

LEX-IS: Enabling Participation of the Youth in the Public Debate of Legislation among Parliaments, Citizens and Businesses in the European Union

At a Glance

LEX-IS eParticipation/2006/01/018

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Project Logo:



THE RATIONALE

As governmental practices and procedures mature, practical results must be constantly diffused to every category of affected stakeholder in order to create awareness and enable participation in decision making processes such as the legislation formation procedure. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can play an important role in helping to cope with the increasing complexity of such procedures and address new challenges that arise regarding better information and wider involvement of citizens into these procedures. Such a need is also identified in the European Commission's "i2010 eGovernment Action Plan" where a stress is put on the request for strengthening citizen participation and democratic decision-making in Europe.

Today, more than 50% of EU citizens are internet users and all the National Parliaments of Member States have established a web presence. However, the legislation process is usually not supported efficiently, as participation-oriented systems that go beyond the available content management technologies of Parliaments' web sites and enable the involvement of stakeholders in the legislation formulation and debate processes are not yet present.

LEX-IS OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the LEX-IS Project is to improve the legislative process in National Parliaments through enhancing public participation in the preparatory stages (legislative drafting and public debate of draft law) with the use of state-of-the-art ICT-tools and methodologies. This will be achieved through the following goals:

- Applying already developed tools for managing the complex legislative frameworks and legal structures (draft legislation, existing legislation, amendments and changes).
- Developing and modeling legal ontologies and metadata schemas for the semantic annotation of legal elements (directives, laws, decrees), so that all involved parties can easily locate the necessary information with the use of internet-based retrieval tools, and so as to

enhance legal impact for the public through argument visualization.

- Modeling of the drafting and public consultation process through a role-activity-document ontology followed during the preparatory legislative phases (legislation preparation, debate, draft legislation formation), with the use of workflow management technologies.
- Providing means for the actual participation of citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations in the preparation and debate phases (public consultation and commenting of draft laws), following the regulations of each Parliament.

In this context, the LEX-IS Project aims to contribute towards:

- Engaging NGOs, citizens, businesses and especially the younger citizens online while bridging the growing gap between citizens and the state, represented by National Parliaments.
- Promoting eParticipation awareness and active occupation of citizens with national affairs, without requiring any specific expertise in complex ICT technologies.
- Gathering informed evidence that has been structured in a clear and unambiguous fashion, in order to provide input to the Parliaments and make them view policy issues from the public perspective. Parliamentarians can analyze this information to review public support of each case and perhaps revise or change its justification to make the policy more amenable to public support.
- Engaging new participants, whether individuals or organizations (NGOs), who can actively experience the merits of e-participation.

IMPACT & EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF LEX-IS

Electronic participation opens up the possibility of e-democracy that enables online deliberations in

virtual democratic communities. Towards this direction, LEX-IS attracts the public interest and endorses the active involvement of all stakeholders in policy making, going beyond mere participation and discussion, in the generation and diffusion of knowledge. The parties involved (Citizens, Businesses, Younger Citizens, NGOs) are given enough scope to defend their own interests, exercise their right to be engaged in the decisions that touch their lives and express the small, but valuable, piece of information, experience, knowledge and competence about the problem or issue under consideration they may possess. Since the interaction is online, it is easier for experts and decision-makers to join; their presence indicating that all views should be considered and lead to real consequences.

LEX-IS also ensures transparency and openness of the policy process, without discriminating against any minority, since all citizens, as well as young people, more or less attuned to the issues of the poor, minorities or those left out of the policy process are included in the innovative participation model supported by the project. Deliberation in LEX-IS may also bring a new legitimization and basis for political decision making, since better legislation that will express citizens' opinions, make rational decisions in the public interest and ensure equal and equitable processes and outcomes is envisaged to be the project's major impact.

Overall, the main concept of LEX-IS is to enable the general public to understand, comment and actively participate in the legal drafting of parliaments through advanced technologies such as enhanced searching and visual presentation of information and arguments about legislation. In that way, it bridges the gap between the state and the citizen, using ICT technologies involving the most active group in Europe and engaging the future voting and decision-making population in democratic processes at national and European Parliament levels.

Further Information

Website Home Page: <http://www.lex-is.eu>