

Systems Thinking and E-Participation: ICT in the Governance of Society

Jose Rodrigo Cordoba-Pachón
University of London, UK

Alejandro Elias Ochoa-Arias
Universidad de los Andes, Mérida, Venezuela

Information Science
REFERENCE

INFORMATION SCIENCE REFERENCE

Hershey • New York

Director of Editorial Content: Kristin Klinger
Senior Managing Editor: Jamie Snavelly
Assistant Managing Editor: Michael Brehm
Publishing Assistant: Sean Woznicki
Typesetter: Kurt Smith
Cover Design: Lisa Tosheff
Printed at: Yurchak Printing Inc.

Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com/reference>

Copyright © 2010 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher.

Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Systems thinking and e-participation : ICT in the governance of society / Jose Rodrigo Cordoba-Pachon and Alejandro Elias Ochoa-Arias, editors.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "This book provides a systemic-based inquiry platform to explore boundaries, limits, and advantages of information and communication technology use in the public decision making processes"--Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-60566-860-4 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-60566-861-1 (ebook) 1. Internet in public administration--Cross-cultural studies. 2. Political participation--Computer networks--Cross-cultural studies. 3. Communication in politics. I. Cordoba-Pachon, Jose-Rodrigo. II. Ochoa-Arias, Alejandro.

JF1525.A8S98 2010

352.3'802854678--dc22

2009035156

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

Chapter 11

Online Communities: People and Processes

Cecilia Loureiro-Koechlin
Oxford University, UK

ABSTRACT

The chapter describes the basic tenets of online communities, their typology and their fundamental elements with a view of informing ways in which people can get to participate online, something that those individuals or organizations dealing with e-governance initiatives also aim at. A key consideration is the importance of socializing as an ingredient that motivates individuals and which can offer them a degree of freedom to discuss government related matters.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a computer network that removes barriers to access information and communication by connecting millions of people worldwide. Since its creation the number of Internet users has grown exponentially, and so have the forms of participation and intentions of use. Modern forms of Internet tools include Weblogs, Online Forums, and Social Networking sites, such as Facebook and YouTube. Institutions and people from all backgrounds use these tools including government departments and community areas, public institutions, local governments as well as individual citizens. They create

websites and weblogs, and participate in forums to express their opinions to the online world. Examples of these are “The Gordon Brown Blog”, Madrid City Council Portal and “CRNUK”- Community Recycling Network UK web site.

Within internet environments, groups of people come together to share their ideas. Online communities emerge when these groups grow in numbers and engage into active participation. These communities are kept alive thanks to their members’ desire to participate and share experiences, their common interests, and the time devoted into developing their relationships. In addition, interesting, good quality content, which is updated regularly, is needed to keep the members interest as well as to attract new ones. Content can be provided by the “owner”

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-860-4.ch011

of the community (e.g. the institution who owns the forum, the blogger, etc.), the moderators or by the members themselves. Norms of behaviour are designed within each group to ensure that the interactions within the communities run smoothly, without misunderstandings. Some common behaviour norms include, avoiding inappropriate language and focusing the content of posts on a topic (or topics) for which the forum was initially created and intended. There are numerous ways to encourage members to follow community norms including moderation and rating.

The use of new improved web technologies and the various forms that the mentioned community aspects can take allow users to create and apply different styles of participation. These forms of interactions can have an impact on social processes, such as leadership, decision making and community administration which can affect (positively or negatively) the capability of the communities to regulate their activities. The aim of this chapter is to explore the aspects of online communities' dynamics which are likely to have an influence on their successful self administration and therefore on the achievement of their goals. I expect that this discussion will help readers to draw some connections between the development of online communities and e-governance efforts, as both of them aim at engaging people in online participation. Successful online communities could be used as models for e-governance initiatives as they have managed to motivate and get the interest of their online participants, and are obviously achieving their goals. This chapter will explore some definitions of online communities, types, members' roles and technologies. A final discussion will highlight some overlaps between online communities' dynamics and e-governance efforts.

WHAT ARE ONLINE COMMUNITIES?

