ORGANIZING FOR E-PARTICIPATION:
LEARNING FROM EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

Work Package 5 – Deliverable D5.2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work Package 5 of the TROPICO project examines the conditions and practices of external collaboration in policy design, focusing specifically on e-participation platforms. The study employs an exploratory approach to investigate the functioning of government-to-citizens e-participation platforms and to identify factors which contribute to the success of these initiatives. In doing so, the contextual factors that surround e-participation platforms – the national context, organizational and individual-level factors – have been explored. The report is based on the analysis of selected e-participation initiatives in seven European countries: Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Spain. The report addresses the following research questions: 1) How are participatory processes designed and implemented?, 2) How are e-participation initiatives organized and administered?, and 3) What are the success factors in organizing and administering e-participation initiatives? Addressing these questions enables to elaborate upon and explain a variety of institutional factors which have an impact on the development and performance of e-participation practices.

A qualitative case study method has been used in addressing these research questions. In-depth single-platform case studies were carried out in order to provide thick empirical descriptions on how e-participation initiatives are designed and administered in selected countries. The compilation of the empirical case studies was implemented in two steps. First, a relevant e-participation platform was selected in each country following a common Case Selection Strategy. Second, each partner prepared an in-depth single-platform case study based on a common analytical model provided in a Case Study Protocol. The case studies relied on information collected through desk research and interviews. The case studies have been presented in the TROPICO deliverable D5.1 Comparative Case Studies on E-participation (Randma-Liiv, Vooglaid & Savi 2019).

Most of the existing research on e-participation takes either a techno-centric focus or explores the “demand-side” of e-participation (e.g. aspects related to the development of democracy, the number of Internet users, digital divide). This study takes a different starting point, by focusing
on the “supply-side” of e-participation, it is, the organizational and administrative context surrounding e-participation practices. The empirical analysis indicates that a complex array of institutional variables contributes to explaining the performance of e-participation initiatives. The analysis focuses upon drivers and barriers related to the organization and process of e-participation. On this basis, supply-related success factors for the implementation of e-participation platforms are identified. This serves a twofold purpose: First, to develop an analytical framework of supply-related success factors; and second, to empirically analyse supply-related success factors on the basis of the selected case studies.

The comparative analysis enables a distinction between four groups of supply-related success factors in e-participation: 1) factors related to organizational design, 2) factors related to participatory process, 3) factors related to management, and 4) other supply-related success factors. Our study demonstrates that the organization of public administrations is an important determinant for the implementation of e-participation initiatives, as various actors in the public sector often initiate, moderate, evaluate and also implement the results of citizen participation. The organizational setup, process design, managerial quality and allocated resources play a crucial role in the collaborative efforts ensuring the functioning, continuous improvement and eventual sustainability of the e-participation platforms. The case studies show that due to barriers in the institutional framework and relevant processes, e-participation systems may end up struggling with low demand and acceptance. Considering that the government has direct influence over the institutional setup of e-participation platforms and e-participatory processes, the report outlines practical challenges that public administrations face in the organization and administration of e-participation platforms in order to provide a systematic framework for addressing them in the future.
# Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2: Focus ......................................................................................................................... 11

Chapter 3: Analytical framework ............................................................................................... 14

  3.1. Organizational design of e-participation initiatives .................................................. 17

  3.2. The process of e-participation ..................................................................................... 20

  3.3. Success factors of e-participation .............................................................................. 24

Chapter 4: Research design ....................................................................................................... 27

Chapter 5: Organization and administration of e-participation practices ............................... 32

Chapter 6: The e-participatory process ...................................................................................... 42

Chapter 7: Success factors for organizing and administering e-participation ....................... 53

  7.1. Success factors related to organizational design ...................................................... 54

  7.2. Success factors related to participatory process ...................................................... 61

  7.3. Success factors related to management .................................................................. 66

  7.4. Other supply-related success factors ...................................................................... 73

Chapter 8: Conclusions ............................................................................................................. 80
List of figures

Figure 1: Analytical model for studying e-participation. .................................................................16

Figure 2: Actors involved in the supply of e-participation...............................................................39

Figure 3: Levels of participation of the selected e-participation platforms..............................51

List of tables

Table 1: The selected e-participation platforms. ........................................................................29

Table 2: Organizational design of e-participation platforms.........................................................37

Table 3: The characteristics of the e-participatory process. .........................................................48

Table 4: Success factors for organizing and administering e-participation initiatives..........78
Chapter 1: Introduction

The TROPICO project investigates how public administrations are transformed to enhance collaboration in policy design and service delivery, advancing the participation of public, private and societal actors, with a special focus on the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Work package 5 of the TROPICO project focuses on the study of innovative practices of external collaboration for policy design and examines the emergence and nature of such practices in governments across Europe. A special emphasis is given to the role of governments in fostering electronic participation (e-participation) in governance processes.

This study of e-participation brings together two streams of literature. First, literature about collaboration as public participation. The scholarly debate on external collaboration for policy design – public participation – has been on the public administration research agenda for more than 50 years. The public participation discourse was spurred on by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Dean, 2017) and was further legitimized by the “deliberative turn” in democratic theory, which had reached maturity by the 1990s (Dryzek, 2000). The more recent emphasis on public participation stems from the perceived democratic deficit present in most stable democracies in the world (Norris, 1997; Papadopoulos, 2003), to which practices of open government, including public participation in policymaking, are seen as remedies. The advent and evolution of the Internet added to the advancement of participatory theory by revitalizing the debate on participation within the context of new information and communication technologies (ICTs), which carry the potential of significantly reducing the costs of deliberation and collective decision-making.

Second, the literature on e-government. Early models of the evolution of electronic government or e-government predicted that public organizations would increase the sophistication with which they apply technology from dissemination of basic information to more interactive and integrated systems (Layne & Lee, 2001; Moon, 2002). E-participation is one dimension of the study of electronic government that focuses on the use of ICTs to interact with external stakeholders with the expectation that greater engagement will better inform government
decision making and enhance democratic processes (Macintosh, 2004). E-participation has been thought to enable the transcendence of political distance (Coleman & Blumler, 2009), thus ushering in a new era of democratic revitalization (Shane, 2004). With its roots in participatory and deliberative democracy, e-participation has by now become a research agenda of its own (Sæbø, Rose & Flak, 2008), which focuses on the role of ICTs in facilitating greater participation and better deliberation in policymaking processes, thus contributing to the values of openness, innovation and collaboration in democratic governance.

E-participation initiatives have been adopted by many governments, and the potential of leveraging ICTs to strengthen democracy in the European Union has also been on the agenda for the European Union since the early 2000s. Already in 2003, the European Parliament released a report on electronic democracy titled “Evaluation of the Use of New Technologies in Order to Facilitate Democracy in the European Union” (European Parliament, 2003), while the European Commission has recently published its own report on e-participation, namely “Guideline for E-Participation in European Union Policy-Making” (European Commission, 2015). The European Parliament has further developed the e-participation perspective via its report titled “Potential and Challenges of E-Participation in the European Union” (European Parliament, 2016). The most recent study comes from a panel of members of the European Parliament, the Science and Technology Options Assessment (STOA): “Prospects for e-Democracy in Europe” (Science and Technology Options Assessment, 2018). The European Commission also runs its own e-participation instrument – the European Citizens’ Initiative (EPI, https://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/) – which is a participatory democracy instrument that allows citizens to suggest concrete legal changes in any field where the European Commission has power to propose legislation.

E-participation initiatives take different forms, such as online discussion forums and consultation platforms to legislation wikis, e-petitioning, online complaint systems and one-stop participation portals. In this report, the focus is set on government-to-citizen platforms, thus contributing to a dominant strand of empirical research in electronic participation, which investigates
governmental initiatives establishing novel platforms for participation and consultation processes with stakeholders and users in policy design (Sæbø, Flak & Sein, 2011). The following definition of e-participation provided by the United Nations (2014, p. 61) is used for the report: “E-participation is the process of engaging citizens through ICTs in policy and decision-making in order to make public administration participatory, inclusive, collaborative and deliberative for intrinsic and instrumental ends”.

E-participation as part of the participatory democracy discourse (Lindner, Aichholzer & Hennen, 2016) has been mostly associated with the idea of democratic innovation (Kö et al., 2013) and thus often features in discussions about the normative values, as well as future prospects of democratic governance. Public administrations play a key role in the development of e-participation (Medaglia, 2012, p. 351), because they are usually responsible for organizing and administering online opportunities and other communication channels with which citizens can engage in the political arena (Gil-García, 2012; Welch & Feeney, 2014). However, insufficient attention to the empirical relationship between the normative theory of e-participation and the actual politico-administrative and socio-organizational context in which these practices unfold, has hindered the possibility of drawing broader conclusions on the adoption and operation of e-participation platforms. Although several models have been introduced for describing (e.g. Macintosh, 2008; Kalampokis, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2008; Porwol, Ojo & Breslin, 2016; Scherer & Wimmer, 2016) and evaluating (Kubicek & Aichholzer, 2016) e-participation initiatives, most of these models do not pay systematic attention to organizational and administrative aspects of e-participation practices.

This report draws on seven empirical cases from the following European countries: Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Spain. Case studies were conducted in each country with the aim to empirically uncover how e-participation initiatives are administered and what the contextual and organizational features and challenges associated with the implementation of e-participation practices are (see TROPICO Deliverable D5.1: Randma-Liiv et al., 2019). This report addresses the following research questions:
1) How are participatory processes designed and implemented?
2) How are e-participation initiatives organized and administered?
3) What are the success factors in organizing and administering e-participation initiatives?

Addressing these questions will help to elaborate upon and explain a variety of institutional factors which have an impact on the development and performance of e-participation practices.

The report first outlines the focus and analytical framework for the empirical study, then describes the research design, followed by a presentation of the main findings of the comparative research and a discussion of the findings in a broader institutional context. The report concludes with the elaboration of success factors in organizing and administering e-participation platforms.
Chapter 2: Focus

E-participation as a practice is high on the agenda of many governments. This is largely due to the fact that for the past decade and more, transnational institutions and policy think-tanks have dedicated increasing attention to developing guidelines and frameworks for e-participation adoption within the larger context of open government strategies (e.g. OECD, 2002; UN, 2014; STOA, 2018). Governments keep trying out new e-participation practices and platforms with greater or lesser success. At the same time, the endorsement of e-participation practices by transnational institutions has left its footprint on e-participation literature. This literature is, however, often plagued by a normative bias – meaning the more participation the better – and tilted heavily towards the analysis of the participatory process from a pre-defined normative viewpoint (Susha & Grönlund, 2012; Lutz & Hoffmann, 2017; Hindman, 2009). Our study tries to avoid the normative trap usually associated with the theory and practice of participatory policymaking. This means that it is not necessarily assumed that participation could or should be a feasible alternative to more hierarchical policymaking, or that more participation automatically equals more democracy or better policy. The normative bias present in the e-participation literature is seen as a methodological challenge, which has to be acknowledged. This calls for reliable empirical information on e-participation practices.

There are several challenges in e-participation research beyond the aforementioned normative bias. First of all, the immaturity of the practice itself corresponds to the high level of fragmentation within e-participation as a field of research. E-participation research has been characterized as suffering from a lack of comprehensive theoretical contributions, insufficient depth, and inconsistency in indefiniton of central concepts (Susha & Grönlund, 2012). In addition to the immaturity of the e-participation practice in general, the piecemeal approach to e-participation research is also due to the inherent multi-disciplinarity of e-participation as a phenomenon. Contributions and perspectives on e-participation come from fields as diverse as political science, information systems research, sociology, economics, public administration, management, communication and psychology, while also reflecting a multitude of
methodological stances (Sanford & Rose, 2007; Macintosh, Coleman & Schneeberger, 2009; Medaglia, 2012).

Proof of the democratizing and legitimizing effects of generic e-participation initiatives has remained scarce, however, with technologies often failing to deliver the transformational changes towards new forms of participation (Norris, 2010). The general criticism towards e-participation studies has been attributed to an overly techno-centric focus, in which politico-administrative and organizational realities are ignored (Porwol, Ojo & Breslin, 2013). Despite a variety of opportunities for engagement offered by new technologies, studies refer to a general weakness of e-participation initiatives to deliver expected outcomes (Ostling, 2010; Prosser, 2012; Toots, 2019), mobilize a sufficient number of active users (Epstein, Newhart & Vernon, 2014), and fulfil the democratic promise of engaging the disengaged segments of society (Karlsson, 2012; Lidén, 2013). Such failures are often argued to relate to societal, administrative, and organizational factors rather than technical aspects (Zheng, Schachter & Holzer, 2014). This is the main reason why we have chosen to focus on the “non-technical” part of e-participation.

When considering the “non-technical” side of e-participation research, there are many studies on the “demand-side” of e-participation. A great share of the existing e-participation literature addresses the adoption of e-participation initiatives referring to the influence of external stakeholders. For instance, studies show that demands associated with the number of internet users (e.g. Åström et al., 2012), digital divide (e.g. Min, 2010; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), trust in e-participation (e.g. Scherer & Wimmer, 2014) and the socio-economic background of the population (e.g. Medaglia, 2007; Williams, Gulati & Yates, 2013) are related to e-participation adoption. A recent study by Pirannejad, Janssen and Rezaei (2019) argues that the characteristics of the “society side” should be given more prominence in the development of e-participation indexes.

This report, however, takes a different starting point, by focusing on the “supply-side” of e-participation research (Krishnan, Teo & Lim, 2012), more specifically, the politico-administrative and organizational context surrounding e-participation practices. So far, the research addressing
the various political and administrative challenges stemming from the institutional and organizational context of e-participation practices is quite limited. Some research has been done on management challenges relating to the costs of e-participation (Andersen et al., 2007; Wang & Bryer, 2013). Previous studies also address organizational cultures and attitudes relating to the success or failure of e-government adoption in general, and e-participation projects in particular (Chadwick & May, 2003; Carrizales, 2008; Aikens & Krane, 2010; Baldwin, Gauld & Goldfinch, 2012; Welch & Feeney, 2014). A few studies have touched upon stakeholders in e-participation (Crane, Matten & Moon, 2004; Flak, Sein & Sæbø, 2007; Feeney & Welch, 2012), while a number of papers concentrate on the various drivers and barriers of e-participation (Chadwick, 2011; Reddick & Norris, 2013; Manosevitch, Steinfeld & Lev-On, 2014; Panopoulou, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2014; Jho & Song, 2015; Zheng & Schachter, 2017).

