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Abstract

This informal, internal report has been issued now to EuroPetition project partners in order to help make improvements to the EuroPetition service in its remaining months; the results will be more fully explored in the final evaluation report due in December 2010.

Please contact Peter Cruickshank before circulating this report beyond the project consortium.

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1 Introduction and overview

Edinburgh Napier University issued the EuroPetition project Evaluation Criteria and Pilot Trials Monitoring Plan (D2.1.1) in 2009, which covered planning for evaluation in 5 Regional Clusters to assess the acceptability, democratic impact and viability of the system. It included plans for the assessment of the assumptions in the D2.3.1 Initial Viability Plan which will feed into D2.3.2 Final Viability Plan.

At project completion, Edinburgh Napier University will issue the Evaluation Report (D2.1.2), but it has been recognised that an a report of the interim findings will help the project partners to plan their operation of the live system.

This report supplements the presentation made to EuroPetition PEC4 in Vicenza in June 2010. It summarises in one place the results of review and evaluation work that have been carried out on EuroPetition by internal and external bodies, in particular:

- The review carried out for MOMENTUM
- The results of the acceptance questionnaires on installation and training
- The results of the baseline survey

Additionally, the Commission Interim Review carried out in Brussels, in February 2010 gives a usefully 3rd party viewpoint on project progress, and perceived challenges. Copies have already been supplied to the partners, and a response to the Commission agreed.

Please note that the findings reported here are preliminary and provisional: partners' feedback would be welcome. At the same time, it is very likely that the final report will focus on different aspects of the data, or even find different meanings in the numbers once responses from live system users have been considered.

In summary: This informal, internal report has been issued now in order to help make improvements to the EuroPetition service in its remaining months; the results will be more fully explored in the final evaluation report due in December 2010.

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2 MOMENTUM Review

Carried out by Jesper Thestrup, Director, In-Jet ApS, Denmark in February 2010

- Accessibility: Lyssna application not available on EuroPetition pages
- Seen as incremental innovation in e-Participation
- Seen as part of i2010 agenda (ie consistent with EU plans)

Strengths:

- Opportunity to gather people from many places

Main weaknesses

- Lack of clarity about what the EuroPetition process was going to work – *hopefully addressed now*
- Clarity over how the process would work: both for
 - rejection/modification of petitions, and
 - political response once the petition was completed: ie to show that participation will result in attention
- Risk of mismatch of expectations against actual experience

Comment: Maybe this raises the possibility that local EuroPetition websites should have quotes from councillors/MEPs saying they support the system and take it seriously?

3 Acceptance questionnaire feedback

These questionnaires were designed to meet the need to capture some basic information on how EuroPetition is perceived by the people who are involved with configuring and operating the system within the clusters and councils/municipalities involved. In particular they cover the objective ‘Measure extent to which user and technical acceptance criteria have been met’.

To this end, three questionnaires were:

The installation questionnaire: captures who is responsible for EuroPetition at the cluster (technical and administration), gives a place for them to record any issues that were encountered and finds out what they have to do check that the system is working correctly

The functionality checklist should be used to show what checks have been done to see that individual functions are working, and to note any issues or comments that arise.

The training outcome questionnaire is for use in any training sessions you have with administrative staff and is aimed at recording the initial feedback from the people who will be administering the system over the next year

Cluster leaders were asked to complete the questionnaires on behalf of the municipalities – with the aim of achieving a broad coverage for a low effort (for instance, there is no need for local translations).

This section summarises the responses that were received.

3.1 Installation & configuration

Basic Information	
Responses from	North Lincolnshire, petites.nl, I2BC, Vicenza, Malmö
Date	01/04/2010
Name & position of person who completed this form	Cluster leaders
Who managed the configuration for: Public-i	If not done remotely, work was led by senior staff at Public-i - Paul Hernanz, Donald Eastwood or Ady Cole

Roles of key staff at cluster	
<i>The ideal would be to have staff from democratic services or communications departments participating in the installation process – or at least having a role in acceptance of the installed application. Sometimes, cluster leaders took this role, with the risk that ownership is not taken by the councils</i>	
Server admin/technical liaison	Digital Inclusion Unit - General Manager and Technical Manager Malmö City’s Web Systems Manager Nestor project manager
Petition admin & support	Senior democratic services staff Department of Communications Vicenza director of IT – comment: would expect end user department to be represented

3.1.1 Installation notes

Criteria	
<i>The aim is that installation & configuration should happen first time, with all potential problems (configuration, environment) anticipated (or if not, documented and processes adjusted).</i>	
1.Summary of installation/ configuration issues encountered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In England, no issues other than EuroPetition list empty when live • For non-English sites: some issues with modifying labels, completeness of translation files (esp identifying context of use) and graphic layouts • In Sweden, most issues were from confusion regarding system changes in the upgrade. Lack of proper documentation made this even harder to dissect – what is a feature, and what is a bug? • Mail messages that the system sends out should be present and visible for the admin in their English form within the system. No chance to do a proper translation of these otherwise. • In Spain, adaptation of the language to be more accessible to the public was needed, due to the unfamiliarity of the term “petition” in Spain. • Need to adapt system for cultural/legal expectations on ID management. Eg in Spain, the I2BC worked with Public-i to develop an extra field in the system which checks and validates the Spanish National Identity number of the user. (Similar issues in Italy)
<i>Aim: User staff with the specified expertise can configure and manage the application on the specified systems</i>	
2.List the skills that are required in your opinion to manage the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good customer service skills, ensuring a regular and friendly contact with lead petitioners. • Knowledge of EC jurisdiction – ie A good understanding of the accepted criteria for a EuroPetition • Knowledge of national/regional petition rules (eg threshold setting for councils in England & Wales) • A thorough understanding of local council competences. • Ability to review petitions, adapting them to be more suitable for the relevant body (Local / European). • Knowledge of alternative means for contact in order to re-direct queries complaints that can't be dealt with by the EuroPetition / local petitioning system. <p>System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good understanding of the process flow of the system. • Basic IT skills OR An IT expert with system and web server management skills • Being proficient in English helps
Indicators of correct installation	
3.Please indicated on attached checklist whether features are installed and running as requested	No issues highlighted

