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## Public Involvement in Taking Legislative Action as to the Spatial Development of the Tourist Sector in Greece—The “OpenGov” Platform Experience

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**Abstract:** By the Aarhus Convention (1998) it is recognized the right of citizens to get access to and influence decision-making in respect to issues affecting the state of the environment. More specifically, in Article 8 it is stated that public authorities are forced to engage public participation when preparing regulations or legally binding rules that have a significant environmental impact. Towards this end, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their applications have considerably expanded the potential of planners and decision makers to interact with stakeholders and the public and engage them in participatory processes through ICTs-enabled platforms. The focus of the present paper is on the context of public consultation in taking legislative action as to the spatial development of the tourist sector in Greece. It consists of three parts: the first part, where the context of engaging the public in governmental decision-making in Greece is discussed, following the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative; the second part, presenting the steps of the “OpenGov” online platform, designed for gathering public knowledge to further improve legislative efforts and policy; and the third part, elaborating on the experience gained by the use of the “OpenGov” platform for decision-making on the spatial development of the tourist sector in Greece.

**Keywords:** public consultation; ICTs; digital platform; legislation; spatial planning; tourism

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## 1. Introduction

During the last two decades, a remarkable shift appears towards engaging the public in the decision-making processes [1–8]. The goal behind the strengthening of public participation in policy making is twofold: on the one hand it serves the need for data acquisition (public opinions, views, visions, *etc.*) on specific decision-making problems and the setting of goals and priorities that reflect groups involved; while on the other hand it supports the sharing of responsibilities as well as negotiating, empowering and emotional commitment [8–11].

The orientation of decision makers and planners towards the engagement of public in the decision-making process can be considered as the outcome of a range of factors, with the most important being the [11]:

- *Shift* from “top-down” decision-making processes, where decisions were made by a small group of decision-making centers and technocrats [12] to “bottom-up” decision-making processes, placing emphasis on decision-making at the local level, where the protagonists are local government institutions and local communities [13];
- *Maturity* of local communities as a result of ICTs-enabled information provision, which has placed citizens at the heart of local, but also global, problems and challenges, affecting community wealth and has opened to them new perspectives for action and engagement in the structuring of planning interventions that can lead to a visionary future, having at its core environmental protection and quality of living [14];
- Understanding that, at the local level, citizens have a good *knowledge* not only of problems, but also of their *intensity*, which consists of important aspects for planning and prioritizing interventions that fulfill desires, values, preferences and visions of local communities, thus placing citizens as partners in the planning process [15].

At the same time, planning is in front of a number of remarkable changes and new challenges, the confrontation of which demands public engagement in the planning process. As such, can be considered the [11]:

- Increasing *complexity* of planning problems [16], which demands the gathering of information and knowledge from a wide range of social groups (citizens and stakeholders) in order to enrich the context and effectiveness of planning interventions;
- Increasing *intensity* of environmental problems (climate change, heavy storms, flood incidents, *etc.*) and the deep understanding by policy makers and planners that the implementation of successful planning interventions, coping with these problems, needs to focus on behavioral changes and the raising of individual and collective responsibility, thus stressing the importance of increasing public awareness as a “tool” that can effectively deal with contemporary environmental and other local/global challenges [17,18]. This in turn has motivated policy makers and planners to engage public participation in the decision-making process, while at the same time has “fired” developments at the institutional and legislative level that have set the public at the heart of decision-making processes and institutionalized public participation in various decision problems, with emphasis on those that have certain environmental implications [19];

- The need to deal with *conflicts* appearing among various social groups, where participatory approaches can function as platforms for communication and interaction, allowing mutual understanding and thus acting as “peace-building mechanisms” [7,20], with planners undertaking the role of *mediators* [8,21,22].

The increasing importance, attached nowadays to the role of public and stakeholders’ participation in seeking for the fulfillment of sustainable development objectives and the management of the crucial environmental problems, reflects the conviction that they can, under certain conditions, constitute “*agents of change*” towards the desired planning direction. Experience, gained from empirical studies, shows the value of participation in the decision-making process in various planning problems and spatial scales (local, regional, national/European *etc.*) [23–27].

The *participatory planning approach* is currently gaining importance in the light of the radical social, economic, cultural, environmental, technological, political, legislative and other developments and is closely relating to the demand of society for taking part in decision-making processes that have an impact on the management of resources. This demand is further reinforced by the symptoms of corruption and poor accounting of the political system [28–30] that are noticed in many countries of both the developed and the less developed world, where legislators, ministers, political parties *etc.* have in many occasions manipulated the public, while “...*extracted illicit resources to maintain political power*” [28] (p. 1236). In this respect, public participation is also largely reflecting the desire of the public for more transparent, accounting and democratic decision-making processes, leading to efficient, effective, legitimized and more valid governmental policy decisions [8,31]. Furthermore, it better serves the *political nature* of governmental decision-making, dealing with conflicting interests of various stakeholders’ groups in policy making and implementation processes, while emphasizing representativeness, responsiveness and accountability of administrative agencies to the public [30], and seeking to compromise multiple goals emerging from these interests. Of importance, in such a context, is also the request for engaging, in the decision-making process, the less powerful groups of society, thus ensuring equal access to decision-making processes and resource management by all societal groups.

Until recently, the so-called “*traditional public participation*” *methods* were the only means through which public participation could take place. The advent of *Web and Web 2.0* though, has set the ground for broadening the chances for participation, through the exploitation of Internet and available “*e-tools*” [32]. According to Carver *et al.* [33] (pp. 907, 918), “...*the proliferation of the Internet...has provided many opportunities to disseminate public information and also the on-line systems have the potential to involve the public more closely in the planning process*”; while Bizjak [34] (p. 117) states that “... *the use of these specific technologies has helped users to exchange and share information not only from personal computers, but also through mobile appliances, such as smart phones and pads*”. From the governmental point of view, Internet technologies enabled the establishment of “*e-governance*” collaborative activities through “*Government 2.0*” platforms [35]. Such activities assure transparency of governmental operations and enhance the range and level of public participation [32].

The *choice* of Web-based or traditional participatory tools draws upon the pros and cons of each specific approach and the specific problem at hand. Compared to traditional, Web-based participatory tools can offer some significant *advantages*, mainly referring to [32]:

- Time- and space-independence;
- Engagement of a large diversity of potential participants;
- Enhancement of democracy and transparency aspects;
- Wider diffusion of knowledge and information, rendering thus the Web-based participatory approaches powerful tools for “increasing awareness”;
- Less time-consuming to implement e-participatory exercises;
- Anonymity, enhancing participants’ potential to freely express their views.

Nevertheless critical issues, such as the *digital divide* and the disadvantageous position of those having *no access* to computers and ICTs infrastructure or lacking the necessary ICTs skills, should be taken into consideration [36,37]. These can, by their nature, lead to a certain kind of social inequality and social exclusion [33] in the participatory context. More specifically, *risks* involved in Web-based participatory processes are mainly relating to the [32]:

- *ICTs-illiteracy*, impeding e-participation of certain societal groups (elderly, illiterate, minorities *etc.*);
- *Broadband accessibility* which, as evidence shows, should nowadays not be taken for granted;
- *Unwillingness* of participants to unfold their thoughts and feelings, as the “black box” (*i.e.*, computer) behind e-participatory processes may create a sense of non-trust, reservation, suspiciousness *etc.* to less educated people;
- Lack of *trust* of the public on the outcome of e-participation [38,39], as people may consider that, through a process lacking face-to-face contact, their opinion will not be seriously received by decision makers.

