

The next Wave away from Democracy?

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According to Robert Dahl there are three waves of democracy: The first one was establishing democracy in ancient Greece, where democracy was defined as the equal participation of free citizens in persona and to reign and to be reigned alternately. The second wave was establishing representative democracy in the modern age in national states. The third upcoming wave is democracy in a globalising system. But the second and third wave of democracy generate a history of decay of participation. So, out of a neoclassical perspective the relation between the third wave and forms of direct democracy in the internet as possibilities are examined a try to increase participation.

Key words: Democracy theory, Innovation in civic participation, history of democracy, virtue, liquid democracy.

1) Introduction

Many history books about democracy tell us a story of a continuous development of democracy: from its ancient beginnings towards modern representation. Most of those narrations state a progress and a victory of democracy, at least since 1945 (for instance Dunn 2005). But my hypothesis is that the opposite is the case: It is a story of decay.

To realise that, one has to understand the historical transformations of democracy. According to Robert Dahl (1989: 13-36) there were two transformations of democracy yet: The first one was establishing democracy in the ancient Greek city state (*polis*). There democracy was defined literally as the rule of the people – for instance by Aristotle (Pol. 1317 a 40-b 16). It was understood as the equal right of participation by free citizens in person, and as reigning and be reigned alternately. The people of these face-to-face-societies assembled in the *ekklesia* and decided about the issues concerning the whole *polis*. The second wave was establishing representative democracy in national states. This happened by the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, starting with the American and the French Revolution. In those modern systems, citizens elect representatives which manage the political issues instead of the people. My historical argument is that establishing a representative system in the second wave is a history of decay, because the original democratic values are fundamentally reduced in order to manage a complex and bigger political system. The values of efficiency and rationality trump the value of a broad participation. This is the case because political representation is in its origins nondemocratic. Indeed, feudal representation was just

virtual (Levin 1992: 45 f.), but in a system of modern representation the representatives are elected and accountable in certain ways. But this is still not democratic, because it does not mean what the original democracy meant to be: equal access of the citizens to the political sphere. In classical democracies citizens decided on their own about political issues and controlled the administration. If we accept this classical promise of democracy, then modern democracy is not democratic enough, because elections are an aristocratic way of recruiting politicians. Instead in its conceptual core the original democracy means the free and equal participation of the citizens, and recruiting the magistrates by lot (sometimes by elections), and controlling their competences because of principles such as annuity, collegiality, or the prohibition of iteration. (Pabst 2010: 52-61) So, it is an immense irony that modern democracy had its breakthrough by establishing a (related to its original intend) nondemocratic system, when elites decide for the citizens, and the only competences of the citizens are voting for politicians or getting engaged in a party or NGO.

But there is a third transformation going on (Dahl 1989: 311-321): This is democracy in a globalised system, for instance in the supranational EU. And with a growing size of territory and population in a supranational unit the chances to make representatives accountable and to have as many delegates as possible even decrease more than in a national state¹. So, the third transformation could be the one that harms the original promises of democracy even more². On the other hand, this wave could be linked to participation via the Internet in new ways, as many theorists hope since the 1990s. Implications of the information and communications technology (ICT) never made it into Dahl's thinking. So, could a third wave of a digital democracy be a solution of a more participatory politics, not in terms of space but interests of the participants (Raab/ Bellamy 2004: 17f.)?

In this paper I want to examine the dialectics of the concepts and ideas of a liquid democracy in the context of the third transformation. The question is: Could liquid democracy stop the decay, and could it bring a turn towards a broader political participation? According to Dahl's theory, the third wave of a globalising democracy could lead to a decrease of those possibilities and the democratic promises even more than the second one. But on the one hand, there are many concepts and ideas how to increase the people's participation online, and how to create a digital democratic innovation. Could the third wave become a more democratic system? My theoretical answer will be neoclassical because it is orientated on

¹ For an example, just take a look at the democratic deficit of the EU, which is even a lack according to the criteria of liberal democracy.

