



Upgrade Democracy 2.0?

Participation, Online Decision-Making, and Problem Solving on the Online Platforms of Late-Modern Media Environment

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Abstract. One of the key issues related to media research is how technological changes impact actual social processes. The web-based social media of postmodern media environment provide new public platforms for media users who tend to become more and more conscious users and active producers and distributors of media content. However, without developing the culture of offline social cooperation, are online platforms sufficient in themselves for making representative democracy more participative? In my thesis, I will examine the possibility of participation on the platforms of social media that emerged during the spring of 2015 in the case of DemocracyOS clone EVoks supporting the expression of opinion on social media networks and in the case of Populus online platform specialized in social problem solving.

Keywords: late-modern media environment, online participation, community decision-making and problem solving

Introduction

An average citizen of the 21st century spends 20 hours online a week.¹ The social-network-based late-modern media environment significantly changes media consumption habits and the rules of media usage. Late-modern media environment has changed the relations between the institutions of society and also between politicians and citizens. The question is now how we, media users, can benefit from technology to make decisions and solve problems online.

1 Ofcom Report 2015: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/82112/2015_adults_media_use_and_attitudes_report.pdf (accessed on: 8 August 2016).

Following the sudden success and subsiding of the Arab Spring, Indignados, Five Star, and Occupy movements, more and more contemporary authors warn against expecting democratic transformations of social and political systems from online tools of late-modern media environment (see Mozorov, 2011; Holiday, 2012).

As the issue was raised by Zizi Papacharissi (2010), it is relevant to ask the question whether new web 2.0 online tools – as cyber-utopian elements – will democratize society or they will conserve the existing system and regime. Are they capable of creating a new public sphere or they will slightly modify the framework of the old one?

Referring to the evaluation of demonstrations in Gezi Park, Zeynep Tufekci techno-sociologist argues that in many cases technology may support, whereas, paradoxically, in other cases, it may even hinder social movements (Tufekci, 2014).

In my study, I will examine the new possibilities that the spreading of late-modern web-based social media opens up to citizens' participation. My research question is whether web-based social media supports participation in politics and the expression of opinion, that is a more participative social publicity and democratic society – and if it does, then how this is achieved.

In spring 2015, I conducted an empirical study in which I examined new Hungarian online platforms helping citizens' expression of opinion, social decision-making, and problem solving.

I conducted half-structured interviews with stakeholders, community organizers, with the creators and operators of the greatest online platforms. In order to gain a general insight into how online platforms work, I extended my interviews to international organizations too. The following online tools were involved in my sample: the Icelandic Your Priorities, the Argentine DemocracyOS, Loomio from New-Zeland, EVoks, which is considered a Hungarian version of the Argentine DemocracyOS, and the Hungarian Populus and Miutcank.hu, which are specialized in social problem solving. Besides interviews, data collection and analysis measured the use and impact of platforms both in online and offline space.

21st-Century Tools of Collaborative Decision-Making

The evolving information society poses new challenges and possibilities for its more conscious media user citizens. Pia Mancini is the director of the Argentine DemocracyOS Foundation, one of the founders of the free and open-source platforms² creating the possibility of social decision-making and the expression of opinion in 2012. She refers to Marshall McLuhan when she states that

2 Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/> (accessed on: 30 June 2015).

politics tends to solve today's problems with the tools of yesterday. "We are 21st-century citizens, doing our very, very best to interact with 19th-century-designed institutions that are based on an information technology of the 15th century" (Mancini, 2014). The free and open-source online platform developed by them intends to change this substantially by adjusting the political institution system to the needs of actual social, economic, and technological environment.

The application is available in 15 languages, similarly to the Icelandic Your Priorities and Loomio platform from New Zealand, thus creating Internet-based social platforms and offering an online tool for participative democracy by encouraging citizens' participation in politics. Citizens have the chance to discuss issues on online platforms and they can vote regarding matters related to their life. The expression of opinion based on online participation offers the possibility of continuous participation in politics instead of voting every fourth year made available by participative democracy and, through elaborating the notion of transferable voting rights, a liquid model of democracy.

