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Title: Preconditions of democratic e-Governance : a critical approach
Main work: e-City : analysing efforts to generate local dynamism in the city of
Tampere
Editor(s): Kasvio, Antti; Anttiroiko, Ari-Veikko
Year: 2005
Pages: 409-448
ISBN: 951-44-6525-3
Publisher: Tampere University Press
Discipline: Political science
Item Type: Article in Compiled Work
Language: en
URN: URN:NBN:fi:uta-201405301520

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Preconditions of Democratic e-Governance: A Critical Approach

Introduction

New opportunities for civic political action have emerged in the contemporary societal transformation process that is often seen to lead towards a post-modern *information society* (Keskinen 1999). The rapid development and diffusion of new information and communications technologies (ICT) provides various political agencies with new tools, channels and methods which can be utilised both in order to transform closed representative democracy systems into more open and communicative ones and to facilitate new forms of authentic civic political action (Malina 2003; Tsagaraousianou 1999; Hoff et al. 2000a). Therefore computer-mediated technology is defined as having had an important role in the process of the reformulation and redefinition of the modern liberal democracies (Hoff et al. 2000b, 1; Bellamy 2000, 33; Bellamy & Taylor 1998 1–32; Mathews 1997, 51–52, 66).

From the point of view of communicative governance systems, the potential of ICT means that whole new sets of concepts and practical solutions can be articulated when different types of e-participation are manifested in modernised societies (Coleman & Götze 2001). The common notion for inclusive political governance is that citizens must be connected in one way or another in the political regime (OECD 2001). Discussion about democratic e-governance has its roots in early theories about participatory democracy and e-democracy that expanded gradually from actions of small groups of academics

and activists towards a high-level policy issue fuelled by the Internet revolution. Simultaneously the development of new forms of governance and globalisation has made 'democracy as usual' look obsolete, leading to a situation that is often referred to as 'democracy deficit'. In a broader policy perspective we can see a convergence of two trends: a well-established instrumental 'informatisation' policy on the one hand, and a more contingent 'communicative e-governance' policy on the other.

This article analyses institutional electronic democracy projects as manifestations of democratic thought or as communicative e-governance constructions that are based upon societal civic participation. Most experimental e-democracy projects utilise fairly similar infrastructures of computer-mediated communication, notably various Internet applications. In general, the electronic democracy discourse is marked by two grand promises: the citizen's free access to public information and open discursive deliberation on the electronic Net (Tsagarousianou 1999). The website¹ of the City of Tampere can be analysed as a comprehensive case of institutionally organised e-democracy which has put a lot of effort into the enhancement of civic participation. The site's applications on the *Participation Portal* (*Osallistuminen* in Finnish)² are connected to a dominant representative system, in other words, people are encouraged to influence political decision-making. Various types of civic participation services have been made available, but the most innovative two-way applications strive to create online forums that take advantage of the Net's interactive properties (Ridell 2004, 92–93; Mäntymäki 2003; Seppälä 2002). The web-site participation services disseminate information about political issues in order to help citizens produce and express reasonable and logical arguments within the online-forums.

In this article the framework of citizen participation is discussed by focusing upon the relationship between knowledge

and political action. We examine the influence of easily accessible information on citizens' political deliberations. This point of view is based on a discussion about the Internet, which supposes that the Internet enables relatively unrestricted and easy access for the citizens to administrative and political information and knowledge. The citizens' awareness of societal affairs is understood as a precondition for meaningful citizen participation, deliberation and ballots to be arranged on the Internet. This is also understood as a solution to the problem of citizen participation in liberal democracies (Becker & Slaton 2000; Bryan et al. 1998). In this context, the retrieval and utilisation of information and knowledge becomes an important factor that defines the theoretical realm of citizen participation and political deliberation. Therefore the relationship between knowledge and political action has to be reflected. The article clarifies the preconditions for e-governance tied to the present administrative participation discourse, which aims to construct and rationalise the practices of participation from above. The institutionally organised participation introduced in the City of Tampere website is a model of new steering imperative, inclusive political communication, which invites lay people to exercise civic influence in new access points and to partake in a systemic decision-making process (Bang 2003a). In the article we bring out how the practices of inclusive governance are based on the ideas given by the tradition of the participatory democracy theory.

Methodologically the article assesses the City of Tampere website's interactive electronic democracy practices. First of all, democratic theory that contains views about political participation and political deliberations of citizens is combined with the research materials acquired from the City of Tampere *Participation Portal* (*Osallistuminen* in Finnish)³ and the city officials. Using this theoretical-empirical approach the consequences of the Internet in relation to democratic theory

are studied. Our key theoretical concepts are participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and e-democracy, which are placed in the e-governance framework. Secondly, a rhetorical analysis of the citizens' political deliberations carried out on the City's *Preparation Forum (Valma)*⁴ during Jan 2004 to Oct 2004 is briefly conducted and presented. Thirdly, we propose political judgement to be adapted to the study of Net participation. Political judgement as a concept can be theoretically used to describe the field of electronic civic political action, which the administrative discourse of democratic participation describes unsuccessfully.

The framework of e-governance: A demand of rational politics?

e-Governance is a novel term and it has acquired various meanings remaining, however, rather undefined so far (Anttiroiko 2004a). In this article, e-governance is approached as an integrative and rhetorical concept for several e-oriented methods for communicative governing. Among the main foundations of e-governance is, for instance, the ensuring of universal access to data, information and knowledge for citizens (Coleman & Gøtze 2001). The governance approach argues for new models and practices that are expected to complement, evolve and reform the current representative democracy to better suit the modern needs of rapidly moving and changing societies (Coleman & Gøtze 2001; OECD 2001; Keskinen 1997).

A concrete example of the governance rhetoric is found in the civic e-participation practices constructed by the City of Tampere:

The City of Tampere has made a conscious effort to develop on-line civic participation. The strategy of the city stresses transparent

decision-making, active communication and the utilisation of new technology. . . .