² The decay would go on. And the problem of elitist representation increases when lobbyists get more power than voters in the post-democracy (Crouch 2004).

classical Greek ideas and values of democracy with the question how to increase participation for the citizens³. My point of view shares Hannah Arendt's (1971: 28-37) statement that politics means the freedom to decide about the issues that concern the whole community, and one is free if s/he can participate in this public realm. With such a point of view I will argue against the optimistic approach that there can be a digital democracy that increases participation in a political sphere – at least not under our social circumstances. Therefore, in a historical part, I have to show the decay of democracy during the second transformation, in order to understand the problem of the representative system and its relation to the size of the political unit. Just if one is aware of this shift, it is possible to think about the third one. The form we call representative democracy nowadays took first shape during the Constitutional Debates of the 18th century; so, I will illustrate my point with one example: the Ratification Debate in the USA in 1787/88. Then I am going to examine the dialectics of digital democracy. By doing so, I will summarize the assumptions and arguments for a democratic renovation in the digital sphere. Afterwards I will argue against the digital turn, because basically, classical democracy needs a citizen's virtue and certain homogeneity of the citizens to decide in favour of the common good, and this is not the case in the digital sphere for reasons I have to show.

2) The Second Transformation

While the first transformation of democracy was the one of Athens around 450 B.C., the second one took shape with the debates about a government of the people, starting with the revolutions of the 18th century. This transformation can be best illustrated by choosing one of the constitutional debates in France or USA. I choose the American ratification debate, because in the writings of the group of the Federalists (in the *Federalist Papers*), the elements of the new representative system are presented clearer than in the many debates during the chaotic French struggles; and the Federalists defend a constitution that is still in charge. In the debate on the Ratification the Federalists succeeded against their competitors, the Anti-Federalists. According to the theory of the Federalists the new system is an extended republic and a popular government. Nonetheless, that means the total political exclusion of the so-called common people, because representatives as elites would govern much better. By doing so they defended a system we accept as democratically today, but which is explicitly anti-democratic.

³ So, I do not want to argue pro slavery or the exclusion of women, but towards equality and freedom of citizens nowadays.

Factions, defined as egoistic interest groups, are a disease the Federalists want to fight. So, to avoid those evils, as John Madison wrote in his famous *Federalist Paper Number 10*, democracy, understood as the ancient *polis*-democracy, has to be avoided, because such a system would create factions. He defines democracy mostly correct as

“a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. A common passion of interest will [...] be felt by a majority of the whole; a communication and concert result from the form of government itself; and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party of an obnoxious individual.” (Hamilton/ Jay/ Madison 2001: 44)

This would have led to turbulences, spectacles, and violence (Ibid: 46). The cures against those democratic factions, which are the aristocratic (and later liberal) fear against the tyranny of the majority, as John Jay states, are representatives in unanimous councils, because they should not “having been awed by power, or influenced by any passion, except love for their country” (Ibid: 7). So, when democracy gets fundamentally neglected, the term republic gets transformed. Formerly it was associated with the participation of the people who need a citizen’s virtue. But now republicanism gets dissociated from classical democracy, and associated with representation and popular government. (Howe 1988: 110-115/ 123-125) The popular government consists in elections of representatives that should manage politics in a more rational and less factious way than the common people. It means giving away most of the political power of the people, because the republican idea of a democratic citizen’s virtue gets reduced to the aristocratic virtue of some wise and rational men. The accountability of representatives is very low, because they should be less influenced by local interests of the voters, and politicians should control each other in a system of checks and balances. „Ambition must be made to counteract ambition“ (Hamilton/ Jay/ Madison 2001: 268). So, representatives may be accountable to each other but much less to the citizens. (Ball 1988: 143f./ 156-160; Jörke 2011: 157-166; Shalhope 2004: 100f.)

This government should be able to run on its own, without the people’s check, because a natural aristocracy would govern. So, the social status of those aristocrats is higher than the one of the voters, and this social inequality gets perpetuated in politics. And this status destroys the democratic approach of an equal participation. (Manin 1997: 102-131) Even if we think nowadays that Members of Parliament (MP) should care about the interests of the voters, we still distinguish two political classes. Both concepts are elitist, but – and that is why the Federalists are a good example for the transformation – the Federalists are more

explicit about their resentments against the *demos* and the aristocratic assumptions of representation.

