

# ***Relationship-based Interaction and Co-Construction of Citizenship<sup>1</sup>***

## ***Two perspectives on design and development of public services***

Annelie Ekelin

Dept. of Human Work Science and Media Technology,  
Blekinge Institute of Technology, SE-372 25 Ronneby, Sweden  
Phone : +46 457 385557, +46 457 126 79  
E-mail: annelie.ekelin@bth.se

### **Abstract**

*In current e-government discourse in Sweden strong emphasis is put on the necessity of enhancing projects, aiming to reach beyond the static information delivery, towards a higher degree of electronic networking and interactivity, involving citizens actively in development of public information and services. The government has through SAFAD, The Swedish Agency for Administrative Development, presented a policy and strategies, in order to increase involvement of the public in service design and decision-making processes, i.e. by stressing the importance of developing methods for analysing information- and service needs, based on a customer perspective.*

*The main objective of this paper is to initiate a discussion and analysis of what could be characterized as new processes of relationship forming, involving various actors, in order to establish and stimulate relationship-based interaction between authorities and citizens and to discuss practices of co-construction of citizenship. Practical examples are the dialogues around service design that are taking place in the development of national, local and regional government in various parts of Sweden. Examples of both feedback failures and prosperous attempts are presented and discussed in this paper. I will also reflect upon ways to promote public involvement and a more participatory government, by the use of methods and tools influenced by participatory design.*

### **1. Introduction**

A key issue in the interaction phase of e-government, according to the on-going debate on development towards the “24x7 Agency” in Europe<sup>2</sup> is how to handle the transformation of a prevailing tradition of hierarchical communication between authorities and citizens, and gradually transform it into a dialogue-model based on horizontal structures and networking (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998), (Hague & Loader, 1999).

This paper discusses these new processes of relationship forming, aiming to establish and stimulate *relationship-based interaction* between authorities and citizens. Practical examples of this are the dialogues around service design<sup>3</sup> that are taking place in the development of local and regional government in various parts of Sweden. In the following I will also address

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper is going to be presented as a work-in-progress report at the PDC Conference in Malmö, June 22-25

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish version of this concept is developed in the report “A proposal for a definition of criteria for the notion 24x7 Agency”, which can be found (in Swedish) at: <http://www.statskontoret.se/pdf/200131.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Basically, a dialogue focusing on methods and processes for including citizens’ needs in development of online public services including citizens’ needs in development of online public services.

the possible implications this transformation process has for design issues within public administration.

Research and evaluation, mostly within Political Science, from Great Britain and the United States<sup>4</sup> concerning e-government and e-democracy, show that handing out information hitherto has been the main goal for national and regional authorities in England and USA (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998), (Hague & Loader, 1999). Using new technologies for citizen's feedback and stimulating participation has not been of the same importance. Swedish evaluations points out the tendency to focus upon providing information and services to customers and users, not to citizens (One-stop shops in development, 1999) the latter a role which encompasses both obligations and privileges, not just passive consuming. In the rare cases when feedback is gathered from the citizens, this is done by collecting opinions upon predestined issues rather than giving the citizens the opportunity of having a say when setting the agenda for discussions (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998), Hague & Loader, 1999). Development of a service culture in Sweden is officially envisioned to have a slightly different tradition, emphasizing a more informal relation, or at least a higher degree of informal communication, between citizens and authorities. The transformation from an "authority culture" into a "service culture" has proceeded gradually during the last decades (Eriksén, 1998). Concerning the last years of development within government in Sweden on the whole, it is possibly the case that the scope of focus has shifted – at least in the ongoing discourse – from enlightening and guiding the citizen, towards taking the starting point from the citizens' point of view and lately also "consulting" the citizens more actively.

