eParticipate

The eParticipation Trans-European Network for Democratic Renewal & Citizen Engagement

e:TEN *Project of the Year*

Project Evaluation:

Webcasting by Local Authorities

www.eparticipate.eu

Ayuntamiento de Getafe (Spain)

Mesto Vrutky (Slovakia)

Fingal County Council (Ireland)

Waverley Borough Council (UK)

Introduction to the evaluation

The *eParticipate* project was set-up to help Local Authorities to use webcasting to re-engage citizens in their democratic process. This evaluation report describes the results of the project for the benefit of Local Authorities wishing to consider implementing webcasting of their democratic processes.

eParticipation begins with open and transparent communication between government and the citizen delivered in a way that is accessible to individuals meeting their increasing needs – 'anytime, anyhow, anywhere'. The eParticipate platform centres on multimedia webcasting supported by the inclusion of key contextual information and feedback facilities combined with other communication tools such as on-line consultation. The principle motivation for the creation of the *eParticipate* platform was the need to address the growing democratic deficit in Europe.

The project trialled the service at 4 very different European Municipalities across Europe; Getafe in Spain, Fingal in Ireland, Vrutky in Slovakia and Waverley in the UK. Each site provided live and archived Internet webcasts of local Municipal meetings and other local events, allowing citizens to view them on-line at any time and place, supported by additional information and facilities.

The project worked on using technology to improve current democratic processes. The project team also felt a parallel requirement for a far more radical rework of our democratic systems to both accommodate our greater participatory demands and the opportunities offered by new technologies. This requirement is not discussed as part of this evaluation but it is the belief of the project team that these two tracks, reform and support, both need to be pursued in order to improve democratic engagement.

Creating a business case for a democratic function is a difficult task – democracy does not have a financial value and cannot be judged solely on fiscal outcomes. The project team approached this by looking at different types of benefits and evaluating each of these differently. These types of benefits were broken down as follows: strategic impacts, service improvements and cost benefits.

Democratic imperative

eParticipate builds on work and collaboration with UK Local Authorities over the last 5 years and from this field experience has categorised the main reasons behind this democratic decline under a few key headings:

▶ Lack of trust in the democratic process and the institutions managing the process

- Lack of understanding as to how to engage
- Reduced fit between the people's lifestyles and the way in which the process works – accessibility

Evidence to support these conclusions has been corroborated and discussed at length in various other publications, for instance the Power Enquiry in the UK, but is also upheld by the end user research undertaken as part of this project.

The objective of the *eParticipate* project was to improve citizen participation by addressing these issues of building trust and understanding in the democratic process and encourage citizens to start to re-engage with their local democracy. The key democratic measure that the project was looking to improve was a 25% increase in citizen participation in local democratic activities & interactions especially with regards to council meetings attendance and consultation participation. As can be seen in the results this objective was not only met but exceeded.

Effective Technology

Any eDemocracy project has its foundations in effective technology. Without easy to use and reliable software eDemocracy is over before it has begun. The eParticipate platform performed well throughout the project and is judged to be more than fit for purpose for further roll out.

Service and Methodology

An important strand to the *eParticipate* project is the marrying of appropriate technological offering with supporting service and project management methodology. The methodology used within the eParticipate project ensured that the 'soft skills' involved in implementing an eDemocracy project are not forgotten and that the right project team is put together from the start of the project.

eDemocracy projects – in common with many technology led solutions - have a tendency to fail through lack of use or follow through from the project team. The project methodology has been a large part of the *eParticipate* project's success.

Summary

This summary highlights the learnings from the project from direct feedback from the Local Authorities and their Citizens so that a wider audience can learn from its outputs. There is a need for ongoing evaluation to see what impact *eParticipate* has over the complete cycle of decision making – often a 2 to 3 year cycle – rather than the snapshot which this project was able to offer. That said the overall conclusion of the project team is that the eParticipate project has been a complete success and should continue to a wider deployment.

2. Power enquiry, An Power to the People, February 2006, http://www.powerinquiry.org/

Evaluation type 1:

eParticipation impacts – Democratic evaluation

Introduction

The main purpose behind the implementation of the eParticipate project is to increase citizen engagement in Local Democracy. In order to achieve this outcome the project team first needed to analyse and define the problems leading to this democratic deficit. Based on the UK experience and now validated further with the eParticipate evaluation work the project team identified three main issues:

▶ Lack of trust in the democratic process and the institutions managing the process
▶ Lack of understanding as to how to engage
▶ Reduced fit between the people's lifestyles and the way in which the process works – accessibility

eParticipate sought to use democratic video transmissions, presented with contextual information and feedback tools, to address these issues.

