Chapter Five

Towards fair participation: recruitment strategies in Demostation

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Introduction

The experimental research project and prototype Web radio station Demostation (www.demostasjon.net) is based on the optimistic notion that technologies like Internet and telephony, with their cheap production, communication, and distribution possibilities, incorporate a potential for participatory–democratic deliberation. Furthermore, the Norwegian editorial/research group [1] behind the experiment cherishes the assumption that if the opportunity is seized, this potentiality may be used to stimulate the further spread and cross-fertilization of emancipating journalistic genres and formats.

Demostation 1 and 2 (that were respectively operational in April and in September 2005) were, therefore, experiments in how these (both new and old) technologies could be used to create new Web radio formats, based on participatory–democratic principles. The goal was to develop a format that also incorporated a fair and representative participant selection procedure, which contributed to the maximization of the participants' expressive freedoms. In this chapter, I will discuss to what extent Demostation 2's strategy for recruitment facilitated this fair participation.

Ideally, when the principle of equality would be applied radically, the inclusion of all citizens in the area – served by the media organization – would need to be ensured, at least if they wished to be included. Since Demostation 2's five programmes were aimed at serving the entire Norwegian population, this was not a viable possibility. Fair participation and selection was, therefore, operationalized by involving equally sized proportions of the different socio-economic groups in society (i.e. a stratified representative selection was generated).

In order to provide a theoretical framework for the concept of fair participation and to deduce the tools to analyze fairness in the participatory process of Demostation 2, I will first briefly discuss four main democratic traditions and their linkages to Habermas' theoretical public sphere tradition. Five values are then deduced from these theoretical strands to be combined in a normative public sphere model called *Publicity for Empowerment*. The next section outlines my methodological approach to analyzing the recruitment strategy in Demostation 2. This section also raises one of the experiment's main questions: does the balanced selection of participants of a radio programme, in which most of the airtime is reserved for them, contribute to egalitarian programmes with extensive

expressive freedoms for the participants? The third section is a description of the strategy developed for recruiting the Demostation 2 participants. In the fourth section, the selection strategy and its implementation, is evaluated in relation to one of the five core values, openness. That section also tentatively addresses the earlier mentioned research question. The last section features the project's evaluation and discusses both criticisms and possible solutions and improvements. In sum, this chapter aims to use Demostation to illustrate why a fair strategy for recruiting citizens as participants (and not only as consumers) should be developed and implemented by all media organizations that cherish (the deepening of) our democratic values.

Theoretical approach

The theoretical framework in this chapter is based on a discussion about the interconnections between the public sphere, participation, and modern democracy. This debate was revitalized in the 1960s by Jürgen Habermas, who in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* describes or/and outlines a normative ideal, built on the democratic importance attributed to the British bourgeois public sphere as could be found in clubs and coffee houses [2]. According to Habermas, this was a sphere where land owning men engaged in unrestricted deliberation where the best argument did not only win the discussion, but also eventually affected policy decisions [3] (Habermas, 1989 [1962]). He also emphasized the importance of varied, high quality, and lasting discourse.

Although these values still bear merit, there are also problems in Habermas' account/theory. After being severely criticized for several years, he recognized that his original model's lack of openness formed a major flaw. Although the bourgeois public sphere was based on the principles of universal access, women were excluded and only educated land owning men had the financial means to participate:

> [...] unlike the institutionalization of class conflict, the transformation of the relationship between the sexes affects not only the economic system but has an impact on the private core area of the conjugal family. [...] Unlike the exclusion of underprivileged men, the exclusion of women had structuring significance (Habermas, 1992: 428).

Habermas thus emphasized that universal access is a prerequisite for fair participation. But even though this adjustment positively broadens Habermas' scope, it is not difficult to agree with Colin Sparks when he argues that 'the classical bourgeois sphere that Habermas identified in eighteenth-century England was only tenuously connected even to the most minimal forms of democratic politics' (Sparks, 2001: 76). Despite the contemporary acceptance and even dominance of the view that universal access to the public sphere's

deliberations is necessary and citizens should be able to influence democratic institutions [4], the necessary degree of access and participation in democracies is still highly debated and dependant on one's perspective on democracy.

Skogerbø distinguishes four major theoretical democratic models: elite/market, communitarian/discursive, participatory, and deliberative democracy [5] (Skogerbø, 1996: 11–14). The earlier presented normative public sphere theory is closely related to particularly the participatory and deliberative models. These models allow a strong involvement of people in ruling the political unit; they also appear to be good analytical tools for assessing Demostation (Deetz, 1999), and they are close to Demostation's sources of inspiration and aims (Nyre, 2006).

Participatory democracy has its roots in the ancient Greek direct democracy which emphasized the citizens' ability to present their views and to be directly involved in the functions of the state (such as the legislative and judicial functions) (Held, 2000: 17). Although more modern versions of this tradition do not necessarily go as far as they did in the Greek city states, the citizen is not only perceived as a voter, but also as a co-producer of the democratic processes:

> *A common normative thread is the desirability of maximising the participation of citizens in the public decision that affects their lives. To do this, they should, to the extent feasible, be active participants in the public sphere as part of an ongoing process* (Gamson, 2001: 57).

Discursive democracy promotes the idea of creating meeting places for dialogue. In discussions, citizens should be treated equally and decisions should be based on the best argument. The model is derived from the ideas of liberal ideologists such as John Stuart Mill. Mill argues that the truth will prevail as long as everything is openly discussed, without any restriction or forms of censorship (Mill, 2001 [1859]). Another source of inspiration is John Dewey, who argues in *The Public and its Problems* that a broad and democratic dialogue is at least as important as achievements in politics (Dewey, 1927). The most important mission for the press is, therefore, to facilitate a public discourse between citizens and politicians – the political community. This emphasis on community has connected Dewey to the communitarian tradition.

