

Arno Schöppe, JS Moin Softnet AG, Hamburg (D)  
Stefan H. Siemer, University of Lüneburg (D)

## From Participation to Citizens' Evaluation: Evaluation in the Knowledge Society

### Abstract

In our contribution<sup>1</sup> we will sketch our new "reverse" understanding of participation and participatory evaluation, which we will demonstrate in the first section with the example of "live-community". The fundamental idea is that it is not the government, nor the administration that allows citizens to participate, but the citizens themselves decide where and what to evaluate of policies and governmental performance. In the second section we will describe the conception and theoretical implications connected with this idea. From the perspective of the system-theoretical diagnostic of the knowledge society, reverse participation appears to be helpful in solving many practical and legitimate problems of evaluation. However, is evaluation, then, still recognizable as what we understand it to be today?

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## "Live-community"

### From Head to Foot

The basic idea of "live-community" stems from a problem with the western-European modern age. Continuously more citizens are turning their backs on current political situations. The "non-voter" party is growing. For example, the constitutional duty of the political parties to organize citizens' participation in political affairs is relentlessly going nowhere. Not only is a culture of regional and problem-oriented action developing in civil movements, but a sub-culture is also developing, which organizes proposals for mostly apathetic protest-voters. The constructive significance of citizens' political involvement is continuously giving way to a self-destructive, meaningless egocentricity. In most citizens' circles, political action is limited to pure self-satisfaction.

Political communication appears to have achieved a degree of objective hyper-complexity, on the one hand, and a morally overloaded polemic, on the other hand. Both make it nearly impossible for a beneficial link to real-life problems in the private sector.

If the top-heavy organization of citizens' participation no longer functions, must this necessarily mean that the body is paralysed? In other words: How can the idea of reversed participation be realized? This is the question that initiated "live-community"<sup>2</sup>.

**Leben in den Ort!**

**live-community**

Homepage live-community | [Bürger](#) | [Investoren](#) | [Verwaltung](#) | [Presse](#) | [Verbände](#) | [Kontakt](#)

*Wissen Sie, wie Ihre BÜRGER = KUNDEN Sie einschätzen?  
Hier erhalten Sie kostenlos qualifiziertes Feedback zu Ihrer Arbeit!*

**Die Idee zu live-community** ist bei uns gereift, nachdem wir für Öffentliche Verwaltungen - Stadtverwaltungen, Ministerien - viele **Mitarbeiter-, aber kaum Kundenbefragungen** durchgeführt hatten. Und das, obwohl unsere Kunden ausnahmslos für Andere arbeiten und es in den Verwaltungen nur selten die Möglichkeit zu einem **externen Feedback** für die eigene Arbeit gibt, denn Bürger werden erst nach und nach als Kunden empfunden.

Den Mitarbeitern einer Kommunalverwaltung und den Kommunalpolitikern muss man aber nicht erklären, welchen Einfluss ihre Tätigkeit auf die Region hat - der Einfluss ist für das **Finden** und die **Entwicklung** einer Region entscheidend!

Aus diesem Grunde ist es gerade bei ungünstigen äußeren Randbedingungen sehr wichtig, ausdrücklich **für Bürger und Investoren** zu arbeiten. Wie gut das gelingt und wo es Verbesserungspotenziale gibt, das klären die Online-Bürgerbefragungen von live-community!

**Gerechterweise** kümmern wir uns aber auch darum, dass die Sicht von Politik und Verwaltung angemessen berücksichtigt wird. Aus diesem Grunde bitten wir auch Mitarbeiter in der Kommunalverwaltung und Kommunalpolitiker darum, die Themenfragebögen auszufüllen - und zwar **aus beruflicher Sicht**, nicht als Bürger Ihrer Kommune!

