

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



WILEY

Organizing e-participation: Challenges stemming from the multiplicity of actors

Tiina Randma-Liiv 

Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn, Estonia

Correspondence

Tiina Randma-Liiv, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Akadeemia tee 3, Tallinn 12618, Estonia.
Email: tiina.randma-liiv@taltech.ee

Funding information

European Union

Abstract

Multiple actors involved in the provision of e-participation initiatives add to the complexity of organizational design and blur accountability and ownership relations. This study addresses the following research questions: How are different organizations and their units involved in the supply of e-participation initiatives? How does the multiplicity of actors affect cross-boundary collaboration, ownership, and accountability relations in the implementation of e-participation initiatives? The empirical analysis is based on comparative case studies on e-participation platforms in seven European countries. The case studies indicate that cross-organizational issues—ownership and accountability, in particular—have often been insufficiently addressed during the development of e-participation initiatives. Ambiguous ownership and diffused accountability are particularly challenging in the cases of multilevel governance and in “bottom-up” e-participation initiatives. The “distance” between the unit responsible for the administration of an e-participation initiative and the decision-makers appears to be a critical factor for the functioning of the platforms.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Citizen engagement through e-participation is expected to inform government decision-making and enhance democratic processes as well as contribute to the values of openness, innovation, and collaboration (Macintosh, 2004).

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2021 The Authors. *Public Administration* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

However, the proof of the democratizing and legitimizing effects of e-participation initiatives has remained scarce, with technology often failing to deliver the transformational changes toward new forms of participation (Norris, 2010). The general criticism toward e-participation studies has been attributed to an overly techno-centric focus, in which politico-administrative and organizational realities are underestimated (Porwol et al., 2013). Despite the variety of opportunities for engagement offered by new technology, studies refer to a general weakness of e-participation initiatives to deliver expected outcomes (Prosser, 2012; Toots, 2019), mobilize a sufficient number of active users (Epstein et al., 2014), and fulfill the democratic promise of engaging the disengaged segments of society (Karlsson, 2012; Lidén, 2013). Such drawbacks are argued to relate to societal, administrative, and organizational factors rather than technical aspects (Steinbach et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2014), thus highlighting the importance of such “nontechnical” aspects.

When considering the “nontechnical” side of e-participation research, there are many studies on the “demand side” of e-participation. For instance, studies show that demands associated with the number of Internet users (Åström et al., 2012), digital divide (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015), trust in e-participation (Scherer & Wimmer, 2014), and the socio-economic background of the population (Medaglia, 2007a; Williams et al., 2013) are related to the adoption of e-participation. A recent study by Pirannejad et al. (2019) rightly argues that the characteristics of the “society side” should be given more prominence in the development of e-participation indexes.

This article takes a different starting point by addressing the “supply side” of e-participation (Krishnan et al., 2012), more specifically, government as a mediator of e-participation initiatives. In the analysis of such a “supply side” of e-participation, both political and administrative factors are important. Although it is not possible to draw an explicit line between political and administrative aspects, the focus of this study is on the *administration* of e-participation platforms rather than on political factors. The organizational design is explored assuming that there is political interest in e-participation and the government is willing to engage citizens in the policy-making process.

Public administrations play a key role in the development of e-participation (Medaglia, 2012; Steinbach et al., 2019) because they are usually responsible for organizing and administering online communication channels with which citizens can engage in the political arena. However, insufficient attention to the empirical relationship between the dominant normative approach in e-participation literature (Lutz & Hoffmann, 2017) and the actual politico-administrative and organizational context in which e-participation initiatives unfold has hindered the possibility of drawing broader conclusions on the organization of e-participation platforms. A thorough literature review on e-participation (Steinbach et al., 2019) concludes that more research is needed to open the institutional “black box” (Chadwick, 2011, p. 24) because there is little empirical research that systematically addresses how e-participatory policy-making is actually organized in order to facilitate collaboration between decision-makers and citizens.

The present research differs from existing studies in two aspects. First, most empirical studies on the organization of e-participation have taken a micro-level focus on *one* organization or unit as a supplier of e-participation initiatives (see, e.g., Chadwick, 2011; Reddick & Norris, 2013; Royo et al., 2013; Zheng et al., 2014). This study, however, assumes that e-participation initiatives are provided through the *collaboration* of several organizations/units. Second, there are several multi-country studies on e-participation (see, e.g., Medaglia, 2007b; Panopoulou et al., 2014; Reddick & Norris, 2013; Royo et al., 2013). However, as the systematic organizational analysis assumes in-depth (qualitative) research, the limited number of such thorough studies on the *organization* of e-participation tend to base their conclusions on the examination of one single e-participation initiative (see, e.g., Chadwick, 2011; Toots, 2019). In order to contribute to existing knowledge, this study draws on a variety of organizational contexts and characteristics across seven European government-to-citizen e-participation platforms, with a particular focus on *different actors and their collaboration* in mediating e-participation, in order to elaborate upon more general organizational patterns and challenges surrounding e-participation.

2 | ANALYTICAL BACKGROUND

In most previous studies, actors involved in the supply of e-participation platforms have been seen as individuals (politicians, civil servants, “champions,” experts, business or civil society leaders) rather than institutions. For

example, it has been typically argued that “stakeholders will form a multi-disciplinary team to support the socio-technical nature of e-participation” (Macintosh, 2004, p. 4) rather than explore a complex web of organizations involved in the administration of e-participation platforms. Innovations in the public sector often emerge from and influence multiactor settings and underlying routines (Kattel et al., 2020). The nature and quality of interactions in terms of synergy, commitment-building, and transformational learning are the key drivers of collaborative innovation (Hartley et al., 2013). Similarly, e-participation initiatives are hardly ever provided by single organizations or units (Macintosh, 2004; Sæbø et al., 2011). E-participation is a collaborative process involving a number of actors (e.g., government units, NGOs, businesses, ICT support) that contribute to the functioning of the platform and are likely to have different roles, leading to complex interrelationships among actors.

As existing academic literature has not provided sufficient analysis on organizational actors and their relationships in supplying e-participation platforms, this article tries to shed light on this “black box.” Four types of actors can be distinguished: a responsible unit in charge of the administration of an e-participation initiative, a technical platform provider, other units involved in the e-participation process and decision-makers using the citizens' input (see Figure 1).