Deliberative democracy also focuses on rational debates among free and equal citizens as the best approach to reach democratic decisions (Elster, 1998: 1). Whereas the discursive model (at least the way Habermas described it) is influenced by the ancient Greek spatialized agora conception, the deliberative democratic model allows more variation in the deliberative sites. John B. Thompson stresses that the deliberative conception of democracy is still dialogical, but unlike the discursive model it promotes the idea that '[…] mediated quasi-interaction can stimulate deliberation just as much as, if not more than face-to-face interaction in a shared locale' (Thompson, 1995: 256).

Both the deliberative and the discursive models have (to some extent rightly) been criticized for being utopian. Critics have questioned whether it is possible to reach consensus through dialogue, raising the question whether the interests of those involved in debates of our times are not too different to be reconciled. Chantal Mouffe argues that the display of the different stances in a discussion, or agonistic pluralism as she labels it, is more constructive than covering up opposing views through what appears to be a consensus (Mouffe, 1999) [6].

One can of course also argue that the modern polis – the democratic nation state – is too densely populated to allow all citizens to participate at an equal level (Dahl, 1998: 105–108). Balanced representation – reflecting societal plurality – is, therefore, perhaps in modern societies a more realistic demand than universal participation (Touraine, 1997 [1994]: 34). Nevertheless, since media 'space' is – after the introduction and spread of the Internet – no longer a scarce resource, it is (at least in theory) possible to grant all citizens the opportunity to express themselves. But even then, a strategy is required to make sure that their participation is fair and to avoid that the elite strata in society and those who can produce and distribute their own media content dominate the process.

Based on the earlier discussion, five values can be selected to form the core of the *Publicity for Empowerment* model that is developed more in-depth elsewhere (Skogseth, 2005). These five components are as follows:

1. Open for as many as possible (both users and producers)
2. Thematically varied
3. Constructive and of high quality (with a cooperative dialogue)
4. Independent of market and state and
5. Instructive for larger public spheres and policy decisions.

Since this chapter discusses and evaluates strategies for ensuring fair participation in mediated public spheres, the first value – (1) to be open for as many as possible – is highlighted in this analysis. Furthermore, given the problems of 'total' participation in large societies, openness is translated here as representative participation. The other four principles constitute the chapter's normative and theoretical background.

Methodological approach

While preparing the launch of Demostation 2, the editorial/research group realized that a strategy to recruit participants was needed, not only to ensure that the experiment would work, but also to ensure that it would live up to its participatory–democratic claims. This necessitated the development of a recruitment strategy, based on the notion of representativeness, to be defined before the Demostation 2 programmes started. One of the first problems that the editorial/research group faced was the difficulty, if not impossibility, to

precisely define the level of representativeness required for the Demostation participants to be representative of the population served by the station. To solve this problem, a matrix was constructed, containing a series of preset categories of participants we wanted to see included in each programme.

After the five Demostation 2 programmes ended, the theoretical principles described in the model *Publicity for Empowerment*, were used to analyze the participatory aspects of the experiment, by looking at how fair participation was operationalized, and at how well the participants matched with the matrices used for their selection. This part of the experiment would be considered successful if (given that the technical and editorial aspects of Demostation worked) the actual participant selection was a representative selection of the population and if this representative selection contributed to the production of an egalitarian programme format, guaranteeing maximum expressive freedoms for the participants.

The analysis in this chapter is based on qualitative data from the log of the editorial/research group's evaluations of the programs and on quantitative statistical data about the participants in Demostation 2. Data and self-reflexive triangulation were used to increase the quality of the analysis. I have also critically questioned my role as editorial secretary in Demostation and my analytical approach while writing this chapter.

Demostation 2's recruitment strategy

I worked as editorial secretary for Demostation 2 and recruited 38 citizens [7] and 15 representatives of political parties who participated in the five 1-hour programmes in September 2005. I also helped to organize – and participated in – Demostation 1 in April 2005. In this first version, much effort was put into testing the technical aspects of Web radio and citizen's participation through the IP-telephony system Skype. The strategy developed for recruiting participants for Demostation 2 is, therefore, partly based on the Demostation 1 experience of having no overall selection strategy. Still, thanks to a hectic last minute effort, the editorial/research group managed to recruit 43 participants [8] for the six Demostation 1 programmes. However, all participants in Demostation 1 were friends or colleagues of the members of the editorial/research group. Consequently, the vast majority of the participants were either students or researchers within the fields of journalism and media studies, and the participants could not be considered as a representative selection of the population served by Demostation. Because of this strong bias in the selection, the Demostation 1 experiment could not be considered as case of fair participation at the level of participant composition.

In contrast to the first version, Demostation 2 actively sought public attention for its (Web-streamed) programmes. These programmes addressed national political issues before, during, and after the parliamentary elections in Norway in September 2005. With Demostation 2's focus on the social and

editorial aspects of the experiment, we wanted to show that Web radio – based on participatory–democratic principles – can also work outside academia and can facilitate fair participation by the adult Norwegian population. Given this point of departure, selecting participants that covered the entire adult Norwegian population was deemed essential.

To recruit (and to persuade) participants to join a radio programme might sound somewhat authoritarian in a country where the citizens have the democratic right to chose 'not' to get involved in politics (and even not to vote) (Eriksen and Wigård, 1999: 153). However, the reason why it might be considered authoritarian is influenced by the neo-liberal ideology that has had a severe impact on Norway (and on many other Western democracies), resulting in the domination of the definition of people as consumers. Contrary to this, the recruitment strategy in Demostation 2 is inspired by the twentieth century's social democratic approach to social engineering as a way to achieve equality. It is furthermore inspired by the ancient Greek direct democratic tradition where all citizens (free men) were expected to participate in all areas of the polis. But the Demostation strategy does not take its ambitions as far as Pericles did, when he wrote 'we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all' (cited in Held, 2000 [1997]: 17). Those approached to participate in Demostation were invited and not enlisted. But, even though a refusal to participate was accepted, the persuasive attempt to include them in the programme was somewhat insistent.

