# TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PARLIAMENTS

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**Abstract.** *Parliaments tend to enhance transparency and promote accountability in front of decline of public trust of citizens for democratic institutions by embracing new technologies for structuring an e-parliament, to perform more effectively their primary functions of lawmaking, representation, and oversight. Sustainability as principle of governance should be integrated in decision making processes driving behaviors of public organizations. The aim of this paper is to provide a framework of analysis to explain how parliaments are embracing new technologies for seeking legitimacy as more open and democratic representative institutions or sustainable institutions that develop sources of knowledge to build a participatory democracy in order o support public trust and improve dialogue between parliamentary institution and citizen.*

**Keywords:** *e-parliament; legitimacy; transparency; accountability; e-democracy; sustainability.*

## Introduction. Parliaments as organizations oriented to sustainability

Parliaments as representative institutions of people dealings with other executives branches of government carry out distinctive functions: oversight, representation and lawmaking. Parliaments debate and define policy priorities, issue and enact laws, approve taxation and expenditures, oversee the executive branch of government, ratify treaties debating and approving constitutional changes (Beetham, 2006).

Parliaments that decide to challenge effectively the decisions taken by government compete with the executive authority in developing policy choices (Norton, 2012). Thereby, parliaments could not perform lawmaking and policymaking activities without assistance of an administrative and legislative staff providing support to the organization outside the operating work flow (Bontadini, 1983). There are different models of parliament and parliamentary support staff. Parliaments that select a decisional and proactive behavior on policymaking in front of the executive authority are supported by consulting and professional staff knowledge oriented. Parliaments that select a ratifying and follower behavior on policymaking are supported by a registration staff able to ensure merely support for transcript of debates and minutes. Mixed models of parliament and parliamentary staff can emerge and develop over time (Chimenti, 1981).

Sustainability as principle of governance should be integrated in decision making processes driving behaviors and action of public organizations (Fiorino, 2010), relying on fostering participation and developing models of democratic engagement (Geczi, 2007). Democratic parliaments as public organizations that contribute to democratic life by building and maintaining the level of public trust underlying democracy (Goodsell, 1994) have to rethink the approach to sustainability promoting accountability and engaging citizens by developing sources of knowledge for effectively contribute to policy formulation (Suurla, Markkula & Mustajarvi, 2002).

In front of deficit of representation, knowledge and competence, commitment and engagement (Burns, 1999) parliaments have to develop cognitive capabilities to deal with complexity, enforcing decision-making processes and developing parliamentary core functions that improve public participation and social learning of community (Mastropaolo & Verzichelli, 2006).

Today, democratic parliaments as forum of discussion and information, as institutions and places for negotiation and conciliation provide legitimacy to government and democratic political system (Pasquino & Pelizzo, 2006). Parliaments should act as meta-sovereign ensuring that governance processes operate according to general rules and procedures for public accountability decided by

parliament to increase transparency and reinforce public trust. Parliaments as collective representative and authority in modern societies are coping with emerging trends of markets, technological and scientific complexity, organizations and interests' groups carrying on a significant part of business of politics and governance (Burns, 1999). In modern societies characterized by complex decision-making, the accountability is achieved by ensuring the openness of decision-making. Parliaments behave as mediators and referees in transition from the representative democracy (unable to solve uncertainty and complexity) with vertical lines of accountability and power to governance networks with more horizontal forms of accountability and power (Kljin & Skelcher, 2007).

Parliaments as responsive organizations should promote an active and democratic citizenship to serve the public interest as result of dialogue and collaboration with citizens as partners (Vigoda, 2002) based on a shared leadership and respect for people (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003). Parliaments should promote transparent processes facilitating a two-way transfer of knowledge between public institution and stakeholders to better develop and implement sustainable policy (Riege & Linsday, 2006).

Parliaments as representative institutions of the diversity of people contribute to produce better laws and policies that serve the people (Beetham, 2006) as information intensive organizations and media infrastructure (Leston-Bandeira, 2007a, Mulder, 1999) and knowledge based organizations that use, disseminate and share knowledge related to social and environmental issues (Leon, 2013) by managing and creating knowledge policy making related by documents, laws, acts (Loukis, 2011). Parliaments tend to achieve and gain legitimacy (Krause, Moynihan & Carpenter, 2012) having the responsibility of sustaining the values of representative democracy (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012) by affirming its role as general voice of people (Burns, 1999).

