

Defining the “E” in E-Democracy: a genre lens on IT artefacts

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Abstract. The field of e-Democracy has suffered from fuzzy conceptualizations about the actual role of ICT in the field. That is, the contribution of “e” in e-Democracy has been difficult to justify. To address the role of ICT in e-Democracy projects we contribute theoretically by combining knowledge on IT artefacts, genres and E-Democracy models to be able to explore ICT in its embedded surroundings. IT artefacts can be seen as technology embedded by tasks, structures and contexts. We argue that the genre perspective of organizational communication, characterized by substance and form (focusing on tasks and structures) combined with E-Democracy models (focusing on contexts) can help to understand the link between the technology and the embedded surroundings. To illustrate the explanatory potential of the suggested approach, genres for different E-Democracy models are identified from empirical research reports of E-Democracy initiatives.

Introduction

Despite increasing interest and emerging conceptual ideas, research on actual contributions of E-Democracy to modern democracy is still in its infancy and the need for empirical studies and subsequent theory-building in the field has been addressed (Andersen & Henriksen, 2005; Grönlund, 2004). Many initiatives have proved to be rather vague in relation to the democracy model or specific aims pursued, and mixed expectations among citizens and politicians on E-Democracy have been reported (Rose & Sæbø, 2005).

The absence of connection between technology and democracy is given as one explanation on the often modest impact reported E-Democracy initiatives have on public participation (Hoff, Løfgren, & Torpe, 2003). ICT is often simplistically coupled to Direct Democracy, ignoring the need to be more specific on democracy to understand in detail how ICT influence democracy (Bellamy & Taylor, 1998; Hoff, Tops, & Horrocks, 2000). Løfgren (2000) state that “We seldom find consideration on the way which the use of new technology might affect democracy” (p 57). This is supported by Schmidtke (1998) who identified the missing discussion on the impact ICT holds on processes for democratic decision making as a major obstacle for succeeding in E-Democracy projects. Hoff et al. add a similar conclusion in their investigation on Danish political parties: “Political parties appear to have entered the world of new technology without any predefined or explicit strategy concerning the ways in which the use of new technology might effect democracy” (Hoff, Tops, & Horrocks, 2000). According to Aidemark (2003, p. 323) “the important lesson is that there is no simple connection between the problems of democracy and the IT-based systems that are supposed to be supportive. It is the intention and strategies behind the democratic processes that are important”. There is a need to build a theoretical and empirical base to better understand the link between technology and politics (Marcella, Baxter, & Moore, 2002; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002) since the connection is poorly understood (Moon & Yang, 2003). In particular the connection between ICT and new media in E-Democracy projects needs to be addressed more in detail (Smith, 2000; Steyaert, 2000).

To address the link between ICT and democracy we bridge knowledge on IT artefacts, genre of communication and the E-Democracy models. We argue that the genre perspective can help conceptualise dimensions on the IT artefact on technology (form), task and structure (substance), and that the E-Democracy models addresses the context the technology is embedded in. To illustrate the explanatory potential of the suggested approach, genres for different E-Democracy models are identified from research contributions on E-Democracy initiatives.

In next section our theoretical approach is introduced. Then the approach is explored by conducting a literature review on reported E-Democracy Genres. Finally we discuss the suggested approach and contributions added in this paper.

Genre Lens to the IT Artefact

Genre theory has been used in ICT -related research since the early 1990s (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). In a review of genre theory in the field of information systems (IS), Firth and Lawrence (2003) argue how the idea of genre analysis has contributed to the identity of the IS field in general, facilitating our understanding of the core issues (Benbasat & Zmud,

2003) central to the IS discipline, such as practice of implementing IT artefacts, human behaviours in development and use of IT artefacts, and analysis of IT impacts on humans and organizations. We continue this line of argumentation and discuss further how the IT artefact can be conceptualized through the genre lens. We use the field of e-Democracy as an example to illustrate the argument, especially as it represents a young field of research in which the contribution of new technologies has remained fuzzy (Hoff, Löfgren, & Torpe, 2003; Nugent, 2001; Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming).