The "community of smart-arses" (see Habermas, 1989) composed of registered private individuals can discuss politics on a user-friendly platform especially designed for the expression of opinion and community decision-making. The tool fostering online participation has already been used: during the voting for the Constitution of Tunisia (I Watch)³ and during the development of open government politics in Mexico. This tool was equally used in Kenya and Buenos Aires to channel citizens' views and opinions. The platform has 16 versions in the world,⁴ one of which is the Hungarian EVoks created by the Átlátszó investigative website.

Evoks

On 5 June 2015, Gábor Vágó, a former LMP MP, announced at a Brain Bar Budapest event that the beta version of EVoks, the first platform encouraging community-based decision-making had been launched. "As a member of Parliament, I had the experience that the political structure and culture are very problematic for several reasons... This is not a critical approach to the opposition. This is a new way of democracy. This is not against the government but for affairs and citizens" (Vágó, 2015). According to the self-definition also published on Facebook, the

3 Retrieved from: <http://vot-it.org/> (12 June 2015).

4 In July 2015, the following 16 mutations of the DemocracyOS platform are available: Congress of Buenos Aires; The Net Party; DemocracyOS Chile; DemocracyOS India; DemocracyOS Peru, Guanyem Barcelona; Councillor Ben Kallos (US, New York); Councillor Nadeem Mazen (UK, Cambridge); PAMI (Health Insurance, Argentina); Eu Voto (Brazil); DemocracyOS France; Government of Mexico; Podemos Party (Spain); DemocracyOS Colombia; Supervisor Mark Farrel (US, San Francisco); EVoks Hungary. Retrived from: <http://democracyos.org/democracies> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

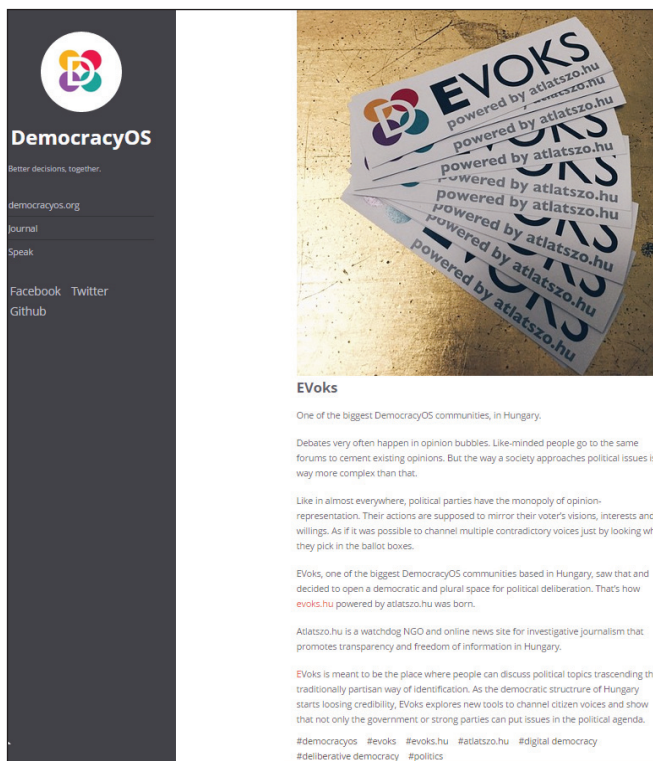


Figure 1. The presentation of EVoks on the website of DemocracyOS

Source: <http://blog.DemocracyOS.org/> (accessed on: 5 July 2015)

platform makes it possible for citizens to discuss political matters and vote regarding important public issues.