<p>4. What other checks/validation do you do so that you know that EuroPetition has installed correctly?</p>	<p>Tests used were a mix of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Browser checks against those we need to support. • Code and usability validation. • Automatic link checking from main website (or manual walkthrough) → What is used for auto-link checking? • Processing feedback from petitioners • Walkthrough of every linked page in the system for each role class • Created a petition and phased it through the different statuses (approval etc) • Create a new user and add information • Log in as an administrator and manage user and petition as an administrator.
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3.2 User training

Feedback from I2BC, Bristol/Birmingham and NESTOR

Training	
1. Place and date of training	Location: I2BC, Bristol, Rome
2. Number and background of participants	I2BC 4 participants from Córdoba, Abla and Malaga UK – 7 participants from Bristol/Birmingham Italy – 3: Project manager, IT expert and trainer
3. What was the scope of the training?	<p>In the UK, users were familiar with V1, so focus was on EuroPetition functionality and new functionality of V2 of petitioner</p> <p>In Spain, the scope of the training included (IT indicates topic was also covered in Italy):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A general overview of petitioning. - Introduction to ePetitioning - Debate about management and marketing of petitions - Introduction to the Europetition system (IT) - Introduction to the Europetition User Manual - In depth look at the Europetition system from both a user and administrator point of view (IT) - Cluster management using the Europetition system (IT)
4. Any training materials (Send/attach a copy of the training material if that's simplest)	<p>Spain and Italy: For the training, two main documents were used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Europetition workshop presentation - User Manual <p>UK: Slidepack (distributed to group) and training manual provided on CD-ROM</p>
5. Lessons learnt. What would you change for the next training session?	<p>More time, more pre-preparation in terms of participants exposure to new functionality and familiarity with their own systems</p> <p>It would have been nice to have more time to carry out practical exercises eg. All members creating their own petitions / signing other etc.</p>
6. What training issues were encountered? What area of	Spain: The most difficult aspect / aspect that caused most discussion was regarding exactly what is a petition (eg compared

<p>using the application was found to be most difficult to learn?</p>	<p>to a complaint). A point to address in communication plan. Italy: Petition process, how create user (admin, officers and user). How create a new petition and how modify the petition status. EuroPetition : how a local petition to become a EuroPetition, including cluster management UK: It was difficult to understand what would happen in terms of functionality by stakeholder. For example, what the petition organiser would “see” compared to what the admin experiences.</p>
<p>7. What went best?</p>	<p>The training gave us all to share our views on the petitioning systems and to discuss current activities being carried out in the different local councils and how the project will fit in. There was a very good dynamic and the discussions were fluid and productive.</p>
<p>8. What will trainees do next? Eg Training other trainers</p>	<p>Different approaches to training: sometimes direct (UK, ES), sometimes training the trainer (IT): The trainees will now share this knowledge with other members of their team within their departments (where necessary eg. in the larger councils Malaga + Cordoba) In UK, trainers with first test their own systems internally In Italy, the next step will be training the Vicenza Municipalities people who will manage local petition.</p>
<p>9. Did you collect internal feedback from the participants? If yes, is access to the feedback possible?</p>	<p>No.</p>
<p>10. Application</p>	
<p>11. How do you think EuroPetition was perceived by trainees?</p>	<p>The project was perceived as a very new and interesting initiative and as an essential step to opening up the Spanish government to the future of eDemocracy. The general perception regarding the tool was that it was accessible and easy to use. (This relates to petitioning generally)</p> <p>In UK: Some scepticism about relevance at local level (there was one suggestion that we should be building a new interface directly for the EC). Some concern that the new EuroPetition functionality would only seek to complicate or interfere with local petitions or confuse local petitioners (e.g. schemes / response times / guidance required is very different).</p> <p>Participants noted “gap” in terms of no destination for national petitions (e.g. No.10 / UK parliament).</p>
<p>12. Were any issues/bugs encountered during the training? (Detail on separate sheet if necessary)</p>	<p>None in Spain UK: EuroPetition (RSS) list on homepages goes off the screen and is too long – participants would prefer more customisation over landing page blocks. Some concern over ability to map petition as per V2 due to postcode lookup and map licensing agreements IT: Whether a petition could be deleted and whether the platform</p>

	being open source can be modified by the cluster.
13. What issues and questions were brought up?	<p>In Spain: The need to simplify the language used on the website. The Spanish public are not used to the term “petition” as it has not been used widely as a public engagement tool up until now.</p> <p>UK: In V2, the number of times a petitioner can contact signees has been uncapped. This causes a problem, particularly where councils have implemented a privacy policy on frequency of contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who tells petition if their Europetition is rejected? Is this the council, project or cluster? Ownership not clear. • Should UK cluster manager correct English? • Do we have any sort of agreement with PETI regarding their response times on clarifying if a EuroPetition is valid? • The group did not like the idea that some EuroPetitions were collecting signatures already with the possibility that they might not be accepted by PETI. • Council needs to see communiqués between petition organiser and petitioners
14. Critical incidents.	None, but UK cluster members expressed desire for Penetration testing on the application before going further.
15. Is an external URL available?	www.europetitionandalucia.es
Other comments	
16. If there are other factors we should be aware of when evaluating the training requirements for EuroPetition?	None raised.