*"Unternehmerische Ausrichtung" der Verwaltung - wer hilft?  
Wir helfen durch Qualitäts- und Kundenmanagement!*

Öffentliche Verwaltungen denken und handeln zunehmend unternehmerisch. Oft wird dabei

Ich bin hier in Verwaltung/Politik tätig, zu meinem Fragebogen...

live-community aktuell:

Neu: [Schnelle Mitarbeiterbefragung in der Stadtverwaltung, Infos hier per eMail-Abruf...](#)

[Innovatives Personal- und Qualitätsmanagement - auch nach EFOM, ISO9001:2000 -](#)

(Figure 1: Homepage from "live-community")

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.jsmoin.de/l/> (25.09.2004)

"Live-community" is the anglicised term, directed at the European area, for an idea of "more life in the community". Political communication should start in the citizens' surrounding area. In comparison to other areas of life, it should grow and become a major criterion in community life under the conditions of global requirements. "Live-community" should not only meet the needs of political execution and legislation, but also the needs of citizens and deliver decision-making criteria to facilitate orientation in the political and scientific realm. Therefore, "live-community" fixes on common topics and areas in people's lives: recreation, work, infrastructure, living, small business, education, family, politics, administration, crime, drugs, violence. These central points are then aggregated in the evaluation into statements about topics such as investor climate, future perspective, citizen proximity, well-being, quality of life, political structure and much more. It is worth mentioning that, in connection to this, the topics are not introduced via a machine, but rather are products of dialogue-rich processes concerning regional and current requirements.

**Online-Befragung**
Logout

Wohnen Seite 1 ▾

*Willkommen zur Befragung in Bad Odesloe!*

**Wohnen Seite 1**

*Bitte beantworten Sie die folgenden Fragen:*

Wie lange leben Sie schon in Ihrem Wohnort?	weniger als 1 Jahr <input type="radio"/>	weniger als 5 Jahre <input type="radio"/>	weniger als 10 Jahre <input type="radio"/>	weniger als 20 Jahre <input type="radio"/>	mehr als 20 Jahre <input type="radio"/>	weiß nicht <input type="radio"/>	betrifft mich nicht <input type="radio"/>
Liegt Ihre Wohnung in einer für Sie zentralen Lage?	trifft voll- kommen zu <input type="radio"/>	trifft größten Teils zu <input type="radio"/>	trifft bedingt zu <input type="radio"/>	trifft kaum zu <input type="radio"/>	trifft nicht zu <input type="radio"/>	weiß nicht <input type="radio"/>	betrifft mich nicht <input type="radio"/>
Wie sind Sie mit den Ausgehmöglichkeiten in Ihrer Umgebung zufrieden?	sehr zufrieden <input type="radio"/>	zufrieden <input type="radio"/>	teils / teils <input type="radio"/>	unzufrie- den <input type="radio"/>	sehr unzu- frieden <input type="radio"/>	nicht vorh. <input type="radio"/>	betrifft mich nicht <input type="radio"/>
Wie sind Sie mit den Gebäuden und dem Straßenbild in Ihrer					sehr		betrifft

(Figure 2: Excerpt from a questionnaire from "live-community")

In the form of online-questionnaires citizens are asked to share their opinion about these topics. The project began in two pilot studies in Hamburg-Wandsbeck and Bad Oldesloe (Schleswig-Holstein) and has expanded to include German states on a federal level and even areas of the European Union.

"Live-community" wants the so-called "soft facts", i.e. opinions and viewpoints. It expands the limited work of the statistics bureau: the statistical data is enriched with knowledge that makes hard scientific and social facts easier to swallow. "Climate" data is generated. Sunny weather does not necessarily correspond to people's well being. At the same time, a country's degree of wealth does not mean that financial deficiency does not exist.

The medium of online-research makes it possible to have access to very recent, regular and nearly cost-free dependable results. This enables political decision-makers, who are accused of not wanting to think beyond their current legislative period, to better understand process-like developments. Public regional administration can obtain an in-depth view into the dynamics of how decisions are executed and their effects. The administrative and bureaucratic apparatus, which are often accused of being blind to their clients' needs, can be made more transparent. Simultaneously, there can be a decisive step taken toward improving quality in the area of client satisfaction, which has recently become law.

