EXPLORING THE VALUE PROPOSITION OF eDEMOCRACY: INSIGHTS FROM eBUSINESS

John G. Mooney, Eimear Farrell

Abstract

In parallel with the rise, fall and now resurgence of eBusiness in business contexts, significant interest and experimentation into the role of Internet technologies in non-profit contexts. While there has been much discussion about the concept of eGovernment, a much quieter public movement, eDemocracy, is slowly building momentum and interest. This paper articulates the value proposition of eDemocracy initiatives by drawing upon insights derived from developments in eBusiness

Izvleček

Vzporedno z vzponom, padcem in sedanjim oživljanjem elektronskega poslovanja v poslovnem okolju opažamo tudi veliko zanimanje in eksperimentiranje o vlogi spletnih tehnologij v neprofitnih okoljih. O e-upravi je bilo že veliko razprav, medtem ko manj opazno družbeno gibanje, e-demokracija, le počasi postaja aktualno in pridobiva pozornost. Članek predlaga model za vrednotenje iniciativ e-demokracije na osnovi izkušenj razvoja elektronskega poslovanja podjetij.

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"We are at the beginning of the information age revolution, which is changing societies all over the world. It changes the way people communicate and access information. It is also changing government itself: the organization of government, its chief relationships with its citizens and the international co-operation between governments."

Stringer, 2001[1]

"It is impossible to be simultaneously blasted by a revolution in technology...and a world-wide revolution in communications without also facing...a potentially explosive political revolution."

(Toffler 1980, p.392).

Democracy: an Evolving Concept

New forms of citizen participation are becoming especially important in conjunction with the new citizen orientation of public administration. In recent years an additional conception of how to improve government-citizen relations has emerged, broadly described as "citizen empowerment," which aims to support citizens by providing them with the facilities to access government and policy information individually and to contact responsible officials (Vigoda, 2000). Better contact and information in turn will promote better accountability of public officials to citizens, and produce fertile ground for reinvigorated civil society. This type of novel administration is often related to innovations in information technology, which would allow citizens to access public information and interact with officials and leaders via the Internet (Kahin and Nelson, 1997).

At the same time, new thinking about governance has also emerged, stressing collaborative relationships and network-like arrangements between various organizations and constituencies that enable more effective problem solving and greater participation in public affairs than in the past (Stoker et al 2000:93).

In his John Gaus Lecture to members of the American Political Science Association in the autumn of 1999[2], Dr. George Frederickson noted that public administration is increasingly defined by efforts to create coherent patterns of governance across political chasms:

The theories and concepts of the clash of interests, of electoral and interest group competition, of games and of winners and losers have dominated and continue to dominate much of American Political Science. Public Administration, on the other and, is steadily moving away

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1 "Putting Government Online, Bringing Citizens Online," Speech by UK Government Minister Graham Stringer, MP, http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/index/min-org.htm and http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ to the Global Forum conference in Naples, Italy on March 15, 2001.

2 Available as audio and video file at the Public Administration of American Political Science Association website, http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~pubadmin/, accessed 14 July 2001.

from these theories and concepts toward theories of co-operation, the commons, networking, governance and institution-building and maintenance. Public Administration, both in practice and theory is repositioning itself to deal with the disarticulation of the State. In short, Public Administration is the Political Science of making the fragmented and disarticulated political state work.

This new kind of "negotiated social governance" can be considered "a new style of governance and as a source of new experiments in democratic practice" (Hirst 2000:19). In this perspective the governance approach can be seen as a possibility to restore legitimacy in the political system by the creation of new channels of participation and partnerships between the public sector, and the private and voluntary sector, contributing to new democratic forms of public/private interaction.

In Europe, a "new" debate has thus emerged, addressing the problems of constitutional clarity, institutional design and transparency[3]. In 2000 and 2001, high-profile speeches by national politicians and EU officials have sought to open the debate on Europe and its 'democratic dilemma'[4]. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, in "Shaping the New Europe" called for "a new, more democratic form of partnership between the different levels of governance in Europe." He claimed that "People want a much more participatory, "hands on" democracy. They will not support the European project unless they are fully involved in setting goals, making policy and evaluating progress"[5].