First, central actors—responsible units running e-participation platforms—are crucial for ensuring both the strategic and operational management of e-participation platforms. A supportive institutional context is expected to provide the responsible units with centrality, legitimacy, access to resources, and organizational back-up (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). This kind of “network centrality” (Cole & John, 1998) tries to capture the actors in terms of their links to others and emphasizes the crucial role of central actors in decision-making and information processing. Second, the impact of technology on the public sector is mediated by the institutional context that frames the ways in which the public sector interacts with nongovernmental providers, as the majority of technological solutions and products are provided by private firms (Kattel et al., 2020). In the case of e-participation, technical solutions can be developed in-house, outsourced, or open-source platforms can be used. Third, there can be a range of other organizations and units that collaborate with the central actor in the delivery of the e-participation platform. These include, for example, organizations to whom responsible units are accountable, funders of the platform, actors involved in the promotion and communication of the platform, technical support, and units checking the validity of citizen input. Finally,

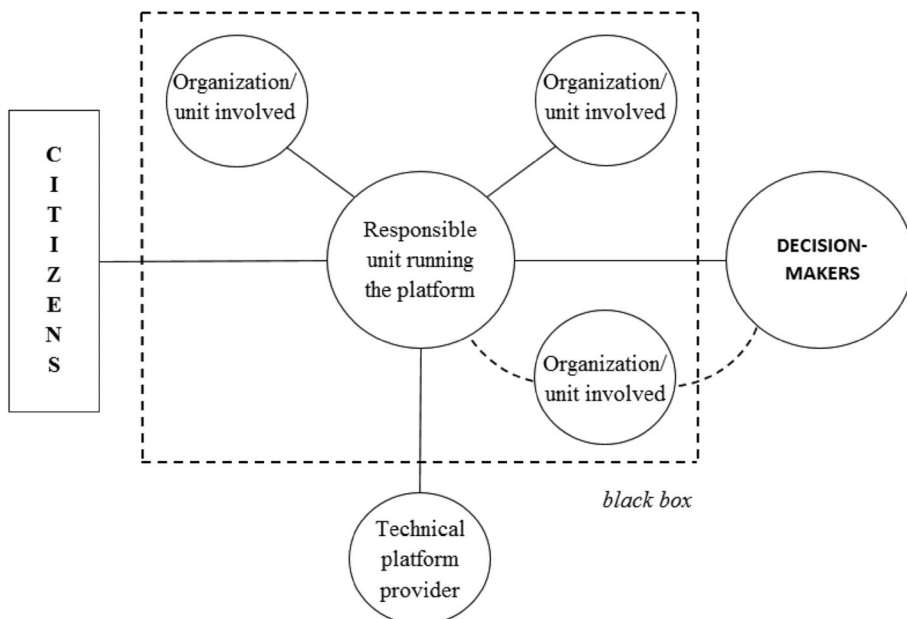


FIGURE 1 Actors involved in the supply of e-participation

decision-makers are the end-users of citizens input—they can be either politicians or responsible civil servants who use the input received through the e-participation platform in the policy design.

The greater the number of affiliated actors, the more crucial collaboration among them becomes. The involvement of different actors in the implementation of e-participation platforms is related to various institutional capacities, resources, and processes. This paper focuses on three organizational characteristics derived from the multiplicity of actors and their complex interrelations: cross-boundary collaboration, ownership, and accountability.

2.1 | Cross-boundary collaboration

Cross-organizational boundaries have numerous consequences: they create behavioral incentives, they establish rights and responsibilities, and they generate barriers to the flow of ideas and information (Boston & Gill, 2011). The multiactor setting in the provision of e-participation platforms raises challenges related to collaboration among the actors, including the use of different coordination mechanisms—hierarchy, market, and networks—which differ in their reliance on various types of incentives provided by means of voluntary agreements, common norms and culture, formal regulations, or coercion (Bouckaert et al., 2010). First, in *hierarchy-type* coordination, interaction is based on formal authority that derives from legislation, administrative orders, common standards, the rights of inspection, and intervention. Such an approach is characterized by the clear distribution of responsibilities but also by the potential mismatch between rigid organizational structures and complex environments, administrative overload, and other bottlenecks afflicting formal bureaucracies (Bouckaert et al., 2010). Second, the underlying logic of *market-type* coordination is based on exchange and competition, where guidance and control are provided by the “invisible hand” through supply and demand, price mechanisms, and the self-interest to earn a profit and avoid losses.

And third, the *network-approach* assumes that coordination is achieved through complex interaction processes among a number of interdependent actors (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Network-based coordination relies on cooperation and solidarity among actors whose relations are shaped and controlled by mutual interdependencies, trust, shared values, and reciprocity (Bouckaert et al., 2010). Networks possess good potential for the inclusion of diverse partners, for coping with dynamic and unstable environments and for inducing innovation (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). However, networks also exhibit disadvantages—slow and difficult decision-making processes, lack of clear responsibility and enforcement capacity (Verhoest & Bouckaert, 2005), limited scope of authority, and the existence of power asymmetries (McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). In practice, various combinations of these “ideal-type” coordination mechanisms are often used, which represent options that are complementary rather than alternative (Christensen & Lægread, 2008).

2.2 | Ownership

On the one hand, with the advent of digital transformation, the formal ownership issues gain importance due to data-sharing, information protection, and limitations surrounding sensitive data within differing eco-systems for setting standards for cross-organizational data exchange (Margets & Dunleavy, 2013). On the other hand, in the context of collaborative work, it is vital for all actors to share a sense of ownership for what is being done and to feel a duty or obligation to contribute (Boston & Gill, 2011). Whereas accountability is typically externally imposed (Boston & Gill, 2011), the (perception of) ownership is internally imposed since it involves a sense of obligation or duty. Actors possess different resources and commitment toward a collaborative arrangement (here, an e-participation initiative) and, consequently, certain actors may obtain a more asymmetrical power position than others (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Besides the available resources and the position from the formal mandate, the underlying organizational culture strongly affects any collaborative arrangement (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The levels of trust, conflict, and social capital can become resources or liabilities during collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2008), thereby also affecting the sense of ownership. Some actors may have low commitment due to coercive engagement and thus have interest in free-riding

(O'Leary & Vij, 2012). Consequently, different actors find themselves searching for a balance between divergent value considerations and similarity (Torfing, 2019). Clearly established organizational design is argued to facilitate trust-building among actors and improve transparency (O'Leary & Vij, 2012), thereby also contributing to shared ownership of the outcomes and process of e-participation.