Benefits of the platform

In the main part the benefits achieved measured up closely against the expected benefits. The main area where unexpected benefits were achieved were around cost savings – for instance in Fingal the time saving for the officer preparing the minutes of the meeting (see Cost Benefit Analysis for more details).

Benefits have been broken down into three distinct types:

Strategic impacts	Often intangible benefits to the use of webcasting – usually in the area of strengthened democracy or citizen perception.
Service improvements	Changes to the way in which the Local Authority is able to do business
Cost benefits	Actual financial benefits which can be seen as freeing up resources – either people or actual cash.

This division of benefits was created as part of the evaluation process for the UK's eDemocracy National Project.

Overall the model for eParticipation being used is similar to Arnstein's Ladder of Participation - which shows different stages of increased citizen participation which an organisation can move through. eParticipate takes a more citizen focused view of this and simplifies the ladder as follows (figure 1):

3. Originally published as Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224
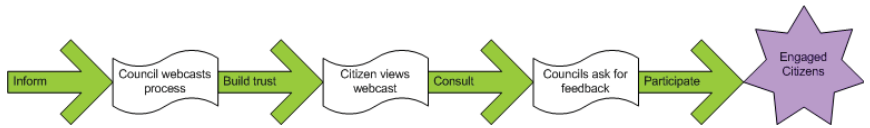
Figure 1 eParticipate model

Rather than the wider scope of the Arnstein Ladder the eParticipate model puts the webcasting of the democratic process at the start of a path towards developing more engaged citizens. The main rationale for this is that only by showing people the process will they begin to trust it and then want to participate. The eParticipate model relies on the efficacy of the use of video in building trust. This is a conclusion which has been supported by the evaluation work on the project.

Webcasts output and contents

In all cases the project participants focused on formal meetings as their core content. In the main part these were formal meetings from the fixed location – usually the Council Chamber – but the Mobile webcasting facility was also tested by each Local Authority from different locations as well.

Given that the focus of the project was entirely on democratic content there was no 'privileged' content included in the content plans. Privileged content is not public and should only be seen by officers and members. However the experience in the UK has been that webcasting can have considerable impact on internal communications and as a result should be considered by all webcasting Councils as a way of improving cost effectiveness for the technology.

A number of UK users have done a lot of work with internal focused content – including Waverley, Mole Valley District and Cambridgeshire County. The feedback has been extremely positive as per the following comments from Cambridgeshire County officers:

"This is long awaited. It enables those who wish to see and hear what the authority has to say, rather than through pages of text."

"This is fantastic!!! It did cheer me up no end!. It is more personal and everyone wanted to see it so it's an excellent communication method".

"Brilliant system. Very easy to jump to what I want".

"I have managed to find my way round your system and find it v impressive. As a School Governor we are interested in using this technology for our schools".

Increased meeting attendance

The single greatest democratic measurable from the project was an objective of a 25% increase in citizen participation in local democratic activities & interactions especially with regards to council meetings attendance and consultation participation. In order to measure this during the project 'virtual' attendance – in the form of webcast viewing – was tracked against estimated physical attendance at meetings.

In summary the 25% increase was far exceeded with an average increase of attendance (measured as average viewership / average physical attendance) for the whole project being 613.74%. This figure can also be calculated against the base line physical attendance figures and continues to show an increase of 539.6%

The increase in the average physical attendance was fairly unexpected and could be looked at further. In some part this is due to the fact that some of the content webcasts were larger events than standard meetings – for instance the launch events – but the increase could also part be in response to greater publicity about the democratic process. This is something that the project team would like to look at as part of future research.

Of particular interest is the increase and maintenance of monthly viewership statistics during the project which implies a high viewership return and retention rate. These were analysed from Oct 05 to Aug 06 (using a Webalizer analysis tool).