The initial goal was to recruit 80 participants who would participate in the programme via telephone, Skype or other forms of IP-telephony, and in the radio studio [9]. Five programmes were produced on weekdays from 2 PM to 3 PM, from 7 to 13 September (see Appendix). Each participant was to be given 3 minutes to talk about the selected programme topic [10]. This would allow including 16 participants in a 1-hour programme [11].

When the editorial/research groups had their first planning meetings, a discussion emerged between those who favored a form of minimal journalism (or microphone stand journalism) (Nyre, 2006) and those who preferred forms of more traditional journalism. In Demostation 1, a preset speaking time had been allotted to each participant. Initially, this concept was planned to be used in Demostation 2 as well. However, the majority of the editorial/research group found this approach too rigid, and the editorial/research group decided to apply a more traditional journalistic approach, enabling the hosts to decide when each participant's airtime ended. In an editorial meeting towards the end of Demostation 2, this strategy was explicitly articulated: the quality of the argumentation should be the parameter for the duration of each participant's airtime.

Before Demostation 2 started, the editorial/research group was aware of the importance of promotion. Unless the Demostation team managed to spread

the word about the programmes, it could not be expected that many people would take the initiative to participate in the programmes. In this scenario, the vast majority of the participants had to be recruited. Two main participant categories were defined: those who defended a (party-political) position and those who could use their own life situation as a point of departure for political deliberation. Those who represented a party would be put on air towards the end of the programmes. This strategy was preferred in order to reduce the effects of differences in public speaking capacities between party activists/representatives and citizens. Introducing them at the end of the programmes also avoided that those representing a political party dominated the first and most defining part of the programme.

Based on the earlier mentioned points, the following strategy for recruiting participants was developed:

- Publish an announcement that members of the public are welcomed to participate in the programmes on www.demostasjon.net.
- Get coverage in the mainstream media through press releases and personal contacts. Mention that Demostation wants to get in touch with people who want to participate in interviews.
- Post information in news groups/blogs.
- Get in touch with potential participants through email and telephone, based on searches in web search engines and the phone book. In addition to (1) randomly selected people, these following groups are to be explicitly invited: (2) participants from Demostation 1 (mainly friends and colleagues of the editorial/research group); (3) other people in the network of the members of the editorial/research group (2 and 3 are not representative groups); (4) interview respondents of the Cultural Techniques-project, of which Demostation is a part of (all these participants live in Bergen in West Norway); (5) party activists/ representatives who are recruited through county [12] party offices.
- In case people called during the live streaming of the programmes, it would be the responsibility of the editor to decide whether or not they should be put on air.

Naturally, this strategy affected the choice of the method used for selecting the participants. Non-probability sampling methods were considered the most suitable (see Ringdal: 2001: 149–151), which resulted in the choice for the quota method. This meant that people had to fit into specific (demographic) categories of the matrix, but within these categories, they were to be selected at random. Especially members of the public that contacted Demostation but also people contacted through searches on the Web were selected through this method. Also the snowball method was used, as some of the participants were (indirectly) selected through the editorial/research group's network.

Variables	50 Percent		50 Percent
Gender	Male		Female
Age	<40 years		>40 years
Occupation/Social class	Blue collar		White collar
Variables	**1/3**	**1/3**	**1/3**
Political sympathies [13]	The left	The centre, do not know and shall not vote	The right

Figure 1: Matrix used to recruit the citizen-participants.

The selection matrix was constructed on the basis of the following variables: gender, age, occupation/class, area of residence, political preference (left, centre, right, none/do not know), and predicted voting behavior (shall vote/shall not vote). The choice of these variables (especially gender, occupation/class and political preferences) relates to the earlier discussion about the limitations in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. In addition to these variables, attention should be spent on potential participants who expressed special interest in one of the topics of the programmes.

The 12 citizen-participants in each programme were to be distributed in the way as discussed in Figure 1.

The variables occupation and class were not used when recruiting activists/ representatives. Only four activists/representatives were granted access per programme, to make sure that the citizen-participants got enough speaking time to express their views. At least one of the political activists/representatives was to be affiliated with the centre/right government, one with the centre/left coalition, and one with the Progressive Party/small parties [14]. The political parties were requested to ask one of their activists (or representatives) to participate in one of the programmes. Political parties could also propose election candidates and MPs to participate, but activists were preferred as they usually are less experienced in speaking in public than representatives are. For the first four programmes, the following parties were asked to provide Demostation with either one or two (2) participants: the Progressive Party (FrP – a right-wing populist party), the Conservatives (H) (2), the Liberals (V), the Christian-Democrats (KrF) (2), the Coast Party (KystP.), the Centre Party (Sp – a former agrarian party), Labor (Ap) (2), the Socialist Left Party (SV) (2) [15], and the smaller parties the Green Party (De Grønne) and the Communists (RV). In the last programme, which was streamed on the day after the elections, representatives of the winning coalition and of the FrP should be invited to participate.
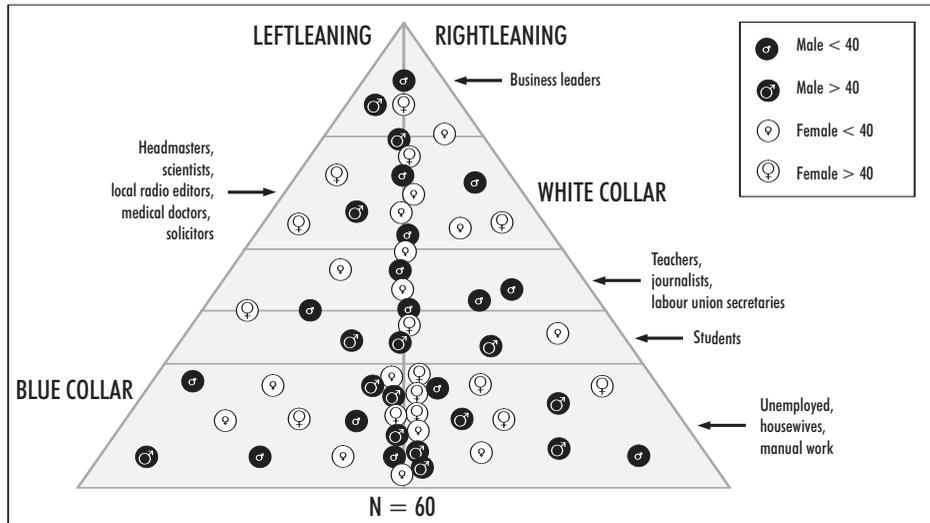
Figure 2: The planned demographical distribution of the citizens participating in Demostasjon 2.