2.3 | Accountability

Accountability concerns the management of diverse and partly conflicting expectations (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). Literature on accountability distinguishes between vertical and horizontal accountability. While vertical straight-line accountability is based on traditional principal-agent relationships, rule-following, and explicit hierarchical reporting lines, horizontal accountability refers to situations where the individuals or organizations involved are more or less equal in authority or standing (Boston & Gill, 2011). Accountability can be shared between organizations, across tiers of government (i.e., national and subnational), and between public and private entities (Boston & Gill, 2011). Accountability is affected by collaboration among multiple actors because partnerships and networks make accountability relations more ambiguous (Olsen, 2010). Network-based collaboration normally implies diffused or shared accountability relations among actors. This is especially the case when the tasks or outputs are difficult to separate and are highly interdependent (Boston & Gill, 2011). Diffused accountability relationships are argued to represent unstable, unsettled polities, and unexpected situations that go beyond the more stable routine situations and “business as usual” (Olsen, 2014). Development of e-participation platforms is often expected to break the routine and go beyond “business as usual.” Together with the involvement of cross-boundary collaboration, this may imply that traditional mandatory, hierarchically oriented accountability gets supplemented by more voluntary horizontal and pluralistic accountability relations in order to cover the cross-cutting issues and activities transcending organizational boundaries.

3 | METHOD

The empirical analysis draws on the case studies on the organization of e-participation initiatives in seven European countries—Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, and Spain. The main research questions are the following: How are different organizations and their units involved in the supply of e-participation initiatives? How does the multiplicity of actors affect the cross-boundary collaboration, ownership, and accountability relations in the implementation of e-participation initiatives?

By applying a holistic case study approach, this research follows the recommendation by Reddick and Norris (2013), who suggested that scholars who undertake further studies on e-participation should consider the use of qualitative methods, such as case studies and focus groups, to tease out some of the more subtle nuances of the real-life implementation of e-participation initiatives.

In the first stage of the research project, in-depth single-country case studies were conducted with the aim to provide thick empirical descriptions on how e-participation initiatives are organized (for single case studies, see Randma-Liiv & Lember, 2022). In the second stage, the main findings of the single-country case studies were synthesized and systematized with the aim of identifying organizational patterns and challenges across cases.

Local academics within the Horizon 2020 TROPICO project were involved in case selection, data collection, and analysis in each of the seven countries. The criteria for case selection outlined in a common Case Selection Strategy were the following:

1. Initiatives which connect stakeholders with the public sector via an open and transparent online platform.
2. Cases which were designed for long-term or permanent collaboration and which have been in operation for at least 1 year.

3. Cases which were (co)administered by a branch of the government.
4. Cases which included a deliberative element that fed into the policy-making process.

Table 1 summarizes the e-participation platforms selected for the study.

All partners prepared in-depth single-country case studies (Randma-Liiv & Lember, 2022) based on the common analytical model provided in a Case Study Protocol. The case studies relied on information collected through desk research and interviews in 2019. The desk research involved the exploration of the following sources: the website of the e-participation initiative and their publications; respective laws and secondary legislation; governmental policy documents; statistics available on e-participation in general; and the selected e-participation platform, in particular. Between 8 and 13 interviews were conducted for each case. The interviewees included the following groups: the initiators of the platform, people who are formally involved with the maintenance and/or moderation of the platform, a senior manager of the public-sector organization where the e-participation initiative is administered, representatives of important governmental and nongovernmental partners who are actively involved in running the platform, representatives of policy-makers who have used the e-participation platform as an input in the policy-making process and stakeholders who have been engaged in the selected platform. The anonymous semistructured interviews followed a detailed case study protocol and lasted for one to one and a half hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The single case studies formed a foundation for identifying and systematizing organizational characteristics following the common analytical model posed in the case study protocol. In analyzing the case studies, a double-step approach for content analysis was used. First, the single case studies were scrutinized and their descriptive content was classified into specific thematic codes such as ownership, organizational structure, participatory process, technical solution, internal partners, external partners, coordination mechanism, accountability relations, funding, and human resources. Second, the analytical/explanatory parts of the case studies were examined and ordered through the interpretative codes. Next, the information gathered through thematic and interpretative codes was integrated and compared.

While conducting the analysis, it was acknowledged that the effects of electronic tools were highly dependent on their context. Although the cases were carefully selected on the basis of a case selection strategy, the selected e-participation platforms were implemented in different national and institutional contexts, they were in different development stages, they represented different levels of government, and they were targeted to either legislative or executive branches of government. Although the length of the manuscript sets limits on the description of the broader contexts of cases (e.g., political, cultural-historical and socio-economic context, civil society development,

TABLE 1 Selected e-participation platforms

Country	Title of platform	Website	Active since	Administrative level	Branch of government
Estonia	Estonian Citizens' Initiative Portal	https://rahvaalgatus.ee/	2016	National	Legislative
France	Parlement et Citoyens	https://parlement-et-citoyens.fr/	2013	National	Legislative
Germany	meinBerlin	https://mein.berlin.de	2015	Local/District	Executive
The Netherlands	De Stem van West	https://stemvanwest.amsterdam.nl/	2014	Local	Executive
Norway	Minsak.no	https://www.minsak.no	2013	Regional/Local	Legislative
Scotland	We asked, you said, we did	https://consult.gov.scot/we_asked_you_said/	2014	National	Executive
Spain	Decide Madrid	https://decide.madrid.es/	2015	Local	Executive

level of digitalization), this information can be found in Randma-Liiv and Lember (2022). Despite the variety of cases, the inductive approach allows to detect certain organizational patterns and challenges across the cases.

4 | OVERVIEW OF E-PARTICIPATION CASES

Brief descriptions of the selected e-participation platforms with a particular focus on their organizational design are provided below.

4.1 | Estonian Citizens' Initiative Portal

The Estonian Citizens' Initiative Portal is an e-participatory instrument allowing individuals to propose new ideas for laws and policies to the parliament (Riigikogu). It was launched in 2016, largely in a “bottom-up” mode, as a collaborative effort by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, the CitizenOS Foundation, and the Chancellery of the Riigikogu. The official proprietor of the platform is the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, which is a quasigovernmental organization affiliated to the Office of the President of Estonia in charge of administering the portal. The owner of the technical solution and the back-end solutions of the portal is the CitizenOS Foundation, which developed the original software. The parliament—represented by the Chancellery of the Riigikogu—is the main recipient of the initiatives. After a citizens' proposal has passed the formal check by the Chancellery of the Riigikogu, the Speaker of the Riigikogu will decide which standing committee will be the “owner” of the proposal. Altogether, this makes five different actors (Chancellery of the Riigikogu, parliamentary committees, Office of the President, Cooperation Assembly, CitizenOS), which are engaged in complex coordination processes. The platform represents a mix of hierarchical and network-based coordination leaning toward network. On the one hand, the e-participation process is thoroughly regulated by law, including the mandatory consideration of the proposal by the parliament, but on the other hand, the platform is administered in a “bottom-up” mode by five different actors assuming their cooperation and shared values, which are complicated by power asymmetries and instable funding (Vooglaid & Randma-Liiv, 2022).