The civic *participation portal* set up by the City of Tampere (www.tampere.fi/osallistu) comprises the following parts:

1. information about municipal government and participation opportunities as well as the contact information
 2. permanent channels of e-participation: feedback facilities, discussion sites and a Questions & Answers service
 3. topical consultations: Internet-user surveys since 1997, budget polls since 1999 and various consultations on issues such as traffic, zoning and services
 4. opportunity to initiate official motions and monitor their progress,
 5. links to other discussion and participation arenas, such as children's and young people's forums
- (Seppälä 2003, 1)

The governance model presented in the City of Tampere *Participation Portal* website, as well as various other fairly similar administrative e-democracy projects, attempts to respond to globalised modernisation pressures by engaging the citizens in the communicative processes of political regime. The public organisations strive towards dialogic relationships with various stakeholders because political environments have become highly complex and fragmented. Political government can no longer be carried out by non-communicative hierarchical steering (Bang 2003b 243–244). The *Participation Portal* of the City of Tampere is an excellent example of how a representation system tries to connect to the political community's stakeholders. The political managers and administrators have to demonstrate nowadays that they want to be in cooperative relationships with civil society and citizens so that they can generate the legitimacy of political steering (Bang 2003b, 252):

In the planning, decision-making and realisation of the future of the city all of us are needed. The citizen has a right to participate in taking care of common matters.

The City of Tampere develops the possibilities of the inhabitants' participation. Our purpose is to hear and to listen to more inhabitants than before in all matters concerning the city. (An introduction to the *Participation Portal* <<http://www.tampere.fi/osallistuminen/index.html>>, translation: Häyhtiö)

During recent decades, ideas and practices of political participation, mobilisation and the various modes of political activity have been in a state of turmoil. Hence, political governance rhetoric also has to be understood as a response to the constantly and steadily declining turnouts in various general elections, the citizen's widespread alienation from partisan politics and their decreasing participation in the activities of institutional parties. Governance thinking shows that democracy is not a stable phenomenon; rather it is a dynamic process. Administrative e-governance practices can be defined as a part of a new communications oriented approach, sometimes called *porous government* or *culture governance* (Slaton 1992; Keskinen 1999; Bang 2003a; Bang 2003b; Bang & Dyrberg 2003). This shift in the democracy paradigm, i.e. taking people 'in' and the generation of new modes of governance, emphasises more lateral, equal and interactive relationships like *mediation*, *recognition of interdependencies*, and *networking* in democratic governance and practices. e-Governance modes deal with the impact of newly formed computer-mediated communication devices in respect of democracy and democratic governance. From this perspective ICT introduces communicative tools for the rearrangement of the party and administration dominated civic participation (Macintosh et al. 2002).

The culture governance adopted by public organisations addresses several rhetorical promises relating to citizens' empowerment, customer orientation, opening up participation channels and the creation of multiple partnership relations etc. (Bang 2003b, 243). A report by the City of Tampere, *Working Group for Improving Citizens' Opportunities for Participation*, states that the residents, civil servants and the elected representatives have to be in closer interaction than before so that representative democracy can be strengthened by direct participation (City of Tampere 2003). Furthermore, it is proposed that the whole organisational culture of the city needs to be changed so that civic participation can become *an inherent aspect of political and administrative culture* (Anttiroiko 2004b, 380). The city wants to generate a responsive participation culture so that the citizens would be activated in participating in the preparation and taking care of matters related to their own living environment. The report also underlines that active participation in the city affairs would have integrative effects for the local community and public policy activities (City of Tampere 2003).

It is not clear how the public organisations follow the self-regulated ideals of communicative governance in their concrete actions, because it is obviously contingent on other factors. According to Henrik Bang, culture governance strives to construct feasible citizen empowerment, which means inviting people to exercise civic influence at new access points and to participate in systemic decision-making. In post-modern society, public authorities want to create an administration related participative culture, which is effective for the legitimacy, coherence and the decision-making of the organisation. Thus, communicative governance refers to the social practices of a modernised political community, in which *the rulers attempt to socialise and regulate people's conduct in an indirect manner by working on their identities and thereby their values, feelings, attitudes and beliefs via a variety*

of new interactive modes of dialogue and co-operation (Bang 2003b, 246–247; Bang commented also in Rättilä 2004).

In practice, governance in political systems has to be based on complex communicative and interactive practices. The e-governance model of the City of Tampere gives an overview of the features of electronic civic participation organised by public authorities. It seems to share a general belief that the citizens' awareness of societal affairs is a precondition for meaningful citizen participation and making them interested in systemic governance issues. The website of the city has made available a wide variety of information about the city's plans, reports, policy alternatives and proposals. For instance, all the agendas and the minutes of the municipal bodies are published on the website at the same time as they are sent to the decision-makers. The *Participation Portal*, especially, extensively disseminates information on opportunities of participation, procedures, local current affairs, formal instructions and regulations. Accordingly, the City of Tampere wants to provide residents with background information in order to help them produce and express reasonable comments to the authorities and political representatives on local issues (Seppälä 2002; Seppälä 2003; City of Tampere 2003, 13, 21–23.).

In modern liberal democratic thinking and institutions the ideal of rational political action is almost taken for granted. Appropriate politics is considered to be a process that focuses on a society's public discussion, dealing with perceived problems, and issues in a deliberate, dispassionate and knowledgeable way. The ideal of rational politics sees information and knowledge as part of politics, which is displayed in political thinking and deliberation in two different, but not separate, manners. Firstly, it indicates the importance of scientific factual knowledge and articulates this knowledge as applicable to the resolution of political conflicts and problems. Secondly, this rational ideal comprises an approach that

holds that political thinking and deliberation should be logical, reasoned and the facts understandable (Rättilä 1999, 49, 52).

