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PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF E-DEMOCRACY.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN E-DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

The article discusses the relationship between technology and politics with regard to the concept of participation. The main emphasis in put on philosophical underpinnings of e-democracy. The latter term indicates a modern version of democracy that is mediated by new ITC technology. Fundamental models of democracy are presented with a special importance assigned to the role and place of participation. Finally, main features of a new approach to information technology which takes into account the role of values in the process of design are presented.

Keywords: Technology, e-democracy, value sensitive design, IT tools in democracy.

1 INTRODUCTION- CYBER ERA IN POLITICS

1.1 New technology and politics

There is no doubt that technology plays an important role in different aspects of our life including its political dimension. Information and communication technology (ICT) offers new opportunities for different forms of political activities and engagement. Therefore, nowadays, many researchers focus their attention on investigating the relationship between new technologies and politics. On the one hand, the advocates of the use of the Internet and electronic tools are convinced that by these modern means democracy will be fostered and reinvigorated (Hoven, 2005, p. 51). On the other hand, sceptics warn that there is little evidence that "ITC stimulates the interest in public affairs and enhances the quality of political engagement" (Bimber, 1998 in Hoven, 2005, p.51). Nevertheless, it is a fact that more and more examples of the use of electronic tools can be found in different areas of our political life (for some examples see Marczewska-Rytko, 2013, p.81-315).

In this context, it seems especially important to look at the relationship between new technology and democracy from a theoretical angle. It is crucial to analyse in particular fundamental democratic processes such as participation, which are mediated by new technologies. E-democracy is one of the concepts where this relationship between politics and new technology is recognized and discussed in depth. As Hagen observes the concept of e-democracy is believed by researchers to "contribute both to democratic theory and our understanding of the working of a democratic political system in the information age" (1997, p.2).

1.2 Ethical aspects of e-democracy

What is especially essential with regard to e-democracy is its ethical aspect. I would like to signal one of many important ethical problems in this regard (for a paper discussing ethics of emerging technology see for example Brey, 2012) regarding the design of IT tools that are intended to serve political purposes. As Hoven argues "it is important to be aware of the value ladenness of IT design" (2007, p. 67). As a response to ethical implications of the use of ITC, also in politics, an approach of "doing a responsible innovation technology", which is called "value sensitive design", has been developed. The paper will briefly introduce main features of this approach.

2 TECHNOLOGY

2.1 The Internet as an example of artefact

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Technological advancements are an important part of our life (Hoven, 2007, p.67). As Arendt observes new artefacts shape our life and condition it so that we become dependable on them (1998). To illustrate this relationship a following example can be presented. People for whom the Internet is an essential tool at work will probably admit that a day without the Internet is a wasted day and they may even concede that they are not able to work at all. In this way, the Internet is conditioning our life and thus in some areas we are not able to function without it. Nevertheless, as Hoven (2007, p. 70) observes it is not so that we are not able to survive without new technological advancements since "technology always aims at making life slightly more comfortable, more easy, less cold, less hungry, less painful". Technology contributes significantly to the quality of our life but our existence and survival does not depend entirely on it (Hoven, 2007, p.70). Therefore, as Nowina Konopka concludes the use of ITC is no more a subject of debate and it is treated as a fact. Researchers are rather preoccupied with evaluating the impact that new technology has on different aspects of our life including politics as an essential part of it (2013, p. 12).

2.2 The influence of new technology on the society

Barber makes an important distinction between two possible theoretical positions with regard to the influence of new technology on the society (2004). As the author claims we can either assume that technology is shaping the society or maintain that technologies "are conditioned by what is going on in the society in which they grow" (2004, p. 110). Barber supports the second view according to which it is of crucial importance to investigate primarily the society that stands behind the latest technological solutions. When referring to modern society in the context of new technology, it is understood as "information society". This term was coined in the 60-ties by a Japan scholar (Nowina Konopka, 2013, p. 13) to indicate a society which "produces", "transfers", "processes" and "downloads" information on a large scale. Each of these actions is a collective one and entails consequences that affect a large number of people (Nowina Konopka, 2013, p. 13).

