Guest Editorial

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We are pleased to introduce the special issue on *Electronic Participation or E-participation*, a prominent topic in digital governance research. Over the last decades, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have increasingly been introduced in attempts to involve citizens in political decision making (Medaglia, 2012) and to recapture otherwise declining interest in political processes (Sæbø et al., 2008). As society becomes increasingly digitised, governments are attempting to boost democratic interest through various e-participation programmes (Tambouris et al., 2008; Wattal et al., 2010). The term e-participation, defined as "a set of technology-facilitated participatory processes, both deliberative and decision oriented" (Sæbø et al., 2008), has been coined to indicate the processes and structures through which ICT supports relationships amongst citizens, governments and public organisations (Veit and Huntgerburth, 2014). Such implementations of ICT might change the political landscape (Criado et al., 2013) and present new opportunities for communication, consultation and dialogue between public organisations and citizens (Medaglia, 2012).

Since their origins, e-participation activities have aimed to "broaden and deepen political participation by enabling citizens to connect with one another and with their elected representatives" (Macintosh, 2004). However, only few e-participation initiatives have achieved their intended aims (Sæbø et al., 2011) and many of these initiatives have remained local or not managed to increase their scale of engagement according to

expectations (Medaglia, 2012).Many e-participation projects fail to attract large groups of citizens and change the way politicians work (Chadwick, 2008) because of low interest, lack of purpose and rules for conversation (Hurwitz, 2003) or lack of citizen participation (Koussouris et al., 2011).

Exploring how ICT usage functions in e-participation initiatives, as well as how related consequences, challenges and opportunities for those being involved is a matter of serious interest to researchers (Federici et al., 2015). E-participation research for many years has been relevant to formal engagement on government-based platforms but later expanded to new and more ubiquitous forms of interaction, especially ones enabled by social media (Wattal et al., 2010; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2014; Criado et al., 2013). Accordingly, the four papers selected for inclusion in the special issue reflect the relevance, geographical spread and diversity of e-participation research.

First, Schossböck et al., develop a multi-dimensional model for identification in e-participation platforms. Identification has always been an important challenge in e-participation activities – one of balancing security and motivating users to participate. The authors develop an expert-based model that allows authorised participants to engage in a secure environment. The evaluation of the model with users in Austria provides interesting findings. As the authors conclude, cultural and other contextual factors indicate that identification is a challenge beyond the technical dimension.

Cultural and national participation context is also the focus of the next two papers that are based on national case studies. Gencer-Kasap draws on Habermas' theory of communication action and other related perspectives to analyse deliberations as they unfold within Turkey's online public sphere. Data from three different platforms (Facebook, Second Life and web-based forum) provide a large sample of discussions on topics such as terrorism, foreign policy and the Turkish economy. The findings show how the interaction features of these three different platforms are manifested in deliberative public discussions. Further to contributing to our understanding of deliberation quality, the data provide an interesting perspective about mass discussions on Turkey's sensitive national issues.

Along similar lines of national politics, Vesnić-Alujević explores young Croatians' attitudes to politics and their relationships with the use of social networks for political engagement. Further to its contribution to the emerging literature on online/offline participation, the study offers a unique perspective on political trust in post-transition states. Survey findings show that Facebook and social networks are the main source of political information – especially amongst young people – with higher use being positively correlated to political trust. This still leaves several open issues about the nature of political engagement on social networks where clicktivism remains prominent.

In the final paper, Soares and Joia develop an exploratory model to conceptualise the influence of social media on mass demonstrations. The model includes both structural (e.g., technological, political) and instrumental factors (e.g., repression of demonstrations, traditional media). The authors explain that while structural factors set the context for such events to occur, instrumental factors are the ones that reinforce or inhibit action, hence highly affecting the ways in which events unfold. The model is contextualised using three illustrative examples: the Egyptian revolution, the Occupy Wall Street movement in the USA and the 20 Cents movement in Brazil.

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