Chapter XI

The Quest for Advocates: Exploring the Missing Political Good Will for E-Democracy in Europe

Harald Mahrer, Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration & METIS Institute for Economics and Political Research, Austria

Abstract

Throughout the world, democratic countries, whether old, new, or in transition, are facing innovations in communications and information technology. Especially within developed economies, the challenge toward e-democracy through the digital transformation of democratic institutions has become increasingly evident. With the identification of the notion of the “middleman paradox,” recent research findings have added a new dimension to existing theories on the hesitant evolution of e-democracy, which clearly identifies politicians as an inhibiting factor. Consequently, the research in this chapter attempts to explore further this newly discovered phenomenon by presenting theoretical and empirical evidence. The findings of a multiple case study carried out in all 25 EU member countries, based on an adopted exploratory research design are presented. These findings give more detailed insights on the nature of the middleman paradox and on the ambiguous role of politicians in the further evolution of e-democracy.
From the Agora to the Internet

For more than 2,000 years, the idea of democracy, which had been originally invented in ancient Greece, had not found favorable conditions to evolve and endure its contests with political systems like centralized monarchy, hereditary aristocracy, and oligarchy. During the European Enlightenment, the 18th century philosophic movement rejected traditional social, religious, and political ideas, and the intellectual foundations of modern constitutional and representative democracy were laid. The promotion of democratic institutions were strongly supported by the ideas of John Locke and Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, who both believed in a republican government based on the consent of the governed (Locke, 1963; Montesquieu, 1952). Montesquieu’s concept of separated and balanced powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government helped to form the philosophical basis for the U.S. Constitution and, consequently, became a role model for constitutional representative democracies throughout the world.

During the last 250 years, a variety of theoretical models of democracy has been introduced, discussed, supported, and opposed by political scientists and philosophers (Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1956; Held, 1996; Pateman, 1970; Przeworski, 1999; Rousseau, 1968; Schumpeter, 1942). Among the more prominent theoretical concepts of democracy, the concept of deliberative democracy has gained enormous public attention parallel to a declining trust in democratic governments in Western democracies and the global wide-spraying of the Internet (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2004; Dryzek, 2000; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 1991; Habermas, 1996; Shapiro, 2003; Van Aaken, List, & Luetge, 2004).

Linking theories of further evolution of information and communication technology with contemporary theories in the area of democratic governance and democracy created the concept of e-government, describing the use of technology by government agencies to enhance the access to and the delivery of governmental services for the benefit of citizens, business partners, and employees (Heeks, 2001). Around the globe, various different definitions of e-government can be found that generally contain goals of more efficient operations, of better quality of services, and increased and better quality of citizen participation in democratic processes (Andersen, 2004; Grönlund, 2002; Kraemer & King, 2006). Looking at definitions in use, there currently seems to be a shift from government to governance, which rather implies a wider and more social and political view than government electronic services to citizens (Council of Europe, 2004b; Norris, 2005). In this chapter we follow the approach that clusters e-government research into two different fields.

E-administration refers to the transformation of governmental services in order to meet the needs and expectations of citizens and to optimize the internal processes of public administration. This should lead to a reduction of internal processing time, an enhancement of internal communications in the administration, together with
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