



“Congratulations for this jump into the participation-oriented Internet. We need more of those stakeholders.”

(A user from the state-administration in the (anonymous) survey)

The ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY EUROPEAN NETWORK Consortium¹

Validation and Evaluation of the “Online Forum Horn-Lehe”

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² Annexes available on request

^{*} By now only available in German

Executive summary:

Within the E.D.E.N. project, pilot sites in Antwerp, Bologna, Bremen, and Vienna are implementing the (mainly natural language processing-based) tools. To prepare the testing-phase, from end of October to the beginning of December 2001, a tool for online discussions and another one for visualizing maps were applied in advance during a discussion about future development of the district Horn-Lehe in Bremen. This political frame enabled a broad approach from the view of content: from urban planning to youth, a lot of topics could be discussed. The discussion tool enabled anonymous and registered contributions with the right name as well as with a nickname to various topics from urban (district) planning to youth leisure activities. The forum combined information (e.g. masterplan and minutes of district board meetings) with discussion, the problem of high expenses for moderation should be met with the innovation of moderation by citizens (of the district); besides, it was a multi-channel access while online discussion and visualizing maps was accompanied by physical committee meetings (with the opportunity for citizens to express their opinion), household-questionnaire, round-table. Some results were:

- about 6.100 visits to the discussions were counted, 67 registered users and a unknown number of anonymous users (some 25-50) participated with 224 contributions;
- Large amount of material was “produced”, it was a big task for decision-makers to read them all (problem of information-handling capacity), consequence was that administrative experts became afraid to use the forum-tool for formal procedures;
- Surprisingly, two thirds of the contributions were constructive (good and better) according to a five-point rating list, nevertheless most of the contributions were only expressive, some listening or responding, a rare number emphatically and none of them persuasive (in both ways: being persuaded as well as persuading). The quality of contributions made by known authors was better. Only one third of the policy-makers judged the contributions to be constructive and of a good and better quality.
- The quality of discussions profited by contributions of the head of the district administration (and other experts);
- Four citizens from the district, aged about 45 to 65 (two women and two men), and the scientific evaluator managed the innovative “citizen moderation”. Mainly one of them, a senior citizen, did a lot of work, the other citizens less, and some of them had problems using the applications. “Citizen-moderators” need to be trained thoroughly (technically but also “socio-technically” to summarize contributions, to find sensible titles for them and to forward contributions to responsible experts for reply;
- A lot of users had problems with downloading the Java-script plug-in which was necessary to read the masterplan (7 MB, with download-times of more than an hour for modem-users), some 800 visits to the masterplan-map were counted (mainly from professional intermediaries);
- The project had a good press feed-back, importance of other PR-means (e-mailing, announcement on Bremen’s central Web site) was small or they were too expensive and ineffective (folder, poster). For further trials additional online activities should be used like integration of the assisted public access points and their mentors in the affected area of e-consultation. Besides, a short announcement (as an advertisement) should be provided on the Web site that can be forwarded by users to friends as an invitation;
- The forum is embedded into the political discussion about future of the district; politicians will test the opinions and ideas of the users; (“multi-channel”-approach; besides, they also organize a written questionnaire and a round-table);
- Evaluation of the (end) users’ views is difficult due to the fact that the addresses of those who replied anonymously (some 25 to 50, estimated) are not available. In this case, registered users also rarely filled out the questionnaire sent to their email-address (they had the opportunity to reply online). Possibly, those users who only participated once or in the beginning of the consultation might not be interested in replying to a questionnaire they receive three weeks after closing the debate. Users’ opinions on the side of the administrations and the policy-makers could be evaluated more easily, and these results are of higher validity.
- Moderators need an easy-to-understand (and brief) manual that should not only contain technical aspects but also explain how to deal with articles submitted by users, to structure and summarize discussions, and to find appropriate headings for the postings.

1. **Method of analysis:**

Interesting points for the validation and the evaluation of the technique have been the following:

1. The technical bases (incl. support) from the point of view of the suppliers (administrations, in the pilot mainly TZI and moderators) and the users and from an (abstract) point of view to support deliberative online citizen engagement
2. The user reach and their reaction on the supply (information and communication)
3. The (quality of the) content of user-contributions to the discussion and the communication among users
4. The expenses and means of compensation (e.g. "citizen moderation")
5. The "adaptability" of the tools relating to further topics, like motivation (of the citizens as well as of the administrative staff), political culture, laws, finance.

Various means of evaluation have been used (in brackets relating evaluation aspects of the above list). The list below shows that there is an overlap of methods and issues of evaluation.

- Attending observation (organizers/moderator have been partly identically with observers), joined sessions of moderators, collaboration with administrations, technicians, politicians (1, 2, 4, 5);
- Regular meetings with citizen moderators for exchange and feed-back (1, 2, 4, 5);
- Distanced evaluation (TZI employed a new scientist when the project was finished and entrusted him with part of the evaluation to avoid interest-collision between organisers' interest in receiving good results and scientifically required inter-subjectivity.) (2, 3);
- Text-analysis of user-contributions (3);
- Logfile-analysis (2, 3);
- Panel with "Internals" (1, 4, 5);
- Online-questionnaire for users (1, 2, 3, 5) (annex 3), and
- Online-questionnaire for policy-makers, administrations, and institutions involved in the implementation of the forum results (1, 3, 4, 5) (annex 4)

The feedback to the user-questionnaire was rather low, only 17 (24%) of (70) registered users (incl. those who sent an e-mail) filled in the questionnaire sent to their email-address (they had the opportunity to reply online). Due to the fact that we haven't got the addresses of those who replied anonymously (some 25 to 50, estimated), it is a feed-back rate that could not be used quantitatively. Besides, possibly those users who only participated once or in the beginning of the consultation might not be interested in replying to a questionnaire they receive three weeks after closing the debate.

Compared to this, the results of the survey among potential "implementers" of consultation results (policy-makers, employees of the district, city and state level of administration) have a higher validity. In this case, target groups received a specially tailored questionnaire via email (and those without email account received it via conventional mail). Table 1 illustrates the target groups who received the questionnaire.

1. The forum was targeted to citizens on the district level, therefore the 18 members of the committee (15 politicians and 3 consulting members) on this level were the main target group for the questionnaire. Five of 15 members of the committee who haven't got an Internet-access by now, got the complete printed version of the contributions to the e-consultation (some 120 pages). It was interesting that they all replied to the questionnaire – maybe because they got the questionnaire by conventional mail and not via email.
2. Recipients in the administrations belong to the three governmental levels in Bremen (district, city, state – because Bremen forms a German "Land" together with the city of Bremerhaven); on city and state level those officers were addressed who were head of a department that corresponds with the content of the forum (with the request to forward it to a responsible officer if necessary). The data base of the online questionnaire was constructed in a way that everybody could only reply once but that we knew *who* replied (of course without merging persons and their answers). Although the feedback-rate seems not to be as high, the most responsible persons replied – only on the upper state level replications were rare. That is understandable due to the fact that upper administrative levels can't handle with all local affairs.
3. As "representatives of interest groups" institutions located in the district were chosen like a sports club, a big school, a large retailer, or the church-community. The feed-back was quite small with 31%.
4. On state and city level, 20 members of two political committees (for urban planning and for the environment) were chosen because the political power of the politicians on the district level (of Horn-Lehe) is rather low (they are mainly responsible for some traffic affairs and can participate in the form of an institution that must be heard before decision-making in the state-level committees). Here only 4

(of 20) representatives replied. This can be explained like the feed-back of administrative officers on the state level mentioned under (2) – events in one of the cities and there in one (of 17) districts are not as important as events that have consequences for the whole city.

