

My e-Participation Story



A compendium of citizens' stories about making a difference through ICT

Stories

- 01 The Albanian November students.
Jora Risto
- 02 Improving city traffic through Facebook.
Aet Kiisla
- 03 Senior citizens went online for their rights.
Eva-Maria Kaes
- 04 Taranto is waiting for replies.
Maristella Berlato
- 05 e-Participation day in Ventspils Library.
Arnita Vaitkus
- 06 Through the computer screen.
Regina Dovidavičiūtė
- 07 Wake up! React!
Karolina Florek and Klaudia Bagmat
- 08 Association for Urban Development.
Dan Patzelt
- 09 Catastrophic floods in Ljig.
Vukosav Sredojevic
- 10 Social and civic engagement through mobile apps.
Antoni Gutierrez-Rubi
- 11 Connecting makes a difference.
Mila Grozdanovska



The online competition ‘My e-Participation Story’ was open from June till mid September in 2015. Telecentre Europe has collected the most compelling personal stories about using the EU and national e-Participation tools to influence policy-making and lives of others around.

The competition was organised in the framework of an EU-funded project ‘Enabling European e-Participation’ that was led by Telecentre Europe together with its 12 partners.

This compendium features 11 winners of the competition (10 national and one European) and presents their views on e-Participation. We would like to thank the authors for sharing their stories to encourage more people to become active e-citizens.

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<http://euparticipation.org>

Story author: Jora Risto

e-Participation tool: [Avaaz Community Petition](#)
Video: <http://bit.ly/1QeNHuC>

Albania 01

The Albanian November students



It all began on 9 September 2013 when the Secretary of State John Kerry declared that Syria should hand over all its arsenal of chemical weapons.

This was followed by the achievement of several agreements on 13 September 2013, where one of them and the most important was the Resolution of the UN Security 2118. This is set by the UN and EU as historic resolution which should be served as a standard for the international community, in context of the threats. Tirana officially stated to contribute to peace and national security and the Albanian government considered to take part in the Syrian weapons to be disposed in our country.

Once this news was made public in Albanian media, I remember that there were many reactions. Environmentalists and toxicologists expressed that we didn't fill the capacity and lacked technicians, students organized massive protests. The thing that led us to gather was social media. Everyone expressed their opinion on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. It was calling the rest of the people to stop the implementation of this decision.

What made it official was drafting an online petition where everybody who disagreed had the right to sign on their behalf. AKIP

petition (No to Assat Chemical Weapons in Albania) was created by Gjergj E., directed to the Albanian government. The reason was clear: "Albania does not have the capabilities to store necessary hazardous waste and it lacks necessary stability to guarantee the security of such waste". The Prime Minister Edi Rama shared on his Facebook to announce the final decision in his speech on 15 November. My friends and I, all of who have abandoned school for many days, gathered in front of the prime ministry building that day to hear the final decision. The government decided not to dispose hazardous waste in the country.



This was my first experience of this kind, which resulted positively thanks to our online accounts that enabled us to participate in the decision-making on such an important issue.

Story author: Aet Kiisla

e-Participation tool: Facebook
<http://on.fb.me/1R12ntM>

Estonia 02

Improving city traffic through Facebook



Aet Kiisla wanted to help to make the traffic management in the city of Narva more intuitive and logical. She has created a Facebook group “Traffic in Narva logical!” (“Liiklus Narvas loogiliseks!”) that today counts over 800 members.

“Our undertaking has thoroughly positive and constructive nature. We do not protest or fight, we make friendly suggestions for making situations better. We bring out and map the places where it’s possible to improve the traffic situation with little resources and make it more logical, convenient and intuitive. We do not think that the places we refer to are improperly arranged but in our opinion they can be improved. We try to focus on proposals that are financially undemanding.”

Aet thinks that a strong civil society is important and it can be strong only through cooperation with partners. Civil society does not mean only demanding: it consists of people’s own contributions as well. The local governments are doing their job, but citizens determine what kind of country they want. It all may sound idealistic, but Aet thinks that idealism and realism are not opposites of each other: idealism is something that leads us to better society.

Aet created the group on social media which sees many active people. Although the group members don’t meet physically

but their relationship with the Commission of the Narva City Municipality is based on mutually friendly and respectful communication.