According to Bernard Crick, the idea that scientific knowledge is applicable to the resolution of political problems is derived from a strand of thought that sees technology as a tool with which all human problems can be resolved. While generating economic development in societies, industrial and technological development has also created a doctrine of rational manipulation. The problems of human civilisation are considered technical and, in accordance with the technical mode of thinking, these problems can be resolved with knowledge that already exists or can be easily developed if only the resources of knowledge are at hand. In political conflicts, the various discourses acquire a scientific and technical form, and solutions are believed to be found in the knowledge that has evolved from the observation of social and historical development (Crick 1982, 92–93, 95). The discourses of political language are transformed into specialised discourses within the fields of economy, law, medicine and others, and the political actors can ground their decision-making upon these expert fields (Ball 1988, 12). The application of neutral scientific knowledge to politics is supposed to lead to the best possible solutions in all problem areas, also overcoming traditional political conflicts.

The application of scientism to politics, i.e. the reduction of political language into the politics of knowledge, transforms modern societies into epistemocracies in which a particular social class, faction or individual rises into a dominant position because he/she/it is in possession of some functional professional or special knowledge. Political power is conceptually assimilated into technical and expertise power, and the people who possess political and administrative power have become experts in their own field. Thus it can be stated that the governing elite in modern bureaucratic societies is in a position in which it can legitimise its

leading role by claiming that it possesses special knowledge and expertise (Ball 1988, 115–116).

The so-called Platonic model of thinking indicates that experts or scientists should be leading states because prudent action is based upon verified knowledge. In a certain way one has to acknowledge the extensive importance of expertise and knowledge because without them society would be functioning blindly. However, it can be stated that in political action and decision-making there are prerequisites and divergences of objectives, which cannot be defined at all in the sphere of science and knowledge. These prerequisites and divergences are excluded from the scientific sphere because political judgements and decisions have to be made subjectively (Ross 1951, 210). In political action, the subjective approach becomes indispensable, because political conflicts are typically complex and ambiguous. In political situations instrumental knowledge can find solutions only when the problems under consideration are sufficiently simple and unambiguous.

Political scientists have not reached a consensus about whether the increasing supply of information in modern societies activates or passivates the citizen's willingness to engage in politics. We do not agree with a view according to which information or knowledge would be a prime factor or key motivator for citizens' participation into politics. Alf Ross states that people's political activity originates more or less in the conscious will or aspiration towards a certain objective. This kind of activity is not based on any kind of firm knowledge; neither is there any such unalterable knowledge that would guide us towards the objectives we should strive for. People can utilise knowledge to achieve their objectives (Ross 1951, 208). Thus if a person wants to participate in the City of Tampere online political forums, he/she can take advantage of the information documents that are attached to the fora if he regards it useful. If a participant is willing to express

himself without using any additional information, it can be supposed that this person does not consider these information sources to be relevant for this particular choice situation.

The forums of institutionally organised electronic democracy projects strive to initiate so-called *civic* deliberation by disseminating information. However, in so doing they often also formulate the goals of civic deliberation without leaving the participants and deliberators enough space to formulate their own floors and arguments. This demand for rational politics undermines or restricts the citizens' self-understanding in relation to politics by defining those characteristics which the political actors should possess (Ball 1988, 123). Together with the demand for rationality, politics is transformed into a privileged area for those who master competent reasoning and argumentation with facts. Politics is characterised by practical action and it is based upon the arts of collective deliberation, dialogue and judgement in which reciprocal relations, different political judgements and opinions emerge and become public. Every citizen possesses the required expertise to participate in this kind of political deliberation: the arts of listening, learning and being heard (ibid, 119). The aim of electronic online forums to cultivate political discussion and deliberation via an effective spread of information is, to say the least, dubious, because political action and decision-making should be emanating from the subject. Personal choices depend upon a person's own situational judgements, and these are made subjectively.

Participatory democracy theory and the civil citizen

Participatory democracy can be defined abstractly as a regime in which adult citizens assemble to deliberate and to vote about the most important political matters. A ballot decides the policy that is to be chosen (see e.g. Budge 1996, 35). According to

this definition of modern participatory democracy, the City of Tampere web-based *Participation Portal* can be seen as having a twofold standing. On the one hand, the portal's interactive Net spaces are modern society's structural solutions to participatory democracy. The citizens are offered an opportunity to access the online forums and to debate political issues, but they do not have the possibility of voting on these issues. But the developers of these electronic democracy practices seem to have a view that citizens in modern societies wish to exert at least some kind of influence upon political decision-making.

Benjamin Barber states optimistically that participatory democracy becomes possible through policy-making institutions and a high level of education, which binds citizens to pursue common good (Barber 1984, 117). A general belief in people's high educational level⁵ also underlies the development of the City of Tampere website. Education is considered a factor that creates a need for citizens to employ political methods of influence that go beyond conventional voting. The communication manager of the City affirmatively describes civic digital education:

Participation in these implementations of e-democracy has been underpinned in all education pertaining to the information society. Every year, the municipal school administration provides some 30,000 citizens with basic computer and Internet skills and some 3,000 are trained every year on separate courses for adult beginners, senior citizens, the unemployed, the socially excluded and immigrants. During 2002, the Internet bus was used by approximately 9,000 people. (Seppälä 2003, 3)

Barber specifies that strong participatory democracy will not develop through civil education and knowledge. Strong democracy will arise when people are given political power and channels of influence. Having attained these, they will perceive that it is necessary to acquire knowledge in order to be able to

make political decisions (Barber 1984, 234). The website in question provides the citizens of Tampere with both channels of political influence and information about political matters. The latter means that the people who participate in the forums can educate themselves and formulate reasonable political arguments.

