

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC VALUES BY USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education is a prerequisite for democracy. The theme of this paper refers to the basics of democracy, principles and factors of influence that turn increasingly to electronic democracy. The purpose of this study is to describe the impact of new faster and efficient media in the promotion of democratic values in different states. In order to spread democratic values there is a wide range of modern tools such as Discovery TV for different age groups, e-learning technologies and e-democracy sites.

Introduction

The link between *education and democracy* is based on mediation factors that determine the type of education and the democratic nature of it (Zulu Mzomuhle, 2000). Since a specific conception of citizenship determines the form and content of education as a process of facilitation, education becomes a prerequisite for democracy. However *education* and wisdom provides the ability to access and process information, to determine general relevance and to promote a critical understanding, which is fundamental to choice.

Plato defined education as "the form of art to develop good habits or virtues of those native skills." Aristotle in his Politics believes that "education should be an object of public oversight." French sociologist Emile Durkheim believes that "education is an action exercised by adult generations on those not ripe for social life" seeks to challenge and develop in child a number of physical, intellectual and moral conditions.

"Democracy" is defined by the following terms: government of the people or majority rule (Wikipedia, 2012). *Modern democracy* emphasizes respect for human rights (equality before law, right to an opinion, etc.), multiparty, and limitation and separation of powers in the state. Although the term democracy is typically used in the context of a political state, its principles are applicable to other organizations or entities such as universities, unions, public companies or civic organizations.

The term defined as *electronic democracy* means to improve accountability and encourage citizen participation in the political process. Electronic Democracy

comes from citizen to state, from bottom to up. The Internet offers various possibilities of communication through portals of electronic democracy, the forums, mailing lists and personal reviews sites. There are three categories of applications of electronic democracy that are found in Romania on the portal www.e-democratie.ro: election applications, communication applications, feedback, logistical and organizational applications.

Fundamentals of democracy

According to a famous statement of President *Abraham Lincoln*, democracy means government by the people (universal eligibility of public functions and free and fair elections, the freedom of expression and association) but also for the people, the government that respects people's preferences. This statement is taken from the speech of *Daniel Webster* in 1830, which argues that government must respond to people's interests.

The *basic definition of democracy* (Sezgi Saraç-Süzer, Alagözlü, 2010, 2397 & next) involves a form of government by consent, which is confirmed by civic policy, through open debate and consultation, rather than through dogma or force, Carr, 2003; Deuchar, 2009). Shechtman (2002), Kelly (1994) and Greene (1988) summarized the ethical principles of democracy as *three main features* of democracy, namely:

- Freedom (with three main sub-meanings, "freedom of thought", "freedom to choose " and "freedom of expression")
- Equality (without any discrimination or favoritism by race, social class, political or economic status)
- Justice (the three main codes that are "economic," "social," and "judicial")

John Dewey first brought the idea of a “Democratic School.” Dewey (1916) points out that school is a microcosm of the type of society that is desirable, which leads to the idea that a democratic school is a prerequisite of a democratic society.

There are two *fundamental principles* (Council of Europe, 2000, 326) underlying the idea of democracy:

1. Principle of individual autonomy: no one should be subject to rules that were imposed by others.
2. Principle of equality: everyone should have equal chances to influence decisions that affect people in society.

These two principles provide moral justification for democracy and form the *key principles of human rights* but there are also pragmatic reasons that explain the democratic system of government:

1. A democratic system provides a more efficient government because the decisions made are more likely to be observed by people. People do not usually violate their own rules.
2. Acceptance by the population is much greater if decisions are made following an agreement between the parties. The rules would not be realistic if they were not accepted by most people.
3. A democratic system should encourage the initiative and would be more responsive to changes, based on the principle that "two opinions are better than one."

There are *three topics* (McAllister, 2008, p. 2) on public support for democracy: popular satisfaction in relation to democracy, accountability with system performance and participation in social groups. To be effective, the public institutions opening for public must be harmonized with *values* such as fairness and responsibility (Ministerio de Administraciones Publicas, 2006, 218).

If governments choose to encourage citizen's participation, a significant challenge (Hendriks & Carson, 2008, p. 308) is the *responsibility* of growing forms of democratic engagement. This will require capacity to organize deliberative procedures in the public sector, NGOs and business.

Theorists of democracy since Alexis de Tocqueville to Robert Putnam (Liebert, 2009, 80.) confirmed the belief that civil society is a vital force for the formation of a democratic political system. In the opinion of Cohen and Arato (1992): "A modern active civil society is an important form of citizen participation in public life" that is "kept alive by social movements aimed at widening rights, defending the autonomy of civil society and its further democratization" (Cohen, p.p. 18-19).

Democracy

Democracy implies freedom of choice, equity and justice and no trial or other practice outside education has the power to promote these fundamental values. Democracy can be established and strengthened only when shared by all members of society, share ways of thinking and behavior, political culture and democratic values.