The European Commission White Paper on European Governance proposes far reaching changes to the way the Union works. Five political principles - openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence underpin the recommendations of the paper.[6] The mandate of the working group on broadening and enriching the debate on European Matters (Group 1a) focused on the need to increase levels of participation in public dialogue, discussion and debate and also to improve the quality of exchanges of information, thought and opinion.

The Emergence of eTechnologies and eDemocracy

The strategic potential of ICTs in the public sector can be found in aspects of speed and quality (Bellamy and Taylor 1998). ICTs can be used to increase public access to service agencies, which in turn can stimulate the openness of government. For example, Tapscott (1996:163) suggested that ICTs:

Not only...reduce the costs of government but also radically transform the way government programs are delivered and the very nature of governance. Internetworked [sic] government can overcome the barriers of time and distance to perform the business of government and give people public information and services when and where they want them. Governments can use electronic systems to deliver better-quality products to the public more quickly, cost effectively and conveniently.

In addition, the information and communications capabilities of the information age are lending increased credibility to alternative democratic scenarios, of which the concept of 'strong' democracy is probably the most prominent (Barber 1994). The significance of electronic means for political participation is often seen to lie in the circumvention of the need for representation. Much of the literature is therefore focused on decision-making aspects, rather than the earlier deliberative stages of democracy. In this paper however, we focus on the potential of new technology to support existing democratic structures. We suggest that information technology has the potential to re-pluralize democratic policy, through its capacity to provide low cost information, deliberation, transparency and evaluation[7]. There is an emergent view, that the process of electronic democracy can be exploited to supply 'strategic guidance' to elected politicians. In such ways, ICTs enable innovations designed to recast the relationships between citizens, politicians and government (Van de Donk et al. 1995).

Information can be 'delivered' and will empower those previously unable to access it. This is a 'push' model of information dissemination; the state will place information in accessible forums and the onus

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3   See Economist, October 2000, "A Constitution for Europe?, leader. Also Diarmuid Rossa Phelan. Antje Wiener ("Debating the EU's Constitution Post-Nice: Rights Policy and the Democratic Dilemma", paper prepared for the European Scholar Seminar programme, Dublin European Institute, University College Dublin, 3 April 2001) has drawn attention to the Union's move from implicit to explicit values in the Copenhagen criteria for enlargement and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the recent EU sanctions against Austria (See Statement from the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union on behalf of XIV member states, httP://www.portugal.ue-2000.pt/uk/news/execute/news.asp?id=425, 31 January 2000 on this latter issue).

4   Notably that of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in his Warsaw speech: "The citizens of Europe must feel that they own Europe, not that Europe owns them" (Blair, 2000).

5   Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, "2000-2005: Shaping the New Europe", SPEECH/00/41, Strasbourg, 15 February 2000.

6   See press release "The Commission Proposes immediate action on European Governance", DN: IP/01/1096, 25 July 2001, available at http://www.europa.eu.int/rapid/strat/cgi/guesten.ksh?p_action.gettxt=gt&doc=IP/01/1096%7C0%7CRAPID&lg=EI...

7   Thereby fulfilling Dahl's criteria (1989, pp. 220-222) for the democratic process: effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage, enlightened understanding7, and control of the agenda.

is on the user to access it (Chadwick and May, 2001). The audience is seen as passive recipients rather than interlocutors. State-produced information is here a passive resource to be transferred between nodes in the information network. And while citizens are inescapably part of e-government networks, their role is not as important as the state, which manages the activity. Cyberspace becomes 'normalized' into the routines of 'politics as usual' (Margolis et al, 1999).

There has been a growing preoccupation in recent democratic theory with strategies for democratizing the multiple centers of power and decision-making in the complex, interdependent structures of modern governance (Chryssochoou, 1998). The case of the European Union and its information policy would seem then to provide a fitting case study for the claims of improved democracy in an electronically mediated environment.

eDemocracy in Europe

"Democracy is not just a matter of voting in elections. It concerns participation and representation in a range of decision-making fora, at many levels. The European model is embedded in the concept of informed democracy" [8]

"Europe needs more democracy" (Fischer 1999a:5).

