Discourse Support Systems for Deliberative Democracy

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E-Democracy ≠ **E-Participation**

E-Government: re-engineering the processes of government, using ICT

E-Democracy is special case – political process re-engineering

Example processes:

- formation of opinion, policy and legislation
- building coalitions, alliances and parties
- making executive and administrative decisions
- resolving legal and political conflicts
- carrying out elections (e-voting)



Discourse Systems: Examples

- Public review of city plan, e.g. for a proposed airport or new residential area
- Collaboration among cities to develop a regional housing plan or policy
- Development within a political party of its party program or "platform".
- Deliberation of legislation within legislative subcommittees and plenary sessions
- Collaboration of lawyers and software engineers on drafting legislation and designing computer systems based on this legislation



Discourse Systems: Some Definitions

Dialog. A goal-directed conventional framework in which the parties "reason together in an orderly way", applying appropriate rules and conventions (Walton, The New Dialectic, 1998).

Discourse. A dialog which produces one or more documents.

Discourse System. The organizational context and technical infrastructure of the persons engaged in the discourse.

Discourse Support System. The system of information and communications technology designed to be used as part of the technical infrastructure of a discourse systems.



Main Components of Discourse Systems

Actors. The persons and institutions participating in the discourse, in various roles.

Documents. The plan, statute, contract, protocol or other documents produced by the discourse, including their modification histories.

Dialog. The dialog(s) about

- the document,
- the subject matter of the document, and
- about the process of the dialog itself.

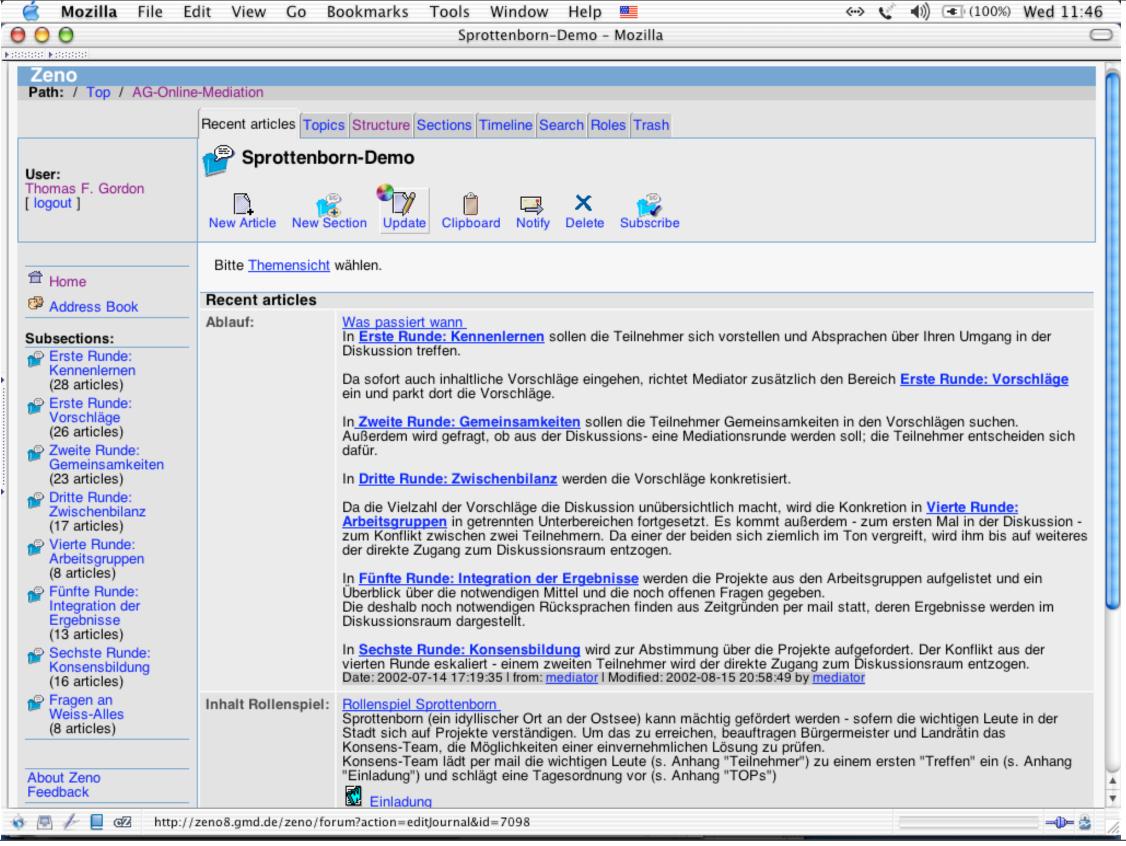
Norms. The rules, principles, conventions, precedents, etc., which guide the discourse.



Overview of Zeno

- Discourse Support System for the World Wide Web, written in Java:
 - Directory service (address book) of users and groups
 - Shared Repository for Documents and Dialogs
 - Hyperthreads:
 - ✓ "semantic network" model of relationships between documents and dialogs
 - ✓ more general than document outlines or discussion threads
 - ✓ supports IBIS and other models of structured discourse
 - Process Management: Moderation Facilities
 - Communication and notification services:
 - ✓ Web browser and email interfaces (pull and push)
 - ✓ User configurable newsletters and reports, distributed by email
 - ✓ Can be used as a "list server"
 - Extensible object-oriented architecture (Model-View-Controller)
 - Customizable user interfaces (CSS and Velocity Templates)
- For further information: http://zeno.berlios.de





Process Management: Moderation Facilities

- Process phases: agenda setting, information gathering, interest identification, issue analysis, brainstorming, argumentation and negotiation
- Sections and topics can be opened or closed
- Temporal views: News, Calendar
- Status reports, summaries and other process information
- Enforcing discourse rules: Articles can be labeled, annotated, edited, unpublished or deleted
- Structuring and visualization:
 - Using hyperthreads for "semantic networks" or "conceptual maps"
 - Parts of graph may be moved or copied, preserving relationships



E-Democracy Applications of Zeno

GeoMed. (1995-1997) EU Information Engineering project (IE2037). First EU E-Democracy project. Citizen review of city plans on the web. Integrated an earlier version of Zeno with a Web-based Geographical Information System (GIS). Piloted in Bonn and Tilburg. Bonn used Zeno in citizen consultation of a planned residential and technology part.

DEMOS. (2000-2003) Current EU E-Democracy project (IST-1999-20530). Integrates Zeno with online surveys, text mining and subgroup formation components and a new user interface. Pilots in Hamburg and Bologna.

Media@Komm in Esslingen. (2001) A successful e-participation pilot application of Zeno in Esslingen, Germany. Used an earlier version of Zeno in a moderated public deliberation about a planned residential area.



Recap

- E-Democracy is more than e-Participation or e-Voting
- Goals of deliberative democracy:
 - fair, legitimate, rational and efficient process;
 - high-quality results.
- Distinction between discourse systems and discourse support systems
- General purpose discussion forums are not enough
- Need for
 - integrated models and views of documents, dialog, and process
 - powerful support for moderators and editors
- Zeno: Good platform for custom discourse support systems
- See http://zeno.berlios.de