No. of sent questionnaires	Recipients	Feedback (no. of questionnaires)	Feedback in %
18	(1) Politicians, district level	11	61
24	(2) Administration	10	42
16	(3) Representatives of interest groups	5	31
20	(4) Politicians, state level	4	20
78	Summary 1-4	30	38

Table 1: Feedback to the questionnaire developed for policy-makers, administration officers and representatives of interest groups

The most important groups are the politicians and the head of departments on the district and city level of the administration. It could be realized to receive a high rate of feed back from these two groups (although it was necessary to send two reminders to the politicians). These results have been used for this evaluation.

2. Background and situation at the beginning:

Although the head of the administration of Bremen is very interested in a sustainable implementation of the EDEN-tools, individual employees in the offices have strong reservations towards new participation means because of organisational and structural reasons evaluated within EDEN WP2 interviews in early summer 2001 (like intensified work, less time resources). Therefore it seemed to be necessary to get internal acceptance through illustrating what might happen by adapting a realistic example. Further aspects that have been important to realize the (pre-) pilot, were:

- A pilot as a pre-test for two main tools within the E.D.E.N.-Project was estimated to be useful to learn from mistakes and have time for improving the tools and for influencing the circumstances of implementation.
- The district administration was open-minded about these tools (in contrary to the central administration – it was seen as a chance to get acceptance for the EDEN tools in Bremen’s central administration);
- The forum was embedded into the political discussion about the future of the district (“multi-channel”-approach: besides, they also organized a written questionnaire and a round-table); Horn-Lehe is a district of Bremen with some 24.000 inhabitants – that means the target group is small enough to keep a general overview;
- Half a year ago, TZI and the district administration launched an online polling on a traffic calming issue that showed that people want to express their opinion about what happens in their neighbourhood;
- The socio-demographic structure of the quarter suggests an above-average Internet-access because citizens mainly belong to the middle and upper class. The two arguments mentioned last underline the potential motivation of the citizens to participate.

The trial had some important features:

- Combination of information and discussion should be provided: Citizens should get the opportunity to receive background information about the topics they brought up. Therefore, for instance, the masterplan of the whole city was provided on the web for the first time; besides further information – like minutes of a district committee meeting and zoning codes and their explanations should be provided, if citizens formulated such a topic.
- A problem to implement online consultations in a sustainable manner is the limited capacity of administrations to do the accompanying work. To find a transferable solution for this problem, an innovative way was chosen by integrating the knowledge of the citizens through leaving the moderation up to them (together with the project-leader from TZI and the head of the district administration).
- Users should have different opportunities of access: anonymously, registered with a nickname or with their correct name.
- To reach a large number of users, a broad content access was chosen which ranged from district and city planning to questions relating to youth culture (“young citizens” are one of the two target groups, Bremen wants to take a special focus on within the EDEN consortium). The forum was embedded into a discussion within the (political) district committee about the future development of the district and fitted therefore best for the demands of EDEN.

- The consultation-forum should provide a barrier-free access (e.g. for handicapped citizens) in its discussion part (maps that visualize planning are another problem).

3. **The usability of the technical platform (incl. navigation)**

The technique (including navigation) is explained in the annexes 1 (for the e-consultation tool) and 2 (for the map-tool) from the point of view of end-users (citizens) and office-users (moderation). The comments below only relate to aspects that should be improved for the next trials in Bremen and other EDEN pilot sites – therefore the positive aspects are not mentioned because the trial (and the application chosen by PVL) as a whole was evaluated as a success.

3.1 **E-consultation tool**

- A general problem relates to **administrative rights**: Moderators had no possibility to change the static parts of the frame, e.g. the introduction text, explanations like the “help”-functionality or the pages behind the “moderation” term – in practice it meant that they had to send texts to PVL and wait until they react or had to discuss content of some pages or had to accept PVL’s change of design. This is okay within an EU-project but there have to be found other regulations for the real business case.
- Some users criticized the **design** of the Web site as boring due to too much text. But all organizers agreed that it should be a clear design with only two colours (beside white) to give the impression of a reputable and official site.
- The tool needs an improved “**help-**” **functionality** with tool-tips that should be linked to possible applications.
- The **homepage** seems to be overloaded with information. From the point of view of a user-centred design, it’s necessary to avoid scrolling at least on the homepage and to give users a brief overview about what is happening and how (s)he can act. Horizontal scrolling was necessary for some browser types and depending on screens of the users. Not IT-skilled Internet users but the average users (who normally don’t have high-speed Internet access at home) should be taken as a yardstick. Originally, the list of the ten latest lead texts (at the bottom of the homepage) should be usable as a filling sheet for the posters which should be updated several times a week as part of the marketing. This turned out to be unrealistic (for the reasons see the chapter 4). Besides, it makes sense to have some contributions on the homepage to make the forum lively (through listing of date, time, topics, subjects as an index to avoid overloading). Contributions already read should be marked in a separate colour to avoid wasting time.
- In the user survey, it was mentioned that users are not informed before participating about what happens with their contributions – e.g. the difference between “topics” and “comments” and that “moderators” edit the “topics” and that “comments” are shown directly on the web. Others criticised the access-opportunities to make contributions as being very bad that they were always navigated to the “enrolment-mask” when they wanted to comment or to add a new topic.
- For experienced users (or user groups that use the tool very often) or specific user groups (like especially advised officers in an administration or policy makers who should work with the results) the **application “presentation of comments”** (“Darstellung der Kommentare”) with (“Kommentare einblenden”) and (“Anzeigemodus”) makes sense to streamlining listing of comments and to enhance reading opportunities. But therefore one precondition has to be realized– a lot of users have to rate the comments – and that can hardly be guaranteed. Besides, the term “über 2,3,4...” (~ “more than 2,3,4...”) is definitely wrong – “besser als 2,3,4” (~“2,3,4 and better”) would be better. The **categories of rating** are inconsistent – if it is a rating similar to school-grades, “nonsense” (“Unsinn”) and “absurd” are not the opposites of “fantastic” (“toll”). For the users, it’s not clear if they should rate the content, the citizen who contributed, or the form. Besides, it might prevent users from participation with their real name because they are afraid that neighbours or others might run their contributions down. To improve user-friendliness of this application, at least a “help-text” (tool-tips) should be put underneath simultaneously with the movement of the mouse to these terms. We would suggest to leave this functionality out for normal use. Another proposal made by users in the survey was to **mark changes** (comments and topics that have not been read yet) relating to the last visit to save time. Besides it should be possible to be guided directly to the new comments.