3 PARTICIPATION AND E-DEMOCRACY

3.1 The concept of e-democracy

The scope of influence that ITC technology has on different dimensions of our life includes democracy as well (Porębski, 2001, p.187). The term of e-democracy, which is an abbreviation of electronic democracy, "has become the one most often used by those dealing with implications of computer technology for the political process" (Hagen, 1997, p. 2). It is worth mentioning that the adjective "electronic" according to London (1994, cited in Hagen, 1997, p. 2) means "the application of interactive technology".

Porębski (2001, p.189) indicates that defining precisely what political areas are included in the concept of "e-democracy" causes many problems and arises some controversies. With regard to the political processes including participation, which are discussed within the concept of e-democracy, Porębski limits the scope of discussion by referring to the works of Kakabadse, who recognizes four main domains (2001, 189). The first one concerns electronic bureaucracy and includes every type of actions aimed at dealing with administrative issues. The second is connected with the provision of political information about all aspects of political life. The third area explores procedures of direct democracy including for example online deliberation, e-voting and online referenda. The last aspect of e-democracy is related to creating, maintaining and reinforcing communities and the civil society.

3.2 The meaning of political participation

As Hagen postulates "concepts of electronic democracy can best be understood if they are interpreted as contemporary theories about political participation" (Hagen, 1997, p.7). Thus, the concept of political participation needs to be scrutinized.

Hagen differentiates four types of political participation. "Staying informed" is perceived as the most fundamental form of participation. The author refers to Jefferson's concept of an ideal citizen, who is morally obliged to seek information and keep "abreast with the issues" (Hagen, 1997, p. 7). In this way, Hagen combines participation with duties of a citizen and indicates a moral dimension of e-democracy. The second type of active participation concerns deliberation which includes discussing political issues with family, friends, coworkers etc. Voting is put in the third place. Nevertheless, as Hagen alerts many experts identifies participation with voting and argue that it is the most essential aspect of democracy. As a result, when a decrease in participation is mentioned by researchers, they usually mean a dropping number of voting turnout rates. The fourth type of participations entails citizens' political activism in organizing events, setting up local communities, volunteering in local governmental boards etc.

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Another possibility to define participation is to relate it to decision-making (Nowak in Marczewska-Rytko, 2013, p.132). Political participation is then understood as engaging citizens in the process of decision making, which can take place in many forms. It is a complex idea which entails a discussion of issues concerning for instance public consultations and their importance, the problem of the division of responsibility, the actual role that citizens can play in the process etc.

As Nowak observes (2011, p.52-54) the definition of political participation tends to be articulated broadly and usually encompasses a whole range of political actions. To illustrate this diversity the author refers to Crowley's typology of political participation (which can be also found in Adler and Goggin, 2005) which specifies two extreme ends with individual and collective activities on the one hand, and formal and informal participation on the other hand. On the basis of Crowley's division, Nowak suggests to classify political online participation as debate, mobilization and elections. Debate can take place either in a passive way when citizens are searching for information or in an active way which entails an actual participation in the debate. Mobilization is connected with the activity of local communities and different groups of interest. Elections means both the election campaign and voting.

What seems to be also important in the discussion about participation is a division made by the authors in the book entitled "A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen" (Zukin et at. 2006). They differentiate between civic and political engagement where engagement is understood in a broad way similar to participation. It is worth noting that the authors define the term participation" as political engagement mainly in elections. The first concept of civic engagement is defined as an "organized voluntary activity focused on problem solving and helping others" whereas political engagement is determined as an "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action- either directly affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make this policies" (2006, p.6). The first area includes a whole range of activities that are aimed at introducing different type of changes. The other domain includes elections and voting but puts an emphasis on the engagement in decision making as well.