## **"Live-community" as an Element in Civil Movements**

The initiative "live-community" is not just out there in space somewhere. In many western countries, at least, developments and decisions are able to be put into actual results and are movements away from democratic control.: privatising trends, the power of committees and interest groups, expertocracy and lobbyists, private norms and privately administrated subvention groups are the one side of the coin. Without a corrective element, these groups pose a great danger for democracy and civil rights. We would like to introduce a few examples of these corrective elements out of various political, administrative, scientific and economical fields, which are, despite their differences, comparable in their basic demands and ways of realization.

### **Political Movements**

On a general level, certain political movements can be mentioned here. The founding of new parties can usually be traced back to similar motivations. Whether it is the founding of the Green-Party in the 1970s, the "Statt" Party<sup>3</sup> in Hamburg, Germany, for example, in 1993, the discussion about a new left party in Germany as a reaction to the reform politics of the federal government or the new founding of Your-Party in 2004 in the UK, one can continuously recognize the same motivation: out of dissatisfaction with current forms of participation and in search of alternatives to put consensus-building and decision-making back into the hands of citizens. As the number of movements within the political scene in

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<sup>3</sup> This can be translated as *instead of* or as *city*. Therefore has a double meaning in German.

Europe steadily increases, we recognize the potential of "live-community" to register these indicators of political change on the communal level.

Your-Party is, in connection to us, interesting, in that this party makes a point to effectively use the technical possibilities of the Internet.<sup>4</sup> The basic idea is as simple as it is depressing for the classical form of representative democracy: If the mass media can get more people to participate via SMS and Internet in the voting for Pop stars in television than politics can get people to vote in the elections, we should begin to think about better using the mass media's political potential. A party that works precisely on direct-participation methods would more than likely have a good chance of success. The possibility of directly participating in decisions concerning political issues and positions via Internet may seem revolutionary in comparison to the established party practices because the Internet represents THE central medium.<sup>5</sup> All together the actual influence of the "net community" on political decisions should not be exaggerated, as is apparent in the unsuccessful campaign for US-Democrat Howard Dean in the US-Primaries. Dean's voting results only lead to the open questions: Can the Internet be more than an information portal and an additional instrument in a campaign? How strong is the influence of the Internet in comparison to other media and networks?<sup>6</sup> If Dean's Internet-based support is perceived as a political movement, this leads us directly to a central ethical problem of life-community and e-democracy: Who is allowed to determine the purpose and use of an emerging political movement?

### Public and Private Initiatives

Undeniably, this question is an open one, without a simple answer. The illustrations of the political parties and Dean's candidacy reveal many basic problems and conditions also concerning "live-community". There are even more initiatives to be found in the interface between politics, rights and administration. For example, all of the intentions seem similar – that is, to secure the access to information (above all public access in the hands of the public). Whether it is through so-called freedom of information laws<sup>7</sup> or the declaration of

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.telepolis.de/deutsch/inhalt/te/17236/1.html> (19.09.2004), <http://www.yourparty.org/> (19.09.2004)

<sup>5</sup> Whether Your-Party can maintain its existence or at least survive as an alternative party, only time will tell. So far there has been reason for skepticism. There are problems with rights, for example, concerning various election processes in certain EU-member countries, which make a new political orientation in Europe more difficult. It also seems unrealistic to imagine an unproblematic practice of imperative mandates through which the representatives of Your-Party act only as mediators of the Internet-decision-making. Besides that the German constitution requires a free mandate of the representatives.