The theory of participatory democracy holds that civil education for political action is one of the main functions of political participation. Schooling means both the development of psychological attributes and the acquisition of the practical skills and procedures required in political action (Pateman 1970, 42). Equal civic development can be achieved only in a participatory society, which emphasises the significance of collective problem-solving methods. Citizens are schooled to be educated community members who are capable of political participation and who have an interest in participating in the political decision-making process (Held 1987, 262). According to Carole Pateman, people's participation in the community's decision-making stabilises the community. A decision-making process that allows public participation develops from the very start as a process that perpetuates itself due to the effects of political participation. Participatory political processes have an impact upon the development of the social and political capacities of citizens, and this positively influences the next act of participation. Participation has an integrative effect especially upon those citizens who take part in political activity, and it makes the acceptance of collective decisions easier (Pateman 1970, 42–43).

One problematic feature of modern liberal democratic systems is considered to be that citizens are often quite ignorant of public political affairs, and thus unable and unwilling to participate politically. According to Ian Budge, political ignorance cannot be seen as a static feature of the members of a community. Forging an interest in political participation requires that people

have an opportunity to participate in decision-making that is directly relevant to their own wellbeing. This can set off a learning process, which leads to the emergence of competent political actors (Budge 1993, 147). According to Pateman, the goal of schooling oneself politically is to develop one's capacity to make intelligent political judgements. Such education presupposes the existence of social circumstances and political organisations, which allow citizens to perceive themselves as political actors. Associated with the idea of how political participation becomes possible is a concept of the development of practical reason. It emerges via political knowledge and experience acquired from participation (Pateman 1985, 187–188; Almond & Verba 1963, 206–207). An individual's linguistic capacity combined with other intellectual capacities is an essential part of his/her capability to perform politically and to understand the other actors' speech acts (Pateman 1985, 178).

According to the modern theory of participatory democracy people's political participation and deliberation are characterised by an aim to acquire information and knowledge about political matters so that political opinions or decisions can be argued proficiently. Knowledge is not, however, usually the starting point when opinions or decisions are formulated; information about political issues is by nature contingent on the situation. The citizens who participate in political deliberations are assumed to possess an ability to select relevant information they can use to support their arguments. Among the most basic principles of participatory democracy is the idea that people learn through the opportunity to participate and by utilising and judging the relevance of different types of information. The City of Tampere website and especially the *Participation Portal* have mobilised electronic technology and provided information produced by administrations as an ingredient of political deliberation. Political information and knowledge are therefore given a certain utility

value in political argumentation. Administrative information and knowledge of societal matters are presented as having significant descriptive power regarding circumstances.

Deliberative democracy theory and reasonable political deliberation

The theory of deliberative democracy doesn't actually differ very much from the ideas of participatory democracy. Deliberative theory can generally be defined as an approach, which aims to construct ideal standards for political deliberation. The concept of deliberative democracy is relatively novel and it has been in play since the 1980s. The theoretical approach consists of the critique of liberal democracy, beginning in the 1970s, and the theoretical discourse of consensual politics evinced by participatory democracy theory (Bohman & Rehg 1997, xii). The theory explicates a markedly normative approach to the political process, which should occur as reformed institutionalised organisations, and be based on public civil deliberation

According to the deliberative ideal, a democratic community's political resolutions are produced in a process of public argumentation and reasoning in which citizens participate as equals. When citizens take part in this process they commit themselves to the solving of different kinds of problems and to collective decision-making. The citizens regard as legitimate only those institutions in which the decision-making is conducted via free and public deliberation (Cohen 1989, 21). In a deliberatively democratic community people assemble voluntarily in order to argue and to find solutions to political conflicts (Knight & Johnson 1994, 285). When political conflicts occur, a deliberative community aims to reach a rationally motivated consensus. This means that common political decisions are rationalised by arguments which become acceptable to all those who have

taken part in the deliberation. However, it can be assumed that political conflicts are by nature such that the requirement for consensus is too demanding. This is the case even when political deliberations are made in ideal circumstances and decisions are arrived at via majority rule (Cohen 1989, 23). A key prerequisite for the legitimacy of decisions is that every citizen is entitled to engage in public deliberations so that the decisions are produced as an outcome of collective political debate and judgement. The legitimacy emerges from the process of deliberation in which everybody's will is taken into account. This procedure grants the output of the process its legitimacy (Manin 1987, 352). The deliberative procedure serves as the source of a community's legitimacy, and the arguments put forward in the deliberation process exert an impact upon the content of decisions made in the collective process (Cohen 1989, 21).

The Participation Portal on the website of the City of Tampere can be connected in an interesting manner to the ideas of the political community presented by the theorists of deliberative democracy. In our opinion, face-to-face interaction cannot be the only standard for political deliberation. The chosen starting point would be the premise that the deliberation can also take place in an electronic network. Moreover, the deliberative forum is considered to be defined by any setting in which citizens assemble regularly to make collective decisions about public matters (Gutmann & Thompson 1997, 12; Cohen 1989, 21). The political deliberations carried out in the online forums, however, are not orderly meetings in which common decisions are made after profound political debates. Rather, they are temporary and informal deliberations in which participants are making conscious efforts to contribute to policymaking. For example, on the City's website *Preparation Forum (Valma)*, the summaries and rejoinders prepared by the forum administrators could be regarded as some kind of political resolutions. On the

other hand, in the City's general discussion space (*Tampereen kaupungin keskustelupalsta*), such documents are not regularly composed, and any political influence that the citizens might have is filtered through politicians or officials who engage in deliberations or read them. The city officials describe these two electronic mechanisms as two separate civic forums partaking in local decision-making:

The City of Tampere employs a workflow management system in case preparation, enabling digital discussion of issues within municipal administration. The agenda of elected bodies are published on the website of the city at the same time as they are forwarded to the elected officials. From the point of view of civic participation in case preparation, this is often too late.

...