E-Democracy models

Democracy models represent a common way of characterizing different forms of democracy. Literature on Democracy models (Held, 1996; Lively, 1975; Van Dijk, 2000) uses varying characteristics in order to clarify differences among democracy ideas, making a detailed comparison of the competing models difficult. A review of this literature conducted by Päivärinta and Sæbø (Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming) suggest a simplified comparison of various E-Democracy models (table I) based on two fundamental characteristics: inclusion in decisions and control of the agenda (Dahl, 1989).

<i>Citizens set the agenda</i>	Partisan E-Democracy	Direct E-Democracy
	<p>Citizens express bottom-up opinions and critique on existing power structures. No explicit connection to the existing governmental or political decision-making processes is defined beforehand. Citizens set the agenda for public discussions, but not for decision-making.</p> <p>ICT seeks to obtain visibility for alternative political expressions uninterrupted by political elite.</p>	<p>Citizens participate directly in decision-making processes. The citizens are online affecting the decisions to be made (mostly at the local level). Citizens set the agenda for both public discussion and decision-making.</p> <p>ICT is a crucial pre-condition for democracy to support coordination among decision makers.</p>
<i>Government (politicians and officers) set(s) the agenda</i>	Liberal E-Democracy	Deliberative E-Democracy
	<p>Government serves citizens who participate in elections and related debates. Government would like to inform and be informed by the citizens. There is no clear connection to the decision-making activities.</p> <p>ICT seeks to improve the amount and quality on information exchange between government and citizens.</p>	<p>E-Democracy projects are used for targeted purposes involving citizens in public decision-making processes. The citizens have a good reason to expect that their voices are heard concerning a particular matter.</p> <p>ICT is developed for increased citizen participation and involvement in decision-making processes.</p>
	<i>Citizens mainly implicitly included in decision-making processes</i>	<i>Citizens have an explicitly defined role in decision-making processes</i>

Table I. Models of E-Democracy (based on (Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming))

Inclusion refers to the idea on whether all adults belonging to a society are able to participate in current debates and decision-making processes. Control of

the agenda is related to the issue of who decides what should be decided on in the first place. The models (table 1) introduce main objectives and differences, allowing comparison on different empirical situations or stakeholder perceptions.

The IT artefact

The IT artefact - the core subject matter of the field of Information Systems (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001) – can be conceptualized in several ways. Benbasat and Zmud (2003) frame an IT-artefact as: “the application to enable or support some task(s) embedded within a structure(s) that itself is embedded within a context(s) (p. 186; Figure 1).

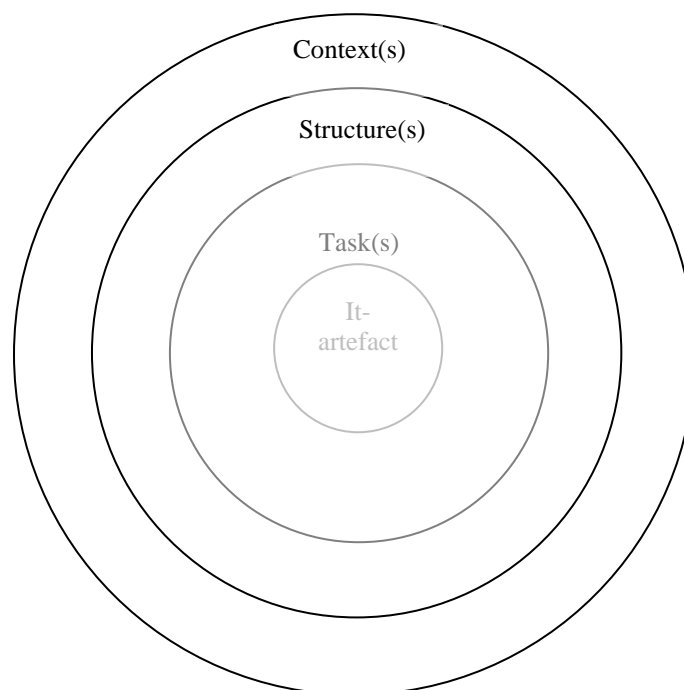


Figure 1. The IT artefact (Benbasat & Zmud, 2003)

Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) identified four different conceptualizations of the IT artefact: the computational, tool, proxy, and ensemble views. The computational view focuses on the IT artefact itself without much interest in the context or tasks how people use it. The tool view assumes that the technology is engineered to do the tasks prescribed by the designers. The proxy view tries to conceptualize the generic “essence” of technology in relation to its surroundings, e.g. by analysing how humans perceive or accept some (generic) technology, how technology is “diffused”, or how technology realizes as capital. Hence, the very concept of IT is abstracted, whereas the selected characteristics of the technology

environments are used to conceptualize the context in relation to a generic idea of (some) IT. Finally, by looking at the IT artefact from an ensemble view, the technology is “only one element in a “package,” which also includes the components required to apply that technical artefact to some socio-economic activity” (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001, p. 125), focusing on all the elements of task(s), structure(s) and context(s).

The genre lens

A genre of communication can be recognized according to its recognised substance and common characteristics of form(s) of a recurrent communicative action type in a community (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Substance refers to social motives, such as the purpose of the communication in relation to the surrounding organizational tasks and structures (e.g. organizational roles), whereas the form of a genre refers to the physical and linguistic features like layout features, language and media used (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). That is, the form addresses the inner core represented in figure 1; design of the IT artefact itself. If we assume the traditional view on genre in which the substance (e.g. task) and form would remain stable over time, we would actually highlight the tool view. However, the modern conception of genre recognizes that the purposes and forms of genres are evolving and being structured through both explicit and implicit (emerging) processes of media use (Yates, Orlikowski, & Okamura, 1999). That is, the context(s), structure(s) and task(s) effect the IT artefact(s) in context over time and vice versa. Now, genre analysis and use, when regarded as a continuous process of structuration (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992) truly provides us with a conceptual tools to capture characterizations of the IT artefact in itself and the context(s), structure(s) and task(s) of its use, that is, the ensemble view of the IT artefact.

Genre-Based View to the IT Artefact in e-Democracy

The field of e-Democracy has suffered from fuzzy conceptualizations about the actual role of IT in the field (Nugent, 2001; Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming). That is, the contribution of “e” in e-Democracy has been difficult to justify. The literature on IT utilization in e-Democracy (Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming; Tops, Horrocks, & Hoff, 2000) has, at best, discussed abstract concepts of IT (such as “the Internet”) in light of abstract ideals at the context level. Or, IT is often viewed from the “proxy” view, for example considering “the Internet” as an abstraction in itself in relation to some generally stated “impacts” on the political behaviour of human populations (e.g.(Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002), forgetting scrutiny of the tasks and structures actually supported with particular IT artefacts in context (cf.(Päivärinta & Sæbø, Forthcoming)).