<sup>6</sup> The positive side of Dean's campaign was that the Internet lowered the hesitation to support him. However, there was also an implicate disadvantage: the overwhelming support overestimated Dean's actual political strength. Whether Dean's failure as a candidate is his actual personal failure is doubtful. Nevertheless, in a very short amount of time, he achieved an impressive influence in his party, which he probably would not have accomplished in any other way. In a few years we will be able to answer the question whether or not his Internet campaigning will become established.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the web page from the Berlin Data-protection-agency: <http://www.informationsfreiheit.de> (19.09.2004). Excerpt: "The source of the modern principle of 'Freedom of Information' is likely based on a statement by the General Assembly of the United Nations from 1946: 'Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone for all the freedoms by which the United Nations is concerned.'

free access to scientific research results, there is always the combination of possibilities of new mediums with a wide-ranging understanding of participation and democracy. The network between local participants over Internet platforms (such as, e.g., for the purposes of our local "Agenda 21") functions similarly. A further example is the online-based citizen conferences.<sup>8</sup>

The community initiative "E-Partizipation"<sup>9</sup> (English: eParticipation) works closer on the case discussed here. Their proclaimed goal, according to their website, is as follows:

"The initiative eParticipation wants to encourage politics and administration to strengthen important decision-making processes through Internet-supported participation procedures. The initiative was founded by innovative service personnel and organizations, which offer conceptional and technical solutions for this kind of participation or serve as scientific counterparts. Methods, techniques and social demands are incorporated – oftentimes it is only the persuasion within politics that prevents this tool from being effectively and positively applied."

In August 2004 eParticipation put out a website ranking for electronic citizen participation in the larger German cities.<sup>10</sup> Altogether, with extensive differences between the cities, the study found that the participation possibilities available through the Internet, are, by far, not exhausted.

The Bertelsmann-Foundation together with the University of Aachen carried out a similar study on the position of Internet-based participation in the areas of politics and administration under the label "balanced e-Government"<sup>11</sup>. The summary on their web page is as follows:

"There are many understandable reasons for the failing than of convincing examples of success of online citizen participation. All too often the projects are accessories for e-administration strategies without being systematically connected to the political and administrative processes. Too often it is also the commitments of only a few enthusiasts, on which the success of the project depends. Too seldom do the innovative initiators take time to check up on the experiences other institutions have had with similar efforts. And perhaps most importantly: All too regularly do the initiators (as an entire body) fail to determine which kind and what intensity of citizen participation they wish to achieve before they start out on their "online adventure". The study clearly shows that online citizen participation can be no more than the technical arm of a superordinate comprehensive citizen participation strategy. The failure of such strategies cannot be compensated with the help of the Internet."

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Similar statements can be found on the web page <http://www.informationsfreiheit.info> (19.09.2004) from the "Bertelsmann-Foundation".

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, [www.buergerkonferenz.de](http://www.buergerkonferenz.de) (19.09.2004). This citizen conference on the discussion topic of genetic diagnostic was organized in 2001 by the German Hygiene Museum of Dresden. For the accompanying evaluation see <http://www.isi.fhg.de/bt/projekte/innopol-d-rz-dresdenkonsens.htm> (19.09.2004)

<sup>9</sup> See [www.initiative-eparticipation.de/](http://www.initiative-eparticipation.de/) (19.09.2004)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.initiative-eparticipation.de/studie\\_eparticipation.pdf](http://www.initiative-eparticipation.de/studie_eparticipation.pdf) (19.09.2004)

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.begix.de/> (19.09.2004)

This short overview illustrates, not only, how much is going on at the moment and what high expectations are developing concerning the combination of new technology and a new, changed understanding of participation, but also: how far can one fall if one stirs exaggerated expectations or starts with a problematic premise?

### Participation – but how?

In addition to extensive technical possibilities through the Internet, political or administrative participation intentions require an improved participation technique. A new questioning method, for example, has been developed on the Ruhr-University in Bochum, Germany, which is unique in that the employees themselves can determine, in a series of steps, which topics in the questionnaire are most important to them.<sup>12</sup> The traditional top-down questionnaire, which only allows for workers to check-off a list of alternate answers, has the problem (well-known to evaluators) that no dialogue communication can develop. The resulting de-motivation leads to low-quality data, weak return quotas, unclear evaluations and outcomes.

