TITLE: The question of technologically mediated civic political participation reformulated

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Introduction

The prefix 'e' in eDemocracy is silent with regard to democratic normative substance. That is, eDemocracy is not democratically qualified by a specific normative claim. This can explain why eDemocracy has been infused with all kinds of democratic normative substances ranging from representative and statistical democracy (McLean, 1989) through deliberative (Coleman & Gotze, 2001) and strong democracy (Anttiroiko, 2003) to radical and agonistic democracy (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007). As such, eDemocracy can be said to function as an empty signifier – as '*an empty place unifying a set of equivalential demands*' (Laclau, 1995: 155). It is an odd empty signifier, though, because this set of equivalent demands not only are motivated and unified by a joint opposition to the democratic status quo, an '*absent fullness of the community*' (Laclau, 1996: 205), but also by a conditioning technological framework. Thus, eDemocracy postulates an interrelation between democracy and technology by explicitly politicising technology and simultaneously technologizing politics; this has to do with a governing of the people by the people by technological means. Taking this peculiar conceptual structure into account, research in eDemocracy tends to follow one of two tracks. Either a traditional democratic concept, e.g. deliberative democracy, is chosen as a scale against which the potentials of the internet or actual eDemocratic initiatives are assessed or then an appropriate democratic counterpart to these potentials and concrete initiatives are sought. This paper proposes a slightly different path: Applying Foucault's knowledge/power analysis and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) the paper pursues the modest questions of how members of the legislative bodies and employees at the public administration in Greenland construct technological mediated civic political participation and why; how they struggle to fill out the empty signifier that is eDemocracy. It does so by posing three questions to which some initial answers are provided.

- Who are relevant actors in a Greenland eDemocracy and why are they relevant?
- How do actors conceptualize eDemocracy and why?
- Which discourses prevail, which are excluded and why?

Greenlandic Contours

Greenland makes for an interesting case for eDemocracy for several reasons, the most relevant of which deserve a short presentation. First, the country's geography and settlement pattern seam to speak directly to technological mediated political participation. The total area of Greenland is 2,166,086 km^2, of which the ice sheet covers 1,755,637 km^2 (approximately 81%). The population as of January 2014 counts 56,282 (Statistics Greenland, 2014), which makes it the least densely populated country in the world (0.026 inhabitants per km^2). There are about 80 towns and small settlements out of which 67 have less than 1,000 inhabitants. Seven settlements are situated on the east coast. The rest is located along the southern and western coastline making it roughly 2,147 km as the crow flies from the southernmost to the northernmost settlement. As a result, going from one settlement to another is either time consuming (when taking a boat) or expensive (when going by plane). Going by car is not an option, as no two towns are connected by road. In short, if ever there was an ideal case for which the internet could prove its long-hailed claim of eliminating time and space, this is it. The demographics, however, also challenges the physical communication infrastructure. While Nuuk (the capital) and Qaqortoq (the largest town in the southern part of Greenland) are connected to the internet through a cable running to Island and Canada, the east coast and northern part of the west coast is connected via satellite. The remainder of the west coast is

connected to the internet via a 1410 km chain of radio stations. Obviously, the internet comes cheaper, faster and more reliable to residents in Nuuk and Qaqortoq than to residents anywhere else. It comes therefore as no surprise that the reason most often provided by citizens for not having an internet connection is the associated costs. In a survey conducted by HS Analyse July 2013 on behalf of the Self Rule 74% of the respondents that did not have any private internet connection mentioned costs (including the purchase of a computer) as the prime reason for this. And, as was to be expected, it was primarily the respondents living in remote areas that voiced this concern.

The second tenet of eDemocracy – that of democracy – is no less interesting in Greenland. Greenland is a young democracy still in the making. Following 232 years of Danish colonization and 26 years of being a Danish county Greenland had its first democratically elected legislative authority in 1979 with the introduction of Home-Rule (Janussen, 2003). In addition, Greenland as of today faces grave political challenges that have generated public focus on and repeatedly calls for civic political participation. Thus, parliamentary decisions regarding extractive industries have spun public outcry for participation resulting in among other the formation of a coalition of NGOs that works for better citizen involvement. Simultaneously, feelings of loss of local democracy affected by a 2009 structural reform that reduced 18 municipalities to four have surfaced in public and political debate. As an answer to these worries Qaasuitsup Kommunia (the northernmost municipality) has held an instructional election on whether or not to divide the municipality. 81% voted for a division. And finally, though the potentials of technologically mediated political participation has not yet been explored in any significant way in Greenland, local and national governments have started to provide services and information to citizens online.

