

ITALY

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN BOLOGNA

Bologna's Iperbole Civic Network is an example of how ICT can be used to improve governance, in an experimental approach to increasing civic participation through the use of information technologies.



The Municipality of Bologna has a population of 900,000 and is Italy's administrative capital. The municipality has a strong tradition of citizen participation. Initiated in 1995 by the municipality, the Iperbole service created a free of charge 'civic network' on the Internet as a measure, among others, to implement 'tele-democracy'. Being a civic network, it is aimed at all Bologna's citizens, associations, schools, other public administrations and local businesses at metropolitan level.

Digital democracy, cyber participation and citizenship, and building an on-line interactive community is

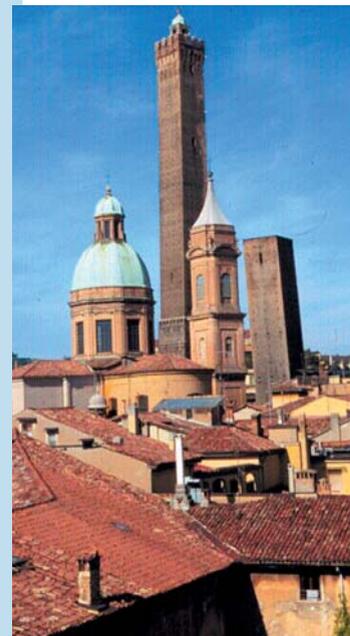


first and foremost an attempt to make services more responsive to the people, which is the key idea of Iperbole. The municipality, as an Internet service provider, offers free of charge e-mail services, news, direct access to the municipality and free full Internet connection to all citizens. The Internet, with a small charge, is made available to local companies. The main goal of the project is its user friendliness. Therefore, effort has been made to simplify the interface with the use of a virtual map in describing the places and functions related to the information stored on the 'electronic archive'.

Through experimentation of interactive and direct channels between the citizens and the local authority, the administration reaches people at home, at work, in the office, at school, and in places of public consultation. An important element of the programme is to make as many public access points to the Net available as possible. In an explicit attempt to include the elderly, a 'Cyber Services for the Elderly on the Net' is set up with the aim of customising on-line services for the elderly. This provides support for those organisations that are interested in IT and the Internet and selects technology of particular value for communication between senior citizens.

The public local network, connected through the World Wide Web, has become a means of disseminating information, a two-way communication between the city administration and society. This involves news groups on more than 35 subjects, including, traffic, urban planning, culture and the environment and has become an instrument in transparency for the decision-making process of the city. Furthermore, it is an experiment in an advanced system of service distribution and quality. It is also a simplification of bureaucratic procedures, of feedback and monitoring and in the dissemination and exchange of knowledge. Iperbole users read nearly 15,000-20,000 articles every day. The Iperbole civic network also offers the possibility of navigating through the whole Internet for free both at home and in public places.

The Iperbole service is based on various principles, including the employment of new technologies for the governance and sustainable development of the territory; innovation in administration and an increase in the accessibility of information to a wider population.



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