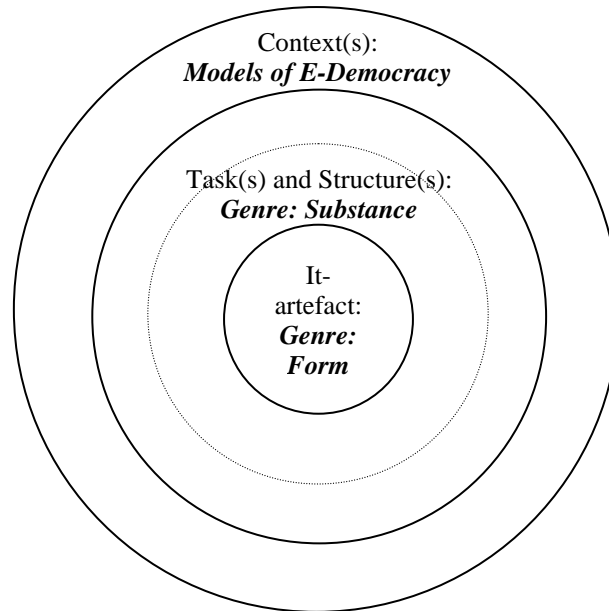


Figure 2: A Genre-Based Ensemble view of IT-artefacts for E-Democracy

The combination of the genre lens to the theories of e-Democracy context(s) makes a major contribution to the field. That is, the genre perspective connects the abstract ideas identified by different democracy models and IT artefacts introduced for E-Democracy purposes. Contextual implementations of tasks and structures can be analysed through genre substance. Now, we do not need to speak fuzzily or too much about technology alone (Hoff et al., 2000), but we can address the ensemble view to e-Democracy. That is, by introducing the genre perspective knowledge on technology use, development, and impact on e-Democracy can be created and shared at a detailed level of particular genres, identified within particular kinds of contexts.

Genres for E-Democracy

To illustrate the explanatory potential of the suggested theoretical approach we conduct analyses of E-Democracy genres related to the suggested model of E-Democracy. The genres are identified in reported E-Democracy literature.

Research approach

The literature review process resembles a method followed by Andersen and Henriksen (2005). Online research databases (EBSCO Host, Sage, IEEE Xplore, Communications of AIS and ACM Digital Library) were consulted in November and December 2004. Subsequent searches were completed by the summer of 2005. During the search, the following keywords were used: E-democracy, digital democracy, electronic democracy, Democracy and Internet, Democracy and Information systems. In addition to articles in journals, we found it necessary to widen the selection of literature sources used because few articles had been published in prestigious journals. Hence, academic conference contributions were included (whereas conference proceedings without references to earlier academic contributions were excluded).

The data analysis took two approaches iteratively, one theoretical and one grounded. The theoretical review was first conducted to form an integrated framework in order to classify the empirical literature later on. However, while reading the empirical research and reports of E-democracy implementations, we found that some focused on concerns that remained unaddressed in the theoretical Democracy models literature. Hence, our elaborated framework of E-Democracy models (table I) was also grounded on the review of the empirical literature, now adding to the theory.

Genres for Liberal E-Democracy

An extensive part of the reported projects are in the category of Liberal E-Democracy. Communication genres for Liberal E-Democracy focus on increased information exchange between major stakeholders. Citizens' influence in the decision making process are not explicitly defined; the objective is to inform, get input from the citizens and to get in touch, but still in with a classical politician – citizen relationship.

Examples of genres for Liberal E-Democracy are dialogue systems, where citizens are asked to submit suggestions to the authorities (Aidemark, 2003). Dialogues are initiated to teach inhabitants to become e-citizens (Biasiotti & Nannucci, 2004). Alternatively, citizens may be given the opportunity to communicate with representatives and government officials (Nugent, 2001). Another example is consultation systems, focusing on increased amount, speed and accuracy of information exchange between government and citizens to make citizens better suited for participating in the public debate (OECD, 2001). As these examples illustrate, consultations and dialogue systems share a commonality with the Liberal perspective: the influence by citizens is implicit through politicians and government. Thus, Liberal E-Democracy projects do not challenge the traditional power structure as such, but aim for more and better input into the ongoing decision-making processes by the citizens.

Some obstacles for use of Liberal E-Democracy genres are identified. Finn and Detlor (2002) found dissensions between user requirements and government standards, poor marketing of new genres and obtaining funding to E-Democracy projects to be obstacles for such services. Poor design, like restricted opportunity to search, absence of site maps and outdated information (Cullen & Houghton, 2000), were found to decrease participation. Absence of interactivity makes websites static and , according to Ward and Gibson (2003), not influential on elections or participation. They found the limited audience addressed, high expenses and unstable technology to be obstacles for putting more effort in E-Democracy services for increased participation (Ward & Gibson, 2003).

Some Liberal democracy projects are evaluated as successes. Jensen (2003) judge a discussion board as a success due to the presence of politician and discussion topics closely related to peoples life's. Liberal democracy projects are successfully delivering information and strengthen campaign (Cullen & Houghton, 2000; Marcella, Baxter, & Moore, 2002; Ward & Gibson, 2003) but are to a much lesser extend utilised to interact with citizens (Ward & Gibson, 2003). Table II introduces genres for Liberal E-Democracy.