The objective of the EVoks website is to launch a real social debate on important issues and regarding matters that a lot of people are interested in; the aim is to provide a public platform where anyone can put items on the agenda of media and politics which mobilize many people. The platform gives opportunity to involve layers of society and social groups to discuss politics who have become disappointed and lost interest in the political system but have a strong opinion regarding some issues. Besides raising issues, conversation and convincing will be important elements on the EVoks platform; votes can be changed during and as a result of an argument or discussion. Our objective is to give weight to arguments and opinions (Facebook.com/evoks.hu).⁵

⁵ See the Facebook page of EVoks: https://www.facebook.com/eVoks.hu/info?tab=page_info (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

Table 1. EVoks issues and the number of participants in July and October 2015

Order of appearance	Topic	Status	Number of participants/ person 4 July 2015	Number of participants/ person 8 October 2015
1	Should people aged 75+ be limited in driving a car?	closed	403	403
2	Should people who damage advertisements of the government be punished?	open	314	497
3	Should Budapest organize Olympic Games?	open	370	682
4	Should the people crossing the borders of Hungary without a passport be automatically arrested?	open	188	385
5	Should Paks II be constructed?	open	272	547
6	Should shops be closed on Sundays?	open	253	554
7	Is it the task of the state to improve the infrastructural facilities of Hungarian football?	open	185	444
8	Should death penalty be introduced again?	open	106	404
9	Would you radically simplify spelling rules?	open	63	335
10	Should homosexual couples be granted the right to marry and adopt children in Hungary?	open	0	438
11	Should an Anti-Corruption Public Prosecutor be set up in Hungary?	open	0	419
12	Is governmental intervention required to improve the situation of Hungarian sync?	open	0	260
13	Should there be a siesta in Hungary during summer months?	open	0	177
14	Should smoking be allowed in certain clubs and pubs?	open	0	176
15	Should there be a referendum concerning Hungary's application for the 2024 Olympic Games?	open	0	120

Order of appearance	Topic	Status	Number of participants/ person 4 July 2015	Number of participants/ person 8 October 2015
16	Should studies on ethics and morality and basic theological studies be obligatory in schools?	open	0	149
17	Should the European Commission put forward the idea of greater transparency for member states' corporate taxation?	open	0	54
18	Should registered gambling addicts be banned from casinos?	open	0	43
19	Should the state sell its agricultural land to the farmers?	open	0	46
20	Should Hungary change its time zone?	open	0	114
Total			2,154	6,247

Source: the author's own collection (evoks.hu)

Registered users (a total of 6,247 people) had the chance to discuss topics and submit their votes regarding 20 topics during the 4 months since the start of the website (see *Table 1*). The first issue that was discussed and voted on was closed on 3 July 2015. 403 registered users participated in the discussion of the first issue, that is the issue of driving limitations concerning people aged 75+. During the period of one month, 398 votes were received and more than 120 contributions were made. 252 people (63.3%) voted against the limitation, 114 people (28.6%) voted for the limitation, and 32 people (8%) abstained.

Registered users had the chance to vote on several policy issues that were on the everyday agenda of politics and media. Presently, 682 people are participating in the vote on the issue whether Budapest should organize Olympic Games in 2024 and 547 have submitted their votes regarding whether the new block of the nuclear power station in PAKS should be constructed, but users equally have the chance to express their opinion on restoring death penalty, closing shops on Sundays, the radical simplification of spelling rules, or even on the introduction of siesta during summer months in Hungary. However, more than 6,000 activities and the above mentioned hot issues did not prove sufficient for the website to thematize mainstream mass media and political agenda and for having an impact on decisions of real importance.

By October 2015, the initial, not so high activity and participation rate had dropped and the newly posted issues were commented on by only about

50–100 users. According to one of the project owners, the key for starting the platform would be the activation of citizens and the involvement of politicians – a possible way of achieving this is to start the discussion of regional matters on a local, small-community level. This would be the first step, to start with regional issues; however, offline community development has not yet started until this day.

Half a year is a short period of time, it is difficult to achieve a great breakthrough. However, the low and ever-decreasing activity in the case of EVoks can be explained by the unfavourable mutual presence of several factors. The most important and most significant of these factors is political apathy and a general lack of citizens' participation in politics, the lack of the culture of community-level cooperation. Added to this, there was no introductory media campaign; due to this, even the small group of active and media-conscious citizens did not receive sufficient information related to the launch of the site. Finally, an important factor to be considered is that the platform is operated by the editors of the investigative website *Átlátszó* labelled as one that is supported by the opposition. Contrasting the present status of the votes and general political discourses, we can state that users mainly represent opinions formulated by the opposition. It can be stated with high certainty that the users of the platform primarily represent the views of the left-wing liberal voting group. Thus, instead of creating a new publicity, a possible platform of community decision-making is lowered down to one of the channels of political demonstration/opposition, keeping away independent, conscious media users who have become disappointed with political issues but have their own opinion, just as media users who voted for the ruling political party. This way, neither real discussion nor social discourse are realized, which would be required and indispensable for the democratization of society – as it was presented by Gábor Vágó.