People may say that traffic management has minor importance and little influence on



Photo: FB group “Liiklus Narvas loogiliseks!”

making overall life better. Aet thinks that dealing with small things is also substantial as small things together may eventually have an important impact, and this is why there should be more citizen initiatives. Today the Narva City Government discusses the traffic solutions with the group members and implements those that are achievable. The citizen initiative “Traffic in Narva logical!” is important not only for the city traffic but likely even more for Narva’s civil society.



Photo: Kristina Reinsalu private collection. Kristina Reinsalu Head of e-Democracy Domain in e-Governance Academy Foundation, Marju Lauristin MEP, and Aet Kiisla Estonian winner of the competition.

Story author: Eva-Maria Kaes

e-Participation tool: Change.org
<http://chn.ge/1QclXn5>



Europe
Comm



Germany 03

Senior citizens went online for their rights

This story is a perfect example of lifelong learning. The house at Hansa-Ufer 5 has been a municipal retirement home since 1975. It was built for pensioners with a certificate of eligibility for public housing. Each tenant was promised that they could “Age in peace!”

But in 2007 the house was sold to a private investor by Berlin’s senate without any protection for the tenants. After rent control dropped in 2014 the investor sent a plan for modernisation. They also announced a rent increase of up to 80% - unaffordable to most pensioners who faced the loss of their homes despite having been assured in writing that their homes were safe, even if the house would be sold privately!

Younger tenants, who had moved in after the sale, terminated their lease within a couple of weeks: no one wanted to live on a building site for two years and have to pay more rent afterwards. Around 30 pensioners aged between 73 and 98 did not want to move out as the community was very important to them: game nights, excursions, the house choir, birthday celebrations together...

At first they tried talking to the investor, but without success. The city expressed their regret at the sale of the house without

protecting the rights of the elderly, but also said that these now have to “live with it”.

The seniors did not see it that way and wanted to make the situation public. In June 2014 they designed their own webpage and opened an online petition on change.org. They were totally overwhelmed by huge public attention, not only in Berlin and nationwide, but also internationally! “Buy back the house” was their demand to the Berlin senate.

Today the petition has more than 104,000 signatures and the seniors have many new supporters around the world via mail, Facebook and Twitter. There are, for example, students from Barcelona who interviewed the ‘Trümmerfrauen’ and wrote their final thesis about their experiences.

The seniors have learned one thing: the internet and social networks are powerful tools for information sharing, contacts and participation.



Story author: Maristella Berlato

e-Participation tool: Twitter
Video: <http://bit.ly/1oAJBT7>



Italy 04

**Our e-participation story:
 Taranto is waiting for replies**



“The problems related to the pollution concern all people in Taranto. The future of our city is actually our future as well,” say nine students and three teachers of I.I.S.S. Pacinotti who were involved in the project and worked on it since May 2015.

They took this opportunity to reach out to the European Parliament about the pollution of their city, but also to make the city, its culture and traditions known.

Students have made a video to present the issue and they used Twitter to initiate a dialogue with the European politicians.

“This experience of e-Participation was very interesting, as it gave us the opportunity to talk about the problems of our city – Taranto – but also of our hopes. We really hope that politicians, both local and national, will pay attention



to our issues. We are waiting for replies”. The video puts in contrast the beauty, resources and culture with the problems of the city, connected to the pollution caused by the steel plant Ilva.

Taranto is located in a bay that embraces two seas: the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea. The

students take as an example the resources from fishing, threatened by pollution to the marine environment. They also emphasize the decreasing number of tourists due to the negative media exposure linked to Ilva in the past few years, despite the rich cultural and artistic local offer.



Through the video the youngsters from Taranto intended to promote and enhance the city, and to call on the institutions to make their voices heard. The video also shows their first steps in the dialogue with the European institutions on Twitter, to draw attention to the city. The title of the story “Taranto is waiting for replies” is mainly a request to the institutions for concrete actions.