4.2 | Parlement et Citoyens, France

Parlement et Citoyens is an online platform that aims to provide deliberative tools for citizens and parliamentarians to work together on drafting laws at the national level. The platform was established in 2013 as a private initiative voluntarily managed by a small group of committed citizens, gathered together around the initiator of the idea, Cyril Lage. Due to the “bottom-up” setup, the platform has been managed in a very informal way. Parlement et Citoyens had no legal status until April 2017, when it was formalized as a nonprofit organization—Parlement et Citoyens NGO. Its board of directors is composed of representatives of MPs and senators, subnational governments, public administrations and consultative bodies, foundations and associations, trade unions and firms, ordinary citizens, founders, and experts. The NGO has no staff and the platform is managed by the Cap Collectif—a for-profit civic tech start-up founded also by Cyril Lage. Parlement et Citoyens is thus dependent on the work of the staff of Cap Collectif but also on the involvement of the parliamentary assistants of MPs and Senators conducting consultations. The lack of permanent staff within the Parlement et Citoyens NGO causes concern about the workload for parliamentary assistants and the staff members of Cap Collectif and provides a rather unstable environment for supplying the e-participation initiative. The organization of the platform is close to the “ideal model” of network as it is operated on the voluntary basis relying on cooperation, solidarity, and reciprocity of involved partners but at the same time it presents problems related to insufficient resources, limited scope of authority, and enforcement capacity of Parlement et Citoyens NGO (Defacqz & Dupuy, 2022).

4.3 | meinBerlin, Germany

Since 2015, the citizen participation processes of all administrative units of the state and district levels of Berlin can be carried out via meinBerlin. The technical implementation of the portal has been outsourced to association Liquid Democracy. Characteristic to a “top-down” approach, the formal proprietor of the portal is the Governing Mayor of Berlin and the State Chancellery. In the everyday running of meinBerlin, the project manager at Liquid Democracy is the closest partner for the State Chancellery. The state and district administrations may also contact the responsible employee at the State Chancellery for advice. The administration of the participatory process is handled in a decentralized manner, meaning that the creation, moderation, and evaluation of the participatory processes are carried out by administrators at district and state levels. In the majority of districts, the same employees who are responsible for the respective policy subject in general are also responsible for carrying out the participatory processes. Two exceptions are the “Mitte” district and the district of Lichtenberg, which have bundled all citizen participation processes in one office. In general, the adoption of online participation depends substantially on the individual engagement of officials in district and state administrations. The division of responsibilities among actors is well-specified, but collaboration practices are mostly informal: both the adoption of meinBerlin by single units and the consideration of citizens' input is voluntary thus indicating a mix of hierarchical and network-based coordination (Pruin, 2022).

4.4 | De Stem van West, the Netherlands

Digital platform De Stem van West presents an example of “crowd-sourcing policy design” by having facilitated the policy-making process of the neighborhood council of Amsterdam-West since 2014. It uses open-source platform MyVoice, developed within the framework of the European D-CENT project. Although established by the neighborhood council, the ownership of De Stem van West is best placed in the civil society sphere, as only the citizens of Amsterdam-West determine what is being discussed on the digital platform, comment, and vote on proposals. Neighborhood council members or civil servants who work for the neighborhood administration are not allowed to contribute in any substantive way to the online discussions. The portal is administered by the Digital Unit of the Amsterdam-West administration. In addition, seven neighborhood council members act as moderators on the platform to ensure that constructive discussions emerge. Special collaboration teams, including citizens, politicians, and civil servants, are established to monitor the implementation and execution of each citizens' proposal. The organization of the platform is consciously developed as a network with emphasis on trust, shared values, and mutual interdependencies of actors (Stevens, 2019).

4.5 | Minsak.no, Norway

Minsak.no, founded in January 2013, is a centrally launched online participation tool targeted toward Norwegian regional and local governments. The proprietor of the platform is the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernization. The technical implementation of the platform is carried out by Last Friday, a for-profit web-developer. Minsak.no can be used in any municipality and any region in Norway. The explicit legal framework and the pre-existence of an almost identical analog process has facilitated both the design of the platform and its implementation across Norway. While the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization is responsible for the website, the municipal or regional administrators act as “service providers” processing the petitions into decision papers and forwarding them to the political decision-makers. The organization of the platform represents a combination of hierarchical and network-based coordination leaning toward hierarchy. The high degree of formalization of the participatory process, the presence of a legal framework, and the mandatory consideration of citizens' input

reaching a certain threshold of signatures refer to hierarchy. At the same time, collaboration across administrative levels assumes the presence of network features: shared values, reciprocity, and the willingness of various actors to exchange their resources in joint processes (Pruin, 2019).

4.6 | We asked, you said, we did, Scotland

In Scotland, interaction between citizens and policy-makers has been organized on the platform We asked, you said, we did since 2014. The Scottish Government's Digital Engagement team and the Engage team jointly proposed the adoption of a platform Citizen Space developed by for-profit organization Delib. Delib is the owner of the technical solution and is involved in its maintenance, implementation, and customization in collaboration with the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government's Digital Engagement team is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the platform and the technical and noncontent-related issues. It also works in collaboration with officials in other government departments to ensure accessibility requirements and data protection. The Engage team supports the functioning of the platform on wider engagement and open government issues. The government's Online Communication team is involved in advertising and promoting the consultation to external stakeholders. The Scottish platform represents a mix of hierarchy and network. The use of the centrally provided platform is institutionalized and mandatory, but the overall quality of the e-participation process depends on each policy team spanning the whole remit of the Scottish Government, thus relying on cooperation, shared goals, and values across policy teams (Bellò & Downe, 2022).

4.7 | Decide Madrid, Spain

In 2015, the Madrid City Council created digital platform Decide Madrid that aims to encourage the participation of citizens in the management of the city. The formal proprietor of the platform is the City Council of Madrid. The implementation and coverage of operational costs of Decide Madrid are the responsibility of the City Council. The software Consul is an open-source software developed by the city council. The General Directorate of Citizen Participation of the City Council is in charge of the day-to-day management of Decide Madrid. This directorate belongs to the Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Open Government Area, which reports directly to the Mayor's Office. All government areas and administrative units of the City Council contribute to Decide Madrid by proposing topics and evaluating proposals. Some innovation projects in citizen participation related to Decide Madrid have been developed by Medialab Prado, a citizens' laboratory and a meeting place for the production of open cultural projects, which belongs to a company owned by the City Council. The City Council also contracts external companies (e.g., Agora Voting S.L) to comply with the data protection law (e.g., encryption of votes to ensure anonymity). The organizational design follows regular hierarchical processes within the organization, while the guidelines and procedures that support the working of the platform have been approved by regulations of the City Council. Horizontally, cooperation with other units of the City Council is based on shared goals and values as well as commitment to citizen participation across the administrative units (Pina et al., 2022).