This elitist view is connected to the idea of an extended republic. Madison defines a representative republic as a system that gets its power from the people, but is different from democracy in two ways: “[F]irst, the delegation of the government, in the latter [the republic], to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter [republic] may be extended” (Hamilton/ Jay/ Madison 2001: 46). This means that a *polis*-democracy would be impossible, but a national state is. There the whole people cannot assemble. The Federalists thought, a nationalistic system would be more efficient than a confederation of single states with forms of local democracy, especially when it comes to foreign policy and economics. (Ibid: 132-143; Dahl 1976: 86-88). That is how the terms *union*, *representation*, *virtue*, and *federalism* get connected. A strong union, Hamilton says, would repress domestic factions. (Hamilton/ Jay/ Madison 2001: 37-40) So, the elected representatives are disconnected from the citizens and the interests of the single states. That is why representatives, Madison writes, “refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens“ (Ibid: 46). So, this republic is a completely new thing. Compared to Charles de Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau that have described the republic earlier as small republics, where the virtuous citizens have to act for the common good, the new model is a big national state, where an elite should act politically without the people (Miller 1988: 106-110; Onuf 1988: 361-364).

But how come that this transformation of concepts like *republic* and *popular government* are interpreted as a democracy nowadays? This shift was a rhetorical task of the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson who spoke a populist language, but did not change the political system. Furthermore, by the end of the 18th century some progressive authors defined the new system as a democracy. Athens would have been the simple democracy of direct participation in a small state, and the American democracy would be a complex form with indirect participation in a big state. For instance Thomas Paine (1865: 361) wrote in the 1790s:

“Representation was a thing unknown in the ancient democracies. In those the mass of the people met and enacted laws [...] in the first person. [...] As these democracies increased in population, and the territory extended, the simple democratical form became unwieldy and impracticable [...] Had the system of representation been then understood, as it is now, there is no reason to believe that those forms of government now called monarchical or aristocratical would ever have taken place.”

In short: The second transformation of democracy towards its representative form in an extended state would have been a democratic progress. Paine (Ibid: 364) famously concludes, that the American system “is representation ingrafted upon democracy [...]. What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude.” But such authors ignore the fact that representation has aristocratic roots – like choosing elites and building a hierarchy. That is why historically the concept of democracy was put upon representation, not the other way round. (Kalyvas 2008: 92f; Roberts 1994: 180/ 209)

So, this elite system, intended to be an alternative to democracy, was soon interpreted as modern democracy. It was decorated with the rhetoric of negative freedoms, equality before the law, and popular government. (Robertson 2005: 1-9; Shalhope 2004: 110f.) But the positive freedom of the participation of equal citizens that made themselves free from economic forces and hierarchies vanished gradually with the rise of the liberalism (Arendt 1971: 38-78). Out of the Federalist’s transformations scholars like Gordon Wood (1969: 606-615) deduce the end of classical politics, because this shift was modern and liberal; it generated a representative democracy without a citizen’s virtue or participation, but a balance of power, without any concept of a common good. That is how the terminological shift from *representative republic* to *representative democracy* could take shape. This is why my argument for this section is that the representative democracy has non-democratic roots and means the reduction of the people’s participation (Manin 1997: 134-148). Indeed, this second transformation, this wave away from democracy, changed into party systems and a more citizen-oriented approach of the MP. But still the institutional form has many similarities and bases on a political distinction. If I am right, and if this transformation is determined by the size of the political unit, then the consequence for the third transformation towards a continental or global democracy would mean that even the last participatory approach would get lost. Can the digital sphere prevent the third transformation from becoming purely anti-democratic?

3) The Third Transformation and the Internet

The ICT for general participation in the web 2.0 offer the dislocation of acting, because it is a global medium, and, contrary to conventional media, has the possibility to interact with each other. There is a multimodality of interaction and communication. (Pentzold/ Katzenbach/ Fraas 2014: 30f.) The internet offers a new form of publicity. And the idea of the public sphere as an arena where political decisions are made, and collective identities of a *polis* are shaped is a crucial point to a neoclassical democratic approach (Gimmler 2001: 22).