As a reaction to this disadvantage, a new dialogue procedure has been developed. Already in the concept phase and in determining the topics the employees participate. Hence, this procedure is a combination of the structural "top-down" method and the substantial "bottom-up" method. Furthermore, the predictions of the relevance of the topics determine the choice of action taken. By separating personal preference and resulting action relevance it is possible to attain a precise evaluation. The model projects' increased return quotas (60%), which have increased by about half, illustrate the success such dialogue and action relevant oriented procedures can have.

Also, large group procedures, such as the one developed by Harris Owen called "Open Space"<sup>13</sup>, can be understood in this way. Each person is there as a self-responsible expert and responsible for the entire result. Participation is adapting itself, in an emerging way, (not: *is adapted*). In other words, each person can work on what he or she wants to work on.

## The Theory

So far we have described what the "case" is. But what is "behind" it?<sup>14</sup> In this section we will talk about the conceptual and theoretical background of "live-community". In doing so, it is necessary to thoroughly discuss questions and terms so that the discussion can go further than the exemplary project.

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.tranet-ruhr.de> (19.09.2004), Piorr (in production)

<sup>13</sup> See Owen 1992.

<sup>14</sup> See Luhmann 1993.

## The First Step: Radical Thinking

### Behind the Terms

"Evaluation as emancipatory effect?" is the title of this session. *Emancipation* and *participation* are both basically positive terms. This goes for *evaluation* as well. Although we share this positive semantic view, we must take a look behind the foggy facade that skews our view and ask what these terms really mean.

### *Evaluation and the Evaluator*

Looking through evaluation books for an explanation, one can become more confused rather than enlightened. "To say that there are as many definitions as there are evaluators is not so far from accurate."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the most common (and peaceful) solution to this problem is to present diverse definitions from various authors and then, with a summary, evade a definition conflict. Stockmann describes *evaluation* as three steps: (1) Information is collected and (2) then assessed so that (3) a decision can be made.<sup>16</sup> Whether this procedure actually flows as cleanly as planned is another matter. Also, the dogma of separating gathered information and assessed information for time and logic reasons should not flare up into a discussion about principles between positivists and constructivists or the quality vs. quantity paradigm. Rather, it should only serve as an empirical indicator for one side.

Our arguments lead to the other side. Nevertheless, we agree with the results described in Stockmann's definition. Even when it suggests etymology:<sup>17</sup> Evaluation is neither *ex*-valuation (German: Aus-werten), nor is it just sorting out information, because the worth or value is not simply in the information that is being evaluated. No: Evaluation is **In**-valuation, specifically **Ad**-valuation, a reading into, an assigning of value, a review (German: Be-werten). The blind spot of the etymological origins clouds the value assignment.

The modern version has obscured the blind spot in the scientific methodology fog, concealed the gap between being and value in a magical way, and, therefore, scientifically secure, has legitimised the occurrence of information **and** assessment.<sup>18</sup> Methodology means being able to reproduce results and, thus, suggests an inter-subjectivity of researcher and employer. The securing of methods has two functions: The *evaluator* disappears behind the definition - the evaluator is usually not a component of the definition. His invisible character makes him into an expert, whose ability is not dependent on his individuality. When he is de-individualized, this legitimises and authorizes his power as being equal to that of his employer. Together they – representative of enlightened policy-making and

<sup>15</sup> Franklin & Trasher 1976: 20, quote from Wottowa & Thierou 1998: 13.

<sup>16</sup> See Stockmann 2004: 13.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.etymonline.com/e4etym.htm> (25.09.2004), Kluge 1989: 193.