Form	Substance
Discussion forums	Increasing interactive communication between citizens and politicians for information exchange, not decision making purposes
Dialogue system	Citizens express suggestions and ideas as input to decisions made by politicians
Information broadcasting	To bring information from elite to citizens (top-down)
Governmental homepages	To inform citizens about timely issues.
E-Debates between candidates	Broadcast debates between politicians to inform the electors
Information portals	One stop access point for citizens to achieve information
Consultation	Government/ politicians are able to respond to citizen's questions.
Candidate/ campaigning websites	Promote a candidate or a case

Table II. Genres for Liberal E-Democracy

Genres for Deliberative E-Democracy

In Deliberative E-Democracy information technology is expected to increase citizen participation and interaction with political decision-makers beyond the mere voting, in connection to elections or citizen activism in electoral campaigns (Biasiotti & Nannucci, 2004; Chadwick & May, 2003; Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese, 2003; Hagemann, 2002; Musso, Weare, & Hale, 2000; Myles, 2004; Nugent, 2001; Olsson, Sandstrom, & Dahlgren, 2003; Ranerup, 2000; Steyaert, 2000).

The earliest e-mail correspondence systems – LIN (legislative information network) in Alaska and PEN (public electronic network) system in Santa Monica, California – were already in the 1980s involving thousands of citizens in

contributing to state-level legislation and municipal decision-making, respectively (Groper, 1996). After the diffusion of the WWW, several Deliberative E-Democracy initiatives emerged, mostly at the municipal level (Aidemark, 2003; Biasiotti & Nannucci, 2004; Carvalho, Rocha, & Oliveira, 2003; Grönlund, 2003). Examples of Deliberative E-Democracy also at other levels of democratic decision-making, have been reported, for example in Norwegian political parties (Heidar & Saglie, 2003), a governmental office in the US (Stanley & Weare, 2004), and in Scottish youth parliament (Macintosh, Robson, Smith, & Whyte, 2003; Masters, Macintosh, & Smith, 2004).

Some obstacles for Deliberative E-Democracy are emphasised. Experimental E-Democracy solutions have often remained unlinked to the decision-making process, which has been regarded as the major problem for succeeding with E-Democracy projects (Heidar & Saglie, 2003; Hoff, Löfgren, & Torpe, 2003; Myles, 2004; Tambouris & Gorilas, 2003). Moreover, it seems that although politicians and decision-makers might first be positive on E-Democracy experimentations, the enthusiasm can decrease when it becomes visible that the new communication possibilities could change the existing power structures (Grönlund, 2003; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Other obstacles are reported, like the digital divide between competent and less competent users of IT (Olsson, Sandstrom, & Dahlgren, 2003), the issue that only those already active in connection to traditional democracy practices tend to participate in Deliberative E-Democracy projects (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002), the general-level resistance to change in governmental and political decision-making structures (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Nugent, 2001), and administrative focusing more distributing resources for managerial e-government projects than promoting new E-Democracy (Chadwick & May, 2003). Table III introduces genres for Deliberative E-Democracy.

Form	Substance
Discussion forum (issue-based), E-Docket	Initiating, drafting and defining political issues, following up decisions
Invitation to submit suggestions	To inform citizens that they can submit suggestions to municipality
(e-) Referendum	To inform decision-makers about citizens' view on a particular issue. Often "for information"
Homepages	To inform citizens about timely issues and to educate them on possibilities for deliberative democracy.
On-line transmissions of meetings	To make decision-processes transparent, to follow-up decision-making of representatives
Citizen panel / "jury"	Getting information from a sample of citizens concerning a specific issue.
On-line questionnaire / Survey	Getting opinions from citizens on particular issue
E-voting / Membership ballot	Getting opinions from citizens / members of a community on particular issues.
"Your question"	Citizens can ask questions from politicians
Public opinion messages	Citizens express their opinions on legislation or local politics, transparency on whether public opinion has been followed on an official form
Real-time chat, Group-to-group chat	Citizens can contact politicians on-line to discuss about issues
Closed discussion forum	Party members can affect opinion within a party.
Expert panel	Collecting viewpoints from targeted debates to decision-makers
Formal consultation report	Choosing appropriate background documentation for a targeted debate
Feedback about targeted discussions	Informing discussants, which representative has been informed and how the discussion affects the decisions.

