PAPER FOR THE BASQUE COMMUNITIES CONGRESS

POSSIBILITIES FOR COMMUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN BASQUE PARLIAMENT ACTIVITIES
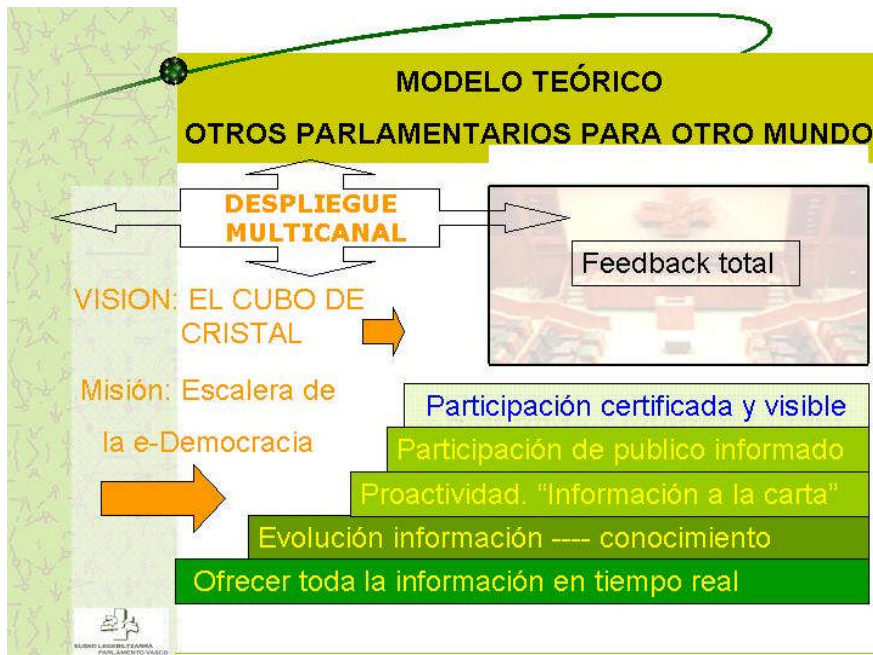
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1.- Introduction:

The Basque Parliament has spent many years' work defining a theoretical model and implementing procedures to make their institution more open. This concept involves real time access to information and creates possibilities to participate for all citizens who are interested in parliamentary debates.

The scope of this work has created digital services which we understand could be of interest to our Basque Diaspora. These services mean that users can monitor the country's debates and political life in accordance with their interests. It is also possible to display their own contributions and ideas along with the answers given to them by the politicians. This paper aims to explain the theory on which this open model is based and describe the given applications.

2.- The theoretical model:

Our theoretical opening model is based on implementing all the steps included in what we call the "electronic democracy ladder," which in organisational terms would be our mission as an organisation. Each step involves specifying its operative consequences and creating significant organisational transformations within the Parliament and its work processes.

The rungs of the ladder, which appear in the graph, attached, are as follows:

1. **Offer all the information in real time** Publishing search engines and contents of the <u>four</u> Basque Parliament documentary databases on the Internet. These databases are interrelated and when users run a search they are offered permanently updated <u>omnicomprehensive</u> files and multimedia. They include originals in several text formats and audio and video clips. A meta-search engine was also set up on all the page's contents with a quintuple filter system to refine the searches. This principle includes broadcasting plenary sessions and commissions live on the Internet.

2. **Evolution towards knowledge:** Offers pre-searches through the databases giving access to the materials without needing to know either parliamentary mechanics or terminology. Access operates using ordinary terminology in the "topics" mode. They also offer personal approximations to the contents (parliamentary forms) or statistics. Theses pages appear to the user as statistics, but they are automatically drawn up dynamically by sweeping the databases regularly to incorporate new material into the information. Only 10% of the web contents on www.parlamento.euskadi.net are static.

3. **Pro-activity:** Customised information service depending on the user-defined profile. This is called <u>Zabalik</u>. A weekly message informs subscribers about new issues involving their interest topics, offering them direct access to each digital file and providing access to participation areas and private communication with the parliamentary groups.

4. **Participation qualified by knowledge:** From the very first edition, the Zabalik service incorporated the possibility that the users could communicate directly with parliamentary groups to present their suggestions and contributions during the debates. In this first stage, this remained between the person making the proposal and the groups.

5. **Certified and visible participation** The <u>Participate</u> (parte hartu) service, displayed the contributions made by Zabalik subscribers, if the user wishes. It also showed the contributions made by each citizen who was interested in participating and the answers offered by the parliamentary groups. When the use of this resource is generalised, the service will be able include certifying user identity by telematic procedures. In the meantime, users who are going to make contributions are required to provide a greater level of data than required to use "zabalik."

In this way, we can see inside the organisation, considering the parliament as an open "glass box" where interaction between representatives and those being represented is truly possible. As shown on the graph, this deployment initially planned for the Internet, is completed with work to project these services on to more open supports. This is what we call "multi-channel deployment" intended to deal with problems derived from the digital gap.