<sup>18</sup> This cannot be formulated other than as a paradox: Our argument can also be interpreted as a form of evaluation, which is also a paradox. See for further reading, e.g., Schöppe 1995, Luhmann 1992 (1998), Luhmann 1990b.



committed science – look down on their "objects" (the evaluation objects and persons in question).

### *Emancipation and Participation*

As experts, evaluators and employers know about the disadvantages of expertocracy and the advantages of participation and emancipation. In order to understand why evaluators and employers like these two characteristics, or specifically quality factors, so much, we must take a closer look at the dark inheritance of etymology:

*Emancipation* stems from the Latin *ex* and *mancipare* or *manus* and *capere*, which originally meant the complicated procedure of releasing a son or a slave from his father or master.<sup>19</sup> The term implies an inclination of maturity, power and competence and manifests itself through this inclination. This problem has been discussed in pedagogy, for example, since its scientific beginnings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, in today's use of the term it remains unclear from WHOSE hand someone is released. If one assumes one's self to be the master (or a group of masters), it is so implicit that it does not require an explanation.

*Participation* comes from the Latin *pars* and *capere*, meaning literally part-taking or being-a-part.<sup>20</sup> The term implies, on one hand, a whole, a sum, which eventually, at the latest in modern times, had led to the question: what does this sum, this whole consist of, if there is no longer a centre? This imaginary whole is a kind of pie, from which everything gets a piece. However, it remains unclear WHO baked this pie, which wrote the recipe and determined the ingredients. Whoever talks of participation, implies the rule that HE is the baker and recipe writer who allows others to participate.

The semantic trap, then, snaps shut, even when persons being evaluated accept this latent meaning of participation and demand more participation possibilities. Thus, they have accepted the basic premise that they will be allowed to participate, that someone is authorized to allow them to participate.

Seen in this way, emancipation and participation are leftovers from feudal-thinking, a top-down mentality. The difficulty with this is that the terms obscure themselves. This authoritative-mentality may have been justifiable in the past; however, we are sure that it is no longer an appropriate measure for illustrating the complex problems of today.

The solution we suggest is very simple: We can still speak of emancipation and participation, only that the point of reference has changed and makes the difference. Who should be sovereign? Who gets to bake the pie? From a democratic perspective, there is only one possibility: to make the citizens the reference point. This reverse understanding lies in the fact that the citizens are not emancipated or participated, but rather, the citizens are in control and release politics. The same goes for evaluation, which, above all, contains a serving, passive function. Ideally, one could speak of evaluation in the sense of the German artist Joseph Beuys: Each citizen is an evaluator.

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<sup>19</sup> See Kluge 1989: 176.

<sup>20</sup> See Kluge 1989: 529.

## Knowledge in the Knowledge Society

At this point, we do not wish to further discuss the social and scientific theory context, but rather only mention it. Theoretically, a reference to the theory of functional difference in modern society should be enough. According to this theory, society has evolved into different functional systems, such as science, rights, economy, politics, mass media, education, religion and others, which all stabilize themselves and develop further by means of autopoiesis.<sup>21</sup> There is no longer a centre and no longer a privileged system.

Even when this social theory is no longer an esoteric game of system theory: above all, this diagnosis from a political and judicial perspective is coupled with certain uneasiness. Linked with this are two fundamental questions: How can a society be controlled und steered? And how can decisions be justified? In accordance to system theory, these questions usually arrive at the conclusion of self-navigation, i.e. context-navigation<sup>22</sup>, in discourse ethics proceduralization is relevant.<sup>23</sup>

Not only do politics and laws break the magic spell, but science does it as well. Science is there to produce true, specifically useful, knowledge that can serve as a control and navigation medium; however, what can be validated as true, is determined by its applicability in the system of knowledge itself – a vicious circle.