4 Narrative from the baseline survey

An online Baseline Survey was run by the project partners in the period up to April 2010. It was designed to capture the experiences of respondents. This section summarises the responses and highlights some initial findings.

4.1 Overview of data

755 responses, quite geographically concentrated – the UK response in particular is very much focussed on one of the partners, Kingston-upon-Thames

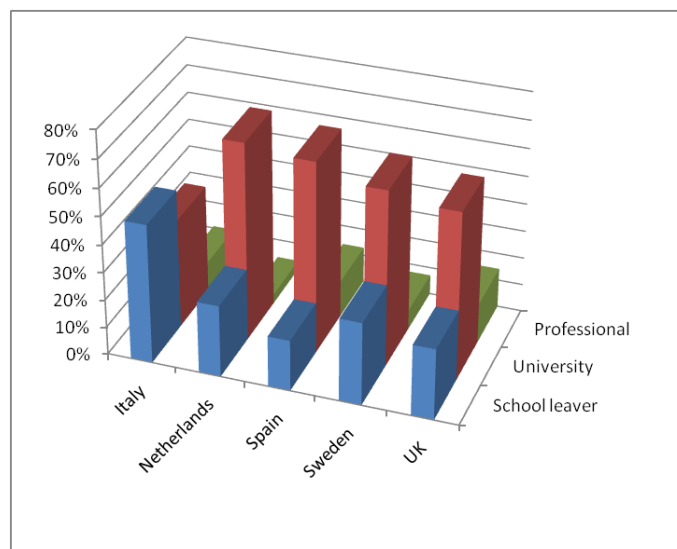
Country and city	Total	Top towns	Route to survey
Italy	28	Vicenza	Almost all via www.comune.vicenza.it
Netherlands	31	Almere	Mostly Almere council website
Spain	131	Málaga, Córdoba, Abla	Mostly direct links or via mailshot (mail.live.com and facebook) and council websites
Sweden	467	Göteborg, Piteå	Dominated by Göteborg and Piteå’s council websites
UK	98	Kingston area	Via mail-links or direct
Grand Total	755		

So it is clear that respondents are generally users of the councils’ websites or people who are otherwise engaged enough with the council to be recipient of mailouts.

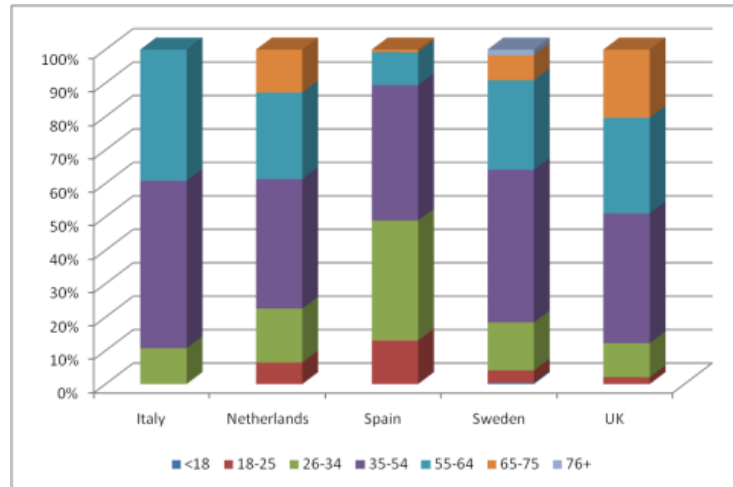
The low response rate from the Netherland and Italy means that most of the following narrative will focus on Sweden, Spain and the UK.

4.2 Basic demographics

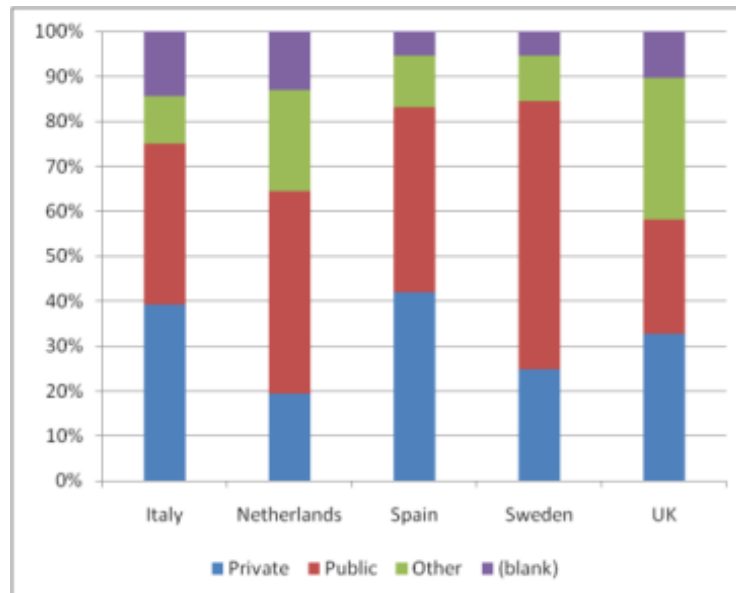
Looking at reported educational level, a large majority of respondents have a University degree - making them slightly atypical of the population