Internet technologies making available documents and information about legislative processes help parliaments to promote citizenship, transparency and accountability in order to appear as responsive and sustainable representative institutions.

The aim of this paper is to provide a framework of analysis to elucidate that parliaments are embracing new technologies to behave as more open and democratic representative institutions seeking legitimacy or moving towards a sustainable development over time in order to restore trust of citizens.

This study is based on archival and qualitative data drawn by analysis and review of literature on the introduction of new technologies for connecting parliamentary institutions with citizens.

**Parliaments seeking legitimacy in front of citizens through new technologies**

ICTs help public organizations and government to re-connect with the public by increasing service efficiency and delivery, enhancing transparency and access to information, creating new opportunities of engagement and involvement of citizens (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward, 2008). Technology helps to increase transparency and improve processes of information and communication by linking different forms and mechanisms of democracy (Anttiroiko, 2003). Technology seems to be putting the democracy first (Denahrdt & Denhardt, 2003). Thereby, the success of electronic democracy relies on capacity to support and enable new forms of publicness within a public sphere (Tsagarousianou, 1998). Technologies help the development of democratic processes through obtaining information as requisite for engaging in deliberation, second phase desirable for participating in decision making (Tsagarousianou, 1999). Internet technologies making accessible data and information about parliamentary institutions and the legislative process lead citizens to exert influence on policy making (Grönlund, 2003) and participate activating their voice to parliamentarians (Missingham, 2001) as to contribute to new forms of policies sharing and participatory democracy (Kingham, 2003).

While parliamentarism increased considerably, parliaments as traditionally closed and far institutions are becoming the public face of distrust and disengagement of citizens embracing new technologies to appear more active in developing mechanisms of communication to engage citizens and contrast political apathy (Leston-Bandeira, 2012a). Parliaments as organizations managing uncertainty as

fundamental problem (Fox & Hammond, 1977) tend to achieve greater legitimacy than better performance enhancing credibility of their actions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, DiMaggio & Powell, 1983 Suchmann, 1995) by embracing new technologies to gain legitimacy maintaining the organizational reputation as a set of beliefs about capacities, intentions and missions (Krause, Moynihan & Carpenter, 2012).

ICTs help parliaments to maintain primacy and democratic legitimacy of the electoral chain of command in relation to some trends that tend to weaken the role of legislatures in western democracies: the control of representative institutions by political executives; the power of party discipline over representative institutions; the decision making is displaced into policy networks; the hollowing-out of the state (Raab & Bellamy, 2004).

Parliaments as institutions perceived as cause of disengagement of citizens with politics are strategically planning a public engagement agenda by embracing new technologies pursuing legitimacy as responsive and democratic institutions (Leston-Bandeira, 2014). Parliaments need legitimacy seeking the social support of citizens by developing information and communication flows with constituencies in order to legitimize policies (Hoff, Coleman, Filzmaier & Cardoso, 2004), strengthening the channels of engagement, networking and linkages (Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006). Parliaments could serve as symbols of political integration among groups and networks and important sources of coherent policy in a 'mixed polity' that embraces parliamentary and post-parliamentary forms of governance (Raab & Bellamy, 2004). Parliaments are managing new technologies in order to uphold the values and ideas of representative democracy to survive as open and transparent institutions (Leston-Bandeira, 2007a), to legitimize policies, promoting citizenship and accountability, fostering greater engagement with citizens (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012), to ensure the legitimacy of parliamentary institution toward a participatory democracy (Smith & Gray, 1999, Smith & Webster, 2008, Smith & Webster, 2004, Raab & Bellamy, 2004), to engage citizens and sustain public trust (Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006) as to be perceived as more efficient organizations in their internal workings (Kingham, 2003).

**Building the e-parliament**

Parliaments have to play a connective role between government and citizens embracing Internet technologies to make open the conduct of business for the people, involving civil society, helping citizens to understand the value of parliament as institution, providing services that enable citizens to be included in decision making processes (Papaloi & Gouscos, 2011).

Parliaments are embracing new technologies in order to build the e-parliament as an efficient organization where stakeholders use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to perform their primary functions of lawmaking, representation, and oversight more effectively (World parliamentary report, 2008). Designing the e-parliament implies to structure a legislature that is empowered to be more open, transparent and accountable through ICT encouraging people to be more engaged in public life by providing higher quality information and greater access to documents and activities of the legislative body. Parliaments are integrating new technologies of information and communication into their work to enhance and strengthen parliamentary functions (representative, legislative, scrutiny, oversight, legitimacy, education, conflict resolution) in terms of communication possibilities, dissemination and management of information (Leston-Bandeira, 2007a; Oppd, 2010; Undp, 2006) by enabling citizens to participate in the policy-making process, to view and discuss parliamentary records easily and permanently available as to develop an inclusive information society (World Parliamentary Report, 2008).