Politically this interaction can go from government to citizens, from citizens to government or from citizen to citizen. And there are four ways of political communication: E-government and E-governance (which are more bureaucratic forms), E-democracy (that is supposed to be a program for reforming representative democracy), and Cyber-democracy (that means the self-government by interacting in a virtual community). While all of these concepts could help to improve the communication between politicians and the people, just the last concept wants a third transformation as “people governing themselves as political equals, and possessing all the resources and institutions necessary to do so” (Dahl 1989: 341), and want to offer a connection between web 2.0 and democracy 3.0. (Kneuer 2012: 36-44; Roleff 2012: 16-20) But is unclear if the digital sphere will become a genuinely political and democratic sphere, what means more than information and communication. What is really at stake is the question if this can empower the *demos* to rule the *polis*.

3.1) Arguments for Digital Democracy

So-called net-optimists think, a digital democracy is possible because the technical instruments (*techne*), as described above, could create an autonomous and political sphere (*politeia*) (Winner 1986: 54; Buchstein 1997: 284f.). “Previous technological breakthroughs have commonly generated exaggerated hopes that machines can transform society and democracy” (Norris 2001: 232), maybe in a revolutionary way. This of course depends on who controls this new sphere and for which purpose: politics, economy, culture, or crime. (Barney 2000: 237-240) At least the internet can be used to organize protests (like the Arabian Spring) or to get engaged into electronic civil disobedience movements. It can be an instrument of different local, national, or global interest groups. (Kleger/ Makswitat 2014: 8f.)

Because of new public forms, like the potentially space-less, costless, and timeless information and communication, it is the hope of the optimists, that this will be the basis of a broad free and equal participation of the people. Forms of direct democracy could become easier: “The Internet may broaden involvement in public life by eroding some of the barriers to political participation and civic engagement” (Norris 2001: 97). In the 1990s net-optimists, as Esther Dyson (1998) Howard Rheingold (1993), thought this could enlarge political participation, if the internet is seen as an addition to representative democracy. Then it could mean an empowerment of the people via e-voting, e-petitions and e-referenda. And a form of e-consultation could help to question and control MPs and make them understand the interests of the citizens. According to the optimists, there are several conditions given, why the internet has a democratic potential: The number of its users has highly increased in the last years; on a global scale this makes a broad inclusion and political communication thinkable. Furthermore

the amount of political information in the internet increased as well. This new sets of ICT are a huge concurrence to conventional mass media which are often seen as allies of the political elite. So, according to the optimists, this could lead to a virtual deliberation, an enrichment of the political discourse, and even liquid democracy. (Winkel 2015: 412-416) Habermas' (1992) theory of deliberative democracy is very important to those argumentations, because they hope that the internet can deliver certain new self-organised spheres or arenas for a public discourse that is designed in a rational way to construct a normative and legitimate decision. Here there should rule the forceless force of the better argument. Net-optimists think the conditions for a digital deliberative democracy are given. Those criteria are: "equal access to available resources; openness in pursuit of particular issues; the disclosure of outer and inner; and a public network of connected participants" (Gimmler 2001: 25). Out of these conditions, I will summarize the main arguments for a cyber-democracy that enlarges participation (Dyson 1998; Winkel 2015: 412; Buchstein 1997: 250f.):

- 1st. It would be easy to get into the internet, independent by time and space.
- 2nd. Information presented in the internet could be independent from political influence, and the missing professional control of quality of the information could be compensated by a collective check.
- 3rd. The internet seems to be transparent.
- 4th. It would be cheap or costless to get access.
- 5th. It could shape a counter-public area, besides parliamentarism.
- 6th. Furthermore, different groups of particular interests could get connected in order to shape a new networked public sphere. This could be done by self-regulation without the influence of a higher authority, just because of an increasing number of users.
- 7th. That is why a deregulated internet would be more or less immune against authorities or authoritarian approaches.
- 8th. The potential of this interaction is global, and ICTs make communication and participation of different actors easier.

This digital participation could be done for instance via different platforms: for instance social media like Facebook and Twitter, interactive broadcast services like YouTube, and online forums. Even the term *forum* implies an ancient approach of participation, as a place to assemble in person, to discuss and to decide, like the republican Forum Romanum or the Agora in democratic Athens (Buchstein 1997: 257f.; Perlot 2008: 125-127).