Eighty participants were scheduled to take part in the five programmes. Some programmes were oriented at participants and users belonging to specific regions (see Appendix). Programmes with only participants from Hordaland and Bergen, and Møre og Romsdal/Volda were produced because these were the
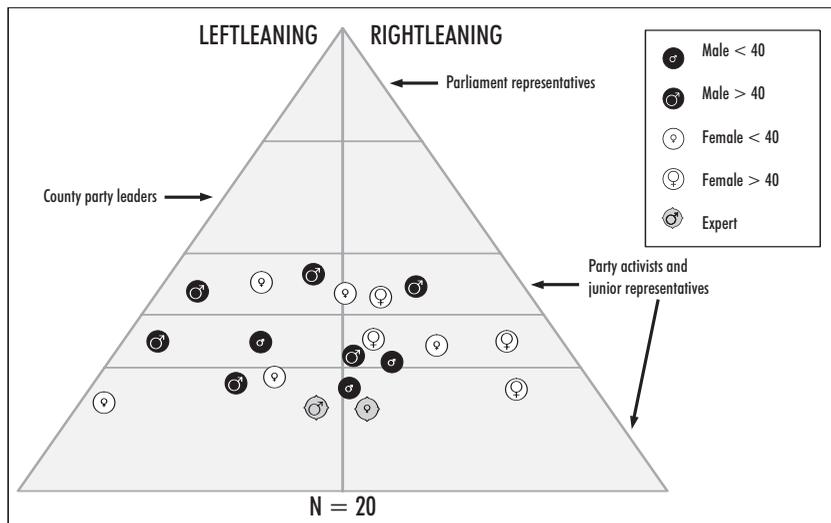

Figure 3: The planned distribution of representatives from political parties in Demostasjon 2.

areas where the members of the editorial/research group (and most of their social networks) lived. Furthermore, the regions Trøndelag and Sørlandet were chosen at random. This implies that there was no systematic plan to include proportions of people from each part of the country, which in practice led to the underrepresentation of the Northern and Eastern part of Norway.

In sum, the selection strategy could not – for practical reasons – be too time-consuming and elaborate, but was still considered crucial in its contribution to the realization of Demostation's core objectives: to make radio programmes based on participatory–democratic principles and to give a broad selection of both citizens and representatives of political parties the opportunity to participate.

Evaluation of the recruitment strategy

This section evaluates how the distribution of participants in Demostation 2's programmes relates to the normative ideal to be as open as possible, for as many as possible (both users and producers). In other words, the question is to what extent Demostation 2 has facilitated – in its practical realization – fair participation. Efforts were made to give a demographically balanced group of participants enough time to elaborate their views. None of the participants were recruited completely by chance, but some searches for participants on the Web came close. Most of the participants were recruited using a snowball method initiated through the members of the editorial/research group.

The first programme already proved that it was too difficult to recruit 16 participants on the basis of the matrix. In the first programme, only twelve people participated [16]. The editorial/research group considered this number of participants sufficient, and for the next programmes the maximum number of participants was consequently reduced from 16 to 12. This was compensated by giving each citizen-participant 4-minute airtime (12 × 4 = 48 minutes) instead of three as initially planned. The new target (of 12 participants) was not met in the remaining four programmes, which only had between 9 and 11 participants. In total, the five programmes counted 53 participants, of which 38 were citizen-participants. Although they were not positioned as activists/ representatives, some of them were politically active.