- The **various possibilities to get comments presented** is of huge help for experienced users (under the precondition that the keywords are better chosen – none of the moderators e.g. understood the different meanings of the words “Diskussionsfaden” and “Flach” – also the English terms used in the original open-source version are not easily understandable – besides “index”). A problem is that all comments need to be listed with appropriate headings – users normally don’t do that (see below) and for moderators it’s additional work but should be done (and therefore trained at the beginning). To improve user-friendliness of this application, a “help-text” (tool-tip) should be put underneath simultaneously when the mouse is moved to these terms.
- To improve communication among users, it would be sensible if the “system” sends an email to those contributors who wrote the topic or comment to which the new comment relates .
- Some users criticized that they didn’t receive an email with a **confirmation of enrolment** and password and advice how to re-subscribe. Several users didn’t use any of the opportunities to contribute but sent an email to the organizers because they didn’t understand the procedure. In these cases, moderators had to explain the procedure via email. The functionality “forgotten password” is missing. Therefore, it is necessary to oblige registering users to fill in the Email-line in the form.
- Boxes to be filled in for making contributions should include a text on what should be written into the box, e.g. under “title”: “Here you fill in the title of your contribution”. The text disappears when users click on the box.
For internal use of authentication (and anonymous validation to know how many citizens really participated in the discussion), users should be obliged to fill in their name (e.g. as a facultative functionality).
If **users** want to participate with a topic or a comment, they need to know something about **html-language** because it’s **no WYSIWYG-** (what you see is what you get) **design** and they have to select from the options “text”, “HTML” and “extended format” (“erweitertes Format”) which seems to be unrealistic to expect from normal users. Some characters cannot be used (e.g. quotation marks) and will be transformed by the system. It’s very useful to give users the opportunity to make proof readings in their text, but if they forget to press “HTML” again if they want their “topic” to be forwarded to the web in the same manner as they have seen it when they wrote it, they are mistaken. Besides, it’s necessary to scroll to see all functionalities – “to send” (“Absenden”) and “preview” (Voransicht).
- **Moderators** need to have knowledge about html-language for using the EDEN-tool, too, because it’s **not a WYSIWYG- design**. They have to select from the options “text”, “HTML” and “extended format” (“erweitertes Format”) which seems to be unrealistic to expect from normal users. Some characters cannot be used (e.g. quotation marks) and will be transformed by the system. The explanations of the options can hardly be understood by non-computing specialists.
- Under “Variables” (“Variablen”) and “logging” in the heading line moderators can see, there are **administrative functionalities** that have not been explained to the moderators in the EDEN-trial.
- Two functionalities for moderators – „pushing a level upwards“ („Eine Ebene nach oben schieben“), necessary to sort comments, and „pushing to the top“ („Ganz nach oben schieben“), necessary to prioritize comments, haven’t been used in the forum – one reason was that the moderators were afraid to destroy comments (because within the first three weeks it was not possible for them to use the editing functionality to change the dates of contributions for instance). (The functionality might be improved if the term “delete” (“löschen”) would be replaced by “trash” to which moderators would have had access.) This aspect underlines that moderators need a **good (and brief) manual** that should not only contain technical aspects but also explain how to deal with articles submitted by users, to structure and summarize discussions, etc. (see chapt. 6).
- It’s not possible to provide links to other background information. Download of “Acrobat-Reader” is necessary (and as users complained, instructions must be provided in the language of normal users not in English if this is not the native language).

3.2 Visualized map tool

The map of the masterplan was of secondary importance in this trial, and the (GIS-) tool has not been developed within EDEN (of one of the consortium members), but was provided by AED graphics. The idea was to find out the problems providing an e-consultation on the one side and taking care for necessary information for the users on the other, because that is (combined with NLP) the tool-combination that will have most relevance for the Bremen pilot site (and other municipalities as well) in the future. Aspects that have to be taken into account for the next trials are:

- Maps should be used without downloading plug-ins. If this is not possible, explanations for the download methods must be given in the mother tongue in natural language (non-planning and non-technical vocabulary!) and information about download-times are necessary.
- Links to external organisations/companies (such as to AED-graphics in this case) should be avoided because they do not increase trust of the users – therefore one address for the whole system (including information) is useful if official information are included.
- The interface among maps (and information-texts) must be produced. In the pilot it was not clear (=self-explaining) for users how the masterplan relates to the issues of the discussions.
- A glossary and explanation texts in natural language for the specific terms (e.g. the legend) and the abbreviations used in the map must be available from all pages. Abbreviations (like FNP 25000 or TK 25000 FNP) should be avoided because it's not understandable for non-planners.
- The provided layers (like changes of masterplan, schools, allotment gardens, etc.) should be chosen according to estimated user demands.
- Specific documents (like the masterplan) need a secure area for non-public comments from citizens to the administration.
- The tool should include a viewport that users have an orientation among the entire map.
- Contacts to responsible staff in the administration should be provided (email, phone, fax, postal address).
- (Layers of) the map(s) must be linked to textual comments and explanations (in the example providing the old text of the masterplan drawn up some 20 years ago made no sense, therefore another text with a broader horizon was provided but not linked to the map). Like for the consultation-tool, here a download of the "Acrobat-Reader" is necessary.

4. *User reach, access and users' behaviour*

4.1 Public relations

Potential users should be addressed through various public relation channels:

- through e-mail dispatching and involvement of the "citizens' association" of the district
- through an invitation to the launch-date (to policy-makers, officers from the administration, members of interest groups with presentations about the political background, EDEN, and the technology)
- through printed media (the main Bremen newspapers): three announcements, one of them with a picture, another as a call for moderators; two comprehensive articles were printed about the launch of the site, two others later with first impressions and results, and one two month after after closing the consultation when results were published.
- through the web site of www.bremen.de, Bremen's online city information system,
- posters (DIN A 2 - ~60x42 cm) to be put up in local shops, at the district office and other public locations. The poster had a white space to update it with a list of the ten latest lead texts of the discussion several times a week. This turned out to be unrealistic because retailers couldn't provide enough space for the posters. Besides, it was a lot of work, done by a student, to visit all shops and public institutions in the area. Doing it many times for updating seems to be too expensive. In the feed-back of the moderators they remarked that a better planned PR-campaign might have been necessary which included the local retailers to be open for public relations in their shops.
- folders (DIN A 4 – 30x21 cm, twice folded into three parts) for shops. Poster and folders showed the same photographs as the homepage of the Web site.

The project had a good press feed-back, the main local newspapers announced the Web site twice and reported five or more times about this event (three long articles). The importance of other PR-means was small (Bremen.online, e-mailing) and ineffective (folder, poster).