Knowledge is understood here with reference to Luhmann and Wilke "as the condensing (hardening) of useful observations, on one hand, and as cognitive stylised meaning, on the other."<sup>24</sup> "Thus, knowledge produces a valid definition of reality and valid definitions for the meaning of this reality."<sup>25</sup> Understood in this way, knowledge has nothing to do with the facts or the truth, rather knowledge presents itself as a particular form of interpretation of "informations". In turn, the professionally informed (!) evaluator knows (!) this, and he knows that exactly this knowledge both enhances and devalues himself.

It enhances because it is exactly evaluation knowledge that can be effective in controlling and steering society, and because it is especially well accommodated to the needs of modern society.<sup>26</sup>

It devalues because the same goes for this knowledge itself: It is created in a circular way and is contingent to everything else. All its goals and purposes are dependant on its observation point. Evaluation has no worth alone. Evaluation loses its legitimacy when evaluators believe that simply from their results decisions can be made about which action to take.

We believe (know?) that this understanding of knowledge is closest to an understanding of evaluation, that it is a service to citizens. This evaluation service consists of transforming

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<sup>21</sup> See Luhmann 1984 (1995), Luhmann 1997.

<sup>22</sup> See Wilke 1998.

<sup>23</sup> See in addition Ekardt 2004 for further philosophical and control-theoretical discussion.

<sup>24</sup> Wilke 1998: 232, see Luhmann 1990a: pp.123.

<sup>25</sup> Wilke 1998: 232.

<sup>26</sup> For the evolutionary advantages of evaluation and quality pursuit see Siemer (in production).

data into information, in other words, sparking reason and, in this way, assisting in a social knowledge evolution. Evaluation accomplishes two things this way: it aids in creating more transparency for the citizens to be able to choose, organize and make their own decisions, and evaluation helps citizens with their decisions by offering useful knowledge. This knowledge can no longer legitimise itself as practical information just by existing. Only when citizens pass their relevant knowledge on as feedback, can evaluation be legitimised. Citizen evaluation is, thus, strictly an assessment substitute. Citizen assessment replaces the evaluation assessment – citizens are citizen-evaluators. Their evaluator-identity allows them to have support in their choices and decisions by having access to questions that interest them.

One can see this as a loss of power for the evaluators (but not a loss of power for evaluation itself). However, one can also interpret this as a form of relief, since evaluation cannot take responsibility for successful social control and steering anyway. Power usually goes along with control fantasies. Nevertheless, it is highly improbable whether societal navigation can be successful, , perhaps it is even completely accidental.

## The Second Step: Pragmatic Action

What we have illustrated here is a radical position, which serves to question assumed matters of course. This may be acceptable as an utopia or heterotopia; however, what about application? We must shout, "Stop!" Even the thought of first thinking something and then applying it, even perhaps to implement it, is "old thinking". The course of action here is experimental, pragmatic. According to our thesis and the result of a systemic understanding of knowledge, there is no "before and after", but rather an intertwined blend of trial and error and reflection.

This confusion is also reflected in the Internet, which represents the essential medium in almost all of the above-mentioned examples. The promises of salvation are becoming faint, whereas the Internet has secured a place in the daily media in most parts of the world. The number of Internet users is constantly increasing. The hope, from which "live-community" is also being carried, is that the functionality of the Internet's lack of hierarchy and its speed will continue to correspond well with the drive for reform and de-centralized quality development. The goal is to have higher citizen satisfaction, more positive community identification and a higher acceptance in the public sector, essentially a stronger democracy.

It is important to us that the expectations are not set too high at the beginning. Subsequently, one thing will certainly become larger: the complexity. This complexity cannot be matched with conventional control and navigation methods.<sup>27</sup> The promises of salvation through the Internet are as follows: Everyone can participate – how, when and where they want to.<sup>28</sup> At this point, one must inspect the achievements of the systemic understanding of knowledge mentioned above. Whoever cannot let go with an optimistic

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<sup>27</sup> A critical discussion of this can be found, e.g., in Ekardt 2004.