Insufficient attention to the empirical relationship between the normative theory of e-participation and the actual politico-administrative context in which these practices unfold, has hindered the possibility of drawing broader conclusions on the adoption and performance of e-participation platforms. Particularly little attention has been paid to the empirical analysis of the institutional, administrative and organizational aspects of e-participation. While participation has been on the research agenda for several decades, and the different levels of collaboration also feature in theoretical papers on e-participation (Kubicek & Aichholzer, 2016), there is little empirical research that systematically addresses how e-participatory policymaking is actually organized and administered to facilitate collaboration between decision-makers and citizens. This is why the goal of this report is to uncover how e-participation initiatives are organized and administered.

In general, most recent research is characterized by a rather narrow focus, or by an examination of one single e-participation platform or practice. In order to contribute to existing knowledge, this report provides an overview of different organizational contexts and administrative characteristics where e-participation initiatives are implemented in order to elaborate upon more general patterns surrounding the development and functioning of e-participation practices.
Chapter 3: Analytical framework

For studying e-participation practices, an analytical model has been developed consisting of three aspects: 1) a thick description of the e-participation platform, 2) contextual factors surrounding the initiative, and 3) an evaluation of the e-participation platform, including its influence on the policymaking process. These three aspects correspond roughly to the framework proposed by Porwol, Ojo and Breslin (2016), where the analysis of e-participation initiatives is divided into a socio-technical view (description of the platform), a project view (contextual factors) and a democratic process view (impact on policymaking). Adding to this, several other models for describing e-participation initiatives (e.g. Macintosh, 2008; Kalampokis et al., 2008; Scherer & Wimmer, 2016) and evaluating e-participation initiatives (Kubicek & Aichholzer, 2016) have been introduced over the last decade, and have also provided inspiration for the development of our particular analytical framework.

Both exploratory and explanatory approaches are employed to investigate the functioning of e-participation practices. In doing so, the contextual factors that surround e-participation platforms – the national context, organizational and individual-level factors – are explored. The dependent variable is thus the e-participation initiative, while independent variables involve contextual factors on national, organizational and individual levels.

Three sets of questions were addressed in the analysis of each e-participation case. The first set of questions focuses on the descriptive and exploratory components: How are e-participation platforms launched and developed? What are the goals of e-participation platforms? How are the e-participation initiatives administered? How is the interaction between the government and the non-governmental stakeholders organized through the e-participation platforms? What kind of collaborative partnerships within government and with non-governmental actors surround the e-participation platforms?

The second set of questions is more explanatory in character: Which national-level factors are particularly important in explaining the functioning of e-participation initiatives? Which
organizational-level factors are particularly important in explaining the functioning of e-participation initiatives? Which individual-level factors are particularly important in explaining the functioning of e-participation initiatives?

The evaluation of e-participation practices ultimately aims to analyse the influence of e-participation on policy design and external collaboration. Here, the e-participation platform becomes an independent variable, while collaborative policy design forms a dependent variable. The following questions characterize the third part of the model: What is the evidence of the impact of e-participation initiatives on the actual policy design? What are the critical success factors of e-participation initiatives? What are the main lessons learned during the implementation of e-participation initiatives?

The analytical model is illustrated in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Analytical model for studying e-participation.

While this analytical model serves as a basis of the single case studies conducted in TROPICO Work Package 5, not all parts of the model receive equal attention within this report. As the focus of the D5.2 report is on the supply-side of e-participation, namely how e-participation initiatives are organized and administered, institutional and organizational aspects of the e-participation practices are given specific attention, with the ultimate aim to contribute to the development of supply-related success factors in the implementation of e-participation initiatives. In order to do
this, we differentiate between input, throughput, and output legitimacy, based on the influential distinction by Scharpf (1970), which was further elaborated on by Schmidt (2013).

Input legitimacy refers to the representativeness of the participants in the decision-making process. The increasing overall participation and sharing responsibility for policymaking are addressing the input legitimacy of e-participation. Output legitimacy refers to the effectiveness of policies. Thus, improving the quality of public policies could be categorized as an issue of output legitimacy. The comparative analysis, however, is specifically focusing on throughput legitimacy, which can be judged in terms of the “efficacy, accountability, and transparency” (ibid.) of the e-participatory process. While impact evaluations are unquestionably important in the assessment of the outcomes and results of e-participation practices, this report concentrates on the process evaluations (Nabatchi, 2012), with the aim to help public sector managers to better understand and improve the implementation and management of citizen participation platforms.

For studying the supply-side of e-participation practices with specific focus on throughput legitimacy, a threefold approach is followed. In the following chapter, we first elaborate upon the organizational design of e-participation initiatives. Second, we analyse the process of e-participation. Third, we add to the existing knowledge by identifying important success factors for the implementation of e-participation initiatives.

3.1. Organizational design of e-participation initiatives

New technologies in the public sector can increase productivity and performance, but also affect organizational change, legitimacy and existing power relationships. E-participation initiatives are hardly ever provided by single organizations. At the same time, the existing literature on e-participation does not pay sufficient attention to the institutional context of the supply side of the online platforms. The impact of technology on public sector is almost always mediated by the institutional context that frames the ways public sector interacts with private providers as the majority of technological solutions and products are provided by private firms (Kattel, Lember &
The formal “ownership” and administration of the e-participation initiative – which organization and which unit is responsible for running it, what is the formal status of the e-participation initiative in the existing organizational design, what are the human and financial resources to run the initiative – lays the basis for the organizational design surrounding the e-participation practice.

Moreover, innovations in the public sector often emerge from and influence multi-actor settings and underlying routines (Ibid.). E-participation is a collaborative process involving a number of actors (e.g. government units, NGOs, businesses, ICT support) that contribute to the functioning of the platform, and who are likely to have different roles leading to complex interrelationships among the actors. The involvement of different actors in the implementation of the e-participation portals is related to different institutional (or individual) capacities, resources and processes that surround the e-participation initiatives. The bigger the number of relevant actors, the more crucial collaboration and coordination among them becomes, and the more likely it is that questions about the ownership, accountability and coordination will arise.

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. Such coordination mechanisms differ in their reliance on various types of incentives, being provided by means of voluntary agreements, common norms and culture, formal regulations or even coercion (Bouckaert, Peters & Verhoest, 2010). Three commonly acknowledged coordination mechanisms are outlined below:

1) In hierarchy-type coordination mechanisms, interaction is based on formal authority which derives from legislation, administrative orders, common standards, the rights of inspection and intervention. The purpose of using the hierarchical power for coordination is to consciously design and control the goals of different actors as well as the procedures used for achieving these goals. Such an approach is characterized by considerable advantages which, amongst other things, are manifested in terms of firmness and speed, the potential for equity and objectivity, and clear responsibilities (Ibid., p. 269). Its
disadvantages include the potential mismatch between rigid organizational structures and complex and dynamic environments, administrative overload, and other bottlenecks afflicting formal bureaucracies (Ibid., p. 35).

2) The underlying logic of market-type coordination mechanisms stems from neo-institutional economics. Market-type coordination is based on exchange and competition. 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. The main resources in such mechanisms relate to information, bargaining and power (Ibid., p. 35). The potential advantages of markets include incentives to performance, contractual clarity, and the balancing of supply and demand. The downside of market-type coordination includes excessive competition between actors, conflicting interests of organizations, instability of the system, asymmetry of information, and potential loss of economies of scale (Verhoest & Bouckaert, 2005, p. 35).

3) The theoretical basis for networks as coordination mechanisms comes from policy network theory (Bouckaert et al., 2010, p. 34) which assumes that policies are formed and implemented in complex interaction processes between a number of interdependent actors (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000, p. 139). The key characteristics of policy networks are the actors involved and their relationships (Klijn, Koppenjan & Termeer, 1995, p. 439). Interaction derives from resource-dependence and assumes that actors are willing to exchange their resources in joint processes. Network-based coordination relies on cooperation and solidarity between actors whose relations are shaped and controlled by mutual interdependencies, trust, shared values, and reciprocity (Bouckaert et al., 2010, p. 35–36). The main advantages of networks are legitimacy and validity in decision-making, emphasis on shared norms and a high level of trust (Verhoest & Bouckaert, 2005). Networks possess good potential for the inclusion of diverse partners and for learning (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004, p. 127–128), for coping with dynamic and unstable
environments (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997, p. 54), and for inducing innovation (Goes & Park, 1997). However, networks also exhibit important disadvantages – slow and difficult decision-making processes, lack of clear responsibility and enforcement capacity (Verhoest & Bouckaert, 2005), limited scope of authority and the existence of power asymmetries (McGuire & Agranoff, 2011, p. 280).

In practice, various combinations of these “ideal-type” coordination mechanisms are often used, representing options that are complementary rather than alternative (Christensen & Lægrend, 2008, p. 112). Governments are constantly searching for an optimal mix of coordination mechanisms, and empirical findings show significant fluctuation in the dominance of specific coordination mechanisms over the last decades (Bouckaert et al., 2010). While in the 1980s, the trend was towards the dismantling of the hierarchies and the strengthening of market-type coordination mechanisms, in the 1990s the focus shifted to the use of networks. However, since the beginning of the 2000s, a number of formal elements have been added to network-based mechanisms, such that one may now talk about the partial come-back of the hierarchies (Ibid., p. 262-263). The increasing use of such combinations reflects the need to counterbalance the shortcomings of one mechanism with the strengths of the other, which is also reflected in the institutionalization of e-participation practices.

3.2. The process of e-participation

The policy cycle provides a useful heuristic model for breaking policy making into different units to illustrate how policies are actually made. The policy cycle approaches the policy process as a series of activities, including (1) agenda setting, (2) policy formulation, (3) policy adoption, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation (Knill & Tosun, 2008). Each policy cycle begins with the identification of a societal problem and its placement on the policy agenda. Subsequently, policy proposals are formulated, from which one will be adopted. In the next stage, the adopted policy will be implemented. Finally, the impacts of the policy are evaluated. This last stage leads straight back to the first, indicating that the policy cycle is continuous and unending (Ibid.). From the
perspective of e-participation, agenda setting and policy formulation are the most likely stages where citizens could contribute to the policymaking process, although they can also be involved in policy adoption, policy implementation and evaluation. The first stage in policymaking refers to the identification of a public problem, which requires the state to intervene. From the citizens’ participation angle, the crucial element here is ‘who’ initiates policies.

Cobb, Ross and Ross (1976) have formulated three policy initiation models: 1) The outside-initiative model refers to a situation where citizens groups gain broad public support and get an issue onto the formal agenda; 2) The mobilization model describes a situation, in which initiatives of government need to be placed on the public agenda for successful implementation; and 3) In the inside initiation model, where influential groups with access to decision makers present policy proposals which are broadly supported by particular interest groups but only marginally by the public. As the focus of this research project is on citizens’ participation in policy design, this typology will be simplified by distinguishing between outside-initiatives where non-governmental actors influence agenda setting, and inside-initiatives where government units themselves propose topics for citizen participation and by that substantially limiting the opportunities of citizens in proposing their own topics into policy agenda.

In discussing the intensity of collaborative process, this report derives from a well-known model by Macintosh (2004) which distinguishes between three levels of e-participation: e-enabling, e-engaging and e-empowering. Macintosh (2004) acknowledges e-participation as a continuum that aims towards an e-empowerment level where citizens actively participate and exert influence on policy decisions. This way, e-participation mirrors the debates present in the literature on “traditional” (i.e. offline) public participation and collaboration with citizens. For the purpose of this study, the approach by Macintosh (2004) has been complemented by a widely used typology of public participation accepted by the International Association for Public Participation (International Association for Public Participation, 2007; Nabatchi 2012) which distinguishes between five levels of citizens’ participation:
1) Inform: the lowest level of collaboration includes processes that inform the public on government’s undertakings to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions. At this level, the public has virtually no shared decision-making authority; thus, it means that the government’s ambition is just to keep citizens informed.

2) Consult: this involves processes that consult with the public, or obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions. Consultation processes provide minimal shared decision-making authority and aim at listening to and acknowledging citizens’ concerns. The typical examples include citizen surveys, various public comment devices as well as traditional public meetings.

3) Involve: this refers to governments working directly with the citizens throughout the policymaking process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. In the context of e-participation, this means that the link between citizen input and actual policy output may vary, as the content of the final policy decisions is left to the discretion of the decision-makers. Involvement processes assume an inherent level of shared decision-making authority, though this can range from low to moderate.

4) Collaborate: this refers to processes where government collaborates with the public, moreover, it partners with the public in each aspect of the decision-making including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. Collaborative processes ensure that citizens’ recommendations are incorporated into the decisions to the maximum extent possible; thus, they have a moderate to high level of shared decision-making authority.

5) Empower: At the highest level of collaboration are processes that empower the citizens through leaving the final decision-making in the hands of the public. Empowerment processes have the highest level of shared decision-making authority because the promise
made is that the government will implement what the public decides. For example, participatory budgeting can be seen as an empowerment process.

A cornerstone of the deliberative process is the nature of the communication involved. Deliberative processes comprise discussion and consideration of arguments for and against a proposed measure. Deliberation is necessary when there is uncertainty, and it proves invaluable when choosing between compelling courses of action. The lowest level involves top-down communication and a one-way flow of information, while the highest level is characterized by dialogue and two-way information exchange. Wirtz, Daiser and Binkowska (2016) argue that these levels also characterize public impact on the policy process, where on the one end of the continuum one finds citizens as passive consumers of information, and at the other end one will find the empowered citizen, who takes responsibility for the decisions taken by the community. Whether the communication between the government and citizens is two-way only de jure or also de facto, is dependent on the design and implementation of feedback practices. This includes questions whether there are technical and administrative processes in place to ensure that citizen input in fact is being considered and on what grounds, and whether it is possible for the participants to follow up on the decision-making process after they have submitted their input.

The formalization of collaboration (Christensen & Lægreid, 2015) emphasizes the rules guiding participatory practices, ranging from highly formalized to rather informal collaboration between government units and citizens. Formalization is addressed by analysing the institutional context of e-participation initiatives both on national and organizational levels. This includes, for example, whether the consideration of citizens’ input has been made mandatory or voluntary for the decision-makers. It is also important to consider whether the rules and processes of e-participation have been made explicitly clear and transparent.
3.3. Success factors of e-participation

The challenge of defining “success” in e-participation is acknowledged. As, Aichholzer, Kubicek and Torres (2016) have pointed out, there has been no explicit stakeholder differentiation in the evaluations of e-participation. If evaluation is carried out ex post and is based on documents, such a differentiated analysis depends on the data available. But within a formative evaluation where primary data are collected, there is a chance to identify the success criteria of different groups of stakeholders and groups involved. Success may then be defined in relation to the success criteria defined by different groups of actors. This means that different actors in the participatory process define success differently, depending on their institutional belonging, formal position and individual goals set for the participatory process. In order to address this challenge of assessment, our study focuses on the thorough examination of one particular group of actors – civil servants and administrators of the e-participation platforms (while background information is also collected from other stakeholders).

