

Chapter Two

Communication and (e)democracy: assessing European e-democracy discourses

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Introduction

This chapter aims to articulate the conceptual nexus between communication and democracy, through a reflection on ‘e-democracy’ discourses. We address the connection between the ‘e-’ dimension and democracy as:

[a] political concept, concerning the collectively binding decisions about the rules and policies of a group, association or society. Such decision-making can be said to be democratic to the extent that it is subject to the controlling influence of all members of the collectivity considered as equals (IDEA, 2002: 13).

Recent initiatives for the analysis and assessment of democratic systems, alongside efforts to clarify the articulation between e-government, e-governance, and e-democracy, offer theoretical and empirical insights towards the development of frameworks for the assessment of electronic democracy as well. From a theoretical perspective, those initiatives build on developments in democratic theory that stress a substantial vision of democratic processes; while at the empirical level they contribute in identifying criteria and indicators for the evaluation of practices, which can be relevant for both offline and online modes.

We, therefore, start by positioning societal transformations in relation to democratic practices and reviewing some of these reflections in order to identify the basic elements for a (re)conceptualization of democracy in the information age. We then proceed by investigating if and how these core elements play a meaningful role in contemporary discourses on e-democracy, through a lexical-content analysis of documents, which represent different perspectives from which the e-democracy discourse is being developed. Finally, since e-democracy is generally understood as a way to strengthen and revive democracy through the application and use of tools that enhance information flows and communication processes in society, and given the close relation between democracy and the exercise of human rights, particularly communication rights, this analysis of e-democracy discourses will identify some open issues that pertain to the potentialities and challenges of information and communication technologies’

(ICTs) applications in the promotion, protection, and realization of communication rights in Europe.

E-Democracy: introductory remarks

It may be useful to outline some of the reasons why the e-democracy concept has become widely discussed and related practices introduced in recent times. We here underline three aspects [1].

First, the evolution and diffusion of ICTs in the last decade in European countries and the centrality they have acquired in many aspects of life have made ICTs' applications increasingly relevant for political systems. They challenge modes of relations which have for decades been grounded on a prevailing representative conception of democracy and open up spaces of horizontal exchange and more direct participation. At the same time, policies for ICT applications and diffusion imply innovations in policy-making processes.

Second, this potential to revive democratic practice and strengthen the opportunities for active citizenship emerges at a time when democratic countries are facing a double challenge. On one hand we observe a disengagement from the formal political life. This apparent disconnection between political elites and large parts of the population has many reasons: a growing complexity of contemporary societies (plurality of demands, different priorities, globalizing processes etc.); the loss of political socialization mechanisms through immediate channels such as the family and education systems to the advantage of mass mediated forms; and changes in the very essence of political communication, which is highly conditioned by a media logic that is more responsive to market and commercial interests than to public interests. On the other hand there are growing visible expressions of national and transnational contentious politics denouncing the limits of public institutions' capacity to respond to demands and priorities expressed by groups and communities and the lack of legitimacy in institutional processes at all levels. These expressions are often interpreted as a generalized demand for more direct civil engagement in political processes.

Third, as Blumler and Coleman (2001: 7) remind us, the 1990s have 'witnessed a significant turn in democratic theory away from aggregative notions of preference building ... towards a more deliberative view of active citizenship'. A shift that was prompted, the authors suggest, by the need for democracies, after the end of the Cold War, to assert their values no longer 'in negative contradistinction to totalitarianism but in more positive normative terms' (Blumler and Coleman, 2001: 7).

The relationship between citizens and governments has changed in recent years, largely due to the increasing role of ICTs. Different concepts have been adopted to describe this transformation such as e-government, e-governance, and e-democracy. In many cases, such terms are used as buzzwords referring in

a rather vague way to the beneficial effects of ICTs on government–citizens relations. Though meaning different things, they all refer to the use of electronic means to improve government’s performance and citizen engagement (JANUS, 2001).

E-government is generally understood as the provision of government services by means of ICTs, allowing public administrations to provide traditional services in new and more efficient ways, as well as offering new services. E-governance refers to a broader set of steering processes in society embracing both e-government and e-democracy. As far as e-democracy, our starting point is an understanding of this concept as one aspect of democratic processes, which relates to the online activities of governments, elected representatives, political parties, and citizen groups (Kane and Patapan, 2004). As such e-democracy should necessarily be linked to the broader context of democratic practices and grounded in democratic theory.

There is no all-encompassing definition of the term ‘e-democracy’, and we find in literature several ways of describing these online activities. For some, there are different models of e-democracy (Kakabadse *et al.*, 2003): a bureaucratic one (service delivery); an information management conception focussed essentially on the potential of ICTs to foster the management of information of public relevance; a populist mode in which citizens can make their preferences known on a range of issues; and a civil society model which assumes the possibility of openness in the conduct of governmental and political practice. For others, e-democracy can be conceived as ‘the use of ICTs and CMC to enhance active participation of citizens and support the collaboration between actors for policy making purposes, without the limits of time and space and other physical conditions in democratic communications’ (JANUS, 2001: 39): a usage of technology that enhances citizens’ empowerment and ability to control their governments, as well as communities’ power to deliberate and act. E-democracy is also thought as the ‘delivery of electronic democracy’ which range from the simple access of citizens to governmental information, to greater interaction between citizens and governments, to online participation in governmental actions and decisions through consultations and forums (Norris, 2003: 3). According to this approach, we may distinguish between a minimalist definition of e-democracy – in which citizens would enjoy electronic access to governmental information and be offered the opportunity to interact with governmental officials and conduct on-line transaction with governments – and a more substantial conception of democracy, which implies ‘a more active citizen involvement [... and] the ability to act both directly and through their chosen representatives to govern themselves and their communities’ (Norris, 2003: 3).

Interestingly, all perspectives seem to be aware of the different ‘degrees’ of engagement that can be found in e-democracy practices, making the participatory dimension one of the elements that needs to be theoretically

clarified and empirically assessed. Referring to relevant literature (OECD, 2001; The Access Initiative, 2003), we can in fact identify at least three levels of citizens' engagement that can be supported by ICTs: at the *information level* citizens may have access to relevant information – through websites, search engines, and electronic newsletters – that allows meaningful personal and organizational choices and decisions. At the *consultation level*, governments interact with citizens, adopting mechanisms, such as online forums, web-based platforms, and e-mail newsgroups, through which public debates and deliberation can inform decision-making processes. A third level is defined as *active participation*, stressing the potentialities (and challenges) for active engagement in partnerships and policy-making processes.

Thus the very idea of a more participatory style of democracy emerges as a feasible and desirable (if not needed) way to respond to something that has been neglected in representative models of democracies, namely robust deliberative processes and active citizens' participation (Barber, 1984). 'New forms of governance are increasingly consultative' (Blumler and Coleman, 2001: 6), and ICTs have a crucial role to play in this transformation, since they have the potential to enhance and facilitate citizens' involvement in discussing and deciding on issues of collective interest. In this perspective, e-democracy could be part of the recipe for strengthening democracy, since 'participation serves three important democratic values: legitimacy, justice and the effectiveness of public action' (Fung, 2005: 46).