According to Article 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty, democracy is one of the founding principles of the European Union. For Lord (1998, p.15), any democracy must satisfy three fundamental criteria: representation, accountability and identity. A precondition of effective democracy is that citizens should have sufficient information available to them. Without adequate information, citizens cannot evaluate the performance of those for whom they have voted. Nor can they participate effectively in the on-going public debate between elections, which is part of a healthy democracy. The Commission believes it is important to bring the EU closer to the citizens by making it more transparent and closer to everyday life through the EU's commitment to allowing the greatest possible access to information on its activities. [9]

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Industrial relations and Social Affairs convened a high-level expert group in 1995 to consider the implications of the information society. This group delivered its final report in April 1997 (European Commission 1997), which included a set of policy recommendations on the theme of 'Transparency and Democracy'. Although this initially takes the form of concerns over media ownership and control, the authors also stressed that access to information is not only uneven but it is not sufficient for the immediate development of a participatory democracy. This led the group to offer a final set of policy recommendations:

To strengthen democratic development within the [Information Society] the EU should implement a democracy project. The objectives would be to reveal how ICTs can:

- step up the interaction between politicians and citizens and increase the latter's participation in political debate and decision-making;
- clarify how issues relating to human rights, xenophobia, social values, etc. should be approached in the Information Society.
- improve our understanding and the transparency of the democratic process in both National and EU institutions (European Commission 1997:51-52).

Building on this recommendation, the European Commission recently called for "eEurope: An Information Society for All" (European Commission, 1999). This initiative stresses the need to go 'beyond simply publishing legislation and white papers on the web' and to establish a discussion and feedback forum' (European Commission 1999:16). EU Commissioner Liikanen argues that "the information revolution can provide governments and administrations all over the world...with better tools to empower citizens and to serve them better."[10]

In Europe, future prospects are sketched for the further evolution of "Internet democracy" with the aid of the concepts "developmental democracy" and "protective democracy" as distinguished by Held (1996) and Macpherson (1973). One is aimed at increasing product efficiency without fostering any illusions about the inherent interest of the customer of public goods in political issues. The other is aimed at increasing "civic" participation by inviting the public to submit their wishes and complaints directly to public institutions and agencies. Both visions can support an increasingly web-supported common definition of

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basic governance; the first to make institutional delivery of services more efficient and the second to improve the ease of informed citizen input. Implementation choices made along the lines of openness will determine the future of openness as an indicator of the vigor of a democracy.

Internet-enabled eDemocracy: Power to the People

What characterizes new Internet technologies from "traditional ICT" is their potential for interactivity, rich communication, and extensive reach. With the success of e-Commerce the transfer of concepts and systems to the public sector has been advocated. As a concept and an emerging practice, eGovernment seeks to realize processes and structures for harnessing the potentialities of information and communication technologies at various levels of government and the public.

The political significance of these developments derives from technology being conceived less as a medium for disseminating information and more as media for interactive communication. Not only are the avenues of political communication multiplying in a process that is becoming more diverse, fragmented, and complex, but also, at a deeper level, power relations among key message providers and receivers are being rearranged and conventional meanings of 'democracy' and 'citizenship' are being questioned and rethought (Brants et al, 1998). ICTs are said to contribute to the transparency of power, to favor interactive decision-making and the empowerment of citizens. The new communications are claimed to sustain a 'dialogic' politics (Fox and Miller 1995).

In particular, claims were made that on-line voting and other new kinds of political communication had the potential to 'revolutionize' democracy (Sackman and Nie 1970). Informatization was expected to facilitate all kinds of (direct as well as participatory) digital democracy (e.g. Van de Donk et al. 1995). The early history of electronic democracy is littered with experiments to employ cable TV to involve voters actively in election hustings or discussions with elected representatives (Abramson *et al.*, 1988).

Following Arthur Anderson (2000), we concur with the distinction between e-government, e-administration and e-democracy.

E-Government is the most inclusive term. The Gartner Group defines e-Government as: "The continuous optimization of Government service delivery, citizen participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and new media."

E-Administration refers to government's use of ICTs to assure smooth running of public services for its clients and for its own internal functioning (Arthur Andersen, 2000: 5).

E-Democracy, the other subset of e-Government, relates to the establishment of systems designed to allow state and citizens to participate in deliberation and decision-making with the aid of new ICTs. It concerns the relation between government and citizen on the one hand, and government to government on the other (Arthur Andersen, 2000:5). A further insight into the realm of eDemocracy is provided by the scope of the "Democracy Online Project" http://democracyonline.org at George Washington University. The project aims to further the role of online technologies in enhancing freedom of expression, universal access to democratic information and the democratic process, government accountability, social tolerance, and public deliberation.