„Ich lebe gerne hier! Horn-Lehe soll so bleiben, wie es ist.“

„Ich studiere hier und bin für mehr Abendkurse.“

„Meine Schule braucht einen neuen Sportplatz!“

<http://www.horn-lehe.de>

„Bleiben wir Senioren da nicht auf der Strecke?“

„Wer im Forum Horn-Lehe schreibt, was er denkt, kann nicht auf der Strecke bleiben!“

FORUM HORN-LEHE

Wirklich etwas bewegen...

Alle Bewohner von Horn-Lehe können ab **27. Oktober 2001** die Zukunft ihres Stadtteils mitgestalten.

Im Forum Horn-Lehe wird online über Projekte, Pläne und Perspektiven zu folgenden Themen diskutiert werden:

- Bauwesen**
- Wohnen**
- Verkehr**
- Nahversorgung**
- Bildung**
- Kultur**
- Freizeit**
- Soziales**

Zukunft im Stadtteil.

Figure 1: The poster for the e-consultation with its motto: “take influence ”

FORUM HORN-LEHE
Zukunft im Stadtteil.

Handel & Dienstleistungen

Verkehrsprobleme

Wohnen & Leben

„Schauen Sie rein und schreiben Sie zu einem dieser Themen.“

Stadtteilgestaltung

Lärm

Sicherheit & Ordnung

Freizeit & Bildung

Durch Anregungen einzelner Diskussionsbeiträge können sich weitere Themenbereiche ergeben, die fixe Bestandteile des Forums werden.

FORUM HORN-LEHE
Zukunft im Stadtteil.

<http://www.horn-lehe.de>

FORUM HORN-LEHE
Zukunft im Stadtteil.

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Das FORUM HORN-LEHE ist Teil des EU-Projektes E.D.E.N. (E-Democracy European Network) und wird aus EU-Mitteln gefördert. Wir danken der Firma „aditional“, dass sie den Lizenzvertrag für die Dauer des Projektes zur Verfügung stellt.

„Wirklich etwas bewegen...“

Figure 2: The folder for the eConsultation

4.2 Access

The district of Horn-Lehe in Bremen enables public access to the internet at (assisted) public access points (in the district office, two senior homes, and a so-called “Web-point” in a school which was launched at the end of the trial). 6,100 visits to the discussions (hits on the homepage were not counted because they are often occasional and don’t say anything about the success of the website) have been counted from which some (at least) 1,500 came from moderators and scientific/technical/administrative staff.

Occasionally, visits were registered regular (not exponential) increasing as figure 3 illustrates. The relationship between duration of the e-consultation and the number of accesses of readers was linear, not exponential as one could have thought. (One should think that an “ideal” user looks at the Web site regularly to see the changes and to follow the discussion. That means with one user who visits the Website sometimes during the discussion-time, the curve would be a line proportional to time. If the number of users increases, the curve must become exponential.) That means that average users didn’t follow the discussion continuously, but only once or twice.

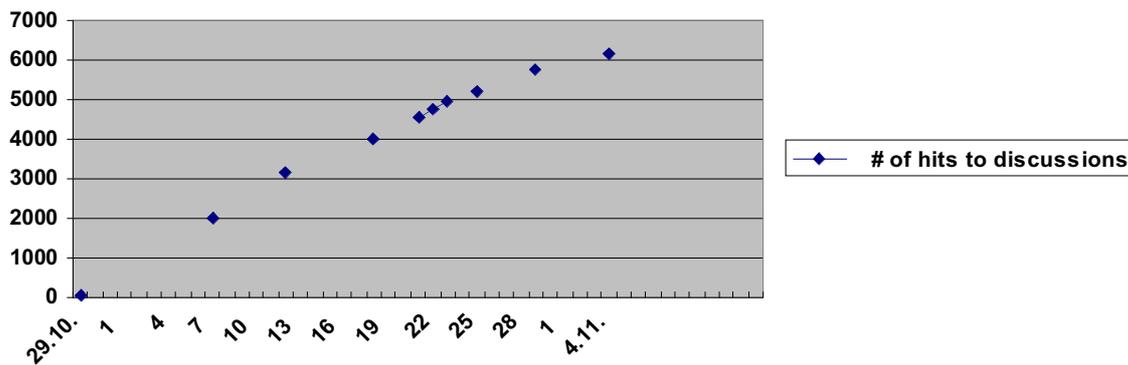


Figure 3: Visits of discussions during the Horn-Lehe trial

To simplify access to the e-consultation site, an easy-to-remember and easy-to-communicate URL was chosen (www.horn-lehe.de). This URL was owned by a private entrepreneur located in the district who allowed us to use it for some months. Governmental supplies should be provided through the official Web site www.bremen.de, but in this case it seemed preferable to make an exception because we thought it more important to have an easy-to-understand URL for this first event and could use a private URL than a (free-of charge) address (including some server space) on the Web site of the city information system. Nevertheless, the local newspaper printed one article with a small mistake in the address that enabled access to the site). Access via the municipal Web site of www.bremen.de (three clicks) was too complicated according to some users’ opinions.

The number of postings is illustrated in figure 4. The figure illustrates the distinguished modes of participation as

- registered user with correct **name**,
- registered user with a **nickname**, and as
- **anonymous user**.

The anonymous access was provided to reduce the inhibition level to show off in the public as well as in a new (unknown) medium. The large amount of postings (the biggest column among these three modes of access with 73 postings) through this channel clearly shows that it is necessary to provide this access-route. At the beginning, organisers had a discussion to post “fakes” to stimulate others for contribution. But this was rejected from a scientific point of view. We only know of two “faked” comments and one contribution of a new topic made by a (citizen-) moderator’s wife (but this seems to be legitimate because she is a citizen of the district) at the beginning for this purpose. (###Maybe, Thomas knows more about ...). Sometimes, moderators stimulated citizens to make contributions who otherwise might not have known about the e-consultation or would be cautious.

The possibility to choose nicknames was provided to identify postings to different topics of the same deliverer – if “Andreas” made a good comment to topic “xy”, I would take his other contribution to topic “yz” seriously although I disagree.

Besides these postings from “normal” citizens, the figure also illustrates contributions of other important stakeholders:

- The head of the district **administration** was involved in the discussion with direct replies to requests, complaints and suggestions of citizens. This was extremely helpful because it raised the quality of discussion or explained the background of a discussed topic.
- The **moderators** tried to do the same (but normally the administrative staff has more inside knowledge) mainly relating to organisational issues or by organising contributions of appropriate experts or written background information (like minutes or a zoning code). Sometimes it was difficult for the moderators (although they received assistance from the district administration to identify the responsible department and level of public authorities).
- Sometimes **external experts** reacted and improved the quality of discussion (but this is a point that could be improved during further trials).