[In the Preparation Forum Project] residents of the municipality will be secured a means of delivering feedback and participating in case preparation from beginning to end. As soon as the decision is made to open a case for preparation (when the case is for instance, entered into working plans) the secretary or spokesperson of the committee places a notice about this on the website of the municipality. The notice will be accompanied by a feedback form returnable to the preparing official, committee secretary or elected officials. The network debate concerning the case is recorded on a discussion forum. When the preparation proper begins, preparation documents in digital form will be available to the residents via the Internet. (Uurtamo 2003; Seppälä 2003)

It must be acknowledged that several theoretical aspects of deliberative democracy theory materialise in the City's Internet forums. People participate in the deliberations as equal citizens; the participants could be considered equal speakers and performers in relation to one another. Electronic deliberations – with the background information provided – could be considered

as processes of political reasoning and argumentation, and the deliberations are free and public. Presentations are not generally hindered or restricted by any authority and they are all public. Although, it has to be acknowledged that the city's discussion services are premoderated (Seppälä 2002; 2003). Participation is voluntary and its aim is to influence local politics – although people do not actually have a direct opportunity to contribute to policymaking. However, the explicit aim of the City's website forums is to promote democracy and the citizens' opportunities to participate in politics. The forums therefore seem to seek a kind of consensual politics by means of argumentative deliberation. The aim of public deliberation is to legitimate future policies. In the forums, participation is reciprocal. Also, background information on the issues under deliberation is provided. This gives the participants an opportunity to justify their arguments and to assess the arguments delivered by others.

The theory of deliberative democracy illustrates and conceptualises the existence of systemic legitimacy that is essential for a community. Normatively, democratic legitimacy can be founded only on public deliberation. The advocates of deliberative democracy, however, are not in agreement about those procedures and processes which would be required if deliberative politics were to be widely applied to a society's politics. Deliberative theorists are generally divided into the proponents of *fair proceduralism* (see e.g. Manin 1987; Gutmann & Thompson 1997; Christiano 1997; Bohman 1997; Knight & Johnson 1994 & 1997; Benhabib 1996) and to those favouring the *epistemic standard* (see e.g. Dryzek 1990; Cohen 1989; Rawls 1997). The former group emphasises the need to carry out political deliberation in just and equal circumstances. The latter group presumes that the outcome of deliberation is qualitatively legitimate when an independent standard is met (Estlund 1997, 177–181.) This independent standard can broadly be defined

as legitimacy. This requires that each political decision relies on arguments that cannot be opposed by any reasonable citizen (ibid, 175). The standard is conceived of as an argument that is founded on knowledge, which cannot be refuted.

Although fair proceduralism excludes strict epistemic standards from the political process, it does not completely discard epistemic definitions. Political deliberations are considered in almost every theoretical case to be serious deliberations about the common good and justice – a fact that assumes the articulation of normative suggestions. This brings to the fore an assumption that deliberation proceeds as a selection between correct and incorrect⁶ opinions, guided by objectivity (Richardson 1997, 349). The theory of deliberative democracy appears to be committed to the cognitive nature of processes it is describing although the degree of cognition varies according to the point of view. In theoretical discussions, the furtherance of the common good and fair justice in the democratic process means that objectivity and cognition are emphasised properly. In a political perspective one expects to find conclusions that lead to certainty and knowledge.

e-Democracy and the networked e-citizen

e-Democracy can be defined as an interactive process enabled by new technology where political communications become networked and diverse. Through information networks citizens can make initiatives, take part in political planning and discuss the effects of decision-making (Keskinen 1995a, 10; Keskinen 1995b, 22; Savolainen & Anttiroiko 1999, 11). e-Democracy is easily associated with technical systems (such as the City of Tampere's website) that are enabled by new information and communications technology, especially the Internet. However, rather extensive e-democratic (then: teledemocratic) experiments examining the implications of direct participatory democracy

were carried out already during the 1970s (Becker & Slaton 2000; Becker 1995, 43). e-Democracy has taken different forms, as exemplified for instance during the 1980s and 1990s by *TELEVOTE* (Scientific Deliberative Poll) (Slaton 1992; Becker & Slaton 2000), *ETM* (Electronic Town Meeting) (Becker & Scarce 1987, 272–279; Becker 1995, 43–49), and *Citizens' Jury* (Carson & Martin 1999; Carson & al. 2002). Early experiments mainly utilised telephone and television as teledemocratic instruments (Becker & Scarce 1987, 274–279). Later on computers and Internet were introduced.

The development of information and communications technology (ICT), especially the Internet, has led to a revision of the theoretical definition of e-democracy so that it includes the fulfilment of a new kind of electronic democracy more extensively. The e-democratic process can be thought of as a combination of participatory and deliberative democracy in which the existence of information networks gives the citizens a possibility to maintain an equal level of information and knowledge about societal affairs. In this environment, the concept of electronic democracy comes to form a whole consisting of networks and people – and one in which the political decision-making processes are guided by a deliberative process (Keskinen 1999). The Internet – understood theoretically in the context of electronic democracy – can be an instrument that fulfils the democratic ideal of the citizen who is active and aware of societal issues. The Internet forums combined with the dissemination of information are serving as a potential environment for reasoned public deliberation (see Hill & Hughes 1998, 1–3, 22; Alexander & Pal 1998, 7; Miller 1996, 217; Slevin 2000, 185–186).