Theory

The theoretical framework guiding the study of Greenlandic eDemocratic discourses is combined of Laclau's notion of empty signifiers, Foucault's power/knowledge analysis and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). While the concept of empty signifiers has already been presented briefly it deserves a bit more attention. According to Laclau, an empty signifier '*is just the name for an absent fullness, the positive reverse of a situation negatively perceived*' (2001: 9). As examples he offers political terms such as 'order', 'justice' and 'revolution' to which, I would argue, we can add 'eDemocracy'. What unifies and makes room for a struggle amongst eDemocratic discourses, then, is that they are opposed to non-democracy. Now, the void inherent in empty signifiers is continuously given substance through discursive struggles whereby some discourses unites into chains of equivalences while others are excluded. In Laclua's own words: '*Being the name of something to which no content necessarily corresponds, it borrows such a content from the particular force capable of contingently incarnating that empty universality at any particular moment in time. This is the very definition of the hegemonic operation*' (ibid.). However, the hegemony cannot be assured once and for all, but is always open to alteration and even eradication. This is exactly what happens when one regime is challenged by other discourses and which prompts Laclau to state that '*political emancipation can only mean the displacement of the existing relations of power – the construction of a new power, but not its radical elimination*' (ibid.: 8). However, there is more to the concept than the positive reverse of non-democracy as its potential substances are technologically conditioned. Thus, means and ends are merged into one concept. In order to trace how actors construct eDemocracy within this setup it will be informative to apply Foucault's knowledge/power analysis. Similar to Laclau, Foucault operates with a constructivist perspective on knowledge. That is, knowledge is not about establishing correspondence between statements and states in the world. Rather, it is a distinct element in the strategic power relations that exists in every social relation (Faubion, 2002). Within these social relations power is exercised through and reproduced by discourses that define the normal from the deviant and define the limits of knowledge. As a consequence the analytical focus is shifted from those who exercise power to the relationships through

which power flows, is resisted and stabilized via discourse negotiations (Foucault, 1994: 99-101). To say that power works through discourse negotiations amounts to say that power produces knowledge, discourses, moral positions, technologies and so forth. The system of power relationships that at a particular point in history can be established between these constructs is captured with the concept of dispositif (Gordon, 1980: 194). During Foucault's authorship his conceptualization of thinking underwent a significant shift, which is very relevant for this study. From conceptualizing thinking as an anonymous discursive thing he started to see thinking as '*a situated practice of critical reflection that establishes a certain distance from existing forms of acting and understanding and also works to remediate and recombine these forms*' (2009: 80). This shift is accompanied by a shift in the object of study. In his early analyses, Foucault studied forms of power that found their conditions of possibilities in stable regimes of knowledge/power. In his later analyses, the actors under scrutiny finds themselves '*precisely amid upheaval, in sites of problematization in which existing forms have lost their coherence and their purchase in addressing present problems, and in which new forms of understanding and acting have to be invented*'. (Ibid.: 95). The focus on actors finding themselves in the midst of problems, on which they act by remediation and recombination fits nicely with the study of eDemocracy, as it is in the making and far from settled. Foucault brings in technologies as something that can be part of chains of equivalences. However, while he is explicit about the workings of technology as discourse he remains rather silent regarding the working of technology understood as artefacts (Gerrie, 2003). In order to analyse technological artefacts' work in the discourse formation the paper draws on ANT. ANT provides an analysis of people and technological artefacts as equal actors who continuously translate, delegate and pass on knowledge, meaning, action and discourses in networks (Latour, 1993 and 1994). Thus, ANT, like Foucault, shifts the analytical focus from the individual actor to the network that constitutes the conditions of possibilities for a given action or discourse formation (Matthewman, 2013: 284). Moreover, constructs like knowledge, moral positions, technologies and so forth, can be subsumed by the term 'actor' that emphasises the different constructs' equal opportunities for action. This in turn enables an analysis of how they, despite their essential differences, simultaneously exercise power in the discourse negotiations and are results of these very negotiations. Finally, by adding networks as an analytical tool it becomes possible to map out paths of discursive power and thereby identify relevant actors.