Partner	Ave visits per month	Total visits over project period
Fingal	999	11,992
Getafe	668	8,010
Vrutky	493	5,921
Waverley	708	8,496

Average Live/Archive attendance by Webcast type
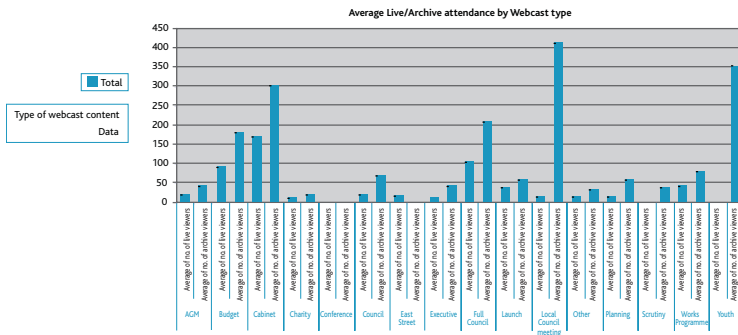
These citizen attendance figures can also be broken down by type of meeting:

What is perhaps more important is the fact that the great majority of citizen's (89% of survey respondents) who have viewed a webcast intend to watch more – an ongoing democratic benefit.

DEMOCRATIC BENEFITS

As with any democratic project the main difficulty is to assigning a value, i.e. benefit, to public engagement. While the project has looked at non-democratic benefits it was also important to define a suitable metric for the democratic element of the benefits which a platform such as *eParticipate* can bring. As was highlighted in the Service provision section the project team identified a number of benefits from the *eParticipate* platform:

Benefit type	Benefit
Strategic impacts	Increased transparency
	Increased visibility for Members
	Demystification of the democratic process
	Increased trust on the democratic process
Service improvements	Increased accessibility:
	DDA
	Time/Place
	Language

Both user and citizens interviews were carried out and combined with desk research (in particular the work of Stephen Coleman and Ann Macintosh was considered). Based on this research the overall evaluation looked to answer some of the following questions:

- ▶ To what extent and in what ways can the *eParticipation* service and methods make policy information more accessible and understandable to citizens?
- ▶ Did the platform and methods contribute to more openness and accountability in policy-making?
- ▶ Did the eParticipate platform and methods encourage and assist the public to participate and facilitate consultation?
- ▶ Did it enhance participation of the socially excluded?
- ▶ To what extent did the eParticipation affect policy? To what extent was it meant to affect policy?

All of these questions can be addressed however within the larger framework of trust, understanding and accessibility.

4. http://www.oii. ox.ac.uk/people/?rq= faculty_professors

5. http://itc.napier .ac.uk/ITC_Home/ITC /Ann_Macintosh.asp

Trust

Key questions:
▶ Did the platform and methods contribute to more openness and accountability in policy-making?

End user research carried out for this project showed that there is a clear message coming from the electorate being that one of the reasons that they don't engage with local politics is that they don't believe that they will have any effect on the process. They see the Local Authorities as a 'faceless' bureaucracy and feel they have little chance of effecting or changing it. Their overall satisfaction with the Local Authorities is low – they do not trust it as a democratic institution.

'I often feel that one will hide behind another.' FINGAL CITIZEN

The use of webcasts to address this issue of trust is the main underpinning of the eParticipate project. The advantages of unedited video over other communication channels are numerous:

▶ It enables the viewer to see the source material directly rather than through a filter or an author or editor. This in and of itself has a big impact on trust.
▶ It associates the actual actors in the process – usually the politicians – with the content. This makes the content more believable and also 'humanizes' the process – both outcomes building trust
▶ By identifying the actual actors the individual accountability is increased
▶ It provides an immediacy of communication that other channels are not able to match. Viewers understand that the process is live and happening as they view it rather than being made up post hoc.

The transparency of video makes it possible for the public to see the individual actors in the democratic process – perhaps for the first time. This enables increases their belief in the accountability of the democratic process:

If we accept that for the formal committee process is an important part of policy making then the use of webcasting clearly increases the openness and accountability of that process:

"I think it's been very good for showing the smoke and mirrors side of councils because I didn't know what to expect before I became a councillor a couple of years ago and certainly it's a lot more democratic and transparent than you are always led to believe." UK COUNCILLOR

"By watching the webcast citizens are for the first time getting an idea of how decisions are being made and not just being told the results"

"Thank you for the webcasts; they are very interesting & a great resource for people to be able to see during working hours. This is a good way to become more accountable.", UK, CITIZEN

You do a public meeting and the public ought to know. So I'm all for it, the more I see of this the better I think it is for democracy." UK, COUNCILLOR

"This is an opportunity to show the public that what we do is not only worthwhile but also effective and to see democracy at work. It is open house. The problem is that in the past decisions were made behind close doors. This is changing. The more openness the better. This means more accountability as politicians can no longer say one thing when canvassing and do another in the chamber. Now citizen can verify if they keep their promise." COUNCILLOR, FINGAL

Understanding

Key question:

▶ To what extent and in what ways can our *eParticipation* service and methods make policy information more accessible and understandable to citizens?

