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**UPSWINGS AND DOWNFALLS OF CITIZENS-ORIENTED  
eDEMOCRACY MODEL IN NATIONAL AND MUNICIPAL  
POLITICS: How to develop legitimate and efficient democracy**

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# 1. Introduction

In common discussion of today, there is an often expressed ideal of a society where citizens can make the decisions of their own community without any intermediating persons. Robert Dahl (1998, 333) writes in *Democracy and its critics* that people desire of a society where all could participate directly and with equal opportunities. Dahl believes that this desire derives from ancient Athens, where citizens had opportunity to participate in all political decisions.

It is said that the ancient Athens' system functioned best at era of king Perikle c. 500-492 BC. According Held (1987, 17) there were three stone foundations in Perikle's democracy which were:

1. Community where all free men were obligated to participate in politics of polis. By participation they would create and maintain common life.
2. Demos had sovereign power to act as court of law and legislature.
3. Participation was direct.

For a long time after ancient Athens, there was a common belief that direct democracy could not function, even in theoretical level, in a community bigger than a very small town (see Michels 1986). However, this belief is questioned now when the society has transferred into global network-society where citizens are more educated, more aware, more skilled, more willing to participate directly at least in questions that they feel close to them, people have more leisure time and there are more ICT (Information and communications technologies) solutions which can be deployed to democratic decision making processes.

This research will take part in this challenge. I introduce here a Citizens-oriented model which will be my research hypothesis of an alternative "better" functioning democracy. There will be a lot of unsolved problems and tools to be tested in different pilot projects, but also a possibility of a more legitimate and better functioning democracy.

This research is connected many ways to Finnish Ondis project (Online keskustelut poliittisena toimintana) which is funded by Finnish Academy, to CODEM project which collects most Finnish eDemocracy studies and to TODOS consortium (Towards increased participation in democratic processes using IT), which I have attended as a researcher of Finnish Futures Research Centre.

TODOS consortium aims at creating relevant infrastructure for eDemocracy under European Commission's 6th Framework programme.

## **2. Research questions**

My hypothesis of this research is that Citizen-oriented model, which is described in chapter 4, could lead to "better" democracy. To find the conditions when this model could be said to accomplish this task, this research needs to study following questions.

1. What kind of deficits of democracy can be identified from western representative democracy at the moment?
2. What is better democracy according theory of democracy?
3. What kind of methods have been suggested and tested to develop decision making processes?
4. What are the constraints, needs, threats and possibilities of eDemocracy or participatory democracy introduced by citizens, politicians, media representatives, local authorities and scholars?
5. What kind of approaches have been working well in pilot projects and what methods have had more difficulties? Is it possible to define "best-" or "bad" practices?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Citizens-oriented model according the theoretical research and empirical research's results?

## **3. How to improve democracy?**

What is there to be said about "better" democracy according theory of Democracy? First of all, the concept of "improved democracy" has to be defined. Also the improvement itself must be defined and assessed. Therefore, methods for the assessment has to be developed.

This chapter requires a complete study of principles of democracy theory. There has to be a clear view of theory evolution from ancient Greek to present representative western modern democracy. Such authors as David Held, Benjamin Barber, Richard Rorty, Robert Dahl, Manuel Castells, Robert Michels, Gabriel Almond, Hannah Arend, John Rawls etc. will give ample knowledge for this study. Especially theory of strong democracy in Barber 1984 and Models of democracy in Held 1987 will be in special focus.

## 4. Citizens-oriented model

There are five citizenship models definitions in EVE (EVE 2001, 4-5) which are described briefly in the following table.

| <b>Administrative model</b>  | <b>Lobbying model</b>  | <b>Referendary model</b>                                    | <b>Deliberative model</b>   | <b>Decision making model</b>  |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Administrative citizenship   | Activist citizenship   | Liberal citizenship   | Commutarian citizenship   | Participatory citizenship   |
| Decision taken by the administration with regard to a file, with or without consultation of an administrative commission | Representatives decision taken after consultation of lobbies, trade- Unions, ad hoc unions or associations | Representatives decision taken after a vote or a referendum | Representatives decision taken after an open consultation involving as many citizens as possible. The consultation is not strictly legally binding. | Decision taken after a legally organised deliberative procedure which ties the political authorities.   |
| E-service tools : e-administration using web sites downloadable informations   | E-mails  | E-vote, e-referenduma, on-line pools.                       | Forums, information platforms using NLP, on-line debates.   | New mediations systems (digi TV, text messages, local TV and Radio), on-line forua, debates and pool, E-vote, deliberative poll, citizens jury etc. |

"Decision making model" as a model which emphasises strongly citizens' active role in political decision making is based on legally tied participatory citizenship. The model is based on citizens' needs and is thus better to be called "citizens-oriented model"<sup>1</sup> as will call it in this research. Political authorities are tied with decisions taken in legally organised deliberative procedures.