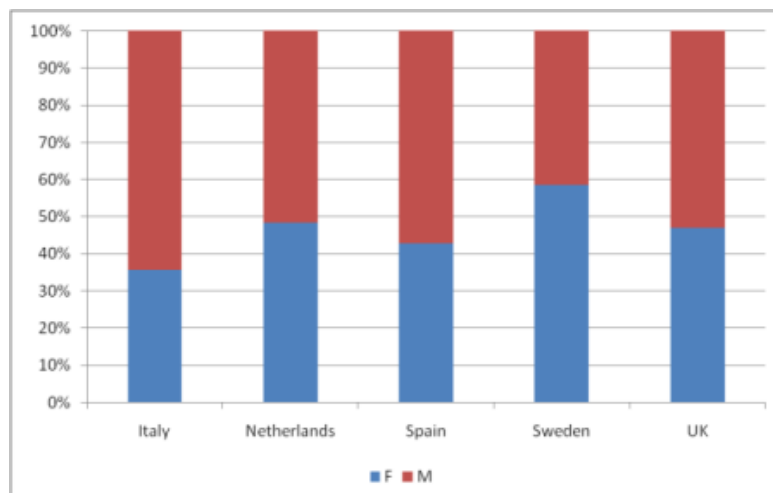
The Spanish respondents are noticeably younger than the others.



Different slices of population responded in each country - in terms of employment sector

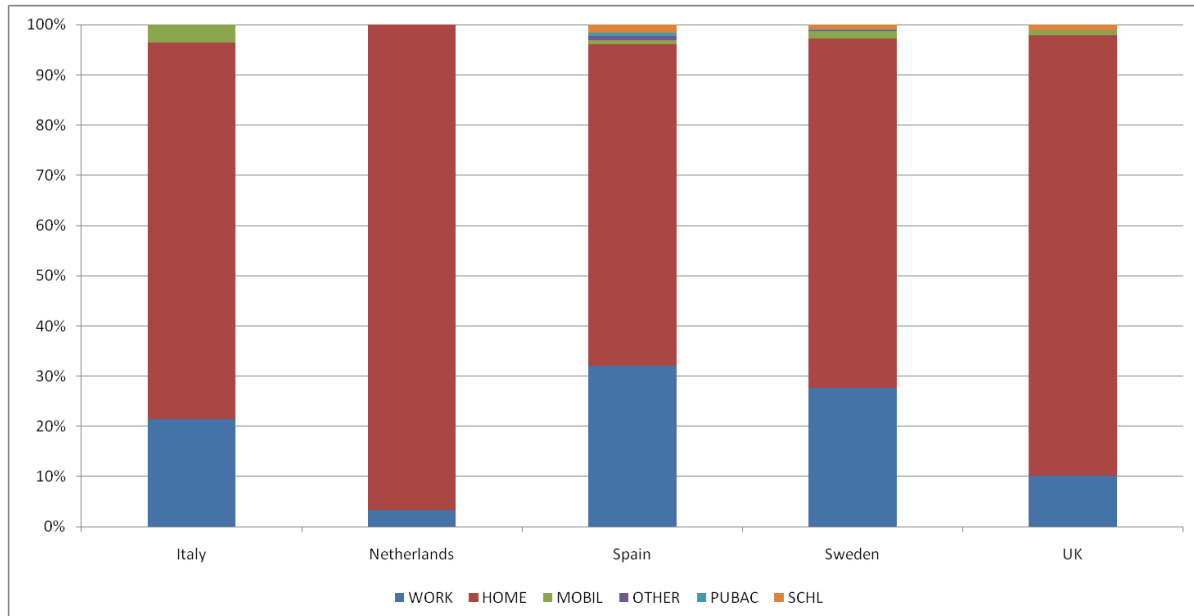


... and gender:



4.3 Use of the internet

Most people access use Home or Work as their primary internet access route, with home by far the dominant route:



Mobile internet access is a strong alternative choice:



Home and Work are the normal secondary (alternative route), but mobile access although not a primary route is the leading alternative to home and work access – ahead of public access points (in Libraries etc), and well ahead of internet cafes.

Policy wise, it shows that applications like EuroPetition need to be preparing for a world of mobile access to e-participation – with all that means in terms of using smaller screens and different forms of interaction.

4.4 Use of computers and Computer Self-Efficacy

Questions relating to frequency of use of the internet were grouped into three.

The first group measure basic use of the internet:

- Visit websites for general news or entertainment (1)
- Look for information (1)
- Pay for items online (3)
- Rate a comment (3)
- Post a review/ask a question (5)
- Post your ideas or join a discussion (5)
- Contact your friends or family (3)

The second focussed on using the internet for political action:

- Access your local council website
- Contact a local politician or council department
- Contact your MEP
- Join a campaign

These two groups were aggregated separately, using the scores noted in brackets after the question (a crude ranking of level of interaction required), multiplied by a score for frequency of use (see table on right for scores)