New technologies offer parliaments opportunities to modernize internal processes, increase levels of transparency, promote accountability, enhance engagement developing adequate resources to effectively use technology. New technologies and social media drive parliament to improve parliamentary language helping people to understand what legislatures do and their processes as to gather feedback and enhance the educative function about political processes to bridge the gap between representatives and people (Williamson & Fallon, 2011).

Parliaments embracing new technologies are perceived as more efficient and effective institutions that improve internal workings and processes, strengthening parliamentary democracy (e-parliament), providing better information to the public improving the interface between governments and citizens (e-government), ensuring the electorate to be better connected with institution allowing citizens to participate directly in the policy process (e-democracy) (Kingham, 2003). ICTs support knowledge management sharing information as significant resource for developing parliamentary basic functions (Suurla, Markkula & Mustajarvi, 2002). Moreover, technological modernization does not automatically make available new forms of democracy because of varying political context and dynamics in different countries (Zittel, 2004) influencing the future of parliamentary information infrastructure shaping e-democracy practices (Mulder, 1999). Parliaments adopt new technologies for modernization or reinvigoration coherently with role that ICTs may play in different models of democracy. Parliaments adopt new technologies in order to: improve citizen participation and involvement in decision making processes (deliberative or strong democracy) reinforcing representative institutions engaging people to participate in the political system (reinvigoration) using participation as a means for providing education and understanding about society; improve quality of information exchange government-citizens (liberal or thin democracy) and the image of representative institutions through websites for seeking legitimacy and consensus, and better performing of task (modernization and reform) (Astrom, 2001; Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2006). Thereby, institutional and political differences in terms of nature and independence of legislature from the government exert influence on the means and extent to which parliaments provide citizens with information and documents (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

**Parliaments promoting transparency and accountability through new technologies**

Public institutions are increasingly considering the use of ICTs for public involvement as an emerging agenda in order to enhance transparency, openness, and legitimacy (Bingham, Nabatchi & O'Leary, 2005). Democratic parliament should be transparent organizations in the conduct of its business, accessible involving the public, accountable to the electorate for performance in office and integrity of conduct and effective in the organization of business in accordance with democratic values (Beetham, 2006). Thereby, the quality of democratic governance is enhanced by Internet technologies if citizens are better informed but not overloaded informed (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse & Kouzmin, 2003). Parliaments as the public face of distrust are engaging citizens by embracing new technologies (Leston-Bandeira, 2012a) in order to cope with an increased disenchantment of citizens (Coleman, Taylor & Van De Donk, 1999) and permit to citizens to be consulted and involved in the policy process as result of dialogue and shared values (Coleman, 2009, Denhardt & Denhardt, 2001). Parliament have to select a political choice for improving and increasing ICTs policies coherently with values of transparency and accountability (Unpan, 2011). Accountability and transparency are factors driving parliamentary institution to re-build public trust in democratic institutions. New technologies are seen as a means to enhance transparency and overcome barriers to access information, to lead representatives to be more accountable with constituencies communicating their day-to-day work. Parliaments should use types of media that are popular for the public, matching the audience balancing with gravitas of the institution, collecting and disseminating information in formats easily readable and re.-usable (Williamson & Fallon, 2011). Public organizations can behave as transparent but not accountable institutions. Transparency does not automatically lead to accountability. While transparency implies dissemination and access to available information, the accountability requires the capacity to produce answers in terms of sanctions, compensation or remediation. Thereby, transparency and accountability can be conceived along a continuum in which the institutional answerability is the area of overlap whereas a clear transparency, that refers to information-access policies and lead to reliable information on institutional performance, is able to lead to a soft accountability (Fox, 2007). Democratic institutions have to behave as transparent organizations to function maintaining the relationship of confidence with citizens in order to increase and restore trust of citizens (Curtin & Meijer, 2006, Grimmelikhuijsen, 2009). New technologies lead parliaments perceived as distant institutions to develop and positively affect the symbolic relationship with citizens in their endless pursuing of trust (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b) sustaining public trust and improving transparency (Moon, 2002) because interactivity and increased transparency favor citizens' trust in democratic institutions (Welch & Hinnant, 2003). Information

