

Q10: The institutionalization of e-participation refers to:

a) a process through which the use of digital tools become a known and routinized activity within an organization

b) a linear and stand-alone process

c) the installation and delivery of digital tools within an organization

d) the process in which organizations become aware of and learn about digital tools.

A: a

Q11: True or False: E-participation initiatives should be conceptualized as isolated projects with a fixed timeframe and end result. It makes no sense to regard them as

processes of long-term institutional change requiring the ongoing attention and support of politicians and managers.

A: False

Q12: Fill in the blank: Empowering citizens and stakeholders through participatory processes is good for the overall _____ of the democratic process as it signals civic respect and builds a relationship based on mutual trust.

A: Legitimacy

Q13: True or False: The first step when planning a participation process is to define the desired inputs or contributions from citizens and stakeholders and the impact they will have on the final decision.

A: False

Q14: True or False: E-participation literature is often plagued by a normative bias and tendency to present the positive and transformational impacts of digital technology on participatory democracy as a given.

A: True

Q15: E-participation initiatives are processes where:

a) contextual factors are the immediate causes of failure

b) failure can be avoided if the initiatives are aligned with the context

c) the negative evaluation of stakeholders does not influence the failure of the initiatives

d) innovation is not characterized by uncertainty

A: b

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8. Glossary

E-government : modernisation of processes and functions of government using digital technologies as to transform the way it serves its constituents.

E-governance : the use of digital technologies by public institutions to engage citizens and stakeholders and letting them co-produce public services.

E-participation : the use of digital technologies by public institutions to hear the views, perspectives, and inputs from citizens and stakeholders.

Open government : a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth.

Consultation : a level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa.

Adoption : the process in which organizations become aware of and learn about digital tools, gather information to evaluate the potential benefits, and make the decision whether to acquire digital tools.

Implementation : the integration of digital tools into organizational processes and structures.

Institutionalization : the process through which the use of digital tools become a known and routinized activity within an organization.