Online communities are formed by groups of people who interact through online or internet tools. The name "online community" itself refers to two important aspects of these kinds of groups. The "online" aspect represents the use of networked computers and software tools used for communication. The following definition of online community by Lee et al. (2003) emphasises the use of technology:

a cyberspace supported by computer-based information technology, centered upon communication and interaction of participants to generate member-driven contents, resulting in a relationship being built up (Lee et al., 2003)

The "community" aspect represents people with similar interests, who gather for entertainment, to discuss or ask for help. The second definition of online communities, by Rheingold (1994), focuses on the human and social processes emerging from the participations:

social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. (Rheingold, 1994)

In relation to this second aspect of online communities, it is important to stress that the mere act of gathering people online does not imply that a community will be created. Online communities cannot be engineered or manufactured. The best technological tools could be used but if users do not engage then communities do not emerge. Indeed most of their success depends on human and social rather than technological factors. In this section I highlight some of these factors.

Online communities emerge from the interaction of people who have the "desire and need to share problems, experiences, insights, templates,

tools and best practices” (APQC (2004) quoted in Coakes and Clarke (2006)). This also involves a shared interest or common purpose. For instance, an online community can be created for citizens to discuss the “effects of the credit crunch in the local community”. Some online communities are grounded on their “occupational communities” as they share “similar goals, work practices, beliefs interests, and value systems” (Elliott and Scacchi, 2003). Members of actual physical organisations or institutions can start online communities to allow extra forms of communications between them. These organisations have distinctive goals and so their online communities.

Online community goals are usually aligned with the ones of their owners or creators and new members join because they share those goals. However, goals cannot be imposed on online members. New goals or purposes need to be decided in democratic consultations. Members who do not agree with the direction the online community is moving to are always free to leave.

Another community success factor is the sense of membership that the users achieve. This is shown by members’ commitment to participation and solidarity to other members. For example, a high number of replies to an enquiry would indicate a high level of commitment and solidarity of the group with its members. This will also suggest that members identify with the group. Usually the core members are the ones who define and reflect the identity of the community, as they are the ones who participate more often. (This will be discussed a bit more in the next section.) Also, the way outsiders or newcomers are treated and the differences between them and insiders reveal the identity of the group. An outsider will have to learn how to integrate into the community and gain his/her membership by establishing relationships with other members and by earning their respect.

As in real-world societies norms are created to show the users of online communities how activities are carried out there (Elliott and Scacchi, 2003). These norms, in a way, reflect the nature

of the communities, the nature of their members and their objectives. Norms are established to ensure that the community goals and members needs are being met. This also involves members feeling comfortable with what is said there, with the way their fellow members treat them, and that no one gets offended or abused by anyone. Figure 1 shows a screenshot of a message posted by a site’s moderator specifying the rules of a forum. This is an example of how a moderator (or any other member) can let others know about the community’s norms. Online members can challenge these rules if they wish by replying to the original post. A thread of conversation can emerge here until users reach an agreement. However, with time, new requests may be added as new members join in or as new events affect the activities of the community.

In addition, as the online world is mainly a written medium there are some “conventions of communication” (Jacobson, 1996) or “chat codes” (Greenfield and Subrahmanyam, 2003) that participants need to adopt. These are not formal norms but unwritten rules that people have to follow to make online communication possible. Some conventions are well spread through the cyberspace whereas others are kept within the online communities that created them. Some conventions mimic real-world conventions from oral or written speech, but others are created especially for the online world. For example, to stress an utterance it can be highlighted by using a different colour. To call the attention of a specific person (in a group conversation for example) his name can be indicated within brackets, as in “Olivia: [Bruce] what is your opinion?” Feelings can be articulated by using especial characters like <<Daniel is concerned>> or by using emoticons which can be graphical or which can be made up of computer characters. Some emoticons are characteristic of western societies:) others are more popular in the east (-_-;). Common expressions can be abbreviated. For example YMMV, which means Your Mileage May Vary (or your experience could be

Figure 1. Rules of Use posted by an online forum moderator. Source: StudyOptions www.studyoptions.com

The screenshot shows a forum interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Board index', 'Terms and conditions of use', and 'Rules of use'. Below this is a search bar with 'FAQ', 'Register', and 'Login' options. The main content area is titled 'Rules of use' and includes a 'POSTREPLY' button and a search box. The post is by user 'cgsvfso', a Site Admin, posted on Friday, January 23, 2009, at 5:01 pm. The post text outlines the forum's Rules of Service, emphasizing a safe and fun environment. It lists guidelines for messages, including civility, relevance, and respect for others. It also states that swearing, abusive language, and other objectionable material are not acceptable.

