Internet based Open Governance: the case of Greece
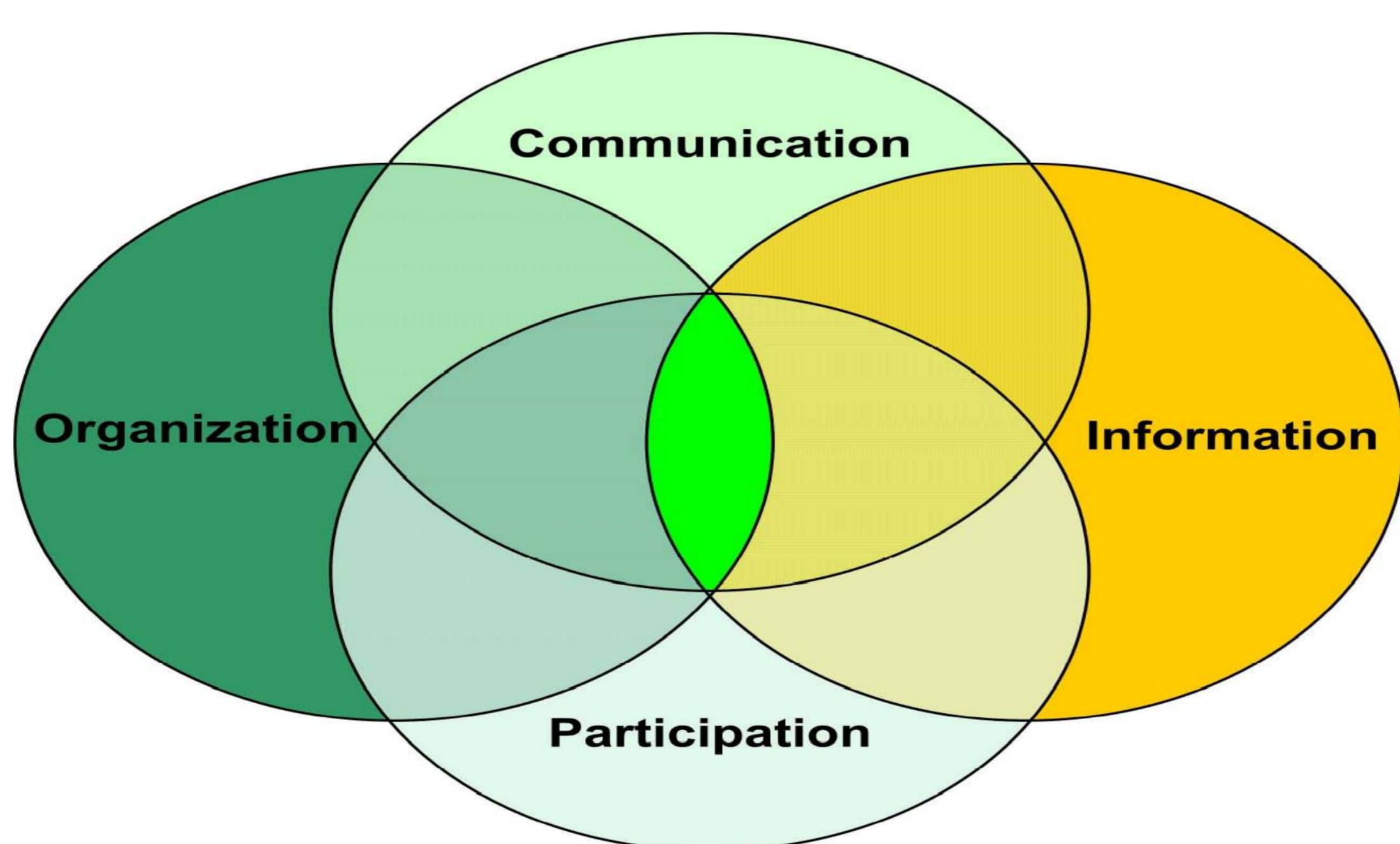
Open Governance

Open governance is a political ideology which promotes the application of open source and open content to the every-day practices of democratic governance. An example is legislation that is open to the general public: this openness allows citizens to express their views on the government directly and in large numbers, and the collection of their opinions benefits policy and those who implement it, the law makers, because they can base their decision-making on a wide range of tangible and specific data ([4]). These views, moreover, can suggest many different approaches of how open governance can merge with actual government. A most crucial factor though concerns how to process successfully vast amount of information within an open source environment ([5]).