Web-based participatory tools seem nowadays a challenging perspective for increasing the number of people engaged in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, as Kingston [40] claims, the impact of their participation is not up to the participatory approach used (traditional or Web-based), but to the way politicians listen to what the community is telling them and act upon it.

In the light of the above discussion, the *focus* of the present paper is on the context of public e-consultation in taking legislative action in Greece, studied through a specific case study referring to the spatial development of the tourist sector. The paper consists of *three parts*: in the first part, is described the context of engaging the public in governmental decision-making in Greece, by means of specific initiatives, which are carried out by the Greek government as part of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative; in the second part, are presented the steps undertaken in the “OpenGov” online platform for gathering public knowledge to further improve legislative efforts and policy reforms; finally, in the third part is presented the experience gained by the use of the “OpenGov” platform for public e-consultation, where the example of e-consultation on the proposed policy reform for the spatial development of the tourist sector in Greece is used for shedding light upon both the participatory *process* and the *impact* of public participation on the final policy decision.

## 2. Paving the Way for Open Government Reforms in Greece

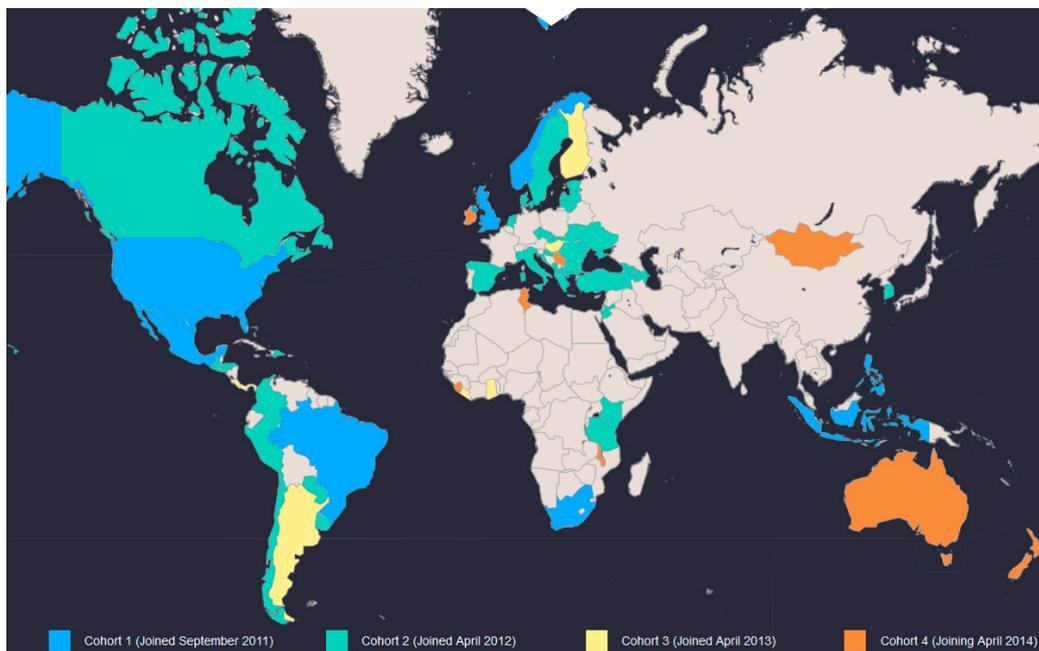
During last few years, the Greek government has placed considerable efforts on the modernization of decision-making processes, in which the engagement of citizens and stakeholders is of critical importance for making decisions that are legitimate and fulfill their needs. These efforts are largely motivated by

the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative, an international initiative aiming at the establishment of “bridges” among governments and citizens, which Greece has joined in 2012 [31]. In the following, is shortly presented the OGP initiative as well as the main actions of the Greek government along this direction.

### 2.1. The Open Government Partnership

In 2011, the Open Government Partnership was launched as an initiative aiming at the creation of an international platform for countries, committed to place efforts on the development and implementation of ambitious *open government reforms*. At the heart of these reforms was the engagement of civil society in the decision-making processes. The partnership has grown rapidly, counting from eight countries in 2011 to 63 countries in 2014 (Figure 1) [31]. In all these countries, national governments have strengthened their efforts and dedication to the provision of more open, accountable and responsive to citizens services, being the outcome of a joint effort of public agencies on the one hand and citizens’ and stakeholders’ on the other, through decision-making processes that reinforce the active involvement of all interested parties.

**Figure 1.** Countries participating in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) [31], CC BY 3.0.



The efforts undertaken by OGP are focusing on both the national and the international level. At both levels, the scope is to create *partnerships* between governmental and civil society organizations. Such partnerships should, as a first step, aim at the provision of free access to open data, information *etc.* to the public on a “24/7/365” basis [30]. Based on well informed citizens due to their accessibility to a wide range of open data, partnerships, and as a second step, aim to *empower citizens and stakeholders* and “place their voice” as equals at the “tables” where policy decisions are made, thus assuring a multi-discipline and pluralistic approach to problem-solving on behalf of both the decision-making process and the outcome (solution) of the problem at hand.

At the *national level*, partnerships aim to support an ongoing dialogue and collaboration between government and civil society, leading to more open, transparent and legitimized decision-making processes and outcomes, while harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance. Dialogue and collaboration can take place by means of an OGP Action Plan, developed on the basis of a multi-stakeholder, open and participatory process (see [41]). Within this Action Plan are presented a set of concrete and measurable governmental commitments, which aim at supporting transparency, accountability and citizen engagement in the decision-making process. The structuring of the country commitments should follow certain guidelines, such as [31]:

- *Availability of timeline*: the process, details and timeline of the public consultation should be available prior to consultation;
- *Adequate notice*: governmental agencies consult population with sufficient forewarning;
- *Awareness raising*: actions supporting the raising of awareness of citizens on the OGP initiatives, thus enhancing the potential of public participation in the consultation;
- *Multiple channels*: need for a multi-modal communication approach, implying the use of a variety of communication mechanisms/tools for widening the range of opportunities of the public to participate, thus ensuring equality aspects of participation;
- *Breadth of consultation*: stresses the need to consult a large variety of actors, both citizens and private stakeholders, widely spread within the national territory, thus ensuring a wide and spatially balanced representation of stakes addressed in each specific consultation process; and
- *Documentation and feedback*: wide publicity of the public consultation outcome, summarizing the key issues addressed, while online availability of such reports is also strongly recommended.

## 2.2. Initiatives of the Greek Government within the OGP Context

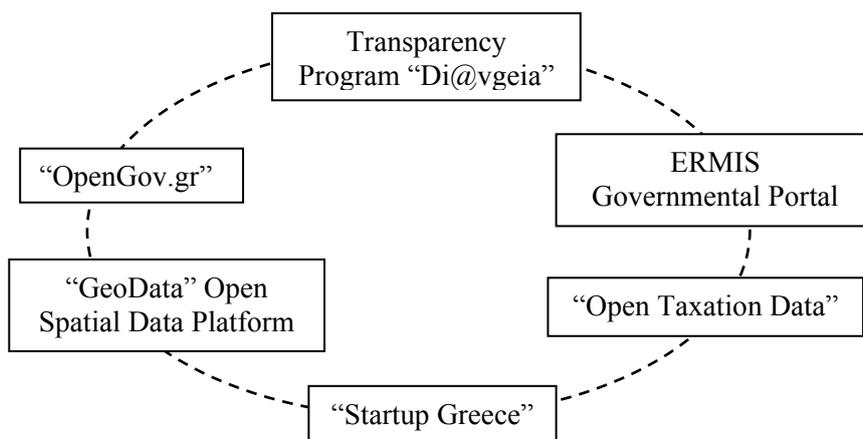
Transparency, accountability and citizen engagement are considered as of high priority key issues in the agenda of the Greek government, in the effort to pave the transition from a traditional to a new ICTs-enabled model of public administration. Such a prioritization partially reflects the context, within which these priorities are set, which, during the last few years, is marked by corruption, mistrust, lack of accounting, lack of or low involvement of citizens and stakeholders in the decision-making processes, *etc.* [31,41]. Moreover, there is a need for improving the quality of services delivered to citizens and businesses, taking into consideration the potential offered towards this end by ICTs-enabled communication means.