The "citizens-oriented model" goes a step further into participation that necessitates the reorganisation of the actual political decision making procedures. Here, the citizen not only gives her/his opinion on a given theme but acts as a decision maker together with the political decision maker in the decision making process. Superfluous focus on efficiency, organisational complexity

<sup>1</sup> This model has been rewrote and modified to TODOS consortium and to this study by me and Auli Keskinen.

and concentration of maintaining the existing decision power structures has for a long time prevented citizen to directly participate into political processes in a meaningful way.

### **Citizens-oriented Model Description**

In the following I open the concepts of this model. I believe that the most important approach is that different decision models can be used in different stages of the decision process. This means that all the models of citizenship are not mutually exclusive and that they play different role during the life "cycle" of the process and which again should be decided by the citizens.

In citizens-oriented model citizens are considered as decision makers with equal opportunities with representative decision makers. In this model the vital difference to all other models is that the citizens set the agenda, not the politicians. However, there has to be a procedure to coordinate this process and avoid contingency / continuous need of voters input.

### **Tools of Citizens-oriented model**

Almost all deliberative/participatory democracy ICT tools can be used in this model as tools of chosen phase. List of relevant and already used tools can be listed as follows: Internet, Text messages, Digital TV, Local TV and Radio, On-line debates, on-line polls, Citizens jury, Deliberative poll, Drawing lot, E-vote, Multiphase referendum.

One type of classification of decision making methods is as follows:

### **Examples of successful existing methods**

Citizen jury is assembled using statistical sampling techniques such as simple random sampling or allocated sampling. Process of the jury is a long term negotiation and preparation method for a dedicated decision making problem. This process has been used in Australia and New Zealand. (see Carson 1999).

Deliberative poll aims to gather well argued alternative solutions to define solutions by using sampling techniques. Opinion poll is however based on social preparation of opinions several

communities and not a individual polling method. This method has been used in US in several occasions with success. (see Becker and Slaton 1981 and 2000).

**Possible new methods for the model**

As an example, my suggestions is to test/employ multiphase referendum as described below.

| Phase 1   | Phase 2   | Phase 3                                       | Phase 4  | Phase 5             | Phase 6   | Phase 7   |
|---|---|---|--|---------------------|---|---|
| Agenda setting: About what will the opinion poll be organized? What for? The aim: binding or recom-mendatory? | What will be asked? Background research and results disseminated, dia-logues, discussions, learning processes, developing the alternatives needed for the Phase 3 | What are the alternatives for the referendum? | What are the methods used in referen-dum? Technical solutions, alternative tools for opinion giving? | Refe-rendum process | Presenting and dissemi-nating the results, public dialogues and debates | Decisions based on the results, other actions or recursion starting from Phase 1. |

(Table Keskinen 1998, 9)

The questions here are then: where do the citizens participate? How? Who will co-ordinate the processes? In the case of deliberative and direct democracy citizens will participate through all phases starting from Phase 1. In participatory democracy they will participated in Phases 2 and 5 and 6 and in present representative democracy only in Phase 5.

Also E-vote can be considered as a tool of this model if it is understood as a supplementing real-time tool (in on-line polls or multiphase referendums etc), and not as conventional voting system.

**What technical solutions are needed to advance this model**

The first and most important tasks for the industrial developers are as follows:

Task 1: Create tools for continual collecting and analysing huge amount of input information given by millions of citizens. Any kind of answers, whether they are zeros/ones, multiple hits etc must be transferred into simple and understandable table percent proportions etc.

Task 2: Create tools for genuine dialogue. Notice that dialogue means not only information and opinion transfer but transformation and synthesis of opinions into better common opinion. In

dialogue people are ready to come down and compromise with their opinions in a process of creating new knowledge.

Task 3: Create tools for monitoring decision makers actions by the citizens. Text messages, digital TV etc can be used for instance. This can mean imperative mandate of citizens, changing representatives on-line or anything else. This is an area which has to be studied more.

### **Challenges of the Citizens-oriented Model**

**The question of inclusiveness.** *Technology development itself is thought to be useful for empowerment increase of citizens in European, national and local levels.* However, there are three different kinds of deficits that need to be addressed.

**a) Participation deficit.** Our main interest at the moment is the participation deficit - but there is no legally binding influence or reaction of policy makers on non-institutional decision making procedures in policy making.

**b) Legal deficit.**

**c) Representation deficit.** The representation deficit seems to be un-solvable, as long as mainly "elites" participate in deliberation processes and as long there is not enough research on present frames of public spheres - what is the role of representative or deliberative process and how to guarantee inclusiveness in decisions? The development of tools without knowing the citizens needs is a futile task One should also tackle the issue of increased representation in the decision making process's outcome.

Actually, it is a secondary question whether citizens use letters to senator or on-line debates in the web, if these deficits are prevailing.

**The question of process.** *What can be done to activate sufficient number of citizens to participate in decision making process? In order to enable citizens to participate in virtual communities three requirements are to be filled: Access- Competence - Motivation.*

**a) Access.** This may include the phenomenon of digital divide and other equality deficits. For example, there are people who do not have the access to needed ICT.