Method

The following section is divided into three. The first section accounts for how relevant actors within Greenland have been selected through the creation of an eDemocratic network. The next section describes which data have been gathered and how. In addition, some methodological considerations regarding the use of interviews in discourse analysis are discussed. The final section explains how data have been analysed.

Networked actors

In order to explore who the relevant actors are the study establishes a Greenlandic eDemocratic network, the principle of which is explicitly founded in the theoretical framework of ANT. The network is established by identifying relevant actors, compare these to each other and by so doing manufacturing homogenous clusters. Next, by looking for relevant others in the discourse negotiations within an identified cluster it is possible to connect the different clusters and thereby lay bare the paths of discursive power. The network that results from these exercises continuously grows and reshapes as new clusters of actors and connections are introduced throughout the discourse negotiations. In principle, any actor that contributes to the conditions of possibilities is relevant. However, a gradual distinction between levels of contribution is

manufactured according to a principle of proximity to the effect of dividing clusters of actors into primary and secondary. The artificiality of the clusters and divisions cannot be overestimated. First off, one actor can occur in multiple clusters. Thus, one actual participant were both a member of the political party IA, member of the municipal board of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and worked at the national citizen portal, sullissivik.gl. Secondly, the actors are interrelated in profound ways, which makes division and characterization highly problematic. Thirdly, due to the scope of the study potential relevant actors are excluded from the network. E.g. Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq is the only municipality out of four that is included in the network, though the remaining municipalities might very well be significant actors as well. To sum up, the clusters and divisions are solely crafted for the sake of analysis.

Would-be eDemocratic actors residing and operating in Greenland are regarded as primary actors. Correspondingly, the clusters comprising these actors are subject to greatest scrutiny. Actors residing and operating outside Greenland are considered as secondary actors even though they might exert a profound influence. The secondary part of the network is limited in scope because only those actors that are either mentioned by primary actors as relevant or estimated so by the researcher in terms of their implications for the Greenlandic discourse negotiations are included. Given the focus of the paper, the strategies and meanings construed and employed by secondary actors have not been analysed in their own right, but only in so far they impact the Greenlandic discourse negotiation.

Gathering data

Data on the discursive construction of eDemocracy comprises of public materials and open-ended interviews – focus group as well as one-to-one. Public materials include the parliamentary report on the structural reform (KANUKOKA, 2005), the national digitalization strategy 2014-2017 (Naalakkersuisut – Government of Greenland, 2014), the opening speech by the premier of the government at the opening of the autumn session of the parliament September 13th 2013 (Hammond, 2013), observation at a public panel debate entitled 'The future citizen inclusion' arranged by WWF and ICC Greenland and an administrative memo concerning citizen inclusion in political decisions regarding the mineral sector (Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, 2014). All materials are publicly available. However, they can only yield a limited amount of information on how primary actors fill out the normative void within eDemocracy. A much more suitable approach to explore these issues is simply by talking to the relevant human actors. That is, by doing interviews. Using interview data in discourse analyses is not wholly unproblematic, though, as the researcher necessarily influences the production of discourses. One way of meeting this challenge, as proposed by Poulsen (2000) is by asking descriptive questions during the interview. That is, asking participants to describe their experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. The solution, however, is not applicable to the present study, partly because no such thing as a functioning eDemocracy exists in Greenland yet, why participants cannot be expected to draw on actual experiences hereof, and partly because the purpose is to explore technologically conditioned normative discourses in the making. Now, focus group interviews are especially well-suited to meet these demands (Wilkinson, 1998 and 1999). First of all, the purpose of a focus group interview is to make the participants talk to each other, rather than the interviewer to the effect of constraining the interviewer's impact on the discourse construction. Secondly, by way of utilizing and documenting the interactional character of meaning making this method can yield data on participants' construction of especially normative opinions (Kitzinger, 1994 and Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). That is, normative opinions are much more debatable than participants' personal experiences. But, due to the Greenlandic demographics, once again one might add, it can at times be practically impossible to gather actors to a focus group interview. Therefore, if it has not been possible to set up a focus group interview with a cluster of actors, one-to-one interviews have been conducted with representatives from the cluster instead. However, in one-to-one interviews the researcher is potentially much more influential on the construction of meaning. To delimit the interviewer's influence on the