The objective of meeting the demand for high quality public services, combined with the need to enhance e-democracy and e-participation have marked the process of designing and implementing a model for open governance, which is heavily based on the use of ICTs throughout the public administration sector in support of Government to Government (G2G), Government to Business (G2B) and Government to Citizens (G2C) communication. As a country committed to the OGP initiative, Greece has in 2012 developed an Open Governance Action Plan [41], aiming to engage citizens in a dynamic and productive dialogue with governmental institutions. The *most important actions* are the (Figure 2):

- *Transparency Program “Di@vgeia”*: the “Di@vgeia” initiative represents the flagship of the Greek government efforts in support of transparency [42]. The scope of the initiative is the wide publicity of governmental policy and administrative actions. At the core of the initiative lies the mandatory publishing of all governmental decisions, across all public bodies. Indeed each decision is digitally signed and assigned a unique Internet Uploading Number (IUN), which certifies the upload of the respective document to the Di@vgeia platform. Decisions that are not uploaded to the “Di@vgeia” cannot be implemented. The “Di@vgeia” platform is heavily based on the potential of ICTs and their applications, representing actually an ICTs-enabled system, integrating innovations in the legal framework and operational processes with technological instruments. Its structure falls within the general strategy of the Greek government for “open architecture” and “open content”.
- *Open e-Consultation and Recruitment Platform “OpenGov”*: it attempts to place technological developments at the service of the political system, in its effort to fulfill critical priorities, such as transparency, deliberation, collaboration, accountability, *etc.*, by means of ICTs-enabled applications. The platform supports two specific initiatives, both served *online*, namely: the “open calls for the recruitment of public administration officials” initiative, in which job vacancies in the public sector are published online and candidates submit their applications through the platform; and the “electronic consultation” initiative, being at the heart of the present paper, through which draft legislation or governmental policies are uploaded in the platform and are subject to e-commenting by citizens/stakeholders or organizations, towards the bettering of respective legislations before they take the way to the Greek Parliament [43].
- *“GeoData”—Open Spatial Data Platform*: the scope of this data platform is to provide a nodal point for the searching, collection, provision and visualization of open public geospatial “data [44]. It is considered as a good example of the application of ICTs in public administration, as well as a repository for the storage of open geospatial data at the service of both the citizens and the public/private stakeholders and institutions. Citizens and stakeholders, by getting access to open geospatial data, can: check the validity and soundness of governmental decisions; identify illegal actions that may have a certain environmental impact (e.g., building within protected or reforestation areas); reuse the open geospatial data for the production of value-adding innovative products/services, *etc.*
- *“Startup Greece” Initiative*: it aims at the creation of a new generation of entrepreneurs in Greece, by providing a platform for information, networking and collaboration, thus inspiring young people to believe in their own ideas, cultivate novelty and innovation, start up their own business, *etc.* [45]. In this respect, economic and social partners (citizens, organizations, associations, research institutes, social and economic entities, *etc.*) are invited to share their knowledge and experience and add value to the initiative by partners’ ideas. As key objectives are considered the [45]: provision of information needed to start up a business (motivation, funding, legal framework, research material *etc.*); creation of partnerships by bridging the gap among people, ideas, corporations, universities, organizations, *etc.*, supporting thus interaction and the creation of new investment opportunities; provision of valid and timely answers to citizens; and promotion of online democracy, dialogue and accountability.

- *Open Taxation Data Initiative*: this initiative seeks for accountability, reduction of bureaucracy and increase of the transparency of the taxation system, while it is also considered as a “tool” for measuring the performance of regional tax offices. Taxation data are elaborated and presented in various forms on a regular basis [41].
- *“ERMIS” Governmental Portal*: it serves as a central point for getting information on governmental services, while it is also considered as a hub for citizens and businesses for getting e-services, based on open standards and interoperability principles [46].

**Figure 2.** Main open governance actions of the Greek government in the context of OGP initiative.



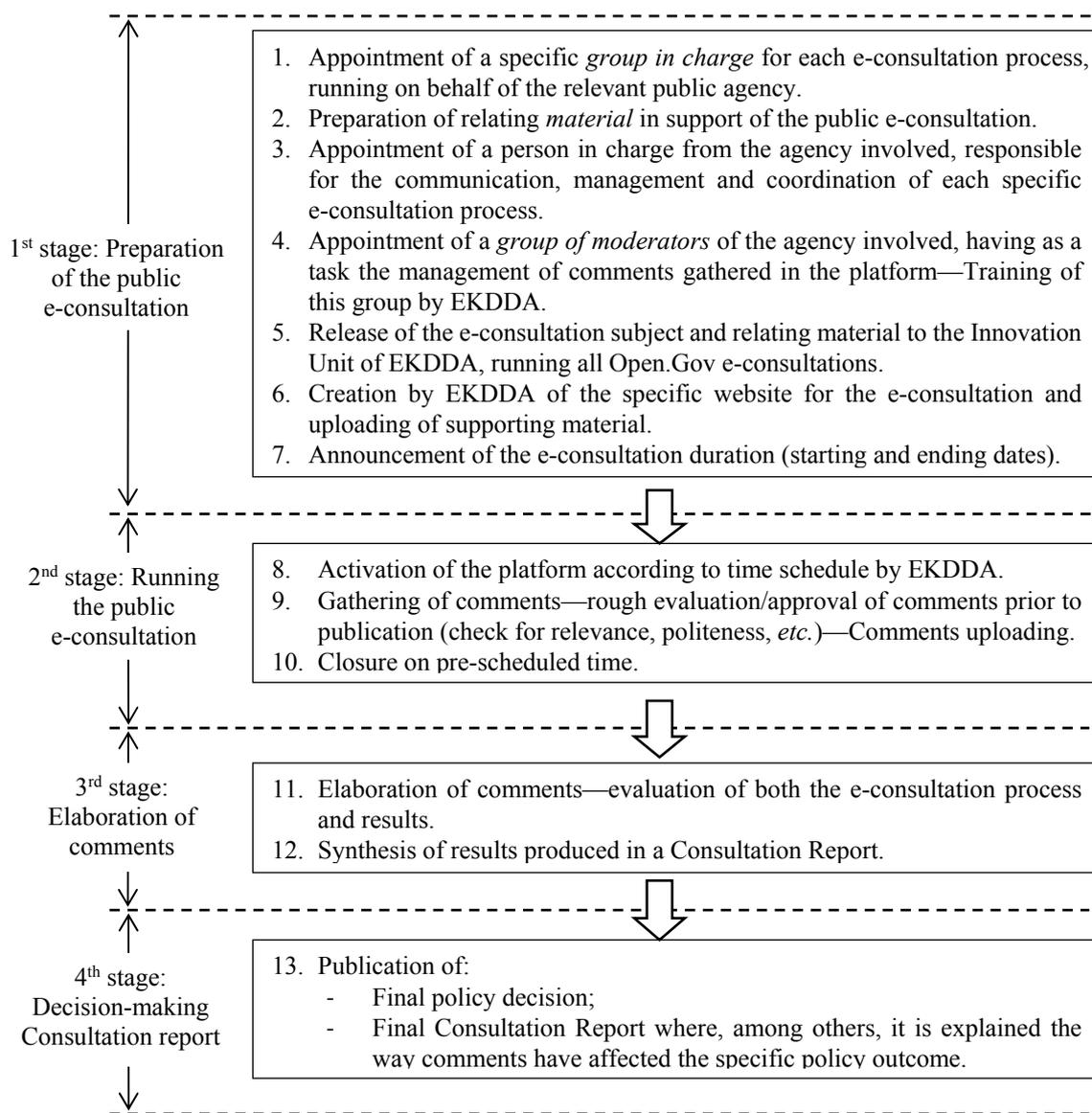
### 3. The Process of Public Consultation in the “OpenGov” Platform

