

Thematic Area:

The EU Democratic Deficit:

Critical perspectives on e-democracy as 'the' answer to getting citizens involved

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Extending the public sphere vs. colonization of the cyberspace

During the last decade, many media researchers have pinpointed the possibility of the decentralized communication over Internet to play a key role in the transformation of another segment of real life - the political activism, citizen involvement and the whole spectrum of related processes. New understanding and perception of the traditional political categories have been introduced, from netizen as a citizen of the network, to digital and cyber democracy as an extension of the traditional agora in the cyber space.

The emergence of Internet, namely, has created new space for information, debate and participation, which at the first glance, offer potential for strengthening the democracy and broaden the scope of critical thinking. Thousands of differently configured conversations which are happening on the net are creating a mirage of expansion of the informal public debate in the cyberspace, which was, in the years before Internet, becoming weaker as a result of the trend of cultural forms in the modern society to be integrated by the subjects of depoliticized culture, that way overcoming the public sphere.

Nevertheless and beside the optimism that was associated with the new communication technology, range of questions appeared about the domains and the nature of the new civic participation. Among the other, the emergence of a specific sort of information aristocracy has been identified as contributing towards undermining the meaning of the universal access as a fundamental equal opportunities paradigm promoted by Internet. It is stressed on one side, that the commodification and the commercialization of the information threaten to suspend the proclaimed autonomy of the cyberspace as a public sphere, while on the other, regardless of the trend the pyramidal nature of the public administration to change into archipelago of networked configurations, bureaucracy has not been prevented from transforming into cybercracy. Even more, the society is increasingly understood as an enormous machine, in which the instant public opinion enabled through computer mediated communications would open the space for sophisticated manipulation leading to a kind of "perfect" governance, which in turn will provide the eternal intangibility of economic and political elites.

This paper looks at these and several other conflicting tendencies while considering the cyberspace as public sphere's extension that is to deal with the European democratic deficit. It further analyses the critical points of cyber discourse, the fragmentation of the society, and other phenomena and challenges related to e-democracy and citizens involvement.