e²FocusGroup Participatory Session

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Abstract:

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are increasingly becoming more pervasive of peoples lives, both for individual and collective usage. Hence, it becomes tempting to develop quality tools that can be used in the context of societal debates on public policies.

The e²FocusGroup (http://alba.jrc.it/eFG/) is a multimedia platform that allows a small group of people to meet, through internet connection, in a virtual room and discuss a pre-defined subject or topic.

Each discussion group is composed of at least by one moderator and by several participants (ideally not more than twelve). The virtual room offers the participants the means for a successful debate.

The e²FocusGroup has the following features:
- An area for Introductory Presentation, where the Organiser of the debate should include a short PowerPoint presentation about the issue under discussion.
- A Participants Table, where it is possible to see a graphical representation of all the people (moderators and participants) present in the debate.
- A Discussion Chat, where each participant can write his own opinion about the topic being debated. It is in this area where the main discussion takes place.
- A Virtual Library, where is possible to store material and links essential for the debate.
- A Collaborative Whiteboard, where it is possible to contribute with real time drawings.

In the participatory session we will demonstrate all the functionalities of the e²FocusGroup platform and explore how they can be used in remote and distributed focus group sessions.

Participatory Session Description:

The objective is to demonstrate a focus group session using the e²FocusGroup platform to debate a fictional water governance issue. Each participant has a specific role, representing a different stakeholder and specific interests, described in the remaining of this proposal. The goal of the focus group session would be to reach a consensus, or a basis for discussion,

among all stakeholders in search of options for the water governance issue using the functionalities of the e^{2}FocusGroup. The discussion is supported by fictional material, including documents, reports and videos that all stakeholders have access through the e^{2}FocusGroup platform and can use them to support their points of view.

The participants of the focus group session will be chosen randomly from the list of the conference participants and are contacted / invited to participate in the session some weeks before the start of the conference, who will be also informed about the ways the e^{2}FocusGroup operate, as well as get acquainted with the fictional argument that will be discussed. In this way, each participant has time to identify with the assigned role and also view the material available for the session.

During the focus group session, the participants are located remotely, being in contact with each other only through the functionalities provided by the e^{2}FocusGroup platform. The e^{2}FocusGroup platform is accessible by internet, not being necessary to make any type of download or installation in the computer. Once the participant has been registered by the organiser of the session, he/she just needs to login with a previously assigned user name and password.

The session will be conducted by a moderator, located in a place different from where the conference is being organised. As a result, the sense of a real remote and distributed focus group session will be enhanced.

The full discussion is automatically stored in a database and can be saved, printed and analysed later on by the Moderator. Unlike face-to-face focus groups there is no need for audiotape transcriptions.