Macintosh and Whyte (2008) argue that there is a need for more coherent evaluation frameworks for e-participation initiatives. They consider three aspects of evaluation that need to be addressed when assessing e-participation projects: socio-technical aspects, characteristics related to the “project” itself and democratic aspects. As regards the democratic aspects, one of the more difficult challenges is to understand to what extent the e-participation project affects policy. The “project” perspective looks in detail at the specific aims and objectives of the e-participation initiative as set by the project stakeholders. The socio-technical perspective considers to what extent the design of the ICTs affects the outcome. Similarly, Toots (2019) distinguishes between three types of failure-related factors in e-participation: those related to the design of information systems, specific challenges that emanate from democratic participation, and those emerging from the public sector context.

The starting point in our analysis of success factors of e-participation rests with a thorough study by Panopoulou, Tambouris and Tarabanis (2014). They carried out a survey among practitioners, on which basis they came up with a model of 23 e-participation success factors. For the purposes
of our study, these success factors are further divided into three categories by following the above-mentioned typologies put forward by Macintosh and Whyte (2008) and Toots (2019):

1) Technology-related success factors: integration and compliance; security and privacy; technology advances/constraints; good practice.
2) Demand-related success factors: user needs and expectations; value for citizens; digital divide, disabled and desired target groups/user training.
3) Supply-related success factors: vision/strategy; scope and goals; policy and legal environment; support from government/management; management and planning; funding; organizational structures, processes and data; organizational culture and collaboration; value for government/organization; employee training; participation process, policymaking stage and roles; change management; leader/champion; promotion plan; monitoring and evaluation plan; and sustainability.

As argued by Borman and Janssen (2012), a comprehensive model of success factors should include factors that are not only focused on outcomes and on the implementation process, but also on the “operating environment”, i.e. how the e-participation is administered. Accordingly, this report concentrates on the “operating environment” and a further elaboration of supply-related success factors. Whereas the supply-related success factors are quite well represented in the theoretical models in the existing literature on e-participation, the in-depth empirical research on these is rather scarce. Most studies that explore success factors are based on large-N surveys. Our study complements this by providing a qualitative research design including thick descriptions. This enables a more nuanced analysis for the elaboration of success factors related to the organization and administration of e-participation platforms. Moreover, even the qualitative case studies on e-participation limit themselves to emphasizing single success factors, such as top management support, the presence of change agents or champions, and promotion-related issues, without paying much attention to other supply-related factors identified by Panopoulou, Tambouris and Tarabanis (2014), and Toots (2019), or earlier studies on e-
government by e.g. Evangelidis et al. (2002), Gichoya (2005), Gil-Garcia and Pardo (2005), Torres, Pina and Acrete (2005), Altameem, Zairi and Alshawi (2006), and Rose and Grant (2010).

Often, important supply-related factors such as administration of e-participation practices and design of e-participatory processes are not considered at all in empirical research. Also, cross-organizational collaboration among actors supplying e-participation platforms is absent from the existing typologies of success factors. Instead, the exploration of supply-related factors has been approached under very abstract labels such as, for example, “managerial aspects”, “project management” (Macintosh & Whyte, 2008) or “program management” (Rose & Grant, 2010). By taking the above-mentioned shortages in the existing literature into account, our research has a twofold ambition in contributing to the study of success factors in e-participation. First, to contribute to the development of a coherent analytical framework of supply-related success factors. And secondly, to empirically analyse supply-related success factors on the basis of the selected case studies.
Chapter 4: Research design

The study explores the organization and administration of e-participation initiatives in seven European countries – Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland and Spain. The main research questions are the following: 1) How are participatory processes designed and implemented? 2) How are e-participation initiatives organized and administered?, and 3) What are the success factors in organizing and administering e-participation initiatives? The aim is to elaborate upon and explain a variety of institutional factors which influence the development and implementation of e-participation practices.

Detailed case studies that examine internal institutional variables affecting citizens’ online participation are still rare (see Chadwick, 2011). By applying a case study approach we follow the recommendation by Reddick and Norris (2013), who suggested that researchers who undertake further studies of e-participation should consider the use of qualitative methods, such as case studies and focus groups, to gather more in-depth information about reasons for top officials’ support for e-participation and the impacts resulting from it. Case studies enables us to tease out some of the more subtle nuances of adoption and practical implementation of e-participation platforms.

In the first stage of the research project, we conducted in-depth single-country case studies to provide thick empirical descriptions on how e-participation initiatives are administered, and to examine what the organizational features and challenges associated with e-participation in a particular country are (see Randma-Liiv et al., 2019). In the second stage, the main findings of the single-country case studies were synthesized to enable comparison.

Highly qualified partners from the TROPICO consortium were involved in the case selection, data collection and analysis in the seven European countries. First, the relevant partners proposed information on the general e-participation landscape of their respective countries together with more specific information on 2-4 e-participation platforms, following a common Case Selection
Strategy. Together with the Work Package 5 leader, one appropriate case was chosen for each country.

The resulting case pool includes both national and local level e-participation portals. As the e-participation landscape is highly fragmented, it is virtually impossible to compile a set of cases similar enough to warrant a strict comparison. In some countries, one will find a number of local level e-participation initiatives, but no national level initiatives, which could be deemed successful. In other countries, it is the other way around. Also, in some cases the e-participation portals function informally (meaning these are not formally integrated into the policymaking process) and are operated and maintained by civil society organizations.

In our study, the focus was set on those e-participation portals which could be explicitly linked to the policymaking process on a procedural and organizational level, regardless of whether it was tied to local, regional, or national policymaking. The criteria for the case selection were the following:

1) Portals which connect stakeholders with the public sector via an online platform which is open and transparent;
2) Cases that were designed for long-term or permanent collaboration and which have been in operation for at least one year;
3) Portals that were (co-)administered by some branch of the government;
4) Portals that included a deliberative element, which fed into the policymaking process.

Despite the increasing relevance of social media in policymaking process, this project excluded social media platforms because this has, by and large, developed into a separate research stream by now. Participatory budgeting is another field which is growing both in theory and in practice, but in the context of this project, preference was made on more generic practices of policy collaboration. Table 1 summarizes the e-participation portals selected for the project.
Table 1: The selected e-participation platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>E-participation portal</th>
<th>Web</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Citizens’ Initiative Portal</td>
<td><a href="https://rahvaalgatus.ee/">https://rahvaalgatus.ee/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Parlement et Citoyens</td>
<td><a href="https://parlement-et-citoyens.fr/">https://parlement-et-citoyens.fr/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>‘meinBerlin’</td>
<td><a href="https://mein.berlin.de">https://mein.berlin.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>De Stem van West, Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="https://stemvanwest.amsterdam.nl/">https://stemvanwest.amsterdam.nl/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>‘minsak.no’, Oslo</td>
<td><a href="https://www.minsak.no">https://www.minsak.no</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>We asked, you said, we did</td>
<td><a href="https://consult.gov.scot/we_asked_you_said/">https://consult.gov.scot/we_asked_you_said/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Decide Madrid</td>
<td><a href="https://decide.madrid.es/">https://decide.madrid.es/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All partners in the selected countries prepared an in-depth single-country case study based on the common analytical model provided in a detailed Case Study Protocol. The case studies relied on information collected through desk research and interviews. The desk research involved the exploration of the following sources: The website of the e-participation initiative and their publications; respective laws and secondary legislation; governmental policy documents, strategies, action plans and reports regarding participatory policymaking in general, and e-participation in particular; relevant reports and analyses prepared by third parties such as NGOs, think-tanks, international organizations; statistics available on e-participation in general, and the selected e-participation platform, in particular; media coverage of the chosen initiative. TROPICO deliverable D2.3 (Batory and Svensson, 2018) was also explored as the analysis of national collaborative government frameworks and the institutional conditions facilitating or inhibiting collaboration – for example, the references to Estonian and Spanish examples – proved useful for the study of e-participation. In addition, the relevant TROPICO partners were encouraged to become „testers” of the platform, i.e. by registering as a user and trying out all of the functionalities that the platform offers.
Between 8 and 13 interviews were conducted for each case. Assuming that attitudes, shared meanings, resources, interactions and decisions of politicians, civil servants and other administrators working in organizations involved in the supply of e-participation platforms play a crucial role in the design, implementation and the eventual success of e-participation initiatives, the interviewees included the following groups: the initiators of the platform; people who are formally involved with the maintenance and/or moderation of the platform; a senior manager of the public sector organization where the e-participation initiative is administered; representatives of important governmental and non-governmental partners who are actively involved in running the platform; representatives of policy-makers (either politicians, policy advisers or senior civil servants who have used the e-participation platform as an input in the policymaking process); and stakeholders who have been actively involved in some of the cases that have been discussed through the selected e-participation platform.

The interviews were semi-structured following the common analytical model posed in the Case Study Protocol and lasted for 1-1.5 hours. Interviews were also used for specifying and triangulating information collected through desk research. The respondents were informed about the project and asked to give their informed written consent. The interviews were anonymized when the interviewees requested that, or when they did not consent to being identified. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The single case studies formed a foundation for a comparative analysis of e-participation initiatives. The Case Study Protocol provided the basis for coding of the country-specific data. While conducting the comparative analysis, several problems related to the comparative design were acknowledged. As Aichholzer, Kubicek and Torres (2016) have pointed out, the effects of electronic tools are highly dependent on their context. Thus, it is necessary to compare similar tools in a similar context in order to detect success factors. As e-participation is still in its infancy, both as a field of research and as a practice, there are not enough examples which are sufficiently similar as to merit thorough comparison. Although our cases are carefully selected following a common Case Selection Strategy, the selected e-participation platforms are in different
development stages, they represent different levels of government, and are targeted either to legislative or executive branch of government. This is the reason why mostly “soft” comparisons can be made. The comparative analysis focuses upon the explanation of drivers and barriers of the e-participation initiatives following the national, organizational and individual-level aspects surrounding the platforms, and the influence of the e-participation initiatives on policy design and external collaboration. On this basis, supply-related success factors for the implementation of e-participation initiatives were identified.
Chapter 5: Organization and administration of e-participation practices

E-participation practices are hardly ever initiated and implemented by a single organization or unit. All seven e-participation cases that were selected are characterized by a number of actors who have been engaged in the inception and running of the platforms. The involvement of the different actors in the implementation of the e-participation portals is related to different institutional (or individual) capacities, resources and processes that surround the e-participation initiatives. The presence of a number of internal and external change agents, such as the government units or (not-)for-profit organizations which developed the platforms or are running them, tend to serve as drivers of particular e-participation initiatives. At other times, however, as demonstrated below, the involvement of different organizations in the maintenance and development of the platforms creates organizational challenges, as the level of coordination required may exceed the capacities and/or resources available for units which are ultimately responsible for the e-participation projects.

Estonian Citizens’ Initiative Portal

The official proprietor of the platform is the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, which is a quasi-governmental organization funded by the Office of the President of Estonia. The owner of the technical solution and the back-end solutions of the Citizens’ Initiative portal is CitizenOS Foundation which developed the original software. The parliament – represented by the Chancellery of Riigikogu – is the main recipient of the initiatives presented by citizens through the platform. When a proposal is accepted by the parliament, the Speaker of Riigikogu will decide which standing committee will be the “owner” of the proposal and forward the proposal to the relevant committee for deliberation. Altogether this makes five different actors (Chancellery of Riigikogu, parliamentary committees, Office of the President, Co-operation Assembly, CitizenOS), which are engaged in complex coordination processes in order to manage the maintenance and development of the Citizens’ Initiative platform. In terms of organizational challenges, the most complex is the division of responsibility between the Cooperation Assembly and the Chancellery
of Riigikogu. The Cooperation Assembly is responsible for securing funding for the portal, educating the public about submitting a Collective Address, as well as dealing with the day-to-day moderating and technical troubleshooting. The digital solution for gathering signatures for citizens’ initiatives is lightweight both in terms of financial as well as human resources. There is only one employee – the project manager of the ECIP – who is supposed to take care of all these duties next to other tasks the position involves. According to our interviews, the leadership of the Cooperation Assembly would appreciate the Chancellery of Riigikogu taking more ownership of the platform, because it would further legitimize it as a participatory instrument, and also help with the financing of the portal. The Estonian parliament, however, has not shown any serious interest in formally acknowledging that a portion of the upkeep of the portal ought to be their responsibility.

**Parlement et Citoyens, France**

Parlement et Citoyens is an online platform that aims to provide deliberative tools for citizens and parliamentarians to work together on the drafting of laws at the national level. The platform was originally a private initiative voluntarily managed by a small group of committed citizens, gathered together around the initiator of the idea, Cyril Lage. Because of this initial setup, the platform has been managed in a very informal way. The Parlement et Citoyens initiative had no legal status until April 2017, when it was formalized as a non-profit organization – Parlement et Citoyens NGO – and thus formally became the owner of the website and the e-participation initiative. The organization has a board of directors and an executive committee. The board of directors is composed of several groups: MPs and senators, subnational governments, public administrations and consultative bodies, foundations and associations, trade unions and firms, ordinary citizens, founders, and experts. 11 senators (out of 348) and 28 MPs (out of 577) are members of Parlement et Citoyens. Although the non-profit organization has no staff of its own, it is mainly managed by the Cap Collectif’s founder (Cyril Lage) and staff. Cap Collectif is a for profit civic tech start-up founded in 2014, following the first year of experience of Parlement et Citoyens. Parlement et Citoyens is thus dependent on the work of Cap Collectif’s staff but also on the involvement of parliamentary assistants of MPs and Senators conducting consultations. Staff
members of Cap Collectif are allowed (and invited) to work a couple of hours a month for the platform. Initially, Parlement et Citoyens was also in charge of writing the consultations’ report, but as of 2019, this task can also be carried out by parliamentary assistants, following a canvas provided by Cap Collectif. The lack of permanent staff within the non-profit organization in charge of P&C causes concerns about workload for parliamentary assistants and staff members of Cap Collectif and provides a rather instable environment for supplying the e-participation practice.

