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Learning democratic participation for active citizenship by e-media

## **ABSTRACT:**

Development towards free democratic society requires constructive cooperation between on the one hand politicians and administrative personnel and on the other hand individual citizens and representatives of economic and cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations. In democratic practice these encounters consist of free information exchange, power to propose alternative lines for action and willingness of all parties to try out and support others' feasible propositions. In real world these conditions are not regularly met, but the European systems of legislation, education and training will be developed towards this ideal. My reflection uses experiences and data from two sources, the EU *Education and Training for Governance and Active Citizenship in Europe* (ETGACE, with its continuation Re-ETGACE) project and the Finnish *Citizen Participation Policy Programme*.

School systems offer limited opportunities for developing capacities and motivation for active citizenship. In Europe main themes are present in national curricula, but learning experiences are targeted towards examination-like goals, in Finland for more than half of each age-cohort matriculation examination, a paper-and-pencil test. According to ETGACE active citizenship depends on real world experiences of injustice, conflicts and developmental projects outside school curricula. The main question discussed is whether and how these two different learning bases can be combined with the help of e-learning: the various means provided by what is sometimes called teledemocracy.

ETGACE has given us examples of how educationally relevant information about active citizenship can be created and transformed into learning programmes. The Citizen Participation Programme offers further examples of teledemocracy and a wide perspective of how these new tools can be used both on the national level and also for international cooperation. Most of them are well known in these days, like open government databases, political forums and discussion groups, sophisticated voting machines that also teach the contents of reforms, group work facilitation programs etc. Their integration into school and adult education will be discussed using mainly Finnish examples. Despite differences of ICT infrastructure between different countries we need intensive research and development cooperation in this area.