5 | COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

All seven e-participation cases in this study are characterized by a number of actors that have been engaged in the inception and operation of the platforms. Various internal and external actors, such as the government units or (not-) for-profit organizations that developed the platforms or are running them, tend to serve as drivers of particular e-participation initiatives. At other times, however, the involvement of different organizations in the operation of the

platforms creates organizational challenges. For further analysis, a distinction is made between responsible units running the platforms, technical providers, organizations/units involved in providing the e-participation initiative, and decision-makers who are ultimately supposed to make use of the input received through the e-participation platform in the policy design.

The determination of the units responsible for running e-participation platforms is closely related to the inception of platforms and especially to whether the platforms were established in the top-down or bottom-up mode. In the bottom-up cases—Estonian and French—the main responsibility for the functioning of e-participation initiatives lies with nongovernmental founders. In the top-down or mixed cases, the responsibility for the administration of the platform has been given to a government organization or unit. The responsible unit forms the core of the network of other organizations and units involved in providing the platform.

The e-participation initiatives studied in this paper have diverse backgrounds when it comes to origin and the development of the technical solutions. Five of the platforms—Estonian, French, German, Norwegian, and Scottish—were developed by private (not-)for-profit social ventures. While in the German and Norwegian cases, the governments outsourced the preparation of the technical platform to private partners, in the Estonian and French cases, the technical developers themselves were among the “bottom-up” initiators of the e-participation initiatives. In the Scottish case, the technical solution was already available in the market. In the Dutch case, the open-source platform was used—it was commissioned by the European Commission as part of the D-CENT project. In the Spanish case, the platform was purpose-built by the City Council of Madrid. The role of technical developers is also related to ownership-issues regarding e-participation platforms. For example, in the French case, the formal proprietor of the portal corresponds to the technical developer. This reduces the number of actors involved in running the portal and is likely to ease ownership and coordination issues as well as curb transaction costs between units responsible for administration and technical developers.

When looking at the entire “supply chain” in the e-participatory process, the relationships among the formal responsible unit/administrator of the portal and the technical developer are at one end of the continuum, while the relations between the responsible unit and the decision-makers are at the other end of the continuum (see Figure 1). The decision-makers are either politicians or responsible civil servants who use the input received through the e-participation platform. In several cases, decision-makers are different from the organizations or units that are responsible for the administration of e-participation platforms. Only in the Dutch and Spanish cases are the decision-makers the same or closely linked to the responsible units. This contributes to the explicit ownership of the platform. Moreover, it is likely to increase the opportunities for systematically considering the input from e-participation platforms in actual policy design, as the formal owners/responsible organizations are using the input from the portals themselves. In other cases—Estonia, France, Germany, Norway—the decision-makers are rather distant from the core administrative units, which implies that in order to fully benefit from e-participation platforms, the core responsible units and decision-makers are expected to be engaged in well-thought-through collaboration. Moreover, the empirical research collected within this study shows that the actual use of citizens' input in the latter cases is often dependent on how enthusiastic *individual* units or even persons—MPs or civil servants—are about the actual use of e-participation platforms due to the lack of institutional ownership on their side.

Considering the wealth of actors involved in the supply of e-participation initiatives, effective collaboration and coordination prove crucial for ensuring the actual performance of the platforms. Of the three recognized coordination mechanisms—hierarchy, market, and network—market mechanisms have found very little use in the organization of e-participation; their presence is limited to the development of technical solutions in the German, Norwegian, and Scottish cases. At the same time, networks prove to be a widely used option in coordinating the activities and tasks of various actors in the e-participation process. In the cases of Estonia, France, and the Netherlands, networks are clearly dominating any other coordination mechanism, whereas networks are combined with hierarchy in other cases. Table 2 summarizes the organizational design of the seven e-participation cases.

TABLE 2 Organizational setup of e-participation platforms

E-participation initiative	Top-down vs. bottom-up inception	Platform/platform provider	Unit responsible for running the platform	Organizations/units involved in providing the e-participation initiative	Decision-makers	Coordination mechanism
Estonian Citizens' Initiative Portal	Bottom-up	CitizenOS/CitizenOS, philanthropic foundation	Estonian Cooperation Assembly, quasi-governmental organization	Chancellery of the Riigikogu, President's Office	Parliamentary committees	Hierarchy/network
Parlement et Citoyens	Bottom-up	Cap Collectif Consultation Application/Cap Collectif, for-profit social venture	Parlement et Citoyens NGO	Cap Collectif, parliamentary assistants	Individual MPs from the Senate and National Assembly	Network
meinBerlin	Top-down	Adhocracy/LiquidDemocracy, nonprofit organization	State Chancellery	–	State and district administrations	Hierarchy/network
De Stem van West	Mixed	MyVoice/D-CENT, network of organizations	Digital Unit of the neighbourhood administration	Collaboration teams	Neighbourhood council	Network
minsak.no	Top-down	Last Friday/for-profit web-developer	The Ministry of Local Government and Modernization	–	Regional and local governments	Hierarchy/network
We asked, you said, we did	Top-down	Citizen Space/Delib, for-profit social venture	Digital Engagement team	Engage team	Policy teams/Ministers	Hierarchy/network
Decide Madrid	Top-down	Consul/Madrid City Council	General Directorate of Citizen Participation	General Directorate of Citizen Participation and administrative units of the city council	Madrid City Council	Hierarchy/network

6 | DISCUSSION

The analyzed case studies indicate that the multiplicity of actors and their complex interrelations in the supply of e-participation platforms leads to three interlinked organizational challenges: cross-boundary collaboration, ownership, and accountability.

6.1 | Cross-boundary collaboration

The case studies demonstrate that the administration of e-participation platforms often requires a collaborative effort from a multitude of organizations and/or organizational units, which are more or less loosely connected and which involve different regulatory contexts, interests, expectations, incentives, and cultures. Such complexity involving different institutional contexts is not present in the Dutch and Spanish platforms which are tailor-made for a single organization and operated by various units within one organization. However, other cases—Estonian, French, German, and Norwegian—indicate that cross-organizational collaboration may lead to problems when actors have different expectations of their reciprocal roles, responsibilities, and tasks.