Story author: Arnita Vaitkus

e-Participation tools:
www.manabalss.lv
www.mansprezidents.lv
www.solvit.eu

http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/index_en.htm

- ▶ E-līdzdalība - sabiedrības iesaiste valdības procesos, izmantojot informācijas komunikācija būt tādi procesi kā – dalība lēmumu pieņemšanā, iestāžu administrācija.
- ▶ Eiropas Savienība ir izveidojusi tiešsaistes rīkus ikvienam, jebkurā no Eiropas Savienības oficiālajās valodās.
- ▶ Eiropas e-līdzdalības mēnesis:
 - ▶ 1. jūnijs – Eiropas diena
 - ▶ 7. maijs – Eiropas E-līdzdalības diena
 - ▶ Notiek 12 Eiropas valstīs



Latvia 05

e-Participation day in Ventspils Library

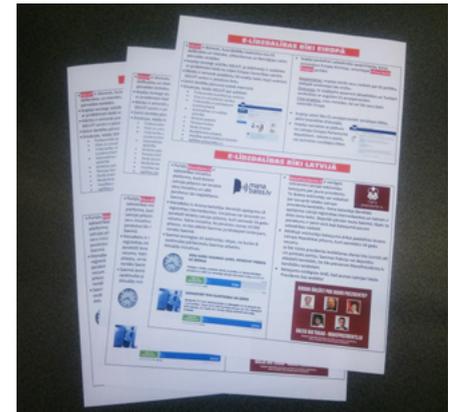
In the framework of the project, I have organized an event “eParticipation day in Ventspils Library”.

During the event the residents of Ventspils city learnt about the possibilities to use Information and Communication Technologies that can engage the whole community in major decision-making.

Together with children and adults we created a video “What kind of President would I like to see in Latvia?” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=70Sxa49DINA) because at the time of the competition Latvian presidential elections were held.

Also I have organized informative sessions about e-participation tools popular in Latvia and European Union: manabalss.lv (national tool),

mansprezidents.lv (national tool), solvit.eu and Your voice. We had discussions and consultations about these tools. The most interesting discussion turned out to be one on an initiative “Don’t switch the clock from winter to summer time”.



To show participants and others that they can be empowered by technologies, we have made together informative materials like brochures and presentations, that were displayed on Ventspils publicly accessible informative screens.

Story author: Regina Dovidaviciute

e-Participation tools:
National petition
Norstat Panel
National e-services

Lithuania 06

Through the computer screen



I was born in a small town of Josvainiai in Lithuania. During my childhood I knew that only 5 telephones existed in my town. In need to reach any neighbour it was much easier visiting than calling. Since then the world has changed, including Lithuania. Technologies have become an important part of our daily lives. And for open-minded seniors ICT has become a window to the whole world and to active citizenship.

My first experience with online tools for citizenship was timid; however I was so eager to try it. So I decided to sign my first petition to include Christmas Eve into the list of celebrated days in Lithuania. After a short period of time when Lithuanian Parliament adopted the petition into our Labour Code I was very satisfied. It was a proof that voices of citizens could be heard; only assertiveness is necessary.

Quite soon I've registered as a volunteer on the European Norstat Portal of online surveys. Through the portal I am often invited to express my opinion through various surveys concerning life of European citizens. In this way I feel part of a larger community. This is my opportunity to contribute to our world through the screen of a computer.

The possibilities of online participation are immense with the internet. It is a window to new ideas as well. I am also registered on the Electronic Platform to Adult Learning in Europe EPALE where I search for new lifelong learning project ideas and participate in public discussions (my personal profile: [http://](http://ec.europa.eu/epale/lt/tags/regina-dovidaviciute)

ec.europa.eu/epale/lt/tags/regina-dovidaviciute).

I am glad to see these changes in my country: Lithuanian governmental institutions are also progressing with e-participation possibilities for local people. The newly updated platforms of "My Government" and "e-tar.lt" allow to quickly find relevant legal acts, but even more important – they provide a possibility for citizens to express their opinions about newly introduced legislation.

At the moment we are using e-participation platform together with my colleagues from University of the Third Age community to make suggestions to the decisions of Ministry of Education and Science regarding the legislation of non-formal education in Lithuania.

For me, as a senior person, the internet has widened my horizons and provided more possibilities. However, the need for face-to-face communication did not disappear.

Story authors: Karolina Florek and Klaudia Bagmat

e-Participation tool: European Youth Portal
https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en

Poland 07

Wake up! React!

(...) We were born in Blachownia and it is here that we are growing up. That is why it is important to us that everyone could live well here. Unfortunately, that is not the case. At almost every turn, inhabitants of our municipality encounter intolerance, both from their peers and from their family members, as well as the problem of “social callousness”.