With voting and voxpops being tools increasingly relied on by the media citizens are now more likely to have voted for the latest *pop idol* than for their local councillor. The impacts of these votes are seen immediately. One of the impacts of this phenomenon is to further alienate people from the democratic process which is of necessity far more considered and slow

6. Coleman S, A Tale of two Houses: The House of Commons, the Big Brother House and the people at home, Channel 4 and the Hansard Society, 2003

moving. The complexities of where decision making powers do and don't sit further add to the citizen's confusion as to how they affect policy.

The often arcane language of government is a further barrier. As the spoken word tends to be less formal and uses more approachable language this is another area where direct access to the source material of the democratic process – to the meetings – can help.

"This is an excellent medium for an outsider to learn about the work of the council."

'Very informative, it doesn't give you second hand information.'
FINGAL CITIZEN

"An excellent facility and enabled me to obtain a live view and understanding of what was happening almost as well as being there (which I was not able to do)".

"At last we will be able to discover what Councillors actually said rather than the potentially biased version propagated by the local media".

"Gave me a good insight of the workings of the authority. Could be extended to the Consultation meetings".

The other advantage that webcasting has over physical participation is the ability to build a narrative within the context of the formal meeting. So often important issues are dealt with over a series of meetings rather than on a single occasion. Webcasts can be linked together in order to create a story around a single issue which is far more understandable for the public.

Access
Key questions:
▶ To what extent and in what ways can our *eParticipation* service and methods make policy information more accessible and understandable to citizens?
▶ Did the *eParticipate* platform and methods encourage and assist the public to participate and facilitate consultation?
▶ Did it enhance participation of the socially excluded?

Access to the democratic process is vital with any lack of access translating into a lack of empowerment. Accessibility can be considered an issue in a number of different ways:
▶ Access to the time and place
▶ Accessibility of the language
▶ Accessibility for anyone with disabilities

Removing barriers of time and place
The obvious benefit here is the fact that citizens can access content where

and when they want. The attendance figures support that fact that this is what people are doing.

Webcast viewers spend on average 9 minutes at a time viewing. This correlates with the typically length of a single item on an agenda and supports the belief that users of the service 'tune in' for the items of interest to them – something which is very difficult to do for a physical meeting:

> "I missed the live web cast due to work commitments. I watched the recorded video from Washington DC. It is a really good idea." UK CITIZEN

> "There's a basic issue here, and that is that pictures are always a nicer way to reach people than printed paper, and that simple fact means that webcasts have a great advantage over documents". SPAIN OFFICER

In the UK, research undertaken as part of the National Project on eDemocracy also identified that the ability to view meetings from home is of particular interest to older citizens who may not feel safe and secure enough to go to Council meetings.

Removing language barriers
One further aspect of accessibility was drawn out by the citizen focus groups – participants talked about how intimidating the formal meeting context can be and said that it is far more comfortable for them to view the content at home. The groups also said that viewing a meeting first could make them more likely to attend meetings to speak on relevant issues in the future.

Disability access
All of these accessibility issues pertain directly to disability access and technology has long been an effective enabler for the disabled in all kinds of areas. The one issue that needs to be discussed more widely with respect to webcasting however is the need to subtitle video content in order to make it 100% accessible. Though this is technically possible it is currently a time consuming and therefore expensive feature of the product. Some research should be carried out into who would benefit from this facility and the best way in which to deliver it.

Social exclusion
The eParticipate project did not specifically research into socially exclusive groups however a number of the focus group participants from Fingal were on some kind of income or social support. This group was actually notable because of its enthusiasm for the technology – partly as a way of getting informed in a non-threatening manner – but also as a potential way to connect with other Citizens.

The more socially excluded focus group had a much stronger community

response to the idea of eDemocracy than the A/B/C/1s who spoke of the ability to contact Councillors directly. Where the higher income bracket citizens looked to the eParticipate tool to link them directly to their Councillor – a one to one relationship – the citizens from a more deprived background saw the community benefits of webcasting. This group were keen to use eDemocracy to connect to other citizens who are interested in the same things.