The “OpenGov” platform [43] aims at serving the principles of transparency, consultation, collaboration and accountability of the public sector in Greece, accomplished by the provision of free-access of citizens and stakeholders to information and public affairs as well as the promotion of public e-engagement in the decision-making processes of the public sector. The “OpenGov” supports the objective of public e-consultation, which takes place along the following *four stages* (Figure 3) [43]:

- Stage 1—preparation of the public consultation process: refers to (a) work carried out within the *public agency* involved, such as appointing of persons/group in charge for the consultation, appointing of a group of moderators properly trained for dealing with issues raised in the participatory process, and preparation of draft legislations/policy decisions as well as additional material in support of the e-consultation processes; and (b) work carried out at the Innovation Unit of EKDDA (National Centre of Public Administration and Local Government), responsible for the provision of technical support on the: creation of respective website, organization of the ICTs-enabled participatory process and uploading of the consultation material, opening and closure of the e-participatory processes, *etc.*;
- Stage 2—running of the e-consultation process: at this stage, the participatory process runs for a predefined time span, during which the group of moderators is in charge for handling issues raised on a daily basis (e.g., questions of participants, rough elaboration of comments prior to upload);

- Stage 3—elaboration of comments collected in the e-platform: at this stage are evaluated the e-consultation process and the results obtained, leading to the production of a consultation report; and
- Stage 4—production of decision/report: the whole consultation process ends up with the publication of the specific policy decision, together with the consultation report.

**Figure 3.** Successive stages of public e-consultation process in the “OpenGov” context.



It should be noted that the public e-consultation process is supported not only by a certain “code of conduct and good practice”, but also by the institutional framework (Parliament internal rules and [47,48]), according to which e-consultations become *compulsory* for all draft legislations and policy decisions, while their duration is defined to *at least three weeks*.

The experience gained by the four years of operation of the “OpenGov” platform can be summarized as follows (elaboration of data from [43]):

## Quantitative results:

- Three-hundred sixty-one e-consultations have taken place on the “OpenGov” platform (52% legislative, 27% pre-legislative and 23% other), gathering 99.206 comments by September 2013;
- The number of e-consultations per year has increased in the period October 2012 to September 2013, while the number of comments per year has decreased 10% in the same period;
- During the life-time of “OpenGov”, there is an average of 7.5 e-consultations running in each month, while it is also noticed the limited interest for participation during the summer time (much smaller number of comments for e-consultations running in July and August);
- The average duration of e-consultations is 17 days (less than the legally binding minimum, which is three weeks), while the average number of comments per e-consultation is 260;
- As to the share of e-consultations among Greek ministries, evidence shows that the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change rates in the first position, while when considering the number of comments per e-consultation, first rates the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

## Qualitative results:

- Rather limited number of e-consultations so far implemented, compared to policy decisions made, which implies a certain reluctance of public institutions to open up the decision-making processes to the public;
- Low perception of citizens as to the level of consideration of their comments/opinions by policy makers, which in turn constrains willingness to participate;
- Lack of a common methodology among public agencies running e-consultation processes for the handling of comments of participants and the proof of their utilization in the decision-making process *i.e.*, the impact on the final policy outcome;
- Lack of concern for the equal participation of various groups, e.g., groups with low level of ICTs skills, leading to a certain distortion or even more to manipulation of the whole process;
- Quite short duration of e-consultations, in many cases less than the one predicted by the legislative framework, which hampers the level of participation;
- Lack of monitoring of e-consultation and regularly reminding of the public on issues open; and
- Status of policy decisions opening to e-consultation (almost finalized decisions), which turns the whole process to rather a “legitimizing game” of the public agency involved than a truly meant e-consultation process, seeking to increase the impact of the public on the final decision outcome.

#### 4. E-Consultation on the Spatial Development of the Tourist Sector in Greece

In this section the experience gained by the e-consultation carried out for the spatial development of the tourist sector in Greece is presented. Discussion focuses on both the ICTs-enabled participatory process and the impact of public participation on the final outcome (final legislation on the issue at hand). More specifically, in the first part is presented the proposed policy reform, while the second part elaborates on the e-consultation process and results.

#### 4.1. Spatial Development of the Tourist Sector—The Proposed Policy Reform

The tourist sector is one of the most important economic sectors, the “heavy industry” of the Greek economy. This is due to the comparative advantages of the Greek territory, such as the extensive length of coastline and the clusters of islands, the natural and cultural capital, the favorable weather conditions, *etc.*, which render many Greek regions attractive tourist destinations on a global scale [49].

The development of the tourist sector in Greece has, during the last few decades, been mainly based on the mass tourist model, thus exhibiting a high concentration in both time (high seasonality) and space (high levels of spatial concentration at the coastline and islands). This pattern of tourist development has, in turn, resulted in an increasing pressure, exerted on the natural, cultural and social resources of certain regions; and a low exploitation of resources of other regions, contributing among others to the increase of regional inequalities [50].

The spatial development of the sector is of crucial importance for the development of a diversified tourist product, more spatially balanced and sustainable, assuring not only the smooth co-existence with the rest of economic sectors, but also the least disturbance of the natural and cultural resources [51]. Along these lines, the strategic directions for the spatial development of the tourist sector at the national level are defined in 2009, through the Special Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development of the Tourist Sector (SF-T) [52]. SF-T is a part of the Greek Spatial Planning Policy Framework, consisting of one General and five Special (sectoral) Frameworks. These provide the strategic directions for spatial planning at the national level, forming thus the ground for spatial policy decisions at the regional and local level.

The SF-T expresses the long-term national policy for the spatial development of the tourist sector (2009–2024) and an action plan for the sustainable tourist development at the country level. According to this, the Greek territory is divided into specific types of regions, based on the following three *criteria* [52]: (a) type and intensity of tourist activity; (b) morphological characteristics; and (c) fragility of local natural and cultural resources. The classification of regions according to the above criteria is presented in Table 1 (column “a: SF-T 2009 classification of Greek regions”). Each specific type of region is suitable for the development of certain types of tourist activities.

The implementation of the SF-T has revealed a number of important issues for further consideration, which combined with strategic choices both at the EU (“Lisbon strategy” [53], “Europe as the top tourist destination” [54], *etc.*) and the national level (Greek legislation on the protection of biodiversity [55], Greek legislation for enforcing European Convention on Landscape [56], *etc.*), as well as the current unfavorable fiscal position of the country, have supported the need for certain *adjustments* of this tourist policy framework. These aim at creating an upgraded legislative framework, capable of improving the attractiveness of Greek regions to tourist entrepreneurial investment decisions.