## **2. Empirical background**

The discussions in this paper are mainly drawn from experiences and empirical material gathered during work on two separate inquiries, conducted within the framework of a research project on public services, the DitA project, Design of IT in Use<sup>5</sup>. As a third source, I have used experiences and reflections from my previous work with the Dialogue project, a Trans-European project, aimed at developing the use of ICT as a means for furthering democracy and methodological development, see <http://www.ronneby.se/dialogue/default.htm>. I am also currently involved in research concerning municipality initiatives on setting up and working with user evaluations based on the concept of focus group interviews, in order to "consult" the citizens, within municipalities in the region.

The first inquiry (henceforth called RISI++ -evaluation) was a study initiated by the EU, DG Employment and Social Affairs, carried out as a commission and follow-up on the Regional Information Society Initiatives, mapping stakeholders' and citizens' experiences, access to and requests for public services on-line. This study resulted in a report in two parts concerning public expectations for development within future public services.<sup>6</sup> The study was conducted as a peer evaluation of a selection of methods, or types of needs analyses, used by

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<sup>4</sup> The development of e-government in both Great Britain and USA and Australia are considered as role-models for the Swedish Government according to SAFAD, (Swedish Agency for Administrative Development.)

<sup>5</sup> The DitA project, Design of IT in Use; Supportive Technologies for Public Services, is a three-year project financed by Vinnova, The Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (project number 2001-03659). See <http://www.iar.bth.se/forskning/arbv/dita/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.ronneby.se/learning-lab/risi/en/index.htm>

different actors and producers of public services in order to get a picture of various needs among the users. Public expectations on the future services were discussed as well as views expressed by service providers, on the dialogue with the citizens concerning public services. This was compared with the practical use or, in some cases, lack of use, of explicit techniques, such as questionnaires, larger surveys and work carried out with the help of focus groups and discussions from user-evaluations. The material was mostly gathered through interviews and observations of technologies-in-use.

During the first half of 2001 I was involved in an evaluation of a Swedish e-government project, *The Swedish Public Internet Monitor Project*, (henceforth called the PIM project) in co-operation with researchers from two other Swedish universities – The Royal Institute of Technology and the Mid Sweden University. Perspectives from different research areas – Human Work Science, Computer Science, Social Anthropology and Political Science – were combined and contributed to the final evaluation. Public Internet monitors (basically a self-service system) in a number of different places in Sweden, and the experiences from their use, have been studied. This has mainly been carried out in the form of observations and interviews with users, and with the persons who are locally responsible for the monitors. However the PIM project can be considered as one of the first pilots promoting integration interaction and networking across authorities' boundaries, but yet not fully including the citizens. One of the results of the PIM project that was highlighted in the project report was what was termed by project management and local organizers as an on-going move from merely providing information on-line towards developing channels for “relationship-based” interaction with citizens. This concept was, however, not explored further or problematized in the report on the project.

### **3. Theoretical influences**

In accordance with Suchman et al. (1995) which summarizes the last twenty years of research in the field of participatory design (PD), I am following three interrelated lines of inquiry in this paper, which are to be seen as the main constituents of what could be defined as an approach striving to achieve “ethnographically-based design of digital technologies” (1995). According to the authors the core research within the PD-field consists of: *critical analyses* of technical discourses and practices, *ethnographies of work and technologies-in-use* and *design interventions* (Suchman et al, 1999). In another article by Lucy Suchman (1994) built upon research and notions originally developed and discussed by the feminist researcher Donna Haraway (Haraway, 1991) Suchman takes a leap and emphasizes the need to take working-relations as the starting-point when examining technology production and use. She discusses the more or less visible webs of working relations required to construct and implement useful technologies. Working across boundaries, locating design and building webs of connection, is highlighted as essential for technology production. The article clearly addresses the complexity of design at work, (Suchman, 1994) the blurring of boarders between professionals and more or less “invisible” actors, of which I pose citizens are an example. The possibility of re-defining the design-issue is outlined in the article and the necessity of questioning which roles different actors actually are playing, is highlighted. An approach of multiple actors-involvement in continuous tailoring of a system, or design-in-use<sup>7</sup>, is also applicable when exploring the rhetoric and practice of public participation in service design. Development of both new forms and contents of public services inevitably affects the infrastructures and technological solutions which are meant to support these changes.