The most radical approach of digital democracy that is – according to its own hypothesis – near to classical democratic participation is the concept of liquid democracy. It was brought

into the political discourse in Europe by the Pirate parties. Liquid democracy should offer a more flexible or fluid form of making political decisions. By using a liquid feedback, citizens or party members could discuss and form political decisions in the web anytime. Questions and programmatic applications could be presented here ad hoc. Furthermore, this leads towards digital short-term voting of delegates. Unlike a common representative system with regular elections, here anytime the citizen can elect a delegate or take his/her vote away. This could be done by software such as LiquidFeedback or Adhocracy. (Liquid Democracy e. V. 2009) So, the citizen could always locate him-/herself somewhere between representation and participation. Those delegates would not be common representatives, like in an independent mandate, as the Federalists suggest. According to this new concept, participants can vote for single policies. This would be done by voting only for one part of a political program of a candidate and by making him/her the delegate just for this specific topic; and maybe the majority makes another candidate or party the delegate for another one. So, citizens would not only vote online for a party but for different opinions. More or less, the mandate would be imperative: If the delegate does not fulfil the program s/he was elected for, or changes his/her mind, citizens could take their vote away. This means a mixture of political programs and principles. If this would work, citizens could decide in a democratic way about political topics and could make the MPs accountable anytime. So, de jure politicians would not be as independent as today in their decisions but bound to the popular basis. They would rather present the political decisions of the voters to his colleagues and to society, than trying to represent them. Of course, this democratic approach implies a revolutionary element because the traditional model of a party democracy could vanish, such as free mandates as the core element of representative democracy. The egalitarian idea behind that concept is making hierarchies as flat as possible in a democracy of the basis in a decentralised system. (Moser 2014: 35-38; Bieber 2013: 162-164) E-voting and the forums in the liquid feedback and evaluation are presented as a virtual *ekklesia*. So, filtering and refining political opinions would not need the Federalist's reduction of participation, because the virtual community of a liquid democracy could be coordinated by software. Yet, this concept was mostly practiced in the context of a national state, without success. But because of its decentralisation, the liquidizing promise of the software and its virtual character, fans can think about an adaption for a supranational or global level by aggregating opinions. (Dörre/ Bukow 2014: 90-92) So, if liquid democracy could realize the classical democratic approach on a national or supranational level, then it would stop the story of decay. Instead of a declining line of

participation, history of democracy would be a parable that overcomes the deepest point and reaches again the former height of participation.

3.2) Why Digital Democracy does not work

However, democracy theorists, like Benjamin Barber, ask if the internet shrinks the world to a global village. If this is the case, the classical criteria for the people to assemble in a virtual face-to-face-society would be given again by ICT. Barber (2003: 117-312), who argues for a strong participatory democracy in a Rousseauistic style, is sceptical about the possibilities of a strong digital democracy – for good reasons. He works out three possible scenarios what could happen to the internet: *First*, Barber is aware of the fact that market forces may drive or control the internet. This could lead towards an *Electronic Colonialism*, when basic techniques of political discourses get commercialised. *Second*, ICTs can lead to a standardisation, control, or repression by elites. So, he knows about the dangers and disadvantages, and questions the libertarian approach of some net-optimists. But besides those dangers, *third*, Barber sketches out one democratic scenario of free and equal communication and information for education and participation with an enlightened, Jeffersonian approach of citizenship (and the people's knowledge, virtue and ratio) of interaction. This could lead to a plebiscitary majoritarianism of responsible citizens and self-governing communities. But even if the last scenario would be the case, Barber knows that this republican participation could be undermined because the internet is an economic sphere, too. So, private issues, like entertainment, commerce, and consumism are put together with the political approach of free and equal citizens seeking their common good. (Barber 1999: 573-588)

This sceptical democrat offers a much differentiated perspective. Mostly, I agree with him, and I include these arguments into my own neoclassical concept. Barber's doubts show that the assumptions of liquid democracy are very idealistic, and in their early and pure optimism even naive. And this causes several normative problems:

1st. There is a problem with information. In the web you find a flood of unfiltered and contradictory information, and often the check by the users does not work out. So, under these masses of information there are Fake-News. It becomes harder to distinct those from reliable news, or opinions or interpretations. And if citizens do not get informed in a correct or coherent way, it is hard for them to make decisions with the approach of more or less equal knowledge on a certain issue. One could say, a (participatory) democracy would just mean the rule of the many. Then for classification it does not matter if the information is correct when citizens vote; it would still be a democracy. But this is not the classical approach of one equal people who decide after getting more

than less correct information out a free debate. Such a loss of quality of a political system causes a loss of the quantitative factor - the question who and how many should participate.

