

## PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF THE PROJECT

### Objective 3.5: e-Participation - empower and involve citizens in transparent decision-making in the EU. Funding Instrument: Pilot Type B

#### Introduction

This project aims to create a new relationship based on cooperation between citizens and legislative body favored by new procedures to sustain a responsible involvement of the citizenship in setting down new policy at different level of government.

The project replies directly to the iii) focus at the object 3.5, that is iii) enhancing the direct participation of citizens in the decision-making process itself and improving new cooperation and intermediations models with policy-makers through a “participated knowledge” and through social networking procedures such as web2.0 technology.

The relevant issues the present project will focus on to answer the call will be;

1. **Institutional features of the proposed model.** In almost every Member States people are losing confidence in politics and in the use of networking for participatory action. One of the crisis reasons is the lack of projects-sharing between voters and elected representatives, as well as the technologies crisis is due to the lack of reply given to citizens concerning their observations and contributions in the few participations that have been realized. The project aims to face the described problem giving “institutional” value to a new interacting model between citizens and policy-making;

2. **Political framework of reference.** The project starts from specific needs that Veneto Region Council realized to be necessary in order to reconnect the Regional legislative body, citizens and territorial stakeholders. Experiences have demonstrated the interest of the citizens to the role that Regional Government plays in the definition of local policy. It seems also that young electorate (open to multicultural comparison) pays more and more attention to the EU policy. With the present project It is intended in fact to create an active model to answer in a coherent way to the existing relationship between these 2 levels of governance.

3. **Specific attention given to the new generations.** Young people are more interested in the use of technologies and social networking rather than the complex politics decisions procedures. The attention the present project gives them has the aim to raise their level of knowledge concerning problems related to the Legislative European Body, to favour the comparison among young people from different cultures regarding possible legislative solutions to social and political themes and to directly act at the creation of a common European culture.

#### Contents of the project

The project will be realized through the creation of an on line virtual area, regulated and institutionally recognized, which will enable citizens and young people belonging to different European regions to voice their opinions, provide inputs, elaborate ideas and verify possible differences of opinions regarding one or more law proposals. The model which can be referred to is a sort of virtual “advisory body” named **Networked Council**”.

The “**Networked Council**” works through social networking and different interactive models thanks to the 2.0 web and will be

- a. A system for evaluation, analysis and civic discussion on the political agenda themes debated by the Institutions in order to elaborate proposals to be submitted to and discussed by the Institutions itself;
- b. A system to facilitate groups of citizens gathering, who will debate about themes of social and political relevance with the aim to define legislative proposal to the concerned Institutions.

The “Networked Council” will be Tested in a first, pilot phase to support the legislative activity of political institutions at territorial level, and later will be used to activate comparisons about European common themes in different countries (multicultural and Multilanguage). At the end of the project, the “Networked Council” will be proposed to the European Council itself as a tool to improve the direct participation of citizens and civil society in the European decision-making process itself and to support politicians and decision makers in the final bill of law.

The “ **Networked Council**” is innovative as it works in an on line way and takes advantage of the e-practice community procedures already consolidated but it is also, and strongly, officially acknowledged by the Institution it refers to.

Strictly connected to the politician’s agenda, this system will refer all the citizens’ discussions and evaluations directly to the competent political body.

A specific attention will be dedicated to ensure the voting procedures, opinions submissions, on line pools response, that will be certified and given a sort of legal recognition by the recipients.

### ***Technical solutions to be adopted***

In order to support the “Networked Council” virtual place previously described, the project partners will make use of the open source platform “openDCN” ([www.opendcn.org](http://www.opendcn.org)) – where DCN stands for Deliberative Community Networks; the openDCN platform has been developed by one of the partner in the framework of the project *e21 for the development of the "digital citizenship" in the Agenda 21*, co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Innovation and Technology within the *Call for projects selection and development of the digital citizenship (edemocracy)*, promoted by the IV action line of the e-government plan.

The openDCN software environment provides on-line dedicated tools to support participation and deliberation.

In particular, an openDCN environment consists of two main interrelated spaces:

- The **community space**, aimed at fostering public dialog on civic issues and facilitating the rise of mutual trust among participants through free discussions. From a technical point of view, community space consists of public forums (the core of every online community)with geo-localization features.
- The **deliberation space** fostering the creation of a shared vision position among the participants, i.e., to finalize a deliberative process in order to produce a well defined outcome. Deliberation space makes up the core of the participatory system; participatory processes consist of a series of deliberation stages, each relying on a different participatory modality and involving different participants. This therefore calls for outright structured participatory processes, divided into clearly distinct phases, each of which relies on a specific deliberation tool. Despite their differences, all the deliberation tools share three architectural functionalities: identifying the actors, framing the issue, and producing a shared position that summarizes the outcome of the deliberation process.

Each module manages these three constituents independently from one another. For example, there are likely to be more actors identified for a voting session than those who speak out on a technical panel. The platform therefore supports redistributing the participants of each module into groups with different roles.

The tools implemented at present are:

- The **Informed Discussion** tool: it is an enriched forum enabling the sharing of information resources in support to discussions and their finalization by producing, asynchronously and collaboratively, a summary document.
- The **On-Line Ordered Meeting** tool: it structures synchronous on-line debate finalized to decision-making. It can be seen as an advanced chat where times and modalities of interaction are organized by a set of business-meeting rules adopted to support a fair decision-making discussion. This tool is useful to support limited groups of people who have to work together synchronously on very specific issues or on well confined domains.