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of design-in-use is developed further in Dittrich, Eriksén and Hansson (2002)

### **3.1 Relationship-based interaction**

In order to open up the notion of *relationship-based interaction* I have turned to Swedish marketing literature, and the explanation of relationship-based marketing, where promises of relationship-based interaction are outlined and substantiated with reference to the following values: *long term co-operation, equal partnership*, (Gummesson, 1998). This could also be described as an ongoing mutual process of increasing the value of habitants or communities relationships, in order to gain social cohesion. All parts are accountable for what goes on and what does not happen in the relationship. These values are defined as core relation- and service values and seen as intrinsically ‘good’ and contradictory to more bureaucratic values, which are associated with ‘negative’ attributes such as: formality, narrowness, blind faith and belief in authority and expertise. These values are significant for the public sector, according to the author (1998, p 33) and are obstructing the ‘pure essence’ of marketing. Increased value for the customer has to be the main goal, and concretely this is achieved by creating *activity links, resource ties* and by developing *actors bond*, (1998, p. 34). Long-term co-operation, stimulation of engagement, building trust, symmetric power, mutual exchange such as transformation of knowledge and information, are also significant for this kind of interaction.

### **3.2 Co-Construction of Citizenship**

If citizenship is regarded as a continual activity based on co-construction, (Lister 1997) this also blurs the boundaries between governmental and municipal authorities, private sectors employees and other actors within, for example, the voluntary sector as well as the citizens. This on-going co-construction of content and services could be described as a central part of creating an active citizenship<sup>8</sup>, and it does in many ways prerequisite a wide range of qualifications, knowledge and engagement of multiple voices.

But if use is seen as an important part of design, is it then possible to distinguish the beginning and the end of the design-processes? Posing this question makes it possible to expand the thinking of the development of technology, in this context public services and their supportive technologies, as a clearly defined task, performed solely by management- and software consultants, towards an understanding of design processes as closely interwoven with use (Suchman, 1999 and Dittrich, Eriksén, Hansson, 2002) and in the public service context as a way to develop citizenship. Is it, by performing this switch in focus in the design-processes, possible to regard citizens as key actors, implicitly or explicitly influencing design processes and development of digitised services in the public sector?

Relating all these aspects to the growth of relationship-based interaction in public administration, inevitably leads to the question, posed from the citizens’ view; who is willing to develop a relationship-based interaction with the municipal commissioner or the municipal officer, if the value of doing so is not properly defined and linked to something that gives the citizen direct satisfaction and feedback? What is in it for the citizens’, so to say? Is the emphasis on developing methods and techniques for continual consultations with the users a kind of relationship-based interaction that has to be seen as a continual co-construction of citizenship? To what extent does this shift in approaches have an impact on, and lead to an actual broadening of the processes of design and development of public services?

## **4. Governmental “wishes upon a star” dialogue**

At the request of the Swedish Government, the Swedish Agency for Administrative

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<sup>8</sup> This “active citizenship” is strongly envisioned by the EU, see <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/citizen/citiz-en.html> and further developed in Lister, p 22, 1997)

Development (SAFAD), in 2000, presented a proposal for a definition of criteria for the notion 24x7 Agency and how it should be applied in the ongoing development of e-government in Sweden. The emphasis is put on “*increased accessibility*”<sup>9</sup> and “*availability*” for the citizens, as well as improvement of the “*quality of services*”. The citizens are placed “in the centre” and the development of “*network-based electronic interactivity*” between different organizations and stakeholders is considered as a measure of how far an agency has come on a development stairway. Important steps on this stairway to heaven are via: “*packaged information*” about the agency and its services to step two, providing “*interactive information*” and “*developed communication*”, allowing the visitor to hand in and retrieve “*personal information*” to the last step of “*increased networking*” and development of “*joined-up services*.” The proposal has been heavily discussed and also criticized for its one-sidedness, focusing mostly on electronically governing, during the debate on the estimates. A follow-up on how the development of a 24x7 service is proceeding was recently conducted and presented last year by SAFAD (2001) posing that the 24x7 Agency partly exists, within some authorities.