‘meinBerlin’, Germany

The planning of ‘meinBerlin’ was carried out by a steering group recruited from interested employees of various administrative units at state and district level. The steering group decided to outsource the technical implementation of the project to a Berlin-based association, Liquid Democracy, which developed ‘meinBerlin’ on the basis of their in-house open source software Adhocracy. The formal proprietor of the portal is the Governing Mayor of Berlin and thus the State Chancellery. In everyday running of ‘meinBerlin’, the project manager at Liquid Democracy is the closest partner for the employee responsible for e-participation in the State Chancellery. Liquid Democracy is responsible for most of the technical support to both the state and district administrations and the users. The state and district administrations may also contact the responsible employee in the State Chancellery for advice on general questions about citizen participation and the portal. The administration of the participation procedures is handled in a decentralized manner, meaning that the creation, moderation and evaluation of the participatory processes are carried out by the respective administrators at district and state levels. In principle, there is no uniform structure as to how e-participation or citizen participation in general shall be organized in the districts. In the majority of districts, the same employees who are responsible for the respective policy subjects in general, are also responsible for carrying out the participatory processes. Two exceptions are e.g. the “Mitte” district and the district of Lichtenberg which have bundled all citizen participation processes in one office. In general, online participation depends substantially on the individual engagement of officials in the district and state administrations. The division of responsibilities among different actors is well-specified. Collaboration practices within the executive in administering the ‘meinBerlin’ are manifold, but mostly informal.
**De Stem van West, The Netherlands**

The ownership of the digital platform *Stem van West* (SvW) can best be placed in the civil society sphere, as the citizens of Amsterdam-West determine on the digital platform what is being discussed, in what manner, and for what reasons. The rights to start a discussion, comment on proposals, and vote on proposals are strictly limited to citizens of Amsterdam-West. Neighbourhood council members or civil servants who work for the neighbourhood administration are not allowed to contribute in any substantive way to the online discussions. The portal is administered by the Digital Unit of the Amsterdam-West administration, which employs four freelance experts to maintain the portal. In addition, seven neighbourhood council members act as moderators on the platform to ensure that constructive discussions emerge. Within the neighbourhood council there is a strict protocol for intervening on the digital platform. The main rule of intervention is when a comment discredits a person, calls for violence, or harms the participation of other citizens on the platform. In the SvW project, special collaboration teams, including citizens, politicians and civil servants are established to monitor the implementation and execution of a selected citizen’s proposal. The SvW case presents an interesting example of “crowd-sourcing policy design”.

**‘minsak.no’, Norway**

The proprietor of the platform ‘minsak.no’ is the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernization. The technical realization of the platform is carried out by two external service providers which are responsible for the technical operation and hosting of the website. ‘minsak.no’ can be used in any municipality and any region in Norway. The procedure is formalized both at state and municipal level. The clear legal framework and the pre-existence of an almost identical analogue process has facilitated both the design, creation and launch of the platform as such but also its implementation and use across Norway. While one person employed by the Ministry is directly responsible for the website, the petitions are processed in the municipalities and regions. The local administrations also act primarily as "service providers" who process the petitions into decision papers and then forward them to the political decision-makers.
We asked, you said, we did, Scotland

The Scottish Government’s Digital Engagement team and the Engage team, that leads the mission of the government being open and accessible, jointly proposed the adoption of the Citizen Space We asked, you said, we did. This is a platform developed by the for-profit organization called Delib. They are the owner of the technical solution and are involved in its maintenance, implementation and customization in collaboration with the Scottish Government. Delib also provides technical support and account management to all customers. The Scottish Government’s Digital Engagement team, composed of two members, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the platform and for the technical and non-content related issues about the e-consultations. They work in collaboration with officials in other government departments to ensure accessibility requirements and data protection. The Engage team supports the functioning of the platform on wider engagement and open government issues. The government’s Online Communication team is involved in advertising and promoting the consultation to external citizens/stakeholders and are engaged when a consultation is about to be published. There is mandatory use of the Citizen Space platform to run all government e-consultations, but the overall quality of the process depends on each single policy team spanning the whole remit of the Scottish Government.

Decide Madrid, Spain

The formal proprietor of the platform Decide Madrid is the City Council of Madrid. The creation, implementation and the operational costs associated with Decide Madrid are funded by the City Council. The General Directorate of Citizen Participation of the City Council is in charge of the day-to-day management. This directorate belongs to the Citizen Participation, Transparency and Open Government Area which reports directly to the Mayor’s Office and also includes the General Directorate of Transparency, Electronic Administration and Quality and the General Directorate of Citizenship Services. All government areas and administrative units of the city council contribute to Decide Madrid by proposing topics and evaluating the proposals. When offline activities are carried out in parallel with Decide Madrid, they are managed, in some cases, in collaboration with the Area of Government of Territorial Coordination and Public-Social
Cooperation. Another relevant partner is “Medialab Prado”, a citizen’ laboratory and a meeting place for the production of open cultural projects which belongs to a company owned by the City Council. Some innovation projects in citizen participation related to Decide Madrid are being developed in “Medialab Prado” (e.g. “Training and research on citizen relations with Decide Madrid”) and the annual congress of the “Consul” project takes place there. The City Council also contracts external companies (e.g. “Agora Voting S.L”) to comply with the data protection law (e.g. encryption of votes to ensure anonymity). At international level, the most important informal partners are organizations using Consul, as they collaborate in improving the software and in the implementation of this platform around the world.

Table 2: Organizational design of e-participation platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-participation initiative</th>
<th>Platform/Platform provider</th>
<th>Responsible unit for running the platform</th>
<th>Organizations/units involved in providing the e-participation initiative</th>
<th>Decision-makers</th>
<th>Coordination mechanism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonian Citizens’ Initiative Portal</td>
<td>CitizenOS/CitizenOS, philanthropic foundation</td>
<td>Estonian Co-operation Assembly, quasi-governmental organization</td>
<td>Chancellery of Riigikogu, President’s Office</td>
<td>Parliamentary committees</td>
<td>network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parlement et Citoyens</td>
<td>Cap Collectif Consultation Application/Cap Collectif, for-profit social venture</td>
<td>Parlement et Citoyens NGO</td>
<td>Cap Collectif, parliamentary assistants</td>
<td>Individual MPs from the Senate and National Assembly</td>
<td>network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘meinBerlin’</td>
<td>Adhocracy/LiquidDemocracy, non-profit organization</td>
<td>State Chancellery</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>State and district administrations</td>
<td>hierarchy/network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Stem van West</td>
<td>MyVoice/D-CENT, network of organizations</td>
<td>Digital Unit of the neighbourhood administration</td>
<td>“Collaboration teams”</td>
<td>Neighbourhood council</td>
<td>network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘minsak.no’</td>
<td>Last Friday/for-profit web-developer</td>
<td>The Ministry of Local Government and Modernization</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Regional and local governments</td>
<td>hierarchy/network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The case studies conducted in this research project indicate that a number of actors are involved in the supply side of the e-participation platforms (see Figure 2). The existing academic literature has not provided sufficient information or analysis on the actors supplying the e-participation platforms. This report tries to shed light into this “black box”. Four types of actors can be distinguished based on our case studies: a responsible unit, a technical platform provider, other units involved in the provision of the e-participation process, and decision-makers using the citizens’ input. All cases are characterized by a number of actors contributing to the functioning of the platform. The bigger the number of affiliated actors, the more crucial collaboration and coordination among them becomes, and the more it is likely that questions about the ownership, accountability and coordination arise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We asked, you said, we did</th>
<th>Citizen Space/ Delib, for-profit social venture</th>
<th>Digital Engagement team</th>
<th>Engage team</th>
<th>Policy teams/Ministers</th>
<th>hierarchy/ network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decide Madrid</td>
<td>Consul/ Madrid City Council and network of organizations</td>
<td>General Directorate of Citizen Participation</td>
<td>General Directorate of Citizen Participation and administrative units of the city council</td>
<td>Madrid City Council</td>
<td>hierarchy/ network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Citizen Space/ Delib, for-profit social venture

Digital Engagement team

Engage team

Policy teams/Ministers

hierarchy/ network

Consul/ Madrid City Council and network of organizations

General Directorate of Citizen Participation

General Directorate of Citizen Participation and administrative units of the city council

Madrid City Council

hierarchy/ network

Digital Engagement team

Engage team

Policy teams/Ministers

hierarchy/ network
Figure 2: Actors involved in the supply of e-participation.

The determination of responsible units running the e-participation platforms is closely related to the inception of platforms, and more particularly on whether the platforms were established in a top-down or bottom-up mode. In the bottom-up cases – the Estonian and French – the responsibility for the functioning of the e-participation initiative lies with the non-governmental founders. In the other top-down or mixed cases, the responsibility for the administration of the platform has been given to a government organization or unit. The responsible unit forms a core in the network of other organizations and units involved in providing the platform. In all cases, a variety of organizations and units are involved in the provision of the platforms, thus making both strategic and operational management of e-participation platforms a rather complex exercise.

The e-participation initiatives studied in TROPICO Work Package 5 have diverse backgrounds when it comes to the origins and development of the technical solutions. Five of the platforms –
the Estonian, French, German, Norwegian and Scottish – were developed by private (not-) for-profit social ventures. While in the German and Norwegian cases, the governments contracted out the preparation of the technical platform to private partners, in the Estonian and French cases the technical developers themselves were among the “bottom-up” initiators of the e-participation initiatives. In the Scottish case, the technical solution was already available in the market. In the Dutch case, the open source platform was used – it was commissioned by the European Commission as part of the D-CENT project (https://dcentproject.eu/). In the Spanish case, the platform was purpose-built by the City Council of Madrid. The role of technical developers is also related to ownership-issues regarding the e-participation platforms. For example, in France, the formal proprietor of the portal corresponds to the technical developer. This reduces the number of actors involved in running the portal and is likely to ease ownership and coordination issues as well as curb transaction costs between units responsible for administration and technical developers.

When looking at the entire “supply-chain” in the e-participatory process, the relationships among the formal responsible unit/administrator of the portal and the technical developer are at the one end of the continuum, while the relations between the responsible unit and the decision-makers are at the other end of the continuum. The decision-makers are either politicians or responsible civil servants who use the input received through the e-participation platform in the policy design.

In the Dutch and Spanish cases, the decision-makers are closely linked to the responsible units which administer the e-participation initiatives, by that also taking the ownership for the platform. Moreover, such a shared ownership of the platform is likely to contribute to more inclusion of the input from e-participation in actual policy design, as the formal owners/responsible organizations are themselves using the input from the portals. However, in several other cases, the decision-makers are not directly associated with the units that are responsible for the administration of the e-participation platforms. In the cases from Estonia, France, Germany and Norway, the decision-makers are rather distant from the core administrative units. In order to fully benefit from the e-participation platforms, the core
responsible units and decision-makers in these cases need to be engaged in well thought-through collaborations. The empirical research collected shows that the actual use of citizens’ input in these latter cases often depends on how enthusiastic individual units or even individual persons – MPs, civil servants, NGO leaders – are about the actual use of the e-participation platforms due to the lack of the institutional ownership on their side.

Considering the wealth of actors involved in the supply side of e-participation initiatives, their effective collaboration and coordination prove crucial for ensuring the actual performance of the platforms. Of the three recognized coordination mechanisms – hierarchy, market and network – market mechanisms have found relatively little use in the organization of e-participation – their presence is mostly related to the development of technical solutions in some cases. At the same time, networks prove to be a widely used option in coordinating the activities and roles of various actors. In the cases of Estonia, France and the Netherlands, networks are clearly dominating over any other coordination mechanism, whereas networks are combined with hierarchy in other cases. The understanding of the functioning of networks is based on the relationships among the actors. Interaction between the actors derives from resource-dependence and assumes that actors are willing to exchange their resources in joint processes. This means that the attractiveness of the interaction process is of critical importance in the network-based e-participation process. Network-based coordination relies on cooperation and solidarity between actors whose relations are shaped and controlled by mutual interdependencies, trust, shared values, and reciprocity (see also Bouckaert et al., 2010). The case studies show that the actual functioning of networks differs from case to case. At the same time, what is common across the cases is the attention given to quality of interactions among the actors which proves to be a crucial factor in the performance of e-participation initiatives.
Chapter 6: The e-participatory process

The e-participatory processes in the selected platforms are briefly described below. The degree of formalization of participatory processes varies ranging from highly formalized to rather informal collaboration between government units and citizens. The analysis looks at the different phases of the policy cycle where participation occurs. We also explore whether there are technical and administrative processes in place to ensure that citizen input in fact is being considered, on what grounds, and whether it is possible for the participants to receive feedback after they have submitted their input. Most importantly, the cases of e-participation are analysed according to the public impact on the policy process, where on the one end of the continuum one finds citizens as passive consumers of information, and at the other end the empowered citizen who takes responsibility for the decisions taken by the community.

Estonian Citizens’ Initiative Portal, Estonia

The participatory process of the Estonian citizens’ initiatives is thoroughly regulated by law. The “Collective Addresses Act”, along with adjunct laws stipulates that when a proposal put forth by any individual gathers 1000 or more signatures (collected either online or offline), the Chancellery of Parliament (Riigikogu) must respond within 30 days and let the author of the initiative know whether the parliament agrees to further handle the proposal. The parliament usually undertakes all proposals that fulfil the legal criteria, i.e. the sufficient number of signatures, regardless of the substance of the proposal or other arbitrary shortcomings. When the proposal is undertaken by the parliament, the Speaker of Riigikogu will decide which parliamentary committee will be the “owner” of the proposal and forward the proposal to the relevant committee for deliberation. There are several ways of further processing of any given initiative, all of them listed in the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act. The first option is for the parliamentary committee to initiate a bill or draft resolution on the issue. The committee can also convene a general assembly, when the initiative is thought to address issues of “significant national importance”. The second option is to hold a public hearing where anyone is welcome to join. The third option is for the committee to forward the initiative to the competent branches of executive
government for resolving the issue. The fourth option is for the committee to transmit the initiative to the Government of the Republic which is instructed to develop a position regarding the proposal and is obliged to notify the committee of their resolution. There is also an option to reject the proposal, if it is incompatible with the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, or any international obligations imposed on the country by international agreements. It is mandatory to include the author of the initiative in at least one of the sessions held on the topic. The process itself must be concluded in three months and any result or decision made must be forwarded as a formal response to the author of the initiative no later than six months after the start of the proceedings. The follow-up phase is visible in the portal as a status update, which says whether the initiative has been accepted by the parliament or not, and all protocols relevant to the decision taken by the government are uploaded to the portal after the deliberation has finished.