In this respect, a revised SF-T (Figure 4) for the spatial development of the tourist sector was proposed, which was exposed to the “OpenGov” platform for public e-consultation [43]. According to this revision, a diversified classification of regions is also emerging, shown in Table 1 below (column “b: revised classification of regions entering the e-consultation”). In each type of region presented in column b of Table 1, are assigned different types of tourist development paths, along the lines of sustainability.

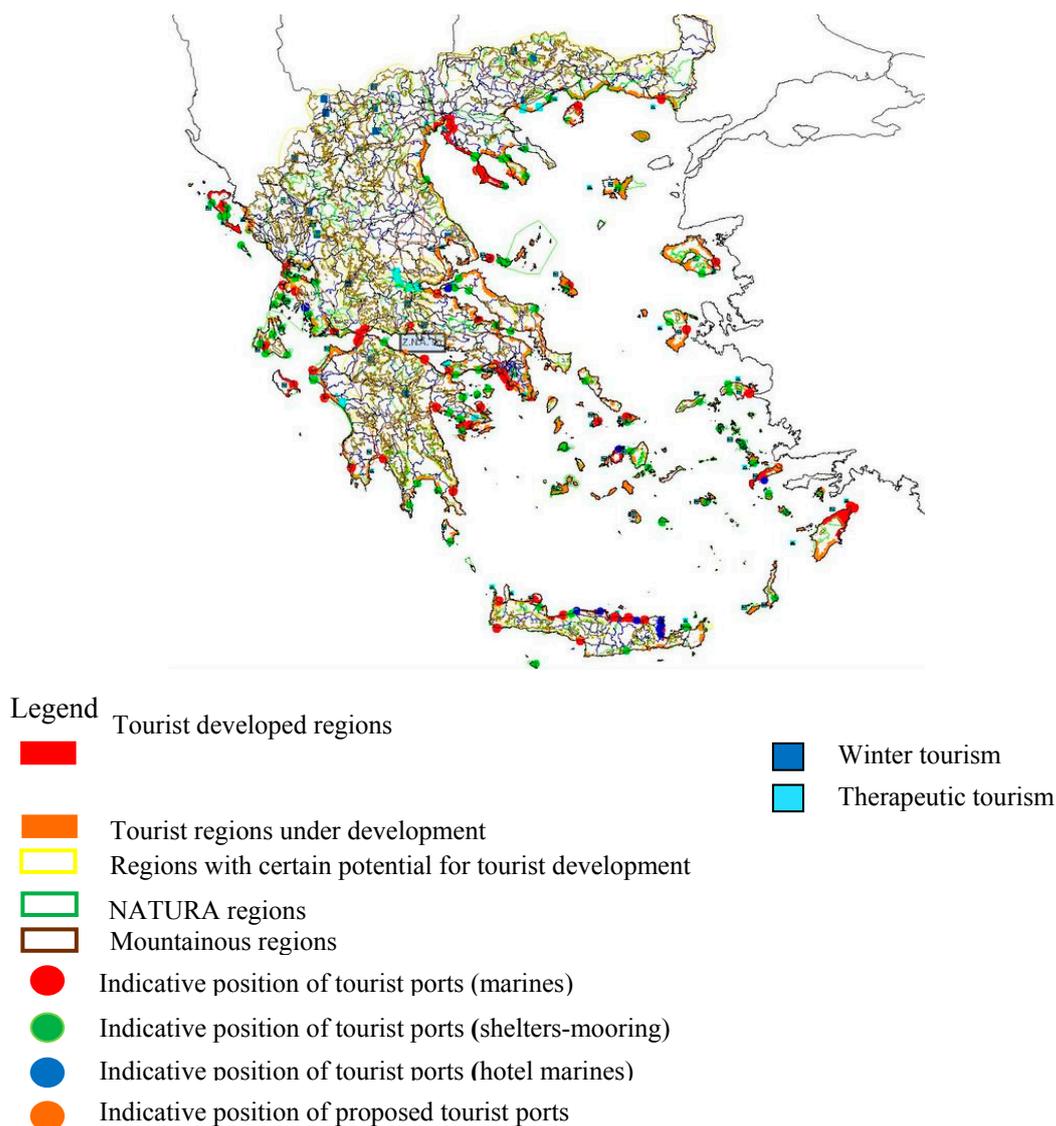
**Table 1.** Types of regions according to specific criteria.

Regions criterion	Description	
	a: SF-T 2009 classification of regions	b: Revised classification of regions entering the e-consultation process
1 “type and intensity” of tourist development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Region type A</i>: developed tourist areas, of recognizable identity and reputation, high concentration of mass tourism, and high degree of dependence of the local economy on tourism;</li> <li>- <i>Region type B</i>: developing tourist areas, presence of natural and cultural resources, significant development of tourist activity, potential for diversification and enrichment of the tourist product, need for planned development/improvement of adequate network infrastructure:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>B1</i>: certain potential for mass tourist development;</li> <li>✓ <i>B2</i>: certain potential for alternative tourist development;</li> <li>✓ <i>B3</i>: mass tourism prevails, potential for alternative tourism;</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Region type C</i>: interesting areas with disadvantageous characteristics and predominant uses different from tourism;</li> <li>- <i>Region type D</i>: metropolitan areas (Athens and Thessaloniki).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Region type A1</i>: mass tourism areas of identifiable tourist identity, highly depended on tourist sector, negative impacts on the natural and cultural resources, conflicts among tourist and other land uses;</li> <li>- <i>Region type A2</i>: the tourist sector has certain potential (presence of cultural and natural resources), suitable for planning integrated tourist interventions, combining mass and alternative tourism;</li> <li>- <i>Region type B1</i>: areas where specific or alternative tourist development paths can be followed;</li> <li>- <i>Region type B2</i>: areas of intensive development of specific types of tourism (mainly winter and therapeutic tourism);</li> <li>- <i>Region type C</i>: urban centers, hosting specific types of tourist development, e.g., urban and cultural tourism, archaeological tourism.</li> </ul>
2 “morphological attributes”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Region type E</i>: coastal areas (areas of the mainland including the island of Evoia, corresponding to a terrestrial zone extending 350 m from the seashore line) and islands (entire islands territorial region);</li> <li>- <i>Region type F</i>: mountainous areas (areas spanning across altitudes of more than 600 m);</li> <li>- <i>Region type G</i>: lowland and hill areas (the rest of areas including lowland and hill areas of Evoia and Crete);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Region type D</i>: incorporates island regions, further classified into:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <i>Group I</i>: developed or under development islands;</li> <li>✓ <i>Group II</i>: small underdeveloped islands;</li> <li>✓ <i>Group III</i>: rocky and non-populated islands.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <i>Region type E</i>: incorporates coastal regions, together with the coastal regions of Evoia and Crete islands, where mainly mass but also alternative types of tourism are developed, regions highly important for the tourist development of Greece, intensive competition of land uses;</li> <li>- <i>Region type F</i>: refers to mountainous regions (&gt;600 m elevation), the presence of natural resources, traditions, culture, etc. renders these regions ideal for alternative tourist development;</li> <li>- <i>Region type G</i>: includes flat regions or semi-mountainous regions, and the hinterland of Evoia and Crete islands, where specific types of tourism e.g., agro-tourism can be hosted;</li> </ul>

Table 1. Cont.