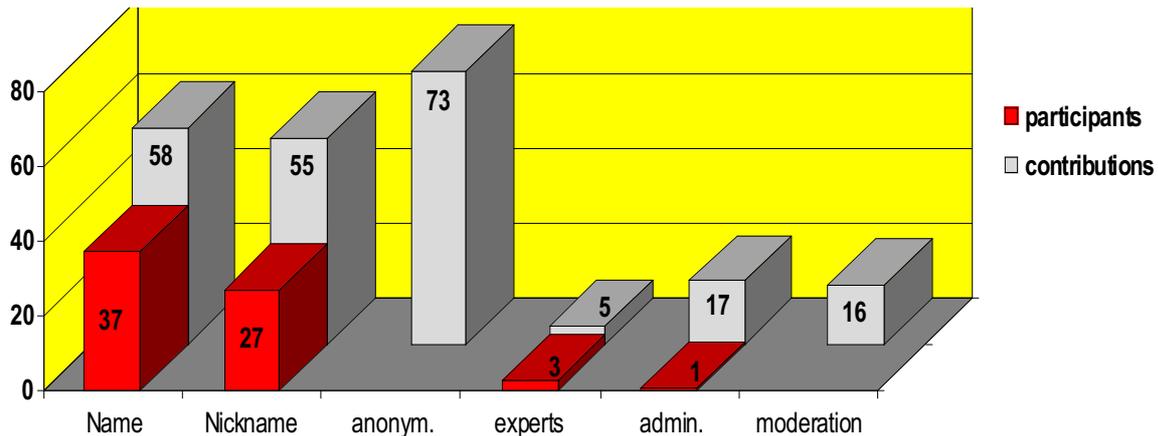


Figure 4: Number of postings and different stakeholders

Some further remarks in brief:

- The trial had the demand to realize an access-for-handicapped-persons-approach which was realized partly.
- One user remarked that he didn't understand the term "moderator" although he uses the Internet for some five years and took this as an indicator that the whole user-friendliness was bad.
- A lot of users had huge problems with downloading Java-script plug-in which was necessary to read the masterplan (7 MB, with download-times of more than an hour for modem-users), mainly intermediary professionals like architects, planners, etc. visited the masterplan-map.
- Some users sent congratulations for the project but sometimes criticised that it is badly known in the population.

For further trials additional online activities should be used like

- providing a short announcement (as an advertisement) on the Web site that can be forwarded by users to friends as an invitation;
- public access points (like Bremen's "web-points" and other assisted access points in senior homes, youth centres, etc.) must be mentioned on the flyers. "Scouts" and other mentors of access points in the area where the forum runs need to receive information about the e-consultation that they can help visitors to participate.

4.3 Provision of content and its comprehension

The forum combined information with discussion. Users could see under the "document"- ("Dokumente"-) button on the first page a list of background information of each topic provided for better understanding (some of) the subjects (for illustration of the design, see the screenshots in the annex 1). Here, e.g., another 3D-animated map, a zoning code, minutes of district board meetings and a comprehensive article about urban planning in the city were listed (in pdf-format) beside the masterplan. The download-numbers listed in figure 5 illustrate that not many visitors used these additional information. A user suggested that suppliers should give information about the history of the district.

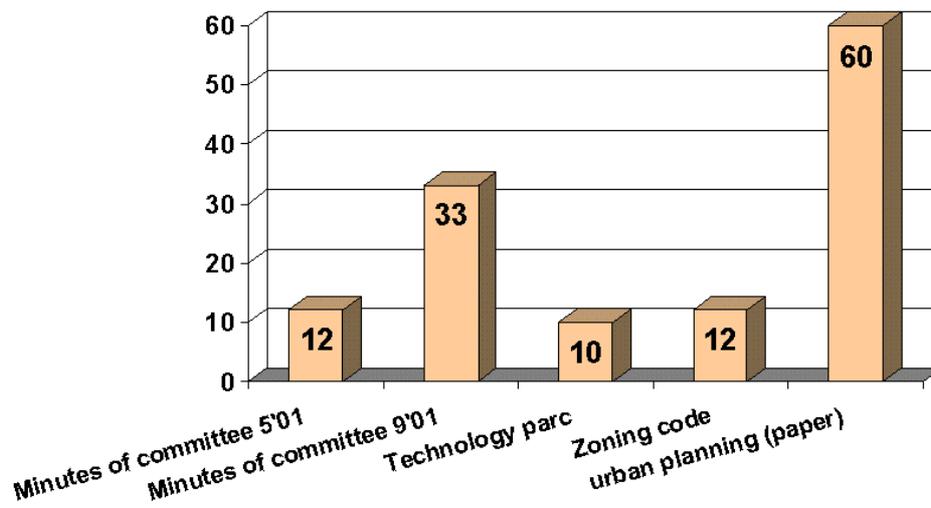


Figure 5: Number of downloads of supplemented information

The task is to improve presentation and interrelation/links between the information-material and the contributions to the discussion. In the trial, only 5 conventional materials (plus the complex but already not NLP-related masterplan with many layers) were provided – for further e-consultations which fulfil the demand to be real deliberative, it's necessary to find ways to organize this supply in a visible-at-a-glance manner. Besides, we would propose to improve the application by advising the (citizen-) moderators

- to write summaries of longer discussions and provide a functionality to highlight them maybe in another colour (in the trial the moderation-team decided after two and a half weeks to summarize one discussion with some ten comments) and
- to title (or maybe re-title, too) new comments (mostly users didn't fill in the "title"-box of comments or topics)

For new visitors this might be extremely helpful. The only problem will be that a moderator might hesitate to make changes at other users' contributions and that their summaries might be wrong or incomplete (esp. in formal participation procedures). Besides, it might be useful and necessary to tailor postings (if they are based on different subjects) and assign them to different topics or to finalise a discussion.

5. Content, its quality and the acceptance of an online-forum

There is a strong correlation/interrelation between the quality of the content of a consultation, the political credibility of the circumstances that lead to the consultation, the political culture, access to and the acceptance of an online-forum:

- The better the **political culture** and the climate of relying on citizens' opinions, the higher the grade of participation at / **access** to participation events ("political efficacy" within the "standard model of political participation").
- If a participation-event (like the e-consultation) is embedded **credibly into a political decision process**, these circumstances lead to higher participation / **access** rates ("legitimacy of procedure").
- The higher the number of participants, the higher the probability that the results are representative, more rational and of **higher quality** (but that's no "must").
- The better the **quality of content**, the higher the **acceptance**.

5.1 Embedding the e-consultation into the political process

When the idea of the forum was generated it seemed that it was adapted into the political discussion within the district committee about the future of the district and that the politicians wanted to evaluate the opinions and ideas of the users; therefore a "multi-channel"-approach was chosen:

- Beside the e-consultation, the committee also organized
- a written questionnaire and
- a round-table.

The multi-channel approach was based on the fact that Internet-users are not identical with the whole population. From the view ex post it seems that it was a matter of concern mainly of the head of the district administration and not of the politicians (indicators are the questions at two presentations of the forum in front of

the committee when the forum was presented to the committee and the delay of response to the survey which only came after several reminders, and the answers to the question if the politicians are willing to implement suggestions made in the forum – only 9% of them answered “yes”, 18% clicked “no” and 36% “don’t know yet” two months after the end of the discussion). The early statement that the e-consultation will be embedded into other means of gathering citizens’ opinions also seems to be rather a gesture of goodwill of the head of the administration, but has not been realized.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the postings according to content-criteria have been surprising.

