
Editorial: The democracy dilemma in the era of globalisation: can ICT enhance democracy, participation, accountability and political autonomy in the public sphere?

Christina M. Akrivopoulou

Greek Refugee Appeals Authority,
Kanellopoulou Avenue 2, PC 101 77, Athens, Greece
E-mail: akrivopoulouchristina@gmail.com

Biographical notes: Christina M. Akrivopoulou holds the post of committee President in the Greek Refugee Appeals Authority. She has a PhD in Constitutional Law and has been a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Greek Scholarship Foundation and the Aristotle University Research Committee. Her main research interests concern human and constitutional rights, the protection of the right to privacy, data protection, the private-public distinction, asylum and citizenship. She has lectured in the Faculty of Political Sciences of Democritus University of Thrace, in Hellenic Open University, in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and in the EMA Unesco Chair inter-university master class. She also works as an Attorney-at-Law at the Thessaloniki Law Bar Association. She is collaborating with several Greek law reviews and she is an active member of many non-governmental human rights organisations in Greece and abroad.

Many problems that the modern representative democracies face in the era of globalisation, namely corruption, political apathy, lack of transparency and legitimacy in the field of political decision-making as well as the need for more transparency and accountability in the public sphere. These problems form what we nowadays characterise as the ‘democratic deficit’ of the modern representative democracies and are even more augmented due to the ongoing European and global financial crisis and thus calling for a re-evaluation and re-appreciation of the traditional democratic principles and institutions.

Traditionally, the democratic principle as any democratic regime’s *grundnorm* could be defined via four pillars which consisted its core, its *sine qua non* minimum content. The first is undoubtedly *citizenship* and *political autonomy*. A democratic regime founded on the democratic principle is based on the *people*, a collective entity of free and equal subjects that enjoy political autonomy, thus the rights:

- a to participate in the public sphere
- b to fully express their political ideas and convictions
- c to be informed on matters of public interest
- d to scrutinise and hold accountable the public officials.

This collective entity, the people, presents the very basis of any democratic regime, functions as the subject of every political decision made in a democratic system and as the source of its legitimation. The second essential element of the democratic principle is

political participation and the existence of a political, of a *public sphere*. Thus, the citizens of a polity, the people, should not only have the right to participate but their actual and true participation should be guaranteed and realised via the construction of a *public sphere, an agora*, an actual (e.g., parliament) or metaphorical space which is transparent and open freely and equally to all and in which political ideas, political dialogue and deliberation can be nurtured.

The third essential element of any democratic system is identified to the principles of *transparency* and *accountability* of political decisions, politicians and public officials. Transparency is essential for the citizens to be fully and effectively informed on matters of public interest and common value in order to substantially participate and scrutinise political decisions, public policies, politicians and public officials. In the same framework, accountability is a necessary prerequisite in order for the people to function as a 'watchdog' as the ultimate guarantor of any democratic system and protect it against corruption and arbitrariness. Accountability enhances the trust of the citizen to the political institution and maximises the responsibility of the public officials both in a moral and in a practical sense.

The fourth necessary element of the democratic principle is its *legitimacy* both as a formal and as a substantial parameter of democratic decision-making. Thus, in any democratic system, the democratic decision-making should respect all the procedural rules that guarantee the citizens political participation (e.g., that parliamentary elections should be held every four years). This is the formal aspect of legitimacy, which is identified to the rules, either legislative or constitutional that regulate the democratic procedure. On the other hand, democratic legitimacy is also a matter of substance. The democratic decision-making should not only be based on democratic procedures (e.g., the majority principle) but also in open dialogue and in its fair and justified results. Thus, from its substantial aspect legitimacy means that the people, the public opinion, should be able to scrutinise in the public sphere any political decision which is not democratically formed (in terms of procedure) or is not democratic in its content and subsequently not fair (in terms of substance).

What we nowadays call 'democratic deficit' is the malfunction of the four above core aspects of the democratic principle. More and more today, the citizens abstain from their active political participation in the public sphere and from the public deliberation and dialogue. A major symptom of what we call 'political apathy' is the citizens' unwillingness to participate in elective procedures as well as their reluctance in fulfilling their fiscal duties. These phenomena known as 'free riding', because they result in burdening the citizens that actively participate with the obligations of the 'free riders', are commonplace in the modern representative democracies. In a similar framework, the public space as a place that all citizens can freely and equally participate in the democratic decision-making has been eroded. Thus, nowadays, the media and not, e.g., the parliament represent the public space where the political dialogue and public deliberations takes place, though not in a sense that includes all the citizens but only the elites, the government bodies and politicians. This evolution has slowly transformed the people from active citizens to a pathetic audience, from the *doers* of a given political system to its *watchers*.

In a similar level, the fact that the vast majority of political decisions is taking place in a supranational level (e.g., the European Union) and thus in a distanced from the nation state's citizens forum, is rendering hard if not impossible the actual political participation of the people in the public affairs. In the same framework, the transparency

of the public sphere seems an illusion since not only the majority of political decisions is taking place in a supranational level but it is also based on perplexed procedures that lack of democratic legitimacy or are do not guarantee the actual information of the public opinion. In the end, the democratic legitimacy of the modern representative democracies of the era of globalisation is doubted due to the augmenting phenomena of corruption.