discourse construction while keeping the conversations thematic relevant a rough interview guide was designed. It consists of four broad thematic questions: Why is political participation relevant? What is political participation? How could political participation be technologically mediated? Potentials and challenges for technologically mediated political participation? Each thematic question have several sub questions intended to get the conversation going in case it got stuck. Some of these are descriptive such as 'how do you experience online political deliberation?' and some are normative such as 'who ought to set the political agenda?'. This mixing of questions does not, I would argue, pose a problem as people tend not to restrict themselves to descriptive or normative answers even though they are asked one or the other type of question. Rather, descriptions tend to be saturated with values just as much as people tend to exemplify opinions by describing experiences.

Until now, five interviews have been conducted: two focus group interviews (one with members of the municipal board of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq representing the political parties Siumut and IA, and one with employees at the Office for Strategically Development at Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq) and three one-to-one interviews (one with an IA member of the parliament, one with an employee at the Ministry for Industry and Mineral Resources, and one with Head of Department for Domestic Affairs in the Self Rule administration). All interviews have been fully transcribed including pauses, interjections and ejaculations in order to document in detail the conversations as they unfolded. This in turn facilitates the analysis, which also takes into consideration the context.

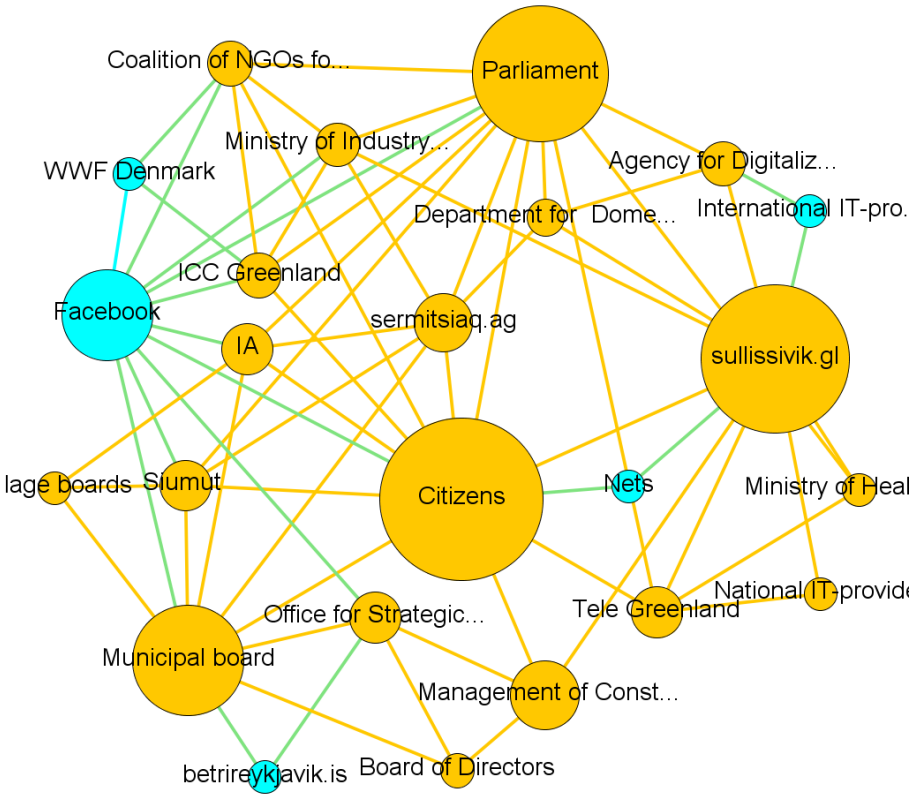
Data analysis

All data have been subject to a discourse analysis. That is, an analysis of the rules that operate in the discourse formations by inquiring into who says what, how, why and to what effect, how actors represent themselves and others and how discursive legitimacy and stability are established. In other words, the purpose is to lay bare how eDemocratic chains of equivalence are formed through discourse negotiations. In order to facilitate such an analysis all data, except the observations from the public panel debate, have been coded using QDA Miner Lite – a free to use coding software that enables and structures an analysis of texts – broadly understood – into themes, subthemes, moods, patterns of interaction and so forth. As stated earlier, the possible interference of the researcher on the data produced is a risk that needs to be dealt with. Therefore, certain care to explicate the interviewer's impact has been taken when analysing interviews. Furthermore, it will be naïve to think that I have approached the data without any preconceived notions of what was expected to be found. Firstly, I am informed by my theoretical outlook. Secondly, with regard to interviews, open-ended as they may be, I did design the interview guide to the effect of delimiting the range of possible themes addressed by participants. Finally, during the transcription, several discourses have already been identified. In sum, it is difficult to define exactly when the analysis started, as it seems to have been going on all along.

Initial Findings

Following the method of identifying and manufacturing clusters of relevant primary actors, and mapping these in Gephi[1], a Greenlandic eDemocratic network as shown in figure 1 has been established.

[1] An interactive visualization and exploration platform



Figur 1 Greenlandic eDemocratic Network. Orange circles represent clusters of primary actors. Blue circles represent clusters of secondary actors. Orange lines represent relations between clusters of primary actors. Green lines represent relations between clusters of primary and secondary actors. Blue lines represent relations between clusters of secondary actors. The size of circles indicates the number of relations in which the clusters are part; the greater the circle the greater share of the median number of total relations.