Open Governance in Greece

Few days after the Greek parliamentary elections of the 4th of October 2009 the newly elected socialist government launched the Greek OpenGov.gr initiative. The idea was to render OpenGov.gr a major reference point to Greek public sphere, a "virtual" meeting point for the government and the public. Some early initiatives included open calls for the filling of governmental posts and for participation in commentary forums formed in order to discuss and deliberate online over proposed legislation. It received major publicity since it was the first time in Greece that software tools and the Internet were openly offered at a large scale to the public for direct interaction with the government. In a society that only 18,3% of the population have advanced or good Internet skills this initiative generated remarkable media attention. This led to an unexpectedly large civic participation: on-line applications for certain positions or comments on legislation sometimes numbered several thousand. An interesting similar initiative is Labs.OpenGov.gr. This is an open innovation contest for the redesign of electronic government services. The response from the public was remarkable and the 15 best proposals that received top ranking are under consideration for adoption by the Greek e-state.
The socialist party now in government has been engaging in a number of similar projects for a long time, while still in opposition ([2]).
OpenGov.gr initiative has generated considerable interest as this is evidenced by the steady publicity it has been receiving in the media, electronic and print, and in an assortment of political information sources. It is obvious that OpenGov.gr is a top-down approach to open e-government since it is headquartered in the offices of the Prime minister.

Labs.OpenGov.gr

This is an open innovation contest for the redesign of electronic government services. The proposals (now in the 3rd round) are evaluated by a scientific committee and are presented in an open event. The presentations have technical character and usually are based on the open source and open content approach. E-procurement, one-stop shops for e-government, e-ticketing, management of cultural information, broadband for all, are some of the areas where solutions were proposed.

An online deliberation platform at OpenGov.gr

OpenGov.gr is the online deliberation platform of the Greek government. Ever since its inception (October 2009) 14 public policy documents from 8 ministries have been published by OpenGov.gr. So far, people have visited the OpenGov website more than 1.000.000 times and submitted 40.000 comments on 29 policy deliberations. In a easy to use, blog-like, environment OpenGov.gr aims to be used:
• By **ministries**, to present deliberation documents accompanied by relevant informational material in order to generate valuable feedback that it is later analyzed to inform the final decisions of the Greek government with citizens input.
• By **citizens,** to receive information about important forthcoming policy initiatives, process and analyze them, and be able to contribute actively by offering counterviews and counterproposals.
• By **civil society organizations** and trade unions, as a potential outlet to promote arguments on their agendas.
• By the **media**, as a useful source of information that occasionally enriches their daily reports with original and fresh content.

An **online deliberation** usually consists of:
• A call that describes the context of the policy initiative and states the starting and closing date of the deliberation.
• The policy document that is published in paragraph format to facilitate a focused and meaningful discussion.
• Relevant informational documents that offer more context
• Citizen comments that are posted after being moderated and approved
• Comments summaries and feedback

A success story

The Greek Ministry of Finance followed an exemplar methodological approach for the online deliberation about the reform of the tax system. The ministry defined six specific areas of the tax system and for each one posted a small set of questions on OpenGov (2-6 questions). Each set of questions was published in a separate opengov.gr/minfin webpage accompanied with a brief paragraph, around 100 words, that explained the context and the deliberations goals. There were several keywords in the text that were linked to further relevant information and documents.
Moreover, the questions were carefully elaborated and had a clear twofold focus. First, they summed up briefly the main points of the current problem and noted the available policy options. And secondly, they asked for concrete ideas and proposals from the public.
15.000 comments were posted during the 15-day period of the deliberation.
The majority of the comments were very relevant and set to offer specific solutions and insights from a mixture of ordinary citizens and professional tax experts alike.

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