5.2 Topics

The consultations enabled discussions about various topics from urban (district) planning to youth leisure activities – this was the result of political discussion within the district committee. “Topics” were

- commerce and services
- traffic
- housing and living
- district planning
- noise
- security
- leisure and education
- discussion forum.

The latter was added during the discussion. Table 2 illustrates which topics were of most importance for the (end-) users. Contributions were made mainly about “traffic problems”, “commerce and services” and “district planning”. Besides, it should be mentioned that 41% of all contributions were made about topics related to community planning and not to “backyard-problems”. Considering that most citizens only participate in NIMBY-topics (“Not in my backyard!”) this is remarkable!

Topics	Subject	No. of accesses/hits	No. of comments
Commerce and services	More diversity	672	17
District planning	General thoughts on Horn-Lehe	478	4
Security	Neo-Nazi’s in Horn-Lehe	354	7
Traffic	Access to „Nedderland“ (a specific area)	261	12
Traffic	Specific traffic lights problem	241	3
Traffic	Traffic problems in a car-free district?	207	5
Noise	Intersection railway – street	207	4
District planning	Planning of a brownfield complex	192	5

Table 2: Topics of main interest for the users

Meanwhile with exception of two contributions every user posted to subjects relating to the above topics focussed on the district of Horn-Lehe (at the launch press conference, a journalist was very sceptical that in a global usable medium like the Internet only citizens from this special district might discuss). People tried to use the forum for their purposes (neo-nazi propaganda) twice, in another case a posting was deleted because it called for violence.

The deliberative quality of the e-consultation was evaluated according to the quality of the content and the means of communication among users.

5.3 Quality of content

To judge the quality of content, all postings were classified to five categories:

- 0 opinion, wish
- + opinion, proposal, information of a fault
- ++ opinion and constructive proposal, reply of an expert
- opinion and in-productive proposal
- box for complaints, swearing, insult.

Surprisingly, two third of the contributions were constructive (good and better) according to this five-point rating list (see figure 6). The quality of contributions made by known (registered) authors was better. The quality of discussions profited by contributions of the head of the district administration (and other experts);

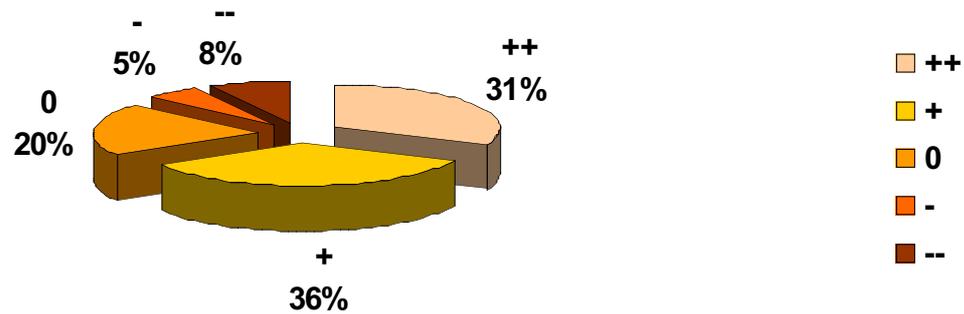


Figure 6: quality of all contributions

The citizens of Horn-Lehe as well as the policy-makers will have other judgements of the quality of the contributions than the organizers of the forum because the latter have a view of more distance - they aren't prejudiced against special citizens but don't know (or rarely) on the other hand about the history of specific comments and topics and can't judge a contribution as "nothing new" or "1000 times heard before". For that reason, politicians, administrative employees and interest group representatives were requested in the survey how they would evaluate the quality of the contributions to the consultation. The statements of the politicians from the district committee and from the administrative staff could be used because their feed-back rate came up to 61 and 42% (see table 1) and can be estimated as representative:

- 40% of these two groups didn't reply to this question at all.
- Nobody of the administration staff and the politicians replied that the quality level is proportional high.

Among all answering politicians and administrative staff, incl. those who didn't reply to this specific question,

- 29% meant that the contributions were predominant constructive,
- also 29% put a cross beside "there are (few) constructive postings";
- 24% said that the e-consultation was misused as a moaning-box (Meckerkasten);
- 10% stated that the postings were under the level of those made in traditional procedures,
- 5% meant that the quality level was quite low.

(It was possible to make more than one cross.)

The (neutral) statement from the scientific point of view mentioned above and these have to be compared with care because we scientists looked at every single posting and classified it while the addressees of the survey gave their general impressions. But nevertheless, there remains a difference between both results that could partly been explained as done above. It could be expected that this difference would remain, if representatives from politics and administration would judge the contributions together with scientists because "politicians" are not a homogenous group – they have different points of view and opinions when they judge citizens' contributions to discussions, a representative of the district administration might have another point of view than sb. from the city or state level.

One important result is that only a small number of politicians and administrative staff read the contributions. This is understandable due to the amount of material and contributions which were produced (some 120 printed pages) but must have consequences for further consultations and their adaptability to political processes (see chapt. 7.2 and 5.2).

5.4 Communication among users

This is another aspect to analyse the deliberative character of the consultation. Do the stakeholders only express their own opinions, are they interested in communication with other citizens, do they listen to one another, do they respond; is it possible to be convinced in such a discussion? There have been 15 "discussions" with more than four comments (up to 17) about one subject (of a total of 55 subjects). A condition for counting them as a "discussion" was that the postings mainly related to each other and were oriented at this single subject.

- First, it's difficult to state how many citizens "listened" to the discussion: We think that of all 6,100 visits to topics, at least 1,500 (up to 2,000) came from the organizers (incl. moderation), With an average amount of three to four hit topics per visit (of eight topics provided) this means that some 1,000

to 1,300 times users read several postings; it's hard to say how many times those citizens returned to the forum – if an average user visited the website only once, we have some 1,000 users, if they returned five times during the five weeks consultation period, we have some 260 citizens being deeply involved into the process at least “listening” (=reading for this medium).

- At least 37 citizens participated with own contributions under their real name, 27 stakeholders with nickname can partly be identical with those who used a real name. Probably, users who participate anonymously send more postings than those who are authenticable – if anonymous users made 73 postings (see figure 4), that will be some 20 to 40 persons, some of them identical with those already counted in both other categories. We can estimate that the forum had about 70 to 100 posting participants.

For evaluation of communication quality, we distinguish between five categories with increasing quality/grade of communication:

1. The character of contributions mainly was *expressive* (users expressed their own opinion in 210 cases) (expressivity);
2. 72 postings relied on an opinion expressed in the related posting (reciprocity);
3. 63 responded to other postings and went into them (responsivity);
4. 10 tried to put themselves in another stakeholder's position (empathy).
5. It couldn't be watched if anybody was persuaded or could persuade anybody else (but this can hardly be observed, neither in electronic consultations nor in conventional discussions. (Persuasion)

Discussion among participants could be improved if the author of a posting gets an email when somebody responds to her/his contribution. For a better analysis of this issue, it is necessary to have a close look into log-files and follow the user behaviour (once, twice, regularly, etc.). This hasn't been done in this trial.