Discussion Forum

Board index Terms and conditions of use Rules of use

FAQ Register Login

Rules of use

POSTREPLY Search this top Search 1 pc

Rules of use
by cgsvfso on Fri Jan 23, 2009 5:01 pm

cgsvfso
Site Admin

Posts: 1
Joined: Tue 11:22 am

Rules of Use

Before you start using the Forum, we've established a few Rules of Service so that everyone can get the most out of their online communication on our message board. These Rules aim to protect all users by making sure the Forum is safe and fun for everyone.

About your messages

Keep your contributions civil, tasteful and relevant. We're committed to providing an atmosphere in which constructive and mature dialogue takes place. Therefore:

No swearing or abusive language. Unlawful, harassing, defamatory, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, profane, sexually oriented, racially offensive, or otherwise objectionable material is not acceptable.

Respect others. The Forum expects you to be respectful to other users, the host and the careers specialists who facilitate the online discussions.

different). People can raise their voices by using CAPS. However that would be considered rude in most online environments. Online members themselves would let the poster know that he/she cannot use caps in their forum. When new members join online communities they need to learn these codes and learn when and how to use them. In other words they need to learn the community's communication conventions to become members and to be accepted by the others. This learning process can be done through guidance from older members and by reading the logs of community communications.

Changes occur within the communities as new members join in and as they learn from their interactions with others. Topics of interest change according to events inside or outside the communities. New members become core members and core members may go into a passive mode or leave. People who have been part of other com-

munities bring with them all their knowledge and experience when they join a new one. Additionally new versions of the communities' software replace the old ones and new communication tools become available. New tools allow users to create new ways of interaction thus changing the social processes of their communities. This is how online communities evolve: through changes in their social processes and changes in their software. Evolution implies as well the challenge of the community norms and their further adaptation to fit the new needs of their members (Rheingold, 1994).

Over the years, the evolution of online communities has influenced the way users perceive the online environment. While before people used to go online to search for information, now they go online to work and socialise. For them the online world is not an alien setting anymore but another manifestation of their real life (Grefter, 2006), a

life in which online relationships are built and thought as genuine (Parks, 1996).

The next section will present a classification of online communities and their members. The classification is not exhaustive but tries to put a bit of order into this vast ever changing spectrum of online communities.

A CLASSIFICATION OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE MEMBERS

Online communities can be open or close communities. Open communities are created upon personal or professional interests, religious or political views, or any kind of entertainment. Members are geographically dispersed and rarely meet each other but nevertheless develop ties between them (Millen and Dray, 2000, 167). The access to these environments is not difficult as they welcome new members who share their interests. In practical terms this means that members do not need to sign up for an account, or if needed, there are no restrictions as to who can open one. To communicate, these communities use public online settings such as bulletin boards, online forums or mailing lists which are sponsored by public or private organisations and which usually run in a browser.

Closed online communities are grounded on physical organisations (Millen and Dray, 2000) like for example an NGO, and their membership is restricted to the physical organisation members. Their online environments are usually held within the intranets or internal systems provided by the organisation. Being all part of the same organisation, members will interact with people they either know in person or by other means such as telephone or email. Connections could also be established with people who are known by people they already know (friends of friends). Most of the activities carried out within these online environments are work related. The purposes of these communities

can be: 1) to perform or coordinate task related activities, 2) to broadcast information and 3) to socialise (Kettinger and Grover, 1997).