**Parlement et Citoyens, France**

The French Parlement et Citoyens (P&C) platform provides a high degree of discretion to MPs and Senators regarding the e-participatory process. P&C offers two participatory instruments to connect citizens and politicians. On the one hand, an individual (or a group of) MPs or Senators can submit a draft law (or ideas about a draft law) for citizens and organizations to comment, discuss and amend. They can also consult citizens and stakeholders about a given issue, usually in the context of a parliamentary information mission. On the other hand, citizens and organizations can launch petitions on the website. If petitions get more than 5000 votes, the MPs and Senators – members of the P&C association – commit to “provide an answer” (in practice, this tool related to agenda setting is little used). The consultation participation process usually consists of five main phases: (1) the presentation of the issue at stake by the parliamentarian, (2) the consultation during which citizens and stakeholders are invited to feed the platform, (3) the synthesis and the lawmaker’s answers, (4) an offline or online debate, (5) the publication of a report or the (draft) law itself. No standard templates are used for these different phases. The structure of the consultation is at the discretion of MPs initiating the participatory process. Although the original setup of the platform expected MPs to provide feedback after the consultation process, in fact,
only a few consultations are actually concluded by a summary statement and a report by a relevant MP.

‘meinBerlin’, Germany

In Berlin, citizen participation of all administrative units at state and district levels can be realized via ‘meinBerlin’, which potentially makes this platform a central ‘point of contact’ for all participatory processes. Despite the centralized setup of the platform, the participation processes are prepared, moderated and evaluated in a decentralized manner by the employees in the respective administrative units. Although the platform was established at the same time as recent eGovernment legislation, no binding measures were included in the law. The eGovernment Act only contains a declaration of intent to promote e-participation. Accordingly, ‘meinBerlin’ is only formalized to a very limited extent. Online participation is therefore a voluntary task for the 44 administrative units including the Berlin State Chancellery (Senatskanzlei), the various State Departments (ministries), the district administrations, subordinate authorities of the districts and state-owned companies. The intensity of using ‘meinBerlin’ varies greatly among administrative units, but the vast majority of administrative units use it rarely or not at all. ‘meinBerlin’ is seen as a complementary measure to “traditional” offline participation. The topics for participatory processes are determined by the administrative units, and citizens cannot initiate their own topics. Moreover, the content of the portal is frequently more of an informative nature rather than representing an interactive form of consulting with citizens. Although the results of public participation are expected to be published after the consultation, this is not always done. The output of the participatory processes and the effects they had on the final decisions are usually not documented.

De Stem van West, The Netherlands

The participatory process in Amsterdam West starts from citizens of this particular neighbourhood: Here, the neighbourhood: They can vote on plans, voice their concerns, and upload ideas and proposals themselves. Promotors of the ideas typically provide arguments in support of their ideas and other participants can comment on these ideas and arguments. The
ideas and arguments that are introduced are, subsequently, up-voted and down-voted to show what the most popular ideas and best arguments for and against the proposals are. Neighbourhood council members (i.e. politicians) or civil servants who work for the neighbourhood administration are not allowed to contribute in any substantive way to the online discussions. SvW is formally incorporated in the policy design process: If an idea on the platform surpasses the threshold of 100 positive votes within three months, the proposal will be put on the monthly agenda of the neighbourhood council. In the neighbourhood council meeting, the promotor of the idea will have a chance to reflect on the online discussions, the arguments in favour of and against the idea, and the possible costs of the project. Then the neighbourhood council will deliberate on the idea without the involvement of the promotor of the idea and will decide on the course of action. If the majority of the neighbourhood council members agree with the promotor’s idea, the proposal will be sent through to the neighbourhood administration to see whether it could be incorporated in existing policy plans, or whether the proposal collides with other ongoing activities. If the latter is not the case, the proposal will be executed by civil servants, and, under the supervision of a neighbourhood alderman, in close cooperation with the promotor of the idea. Special collaboration teams, including citizens, politicians and civil servants are established to monitor the implementation and execution of a selected citizens’ proposal.

‘minsak.no’, Norway

On the e-petition platform ‘minsak.no’, a petitioner has to register first, and then he/she can write a short text to describe his or her concern. Once posted, texts cannot be changed. Other citizens have the opportunity to sign, view previous signatories or comment on the proposal. The participatory processes pertaining to the handling of citizens’ initiatives or petitions, are regulated by law. The process is highly formalized both at state and municipal level. The clear legal framework and the pre-existence of an almost identical analogue process has facilitated both the design, creation and launch of the platform. The Municipal Act of 2018 states that local and regional legislative bodies have to deal with petitioners’ proposal if at least two percent of the respective population have signed the petition. 300 signatures are sufficient if the municipality has 15,000 residents or more, whereas in regions, 500 signatures are needed to submit the
petition. Issues that do not reach enough signatures within 12 months will be closed. Thus, if a proposal reaches a certain threshold of signatures, the local or regional council has to consider the proposal. Citizens’ proposals only serve the purpose of agenda-setting. If the proposal meets the formal criteria, it is forwarded in written form to the parliamentary groups of the respective regional or municipal council. In the case of the city of Oslo, the proposal is then evaluated in the parliamentary groups and debated in the city council. The petitioner has the right to speak at the Council meeting and may present his or her case. The municipal or regional council shall decide on the matter within six months after it has received the proposal. The platform ‘minsak.no’ does not provide any tools or means for following up the impact of submitted proposals on actual policy design. In Oslo's case, interested users can consult a different website, the electronic documentation system of the Oslo administration, to inform themselves about the processing of the petition.

*We asked, you said, we did, Scotland*

The Citizen Space platform *We asked, you said, we did* is used on a mandatory basis to run all government e-consultations, but the overall quality of the process depends on each single policy team of the Scottish Government. The platform is generally used for consultations on policies that have already been designed and need implementation, but it has also been used for the other stages of the policy cycle (agenda setting, policy formulation and policy evaluation). The responsibility for running a specific participatory process is delegated to each policy team. In addition, a specific interest group or a stakeholder organization may also ask the Scottish Government to run a consultation about a topic of interest using the platform. Policy teams write the consultation question, manage the process, tailor the advertisement of the e-consultation according to its content and audience, decide whether to complement the e-consultation with face to face, off-line consultations, and determine how the results will be analysed – either in-house or through the commissioning of external analysts, such as academics. Once the consultation is closed, each policy team collects the responses and reports the conclusions back to government Ministers. It is up to the politicians to decide what to do with the responses, either through informing legislation, revising policy or potentially doing nothing. *We asked, you said, we*
did provides a format for feeding back outcomes as a result of a consultation. It provides a concise overview on how citizens/stakeholders responses (You said) to the consultation (We asked) have been considered in the policymaking process (We did). In addition, there is also a feedback form that asks participants about their experience of the consultation itself and the platform as a method to respond.

**Decide Madrid, Spain**

Decide Madrid allows citizens to make proposals, vote in citizen consultations, propose participatory budget projects, decide on municipal regulations and participate in open debates to exchange opinions with others. The participation of citizens is regulated by the Organic Regulation of Citizen Participation of the City Council of Madrid. The guidelines and procedures that support the working of the platform have been approved by different regulations of the City Council. Decide Madrid allows citizens to participate in different stages of the policy cycle: Agenda setting, policy formulation and, in some cases, policy evaluation. Participation can be carried out through five modes: debates, proposals, polls, processes and participatory budgeting. In most cases, citizens decide what is discussed in the platform, with the exception of public consultations. All governmental areas and administrative units of the Madrid City Council contribute to Decide Madrid by proposing topics for consultations and analysing proposals made by citizens. Citizens are provided with information to facilitate their participation (e.g., technical reports, proposals for public consultation and related information). Citizens’ input is publicly available and statistics about the profile of participants are also disclosed for participatory budgets and some polls. However, citizens can only follow up their contributions in participatory budgets. There is no feedback provided in other participatory processes about the outcome of citizens’ contributions and the progress of the projects already approved.

Findings on the e-participatory processes in the seven cases are summarized in Table 3.
Table 3: The characteristics of the e-participatory process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-participation initiative</th>
<th>Stage of the policy cycle</th>
<th>Initiator of the participatory process</th>
<th>Level of participation</th>
<th>Voluntary/mandatory consideration by government</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Degree of formalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estonian Citizens' Initiative Portal</td>
<td>Agenda setting, policy formulation</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Consult/Involve</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Written feedback, publicly available</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parlement et Citoyens</td>
<td>Agenda setting, policy formulation</td>
<td>Individual MPs</td>
<td>Consult/Involve</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘meinBerlin’</td>
<td>Policy formulation</td>
<td>Administrative units on state and district levels</td>
<td>Inform/Consult</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Stem van West</td>
<td>Agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Involve/Collaborate</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Deliberative communication, joint implementation of proposals</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘minsak.no’</td>
<td>Agenda setting, Mostly policy implementation but also agenda setting, policy formulation</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
<td>Consult/Involve</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Ad hoc</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We asked, you said, we did</td>
<td>Agenda setting, policy formulation</td>
<td>Policy teams, interest groups</td>
<td>Consult/Involve</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Thorough written feedback, publicly available</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide Madrid</td>
<td>Agenda setting, policy formulation</td>
<td>Citizens, administrative units of City Council</td>
<td>Involve/Collaborate</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Feedback is provided on participatory budgeting, missing in other processes</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When analysing the e-participatory process in the selected cases, we draw upon one of the first evaluative frameworks on e-participation that was developed by Macintosh (2004), in which she outlines key dimensions of e-participation. The first key dimension is the level of participation, which is presented on a continuum from low to high. The second key dimension is related to the stage when the citizens are being engaged in the policy process. The third key dimension concerns
the actors in e-participation, or in other words, who engages whom. The analysis of the e-participation cases covers all these dimensions and adds a few more such as feedback and degree of formalization.

When considering the stages of the policy cycle in the selected cases, agenda setting and policy formulation are proved to be the most often targeted stages. Each policy cycle begins with the identification of a societal problem and its placement on the policy agenda. The opportunity to participate in agenda setting is a powerful tool for citizens, as it allows to raise issues that are either ignored or downplayed by decision-makers. Here, the initiator of the participatory process plays an important role. The case studies we conducted show that as a rule, citizens have the opportunity to participate in the agenda setting, especially in the cases where they have been granted the right to initiate such participatory processes. This is what Cobb, Ross and Ross (1976) call the outside-initiative model. An exception to such practices is provided by the German example where citizens do not have such an opportunity, instead, only administrative units on state and district levels can start the participatory process and by that leaving citizens apart from the agenda setting. The most popular way of using e-participation platforms appears to be in the policy formulation stage, which is being used in all cases but in the Norwegian case, where the use of the platform is limited to the agenda setting. The Dutch and the Scottish platforms appear the most complex in the sense that they also enable citizens’ participation in the phase of policy implementation.

The presented case studies indicate that there are very different degrees of formalization of the participatory processes, ranging from highly formalized ones to rather informal collaboration between government units and citizens. A low degree of formalization occurs in the French and German cases, where the decision-makers consideration of citizens’ input is voluntary. In the rest of the cases, decision-makers are obliged to further handle citizens’ input if it is above a certain threshold based on the number of signatures. In the French case, the low degree of formalization is dependent on the bottom-up establishment of the e-participation platform. Another bottom-up platform, the Estonian one, however, follows a highly formalized process cemented in the law.
In the cases with either a high or medium degree of formalization, the rules and processes of e-participation have been made clear and transparent, which ultimately facilitates their adoption by both citizens and decision-makers.

The most cumbersome part of the e-participatory processes appears to be government’s feedback to citizens. At the same time, this is a key component of a deliberative process, a litmus test to indicate if the government is truly interested in two-way communication with citizens (vis-à-vis top-down communication). As argued by Wirtz, Daiser and Binkowska (2016), this is also linked to public impact on the policy process. Feedback is regularly provided in the Dutch, Estonian and Scottish cases, whereas in the rest, feedback is either missing or provided on a more *ad hoc* basis. In addition, in some cases implementation gaps were detected in the provision of feedback. Such gaps are situations where, despite the fact that feedback is prescribed by formal regulations, it is not followed in practice. Therefore, it is questionable whether further formalization would help to address this issue, as this is rather a question of organizational culture and priorities set by managers. In several cases limited feedback is by citizens seen as a major problem. This may reduce their trust, not only in the specific e-participation platform, but also in participatory democracy in general.

The presence of deliberative communication is closely linked to the levels of participation, where at the one end of the continuum one finds citizens as passive consumers of information, while at the other end - as empowered citizens who take responsibility for the decisions taken by the community (see also Nabatchi, 2012). The placement of the selected e-participation cases on the participation continuum is illustrated in Figure 3.
As for the level of participation, the Dutch and Spanish cases can be considered as the frontrunners because their participation levels border “involve” and “collaborate”. These cases can be seen as good examples where online e-participation instruments have had rather ambitious goals and the information collected about the actual performance of these platforms confirms their success. In these cases, it is obvious that the respective local governments (City Council of Madrid and Amsterdam West) indeed collaborate with the citizens. Collaborative processes ensure that citizens’ recommendations are incorporated into the decisions; thus, they have a moderate to high level of shared decision-making authority. The Estonian, French, Norwegian and Scottish cases can be placed between “consult” and “involve”, which refers to governments working directly with the citizens to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. This means that the link between citizen input and actual policy output varies, as the content of the final policy decisions is left to the discretion of the decision-makers. The lowest participation level among the selected cases is presented by the German e-participation platform which involves processes that mostly consult citizens, but on
some occasions merely inform the public on the government’s undertakings to help them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities or solutions. At this level, the public has only minimal shared decision-making authority; thus, it means that the government’s ambition is predominantly to keep citizens informed, listen to them and to acknowledge citizens’ concerns. It must be noted, however, that both the German and the Spanish platforms also provide home for participatory budgeting (referring to empowerment), but as this process is out of the scope of this study, this is not considered in the comparative analysis. All in all, it is somewhat surprising that the level of participation has remained by and large on the same level as practices of “traditional” offline participation. Although the online platforms have in some cases managed to increase the number of citizens participating in the policymaking processes, the “quality” of participation, i.e. the degree of shared decision-making with citizens, has very much remained on a modest level with the exceptions of the Dutch and Spanish cases.
Chapter 7: Success factors for organizing and administering e-participation

The seven selected case studies indicate that a complex array of institutional variables contributes to explaining the performance of e-participation initiatives. In previous research, the exploration of supply-related success factors has been approached under abstract labels such as “managerial aspects”, “project management” (Macintosh & Whyte, 2008) or “program management” (Rose & Grant, 2010). Previous case studies on e-participation have limited themselves to emphasizing single supply-related success factors, often biased towards management (rather than organizational design or processes), such as top management support, the presence of change agents or champions, and promotion-related issues.

In this report, the intention is to systematize supply-related success factors of e-participation based on empirical findings from multiple cases. It is acknowledged that the success of e-participation is contingent on specific contextual factors, situations and issues. Although the performance of e-participation initiatives is context- and issue-specific, there is a reason to expect general patterns across contexts and issues. For example, leadership, collaboration and transparency are important regardless of the context. As Creighton (2005, p. 2) emphasizes, “There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all public participation . . . But there are critical issues that can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful program”.