technology pressures are leading to increased public accountability coherently with national characteristics (Wong & Welch, 2004). Thereby, the Internet as means for ensuring policy discussion and evaluation from citizens seems to be still in its infancy (Pina, Torres & Royo, 2010). Internet technologies make public organizations as open, responsive institutions willing to serve the interest of citizens (La Porte, Demchak & Jong, 2002). Parliaments, traditionally regarded as closed institutions, have to connect more directly citizens as listening and learning institutions developing a meaningful interaction (Coleman & Spiller, 2003). New technologies help parliaments to increase accountability and openness enhancing parliamentary democracy (Smith & Webster, 2008) and to realize the value of transparency, openness, accessibility and accountability by making available for citizens document and information about legislative process and policymaking activities (Leston-Bandeira, 2007b).

Parliaments as governmental institution use transparency in order to increase and restore the trust of citizens within institutions (Grimelikuijsen, 2009) by embracing Internet technologies to emphasize the value of transparency as a myth in order to strengthen social legitimacy of the institutions (Curtin & Meijer, 2006). Parliaments should ensure two aspects of transparency: document transparency implies the possibility that parliamentary documents for political decisions are examined; meeting transparency implies the following on line real-time proceeding of meetings of political bodies and webcast archive (Berntzen et al., 2006).

Parliaments tend to increase greater openness and legislative by the visualization of parliamentary information about legislative processes in the attempt to empower citizens encourage participation too (Papaloi & Gouscos, 2013). ICTs permit to parliament to increase transparency improving the knowledge and information about decision-making towards an accountable relationship with citizens (Meijer, 2003) facilitate processes of information access and communication (Lusoli, Ward & Gibson, 2006) encouraging both positive and negative feedback, and public participation in policy formulation (Taylor & Burt, 1999; Missingham, 2001).

**Connecting with citizens: the role of websites between lights and shadows**

The publicity of political decision making is a central element of representative democracies. Websites are considered the main vehicle through which citizens gather and obtain data and information to monitor governmental activities (World parliamentary report, 2012) making available a growing amount of information about legislative process. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) providing guidelines for structuring parliamentary is leading parliaments to promote a culture of openness, transparency and accountability through design and implementation of their websites as the primary means for making their work known to citizens in order to appear as a genuine and accountable voice in front of the executive authority.

Parliamentary websites tend to ensure a more open institution providing the most current reports of committee actions and plenary debates, and offer facilities for citizens to contact the parliament directly to request information or ask questions, and permit to the decision-making to be more publicly visible. Parliamentary websites as an important tool for the parliament to 'market' itself to the citizen (Dai & Norton, 2007) contribute to the levels of political knowledge among citizens that may relatively easily receive information on procedures, current legislative activity, and administrative acts increasing the chances of ex ante and ex post public scrutiny of legislatures, providing the citizens with detailed information on parliamentary work at a relatively low cost (Setälä & Grönlund, 2006).

Parliamentary websites as positively judged only in few cases should be improved in terms of transparency and accountability (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012). Parliamentary websites seem not to open to participation and effectively involve the citizens as a partner to be engaged into the legislative and policy processes (Sobaci, 2010) despite of participatory and democratic potential of the Internet (Taylor & Burt, 1999). Websites seem to provide access to data and information rather than expand possibilities of consultation and participation (Joshi & Rosenfield, 2013) and often fail in providing a viable channel of communication between parliamentarians and citizens (Kindra, Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2013) emphasizing the classical role of parliament as liberal representative institution (Norris, 2000),

taking the risk to play a rhetoric role and fulfill an administrative function of merely representing people rather than searching a dialogue or understanding and taking demands of voters (Ward & Lusoli 2005). Websites focus on parliamentary output rather than parliamentary and political actors but often there is no match between what parliaments do and what websites show so that the function of enhancing parliamentary democracy is weakened (Leston-Bandeira, 2009).

**Encouraging citizen participation: positive aspects and some constraints**

Internet Technologies leading to an accessible and decentralized democratic representative system (Zittel, 2003) enhance the quality of democratic governance making available for citizens a growing amount of information about legislative process and providing a means of seeking the views of constituents on public policy.