Table III. Genres for Deliberative E-Democracy

Genres for Partisan E-Democracy

In Partisan E-Democracy ICT is applied to gain visibility for alternative political expressions and critique without interruption from the political elite. Focus are on the potential facilitation of the public sphere on the Internet (Olsson, Sandstrom, & Dahlgren, 2003; Paolillo & Heald, 2002), citizen's influence on the decision-making processes (Hurwitz, 1999; Moon & Yang, 2003; Paolillo & Heald, 2002), characteristics of the users (and non-users) of online services (Fung, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2002; Tsaliki, 2002), characteristics of the language and arguments used (Papacharissi, 2004), different perspectives on control and censoring (Fung, 2002; Rodan, 1998) and equality towards participation in online debates (Schneider, 1996) .

The opportunity to raise alternative voices uninterrupted by the political regimes and communicate across geographic borders and proposing new avenues for political change is seen important (Moon & Yang, 2003; Papacharissi, 2004). Reduced costs and speed of communication enables citizens and interest groups to communicate directly (Moon & Yang, 2003). Prerequisites to succeed are found to be a population educated to utilise information technology and dissemination of broadband enabling citizens to communicate (Moon & Yang, 2003). Stromer-Galley (2002) investigated differences between online and offline participators in discussions concerning democratic related issues, indicating that

alternative voices are present online because people would like to meet new audiences in a forum where anonymity can be allowed.

The importance of being heard and to meet an audience (Moon & Yang, 2003; Paolillo & Heald, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2002) seems to be important, even though the audience is rare or absent (Hurwitz, 1999; Stromer-Galley, 2002; Tsaliki, 2002). Bringing new voices to the arena (Fung, 2002; Stromer-Galley, 2002) and empower citizens to express alternative ideology (Fung, 2002; Papacharissi, 2004) fortify the importance of Partisan E-Democracy solutions even with the absence of connection to decision making processes.

The experimental solutions have succeeded to a certain level on illuminating alternative information (Hurwitz, 1999; Tsaliki, 2002), but to a much lesser extend to bring in new audience (Olsson, Sandstrom, & Dahlgren, 2003; Tsaliki, 2002) Without audience arguments are not brought forward (Tsaliki, 2002) and reflexivity are infrequently (Olsson, Sandstrom, & Dahlgren, 2003). Then the support of public sphere may become more a dream than a reality (Schneider, 1996). Individual users may dominate the debate without building a common consensus valuable for the society as such (Hurwitz, 1999).

Obstacles for Partisan E-Democracy are discussed in the literature. Most prominent is the discussion focusing on the absent explicit connection to decision making processes (Hurwitz, 1999; Paolillo & Heald, 2002; Schneider, 1996). The online services are not connected to the political process (Papacharissi, 2004) and online activities are sometimes considered to be a panacea for a meaningful debate (Tsaliki, 2002). Further the participation is highly influenced by very few participants posting a major amount of contributions (Schneider, 1996) and are therefore not to be considered representative (Rodan, 1998; Tsaliki, 2002) making it hard to judge the content. Citizens also seems to be more eager on contributing new postings than accumulating present other arguments (Paolillo & Heald, 2002). Building a common consensus is also challenged by the fact that different roles are not explicitly stated and clear for the participants and the audience. Rodan (1998) found participators supporting the existing regime to participate covered behind false roles. Table IV introduces genres for Partisan E-Democracy.

