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DEMOS – Delphi Mediation Online System**

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DEMOS – Delphi Mediation Online System

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DEMOS stands for Delphi Mediation Online System. DEMOS is an e-democracy research and development project funded by the European Commission (IST-1999-20530).

DEMOS offers innovative Internet services facilitating democratic discussions and participative public opinion formation. The goal is to reduce the distance between citizens and political institutions by providing a socio-technical system for moderated discourses involving thousands of participants about political issues at the local, national and European level. The vision and long-term goal of DEMOS is to motivate and enable all citizens, whatever their interests, technical skills or income, to participate effectively and actively in political processes which are both more democratic and more efficient than current practice.

The DEMOS system provides support for three phases of discussion processes: broadening, deepening and consolidating the discussion. In the broadening phase the discussion is initiated and information about the problem situation and the interests, positions and ideas of the stakeholders are gathered from as many sources as possible. The DEMOS system supports this phase with tools to help moderators with clustering and structuring discussion forum articles and visualise relationships among them. The result of this phase is an outline and summary of the discussion thus far. The main task of the second phase is to address selected issues in more depth. For this purpose, the DEMOS system provides tools for helping the participants to break up into sub-groups, for conducting online surveys, and for collaborating on the formulation of joint position statements. The task of the third and final phase is to consolidate the results from the sub-groups into a document summarising and visualising the main points of the discussion. Ideally, this structured discussion process can lead to political consensus. In practice, we would be satisfied with 'rational dissent': the participants may continue to disagree, but the reasons for the disagreement will have been made clear and comprehensible.

The argumentation and mediation component of the DEMOS system is being designed and implemented jointly by the AiS and FOKUS institutes of Fraunhofer, using our Zeno system. Zeno is an Open Source Internet groupware system, written in Java. The latest version, Zeno 2, unifies and simplifies shared workspaces, content management, discussion forums, group calendars and basic task management under a common 'journal' concept. Apart from the usual features of groupware systems, Zeno provides special support for the moderators and mediators of consensus building and conflict resolution discourses. For example, the data model of Zeno journals generalises threaded discussions from trees to arbitrary directed nets with any number and type of user-defined relations between the contributions of the participants. This allows moderators to define and apply a broad range of models of rational discourse, including but not limited to the Issue-Based Information System model (IBIS), to structure and visualise discussions.



DEMOS demonstrator for the City of Hamburg

Coming to terms with the complexity resulting from the inherent distribution of users and their asynchronous participation in a discourse combined with the multiple structures of information resources is one of the main research goals pursued by Fraunhofer within DEMOS. The tasks range from overall system specifications via semi-formal and formal system and process models to formal specifications of core functional units. The results are used for developing concepts of discourse awareness, discourse rules (including rules of order)

for asynchronous discussions or system-supported argumentation structures. The DEMOS system is being validated in pilot applications in the cities of Bologna and Hamburg.

Partners

Comune di Bologna; Fraunhofer AiS, Sankt Augustin; Fraunhofer FOKUS, Berlin; Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg; Ibermatica SA, Madrid; Ipsos-RSL Ltd., London; NEXUS-IBA, Milano; Pixelpark AG, Berlin (until December 2001); TUHH-Technologie GmbH, Hamburg-Harburg.

Links:

<http://www.ais.fhg.de>

<http://www.fokus.fhg.de>

<http://www.demos-project.org>

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