In order to identify the potential processes and outcome opportunities of eDemocracy, we examine the eBusiness value proposition.

The eDemocracy Value Proposition

Combining theoretical and exemplar analysis, Mooney(2001) proposes a conceptual model of the "eBusiness Value Proposition" for business enterprises. Drawing from this model, we propose the following elements of the "eDemocracy Value Proposition," that articulate the value-enhancing opportunities of Internet technologies for democracy.

Communication and Interaction-based opportunities

Compared with their ICT predecessors, Internet technologies enable significantly more interactive and richer communication between democracy stakeholders. Traditional paper-based documents and reports published and distributed by "Government Publication Offices" can be replaced with rich multimedia content that is accessible anytime any place. In addition, the interactive capability of Internet technologies can be used by citizens to engage in widely inclusive dialog among citizens, or between citizens and government. Such enhanced dialog capability enables government to be "more attentive" to its citizens, and to implement relationship enhancing service policies as "Our door is always open," "Be sure to tell us if you have a problem or issue," "The latest development on this issue is .."

The European Commission is beginning to exploit the potential of Internet technologies to improve

communication and democratic dialogue. There are currently experiments with online debates, Internet video, and electronic magazines like European Dialogue[11]. According to the Working Group again: The EUROPA website is set to evolve into an interactive platform for information, feedback and debate, linking parallel networks across the Union.

There are several examples in the UK of successful consultation websites, e.g. COD - *Citizen On-line Democracy* (COD), *Uspeak: Parliament listens, UKOnline CitizenSpace*[12] and the *Scotland E-petitioner*. [13] The Finnish city of Tampere has a city website going on since 1997, which debates on the life of the city and issues which relate to the city in a broader context. Another good example of technologically mediated democracy can be found in the Netherlands- Expertise Bureau for Innovative Policy-Making.[14] The Dutch central portal (www.overheld.nl) offers discussions with information about referenda and interactive policymaking[15]. Sweden's Votia Empowerment www.votia.com aims to create "living dialogues" between citizens and government, and to enable the latter to "build long lasting relations with citizens."

Community-based opportunities

The use of Internet technologies to develop online communities has created significant value in eBusiness contexts. Elements of value include the use of online communities for content generation (for example, the contribution of book reviews by amazon.com's online community). In the eDemocracy context, online communities provide powerful alternatives to focus and special interest groups, and traditional lobbying channels. Technologies being used for activism[16] and community media networks. As e-governance becomes more firmly entrenched and initiatives proceed beyond delivery mechanisms for existing services, new instruments of participation in policy making may be expected to emerge. Online communities provide a highly effective and efficient means for citizen participation, thus enhancing their

sense of engagement with the democratic process. Furthermore, online communities are important mechanisms for trust enhancement, and the creation of "comfort zones" with Internet channels.

Fora such as those facilitated by ICT provide an attractive way to unite European actors. One example is the Belgian Presidency's Expedition Europe website (http://www.expeditioneurope.be). This, in contrast to the Futurum site (http://www.europa.eu.int/futurum) is targeted at 17 to 25 year olds living in the European Union. These fora have the likely effect of not only reducing the democratic deficit through more defined information routes, but also have the potential to encourage greater involvement. As with fora in the non-virtual world however, debate must be structured and contributions valued.

On the other hand, projects like USpeak (http://www.uspeak.org.uk) have been quite successful in garnering input and discussing issues of social benefits from their website: "Uspeak is a direct link between you and Parliament - your opportunity to tell MPs your experiences and your views on tax credits, work incentives, childcare and benefits."

Another example of community-based e-Democracy is www.MoveOn.org, a community of "citizens making a difference." This initiative was created as a campaign to "immediately censure President Clinton and Move On to pressing issues facing the country." The site attracted US$13m in pledges for the last US Presidential election, and raised over US$2m for 29 democratic candidates from 43,232 individuals across 28 races that wanted "people reflecting our values to represent us." The site encourages the community to "speak out through its national initiatives forum."