The analysis of the collected case studies enables us to distinguish between four groups of supply-related success factors: 1) the factors related to organizational design, 2) the factors related to participatory process, 3) the factors related to management, and 4) other supply-related success factors. All of these will be elaborated on below by outlining the most important factors in each group. This does not pretend to be a finite list of supply-related success factors but rather a summary of critical institutional aspects that have emerged from the analysis of the collected case studies.
7.1. Success factors related to organizational design

Ownership

The analysis of the case studies indicates that in several cases the ownership, and accordingly, responsibility for the development and running of the e-participation initiative is a crucial factor for explaining the actual functioning of the platform. It is possible to distinguish between three types of ownership patterns. In the first mode, the e-participation platform is developed and implemented under the leadership of one particular organization, most often that being a local government. In such cases, the technical solution of the platform has been contracted out under the steering of the “owner” and contributing units for running the platform are located within the same organization. Even more importantly, the end beneficiaries of the citizens’ input – decision-makers – are also located within the same organization. This creates a rather straightforward setup where the ownership of the platform is clear to all stakeholders, and the key units contributing to the implementation of the platform are all placed under the same organizational umbrella. Such an ownership pattern is likely to increase the opportunities for systematic inclusion of the input from the e-participation platforms in actual policy design, since the proprietor of the platform/responsible organization is itself using this kind of input, and thus is interested in the seamless functioning of the platform. In fact, the highest levels of participation (ranging between “involve” and “collaborate”) have been achieved in cases where the ownership over the platform follows this pattern.

The second and third mode, however, demonstrate more ambiguous ownership patterns which may become a barrier for running the e-participation platform. In the second mode, the technical provider of the platform partially holds the ownership of the platform. This is more likely the case with platforms that have been developed bottom-up rather than top-down. It may ease the situations where technical problems need to be addressed, however, in the long run the complex ownership issues between the technical provider and a core administrator of the platform are likely to cause problems of coordination, division of labour, accountability and further investments into the platform.
The third ownership pattern refers to situations where there is a considerable “distance” between decision-makers (the end beneficiaries of the platform) and the core administrator of the platform. This “distance” appears to be one of the most critical barriers to the functioning of the e-participation initiatives. It becomes problematic if, for example, the core administrator is a non- or quasi-governmental organization, and the end beneficiaries of the platform are either MPs or local politicians. Similarly, the distance becomes critical if the core responsibility for running the platform is placed at a central unit (e.g. a ministry or a state chancellery) whereas decision-makers who are expected to use the platform in policy design are located in very different units, e.g. in local governments, regions or districts. This creates a complex situation where potential coordination problems are coupled with broader challenges of multilevel governance. The case studies demonstrate that in such occasions the use of citizens’ input is often dependent on the motivation of individual units or persons due to the lack of institutional ownership by their organizations. Thus, the root cause of the often-reported uneven adoption of e-participation in such cases rests with ambiguous ownership of the platform, especially if this is combined with a low degree of formalization of participatory processes. A high degree of formalization of participatory processes (e.g. by making the consideration of input from e-participation platforms mandatory for decision-makers) may somewhat alleviate this problem.

Finally, ownership issues are also linked to the presence of formal authority, legitimacy and resources of the core unit of the e-participation platform. Platforms that were established bottom-up tend to delegate the responsibility for the administration of the e-participation initiative to non-governmental actors. On the one hand, this may be beneficial in promoting the platform by the use of approaches which are appropriate for NGOs and help to remove concerns about the possible manipulation of the participatory process by the government or the ruling party. This may increase the legitimacy of the platform, however, on the other hand, the case studies show that in such instances the core administrator may lack formal authority vis-à-vis governmental decision-makers and may become short of resources for running the platform. Problems of legitimacy, authority and resources were also reported in the cases where core units
were based on a different governmental level than decision-makers referring again to the complexity of multilevel governance.

**Cross-boundary collaboration**

Actors engaged in the administration of e-participation initiatives have been considered important success factors from the very beginning of e-participation research (Macintosh, 2004). In most studies, actors are seen as individuals (politicians, civil servants, “champions”, experts, business or civil society leaders) rather than institutions. Similarly, it has been typically demonstrated that “stakeholders will form a multi-disciplinary team to support the socio-technical nature of e-participation” (Ibid., p. 4), rather than exploring the web of organizations and organizational units with a large array of interactions involved in the supply of e-participation platforms. Not only intra- but also inter- and extra-organizational factors drive or hinder the implementation of open innovation practices in the public sector (Mergel, 2018). Consequently, the development of success factors for e-participation should not only take in-house barriers to e-participation within a single organization into account, but also review a variety of factors that cross organizational boundaries.

It is known from previous studies that the nature and quality of interactions in terms of synergy, commitment-building and transformational learning are the key drivers of collaborative innovation (Hartley, Sørensen & Torfing, 2013). The following contextual factors can influence the inter-organizational collaboration: 1) history of relationships (lack of, negative or positive); 2) relative power of members; 3) imposition of rules/guidelines (interplay between and influence of formal and informal rules); 4) impact of political/cultural context (supportive or hostile); 5) type of issue (highly controversial or non-controversial); and 6) culture of members (value systems, norms, attitudes and beliefs) (Steelman & Mandell, 2003). Thus, the barriers for running e-participation platforms may include negative past experiences among actors, a lack of motivation of any actor, different interests among actors that prevent collaboration, the prevalence of mistrust and opportunistic behaviour, the presence of procedural uncertainty, the existence of
incompatible cognitive and discursive frameworks, strategic uncertainty, incomplete institutionalization of network arenas and communication failures.

The case studies demonstrate that these potential challenges for the implementation of e-participation platforms have occurred in several instances. Often the administration of the e-participation platform requires a collaborative effort between a multitude of organizations and/or organizational units which are more or less loosely connected, and which involves different regulatory contexts, interests, expectations, incentives and cultures. The characteristics of actors who are expected to collaborate in the provision of e-participation platforms, differ a lot, including actors from public, private or non-profit sectors, and by that contributing to institutional complexity involving different institutional rules and procedures in the collaborating institutions. This may lead to problems with responsibility and division of labour where actors have different expectations both of one’s own role, responsibilities and tasks, and the reciprocal roles, responsibilities and tasks of others.

In addition, one can notice that digital leadership plays an important role in the administration of e-participation platforms. It brings people into the public sector with rather specific skills and professional backgrounds, namely ICT engineers and designers who have software engineering, digital design and similar backgrounds. This contributes to the diversity of professional cultures, but also poses challenges for collaboration, possibly leading to substantive complexity, i.e. presence of different perceptions of the nature of collaboration; solutions and values; different types of knowledge and available information, and differences in the professional language used (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2014).

How can one then administer such a diverse group of actors? Our analysis of e-participation platforms confirms previous findings that networks possess good potential for the inclusion of diverse partners, for learning to cope with dynamic and unstable environments, and for inducing innovation (Kickert et al., 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). However, networks also exhibit important disadvantages — difficult decision-making processes, lack of clear responsibility and enforcement capacity (Verhoest & Bouckaert, 2005), as well as limited scope of authority and the
existence of power asymmetries (McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). Several e-participation cases in our pool where network is a dominant coordination mechanism, provide empirical evidence for such findings. Often, however, different combinations of the basic coordination mechanisms are used, which are complementary rather than alternative options. The collected cases show that most often networks are combined with hierarchy in the administration of e-participation platforms. The use of such combinations reflects the need to counterbalance the shortcomings of one mechanism with the strengths of the other. In both the strategic and operational management of e-participation platforms, the presence of some hierarchical elements in network administration may prove inevitable. A certain degree of formalization can also prove helpful as clear network rules may reduce complexity and enhance collaboration as they make the behaviour of actors more predictable.

Central actors, i.e. responsible units for running e-participation platforms, are crucial for ensuring both strategic and operational management of the platforms. Having a supportive institutional context is expected to provide the responsible units with centrality, legitimacy, access to resources and organizational back-up (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). The collected e-participation cases in TROPICO, however, demonstrate a large variety in institutional support. In some cases, support to the core unit is insufficient, severely challenging the potential of the platform. It needs to be acknowledged that a centre of a network – being the core unit administrating an e-participation initiative – is expected to be responsible for, and retain control over most important issues such as strategic decisions, the setting of key performance indicators, allocation of resources or ensuring the development of a technical solution for an e-participation platform.

**Accountability**

The establishment and implementation of e-participation initiatives is likely to affect existing accountability relations, both relating to political and administrative accountability. First, regarding political accountability, the analysis of e-participation initiatives suggests that traditional mandatory, hierarchically oriented political accountability needs to be supplemented by more voluntary horizontal accountability relations, in order to cover cross-cutting issues and
activities transcending organizational borders (see also Bovens, 2007; Schillemans, 2008). The problem with the hierarchical approach to political accountability is that it assumes a clear division between politics and administration. In practice, however, much of the work of the public administration is political, which tends to blur the politics-administration divide. The use of e-participation platforms tends to blur it even further. For example, the creation of e-participation initiatives where citizens feed directly into the parliamentary decision-making processes pose challenges for the executive branch of government concerning insight and information. This means that e-participation platforms may contribute to the emergence of grey zones in political-administrative relations. Citizens’ input into the policymaking processes can be unpredictable and in situations where clear (formalized) participatory processes are missing, this may lead to practicing hands-on management with respect to politically salient issues. The political dynamics may also produce unstable trade-offs between accountability mechanisms. Moreover, collaboration within a multilevel governance setting in administering e-participation platforms makes accountability relations more ambiguous through the involvement of the political accountability principle of local self-government via the (mandatory) partnership arrangements with the central government.

Second, the administrative accountability is affected by the use of networks as a dominant coordination mechanism in the provision of e-participation platforms. It has been shown earlier that partnerships and networks have made accountability relations more ambiguous (Olsen, 2010). Due to the wide use of networks and their various combinations with hierarchy, the collected case studies indicate several accountability challenges related to running the e-participation platforms, triggered by a number of engaged actors and their complex relationships. In several cases, it is not necessarily clear whom the official proprietor/unit running the e-participation portal is accountable to, which is especially relevant for bottom-up and network-dominated e-participation practices. There is also a danger that the existence of tangled accountability relationships in the development of e-participation initiatives makes it difficult to identify which actor is responsible for which outcomes. This normally represents unstable, unsettled polities and unexpected situations that go beyond the more stable routine situations
and business as usual (Olsen, 2014). One can argue that the establishment of e-participation platforms can often be characterized as “beyond business as usual”. In these situations, accountability processes affect the actual exercise and control of authority, power and responsibility, and the question of who shall have the right and capacity to call to account, to question and debate the information given, and to face judgement and consequences becomes important. This means that there is a need for going beyond the hierarchical principal-agent approach to accountability and for allowing for more dynamic multi-dimensional accountability relationships.

Accountability is about managing diverse and partly conflicting expectations (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). In a multi-functional public sector, goals are often conflicting and imprecise. As can be seen from the TROPICO case studies, even a straightforward activity such as the establishment of an e-participation portal can have different objectives, which, however, are often not specified and remain rather abstract. This, in turn, forms a basis for potential conflicts. Accountability in such a system means being answerable to different stakeholders and for the achievement of multiple and often ambiguous objectives. Network-based collaboration normally implies diffused or shared accountability relations among actors. This is especially the case when the tasks or outputs are difficult to separate and are highly interdependent (Boston & Gill, 2011), which is the case of e-participation. The problem with shared accountability is that it tends to become fuzzy. Accordingly, instead of choosing between different accountability mechanisms, there is a need to treat them as supplementary and complementary leading to a multiple accountability regime (Schillemans, 2008). New accountability regimes with more complex, dynamic and layered accountability forms are also reflected in the cases on e-participation. A key challenge is how to handle complex and hybrid accountability relations embedded in partly competing institutional logics. Ambiguous accountability relations may not only affect the everyday functioning of the platforms but also their long-term strategic development and (financial) sustainability.
7.2. Success factors related to participatory process

**Level of participation**

Digital democracy is fraught with many of the same pitfalls as in traditional democratic discourse. Democratic deliberation and public participation in the policy process are not easily achieved. While the impact of citizen participation on policy design is pending on many general country-specific variables such as cultural-historical context, development of democratic institutions and civil society, the more “technical” administration and organization of e-participation platforms can also influence the level of participation. While the different e-participation initiatives have been set up to enhance the opportunities for citizen participation in the policymaking process, the level of participation (on the inform-empower continuum) has often not been explicitly outlined within the objectives of the selected cases. On the contrary, the term “citizen participation” seems to be handled on a rather abstract way by governments. However, the level of participation is a key characteristic of the quality of participation and of the level of shared decision-making authority that citizens have vis-à-vis the government. Moreover, as Macintosh (2004) argues, e-enabling, e-engagement and e-empowering each require a different set of technologies.

The collaborative and empowerment modes of participation are the most difficult for governments to achieve (compared to informing or consulting), since they involve changing existing power dynamics, which is decidedly more complex (Reddick, 2011). This explains why the level of participation through e-participation channels has remained by and large on the same level as practices of “traditional” offline participation. Although the online platforms have on some occasions managed to increase the number of citizens participating in the policymaking processes, the quality of participation i.e. the degree of shared decision-making with citizens – has remained on a rather modest level with a few exceptions. This shows that in order to fully benefit from e-participation initiatives, there is a need to systematically target higher levels of participation: collaboration and empowerment that ensure that citizens’ recommendations are incorporated into the decisions, thus indicating a moderate to high level of shared decision-
making authority. This needs to be kept in mind already in the planning phase of the e-participation platform so that the technical solution and the entire organizational and process design would support the achievement of higher levels of participation. With higher levels of participation, it is more likely to increase trust, accountability, and ultimately higher degrees of buy-in for the final budget, policy, or service (Mergel, 2018).

As long as the target of new or existing e-participation platforms is generic “participation”, it is likely that the participation level remains on the lower levels (“inform” or “consult”), meaning that the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process is superficial. In these situations, the public has virtually no shared decision-making authority, or it is only minimal. This indicates that the government’s ambition is predominantly to keep citizens informed, listen to them and to acknowledge their concerns, rather than truly involving them in decision-making.