Yet the very notion of participation becomes highly problematic when it needs to be translated into concrete modes: participation makes sense not as an end in itself but when it 'addresses pressing deficits in more conventional, less participatory arrangements' (Fung, 2005: 3). As different degrees of participation can be envisaged, very often actors that have stakes in policy processes have differentiated visions of participatory processes (Padovani and Tuzzi, 2004) and the difference between access and participation should be clearly articulated (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2005). Furthermore, the design and management of participatory practices require addressing a number of highly relevant queries concerning the 'who', 'how', and 'what for' of participation. As far as the subjects entitled to participate, we can have different levels of 'inclusion', from the broad macro-public or public sphere, to state actors, passing through mini-publics, including lay and professional stakeholders' selection. As far as the 'how' we can have different levels of 'intensity' in participation, from a general 'sit as observers' to actively deliberate, passing through education and development of preferences. Finally, possibly the most problematic aspect remains the 'influence' that public participation in deliberation and consultation can have on decision-making processes (Fung, 2005).

Given this complexity, when it comes to the adoption of ICTs to address democratic challenges we are faced with a number of open issues: what vision of democracy informs e-democracy developments? What is the awareness, both

at the institutional level and among citizens, of the challenges and opportunities brought about by the adoption of ICT to foster democratic processes? To what extent is the potential to enhance citizens' involvement actualized in practice?

A substantial understanding of democratic practice

In order to set the stage for a better understanding of e-democracy, we refer to recent attempts to conceptualize democracy beyond simple procedures. Earlier attempts to evaluate the 'quality of democracy' in contemporary societies (O'Donnel, 1994; Morlino, 2003a, b) were mostly developed within a state-centered approach to representative democracy, but the assumptions elaborated in order to develop indicators to evaluate national democratic quality may be generally applied to both offline and online practices as well as to different levels of authority, from the local to the global.

Following Morlino's conception of democratic quality, a first distinction can be made between formal and substantial democracy, that is, between the procedural aspects [2] and the content [3] dimension. A third element should also be taken into consideration, which is the result [4] (degree of satisfaction, or 'performance') of democratic systems. No full conceptualization of democracy can be developed unless all these three dimensions are considered and a multi-dimensional approach is adopted.

According to Morlino, five aspects should be taken into account, two of which relate to procedural aspects (the rule of law and accountability), one to performance (responsiveness), and two to substantial elements (respect for rights and freedoms and the implementation of a certain degree of equality). Each of these aspects can be differentiated in sub-elements and presupposes a set of democratic pre-conditions. As far as the relation between formal and substantial democracy, Morlino (2003b: 15) points to 'levels of intensity', stating that when speaking of 'procedural democracy' we refer to the 'who' and 'how' of decision-making, while substantial democracy concerns 'what' is being decided upon. Following the line of reasoning adopted earlier, who participates and how these participants interact are central elements of the procedural context of democratic practice; while the capacity of these subjects to affect the substantial output and outcome of such processes, depends on the level of influence they may exert (Pateman, 1970). Substantial democracy presupposes the procedural dimension of which it is a precious enrichment. Furthermore, if we are to evaluate democracy in substantial terms we would find several 'degrees' of democratic quality, due to the correspondence of concrete situations to an ideal of democratic practice. Morlino's proposal can be synthesized in the Table 1.

In order to further clarify the dimensions and develop an analytical framework for the assessment of e-democracy discourses, we refer to the methodology developed by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2002: 12). Starting from a review of former attempts to assess democracy (human rights surveys, governance assessments, democracy indices,

democratic audits) and trying to overcome their limits, IDEA produced a multi-dimensional assessment framework, the aim of which is to raise public consciousness, contribute to public debate, and provide an instrument to effectively evaluate how democratic reforms are implemented.

Table 1:

Dimensions, elements, and basic conditions of democracy (elaboration from Morlino, 2003b)

| Dimensions of democracy | Five aspects to evaluate democracy | Elements composing the different aspects | Basic pre-conditions |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|
| Procedural | <p>Rule of law (decisional output and implementation according to the supremacy of law)</p> <p>Accountability (obligation of elected political leaders to answer for their political decision when asked by citizen electors and other constitutional bodies)</p> <p>Vertical and horizontal accountability</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal enforcement of law • Supremacy of the legal state • Independence of the judiciary and fair resolution of lawsuits • Supremacy of the constitution • Information • Justification • Punishment/compensation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffusion of liberal and democratic values among both the people and, especially, elite • Existence of bureaucratic traditions • Legislative and economic means • Existence of a public dimension characterized by pluralism and the participation of a range of individuals and collective actors • Political competition/distribution of power • Well established intermediary structures (parties, media, associations that share democratic values) • Interested, educated and informed citizens who remain involved in political processes |

Table 1: (Continued)

| Dimensions of democracy | Five aspects to evaluate democracy | Elements composing the different aspects | Basic pre-conditions |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| Substantial | Respect for rights and achievement of freedoms Progressive implementation of greater political, social and economic equality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic, political and social rights • Formal and substantial equality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political will • Affluence • Organized interests • Political will • Affluence • Organized interests |
| Result | Responsiveness (the capacity to satisfy the governed by executing the policies that correspond to their demands) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies • Services • Distribution of material goods • Extension of symbolic goods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well established, independent, informed and engaged civil society • Concurrent presence of active intermediary structures |

The starting point is that *'the key democratic principles are those of popular control and political equality'* (IDEA, 2002: 13), two very general principles which need to be sustained and realized through a set of mediating values: participation, authorization, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity. Again a number of requirements (or pre-conditions) are identified, such as constitutionally recognized rights, capacities and resources, ad hoc agencies and a vibrant cultural life. It is precisely by looking at the implementation of these principles and requirements that a multi-dimensional assessment of democratic practice should be carried out.

What emerges from this quick review of democratic quality assessment exercises is a 'strong' version of democracy (Barber, 1984): a vision in which the exercise of *citizenship*, *rights* and *responsibilities*, and values of *participation*, *transparency*, *responsiveness*, *accountability* and *effectiveness* emerge as central nodes in the network of interactions that makes up a strong democratic project. These elements— citizenship, rights, responsibilities, participation, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, effectiveness— make up the initial list of concepts considered in our analysis. Besides this, since the focus here is on e-democracy, a few additional aspects have been included. The very nature of ICTs and online practices often relate to notions such as *debate*, *dialogue* and *consultation*, stressing the potential of information technologies to foster citizens' active participation and the expression of ideas and preferences. We have therefore

inserted these concepts in our analytical framework. Finally *information* and *communication*, the first indicating unidirectional transmission flows and the second underlying the horizontal dimension of exchange and interaction, seemed to be central to our attempt to connect electronic citizenship and communication as a fundamental right, and have thus been considered in our analysis.

Framing e-democracy discourses

Research questions and selection of documents

Our main research question, in looking at the e-democracy narrative, concerned the possibility to discern a coherent approach to e-democracy or to recognize that, on the contrary, diverse and possibly competing visions are emerging. To address this question, a lexical-content analysis has been conducted on a selection of documents, chosen as somehow ‘representative’ of the different voices producing contemporary e-democracy discourses. The language of academic reflections and the narratives emerging from practices in the field of e-democracy, but also the discourse that characterizes European institutions on the use of ICTs to foster and facilitate the relation between citizens and institutions, are compared. Due to requirements and constraints in the use of lexical-content analysis, we have chosen written texts that are short enough to be processed by the software used (Taltac), yet contribute substantially to the definition of e-democracy. These documents are well known and widely cited in the literature, and are recent enough to offer an account of contemporary reflections. Table 2 lists the selected texts as well as the rationale for our choice.

