Electronic Democracy: Minitrack introduction

This minitrack is a direct successor to the previous eDemocracy minitrack in the e-government cluster. E-democracy focuses on the use of information and communication technologies to support the democratic decision-making processes and to allow more effective and transparent engagement between government, business, NGOs and citizens.

This mini-track focuses on the growing number of digital-government e-democracy applications. Over the last few years e-democracy has received increasing attention from both government and academic researchers. Both national and local governments worldwide are initiating e-democracy strategies and piloting e-democracy initiatives.

This is an exciting and challenging research area, which requires a novel combination of technical, social and political measures, and as such there is a need to recognize the complex processes required and to understand the reasons for both successes and failures.

This minitrack presents 3 research papers that investigate this challenging research area, demonstrating how a combination of technical, social and political measures are required and recognizing the complex processes that are involved.

The minitrack session starts with a paper entitled Structuration, Emancipation and Democracy and is authored by Ook Lee from Hanyang University in South Korea. The paper describes a theoretical model to understand the role of ICT in facilitating democracy using structuration theory. The paper argues that ICT may work as an enforcer of structures but can provide a springboard for change. Actor-network theory is also used to explain the success of ICT as facilitating non-human artifact to democracy in South Korea.

The second paper remains with structuration theory and is entitled The Impact of ICT Expenditures on Institutionalized Democracy and Foreign Direct Investment in Developing Countries. It is co-authored by Daniel Soper, Haluk Demirkan, Michael Goul, and Robert St. Louis from Arizona State University. The paper examines the impacts of ICT expenditure on developing countries using adaptive structuration, global and local adaptation, and network society theories. It argues that ICT expenditure has a strong positive impact on future levels of foreign direct investment, as well as on future levels of institutionalized democracy in developing countries. The level of institutionalized democracy is also shown to mediate the impact of ICT expenditure on foreign direct investment.

Finally, moving from the US to Portugal, the third paper is Discursive e-Democracy Support. It is co-authored by Rui Pedro Lourenço and João Paulo Costa from the University of Coimbra. The paper addresses the interesting area of citizen engagement and argues that the Internet plays an important role in today’s public sphere but still lacks the necessary tools to promote the creation of what the authors call ‘constellations of discourses’ and support citizen’s deliberation on them. The authors describe how they propose to structure public participation as a collaborative writing effort, producing agreed documents reflecting different discourses used to influence public decision processes.

Although there are only 3 papers in this minitrack this year, we believe they provide a very good basis to debate this challenging topic of e-democracy.