A few days ago we witnessed how a boy of our age was beaten up because he was wearing tight trousers called “drainpipes”. (...) We decided to react although the attacker was older and stronger. (...) we helped the boy... We strongly disliked the fact that our society proved so indifferent and intolerant. We tried to solve the problem with e-tools for civic engagement activities.

We visited the European Youth Portal, where we were advised to turn with this problem to the municipal authorities, because such problems could hardly be solved with e-activity tools. We went to see the mayor of our town, who was very pleased with our visit. We told the mayor about what had happened a few days earlier. The mayor was left concerned about the attitude of inhabitants in our municipality; we suggested holding a workshop with primary school pupils on whom we pin our hopes.

Right after the meeting we went to the education inspector in our municipality. The inspector helped us to contact directors of nearby primary schools, with whom we agreed the date and a venue of

the workshop. The mayor offered us material assistance: colour markers, coloured paper blocks and notebooks were bought. These supplies were of great help to us. We prepared a workshop scenario on our own.

Together with pupils we wrote down things associated with the word tolerance, we explained the meaning of this term. We made a short test to check whether the pupils were tolerant. We discussed what prejudices exist and what intolerance is. Together we talked about the reasons for intolerance. We divided the pupils into groups so they had to overcome prejudices together. We played a film about the lack of tolerance, drawing the pupils’ attention to inappropriate behaviour and the behaviour that should characterize a tolerant person.

In spite of showing little enthusiasm at the beginning, the pupils were very active and treated the workshop very maturely. At the end they heard our conclusion: “It is very hard to evaluate others because each of us is different, but it does not mean anyone is worse, it simply means everyone is unique”. (...)

Story author: Dan Patzelt

e-Participation tools:
www.thepetitionsite.com
www.petitiononline.net
Facebook

Romania 08

Association for Urban Development

The Association for Urban Development in Romania is a very active advocate which aims to improve the lives of people living in urban areas.

Just to mention some projects recently developed by the Association:

- Healthy yoghurt – campaigning for the distribution of yoghurt in glass containers and not plastic,
- Clean streets for people – provision of special bags for collecting dog waists on streets and parks,
- Quick bus – campaign for determining local authorities in big cities to establish special lanes for buses to improve public transport in towns,
- Lost and Found – an online space where people post information about lost and found objects/animals.

In every single campaign and project, the Association used online e-participation tools to reach as many people as possible and align voices into one strong message – with the objective to influence local or national policy. Some of the campaigns undertaken by the Association



have started in a small way, but grew to national scale due to people who use and are interconnected through online platforms like Facebook or Twitter.

In Romania, one of the most popular and well used online tools is www.petitiononline.net where people can sign up and advocate for causes which are important for their community and peers. The Association for Urban Development has regularly used this platform in its campaigns.

It is very clear that online e-participation platforms are making a significant difference in attracting people with common interests and giving them a voice which ultimately influences or even impacts local, regional, national or even European policy.



Story author: Vukosav Sredojevic

e-Participation tool:

Website <http://ljig.info/48sati/>

Serbia 09

Catastrophic floods in Ljig



I am an ICT engineer by profession and I also do web design and web programming. I have so far constructed dozens of different online tools for communication between users and clients. However, what I am proud of is a website which enables excellent communication with users: this is an official portal of a small Serbian municipality of Ljig (www.ljig.rs).

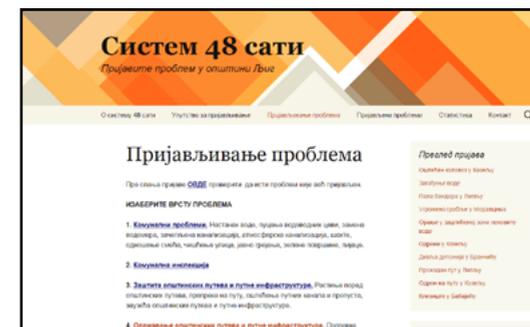
I have been enhancing and maintaining this website for years. Since good communication between local authorities and citizens is of great importance, numerous tools have been created for citizens to actively participate in the work of local government.