In the United Kingdom, www.YouGov.com is illustrative of a "facilitated" virtual community initiative in which broad community engagement in the democratic process is facilitated online by a team of professional commentators, journalists, and experts. YouGov.com services include a "People's Parliament, " ePetitions, and GovDoctor[5]

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11 The Futurum site provides an example of the role that new media will play in the creation of a European public sphere. Indeed this area received much attention in the new White Paper on Governance and the recommendations of Working Group 1 (a) on the promotion of public debate on European questions.

12 UK Prime Minister Tony Blair offers chats on the web at the No. 10, Downing Street site.

13 www.e-petitioner.org.uk/. See also The International Centre for Teledemocracy at Napier, Edinburgh, www.teledemocracy.org.

14 The Government is devoting increasing attention to shaping the process that takes place prior to new policy measures. The trend towards a more 'horizontal' society and the rise of new forms of ICT have prompted the creation of an Expertise Bureau that can gather the acquired know-how and experience and apply it elsewhere in government organisations.The Bureau was launched on 14 June 2001. The website (www.xpin.nl/) is a virtual marketplace where clients (ministries, regional and local authorities) and suppliers (process supervisors, website/tool constructors etc.) can be brought together on an interactive basis. The website also has a database of best practices that are taking place around the world.

15 The Dutch Minister has also installed a webcam in his office

16 The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was stopped by private citizens and interest groups organizing transnationally through the Internet. Similarly, net activism was a key feature of the Seattle, Washington, Davos, Québec City (April 2001) and Genoa (2001) protests.

Convenience-based opportunities

In general, the convenience-based dimension of eDemocracy aims to create value by removing the inconveniences of the democratic process for citizens. Three elements are evident. First, time-based convenience aims to overcome traditional time restrictions on democratic process and services (e.g. traditional "9 to 5 closed for lunch" opening hours of government departments. Second, location-based convenience aims to use the capabilities of Internet technologies to overcome geographic barriers to citizen participation in democratic processes, for example providing virtual access to government services and democratic processes to those located in remote regions. Third, process-based convenience aims to use the capabilities of Internet technologies to reduce the complexity and/or inconvenience ("hassle") of certain democratic processes. For example, www.election.com provides secure on-line voting services, which offer significant convenience to senior citizens and others for whom physical attendance at a "voting station" is inconvenient or impossible.

Cost and Efficiency-based opportunities

Democracy has been described as "the inefficiency required to make the best public choices."[17] While this may indeed be the case, it is desirable that democracy be as efficient as possible. This is increasingly the case in a "real world" in which the dominant scarcity is time, and in an online world in which the dominant scarcity is attention. Internet technologies provide opportunities for reducing the costs and increasing efficiencies of democratic processes. Examples include the reduced costs of information dissemination, citizen communication, constituent care, online donations, online voting. Efficiency improvements include reduced administrative errors, online versus paper-based processes, and faster response times (for example, real-time tallying of online voting).

Customization and Personalization-based opportunities

Within the eBusiness domain, much emphasis has been placed upon the customer value created by customization and personalization. Customization refers to the tailoring of product or services offerings to the specific needs of the customer. Personalization refers to the growing trend of engaging in personalized exchanges with online users, resulting in a "personalized relationship" that grows from becoming acquainted, to remembering the details of previous exchanges, to anticipating future needs. In the context of eDemocracy, each citizen could be presented with personalized online services and interactions that are reflective of the history of interactions between the citizen and the state, given the enhanced online "memory" of the state. In addition, citizens may be presented with customized offerings based upon the citizen's preferences, legal status, and societal role. http://www.hotearth.net allows people to contact their government representatives. In addition, however, visitors can calculate their contribution to global warming by specifying their car and annual mileage. Based upon this information, the site provides customized and personalized advice on what the visitor can do to reduce global warming.

Information-based opportunities

New Internet technologies permit improvements in diffusion of information and encourage the practice of a more direct, efficient and transparent administration.[18] Informing stakeholders of key facts and events, and from the enhanced learning and citizen empowerment that subsequently emerges enhances democracy. In addition, improved information flows contribute to greater transparency and openness. This aspect will be discussed below under transparency and accountability.

The launch of the EUROPA server and its recent redesign can be considered as one of the most significant EU developments in this regard.[19] The California Voter Foundation www.calvoter.org is a "non-profit non-partisan organization dedicated to applying "new technologies" to provide the public with access to the information needed to participate in public life in a meaningful way." One of CalVoter's primary objectives is to improving voter and civic education, by providing politician backgrounds, contact information, maps of electoral districts, and information on how citizens can get involved in the democratic process.