2nd. This flood leads not just towards diversity and pluralism, but a fragmentation of the internet as well. The approach of one people deciding together in one common public sphere erodes, the inclusive element of democracy is not given, if groups separate themselves from each other and do hardly interact. Because the masses of data and information of the web overcharge our minds, users integrate themselves into special groups and then just get preselected information. So, maybe the internet has the potential to shape certain different small separated spheres that are just concerned with certain policies, ideologies, and worldviews. Cass Sunstein (2001: 67-71) calls them “deliberative enclaves”. This could cause polarisation or even extremism, because of the social fragmentation and isolation. (Dahlberg 2007: 828-831) This is the case, because social fragmentation would not shape an identity of the people as one autonomous collective. But it creates different identities that hardly find one common arena to discuss. Then it is impossible to seek for a republican common will in a fragmented digital society with such a huge heterogeneity of several parallel digital societies⁴. (Jacob/ Thomas 2014: 38f.; Buchstein 1997: 254-259) These spheres will not really be a public sphere because it is not concerned with the whole political community of a republic but a sub-public sphere that shapes its own community and may not be linked to a certain state. So, the classical approach of people getting an overview about one political system and its current topics, cannot be delivered by those masses of different fragmented groups, topics, information, and the complex contexts of contemporary politics (on a national or international level). If fragmentation is too high, not enough will be found what most of those groups have in common and is part of their political identity. Something misses, that makes them a homogenous *demos* whose members are willing to interact as equals. There is no classical idea of citizenship anymore.

3rd. Both arguments lead towards a digital divide. Especially in the 1990 the so-called net-pessimists thought that the internet would be an exclusive sphere, because most users were male, young, and educated. This is still right, even if the number of the users is increasing and the users are getting more diverse, because at least many older people

⁴ Well, it is correct, as Oren Perez (2004: 146) states, that the internet has the capacity “to sustain a high volume of multi-directional communications (connectivity), and to provide efficient archive services (memory) were seen as providing very strong potential for the efficient organization of transnational political action”. But especially if interactions take place on an international level, it does not mean that these interactions are not the one of fragmented spheres.

who are not digital natives do not participate in the internet. And especially if one thinks about a global democracy, the different possibilities to get access in different world regions undermine an egalitarian approach. But still, one could speculate if those problems can be solved during the third transformation, maybe in one generation (at least in the West). But even if every citizen has access to the digital sphere there are still two groups: a minority of very active and well informed users and a majority of passive ones that may give a political statement a Like on Facebook, but not more. This can be the case, because the majority cannot tell which information is right or wrong, because of a lack of interest, or because of a scepticism against the provided information and opinions (Norris 2001: 230f.). Furthermore, the passive group may not be able or willing to use the devices or digital rules that are not self-explanatory. Not everyone has the necessary technical skills. The higher the conditions of participation (like the need for skills and devices) are, the less inclusive or participatory the sphere will be. (Jacob/Thomas 2014: 37; Roleff 2012: 15f.) These restrictions undermine the democratic approach because inside of the digital system there would be again at least two political classes, and just one of them includes political debates and decisions. Combined these three arguments show a high discrepancy between dealing with masses of complex information and technical skills on the one side and the expectation of an equal participation on the other side. (Winkel 2015: 423f.)