This was a fascinating research result and one which the project team would like to follow up on in the future.

Future use of the platform

In conversation with any Local Authority who is currently webcasting, both as part of the eParticipate project and also as part of the more established webcasting UK Local Authorities, and it is clear that they all see the webcasting of formal democratic content as a starting point and not as an end in itself. Each of the project partners have identified future uses for webcasting such as:

▶ Parts of Consultation processes – either meetings or 'vox pop' content
▶ Community meetings
▶ Updates from key officials

From the UK client base there are also ideas such as:

▶ Online video magazines
▶ Public information films on specific service areas
▶ Interviews with senior members/officers by members of the public.

These concepts are all being trialled with UK clients.

Conclusions

To what extent did the eParticipation affect policy? To what extent was it meant to affect policy?

The length of the project period was really too short to track a policy through all the committee stages and to results – which is what would be needed in order to truly access webcasting's impact on the policy making process. This initial research has shown however that there are tangible impacts on people's perception of the process and moving forward the opportunity to engage citizens through this medium.

Overall the reaction of the Citizens who took part in this evaluation can be summed up by the following quote from a Fingal resident:

"It is brilliant. I would have no knowledge about FCC and it workings and this has opened it up to me. As a Donabate resident I found it great to be able to follow the progress of the LAP thru the chambers. I now understand more about motions, omnibus motions, out of order motions etc etc. I was a travel agent for many years and we kept the secrets of airline and hotel and car reservations very close to our chests as if it were some form of magic. The internet did away with all that guff so now everyone can see how it all worked and are able to do it themselves. Well I think webcam in the chambers will do that for local government. The public will see how it works, see how difficult/easy it is and will in my opinion, and participate a lot more."

Evaluation type 2
Cost benefit analysis

INTRODUCTION

As was detailed in Section 1: Benefits from the eParticipate project are being broken down into the following areas:

Strategic impacts	Often intangible benefits to the use of webcasting – usually in the area of strengthened democracy or citizen perception.
Service improvements	Changes to the way in which the Local Authority is able to do business
Cost benefits	Actual financial benefits which can be seen as freeing up resources – either people or actual cash.

This section covers the evaluation of any potential Cost benefits from using the platform. The cost benefit analysis is a core business tool and applying it to a non-business context such as democracy causes some problems. It is possible to make some savings and to contextualise the costs of the project – though a Local Authority considering the use of webcasting would also need to be looking at the other two benefit areas in order to build a compelling case.

Cost of democracy formula

The cost of democracy formula is a financial calculation which works out the cost of a Council's democratic infrastructure (e.g. staff time required to run a meeting/election service) and expresses it per capita population. It was created by the team at Waverley and it's a useful comparator when looking at *eParticipation* projects.

Using this formula it is possible to put the Local Authority resource spent on the webcasts into context by looking at them as part of the larger democratic picture. The formula looks at the following areas of expenditure:

- ▶ Committee Services Section
- ▶ Other Sections
- ▶ Public Relations
- ▶ Mayor's travel
- ▶ Members' Travel & Subsistence
- ▶ Equipment
- ▶ Printing
- ▶ Mayor's Allowance / Printing / Use of Council Hall
- ▶ Members' Remuneration Panel-Fees

Members' Expenses:
- ▶ O&S Committees
- ▶ Monitoring Officer
- ▶ Subscriptions
- ▶ Insurances
- ▶ Twinning
- ▶ Civic Accommodation
- ▶ Wages – reception duties
- ▶ Computer costs

Members' expenses can be further broken down as follows:
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Meeting / Hospitality
- ▶ Councillor Support
- ▶ Telephones
- ▶ Conferences
- ▶ Flat rate Members' allowance
- ▶ Special Responsibility allowances (e.g. committee Chairman / Deputy)
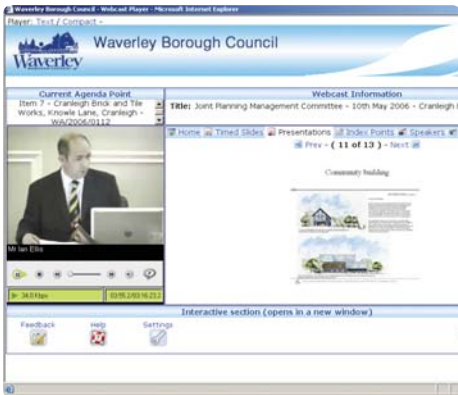
In the case of Waverley the cost of webcasting (including internal resource costs) based on webcasting of 25 hours of meetings a month is 0.03% of the total cost of democratic representation. Alternatively one could state that based on running 25 hours of democratic meetings a month for Waverley each meeting equates to a cost of democracy of £3,869 per hour of meeting. To webcast each hour of a meeting costs a further £70 per hour. This additional cost can then be compared directly to the significant increase in citizen involvement in the meeting.