In either kind of community (open or close) members can be classified according to their role and level of participation. The following classification is based on Millen and Dray (2000) and McDaniel et al (1996) typologies of participants:

- **Core members or frequent contributors:** They usually dominate (McDaniel et al., 1996) the conversations by initiating more conversations and by sending more replies than the others
- **Sporadic contributors:** Participate when “a topic of personal interest is discussed“ (Millen and Dray, 2000)
- **Marginal contributors:** They have low levels of participation. They could be new community members or members who wish to stay in the peripherals of the community
- **Lurkers:** They read without responding (Parks, 1996)

The above list defines a spectrum of the online members' levels of participation, having the senders on one side and the readers on the other. This agrees with Marcoccia's (2004) taxonomy of participation as well. A role that was not mentioned in the classification is the host or monitor. Depending on their personal approach to monitoring, hosts could think of themselves as community members or as outsiders. Hosts act as the moderators of conversations and have power over the other members (e.g., they can ban members when they do not follow the norms). Some hosts participate in discussions (sender end of the participation spectrum), some just stay in the background checking on the members behaviour (reader end of the participation spectrum.) Core members do not have the privileges of the moderators, but they are influential opinion leaders and as such they are respected by the other members.

Online Communities

They are closer to the sender end of the participation spectrum. Core members tend to dominate topics of conversations. Their ideas and opinions are the ones that prevail and the ones which are portrayed by the community. So in a way it could be said that the opinion of an online community is the opinion of its core members, or that what we perceive is the community's ideology is only a reflection of its core members' ideas. However these ideas are only a partial view of the totality of the community. Sporadic and marginal contributors, may have opposed or different opinions but because of their lack of participation, their views are not that visible. Unfortunately, due to their lack of participation, lurkers' perspective and behaviour cannot be observed. However, their role could be thought of as supportive of the community. Comparing their participation with real world situations, lurkers are like the people who attend meetings but do not talk. In spite of this their presence is seen by the rest. In online settings their presence can be noted by the times the member has logged into the community, and if the community does not have authentication system then by the visit counters.

Despite the scepticism of some scholars who thought that online gatherings were a "socially-impoverished domain" (Baym, 1995) people are using the internet more to engage in online interactions. There is evidence to prove this. For years now research has been carried out to study the nature and dynamics of different kinds of online communities. This research shows that online communities are a phenomenon that is growing in importance, in different areas of society. For example in her study about humour Baym (1995) shows how people create an online community to talk about soap operas. Rheingold (1994) provides too a rich picture of a online community devoted to share medical and family problems. There is also evidence of communities created for work purposes. An online community of journalists is studied by Millen and Dray (2000) and a group of public relations professionals was studied by

Thomsen (1996). Elliott and Scacchi (2003) study a virtual organization of Free Software developers that successfully collaborate and resolve conflicts online. The members of this community share the same values about the use of free software and freedom of choice which are manifested in their online conversations and influence their practices.

Although that the heart of online communities is the people that are part of it, they would not exist without the technology that allow their members to meet online. The next section will briefly introduce the most popular software technologies used by online communities.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Many are the tools used for online communities to communicate and to hold their information. These online communication technologies have evolved through the years establishing new ways of online socialisation. In this section I will discuss what I believe are the three most popular: discussion forums, weblogs and social networking sites. These technologies have obvious implementation and visual differences. However the fundamental difference is the different social structures and dynamics that emerge from within them. Whereas discussion forums offer a single floor which is shared by everyone, interactions in weblogs happen at two levels: the authors' and the readers'. Social networking sites are a mixture, offering personal and group spaces. Additionally, interconnections between participants are inherent in the nature of the forums. When one member joins a forum it is assumed that he or she is now connected to the other members through that forum. In contrast, online members have to build their own connections in weblogs and social networking sites to not become isolated from the rest.

Discussion Forums

Discussion forums (or fora) have been around for quite a lot of time. They have changed shapes and names many times. You could associate them with the earlier mailing lists and Usenet or with discussion boards. Under the discussion forums heading I am including all these tools we use to converse between two or more people by sending or posting messages onto a public space, or by directing them to everyone else's emails. Discussion forums are asynchronous tools. That is, participants do not need to be present at the same time to be part of a conversation and the messages or posts stay on the public environment (or people's emails) for others to read for a long period of time. Usually discussion forums are structured by topic of conversation or interest. Discussions happen in threads of conversations started by any participant. Other participants can add their comments by replying to the original poster or by replying to any other replies. Posts tend to be short in length comprising a few lines. Depending on the design of the forum, it could be hard sometimes to follow a conversation, especially when many people have been participating. As in real life conversations, the focus of online conversations can change and two or more branches of that conversation can emerge. The discussion forums keep the logs of all these threads containing participants' thoughts and interactions between them. These are rich sources of information about the communities themselves and about the topics or areas of discussion in general. When a new member joins that community those threads are useful guidelines as well as the actual forum guidelines as to how to start participating in community activities.