The clusters of primary actors comprise of members of legislative bodies (the parliament and the municipal board of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq), party members (of Siumut, which is the leading party of the government and three out of four municipalities, and IA, which is the largest party in opposition to the government and the leading party of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq), public administration (Self-Rule and Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq), NGO's, IT-providers (national and international), technologies (especially Facebook and sermitsiaq.ag, which is the national newspapers website) and citizens. The cluster termed 'citizens' contains actors that do not have any other relation to a functioning eDemocracy than being potential end-user hereof. As such, members of political parties and those working professionally with matters related to eDemocracy, e.g. in the public administration or as IT-providers, are not included in this cluster even though they strictly speaking are citizens. Of relevant secondary actors can be mentioned Nets (a private company owned by Bain Capital, Advent International and the Danish pension fund ATP that manage the login system used for the existing Greenlandic citizen portal, sullissivik.gl), Kimik iT (a private Danish enterprise that provides three out of four municipalities in Greenland with IT solutions and manages the link between Greenlandic public IT systems and the Central Person Registry in Denmark) and Facebook (in every interview conducted so far, people have drawn on their Facebook experiences when deliberating on eDemocracy).

How do members of the legislative bodies and employees at the public administration make meaning of eDemocracy? How do their relations in the network inform their discourse negotiations? In what follows

some initial findings, some preliminary answers to these questions, will be presented. In order to make more solid conclusions, these initial discoveries need further empirical evidence. What is presented here, then, is but a first analysis of eDemocratic discourse formations and, as such, needs to be read with some precaution.

The eDemocratic impetus

The issue explored is not solely an academic construct, but is certainly present in the actors' experiences as well. Thus, the technological conditioning is expressed in statements like '*that's just the way the development goes, right?'* (Interview, Office for Strategically Development, March 14th 2014), '*it is more important than ever that we constantly consider digitization as a driving force*' (Naalakkersuisut – Government of Greenland, 2014: 2), *'I think that is what is the future... it is coming sooner than I think*' (Interview, municipal board, April 11th 2014), *'We must admit that sometimes we feel that it is not so much legislation and so on that affects daily life. It is as much technological change'* (Interview, Department of Domestic Affairs, April 30th 2014) and '*It is a platform, you must use and that you have to develop more*' (Interview, the parliament, April 28th 2014). Similarly, the actors' opposition towards the democratic status quo – the absent fullness of the community – is articulated thus *'It's almost gradually becoming a form of shareholder democracy where at each election, general meeting, it is estimated: "Have I been happy? Have I got enough out of it? Like, have I got enough of my share?". If not, then I choose a new board. Instead of having a participatory democracy'* (Interview, Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, April 10th 2014) and '*It has been a tradition to say: "It is the municipality's problem or it is the Government's". Point fingers and say: "it is you who must take care of this". Instead of seeing oneself as part of the solution*'(Interview, Office for Strategically Development, March 14th 2014). Thus, the eDemocratic impetuses for discourse negotiating seem to be agreed upon.