Our main research question has been articulated further in a set of sub-questions which guided the analysis of the selected documents:

- Looking at the language used by the different authors, is it possible to identify some ‘core concepts’ that could be considered as conceptual references of a shared vision of e-democracy?
- Through which concepts is the narrative elaborated? Are the dimensions/elements of democracy identified above relevant to e-democracy? What is the authors’ understanding of information and communication? And what is their perspective as far as citizens’ participation through on-line debates is concerned?
- Finally, which elements are specific to each document (or relatively more relevant in a document)? Is it possible to identify differences between a more academic-oriented discourse and the one that emerges from more institutional actors?

In order to answer these questions, and building on the earlier mentioned reflections on democratic quality, a set of key concepts/semantic areas have been identified in order to develop an analytical framework. We have thus looked at

Table 2:

List of the documents and rationale for their selection

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>J. G. Blumler and S. Coleman (2001), <i>Realising Democracy Online: A Civic Commons in Cyberspace</i>, IPPR/Citizen Online Research Publication.</p> | <p>A text written by two respected academics who have for many years devoted attention to changes in the sphere of political communication and more recently to the relation between democracy and technologies. Though written in an academic style, both in language and structure, it is not just an academic reflection as it develops clear-cut proposals for active intervention of institutional actors.</p> |
| <p>S. Clift (2003), <i>E-Government and Democracy. Representation and Citizen Engagement in the Information Age</i>.</p> | <p>The article is based on a research provided by the author to the United Nations UNPAN for the 2003 World Public Sector Report. It is grounded on the direct experience and engagement of Steven Clift in promoting and improving citizens participation through the use of the Internet since the mid 1990s, including the Minnesota E-Democracy project, one of the first consultative and participatory experiences using ICTs.</p> |
| <p>EU eGovernment Unit, (2004), <i>Report on 'eDemocracy Seminar'</i>, IS Directorate General, Brussels: European Commission.</p> | <p>The document is the official Report of the 'e-Democracy seminar' organized in Brussels (12 and 13 of February 2004) by the eGovernment Unit of the Information Society Directorate General of the European Commission. On that occasion over 250 experts and practitioners in e-democracy from across the European Union and beyond gathered 'to assess the current state of eDemocracy, how it is being practiced and what are the implications for the future'. The report is an overview of the interventions and discussions and is structured around two main streams: e-Voting and e-Participation.</p> |
| <p>R. W'O Okot-Uma (2004), <i>Electronic Governance and Electronic Democracy: Living and Working in the Connected World</i>, Commonwealth Centre for e-Governance.</p> | <p>This document, written by Rogers W'O Okot-Uma of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, is a chapter of a publication titled '<i>Electronic Governance and electronic democracy: living and working in the connected world</i>'. It has been selected in order to investigate the conceptual and linguistic relation and/or difference between discourses focused on e-democracy and those focused on e-governance.</p> <hr/> |

clusters of concepts [5], identified as central to a strong reading of democracy. Concepts related to: democracy, citizenship, participation, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and effectiveness, rights and responsibilities, debate, dialogue and consultation, information and communication.

From the analysis of the entire vocabulary of our corpus [6], a number of immediate observations emerge. The term ‘democracy’, as was foreseeable, is often used in all documents, yet the articulation in language – as expressed in formulations such as ‘participatory democracy’, ‘deliberative democracy’, etc. – is rich and diversified in only a few documents.

The ‘potentiality’ dimension, meaning a focus on opportunities and potential of ICTs, seems to prevail over the recognition of the challenges or constraints brought about by ICT applications. There is also a strong normative perspective indicating directions of what ‘should_be’ and ‘must_be’ done in order to develop e-democracy.

The ‘deliberative’ dimension made possible by ICTs seems to prevail on the ‘participative’ dimension, especially in the case of institutional speakers. All documents, except the EU one, refer to a connection between a transformation in democracy and innovative governance practices. Finally, a diffused reference to the global context indicates an awareness of global challenges which could be addressed also through e-democracy.

Lexical-content analysis and focus on specific semantic areas

For each key concept in our list, we have elaborated a table that shows how the specific semantic area is articulated in the corpus. In each table, we have positioned a selection of complex textual units (CTU), thus showing how many times each textual unit (rows in table) appears in each document (columns in table). This allows to identify which formulae are relevant to each speaker, while comparing similarities and differences, both from a quantitative point of view and in terms of the richness and depth of each speaker’s language.

Every document is also positioned in the semantic space created by each concept, producing a graphic visualization, which is helpful in identifying documents’ specificities, allowing an immediate comparison in terms of which document is similar to which according to the language used. Each table (and figure) is followed by a short comment, while a more comprehensive interpretation is presented in our concluding remarks.

Lexical-content analysis of the selected documents

On democracy

As anticipated, the corpus shows a very high use of terms relating to democracy, yet it is interesting to note how the texts by Clift and Blumler and Coleman are

Table 3:

Selection of CTUs relating to democracy as a semantic area

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| E-democracy | 60 | 5 | 27 | 28 | 0 |
| Democracy | 55 | 22 | 15 | 13 | 5 |
| Democratic | 40 | 19 | 20 | 1 | 0 |
| Participatory_ democracy | 13 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| Edemocracy | 11 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 9 |
| Democracies | 10 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ process | 9 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| Democratic_ outcomes | 8 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ policy | 8 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Representative_ democracy | 8 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| E-government_ and_democracy | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Electronic_ democracy | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Direct_ democracy | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| E-democracy_will | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Teledemocracy | 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Democratic_ institutions | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ goals | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ processes | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Information-age_ democracy | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ participation | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Inherently_ democratic | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance_ participatory_ democracy | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

(Continued)

Table 3: *(Continued)*

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Deepen_democracy | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Growth_of_ e-democracy | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Nature_of_ democracy | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| System_of_ representative_ democracy | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Citizenship_and_ democracy | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ict-enhanced_ participatory_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Service_of_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Commitment_to_ democratic | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Implementing_ e-democracy | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ movement | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ sphere | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ seminar | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ process | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E-government_and_ e-democracy | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| E-democracy_ technology | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Challenge_for_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| E-government_ and_democracy_ activity | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ democracy_online | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Table 3: (*Continued*)

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Deliberative_ democracy_as | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Democracy_and_ e-government | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Strengthen_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Democratizing_ potential | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ potential | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ citizenship | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ process_and_ institutions | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Traditional_ institutions_ of_democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Government_ e-democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Nature_of_ democracy_itself | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

more similar than the other two in their articulation of democracy (cf. Figure 1). Their position towards the centre of the graph indicates the fact that these texts contain most of the terms that appear in other texts. But Clift, in particular, utilizes a very articulated terminology, referring to ‘deliberative’, ‘participatory’, and ‘direct’ democracy in a way that no other speaker does. On the other side of the spectrum, the EU e-government unit offers a quite static vision of e-democracy, always using the prefix and stressing the ‘applicative’ dimension of ICTs. Also interesting is the fact that all documents, but one – namely the Commonwealth Centre document – refer to representative democracy, and a qualitative reading of the texts indicate clearly the underlying idea that e-democracy should not be considered as an alternative to traditional representative democratic practices, but a complementary element in order to strengthen them.