Form	Substance
Discussion forum	To provide a channel for expressing opinions otherwise gaining little or no visibility under the prevailing political system
Chat system	Synchronous system for short and fast messages. Not for long, contemplate messages
Information Portals	Provide either information on a particular case or with a particular view, or as much neutral information as possible
Newsgroups/Usenet groups	Asynchronous discussions, allow longer threads than chat since the time issue is not that present when messages are not in real time
Mail-based discussions	Asynchronous discussions differ from others by introducing a push-technology by sending mails to participants.
Web Blogs	Broadcast it's own views

Table IV. Genres for Partisan E-Democracy

Genres for Direct E-Democracy

It has been stated that Direct Democracy in general has not existed since Athenian polis-state (Banathy, 2000) and that there are currently no examples of direct democracy (Netchaeva, 2002). However, Direct Democracy has its examples also in the modern world: for example, in a few Swiss cantons, citizens can raise initiatives concerning issues to be decided by referendums and that such democratic movements have gained more visibility also in other societies (Ladner & Brändle, 1999).

Despite of optimistic theorizing, the actual implementations of Direct E-Democracy have remained rare (Aidemark, 2003; Heidar & Saglie, 2003; Myles, 2004; Netchaeva, 2002). For example, some municipalities have failed to establish explicit relationships between citizen participation and the decision-making process in their experimentations on E-Democracy (Myles, 2004). However, at the level of local/municipal politics, examples of Direct E-Democracy have begun to emerge in the form of new www- (or net-) parties, e.g. in Sweden (Aidemark, 2003; Sæbø & Päivärinta, 2005). This development seems to emerge especially due to new actors and citizen movements enriching the map of political parties, as the traditional party organizations seem to stick to their representational practices despite of several trials of new communication media, e.g., in Norway (Heidar & Saglie, 2003) and Denmark (Hoff, Löfgren, & Torpe, 2003).

Hence some rare examples of genre repertoires promoting Direct E-Democracy are identified. Two identified Swedish Internet-parties, Demoex (www.demoex.net) and Knivsta.nu (www.Knivsta.nu), have explicitly stated to involve the ideal of Direct E-Democracy in their internal decision-making processes. These parties have also gained representatives to use political power the municipal boards (in Vallentuna and Knivsta). Especially, the www-based communication tools are explicitly defined to be used as a part of the decision-making process and actions taken by the party and its representatives. Table V introduces genres for Direct E-Democracy identified from the two internet parties.

Form	Substance
User Registration	To join the Internet party and to get rights to act in the community
Open discussion/ idea forum	To raise new issues by the citizens and discuss about them
Decision-making on issues to be debated	To decide, which issues are to be debated and voted further, so that the representatives can raise the issue in the municipal board
Targeted debate forums (before particular decisions)	To discuss about issues rose for formal discussion.
Background documentation of issues	To inform the users about timely issues and the, decisions taken.
E-Voting	Telling the party representatives how to act in the municipality council

Table V. Genres for Direct E-Democracy

Summary of the review

Each democracy model generally assumes that citizens should participate in democratic communication, but the purpose of such communication varies according to the idea of citizen participation and relationships between citizens and other stakeholders which varies among the democracy models. Whereas all democracy models can involve use of ICT, some forms and individually seemingly the same genres of communication (i.e., parts of the what-aspect) can be actually same regardless of the democracy model. For example discussion forums were identified as a potential communication form in every model. However, at the level of the whole repertoires of genres under different democracy models, the issue of why to communicate varies (Sæbø & Päiväranta, 2005). Communication genres of the liberal model focus on general-level topics connected to elections and one-way communication between elections, while the deliberative and direct democracy models highlight more issue-based communication genres. Partisan e-democracy includes both issue-based and general-level political communication. Since the contemporary direct democracy experiments still need to function in the context of representative democracy systems, e.g. internet parties still have a need for selecting representatives, which mainly can occur through rather traditional elections.