New technologies help parliaments to develop a trustee model of representation to reconcile with the electorate (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). Contribution of citizens in political decision-making processes rely on models of democratic engagement and require to embed participation in the organizational and cultural infrastructures of modern governance systems legitimizing a decision making process that is efficient and productive of social value over time (Luhers & Molinari, 2010). Thereby, parliaments as public institutions behave as hesitant institutions towards communicating with citizens online being mainly interested in one-way information provision to citizens and not so much in citizens' feedback about legislation or policies design and implementation alternatives (Östling, 2011). Thereby, there is a lack of research combining stakeholders with methods, tools and environment, integrating both different disciplinary contributions (Susha & Grönlund, 2012) and taking account of social, political and technical perspectives (Macintosh & Smith, 2002).

E-democracy can employ different techniques for increasing the transparency of the political process, for enhancing the direct involvement and participation of citizens by improving the quality of opinion formation and opening new spaces of information and deliberation (Trechsel et al., 2003). ICT tools can be implemented to change or reinforce parliamentary institutions governed by path depth processes, support more participatory forms of citizenship and facilitate a two way dialogue reinforcing participatory forms of citizenship and public involvement based on a two way dialogue (Pratchett, 2007). Thereby, e-petitions as a response to declining trust of citizen help to sustain legitimacy of parliamentary institutions and enhance the relationship between parliaments and citizens even if it is too early to evaluate (Bochel, 2013; Hough, 2012).

The use of social media seems to be still in its infancy. Parliaments are timid in the adoption of social media for providing more information about parliamentary business than sustaining engagement and participation of citizens as to lead people to better understand role, functions and characteristics of parliamentary institutions (Leston-Bandeira & Bender, 2013). Thereby, parliamentary actors are no sure of how to cope with democratic potential of ICTs and reconnect people with their representatives and use the input received as to summarize ideas and suggestion that emerge in the electronic dialogue (Francoli, 2008). Parliaments should enhance engagement of citizens communicating how the institution works, showing how the feedback and inputs by the public are considered by legislature (Williamson & Fallon, 2011). New technologies help representative institutions to design and implement e-democracy initiatives ranging from one to two-way access of information to developing a two-way dialogue with citizens for engendering a meaningful dialogue (Coleman & Spiller, 2003; Marcella, Baxter & Moore, 2002) in order to gather, manage and understand the feedback of citizens (Papaloi, Ravekka Staiou & Gouscos, 2012; Papaloi, 2011). Thereby, ICTs help to introduce change or reproduce social structures (Parvez & Ahmed 2006), becoming a rhetorical tool for politicians that may oppose a civic engagement that could obscure traditional political representation (Maherer & Krimmer, 2005).

**Discussion and conclusions**

Parliaments as intensive information and knowledge-based organizations should use technology as a means to redesign internal processes, increase transparency and behave as accountable institutions encouraging citizens to be included in decision making processes. A framework of analysis is proposed to explain how parliaments select a different path embracing new internet technologies of information and communication for modernization or reinvigoration of processes along a *continuum*: from connecting with citizens to make available information and communicate with citizens to engaging people fostering participation in policy making; from ensuring transparency to promoting accountability (figure 1).

|  | connecting with citizens | encouraging citizen participation |
|---|---|---|
| ensuring transparency | Open  Parliaments | Parliaments seeking legitimacy |
| promoting accountability | Democratic Parliaments | Sustainable Parliaments |

*Figure 1. Parliaments towards a sustainable development: a framework of analysis*

The design of parliamentary e-participation is still in infancy. While parliaments as open institutions tend to ensure transparency connecting with citizens, democratic parliaments activate channels of communication for building an accountable relationship with citizens following a responsive approach to relationship between State and citizens. Parliaments seeking legitimacy as representative institutions tend to bridge mediate and direct forms of democracy and increase transparency by encouraging citizen participation to build consensus on representative role of the institution without effectively involving citizens in policy-making based on dialogue and consensus. Sustainable parliaments tend to play a proactive role on policymaking in a deliberative democracy by promoting accountability and engaging citizens to build better policy solutions supported by citizens.

New technologies lead to organizational and professional re-design of parliamentary staff (Leston-Bandeira, 2007a; Mulder, 1999; Oppd, 2010). Parliaments playing a decisional role and having at disposal consulting and professional staff tend to redesign core functions and processes by introducing new technologies and developing a knowledge approach to encourage citizens to have access to information for sharing knowledge and building a sustainable policy process. Parliaments merely modernizing internal processes by new technologies offer openness and accessibility to documents and acts improving transparency without making citizens as partner for policy building.

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