Populus, a Community Problem-Solving Platform

On 16 April, the website Populus was launched by Zsolt Várady, the founder of iWiW.⁶ This community site was dedicated to solve public affairs online.⁷ The declared objective of the community platform exempt from politics that entered its second phase of development in October 2015 was to create solutions for problems related to public affairs based on the active participation of citizens,

6 iWiW (International Who is Who) was the greatest Hungarian social media site: it functioned between 2002 and 2014, it was the most visited Hungarian site from 2005 to 2010, and by 2008 the site had had 4 million registered users.

7 Retrieved from: <http://vs.hu/magazin/osszes/elindult-az-utcai-ellenzek-facebookja-0416> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

so it mainly focused on the collective solution of problems that we were facing in our offline life but which were revealed with the help of an online tool. The umbrella platform fostering the solution of our own matters tries to provide a surface, community, and pattern for the successful solution of public affairs. With its educational contents, it aims at awakening a sort of self-consciousness in citizens and in the long run it aims at encouraging a shift towards participative, liquid democracy.

Let's stand up together to solve local, regional, or national public affairs that are not working. Let's experience it together that instead of just talking about it we can really take action together and we can achieve great results. Populus.hu provides online tools and platform for this objective (Populus.hu).⁸

There was a great expectation preceding the launch of the website. The press releases and news announcing its kick-off⁹ told about a new community website being launched instead of the popular iWiW counting several millions of users. The great initial enthusiasm was evident: during the first week, 50 thousand individual visitors looked up the site and 400 new suggestions were received for new affairs to be discussed, but it is also very important to note that only 5 users volunteered to take responsibility and become an owner of a certain affair.

Since the start, there have been two main topics: one of them is the issue of wheel clamps, while the other thematizes the problematics of tax and duty payment. Related to the issue of wheel clamps, the participants of the social website would like to reduce the number of wheel clamps put on vehicles in unclear traffic situations, due to the lack of traffic signs, by collecting these places and sharing them among themselves. This way of revealing problems and listing them collectively is not a novelty, this is the principle on which website jarokelo.hu is based. This site is specialized in traffic problems, where any such problem can be posted anonymously: a missing lid on public utilities, damage, garbage, or dangerous road problems, which are checked by the administrators of the site, and following the check-up they forward it to the competent authorities. Problematic issues are listed on the website according to their solution status.

Concentrating on the affair of wheel clamps, the administrators of Populus submitted a petition to request data concerning the number of wheel clamp affairs, and based on the number of users they collect the problematic places. The members of the community can provide a short description and upload photos, and they can mark these places on a map. Allocated to each and every

8 Retrieved from: <https://populus.hu/> (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

9 Retrieved from: http://index.hu/belfold/2015/04/16/az_iwiw_atyja_elinditotta_uj_szajtjat/ (accessed on: 4 July 2015).

affair, there is a description detailing the possible phases of solving the problem. After the specific problematic places have been collected, they are looked up, and the local competent authority is contacted.

Users uploaded 15 such places until mid-July, and in many cases they started to eliminate problematic places. Zsolt Várady, the owner of the website, said that based on the collected material and the wheel clamp map they had written a letter to the competent local authority in which they had requested the elimination of problematic places.

In the other case, the community's objective is to achieve that they do not have to transfer the sum of different taxes and duties to a separate bank account – having to pay a separate transfer fee in the case of each payment – but that the authority would have to select them from a collective bank account.

The present beta version of the platform is going to be updated soon; user activity measured on the site had significantly decreased by autumn 2015, initial enthusiasm flagged shortly afterwards, and thus collective community problem solving is implemented only to a small degree online.