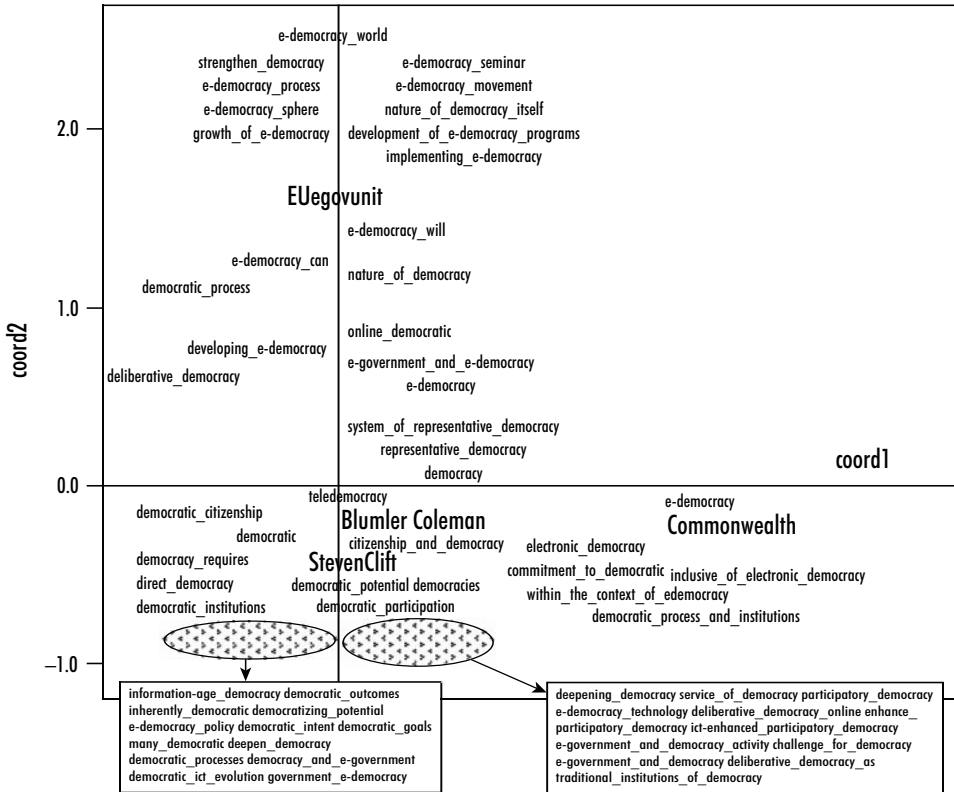


Figure 1: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to democracy.

On citizenship

The theme of citizenship is much more developed and articulated in the document written by Clift than in other documents, and from his text a more elaborated conception of citizen participation emerges. The connection between citizenship and democracy is strongly expressed by Blumler and Coleman, who also stress the active role of citizens, while the EU e-government unit focuses on the idea of citizens’ engagement (‘engaging’, ‘engage’, ‘engagement’). The EU document also talks about citizenry and not citizenship, suggesting a vision of citizens as receivers/consumers of services. The Commonwealth Centre text is again quite different in its language, though it is interesting to note that it refers to ICTs potential to ‘foster a sense of citizenship’ and also to active citizen participation, alongside access to information for all citizens.

Table 4:

Selection of CTUs relating to citizenship as a semantic area

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Citizens | 107 | 28 | 54 | 19 | 6 |
| Citizen | 55 | 1 | 23 | 28 | 3 |
| Citizens' | 9 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizenship | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizenry | 6 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 |
| Many_citizens | 5 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Citizen_ participation | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen_ satisfaction_ and_service | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Online_citizen_ engagement | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen_input | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen' | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen_ engagement | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| E-citizens | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Informing_the_ citizen | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Global_citizen | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Citizens_online | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Consulting_the_ citizen | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Individual_citizens | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Citizen_access | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Citizen-centric | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Citizens_they_represent | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizenship_and_ democracy | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E-citizen | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Making_information_ widely_available_ to_citizens | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Representing_the_ citizen | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Representation_and_ citizen_engagement | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

(Continued)

Table 4: *(Continued)*

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Involving_the_citizen_function | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Its_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Role_of_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberation_among_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Encouraging_the_citizen_to_vote | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Empower_citizens | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Engagement_of_the_citizen | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Engaging_citizens | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Engaging_the_citizen | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Democratic_citizenship | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consult_with_citizens | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Global_citizens | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Government_and_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Connect_with_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Fostering_a_sense_of_citizenship | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Give_citizens | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| All_citizens | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Among_citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Active_citizen_participation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Active_citizen | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Allowing_citizens | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Citizen-based | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen_satisfaction | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Between_governments_and_citizens | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Available_to_citizens | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Involving_the_citizen | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Informed_citizenry | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Governments_and_citizens | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

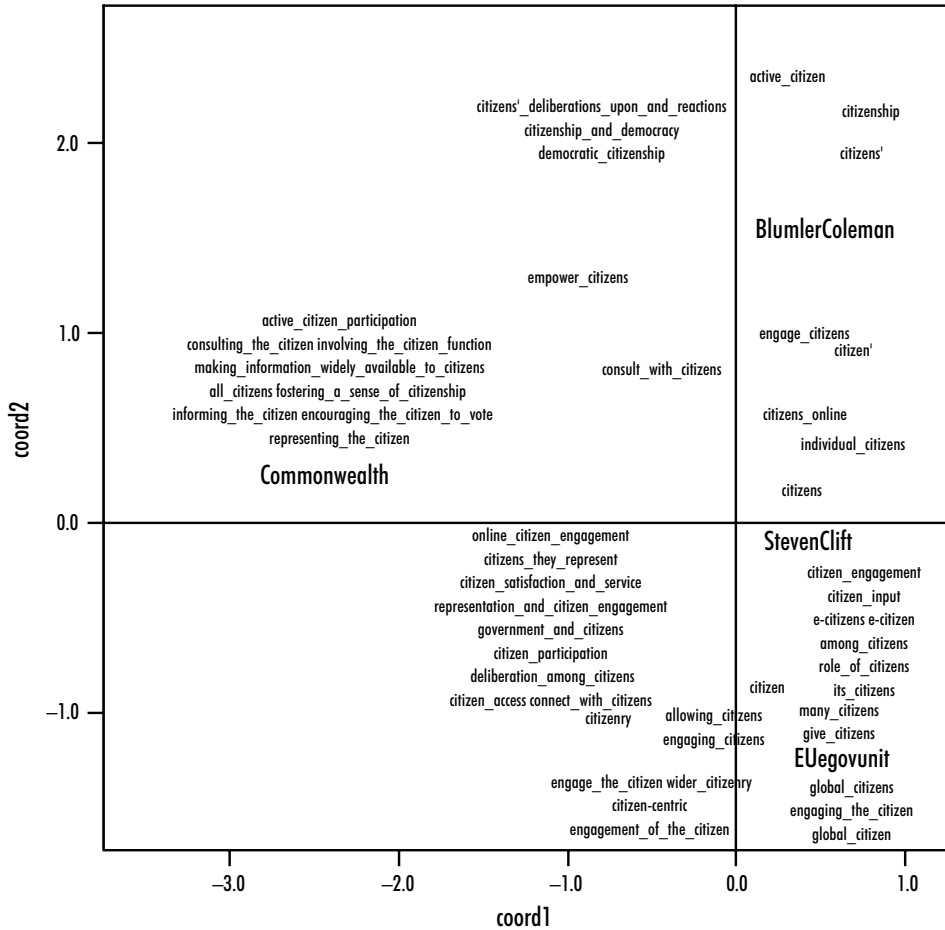


Figure 2: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to citizenship.

On participation (and openness)

The nexus between participation and democracy is clear in Blumler and Coleman as well as in Clift, while the more institutional texts are rather vague in this regard. References to public and political participation are also specific to these authors. In the EU e-government unit text, we find recurrent reference to the ‘e-dimension’ (again a quite static and limited reading of participation without articulating the nature of such participation, nor the goals) and to channels for participation, thus stressing the functional role of ICTs. The graph shows once again the different language of the Commonwealth document, where reference to participation does not occur often, but it is referred to as ‘active’ through the enabling potential of ICTs.