Further distinctions and attempts to provide a specific definition of civic engagement can be found in an article of Adler and Goggin (2005, p.238-239). In brief, the authors recognize four main types of civic engagement which include community service, collective action, political involvement and social change. However, it seems that this typology covers some aspects of political engagement as well and in this way it overlaps in a way with the distinction made by Zukin et al.. This example together with the above mentioned definitions illustrates problems that experts meet when trying to specify the meaning of participation as well as civic and political engagement. As Ramaley (cited in Adler and Goggin, 2005, p. 238) observes the way definitions are formed depends on the intention, perspective and purpose of the definer. For instance, Crowley defines civic engagement as a social change (Adler and Goggin, 2005, p. 239) since it is a social change that is his main focus as a founder of Social Capital, Inc. (SCI). SCI is an organization whose "mission is to strengthen communities by connecting diverse individuals and organizations through civic engagement initiatives" (from the website http://www.socialcapitalinc.org/about). Enthusiasts of SCI believe that by civic engagement new communities will be created what will strengthen the society on the whole and add to the maintenance of democracy.

3.3 Theories of e-democracy

3.3.1 Teledemocracy, Cyberdemocracy, and Electronic Democratization

With regard to political theories, the concepts of e-democracy concern models which regard "computers and/or computer networks as central tools in the working of a democratic political system" (Hagen, 1997, p.2). Hagen proposes a typology of e-democracy and distinguishes between Teledemocracy, Cyberdemocracy, and Electronic Democratization. The three concepts differ with regard to their normative underpinnings and especially in terms of the perception of the role of representative and direct forms of democracy and the level of citizens' political activity (Hagen, 1997, p. 2).

The first concept of Teledemocracy "strives to establish more forms of direct democracy" and "aims to employ new communication technologies for this end". However, there is no agreement about the type of modern technology that should be applied. Some proponents of Teledemocracy perceive television as the most appropriate tool whereas others believe that computer networks and the Internet will better serve these purposes. Enthusiasts of this vision of e-democracy are strongly convinced that representative government no longer serves the interests of "information society" with its plurality of political views. With regard to the relationship between citizens and the state, Backer argues that "Teledemocracy's principal aim is to bring power back to the people" (cited in Hagen, 1997, p. 6).

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As for Cyberdemocracy, it is strictly related with the development of the Internet and refers to virtual reality as a "spaceless place' where words, human relationships, data, wealth, status and power are made manifest by people using computer mediated communications technology" (Ogden 1994, p. 715). Two main variations of Cyberdemocracy has been developed. The first is more conservative and libertarian and underlines the role of free market and capitalistic values. Nowadays, it is not the material goods that will perform the role of capital but it is "information". The other tendency is more liberal and communitarian with the emphasis on community values (Hagen, 1997, p. 7).

The enthusiasts of the latter version of Cyberdemocracy believe that the "social capital" of the cyber citizens will be increased by the means of ITC tools. The concept of "social capital" has been developed by Putnam and is discussed by researchers in the context of e-democracy. It can be defined as "connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 1995, p. 19). What is important in the context of Cyberdemocracy is the fact that the author puts forward a thesis that the level of social capital is positively correlated with political participation, satisfaction with the government and the trust to public institutions. For example, "joining and taking part in local organizations helps to foster trust in others and a sense of shared values" (Wilson et al., 2009, p. 35). Whether social capital theory actually proves to be true or not is another issue (for some discussion about it see Wilson et al., 2009, p.35-36 and Nowak, 2011, p.55-56).

3.3.2 Electronic Democratization and e-democracy

According to Porębski Electronic Democracy, which corresponds and is generally in accordance with the Hagen's third type of Electronic Democratization, seems to be the broadest term (Porębski, 2001, p. 188) and in contrast to the two other concepts, it aims at reinforcing representative democracy and therefore puts the main emphasis on the ability of ITC tools to "bring more people into power". It aims at establishing new modes of communication between citizens and the government. The current crisis of representative democracy is seen in malfunctioning of certain procedures and a bad choice of particular solutions and not in the very concept of representative government and its theoretical underpinnings (Hagen, 1997, p. 9).