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17 http://www.e-democracy.org/do
18 Madame Loyola de Palacio, La gouvernance et la démocratie en Europe, SPEECH/00/439, at a conference on "New Forms of Governance in Europe", Lille, 9 November 2000.
19 The WWW server EUROPA (www.europa.eu.int) was launched by the Commission in February 1995 and subsequently redesigned in 2001. Its success has generated an important internal institutional process of reflection and discussion about the roles of the Internet and electronic information and their impact on information dissemination generally. It is among the world's most frequently visited sites with around five million hits per month. EUR-LEX (information source on European Community law - www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/index.html), RAPID (database of daily European Union news briefings), EUDOR (document delivery service), SCAD (bibliographical database) and SCADplus (listings of EU policies and meetings) should also be noted.

Another information-based opportunity is that of online advocacy. Many political and community interest groups have used email and web sites to distribute information about their issues and priorities. The Citizens for Local Democracy in Toronto http://www.c4ld.org/ used the Internet to further their opposition to a province-directed amalgamation of six cities into a larger Toronto. In Minnesota, the Residents Opposed to Airport Racket http://www.nonoise.org/quietnet/roar/ used the Internet to publicize their nighttime pajama protest at the international airport. Those prepared to contract for e-advocacy services will find a willing partner with www.e-advocates.com, the "first, full-service Internet advocacy consulting firm ... to harness the power of the Internet to achieve legislative and political objective."

Interaction-based opportunities

For a healthy democracy, dissemination of information is not enough. As explained in the Working Group paper:

"Member States and the Commission should extend the use of the Internet to ensure consultation and feedback on major political initiatives. The aim would be to go beyond simply publishing legislation and white papers on the web and establish a discussion and feedback forum possibly with independent moderators."[20]

One area of e-Commission activity is the improvement of democratic participation through online interaction, perhaps culminating in various forms of online public commons. EU Commissioner Liikanen believes that "To be a modern regulator, we need new ways of consulting stakeholders, for example, through increased use of the Internet"[21]. As part of the eCommission initiative the Commission has presented "Interactive Policy-Making to improve governance by using the Internet for collecting and analyzing reactions in the marketplace for use in the EU's policy-making process". (IP/01/519)[22]

The development of an Internet-based mechanism for Interactive policy relying on spontaneous reactions in the marketplace and on open consultations of stakeholders meets the e-Commission objectives set out in the Reform White Paper[23] and is seeking coherence with the Commission's commitment to draw up guidelines on best practice in consultations (Action 4 Reform White Paper). It also represents an important project in the context of the Governance objective. Moreover it plays a part in the Internal Market Strategy and will help to identify people's needs during the enlargement process.

(Extract of the Progress report on Interactive Policy Making, Communication of Mr. Bolkestein, Mr. Kinnock and Mr. Liikanen).

Transparency and Accountability-based opportunities

Improved information and communication are important levers in bringing about improved control and accountability of the democratic process, primarily through the improved transparency brought about by better information and communication. Transparency has been one of the key areas of reform within the Union in the 1990s (Lord, 1998, p.87). In the wake of the European Commission's mass resignations for fraud, a Reform White Paper has identified the development of an "e-Commission" as one of the fundamental pillars to increase the transparency of the various European institutions. The issue of transparency has a number of aspects. It involves public knowledge about procedures, access to proceedings and documents and greater public participation. Enhanced use of ICTs by public authorities can ensure that citizens access information quickly and easily. In the last few years much has been done to improve the transparency of policy and decision-making (including public session of the Council) and legislation has been passed to grant access to official documents.[24] Clearly visible results of this reform to date have been:

- Dialogue on Europe[25]

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20 Point 10. Government online.

21 Cited in "Internet to host EU policy debates", Information dossier, Transparency section, Euractiv, www.eurctiv.com.

22 Interactive Policy Making: Commission seeks to use Internet in EU's policy-making process, DN: IP/01/519, 4 April, 2001). Further information on the initiative can be found at: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/en/update/citizen/index.htm

23 Reform White Paper - Action Plan, Chapter II, point VI: "Towards the E Commission" Action 8 (b) - In line with the targets of e-Europe Initiative, the Commission should extend the use of the Internet to ensure consultation and feedback on major political initiatives. The aim would be to go beyond simply publishing policy documents on Internet, and to establish appropriate feedback mechanisms. Resources will have to be made available to this end. - Directorate-General Internal Market to lead pilot exercise, supported by OPOCE. Directorate-General Information Society, Secretariat general and Press and Communication Service - Review by end 2000.