Frequency of use	Score
Weekly	5
Monthly	3
Sometimes	2
Have done once	1
Never	0

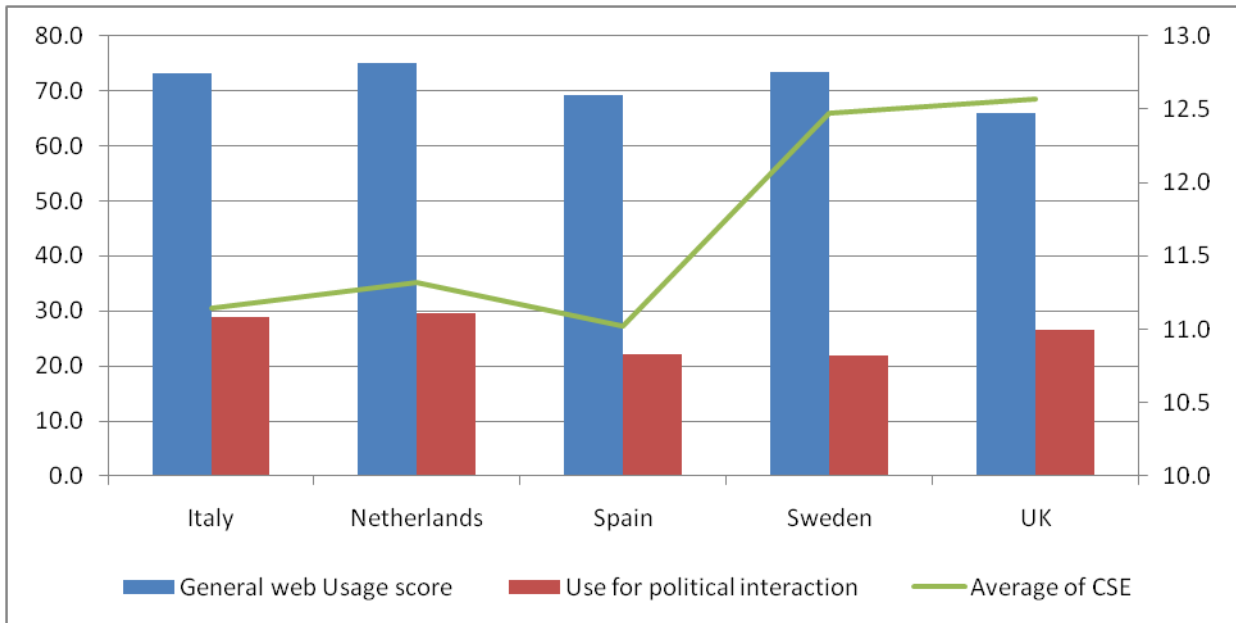
The final group was for questions relating to CSE:

- I am worried that if I use the internet for something important I'll make a mistake that can't be corrected
- I am confident using the internet for... shopping
- ...keeping track of friends and family (eg using Facebook, MySpace, Bebo)
- ...contacting government to get something done

Agreement was scored 1-5 and added together (allowing for questions with negative sentiments) to give a simple CSE score; responses were then divided into quartiles.

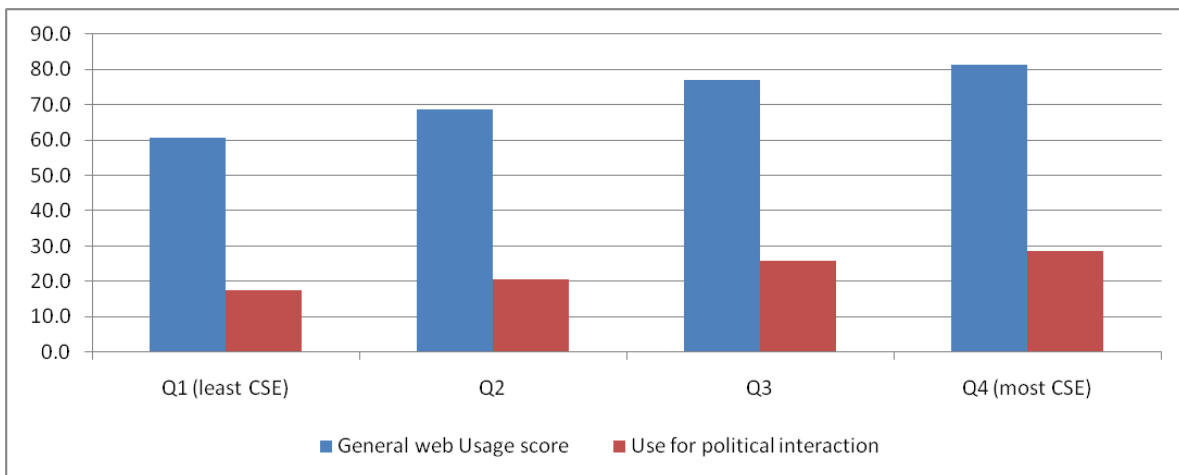
The results are graphed by country and by quartile.

CSE follows use of computers for political interaction more closely than general usage - so CSE is measuring use of technology to effect change? (Remembering that the respondents are people who already are known to use the internet interact with the local government)



(Note that the green line simply show the level of calculated CSE – it does not measure progress between countries)

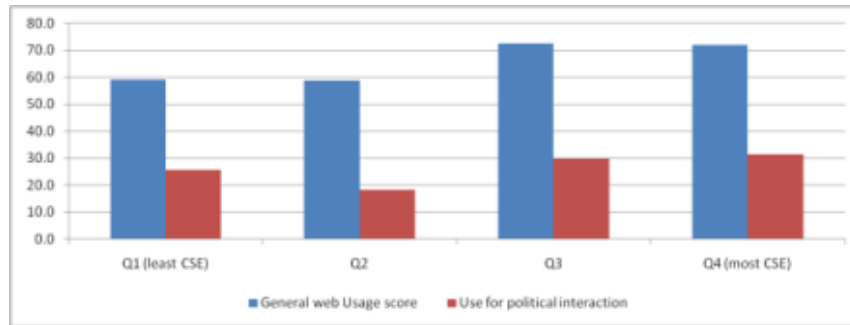
This agrees when CSE quartiles are compared:



