

Chapter 1

Between Davos and Porto Alegre: Democratic Entrepreneurship as Crowdsourcing for Ideas

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ABSTRACT

Surfing contemporary media communications allows us to notice the names of a Swiss town of Davos and a Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. They stand for two different strategies of pursuing knowledge, allocating it to social institutions and organizing social learning processes. The first is for the rich and powerful. The second is for the poor and powerless. Both symbolize global class struggles, also in producing and applying knowledge, which is the fastest growing human resource. What if we apply the idea of a democratic entrepreneurship and explore contemporary possibilities of information and communication technologies from the point of social learning processes? Can improved learning be imagined as the only sustainable guideline in the longer run? Can primitive accumulation of knowledge give way prevent costly cognitive failures?

MOTTO

Very much like the US Americans, we believe in God. But as opposed to them, we don't trust Him. - Laybach Group, Slovenia

Is it OK to be a Luddite? - Thomas Pynchon

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ideological Bias

Political processes in complex societies flow in the shadow of two dangers looming large over frequently declining public attention and diminishing civic participation. One of them is the power of ideological hegemony exercised by networks of influence in multi-mediated social communications, which prevent targeted citizens from unbiased self-reflection on their authentic interests and possible futures. This is why poor US voters in Wyoming identified with George W. Bush in spite of the fact that his policies harmed them more than any other group of the US citizens, and why voters who are most likely to suffer from policies announced by Donald Trump in his race for the presidential nomination on behalf of the Republican party also tend to support him - rather than choosing Bernie Sanders, who is the strongest advocate of social security in the US political arena. Nor is the problem limited to established democracies – Russian voters also tend to support the absolute rule of the current president - Putin (at least in so far as one can judge from biased reporting in censored media and lack of mass protests against the invasion of Ukraine, Crimea or Syria). In all three cases mentioned above an astonishing display of counterproductive preferences seems to be anchored in ideological preferences and unchecked beliefs, which can be manipulated in multi-mediated ecology of mass media (which manipulate bias and install frames of ideological reference) and social media (which cater to a private world of personal relationships and regulate the level of ideological contamination). Can we design an effective social clearing house for ideological contamination – following the lead of anti-Milosevic opposition in Serbia, which had subverted ideological domination of the ruling elite with subtle irony and succeeded in undermining of the coordinated media campaigns?

Another shadow looming large over public participation of informed citizens in democratic decision-making is disguised as the iron necessity of anonymous forces of progress and technological change. The emergent supercomputerized hyper-intelligent robot-like HAL9000 (to use the name of the rebellious supercomputer from Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey") embodies the threat of unexpected consequences of technological change enclosing individuals in a seamless web of predetermined technological choices, manipulated by military-industrial complexes and other uncontrolled networks of power and wealth. The impact of Information and Communication Technologies, and of searchable large data bases, upon surveillance of citizens - partly revealed by the Wikileaks and their counterparts in numerous other countries (the Polish "Sowa" restaurant tapes with politicians' private conversations are a case in point) clearly demonstrate a threat posed by the growth of intelligent computers, profiling techniques and the experiments of Google, Facebook and Microsoft. This threat is as real as a large and growing family of big brothers watching most of us most of the time. Does this mean that the future of most professions as we know it will be undermined by computers as much as the weavers' profession had been undermined by a steam-powered spinning wheel? Should we have been more alert and smash the Commodore desk computer before it grew into a mobile phone and portable iPad? No, not really, really not. We should invent more democratic forms of deciding about the future technologies, not close technologies down hoping that the earlier ones will be easier to control. Social learning does not have to involve throwing out these parts of a curriculum, which are hardest for the student to master.

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