Unfortunately, in May 2014 catastrophic floods struck Serbia, including the town of Ljig, leaving many inhabitants without homes, electricity and water, and cutting them from the rest of the world. Crisis situation has been introduced, everything collapsed, households suffered from huge damages. Citizens could not reach relevant bodies to report the damage. Communal and construction inspectors worked hard every day to visit every single household that was damaged, but it was not possible to cover everything.

One of the fortunate circumstances in this misfortune was the System 48 hours which I have posted on the official portal of Ljig municipality (<http://ljig.info/48sati/>). On this portal citizens can report any problem they have and the local authorities are obliged to go out to the field

within 48 hours and identify the problem. Having seen the difficulties that the local inspectors had been facing I went from house to a house, as a volunteer, in the most affected areas of the Ljig municipality, collected data on the damage and sent them online through the System 48 along with the photos from the field. In three days I sent 54 requests, while there were 80 requests in total submitted through this online system that were received and processed by the inspectors within the shortest possible time.

I believe that this online tool proved extremely valuable in this crisis situation and I strive to further improve it so that citizens could adequately use it in resolving everyday problems.



Story author: Antoni Guitiérrez-Rubí

**e-Participation tools:
Puzzled by Policy**

<http://join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/>

Other tools with access through a mobile device

<http://apps4citizens.org/>

Spain 10

Social and civic engagement through mobile apps



Apps4citizens is an initiative which aims to promote participation and civic, social and political engagement through the use of mobile applications.

The platform, based on a user who interacts, has three complementary approaches:

- For a citizen it is a place to find and propose apps so that it will build a quality selection among all
- For application developers it is a stimulus for their work
- For organizations it has the ability to articulate innovation differently (with a certain model and values).

All this goes under the common umbrella of social commitment and collective political action for the improvement of the quality of democracy.

The project is built on four legs:

1. the appteca (compilation apps)
2. the festivalapp (recognition)
3. the hackapp (development)
4. wikapp (knowledge about the subject).

The project involves dozens of experts in order to evaluate and assess the applications that are proposed by the leaders but also by individual citizens who join the initiative.



Story author: Mila Grozdanovska

e-Participation tools:
European Youth Portal
https://europa.eu/youth/EU_en
Puzzled by Policy
<http://join.puzzledbypolicy.eu/>

11

Connecting makes a difference

We live in a world of highly developed technology and science, and as people, we're standing at a turning point where awareness of equality between all people is constantly increasing. We call for a peaceful society where nobody is judged based on their skin colour, gender, sexuality or religion, and with time it's becoming more possible to make that idea a reality.

As a 16-year-old, I think of what makes me feel safe and what motivates me to do better. After a lot of thought, I found the answer: being part of something bigger

that brings everyone together, a feeling of unity, mutual support and connection. One way to make that connection was by forming the European Union, a way for European countries to work towards achieving mutual goals. Even though my country isn't a member and I'm a small part of it, I was glad to discover a simple tool called e-Participation, which enables me to make my own connection to the EU, allows me to interact with members of the EU, share my opinions and ideas, and open a door to new possibilities.

Self-reflection and self-awareness are very important values to me, which is why I want to take time to develop my social and communication skills and grow on a personal and professional level. After I have searched for EU content on social media, I have quickly learned about a network of organizations and websites that offered information for non-formal education, trainings and contests, in the subjects I'm interested in, such as youth activism and environmental protection.

One that caught my attention the most was the Facebook page of European Youth, which easily led me to the European Youth Portal. I was very happy to see some other topics that I like there, such as Arts & Entertainment, which brought me to an open call for participation at the Innsbruck Nature Film Festival 2015. I'd like to take place in it because it's an amazing opportunity and I'll try my best to seize it.

Another part of this first-time experience was using the main EU tools, such as the Puzzled by Policy website. It immediately interested me because I saw

headlines related to Immigration policy and discussing and sharing ideas about immigration issues. This was a topic I could relate to the most because of the situation with the immigrants in my own country. I took a short survey and realized I had strong views on immigration for family reunification, so I have joined the debates on the topic. The whole journey was educational and made me think about the policies EU countries have for immigrants, their employment, families, rights and education.

I'm thankful for the opportunity to be involved and find out more about how the EU works, because that's the key to success – being connected and realizing we have the power to achieve anything if we're together, helping and challenging ourselves to be the best we can, only then we'll be able to build a better society for us and our future generations.



Project partners





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