



## e-Cognocracy and the design of public policies

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## ABSTRACT

Designing public policies using information technology as a communication support system is one of the most important current issues in the public policy making field. This work presents a methodology for the design and selection of public policies based on the cognitive democratic model known as e-Cognocracy. In addition to facilitating debate between representatives and the represented (deliberative democracy), this model allows for co-decision making between citizens and politicians. Furthermore, and of even greater importance, e-Cognocracy generates a process of continuing education that is concordant to the lifelong process of living systems (cognitive process). The methodology contemplates multiple rounds (usually two) when incorporating the preferences of the actors implicated in decision making and takes advantage of the creative capacity of human beings when solving complex problems. At the same time, the methodology permits the evaluation of both the individual and social learning that is derived from the scientific resolution of the problem and the democratisation of the knowledge that is extracted. This methodology was applied to a real-life experience in the Spanish municipality of Cadrete.

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## 1. Introduction

As classical Greek (Plato) and medieval Arabic (Averroes & Ibn Jaldun) scholars affirmed, the evolution of democratic models is not an arbitrary process; it depends on interconnected necessities (Baack, 1994) derived from human nature and the functioning of society. With knowledge of the interactions between the components that explain the way society functions, humankind can correctly and suitably govern and control this evolutionary mechanism (García Lizana & Moreno-Jiménez, 2008). This paper identifies the characteristics of the new context of the Knowledge Society (Bell, 1973; Drucker, 1969, 1994; Faure et al., 1972; Stehr, 1994; UNESCO, 2005), examines recent governance models oriented towards improving social existence, presents the cognitive democracy known as e-Cognocracy and proposes a methodology for its use in the design and selection of public policies. The methodology has been applied to a real-life experience concerning the design of cultural and sporting policies in the Spanish municipality of Cadrete.

The Knowledge Society (KS) can be understood (Moreno-Jiménez, 2003a) as a framework that accommodates the creativity, imagination, ingenuity and talent of human beings, based on the development of information and communication technologies (ICT). In this setting, the resolution of highly complex problems requires the utilisation of the creative abilities and potential of the greatest possible number of

individuals. For problem resolution to be as effective as possible, advantage should be taken of the opportunities offered by this new context (KS).

There are three fundamental characteristics of the KS (Moreno-Jiménez, 2003a) that must be utilised in the conjoint creation of a better society: (i) deterritorialisation; (ii) the interconnection between the actors and the interdependence of the factors; and (iii) the relevance of the individual (human factor). *Deterritorialisation*, or the elimination of geographical constraints, refers to the absence of a physical space in which the actors involved in the resolution of the problem are located. *Interconnection* reflects the potential communication between the actors and is facilitated by ICT tools. *Interdependence* can be viewed as the frame of reference, a holistic vision of society, within which the factors considered in the problem are interrelated.

Taking into account the fact that the most important of the three characteristics is *the human factor*, the KS aims to (Moreno-Jiménez, 2006): (i) educate the individual in aspects related to intelligence and learning; (ii) foster relationships with others, improving quality of life and societal cohesion through better communication and social harmony; and (iii) facilitate the conjoint construction of the future in a world of ever increasing complexity.

In dealing with the construction of this future, it is necessary to develop new models of participation that can make use of the potential of the KS and respond to the challenges and needs that it generates. The determination of a model of participation that is most appropriate for a given epoch is by no means an original topic of debate and discussion; as Ibn Jaldun concluded more than six centuries ago (García Lizana & Moreno-Jiménez, 2008), this problem may only be resolved if the

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dynamic of the system is understood and the system is self-organised and adaptive.

Advances in information technologies and the progressive increase in citizens' access to the Internet have opened up possibilities for new approaches to the governance of society. The Internet and the new electronic information networks have become indispensable instruments for the political expression of the organs of civil society at all levels (local, regional, national and supranational). As Manuel Castells (2002) suggests, the Internet is not only a technology but also a cultural production.

In order to respond to the new societal needs, it is necessary to examine the models of representation within the context of *electronic government* or e-Government: the application of ICT to Public Administration with the aim of developing a better quality of life for the citizen. This further involves (Moreno-Jiménez, 2003a) the objectives of *efficiency* (doing things correctly), *efficacy* (achieving goals) and *effectiveness* (doing what is right).

The main theories on the development of e-Government focus on the relationship between the citizen and the Administration (Coursey & Norris, 2008; Parent, Vandebeek, & Gemino, 2005). In the majority of developed countries, e-Government is currently in the phase of the provision of public services that involves interaction and transaction through the Internet. Not all services offered by Public Administrations can be undertaken through non-traditional channels (Van Dijk, Peters, & Ebberts, 2008) but there are more and more administrative procedures for obtaining public goods and services that can be carried out through the Internet.

