



oxford internet institute university of oxford

The Networked Public Sphere

Internet and Democracy

20 June 2008: Session II

Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaften

Universität Bonn



Source: e-media.at



Coming up ...

1. democracy models for eDemocracy
2. the networked public sphere
3. 5.30pm: Markus Beckedahl
[netzpolitik.org] about blogging
4. 6pm: Oliver Märker [zebralog] about
online dialogues



Markus Beckedahl

- netzpolitik.org, campaign blog for
 - freedom of expression online
 - data protection
 - free software
 - free culture
- Creative Commons project lead Germany
- company: newthinking communications
 - agency for Open Source Software (e.g. Linux)
 - PR, software implementation, shop
 - conference organisers (Linuxtag, re:publica)



Oliver Märker

- zebraLog
 - based in Berlin and Bonn
 - online dialogues for all levels of government
- until 2006:
 - Fraunhofer Institut für Intelligente Analyse- und Informationssysteme
- till 2004
 - PhD thesis on “Online-Mediation as an instrument for sustainable urban and regional planning”



Why bother about democracy?

SPIEGEL ONLINE [Wednesday, 18. June 2008](#)

- **“Wissenschaftler warnen in einer neuen Studie: Demokratie ist vielen Bürgern kaum etwas wert.”**
- **“Mit dem Begriff Demokratie können viele nichts anfangen.”**
- **“Demokratie gilt nur so lange etwas wert, wie sie individuellen Wohlstand garantiert.”**



Foundations of eDemocracy



„The trouble with the zealots of technology as an instrument of democratic liberation is not their understanding of technology but their grasp of democracy.“

Benjamin Barber (1997:224)



Would they like eDemocracy?



- preconditions
 - access
 - democracy



What is democracy?

*„government of the people, by the people,
for the people“* (Heywood 2002)

- political equality (equal weight for every vote)
- popular control
- dates back to ancient Athens



The problem of democratic control

- major antagonism: direct participation VS. complexities and time needs of governing
- basic distinction
 - direct (e.g. ancient Athens)
 - indirect / representative (think contemporary democracies)
- modern democracies
 - political experts
 - popular control by elections (periodic, competitive)
 - majority vote



Crucial role of public sphere

- Öffentlichkeit
 - mediates between politics and other systems
 - created through communication
 - encompasses mass media, issue publics (e.g. public events) as well as personal encounters
- role
 - information for political control
 - reaching consensus on problems
 - organise for collective action
- *public space*
 - physical: publicly accessible, ie. not private
 - communicative: open, visible
- place to discuss *political* issues, ie.
 - common good
 - what affects all and needs a common resolution
 - non-individual, non-particular



Criticism of mass media public sphere

„Contemporary democracies suffer from what might be called a deliberative deficit: an absence of spaces or occasions for the public to engage in open and critical discussion in which opinions can be exchanged and reviewed and policy decisions influenced.“

(Coleman, 2007: 370)

- mass media effects
 - agenda-setting
 - gatekeeping
 - corruption
 - quality
- passive audience
- problems of equality and reciprocity of participants



Electronic media as a public sphere – early studies

- Laudon, K. C. 1977. ***Communications Technology and Democratic Participation.*** New York: Praeger.
 - *“implicit in the development of certain information technologies are very definite models of democracy which differ considerably from one another”* p14
- Pool, Ithiel de Sola. 1983. ***Technologies of Freedom.*** Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.
 - main concern: protection of „freedom of speech“ principle from the press also in electronic media
 - shifts focus to a „new“ understanding of electronic media, ie. as a public sphere or a space



The potential of ICTs

- it's all about INFORMATION (e.g. see Bimber 2002)
 - who owns information and
 - what is cost of obtaining it

“The hope has been that the Internet would expand the public sphere, broadening both the range of ideas discussed and the number of citizens allowed to participate.”

(Hindman forthcoming:6)



Features of public sphere

• traditional public sphere

- one-way / broadcast
- high communication costs
 - limited bandwidth
 - selection bias / gatekeeping
- producer-consumer distinction
 - passive audience
 - hierarchy
- time and space constraints
 - national
 - news cycles / synchronous

• networked public sphere

- one-2-one & broadcast / interactive
- low communication costs
 - information abundance
 - access to audience / visibility
 - pluralistic / unmediated information
- shift consumers to producers
 - active users
 - horizontal / equality
- no time and space constraints
 - transnational
 - always on / asynchronous