Table 5:

CTUs relating to participation as a semantic area (occurrence above 2)

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Participation | 22 | 6 | 10 | 3 | 3 |
| Participate | 15 | 2 | 6 | 7 | 0 |
| Participatory_ democracy | 13 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| E-participation | 12 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 0 |
| Public_participation | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Participatory | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Citizen_ participation | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Participating | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Political_ participation | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| E-voting_and_ e-participation | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Online_ participation | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Participatory_ governance | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Democratic_ participation | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance_ participatory_ democracy | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| More_participatory | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Ict-enhanced_ participatory_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Channels_for_ participation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Successful_ e-participation | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Enabling_participation_ in_the_information_ society | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Forms_of_ participation | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Either_e-voting_ or_e-participation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Participatory_audience | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Table 5: (Continued)

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Participation_ through_input_ and_consultation | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Active_citizen_ participation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

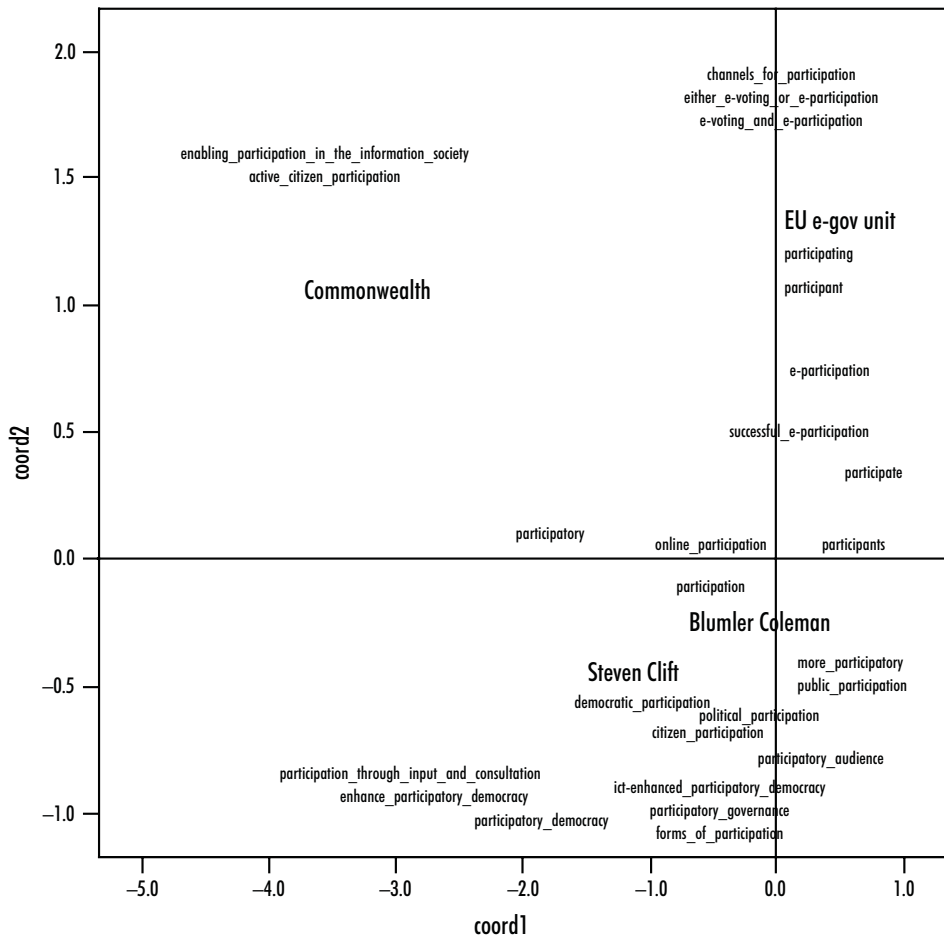


Figure 3: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to participation.

On representation and representativity

As mentioned earlier, representativity and representatives remain relevant in a context that is being transformed by less-mediated communication channels: all documents but the Commonwealth one explicitly mention ‘representatives’ and ‘representative democracy’, while ‘representative institutions’ and the ‘system of representative democracy’ are relevant to both Clift and Blumler and Coleman. This last document appears, nevertheless, as the most concerned with the relation between representative democracy and democratic practice through the use of ICTs.

Table 6:

CTUs relating to representation and representativity as a semantic area

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | Length | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth unit |
|--|------------------|--------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Representatives | 14 | 15 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 0 |
| Representative | 8 | 14 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Representative_ democracy | 8 | 24 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Representative_ institutions | 5 | 27 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Elected_ representatives | 5 | 23 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Representation | 3 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| System_of_ representative_ democracy | 3 | 34 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Representative_ processes | 2 | 24 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Representative_ bodies | 2 | 21 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Representation_ and_citizen_ engagement | 2 | 37 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Representative_ role | 2 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Effective_ representation_ and_decision- making | 2 | 44 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Effective_ representation | 1 | 24 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

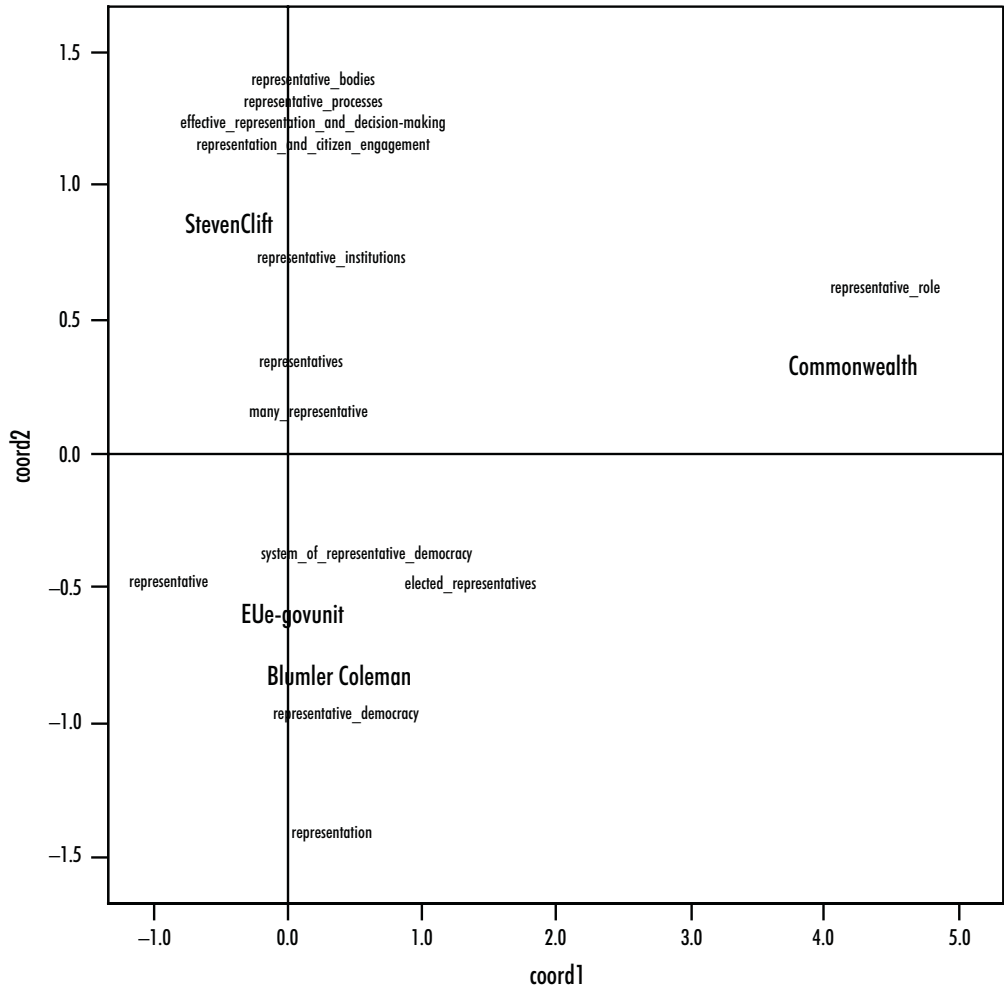


Figure 4: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to representation.