According to Savolainen & Anttiroiko, participation in public debates within the framework of deliberative electronic democracy presupposes that the citizens have sufficient capabilities to express themselves as well as to search for and

to make use of the background information that is needed to support arguments (Savolainen & Anttiroiko 1999, 35). In an interactive information society, then, citizenship refers to a proactive actor who participates in the production of new information at the same time as he/she participates in reciprocal communications (Keskinen 1999, 20, 23). According to this definition, public argumentation, individual opinions and the background information they include develop into a kind of *process of spiral feedback*, which builds a positive and supportive ambiance in the political community. According to Kenneth Hacker, interactivity of this kind aspires not only to attenuate societal uncertainty, but also to construct political definitions and policies by way of close co-operation. In electronic deliberation it is not important that all messages are answered promptly. More essential are the quality and information content of a response (Hacker 1996, 228). According to Scott London, rational dialogue and political deliberation are possible in a network environment whose operation is founded on horizontal networks of co-operation and mutual trust between citizens (London 1997, 8). According to this interpretation, electronic political activity should manifest itself as reasonable political deliberation that increases social capital. In political deliberation of this kind, reasoned and confidence-inspiring dialogue are meant to balance and to solve political conflicts.

According to Lewis Friedland, theories that emphasise discourse cannot explain the citizens' motives for civic participation in an electronic operating environment. Discursive democratic dialogue does not arise in virtual online-domain spheres unless the community has the infrastructure formed by social capital, or in other words, the norms of reciprocity that inspire confidence and the social networks developed among citizens (Friedland 1996, 189). In our opinion, however, theories

of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy, and e-democracy are not just contextual definitions about discursive political talk, but also models of thinking about the infrastructure of social capital. These models, like the theory of social capital, aspire to political deliberation, in which people are communally motivated to deliberate in a civil and reasonable manner.

These approaches emphasise the distribution of information and knowledge as a material used by the public in order to form arguments or to support their political opinions so that confidence among citizens increases. These confidence-inspiring relationships aim to create functional models in democratic communities. The models in which solidarity and intellectual deliberation are respected are based on effective cooperation. A political community is therefore to be founded on moral commitment and admission of legitimacy to reasonable, logical and knowledgeable arguments that are approved by a majority. The aim of the requirement and search for such arguments is to reduce societal uncertainty; it is assumed that the rationality of political deliberation produces clear and correct political solutions.

The main aim of reasonable political deliberation is to create an operational model of communality. Collaboration is politically easier when communal values are popularly accepted and individual interests are relegated to the background. Under the prevalence of democratic communality and unanimity legitimation for political decisions is sought in informative and knowledge-based arguments. It is easier to concentrate upon these when political deliberation is not disturbed by individual interests. The theoretical definitions of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and e-democracy generally try to promote such communal politics and, in so doing, they present a desirable functional model for the accumulation of social capital in democratic communities.

The modern tradition of participatory democracy which deliberative democracy and e-democracy also belong to stresses the importance of citizen participation in public political deliberation and decision-making. The tradition opposes the idea that the administration of political affairs is best centralised and left to professional politicians whose position and dignity within a community are based upon their ability to argue in a manner that appears rational and upon their ability to defend their arguments with factual information. But simultaneously the tradition of participatory democracy commits itself to rational politics and wants to set an epistemic standard for civic deliberation. Citizens ought to possess intellectual capacities, as well as be educated, so that they can construct a convincing and reliable argument. Civic education is considered to be a factor that familiarises citizens with rational political deliberation. Civic education also helps people to understand that they are recognised as politically valid actors only if they master a convincing method of argumentation.

The City of Tampere website and its *Participation Portal* are modern, virtual spaces for political action facilitated by new ICT. Theoretically, they are ideal examples of deliberative, participative e-democracy. The key preconditions of this theoretical viewpoint materialise quite extensively in the online forums. Information resources are distributed, the participants are considered equal and everybody has a say. Moreover, the deliberators are mostly well educated and they have at least to some degree a chance to influence decision-making. Thus, it is quite obvious how the tradition of participatory democracy thinking has given organic civic participation ideas to the e-governance practices, which aims to construct and rationalise the practices of participation from above. Both approaches are in favour of construction of a political discussion environment, which adheres to an assumption of civil sociability. The concept of *civil* signifies, in this context, a kind

of erudition and a level of competency in deliberation, on the basis of which people feel capable of co-operation and of trusting each other. Co-operation and trust engender predictability and certainty about the action and its effects. Politics therefore becomes sociable politics, in which conflicts emerge on the political agenda but in which they are resolved in the harmony created by civic deliberation (Lappalainen 1999, 56).

Civil sociability also requires, in addition to communality, civil self-understanding. Habermas develops, in his theory of communicative action, a cognitive-instrumental rationality, which has contributed to people's self-understanding in modern society. The concept denotes successful self-presentation, which provides intellectual readjustment to the terms of the contingent environment and the utilisation of those terms (Habermas 1987, 95–96). Inversely construed, modernised society appears to require, in certain situations, civil argumentation from its citizens. The City of Tampere's website and its *Participation Portal* has drawn attention to the condition of successful self-presentation. This condition, more precisely, presupposed that the information relevant to the administratively organised topics ought to be used in argumentation. The political environment of citizen engagement constructed and theorised by the tradition of participatory democracy theory assumes that people should be civilised in order for them to adequately take part in politics. As citizens take part in public political deliberation, this civilisation should manifest itself as reasonable, logical and knowledgeable argumentation.

Political judgement as a precondition for participation

Since the last decade modern representative democracies have actively tried to increase civic participation in public affairs (Rättilä 2004). This governance approach represents

administrative participation discourse, which aims to construct inside the governing system the efficient communication channels of participation. It is expected to strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of the decision-making of the representative system at minor costs. In networked governance practices it is distinctive that lay people are given voice, consulted or involved in matters, which are suitable for the interests of the representative system, or simply, it is desirable to open up civic discussion to the public. Today, the complexity of the political environment and need to find out the citizens' opinions are evident for the political management because in the postmodern society political judgement is dangerous to found only on the hierarchial views (Luomala 2004).