24 The issue of openness and access to public sector information was attended to by the G7 in a 1995 meeting. Most directly, this was addressed by the "Government Online" project. The objective of this project was to exchange experience and best practice on the use of online information technology by administrations.

It is noted in the programme objectives that the potential of the Internet could be harnessed to realize the objective of the Amsterdam Treaty to ensure full transparency for citizens on the activities and decisions of the EU institutions. (Casey, 2001, p.68).(Government Online).

25 http://www.europa.eu.int/igc2000/;

- Online register of President Prodi's external mail[26]
- Unique portal to European Governments[27]

In the United States, www.calvoter.org promotes Internet disclosure of campaign finance data, an initiative called "digital sunlight" that was subsequently enacted as California legislation through the "Online Disclosure Act." In addition, CalVoter provides an "Initiative Watch" that tracks the progress of various political initiatives, and the contribution of various political representatives to the progress or otherwise of these initiatives. It also works with the media to improve political coverage by providing non-partisan political information.

Discussion and Conclusions

The above discussion illustrates the prime dimensions of the eDemocracy value proposition. It is evident that the enhanced information and communications capabilities of Internet technologies have already been applied in a number of simple yet powerful ways to enhance democratic processes and outcomes. Some e-initiatives sought to better inform citizens, enhance transparency and improve accountability. Others sought to engender grass roots empowerment, local mobilization, and virtual community-based lobbying. We have seen remarkable achievements in online fund raising, and exciting experiments in online voting. There are also some tentative moves to transfer the eBusiness concept of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to Voter Relationship Management (VRM) in the eDemocracy domain.

Together, these initiatives promise powerful new mechanisms for democratic participation. For many, these new mechanisms will be more accessible, more convenient, more efficient, and less intimidating. In particular, eDemocracy may be an important aspect of engaging "Generation X" in the democratic process. For others, they will be significantly less appealing than traditional democratic mechanisms. Real and perceived threats to privacy, anonymity, verifiability, and security will mitigate against widespread adoption of these mechanisms for some time. For many, the dynamic underlying the "Digital Divide" creates the strong possibility of online exclusion, rather than enhanced participation in eDemocracy initiatives.

For all these reasons, significant caution must the exercised before assuming that Internet technologies offer a panacea for the perennial problems of democracy. The tools and mechanisms of e-Democracy should be viewed as augmenting rather than automating, complementary to rather than competing with the tools and mechanisms of "traditional" democracy. One of the challenges will be to identify the optimal combination of traditional and virtual democratic processes. Certainly, as citizen experience and comfort with eBusiness increases, and as dimensions of the eBusiness value proposition become the norm, these new norms of empowerment, engagement, transparency, and responsiveness will create expectations in other domains.

As with eBusiness, an evolutionary process will characterize the emergence of eDemocracy, in which early principles, actions, and outcomes will have significant effects on subsequent development. In the short term, and as long as geography continues to exert a strong influence on political boundaries, most of the early successes in eDemocracy will likely emerge from local, community-based, activist-driven initiatives.

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John Mooney is currently a Visiting Associate Professor of Information Systems at the Graduate School of Management, and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Research on Information Technology and Organizations, University of California, Irvine, USA. He is a Senior Lecturer in Management Information Systems and eBusiness at the Smurfit and Quinn Schools of Business, University College Dublin, Ireland. Professor Mooney's research interests include eBusiness strategy and processes, the management of Information Technology resources, and IT Outsourcing. The original concept of this paper was first presented at the 14th Bled Electronic Commerce Conference panel session on "eDemocracy: A Panacea or Pandora's Box," June 26, 2001.

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Eimear Farrell is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and is currently reading for an MA in European Studies from the Dublin European Institute (UCD). Her research interests include the impact of information and communication technologies on democracy and on public administration. Her Masters' thesis examines e-government as an emerging force in European governance, including design, delivery and decision-making capabilities. Much of the background material for this article is drawn from this thesis.

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