This public deliberation process is seen as more open and unstructured, taking place in the public, outside of the formal decisions of the institutions (Benhabib 1996; Dryzek 2000; Habermas, 1996). The focus in macro deliberative democracy is *the informal new way of communication* (through conversations, speeches, protests and appeals) that can form public opinion and influence public institutions.

The quality of the democratic process is determined by the information infrastructure that takes place. Effective functioning of any democratic government is dependent on the many directions information flows. There are four categories of direction of flow of information and communication (Tosun & Tosun, 2007): downward, upward, lateral (or out) and interactive.

Education

Education has the following characteristics (Wikipedia, 2012): it focuses on people, aims to develop human qualities and explore horizons, and it is predominantly oriented towards preparation for life and questions of existence. The purpose of education combines the short-term with the long-term view. Educational activity is dynamic and flexible at the same time.

The educational system in Romania has been organized to correspond to major stages of state development. During the royalty, education was made by family, during the republic the people begin to be more concerned for the organization of education system and during the empire, education and training system begins to have a state characteristic.

Discovery School (2012) is a project of Discovery Networks (the company that owns the stations Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and Discovery Science) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports of Romania. The role of this initiative is to bring the Discovery world into the classroom, stimulating the natural curiosity of students to science, but also to integrate audio-visual resources and new media in education. The Discovery Channel presents a fascinating world, which is able to increase students' interest towards science subjects studied in school. Since January 16, 2012, two resources were made available to students and teachers that they can use anytime to better understand scientific phenomena and to make lessons more attractive in the class:

- Television: Discovery Channel Romania broadcasts a series of educational programs each day, Monday to Friday at 14.00 and then replays them, the next day, at 08.00, and again in a dedicated program block on Saturday and Sunday. The programs present topics of science, chemistry and mathematics, physics, biology ecology and inventions. They have been specially selected to help pupils in grades V - XII to better understand scientific phenomena, conveying the message that science is an interesting and exciting field. Programs will be dubbed in Romanian, without any advertising breaks.
- Internet: scoala.discovery.ro is a portal for teachers, which can be downloaded to provide support materials that can be used in class with the students. The site includes a program schedule and a complete guide for teachers about each episode, presenting lesson objectives, sets of questions for the students that are close to the lesson content, class activities and proposed definitions for vocabulary words.

Various *electronic equipment* (digital/multimedia) support the educational process: maps, dictionaries, encyclopedias, educational videos, presentations in various formats, sites, electronic books (e-books), tests, tutorials, simulations, software forming abilities, practice software, educational games, etc. However teaching software can be found or e-learning tools and resources. Computer and electronic materials/media prove their usefulness in teaching, learning, assessment

or education as a means of communication. Combining traditional e-learning is a natural consequence of the evolution of society and has the effect of virtualization. "The specific of virtual reality is opening a range of opportunities by overcoming the properties of real things." (Cucoş, 2006). The task of education and training based on new information and communication technologies is to substitute part of the current structures with a range of high performance, to meet the inherent changes that occur in culture and civilization.

E-learning is a normal effect of the need for education, with many offers and training institutions, in various *fields* (Istrate, 2006): actors involved (competent trainers, community learning ventures, etc.), circulating content (media and various teaching materials, teaching many elements developed only in electronic, modular programs, a variety of content adjacent, complementary, alternative, new disciplines), assessment procedures (adaptive tests, standardized tests automated immediate feedback), institutional management procedures (student management, online registration, selection and certification of students based on their portfolio, etc.), extracurricular activities (online resources, remote collaborative activities, participation in online communities of practice or virtual campuses, etc.).

A broad perspective on democracy demonstrates that from the 193 countries around the world that are recognized by the United Nations, 123 are considered truly democratic (Becker, Raveloson, 2008, p. 4). Research presented on the *Eurostat database in 2011*, shows that individuals have used the Internet for at least one of the following: Internet consulting for learning, searching for information about courses or even e-learning courses (see Figure q).