3.3.3 Theory of representative democracy

The belief of the advocates of e-democracy that ITC technology will increase the degree of participation can be linked to a philosophical theory of representative democracy. One of the authors that should be mentioned here is Dahl (1991) with his concept of liberal representative democracy. In his book "Democracy and its Critics" he has identified essential elements of representative democracy such as an accountable government and fair and competitive elections. According to this view, the government acquires its legitimacy by the means of fair and competitive elections.

One of the main concerns of modern policy makers is the dropping number of people taking part in voting (for some data see for example Rachwał, 2013, p.59). When this fact is confronted with theoretical foundations of representative form of democratic government, the hope that is assigned to e-democracy that it will increase citizens' participation, seems to be understandable. In line with Dahl's theory, the smaller the number of voters, the weaker the accountability of the government. The above example illustrates the relationship between theory and practice in e-democracy. Further examples can be found in a section about the theory of participation in a book entitled *People and Participation. How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making* prepared by experts from Involve, an organization that is mainly concentrated on practical issues connected with political participation.

3.3.4 Philosophical underpinnings of e-democracy

It is worth noting that Dahl's concept is only one example of many possible modern philosophical underpinnings of e-democracy. Different experts suggest different concepts that could serve as a theoretical model of e-democracy (Hoven, 2005). Barber raises a following question "What then are we talking about when we refer to democracy?" He indicates two theoretical philosophical concepts of democracy. He primarily differentiates between "thin" and "strong" democracy. The first concept refers to the theory of representative democracy with a sharp division between the private and the public and with the government and power in the hands of experts and elites. Like in the Schudson's concept of "monitorial citizen" the role of citizens is to observe representatives who are accountable to the voters (Porębski, 2010). The relationship between citizens and the actual power to rule remain distant. These features of democracy together with negative consequences of ways that media are reporting, are very often perceived as main reasons of the decreasing level of citizens' political participation (Hagen, 1997, p.5).

Barber describes "strong democracy" as incorporating strong participatory and deliberative practice. Citizens

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are actively engaged in political activities. They may not be active all the time and not necessary at the level of state government but by different opportunities they participate in democracy. This is not an example of direct democracy but rather of various forms of self-governing.

3.3.5 Contestatory democracy as an exemplary model

Hoven (2005) in his article about philosophical foundations of e-democracy discusses also other possible theories. He makes an account of fundamental modern conceptions of democracy including such as liberal, communitarian, direct, deliberative, epistemic (for a discussion on epistemic democracy see Hoven, 1999) and republican- contestatory ones. The latter one seems to the author to be especially relevant in the context of e-democracy. The main assumption on which the concept of contestatory democracy is based is a specific meaning of freedom, which is determined as non-domination in contrast to negative freedom (understood as "absence of interference by others" (Hoven, 2005, p.55)) and positive freedom (understood as self-mastery and self-discovery). Following Petit, Hoven states that this type of freedom means to "avoid domination by those who wield arbitrary power over us" (2005, p.55).

Furthermore, the role of electoral element is also emphasized. To lower the risk of the "tyranny of the majority", so called "contestatory regime" is proposed where "public decisions are warranted to the extent that they are capable of withstanding individual contestation in forums and procedures acceptable to all" (Hoven, 2005, p.56). Contestation is a central idea in this vision of democracy. It is not the very fact that people do actually exercise the right of contestation all the time but the possibility of questioning a public decision and asking those who made it to present their reasons and prove that relevant interests have taken into account, that constitutes the fundamental nature of contestation. However, a more detailed analysis is required to determine the meaning of "relevant interest". Hoven, briefly states that a decision should take "people's avowable perceived interests equally into account" (Hoven, 2005, p. 56).

Furthermore, following Dewey, Hoven observes that democracy needs to be "serviced regularly" (Dewey cited in Hoven, 2005, p.55). Contestatory democracy needs to be designed and maintained by various activities and procedures. What is more, in the context of new technology, it is of crucial importance to design IT tools so that they "implement and support (E)democratic arrangements and practices" (Hoven, 2005, p.55).