Synchronous discussion or conversation tools exist as well. In those tools participants need to be present at the same time. However in most of them the content of the conversations and the conversations themselves only live for a short period of time. That is, logs of conversations are not saved anywhere. Therefore there is little, if

any, evidence on the web of them ever happening. Example of synchronous discussion tools are instant messaging and chatrooms.

Weblogs

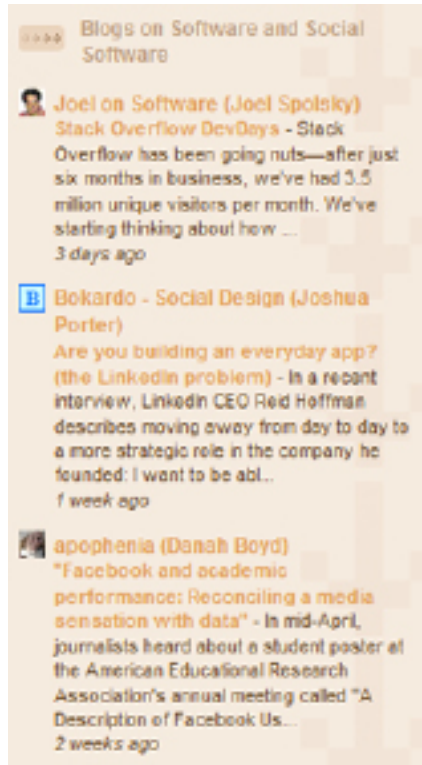
Weblogs or blogs are online journals containing posts written by one or more people. Most weblogs however are owned by only one person, usually called the blogger. Co-authored blogs are scarce but exist to represent the work or thoughts of a group of people, for example a project team. Weblogs provide means for personal expression and sharing information via the internet. (Allan, 2007) Blog posts are longer than discussion forum comments, perhaps like short articles. Writing styles, while informal, tend to be more elaborated than posts in discussion forums. Blog posts are ordered chronologically, the last one always being on top. Posts can be commented by the weblog readers. Therefore each post can become the starter of an online conversation, with readers commenting about the original post.

Bloggers are the hosts of their blogs. They are the ones who design the content and the layout. They can also decide whether to allow comments to their posts or not. When comments are allowed they can moderate them. Most common systems of moderation in weblogs are: placing a confirmation level whereby the blogger has to approve a comment before it can be published, or removing the comments which they do not find acceptable. Unlike discussion forums, where all participants share the same floor, bloggers are positioned in a centre stage within their weblogs, and their readers are positioned as their audience. However, where comments are allowed discussions can arise which can enrich the blogger's post by the addition of similar or opposite ideas. This is a useful source of information that can help the blogger to develop new ideas.

Bloggers can follow other weblogs, and be read by other bloggers. It is not that uncommon that beside their posts, bloggers add a list or blogroll

Online Communities

Figure 2. Blogroll (Source: Software, Software Development and other Atrocities <http://clk0.blogspot.com>)



of weblogs they read or are interested in (see Figure 2). This list could be a simple inventory of links to other weblogs or RSS feeds containing short extracts from the latest posts in those blogs. Bloggers can also reference other bloggers' posts in their own posts. When that happens the original poster can keep track of those references by using LinkBack. Linkback is a method that allows authors to get notifications when another blogger inserts links to one of their posts in their posts. These notifications usually come in form of links which are attached next to the original post.

All these interconnections between blogs and bloggers create a network of blogs, also called Blogosphere. Some people could perceive the Blogosphere as a community of bloggers and readers, as they are interacting through their own postings and comments. Having blogs referenced

in other media and vice versa – in online forums for example - enhances this perception.