The analysis of e-participation platforms confirms previous findings that networks possess good potential for the inclusion of diverse partners, for learning to cope with dynamic environments and for inducing innovation (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). However, some e-participation initiatives where a network is a dominant coordination mechanism also provide evidence for the lack of clear responsibility and enforcement capacity as well as the limited scope of authority and the existence of power asymmetries. Whereas such collaboration challenges have been reported in cross-organizational collaboration (e.g., in the Estonian and French cases), these have not been present in the Dutch case, where the network-based cross-unit collaboration takes place within one organization. The selected cases show that networks are most often combined with hierarchy in the administration of e-participation platforms, as indicated in the German, Norwegian, Scottish, and Spanish cases. The use of such combinations reflects the need to counterbalance the shortcomings of one mechanism with the strengths of another. In both the strategic and operational management of e-participation platforms, the presence of some hierarchical elements in network administration proves inevitable. A certain degree of formalization can also prove helpful in managing networks, as indicated by the Estonian case, where formal procedural regulation reduces complexity and makes the behavior of actors more predictable.

Units responsible for running e-participation platforms prove crucial for ensuring both the strategic and operational management of network-based e-participation platforms. The selected e-participation cases, however, demonstrate varied institutional support in providing the responsible units with centrality, legitimacy, access to resources, and organizational back-up. In the case of clear ownership patterns (e.g., the Dutch, Scottish and Spanish cases), this is not an issue, whereas in several other cases, support for the core unit is insufficient, severely challenging the collaborative capacity and the overall potential of the platform.

6.2 | Ownership

The analysis of case studies indicates that the ownership related to the development and running of the e-participation initiative is a crucial factor for explaining the functioning of the platform. It is possible to distinguish three types of ownership pattern. In the first mode, the e-participation platform is developed and implemented under the leadership of one particular organization, most often a local government (e.g., the Dutch and Spanish cases). In such cases, contributing units for running the platform are located within the same organization. Even more importantly, the end beneficiaries of the citizens' input—decision-makers—are also located within the same organization. This creates a rather straightforward setup where the ownership of the platform is clear to all stakeholders and the

key units contributing to the implementation of the platform are all placed under the same organizational umbrella. Such ownership pattern is likely to increase the opportunities for systematically considering the input from e-participation platforms in actual policy design, since the proprietor of the e-participation initiative is itself using the input from the platform and is thus interested in the seamless functioning of the entire e-participation initiative.

The second and third modes, however, demonstrate more ambiguous ownership patterns. In the second mode, the technical provider of the platform partially holds ownership of the platform. This is more likely the case with platforms that have been developed bottom-up (such as the Estonian and French cases) rather than top-down. It may ease situations where technical problems need to be addressed; however, in the long run, the complex ownership issues between the technical provider and the core administrator of the platform are likely to cause problems with coordination, division of labor, accountability, and further investments into the platform.

The third ownership pattern refers to situations where there is considerable “distance” between decision-makers and the core administrator of the platform. Distance may become problematic if, for example, the core administrator is a non- or quasigovernmental organization and the end beneficiaries of the platform are local politicians or MPs (e.g., the Estonian and French cases). Similarly, this distance becomes critical if the main responsibility for running the platform is placed with a central unit (e.g., a ministry or a state chancellery), whereas decision-makers who are expected to use the platform in policy design are located in very different units, for example, in local governments, regions, or districts. This creates a complex situation where potential coordination problems are coupled with the broader challenges of multilevel governance. The German and Norwegian case studies demonstrate that in such occasions, public awareness of the e-participation platform may suffer and the actual use of citizens' input may become dependent on the motivation of individual units or persons due to the lack of institutional ownership by their organizations. Thus, the root cause of the uneven adoption of e-participation in such cases may rest with the ambiguous ownership of the platform, especially if this is combined with a low degree of formalization of participatory processes. A high degree of formalization of participatory processes (e.g., by making the consideration of input from e-participation platforms mandatory for decision-makers, as in the Estonian case) may somewhat alleviate this problem.

Ownership issues are also linked to the presence of formal authority, legitimacy, and the resources of the core unit running the e-participation platform. Platforms that were established bottom-up tend to delegate the responsibility for the administration of the e-participation initiative to non- or quasigovernmental actors (e.g., the Estonian and French cases). On the one hand, this may be beneficial in promoting the platform using approaches that are appropriate for NGOs and help remove concerns about the possible manipulation of the participatory process by the government or the ruling party. This may increase the legitimacy of the platform but, on the other hand, the case studies show that in such instances, the core administrator may lack formal authority vis-à-vis governmental decision-makers and may become low on resources for running the platform. Problems related to legitimacy, authority, and resources were also reported in the German and Norwegian cases, where core units were based on a different governmental level than that of decision-makers.

6.3 | Accountability

The implementation of e-participation initiatives affects existing accountability relations as far as both political and administrative accountability are concerned. First, the problem with the hierarchical approach to political accountability is that it assumes a clear division between politics and administration. In practice, however, much of the work of the public administration is political, which blurs the politics-administration divide. The use of e-participation platforms tends to blur it even further. For example, the creation of e-participation initiatives where citizens feed directly into the decision-making processes in the legislative branch of government pose challenges for the executive branch concerning insight and information (exemplified by the Estonian and French cases on the national level and the Norwegian case on the local level). Citizens' input in policy-making processes can be unpredictable and, in situations

where clear (formalized) participatory processes are missing, this may lead to the practice of hands-on management with respect to politically salient issues. In addition, the German and Norwegian cases show that collaboration within a multilevel governance setting in administering e-participation platforms makes accountability relations more ambiguous through the involvement of the political accountability principle of local self-government via the partnership arrangements with central/regional government.