3.3.6 Conclusions

Summing up, researchers discussing theoretical foundations of e-democracy put an emphasis on the fact that some technological solutions regarding ITC tools may be more suitable for certain visions of democracy than others (Barber,2004). As Hoven observes: "It is important to investigate and articulate the basic conceptions underlying new forms of IT supported democratic politics, since different conceptions of democracy require different IT tools, have different patterns of technological development, require different investment and have different patterns of usage associated with them" (2005, p.51). Therefore, different authors describe various concepts and advocate to link rather some theories with e-democracy than others. What is especially important is the fact that the link between theory and practice is emphasized. This leads to the discussion of the moral dimension of e-democracy.

4 VALUE SENSITIVE DESIGN- A THIRD PHASE IN ETHICS

4.1 Towards "design"

Value sensitive design is an approach to new technology "that aims at making moral values part of technological design, research and development". It is based on an assumption that both ethics and information technology enter a new era of design. Hoven argues that significant changes in ethics took place firstly when "philosophers started to realize that philosophy could contribute to social and political debates (…) by clarifying notions and structuring arguments" (Hoven, 2007, p. 71). Rawls' theory of social justice has marked another significant change. Rawls' theory aims at specifying and justifying principles of justice that could serve as fundaments to design social institutions. The emphasis that is put on the design with an awareness of the importance of taking into account real world circumstances as well as the aim to implement some applied ethical analysis is a significant move into a new direction of the era of design. Similarly with technology, at the initial stage of development, ITC solutions were not tailored with regard to the real world conditions and the users in particular. Gradually, users' needs, expectations and requirements have started to play an important role. As a result, "social and behavioral sciences came to the aid of ITC" (Hoven, 2007, p.71) and the role of design has been increasing.

4.2 The role of values

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Barber makes an observation that "those who create and first use new technologies, take for granted the values and frameworks of previous eras and previous technologies and assume that new generations will have those same values and frameworks" (2004, p. 113). However, according to the author the relationship between the values and new technology may be lost. What may seem to be obvious for one generation, may turn out to be unknown to next generations. To prevent the disconnection with values to happen, the advocates of value sensitive approach to technology point out the necessity to recognize the role that values play at the stage of technological design. They call to "think about how to behave morally with information technology" (Hoven, 2007, p.68) and distinguish at least three areas to be considered. The first one is a moral obligation "to prevent harm to others" (Hoven, 2007, p.68). The second area indicates the commitment of designers to "improve the quality of life" and finally, the need to "solve some of our hardest social problems" should be recognized (Hoven, 2007, p.68). These are the most essential features of the concept of responsible information technology.

4.3 Value sensitive design and e-democracy

As it has been mentioned before the role of new technology in politics and democracy in particular is becoming more and more important. Since the effects of political actions have always an impact on citizens' life, it is of crucial importance to be aware of their moral dimension. This applies to the use of ITC tools in democratic processes as well. The three above described areas of responsible information technology should considered with regard to e-democracy. What is more, the IT tools in e-democracy should be verified if they "implement and support (E)democratic arrangements and practices" (Hoven, 2005, p.55). Therefore, it is so important to specify what type of model of democracy the IT tools support. At the stage of design, it is also crucial to be aware that the IT tools used for political purposes carry certain political values.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The importance of analyzing theoretical underpinnings of e-democracy is being gradually recognized among experts. It is of crucial importance to define and characterize the relationship between a theoretical model that is underlying a certain vision of e-democracy and IT tools that are aimed to support political processes such as participation. It is worth noting that the way fundamental concepts are defined determines also some practical solutions. What needs to be taken into consideration is the ethical dimension of the use of IT tools for political purposes in e-democracy especially for the procedures connected with participation. Whether intentionally or not values are incorporated in all technological solutions, which are adopted or currently rather designed for the political use. In the context of e-democracy, an attitude of doing responsible information technology enables to design IT tools and implement technological advancements with respect to moral values.

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