On transparency, responsiveness and accountability

The analysis also shows that there is limited attention for qualitative elements of the democratic process, such as transparency, responsiveness, or accountability, which could all be affected and strengthened by the use of ICT [7]. Few mentions are made of transparency, with a slightly higher relevance in the EU e-government unit document. On the contrary, responsiveness, as the capacity to relate to demands from individuals and communities, which could be

strongly enhanced through ICT, is not mentioned in the more institutionally oriented texts, whereas accountability is mentioned in very vague terms. These aspects are, however, highly relevant to Clift and, to a lesser extent, also to Blumler and Coleman.

Overall the picture, according to our theoretical framework, is quite problematic: in spite of the recognition of the potential of new technologies, little effort is made, especially from the side of more institutional speakers, to articulate such potential with explicit reference to (strong) democratic principles.

On rights and responsibilities

Also highly problematic is the semantic area concerning rights and responsibilities, which are central aspects in a substantial vision of democracy conceived here as the realization of equality and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. Overall these themes are not relevant to any document, though responsibilities are referred to by Clift and the Commonwealth document, while being completely absent from the EU e-government unit text. As far as human rights, a single mention of this concept in each document can be observed, without any further articulation, in spite of the fact that precisely the diffusion of ICTs and their usage to strengthen (or repair) the relation between public authorities and citizens may raise new and serious concerns with respect to the protection of fundamental communication rights such as the right to privacy and protection from surveillance of private communications.

Table 7:

CTUs relating to rights and responsibilities as semantic areas

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Responsibilities | 7 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 |
| Responsibility | 6 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Responsible | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Human_rights | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Right | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Rights_and_ opportunities | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Rights | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Fundamental_ human_rights | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

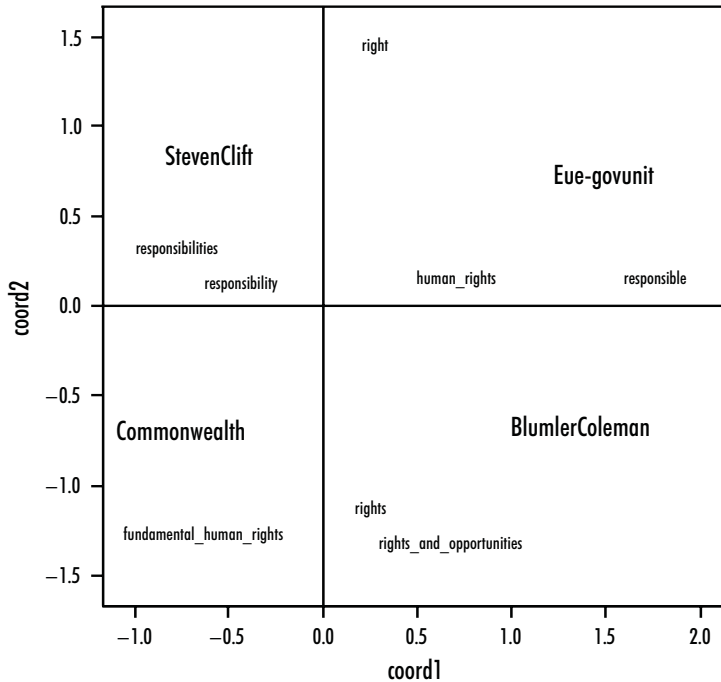


Figure 5: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to rights and responsibilities.

On deliberation and consultation

Maybe less problematic than the almost inexistent reference to rights and responsibilities, but indicative of quite different understandings of the potential of ICT to enhance participatory processes, is the use of terms such as consultation and deliberation. Clift as well as Blumler and Coleman express a much more articulated vision of the interaction between consultation and deliberation in which online consultation go together with the idea of ICT to promote a deliberative arena. The EU e-government unit remains within the boundaries of applications (e-consultation) without engaging with the crucial questions of consultation for what and of what kind. The Commonwealth Centre document stands, once again, on its own, with a different language, which refers to ‘consultating_the_citizen’.

On information and communication

As far as the awareness of the distinction/interplay between information and communication is concerned, it is important to stress that in all documents reference to information prevails on communication. An awareness of the

Table 8:

CTUs relating to deliberation and consultation as semantic areas

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Consultation | 20 | 6 | 12 | 2 | 0 |
| Online_consultations | 16 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 0 |
| Consultations | 16 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| Deliberation | 15 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Online_consultation | 10 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 0 |
| E-consultations | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Public_deliberation | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative | 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Consultative | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Deliberate | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Engagement_and_ deliberation | 4 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberations | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| More_deliberative | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Consulting_the_ citizen | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Consulting | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Consult | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Citizens'_ deliberations_upon_ and_reactions | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| E-consultation | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ opportunities | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ democracy_online | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ democracy_as | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_ democracy | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Deliberation_among_ citizens | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_arena | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Deliberative_polls | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consult_with_citizens | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Consultation_activities | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Participation_ through_input_ and_consultation | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Table 8: (Continued)

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Online_deliberative_poll | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Online_consultations_and_events | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Online_deliberation | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Online_consultations_are | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

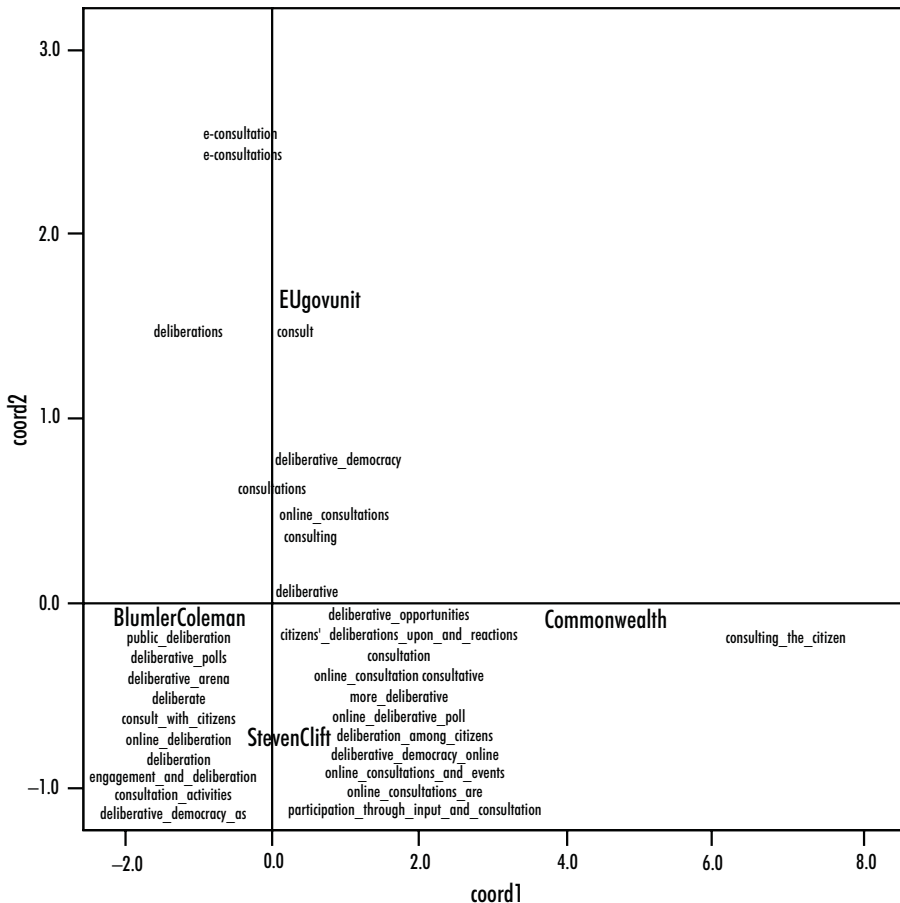


Figure 6: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating to deliberation and consultation.