Looking at the demographics of these citizen-participants (and excluding the representatives from the political parties), it becomes clear that a large majority (31 out of 38) of them were men. Although there were quite a few participants that were in their 20s and 30s (22 out of 38 were less that 40-years old), all age groups of the adult Norwegian population (up to 72 years) were represented. Thirty-three of the 38 participants were students or educated white collar workers. Almost half of the participants leaned towards the political left. Those associated with the political centre and right were thus underrepresented. Still, the quite large group of people who claimed to be
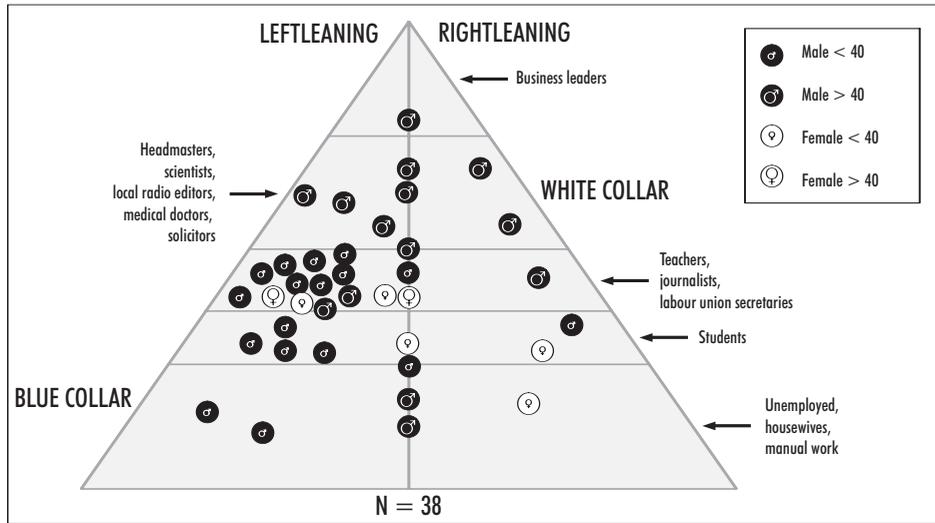
Figure 4: The actual demographical distribution of the citizens participating in Demostasjon 2.

neutral, or would not answer the question (7 out of 38) might include a high portion of people associated with the political centre and right. The variable predicting voting behavior (shall vote/shall not vote) was not used extensively (even in the programme about doubt and mistrust towards the political system) because it was hard to recruit people who were certain that they would not vote.

The citizens' unbalanced demographics are of course partially related to the practical elaboration of the recruitment strategy. Although the five days period that was set aside to recruit participants, was increased to approximately nine, it turned out to be very difficult to persuade enough people to participate. Since so few people contacted the editorial/research group asking to participate, people who did not fit into the demographical matrix soon had to be accepted in order to get enough participants for each programme. Part of the explanation is that Demostation is still a relatively anonymous mini public sphere. Furthermore, www.demostasjon.net only started their promotional activities a few days before the programmes started. Due to time constraints, too little work was invested into getting mainstream media coverage and very little information was posted in news groups and blogs.

Especially in the two first programmes, participants were selected because they featured on the interviewees' list of the Cultural Techniques-projects. Others were selected through searches on web sites of NGOs, educational and cultural institutions, companies, labor unions, the employers' federation, a trade chamber, newspapers, religious and ethnic communities, and residents

associations. Participants were recruited through these organizations and institutions because this strategy made it easier to get hold of a diverse group of people, and partly because these people would be able to live up to the editorial/research group's quality-of-argument criterion. Most of the participants in the three last programmes were people that the editorial/research group knew (or were suggested to them by people they knew) and representatives from political parties. Although this biased selection of participants made the experiment problematic at the level of the participant selection, it nevertheless gave interesting results at the level of the programme content.

Since there is limited demographic information available about the people who were asked to participate, but declined, it is difficult to assess if the distribution would have been more balanced if they had indeed accepted to participate. However, it is clear that more women and more business professionals and managers declined than other groups. While more positive replies from women would have made the gender distribution more balanced, there is also reason to believe that an increase in participation of business leaders would have implied more participants that adhered to the political centre or right.

Out of a total of fifteen, nine men and six women represented a political party. Out of these people, seven were under 40 years. Thirteen were students or had white collar jobs. While five of them lived in Hordaland, three in Trøndelag, two in Rogaland, and two in Møre og Romsdal, none of the representatives lived in Oslo. As 13 of them were recruited through party offices, using organizational and election secretaries at the parties' county offices as intermediaries proved to be a fairly successful strategy. This was in most cases not too time-consuming, and the parties did manage to delegate a person for the programme. Still, in the first four programmes, for a diversity of reasons that were beyond Demostation's control, Labor, the Progressive Party, the Green Party, and the Socialist Left Party had one participant less than planned [17]. In the programme the day after the election, a representative of the Liberals was included alongside the Progressive Party and the winning side of Labor, the Centre Party, and the Socialist Left Party.

The Demostation team preferred party activists but allowed the party secretaries to choose for themselves. This strategy turned out to be beneficial as several party secretaries were not sure if an activist could be delegated (or if they had party activists at all). However, as ten of the fifteen representatives from the parties were candidates and/or board members of the party county branch, there was probably a more considerable distance between party representatives and the members of the public than planned [18]. Of the remaining five party representatives, two of them were party secretaries and only three were local activists who held no prominent position. Two of these three participants represented or had represented their party in municipal councils.
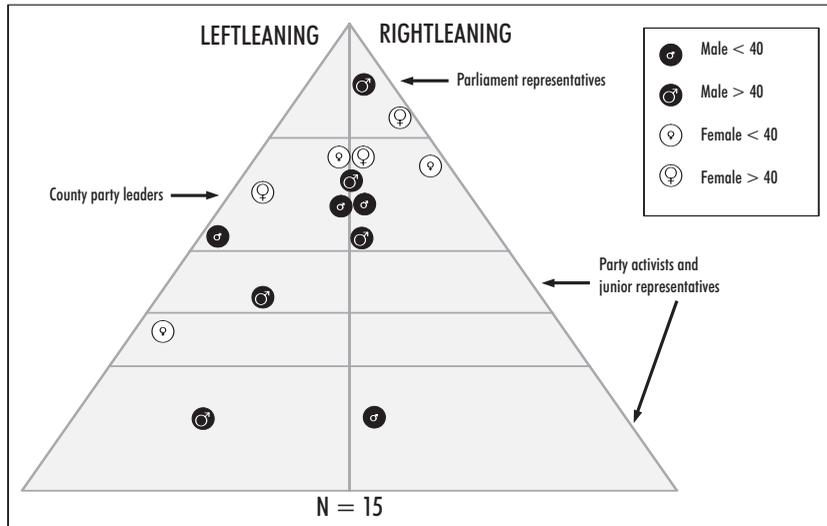
Figure 5: The actual distribution of representatives from political parties in Demostasjon 2.