Second, administrative accountability is affected by the wide use of networks as a dominant coordination mechanism. Accountability processes affect the actual exercise and control of authority, power, and responsibility; and the question of who shall have the right and capacity to call to account, to question and debate the information given, and to face judgment and consequences becomes important. In the cases of intraorganizational collaboration (e.g., Dutch, Spanish), the accountability relations are predominantly vertical, following the traditional organizational hierarchy. However, in the cases of cross-organizational collaboration (e.g., Estonian, French, German, Norwegian, and Scottish), horizontal accountability gains more prominence. In several cases, it is not necessarily clear to whom the responsible organization/unit running e-participation is accountable, which is especially relevant to bottom-up e-participation initiatives (such as the Estonian and French ones). The same is true for the cases of multilevel governance—demonstrated by the diffused accountability in the implementation of the German and Norwegian e-participation platforms. Problems arise if there are different principals to whom the various agents are accountable and if these principals have differing expectations for performance, contrasting goals, or different information and reporting requirements. Unless systematic attention is paid to complex accountability issues in the implementation of e-participation platforms, there is a risk that “shared accountability becomes, in practice, joint irresponsibility, where no one is accountable” (Jones & Stewart, 2009, p. 63). There is a need to go beyond the hierarchical principal-agent approach to accountability and to establish grounds for more complex, dynamic, and pluralistic accountability relations. Instead of choosing between accountability mechanisms, it makes sense to treat them as complementary, leading to a multiple accountability regime.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

Citizen involvement is embedded in existing institutional context and constrained by the challenges that multiple actors face in the supply of e-participation initiatives. The organizational setup plays a crucial role in the collaborative efforts ensuring the functioning, continuous improvement, and eventual sustainability of e-participation platforms. If the participatory process is not carefully designed and implemented, it may delay decisions, increase conflict, disappoint participants, and lead to more distrust (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Consequently, despite the positive connotation of the term “digital democracy” and the high expectations policy-makers have with regard to the potential of e-participation, it takes a lot of effort and adaptability to incorporate digital democracy processes into appropriate organizational settings.

This article indicates that smooth collaboration among actors supplying e-participation platforms cannot be taken for granted. On the one hand, the cases which are designed for one specific organization and in which collaboration takes place among the units within the organization are easier to operate because their management practices tend to follow ingrained organizational logic and accountability relations. On the other hand, cross-organizational practices raise a number of issues including ambiguous ownership and diffused accountability. These problems are particularly visible in the cases of multilevel governance and the “bottom-up” development of e-participation initiatives. In addition, the distance between the unit responsible for the administration of the e-participation initiative and the decision-makers appears to be a critical factor for the functioning of the platforms. The more complex and longer the distance is, the more it can become a barrier in the implementation of the participatory process.

The selected case studies indicate that organization-related issues—ownership and accountability, in particular—have often been insufficiently addressed during the launch and development of e-participation initiatives. However,

these factors, unlike several other aspects of e-participation (such as development of civil society, trust in digital solutions, development of technology), are the ones over which the government has direct influence and which can therefore be changed most easily.

As the case studies show, there are a variety of organizational approaches in the administration of e-participation, showing no isomorphism or convergence toward optimal institutional design. Therefore, it is expected that the development of e-participation initiatives is a living process grounded on continuous innovation, learning, and adaptation based on performance information. However, the case studies show that only a minority of e-participation initiatives collected performance information on a regular basis. In fact, in most cases, there were no specific performance indicators in place (which can also be related to ambiguous ownership and accountability relations). This is also the main shortcoming of this study; it does not allow links to be drawn between the institutional design and the performance of e-participation initiatives. Further research should indicate how different organizational patterns affect the quantity and quality of participation. Similarly, it would be interesting to find empirical evidence for whether barriers in the institutional framework affect demand for e-participation initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement no. 726840.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in TROPICO website at <https://tropico-project.eu/publications/>.

ORCID

Tiina Randma-Liiv  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1146-3425>

REFERENCES

- Ansell, C. & Gash, A. (2008) Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571.
- Åström, J., Karlsson, M., Linde, J. & Pirannejad, A. (2012) Understanding the rise of e-participation in non-democracies: domestic and international factors. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(2), 142–150.
- Bellò, B. & Downe, J. (2022) We asked, you said, we did: assessing the drivers and effectiveness of an e-participation practice in Scotland. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Forthcoming.
- Boston, J. & Gill, D. (2011) Working across organizational boundaries: the challenge of accountability. In: Ryan, B. & Gill, D. (Eds.) *Future state: directions for public management in New Zealand*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Bouckaert, G., Peters, G.B. & Verhoest, K. (2010) *The coordination of public sector organisations. shifting patterns of public management*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chadwick, A. (2011) Explaining the failure of an online citizen engagement initiative: the role of internal institutional variables. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 8(1), 21–40.
- Christensen, T. & Lægreid, P. (2008) The challenge of coordination in central government organizations: the Norwegian case. *Public Organization Review*, 8(2), 97–116.
- Cole, A. & John, P. (1998) Sociometric mapping techniques and the comparison of policy networks: economic decision making in Leeds and Lille. In: Marsh, D. (Ed.) *Comparing policy networks*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Defacqz, S. & Dupuy, C. (2022) An e-participation platform connecting legislators and citizens for collaborative policy design: *Parlement and Citoyens* in France. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Forthcoming.
- Epstein, D., Newhart, M. & Vernon, R. (2014) Not by technology alone: the “analog” aspects of online public engagement in policymaking. *Government Information Quarterly*, 31(2), 337–344.