The Government has the power to apply a range of methods for supporting and stimulating the development of a so-called “*network based service delivery*” and thereby an emergence of a relationship-based communication, including citizens as a partner. This could be done through i.e. management dialogues, by the usage of service charters, continuous follow-ups and customer surveys, work on needs assessments, focus groups and so on. All in the name of renewing the dialogue around services. As it says in the report: “*The 24 hours agency must be keenly alive. It has to be alert and constantly listening to the citizens - it must consult the citizens. Consulting means seeking advice from, taking counsel, deliberating, but also listening to and thinking upon. The consultation then becomes a way to create participation.*” (SAFAD,2000)

The key aspects of the discourse on participation in e-government express the need for development and change of dialogue, stressing the importance of including a citizen’s perspective, and falls within the limits of what is politically correct to promote. But how is it possible to maintain and support an ongoing dialogue, electronically or by other means, internal as well as external, actively involving different actors; i.e. municipalities, governments, citizens and interest groups, concerning an ongoing development of public services? The strategy must be:

*“...cluster into categories such as citizens (households, individuals) small enterprises, organizations and interest groups, associations) and big companies (global organizations) and as a first step reach co-operation within these clusters and then expand it to co-operation between different clusters”* (SAFAD, 2000).

Or, in other words, to build a network of strategic alliances, formed by relationship-based interaction.

#### **4.1 The first lane discourse**

Tracking the different routes in the discourse on participation in e-government, leads us to what can be defined as a management- and marketing related discourse. Philip Kotler, an American “guru” and initiator of the concept of marketing relationship, poses that: “*Our thinking [...] is moving from a marketing mix focus to a relationship focus.*” (Kotler, 1991) Several of the respondents in the RISI++ evaluation relate development of e-government with the issue of marketing the municipality or local region. Citizen involvement in service design

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<sup>9</sup> The quotes in italics are from the proposal, available in Swedish at: <http://www.statskontoret.se>. (Translations by author.)

is considered essential for qualitative reasons, and seen as an important instrument in the future for marketing a municipality. People are expected to become even more quality-conscious, active and mobile, and therefore the municipalities need to fight to be able to keep their inhabitants. One respondent points out that the emphasis in future development should be on discussions around attitudes towards the customer, not development of new technical solutions. Another respondent talks about, relationship-based marketing, and thereby also defines the relation between the marketing-related approach and development of public services, in the following way: *“The main idea with the notion of the 24 hours authority is to make interactive interchange around services possible but...we haven’t got this thinking yet, as they have in marketing that there are possible channels, but we have to manage them.”*

#### **4.2 The parallel lane discourse**

In the previously mentioned work-in-progress report, examining the current status of the development of 24x7 service in Sweden, the authors point out that municipality websites are way ahead of governmental authorities concerning the handling of democracy issues, i.e. offering visibility of, and influence on processes of decision-making.

County councils and municipalities have developed a higher degree of transparency (around 70-80 percent), according to this report<sup>10</sup>.

E-democracy, in this context, is defined mainly as how citizens and businesses can reach the institutions, their possibility to influence the organisation and to have an impact, i.e. by sending in their opinions electronically. (SAFAD, 2000)

Strong democracy, or deliberative and discursive democracy (Barber, 1999) could be explained as a process where the citizens are given the possibility of having impact on the early stages of decision-making. A frequently used term is “a sustainable democracy”<sup>11</sup>, a concept that is spoken for in the Swedish National Inquiry of Democracy<sup>12</sup>. How this relates to the use of ICT's is discussed in separate research volume, *IT in the service of democracy* (1991) A key difficulty addressed in the above-mentioned inquiry of democracy-development, is the question of how to stimulate a more participatory approach among citizens who are not at all interested in participating in local decision-making or deliberation in society. There is, however, very little reflections made concerning the basic issue of the democratic values that could be gained, or how to stimulate such developments, for instance by early involvement of citizens in developmental work or technological-based activities in the shape of local tailoring of technologies in settings of direct, and concrete importance for citizens', such as for instance work-place contexts<sup>13</sup>, that has been of central concern for the PD Community for several decades.