eDemocracy in construction

To be clear from the onset, there is no clear-cut agreement, neither within clusters nor among them, on what eDemocracy ought to be and why. That is, the actors' discourses are saturated with internally conflicts, which, to my mind, leave evidence that the actors find themselves in a situation where no stable regime of knowledge/power is easily identifiable. In other words, the actors are struggling to give meaning to and secure themselves a place in a potential Greenlandic eDemocracy. Furthermore, judging from the interviews the actors employ a high level of reflection, in the sense that they actively reformulate and recombine possible discourses. From these negotiations, though, one coherent discourse is taking shape, which frames eDemocracy as a technologically mediated critical dialogues between electorate, members of legislative bodies and public administration, where the agenda is set by the legislative bodies or the public administration and where topics of public deliberation is made, again by either the legislative bodies or the public administration, sufficiently narrow and concrete so that citizens can be expected to be interested in and capable of participating. Furthermore, all political decisions reside in the hands of the legislative bodies formally representing the public. This discourse is made up of a set of contested constructs regarding the democratic dialogue, the technological framework, the citizen, the politician and the public administrator, each of which deserve attention.

Generally speaking eDemocracy is framed as a technological mediated dialogue as opposed to e.g. petitions and voting. This is not to say that the other possibilities provided by the technological framework are discarded right away. The democratic dialogue between citizens, politicians and the public administration is simply given primacy. In other words, the value of eDemocracy is largely judged by how well it can facilitate a democratic dialogue. During an interview on April 11th 2014 with the municipal board one participant,

thus, talked about the necessity of re-establishing the democratic dialogue in the municipal, which had been challenged by the 2009 structural reform. To this, the remaining participants added:

P1. It's a prerequisite for…
P2: Yes
P1: … participation and dialogue and that you don't control from above, but that you kind of listen how ... how can we work together in the best possible way so
P2: Yes. I see it as the core
P1: Yes

Similarly, one participant argued that the overall political quality would improve by a greater dialogue with citizens: '*The more input the better. The question is just how…* ' (interview, Department of Domestic Affairs, April 30th 2014). Yet another example of the priority given to dialogue in the participatory process comes from the premier of the government: '*The Government is of the opinion that information and dialogue with people create the best projects. Often, people possess knowledge of local conditions, which can be critical to a project's success. I have previously mentioned that the Government prioritizes local democracy. These are not just empty words*' (Hammond, 2013). As Hammond's speech attests to, the dialogical element is unquestionably given primacy also without the eDemocratic context. Within the eDemocratic context the primacy of the dialogue, however, seems to be accentuated by the technological actors. Thus, when deliberating on eDemocracy interview participants tended to draw heavily on online social networks, e.g. Facebook, or other technological actors that facilitate online debate, e.g. sermitsiaq.ag (the national newspapers' website on which much public political debate take place) to the effect of limiting the discourse to the question of online dialogues. Now, the participants framed these technologies both as a challenge and as possibility with regard to facilitating a democratic dialogue. Thus, participants valued online dialogue because the technological mediation distances the citizens from the legislative bodies and the public administration whereby citizens not comfortable with speaking directly to either of these institutions are provided a suitable communication channel. In addition, the distancing effect is also valued because it is supposed to traverse the informal power structures that, according to the participants, constrain much political participation in Greenland. The very same feature of the technological mediation, however, is also framed as a challenge to the democratic dialogue. Thus, the potential quantity of citizen generated input challenges the process of lawmaking. While this was mentioned by all participants it seems especially worrisome to public administrators who frequently mentioned that citizen involvement is very expensive and time consuming: *'It's just tedious, like hell […] And it would be much heavier if you began to include social media'* (Interview, Department of Domestic Affairs, April 30th 2014). This is deemed all the more troublesome because the public administration already lacks resources: '*we just have to realize that our administration, great as it is, then all people have enough to do*' (interview, the parliament, April 28th 2014). Technological mediation moreover poses a challenge to the democratic dialogue because it is understood as animating a certain type of dialogue that is judged as having a politically low standard. When asked how they would feel if the political agenda was set by the citizens via a technological platform the municipal board (interview, April 11th 2014) replied:

P1: I do not know how to interpret those responses on sermitsiaq.ag, Facebook and ...
P2: Mmh
P1: uh... I don't think it's benign. And I do not think its quality... it is very bitter [laughter]
P3: Mmh

This view was also clearly expressed during an interview with the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, April 10th 2014: '*That is what you experience on Facebook. But that is not – in my world – an expansion of democracy. Quantitatively it is, as people state their opinions. But, come on, it is a pile of rubbish*'. The discourse on the eDemocratic dialogue is not only informed by the participants reading of the

technological framework but also by their construction of the citizen, who is largely constructed as complicating the dialogue. When speaking on citizens' political interest (interview, April 11th 2014) participants from the municipal board agreed:

> *P2: But generally speaking, it seems a bit like... and that... I'm thinking kind of ... likening with the comments at sermitsiaq.ag and the debates that go on in the parliament. Because it's simply [snaps the fingers] fireworks*
> *P1: Mmh*
> *P3: Mmh*
> *P2: and action packed and highly explosive topics and cliff-hangers and everything*
> *I: [laughter]*
> *P2: It's extremely exciting. And maybe it's just not really a tradition of local politics to dig trenches from which you shoot at each other*

This could be read as a comment on the nature of local politics vs. national politics. However, the quote is accompanied by statements like '*Apparently it is not all that sexy. I don't get it either*', '*I don't get it. I don't understand why*' and '*We think it's really exciting [laughter]*', why I think it is fair to conclude that what are being characterized are citizens and their view on local democracy and not local democracy as such. The constructed citizen, moreover, favours sociality to politics. Thus, one participant compared public meetings with a 'kaffemik' – a traditional informal social gathering widely used to celebrate e.g. birthdays: '*This is the way one perceives local democracy: that you as a minister or politician go out and talk, even across political parties, and say what you want to say and the village's residents have the opportunity to get up close and are allowed to ask questions. Yes it is a bit like a good kaffemik tradition*' (interview, Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, April 10th 2014). Indeed, this social aspect of politics was by the municipal board (interview, municipal board, April 11th 2014) framed as a direct challenge to the prospects of eDemocracy:

> *P1: I don't know. But I think ... I just find it hard to imagine that... eDemocracy can be achieved in our smaller settlements. Not even Paamiut [laughter]*
> *P2: Mmh*
> […]
> *P3: But ... I agree with P1. I think it is very much part of the culture still that the relation...*
> *P2: Yes*
> *P3: The personal relationship*
> *P1: Mmh*
> *P3: It is very very important*
> *P2: Mmh*
> *I: Yes*
> *P3: And therefore the physical meeting is still very important*

The citizen, however, is not understood as politically disinterested per se. On the contrary, it is emphasized very strongly that people tend to be very informative and hold strong opinions on personal issues: '*if you ask people directly into the area that affects them - whether it's your child's school or day care or it's your recreational club or whatever it may be – your senior centre - and this is something that relates to your life, then people will speak up*' (Ibid.). Complementarily, the citizen is constructed as possessing local as opposed to expert knowledge: '*The locals they know their nature. And if you have the patience and time, it implies an astounding amount of knowledge about a lot of issues. About the weather and stuff. There are many of the locals who believe that our airport is placed at the wrong site. There's always foggy out there* […] *and it blows all the time* […] *that is the kind of things that the locals know about*' (interview, Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, April 10th 2014).

Taking this construct into account, it is no surprise that politicians and public administration find it hard to leave political decisions and responsibility in the hands of citizens. Rather, what is needed, according to the logic of this discourse, is to adjust the democratic dialogue to the citizens' political capabilities. That is, the legislative bodies or the public administration must decide on which topics are to be publicly debated and which are not. Furthermore, they need to frame these topics in a way so that citizens are able to participate in the deliberation, which means that the topics need to be sufficiently concrete and affect the citizens personally in some way or another. As such, the power to set the political agenda and frame topics is very much placed in the hands of the legislative bodies and the public administration. That this is actual praxis was unmistakably expressed by the premier of the government: '*The parliament and the government are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people. But sometimes it's so important issues that we have to ask the question directly to the public. Earlier, I mentioned that the government wants to abolish the overall policy - zero tolerance towards uranium. This basic overall question we decide here in the parliament*' (Hammond, 2013). Apparently the overall policy of a zero tolerance towards uranium extraction was not important enough, in the sense of being concrete and affecting the personal lives of citizens, to leave the decision in the hands of the people. The discourse on political actors as necessary critical decision makers also surfaced during a panel debate on the future citizen inclusion were the Minister of Industry & Mineral Resources, when pushed by the other participants, threw out his arms in a surrendering gesture and stated in an ironical tone '*Well, then we can just do direct democracy like the Swiss Cantons and vote for everything*' (personal observation at a panel debate, April 24th) effectively closing the topic. One possible and indeed plausible interpretation of the ensuing silence is that no one of the participating actors really found direct democracy desirable. Instead of taking political decisions, the citizens' role within this constructed eDemocracy is, rather, to contribute with local knowledge and perspectives once the overall political decisions have been made. While this seems like a small part to play, one participant observed (interview, the parliament, April 28th) that this is what all politics ought to be about:

> *P1: And that idea I like; that you bring societal decisions down to a level where people understand that "Well, it's about my living room"*
> *I: Yes*
> *P1: "It's not about anything outside of me. It's about the price of the bus fare and how to get around when it is slippery and ... well, the prices in the store"*
> *I: Yes*
> *N: it has... that you takes it to a level where people [inauidble] "But you can easily participate"*
> *I: Yes*
> *N: "For it is about YOUR life, when you walk out the door. But also when you sit at home"*
> *I: Yes*
> *N: that's really what politics is all about to me. Something very very down to earth*

Conclusions

Each actor argues for what he or she takes to be the best eDemocracy solution, albeit from their particular position. Actors within the public administration speak from a position of professional integrity; what is at stake is the quality of laws:

> *P1: So, ideally, all legislation should, so to speak, correspond to the population's opinion of right and wrong*
> *I: Yes*
> *P1: so fundamentally... that ought to be the first thing you need to do: It is to make sure that you have some legislation that people generally perceive as good and reasonable and workable*

(Interview, Department of Domestic Affairs, April 30th 2014)

Likewise, members of legislative bodies generally speak of themselves as visionary and political responsible, as opposed to the naval-gazing citizen. As such, they frame themselves as a necessary bulwark against irresponsible and shortsighted political decisions; as securing political eDemocratic responsibility:

P1: We listen and we have... we are in dialogue. So as P3 says, so they cannot come and say "Hey. Now there must be a culture house here. "Come on... "All right, look..." come on
P2: Mmh
P1: There must be a meaning to it [laughter]
P2: Ultimately, we are the decision makers

These constructs, though, are not just simple power exhibitions. Rather, members of the legislative bodies and employees at the public administration find themselves in a vast network, which includes diverse actors such as technological artifacts like Facebook, sermitsiaq.ag and sullissivik.gl, administrative institutions like the Ministry of Infrastructure and Health and private enterprises like Tele Greenland and Nets. All of these actors – and especially the actual artifacts of Facebook and sermitsiaq.ag – inform the discourse negotiations and therefore the constructions of eDemocracy. Members of the legislative bodies and employees at the public administration, however, do not pass on constructs passively. Rather, they are reflexive and nuanced when deliberating on eDemocracy; they do not confine themselves to one discourse. Instead, they exhibit, weigh and discuss several contrasting discourses among themselves and their peers. Through this process they struggle by way of discourse negotiations to create positions that are suitable to them and which provide the relations that best support their version of an eDemocracy. And it is within these negotiations, informed as they are by multiple actors within the network, that power is exercised.

Further Research

This paper presents some initial findings from an ongoing research project. In order to provide a more solid foundation from which to draw conclusions on the discourse negotiations within and in-between the clusters of members of legislative bodies and employees at the public administration, further empirical evidence is needed. Furthermore, in order to paint a more complete picture of the eDemocratic discourse negotiations within Greenland the citizens' own discourse negotiations need to be explored.

Yet another component that needs further consideration is the Greenlandic eDemocratic network and how discursive power is distributed throughout it. In this paper, the primary function of the network has been to identify relevant clusters of actors and trace the relations in-between them. As such, it has been used as a method to map the field of interest. However, I think it would be both interesting and fruitful to apply the network more directly in the discourse analysis as a way to map out how the discourse negotiations are mediated. This in turn would require additional empirical evidence.

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