Regions criterion	Description	
	a: SF-T 2009 classification of regions	b: Revised classification of regions entering the e-consultation process
3 “fragility of natural and cultural resources”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Region type H: NATURA 2000 areas and other areas of environmental/cultural sensitivity (declared historical sites, wildlife sanctuaries etc.);</li> <li>- Region type I: traditional settlements, demarcated according to the existing legislative framework;</li> <li>- Region type J: archaeological sites and monuments, demarcated according to the existing legislative framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Region type H: NATURA 2000 regions and regions of relative environmental fragility that need special consideration in the context of their tourist development;</li> <li>- Region type I: traditional settlements or settlements under other protection regimes, which can host specific types of tourist development e.g., thematic tourism, sight-seeing tourism;</li> <li>- Region type J: archaeological sites, monuments and historical sites, supporting respective types of tourist development.</li> </ul>

Figure 4. The proposed spatial development of the tourist sector entering the e-consultation process [43], CC BY 3.0 GR.



In the following section the experience gained by the public engagement in this policy reform, shedding light on both the *pros and cons* of the e-consultation process adopted, and the *impact* of the consultation on the final policy decision is discussed.

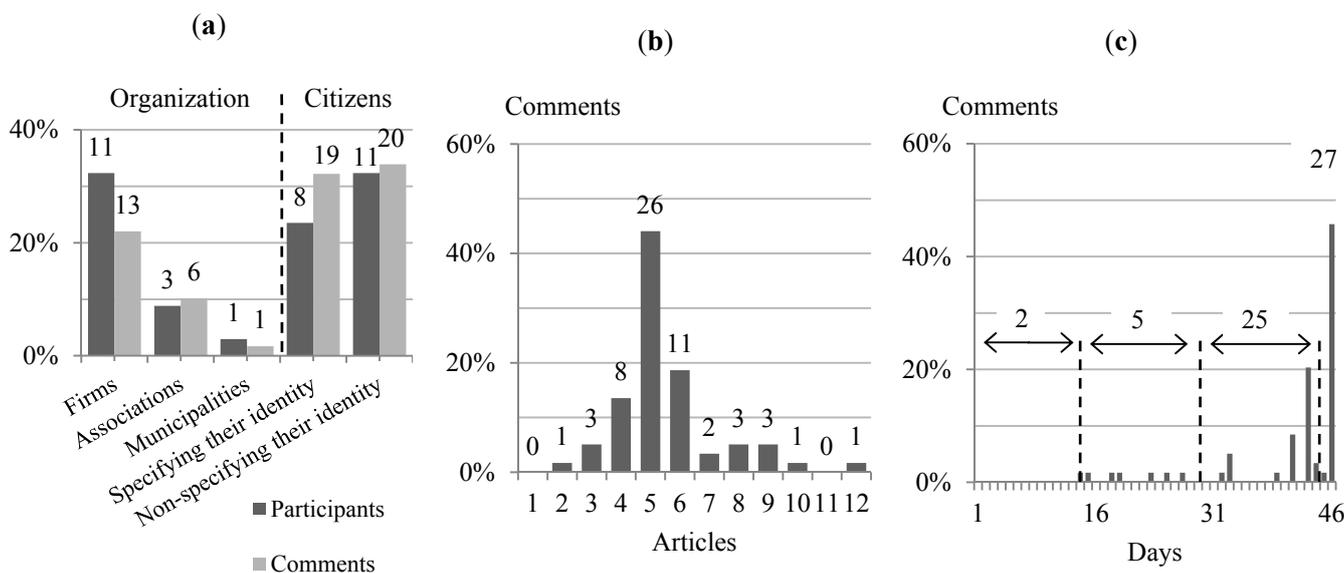
#### 4.2. E-Consultation Results

During the last two years, tourist development of the Greek territory has been extensively discussed, mainly as a promising perspective for attracting investments and reinforcing economic activity in this stagnating, for the country, period. In this respect, three successive e-consultations took place on this specific issue through the “OpenGov” platform. The last one, being the subject of this paper, aims at certain policy reform in the sector at the national level and was opened in the period June 7 to July 22 2013, for gathering the opinions of the public on this reform (citizens, stakeholders, decision-makers, *etc.*). In support of this e-consultation, certain materials were uploaded in the “OpenGov” platform, relating to the: proposed legislation (article by article description), proposed spatial development plan of the sector (Figure 4), Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed plan, *etc.* In the following, the focus is on the *critical discussion of this participatory exercise*, concentrating on both the participatory process and the results, *i.e.*, the impact of public participation on the final policy decision. Towards this end, *data* used relates to the [43]: (a) preparatory material uploaded in the “OpenGov” platform; (b) comments gathered during the consultation period; and (c) final policy decision (final legislation text) out of this process.

The *outcome* of the e-consultation process has as follows:

- *Number of comments*: 59 comments.
- *Type of participants*: 19 citizens (classified into citizens specifying their identity e.g., politicians, engineers and citizens non-specifying their identity) and 15 organizations (firms, associations and municipalities). As to the number of comments, citizens with non-specified position were rating first, followed by firms and engineers (see Figure 5a).
- *Comments by article*: the share of comments by article sheds light on the emphasis placed by participants on the spatial dimension of the proposed policy reform (Figure 5b). More specifically, the majority of comments (63 percent) were concentrated on the directions of spatial organization of the tourist sector (article 5 and 6), and the classification (As defined in Table 1 below) of tourist regions (14 percent) (article 4). These were considered as key elements of the proposed policy reform, as they are somehow affecting the “where” and “what” policy decisions, *i.e.*, what type of tourist development path in which type of region.
- *Submission date*: by classifying comments received by submission date, it is stressed the uneven distribution in time of comments uploaded, while of interest is the fact that about half of them (46 percent) were uploaded during the last day and the majority of them (88 percent) during the last 16 days of the e-consultation (Figure 5c).
- *Timely response*: all comments were timely uploaded in the platform (within 1 to 3 h from the time they were uploaded by participants), thus providing the chance to participants to get informed on comments already uploaded by other participants.

**Figure 5.** Elaboration of e-consultation comments. (a) Type of participants; (b) Comments by article; (c) Submission date.