5.5 Acceptance:

Compared to offline procedures, the online consultation was very well accepted by the citizens. Horn-Lehe has 24,000 inhabitants; some 260 to 1,000 users read postings of the e-consultation, 70 to 100 participated with own contributions (normally, public meetings in the evening have some 50 to 150 visitors with about 10 to 20 persons making contributions). From this point of view, the Forum Horn-Lehe was extremely well accepted by the citizens. But looking closer into the two groups, the Bremen pilot site wants to focus on – young citizens and interest groups – the result was no success: No participant declared that (s)he belongs to a lobby group (although we know from the name, that members of the “citizen-association” (“Bürgerverein”), an environmental group and a political party sent postings; but they did so as individuals. There was only one subject directly related to problems of young citizens (the future of the youth centre), initiated by one of the citizen-moderators (marked “anonymous”) who is a teacher at a school in the district, but comments were rare.

Administration as main editor in the background increased the acceptance for users. To illustrate this role of the administration, it was necessary to have contributions from experts from the administration and to highlight them.

The politicians of the district committee have been more sceptical. They argued that only (small) parts of the inhabitants have access to the Internet (and are using it continuously) – therefore results are not representative. Regarding to often discussed issues like “social exclusion”, this is quite correct, otherwise according to EU surveys some 40% of German households have access to the Internet (http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/benchmarking/list/2001/cheap_fast_safe/int_hous_june01.gif), Horn-Lehe will have better access rates because of its social structure. (And it could be doubted that participants at public meetings represent the average of the citizens). A further proof of scepticism was that most names of participants of the e-consultation are well-known what was taken as an indicator that the results are not representative. An officer from the administration stated in the survey: “The strong focussing on few contributions which do not represent the opinion of the majority, might lead to a bias of the public opinion, like letters to the editor of newspapers. These distortions can hardly be controlled. The fact to react in a form that everybody can read it might lead to a wrong assessment of the relevance of own contributions.”

A large number of users and especially employees of the administration and policy-makers criticised that it was possible to post contributions anonymously. “We are not living in a dictatorship, and those who only want to stir things up, should do this with their real names!” Others (from administration) said that the shaping of opinion might be distorted by anonymous contributions. Somebody from an interest group wrote (in the survey) that

(s)he thinks that an anonymous posting is not democratic. It might lead to a lack of objectivity. A politician from the district committee demanded not to use anonymous contributions.

But there are good **arguments to accept anonymous postings** in e-consultations and to keep it part of this EDEN-tool (beside the – abstract – increase of the total number of contributions) which were not mentioned in the survey:

- It's a fact that only a minority of citizens is courageous to participate in public discussions were they have to stand for their own opinion (like letters to editors of newspapers or speaking at public meetings). It is the specific chance of the medium Internet to provide an opportunity to those who are afraid to do so or who think that they aren't so very sophisticated or trained in speaking or writing.
- In this context it seems like a joke that also (at least) one politician reacted anonymously to a previous posting. (It's well-known that especially politicians are afraid to participate in e-consultations within not-finalized discussions or to reply to e-mail requests because citizens then can refer to their written statements.)
- The qualitative analysis of the postings clearly showed that more than 40% of anonymous contributions had a good quality (and only less than 30% were bad).
- Opinions being latent within the citizenship (but made taboo) can be articulated this way (see the discussion about and among neo-nazis or latent-xenophobic citizens in Horn-Lehe).

6. Expenses and means of compensation

6.1 Expenses and necessary resources

The main expenses for maintaining an information-based e-consultation are the following:

- Software for the necessary tools, interfaces between the Intranet of the administration(s) to provide maps and the public Internet access, hardware in the form of (map-) servers (maybe via a secondary provider, but it remains a problem of trust if users are routed to a commercial URL);
- Support for the internal users to apply the tools for the concrete site and use;
- Provision of information material (its organisation and processing, re-writing of existing material for publishing via the Internet),
- Public relation (designing and printing folders, organisation and carrying out of press talks, other means of dissemination);
- Moderation and facilitation (provision of "official" contributions, mainly from the administration, editing postings, structuring of discussions, writing summaries, control of discussion);
- Continuous maintenance of interfaces between discussion and information;
- Preparation of results (as summaries) for policy makers (and the public).

(Main) part of the trial in Bremen was the development and permanent improvement of the discussion-tool and the application of the online presentation of the masterplan. These are issues that normally (in the business case) should not play a role.

Underestimated expenses are the provision of content from the administration (interfaces among maps and discussions to get utility for the users), necessary contributions/replies of experts to postings of citizens, and the moderation. For the latter, an innovation was applied in Horn-Lehe, the "Citizens'-moderation".

6.2 Citizens' moderation

The idea was to reduce costs for moderation on the one side and to let citizens participate at the maintenance of the e-consultation to get a higher commitment of the citizenship on the other side. Residents were invited through newspaper-articles, and (after low feed-back) selected persons aged about 45 to 65, two women and two men, were won over to do this work together with the head of the district administration and the author. The main reason for some moderators to participate was (beside they were interested in the issue) that the duration of the e-consultation was limited to five weeks.

- "citizen-moderators" have to be trained intensively technically but also "socio-technically" to summarize contributions, to find sensible titles for them (for the index-listing and better usage) and to forward contributions to responsible experts for reply;
- for the technical part, a good manual is necessary;
- we made good experiences with scheduling the work of the volunteers who supervised the forum due to their working situation (the responsibilities over the day were divided into 2-4-hour blocks); in practice, the "senior" did a lot of work, the other volunteers less, they had problems using the applications (which shows that the application must be finalized before the launch, so that there is enough time for

training in a workshop). Nevertheless, it will be necessary to “supervise” the work of the volunteers and to stand in if somebody cannot do her/his job.

- The role of moderation must be explained on the website because some users won’t know what this means. Competences must be clarified to the public, a neutral address for complaints must be considered. In the trial, moderators suggested to choose a “chief-moderator”; but this does not seem to be necessary if there is good exchange of information within the team.
- The moderation-team needs an internal communication structure (weekly meetings, email-list for exchange of external mails, editing summaries, structuring discussions, exchange of experiences).
- It is not clear if a citizen-moderation is feasible for very controversial issues because users might think that they are not neutral.

7. **Adaptability**

Success of e-democracy activities is not only a question of technical adaptability (usability and utility) but also a question of motivation (of citizens as well as administration-internal staff), of laws, of organisational circumstances, (financial) resources, of political culture and general attitude towards political participation. Therefore, in this chapter we will focus on two important stakeholders, the administration and politics.

7.1 **Role of the administration:**

One main reason to select this district was mentioned at the beginning – the head of district administration is very open-minded relating to IT-questions and public participation. (TZI already carried out an opinion-poll with very good results.) This is one important precondition for success of these activities. The district administration was mainly involved in the forum and has respectable influence on implementation of its results. Nevertheless, main responsibilities for implementation lay with the central administration of the municipality which is very fragmented (the head of the district administration sometimes did not know which department is responsible for certain subjects...).