In the City of Tampere the utilisation of new ICT networks, especially the Internet, in the citizen-oriented governance practices illustrates the features of administrative civic participation discourse. Obviously, this invitation to participate in municipal affairs has not been a great success (see Anttiroiko et al. in this publication). Some of the citizens actively consume public e-services but big crowds have not turned their activity to the city's political electronic discussion forums on the *Participation Portal*. Instead, it can be observed that only a few civil servants fairly diligently answer the questions and floors presented by individual citizens on these electronic sites, where the elected city representatives do not figure (Ridell 2004, 95).

However, we do not wish to propose that political civic activity on the Internet is somewhat impossible to perform. Our criticism take a stance that citizens' political judgements and actions are highly present on the Internet (Meikle 2002, McCaughey & Ayers 2003, van de Donk et al. 2004) but citizens cannot 'properly', or in intensive political conflicts don't want to, harmonise their subjective or do-it-yourself styles of action to the demanding practices constructed by the party-administration

form of political governance. To demonstrate this argument we have conducted a brief rhetorical analysis of the citizen discussions of the *Preparation Forum (Valma)*⁷ located on the website of the City of Tampere. In addition we have connected the concept of political judgement to our research subject to take a hold of the field of electronic civic political action. During January-October 2004, 30 administratively launched discussion topics were published on the *Preparation Forum* discussion site and 254 floors took place on the forum (up to 19 Oct 2004). Most of the addresses (or floors) have been characterised by a strong normative attitude, in other words, the participants have wanted to express their opinions about how things should be and how they ought to be understood. In any case, a majority of the addresses tended to argue for their opinions at least in some way, even though they could not always be considered as being valid or persuasive.

Our study reveals not only big differences concerning the argumentation techniques and the types of knowledge used in the discussions. We could also see that certain argumentation techniques and types of knowledge were dominant in the samples. Most of the floors contained an argumentation technique that emphasises informed argument. Singular and perceptive knowledge was used extensively, and it was often related to the people's own observations and lives. When using this type of knowledge people rarely try to evince, or even can evince, a complex construction of the present. Instrumental and modal knowledge were also used to some extent. However, in political deliberation they are used mainly in order to choose desirable forms of action, because instrumental action cannot offer any universal functional solution to a political problem. In civic deliberations, the floors offering solutions by utilising instrumental knowledge have often seemed to consist of the speaker's own empirical observations of their environment. In the

online deliberations, the citizens seldom justified their views by evoking other kinds of facts, regularities, causal connections or explanations about why or to what end certain states of affairs are to prevail or come into being. Systematic evaluations about ways in which certain issues and functions might perhaps be connected to a wider context were rarely pursued.

The City of Tampere's *Participation Portal* and online forums have not developed, as the tradition of participatory democracy theory envisages, into a cradle of new communal politics in which the citizens would aim to handle common societal issues by applying civil and deliberative means. The motives hypothesised by participatory, deliberative theory do not govern the actual processes of party-administration machinery organised civic deliberation, and political participation does not transform into the envisaged cognitive learning event. Neither have the deliberations obliged participants to present their arguments in an informatively and reasoned fashion. The arguments and their contents have been dominated by the participants' own subjective and normative opinions about issues on the agenda.

The political deliberations we have analysed can be described as the speakers' subjective performances, directed at an audience. The addresses delivered in the Internet-forums do not conform to a reasonable and knowledgeable style of deliberation that is supposed to be facilitated by the forums. The addresses are mainly subjective, situational judgements about the style and ways according to which the actor has formulated his/her performance. Hannah Arendt defines situational and temporal political action, politicking, as a performing art, by which she refers to politicking as action; action that has its own independent existence as a product of acting. The principles that guide political action are formed in an actual political performance (Arendt 1987 [1961], 152–153). Political action must thus always be understood, at least partly, as a situational and temporal performance, in which

political judgements or self-assessments become concrete in the present situation.

In this performative view, political judgement is defined as action in which a political actor judges some situation. According to Kari Palonen, in theorising the concept of political judgement, it has to be noted that political action in itself is based upon criteria that apply to action in contingent situations. He divides politics, on a temporal basis, into verbal forms of politicisation and politicking. When politics is viewed as an action, politicisation and politicking are displayed as primary performative operations (Palonen 1998, 5–6). In political judgement the focus is on the making of politicisations, which refers to opening new contingent dimensions for politicking. Politicking the present is an inseparable part of the politicised horizon of opportunity. The political sphere, strengthened by the polity, excludes and includes some possible forms of politicisation and bars some politicisations from becoming generally accepted policies. As a concept political judgement crosses the border between the conformed and non-conformed spheres of the polity, and the politicisations are combined with the aspects of the past and the future. Political judgements connected to the non-conformed sphere are difficult for performative actors due to the fact that the constraints formed by the generally accepted sphere are also regarded as general restrictions of politicking (Palonen 1998, 8–9).

However, according to Palonen, politicking includes an attribute of transcendence. This is because politicking takes place in the extended moment of the present in which the predetermined formalities do not apply. The momentary separation of politicking creates an opportunity to construct alternative modes of action (Palonen 1998, 10). Political judgement can attain a reflective form, which critically examines the prevailing hegemony and constructs alternative discourses

(Forti 1998, 27–28). Political judgement, then, is not merely judgment from the viewpoint of a spectator; there is always an aspect of self-judgement attached to the action. This means that an actor judges his/her own position in relation to the political mode of action and to the politicking of the active politicians (Palonen 1998, 10). The performance of political action means that through the Internet, offering communicative civic space, citizens have an improved opportunity to make public political judgments and self-assessments of their own. On the Internet these judgements do not need to be policy-conforming; they can gain attention and take place on the political playground through their alternative performances. The Internet, then, provides citizens with a channel through which they can try to take a position on a local, national or transnational public political debate.