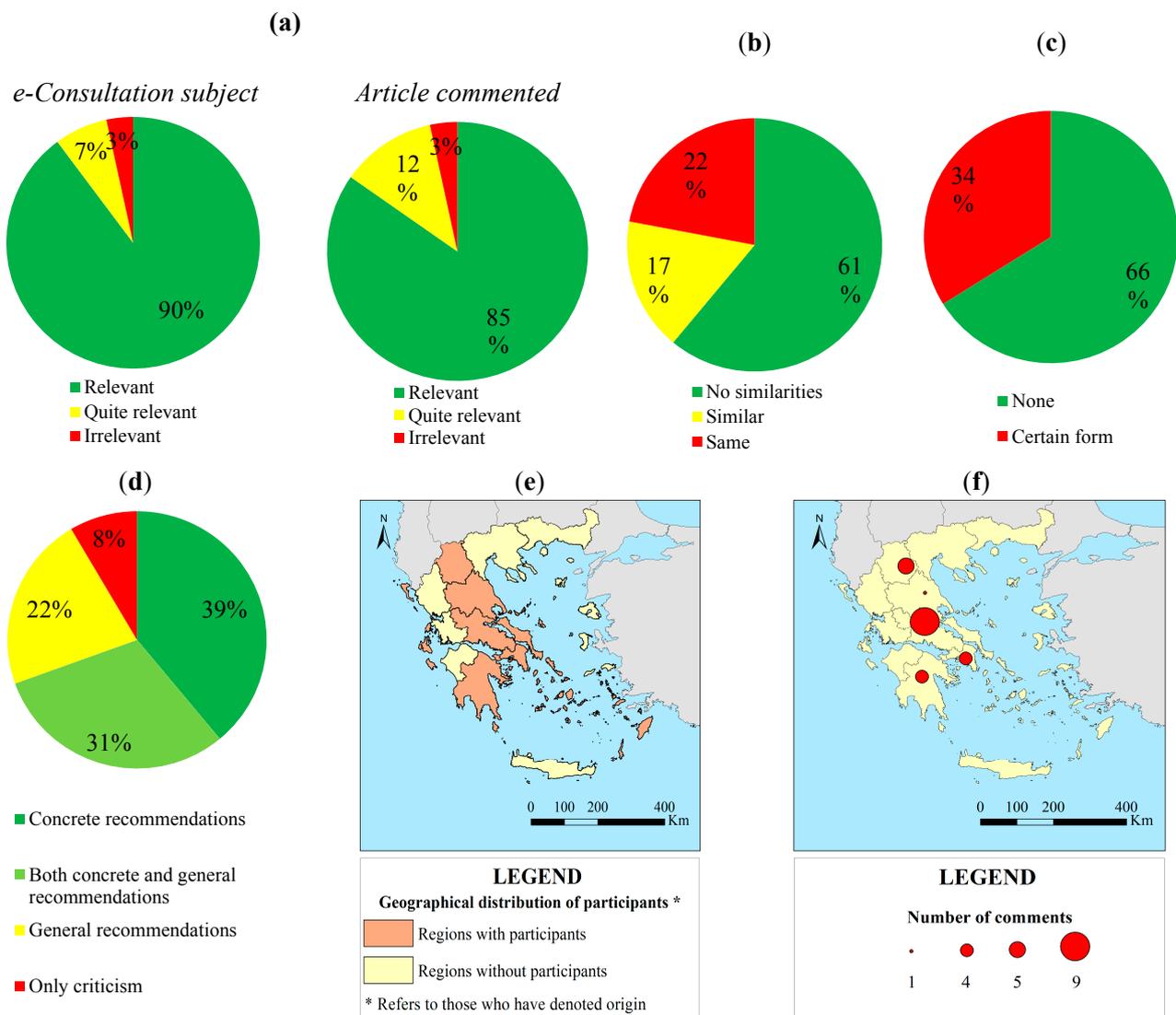


As a next step, issues relating to the effectiveness of the e-consultation process are discussed, where the following remarks can be made:

- *Participation* was rather low compared to the importance of the specific sector for the Greek economy, which can be partly justified by: the timing of consultation, being at the heart of the summer time, a period of relaxation for citizens, stakeholders, agencies *etc.* or of rush work for tourist stakeholders; and the fact that this was the third public consultation opened within a two years time span, with the previous ones having somehow resolved a number of issues of tourist interest (e-consultation of March 9–20 2012 on the approval of the SF-T and the Environmental Impact Assessment Study, receiving 81 comments and e-consultation of January 16–29 2013, focusing on the restructuring of the Greek National Tourism Organization, the simplification of procedures to enhance tourist entrepreneurship *etc.*, receiving 273 comments) [43].
- *Time period*: the e-consultation has had a large time span (approximately six weeks), compared to what was usually used so far in other consultation contexts (approximately two weeks). Nevertheless, this did not work to the benefit of participation, as the timing was rather unfortunate.
- *Participation mean*: as the “OpenGov” platform supports only e-consultation processes, participation implies the disposable by participants of certain ICTs skills, thus excluding some groups of potential participants (ICTs-illiterate). Moreover, it presupposes access to the Internet, which is not always the case (small isolated islands or mountainous regions with no or of bad quality accessibility) [32].
- Lack of *monitoring of the participatory process*, which can orient action of the public agency running the consultation towards motivating participants, e.g., by sending, during the consultation period, regular messages for wide dissemination of the consultation. This is evident by the distribution in time of comments received, where the majority was received during the last day.

- Lack of *flexibility on duration*, implying the need to be flexible in respect of time duration of the e-consultation, and be able to extend it in case of low participation. Of course this can be combined with certain motivation actions to increase level of participation.
- *Openness* of the platform: comments uploaded in the “OpenGov” platform are open to all participants, serving thus transparency of the decision-making process.

**Figure 6.** Elaboration of the context of comments. (a) Relevance, (b) Repetitiveness, (c) Promotion, (d) Level of intervention, (e) Origin of participants, (f) Region-specific comments.



As a next step, the elaboration of the *context of comments* received is carried out. Although the number of comments is rather poor, certain concluding *remarks* can be drawn, such as:

- *Relevance* of the comments as to the: (a) e-consultation subject, where almost 90 percent of comments were relevant to the e-consultation issue (only two comments were irrelevant); and (b) article commented, where also the majority of comments (85 percent) were relevant (Figure 6a).

- *Repetitiveness*, referring to the degree of similarity of comments: most of them (61 percent) had no similarities, while 22 percent were exactly the same with other comments (Figure 6b).
- *Personal/organizational promotion* as a feature of the comments received, relating somehow to the motive of participants involved. Almost 30 percent of the comments received, contained a certain form of personal/organizational promotion (e.g., website link) (Figure 6c).
- *Level of intervention*, where comments are classified according to whether they proceed to certain policy recommendations, distinguishing between comments that proceed to general or concrete recommendations (91 percent) and comments that remain only to the criticism of the proposed policy reform (nine percent) (Figure 6d).
- *Origin of participants*: most participants have not declared their place of origin (56 percent). From those who have (44 percent), the majority had as place of origin the regions of “Central Greece” and “Attica” (Figure 6e).
- *Region-specific comments*: the majority of comments (71 percent) were not region-specific. From the rest, the region that was most often referred was the region of “Central Greece” (15 percent of comments) (Figure 6f).

Moreover, the *impact* of public engagement on the decision-making process is studied, where in an article by article approach, is presented the way from the draft to the final decision. More specifically, in Table 2 are presented the changes that were made from the draft to the final policy text, among which are:

- Changes that are proposed merely by participants and are adopted by decision makers in the final policy decision (green color in Table 2);
  - Changes that are proposed by both participants and policy makers (yellow color in Table 2); and
  - Changes that are proposed merely by policy makers (orange color in Table 2).
- By elaborating on the outcome of the participatory process presented in Table 2, it is obvious that there is a certain *impact* of the views of participants on the final policy statement (green and yellow areas). By further inspecting the areas of impact, it is revealed that these are mostly focusing on the *objectives* as well as the *spatial implications* of the proposed policy reform. It should be noted that this conclusion is also supported by the elaboration of participants’ comments in respect of the final legislation, where almost half of them (51%) have had certain impact on the way respective articles of the SF-T are articulated (fully adopted comments: 10% and loosely adopted comments: 41%).
- Finally, the correlations among the specific attributes of e-consultation were explored by a bivariate correlation analysis, in which 272 relations between 17 variables were searched with the usage of Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) and two-tailed test of significance. The result of this analysis is 15 different, statistically significant, correlations between variables (Table 3). The most important finding coming out of this elaboration is that comments of participants of a certain origin are mainly spatially delimited to this specific region of origin.

**Table 2.** “Mapping” the impact of public participation in the specific policy reform on the spatial development of the tourist sector.