Cost benefits

On the flip side of the cost analysis there are some cost benefits which can be identified as part of the eParticipate project. In the main part these can be split into three types:
- ▶ Time/Resource saving
- ▶ Actual Cash savings
- ▶ Cash equivalent benefits
- ▶ The table below details each of these areas, examples of benefits as well as indicating which project partner has experienced these benefits:

Area	Benefit	Example of value	Calculation
TIME/RESOURCE SAVING	Time savings for Officers / members	Members do not need to attend meetings at which they are not speaking.	(Average length of meeting) x (Members allowance)
		Officers can work at their desks and join meetings at the appropriate point rather than waiting outside to be called	(Average length of meeting) x (Officer day rate)
	Recording of meetings. Ability for Officers to complete minutes during normal working hours	Officer does not have to take minutes live – saving on overtime costs for evening meetings	(Average length of meeting) x (Officer hourly overtime rate)
COST SAVINGS	Travel savings for Officers / members (reduction in need to pay travel expenses)	Members do not travel to meetings where they do not want to speak.	(Average length of meeting) x (Members travel allowance)
	Reduction in printed matter required to communicate with residents / officers / members	Rather than distributing copies of meeting minutes Citizens can be directed to view the webcast.	Reduction in print budget
	Reduction in costs used to brief staff	Information can be cascaded directly via the webcast rather than through different layers of management	Estimate re: staff time
	Reduction in telephone costs to answer citizen queries	Citizens can be directed to the webcast rather than needing to have a precise of the content of the debate from a member of staff.	Reduce average call length
CASH EQUIVALENT BENEFITS	Comparative advertising spend	In terms of PR, councils using webcasting have (for the reasons identified elsewhere in this business case) received positive coverage and feedback from the public, the press and the Audit Commission; e.g. Devon's estimate that to replicate the positive PR they have received from webcasting would have cost them nearly £300,000	Measured via press clippings service

There are two other areas where some savings could be experienced in the future:

▶ Potential reduction in any legal defence costs through full actual record of decision making process being maintained

▶ Electronic storage of meetings reducing storage costs of meeting papers

The creation of a permanent and official video record of democratic meetings would enable consider savings to be made by Local Authorities, not only in the two areas referred to above but also with respect to the time currently spent creating the permanent record – the minutes.

Some local authorities in the UK have been nervous about the idea of the permanent video record – and it is true that in the case of a meeting being at fault the video record would show this. However in most cases the formal process works well and the video record would be the means to speed up the dismissal of spurious actions. In the UK experience all the reports around the use of the video record with respect to legal actions have been positive.

Conclusion

The key identifiable benefits of webcasting formal meeting are clearly at the strategic level where it can be shown to having a real impact on re-engaging the public in the democratic process.

However it is possible for a Webcasting project to justify its investment by providing some meaningful contributions to Local Authority efficiencies through eGovernment. None of these by themselves offer a compelling basis in terms of cost, but together they show that councils can potentially make the outlay on webcasting pay for itself. It should always be remembered that a significant increase in viewership compared with previous attendance at most council meetings is moving towards justifying the cost on its own.

The project showed that the net costs of webcasting is at worst only a very small percentage of what councils already spend on democracy - even if many councils have no formal method of recording their existing expenditure on democracy - and this small cost must be outweighed by the application benefits of webcasting formal meeting. These benefits are clearly at the strategic level where it can be shown to having a real impact on re-engaging the public in the democratic process

For Local Authorities wishing to make a cost benefit case it is possible to use the structure provided here to do this. However the main hindrance to proving this is the fact that Councils in the main do not seem to look at the cost of democracy and to compare democratic functions in this systematic way – a fact which may be linked to the lack of clear budget for eDemocracy (as discussed in Section 1: Service evaluation).

Overall the *eParticipate* project has been extremely successful – showing that the contextualised use of webcasting to support the democratic process can be seen to improve levels participation of citizens.