There are two main spheres (Moreno-Jiménez, 2009) that can be contemplated within the context of e-Government: (i) *e-Administration*, oriented towards the improvement of public services offered to the citizens by institutions and (ii) *e-Governance*, understood as the processes that are based on the intervention of the citizens and their representatives in public decisions relative to the government of society through the use of ICT tools. This second sphere includes e-Voting, e-Democracy and *electronic Cognocracy* or e-Cognocracy.

e-Cognocracy (Moreno-Jiménez, 2003b, 2006; Moreno-Jiménez & Polasek, 2003) is a new democratic model that combines both direct and representative democracy, resolving many of the limitations of these two models whilst allowing co-decision making between citizens and representatives and the social creation of knowledge and continuing education of the citizen by means of the democratisation of the knowledge derived from the scientific resolution of the problem.

The co-decision of the actors involved in the resolution of the problem and the education (individual and social learning) associated with the debate stage are two of the characteristics that distinguish this cognitive democracy, which seeks effective Public Administration, from other e-participative and deliberative approaches (Barber, 1984; Bessette, 1980; Bohman, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 1991; Medaglia, 2012; Saebo, Rose, & Skiftenes Flack, 2008; Zimmerman, 1986). These characteristics are exemplified in the application of e-Cognocracy to the design of sporting and cultural public policies in a project implemented by our research group in the Spanish municipality of Cadrete (<https://participa.cadrete.es>).

The structure of the rest of this paper is as follows: Section 2 explains what is meant by the design of public policies; Section 3 gives a brief outline of e-Cognocracy; Section 4 presents a systematic procedure, based on e-Cognocracy, for the design of public policies; Section 5 describes a real-life application of the procedure for the design of cultural and sporting policies in the municipality of Cadrete (Zaragoza); Section 6 discusses the most significant conclusions of the experience.

## 2. The design of public policies

Dye (1975) defines public policies as "...everything that governments decide to do or not to do". Lowi (1964) identifies three types of public policies: *distributive*, *regulative* and *redistributive*. There are many

other typologies of public policies (Birkland, 2010): *procedural* and *substantive*, *symbolic* and *material*, *innovative*, *mimetic* and *incremental*, *conservative* and *liberal*, *distributive*, *regulatory*, *constituent*, *miscellaneous* etc.

Policy design can be understood as the adoption of an alternative and the establishment of the means that permit its implementation. Public policies are the group of objectives, decisions and actions that are undertaken by a government in order to solve the problems that they have to deal with at any given moment and which the citizens and the government consider as priorities.

From this perspective, the design of public policies is a process that is initiated when a government or a public administrator detects the existence of a problem, or has to address the demands of the citizens, and finishes with the evaluation of the results of the actions undertaken in order to eliminate, mitigate or solve the problem or demand.

Therefore, the design of public policies can be considered as a decisional problem with differing aims and objectives which are very often conflictive (André, Cardenote, & Romero, 2010). Following this decisional approach, the procedure for the construction of public policies can be seen as a multicriteria problem characterised by the existence of multiple scenarios, actors and tangible and intangible criteria. The phases or steps taken to resolve multicriteria problems concerning public decision making (Anderson, 2011; Mamaqui & Moreno-Jiménez, 2009) are basically the same as those required for the design of public policies, that is to say: (1) The identification and definition of the problem; (2) The formulation of the alternatives for the solution of the problem; (3) The selection of one of the alternatives; (4) The implementation of the selected alternative; and (5) The evaluation of the results obtained.

The first phase in the cycle of designing public policy is the definition of the problem, this means defining the situation in which an individual or group perceives a difference between the current reality and that which is desired. Resolution consists in establishing a plan of action that can transform the current situation into the desired one. The process of identification and definition is not easy and requires the investment of a considerable amount of time and effort. Many more mistakes are made as a consequence of the erroneous definition of the problem than the poor resolution of a problem that has been correctly defined (Dunn, 1981).

Once identified and defined, the problem is placed on the agenda<sup>2</sup> of the public authorities. To be included on the agenda, the problem must comply with a series of conditions: (i) the issue must fall within the competences of a specific authority or the public authorities in general; (ii) the challenge, the object of the problem, must be worthy of public consideration; and (iii) the problem must be accessible to public consideration.

It is important to analyse the possible, initial, alternatives for their resolution; they are then described and characterised. It may be the case that an alternative is discounted because it does not require more study or in-depth examination, or other alternatives have arisen during the resolution process. After analysing the alternatives, the most appropriate is selected in accordance with the multiple criteria, both tangible and intangible, that have been set for the resolution of the problem. Depending, among other criteria, on cost, number of beneficiaries, urgency or relevance, the priorities are calculated by means of multicriteria decision making techniques, followed by the ranking of the alternatives.

When the problem has been defined, the objectives specified and the highest prioritised alternative selected, the next phase is the implementation of the public policy, which means putting into practice the selected alternative for the resolution of the problem. The key point in the implementation phase is what Pressman and Wildawsky (1973) referred to as "*the complexity of conjoint action*". Evaluation is the last

<sup>2</sup> In this case, an agenda is defined as a group of problems that provoke public debate and that may lead to the intervention of the legitimate public authorities (Padioleau, 1982).

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