The genre analysis of reported E-Democracy initiatives reveals several differences in the ideas and implementations of E-Democracy applications. Different E-Democracy models require different implementations of communication genres to be shared among citizens, officers, and politicians. We argue that implementations of E-Democracy genres need to be considered holistically from the viewpoint of the political and decision-making context as a part of democratization in the whole society, not as a target of development in itself. A great proportion of such genres need to be accepted and shared among the politicians and officers as well in parallel of the general visibility of such genres in the eyes of citizens through varying media.

Discussion

Our paper illustrates how the “IT artefact” can be conceptualized from the “ensemble view” (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001) in the field of e-Democracy by using the genre lens together with application-domain specific theories of democracy models. At the level of context we thus need a theory which demarcates a general-level purpose or purposes in universe of discourse, under which a repertoire of genres (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994) can be meaningfully organized. For example, a form of technology can be same under two contexts (e.g. the form of a discussion forum can be used both under the liberal and direct technologies), but through analysing genre substance in context (e.g. in relation to

tasks and organization structures), we can still identify how IT artefacts based on a similar form can have different roles and actually different implementations at a fine-tuned level in different contexts.

The suggested framework for genre analysis can be rather straightforwardly used as a means for analysing IT artefacts by two interest groups in the field of e-Democracy: the developers of democratic contexts and the developers of technology. From the viewpoint of a democratic context, a repertoire of genres which serves the general-level purpose(s) of that context can be identified by defining the structures and tasks and finally the forms of available or imaginable information technologies which could correspond to those. On the other hand, a vendor of a particular technology, such as an e-voting package, can, in turn, identify the contexts and tasks which would fit to the technology with reasonable (or minimum) efforts of customization. For example, customization may be needed e.g. for fine-tuning the e-voting package for general-level elections vs. for issue-based decision-making of a municipal internet party. Hence any particular technology can be scrutinized from the viewpoint of identifying individual genres which could be able to utilize the technological forms in question. Genre analysis could then provide a common language, or a set of “boundary objects”, according to which context-oriented developers and technology-oriented developers could share intersecting ideas for development – concerning particular societal systems as well as particular IT products (cf. also(Päivärinta, 2001)).

In the field of e-Democracy, it is easy to see the potential of the genre-based approach to the analysis of IT artefacts: genres for wide audiences related to unquestionable democratic rights of citizens simply need to be explicitly defined and enacted at the level of societies. Although more turbulent organizational domains may require more improvised and ad hoc communication using varying media without conscious application of prescribed genres, a great proportion of IS development and design in other fields may benefit from the genre-based theorizing. That is, whenever the context-oriented developers can predict the structures and tasks beforehand or technology-oriented developers want to engineer towards a prescribed set of tasks and structures, the genre based way of thinking can be applied.

Conclusion

Our research responds to calls for establishing theoretical grounds for the hitherto scattered field of e-government (Andersen & Henriksen, 2005; Grönlund, 2004), focusing on the issue of e-democracy. We argue that our work suggests at least two contributions for research: 1) a possibility to cumulate knowledge of studies on success of particular e-democracy models and particular implementations of communication applications under them (which can provide also guidelines for practitioners) and 2) a possibility to categorize, compare, and criticize e-

democracy research which has remained implicit on the actual democracy ideals pursued or the communication forms implemented.

Empirical research on e-democracy remains a scattered field lacking theoretical foundations and cumulative knowledge that would guide research and practice forward. In this paper we respond to the call for more theory building in the field (Andersen & Henriksen, 2005; Grönlund, 2003) by introducing a framework of genre analysis under four stereotypical models of e-democracy.

We suggest that our framework provides a basis for more cumulative research efforts and structured practice, which would be able to utilize previous research on democracy ideals and genres more systematically. For these purposes, we suggest efforts to utilize and test the framework further in proactive research tightly connected to practice. We expect the framework to help practitioners in envisioning new e-democracy solutions as well as researchers in cumulating knowledge of the field. More efforts need to be directed to build up a dynamic experience base discussing particular e-democracy genres further so that such knowledge would really cumulate among the researchers and practitioners. As new communication technologies and communication preferences of people will likely still change, the importance of such work will not decrease in the foreseeable future.

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