Drawing the conclusions of the experiences made during the 6 months preceding the kick-off, the project developer will transform the platform as part of a second phase of development.

One of the significant changes is that it will be possible for the users to launch new affairs on the website, and they will channel other issues and problems that were posted for solution on other platforms by civil users. Another great novelty and innovation is the publication of infographics on the website: these professional contents provide a background for solving social issues, they serve educational objectives. Besides this, in order to increase participation, the tools of community development and organization have to be used more intensively. The objective is to acquire 1,000–1,500 visitors on a daily basis by the end of the year and to extend the number of affairs from 2 to 5–10.

As a great Hungarian example of community cooperation and problem solving, it is worth mentioning *Miutcank.hu*, an initiative that was launched during the summer of 2014, aimed at media users living in cities. This late-modern platform designed to build a community of neighbours to solve problems and communicate with each other – having had more than 30,000 users during the summer of 2015 – uses the new form of online presence in order to provide a space for solving everyday issues and problems that they are facing locally in their neighbourhood. The objective of the platform is to use online tools to bring people closer to each other in the offline world as well. The website enjoys an ever-increasing user community and is about to go through a next phase of development. It is not a confidential information that the site is a business enterprise as well: besides providing an online space, it organizes

offline community programmes in order to provide personal experiences and create commitment, thus strengthening its user community.

Hot Questions of Online Participation in Hungary

Hungarian online platforms destined to make participative democracy more participative based on countless successful international initiatives and the best practices taken over from abroad – which I am not going to present in this paper – could be good tools to channel citizens' opinions. However, it is difficult to make these platforms widespread and popular.

Their application is hindered by numerous obstacles. The greatest problem is that the political elite of empty participative democracy is not interested in promoting these initiatives. They are entirely satisfied with the group of voters convinced by marketing campaigns instead of real election programmes and with so-called consultations. It is not in their interest to put their authorization to the test by participative tools, such as referendums. However, there is another difficulty that hinders this process: citizens do not have enough experience in participation and cooperation, they tend to reject politics, and they mistrust politics in general. The limiting factors of the lack of digital competences and that Internet penetration and the access to technological tools is only 74% (Nielsen, 2015) are, however, negligible when compared to the above mentioned phenomenon. I will present this in the following chapters.

1. Involving Citizens – the Question of Political Apathy

The key to increasing the success of both online and offline citizen consciousness and participation is how they are able to restore citizens' trust and faith, change fixed bad habits, the concept of a citizen who is exposed to the power of the state and has no means to take action. The results of a survey¹⁰ carried out among 1,600 respondents during the Citizens Participation Week organized by civil organizations confirm my idea about the situation of civil organizations in Hungary: the trust in them is weak, but it is becoming stronger and stronger.¹¹ Another important statement of the survey is that the positive impact of online tools on community organization is evidently perceivable.

10 2014 Common Trust Survey: Retrieved from: <http://reszvetelhet.hu/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/K%C3%B6zbizalom-2014.docx> (accessed on: 23 June 2015).

11 As illustration: while only 2.1% of the population has a strong trust in politicians, 12% trust in civil organizations. The quoted number shows the results in percentage of "Very much" answers to the question "How much do you trust politicians/civil organizations?".

Political apathy is more and more widespread in representative democracy, it puzzles *spin doctors* and provides an exciting field of research for sociologists. At any rate, it is important to examine the role of the media. According to Pippa Norris, the political communication of media and political parties that are often accused of being scapegoats in this matter does not increase the apathy of citizens related to politics; moreover, in some cases, it even increases the interest in politics; it is rather the deeply rooted deficiencies of representative democracy that are to be blamed for the existing apathy. Instead of the *media malaise* theory, it draws a virtuous circle (Norris, 2000).

Far from a negative impact, the most convincing picture to emerge from this study is that attention to the news media acts as a virtuous circle: the most politically knowledgeable, trusting, and participatory are most likely to tune into public affairs coverage. And those most attentive to coverage of public affairs become more engaged in civic life (Norris, 2000: 6).

