



# CDE Programme

**Research project financed by the call for proposal 2008**

## **Framing citizen's expression in participative procedures at the local level in environment: a European comparison**

**Laurence MONNOYER-SMITH - Université de Technologies de Compiègne**

**Abstract:** Our project aims to analyze the varying levels of competence and skills shown by the citizens when expressing their opinions, by conducting a European comparison of both online and offline participative devices set up by public authorities at the local level. We assume that the setting up of technical devices using the information and communication technologies (ICT) leads to broaden the participants but also to devise new forms of mediation between elected representatives and citizens, therefore renewing the conceptions of representation and participation in politics. This can in particular be observed in the environmental field where many local authorities implement various kinds of consultation such as “agendas 21” or town planning workshops. How does the procedures of concertation contribute to frame the expression of citizens is the main theoretical question of our project. It leads to establishing a link between the participative devices and the formats of the citizens' expression, i.e. how their express their views, their sociological profile and the nature of collective involvement in the debate. Several questions underpin our research: how do the formats of citizen expression fit with the devices set up by public authorities? Under what conditions can such devices allow us to reconfigure power relations amongst the various players and participants? How can online and offline devices be linked together to allow a broader inclusion of the public? To what extent does taking part in such devices influence the acquisition of knowledge (in politics and more specifically in environmental issues) and know-how, the political and civic engagement of the citizens, whether they speak or not? This study covers a range of disciplines (information and communication studies, political science, social psychology and anthropology). Our methodology operates at the cutting edge in both quantitative and qualitative methods since interviews with project managers, local politicians and participants, observations on the spot (for public meetings), data collection (from official documents to personal notes), participants surveys, content analysis of web sites and conversational analysis of face-to-face discussions are mixed in order to better understand citizen participation and its constraints. We plan to work on three levels of government (local, supra-local, regional) in France and Great-Britain. We will analyze the participative devices dealing with climate change proposed by one local authority in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, by the city of Bristol and the “Virtual Town Meeting” implemented in the Poitou- Charentes area.