

Chapter 78

New Technologies and Democratic Participation on the International Level

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ABSTRACT

This chapter shows that the role of new technologies in global democracy is very important. First, the concept of democracy is analyzed with particular reference to participation and (access to) information. Second, it is explained that democracy should not be limited to the national level because of the major changes of globalization and because of the fact that these changes influence the everyday lives of billions of people. Examples of the United Nations and the European Union are examined, the former as an example of what could be done and how (with regard to individuals' participation) and the latter as an example of what has already been achieved. Finally, it is explained how and under which conditions new technologies could help build more democratic and more participatory processes on the international level. The concept of access is the central link between information and communication technologies on the one side and international participatory democracy on the other.

DEMOCRACY, PARTICIPATION, AND INFORMATION

The term 'democracy' is composed of the Greek words 'demos' (people) and 'kratos' (power). It means that the power belongs to the people. As Abraham Lincoln said, democracy is the 'government of the people, by the people, for the people.'

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There have been many theories about democracy, about its advantages and pitfalls, its fundamental elements. Aristotle, Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Rousseau were only few of those who tried to explain and examine democracy. A common categorization of various patterns of democracy is that between direct/semi-direct and indirect (or representative) democracy (Denquin, 2008, pp. 264-265). This categorization has to do with *participation* which is considered to be a funda-

mental element of democracy (Dahl, 2001, pp. 62-63) and makes us think about *participative democracy* in particular.

Participative democracy obviously emphasizes participation. It calls for the political participation of as many people as possible in as many issues as possible. Participation is understood as involvement in the shaping of the general political will and as engagement in decision-making (Schmidt, 2004, pp. 279-281) as was revealed by Rousseau's thought, it helps protect the interests of the individuals and promote good governance (Pateman, 1974, p. 24). Participative democracy is of utmost importance especially nowadays not only because centers of power are far from people and cannot easily be controlled but also because of globalization and the power and influence of international organizations.

It is true that democracy has traditionally been linked with sovereign states and so has participation. However, now that many competencies have been lost for the states and less decisions are made on the national level, individuals are less and less able to participate in policy planning and decision making. They are less and less able to control how they are governed. This is why participation and participative democracy should be strengthened and have a more powerful role on many levels. This would require sufficient information. Access to information is thus another constitutive element of modern representative democratic governance (Dahl, 2001, pp. 120, 134-135).

Summarizing the above, it would be true to say that two elements of democracy particularly important in our days are information and participation. We need to be *well informed* in order to *control* and *participate* actively in policies and decisions that concern us directly. As a result, democracy will henceforth be understood as a synthesis of the following two concepts: *information and participation*.

The question that comes next is: where should democracy exist nowadays? Who/what has to be

democratic in the era of globalization and increasing interdependence? Answering these challenging questions needs first to define *governance*.

DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Supposing that democracy applies by definition (as shown above) to those who have the power and that its exercise should be in favor of the people, we think that it should be understood not only as concerns (national) governments but in the more general context of *governance*. What governance means and how it is distinguished from government will be treated shortly in the following paragraphs.

For many centuries, states had been the only source of power and influence. States and national *governments* had been for a long time considered as the only subjects of international law, they had the power to impose their will domestically and conclude treaties internationally. They were major mechanisms of political organization (Deliyianni-Dimitrakou, 2008, p. 7). As long as this was the situation, democracy was only described as a way of governing (in the sense of a government) a people. It had to do with institutions, procedures and practices inside states.

However, as cooperation between states began flourishing and as it started having an organized and institutionalized form (Woods, 2002, p. 29) states lost the monopoly of power and their hegemony collapsed. Many other subjects of international law emerged: Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), Transnational Corporations (TNCs), elite groups or mass publics (Rosenau, 2002, p. 80). All these 'players' intervene, interact, and on several occasions create 'law' either in its traditional form or in the form of 'soft law.' The creation of new problems because of political and financial globalization (Lake, 1999, p. 42) has led to the effort to respond to these challenges through

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