3.- Organisational transformation

The basis of the organisational transformation required to implement this mission has been to design the information incorporation processes so that data can be downloaded whilst it is undergoing administrative processing, just once for the whole system and by each person who is responsible for managing it.

In this way, we are attempting to create the vision of the organisation, converting it into a transparent and accessible "glass box" where total feedback is possible between citizens and the people who represent them. The final schema also lies along the line of Andrew Shapiro's "over-steering" theory, following the conviction that, in these conditions, public representatives' mediation work is needed more than ever. Defining the common good, carrying out measures derived from this definition, will require new skills and resources on a transformed stage and society.

4.- Advanced services for the democracy

Two of the advanced services are described below, linked to the top rungs of the ladder given in detail in the previous section:

4.1.- "Open" (Zabalik). Proactive information

The product which, in some ways summarises and symbolises this corporate approach is called "Zabalik" which means "Open" in Basque. It is an email distribution list which offers every citizen, association or institution free information and direct access to all the working documentation in our databases on the initiatives and parliamentary debates linked to topics in which the user is interested. Users can also sign up to individual initiatives which interest them the most, after consulting what has been presented over the last two weeks.

Users can sign up for the service on the Basque Parliament website. All they have to do is provide an email address where they would like to receive messages. In order to formalise the registration they choose topics interest them most from a list of close to one hundred topics, or from the list of most recent initiatives and they create a personalised profile which permits each subscriber to only receive information which interests them.

The service is designed to allow users to learn about the parliamentary initiatives they selected from when they entered the register to when their processing concludes. They also give access to all the material which is generated in real time and they can communicate with parliamentary groups at any point in the processing by means of email messages. In order to achieve these objectives, Zabalik sends out an email to all its users every week which includes two products:

A file in HTML format with personalised information which contains:

- Links with the digital file for each of the parliamentary initiatives which have been presented or changed between Monday and Saturday of the previous week or with those which are going to be processed in the next seven days. It only includes initiatives related to topics chosen by the user.

- Links to different services aimed at strengthening user participation and interactivity:
- Link to the email address for all the parliament groups.
- Link to the weekly calendar of activities for the parliament.
- Link to the direct broadcasting service and to the protocol service, to process direct guest attendance to the institution's plenary sessions.
- It can also be used to incorporate information and links with new services which are incorporated into the website.

The digital file which the user accesses contains:

- Information on the status of the processing. Allows the initiative's evolution to be followed from when it is presented to when it closes, throughout its entire active life in the chamber. The user is informed of the processes which are being carried out and their result. In the file, in addition to links to original documents, all the relevant data appears: nature of the initiative, dates of presentation and publication, status of the processing, links to the video and written reports for the sessions which have covered the topic and the decision which is finally adopted.

- Access to the original documents presented in the register and those which cover processing of the initiative. This concept includes the amendments, governmental answer and materials linked to the

processing as well as publication in the bulletins, the session reports and the video signal recorded during the debates.

<u>4.2.- "Participate" (Parte hartu).</u>

This service crosses and complements the above and allows any citizen to set questions and proposals to the groups in the Basque Parliament on any topic. These contributions are published in the space intended for citizen participation in the Basque Parliament website with the answers given by the politicians published alongside. So the service users know what has happened to the concerns which are reflected in their proposals. "Parte hartu" offers the possibility of classifying citizen ideas into twenty major categories according to the matter they refer to, which also govern the Zabalik service.

When users consult the "parte hartu" web space, they directly access citizen question texts and the answers provided by the parliamentary groups. In order to pose a question or proposal, the system establishes a procedure to register, explains how the service works and requests a series of data. Once this form has been completed, anyone can start to participate from the Basque Parliament web portal.

The service also includes two facilities to keep users permanently informed on what is happening to their contributions. Firstly, when an answer is given by the parliamentary groups, the proposal author(s) receives notification, via email. They can also sign up to "zabalik and for a weekly update on all the parliamentary initiatives related to the topic covered by their contribution. In this way, if their proposal becomes an initiative, they can follow the whole process. Furthermore, they can find out first hand about the work which is done in the parliament on the area their contribution tackles.

The programme which permits the Basque Parliament to edit this participation service in its web portal is drawn up in open source free software. The service was set up on 11th January and started to offer its first results. In less than a month, around one hundred contributions have been collected even though there has been no parliamentary activity this month. When parliament opens again the Zabalik service users will start to make contributions with greater added value.

*Review author's CV.

Jon Gurutz Gómez Goikolea, Vitoria Gasteiz 1959) is a graduate in Information Sciences from the University of the Basque Country. He completed his training with diverse courses related to marketing, human resources and new information and communication technologies.

His professional experience began at la Hoja del Lunes in San Sebastian. He worked as a parliamentary correspondent on the newspaper Deia (81-84) and representative for the Iparaguirre publishing house in the province of Alava (84-90), whilst at the same time working as a commentator for different radio stations.

 In 1990 he joined the Basque Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries as a PR consultant. Between 1991 and 1995 he did the same job in the Autonomous Executive Home Office and then in 1996 he ran the Minister's press office in this same department. Since 1998 he has been the Press Office Director for the Basque Parliament presidency.