Articles and their contents	Comments of participants	From the e-consultation to the final decision—Features removed, changed and added		
		Removal	Change	Addition
Article 1— Purposes and content	No comments	One purpose, a part of another one and the content		
Article 2— Objectives	Addition of three objectives and completion of the description of some others	Five objectives and parts of other objectives		One objective
Article 3— Definitions	Addition of one definition and completion of the description of some others	Two definitions and parts of others		Five definitions
Article 4— Classification of regions. Definition of specific types of regions for specific types of tourist development	Addition of some regions to specific types; Modification of certain characteristics and clarification of others in various types of regions; Modification of the map providing the main directions of spatial organization of the tourist sector	Part of the reasoning for classifying regions to certain types of regions Five characteristics and some parts of others; Three clarifications and some parts of them	Delimitation of types of regions; Map of main directions of spatial organization of the tourist sector	Mapping explanation; Some characteristics, some areas and an explanation of various types of regions
Article 5— Directions of spatial organization	Certain specialization of rules for developing built tourist infrastructure; Addition and modifications of certain directions	Ten directions and some parts of them; One explanation and some parts of explanations of certain types of regions	Some parts of directions	Five directions and some parts of them and a part of an explanation of a type of region
Article 6— Alternative forms of tourism	Clarification, completion (including areas) and addition of some directions. Addition of two tourist forms and clarification of the spatial organization of the marinas network—Map	A part of the description of alternative tourism; One direction and parts of other directions; One clarification and parts of other clarifications of various alternative tourist forms	Some parts of directions of alternative tourist forms; Spatial organization of marinas network—Map	Five directions and some parts of directions (including areas) of alternative tourist forms

Table 2. Cont.

Articles and their contents	Comments of participants	From the e-consultation to the final decision—Features removed, changed and added		
		Removal	Change	Addition
Article 7— Special/technical infrastructure	Addition of 1 direction and a part of another one			One direction and a part of another one
Article 8— Directions for specific types of regions—Resolving conflicts among uses	Changes, clarification of various directions; Addition of a specific type of region	A part of the title of the article; Some parts of the directions		Clarification of type of regions; Parts in various directions
Article 9— Organized regions for hosting tourist activities	Clarification of the features of such regions—Harmonization with the legislation	The whole article		
Article 10—Setting directions and suggestions on the modification of legislation	Completion and clarification of some directions and suggestions	One direction One suggestion Part of another one		
Article 11—Action plan	No comments		Part of measures and actions	Completion of funding options
Article 12— Transitional and repealed arrangements	Addition of a part of arrangements	Two arrangements		One arrangement and some parts of another one

 Changes emerging from participants only; 
  Changes emerging from both participants and policy makers; 
  Changes emerging from policy makers.

**Table 3.** Statistically significant correlations among specific attributes of e-consultation.

Attributes	$ r ^1$
Origin of participants ↔ Region-specific comments	0.991 **
Submission date ↔ Region-specific comments	0.779 **
Repetitiveness ↔ Region-specific comments	0.532 *
Submission date ↔ Origin of participants	0.513 **
Relevance of the comments to e-consultation subject ↔ Level of intervention	0.485 **
Repetitiveness ↔ Origin of participants	0.430 *
Level of intervention ↔ Origin of participants	0.385 **
Submission date ↔ Relevance of the comments to e-consultation subject	0.384 **
Type of participants ↔ Region-specific comments	0.377 **
Comments by article ↔ Origin of participants	0.364 *
Type of participants ↔ Relevance of the comments to article commented	0.326 *
Relevance of the comments to article commented ↔ Personal/organizational promotion	0.326 *
Type of participants ↔ Repetitiveness	0.322 *
Type of participants ↔ Origin of participants	0.302 *
Personal/organizational promotion ↔ Origin of participants	0.275 *

<sup>1</sup> The values of  $|r|$  are ranging from 0 to 1. When  $|r| = 0$ , there is no correlation between variables, whereas when  $|r| = 1$ , the variables are completely correlated. Consequently, the higher  $|r|$  means stronger correlation between variables [57]; \* Statistically significant at a confidence level of 95%; \*\* Statistically significant at a confidence level of 99%. Source: own elaboration of consultation responses gathered.

## 5. Conclusions

The issue of public participation is nowadays at the heart of policy making, seeking to bring “on board” a variety of public and stakeholders’ views, opinions, visions *etc.* that may result to the enrichment and bettering of both the decision-making processes and the final decisions made. Opening up decision-making processes to the public is in many occasions not only desirable but also *mandatory*, based on the European and the member states’ legislative framework on various issues.

Along these lines, the focus of the present paper was on the ICTs-enabled engagement of public in the process of taking legislative action as to a very important sector for the Greek economy, the tourist sector. This action was carried out through the “OpenGov” platform, which was designed by the Greek government to support e-democracy and e-participation, while enhancing transparency and accountability of policy-making processes. As such, it consists of part of a systematic effort to take advantage of the ICTs potential for re-engineering decision-making processes in the public sector and open a wide dialogue with citizens and stakeholders, to the benefit of all parts involved.

Focusing on the work carried out so far on this platform, it is worth noting that although there are already a considerable number of e-consultations, aiming to engage citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes on various topics, participation can be characterized as rather poor. It seems that there is still a long way to go, until all parts involved can realize the benefits that can be reaped by adopting participatory decision-making processes. Towards this end, a variety of *barriers* apply, mainly relating to: the lack of *participatory culture* in decision-making processes so far; the lack of effective and wide *communication* of each specific e-consultation; the interest on the *issue* concerned, *i.e.*, how intriguing and challenging the issue is for society; the lack of *trust* of various societal groups to the

decision-making processes and decision makers, cultivated so far; *etc.* Moreover, a certain divergence is noted among the various opinions on the *role of ICTs* in representing different political interests in decision-making processes. Thus, while certain researchers maintain the view that ICTs lead to an improved representation of these interests in the decision-making process [28,30], acting as a “... *political tool to realize collective interests*” [30] (p. 8); other researchers stress the role of ICTs as *barriers*, leading to the reinforcement of current power structures, where adoption and utilization of ICTs in participatory decision-making processes can be seen as a privilege of ICTs-literate groups of society for increasing control over ICTs-illiterate groups [58,59]. Such discrimination can be further expanded among different *age groups* of society, where younger, more educated and ICTs-skilled societal groups are in an advantageous position in contrast to older groups, a fact that can disturb the *balance* among different interest groups in the context of participatory exercises.

Furthermore, the work carried out in this paper reveals the need to *constantly monitor* the participatory process and come back regularly to inform and motivate citizens to take part in the running e-consultation processes, in order to strengthen the participatory dimension. This calls for a new culture of policy making within public institutions, a shift from a “*must do*” view of the whole participatory process that is enforced by the existing legislative framework, to a “*wish to*” view that emanates from the understanding of the value of participation and the distinguishing role of the public and stakeholders as “consultants” and/or equal partners around the table, where decisions are made for the management of scarce resources.

As to the specific case study considered in the paper, namely the e-consultation on the policy reform in respect of the spatial development of the tourist sector, the evidence obtained shows the same poor picture as to the number of participants engaged in this particular case. Nevertheless, it has to be noted the power of participation in this example, by means of the impact it has had on the final policy decision. This can be considered as a promising outcome, while by promoting a more *active stand* of decision makers towards motivating participation and training people to take part in e-decision-making processes, the interest of participants to “log-in” and contribute can be significantly increased.

### Author Contributions

Both authors have equal contributions in researching and writing the manuscript.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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