#### **5. Case number one: municipalities**

In one of the municipalities that form part of the empirical material, a strategy on how to create a common arena, virtual and physical, in order to enhance the development of applied ICT, citizen services and continual learning, has been accepted by the local city council.

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<sup>10</sup> Basically a charting of services offered on the web pages of 95 authorities, 97 municipalities and 7 county councils in Sweden (number of services, possibilities to observe and influence ongoing decision- processes, availability)

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.demokratitorget.gov.se/>

<sup>12</sup> Further developed on <http://www.demokratitorget.gov.se>

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the workplace democracy discourse of the 1970:s and 1980:s, which was one of the central issues for participatory design in Scandinavian approach for more than two decades, seems to be unheard of, or even unmentionable, in current e-democracy discourses.

In the describing text, several proposals of how to force the development of citizen's services in the municipality towards "24 hours service", are presented. At the same time the main goal of transforming the old industrial society into a knowledge-based society is expressed. This is to be done by municipality engagement in developing the competencies of the local users of the services. The information officers are expected to be key persons in the work of developing new services for the net, and to enhance the development of communication between citizens and municipal officers, the need for "*lively contacts*" with the different apartments within the municipality are stressed as essential to reach positive results. The needs among the citizens are expected to "*expand*" and the citizens are "*included in project work, invited to join courses and to provide feedback*", but are not yet seen as equal partners in developing the services and technological solutions. A scenario is presented: "*On the Intranet, you can find an education-package for politicians on how to enhance democracy. A focus group consisting of local inhabitants and politicians is testing how the ideas are to be implemented in "real life", this is just one of many ambitious ideas on how to create a better communication among different actors...*"<sup>14</sup>

The same Swedish municipality was planning to reshape their website. A young designer was commissioned to make a new fresh design. The re-designed site was sent out to the municipal employees in order to get feedback on the renewal of the site. The response was overwhelming, and certainly not as positive as expected. This looks like "*Disney World Park or a candy-store*"<sup>15</sup> is just one example of the reactions. The chief of information then adopted a totally different approach and set up a group of referees, consisting of users representing different ages, and groups within society. During the meeting the citizens were merely asked for opinions about the functionality of the new website, but during a discussion about the need for a comprehensive index with a citizen, technological issues were also addressed, in terms of how to store the information, and whether the site should be database-driven or not. The municipally employed chairman said the following, at the first meeting with the selected user group: "*This has been very good, and this is the first time we've managed to meet people in this way. I think there is a need for continuous consultation with users in order to develop the website and all the services.*"

The citizen's feedback then was taken in account in the next remaking of the website. Another municipal officer, in the same city, commented the plans of setting up a focus group before re-designing their website: "*We get no feedback about the website, and we can't see the use of it, we just know it is used by few people. We printed all the pages and put them up on a wall, but we didn't know where to start...we need to make clear the functionality, and we need to know; how is it used? How is it apprehended by people and how to develop the content? Now we are setting up focus groups and we are thinking of combining these activities with training and giving people an opportunity to develop their computer skills.*" This need to read the public will, or rather anchor the changes of service provision, is expressed several times during the earlier refereed RISI++ evaluation (Ekelin, 2000) as of central concern for the service providers but there is also a lack of understanding, lack of resources and methods as well as possibilities to act upon these requirements which is illustrated in these quotes:

*"It is important to involve citizens; we have to focus on the citizen more and more and how the persons want to have their services supplied. [...] if the organisation is susceptible, of which I'm not so sure, it's possible to take the next step together with citizens and ask them: how do you want this done? This is where we are today and we have to test this on citizens."*

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<sup>14</sup> "E-center or Learning-resource-center. A virtual and physical arena for development of applied ICT; citizen services and learning. Presented during a city council –meeting in 2002.