Another issue that is critical for the level of participation is related to the “right” threshold of collected votes necessary for the consideration of e-participation proposals by the government. The selected TROPICO cases demonstrate a large variety of thresholds for votes, calculated according to different algorithms. In a few cases the threshold is set on a rather high level. Here, it is rather difficult for the citizens to reach the threshold, resulting in a relatively small number of proposals qualifying for government’s consideration. This may in turn result in the feeling of “a waste of time” by both initiators and supporters of a proposal, which then may lead to citizens giving up and ultimately abandoning the platform. In other cases, the government has to deal with petitions that only meet a relatively low threshold. Here, both the legitimacy of specific citizens’ proposals and that of the e-participation initiative as such may be challenged. Consequently, for the effective functioning of the e-participation platforms, it is necessary to carefully analyse the alternative thresholds in order to find an optimal one.

**Feedback**

E-participation assumes that information provision and the interactivity between the government and citizens enhances the overall transparency of decision-making (Macintosh, 2004). Wirtz, Daiser and Binkowska (2016) claim that transparency is not only an important target, but also a
driver of e-participation. Citizens are keen on knowing about the impact of their contributions, the results of their public engagement, the progress of the projects already approved, or the cancellation of debates and proposals. It can also be argued that especially when citizens do not get what they asked for, it is imperative that the decision-making process is at least as transparent as possible. Otherwise, any negative decision made about any initiative might be corrosive for trust not only for the specific e-participation platform but for participatory democracy in general. The lack of transparency makes it difficult to legitimize e-participation initiatives and could also negatively influence citizens’ future participation in policymaking processes.

Based on the case studies presented in this report, it appears to be a wide-spread problem that citizens who contribute their ideas to the policy process, do not know how their input is being dealt with and how the eventual decision is made. E-participation practices have both strengths and weaknesses in this respect, compared to traditional participation. On the one hand, the online element of e-participatory policymaking makes it easier to disseminate information about the follow-up phase. For example, it is possible to feed back through the same online instrument where citizens’ proposals are initiated, or to create e-mail notifications about any changes or news about the policy process underway. On the other hand, as the political and administrative processes that surround the e-participation practices are complex and vary in their degree of formality, it is difficult to design a follow-up phase that would be accurate but at the same time user-friendly. Moreover, feedback is not only about the creation of a technical tool to monitor the success or failure of a proposal. After all, the policymaking process is neither rational nor linear, which complicates the feedback phase in both offline and online participatory practices. Furthermore, as Macintosh (2004) suggests, an increased number of stakeholders in the policymaking process risk complicating the questions of who “owns” the results and who has the responsibility for communicating them. The more bodies and individuals are involved in the policymaking process and in the administration of the e-participation platform, the more the responsibility for giving feedback gets diffused among a variety of actors involved.
The seven case studies further demonstrate that although feedback is a critical component of the participatory process, it was also possible to detect implementation gaps in the feedback process. This refers to situations where feedback was prescribed by formal regulations, but was not followed in practice, or where feedback was provided on an ad hoc basis. It is thus questionable whether further formalization would be sufficient in addressing the lacking or minimal feedback in cases where formal regulations have not been followed so far. The formal regulation of feedback should be supplemented by attention paid to leadership and organizational culture which should ensure that the rules on giving feedback are followed. This also raises a question about the quality of feedback. “User-friendly” feedback does not necessarily mean that it should be too generic or too simple. Feedback also cannot be selective so that only “simple issues” get addressed. This is of particular importance when trying to create a climate of transparency, trust and creative interaction in the government-citizen relationship. Government agencies need to build organizational capacity to adequately answer questions, facilitate online discussions and provide professional feedback to citizens. Without such capacity the otherwise great idea of citizen participation and investments made into creating technical solutions may prove not only useless but also detrimental to participatory democracy.

**Formalization**

Formal regulations may sometimes generate constraints on e-government systems (Sarantis et al., 2010) but they also shape the general information society infrastructure and determine the conditions for democratic participation, including access to technology and information, the right to participate, and safeguards for participants (Berntzen & Karamagioli, 2010; Toots, 2019). The formalization of collaboration refers to the rules guiding participatory practices, ranging from highly formalized to rather informal collaboration between governments and citizens.

Throughput legitimacy of the e-participation practices is closely linked to a degree of formalization. A high level of procedural formalization is expected to increase the throughput legitimacy of the platform and ensure the transparency of the participatory processes through cementing the process of e-participation either in the legislation, lower level regulations or
procedural regulations. Formalization ensures that the way citizen proposals are formed and handled by the government is transparent and independent of the individual discretion of decision-makers. This can be contrasted by cases where procedurally non-binding petitions are forwarded to decision-makers, who may simply decide to ignore citizen input, or fail to inform the authors of the initiative on any decisions taken, because no procedural rules exist which would structure the whole participatory process. There are also other options between these two extremes of formalization such as the development of softer or voluntary recommendations, for example, “good practice of participation”, “checklists” for handling citizen participation processes or guidelines for citizen participation in order to signal a certain predictability to citizens as well as to politicians and administrators.

The collected TROPICO case studies indicate very different degrees of formalization of the e-participatory processes, ranging from highly formalized ones to rather informal collaboration between government units and citizens. In all cases with either high or medium degree of formalization, the rules and processes of e-participation have been made clear and transparent which facilitates their adoption by both citizens and decision-makers, and where the consideration of citizen input is made mandatory for decision-makers. A low degree of formalization occurs in other cases which have left the consideration of citizens’ input voluntary for decision-makers. In most cases, the input side of citizen participation (i.e. how citizens’ proposals are formed and submitted to government) is formalized, whereas the output side of the participatory process (i.e. feedback) remains insufficiently formalized.

In addition, formalization enables to handle citizen proposals in a standardized way instead of relying on the enthusiasm of individual organizations, units, politicians or administrators which, as the collected case studies show, often leads to uneven adoption and quality of participatory processes. This is particularly important in cases where there is considerable distance between core administrators of the e-participation initiative and decision-makers (especially the cases where issues of multilevel governance come into play). Formalization and standardization would facilitate similar quality of the participatory processes across different organizations, units or
teams. Importantly, the level of participation on the inform-empower continuum seems to increase together with the degree of formalization of the participatory process. Finally, when considering the formalization of e-participation practices, the question arises whether it would be more effective to design e-participatory processes separately from the existing organizational and decision-making processes or in an integrated way. Again, our cases differ in this regard. As e-participation platforms could mostly be considered novel instruments for most governments, it may happen that they are designed as ‘islands’ compared to the rest of the administrative organization. Although this may grant special attention to the e-participation platform in the inception phase, it may create artificial barriers to the functioning of the platforms in the longer term. It could be argued that the long-term sustainability of the platforms and their actual impact on the policymaking process would benefit from their integration and institutionalization into existing organizational structures, cultures and decision-making processes. Formalization of e-participation is instrumental for linking the e-participatory process to the existing institutional framework. Formalization and integration of e-participation in an organizational “routine” could also form a basis for considering e-participation as part of organizational (or national) strategic development and for the allocation of financial and human resources for its implementation.

7.3. Success factors related to management

**Leadership**

Public sector innovation and e-government literature emphasizes the importance of individuals as innovation champions and change agents (De Vries, Bekkers & Tummers, 2016; Panopoulou et al., 2014; Toots 2019). The case studies conducted in TROPICO Work Package 5 demonstrate that leadership and professional project management are essential components for success, especially on occasions where e-participation platforms are established bottom-up or function in a less institutionalized environment. There is a need for change agents from within the organization to embrace and internally promote the e-participation platform. This calls for transformational leadership. In fact, transformational leadership as a concept emphasizes the role of citizens in formulating and realizing shared goals (Denhardt & Campbell, 2006). Transformational leaders
motivate behaviour by changing their followers’ attitudes and assumptions (Burns, 1978), which is crucial for administering citizen participation because participatory governance often means doing things differently from the bureaucratic tradition. Transformational leaders are typically seen as catalysts of change as their inspirational motivation helps other employees to see the potential benefits of citizen participation and embrace change resulting from participation (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Leadership style affects how organizations are run and how citizen participation is handled.

As found from our case studies, most e-participation platforms are administered through networks, which poses specific expectations to leaders. Network leaders need to be able to act as conveners (bringing networks together), champions/sponsors (creating room for networks to act), mediators (facilitating networks) and catalysts (changing networks) (see also Steelman & Mandell, 2003; Crosby, Hart & Torfing, 2016). Collaborative networks have to be steered and managed in ways that influence their processes and outcomes without reverting too much to traditional forms of command and control, thus leaving room for collaborative innovation (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). This implies that individuals involved in the administration of e-participation platforms should not hold on too much to their own task, instructions and priorities, but instead also take some risks by seeking for more convergence with their partners’ skills, tasks and expectations by searching for collaborative advantages. As much is expected from network leaders, it is important to remember that their demanding roles can be best implemented in a supportive institutional context providing the network leaders with centrality, legitimacy, access to resources and organizational back-up (Ibid.).

Transformational leaders who are also able to fulfil the demanding roles of network leaders are still rare in the public sector. Many managers turn out passive and reactionary which is evidenced by the very uneven adoption of e-participation practices in some of the collected cases, and limited feedback given to citizens. Many public managers also tend to avoid experimentation. Often government’s existing culture constitutes a safe environment which does not support innovation and taking risks (Mergel, 2018). It is, therefore, crucially important that public
managers’ values and attitudes towards citizen participation are positive, which has been found to be key to explaining e-participation take-up (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

**Political and top management support**

Political and top management support is frequently mentioned as a success factor in information systems and e-government projects. However, for e-participation initiatives, strong backing by politicians and public sector managers is a particularly important success factor (Panopoulou et al., 2014; Toots, 2019). Without trust and support from elected officials, decisions based on citizen input are likely to be delayed, and consensus and changes are less likely to occur (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Strong support by politicians brings funding, agency stability, and agency autonomy (Yang & Pandey, 2009). Political support is also found to affect the innovation, performance, and effectiveness of public organizations (Moynihan & Pandey, 2005). All collected case studies confirm that support by politicians and administrative leaders is a critical success factor for e-participation. In some cases, political or administrative leaders themselves have stepped into the shoes of a change agent or a “champion”. At the same time, in other cases respondents indicate a shortage of resources for running the e-participation platform, and sufficient political and/or administrative commitment and support are obviously missing. Support from the top is also an important aspect for ensuring cross-boundary collaboration and management of networks that are involved in the administration of e-participation. As already argued by Chen and Gant (2001), backing by the top levels provides the political will to get different organizations and units to work together, essentially breaking down the silos of government. The interest and active support from top leadership has been shown in the collected cases to improve the coordination and ensure enough financial resources to develop and run the platform.

Although the importance of political and administrative support to e-participation initiatives is unquestionable, the case studies still reveal a great deal of ambivalence among politicians and public sector managers toward engaging the public online. This is evidenced by uneven take-up of e-participation by individual managers, limited feedback to citizens, shortage of human and
financial resources dedicated to the administration of platforms, and modest levels of participation in the inform-empower continuum. Although many public administration scholars conceptualize citizen involvement as occurring in the administrative process, it is crucial to note that any administrative decision is political, and therefore so are any involvement efforts (Yang & Pandey, 2011). E-democracy studies have outlined the existence of a ‘middleman paradox’ where decision-makers responsible for democratic engagement tend to oppose citizen participation (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005). This may be due to fears of redistribution of power and losing status and control (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). This supports the conclusion of Kraemer and King (2006) who believe that digital transformation has not been able to change organizations because it tends to reinforce existing power relationships rather than change them.

Support from politicians and top management is not only essential for the establishment and “take-off” of the e-participation platforms but also for ensuring stable institutionalized backing necessary for further development and progress in advancing online democracy. Change agents need to be backed up by an actual willingness of the organization to hold a government-citizen dialogue. Elected officials’ support is argued to lead to organizational stability, which also facilitates better participation outcomes (Yang & Pandey, 2009). Support from the top is particularly important in the cases where e-participation platforms have been established in a bottom-up mode and where the participatory processes are not sufficiently formalized. Moreover, in order to minimize the risk related to situations where supportive politicians and/or top managers leave, and would be replaced by less supportive successors, the formalization and institutionalization of participatory practices may be necessary in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the platform under the potentially less favourable top management.

**Marketing of e-participation platforms**

There is a need to actively market digital deliberation opportunities to reach out to different groups of citizens. One would assume that organizations seeking legitimacy want to proactively present the e-participation instrument to citizens. However, typically for the public sector, marketing of new and innovative initiatives is often not undertaken. Despite the public sector’s
progress in the adoption of e-participation, a slow response by citizens could detour citizen participation (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Several cases in this study demonstrate that citizens are not well aware of the opportunities that e-participation platforms offer, evidenced by rather low participation rates in some cases and critical responses from stakeholders. The preliminary evidence suggests that the visibility and public awareness of e-participation platforms is particularly problematic in cases which can be characterized by considerable distance between core units of the e-participation platform and decision-makers as distant decision-makers do not necessarily take the ownership of the platform which, in turn, complicates its promotion. Low participation rates combined with low formalization of the participatory process may lead to a vicious cycle where the results of e-participation processes are not used by decision-makers because too few citizens participate.

Our case studies indicate that there is a need for a detailed, professional and intensive communication strategy to promote e-participation platforms. This is of critical importance when e-participation platforms are launched, but the cases show that marketing needs to continue throughout the existence of the platform. The core unit has to have sufficient resources for organizing and running advertising campaigns, and collaboration with the organization’s communication or marketing units may prove beneficial. In particular, marketing strategies should include materials for citizens concerning the availability of the e-participation opportunities and broader benefits from participating in the policymaking process. Digital marketing may significantly reduce the communication costs to public organizations. This study also refers to a good practice of active recruitment of community leaders where administrators of the e-participation platform introduced targeted marketing in order to reach out to influential people in the community and promote the possibility to suggest new policies on the open-source tool and deliberation on the digital platform. Such committed community leaders may themselves become “change agents” and further disseminate information on the platform.

Problems with low awareness of e-participation initiatives are not only related to little visibility among citizens but also among politicians and civil servants. This seems to be more critical in
cases where e-participation platforms are designed and administered in other organizations than those which actually use the results of the participatory processes. When the decision-makers are distant from the units running the e-participation platform, it is not surprising if their knowledge of the platform remains insufficient. Consequently, the longer the distance between the core unit and decision-makers, the more marketing instruments should be targeted towards politicians and civil servants.

Finally, in order to avoid failure due to unrealistic expectations towards digital engagement opportunities, it is vital to explicitly define the purpose and address potential limitations of the e-participation initiatives from the outset (Panopoulou, Tambouris & Tarabanis, 2010; Susha & Grönlund, 2014). This assumes the elaboration of the specific objectives of the e-participation platform, including the question of which level of participation is targeted on the inform-empower continuum. Before any communication on a specific e-participation platform starts, it would be wise to analyse what could be realistically achieved considering the financial and human resources allocated for the administration of the platform. For example: should citizens expect regular feedback or is this beyond the government capacity? Moreover, the communication and marketing strategies should consider stakeholder multiplicity characteristic to e-participation initiatives (Macintosh, 2004; Sæbø et al., 2011). This adds pressure to the administrators of e-participation platforms as they are expected to satisfy the interests of a number of stakeholders (citizens, interest groups, civil servants, politicians) simultaneously.