An interactive late-modern media environment that is independent of the political elite and aims at a well-balanced equity could foster conscious media users' participation; however, we cannot talk about anything like this in Hungary now. It seems nowadays that mainstream mass media is a communication tool for the political elites of different interest and it operates as the only unidirectional communication platform for the big political parties and for the population.

The creators of platforms supporting community decision-making explain the ever-increasing political apathy by the fact that in representative democracy citizens consider their votes as something weightless and they evidently blame the existing political culture for this. Pia Mancini, one of the founders of DemocracyOS, summarizes this in an interview as follows.

The challenges that we have to face today are rather cultural challenges, not technical ones. We have to change people's mentality; they think that they are not able to decide regarding important issues affecting their life. This mentality and approach has been an integral part of our personality for several thousands of years, and thus it will be very difficult to change it (Botás, 2015).

In her view, political apathy is characteristic of the younger generations.

I think it is not at all surprising that young generations do not want to deal with politics since they do not have a say in the matter, in how things are going in their country. What do they profit from such a system and why would they feel that their interests are represented? It is not enough to deal

with politics on the occasion of elections, we have to become part of the process, not as the consumers of pre-defined political choices but as active creators. I think that a tool aimed at facilitating direct democratic expression of opinion such as DemocracyOS would be useful for society to participate in decisions of common interest (Botás, 2015).

Lucia Csabai, the community developer of the Icelandic *Citizen Foundation* and the developer of Your Priorities platform, highlights this with the following words:

I think that we can overcome political apathy on the level of small communities, but I am this sort of short-paced person with “slow” principles and mentality. We are talking about situations when, for example, Joe Public realizes that his opinion is important, his views count at a villagers’ reunion, and he is willing to take action for the sake of the village’s and the neighbourhood’s development, just like any other people, and he equally listens to others as part of a pleasant conversation (Csabai, 2015).¹²

The key to participation is that citizens shall experience that their word, opinion, and action are taken into consideration and have a direct impact on decisions regarding their own life. In the long run, it is only the voice of these conscious citizens that can change the present political culture. Well-organized online social actions that have repercussions in offline space are good incentives, only for short periods of time though. A good example for this is the series of demonstrations that were held during autumn 2014 against the Internet tax that the government intended to introduce, calling several ten thousands of people to the streets and forcing the government to withdraw the planned measure. This initiative won the European Civic Forum European Democratic Citizenship Awards¹³ in 2015.

2. Involving Decision-Makers

It is a determining factor both in the case of online and offline community projects how these systems can influence the political elite making actual political decisions and how they can thematize political discourse. In accordance with the principle of critical masses, the higher the number of stakeholders who share their opinion, the higher the number of local opinion leaders that can thematize political discourse and the higher the chance that political decision-makers will

12 Source: Research Interview with Lucia Csabai, 2015.

13 Retrieved from: <http://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Campaign-of-the-Year-100-000-against-the-Internet-Tax.pdf> (accessed on: 23 October 2015).

take into consideration citizens' opinions and demands in order to preserve their political position. However, the truth is that presently in Hungary we have a civil society that is very weak in validating its interests and they are rather insufficient for creating such an impact. Neither online nor offline tools are sufficient for mobilizing critical masses and thus become tools that can bring about a change.

International examples show that political decision-makers are involved in online decision-making in different ways. DemocracyOS is applied in several countries¹⁴ in decision-making processes related to public affairs,¹⁵ which had an impact on political systems and involved different players of the political elite. Your Priorities platform is one of the important decision-making tools in Iceland. It is operated in the interest of citizens, supported and financed centrally, and, among other countries, it was successfully used in Estonia.¹⁶ In smaller communities, the issues impacting local communities can be the first stage of involving society and, parallel to this, involving decision-makers. Following international examples, the Hungarian EVoks plans to involve the local government in smaller villages, offering the possibilities of the online platform for making decisions regarding the public affairs impacting the population.

3. Questions of Technology

Internet penetration is a fast-growing phenomenon in the world; however, unlimited access to technological tools is indispensable for making the platforms more popular. Computers are not a prerequisite since smart phones are fully available in the developing countries of the world, and thus they can substitute computers. According to the professionals of DemocracyOS, the digital gap will not be related to technological tools but rather to the spreading of cultural habits including participation and to the understanding of possibilities offered by the Internet. For this reason, technological tools have to be even more open and user friendly so that they can offer a real alternative for more and more people.