<sup>28</sup> In order to return to the roots of the Internet: Internet is the only successful strategy against throwing atomic bombs.

viewpoint here, whether as politician, evaluator or administrator, will only imagine chaos. There are good reasons (a) for this optimism and (b) one needs to take a long breath.

To start off, there are a couple of simple words of advice that need to be taken to heart, which one can gather from the above-mentioned studies.<sup>29</sup> They range from simple, yet important technical questions about, for example, the data-transfer rate, to basic questions of administrative culture.

- In this way, criteria such as availability makes it possible that information can get from citizen to decision-maker, either via email, web forms or forums and chatrooms.

Further criteria in the study "eParticipation":

- Transparency: What information is available, how does one access it? What about an encouraging character? Is there an motivating invitation to participate?
- Discussion management: How deep does an Internet-supported discussion go? How can the discussion be hosted? Are the procedures understandable and transparent? Which rules are there for participation? How "user-friendly" is it in general? And what kind of feedback options are there?
- Influence on decisions: How will the results be treated? Which relevance do the results have on administrative and political decisions?

These areas represent the field of participation and transparency in the Begix-study. In this study they are supplemented with an instrument of balanced e-government-score-cards for the fields "user" (11 criteria), efficiency (16 criteria) and change management. It is important, for our context, that there are well-formulated and proven criteria catalogues with which people or administrations can test or develop their own proposals.

### **The Third Step: Looking Ahead**

Can we dare to look ahead under these circumstances? From an objective viewpoint we can see social evolution in real time. Initiatives are springing up everywhere; there are reforms, emancipations, evaluations and participation. That is one side of things – and it contrasts greatly with the other side: manipulation, denied access to information, initiatives drowned in bureaucracy and ignorance everywhere. These contradictory developments can no longer be counted as one comprehensive diagnosis. It is helpful to refer again to the knowledge understanding discussed above in order to prevent doubt and estimations of how powerful the actual changes are from creeping in. Also because there is no easy orientation or navigation possible under these confused circumstances, it is important to understand evaluation as a service to citizens.

Originally, we wrote this text with a pedagogical background. This pedagogical perspective made room for a principle optimism, which deals with the power of the reforms and quality development ideas discussed here. Increasingly, there is an understanding that modern education can only be successful from the bottom up and that there must be long-

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<sup>29</sup> See [http://www.initiative-eparticipation.de/studie\\_eparticipation.pdf](http://www.initiative-eparticipation.de/studie_eparticipation.pdf) (19.09.2004), <http://www.begix.de/> (19.09.2004)

term "emerging" construction phenomena. Historical education research<sup>30</sup>, as well as international education comparative studies point to a central message: that the central indicators for a prosperous community in the knowledge society are education and educational growth. Thus, only a conditional prognosis is possible. In reference to Germany: If it works to exhaust the coming educational growth, the signs for a stronger e-democracy would be more apparent. In Germany, at least, it appears the circumstances are favourable: five factors come together in a unique historical combination:

- The intensive societal discussions in the aftermath of the weak German placement in international educational comparison studies,
- the coming UN-decade of "education für sustainable development" (2005-2014), which puts the topic of education in a new context on the international agenda,
- the far-reaching effects of the Internet,
- the effects of globalisation,
- and, primarily, that the medium Internet is a natural element in life for the up-and-coming young generation.

It is very important to conclude with the remark that real change takes a long, long time. Only after a few generations will we be able to look back and realize what has really changed.

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<sup>30</sup> See summary: <http://www.quakri.de> (25.09.2004), with evaluation relevance see Titze 2002 (Excerpt from summary: "During all this, 20th century Germany lost its exemplary role in questions concerning education. It will take generations to catch up for developmental lags (e.g. in approaches to integrative learning). Our educational institutions are an inheritance of Absolutism and they must be given more freedom for self-determination. We should free ourselves from the resilient German prejudice that culture deteriorates in proportion to growing education participation. A culture of sharing which develops from the bottom up can, in fact, be achieved through increased educational participation.").

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