Political judgment presupposes a *sensus communis*, or an agreement of minds, which does not, however, refer to the social capability that arises when people are pursuing a good political community. *Sensus communis* refers to a kind of preliminary stage in the process of political judgment. It manifests itself as two simultaneously occurring conditions: as the opportunity to communicate (language) and as a general opportunity to share (Forti 1998, 21). On the basis of this assumption, political judgment manifests itself as a practical rationality and as a form of communicative action and understanding. This allows room for subjective meaning-making of occurrences without having to give them a definitive meaning (Forti 1998, 29).

Practical rationality cannot be understood as a function of reason that uses knowledge as an instrument. It must be understood as a thinking process that formulates meanings and stories upon which the operations of the mind, will and judgment depend. These operations are significant elements in trying to understand political action (Kotkavirta 1998, 117). The human

reason that uses knowledge as an instrument always tries to reach some objective and to attain truth. Therefore, the process of reason creates knowledge that political judgment cannot pursue. Thinking, for its part, is not characteristically instrumental or orientated towards any particular objective. It is not governed by given methods or regulations: thinking consists of ideas, which give birth to new ideas. Political thinking and judgment cannot be conducted individually in the same way as cognitive reasoning. Political judgments aspire to meaningful claims and assertions, and the tenability of these judgments assumes quite a special and specific nature. In other words, they are not held to be universal. Understanding and interpreting situations are objectives of judgments, not universal truths. Thus understood politics creates shared understandings about interpretations, meanings, values, norms, good and bad, right and wrong, on the basis of which popular deliberation and action become possible. In this view, the political environment must be understood as an unpredictable and plural field, whose preliminary condition as well as outcome is a kind of *sensus communis* of the manifestation of the world (Kotkavirta 1998, 117–119).

Acting and judging politically are not the same thing, even though they cannot be separated in politics. In other words, political action calls for political judgment and vice versa. Acting and judging politically cannot always occur simultaneously because of the retrospective character of political judgment and because of the *ad hoc* factors that influence action. On the other hand, without retrospective judgments individual political activities would be meaningless. The inseparability of judging and acting comes to the fore when judgments are made about future occurrences. The actors have to anticipate their potential contingencies without having an opportunity to perceive the whole in the same way as can be done in relation to retrospective events. Reflective evaluation of the past, however,

provides political actors with a capacity to judge the future and to understand its unpredictability (Parvikko 1998, 49–50). Thinking is the only means by which the political actor can direct his/her action to events that might take place in the future.

The concept of political judgment, in the Arendtian temporal point of view, puts forward the contingent and unpredictable character of political action. The political environment of action described by this concept does not allow the use of knowledge in politics in an instrumental or goal-oriented manner; the utilisation of knowledge cannot have the same kind of role that it has, for example, in rational natural sciences. According to the political judgement approach; information documents attached to the City of Tampere website belong to the realm of practical rationality. That is, they have to be seen as objects of meaningful subjective thinking and judging. The citizens' political activities in the City electronic forums are guided by subjective and situational judgements about those performative actions according to which they decide to act.

Conclusions

The theoretical approaches of participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and e-democracy have misinterpreted and constructed in an incorrect manner the nature of institutionalised electronic political deliberation. According to these theories, deliberations should be reasonable and disagreements resolvable by dialogue (Schalken 2000, 168; Meikle 2002, 34–37, 55–58). However, it is characteristic to politics that opinions about political issues differ from each other. Reasonable and knowledgeable argumentation cannot therefore be treated as a method that would be able to remove the basic element of politics, i.e. conflict (Rättilä 1999, 54–57).

In principal, the e-governance practices constructed by the City of Tampere have to be comprehended as supportable governing activities. Normatively, it cannot be erroneous behaviour for political governors in democratic polity to strive *to hear and to listen to more inhabitants than before in all the matters of the city*. The governance model presented in the City of Tampere *Participation Portal* website attempts to answer globalised modernisation pressures by engaging the citizens in the communicative processes of political regime. The public organisations strive towards dialogic relationships with various stakeholders because political environments have become highly complex and fragmented. However, the organic preconditions set by the administrative participation discourse have a very limited capability of responding to the challenge of authentic *citizen politics* (Donk et al. 2004), which means making meaningful political judgements and acting politically in your own terms. This is the main reason for low participation figures on *the Participation Portal*.

Although we can easily conclude that the City of Tampere e-democracy experiments have only gained modest results in activating citizens and inserting e-democracy practices into the dynamics of the representative system (this has also been a reality for other top-down e-democracy pilots) (Dahlgren 2004, xiii), we are also able to note the substantial intensity in local civic netactivism bringing alternative meanings and practices from below (Ridell 2004). Extra-institutional politics is particularly keen to adopt the new ICT offering publicness and public spaces as a tool and a channel to compete in complex democratic games (Donk et al. 2004). In the society of interactive media the do-it-yourself civic activity is much easier than before. The logic of computer-mediated communication enables nearly unlimited freedom to produce digital contents on the electronic network.

Political judgement at the level of free debate easily detaches the debate from conformistic policies. It can also stimulate citizens to take up performative means of action in the political arena. Thus the citizens can have an opportunity to create and open new avenues of politicisation. Generally, it seems that performative politics defines citizens' political action. On the Internet space citizens are politicking in the context of the near past, present and near future. In modernised information societies this means a substantial potential for citizen politics facilitating new styles of political action and accelerating the fractures of political environment in local, national and transnational levels.

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Endnotes

- ¹ <http://www.tampere.fi/>
- ² <http://www.tampere.fi/osallistuminen/index.html>
- ³ <http://www.tampere.fi/osallistuminen/index.html>
- ⁴ <http://www.tampere.fi/osallistu/valma/index.htm>
- ⁵ General confidence to high-level education also presupposes citizens' computer literacy.
- ⁶ Incorrect is taken here to refer to a political opinion, which cannot be reasoned in a generally acceptable manner.
- ⁷ <http://www.tampere.fi/osallistu/valma/>