The online platform of liquid democracy is often criticized, namely that online systems are also easy to manipulate. This might be one of the reasons why online voting is not an accepted form of the democratic expression of opinion. Limited access to technological tools, the 74 percent Internet penetration (Nielsen, 2015), and political culture also have to be taken into consideration since in

14 Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/democracies> (Accessed on: 13 May 2015).

15 DemocracyOS has been used in Tunisia to debate its national constitution; by the Federal Government of Mexico to develop its open government policy; by the youngest parliamentarian in Kenya to consult his constituency or the Congress of Buenos Aires, becoming the first experience of digital democracy on the American continent. Retrieved from: <http://democracyos.org/about-us> (accessed on: 13 May 2015).

16 Retrieved from: <http://www.citizens.is/portfolio/estonian-laws-changed/> (accessed on: 11 May 2015).

many countries, such as in Hungary, there is no tradition of channelling citizens' opinions, apart from some consultations which can be rather considered as a marketing campaign aimed at legitimizing the political elite.

An important question of using the platforms is identifying users. This is indispensable because checked profiles prevent trolling, and the aim is to have results which can be easily authenticated later on. In the case of the Argentine DemocracyOS, this is realized in such a way that the system is connected to the central system of the population register, and thus those who take part in elections can vote officially with the help of the platform. However, as Gunnar Grimson, one of the founders of Your Priorities put it, the more complicated the registration phase and the more personal the data citizens have to provide, the less likely they are to participate in using these technological tools.

Conclusions

In the present study, I had the intention to examine the possible role of social media of the late-modern media environment in the case of platforms facilitating citizens' participation, community decision-making, the expression of opinion, and community-level solutions of public affairs. My objective was to map the actual situation in Hungary and to ask questions which are presently visible.

It is becoming more and more evident that neither the mainstream, high-ranking mass media directed by elites of different political interest since the change of the political system nor social media with its social, entertaining function – which can occasionally be used for mobilizing people and organizing events with success, but only with limited participation of people (Tufekci–Wilson, 2012) – can provide an efficient public platform for the expression of political opinion and conversation.

Specialized online community platforms promoting citizens' participation, community decision-making, and the expression of opinion might help in the long run. EVoks, which made its debut in June 2015, and the platform of Populus launched in spring to solve public affairs on a community level have not been present for enough time to draw foregone conclusions.

However, it seems to be obvious that the new technological tools will not be sufficient alone to create a more participative democratic political system, but a self-consciousness-encouraging participation and a change in the political culture will be needed as well to pose great and serious challenges for citizens, the civil sphere as well as for political stakeholders.

Similarly to the success of mass movements, the popularity of using online platforms depends on the favourable coexistence of several factors. In general, we can state that an appropriate political environment is required and a suitable

affair will launch the necessary processes. However, several factors have an impact on citizens' participation, as it was presented before: the living standards of a certain community, the level of education, the political structure, or the degree of development in the case of a civil society, just to mention the most important ones.

The most important issue of the next decade is whether online platforms succeed in involving and mobilizing critical masses in social and political discourse, thus putting pressure on politicians and draw their attention to citizens' political will with the help of online and offline tools, or whether they will sink into oblivion and contribute to stabilizing the existing political institution system. It is evident that without active, self-conscious citizens, who have the willingness to take action for themselves and are able to cooperate, any kind of online tool might fail to be useful.

In an outdated political system that is similar to Hungary's traditional system based on representative democracy, where the political elite distanced from the citizens is not interested in encouraging participation, a conscious and strong civil sphere may be an efficient counterweight. Education and community organizations aimed at awakening consciousness and restoring the trust of disappointed citizens can be proper tools to create such a civil sphere. In order to create the culture of community cooperation, offline community organizations tailored to local needs may offer a solution. Without this, the online tools are not effective enough, they only provide a way of alternative resistance for a small layer of society – that is not sufficient in itself.

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