In this background, there are many voices raised that call for renewed and modernised democratic mechanisms that can regenerate the classic values of democracy in the era of globalisation. Thus, it is argued that the use of interactive communication technologies (ICT) can facilitate the need for 'more democracy' especially in the fields of participation, transparency and accountability. Therefore, cyberspace, blogosphere, social networks can be used as a metaphorical *public space, an agora* where the exchange of political ideas and political dialogue can take place. In the same level, ICT can be employed in order to facilitate forms of direct democracy such as e-referenda, or to enable transparency of democratic decision-making through policies of electronic public deliberation and subsequently enhance public accountability.

Bibliography

A basic bibliographical guide in the subjects of democracy, ICT, public autonomy and accountability is presented below:

- Akrivopoulou, Ch. and Garipidis, N. (2012) *Human Rights and Risks in the Digital Era: Globalization and the Effects of Information Technologies*, IGI Global, Hershey and New York.
- Akrivopoulou, Ch. and Garipidis, N. (2013) *Digital Democracy and the Impact of Technology on Governance and Politics: New Globalized Practices*, IGI Global, Hershey and New York.
- Akrivopoulou, Ch. and Psygkas, Ath. (2011) *Personal Data Privacy and Protection in a Surveillance Era: Technologies and Practices*, IGI Global, Hershey and New York.
- Arterton, C.F. (1987) *Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy?*, Sage, Newbury Park.
- Bang, H. (2003) *Governance as Social and Political Communication*, Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York.
- Barber, B.R. (1998) *A Passion for Democracy: American Essays*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Beck, U., Giddens, A. and Lash, S. (1994) *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Beetham, D. (1991) *The Legitimation of Power*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London.
- Bennett, L.W. and Entman, R.M. (2001) *Mediated Politics. Communication in the Future of Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Budge, I. (1996) *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy*, Blackwell, Cambridge.
- Castells, M. (1996) *The Network City*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Cronin, T.E. (1989) *Direct Democracy: The Politics of Initiative, Referendum and Recall*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Dahl, R.A. (1989) *Democracy and its Critics*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Gray, Ch.H. (2002) *Cyborg Citizen*, Routledge, New York.

- Habermas, J. (1991) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: A Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Hidman, M. (2009) *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Hughes, J. (2004) *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future*, Westview Press, Cambridge MA.
- Huntington, S.P. and Nelson, J.M. (1976) *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Johnston, H., Larāna, E. and Gusfield, J.R. (1994) *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Jung, H.Y. (1979) *The Crisis of Political Understanding*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh.
- Kaare, S., Müller, W.C. and Bergman, T. (2003) *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, OUP, Oxford.
- Kasvio, A. and Anttiroiko, A-V. (2005) *E-City. Analysing Efforts to Generate Local Dynamism in the City of Tampere*, Tampere University Press, Tampere.
- Keane, J. (1991) *The Media and Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Keane, J. (1998) *Civil Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- March, J.G. and Olson, J.P. (1995) *Democratic Governance*, The Free Press, New York.
- Martinussen, W. (1977) *The Distant Democracy*, John Wiley & Sons, London, New York, Sydney, Toronto.
- McCandless, H.E. (2001) *A Citizen's Guide to Public Accountability: Changing the Relationship Between Citizens and Authorities*, Trafford, Victoria BC.
- McCaughy, M. and Ayers, M.D. (2003) *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York & London.
- McNair, B. (1995) *An Introduction to Political Communication*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Meikle, G. (2002) *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet*, Routledge, London.
- Mulgan, P. (2003) *Holding Power to Account: Accountability in Modern Democracies*, Pelgrave, Basingstoke.
- Norris, P. (2001) *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*, University Press, Cambridge.
- Przeworski, A., Stokes, S.C. and Manin, B. (1999) *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Roberts, J.T. (1982) *Accountability in Athenian Government*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI.
- Saward, M. (2000). *Democratic Innovation: Deliberation, Representation, and Association*, Routledge, London.
- Schedler, A., Diamond, L. and Plattner, M.F. (1999) *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London.
- Smelser N.J. and Baltes, P.B. (2001) *International Encyclopedia of the Social Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier, Amsterdam.
- Solove, D.J. (2004) *The Digital Person: Technology and Privacy in the Information Age*, New York University Press, New York & London.
- van de Donk, W., Loader, B.D., Nixon, P.G. and Rucht D. (2004) *Cyberprotest. New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*, Routledge, London and New York.

- van Slyke, C. (2008) *Information Communication Technologies: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (Six Volumes)*, IGI Global, Hershey and New York.
- Verba, S. and Nie, N.H. (1972) *Participation in America*, Harper & Row, New York.
- Verba, S., Schlozman, K.L. and Brady, H. (1995) *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Waldron, J. (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Wilhelm, A.G. (2000) *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*, Routledge, London & New York.
- Williams, R. (2006) *Leadership Accountability in a Globalizing World*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.