4th. The approach of digital democracy is often the one of a deliberative democracy. But the way the discourses are shaped do not fulfil Habermas' conditions of a deliberate democracy. Often digital discourses are not rational, and usually they do not form consent in a digital agora. Provoke or extreme opinions are much more discussed than arguments of information. And very often emotional debates, shit storms and hate speech dominate the arenas, and harm the free speech that is necessary for a democracy by verbal violence. This can be done by persons who are not really acting as citizens because they hide themselves in anonymity; and sometimes participants are bots. Because in real-time-media censoring or moderation in advance is not really possible⁵, the necessary function of moderating and planning the agenda to discuss is not given in those virtual assemblies. (Gimmler 2001: 30f.; Buchstein 1997: 257-259) This judgement does not get changed, if we take a neoclassical direct democracy as the theoretical basis, instead of a deliberative democracy. One could say if there is no moderation, like the *boulé* in Athens, and not the necessary way of a citizenship with a

⁵ And of course, it is questionable, if censorship is democratic.

virtuous approach (which means the education, behaviour and communication is not the one of a democratic state), then the classical approach does not fit, too. Indeed, it may be possible to organize several cyber protest movements and particularistic counter-public spheres, but not a democratic debate of a *polis*.

5th. The net-neutralists are right in their statement that the internet does not have a genuinely democratic or political function per se, because the web 2.0 is neutral in its form. That makes the internet being not just a sphere of political discussion, but of economy and crime, too. So, if the authorities of a national state fail to regulate the internet as a global phenomenon, this undermines the sovereignty of the state. And if the people should rule about their *polis*, they need to be the sovereign. This is done for example by hyper-libertarianists and hyper-capitalists, resistance movements, or criminals. It is not an automatism that a resistance against the state's authority comes from a democratic perspective. And in some cases it may be useful if the internet would not be a sphere that tends towards anarchy. Global economic interests that are coordinated and presented in the web are dominating it, so the new global powers of the web are transnational companies, but hardly one supranational state under the people's power. So, the internet will not only consist in political arenas. It is already a commercialised space, too. Both coexist. So users that want to use one of these spheres will be forced to mix it up. But the classical approach to be a free and equal citizen means that the citizen is able to get over economic needs and social inequality, for instance done by a payment for participation (and additional in ancient times by leaving non-citizens doing the economic work). So, citizens are free of economic inequality and egoistic needs, if they are able to participate in the separate sphere of politics, where everyone is equal by law. According to neoclassicism, participation and positive freedom are linked to a non-economic perspective. If both spheres are mixed up in one medium or forum (as it is the case for example in social networks), classical political freedom and equality are impossible because of economical distractions, advertisements, entertainment, infotainment, and needs. In short, capitalism and social inequality coexist with political equality in the same place. Ergo there is no possibility to find a common good in political decisions, but just the fight of different interests and needs, and needs are the opposite of political freedom. Also, if users focus on one of those spheres, there is not just the danger of fragmented sub-public arenas: They can choose between political debates that may make some feel uncomfortable, and private, commercial, or entertaining issues. Politics just becomes one (maybe not very fancy)

virtual product offered in a digital market. And so does democracy. This may make users non-political, Sunstein (2001: 3-12) fears. According to classical democracy, users would probably become just private people (*idotes*), and the liberal *homo oeconomicus* succeeds in every sphere. Furthermore, as Eli Pariser (2011) points out, most algorithms are designed by companies. They influence what you see. That creates filter bubbles that increase fragmentation, for instance by economic criteria. Sunstein and Pariser make the problem look bigger as it is, because algorithms do filter but not destroy information and the possibility of a political discourse is still given for those who identify themselves as politically interested (Dörre/ Bukow 2014: 97-105). But nonetheless, fragmentation and economisation increase. Yet this global medium is driven by oligopolies, such as Facebook and Google. If people mostly get informed and discuss by using the tools and algorithms of those companies, they may not get pure political information and debates. (Barney 2000: 238-264) A digital democracy would just be possible, if the economic power of digital capitalism would be banned by a supranational authority (that cannot fulfil the classical democratic criteria, yet) – and this is quite unlikely. Otherwise digital politics is determined by economy, and then it is not political according to the Aristotelian definition. Also, the economic power (such as the digital divide) perpetuates asymmetries of political power.