**b) Competence.** There are also people who do not possess the adequate know-how to use ICT or who do not feel that they know enough about the subject to participate in the public affairs.

**c) Motivation.** Without motivation citizens will not participate in common affairs. To be motivated people need a feeling that their opinion is heard and can have an impact. They should also be able to feel to have been part of the social community behind the decision.

On the other hand, the free-rider problem decreases the motivation. Some people think that if all is going well without their interference, why should they bother. Also, a very basic need is the human face-to-face interaction and "doing-together". This need cannot be completely fulfilled by ICT. In the old days voting and political farmhouse meetings were part of leisure time and social interaction, whereas today participation to politics has to compete with new forms of social interaction.

**The question of outcome.** Does eDemocracy of Citizens-oriented Model result to different decisions as compared to the traditional democracy? What can be said about ontology (ethical and political questions) of eDemocracy compared to traditional democracy?

The future is very open as almost all technologies can be used for implementation. The question is more a political and social one: what type of citizenship model do the European society want to develop for what type of decision? The Citizens-oriented Model can be created in technological or political sense, but is this type of participation wanted, and by who? More participation in every decision is not necessarily compatible with an efficient modern state, even a democratic one.

## **5. Concept analyses**

The concepts of direct-, semi-direct- and representative democracy has to be explained here as well as parliamentarism, presidentialism, directorate government, parliamentary dualism, legitimate, legality, electoral system, e-? etc.

## **6. History of eDemocracy**

This chapter focuses on the issues that have been researched in field of ICT use with in decision making process. Researches as Hague 1999, Fishkin 1991, Keskinen 1999 (Kuorevesi pilot) and many other relevant researches. What kind of eDemocracy pilot projects have been established around the world and how those projects are studied? What methods were tested and how? What

kind of results there were? Are the reported conclusions relevant and competent? Is it possible to make new synthesis of the results?

## **7. State of the art**

What is being done in this research field at the moment? The research projects and pilot projects of eDemocracy today around the world. Here I will introduce also European Commission's 6th Framework programme's aims and consortiums on the fields of ICT use in decision making and -government. If TODOS consortium gets the commission's funding, the progress of this and other relevant consortiums will be explained here. It is also a very important question, how the software solutions of this field are developing.

## **8. Empiric research material**

The empirical material of this study will consist of three different pilot projects, which are Town of Varkaus eDemocracy pilot: Citizens voice in local democracy (VARDEM), Netti-Maunula and Espoo forum.

VARDEM pilot is starting in the first quarter of year 2003. The project consists of 200 panellists (gathered by simple random sample) from Town of Varkaus, infrastructure and relevant education to panellists given by Sonera, and municipal council groups who ask their questions from panellists via text messages. The Panellists are using text messages as well for answering.

The Town of Varkaus and Sonera have asked me to analyse the project and its outcome. They are especially interested in to get answers to questions of citizens opinions of the project, such as did the citizens get more active and interested in municipal politics, what kinds of new forms of interaction were developed in town, what was the role of library in the process, is it necessary to tell background information in the web before voting and what kind of role was taken by local media in town?

VARDEM project lasts for two years 2003-2005. For funding the analyse work, FFRC has sent an eight month fund application to Kunnallisan kehittämissäätiö [development fund for field of municipals].

Netti-Maunula is a discussion forum attached to local decision making that has been running successfully for several years and is still under the development. It is a very promising forum for a study.

Espoo forum is about to be established and I am actively participating on it's development. I hope this forum will give possibilities to analyse and experiment with solutions that are different with VARDEM and Netti-Maunula and perhaps even more dynamic and in some sense evolutionary.

I plan to use different analysing methods to study the pilots mentioned. In VARDEM I will use questionnaires and interviews of citizens and media representatives. For interviewing politicians and municipal authorities I will employ internet based DELFISCAN software. In Netti-Maunula I will introduce Futures Workshops (see Jungk & Müllert 1987) to be conducted among users and in Espoo forum I will try to conduct a multiphase referendum or a deliberative poll process and evaluate the results using multiple methods. I will also consider conducting a DELFISCAN process to members of Finnish parliament and take part in analysing The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities and Ministry of Internal Affairs pilot of eDemocracy. In order to be able to successfully utilise these methods knowledge of Futures studies methodology and -tools is required. My studies include at the moment these courses at Finland Futures Research Academy.

## **9. Conclusion**

What are the upswings and downfalls of Citizens-oriented model? What are the conditions when one can say, that the hypothetical model answers to legitimating-, participating- and representative deficits and therefore introduces perhaps better democracy? On the other hand, what are the constrains of this model? What arguments support and what undermine the ground of the model? What kind of changes to law and political structures there would have to be made before this model could be introduced? What kind of changes to the model should be done before it can be integrated to decision making process?

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