Both in the case of citizens and representatives of the political parties, especially Hordaland/Bergen, but also Møre og Romsdal/Volda, Trøndelag, and Sørlandet were overrepresented. In addition, Oslo had more participants than planned (eight out of 38) while other parts of East and North Norway were underrepresented.

As the participants' demographics were not in accordance with the selection strategy, and a series of biases skewed the equal distribution of the citizens-participants, this part of the Demostation experiment can hardly be considered successful. However, at a number of other levels, the project was still a success. The exchanges between the participants in Demostation were more vibrant in comparison to existing talk radio platforms on channels such as BBC London and LBC (also based in London) (Nyre, 2006). The Demostation participants had up to 8 minutes of dialogue without intervention from the hosts. It illustrates the expressive freedoms they did have.

In total, the hosts talked more than the minimal journalistic approach in Demostation would have allowed them. But this was mainly in situations where participants clearly expected to engage in a conversation or needed questions to continue their reflections. Demostation 2's use of a parameter (the argumentative quality) to decide on the duration of the interventions was less egalitarian than in Demostation 1, where the hosts allocated a preset amount of time to each speaker. But because of the reduction of the number of participants per programme from 16 to 9–12, all participants still had extensive
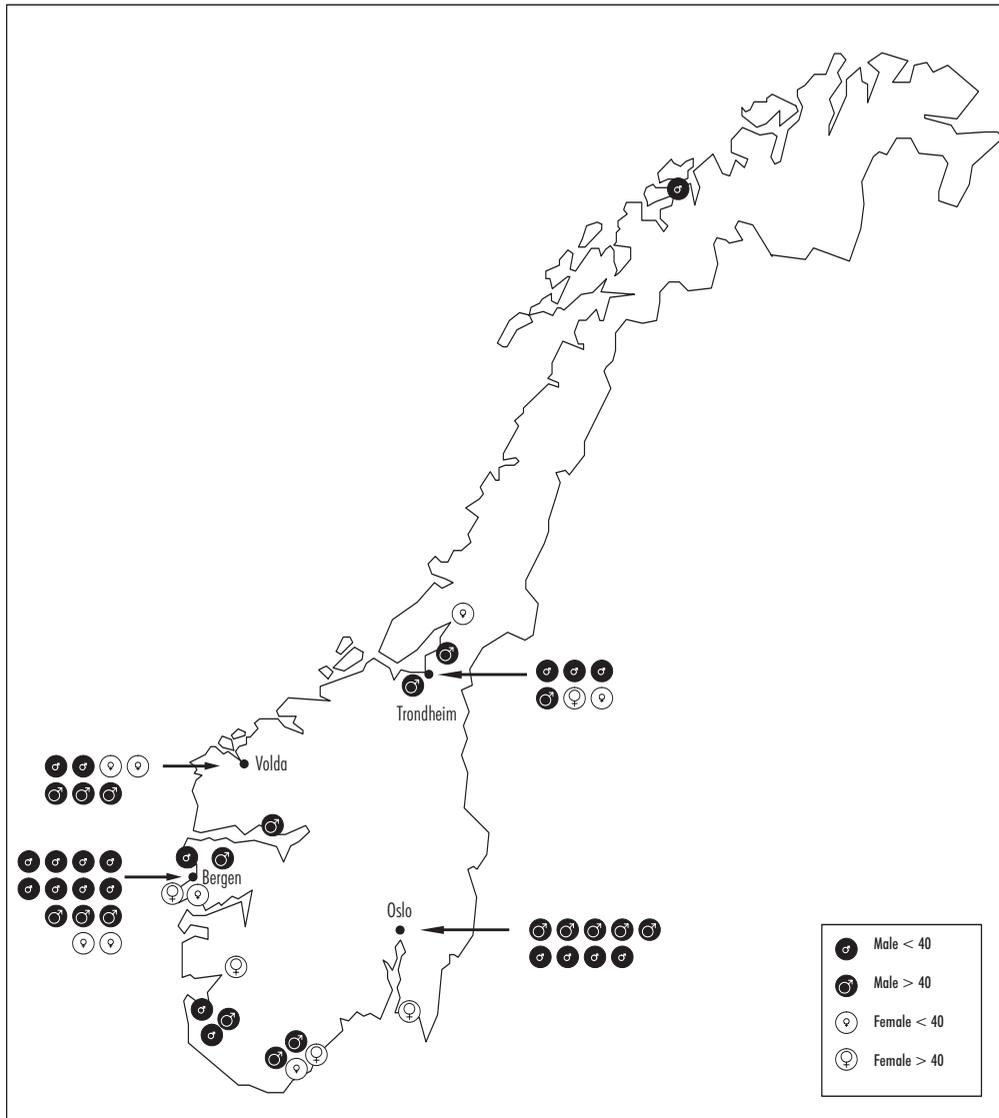
Figure 6: Geographical representation in Demostasjon 2. Citizens and representatives of political parties: N = 53.

opportunities to express themselves. It can, therefore, be argued that despite the problems in the selection procedure, the five Demostation 2 programmes still had an egalitarian profile, which supported the expressive freedoms of the participants.