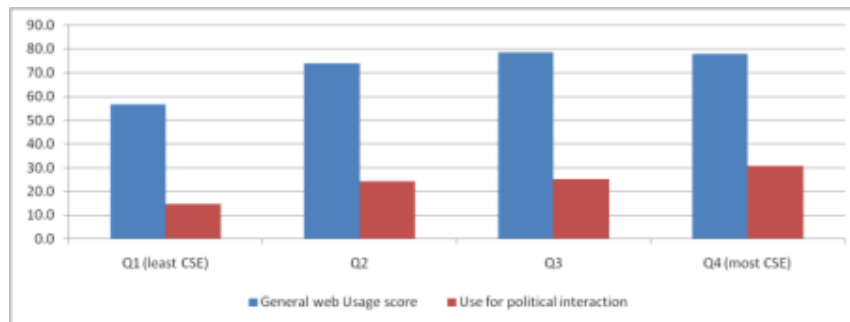
This shows that individuals with high CSE also use computers more.

The shape of the graph reflects Swedish figures dominance in results – UK and Spain do not show such a clear relationship, but the overall trend remains:

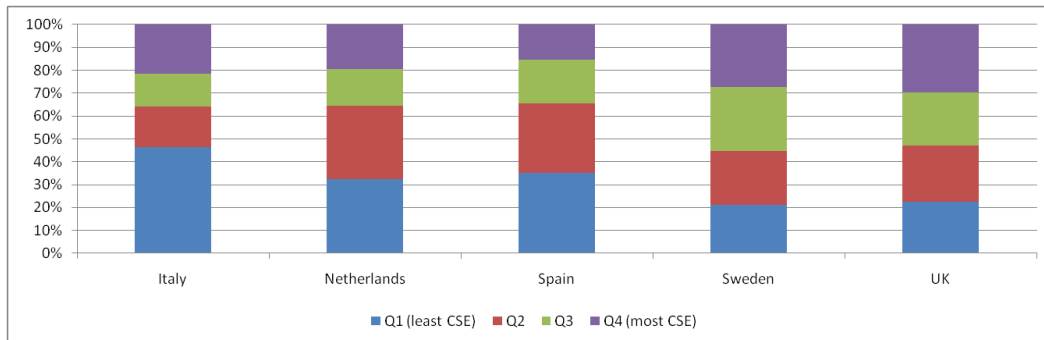
For the UK:



... and Spain:



The final graph illustrates the distribution of feelings of CSE by country:



...showing that Spanish (and Dutch and Italian) respondents place themselves low in CSE relative to Swedes and people from the UK.

4.5 Political activity

Using a similar approach to the previous section, the questions relating to political were grouped into three. The first asked about relatively passive forms of engagement:

- I voted in the 2009 EU Election
- I voted in the last national election
- I voted in the last regional election (if applicable)
- I voted in the last council election
- My friends are politically active or are in campaign groups
- I am a member of a campaigning/volunteer group
- I am a member of a political party

A Yes scored 5, a No 0 and Not sure a 1.

The second group asked “if there was an issue that you felt strongly about, how likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?”

- Write to a newspaper
- Sign a petition
- Contact a locally elected representative (eg councillor, MP, MEP)
- Donate money or pay a membership to a political party
- Take an active part in a campaign (e.g., demonstration, picket or march, public meeting or rally)

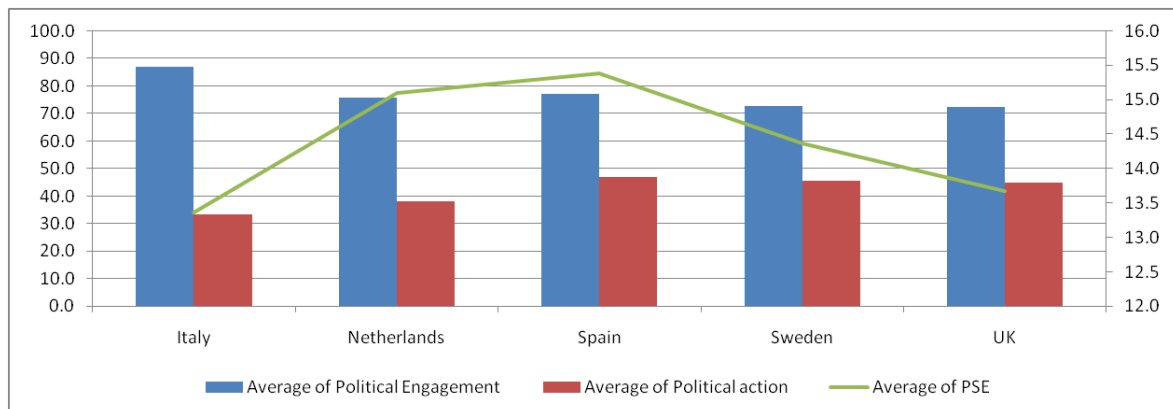
Responses were scored 1-5 according to likelihood.