<sup>15</sup> The originally quote was referring to a well-known, Swedish amusement park.

Another officer points out the “invisibility” of needs and the need to develop new methods on needs assessments:

*“I think it is important to ask people – beyond these requirements you spontaneously feel like talking about, what more is there? /---/ That kind of needs analysis I think is as important as anything else, and that is not done today in this municipality and I have seen very few examples of other municipalities where they in a sustainable, strategic, purposeful way and in a constructive manner have tried to measure or identify that need. That is why I try to separate the meaning of “citizens” public services from “providing municipal utilities”, which just means to supply “something”. Citizens’ public services also say something about quality and mutuality.”*

## **6. Case number two: a governmental pilot**

The European Commission as well as the Swedish government emphasises the policy “IT for all”.<sup>16</sup> One concrete example of an attempt to increase access for disadvantaged groups in society is the *Swedish Public Internet Monitor Project* (the PIM project)<sup>17</sup>. This project was started as a co-operative initiative, between different authorities, aiming to co-ordinate their public services and makes their web sites more accessible to the general public. Computer terminals with printers have been made available in places where the authorities do not have their own offices, for instance in libraries and local authority offices. The service is free of charge. The terminal is intended to guarantee a basic democratic right; easy access to comprehensive public information and services on the Internet for everyone. Approximately 140 public Internet monitors have been set up in various parts of Sweden. They are located in sparsely populated rural areas, as well as in towns and in large cities. The authorities are co-operating both in the maintenance of the monitors and in the development of the shared Internet portal ‘Medborgartorget’ (‘Citizen’s Square’) and the public services connected to this. The project is being run in close co-operation between the following five Swedish authorities: the Employment Office, the Social Insurance Office, the National Board of Student Aid, the Premium Pension Authority and the National Tax Board.

During an evaluation meeting in which I took part, where representatives from all the steering groups of the involved authorities participated, the issue of feedback from citizens was addressed in terms of “*how to create better interactivity*”. In the discussion several ideas were given as examples, such as managing errands on-line, putting more emphasis on the planning and conducting of needs assessments, the need to develop more inclusive techniques or methods for incorporating users’ or citizens’ feedback in design and continuous development of public services. However, when the organisational schemes for further development and maintenance of the project was sketched on the white-board, the word citizens was not mentioned or included at all.

The evaluation of the PIM project highlights several aspects related to accessibility issues and service design. A basic question was: To what extent are the different actors involved prepared to engage in an extended service design, including developing processes for active incorporation of users' feedback?

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<sup>16</sup> This was emphasized in the words of the Prime Minister of Sweden, Göran Persson, at the opening of the parliamentary session in September 1999-09-14. <http://www.riksdagen.se/debatt/9900/prot/2/htframe.htm>. More to read at: <http://www.naring.regeringen.se/fragor/it/lasmer.htm#Informationssamhälle>

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.medborgartorget.nu>

The hosts<sup>18</sup>, and members of local working-groups, give concrete examples in the interviews of how to manage this through sharing work-practice experience and by taking active part in a continual process of “local tailoring” of the services:

*"To be able to get some sort of continuity in this contact, we have discussed establishing some sort of continual sharing...the simplest way could be to man the various authorities' help-desks. [...] In that way we can get in-service training."*

In the evaluation parts concerning accountability<sup>19</sup> issues and influence, the responsible authorities had visions of establishing a chain of interlinking anchoring-processes, meaning to sustain responsibility-taking, including citizens, in order to personalize the services with regard to local practices and user-environments. But it did not always work as planned, exemplified by the comment from a member of local working-group:

*"We could have developed the dialogue around support- and activities targeted to users further, but the question is who is responsible for doing so? If the authorities put more emphasis on it, we will gladly take part. They can't mean we have to start a lot of training and talking to people, without getting any support or resources to accomplish this."*