changes in political and public communication processes, and of the challenges posed by ICTs to citizen–institutions relations, is explicit only in Blumler and Coleman, whereas in the more institutional texts ‘access to information’ and ‘information sharing’ emerge as favorite practices which can be facilitated by ICTs. The EU e-government unit is the least original text in this regard, while the Commonwealth Centre document offers a greater articulation of the two concepts, in relation to governance processes.

Different e-democracies

What emerges from the analyzes of these e-democracy narratives is not yet a common vision. The discourse is expanding, but it is being developed in

Table 9:

Selection of CTUs relating to information and communication as semantic areas

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Information | 54 | 13 | 20 | 10 | 11 |
| Communication | 20 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Communications | 14 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Political_ communication | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 | |
| Informed | 8 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Information_and_ communication_ technologies | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| Information-age | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Information_access | 6 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| Public_information | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Inform | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Access_to_ information | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Channels_of_ communication | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Freedom_of_ information | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Information_sharing | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Information_and_ knowledge | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Information-age_ democracy | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Information_age | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |

Table 9: *(Continued)*

| Graphic form | Total occurrence | 1 Blumler/ Coleman | 2 Steven Clift | 3 EU e- government unit | 4 Common- wealth |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Informing_the_citizen Information_ | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| management | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| National_information_ infrastructure | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| New_information_and_ communication_ technologies | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Relevant_information | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Information_online | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Information_and_ communication | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Information_society_ initiative | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Information_systems | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Information_society | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Communicate | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Communication_ technologies | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Making_information_ widely_available_ to_citizens | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Enabling_ participation_in_the_ information_society | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Greater_public_ access_to_information | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Creating_the_ infrastructure_for_ the_information | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Public_communication | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| New_information_and_ communication_ technologies_are | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| New_and_emerging_ information_and_ communication | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Providing_ information_about | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

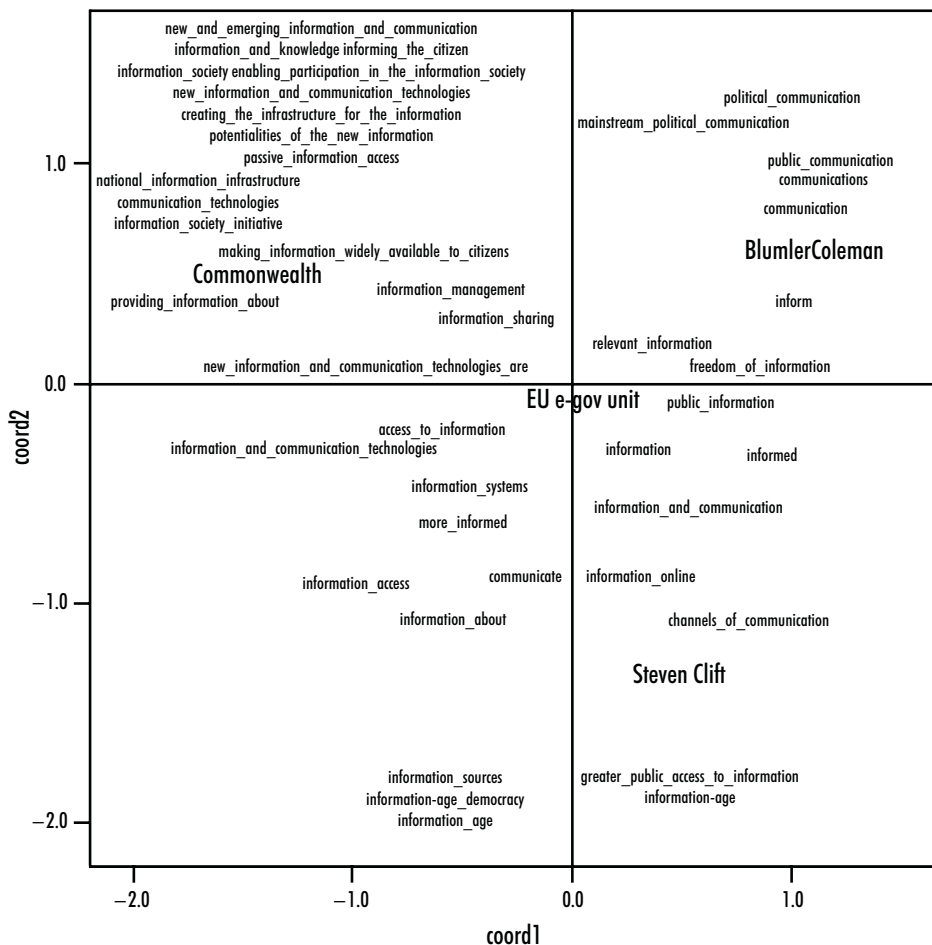


Figure 7: Visualization of documents position in the semantic space relating information and communication.

different directions; there are common linguistic elements – mostly generic references to democracy, the citizen, access to information, ICTs, but when looking at the depth of language meaningful differences can be observed.

A first line can be drawn between texts that express a more institutional approach and texts that are the outcome of reflections both from an academic point of view (cf. Blumler and Coleman) or from practice in the field (cf. Clift). From an institutional perspective, there seems to be very little reference to a theoretical understanding of democracy in spite of the fact that the seminar, of which the EU document was an outcome, was attended by more than 200

'experts' in e-democracy from different sectors. With regard to academic and practitioner discourses, a sound relation to democratic thinking and theory emerges, outlining in a more explicit way the transformative potential (and the challenges) of ICT use to foster, enhance, and strengthen political participation.

The focus of the EU e-government unit document seems to remain within the context of ICT applications (e-voting and e-participation) without a broader perspective of the challenges facing political systems which could be addressed through appropriate usage of technologies; neither is there an emphasis on the implications and potential consequences these application may have on the exercise of democracy.

Steven Clift appears as the author with the strongest interest in the actual relation between the 'e-dimension' and democracy as such. In doing so, Clift offers a very articulated vision of electronic democracy, through the use of more diversified linguistic formulations.

Blumler and Coleman, adopting changes in public and political communication as a starting point, express a similar position but are more concerned with the societal transformations e-democracy is trying to address than with the democratic potential of ICTs applications.

Finally, the language of the Commonwealth Centre document is quite different altogether and ends up being always positioned separately in the visualized semantic spaces. The document was selected precisely because of its specific focus on e-governance and not on e-democracy. Our findings, nevertheless, result quite problematic: they seem to indicate that basic principles of democratic practice are not a major concern in the context of the e-governance language, in spite of the fact that the very governance concept is one of the novel, though controversial, terms through which a re-structuring of political processes is described. As such, e-governance also refers to attempts to make decision-making and decision-finding processes more inclusive and participatory to different subjects operating at different levels of authority (Rosenau, 1999; Cammaerts, 2006; Padovani and Cammaerts, 2006).