The Political Self Efficacy (PSE) Questions:

- Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on
- I don't think public officials care much what people like me think
- I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics
- I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our society
- I feel I could do as good a job in public office as most other people

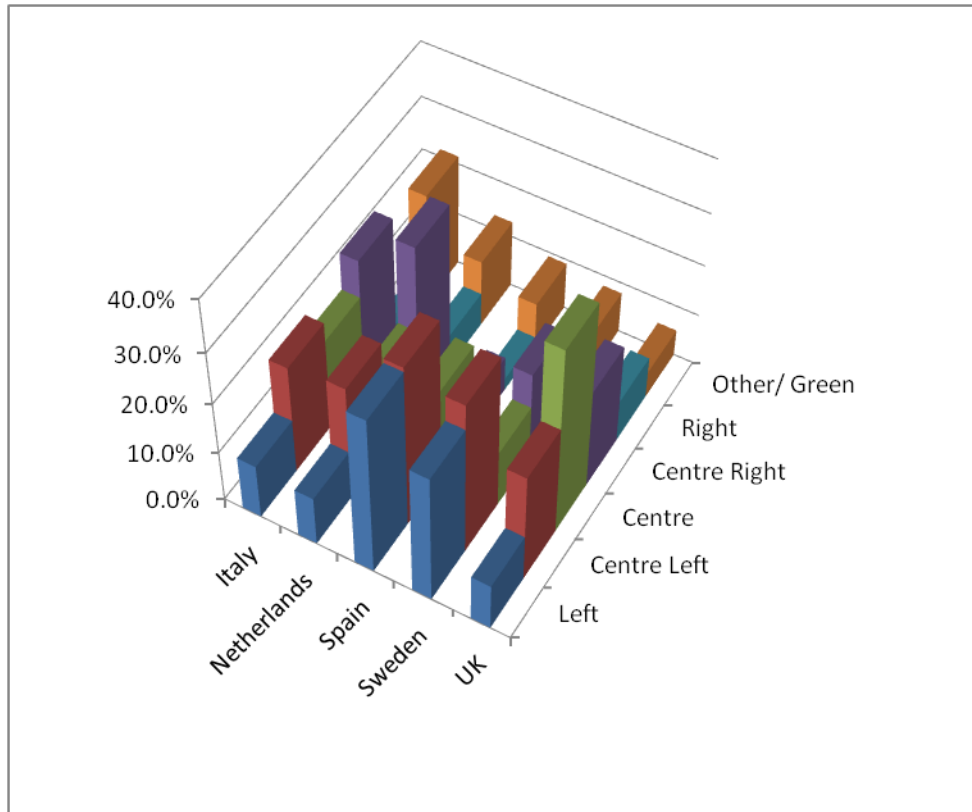
...were scored on the same basis as those for CSE.

The connection between PSE and other measures of activity is not as clear as was the case with CSE:

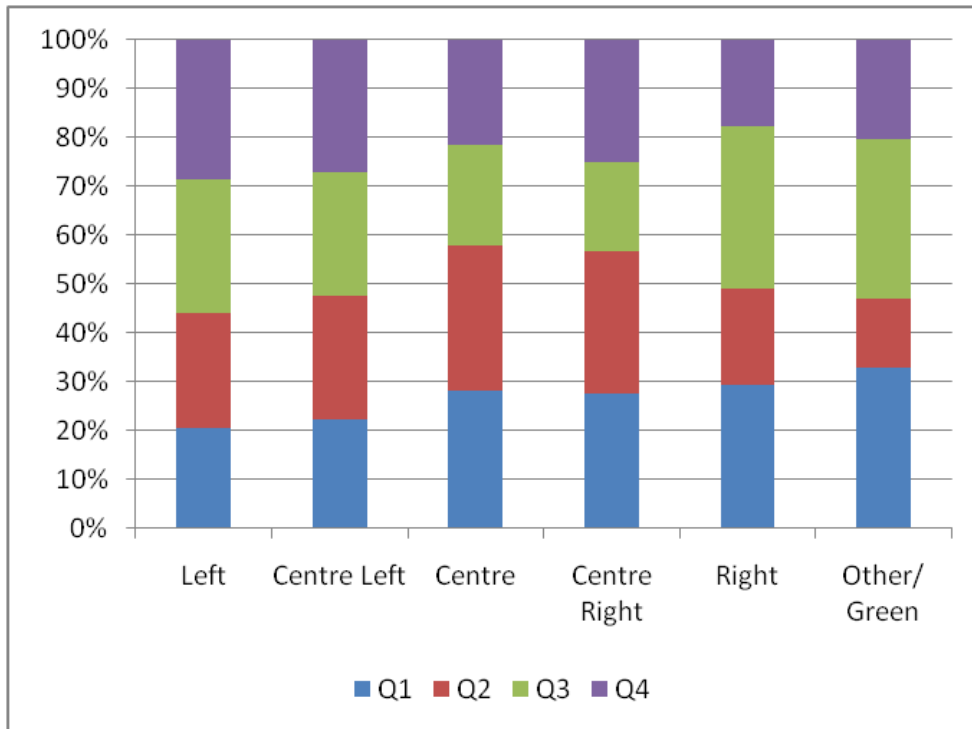


This may simply reflect different stages in the political cycle and the relative popularity of the government in place amongst the respondents.

