e-Participation System on Climate Change in the Basque Autonomous Community: the Stop CO2 Euskadi Initiative

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Abstract

Basque Country approved a plan to fight against climate change in 2007. This plan proposes an objective to reduce Basque contribution to climate change and includes specific action, from different stakeholders (citizens, companies, administration). This challenge for reducing greenhouse gases emissions in the context of climate change is the main argument for the use of participatory systems. Collaborative work based in a transparent and effective communication process could be very useful and even necessary for an effective solution.

In this context, www.stopco2euskadi.net is a regional initiative of the Basque Office on Climate Change, based on a e-participation system, that promotes and brings together the actions carried out by all the agents of the Basque Country, in order to reduce greenhouse gases causing climate change in the 2009-2012 period.
1. Designing the initiative

During the 10 months of the conceptual design and the implementation of the tool, various elements were analysed; such as:

- What we wanted to achieve with this initiative: objectives
- To which agents in basque society we wanted to direct: clients
- How the message in the web should be, in order to attract different sectors: contents
- How the web should be structured to achieve all these aims: architecture
- Other in person initiatives that could complete the web offer: display
- The resources we could use for all these actions: resources
- How to launch an inclusive initiative where companies, administrations and general public would have their own space: participation

Finally the initiative was presented in January 2009 and more than 50 organisations from the private sector and from the public Basque administration have already joint it. All of them have emission management plans. The initiative's main objective is to have 200 members by the end of the year.

2. the agents and their participation

The initiative is open to all agents in the Basque Autonomous Community and on the web, we identify ourselves as

- Public Administration
- Companies
- General public

This classification answers to the fact that each segment has its own objectives and uses different languages and tools.

At the same time, however, we consider different participation levels in the initiative for the mentioned segments:

- Collaborating entities: These organizations consist of associated people or entities and take part in the initiative, informing their members about the importance of the commitment in the field of climate change. This is materialized by making an annual communication plan
- Public administration and companies: they take part as members or special members of the initiative. The participation of public administration is materialized by making an annual inventory about their emissions and a CO₂ management plan. Additionally, companies check the inventory and include in the management plan communication actions directed to workers, suppliers, clients, town...
- public in general: their participation consists of calculating their emissions, suggesting ideas on the web (in the section called question of the week) through Facebook and also taking part in the campaigns and initiatives organized by special members

The proactivity of these organizations, which are starting a process of knowing and managing their emissions and the process of raising awareness, makes the web acquire a recognition character, which makes visible for the visitor of the web the individual exemplary efforts and most relevant achievements. Some of the tools that are used are the publication of news, elaboration of good practices and the organization of awards

The campaigns of StopCO2 Euskadi

Campaigns are a set of actions which are coordinated based on a theme and meant for all segments. They are carried out in approximately three months and their aim is to strengthen the main message. In order to achieve that, they organize meetings for training and exchange of good practices, specialized courses, travelling stands etc. These are the next three campaigns organized within Stopco2euskadi:
3. Web Architecture

The initiative is located at an open website and has been designed for the users to be able to find information on climate change, tools to calculate their impact and proposals to help reduce emissions. It goes a step forward and allows joining the initiative with specific proposals for organisations and citizens. It also suggests training events and other formats to help qualify people and organisations and to create contents to be spread through the web to make exemplary actions and initiatives known.

The website is managed by a content manager developed for the purpose for Ihobe, which serves to manage 5 websites (www.stopco2euskadi.net, www.ihobe.net, www.udalsarea21.net, www.torremadariaga.net and www.productosostensible.net) and 15 extranets. This content manager is based on 5 SQL Server 2005 databases with a total of over 1000 tables. The website was written in an ASP environment, and meets all the accessibility criteria for WAI AA classification, and international usability criteria. The content manager enables different units to work on the same database, ensuring the standard of service provided at all times and facilitating publication online in a simple, smooth, clear fashion.

The virtualities of the 2.0 web are attractive for an initiative like this. Nowadays, as pilot step, we are working a complementary initiative based on a social web, Facebook, where there is a group of 150 members discussing ideas and proposals. We analyse this tool in terms of web 2.0 potential, accessibility to users, security in exchange, user’s participation.

4. Strategic Analysis

Analysis of the role of the web and the rest of tools at the initiative's strategy:

- Stopco2euskadi was created as a strategy with clear objectives and targets. Its communication plan identifies consistent actions and contents for several users. From that moment on, the web is the channel and the rest of applications process, register and spread the information. All of it is aimed at the fulfilment of the communication plan and the strategy. Consequently the efficiency of the tools is linked to its alignment with the strategy and the communication plan.
- In that sense, the participation of the agents of Stopco2euskadi is articulated through the web or through on-site groups depending on the needs arisen from the strategy.
- The initiative’s web has a 2WAI accessibility due to social responsibility and because it belongs to the Basque Government's area. All this puts limits to the use of products such as multimedia or flash animations.

…and main opportunities of this tool for the Basque Country:

- Stopco2euskadi is an institutional initiative. The use of those tools by the administration allows the participation of the stakeholders in public policies and in the collective resolution of environmental problems.
- It allows to put problems and solutions within the citizen's reach and to visualise the space for individual contribution helps make people jointly responsible.
- It allows to pay attention to requests of new agents and more sophisticated requests, to raise the need to migrate to a bigger net, either regarding the topics (mitigation vs. climate change), or in the presence of other agents, or the need of autonomy of those agents.