She continued:

*"When we've asked them to participate in connection with some activities to users, we also tried to give them response on content and functionality of the website, and talk about our needs, what is good and what work less well, and how we want to change it in order to make it better. It's an opportunity to pass this feedback on, and quite a good evaluation of these pages. It would be marvellous if we could talk to some people in management on these issues. It is possible to develop further, because we gather opinions and information on possible improvements, but now no one knows who is responsible, and it takes such a long time before it reaches the right person, if it ever gets there."*

The citizens who were using the self-service system also talk of feedback in terms of “*their duty of reporting things to the staff*”, who in turn are expected (by the citizens’) to pass on feedback and comments mainly about functionality to the developers and ultimate owners and managers of the monitor.

## **7. Conclusive discussion**

My objective with this paper has been to initiate and outline a discussion on the increased focus on how to see citizens as strategic allies in future development of public services. The analysis of the discourse on participation within e-government, in texts and practices, shows that different actors, including stakeholders from the governmental arena as well as local municipal officers and citizens, responds to the changing approaches on participation in various ways. The emphasis in the participation discourse is put on developing methods and techniques for “consulting” the users, and this gradual transformation – which actually is taking place – is shaping and influencing the ongoing dialogue in the direction towards what is often referred to in the discourse, without further questioning, as a form of relationship-based interaction. Long-term co-operation is discussed and explored, in terms of developing regular methods on how to get a hold of and put words on the public will. The service declarations could be seen as a way for the authorities to give account on their service and establish a contract with the users, and thereby open an invitation to discussions on

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<sup>18</sup> Basically the responsible person, within a local institution, that provides the Swedish Public Internet Monitor.

<sup>19</sup> Accountability is one of the basic democratic values, according to Bellamy & Taylor[2]. The concept of accountability, like (and not unrelated to) that of relationship-based interaction, needs further problematising in this context. See Eriksén (1998)

development of services with citizens. At the same time as this willingness and readiness to take into account users' or citizens' feedback and to start up a continuing dialogue are expressed, we see several examples of failure in local practice which highlights the risk on creating what could be defined as a "detached engagement".

A basic question is; what is in it for the citizens? And there is definitely an opening here for exploring and expanding the notion of relationship-based interaction further, by acknowledging the connection between developing skills and providing feedback for different purposes. The will to create activity links, such as continuing evaluation of websites and identification of needs through focus group-based interviews is still to be seen as rare examples, and the resource ties are possible to distinguish for instance in the shape of offering basics in computing to citizens. The actors' bond could be exemplified by the demands on citizens to give their feedback on request. The interaction is still performed as single activities, (the user-evaluation of a proposal on a renewed website), but there are potentials on developing a continuing consultation with citizens. Relations need to be structured, though, and mutual exchange and transformation of knowledge and information need to be enhanced. The vision of seeing the citizen as a strategic partner in this development is significant for this kind of interaction, but what does it really mean, when it comes to basic involvement and participation of citizens in design-related issues? The aim to develop public services is closely interwoven with the aim to achieve organisational change as well as societal development and to strengthen democratic values.

Mainly emphasis is put on conducting survey methods, while there is very little discussion concerning the basic issues of democratic values, stating what could be regarded as a participatory design perspective in this context, on how to stimulate such dialogues by early involvement of citizens in developmental work, technological-based activities or local tailoring of technologies, for instance in work-place contexts. The various attempts to establish a relationship-based interaction seems to be conducted in an unconscious way, which of course is good for a start, but the methods could be strengthened by taking into account the competencies of participatory design methods on incorporating a multi-perspectives in service design as well as technology production and use, and thereby stimulating other strivings.

Still, it is a main challenge for local governments and public administration, to develop and enhance methods for creating and supporting an ongoing communication between local authorities and citizens, and to develop processes for continual co-construction of integrated, interactive public services, as well as a more well grounded "strong democracy", built on citizen involvement on a basic, everyday level.

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