- The **Certified Consultation** tool: it polls among participants, who choose among alternatives, by means of a variety of polling modalities; Certified Consultation is suitable when the opinion of a large number of people must be heard.

To pursue the project goals, during the fine-tuning phase of the “Networked Council” software environment, the openDCN platform will be enriched through:

- The **development of an e-petitioning tool** enabling the members of the networked council, and in general all participants, to manage their petitions autonomously and in a way that the submission can take place through different procedures. Each of these procedures will have a different reliability and worthiness rate assigned, based on the quality and level of identification of submitters (trust level);
- The **integration of mobile technology and tools for the interaction with other social network existing platforms.**

Specific development work will be carried out to allow, through mobile device:

- the use of a certified consultation and e-petitioning tool
- the sending of geo-referenced indications within the forum

In assessing the mobile technologies to be used, consideration will be given to the fact that their use is very articulated and diverse.

On one side there are users who utilize complex mobile devices, who are in most of the cases those belonging to the user class of computer literates. On the other side there are users who just have simple mobile devices and use them only for vocal communication and for the exchange of sms. In this framework, it is necessary to identify and integrate technological solutions enabling to address both classes of mobile device users.

### **Communication and promotion of the project**

The overall aim is to address with ICT based solutions today’s challenges in policy making. As it is well known that most of the obstacles participative processes meet are mainly related with stakeholders’ involvement and commitment issues, rather than with technological and organizational constraints, a great effort will be dedicated during the project to “stakeholders “motivation” activities. The major activities of the project will be

1. involving citizens and young generation in the policy-making process by enhancing a good social networking thus overcoming the actual mistrust in the Institutions and in the political use of the network technologies;
2. Identifying privileged communication channels among citizens and administrative and political representations thus creating a new communication based on mutual trust. Particular attention will be dedicated to those already existing groups, such as personal and professional social network;
3. organizing starting events and communication actions able to involve those community sectors farther from the ICT. As far as the young generations are concerned, special initiatives of communication will be specifically finalized as they are considered strategically important to the project development.

### **Activities plan**

The project will last 24 to 30 months and 10 will be of effective activities.

The scheduled actions are:

1. Context analysis
  - Analysis of the laws and the norms regarding the processes of advisory and deliberative democracy in the countries partner
  - Analysis regarding the use of the technologies and the habits of communication between institutions and citizens
  - analysis regarding the social and cultural elements related to the themes on which the pilot experiences will concentrate

2. Definition of the motivation's protocols and involvement
  - definition of a advisory participation model which takes into account all the different levels of competence and representation
  - definition of participative protocols which take into account contents problems and can solve potential conflicts arising from adversarial positions.
  - definition of participative protocols considering both single events and continuous communication flows
  
3. Planning of the methodology and normative protocols which will regulate the "Networked Council" in every testing Country and in the European context. The methodology will deal with:
  - functioning and organization of the body with the definition of the internal rules and roles
  - rules and methods to discuss and debate issues and to succeed in law proposals elaborations among the different participating subjects in the "Networked Council" framework
  - representative value of the "Networked Council"
  - interacting modalities with the reference Institutions: criteria and format for the agenda themes suggestion and the law proposal submission
  
4. Definition of systems and communication technologies
  - best practices analysis at European level and within the partner Country
  - definition of communication system to integrate the different participative tools and levels activated within the project
  
5. "Networked Council" pilot territorial test
  - platforms and participation system activation for each of the testing Partners
  - promotion of the project within the Partner Country towards the different citizens target groups
  - testing procedures on 1 or more themes of the current country legislation
  
6. "Networked Council" European test
  - platforms and participation system activation at the European level, with Multilanguage's functions and with the support of all the territorial and European Partners
  - project promotion
  - testing procedures on 1 or more themes of the European legislation
  
7. Evaluation and project dissemination
  - monitoring and surveys activities (intermediate and final) in order to verify the "Networked Council" system response to the project objectives
  - analysis and verification of the ongoing project activities to identify strong points and weak points. The analysis will be carried out considering the "participative behavior" of the people taking part into the project within every partner Country
  - definition of the formalities for the final release and operation of the system and for the citizens' involvement process after the end of the Project;
  - introduction of trials improved for the on-going adjustment of the project to the attended results
  - identification of the stakeholders able to contribute to the project continuance
  - definition of a business plan for the project activities continuance for each partner Country
  - Search of other interested countries to the adoption of the developed deliberative/advisory system.

### **Partners of the project**

The project is promoted and coordinated by the Regional Council of Veneto (Italy) which works in strict connection with the other 2 technical-scientific Partners:

- Milan University (Italy), Department of Informatics and Communication/RCM Foundation (FRCM): technical and social networking
- CSP (Piemonte, Italy): use of multimediality in the E-participation;

The scientific responsibility regarding the social and political aspects of the e-participation is submitted to

- The University of Leeds

Other 2 (or more) European institutional partners (Member States) take part into the project and will use the participation system on their territory:

- Regional Government of Cataluna (Spain)
- Regional Government of Flanders (?)
- Malta (?)
- Portugal (?)

The partner oriented to the transversal citizens involvement is

- ESN Europe (an Association Erasmus).