Concluding remarks

To conclude, it is appropriate to state that democracy emerges from our analysis once again as an 'unfinished journey' (see Enwezor, *et al.*, 2002), now opening to new opportunities of deliberation and participation – a challenge to citizens and institutions alike.

However, the very idea and nature of citizenship is not being revised. Nothing is being said, for instance, about the challenges and potentials of new technologies regarding a re-articulation of citizenship in a transnational and multi-level space; an aspect that is crucial to the European experience in which the democratic deficit is widely recognized as a major challenge for democratic institutions.

Another issue that requires further reflection is that of participation. This is one of the crucial aspects that ICT application in democratic processes touches upon. In this regard, not much attention seems to be devoted to how new modes of participation will relate to and impact on representative systems, how they will redefine issues of legitimacy and how they will affect the concept of institutional accountability. Furthermore, a clearer definition of participatory mechanisms and their outcomes should also relate to the distinction between consultation and engaging in deliberation on the one hand and, possibly, decision-making or what Hemmati (2002: 2) calls ‘decision-finding’ on the other. The former referring to opening up channels for expressing views without any guarantee in terms of feedback and impact; the latter relating to different stakeholders’ engagement in public deliberative discussions, where views may be transformed through dialogue and decisions taken in a more participatory way.

Problematic in this regard is that e-democracy discourses say very little about central features of democratic processes such as transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. ICTs can potentially influence these aspects in a positive way, yet this is not pre-given; it requires political will and precise choices from the side of all actors involved. These aspects should, therefore, play a more central role in the e-democracy narrative in order to inform practices and actions. But for this to materialize in a meaningful way, a ‘culture of (e-)democracy’ should be promoted among institutions and officials, as well as among citizens.

Also problematic is that information (flows, systems, technologies) is deemed much more relevant in e-democracy discourses than communication (processes, exchange, interaction). This is especially the case if we take into consideration the wide recognition that what characterizes ICTs is precisely their capacity to create horizontal (interactive) flows of exchange among individuals, groups, and peoples. It is this active orientation made possible by the use of communication technologies that would allow citizens to have a voice and express their preferences, priorities, and demands.

And finally, what really seems problematic is the almost total absence of any reference to the dimension of individual, neither collective, rights and freedoms, the protection and promotion of which should be one of the main outcomes (both in ‘substance’ and ‘result’) of strong democratic processes. These considerations lead us to conclude our discussion by referring to the nexus between developments in democratic practices and the exercise of communication rights.

By communication rights, we generally refer to ‘those rights – codified in international and regional human rights instruments – that pertain to standards of performance with regard to the provision of information and the functioning of communication processes in society’ (Hamelink and Hoffman, 2004: 3). Communication is increasingly seen as a right[8], closely related but not equal

to the right to freedom of expression as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. The debate around communication rights has recently been revived in the context of the UN World Summit on the Information Society [9], where discussions have engaged different actors, both governmental and non-governmental, on the very idea of conceiving communication as fundamental to every social organization [10].

A lexical-content analysis on communication rights looking at documents and positions recently elaborated by a number of civil society actors (Padovani and Pavan, 2006), suggests that in spite of the different vocabularies and specific focuses, a somehow shared consensus on core principles of communication rights is emerging amongst civil society organizations worldwide [11]. These principles are freedom (of expression, thought, assembly, etc.), inclusion/access (to old and new media, to public information, etc.), diversity/pluralism (cultural and linguistic as well as relating to the media), participation (in cultural life and in the promotion of a democratic environment through communication), and the idea of knowledge as a common goods.

The connection between these ‘communication rights principles’ and the mediating values which were identified as central to a substantial conception of democracy, need to be made explicit. Some of these principles are in effect pre-conditions for the practice of democracy, for instance freedom of expression; other simply coincide with democratic values, as in the case of participation.

We can, therefore, consider democracy and communication rights as interdependent. The respect and promotion of communication rights, such as freedom of expression and respect for privacy, would enhance the democratic nature and functioning of our societies, fostering communication processes that would be grounded in the principles of pluralism and openness while at the same time strengthening democracy. Consistently, a democratic society is one in which the full enjoyment of communication rights would accompany and support transparency, effectiveness, and accountability of political institutions and inclusion of citizens in full respect of their diversity.

The application of ICTs to democratic processes, if grounded in a strong conception of democracy, could further enhance not only those processes but also the enjoyment of communication rights. At the same time, if obstacles and constraints that impede the full enjoyment of such rights are not removed – in terms of censorship as well as digital divides and non-respect for cultural diversity – the democratic potential of ICT applications will not materialize. The very limited reference to communication processes that we find in contemporary e-democracy discourses therefore is in itself a constraint. Not only e-democracy policies, practices, and strategies should be informed by mediating values of democracy in a more explicit manner, but also a stronger

awareness of communication processes and related rights should constitute a theoretical and normative basis on which to design and develop ICT-supported democratic processes, if these are to foster not just increased efficiency in citizens–government relations but also legitimacy and social justice.

Notes for Chapter Two

- [1] Many other aspects should be discussed. Particularly problems related to existing divides in terms of access to infrastructure, knowledge, and skills as well as of the unbalances in information flows between and within countries should be mentioned. The scope of this chapter does not allow to fully consider those aspects; therefore we keep them in the background of our reasoning.
- [2] ‘In a good democracy the citizens themselves have the power to check and evaluate whether the government pursue the objectives of liberty and equality according to the rule of law’ (Morlino, 2003b: 3).
- [3] ‘A good democracy is one in which the citizens, association and communities of which it is composed enjoy liberty and equality’ (Morlino, 2003b: 3).
- [4] ‘A good democracy is first and foremost a broadly legitimate regime that completely satisfies citizens’ (Morlino, 2003b: 3).
- [5] By clusters of concepts we mean semantic areas that relate to a specific concept. For instance, in the case of participation, we would look at all textual units, both single words and sequences of words, sharing the root ‘participat’ such as participation, participant, participatory, participatory_democracy, e-participation etc.
- [6] The first and second text are almost the same length (respectively 9409 and 9828 words) while the e-government unit text is about two thirds (6076) and the Commonwealth Centre text is one third (3126). This difference must be taken into consideration when referring to occurrences in the corpus and relative richness in language.
- [7] Respective tables are not re-produced due to space constrains.
- [8] Reference to a ‘right to communicate’ dates back to 1969 when it was first mentioned by Jean D’Arcy, then in charge of the Information Services of the United Nations, and then included as one of the controversial issues in the debates that developed around the proposal for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s. For a historical account and a comprehensive analysis, see Padovani and Pavan (2006). On communication rights, see also ‘Manuel d’évaluation des droits de la communication’, *CRIS Campaign*, (2005) and Lee (2004).
- [9] www.itu.int/wsis.

- [10] ‘Communication is a fundamental social process, a basic human needs and the foundation of all social organizations’ WSIS Declaration of Principles, Geneva, December 2003.
- [11] The analysis was conducted on the following documents: the Statement on Communication Rights (World Forum on Communication Rights, WFCR 2003), the Statement by Article 19 (London 2003), the Charter of Civil Rights for a Sustainable Knowledge Society (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2002), the International Researchers’ Charter for Knowledge Societies (IAMCR, 2005), the Council of Europe Declaration (CoE, 2004), and the Charter on Rights of Citizens’ in the Knowledge Society (Telecities, 2003).

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