Concluding Remarks

Theoretical and methodological evaluation

To what extent can media research be normative? Is it plausible, through experiments and prototypes, to attempt to influence the journalistic practices in the media sector and government media policies? The editorial/research group behind the experimental prototype Demostation definitively (as the reader probably has understood) give a positive answer to this question. However, as these interventionist approaches to research also can be problematic, more efforts should be invested into developing a more thorough theoretical and methodological foundation for experiments and prototypes in 'normative empirical media research'. One of the disadvantages is that the Demostation team had to develop the theoretical and methodological foundation for themselves, which generated an important learning experience, but also unavoidably caused a number of problems. Still, as an experimental prototype for participatory democratic media production, Demostation can form a unique [19] basis for new practices in the media production and policy sectors.

Demostation is based on a technologically optimistic approach, as it assumes that new digital production, communication, and distribution technologies embody a potential for democratic deliberation, and that:

1. This potential may be transformed into newly mediated public spheres based on fair participation
2. It offers a model that can be used to persuade governments, media organizations that control (most of) the existing mediated public spheres, and their editors and journalists to facilitate fair participation and use their media as tools for societal deliberation
3. It can be used to influence the attitudes among journalist students and
4. It ultimately can empower citizens to become active agents who can influence political representatives and other more powerful groups.

As these values and objectives can (at least partially, especially 2 and 4) be found in traditions, such as Public and Civic Journalism (Rosen, 1993), some of these ideas can hardly be considered new. Similar to these traditions, the values that feed into Demostation may be considered utopian. But Demostation has realized its important objective, by showing that it is socially, journalistically, and technically feasible to produce a talk-only radio station based on participatory–democratic ideals.

It is nevertheless important stressing that the experiment has had numerous problems. The earlier discussed problems with the selection of participants are only one set of problems. Moreover, even a highly competent editorial group cannot guarantee that the conversation does not turn into a

cacophony. Demostation's deliberations will have to find ways of dealing with participants whose behavior is destructive towards the process of deliberation itself. These interventions would harm the core value of openness and the principle of representativeness, but they would – ironically – contribute at the same time to Demostation's ideal of becoming a policy sphere and facilitate the training of the participants in public speaking. It is also relevant to mention that no more than twenty people listened to the actual content – the highly appraised deliberation – at any point in time. As each programme only featured between 9 and 12 participants, this might be in accordance with C. W Mills' understanding of the word public as 'virtually as many people express opinions as [they] receive them' (cited in Habermas, 1989 [1962]: 249). This does, of course, raise the question how socially relevant a permanent version of Demostation, and similar mini public spheres, would be if they remained confined to this small scale.

It can furthermore be argued that if Demostation's long-term participatory objectives should be upheld in talk radio, the selected area needs to be smaller than the Norwegian nation-state. However, if this strategy is preferred, it decreases the possibility of this public sphere to affect policies. This problem can be captured by reformulating Robert A. Dahl's fundamental democratic dilemma (Dahl, 1998: 109–110). The smaller the area that a mediated participatory public sphere tries to reach, the greater is its potential for equal participation (by including everybody who wants to) and the lesser is the need for representatives. The larger the mediated public sphere (both in terms of geography and users), the greater is its capacity to influence policy decisions on issues that are important to the citizens, and the greater is the practical necessity for these citizens to have representatives who can speak on their behalf.

Demostation's technologically optimistic approach, which relies on the publics' access to modern digital communication technologies, is also problematic. Most participants were asked if they had access to the IP-telephony programme Skype. Since only two participants had IP-telephone/Skype (a third participant did not get on air because of technical problems), most participants used a fixed line, and in some cases they used a cell phone. This reduced the technological threshold in Demostation 2 (in comparison to Demostation 1). Because the editorial/research group wanted to treat everybody equally, none of the participants were invited to the studio. Telephone/cell phone possession is very widespread in Norway, and the likelihood that the choice for this technology to access Demostation excluded many people is very small. More surprisingly, also none of those who were asked to participate declined because of the lack of access to a computer with a Windows Media Player and an Internet connection [20]. But some did agree to participate although they (because of practical reasons) did not have the opportunity to listen to the programme.

Nevertheless, even though a high proportion of the Norwegian population has Internet access, a fair share of the population cannot listen to Web radio. This digital divide remains a problem, which should not be forgotten while enthusiastically promoting the brave new World Wide Web.

Achievements, criticism, and proposals for improvement

Did the recruitment strategy and its implementation facilitate fair and representative participation? At the theoretical level, it can be argued that the matrix should have included a geographical/regional variable and variables, such as occupation/social class, should have been better operationalized (instead of using only the two categories 'blue collar' and 'white collar'). More variables could also have been added. Still, although the developed strategy was by no means perfect, its successful application could nevertheless have resulted in a fairly representative group of the Norwegian adult population. The main problems were situated at the practical level as time constraints, limited resources, the airing of the programs during the daytime (excluding quite a few people who worked at this time of the day [2–3 PM]), and lack of experience in effectuating such a recruitment strategy, prevented its successful implementation.

Strategies for recruitment, similar to the one used in Demostation 2, can still be implemented in future research and more general in media practices, but it has become clear that sufficient resources must be allocated to the recruiting phase. This recruiting phase also needs to be seen in connection with all other participatory components that characterize Demostation 2. Simply copying this one component would be meaningless, as the participatory nature of the entire project is built on an interrelated set of components that are based on a normative framework, supported by the 'participatory attitude' (Carpentier, 2003: 442) of its initiators.

Demostation 2 has shown that it is possible to facilitate deliberation by using the phone-in concept for Web radio. Well-educated, predominantly leftist, middle class people and representatives of political parties with all sorts of ideologies did effectively participate. Although other groups were represented as well, the selection of participants was not balanced enough, and some of the constraints were too present to allow Demostation 2 becoming an open public sphere where the airtime is fairly distributed among the different societal groups. One may argue that this remains possible, but even though much effort was put into establishing a fair recruiting procedure, Demostation 2 was not a success in this regard.