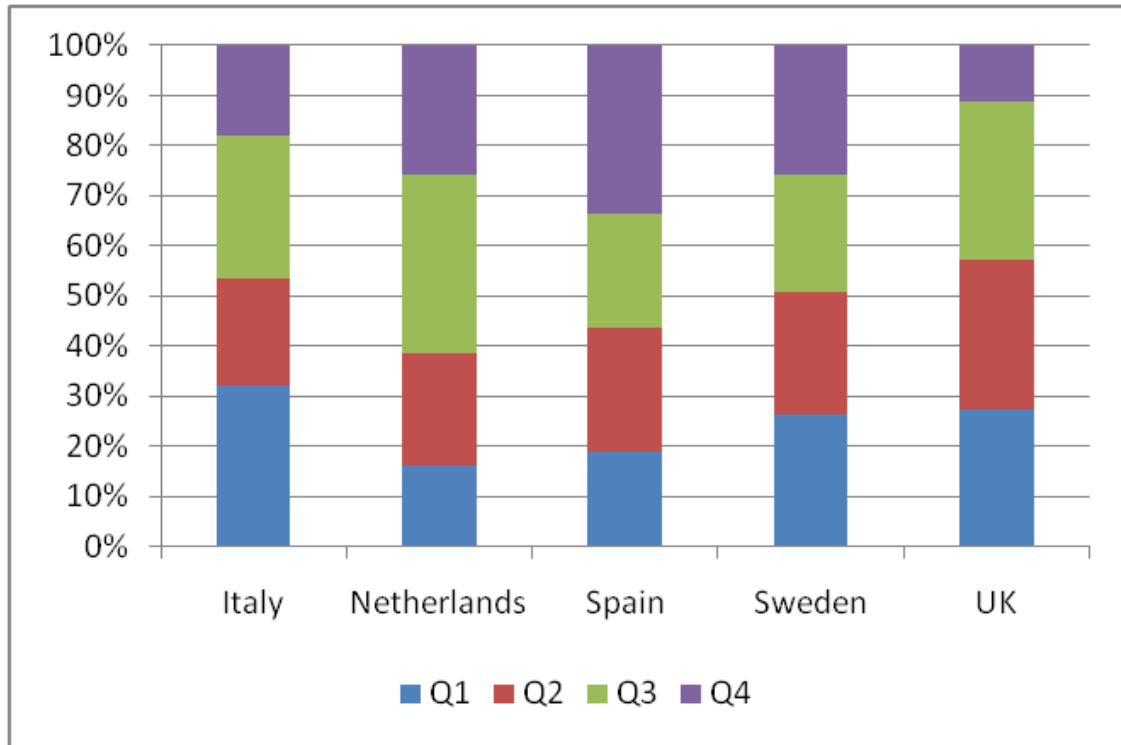
The survey also asked about political alignment:



And compared it to feelings of PSE, with no clear results:



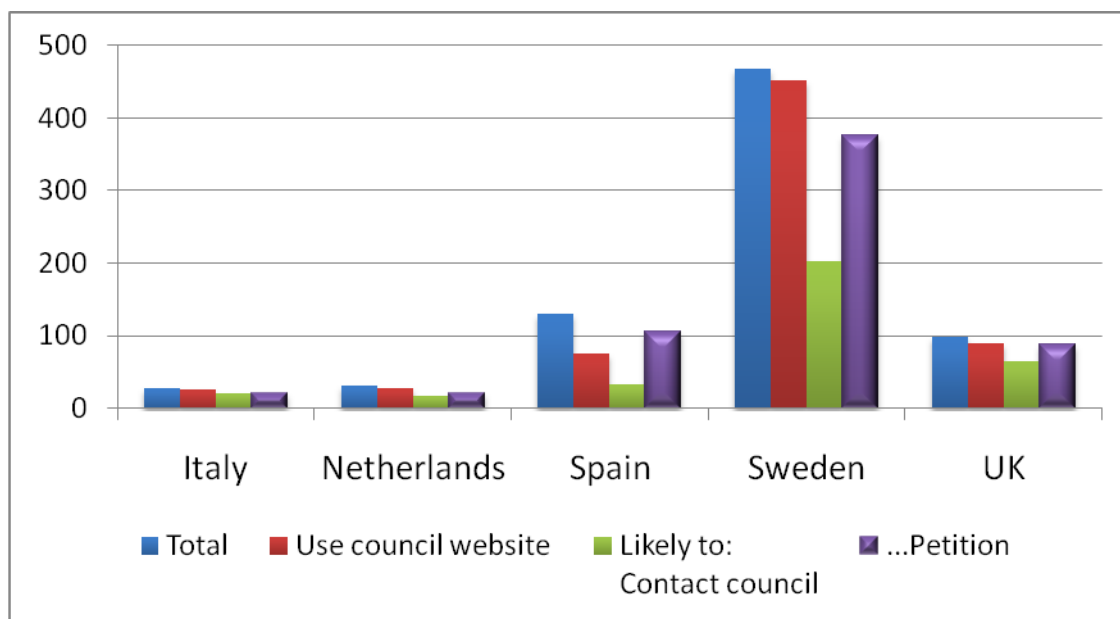
On the other hand, the Spanish do show a stronger feeling of PSE, and the UK people a lower level:



More generally, almost all respondents use the internet more than once a week and active users of the internet are also likely to sign petitions. Of them:

- Half have contacted their council more than once
- Over half are ‘very likely’ to sign a petition, even if they don’t make a habit of contacting the council

Returning to the question “if there was an issue that you felt strongly about, how likely or unlikely would you be to do each of the following?”, even for the active users of council websites that were surveyed here, petitions are preferred for making a statement – over acting as an individual and contacting the council directly over an issue that concerns them:



4.6 European parliament

Responses to the question on petitioning the European Parliament show low awareness on what is possible. Comments cover many items that are a national responsibility, such as health and education, animal rights, or areas that cannot be addressed through petitions (or the ECI) such as the structure of Lisbon Treaty, roles and costs of MEPs. This implies need to be flexible about ultimate target of submitted petitions.

4.7 Pool for follow-up questions

Finally, a significant number of respondents wish to continue involvement with the project in one form or another.

Country	Will do follow-up work	Want Updates	Total responses
Italy	22	21	28
Netherlands	21	18	31
Spain	80	80	131
Sweden	227	176	467
UK	67	47	98
Grand Total	417	342	755

The appropriate contact data is being supplied to the cluster leaders to use as appropriate in their context.