What is more there has been shown to be a sustainable business case for the use of the eParticipate platform for Local Authorities.

The evaluation process has highlighted specific recommendation for each of the actors in the *eParticipate* project process and these are discussed below:
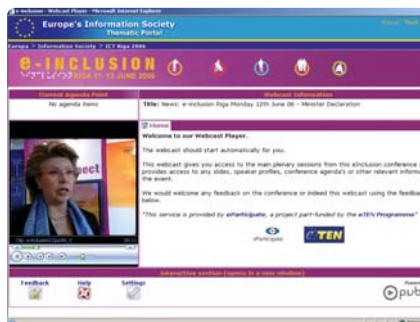
Local Authorities

Local authorities can be seen to act in two different spheres – one is the political and the other is the commercial business case. In terms of the political context the evaluation has shown that webcasting can have a positive impact on levels of citizen's participation. These benefits do however require Local Authorities to adequately resource and promote the project and this will need to be stressed to any Authorities taking part in the future deployment.

It has also been shown that it is possible to build a reasonable cost case for the implementation of *eParticipate* – this framework will also be recommended to future participants.

Local Authorities need to ensure that they are not too ambitious with content plans and that they ensure that they get wide buy-in from all areas of the organisation as part of the project process. The *eParticipate* methodology can help frame their thinking on this.

Citizens

Citizens were shown to value the transparency and openness that webcasting the formal process brings and the viewing figures prove an appetite for this content. What was constantly emphasised in the focus groups however was the need for an effective return path of communication which would enable the citizen to respond to what they are viewing. This return path is something which must be given greater emphasis in the next phase of the project and should be discussed as part of the initial site survey process to ensure that the Local Authorities have considered this and put resources in place to accommodate it.

eParticipate user comments

"One of our concerns was that with the webcasting we would lose the banter in the physical meetings – but the webcasting does not inhibit people and the meetings are still very spontaneous – this comes across for the webcast viewers as well"

"The minutes only give decisions and not a true picture of the debate – the webcast provides people with that context"

"Surprised at the ease to operate – there was no problem introducing to staff and they were easily able to use it"

"Members took to the webcasting quickly and do not notice the system anymore"

"New channels for reaching people are a key to get economic development policies and other areas. All part of reach-out programme including TV, sms, portal etc."

"Participation in our Council had dropped considerably in recent years before project. This is a very important way for us to improve that".

"This definitely improves the image of the Council as modern with vanguard technology".

"Very much in favour of webcasting. Seeing and hearing is an excellent way to develop a corporate ethos, and to communicate with workforce".

"An excellent idea! I think it'll really improve the 'visibility' of senior managers to use this method for announcements, and it lends the message a much more personal feel".

" Excellent service to provide these webcasts. One hopes that it will result in a raising of the level of debate and reduction in the often childish attempted point-scoring that goes on".

"I was unable to get to the last meeting. Thank you very much for the minutes, and for putting it on the web. I can't make this Tuesday's either and would appreciate the minutes again. Thanks very much".

"I think it's sharpened up the councillors act"

"In general terms it's saying the council is open for business and that's helped a lot of people"

"Webcasting gives residents the means to actually find out if elected officials follow up on campaign promises"

"It opens a lot of doors that you wouldn't normally have thought about for E-Democracy and a lot of people go, "Oh I didn't know you could do that, that's great.""

"Taking it out, doing the events for young people, being able to move it around, being able to broadcast particular meetings which you wouldn't normally have done, for example it suddenly opens up a lot more doors"

"We had a public enquiry which was of national significance because of the planning implications on poly tunnels and it was amazing that anybody in the country, any farmer worried about it can log in and check it out"

The *eParticipate* project piloted the use of webcasting by Local Authorities to re-engage citizens in the democratic process. This evaluation report describes the results of the project and contains feedback from citizens, councillors and officers in local authorities in Ireland, Slovakia, Spain and the UK. It addresses the potential strategic impacts, possible service improvements and cost benefits of using webcasting to engage with a local community.

Further information can be found at: **www.eparticipate.org**

Also please see the Local Authorities' webcast sites:

Fingal, Ireland:	**www.fingalcoco.public-i.tv**
Vrutky, Slovakia:	**www.vrutky.public-i.tv**
Getafe, Spain:	**www.getafe.public-i.tv**
Waverley, UK:	**www.waverley.ukcouncil.net**

eParticipate Participants, 2006