There are good reasons to believe that this procedure would be easier to achieve by large and well-established radio stations, if they desired to do so. Still, Demostation 2 participants are generally more representative than is the case of most current affairs programmes in Norway. This experiment suggests that radio programmes where most of the airtime is reserved for the participants and where their selection is based on the principles of representativeness can

lead to more egalitarian programmes that provide participants with extensive expressive freedoms. Demostation 2 shows the importance of having a well-thought-through recruitment strategy that is based on participatory–democratic ideals and needs to be taken into account by all mainstream media programming that claims to play a democratic role.

Notes for Chapter Five

[1] The Demostation experiments were part of the research project Cultural Techniques, funded by the Norwegian Council of Research for the period 2003–2007. The thirteen members in the editorial/research group were students, engineers, and media researchers of the University of Bergen and Volda University College.

[2] Even though Habermas has only recently started to adress public spheres on the Internet, his theories are used here because they are useful for describing the notion of the public sphere. Although *Structural Transformation* has been criticized, Jacobson and Kolluri have argued that it can be used to theorize participatory media (such as Demostation): 'His analysis of the public sphere could provide the basis for an analysis of media institutions in so far as they facilitate democratic participation through public discourse' (Jacobson and Kolluri, 1999: 266).

[3] This relates to Bennett and Entman's division between public and policy spheres. The 'public' sphere includes all physical and virtual spaces where ideas and feelings related to politics (broadly defined) can be communicated freely and openly. The 'policy' sphere is a subset of the public sphere where ideas connected to policy change are communicated to government officials, parties, and politicians holding office, who may decide on the outcome of the issue (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 4).

[4] As one cannot guarantee that state media are in favor of universal access, media should ideally be independent from the state and the market.

[5] While the former is connected to the 'realist' position, the three latter have been termed 'idealist'. Elite and market democracy and communitarian and discursive democracy, respectively, have of course differences but share some common values.

[6] The negotiations in the World Trade Organization seem to be a modern example of a problematic approach to consensus democracy.

[7] One citizen participated twice and is counted as two participants (i.e. 37 individual citizens).

[8] Six participated twice (i.e. 37 individual citizens).

[9] The idea to invite participants to the studio was abandoned later.

[10] The topics were chosen by the editorial/research group. Topic selection criteria were that the topics had to relate to the different stages of the election campaign (and look beyond the election), be somewhat original (compared to the mainstream media coverage), and not presuppose too much knowledge about political processes amongst the participants (see Appendix).

[11] $3 \times 16 = 48$ minutes and five programmes $\times 16 = 80$ participants. The four representatives of the political parties/experts that participated in each programme were all given 4 minutes of airtime, bringing the total up to 52 minutes. The remaining 8 minutes were to be used by the producer and hosts for jingles, introductions, questions, and small talk.

[12] 'Fylke' in Norwegian.

[13] This distribution was not to be used for the programme about doubts and mistrust towards the political system on 9 September. Ideally, none of the participating citizens in this programme were active voters. The symbol for each of the participants in the Demostation 2 programmes who do not vote are unsure, or neutral politically, are put in the centre of figures 2–5. Figures 2–6 are designed by Jørgen Furuholt.

[14] In the programme on 9 September, this distribution model was not used as only two activists/representatives were invited.

[15] These eight parties were represented in Parliament during the period 2001–2005. This high number is explained by the traditionally relatively strong periphery in Norway (Rokkan, 1987) (manifested by four parties: SP, V, KrF, and KystP.), and by the election system with proportional representation from multi-member majority constituencies. Since 1961, no political party has had a majority in Parliament and coalitions had to be formed in order to enable the formation of majority governments. In the 2005 elections, the centre–left coalition (AP, SP, SV) competed against the centre–right coalition (H, V, KrF). The opposition centre–left coalition won.

[16] This number included the four representatives of political parties and one caller who was asked to call in 'spontaneously'.

[17] This was due to (1) a robbery, (2) no reply after contacting the party office several times, (3) no answer when the producer called the person before the programme, and (4) a last minute cancellation.

[18] This distance was reduced by the hosts who did not distinguish between citizens and representatives from political parties.

[19] Web radio is – technologically speaking – by no means new, but Demostation's conscious participatory–democratic and research-driven approach to the new (and old) communication and distribution technologies

offers a new contribution to the genre. We do of course acknowledge that participatory media projects exist, (or have existed) both in the mainstream (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Carpentier, 2003, McNair *et al*., 2003) and in the alternative media sphere (Engelman, 1996; Atton, 2002; Meikle, 2002; Curran and Couldry, 2003; Gilmor, 2004; Skogseth, 2005). Furthermore, similar research projects have been conducted earlier. The Australian Youth Internet Radio Network (YIRN – http://cirac.qut.edu.au/yirn/) is for instance similar to Demostation 2 in the sense that both explore the way Internet technologies can be used to create public spheres (Web radio stations), which can enhance participation. Still, while Demostaton 2 focused on adult citizen's involvement in political issues, YIRN's focus is on how Web radio can be used as a channel for artistic expression for youngsters, leaving 'explorations of citizenship and participation' as a 'bi-product' (Tacchi *et al*., 2004). Other differences include YIRN's ethnographic action research method. This implies including competent users as producers – and not mere 'ordinary' participants – and analyzing them when they take part in the process. Furthermore, unlike the research group behind Demostation, YIRN takes a more positive stance on the commercial potential of new media.

[20] The editorial/research group were contacted by colleagues from Department of Information Science and Media Studies (University of Bergen) who argued that demanding that users should have a computer with commercial software installed on it was not democratic. This is a fair point, but the editorial/ research group could, due to time constraints, only partly solve it by offering a direct hyperlink to the streaming audio on www.Demostasjon.net.

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