6th. In the digital sphere the separation of economy and politics get not just trumped by commercialisation, but by a panoptification as well. Companies and states observe and record what we do in the internet. Of course, it is a violation of human rights. (Buchstein 1997: 250/ 260f.) But besides this fact, the separation of *polis* and *oikos* is undermined. So, from both sides, the market and the state, users get forced into the mix of politics and economics. (Moser 2014: 40f.) The political freedom from economy becomes impossible under these circumstances. The public gets private (by economisation) and the private get political (by observation). Both phenomena show that the political part of the internet is dominated by the post-democratic hegemony of an economisation of the representative system

These selected reasons that speak against the possibility of a liquid democracy with a broad participation have something in common: They show that the assumptions of political participation in the internet are idealistic and oversee the social basis. This is the case from the point of view of a classical participatory approach, a republican approach. The digital sphere is not an independent area where everyone can act politically easily. This sphere is linked to and contextualised in the analogous world. That means the possibility to participate politically

in the internet does not just depend on technical access and skills (both could improve in the future). Also, it depends on the question, how economic and political power is structured in general. There, the increase of post-democracy on a national and international level with a huge influence of economical actors, the rise of a supranational government with a loss of accountability of the representatives, and the complexity of political interdependences determine it. And this gets transferred into the digital sphere. This sphere can just reproduce the social basis' of the analogous world. So, my point is that the internet cannot become a democratic sphere as long as analogous politics has so many deficits in participation and makes social inequality grow. The internet itself may be more immaterial than the analogous world, but it is determined by materialistic and economic issues. Under these social circumstances a broad political free and equal participation is not possible. Furthermore, citizens do not fulfil the conditions that must be given to act democratic in the internet when they get fragmented (in private identities), or confronted with bots or shit storms, even more than in the analogous world. Internet, politics, and economy are still driven by (neo-) liberalism. This cannot match with a citizen's virtue or a people's identity, because the own private, fragmented interests are more important than a common good and a collective identity of a *demos*. Usually, liberalism does not highlight direct participation. So, as long as liberalism is more dominant than a republican attitude, a classical democratic approach cannot be realised. The web 2.0 is good for particular counter-public areas or for certain resistance movements, if the people are willing to transfer it into the analogous world, and it can make political communication maybe easier (on a local, national or supranational scale), at least between citizens and MPs. This may help to reduce some political problems. But it does not solve the problem of a loss of participation with the growing size of political units.

4) Conclusion

As showed above history of democracy was a decay of classical participation, yet, starting with the second transformation, because of the increasing size of the political unit and the combination of hierarchical representation and democratic values, which shapes an oxymoron (Keane 2009: 161f.). The third transformation of democracy does not seem to improve the situation. Indeed, it sounds fatalistic if one states that the transformation, as a new wave away from participatory democracy, cannot be stopped. And this would be oversimplified and deterministic. My point is that under the circumstances of digital oligopoly-capitalism, fragmentation, and digital divide - or in short the omnipresent influence of social inequality – a cyber democracy is an unlike ideal.

There are several conditions of a democratic *polis*, describes by Aristotle: a relative homogeneity of the people in social or cultural ways, a face-to-face-society, and a spirit of citizenship, shown by the interests of the individuals to act free, equal and for a common good, and not for a particular interest. If none of those conditions are given for the majority of the citizens, one cannot think about a neoclassical democracy that wants to increase participation again. The internet may make political communications easier, but as long as social inequality dominates the internet, a public realm of political equality cannot rise in the same sphere. So, liquid democracy suffers from the same problems as analogous democracy at the beginning of the third transformation (maybe even more because the internet is not as egalitarian as optimists think, but it has no political filters either): the impossibility to shape a *cosmopolis* that still has democratic homogeneity and relatively equal interests, and the increasing problem of representation. What one could think about is establishing liquid democracy on a communal level, to increase participatory elements in a smaller unit; because the smaller the political unit, the higher the probability for a direct participation in this public realm will be - at least if a payment for participation is introduced. This could help to minimize the problem of representation of the bigger units in a federal system, done by communal digital democracy, if citizens decide on issues they may know well and may easier find a consent.

But the digital age and virtual participation will influence global politics as well, not just the other way round. But how it will presumably change politics is not a democratic way, but maybe an anarchic one. As Charles Raab and Christine Bellamy (2004: 29-38) point out, the digital age could lead towards a mixed polity of parliamentarism and postmodernism where plural modes of decision-making, bureaucracy, and market processes coexist, but without a clear sovereignty, and without truth-claims, but with fragmented identities. This mixed form may be many things, but for sure even less democratic than modern representative democracy.

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