Social Networking Sites

Social Networking sites host a variety of communication tools within them. Sites like MySpace, YouTube and Twitter are categorised as social networking services. Social networks gather users to interact around different themes. For example in MySpace members customise their own personal websites using html, YouTube is focused on sharing videos and Twitter is a micro-blogging environment. Members of these sites create a set of connections with other members who they can call contacts, friends or followers. All these connections form a network of contacts through which social interactions happen, hence the name social networking.

Social networking sites offer their members the spaces to create their own profiles. Through their profiles members can decide the way they can portray themselves to their network of contacts. Other tools available could be classified in two. First, tools which allow members to present an aspect of their persona or their lives, such as photo albums and personal music lists. Second, tools which allow members to interact with others such as discussion forums or commenting facilities. Traces of interactions are left in all these tools showing what has happened between users across time. Moderation of content occurs mostly at a personal level. So it is on everyone's hands to keep control of their own content and the content that is posted in their spaces. In extraordinary cases, profiles and content need to be removed when administrators of the social networking sites believe those belong to people who are trying to disrupt the harmony of the groups.

Concern exists among social networking site users who worry about the privacy of the information they upload in their profiles, most of which is of personal nature. However, in most of these sites users are free to choose who can see their

information. So for example, they can choose to keep their data to themselves, show them to their contacts, to everyone in the site, or even to non members. There are also debates about the ownership of the data which some social networking sites would like to claim for themselves but which users believe is theirs.

DISCUSSION

This chapter has presented an overview of the nature of online communities and their dynamics. This overview has highlighted some aspects which concern the way online members organise themselves to keep their participations harmonious, and which keep the communities alive. Distinctions between different online environments show how various kinds of participation could be achieved depending on the tools and strategies used.

Being this a book on e-governance in this last section I would like to highlight some possible areas of intersection between the development of online communities and the efforts of governments at trying to provide better electronic services and get community engagement.

For a few years now, governments and local public institutions around the world have found the internet and other electronic networks useful tools to carry out some of their activities. In its beginnings e-government was associated with e-commerce and hence it had a focus on transaction and customer satisfaction. An example of this would be paying taxes online. However, with the advancements in technology and the emergence of new uses for that technology, public administrations have now the potential capacity to transform

their processes by introducing e-governance. New web technologies – like web2.0 - allow people to interconnect and interact between them in different ways. Apart from the obvious benefits of modern electronic tools (saving money, increasing efficiencies, 24/7 access), there are other perhaps more important benefits to public administrations and their citizens brought by the use of the internet. Research in this area shows that the internet helps democratic institutions by increasing their transparency and accountability. (Torres et al., 2006) This brings e-government to a political plane (Calista and Melitski, 2007) with more citizen empowerment as citizens are able to see and have a say on what the authorities are doing for them.

UNESCO defines governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority and e-governance as the performance of governance via electronic medium (UNESCO, 2005). In other words e-governance is about governments' efforts to encourage civil engagement via electronic tools. It is about allowing authorities interact with their citizens and vice versa; and thus establishing new channels of communications between them. By doing this, citizens are able to participate in processes such as decision making, development of new ideas, requesting changes or protesting. As these kinds of activities are typical of online communities, understanding their nature and dynamics could be useful for implementing governance in the online medium. An example of the use of online community strategies for governance purposes is shown in figure 3. This is an extract from the White House weblog where the writer (who reproduces the authorities' requests) offers readers (citizens) ways to contribute with

Figure 3. Authorities ask citizens for their opinions (Source: The White House weblog, www.whitehouse.gov/blog, date of post: 13th of May 2009)

- Have a suggestion for reforming food safety policy? Drop it in our [comment form](#), or let the Working Group know on [twitter](#) (hashtag #WHsafefood) or at [our Facebook page](#).

their comments on Food Safety issues. In this instance there are three possible ways for giving opinion, one being an online form, and the other two via social networking sites.

Figure 3 shows how authorities can develop initiatives by employing tools used by common citizens. With these media they become more accessible by placing themselves at citizens level but without abandoning their status as authorities.

Another important aspect that should be considered is that the online world is not only a technological world but a gateway through which people would like to contact other people. Having the most advanced technologies would not help if citizens do not get the impression that someone is listening and doing something about their concerns. Therefore what is needed is authorities or their representatives getting involved in online dynamics rather than portraying themselves as sophisticated electronic tools. An illustration of this is given in Figure 4. 10 Downing Street has

read a post by a Twitter user and is replying to him through the same medium.