**Monitoring and evaluation**

E-participation platforms are expected to meet the needs of citizens more effectively than traditional participatory instruments. However, there are also doubts about their actual impact, scale, and durability (e.g. Epstein et al., 2014; Ostling, 2010; Toots, 2019). E-participation platforms are still relatively new instruments, and as the collected case studies show, there is a large variety of organizational and procedural approaches in their administration, showing no isomorphism or convergence towards optimal institutional designs. Therefore, it is expected that the development of e-participation practices is a living process grounded on continuous
innovation, learning and adaptation. In order to enable organizational learning, it is vital to examine which positive and negative outcomes they produce, whether there are any unexpected outcomes, whether they remain sustainable, what challenges they face, and how they respond to these challenges. As e-participation initiatives often have to cope with constantly changing demands of stakeholders and changing political and societal contexts, a classical management approach would not suffice, because of complicated and time-consuming change management processes. To deal with this, Scherer and Wimmer (2012) suggest an agile approach, as it allows for a rapid integration of changing requirements and better prioritization in the process.

The case studies show that only a minority of e-participation initiatives collect performance information on a regular basis. In fact, in most cases there are no specific performance indicators in place which can be related to ambiguous ownership and accountability relations. In several cases, the only indicator that is available, is the raw number of participants. In a few exceptional cases, there is even no public information on petitions submitted through the e-participation platform and on the number of participants. This may be caused by the concern that publicly visible performance information, especially if it is below expectations, could reduce citizens' confidence in the instrument and thus their perception of the legitimacy of the instrument. Consequently, citizens and the leaders of the e-participation initiatives alike have very limited access to information on the platforms, their actual performance and the underlying trends. In most cases, there is a lack of a proper system to evaluate the impact of the e-participation initiative on policymaking, not to speak of the information on its impact on trust in government. This forms a very poor basis for organizational learning and continuous innovation.

Whereas the earlier success factor addressed feedback on substantive policy issues, the administrators of e-participation platforms could also consider asking for feedback from citizens and other stakeholders on the process of e-participation, including the practical functioning of the platform. This has already been done in a few cases where participants have been asked about their experience of the participatory process itself and use the platform as a channel for feedback.
This way, the administrators can get insight on the potential problems early on and could efficiently customize the platform to fit its purpose.

### 7.4. Other supply-related success factors

**Resources**

The TROPICO case studies of e-participation platforms demonstrate that resource-dependence is an important success factor for e-participation initiatives. This relates to both financial and human resources. Several cases, especially those where the initiatives have been established bottom-up as well as the network-dominated cases, indicate shortage of financial resources for administering the platforms. It is not always clear who is responsible for covering the operational costs of the platform referring to the consequence of ambiguous ownership and unclear accountability relations in the administration of e-participation platforms. Especially in the cases where the responsible units for the administration of e-participation initiatives and decision-makers are distant from each other, financial resources can be allocated on an *ad hoc* basis leading to potential capacity problems in administering the platforms. Such cases indicate that the shortage of funding may jeopardize the performance of e-participation platforms. For example, lack of resources may prevent from hiring extra staff or lead to insufficient attention paid to certain functions such as marketing of the platform, giving feedback to citizens or regular monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the platform. Less institutionalized platforms are particularly endangered, as they are more dependent on (potentially unstable) political and top management support.

Several examples show that the decision to allocate adequate resources for online engagement is, first of all, a matter of political will. Whereas political will is usually present during the establishment of the platform, it needs to be acknowledged that for e-participation platforms to be successful in the long-run, they need to be backed by sufficient coverage of running costs and investments into their further development. It seems that during the planning phase, not many initiators of e-participation platforms undertake thorough *ex ante* analysis of expenditures necessary for the everyday functioning of e-participation initiatives. One can assume that
governments that are well prepared and motivated to provide sufficient resources for the administration and further development of platforms are more likely to adopt e-participation initiatives and would receive more positive effects from online engagement activities.

The presence of stable and sufficient financial resources is a determining factor for the recruitment of personnel for running e-participation platforms. Capable and motivated people are indispensable in coordinating the joint policymaking process with citizens and with other units involved in the participatory process. Our case studies show that the human resources necessary to coordinate the multiple actors, and also keep track of the policy-process as it spreads out through political-administrative structures, are often underestimated. Some cases where the responsibility for e-participation is given as an extra task to existing employees, have led to modest adoption of e-participation opportunities. It is not only a matter of quantity but also quality of personnel. In a few positive cases, civil servants receive specifically targeted training in order to become more acquainted with digital forms of citizen participation and ways to show a more open attitude towards citizens’ involvement. By and large, most of the e-participation platforms we studied are rather lightweight in terms of financial and personnel resources. The long-term consequence of such a setup can involve modest performance of the platform or even gradual demise of the e-participation initiative.

**Competition among different participatory instruments**

The increasing popularity of e-participation platforms in government agendas, and the business opportunities such popularity has created for civic-tech start-ups blooming in the market, have led to a situation in several of the studied countries where there is a multiplicity of e-participation platforms which seek to influence the policymaking process. Some platforms are established top-down by government units, while other - bottom-up by private entrepreneurs (for-profit or not); some are set up for addressing individual issues or running single campaigns, whereas others target more permanent citizen engagement. The output from some participatory instruments can be mandatory for governments to consider, whereas it may remain voluntary in other cases. In addition, online engagement opportunities co-exist with more traditional offline participatory
instruments. As a result, an increasing number of both offline and online participatory instruments is likely to crowd out the policymaking scene. Moreover, it creates confusion about a variety of processes of different participation channels among the citizens, civil servants and politicians alike. A few cases within this study show that it is difficult for the citizens and NGOs to understand when to use one or another portal, whether it is possible to combine them or use them in parallel, and which one is more likely to lead to an impact on the policymaking process. Civil servants as primary administrators of participatory initiatives are likely to face problems related to a variety of types of citizen input in the policymaking process, leading to potential problems with giving feedback. Politicians may lose track of how to handle citizen input received through a variety of means. This points to competition as a factor of failure in e-participation (see also Dwivedi et al., 2013; Toots, 2019). As a matter of fact, all participatory instruments are essentially competing for the scarcest of resources – the attention of the government. The crowded-out situation of participatory instruments may delegitimize participatory democracy as such unless it is institutionalized to a certain degree.

It would be beneficial for the governments to thoroughly conceptualize different participatory processes at different levels of government and optimize the landscape of (e-)participatory instruments. This assumes the development of a strategic view and commitment by the government which would also indicate that the government takes citizen participation seriously. There is space for some complementary e-participation platforms, especially those established through bottom-up efforts from the civil society (Pirannejad et al, 2019) but a greater number of platforms not only affects their sustainability, but also reduces the likelihood that citizens’ input is given the attention it deserves. Here the institutionalization and formalization of e-participation platforms becomes crucial. In a situation of multiplicity of platforms, it is likely that the participatory instruments prioritized by the decision makers are those which are institutionalized in existing legislative and/or organizational routines, which offer integration with formal policymaking processes, and which formally ensure the consideration and feedback by decision-makers.
**Sustainability**

Despite the recent flourishing of e-participation platforms at all levels of government (Medaglia, 2012), previous research shows that such initiatives have often failed to deliver the expected outcomes (Ostling, 2010; Prosser, 2012; Toots, 2019), mobilize users (Epstein et al., 2014) and fulfil the hopes of engaging the disengaged members of society (Karlsson, 2012; Lidén, 2013). This has led to their gradual demise or abandonment. Although there are a variety of context- and demand-related aspects behind the failure of e-participation initiatives, such as political rights and civil liberties, socio-economic and cultural factors, global trends and crises, the amount of internet users, digital divide and the development of civil society, the focus of this report is on the supply-related factors behind sustainability. For example, budget constraints and a concomitant sense of organizational instability have been outlined as very important explanations for the e-participation failure (Chadwick, 2011) and by that emphasizing the importance of organization and administration of e-participation platforms in securing their sustainability.

Although the e-participation platforms analysed within this study are still very new initiatives, a few of them already refer to problems related to long-term sustainability. The concern for sustainability seems to be particularly relevant for those initiatives that were established in a bottom-up mode as they are more dependent on resource constraints as well as insufficient (or changing) political and top management support. Also, in cases which are characterized by ambiguous ownership and unclear accountability relations, it is often uncertain which organization or unit holds the ultimate responsibility for the performance and continuing development of the e-participation platform. This has to do with hybrid organizations which are often involved in the administration of e-participation platforms as the case studies show. On the one hand, the hybrid organizations are praised for their ability to meet the needs of citizens more effectively than traditional public sector or private sector organizations with innovative approaches. On the other hand, there are also doubts about their actual durability. Whilst these organizational forms are often seen to offer an innovative solution to community needs, it is also vital to engage in “risk management” of e-participation platforms: examine whether they remain sustainable, what challenges they face, and how they respond to these challenges. This is
particularly important in cases where a specific e-participation platform functions side-by-side with other participatory instruments.

The development of a long-term vision of the platform is necessary to ensure its sustainability and further improvement. The lack of such a vision not only indicates limited interest in the performance of the e-participation platform by politicians and administrative leadership but also increases risks of failure. The best strategy for reducing the risk of failure and ensuring the continuous development of the platform is to constantly scan the performance of the e-participation platform and its surrounding context through conducting regular evaluations, setting clear development goals, and making adaptations according to the results of regular monitoring exercises. This not only assumes building flexibility and adaptability into the system by design (Toots, 2019) but also presupposes the presence of clear ownership and an accountability framework for the development of the e-participation platform backed by continuous political and top management support.

The success factors are summarized in Table 4 below.
### Table 4: Success factors for organizing and administering e-participation initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of factors</th>
<th>Success factor</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational design</strong></td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Core administrator vs technical provider</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Core administrator vs decision-makers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distance from decision-makers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-level governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Core administrator: presence of formal authority, legitimacy and resources?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-boundary collaboration</td>
<td>Actors as individuals within a project vs actors as organizations/units</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One organization vs a complex web of organizations/units</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Different regulatory contexts, interests, expectations, incentives and cultures of actors</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managing networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of central actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Influence on political accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-dimensional administrative accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous objectives of e-participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How to handle complex, dynamic, shared and layered accountability relations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of participation</td>
<td>Which level of participation is the goal of the platform (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower)?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of participation: setting more ambitious goals for participation than “consulting”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The optimal threshold for citizen participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Feedback as a basis for transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who is responsible for giving feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formalization</td>
<td>Throughput legitimacy of the platform</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary vs mandatory consideration of citizens’ input by government</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standardization vs enthusiasm of individual decision-makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of e-participation into organizational and decision-making processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Management | Leadership | Presence of transformational leadership  
Specific demands for network leaders  
E-participation take-up by individual managers |
|---|---|---|
| | Top management support | Political and administrative support  
Redistribution of power  
Institutional backing |
| | Marketing | Marketing to citizens  
Involvement of community leaders  
Marketing to politicians and civil servants  
Expectations’ management |
| | Monitoring and evaluation | E-participation as a learning process  
Regular monitoring of the system and its environment  
Collecting and the use of performance information  
Feedback from citizens and stakeholders on the process of e-participation |
| Other supply-related factors | Resources | Stable and sufficient funding  
Capable and motivated human resources |
| | Competition | Increasing number of participatory instruments  
Confusion among citizens and decision-makers  
Strategic approach by government in managing citizen participation |
| | Sustainability | Responsibility for sustainable development of e-participation platform  
Risk management  
Long-term vision of the platform |
Chapter 8: Conclusions

The e-participation cases analysed in TROPICO Work Package 5 demonstrate that governments can indeed improve the engagement of citizens through technology. ICTs and Internet-based applications are viable and complementary means of the participatory process in policymaking. Opening up public sector organizations to external stakeholders – citizens, other governmental agencies, private and voluntary organizations – enables decision-makers to take advantage of available external knowledge. By creating interactive linkages between internal and external stakeholders, politicians and civil servants can subsequently come up with novel solutions to public policy challenges. Greater citizen engagement does not only better inform government decision-making but also enhances democratic processes through contributing to the values of openness, innovation and collaboration in governance.

The impact of technology on the public sector is strongly mediated by the institutional context that frames the ways public sector interacts with citizens and other governmental and non-governmental units contributing to participatory policymaking. After citizens give their voice, whether and how that voice affects the actual policymaking process depends on characteristics of the organization and process. Organizations are processors of information (Arrow, 1974). Organizational arrangements determine what information they seek, how they process the signals, and how they act on their perceived reality. Thus, citizen involvement is embedded in existing institutional arrangements and constrained by political, administrative, organizational and individual factors. If the participatory process is not carefully designed or implemented, it may delay decisions, increase conflict, disappoint participants, and lead to more distrust (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Consequently, despite the positive connotation of the word “digital democracy” and the high expectations policymakers have with regard to the potential of digital democracy tools, in reality, it takes a lot of effort, time, and adaptability of the governance systems to incorporate digital democracy processes into the existing organizational and procedural routines.
Our analysis demonstrates that the organization of public administrations is an important determinant for the implementation of e-participation initiatives, as various actors in the public sector often initiate, moderate, evaluate and also implement the results of citizen participation. The organizational setup, process design, managerial quality and allocated resources play a crucial role in the collaborative efforts ensuring the functioning, continuous improvement and eventual sustainability of the e-participation platforms. Multifaceted organizational structures and processes combined with the complexity of the surrounding societal and political context makes e-participation systems prone to fail and requires them to be managed as a process of learning and adaptation rather than as a static technological product. The case studies show that due to barriers in the institutional framework and relevant processes, e-participation systems may end up struggling with low demand and acceptance. There is a need to re-think how governments should be vertically and horizontally integrated in the days of fast-changing technology in order to constantly adapt the system to contextual changes.

The report at hand shows that that the understanding of citizen involvement should be practical, balanced and realistic so that we could build “a theory that has much more practical value for public managers than either the pure enthusiasm of the proponents of public involvement or the scepticism of its critics” (Thomas, 1995, p. 30). The analysis of the seven European cases led to the development of a framework of success factors for the organization and administration of e-participation initiatives. In order to achieve success in e-participation, these supply-related factors need to be complemented by other factors targeting democratic (demand-based) and technological variables. However, the supply-related success factors are the ones over which the government has direct influence, and which can thus be changed most easily.
References