Besides, the pilot had the function to motivate parts of the administration staff responsible for urban planning who reacted very sceptically in the user-requirements’ research at the beginning of the EDEN-project. It was a great leap forward that the central administration provided money and personnel resources to enable the launch of the current version of the municipal masterplan which shows and explains planning objectives and site-uses which are binding for the administration. The positive reactions especially from the professional intermediaries (architects, planners and developers) motivated the employees (nevertheless it became clear that the combination of a forum with NLP-supported maps is a hard task).

Some important results and conclusions are listed below:

- Motivation of the administrative staff responsible for organisation of the results’ implementation is crucial.
- The quality of discussions and the acceptability of the entire forum benefited from contributions (quick response to requests, complaints or hints of citizens) from the head of the district administration (and other experts).
- If a forum results in so many contributions like the one in Horn-Lehe (some 120 pages printed in small letters), it cannot be expected that they all will be read by different staff employees (esp. if e-consultations become common practice). Another problem is that many officers of administrations do not have access to the Internet at their offices (partly because superiors are afraid that they waste time with games etc.). It is necessary for both reasons to find methods to involve them with those aspects specially tailored to their responsibilities.
- A large amount of material was “produced”, it is a big problem for officers to read them all (problem of information-handling capacity). In normal procedures, it is the task of administration officers to shorten citizens’ contributions to planning before they deliver it to policy makers in the committees. Similar efforts are necessary to increase the handling of the e-consultation’s results.

In the survey, officers made the following remarks:

- “The strong focus on few contributions which do not represent the opinion of the majority might bias the public opinion, like letters to the editor of newspapers. These distortions can hardly be controlled. The possibility to react in a form that everybody can read might lead to a wrong assessment of the relevance of own contributions on which the administration could hardly react.”
- “The discussion produces an added expense and a lack of time in the procedures if users’ opinions differ from those of politicians.”

- “There is the chance that the function of a “complaints box” the forum also has, aggressions against the administrations could find an outlet. For many citizens it is good if they can express their opinion without expecting that it will lead to concrete activities asap.”
- It was suggested that e-consultations should not be held about such broad issues like in Horn-Lehe. “A concrete issue should be the centre of the discussion; otherwise there is the danger that people will talk about everything and nothing. Besides it will attract citizens involvement if they know I can contribute to a specific subject within a given time.”

7.2 Role of policy-makers

A further issue is the political adaptability: Participation supplies are less credible if a promise of implementation is missing. Online participation supplies must be integrated into the political process. Issues like legitimacy (elected committee, occasional public of an online forum) must be weighed against the new input (knowledge of citizens) into the political process and the social demand for other participation means than elections. Besides, it's a matter of sharing power that politicians have problems to listen to citizens' opinions as well as of the necessary amount of time to invest (and sometimes waste) for listening to often very particular (NIMBY) interests.

Before starting the forum, it seemed that it is embedded into the political discussion about the future of the district and that district administration as well as politicians will test the opinions and ideas of the users. One result of the e-consultation is that only a small number of politicians read the contributions. This is understandable due to the amount of material and contributions which were produced. On the other side, it was shown (see chapt. 5.3) that it can be doubted that the district committee stood behind the e-consultation. Politicians had hardly questions at two presentations of the forum in front of the committee (nevertheless they put it on the agenda and listened!) and the delay of response to the survey which only worked after several reminders is a further indicator. The answers to the survey-question if the politicians are willing to implement suggestions made in the forum are illustrating the problem of political adaptability – only 9% of them answered “yes”, 18% clicked “no” and 36% “don't know yet” two months after the end of the discussion). This should have consequences for further e-consultations (but it is not a problem of electronic consultations but of informal means of political participation in general).

Politicians had problems to participate in the e-consultation themselves. Although ten (of fifteen) members have access to the Internet, only one of them made contributions under his name; others argued at a committee meeting during the consultation that they want to listen to what the citizens are thinking. Surprisingly those members who do not have access to the Internet and who received the survey via traditional mail (incl. all postings in a printed version), replied soon while most of the others had to be reminded several times.

One interesting argument in the survey was (made by sb. from the administration) that (s)he is afraid that politicians might use results of Internet consultations like a plebiscite and could react in a populist manner.

8. Conclusions for further pilots within EDEN

The Horn-Lehe trial within the EDEN-project met the demands to clarify problems that should be solved before exploiting the EDEN-toolkit. Technical problems of the consultation-tool and of the map-tool were explained in annexes 1 and 2 (and summarized in chapt. 3). In the following, the non-technical aspects that should be considered for a successful implementation of the tools at other pilot sites are summarized:

- A detailed planning incl. timing of public relations in advance is necessary (receiving an easy-to-communicate URL; involvement of retailers and institutions to disseminate advertisements such as – non glossy – folders; press conferences for the launch date as well as in the middle; actions to target potential users during the trial; looking for mailing-lists to distribute electronic advertisements; direct approach to specific journalists; concept how to involve the special target groups each EDEN-pilot site has chosen). There should be additional online activities such as the integration of (assisted) public access points (and their mentors) on the affected site of the e-consultation. Besides, a short announcement (as an advertisement) should be provided on the Web site that can be forwarded by users to friends as an invitation to participate.
- It must be organised how to manage moderation, at first it should be tried to win them moderators ? through a short newspaper article or via the mailing-list of the administration. If this does not work representatives of different citizen groups and other well-known citizens should be appealed to. It is important that both genders, different ages and interests (if it is a controversial topic) are represented.

- It makes sense to focus the topic – otherwise too many contributions might be made so that handling them will become a problem . Besides, experts should be involved to participate in the discussion. The Horn-Lehe e-consultation illustrated that the quality of discussions extremely profited by contributions of the experts.
- The tool must be finalised weeks before the launch to enable a test? phase for the moderators and for the contact persons from administration mainly involved. The (technical) developers must be available during the days after the launch to react to users' demands and problems asap. The first impression of the website is lasting and could lead to avoiding the site.
- Moderators need a comprehensible (and brief) manual before the test? phase starts so that they can learn by testing the functionalities. This training should not only include technical aspects but also explain how to deal with articles submitted by users, how to structure and to summarize discussions, how to link discussion with relevant documents, and how to find appropriate headings for the postings – and if the citizen moderation is being used, how to communicate with one another.
- It needs to be clarified in the beginning how the results should be used and what their relevance is. Who is responsible to deal with the results, how should these addressees be involved? Who writes summaries for the decision-makers (moderation or administration)?
- Maps should be used without downloading plug-ins. If this is not possible explanations for the download methods must be given in the mother tongue in natural language (non-planning and non-technical vocabulary!) and information about download-times are necessary.
- Further software (e.g. download for Acrobat reader) should be provided.
- It should be clarified in advance which documents are to be provided (e.g. links to the history of the site if available somewhere else in the Web, etc. ...).
- Results of the discussion as well as a “thank you” should be published on the Website after the discussion.