These last two illustrations (figure 3 and 4) are good examples of how governments can engage in online community participations by using media which is already established in the mind of citizens. Every common citizen can have a weblog or an account in Twitter, and indeed millions of them have one or more. Citizens like those would probably feel more identified with a government's face with which they are familiar. By using these means of participation governments and citizens must of course play by the rules and norms that allow these communities to exist. Note how 10 Downing Street uses Twitter's conventions of communication by using the @ symbol to refer to another person or entity.

Rather than using top-down strategies e-government efforts can also focus on bottom-up approaches by giving citizens more freedom to shape their own ways at accessing their authorities. With this I do not mean that citizens should

Figure 4. 10 Authorities interact with citizens (Source: 10 Downing Street Twitter site, date of post: 15th May 2009)



design or own e-governance initiatives. That is in the hand of governments and authorities. However, I think that these initiatives could embrace some community success factors so as to incorporate all the richness from online dynamics and content. As I explained in the previous sections, these factors emerge from the online participations. For example, considering the reasons and motivations that will lead citizens to use a web site to access their authorities, or by being aware that such participations do not always happen on a personal basis but emerge from community interactions.

REFERENCES

- Allan, B. (2007). *Blended Learning: tools for teaching and learning*. London: Facet Publishing.
- Baym, N. K. (1995). The Performance of humor in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1(2).
- Calista, D. J., & Melitski, J. (2007). E-Government and E-Governance: converging constructs of public sector information and communication technologies. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 31(1), 87–120.
- Coakes, E., & Clarke, S. (2006). The Concept of Communities of Practice. In E. Coakes & S. Clarke (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Communities of Practice in Information and Knowledge Management* (pp. 92-95). Hershey, PA: Idea Group Reference.
- Elliott, M. S., & Scacchi, W. (2003). Free software developers as an occupational community: resolving conflicts and fostering collaboration. In *Proceedings of the 2003 ACM SIGGROUP conference on supporting groupwork* (pp. 21-30). New York: ACM Press.
- Greenfield, P. M., & Subrahmanyam, K. (2003). Online discourse in a teen chatroom: New codes and new modes of coherence in a visual medium. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24(6), 713–738. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2003.09.005
- Grefter, A. (2006, September 16). This is your space. *New Scientist*, 46–48. doi:10.1016/S0262-4079(06)60500-9
- Jacobson, D. (1996). Contexts and Cues in Cyberspace: The Pragmatics of Naming in Text-Based Virtual Realities. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 52(44), 461–479.
- Kettinger, W. J., & Grover, V. (1997). The use of Computer-mediated Communication in an Interorganizational Context. *Decision Sciences*, 28(3), 513–555. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5915.1997.tb01321.x
- Lee, F. S. L., Vogel, D., & Limayem, M. (2003). Virtual community informatics: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, 5(1), 47–61.
- Marcoccia, M. (2004). On-line polylogues: conversation structure and participation framework in internet newsgroups. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36(1), 115–145. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(03)00038-9
- McDaniel, S. E., Olson, G. M., & Magee, J. C. (1996). Identifying and Analyzing multiple threads in computer-mediated and face-to-face conversations. In M. S. Ackerman (Ed.). *Proceedings of the 1996 ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 39-47). New York: ACM Press.
- Millen, D. R., & Dray, S. M. (2000). Information sharing in an online community of journalists. *Aslib Proceedings*, 52(5), 166–173. doi:10.1108/EUM0000000007011
- Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). Making friends in cyberspace. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 1(4).

Online Communities

Rheingold, H. (1994). *The virtual community: finding connection in a computerized world*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Thomsen, S. R. (1996). @ work in cyberspace: Exploring practitioner use of the PRForum. *Public Relations Review*, 22(2), 115–131.

Torres, L., Pina, V., & Acerete, B. (2006). E-Governance Developments in European Union Cities: Reshaping Government's Relationship with Citizens. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 19(2), 227–302.

UNESCO. (2005). *E-Governance capacity building*. Retrieved December 2008, from http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=4404&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html