- Hartley, J., Sørensen, E. & Torfing, J. (2013) Collaborative innovation: a viable alternative to market-competition and organizational entrepreneurship? *Public Administration Review*, 73(6), 821–830.
- Jones, G. & Stewart, J. (2009) New development: accountability in public partnerships—the case of local strategic partnerships. *Public Money & Management*, 29(1), 59–64.
- Karlsson, M. (2012) Democratic legitimacy and recruitment strategies in eParticipation projects. In: Charalabidis, Y. & Koussouris, S. (Eds.) *Empowering open and collaborative governance: technologies and methods for online citizen engagement in public policy making*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Kattel, R., Lember, V. & Tönurist, P. (2020) Collaborative innovation and human-machine networks. *Public Management Review*, 22(11), 1652–1673. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1645873>
- Klijn, E.H. & Koppenjan, J.F.M. (2000) Public management and policy networks. *Public Management: An International Journal of Research and Theory*, 2(2), 135–158.
- Koppenjan, J. & Klijn, E.H. (2004) *Managing uncertainties in networks. A network approach to problem solving and decision making*. London: Routledge.
- Krishnan, S., Teo, T.S. & Lim, V.K. (2012) Contextual factors, e-participation, and e-government development: testing a multiple-mediation model. In: Pan, S.L. & Cao, T.H. (Eds.) *PACIS 2012 proceedings*. AIS eLibrary.
- Lidén, G. (2013) Qualities of E-democracy: examples from Sweden. In: Geißel, B. & Joas, M. (Eds.) *Participatory democratic innovations in Europe*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Lutz, C. & Hoffmann, C.P. (2017) The dark side of online participation: exploring non-, passive and negative participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(6), 876–897.
- Macintosh, A. (2004) Characterizing e-participation in policy-making. In: *Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii international conference on system sciences*. IEEE.
- Margetts, H. & Dunleavy, P. (2013) The second wave of digital-era governance: a quasiparadigm for government on the web. *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 371(1987), 1–17.
- McGuire, M. & Agranoff, R. (2011) The limitations of public management networks. *Public Administration*, 89(2), 265–284.
- Medaglia, R. (2007a) The challenged identity of a field: the state of the art of eParticipation research. *Information Polity*, 12(3), 169–181.
- Medaglia, R. (2007b) Measuring the diffusion of eParticipation: a survey on Italian local government. *Information Polity*, 12(4), 265–280.
- Medaglia, R. (2012) eParticipation research: moving characterization forward (2006–2011). *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(3), 346–360.
- Norris, D.F. (2010) E-government ... not e-governance ... not e-democracy: not now! Not ever? In: Davies, J. & Janowski, T. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 4th international conference on theory and practice of electronic governance (ICEGOV'10)*. ACM: New York, NY.
- O'Leary, R. & Vij, N. (2012) Collaborative public management: where have we been and where are we going? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 42(5), 507–522.
- Olsen, J.P. (2010) *Governing through institution building: institutional theory and recent European experiments in democratic organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, J.P. (2014) Accountability and ambiguity. In: Bovens, M., Goodin, R.E. & Schillemans, T. (Eds.) *The Oxford handbook of public accountability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Panopoulou, E., Tambouris, E. & Tarabanis, K. (2014) Success factors in designing eParticipation initiatives. *Information and Organization*, 24, 195–213.
- Pina, V., Torres, L., Royo, S. & García-Rayado, J. (2022) *Decide Madrid: a Spanish best practice on e-participation*. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Forthcoming.
- Pirannejad, A., Janssen, M. & Rezaei, J. (2019) Towards a balanced e-participation index: integrating government and society perspectives. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(4), 1–16.
- Porwol, L., Ojo, A. & Breslin, J. (2013) On the duality of e-participation—towards a foundation for citizen-led participation. In: Kö, A., Leitner, C., Leitold, H. & Prosser, A. (Eds.) *Technology-enabled innovation for democracy, government and governance. Second joint international conference on electronic government and the information systems perspective, and electronic democracy, EGOVIS/EDEM 2013, Prague, Czech Republic, August 2013, Proceedings*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Prosser, A. (2012) eParticipation—did we deliver what we promised? In: Kö, A., Leitner, C., Leitold, H. & Prosser, A. (Eds.) *Advancing democracy, government and governance. Proceedings of the joint international conference on electronic government and the information systems perspective, and electronic democracy, EGOVIS/EDEM, Vienna, Austria, September 2012*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Provan, K.G. & Kenis, P. (2008) Modes of network governance: structure, management, and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(29), 229–252.

- Pruin, A. (2022) How organisational factors shape e-participation: lessons from the German “one-stop participation portal” *meinBerlin*. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. Forthcoming.
- Pruin, A. (2019) Norway: e-participation platform “Minsak.No”. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Comparative case studies in e-participation, TROPICO Deliverable 5.1*, pp. 85–99. <https://tropico-project.eu/download/d5-1-comparative-case-studies/?wpdmdl=1155&refresh=6076c0d8a34921618395352>
- Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.). (2022) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Reddick, C. & Norris, D.F. (2013) E-participation in local governments: an examination of political-managerial support and impacts. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 7(4), 453–476.
- Romzek, B. & Dubnick, M.J. (1987) Accountability in the public sector: lessons from the challenger tragedy. *Public Administration Review*, 47(3), 227–238.
- Royo, S., Yetano, A. & Acerete, B. (2013) E-participation and environmental protection: are local governments really committed? *Public Administration Review*, 74(1), 87–98.
- Sæbø, Ø., Flak, L.S. & Sein, M.K. (2011) Understanding the dynamics in e-participation initiatives: looking through the genre and stakeholder lenses. *Government Information Quarterly*, 28, 416–425.
- Scherer, S. & Wimmer, M.A. (2014) Conceptualising trust in e-participation contexts. In: Tambouris, E., Macintosh, A. & Bannister, F. (Eds.) *Electronic participation. 6th IFIP WG 8.5 international conference, ePart 2014, Dublin, Ireland, September 2–3, 2014. Proceedings*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Sørensen, E. & Torfing, J. (2016) Collaborative innovation in the public sector. In: Torfing, J. & Triantafyllou, P. (Eds.) *Enhancing public innovation by transforming public governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steinbach, M., Sieweke, J. & Süß, S. (2019) The diffusion of e-participation in public administrations: a systematic literature review. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 29(2), 61–95.
- Stevens, V. (2019). Managing uncertainties in digital democracy experiments: a case study on the management of the *Stem van West* experiment in Amsterdam-West. A paper presented at the EGPA Conference, Belfast, 11–13 September.
- Toots, M. (2019) Why E-participation systems fail: the case of Estonia's Osale.ee. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(3), 546–559.
- Torfing, J. (2019) Collaborative innovation in the public sector: the argument. *Public Management Review*, 21(1), 1–11.
- Van Deursen, A.J. & Helsper, E.J. (2015) The third-level digital divide: who benefits most from being online? In: Robinson, L., Cotton, S.R. & Schulz, J. (Eds.) *Communication and information technologies annual*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Verhoest, K. & Bouckaert, G. (2005) Machinery of government and policy capacity: the effects of specialization and coordination. In: Painter, M. & Pierre, J. (Eds.) *Challenges to state policy capacity: global trends and comparative perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vooglaide, K.M. & Randma-Liiv, T. (2022) The Estonian citizens' initiative portal—drivers and barriers of institutionalized e-participation. In: Randma-Liiv, T. & Lember, V. (Eds.) *Engaging citizens in policy-making: e-participation practices in Europe*. Bingley: Edward Elgar. Forthcoming.
- Williams, C.B., Gulati, G.J.J. & Yates, D.J. (2013) Predictors of on-line services and e-participation: a cross-national comparison. In: Luna-Reyes, L.F. & Zhang, J. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 14th annual international conference on digital government research*. ACM: New York, NY.
- Yang, K. & Pandey, S.K. (2011) Further dissecting the black box of citizen participation: when does citizen involvement lead to good outcomes? *Public Administration Review*, 71(6), 880–892.
- Zheng, Y., Schachter, H.L. & Holzer, M. (2014) The impact of government form on e-participation: a study of New Jersey municipalities. *Government Information Quarterly*, 31(4), 653–659.

How to cite this article: Randma-Liiv, T. (2022). Organizing e-participation: Challenges stemming from the multiplicity of actors. *Public Administration*, 100(4), 1037–1053. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12788>