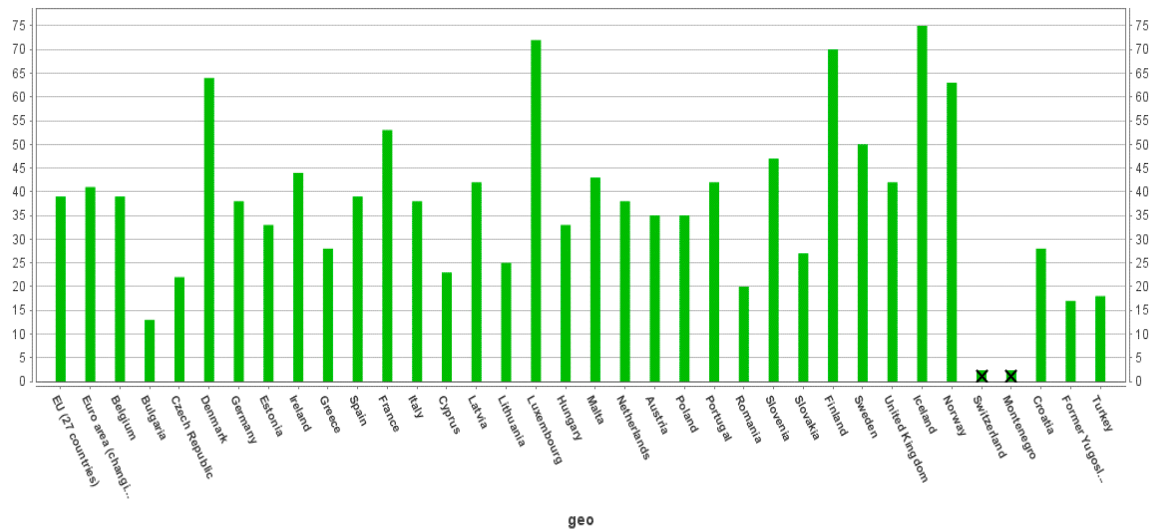


Figure 1. People who use the Internet for training and education, % of people aged 16 - 74 years.

Source: Eurostat, 2011.

Evolution of democracy to e-democracy

If *Aristotle* believed that a *democratic government* may only extend on the distance a person could walk in a day, (University of North Carolina, 1997), because active participation by all citizens is essential to democratic governance; *e-government* uniquely solves the problems of distance and limited participation. As long as someone has access to the Internet and wants to be involved, e-government in theory makes it possible for many remotely located people to participate in the democratic process. *Democracy* can only exist when people are actively involved in dialogues on important social and political issues (Dewey, 1959).

Democracy is a path to development. *Basic elements* of this process are taken into account and promote fundamental rights and freedoms, democratic elections, media promotion, the development of political culture and a government based on democratic values, which foster democracy, promote economic growth and rapid sustainable, taking into account the interests of society.

Democracy is based on the assumption that citizens can govern themselves if they are well informed (Hacker, 1996). Given the importance of free exchange of ideas and exposure to conflicts of opinion in a democratic society, the potential of the Internet and e-government in particular are worth taking into consideration. *Speed computer communication*, which allows very fast responses, rather than reflection, may increase the prevalence of polarized opinions prevalence in cyberspace (Barber, 1997).

Computer benefits through *telecommunication* devices radically transform traditional relationships with governments and offers greater freedom to citizens for students and for teachers. Some of these *advantages* are (Cerrillo i Martinez, Galan Galan, 2009, p. 240):

- Traditional concepts of space and time are eliminated. Because of new information services, students will not have to visit the school to retrieve any document, or to accommodate the specific and determined timetables that in general coincide with their schedule with all the disadvantages included.
- With new forms of provision of administrative services, access to information is more convenient, quick and easy, with just one mouse click citizens can obtain all the information they need and not only by computer but using any device, such as a mobile phone even in a personalized format.
- New information services open new avenues for participation and communication by electronic mail for complaints and suggestions, e-mail lists or forums express opinions, news bulletins to be constantly informed and updated way of issues of concern including representatives of political participation that affect their work through electronic voting.

Electronically path becomes a genuine way of producing and strengthening the citizen participation in democracies.

- On the other hand, in addition to the optimization of service, electronic administration has the benefit of increased *efficiency* in its activities of documented information: required engineering and simplification of the processes to electronic managing, resulting in a reduction of time for the delivery of documents and a considerable saving of resources. Besides the financial aspect of this savings, we gain more time in administrative management, which can be dedicated to different tasks other than traditional activities such as training and learning and developing value-added products. Also, this economy can provide access to all information about management, allowing a true informational transparency required by a law state.

Information and Communication Technologies have a special *role* in strengthening civil society and promoting participatory democracy. The new ICT have the potential to provide more opportunities for citizens to participate and influence the formulation of problems and discussion before decisions by elected assemblies.

In the context in which there are *new forms of education services*, various *factors* play an important role, such as:

- *professional competence* of teachers, using new information and communication technologies
- *The right to information* that is recognized by any constitution turns into a government policy priority and a strategic objective of the education system. Based on these principles, citizens have the right to request and obtain information.
- *Typology of users* who are addressing administrative information services will be divided *by age* for each phase of education, i.e. primary, secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate.
- *Information and Communications Technologies* are always integrated into management activities and public education is a fundamental configuration of new forms of communication between teachers and students.

Teachers should be aware of the fact that *students* have changed behavior with the informative - documentary avalanche. They know how to prioritize needs and how to require not only products in conformity with personal guidelines and standards but also for quality services that meet specific applications for their needs resulting in a completely *personalized education*. Users would like to obtain maximum information with least effort, enabling them to devote time for other activities.

Conclusions

Faster promoting democratic values is made possible by the new media technology starting in the childhood education system, then continuing with adult education through a continuous professional training.

Currently, the school system involves both compulsory and optional (taught printed on paper but also electronic), which complete general education of young people but also international exchange of cultural experiences for broaden participants knowledge.

From our observations it appears that education is a prerequisite for democracy and electronic democracy default. The result of this approach is that citizens, regardless of age, have become increasingly aware of the importance of being informed in time with the news that affects them directly or indirectly, to take the best decisions.

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