Implications for democracy

eVoting and
opinion polling

forum for discussion
and deliberation

accountability by direct
link to representative

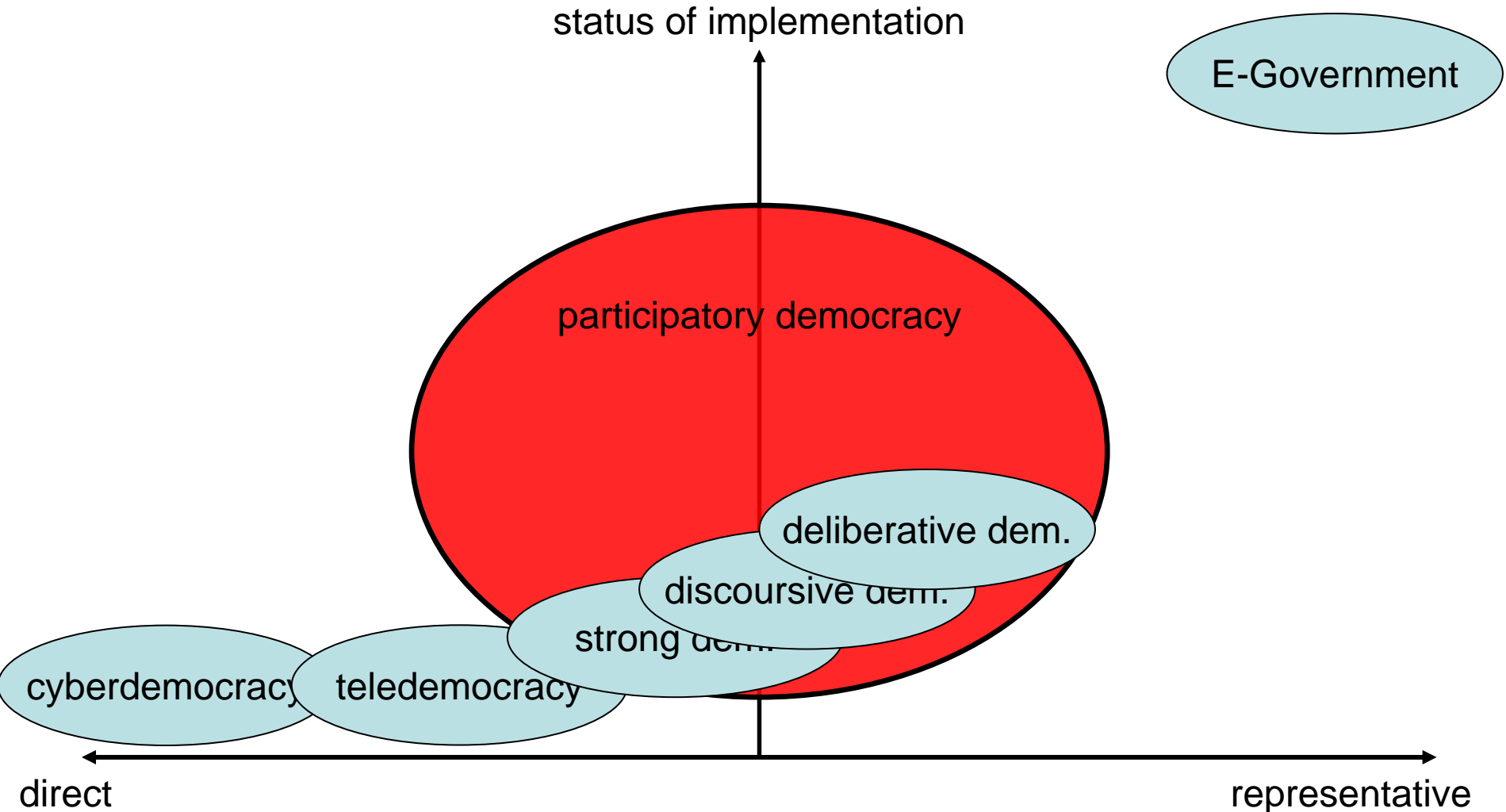
peer production /
self organisation

better access to
gov services

arena of free speech /
plurality of
information and
opinions



Which (e)Democracy?





Which (e)Democracy?

- cyberdemocracy
 - *“The two dreams of this virtual class mix in the Cyberdemocracy concept: the dream for true democracy, generally understood as direct, selfempowered citizen government, and the dream for material wealth, the individual pursuit of happiness (generally measured in dollars and stock values).”* (Hagen 1997)
- teledemocracy
 - *“Using advanced computers, satellites, telephones, cable, polling techniques, and other tools, an educated citizenry can, for the first time in history, begin making many of its own political decisions”* (Toffler 1980:430)
- strong democracy
 - *“a democracy that reflects the careful and prudent judgement of citizens who participate in deliberative, self-governing communities”* (Barber 1997)
- deliberative democracy
 - *“Despite their differences, these deliberative democrats all agree that democracy should be more than just a process for bargaining and aggregation of preferences. All suggest that true participation requires citizens to engage in direct discussion with other citizens.”* (Hindman forth)
- discursive democracy
 - *„Jeder soll an der Kommunikation teilnehmen dürfen und jedes Thema soll behandelt werden können. Zwischen den Teilnehmern soll Gleichheit herrschen und nur die Kraft des besseren Arguments soll im herrschaftsfreien Diskurs zählen.“* (Habermas)
- E-Government
 - use of ICTs for government processes and citizen-government interactions



Which (e)Democracy?

- explicit model not so important
- broadly participatory, based on opportunities of networked public sphere
- some baselines
 - discourse
 - deliberation
 - inclusive
 - public
 - no particular interests but common good



Summary

- democracy as people making the decisions, either direct or indirect
- need information in order to do this
- public sphere provides information and space to discuss, (reach agreement) and take action
- ICTs transform public sphere and offer opportunities for more participation and maybe even more direct democracy



The End

see you tomorrow at 10am 😊



references

- Barber, B. R. (1997). "The New Telecommunications Technology: Endless Frontier or the End of Democracy?" Constellations 4(2): 208-228.
- Bimber, B. A. (2002). Information and American democracy : technology in the evolution of political power. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Gerhards, J. and F. Neidhardt (1993). Strukturen und Funktionen moderner Öffentlichkeit. Politische Kommunikation. Grundlagen, Prozesse, Strukturen. W. R. Langenbucher. Wien: 52-88.
- Hagen, M. (1997). "A Typology of Electronic Democracy." from http://www.uni-giessen.de/fb03/vinci/labore/netz/hag_en.htm.
- Heywood, A. (2002). Politics. Basingstoke, Palgrave.
- Hindman, M. S. (forthcoming). "Voice, Equality, and the Internet."
- Toffler, A. (1980). The third wave. London, Collins.